

## **A Word from the President**

By : Claude St-Jean

### At the basis of everything, self-esteem

People often reproach me for talking too much about Friedreich's ataxia, but it is stronger than I; there are so many things to say on this subject.

According to me, it is very important that every ataxic has self-esteem. This means to be very proud to be alive and to find it wonderful to be able to accomplish all kinds of things.

Here are two examples. The first concerns my sister Francine. Victim of Friedreich's ataxia, she went about in a wheelchair. She loved to chat with everyone, she said to herself: if people do not want to mix with me because I am in a wheelchair and this makes them feel afraid, well! All they have to do is move away from me. Every time, it was the opposite reaction which was produced because Francine, rather than talking about her disease, had various subjects for conversation, which made her interlocutors forget that she went about in a wheelchair.

The second example concerns my contacts with women. They often told me that one forgets my wheelchair because I behave like everyone and maybe better because I know suffering. To receive this kind of compliments gave me great pleasure.

I think that all ataxics would be able to cite examples like these.

One day someone said to me: you would surely like to have a second life and if you were able to start your life over again, what would you do differently? I would allow myself more mistakes, I would relax, I would do more exercise, I would be more mischievous, I would take things less seriously, I would take more risks, I would travel more, I would climb more mountains and I would go through more swimming courses. If I could walk, I would do it for hours and hours in order to keep up my health. I would have an intense family life; I would amuse myself with my children and much more.

**In spite of everything, life is still very beautiful!**

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