



Iuliana



On the road outside



Me and my mum



**Iuliana Negoită  
Romania**

My name is Iuliana and I live in the little village of Răstoaca in the Romanian countryside.

I am 37 years old and I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis 20 years ago. I love writing, so almost every day I write a blog (<http://iuli-ana.blogspot.com/>) about the problems people with disabilities face in their daily lives; problems that my friends and I also have to deal with.

Reading literature and philosophy is another hobby of mine, but poetry is the dearest to my heart. I am also part of a team that manages a website dedicated to people with disabilities ([www.dizabil.eu/](http://www.dizabil.eu/)). As a team we try to encourage people with disabilities to fight for their rights, to fight to overcome their disease, the suffering, the prejudice and the obstacles and barriers they encounter in life.

I read about this competition on the Romanian Rheumatism League's website and decided to take part in order to raise awareness of the difficulties faced by people with rheumatic diseases, and other mobility issues, who live in the Romanian countryside and far away from cities.

## Life – one step at a time

**On a beautiful autumn day, my entire existence changed. The dreamy teenager who believed that everything is possible in life if you really want it, found out that there are illnesses that create barriers which are sometimes very difficult to overcome. I, too, was diagnosed with one of these illnesses: rheumatoid arthritis. And then nothing was ever the same again...**

Today, twenty years have passed and this illness is part of my life, and I am still fighting the limitations enforced by my condition and society.

Inside my home, I can move about fairly easily, because over time, it has been adapted to my needs. The doors and windows have been changed so they are easier for me to open and close, the bed has been raised so I can sit or stand up easily,

and the sockets and switches have been moved to a height where I don't have to bend over or stretch up high to reach them. I place all the objects I need on the middle shelves of my cupboards, again so I don't have to bend over or stretch up high to reach them, which would be too difficult for me. To increase my independence, I also use a range of tools that are useful when you have reduced mobility, such as a sock aid, or a 'grabber' to help me pick up objects from the floor. The only problem I still have is the steps at the entrance. I try to go up and down these steps in places where I can support myself on something, or I use crutches. Apart from this, I would say I am independent in my home.

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**'grabber' to help me pick up objects from the floor."**

However, things become more complicated if I want to leave home and go anywhere. Why? Because I live in the countryside and the roads here are covered with gravel, not asphalt. This means, I can't leave the yard alone because of the condition of the roads. I just don't have the confidence to go out on my own on roads like this. I can't go to the nearest shop to buy anything by myself, and I can't visit anyone on my own. Making my way to the doctor's surgery is out of the question. It is two kilometres away from my house, which is much too far for my physical ability.



*My computer, connecting me with the outside world*

**“The nearest bus stop is one kilometre away from my home – one kilometre down an un-made road that I find very difficult to walk on.”**

Another major inconvenience is that I can't use public transport to get to the nearest town, which is 10 km away from my village. The nearest bus stop is one kilometre away from my home – one kilometre down an un-made road that I find very difficult to walk on. And if I manage to walk this kilometre and reach the minibus, I can't get on because these vehicles are not adapted to the needs of people with reduced mobility; in fact, these minibuses are so high off the ground that even a healthy person finds it difficult to get on and off them. So it is goodbye to any trips on public transport when I want to go shopping, or for a specialist medical consultation, medical examination etc. Therefore, I

have to pay someone to take me in a car whenever I want to go into town. Once in town, I cannot walk about by myself because I can't climb up and down the high kerbs of the pavements, or the steps to various shops and public institutions etc.

A few times a year I do, however, have to use public transport when I have to travel the 200 kilometres to visit the hospital in Bucharest where my condition is assessed and treated. Travelling this distance is a real adventure. I have someone take me by car from home to the nearest bus station, which is 13 kilometres away. Here, I have to be helped up into the minibus that will take me to Bucharest. When I reach the bus station in Bucharest, someone has to help me off the bus, and then I take a taxi to get to the hospital.

I haven't been able to travel by train for a very long time, for the same reason – they are too high and it is really difficult to get on and off them.

When you suffer from stage four rheumatoid arthritis, life is not exactly easy. Apart from the illness itself, it is very difficult to have a social life. You can't have a job you go to every day, and you can't go out to socialise or solve other problems by yourself. Going out with friends has been replaced by internet chats and

telephone conversations. These are the main ways in which I keep in touch with friends. We rarely see each other face to face, because they live in different parts of the country.

But then, what is life but a challenge we have to take one step at a time?

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