

Beyond your limits

Dani Genovesi

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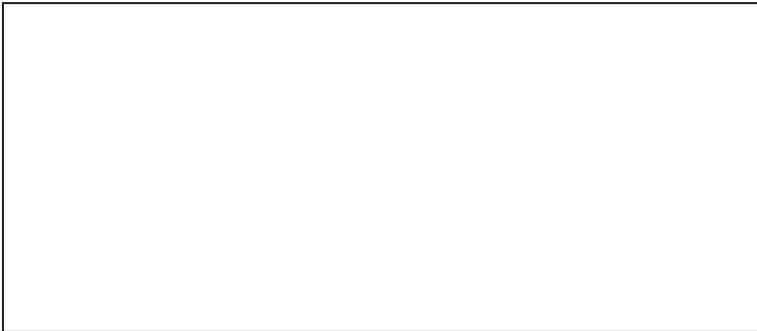
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A huge thanks to my students who became my great friends and supporters. You are my fuel.

A special thanks to my husband, Alexandre. Together we have built a beautiful family. My children Victor, Julia and Antonio that while educating them I have learned, and I still learn every day from them.

Finally, thank you for buying my book and for reading my story. I hope you have a good journey.

Dedication

I dedicate this book to all who strive to surpass their own personal limits, whether they are aware of doing so or not.

I dedicate this book to you.

I never felt “out of the curve”. I never felt I could surpass and overcome my personal limits or go beyond them. All that I have achieved came from many hours of dedication, countless hours of training and a lot of sweat, pain and love for what I do.

I believe we are all “out of the curve”. We are all extraordinary living beings who constantly redefine our own limits. Just listen to yourself, discover yourself, and fight for your dreams, fight hard, more than anyone else. I fought very hard to get to where I am, I made difficult choices, gave up more than I should have at times for a dream. This is something people hardly see or are aware of (only those who are very close to me really know how real the struggle was and still is). It is very easy to say, “Dani is amazing, brilliant, an outlier”, “Dani is from another planet”, “Dani has done it again, has gone beyond all limits”, “Dani is awesome, radical” ... and so on.

I may be all that today at the age of 50, but since I was 14 years old, which was when I discovered my passion for competitive sports, I have always tried to pursue perfection and give my best. Achieving and ultimately overcoming my own limits was a wonderful process of construction but also a tremendous hurdle.

Nothing comes overnight, everything is the result of wanting to achieve something more.

That is why I believe that all of us, regardless of age, regardless of how, should believe in ourselves. Fight for your dreams, give all that you can give, and one day, you will find yourself **BEYOND YOUR LIMITS**.





Introduction

By Marcelo Barreto

When I first heard Dani Genovesi's story, I thought I had misunderstood something. She could not have cycled from coast to coast in the United States in a continuous stream, stopping only to eat, sleep, and to use facilities for when bathroom stops were necessary — when there was one. The competition Dani participated in and won, the Race Across America (RAAM), must have had something in the regulations that escaped me in our initial conversation. Because the way I was told, it didn't seem like something a human being could do.

However, what happened was just the opposite: the more I heard about the story of Dani Genovesi and the Race Across America, the more extraordinary it seemed to me. Beginning with the pre-race training, which already required creativity and resilience, each step of the way had so many physical prowess that just hearing about it would make you feel exhausted. And the same question came to mind: how did she do it?

In the answer, perhaps, lies one of the greatest secrets of this book. Dani Genovesi crossed the United States with the strength of her muscles, the capacity of her lungs and the resilience of her mind ... But she didn't do it all on her own. The story of the Race Across America's conquest is also one of a team that has always been by her side in support cars and hydration points, taking care of her health, basic needs, motivation and the bicycle - which is not a person, but also needs attention.

All these people were somehow inspired by Dani. Relatives, friends, and students who embarked with her on this adventure because they believed the message that, as a relative, friend, and coach, this extraordinary athlete has always passed: “you can do it.” They are the ones who help me tell this fantastic story you will read in the next pages. Across the United States, Dani has built a path of inspiration - for her life and anyone who wants to be inspired by it.

Have an excellent journey!

Foreword

By Bernardo Rezende

The sports world is full of exciting stories of breakthroughs, accomplishments achieved by athletes' determination, of resilience in the face of extreme difficulties, levels of absolute dedication to extensive and painful training processes.

Inspirational stories about champions that the media turns into idols as they make their great deeds known.

Dani Genovesi is one of those champions, an example of determination and resilience, who has not yet become an idol of national sport simply because the general public have no knowledge of her incredible achievements. However, in the world of cycling (a growing sport but not yet as popular in Brazil) and in endurance sports, she is one of the top, if not **the top** Brazilian reference.

Fora da Curva, as originally titled, details her most important victory: The Race Across America (RAAM). Competing in the solo category, Dani travels 4,800 km in 11 days, an average of over 400 km daily, across the US from west coast to east coast, overcoming all topographic and climatic obstacles, such as Rocky Mountains and extreme temperatures, in a permanent fight against her own limits (I wonder if she even has any).

The book describes her personal and sports trajectory, and RAAM's walkthrough, and brings us elements that go far beyond her great individual skills. Like the importance of planning, teamwork - so crucial for getting so far, and the

extreme preparation that allowed her to reach the end of the race and win.

Celebrating 10 years of this great achievement, I hope this book can make this feat and this super athlete known to other athletes and non-athletes, looking for inspiration and examples to overcome their own challenges.

It is an honor to be able to write about this athlete, mother, coach, wife and champion that I admire so much! And may the next RAAM come!

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1

BRASIL MOSTRA TUA CARA

June 24th – 26th, 2009.

From Sullivan (IN) to Chillicothe (OH)

WHERE WILL YOU LIVE OUT THE MOST DECISIVE MOMENT OF YOUR LIFE? Or, keeping things closer, of your career, of your relationship, or even a competition... You might have already given thought as to **when**. What about **where**? It might be in a crowded stadium or in a meeting room; on a busy street or in your own room. Or even, it might be in the middle of nowhere.

The I-70, which links Effingham, known for its 40-meter-high cross in the heart of Illinois, and Sullivan, the state's outdoor recreation capital of the neighboring state (Indiana), is the postcard of boredom. On one side, cornfields. On the other, more cornfields. The landscape, which stretches over many straight lines and a few slopes, only changes - for worse



- in winter, when snow covers the undergrowth of already-dried cornfields. It is most definitely not the place you would choose to live out a turning point in your life.

At about 8 pm on June 24th, 2009, Daniela Figueiredo Genovesi, a 41-year-old Brazilian mother of three, was riding a Specialized Tarmac race bike between Effingham and Sullivan, unaware that she was about to live one of those moments in her life, that moment being taking the lead in the Race Across America, the most important competition of her career as an athlete. The support car accompanying her on the roadside of the I-70 suddenly changed the musical program coming out of the speakers - to help her fight the boredom of the road and gain mental strength for cycling. The options which ranged from the latest radio news to flashback hits became more specific, focusing on lively versions of musical hits.

Dani, as her friends call her, sensed that the moment had arrived when the car's radio began to pump "Brazil" Cazusa's rock protest anthem that was a hit in the 1980s calling out, quite literally, "Brazil, show your face!" or, in other words, Brazil is coming and there is no stopping us now. Dani was ready to illustrate, to represent that moment. As the music changed, her pedaling strength increased, and just ahead she spotted another support car moving along the side of the road, following another biker - the last obstacle between her and the lead.

Dani made a signal and "showed her face", overtaking both her last obstacle and the lead, disappearing into the road ahead.



THE RACE ACROSS AMERICA IS THE WORLD'S most exhausting bike race. Precisely on the stretch between Effingham and Sullivan, where the checkpoints 36 and 37 were, the route reached the full distance of the Tour de France, the most traditional cycling race on the planet - and there was still more than 1,200 kilometers to go. It was Day 8 of the race, which has no set stages with stopwatch and rest time, as in the French version. Each cyclist decides where and when (or if) he or she wants to stop for food and sleep, and what counts is the total crossing time. In the 2009 edition, which began in Oceanside, California, and ended in Annapolis, Maryland (near New York), the overall winner, the Swiss Dany Wiss, took 8 days, 5 hours and 45 minutes to cover 3,006 miles, the equivalent of 4,837.69 kilometers.

The RAAM – acronym for Race Across America - crosses the United States from coast to coast, always from west to east. The adventure was inspired by journalist George Nellis, who took a similar route in 1887, following the train lines. Riding one of those bikes with the front wheel much larger than the one in the rear, which weighed 20 pounds and had no brakes, it took him 80 days to complete the trip. In the 1970s, John Marino, a baseball player whose career was cut short by an injury, decided to find a way into Guinness World Record book, choosing to cross Nellis' route in the shortest time as possible, a feat which he first achieved in 1978.

Four years later, he turned his adventure into a competition, joining three other cyclists in what he named the Great American Bike Race. He placed last and never won the race that he helped create. Since that edition of the race, won by



Lon Haldeman, the RAAM has changed its name, opened new categories (women, doubles, quartets) and established itself not only on the world cycling scene, but also among the main endurance events of the world - competitions that push human performance to its limit, such as ultramarathons and long aquatic crossings. Despite the heavy physical effort and bike rides crossing some of the busiest highways in the country, there were only two casualties in the history of the event, both caused by car crashes.

As the route to follow course for the RAAM changes constantly, it is not possible to refer to any record breaking. The shortest time recorded to date was that of American Rob Kish in 1992: 8 days, 3 hours and 11 minutes on a 2.911-mile (4.684,8 kilometer) course. Another American, Pete Penseyres, achieved the best average speed - 24.8km/h in 1986, completing 3.107 miles (5.000,23 kilometers) in 8 days, 9 hours and 47 minutes. The comparison isn't fair, considering that the geographical conditions are different. What these athletes achieve is like cycling from Porto Alegre to Manaus in just over a week.

Daniela Genovesi had a secure place in this history already at the start of 2009. She was the first South American woman to have gone through the demanding classification process for the RAAM. In addition to her, only three other women started out in the race, trying to join a select group of 20 who had successfully completed the women's solo competition in the 27 disputed editions so far. South African Michele Santilla ended up withdrawing from the race. Englishwoman Ann Wooldridge suffered an accident, failed to complete the



second cutoff time (which should be eliminatory), but the willpower she showed to return to the race led the organizers to allow her to continue, even though her time wouldn't count for competing purposes. American Janet Christiansen was the biker right in front of Dani, just as we interrupted our story for these explanations.

“HI, JANET!” WAS ALL DANI HAD TIME TO SAY as she passed the American and disappeared on the I-70. In that decisive moment, the Brazilian participation in the RAAM changed completely. She traveled to the United States thinking only of becoming the first South American to complete the race (which she would have to do in less than 12 days and 21 hours for the result to be considered official). Now she could think of winning.

Pedaling slowly, her muscles locked after eight days of effort, the opponent could barely respond to the greeting. Dani still has fun remembering the moment: “Janet said “Hi”, but it felt more like a breath, a sigh. It was like someone extremely tired muttering an “ouch”. I noticed that she was exerting extreme force with each stroke, and I was thinking about how I good I felt, with no pain in my body, controlling my pace.”.

It made sense. Janet used a common strategy at the RAAM, one of starting the race at a fast pace, to open the biggest possible advantage over the other competitors and try to manage it in the final stages. Dani, however, left Brazil with a plan drawn up with the team that helped her in the preparation



and accompanied her on the crossing: she would always cycle about 400 kilometers per day, which would be equal to an average of 20 hours on the bike. When she got close to that, the support team would look for a hotel for her to sleep the remaining four hours.

“Cycling 400 kilometers is like going from Rio de Janeiro to São Paulo,” as Dani likes to compare. “If you take this trip every day by plane, you will get tired. If you do it by car, even more so. Now, imagine on a bike... It’s not just physical fatigue, it’s psychological as well.”

The goal was to follow this strategy every day, without exception and without taking into consideration the location of the opponents and the natural conditions (desert, mountains, plains, ascents or descents, wind for or against, heat or cold, sun or rain). Dani took the proposal so seriously that she prohibited the team from informing her of Janet’s whereabouts. She knew she had been overtaken shortly after the race began - not while cycling, but during one of her rest periods. And she trusted the strategy.

The team respected the request - in front of Dani at least. Out of earshot, everyone was talking so much about Janet that they had already started calling her “Janete”, which would be the equivalent of Janet in Portuguese. They controlled the opponent’s location, received news, calculated how long the inevitable overtaking would take. June 24th, the eighth day of the 2009 edition of the RAAM, began with the distance between Dani and the American reduced to less than two hours.

At a bike adjustment stop, a race inspector reported that Janet had been there shortly before. Dani paid no attention



to this information. Instead of rushing back to the road, she summoned everyone into dungarees, baggy overalls that are typical Midwestern farmers' attire, for a photo shoot and lots of laughter. At nightfall, another change of clothes, this time mandatory: one had to wear the uniform with lighting beacons required by regulation to cycle on dim roads. It was during this time that the accompanying film crew gave the long-awaited warning: Janet was only ten minutes ahead.

“Throughout the day, I had already seen the team, especially Crico and Roberta, whispering a lot, in a very lively way,” recalls Dani. “But at that time, I knew that more important than knowing where Janet was, was to keep myself in a good mood. So, I insisted that we took those pictures with the dungarees. It’s one of the best memories we have of the race.”.

THE ENTREPRENEUR, CHRISTIANO FONSECA FILHO AND HIS WIFE, the business manager Roberta, met Dani in 2003. Christiano, whom his friends call Crico, takes part in adventure racing - a New Zealand-created endurance race in the 1980s, mixing sports such as trekking, mountain biking and canoeing or kayaking with navigation over rough terrain. He needed to invite a woman to complete his team. Roberta had taken spinning lessons with Dani and made the connection between the two athletes.

Since then, the three have been together in every kind of adventure. From the beginning, the couple followed Dani's preparation process for the RAAM. Roberta is João Felipe, the



teams' doctor, sister. It was Roberta, realizing the difficulties in finding the right people for each post, that began to mature the idea of participating in the crossing. When she made the proposal to Crico, he agreed to it on the spot. Both had only one limitation: time. They could not postpone personal and professional appointments during the ten days of the race and boarded after the start - unaware that this would be precisely the great advantage they would have.

On June 22nd, the Day 6 of the RAAM, Crico and Roberta arrived in Wichita, Kansas. They reached Dani in the 2.500-kilometer mark, and in an e-mail, they pointed out to friends in Brazil that Dani was doing just fine and not otherwise, as they imagined. But it was only by getting closer that they realized that fatigue had indeed begun to wreak havoc - and not just on the bicycle.

The team took turns in two cars. The motor home, those with the beds and kitchens that families use to travel the countryside in, went ahead, looking for stopping points for rest and meals. The other, the follow car, stayed with Dani along the roadside. Whoever boarded it had to be on hand to provide support for the bicycle and the cyclist: repairs, first aid kits, hydration... and, most importantly, navigation, that is, the orientation of the path to be taken.

Now imagine doing this for 20 hours a day. There is no fatigue to compare with that of the cyclist, but the RAMM's support teams also endeavor: little rest, roadside food, constant attention... and the inevitable discussions. By the time Crico and Roberta arrived, surrender was more than welcome. "Two of the best navigators in Brazil, Rafael Campos and Alexandre



Abreu, were accompanying Dani and had already made silly mistakes, on the very same day we arrived. I soon realized the reason: tiredness makes you stupid,” remembers Crico.

The couple was in the support car when Dani passed Janet. It was Roberta’s idea to switch soft songs for a more cheerful one during the overtaking, and “Brazil”, by Cazuza was the perfect soundtrack. “Dani was excited, dancing on her bike,” Roberta recalls. “The mood in the car, despite all the tiredness, was cheerful. When she overtook the other biker, we vibrated and cheered as if it were a goal being scored on the soccer field.”.

