

OLA

When I'm getting to know somebody new, the first questions are usually about the fact to what extent I am self-sufficient. So, they ask me about stuff they would not ask when getting to know someone who isn't in a wheelchair. For example:

"How did you get to school in your wheelchair? It must have been difficult, right?"

Certainly, that's not one of the first questions that you usually ask when getting to know someone. Rather, that's what one asks in some specific situation; like when someone tells you that they don't live here but in some nearby village or that their train didn't come in the morning. It seems to me as if they are examining you with questions of this sort; as if they are examining my state of health. Due to the fact that I'm in a wheelchair, I am becoming a medical curiosity to them. It is as if I would not be able to talk to others and start new friendships because I cannot do the same things as them without problems. And because of my limited physical self-sufficiency, I cannot be an equal friend to them.

This is similar as to my hobbies. I go in for music very much, for example. But the fact that it is me who makes music draws attention. People often act as if I cannot do this adequately just because I am in a wheelchair. On the contrary, they put it in the context of my health and my treatment, and they ask me why don't I get music therapy. So, what I do or who I am is perceived as the subject of treatment or medicine. But the fact to which extent I am physically self-sufficient doesn't correspond, after all, to how I am able to decide for myself.

I don't come across misunderstanding related merely to my relationships and hobbies but also related to my needs. Others often think, for example, that all of my needs concern medical care. But I also have plenty of other needs. It is difficult for me to talk about these other needs because people around me usually expect that I have only needs related to my medical condition. That's why it is important for me to have somebody around me who hears out even my other problems and won't perceive me as a medical issue.