

*Connect-shun by Sharon Sztar

When I developed Chronic Fatigue Syndrome three and a half years ago, slowly my world began to change and within 12 months I was no longer able to read, watch TV, drive, use a computer or even send a text message.

At first I was too ill to notice the impact on my life, but then it gradually hit me how dependent I had been on modern technology, especially the internet, and how those who don't use it are often disadvantaged. Everyone wanted bills paid online, service pamphlets have in the most been superseded by websites and you get charged extra for booking a flight by phone. Not being able to access the computer circa 2010 can, not only be more expensive, but is akin to having a disability.

However, as with any disability, when you are weakened in one area, you seem to gain heightened awareness and strength in another. With less of my time taken up by computers, phones and of course work, I had more time to appreciate what was around me. I started to notice the changing of the seasons, marked by the death and rebirth of annual plants and trees. I know exactly when blossoms will spring and that jacarandas and butterflies mean summer is approaching. I no longer suffer from information overload and, rather than reading and 'surfing' my way through life, I'm out there experiencing it.

I feel sad that today's youth block out the beautiful sounds of nature by having an iPod glued to their ears. When I was on holiday recently I listened to the kookaburras and

rustling of the trees and, as I drifted into a beautiful serene daydreaming state, I reflected back to the days when those sounds would've been blocked out by my own iPod.

By the sheer force of life I broke the email checking addiction overnight and realised that if people really want to find you they will and that things can wait – no one really needs to be on call 24/7 other than a surgeon.

I don't have a Facebook profile, I have no clue what Twitter looks like, and as an alternate to the 'too easy to send' birthday text or email, I am constantly buying beautiful and inspirational greeting cards to send to friends.

And, as I sit here now with old-fashioned pen and paper writing this article, I notice how I'm more focused on choosing the right words as I don't have the backspace or delete button to fall back on. It makes me realise that the most important thing the past few years without the constant use of technology has taught me is the practice of being present.

I have slowed down, I am more conscious and I am aware of the space around me. Now, as I gradually recover and am able to reintroduce technology, I choose to do so with discretion. With all its benefits and conveniences – and it does have many – modern technology, such as mobiles, computers, iPods and iPads, has the power to distract people from truly being present and connected. I know, a paradox indeed considering that technology is apparently all about connectivity ...

