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My Other Life: Sachin Pavithran's High Adventures

Center for Persons With Disabilities

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By Storee Powell

There are many thrill-seekers in the world, including people who are blind. The CPD's Sachin Pavithran is one of them.

The director of the Utah Assistive Technology Program and blind advocate said, "I love thrill – anything that gives me a rush – especially extreme sporting. When people say I can't do things because I'm blind, I do it just to show them I can."

A few activities on his 'extreme sporting' resume include skydiving, bungee jumping in Dubai, base jumping in London, cliff jumping at Lake Powell, white water rafting in the Snake River, and kayaking in the Salmon River.

In July, Pavithran went to Lake Powell with some friends, including the CPD’s Shane Johnson. The rocks were calling Pavithran's name as he was the first to volunteer to jump from the 30 foot cliff to the lake below.

"I jumped from 12 or 15 feet, and it was pretty scary," Johnson said. "I would not have done it with my eyes closed, but he never hesitated. The first thing he said after he surfaced in the water was, 'Did you get a picture?'"

A fifty-foot cliff was his next goal, but that was vetoed by Pavithran's wife, Johnson said, laughing.

While fear is a part of extreme sports, a lot of people are especially nervous to see a blind person doing these things, Pavithran said.

"I get nervous, but it never stops me from doing anything," Pavithran said. "I've never backed off doing something because I was scared or because people had the perception I couldn't do it."

Of course Pavithran posts updates and photos of his adventures to Facebook, which usually elicits a phone call from his mom.

He said, "She'll call and say, 'What the heck are you doing?!' But my family and wife are very supportive of me doing these things. I didn't grow up in an environment where I was nurtured to believe I couldn't do things"
When he did his first skydive, which was after graduation from undergrad, he didn’t tell his parents outright. Rather, Pavithran popped in the video of his graduation that was followed by shots of him skydiving. It would seem he not only enjoys the rush himself, but sharing it with others.

“They were so surprised, and it was a fun reaction,” Pavithran said. “Sometimes I even get my family to do it with me, like when I cliff jumped at Lake Powell this summer.”

After a pep talk, Pavithran got his wife to jump from a cliff with him. But learning how to do such extreme sports hasn’t always been so accessible for Pavithran.

Growing up in Dubai, Pavithran didn’t know other blind people and had to learn how to do extreme sports on his own. But it didn’t stop him from speed boat racing, jet skiing and wake boarding in the Arabian Sea.

Now, however, Pavithran networks with blind friends in the U.S. to learn new strategies of accomplishing an extreme sport.

“A lot of blind people do these same things, whether people believe it or not,” Pavithran said. “I look to find opportunities to do these things, and sometimes I have to tweak a few things for my personal purpose to do them.”

Two examples are golf and target shooting, some of his favorites. He began golfing this summer.

“I love golf – I’ve always had a desire to learn,” Pavithran said. “I’m still perfecting my game, but I want to get good at it.”

In both sports, Pavithran gets a description from friends of how far the hole or target is, allowing him to adjust his position.

Long range target shooting is something Pavithran and his friends are working on making accessible. The idea is to use a feed from a camera to send to an iPad so the scope can be positioned with the feedback. Also, a custom rifle will have to be built that will reach 1,200 yards.

“It really is all about attitude,” Pavithran said. “I don’t have to do extreme sports to be confident, but it is one way to show that I am.”

“My other life” is a recurring feature that highlights CPD employees away from their desks.