

Dear Gillian,

I am writing to tell you about the way I was told I have MS.

It was 2005 and I'd been short listed for redundancy for the third time by the same company. I was under a lot of stress when I lost some vision from my right eye – it was more blurry than anything else (optic neuritis). I was physically fit but started noticing I would tire easily when climbing some stairs. While I was riding my motorbike, my weekend hobby, I experienced painful spikes in my left wrist after about ten minutes riding and would find that the clutch lever was almost impossible to operate. Even whisking an egg while making an omelette was difficult as my hand and arm would suffer what seemed like cramp. I then lost feeling in the skin on my upper body. During this time I visited my local GP on a number of occasions before he got the ball rolling and arranged for me to have an MRI scan. This was March and it was not until November that same year that I actually had the MRI. Then, several weeks later, I underwent a lumbar puncture.

A fortnight later I was in work. I was quite ill but figured work would keep my mind active. My mobile phone rang mid afternoon. It was my hospital consultant saying that I'd to come in and see him soon. He told me right then, on the phone, that I had MS!

I felt a cold rush come over me and then drove home in a daze. I found it hard to tell family and friends of this shocking news.

I had started noticing that simple tasks were becoming more difficult, so meeting my consultant couldn't come quickly enough. I had many questions to ask him, but before I could ask anything, he looked at me sternly and said, "The damage to your brain is extensive. I'm amazed you are still walking and talking as well as you are."

He showed me my brain scan, which had in excess of 30 lesions. I was shocked. My cousin on the paternal side of my family was very unwell with MS and that was my only knowledge of it. I searched online for information, but internet searches had me in tears as so many ads popped up for disabled aids, including a motorised scooter to aid mobility.

I was 32 and thought my world was over. It wasn't; it was simply a new beginning. Doctors offered me nothing proactive as most of their treatments (excluding interferon injections) were just

aimed at trying to alleviate symptoms.

Despite being understandably upset at first, I decided I was going to learn all I could about MS. I now lead a relatively stress free life and enjoy the simple things that once passed me by unnoticed.

Good luck with your studies.

Be well,

Sandy