

Rose's Story

Rose wrote her own story.

I am a 57 year old woman and I live with disability associated with cerebral palsy. I have never let my disability rule my life. When I wasn't developing like other kids my mother and father took me to the doctor who thought at first that it was polio. Later, when I was about three years old, I was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. I had a very severe limp and one leg was significantly shorter than the other. I spent a lot of time at the local Children's Hospital with physiotherapists and orthopaedic surgeons doing everything they could to promote my chances of walking. Of course I had to wear splints and a plaster cast as a child. I ended up with leg callipers. Luckily we lived in a big city where there was an availability of services.

It was very hard for my parents. Very little was known about cerebral palsy in those days and there wasn't much support around. The medical profession provided the only means of guidance and support. Mum and Dad were told I would not live a normal life. However my parents were intelligent people, my father was an engineer while my mother looked after the house. They wanted me to be able to live as fully as possible. My own personality would make sure they would not be disappointed in me. I was a born fighter and I was determined to achieve some, or all, of the milestones that other kids did.

I had to wear an ankle prosthetic on one leg to help me to walk by holding my foot in the correct position. This meant I had to wear shoes which specially made for me. They were brown and horrible and made me feel worse about myself. I learnt to wear long pants and long skirts so that people wouldn't judge me. I found that in those days people treated you very differently if you had a disability. I think people fear what they don't understand and I felt very different from other children.

Nevertheless I had the same hopes, dreams, and fears as everyone else. Growing up different was tough and it made me tough! Even though back then I wanted to be like everyone else I can look back now and appreciate that living with a disability has made me a stronger person.

I went to a normal primary and high school. I know that other children looked at me waddling along with my callipers and saw me as a "spazzo". I got through high school without special assistance from the teachers and was determined I would find a job. Six months after applying for many positions I heard from an occupational therapist I had worked with that there was a job as an administration assistant in the OT department of the hospital she worked at. I applied and got the job. Finally I felt normal, I had a job, I was earning money and I was able to afford my own place to live. Life developed for me from there on.

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I learned to drive a modified car, got my license, bought a little red car, had it modified and was free as a bird to go where I wanted for the first time in my life. Being able to drive was a significant factor in my life because I could go where I wanted without depending on anyone. I still drive and it is the only time I feel the same as everyone else.

I think I got through the hard times because of my religion and the encouragement of people around me. Other people have regarded me as an ordinary person trying to live my life like everybody else because I have been determined to get a life despite my disability. My work colleagues have always included me in activities and we have lots of laughs. Working makes my life easier even though it tires me out. I am planning to retire soon so there is a light at the end of the tunnel. I am proud of what I have achieved.

Despite my small stature and weakness in my body I have struggled to live an ordinary life. But let's not look at my life through rose coloured glasses. It was by no means easy! I have never had an intimate relationship, never married nor had children. I have spent a lot of time in my life feeling lonely. Along the way I got a little dog who has been a great companion to me. I don't know what I would have done without him, especially in times when I have been down. My parents died within five years of each other and I felt very alone without them.

I am an active member of the Catholic Church and attend some social activities connected to the church. One thing I do through the church is read to a 90-year-old woman who is living in a nursing home. She likes me to bring my little dog and we have permission to do that so we can visit her together.

I am a religious person and try to focus on living a good life according to the Bible. I do get frustrated and depressed at times but I have faith that the good Lord will not give me anything to deal with that I can't cope with.

At times I have needed to obtain the services of a financial adviser to make decisions about the money I've saved and about the inheritance Mum and Dad left for me. I feel quite secure now even though Mum and Dad are not here. I have heard a lot about the National Disability Insurance Scheme but am not sure if I will ever need it.

My life is quiet and predictable, but I have achieved a level of contentedness with the way life has worked out. I credit this to my determination to struggle and achieve what I see other people achieving. I am disappointed that I have not married or had my own children but I see there are many people who are married and unhappy. I guess you'd call this getting it in perspective. My Mum and Dad taught me to do that, and that the grass is not always greener on the other side of the fence.

At this stage prior to retirement I would say “I am what I am” and I have done what I could. I have not given up, I have struggled on. This determination and strength is the reason my life has turned out the way it has. I would advise others to never give up on what they want for their life.

At times I have felt disheartened and overwhelmed by the cards life has dealt me. It is easy to feel as if you are defeated by your disability. But I will never forget what my mum and dad drummed into me! “Your disability does not say anything about you as a person. It is one factor in your life and there are many other factors which will influence the person you become.”

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