

Solutions for Living Life Well With a Disability

SAMPLE

By: Barbara E. Ashcroft

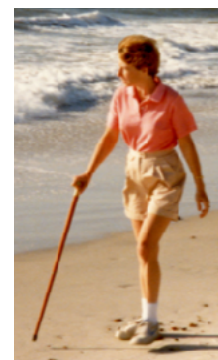
Edited By: Wendy J. Ashcroft



Preface

Hi! My name is Barbara and I like to do things for myself. I value independence, especially since I have so little of it. Well, that's a bit dramatic! Now that I say that, I realize I get to do a lot on my own. Sometimes I exaggerate!

I'm not exaggerating when I say I have had MS (Multiple Sclerosis) for 40 years. In fact, it's been 47 years since I noticed my first symptom.



Throughout these years, I have experienced quite a few challenges related to my MS. To manage these challenges, I've used solutions ranging from do-it-myself ideas to commercially-made products.

It never occurred to me to write a book, but a rehab nurse encouraged me to share some of my solutions with others. She told me she believed many of her previous patients could have benefitted from them. Writing this book has caused me to reflect on my life.

I try to do as much for myself as I can. Anytime I can't do something, I find it fun to take it on as a challenge. If I can find a solution that helps me accomplish it, I feel successful. Who knew pool noodles and zip ties could make someone so happy?

I find it gratifying when I can help the caregivers that are helping me. I try to be a good listener and I enjoy learning about my helpers! I feel that everybody can use somebody who cares and listens!

There are lots of definitions of living life well, but the one I like best includes having meaning in my life. For me, that always means helping others.

This sample book provides one solution from each chapter of the full book, which includes over 120 solutions. In the complete book, I've used over 300 pictures and a bunch of videos to illustrate my ideas.

I know that all my solutions won't work for everybody, but I do hope each solution will work for someone! Best wishes and Live Life Well! Barbara

Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)

Sink Faucet Handle

My wheelchair prevents me from being able to reach the faucets for my bathroom sink. In the beginning, I used a stick with a hook to turn on and off the water. Because of my tremor, the hook sometimes slips when I push the handle to turn off the water. This makes me nervous because my sink doesn't have an overflow drain. Why is that? There might be a really good reason, but I sure don't know what it is.

Not being able to quickly turn off the water worries me because I can't clean up a mess and I hate to waste water! So, I invented the tool below so that I can turn the water both on and off easily and reliably.

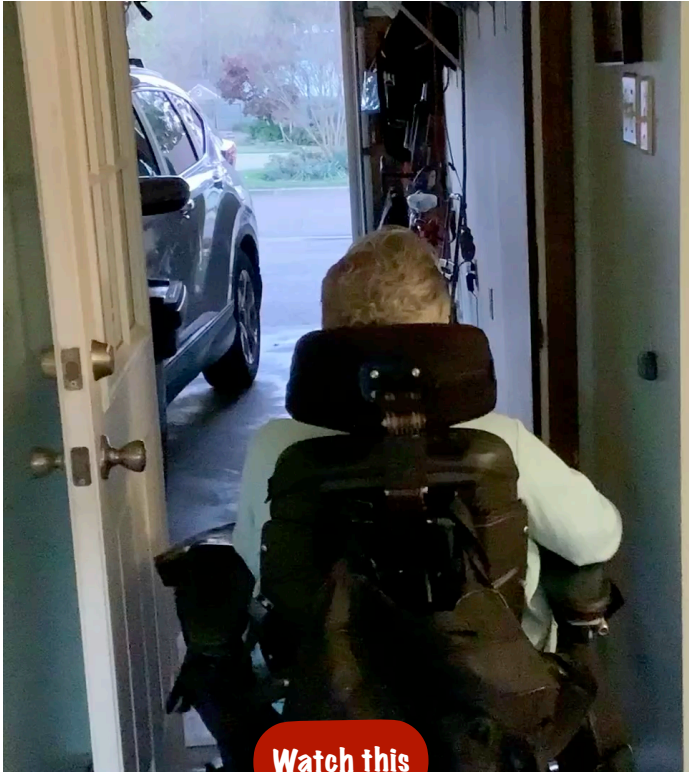
I first tried PVC pipe. It was too heavy and cumbersome. In the picture on the left, you can see the items that were used to make this tool. We used a small stick, two pieces of swimming pool noodle and some contact paper. Finally, this tool is perfect! It is lighter and easier to handle. And, it was cheaper! This probably cost about five dollars to make. What a bargain!



