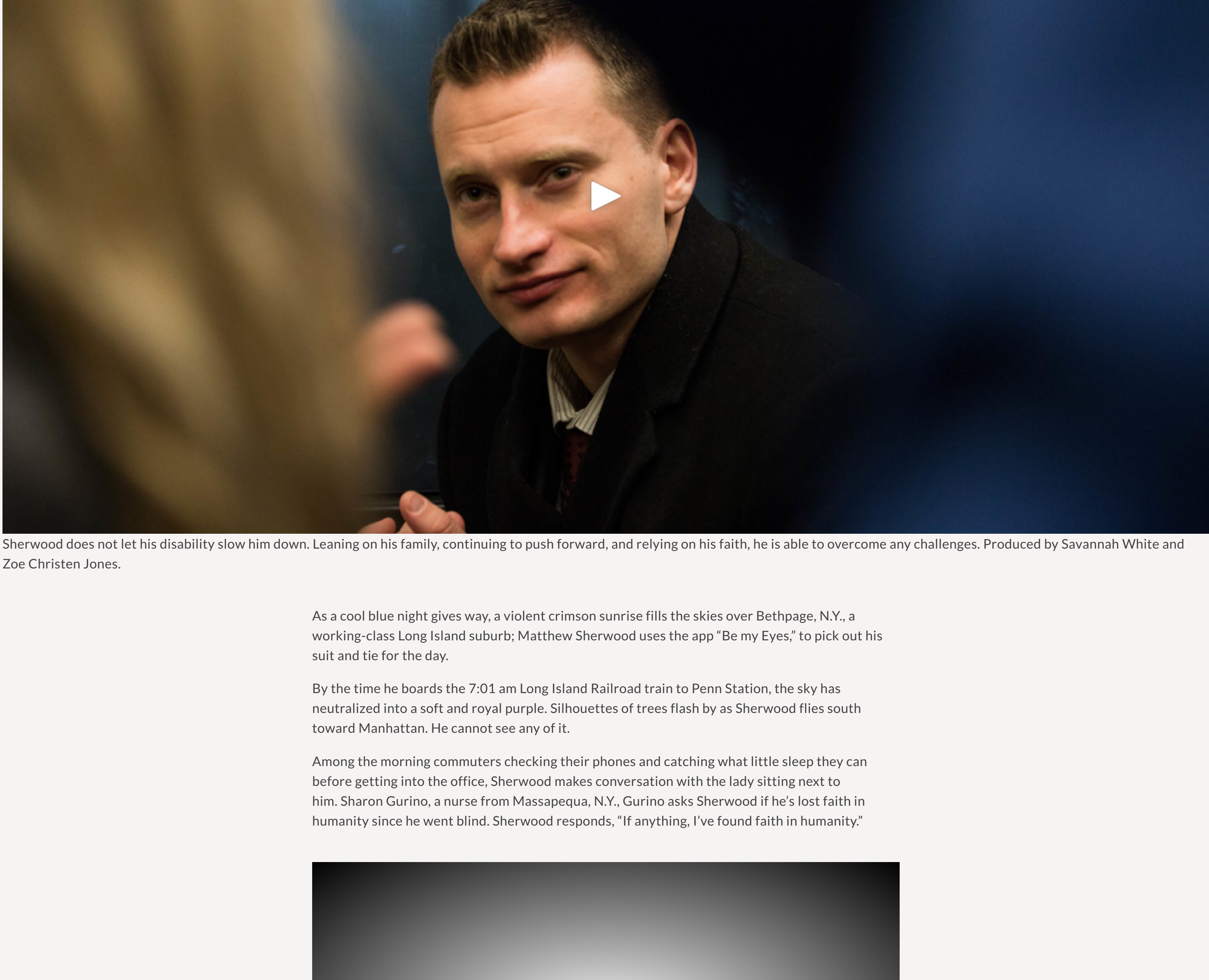


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Blind and Managing Billions

Wes Parnell · May 24, 2018



Sherwood does not let his disability slow him down. Leaning on his family, continuing to push forward, and relying on his faith, he is able to overcome any challenges. Produced by Savannah White and Zoe Christen Jones.

As a cool blue night gives way, a violent crimson sunrise fills the skies over Bethpage, N.Y., a working-class Long Island suburb; Matthew Sherwood uses the app "Be my Eyes," to pick out his suit and tie for the day.

