MS Changes Everything

by LEEANNE LAPUM

The Day-To-Day Changes MS Brings

Most people start their day when the alarm clock goes off, excited to face another day. Well… perhaps not particularly excited during the workweek.

But regardless of the level of excitement, the workday morning has a definite routine. For most, after a refreshing shower, getting dressed and grabbing a bite to eat they're ready to begin the day. Keys in hand they walk out the door to meet the day and its challenges head on. Confident. Cheerful. Equipped for anything.

Thanks to MS my days and my husband’s days hold no guarantees. First of all, neither of us sleeps all that well. Although I usually go to sleep fairly easily at night, I sometimes wake up during the night for no apparent reason.

Sometimes it's due to the pain of neuropathy caused by MS. Other times it's because I haven't been active enough during the day to get tired. I usually wake up before the alarm clock goes off. On rare occasions I'm still asleep until it goes off. Once it goes off our day begins.

Morning Routine

My husband goes out into the kitchen to prepare breakfast. Nothing too exciting — a couple of eggs each. He eats his while he feeds me mine. Following that he gives me my morning pills, which consist of a couple of prescriptions and various supplements. Fortunately taking pills it isn't a problem for me; I am able to swallow 10 or 12 at a time.

The next part of our routine differs depending on what time of year it is. During the summer months I have the luxury of showering daily. During the school year I shower every other day due to before-school meetings and various other requirements.

From start to finish showering me, dressing me in a nightgown, brushing my teeth and putting on makeup takes just over an hour — my loving husband does all of this without complaining, as he has done years.

Family Impacts

With my needs taken care of he quickly showers, get dressed, grabs his keys and whatever he needs for the day and is out the door. Confident? Not necessarily. Cheerful? Not so much. Equipped for everything? More or less.

Whether he'll admit it or not he's probably ready for a break… from me and my requirements. If he did feel this way, I wouldn't blame him at all.

My husband teaches middle school/high school close to home. When I say close to home, I mean it — the school is exactly one mile from our home. He teaches art and videography, and the subjects he covers range from

contour line drawing and self portraits to calligraphy, watercolor and acrylic painting, and ceramics.

He always he introduces each unit by allowing the students to watch him fabricate something using that particular medium. We have examples of his work in various places throughout our house, and there are often several different projects in varying stages of completion floating around.

Next page: my advice to anyone who has been diagnosed with MS.

A Difficult Time of Year

My husband's favorite unit to teach is ceramics. It's my favorite also, because I reap the benefits. To prepare the stiff clay for use on the pottery wheel, my husband has to knead I to make it malleable, a process called "wedging." Doing this develops great strength in his hands.

I can always tell when the ceramics unit is being taught. My husband massages me every night, and has done for many, many years. During that particular unit his massages go little deeper and last a little longer. I always sleep better after a soothing massage.

But improved massages aside, the end of the summer when school starts again is always difficult for me to deal with. I'm grateful for the good times we enjoyed during the summer months, but I must admit that I miss them terribly when fall comes.

I was once a teacher, too. I thoroughly enjoyed it and it came very easily to me, but because of MS I can no longer physically meet the challenges of teaching.

For this reason the beginning of the school year brings back many memories. At one time I taught pre-K/kindergarten for over 10 years, worked with 2 ½ to 6-year-old children. I loved every minute of it. I distinctly remember presenting new concepts to the children — nothing could compare with the looks on their faces when they were able to grasp a concept; sheer elation. Those are precious memories that I will always cherish.

A Totally Different Reality

Now I face a totally different reality. Thanks to MS my life is totally different than it used to be. I am no longer able to take an active part in daily life. I can't even begin to tell you how difficult it is for me to deal with.

I was diagnosed with MS almost 23 years ago. I'm still in the process of dealing with the challenges it presents. I have my weak moments. I get depressed. I get angry. I get lonely. But I've learned to accept those feelings. I don't necessarily enjoy them, but I accept them as part of my life.

I have learned to search the Internet for possible resources and solutions. This accomplishes two things. First of all, it helps me feel useful once again. Secondly, it saves my husband a lot of time that he can't really afford to lose because his insanely busy schedule.

Doing this kind of on my computer keeps my mind both active and challenged. And my husband occasionally involves me during the school year — I help him with things like writing course descriptions, which also keeps me occupied. My brain, although foggy at times, still functions on a somewhat normal level. (Although my family may dispute that!)

My advice to anyone who has been diagnosed with MS or has a family member or friend who is suffering from the afflictions that they face on a daily basis is this:

- Be patient and loving no matter what happens.
- Look for the positive in spite of daily difficulties.
- Look for humor in difficult situations.

- Don't be quick to judge.
- Remain sensitive and understanding.