



## We give the *Mountain* pulpit to: **Robyn Benincasa** | founder of the Project Athena Foundation

After Kristin Salzman was diagnosed with breast cancer, she endured five surgeries, chemotherapy, and radiation. But she told me that the hardest moment was shaving her head. “I looked different on the outside, just as I was different inside,” she said. Kristin—a mother who loves to run and kayak—beat cancer. But she’s still recovering.

In 2009, I started the Project Athena Foundation to help women like Kristin who have survived medical setbacks connect with their new selves. The specific setback isn’t all-important: To date, Project Athena has helped 150 women recovering from cancer, traumatic accidents, violent relationships, and many other obstacles. As they ramp up to attend one of our summer adventures each “Athena” receives a customized 16-week training plan and weekly check-ins from a Project Athena coach. Grants cover equipment and airfare. Family, friends, and supporters assist with fundraising and accompany the women as they trek the Grand Canyon, hike from harbor-to-harbor in San Diego, and bike and kayak the Florida Keys.

I know firsthand how a physical crisis hollows out your identity—and how getting back outdoors can help rebuild it. After 15 years of adventure racing, I was diagnosed with osteoarthritis in both hips. Doctors gave each thighbone a metal cap and removed damaged bone and cartilage. They said I would never run again. I didn’t listen.

As for Kristin, her adventure begins this September when she travels to Arizona to hike the Grand Canyon from South Rim to North Rim and back again, a gain of 11,000 vertical feet in two days. I’ll be with her, recovering from my sixth hip surgery. Together, we’ll heal, and through our adventure, we’ll transition from survivor to athlete. 🏔️

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[projectathena.org](http://projectathena.org)  
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information.