



National Disabled Veterans

Winter Sports Clinic

Skier Profile

Mark Drake – Healing through the Soul

Mental and physical hurdles won't stop U.S. Army veteran Mark Drake from conquering the Rocky Mountains at the 2007 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. In spite of some significant challenges, Drake continues to stay active and maintains an extremely positive outlook on life.

A strong military family history coupled with his own desire to serve his country gave Drake the incentive to fight in the Vietnam War when he was drafted at age 20. Serving in the Army from 1969 to 1970 as a medic and X-ray technician, he was a member of the Medevac 1st Cavalry Division stationed in Tay Ninh, a small city north of Saigon.

Drake finished his x-ray training in a Sacramento hospital and continued to work in the field until 1993. Although he continued to work part time in the hospital, his favorite hobby was working full time in the two bicycle shops he owned. In 1991, he was diagnosed with Post Polio Syndrome (PPS) a condition that affects polio survivors anywhere between 10 and 40 years after recovery. "I got polio from the vaccine," Drake explained. "When I was in the second grade, I developed polio so badly that I couldn't walk for four months." Now 57, his leg muscles have weakened to the extent that he uses a wheelchair for most activities, although he can stand for short periods. When he had to give up bicycling because of his disease, Drake turned his interest to handcycling instead. A resident of Longmont, Colorado, Drake now competes in numerous handcycling races in his home state and is extremely active in promoting adaptive sports. This year, Drake will complete a week-long, 400-mile handcycle race across Colorado. In addition, he manufactures and develops adaptive sports equipment through his own at-home project, *Adaptive Sports Technology*.

This year's Winter Sports Clinic will be Drake's third year skiing the slopes of Snowmass. "The Clinic is the most amazing thing for me," he said. "I had a lot of self-imposed prejudices about being in a wheelchair, but attending the Clinic has allowed me to see through those things. A completely new area of sports has opened up to me." Among his favorite aspects of the Clinic are the staff and volunteers who make the event a reality. "The staff at the Clinic is the most professional and empathetic group of people I've ever met," he said. "I was nervous to step out of my comfort zone at first, but once I saw how supportive they were I realized that I was stepping into an even bigger comfort zone."

Mark Drake sees the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic as a tool that not only helps him physically, but mentally as well. In his words, "The Clinic can't put your legs back together, but it can certainly help your soul."



Miracles on a Mountainside!