



SLOPESIDE

CHALLENGE ASPEN AND MY BEST DAY ON THE HILL

We hopped off the chair lift on what was another beautiful Colorado ski day. Heading down the mountain in front of me was my ski companion, Aspen/Snowmass local, Jen Arkin and her ski buddy, Deb. As I followed down the groomed slope watching them navigate the trail ahead I realized that this day on the mountain was going to be different. Jen waited for me to catch up. “I love to ski moguls, how about you?” and proceeded to fearlessly navigate the bumps below. I watched her in amazement and when I caught up, she was grinning from ear to ear. Jen has Cerebral Palsy and decided years ago that her disability was not going to stop her from enjoying the exhilaration of the activity she loves so much. On the chairlift ride back up the mountain Jen proudly exclaimed “I can actually ski better than I walk” and proved it by leading me down a black diamond trail. Her contagious smile and upbeat attitude were nothing short of inspiring as we spent the morning sharing our love of the mountains. Skiers often speak about their ‘best days on the hill’ -this was surely one of mine.

Jen is one of thousands of folks who participate in adaptive programs on ski mountains across America. Challenge Aspen, in partnership with the Aspen Snowmass Ski Company, provides those with special needs discounted private lessons by specially trained PSIA instructors, buddy support by trained assistants and volunteers, and all types of adaptive equipment necessary to participate in on-snow activities. Remarkably, this includes the visually impaired, who courageously navigate the hill through voice commands and deep trust in their guide.

The patient and caring staff along with volunteers and apprentice pros have served those with over 150 different types of disabilities year round since 1995. CEO Jeff Hauser explains Challenge Aspen’s goal is “to help

JEN ARKIN, HER SUPPORT BUDDY DEB AND RICH SILVER



rebuild the list of what they can do, not focus on what they can’t”. He emphasizes that this is not just a ski program. Summer retreats offer groups from around the world the opportunity to sign up for fly fishing, archery and camping. In addition, Challenge Aspen Military Opportunities or ‘CAMO’ is specifically designed for injured veterans, offering full financial aid to those suffering from PTSD and traumatic brain injuries.

Challenge Aspen is dedicated to changing the lives of its participants and rebuilding their confidence. If you or someone you know has physical or cognitive challenges but would like to enjoy all of the outdoor activities the mountains have to offer; or if you’d like to donate or get involved as a volunteer, contact Challenge Aspen at (970)923-0578 or browse the website challengeaspen.org. You might be lucky enough to run into my new friend Jen, who I look forward to skiing with for many seasons to come. - Rich Silver

