



↑ Verena keeps this pill organizer in her bedroom. She takes at least nine pills every day in order to manage her MS.



↑ It's most difficult for Verena to climb stairs in the early morning, before her muscles have had a chance to warm up.



↑ Bulk shopping and extreme organization are key: Verena buys everything from toilet paper to birthday presents ahead of time.

empowering women through programs that build self-esteem and enhance their quality of life. “I don’t let things get me down,” explains Verena, who is recently divorced. “Sometimes I have a ‘woe-is-me’ moment, but then I’m like, ‘Hey, Keep it moving.’” She graciously allowed me to join her on what passes as a “typical” day.

6:30 a.m. Verena wakes up and reaches for her pill organizer. She also stretches and uses a muscle massager to warm up her joints before she gets up. “I can’t just pop out of bed,” she says. What happens if one of her children calls out to her during the night? “It takes me a while to get there because I have to be careful not to fall,” she explains.

7:00 a.m. The family’s au pair starts her workday and enters Verena’s bright, spacious bedroom. Live-in child care is a must: “If my son runs out the door, I physically can’t chase him,” she says. “He once climbed out the window—thank God he

was in the basement. But that’s why I want a one-level house.”

Conserving energy and movement is a theme in Verena’s life. It’s the reason she has toothbrushes, toothpaste, and flossers in each of the three bathrooms in her home. And why she makes her kids’ beds with three layers of mattress pads and sheets. “This way, if a kid’s throwing up or wets the bed, I’m not remaking it—I just have to pull off a sheet and a mattress pad.”

She recalls when her symptoms started taking over her life. It was when her mother had a stroke, after Stephen was born. “I was flying back and forth to Michigan to see her, I had a baby and a 1-year-old, and I was so stressed.” Around that time, Verena lost all core strength.

Her divorce has been another grueling experience, but she thinks of the stress as a wake-up call to focus on herself and not let her symptoms worsen. She started going to Pilates two or three times a week. “At first, my foot was so stiff that I couldn’t move it. It was

like a brick,” she says. Pause. “When I was younger I was so athletic—cheerleading, everything... I used to be so *fast*.” Her voice trails off.

9:00 a.m. We pile into the car. Verena stocks it with the items she uses all day long, including baby wipes, straws (hand weakness can make it hard to lift a cup or a bottle), a roll of plastic diaper garbage bags to keep the car tidy, and a huge container of nuts.

9:23 a.m. Arriving at Olivia and Stephen’s school, Verena asks

How to Help a Parent With a Disability

Ask what you can do, suggests psychologist Rosalind Kalb, Ph.D., vice president of clinical care for the National MS Society. A straightforward “I hope you’ll let me know if there’s any way I can help you” is a good place to start; from