

Susan Kiddie

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Photo by Charles Forerunner

I finished my breast cancer treatments about 4 years ago. I did not have any disabilities before my cancer diagnosis. Today, I have several mobility issues related to my treatments and surgeries. I also have medical-related posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Whether it's COVID-19 or cancer, it is often not as simple as recovering or dying. Many, like me, have long-lasting disability related to the illness from which they were "cured."

Being diagnosed with cancer is like being strapped to the front of a high-speed train. It just starts moving. Understandably, you want things dealt with quickly, but the train speeds along without time for you to process the experiences, some of which are fairly horrifying. I honestly cannot tell you how many procedures I went through.

There were other factors that played into my developing PTSD. I was laid off from my job in the middle of chemotherapy. I lost my home. I lost many of my friends. For me, PTSD is a somatic experience more than a mental one.

I get a lot of medical people who see my history on paper and call me a survivor. They tell me how I beat the odds, throwing what I now call "toxic positivity" at me. I have no patience for it anymore. I need authenticity now, not spin. When you've gone through hell, you don't want to hear that your story is somebody else's inspiration. We live in a society that does not deal well with difficult or different.

When the SARS-CoV-2 vaccine rollout began, it was immediately evident to me

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that disabled people and immunocompromised people were not considered. Accessibility means more than just a wheelchair ramp. It has to be thought of in the booking process. It needs to apply to the lineup. The aftercare. For me, the idea of a mass vaccination clinic is terrifying — I've spent the last year isolating so I don't get sick. Pop-up clinics are also not ideal because I can't stand for more than 10 minutes or sit for more than 30 minutes. As a disabled person, I often feel like I'm invisible or disposable in our health system.

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