7 Things I’ve Learned About Life Since My MS Diagnosis

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MS Life Lessons That Make Us Stronger

There’s no doubt that a life-changing diagnosis like multiple sclerosis (MS) will challenge how you see the world and change who you are. I was diagnosed eight years ago now and in that time I’ve learned a lot about myself and life in general.

Maybe I would have come to these conclusions anyway, but I think I’ve been influenced by what I’ve been through over the last eight years and have come out stronger for it. Here are some of my thoughts about what I’ve learned about life in the wake of MS.

1. It Is What It Is

A fellow MSer said this to me and I found it so useful. I met her at a kids’ martial arts class while waiting for our sons to come out. We hit it off straight away and after a couple of weeks she told me she had MS and I nearly fell over with surprise!

“So do I!” I exclaimed and we were firm friends after that. I remember moaning at her one afternoon, feeling sorry for myself and worrying about the future.

“It is what it is,” she said, and for some reason this resonated with me. There’s nothing I can do about my MS diagnosis.

I can’t change it and neither can any of us when faced with life changing news. It is what it is and we have to get on with it.

2. Why *Not* Me?

These are also useful words of wisdom when trying to avoid self-pity after a life-changing diagnosis.

I was talking to a lady who couldn’t have children due to cancer. She was only 34 and her life and future changed in an instant following that diagnosis. She said she didn’t like to wallow in misery, asking herself, “Why me?”

She understood the random nature of life’s setbacks and preferred to think, “Why *not* me?”

These things have to happen to someone and there are always people worse off than you. There is no point feeling sorry for yourself — count all your blessings instead of focusing on MS. I also like to think my diagnosis will spare me from something worse.

3. Sympathy and Compassion

I am actually much less sympathetic and compassionate since my diagnosis, which is surprising. I thought it would make me empathise more, but now I can't abide people moaning and feeling sorry for themselves.

I think MS has made me strong, and I always (secretly) wonder how people would manage in my position when they're wallowing in self-pity. This sounds harsh, right?

Don't get me wrong though. I have so much time for people who are genuinely suffering and going through horrendous times, but I have a problem with weak self-pity and I long to say, "At least you can walk."

4. We Have a Choice How We React

During my career I've learned a lot about cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and how we can, with help, alter how we respond to a situation. Viktor Frankl, one of the founders of this approach said:

"Between stimulus and response is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom."

I love this and always try and live by its message. Whatever happens to us in life, however terrible, we have a choice how we deal with it.

We can respond positively by standing and fighting or we can give up and let it consume us. I chose to accept my condition with dignity and get on with my life. It gets me down at times, of course, but I don't wallow in it and let it win.

5. I Know Who My Friends Are

The other day I was at a kid's party on my scooter and one of the dads was someone I've known for 25 years. He's a friend of a friend but we have shared numerous conversations over the years.

Anyway, he ignored me completely! I could see the panic on his face when he saw me trundling along and it was painfully obvious that he couldn't deal with my disability and didn't know what to say.

What a loser! Luckily I have many good friends who would never treat me like that. You soon find out who they are after something major happens to you so keep them close.

6. Family Is Everything

This is the same as with friends, only deeper! They are stuck with you whatever happens and they're usually the first to accept what's going on and adapt to the new "normal."

Cherish these people and count your blessings.

7. What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Stronger

This is a cliché but true nevertheless. Life-changing stuff happens to good people all the time, but if we respond positively and avoid self-pity we can grow as people and be strong despite our challenges.

Stuff happens — get over it!