

FLYING

OVER THE FINISH LINE



FOREWORD BY
SALLY EDWARDS
NATIONAL SPOKESWOMAN,
DANSKIN[®] WOMEN'S
TRIATHLON SERIES

SUSAN L. KANE

WOMEN TRIATHLETES' STORIES OF LIFE

- **Change.** Many people fear change because of the stress that it brings—even with welcome changes such as getting married, accepting a new job, having a child or getting fit, for example. Change takes you from familiar ground to new territory and, for a while, it can reduce the control you have over your life.
- **Fat.** Living in a world where the perception is often that “thin is in,” fear of becoming or remaining fat is a preoccupation for many women. Constantly bombarded with media images and messages featuring ultra-thin, air-brushed women, we develop unrealistic expectations for what our bodies should look like. Rather than focus on getting fit, we focus on getting thin, the result of which is often temporary.

IT'S NOT EASY, BUT IT'S WORTH IT

by Sharon E. Best

Attempting the impossible, or at least, the unreasonable, I did two tough things this summer. I climbed Mt. Rainier all the way to the very top, an elevation of 14,500 feet, in July, and finished the Danskin triathlon in August. Which would you think is harder, climbing Mt. Rainier with a total elevation gain (and loss) of over 9,000 feet, or doing the Danskin triathlon?

The answer probably depends on the person deciding to do it. It's true that summiting Mt. Rainier was tough. It took a great deal of training in addition to the physical challenges of the actual climb. There was the ecstasy of achievement and the intensity of exhaustion that came with summiting the mountain around 7:00 AM and being back at the base camp at 4:00 PM. All that was truly great and worthy of the pride that comes with achieving a difficult goal. But, for me, the Danskin was harder.

It wasn't the two hours it took to complete the race; that turned out to be relatively easy. What made it hard was that in January before the race, I couldn't swim farther than one breath would take me. That's not very far. So I had to learn to swim after 58 years of fear of water. THAT'S NOT EASY!

I didn't have fear based on any close call in the water. I don't remember ever almost drowning. I simply sank every time I got in the water. That makes swimming difficult! I couldn't float and never got the hang of breathing *out* under water so that I could breathe *in* when my head came up for air. So one breath was all I had. You might think that learning to swim as an adult is easy if you just put your mind to it. I'm here to tell you: IT'S NOT EASY!

I started in January as my New Year's Resolution. I went to **Mary Meyer** Life Fitness beginner swimming classes every Sunday for almost seven months! After the first three months, when I felt I just wasn't getting it, I started taking private lessons every Thursday. And I still wasn't getting it! IT WASN'T EASY!

I was very frustrated and many times considered quitting. However, at some indiscernible point, I started exhaling under water. "Suddenly" after many months, I "got" the breathing. I then found out, however, that my breathing was not the only thing preventing me from swimming. There was this issue with my sinking legs. It's very hard to swim with your legs hanging at a 45 degree angle and acting very efficiently as an anchor. I haven't mastered this little dilemma yet, but I found that swimming with a wet suit or training fins does resolve the problem. It's cheating... a little bit... but many triathlons allow wet suits. After I tried one in the swimming pool and discovered I really could swim in it, I thought I was home free. BUT IT WASN'T SO EASY!

My swim coach, Ed Artis, assured me that swimming in open water was not the same as swimming in a pool. There

are a few more skills to master. I actually thought that since I could now breathe, it wouldn't matter what kind of water I was in. Ed took me out to swim in the lake and I swam in shallow water where I could stand up any time. The choppy waves and milfoil were a little disconcerting; however, when he sent me out to the far buoy, well over my head, I freaked out! I had to flip over on my back and get my uncontrollable panic under control with Ed by my side supporting my back. I did manage to make it to shore while Ed was complimenting me on the achievement.

