

Iron-Willed

"Wow! You finished an Ironman? You mean *the* Ironman? Why go through that? Sounds crazy!"

Personally, I blame Adventist education and its "stay off drugs" and "be good to your body" philosophies for this craziness of mine. I graduated from a day academy, Cascade Christian Academy, located in Wenatchee, Wash. In seventh grade, I met one of my best friends, Mike Kyle. Like most kids around us, we were looking for something, anything, to do to keep us busy and out of trouble. That was when we discovered the existence of these "toys" people refer to as mountain bikes. Soon, our bikes became an essential part of our lives. The city of Wenatchee is in a valley surrounded by mountains which provides a perfect location to practice this sport. There are some very nice trails about two miles from the school, so every afternoon and on the weekends we would go out and do what, by then, seemed the most natural thing: mountain biking.

A few months later, we became bored and wanted to add a little more action and challenge to the sport. So we registered to participate in a mountain bike race. After our first race, we were introduced to a whole list of new and exciting sports such as road cycling, triathlons, and marathons. I clearly recall my algebra teacher, Monty Saxby, telling us stories in class about running marathons. I remember thinking that running 26.2 miles was insane but, at the same time, very impres-

sive. Inspired by him and other athletes, I completed my first sprint distance triathlon at the age of 15. Having watched Ironman Hawaii on television a number of times, I knew that completing an Ironman was definitely a goal I wanted to achieve.

On Sept. 7, 2003, I had the opportunity of treading water in Lake Monona, Wis., along with more than 1800 athletes a few minutes before the start of the Ironman Wisconsin Triathlon. The race takes place in Madison, Wis., and consists of a swim course of 2.4 miles, followed by a bike course of 112 miles, ending with a full

take a person physically and mentally to places that you would never dream of. Such a race makes you dig into your soul like you never have before.

After many bottles of Gatorade and water, over 15 PowerGels, five or six PowerBars and loads of bananas, I finally crossed the Ironman finish line in 14 hours, 49 minutes, and 15 seconds. It was hard, extremely hard. Even though I may not remember every minute of the race, the last two or three minutes, the last few hundred yards into the finish line, are unforgettable. What an amazing feeling! I will never forget those moments.

I am very grateful to God for giving me a healthy body that can handle the sport. Yes, I guess now I can call myself an Ironman, but more important than that I am grateful to God for the family He gave me who is very supportive and, among other things, also believes in Adventist education. I can't wait for the day when I get to run (or even fly!) the last few hundred yards into heaven. Sometimes it is hard for me to imagine that day, but I know for certain that it will be immensely more exciting than crossing the Ironman finish line.



Jairo Flores (Erin Heldstab, photographer).

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marathon of 26.2 miles. At 7 a.m. sharp, the gun went off, and I knew this was merely the beginning of what could well be the hardest day of my life. All triathlons, but especially an Ironman triathlon,

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