

# NO FEAR

A skiing accident took the use of Greg Mallory's legs. Now the Portland lawyer pushes his body to the limit as a member of the U.S. Disabled Ski Team



Greg Mallory has had a few wipeouts on his handcycle. Once, he jammed on his brakes and tipped over, skidding across the oncoming lane into bushes.

Dawn creeps past the shadows of Greg Mallory's garage in Portland's Forest Heights on a recent Wednesday morning. Light reveals the gear that has granted the 39-year-old Paralympian new life.

Four pairs of cross-country skis in one corner. Three whitewater kayaks in another.

Grimacing, he pushes his hands down, lifting himself a few inches off his wheelchair while swiveling onto a 27-speed handcycle. Next, he grabs each of his limp, rail-thin legs, maneuvering them onto the cycle's leg rests.

Doctors told Mallory that he'd never walk again after a skiing accident on Mount Hood paralyzed him from the waist down more than 13 years ago. He didn't believe the prognosis.

"I still don't accept it," he says. "I'll walk again."

In the meantime, he's not about to let his disability get in the way of his true love: exploring the outdoors and pushing his body to its limit. His determination landed him a spot on the U.S. Disabled Ski Team each of the past three years.

"He sees life in a little different perspective," says Jon Kreamelemeyer, the team's coach. "He lives each day to the fullest extent."

Which helps explain why Mallory would rather give his arms a grueling workout by cycling 50 minutes to his office downtown than driving in his Toyota Tundra truck.

"It feels good," he says before wheeling out of his driveway and disappearing down the street.



Portland's Greg Mallory finished a career-best eighth in the World Cup rankings this season. Qualifying for the 2010 Paralympics in Vancouver, B.C., is a long-range goal.

**Starting over**

The story of Greg Mallory is the third in an occasional series on people who credit sports with helping them start over after a life-changing experience. To see previous installments, go to [www.oregonian.com/sports/oregonian/7spass](http://www.oregonian.com/sports/oregonian/7spass)

"I didn't care if I lived at that point. I could've flipped a coin."

Greg Mallory, recalling his mind-set in the hospital after his February 1994 accident

**Starting over: Kayaking is an outlet for Mallory**

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Cloudy, with off and on snow flurries. The conditions at Mt. Hood Meadows were not ideal Feb. 11, 1994, the Friday that forever changed Mallory's life. But the idea of skiing all day still beat going to class. Plus Mallory, in his final semester of law school at Willamette University, already had a job lined up at Schwabe, Williamson & Wyatt in Portland.

Mallory and two classmates arrived early. They skied the entire morning. After grabbing lunch at the lodge, they went out for more. They soon found themselves at the top of a cliff banded by rocks. From the ledge, it looked like a 35-foot drop. Mallory, 25 at the time, agreed to jump first. It was his home mountain, and he had leapt over that spot countless times before. He figured the eight inches of new powder would act as a nice cushion.

So off he went.

Midair. A gust of wind. His back straightened.

Impact.

He was conscious, he had no feeling in his legs. His first thought: They were broken.

Pain and pressure screamed up in his spine. It felt as if someone was supporting him with a broomstick in the small of his back.

Mallory remembers medics showing a tube up his nose and down his throat. Inside the ambulance to Welches and the Life Flight helicopter to Legacy Emanuel Hospital & Health Center in Portland, he wondered what his parents would think.

Mallory's father, a banker, and his mother, who managed their 150-acre Sherwood sheep farm, taught Greg and each of his three older siblings how to ski before they could go to kindergarten. Each year, family ski trips took them to resorts in Colorado, Idaho or at Lake Tahoe near Reno. But mostly, Mallory skied close to home on Mount Hood.

Mallory, his brother and two sisters had plenty of chores on the farm. Lots of room to roam, too.

"It was almost as if I didn't have a leash growing up," he says.

His freedom and an adventuresome spirit added up to a fair share of mischief. Like the time Mallory, a friend and his sister found a small cave after a flood on the sandy banks of the nearby Tualatin River. Intrigued, they began digging it out, deeper and deeper. One day, they returned for more. The cave had collapsed.

