THE CATALYST

The new frontiers of ability

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By: Ainsley Huard | Posted: March 9, 2023

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Letting go of the familiar

A serious illness has changed my life. I can no longer do many of the things I love to do. To adapt I have had to change how I live. I can still walk but not very far. The new snowshoes I bought are now in storage. I look out the window and dream of the times when I could grab my gear and go for a hike. I remember the feeling of living in the moment. Exercise and working out have become impossible. Most days I do not have the strength to do a load of laundry. Going to meet a friend for coffee is a small miracle because I never know how I will be feeling day to day. A minor errand is a major undertaking. I struggle to do the simple things you take for granted.

My life does not resemble my life anymore. Losing access to what's important to my well-being has affected me in a way that is difficult to describe. The words loss and grief seem completely inadequate to describe how it feels. What is the right word for the theft of joy? How do you describe the sense of disbelief? How do you express what it's like to ask yourself, what if I never get my life back? Am I disabled? People living with chronic illness or disability will understand the nuances of this question.

The hinterland of otherness

I am learning about navigating this new space between known and unknown, this hinterland of otherness. But I have learned that I am not alone. 22% of Canadians have a disability, and I suspect the number of people who are now experiencing disability is growing exponentially.

I have discovered a new community of thousands of people just like me. Reluctant explorers of this hinterland, sometimes we are seen but often we are invisible. Exploring the boundaries of a new terrain, I don't recognize the landscape. New frontiers. New directions. We don the pith helmet of the archeologist and dig through the layers, the vestiges, the remains of past and enduring fortifications. Like pioneers, we pan for gold, a golden vision of a better future.

Happy wanderers, turn back

There are signposts on this journey, but I’m still looking for the map. This is no happy wandering. This is no Insta-moment, no mini-break holiday. This is not for the faint of heart. It is a long, arduous journey, and we are in it for the long haul.

Sometimes I dream of a long dark tunnel. Faint beams of light peek through tiny cracks. There’s not enough light to see the way forward, but just enough to stop me from becoming paralyzed by the dark. We travellers of the hinterland know a thing or two about long nights of the soul. We know about getting lost for awhile and suddenly finding our way, and even trailblazing on our better days. We don’t tiptoe through the tulips; we tiptoe through minefields. We don’t shout from the rooftops, look at me! Carefully and quietly, we share our journey with our clans – our living experience, the prickly, stinging moments, the setbacks, and the small victories. It takes courage to bare your soul.

Maybe one day I might meet you on this path, although I advise you to go in another direction. But if I do, I promise I will wave, slow down, give you a hug and point you toward the next marker down the road. Intrepid traveller. Brave heart. I see you. I wish you well.

Author: Ainsley Huard

Mental Health Commission of Canada
https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/
350 Albert Street, Suite 1210 Ottawa ON K1R 1A4
Tel: 613.683.3755 | Fax: 613.798.2989
mhccinfo@mentalhealthcommission.ca