

LE Magazine April 2000

## PROFILE



## Lose The Fear

Stronger than she ever imagined-despite MS

Cindie Smoyer remembers the exact moment in which she'd turned the corner in her battle against MS for control of her life. It was August 1998, and her beloved German shepherd, Elvis, had just snuggled up to her in their Cleveland home for a little attention. She realized that she could feel his fur against her skin for the first time since losing sensation in her arms five years ago. "I went 'Holy Cow, I can feel this dog,' " remembers the 42-year-old Smoyer. "I was so excited."

For 31 years, Smoyer had taken for granted her ability to experience such normal, yet hugely significant, occurrences as patting her dog, baking a dessert and playing classical guitar. Then came her first flare-up of what would prove to be MS-her doctor couldn't make a conclusive diagnosis on the basis of a single episode-in which she lost vision in her right eye. Her sight gradually returned after a round of intensive steroid therapy. Yet she found that dealing with the constant terror and uncertainty was as debilitating emotionally as her symptoms had been physically.

For six years she lived with the anxiety, then came a second-and far more severe-attack. This time Smoyer's right hand began to tingle and went numb, then the loss of feeling progressed into her arm and finally up to her shoulder. At the same time, chronic fatigue and dizziness set in. Smoyer was forced to close her catering business, which had been both an artistic outlet and a way to supplement her salary as a medical office manager. She learned to write with her left hand.

Shortly thereafter, an MRI confirmed what Smoyer had long suspected-she had MS.

She spent the next couple of years trying to deny that there was anything wrong with her-even though she was essentially homebound and steadily losing her ability to do even the most mundane household chores. Her balance and strength were so badly affected that she could no longer lift and carry things. Because she couldn't differentiate between heat and cold in her right hand, her doctor forbade her to cook. And when he heard that she'd been on a stepladder painting the walls of her bedroom, he limited her to painting only those areas that were less than three inches above the floor. "Here I was in the house and I couldn't do anything and I was completely stranded," she says. "Every night when I shut my eyes I would see a wheelchair and I knew I didn't want that kind of life."

But it seemed that such a life might indeed be in her future. Smoyer gradually lost feeling in her left hand and arm, and then began to drag her left foot. A bout with the flu provoked yet another MS attack, which affected the vision in her good eye. Massive doses of steroids no longer helped. In fact, they caused adrenal stress in which Smoyer gained 10 pounds of fluid in four days. Since traditional medicine was now failing, a close friend of Smoyer's suggested trying an alternative route and recommended a local practitioner. Smoyer's appointment with him became the first of many turning points in her journey to reclaim her life.

This doctor did a full blood work-up, testing absorption and metal levels, as well food allergies. The result: Smoyer had such a high acid content in her system that she couldn't absorb nutrients from her food and she was allergic to everything from eggs and milk to sugar and yeast. Since she had been raised on a diet of eggs, milk and bread, she had been consistently undermining her immune system since childhood. The new doctor immediately put her on a rotary diet, in which she combined certain food groups one day, then avoided that particular group for four days and avoided all her allergy foods. At the same time, she received vitamin B intravenously. Within three months Smoyer felt significantly better, but after six months her improvement reached a plateau. She knew it was time to take new steps to reach the next level. That's when she began reading the labels on every vitamin and supplement bottle she could find and calling the manufacturers with questions. Her quest finally led her to Dr. E. K. Schandl, scientific director of the Life Extension Foundation-and a second turning point.



Early blood tests ordered by Schandl found Smoyer to be anemic, with elevated cancer markers and significant blood chemical issues. He prescribed a Monday through Friday program that Smoyer, now past her third year with Schandl, still follows. To address the radical changes in the body's hormone levels that MS causes, Smoyer takes progesterone, DHEA, and pregnenolone, all of which she credits with greatly improving her immune system. "My husband recently came home with a bad flu that lingered for about six weeks," she says. "So I doubled my DHEA and I never even got sick. Two years ago, not only would I have gotten the flu, but I would also have had an MS flare up."

Smoyer's regime also includes digestive enzymes, folic acid, niacin, and vitamin E to further bolster her immune system. (Vitamin E also helps prevent fibroids, which had been a problem for her.) She takes a host of antioxidants, such as CoQ10, acetyl L-carnitine and alpha lipoic acid to help her body better handle DHEA and to protect and provide energy enhancement to her nerve fibers. Minerals such as chromium and boron assist in the uptake of other supplements, and Smoyer relies on garlic pills for overall good health, especially in digestion and joint function. Ginkgo biloba is on the list because she "isn't as swift" as she used to be; she swears by melatonin every night to ensure good sleep and protect her immune system. "Everything I take is geared toward keeping my immune system tough and strong and keeping me anti-cancer," she says, adding that recent blood tests show her cancer markers are now normal.

Also key to her regime is a twice-daily concoction. It's a phyto-herbal mix with plenty of protein powders, vitamin C, amino acids, bio-flavonoids, vitamin B6, assorted minerals, flaxseed, vitamins A and D, omega 3 and omega 6. To make it more palatable, she mixes in banana, honey and plenty of cinnamon. In between these mid-morning and evening shakes, Smoyer eats mostly broccoli with some rice cereal and cheese made with sheep milk. Other than the latter, she never eats dairy. And, she is long past her earlier obsession with sweet-these days sugar doesn't even taste good to her anymore.



As this comprehensive regime and her work with Schandl did its magic, Smoyer began feeling significantly stronger. Over a year ago, not long after the day when she first felt Elvis' fur against her skin, she asked Schandl if she could begin exercising. His advice: "Whatever you do, do it harder than you've ever done anything in your life." Smoyer took him at his word-found a trainer and began a serious makeover that included strength training. "In the beginning, I couldn't pull a wet towel out of the washing machine," she remembers. "Now, my balance has improved and I am stronger than I ever imagined I could be."

This past January, Smoyer had planned to fly to Fort Lauderdale to meet Schandl personally and thank him for all his help. She was particularly touched by a recent note from the scientific director, in which he applauded her determination and attitude in her fight against MS, and called her a warrior. Unfortunately, her trip was postponed due to business.

"I worked so hard to get here," says Smoyer. "I wanted my life back and I think if you do the right [tools] you can get your life back-of course some people might not have as much luck as I did, because they might be farther along in the disease and everyone's progress is different. But I'm better now. This disease doesn't control my life anymore." Her advice to anyone with a debilitating disease is to put aside the fear. "I was almost paralyzed by fear, but you have to stare down your demons," she says. "If you know what you have, you can turn it into a positive and work on it-there is nothing to be afraid of." -Twig Mowatt

[Back to the Magazine Forum](#)

These statements have not been evaluated by the FDA. These products are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. The information provided on this site is for informational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for advice from your physician or other health care professional or any information contained on or in any product label or packaging. You should not use the information on this site for diagnosis or treatment of any health problem or for prescription of any medication or other treatment. You should consult with a healthcare professional before starting any diet, exercise or supplementation program, before taking any medication, or if you have or suspect you might have a health problem. You should not stop taking any medication without first consulting your physician.