

Society Scholars: Where are they now?



Former scholarship recipients stay connected to the movement—and bring others along.

by Marcella Durand

Since 2003, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society's Scholarship Program has helped more than 3,500 young people whose lives have been affected by MS to attend college. But former scholars attest that the impact of that early support continued beyond graduation to powerfully influence the course of their lives. Here are a few of their stories.

The road to MS research

For Society scholar Anna Whetstone, support from the Society didn't end when she graduated from college. That's because her first job after graduation was as a research assistant at Johns Hopkins University, where she says she worked on Society-funded clinical research projects, including studies comparing disease-modifying medications and research into diagnostic techniques for MS. "I had my hands in all the projects going on," she says.

Whetstone was always interested in the brain, but her own diagnosis with MS in 2007, one year before she graduated high school, catalyzed her desire to study neuroscience. So, with the help of a Society scholarship, she majored in the field at Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and graduated in 2012. Now, she is studying to be a physician assistant in a three-year program at Rutgers University in Piscataway, New Jersey.

"When I graduate, I will be a practicing medical professional," she says proudly. "I loved doing clinical research at Johns Hopkins but now I want to be right in there treating people with MS."



**Kali Dye Sullivan
celebrates her wedding
day last June in Avon
Lake, Ohio, with her
mother, who also has MS.**

Photo courtesy of Kali Dye
Sullivan

Living a longtime dream

Kali Dye Sullivan's MS diagnosis came a year after she had received her Society scholarship in 2004 to attend Baldwin Wallace College in Berea, Ohio. "My mom was diagnosed with MS before I was born," says Sullivan, noting that she received the scholarship as a child of someone with MS. "So it was ironic that I was diagnosed myself a year later. I was like, 'Wow, I can't believe the Society chose me for a scholarship, and maybe there was a reason that happened.'"

Sullivan credits the scholarship for helping her realize her longtime dream of becoming a teacher. "I always knew I wanted to go into education. My dad was in education, my grandmother, aunts and uncles all had ties to education," she says. "And even though my mother didn't work, she was very active in my school. I saw how supportive everyone in education was with my family and our situation."

Today, Sullivan teaches sixth-grade science to middle school students in Rocky River, Ohio. Her involvement with the MS movement has grown stronger over the years, dating back to her first Walk MS the year after she received the scholarship. "We got a group of people to do Walk MS and volunteer for Bike MS events throughout college. Then, after I graduated, I started riding in Bike MS."

"My diagnosis hasn't stopped me from what I wanted to do," says Sullivan. "I wanted to be a teacher and I was able to pursue that. I make sure I ride Bike MS every year and I also ran a marathon. Even though I've been diagnosed with this disease, I still have fight left."



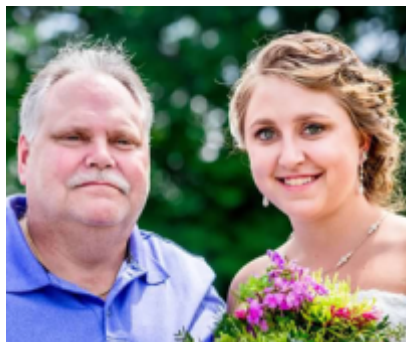
Jeffrey Breault, whose mother was diagnosed with MS in 2003, relaxes on vacation in Bar Harbor, Maine, prior to starting a new career in Boston in July 2014. Photo courtesy of Jeffrey Breault

A sense of responsibility

Jeffrey Breault, whose mother was diagnosed in 2003, found that his 2010 Society Scholarship came with a strong sense of responsibility. “It definitely made me very appreciative how other organizations and individuals were funding my education. I not only had my goals to live up to, but I wanted to make sure that I always put my best foot forward and that their belief in me was translated into success in the classroom,” he says. “That drove me to do my best and stay involved.”

And stay involved he did. At college, Breault studied marketing as well as ethics and social responsibility, carrying what he was learning into his volunteer work for the Society and into his current job as an allocation analyst for The TJX Companies. Breault is involved with LEAD (Leadership, Education and Adaptation for Disabilities), an internal workplace group whose mission is to be a resource for caregivers, family and friends, and provide networking and career development opportunities for people with disabilities.

Now, Breault wants to use his experiences to help other Society scholars and is reaching out to the Society to make it happen. “I know some students might not know how to find these opportunities,” he says, “so I want to keep connecting with them and keep them engaged. I feel like it would be repaying the Society for all the help it’s given me.”



Erin Martin with her father at Spirit Mountain in Duluth, Minnesota, on her wedding day in August 2014. Martin and her father are close; he has been a source of motivation in her fight against MS. Photo courtesy of Erin Martin

Keeping to the path

2007 scholarship recipient Erin Martin's father was diagnosed in 1991, when Martin was 3 years old.

"Growing up with a parent with MS influenced every decision that I made," she says. "It taught me a lot about compassion, hard work and giving back to the community, so I really wanted to follow a career path that would allow me to do that."

Martin kept true to that path, and now works as a creative arts specialist at Journeys Secondary School in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she helps children with emotional or behavioral needs develop their life skills. "The scholarship gave me an opportunity to try out a lot of different things," she says. "I didn't have to worry as much how I was going to pay for college. Instead, I could join clubs and volunteer at different places, and that's how I learned I wanted to work with children."

Martin's passion for helping young people extends beyond the workplace. She now volunteers to help select future scholars. "As a past recipient, I can talk about what it might be like for prospective scholars," she says. "I know how hard it can be to balance all the demands of academics, extracurricular activities, finances and having to go home and help your parents."

Martin is now back in graduate school, working toward dual master's degrees in social work

and business. “Kids with parents with chronic illnesses get overlooked by a lot of services,” she says. “I would like to do something to serve those youths better.”

Marcella Durand is a frequent contributor to Momentum.

To learn about eligibility for the Society’s Scholarship program or to donate, visit nationalMSSociety.org/scholarship.