

ADVOCACY CHATS

EPISODE 4: HOTEL ACCESS ISSUES

Lee Page

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Lee Page: Good morning, or good afternoon everyone depending on where you are. My name is Lee Page and I'm with the Advocacy Department of PVA, Paralyzed Veterans of America.

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Lee Page: I'd like to talk to you today about travel after the pandemic: transportation and accommodations.

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Lee Page: Most recently, as you know, on July 26 we celebrated the 31st anniversary of the ADA, the Americans with Disabilities Act.

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Lee Page: This law prevents discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, public services, public accommodations, telecommunications and transportation.

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Lee Page: President George H.W. Bush said in the signing ceremony that transportation was the linchpin allowing people with disabilities full access to the mainstream of society. Transportation allows a person to interact with others to work and to pursue basic freedoms of choice and movement.

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Lee Page: So, after more than a year and a half or so of being at home because of the Covid-19 Pandemic, people are ready to get out and go places to travel to go on vacation to go visit family and friends, but be mindful that people with disabilities want their destination, to be safe and accessible.

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Lee Page: To go someplace a lot of times you've got to get on an airplane and fly. We've seen and heard many complaints with air travel.

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Lee Page: Lately, the usual problems with people with disabilities being injured in the boarding process due to poorly trained staff, problems with the aisle chair.

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Lee Page: Either being in disrepair or in the process of transference being dropped, seating accommodations inside the plane that don't meet the needs, and return of personal DME equipment, the wheelchair being damaged or broken.

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Lee Page: If you encounter problems, you need to file a complaint, firstly with the airline that you flew on.

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Lee Page: And then, secondly, with the Department of Transportation, you can go to DOT.gov and look in the search bar for "air consumers complaint form," and that will bring you to the correct web page on how to file a complaint under the Air Carrier Access Act.

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Lee Page: Unfortunately, so you've taken your plane and gotten to your destination and so your next move is firstly to get an accommodation, go to your hotel. Unfortunately, problems don't end.

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Lee Page: At that at that point.

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Lee Page: Hotel accommodations can present a lot of problems for travelers with disabilities. Too many times, an accessible room isn't accessible for a wheelchair user.

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Lee Page: For example, the bed may be too high, the shower or bath may not be accessible, and it might be difficult to navigate the room basically be just because there's too much furniture in it.

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Lee Page: Other hotel problems include website access, a lot of times the website might not be accessible for your needs when it comes to making a reservation, or just understanding what your needs are or access availability.

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Lee Page: Once you're at the hotel a path of travel from the parking lot the main entrance can have problems.

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Lee Page: You got handicapped parking, you've got slopes, you've got sidewalks that might not be accessible, curb cuts or door openers.

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Lee Page: May or may not be at the hotel and then accessing amenities, like the swimming pool, even though pools were required to have a lift back in 2013 some may or may not have them.

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Lee Page: So, today, I'm joined with PVA National Vice President, Michael Negrete and his wife Terry.

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Lee Page: They love travel for work and pleasure and I understand that they've had some problems recently with hotel accommodations on their trips; so, with that I'd like to ask them how their experience was Michael, Terry.

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Michael and Terry Negrete

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Thank you for having us today, Lee. I know that this is a very important discussion to have. Terry and I both have had as you mentioned some.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Personal experiences and challenges with accommodations at hotels and one comes to mind recently was a trip to Las Vegas where we were going to.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Renew our wedding vows but I'd like Terry to share that story, because I think it's important to also share the spouse or caregiver's perspective. In these scenarios, we focus a lot of times on the veterans but.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Most of the time, it's just as stressful on our spouse or caregiver these scenarios was a lot of times they're having to do a lot of the advocating or trying to find the solutions for us; so, with that, I'll let Terry share that experience with us.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Yeah, so like Michael mentioned, we decided to renew our wedding vows in Vegas few years ago and it was at Christmas time, Christmas Eve, and we had made arrangements at a large hotel chain.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Checked in advance to make sure that the.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Everything was accessible and then, most importantly, that the bed had room underneath it for a lift. I do use a Hoyer lift to transfer Michael in and out of bed and we've learned from prior experiences that oftentimes hotels can't accommodate that. We were assured a couple of times prior.



