

Getting There On My Own...A Bronx Tale

Nicole grew up in the Bronx, so she and her family didn't drive much. But now a whole new world has opened up for her because of her brand new wheelchair accessible Honda Odyssey.

At age 27, Nicole fell and broke her neck while installing solar panels. Since then, she had been living in a nursing home. Most of the other residents were much older and many had succumbed to a debilitating institutionalized mindset. Plus there was a curfew in place that severely limited her social time

outside the facility. Six and a half years later, Nicole has just moved into her own apartment in the Bronx...and it even has a garage to park her Honda Odyssey!

Now independent and free to move about as she pleases, Nicole said this about her new lifestyle:

"I'm excited but a little nervous, too. I'm really looking forward to getting out and being active in my community, to exploring my neighborhood and getting to know my neighbors."

This is Nicole's first vehicle, and the entire process of driving is a new experience. That includes things like getting insurance, filling up the gas tank, and checking the oil. She especially likes the camera on her Honda Odyssey, and the fact that it helps her to see more clearly behind and to the right.

"When I was choosing my van, I really appreciated how helpful everyone was at Bussani. It felt like they understood my needs, and everything is accessible here. That's not true in a lot of places. It was also so important to work with my driving instructor, who helped me decide what type of equipment and features I needed."

The main reason Nicole decided to get her own vehicle was so she could get to her doctors appointments in Manhattan. For years, she had been dependent on Access-A-Ride or other similar services. She has nerve pain so the bumpy ride was really uncomfortable. Plus she spent far more time waiting for her ride than she did with the doctor. It would typically take four hours of her day to get to the appointment and home, while she only spent about 15 minutes with the doctor. And then there were times when the ride didn't come through, and she had to call her dad to accompany her on public transportation, which can be a tricky experience to say the least.

"What I'm most excited about is having the independence to get to wherever I need to go... on my own."



Before, the ride services wouldn't take her outside the city limits. But now Nicole can go anywhere she wants. To the Ridge Hill Mall in Westchester where there's a nice movie theater. With her church when they go on functions to CT, NJ, and Rockland...all places that people who are

paralyzed have difficulty getting to.

Her new van will also empower Nicole to help others even more than she already does. She was an informal advocate for people who couldn't help themselves in the nursing home, those who couldn't speak or didn't know their rights. She would go to the health department's web site and find the phone numbers they needed to reach supervisors, and showed them how to advocate for themselves.

From her experience there, she said: *"If you have a loved one in a nursing home, I urge you to watch their care, and do things like check their skin when you visit. The nursing home industry overall is not good and most people there don't have anyone standing up for them. We're all going to get old one day. Take care of your loved ones."*

Nicole is young, but she's wise beyond her years. We asked her what advice she has for people who are newly injured or who are struggling with their physical challenges.

"Be patient with yourself. It will be frustrating at times, but expect progress anyway. Months or even years down the road, you'll see how far you've come. I remember when I was first relearning to brush my teeth. I got frustrated and threw the brush. Now I can do it with no problem."

She also encourages people to find a support group. To meet with others in person who have the same injury. *"When you see how others have moved on in their lives, it motivates and encourages you to know that your life is not over and you can see that there is hope."*

We wouldn't be at all surprised if, one day, Nicole becomes an advocate for people living with disabilities in a more formal way. One thing we know for sure is that her heart lies with helping others. She inspires us all!