

S3E44b Transcript

Coffee Break #25 with Nicole Zobrist

Geoff Allix (1s):

Welcome to Living Well with MS Coffee Break, a part of the Overcoming MS Podcast family made for people with multiple sclerosis interested in making healthy lifestyle choices. Today, you'll meet someone living with MS from our global Overcoming MS community. Our guest will share their personal perspective on the positive and practical lifestyle changes they have made, which have helped them lead a fuller life. You can check out our show notes for more information and useful links. You can find these on our website at www.overcomingms.org/podcast. If you enjoy the show, please spread the word about us on your social media channels. Finally, don't forget to subscribe to the show on your favorite podcast platform so you never miss an episode.

Geoff Allix (45s):

So, get your favorite drink ready and let's meet our guest. Welcome to Living Well with MS Coffee Break #25 and please welcome Nicole Zobrist as our guest. Our Coffee Break series is your chance to get to know members of our diverse OMS community. In each episode, you're joining me for an intimate chat with a member of our global community. Our guests will share their personal stories and talk about their challenges and victories, large and small. We hope you find common cause and a source of inspiration from the stories of these very special people. As always, your comments and suggestions are welcome by emailing podcast@overcomingms.org, or you can reach out to me directly on twitter @geoffallix.

Geoff Allix (1m 26s):

We hope you enjoy this episode's conversation with Nicole coming to you straight from Portland, Oregon in the Pacific Northwest of the US. Nicole Zobrist lives with her husband and six-month-old golden doodle. She was diagnosed with relapsing remitting MS in April 2020 and found OMS shortly thereafter. She enjoys cooking and baking OMS friendly recipes, reading, hiking, a great microbrew and everything else her local community has to offer. She is also the ambassador of the Portland, Oregon OMS Circle. The biggest change she's made since her MS diagnosis is finding ways to manage stress, which led her to quit her job and become self-employed. So, Nicole, welcome to Living Well with MS Coffee Break.

Nicole Zobrist (2m 9s):

Thank you.

Geoff Allix (2m 9s):

We're pleased to have you on our program. The purpose of this series is to better get to know some of the diverse members of our community from around the world. And today you're in the hot seat. So, could you tell us a little bit about your day-to-day life?

Nicole Zobrist (2m 23s):

Yeah. So, you went over the basics. I live in a really great part of the US, lots of really great outdoor activities, weather permitting. Right now it's fall, so the rain has come today. With that came a lot of great changes in the leaves and stuff. But so day-to-day, I am an accountant by trade. So, I recently quit my job, I guess earlier this year, to become self-employed so I could manage my stress and my schedule a bit more. Being in accounting we had a lot of deadlines and that doesn't always bode well for work-life balance and stress.

Nicole Zobrist (3m 4s):

So, I went into business with my mother-in-law, helping small businesses with their finances and accounting and what have you. And then when I'm not doing that, I get to spend a lot of time with my husband and my dog. My husband is also self-employed, so we like to go on bike rides, go on hikes, spend time with our families. Yeah.

Geoff Allix (3m 31s):

So, you were diagnosed with MS about 18 months ago, was it?

Nicole Zobrist (3m 35s):
About a year and a half.

Geoff Allix (3m 37s):
And so, could you tell us a bit about that and how you initially dealt with your diagnosis?

Nicole Zobrist (3m 47s):
Yeah, so in April 2020, I got really sick. I was dealing with a lot of nausea, vertigo, and then thought I just had a really terrible stomach bug, but then I started to experience some numbness in the right side of my body, which just started in my hands and then slowly spread up the side of my neck and face. And that's what took me into the hospital, because then I knew it was something a little bit more serious than a stomach bug. And I was really fortunate to receive my diagnosis the same day I went into the hospital, which I do feel like listening to this podcast and other people's stories is really rare.

Nicole Zobrist (4m 27s):
So, I felt relieved to have an answer so quick. And I, whenever, you know, when you consult Google for what's going on with you, when you talk about tingling and vertigo, MS is one of the things that came up. So, it wasn't like I was completely blindsided. So, there was just relief to have an answer and just have answers so quick. And I feel fortunate that the, all the doctors and the staff in the emergency room were very kind, took me very seriously. I remember the nurse telling me that I would be okay. She had a friend who was in her sixties who had MS.