DANI STILL HAD TO OVERTAKE JANET AGAIN to definitely take over the leadership of the RAAM. Once more, the reason was the resting strategy: the American opponent pedaled as much as she could after losing her position, while the Brazilian accomplished what had been determined by her schedule, closing Day 8 of the competition with just over 434 kilometers and five hours of rest. The second overtake early next morning between Sullivan and Bloomington, the Indiana University headquarters and checkpoint number 38, was expected. There was no soundtrack or goal celebration.

“Janet was having an even worse time than the day before. I decided to encourage her and so instead of “Hi”, I shouted “Go!”. While the answer didn’t come, I ended up remembering the day they introduced us. She was a bit snooty; she left my hand in the air. So, I left my “Go!” there and went on,” Dani recalls.



It was the perfect time for the “happily ever after” of fairy tales. But in the RAAM’s real life, there was still a thousand miles to go. And Dani seemed to have felt the weight of leadership. Over Day 9, it fell in yield. She stopped all the time, to rest, to relieve herself. And the advantage over Janet - which she now allowed the team to inform her - reached no more than two hours.

Dani didn’t want to have dinner. She wanted nothing of what the team offered her. Dialogues between the support car and the bicycle were harsh.

“Want to eat?”

“No”

“Want a coat? Rain is coming...”

“No. Let me cycle.”

The second question was more important than the first. A storm was forming on the horizon. A storm announced by a festival of lightning and thunder. When she felt the first thick drops fall from the sky, Dani increased her pace without knowing where so much strength came from: the speed of the bike, which in a stretch like that used to be between 27 and 32km/h, jumped to 40-45km/h. It was enough to complete almost 417 kilometers of cycling throughout the day and in time to reach the hotel booked for the night’s rest - some 600 meters off the route, because there were no vacancies in nearby ones - in Chillicothe, Ohio’s first capital, and checkpoint number 42.

As the team checked in, around one o’clock in the morning, the storm collapsed at once. Almost no one slept well that



night. Not only because of the loud thunder sounds, but also because it echoed in everyone's mind that Janet's support team were in the same hotel, making reservations. Only by next morning would they discover, relieved, that the American had failed to reach Chillicothe in time - which only increased the distance between Janet and Dani.

Dani, overcome by fatigue, slept a dreamless night. More than the body, her mind was exhausted. In the miles before those four hours of sleep, for the first time in the nine days of the RAAM dispute, she had thought of life.

That is, she thought about her entire life, until reaching that moment.

DANIELA FIGUEIREDO WAS BORN ON FEBRUARY 28TH, 1968, in Petrópolis – by chance. Her mother, Sylvia, miscalculated and left Rio de Janeiro to spend the Carnival, famous in Brazil, in the uphill region of Petrópolis, giving birth on *Quarta-Feira de Cinzas* (Ash Day), a day devoted to fasting and prayer for those who are catholic. Daniela came down to Rio with only a few days and since she was a small baby girl, she became known as Dani. She adopted the surname she would be known for winning the RAAM by marrying, at the of age 22, the Jiu-Jitsu instructor and champion to be, Alexandre Genovesi.

Meeting her husband in the sport's world seemed like the natural destiny of those who found in physical activity the reason for living. But Dani had many chances to walk a path



that would take her far away from sports. Her father, who was a smoker, would die of cancer in the year of her wedding. Her older sister, Claudia, with whom she lived until she got married, lived the 80's quite intensely, a time registered in Brazil by sexual freedom and the easy access to drugs. It was the Woodstock generation reaching adulthood. The youngest did not like what she saw going on inside the apartment, which was in Ipanema, a mecca for that lifestyle. She would wake up very early, ran to Arpoador Beach with a surfboard under her arm, forgetting about fights she had with her sister, getting lost in the middle of the waves. (Surfing would ultimately reconcile the sisters: Claudia eventually became a supporter of the youngest and took her along with her friends on trips to Saquarema, another famous spot by the shore of the state of Rio de Janeiro).

But it was through her mother that Dani made her official entry into the world of physical activity. Sylvia, who today, at the age of 64, causes a sensation by pulling six plates on the bench press, found her daughter too shy and decided that working out would be a good way to help her daughter become more sociable. She took Dani to a gym located right above the nightclub *Carinhoso*. Bullseye! The youngest, then 14, soon found herself among the exercise machines and, starting to develop what would be a trademark in her career, she immediately wanted more.

A sign on the wall of the gym announced a five-kilometer race promoted by *Corpore* - the 1980s runner's mecca - in Sao Conrado, a neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro. Dani signed up, ran, won, received a workout scholarship and an invitation: a



scout was putting together a women's track team for the Flamengo Club. Dani accepted. In the beginning, she took a few falls because of the running shoes she had to wear. Gradually, training every Tuesdays and Thursdays, she began to stand out in the 800m and 3,000m steeplechase. The hope that a new Olympic athlete was emerging lasted a year. In order to get to the training facilities, it was necessary to take two buses to reach the Célio de Barros Stadium, where training took place. Arpoador Beach was closer to home and beckoned her with a novelty: the bodyboard.

It was her first boyfriend who encouraged her to try the small board. But what really took her back to the water was realizing that, "There are no other women in the sea." I wanted to be the first. Soon, others emerged, championships were organized, and the sports world heard the name of Daniela Figueiredo, three-time Brazilian bodyboard champion.

Winning the national title three times would be enough for many people to hang up their cleats and live on the laurels of such a glorious career. For Dani, however, this only meant that it was time to try something new. Already in college, studying – any guesses? - physical education, she was introduced to Jiu-Jitsu. In addition to her husband, she conquered the state and Brazilian titles of all belts, and she won both the European and the World Black Belt championship. At the invitation of her friends Crico and Cabeça, she got to know the adventure races that took her to the Hawaiian canoeing (winning a few rowing titles, of course). Working, she started teaching spinning classes and got into cycling - which eventually led her to the RAAM.



Why do all of this? Dani does not have an answer. When a new challenge presents itself, she simply jumps in. And it's not just in sports, it's in life too. On the RAAM website is a quote from George Mallory, a climber who died trying to reach the summit of Mount Everest from the north face. On one of the many occasions when asked why he climbed the mountain he uttered a simple and instantly famous answer: "Because it is there."

Ipanema Beach was there. The gym on top of the nightclub *Carinhoso* too. As was the *Corpore* race, the Célio de Barros track, the mats, the sea, the trail, the road. Daniela Figueiredo Genovesi never thought about what she would find in each of these places. Deep in those thoughts about all the places she had been she was now at the landscape-free stretch of the I-70 between Effingham and Sullivan. And right there, at that moment, she reached the turning point in her life as an athlete, and Dani was ready.





The Race Across America (RAAM) – from Oceanside (CA) to Annapolis (MD): 3000 miles





Crico & Beta





Dani pictures, interviewed by a very TALL reporter, 10 minutes before starting the RAAM



Final moments - joy and strength of having Carlos Alberto Ribeiro (the sponsor) present!





Dani's friend, "brother" and partner, How How, ALWAYS protecting her from the desert sun





2

FRIENDSHIP

June 16th, 2009

From Oceanside (CA) to Brawley (CA)

BEING PREPARED IS NO GUARANTEE THAT EVERYTHING will work out. Dani arrived at Oceanside, the starting point of the Race Across America, a week before the race start. Though densely populated, with its nearly 200,000 inhabitants joining those of Carlsbad and Vista to form a major urban conglomerate in the San Diego region, the city offered the tranquility of a sprawling coastal area - around which, among other attractions, are Tom Cruise's character bungalow in the movie "Top Gun" and the California Surfing Museum. The temperature, varying at that time of the year between 17 and 22 degrees, was not unusual for a Brazilian.

The problem is that, as simply put by Didi, a soccer star and respected on the world of soccer as if a philosopher, used



to say “training is training and game day is game day,” although Dani could never have been accused of not training enough. As soon as she learned, back in September 2008, that she would be sponsored for the RAAM, she began to find her way towards the United States of America. She found out that there was still time to qualify for the 2009 edition, and between one round in Miami and one in Fortaleza (the remaining two), she chose the latter. It was closer and cheaper, but also earlier: the US stage would take place in February, whereas the one held in Ceará (Brazil) would be held in November.

It took six weeks of training, canceling her participation in a mountain bike race in Costa Rica and greatly reducing time with Antonio, the youngest of the family, born in February 2007. Dani took him with her to the first race she participated in after his birth.

JUST A MONTH OLD, he waited at the hotel with his grandmother. He was fed every three hours - which did not allow long nights of rest for the mother athlete, who stored the milk from breastfeeding thinking that she would complete the route within that interval. But it took almost five hours to arrive, placing last. “I came back to the hotel with swollen breasts, worried that I had been away for too long,” she recalls. “It was time to nurse him again, but I saw that he was fine and that it was just a matter of organization and planning to compete once again”.

Prior to Antonio’s birth, Dani would practice different sport-related modalities: Hawaiian canoe, adventure racing,



mountain biking and road cycling. His arrival coincided with her preparation for the RAAM, when Dani dedicated herself solely to cycling, her greatest sporting passion (with one or two relapses back to canoeing). Sleeping by her son's side was Dani's only allowance during practice, with long absences and sessions that continued at home on a stationary bike while the boy played nearby or watched TV.

The impromptu support team for the qualifying race in Ceará had only her daughter Julia and the mechanic How How, who would accompany her at the RAAM, and her mother. Sylvia Figueiredo was already prepared for the challenge. From the beginning of her daughter's career, she was a constant presence, spending all day at the beach, waiting for the results of bodyboarding competitions, or shouting like she was at Maracanã during Jiu-Jitsu fights. The maternal relationship became a partnership: today, the athlete and her main supporter are partners in a company that specializes in fitness and wellbeing. "With my mother there is no bad weather. She is a life example for me, for my sister, for my children and for my nephews," Dani kindly explains. "Without her, nothing in my career would have been possible."

THE CHALLENGE IN FORTALEZA WAS TO BEAT Canadian Caroline van den Bulk and the recently defeated Alziane Diogenes, from Ceará in order to win the only place in contention in a 24-hour closed circuit race. Dani didn't have much sense of strategy yet. She started at a breakneck pace, had cramps (which she was able to control with the breathing technique



taught by her yoga master, Orlando Cani), suffered from the sun and wind from Fortaleza, ate badly ... and won.

There were now seven months to the RAAM, and the first step was to assemble the team. One call here, another there, adventure racing partners and other competitors confirmed, and before the holidays, the group was practically complete. The first meeting was held in January, at a Crico's office. Dani felt well surrounded, but she still had no idea how to train for such a unique race. Cycling friends, such as Alexandre Ribeiro (who had already participated in a quartet and a double edition of the race), Adriana Nascimento, Tavinho and Walter Tuche, provided fundamental help at that initial moment. But it was Claudio Clarindo who really showed her what she should expect on the amount of suffering she was going to endure at the RAAM.

Dani and Clarindo, who had completed the RAAM in the solo category in 2007, met in Santos, the cyclist's homeland, in the most favorable way for both: on bicycles for a 200-kilometer training session. Sylvia was waiting for them at the arrival point with Antonio. Staying away from her son was her biggest difficulty at that moment, and that was precisely the subject of the conversation at 6:30 am, while cycling over to the ferry that would take them to Guarujá (São Paulo).

“What do you expect from the RAAM?” Clarindo asked Dani.

“A lot of suffering and to complete the course of the race,” Dani replied.

“It will be the greatest suffering of your life,” was his frightening reply.



Dani asked Clarindo to make her training worksheets, but he explained that for an athlete with the professional background and technical understanding of her training process, preparation needed no such form. “You just have to think about living on the bike, eating and cycling, working and cycling, sleeping and cycling, cycling and cycling...,” he said, and exemplified. The first stop was at a bakery, where the two stuffed themselves with food and got back on their bikes. *Pão de queijo*, sugarcane juice, sandwiches... and cycling. It was the first lesson of what life is like during the RAAM.

Dani returned from Santos (also in São Paulo) without a spreadsheet, but with a homework assignment: understanding what it would be like to cycle 400 kilometers a day (her future RAAM routine) and to undergo two workout practice simulations: one 48-hour long workout, and one-week training, with 200 kilometers a day. She immediately began to prepare, progressively increasing the distance, biking where possible, not only on the roads near Rio de Janeiro but on the available cycle paths, and made the first attempt with a couple of friends, Ricardo riding along with her, and Simoni in the support car.

During the Holy Week, Dani left Rio de Janeiro and went to Andrelândia, a town in the south of Minas Gerais state, stopping at 380 kilometers after several slopes and due to cold weather. Her husband Alexandre met her there, reinforcing the team, and beginning to understand how it would be like to drive the support car at the RAAM. After a cornmeal cake for breakfast the next day, (so lovingly prepared by Simoni’s mom that Dani still says it was the best she’s ever eaten) wheels were back on the road for another 250 kilometers.



This time around, Dani was able to complete the proposed training plan and was received with a dinner at the house of friends Crico and Roberta, in Araras. There, they decided that Rafael Campos would be invited to lead the team and she got back on the road the next day in order to amass a total of 150 kilometers and wrap-up the two 400km series, all of that without practically sleeping. “I would roll over in bed, asking myself several questions and go over my checklist,” she recalls. Dani was frustrated that she could not complete the first section and still worried about the need to better plan, but confident of the support team coming together (it was her friend, Cabeça, for example, who helped her on the last part of the day, during the climb of the mountain between Itaipava and Teresópolis).

Team meetings were weekly and after hours, and even those who were traveling attended by speakerphone. On other days, communication continued with such a frequent e-mail exchange that it led Dani to a financial madness: buying a Blackberry, which turned out to be an excellent companion for loneliness at roadside stops during practice workouts.

Dani went to bed after 10 pm and woke up at dawn to train - lack of sleep was also a way to prepare. The final seven-day series of 200 kilometers was held near Indaiatuba (Campinas), São Paulo’s countryside, where roads and hotels were in good condition. Dona Sylvia was waiting for her in her room every night with Antonio. It was the farewell between mother and son, who would be cheering for her in Brazil.

There was still 48 hours’ worth of practice with 400 kilometers per day to go. Dani was preparing on the roads of



the state of Rio de Janeiro, which offered several alternatives: uphill options in the Teresópolis and Itaipava mountains, busy highways like the BR-040, long flat stretches on the way to Campos dos Goytacazes ... The weather also wasn't helping with its variations between rain and sun periods. It was a complete training, not only for the cyclist, but for the team that simulated the performance at the RAAM. They would all leave for the RAAM feeling all the more confident.

ONCE IN AMERICAN SOIL, DANI HAD BARELY ARRIVED and she immediately sought out to test, more than once, the first of the 53 stages planned for that edition of the RAAM. From Oceanside's long beach to Lake Henshaw, a resort that, as the name implies, is on the edge of a beautiful lake at the foot of Palomar Mountains, much sought after by tourists for fishing in its crystal-clear waters and barbecuing on its well-equipped shores for camping. It was, in short, the ideal setting to devote exclusively to the final stage of getting ready for the race, the so-called polishing time. And it was precisely there that the problems began.

During the last practice round, already on the way back, Dani got lost. She cycled five hours instead of the three planned and went into a thousand-meter climb. For those who were about to leave the Pacific for the Atlantic, with a total of ascents and descents equivalent to climbing Mount Everest three and a half times, it was hardly a physical problem. But psychologically, (and the mind, during the RAAM can weigh much more than the feet) it was not a good sign.



Dani had never participated in a race with spreadsheets being interpreted by the support car. Her only experience was two trip trail competitions, where they are much simpler and affixed to the bike itself - just a peek is enough for the cyclist to know if he or she is going in the right direction. At the RAAM, it is much more complex: in the race book, which is the printed material that guides the competitors, there were not only road signs and 53 checkpoints (known by the team as TS, which stands for team station), but also included all of the regulations of the race. Stoppages, signals, overtaking. Everything is regulated and in extreme detail. Thinking no one is seeing what you are doing during the competition could be your biggest mistake.

