

BREAKINGBARRIERS

everybody belongs ■ everybody serves

Fall 2020 | Theme: Traveling with a Disability

Traveling with a disability can be challenging, if not difficult, and the memories of those adventures can be instructive, hurtful, hilarious, and more. People with various disabilities share some of their experiences in this issue.

A Preaching, Traveling Quadriplegic

by Joel Vander Molen

Second CRC, Pella IA

When I was three, my family and I were in a car accident that resulted in a high-level spinal cord injury that left me unable to control anything below my shoulders or breathe on my own. Traveling with ventilators and all my daily medical supplies isn't easy, but my parents and I have taken several trips in the past 35 years.

One such trip came once I had received my license to exhort from CRC Classis Central Plains in 2017. A pastor friend invited

me to preach at his church, but his church is near Louisville, Kentucky, about 550 miles from home.

Since I depend on a machine to breathe, I need to have someone awake with me at all times should problems arise. My parents can't cover 24 hours a day and travel, so I needed one of my caregivers to help at night. Planning for four busy people to go away together takes careful planning, including several months of looking at schedules and hotels. However, just a week before we were scheduled to depart, I unexpectedly spent a few days in the hospital and feared that our plans would no longer work.

Thankfully, God allowed a quick recovery, and we continued preparing to leave. Packing my supplies for just a few days away requires many bags and checking that everything is included. It took several days to pack everything I would need and get my luggage, along with my parents' and caregiver's, packed in the vehicle.

Sermon planning also took time and prayer, but I reviewed on Friday evening before we drove all day Saturday to get to our hotel. Once we arrived, it was good to see my friend and his wife again after a few years apart, but the evening was spent on planning logistics for the services I would be leading.

When I arrived Sunday morning, I was glad to see the church was easily accessible, and the stage had a ramp so I didn't need to preach from the floor. Even with the difficulty in planning, God allowed me to present his Word twice that morning. I have preached since then, but all within Iowa with much less trip coordination required.

Lovely Cruise, Sprinkled with Disappointment

by Syl Scorza

Trinity Reformed Church, Orange City, IA

I am a paraplegic. In 2004, my wife Phyl and I signed up for a Holland-America round-trip cruise through the Baltic Sea from Copenhagen, Denmark, to St. Petersburg, Russia.

We flew from Boston, where three male attendants tried to put me in an aisle chair; getting in each other's way, they ended up putting me on the floor of the plane. The first stop in Europe was Schiphol Airport in the Netherlands, where two female attendants put me in an aisle chair as smoothly as silk. No injuries!

During a wait between our arrival in Denmark and the cruise, we explored almost five miles of Copenhagen's pedestrian-only avenue in the rain, a coast drizzle that we tried to ignore. No complications.

While on the cruise, in Tallinn, Estonia, I had the roughest riding surface imaginable for a wheelchair—cobblestones. Since the country's 18th-century royal palace was slightly less than a mile from the dock, we persisted. We enjoyed our tour of the town square, overlooked by the palace, and even found some English-speaking tourists.

Our main stop was St. Petersburg, the former capital of Russia with magnificent museums and Queen Catherine's gorgeous palace. With our ship anchored in the Neva River, we signed up to go ashore. We were deeply disappointed that Russian authorities would not allow me off the ship because no accessible taxis were available. Phyl collected booklets with many pictures and quite a few historical stories, but that didn't come close to an actual visit. I thanked the Lord that she got to see it, and I still insist I was in Russia, sitting on a ship in one of the country's famous rivers.

In Helsinki, Finland, an accessible taxi took us downtown. I was eager to see the Finnish culture because my best chess-playing friend is Finnish-American from Des Moines, Iowa, and one of my first international chess-by-mail ventures had assigned me a player in northern Finland. We were treated with great friendliness in the capital.

We were allowed to get close enough to the palace of the ruling monarch in Stockholm that we got the sense that the royal family was sensitive to their responsibilities to share the daily activities of the people of Sweden.

We enjoyed a memorable cruise across northern Europe, and Holland-America apologized that I missed seeing St. Petersburg. We encourage disabled people to do lots of traveling!

The Challenges of Motion Sickness

by Michèle Gyselinck

First CRC, Montreal, QB

For me, traveling mostly involves managing motion sickness. So whether I ride public transit, take a car, or fly, I have to make sure the solids in my stomach outweigh the liquids. Otherwise, I'll get sick.