Watch this

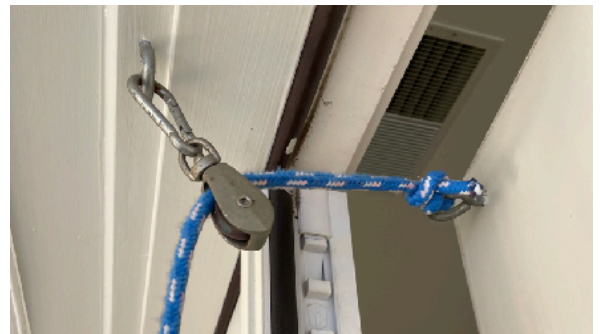
Easy Come, Easy Go!

Rope and Pulley Door Closer



Coming and going can be a challenge if you use a wheelchair. Doors aren't always easy to open and close and sometimes there are obstacles like thresholds or steps! Let's talk about doors first. When I go through a door, it's difficult to close the door behind me, especially when I'm headed down a ramp!

My first idea was to tie a rope onto the door knob and pull it closed as I was going down the ramp.

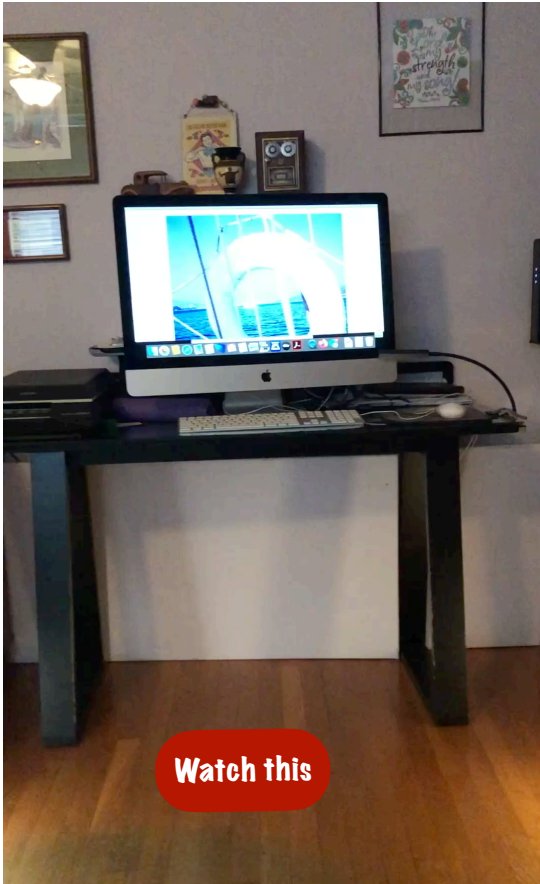


It worked well enough, but when my father visited me and saw what I was doing, he came up with a terrific idea. This was a big improvement - and was simple and reliable.

Here are two close up pictures of my Dad's design. The first is on the door from the kitchen to the garage. The second is from the sunroom to the outside.

Working Smarter Not Harder

Desk Organization



I am totally a 100% Apple person, except for the Google jokes, of course.

This is my current iMac desktop. To the left of my computer is a scanner, printer, and fax machine.

My desk is the perfect height for my wheelchair. It also has lots of open space for my footrest, even when I tilt my chair back a bit.

I tried a number of solutions to improve the organization of the messy cords that come with all this technology. Zip ties, Velcro® loops, and plastic bag ties helped some, but they also caused problems by restricting the cords too much when I needed to rearrange.

The solution in the video involved buying two \$10 canvases that artists use for painting. The canvas came already stretched and stapled to a wooden frame. These frames are light and easy to move.

Each canvas is painted, but just with the lavender paint that matches my walls. And, it didn't take an artist to do it!

Another change that I just made to my desk top was to get a gaming mousepad that is 30" by 15." It's big enough that I can move the mouse without running out of space.

Stretch! Exercise!

