



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Reframing Life **Amy** **Brown** Portrait of a Fighter

“Just because we have MS doesn’t mean our lives are over.” — Amy Brown

by Joy Blackburn, MSA Staff Writer

Amy Brown wasn’t supposed to be where she is today. This professional artist and high school teacher had a great life for herself out in Brush, Colorado. She was married, successful and ready for whatever the future may bring. Or so she thought. But in the year 2000, when Amy was 29 years old, that future brought her Multiple Sclerosis.

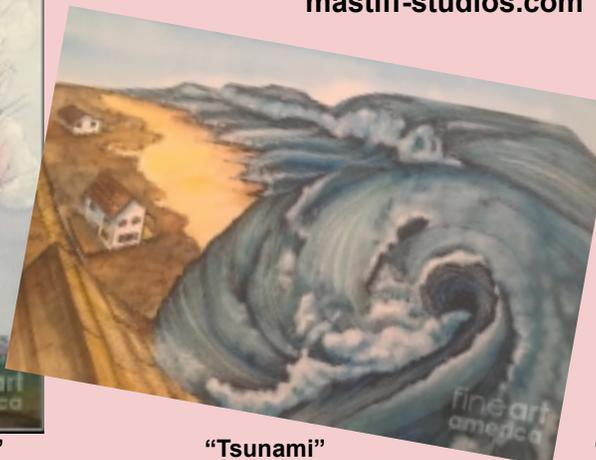
“After I was diagnosed, the disease progressed quickly,” she told me during our recent interview, “and it got serious. By 2006, I had swallowing issues and leg braces and a cane, and I had the shuffling walk of an old person. I was thirty-five. It all happened so fast.” Convinced it would only get worse, she withdrew and prepared herself for the decline.

“If my prospects weren’t so depressing, I probably would not have tried Tysabri,” she told me. The controversial drug can lead to PML — a deadly brain-swelling condition caused by the JC virus. Many people had died from Tysabri at the time, but doctors weren’t sure yet why. Amy was taking a real risk, and it paid off. The results of the drug astounded her. “It didn’t just stop the progression,” she stressed. “I got better! By 2008 I was able to return to work.”

Amy’s strength and grace come together in her artwork with profound beauty.



“Colorado Cottonwood”



“Tsunami”



“Elephant Holding a Tree Branch”

Images courtesy of
mastiff-studios.com

Reframing Life Amy Brown, Portrait of a Fighter *Continued*

Amy moved to North Denver and resumed teaching and painting. For the next ten years, she was full steam ahead, reinventing herself in a new life that she loved. Then she suffered a relapse bad enough to force her to rethink everything. Once again, she was starting over.

“I saw a building for sale in Old Colorado City that looked perfect for me,” Amy recalled. “I could live in one half of it and use the other half as a studio.” She bought the building and made the move from Denver to Colorado Springs.

“For the first year, I worked part-time as a substitute teacher and hosted art classes in my studio on the weekends.” She had a Masters Degree in art, and now worked for a post graduate certificate in Expressive Trauma Therapy online. Her house, however, needed more repairs than she could afford. To cover the cost, Amy would end up renting her studio space out to a good tenant with a successful business — the same tenant is still there today.

“I contacted MSA my first year in Colorado Springs,” Amy told me. “I’m so glad I did. Nikki has a way of making you feel like you’re the most important person in the world.”

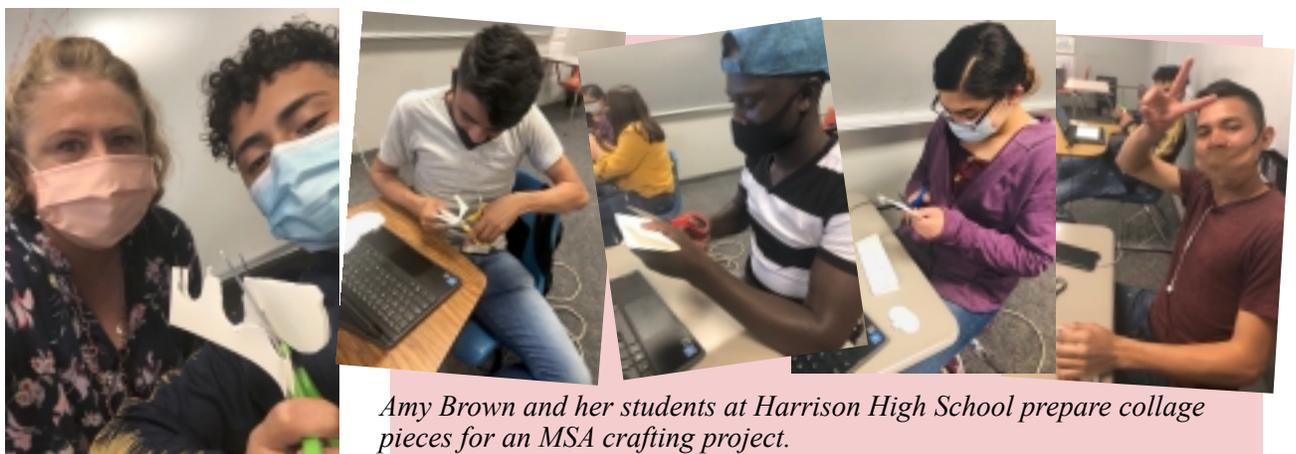
When her strength began returning, Harrison High School hired Amy on full time. “They hired me knowing I had MS,” Amy marvelled. “Of course no one is going to *tell* you that’s why they’re not hiring you, but you know it is anyway. It’s obvious. But Harrison hired me knowing I had a potentially debilitating disease. It’s a great school run by truly good people.”

Today Amy is one of four teachers in Harrison’s Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education program. The seniors in this program come from all over the world with only one thing in common: Little-to-no English language ability. This year’s crop of students in Amy’s classroom speak Spanish and Swahili. “It’s a wonderful challenge,” Amy told me. “Every day is different. And these kids really want to learn.” Amy’s voice came alive as she talked about her students. She has happily reinvented her life once again.

“On your best days, make the best of it. Enjoy every minute.”

Recently, Nikki reached out to Amy asking if she’d host an online painting class for MSA clients. Amy also offered to have her high school students cut paper shapes for an upcoming MSA craft project. Amy used this opportunity to teach her students about Multiple Sclerosis. “It’s fun to see how happy they are to be helping other people,” Amy said. “I never imagined my life could be this rewarding.” 🌟

“I’ve regained a lot of my abilities, but once in a while, a flair-up will send me right back where I was. I try not to take anything for granted.”



Amy Brown and her students at Harrison High School prepare collage pieces for an MSA crafting project.