



Annette Jørgensen

Age: 63 yrs old

Place: Copenhagen

Job: Disability pensioner awarded maximum disability pension since she was 22.

Arthritis: Severe rheumatoid arthritis. Several joints replaced by artificial ones. Only allowed to lift 2 kg.

Civil status: Has lived together with Per for 38 years.

Hobbies: Volunteer in the Copenhagen section of the Rheumatism Association

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Interviewer: Sofie Widding, People&Product, Kim Aa. Holm: Designastronaut

“I feel I have the same right as everybody else to get what I like”



Annette is 63 years old and lives together with Per, her partner through 38 years, in a small terraced house in Ishøj near Copenhagen. They don't have any children, but Per has one child and a grandchild whom Annette considers as if they were her own. According to Annette her arthritis has been a significant factor in realising it would be difficult to have children.

Annette was diagnosed at 16 with rheumatoid arthritis which she tells is a form of arthritis mostly contracted by elderly people. The arthritis has spread to her entire body and she has had surgery in her feet, knees, shoulders, elbows, wrists and hands. Several of her joints have simply been replaced. She has had these replacements not so much to improve her functions but more in order to minimize the pain as this often betters her functions. Annette's hands are very clearly marked by the arthritis and she has been forced to learn how to use them in her own special way. According to her physician she is not allowed to lift more than 2 kg in order to prevent damage on her joints, but often she has to make compromises and disregard this precaution in order to be able to act practically. This sometimes aggra-

vates Per e.g. when she strains her elbows.

At 22 she was awarded maximum disability pension. She says: “It is revolting not to be able to work and continuously to have to justify to others why I don't work, because rheumatoid arthritis sometimes disappear for a while and then people cannot understand it, when they cannot see anything is the matter. I lost my self-confidence and self-worth and for many years I found it difficult to accept my condition and didn't want to show that I suffered from it.”

Today she has accepted her illness and says that it has become part of her. If one morning she were to wake up not feeling any pain she would believe she was dead as this would be very unfamiliar to her. Instead she has chosen to meet life head on so she has attended language training, china painting, drawing and sewing and at the age of 45 she joined the Rheumatism Association as a volunteer. She wishes she had done that earlier but she had to be “done” in order to be able to “receive”. After 18 years as volunteer she has regained her self-confidence and self-worth as well as a lot of joy from the people she has been in contact with through this

work. Annette says that there is a big difference between having had this illness for a short while and having had it for many years. It takes time before you accept being arthritis-stricken and often she experiences - like in her own case - that it is the people with the longest arthritis process who comes to terms with the situation. Generally, however, she feels that people handle it well.

VISITING ANNETTE

We go shopping. It is difficult to get the coin in and out of the lock in the shopping cart. Annette has fastened a piece of string in her coin making it easier to handle. It is also helpful if she drops it. Dropping things is a major operation for Annette. It can take quite some time to pick up the dropped thing. We are shopping for “smorgasbord” which Per loves.

Annette and the cucumber

Annette needs to get the foil off the cucumber. Quickly she grabs a knife and cuts off the end of the cucumber and puts the knife under the foil and drags it forward. It looks a bit dangerous as the knife could possibly slip and hit the hand she is using to hold the cucumber. Her comment: “Why make it harder on myself?”

Annette and the canisters

Situation 1: Annette takes out the coleslaw and holds the canister close to her body stating, that if the canister is on the table she will not be able to open it because the strength in her fingers don't allow her to get a good grip. She takes a small pointed pincer and grabs the protruding corner of the foil. The flap breaks and she explains that it is “irritatingly small”. Then she presses her thumb into the foil breaking it and then she rips the foil off in little pieces. “It is just typical that none of this really works. Especially cold cuts types of packaging. Firstly the flap to tear is too small and kind of ripped off already and then it actually sucks. It is this kind of troublesome nitty-gritty that can drive me absolutely crazy.”

Situation 2: Annette fetches the sour cream from the refrigerator and while we talk she lifts off the transparent lid, grabs the protruding flap of the plastic foil and rips it off in one movement. “This was an easy one!” We ask her why. “...Also because there is a good flap that I am able to get a grip on”, she says, while we talk about the fact that it is a plastic foil instead metal, and that makes it easier because it doesn't break.

QUOTES from observations

“Gradually you don't see arthritis as an illness - it becomes part of you”

“This bread ... that's easy enough”

“All in all the assistive technology simplifies my day”

“Here you never try first using your fingers?”; “I don't bother. It takes 190 yrs and I don't have that kind of patience”. “I quickly grab a tool when I see it. Comes from experience I guess.”

“Now I need the scissors again - they are indispensable”

“One like that I cannot open - makes me mad”

“Those I have bought sometimes - I like those” (Tulip re-seal)

“I would rather be normal”

“This unnecessary dependency, it just takes a bit of consideration sometimes”

“I just don't understand why there isn't some kind of standard packaging which can be opened - then you'd know you were able to open it”

SOURCES

Video:
“The russian salat”
“The Juice, the universal auxiliary tools and the plastics foil lid”

Annette self portrait:
“My name is Annette Jørgensen”