TheraBand® Resistance Tubes

For stretching and strengthening, I love TheraBand® resistance tubes. I attached them to a grab bar in my bathroom specifically to have them easily accessible. In the picture on the right, you can see the tubes hanging from the metal grab bar. I use the TheraBand® tubes with soft grip handles.

I have multiple colors of bands because each color provides a different level of resistance. One of my arms is weaker than the other, so I use two resistance levels at the same time. I use yellow or green for my weaker arm and red or blue for my stronger arm. I estimate my home therapy setup pictured to the right and below costs about \$2.00 per tube.



I had a curtain rod installed on the inside of my closet. I looped these TheraBand®s over the curtain rod. This allows me to exercise my back and shoulders. I can pull the tubes down and out to squeeze my shoulders together to strengthen the large muscles in my back.

It's important to me to have the tubes available and in sight. Having to set them up each day would reduce my motivation to exercise. When I see them hanging there, I don't have any excuse to skip a day!

Whoops!

What Goes Down, I Must Pick Up!

Family of Sticks



← Here is my family of sticks.

These are two new additions to the family. →



Now, I need them all!

In fact, I'm in the process of making a small U Stick for my bedside.

Of course, commercially-made reachers are also good tools. I used them for years and they were very helpful. At this point, my hands don't have the strength and coordination I would need to use them.

I have multiple opportunities each day to use my sticks. One is for reaching something on the floor, one is for getting Winston's tennis balls from under the file drawer, one is for flushing the toilet, one is for turning on the sink faucet, and one is just to extend my reach by 12 inches. The cost of my sticks ranges from the longest one (costing \$4.84) to the shortest one which probably costs less than \$3.00. To me, they are priceless!

When I get distracted and fumble something, one of these sticks provides the perfect solution!

What's For Dinner?



As my MS symptoms progressed, I started to struggle with cooking. It became difficult to hold heavy objects and it was hard to move dishes and pans from place to place. And, it required extra care to manage hot things! At first, I was able to use the basket on my walker to move food around the kitchen.

One of my favorite dishes to cook was chicken pot pie. I would boil chicken breasts on the cooktop and then put the hot pan in the basket of my walker, take a few steps, and transfer the pan to the kitchen sink. That's when I learned that if I could reach something, so could my sister's dog, Mariah. She ate my chicken!

Lap Hot Pad

After I started using a wheelchair, some things got a little easier. But, one day I was baking cookies and almost dropped the hot cookie sheet into my lap. Luckily, I caught it, but it burned my leg a little.

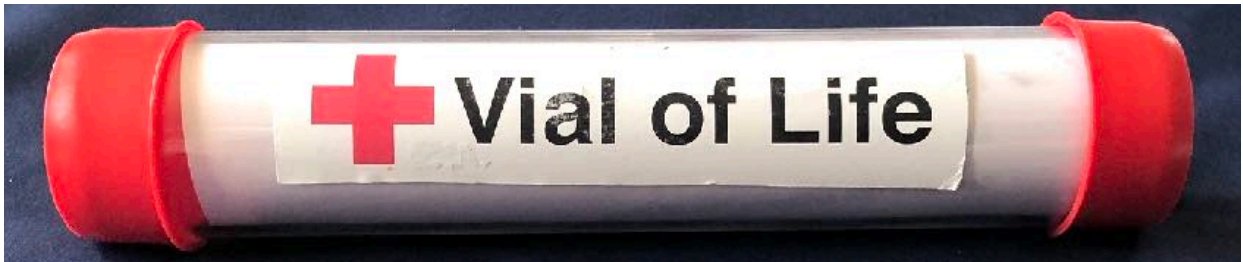
So, my mom and dad went to work! Dad designed a lap-sized hot pad and Mom got some thick fabric. She put on a backing, leaving one end open. She then sewed vertical rows in the material and put in some sand. Then, she sewed a horizontal row, added some more sand, and then sewed another horizontal row and so on until the final product was this wonderful hot pad with squares of sand. My parents always helped me find unique solutions!



Better Safe Than Sorry!

Safety & Emergencies

Vial of Life



When my parents moved in to a retirement community, they were asked to fill out some papers that included information on current medicines, health history, and doctors' names and phone numbers. These papers were stored in the "Vial of Life." Every resident's vial was attached with Velcro® to the inside of the cabinet door under the kitchen sink. First responders knew to look there.

