

People with MS pursue various hobbies



Hobbies can be fun, fulfilling and even help people with MS manage symptoms.

by **Robert Lerosé**

Patti Paul loves to walk on the beach and mentor high school culinary students. Jason Kubelle plays video games on land and rides waves in the ocean as a body boarder. Vadim Kapriyelov is learning to play his seventh musical instrument when he isn't building custom cars or lifting weights.

From the everyday to the exotic, there is no limit to the types of hobbies and enriching activities that people with multiple sclerosis pursue. Hobbies can be fun and fulfilling for anyone — but for people living with MS, hobbies can also help their physical, mental and emotional well-being, as these four examples illustrate.

Queen of the ballroom

Phoebe Walker was diagnosed with MS in 2001 after one side of her body quit functioning. She recalls that 2006 to 2007 “was the longest year of my life. I became blind in both eyes and completely incapacitated. I didn't even know if I was going to live, let alone come out and do anything.”

But Walker went on to earn a master's degree in 2013 and had her scientific research published in a peer-reviewed journal. She regained most of her eyesight, though she does have permanent optic nerve damage. The turning point came when she took up ballroom dancing to become more independent.

Walker, 50, found dance challenging at first, but then “it became a way of life. It is a process. You don’t see a benefit until months down the road. I realized I had memory, balance and bladder control. I was happy. I felt like I had found my life.”

Walker, who earned top points in her first ballroom dance competition in April 2023, is using that recognition as a way to make others aware of the positive benefits of dance. She founded the not-for-profit [Dance A Myelin My Shoes](#). “It is not about getting people to compete,” she says. “It is only about getting them to dance or simply stay active.”



Danielle Welch and her son Killian

Theater major

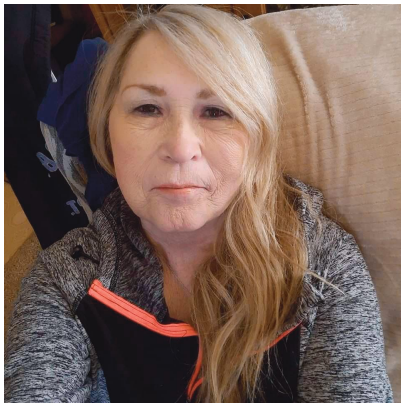
A sense of drama seems to be a constant in Danielle Welch’s life. After attending the University of Tampa for musical theater, she was accepted by the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland for acting and later did her residency at Shakespeare’s Globe Theater in London. In between, she eloped with her husband, James.

Welch was diagnosed with MS in December 2019 after the left side of her body went numb. Today, the 34-year-old has burning sensations in her arm, but she is able to walk and run — either chasing after her 5-year-old son Killian or to the theater.

After returning to Florida to be a theater director at two high schools, Welch yearned to get students interested in Shakespeare. She adapted “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” into “Midsummer(ish),” an activity that led her to become a published playwright. More adaptations are coming.

“I turned it into a fast-paced, about 50-minute play, and they loved it. I kept some of the Shakespearean aspects in it, and then it made them want to read the original, which was the intended goal.”

To sharpen her motor skills, Welch also took up hand embroidery, allowing her to indulge her “dark, self-deprecating sense of humor” by creating her own patterns with “inappropriate, snarky things in them, which gives me joy.”



Theresa Hepinstall

Bargain hunter

Theresa Hepinstall taped a note on her mirror encouraging her to get up, get dressed and be present in the day — a daily reminder and perhaps the through line in Hepinstall’s life.

A lifelong Michigan resident (she loves the change of seasons), Hepinstall, 67, worked as a contractor for Dow Chemical, supporting 18 Dow salespeople around the country. She now works part-time at a housing assistance center.

Her first MS symptoms appeared in 1992 when her legs felt like Jell-O, but she was not officially diagnosed until 2012. She has neuropathy in her feet and restless legs, but her other symptoms have dissipated, allowing her to be present for her hobbies.

A dedicated thrifter, Hepinstall makes the rounds of second-hand and consignment stores. As a resident of the Wolverine State, it’s not surprising that she has an extensive collection of wolf items. “I have a long ceramic wolf lying down that my husband’s mother hand painted. It’s a gray wolf and I just love it.”

For more than 20 years, Hepinstall and her husband, Kirk, have kept a fifth wheel, or camping trailer, year-round at Houghton Lake about an hour from their home. “The front yard view is all woods,” she says.

Hepinstall is also working on a novel, which distracts her from the day-to-day reality of MS. “I don’t think about it [when I’m writing], “ she says.

Free spirit

In attitude and hobbies, 69-year-old Faith Agauas embodies the best of the 1960s: independent, nurturing, welcoming — appropriate for someone who attended Woodstock in 1969. “It changed my life and made me less afraid to try things that maybe I might not have

wanted to try.”

Agauas worked for the Federal Reserve and then for a subprime automobile loan company before retiring in 2014 after her department was dissolved. She experienced optic neuritis, tingling and falling for about 10 years before getting an MS diagnosis in 1999. She doesn't let her vision problems or using a walker and cane deter her. “I get up every day and [see] what kind of trouble I can get into and then deal with the pain at night.”



Faith Agauas enjoys many hobbies, including sewing and making quilts.

Agauas is passionate about cooking and baking from scratch (pot roast and apple pie are favorites) — a skill she learned from her grandmother and from women in the close-knit Detroit community she grew up in. Sewing and making quilts is “peaceful and soothing. You don't worry about your pain.”

Living next to the Michigan State Fairgrounds allowed Agauas to catch classic Motown acts and kindled a lifelong love affair with music. Today, her home is filled with an eclectic collection of art, from John Coltrane and Santana to Metallica and Dermot Kennedy — which she shares with the 40 indoor plants living within earshot.

“Find whatever it is that makes you happy and give it a try. It doesn't matter if somebody else doesn't like it. If you enjoy doing it, do it again,” she says.

Robert Leroise is a writer based in Long Island, New York.

Read about [more things that bring people with MS joy.](#)