

BODY & MIND



IN BODY & MIND SUPPORT READERS PRESENT THEMSELVES. THEY TELL US ABOUT THEIR LIVES, MOTIVATION AND BODY, ON THE SOFA AT PHOTOGRAPHER MONIQUE VELZEBOER'S PLACE. THIS TIME: TOM MYKLEBUST, ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF HANDICARE.



PSYCHE

BODY

Tom Myklebust (48) was born in Bergen in Norway and enjoyed a carefree adolescence as he grew up. In 1981, when he was in his third year of studies at the NIH (Norwegian School of Sport Sciences), he suffered a fall while freestyle skiing. 'I was an experienced freestyle skier. Everything always went well, but on that day that wasn't quite the case.' Once out of hospital, Tom spent four months in rehabilitation. During this time he learnt to move himself around by rolling. At the time he could not know that five years later he would start his own company, together with two other wheelchair users. The company, 'Rullestolekspertene', is better known today as Handicare.

MIND

Tom found neither the period of rehabilitation nor getting used to a wheelchair too difficult. 'Sports have always been a part of my life. I'm used to training hard and to challenging myself to go just one step further. That meant that I was up to this challenge too.' The time after his period of rehabilitation was much more difficult. 'Coming out of that small world and going on to the streets is when it became difficult for me. There are the physical hurdles and obstacles you face, and then there are the people who suddenly see you differently...' Tom tried to limit himself to the here and now and decided to concentrate on opportunities instead of problems. Step for step he started to live again, playing sports and returning to the Sport Sciences School to finish his sports teacher training. 'I was doing teaching practice at a school before I had my accident. I always used to pay attention to the child who performed best and didn't really have time for the others. I went back to the same school for teaching practice after my accident and noticed that I was no longer occupied with only the best pupils, but paid attention to all the children. My focus had changed.' Richer in experience and armed with a diploma, Tom started work with the Norwegian organisation for sports for people with a limitation, where he was involved with large sporting events and competitions. During this period he was fanatical about wheelchair racing. Whilst being happy enough with his wheelchair, he was annoyed by the way it was presented. 'In those days if you needed a wheelchair, then a man in a suit with a catalogue under his arm would come to see you. You were



then allowed to choose a wheelchair, which would then be delivered to the rehabilitation centre or to your home.' In 1986, together with two other wheelchair users, Tom set up a company called 'Rullestolekspertene'. 'We concentrated on both the person and the wheelchair, seeking direct contact with the user and working with him or her to find the best solution. We were the experts in the world of the wheelchair supermarket.' The concept was a great success and the company eventually grew so big that it was sold. 'You do have to remain realistic. Setting up a company is one thing, but you need completely different skills to keep it running. We managed to find a good buyer at that time and the company has continued to develop. That is hardly surprising, of course, as the industry is constantly changing. Over the last few years small companies have been disappearing and the larger companies have continued to get bigger. Handicare is growing too, but we are remaining small in practice. We buy companies which are performing well in various countries. They are locally based and just carry on with the business they are good at. Over the years our mission has essentially remained the same: to make daily life easier. We achieve this by identifying with the individual wishes of the client and with the needs of our business partners.'

The general manager's job still challenges Tom, but he does not want to be occupied solely with work. 'A good balance in life is very important. I like to be active and love having fun with family and friends. That's why I really enjoy myself when I go sailing on the lake near our home with my wife Liv and our two children, Espen and Nina.'

TEXT MONIQUE WIJNEN

PHOTOGRAPHIE MONIQUE VELZEBOER

IN COOPERATION WITH HANDICARE

OOK IN BODY & MIND?

Stuur dan een brief of e-mail met je foto, naam, adres en telefoonnummer naar Support Body & Mind, postbus 160, 2290 AD Wateringen of ad.van.galen@lakerveld.nl. Heel bijzonder: je krijgt je foto op canvas cadeau!

Deze rubriek is tot stand gekomen i.s.m. Handicare (voorheen movingpeople.net). Alle geportretteerden staan midden in het leven. Dat is precies wat Handicare met haar producten beoogt: maximale vrijheid en onafhankelijkheid. En omdat elk mens uniek is, gaat Handicare bij de ontwikkeling van haar mobiliteitsproducten uit van persoonlijke mogelijkheden en wensen. www.handicare.com

