



# Back to the SKIES

By K.H. Queen

## Post-Hip Surgery, Former Pararescueman Makes Record-Setting Return to Skydiving

Doctors told Ray Medley he'd never run again. Skydiving? Don't even ask. But a year following his hip replacement with Dr. Richard A. Berger, the former Special Operations Pararescueman returned to skydiving after a decades-long hiatus. Five years later, he was part of a team that broke a world skydiving record.

"Dr. Berger told me, 'I'm giving you this new hip to be active—not to sit in front of the TV,'" Medley recalls. "He told me, 'You want to run, run. If you come into surgery an athlete, you'll go out an athlete.'"

In March 2013, Medley returned to work just ten days after his surgery with Dr. Berger at Midwest Orthopaedics at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. He resumed running two months later. Five months after his surgery, Medley hiked Longs Peak in Rocky Mountain National Park.

### PATIENTS RETURN TO SPORTS THAT BRING JOY

"I have had patients return to every activity you can imagine, and quickly," Dr. Berger says. "I had a patient run the Chicago Marathon six weeks after her hip replacement, finishing in under four hours. I have had a man return to triathlons, who

won his age group in a major competition. I have had a yoga instructor back doing full splits and backbends six weeks after a hip replacement. Yes, I have even had patients participate in extreme sports like skydiving—though I wouldn't recommend that for everyone!"

For Medley, skydiving is fun—hard landings and all. Previously, skydiving was also his career. As a U.S. Air Force Pararescueman, Medley rescued downed pilots around the world for four years.

In 2014, one year after surgery, he resumed skydiving and has completed about 800 skydives since, including landings that sent him to urgent care.

He earned his instructor's license in 2015 and in 2018 was invited to be part of a World Record Formation for Skydivers Over Sixty (SOS). According to the United States Parachute Association, the team first set a record in April 2018 with a formation of 66 SOS skydivers. That August, they set a record with a formation of 75 people, according to the Parachutists Over Forty Society.

"I have put this hip through the test and it comes out great," Medley says.

### MUSCLE-SPARING SURGERY MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

Dr. Berger's innovative surgical technique made the difference, Medley says.

During traditional hip and knee replacements, the surgeon cuts muscles, ligaments and tendons, Dr. Berger explains. The scar tissues that form during healing doesn't function like the patient's original tissue.

Dr. Berger reports that with his anterior, muscle-preserving, minimally invasive approach, patients experience less pain, faster recovery and a better long-term prognosis without the additional worry of hip dislocation.

Dr. Berger reports performing more than 20,000 muscle-sparing hip and knee replacements since 2001 and estimates that about half of his patients leave the hospital the same day, with the rest leaving the following day. At the end of 2018, Dr. Berger performed his 10,000th muscle-sparing joint replacement. He is now well on his way to almost 12,000 just a year later.

Medley, now 63 and living just outside Milwaukee, began experiencing hip pain in 2011. The first doctor Medley consulted assured him his hip was fine and that he just needed heel lifts in his running shoes to compensate for training on convex roads. While running the Bataan Memorial Death March marathon, Medley's pain became excruciating. He gutted it out, but knew heel lifts weren't the solution.

Medley consulted a second doctor, who ordered an MRI. "I was shown to have no cartilage left in my left hip," he says. "The head of the femur looked like the surface of the moon."

That doctor and a third doctor told Medley he needed a hip replacement and that he'd never run again. "They put limitations on everything I wanted to do," Medley said. "I had to find someone to make me whole."

A friend of Medley's, who continued to run and wear high heels after her hip replacement surgery, recommended Dr. Berger. "That was the guy I wanted," Medley says.

Medley was impressed by the professionalism, care and attention to detail throughout the process with Dr. Berger's team. "They educate you on what your surgery is going to be," he says. "They show you the device that's going in."

Dr. Berger ensures patients can reach him and his team.

"Every patient gets my home telephone number," he says. "If they have a question, I want them to be able to talk to me immediately. My seven nurses have cell phones and patients can call these numbers. I think this makes everyone feel more comfortable with the procedure and with leaving the hospital a few hours after surgery."

After his surgery, Medley used a cane only briefly. According to Medley, the bone-on-bone acute pain in his hip was gone. "The pain I was feeling was from the surgical incision and minor swelling—the actual pain from the arthritic hip has been alleviated," he says. His next order of business was unassisted walking, then physical therapy.

"Dr. Berger did not give me a handicapped parking (placard)," Medley says. "He told me, 'You need to walk.'"

Medley considers himself a model patient: "I did exactly what Dr. Berger told me to do."

### AGE NOT A DECIDING FACTOR

Medley was more than ten years younger than the average hip replacement patient. According to research published by The Association of Bone and Joint Surgeons, the average age for a hip replacement is 68.

Age is not the deciding factor for a hip or knee replacement, however. Dr. Berger has replaced hips and knees on a range of people: from teenagers to those over 100.

"The oldest hip replacement I have done was on a man who was 101 years old," Dr. Berger says. "He walked a mile back and forth to his 82-year-old girlfriend's house. His hip hurt him too much to walk, so I replaced it. He lived to 106. The youngest hip replacement was 17 years old; I have done a few at this age."

After being told by other surgeons that their activities will be limited after surgery, Dr. Berger's patients are thrilled to hear they can resume their active lives.

"My patients are surprised when I tell them 'Do everything and anything you want as soon as you want to,'" Berger says. "Mostly, they are delighted and overwhelmed when

they actually do the things they loved but had to stop previously with the arthritis. They uniformly come back saying, 'Why did I wait so long?' and 'Thank you for my life back.' Arthritis takes away your life and your joy; I return it."

Medley is happy to be running again—and to be back in the sky. "Dr. Berger makes you feel like you can conquer the world," Medley says.

And set world records.



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DR. RICHARD BERGER

Photos courtesy of Terry Weatherford and Dr Richard Berger