

Living with diabetes

About 8 years ago, somebody dumped a bit awkward parcel in my arms and told me that I had to carry it...until the end of my life.

No warning, no explanation and no escape route. I didn't see who did it to me, and I didn't even know what was in the parcel.

The immediate impact was that I had to walk incredibly carefully, because I couldn't see over or around it. It was so big that I had to carry it with both hands.

I was terrified of dropping it. I didn't know what the consequences might be, and anyone I asked gave me alarming replies. I was frightened into carrying it carefully.

A few months on, I became sick of only being able to see the big parcel in front of me, with all my attention focussed on it. I was unable to enjoy what was going on around me. Why should I carry it?, I asked but no one would answer. Then I started thinking, if this was the way it was going to be, forever, then I wanted no more of it.

I tried to put it down, but couldn't. I tried to throw it down, but it was attached to me. I then tried every way I could think of to get rid of it, kicking, pushing, even getting my friends to try and pull it away. Everything failed. I then tried to totally destroy it, but it was me who suffered from the repercussions.

I started missing my old self, the happy, carefree, parcel free person. It was like someone had stolen my identity, and replaced it with this stranger. I missed the old me terribly. The fact I knew the parcel was a life sentence made me feel like the old me had not just been taken away, but killed too and I would never get it back. What made it worse was that no one talked about my old identity.

After failing to get rid of it, I got angry. None of my friends had to carry one, and there was just no logic as to why it had happened to me. Had I done something really bad to deserve it? I even started wondering if perhaps it was my fault, somehow I had brought it on myself. What if I had inadvertently asked for it?

I have to admit, though, while I was feeling so angry, I did turn nasty on anyone who told me it was forever and that I had better stop fighting and get used to it. Anyone who tried to enforce my order to carry it became a tangible, visible face to the problem, and I turned my anger on them. Unfortunately, it was usually my family and close friends just trying to help me or give me suggestions.

Then I dug my heels in and stopped walking, partly by way of protest and partly because I could not face struggling anymore. I would refuse to carry it by refusing to go on.

So I just got left behind.

So I determined to ignore it. I battled on, pretending not to notice it dragging behind me, and more importantly, I pretended not to care.

I managed for a while, and it even seemed like I was enjoying myself, but it was dragging so heavily that it had pulled me out of shape, and I was really suffering. I had to admit that denial did not work either.

I had to find a comfortable way of carrying it. A reasonable and practical way, where I didn't neglect it, but neither would it be the centre of my life.

It was then that I noticed many young children with parcels, only theirs had been attached to them with special string, like back packs. They weren't worrying about theirs at all. What was wrong with me? Why couldn't I manage mine? Where could I get some string? Could I make some?

Then I noticed the children's *parents* had been given the parcels along with the string to attach them to the children. The difference was, the parents had been given the responsibility.

Mine was given to me though, not to my parents, and no string came with it.

I had to get brave. It was a mixture of being brave enough to attempt it one handed, and being too fed up to carry it with two anymore.

I had to learn to balance it under one arm and then my other hand was free to pick up all sorts of other exciting parcels, ones which I wanted to carry. As long as I kept hold, it worked OK.

But there came times when I had a lot of important parcels which I had to carry all at the same time, and I couldn't drop any. It was then that I wanted to put down the awkward one more than ever, I hadn't chosen to carry it in the first place. It was during those stressful times that it became trickier still to carry it. It was the hardest one to carry, but of course the only one I couldn't drop, even if I wanted to.

I got exasperated that in the middle of such a hectic time, I was having to deal with all these negative emotions towards the parcel. I wanted to shout to the people in charge.

'Hey go easy on me, I've got one extra parcel than everyone else here...I'm struggling a bit.

But I was too frightened that if I drew attention to it – as a handicap, I would never be allowed to carry other parcels again. Some of the chosen parcels were good to carry, even if they did have responsibility with them.

I didn't want to say that I couldn't do it on account of my awkward one just that I needed them to be understanding while I grappled to find a way of carrying them all at once, whilst still balancing the awkward one satisfactorily. Even if it made me fall a few times whilst adjusting it, I really wanted to succeed given the chance.

The thing is, there is no tried and proven solution. Nobody can give you 'the answer' and it's hard to take advice, because at the end of the day, it's you that has to carry it, not anyone else. Other people also have parcels and can tell you how they manage, but there is no guarantee it will work for you.

We may all have one parcel in common, but it's how you manage all the others in your armful, along with it, and I think you have to keep adapting how you carry them all.

Some of life's parcels you get to put down after a valiant stint. Mine is not one of them. It's like an arranged marriage, there's a lifelong commitment that I never agreed to take. I've stopped asking why, because there is no answer, and I have tried to find ways of letting go of my anger, if it bubbles up, ways that don't involve hurting myself or pushing away the people who love me.

I do try to avoid feeling sorry for myself, to be honest, I am afraid of self pity as it reminds me of when I stopped walking for a while. I try to keep to the belief that if you can't change something, you have to make the best of it.

It's just a case of trying to find a good way of carrying it, really. I can't see that I've found *the way*, which is going to work for me from now on. My other parcels keep changing all the time, and I have to continually adjust the weight load and juggle things around. Sometimes I do manage to forget the order of things and will rush on excitedly, forgetting the awkward parcel momentarily, and without having thought it through it will end up falling on the floor requiring picking up, sorting out, needing attention and bringing to the foreground again.

But the one thing I can say is that I have been to extremes, having it as my only focus, and ignoring it altogether. They are both unbearable. I need to stay somewhere in the middle of the road, that gives me the opportunity to carry as many other parcels as I want to, and as long as I give the awkward one enough maintenance care for it not to slip the road can be long and exciting.

(Anon)