

Weathering the Storm

By Mackenzie Lobby

Greek philosopher Epicurus wrote, "the greater the difficulty, the more glory in surmounting it. Skillful pilots gain their reputation from storms and tempests." Perhaps no one better understands this than 49-year-old Annemarie du LeBohn. From a black widow spider bite to a near plane crash to a collision with an 18-wheeler, du LeBohn has proven she is a survivor. In the scheme of her life, however, it was a secret she kept for many years that left the deepest emotional scars.

It was 1980 when it happened; she was 19 years old. Brutally raped and subsequently stalked by her attacker, du LeBohn was left to carry a burden she did not want to bear. She felt shame, denial and confusion pushing her down, taking her breath as she struggled to come to grips with the moment that would cast a shadow over her life for nearly three decades.

"It was like the big elephant in the room," she remembers. "As I tried to ignore what had happened and not deal with my feelings, my secret got bigger and bigger and bigger." She was no longer the happy-go-lucky extrovert her friends and family knew her to be, at least not on the inside. "Before that moment I saw the whole world ahead of me and had certain dreams," she

says. "But after that, everything went in slow motion."

HEALING ROAD

Despite her attack, du LeBohn went through the motions, graduating from college and getting a job, not revealing the tumult that continued to swirl. After years of living in constant fear of everything and everyone, she realized something had to change.

"It hit me," she recalls. "I thought, 'I've lost my way. I'm so worried about somebody hurting me, I feel like a caged animal.'" She dropped everything and made several trips to Europe, throwing caution to the wind. "I realized that I couldn't always control everything and I had to start just living my life."

Along with her international travels came a newfound sense of freedom, but at the same time she craved purpose and direction. An experienced athlete, she was attracted to the discipline that endurance sports provided, however, lingering fears of the unknown trumped passing notions of training for an Ironman. It wasn't until 2009 that the idea resurfaced. Having read

a number of stories of Ironman triathletes who overcame incredible challenges to compete, she recognized what she wanted to do, what she had to do.

"I suddenly knew if I didn't do the Ironman, I'd regret it the rest of my life," remembers du LeBohn. "I felt that was the way to mentally change my game, regain focus in life, and strategize about where I wanted to go and how I was going to find happiness."

So began a year's worth of training, interspersed with a whole lot of emotional mending. It wasn't the physical challenge that intimidated her, but rather the concept of dealing with and working through the pessimism that had so defined her existence. She came to find that in Ironman training, there was no way to avoid the wall. It was finally time for her to crash right through it.

TOTAL TRANSFORMATION

On Sunday, Nov. 21, 2010, du LeBohn stood on the beach of Tempe Town Lake, wetsuit-clad and ready to begin the first leg. Standing among her peers, she felt sheer joy as she smelled the scents of food

and drink vendors, listened to nervous chatter and music playing, and took in a breathtaking sunrise. Today would be the start of something new.

Facing 30-mile per hour headwinds, a sandstorm, rain and hail, she pushed forward. "I had this moment on the bike where I thought, 'whatever you got for me, God!'" she says. After 12 long months of training, nothing was going to stop her.

The transformation was complete as she crossed the finish line. She remembers thinking, "this is what it feels like to set a goal and accomplish it. This is it. I made it." Along with that pride came peace. For the first time in 30 years, her burden was lifted and focus restored.

Now a bona fide Ironman, she says, "whether you're riding against a 30 mph wind, going through a divorce, or being forced to carry something you emotionally don't want to carry, you can get past it. It doesn't need to dictate your life. It all starts with that positive attitude and that belief in oneself and your own goals and dreams." Whether she is swimming, riding or running, she has proven that no storm is too harsh to weather. ■



Training for and completing an Ironman helped Annemarie du LeBohn restore her focus in life.

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