

A BRIDE'S MAID NO MORE!!!!

To make a long story short, I've been involved in the sport of triathlon for almost 20 years and in that time I've competed in hundreds of races, made tonnes of fabulous friends, and been able to break-out the podium dress a few times. Despite these amazing "gifts of triathlon", a few personal goals remained elusive: a sub-10 Ironman, an Ironman age group win, and of course the big one, a lifelong training partner to "win-over" - forevers! In November 2010, my luck was finally starting to change with a 9hr58min finish at Ironman Florida. Sadly, the Ironman age group win slipped through my fingers yet again! And speaking of fingers, despite three years of *not-so-subtle* hints, that very expensive and precious "carbon stone" still hadn't found a place on my finger!!! Were the sands of time conspiring against me? Were my pheromones overpowered by a sea of sweaty socks, shoes and jog bra's hanging from an overflowing laundry basket??? Little did I know – IM Germany 2011 was to be a life changing experience – in more ways than one!

Last July Glenn, Stuart, Dave and I all signed up for Ironman Germany – it was to be a international reunion of the old Toronto training gang, now separated by oceans and continents, with Stu moving home to Aussie in search shorter winters and Dave to California in search of triathletes in smaller speedo's! The initial excitement of registration wore off quickly as the winter months of training dragged on. We were lucky to have our time on the turbo trainer punctuated by a trip to Tucson (twice for Glenn) in February, followed by a trip to California in May to visit D! Both trips included fun races as we competed in the Desert Duathlon in Scottsdale, AZ, and the World's Toughest Half Ironman ('nuf said, pretty close to accurate) in Auburn, California. Lucky for Glenn, he also managed to squeeze in the infamous Escape from Alcatraz, which has been on my "to-do" list for almost 10 years! Unfortunately, as July drew near Dave was forced to withdraw from the race due to nagging injuries, and Stu very nearly did himself in with a nasty crash in the rain 3 weeks out. Similarly, Glenn struggled to get in the training hours required as he prepared to change jobs a mere week before his departure for Germany, AND then, to add injury to insult, had a bike crash on his commute home where he fractured a rib a week before the race!! At this point, I wondered if it was going to be me alone with the Grrrrr-mans (Hello Raelert brothers :-)!).

So... where was I....? Ummmm... Raelerts.... Oh right... IM Germany! I arrived in Frankfurt on Sunday afternoon, followed by Stu on Monday and Glenn on Wednesday. Our days leading up to the race were spent on course recon, light training, finding our way through the subway system, side-stepping pastry shops, giant pretzels, sausage kiosks, and eventually finding the lake where the swim took place. With the arrival of CK (Stu's wife) on Friday our crew was finally set to get into race mode... all except Glenn, who was preoccupied most of the time with sending emails and generally hogging my computer....what's up with that? I thought he left his job and blackberry a week ago? We also spent some time devising the "race within the race". Being a true Aussie, Stu had come up with a series of race day wagers - for added incentive of course!

- Handi-cap winning time based on 5mins per year difference in age – winner gets dinner purchased by the other two
- Slowest T2 time to purchase the first round of pints
- Slowest T1/T2 combined to purchase the second round of pints

It must have been a premonition as there was no discussion of a third round of pints - A hard day lay ahead!

I'm not sure how I did it, but during our bus ride to the lake on race morning, I managed to convince Stu that he could still beat all of us even if he added another minute per year. In a moment of weakness he took the bait and I now had an age adjusted overall handi-cap of 48 mins!! Silly Aussie!

Race day dawned like every other day of the week in Frankfurt; cool, overcast, with a high probability of rain starting in the morning....oh and high winds... ugh! The upside of course was that it kept away the nude bathers at the beach adjacent to the swim start. As we made our way to the swim start Glenn and I were greeted with a big hug and a smile from our friend Dede Griesbauer, who we met at IM Brasil – a top pro athlete with a sharp wit, infectious smile, awesome blog and always a good come-back. Even though we wished her luck, it was not her day as a crash on the wet cobbles on one of the many 'round-about's' took her down in the first loop of the bike. She may have fractured her elbow and pelvis (what else??), but it wasn't enough to break her sense of humour when we saw her at the airport after busting out of the German ICU! Wishing you a speedy recovery Dede!

Stu and I were in the first wave, starting at 6:45 with a gap of about 15meters to the pros. Glenn was in the second wave starting at 7AM. The two loop swim is in a small lake about 12km south of Frankfurt. While it was nice not to be totally engulfed by 2,500 other competitors, I didn't feel like I was swimming to my potential. I tried to push the pace, but nothing was firing, and I stayed within the same "pod" of swimmers I'd been with most of the course. Although I figured things must be going OK if I was swimming the same pace as two pros that had fallen off the back of the lead pack. **Swim time 1:01:44.**

T1 was awesome – after a short run up the hill it was directly to the bike and my transition bag, – no change tent required – woo hoo! The air temp was pretty cool, so I took my time to put on my arm-warmers, gloves and vest. This took awhile, but as I learned at IMFla last year – it's essential gear!!! And I was glad I did, as it started to rain almost as soon as I got on my bike and didn't let up for the next 3.5 hours!

