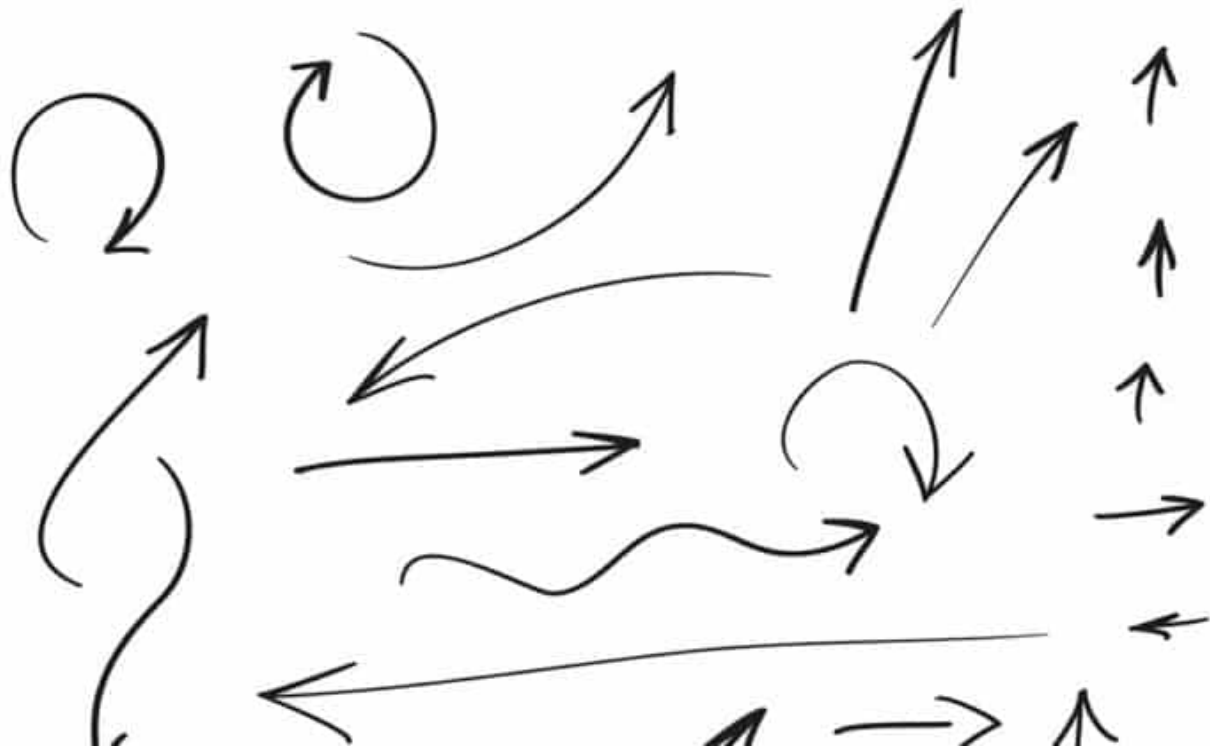


Accepting the Good



My MS journey started while I was in the military. I served in Saudi Arabia, as well as serving in Haiti during Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti. I actually received my Purple Heart in October of the year I served in Haiti.

Upon my return from Haiti, I started to have problems with my health – blindness, fatigue and headaches. I went to sick call (that’s the military term for going to the doctor), and I was basically told they were symptoms of stress and to take a few Motrin and let it pass.



But the symptoms were so bad that I had to leave the military because I couldn't perform essential duties like 10-mile runs. This was in 1995.

Fast forward to 2004, those same issues got much worse. I went to the doctor and was immediately admitted to the hospital. I got an MRI and was told that I may have MS, and they would eventually give me a spinal tap. All of this occurred while I was diagnosed as being legally blind due to my issues.

In 2005, after receiving a second MRI, I received a call from my neurologist the day before my 35th birthday and he told me, Mr. Matthews, I have good and bad news:

Good news: Your MRI was a success.

Bad news: You have MS.

Happy birthday to me...

The world seemed to come crumbling on me like a ton of bricks. All of this while working, completing my degree and raising my daughter. After being diagnosed with such a disease, I knew I needed to do something to make a difference.

In 2010, I created the Shannon L. Matthews Veteran's Scholarship to assist older Veterans (pre-9/11) with an opportunity to work towards that degree which had passed them over time for whatever reason.

In 2012, I retired from the civil service with the US Government.

Since then, I have been doing speaking engagements and volunteer work all while doing project management work for my current employer.

In 2021, I was selected to represent the state of Minnesota in the National Purple Heart Honor Mission, an organization that recognizes Veterans for positive achievements in society.



In 2022, I became the first living Veteran to donate their purple heart to an institution of higher learning – my alma matter, Oklahoma State University-Tulsa.

While MS can be a devastating disease to have, it doesn't have to be a death sentence either. While I have my ups and downs in life, if we only focus on the negative aspect of life, we won't make it.