

You can't change what you don't know

It is probably an uncomfortable thought but most of our days are spent in a state of self-delusion. **We often excuse our behavior and justify our actions within a twisted internal monologue that feels safe and cosy.** Whether it's something bad or even good, we will defend it with everything we've got without realizing how much deeper into an unhealthy pattern we lead ourselves.

To make things worse, when we do get a chance for self-reflection or critical feedback by others we quickly contest it and get upset. Many people claim to be in favor of constructive criticism but **when it actually comes down to hearing things that wound our egos we simply don't want to know.** We retaliate and, at times, become verbally abusive or defensive only because we are not self-aware and thus unable to admit and accept uncomfortable truths.

Sedikides in 1993, identified three motives for evaluating oneself: ***self-assessment*** (seeking accurate self-knowledge, whether positive or negative), ***self-enhancement*** (seeking favorable self-knowledge), and ***self-verification*** (seeking fairly obvious self-knowledge that is probably true. When research participants were given the chance to select questions on knowledge about themselves, self-enhancement was obviously the most popular while self-assessment the least sought.

"Despite what they may believe to be true, most people do not really want to know more about themselves; rather they want either positive information or information that simply confirms what they already know", (Byrne).

The lies we tell ourselves are the most damaging. They lead to a fake perception of one's self, denial and inability to change and get where we want to be. Without being willing to

acknowledge sides of our personalities and lives which are unpleasant, we keep being dishonest with ourselves. Self dishonesty leads to unhappiness, problematic connections with others, unfulfilling interpersonal relationships, depression, lower self esteem and a sense of 'everyone else is to blame' thinking for what is happening in our lives or how we react to different situations.

A good way to start practicing self-awareness is self-reflection. One of the biggest challenges is to manage and pause our thoughts for one second before engaging into conversations with our default reactions. People who are mindful can discipline themselves and allow for moments of reflection before responding.

Self-reflection allows for deeper understanding of our reaction, words, thoughts and how our behavior affects others. It can take place anywhere and at any times. Allow yourself time to think : 'what was my fault?', 'what is it I refuse to acknowledge?', 'what was I afraid of admitting by welcoming others' criticism'?, 'what is it missing from your life and is getting filled in other, not fruitful, ways?'. These questions will surely bring up insecurities and misconceptions.

Seek to understand, not to be right.

Self-awareness is an emotionally painful process. It is very hard to see things about ourselves that we don't want to admit. As you develop self-awareness you will be able to make drastic changes in your thought process and emotions. Self-awareness is also one of the attributes of Emotional Intelligence which is an extremely important factor of success in every aspect of life.

Having self-awareness allows you to see where your thoughts and emotions are taking you. It also enables you to escape from the bubble you have created and get a more objective, clear and realistic understanding of yourself, specific feelings and thoughts you have and why. **It will give you a**

great opportunity for self-observation, acceptance, self-honesty and openness.

You will, therefore, be able to focus your attention and energy on things that will take you where you need to be in all aspects of your life.

Get real and acknowledge the lies you have been telling yourself. The uplifting sense of freedom you will end up feeling will enhance the quality of your relationships, your life and sense of self.

*“Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom” –
Aristotle*

MS – the invisible war on emotion

So you have been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. Like every other serious health diagnosis, the news is really hard to take in, especially if you are feeling relatively good.

While some people feel relieved to finally get a name for all their unexplained symptoms and/or years of misdiagnosis, others will start going through the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and eventually acceptance.

Mourning takes place throughout many big life changes; we mourn the end of a relationship, the end of a happy era, huge lifestyle changes. We also mourn who and how we used to be. Being told you suffer from a condition that has no cure, that is unpredictable, that could put you in a wheelchair, that

will change your life as you know it forever and which comes with so many symptoms and side effects triggers a mourning state which could last for very long.

“Often, people will grieve not just after diagnosis, but each time they experience significant changes in functional abilities or life roles”, Rosalind Kalb, Ph.D., vice president of Clinical Care at the National MS Society

Like many other ‘invisible’ conditions, Multiple Sclerosis is sneaky; many of its symptoms are not seen by others and a few more are not even given much attention, although are detrimental to the sufferer. Of those symptoms are the psychological impact MS has on people and also the emotional problems it brings with it.



Unfortunately, it is understandably difficult for others to comprehend how fatigue, pain, itchiness, body aches, trembling and tingling affect you daily let alone mood swings, depression, and emotional ups and downs.

Saying that, you would wish for people in your life who truly care for you and love you to be actively helping, trying to understand and listen more, getting involved in learning and educating themselves – you are right thinking like that.

