Letting the cracks show

Sometimes, admitting you need help is a sign of strength.

by Robin Rubenstein

I used to feel like asking for help made me weak.

After all, it seems that women today are expected to have everything together—and make it look easy. For me, that usually means having perfect hair (a true obsession of mine) and never leaving the house without wearing makeup and a relatively cute outfit.

My kids are almost always clean and well-dressed, and pretty well-behaved. I cook, keep an immaculate house, laugh withmy husband and almost always look happy.

But what happens when the outside doesn't reflect what's on the inside? When managing a household, a husband, two kids' busy schedules and a job becomes too much? Is it OK to let some of the cracks in the façade begin to show?

For many people, that might have been their breaking point. But not for me. I was tired, had blurry vision and was constantly anxious. But admitting that I couldn't do everything on my own was painful. Being vulnerable was not a comfortable place for me. I began to feel like I was spinning in circles even as I was standing still.

My breaking point came that first night in 2011 after I found out I had MS. I didn't know anything about MS then, and all I could focus on was that I had lesions on my brain. I thought that it was going to be the end of me. I was lying in bed, unable to see out of one eye, and

thinking, what if my daughter loses her sparkle, or my son, his sweetness? I didn't want my illness to take those traits away from them.

In that moment, I was so scared. I turned to my husband and admitted that I needed help. My husband just looked at me the same way he always has—with love and care—and told me it would be OK. Of course in that moment I didn't believe him, but it helped to know that I had him on my side. It became clearer then that being vulnerable, and letting others help support me, made me stronger.

Eventually, I began to admit to family and friends that I wasn't actually OK, and to trust in them enough to let them know what things made me feel better—things like laughter, loud music, long walks, food and cooking, work, sleep, relaxation—and just being. I became more comfortable asking for help, and people were always there for me when I needed them.

And you know what happened? I felt freer and lighter than ever before. Free to be a little less perfect. Free to say that I was scared and needed a hand to hold. What I thought made me weak actually made me stronger and gave me more courage to be the way I actually wanted to be. I became a better version of myself.

As I have allowed myself to be vulnerable and to ask for help, the quality of my life has improved. Yes, I have MS—and I'm still a work in progress—but I know more about myself and what I need than ever before. MS or no MS—nobody can do it alone.

Even if I lose my vision again, or something even worse happens, I know that what's inside me, at my core, is strong. Every day will be different, and I am sure how I feel and think about this will change too. But I'm good, I really am, even on the bad days.

And now I know what I didn't fully understand on that awful night two years ago: that my strength is greater when I allow others to hold me up.

Robin Rubenstein lives in West Bloomfield, Michigan. She was diagnosed with MS in 2011.

Ever felt others don't understand what it's like to live with MS? Share your story at MSconnection.org.

Read "Man of steel: An MS hero," from the Summer 2014 issue of **Momentum**.