

## NATIONAL MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY

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## FEATURE STORY

# GOING THE DISTANCE TO END MS

**JOLIET RESIDENT KELLI McDONALD  
TO RUN IN RELAY ACROSS U.S.**

BY TAREK WILEY

**LIVING WITH MS** for over 24 years has taken its toll on Peggy Kubic's memory, so it had completely slipped her mind that her daughter, Kelli McDonald, would be participating in the second ever MS Run the U.S., a 3,000 mile relay run across the United States to raise money for research and support of those affected by MS. When reminded about the event, Kubic was surprised to learn that her daughter would be running 142 miles from Davenport, Iowa, to Joliet, Ill., where McDonald lives with her husband and three children.

"You're amazing," said Kubic, once the information had finally sunk in. "You're crazy and amazing."

Crazy as the relay may have seemed to her mother, physically demanding events are just another day at the office for McDonald. She is an avid triathlete, and in 2012 she dedicated her season to helping bring an end to MS. She raised money throughout the year and participated in several races — including her first Half Ironman (70.3 miles) — dressed in orange from head to toe in honor of her mother and her struggle with MS.

"I have seen MS take so much away from her," said McDonald. "It took her ability to teach preschool, her ability to run, dance and walk long distances. It has almost crippled her with scoliosis and given her pain and numbness 24/7. However, MS has not taken her will to fight."

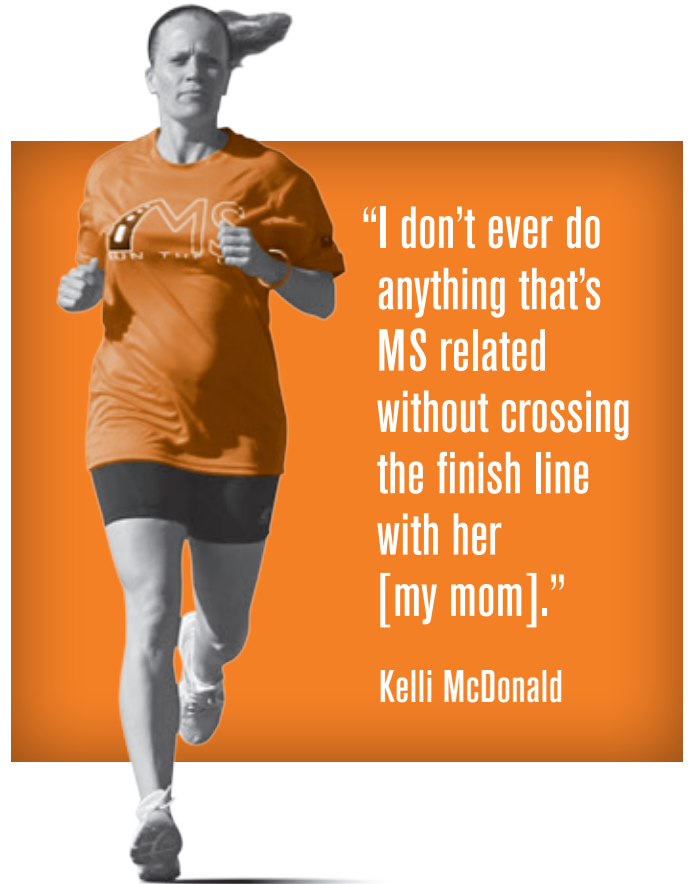
## FROM STRUGGLE TO INSPIRATION

Kubic was diagnosed with MS in 1989. She had been attending McDonald's eighth grade graduation when she passed out in the bleachers and had to spend the night in the emergency room. The following years were tough on the family, with Kubic relapsing and remitting in such rapid succession that she could barely recover from one cycle before starting another.

"We've had a lot of ups and downs over the years, but my mom's pretty amazing," said McDonald. "She has a spirit that is unwavering, and I think that's what has gotten her through the many years of challenges that MS has brought to her."

After a successful triathlon season in 2012, the Greater Illinois Chapter invited McDonald to a Finish MS (formerly the Race to Stop MS) dinner to acknowledge her fundraising efforts for the year. The evening's keynote speaker was the founder of MS Run the U.S., Inc., Ashley Kumlien, who ran the inaugural course from California to New York by herself, becoming the 16th female to run across America. Kumlien's inspiration for the run was her mother — who is also living with MS — and when she told her story, McDonald was captivated by how similar it was to her own.

After talking with Kumlien later that night, the idea of participating in the relay was firmly implanted in McDonald's head, but she still had one reservation. She was confident in her skills as a triathlete — particularly the swim and bike portions — but she did not consider herself a very strong runner.



"I decided to focus on my run and get my times down," said McDonald. "I knew I could make major improvements for my triathlons, and the thought about the relay was still in my head."

## EARNING EVERY MILE

Now her training is all about the run as she prepares for the relay. Kumlien has provided her with a six-month training program that breaks down mileage building and maintaining marathon distance leading up to the event. McDonald is also doing strength training, working out six days a week.

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McDonald and her Mom, Peggy

“I’m not really worried about the run,” said a confident McDonald. “I’m sure it will be a life changing experience for me because I

have not run a marathon yet. I figure if I can do a 70.3 mile Half Ironman with swimming, biking and running, 26.2 miles [each day] shouldn’t be too hard. By the time July rolls around, I should be ok. The fundraising part is more terrifying to me.”

To participate in the MS Run the U.S. relay, all runners are expected to raise at least \$10,000 by the end of September, including \$4,000 by the end of April to secure a spot in the relay. McDonald has already surpassed the \$4,000 mark and looks poised to reach or even surpass \$10,000 by September. Her donations have come from family, friends and complete strangers who have been inspired by her mother.

“She used to run one of the support groups, so she has known and touched a lot of people,” said McDonald. “It’s neat to see that support coming back through the relay and my fundraising.”

## A FITTING FINISH

Nobody has been more inspired by Kubic than McDonald, who credits her mother for her own stubbornness and refusal to give up.

“I just think to myself that my pain will be fine —

it will go away,” said McDonald. “But my mom and so many others have to deal with their MS symptoms every day, and those symptoms will probably never go away completely. I just have to think about what she’s been through, who she is and that she gets up knowing what she has to deal with every day, and I can’t complain. I just have to keep going. I run because others can’t.”

The MS Run the US relay kicks off April 13 in Los Angeles and finishes in New York on August 17. McDonald’s leg begins July 7 in Davenport, Iowa, and she will be running back to Joliet, Ill., on July 12, where she will be welcomed home by friends and family, some of who will be running the last five kilometers with her. Regardless of who shows up for her final steps of the relay, McDonald knows that she can count on one person to be there — her mother.

“I don’t ever do anything that’s MS related without crossing the finish line with her,” said McDonald. “It’s just fitting.”

Learn more about the MS Run the US relay at [msruntheus.com](http://msruntheus.com), or visit McDonald’s fundraising page at [firstgiving.com/fundraiser/KelliMcDonald/msruntheus2014relay](http://firstgiving.com/fundraiser/KelliMcDonald/msruntheus2014relay). ■

Interested in racing on behalf of the National MS Society, including for this year’s Chicago Marathon? Register for **Finish MS** at [finishMSillinois.org](http://finishMSillinois.org) to dedicate your endurance event to creating a world free of MS.