Nicole Zobrist (5m 7s):
And she still golfed all the time. And so, I just, I felt hopeful. It didn't have that same level of dread. I mean, obviously I was still very nervous about the uncertainty of it all. And my uncle, he also has MS. And he lives a pretty normal life. So, I didn't have like this negative image in my head of what MS might look like. So that just, I think that equipped me to figure out how to live with this news and make the most of it.

Geoff Allix (5m 42s):
Yeah. I think the whole diagnosis thing is-- the healthcare systems around the world are so different. And so, I came across recently, someone who said that the medication they wanted, they couldn't-- they're in the States and they couldn't get the medication they wanted because their insurance wouldn't pay. And which to us in the UK is really weird because we get free healthcare, completely free. So, if something works effectively, then we can have it. But the diagnosis takes months. So, it's sort of, okay, private system, yeah, it's really quick. But then you might have to pay, or you might find it's not covered by insurance and all, but actually you get some medications you can have that we can't, because if our health system has decided for whatever reason that they're not cost-effective enough, then they're just not available.

Geoff Allix (6m 32s):
So, it's, there's nothing you can do unless you literally pay the entire cost yourself. You wouldn't be able to. And even then, I don't know if you can, it's really difficult. So, it's that, tradeoffs. There's got to be a perfect country in the world that has everything. Just seems to be a bit of a lottery about where you are. So, when did you come across OMS and why did you decide to follow the Overcoming MS program?

Nicole Zobrist (6m 60s):
Yeah, so I was trying to think about when I specifically discovered OMS and it was shortly after my diagnosis. After I found out I had MS, I think I did what a lot of people did and just started combing through as much information as I could on the internet. And then I stumbled across OMS, devoured the website, read the book. And I think OMS really appealed to me because I was looking for more than just a medication. I knew I wanted to be on medication, but if there's other things I can do to give myself the best shot I wanted to do those things because I'm only 29.

Nicole Zobrist (7m 40s):
So, I have a lot of life to live with MS, and I'm hoping that it will be, you know, just the same, despite the MS. So, I think when I found the OMS website, read the book, that was the first time I felt like there were things I could do to

take some control back rather than just doing what my doctor would tell me to do. Of course, that's important, if you agree with what your doctor is saying. And, but if there's other things I can do, then it felt well worth it. And I was already mostly vegetarian. My husband's been vegan for about five, four years, so that, I guess it wasn't a huge strain to just make those few tweaks and cut out cheese and eggs, because that was pretty much it.

Geoff Allix (8m 32s):

And if your partner is already -- that's really so much easier because if they're already vegan, then you don't have to sort of cook two meals or anything like that.

Nicole Zobrist (8m 42s):

Yeah, exactly. So, I recognize that that was, I am fortunate in that regard.

Geoff Allix (8m 47s):

Yeah. And so, we mentioned stress management. So, can you tell us a bit about the stress side of things and how you dealt with the stress of MS and life?

Nicole Zobrist (9m 3s):

Yeah, so I used to, I'd like to think that I do a good job of handling stress, but in reality, it still takes a toll. Before I had my MS diagnosis, I was in public accounting, which I don't know how it is in the UK but it can be a really stressful and demanding career in the States. And I enjoyed it, but it was stressful. You're working with a lot of deadlines. I think a lot of jobs in accounting, you have month end and year end deadlines. And I just found myself, I wasn't in public accounting anymore. I was in another job doing accounting work and it was around the end of the year, dealing with deadlines, that I had a relapse.

Nicole Zobrist (9m 49s):

And I just felt like I couldn't, you just feel bad telling your work, "Hey, I'm not feeling well. I need to take some time off." Even though that's what you need to do for yourself to rest and recover. So, I just knew that I needed to have a job, have a career where I could have that control and I didn't have need to have the extra stress of feeling guilty when I needed to take the time to take care of myself. So that's been a huge change just recognizing that, you know, you can't avoid all stress, but it takes a toll. So, if you can kind of change your life a bit or your career a bit to better manage that then, it's probably for the best.