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Michael and Terry Negrete: To arriving that there would not be a problem.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: We arrived very late due to travel delays with the airline and not being able to find accessible transportation at the early morning hours, just after midnight from the airport to the hotel. So, we arrived, you know very, very early morning.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: To the hotel and it was beautiful hotel beautiful accessible room, huge roll in shower, but the bed, unlike what we were told prior to arriving there was.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Not accessible. There was no way for me to get him into bed using the Hoyer because there was a box frame under the bed, even though we were assured that wouldn't be there.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: At that hour of the day, there were no engineering resources to try to help us with that problem and we were basically told there was nothing that they could do and it's about 3:30 in the morning at this point; so, I did my best to transfer Michael up on to the bed.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Use in the Hoyer tried to get him on the corner of the bed, you know spread the Hoyer legs apart and try to get him on the corner, maybe I can drag him up onto the bed.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: And I just couldn't do it. The bed was very plush and I'm not strong enough to do that. So, I call down and asked if they could send some someone to help me get him into bed.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: And they sent up two security officers who took one look at him hanging off the corner of the bed and said I'm sorry we don't do that we can't help you.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: So.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: I decided, the only thing I was going to be able to do at that point was maybe get a roll away, and I could kind of roll him into that bed, and the thankfully.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: The housekeeper that brought the roll away to the room, was a very large man and I just asked him I said

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Michael and Terry Negrete: I would really be appreciative if you could do me a favor and help me put my husband back into the wheelchair because, even if I got into bed at that point, I don't know how I would be able to get him out of bed, and so this man.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Thankfully, helped me put Michael back into the wheelchair. During the time all this was going on, I have family members.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Calling to find out if there was someplace else that we could go, because this especially being Christmas Eve, we weren't.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Confident we were going to get this problem resolved, we were able to transfer to another hotel that was actually attached to this one, as many of them are in Vegas.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Who was able to accommodate our bed needs and make sure that any of our other needs were taken care of; so, in that case we were we were very lucky.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: The issue with the bed was resolved. Transportation, not so much. Again, you would think Vegas being a big.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Tourist town, we would be able to find transportation. Not the case that Christmas Eve. When we finally got our room settled and got dressed up, we could not find.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Wheelchair transportation to our wedding; so, we did have to reschedule it a few days later. So, it was, you know, someplace where you think that we're going to not have so many challenges.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: With regards to the hotel and transportation and under the circumstances, you know just it just didn't work out for us that time but.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Let Michael, I know we've had a few other you know hotel stories. Yeah we're just going to reiterate that, on this isn't a specific problem and just a.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: specific geographic area, or a particular hotel chain, it's really a nationwide problem we've had experiences. One comes to mind was another Christmas was down in Florida around the

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Michael and Terry Negrete: University of Central Florida area where we were going to visit family there and we actually called 15 hotels in that area, to see if they can accommodate.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: A bed with space underneath that could accommodate our Hoyer lift and out of those 15 hotels, not a single one.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Could accommodate that simple request. So, we wind up having to stay with my sister-in-law and forego having a daily shower and had a bed bath in place of that which wasn't necessarily ideal but.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: You know, it just was another heartbreak and circumstance, where at Christmas time we couldn't get the accessible accommodations that we needed.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: To move to another part of the country, in Maine, we stayed there at a hotel chain, and one thing that they did have was space under the bed.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: But the thing that we did notice was that, the bed was on wheels; so, whenever I went to transfer into the bed, the bed moved out of the way and I went up on the floor. So.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: There's a lot of different aspects to look at when people provide those accessible accommodations to you or they don't is you need to be really specific and what they are, but yeah it isn't unique to any particular area. It is a nationwide problem and.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: You know it definitely needs to be addressed by the ADA will be for yeah just one thing that I'll add on we try to.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Go to the same hotel its same hotel chain that we know is going to accommodate us and there's a couple of ones who we feel.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Comfortable that they're always going to be able to provide us what we need--the room under the bed, roll in shower that we haven't had issues with.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Until they decide to renovate. So, there there's a chain that we've been to in Texas, Nashville we've been to a few of their hotels and they've always had room under the bed and in their accessible rooms.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Until they went through a renovation and part of the renovation and standardizing all the hotels, was to add those box frames under the bed; so, suddenly.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Box frames were added that couldn't be removed and we no longer can stay at those particular hotels. So, you know, the search starts again, and you know every place we go that's our biggest challenge is finding that room under the bed.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Those are just a few examples, but you know, certainly be glad to answer any questions.

