

Yes, I Still Care About How I Look



It was Betty Davis who said, “old age is no place for sissies.” This expression is doubly true when it comes to those of us in the disabled community.

Having received a diagnosis of MS over 35 years ago, I always had an air of vanity even as I wobbled through the mall with my cane, in search of the perfect shade of red lipstick. Or in trying to find a cute, stylish tunic that would cover my rear end should my Depends leak. And don't even get me started on fat feet and finding the right pair of shoes. My feet are decently lean in the morning, with their polished pink pedicure, but by midafternoon, they're almost unrecognizable if I haven't taken proper precautions. With the grace of age, I have learned a few things, like putting your shoes on first thing in the morning, strapping them down and hoping for the best.

My husband serves as my primary caregiver. Planning is key when it comes to the dressing process. I've got to know what I've got going on for the day and make sure it will transition into the evening if need be – because trust me, there will be no undertaking this series of events twice in the same day. This task can be an arduous one. With all of the twisting, turning, pulling and shoving that goes, on it almost sounds like a sex act, but unfortunately, it is not. I'm fortunate to live in sunny SoCal, so I don't have to deal with extreme elements. I can only imagine the extra layer of demands that are put on those of you who live in colder climates to be dressed for the weather conditions. I wear pants maybe three times a year, but only after I have spent the days before prepping my husband for the event.

As I no longer drive, my friends all know how much I enjoy getting out of the house, no matter what the occasion might be. I had mixed emotions when my friend stopped by and

asked if I wanted to get a coffee. My initial reaction was yes! Of course! I hadn't planned on going out and looked the part. My dress was well past the well-worn stage. I hadn't showered in six days and my curly, matted hair was piled on my head in a ponytail. I wasn't wearing shoes and looked at my dry, chubby feet with the chipped nail polish and wondered if things could be salvaged. My friend, who tends to be pretty loose when it comes to appearances thought we could make it work. We redid my hair. I put on some mascara and lipstick and come on ladies, who's with me here? There isn't much that can't be done once your eyelashes have been coated and your lips slathered in red. When I told her I would need to wear some shoes she shrugged her shoulders and said, "not really." Honestly, please. In spite of everything, this girl's still trying to get her groove on. As long as I'm able, I still want to keep putting my best foot forward, which in this case meant pushing my feet into my stylish, meshy heels.

What I'm trying to say is, it's not easy. I have lost so much of myself to this disease, but there are some things I'm fighting desperately not to lose. Yes, I'm still going to get my hair colored every few weeks in a futile attempt to ward off the gray. I'm going to agonize over wrinkles and dammit, I'm going to roll out in shoes that even the 20-year-olds compliment me on. Betty was right. Aging isn't for sissies, whether you're able bodied or you're strapped to a wheelchair.