



Kathy Ness has always been a go-getter.

As a speech and language pathologist in Joplin, Missouri, she worked with special needs kids for years—and loved it.

She was in her final year of studies to get a master's degree when she began experiencing weakness, eye problems, and severe fatigue. Her doctor diagnosed multiple sclerosis.

She didn't want to accept that she had MS, but the extreme exhaustion and flare-ups persisted. She had trouble climbing the stairs to her apartment—or going downstairs to the laundry room. She fell so many times in her apartment bathroom that the bathtub chair was bent out of shape. During a massive attack of MS she fell from a stool and broke her left leg in three places.

Kathy knew she could no longer live in a typical apartment. One day she saw a newspaper article about Blackbird Apartments, an accessible, affordable apartment building developed by Accessible Space, Inc. in Kansas City, Kansas.

The switch to an accessible apartment made all the difference. The accessible design of her apartment lets her live independently. “The kitchen is my size,” she says. “I don't have to reach, so my energy can be conserved. The stove and oven are at my level. It's nice not to get burned on the stove.” No more falls in the bathroom: she can just walk or roll

into the shower. Hauling groceries used to be an ordeal. Now an automatic security system lets her into the building so she can ride the elevator.

She has found a community of friends in the building. “It's always nice to come home to friendly people who care about me,” she says. She enjoys the community room (including movie nights, cards, and holiday parties) and the nearby neighborhood amenities. “Everything is close.”

Using her walker or a cane, Kathy still works part time with students three days a week.

Of life at Blackbird Apartments, she says, “I think it's beautiful. It's not a nursing home and it's not assisted living. Some consumers have resident assistants, but everyone is encouraged to be as independent as possible. I still can't believe I'm in!”

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