

## **S4E53b Transcript**

### **Coffee Break #33 with Geoff Allix**

Geoff Allix (00:01):

Welcome to Living Well with MS Coffee Break, a part of the Living Well with MS podcast family from Overcoming MS, the world's leading multiple sclerosis healthy lifestyle charity, celebrating its 10th year of serving the MS community. I'm your host, Geoff Allix.

Today, you'll meet someone living with MS from our diverse and global Overcoming MS community. Our Coffee Break series invites you into the lives of each guest. They share their personal MS journeys and speak openly about their challenges and victories, large and small. We hope you find some common cause and a source of inspiration from the stories of these very special people.

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](http://www.overcomingms.org/podcast). If you enjoy the show, please spread the word about us on your social media channels or leave a review wherever you tune into our podcast. Finally, don't forget to subscribe to Living Well with MS on your favorite podcast platform so you never miss an episode. So get your favorite beverage ready, and let's meet today's guest on Living Well with MS Coffee Break.

Alex Twersky (01:10):

Welcome to Living Well with MS Coffee Break. And I am definitely not Geoff Allix. I'm Alex Twersky, and I'm the creator and producer of the Living Well with MS podcast series. I've been really proud to work with Geoff Allix from day one as our intrepid host since the show's launch, all the way through two spinoffs, including this one, Coffee Break, and Ask Jack, and now four seasons in.

So why am I the one narrating this episode and not Geoff? Well, we'll find out in a second, but before we do, I'd like to introduce you to Geoff Allix. Geoff Allix hails from Devon in England, and he was diagnosed with MS in 2015. Geoff's father also had MS and sadly passed away at the age of 54. When he himself was diagnosed, Geoff was determined to do whatever he could to remain well.

Once he was told that he almost certainly had MS in May 2015, he and his wife launched into action. They Googled as much as they could about the condition. And shortly before Geoff was formally diagnosed in September 2015, they came across OMS and the seven-step recovery program. He's been on the program ever since, and although his walking has gotten a bit worse, he's certain that the Overcoming MS program is critical to maintaining his wellbeing.

Geoff works as a computer consultant and is a dad to two children. Geoff serves as co-ambassador to Overcoming MS's Southwest Circle, and as you all know, also hosts the Living Well with MS podcast. Geoff, welcome to the other side of Living Well with MS Coffee Break.

Geoff Allix (02:48):

Hello.

Alex Twersky (02:50):

Well, it's a bit unusual to have you in the guest chair, so I'd like to explain to our audience why that's the case. Since OMS is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year and our podcast is actually going to mark its 100th episode this August ... Can you believe that Geoff, 100 episodes? I don't know if you've registered that in your mind, but-

Geoff Allix (03:11):

It is crazy when people talk about an episode and you have to sort of rack your brain through which one it was because there have been so many.

Alex Twersky (03:19):

It's like a fog, but that's why, precisely why, we want to come out of the fog and celebrate almost 100 episodes, coming up on August 29th, it will be 100. But in celebration of our 10th anniversary and to mark our 100th episode a bit early, we decided this time around that we'd have you in the hot seat and allow some of our fans old and new to get to know a bit more about you.

And since the purpose of this series is to better get to know the diverse members of the OMS community from around the world, who better to fit that bill than Geoff Allix? Many of our audience knows you as our podcast host, but there's so much more to you and your service to the OMS community, which we'll get to in a moment. But for the moment, perhaps you can tell us a little bit about your day-to-day life in the UK, in Devon.

Geoff Allix (04:15):

So I work from home, but I've actually worked from home from a long time before the COVID pandemic, when now everyone works from home. But yeah, I think, how long, maybe 16 years, I think I've worked from home. I used to travel quite a lot as an IT consultant. I was traveling all around the world, really, to the point where actually when I got married, the six weeks before my wedding, I was in different European countries each week. So thankfully my wife took care of arranging the wedding, and I just turned up on the day.

And then I moved into a role where I basically create content for Microsoft. So a lot of their online content, I work, I subcontract to them, creating content for them. So it's mostly from home. It did involve a lot of travel to Seattle, but the pandemic has put a stop to that. That may start in a bit, hopefully not as much as I did, but yeah, sometimes international travel, mostly sitting in an office in my garden.

Alex Twersky (05:21):

So Geoff, now I know that any time I need someone to grouse to about problems I'm having with a Microsoft product, you're going to be first on my call list.

Geoff Allix (05:30):

Yeah. I'm pretty good with all those sort of things, but not printers. Anyone who works in IT, all of us hate printers because they're a dark art, how printers work.

