

The View from Here

By: Justine Chichester

“Just so you know, our two elevators are not working, so you’ll have to use the stairs.”

My husband, John, and I were driving to meet some friends for dinner the other night. We pulled into the parking garage near the restaurant and the ticket taker informed us that we’d have to use the stairs because their elevators were not working. “Well, that doesn’t work for us because she’s in a wheelchair” my husband said pointing at me. We quickly realized we’d have to leave and go elsewhere. There was nowhere to park. As we circled through the parking garage to turn around and leave, I got very angry. Why should I have to leave? Why should I be the one who has to miss out? Just because I can no longer climb stairs, I have to miss out on dinner with my friends? That just doesn’t seem fair.

I’m still new to this and it can often be so frustrating. Not only do I face challenges at home in my daily activities such as getting dressed, showering, etc., the things most people take for granted being able to do so easily every day, but it seems to me at times the outside world is fighting me every step of the way...or every roll of the wheel.

It’s not just about accessible parking, although that is so very important. I’ve found the smaller things, things I had never even considered before becoming disabled, to be the things that make living every day with a disability just a little more difficult. They are the things that the average person would never even think twice about.

Doors, for example. Who would have thought doors would be such a problem for me? Well, some doors are so heavy; I can’t manage to open from my chair. So imagine you get dressed, get out of the house, find the perfect accessible parking spot, only to wheel up to the door that you can’t open. And there is no one there to help you open it. What do you do? And then there are high top tables. Who knew there were so many high top tables in restaurants? I would have never before even considered how important the height of a table was, until I ventured out in my wheelchair. Wheeling into a restaurant for dinner and finding that all of the tables are over my head can put a real damper on an evening, that’s for sure.

The good news in all of this, however, is that I have found most places to be very accessible, and I haven’t had too many instances (yet) where I’ve been forced to turn around and go home. But the few times it has happened have been truly heart breaking for me. We have enough to deal with on a daily basis, we shouldn’t have to then be faced with these types of barriers that hinder our ability to live our lives to the fullest.

So, John and I turned around in that parking garage and left to meet our friends at a different place. One that was much more accessible for me. We found a parking spot at the new place right up front that same night, and I wheeled in and had a lovely time. I forgot all about my anger over the broken elevators and how life keeps throwing me these little curveballs. It just proves, I guess, that I continue to be up for the challenge.