

Spend a day in a wheelchair

Dear editor:

Every spring drivers need to be reminded to watch for children at play, cyclists and motorcycles. But those in wheelchairs, scooters as well as walkers are often overlooked. Although the government is working on legislation to enforce and improve handicap standards for businesses and public areas, there has been little change.

To really grasp the situation I challenge local councils and business people to actually spend a day in a wheelchair. But not the usual way, as paraplegic, which is difficult enough for most people. Therefore, one must assume roles of those with muscular and nervous diseases and disorders such as MS, MD, Parkinson's, Lou Gehrig's as well as such things as arthritis and stroke, to name a few.

Start with a wheelchair electric or manual adding gloves on the hands of 5 to 10 pounds (sports weights) and a secured seatbelt. Now, from your bed in the morning until bed time, try to follow your regular routine. Use banks, shop in stores, travel sidewalks and crosswalks and enter public buildings. For good measure, use the bus (if applicable) and take a taxi, be sure to enjoy the ride. Very quickly you will realize many access buttons for handicap people are too high, too far away, or in a corner of a confined space and sometimes behind the door you are trying to access. These are very difficult even with the aid of a cane. Many restaurants and businesses have large planters barricading the very button required to open the door. And oh those crosswalks, be very alert as drivers stop on the crosswalks ? coming to rolling and even jumping lights, especially when making right-hand turns. Remember, they are watching traffic and are in a hurry.

Simple things like managing bank card machines, washroom doors, cars, and garbage on sidewalks can, and yes even doggie dodo, suddenly seem like monumental tasks to overcome. Cluttered stores, with boxes of merchandise along narrow hallways and small restrooms will test your patience. To make matters worse, people who will crowd you and your wheelchair even with little children. With electric wheelchairs this puts them very much at risk as an occupied chair can weigh as much as 600 to 700 pounds.

To those with the brass to actually try this, it will be a glimpse of what many handicapped people endure, but also realize that they struggle 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Even as they try and sleep.

So as you are watching traffic and creeping up on crosswalks, please watch for children, motorcycles, cyclists, people on scooters, wheelchairs and walkers.

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