Alex Twersky (05:41):

They are indeed. They're a sorcerer's tool, but hopefully most of us more eco-conscious folks are weaning ourselves from printing stuff because we're all living in the throes of our digital tools, right?

Geoff Allix (05:57):

Well, actually, yeah, to be honest, mine is a scanner with a thing underneath that very occasionally pumps out paper.

Alex Twersky (06:04):

Awesome. Well, I wanted to focus in a little bit on your actual experience with MS. Just to find out when you were diagnosed with MS, and how did you initially deal with that? Because we talked a little bit about that in your bio, but maybe just go a little deeper to understand what that was like for you and how you handled the situation and persevered.

Geoff Allix (06:30):

So well, the original story goes back a really long way. I think, when would it be, about 1998, something like that. And I lost feeling in all my fingertips, and they sent me to a specialist. I lived in London at the time. So it was a big London hospital, top specialist. And it's very unusual. There're two different nerves that go down through your hands. And so it's really unusual to lose all sensation in all the fingertips. They were really perplexed about this. They couldn't work out what it was. Six months later, it cleared up completely. And then they said, oh, well, that's okay then.

And then just odd things like that, which would occur and then go away. And then doctors would be, well that's okay, it's gone away. It's fine. And then when I was diagnosed, it was because of double vision. So I had, not all the time, but double vision would come and go. And I went to an optician. The optician said, "There's absolutely nothing wrong with your eyes. You're seeing perfectly. Everything's absolutely fine. But I only look at inside the eyeball, and something is going wrong outside the eyeball because your eyes are both pointing the right way. They're seeing perfectly. It's just your brain is doing something with the signal and mucking it up. So you need to go and see a neurologist."

And that's what then led onto initially an MRI scan. I thought I was being clever by going private, which I'd never done. I'd never used private medical insurance before, but I had insurance from work. And so I thought I'd jump the queue and get it sorted quickly. And what actually happened is the private practitioners didn't want to do all the tests because some of them were very expensive. So they said, "You need to get to the back of the queue with our National Health Service." So actually by trying to jump the queue, I then extended the whole situation because I then went to the back of the queue, which I would've been in earlier had I just gone with the National Health Service, which is a fantastic thing in the UK. I know everyone doesn't have the same level of health services, but we're very fortunate for that.

And so I was told I almost certainly had MS, but I didn't definitely have MS. And so that's why I had a very long gap between initial diagnosis and final diagnosis. And in that time, I didn't have any support or guidance or anything. I was just told, "Yes, you've almost certainly got MS, but we need to do all these other tests." I took it pretty well, to be honest, because, as you said, my dad had MS. And it was very weird actually because I still thought MS meant wheelchairs. I was convinced that everyone with MS was in a wheelchair except my dad, which is very strange because obviously I knew my dad and he was never in a wheelchair. He died very young, and there were certainly complications caused by having MS. He had some sort of bladder infections and things that led on to other stuff.

But yeah, when I got it and I thought, well, okay, it doesn't have to be, and you know, he was still mobile right through his whole life. And so I thought, okay, there's this sort of public perception and I know there's a slightly different reality. So it wasn't as bad as some people, where they're really so devastated. And also because I wasn't, you know, when people are 20 or something like that, I mean, I was in my mid-forties, so I'd already run marathons and climbed mountains and done all these crazy things.

Alex Twersky (10:18):

So in some ways, Geoff, you kind of have your eye doctor to credit for at least finding that first important clue.

Geoff Allix (10:29):

Well, actually saying that there's nothing wrong with my eyes. Yeah.

Alex Twersky (10:32):

Yeah, I guess-

Geoff Allix (10:33):

He did reveal to me, because I was 45 at the time, he said, "You seem to come in about every five years." And I said, "Yeah, well my wife's always been a glasses wearer, so she said, oh, you should go in. They check for other stuff." And he said, "Oh, you do seem to come in. That's good. Yeah, we do check for other stuff." And he said, "Now, your eyes are absolutely ... You've got brilliant eyesight. It's absolutely fine." He said, "But you're not going to come in again in five years' time and me tell you there's nothing wrong." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, no one hits 50 and doesn't need reading glasses." And he was right.

Alex Twersky (11:03):

I'm a testament to that myself.

Geoff Allix (11:03):

I have my reading glasses.

Alex Twersky (11:08):

So tell me, Geoff, so you get this diagnosis. I mean, you have a little bit of a leg up because you've had experience with MS in your family with your dad. But then you sort of, it seems like you and your wife kind of hit the contemporary version of medical research, which is Google, and you come across OMS. So what was that like for you? How was the experience of finding the OMS program, and why did you decide to start following it? What about it appealed to you, and how did you end up committing to it?

