

IRONMAN NEW ZEALAND 2011

Sarah Hulme

Swim 1.01, Ride 6.32, Run 4.44

Total 12.40

These questions were asked by Hannah Hogan for her own reference. I thought they would give a good insight into my encounter with ironman all the same. A full race report follows.

What made you decide to do an IM?

After starting triathlon at 35 I knew I was never going to be fast and sprint distance wasn't for me. I'm known for my sheer determination and pig headedness and thought I was better suited to longer slower race. I watched my good mate Emma online in her first IM in NZ last year and cried most of the day watching her. The very next day I knew I was to do an IM.

When did training begin (date)?

The 'true' training is 20 weeks out from race day, but my lead up was about 6 months before that. Mark's (coach) programmed race training plan started in early October 2010.

Highlights of the training?

I was really lucky to have my good mate and training partner Alicia. We are very similar in ability and being together made it fun, supportive and one could always pick the other one up when needed. I relished my improved fitness and skills and loved giving the boys a run for their money in the pool and towards the end, on the bike. I like to keep them honest and just quietly stick to their wheels when they least expect it! Tim O called me 'dog shit' cause he just couldn't get rid of me on our long 150k ride on camp (me and 9 blokes – Alicia couldn't come).

Lowlights of the training?

The consistency was really the hardest. The backing up every day twice a day was wearing after a long while. I really got sick of getting all my gear ready before each session. No matter how many times I did it, I couldn't do it any faster. Pump up tires, clean my bike, wash all smelly run clothes, dry out wet shoes (always raining!!), where are my goggles? My togs are still wet from last swim, my Garmin needs charging again before tomorrow etc etc etc. This seemed to never stop and I wasn't ever really able to get on top of it.

I certainly missed some family activities like Sat cricket and that was really difficult. It's hard enough to get your mind ready for some intensive training and keeping always positive, it's all the more difficult with guilt and the constant worry of them missing you.

Did you ever reach breaking point?

Not really. There were a few rides where I had nothing left by the end. 6 hr rides and a 1 hr run off the bike really takes the fork out of your nighty one week after the other. Hills on the bike have never been a fav of mine, so the Wed morn Mt Coot sessions were tough mentally for me.

The hardest part was doing these massive sessions and then arriving home to kids saying 'what are we doing today?'. I struggled with my patience and energy levels. Let's not forget that 8 of these weeks were during school hols!! I would also resent other triathletes who would go home, sit in air conditioning and watch DVDs all afternoon. I know guys who are 100% supported by their wives during training and they don't lift a finger at home. I would be cursing them whilst I sat in the heat watching cricket feeling myself dehydrate!

Did you ever think about giving up?

Never! Giving up is a very bad swear word Hannah. !!

Funniest moment during training or the race?

I think when you spend a long time with someone (Alicia and I) doing something as intense as training for an ironman the long runs and rides

become very entertaining. You seem to talk about things you wouldn't normally tell even close family. Put it this way, between us both (and sometimes twice) we had piles, thrush, cold sores, ulcers, very minced girlie bits and a bad case of monkey arse (where your sit bones get very dry red and sore from being on the bike too much). We certainly had a good laugh at competing who had the worst case of each 'disease' as we called them. Alicia claimed she wasn't going to take to swearing all the time and I took great delight in timing how long it took for her to scream out her first "fuck this bastard hill"!

One afternoon a week was Dougal's cricket training. I had a 45 min run so I started running around the perimeter of two cricket ovals whilst supervising the twins playing in the park and Bill doing his homework at a picnic table. The other mothers would laugh at me constantly. It was all in good humour. One time I ran past them on lap six or seven, and one of the asked "Heh Sarah, are you lost?". They all laughed for a good 15 mins about that.

What kept you motivated during the training?

Mark gave us a list for each three week block. I blew it up and pinned it on the fridge for all the family to see. We all took great delight in marking each one off and not missing any (if possible). There is also no greater motivation than entering a bloody massive bastard race like ironman and giving it all the respect it deserves.

