

"Poor, pitiful me," Marc Shotzberger says facetiously. The former superintendent is trying to inject humor into his dire situation, but he's not laughing. Neither am I. For what

Shotzberger has been through, it's a wonder he even attempts to be comedic, especially when you consider the string of Job-like bad news he's been on the receiving end during the past year.

About 14 months ago, Shotzberger was fired from his job as superintendent at Spring Mill CC in Ivyland, Pa., after more than six years. Last spring, shortly after Shotzberger got a job as an assistant at Lookaway GC in Buckingham, Pa., he severely damaged his knee after his leg was crushed by a tractor. And then last summer, while Shotzberger was out of work and still on the mend from his mangled knee, his wife asked for divorce after 11 years of marriage. Three months ago, Shotzberger moved out of his family's house and into a lonely one-bedroom apartment in Horsham, Pa.

To make matters worse, Shotzberger suffers from multiple sclerosis (MS), a degenerative disease of the central nervous system. Of course, when you hear about the bad things that have happened to him, you can't help but wonder if the disease had anything to do with the setbacks he has suffered. Shotzberger does, too, but realizes he may never know.

He is certain of one thing, however. He can't pack it in. No way. He has no choice but to keep on keeping on, especially for the loves of his life — his two boys, 9-year-old Aaron and 4-year-old Noah.

"You lick your wounds, put your tail between your legs and go on," Shotzberger says matter-of-factly.

"Why me?"

Shotzberger was working as an assistant superintendent in Chicago when the symptoms of MS struck about 11 years ago. He was 35 and healthy. He worked and played hard — basketball, baseball and golf. And, boy, could he hit a golf ball. He sported a low handicap. "I could go out and shoot par any day," Shotzberger says proudly.

First, there was the dizziness that effected

'I'm Going to Keep Pluggin' Away'

BY LARRY AYLWARD



MARC SHOTZBERGER,
STRICKEN WITH
MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS,
WONDERS WHAT
HIS FUTURE HOLDS

his balance. Then he experienced pain in his back. Both worsened slowly over the next few years. Shotzberger knew something was wrong, and he finally went to a neurologist who diagnosed him with the unbelievable news about five years ago. It was a shock. He had never even known anyone with MS. How did he get it?

"Why me?" he asked, understandably.

Over the years, the disease has taken its toll on his body. A few years ago, Shotzberger began to have trouble lifting his right leg, which felt like it was filled with 200 pounds of concrete.

Predictably, Shotzberger's golf game went south. "I can't even swing a club anymore," he says.

About four years ago, the disease began to affect his job as a superintendent. "I could still jump on a tractor, but the job was getting more difficult," he says.

Shotzberger didn't have the strength he once had. He also felt more lethargic, a classic symptom of MS.

He began to limp on his right leg. When he had to stop playing golf at Spring Mill, he says he felt his tenure there was in jeopardy. How could he be a superintendent of a golf course without knowing its playability?

"After that, I knew it was just a matter of time," Shotzberger says of his dismissal.

He accepted his firing without a fight.

"It happens all the time in this industry," he says. "What are you gonna do?"

He landed at Lookaway GC a few months later as an assistant. A month into the job, he was getting up and off a tractor when he accidentally kicked it into gear. It ran over his right leg — the same leg impaired by his disease. Shotzberger tore three ligaments in the knee.

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But would you believe he feels fortunate about the injury?

"There's a silver lining with this dark cloud," he says. "At least the tractor hit the bad leg. If it would have hit my good leg, I'd have two bad legs now."

An orthopedic surgeon decided not to operate and told Shotzberger to rest at home and let the injury heal on its own. A few months later, Shotzberger's wife floored him with the news that she wanted a divorce.

Shotzberger says he's not sure if his MS has anything to do with her request. He does admit, however, that he spent too much time being a superintendent and not enough time being a husband and father. "I didn't heed the advice that I gave everybody that worked for me — that your family should come first," he admits.

It took him two hours to move out of the house and into the apartment. Shotzberger didn't take many possessions from the house because he didn't want to disrupt his boys' environment. "Who cares that I don't have a coffee table?" he says.

The first week in the new apartment was brutal. There was much sobbing and crying. But soon life in the apartment was bearable. Shotzberger made it that way because he wanted his sons to have a happy place to visit.

There isn't much in the apartment — a couch, a computer, a kitchen table, a bed and a big TV. Shotzberger, who studied turf science at Penn State University and grew up in a town near State College, Pa., loves his Nittany Lions. "I *have* to watch Penn State on a good TV," he says.

His days are spent looking for work and planning for the future. Shotzberger was cleared to go back to work last November, but there was nowhere to go. "It's the slow season," he says.

Shotzberger has faced the hard realization that he can't be a superintendent anymore. He's trying to find a sales job with a company that supplies



PHILADELPHIA ASSOCIATION OF GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENTS

products to the industry. He has had a few interviews, and he has some good leads. He's hopeful there will be some good news soon — finally.

"I *need* to get a job," he says, the urgency evident in his voice. "I've got too much time to sit here and stew and contemplate all the bad things."

He doesn't want to brood about the past. He doesn't want to think about relaxing backyard barbecues with his wife and kids. He doesn't want to dwell on his love for walk-mowing greens.

Damn right he feels sorry for himself. "But I don't perpetuate it; I don't let it fester," he says.

He knows deep down that others are worse off than him.

"So what that I limp?" he says. "At least I have feet to put shoes on. Some people don't even have feet."

Brothers in arms

What has helped keep Shotzberger going is the love of his comrades. I've always heard that superintendents look out for each other like brothers. That's the case with Shotzberger, whose peers recognized that his life had taken a turn for the worst.

Last November, members of the Philadelphia Association of Golf Course Superintendents took it upon themselves to raise money for Shotzberger, who was only getting a pittance from workman's compensation at the time. They invited

Marc Shotzberger (left) is grateful for the help he's received from his peers, including Mark MacDonald, superintendent of Regents Glenn CC.

Shotzberger to their annual meeting in November and gave him a generous donation — several thousand dollars.

Shotzberger says he was stunned and humbled by their generosity. "I feel not worthy of such a donation."

The gesture gave him hope. And through is faith in God, Shotzberger has gained strength, which has aided him in his plight. "My faith has helped me," he says softly.

He's fearful, though, about the future. Shotzberger wants to know if the disease will get worse. And when? Will he soon lose control of his left leg and arms?

"I don't want to give in to a wheelchair," he says. "That's the beginning of the end. I'm going to keep pluggin' away. I don't have a choice."

There's frustration in his voice because he desperately wants God to let him know what's going on with his life.

"I don't know what the big plan is, and that's the problem," Shotzberger laments. "I wish God would let me in on it."

Hopefully, God won't keep him waiting too long.

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