By the time he boards the 7:01 am Long Island Railroad train to Penn Station, the sky has neutralized into a soft and royal purple. Silhouettes of trees flash by as Sherwood files south toward Manhattan. He cannot see any of it.

Among the morning commuters checking their phones and catching what little sleep they can before getting into the office, Sherwood makes conversation with the lady sitting next to him. Sharon Gurino, a nurse from Massapequa, N.Y., Gurino asks Sherwood if he's lost faith in humanity since he went blind. Sherwood responds, "If anything, I've found faith in humanity."

Despite losing his eyesight, Sherwood carries himself chin-up and heart-forward; he makes eye contact with whomever he speaks to. Strangers don't initially recognize he's legally blind because his blue eyes still possess limited peripheral ability. When he happens to bump into scaffolding he chuckles and asks, "Who put that there?"

Sherwood owns many hats and has worn countless more. Growing up in upstate New York, he worked in farming, restaurants, construction, asbestos cleaning, mental-health facilities, college campuses, and a slaughter-house. After he lost his eyesight and his job at a hedge fund during the 2008 financial crisis, he did a stint in door-to-door sales while working on his PhD.



Photos by Wes Parnell

In college, Sherwood ran a 4.5 second, 40-yard dash. (For those who don't follow football, that's fast. It's the kind of speed pro-football players possess.) Sherwood now walks 3.5 mph with a cane.

After checking his schedule, he sarcastically chuckles that he only has "two wonderful meetings today," explaining that "the less meetings I have, the more work I get done."

At his office in a tower overlooking the Hudson River on the Upper West Side, Sherwood's nose hovers an inch away from the flat screen TV that serves as a desktop monitor. Using a specialty software that magnifies 12-point font to 200, Sherwood rapidly clicks through emails and spreadsheets, reading whole documents two words at a time.

He checks futures and bond prices, foreign and domestic, using them as derivatives alongside implied and historical volatility trends to gauge market sentiment. All of this is done in time to start taking risks come opening bell at 9:30 am.

"I just kind of go at it," Sherwood explains.

While Sherwood means business, his demeanor is light. He is down to earth and friendly, a good ol' boy from upstate New York. He had his first beer when he was 21 and attributes his work ethic to life on the farm. Not able to afford college, Sherwood made sure his academic and football skills could help him get there. After receiving a full-ride athletic scholarship to Liberty University, Sherwood graduated Summa Cum Laude in three years with a 3.9 GPA, he then received his MBA in an accelerated one-year program. Following his 2007 graduation, Sherwood accepted a position at Morgan Stanley in its private wealth management division before taking a job at a hedge fund, managing a full discretionary investment position at Axis Global.

"I've always had a chip on my shoulder growing up, not in a boastful way but I've always had something to prove," Sherwood said, taking a break from his computer in his office. "I grew up from humble beginning and when you go back to upstate New York, my dad is still in a single wide trailer. I grew up with hard times and, for me, I always wanted more. Now, I eat a lot less ramen noodles in life but I still stay humble."

While the S&P 500 index saw a 40 percent drop during the 2008 financial crisis, Sherwood's asset portfolio at the hedge fund where he worked increased 18 percent, a 58 percent out performance over the benchmark index. But on Aug 13, 2008, during the heart of the crisis, Sherwood's life changed forever.

"I woke up and there was a dot on the mirror. It was 6:30 in the morning, this was after trading Asia all night. I tried to wipe the dot away and all of the sudden the dot was on my hand, it was a bright white dot, anywhere I looked," Sherwood said.

Not knowing what to think and with a pregnant wife at home, Sherwood decided to conduct business as usual. He was in his office by 8:30 am, making trades and taking risks by 9:30 am.

"I got to my desk and the dot was everywhere I looked," Sherwood said. "I just wanted to stay focused on what I was doing. August 2008 was a very volatile time for the market, this was after we dissolved Lehman Brothers and Bear Stearns was in turmoil."

After work, Matthew made his way home, stuck to the routine, ate dinner as quickly as possible and was on his screens in time for the Australian and Japanese market opening.

"I didn't want anyone to know. I felt very vulnerable."

-Matthew Sherwood

"I then woke up in the morning on the 14th after a brief REM sleep. I looked at the mirror and that dot was now the size of a quarter. And wherever I looked there it was. And at that point I remember being nervous but I didn't want it to faze me in any way. I made it out the door, made it to the train at a normal time. Sticking with the routine. I was in front of my desk by 8:15 am. I ended up looking at my screens and I couldn't see anything - I couldn't see any numbers, I couldn't see anything," Sherwood said.

