Dear Gillian,

I am writing to tell you about the way I was told I have MS.

I guess my story starts a little over three years ago. I had just turned 30, had been running my own business for a few years and was living with my boyfriend. I wouldn't say I was the most mature 30 year old in terms of being a grown up, taking care of myself and generally thinking too much about the future. In fact, my boyfriend was only 26 at the time and that year I told everyone that my 30th was my 25th birthday! Those friends I had known only a few years actually believed me – and those I had known for a wee bit longer kept my secret… mostly, until booze was involved then, all bets were off.

It was the height of summer in Glasgow (which means it's pretty cold but we drink in beer gardens and parks regardless!) and I was busy counting up how many pints of beer garden cider I could have without going over my calorie intake for the day, when my boyfriend said that his eye felt weird and he had a big black spot in his vision.

Over the next two days waiting for an appointment at the eye clinic I worried about brain tumours, diabetes and a whole host of other horrible things but MS never entered my mind; I hadn't ever really heard of it.

The eye appointment came and went, and we left the office with a yellow post-it note with the words 'optic neuritis' written on it and strict instructions not to google this as it would come up with scary stories. Obviously, we googled it.

This was the first time I had read anything about MS and it was all so overwhelming that I don't think I took much of it in. I told my boyfriend not to worry, as I doubted it would be anything scary and the MRI was 'just in case'. We found out the MRI scans showed lesions on his brain; it was late summer. I remember lying in bed awake at some ridiculous time in the morning thinking about the future and worrying so much about what my boyfriend was feeling and how he would cope with this and how we would cope in the future.

We ended up fighting a lot about stupid things and the stress of closing down my business and feeling powerless to help my boyfriend deal with this potential diagnosis was all just a bit much to bear. But, as the weeks went on we began to feel more positive.

A few months later I started a new job. It was really exciting but pretty stressful and I felt overwhelmed most of the time. After a few weeks, I felt numbness in my face like I’d had a jag at the dentist and then slowly the same in my left arm, leg and all over my scalp.

I knew I was totally stressed, not sleeping, drinking FAR too much coffee and generally not looking after myself. The morning I phoned my doctor for an appointment I was in the shower when my boyfriend asked how I was feeling. I told him the numbness was still there and it was painful to shampoo my hair because my scalp was tingling so badly. He said, ‘Uch. It’s probably MS.’ We both laughed and I got ready for work.

The doctor said she thought I had an inner ear infection but I would get an appointment for neurology through the post, ‘just in case’. Even leaving the surgery I honestly didn’t think the ‘just in case’ was MS; I thought it was an ear infection and I’d be fine in a few days. I wasn’t. It lasted until just before my MRI scan appointment two months later.

At some point in those two months I knew it was MS. There wasn’t a big epiphany and all of a sudden I realised MS was causing these symptoms. It just slowly dawned on me that what I had been reading about when I was so worried about my boyfriend was actually happening to me, and had been happening to me for a while. By the time my MRI and lumbar puncture results came back it was summer again, and I was back to counting up my calories for a beer garden cider, when I got the letter that confirmed demyelination consistent with MS.

It wasn’t a shock and it wasn’t as scary as when I was worried about my boyfriend. This time we didn’t fight or cry. We knew what to expect and it seemed like a strange kind of normal to us and our families.

I think it’s pretty unusual to be diagnosed within a year of your partner and it does make planning for your future just that little bit more uncertain. But, for now we are coping one cold Glasgow summer at a time - with plenty of vitamin D and lots of cider in the fridge for ‘just in case’.

Kind regards,

Elaine