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Lee Page

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Lee Page: Okay, well thanks, Michael and Terry

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Lee Page: That's.

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Lee Page: Horrible experience, especially for being on vacation to renew your vows. Like you said, Vegas is a hugely accessible city. You would think those accommodations would be readily available for you.

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Lee Page: I can completely identify with what you said, because I had almost the exact same experience myself on a Christmas Eve night also.

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Lee Page: In Richmond, Virginia, where at seven o'clock at night, I had made arrangements with the front desk to lower the bed, because it was too high to transfer into, and so, then I went back to my.

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Lee Page: Celebration, with my family, came back to the hotel at 11 o'clock at night and the bed had not been lowered and they said, we have no personnel to do it.

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Lee Page: And I said, well, I can't stay in the hotel and so I had to leave and drive back to my home, you know 120 miles away at midnight on Christmas night, though.

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Lee Page: Unfortunately, this is a systemic problem in the hotel industry where branding is taking more precedent than accessibility, when it comes to accommodations in what they deem an accessible room for wheelchairs.

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Lee Page: The bed height or bed under carriages aren't really taken in consideration.

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Lee Page: The reality is that.

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Lee Page: hotels are public accommodations.

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Lee Page: Are covered by Title III of the ADA, the Americans with Disabilities Act.

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Lee Page: They're required to meet the ADA accessible guidelines, or ADAAG which provide design standards for accessible bathrooms, requirements for door handles, carpet thickness, reach range, door widths, slopes, and parking lots.

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Lee Page: And yet bed heights.

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Lee Page: Are not necessarily.

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Lee Page: Governed or have not been defined.

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Lee Page: As public accommodations, it would be is readily achievable as a barrier that the hotel should.

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Lee Page: Remove upon request.

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Lee Page: So, the real question is, if you feel like you've been discriminated against, you can file a complaint and to do so, you go to www.ada.gov.

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Lee Page: Besides filing a complaint with.

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Lee Page: Under the ADA with the Department of Justice, ADA allows for private right of action where an aggrieved party can file a lawsuit to enforce their rights to have the accessible accommodation.

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Lee Page: It also allows for mediation between two parties to come to an agreement on how the hotel would come into compliance, but, as you know, complaints take time.

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Lee Page: That's why it's important to advocate for yourself.

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Lee Page: Which you've tried to do, I've tried to do, but first you need to talk with the hotel manager on duty to explain what the barrier you're faced with.

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Lee Page: And try to come to an agreement on solving the problem, so that you can actually stay in that hotel, for example, if you need a roll in shower.

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Lee Page: In an accessible room, often when you make that reservation.

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Lee Page: You ask for their roll in shower but sometimes they book you into a room that doesn't have the accessible bath room. Once you identify this at the front desk, the hotel normally will do everything it can to try and find the room, with the roll in shower.

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Lee Page: So, this is one way to take a look.

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Lee Page: And try to work with the management, try and figure out the problem. The same goes with the bed issues; unfortunately, both of our cases.