Crying, laughing and then crying again...

With an MS diagnosis also comes loss; you might lose the ability to do certain sports, to go to work, to think as clearly as before or the loss to control your emotions. Grieving and feelings of sadness could lead to depression which could last for a few days or even turn into clinical depression which lasts for much more and is more unremitting.

You might enter an emotional roller-coaster with confusing feelings that will make you more sensitive and prone to bouts of crying or laughing for no particular reason.

Another reason for why that happens is the '[Pseudobulbar affect](#)'! This is a condition often referred to as 'Involuntary Emotional Expression Disorder'. **You could burst into uncontrollable laughter or cry without necessarily feeling the emotions associated with that expression.** It is a truly frustrating situation where for no apparent reason you could start crying or laughing at something not funny at all, without being able to stop.

"These changes are thought to result from lesions in emotional pathways in the brain. It is important for family members and caregivers to know this, and realize that people with MS may not always be able to control their emotions", (National Multiple Sclerosis Society).

Stress, Anxiety, and Depression

Studies, which were conducted as early as in the 80's, had already warned of the mental health risks patients with Ms face. In particular, Devins, Gerald M, in 1987, concluded that two factors—functional loss (imposed by the increased physical disability produced by MS) and disease activity (exacerbation and progression of symptoms)—have been identified as contributors to increased emotional distress in MS patients. He called for further investigation into the matter so that patients get all the needed support. In later studies, more scientists also found that **anxiety and depression occur more frequently in multiple sclerosis patients than in the general population.**

'Studies have found that more than 35 percent of people with MS have some type of anxiety disorder, which is higher than the general population. Within this 35 percent, the majority of people have generalized anxiety disorder, though



obsessive-compulsive disorder and panic disorder are also well represented. Women are more likely to have anxiety than men; the same is true for depressed mood.'

It is easy to see how coping with MS can lead to feelings of anxiety and depression. **The daily struggles patients face are exasperating, stressful and frustrating at best. Trying to adjust to a new reality with many disabilities is exhausting and scary.**

Regardless of these factors, the condition itself can also cause depression "by destroying the protective coating around nerves that help the brain send signals that affect mood", (WebMD). As if these were not already enough reasons for a person with an MS diagnosis to suffer from depression, some of the disease modification drugs used, such as interferon, can also cause, sometimes severe, cases of depression.

Stress is a possible trigger that could lead to a relapse in MS so it should be managed as much as possible.

Ask your doctor for help if:

- Your sadness is making your life worse, like causing trouble with relationships, work issues, or family disputes – and there isn't a clear solution to these problems.

- You have thoughts about suicide. If that happens, get medical help right away. (WebMD)

Too many things happening at once...please stop!

Very often, things get too much for a person who suffers from MS. There could either be situations where overloaded data from multiple sources is being processed or even just interacting with one person can feel like a sensory strain. Too many external triggers can kick off many internal responses. Maybe the sounds will feel too loud, the scents too strong, the music too annoying or the sun too bright. It might also be people talking at the same time, the supermarket being too crowded or a 3D movie making you feel really sick.



Sensory overload becomes so unbearable that it can force people to quit their job, stop attending places they used to like going to and it can generally disturb normal daily routines. Many situations like the ones described above result

in excessive stress and anxiety. **What makes everything worse is the inability of the people around MS sufferers to empathize with what is going on inside their heads.**

People suffering from Multiple Sclerosis mostly feel alone – lack of understanding or willingness to empathize/support/get informed by family, loved ones and close friends create feelings of loneliness, desperation, and abandonment.

Many people will often tell me that they get most of their emotional and psychological support through Facebook groups rather than from their partners and family.

Feeling angry and frustrated

The problem is that the connection between MS and emotions

often goes unrecognized. In moments of great emotional upheaval, there is a need of release and it often comes in the form of anger or frustration. There are times when things can get patients worked up really fast to the point where anger management becomes an issue.

“We believe that the higher levels of withheld anger shown by the study subjects is due to demyelination, loss of the substance in the white matter that insulates the nerve endings and helps people receive and interpret messages from the brain” explains lead



researcher Dr. Ugo Nocentini from the IRCCS S Lucia Foundation in Rome.

In his latest [study](#), he explains that high unexpressed anger in MS patients is linked to nervous system damage and not disease severity which actually means that people in the early stages of diagnosis are also susceptible to it. It is vital for MS sufferers to ask for help and seek support when they feel like they are not in control of their anger and frustration.

Not thinking straight...

