

**Only a doctor can diagnose and treat Epilepsy!**



## **Celebration of me by CazzyB.**

I for one know only too well how hard it is sometimes to stay positive and keep going. But I only have to look around here and a positive side of all this does shine out. I think it is without doubt that we are all much stronger people through dealing with epilepsy, in whatever way, day in and day out. The demands of facing up to an ongoing condition could easily be crushing. We are all also much more self aware, much more aware of what our limitations are and so on. And I think we all have greater empathy and understanding for others. Not just others with epilepsy, but with whatever struggles they face in their own lives. These are all excellent skills to bring to other areas of our lives. And the next time someone tries to put me down in any way because of my health, that is what I want to be able to tell them.

Everyone here is a huge achiever in one-way or another. I feel that everything we do whilst facing the challenges of epilepsy is an achievement. Just getting out of bed in the morning is an achievement because it is harder to face the day with these added challenges. I sometimes get upset that other people don't always realise that. For example, instead of valuing me when I am at college and the contributions and achievements I make, they nit-pick about the times I am unwell.

So this post is about celebrating myself. If I can't validate my own achievements, then how can I expect any one else to do it? It isn't about being big-headed, or blowing my own trumpet, but I am proud of the things I have done, and the fact that it has sometimes been twice as hard for me to achieve these things as it is for other people. I am especially proud of gaining a good degree this summer, and I am proud of being at dental school and the positions I hold now and have held in the past.

Sometimes I push myself too hard trying to "prove" something to others. But it isn't my problem anymore if they don't notice what I do and how much effort it takes me to do it. I know these things, I'm proud of myself and I think, for now at least, that's enough.

But if I ever could say something to those who are lucky enough to face life without epilepsy or any other condition which poses a challenge to them, but see fit to offer criticism to those who do, maybe it would be something like this:

Please don't pity us. Epilepsy is, at times, difficult to live with. Seizures in public places can be embarrassing and inconvenient. Fear of seizures, both our own fear, and that of other people, can hinder social and professional life. Medications can have unpleasant side effects, and this, combined with the effects of seizures can be exhausting. But the last thing we need is pity, or sympathy, or wrapping up in cotton wool. It is strange how quickly these things are offered. As are criticisms if we take a risk others may see as being stupid – "you should have gone to bed earlier", "you shouldn't have gone out", "you shouldn't

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have had that drink". If I had a pound for every time I'd heard these, or similar phrases, I'd be a very rich lady by now.

What is strange is that when things are going well, we are coping, living well and achieving things, its rare to get a comment. An example that illustrates this concept beautifully is exams. For someone who has been ill throughout a course leading to an exam, a doctor's letter will often allow a candidate close to the pass mark to be passed. If a candidate is close to the marks needed for a higher pass, such as a distinction or merit, the doctor's letter, and everything the candidate has struggled against, will count for nothing.

The pity that is so forthcoming doesn't help anyone. Celebration of our achievements – however small – is so much more valuable. It is what helps us achieve more. For some people, just getting out of bed is an achievement, for others, making it to the supermarket or going outdoors alone. Others may be involved in community events, or achieve things in their professional lives. Whatever the achievement is, you can be sure it took much more for the person with epilepsy to get there that it might take those who don't face the same daily difficulties. Encouragement makes it possible for us to get there.

So please, don't pity or criticise us. Instead please recognise and honour our achievements, whatever they are and however small they may seem. And just remember, one day it could be you in these shoes.... And then you will understand.

Cazzy

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