

Speaker Profile



At age six, Jessica Kruger joined her family on a four-year, round-the-world sailing trip to 37 countries. When she returned to elementary school in Coquitlam, she played volleyball, basketball, and softball, and says she “enjoyed growing up as a Canadian kid.” Jessica was 15 when she started her first real job at an exterior house-painting company. Ten days later, her life changed forever.

“It wasn’t easy,” she recalls. “But I loved the high work, the tall ladders.” Jessica was six metres above the ground and on the second storey of the building when she suddenly blacked out, falling and breaking her neck and spine in four places. The injury left her a quadriplegic, with paralysis in most of her lower body.

Jessica’s journey to recovery was challenging. “It was months before I could transfer on my own, shifting from wheelchair to couch to bathtub. No part of rehab was easy — not learning to transfer, not physiotherapy, not occupational therapy.”

Jessica’s goal was to be independent, and as she slowly got stronger, she realized she could push herself. She earned As and Bs on the four Grade 10 classes she took in rehab and got a physical education credit for physiotherapy.

Since then, she has joined a mixed gender wheelchair rugby team, with hopes to compete at the provincial level, and eventually the Paralympics. She is also in her first year at Simon Fraser University, studying English and psychology. “The accident will not stop me from living my life.”

Jessica hopes that one day to teach English in third-world countries, but recognizes the obstacles she’ll need to overcome in order to do so.

Jessica and her family have learned to accept the injury. “But the fact is, I do think about what happened,” she says. “On good days, I see it as just one of those things. Everyone experiences trauma and loss in life, and I got my dose a bit earlier than most people.” She deals with the bad times and moves forward.

“Still, I’m looking at living the rest of my life without legs and I know my accident didn’t have to happen. I know I should have worn a safety harness.” The harness would have kept her from falling to the ground and breaking her neck.

Jessica wants young workers to know their limits and get training at work about the job, how to do it, and what they need to prevent injury. “Nothing in any job is more important than staying safe. It’s that simple, and something you definitely don’t want to learn the hard way.”

For more information, or to schedule a presentation, please contact:

Breanna Graham
WorkSafeBC, Public Affairs
Email: breanna.graham@worksafebc.com
Tel: 604-231-8578 Fax: 604-279-7696
Toll Free: 1-888-621-7233 (Local 8578)

Support Services
Tel: 604-276-3100
Toll Free: 1-888-621-7233