“RAAM inspectors are not just in the TS,” Dani explains. “They appear out of nowhere, in places where you imagine there is no one else but yourself. It may be in the middle of the desert or in the mountains, there will always be someone ready to point out a mistake.”. There was an inspector present on the first day, who pointed out Dani’s infraction. She did not obey an item that seemed secondary in the regulation: fully put one foot on the ground in front of any traffic stop sign. Dani soon discovered that there was no “Brazilian way” in the United States crossing and was punished with a loss of 15 minutes of her full time.

The simplest comparison for this navigation system would be with a rally. If the RAAM were one, the responsibility for the spreadsheet would not lie with the pilot, but with the navigator, who goes in the passenger seat. The difference is in communication. It is from inside the support car that they



pass, through the sound system, with a megaphone or even shouting, the indications of moving on, turning or stopping. This is quite straightforward on slow or light stretches, but it can get very complicated if one is speeding downhill or in an urban area full of cars (it is worth remembering that the most developed country in the world will not stop to watch cyclists pass by).

Dani's team used the strategy of adventure racing: the navigator would anticipate the references so that any occupant of the car could point them out. But even with the best preparation, this whole process of communication, in 11 days with more than 400 kilometers of cycling per-day, tends to build up tension. If a mistake turns into accusations between the navigator and the team or cyclist, chemistry can be lost for the rest of the way.

In Dani's case, the debut factor still weighed - neither she nor any of her team members had ever participated in a RAAM edition. And in this competition, it is also up to the navigator to check the weather conditions, which may vary from the heat of the desert to the snow of the mountains, and to find a hotel or motel for the night on unfamiliar and often deserted roads.

On the eve of the competitions' start, the team's nervousness was latent. The support car and motor home were checked several times, as well as the shopping list: food, medical supplies, sheets, blankets, chairs, reflective tape for nighttime, radios and telephones for communication. The onboard mini-bars were loaded with enough food and drink for three days. And she still had to present herself early the next morning to



take the official photo, hand over a long list of documents (insurance and other signed documents) and pass the car checks.

By midday on June 16th, 2009, Daniela Figueiredo Genovesi was riding a Tarmac Specialized Bike, her favorite, on the Oceanside Pier, under a portal with the word “start” printed on the sides; on the top, in blue, read “Race Across America”, and in red, “Oceanside, CA to Annapolis, MD - 3,000 miles”. To Dani’s right were the three women who would compete with her in the solo category: Michelle Santilhano from South Africa, who had presented her with a sheepskin bicycle seat, saying it was soft and fit for the race (Dani still keeps the gift as a reminder); Ann Wooldridge from England; and Janet Christiansen from the United States. On her left, the only man in the 60-plus category, the American Paul Danhaus. It was in this setting, surrounded by palm trees, that the dream of a lifetime was about to begin.

When her name was announced on the speakers, Dani put on her special competition glasses, but not because of the starring sun shining over the crowded beach. “I started to feel a lump in my throat, and I thought: I’m going to cry”, she recalls. “But how do you cry like that before you leave? Then I said to myself, Dani, get it together!”. Even under the cover of her sunglasses, it was hard to hold back all the emotion. Before getting on the bike, she had been to the bathroom several times (a habit, her bladder works non-stop at the start of any race). With her feet on the pedals, she felt her entire body tremble: “Starting the RAAM was special, unlike anything I’d felt so far.”.



IT WAS A CALL FROM THE PUBLIC THAT DREW DANI from the numbness that seemed to be able to stop her from beginning to cycle. After the official start ceremony, with hymns and homage to the athletes, she was already fitting her foot on the bike pedal when she heard an unmistakable voice calling her name. “It’s Cabeça!”, she thought, and turned to find businessman Guilherme Figueiredo, who, despite his last name, is not her relative, stepping out from the crowd to wish her luck. It was the surprise that she needed to think positively again.

Guilherme was the captain of Rio Off Road, the adventure racing team to which friends Crico and Roberta had invited Dani years before. It was under his command that she took the first steps in the new sport in 2002, and since then the partnership has established itself in several competitions. “I learned a lot from him, lessons I took to with me to the RAAM,” she thankfully recalls. And the reciprocity is true. “I’m a big fan of Dani,” Cabeça equally compliments. “I decided to join her at the RAAM after a training session we did together. Dani was coming from about a hundred kilometers of cycling sessions and yet, she left me behind on the way up the Serra de Teresópolis.”.

Due to commitments in Brazil, however, he could not accompany the entire competition, so he did not sign up as one of the support team members. He would be a luxury fan following Dani in his own car, which he had rented that day at San Diego Airport, where he was received by his brother. They both sped off to see if they could make it in time for the start.

They arrived just in time to reach Dani on the stage. Three days later, in half of the time he had predicted, Guilherme



would say goodbye to the RAAM, leaving with a great lesson: no matter how great the friendship is, at that moment, during the competition, everyone's attitude had to be professional. Cabeça couldn't register his car in the race, and was punished by the organization of the competition, who even threatened him with elimination. "When I arrived in Colorado, I asked my brother to take the car away and went with my things to the motor home," he recalls. "But I soon realized that I was of no use. Everyone had a specific function already, so it was easier for me to hinder rather than to help at that point."

Guilherme stopped at a hypermarket near Durango, headquarters of the RAAM checkpoint number 14, where he asked his brother to turn around to pick him up. His departure caused the first tears in the team. Dani was only informed at a stop later. She went up the Colorado mountains still with the memory of Cabeça's arrival, the surprise that had made the start seem less tense.

"Every beginning of a competition is painful," Dani reflects, or rather, she promptly corrects, "Every beginning is bad.". And the only solution is to move on. Still with the thrill of the start flashing through her head, she cycled the first eight kilometers along a river, still unofficially counted. The race began in earnest at the exit of an abandoned bridge, with each cyclist starting one minute after another, in a time trial style. And then the nervousness merged into speed.

Dani started off at a breakneck pace that would have her breaking RAAM's time records for the first two checkpoints. The route helped: after 40 kilometers of flat terrain, the support car was waiting for her on a winding road that ran through



an indigenous reserve which led to an uphill landscape (Dani's best performing feature), that reminded her of the Serra de Teresópolis. She was already leading the race when she arrived at Lake Henshaw. And there, respecting the team's strategy, surprised the American press for the first time.

The plan was to stop for a snack provided that the check-point was in a cafeteria, and Dani complied. It was already different from what all other teams did, which after the start usually only stop when the cyclist can no longer stand cycling. Dani only stayed for five minutes because the locusts infesting the lakeshore would not leave her alone. But it was long enough for her to return to the race confident of the team's work: everything had worked out perfectly since the meeting in the mountains, along a path traveled by both cyclist and team in the final stretch of practice for the race. Despite the first punishment, the back-up car followed her closely and the motor home went ahead, easily finding stopping points for eating, bathing, or going to the toilet.

While eating dinner, Dani watched her opponents cross the road - only to overtake them just ahead. The first stretch of cycling would not end until about 2 o'clock the next morning, 374 kilometers after the start, and way ahead of her opponents.





Last meeting in Brazil before leaving for the United States.



Guilherme Figueiredo





Training in Rio de Janeiro, simulating the RAAM with the team. Guilherme cycled with Dani on this day, from Três Rios to Friburgo.





3 JULIA

June 17th, 2009

From Blythe (CA) to Cottonwood (AZ)

ATHLETES LIKE TO SAY THAT THERE IS NOTHING LIKE ONE DAY after another - especially after a defeat. But for those at the top, the morning after a big achievement is just the first time when that achievement must be upheld, nurtured even. And the conditions of the previous day are not always maintained. Daniela Genovesi came across this axiom early on her second day at the RAAM.

Dani had arrived 11 minutes ahead of her opponents to the third checkpoint, the last one in sunny California. She slept in a hotel in Blythe, a small town of 12,000 inhabitant's midway between Los Angeles and Phoenix, and therefore much



in demand of tourists looking for a break from their trip. Although it was dawn, you could tell by now that Oceanside's beach mood had fallen behind. Even the city's lower-league baseball team is named Blythe Heat because of the heat that had already reached 50 degrees Celsius. The desert was approaching. And as much as they tried to simulate all the conditions of the crossing during training, there was no way to prevent a Brazilian cyclist and her team from being surprised by the natural conditions encountered during this stretch.

A few miles from Blythe is Arizona, RAAM's second stage. What is known as the fourth largest US state was already a desert region when the continents had not yet separated and there was only one large block of land called Pangea. Even today, the landscape is prehistoric, with formations such as the Grand Canyon (a dry, mountainous riverbed that is one of the country's biggest tourist attractions), Monument Valley (where large rocks look like sculptures) and The Wave, located near Big Water (sandstone rock formations). Underneath the red sand, several dinosaur fossils have been found, and there is a huge crater caused by the impact of a meteorite.

It may be a paradise for tourists and scientists, but not for cyclists. Dani arrived in Arizona from the Southwest, which, besides being home of the desert, has regions of low altitude (the lowest point of the RAAM was therein located), which enables the increase in temperature. In summer, during which the RAAM took place, the average is of 34 degrees. And it doesn't rain: the annual rainfall in the driest areas is less than 15 centimeters. The effect of this explosive combination soon made itself felt: the average speed, which for a long time in California had been 32km/h, dropped to 17km/h.



CYCLING IN THE DESERT WILL MAKE YOU VERY THIRSTY. “It’s hard for a carioca to say that she suffered from the heat,” compares Dani. “But in my entire life I had never felt my throat so dry.”. And not because the team wasn’t prepared to take care of her hydration. In the back-up car, there was always one person responsible for keeping three Squeezes’ - as the bottles the cyclist use during a race are called – always full and cold: one with water, one with isotonic and another with a protein shake or Endurox R4, an energy replenisher designed especially for high performance athletes. Everything she drank at scheduled or unforeseen stops (such as a tire change, for example) was noted in a spreadsheet.

Dani’s hydration menu had a touch of ‘*Brazilianness*’. To accompany some meals, she drank acai juice and coconut water. The juices, especially grape juice, were mandatory. Only carbonated drinks were forbidden. Dani made only one exception throughout the crossing at the end of the day when she first passed American, Janet Christiansen. And it was not to celebrate. “I got to the hotel tired because of a mistake committed by the support car, which had increased the route by 40 kilometers,” she recalls. “I was mad at the team’s decision, mad at everything, and everything in my body ached...”. In order to undergo the relaxation sessions with yoga master Orlando Cani, she needed a shower, some time to think and a hug. But ending that odyssey with the protein shake that the menu predicted for her each evening was just too much: “I had a turkey and cheese sandwich and a soda.”.

The rest of the way, complaints were much rarer. “The team was always offering me different drinks or super cold



water, which was a luxury,” says Dani. As she cycled over the boiling asphalt, she remembered the Piocerá, a four-day competition between Teresina and Fortaleza that she had participated in January of that year. January is Brazil’s summertime: “It was a crazy, intense heat and I had no support team. In many moments I drank hot water. That was suffering from real thirst.”. In Arizona, the real problem was the total lack of relative humidity: “It was no use drinking water or any liquid because no matter what, the feeling of dryness would never go away.”.

The desert was like a post-graduate course in hydration for the team. The schedule determined that Dani should always drink water, should drink an isotonic every hour, and have other drinks twice a day. And the bottles had to be offered, because it is normal for a competing cyclist, focused on cycling, to forget to ask for a drink or even to think about hydrating. It was also important to pay attention to Dani’s reaction: few sips indicated that the intervals were being well observed; if she drank all the contents of the Squeeze bottle at once, like a baby does with a bottle, it was a sign that thirst had already passed from the tolerable point (which rarely happened).

It was a complex operation - and therefore subject to all kinds of mistakes, even the hardest ones to imagine. For example, leaving someone behind in desert by mistake. This happened with Dani’s daughter, Julia, who got out of the support car in order to provide her mother with a replenished Squeeze bottle. The driver at that moment was her father, Alexandre, who thought he would not have to go back to pick her up, because another car, the motor home or the crew camera,



would. But that was not what had been established and Julia remained alone on the roadside.

It was the second time in the family history that Julia Figueiredo Genovesi, the second daughter of the couple Daniela and Alexandre, was forgotten. Julia was born in Rio de Janeiro on February 15, 1993 (her mother didn't mess up the dates, as her grandmother had: Carnival would only start the following week). When she was still a baby, Dani left her one afternoon at her husband's gym to go to the beach with Victor, the eldest son. Involved with the classes, the Jiu-Jitsu teacher left her sleeping in the baby comfort. At the end of the day, he locked the door, went down to the street, and suddenly realized that he was not as loaded as usual. Something was missing.

It was Julia. Seconds later, he had climbed the stairs, opened the door, and was looking relieved at the baby comfort, where his daughter was still peacefully sleeping. "My father won't leave his own head behind just because it is attached to his neck", laughs Julia (the forgotten one), who at the time was already a grown woman, on the eve of her entrance exam for Engineering. This story always occupied a prominent place in the family folklore and was only surpassed by the desert episode.

He learned of his mistake and swore he had no idea. Dani was spared until the end of the race so that such a scare would not hinder her performance. Julia, who spent about 15 minutes on a road, just as in a typical American movie, under a harsh sun, seeing no sign of life and without a cell phone for help, was rescued by the car of reporters Cesar Augusto



and Luciana Michellis, who were accompanying the race and filming for broadcaster TV Globo. She had to hide so as not to receive a punishment, because the RAAM regulations prohibit media cars from hitching team members.

More than a fright, what worried her was that it had caused a nuisance. “I was the youngest on the team, and I knew everyone thought I couldn’t keep up the pace,” she recalls. “So, I told myself I couldn’t get in the way.”. But even she was surprised by her ability to overcome, especially when it came to lack of sleep. “I wake up early to go to school, but on weekends, if I can, I’ll sleep until noon,” says Julia. “At the RAAM, I was on the morning shift, slept a few hours, and already had chores to do. I think I was inspired by my mother’s efforts every day.”.

It was the same dedication she’d gotten used to seeing at home. Julia describes Dani as an affectionate mother, who gives her children all the little free time that an athlete’s life leaves her, but she is also very demanding. “Because she is extremely applied and focused with her training, the same is done in terms of our education”, she compares. “If one of us gets a low grade at school, the first thing she says is, you should have studied more.”.

These expectations, however, are limited to studies and school related issues. Julia is the missing link in the family genetic chain: she never had an athlete’s blood or calling. She has trained Jiu-Jitsu like all of Dani’s children, but has never adapted to the competitive environment. “For her, physical activity is for the purpose of feeling beautiful and staying healthy, and what we do is crazy,” says Dani, who has never put



any pressure on Julia to follow in her steps. “I’m lazy, I only workout occasionally. If I decide to run, my mother makes a spreadsheet, but she doesn’t expect any specific results later,” says her daughter.

Dani just disagrees with one word spoken by her daughter: “She says she’s lazy, but she’s always running, working-out, practicing yoga, stretching... She is much more of wellness and fitness person than everyone else at home.”. Her daughter’s resilience at the RAAM didn’t surprise her mother: “At age 15, she had already been my support “team”, alone, in a 12-hour competition from midnight to noon in Itupeva, in São Paulo’s countryside. I thought she would have left before, but she held on and pushed through. I won, but I ended up unable to get up and down from the podium. Julia was broken too, but she waited for me to sleep, woke me up for dinner... In other words, she didn’t lose focus, even when she was exhausted.”.

THAT ABILITY AND THE UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN MOTHER AND DAUGHTER led Dani to elect Julia as her early morning companion at the RAAM. “We were two zombies in automatic sleepwalking acts, but we didn’t forget anything,” she says, and notes, once again: “She may like to sleep, but lazy? Never!”.

