



Fighting Fit

BY KIRSTY EDWARDS-HARRIS

WTM SITS DOWN WITH MYRNA SALIBA, BAHRAIN'S NUMBER ONE FITNESS GURU, TO TALK ABOUT HOW SHE TURNED HER LIFE AROUND WHEN OTHERS MAY HAVE GIVEN UP HOPE.



Considered by many as the most professional sport and fitness doyen on the island, Myrna is not only extremely qualified as a trainer, she is also a professional athlete herself. Holding a myriad of qualifications under her belt, which include being a certified running coach and fitness trainer from the ACSM as well as holding a masters degree in Physical Education, Myrna has also run 19 marathons, one ultra marathon, six half marathons and completed one iron man competition.

"I talk the talk and walk the walk. I have the background, education and expertise and am involved with fitness at all levels."

Myrna runs a wellness consultancy in Bahrain and a speciality sports outlet called ASHE, awareness for sports health and environment, where she not only sells sportswear but educates those interested in fitness on wellness. Myrna also holds adventure boot camps in Bahrain designed to improve physical and emotional wellbeing, guaranteed to get you fighting fit in no time at all! Motivating others is what drives Myrna to do the work she does.

"When you have been blessed with something nice, you have to feed it back into society. I want to know that whatever I've learnt and gained I can pass on to others. It will make me a much better soul."

The will to achieve

Eating healthily and keeping fit have always been part of Myrna's lifestyle; but when she found out about her debilitating condition with osteoporosis she turned inwards,

discovered her passions and turned her life around.

"The thought of becoming a cripple when I was older devastated me; but instead of being paralysed with fear, I took immediate action. I started taking medication, modified my diet and began a special rigorous training and fitness program."

With a lot of inner analysis, determination and discipline Myrna was able to combat her condition.

"I went back to my inner roots. Just like if you want to operate a machine, you learn about it. I spent a lot of time learning about myself--who I am and my physical potential. I believe in the power of my mind, and the key

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is passion. If you don't have passion it's hard, no matter how determined you are. You need a voice in your head telling you that you love what you're doing.

"Discover who you are, heal yourself, believe in the power of your mind, then add passion and anything and everything becomes possible."

This is when Myrna took her interests to the next stage. She developed a passion for running and started training, at a very high level, to do all the things that she didn't previously think possible.

"I'm proud that I've managed to turn my life around. The discovery of my condition was the first step on the road to becoming who I am today; and I really like myself more now than who I was in the past."



Back to nature

Myrna's philosophy on fitness and wellbeing is to become as close as possible to nature. She believes that people should think about how to do things without the need for technology.

"When I can, I run, and then I bike; and if I can't do either of these things, then only do I drive. When I'm in Canada, I drive a hybrid car.

"I also believe in eating food in its most natural state, as it has the optimum nutritional value without being loaded with chemicals and additives which are not good for the body.

"Why do people practise yoga and meditation? It is because they're trying to get back to nature and a more peaceful life. If you look at the monks in Tibet, they live a happy and simple life."

Although at her core Myrna had always been interested in medicine and caring for others from a very young age, only art degrees were available to her at the time, so instead she dreamed of becoming an interpreter for the UN.

"I studied journalism and had a talent for languages but then I met my husband and I gave it all up. We got married at a young age and moved away from Lebanon as he was working abroad.

"My full attention then went into raising a family. At every opportunity I got thereafter, I studied to enhance my knowledge to give me a broader range of topics of interest to talk about."

The measure of success

Myrna believes that her greatest personal achievement was marrying her husband who is her soul mate and raising all her successful children. While they were growing up, she was able to give her children everything that she had without compromising on their happiness.

While accompanying her children being schooled in Canada, Myrna graduated with a first class joint honours degree in economics and finance on a very tough course that only a handful of people were able to pass. Then, while in Bulgaria with her daughter, who was on the Canadian national gymnastics team, training under the supervision of Neshka Robeva, the world champion rhythmic gymnastics coach at the time, Myrna studied for her master's degree in Physical Education.

What inspires Myrna to go that extra mile is the fact that she feels she has a lot of untapped potential. Her earlier life was committed to raising her family; and now she's committed to trying to achieve everything she possibly can.

"Before it was always about my family; it was never about me, but I don't want my children to feel that I sacrificed my life for them. I could have done both but I didn't want to compromise either. I am very happy that they're successful, and now it's my turn to make a success out of my life.

"My husband and children are very supportive of my ambitions. They know I supported them and now, in turn, they want to support me. Even though they had their own family and work commitments, my daughters flew to Australia to lend their support for the Ironman competition I entered. They even insisted on getting up with me in the early hours of the morning, even though it was cold and dark.



"Many people have to go on a sabbatical to train for an Ironman competition. If you don't have the support at home, you won't be able to do it. I'm blessed in this way. We are like a support network and all try to help each other."

Crossing the finish line at the Ironman Triathlon in Western Australia was Myrna's greatest ever professional achievement, with only one per cent of the world's population ever finishing an Ironman competition; it's no wonder that she's proud of her success.

"As I crossed the finish line, I was shouting 'I did it! I did it!' We had to complete a 3.8-kilometre swim, 180-kilometre bike ride and a 42.2-km run."

It was Myrna's sheer determination that got her across the finish line. With several injuries leading up to the event, including cracked ribs and numb fingers, she had many telling her that it wasn't possible but with the power of her mind and passion in her heart she made it.

