

The Definition of a True Athlete

The story of Martha Quinones

By: Christine McInnes

When I started taking boot camp in Deerfield Beach I was automatically drawn to a Silver Volkswagon, not because I used to own one but because the back-end was covered by magnetic stickers, labeling the driver as a runner, a tri-athlete, and an Ironman 70.3. I was on a mission to find the driver of this vehicle because I knew it was owned by an individual who would inspire me and I couldn't wait to hear that person's story. Little did I know how truly amazing this athlete's story would be. One Saturday morning, I had successfully tracked her down!! It belonged to Martha Quinones, this newsletter's featured athlete. I introduced myself to Martha and told her how I was tracking her down; she blushed and said, "I am a decaffeinated version of an athlete. If I can do it, anyone can, believe me." As we continued talking she explained that her active lifestyle was relatively new. She pretty much went from couch potato to Ironman (with more than a few bumps in between). It wasn't until her 40's that she started getting serious about training.

I had the pleasure of getting to know Martha on a personal level and am thankful she is in my life. When I asked her to be one of my featured athletes, I was just as surprised as she was when I got her reply. She doesn't consider herself to be someone that could be an example of athleticism. This just seemed crazy to me! I couldn't understand how someone could accomplish everything that she had and feel like she was not an athlete. During our interview she explained, "I have thought that to be an example you have to excel at what you do and, sadly, I don't excel in any of the sports in which I have participated." This made me even more motivated to put an article together... not only will this motivate others to let their inner athlete out but it will show Martha what an amazing athlete she truly is. Like Jeff Galloway says, "Being an athlete is a state of mind which is not bound by age, performance or place in the running pack."

Martha grew up in Colombia in the 1950s where sports such as, swimming, tennis and basketball, were not part of her upbringing. She would play children's games but no organized sports. As a young adult living in the U.S., she took swimming lessons at the YMCA so she wouldn't have to worry about drowning; it was basically for survival. As she developed basic swimming skills, she would be in awe of the people who would be able to swim laps. Around this time, she also began taking tennis lessons and by the time she was in her 40s, she started taking tennis more seriously. She joined a few leagues, took clinics and played just about every day. She also started going to the gym 3 times a week, started eating a healthier diet and became overall more health conscious. She's been eating relatively healthy for years now but continues to learn more about nutrition and modifies her diet.



The angry ocean during Martha's first tri-athlon.

Currently, she eats a mostly vegetarian diet with unprocessed foods, no preservatives and organic for the most part. In her words “REAL FOOD!” Part of her decision to eat healthier was her family’s health history which she has mentioned was scary.

“In my late 40s, I heard the word Triathlon and was curious. Went as a spectator to a local sprint triathlon in Boca Raton and was totally fascinated! People of all sizes and shapes were swimming, biking, running, and having FUN!! I left saying to myself, I HAVE TO TRY THIS ONCE!!!” Feeling so motivated and energized, she set the goal of completing this same triathlon the following year at the age of 49. Not only was this a goal to complete a triathlon but it was a goal in which she would learn to swim laps, how to ride a bicycle and get into running. “I had never been a runner, as I considered that activity to be boring but it had to be thrown in if I wanted to do that race.”



First of many finish lines!!

The first thing she did was join a Master’s swimming group. She quickly discovered that this group had been meeting 3 times a week, for the last 20 years. In her mind... these were athletes and she wasn’t even sure if she could get to the other side of the pool. But she put herself out there and didn’t let the fact that she felt intimidated get in the way of her dream and quickly realized the coach and the swimmers were very welcoming and helpful. Every meet, the coach put together a workout just for her so she could learn at her level. No longer was she on the side lines watching and wishing she could swim laps... she was doing it!

