

## Winning the battle

Aggies Fighting Multiple Sclerosis strengthens students, raises money for cure

By Beth Brown  
THE BATTALION

For 21 years, senior agricultural economics major Amy Neely led a normal, healthy life. But in 1997, Neely was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, and her life changed forever.

"I had just returned from a vacation on South Padre Island when I noticed my left arm went numb," Neely said.

After a week of waiting for the numbness to go away, Neely went to the doctor and was told she had a pinched nerve. But a month later, the numbness had not gone away.

"I went to see a neurologist ... and he wanted to schedule me for an MRI. I said OK and went home," Neely said.

But when she got home, Neely found herself unable to use the restroom. Neely was rushed to the hospital where several MRI's were performed.

"By the fourth day of my second attack, which was no better, I found out that I had Multiple Sclerosis," Neely said.

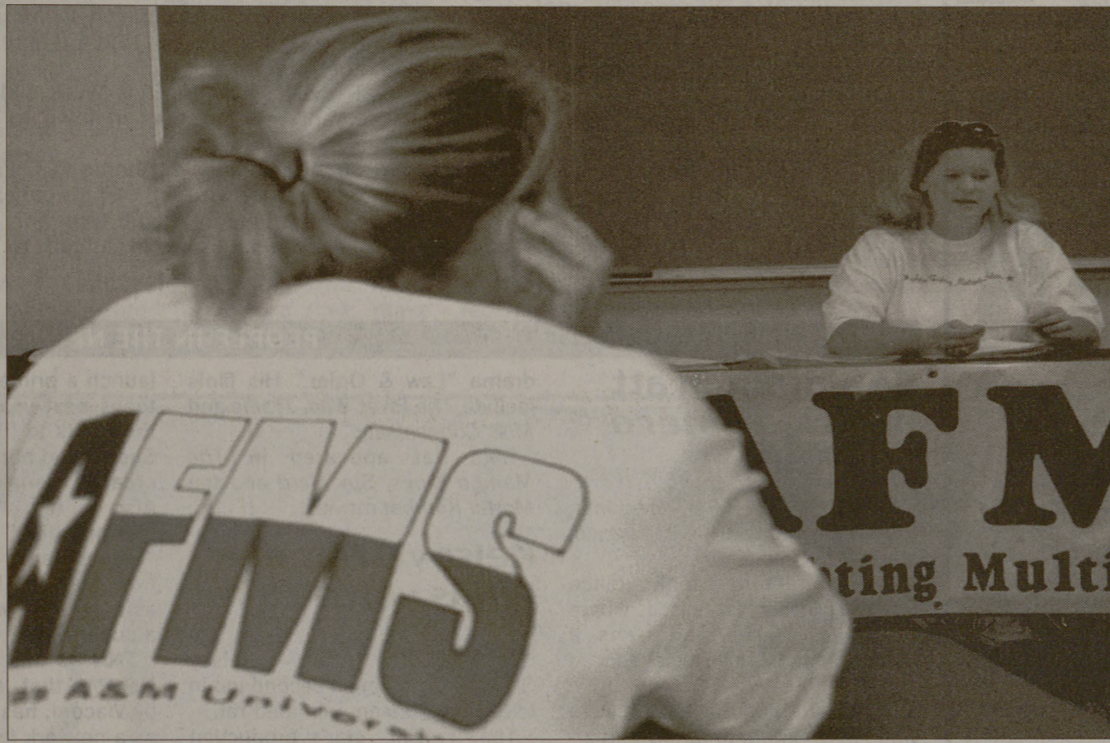
Many Aggies have heard of Multiple Sclerosis, or MS, but most do not know what the disease is.

"Today, Multiple Sclerosis, as defined by the Mayo Clinic, is a chronic disease of the central nervous system which is comprised of the brain and spinal cord; the CNS (central nervous system) sends and receives signals through a network of nerves insulated by a protective protein coating called myelin," Neely said.

"[With Multiple Sclerosis], the myelin is broken down, causing disruption in these signals."

In 2001, Neely founded Aggies Fighting Multiple Sclerosis on the A&M campus. She began the organization to help fight the disease.

"I knew a lot of other people who also had MS and decided that I wanted to do something to promote awareness and raise money for research while volunteering to help others within the community who have MS," Neely said.



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Amy Neely, a senior agricultural economics major, leads the Aggies Fighting Multiple Sclerosis meeting Tuesday night.

Stephanie Arnaud, a junior elementary education major, joined AFMS this semester. Arnaud has been fighting against MS since the summer of 2000.

"The one symptom I deal with day in and day out is the constant fatigue," Arnaud said. "It makes it hard to stay up and study or even get up to go to class."

