



### Q: Why are more everyday women entering endurance races?

**A:** Because they can! And they see other women out there like them doing it, too. Races that involve everyday skills like walking, riding a bike or swimming have really evolved to being less about the awards stand and more about the challenge of reaching a difficult finish line, "whatever it takes". There's an athlete and adventurer in all of us, and a desire to challenge ourselves. It's really just a matter of doing the very best we can with what we've got, and that's a human need, not just the bastion of the elite athlete anymore. I love seeing people of every size, shape, speed, and skill level out there! And I'm so proud of every one of them for getting "into the arena".



### Q: Why are you so passionate about helping women reach these ambitious fitness dreams? why is the physical aspect so important?

**A:** The ambitious goal, like hiking across the Grand Canyon (and back!), kayaking and cycling from Key Largo to Key West, or hiking 50 miles from Oceanside Harbor to San Diego Harbor (a new event for 2015!) is really just the vehicle we use to show people how awesome they are. At Project Athena, the real impact we have is in setting the stage for Survivors and Fundraising Gods/Goddesses to amaze and inspire THEMSELVES. The feeling of standing at the finish line after hiking for 45 miles with 12,000 feet of elevation gain/loss or paddling and riding for 120 miles is pure joy. And the best part is that it's a gift that we gave to ourselves and to our teammates on the journey. The thrill of accomplishing a physical feat that very few people are capable of as an "everyday" woman or man inspires a confidence and satisfaction that stays with us for life. Because we understand that we're capable of so much more than we ever imagined, especially with a great team around us to share our strengths and weaknesses. These lessons spill over into every aspect of our lives, and people go on to accomplish so much more--not just physically, but in confidently moving forward toward their dreams. It's so much fun to hear the stories of new business ventures, new athletic dreams, and new relationships happening after our adventures. Nothing can stop an Athena, Goddess or God when they find out how strong they really are. And when we are proud of and happy with ourselves, there's also so much more positive energy available to give to the people around us.

### Q: Do women have certain skills that actually give them an advantage in achieving endurance feats? Mental or physical?

**A:** HECK YEAH. And I know this to be a fact from competing with the best of the best athletes in expedition length (6-10 day, nonstop) adventure races like the EcoChallenge and the Raid Gauloises for 16 years. In my sport, there is a rule that each team of 4 must have at least one man and one woman on the team. At first, some people were calling the woman on their team "the mandatory equipment"...until we discovered the truth. The women on these teams often started out needing some help to keep up with



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the pace off the start line (read: me!), but 2-3 days in, women began emerging as some of the stronger members of their teams. In my experience, women are much better in extreme heat and extreme cold, and we are better by comparison when the race gets longer and harder. By day 6 or 7, I was usually carrying the extra weight or towing another teammate. In fact, just to show how strong women adventure racers are, we had a 3 woman/1 man team for the Eco-Challenge in Patagonia, Argentina, and we took 4th place overall out of 70+ teams!

Women are just wired for ultraendurance and physical extremes. And I'm convinced that it's (gasp!) because of our extra body fat (not to mention our iron will :). We knew it had to be good for something, right?! I thank the man who invented the sport, Gerard Fusil, every day for making sure that teams were of mixed gender, or women may never have gotten a shot at racing with the best endurance athletes in the world, side by side, every step of the way. On the mental side, men and women were pretty equal. It was more of a cultural issue to let one's ego get in the way of a good race result than a gender issue. For example, most of my American male teammates had trouble leaving their egos at the start line and accepting help, but my New Zealand and Australian teammates knew it was an important part of winning to accept help and ask for help, and they did it readily. I wasn't allowed to bring my ego to a race because it was of no use. If we were going to win, I was sometimes going to be on the far end of a tow line. And as the race went on, I would often get a chance to return the favor. Kinda like life. :)

### **Q: Is the training just as important as the overall experience?**

**A:** Absolutely. The actual race/adventure is just supposed to be the victory lap! In our training we have the thrill of seeing progress, feeling accomplished, happy, successful, and productive. It's also pretty fun to watch our bodies change, and to feel that inner athlete emerge. Whether you're an elite athlete, just getting back to being active, or are just getting "off the couch" (not literally! that's the term that my teammates used to describe "a little out of shape" :), the awesome thrill of being better, stronger, faster every day is addictive. I can't imagine not training for "something". Even through 4 hip replacements in the last 6 years I still had a race on my calendar to train for every 3-4 months. Lots of them involved paddling. :) Remember, it's all about rocking what you've got at the moment!





### **Q: Do you see these achievements making an impact in other aspects of women's lives?**

**A:** DEFINITELY. When we dig our own show and we're proud of ourSELVES, there is so much more love, attention, affection, and caring available for other people in our lives. When we feel strong physically, we also bring that strength to our businesses and families. And when we get that jump on the day by working out before most people we know have even opened their eyes, we're inclined to keep that feeling of being one step ahead of the world all day long--making us feel more productive and more positive. Then there is also the long term benefit of changing the image we see in the mirror forever, and not just physically.

One of my favorite moments since founding the Project Athena Foundation was when, driving home from the Grand Canyon Rim to Rim to Rim trek, I asked one of our Athenas what her favorite part of the adventure was. I expected her to mention a certain section of the canyon that she thought was especially beautiful, or to say something funny like "the finish line, of course!". But she sat there quietly thinking for about 30 seconds before she said, "My favorite part of hike was something that you probably don't even remember, because it was an offhanded comment for you...but it meant the world to me. You said 'Isn't it cool? You're an endurance athlete now.' And I couldn't answer because I started to cry. I had secretly admired endurance athletes my entire life ...and now I was one of them."



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