

COMOX VALLEY ECHO

The mind-blowing sight that changed my life

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The success of last year's International Paralympic Committee Nordic World Cup events on Mount Washington has led to the mountain being asked to host the 2009 event. The local organizing committee in the Comox Valley is looking for more volunteers to make the next event an even bigger success this time around. Here, one of those who has signed up, tells the story about how learning to ski after becoming disabled transformed her life.



Photo credit: Brent Reid

Throughout the 1990s, I thought that my life was pretty much in place. During the school year, I worked with teenagers at risk and also those with mental and physical disabilities. In the summer months, I guided month long trips back-to-back, kayaking and backcountry hiking, encompassing Yukon, Alaska, and the Broken Islands in British Columbia.

I loved it all and never questioned my ability to continue in either job, never. I did know that one day I would be too old, but hey, we ALL age, don't we?

But in July 2001, everything exploded inwards, when I had what we eventually learned was a Multiple Sclerosis 'stroke'. Within minutes of waking one morning, I had lost my speech, my ability to walk, to think, to access emotions; I was an automated empty shell of a human being.

Never in my wildest thoughts would I have imagined becoming what I had been supporting and 'teaching' all those years. The 'Diane' that I had been was gone, dead.

The following years saw me just trying to survive through each day, constant rehabilitation, walking with a cane, fighting the medical system, and ever-growing crushing pain. All I had was the moment I was in, no past, no future. And most certainly, no dreams.

We were raised in the woods in Alberta. This environment was at our core and I now believe that this drove my mom to do whatever it took to return me to the mountains, our spirit home. A close family friend bought me snowshoes; mom also got a pair to be with me, as I was rarely able to be on my own. We spent the next few winters just being in the forests up on Mount Washington in the Comox Valley. I was 'home' and this, it seemed, was enough.

But then my dad volunteered for the 2007 International Paralympic Committee World Cup (which was being held at Mount Washington), and on the last day of competition he encouraged me to come up and watch.

It was mind-blowing. Here were people who had disabilities, and they were athletes!

I was then introduced to Colette Bourgonje, a five-time Paralympian. She suggested that I try a Nordic sitski and head out with her after the award ceremonies.

I did, and the rest, as they say, is history. I was free.

Last year I was fortunate enough to be involved with volunteer instructors from Vancouver Island Society for Adaptive Snowsports.

The end of the season saw me taking part in my first race - The Strathcona Nordic Racing Club Coastal Cup - and Mount Washington finally had its first sitskier.

When I heard that the IPC World Cup was returning to the mountain next year, I knew I had to be involved somehow. Mount Washington has shown that it can host world-class events at the highest technical level.

Now, as a result of supporting its own para-athletes, it is demonstrating solidarity and heart-felt support for those athletes who will be here next year.

I am on the volunteer committee for the World Cup and I am an athlete again. Isn't life the darndest thing?

The Comox Valley World Cup Organizing Committee is honoured to be coordinating the 2009 International Paralympic Committee (IPC) Nordic Skiing World Cup on Mount Washington and in the Comox Valley on March 11, 12, 13 & 14 of next year.

This incredible event requires dynamic and dedicated volunteers to make it a success, and the committee needs many more of them.

Over 125 athletes, from 23 countries, along with their coaches, will be coming to the Valley to ski our mountain.

Volunteers will be required from March 5 through March 16 and will be involved in lots of work and play as we showcase our abilities as a community to hold World Cup calibre events and play host to some of the most elite winter athletes in the world.

For further information please visit www.mountwashingtonworldcup.com or email volunteers@mountwashingtonworldcup.com. Forms can be completed on the website and returned via email or may be dropped off at Comox Valley Economic Development Society's office at 2435 Mansfield Drive Courtenay. Forms are also available at Volunteer Comox Valley at 310 Puntledge Road in Courtenay.