Geoff Allix (11:48):

So yeah, I mean, so Dr. Google isn't always the best resource, I think most actual doctors would say, but we were left with nothing because I was told I almost certainly had MS, but all of the support that I now have with neurologists, MS nurses, various organizations, that wasn't really open to me because I didn't definitely have MS. I kind of knew I did. I mean, I knew I had MS. I had all the symptoms I knew. The neurologist told me I did.

But until you get formally diagnosed, then you don't get any of the support, treatment, or anything. So we were left with Google, and there's a lot of, I was going to say, I think charlatan is the word. I'd say charlatan is too strong, but I don't think it is because there's a lot of people who are peddling cures who say, you know, you could buy this and it's a mixture of different vitamins and minerals that will effectively cure you from MS. And you think, wow, that's really expensive and it doesn't sound like it would necessarily work.

So there were a lot of things that were quite expensive, and a lot of books that were, again, quite expensive. And then it was my wife who came across OMS and she said, "Look, there's these guys, and they're going to give you the book for free." I was like, "Okay, there's no strings here?" It was like, no, no, they're just going to send you a book. And I've always had a bit of a scientific background, and it just really appealed to me, you receive it and there's just endless references in it. So it's scientific references. It's written in a scientific way. So it was very evidence based. It was full of evidence, which is backed up with citations and references. And so that very much appealed to me. And the fact it wasn't trying to take any money from me at all. So it clearly wasn't there to make a fast buck.

Alex Twersky (13:45):

So you sensed a bit of integrity to it. And also obviously you understood that there was a heavy foundation, a heavy kind of scientific backdrop to it. So that led you to decide to follow it. Now, since many of our audience know you as the host of this podcast from its very inception, and I personally have to say, you're amazing and I love working with you, and that's not a plug, that's my genuine feeling. But apart from embracing OMS yourself, at some point, you also decided to serve the OMS community in other ways, apart from this podcast.

One of those ways is your work as an ambassador for the Circle in Devon, the OMS Circle in Devon, or maybe more appropriately the Southwest Circle is what it's called, but I'll leave that to you to explain in more detail. So could you tell us a little bit about that and your role as an ambassador, and how you got involved working with the Circle and what that's meant to you and your local community of fellow OSMers?

Geoff Allix (14:58):

Yeah, so I think it really helps, having a community. And when I was first diagnosed, I didn't have any form of community, and where I live, so the southwest of the UK is, it's quite a spread-out place. It's not big cities. There are a couple of cities, but they're quite a long way from where I live. So it's quite rural, and so I didn't have really anyone to turn to.

I went on an OMS retreat, which was life changing, and I made a number of contacts through that. And that was really beneficial. But in terms of meeting people, knowing people, there was no one local. There was a sort of precursor. Before Circles, there were local groups set up in the forum. And I did meet one other person in Devon, but they were the other side of Devon. It was a good probably an hour and a half drive. And then we met up once and then this guy was looking to move to New Zealand, so that never happened again.

And then, so when the Circles idea came about, it's really, I mean, to be honest, selfishly, I wanted to have more of a community and people to speak to and that were on very much the same wavelength as me. It's very difficult, I think, if you've got MS. No one fully understands it unless they've got MS. Even to the extent, actually, that they understand that we don't have the same symptoms as each other. We all know all of us are different, but we accept that. People who don't have MS, however much they care about you, your family and so on, they don't fully understand. And so it's really beneficial, I think, to have a community.

So setting up a what was at the time a North Devon Circle meant there was a small group of us. There was another South Devon Circle set up because it is quite a large county. So it was worthwhile having two, and another one in Cornwall, which is the neighboring county. And the ambassadors of the three, most of the time, myself, Tessa, and Sean, we did meet up. So we met up as ambassadors a couple of times, but they were quite small Circles.

And then the pandemic happened and we couldn't meet up. And between the three of us, we made the decision that if we're going online, it would actually be beneficial if we joined the three Circles together so that we had enough people, there would be a regular conversation going on. And we moved to WhatsApp. So we have a regular WhatsApp chat going. Actually, it's taken off from that original beginning where we joined together because we thought we needed to, you know, you couldn't have a WhatsApp chat between four people. So now I think we're up to about 45 or something in Southwest. So it's a very, very lively, regular chat, and it's become a really close group. And we met up recently at an art event in south Devon. And hopefully we'll go back to actual physical meetings, but I think we'll always carry on with the virtual side of it as well, because it has been so beneficial. And I think that some good things can come out of terrible things like the pandemic. And I think that's one of them, we've embraced that side of things, that virtual side of things.

