

A NEED FOR SPEED

By Erin O'Sullivan



Ten months after waking up in the intensive care unit with life-changing news, Lonnie Bissonnette was flying again.

The extreme sports enthusiast, daredevil and adrenaline junkie didn't know exactly what life was going to look like living with a spinal cord injury, but he did have a few certainties. He knew himself well enough to know that his injury was not going to define who he was, what he was capable of, or hold him back from what he loved.

Lonnie was no stranger to taking risks. With over 15 years of experience jumping off of just about everything, including mountains, buildings and out of planes, not even the sky was the limit.

In 2014 Lonnie set out to capture a record-breaking jump in Idaho. The plan however, didn't go as expected and he was quickly wrapped up and caught in his chute. He awoke in the hospital with a broken neck and back, shattered femur and broken ribs.

Lonnie never believed his doctors when they said that he would not be able to jump again. "I'm sorry, but you



don't know who you're talking to," Lonnie told them.

The self-proclaimed 'hell on wheels' worked hard in his recovery and kept his mind focused on the future of what he could still do, not what he had lost.





Just ten months later he was strapped into his wheelchair for his first jump out of a plane since the accident, willing to risk everything to prove there really were no limits on him.

When asked if he was afraid, Lonnie didn't think much of it. "Everybody gets scared. Fear is the norm but it's a tool to use. Use that adrenaline to help you focus and concentrate on what you need to do."

That first jump back was a special moment for Lonnie, not only because it was his return to jumping after his injury, but because he wasn't jumping alone. His passion and enthusiasm for extreme sports seemed to be genetic, and for someone who had already made some sort of leap in the sky 1,500 times this was going to be a new experience beyond the use of a wheelchair. It was also his first jump accompanied by his then 15-year-old son.

"It made my heart melt," said the proud father, who had witnessed many rookie and novice jumpers face a moment of fear or hesitation before making their first jump. But both he and his son were fearless and excited to make that first jump together.

The jump was a success and kept the passion for the sport burning for Lonnie, who was determined to push himself as hard as possible to stay involved in the sport.

But jumping out of planes and off of the sides of mountains wasn't enough to keep this adrenaline junkie satisfied. Lonnie loves a diverse range of activities, including competing in Para bobsleigh internationally.

Para bobsleigh is an event unlike any other. Sliding down a tube of bumpy ice in a container barely big enough for one isn't a sport for everybody, but the sport does attract a certain type of personality.

"It's like a being on a roller coaster on steroids," laughs Lonnie.

The Para bobsleigh team for Canada so far consists of one extraordinary member, Lonnie himself, though the sport is growing globally and on the hunt for more talent in the sport community.

Coaches play a key role in the growth and development of the sport. Each and every athlete is unique, not just those with a disability. Adjusting on the fly, predicting problems and solutions, and adaptability in different situations, all contribute to success.

It wasn't something Lonnie had been searching for either, but it was a perfect match for him. The extremism of the sport, the fearlessness, the drive, the grit and pure determination to work and push through obstacles, all compelled him to pursue this adrenaline-filled sport. It was enough to get Lonnie hooked and now he spends most of his time training and preparing for international competitions and racing as much as possible.

When Lonnie isn't making a name for himself and Canada on the world stage he's enjoying one of his many other activities. On top of sky dives and BASE (Building, Antenna, Span, and Earth) jumps he is also busy as a father, husband and promotor of para sport around the world.

Lonnie encourages anyone seeking a way to get involved in the sport, or who simply wants to know more, to search him on social media and to not rule out what is possible for them.

"Go for it, if you want to do it, there is no reason for you not to," promotes Lonnie, which is his own philosophy for just about everything extreme or otherwise.

If you want to catch Lonnie in a race you'll have to keep a close eye and don't even think about blinking.

Lonnie is currently the World Champion and World Cup title-holder competing in the Para sport World Cup races. With a need for speed there seems to be no signs of slowing down for this extremist.