



Darina Kostíková
Slovakia



With my dance group "Gold"



Performing with "Gold"



High5 in High Tatras

Never be afraid to dream

My name is Darina Kostíková and I am a kindergarten teacher living in Bardejov, Slovakia. I am 53 and married with three children and two grandchildren.

I have been volunteering at the Slovak League Against Rheumatism for three years and am informed of everything that is taking place at the European level. It was through them that I heard about this competition.

I decided to participate because this topic was very interesting for me. I wanted to share my fortune with the readers despite having suffered with a rheumatic and musculoskeletal disease for 30 years.

I had long felt that my life was hard and demanding. When I now compare myself with friends with rheumatism, I see that it was much easier than theirs.

Life has dealt me a few blows: psoriasis, visual impairment, miscarriage, premature birth of twins at 34 weeks, rheumatism and, finally, a diagnosis of practical blindness. I don't even properly know what this last one means, and for peace of mind I won't try to find out. These entries in my medical record are quite enough for me.

When I was six, I was diagnosed with psoriasis and, along with it, amblyopia. Both diseases affected my self-confidence. I grew up in a village where everyone knew everything about each other, so I felt that people were pointing at me. Red, scaly patches all over my body are not particularly nice to look at. On top of that, I wore glasses and an eye patch. I suffered greatly and I was ashamed of my appearance.

The word "psoriasis" was still taboo a few years ago. People didn't know it. No one wanted to talk about it in public. Since childhood, I would ask "Why me?" I played second fiddle to my classmates and friends – maybe even third. I disliked being with children. I preferred to stay at home reading, and I would only play with my siblings.

"Suddenly I wanted to live again"

Long-term therapy and a variety of treatments finally brought success. The scales on my body disappeared and remained only on my scalp. It was a miracle. Suddenly I wanted to live again, to meet up with friends. My self-confidence gradually returned. This was how I lived for several years, until a further diagnosis added something to my varied life: rheumatism.

I was 24 years old and had my whole life ahead of me. My joints started to feel painful. I had been happily married for three years, and my husband and I were planning to start a family. The first time it didn't work out. I lost the baby at three months.

Three years later our faces were once again brightened with a smile — we were expecting twins. Tears of joy and happiness followed. The euphoria only lasted until the third month. I got chickenpox. It was not pleasant, with itchy rashes and temperatures in the 40s, and among other things, the possibility of foetal harm. I was terrified. But the worst was the uncertainty and fears.

Fortunately, our guardian angels were looking down on us and the children were born healthy, if about six weeks premature. After the twins were born (weighing 1.75 kg and 1.50 kg), I blamed the fact that I had no time to myself, that I was all tiredness, exhaustion and joint pains, on caring for the babies. It was only after my second pregnancy and the birth of my third daughter, when the pains did not pass and my fatigue was getting worse, that I was diagnosed with rheumatism, specifically psoriatic arthritis.

Twenty-seven years have passed since then, but I remember it all very well. The first treatment was unsuccessful. The drugs that eased the rheumatic pain brought about and worsened the psoriasis. So, at the age of 26, and with three small children, I was back at square one. Psoriasis erupted all over my body. The rheumatic pains were a bonus! Aching, tired, weak, and now ugly to boot.

You might not believe me, but because I work as a teacher in a nursery school

where I come across fairy tales every day, I have dreamt up my own fairy tale. It is called “Happy RheuMummy”. I don’t plan my life, I take what comes along. And my 50th came along and, with it, a sudden change in my life. At last I had time for myself and my hobbies.

We all have our own view of the world, and the word “happiness” means different things to different people. For me, happiness – and the most important thing in life – is the fact that my husband and I have managed to raise three healthy and successful daughters.

“Happiness means different things to different people”

But now that the children are independent I have found a new hobby, and that is volunteering at the Slovak League Against Rheumatism. It gives me pleasure and brings into my life new experiences and new friendships with patients with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs).

The League pushes me forward and gives me new strength to face life. I have met many great people there who are like family to me. At the League I also found a real friend, whom I would not trade for any gemstone in the world. She showed me how to move forward and not always see the faults in yourself, but also the goodness and beauty. She taught me to think positively. Thanks to her, I started to

feel successful and self-confident.

Perhaps this is one reason why this year, at the age of 53, I decided to fulfil a dream. I have enrolled at a private art school and have taken up modern street dancing. Our group of 15 young women – mothers whose children attend this school – is trained by our skilful teacher. Thanks to the dance group, I am once again part of life. Dancing is, for me, adrenalin, endorphins and joy all in one. After hours of training, when the pain in my legs becomes severe, I might have a little cry and sob into a pillow. I tell myself that I will quit, that there will be no “next time”. I am worried that I won’t be able to go on, that it won’t be possible. But when it’s time to train, I do not hesitate even for a second and I launch myself into it again.

In November, we took part in a Slovak dance competition, MOVE ON! Dance Cup in Žilina, where we won a magnificent first place in our category of seniors over 25 years of age. We participate in various public appearances. The dance school has a great team which takes me as an equal partner. They support me in my dancing and cheer me on. They don’t want me to stop dancing: age is just a number, apparently. I will never forget the trainer’s words when he said “Daja, I take my hat off to you. You dance your own way, but with such skill that everyone thinks this is how it should be.”

Nothing can motivate me more than these words. Since then, I have been dancing with even greater passion and joy. I cannot get enough of dancing because it was something I denied myself for years. I feel great when I am with the dancers.

“Nothing can motivate me more”

I am also supported in my dancing by my nearest and dearest — my husband, three daughters and two granddaughters. They came to cheer me on and encourage me with their applause at the dance competition in Žilina. So what if I can’t open a jar of pickles or an ordinary bag of pasta with my hands?

For me it is my legs that are now important, for it is my legs that must master the dance moves. Many people really do envy me.

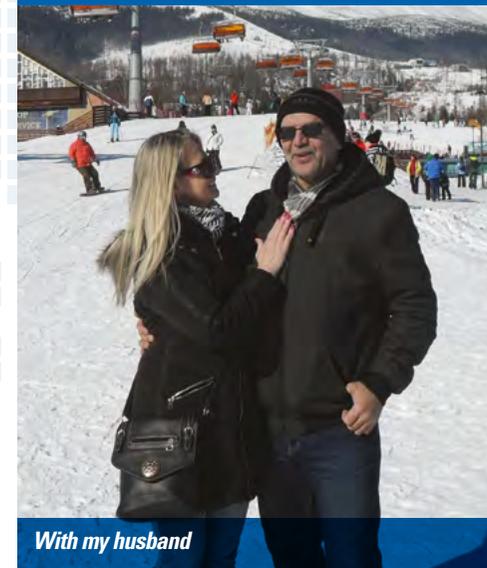
This, for me, is real happiness and a full life. I know that everyone has different ideas. For me, happiness is my parents, my children and my hobbies and, therefore, my rheumatic friends and my most beloved activity at present— modern dancing in the group “Gold”.

I live life to the full, even though I have rheumatism. One must never give up without a fight. One must move on and try new things. What if fortune smiles again? Dreams come true only to those who are not afraid to dream. Mine have now come true.



Family vacation in Croatia

Never be afraid to dream
Darina Kostíková



With my husband