

What Do You Want To See? My MRI Scans?!



For those of you who don't "look disabled," this is something I hope you will relate to.

Let me ask you this... has anyone ever said anything to you about using a disabled permit when you look "perfectly normal?"

For me personally, this has happened a few times.

Sure, like I get it, I look "normal." I look like I don't need a permit. I look like I don't need to park closer to the store (because I'm obviously just lazy, right?).

It. Drives. Me. Crazy.

The thing is, a lot of disabilities are invisible.

So why is it that all these types of disabilities are being represented solely by a wheelchair?

When the general public sees an image of a wheelchair, they think the person using that person has to be in a wheelchair to use that facility, but guess what - we don't all need wheelchairs, and we can be classed as "disabled" without them.

I've teamed up with the UK MS Society, Grace Warnock (who has Crohn's disease) and Scottish MP Martin Whitfield to spread the word about a new "disability" symbol.



A new disability symbol

This disability symbol includes all types of disabilities ranging from wheelchairs to a “normal” looking person. I think this is fantastic and will help the general public understand that not all disabilities are visible. Because often, the public is very misinformed and take it out on me.

My most shocking stories typically come from when I was on my own and vulnerable.

The first being when I was in a multi-story car park. I was having such a bad MS day and promised to meet some friends for lunch. I'd already cancelled 2 lunches with them due to MS and was feeling pretty guilty. I parked in the last disabled space and felt so relieved to have found one.

Little did I know what would happen next.

I got out of the car and started to stagger towards the exit of the car park, I heard a male voice shout from behind me, “what’s she parked there for? She’s not even f**king disabled!!” I turned around to face him, feeling very low, vulnerable and exhausted.

He was a young man probably in his twenties who apparently needed the space for his mum who was in a wheelchair. I apologized to him, trying to explain my situation and offered to look after his mum while he parked on another floor. He didn't want to listen, so I just left him to it and left the parking lot. I remember feeling so scared going back to my car later on in case he was waiting for me or left something on my car.

I remember another time when I was in a bar in London. I was exhausted from walking all day and by the time I got to the bar to meet with friends, my legs were like jelly. I found out the toilets in the bar were all down 3 flights of stairs. Typical.

“There’s no way,” I thought. “I’ll collapse on the floor.”

I started to panic until I saw there was a disabled toilet on the other side of the stage. “Thank goodness!” I made my way over to be greeted by a bouncer at the door.

Why was there a bouncer covering a disabled toilet? I have no idea.

I went to walk past him into the bathroom and he stopped me with his hand in front of my face.

“Where are you going?” He asked sternly.

“Erm... to the loo?” I replied, confused by the obviousness of the situation.

“Nah, toilets are downstairs.” He shook his head and folded his arms.

“Oh, yes, I know they are. Thing is I have MS and my legs are very weak. I don’t think i’d be able to get back up the stairs, otherwise I’d use them instead,” I explained.

He shook his head again. “Sorry I can’t let you use them.”

“Why? I have a disability. I have multiple sclerosis. My body is destroying itself as we speak,” I explained again. “What do you want to see? My disabled badge? My MRI scans? What?!”

I was getting annoyed now. The bouncer looked me up and down and said, “you look normal to me.”

“Yes, I know. But I can assure you I’m struggling to even stand to have this conversation. Please can I just use the toilet?! I really need to go!” I exclaimed, impatiently.

“Alright, well, I’ll let you in this time but next time I might not be so kind,” he said with a smile. I’m sure he was joking, but at this point, I didn’t care.

It was awful to be treated that way. It made me feel like a fraud. From his point of view, why would I fake a disability just to avoid going downstairs to the toilets?

This is exactly why we need to change the perceptions of the general public.