Alex Twersky (18:36):

That's amazing. And plus with your magic touch with technology, I'm sure if they ever have trouble connecting the entire cohort, you probably dive right in and patch it up, right?

Geoff Allix (18:52):

I do, yeah. I mean, I sort of do some bits like that, but then there's also some great ideas. People like Sean, he's not an ambassador anymore, but he was the Cornwall ambassador, he came up with a fantastic idea of how to do an exercise, because we were like, how can we do exercise? We're all at home. We used to do things in groups, but now we can't. So how are we going to encourage each other to exercise? And he came up with this fantastic idea that we're going to travel the world in a hot air balloon, which is pedal powered. He found some painting of this pedal powered hot air balloon.

And the idea is we're all going to sit in this thing and pedal away and travel around the world. And he said, "So all of our time doing whatever exercise we do all counts as miles towards our destination." So we travel the world in a hot air balloon and find out the interesting places we get to. And then people tell their stories about travels in their past. We drop in on famous people like George Jelinek, and have a chat with them. And it's just been really useful. So just, yeah, I'm not necessarily the ideas person, but yeah, technology I'm okay with.

Alex Twersky (20:04):

Boy, that's a phenomenal idea, and kudos to Sean. I think that's Sean Kressinger, right?

Geoff Allix (20:09):

That's right. Yeah.

Alex Twersky (20:11):

And so kudos to him for that. And if any ambassadors or Circle members are listening, you can note that one down and imitate it. It'll be flattering.

Geoff Allix (20:21):

Well, I mean I'm happy to pass, yeah, if anyone wants to get in touch about that, happy to tell you how we do it. It's pretty easy. We just do it on Google Maps and work out our mileage. I think they've done it around Ireland. One of the Irish groups did it. They traveled just around Ireland. And now we are just going around the UK this year. And yeah, you can do it all sorts of different ways.

Alex Twersky (20:40):

That's phenomenal. And since we're on the subject of local community, you also recently represented OMS at Delamore Art, which is an exhibition where OMS was one of the featured charities. So can you tell us a little bit about that experience?

Geoff Allix (20:56):

Yeah. So this was the other ambassador Tessa, who's based in south Devon, she's an artist. And I have no skills as an artist. She's a very good artist. That's her profession. And she decided to do something for OMS, and the Delamore Arts Foundation, it's like a country house with lots of art in the gardens, as well as art galleries. And it was their, I think it's their 30th year, and OMS's 10th year, and they have a charity each year that they support.

And so this year Tessa arranged to get their support. And there was lots of art, which was being auctioned off for OMS, from postcards done by artists who you didn't know who they were until you actually, unless you won it, and right up to full sculptures and all sorts of works of art. So incredible things. And then we had an evening-

Alex Twersky (20:56):

You spoke there, right?

Geoff Allix (22:00):

I did, yeah. We had an evening there and I was asked to do an introduction. Because there's a new CEO at OMS, I thought I was introducing him and saying a lot about OMS. And then I was told a couple of days before, actually he's going to do all that bit. Can you just talk about what you get up to? And actually, I quite like doing things informally. So whereas before I had a script, where I had to say all these important things, then I didn't have a script and I just had a chat with the audience and everyone liked it. So it was good.

Alex Twersky (22:41):

Much like you do on the podcast, which is what I and I'm sure many, many thousands of our community appreciate every 10 days when you pop into their Apple Podcast feed or wherever they get the podcast. But speaking of you specifically, Geoff, I mean, I know that you recently marked a birthday, and happy, happy belated birthday, and you did something a little bit outlandish to celebrate life, but also to raise a little bit of money for OMS. So can you tell us a little bit about the death-defying feat that you accomplished?

Geoff Allix (23:17):

Yeah. So my birthday was actually back in March, but this was a present from my wife. And I've always liked adrenaline sports. So I was a very keen rock climber when I was younger. And then now I live by the coast and I was a keen surfer, mountain biker. Those things somewhat curtailed when I had MS. The balance wasn't so good. But I did carry on snowboarding for a while, so I've had a few snowboard trips since I've had MS, actually. And I like adrenaline-based sports.

So she booked me a sky dive. And it wasn't in this country. I don't know if it's a worldwide thing, but in this country you can certainly do charity skydives where you don't pay for the skydive. The money comes out of the donations. But she'd just paid for it. She just said, "Well, for your birthday, I booked you a skydive."

