

Top Society scholar stays the course



Before a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis in her sophomore year of high school, Erin Saito, the National MS Society's 2013 Presidential Scholar, spent her free time playing basketball, softball and tennis.

Since her diagnosis, Saito still plays many of her favorite sports, but she's changed in some very deep ways. "[I have] a greater appreciation of being able to do some of the simple things associated with daily living," she says. "I realize that having a bad hair day or not getting a date to the upcoming dance is nothing compared to never walking again."

She also has developed a deeper empathy for others. "My parents did not believe in shielding me from reality," she says. Instead, they encouraged their daughter to volunteer for the Society and take part in events such as MS Family Days to meet other people living with MS. "As I got to know them, I learned how MS had heavily impacted their lives," she says. "Instead of shying away from those with problems, I am developing new friendships." With new focus, she organized a Walk MS team in her hometown of Santa Barbara, Calif., and raised more than \$3,000 for MS research and programs last year.

Saito remembers meeting one young woman with MS who told her, "Don't ever let MS change your goals." She has listened to that advice—for the most part. "I still plan to go to college, pursue a career in medicine and have a family," she says. "[But] I have added a new goal—to help find a cure for MS." To that end, she will be attending the University of California, Los Angeles, this fall, where she will major in biological sciences.

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