Did you ever scream or use profanity towards Mark during training?

Yes. Only once though. I was riding up the Gatton Range from Landsborough up to Maleny, Montville etc on our 200km Caloundra ride. Why the fuck do we need to do this bastard ride? Why does Mark have to be such a mongrel and make us do this? Mark got bad cramps and came back down and went home the short way. I called him a soft cock cop out pile of shit the whole way to Caloundra. Once I rolled into Caloundra I realised with a clash why he'd made us do that ride and silently went

about my business trying to take back all the nasty words I'd said.

How did you manage home commitments, training, work, and raising your 4 children?

Ric was amazing. He doesn't understand triathlon (or any mass participation sport) so he was always bamboozled by the whole thing. He knew what I was doing each session ie. riding, but he had no comprehension of what two loops of nebo, glorious, Samford, the gap meant. We set some family rules early (agreed by EVERYONE) and they were to be home before 7.15am in the mornings and only two nights a week (the other sessions I did during the day). Weekends became messier. With each session I did I prepared everything I could for the kids, house and us. For example, I'd have the kids eating their dinner and have had their showers before I went to swimming and our dinner ready to go as soon as I got home. I'd also packed all their lunches, homework, sport gear etc the night before, as well as get my gear organised for the following day. It was constant! With this strategy, when I was at training I could focus on just that and when I was at home I could pour my energy into that. The kids were also great about it and old enough to understand. Bill (11) was always asking how my training was going, what I did etc and was very nervous for me before the race. I tried to always involve them by telling them stories about training. All they ever wanted to know who was the faster guy in the squad....

Age/sex of your children?

Bill is 11 in Grade 7 at BBC

Dougal is 10 in Grade 5 at Kelvin Grove State

Jess and Annie are both 8 in Grade 3 at Kelvin Grove State.

A normal day in the life of Sarah during training?

Monday – day off training. Fill the line with washing, fill a trolley with food, clean the house, bike, car. My new neighbour behind us told me once (over the fence) "Heh love, if you put any more washing on that

line, you're gunna break it!".

Tuesday – 2.5 hr run, home by 7 am, the usual running around for family stuff, spend 1 hr in Dougal's class, pick Bill up Toowong at 4pm, home, homework, dinner and shower for kids, swimming, dinner for us.

Wednesday – 3 - 4 hrs at Mt Coot tha, home by 7.15am, Ric and Bill leave at 7.15 for cricket, work all day at school (I'm a swimming teacher for the junior school), home, homework, dinner, washing, Dougal's cricket training 5pm, I run for 45 mins round the cricket pitch (with other mothers laughing at me), dinner.

Thursday – BTS swim set am, home by 7am, more washing, ironing, food shopping, dinner, homework, hockey training for twins at 5, home, 1 hour run, dinner.

Friday – BTS wind training, Ric and Bill leave early for cricket, I tried to make Friday 'my' day to do my own thing, sometimes worked, sometimes didn't, pack everything ready for two cricket games in the morning, everyone falls in a heap Friday night.

Saturday – endurance swim set and 2 hour ride in the morning, straight to one of the cricket games til 12 noon, (I hate cricket – this was horrible), home, run in the evening.

Sunday – build up to 6 hr ride, 1 hour run. Try to stay awake all afternoon. Touch footy in the arvo with a doz kids and parents from our street.

I had a beer every Sunday night. I'd put it in the freezer for 10 mins before I drank it so it was really cold. I'd sit down near the chooks in the cool of the back yard and scull it in one hit. It was a bloody great part of my week!!

What time did you wake up for training?

Never any later than 5am. Tuesday and Wednesday mornings were before 4am.

How did your husband handle the commitment involved?

Ric was great about it. He was very proud of my commitment and would

tell his mates what I was up to often. He would tease me all the time and call me 'elite'. Saying that, he just didn't really get it.