DURING THE RAAM, DANI FOCUSED ON HER ATHLETIC persona, she had no room for any maternal behavior regarding



Julia, and, forgetting her daughter in the desert was far from the only mistake she made during the race. In Arizona, the excitement had passed, and the preparation of the team was beginning to be tested. Near Blythe, at the lowest point of the course, she had already made her first attack. “At one stop there was enough anxiety to go around, with everyone wanting to do everything, some told me to eat, others to promptly leave,” she recalls.

She ended up doing a little of each. She grabbed an apple, passed by her husband Alexandre, and said in an almost quarreling tone, “You have to make up your mind”, referring to the team as whole. Without waiting for an answer, she got on her bike and went back on the road. Behind her, the shouts of confusion turned first into a puzzled silence and then in a hurry to get back on track. Only at night, during the dinner stop, did the spirits calm down. Orlando Cani, Dani’s yoga master, took her arm and asked her to control her nervousness so as not to pass it on to the team.

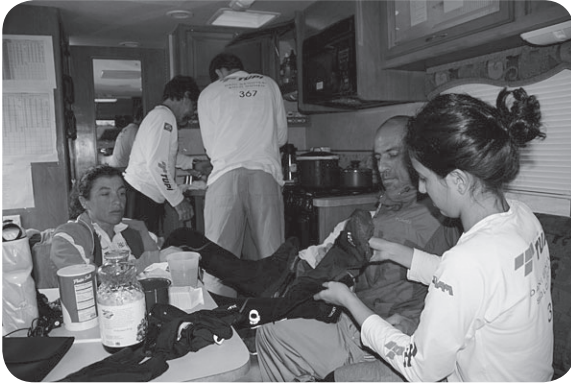
Dani agreed, but a long day was coming to an end. In the early hours of that morning, not even the music program had been established. How How, the bicycle mechanic, was primarily responsible for the sound coming out of the speakers and he chose a selection of Tim Maia songs in which only the first two tracks were upbeat. As either a result from a nap or just sheer distraction, he let it go on into what would become a succession of depressing songs. Have you ever wondered what it is like to cycle in the desert, after two or three hours of sleep, in the dark of the early hours of the morning, listening



to encouraging words such as “give me reason to leave, I am looking forward to losing you”?

Julia did a much better job as a DJ, and from then on Dani demanded that she always oversee the morning’s music program. And started to face the first cycling moments listening to “Tato”, from the *Fala Mansa* musical group, singing along that she was laughing for no apparent reason. She wasn’t quite there yet, but she would leave the desert even more confident: “The first mistakes eventually lead to a more connected team.”.





Julia taking care of Dani (daughter & mother)





Julia and Dani at the airport



Together before the start!





Julia also needs her beauty sleep...





In this exchange... Juju was left behind!



Location where Julia was left behind



4

THE DESERT

June 18th, 2009

From Flagstaff (AZ) to Mexican Hat (UT)

A CHINESE PROVERB TEACHES THAT A LONG WALK begins with the first step. It's a valuable lesson for a race like the RAAM, but Dani would soon learn another valuable lesson: concentration and focus. For all those who will strive to dispute the RAAM, concentration, being alert and focus are vital. One mistake, even though it might not be serious, is all it takes along the 4,800 kilometers for the dream of crossing the finish line to be over.

Near Tuba City, or Tó Naneesdizí as the Navajo Indians call the small town of eight thousand people that forms the largest cluster in their reserve and home to the 9th RAAM checkpoint, Dani felt her nose clogged. This was not the first time this had happened along Arizona's dusty roads, and she



did what a cyclist in the middle of a race must do: she turned her face to the side and blew hard. She felt that she was more congested than usual, but only when she looked down at her uniform shirt, did she realize what was wrong: it was all stained with blood.

Even easier than forgetting to hydrate in the desert, for an athlete focused on the race, is to neglect basic precautions, such as applying saline to the nose. After breathing the Arizona dust for a full day, Dani's nostrils were completely dry. Her first concern, seeing the red stained shirt, was to hide it from her daughter Julia. She motioned for the support car to stop, asked to change, and dodged as best she could. Nonetheless, Julia saw her and got scared as, indeed, everyone else on the team.

“FROM NOW ON, I BEGAN TO PAY ATTENTION TO ALL HEALTH care recommendations,” Dani recalls. At each stop, she incorporated not only serum, but also sunscreen - for obvious reasons - and ointment. And if she had not yet used all of this regularly, it was not for lack of warning. “There is no bad weather with Dani,” sums up João Felipe Franca, the team doctor. “I warned her about all precautions, but she was very focused on cycling, especially at the beginning of the race, and just didn't feel the need to use them.”

The desert was the first stretch of the RAAM to challenge Dani's health. After cycling all day in the scorching sun and boiling asphalt, she had, besides her throat, very dry skin



which made it even more sensitive to the cold. At night the temperature dropped dramatically, and the effect of the cold wind on a hot body which had been absorbing heat all day, could be devastating. “I wore clothes that I would take with me to a European winter,” says Dani.

That was not easy for a cyclist who doesn't even like wearing glasses (for protection) while cycling. Later, while facing a desert storm, she would have to add a bandana to her apparel, covering her face so she wouldn't swallow sand. But none of this could be more frightening than the pain in her feet, which Dani considered her greatest enemy in the desert. “I thought: My God, the start of the race and my fingers are burning, what will it be like in the next few days?”, she remembers. “I was trying to get these fears out of my head so as not to give up, but when I stopped my feet were white and freezing cold.”

Dr. João Felipe examined her at every stop, always finding that the circulation had not been affected. It was just a common effect of a long cycling competition – injuries caused by fatigue, such as the ones experienced by Dani, are common reasons for cyclists to withdraw from competitions such as the RAAM. But much more prosaic enemies hide under these other injuries: blisters and rashes.

Dani had to face them all. The uniform shorts made especially for the race, with no time to be “broken in” as athletes like to define the first use of the equipment, had a high seam that caused three huge bloody blisters in the groin. They appeared early in the race and got worse and worse. Luckily, Dani could not see them. It was her daughter Julia who



oversaw and took care of the situation, and then the position of who was hiding something was reversed. “The bubbles were raw,” Julia recalls. “If I told my mother the truth, she might be scared. So, I said it was no big deal, she just had to treat them with an ointment, but I ran to tell Dr. João Felipe.”

JOÃO FELIPE FRANCA, EXERCISE AND SPORTS MEDICAL SPECIALIST, was one of the last acquisitions of Dani Genovesi’s team for the RAAM. Appointed by Roberta, it took him a while to convince himself that he would have the time and structure to prepare for the venture. Monitoring a patient who sleeps less than four hours a day and spends almost the other 20 on a bicycle would require care beyond what is expected from a doctor in the office. “My main concern was the falls, which can cause an athlete to leave the race even if he or she is physically ok”, he explains. “we had to fight the many causes, such as lack of attention and fatigue. And the only prescription for that was to make sure she got enough food and liquids at the right time and respected the resting hours.”

Just in case, on board the support car, Dr. João Felipe brought with him two suitcases with first aid equipment, not those little boxes with tape and mercurochrome that families keep at home, but also nothing that made the vehicle look like an ambulance. Dani’s health monitoring was done at longer stops and one would be surprised by its simplicity. “A brief clinical examination was enough, and her condition was always good,” he recalls. Later, in the blog he wrote about the race, using the little free time he had while traveling, he reports the athlete’s blood pressure measurement after another



long stretch of cycling: 14 by 9, a level that many people reach without making any effort.

This entire process had been rehearsed in races and training in Brazil, an opportunity that was also used to simulate the RAAM conditions and come up with early solutions. The blistering problem, for example, had sparked a debate on what to do with hair in the groin area. Dr. João Felipe suggested that Dani undergo laser hair removal, but she didn't want to worry about the long-term effects. The solution, then, was the simplest: no shaving or waxing.

Oh and, yes, Dr. João Felipe saw the blood blisters after being alerted by Julia. At this point, he decided the best thing to do was wait for Arizona to be left behind. "It was something expected. Every cyclist goes through this problem", he says, as naturally as someone who was prepared for everything. "It's the negative side of deserts."

THE GOOD SIDE OF THE DESERT is that they still haven't invented one that never ends. Even the dinosaurs seemed to know this: archaeologists have found a trail of prehistoric footprints from Arizona to neighboring Utah. The RAAM route did the same, and Dani could slowly begin to get distracted by the landscape. "The sunset over that red sand was very beautiful," she recalls. "It's one of the strongest images I saved from the crossing."

At the last RAAM checkpoints in Arizona (and there were seven, spread over two days of the race) there was something



else to look at by the road. At the exit of the so-called Navajo Nation, the area reserved for this indigenous ethnic group, are the carved stones of Monument Valley. Everyone on the team took several photos at this beautiful setting, and just ahead Dani saw another curious geological formation: at a 3.7 meters on top of an 18-meter-wide base, a flat, round rock balanced on a smaller, cylindrical rock, giving the perfect illusion of a *sombrero*, the typical Mexican hat. Not by chance, it was called Mexican Hat and lent its name to the neighboring town, which in the last census done in 2000, had 88 inhabitants in 29 residences (whereas in the previous one, in 1999, there were 259, it is possible that they were even less inhabitants when the RAAM occurred in 2009).

In this quasi-ghost town was RAAM's 11th checkpoint, the first in Utah, the state with the largest population of Mormons in the United States. For Dani, none of that mattered, only the sign that time had finally come to say goodbye to the desert. But the desert wouldn't let go of Dani without leaving a memory. Shortly after passing Mexican Hat, a sandstorm hit the road.

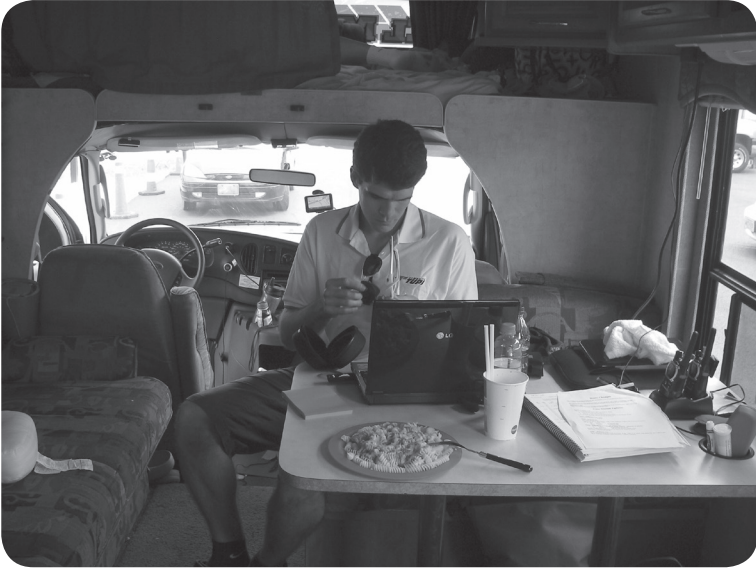
"I had never seen something like that in my life, and, at first I didn't know what to do," Dani recalls. "I could only remember an old man I met at the last dinner before the start of the race. When he learned that I was going to attend the RAAM, he told me that the only secret in any adversity was not getting off the bike."

The old man, she later discovered, was also a cyclist and had completed the course six times. Following his advice was worth it: the storm came and, the Brazilian who had never



faced the desert passed through the storm without wasting much time and her team, who had gone to sleep the night before nodding their heads, ended the day by reading that the official website of the race had elected her the best so far.





Dr. João Felipe waiting for Dani to eat.



During stops, even short ones (10 minutes), Dr. João Felipe would always monitor Dani's health conditions.



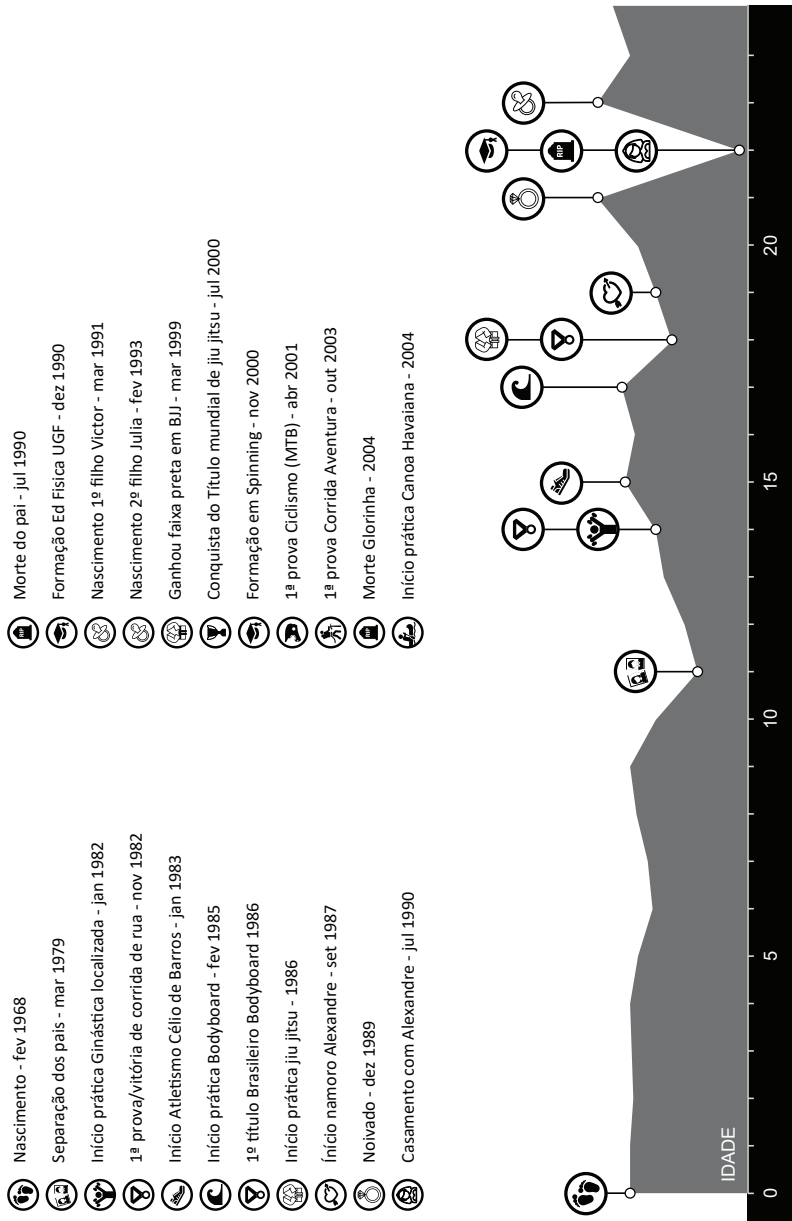


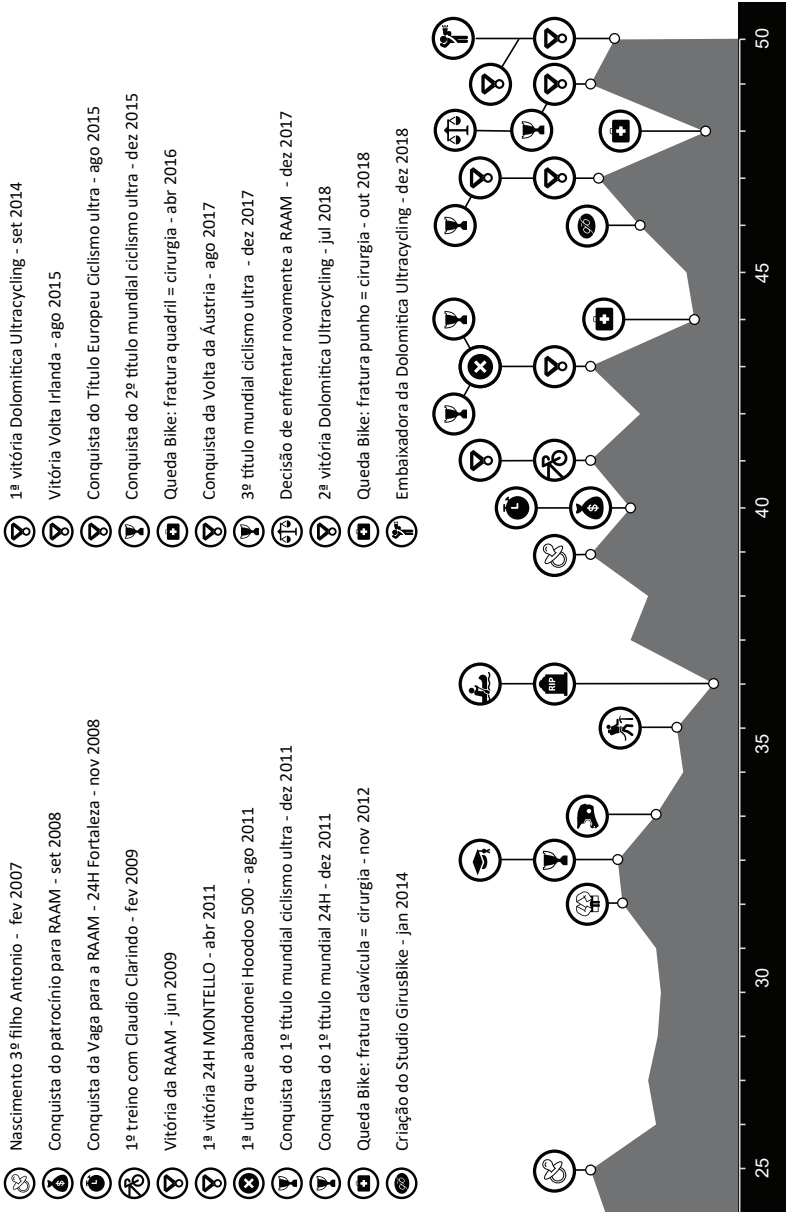
Before the sandstorm.



