Skater Kaci Bell lives with MS — and uses her passion to bring attention to the disease.

by Robert Leroe

Among the things that residents of a Dallas apartment complex see when they look out their windows is a 28-year-old woman with a radiant smile, wearing plush knee pads and a scuffed pair of roller skates.

Kaci Bell is coasting around her building again, reveling in a childhood passion and, if only for a short time, pushing her multiple sclerosis out of her mind.

When MS strikes again

Being on the go has been a constant throughout Bell’s life. The daughter of military parents, Bell was accustomed to moving around, living in Georgia, Alabama, Texas, Germany and Italy. She was also used to MS, helping care for her mother who was diagnosed with the disease.

Bell always considered El Paso, Texas, her birthplace, home. A cheerleader for 10 years through high school, she was also a devoted roller skater. As the rinks began to close, though, she got out of the habit.
Bell studied graphic design at the University of North Texas. After graduation, she settled in Dallas and began working for sign shops. She focused on industrial design, creating images for hospitals, nail shops, restaurants, emerging businesses and even local street signs.

In the summer of 2016, on a lunch break in her car, Bell felt numbing, cramping and tingling from her shoulder to her fingertips. “I ended up driving myself to the hospital, but I drove with my elbows because my hands weren’t working. It was a mess.”
After seeing a neurologist and getting an MRI, Bell was diagnosed with MS in 2017. Although she had lesions, she was not in pain, which surprised her doctor. Growing up, Bell had felt numbness, but shrugged it off and didn’t think it was MS. “My mom said it’s not hereditary, so I thought it’s probably something else,” Bell recalls. “Then honestly when I got the diagnosis, I was kind of relieved because I already knew what was going to happen. I grew up with it, so I already knew what the story was going to be. It softened the blow.”

**Working — and skating — for the cause**

A change was coming in her professional life as well. After four years as a designer for the business community, the work had lost its appeal. In January 2022, she began working for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society as a specialist in fundraising support, tackling questions about how to fundraise, how to set up an account with the Society and how to manage donations. “I decided the MS Society is probably a good place to call home. So, I decided this was the best place for me. I get to talk about my disease all day. It was perfect.”

Perfect perhaps, but not complete.

Whether it was her own high-spirited nature or the changes in her health and professional life, Bell felt an energy building up inside that needed an outlet. She began to see more people posting on social media about skating. She wanted to do something “fun and positive.” She dusted off her skates and relearned how to soar on land.

The decision proved beneficial in more ways than one.

Bell, who had an issue with balance since her MS diagnosis, has seen her balance improve since she took up skating. Using a lot of leg muscles, she is not as wobbly as she used to be. She still gets occasional tingling and numbness, but skating distracts her, taking her out of herself and preventing her from fixating on her MS.

Bell uses traditional four-wheel skates. Typically, she works out four times a week for 45 minutes to an hour, skating on anything flat — sidewalks, curbs, trails and, of course, the area around her Dallas apartment complex. Friends will join her occasionally, but usually she is content to skate by herself. To avoid getting dizzy and aggravating her MS, she schedules her sessions during the coolest parts of the Texas day.

**Skating’s benefits and joys**

It would not be inaccurate to call Bell an evangelist for the benefits and joys of roller skating. For the Walk MS El Paso fundraising event in 2019, she asked for and got permission to lead the walk on her skates. “That was magical,” she says. “I loved it.”

Bell hopes to put together an MS DIY event this year, which she’s dubbed a Roll Out, where roller skaters and even skateboarders in the area could meet and “roll out into the street” to raise funds for MS and connect people over a love of being on wheels.

“I want to continue to combine those two elements of my life because they’re both important
to me. I think that’d be a fun place to get the community involved. If more people knew what we go through and why it’s invisible, I think there would be such a better attitude towards it. I think people would take other people living with MS more seriously and [perhaps] go as far as to advocate for somebody else that they know who lives with MS who needs a cure.”

Robert Lerose is a writer based on Long Island, New York.

Learn how to create your own DIY event.