

Guest Blog: Making Our Home Accessible, Pt. 2: A Room-By-Room Tour

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Many accessibility explorers have come before us and charted our course, and in this day and age, we are lucky to have had great innovators in the field of assistive technology. Many people in similar circumstances have also innovated purely out of necessity. Advances for we "differently-abled" are achieved every day, but there is much left to discover and share. It's an evolving process. We are always searching for the optimal solutions to the obstacles placed before us.

Here are some my family found, room by room.

Closet

We attached a nice curtain inside the closet with a pull-back to hold it out of the way when it wasn't necessary. They designed my closet to be expansive and roomy so I can drive in, access needed items, and turn around to exit. It reminded me of a Barbie closet. The more I talked about it, I realized that's what I actually wanted! I found a reasonably-priced crystal chandelier on a shopping website. After a bit of coaxing, I got it! Which didn't take much, because my husband loves me or he didn't want to hear me beg anymore. (Either way.) Yeah, I got my, or I should say we got our, Barbie closet! ... Or should I say we got our Barbie and Ken closet? Although pink walls were out of the question.

We should've constructed it even larger. It has easily reached maximum capacity, jammed with two people's clothes, two chests of drawers, some storage, and wheelchair parking/charging. I also had a cute little shelf

made in the closet so I can drive under and access my jewelry and smelly stuff. We just need to keep it clutter-free. (That's a hard one.)

Anyone who has utilized a wheelchair has quickly discovered it is impossible to reach all the way to the floor. My arms need to be four inches longer, but then I would look like an Avatar. (My life is already awkward enough.) The electrician installed the power outlets about a foot higher at my request. With higher electrical plugs I can plug things in all by myself. If a cord, or anything else, is laying on the floor I've learned to always have grabber handy. Many are smartly scattered around the house (kinda like reading glasses). Due to the laws of physics, heavy items are seriously hard to grasp and raise with a grabber. Those laws have been tested by me, and then a few choice words have been uttered. Grabbers also have trouble successfully picking up papers without mangling them. Maybe that's just my problem. However, I can make a grabber work successfully with a sock or a cotton ball!

Office

Our efficient yet perpetually messy office is just off the new bedroom, and it doesn't possess a door either. We figured the outward swing was awkward, and swinging inward blocked precious desk space. Counters were installed a little higher, in a big U-shape so I could drive right in and under. (Heaven.) My pre-stroke interests included many crafts and jewelry making. I hope to try all those hobbies again. So I found a fly-tying vise to be my right hand. It clamps onto the counter, and I am endeavoring to get back into the swing of things. There is a learning curve, though. Everything just seems more complicated with one hand! I got left-handed scissors. Normal scissors don't operate successfully in the left hand. (Try it for yourself.)

A handy paper weight is invaluable. This aids in writing. A good gel pen also makes writing less difficult, as a ballpoint pen takes lots of pressure and doesn't usually come off well. An automatic stapler is a godsend for one-handed stapling. I bet a one-handed person invented it. A suction grab bar (made for showers, only works on slick surfaces) functions excellently on most counters to assist me in standing up, leaning and reaching 'light' objects. I've sadly discovered that even though I can reach something, I need to gauge its weight. An object might be too cumbersome and dangerous to lift down one-handed. I learned that lesson the hard way, and my head agrees.

Bathroom

My new bathroom is a spa-like sanctuary. Through the door are sinks and mirrors on both sides. One is for me with no cabinet, just a counter, wheelchair-height. It is six feet wide so I don't ding the walls. (Well I endeavor not to, anyway.) A narrow rolling shelf for all my girly necessities is convenient so I can tuck it out of the way. Watching HGTV made me want those trendy bowl sinks that sit on the counter, but I soon realized that wasn't the best idea due to my limited reach. The outlets and light switches are set near the edge on the left. Right placement would've proved difficult.

My husband has his counter and cabinet installed a little higher to accommodate his height. Then, further through another doorway on each side, is a roomy toilet area and monstrous (6'x6') shower with a solid floor, no lips, so I can roll on in. A chair and hand-held shower facilitates my ease of shower usage. Two grab bars on the shower walls help with standing and maneuvering. The floor is covered with two-inch square tiles, which we were told is the optimal size to avoid slips. On the left of the toilet is a cabinet for TP and essentials, and a grab bar sticking out so I can get on by myself. (Off is another story. Not going to tell it.)

I really want a bidet that has a separate remote, because most are right handed. (Christmas is coming!) I am also lobbying for a towel warmer, but that is totally for selfish reasons.

Laundry Room

The laundry room layout is Kim-friendly, too. Aside from the front load washer and dryer, (love them) the room is outlined with counters. The countertop bill was not pretty. I instituted a house laundry rule, but its more like a guideline: "Dirty under the counter, clean on top." That way there is no question. This also helps me, because it leaves me the center of the room clear to maneuver.

I'm giving a shoutout to laundry detergent pods. Love them! There are no bulky liquid soap containers I must lug around, even if that was possible. A simple t-shirt folding gadget, like they use in the malls, makes light work of my folding duties. Seriously, that is not easy!

Flooring

The floor is not your ordinary floor. We learned quickly that plush carpet with thick pad is positively not a friend to rolling things. It's too hard on the one pushing, and the

carpet, and, well, I don't enjoy whiplash. We acquired very flat carpet tile and easily laid it throughout the downstairs living area, except in wet places. That way, we can replace one if it gets ruined, however that may be. There are no thresholds that would impede my roll.

Kitchen

Someday, I might score a kitchen remodel if we ever have a little money again. Well, a girl can hope. I would appreciate lower, juttied out counters I can drive under to work or eat. A low sink with no under-cabinet, equipped with a hands-free faucet would be super-cool, too. I have a side split fridge, which is okay, as long as what I want is in the middle areas. There won't be a fix for that until we get levitating fridges.

I would like to invent a microwave and appliance shelf so they were always out and accessible. Then I wouldn't have to wrangle those big bulky items by myself. Usually I just do without. A microwave stuck in the back corner of a counter, like mine, is not easily assessable. I don't like doing it.

Stirring a pot on the stovetop or stretching across hot things always leads to a burn on the forearm. I've branded myself a few times. I never learn until I burn! (I'm a poet!) I've learned to position the dishes and foodstuffs that I need much lower, where I can reach them. I hate breaking dishes and being needy. I wanna be a real, close-to-independent person.

It is incredibly fulfilling to achieve all I can for myself. There are so many inventions and strategies we can implement. Sometimes certain items that were invented for another use can be used for your task. The modern day disability explorers have done much to aid us in our special population. I appreciate their contributions to my quality of life. You and I in the "differently-abled" community can be explorers, too! We must constantly be looking for ways to improve our journeys. Ahoy mateys! Editor's note: Did you miss Part 1 of Kim's adventures? Read it [on our blog!](#)