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The Upside, Downside and Flipside of Passion

By Linda U. Foley



Heather Wilson Photo provided

Campolindo graduate Heather Wilson is the picture of health and femininity, her flowing blonde tresses caressing her shoulders. It's hard to believe that this woman once had a day job in banking while maintaining the weekend persona of "Crashing Girl," the moniker of a nationally recognized motocross icon.

Wilson began racing motorcycles, a field dominated by men, in her mid-twenties and was a ranking pro by the age of 30.

In the sporting arena, motocross is a demanding and rigorous competition. Arduous training, strength, mechanical know-how, and racing-smarts aside, there is the inherent, unavoidable burning and crashing. Having undergone dozens of surgeries for seriously debilitating injuries, often followed by months of rehab, Wilson never lost sight of her determination to end up on The Podium, to get back in the saddle.

Not satisfied with her top ranking amidst a field of male athletes, Wilson wrote marketing proposals to her sponsors to better promote their products, and herself as an athlete. Her marketing endeavors, along with her race performance record, gained her the attention and trust of some 23 sponsors.

Wilson also developed a dedicated fan base by focusing on the younger crowd, initially offering posters, "Heather bears," and stickers. Next came Heather Make-overs, which made kids' bikes look akin to her motorcycle. Make-up (no smudge mascara) and hair products followed.

She laughs, "Haven't come up with a non-smear lipstick yet."

Wilson's notoriety coupled with her desire to inspire youngsters to reach their potential, brought her into another arena -- motivational speaking.

Her speaking engagements, including Sister-to-Sister, a program helping junior high girls transition into high school, focused on self-esteem, pursuing personal passions, the evils of gossip, importance of long-lasting friendships, and 'making it' in a man's forum without compromising your femininity.

"I would ride onto the stage... decked out in all my gear... take off my helmet and shake out my hair. Not surprisingly, the girls always wanted to know first how my hair looked so good being scrunched under the helmet. Later on, they all wanted to know how I 'made it.'"

A tempestuous journey to achieving her goal of being one of the Big Three on the Podium has come at an ultimate price. Her latest injuries have ended her racing career, permanently. Nonetheless, Wilson's energy and confidence are contagious. Undaunted, she deems all her experiences as a learning process to other areas of success and self-fulfillment. Her current focus is to complete her degree at Saint Mary's in - no surprise - marketing, which eventually may include designing riding gear intended to enhance the female athlete.

There's no doubt, Wilson will succeed in whatever she undertakes and leave an indelible and feminine mark. The old song, "I am Woman, Hear me Roar," may have been written for someone exactly like Crashing Girl.

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