And I thought, well, I should do it for charity. If I'm going to do it, it's the sort of thing people would sponsor you for. So I did it for OMS, and actually that way it meant because we'd already paid for it, then more money went to the charity, which I was grateful for. And yeah, it was fantastic. So because I've got MS, they put me with the top instructor. We went from 15,000 feet, which is, I didn't realize that's the highest you can go from, well, higher than

that, you need oxygen. So it's the highest normal people can go. And I was strapped to an instructor. I didn't have any choice about jumping out of the plane. You literally didn't even pause. They just push you out basically. So we were the first people out of the tandem people. So yeah, we couldn't really have held everything up anyway.

So you just get pushed out the plane. You do free fall for about a minute or so. You're going about 160 miles an hour. It was fantastic. It was a beautiful clear day, and I could see all the way across the whole, from both coasts, the English Channel all the way across to the Atlantic, across to Wales. You could see fantastic distances. And on the way up, the plane, the guy and the instructor had got the measure of me and he said, "Oh, okay. You like adrenaline sports. Okay." And then once they open the chute, they give you the controls. They actually have their own straps as well. I think they can override what you're doing. So you do sort of feel like you're in control.

And he was just going, "No, pull the right one more. Now pull the left one. Now pull the right one." And then we came in very steep as well. It felt very steep, anyway. And I said to my daughter, who was down where we landed, I said, "Wow. It felt like we were spinning around a lot," but I'd seen other people come down, do jumps. I said, "You know, same as everyone." And she said, "Oh yeah, everyone turns a bit." She said, "But you were turning a lot more than everyone else." So I think getting the head instructor, who got the idea that I liked adrenaline sport, to get me spinning around pretty fast and also coming in pretty fast landing as well. So it was fantastic. I'm so grateful for everyone who did donate towards OMS. All I did was jump out of a plane, to be honest.

Alex Twersky (26:37):

Well, we're grateful to you for making it a fundraiser. And your appearance on this podcast is a testament to the fact that you not only survived but had a great time.

Geoff Allix (26:47):

Actually, the Delamore Art event was the very next day as well. So it gave me something to talk about, as well.

Alex Twersky (26:54):

Excellent. Excellent. Well, thank you again for earmarking OMS as your charity of choice for that great experience you must have had.

And I wanted to take a quick pause here to make a couple of announcements that may be of interest to our community. First and foremost, the OMS Big Picnic is coming up again in July. And this is a great event for members of our global community to organize because they can organize their own picnics worldwide, featuring OMS-friendly cuisine. You can learn more about that on our website at [www.overcomingms.org](http://www.overcomingms.org), that's [www.overcomingms.org](http://www.overcomingms.org).

And speaking of food, tune into our next webinar, featuring nutritionist Sam Josephs, presenting an easy and OMS family-friendly set of recipes and foods. It's really the perfect kick starter for your own OMS Big Picnic. The webinar streams live on June 29th, but you can catch it any time on replay. So you can get all that info and tap into all those delicious recipes and happenings on our website. Again, that's [www.overcomingms.org](http://www.overcomingms.org).

Now back to you, Geoff. I want to shift gears a little bit and talk about what must be scratching the curiosity post in a lot of our listeners' minds, which is what's it like to host a podcast, and especially for nearly 100 episodes, no less. How has that been as a journey for you?

Geoff Allix (28:28):

In terms of this podcast, it's been hugely beneficial for me. So I did it because I was doing well on my MS journey. My neurologist said, "Oh, you're doing extraordinarily well. Everything looks really good. Your improvements are beyond what we'd expect to see with disease modifying therapy alone." So he was like, "Yeah, whatever you're doing, it works." So I thought I wanted to give back, and that's why I wanted to do it.

But actually it's been hugely beneficial because obviously I get to speak to, you know, I don't miss an episode. Other people are like, "Oh, I didn't catch that one." I obviously catch every episode. And also, I've actually made personal

connections with a lot of top neurologists, top nutritionists, top exercise experts. And I've got to know some of them and I can ask them direct questions.

And also with the podcasts, when the recording's finished, sometimes I'll ask them a personal question that might not be of interest to the guests, to the audience, rather. So actually, it's been hugely beneficial for me because I've just found out vast amounts about MS, and to the point where I go and see my neurologist and he knows that I know everything about all the new things coming out, new drugs that are available. He knows that I know all of that because of all the people I speak to. And he knows the people I speak to. And I speak to people that are senior to him. So it's hugely beneficial. I think I'd probably enjoy any podcast. I quite like chatting to people, so it'll be good, but having one where I just find out so much stuff has been hugely beneficial.

