

Being Invisible Oct 5, 2015

These are real insults that have to be dealt with daily. When I park in a handicap spot, have to walk a little further, (one block instead of 100 yards,) travel on public transportation, apply for employment, ask for assistance and more, the phrase 'you don't look sick,' near always comes up. It is very hard to understand. I would do almost anything to have the life I was leading before MS back, so 'you don't look sick' invariably instigates my coping mechanisms.

I cope with various situations differently.

First: When I see someone using a handicap parking spot, I first try to be understanding. The person using my (see how possessive I've become,) probably thinks they have a good reason. The most common is, 'I only need it for a minute,' which often places me in a spot where I have to walk a distance, which causes problem two. This excuse is the most frustrating for me. As a society, we have recognized that there are handicaps that have a physical or mental impact, and we have tried to accommodate those. When someone uses these accommodations, even for a short period, it causes concern and in some cases, actively requires the directed use recipient find other accommodations. Here is a note I found that I place on cars that are unattended:

...u are receiving this note because I noticed u parked in a Handicap Slot without a Handicap Sticker....

I'm assuming the best of your parking actions:

1) U just forgot to put your Handicap Sticker up

2) U misplaced your Handicap Sticker

3) you didn't see an enforcement officer who would hand you a \$250.00 ticket for such an action

3) U parked in the Handicap Spot "just for a quick second" and don't see what the big deal might be....let me share...there are many folks with invisible handicaps that make parking in an available Handicap Spot critical to their self-esteem, self-worth & daily functioning...let me explain: many folks with invisible handicaps are affected by bladder and bowel issues...your "just a second" can result in their inability to access the store's restroom, resulting in their shame from a bladder or bowl occurrence...that's just ONE issue that people unable to access a Handicap Spot may experience....my personal issue is that I have Multiple Sclerosis and walking just the extra 100 yards can be tiring on my body-which may look "normal" to you...but the disease in my brain causes every function in my body to have to exert 10 times the energy to accomplish the task (if that body part still works) prior to my diagnosis. I'm not writing this to result in your pity or sympathy....yet to simply appeal to your empathetic side, so you NEVER park in a Handicap Spot again....and hopefully you never will have to use the Handicap Spot in your lifetime. Pay it Forward!!

Second: Walking. Just because I am still able to walk, I wish others would recognize I cannot climb a mountain. Any effort at all will be cumulative. 'You don't look sick,' translates to 'it's only a block.' A short story, I went to a game at the 'Big House.' If you have been there, you know how busy it can be. I went with my family. I tried to tell them to use my handicap placard to get a parking spot

nearer the stadium. Needless to say they wouldn't use it (they were not handicapped,) and I had to walk. We parked in what they thought was a 'good' spot. I got out of the car, looked at the stadium (four blocks away,) and mentioned to my family, the stadium may as well been the Himilaya's, but I would do my best. An hour later, yeah an hour, I arrived at the stadium.

Third: Public Transportation. While this is usually a method of transport I find to be understanding, occasionally it turns into a problem. Whether it is TSA, Railway Police or even regular police, a common assessment of me, is I am drunk. I assure them I am not, I always wobble. More than once I have been threatened with action to intervene in the perceived infraction. I went so far to have information cards made to explain MS, carried a cane and anything else that will explain my situation. Sometimes they help.



Fourth: Applying for employment. It is a tragedy that potential employers do not see a diamond in the rough. I am in a predicament. At my last position, I was compensated at \$175,000.00 per year. The types of work I am educated for, and experienced at is substantial. I have interview often (see other blog post,) and the most frustrating question is why are you willing to work for so much less. I have yet to find an answer that the interviewer understands. In my life before MS, I was likely one of those persons. For persons who spend there working life 'climbing,' it is hard to understand why you don't want it too.

Fifth: Asking for assistance. This is probably the most frustrating. I have used every descriptor I can think of to explain the meaning of two simple phrases, 'I will try,' and 'I can't.' I know what I am capable of, and give an honest answer. But 'no means no.'