

S3E45b Transcript

Coffee Break #26 with Pat Feller

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 (46s):

Get your favorite drink ready and let's meet our guest. For this episode of the Living Well with MS Coffee Break, I'm glad to welcome Pat Feller from San Diego, California. Pat's a dynamic member of the OMS community who has really transformed his life by following the OMS program and is now in the process of transitioning his career from financial advisor to a certified health coach. Pat, thanks so much for agreeing to take part in our podcast.

Pat Feller (1m 14s):

Thanks, Geoff.

Geoff Allix (1m 15s):

Firstly, Pat, our audience would like to know a bit about you and your life. Could you share some background information on where you're from, what you do, and anything about your personal or family life that would give our listeners a sense of who you are?

Pat Feller (1m 28s):

Sure. Thanks for having me on this podcast. I appreciate it, Geoff. I am a Southern California guy. I was born in Newport Beach, California. No, I didn't surf. I body surf though. I went to the University of Oregon. In my 20s, I bounced around. I spent four years in France, a year in Taiwan, married my wife who is from Hong Kong. We have two lovely daughters, 19 and 16. I ended up in a career in financial services working for investment managers up until my diagnosis four years ago. Right now, we are slowly transitioning to the empty nest phase because we have one daughter in college and our next daughter will graduate for university in a year's time.

Pat Feller (2m 20s):

That's where I'm at right now.

Geoff Allix (2m 23s):

That's a high-stress job that you're in, it sounds like.

Pat Feller (2m 25s):

It was high. Yes, it was high stress. It was high energy, high stress. Yes.

Geoff Allix (2m 32s):

How about your experiences with MS? Could you tell us a bit about when you were diagnosed, what happened, how you found out you had MS, and how you initially coped with it?

Pat Feller (2m 44s):

Yes. Like a lot of people, when I look back, I can see when the symptoms started, probably 10 years before my actual diagnosis. I used to be a very ardent runner. Similar to you, I used to run every day four to six miles. I ran a couple of marathons. I'll give you an example. In San Diego County, we have the largest Marine base in the United States. It's called Camp Pendleton. Every June, they hold what is called a mud run. So, you run four or five miles.

Pat Feller (3m 26s):

They throw you in mud, bark orders at you, and you climb over things. I did this with a team and the first year we did this, I crushed it. I was by far the fastest. Six years later, I struggled to finish it. The other guys were looking at me like, "Pat, what happened?" I had this exhausted look on my face, but as a guy, I never thought to advocate for my health, go to a doctor, and say, "I think there's something really wrong with me." I just thought, "You know what? I'm getting old. This is life." There were progressively more symptoms that should have keyed me in on what was going on, I had no background, no family history with MS.

Pat Feller (4m 14s):

Like a lot of people, I had one old childhood friend who had been diagnosed with MS. I met him once after his diagnosis and it's like the cliché, "Hey, you look fine to me. You look amazing. What's the big deal?" I look back on that and I feel very guilty. In 2017, I started feeling a lot of symptoms, and then the kicker was, Geoff, in the fall, I got a flu shot in 2017. That just cascaded in one month.

Pat Feller (4m 55s):

I lost 35 pounds. I went legally blind in my left eye. My short-term memory completely disappeared. I was starting a new job at that time. When you lose your short-term memory and start a new job, that is not good. I was having trouble walking from the parking structure to the office. My balance was off. It was a nightmare. I was misdiagnosed for probably six months until, finally, an optometrist said, "Hey, you're legally blind in your left eye." I went and saw an ophthalmologist and then I saw a neurological ophthalmologist. They then said, "You've got to see a neurologist immediately."

Pat Feller (5m 37s):

He put me in touch with a friend of his who saw me the next day, ran MRIs, and said, "You got MS." At the time of diagnosis, I was in a really bad way. As a male, Geoff, I was coming off a successful career, a career that, in the financial services industry, I used to travel a lot so high energy, a lot of stress. I could see that my career during that time was probably evaporating because I just simply didn't have the energy to do it.

Pat Feller (6m 24s):

Plus, my bladder and bowels were a mess, which is a very common MS symptom. Here's the thing. When my transition to OMS occurred, I was immediately put on Tysabri. I've always considered myself a healthy person, so I was shocked. I'm like, "What? I'm not a healthy person? That can't be true," but it was true. I was sitting there in the infusion center, getting the Tysabri, and up until then, the specialists were saying, "We have these medicines. We have these therapies for you to take."

