Never Take for Granted
By Debbie Grosser

How many times in our lives have we thought or uttered the words, “I will never take anything for granted?” As a 10-year survivor of a near-death accident and a traumatic brain injury, these words have become more meaningful to me than any others.

In August 2011, I fell down a steep flight of stairs, fractured my skull and suffered severe damage to my brain. My condition was so perilous that the organ donation team was called before I even arrived at the hospital. I survived thanks to God, my excellent neurosurgeon, and an amazing critical care nursing team. Although I have very little memory of the accident and the days that followed, I retained all my cognitive abilities. Since my fall, I have undergone 21 surgeries due to the severe injuries I sustained to my skull. Realizing I had an amazing story to tell, I wrote and published my memoir, Never Take for Granted.

Before my injury, I was a successful Wall Street analyst for 30 years. I traveled the world, was an avid triathlete, and even completed an Ironman in Lake Placid in 2005. My life was turned upside down in a split second. My journey over the past ten years has included every emotion under the sun—anger, guilt, depression, and finally, gratitude.

My recovery began at Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation in West Orange, NJ. I arrived there in a wheelchair, with no memory of what it felt like to walk. When I left seven months later, the physical therapists had me running again (with handheld assistance). They showed me that my body still remembered the mechanics of running!

After leaving Kessler Institute, I stayed with my brother and his wife before moving into a one-bedroom apartment in Garden City, NY. I lived there until December 2013 when I suffered a grand mal seizure. I was in and out of several long-term care facilities for the next few years. Since 2016, I have resided at Gurwin Jewish Nursing & Rehabilitation Center in Commack, NY. It was not an easy transition to accept because I was so independent previously. However, God had other plans for me.

While at Gurwin, I formulated the idea for writing my memoir and interviewed almost every employee. I also created the Deborah F. Grosser Foundation to fund cutting-edge research into the causes and treatments for TBI. The COVID-19 pandemic afforded me the time to finally finish my book. When it was completed, I decided to direct all proceeds to my 501c3 foundation for TBI research as a way to give back.

It’s been a long road and a very difficult journey, but I have truly learned to never take anything for granted.
Do you want to visit a new store, but aren’t sure how accessible it will be? Or perhaps you are planning to meet a friend for dinner in an untried restaurant, but are concerned about the amount of noise or lighting you’ll encounter? AXS Map may be able to provide the information you need.

AXS Map is a crowd-sourced tool for sharing reviews on the wheelchair accessibility of businesses, buildings, and other places. The tool gets better as more people input their reviews. AXS Map has won several awards including the da Vinci Award from the National Multiple Sclerosis Society and a charitable grant from Google.

AXS Map uses a basic ranking system when reviewing a location. Here are some examples of the criteria AXS Map provides for its ratings:

• Entrance – Are there steps or a ramp for access? If not, is there a second entrance? Is there reserved parking?
• Interior – Is there room to move around inside? Is there an elevator? Are there tables at an accessible height?
• Restroom – Do the restrooms have large enough stalls and swinging doors? Are there accessible sinks for wheelchair users?
• Other – Are there other important accessibility features to share? Are the rooms too bright or too dark?

Is the location very noisy?

If your neighborhood establishments aren’t reviewed on AXS Map, you can create a group to conduct a “Mapathon.” Using the AXS Map mobile app, groups of people can compete in different teams to review and rate businesses and buildings in their communities. You can either start your own Mapathon or join an upcoming one in your area. Since 2012, there have been AXS Mapathons in over 300 cities!

The success of AXS comes from its users rating and reviewing businesses and buildings all over the world. Currently AXS Map lists over 12,000 registered users with maps in over 100 countries.

The unyielding, jagged rocks surrounding Portland Head Light in Maine remind me of the hardness of life with TBI and the resilience it takes to face TBI’s challenges. While reflecting on my own journey through the TBI fog, the lighthouse beam inspires me to think about people as beacons—individuals who use their TBI experience to illuminate the challenge and light the way forward for others.

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