

[The \(2nd\) Adventure of a Lifetime: MS on a Mission Trip](#)



Back in 2017, I shared the story of my stepdad, Tim's, [first time traveling abroad with MS](#).

While it was definitely an adventure for my family, what made this experience even more memorable was everything Tim, my mom and I learned about the challenges visiting different countries (or traveling in general) with MS and how to deal with the symptoms along the way...

Fast forward to January 2019. Tim would soon fulfill his dream and go to South Africa for a mission trip to help those less fortunate. Only this time he was traveling without his family... without his safety net.

Spoiler Alert:

Tim traveled to South Africa with his mission group, helped support some great communities in need, had an incredible, humbling time, and came home safe!

After Tim got back, I sat down with him and and my mom, Janet.

I wanted to interview them about his mission trip. Maybe his experiences could help others with MS feel less stuck in their comfort zones and more ready to say, "Not today, MS!" and travel anyway. But first, we started from the beginning...

Tell me about your MS diagnosis. How did it make you feel? At the time, how did you think it would impact your life?

Tim: I didn't know how it was going to impact my life. I was scared of the unknown.

A few years after your diagnosis, you met your wife, Janet. How have the two of you learned to adapt to the challenges of MS together?

Janet: We joined a local support group and we were active for about 6 years. The group had break-out sessions for caregivers, which were especially helpful. We both learned a lot from the other members too. Overall, it really helped us learn what things to expect from MS, how it affects life, and how to deal with all the problems it causes.

Fast forward 14 years and Janet was dropping you off for a 10-day mission trip in South Africa! What made you decide to pursue a trip like this?

Tim: For as long as I can remember, I always wanted to go on a mission trip and be part of it. Janet encouraged me to go, because it was something I always wanted to do. I was thankful I was able to pull it off.



Did you feel any insecurities leaving Janet and your safety net at home? What were your biggest worries as you boarded the bus to the airport?

Tim: For the most part I didn't have any insecurities. I was comfortable with the group that was selected. I have a strong faith, and I trusted that God would take care of me.

Janet was worried that I would have some trouble communicating with the group and keeping up with them. She hoped that someone would try to look out for me.

Oh, I did have a fear that I would be detained in the airport because of my medications and that I would slow down the group. I also wondered if they would understand what fatigue looks like.

Did our trip to Europe impact how you handled this trip or your decision to go in the first place?

Tim: I probably would have decided to go on this mission trip even if we hadn't traveled to Europe. It's always been a dream. But traveling to another country first did help.

Janet: Everything he learned on his first trip helped his second go a million times

smoother. He knew what to prepare for and what to expect, especially regarding medications and getting through airports. We were able to get the documentation that Tim needed from his doctors right away, pack the medications correctly, and talk to the pastor supervising the trip about Tim's needs for wheelchair service in airports and an aisle seat near the bathroom.

What was the most rewarding part of going to South Africa?

Tim: Seeing the smiles on the children's faces when I shook their hands. And seeing how big those smiles got when I gave them all big bear hugs! When they saw that, they all wanted one. That was the high point—seeing the smiles on the children's faces. It made my heart smile.



What would you tell someone who has a desire to travel - whether for a mission trip or in general - but is afraid of the limitations their MS, or any disability, might bring?

Tim: Don't be afraid to travel just because of MS. Do your research on where you are going and what is available to help you.

Some things we cannot go see, like things with lots of steps. There are limitations to seeing some historical landmarks in other countries. This isn't always the case though—it depends on the country.

Learn some of the language or at least write down some phrases to use. Then you can ask for help easier or read some of the signs. Don't be afraid to ask questions, like where's the bathroom. That's an important one!

Janet: I would add to travel with a group you are comfortable with and use any services for people with disabilities. It's not a time to be embarrassed. Everyone around at the airport is in their own traveling bubble anyway.

Tim: Also, don't be in a rush. Give yourself plenty of time. Get on the plane first and get off last. Let people who are in a rush get past you and continue their rush. Communicate with your group about it taking you longer to do things, and don't be

afraid to use a cane or a wheelchair if you need them.

Janet: Airports assign somebody to push you in a wheelchair through the airport so that you will be on time, so definitely use this service.

Would you do it again? Any other last bits of advice?

Tim: Would I do it again? Yes. There is too much of this world to experience and you can't do it from inside your house, so get out and travel.

And, of course, stay cool! Temperature wise and attitude wise.