

My Life in Chronic-logical Order



I am at a point in my life where I can acknowledge the toxicity of my own behavioral patterns and the significance they play in my life. Ultimately, realizations such as these bring me to a place of contemplation and reevaluation of myself.

One of these hard-to-swallow realizations? I have **always** been a people-pleaser.

If your insides are humming in solidarity, perhaps you have also spent an exhausting and obsessive amount of time worrying, wondering and proactively planning how to approach situations to achieve the most desirable outcome possible; rarely with consideration for your own happiness, but rather to avoid disapproval or disappointment of others.

I didn't understand how to operate outside of this before MS.

My husband was diagnosed with chronic illnesses 4 years before I was. At the time, I considered myself "young and healthy" enough to move forward as the sole provider for our family, a wife/caretaker and a mother. It wasn't long before I thought I was an expert on the obstacles those with chronic illness faced, failing to acknowledge I was still only an observer.

I felt certain that I could ascertain when my husband would/should have been well enough to make it to a family gathering or holiday function. I would question when he told me otherwise; judgement and frustration stemming from the weight of the expectation of others that we would attend as a complete family unit. Furthermore, it was my misguided attempt to live his experience (mentally), with inability to truly understand what he was

facing(physically).

My personal wakeup call came in 2013 when I was diagnosed with MS.

It wasn't until I was thrust into a life of chronic illness myself that I began to see how detrimental my existence as a people-pleaser was. I sacrificed more and considered myself less as I struggled to fulfill the expectations of others that I might still have the same ability, energy and availability to do things as I always had. I was running myself into the ground in the workplace, I felt endless guilt for not fulfilling expectations in all environments, and I was frustrated and angry with unsuccessful outcomes because I felt that others expected and deserved more than what I was able to give.

It wasn't until 2018 that everything came to a head for me. I had forced myself to attend a holiday event despite knowing I probably shouldn't. Angry with myself for succumbing to the overwhelming pressure to be present as a **family** left me feeling very isolated in my feelings and frustrated by the judgement and whispers of others. This resulted in the declaration that I would never do this to myself or my family again.

It has taken a lot of small adjustments and daily reminders to put myself first and to release any guilt attached to it. These days, when we have outings or holiday functions, we take who is well and leave home who is not. Sometimes we decline or cancel plans altogether because it is the most logical thing to do considering our health.

I no longer expect others to understand what my family is facing, as I remember how misguided I was in understanding my husband's experience. The truth is, most have not had a lived experience with a chronic illness that justifies their perception of me and my family, so I no longer take unsolicited suggestions or judgmental reactions personally.

In this admission, I have to take responsibility for putting things in logical order for myself and my family in the ways chronic illness requires; or what I like to call, "Chronic-logical order."

Chronic-logical order allows me the freedom to do what is best for me and my condition; to be mindful in selecting the things I choose to do or not do for my overall health and wellness, and to be selective in the determination of who earns a place in my innermost circle and who does not.

The freedom and importance of chronic-logical order is its gifting of power back to those who often gave it freely to fulfill others' expectations. My hope is that you will find the same freedom in creating and protecting the ever-changing "you" that chronic illness is continuously shaping and molding – without taking into account the expectations of others.