



JESSICA VLIEGENTHART – The Roll Model  
([www.therollmodel.ca](http://www.therollmodel.ca))

SPEAKER | WRITER | LAWYER | PARALYMPIAN

In 2004, while working as a forest firefighter in the Northwest Territories of Canada, I was severely injured. Ejected from a truck in a rollover accident, I was immediately paralyzed from the waist down. In those moments immediately following the crash, lying on the ground beside the truck, I knew it would be hard.

It was hard. A lot harder than I expected.

But as humans do, I kept going. Now a T8 complete paraplegic, I set out to rock life on wheels. As I kept going, I began to realize that almost anything is possible. Maybe not right away, and maybe not in the way I originally imagined, but 15 years later I can objectively say “life is awesome.”

A life-long athlete, I quickly got involved in adapted sport. I represented Canada in wheelchair basketball, winning silver at the 2007 PanAm games, bronze at the 2010 World Championships, silver at the 2011 PanAm games, and 6th place at the London 2012 Paralympics.

I'm also the co-founder (along with my husband Jon) and current VP of Kamloops Adapted Sports Association and have taken up sit-skiing along the way! I have been skiing and taking lessons with Adaptive Sports at Sun Peaks since 2013.

As if training and playing for Team Canada wasn't enough, during that time I was also working towards my law degree at the University of Victoria, graduating in 2011.

Since 2013 I've worked as a critical injury lawyer, helping clients navigate the complexities of insurance claims after injury. I'm passionate about advocacy. I love helping people find their voice and figure out how to move forward from less than ideal circumstances. I've done it in my own life, and I've learned some tricks along the way (pro tip: ask for help, often).

I married my handsome husband Jon in 2009 and we welcomed our son in 2015, and daughter in 2018.

Throughout it all, I've written and spoken about the trials, tribulations, and hilarious hijinks of life as an athlete, lawyer and momma with a visible disability.

A disclaimer: I don't have all the answers. Or any answers, really. My life is possible because I have a crew of role/roll models I regularly rely on for advice and encouragement. Everyone I know is a role model in some sense of the word. The Roll Model is about sharing experiences, changing ideas and finding common ground. It's about comparing notes and figuring things out together.

When life throws punches, it's our people that pick us up and dust us off. Rolling with the punches is always easier with pals. I hope you join me for the ride.