

It's Christmas time at the Inbody house which means presents, family gatherings, decorations and, of course, Santa in the window. But this year amongst all those presents being opened at my house there is a special unwrapping Jennifer and I are excited about despite the fact that we already know what we are getting. We get to unwrap the brace boot on my wife's left ankle!

About eight weeks ago she was taking our new puppy outside at 1am. Puppies often can't make it through the night when they are very young, so that means frequent trips outside. On this fateful night Jen slipped on the staircase and cracked her fibula high on the ankle. Luckily it did not require surgery or even a cast, just one of those brace boots. Of course I tell everyone that she broke her ankle trying to kick me and missed as that's a better story. But what really happened is that she fell trying to go downstairs in the middle of the night, sleepy, with the lights out.

She is recovering nicely, but it has really lowered her mobility. It has been an experience for both of us and I soon learned a few things.

First, I quickly discovered that there are WAY TOO MANY STAIRS in our house! Yes, it is a two-story house, so you would expect that getting upstairs to the bedrooms is a nightly adventure now. But on the first floor, if you count the garage and I do, there are three sets of stairs! It's one step up from the garage to the entry room, three steps up to the kitchen/dining room, and four steps down to the living room. That multi-level design thing might have been a cool trend a few years back but is a bit of a pain when you are on crutches.

Once I get Jen settled somewhere with her foot up I'm the one running from room to room getting things she needs, letting the dogs in and out (often!), answering the door, fixing dinner, cleaning, doing laundry, etc. I believe I've always done my fair share around the house, but now, well, let's just say, I'm going to be just as happy as she is on Christmas week when we unwrap that brace boot and she gets some of her mobility back.

In the meantime, we got her one of those carts where you put your knee on the cushion and then roll where you need to go. It has helped a great deal because as one person told me, "crutches are a game for the young." That cart was essential in getting back to work more easily as her workplace, Royster Middle School, is very accessible. That brings me to my second item, a reminder of how important ADA is.

Jen's experience, and mine in helping her, really brought home to me the importance of the Americans with Disabilities Act, better known now as ADA. ADA is a federal law that requires public places to have reasonable access to all members of the public, including persons with different levels of ability such as mobility, blindness, deafness, and a range of other issues. ADA is not just ramps, elevators, and door-openers. Its bathroom accommodations, brail room numbers, service animal access, and on and on.

At the college we are always working to improve our access because we know that it is always a work in progress. Everything from buildings, to water fountains, to computers we have accommodations in place for everyone. Recently we have run into supply chain problems that kept one student from getting access to a room, so we made other arrangements until that can be fixed. It's on-going work that will never be totally completed.

You know about our new Mitchell Career and Technology Center which should be operational fall of 2022. There we are planning ADA access in its design right now. But ADA is not just part of large

projects like the MCTC. We are set to build a greenhouse on campus to act as a lab for biology and environmental science. In the greenhouse we have added sidewalk access and ADA doors for accessibility too.

Does it add cost to the projects? Yes it does. For instance, the brick ramp we put on the Chapman Learning Center cost over \$60,000 and that was more than 10 years ago. You can imagine what the cost would be now to add that ramp. It is required under ADA to provide reasonable and dignified access to the buildings. But beyond that it is our pleasure to do it.

Accessibility to all is part of our college purpose statement. It means we follow ADA and even go beyond the requirements at times to be open for all. We offer classes not just for 18-24 year olds who take traditional daytime classes, but night, weekend and online classes for working adults. We have extended evening and even 24-hour access to computers at our Chanute campus to provide access for those who may not have high-speed internet. We make a range of in-class accommodations for students with documented disabilities. The list goes on and on of ways that we are clearing barriers so that students of all types, situation, and ability levels can achieve.

Recently Senator Bob Dole passed away. Sen. Dole was instrumental in the passage of the ADA law. Dole had a disability himself due to an injury he suffered during his military service. He lost much of the use of his right arm and often kept a pen in his right hand to “appear normal.” This was a few years ago when some Americans had the view that a person with a disability was somehow weaker than other people. After eight weeks of watching Jen work hard to overcome this very temporary mobility issue, I can tell you it is just the opposite. People who are differently-abled have incredible patience, strength, and poise, especially those who have to deal with their disability for their whole lives.

ADA gives them the right to what they as fellow taxpayers should have – equal access. On behalf of all of my differently abled students and community visitors and, of course, my temporarily limited mobility spouse, thank you Senator Dole for all you did to help make public resources and services available to all! NCCC has and will continue to make accessibility in all its forms an important priority of the college.

For now, let’s get that ankle unwrapped! Jen, it’s your turn to let the puppy out.

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays from NCCC and the Inbodys!

If you have any questions about this article or anything else, please contact me at [binbody@neosho.edu](mailto:binbody@neosho.edu).