I feel like that quite often. Experiencing fatigue is NOT the same as feeling tired and the truth is that 99% of non-MS sufferers will not comprehend the difference. Fatigue is an overwhelming feeling of mental and/or physical exhaustion out of proportion to the task performed. Cognitive symptoms such as difficulties with slowed thinking, poor memory, concentration, and attention span are also quite frequent in sufferers. All these mount up to more of the invisible insane crap that the majority of people will not see, acknowledge or quite grasp.



Living with MS is not great at all. Despite being a totally different experience for every patient depending on the severity of the disease, a plethora of everyday symptoms are struggled with universally the same. The worry and fear

of progression and the uncertainty of the future are also experienced by all.

Emotional and mental problems are often overlooked which potentially makes things ever so much worse. On top of that trying to cope with a condition that for many doesn't have physical manifestations is often met with expressions such as: 'but you don't look sick'.

But although it is all too much to handle at times, this is not a negative and demoralizing post but rather one on awareness which we need to spread around the world so doctors, nurses, family, loved ones, and friends are able to positively contribute to our health plan. **Emotional changes have to be recognized and acknowledged as a serious MS side effect.** Its effects need to be researched more, guidelines should be put in place and medical professionals should receive education on the subject. **Until then, stay positive and hopeful** ☐

My abuser hasn't won

"I met my abuser when I was 21 years old. I was young, happy, energetic, very sociable, a University student and full of thirst for life. No abuse story begins by being abusive – this is what many people get wrong when asking why did someone stay. It didn't start like that. On the contrary, the

relationship started off like any other young love story. There was flirting, dates, lots of laughter, excitement and falling in love.

He even told me right away about his past troubles with the law, his short prison sentence and his horrible childhood. I liked that he was honest and also felt he was deeply affected by his abusive past.



He was very charming, hard working, funny and quite loved by those around him. We worked together and a few months later we also moved in together. Most women who have been victims of abuse have trouble remembering the exact moment things turned sour because there is no such moment.

Emotional abuse is subtle and builds up slowly in a very sneaky way. It doesn't come with huge warning signs at first, nor does it leave physical scars. Changes take place daily in a very discreet way. By the time emotional abuse occurs, you feel love and care for the other person. You feel happy, you trust him and denial doesn't allow for any realization of the truth.

I can't recall when our relationship was not so good anymore. There are key moments that are stuck inside my head and I don't think will ever go. He started abusing class A drugs – something I had to find out myself months later. When I confronted him with that the initial reaction was anger, verbal abuse, aggressiveness. Later on he would apologize, even cry telling me how sorry he was, how others lured him into that and how badly he wants out. **The abuser/victim role was a common game he often played with 'last time never again' promises. I wanted to believe him so I did.**

I wasted 7 years of my young life in an abusive relationship, 5 of them trying to save him from drug abuse. **Why did I stay? Because I didn't know I was being abused. When I did realize that, I didn't know there was a way out. Later I believed there is ALWAYS a way out but I couldn't find mine. I couldn't leave because I was left alone with hardly any friends. I had lost all my self esteem, confidence and self worth. I had let myself go, had self destructive tendencies and many times lost my will to live. I was lost.**

Was I so good at hiding everything or were my friends and family not looking hard enough? Was it easier to look the other way? Couldn't they see it?... sometimes I wonder.

Like most victims of abuse, I thought I loved my abuser and that he loved me back. Until the end I had hopes that things would be like before somehow. Ending a relationship you invested so much in is a great loss and I couldn't possibly go through that mourning stage.

Every time he called me names, shouted at me, humiliated me, put me down, killed everything that I ever loved about myself – **I thought it was my fault.** Well, he told me so and I believed it. The times that I didn't he would put on his crying victim face and apologize. I felt sorry for him. Besides, he had had a bad childhood – he needed help. He was very good at blaming everyone else for his behavior. He was also great at not acknowledging any of his abuse and belittling me every time I mentioned it.



He hit me a couple of times – both out of the blue, sudden. On one of those times I was punched in the stomach and fell on the floor – **I thought I would die.** Laying on the floor, alone, being unable to breath I thought of all my loved ones who I might never see and of all the things I might never do again.

No woman or man deserves to fear for their lives at the hands of an abuser.

