

# People Like Me - MJ's Story



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I was recently engaged, working as a general manager of a hotel and living a fantastic, carefree life when I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

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It was just before Christmas, twenty years ago, that I felt my first symptoms. I was about to go away on holiday to Europe when I lost the feelings in my hands. I panicked and called my GP. She reassured me that it was just a trapped nerve and told me enjoy my holiday.

But during the trip, things just got worse. The numbness slowly moved up my left arm and then the tingling and itching started. I tried chiropractors and natural remedies but nothing worked.

As soon as I came back, I went through the process of diagnosis. It took about five months before doctors finally figured it out. The neurologist told me I had MS and that was it. I walked out of the office and burst into tears.

My diagnosis felt like a death sentence. I had never heard of MS. The first thing I did, days after I was diagnosed, was to learn more about the journey I was about to embark on.

The MS Society was a great lifeline. They gave me all the information I needed and it was comforting to know that at the drop off a hat, they would be there for me.

I joined a young MS support group but found it very confronting to see people living with MS in wheelchairs. My mind went straight to the worst case scenario. I didn't want to end up in a wheelchair and I hadn't dealt with anyone in a wheelchair before, either.

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Meeting with people who were living with MS and talking to them helped eliminate those fears. But still, I worried about my future.

I decided to start my own business because I didn't think I was employable anymore. I also wanted the freedom to be able to set my own hours and take time off if I needed it.



**“It might seem hard to imagine but over the years, I have learnt to view MS as a gift. It has taught me to value people, memories and experiences.”**

It turned out to be one of the best decisions I have made and funnily enough, I have MS to thank for it. Today, I run a thriving training organisation that has been nominated for numerous awards and won plenty too.

I've learnt to listen to my body and I take care of myself very well. I watch my diet, manage my stress levels and ensure I get enough sleep. Fatigue affects me the most. If I have a late night or get stressed, my body falls apart and the numbness and tingling come back.

It helps to have a fantastic support system. My mother and husband take care of everything else for me so that I'm able to run my business and still get the rest I need.

Every day my husband makes me breakfast in bed, makes my lunch and does all the housework. He makes my life so easy. He truly is the most selfless, caring and loving individual. I couldn't live the life I do without his support.

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MS has affected me in many ways and has changed my life completely but not all of them have been negative.

It might seem hard to imagine but over the years, I have learnt to view MS as a gift. It has taught me to value people, memories and experiences.

I've been bungee jumping, bought a sports car and lived life to the fullest.

I tell the story of my MS journey in my training sessions as a lesson in resilience. I know that if I find myself in a wheelchair tomorrow, I'll make sure I'm the sexiest person in a wheelchair!

You can have an amazing life after diagnosis. I'm proof of that.

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