Alex Twersky (30:18):

So maybe this kind of precludes the next question, but I might have to pressure you into coming up with a second answer, because it sounds like one of your favorite things about hosting the podcast is how much you get to learn and the diversity of people that you get to meet and eventually perhaps become even better acquainted with. But apart from that, what would be your next favorite thing about hosting the Living Well with MS Podcast? I mean, obviously except for working with me, of course.

Geoff Allix (30:51):

Yeah. I think it's such a diverse and interesting group of people. We have one thing in common, which is that we have MS, but then there's a commonality in the people that are going to be on the podcast. And they're all people who have decided that they want to do something proactive. So the people with MS are all people who are not necessarily 100% following OMS, but they all have that proactive mindset. They want to do something. They want to do Tai Chi and do exercise, or they're interested in nutrition. They certainly, they all have an interest. So I like that positive mindset of actually taking control of your own destiny and doing something. So I just think it's been a fantastic group of people that I've come across.

You mentioned Sam Josephs, because she's been on the podcast as a nutritionist, and also just random things because actually I went to university with her, which is by sheer chance. And I don't think-

Alex Twersky (30:51):

Oh, really?

Geoff Allix (31:59):

I'm not aware that I met her at university, but we have huge numbers of mutual friends, which is somewhat extraordinary because we were a university of 10,000 people and we just happened to have almost the same group of friends. We must have met each other, but neither of us could remember it. But that actually led to the retreat I went on. The CEO of OMS at the time, Gary McMahon, ended up showing my university picture, my university badge at the time, where I had shoulder length hair, and everyone found it hilarious.

Alex Twersky (32:36):

You were a [inaudible 00:32:38] hippie.

Geoff Allix (32:38):

Well, yeah. And now I don't have any hair.

Alex Twersky (32:43):

You've come full circle, Geoff. Maybe one day you'll return back to your-

Geoff Allix (32:47):

It's unlikely.

Alex Twersky (32:50):

But tell me, Geoff, when you started hosting the podcast three and a half years ago or more, did you think when you started that you'd still be going strong four seasons on and nearly 100 episodes under your belt?

Geoff Allix (33:06):

No, not at all. There had been a previous incarnation of the podcast, which was very few episodes I believe. And so I was expecting it to be maybe for a year. Yeah, I didn't think it would be any longer than that. I mean, I just didn't know, would anyone listen to it? And I still joke now when I meet someone who's a listener and I say, "Oh, you're our listener," but I know that we have thousands of people who listen.

And so yeah, which I find extraordinary as well. I just think it's great that we're doing something that's caused a loyal fan base. So yeah, it's been fantastic. I mean, and yeah, it's just going from strength to strength. I mean, we started with one series and now we've ended up with three series. So yeah, we're clearly doing something right.

Alex Twersky (34:00):

I couldn't agree with you more. And I myself am always heartened when random people reach out and say how much they appreciate the podcast, because I mean, I'm sure you feel the same way. I know that I've really been very fortunate to have been involved in this project because it really is such a great platform to bind our community closer together and share knowledge and new experiences and inspiration from all corners of the world. So again, thanks to you, Geoff, for being such a stalwart and exemplary representative of the OMS ethos and for being such a great host for all these years.

So I wanted to, on the subject of the podcast, and I promise, just a couple more questions about the podcast and then move on to another topic. But I know that I should be the last person to ask you if you have any favorite episodes, because I'm sure you love them all equally, like you do your kids, but are there any that just off top of your head that stand out for you personally, or kind of hit you close to home?

Geoff Allix (35:14):

So there's one, I actually mentioned it recently at the Delamore Arts event. I interviewed George Jelinek for the first episode. And then later on, his wife, Sandra Neate, who took over from him his role in the neuroepidemiology unit in Melbourne. During George's episode, he's got a couple of dogs and they went ballistic when someone came to the door. I think there was some post that arrived. And it's fine. I mean, I have editing software and cut the episode and restarted it. And it was all fine. You didn't come across it in the actual final version.

But then I saw the dogs again. We normally have video turned on when I'm actually recording, although it's just for the sound. But I saw the dogs again because I was interviewing Sandra Neate. And the dogs were sitting, she was actually in a bedroom and the dogs were sitting on the bed behind her. And I was like, "Oh, are they the same dogs?" She said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." I said, "Yeah, they were a little bit of a problem last time, because there was a noise and they just went ballistic and made huge amounts of noise." And she said, "Oh, don't worry. It's absolutely fine." So during the episode, there were a few background noises. The dogs were the best-behaved dogs you have ever seen. And so it was very interesting because it revealed to me that George Jelinek is one of the people I respect most for huge numbers of different things. But actually, I think the dogs might respect his wife a little bit more.

