

For over 20 years I have walked with help of a cane thinking this was due to the very extreme lifestyle I had lived. From broken bones to artificial joints, even rebuilding of left side of my face and eye, I have endured many surgeries. Every few years it seemed to get a little worse and many doctors had no idea what was wrong with me. I had surgeries on my legs, MRI's , scans, dozens of x-rays with no clear diagnosis. 17 years ago I had a TIA better known as a mini stroke. At this time a heart specialist told me I needed a Cardio Inversion to reset the timing of my heart. I woke up with cracked ribs and massive burns on my left side and chest. I was told that I flat lined and took 4 defibrillations, with 3 on maximum power to bring me back to life. I actually was brought back from death. From that, I was referred to another heart specialist who did a total of 4 radio wave ablations on my heart over a period of 2 years. On the third one I actually woke up and tried to sit up and I still remember that experience to this day. This procedure at first appeared to help but didn't last more than couple months before my heart returned back to full atrial fibrillation, which I still live with to this day. 15 years ago the pain started in my legs and, with no answers, I was given progressively larger doses of very strong pain killers and massive handfuls of other medications. At times it felt like gasoline had been poured on my legs and set alight.

During all this I kept working and, with no answers from doctors, I took the prescribed medications and stopped seeking medical help as I had enough. I lived only to fill my days with work, and work I did from 100 to 130 hrs a week. Relationships were destroyed and no real life, just work and pills. I made a name for myself in the construction industry building bridges, gradients and other types of civil construction as a no-crap-get-it-done Supervisor, who never gave up and kicked butt and got the job done no matter the obstacles. Then, I was offered more money in a project manager position in a civil solar energy company, building sites of 100 acres or more. I was able to move to Quinte West and be close to my mother as my father had passed fairly young. This was good, but I was never at home as these solar sites took me all over the world. In a 3-year period I slept in my own bed maybe 6 nights in total.

This leads me to the two loves of my life, second being the Philippines and first being who I found in the Philippines: my beautiful, amazing and supportive wife Arlene. It was in the Philippines, while working on one of my many solar site trips there, that I had a bad accident. In the blink of an eye, I could no longer walk and lost all feeling in my right leg, most of the feeling in my left leg, as well as everything from uncontrolled shaking in right arm, incontinence and partial loss of some senses and pain, like I was on fire. No drugs on offer even put a dent in this pain. The doctors in the Philippines had no idea what was wrong with me. After a week in Filipino hospital and the involvement of many doctors, my insurance company arranged a mercy flight home and with hesitation the Filipino doctors signed for me to fly. After a quick stop in Hong Kong to ensure I would survive the flight home, 24 hrs later I was home in Canada. Alone. Because of the government at the time, I had to kiss my new wife good bye on the tarmac in Manila. Once home, I again saw many doctors and in the hospital it was nothing but test after test, still providing no answers to my condition. Until one day I met this amazing doctor who started tests on me like I had never had before. He started testing my brain, my brain stem, and my upper spinal cord. It was hard to believe, but after the tests were over he diagnosed me: I had the rarest form of Multiple Sclerosis, and the accident had made me progress 15 years in the blink of an eye. My nerves in my brain stem and spine are no longer protected, and they short circuited and died - never to come back. I have 27 lesions in my brain and 17 in my spine. He also told me I have had MS for over 25 yrs, quite possibly born with it. The doctor was amazed, he could not believe my drive as I should not have been able to do all the things I had done prior to my accident. I also found out all the drugs I had been taking were only killing me faster as there is no cure, no medication, they don't even know what causes MS and that I just needed to accept my fate. Which is: this condition is a terminal and progressive disease, and only by keeping healthy and strong will I be able to delay being bed ridden and stay alive. I was given my `Frankenstein` wheelchair (now used by Lisa Marie of Dominion Assistive Dogs for training purposes) and sent home to my inaccessible apartment, alone. It was the love of my wife, on skype with me sometimes 24hrs a day (she even watched me sleep) for 9 more months before she was allowed in Canada.

Thanks to my mother Mary Watts and unending support of Reverend Steve Timpson and social worker Andrew Ward, without which I would not have made it, and probably not be here today.

By the time my wife arrived I was down to less than 150lbs, and had been in the hospital a few times with issues from heart problems to bad falls, where Quinte West fire fighters, paramedics and OPP had saved my life. One fall was so bad just trying to bathe; I fell on the side of tub which had pushed my bowel into my chest cavity, almost touching my heart. After an unbelievable fight and cost, finally my wife Arlene arrived to be by my side. Instantly my life changed to where I am now; stronger, more determined than ever, and very happy to be alive. The only pills I take now are two heart pills to keep my heart rate under control, and lots of vitamins. I don't drink, I eat healthy and even my expensive electric wheelchair is a coat rack at home - only used when I cook so I don't spill boiling sauces on my legs again. I love to cook. Life is difficult and challenging, but there is no alternative. Some days are very hard but I don't think about my disability or what my future holds. I accept each day as a blessing, and I know just how beautiful life truly is.

