

# An unforeseen challenge



## **My MS experience taught me to embrace a whole new world.**

by Lovey Ray

My entire life has been a balancing act.

I've been juggling new challenges since I was a 5-year-old Black girl adopted into a Norwegian/German family, never feeling like I fit in, then abandoned at age 17. My military career was cut short because of an abusive marriage, and I became a single mom of two at a young age. I was homeless for a short time, and I dealt with several roller-coaster relationships.

### **Growing strong**

It all taught me that I was strong. I could overcome any obstacles thrown my way, but being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2014 at age 31 was a challenge I did not see coming. It became front and center in my life.

I had just started what I thought would be my dream job when I was injured in a car accident. I started losing my vision a few weeks later. Right away, a whirlwind of tests began — in-depth vision screenings, MRIs, a spinal tap, repeatedly being asked what happened. I remember sitting in the doctor's office, being told I had MS. I didn't take it seriously until I researched the disease.

Then began the stages of grief. I was in denial — this was not going to be a big deal, and I would not make a big issue out of it.

I did not feel I needed to start medication right away, and I would get better. I experienced depression and anger. Being a veteran of both, I knew that if I was going to survive whatever MS had coming for me, I needed to embrace this new world and surround myself with others who were supportive and, like me, were fighting an uphill battle.

I began attending an MS group sponsored by the [National Multiple Sclerosis Society](#). Although I was the youngest and the only female of color in the group, they accepted me. The one thing we had in common was this terrible disease. What a relief it was to hear the stories from others about symptoms that I experienced every day and how they worked through them. I started accepting that this was now a part of my life and that it was important to teach my five beautiful children that despite issues of health, race or any other curveballs that are thrown your way, you work through them. It will not be an easy climb, but you can make it.

### **The MS experience**

As I adjusted to the new world I was forced into, I started reevaluating my life and removing obstacles and people who were either holding me back or holding me down. My children became front and center, and I vowed I would never miss an important day of their lives unless my health prevented me.

I would focus on the here and now, not worry about the future, knowing God had it all under control and that worrying just leads to stress and anxiety. I share my story of resilience with anyone who asks, and I try to be an example of how MS does not define who I am. Having MS led me to share my story so that others know MS does not discriminate.

Like any other disease, MS does not pick and choose who is diagnosed or tests positive. Just like so many other invisible illnesses, you never know who around you might be in pain and suffering.

The world has been thrown into chaos with different groups fighting about who is right and wrong. They forget that everyone is different and that the color of one's skin does not make one better than another.

I was raised to not "see" black or white but that we are all people who make mistakes and have a right to our own opinions. We all have feelings and pain that we hide behind.

What makes us unique is that our country is a melting pot of so many different people from different backgrounds. MS is often called the snowflake disease because no two people have precisely the same symptoms. Just as MS affects each person differently, we need to be more caring and empathetic to those around us whose opinions may not align exactly with our own. I am grateful for being unique, and while I did not ask for MS, God has allowed me to use it to encourage others, because only together can we make a difference.

**Lovey Ray lives in Mill Creek, Washington, with her daughter and four sons. She is an Army veteran. When she is not working as a chiropractic assistant, she enjoys cooking and traveling with her family. She also leads a local MS support group in her area.**

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