

A Rolling Perspective: This IS My Normal | CPD Blog

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Wheelchair users get such questions by caring people as, “What happened?” or the more blunt, “What’s wrong with you?” When I hear those questions, I look around to see who they mean. Then I realize they’re talking to me.

“Oh!” I say. “There’s nothing wrong with me. This is my normal.”

They blink a few times, murmur “Oh...okay,” and leave, perplexed.

People assume that if you’re in a wheelchair, there’s something wrong with you. Indeed, I think many wheelchair users also believe there’s something wrong with them. They haven’t yet realized that their wheelchair is the most natural, practical, and helpful thing in the world—at least right now. Believing that you shouldn’t be in a wheelchair—when in fact you are—causes deep suffering. I choose not to suffer that way anymore.

We use words whose meanings we believe we share: honest, fair, or even our friend, normal. But the truth is, we do not share these meanings; instead, we create definitions based on our perceptions.

Let’s alter our perception of the term “perfect.” Doesn’t perfect mean that something or someone cannot get or be better than it is? In this moment, can you or I be different than we are? The key is: in this moment. And I hate to break it to you, but we only have this moment. We may choose to alter our behavior in the next moment, or the one after that, but there is no way in this moment to change what’s happening. By definition, it’s perfect. We confuse perfect with ideal. Ideals, when we feel we’re not meeting them, make us feel not-good-enough in that moment and thus rob us of our greatest gift: the present.

To believe that we are not “normal” also robs us of the present. It’s saying to the universe or your Higher Power: “Not good enough. I don’t want this present. Give me another one.” Don’t you hate hearing that after you’ve spent big money on the perfect gift? Yet many of us do this day in, day out.

Let’s get back to normal. We have the perception—aided and abetted by the billions of dollars poured into advertising—that there is a normal out there, and if we just buy/do/say the “right thing,” it can be ours. We who are older think we remember a time when we were normal. (Um...yeah.) We spend every waking moment and most of our savings trying to recapture that. (They don’t call it “lost youth” for nothing.) Young people spend their money and time trying to ward off or postpone the Demon, Age. (Thus, “youth is wasted on the young.”) Living in the past or fearing the future is a surefire way to waste your present in suffering. And it’s utterly needless, for neither past nor future normals exist. Few people recognize that the present is their normal, and it’s just perfect the way it is.

What great news! If you change how you think about it, then right here, right now, YOU'RE NORMAL! And your body knows exactly how to get you to your normal—not the ideal you’re harboring. It’s constantly giving you feedback. Maybe instead of muffling what it’s trying to tell you (with social media, drugs, alcohol, or shopping, to name a few), you might like to listen to it. Your body, with its neural networks and receptors and genes, works tirelessly and perfectly behind the scenes, listening to how unhappy you are and how you wish you were someone/somewhere/something else. It loves you anyway and gives you a constant stream of feedback to let you know what systems need your attention now—not twenty years from now, or twenty years ago. If you choose to listen, you can give it what it asks for: sleep, a good cry, exercise, nourishing food, pure water, a hug.

We arrived in life hardwired with incredible healing powers. We can switch our genes on and off with a mere thought; we can change the course of our own lives in a nanosecond. The caveat? We must be present to do so. We’ve been conditioned to regard our world in a binary way—good/bad; right/wrong; normal/not normal—as if we were computers and

not humans. We wonder why we feel so out of place, and agonize because we don't have/look/act like "everyone else." It is very painful indeed for social animals like ourselves to feel like we're just wrong the way we are. It's painful because it's so untrue. We are not just one thing or its opposite; there are as many normals as there are people. Not an ideal system, but it is perfect.

Our complex body systems have infinite capabilities and thus, an infinite number of "normals." We're equal spokes on the ginormous wheel of time, yet we each have a slightly different perspective of that wheel and our place in it. We cannot adjust its spin, but we can know we're perfectly placed. And normal.

Jennifer Holland taught herself to read and write at age four and has been doing both ever since. Minnesota-born and Wisconsin-bred, she nonetheless inherited the Irish penchant for travel. Despite the shoestring budget, she visited a dozen countries before her diff-ablement, and even lived in Ireland for nearly fifteen years. Her encounters with other cultures inform the quirky insights into human behavior that find their expression in her poetry, novels, and non-fiction works. When she's not reading or writing, she enjoys chair yoga, video chats with her children and grandchildren, and living happily with MS on a tiny fixed income.

