

I'm Going to Let You in on a Secret



I'm going to let you in on a little secret: not everything about using a wheelchair is bad. I know, I know. That goes against popular thinking, but it's true. Of course, I'm not saying it should be anyone's goal to start using a chair. It's just that if it happens, you're most likely going to be fine. In fact, you can live a life that is every bit as fulfilling as our able-bodied, high-heel wearing, beach-walking counterparts.

This feeling struck home with me when I read a comment in an online MS support group where a newly diagnosed woman was expressing her fears, ending her note with "I just don't want to end up in a wheelchair."

Ouch! That was a real gut punch. My first reaction was to provide her with an education on political correctness, but since she was newly diagnosed, I gave her the benefit of the doubt for not knowing what she was saying.

First of all, using a wheelchair is by no means anyone's "end." In fact, for many people it can be a new beginning. Before transitioning to the full-time use of a chair, I used a walker to get around. This worked pretty well for a while, but I always had to worry about conserving my energy. As the mother of two young children, their safety was my priority. I wanted to make sure I could go out and do things with them without running out of energy. When I made the decision to start using a wheelchair full time, it made a significant improvement in the quality of my life and in the lives of my husband and kids.

Rather than being a sad, solemn experience, I found it to be quite liberating. It gave me so

much more freedom and opportunity. Without it, I wouldn't have been able to walk my kids to and from their classrooms, go with them on field trips or be a Brownie leader. Until a decision is made to use a wheelchair, it's impossible to fully realize the mental anguish and limitation of struggling beyond the point of practicality with a device you have outgrown. I was happy to no longer be missing out on opportunities and things that in the past I wasn't able to do because I was too worn-out.

Wheelchairs aren't the answer to everyone's struggle with fatigue and mobility. Honestly, those problems still exist, but to a much lesser extent. The physical and mental anguish of not being able to do things the way I want to are still there, but there's also satisfaction in knowing that I've been able to figure out other ways to get stuff done.

Secondly, people who use wheelchairs should not be looked upon as individuals who have given up or as those who should be pitied. The truth of the matter is that we are a very strong lot.

We have made the choice to not be burdened by the physical and mental stress of living in a body that doesn't work optimally, and instead have decided to focus on more fulfilling aspects of life, like friends, family, civic mindedness, curing cancer and catching the half yearly sale at Nordstrom.

While previously I may have been at home, exhausted, I'm now in the front of the line at Disneyland. I've done the grocery shopping, made dinner and am helping the kids with their homework. I no longer have to make the decision between doing a load of laundry and walking the dog.

Don't look at us with pity. Instead see us as smart, vibrant people, who have chosen to make the most of our lives. We are a strong, dynamic force to be reckoned with and should never be looked upon as lesser than.

Editor's Note: For help finding assistive equipment or mobility resources, use the Society's [Find Doctors and Resources Tool](#). Read about the experience of others on [Momentum Magazine](#).