(W29) DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE GUY—GOES BY THE NAME OF FLASH—WITH MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS?
E.S. Vander Kamp

Aquatics, Lakeshore Foundation, Birmingham, AL

Background: “Life is too important to be taken seriously,” wrote Oscar Wilde. A life with multiple sclerosis (MS) is certainly, most certainly, still a life—with a serious diagnosis. So, is this the time to hunker down and get serious? Absolutely not. Now is the time to pull out all the humor you can get your hands on. A group of men gather for an aquatic class. They know the value of humor. A common exchange between them goes something like this: Jim, via his walker, arrives at the pool. He yells to his friend, Vincent, “Come on, Lightning!” Vincent, walking with his AFO and cane, yells back to his friend Jim, “Hold on there, Flash, I’m comin’!” Not far behind Flash and Lightning comes Blaze, who transfers from his power chair to a hydraulic lift and into the pool. Hot on Blaze’s heels is fast-moving Speedy, walking without a cane, but none too steady, and pulling up the rear is Giddy-Up, who has a definite hitch in his right side. Are these nicknames cruel? Far from it. They are terms of endearment between friends who have seen faster days. Giddy-Up holds a black belt in karate, but can barely balance long enough to do a kick anymore. Flash was once a champion swimmer. Blaze played tennis for years before his legs stopped working because of MS. Lightning raised two children, and Speedy has traveled the world. These men have taken MS and made it “March Sideways” out of the center of their lives. They laugh because laughter is healing, because “he who laughs, lasts” because if they are laughing they are themselves, not their diagnosis. When these men get together and laugh and give each other nicknames, they feel better. Their humor holds hope. Their humor is not ignoring that their bodies move more slowly, nor is it pretending that their fingers contain the same dexterity they held before MS. No, the humor of these men lives in reality. It just doesn’t get bogged down in it. Yes, a diagnosis of MS is serious. Living with MS is serious. So, let’s take that as a given and move on with the important business of living. Lightning, Flash, Blaze, Speedy, and Giddy-Up are ready to show us the way.

Disclosure: Nothing to disclose

Keywords: quality of life in MS, psychosocial issues in MS, psychological issues and MS