

Enduring the Invisible

Category: Chronic Pain

written by Susan Berry | November 18, 2025

Like everyone, I was taught as a child how to walk across a room on my own and how to hold a spoon to feed myself. As an adult, I never paused to marvel at these ordinary acts, while strolling to the mailbox or eating dinner with my family—until they slipped from my reach, replaced by chronic pain and deformed limbs.

Now, a week before my sixty-fifth birthday, as my home health care aide gently drapes a towel over my chest so I can attempt to feed myself, my embarrassment over the mess I will undoubtedly make of my cottage cheese and baked beans on that towel reminds me all too sharply of what I've lost.

Chronic pain has stolen my life. Gone are the days of cooking holiday meals or shopping with my daughter. Even walking, bathing, and rolling over in bed have become impossible challenges. Rheumatoid arthritis has twisted my body and embedded relentless pain that hums beneath my skin, insisting on my attention every waking moment, no matter how hard I try to tune it out.

Confined to a hospital bed in my living room for the last nine years, I watch caregivers and family members move in and out of my world. Their stories of life outside these walls fill my desperate need for connection and, if I'm honest, leave me with a pang of jealousy. And this pain doesn't affect just me but has changed the way I interact with those I love, and that is something I often apologize for as tears stream down my face.

Today, as I lie here, my gold-colored stylus pinched between the last two usable digits of my right hand, pain flares with every stroke on the keyboard. Writing has always been my lifeline, my passion. I dread the day when pain steals even that last refuge from me.

For now, I cherish every minor victory and each movement of happiness, a personal testament to human perseverance. And though I know this fight with chronic pain is one I will not win, I hold tight to the warmth and comfort of those who care for me, and to the possibility that some meaningful life can still exist.

But often, in the quiet of night, I imagine the release that will come when I finally slip free from this aching, battered body. I dream of a place unburdened by pain, where I am no longer tethered to this flesh that betrays me. Of an eternal rest, where painful suffering can no longer reach me.

Susan Berry
Spanaway, Washington