Why would you run the Bridge to Brisbane with 50k people when you could run on that day totally alone along the river in Toowong? Why would you want to do three completely different sports, at their ultimate distances, all on the one day? Why can't you have a beer on Tuesday nights? Have a chip with that? Why are you constantly cleaning your bike? Why do you keep pumping up your tyres? Why, do they go flat overnight? How come there are always togs hanging on the tap in our shower? Are those goggle marks around your eyes still there from last night? What do you and Alicia possibly find to talk about when you spend 30 hours a week together? Why do you ring each other three times a day?

Who were your biggest supporters?

Ric and the kids must be first. Alicia and I held each other together well. Alicia's husband Adrian was incredibly supportive with his time. He is an amazing cyclist so I'd always be asking for advice on maintenance, garmins, pedal strokes and how do I get that bike into that box? Ric's aunt was great with phone calls. My mum was on the phone a lot (usually panicking about my long rides and then the race itself). She constantly asked me, and was amazed every time, how long each of the legs were? My neighbour Jo would run with me quite often and was very supportive. Ric's mum took boys to the cricket on Sat morns and then I'd relieve her half way. She also had the kids for the four days we were away in NZ together which was great.

Mark always believed in me and was nothing short of confident in my ability all the way through. More about him later.

Talk me through the race?

See attached.

Were there any setbacks in your training and on race day?

I was extremely lucky I went into the race injury free. My only real problem was the issues I had with my digestive system during the race.

Will you do another IM?

The jury is still out on that one. A big chunk of me would love to try to improve my time (sub 12!) but I don't want to become selfish and one minded and potentially neglect my family. It's easy to take these things too far. Plus, I do love our kids and spending time with them was something I really missed. Do I want to do that again?

What advice would you give to anyone thinking about doing an IM?

There are a few tips for first timers:

Don't try to attempt an ironman before you are ready. A good base is a must!

Talk to all your family, friends and support crew well before hand. Do your homework on estimated time of training, cost, sacrifices and especially what roles you and your supporters will play. Make it very clear.

Don't questions your program. Mark knows what he is doing – that's why we ask for a program. Even elite athletes need a coach so don't be arrogant and make your own decisions. It's very simple: he gives you a list, you just do it!!

Treat ironman with respect (especially your first). Don't undertrain and think you'll be OK. You won't! Don't think too much about times, just be very pleased you finished.

Ironman is an individual race. It's very easy to compare yourself to other athletes or people you train with. This is the one fundamental mistake which will bring your mental strength to a very messy end.

Believe in yourself. You know you can do it. It's just how well you handle it. Have a sense of humour. Lastly, it's a very simple process. Work through the list Mark has given you, concentrate on pacing and work hard on practicing your nutrition. It's really that simple!!

RACE DAY REPORT

In the lead-up:

Two days before the event I was ready. I wanted it to just start and all the fapping around with registration, bike racking, bike inspections, labelling all my gear etc was starting to wear me down. Alicia and I had an itinerary for each day there was so much to do.

I had two set backs in the days leading up to the Saturday. I tore a hole in my wetsuit and had to get it fixed. Found an amazing lady who not only fixed my wetsuit but also gave me a hug in promise I wouldn't panic. My helmet didn't pass inspection so I had to purchase a new one. I was worried I'd end up with something I didn't like which cost \$800 (or worse, one of those wanky aero sperm thingos).

I took both of these in my stride with a matter of fact nature and was drawing strength from this. I am unflappable and quietly patting myself on the back.

Bike racking scarred the pants off me entirely. Each person has their own racking spot by number. You are personally taken on a tour of transition. My fellow was possibly the nicest man in the world, about my Dad's age and very caring. In fact he was so caring and gentle with me, I spent the whole time fighting back tears. This is it. It's real. It's happening. I'm amongst all these lean muscle bound guns. Me! Little old me. But here I am. I'm scared but I know I can do this. I've trained hard and I'm ready. But what if something goes wrong? Don't think like that. I have improved heaps. What if I get my nutrition wrong? I'll hit the 'wall'. No you won't. Think positive. You'll be great. You'll be fine. Why the hell did I tell so many people I'd be doing this? They are all watching me and expecting so much from me. Who cares? It's your race and not theirs. They are at

home on the couch eating chips. Just smile at the nice man and leave. Now. Oh crap, there is Alicia. She's crying too. Don't look at her and just walk. Are you crying Sarah? No. you? Yes. Me too.

