

Among Brothers and Sisters



November 2017, specifically Veterans Day weekend, my life would change forever. In the months leading up to November 11, 2017, I knew something was different. I felt off. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but I knew that something wasn't right. The following weeks would consist of multiple ER trips, an increasing loss of feeling throughout the entire right side of my body, and deteriorating muscle strength and motor skills to the point where no doctor could continue to overlook this sudden onset of odd, random and unexplainable combination of symptoms.

After 4 days of hospitalization, steroids, an MRI, blood work and a spinal tap - I received the dreaded, yet comforting diagnosis.

You might be asking yourself right now, "how could this possibly be comforting?"

But for those of you who have MS and have experienced the various, random and unexplainable symptoms from day to day, you might have had a similar encounter. Leading up to my diagnosis, the only explanation I had for what was happening to me was that I was crazy. Nothing else made sense, and when I was finally diagnosed with MS, the puzzle pieces started coming together.

Although a diagnosis did not mean a cure or a solution, it meant answers and a plan forward.

However, I had neither the answers nor a plan for what was coming.

It's difficult and lonely enough being diagnosed with an incurable disease like MS that no one

understands - that affects everyone differently, and in some cases, not everyone can see. But then you add military service, military medical care, and the process of separation, where again, you are 1% of the population.

There is a special connection between those who serve and those who have served in our military. They become your family away from your family, forming tight knit relationships among brothers and sisters. Ask anyone who is serving or has served in the military, and they will tell you about the camaraderie between service members.

For example, we don't always fit into the civilian population because of the core values we live by, the structure that runs our day, our crude sense of humor, and the trials and tribulations we share and if that didn't make it difficult enough, now you add separation from the military, a loss of identity, reintegration into a civilian population, and an uncertain future.

For this very reason, I wanted to start a self-help group specifically for active duty service members and veterans who are battling MS. I wanted a safe place where the camaraderie could carry over and continue to strengthen as we help one another navigate through the challenges of living with MS. A place, not to gripe and complain, but to educate, to empower, and to support our brothers and sisters. A place where you can feel safe and understood by the very people who stood in the same ranks as you. A place where even though our future with MS is uncertain, you can be certain that we will have your back.

Editor's Note: Read [more blogs](#) on the veteran experience and living with MS, as well through this [Momentum Magazine article](#). Watch the latest [Ask an MS Expert](#) for more.