

A Virtual Cup of Sugar **By Kevin Campbell**

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“Back in the day, you went to your neighbors to borrow a cup of sugar, but you really went to talk, complain, to *kvetch*,” explains Erin Kotecki Vest. “Now we do that online, to get community support – I like to call it my ‘virtual cup of sugar’ – and we complain together, but we also lift each other up.”

Erin’s ailments are an arm-length of overlapping conditions familiar to anyone with Fibromyalgia. An award-winning television journalist (she covered then-senator Barack Obama’s campaign in 2008), she became ill with a host of pains and diagnoses including Rheumatoid Arthritis, Lupus and Fibromyalgia; she endured a hysterectomy, stroke and steroid medication that added 100 pounds to her frame.

Today, Erin is a “citizen journalist” for BlogHer.com, and is immensely grateful for the connectivity the Internet provides her to connect with others who have chronic pain and Fibromyalgia. Because she’s a vocal blogger with a loyal following, there are many who want to “talk” to her and share their common complaints. Erin loves to remind her readers that they’re not crazy, and encourages them find doctors who can believe their pains are real.

“It helps them to know they’re not the only ones,” Erin says. “Millions are going through it. I’m not the only one who has a moon face from my weight gain. All my readers love to say, ‘me, too!’ and that keeps me going.”

“If someone is the hospital, we’ll send virtual loves. If someone needs a meal, we pull together money so their husbands or partners don’t go without.”

Like many other caregivers, Erin’s husband Aaron (yes, Erin is married to an Aaron) had never heard of Fibromyalgia until he worked on a television commercial for Lyrica. “The internet gives us a way to build community,” he says. “As a caregiver, it’s my job to give support, but I need support as well.” With Erin’s blogging audience, her husband can get help for everything from making meals to watching the kids, and mostly just being there for each other.

“The online community gets you through it.” Erin takes a moment to hug her kids, nine-year-old Hala and 11-year-old Jack. “You don’t want to be a burden to them,”

Erin says, wiping chocolate off her daughter's face. "Instead, you can go online and feel the support you need."

These days, we may not actually need a real cup of sugar, but we still have the human need to connect to our communities. The Internet helps people with Fibromyalgia smile through the pain because they know they have a vocal, caring community that supports them, no matter where they are in the world.

"I have my kids as inspiration, but also the community around you buoys you up, supports you, and daily gets you through."

You can follow Erin online here:

<https://www.facebook.com/erinkoteckivest>

<http://www.blogger.com/myprofile/erin-kotecki-vest>

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