Race day morning:

Got some sleep so feeling pleased that I've had 'enough'. Eat some food which I manage amongst the nerves. Thank God it's finally here. Holy shit it's finally here.

Still fairly calm going through our list of more fapping around; body marking, put up tyres, put a whole pantry of food onto the bike, hand in special needs bags etc etc. At least once it's started, this constant organising will be over.

Meet at arranged place with all the other BTS crew; Brad, Brad and Tom as well as Mark and Suz and some family and supporters. Alicia and I are sitting in the gutter trying to share a powerbar and it taste vile. We all put on our wetsuits and Mark does mine up. I can feel he wants to say something to me to encourage me and is willing me to give of my best and have a good day. If he'd said one word to me I would have dropped my bundle completely so I'm glad he remains quiet and slowly checks everything is done up properly.

We all walk down to the swim start. Walking is good, distracting. We get to the area where athletes go into the water and spectators stay put. Saying good bye to Ric is heart renching and by this stage I'm really really nervous. I shove my head into his chest and allow myself 20 seconds to dissolve before I gather myself together again and promptly march off to the start without another word. Alicia and I are together and doing everything not to cling onto each other in fear like identical twins in a cyclone.

Head into the water, wee, have a little swim, wee, find a good starting spot, wee, look at the bloke next to me knowing I've just done a wee on him, smile to myself, look again, it's Brad Hector. Cripes, so sorry Brad. This start is the most spiritual moment of the day. 1,600 people in their self seeded spots treading water waiting for the start gun. It's is pouring with rain. I mean belting down. Vietnam rain. I can hear it hitting my

swim cap. It's dark. I look ahead and see the outline of 20 large blokes in a warrior boat. I'm speechless. Everyone else is the same. No noise at all. Where does that ever happen with 1,600 people in close range? Then, I focus on the noise at the beach. Another group of massive men performing a terrifyingly passionate, extremely loud and very moving Haka. This is all I can hear and its deafening. The start gun at Taupo is an almighty cannon. I'm waiting for it. The Haka has stopped and all I can hear is absolutely nothing. My senses are on fire and I'm crying my eyes out with the wonder of this moment. Here I am, in the middle of this powerful moment, in ironman, in the water with all these people I've always thought better than me, right near the middle and second from the front, ME, if everything goes wrong today it's still been worth it just for this moment.

The cannon goes off with an earth shattering crack and it's on!! It's started. I am as cool as ice cream by now. My mind is clear. All I hear in my own mind is "I grew up in the country – give me your best ironman. I can take it!"

The swim:

I feel confident and good. My heart rate is fine and I've found my rhythm quickly. I know I can build later and I do. I watch the bottom and it's crystal clear. This is bloody marvellous. I get slapped around a lot but I'm ok with this. In fact, I love a rough swim. Some bloke tries to push me under four times and I just take it. That's mass swimming. No point getting upset about it. He does it again. I elbow him in the side so hard I hear all the wind come out of him. Problem solved. Swim on. At the turn around I've got plenty of room and seem to be swimming in a straight line for once. I turn the buoy and head for home. Family, friends and coach awaiting me. Before I know it, I can see the finish and I'm quite sad it's nearly over. I exit the water and run the 400 m up to transition through a sea of people. I feel like royalty for the cheering and high fives. Some lovely volunteer passes me my transition bag and I'm in the big marquee. The loveliest lady in the world sits me down on a chair and rips

off my wetsuit. She must be the daughter of that great bloke who took me round transition the day before. Are they all related? This is unreal. Before I know it, she has fully dressed me like a toddler being spun around and dressed by her mother in a screaming hurry. The girl next to me says, great swim. I ask what time. She says 1.01 and I say, No bloody way. That makes me happy. Am I great, or what?

