

This is how I roll!



By Terry Ingersoll

Several years ago I woke up and couldn't see out of my left eye. Several doctors' appointments and a Spinal Tap later I was diagnosed with MS (multiple sclerosis). My first thoughts were memories of my aunt who I don't remember without MS. I remember that my grandmother went to my aunt's house every day after work and was there most weekends. My grandmother helped my uncle bathe my aunt, take care of the four children, fix meals, clean the house and did whatever else needed to be done. My aunt was wheelchair bound and got to the point where she had to be tied to the chair- even her head- because she didn't have the strength to hold herself in a sitting position. My aunt had to be fed because she couldn't do it herself. She gradually lost all ability to speak. She weighed about 80 pounds at the time of her death. I was 14 years old.

I did not want MS. I immediately adopted the mantra that I had MS but it didn't have me. The mantra has helped me a lot. I was given a steroid shot to get rid of the infection in my optic nerve. My sight was restored in a few days. I was told that a loss of sight was the onset for my MS.

For many years, the only reminder that I had MS was shot day. Once a week I had to give myself a shot in a rotation of muscles (one week- the top of my right thigh,

next week- the side of my right thigh, next- the right arm, next- the left arm, next- the side of the left thigh, next- the top of the left thigh). On shot day I would take a pain reliever every four hours to keep a dreadful headache at bay.

Life went on as normal. I was busy with my family, church callings, friends, yard work, stitcheries, crocheting, art, writing, and whatever else came along. A few years ago I started noticing occasional dizzy spells that would last a microsecond. Then they would happen a little more often and last a little longer. Then I started noticing things like while walking I'd be turning, my knee would get the message but my foot wouldn't. Pretty soon I was holding on to a counter or chair or wall to keep my balance, then a cane was needed all the time. Then elbow canes were more helpful or someone's arm or walker. Then I needed to be pushed in a wheelchair.

Navigating Life:

After a couple years, declining balance found us purchasing a van with a ramp and wheelchair locks and hand controls. I was fitted for a motorized wheelchair. It reclined, tilted, lifted my feet, raised and had several speeds. The only thing I didn't have was rearview mirrors.

The tech who was helping me get the chair to best fit my needs, pushed the horn button -beep beep- he looked at my husband and said that means get her a Pepsi, my grandkids love that feature.

My husband sewed foot straps out of old tow straps for me. The loop fits rather snugly on my foot and the top of the strap is pinned to my pants on the front upper thighs. Those straps help me move my legs and position my feet to help me stand etc.

Navigating the world in a wheelchair has been a learning experience -to say the least. ADA means just about anything. I have been in bathrooms that require an 8 point turn to get in, another eight point turn to turn back around past the now closed door, to make another eight point turn to get in the stall. Many grab bars have toilet paper dispensers above them -hard to use the grab bar, most only have a vertical grab bar -a horizontal one helps so much also. I can't reach the soap in many bathrooms and the bathroom doors are heavy. Many ADA approved bedrooms have headboards that are tall, solid and attached to the wall. I would think that reason would tell designers and inspectors that if a person can't use their legs to walk, they can't use their legs to turn in bed. My headboard at home is so helpful. I can grab and pull on the turned bars, the side and the top.



On a vacation, my husband and I checked into our ADA room. The bathroom door opened to the right, barely clearing the front of the toilet, and stopping along the side of the tub. There was no way of getting into the tub -with a vertical bar in it -without the door being closed. The only space for the wheelchair was in the doorway pulled up to the front of the toilet. There was nothing to hold onto to transfer from the wheelchair to the

toilet. We checked with the desk to see if there was a different ADA room available to check out. The room we had was the only one in the hotel. When we mentioned the problems with the room the desk clerk said “I'm sorry. I can send up extra pillows” Really- a pillow will fix everything? Maybe the pillow was going to go on the floor for me to land on when I fall.

Retirement and Covid:

My husband retired, covid hit, and I became wheelchair bound all in a matter of months. Life changed drastically. Through it all we tried our best to keep our traditions. Family activities have been very important to us. We've been able to keep them going -sometimes making small changes to accommodate my lack of mobility. Time with friends, church attendance, shopping, doctor's appointments, etc, have been accomplished also.

Our ‘Wheelchairs’ come in all shapes and sizes:

Just like installing a grab bar doesn't necessarily help a mobility problem, telling someone to ‘deal with it’ doesn't help someone with mental illness or a package of tums doesn't help someone with food allergies. I encourage each of us to be slow to jump to conclusions

and slow to anger. Let's be more patient, more tolerant and more knowledgeable.

