

JULIE GIBBONS

What could be worse than being 14 years old with zits, raging hormones, exclusion from the "in crowd", and general awkwardness? How about all those problems and 8th grade math, too?? VERY scary...VERY intimidating. But how about balancing out all that bad stuff with a caring, energetic, and enthusiastic teacher? And, how 'bout if that same teacher shares her passion for triathlon in a way that will help build trust and self-esteem in those new teenagers. It kind of seem like a win-win...the kids feel better about themselves, they have a teacher who cares about them, and they start on the path of good health and fitness!! Our FEATURED FOX is just that kind of teacher and just that kind of TRI FOX.

So, how did Julie come to be a member of the club? It actually is a tale of lost love and swimming...

Swimming: Julie grew up in Marathon, WI and when that city built a public pool she thinks it changed her life...she started swimming there at age 6, moved onto more competitive swimming starting when she was 7 and eventually spent 4 years on the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh Swimming and Diving Team. Throughout high school and college Julie taught swim lessons, coached swim teams, and life guarded. Julie says, "I was ALWAYS in the pool!"

Lost love: About a year and a half ago Julie was faced with one of those life-changing decisions. She was supposed to get married, but decided to call it off because she was not 100% certain it was right. She began to question herself ...that lead to self-doubt..but time helped and she realized that anything less than 100% certainty was not enough. "I learned a lot about myself through this experience and would not change a single challenge I have faced since then. These are the things that have made me the person I am today."

With heartbreak and uncertainty what was she to do? Julie turned back to the only thing in life that ever made sense to her...swimming. She joined the Y and began to do laps..."it was time for me to reflect on my life and a time to raise the bar and set some goals for myself. It was life changing and very therapeutic all at the same time." She even met people at the pool who told her about the TRI FOXES. She was hesitant at first because Julie liked lap lines and the confines of a concrete pool...she hates seaweed and the thought of seeing fish terrified her!! But that whole "goal setting" mantra kicked in and with a little prodding from another math instructor and our own TOP FOX, Kelly Jansen, she decided her first goal would be competing in a triathlon and getting over her fear of lakes. And..."after my first trip to 'World HEADQUARTERS' to pick up my gear, I knew I was hooked!"



Her parents bought her a birthday bike in May of 2008 (less than a year ago) and she started getting ready for her first tri--the Mighty Wolf Sprint in Winneconne. "I remember it like it was yesterday. I was standing there, getting ready for my wave when a Tri Fox walked up to me and told me that he 'accidentally' kicked my water bucket over. I was so nervous about starting the race, let alone dealing with the bucket. I think it was his strategy to get me thinking about something else and to help me get my adrenaline going. Thanks fellow TRI FOX! I ended up loving the whole experience and signed up for five more events last summer."

Julie was so enthusiastic that she did what all of us have done...overtraining....her hamstring is paying the price!

So now we have a seasoned veteran with enough wisdom that she was one of our presenters at Tri 101. But Julie's enthusiasm doesn't just end with racing...it goes right back to the core of who she is...an EDUCATOR. In January of this year, Julie and another club member, Kyle Christianson, started their own tri club for 7th and 8th graders at JR Gerritts Middle School in Kimberly. They have teamed up with

The Fox Cities Triathlon Club and call their group ROCKS FOXES. R-O-C-K-S Recognizing Our Committed Kids....a group of 55 teens who have committed to being drug and alcohol free and who train 4 days a week.

Julie coaches them on core exercises, running, cycling, and of course swimming. The group is going to volunteer at local triathlons to give them a sense of what this sport offers in terms of life-lessons. The ROCKS FOXES have incorporated our logo into theirs and they are going to compete in the Fremont Triathlon. "At school I am constantly talking about triathlon and trying to set a good example for my students about how important staying active is. We try to bring in guest speakers a couple of times a month so if any TRI FOX is ever interested in coming in and sharing their knowledge, we'd love to have you!"

And wouldn't we all have loved to have an 8th grade teacher like Julie Gibbons? Think about how her energy and strengths would have made those awkward pre-high school years that much easier....think about the life lessons those kids are learning...think about the overflow of self esteem in that classroom!!!