Not wanting to lose valuable time on the markets, Sherwood asked his assistant to magnify his screens. He proceeded to do business as usual, taking risks, entering and exiting out of trades and holding positions overnight.

"I ended up getting home, mentally I was frustrated. I think a lot of me was hoping that I would wake up the next day and it would go back to normal," Sherwood said. "I didn't want my pregnant wife to know. I didn't want anyone to know. I felt very vulnerable."

Sherwood woke up the following morning at 6:30 am to find that his eyesight had gotten worse. He could only see peripherally. Determined to stick to the routine, Sherwood got in his car and drove to the Syosset, Long Island, train station, running two red lights on the way. Getting to his office, he could not see anything that had been magnified the day before.

"I remember going to the bathroom, just splashing water on my face. I did that the day before and the day before that too, and this is August 15th of 2008, just splashing water all over my face, getting water over my shirt, and just having a very confusing breakdown of sorts," Sherwood said. "I went back, tried to keep it together, went back to the screens, really didn't want anyone to know anything was going on."

Sherwood called his assistant over and told him to de-risk the portfolio, selling off any risky stock positions to cash. Sherwood was out of 90 percent of his positions by 10 am.

He proceeded to call his now ex-wife, who was working at a hospital at the time. He told her he needed the first available appointment with an optometrist. He was in a doctor's office by 12:45 pm. Sherwood remembers the optometrist saying, "you're blind, you're legally blind, you're 20/2300 both eyes...legally you are not allowed to drive anymore. It's in your optic nerves where your optic nerve meets your retina which is part of your brain; there is nothing that you can do, just nothing we can do for you - this will be your life."



The sudden loss of sight was some combination of multiple concussions throughout high school and college football as well as a genetic eye disease and the stress of trading on screens for long hours.

On the car ride home, Sherwood came to grips with his reality. He remembers telling himself, "I'm going to be fine, everything is going to be fine, because it had to be."

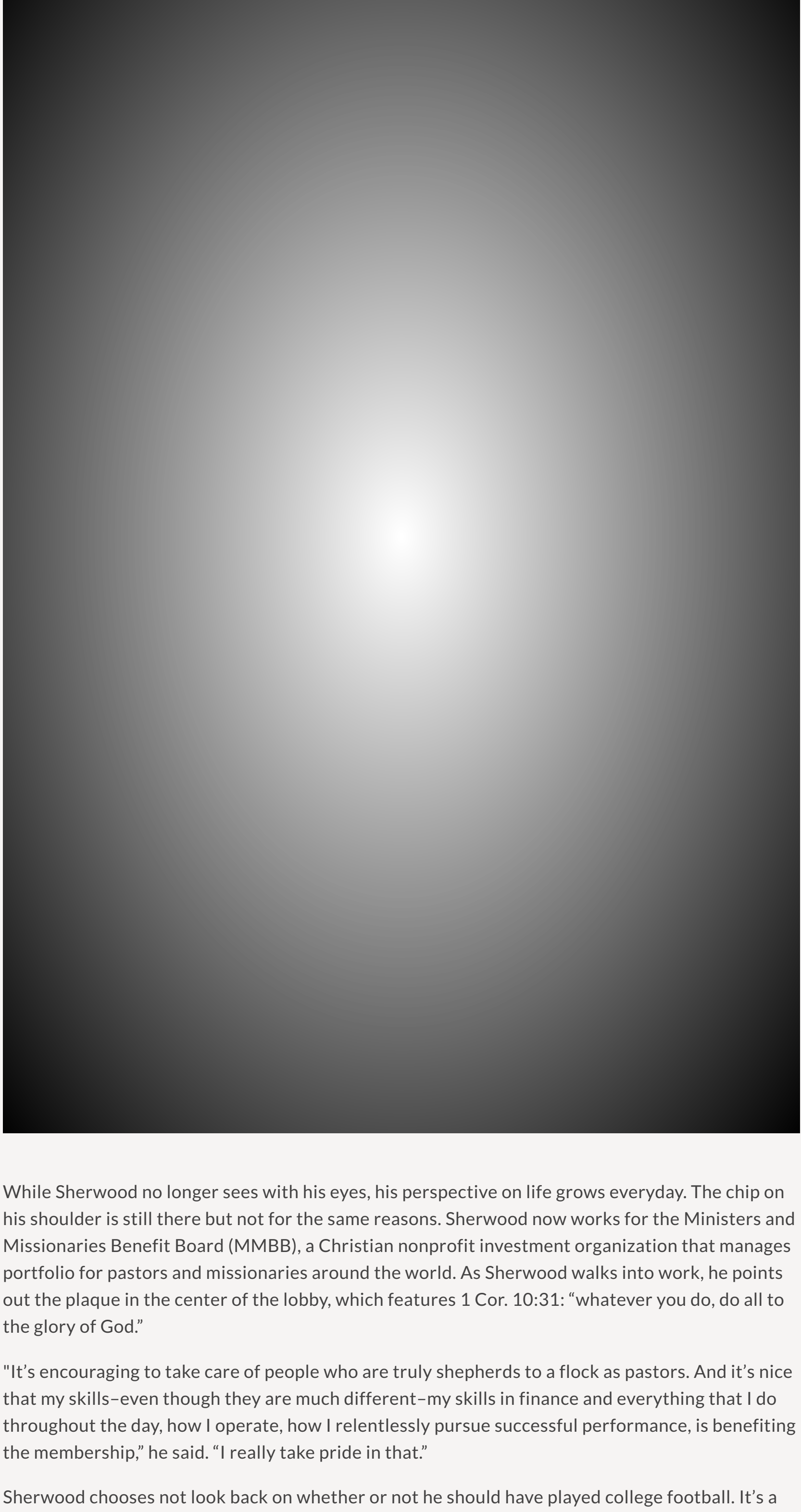
In the week between him losing his eyesight and returning to work, he had ordered a cane, found a software that would allow him to trade and decided to learn the rest on the go. He didn't receive formal mobility training until a year later.

