

# I've Fallen and I Can't Get Up

## By Joseph P. Guzzo



Remember that commercial, it's an all time classic. The ad was meant to be serious, however it just turned out to be funny. People still chuckle when they hear it or use it as their own one liner.

Recently, that ad became all too serious for me. Although I did not fall, I was on the living room floor trying to do exercises prescribed by my physical therapist for unknown aches and pains. After giving the routine my best shot I literally could not get up off the floor. Always second guessing myself, I said damn if I only bought one of those alarms the old lady in the commercial had, who knew? Anyway, I wasn't laughing any more. I managed to drag myself to the couch and pull myself up. Later I would be diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA).

RA is not your run of the mill ordinary arthritis that comes with old age and wear and tear. RA is a serious disease of your immune system. Your own immune system, for still unknown reasons, decides to attack your joints, eating away at the soft tissue - the result is excruciating pain, immobility, loss of strength, fatigue, joint and bone destruction, and in some cases complete incapacitation. The good news is with today's modern medicine RA is treatable, but a cure has still not been found.

The reason I am writing about my personal health issues in a plumbing magazine is pure irony at its best. It is well known that I am the most vocal Plumbing Inspector and staunch advocate for the enforcement of handicapped toilet facilities. And many are aware of the battle I have been waging against the opponents of handicapped toilet facilities, the Division of Professional Licensure (Plumbing), and the State Plumbing Board. Well it is as if I have been sent new ammunition, although cruel, it is real.

For the first time in my life I needed to use the grab bars in a HP toilet room. One morning I literally could not open the cap of my pills. This brought to mind the importance of a variety of handicapped regulations I have been reading for years. Like the requirements of items like door handles and lavatory faucets to be able to be used with a closed fist, devices that do not require tight grasping, etc. Much thought and planning has gone into these regulations designed for people with disabilities.

One of the most common misnomers I hear about handicapped toilet facilities is many think they are just for people in wheelchairs. Someone would say, "why are you making me put a handicapped bathroom on the second floor, you can't get a wheelchair up there." To me this is pure ignorance, but I suppose some laypersons could have an excuse and just need to hear an explanation. But when you hear statements like that by a supposed professional like the followers that work for the Plumbing Board, well that's just sad.

Worse is that the current administration has convinced the Board that handicapped toilet facilities shall not be enforced by local Plumbing Inspectors. With direct orders to instructors at continuing education classes, told to hundreds of Plumbing Inspectors to ignore all requirements of the handicapped code 521 C.M.R. it is shameful.

The use and installation of handicapped toilet facilities is and has always been in our regulations 248 C.M.R. However because of the ignorance of the current Executive

Director, he has thrown a monkey wrench into the entire process, creating nothing but confusion among not only Inspectors, but architects and builders alike. Many are now unsure if or when handicapped toilet facilities must be installed. And when they are installed they are told not to enforce the very dimensions critical to the installing plumbers found in 521 C.M.R. It is a travesty that there is no uniformity in this state for something as important as handicapped toilet facilities.

I have now renewed by battle to stop the madness. And will strive to have handicapped toilet facilities enforced by all Plumbing Inspectors, for all uses. I shall petition the Mass. Office on Disabilities, and the Architectural Access Board to correct this problem by working with all agencies for a resolution. I shall implore the voting members of the State Plumbing Board to reject the Executive Director's false and misguided interpretations. And to think of what is better, what helps people more. Think about if you, a friend or family member was afflicted with a disability. Imagine going into a bathroom and not being able to do a simple thing like turning on a faucet, or worse being confined to a wheelchair. Rheumatoid Arthritis is just one of the hundreds of disabilities people are afflicted with everyday, everywhere - some by accident, some by God's will, none by choice.

Do the right thing. Please help me fix this problem and create uniformity, and make handicapped toilet facilities available to all. Please call or write me. Thank you for understanding. Joe