



Making the Most Of Life

I Always Wanted to do That

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It's funny how life sometimes throws something in our way that at first glance seems insurmountable. I know I felt that way when I first realized that having MS would in fact change my existence as I knew it. I went through the stages of anger, frustration, grief, confusion, elation and finally acceptance.

Prior to finally being diagnosed I was too busy raising my large family to give the symptoms a lot of attention. I was also working and trying to fit in some of my hobbies. I had so many interests and so little time.

One of the favorite outings for the children was swimming at a local state park. Being the kind of mom I am, I could not relax and rarely took my eyes off them when they swam. They were all very good swimmers, but I am also a very dedicated mom.

I tried bringing different things to the lake to occupy my time. It was impossible to read and still stay focused on the gang in the water. I love to write. That was also too difficult to do while keeping my attention on the kids. I tried all kinds of things. Everything was too hard to focus on, was difficult to keep clean and dry, needed too much space, and just wasn't worth the effort.

On one of my shopping trips to a craft supply store I noticed a child's paint box. It was big with a large assortment of colors. The cover was decorated with Alice in Wonderland pictures. The paint box appealed to me. I bought the paint box and a few inexpensive brushes and watercolor paper.

The next outing to the lake was a new beginning for me in many ways. I set up my chair at my usual spot by the edge of the lake where I could keep my eyes on the kids. I took out my new paint box and supplies. I used one of the paper cups that we used for drinks to scoop up some lake water. I began to paint.

The image grew as the day went on. People stopped and asked if I was an artist. I answered that I was not; I was just a mom keeping busy while the kids swam. Everyone that stopped had a nice comment about the work in progress.

The day passed and we packed up to go home. The kids as usual were tired from their swimming. I was happy from having released some of my creative energy.

As we drove home that day; I thought to myself that I had always wanted to try that. I love art and thought that lessons and years of experience were needed to accomplish a "worthy" work of art.

The paint box went into storage when I started being too busy trying to find the answers to what was wrong with me. I spent years and energy trying to get better. I finally was diagnosed with MS in 1998 and began therapy with AVONEX® (Interferon beta-1a) a few months later. I started to feel stronger again. I regained my confidence and began to live life more fully.

I was asked in an interview if I had any hobbies. I mentioned a lot of things; painting was one of the items on my list. I was asked if I would do a painting for the cover of The Avonex Alliance® program publication. At first I thought to myself that my paintings were not good enough to be seen by anyone other than my family. I then realized that it was another of the things that I always wanted to do. The painting was published on the cover of the winter edition of the magazine in 2004. I have been painting frequently ever since. What seemed to be an insurmountable problem in the beginning was the reason I was doing something that I love and brings happiness to others.

I believe we all have something that we always wanted to try. When life throws that bad thing in our path we can either let it stop us or we can make the best of it. I hope everyone embraces the second option. We never know what we are capable of until we try.