



**THE 3rd ANNUAL NELL HARDY COMBINED
TEST BENEFIT HORSE SHOW
SATURDAY - OCTOBER 6, 2012, 9:00a.m.
*Sponsored by: Friends of Nell Hardy
At the Erie Hunt and Saddle Club***

All Proceeds will be donated to help Nell Hardy fight her battle with ALS

Entry Form can be found by going to the EHSC Documents Page

**For more information or to make a donation please contact Barb Nash at
Nash7300@gmail.com or 814-450-5728**

Nell's Times News Essay

Changes occur almost every day of my life. Some are lovely, such as the advent of tulips or arrival of hummingbirds. Other changes, like being unable to hold a fork or take a step, are unforeseen and difficult. I try to take it all in stride, though. With amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), sometimes the only constant is change.

It wasn't always this way.

I used to ride horses competitively for over four decades. I raised three willful boys on my own, worked full-time at Mercyhurst College, tossed hay bales with a flick of my wrist. Then the diagnosis changed everything.

In May 2009, I went from powerful to powerless in the course of a telephone conversation. A winter's worth of tests confirmed that I had ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. It is a degenerative neuromuscular disease in which muscles atrophy and die, resulting in paralysis and eventually death. My doctor was brief but direct: life would never be the same again.

The changes during the first year were gradual yet steady. I continued to work at Mercyhurst but found that simple tasks like typing, holding the telephone and opening drawers were becoming impossible. I dreaded telling the students the truth about my terminal illness. But rather than view me as flawed, which I feared, they rebounded by decorating my walker with outrageously bright colors and a pair of fuzzy dice. I drove away that day not knowing I'd give up driving the next month.

The human spirit has a marvelous ability to absorb and accommodate change. As I moved from the walker into a wheelchair and let people begin to feed and bathe me, I felt a mixture of awe and gratitude. Each time I was on the threshold of another loss I simply asked for strength and moved forward. I knew that ALS was ruthless and deadly; reaching a tentative acceptance seemed the best route to take.

My second year with ALS found me scurrying to cross items off my bucket list while still able. With funds from a generous benefit held for me, I purchased a special van for the handicapped. We pointed it toward Florida last December and 21 hours later my three sons, an aide and I arrived with barely a hair out of place.

That was not the case with the roller coaster rides.

Not one to be outdone by my children, I convinced them to slide and wedge me into the seat of the first ride. Aside from some grave misgivings as the coaster jolted forward, I laughed my way through and ended up physically and psychologically intact. Five hours, two rides and a cotton candy later, I left the park feeling more alive than ever.

Planning trips was a little difficult as I didn't know how my condition would change. Luckily, this spring I managed a Caribbean cruise, an ALS walk in New York City and a spiritual retreat with 88 women on the shores of Findley Lake. No moss grows under these wheels!

The changes that catch my spokes aren't always the big ones. For instance, I was in tears last week at Presque Isle when my wheelchair wouldn't negotiate a small hill. I realized my days of beach yoga and shell picking were officially over. But then, in the midst of quiet resignation, I found the silver lining. My chair fit sideways behind the driver's seat; I could see perfectly out the open side door. With dusk falling and a light rain around me, I enjoyed a beautiful, fiery Lake Erie sunset.

Oddly enough, most of the changes in my life are a gift rather than a hindrance. My body has deteriorated but my spirit has not. With the help of my wonderful friends and family and a shift in perception, I can weather the changes ahead.

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