

MEN... & MRS

What Counts is the Journey

By Jim Haverlock

No one likes to give in or give up. Not me, that's for sure. When my doctors handed me a diagnosis of progressive MS, I decided that this challenge would not destroy my love affair with life and adventure – and it hasn't. The thirteen years that have passed since my diagnosis have been filled with adventures and opportunities galore. Some were good, others not so good, some uplifting, and others downright embarrassing. But all have been part of my journey.

While I've weathered falls and broken ribs, a broken thumb, various sprains, a torn rotator cuff, and enough concussions to last several lifetimes, I've also hiked through mountains alone in an electric scooter and had the time of my life. Even when challenging terrain caused me to get stuck, I still managed to marvel over the wonders of nature as I worked toward becoming un-stuck. Because I'm unable to stand, I planted a garden using only a hand shovel and rake. After much sweating and groaning from the physical exertion, I enjoyed the fruits of the harvest all the more, knowing I helped Mother Nature pull it off. After my voice stopped working normally, I learned to communicate in other ways. I even hammered out a book about it called *Challenging the Dragon*. I've traveled alone around the world,

met interesting people and took in awe-inspiring sights, all the while learning that one can fall anywhere in the world, so why just do it at home?

On my journey, I choose to be happy. I choose to move beyond the comfort of home and familiarity. I embrace the ongoing opportunity to improve my spiritual life and forge an intimate relationship with the Creator. I welcome opportunities to really listen to others, to offer an ear or shoulder as needed, to help those who are less fortunate, especially those struggling with poverty. I've also been a guinea pig for numerous clinical trials. In fact, I recently underwent a human umbilical cord stem cell treatment in Mexico. I received three varieties of some 5.5 million genetically engineered stem cells. So far, I've noticed slight improvements in my speech and walking ability.

Being a bit of a maverick, I've managed to build my own somewhat lucrative online furniture business. Learning to use the computer has helped me to meet my own needs and generate enough of a surplus to help those who are less fortunate. It has been my privilege to be aiding several young women, men, and families in Uganda, Africa, for the past few years. During this time, I've learned many lessons about how well Americans live, even those at poverty level, compared to

the majority of Ugandans.

I've been blessed with the chance to venture out and have lunch and dinner with friends, folks who aren't bothered by my choking while swallowing, or spraying a mouthful of food all over myself or them, or by my occasional penchant for racing to a bathroom to avoid an accident.

The list of adventures and opportunities are endless – for me, for all of us. However, those of us blessed with a challenge such as MS have a unique set of adventures and opportunities, to be sure. Yes, we will mourn each loss that occurs. But then, we must smile and move on. Life is short and we simply don't have the luxury of wallowing in self-pity. After all, life ends regardless of whether we are healthy or challenged, rich or poor, smiling or angry, happy or sad. What counts is the journey twixt here and there.

So I say choose happiness, embrace opportunities, help others, and reap the blessings these choices spawn. As my friend, the Wizard (Dr. Anthony G. Payne) says "None of us arrive at Forest Lawn with a U-Haul. We take to the grave only our deeds – and scars."

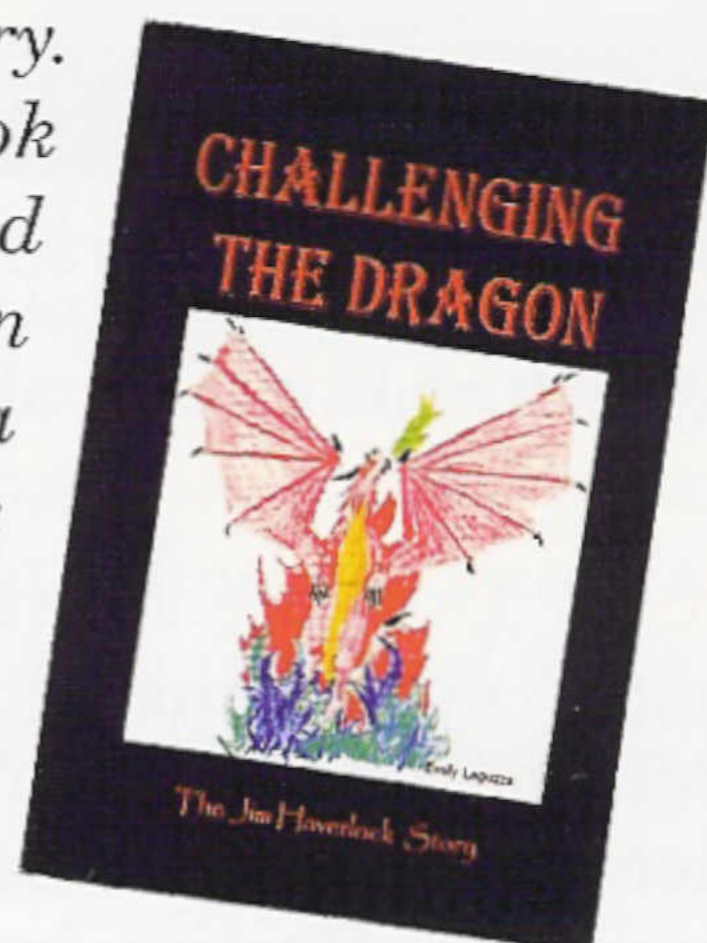
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A father of eight, Jim Haverlock grew up on the prairie lands of North Dakota. Read all about his tragedies and triumphs in **Challenging the Dragon**, available on his website www.14ushop.com (click on the Health section) or through the MSF Lending Library. Proceeds from book sales will help build wells and purification systems in Uganda and help pay the tuition of Ugandans trying to obtain higher education.



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