The bike:

Off I go into the pouring rain. I can ride in the rain. I'm from Qld. It hasn't stopped raining for 6 months. Sucked in every one else. Sucks to be you. Up the hill and I feel OK. Why? I should have my heart rate up by now but it's not. This is good news and maybe I am OK at this silly caper of riding.

I quickly settle into the bike. I like tri bars and I'm comfortable. I eat a totally drenched sandwich and it tastes great. I'm happy and beetling along at what feels like a good pace. I look down – 31.5km / hr. Don't go out too hard Sarah and I'm conscious of my heart rate. It's all fine and I'm doing OK. In fact, I feel great and I'm doing a great job.

Like a clap of lightning all the pressure from the previous 4 months hits me. I'm crying. Again! I'm so overwhelmed by the impact this has had on my body. I'm talking out aloud to myself. I can't believe this! My body had done great things for me. This stumpy little body is in fact great. I've given birth to four children, including twins, all naturally without any drugs. I've managed four pregnancies without hitches, survived a chronic case of pneumonia and now I'm doing ironman. Who would have thought? This little body is made like a Sheltand Pony yet it just goes on and on. Not one injury and not one trip to the physio, chiro, quack, oesteo! I'm on cloud nine and still beetling along in the low 30s. What the hell has everyone been complaining about? Ironman is great.

With all this emotional dribble now out of my system, I've done the 45k turn around and can hardly remember it. I'm heading back into town and again looking forward to seeing family, coach and mates.

Second lap is on the way and my stomach is a bit upset. Just push on and

drink some more water. Stomach starts to cramp and it's making weird potentially embarrassing noises. What the? Just ignore it and keep peddling. The wind is picking up and the rain is getting heavier. Think positive thoughts! Oh cripes, I need to use a bathroom and I'm certainly not that hard core that I'm going to go in my pants. I like this tri suit and I don't want to have to throw it out in recovery at the end! Stop at the loo and again have the brother of nice transition bloke who holds my bike and gives me encouraging words. These people are unbelievable. They are lovely and it's still pouring.

In the space of a millisecond, the wind and rain have doubled in strength and I'm heading straight into it. Now my resolve to be positive is being really tested. Stomach and bowels are still unhappy, wind is driving straight into my face and so is the tropical strength rain. Still 25 km to the turn around. Right cowgirl. Bunker down and just get on with it. Don't look down at Garmin at all. Look 5 m ahead and just bloody do it. This was never going to be easy and it's ironman. The hardship is what makes you happier at the end when it's over. Look at Garmin and I've gone 1.2 kms. Crap. This is going to be tough.

Finally get to the turnaround and head back into town. Family, coach and friends waiting. Some bloke from America comes along side me and says 'gotta love the wind right up your arse hole'. Charming those Americans. And yes, there's plenty of wind up this arse and I need to use the loo again. Push on up the long slow incline, hills and 'undulation' and I'm heading into town with about a 6h30m ride. Sooo pleased to be finished and I'm very happy with how I've coped. Average speed pretty good for a short stumpy pony. Roll into transition, uncle of nice bloke from transition takes my bike with a smile and good words. I tell him he can keep my bike. It's yours! That makes me happy. Am I good, or what?

The run:

OK. The big test of the day for me. Running and I have a love hate relationship from way back. Actually not that way back. Only started running about 3 years ago and it has always been my biggest test. Grew

up in the country and can ride a motor bike, do dirt work in a ute and drive a six wheeler tractor. But running? Not a lot of that in my childhood. I start off really steady like Mark tells me. He said to walk through all the support stations and get plenty of nutrition on board. I reach the first one quickly and think of it as a reward. Briskly walk through thinking I look like an idiot walking this fast and drinking at the same time. Never mind. I'll probably poo my pants soon so my walking style is the least of my problems. My stomach is in so much of a knot by now I'm going to have to stop at the next one to 'off load'. Another 10 mins and I'm in all sorts and my mind is starting to see the pattern ahead. If I can't sort this out I'll be reduced to a hands and knees crawl between some of NZ's now over used crappers. Mark told us to be tuned into our instincts when things go wrong. What's the first thing your body is telling you? Before you second guess it, listen. I stop drinking electrolytes for the rest of the day. I'm now walking more like an old dog than Kel Knight through the support stations and hope Mark doesn't creep up behind me. Attack the loo with vengeance whilst listening to some bloke in the crapper next to me throwing up. This is a low point. Get out of this loo Sarah and get the fuck on with it. Make like a ninja and move it!! So, I do.

