



# Doing MY PART, joking apart

*One life says it all.*

*Usha Sunder*

I have nothing to hide. I mean it is too obvious! I have the brain of a scientist, heart of a philanthropist, an ever-ready bright smile and the body of a 64-year-old man profoundly affected with polio.

I was an ordinary child, jumping around and singing, till I was 18-months old. An attack of Poliomyelitis made me an extraordinary child. Course of my life took an unexpected turn. Polio paralysed both my legs and left arm. Luckily my other sense organs were intact. Surprisingly, the doctors even certified that my brain was not affected!

My father used to carry me to school till I was eight. I had to drop out of school after that. Though my schooling stopped, my learning did not. Radio became my personal tutor; cricket commentary my personal favourite.

By that time, I had developed friends from school and in the neighbourhood. Whenever they went to the grounds to play cricket, they used to carry me,

put me on a chair in the square leg and gave the dignified post of an umpire! I would pray that the batsman wouldn't swing the ball towards me, because not only would I get a good knock, but also the batsman would scold me for preventing those runs! Those moments taught me the value of friends, value of people!

I learnt through radio, books and talking. I used to read everything I could lay my hands on, including laundry bills. There was not much travelling I could do, so I did stargazing, the predictive way. Astrology became my special interest, mainly

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because I have yet to see someone who is not interested in knowing his own future. I hate to be alone. Astrology made people come to me. Astrology is a scientific tool I use to instil faith and confidence in people.

I know of a television serial 'Walk the Talk'. I wonder what they would call it if I were there, because when you cannot walk, you tend to talk a lot! You see my conversation has an accelerator but no brakes, I talk and talk; sometimes talk to myself all alone! Slowly I started channelising this ability to talk by reading out to visually impaired students. Although initially I started this to pass my time, I benefitted enormously by this. My world and knowledge expanded. Of course, my self-image expanded too!

A gift of a wheelchair by a cousin showed me other beautiful dimensions of life. I enjoyed the feel of the road. I could even travel to other cities and places. Once when I was in Cochin for a Ham radio conference, the chief guest came late and the organisers asked me to keep the audience occupied. I believed that humour is a great way to connect with people. The audience was rolling in laughter, hearing me.

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Mobility enabled me to observe my neighbourhood. I started helping children who were school dropouts in a casual way, initially. Following a trigger from a friend, with just Rs.1000, 'Maithri' was registered as a trust in 1991, to provide support to the educational needs of children who are economically disabled.

'Maithri' gives meaning and purpose to my work and for my life. I earn by providing consultations in astrology to people, and my entire earning is ploughed back into 'Maithri'. This year alone 200 children are benefitted through 'Maithri'. Of course, none of this would have been possible without the support of family and friends.

To me, the only disability is the inability of people to see ability in themselves. When a door is closed, check out, a window will definitely be open. Welcome the fresh air through the window and just do your part.

I am Rajaram Sridhar alias 'Maithri' Sridhar.

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