



Take a Risk... and Manage It!

by Di Westaway

**Take risks: if you win,
you will be happy; if you lose,
you will be wise.** Author Unknown

I've been told I'm a risk taker. My mum says I always have been. And I say, lucky, lucky me because apparently I have the risk gene.

Lucky, lucky I say because in taking risks, I reckon I've found true happiness. I have a life I love.

I've had my share of tough times. But the times I've taken the biggest risks have been the hardest; the most rewarding AND the most educational.

Last Tuesday night I had the great privilege of hearing Australian mountaineering legend, Tim McCartney Snape, share his passion for adventure. He told of a fulfilling life, with so many adventures past and future, it made my head spin. For a moment I thought he was having more fun than me.

But one thing he said really struck a chord. He was asked about his motivation to keep pushing on through extreme physical discomfort and sometimes pain, to achieve a goal. His response was very enlightening. He said he kept going because he had invested so much time, effort, planning, preparation and energy into getting to these extraordinary locations, that he was highly motivated to "never, never, never give up."

In other words, the more time and energy we put into minimizing risk and preparing for our life's adventures, the more likely we are to follow through with them.

For me, taking risks and achieving goals brings great satisfaction and contentment. These risks are in my personal life, my work and my hobbies. But I then act every day to minimise and manage the risk. And that's why I exercise every day: to minimise the risk of disease.

Within the community of Wild Women On Top, I can find countless examples of women who are taking risks and leading healthy, inspiring, fulfilling lives. Margaret Sheridan, a 72 year old legend from our Tuesday night Trek Training group, is one of these. She is constantly breaking down barriers and taking on challenging adventures, including Everest Base Camp thirty years ago.

Of course there's Meerie Barkle, mother of twelve, (yes, that's TWELVE children), who has taken on many extreme adventures, including a Seven Summits journey. And Monica Hitchinson, 59, who climbed Mt Kilimanjaro two weeks ago with Melissa Norsa and Barbara Alessi. And former members, Annie Doyle and Amanda Jones, who are climbing Mt Everest next year.

Ten years ago I found myself at 20,000 feet on the edge of the highest mountain in the southern hemisphere, struggling for breath, and wondering what the hell I was doing. I realised that I was ill prepared for this World Class Trekking peak of Mt Aconcagua, Argentina, 6,962m. I was not equipped to manage the risks associated with this mountain, and as a consequence, I was forced to return home without summiting, feeling like a complete failure. I was devastated. I was used to achieving my goals and I had thought I was tough and fit. What I learned is that preparing for a World Class Trek and managing the risks associated is not as simple as jogging and going to the gym. Preparing for a World Class Trek requires Trek Training, which is a systematic program of preparing the body and mind for trekking. It teaches you how to increase your physical and mental toughness in the wilderness, as well as how to manage nutrition, gear, people, weather and altitude.

Eight years after our failure on Mt Aconcagua, we finally achieved success. Wild Women on Top motivated and trained a team of women for this World Class Trek using Trek Training. We chose an itinerary guided by World Expeditions and this time we were prepared. It took eight years of hard work, passion, commitment and lessons learned to build up the skills to earn this

summit. On January 12, 2008, our team of Wild Women on Top, finally stood on top of the highest mountain in the Southern Hemisphere, Mt Aconcagua, nearly 7,000m high!

In the words of Sir Edmund Hillary:

"It is not the mountain we conquer, it is ourselves."

Through Trek Training, we conquered ourselves. I am sometimes criticized for being a mum and taking risks. But I know that as long as I put the time and energy into minimizing the risks, through preparation and training, the risks I am taking will bring me both happiness and health. I challenge you to take a risk, add meaning and adventure to your life and inspire those around you to do the same.

"It is only in adventure that some people succeed in knowing themselves - in finding themselves." André Gide

For more information about how to minimize risks when trekking, you can purchase a copy of Di's book *Wild Women On Top; How to Prepare for World Class Treks* <http://bit.ly/xqOsdM>



Di Westaway has been a physical educator for over 30 years, and a trekker and mountain climber for ten. She is a former Australian Gymnastics, Aerobics and Masters bouldering champion. Experienced in teacher training, journalism and public speaking, she has trained coaches and hundreds of women of all ages for world class treks. She is a member of the Wild Women On Top Seven Summits team, a keen rock climber and most importantly, a mother of three.
<http://www.wildwomenontop.com>