

Schwarzenegger Hands
by Angela Corrieri
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From time to time I glance at my hands and think, "my lord, I have Schwarzenegger hands".
Wide across the knuckles. Hands and wrists thick with muscles.

The condition isn't life threatening. Matter of fact, it has probably saved me several times in my life.

The other day I traveled to Washington, DC for a meeting at the Department of Homeland Security, driving and leaving my car at the Greenbelt Metro station, and took the Metro to L'Enfant Plaza.

On exiting from the train, I looked for the wheelchair symbols, the arrows under them directing travelers to the location of the elevators to the street level. I had not been to this station in a while, so I followed the arrows, found the elevator which took me to the exit turnstiles, but not the street level. Dutifully inserting my farecard into the turnstile and retrieving it, I followed the source of sunlight, thinking that an elevator would be nearby.

As I moved away from the turnstiles and toward the source of sunlight, I looked around. No sign of an elevator. As I rounded a corner, confronting me were two very very high escalators ending at an opening in the ground. One moving downward from the street level and one moving upward. Looking around once more, and not seeing an elevator, I sighed and reviewed my options. I could spend some time looking for an elevator or going back to ask an agent, or I could take the escalator up. I decided to not spend the time, and moved my wheelchair toward the edge of the escalator.

Positioning the wheels so that the front ones were on one step and the back ones on the step behind, I stretched my right arm, grabbed the moving handrail with my right hand, and the left tire of my wheelchair with my left hand, making sure the wheel was tight forward against the step above. I was wearing new gloves with some rubber on them. The escalator started to take me upwards, my right hand firmly gripping the handrail.

I have taken escalators several times in the past, so, the activity didn't scare me. But, the length of it did concern me a bit, which is probably good, because it allowed my "careful sense" to keep me alert.

For whatever reason this occurs, I have noticed that after a few seconds, the hand rail under my right hand moves just a bit more forward than my outstretched arm, but has been manageable on shorter escalators. My hands or my gloves easy to re-position.

About half way up, the right handrail stretched a bit farther than was comfortable for my arm, and for one fraction of a second, my hand slipped slightly. I don't know if my heart raced or my eyes widened or if I uttered an expletive. I did hear a sound coming from my throat, "achh". I had not examined my new gloves closely- they were a gift, and knew there was some rubber, but didn't know how much or how many fingers were covered.

I dared not look backwards. One thought of falling backwards flashed in my mind and I dismissed it, with the thought, "If I fall backwards I will die".

The escalator reached the two-thirds point and seemed to take forever to travel the rest of the way up. My hand slipped a fraction more. I looked up toward the street, hoping that my thoughts could hasten the escalators movement. I tightened my grip on the handrail and prayed.

Step by step. Inch by inch. I looked at the steps below me and leaned my shoulders down to keep my weight forward, gripping so tightly, and then looking at my hand. I think my thoughts were, "make it. make it", like a cheer.

After another endless few seconds, the steps I was on were reaching the top. Anxiously, I pushed off the escalator and reached cement sidewalk. Some people were walking by, others including Metro security milling around, looked at me with surprise.

I was just happy to be on my way, sighing repeatedly with great relief. Crossed the street, went down the block, and entered the building where my meeting was to be. Breathing relief and thanking God all the way.

Thanks for the Schwarzenegger Hands.