Pat Feller (7m 8s):

They didn't talk about anything else except these therapies so as I'm taking the Tysabri and it's a very expensive medicine, as a side effect, I felt very disempowered. I felt like a bystander to my health, and I didn't like that feeling at all. Somehow, I forget how I initially came across OMS, but I got the book. In the book, Dr. Jelinek talks about the self-efficacy or the self-agency that comes about when you take steps in your lifestyle, steps with the diet, your eating pattern, exercise, stress management, that you no longer feel like a victim, but then you feel like you have an active role in your recovery.

Pat Feller (8m 6s):

Psychologically, that's a mind shift right now and that really resonated with me. I thought, "Oh, my gosh, this is a board-certified doctor who is saying this." It was a game-changer for me. That led me to the research of Swank. I came across Dr. Terry Wahls, which is not completely aligned, but from a nutritional density standpoint, it is aligned. It was leading me to a different practice. Right now, this has evolved so that today, I'm really enthusiastic about Dr. Stancic, who also is a triple board-certified MD here in the States.

Pat Feller (8m 49s):

She has adopted lifestyle medicine. She's not affiliated with OMS, but it's completely in line with OMS. She, similar to Dr. Jelinek, is thriving and that really gets me super excited. I thought, "You know what, what if I transitioned my

life, like a lot of people do in the MS world, to try to give back and that it can be part of my health journey?" I'm slowly transitioning to becoming a health and wellness coach as well.

Geoff Allix (9m 27s):

Yes, I think you are quite lucky in the States really because OMS, certainly until recently, didn't have a big presence in the US. In the UK, I was fortunate because they have a program where they send the book out for free. A charitable donor has funded that. There is a newer version of the Overcoming Multiple Sclerosis book coming out not so long. I think I'm allowed to say that now.

Geoff Allix (10m 8s):

It's in the relatively near future, but you can get it on Amazon and other places. I would say there are many books. There is funding in the UK so you can get the version. It is expanding and there is more stuff going on. And there's Aaron Boster, a trustee of the organization, who's a doctor.

Pat Feller (10m 45s):

I'm very familiar with him. He's at Ohio State, I believe, yes. I did not know about his affiliation. That's really interesting. That's great.

Geoff Allix (10m 51s):

Yes, he just, in the last couple of months, became one of the trustees. He's very supportive of Overcoming MS. It's just fortunate really. I think the global spread is a good thing. How did you do with the OMS program then? What positives did you see? What problems did you have?

Pat Feller (11m 24s):

I think it's been very positive, and I'll give you an example. Recently, I went to the University of California, San Diego health system. I'm with a neurologist who I think is very competent, very open-minded, very supportive, and she placed me in a clinical trial that they were testing MS patients, their biological age with their chronological age. They took a lot of blood analysis.

Pat Feller (12m 5s):

They had a certain number of biological health markers. They had said, "Usually, the variance is plus or minus two years. I am 53 years old, and my biological age is 47 so that's great. I think that tells you something, but please don't get me wrong. Everything's not hunky dory. A lot of neurological damage occurred from which I'm still healing, rehabilitating, repairing so I don't deny that but from a health marker standpoint, from a biological standpoint, OMS is doing wonderfully.

Pat Feller (12m 48s):

I feel like my cognitive function has improved dramatically, which is so important in the MS world. I've got a lot more energy. I've got a pedometer. I track my steps every day. Yesterday, I ratcheted a personal record this year of 15,000 steps, which might not sound like very much to people out there, but when you've got MS, that's a good thing. I can see the fruit and, Geoff, the wonderful thing is my mindset has changed so that I truly believe that through OMS, I'm healing in a multi-tier systems way.

Pat Feller (13m 36s):

Our bodies are comprised of all these different systems, right? When I say system, it could be the lymphatic system, the endocrine system, cognitive, our gut health, our mitochondria, all these things. What OMS is allowing me to do is to heal and promote better health outcomes for me so I'm super excited about OMS.

