I SAW YOU POUR YOUR WATER

by Lauren Merryfield

I recently moved to a retirement center where most of the residents are quite active.

One woman wanted to help me with every little thing, but, as she said, she was doing it because she didn't think a blind person could do this or that.

She did not think I could find my utensils and napkin at mealtime because I am blind. She did not understand how I found the tv room when I was blind.

She kept saying things that implied that even when I could do something, I couldn't possibly do it well because I am blind. The term "blind" was in nearly everything she said to me.

I accepted some of her help but tried time and time again to explain to her that I could do whatever it was she was doubtful about.

This went on for weeks and was getting old. I was about to either yell at her or go to the management staff to put an end to what was feeling like a case of psychological bullying. She kept putting me in my place as inferior to hers.

Then her husband became seriously ill and was placed in hospice. The woman visited him every day until he passed away.

During this time, she did not hover so much over me because, as she said, she was grieving the loss of her husband. I was sympathetic toward her at this time, having lost my husband twelve years ago. So we were actually now on better terms with each other.

There are several people living here who have macular degeneration and they cannot read print, drive, play Bingo (they think) or a number of other things. Yet they see me doing all of these things except driving. Several of them were feeling perturbed at how this one lady was negatively stuck on my blindness. They told her so, stating that my being here has been very helpful to them. They are now aware of the print/braille Bingo cards, Newsline, the Library for the Blind, the NFB, (though none have joined yet), and maneuvering my manual wheelchair. They see me struggle due to pain and stamina issues, but they see me get where I need to get. So they told this lady to back off and realize what I could do, which they found helpful to them.

A couple evenings ago, at dinner, I sat down and poured myself a glass of water, as I do for each meal. The lady announced, rather loudly, in front of everyone in the dining room "I saw you pouring your water, with your finger there to feel when it is at the top. I've seen you do other things I thought you couldn't do just by doing something a little different so that you feel instead of see what you are doing. I am learning from you." (something like that). Several others piped up that they were learning, too, and that was good because they have macular degeneration. Sometimes they can see something and sometimes not.

This was the first time this lady did not lower her expectations of me and put me in an inferior position to her. It was a dawning, on her part, of recognition and acceptance of how I might do something a little differently, but still, I do it.

So remember, it is not necessarily the big, impressive things we do as blind people that finally convince someone who is bent on lower expectations for us. It can be an everyday act, such as pouring a glass of water, that can make the difference. That evening, this woman was finally beginning to see that in spite of the doubt in others, I am living the life I want.