MDA: Help and hope to those in need

In the July *Postal Record*, I wrote about a young man stricken with one of the diseases under the umbrella of the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Zachary McKinney, the son of a 38-year letter carrier, was diagnosed with Charcot-Marie Tooth disease, which attacks the nerves in the lower legs and feet of those afflicted. His mother, Suzanne Johnson, is the secretary of Branch 588 in Athens, GA.

In that article, I described the pressure that Suzanne felt when no answers were forthcoming when Zachary began to have symptoms. Finally, a local neurologist referred her to the MDA clinic in Atlanta run by MDA doctors for patients with MD. The clinic put Suzanne and Zachary in touch with a whole host of doctors trained to diagnose and help those with muscular dystrophies. In one day, they met with psychologists, neurologists and even occupational therapists. She asked questions and received the answers she'd needed. It was a godsend to her and Zach. While the diagnosis was tough to hear, at least they knew the enemy and how to fight back.

At the same time, Suzanne heard about camps for kids with muscular dystrophy. Zach began to attend when he was 13 and it was the beginning of something important in his life. For most of us, camp for our children can be taken for granted. We send them off and know they will have a good time in most circumstances. That is not the case with MDA families. For Suzanne and other parents of MDA children, every day is a struggle because of the increased needs the kids have. MDA camp provides a break for the families from the indescribable pressure. For the kids, it is the chance to get away from the routine and have fun with others who face the same problems they do.

That's exactly what happened for Zachary. He enjoyed himself tremendously and after a few years, became a junior camp counselor for others. He helped those who were in worse shape than he was and looked forward to MDA camp every year until he was 18. Suzanne says that camp was a turning point for Zachary and to this day is a cherished memory for him.

All in all, MDA was there for Suzanne and Zachary and the help did not stop. As the years passed, MDA provided vocational counseling that gave Zachary a vision for his future. He loved working with cars and eventually went to school to study to be a mechanic. He graduated and is currently working at a dealership near his home. His goal is to have his own custom upholstery shop.

I asked Suzanne what she would say to our members about what MDA has meant to her. Her answer is one you might expect. She says: "Life can change in the blink of an eye. Never take your family's health for granted. For those with MD, every day and every step is a focused struggle. Don't look away when you see a disabled person. Even though they might be in a wheelchair, they are just like you."

Suzanne describes her son as a wonderful young man who is kind to others. She knows that MDA was there for her and her son.

So when you wonder if it is worthwhile to have that fundraiser in your branch or whether our efforts to help kids makes any difference, think about this letter carrier family that has directly benefitted from what you and your branch do. In the final analysis, our lives are defined by those whom we help along the way. Remember, this is but one story among thousands of others.

I hope that your branch has a successful bowlathon on November 7 and I want to thank all of you for the hard work you put out to make this second national event a success. Reports are coming in from all over the country that letter carriers turned out to support our national charity, the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Please get your branch report forms in as soon as possible so that your branch can be credited with that money. In the next few months, we'll publish a list of the branches that won their categories. Again, thanks from all the families you helped!

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