Arriving at the desert.









5

SAUDADES¹

June 19th, 2009

From Montezuma Creek (UT) to Pagosa Springs (CO)

PLANNING IS ALWAYS NEEDED; HOWEVER, it not always solves everything. There is a quaint and famous football story, attributed to football player Garrincha, (like many of the quaint and famous football stories) that tells of a lecture given by a COACH IN the locker room. “Let’s push from the start and score first, before 30 minutes of game time,” he would say, drawing buttons and arrows on a blackboard. “Then we hold on to this result so we can relax during the break. When we come back for the next 45 minutes of the game, we score 2-0 right away and the game is won.”. At this point, a player

¹ The word “saudades” in Portuguese is, for many, untranslatable. There is no corresponding word in English that can convey the strong meaning of the word “saudades”. “Saudades” can be defined as the act of deeply missing something, someone or even a situation; a yearning.



who seemed oblivious deep down, (and everyone likes to say it was Garrincha) raises his hand: “Coach, I understand almost everything. I only have one question: have we discussed this strategy with the opponent?”

Dani Genovesi arrived at Montezuma Creek, the second RAAM checkpoint in the state of Utah, in the early hours of June 19th. She had come from two days across the Arizona desert, with heat all day and cold at night. She had already gone through a nosebleed, groin blisters, foot pain, and a recent sandstorm, among other obstacles. A good night’s sleep was well deserved. The only problem was determining such a strategy with the opponent.

Utah’s southeastern extreme – placed as the forty-first among the 50 states in population density - is not the ideal place to find a good roadside hotel. Or a motel, or even a shack. If Mexican Hat, the previous stop, had 88 residents, the situation at Montezuma Creek was not much better: 507 residents spread over 34 square kilometers with one of its main attractions being a burned-down gas station in the city’s downtown area.

In this bleak scenario, further aggravated by the fact that cell phone and mobile internet coverage had been disrupted in different stretches of the desert, making it difficult for the team to arrange in advance overnight reservations, the only solution was to sleep in the motor home. While planning for the race, the team foresaw situations like this, but everyone knew they should avoid it as much as possible.



THE MAIN REASON OF HAVING A VEHICLE of this size in the entourage during the RAAM was to make it easier for cyclists to make roadside stops, especially for food and hygiene. In the first two days of the race, Dani's traveling team members had already learned to deal with the advantages: having furniture, a stove, a refrigerator, two air conditioners, electricity systems, drinking water, sewage and gas, as well as an onboard toilet. But they also had to deal with some of the difficulties inherent to a wheeled home.

The use of the bathroom, for example, was complicated. US legislation allows the water tank to be filled anywhere, but in order to dispose of toilet waste, you need to stop at authorized locations, such as parking lots and campgrounds, which are not always easy to locate. There was even some comfort to eat, but washing the dishes created another difficulty: the water with the leftover food was stored in a box and one had to remember to dispose of the contents as well (which was allowed on the earth shoulders by the road). Not doing so would clog the sink, causing a flood in every single turn on the road, leading to much more disturbing results.

Even without overflowing water, driving required some care. Forgotten dishes and pans on the table and stove were always ready to fly in a sudden use of the breaks or in a sharp turn. The RAAM race book provides directions for alternative motor home paths, because in some sections the largest ones cannot pass due to space.

Motor homes can vary in size between a van and a truck. The larger ones are, of course, the most comfortable ones, but driving them requires having the proper driver's license, which no one on



Dani's team had, nor had time to go through the procedures in order to acquire the necessary license. It was then necessary to opt for a smaller model, which accommodates 5 to 6 people.

Seven people slept in the motor home that night, including Dani - who had the privilege of using the double bed alone. How How, the mechanic, slept in the support car.

DURING THE FIRST TWO DAYS OF THE RAAM, Dani had not yet managed to find the right pace. Beating the time record at the first two checkpoints was the result of hard cycling, but also anxiety and the lack of knowledge about the route - a combination that had increased physical demands early on. It was therefore important that she strictly follow what had been determined while planning for the race: The resting strategy - sleeping three to four hours per night.

It was precisely while she was sleeping that Dani lost the leadership gained shortly after the start of the RAAM. But it bothered her a lot less than the state she woke up to. Not that she was sleepy (her nighttime habit at home is a maximum of six hours per night). However, after 20 hours of cycling, with few stops to eat, bathroom stops, or any breaks, her body called for a longer resting period. Even though she had slept the first two nights in hotel beds, she woke up feeling her muscles stiffened, heavy and therefore, she was slow to get back to her usual pace and rhythm.

At a roadside lunch, without the support of the motor home, along with her husband Alexandre and mechanic How



How, Dani saw Dany Wiss, who would be the overall winner that year. The Swiss's speed increased her sense of lack of rhythm: "It seemed like the race would last a single day. I thought of myself as a turtle. I thought, dammit, men go at this speed? I will not make it...". To make matters worse, when returning to the bike the sun was extremely intense, casting all its mighty force on Dani's back. "My kidneys almost fried," says Dani, without sounding as if she was overreacting. At each stop, she had to change her belted ice packs, which melted quickly as they refreshed her and relieved a pain that men athletes need not face: it was the second day of her period cycle. "I ended the day feeling completely defeated."

It was in that spirit and thinking about what the next morning would look like, that Dani pulled the bike over and prepared for her first night of sleep in the motor home.

AT THE DOOR OF THE MOTOR HOME, a 73-year-old man was waiting for her. It was Orlando Cani, who was from Santa Catarina, and had moved to Rio de Janeiro to "try another life", as he self-defines, at the age 13. He was a skydiver, artistic gymnastics athlete and military pentathlon, who graduated in physical education in 1956 and became a Yoga master five years later. His mission in the team was basically to give Dani two daily sessions: a relaxation session when she got off her bike to sleep; and another warming up as soon as she woke up for another day of cycling.

"I couldn't believe it when I saw Orlando," Dani recalls. "After so many hours on the bike, all I wanted was to lie down,



and he was there, also tired, but ready to relieve me...”. Only the respect of more than 20 years of student-teacher relationship prevented her from ignoring or dribbling him, which he would have understood perfectly. “It was a pity to see her state ... One day I cried,” he recalls. “If it was my daughter, I’d have taken her away.”.

Well, it was almost as if she were his daughter. Dani met Orlando in the late 1980s through her husband, when she was already a jiu-jitsu fighter. To those unfamiliar with this form of martial art, it may seem that there is no relationship between the tense moments on the mats and the sense of peace conveyed through the practice of yoga. But some of the top athletes in the sport, such as Rickson Gracie and Murilo Bustamente, had already taken advantage of his teachings. “I developed a method that works on strength, speed, endurance and explosion,” he explains. “It’s a combination of posture, breathing, relaxation and meditation.”. The recipe was successful and spread to other sports: coach Bernardinho applied it to the men’s and women’s volleyball teams. Beach volleyball champions, Adriana Behar and Shelda also experimented with the technique.

It was through this technique that Dani would have to go through again during the first night in the motor home. But she had already learned that it would be worth it. “The pain accumulated by my crazy rhythm vanished. From the third night on, I would return in shreds, but it was a great joy to have the master there to make me sleep better.”.

And it wasn’t just her. Orlando Cani slept even later and woke up before Dani to devote himself to the exercises and



made up for his few hours of sleep (about an hour and a half a night during RAAM) by applying his techniques to himself. He would retire to the motor home, meditate, and would be ready for Dani when she returned. Gradually, the other team members came to him. “One was too stressed, another had lower back pain... I ended up doing several massages”, he recalls, amused. “After the race, Alexandre Abreu, our boss, confided in me. When he learned that an old man would be part of the team, he thought he would have to take care of me. And in the end, I ended up taking care of him and everyone else.”.

The evening session took no more than ten minutes. It began with a conversation where Orlando asked if Dani had applied the breathing techniques, she had long learned from him and trained in competitions in Brazil on the bicycle. She responded and took the opportunity to complain about the problems of the day, the mistakes of the staff, the quarrels with her husband. Then the master’s expert hands worked on the main pain points in a technique he calls corrective gymnastics. Stretching and reiki - manual alternative therapy to restore balance - ended the work. “Cells basically need two things: oxygen and rest. My goal was to take the stress away so that her body could rest”, explains the therapist. The next morning, the main concern was to stretch: “When we were done, Dani was already looking for the bike, eager to start cycling.”.

Dani wanted to cycle as soon as she woke up in the motor home. She looked for her bike to start a steep ascent to Colorado, a state famous for its ski resorts.

Cycling uphill is one of Dani’s best assets. But in Brazil there is nothing that one can compare with the 3,000 meters



of altitude she would have to face on the way up the Rocky Mountains, a range that runs from Canada to New Mexico and occupies two-fifths of Colorado's territory. *Pico da Neblina*, the highest point in the Brazilian territory, is 2,993.78 meters, and there is no cycling there.

All day long Dani felt her performance compromised. Worse yet, the crew, who had slept crammed in the motor home, also showed signs of tiredness. Her average speed to the first checkpoint of the day, Cortez, in Colorado, was the lowest ever - 8.34km/h, just below the 8.74km/h she had done in Flagstaff in the heat from the Arizona desert (both came after a sleep stop, which affects the average, but were nonetheless indicative of poor performance).

And it was just the beginning of a long day up the mountain - it would end with the entire crew mobilized to avoid another night at the motor home and Dani's first tears during the RAAM. "I don't know why, but I remembered my father, who died over 20 years ago," she says. "I yearned for him the most."²

LEOPOLDO DE OLIVEIRA FIGUEIREDO NETO, known to everyone by the nickname Lelo, got divorced from Sylvia, Dani's mother, when she was 11 years old. That separation did not affect the relationship between father and daughter: "My father was my first bodyboard sponsor. At the occasion of my first competition sponsored by him at *Quebra-Mar* (a spot in Rio de Janeiro where the sea invades a channel during high tides), in 1984, I was unjustifiably disqualified from the competition, and left during the

² In Portuguese: "Meu deus a maior **saudade** dele".



second heat. There was a lot of rivalry between the teams, and I was from Arpoador. When he found out, he lost it, and wanted to talk to the judge, called him a thief, as we usually react when in the Maracanã stadium cheering for our soccer team...”.

Lelo cheered for Fluminense Football Club and liked to take his children to the stadium. He had four, two girls with Sylvia plus two boys from another marriage. He passed on his love for football and his aptitude for sport to his children. He was the first Brazilian Junior Champion in 1957, and soon after, part of the team champion in Argentina. Even today he is remembered for his good humor, joy, beauty (Lelo was a handsome man!), and for his great riding skills among important names in horseback riding. “My father loved horses,” Dani recalls. “He competed and won a lot in horseback riding, and when he came home, he would listen to football round tables on the radio. When our team fell to the third division of the Brazilian Championship, I thought: at least Dad didn’t live to go through this heartbreaking moment...”.

He was already ill when his youngest daughter got married and would die less than a week later from lung cancer caused by his smoking habit. “My father was from the Marlboro generation,” says Dani, with no trace of a disapproving tone. “I remember him cheerful and as a party goer, but also as businessman. He was a tough guy with my sister and I, always demanding something from us, but we also had fun and learned a lot from him. He would have been young athletic grandfather, but fate would not allow it.”. An uncle was given the role of walking the bride into the church. But in that night, when Dani was alone, surrounded by the solitude of the mountains, there was no substitute for her father figure.





Moments of extreme pain and discomfort.

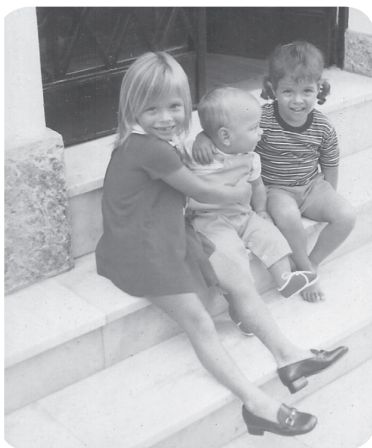




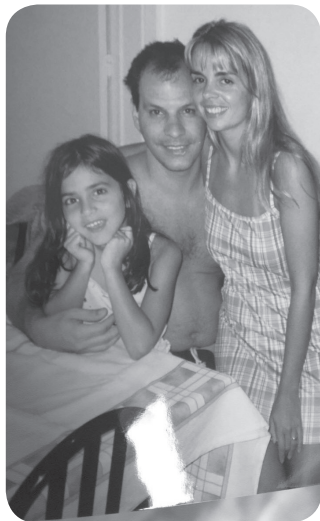
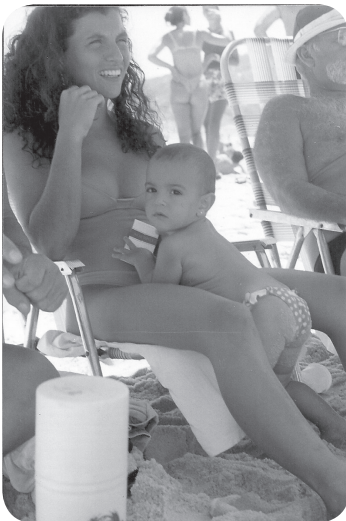
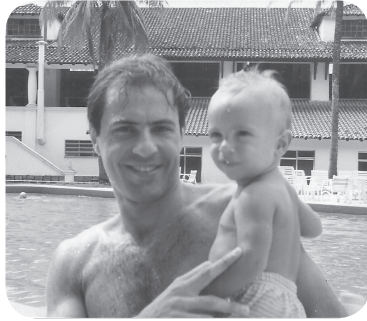
Master Orlando taking care of Dani.



