

How Silke still flies high ...despite horror injury



DEFYING THE ODDS: Silke Pan in action with the Gravity Circus

By Karen Rockett

FLYING high across the Big Top, it is hard to believe that trapeze artist Silke Pan is unable to feel or move her legs.

Even more amazing is the fact she almost died back in 2007, when she fell from a trapeze while rehearsing without a safety net.

She crashed to the ground, fracturing her skull and breaking her back in two places.

Silke believed her career as a circus performer was over. But now she is back in the Big Top touring the UK for the first time, 20 years after her world came crashing down.

Silke, 51, said: "I don't remember the accident and I think that is for the best, I blacked out and woke up in hospital. In those days you weren't considered a 'real artist' if you used a safety net - and we often didn't."

Silke and her performance partner "missed a catch". She apports no blame and does not want to talk about that traumatic time in her life. "I still have fears performing again, of course, because I know what it is like to have a tragic accident. I am really careful now because I know what's at risk. If I were to fall with a bar attached to my neck it could be very dangerous."

Silke is performing with the Italian troupe Gravity Circus. Despite her disability she still embraces circus life, living in a caravan with her husband Didier Dvorak, who assists her on stage. "It's just a normal caravan so I have to leave my wheelchair outside.

"I keep everything I need to hand on the floor and my husband reaches the higher cupboards. I manage and really love being part of circus life again."

From 1992 to 2007 Silke performed in theatres across Europe, as well as on cruise ships, in amusement parks and at gala events.



BRAVE: Silke; below as a pro-handbiker

After breaking her back she was in hospital in Switzerland for seven months.

"During rehab I had to learn to accept this completely new body. I kept trying to form trapeze figures in physiotherapy, but it was impossible to turn my paralysed pelvis. Floor exercises, headstand, handstand, none of it worked."

Silke started using a wheelchair but was determined not to give up on athletic activities. So she began training on a handbike from the first day she left the hospital. She says:



"Sports allowed me to better accept my disability." Five years later she began competing professionally and became a handbiking champion.

In 2016 Silke switched to alpine ultra-paracycling with the ascent of more than 80 passes in the Swiss Alps, the Maritime Alps and the Pyrenees. In 2018 she crossed the Pyrenees which involved 28 alpine passes in 10 days, using the strength of her arms.

In 2019 she competed in the Tour des Laacs, a 1,000km race across 30 Swiss lakes in para-triathlon mode which consisted of handbike, racing chair, swimming, and bellyak (a modified kayak). The Swiss citizen also used her story to help others, forging a secondary career as a motivational speaker and champion of disability rights.

While at home with her husband during the pandemic she trained doing handstands, using a snowboard to keep her feet in position. Now after 15 years of sitting in her wheelchair, she is back on stage as a circus performer. "At first I was scared my performance would not be a success and that I would only be pitied instead."

However, her first standing ovation convinced her otherwise.

"Although I have never dwelled in the past, being an acrobat again is a huge gift to me."

Anthony Anderson, director of Circus Extreme who organised the UK section of the Gravity Circus tour, said: "Silke defies gravity and expectations, showcasing the sheer power of the human spirit."

● For details visit gravitycircus.co.uk

Gran's got more pals than me!

HALF of students who have their grandmothers live a better social life than them - and more than 50% of young people have a life-long friend.

ASK IT! But social media use is on the rise. 30% and 40% more people use social media in their spare time.

affinity ASK IT! Busting the myth of the isolated person, 44% of 44-and-under people are more likely to socialise and feel lonely due to real-life connections.

Design handbags target

THEFTS of designer handbags are more than 50% of the capital value.

In the first 4 months of this year, 4 bags worth over £100 were reported to Metropolitan Police.

Westminster is a hot spot followed by Chelsea and Chelsea.

overall, only that period.

Last year, high-end accessories were snatched from up from 2,000.

The most was Louis Vuitton with Chanel Hermes and the top of the top.

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Supermodels • Celebrities

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