Arnaud, like many other sufferers of MS, has

found some relief in various medications that fight the disease.

"I have been dealing [with the disease] by taking Avonex, medication that is injected intramuscularly, which is no fun since I hate needles," Arnaud said.

Arnaud has also found relief among the members of AFMS.

"I am so glad that I have found this group,"

Arnaud said. "It's nice to know that there are other people my age dealing with this (disease), whether they have MS themselves, or know a friend or family member with it."

Renee Gillman, a junior finance major, is faced with MS in a different way. Gillman's mother, Denyse Henry, has the disease.

"It has affected my life in the sense that I wish my mom could do more things that she wants to do," Gillman said. "It's hard for me to know exactly what she can and can't do because she pushes herself a lot, so I wish I could understand what she is going through."

Gillman said her work with AFMS is a way to help others who are experiencing the disease.

"Hopefully through this organization, we can raise awareness and maybe some money to donate to the MS society," Gillman said. "Most importantly, I would just like to volunteer for MS fundraising events and volunteer in the community to help people around here with anything that they need help with."

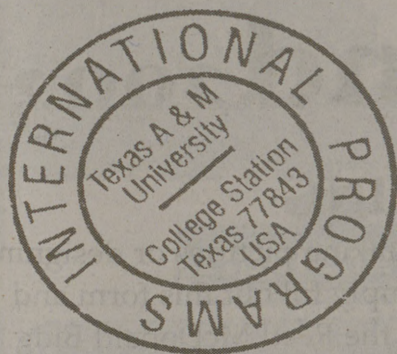
AFMS has some big events coming up that it hopes will help the fight against Multiple Sclerosis.

"Currently we are planning to volunteer for the MS 150, which is a bike ride from Houston to Austin; this is the biggest fund-raiser for MS," Gillman said.

"In the future, we hope to put on a walk-a-thon here with the help of the national MS chapter."

Despite the hardships that come with MS, many who have been diagnosed with the disease have grown stronger and more determined as people.

"I firmly believe that because of MS I will graduate from A&M in December. Because of MS I was strong enough to apply and get a Congressional internship in Washington, D.C.," Neely said. "Because of MS I am a lot stronger and less scared of the world."



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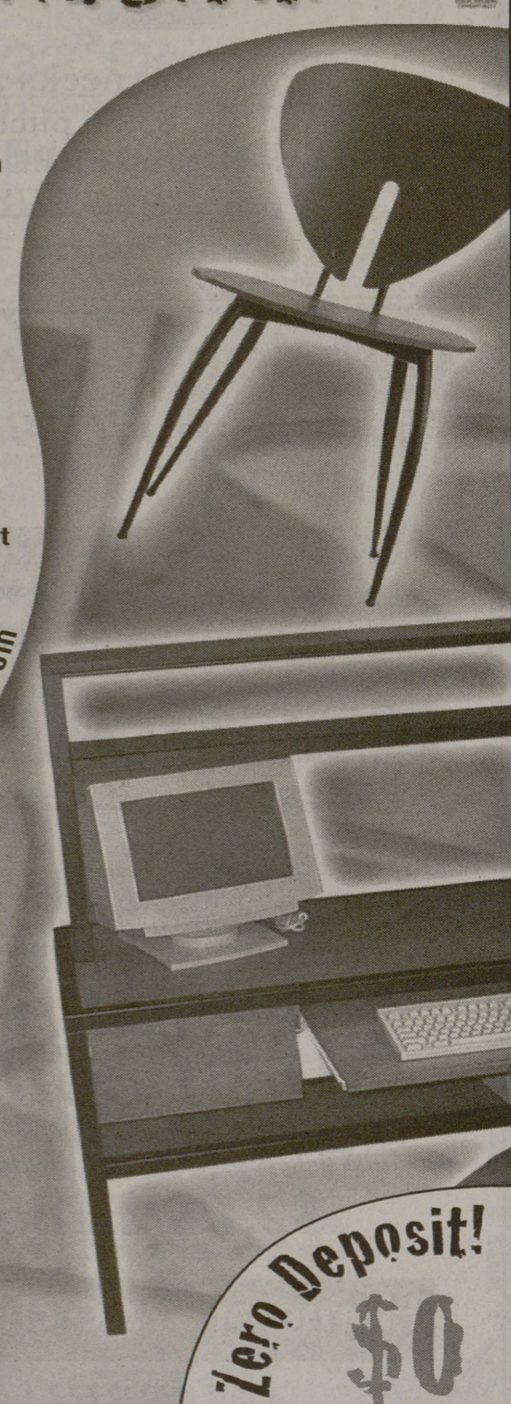
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