

Fiona and David: Feeling redundant

[Perthshire, Scotland]

Fiona: This is a picture of us probably about the time we got married. Just looking happy. Sometimes when you look back you think it just seemed like yesterday. But 30 years is a long time and a lot has happened.

My name is Fiona Gemmel. I'm 48, married and a mother of 2.

I haven't always been disabled. See I hurt my back in November '98 – it was very sudden. They said it was a slipped disc, so they had to do a discectomy. After that I was left with nerve damage. My walking is very difficult.

David: How much tea do you want Fiona?

I am David Gemmel, Fiona's husband. I used to be a technical instructor with the National Health Service. Since I became disabled I am now Fiona's full time carer but I have a lot of my own problems as well.

[Fiona as a teenager]

Fiona: Like everybody you dreamed of what was going to happen, you know, get married, we...

[Fiona and David on their wedding day]

Fiona: ... were gonna have children. Our jobs were gonna get better.

[Portrait of Fiona and David on their wedding day]

Fiona: I never ever thought I ...

[Fiona with one of her sons]

Fiona: ... wouldn't work.

[In total, Fiona worked for 19 years, first in a crèche and then as a school care assistant.]

Fiona: It was quite a cultural shock ... because I worked with children you were quite active, you had to run about and things. And to go from that to being unable to

do things, you got quite depressed. It actually took a good couple of years to really come to terms. That was why I applied for a couple of voluntary jobs with disability organisations.

[Fiona volunteers as a secret shopper to check disabled access.]

Fiona: You have to do something – you need to have some sort of interest or something to keep your mind going.

If I didn't have the voluntary jobs that I do, they really keep me sane. I like to be doing things to the maximum that I can.

[David also has multiple disabilities and can no longer work.]

David: There's the spondylitis in my neck, is what they call it, and the pain is always there. There is the arthritis, which is all over, various parts of my body.

Fiona: Diabetes

David: Diabetes, glycogen storage, which is quite a marvel according to the doctors, the fact that I've got both. What else?

Fiona: High blood pressure.

David: I've forgotten what I've said already.

Fiona: High blood pressure and your memory problems.

David: Yeah, that's it. When I became retired, it is difficult to think, whether you want to call it retired, medically disabled, redundant. Redundant is how it feels.

[David in his work uniform]

David: You don't want to accept it. But it's really, really hard.

[David with his two sons]

David: When people turn round and say, 'Och, there's nothing wrong with that guy – he's just a scrounger or a waster', and that actually really hurts because I know what I am capable of. I know what I would like to do and I know what I can actually do.

Fiona: I don't want to be living better off, better than somebody who is going out and working really hard all week. I don't want you know? I am not expecting anything like that, you know? I just want to be able to cope. To pay my bills and to be able to sleep at night.

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