MS Ages Us More Than We Expected

by LIBBY SELINSKY

How MS Makes Us Old Before Our Time

Multiple sclerosis (MS) hits most of its targets when they are young. Being the most prevalent neurological disease that hits young adults in the world, MS's disabling effects can age its victims far earlier than they had ever expected.

From the onset of diagnosis, people with MS are struck with neurological damage that can slow them down and chip away at the list of activities that were once the very definition of youth. MS hits a person's strength, drains a person's fine motor skills, and cuts away at their energy, stealing the vivacity that was once there.

MS is inconsiderate and it does not stop. MS finds its way into every aspect of a person's life. A person who was once carefree, happy and strong can very easily and expediently find his or herself feeling lost, tired and useless.

When our human bodies lose functionality that was once natural and expected, the tendency to feel lost, tired and useless can bleed into their mindset. Life can feel heavy and meaningless if we allow the disease to dictate our experiences within it.

Carrying the MS Burden

I have read countless articles about learning how to let go of the things you love as the phases of MS progress throughout different lives. It is a mindset I never can get used to — it makes me furious really.

I don't mean to say that people with MS should live in denial. For sure, the likelihood of losing functionality is very real and very present. What I am saying is it is hard to live a happy life when you are constantly letting go of the small things you love.

I have MS. I also have a life. My life was in full swing for many years before MS sauntered in and started trying to rob things when I wasn't looking, and I refuse to live in a police state now that it has arrived.

MS can take my vision, but there are ways of reading without my eyes. MS can take my ability to walk, but I will still travel, go boating, go swimming and all of the other lovely things I do today.

The point is, MS is in my life, but MS does not dictate what I do with it.

Make Your Mindset a Priority

It is important to make it a priority to check in with yourself and evaluate how you are interacting with the world you live in. I believe this is a relevant point for anyone in the world.

However, when you have MS, I feel that checking in with yourself is the only way to live a full life with this disease.

We all have our daily challenges — our daily routines and strategies to get by and get things done. We have doctors, insurance companies, health tests, medicines, pharmacies to deal with.

The list of daily tasks and responsibilities can go on and on. And that is all before you even start to look at what you need to do for your life beyond this disease! And that is my point.

Dealing with MS is expensive for your time, energy and financial budget. It is easy to get so wrapped up in just dealing that we don't realize when we are checking out on the small joys that make up the bulk of our happiness.

Life can begin to feel dull, predictable and old, way, way before your time, while youth is still very presently running through your veins.

Next page: staying in tune with yourself and your emotions.

Make Your Mindset a Priority

The desire to avoid self-reflection can become great. Why would you want to think about your disease any more than you have to already?

It is hard to dig deep on the emotions that come along with MS. I still struggle in this regard. Some things just feel too painful.

Fortunately, self-reflection does not need to go to deep to remain beneficial. I feel like it all comes down to making choices and sticking to them.

Keeping a youthful outlook on life can be built upon three things: a foundational understanding of who you want to be, how you want to live in this world, and a dedication to keeping yourself aware and in-tune with your outlook.

Understanding Who You Want to Be

Who you want to be is completely in your hands. It can be hard to remember this when MS is doing its thing, but for as long as you are a living, breathing, human being, you are in charge of what you make of your life.

No person or thing in this world is in charge of deciding where your heart and mind lead you. Remember this fact. Make use of it. Do what YOU want with your time in this world.

How Do You Want to Live in This World?

Again, deciding how you want to live in this world is completely up to you. If you want to sail around the world, then you need to get busy finding a way to do it.

MS can take away your lust for life if you let yourself believe all of the dreams you once had are now shattered. On the other hand, MS can be your alarm telling you to wake up!

Your dreams are still attainable in some way, shape or form. The journey towards fulfilling those dreams might have changed, but I ask you. What journey has ever gone unchanged and remained interesting or carried any value.

Victor Schreckengost, a sculptor and industrial designer, talked to me years ago about some pedal cars he had designed. "People collect them," he said, "because the airplane pedal car looks nice. They don't want so see them get scratched or banged up. I designed them because I love watching children use them. The pedal car is of no use when it is just sitting there, avoiding damage."

Schreckengost's art was designed to be pervasive in daily life. He created simple, easy, cheerful, beauty. He saw

beauty in the journey of art beyond the creation of the piece. Life and art are intertwined within the beauty and the pain that humans experience. One cannot exist without the other.

Keeping Yourself Aware and In-Tune With Your Outlook

MS is pervasive — it never leaves. Even when we are relapse-free we are feeling the ever-present tug between possession and loss of self.

Periodically reminding yourself of who you want to be and how you want to live in this world can make all the difference in the amount of joy you maintain in life.

Remembering to check in with yourself keeps you aware of your happiness level. It keeps your focus on the positive and reminds you to live your life with and awareness of joy.

Prioritizing your desire for happiness redirects your mind to the bounty that is your life beyond MS. With this mindset MS falls to the wayside.

The diseases power and presence within your life remains in the background. Yes, MS will always need to be managed in one way or the other. No, it is not the masthead that steers your journey. Allow yourself to remain youthful and happy beyond MS.