



John Van Mannekes

Firefighter for 21+ years
Captain
Ventura City Fire Department



Tiny muscle spasms were the first sign. *Fasciculations*, John Van Mannekes would later learn they were called. Unremarkable at first, a minor annoyance. **Until they didn't go away.**

An internet search suggested it could be as simple as a lack of potassium. "Just keep an eye on it," doctors told him. But the spasms were enough to interfere with his work as fire captain. A dedicated cyclist and career firefighter, John knew his body. He knew his strength, his stamina, his ability to endure. And he knew something was very wrong.

More doctors' appointments. A series of MRIs, CTs, brain scans, blood tests... It took months before the diagnosis came in.

ALS. Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig's disease as it's often commonly known. The worst case scenario.

The news was devastating.

John began to process the reality of what his life would become with his wife and two teenaged sons. Fear and grief were rapidly setting in.