Family

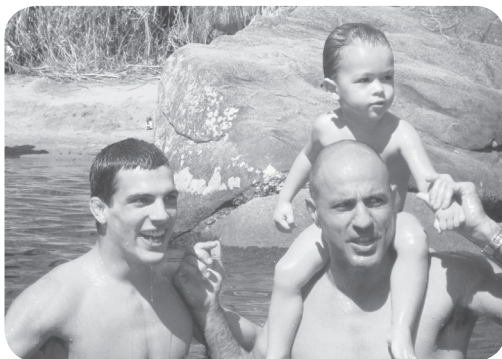




















6

THE ALTITUDE

June 20th, 2009

From Chama (NM) to Springer (NM)

DANI GENOVESI WOKE UP FOR DAY 5 OF THE RAAM at 2,399 meters above sea level, and with one more lesson learned and noted in her private booklet. It is the athlete who sweats, who faces difficulties, who deserves the victory or suffers the pain of defeat the most. But despite all that, he or she is not yet capable of making all decisions on his or her own.

On the previous night, she wished she had cycled enough to complete the 400 kilometers of the initial planning. Team doctor João Felipe had to argue hard to persuade her to stop at the 360-kilometer in order to sleep in Chama, a small town of 1,200 inhabitants with a wild-west setting in New Mexico. “I thought it was because he believed I wasn’t doing well”, confesses Dani.



“We were on Day 4 of the RAAM, our faces were beginning to change. Then I thought: It will get much worse. I will get much worse and, if the doctor wants to reduce the distance (every time he sees me like this), I will not complete the race.”.

However, there was another reason for such measures, and a scientific one for that matter. If Dani continued, going through the next 40 kilometers during dawn, she would head towards the highest point in all the RAAM, the 3,124.2-meter-high La Manga Pass. And there was no guarantee that the road that runs through the mountain, connecting Chama to Antonito (Colorado), would offer good lodging options somewhere at a reasonable altitude, reasonable being somewhere below 2,500 meters (it’s not only the physical performance that decreases at high altitudes, but also the ability to recover).

In Chama, where a motorcycle rally was taking place that day, the team was luckily able to book the last two rooms available at two nearby hotels. When approaching her designated hotel, Dani was already convinced that João Felipe’s decision had been correct. “It was very difficult to cycle that night,” she recalls. “I thought, thanks to the doctor, I’m arriving at the hotel and soon I will be asleep.”.

As her body still carried the tiredness of a long day that had followed a sleepless night at the motor home, Dani did not complain about another relaxation session with Master Orlando Cani. She closed her eyes and immediately blacked out, without even having time to think that she would wake up to face two mountains with over three thousand meters high each.



IN PHYSICAL TERMS, DANI ESCAPED unharmed from La Manga Pass climb – further complicated due to cold weather and rain. But it was just at the beginning of the descent that she hurt her knees. The reason, as is usually common in the RAAM, was one of the most prosaic: a trip to the bathroom.

Think about how many times a day you need to use the toilet. People with regular bowel functions have an average of one daily bowel movement. And those who follow a doctor's recommendation to drink between two and three liters of water need to urinate at least once per liter. Multiply this by close to 12 days on the go, covering 4,800 kilometers of road, taking into account that cyclists competing for RAAM have vital functions affected by constant physical exertion, not being able to eat at regular times, and hydrate themselves all the time and the result is a complicated mess to say the least.

Dani tried to match her trips to the bathroom with places where they existed (i.e. hotels, gas stations, or the motor home, despite the work involved). But it was not always possible. In fact, it was often **not** possible. Holding back the urge to evacuate or urinate causes discomfort to anyone. Now imagine in a person who is on a bike, cycling 20 hours a day, against the clock. Therefore, the only solution was to resort to roadside bushes, when those were available because that was not the case while going through the desert.

Luckily, two family members were part of the team, which at least lessened the embarrassment of asking for help, because a cyclist woman, fully equipped with the necessary gear and in a hurry to get back on the road, has no time do to everything on her own. “I would almost always get some on my feet,



which eventually I got used to”, says Alexandre, her husband. “I let go of all feelings of disgust and revulsion”, adds Julia, Dani’s daughter.

They were not only in charge of cleaning, as far as toilet paper goes and baby wipes, but also had to help Dani in terms of balancing, supporting the position she chose to relieve herself. In the most difficult times, Dani had to bend her knees to 90 degrees, supported by Alexandre or Julia, who held her by her arms. It should be no big deal for someone with athlete’s muscles, if the muscles were not punished by the constant cycling. And it was during one of those moments, that things went wrong.

“I was very pressed for number two,” remembers Dani, who can laugh at the story today. “There was only mountain after mountain, no toilet and the motor home had gone through another route... so the brushes nearby had to do.”. Supported by Alexandre, she crouched down and ended up doing a hyperflexion. Both knees hurt a lot at that moment, but the warming of the movements on the bike made them return to normal (although they would hurt again later, in another stage of the competition).

It was all that Dani needed at that moment in order to face the second uphill stretch of the day and reach her first goal at the RAAM.

TAOS is the NAME OF A TYPE OF RED WOOD in the *tiwa* indigenous language. A village of this ethnic group, as everything



else around it (i.e. its county, the city headquarters, with less than 5,000 inhabitants, and a ski station) was named after such wood in the north of New Mexico. Dani passed by Taos in the summer, and with no time for trying the skiing modes available (downhill and cross country). However, she could enjoy the beautiful view of the region from one of the Rocky Mountains, also called the Taos, although the mountain range is only covered with snow, as it appears in most pictures, during the winter.

What Dani was looking for in those surroundings, just as all other RAAM participants, were numbers. Checkpoint 18 of the 2009 edition was in Taos. A total of 1,044.1 miles had been covered up to that point, which would be the equivalent to 1,680.32 kilometers (just over a third of the total distance of the race). Because of this location, the city was chosen as the first cutoff point: competing cyclists must reach this point before a pre-established time by category and age groups in order to classify and continue in the race.

South African Michelle Santilhano didn't make the cut. With excruciating pain in her legs, she realized that she would have a hard time getting to Taos within the time limit. From Pagosa Springs, a city in Colorado where a checkpoint was located, she contacted the race organization and announced her withdrawal. The first to arrive was American Janet Christiansen and the last one was the British Ann Wooldridge.

Between the South African and the Englishwoman, at 2:36 pm that afternoon, under heavy rain, Dani made it, with a comfortable seven-hour margin below the cutoff point. Receiving the news after a full day of rain and knee pain, was



invigorating. Now she just wanted to know what the next rounds lay ahead for her.

IN ORDER TO FIND OUT WHAT THE NEXT STAGES OF RACE WOULD BE, Dani had to consult Jean Todt. Not the Frenchman who now heads the International Automobile Federation and is still part of Ferrari's executive board, but a 53-year-old *carioca* who earned the nickname in his honor. Alexandre Abreu was chosen to be the team leader at the RAAM because he is as meticulous as one of the most famous Formula 1 team leaders. He handled the bureaucratic part, receiving and delivering documents for the race organization, and shared the responsibility for driving and navigation with Rafael Campos, who occupied the post of captain. "I had a better time keeping myself awake, so I stayed with the night shift and Rafael with the day shift," he explains.

An engineer, professor of strategic planning and information systems, Abreu has an extensive experience in adventure racing (many of them with Dani), who had invited him to be part of the team during a New Year's Eve party at a friend's house. He has already crossed Alaska on an expedition of Hummers, US military vehicles. But had never faced such complex navigation. "As much as we planned, the reality was always very different," he explains. "The human factor is the main and most important factor in such a long race."

The answer to addressing this complexity was to add to the electronic paraphernalia that the team carried on board what



Abreu calls the “SOLVE key” - an imaginary button. “It’s in the internal hardware of one’s mind,” he jokes. To prove the importance of this “equipment”, he elaborated a prank, still in Brazil. During a race, he asked the strongest team members to open the hood of his car, a Land Rover, which has an English logic/structure, meaning it is reversed. No one succeeded. Only when he showed that the correct action was to turn the other way did everyone realize that conventional thinking will not always do the trick.

For this very reason, Abreu’s race book was, as he put it, “all tricks”, that translated the indications of the official language of the race into one he could quickly understand. And he had the same concern for clarity when passing on information. His paused way of announcing out loudly each turn of the road would trigger one of Dani’s biggest bouts of laughter during the crossing. Resting at a gas station while the team tried to locate themselves after a mistake, she and mechanic How How began to imitate him and couldn’t control themselves. The combination of laughter, effort, weakened abdominal muscles and constant hydration would have her having to change her shorts twice. “I got the message: in communicating with Dani, just say right, left, or straight ahead,” he says with good humor.

And she obeyed, even though sometimes she might have been suspicious, as in one day when he had been the only one to have noted an erratum, passed on by the RAAM organization through the telephone. Everyone hesitated, believing that it was the wrong way, and in the end they all breathed with relief at finding the school and church indicated in the race



book, which they would never have reached by following the initially printed out directions. Dani treated Abreu with the respect that Ferrari drivers gave Jean Todt, and it was at him that Dani addressed in the most pessimistic moment of the early days of the race when they stopped to sleep in Chama, New Mexico, famous for its high altitudes. Together, they checked the uphill Dani would have to face the next day and with that she was able to concentrate once again on the race.

THE ROAD THAT LEAVES TAOS AND CONTINUES UNTIL SPRINGER, ALSO IN NEW MEXICO, presented a spectacle of nature capable of making Dani forget a little about the difficulties she had faced so far and the fight that was starting for the lead of the race. The rain finally stopped, and the sun illuminated the winding path, with rich vegetation, rivers, lakes and mountains, some even with snow at the top.

The first impression of those who think of a coast-to-coast crossing of the United States may be that of a succession of beautiful landscapes, as in the excerpt from the movie 'Forrest Gump' in which the main character crosses the country several times, running. In fact, the country has plenty of them, but the RAAM is not a sightseeing trip. The stretch that goes from Oceanside to Annapolis is boring and tedious, referring not only to the desert sand and between the wheat and corn fields, but also in urban areas whose biggest attraction is a supermarket.

Perhaps, as a consequence, but also from the sense of duty accomplished after passing Taos, Dani vividly remembers



much of what she saw along the way: on the way up, a forest of huge pine trees from where it seemed a bear could appear at any moment; at one particular stop for a snack, by a river Danie recalls as a magical place, for the joy it seemed to cause on the team; on the way down another stretch of river, she spotted a fishermen knee-deep in the crystal-clear water that seemed freezing.

The next stretch, until Clayton, already near the Kansas border, would be much longer and with no cities along the way. Dani would then have to spend her second night at the motor home. But this time everything was well planned: some members would go to Clayton to sleep in a hotel; others would stay with her to leave early in the morning. The Arizona desert and the Colorado mountains had fallen behind, and the first cutoff point in Taos had been a success.

A starry sky sheltered a confident team by the roadside, ready for the other two-thirds of the RAAM.





Yoga master, Orlando Cani and Alexandre Abreu in New Mexico's unforgiving cold weather.



Alexandre Abreu





7

ALEXANDRE: MY SAFE HARBOR

June 21st, 2009

From Clayton (NM) to Plains (KS)

BEFORE SUNRISE, DANI already cycled towards Kansas. A new stage in the RAAM was beginning, and the worst seemed to be over. The excitement of the moment was transferred to the action of cycling: at the first checkpoint in the new state, Dani reached her highest average speed in the race, 32.6km/h, a mark that would not be surpassed until the finish line. By the end of that day, she would have cycled 460 kilometers, also her best mark on the entire crossing.

Why then fight with her husband at such a time? Dani herself could not explain or answer why. She just remembers what she did: at a refueling stop, Alexandre was playing with a can of sunscreen spray and sprayed a little on her. The answer, reflexively, was to throw at him what was at hand - in this case,



the contents of a glass of coconut water. “The support-up car was excited and in awe of my achieved average, only I felt irritated, wondering what would become of me over the next three days,” she argues. “I lashed out... And on whom? My husband, of course!”.

It was not the first, nor was it their last disagreement throughout the race. Dani herself admits that her husband was her first target for letting on and unburdening her nervousness and frustration. But this time Alexandre reacted. He did not accept the insistent apology, told his wife to get back to cycling, and returned to the wheel of the support car, which he had not left since the start of the race, denying all relay requests until then.

“ALEXANDRE EXCEEDED IN MANY WAYS,” says Dani. And she is not referring to the fact that her husband drove for the most part, (and finished off the Red Bull stock in the support car) during the time she had biked from the California coast to the Kansas plain. It was hard for him to have to share his wife’s intimacy with ten other people. The bathroom trips (or the like) were still accompanied only by him and his daughter Julia, but at other times it was not possible to keep everything within the family.

Dani remembers, for example, the moment when she had just crossed the desert storm from Arizona to Utah. “When it was over, I just wanted to take a shower, and the best I could do was use the sink at a gas station.” It was hard to know what made Alexandre more uncomfortable: Watching his wife wash without having much to preserve her privacy with or



contemplate her fragile physical appearance after hours on the bicycle, breaking through sharp gusts of wind and sand.

But it was an exception. Along the RAAM route, Dani tried to leave the bath for places that offered some comfort. Her favorite time was right before relaxation exercises with yoga master Orlando Cani. She would arrive at the hotel and get in the shower while he prepared the room with exercise blankets. It was the combination that earned her the best hours of sleep.

Throughout the day, however, it was far more complicated. First, because there was no guarantee that the team would find a decent place. Second, because changing shorts, with the ever-worsening state of the three groin blood blisters that had accompanied her since the desert, was becoming an increasingly complicated task.

Furthermore, in last few days, the haste factor took its toll. “I just wanted to complete the competition, I couldn’t even stop to think about taking a shower or changing clothes,” she recalls. With Alexandre, admitting his chauvinist background, due in part to his family background, but also because of the sports universe he is used to being, it was better this way: “When she had to take those makeshift showers, I would go somewhere else so as not to get angry or irritated.”

DANI CYCLED THROUGH THE KANSAS plains taken by an unconditional love for her husband and family. Thinking about the fight with Alexandre, she remembered when, feeling weak as she left the desert heat to the cold of the night, Dani would



vent with him and heard a phrase that would become a mantra for the most difficult stretches of the RAAM: “Dani, you are doing what you always wanted. Cycle with love.”.

It was with this love that she called for the support car, but not to ask for water, food or rest. Dani just wanted to make peace with her husband. Alexandre, incarnating the tough Jiu-Jitsu fighter, barely opened the window. He would make a sudden gesture and told her to keep pedaling. But inside, he had fun. I would look at the other team members and say, “I’m here working for my wife and I still get coconut water in my face.”

Dani resumed her course with the conviction that the fight would end there. She had known Alexandre long enough to be sure of that.

ALEXANDRE GENOVESI IS KNOWN AS GIGI in the jiu-jitsu world thanks to a creative combination of nicknames: a random motive and an angry reaction. During a tournament, fighters Jacaré and Fábio Gurgel made up a story saying he came from Sergipe and further confused the announcer of the event, who already had the greatest difficulty in correctly pronouncing Alexandre’s surname. From an unusual mix of Sergipe and Genovesi it came out Gigi, and he didn’t like it. It was enough to make it so popular that he was never able to get rid of it.

Renamed Gigi, Alexandre met Daniela in 1988. He was a jiu-jitsu fighter and she, coming from the bodyboard phase, was taking her first steps in the sport. They attended the same gym and soon began to see each other outside of the training



mat. He provides no details on how it all began, pretending he no longer remembers, thus maintaining his tough reputation. But one has just to ask about Dani as an athlete and the compliments start to spring up. “In addition to physical fitness and genetic characteristics, she has a strong desire to win and a strong will to train,” he says. “Sometimes the training sessions are harder than the competition, and Dani, who is very dedicated, goes through difficulties thinking about everything she had to go through to get there.”

