

I want to share with you what I learned when I tried again. One year after my first attempt, on a sunny Saturday morning, my husband Shawn dumped me into the ocean at the Kona Pier and, with 2,500 of my closest friends and competitors, we started swimming as that cannon went off promptly at 7 a.m.

I focused on one stroke at a time, staying in between bodies, counting my strokes — one, two, three, four — and lifting my head to sight every so often just so I wouldn't get too off track.

And when I finally reached the shoreline, Shawn picked me up, and he carried me out of the water. I was so stunned and thrilled when Shawn had told me. I had managed a one-hour-and-43-minute swim time. On to the bike segment I had eight hours and 45 minutes to complete the 112-mile bike course.

I broke up the course in seven- to 10-mile segments in my mind just to reduce the enormity of the race. The first 40 miles, they clipped by as we benefited from a little tail wind. By 4 p.m., I had made it to mile 94, and I did the math and I realized I was in serious time jeopardy because I had 18 miles to go and less than 90 minutes, and that included a few sizable hill climbs.

I was stressed out, and I was scared that I wasn't going to make that time cutoff again. At this point, I pushed my internal voice aside that said, "This hurts. Quit." And I told myself, "Minda, you better focus. Focus on what you can control, and that is your attitude and your effort."

I resolved to be OK being uncomfortable, and I told myself, "Push harder, forget about the pain, and keep that laser focus." For the next 90 minutes, I cranked as though my life depended on it.

And when I rolled into town, I heard on the loudspeaker, "Minda Dentler is

one of the last competitors to make the bike cutoff." I did it!

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By only three minutes. It was 5:27 p.m., and I had been racing for 10-and-a-half hours. The first 10 miles of the run went pretty quickly, as I was so excited to finally pass people with my three wheels to their two feet. The sun quickly went down, and I found myself pulling up to the bottom of Palani hill, looking straight into a half-mile hill that looked like Mt Everest at mile 124 of the race.

My friends and family were ready at their stations to talk me up that hill. I was struggling, tired, desperately gripping those rims just so I wouldn't tip backwards. When I finally reached the top of that hill, I turned left onto a very lonely 15-mile stretch onto the Queen K Highway, totally exhausted. I pressed on, focusing on one push at a time.

By 9:30 p.m., I made that final right-hand turn onto Ali'i Drive. I heard the crowd's roar, and I was overcome with emotion. I crossed that finish line.

And my final time was 14 hours and 39 minutes. For the first time in the 35-year history, a female wheelchair athlete completed the Ironman World Championship. And it wasn't just any female athlete. It was me.

A paralyzed orphan from India. Against all odds, I achieved my dream, and through this very personal commitment to myself, I slowly realized that completing the Ironman was about more than conquering Kona. It was about conquering polio and other disabling but preventable diseases, not only for myself, but for the millions of children who have been and still will be afflicted by vaccine-preventable diseases.

Today, we are closer than ever to eliminating one of those diseases

everywhere in the world. In the mid-1980s, polio once paralyzed more than 350,000 children a year in more than 125 countries. That amounted to a staggering 40 cases an hour.

By contrast, so far this year, the last endemic countries have reported a total of only 12 cases. Since 1988, more than 2.5 billion children have been immunized against polio, and an estimated 16 million children, who otherwise would have been paralyzed like me, are walking.

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Despite this incredible progress, we know that until it's eradicated, polio remains a very real threat, especially to children in the poorest communities of the world. It can reemerge in some of the most remote and dangerous places, and from there, it can spread.

And so this is my new Ironman: to end polio. And I am reminded every day, when I look at my two-and-a-half-year-old daughter Maya. She is able to climb a ladder in the park, push her scooter or kick a ball across the grass.

Almost everything that I see her do at her age reminds me of what I could not do at that age. And when she was two months old, I took her to get her first polio vaccine. And when the doctor came in the room to prepare the shot, I asked him if I could take a picture to document the moment. When we left the room, I could feel my eyes welling up with tears.

I cried the entire way home. It was in that moment that I realized that my daughter's life would be very different from mine. She will never be faced with the crippling disability of polio, because a vaccine was available, and I chose to get her immunized. She can do anything she wants, as can each of you.



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Now I'd like to leave you all with one question: what is your Ironman?

Thank you.

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