During our recon of the bike course, it appeared to be very manageable. Yes, there were numerous little towns to go through with multiple round-about's and multiple turns, yes there was a cobble stone section, and yes, there was "Heart Break Hill", but it all seemed – at least from the car window - manageable. Of course reality hit when I had to do it twice in the cold, the wind and the rain! While I didn't really feel drained after the bike, I was more fatigued than I had expected.

As I got close to the end of the second loop of the bike I started to feel the need to go to the washroom... eeks! I thought I was close enough to hang on till T2 however, doing this meant I would put my chances of winning the "T2 challenge" in jeopardy and there was no way I was losing that bet to a couple of boys! So, I hopped off my bike and took a quick break before finishing off the **bike in a time of 5:31:51.**

I quickly went through the co-ed T2 change tent – with blinders on – and onto the run. Very soon I needed to make another port-o-pottie stop – about 15mins into the race. Confident that I was now "all clear" I headed up and over the first of two

bridges that were on the far end of each loop of the four loop run course. After running down the ramp off the bridge, and back onto the bike path along the Main River, I saw Glenn crossing over the bridge. I reckoned the gap was about 2K max at that time... the race was on! My next sighting of Glenn was after the turn-around at the far end of the river – the gap was holding. From then on I said to myself that I had to run my own race, and not think about how soon he'd catch me, or spend any time looking for him in the crowd....easier said than done! After the first loop I never saw Glenn again and worried that he had dropped out. I didn't see Stu at all either – but knew that he was too determined to let a back injury take him out!! I did see CK, and friends of Dave's – Rentao and Silvia Derks, from Germany who came to watch the Canadian contingent race!!! During the run I kept reminding myself that I had to focus on my own race, as the 15min lead I had over my competition meant that in 'virtual time' someone could actually be ahead of me!

It was amazing how the seemingly flat run course actually felt anything but flat. The "up and over and down" of two bridges on each loop meant my legs were screaming by the fourth lap. This was likely compounded by the fact that I didn't drink enough on the bike given the wet and cold conditions. As I approached the last 2K to the finish line a spectator told me I was in first place. The initial jolt of adrenaline was followed quickly by thoughts of doubt... how could this guy be sure? I did have that 15min head start... so I decided not to let-up and willed my legs to "shut up and run".

On the down-ramp of the last bridge I grabbed the hand-railing to speed my turn around the corner and passed two guys on the inside. I apologised, and told them I thought I was running for first – which got a little cheer from them – NICE! As I ran along the bike path towards the final right hand turn that would take me off the run course and into the finish line chute, I could still here the guys behinds me as one of them was clearly struggling – I yelled some encouragement back.

As I passed the T2 bike racks I thought to myself "OK – this is IT!! GO FOR IT!!" With the adrenalin now at an all time high, I entered the finishing chute with my arms in the air and started to cry. Everything that I'd been told about the finish line at Ironman Germany was coming true... the crowds, the music, the excitement – this was going to be the best 150m run to the finishing banner ever! Unfortunately, about this time I was passed by the two guys behind me, who proceeded to open a giant flag between the two of them as they ran right in front of me – NOT NICE! My first thought was to drop back so that they didn't ruin my finish line photo, quickly followed by: "every second counts... keep running!" And so, my finish line experience was one that included about every emotion possible – happiness, pain, joy, frustration, fear, and thankfulness. **Run split 3:36.**

... and then... CONFUSION, ELATION, SURPRISE AND WHAT THE HECK???? As I lifted my head and gathered myself I gazed ahead and saw two volunteers holding a giant banner that read "Linnea Will You Marry Me?" In a state of exhaustion and bewilderment I think I muttered something like "Um... that's me!" Obviously someone had been very busy not only changing jobs, training for Ironman, getting injured, sending numerous emails (now understood) and racing, but also had been planning a very memorable, personal and touching proposal. The only problem was that the "groom-to-be" wasn't at the finish line – he was still racing!!

