

ampus, I jumped at the chance to participate. I
 All my activities would be done from the
 bathroom.

This eating what I want may be harder than it seems.
 First of all, I can't reach the bagels. I reach up and my fingers barely scrape the bottom tray, where all the plump, mouth watering morsels are located. I look around and realize that no one is really noticing that I can't reach my bagel. I stretch and reach and adjust myself, but to no avail.



So, I move to the pizza counter. Can't reach the pizza. Coffee? Nope. Soup? Too far back and too risky. Salad? Can't reach the tomatoes. Finally, Russ (the manager) comes over to assist me. He explains that the problems in the cafeteria are a problem to most wheelchair-bound students and hopefully with enough complaints something can be done about it.

Apparently, on a busy day a person in a wheelchair can't maneuver through the cafeteria at all - especially when people block people from moving by putting their chairs in the aisle-way.

So today, I've come to the conclusion that Clackamas isn't a very friendly place when it comes to hungry people in wheelchairs.

1:00 p.m. - Today is Valentines' Day. My boyfriend, Jeremy, made me tie a huge (and I do mean huge) heart balloon with a dove attached to it on the back of my chair. So now, not only do people stare at me because I'm in a wheelchair, but now they can see me coming a mile away with this gigantic balloon floating behind me.

I find this more embarrassing than crashing into the wall at the Barlow Ramp of Death. Sigh.

DAY FIVE:

1:20 p.m. - A friend of mine says that he noticed himself treating me differently since I had become wheelchair bound. "I'm more patient, more eager to help you...it's like your disability makes you more intriguing." Some of my other friends said that they found themselves annoyed by having to wait for me to get situated when we went places together.

I have become kind of fond of my wheelchair. It's a granny-chair (not a cool sporty one that I have become quite jealous of), but it has served me well these past five days. I'm not sure what it will be like to make that transition back to walking to my classes. I won't have to sit in the back of the class anymore. I can reach my food at the cafeteria. And I won't have to wait until I get home to use the bathroom.

However, there will be something missing when I leave the chair behind. Maybe it'll be the determination I learned when I encountered a hard situation or the sensitivity I gathered toward people who will spend the rest of their lives in a chair. Someone mentioned to me that anyone can end up in a chair at anytime during his or her life. Tomorrow, I will be able to leave the chair at home, but maybe, someday, I won't have that option. I just need to keep in mind that this was not just a story, but a moment of realization at how unprepared I would be if God took the use of my legs away.

Those of us who can walk, take advantage of this simple activity. You never realize what you have had until it's gone.



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY TERYL HOFFMAN-FIGGINS

Teryl Hoffmann-Figgins, pictured at the Northfork of the Clackamas River, loves skiing (water & snow), 4-wheeling, rafting and other activities although she has been restricted to a wheelchair since 1988.

Never giving up in the face of challenges

SHELBI WESCOTT
 Feature Editor

The accident

Teryl Hoffmann-Figgins, a student at Clackamas, loves to go rafting, skiing (both snow and water), and 4-wheeling. She plays rugby, basketball and tennis.

She is also in a wheelchair.

In July of 1988, while on her honeymoon, Teryl and her new husband were in a four-wheeling accident that left her with only partial use of her legs. Despite her new challenges, Teryl pushed forward to receive her license to become a Physical Therapist Assistant.

In 1994, while transferring a patient to her bed, the woman slipped and gave Teryl whiplash, causing severe spinal cord damage.

The accident left Teryl paralyzed. "I woke up in the hospital," Teryl recalled, "unable to move. I was devastated... I felt like I was trapped in a useless body. My whole identity was wrapped up in the things I did, not who I was on the inside."

Admitted into rehabilitation, Teryl regained partial use of her arms and she learned how to maneuver in a wheelchair. She slowly started becoming more active.

"My siblings weren't going to let me slow down, so I didn't have a choice. You learn to do things differently, being in a wheelchair isn't an excuse," Teryl said. "Over time I've learned that it wasn't me who changed, it was my perspective."

In 1999 Teryl was honored as the Oregon Disability Sports Coach of the Year. She coaches children in the WOW (Winners on Wheels) program and teaches them that they can accomplish anything they set their hearts and minds to.

"If they know that they can do something, then they will," Teryl said. "They've heard their whole lives 'Oh, you can't do that, you're in a wheelchair,' and people don't understand that people in chairs can do almost anything a walking per-

son can.

"And people don't realize that anyone can end up in a wheelchair at anytime. No one is immune."

Life at Clackamas

"Being in a wheelchair is like being in a different culture. And what would you do if you wanted to learn about another culture? Ask them questions," Teryl commented. She

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 Teryl Hoffman-Figgins
 Student

noticed that people will assume they shouldn't help a disabled person in need if they want help, but all it takes is asking them a question.

"I waited in the cafeteria at the bagel case one time, to see how long it would take for someone to ask if I needed help," Teryl recounts. "People would come in and reach over me to their bagel, others would squeeze in front of me. Some were annoyed that I was taking up room. It was ridiculous."

"I tell people that it's like this: would you help a woman pushing a baby-stroller? A man carrying a load of books in his arms? You bet you would. Why is a person in a wheelchair different?"

Teryl has overcome many challenges at Clackamas during her time as a student. When she first started attending, there weren't any power doors, there wasn't an elevator in Randall Hall and there wasn't wheelchair access into the cafeteria.

While Clackamas has made huge strides in becoming more accessible to the disabled, it still has a lot of room to grow.

"The community center is horrible to maneuver around in and the maps to the buildings are set at a height for people who are walking around, not someone in a chair," Teryl said.

While Clackamas meets the code for handicap access, "the code was written by someone on two feet."

Teryl hopes to see extracurricular activities geared toward the disabled and making PE courses available for people in chairs (Teryl wanted to take the skiing class, but there wasn't any way to make it work.)

A final thought

"Limits are what others put on you. Challenges are what you put on yourself. And boundaries are what you use to tell the difference," Teryl remarked.

Teryl has never let her disability slow her down.

"Being in a wheelchair has reminded me to appreciate the little things in life. I have begun to realize that it's not what I do in life that matters, it is who I am on the inside that truly defines the real me."



Teryl skiing at the "Top Of Texas", on Mount Hood.

