



# the reactor

by Paul Azevedo

Why was I limping around last week? Glad you asked. It's because I burned my hand. Sorry. That IS confusing.

To start over... I went to rinse something in my kitchen sink, reached down to get an annoying aluminum pan out of the way (why do kids clutter the sink, anyway?) and found out the hard way it was sizzling hot.

Reacting... (I am a reactor, after all) I jumped back so fast I must have damaged the big muscle in my leg.

That's how I wound up crawfishing around the office and explaining my problem to everyone who would listen.

It also gave me an instant case of empathy for the disabled. They have to put up with this kind of nuisance permanently. For me it's just a temporary annoyance.

Up to now I've found curb cuts rather unaesthetic. They accumulate trash and puddles and put a slope in otherwise level sidewalks. But last week I found that curb cuts helped me avoid serious pain. Shuffling up those little ramps avoided lifting my foot over eight-inch curbs.

I've always been able to justify curb cuts and handicapped parking intellectually. That didn't stop that twinge of frustrated annoyance when I spotted a great parking space right next to my destination, only to find a blue sign painted in the middle.

Finding a good parking spot is one of those self-satisfying little victories that are too rare these days. The gods are smiling. In a small way you have beaten the system, until you see the sign "handicapped parking only."

Of course you know that someone else would be in the space if it hadn't been for the sign. And you do feel properly guilty at having such thoughts about people whose handicaps are as permanent as yours are temporary.

As Mayor Pete Murray and I were talking last week a young woman drove up and parked near us, blocking both the firelane and a curb cut. We objected, and were told "I'll just be a minute" in that angry tone that says "How dare you annoy me?"

It's that kind of self-centered behavior that causes the disabled much grief. What to her would have been a mild inconvenience—walking another 50 feet—might have blocked a wheelchair victim from getting in or out of a car.

By the time you read this I will probably be okay, this painful episode behind me.

For those who will need curb cuts and blue-painted parking spots for the rest of their lives, those unaesthetic and expensive amenities are more than just a convenience.

They are a necessity. If you are able-bodied, I hope you'll leave those special spots open for the disabled. After all, you may grab a hot pan yourself some day.

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