

FIJD attendee sends open letter of thanks

Marcel Ruest, President of l'Association des Arthritique thanks attendees, presenters and organizers of the Frontiers in Inflammatory Joint Disease conference for giving him hope for a better future. This is his letter.

Can you imagine what your life would have been if you were :

1. To live 40 years with Ankylosing Spondylitis?
2. To lose your friends, your hobbies and your respect?
3. To search in vain for the answer to this question : What's the matter with me?
4. To wait 16 years for the right diagnosis?
5. To live decades without being able to communicate with anyone about arthritis?

I could speak about that questioning for hours. Going through that tunnel ended when I received an email saying, 'You've been chosen to be part of *Frontiers in Inflammatory Joint Disease.*' That was my jackpot.

Imagine. I, who had been forgotten by everyone when I was 20, being welcomed with warmth and friendship by people who dedicate their lives to finding the miracle drug which would soothe all those who have juvenile arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis or ankylosing spondylitis. I felt like a very important person - kind of a hero for that weekend. Now I wasn't alone anymore. There were a lot of people with knowledge to help me find answers to my queries. Now I would have answers. Even the simplest questions were answered : 'Is it true that Texas is be the best place to live if you have arthritis?' Oh how I'd have liked my mother hearing that, 'Yes.' You know, she told me so much about that part of the United States and she always wanted me to live there with her, in order to stop my suffering.

I attended rewarding conferences. Naturally, I was fond of the one on ankylosing spondylitis. We learned about the results of several experiments. Those give me hope for what is to come in the near future. Moreover, we had table themes which helped us to discuss every conference subject. We discussed the gaps in our health care system and progress being made. A list of improvements was reached by consensus and shared with the facilitating committee.

I also met persons devoted to the arthritis cause and working for various organizations. And of course I met those for whom the conference was dedicated : patients who spend their life smiling even when suffering is very painful. We spoke a lot about our life with arthritis but most of all we laughed a lot.

I would like to thank you for that amazing weekend. Thank you FIJD for answering my expectations. Thank you for giving me back hope for a better future.

Thank you all,

Marcel Ruest
President of l'Association des Arthritique