

Unstoppable force on wheels

‘Where there is a will, there is a way’ — Deepa Narasimhan doesn’t flinch from proving it true

Striking terror in the hearts of the bad guys, Deepa Narasimhan was the saviour of a world on the brink of Armageddon. Through years of practice in video games, she had mastered the tricks, unlocked all secrets and turned the dragon that captured the princess into a house lizard. “Mario, Contra, you name it, I played and aced at nearly all video games there were, between 1993 and 2000,” she says.

After dropping out of school in the seventh grade, Deepa did not study further nor take up any activity for the next 15 years. “I played video games, I painted, I taught myself new skills, I completed my bachelor’s in computer application. But best of all, I used my disability as a tool to get whatever I wanted from my parents. Those 15 years weren’t so bad! I also learnt a lot about my condition,” reveals Deepa with a smile.

Six months into her nascent life, Narasimhan was diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy. With the help of therapy, she was able to walk a few steps until the age of eight. Now, she canters around in her wheelchair, leading the diversity and inclusion programme at DELL EMC, a multinational firm. Using just her wrists, fingers and a mind that refuses to be bogged down, she has learnt, built and guided EMC’s communication strategy during her 10-year tenure.

“Most companies rejected me because I needed help to lift my hand. EMC looked at my qualifications and my work as a freelancer and asked me when I could join. They offered me the option of working from home. But I applied for a corporate job so I



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could travel more,” Deepa shares. The learning curve for both Deepa and her company was steep. Deepa was learning what EMC did and how she could help while EMC was ensuring Deepa had assistance wherever and however she needed it. In her current role, Deepa is doing the same for other employees with disabilities. “After a two-year rigorous internship, today, Pradeep, an employee with visual and aural impairments, is the first point of contact in IT asset management,” says Deepa. Other companies approach Deepa, looking to employ talented individuals with disabilities.

“Perhaps these companies want to hire them because it’s good for the company

image. There are also those who are simply concerned with this untapped pool of talent and don’t care much about the disability aspect. Whatever the reasons for these companies, these individuals deserve the opportunity to prove themselves. Technology has made it possible that it only takes willpower to overcome disability,” she feels.

To keep this unusual, taxing career path going is easier said than done — willpower has to remain in constant supply. “There was a phase where I kept wondering how I would live my life with this disability. My recidivist mind kept grabbing on to the negative thoughts of self-doubt and fear, but my parents and siblings got me through it. It was only with their help that I moved on to phase two, where I got a job. I even lived my dream of going to a pub...quite a few

times! I have met interesting people although I am single right now. It takes a while for a new person to understand me. I am not searching for love anymore. If it happens, it happens.”

Deepa is slowly stepping into phase three of her life. She isn’t quite sure of what that is exactly, but she knows she wants to give back. Through the Disability Employment Resource Group, she’s providing employment for the disabled. She speaks about LGBT rights and gender equality as well. “Just because someone or something is different, doesn’t mean it won’t fit in.”

Deepa loves to travel, she paints, watches movies, socialises with friends and colleagues. She is a member of various disability and inclusion forums and is a partner of KickStart and Wheels of Change, accessible cab services in Bangalore, and a proactive accessibility evangelist. She does not shy away from asking for help once in a while, but for the most part, her fingers and an indefatigable spirit do the job.

James Roy

The THIS-ABILITY series of articles is an attempt to create a positive, humane and empowered discourse around the lives of people living with disabilities. An initiative of the NGO, TRINAYANI, founded by Ritika Sahni, it aims at altering perspectives and changing attitudes of the masses with the premise being that we are all different, yet similar. www.trinayani.org

What’s your message for Deepa Narasimhan? Tell youngmetro@abpmail.com

Crusaders for a clean Calcutta

Silver Point School students recently organised a clean-up drive in an area near the school.

Members of the school’s Eco Club came up with the idea to clean the nearby Kasba Rathtala Mela ground. The school faculty collaborated with the mela committee for the same.

Around 50-60 students from classes IX-XII participated in the drive. They started the walk around 3pm. It was great to see them work together with so much enthusiasm. They not only cleaned the area, but also talked to the local shopkeepers about the importance of maintaining cleanliness and distributed flyers among them. Having noticed that there were no waste bins on the fair ground, the students and teachers took the initiative and got a dustbin for the shopkeepers to throw the waste in.

Headmistress Sucharita Roychowdhury expressed happiness at the initiative taken by her students. “We all believe in keeping our neighbourhood clean. A clean environment is necessary not only for children, but also for adults. I am very proud of the kids for taking such an initiative which will not only benefit them, but also the entire neighbourhood.”

Principal Sucharita Basu said, “This activity is an extension of our World Environment Day celebrations. The students had always wanted to do something for the area. I feel very proud of the fact that the children are sparing a thought for such issues and working towards them.”



Students cleaned the fair ground, spoke to local shopkeepers and also to auto-rickshaw passengers (extreme right) passing by

As a citizen I feel that it is our responsibility to keep our environment clean. So I feel obliged to be a part of this initiative taken by our school’s Eco Club.

— Avinandan Sinha
Class XII



I am glad that our school and our Eco Club came up with such an initiative. It is our duty to clean up our locality, not only for us but also for others.

— Dwaipayan Bhoumik
Class XII



I feel very proud to be a part of this initiative and a part of the Eco Club. By participating in this drive, we are not only helping ourselves but also others in the neighbourhood.

— Ananya Roy
Class XII



I feel that this is a very good opportunity for us to learn from. We are the ones taking initiative in this matter and we are also teaching others about it. I felt like a responsible citizen while conducting the activity.

— Sreya Ganguly
Class XII



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