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Lee Page: Management was not able to accommodate our problem. I think, basically, because hoped it was the holiday season, they didn't have any staff to assist us in one case and in your case.

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Lee Page: They just didn't have what you needed, which was rolling space underneath the bed, and unfortunately, that's due to the design of the bed.

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Lee Page: So, as you mentioned, one of the best ways we can fix the problem to minimize access issues is to plan ahead and have tips for traveling. I'm wondering Michael and Terry what, what do you do when it comes to plan ahead tips for travel stuff like that.

Michael and Terry Negrete

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Michael and Terry Negrete: I would say, one of the most important things to do, is, in particular with hotels, is once you make your reservation.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Is to continue to follow up with them leading up to your arrival because one person may make the reservation and think that you have an accessible room, with the specific.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Combinations that you need, but then followed up with someone else that might not be the case, and so.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Each and every time you follow up you might get a different story and even up until your day of arrival, you may find something different so.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Terry and I have always made it a point to continue to follow up with the hotel wherever we're staying not just at the point of the reservation, but you know all along.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Leading up until our point of arrival, but I know that um you know Terry has some other tips that she could probably add it there's as she does a lot of the confirmations for us when we travel.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: And.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: You know, like Michael said, I always call when I make the reservation, the day before we're heading out, of the day we're heading out, and even then.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: It's really a matter of who you get on the phone and how willing they are to help you. We went to New York City and.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: We knew that they could make the accommodation, but even as we're driving down there, in the car, person on the phone.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Said, yes, we're all set. I call back. We asked for somebody to visually check the room.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: And he came back and said, no, it wasn't done but I'll make sure it's done by the time you get there.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: And you know those people if you're going to go back to that hotel again, you know those people that are going to help you when you make sure we remember their names and we asked for them, because not everybody has that same level of customer service.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: You know willingness to just go above and beyond, to make sure you know we're taking care of we do it if we are concerned, bring lifts for underneath the bed feet, it could be that there is.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: A way to lift the bed, it may not have enough room to get a Hoyer underneath, but it is a type of bed that can be lifted up; so, we have lifts that come in different heights that we just pack.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: There plastic and we can stick those under to provide a little bit more room to lift the bed up.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: But plan, plan, plan is just really the, the best thing. Yeah, Terry, touched on something that's really important is the visual inspection of the room.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: When you make the reservations, because to one individual a handicap accessible room with the a roll in shower to them just means.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: It's gotten grab bars in particular areas. So, a lot of times, we frequently asked them can you go look at the room to ensure that it is an actual roll in shower and it doesn't have a lip to get into it.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: Because that's what we're really looking for or with regards to the bed, to ensure that in that room.

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Michael and Terry Negrete: That there is actually space that's under the bed, because a lot of times individuals have different perspective on what's accessible and what's not accessible and we even go so far, sometimes, to have them snap a picture and send it to us just to verify as well.

Lee Page

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Lee Page: Okay, what those are great ideas, especially for you know when you're making your reservation, you really got to be on top of it because.



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Lee Page: The truth of the matter is, you know your disability, the best you know what your how to meet your needs and the accessible room, even though it meets an ADA standard.

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Lee Page: As you said, what's accessible for one person is not necessarily accessible for the other and the hotel staff folk can only go by how the room is designed.

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Lee Page: And so, in their mind a roll in shower meets everybody's needs, and yet we can all prove that it doesn't. So, for me, when I travel, I take a transfer board because that helps me getting in and out of the bed or.

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Lee Page: In and out of.

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Lee Page: You know, a sofa or a near chair it's in the room also. So, I really want to thank you for being here today and giving us these tips and ideas and sharing the experience you had in your most recent travel.

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Lee Page: As you know.

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Lee Page: Working with the advocacy department is trying to do our best to work with the hotel industry to solve some of these problems that face our that our members face and people with disabilities as a whole.

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Lee Page: So, for more information on it, you can go to PVA advocacy or visit pva.org and I want to thank you both for being here today, and with that we will talk to you later.