

## **Invisible, Not Non-existent**

By Teal Quin

Ever wonder what an invisible disability looks like? I'm not talking about a developmental disability, because those can be assessed easily (though this is not true of the degree of hindrance). I'm talking about depression, anxiety, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and even Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). These are tricky things to pin down at first blush. Personally, I have a number of issues that affect my life: major depressive disorder, anxiety, a mild form of depression), PTSD (from a serious bodily assault by an ex-boyfriend), Lupus, agoraphobia, fibromyalgia, Myofascial Pain Syndrome, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) and, finally, degenerative bone disease. As if that were not enough, I had a stroke four months before the assault – at the age of 35. The residual effect is that I have facial tics and a stutter, which get worse if I feel stressed.

Lupus is called “the disease of a thousand faces,” and for good reason. An autoimmune disease with numerous symptoms, it can rear its ugly head at any time and present challenges by masking other diseases.

Recently I woke up on a morning like any other – except that the left side of my face was paralyzed. It turned out that I had broken a molar, and the nerve was pressing down on my jawbone, causing a condition called Bell's Palsy. After two weeks, things returned to normal.

Just figuring out what is going on can be a daunting task. Sometimes, without meaning to you can buy into the “poor me” attitude. Instead I say, “It's mind over matter: if I don't mind, it don't matter.” And if anyone knows how hard this can be, it's me.

Making daily commitments like showing up for a job can be scary, or seem impossible. Yet having a schedule that you can stick to is important.

...2

If you can't work, then volunteer; having something to look forward to is critical. Otherwise, symptoms of depression, anxiety or other syndromes or diseases can get the upper hand without you realizing that this has happened.

Despite my Lupus being active, I am committed to a program offered by the Elizabeth Fry Society, called W.I.L.D. – short for Women in Leadership Development. This gives me some structure and a weekly commitment.

Remember, *just because you can't see it doesn't mean it's not a disability*. This article is the first of many I hope to present. With my passion for social issues and desire to educate and enlighten, I hope to affect change: change of mind, change of attitude, and change of quality of life.

.....