Geoff Allix (14m 9s):

Something you said before, actually, which was the mindset of doing something. It actually gets called out in the book and it talks about faith. That thinking you're doing something actually makes it more likely that you'll have a positive outcome. That's why when they test for drug trials, they have to use a placebo because, actually, people on the placebo, on average, all get a bit better, even though they're not taking anything but sugar and water, whatever

it is. They get a bit better because they think that they're doing something. There was a guy in the UK, it was for the BBC, but he was a lot behind the five-two fasting, I think was one of the things he did, but he also did a thing on the placebo effect.

Geoff Allix (14m 56s):

Basically, they gave everyone a placebo. They had back issues. They'd been through every form of medication, everything available to the health system. They didn't work. They cured, I think, 50% of these people. They gave them nothing. What they were giving them was just saline drips or something. It did nothing for them basically, and then that 50% of the people who got better, even after they told them that it was a placebo, it still carried on. They still got better because they basically changed their mindset. A lot of those people are still better even though nothing had happened to them medically. The mindset I think is an important thing, which is what you're saying.

Geoff Allix (15m 37s):

I think the fact that we're doing something actually helps our outcome because we know we've taken on board and we're doing something. We're getting better. We're not passengers to a journey that ends up wherever it may be. We're actually trying to do the best thing. I think that in itself has a positive outcome. You've talked about the good things. How was it going? A lot of people see it as a diet. I don't really like that because it's much more than the diet.

Pat Feller (16m 7s):

I don't like the word diet, yes. I don't use that word at all.

Geoff Allix (16m 13s):

How was it actually switching? I presume you switch your diet, maybe your exercise, mindfulness. How was it actually transitioning to doing well as parts of the program?

Pat Feller (16m 25s):

The exercise was easy because I've always been very exercise oriented. Stress management, actually, I also hired a life coach who, in conjunction with the OMS, has helped me a great deal in managing stress. Then also, with a lot of people, it's so interesting talking about eating patterns, right? Eating pattern, I would like to say, "Geoff, it has been a piece of cake." No. Why? Because what I've learned through the research and my reading is, are you familiar with the term the bliss point?

Geoff Allix (17m 9s):

No, no. What's that?

Pat Feller (17m 11s):

The bliss point is what food engineers call the optimum combination of sugar, fat, salt in these ingredients. They're looking for the bliss point, it was sugar, salt, fat, which really makes these foods irresistibly addictive. There's a reason why people have trouble changing their eating. I called it changing their food relationships because, from the get-go, we establish a relationship with food, right? Typically, it's going to be the more processed, the higher the bliss point. Coming out of World War II, the United States needed to provide enough calories for the population, so the food engineers really did a wonderful job.

Pat Feller (17m 56s):

I would argue that they actually did too good of a job because these foods are so doggone good. They taste so delicious because they're hitting all the dopamine receptors and all that biochemistry going on. I got this from Britain, your Olympic or the Tour de France bicycling team, the aggregation of incremental gains. Are you familiar with that, Geoff?

Geoff Allix (18m 31s):

Yes. I think most people in the UK would be. I think Brailsford was behind the team.

Pat Feller (18m 36s):

Yes, and that really resonated with me. I'm like, "Yes, I don't need to ship all at once." I can make these little changes over time and that's what I've been doing. I've pretty much eliminated sugar right now in the process of transitioning. I have been eating a little bit of chicken. I will confess some pescatarian orientation. I'm now going full whole food plant based. It's a journey and a lot of people have to realize if you expect just to turn on a dime immediately, you're probably setting yourself up for failure.

Pat Feller (19m 21s):

Go for those incremental changes. I'm in a marathon. I'm not in a sprint. I'm in a marathon for the rest of my life. I need to set myself up with small wins and build upon those. In the financial services industry, we call it the power of compound interest. When you earn interest or dividends and they compound over time, and over time, that creates a lot of wealth. I feel what we're doing with OMS is another form of compounded interest. We have to take a long-term orientation, not get discouraged when you buy that wrong stock and it goes down, or you have a little bit of trouble with OMS. It's all right. Be patient with yourself. Give yourself some grace and just dust yourself off, stand up again, go at it, and keep a positive mindset.

Pat Feller (20m 8s):

I'm a Christian. Sometimes, I've brought a spiritual component to this as it's amazing the way our bodies are designed to heal in all these fashions. OMS really is promoting that healing is how our bodies are designed and that's really very exciting.

