

Unstoppable



In 1999, I was living life to the fullest. I had two children, working at a great job, traveling, going to college and exploring all life had to offer. I was an active mother, always juggling multiple work and personal duties at the same time. I was always on the go (I still am). I never took sick days and rarely used vacation or personal days. But I began to feel my body change.

About 10 years prior to this, I noticed some forgetfulness, tingling in the hands and feet, and fatigue. I always thought it was because I did too much and because I was always on the go. The 10 years leading up to 1999, these symptoms became worse and harder to deny. I also began to develop new symptoms such as weakness in my extremities, migraines and what I now know to be optic neuritis. I also had battled my first diagnosis of cancer (I would go on to develop and beat cancer 2 more times). So for years, I went to doctors to figure out what was causing these symptoms.

In the 90s, the doctors I saw attributed everything I was feeling to being a woman. I was told it was a “female” issue, that it was from postpartum and that I just depressed. Doctors didn’t take me seriously. I was told to go home, eat healthier, get more sleep and have less stress in my life. Easier said than done. I was a single mom with two kids and working full-time. I also didn’t appreciate that I wasn’t being taken seriously and that these symptoms were a cause of a medical disorder and not something I was just making up in my head.

After years of searching for a doctor who believed me and with symptoms becoming more prevalent, I found the answers I was looking for. I finally heard those three words: “you have MS.”

I had heard of MS from a few well-known public figures, but I didn't know what the disease entailed. All I was thinking about was how am I going to raise my children, work and go back to school. There were no support groups or communities to turn to. I didn't know anyone like me, going through the same struggles I was. That didn't come until much later into my diagnosis.

The years following my diagnosis, I continued to work full-time, sometimes even working two jobs. I raised my children. I went back to school full time. Unfortunately, I did have to quit school after earning my associates. The workload became too much and the field I was pursuing, criminal justice, wasn't a field I could physically partake in anymore.

Since the day I was diagnosed, I didn't let this life changing moment define who I am. My family and I have always just figured it out. We've adapted where needed. I've always kept a positive attitude and used humor as my number one medicine to get through everything. I'm a very stubborn woman. If you tell me no, I'll try to prove you otherwise. Even if I don't succeed, I go down swinging and fighting. That's not to say I don't have bad days. We're all human. My daughter says, "you have 24 hours." I have 24 hours to be mad, angry, wallow and cry. Then I pick myself back up and face the day. I never settle. I get up every morning, put my feet on the ground, and I see what kind of trouble I can get into.