

The View from Here

By: Justine Chichester

I've had a love-hate relationship with my wheelchair ever since I was told I needed to use one two years ago. I have struggled with my chair being a constant reminder of my disability and all of the things I could no longer do. It was the barrier that kept me from activities as simple as climbing a flight of stairs or as long-term as my goal of running that marathon. In my mind, the list of things I couldn't do was endless because I was now a wheelchair user.

One day, after venting my wheelchair frustrations to a friend, she encouraged me to check out a few people on social media. They were people living with disabilities who were sharing their journey by posting photos and stories about their daily triumphs and struggles. She thought these stories might inspire me to change my mind about new my life on wheels.

Up until this point I hadn't really engaged too much in social media since my injury. Before my fall, I always loved to post pictures and share updates on Facebook and Instagram of my husband and I out and about, or when I would go out with friends. But once I became disabled, I stopped posting like I used to. So when my friend encouraged me to get back on social media, I was reluctant. When I finally checked out the posts she suggested, I found it empowering that there were all sorts of people using wheelchairs and living vibrant, exciting lives. I also found people posting helpful tips that I could use in day-to-day living in my wheelchair. It was a whole new world to me, entirely, and I became very excited about my new discovery.

I started to see that my wheelchair didn't have to be the obstacle keeping me from all of the things I once did. My wheelchair would be the means by which I would be able to get out and do all of those things once again. I figured I would now need a new set of wheels to get going and make life a little easier. The prospect of buying a new chair would have at one time been truly daunting for me. But I am now actually excited about building a new chair. I find myself saying things like, "I can't wait 'til I get my new wheelchair."

I still have days, of course, where I face frustrating situations as a wheelchair user. So, the love-hate relationship continues. There will always be obstacles to find a way around. But with the encouragement of fellow wheelchair users, I've come to realize how lucky I am. Lucky enough to experience two different types of lives. One as an able-bodied person, and now one as a person who just happens to use a wheelchair.