

Living With an Injured Iron Psycho Beast

by Lee Gruenfeld *

A few years ago I wrote an article for Competitor Magazine entitled "A Word to the Triathlon Widow(er)." It was a highly idealistic and somewhat romantic plea to the spouses or Significant Others of Ironman athletes, urging them to be as understanding as possible as their loved one pursues an idyllic and demanding dream.

A lot of people read that piece, copied it and passed it around, and to all of them I say this:

Please disregard it.

I've changed my mind.

You may have heard the old expression, "No captain ever proved himself on calm seas." Well, let me tell you, no Iron-spouse ever proved himself with a healthy triathlete.

If your Significant Other is a dedicated Ironman triathlete, at some point or other he/she is probably going to have a sidelining injury. Here's my suggestion if that should occur:

Shoot him. Immediately.

Trust me on this. It will be a mercy to both of you.

Four years ago my Iron Psycho Beast wife Cherie got creamed by another cyclist at Ironman Utah. It was to be the first time in eleven years she wouldn't be able to compete in Kona in October.

Let me explain something. Cherie is an accomplished woman. She has three college degrees and was a highly successful executive in the advanced technology industry making lots of dough.

One day fourteen years ago she chucked it all into the *lua* so she could do Ironman. Now she eats, sleeps and dreams about it.

So when it sank in that she was going to have to skip a year, she was — how shall I put this — unamused. It went thusly:

STUMBLING TOWARDS THE FINISH LINE

DAY ONE: She's a little blue.

DAY TWO: The core melts down completely.

DAY THREE, MORNING: I hire a Mafia hit man to take her out in the parking lot of Trader Joe's.

DAY THREE, EVENING: I see on the news that some guy named Nunzio was beaten to death with his own leg in the parking lot of Trader Joe's.

But we eventually got through it, and Cherie recovered enough to do a few more World Championships.

Last month she cracked up again, this time because some lady blew out of the DMV lot without looking. The guy who was pedaling just in front of Cherie stopped. My wife, who is genetically incapable of stopping until either the pre-determined workout time or the finish line arrives, didn't. Owing to some idiotic physical law concerning the impossibility of two objects occupying the same space at the same time, she ended up with a fractured hip, a separated shoulder and a torn rotator cuff.

Needless to say, she won't be doing Kona again this year.

Would you like to know what that's like?

Okay. If you could figure out a way to hook a generator up to gnashing teeth, my wife could fulfill all the electrical needs of Las Vegas for a year.

A recent house guest, while getting a fork and spoon out of a drawer in our kitchen, remarked that we really needed to stop letting our silverware slip down into the garbage disposal.

We don't have a garbage disposal.

The gardener waits across the street until he sees Cherie drive away before he'll tend to the lawn. Sometimes he has to sit there for five or six hours. The gardener, a six-foot-ten, 280-pound former tailback for the Detroit Lions, doesn't seem to mind.

Cherie coaches a lot of triathletes. Some days she spends a great deal of time on the phone listening to them gush about all these great workouts they had and how well their

STUMBLING TOWARDS THE FINISH LINE

training is coming along and how terrific they feel and all these races they've scheduled. After several hours of this, she often feels the need to vent her frustration. The last time something vented that level of frustration, two-thirds of the island of Krakatoa was blown clear off the planet. That island is, of course, no longer near at hand to serve as the object of Cherie's frustration. I, however, am.

The fellow cyclist she smacked into, who emerged from the incident unscathed and didn't even fall over, now wishes he'd just run into that car and killed himself.

It's been an educational experience. One thing I learned is that the phrase "Snap out of it already!" often results in an entirely different reaction than the one you expected.

Believe me, you haven't lived until you've seen a perfectly innocent airport security officer picking his teeth up off the floor because of an exquisitely ill-timed and overly jaunty "So how's it going?" delivered to an Iron Psycho Beast limping through the metal detector.

I've had to take measures. Now, Cherie doesn't even get out of bed most days, because it just doesn't seem worth the effort to chew through the straps.

You think I'm exaggerating? Wait until it happens to you. We'll have dinner and talk about it.

I'll probably be sipping mine through a straw.