

EXPOSED

by
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My life consists mostly of one long string of awkward situations punctuated by moments of extreme indignity. I think I've always had a propensity to get myself into incredibly embarrassing situations, but twenty years of SCI has given new meaning to the term "humiliation."

It's important to be able to laugh at yourself, especially when you must choose laughter or tears. Sometimes living with a disease or disability casts every situation as serious or life altering. Occasionally we need to gain some perspective and chuckle at life's absurdities.

I've been blessed with friends who are willing to lend a hand even when circumstances compromise propriety and modesty. We

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We share a number of embarrassing stories that merge humor and compassion—at least I hope it's compassion. Sometimes I wonder if they keep me around as a dependable source of cheap entertainment.

When I first learned to drive following my injury, I purchased an old van equipped with hand controls and an ancient lift. The price was right and having my own wheels created a welcome sense of increased freedom, but the equipment proved to be about as reliable as a rain dance. Aging adaptive gear failed frequently, and the vehicle itself had significant mechanical issues. I divided my time between driving and waiting in various repair shops.

One morning my van failed to start, so I called my friend Hal for a ride to work. We'd done this before, and usually he just traded vehicles with his wife and arrived in her car. I'd transfer easily, the chair would slide into the trunk, and off we'd go.

On this particular morning, however, he showed up in his vintage full size Chevy pickup. The seat seemed about a mile higher than my chair, and we immediately realized that we faced a challenging dilemma. No matter how he parked the truck or where I placed my chair, I couldn't even get close to hoisting my backside onto the seat.

Hal tried standing behind my chair, but despite

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unintentionally groping inappropriate body parts he couldn't generate sufficient leverage. He tried standing in front of me and pivoting, but there seemed to be no

position from which he could lift effectively. We had to figure something out quickly to avoid being late to work.

As it turned out, being late would have been a much better option than what actually happened. After twenty years of experience I've learned some tricks and become a lot stronger, but on that morning we were inventing on the fly.

Perhaps spontaneous creativity on the part of uninformed and untrained amateurs isn't the optimal approach to effective adaptive assistance.

In retrospect it's difficult to believe that either of us even considered Hal's next idea, but much of my life's like that. Things that once made perfect sense lose their obvious logic when viewed with the 20/20 vision of hindsight.

Hal told me to park my chair as close as possible to the passenger side of the truck, then lean my upper body onto the seat. He went to the driver's side, climbed in, and leaned across the cab. He reached under my arms, intending to drag me toward him and onto the seat.

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Anyone with an ounce of experience with transfers understands that this was a bad plan. Hal's body mechanics were horrible, and the stress on my arms and shoulders wasn't especially healthy either. However, those issues diminished to insignificance compared to the next development.

Hal might have actually succeeded in tugging me onto the seat except for one tiny but important detail. The lever that adjusted the seat protruded to the side, so as he hoisted me

upward the knob hooked the waistband of my pants. Hal gave a mighty heave, and in an instant we confronted a good news/bad news scenario.

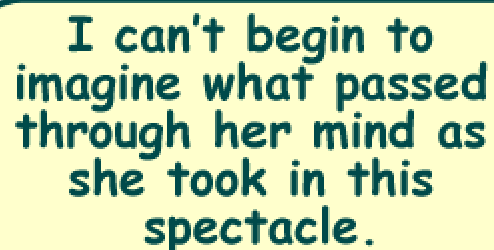
The good news: my upper body now rested face down on the seat, legs dangling precariously over the edge. The bad news: my pants neatly encircled my ankles, leaving my bare butt stuck in the air for the entire neighborhood to see.

Now you have to get this picture in your mind. I lay immobilized, bent over the seat with my backside exposed and pants pulled down to my shoes. Hal ran to the passenger side, and as he moved my chair he stood directly behind me contemplating a view he hadn't quite anticipated. Adding to the indignity, when he stooped to grab my legs I heard him laugh. Since I wasn't seeing the humor, I turned my head to see a woman walking behind him on the sidewalk.

I can't begin to imagine what passed through her mind as she took in this spectacle. She stared at my exposed posterior while Hal crouched to wrap his arms around my lower legs. If you envision where this placed his head, you get an entirely new and undesired interpretation of "cheek to cheek."

At this point we had little to lose. He lifted my legs and reached around to unhook my waistband, causing us to become even

more intimately acquainted. Then he shoved me onto the seat. I suppose it could have been worse; he could have pushed too hard and propelled me out the other side.



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Our one-woman audience had moved on, but it no longer mattered because any pretense of propriety had disappeared. We both laughed uncontrollably at the sheer insanity of the circumstances. I was lying basically naked from the waist down in my buddy's truck, trying to reach for my pants. He was trying to help without getting himself into any more positions that might give neighbors cause to summon the police. We made slow progress because we were giggling like a couple of little kids.

Eventually we managed to get most of me covered and seated upright, and we even got to work on time. I just hope we didn't cause some sort of permanent psychological scars for the unfortunate woman who simply wanted a little early-morning exercise.