We Have Lupus, But We're Still Worthy of Love

by ANNA SCANLON

Lupus and Love: Learning You're Loveable Despite Lupus

Maintaining long-lasting relationships is difficult. Like, really difficult — even without lupus.

It is something we aren't told as children; when we watch our Disney fairy tales, they all end with a "happily ever after," and so we all expect that, even if we don't admit to it.

Of course, "happily ever after" doesn't exist for anyone, people without lupus included. Lupus is just one more thing that can make a relationship more difficult. And some people are either so afraid of being alone or never finding someone again, that they cling to their deluded sense of "happily ever after," even if it isn't all that it is cracked up to be. And I'm totally not immune.

I'm well aware that relationships are not all a bed of roses and take a fair amount of work. But with most things, the good should outweigh the bad; otherwise what is the point of being with the person?

However, I have noticed within the disability community (and with lupus specifically), that many people stick with partners that make them dreadfully unhappy, simply because of their lupus.

Let me explain. When you have lupus, sometimes your self-esteem can really take a nose-dive. And I'm totally there with you. I have nights when I'm in so much pain that I'm crying and I wonder why the hell my boyfriend wants to put up with this.

I convince myself I'm not worth it, that no one should have to endure this and that I'm a huge burden to the people around me. But in the end, the people around me stick around not because I'm a burden, but because they love me despite having lupus.

But lupus can really mess with your brain when it comes to relationships.

I've had friends complain to me on an almost daily basis about seriously screwed up things their boyfriends have done to them, like calling them names or talking dirty to other women; or just run-of-the-mill compatibility things, like abstaining from sex when their girlfriend wants to engage in it, or drinking to excess when they know it annoys her.

Heck, I've allowed some behavior in boyfriends that would cause some serious side-eye from me now. I even once (and never again!) let a guy who already had a serious girlfriend pursue me and try to develop a relationship with me.

I made all sorts of excuses for him, until he totally screwed me over in the end (he had been basically "dating" three women at once and making them each think they were exclusive — which I have to admit is kind of a remarkable, albeit totally gross, feat).

Why Do We Put Up With It?

So why do these women allow this kind of behavior or stick with people who don’t fulfil them on some fundamental level? Why did I make excuses for Idiot McIdiotson?

Next page: why having lupus doesn't make you unlovable.

Why Do We Put Up With It?

Very simple. When you have lupus, many times you are convinced no one is going to want to put up with you, especially if you have had issues in the past with intimacy and lupus, or even having a partner leave you for it.

My first boyfriend and first love actually did leave me because of my lupus (and found another chick to hang out with like a week later), which crushed not only my self-esteem, but affected my ability to believe that anyone would want to date me in spite of my lupus. Because he dumped me so out of the blue (although clearly he had been thinking about it for a while, he just hadn’t let me in on the conversation), I put a huge shield up, both expecting to be dumped at any moment in subsequent relationships and fully expecting each relationship to be my last.

I would, I reasoned, never find anyone else who would put up with my lupus shenanigans if I didn’t stick with the person I had at the moment.

This meant putting up with a whole heap of questionable behavior, ranging from simple incompatibility to total jerk moves. But, I reasoned, this was the only person who would want to be with me and would actually put up with all of my personality quirks and the fact that I have lupus.

I told myself that I had to hang on, while also fully expecting to get dumped at any moment.

I did get dumped two and a half more times after my first boyfriend peaced out due to my lupus. I say half because one was mutual, as in I was starting to think about breaking up with him when he showed up at my apartment with my stuff.

And aside from the half, neither of those other two were about lupus and I believe they would have occurred no matter what. To be frank, I probably should have made my exit in those relationships, I was just too scared that I would be alone forever if I did so.

Lupus Doesn't Make You Unlovable

I don’t think my feelings are all that uncommon really. I’ve talked to many women who stay with men who are either terrible or just very mismatched to them simply because the guy is “sweet” about them having lupus.

Or in the worst case scenarios, I have met people who stay with men simply because it enables them to have health insurance. Without these men, they wouldn’t be able to afford the medicine they need to keep their lupus under control. And that, in itself, is 10 shades of screwed up.

We need to start being honest with ourselves and why we are with the people we are with in the first place. Is it because we are scared to be alone, or scared of starting a new relationship, or is it because we genuinely love and are being fulfilled by the person we are with?

It took me a really long time to realize that someone who wasn't a total skeeze could love me, even with my lupus. It is something I wish I had learned a long time ago.

In fact, at the time I would have told any other person in my shoes that they could be loved in spite of their lupus — I just didn’t believe it for myself.

The thing with lupus is that plenty of people living with it have fulfilling and happy romantic relationships. If you are worried it will dictate your relationships, then it likely will.

But, if you focus on finding someone you really click with, ultimately they will love you despite it. And they'll not only put up with lupus but support you through it.

It isn't an easy mindset to get to and it may take some time and maybe even some counseling, but it is worth it. And you're worth it.