

Dave Myers: Living with MS

“In 1965, when I was eight years old, my Mam, Margaret, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS). Her first symptoms occurred when she woke one day and couldn't stand when she got out of bed – me being young I couldn't lift her so my Dad had to come home from work to help her back into bed.

It took a long time for her to be diagnosed and when she did receive the news she began to deteriorate quite quickly. About a year after her diagnosis she needed to use a wheelchair and once she got in it, she never came out of it.

I'm an only child so needed to help around the house quite a bit when I was growing up. My Dad was at retirement age when my Mam was diagnosed so he gave up work to care for her full time.

The first year of her diagnosis we ate a lot of processed mash and tinned peas but gradually me and my Dad, Jim, started working together to produce some decent food. We'd go out fishing, bring back our catch and fillet it for dinner. We did interesting things and started to have fun in the kitchen.

Caring for Mam became part of my life and we developed a routine. Bedtime was always an event. I couldn't go to bed until we'd put Mam to bed and at the time we lived in a terrace house in Barrow-in-Furness. My Dad would carry Mam under the arms and I'd carry her legs, resting her on every other step as we went up.

I became quite thick skinned about my Mam and didn't often get embarrassed, other than the time I was Toad in the school play of 'Toad of Toad Hall'. When my parents came to see me in it Mam had started making involuntary sounds and when I turned up on stage, these got louder and louder – I didn't take too kindly to that.

Before being diagnosed my Mam was a great cook – once she cooked us steak and chips, a real treat, but dropped it all as she carried it into the dining room. She was the butt of many a joke afterwards, but I realise now it was the first signs of her MS.

Things got really tough when I was studying for my A levels. My Dad had a stroke, which was completely unexpected, and I was then caring for my mother and father at the same time.

My mother went into hospital and I helped care for Dad at home. When he passed away 18 months later I made the decision to move to London and go to art school. I still kept my close links with the north and visited me Mam in hospital all the time but she was really ill at this stage and, 2 years into my course, she died too.

I finished art school and got a job working for the BBC in the prosthetics department working on shows like Spooks and period dramas. It took me all over the country and, while working on a Catherine Cookson film in

Newcastle, I met Si – the other half of the Hairy Bikers – who was a location manager for the BBC.

We got on well as we both liked cooking, travelling and motorbikes. We kept in touch and crossed paths quite a few times more until deciding that we wanted to do something a bit different and more exciting, together. We made a pilot of a cookery programme and then developed a short series. Ratings were high and so more opportunities came our way. We're currently filming a series, due out in late summer, which looks at food from different counties in the UK, called 'The Hairy Bikers Food Tour of Britain'.

When I look back at my childhood now I'm a little bitter that my Dad and I didn't get any respite from caring. A few days here and there would have been great – but it wasn't that way. I'd say my Dad was the best Dad in the world and I'm sorry that my Mum didn't get more out of life. I'm glad there is more support available for young carers now."

For more information on providing support to young carers see here - http://www.mssociety.org.uk/support_and_services/family_and_friends/kids_and_teens.html

For information on the MS Society's respite care services see here - http://www.mssociety.org.uk/support_and_services/respite_care/index.html

To sign up for this year's Cake Break see our fundraising pages here - http://www.mssociety.org.uk/ms_events/community_events/cake_break_2009.html