

Dear Gillian,

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

My symptoms began on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2010 about mid-morning – pretty exact, huh? The date sticks in my mind for a number of reasons: I'd played cricket on the Saturday (in what was my last proper game), and walked to work on the Wednesday (it's about a 35 minute walk). Around mid-morning I got numbness in both feet and thought I must have hurt my back whilst playing cricket. The following day was my niece's first birthday and she was having a party, whilst the Friday was my 43<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

As I still couldn't feel my feet – due to numbness, pins and needles, or some other hard to describe sensation – I cried off my cricket match on the Saturday and booked to see a physio who insisted I see my GP as the symptoms sounded to her like diabetes, which runs in my family.

The following week I flew to Sweden for a meeting, although even this wasn't without its dramas as it was in the wake of the ash cloud crisis, due to the eruption of the Icelandic volcano, and the trip was in doubt until the very last minute. Whilst I was away the sensation gradually worked its way up my legs to my midriff and so on my return I booked an appointment with my GP, calling the surgery from Manchester Airport.

When I saw my GP he pointed out that as the sensation was in both legs it couldn't be a trapped nerve, or similar, and as such it was a 'red flag' issue and he sent me for blood tests and a chest x-ray as I was suffering from terrible night sweats.

My wife, Caroline, came with me to the GP for the test results. They were all clear so he told us he was referring me to a neurologist. As Caroline, who I married in 1990 and was diagnosed with MS in 2001 – strange but true - we asked him the likely possibilities. These were: MND, spinal compression or MS. At this stage, even given our knowledge and past experiences of the condition, we still didn't think MS to be likely, as surely we would have known.

I finally saw the neurologist, following several run ins with his attack dog medical secretary, in July and was sent for an MRI scan which took place on August 4<sup>th</sup>. I seemed to be in the scanner an age but had a rough idea of actually how long from the number of songs from the 80s, which I endured, on local radio via the headset.

We went on holiday to Scotland in late August and on our return, since the scan was inconclusive; the neurologist recommended a lumbar puncture, which took place in September. The procedure itself wasn't too bad but I felt like I had a hangover headache for about a week afterwards.

In early October, whilst on a management conference in Stockholm one of the speakers struck a chord with me as he spoke about the circle of grief – shock, denial, anger

etc. Afterwards I sought him out and it turned out he was a clinical psychologist. I asked his advice on telling people about my health (if a positive MS diagnosis came through). His advice was that it was better to tell people as it's best to be honest rather than trying to remember who knows and also you may need their help and support in the future – good advice, I thought.

We were finally called back in to see the neurologist on 2<sup>nd</sup> November (almost six months after my initial symptoms) and he confirmed what we had by now expected to be the case – I had Relapsing Remitting Multiple Sclerosis. That afternoon I had a dentist's appointment and was asked to complete a routine form about any changes in my health – so the first person I told was actually my dentist!

We made a conscious decision to tell everyone about my diagnosis and that evening I told my elderly parents, which was very difficult, and meant trying to manage their shock as I had always played my concerns down. Over the following few days I also told other family, friends and work colleagues – actually hearing myself say, 'I have MS,' was a strange experience.

Four years on I take no MS medications. I am still enjoying working fulltime, going to the gym – concentrating mainly on a range of core exercises - and walking Emily, our 11 year old Westie, and other than occasional pins and needles if I stand for too long, I am managing my MS sensibly. I so hate that word!

Regards,

Steve