Race to join the movement

Now you can help create a world free of MS at your own pace, at any race, anywhere.

by Maureen Salamon

When Danielle Furey learned she had multiple sclerosis in May 2012, she thought the diagnosis signaled the end of her lifelong passion: distance running. The Weston, Fla., resident's action-packed lifestyle included participating in marathons, triathlons and other athletic events, not to mention mothering four children and working as an attorney.

Get involved with Finish MS

1. Sign up for any event of your choice. Pick a 5K, marathon, triathlon or any event in any state or country you want to participate in. Then visit FinishMS.org to get started!
2. Start fundraising. Finish MS provides access to an online participant center and other tools to help you set and achieve your fundraising goals.

It turned out that Furey, 44, had actually been living with and managing MS for about 10 years, ever since severe but temporary numbness prompted earlier, inconclusive tests. Now that MS was a reality—and knowing she had been running successfully all that time—Furey resolved not to let anything stop her from pressing forward.

"At first I was pretty shell-shocked and thought that this was the end of my athletic life," Furey says. "But my doctor pointed out that I'd been living with this all this time, and I

decided I'm going to keep living my life as I had been, and continue to race."

Finish MS

A month after her diagnosis, Furey began training for the Marathon des Sables across the Sahara Desert, described as the toughest foot race on the planet. She decided such extreme efforts should help raise awareness and funds for MS. So, last April, Furey completed the 156-mile, six-day race as part of Finish MS, a National MS Society initiative that gives people participating in a wide range of endurance events an opportunity to do the activities they love and help create a world free of MS.

Finish MS, a fundraising program available across the country, allows runners, cyclists, swimmers and distance athletes of all experience levels to compete in any race of any distance at any location, while raising critical funds to support life-changing programs, such as MS research, for people affected by MS.

"There are many people who participate in endurance-type events and want to use them to raise awareness and money for the Society. This program enables them to do just that," says Rachael Nuwash, the Society's director of Emerging Campaigns. "It's a win-win for everyone. The Society provides the online fundraising tools, tips for raising money, opportunities for networking and idea sharing with other Finish MS participants, and all the support needed as they reach out to their friends and family for support and donations as part of the Finish MS program."

'A whole new path for my life'

Paul Goldstone is the captain of the international team called Karma Striders, which helps raise money for the Society. Photo courtesy of Paul Goldstone

Many Finish MS participants are living with MS themselves or are inspired by someone else with the disease. Paul Goldstone of Bryn Mawr, Pa., runs for his father who was diagnosed with MS more than two decades ago, as well as for millions of others who live with MS. Goldstone helped inspire the creation of Finish MS after he signed up to run in the New York City Marathon in 2007.

“We realized that runners weren’t raising money or awareness for MS,” says Goldstone, 45, who captains an international team called the Karma Striders. “So if people raise money for the movement and wear our [Society] gear, it’s a win.”

Furey’s supporters were so enthused by her amazing feat in the Sahara that she continues to collect donations, and has raised more than $16,000 so far. Though she was elated to complete the extreme event—which required carrying food and supplies on her back—she recalls several moments where she doubted her ability to finish, especially when forced to climb rock-faced cliffs.

“After three days of being in the desert, hungry and so torn up, I wasn’t really sure I could do it,” she says. “But I thought of all the people who had donated money, so many people watching me and counting on me, and I thought, ‘I’m not going to stop.’ It was the best feeling. This has opened so many doors and put me in touch with so many people with MS, I can’t really shut it down,”

Furey adds. “It’s created a whole new direction for my life. The diagnosis changed my life, and not for the worse.”

Maureen Salamon is a New Jersey-based writer. She has written for The New York Times, CNN and other major outlets.

Choose your own event or race, and raise money for MS while pushing your personal limits. Visit FinishMS.org.