"I had made a conscious commitment that night to not worry about what I couldn't control and just worry about what I could," he says.

In the midst of losing his eyesight, Sherwood lost his wife and many of his old friends. He said that he felt like Job, "going through loss and just feeling hopeless but still trying to trust."

Now Sherwood looks back and sees the larger picture.

"I feel restored, I feel like Job where God put me through these challenges. He may not have given me my sight back, but in many ways I am blessed to have better vision than many," Sherwood said. "My relationship with God and Jesus Christ has been a crutch through the hard times and it also helps me recognize the blessings that I do have... Now, more than ever, I realize if God takes care of the birds, God is going to take care of me."



While Sherwood no longer sees with his eyes, his perspective on life grows everyday. The chip on his shoulder is still there but not for the same reasons. Sherwood now works for the Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board (MIMBB), a Christian nonprofit investment organization that manages portfolio for pastors and missionaries around the world. As Sherwood walks into work, he points out the plaque in the center of the lobby, which features 1 Cor. 10:31: "whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

"It's encouraging to take care of people who are truly shepherds to a flock as pastors. And it's nice that my skills—even though they are much different—my skills in finance and everything that I do throughout the day, how I operate, how I relentlessly pursue successful performance, is benefiting the membership," he said. "I really take pride in that."

Sherwood refuses to look back on whether or not he should have played college football. It's a question I choose to answer, he said. "I just say this is the card I was dealt so it's up to me how I play the hand... Instead of wondering why, I just say, 'what can I learn from this and how can I learn from this and how can I move forward.'"