When my mother moved into our home, we thought it would be good to have her information readily available in case of an emergency. I could not find this kind of thing to purchase so, I decided that I would make one. I got clear PVC pipe and had a friend cut it into 12-inch lengths. That was the easy part. Well, printing a label was pretty easy too, the hard part was finding red caps just this size.

Once we got the perfect red caps, we completed a "Vial of Life" for my mom. Several years later when we called 911 for an emergency, having this information easily accessible was helpful for the paramedics. It was annoying that the papers were so curly, but both the first responders and the hospital staff really appreciated having the information.

After I made some of these, I found out that our local fire department gives out small tubes for this purpose. Their tubes would fit in a purse or a pocket. We're still using the large ones.

My Quest for a Good Night's Sleep!

Whatever It Takes!

Touch and Glow Light

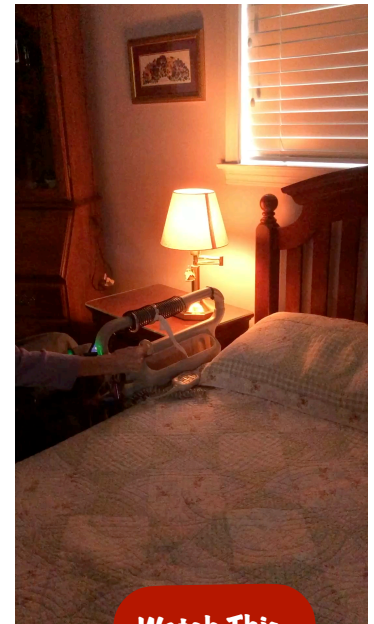
Do you want to see how the touch control works?

I love this Touch and Glow control that I have connected to my bedside lamp. I got it from touchandglow.com. You can find a touchpad control online. Having this control lets me turn off the light when I am ready to sleep. Also, with another touch, I can turn it on whenever I want.

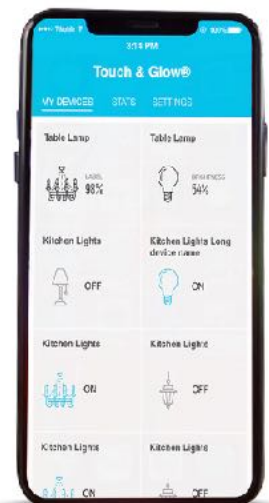


On the left is a picture of the Touch and Glow switch pad.

The white part plugs into any outlet. Then, a light or any other corded device can be plugged into it.



Watch This



Touch and Glow (and other systems) allow people to convert light switches, lamps, and small appliances into smart devices so they can be controlled with a phone or tablet. There is a Voice Assistant option too!

What's cool is that these lights and appliances can be controlled by apps that can be on the phones or tablets of everyone in the house. Also, they can be controlled from anywhere in the world.

"I highly recommend this easy-to-read, inspiring and helpful book. It contains over 125 practical solutions for a variety of disabling conditions. It includes videos and photos showing how to make your own tools as well as clear search terms to use if looking online for devices. The author demonstrates how to keep managing solutions to health issues as her condition progresses. All of this advice is given with humor and humility. The focus is on maintaining independence while gracefully accepting help when needed but on your own terms." Caroline B.

Independence is vital to overall well being! Incredible and awesome for ADL for all kinds of conditions. This book offers tons of detailed and practical and useful ways to maintain independence. A must read for health care workers and caregivers. WOW Villager Suez

In this wonderful resource, Barbara shares how she overcomes many of the barriers that she faces as she lives with Multiple Sclerosis by using creative solutions to maximize her independence. She shares how she uses voice controls, commercially available adaptive devices, a homemade sandwich gripper, and even zip ties to adapt to the demands of everyday life and carry out her activities of daily living. Barbara's unique perspective, fun sense of humor, determination, and positive attitude are evident throughout the book. Anne Z., PhD, OTR



Barbara Ashcroft, Ed.D., currently manages SCALARS Publishing LLC, a small family company that publishes Ashcroft's *Programmed Instruction in Braille* and *The Braille Enthusiasts' Dictionary*. In 2019, Barbara started OnMyOwn Solutions LLC. Barbara is also a partner in TennAsh Visions, LLC.



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Winston loves his life! Having Golden Retrievers is one of the many ways Barbara enjoys life.