As you can see, being in a wheelchair isn't just a small inconvenience. It is a multi-feature challenge. I described some of my wheelchair challenges. We all have wheelchairs (big challenges). One of mine is visible. Keep in mind that everyone has a lot to deal with -physical, mental, emotional, and relationship, financial, etc. Each person has a personal combination of wheelchairs. I am finding more and more -the most effective way to deal with my 'wheelchairs' is to help others with theirs. As we uplift and encourage each other a genuine strength grows in each of us. As we serve one another as our heavenly father has asked us to -we find that what seemed helpless becomes very endurable. We are able to look back at the hard path we have traveled, and we can see many, many blessings.

Positivity:

So, how am I managing to be so positive? Let me first say that I have moments of frustration, hopelessness and "just let me take this (can't walk) off for 15 minutes-please". So, back to what helps me, leaning on my mantra that 'I have MS but it doesn't have me' I have decided that

if I had to be in a chair I would make it as fun as I could
When I would go places I would notice that the kids
would watch me maneuver in my chair. Often, I would go
over to a child and let them honk the horn, raise my chair
or recline my chair a bit. They would smile soooo
preciously.

I use a sense of humor regularly. When people ask
me if it is hard to be in a wheelchair, I usually don't give a
pity party answer. I usually say something like "I miss
driving the motorcycle, getting into my daughter's house,
getting on my roof to service the air conditioner, (all of
which are very true) then I add "about the only thing I
don't miss is weeding".

It's easy to sit in my chair and make a list of everything I
CAN'T do. I tried to find things that I CAN do. I work on
crocheted and embroidery projects for family members. I
send uplifting and clean humor text to family and several
friends. I organize service projects so -I can still
contribute.

Sense of humor:

I often ask people if they want to race. After meetings
at church, I raise my chair so I can be eye level with
people. One of the guys in my ward teases me about

driving high. One time while talking to my friend I was telling her about helping my granddaughter face and overcome challenges, my friend said “that's how you roll”. Her “go to” about anybody is “that's how you roll”. Then she looked at me as we both realized that I roll. That became my new mantra “that's how I roll”.

I've had some scares as I've learned to go over bumps safely. One time I didn't pay attention and drove off a sidewalk and fell as my chair tipped. Luckily -no it was a miracle- I got some scratches and no other injuries. Many people were close by and helped me back in my chair, I now know that my chair has a fly button -but it doesn't have a land button.

One Sunday at church I looked at the posted hymn numbers. One was 255. It struck me that 255 was the prefix of our phone number when I was a child. I looked in the hymnbook and saw the very familiar Carry On. That became a special reminder to happily endure as best as I can-carry on.

Simple tasks turn into big efforts:

Halloween is hard for me. Getting to the door takes at least two to three minutes usually and opening it and distributing candy takes great effort. I don't want to

participate so I go to our ward trunk or treat activity and give out candy there. I play monster mash over and over while the lights on my chair sync to the music and my husband passes out candy. We also go to families' homes who have children at home. We give them several pieces of candy and explain that we won't be doing trick or treat on Halloween night.

My grandson found a video of a wheelchair with a snowplow, I'm afraid that if I let my husband put one on my chair, most of the time I will be sitting on the couch while one of the family or another is on my chair plowing snow all through the neighborhood.

Support System:

Throughout the years I have made many friends and I keep in touch with most of them quite regularly. If anyone ever needed something, I would do my best to get it done, Now, with my limitations, I find someone who can help me help a friend. I call it volun-told. My family and friends are very helpful and supportive. One of the things we've discussed is that "if Satan thinks that me being in a wheelchair is going to level the playing field -he's wrong". Satan will NOT win. My son suggests that I run over Satan with my wheelchair.

When it became evident that I would be in a wheelchair I thought I would organize a fast with my family and friends to ask for the use of my legs to be restored. Heavenly father told me that it would take more faith for us to go through this experience than the faith needed to heal me. I had heartfelt discussions with many family members and some friends. They were all willing to support me and do whatever it takes to help me through the difficulty. We thought of the scripture John 9:2-3 which gave us a hopeful perspective.

“And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

Even though it's only been a year and a half since I chose to endure the trial, we've seen many miracles and blessings that we feel are a result of increased faith and knowledge gained by going through the experiences associated with my physical handicap.

Due to my mobility issues I am not able to wear a dress. One time recently when I was serving in the Temple, I was being assisted by some of the Sisters that

were there. One of them said ‘hang on a minute’ and walked into the other room, came back with the custom made apron skirt that would go over my pants to make it look and feel more like a skirt. When I was done with what I was doing I came to return the apron skirt and they said it was mine to keep. What a great blessing and support

Relying on the Lord:

Gospel perspective, family, friends, and humor help. Sometimes the pain, frustration and fear push me into a ‘just throw me in the garbage’ frame of mind. That's when I really need the strength of others. I really wish I knew what my future held. I don't want to become an invalid. I fear that I might fall and hit my head and die. Or any number of painful and/or debilitating scenarios. Then I think of what the savior went through on the cross. If he was willing to endure nails in his palms and wrists and feet and the crown of thorns on his head, then I should be willing to endure what will be asked of me.

