

Despite everything, the wilderness is still my favorite medicine. Camping - being out in the woods and mountains -is something I've always loved. I started out as a kid romping around the Big Thompson River in Colorado, eventually spending 15 years on a volunteer mountain rescue team. I've climbed a peak in Borneo, spent countless nights under the stars and even my time in the military was with an infantry unit which was mostly outside – though we didn't call it camping at the time.

But finally last weekend, I've come to realize how much I miss it. For the first time since my MS diagnosis in 2017, I went camping.

I've wanted to go. I've driven in the mountains of Colorado with my wife a number of times - even made my way to a panoramic spot to gaze up at the Indian Peaks mountains with the Aspens just starting to turn their bright Fall colors. However, I'll admit I had trepidation- really fear - of going camping. Not because of wild animals and not because of unpredictable weather but because of the limitations imposed on me by MS and really, it just came down to one thing. Getting up in the morning. That's right - the effort to get out of my sleeping bag and beginning to move in the morning kept me from an experience that I deeply love.

Like most of us with MS, I am most at ease laying down. The effort to stand and stay upright is a constant challenge involving work. It's not like I can't do it, it's just a lot of effort. It was this that kept me from going camping. I still have tons of gear (more than I should have) and I still occasionally teach avalanche safety and awareness classes which just makes me want to go out more. But I've hesitated to venture too far out. No more.

That morning of waking up reminded me of something I had ignored for too long. The sounds of the bees, flies, and the breeze moving across the Aspen leaves is magical. The solitary ant moving across the ground by the fire pit is mesmerizing as it negotiates around blades of grass and pine needles. The warm rays of the sun on my neck contrasts with the coolness of the breeze warmed me to the core. I miss this. I miss it so much that my eyes were watering as I sat there in the sun and shade looking at all around me. The deep refreshing breathes I took with smells of the forest are more intoxicating than any sip of wine or whiskey.

My best friend took me camping. He and I had spent many a night outside. I was very apologetic ahead of time telling him he'd have to do a lot of the work. That was the other source of fear – or at least hesitancy – asking him for help. He didn't care and he was happy just to be outside and happy I was willing to go.

We had a fantastic time and will do so again. And while I lost 5 years of happy experiences, I won't lose another 5. Come join me and let's get out fellow MS'ers.