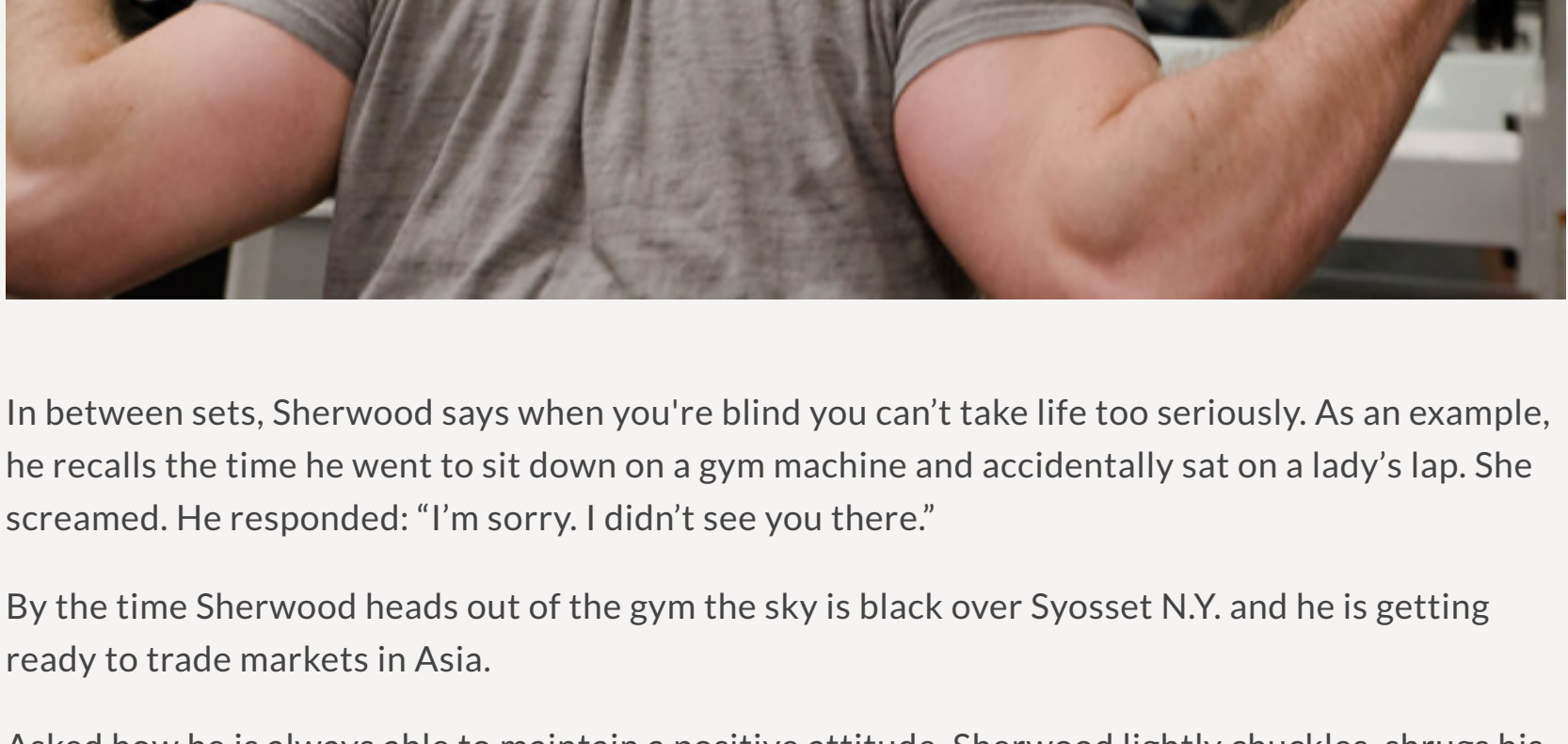
Moving forward, Sherwood is focused on providing for his daughter and fiancé, making a positive difference in the world of sustainable investment, and being an inspiration for the blind community. He still falls and trips during his daily three-hour commute to and from work, but humor and a positive perspective on life pull him through.

When Sherwood finds the time, he'll occasionally perform at comedy club open mic nights on the Lower East Side. His specialty? Blind guy jokes.

Asked how he met his fiancé, Stephanie, Sherwood responded, "We met the old fashioned way... in a bar at like 1 in the morning." Realizing that he had met someone truly special, Sherwood used the line, "have you ever tried going on a date with a blind guy? You should try it - bucket list."

Sherwood and Stephanie have been together now for six years. Sherwood says that she helps him get around but still allows him to be a gentleman and open doors for her, "even though it takes me 15 minutes to find the handle."

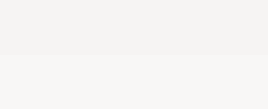
After a long day in the office, Sherwood often makes a stop at the New York Sports Club in Syosset, N.Y. Before he walks into the gym, Sherwood pauses in the doorway to take some last minute phone calls. Walking in, he exchanges words and banter with young jocks and retired NYPD officers. Sherwood still squats three plates and bench presses two. Gary Weinstein, a local athlete with a speech impediment, spots Sherwood on a 225 bench press. Weinstein explains that Sherwood is an inspiration, adding that he looks up to Sherwood and how "he is able to overcome his disability."



In between sets, Sherwood says when you're blind you can't take life too seriously. As an example, he recalls the time he went to sit down on a gym machine and accidentally sat on a lady's lap. She screamed. He responded: "I'm sorry. I didn't see you there."

By the time Sherwood heads out of the gym the sky is black over Syosset N.Y, and he is getting ready to trade markets in Asia.

Asked how he is always able to maintain a positive attitude, Sherwood lightly chuckles, shrugs his shoulders, and responds, "It beats the alternative."



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