Another example of using the power of her mind to succeed when all odds were stacked against her was when she was in training for the London marathon. Just ten weeks before she broke a bone in her foot and it had to go into a removable surgical boot.

"The doctor told me that there was no way I could run, but I went to the race anyway, took off my surgical boot, ran the race and when I was finished, put it back on again. I just kept telling myself I could do it."

Driving force

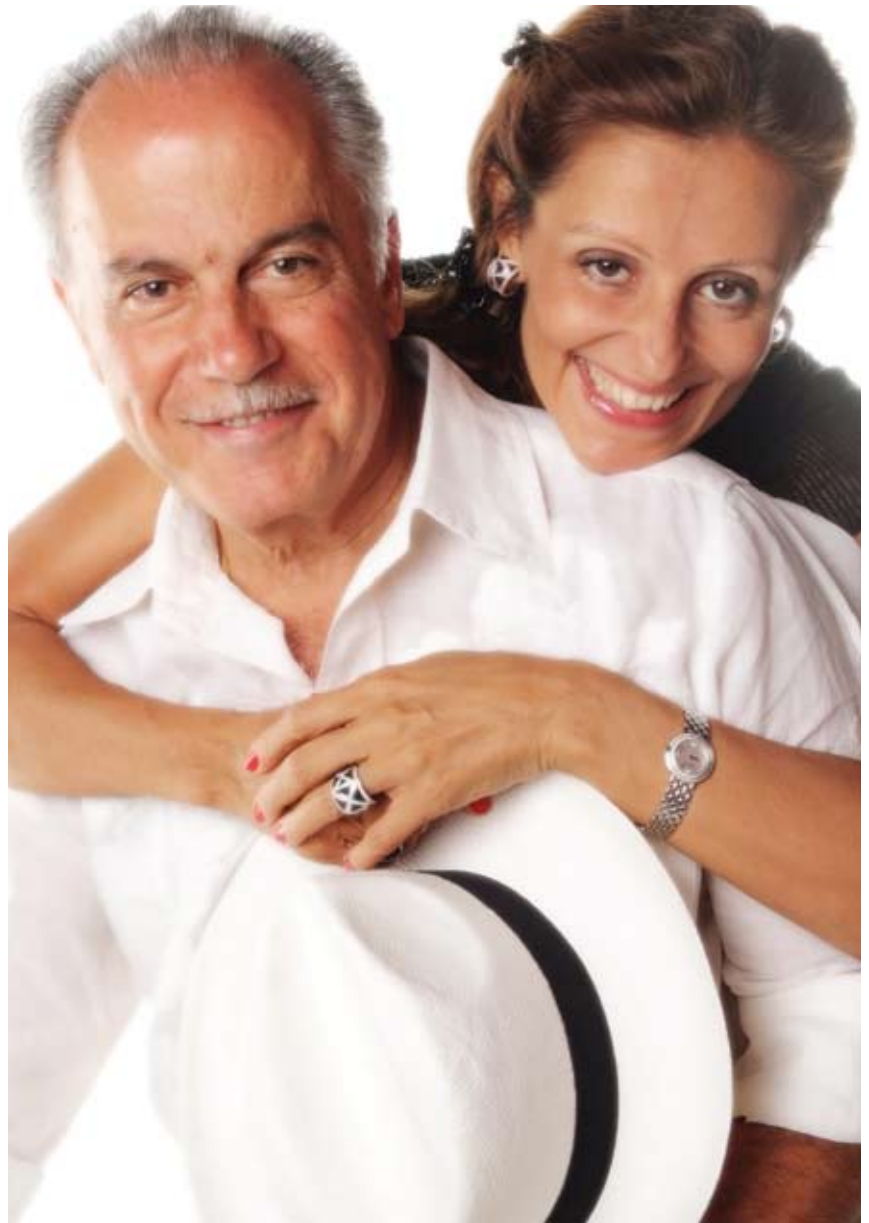
Motivated by other athletes, Myrna finds solace in the fact that they're other people like her with similar ambition and dreams who also have family and work responsibilities.

"Finding out that there are other people like me makes me feel good. I look at them as my role models and they keep me on track. The challenged athletes that also do what I do inspire me, and hearing their stories makes me feel very humbled."

Currently in training for a full Ironman competition in America in the summer, Myrna is as dedicated and driven as ever. "You have to give your full commitment to achieving your untapped potential. Even if I've been out to dinner with my husband until late at night, if I haven't finished my training, I'll complete it when I get home and go running around the neighbourhood in the early hours of the morning."

After many years of waiting, Myrna is also finally in the process of achieving her dream of becoming a doctor of natural therapy.

"I believe in the body's innate power of healing, in preventative medicine and in diet and exercise. It's good for the body to fight on its own as it creates immunity.



Rather than bombarding yourself with antibiotics, it's better to try other alternatives first."

Advice that Myrna would like to offer those who feel like they are stuck in a rut is to try and find something, whether it be a person, a passion or a goal, that will give them the motivation to look beyond their current situation.

"Find a reason, a motivation to better yourself. If you are struggling, often it is the first little step that is the hardest to take. Find something to make that first step, once you achieve that, then the rest becomes yours."

And, her parting words, "Be healthy, be happy, live as close as you can to nature; and above all else, believe in yourself."

Every Wednesday Myrna has a free group walk/run starting from the Ashe Wellness Centre in the Financial Harbour Mall at 5.30pm. Anyone who wants company or support can go along for a group walk or run. This is your chance to take that first step.