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Adventure Athletes: People Who Push the Limits

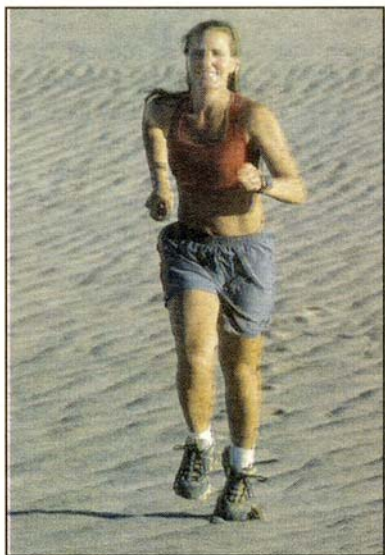
By Maggie Hall Walsh and Jerry Painter

BY MAGGIE HALL WALSH
AND JERRY PAINTER
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These people might be your next door neighbors, but they're different than most of us. They refuse to quit.

They set big goals, train hard and accomplish feats the rest of us only dream about. They do things such as climb 50 mountains a year, run in 145-mile races or ride a horse all day at a gallop. They all have world-class physical triumphs that set them apart. They have a hard time sitting still.

These four local adventure athletes have reached incredible heights in their sports and aren't stopping for much more than air and an energy bar.



Courtesy photo

Lisa Smith-Batchen runs in sand dunes in preparation for one of her ultra marathons.

Lisa Smith-Batchen

Victor. Age: 42

What's your claim to fame?

Ultra-runner, multi-sport adventure racer and one of the world's top endurance athletes.

My motto is: "Find a dream and chase it down." Accomplishments include: Six Badwater Ultramarathons (Death Valley to Mt. Whitney), including three wins; two Marathon des Sables Ultramarathons (145-mile self-sufficient desert run in the Moroccan Sahara), including being the first American, male or female, to win the event in its 15-year history (1999); GNC National 100k Championship, March 2000, 1st place team; Team USA 1999 World 100km Championship Team (France); seven Hawaiian Ironman Championships; three Eco-Challenge Multi-Sport Adventure Races; two ESPN X-Games Multi-Sport Adventure Races; 20 ultra-marathons (50 miles or more); more than 90 marathons; numerous other ironmans, triathlons and outdoor activities such as kayaking, rock climbing, snowshoeing, mountaineering, white-water rafting, cross-country skiing, in-line skating and mountain biking.

How do you stay in shape?

I became a mother eight months ago to a 4-year-old boy, and we now have a 3-month-old daughter. My life has changed a great deal with my training and my time.

I have always cross trained. My training is running, swimming, biking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and now skate skiing. Any way or time I have to get exercise I do it. Since I started working at Targhee Ski resort, I run to and from work every once in a while to get the VERY LONG 7-mile hill up and down.

Most of my training is done early in the morning

between 5 a.m. and 7:30 a.m. On the weekends, I try to mix up the activities.

Biggest fear?

My biggest fear is not being able to do what I love to do. I have always believed that fear is my friend. I take on something that I am fearful of and get through it. I have been in this situation many times while in and out of a race.

Who's your hero?

I have many heroes in many areas of life. But I have to say that my mother is my hero. She raised five kids. I look back, and I have no idea how she did what she did. I was always an athlete and so were my sister and three brothers. My mother found time to take all of us to our different sports, have three meals a day waiting for us and was always there to support us.

My mother allowed the opportunity to try any and all sports and encouraged us to be the best we could be. I still carry this with me wherever I go. My mother is still my No. 1 support system.

Ever had a close brush with death?

I have had three close brushes with death. The last time was last year in Ironman Utah. I think this was the worst for me, and it was in the water. I'm a very good swimmer. The race should not have happened. The swim portion is the first of an Ironman, and you swim 2.4 miles in open water. The swim was in Utah Lake. The winds became so fierce that they had to rescue many people from the water. I could not see one foot in front of me, and the waves were flipping me all over the place. I swallowed a ton of water and could not breathe. I rolled over onto my back, but I started to hyperventilate and panic, which is not what I would think I would ever do. I was sure that this was it for me, and things in my life passed through my mind. Then two male swimmers, angels sent from God, grabbed my arms and held me up over the waves. I don't know how long this was for, but I caught my breath, and they had to let go because they were having trouble as well. I got to the shore a long time after this and was a mess, but then found out that a swimmer did die, and I became so thankful for life and mourned the death of a fellow athlete.

How did you get started?

I got started at a very early age. My mother had me in swim lessons as soon as I could walk, and then it all went from there. I was an athlete in high school and college. From the gymnastics team, diving team, swim team — you name it, I tried it. But, I hated to run! I did not start running until my last year of college.

What keeps you motivated?

I love to challenge my mind, body and soul. I feel that as long as I'm able and as long as I love what I'm doing, I will keep on doing it. I enjoy the people and the races course. My main reason at this time in my life is to raise money for the kids all over the world that have nothing to eat. Last year through my races, I raised \$78,000. Please look at our Web sites for more information on the fund-raising and our Dream Camps: www.badwaterultra.com/lisa and www.Dreamchaserevents.com

Does coming from (or living in) eastern Idaho/western Wyoming give you any advantage?

Living in the mountains helps. Living on the East Coast where it's flat and sea level does not help you a great deal while running races at over 5,000 feet and mountains to climb. I'm thrilled to be living in the mountains. It's my energy source.

Favorite thing to do outdoors?

My favorite thing to do outdoors is to do just that, be outdoors. I hate being indoors. Being on a trail with the sun in my face is about the best place I can be!