

# OPINION

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Josh Dwyer's

# Josh Dueck's inspiring story

Everyone has obstacles to overcome in their lives. Sometimes, it feels as though the very thought of opening one's eyes is simply too much to bear, let alone getting out of bed, dressing or making breakfast. For some, life is difficult right from the moment they are born. For others, a major event happens that transforms their life.

I've noticed it is not necessarily the challenge of the moment that is life changing, but the attitude we take and manner in which we take it on.

Having a positive outlook in a bleak situation can be difficult for some. Whether that's due to the severity of the event or one's outlook, in many cases we can choose to become positive – if we try.

Josh Dueck made his life-changing moment an opportunity.

The words "truly inspirational" sum up this Vernon resident's story.

Dueck was what some think of as a typical kid – fun loving, loved to have a good time, although he was on the ski team, he may not always have showed up, but certainly never missed a party.

In many ways, his real journey began seven years ago on a sunny, crisp, clear day at Silver Star Mountain.

He was teaching skiing and about to perform a jump for his students. As it was a sunny, spring day, the snow was slushy so he hiked up a bit higher to ensure he was going fast enough to do his signature jump, a front flip.

Dueck started skiing towards the jump and realized at the last moment he was going too fast. But he carried on.

After successfully completing the first part of the aerial stunt, he realized he wasn't slowing down and was going much too fast to control the rest of the jump. He fell from the sky going 60 mph and dropped 100 feet to a landing on his face.

He severely shattered his neck and back in the horrific crash.

Dueck could tell from the kids' faces rushing to help him just how serious the fall was, and he noticed that he couldn't feel anything from his waist down. He was rushed to hospital to begin the journey of his life.

As a young man, Dueck wondered what he had to live for as he waited 36 hours for surgery, unable to feel his legs.

Taking pain medication seven times stronger than morphine couldn't stop the pain. Realizing he would never walk again, let alone ski, what did he have to look forward to?

He didn't want to spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair. He was a young man, he was a skier and a ski instructor. He lived to ski!

Imagine how physically, mentally and socially difficult having such an accident would be in the acceptance of becoming a paraplegic. Imagine what strength one would require to feel at peace with what life had dealt you. Imagine what you would do in that situation.

"It's not what happens to a person in life that defines their character, but more so how you respond to those challenges," says Dueck.

Out of the ashes, emerged his phoenix – an amazing spirit and positive attitude.

He was determined not only to ski again, but to race.

Dueck believed he would compete in skiing and be the best he could possibly be. Due to his strength and vision and some incredible people supporting him, including his family, special friend Lacey and coach Rob Coburn, he was able to find the strength to see this as an opportunity, if you can imagine that.

"A challenge to one person can be an opportunity to the next. It is all about how you see it," he said.

Dueck not only learned how to overcome the mental and physical challenges life threw at him, he surpassed his dream of skiing, competing and winning internationally again, and celebrated in his victory.

He has skied in many competitions and was the 2009 world downhill champion and a 2011 X Games gold medallist. He is currently ranked sixth overall in the world and is an eight-time Canadian champion.

He also sums up the energy to be a spokesperson for many organizations, especially his charity of choice, Opportunity International.

Opportunity International provides small business loans, savings, insurance and training to more than two million people working their way out of poverty in the developing world. Clients in 24 countries use these financial services to start or expand a business, provide for their families, create jobs for their neighbourhood or build a safety-net for their future.

"I see myself as extremely fortunate" said Dueck. "Yes I have some extra challenges, but I live in an amazing country, where all my needs are met, and every day I get to wake up and do what I love.

"In the developing world, there are millions of people facing unimaginable circumstances and struggling to survive. By providing microloans and financial services, Opportunity International changes that."

Dueck recently received the tremendous provincial honour of March 13 being proclaimed Josh Dueck Day, in honour of his medal win at the 2010 Paralympics Winter Games.

He won silver in the para alpine skiing event and is one of 17 B.C. athletes who won medals and were recognized on the one-year anniversary of the Games. Dueck shares this day with Lindsay Debou.

Not only has he been incredibly successful personally and in sport, Dueck has also been lucky in love, marrying his special friend Lacey, who has been by his side since the accident.

It is often said that life is about the middle bit of the journey, not about the start or the end. Dueck helps us all understand a bit more about that amazing ride – through his positive attitude, his amazing athletic ability and his ability to help others in his community and around the world.

Perhaps more of us should follow his example.

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*Whose Challenge Is It Anyway?*