

Kevin Mackinnon profiles an amazing Ford Ironman World Championship competitor - Crystal Flaman

Published Friday, September 26, 2008

Go ahead. Try and tell me one person can't change the world. All I have to do to prove you wrong is introduce you to Crystal Flaman.

In two-weeks and a day she's going to be competing at the Ford Ironman World Championship. The 37-year-old isn't likely to end up on the podium – she's a self-proclaimed “average” Ironman competitor with five Ironman races under her belt – but I can guarantee that there won't be too many people who finish ahead of her who will have made as much of a difference to their communities ... heck, who am I trying to kid – to the world ... as Flaman has.

She's already raised \$200,000 for the charity Room to Read and I'm not ready to bet that she won't have raised her goal of \$500,000 by the end of the year. It's not like she hasn't done that before. In 1994, two years after her mother went through open-heart surgery, Flaman and her twin sister, Carla, rode across Canada on a tandem bike, raising \$500 grand in the process. Cute twins riding a tandem across the country, the first time it's ever been done? Hmmmm ... shouldn't be surprised that was a hit.



I'd hate to be trying to fundraise for anything else with this woman around. Three years ago she got it in her head she would raise money for Partners in the Horn of Africa. She and a friend ran 100 km, raising \$7,000. Then they got smart, she jokes. They turned the event into a relay, which has raised \$100,000 in the two years since. When she gets back from Kona she'll have that event to look forward to – she says the goal for this year is \$100,000 alone.

Kona, though, is all about Room to Read. Flaman learned about the charity a few years ago when she picked up the book “Leaving Microsoft to Change the World,” by John Wood. He did exactly what the title suggests – left the software giant after he visited Nepal and was appalled to have seen a school with a grand total of two books. “What began as a vision to share my love of reading with children of a rural Nepali village has quickly become a global movement of promoting literacy and education,” Wood writes on his website.

Flaman read the book and immediately decided she had to do something. (There are those of us who might have tried to suggest she's already done a lot, but ...) She has taken a portion of her earnings from her work as a “Social Entrepreneur” – she does presentations and workshops to companies on team building and customer service – to help build a school in Nepal. Now she has set her sights on a full-fledged worldwide scholarship.

“The scholarships are going to help kids attend schools that are already in existence,” she says, pointing out that in many countries kid's can't attend schools because they're needed to help work at home or care for their siblings. “Less than \$100 is enough to support a child's schooling for a year in many of these countries. That means For \$1,200 you can support a child's entire schooling.”

In case you're wondering how she's so aware of these numbers, somehow Flaman also finds the time to take groups to poverty-stricken areas in Central and South America, where she has seen first hand how difficult it is for so many kids to even attend school.

It's hard to believe that a fireball like Flaman would be afraid of anything, but she says she's nervous (“scared to death” were her exact words) about competing in Kona. She needn't be – there are so many people pulling for her that their good will alone should get her through this Ironman. Even in the last week a company she spoke at was so inspired that they've put together a fundraising walk. A few hours with Flaman and suddenly the entire community is determined to walk the equivalent of the distance from Kelowna to Kona, raising pledges along the way to help her cause.



Which is something I hope you'll do, too. You can find out more about Flaman on the website she's created for her Kona challenge, www.inspiredtoggivenow.com.

You can reach Kevin Mackinnon at kevin@ironman.com