

My Dad: The Flying MS Superhero



My brother and I exhaled collectively as our dad’s parachute glided to a smooth stop. The first words out of his mouth were, “I’m doing that again!” We weren’t at all surprised to hear that announcement. Our dad, Skip (who is usually in a wheelchair most of the time), had just jumped out of a perfectly good airplane for the first time in his life at 68 years old.



Photo credit: Skydive Chicago

In the 1950s when our dad was a little boy, he dreamed he was flying. The one-time-only dream allowed him to imagine he was a bird. In the dream, he soared through the sky with a

newfound sense of freedom that temporarily transported him to a world free of suffering. Although he has always maintained that he came from a very loving family, his home life wasn't always stable. He lost his mom as a young boy to tuberculosis, his dad turned to alcohol, and he was in and out of foster homes. In one of those foster neighborhoods, he met the love of his life, our mom, Vicki.

Fast forward to 2022 when our dad shared the news that he had another dream. In this new dream, he was again flying, but this time out of an airplane. After waking from his dream, he shared with us his desire to go skydiving.

Skip was diagnosed with [primary progressive multiple sclerosis](#) in 1989 at the age of 36 and has taught us lessons in the power of hope, determination, kindness, giving, love, humor and the capabilities of the human spirit ever since. He will tell you it's plain and simple, but the example he has set for those in his life has been something we carry with us every day.

I reflect on how it hasn't been an easy road. The year our dad was diagnosed with MS, he thought, "no big deal. I'm sure they will have a treatment or cure for this in the next few years." Those years turned into decades. He shared that jumping out of an airplane could help him raise MS awareness, support my rainbow-inspired picture book by wearing colorful headbands that also doubled as support for the LGBTQ community, and fulfill his dream of flying! Our dad has been a beautiful example of how to love, support and believe the best in people - plain and simple.



Our dad is determined, kind, funny, and unlike anyone we've ever known when it comes to finding the silver linings in life. Watching him jump out of that plane brought me back to life as a preteen and learning of my dad's diagnosis. I'm brought to how he adapted to his favorite sport by inventing a one-handed set on the volleyball court, and how he's continuing to challenge the status quo. And although MS presented so many challenges, our dad has found ways to adapt to his circumstances and create clever tools and ideas to live life on his own terms.

And don't get us started on his sense of humor! Years of hearing him tell jokes may get the occasional eye-roll from the people who love him most, but those same jokes we've listened to time and again have often brought laughter to the lives of so many people. Everyone is invited to join in on the fun when dad is in joke mode. Some examples include unexpected telemarketers, doctors, religious figures, waitstaff, and his new skydiving buddy, who joked right back with him in an unexpected twist! There's a good chance he's telling a joke right this very second. I believe his humor is medicine. Not just for himself, but for the people in his life and those lucky enough to cross his path.



Photo credit: Skydive Chicago

On the big day, we watched him descend from the sky, video footage showing the absolute awe of the experience. Somehow, he looked years younger, and we recognized a new gleam in his eye! He later reflected on how much had changed in his life since that first dream so many years ago. Three things stood out: The feeling of soaring like a bird was a life-changing gift that opened him up to a new perspective. Living with MS was hard, especially without our mom, who had passed six years earlier, but he had built a beautiful life throughout the years. He had a wonderful family, supportive friends and just added an adventure-filled hobby to that happy list.

There's been pain, tears, adjustments and frustration, but there's also been hope. Hope that one day there will be a cure. We hope that future cases of MS will look a lot different. That families who learn of MS diagnoses will rest assured that their loved ones won't have to suffer through one of the world's most unpredictable and debilitating conditions.

Our Dad is so much more than his MS diagnosis.

Our Dad is our hero.

And that day, we watched him FLY!