Both Dani’s husband and her coach share these opinions. Shortly after Alexandre and Dani started dating, she wanted to take Jiu-Jitsu seriously - as with everything else she gets involved with - and enter competitions. She turned her boyfriend into a coach, which made her successful on the mat but also led to some disagreements when they were no longer training. “It’s normal to get things mixed up a little,” he concedes.

Alexandre’s participation in the RAAM did not escape this somewhat predetermined rule. He says he had to be convinced to participate. He had already accompanied Dani in a few races, but in order to devote himself fully to training, practices, and to the competition, he would need to be away from his gym for a month, and, furthermore, be exposed to Dani’s outbursts, like the last one, in which he got showered with coconut water, on a daily basis. In the end, he agreed, but Dani knew it would have to be on his terms.

Alexandre had not planned to drive the support car non-stop. He simply couldn’t let go of the wheel, worried that something would happen to his wife, cycling in front of him. So much care and worry eventually caused the team to suffer a



punishment: she stopped suddenly, he wanted to see what had happened and parked the vehicle on the roadside shoulder, just 1.10m from the track, far less than the required minimum of 1.50m according to the regulation set by the RAAM.

Only later did he learn that the team had a meeting to remove him from the support car, relocating him to a more comfortable position in the motor home. But it did not bother him at all. “I wasn’t a team leader, but everyone respected me, I was Dani’s husband,” he says.

The day after the Kansas disagreement, Crico and Roberta, Dani’s friends whom he was well acquainted with, would join the team. And Alexandre would finally give up his almost permanent position of support car driver.

“They may say that over time people change, but not Alexandre, thank God,” says Dani, openly complimenting her husband. “I love his way of being. Hard, tough, but also cheerful, funny, high-spirited, playful, righteous, serious, honest ... But if you put down your guard while playing cards with him, he will get the better of you! It took three years for this combination of qualities to take her to the altar. Alexandre at the time was an industrial designer for the advertising agency DPZ. However, he lost his job right before the wedding. For the first three months of their mutual life, the couple lived by reselling the beverages they had bought for the wedding party, which had to be canceled, to her stepfather, a hotel manager in Búzios (a beach area in Rio de Janeiro state). And it was precisely during this time that the news of the first pregnancy arrived.

The difficulties of the RAAM were far from being the first that Dani and Alexandre faced together.



MAYBE IT HAD BEEN THE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE with which Dani cycled after her fight with Alexandre, or may the proximity of Crico and Roberta's arrival, or even the motivation brought on after having passed the first cutoff well below time, or simply the fact that the Kansas roads are as straight as they are long and tedious. The truth is, Dani did not slow down her pace since she had left that morning.

The team's plan foresaw another night's sleep in the roadside motor home along the roadside once it reached the 400-kilometer mark on that day. But Dani was feeling strong, so she added another 30km. It was all she needed to reach Greensburg, a town of just over 1,500 inhabitants that had 95 percent of its area devastated by a tornado two years earlier.

Luckily, the reconstruction work was already well underway and there was a vacant hotel. It was another starry night, but the Kansas heat was uninviting. It was better to sleep one more night in a room with a bed and air conditioning, small luxuries that make a tremendous difference at the RAAM.



Alexandre and Dani after the sandstorm.





Master Orlando Cani trying to soothe Alexandre.



ALWAYS by Dani's side.





8

GO GENOVESI GO

June 22nd, 2009

From Greensburg (KS) to Fort Scott (KS)

ATHLETES NORMALLY HAVE NO TIME to lie on the laurels of victory. In Ancient Greece, the branches of such leaves were transformed into crowns for the Olympic champions (whereas today, they are used as spices). Centuries later, at the RAAM, Dani Genovesi had no time to lie down on a mattress as it were. The accomplishments' achieved one day, no longer meant anything the next morning when she woke up, did her stretching workout with Master Orlando Cani, and got on her bike, even if everyone else thought they knew what was waiting for her on the road ahead.

Kansas was perhaps the state that best exemplified this situation. If the first day in the state was marked by a sense of resumption and good performance, the second, on the same



roads and weather conditions, brought a shock of reality: Dani was facing the stretch with the harshest geographical features of the RAAM. The constant heat of 35 degrees Celsius was considered worse than the Arizona desert by team doctor João Felipe. And the monotony of the plains was beginning to become a psychological challenge.

“Right there, I had the feeling that the United States was one vast terrain”, compares Dani. She had even trained to face this kind of situation. She cycled from 5 am to 7 pm in Magé’s surroundings, in the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro, a flat and monotonous stretch where the temperatures reach high extremely degrees. But it was impossible to reproduce stress conditions after six days in the world’s toughest cycling competition.

“I was sick and tired of pedaling”, says Dani. “I stopped every two hours, for whatever reason.”. At one of these stops, she decided to access her official website for the first time during the race, which had a virtual wall so that internet followers could post supporting messages. The effect was unexpected: “There were people I had not seen for a long time, relatives, friends ... I was amazed to see how many people were following me, I was so moved and decided not to access the website anymore, to maintain my focus.”.

Perhaps because Dani felt that she had lost too much time, perhaps to regain her lost focus, she did not want to make the main stop scheduled for the day: an hour’s break, during which she could do as the team members and battle for a spot in the motor home which had two air conditions turned on at full capacity. Only at lunch time did she gain the motivation she needed to complete the day, but no thanks to the menu.



DANI BOARDED THE FLIGHT TO THE UNITED STATES with a rigorous food plan, prepared by an endocrinologist, nutrition doctor, and physical education teacher Oswino Pena, who has been with her since her Jiu-Jitsu days. Oswino took part in the preparation process for the RAAM to be able to fully understand her needs. Three months before the RAAM, Dani was already on a very similar diet to the one she would be following once at the RAAM. The main difference on race days was the increase in the amount of liquids. “I felt safe and comfortable with what I ate and drank,” she recalls. “I didn’t get sick, I lost weight only at first and yet it was not a significant loss.”.

Oswino, who continued his work during the competition, monitoring his pupil’s participation on the radio and intervening at crucial moments, such as when he prescribed multi-vitamins to compensate for the losses caused by menstruation. He concluded that Dani would have to eat six meals a day, without fat or fried food, interspersed with the protein and carbohydrate shakes that accompanied the water and isotonic hydration. All very well balanced to replenish an estimated calorie expenditure of between six and eight thousand calories. Describing it that way, it might look like a sequence of grilled meats and salads. But you can’t eat lightly while cycling on deserted roads on fast food land: one of Dani’s favorite orders was a sandwich from the Subway food chain.

“I love sandwiches,” confesses the super athlete. “When we were in San Diego, getting ready for the start, the TV was constantly announcing a Subway new release of minced chicken with salad and cheese.”. Along the way, Dani commented several times with her daughter Julia, who was responsible for providing their food, that it looked really good: “Whenever I



saw an outdoor billboard with the ad displaying the new sandwich, it made my mouth water.”. Until one day, in the middle of the Arizonian desert, they spotted a sign indicating that in the nearest town, a little off the route, there was a Subway franchise. With permission from Alexandre Abreu, the team made a slight detour and her craving at last fulfilled.

From the very first meal at the RAAM, prepared at the motor home by Julia, it had become clear that there would be no time and structure for refined menus. An hour before the start, at Oceanside, Dani ate an instant noodle with chicken cubes that she defined as “tasting like nothing”. The team didn’t have much choice either: that day, as there was no certainty to find a restaurant along the way, the support car was packed with sandwiches from the first McDonald’s they passed by on the road.

The logic behind the meals was like that of the nights of sleep: if it was possible to find a restaurant for lunch or dinner, the staff would stop, no matter how exotic it was. On the first day of the race, for example, they stopped by a casino. Dani stole the scene among the old ladies who were filling the slot machines, having arrived all dressed up as a cyclist, only exchanging her cycling shoes for *Havaianas*. When a restaurant wasn’t available, and not even a casino, the solution was to cook in the motor home. Chef Julia had some experience at home but had to face a new challenge: “I always managed cooking for myself. On the other hand, preparing food for ten people was quite an experience.”.

If it were up to Dani, her daughter wouldn’t have to go through so much work. A Subway sandwich with grape juice,



her first nights' dinner menu in Kansas, was all that she needed to be satisfied. But not even that was easy. The next day she wanted to repeat the request and the team couldn't find a Subway franchise along the many miles of deserted road. The request had to be replaced for a pizza, quickly eaten without complaint.

Eating quickly was the first concern, and for that, pizza and sandwiches were perfect. Nevertheless, it was also important for Dani to eat well in order to sustain the effort of the daily 20 hours of cycling. At every stop, Dani had several options available for a healthy snack. And for that, the participation of Ana Abreu, was fundamental: she could not participate in the race, but she was in Oceanside before the start of the race, and took Julia shopping and filled the support car and the motor home with groceries, all properly labeled so that it was easy to find the necessary ingredients when preparing a meal. "Everything was easy to find, nothing was missing," compliments the gourmand.

A typical day for Dani at the RAAM was something like this: for breakfast, a cream cheese and turkey sandwich, banana yogurt shake and black coffee; for the morning snack, banana, honey, granola, isotonic and cereal bar or toast (or both); at lunch, rice, potatoes, vegetables and chicken, or pasta with tomatoes and chicken (always served with a lot of olive oil, at the suggestion of captain Rafael Campos); in the afternoon snack, protein bars, mini sandwiches and juice; at dinner, something like lunch, with concessions to Subway sandwiches and pizza (only fried foods were strictly forbidden); and before bed, a protein shake.



The last meal was always the worst for Dani. She hated the taste of the protein shake, and Julia had to resort to creativity in order to disguise it.

But one way or another, Dani would endure and drink it all up. Ensure, a brand for another type of shake (widely used by older people in the United States and incorporated at the suggestion of Dr. João Felipe), was easier to drink and came in plastic bottles like some yogurts in Brazil. It became both Dani's and the teams' favorite drink.

In addition, the menu provided carbohydrate gels of a variety of flavors and brands or ice cream, between meals, when it was unbearably hot. "Every 20 or 30 minutes I was ingesting something, either solid or liquid," Dani recalls. "I think that is why after the RAAM I got a nervous mouth, always wanting to chew something. I had to control myself not to gain weight... I went through an uncontrollable eating phase for a couple of months."

THE SECOND DAY'S LUNCH IN KANSAS was set across a gas station. Dani was in a good mood, even though she was not able to repeat her Subway meal. Shortly before the lunch break, she had received the news of the arrival of Crico and Roberta, her friends and fellow adventure running colleagues. It was already agreed that they would only join the team in the middle of the race, but the couple's arrival at the Wichita airport, which was very close to half of the total of the RAAM's route between Pratt and Maize checkpoints, had the impact of a great novelty.



As soon as Dani learned of their presence, she asked to stop. She got off her bike, but did not want to eat, drink or rest, she just wanted to hug her friends and take many pictures with the team, now complete. This emotional fuel proved even more important than food, hydration, or rest. Timing was on our side because it was just before lunch that Rafael, our captain had made his first and only mistake in the race. Luckily, Crico and Roberta were already with us.

“It was a busy road and we had to take an exit,” recalls Dani. “We passed such exit and I had to cycle about three or four kilometers until the next return. No one warned me, but I knew that we had made a mistake.”. In total, it was about ten kilometers, plus the usual rush to warn the race organization that the team was not taking a shortcut. Still, the athlete did not challenge her captain, as she usually did when she thought something had not gone as planned.

“I am well aware of what it means for an athlete to make a mistake,” says Dani. “When it happens to me, I just want to be quiet, and I figured that was what Rafael needed at that moment.”.

ENTREPRENEUR RAFAEL CAMPOS, AN ARMY Reserve Officer, was perhaps the most admired member of Dani’s team. In the world of extreme sports, with whom everyone had some identification, he is known as one of Brazil’s greatest adventure racing athletes. If you play tennis, the comparison is easy: Imagine having Guga as your coach in your next championship.



“When I was offered the position of chief, I asked: are you crazy?” Recalls Alexandre Abreu, who shared responsibility for navigation with him. “Rafael is already on the team, and among cyclists and adventure runners, he is a guru.”.

But the guru already had another important role to play, that of a captain. It was Crico, friend and fellow adventurer who came up with his name. “I barely knew Dani,” recalls Rafael, who had never been in a race with the team before the RAAM. His experience was only in participating of the two days of training along the roads of Rio. “I knew very few people and was the only *paulista* (i.e. the only person from São Paulo) among several *cariocas* (i.e. those who were from in Rio de Janeiro). The respect that everyone had for me as an athlete turned out to be fundamental so that I could play a commanding role.”.

Rafael was always in charge - or almost always. “There were very few disagreements, that were solved in no time,” he says. The only thing that could have been considered a breach of hierarchy was the refusal of Dani’s husband Alexandre to leave the position of navigator of the support car during the first days of the race. But patience proved to be the best solution: “He made the decisions more emotionally, which is normal. He was worried about what might happen to his wife. With time, however, he felt more comfortable, and one day when we left him resting a little more at the hotel, he finally gave in.”.

Alexandre’s position in the car affected, more than Rafael’s commands. It affected his designated job. In addition of taking care of navigation charts during the day, he was also re-



sponsible for all logistics planning. “I was in charge of setting the stops, for the meals, for resting, and every and each other stop we made,” he explains. “This was very important not only to keep Dani’s pace in the race but also for the team dynamics.”.

Splitting ten people between two cars, coordinating obligation and time for meals and rest, turned out to be a much more complex task than taking part in an adventure race. “In the support team, I didn’t have the physical stress I was used to facing as an athlete,” he compares. “Even so, I can say it was the hardest race I’ve ever attended.”.

It was precisely the major burnout one suffers being in the RAAM support team, specifically a mental one, that led Rafael to make a mistake that day. “It was an easy stretch, I just had to indicate an exit on a straight road,” he recalls. “But I was involved in other functions, updating the spreadsheet, and I forgot.”. Seeing their admired captain make a mistake served as a warning to the entire team: tiredness was hitting hard. “I spent a couple of days punishing myself internally, trying hard not to pass on that feeling to the team.”.

ON THAT VERY SAME DAY, CAPTAIN RAFAEL CAMPOS would have proof that exhaustion had played a major role in his error. Shortly after taking over the navigation in the afternoon, Alexandre Abreu, the team leader, also made a mistake with the navigation when leaving El Dorado and the last checkpoint where Roberta and Crico had joined the team. “The first car was already following me,” recalls Dani “when Abreu started screaming so that I would stop.”.



Much less on account of the mistakes than the conditions she had to face on her second day in Kansas, Dani arrived, as literally translated from an expression in Portuguese, “only the orange bagasse”, meaning in a destroyed, terrible state, at Fort Scott, the last checkpoint in the state. Another small town on the RAAM route, with its little more than eight thousand inhabitants and the tourist attractions that cyclists have no time to see: the fort that gave the city its name, the last on the frontier of the so-called indigenous territory in the Old West, a historic center destroyed by a fire in 2005, and the home of Elmer Verner McCollum, the discoverer of vitamin A.

At the end of a hot night, which caused four contestants to quit over the course of the day, due to dehydration, all that mattered was a poster carried by a resident from Fort Scott. A 12-year-old girl who had seen Dani cycling through the window of her mothers’ car and had written “Go Genovesi go” on a piece of cardboard.

It was Julia who brought the poster into her mother’s hands. Dani promised to give the new fan an autographed T-shirt, which would be her first autograph, and at that moment she seemed to have reached the limit of emotion she could withstand on a day also marked by extreme physical wear. Once again, Dani barely reached the end of the relaxation session with Master Orlando Cani, shutting down completely.





Final touches before the start of the RAAM.



Raphael and Juju





Dinner time, party time: PIZZAAAAA!





9

STRATEGIES AND OTHER GIMMICKS

June 23rd, 2009

From Weaubleu (MO) to Washington (MO)

WHAT DID YOU DO LAST WEEK? This measure of time is so powerful that the Hebrews used it in the Bible for the purpose of telling the story of how the world was created. Two hours after passing through Osage Beach, Missouri, Dani Genovesi completed exactly seven days at the RAAM. She had left the beach, crossed the desert, went up and down the mountains, had faced the cold and the heat. And there were still more than a thousand miles - or approximately 1,600 kilometers - to cross the finish line.