"It could have been a headline story of three kids buried on the Tualatin," Mallory says.

After X-rays, a doctor delivered the diagnosis. A shattered vertebra. Surgery tomorrow. The chances of walking again: Forget it.

Defiant, Mallory asked if anyone had recovered from such an injury. Perhaps, he recalled hearing the doctor say, "but yours is bad."

Surgery would be complicated. Doctors were concerned about potential blood clots and paralysis spreading up past Mallory's waist. His parents cut short a ski trip in Canada and drove all night to the hospital, fearing he might not make it through alive.

Mallory was indifferent.

"I didn't care if I lived at that point," he says. "I could've flipped a coin."

Surgeons fused his back-bones, but Mallory didn't sleep well during rehab. Every two hours, a nurse woke him up to administer shots, take his vitals and roll him over.

By day, he stretched, took strength tests and learned how to avoid pressure sores. Therapists taught him the ins and outs of using a wheelchair. Opening doors. Dropping down curbs. Bumping up curbs. Getting in and out of a car. Moving in and out of the shower.

Popping wheelies, too.

In the evenings, classmates



U.S. Paralympic skier Greg Mallory of Portland explodes fresh powder in March in Colorado during the 12th SKITAM event, a fundraiser for the U.S. Disabled Ski Team.



Greg Mallory bought a sit-ski frame to begin training for the U.S. Disabled Ski Team. He earned a spot on the team in 2004.



It's 50 minutes by handcycle from Greg Mallory's Forest Heights home to his office in downtown Portland, but he says it beats driving. "It feels good," says the outdoor sports enthusiast.

dropped off assignments and reading material. He was determined to finish law school on time, and the work distracted him from feeling mopey. He fought back thoughts of what fate had dealt him.

He studied for the bar that summer. But with no physical outlet, he began going stir crazy.

Mallory's life always had been chock-full of outdoor activities. Hiking, camping and fishing in summers. Skiing in winters. He played baseball and tennis in high school. He turned into an avid mountain biker during his undergraduate days at Oregon State. He tried windsurfing while in law school.

pondering the question of "What now?" Mallory called up a buddy who worked at Adidas.

"What do you think about the possibility of me getting in a kayak?" he asked.

White-water kayaking required a sitting position, athletic ability and a love of rivers. It sounded like a good fit.

A few days later, Mallory lowered himself into a kayak at a neighbor's pool. His friend taught him the basics of rolling. He soon caught the hang of it.

"That was encouraging," he says, "my first spark of afterlife."

Mallory joined Schwabe, Williamson & Wyatt in fall 1994, specializing in securities and corporate law. For him, one of two new associates, work was a grind. He lived for the weekends and his new passion.

It was exhilarating. He paddled to remote sites no able-bodied hiker could ever see. And it filled him with more nervous energy than he ever felt skiing.

"If you're committed to a big

**Greg Mallory**  
 Age: 39  
 Height/weight: 5-10, 148  
 Residence: Portland's Forest Heights with his black Lab, Jud  
 Achievements: Member, U.S. Disabled Ski Team; International Paralympic Committee World Cup cross-country skiing season-ending rankings: 16th (2004-05), 23rd (2005-06), eighth (2006-07)  
 Full-time job: senior counsel, Portland office of Schwabe, Williamson & Wyatt law firm

rapid, there's no way to stop in the middle of it," he says. "You go upside down. It's dark, it's cold, the water's moving, your head is hitting rocks, you have no idea where you're at and you're trying to remember how to roll at that point."

Eager for bigger and better rapids, Mallory joined two other novice kayakers gear-up to try out the Table Rock section of the Molalla River on a cool and overcast Sunday in March. The guide books rated it class III-plus, a moderately difficult run.

Trouble began after they inadvertently drove two miles past the start of the run. They cheered paddling over the first drop. But coming around a corner, their surroundings became mysterious. The river grew on both sides of the river higher. They were all alone, in over their heads, on a class IV rapid.

