

# CHAOS to control

**Quadriplegic Lorraine Tran had her mind freed when organizer Lynne Davidson freed up space in Tran's home**

Story by Michael McQuillan  
Photos by Mario Bartel

Lorraine Tran's life was thrown into chaos four years ago when an accident left her without the use of her arms and legs.

But she adjusted.

It was like taking off one pair of shoes and putting on another, says the Vancouver woman about learning to live as a quadriplegic.

"I don't give up very easily."

But after undergoing treatments and rehabilitation in four different hospitals, getting used to a motorized wheelchair and moving from Fort St. John, Tran felt her life had stalled.

With the help of a breathing tube she was able to control her wheelchair, and other assisted living technology helped with other activities.

But it was the inability to keep her apartment clean and organized—that everyday challenge—that bothered her most and made her feel that her previous organized life had fallen out of her control.

And though she had visiting caregivers, they couldn't help, since their job centred on basic supports.

"Everything was chaotic," said Tran. "It's stressful for me to not be organized. It can be depressing. You want to get going but you can't."

## INDEPENDENT LIVING

Thankfully, an unlikely benefactor helped get her life back in order.

Earlier this month, Tran was visited by a team from the local chapter of the Professional Organizers in Canada (POC), who went through her apartment shelf by shelf, drawer by drawer, and helped her put together a system to keep it all straight.

"When you think of it, people who are disabled or in wheelchairs need things to be really organized," said Lynne Davidson, a Burnaby resident who was part of the volunteer team of organizers working with Tran.

For the disabled, having an organized home means having greater independence and accessibility, she added.

The exercise was so successful, the B.C. POC chapter is now considering expanding the practice, and volunteering its services to help other disabled persons get organized.

Although Tran's apartment involved seven professional organizers, it still took longer than most projects. That's because it was a learning experience for all. With Tran getting around in a large motorized wheelchair, the volunteers realized her furniture and belongings had to be placed at the perimeter of rooms. It was also important everything be immediately visible for Tran and each item have a set place—so she could tell her various caregivers exactly where items were located and where they belong.

"We had to learn a lot about what Lorraine's needs were," said Davidson.

## FEELING FREE

The idea of bringing in professional organizers was sparked by a conversation between Tran and Simon Cox, executive director of the B.C. Association for Individualized Technology and Supports for People with Disabilities (BCITS). Cox was working on some of the



Lynne Davidson is a professional organizer who also volunteers her skills to help people with disabilities, like Lorraine Tran, who was paralysed in 2004, better organize and manage their surroundings. Below: Davidson says the kitchen is an area of particular concern.

assistive technologies for Tran when he said it would be great if the host of the home organizing TV show *Neat* could help her.

They approached *Neat* producers but were turned

down. Then they contacted POC.

Tran is happy they did.

"Now that I'm feeling uncluttered and free, I just want to get out the door and do things," she said.

Davidson and the other organizers also feel fortunate they volunteered their time.

"Lorraine has a better attitude towards life than all of the people I know. She's amazing," she said. "We really enjoyed being around her."

Tran's approach to life is typified by how she reflects on the accident that changed everything.

In 2004 she was driving down a Fort St. John road late at night when her car collided with a full-grown moose. The accident caused her neck to snap.

"I don't hold God accountable for the accident and I don't hold the moose accountable," said Tran, who has a strong faith in Christianity. "The only bad thing that happened was the moose walked away and I didn't get all of that moose sausage."

• To find out more about the POC, go online to [www.organizersincanada.com](http://www.organizersincanada.com) while the BCITS website is [www.bcits.org](http://www.bcits.org).

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NEWS

## ROBBING THE BLIND

A legally blind elderly woman had her purse snatched at a Metrotown parking lot Wednesday. Around noon, a woman was getting into the passenger seat of a car parked near Zellers on Central Boulevard when she felt someone grab her purse.

Her husband, who chased the thief for a short distance, described the suspect as a non-Caucasian man wearing a dark blue hooded jacket. The thief, thought to be about five-foot-eight to five-foot-nine and 140 pounds, was last seen in the Bonsor Recreation Centre parking lot.

The purse was later found and turned into the rec centre by an unknown man. When it was returned to the woman, she confirmed everything, including cash, was still in it. Burnaby RCMP request help to find the thief and ask anyone with information to call Const. J. Sangha at 604-294-7922.