Before this point I had seen family, coach and friends and raised my arms, smiled and tried for a high five or two if I could. Now, on the way back into town on the first lap I was positively fanging to see someone I knew. I needed to see people I loved. This running caper is a bloody lonely and unsexy thing. I saw Mark and Suz first and they gave me a big cheer. I go around the turn around and theres Ric standing on something big. For those who don't know Ric, he's enormously tall at 6 foot 4 and now looks like my very own Statue of Liberty. Can't stop laughing for a short while. Back around the corner and quickly see Mark and Suz again. They were looking the other way and I needed them to cheer. Loudly. For me. Now. Oh God, they aren't turning around. I yell out "coowee" to them and they both erupt into cheer like I'd put a fire cracker under them. The remedy I was after and I soldier on feeling good.

Second lap and now is the big test. I'd been checking my pace all day and

it was sitting on 6m22s all day. I'd look down again and it was always on the same pace. I was astonished by this and it gave me some entertainment in watching it. Even trying to go faster or slower just to check it was working. I spend most of the second lap mesmerised by this, even when I thought I was getting slower and slower. I'm now about 8 km from the end. I've been reduced to standing in front of the support station table with hands on hips deciding what I'd like to eat or drink like I was at a buffet at the Marriot. Please Mark just stay away. You don't need to see this at all.

Eight kms to go and I'm suddenly hating this. So, 8km in the scheme of the day is nothing. Easy. I know exactly what 8 km is from my long runs and it's nothing. But it seemed like 30! I was hurting and my body was needing something it wasn't getting. Do I need more fluid? Do I need some food? Have I had enough and now it's bogging me down? The kids all made me very special home made cards and I start picturing them in my mind. They are innocent and lovely and full of hope. The twins are proud of me just being brave enough to go to a new country. I have done that and pleased them. Bill was very nervous for me. He was worried I couldn't cope and to this point I have. Dougal's card was very profound with the words 'I will be thinking of you ALL day. Never never never never never give up. I know you can do this! It's at this point I hope to God I can live up to his wise words.

Some bloke comes up beside me and starts talking to the side of my face. I didn't ask for this and I don't want to have anything to do with him. Leave me alone you creep. He starts telling me about his sore knee. I don't give a shit mate. Rack off. He starts telling me how bad a runner he is. He could have done this in under 12 hours if he wasn't so slow. He is still talking to the side of my face. I haven't even looked at him or muttered a word. He is really annoying me. He is not related to the nice bloke in transition. He must be American!! Just ignore him Sarah and use him as a distraction. Please don't talk to me. Please shut your mouth. Please stop telling me how good you are. Please stop telling me you are a shitty runner when I'm running at the same pace. You arrogant piece of

dog shit. Go away. Why won't he go away? I'll slow down and he'll get the message. I do and so does he. This bloke has really got under my skin now and I'm wanting to turn to him and just slog him one. I grew up in the country and went to school with Abo kids. I can fight dirty and if you keep dribbling on I'm going to have to blind side tackle you straight into the lake and smack you in the chops for good measure. The only way to get away from him is to run faster. Crap!

And so I do. I run past him and say a very sly 'see ya later pal' over my shoulder. Two km to the end and all I want to do is hold off the dick head behind me. I start to prepare myself for the end. This is what its all about. Mike Riley. The chute. The finish. Family and friends. I want it all right away. I'm hearing the crowd not far ahead and now all the pain in my legs and stomach and shoulders has gone. I'm determined to look good running down the finish line. I don't but I think I do so that's all that matters.

