MS May Alter Your Life, but Don’t Let It Hold You Back

by LIBBY SELINSKY

Don't Let MS Hold You Back

I can remember it like it was yesterday. The moment that I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS), I felt like my life had come to an end. All of my hopes, my dreams, my views of myself and my life, washed away with one simple sentence.

The doctors and nurses told me that the first year would be the hardest. “You have to adjust to your ‘new normal?’” They would say. Why on earth would I ever want to adjust to a “new normal?” Who were they to say such a thing, in such a flippant way?

I was furious at the world. I had a rage within me that wouldn’t allow me to heel. I fell into a depression that paired itself up with anxiety. My self-worth plummeted, and I felt alone, no matter how hard my loved ones would try to reach me in my pain.

I have never had an easy life, but I have come to know my first three years with MS, as the darkest ones that I have ever known. I tried counseling to shake my depression, but that just made me feel more alone and misunderstood. It is surprisingly hard to find a counselor that understands the unique isolation and fears that MS can create.

Time and Love Became My Allies

Eventually, time became my one true ally. Well, time and love. Time never ceases, and neither does the love of my husband and son. These were my essential constants in life.

They are also my essential motivations. Time will not release me from living a life with this disease. Love will not allow my self-worth to sink. I must rise-up and live up to the beauty that my family sees within me, even when I do not see it within myself. I must use the time that is given to me as well as possible.

When I learned how to see the value within myself again, I was able to see how my life view before my sickness was askew. I had so many preconceived notions of the *inevitable* life of a person with a chronic illness that was off balance and unfair to these people.

I think we all do this, carry our own set of ideas of how people should act when they are sick. We don’t quite realize how wrong we are till we are forced to wear those shoes and walk an involuntary path forever.

We Are Alive

Here I am, here we are. We are alive; we have time, we must do something with it. Do we sit around, allowing the world to pass us by as we feel our rot settle in on our nerves? Or do we enjoy what we have?

The Dalai Lama said once, “If we have a toothache, we long for a time when the pain is gone. When we have never had a toothache, we rarely reflect upon the joy of life without that pain.”

I have often thought about this perspective. Longing for a time without MS in our lives is easy. That is a natural thought and heartache that we can carry with us. It is a thought and heartache that we never rejoiced in the absence of before we were diagnosed.

Maybe, the joy in our lives can be found when we find ways to let go of our pain. This sounds easier said than done, for sure; however, letting go of pain is the thing that I pray for more than anything. It feels like the only thing that I can have any control over.

I Will Not Allow MS to Hold Me Back

When I was first diagnosed, my anger led me to grip tightly to my pain. I focussed on every progression, every symptom, every loss of sensation, of joy. It was when I was able to begin concentrating on fulfilling my wants, my needs, and my dreams; that I was ready to start living again.

There was a fog of time and emotions that surrounded me for those first three years. I had to let go of my worldview and walk into the sunlit scope of time, of love, of future possibilities, to start living again.

However, I cannot and will not tell a person how to live with their disease. I will say, however, I have seen more lovely people than I would like to admit, fall into that pandora’s box of depression that a chronic illness can bring. I have been saddened by the loss of love, time and opportunities of joy that could have been in their lives and the lives of their loved ones.

We all have choices of how we handle sickness when sickness walks into our lives. I hope for everyone who reads this that you can let go of your pain and step into your sunlit scope of time, of love, and of possibilities.