

## The nice things in life

Anne Brennan



Typically my day starts as I regain consciousness at approximately 7.45am, following calls from my children to “get up! It’s time to take us to school!” So, after gulping down my tea, tablets and toast lovingly prepared for me by my husband, I check my pyjamas are looking presentable, tie up the tangles in my hair, grab the dog, stumble out of the door to the car, then back to look for wherever I left the keys, and finally drive the girls to school. If it’s a nice day I like to wind down the windows and sing very badly and very loud; I have learned not to be embarrassed about things.

My husband’s brand of MS is different from my own. He wakes up very early and makes the packed lunches, makes sure that those who like Frubes in their lunches get them, and those who dislike mayonnaise get none, and for the ones that prefer cold, hard cash for lunch, it is there.

David has had MS for seventeen years and I have had it for five. When we met I was going through my diagnosis and he was my support; he understood me and taught me that life does not end with a diagnosis of MS. MS hurts, MS is horrible, and MS takes away a lot of things. All that is true, however

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MS has also opened doors for me. MS has made me appreciate those things in life that I would not have noticed before, and has given me more than it has taken away. I love my life and would not change a thing... except I would like my daughters to clean their rooms, pick up their washing and clean the bathroom after themselves. So you see, our life is not all that different from that of a ‘normal’ family.

When I arrive home, dog in hand (or wrapped around my legs), it’s time to rest a while. David and I have a coffee together, extra caffeine please, washed down with a few more pills (I find it does help to get through the day) and instead of comparing leg spasms or which bits are numb today, we do normal things like decide what to have for dinner. David switches into his electric wheelchair and shops for the delicacies to be found in our local supermarket, and I take an hour or two to shower and drink more coffee before jumping onto the quad bike, (electric scooter) and making the dog exercise. She quite likes it but I’m hard to keep up with these days! No slacking, because pugs are prone to getting fat.

In the beginning I would have been mortified to think that at age 33 I would be riding around on an electric scooter, because they are just for ‘old’ people aren’t they? Well, I think I make it look pretty good. No arm rests, no rear view mirrors, no basket on the front. It’s minimal, it’s fast and I go anywhere I want to on it. It does have a very loud horn though, which I fully intend to use one day.

I would also have been mortified to think that I would have been wearing a top of the line carbon fibre leg splint, but wearing one I am. The up side is that I no longer fall over my own feet several times a day and I get to go shoe shopping (doctor’s orders) for shoes that fit the splint. Also my ankle doesn’t feel like it’s breaking anymore, which is good.

Today is Tuesday, which means it’s vacuuming day. Monday is bathrooms, Wednesdays are for... whatever. Nobody can live life like that, but my point is, I have had to learn to pace myself because if I do too much one day I pay for it for the next three.

Before long it’s time to pick up the children from school. First thing to do is check with David what day of the week it is and then ponder for a while over which after school clubs are running and which child does after school clubs! Once that is sorted, I get back into the car and pick up the children from their various schools and activities.

When home, it’s time for me to rest again. The slightest things tire me. Writing this article is tiring. My wrists are aching and my eyes are stabbing me but I am enjoying putting things down on paper. Achieving something, no matter how simple it used to be, is no longer easy, and that is why it’s more fun. I notice small things and enjoy small achievements.

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David and I cook together. We talk. He opens the bottles and cans because my wrists are weak, and I stir the pans because he is only three feet tall when in his wheelchair. Whichever one feels the safest with a knife cuts the vegetables and if neither feel safe with a sharp knife we just cook something different. We have learned many things you can do safely with a tin of tomatoes and a pack of spaghetti!

Over dinner the kids laugh, they bicker, they talk about their day, or they refuse to talk about their day, we joke about the dog being stupid. ‘Pudding day’ is strictly Fridays, however we ‘regularly break the rules, because rules like that are made to be broken.

Clearing up after dinner is exhausting. It’s something we’d rather put off, but that can’t be done. Life has to be normal and preferably hygienic. The trick is to housetrain children to help with these things. After dinner is the time when I really go flat, however it’s not the time for more ‘wake up’ pills or coffee because it’s nice to sleep at night as well as during the day.

Homework has to be done, help needs to be given. Thankfully, children are children and without a doubt they are the reason we get up every day and enjoy every day, no matter what that day may bring.

Our day closes at about 8pm with us kissing the kids goodnight before we go to bed, reminding them to switch off all the lights and make sure the alarm is set. I take the bedtime tablets which gently drift me back into unconsciousness once again until the screams for hair straighteners and not making them late for school begin again.

It’s our life; it’s not really that different from anybody else’s. I know MS is always going to be here, marching on the way it does. Thankfully however, small things happen every day which make us smile and those things will also be constant, and will always be the most significant. Our lives are normal. We are both parents, I am a sister, David is a brother. We are husband and wife. We have each other.

**See page 16 for information on books for families affected by MS**