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OCT

NOV

14

2010

2011

2012

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4 captures

14 Oct 2011 - 16 Sep 2013



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Diana Nyad Xtreme Dream 103 miles. Cuba to Florida. Summer 2011

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Home » Blog » Kayaker Katie Leigh

Kayaker Katie Leigh

Posted by Xtreme Dream Team on Oct 4, 2011 in Blog, Slider | 4 comments



Photo by Christi Barli

As a kayaker on the Xtreme Dream Team, I got to see Diana up close and personal for three hours out of every nine, so about one-third of the time. During the hours I was "on," I got to be in the presence of greatness. But you may be surprised to learn that greatness doesn't look like it does in the movies.

From a mere 100 feet away, on the deck of Becky Bad Girl, the swim appeared to be over numerous times. The sound of screams and dry heaves across the water, the frantic calls over the marine radio for oxygen, doctors and meds, the stopping and slow progress of the escort boats. These were all

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Diana's Tweets



- [@brkfastattiffys](#) Thanks so much for the follow back.. make sure to check out my facebook page! <http://t.co/nf0JK8HG> about 9 hours ago from HootSuitein reply to BrkfastAtTiffys
- [@janetober](#) Don't let anything stand in the way of your dreams- courage is never stopping!! about 9 hours ago from HootSuitein reply to JanetOber
- [@slatefree1](#) I'm happy to have followers! The next adventure is whatever jumps out at me next in life. about 9 hours ago from HootSuitein reply to Slatefree1
- [@mezzoring](#) I couldn't agree more, we need to lean to preserve the earth and all of the creatures that come with it! about 9 hours ago from HootSuitein reply to mezzoring

indications of a swim going badly. But as soon as I arrived in the presence of Diana, I never doubted the final destination would be the shores of Florida.

- [@erica_reed](#) Thanks, we're excited too! about 9 hours ago from HootSuitein reply to erica_reed

That's not to say she made it look easy. From the first time I accompanied her (midnight on the first night, so post-jellyfish sting), she was struggling. Throughout the swim at various times, I witnessed 4 captures 14 Oct 2011 - 16 Sep 2013 shivering and having difficulty breathing. Her face and lips were swelled, her stomach

SEP OCT NOV
14
2010 2011 2012
About this capture

was upset and she was burned, chaffed and stung all over her body. Having seen Diana previously only in top form, bigger than life, happy, positive and confident, it was difficult to watch her laboring alone through this journey. And despite a team of more than 30 people, the entire burden of The Dream rested heavily and totally on Diana's shoulders ... on her every stroke, word, thought and motion. She could not have done it without her support team, but there would be no support team without Diana's Dream.



Photo by Christi Barli

The team was composed basically of three shifts of every position – three shark divers, three doctors, three crew on every boat, 6 kayakers working in pairs. This makes total sense until you put into perspective that throughout your personal rest, food and sleep breaks, Diana will be out swimming the entire time! All of the sudden, arriving for a 3 a.m. shift on 1.5 hours of sleep does not warrant any attention and certainly no sympathy. Instead, each team member drew strength from the absolute determination that Diana possessed.

That first night of the swim, we all went through a range of emotions. Questions were left unanswered and whoever slept did so with a heavy heart. After finishing my midnight shift, I crawled into bed in the starboard cabin. Through my porthole, I had a perfect view of Diana swimming alongside Voyager and the kayaks. Muffled voices could be heard and her little red light continued to bob up and down in the water. As long as I could see the light moving, I knew that all was right with the world, and I fell into a deep, yet brief, sleep.

The following night, when I witnessed the second jellyfish sting, I began to doubt. Seeing Diana on the boat, cold, tired and in pain, I doubted she could get back in the water. I doubted anyone could. And I understood for the first time, why it was so important to Diana to continue her journey unassisted, no matter what. That simple act of getting out of the water, even just for medical attention, changed everything. A warm towel, a soft pillow, a friend's touch. The lack of those amenities allows your mind to deny them. And now, wouldn't it just be easier to fall asleep and forget? So many times throughout the journey I thought, why? Why is she doing this to herself? Why doesn't she just get out, go home, turn

on the TV and settle into a nice warm, safe and simple life. But I knew the answer to that question.

Diana was not interested in easy.

The thought of Diana getting back into the water was impossible, and yet, no one was really surprised

[4 captures](#)

14 Oct 2011 - 16 Sep 2013

she did. It was these continual and constant oxymorons that defined Diana. Every stroke she
the progressed defied human possibility. And yet she did it over and over again. Until

SEP OCT NOV
14
2010 2011 2012
About this capture

you just believed. Anything was possible.

When the decision was made to end the swim, it was not because Diana could not have swum another 10, 20 or 30 hours. We all believed that she could have gone on, despite her injured state. The sheer act of propelling herself forward in the water was not the hurdle, it was the direction of that progress that made the dream impossible. I hurt for Diana all over and I had only been a part of the team for a little over a week. Nobody wants to see a dream die, a hero fall.

And yet, despite its non-perfect ending, this is still an overwhelming positive story for the universe. Over the past week, I have thought a lot about what it took to have an XTreme Dream like this one. And I keep coming back to an excerpt from a quote from Nelson Mandela:

"Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you ... And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."



Photo by Christi Barli

Diana dared to Dream Big and she put it all out there – every last bit of her, every joy, every tear, every painful moment: open, awake and alive. And her dreaming big has allowed a world of people to do the same, on whatever scale. Her goal may have been to swim from Cuba to Florida, but her legacy will be her leadership, courage, strength, compassion, foresight and total determination. Her light shone brightly on the water that night as I fell asleep somewhere in the Florida Straits and because of it, so many others are able to shine in their own endeavors. That's the big picture and that's what I'll remember.

Katie Leigh

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woosterburd

what a gang!!!

October 4, 2011

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[4 captures](#)

14 Oct 2011 - 16 Sep 2013



Nancy Curran

October 4, 2011

Woohoo! Well put Katie Leigh, and it is a privilege to have shared the journey with all of you through your words and spirit! I live big, and share the light, inspired by the Xtreme Team!

Reply



Judy W

October 4, 2011

Katie-this was by far the most eloquent, insightful account of Diana's journey, and it's hard to believe you were so new to the team. Well done. I do, however, feel compelled to correct one thing: the quote is often attributed to Nelson Mandela, but it's in fact by Marianne Williamson. Your point was well made, though. Your message...

Reply



Swimming Holiday

October 13, 2011

A master team for Diana's swimming adventure! Congratulations to you all!!!!

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14 Oct 2011 – 16 Sep 2013

... is more than a swimmer.
... hope to us all
that we can dream big, live life
large, and look back at all of it with
no regrets whatsoever."

- Shark
- Roz Savage Part 4
- Roz Savage Part 3
- Roz Savage Part 2
- Kathy Loretta

- Kajon on Shark
- Swimming Holiday on Shark
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- SEP OCT NOV
◀ 14 ▶
2010 2011 2012
- August 2011 (36)
 - July 2011 (20)
 - June 2011 (11)
 - May 2011 (15)
 - April 2011 (4)
 - March 2011 (2)
 - February 2011 (1)
 - January 2011 (2)
 - October 2010 (3)
 - September 2010 (7)
 - August 2010 (14)
 - July 2010 (13)





About this capture

Xtreme Dream. For Diana Nyad's representation please contact Pam Derderian