

# Jim Milina

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**It's about more than a mountain**

Jim is an extremely positive individual who knows, not only the power of having a dream, but also about seeing it through to success... regardless of what barriers and limitations may be in the way.

Jim is a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the chest down, the result of a freestyle skiing accident almost thirty years ago. *"Well, back in my able-bodied life, I was an intense athlete with great focus and tenacity."* At seventeen he was a champion-level freestyle skier, with sights set on competing in the Winter Olympics in Calgary. Instead, an unexpected and tragic accident during a performance at the Toronto Ski Show in 1981 changed everything, and at eighteen he broke his neck and embarked on a new life inside a disabled world.

In 2000, after spending eighteen years in a wheelchair and away from his beloved outdoors and the mountains, he was presented with a very unique opportunity. It was a chance to return to the mountains and to climb Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest peak in Africa. It was a daunting challenge, and a feat never imagined before let alone attempted by a person with Jim's level of injury. *"The possibility of returning to the wilderness and the experience of being back on a mountain sounded exhilarating, but seemed farfetched and remote. But those weren't good enough reasons for us to give up on the dream."*



In August of 2002, Jim and a team of nine friends went to Tanzania to climb Kilimanjaro. The team was dubbed the, 'CORD Climbing Team' with acronym CORD standing for the name of the disabled advocacy group Jim formed for the expedition called, 'Climbing Over Restriction and Disability Society' which he headed.

*"Climbing Kilimanjaro was a real handful and we really didn't fully comprehend what we were in for until we were right in the middle of it."* After three and a half days of climbing, some of which was quite horrendous, the team stood, and in Jim's case sat, side by side on the Saddle of Mount Kilimanjaro

posing for a picture. That picture showed Jim to be the first quadriplegic to ever climb the mountain, the first wheelchair climber to ascend using the rugged northern Rongai route, as well as the first wheelchair climber to successfully 'climb over Mount Kilimanjaro' by climbing up one side and down the other. In accomplishing these feats, Jim also set a World Altitude Record for a Quadriplegic at 14,800 feet.

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Since returning from Africa Jim's story has been told in local and national newspapers, radio, and television. Jim was featured on the national television talk show, 'The Vicki Gabereau Show' where he showed off the all-terrain wheelchair he helped design and had built for the climb, and treated viewers to some video shot during the climb. Currently, Jim is about halfway through writing a book telling of his Kilimanjaro experience as well as producing a documentary film about the expedition using the footage shot during the climb.



Jim also has returned to his voluntary commitments including speaking to school children helping the kids to, *“understand what disability means, and what it doesn't necessarily have to mean.”* He adds, *“It gives them a more well-rounded definition of what being disabled is.”* In addition, he continues to tell his Kilimanjaro story through presentations incorporating messages of what he considers his keys to success. *“Teamwork. Determination. Resiliency. Human spirit. Focussing on Abilities... not disabilities. And of course the importance of having and pursuing one's dreams. These are the things we needed to be successful.”*

Jim's list of audiences continue to grow, including Fortune 500 company Avaya Communications, Central Washington University, the International Adventure Therapy Conference, and Chapters-Indigo's Chapters In Health Speakers Series. Jim was also a presenter at the 2003 Vancouver Mountain Film Festival. In 2010 he was invited to speak to international guests and dignitaries at the gala event on the eve of the opening ceremonies of the 2010 Paralympic Games in Vancouver. Earlier in the day he carried the Paralympic Torch in the Official Torch Relay leading up to the games.



Jim was awarded The Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal in 2002, as well as a BC Community Achievement Award in 2011. Also in 2011, Jim carried the Rick Hansen Medallion in Rick's 25 Year Anniversary Relay across Canada celebrating his epic Man In Motion tour.

Jim continues his advocacy of the disabled and their abilities, as well as the integration of the disabled and outdoor recreational activities as well as other disability-related issues.

Jim now resides in Comox where he lives with his wife and fellow Kilimanjaro climber Corrine. Their family is completed by two children; a girl and a boy ages 10 and 6.