

Woodstown Woman's 'Eyes Open' to the Plight of Wheelchair Users



A Woodstown resident, who has been wheelchair bound since breaking her femur (thighbone) eight weeks ago, says her eyes opened to the plight facing wheelchair users given the time she's spent off her feet.

Speaking to The Munster Express, Kathleen Tobin (63) of Kilcock, Woodstown, said she has "gained a new appreciation" for some of the problems passionately outlined by Ballybeg's Mark Waters in last week's edition.

"The lack of facilities is obviously a very big issue, there's no getting away from that, but the total lack of respect and consideration shown to those in wheelchairs has really taken me aback," she admitted. "It's shocked me, to be honest."

This has particularly manifested itself when frequenting two supermarkets in Waterford city, neither of which shall be named here since the problems were created by customers as opposed to the businesses in question.

"I've been really shocked by the attitude of so many people; I wish I could say it was just a few, but it hasn't been."

"A lot of people have been very, very ignorant. It's almost as if you either don't exist or are just a total inconvenience to people who are lucky enough to be freely moving around. I've been treated with complete disdain, and, from what I've seen over the past eight weeks, people with disabilities have to deal with a lot of animosity day in, day out."

"Example? "I was going around a supermarket a few days ago, and I had a special trolley for my groceries, and I swear, a middle-aged woman, who could clearly see me approaching, violently swung her trolley right in front of me, and had it not been for my husband who was pushing me in the chair, she'd had collided straight into me, a woman in a wheelchair with a broken leg. It was hard to credit."

Speaking of her experience in another, smaller city supermarket, Mrs Tobin stated: "Well that was even worse. I was trying to get to the meat counter, and there were two women just standing directly in my way, not apparently interested in buying anything, just gabbing away, to be honest. It was like I didn't exist."

"Well I kept waiting and they kept talking, so eventually I discreetly called for the manager and he kindly and politely asked

the two women in question, a pair of 'yummy mummies' if ever I saw two, to make way for me, and they did.

"And to think they're rearing the next generation – it's difficult to feel a little sad about the teaching of good manners, the lack of it, and I've seen it time and time again over the past eight weeks. And it's frightening."

Kathleen, who thanked this newspaper for highlighting the issues facing wheelchair users last week, didn't mince her words when it comes to the discrimination that's been made plain to her in recent weeks.

"There are some out there who blame the young about pretty much everything that's wrong in Ireland today; well let me tell you I'm not one of them. Most of the ignorance I've encountered has come from people who've lived long enough to surely know better. I'm 63 years old, I really thought I'd lived long enough to not be genuinely shocked – well how wrong was I?"

And it didn't end with supermarkets either.

"Getting in and out of the hospital – now there's something you'd have thought would be straightforward and hassle-free," said Kathleen.

"People just don't seem to look where they're walking, particularly those whose heads seem to be permanently buried in their smartphones; I've almost had a few people falling into my lap – the last thing a healing femur needs is somebody falling on your lap!"

"I've been stunned at the sheer level of disregard I've had to put up with, and I know I'm only going to be in the wheelchair for another few weeks, and I know how lucky I am. But my goodness, let me tell you, my eyes are open now, and those who depend on a wheelchair to get around permanently have my total sympathy. They have a lot to put up with."