Being a victim is not only hurtful and traumatizing but also very difficult when having to share your story with friends and family. Some people blame the victim, others make you feel uncomfortable and not good enough and many are judgmental. **You don't have to be naive or uneducated to become a victim of any type of abuse – it affects people from all walks of life.**

I feel really sad for women who feel now like I felt then – who can't find their way out. Women who don't really understand how much they are worth, how special they are and how unique. Women who live in fear of the ones they love and whose self-esteem has been destroyed. I feel sad for those men and women who are scared to speak up, ask for help, get out and claim the life they deserve. **No-one will ever really know or fully understand what you went through or still are. This shouldn't discourage you – having managed to cope on your own despite that fact shows how strong you are.**

There is **ALWAYS** someone who **WILL** truly love you for who you are and who will help you put all the broken pieces back together again. I choose to seek professional help, heal from my past and find closure within me. I also choose to feel strong and empowered and help other women and men around me feel the same. The journey towards liberation and recover is hard and long but it's happening! My abuser doesn't have my love anymore. **My abuser hasn't won."**

Anonymous

- Do you have a story you want to share? I would love to [hear from you.](#)
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Your story: Break the Chains of Abuse

Natasha was a young mom that had to come face to face with a parent's worst nightmare. This is her inspirational story:

"I met my abuser when I was just 16. I had never been in a physically abusive relationship before, and he was my first serious relationship. He applied for a job where I was working, and I thought he looked so cool in his leather jacket and bleached hair. I always had a thing for the older "badass" guys (Read: ['Bad Boy Love'](#)).

*We started talking as friends, and had an agreement that we wouldn't start dating until I was 18. However, **within just 2 months he had sucked me in with promises of a bright future, and I bought everything he was selling.** Contrary to popular belief, he didn't start abusing me as soon as we met, nor as soon as we started seeing each other. It took a few months before he tried anything at all. One day we were sitting on his couch and play fighting. **He slapped me hard across my face.***



*I was so hurt, emotionally and physically! I could feel my face stinging, and I ran away from him and drove as fast as I could home. I was so confused! **Why did he do this?!** He called me about 50 times that night – all night. Until finally around 3 a.m. I answered the phone. **“I am so sorry – we were just playing and sometimes I don’t realize my own strength”** I believed him, why else would he call so many times just to tell me that?! I was so young, so naïve, I had no clue what I*

was in store for.

So, I forgave him, and we continued seeing each other, but I felt like I was in control. We only saw each other when I had spare time, and only for as long as I could stay. I was going to school, working, and was on the dance team in high school. Things were going ok. He hadn’t hurt me since the first “accident”.

I don’t even remember the second time he hurt me, or the third. I remember the really bad times, and even have most of them blocked out and will remember them now as a flashback.

We were together for 6 years. I had tried to leave once before, but the threats of him killing my whole family, my son, myself scared me to the point that I felt I had to go back so that my family’s deaths wouldn’t be on my hands.

I knew that if he decided to act on those threats I would never be able to look at myself or my family again without feeling so much guilt. I knew that I wouldn’t survive him

doing that to my family – because I knew that the guilt would cause me to give up on my own life. **I was so afraid of everything.**

If I caught my own shadow out of the corner of my eye just right, or someone moved too fast, I jumped out of my skin. **He convinced me that I was no good, that I was broken, and that I deserved everything he ever put me through** (Read: [‘Speak Up’](#)).

We ended up moving up north near Sutton’s Bay, Michigan. The two of us, my son, and my daughter. He moved up with my kids before me, because I was still working to try to afford for the U-Haul to move all of our belongings up north. He took them the week before I was done with school, and it was his own assurance that I would be coming up.

He knew I couldn’t live without my kids, so he knew he had me trapped. So, the next week, the night after I finished my last class at 10 pm, I got in the U-Haul and drove the 3 ½ hours north to what I thought would be a new beginning – and it was; just not the way I thought it would be.



I was up there for roughly three weeks. I was working 12 hour shifts trying to finish my externship, as well as working part time at a local restaurant to try to support the four of us. I was barely making anything at all. **I had to go to a local Church to even have enough formula to feed my daughter. I had to depend on the generosity of strangers to feed my son.** I ate when I could get enough change together to sneak a McDougle on my break without him knowing.

On August 12, 2011 my life would change forever. I woke up that morning, thinking it was just like any other. I got up,

got ready for my externship, kissed my children goodbye and left. The work day was uneventful, I don't remember anything really out of the ordinary from that day. I do remember him texting me to ask me where the change was. I had taken it so I could eat that day.. But that didn't matter to him, he needed it so he could take his brother to work. **His family were always more important than me.**



I always had to let him know where I was, or where I was going to be, so I remember calling him as I was leaving my externship to let him know I was leaving, and heading to the restaurant to pick up my pay. I remember calling him to let him know I had my pay and was headed home. **It was about**

10 minutes later I got the call with him screaming that I needed to "Get Home Now, NOW! GET HOME RIGHT NOW!!!"

