

Assumptions

Category: Disability

written by Marilyn Barton | October 15, 2025

Floanne, a fellow nurse, was a close friend of mine for thirty years. She was widely known for the grace and compassion she showed to those around her. Sadly, in her later life, she developed peripheral neuropathy. After a million-dollar workup at a hospital, the physician specialists declared her condition a mystery and therefore untreatable. Flo became confined to bed—unable to stand, walk, hold a book, or use eating utensils without assistance.

Dedicated physical and occupational therapists worked with her, and eventually she regained the use of her hands and could tolerate short periods in a wheelchair.

One afternoon, Flo's daughter sprang her from the long-term care facility where she was living to attend the funeral of a family member.

Flo confided in me afterwards that she was baffled by the way people approached her in the church. Many of them leaned down, shouted at her, and spoke very slowly: "How ARE youuu?" Flo remarked, "I wanted to tell them that maybe my arms and legs don't work right, but my mind is perfectly fine. I'm in a wheelchair. Not deaf and stupid."

She and I then philosophized about appearances, perceptions, and people's general lack of knowledge about those who depend on mobility devices—especially about the fact that one or two problems do not equal total disability. I realized that, before my education as a nurse, I might have misjudged some people.

We concluded that other people were just showing their ignorance—and then, thanks to Flo's enduring sense of humor, we had a good laugh.

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