

Alexa Brill  
Social Media and Website Manager  
The Arc of Pennsylvania

Hello, my name is Alexa Brill. I'm the Website and Social Media Manager at The Arc of Pennsylvania. I graduated from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania in 2013 with a degree in Sociology.

Growing up, my family loved to travel. We would go on vacations to Disney in Orlando, Florida by plane, and various other places by car. Traveling has always presented obstacles for me. My parents raised me to be as independent as possible, which I always wanted as well.

A few years ago, my sister was working in Orlando, Florida. I hadn't seen her in months. We're really close, and I was really missing her. After asking her multiple times when she was going to come and visit, I said "Lauren, I'm about to just put myself on a train and come see you!". She said, "You can't do that...". She didn't mean it in the sense that she didn't believe in me, or that she didn't want to see me. She knows that when I travel, I have trouble accessing the restroom, and she explained to me that a train ride to Florida takes about 24 hours. That's a long time to go without using the restroom.

Even if I had someone with me, I still wouldn't be able to use the restroom because they're so narrow, and I would have to be lifted on to the toilet. This means that the restrooms have to be big enough for the person helping me to be able to lift me on to the toilet. Restrooms on trains and airplanes are not accessible at all.

Another issue for me is when I travel by airplane. One time, we were going on vacation to Disney World in Orlando, Florida. I always take my power wheelchair with me wherever I go. I refuse to even get a manual wheelchair, because like I said, I like to be as independent as possible, and I cannot be independent at all in a manual wheelchair. So when I travel by air, unfortunately, my chair has to be somewhat taken apart, and put in the cargo hold of the airplane.

Usually, we did that, even disconnecting the power wire on my chair, to minimize the chances of damage or mishaps. When we do this, obviously, my chair has to be pushed into the cargo hold. My chair is very heavy to push. So one time, we decided to try to make it easier for them. We didn't disconnect the power, so they could use my joystick to put my chair in the cargo hold.

Well, after they drove my chair into the cargo hold, they didn't press the button to turn it off. While we were flying, a piece of luggage fell on top of my joystick. My chair was actively going against the wall of the plane for the entire two hours that we were flying. When we got off the plane, and my chair was brought up the elevator, it was smoking.

When I got back in my chair and tried to move, it was very bouncy. Not only that, but then I discovered it wouldn't make right turns. It turns out that since my chair was actively going against the wall of the plane for two hours, one of my motors was completely fried, and had to be replaced. Experiences like these are why it is difficult for me and other people with disabilities to travel.