I now see the world differently. Through all this, the one constant that still affects me multiple times every single day is: accessibility, or lack thereof. So I started investigating why. Being in construction, especially civil construction, I could not understand why this was such an issue. When I found out just how many people it affects, first in Quinte West, Prince Edward County and Northumberland, then in all of Ontario and Canada, and then the world, I was perplexed. I knew from my experience in construction that it costs no more, or very little, and even in a lot of cases less expense just to be accessible to all citizens.

The numbers are huge. There are 1.8 billion people worldwide with mobility disadvantages. This equates to the size of China! In Ontario alone there is over 1.7million people facing accessibility barriers, and this is from STATS CAN (note that this number does not include those under 15 yrs of age and was only surveyed once back in 2012). Now it is estimated that the numbers are over 2 billion worldwide and 1.9 million in Ontario alone

with the largest concentration being in Southern Ontario. Per capita the largest is in South Eastern Ontario. When friends and family of disabled are included it represents \$1.3 billion of disposable income, these numbers are going to double within the next 15 years with the aging population. Any given business can increase its bottom line by over 15% by becoming accessible. It has been proven that those who welcome the disabled also welcome all accessibility challenged people, from parents with small children, the elderly and the temporarily disabled.

I could tell you about the thousands of illegal and dangerous constructions built contrary to the laws and regulations spelled out under The Human Rights Act, including regulations governing Customer Service, Design of Public Spaces, Public Transportation, and the Access Ontario Disability Act, and various building codes, to mention a few. Pointing this out solves nothing, and from personal experience dealing with those responsible, it only creates anger and resentment towards the disabled. I now understand why: in most cases its either due to lack of education, or believing its too expensive, or the `it's good enough` attitude. I refuse to be negative and have come to realize that until it's your turn to spend your life disabled, or a loved one becomes disabled, you simply don't understand. I'm guilty of this myself as I never truly understood - **but I get it now.**

Look around you. The statistics say one out of five people will be dealing with an accessibility situation sooner rather than later, if not already. This is why Wheelchair Friendly Solutions was established. We are about low cost solutions for inclusion, offering education, planning and engineering for access and mobility. The short time I've been in this chair, nothing is clearer than this: it's not about disability, only ability. Since becoming wheelchair bound, I have had to completely change my life. I now teach contract law, project management and health and safety law at Loyalist College; as well I'm accessibility project manager in charge of the entire campus. I've become an activist, going to Ottawa and Toronto more than once for MP, MPP, and local government meetings. I've also spoken to the Department of National Defense, and both the Carleton and Ryerson Universities. I have talked with Jodi Mitik, Rick Hanson, the Chamber of

Commerce's from Brighton to Kingston, various City Hall's, and attended Access Committee meetings. I have personally been to over 250 businesses. I have been very busy.

I believe education, innovative thinking and planning is the only way to get the message out that there are very low cost solutions for small business's accessibility requirements. Most situations do not need the onerous job of digging up and re-pouring concrete, or the installation of automatic doors, both of which can cost thousands of dollars. We have hundreds of solutions for small and large businesses, organizations, events and government, and we offer the best, most extensive AODA education program in Canada. We also want to build a local facility in the future to construct mobility devices at the lowest possible cost in a wheelchair friendly environment, and have started talks with local car dealership to install assistive devices in vehicles and provide them at a reasonable price. This is just the beginning. We are now looking for and talking with investors and those who know how important this is and want to be involved, as well as companies, organizations and government around the world who care. It's not just the law in Canada, it is the right thing to do. **We have the duty to accommodate.**

But accessibility remains a daily struggle, one of the reasons 62% of people in wheelchairs are shut-ins. That is why I have decided to fight for this cause. These people cannot be invisible any longer. Together, we can build a world where everyone has access. It's not just the right thing to do, it is profitable to accommodate, and that is where Wheelchair Friendly Solutions can help. We have a great team of experienced business people lending their time to getting this new corporation off the ground. We have created a well prepared Business Plan and our intention will always be a value driven one, with low costs so we can deliver modestly priced but high value goods to our accessibly-challenged society. Corporate greed does not work here. Accessibility and inclusion is a given human right, and that can only be achieved by a large number of organizations meeting these legal requirements with a cost effective outlay. The fines and penalties are in place; if your place of business is not compliant the first fine is \$1,500. In contrast, we have determined most situations can become compliant with

an investment under \$700 and training. We can provide low cost accessible solutions to make your premises accessible to everyone, and if required we can also provide training to make your premises AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) compliant. We want to see a world where the wheelchair is invisible, not the person in it.

I want to thank the one single most important person who, without her, none of this would be possible: my amazing wife Arlene who is everything I am not and so much more. Thanks also to the local Quinte West businesses and organizations who have embraced and supported the accessibility obstacles, such as Dapp's Restaurant, Willow Publishing, Bruinix Jewellers, Barbers Flowers, Impressive T shirts, Bayview Auto, Pipers Pub, Dinkels Restaurant, Quinte West Fire Hall, CIBC Trenton and many more. There are still hurdles to overcome as in any start up business, but we will not stop, and will not go away. We are a formidable team that is growing faster every single day, and I will use my last breath to educate and do the only thing I know, that is to never quit.

As I see it, there is no Disability, only Ability.

Ask yourself, are you Wheelchair Friendly?