

Silver Linings Exist: Reflecting on a Decade With MS



I recently turned 50, so I gave myself permission to reflect on the past decade. You see, I happen to have been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at 40.

Some of this I might have learned just by getting older. But my life is so different now that I don't know if I would've learned the lessons that I have if I hadn't been forced to just slow down.

My MS has been completely life-altering to me. I have used a wheelchair since I was 40. I have not worked since I was 40. I used to travel all the time. Now, I don't drive and air travel is very limited. My world is my apartment.

Appointments to get my hair done, enjoy a pedicure or a massage, etc. – all the things girls do – have now been traded in for all the things that a patient does: appointments at physical therapy, the neurologist, the urologist, the primary care doctor, infusions, bloodwork, imaging... The list goes on.

So, I will never be one of those people who says, "I'm glad that I got MS," but I have found some silver linings.

Since I'm 50, here are my top 5 MS silver linings.

1. **Empathy** — I needed to learn how to be empathetic, so I certainly did. It's so easy to

spot when someone has little empathy. I regularly put myself into other people's shoes, and it makes me realize how good I have it. Which leads me to my next point.

2. **Gratitude** — I always say there are certain things that I'm fortunate for, and I have a friend who tells me, "MS does not seem fortunate. And you are not fortunate." She is right, on one hand, but on the other, I have it so much better than so many people. That keeps me very grateful for the things I have, like my independence and my relative health.
3. **Listening** — Because of my MS, I often can't get the words out. I think my brain works faster than my mouth! That was not always the case. As a result, I think I do a better job at active listening.
4. **Patience** — Patience was not always my virtue! Now, I wait on everything. I don't drive, so spontaneity is out the window. I have to plan everything. Not to mention, everything takes me longer. My fine motor skills are not great, thanks to the MS. So, between that and using a wheelchair, everything takes me a long time. But my attitude now is, "I'm doing it. So, as long as it takes, it's still better than not doing it!"
5. **Routine** — I had very little routine before MS. My life was very fast paced. What would seem boring to me before, I now embrace. MS makes me tired, and my sleep schedule is weird, but it is a schedule nonetheless. In addition to getting my DMT every 28 days, I am diligent about taking my other pills and vitamins 3 times a day. I also have always had a trainer, but, for me, I know I am very fortunate to have one now. My trainer not only keeps me on track physically, but she is also a huge help to me while I exercise. Instead of fetching weights, bands, steps and other equipment, which is a workout in itself for me, she gets them.

The past decade has been extremely different than the one that I envisioned for myself, but I feel that we have to play the hand that we've been dealt. And so that's what I do. And some days I do it way better than others. Fight on, MS Warriors! It is not for the weak. What are your silver linings? We all have them.