

Muffy Davis

Jimmie Heuga Award 2005

Citation: We take great pleasure in nominating Muffy Davis for the Jimmie Heuga Award, recognizing her superior achievement in her significant contributions to skiing and the Paralympic movement and her physical bravery in overcoming personal adversity.

(Excerpts from an article by Mark Reiman, editor-in-chief of Incredible People Magazine)



Muffy Davis began weekend ski lessons at the age of four. In just three years she found herself on the Sun Valley (Idaho) Ski Team and improving quickly into one of the brightest young skiers on the mountain.

Muffy became an honor student at Wood River High School with a stated goal to win an Olympic gold medal. She also became good friends and the head-to-head competitor with a very talented classmate by the name of Picabo Street.

When Davis woke up Saturday morning, February 18th, 1989, she had no idea that a turning point in her life was only hours away. She had been named to the US Olympic development ski team, and training directly with the US Olympic ski team in Sun Valley. They were skiing a new downhill course early that morning. As Muffy blew down Bald Mountain at 55 mph she was unable to hold her line in the rough snow, hurtled off the course and hit two trees, fracturing her spine and hitting her head, shattering her helmet. The helmet most surely saved her life. "It was a serious compression fracture. You wake up from surgery and, you know, you try to wiggle your toes...you expect them to move and they don't. That's when it kind of hit me." She was paralyzed from the mid-chest down, complete paraplegia.

Muffy recounts her first days and weeks in rehab and trying to come to terms with her accident. Then, one night, she had a revelation, a defining moment, that changed her life again, but in a very different way. It changed her spirit.

"One night I was having a lot of sadness, a lot of real anxiety about my accident. And then a dream...or vision...a Higher Power came to me. I understood that this accident happened for a reason, and there was a lot to be learned and gained from my disability. Ever since that moment there has been this real sense of peace." Muffy Davis was just 16 years old.

She was aided by her entire community and some notable friends, including Gretchen Fraser. Gretchen was a gold medal winner in the 1948 St. Moritz Olympics, making her the first American, man or woman, to win an Olympic medal in alpine skiing. Gretchen became a fixture of support for Muffy and an inspiration. "If I can touch just one person the way that Gretchen touched me in my life, it will have been successful."

Muffy Davis went on to become Wood River High School's homecoming queen and eventually the Valedictorian of her graduating class. She graduated from Stanford University in 1995 and a degree in human biology, with an emphasis on the psycho-social aspects of disability. But, even with so many incredible accomplishments and obstacles overcome, one important challenge still remained in Davis' life: to ski-race again.

The turning point came the day that Davis drove her truck alone to the Bald Mountain ski area parking lot, got the mono-ski out all by herself, and proceeded to ski all day.

By 1998 Muffy was in her third season as a disabled ski racer and her first on the US Disabled Ski Team. It was highlighted by winning the bronze medal in the super giant slalom at the Paralympics in Nagano, Japan. She has gone on to win gold medals at the World Cup Finals and was honored by the Paralyzed Veterans of America with their Outstanding Skier Award public service.

Davis takes both an optimistic and a philosophical view of the current advances in spinal cord research. She is encouraged by the exciting developments that could help her walk again. "But I don't live for that day. I live for today...with hope that maybe that day will come, but enjoying and appreciating each day that I have. If a cure is found, that's great! But if I live the rest of my life in a wheelchair, I'll have no regrets. My life is full and I love who I am and what I'm doing. That's what I focus on."

When Muffy Davis was just 15 years old, she was asked in a school assignment to briefly describe the essence of who she was. With prophetic wisdom beyond her years she wrote, "I am about success through determination. I am here to live the best I can and through that, lead others into the best they can be."