

Loss is a Four-letter Word

By Dr. Karel Kovnat Adler with comments in green by Joni S. Mantell, LCSW, Director IAC Center

Karel Kovnat-Adler, PhD. is a respected colleague and one of my best friends in the world. I have asked her to share some of her wisdom on coping with loss with you. Many of Dr. Kovnat's feelings about her medical issue will resonate with you as you think about your infertility journey. In some ways all losses have certain facets in common.

Loss is a four-letter word. Others think I lost something, or that I am missing something. I have multiple sclerosis and I have lost physical abilities. I walk slow and with a cane. My cane steadies me. It keeps me from falling. When I don't use my cane people just think I am drunk. People seem to pity me. I'm often treated as if I'm helpless. That is not true.

MS is not my friend. It's an unwanted burden I lug around. I don't think about it all the time, which would be a waste. Yes, I walk slowly, but I get where I want to go. I laugh as heartily as I did before my diagnosis, I love as deeply as I did before my diagnosis and I think as well as I did before my diagnosis.

Loss is a relative term. Did life hand me a lemon? You bet it did and I had to make a choice. Will MS define me or will I define my experience of living with MS? It took time for me to incorporate this new aspect of myself. Others greeted me with patronizing, condescending and ill-informed platitudes about my disease and about disability. With time I was able to turn down the volume on these unwelcome voices. Now, I tell them all, "I am a very lucky women and I know it."

My lemon is not the sourest one on the tree. I've added some sugar and lots of spices. Multiple Sclerosis can cause very severe disabilities, like complete paralysis and blindness, for example. I am grateful that I have a milder form of the disease. My life is easier to live. I have a good life. My life is about my family and, the joys I share with my husband as we watch our two daughters grow. My parents share these joys with us, as do our brothers and sisters. MS is a part of our lives. It's there and it's not going away. I am a clinical psychologist and I work full-time. I go to my daughter's basketball and tennis games, orchestra recitals and school plays. I haven't lost and I'm not missing anything.