The real accomplishment was that I went back again. That time I did better. Soon I was doing my twice-weekly swims in Lake Washington. I was getting some confidence. So I went to **Mary Meyer's** Open Water Swim Clinics. There I got to practice with about 100 other swimmers of various abilities competing for the exact same place in the water by hitting and kicking (unintentionally) whoever was in their way. Again, I freaked out and semi-panicked the first two practices. Not until the third practice, with humongous choppy waves, did I start feeling confident about swimming in open water with 100 other people.

I was finally ready to take on Danskin! I actually made it through the entire half mile in just over 21 minutes without resorting to a Swim Angel, noodle or my back stroke! I felt like I had climbed Mt. Everest when I got out of the water and I basically floated through the bike and the run. I wasn't there to really compete, but to participate. It was a wonderful day! Over 400 cancer survivors were there, inspiring each other and all the rest of us. There were much older women and women who had never done anything athletic before who decided to try because of the great support at the Danskin triathlons. The back of the completion medal was stamped with the statement that "The woman who starts the race is not the

same woman who finishes it.” As hokey as that may sound, I think it was true for me and for many of us. I conquered an irrational fear about swimming that lurked in the background my whole life and reaped the tremendous psychological benefits that came with that.

So, which was harder, summiting Mt. Rainier or doing the Danskin? For me, I had to show far more perseverance to learn to swim for the Danskin. Both, however, have underscored my lifelong belief that you can do anything you choose to do if you take it one step at a time. You can learn to play the piano or violin, draw, paint, start a business, change careers, repair a fractured relationship, deal with life-threatening illness, write poetry or a book, learn karate, yoga, or judo, lose 100 pounds, stop smoking, become a lawyer, do a triathlon, meditate, anything! The first step is to choose to try. Next, you need to plan how to do it and get whatever expert help you need (personal trainer, mountain guide, swim coach) to gain needed skills and overcome your fears. Then you need to execute your plan but be prepared to modify it, if necessary. In the end, you can stand on top of your personal mountain, grinning from ear to ear.

Sharon E. Best has built a successful law practice in Seattle over the past 18 years. A graduate of the University of Missouri-Columbia and the University of Florida Law School, she is a retired Lieutenant Colonel of the US Army where she served for 20 years.

DON'T LET THOSE MONKEYS STOP YOU!

by Pamela Kropf

The morning of the tri, I woke up at 5 AM with bubbles of excitement flowing through me. They weren't nervous bubbles but bubbles of anticipation for finally being able to put to use the training and knowledge I had gained over the past four months.



SUSAN L. KANE has completed nine Danskin® Women's Triathlons and two Olympic-distance triathlons since she first became a triathlete at the age of 42. She now coaches first-timers in achieving their triathlon dreams. A mother of three, wife, businesswoman, CPA and MBA, Susan was compelled to share her own story and those of other women triathletes.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU DID SOMETHING FOR THE FIRST TIME?

Do you yearn to try something new, to spice up your life, to enjoy a new adventure? Is a voice from within calling to you and saying, "Come follow me?" Yet is there another over-powering voice that tells you: "You have too much to do already..." "Don't try—you might fail..." "You're too old..." "You're too fat..." or too whatever?

Read the stories of women, from all walks of life, who overcame fears and self-doubt to accomplish what they once thought was unattainable. Share in the universal truths these women learned to recognize by taking on a remarkable stretch goal—completing a triathlon!

These are generally not the stories of professional or elite athletes. Rather, they are stories from everyday women. Their ages range from 20-something to 70-something. Some recovered from serious illnesses. Others needed a challenge in their life or a new focus during a transition. What they have in common is setting the goal of completing a triathlon.

Whether you aspire to become a triathlete or to accomplish just about anything outside of your comfort zone, these stories will inspire you to turn your dreams into reality!

"You'll want to get this book, *Flying Over the Finish Line*. Get into the lives of women who have finished their first or umpteenth triathlon. Get motivation to grow your own intrinsic internal drive to do something outside your comfort zone. Start by reading about others' successes and accomplishments. Get empowered."

— Sally Edwards, National Spokeswoman of the Danskin® Women's Triathlon Series and author of *Triathlons for Women*

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