

In April 2022 I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. I was 44 years old, working in a high stress job as an executive. My MS “episode” presented itself as severe double vision, diplopia. It scared the heck out of me, and came on suddenly. For about two weeks whilst awaiting the results of an MRI and other tests, I was faced with potentially having a brain tumour, before I finally got the diagnosis of MS. The whole process was incredibly stressful, because of the unknown.

The day I got my diagnosis there was little time to process it, suddenly I was forced to change my life. I had to take pills, twice a day to prevent MS episodes. For me, this was huge. I was not someone who took pills every day. I hated it, resented it. At first, I felt like it was this constant reminder that I was different. Now, I don’t even think twice. I just take my pills and get on with my life.

The first 6 months were tough, I cried a lot. Felt alone, isolated, depressed, and angry. Then one day I got a call from Liz at MS Waikato. Suddenly, there was a light shining from someone who got it. I still remember the first visit I had from Liz, she was optimistic and provided me with lots of information, guidance, and a supportive voice. I was so incredibly grateful to her for those first 6 months. Aside from getting the diagnosis, the support from MS Waikato is what I remember the most. Liz would call me and check in, asking how I was doing. She always listened and never judged. Instead, she filled me with hope that I could continue to live my life and just make some small adjustments, but that for the most part I would be fine. Liz would tell me stories about other people’s journeys and that MS ended up changing their lives for the better. The notion of this shocked me, at first. But gave me hope.

The last 16 months have been some of the most challenging times in my life, not just because of the MS diagnosis. But the realization that I have limitations, that previously I put everyone else before myself, to the detriment of my health and wellbeing. In many ways, getting the diagnosis of MS has saved me and forced me to prioritise myself. I liken it to putting the oxygen mask on yourself before others, that is what MS has done for me.

It has taken me a while to get here, to be ok with my condition. MS is a unique journey for everyone. Now my life is different, I regularly take breaks, prioritise sleeping and reducing my stress levels. Having a supportive network around you is essential. I’m optimistic about the future and living with MS, I’m grateful for the support I have received and the new outlook I have on life.

Julie