Alex Twersky (36:52):

I think we now know we've revealed a great hidden secret.

Geoff Allix (36:57):

Who the boss of the Jelinek household is.

Alex Twersky (37:01):

The boss of the dogs in the Jelinek household is Sandra Neate. So we'll share that as a bonus with our listeners, considering that it's our 10th anniversary year, but keep it to yourselves. So Geoff, a final podcast question is, and I'm particularly curious about this one, is how would you like to see the podcast evolve in its fifth season or beyond?

Geoff Allix (37:23):

Well, that's a difficult one. I think it's just getting that variety of people. I think maybe we reach out a little bit more now to people who are not necessarily directly connected with OMS because there's also, there's exercise people. There are people, and you realize actually there's so many people who've got a very similar mindset. So it might be someone, like sort of people who, you know, the MS Gym, again, very much follow a healthy lifestyle, do exercise. Mat Embry, he's got his own thing. He has a slightly different diet, but there's so many similarities. It's sort of do the exercise. He's very much against disease modifying therapies, but his diet, there's a lot of overlaps. Don't have dairy, keep saturated fat low, avoid processed foods. So there's all these sort of things. It's quite interesting to explore those areas and where there's overlap between different organizations. And reaching out to other organizations as well, like the larger MS charities, would be quite interesting.

Alex Twersky (38:40):

Apart from the podcast, Geoff, are there any other fixtures of your life, whether they're related to OMS or not, that would help our community get to know you a bit better?

Geoff Allix (38:51):

Whoa. I think most of my friends would say, would probably highlight, I mentioned adventure sports, and that's probably a definite aspect of my life. So as a teenager, I was very seriously into rock climbing. I rock climbed with a guy who was a world champion at the time, a guy called Jerry Moffatt. Another guy who was very famous in the UK, Ron [inaudible 00:39:22], I went climbing with. So I climbed a very high level, and then just, I love the outdoors. I love mountains. I love climbing mountains. I love snowboarding. I love scuba diving.

And some things I can't do anymore. I mean, certainly balance and things like that are an issue. I wouldn't like to rock climb now, I don't think, not the sort of climb I used to do anyway. But certainly scuba diving. I still go scuba diving. I just love the outdoors, the natural world. And I, because of that, mostly because of that, I moved from London and I come from near London or from southeast UK and lived in London for a long time. And I moved to Devon, which is a very rural area, very close to the area. So I just, yeah, have a huge love for the great outdoors.

Alex Twersky (40:27):

Well, you certainly live in an area where you can take maximum advantage of it, so that's great.

Geoff Allix (40:33):

And now everyone knows me because I tear around on a three wheeled off-road trike, which has huge big fat tires. And I'm known for riding up and down the beach.

Alex Twersky (40:45):

I think they call you the scourge of Devon now.

Geoff Allix (40:49):

Probably. And actually, what I'm doing next week is I'm going to Glastonbury Festival, the Glastonbury Music Festival.

Alex Twersky (41:00):

Oh, so you'll be covered in mud.

Geoff Allix (41:01):

Well, yeah. I'm being optimistic. It might be dry. I have been there quite a number of times. I think this might be, it's about the 12th or 13th time. And I have been on that a few times when it's been very, very muddy, but equally, a lot of times it's not at all and it's absolutely glorious. But I shall be, if anyone sees someone going around on an off-road trike, then that's me.

Alex Twersky (41:21):

And for our listeners outside the UK, I believe Glastonbury is a very well-known annual music festival.

Geoff Allix (41:28):

I think it is the largest performing arts festival in the world, I believe. It is huge. It's the biggest population in the southwest of the UK when it's on.

Alex Twersky (41:40):

Wow. Well, I hope you have a great time and keep safe on the track. And Geoff, with that, I wanted to really offer you my profound thanks for being on this edition of Living Well with MS Coffee Break and allowing our community to get to know its very own podcast host a little bit better.

And as you very well know, there's one last question before you go. And it's a tradition that we ask all of our Coffee Break guests, including our Coffee Break host when he is a guest. So if you tap into your experience with MS generally, and also OMS specifically, for that one nugget of wisdom that you think would help people ease into and better adopt the OMS program, what would your advice for that be?

