

## The “Normal” Paradox



**Have you ever been in a situation where you park in a disabled stall and then act worse than you feel when you get out of the car? I know I have. It stinks, too, because I feel like I need to “look the part” if I don’t want to be judged.**

Some days are worse than others, as we all know, but having to park on the other side of the lot in 90 degree heat would make this whole day a lot worse. I probably wouldn’t even bother making the trip. So I act “disabled.”

In a world of bullying and image issues, we all worry about being judged. It’s something that we pretend to not care about – but we do. It’s not just friends or people at the grocery store, either. It might be your employer or your insurance company.

I was recently denied my wheelchair request for insurance coverage. This may have been a “check the box” scenario for them, but for me it wasn’t a simple decision. I had to concede that I was no longer able to do the simple things I thought defined me as a dad and husband without help. I had to admit it to the whole world – starting with my doctor.

Sure, I have a cane. Truth be told, I have a bunch of them. The problem with MS, though, is that nothing works forever. I can’t walk a straight line to save my life. If I go more than 20 feet without collapsing, it takes a half-hour just to get to the point where I don’t look and feel drugged.

But, I can “ambulate” with a cane. This makes me ineligible to be covered for a wheelchair.

Last summer I took my family on a vacation. At one point, my boys wanted to go shopping on “the strip,” which we’ve done every year for the past several. I started the walk with them and turned back almost instantly. I knew I wouldn’t make it to the first shop and I didn’t want to deprive them of their fun.

Sure, I tried to enjoy myself and be positive about the situation, staying back and sipping my coffee. But I wanted to enjoy the day with my family.

It’s getting to the point where I can’t function without a chair. The further I try to walk with a cane, the more dangerous it becomes. I don’t even bother anymore.

But I can “ambulate.”

So when I visit my doctor, I’m excited to show him how well I’m doing – how I’ve kept in pretty good shape. I’m independent and remaining optimistic despite my prognosis.

And I can “ambulate.”

After having the difficult mobility discussion with him, he sent me to physical therapy to discuss my options. I was honest about my immediate needs – I won’t use it in the house. Why? Because it won’t fit and I can lean on walls and take a seat whenever I want. The safety of the carpet and cushions has limited my injuries to a bloody arm and swollen wrist at this point.

And I can still “ambulate.”

Getting into my office or picking something up from Target is a different story, though. That apparently doesn’t matter. I need to **not** act “normal” if I want to be treated like I have a disease. But wait... I **don’t** want to be treated like I have a disease – unless the insurance company asks, I guess.

It’s hard to be optimistic when you’re always hiding from something. So, I continue to manage my situation and not worry about image – even if it means “playing the part” for those that only see a box to check.