



PROUDLY SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH
ALL NEUROLOGICAL CONDITIONS

Rob's Story

My life has been a series of life changing moments. One of the firsts happened when I met my Australian wife, Sharon, on a tour of Europe when I was 22 years old. Two years after we met, I uprooted my life in Canada and moved to Western Australia's South West to start our lives together. We got married in 1995 but not even a year into our marriage came the next life changing moment - my multiple sclerosis (MS) diagnosis.

I didn't know what to expect or exactly how MS was going to change my life. A week after my diagnosis, I visited MSWA to speak with one of the nurses to find out more. It just so happened that we arrived on the same day of their Annual Member Christmas party. For someone who had just been diagnosed, it probably wasn't the best introduction to MS. There were about 50 to 60 people there in various stages of MS. I met a guy in a wheelchair with slurred speech who tried to talk to me and thought to myself, this is how I'm going to end up.



But that's the thing about MS. You never know how it's going to affect you. I bet on it having a minimal impact on my life and got on with my life. I never thought that being diagnosed with an incurable degenerative neurological condition would affect positive change in my life but that's exactly what happened. MS opened doors for me I never, ever imagined and so many things that have happened in my life since my diagnosis have been as a result of having MS.

One of the first things MS changed about my life was my career. I worked as a chef at one of the top restaurants in Albany but the long hours and the physically demanding nature of the job meant MS symptoms like vision loss, heat intolerance and fatigue reared its ugly head. Eventually, I decided I could no longer handle the heat and got out of the kitchen.



I found a new job working in a disability employment organisation and threw myself heavily into the MSWA Outreach Group. I became president of the group in only a few years' time and not long after, in 2000, MSWA asked me if I wanted to carry the Olympic Torch. I was the only person with MS to do so in WA. It was a thrilling once in a lifetime experience.

In the next couple of years after that, Sharon and I had more life changing moments when we added to our family with Connor, 16 and Mackenzie, 14. My children have always known about my MS and are very supportive. They are my motivation to stay positive, active and engaged. I want to show them that even with barriers, you can live life to the fullest and do what you want.



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So, in 2012, when a gold medallist Paralympian called me out of the blue and said, “I understand you sailed 20 years ago, don’t walk well and have MS. Would you like to be a part of a 3-man sailing team and help me get to the Paralympics?” I said sure. By that time, MS had affected my balance and my ability to walk and I was using a crutch full time.

MSWA were really supportive and together with members of the outreach group, they helped us in raising money to get to the International Association for Disabled Sailing competition in Canada. Out of 18 world class competitors, we came in 12th. Not bad for our first time. We continue to sail together regularly and are hoping to get to the Paralympics in 2020.

I never would have changed careers, I never would have had carried the Olympic Torch, never would have had the chance to compete in sailing internationally and do so much more if it hadn’t been for MS. I consider myself blessed in a way that I have more opportunities because of disability than other people.

My experiences have inspired me to want to help those who are disadvantaged in society. I completed my degree in social work in 2015 and since then I’ve been working as an advocate for people with disabilities. I’ve been given a platform and I think I have a great story in life. And I want to inspire.

I’ve now been living with MS for 21 years and despite my positivity, there’s no denying that MS makes things harder. Putting on pants is harder, putting on a pair of socks is harder, putting on your shoes is harder and everything will continue to get harder. And it’s not just physically but mentally too.

As you become more disabled, it’s a mind shift to go to one crutch and then to go to two crutches. It takes time for you to get used to that. But I roll with it because what else is there but overwhelming despair if you open that door and think about all that could go wrong with you.

My family is my rock. Sharon knows when I’m not on my game and she’ll tell me it’s going to be okay, we’ll figure this out. And my children are always there beside me when I need a hand.



MSWA has been great. What they’ve done for me is taken someone who is scared of the unknown and the future and said, we’re going to support you in your journey throughout life. That support is invaluable and knowing they have my back is huge for me. I know I can always rely on them.

Over the years, I’ve accessed their services such as physiotherapy, massage, the outreach group and as my MS progresses I find myself needing MSWA more. Your support of MSWA means they continue to be there for people like me when we need it. Life is for living and when you give to MSWA, you are giving me a chance to live my life to the best of my abilities.