

Working with a Rheumatic Disease – My Daily Reality

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Rheumatoid Arthritis, and I live in a two-room flat in the right forefoot of my host, close to the 2nd and 3rd toe. It's a lovely and large flat which I have renovated and modernized over a period. This has rubbed off on my neighbours, so now they will also renovate their kitchen and bathroom. I can hear my host complain in the distance - and sometimes she resorts to painkillers to reduce the renovation hassle.

In spite of my small size, I manage to keep her under control. Our daily battle concerns her choice of footwear for work. Here, during the winter, she prefers to wear fancy boots, but I only want her to wear the black running shoes. I win. Every morning.

My host's name is Karin; she is 44 years old, married with two children, 10 and 13 years old, respectively.

She works fulltime as neuro-psychologist in an epilepsy clinic at Glostrup Hospital, where she was hired 1 November 2008. Here, she talks to patients afraid of epileptic attacks, tests patients with concentration and memory challenges related to their epilepsy, talks to patients with attacks *resembling* epilepsy, but which are not epilepsy, but rather emotional problems manifesting themselves as epilepsy-similar attacks: She is also responsible for a youth group for young people who need to learn to manage their epilepsy themselves. Evidently, she has many different tasks, and I often hear her talk very enthusiastically about her work. She does not need to walk much, as her office is situated centrally in the clinic. However, lately she has decided to stay away from morning conferences in another building, due to morning stiffness and soreness in different parts of her body.

She has only known about my family's existence since 19 March 2009, but we have resided in her body for longer than that. Actually, it was my cousin in her neck, who crawled from her left shoulder joint to her right one and back again, that started her Odyssey to attempt to find and track her tormentors. She ran from doctor to physiotherapist to chiropractor, and back again. And while she was laying on a bed receiving treatment for her neck, one of us took hold of her right knee or her left index finger. She did not mention this to anyone, as she thought it to be a coincidence - even if it did happen a lot. We had a grand time, peace and quiet to multiply ourselves.

She has now been working in the clinic just over a year. In the beginning, she did not mention her sporadic pains. She tried to cover them up, but after a while, an alert nurse commented that she had noticed that my host walked with a limp, and that she had to use both hands to lift a half-empty coffee cup. My host tried to play it down and said that it would probably soon pass. We all nodded eagerly in agreement. Five minutes later, she held a blood test note in her hand with a lot of checkmarks on it. She felt that she practically had to be bled.

That was the beginning of a somewhat more surly life for me and my family. She began taking MTX and felt better. We were dislodged for a while, but slowly we are regaining ground.

You cannot tell by her appearance, except from her limp which is caused by me. She can take care of her work without any problems, and she does not feel ill. She hates to have to admit that her personal energy level is not as high as it has been. She has caring and supportive colleagues. Before she had even thought about it herself, the secretary had ordered a vertically adjustable desk. Now, I cannot of course see her face, but I think she does look a little tired at times. Her colleagues have tried a few times to make her lie down on one of the couches in one of the examination rooms, but so far, they have not succeeded. Her manager has told her that, if needed, she could also work from home some days. Evidently, there is no lack of support.

I will not disclose how her future will be. She lives in the present, and does not expect her condition to change considerably. She disregards the fact that I and my family have grown in size and strength. She does not spend time studying what kind of creatures we are, or which perspectives she has before her. That is her choice. She will gradually become wiser. At least, we intend to remain in her body.

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