Geoff Allix (10m 32s):

Yeah. I had the previous role where I, it was lecturing people, standing in front of people and things like that. And for a long period of time and I really liked the feeling when I finished. And then, and it was only after a while that I thought, I thought I really enjoyed this, but actually I thought, hang on. The best feeling is the feeling when I stopped doing it. It's that relief when I stopped doing it. And you think that's not really a positive thing. I'm basically enjoying the feeling of no more stress. So that's not a positive, but I'm putting myself under loads of stress, then enjoy the feeling of when it stops is like, it's almost doing yourself harm to enjoy the feeling of it stopping is not really a positive thing.

Geoff Allix (11m 15s):

So, yeah, I agree. Yeah. I think stress is one of the big things. And so, I mean, are there other challenges you had in adopting OMS?

Nicole Zobrist (11m 26s):

So, I think I'm not alone in saying, so speaking of stress management, meditation has been something that I've struggled with. Not so much, I actually enjoy the act of meditating and I recognize the benefits and I know when I can be consistent with it, I really do. I feel that that's a positive thing. I just think having the discipline to make time every day has been something I struggled with. But I think that I've heard before, if you don't think you have time to meditate, then that probably means that you need it the most, which I feel is true. So, I think that's been just the refining, just making a routine of meditation has been challenging.

Nicole Zobrist (12m 8s):

But I do feel like, you know, I journal, I started doing yoga maybe six months ago. So, I think there's other aspects of stress management and having that mindfulness, you know, you can still do that.

Geoff Allix (12m 22s):

Yeah. I think those things count as well. I think, I mean, journaling is a form of mindfulness and yoga is certainly, and I mean, you said about things like hiking. Hiking, you can, I used to hike a lot and basically you can walk around getting completely buried in your work or stress or worries, or you can actually enjoy the outside and the environment and clear your mind and really enjoy nature. And that's mindful. So, you can mindfully walk and that counts. I think. All those things count, you know. It's not just, you know, the sort of, oh, I need to set aside half an hour and it's going to be between 9 and 10am.

Geoff Allix (13m 7s):

There's a guy I met, Alex, not Alex Twersky who is the guy behind the podcast. Alex Tsirigotis, and he's a marathon runner, who's got MS and follows OMS. But he was saying, he's so competitive that he started to really get stressed out about having streaks on his mindfulness app. Because it was telling him he'd got back a streak of 25 days or something. And he started getting stressed out about doing mindfulness. So now he actually deliberately throws in a day off to make sure he's not building up a big streak that he'll worry about. Because otherwise he starts to get stressed out about mindfulness.

Nicole Zobrist (13m 43s):

That defeats the purpose, right?

Geoff Allix (13m 46s):

So, I got to think, it's not just about having that half hour. You can just live mindfully and that's cool. So actually yeah. Doing those mindful activities, they all count, I think. So what are some of the benefits that you've had then? When did you start seeing positive things from the OMS program?

Nicole Zobrist (14m 11s):

It's hard to really pinpoint when, because I started following OMS so soon after my diagnosis, but I know that like, I haven't had to deal with fatigue at all. So, I don't, you know, and I know there's been a lot of positive evidence saying that, you know, a low saturated or a diet low in saturated fat, plant-based can help with fatigue. So, I am not, it's been working, I haven't dealt with fatigue and really severe symptoms. So, I'm not apt to change things because I feel like, you know, whatever I am doing is working.

Nicole Zobrist (14m 53s):

But aside from the physical benefits of OMS, there are the mental benefits. I just feel like if I have tangible steps I can take to live a healthy life, and really there are things, I know you've mentioned before on the podcast things you should probably, you should be doing anyways, despite MS. So, I think that positivity in that hopeful outlook is something that I have really noticed with OMS.

Geoff Allix (15m 22s):

Pretty much, apart from the disease modifying drugs, you should be doing all of it. Every effort, pretty much everyone would be healthier if they did the OMS program, discounting the drugs. because it's just like it's, I mean, that's what my neurologist said. He said, there's no proof there that it will help with MS because it's unlikely to be proved because it's really difficult to do double blind trials on whether you're eating cheese or not. But he said, this is just going to make you healthy. He said, literally, everything you're doing is not bad for you. So, if you have a healthy whole food-based diet it is going to reduce your risk of cancer, it's going to reduce your risk of heart disease, diabetes, loads, and loads of other things.

