



Mid America MS Achievement Center News

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

by **Richard E. Carlson**, participant since 1995

Hello, my name is Richard and if we have not had the opportunity to become acquainted, I would like it if we could. I regret that you meet my wheelchair and my disability first, before you have a chance to meet me as a person. Because my abilities outnumber my disabilities and I believe our similarities outnumber our differences. I am married, have two adult children and three wonderful grandchildren. I enjoy cheering for the Chiefs and the Royals, and a day at the stadium is a real good treat.

What else makes me happy? Movies at the theatre with popcorn; watching NYPD Blue, Headline News, Jayhawk basketball, Mash reruns, and tropical fish aquariums; refinishing furniture; being a good listener and friend; worshipping at Immanuel Lutheran Church; laughing at a good story and groaning at the rest; watching people at the mall; chocolates, imitation chocolates and chocolate flavoring; eating breakfast at a restaurant; the Democratic platform; writing in a journal; snowy days when the city shuts down; singing in a group or choir; being a buddy; handicap parking; contributing to a cause that I believe in; visiting book stores; playing card table games; my computer and winning at Hearts and Free Cell and sending email; chocolates, imitation chocolate and chocolate flavoring.

A wheelchair is a great resource which allows me to express my abilities. Handicap accessibility improvements enable me to get there. How I get there really doesn't matter.



I want you to know that I am okay with my disability 95% of the time and I certainly don't blame you or anyone for it. Persons with disabilities, I believe, neither consider themselves victims nor allow others to do so. We are all responsible for living with the cards life sometimes deals us. Fortunately, there are some helpful resources in the community.

Sure a wheelchair is also a reminder to us that some parts of life don't make sense. Perhaps there is an inner fear in everyone, when associating with a person with a disability, that this could happen to "me". Disability is arbitrary: life isn't fair; everyone is vulnerable; unjustified suffering is part of life; bad things do happen to good people. Disability represents a minority anyone can become a part of whether rich/poor, man/woman, black/white, educated/uneducated.

Let me tell you how to be comfortable with me. When you don't know what to do or say, ask me how you can help. Let's explore our mutual interests. I'm sure we have many interests besides those connected with disabilities.

Let's talk about what we have in common. People with disabilities are people first, like anyone else. That is the most important experience we share together. I am a person before a condition. I am a stranger before a friend.