

Shipman in Training for Ironman Competition

Beats Cervical Cancer and Focuses on Training

By Louise Rachlis

Krista Shipman, 32, is a paramedic with the City of Ottawa and busy planning her September 2010 wedding to Chris Gifford.

She's also a survivor of cervical cancer, and an Ironman finisher.

Five years ago this summer, Krista had a routine exam at her family doctor's office. He saw a spot that "looked a little funny." He sent her to a gynecologist who saw a polyp and took a biopsy.

"The gynecologist said 'not a big deal. It doesn't look like cancer,'" says Krista. "I felt normal; I felt fine."

She was floored when two weeks later the doctor called and said, "it's not what we expected." "I started to cry. I was standing there in my pajamas and didn't know what to do. The rest of my family was at the cottage; it was just before Canada Day."

She called her family and they started to cry as well. "My parents are in their fifties and when they hear cancer they think doom and gloom. I felt okay, so I thought it couldn't be so bad."

In August she went to the oncologist who did a cone biopsy, and then a week later she had a follow-up appointment. "It's not good," he said, recommending a radical hysterectomy and removal of the lymph nodes. She had that surgery in October, and it was good news that the cancer hadn't spread to the lymph nodes.

"The chance of re-occurrence was 10 to 15 per cent chance of re-occurrence, and if it did, there was a 50 per cent chance it would be terminal," she says. "Chemo and radiation were recommended to lower the chance of re-occurrence to 2 to 5 per cent. They said the next step was up to me. I remember looking at the doctors and saying 'what would you do if I were your daughter?' It was a shock that I was 27 years old and would never be able to have kids. Luckily my sisters have a bunch of kids!"

She had six weeks of radiation Monday to Friday, and chemo once a week. "It was tough because it was right over Christmas. I didn't feel great; a combination of car sick and hunger."

One side effect of the radiation was that it could and did affect her ovaries. "Not long after, I started having really bad hot flashes and was moody and irritable. I had hormone therapy and was referred to the menopause clinic at the Riverside which was very helpful."

He friends were very supportive. "My girlfriends were awesome. We went on a trip to Cuba the week after radiation finished."



Krista Shipman, 32, survived cervical cancer, and then focused on Ironman training.

She had just moved into her first house that April, and she was off work from October to May. She had to recover from the surgery and radiation before she could go back to such a physical job as a paramedic.

Once she was back at work, she decided to get more fit. "When I first met Geordie McConnell of the Ottawa Triathlon Club in the spring of 2005, I was out of shape, and had gained 20 pounds while recovering from surgery, chemo and radiation," she says.

"I am sure Geordie thought that I was crazy when I said my goal was to do an Ironman in three years, but with his guidance and the support of the club I was very proud to say that not only am I a cancer survivor but I am an Ironman."

Sure enough three years later, she had successfully completed the Ironman race at Lake Placid: a 4 kilometre swim, 180 kilometre bike and 42 kilometre run.

She has high praise for coach Jane Armstrong, who helped coach her through the Ironman training. "Jane was great at giving me a training program that worked around my sessions with the OTC and my crazy shift work schedule. She was always there with great advice and support."

At the start of the race in Lake



Placid, "my Mom was crying, my sister was crying, my friends Tina and Julie were crying. It is tough to get into your wetsuit when you are crying!" she recalls.

"Once I entered into the finishing oval I felt like I was flying. I remember hearing the announcer and I kept looking back to make sure no one was going to steal my finish. Then I heard it, the words I had been waiting three years to hear, 'Krista Shipman you are an Ironman!'"

It was such a great experience, that she has signed up to do it again in July 2010.

"I'd been doing triathlons for years," she says. "I'd always wanted to do an Ironman. It's life changing. My whole goal was to finish happy and smiling. I don't know that I would have tried it without having cancer, but I learned don't take things for granted. It gave me a reality check. You don't know what's going to happen in life, and so go after your dream."