Scared, Mallory turned stiff. He flipped out of his boat as it careened over a 6-foot drop. For three-quarters of a mile, Mallory dodged logs swimming down the turbulent white water.

"The whole time I was convinced we were gonna die at every corner," he says.

Somewhat, they survived. Mallory shook every time he thought about the experience the next week at work. It had terrified him. And thrilled him.

No fear.

It's what stood out about Mallory as a rookie on the U.S. Disabled Ski Team in 2004. What he lacked in technique and conditioning starting out, Mallory made up for with aggression.

"He skis a lot like an Alpine skier would, just full tilt to the wall," says Sean Halsted of Ephrata, Wash., a sit-ski teammate. "He's a white-water kayaker, so his concept of danger is at another level than ours."

Kayaking had taken Mallory down some of the most wild rapids across the western United States and Canada. He had begun handcycling in 1998 to build up his cardiovascular conditioning in the offseason. But he longed for more variety in winter.

Sitting around a campfire on an overnight kayaking trip in Idaho during summer 2001, Mallory perked up when he heard that the U.S. Ski Team was looking for disabled cross-country skiers. He liked the thought of traveling the world while finding out what it would feel like to be in the best shape of his life.

He bought a sit-ski frame and began training that winter and spring. The next year, coaches invited him to the U.S. Disabled Ski Team's training camp in West Yellowstone, Mont. He earned a spot on the team in 2004 after performing well on the development squad.

Even in practice, Mallory went all-out.

Kreamelemeyer likes to tell the story of when Mallory attacked a steep slope during a training camp two years ago. Mallory sped so fast around a corner that he slammed face-first into a tree four feet off the trail. He suffered a concussion, battered nose and mangled upper lip. Five days later, he was back out training. He named his skis "bark eaters."

Quebec, February 2004. The second World Cup event of the season.

Mallory remembers the 15-kilometer race as the one that hooked him to the sport.

He didn't win, didn't even medal. But it was the first time, Mallory says, he felt his body working in rhythm to the demands of a race. Until then, he says, he crashed hard and often.

Mallory came in 16th out of 35 in the World Cup rankings his first year racing. The next year, at the 2006 Paralympic Winter Games in Turin, Italy, he ended up toward the back of the pack. After a by-the-book training routine, he finished the season a disappointing 23rd.

This past season, Mallory embarked on a more relaxed approach. He took a month off in November to kayak rivers in Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan. He lost his heart-rate monitor and never replaced it. And he ditched a regimented training schedule for whatever activity he felt like that day.

By the final World Cup event of the season on Vancouver Island, B.C., in mid-March, Mallory felt great.

Chris Klebl of Heber City, Utah, Mallory's sit-ski teammate who had beaten him in every prior race, won the first event. But Mallory, who finished fourth, had narrowed Klebl's

margin of victory in the 16-kilometer race.

Three days later, Mallory won the men's sprint qualifier. In the finals, Mallory edged Klebl up the first hill and widened his lead on the downhill. Mallory says he figured one of his competitors would catch him on the 875-meter course.

They never did.

Mallory went on to win his first World Cup race by more than five seconds. He finished a career-best eighth in the season-ending world rankings.

Mallory nears the 45 mph speed limit zooming down Northwest Cornell Road on his handcycle. He clenches his teeth veering around a corner, leaning his body into the turn.

He's had a few wipeouts. On a misty morning last summer, he jammed on his brakes seeing stopped cars coming out of the second tunnel down Cornell. He tipped over, skidding across the oncoming lane into blackberry bushes.

He admits he gets going too fast sometimes. Just don't expect him to slow down any time soon.

Kreamelemeyer says he's counting on more podium finishes for Mallory in the 2007-08 season. Mallory's main objective hasn't changed: ski as fast as he possibly can. Qualifying for the 2010 Paralympics in Vancouver, B.C., is a long-range goal.

Above all, Mallory says he plans to stick to a simple principle: "Have fun while you can—because you never know what's gonna happen next."