

Giving or taking?

By Lisa O'Donovan

I went to Canada for a camp for the blind and visually impaired. I wasn't long after receiving my diagnosis - legally blind - and I really didn't know what to expect. Not to get all into the camp, but it was amazing, a real eye-opener. (Get it?!). The memory that has stayed with me, however, is one which I have thought about often. I have replayed, pondered and laughed at it many times. And I am going to share it now.

I was sitting at a table in the dining hall, listening to the chatter around me. I took note of the conversation between two women who were discussing their eye conditions. They were talking about what little difference it made to their lives. They agreed that, if given a choice, they would keep their conditions, their visual impairments, their blindness. I was horrified! I remember thinking that these women must be nuts; damn Canadians. How, or why, would anyone choose to be blind? This made no sense to me. None, whatsoever.

Now here I am, over a decade later, and I get it. My visual impairment has become such an integral part of myself that I wouldn't know who I was without it. In giving me my sight back, a part of me would be taken away. Giving or taking... I guess the real question here is, if offered, would I take my sight back? I don't know who I would be, if sighted. I just know I wouldn't be me. The general social perception is that, if you have a disability, you would want to get rid of it. It never dawns on people that a disability might also be an integral part of someone's personality, their life. So much so that maybe it's worth keeping.

I find it ironic - even hilarious - to have come to this conclusion. I didn't understand what those women meant, all those years ago. And I don't think everyone will understand my perspective now. More than likely, they'll just think that I'm nuts, too! I do wonder, though, if anyone with a disability will understand.