I come around the first corner and there are people everywhere. They call my name (it's written on my race number), they look me in the eye and tell me I've done a super job, they really mean it too. Kids and adults give me high fives. They are so genuinely happy for me and it's written all over their faces. These people are so enthusiastic about their role I wonder if I should know them or recognise them. I come around the second corner and there it is! The chute. I can't bloody believe it. I have done it. Me? And the clock says 12 hours 40 mins. I was aiming for 14 hours. Maybe they have a different time zone I'm unaware of here in NZ and it will explain my finish time and my crazy pacing watch. I hear Mark and Suz before I see them and Mark nearly jumps the fence to congratulate me. They are going nuts! I hug Mark and shuffle off up to the chute. I want to run fast here but I know I'm still doing the Shelton Pony shuffle. Mike Riley yells 'Here comes Sarah Hulme. From Brisbane. She's a mother of four'. The crowd goes more nuts. Then he yells 'YOU ARE AN IRONMAN'.

This has to be one of the best moments of my life. The exhilaration of finishing, remembering all the sacrifices, all the early mornings, all the

hard hills sessions on the bike, all the long runs, all the aches and pains, all the worry about the family the whole way through. Better still I finally get to actually stop. What my body has really been asking for for the last 12 hours.

My brain and I have been in unison, at logger heads, in bliss and tearing at each other all day. I'm mentally exhausted more so than physically. My body has been marvellous and done me proud. The good side of my brain has won the battle victoriously and without a doubt this is what makes me the happiest of all. There is not greater satisfaction, no matter what the finishing time is, than to know you have done your best and left nothing on the track. I have given my negative thoughts a huge kick and they have certainly come off second best.

In the end:

I am now home and loving the sleep ins and all the pressure is off. I relish the time with the kids. Ironman starts to consume your life and now I can think about other things for a while. I've been eating terribly and drinking whenever I can. I had a custard tart and a huge glass of wine for dinner Friday night. I woke this morning feeling frightfully unwell and unhealthy for it. I've just been for a swim with some other mother mates and loved every second of it. I'm still stiff and sore but just happy to be back in the water.

Alicia was my rock on my bad days, and I was hers when she needed me too. She was always up for a laugh and kept it real. I could see a very determined streak in her every now and then and I could see her physically knuckle down and find all the right words in her mind. I'd draw strength from this as well and this is how we managed to finish ironman within 6 mins of each other. I never felt threatened in a competitive way, only supported. Thank you.

A very special thank you to Mark. He has never doubted what I can do, even from the very beginning when I was a complete beginner. As I was contemplating ironman, I put on my interrogation face and muscled up to him to ask the big question: can I do this? Thinking I'd get 'with lots of effort and dedication, consistency in training and working with the family,

you will be able to finish the race in just under cut off time'. Instead, I got a big grin and a giggle and 'of course you can. You are really pig headed!'. Mark was always direct with me which I liked and would email through the list and I'd try to go about it without fuss. He trusted I was getting on with the job without question and always gave me truthful answers when I needed them. When I came around the corner and saw his face of happiness, I knew I'd done all the things he wanted to say at the beginning of the day, and more! That is a great feeling. He told me he was so very proud of me and of all the people in the squad loved watching me finish. He tells me I'm a role model for other aspiring women who want to do ironman and that feels like quite a privilege I hope I can bear. So, thank you Mark!!!

After a few wines with Ric one night he opened up to what this meant to him. He told me I have proven to him that anything is possible. Not matter what the odds are he believes I can achieve anything in my life. He says I am a wonderful role model for the kids to have big dreams and they will never forget this. He also said I have shown him that our family can now do things he never thought possible. Our opportunities for change and our ability to do them are now quite possible by my strength, determination and courage. We can spread our wings and try anything we want to and he said I will be the vessel that takes us there.

With those words, it has made it all worthwhile beyond my wildest dreams. Thanks Ricco!