Geoff Allix (16m 5s):

And stress management, that's good for you. Exercise, that's good for you. Vitamin D, now recommended for everyone who's not near the equator. All that's good for you. So, all these things are good for you, regardless. And

he said that ultimately, even if it did nothing for MS, it's good for your MS not getting heart disease. Because if you have another co-morbidity, that's going to make that worse. So, all these things, he said ultimately, it's just good for you and everyone. Basically, everyone should be living a healthy lifestyle, and this is a healthy lifestyle. So yeah, I'm pretty cool with, okay, we're not doing anything really weird, and people think it's an alternative. It's not really an alternative. It's kind of sensible stuff like, it's very standard.

Nicole Zobrist (16m 42s):

And it's fun to see, you know, people like, that don't have MS that are, maybe dairy free or trying to eat, you know, more whole foods, plant-based. So, I think that like the conversation is changing, which makes it, makes us not seem like such outliers sometimes because yeah, like you said, it's not, it's not really that outlandish at all.

Geoff Allix (17m 8s):

Yeah. I don't think so. Giving Tuesday is on November 30th, 2021. It's a global movement where everyone, everywhere can do something to support a good cause. This year please show your support to Overcoming MS and donate at www.overcomingms.org/donate. That's www.overcomingms.org/donate. Your donation large or small will ensure we can help everyone live well with MS, including through this podcast and much more. Thank you and now back to our interview with Nicole Zobrist. So let's also talk about Circles and communities, so you're the ambassador of the OMS Circle in Portland, Oregon.

Geoff Allix (17m 50s):

So, can you tell us a bit about the OMS Circles experience, how that's been, what it means to you?

Nicole Zobrist (17m 57s):

Yeah, so it's a new circle. We've only been active for a few months and we're growing. But I just, so when I found OMS and kind of being diagnosed with MS during a pandemic, it's really hard to meet people with MS. And it's nice, you know, I have really supportive friends and family in my life, but obviously they don't understand what it's like to have MS, necessarily. So just finding the OMS program and just kind of wanting that sense of community locally, I volunteered to start a Circle in Portland.

Nicole Zobrist (18m 38s):

So, like I said, it's new, but I think it's great to have that kind of, to be able to bridge online with in-person. And even though we haven't been able to meet in person yet in Portland, I look forward to being able to do that and just kind of fostering that sense of community and finding people that are interested in lifestyle modifications because I think that's hard too. When you talk about what you're doing to help manage your MS, you want to find people that are, you know, open to hearing about lifestyle modifications or already have been doing it before they heard about OMS.

Nicole Zobrist (19m 17s):

So, it's been fun to kind of meet people virtually at the moment, but eventually in person.

Geoff Allix (19m 27s):

And so, this new online platform for Circles. Have you been using that? Can you tell us a bit about that platform?

Nicole Zobrist (19m 35s):

Yeah, so we are able to just kind of chat online, which is great since we can't necessarily do it in person. We've had a Zoom call and so it's just nice. You don't see everybody every day, but you're able to pop on with questions or just say hello or whatever it is just to kind of still have that sense of community even when you're not meeting in person, which is really great. I think that's a positive of living in a more virtual world right now with everything going on, it makes those online interactions not feel maybe quite as awkward as they would have like two years ago.

Nicole Zobrist (20m 16s):

Like, oh, talking to, you know, strangers on the internet, but it's a really great community. It's fun to talk with all the other ambassadors too, and just hear what's working in their Circles to be able to bounce questions off them.

Geoff Allix (20m 34s):

Yeah. So having been involved before the pandemic, then we used to meet up every month, two months, something like that. But didn't have much interaction between, so now we have constant interaction, like this constant chatter going back between two to four members. So actually, hopefully, it will move to actually we will meet up again and then we have, there's been one meeting, but hopefully it will go back to actually physical meetings, that would be good. But keep up the virtual, the online stuff as well. So that'd be really good. So actually before, we talked less, so now it's mostly on the internet, but there's a positive from that as well, I think actually.

