

Riding the stairs preserves independence

By Howard V. Walker

When advancing years or infirmity make that flight of stairs to the second-floor bedroom one challenge too many, some obvious options spring to mind: move to a bungalow, build a ground-level bedroom and bathroom or install a stair lift or possibly an elevator.

As the majority of Canadian seniors live in single detached houses — 60 per cent according to Statistics Canada — these are choices many readers are facing or will face in the near future. Equally well-established is the desire to live independent, productive lives for as long as possible in familiar surroundings. The family home is invested with memories; moving can be both traumatic and costly.

Substantial expense is involved, also, in the construction of ground-floor facilities. The stairway lift or glide has been around for a long time, although today's version is

greatly improved over the one Charles Laughton's irascible character rode in that memorable scene from the movie classic *Witness for the Prosecution*.

The two basic models provide vertical means of access for users in a seated position on the unit or on a platform in their wheelchair. They glide on a steel I-beam track bolted directly to the stair tread, on top of the carpet or other floor finish. Total projection into the stair width averages only 30 cm. Tracks can be designed to make turns at landings or for curving runs.

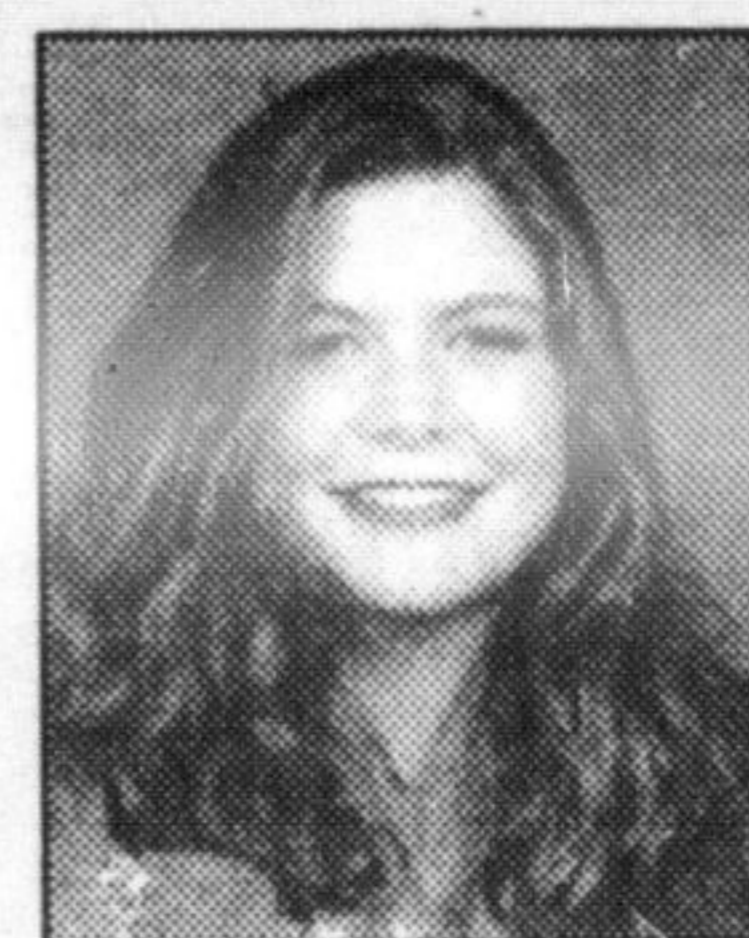
Installation is normally simple and quickly accomplished. Conveniently, standard household electric current is quite adequate. Features include user-friendly fingertip pressure controls, plus remote "call" and "send" controls for use by others if arthritic or physical condition prevents self-operation.

Dorothy Walton of Ottawa finds her lift "wonderful and easy — it has given me total independence in my own home." Her

husband is also grateful, both for the benefit to his wife following her stroke and for the reduced demands now placed upon him.

In the same city, artist John Ball's single-storey house has steps in the entrance leading up to floor level; he has severe spinal problems. Para Transpo brings him from hospital to front door in his wheelchair. Installation of a platform lift (recessed in the floor when inactive) now provides a comfortable transition between the two levels.

The tax-exempt cost of these access stair lifts ranges from \$3,500 to \$4,500 for straight flights, according to style and finish. Reconditioned units are less expensive: \$2,500 to \$3,000. Stair platform lifts begin at \$7,000. All come with warranties, usually one year for parts and labour. Check to see whether your stair lift will qualify as a medical deduction for income-tax purposes. Access Industries of Missouri manufactures the Excel Stairway Lift. It is available in outlets across Canada.



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