

Wheelchair Reaction

by Nichol Scholze

Strangely enough, I was very anxious to use a wheelchair for twelve hours straight. I was curious to what it would actually be like. To my surprise, I was in the wheelchair for about 5 minutes and I absolutely hated it! I was suddenly slowed down to a snails pace and I was limited to a lonely path that very few other students were on. It was lonely in the elevator, no one there to talk to. It was quiet in the hallway with no other students around anymore as they all hightailed it outta here right when class was finished. Not me, I was crawling along, slow as molasses. I hated the fact that I could not just cruise on down the steps and out the door to my car when I wanted to leave campus. My upper arms were aching and my hands were red and sore within the first ½ hour of using the wheelchair. The initial excitement I had experienced was now rapidly being replaced with an intense feeling of anxiousness to get the next twelve hours over with as soon as possible.

Getting around on campus was not so bad. There were handicap accessible doors, bathrooms, telephones, water fountains and elevators that made using a wheelchair a bit smoother. The only major frustration I experienced was when I wanted to use the elevator to get back upstairs in the Kumm Building. I waited for about 2 minutes for the elevator to get to the basement level and when it finally opened, there stood about seven healthy, able-bodied college aged students. They just stood there quietly staring at me in the wheelchair as I said, "Oh wonderful, now I have to wait here even longer until this thing comes all the way back?" I didn't realize the impact that whole situation actually may have had on all of those people who were using the elevator yet appeared to be physically able to use the stairs. I hope that they all thought about what I had said and hopefully next time they will use the stairs, so that someone who really needs to utilize the elevator, can so without delay.

I had trouble getting the wheelchair into my car. It didn't fit into my trunk, so I jammed it into the backseat of my two-door car. I cannot imagine how difficult it is for someone paralyzed to get themselves into their vehicle and get the wheelchair in as well. It was difficult for me and I do not have any physical limitations. I wanted to make this experience as realistic as possible, so when I went to Valley View Mall to have lunch, I had my fiancé meet me at my car, so he could help me get the chair out. I hoisted myself into the chair and he wheeled me into the mall. Having someone push me in the wheelchair was something I could get used to. We ate lunch at Kate's Kitchen. It was a little tricky to get around inside the restaurant because the tables were sort of close together. I did manage to get myself a drink from the soda machine. It was nice to be able to do something on my own. I parked myself at a booth while my fiancé ordered the food. It was nice that the waitress brought the food to our table because it would have been very difficult for me to bring it to the table myself. I was glad that I had some assistance for this particular situation.

There was no way I could get into my house. Even if I had a ramp to get up the steps, I wouldn't have been able to get into the door because the landing on the top of my steps is just too small. I tried to use the wheelchair inside my house and it was very difficult to get around. There was not enough room to maneuver from room to room. It also was hard to adapt to the extra leeway needed for the wheelchair. I would be forced to move into a different home if I were permanently limited to using a wheelchair.

I was so happy when I finally finished my twelve hours of torture. This experience was one I will never forget. I never realized how difficult it really is to have limited physical abilities. I learned some valuable lessons from this and hopefully those people in the elevator learned something too!

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