

Memories of Health

I'd like you to take a moment and think of someone you have known that has passed away and is no longer with us. If you are one of the few who have not had the ever changing experience of losing someone you love, than you are truly are blessed and I ask you to do your best to imagine.

Think of the time shortly after that person passed away and how vividly you remembered them. How easy it was to recall their smell, their touch, the sound of their voice, their laugh. Think now of the slow process of those memories slipping away, a process you didn't even realize was happening. My father passed away 7 years ago, and I do not remember his smell, his touch. The sicker he became the less I knew the sound of his voice from when he was healthy, and now I can barely hear the sound of his voice from the days before he died. I recall only the sound of his laugh in a few select memories, and I grasp those memories with an iron fist.

Time does this to us. Our memories are not as sharp and soon we remember a person as who they were as a whole and not the small details that made them up. It doesn't make us love them or miss them any less, and for some of us it doesn't make the loss any easier.

For someone who has been diagnosed with a chronic illness remembering times they were well, that their body did not rebel against them and make life so different – sometimes so difficult – is just like remembering someone who has passed. After a diagnosis one must grieve their health, grieve the person they once were and the loss of things they no longer will be able to do. That grieving takes different lengths just as it does when we grieve the loss of a loved one and that grieving takes different forms for all. Just as with coping with the loss of one who has passed, coping with a chronic illness is a very personal experience. Some wish to do so in private while others want to do so surrounded by their loved ones.

Once the initial strike of the diagnosis calms, the memories of healthier times hold in the minds of those diagnosed. At first they are vivid. Perhaps they are remembered in fondness of a better time, or remembered with anger as a reminder of what now will forever be. But just as the mind slowly releases the crisp details of one who has passed on, so too does the mind slip away from the vividness of these memories.

For me, I can now recall the last occurrence I did not feel pain – the last time my day was not hindered by sheer exhaustion. But I cannot tell you when that day was. I cannot recall if specific days in my life were before or after my diagnosis, a time that I have a hard time defining the length of.

This is what chronic illnesses does to those who carry that burden. It takes hold of not just the part of their life after their diagnosis, but every part of their life. Present, future, past, chronic illness claims it all.

Fibromyalgia is now a part of my life, it is something I must account for, prepare for, constantly. It creeps into my thoughts not allowing me the simple pleasure of a memory without the consideration of my chronic illness. But it is not something I allow others to bear the burden of, because I was the one diagnosed: not them. While some may think this is the mentality of a martyr, it is often the case with those diagnosed with chronic illnesses.

Just as someone who is grieving the loss of one they love will not share every tear that falls, one who is diagnosed with a chronic illness may not tell you every ache, pain or struggle they have. Lack of sharing doesn't necessarily mean everything is ok. If you know someone with a chronic illness please consider this.

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