Geoff Allix (42:29):

So well, there's two things I want to say. One is not so much easing into it, but it's just the advice of someone newly diagnosed. And it took us a lot of thinking about the name of this podcast, that ended up being Living Well with MS. And I think it's that you can have a really good life with MS. And I think at first, it can seem like it's the end of everything, but actually, it's not. Your life will change, but that's not to say it can't be fantastic. And I think that applies to everyone, that applies to people I've met and interviewed who are running marathons and equally people I've met and interviewed who are in a wheelchair. All of them can have a very fulfilling, optimistic, healthy life. I mean, MS doesn't mean you can't have good health.

I keep being told by my doctors that all my metrics are all brilliant. They just say, "Oh, you should be much younger because your heart's in great condition. Your blood pressure is fantastic. Your pulse is brilliant." And they do seem to ignore the fact that I'm there because I've got MS. But they said, "Well, apart from that, you're in really, really, really good health." So I think sort of following a good, healthy lifestyle like OMS is actually, and it's something my neurologist said, he said, "It's good for pretty much everything. Good for heart disease, lowers your risk of cancer, diabetes." Endless, it was a huge, long list of things. All the Western illnesses, you are lowering your risk by having a healthy diet and reducing your levels of stress. So it's beneficial for everything.

In terms of adopting the OMS lifestyle, I think the most daunting thing is the food, to start off with. And I think the thing to do is not think about it. It's not a diet, it is a lifestyle. So it isn't just food. I mean, there's multiple steps, seven different things, the protocol, and they're all very, very important. But in terms of diet, I think it depends on your mindset. I went all in. I just got rid of everything I shouldn't have straight away. Other people don't. And I would say it's really down to what you are like. Go with whatever's easiest for you. And equally I've met a number of people who said, "At first I cut out dairy. Then after that, got used to that, and then I decided to cut out red meat. And then after that," and they just moved step by step, got used to each stage, moved on, and then ended up at the level that they're happy with.

And I think you can do it in different ways. I think there's so much advice now about diet, but what I would say is try not to be an unhealthy vegan because it's very easy to fall into the trap of thinking you are compliant because there's a huge amount of heavily processed vegan food now available. And yes, it will take more effort to cook everything fresh, but it tastes fantastic. That's the first thing. Freshly cooked food tastes really good. And the second thing, it's so much healthier. So it's a whole food, plant-based diet plus seafood.

So think of that whole food aspect. Don't just think I'm okay because I'm eating stuff from the vegan aisle in the supermarket. Some of that is not all that healthy. Even if it's low saturated fat, it's still heavily, heavily processed food. And the other thing, yes, it's a lot more work to cook. Use your freezer. I think get another freezer, get a bigger freezer. A lot of people who do very well, I think, they don't cook one meal, they cook three meals, and then nothing wrong with microwaving food. And so they're eating actually very healthy food and cooking it less often but spending more time cooking.

It really, I mean, it's the way that our grandparents used to do things. It's not rocket science. Just our generation has got so used to convenience. And I think we need to sometimes take a step back and do things a bit the old-fashioned way.

Alex Twersky (47:09):

Excellent advice, Geoff. And even though you've labeled it old fashioned, I'm sure that it's as applicable in the 21st century as it was in the 20th. And thank you so much for sharing those perspectives and everything else you did on this episode. And also sharing of yourself in so many ways, as the host of our podcast and also as an ambassador and as just such a wonderful and instructive and cheerful member of our community. I really appreciate it.

So with that, I'd like to thank everybody for tuning into this episode of Living Well with MS Coffee Break. Please tune in again for our future episodes, especially as we hit that 100 mark and beyond. And don't forget to check out this episode's show notes, where you'll get more links that refer to some of the content that we covered in this episode. So thanks again, and thanks for being part of our podcast community.

Geoff Allix (48:13):

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](http://www.overcomingms.org/podcast). You'll find all sorts of useful links and bonus information there. Do you have questions about this episode, or do you or someone you know want to be featured in a future Coffee Break episode? Then email us at [podcast@overcomingms.org](mailto:podcast@overcomingms.org). We love to hear from you. 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](http://www.overcomingms.org/donate). To learn more about Overcoming MS and its array of free content and programs, including webinars, recipes, exercise guides, OMS Circles, our global network of community support groups, and more, please visit our website at [www.overcomingms.org](http://www.overcomingms.org). While you're there, don't forget to register for our monthly e-newsletter so you can stay informed about the podcast and other news and updates from Overcoming MS. Thanks again for tuning in, and see you next time.

The Living Well with MS family of podcasts is for private non-commercial use and exists to educate and inspire our community of listeners. We do not offer medical advice. For medical advice, please contact your doctor or other licensed healthcare professional. Our guests are carefully selected, but all opinions they express are solely their own and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the Overcoming MS charity, its affiliates, or staff.