I have to avoid looking at my phone or computer while traveling. Instead, I spend a lot of time looking out the window at well-known sights, whether it's the regular route I take to get to the mall or the sky over the wing of a plane, because where I sit has a bearing on whether I throw up or not. According to the TV miniseries *Mayday*, if you want to survive a crash, the safest seat on a plane is at the back, but I usually don't worry about that.

For me, getting through a flight without throwing up my lunch is more important than surviving a crash because the worst

thing that ever happened to me on a plane is throwing up, and I do that even on solid ground. But it is a nuisance, and I try to avoid it as much as possible. After throwing up all over myself during my first trip by air to Grand Rapids and having to wait until I got to my destination to change, I have also started to take a change of clothes along in my carry-on bag in case that happens again.

Of course, I take medication along to control this motion sickness, the sort that induces drowsiness because it lasts 12 hours. If you add that to the sedative in my antipsychotic, I get so sleepy that I feel like a zombie. Although all I want is to crash into bed, I still have to get home from the airport before I can do that. Still, I count my blessings, because traveling for many other people living with disabilities is so much more complicated than it is for me.

Traveling Blind

by Tom Vos

Crossroads Fellowship CRC, Des Moines, IA

As a blind person, I was nervous about traveling alone by air from Des Moines to meet my wife in Chicago and make the return trip, but it went smoothly. The airlines have done a good job of helping people with disabilities make it to their

destinations, and cell phones have become a very helpful tool for connecting with people at the right times and places.

My daughter dropped me off at the Des Moines airport and left me at the ticket counter. As soon as I was checked in, an attendant came and led me up through security to my gate. She thoughtfully asked how she could best lead me, and I told her it would work best if I could hold onto her elbow. Someone else assisted me down to the plane, and the flight attendant brought me to my assigned seat. I had some cash in my pocket to thank each person who helped me. I sat back to enjoy the flight.

Upon arrival in Chicago, an attendant met me at the gate and brought me out to the front door. He patiently waited with me until my wife came to pick me up. For this trip I had just a carry-on bag, so I did not need to deal with baggage claim.

The return trip went equally well, with my pastor picking me up at the airport and dropping me off at home. We live life in community, and I am thankful for those who help me do what I cannot do for myself.

Editor's Note

Planning, Patience, Flexibility

I met a man years ago who prepared for a weeklong trip on his motorcycle by sticking a toothbrush in his back pocket. For most of us, travel takes more preparation, especially when one of the travelers has a disability.

When our family took trips with all our kids, my wife, Bev, used her excellent planning skills to pack two suitcases for our oldest daughter Nicole, who has multiple disabilities and medical needs. Bev put the usual stuff in one and filled the other with supplies—cannulas, probes, tubing, syringes, medications—so that we had all we needed for Nicole's everyday needs and for potential emergencies. We considered accessibility of our destination attractions and accommodations, proximity to major hospitals, air quality, and more. Still, we enjoyed traveling to the Poconos and the Rockies, to Key West (Florida) and Mackinac Island (Michigan). With good planning, patience, and flexibility, we made these trips work and had great times together.

RCA and CRC Disability Concerns produces *Breaking Barriers* to provide our readers with insights into the lives of people with various disabilities. We tell these stories to encourage understanding. In this issue, we hear how a few of us make

travel work. Almost no one can grab a toothbrush and travel for a week. Some of us have to do a lot of advance planning and preparation, but most of us can enjoy travel, experiencing God's gift of cultures and creation—across town or across an ocean.

—Mark Stephenson

Upcoming Themes

Winter 2021—Unexpected access.

The coronavirus pandemic actually has removed barriers for some people with disabilities, allowing access to communities and spaces that were inaccessible before. If this has been your experience during our long stretch of isolation and distancing, please tell us your story (400 words) of unexpected access **by October 30.**

Spring 2021—Race and disability. Daniel Prude might still be alive if he had not been black or disabled. If you are Black, Indigenous, or a person of color and live with a disability, please tell us your story (400 words) **by January 29, 2021.**

Awards and Past Issues

This newsletter and the Disability Concerns blog (network.crcna.org/disability), co-published by CRC and RCA Disability Concerns ministries, received two awards from the Associated Church Press this year: for the Best in Class category, the Award of Merit for *Breaking Barriers*, and in the blog category, for the Disability Concerns blog on the Network.

In addition to this summer issue, find back issues of *Breaking Barriers* and editions in Español and in 한국어, plus a link for electronic subscriptions, at either the CRC website (www.crcna.org/disability) or RCA website (www.rca.org/disability).

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