Multiple Sclerosis Patient Story: LeeAnne’s Story of Her Diagnosis

by LEEANNE LAPUM

Reflecting After Diagnosis

The alarm clock goes off, signalling the start of another day. I slept well last night but you wouldn’t know it; I feel as though I haven't slept in years.

The thought of facing another day in isolation starts each day on a negative note. I know that I have to face it; I make the mental switch to "autopilot." Once my needs are taken care of, all I can do is sit by and watch as my family leaves to start their busy days. Once again, I face a day of isolation. I sit on the sidelines each day and watch the world go by, hoping to survive to see another. I pass time following the routine that I've developed during my more than 22 years of dealing with MS, and the isolation that comes with it.

Reflecting on the Diagnosis

Lingering in the back of my mind are memories of happier times, when I was active and totally involved with my young family. Also, tucked away, is a painful memory that still feels as if it happened yesterday.

I vividly remember the day that I received a diagnosis that would change our lives forever. After having two MRIs, I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. I remember meeting with my neurologist who gave us the results. I have primary progressive MS it's untreatable; I was crushed. Why has this happened? Why couldn't I have a normal life? Why me? What will we tell our young children?

On the drive home from my appointment we discussed at length exactly how we were going to break the news to the family. My parents had stayed with the kids while we went to my appointment. We walked into the house as if everything was normal. My husband took the kids outside to play. I sat down with my parents to break the life-changing news. I broke down as I shared the diagnosis. My mother was extremely upset; she had a cousin who had been afflicted with the same debilitating disease. She knew what lay ahead of us.

After my parents left, we called the kids into the room. We made the explanation very simple. We kept it simple, and explained that our lives would change because their mommy was sick. We told them that we were a strong team and that we had to depend on our faith to get us through each day. Satisfied with the explanation, our children went out to play. My husband and I breathed a sigh of relief, prayed together, took a deep breath and started our uncertain journey. It was then that we decided that we would survive the isolation that undoubtedly lay ahead.

Conquering Each Day

Over the years I have learned to scale-down at the end of the day. I have discovered some things that help me, no matter the situation:

- Breaking down treatment or challenges into segments instead of looking at the long term experience. Hills

are easier to climb than mountains.
- Purposely focusing on the problems of others.
- Focusing on the positive, being optimistic, and finding humor in things before, during and after treatment.
- Allowing others to share their fears, listening and helping them work through it.
- Keep a smile on my face no matter what. Others will be amazed, wonder what you're up to and why you're different.

Many years later, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was then that I realized that my cancer experience could be dealt with in the same way that I have dealt with MS. That was when it all made sense; a light bulb had turned on in my mind. MS had prepared me for breast cancer! I allow myself to have meltdowns, fears and doubts just as I had with MS. Instead of looking at the big picture I learned to face each treatment, conquer it and its side effects and move on just as I had faced each day while dealing with MS.

I think of myself as a survivor, not a victim. I conquer one day at a time.