

# Accessibility Horror Story

## Personal information

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- **Your accessibility needs or how are you related to accessibility:** Little person and single crutch user.

## Your horror story

More than 15 years ago, when I still regularly walked, I had a summer job in a haunted house at an amusement park on top of a mountain. I knew that it was not my cup of tea, but I wanted to know as a little person what it felt to work in a disability cliché. Can't talk about something if you don't know anything about it.

Anyway, one day, a rumour started spreading that there had been some assaults in the mountain. That night, at 10pm, I exited the park and made for the parking lot, more than 500 meters away downhill. At my pace, when I got to it, mine was the only one left. I got on, turned the keys and nothing. Turned the keys again. Silence. I checked around and saw that I had left the hand break on, which had most probably drained the battery. As I'm one meter tall, I use hand controls and, to shift gears when parking, I have to lock the break lever. As usually noone can leave the break pedal pushed, the lights-on alarm doesn't set off if you leave the break on. Thus, as I had forgotten to release it, no alarm, break on, the car's battery had died after so many hours. I cursed a bit, but I kept my cool. I'd have to call for assistance.

I took my phone out from my bum bag, I pressed the button to light the screen... but it didn't turn on. I pressed again. Nothing. I held the "on" button for a while and the dreaded no battery sign appeared. It was not the first time that my phone had nearly run out of battery while working at the park. As signal was poor in the mountain, the phone kept searching for signal the whole day, so it used more power than usual. Today, when I most needed it, it had completely run out. Hail to the power outage day.

It was time for difficult decisions. Should I spend the night at the car at an empty parking lot in the middle of the mountain or should I try to go back to the park and find some help? Most probably a night guard would be there and I might be able to borrow their phone. On the other hand, it was completely dark outside, the way back would take more than 20 minutes and that day's rumours were definitely unsettling. However, if I stayed the night, safety concerns were quite similar and my family would for sure worry without news.

I decided to make the trek back up. I left the car, locked it with the key and started walking. As I left the parking, I did not use the narrow sidewalks, but the middle of the road. The surroundings were pitch black and my mind kept going to the rumours. I tried to pick up the pace, but after a long day's work, I couldn't muster any speed. I kept on, wanting to distract myself to make time go faster, but the stillness of the night made it impossible to focus on anything else. There was no wind, no moon, no stars. You could not hear a single soul, not even summer crickets. My crutch and footsteps were the only sounds piercing the night.

At long last, I reached the square in front of the park. Dim street lights gave it a bleak atmosphere. I got near the fence and saw a guard seated at his post. I waved at him. He approached. His face was obscured by the shadows. When he was about 5 meters from me, I spoke. "Excuse me, could you help me. My phone is out of battery, could I make a...". I couldn't even finish that he turned around, but just before that, I saw a glimpse of his eyes, wide with surprise. He left and never looked back.

I was left there standing. Alone, but not beffudled, as I had already had my share of hiccups and one more only added a bit to it. Did he think I was a ghost? Did I have some make up left from the haunted house? No, I always removed it before going. Was he spooked by a one meter tall person that talked like an adult? That sometimes happened, plus the eerie setting might have helped it. Either way, my position was the same. Left with a return ticket to spend the night in my car.

I took a deep breath and looked around one last time hoping for a potential way out. On a far corner of the square, I saw a telephone box. I looked at it with longing and bitterness, as I knew that I wouldn't be able to reach it. However, instead of starting on my way back, I approached it anyway, wondering if I'd be able to operate it with my crutch. As I got closer, I was blessed by the gods of accessibility. It was a lower telephone box designed so that anyone could use it. With relief, the only thing left was for me to have a coin, as most probably the kind guard wouldn't lend me one. I fished in my purse and there it was, a 2€ dime. The most expensive and relieving short call of my life. I dialed my parents house.

After a 30 minute wait, they picked me up and we were able to restart the car by charging it with connecting battery cables. This wouldn't be the last time for it to run out of battery, but that's another story...