



Keeping Balance

A psychologist's experience of chronic illness and disability

Katherine Cuthbert

In the summer of 1993, Katherine Cuthbert, with her husband Pete, was coming to the end of a cycling holiday in Bavaria. Suddenly her left leg was giving way and she was soon having considerable difficulty walking. Two months later she had been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis and was facing the challenge of coping with an uncertain future and possibly increasing disability.

By their nature chronic illnesses have no cure, so coping psychologically is a central part of adjustment. Most significantly, Kath *is* a psychologist, having taught the subject at degree level for twenty-five years, so she has been able to draw on her professional knowledge and her own life experience to write a unique account of living with MS that is rooted in her psychological knowledge.

Where many books on the subject provide a somewhat impersonal list of coping suggestions, this is a personal memoir about trying to live well in difficult circumstances.

The major theme, through the book is that psychological understanding can make a practical contribution to coping with any chronic illness. Issues considered include threatened identity but also acceptance; the difficulty of disclosure and the possibility of stigma; depression but also 'mindfulness' and optimism. The new ideas in positive psychology, especially from 2000 onwards, are particularly significant, as are those related to self-management.

This is a book for people with MS. It is also a book for those who have other chronic diseases. Beyond that, it is a book for anyone facing challenges in their life – and, to a degree, that is most of us.

About the Author: Katherine Cuthbert grew up in Aberystwyth, mid-Wales, and graduated in psychology and biology from Keele University in 1969. She taught on an innovative, multi-disciplinary social science degree at a Cheshire college which became part of Manchester Metropolitan University. Since her early retirement in 1998 she has worked at coping with her MS, and the completion of a PhD.

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