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The New 61

Posted by admin on May 12, 2011 in Uncategorized | 0 comments

More than 90 miles of open ocean lies between Cuba and South Florida. For Diana Nyad, that stretch of shark-infested water equates to about 65 continuous hours of solitude, if all goes well —no rest, no physical contact with another person, no sound or movement except for the rhythmic kick-stroke-breathe, kick-stroke-breathe. Nyad, 61, plans to swim every inch of this journey without assistance... or a shark cage.

From the moment you meet Nyad, her passion for life is obvious. Everything she talks about carries a note of excitement, an audible thrill for the opportunity each new day brings. Nyad's impressive résumé —multiple world-record holder in endurance swimming, journalist, author and motivational speaker— belies her personal philosophy that life isn't really a series of accomplishments. For Nyad, it's more about pulling together all the elements that go into the pursuit of a goal and seeing where they take you.

"You don't simply tell someone to get out there and win the tennis match," she tells SUCCESS. "You say 'move your feet' or 'watch the fuzz on the ball' to really get into the Zen of it. You pull all that together and then you just might hold up the Wimbledon Plate.... It's not about winning first place but bringing every element of effort to whatever you do."

Nyad's determination to fully invest in every aspect of a pursuit is one of the compelling forces behind her upcoming swim from Cuba, tentatively planned for July. The intense training, discipline and drive are more compelling to her than becoming the first person ever to accomplish this feat. She laughs at how obvious that must seem since, after all, it would be crazy to think that 65 hours of isolation and extreme physical exhaustion would be the reward.

To understand her perspective, you have to know a little more about Nyad. In 1975, she swam around Manhattan Island in a jaw-dropping seven hours and 57 minutes. In 1979, she swam from Bimini to Florida, a distance of 102.5 miles, which set a new world distance record that stood for nearly 20 years. And she did it all with a smile, loving the opportunities she got to push herself and embrace new challenges.

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- [@blkberryswirl](#) Back at ya! Have fun, be safe and take in the New Year with a blast! [about 15 hours ago](#) from [HootSuite](#) in reply to [BlkBerrySwirl](#)
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- [@h2ornrspf](#) Thanks for the mention. Hope your enjoying the Holidays [about 17 hours ago](#) from [HootSuite](#) in reply to [H2OrnrSPF](#)
- [@marystan55](#) Your very welcome. Keep pushing ONWARD into 2012 and beyond! [about 18 hours ago](#) from [HootSuite](#) in reply to [marystan55](#)
- Just in case you havent seen my video yet, I wanted to make sure I got to say Happy Holidays to all of my followers! <http://t.co/J2fZgmde> [about 18 hours ago](#) from [HootSuite](#)

One of her biggest challenges was her first attempt to swim from Cuba to Florida in 1978. "For previous generations, swimming the English Channel was the feat to accomplish," she says. "And that's been done. Now, there is probably no other body of water that has the mystery and mythology to it like the stretch between the U.S. and Cuba has."

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winds. After 42 hours of swimming, with her only "breaks" coming when she stopped to tread water while eating peanut butter for energy or drinking fresh water handed to her from the escort boat, she was forced to face the reality of the situation; the weather had blown them so far off course that they didn't have sufficient provisions and equipment to last. More than two-thirds of the way into the swim, she was forced to abandon the effort.

Nyad was disappointed but undaunted. She had proven to herself that she had the discipline and mindset to train for the task; sometimes circumstances just don't allow for plans to come together the way we'd like them to. Instead, she turned her attention to other goals, eventually moving from swimming to new challenges. She's been part of a team that cycled the length of Vietnam. She's kayaked waterfalls in Borneo. She has establish a career as a respected journalist, covering everything from the Olympic Games to banned substances in major league sports as a correspondent for Fox Sports and National Public Radio, besides writing a number of books and articles. "It's not like I was waking up in cold sweats with regrets that I hadn't done the swim," she says.

But as 60 neared, she began to evaluate her life and consider what she really wanted to do with her self-described "prime years." When her mother died, Nyad was struck by "how quickly this precious life goes by" and decided to prove that no one should just fade into retirement simply because that's what society dictates.

She longed for that feeling of commitment and drive that had been so important in all of her swimming feats when she was younger. And there was only one challenge she'd chased in her life that she wished had gone differently, so she started to plan.

"I think 60 is when many people hit their prime," she says. "We elect many of our presidents in their 60s. At that age, people are full of ideas and their best self. I wanted to dig into my potential and bring out my best self."

It wasn't about torturing her body to prove she wasn't getting older. "It's not masochism," she laughs. "I just had to look at myself in the mirror... and say, 'You have this in you!'"

And so, more than 30 years after retiring from swimming, Nyad hit the ocean again. It's a lesson she says is relevant to everyone: "Write that novel. Start that business you've always wanted to. The ultimate high of life is the commitment to pursuing something. I wanted to feel that commitment again."

Nyad's hours in the water give her a lot of time to separate herself from concrete thinking and exercise her mind in new ways. With so much exertion and such limited stimulation for the senses (quiet water, foggy goggles), the logical side of the mind powers down and a dreamlike state takes over. In the 1970s when she trained, Nyad explained that her mind would often wander to questions along the lines of: "What is life about? What is the universe? All sorts of Zeitgeist stuff.... But then you hear a whistle from the boat or see a dark shape pass underneath you in the water—and it kind of wakes you up."

She still has her deep moments but admits it's not all so serious. Recently, while training in Mexico, her nephew's fiancée handed Nyad a hard-boiled egg and peanut butter from the escort boat and asked what she thought about while swimming. The mysteries of life under the ocean? Whether humans will ever have to live under the sea because of the state of life on Earth? Actually, Nyad answered, "I was singing the Beverly Hillbillies theme. The rhythm matched my strokes."

Nyad isn't out to solve any of mankind's great questions or problems. She isn't trying to chase after a dream of her youth. She really just wants to celebrate the hard work and focus that have carried her so far in life and will continue to drive her to new goals for as long as she is willing to pursue them. It's not about the record books or trying to fatten up her résumé— she certainly isn't focused on that right now.

Instead, her upcoming swim is about pouring herself into a project with the same passion and vigor she has always brought to life and showing others they can do the same. She insists that "retirement age" doesn't mean anything anymore. "I want people to see me and say, 'Wow! That's the new 61!"

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Diana Nyad's Xtreme Dream

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

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