Excited and nervous to learn how to ride a bike, Martha went to a local bike shop and purchased a hot pink beach cruiser that in order to stop, you pedaled in reverse. She joined another group of amazing individuals called, The Boca Raton Bicycle Club and recruited a couple of friends to join her on her first ride. “Everyone had these beautiful road bikes, including my two friends, and here I was with my beach cruiser. But, again, the group was very welcoming and assigned me a ‘baby sitter’; two riders would take turns riding with me. Poor souls it had to be the most boring day for them ever.” Knowing Martha’s personality, drive and devotion, I am sure the “baby sitters” didn’t mind helping a fellow cyclist and as time went on, loved watching her grow.

Finally she joined a running group called, The Boca Raton Road Runners who are supportive and welcoming to all running/walking levels... I know because I run with them too. “With all of these fabulous groups it was no wonder that I looked so much forward to all of my activities. I read everything I could about triathlons. I was now officially on my way to achieving my goal of competing in my first race.”

Her biggest challenge was the bike. She had tried to ride a bike once in her teens while living in Brooklyn but she informed me that, that quickly ended in a fat lip. After experimenting on the beach cruiser, she upgraded to a big and heavy hybrid. To help her be more confident and agile on the bike, she had been advised to practice U turns and to do figure 8s as drills. While practicing a U turn, in her neighborhood, she crashed... breaking her tibia and the fibula on her left leg. Followed was a 10 month stint in various casts. She obviously wasn’t able to run and bike during her recovery but was cleared to take off the cast to swim. On Nov 7, 2001, one year to the day of her accident, she got back on the bike! She hired a triathlon coach that was recommended by her swim coach and told me, “I was deeply

grateful that he accepted me as a student. He usually trained super duper athletes; I was far from being one. He created a program for me. Basically there were two workouts a day, 6 days a week and one day off for resting. I reported to him almost daily on every aspect of my life, how I was feeling physically and emotionally, my stress levels, my workout performance, my nutrition.” Since then she has upgraded her bike to an AEGIS Swift that she named Victoria. Victoria is a light weight bike and has a tiny 44cm frame and is a beautiful red. Martha and Victoria now make a great pair and love to hit the streets together. She thinks the overweight hybrid was too big for her and that was why she had the accident.

The accident set her goal back a year but it did not keep her down. Race day came and Martha described it as “the triathlon from hell”. It was pouring, the ocean was angry and treacherous but she did it!! And goes on to say, “The sense of accomplishment was so awesome!!! Me, a triathlete, who would have thought!!! And it was soooo much fun!!!! So I decided I would do a few more!!!” She went on to do several sprints triathlons, then began doing Olympic distance, onto several ½ Ironman races and finally, 6 years later and after two attempts, she completed the mother of all triathlons... An Ironman!!

In her write up about the Ironman she writes “I was on the beach at Panama City again, a third and final time no matter the result. I had already decided that, at least for the foreseeable future, this would be it because the time it took to get to this beach was too much of a commitment and I wanted my life back.” In an Ironman you must travel 140.6 miles in 17 hours or less by using the will to keep going and the strength of your own body. Martha swam 2.4 miles in 1:44:09, and then she biked 112 miles in 8:25:18 followed by a 26.2 mile run which took her 6:24:22. Martha’s total time was 16:54:14, less than 6 minutes to spare! “It was a nail biter to the end... But, as if it were some sort of dream...I crossed the finish line, my arms up in the air. I MADE IT! I AM AN IRONMAN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” and she was not the last one that day to complete what she set out to do either!

Because Martha has the heart and soul of an athlete she was able to embark on this journey that was a total transformation for her. I am amazed and inspired by everything she has accomplished. By listening to her story it shows us we all have the power to succeed. Follow Martha’s steps by surrounding yourself with people who will motivate and guide you along the way. She explains that this journey has been so exciting and filled with challenges, joys and achievements, big and small. When I asked what her favorite athletic activity was, she said, “I loved all of them. If I did not love them, I don’t think I would have kept motivated or interested... It does not matter what activity you do, as long as you like it. Everything else will fall into place.”

Below: The Three legs of the Panama City Ironman!! Amazing!!