I'm trying to build my trust in knowing that God knows what will be for my good and that he will never ask me to face anything I cannot endure. Heavenly father understands things perfectly... I do not. One conference

speaker called it Mortal Myopia. I asked, “why did you take the use of my legs away”? I could do so much more with my legs. I occasionally see something that has resulted from my new condition. Something that I would not have been able to accomplish with the use of my legs.

Another hymn that I've adopted and adapted as a spiritual one for me is I'll go where you want me to go - I'll roll where you want me to go. D&C 122:7



Just like this lift raises me physically, The Lord will raise me Spiritually, Emotionally, Mentally, and so much more.

Serving others:

One day my husband and I were at lunch with a son. After watching me interact with some kids, my son jokingly suggested that we put motorcycle lights on my chair. I LOVED the idea and asked my husband to put lights on my chair. Once the lights were on I'd go around the neighborhood with the lights syncing to music on my playlist. I would also approach a child, turn the lights on, and let the child turn the color dial to change the colors of the lights, they loved it!

One time my husband and I were in line at a wedding reception. I noticed that the young boy ahead of us was getting fidgety. I turned on my lights and let him turn the color wheel. He played with my lights occasionally as we slowly made our way through the long line. After greeting the bridal party my husband and I sat at a table to enjoy refreshments. Soon my little friend came over and asked to do my lights. Then he went back to his family. My friend was back to play with my lights then he went back to his family. This happened several times. My friend came back and whined, where's my mommy? I said "I don't know, should we go look for her"? He immediately quit crying and said "yes, I'll drive" and he grabbed the joystick. I grabbed the joystick and said I'll drive. He went back to mommy.

Recently a friend in the neighborhood called me. The 4-year-old neighbor girl had just been there asking where the lady with the chair with the lights on it was. She just got new shoes with lights in them, and she wanted to show them to me. The girl had seen me in my friend's driveway chatting a few weeks back and I had turned on my syncing lights and she danced to the music.

I was at lunch in a food court in a large three-story mall one day. I noticed a girl about five years old wandering alone. I thought I ought to help her find her parents. I followed her and caught up with her just before she got to the elevators. I started talking to her. I distracted her by letting her push buttons on my chair. Soon her mother, with a tiny baby and a toddler, walked up and declared, with great relief, “there you are”. The five-year-old hugged her mother. Who knows what would have happened if she had gotten on an elevator. Even in a wheelchair I was able to help.

With Faith, we can endure all things:

We know that there are great and dreadful days. We see the dreadful all around us but, if we look, we can see great all over -family, friends, the beauties of nature, comforts

and conveniences, kindness of others, churches, temples, answers to prayers...

Dealing with your wheelchairs

The scriptures tell of several times when people are led to leave their home and move through experiences where they grow in ways they couldn't have had they stayed where they were.

Lehi was instructed to move his family into the wilderness. They left the known, familiar, and comfortable and made their way into the unknown, when things were hard Laman and Lemuel wanted to go back. Nephi worked to overcome - made a bow, hunted for food, built a ship.

In a similar story Lot's wife kept looking back to Sodom. Apparently, she didn't want to leave. She turned into a pillar of salt she couldn't progress. Often times we want to go back to- when I could walk, or before the injury, or before the cancer, or back to my old house, or back to the way things used to be etc etc. but as we follow the Lord's promptings he will guide us and help us grow into the people he knows we can become and through those experiences we can serve others so they can grow and become the people Heavenly Father intended them to become.

As we find ourselves traveling through our personal wildernesses (disease, abuse, mental illness, death of a loved one, depression, etc.) we would do well to follow the example of Nephi rather than always want to live in the past like Laman and Lemuel. Nephi would encourage us to get whatever medical, clinical, technical and mechanical etc. support and help we can.

Sometimes we want to return to Jerusalem like Laman and Lemuel. Fine- have a short pity party and get back to work making the best of your new situation (the wilderness). President Nelson encourages us to ‘think Celestial’. Some ways to do that are to A- ponder what am I learning and what are others are learning, B-seeking encouragement from others, C- encourage others as they deal with their wheelchair.

Going through the wilderness will help us become a better person. So D- look at the progress you have made. Every day make the choice time and time and time and time again to do what it takes to progress. Don't let the past have such a hold on you that, like Lot's wife, you turn into a pillar of salt that cannot progress.