Pat Feller (20m 51s):

Again, that's feeding into my mindset and that also feeds into what OMS has helped me with finding a good tribe. We all need tribes. We can join bad tribes that pull us down, or we can join good tribes that lift us up and elevate us. I've been very proactive in establishing or joining really healthy tribes. OMS is a wonderful tribe for me to be in. When I'm talking to other OMS ambassadors, I love it. I love talking to them.

Pat Feller (21m 33s):

When I'm talking to other people who understand OMS, it makes my day. It really does.

Geoff Allix (21m 40s):

Just to highlight it, they're called Circles in the OMS world. If you look on the website for Overcoming MS Circles, they're regional groups of people following OMS and ambassadors run those groups. They're not in charge, the ambassadors. It's more just they'll manage it.

Pat Feller (22m 2s):

They're facilitators. Yes, facilitator. That's a good one. Yes, so go on the website. There's a map plugin where you are, and I would just encourage anyone to join a Circle. They're wonderful.

Geoff Allix (22m 14s):

If you are a very long way from anyone else, there is also a Circle for people who are not close. Let's say you're in the Antarctic. If you're on an Antarctic base doing research, I'm pretty sure there's no Circle for the Antarctic. There is also a Circle that covers people who are not close to another one. Don't worry if you're miles from anywhere. There is a Circle for people virtually.

Pat Feller (22m 40s):

There might be some people out there who are like, "Well, Pat, I'm not doing very well right now. My attacks, my gait, my mobility, or whatever. I'm just not doing well. I don't feel like I'm healthy enough to join that tribe." That's not true because we do also have a global progressive Circle. I'm the host of that. I'm the ambassador. Here's a funny one, Geoff. My previous neurologist said, "Pat, your primary progressive," because I've never had any relapses, but I have been slowly deteriorating in certain functions.

Pat Feller (23m 22s):

My EDSS is only three and a half and that's really not very much. I changed neurologists and she said, "You're RRMS with possibly transitioning to progressive. We're not sure." I don't let that get me down. I never said that I'm perfect. I'm working on it. This is a Circle for anyone who's secondary progressive or primary progressive. Come and join us. It's a great circle.

Geoff Allix (24m 5s):

On another topic, how did you have to adapt your daily habits? Did you find it easy? You said diet you did a bit. Did you find it quite easy to do mindfulness? You said that because it was quite easy, the mindfulness side of it. Did that work all right?

Pat Feller (24m 33s):

Yes. What's really been a change for me is trying to be far more intentional with my day, intentional with my eating patterns, intentional with making sure I allocate a block of time for a variety of exercises. I'm intentional about getting my steps, intentional about stepping back and doing some mindfulness. For me, that's a bit of a combination of I'm a little bit of a Hoffer. Do you know Wim Hoff?

Geoff Allix (25m 8s):

Yes. It's worth mentioning that if people aren't aware. Yes, tell us a little bit about Wim Hoff because I think it's quite an interesting topic.

Pat Feller (25m 20s):

The Iceman. He's a man. He does not have MS. What happened to him? He's from Holland. A while back when he was young, he had a young family. He was married. He had three or four kids. Tragedy struck in the form of his wife committing suicide. It plunged him into depression. He struggled with just coping with the loss, coping with the depression. He's come up with, on the surface, can be very simple techniques. There are two of them. One is breathing deep breaths.

Pat Feller (26m 2s):

You're basically hyperventilating, then you'll hold it, and you do rounds, and then also cold water. That's why they call him the Iceman. You can do a cold shower, take an ice bath in packs of ice. It really has a remarkable way of promoting health, of helping your immune system, as well as just promoting a sense of wellness and balance in your life. They've put him to the test in hospitals and it's real.

Pat Feller (26m 44s):

There's medical evidence through the testing of him that this can make a difference. For me, I am not dogmatic, Geoff in like, "Okay, I can only do OMS." I like to think of it as I have a quiver of a lot of different arrows in it or a toolkit. We see what works for us and we add it to our toolbox. If it's a line, and they should be a line, obviously. For me as a Christian, I'm going to pray. I'm going to do some deep breathing. I'm going to change my inner voice because that helps reprogram the mindset.

Pat Feller (27m 34s):

That's been a journey about just changing my inner voice and making it very positive, very life-affirming. It's been a journey, but it's been a good one.

