

Harnessing Destructive Forces



I've found ways to work through my battle with MS. Through the chronic pain 24-hours a day, I've grown more used to it and found ways to work with or around said pain.

For instance, as a musician, I've learned to program drums instead of play acoustic kits. As a runner, I pay attention more closely to my balance while traversing roots so as not to fall. As a cyclist, I've learned that riding consecutive days often takes too much energy, and that spreading workouts out during the week gives me more time to recover. As a print designer, creative problem solving is tougher, as some synapse connections no longer fire. I've resigned to choosing a simpler approach to artistic solutions instead of more complex ones.

Living with chronic pain, issues with balance, trouble concentrating, problem solving, stress management, getting enough sleep to recharge and keeping a positive attitude comes with an incredible amount of effort. Something I hear on the regular is, "but you don't look sick," "but you ride and run and create constantly" and "but you are so positive."

Don't be fooled, none of this is easy, and so much of my daily strength is turned into a mask that I wear.

Of note: no one wants to see folks troubled, so I wear a mask of acceptance with a smile for all to see. Faking positivity often actually makes us more positive, at least in my case. It's like cooking: with practice and following early recipes comes knowledge and a daring culinary experimenting with risk to create often wondrous offerings (a shout out to my aunt Cheryl's pumpernickel bagels).

So, now, to the point of this rambling's title, "Harnessing Destructive Forces." Here's an analogy I often use in talking about my life with multiple sclerosis: imagine that chronic pain is the wind and we are the wind turbine turning that force into usable power. From www.energy.gov: "The terms 'wind energy' and 'wind power' both describe the process by which the wind is used to generate mechanical power or electricity. This mechanical power can be used for specific tasks, or a generator can convert this mechanical power into electricity."

The wind, in this case, is pain. And remember dear readers, we can't control nature. So, perhaps we harness its power. Pain is a reminder that we are nature itself, it cannot be denied or avoided. As soon as I started thinking this way, the pain/wind became life and I became one of the firmly-rooted poplar trees I grew up with in my California backyard. That power manifested into acknowledgement, understanding, empathy, sympathy and purpose.

The wind is something I cannot control, something that others around me are affected by it too, and it gave me a purpose... that I share with others as I walk on through life.

I am so privileged to be sharing my story. Because without sharing our stories, inspiring thoughtful discussion, and learning about our similarities towards a collective lifespan facing natural forces—our reaction and repurposing of those forces—we'd most certainly be dead in the water, without wind in our sails.