Geoff Allix (21m 15s):

So yeah, the fact that there's an online platform for Circles, but also, we can use tools like Zoom, WhatsApp is used quite a lot by my group and there's nothing wrong with that. So, we've got like multiple different ways of communicating and that's really good. So, I think going forward, it would be really positive that you've got people who want to communicate online. Maybe some people don't want to meet up physically and that's cool as well. So, there's a bit, there's something for everyone now I think in this actual--.

Nicole Zobrist (21m 42s):

Yeah. And there's some people that don't necessarily live right in the city or in the suburbs. So, it's nice for them to still be able to make connections, even if they're a few hours away.

Geoff Allix (21m 56s):

Yeah. And so, there was a mention of cooking and I hear you're passionate about healthy eating. So, could you tell us a bit about the foodie side and any tips that you have for healthy eating that have worked for you?

Nicole Zobrist (22m 12s):

Yeah. So, I've really enjoyed just trying new recipes. I think, it can be kind of daunting when you think about like cooking with less oil and just certain things that aren't necessarily OMS friendly, but I enjoy trying new recipes that are OMS friendly, whether that's like through the OMS website, all the recipes that are available, looking things up on Pinterest or Instagram, finding good accounts and making those substitutions for oil or whatever it is. So, I just think not being afraid to try new recipes and make substitutions for stuff.

Nicole Zobrist (22m 56s):

So, if you're baking and you're not sure like what you're baking and what you should use for an egg substitute, just Google it. Like there's so much information out there or just find an account that you really like and you follow that. So, I follow a few accounts on Instagram or I got a cookbook that I really liked and you have your favorites that you'd go to. So don't be afraid to try new things. They might turn out terribly, but then, you know, and you won't try it next time. And then on the flip side, have, you know, like a handful of recipes or bakers or chefs that you can always go to for recipes that you know that will work.

Geoff Allix (23m 39s):

So, what is your favorite cookbook? You can mention names.

Nicole Zobrist (23m 42s):

Oh yeah. So, I like, I think she's, I think she's been interviewed on this, Ashley Madden's cookbook, which I want to - I think I heard about her maybe on this podcast and I thought that's perfect because then I don't have to worry about making any modifications. So that's like, that's my go-to cookbook. And then for like baking, I like, there's an Instagram account called Nora Cooks. She has a lot of good baking stuff and there usually are options to swap out oil for apple sauce or whatever it is. But sometimes, you know, if there's not, I just don't eat very much, and my husband gets to eat the rest of it.

Nicole Zobrist (24m 26s):

You know, life is all about a little bit of balance. So yeah.

Geoff Allix (24m 29s):

So, with that, thank you very much for joining us on Living Well with MS Coffee Break and letting us get to know you a bit better. But one last question before you go, we have a tradition for Coffee Break guests, which is, if you tap into your experience with MS generally and OMS specifically, for a nugget of wisdom that could help people get into the OMS program, what advice would that be?

Nicole Zobrist (25m 1s):

I would say that it's important to have some grace with yourself. It's not all or nothing. If you're making small steps in whatever area of the program, that's still pushing you closer to being overall healthier. So, I think just not being so hard on yourself if you're not perfect in all steps is really important.

Geoff Allix (25m 23s):

Okay. Brilliant. And with that, thank you very much for joining us, Nicole Zobrist.

Nicole Zobrist (25m 27s):

Thank you for having me.

Geoff Allix (25m 29s):

Thank you for listening to this episode of Living Well with MS Coffee Break. Please check out this episode's show notes at www.overcomingms.org/podcast. You'll find all sorts of useful links and bonus information there. If you'd like to be featured in a future Coffee Break episode, or have any suggestions, please email us at podcast@overcomingms.org. You can also subscribe to the show on your favorite podcast platform, so you never miss an episode. Living Well with MS Coffee Break is kindly supported by a grant from The Happy Charitable Trust. If you'd like to support the Overcoming MS Charity and help keep our podcast advertising free, you can donate online at www.overcomingms.org/donate.

Geoff Allix (26m 12s):

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