

Game On

By Dan Digmann, *self-help group leader in Alma, and a frequent contributor to the MS Connection.*

*You can try with all your might,
But you're reminded every night
That you been judged and handed life
Down in the Jackson Cage.*
- Bruce Springsteen

I didn't have a choice when I was diagnosed with having multiple sclerosis.

Oh, I guess I could have kept the numbness in my hands, chest, and feet to myself. But the abundant scarring on my brain was kind of hard to

deny while the neurologist held my MRI scans up to the light as though he was presenting evidence in a high profile court TV case.

Hindsight being 20/20, I should have shouted, "I object!" when he formally issued my diagnosis.

Multiple sclerosis: A chronic, unpredictable neurological disease that affects the

central nervous system. Not terminal, but no known cure. Two to three times as many women as men have MS.

Lucky me.

The phrase that looped through my head the entire ride home and all the next day was reminiscent of when I pleaded for my parents to mercifully overturn a childhood grounding: "But I didn't do anything."

And just like my brother would stand behind Mom and Dad pointing and making fun of me, MS was in the back of my mind laughing as she made herself at home.

MS was here to stay. I didn't have a choice.

But I soon realized that the choice was all



mine when I decided how I was going to live with the disease. Empowered by lyrics in the Bruce Springsteen song Jackson Cage and using the title as a euphemism for multiple sclerosis, I began endurance training for my competition of a lifetime.

*And it don't matter just what you say
Are you tough enough to play the game
they play
Or will you just do your time and fade away
Down into the Jackson Cage.*

Game on, I said. Game on, I continue to say every single day.

I have no control over what the disease may do to me. But it is my choice and it's the choice of every other person living with MS whether to get into the ring and give it our best shot every day.

These are just a few of the things in my life that came about because I chose not to give up

after I was diagnosed with having MS:

I didn't choose to have the disease, but I did choose to start taking better care of myself by eating more healthy foods and exercising regularly. Oh yeah, and I lost nearly 40 pounds as a result.

I chose to help others and myself deal with the disease by starting and leading a self-help group. Take that, MS!

I chose to befriend a National MS Society programs manager who helped me develop as a writer and introduced me to Jennifer, the woman who became my wife. Thanks, Karen.

Game on, and may we all be champions in our respective competitions.