

## The **fuNny** page: Would you just shut up!?

by Katherine Shaw

**W**e arrive at the airport and the first thing out of Jessie's mouth is, "Should I get you a wheelchair?"

In that instant, my blood pressure shot up 300 points—at least! I looked at her coldly and, faking confusion, said, "Why?"

**The author is the soul of patience when it comes to dealing with her MS. It's just that little devil on her left shoulder.**

"Well," she said awkwardly, "I thought you might want one."

Meanwhile, that little devil on my left shoulder is shrieking, "What? **What!** I've never needed one! What is your problem? Shut up!! Would you just **shut up!**? Can I blow your head off?"

The more rational little being on my other shoulder reminded me that it was 8 a.m. and I had an entire day of travel ahead of me so I should behave "with this annoying person, who used to be my friend," little devil pointed out.

So, I put on the tersest expression I could muster, coupled with that piercing squinty-eye thing that I'm sure makes me look like pure evil, and said

curtly, "No thanks. And in the future, how about **I let you know if I need one?**"

Then I turned away and walked toward the gate, ignoring her completely.

Now to be fair, I'm not walking as well as I once did. And as much as I pretend it's not a big deal, it is noticeable. While I can do most airports pretty well, I am definitely not passing up trams, elevators or moving walkways in the name of getting exercise. Forget that. But I've never needed a wheelchair!

So I'm rethinking this situation as I try to walk gracefully to security with Jessie three steps behind me.

Little Rational points out that what I really want to say is, "Is that how you think of me? Yes, I do have this creepy disease, but I'm not obsessing about it, so why are you?" Little R knows I wasn't really angry at Jessie, just disappointed and sad that her first thought in the airport was about my MS, when I'd hoped it was the same as mine; i.e., "Where's the Starbucks?"

And to be **entirely** truthful, Little R continues, her comment frightened me. Maybe someday I'll really need that wheelchair. I know this, but I really could have done without the reminder, thank you very much.

And yet Jessie's intent was kind and thoughtful. She certainly was



not meaning to hurt my feelings or upset me. I know all that. I think what I failed to take into account is that my MS isn't about only me. It impacts all my friends and family and they all have their own ways of dealing with it.

So I'm working at this communication thing. With close friends I'm learning to explain that I really hate constant reminders of my MS, that I try not to think about it myself and I hope they can do the same.

With people I know less well, I've taken the "Shut-up Lite" approach. I say sweetly, "Oh, I'm just fine and thank you for asking. Now tell me about your trip to Kansas. ..." While I'm still seething inside, it's an approach that quickly gets everyone beyond the issue.

With people who are new in my life, I'm trying hard to practice early on. "Hey Brad, my left leg isn't as good as my right, so could we switch sides so I can grab your right arm if I need to?"

We did a quick 180° switcheroo and continued our walk. Hmm, that wasn't so hard. ■

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