As I was guided to the sideline of the finishing area Kevin McKinnon appeared. After congratulating me on my race he told me some of the work that Glenn had put into

getting this finish line proposal together, including working with my friend Chris Brook on designing/printing and picking up the banner, contacting both the Race Director Kai Walters, and the Assistant Race Directory Amy Zwilling to get permission to do the proposal and for CK and Stu to have access to the finish line area, coordination with Kevin for the drop off and organizing of the volunteers to hold the banner – these people, and likely many others, had done everything they could to accommodate this very special event for Glenn and myself, including a hilarious live-blog update by Kevin. Here is an excerpt:

- *The sprint for the finish line! Glenn Rossitter wants to propose to his girlfriend, Linnea Humphrey, at the finish line here in Frankfurt. He's prepared a big banner for the occasion. The only problem is that they're both in the race and on a similar pace towards the line. She left at 6:45, he left at 7. She went through 28.7 km at 9:07:20, he went through at 9:06:31. We're doing our best to make sure Linnea sees the banner when she comes across the line, but it would be really cool if he was there, too. Get running, Glenn!*
- *Uh oh ... Linnea seems to be running faster now! Humphrey is a many-time Kona qualifier, so there's no way she's waiting for anything out on the course here today.*
- *Linnea is done ... now we're just waiting on Glenn! We managed to get the banner across the finish line for Linnea Humphrey from Glenn Rossitter - "Linnea, will you marry me?" Since she's still waiting at the finish line, we're guessing we know what her answer is going to be.*

Given my head start, and his faltering legs, Glenn just wasn't able to close the gap between us. And, ironically, while I had been worried about him dropping out, he confessed that he too was worried about the same thing for me! I'm sure those nagging doubts also impaired his ability to run to his potential (right honey?). So after waiting a short time (ok so 18 minutes that felt like an eternity!), Stu and CK grabbed the finish line proposal banner and stood in front of the finish line to officially welcome Glenn to his very happy, albeit stinky, sweaty and dishevelled bride-to-be, who was waiting for him with a big smile and a kiss!

This is where things get a bit murky in my mind. As we were ushered off to the side of the finish area, Glenn started to say something... and I, feeling regal draped in my golden shield (heat blanket), red velvet blanket (race towel) and emerald finish line banner, still wanted the "FULL ON" experience. At this point I think I blurted out "I hope you're going to get down on one knee for this!" (Ok, I do remember that). And so, with many of our family and friends watching live on-line (another one of the many secret emails Glenn sent out alerting them to the special occasion the night before the race), Glenn got down on one knee – unaided - a mere 40 seconds after crossing the line and asked me to do him the honour of spending the rest of our lives together (timing confirmed by the "screen-shot" D took of his computer monitor while watching the live video feed). He then proceeded to present me with my "stand-in" engagement ring – not wanting to risk losing a diamond while discarding an empty Gu package from his Fuelbelt during the race, Glenn wisely presented me with a very memorable triathlon inspired ring (Hey Vinu – you gotta include an extra 'ring' pocket in the fuel-belt, maybe with a little safety hook – you can call that model "The Rooster"). Unaware of the cameras capturing our special moment, I accepted his proposal and after two burly medical guys helped Glenn stand-up, we

shared a post-race hug as I inadvertently emptied the contents of my gel flask down his back by giving him the biggest squeeze ever.

After a lovely hot shower at the race site (so civilized to have on-site shower facilities), Glenn, Stu, CK and I hobbled off to get some beer and champagne to celebrate all that was so great with the day, including; Stu overcoming the odds stacked against him and grabbing the last qualifying spot for Ironman Hawaii, Glenn getting through a day where he was preoccupied with making me the happiest gal in the world, and me for finally winning my age-group, being the first Masters female, 9th amateur woman overall, and FINALLY becoming betrothed – for *reals* this time! In deed, a bride's maid no more!!

A quick post-script:

- Handi-capped race winner – Linnea 10:17! Stu 9:33 and Glenn 10:20 (love those extra minutes! Thanks Stu)
- Slowest T2 time - ME – despite my on-course, T2 time-saver pit-stop
- Slowest T1/T2 combined - Glenn – darn those extra clothes!
- Best time ever seeing Stu and CK again after not seeing them for over 2 years
- So happy that our friends and family got to watch the proposal live on-line
- Its true – Ironman Germany has the best finish line EVER!

With Ironman #19 completed, I'm now setting my sights on #20, which will be in Hawaii on Oct 8th, 2011 – hope I can get in the required training with all the wedding planning I'll have to start!

This must be one of my longest race reports yet, but there was so much to tell and really, there is so much more. My success at this race and the success of Glenn's planning for the proposal can be attributed to, in large part, our very supportive group of triathlon friends. I can honestly say that without all the people we have met over the years, trained with, sweated, cried and cheered with, none of this would have been nearly as rewarding or exciting. So thanks to all of you (those I've mentioned and those I haven't), in helping Glenn and I have the most memorable day in sport we've had so far.



Hey, Ironman Hawaii.... You've got big shoes to fill!!!