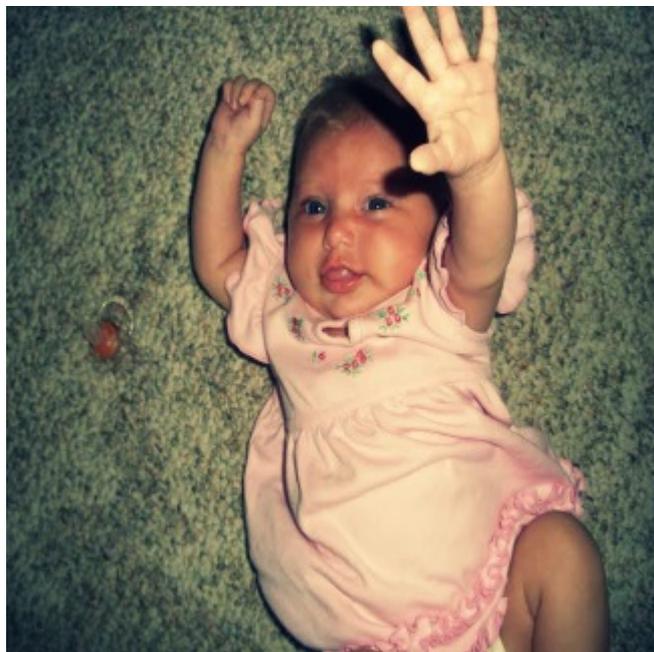
One of our biggest mistakes as victims of abuse is that we feel that as long as it is only affecting us, we will be fine, or that it is ok, (Read: ['Why I Stayed'](#)). That is not the case, and that is why I share my story with you today. **I made that mistake. I felt that since I had never seen him abuse my children, and his anger was only aimed at me, that they were somehow safe and unaffected.** I wish I knew then, what I know now.

My daughter was just 3 ½ months old when he sexually abused her, and she passed away.

There were no signs that he was sexually abusive towards children. The State of Michigan sealed his prior record, and that would have been the only indication. His family knew, but said and did nothing. Now my family feels nothing but pain and guilt for not seeing or doing anything to get me out of the

situation. They don't look at me the same, and it isn't that they feel I should have done anything differently, other than speaking up about what I had gone through. Abuse doesn't just affect the person being abused.

*It affects children in the relationship, it affects the victim's families – immediate and extended. The only way to put an end to it is for Survivors to step forward and share their story. **Let victims know that they need to get out, and that the Survivors are there to help them do that.***



After he murdered my daughter, he was arrested, convicted and sentenced to two natural life sentences for sexually abusing her and murdering her. It wasn't until I was removed from the relationship, and started to notice how jumpy, broken and beat down I was that I started to realize that there aren't enough resources for others trying to get out of these situations.

I couldn't afford counseling, and didn't know where to turn to for help. Because of that, I founded the Evelynne Aimee Foundation on May 1, 2013. I founded it in Evelynne's honor, sharing her story to help others. We help victims of Child, Sexual and Domestic abuse to get out of the situation in Genesee County, Michigan, (Read: ['Abused no More'](#)).



Please don't think that what you are going through is ok. Speak up about what you are going through, or what you have been through. I always tell everyone "Share your story, and if you aren't comfortable with that, share my story –you never know who you could be saving in doing so." (Read: ['Reader's Story: She Finally Flew Free'](#)).

[She Finally Flew Free'](#)).

The abuse and suffering I went through didn't stop after I was out of that relationship and this is the sad reality for most victims. Its long lasting effects will always be there to remind me of a situation where no woman should ever find herself in. I now suffer from chronic migraines which I can get from the sun, loud noises and pretty much anything that can trigger it. They are caused by permanent nerve damage due to the abuse – and this is just the physical side of it. The emotional scarring and the hurt and pain from losing my daughter will last a lifetime.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and watch the video on my story.

You can find out more about the Evelynne Aimee Foundation, as well as follow what we are doing to make a difference on Facebook

(<https://www.facebook.com/EvelynneAimeeFoundation?fref=ts>)

and Twitter (https://twitter.com/e_a_foundation).

We are a 501©3 organization, which means all donations are tax deductible, if you are able to help support our cause, you can make a donation at <https://www.razoo.com/story/Evelynne-Aimee-Foundation>.

Thank you. Natasha

- Do you have a story you want to share? I would love to [hear from you.](#)