Geoff Allix (27m 50s):

For the last nearly two years now, we've been going through the COVID-19 pandemic. How has that affected your healthy habits? I'm not quite sure what the situation was in San Diego, whether you had full lockdowns or could you get out and exercise? How did it change?

Pat Feller (28m 9s):

It was tough. I'd be remiss if I said it was easy, but yes, we locked down. What I've realized is I've aged, I've become very social. Social connections are very meaningful to me. Relationships are very meaningful to me. At that time,

two years ago, I had attempted to return to full-time traditional work, going to an office, putting in the hours, nine to five. When we went into lockdown, the office became empty, and it was really difficult.

Pat Feller (28m 52s):

Also, a nine to five lifestyle when you have MS is very difficult. It wasn't conducive to my healing. I needed to step back and to really pivot and redefine my life, redefine my purpose. I'll tell you, Geoff. As a male with MS, I find that a very interesting subject of when men are diagnosed with MS, a lot of times we need to change our careers because maybe our previous career was not conducive to our newly found prioritization of health through the form of OMS or whatever else we're doing.

Pat Feller (29m 48s):

There are numerous people within OMS that come to mind. I'm in the process now of repurposing myself. During the lockdown then, it was tough, but that made me very aware of the importance of social connections. That's when I really became much more involved with OMS because I saw that I need this in my life. I need social connections for my mental health and to encourage my OMS protocol. That's when I deepened my relationship with OMS.

Geoff Allix (30m 27s):

I think that social aspect, as well. I think no one knows what it's like to have MS except for other people with MS. My family are fully supportive, but they don't fully understand. My neurologist is an expert, but actually, he doesn't fully understand what it's like to have MS, but I think the connections that I get with the Circles I'm in and speaking with people like yourself, although we will have different symptoms, there's still an understanding, I think of what it's like to have MS. I think that the social aspect is so important because no one else could fully understand it, except for people that are going through it.

Pat Feller (31m 10s):

A week or two ago, I was on a call with other ambassadors. We were getting to know each other. We spent some time talking about OMS-related type stuff. There was an ambassador in Berlin. In the end, she said, in English, not German, "Hey, how are you guys doing?" I'm like, "Yes, I love that. That's what I want to talk about. How are you guys doing?" Because a lot of times when people have a title, I'm an ambassador, you just assume they've got it all together.

Pat Feller (31m 54s):

Then it started coming up. There are always going to be things out of your control, and you can't let those things discourage you, but they are a reality. When I help host and facilitate Circle calls, what I try to do, there's a number of things, but I want to make sure, number one, we acknowledge any trials and tribulations we're going through. Acknowledge it. I don't want to dwell on it, but we've got to say like, "Yes, man. My mobility has been declining," or this or that. Acknowledge it, but then, let's talk about what brings you joy in life?

Pat Feller (32m 37s):

What gets you out of bed? What sparks your eyes? What made you laugh in the last week? There's a bit of sweetness and sourness to it. Acknowledge the difficulty. MS, like you said, it's inherently a difficult condition. You got to acknowledge it, but let's focus on the positive for the long term. That's what we try to do.

Geoff Allix (33m 11s):

As a final question, what would be the best piece of advice you could give to someone who is new newly diagnosed with MS, new to the OMS program? What would that bit of advice be?

Pat Feller (33m 30s):

Choose your tribes wisely. OMS is a great tribe. Be aware of the importance of your mindset. It's all about mindset. Focus on your mindset. If you can focus on that, everything else will fall into place. Choose your tribe wisely and adopt a really positive, affirmative mindset for yourself. Those are my two bits of advice.

Geoff Allix (34m 4s):

Excellent. With that, thank you very much for joining us, Pat Feller.

Pat Feller (34m 7s):
Thank you, Geoff.

Geoff Allix (35m 2s):

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. Do you have questions about this episode or ideas about future ones? Email us at podcast@overcomingms.org. We'd 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. Thank you for your support. Living Well with MS Coffee Break is produced by Overcoming MS, the world's leading multiple sclerosis healthy lifestyle charity. We are here to help inform, support, and empower everyone affected by MS. To find out more and subscribe to our e-newsletter, please visit our website at www.overcomingms.org. Thanks again for tuning in and see you next time.