ForeWord Reviews

HEALTH & FITNESS

Life on Cripple Creek: Essays on Living with Multiple Sclerosis
Dean Kramer
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"Approximately one third of a million Americans acknowledge having MS [multiple sclerosis], and every week about 200 people are diagnosed. Worldwide, MS may affect 2.5 million individuals," according to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. The author, a champion for people with the disease, writes a monthly column for MSWorld called "Life on Cripple Creek," and has been widely published as an essayist. Often those with MS are considered disabled or "crippled," a previously defamed word that Kramer tries to place in a new light. Far from being crippled, she is a magician, turning essays into inspiration. Any person affected by a disease that has created mental or physical change should open this book; the pages will magically fly by.

Essays written through four seasons along Cripple Creek, Kramer's rural sanctuary, discuss topics crucial to all affected by multiple sclerosis. From the seasons' influence on symptoms, holiday stress, challenges, and relationships to movement and activities of daily living, this book abounds with lessons of positive reinforcement. Canes and wheelchairs, normally tools of disability, inspire humorous moments in the author's life. Periodically, she tosses yet another gadget from television ads, deemed to assist productivity, into her closet with the stack of other useless aids.

Laughs aside, Kramer states, "One important lesson I've been teaching myself is that I don't have to be perfect, nor do I have to be exactly as I was before MS." Everyone changes, but MS can be devastating during flare-ups and exacerbations, causing physical and mental problems not always obvious to others. The adage that if one looks good, one is not disabled, applies in MS. Even those affected question their fitness.

Addressing people's beliefs and ways to adapt to multiple sclerosis, the chapter titled "Chicken Little and the Terminator" elucidates two of Kramer's MS personalities, the hero and the over-reactor. The Terminator lugs furniture around during remission, while Chicken Little nags about the danger of this activity.

Kramer's battle with MS fluctuates between fighting to walk the farm and scooting around on her "red pony" scooter. Her not-so-smooth ride affects the lives of others: "And

tomorrow, whether or not I can get out of bed and put my pants on one leg at a time, I and my loved ones will continue learning the lessons of MS here on Cripple Creek.”