Dani considered Missouri an extension of Kansas, as far as the competition conditions and scenario were concerned: a succession of dull, hot plains. The difference was in the constant presence of urban centers, gradually replacing the wheat



and oats fields. Also, in the state of Missouri runs the Missouri and the Mississippi rivers, natural lakes as well as men-made dams. On the stretch Dani crossed on June 23rd, RAAM cyclists rode primarily over grounded marshes and many, **many** bridges.

When reaching that far into the race, it is advisable to go through a medical assessment. Dani underwent a medical examination that revealed a good general state of health. She was keeping her weight, which showed that the calories lost with the cycling were being properly restored; she also showed no signs of fatigue, thus revealing that she was able to enjoy the few hours of sleep available, and kept a good (at least for most of the time) mood. The team had been startled to learn that the male race leader had come to such a state of physical and mental stress that he had hallucinated while cycling.

The equipment also needed to be checked. Crossing the United States in just over 11 days, following very strict regulations regarding the role of support teams, makes the RAAM a kind of low-speed regularity rally for the support car and motor home. Refueling, especially that of the latter, a notorious “drunkard” so to speak, was an important part of the planning worksheet for the competition. Running out of fuel, becoming stranded on the roadside, would cause Dani a great deal of damage, just as a flat tire or a blown engine would. But everything worked out perfectly.

Furthermore, there is just one other, specific equipment that can, at any given moment, either leave the cyclist on foot or, hopefully, lead her victoriously through the finish line.



DANI LEFT BRAZIL WITH THREE BICYCLES ALONG WITH HER LUGGAGE. Her bikes, which were large in number and size-wise, were divided among all the team members in order to avoid overweight charges. They were all Specialized bikes, which is one of the most respected brands among cyclists. In Kansas and Missouri, Dani mainly used the time trial model, with speed characteristics appropriate for long flat stretches. Her favorite bike was the 7-pound Tarmac, good for steep, uphill biking, which is Dani's best ability. There was also a Specialized Rubi, a model best suited geometrically for women, and, therefore, a more comfortable option for relaxing after long stretches on the roads.

Dani's favorite bike was fully acquired by her sponsor; the other two were provided by the manufacturer through a marketing agreement. Together, the three comprised a state-of-the-art equipment. Throughout the race, the team was comparing Dani's structure with that of her opponents, and the unanimous conclusion was that there was no other competitor that could match Dani's equipment and structure. "I had a very, very good structure. My sponsor, *Cimento Tupi*, provided me with state-of-the-art equipment", she compliments. "I would look at the bike, call How How and say: How How, just look at this rocket! And we would happily laugh together."

Most cyclists are aware that there is a big difference between a road speed bike and a mountain bike, but in a race like the RAAM, you need to pay attention to much smaller details. All frames were made of carbon fiber, but the geometry, for example, were different according to each bike, and it affected Dani's performance in each stage of the race.



The team left Brazil with a complete plan for the use of each bike model (while the other two remained in the support car), based mainly on the altimetry data of the race. Evidently, not without taking into consideration, the cyclist's sensitivity, which often influenced the choice, and the spreadsheet would have to change. Following this routine ensured that the equipment did not suffer any serious setbacks over the more than 4,800 kilometers of the crossing.

THE MISSOURI RIVER LEADS TO A RAAM CHECKPOINT: the second cutoff at checkpoint 34 in Illinois, after the Mississippi River bridge. Dani didn't know it yet, but from there the fight for victory in the women's solo category would be limited to her and the American Janet Christiansen.

On the way to checkpoint number 30 at Weaubleu (MO), the first in Missouri, Englishwoman Ann Wooldridge, the only woman besides Dani and Janet in the race, suffered an accident. While trying to dodge rocks on the road, Ann lost control and was thrown off her bike, banging her head with the fall. She failed to meet the time requirements and left the competition, although the race directors, recognizing her effort to return, allowed her to complete the course.

An accident was the biggest concern of all of those on Dani's team. Starting with her husband, Alexandre, who at the start of the race refused to let go of the support car so as not to lose sight of Dani. Followed by the doctor, João Felipe's worry regarding Dani's resting and eating schedules in order to avoid



unscheduled naps. And finally, the one responsible for Dani's bike that would successfully take Dani across the United States.

COMPUTER TECHNICIAN MAURÍCIO LACERDA came up with his own nickname. He needed a signature for the graffiti art he was doing on the walls of Rio de Janeiro's streets, during the time that he was part of a skateboarding crew. He can't explain why, but he ended up with How How (pronounced Rôu Rôu). The nickname stuck, of course, and that is what everyone on Dani's team (and anyone else in Rio) calls him by.

How How was not recruited to take care of the laptops, smartphones and other sophisticated communication equipment that the crew carried aboard the support car and the motor home. Dani invited him to pursue an activity he was no longer engaged in fully since he began studying computer science: a bicycle mechanic. "It may seem a bit immature, but I was one of five or six top mechanics in Rio de Janeiro," he says. (Reading the statement, Dani did not hold back: "In my opinion, he is the best!").

Dani and How How met each other while he serviced spinning equipment at the gym where she was the class instructor. At that time, he came up with a very good idea that would help her, later, go through the RAAM. "I was the one who convinced her to buy a mountain bike," he says. "We biked together, and since I never had much strength on the uphill stretches, I was soon left behind by Dani. But I've always had a quite descent technique for downhill, and she told me she had to learn that from me." Apparently, she did learn.



How How's invitation to join the team came naturally, as he had already participated in other races with Dani. But it took some work: "I didn't have an American passport or visa; I don't speak English ... It took a lot of effort to get me to travel." And it was worth it. The amount of time lost spent with the bikes maintenance can be counted in one hand, although How How minimizes his role in this achievement: "We had a flat tire or two. Otherwise, I did very little. The equipment was cutting edge, so problems were minimal."

In addition, How How proved to be an excellent acquisition for the team inside the support car or motor home and at stopping points. Not only was he a "jack of all trades" but was also a great company with an excellent sense of humor, fundamental during difficult times, to raise everyone's mood (including Dani's). He was everyone's favorite partner during stops talking nonsense and laughing at the other members was the only way to relax a little.

In addition, How How externalized the confidence and the trust of someone who happened to see Dani attempt her first ride on a mountain bike. "I always knew she would complete the race," he says. "This girl has blue blood running through her veins. She was born to win so, if she decided to enter a distance-spitting competition, she would win that too."

IN SPITE OF ALL THE SUPPORT, DANI would finish her day of cycling in Missouri crying. And this time it was not due to *saudades* or that longing feeling, but out of fear.



Dani's last meal had been a confused one. On a road without too many shoulder options, she was still accompanied only by the support car (the motor home did not fit on the tight turns and had to take an alternate road). When they finally found a parking spot, dinner was a little disappointing: instead of a slice of pizza from Domino's fast delivery network, as usual, the team only got mini pizzas. Dani had swallowed a few when she suddenly summoned them all to leave. She had just realized that they were in a cemetery.

On her way out, she faced a wind that rattled the bike, making a frightening noise. She managed to make another stop, completed the unsuccessful meal with cereal bars, and Ensure, wrapped up and returned to the road. And that's when the fear hit her, not of a ghost or the howling wind, but of failing to complete the race, of disappointing her fellow travelers, her sponsor, the little girl who had written her a poster in Fort Scott...

Just then another poster brought Dani back to the race. Laura and Alberto, her sponsors and who were recording her participation through videos and photos, came out from the darkness of the road, without cameras, holding only a poster board that read "Go Dani Go!"

"Tears streamed down unceremoniously," Dani says. "By feeling the pain, I was able to let go of it." The night of fear would end at a fast pace, with more than 40km/h on average and the team partying as if she had won a race. But everyone knew that there were still many hurdles to come – both physically and emotionally.





Rachel (she was responsible for the motivating poster ♡)



Rachel's poster.





At the end of a terrible day. Dani pictured during her 3 to 4-hour pitstop before the next day.





10

DISAGREEMENTS

June 24th, 2009

From Mississippi River (IL) to Sullivan (IN)

SHORTLY BEFORE OVERTAKING JANET CHRISTIANSEN for the first time (Dani's rival in the fight for the tittle at the RAAM), Daniela Genovesi wept once again. Not because she saw her opponent or because she felt that she would take the lead, nothing of the sort. Dani began to cry between the strokes of her pedals on a deserted Illinois road but still says she doesn't know why.

But it is easy to imagine why. Each day, a new problem presented itself and added to all the difficulties experienced until then. To enter Illinois, the state that would be the scene of both her over takings, Dani crossed a bridge over the Mississippi River, leaving the Missouri heat behind to find ... more heat. And a mosquito infested area.



These little enemies had been attacking her since the previous night in Missouri. In addition to the risk of being swallowed by a speeding cyclist who needs to open her mouth to breathe, it was necessary to avoid possible illnesses and the skin bruises they could cause with their bites - and this had an uncomfortable side effect. To protect herself, Dani smeared her body with mosquito repellent. As sunscreen was already a basic precaution, the result was cream on cream, attracting lots of dust along the way.

It was up to Alexandre, the husband, to rub Dani's body with moist wipes, which soon turned black with dirt. And, of course, it was necessary to have one more change of clothes. There were at least three every day, although the fabrics were very light and fast drying to avoid any discomfort that sweat, and seams could cause. Julia, her daughter, managed the changing of clothes and the laundry work. "I was my mother's fashion producer," she jokes.

Going for a bike ride requires basic fashion production - unless you want to make of the bike pathway a runway a catwalk. A lightweight T-shirt to withstand the sweat, comfortable shorts to help you cope with the hardness of the bike seat, a pair of sneakers that don't interfere with the bike pedals, and you are all set to bike around Lagoa Rodrigo de Freitas (Rio de Janeiro), a flat 7km stretch imposing no difficulties whatsoever or through the Ibirapuera Park (São Paulo) or in the streets of your city. However, if the chosen bike ride is considered more radical or intense (such is the case with biking up to the *Vista Chinesa* (a must if you wish to be called a cyclist in Rio de Janeiro), or Serra da Cantareira, in São Paulo, the



mandatory equipment increases, adding to the list helmets, protection glasses, gloves, plus all the gear necessary so you don't put yourself in harm's way nor do you endanger others.

At the RAAM, Dani used all this and more. Not out of vanity, on the contrary, she's the kind of cyclist who likes to ride wearing the bare necessities. But in addition to the rigorous safety requirements of the race, it was necessary to adapt to different road conditions. For this reason, a detailed survey was made still while in Brazil, and the motor home drawers were full of clothes and accessories for all occasions.

The desert was the first major test. Dani spent the day cycling in the heat, wearing light clothes. She couldn't afford to not wear glasses, as she would have preferred, because of the sand, and in the middle of the storm had to resort to a bandana tied over her mouth for the purpose of protection. At night, the temperature dropped sharply, and she covered her sun-weakened body with special jackets, capable of warming up without the fabric weighing in and disrupting her performance.

Other types of warm clothing were essential when going uphill and downhill through Colorado in cold and rainy weather: raincoats and windbreakers were quick-to-use shelters for sudden drops in the temperature. Fitting cycling shoes into wet pedals also required the use of neoprene boots, a kind of foot cover made of the material surfers wear to get into cold water.

These were all included and packed in the luggage. Insoles too, to help Dani withstand the pain in her feet that nearly knocked her out of the race. As well as all the bike components the team imagined might need replacement during the competition.



IT WAS ACTUALLY DANI'S REQUEST TO REPLACE A BIKE COMPONENT that led to one of the few disagreements among the team members. Shortly after passing through Illinois, RAAM's sharpest uphill stretch would begin. The atmosphere within the team was that of reaching the final stretch of the RAAM, and Dani asked for a radical change: during one of the stops, she asked mechanic How How to get her best pair of wheels (which were all ZIPP, the top brand for high quality wheels) from the time trial (TT) bike and asked installed them on her favorite model, the Tarmac. That would provide faster wheels on her lightest bike, which also had faster tubular wheels.

The problem: these tubular wheels were harder to remove and replace, and by doing so would affect the derailleur, which are not like normal bikes used leisurely, but instead is sophisticated and sensitive. A pair of ZIPP wheels bought in Brazil would come out for the trifle of R\$8,000 (about 1935,45 USD), and could no longer be used in another frame. More than a financial decision, it was a fundamental change in the race strategy. And this decision was made only between Dani and How How.

This was precisely what caused the disagreement. Márcio Rebecchi, the head of all equipment strategy, had not been consulted. Finding out that the change had already taken place, he questioned How How. The discussion ended with a harsh reply from the mechanic: "Are you the one who is going to be cycling? No, it's Dani! So just let it go!".



MÁRCIO REBECCHI DIDN'T COMPETE IN THE RAAM. But it was on a bicycle that he met Dani Genovesi, with whom he practiced mountain biking, and it was because of his advice on the use of the different equipment's, her working instrument that she would eventually invite him to join the team. "She gradually surrounded me and only invited me when she received my wife's ok," he jokes.

One of his activities as an entrepreneur, that of a representative of cycling equipment, ended up defining his main role, back in Brazil. It was Márcio who bought the Tarmac bike with money provided by the sponsor and made the initial contact with Specialized, acquiring both standby bikes. He was also responsible for buying the spare parts and components, praised by How How, who said that nothing was missing for the maintenance work.

"I often say that those who lack in talent, make up for it with equipment. As my greatest talent is not as a cyclist, I ended up investing in equipment, talking to people in this business and learning a lot", Márcio confesses, with humor. In addition to the bicycles, Dani's personal equipment, described at the beginning of this chapter, were all researched and acquired by him: "I specially determined and chose the bicycles and the clothes." And that was just the beginning.

"During the RAAM, I offered to do everything but navigation. I will get lost in Leblon (which is a small neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro), says Márcio, mentioning the neighborhood where he lives and which even the spectators of Manoel Carlos's soap operas seem to know like the palm of their hands. As the strategy of using the equipment suffered few changes during



the race, he had time to devote himself to other functions, especially as that of driver. Observing the opposing teams, he concluded that he had participated in two important points of the process: “Dani’s team was blatantly ahead of the others, in terms of both structure and performance of the members, especially Dani herself.”.

The disagreement with How How (the team member with whom he had the closest relationship with because they had already participated in adventure races together) could have ended with each one going his way, with tightened up faces. A few hours later, however, their mood would speak louder. “Maybe I didn’t even disagree,” says Márcio. “It was just because I wasn’t consulted. But soon we talked it over and sorted it out.”.

EVEN THOUGH MÁRCIO REBECCHI HAD BEEN IGNORED IN SUCH A MAJOR DECISION, he knew though that he would have a positive influence as Dani began to face the uphill climbing – at this point not as her equipment strategist but as a cyclist himself. “Dani is originally from the mountain bike world, and she likes to bike with what we call low rpm, a heavier style suitable for her powerful legs while in rough terrains,” he explains. “While still in Brazil, I had persuaded her that in a race like the RAAM she would have to adjust those gears during the many flat stretches she would have to cycle through.

Following that advice had already been proven important in the flat lands or light up and downhills of Kansas, Missouri and Illinois, and not just to improve speed averages. By doing



so, Dani went through the long stretches dealing with knee pains acquired earlier in the race.

The consequence: energy was saved, protecting her body on the course of those three states, making Daniela Genovesi stronger to cycle up the Appalachian Mountains, where we will find her in the next chapter, already leading the race, after two days of strong emotions with which we started this book.





Márcio Rebbeci advising Dani on her choice of equipment





After the disagreement: everything went back to normal!





11

PANIC

June 26th and 27th, 2009 **From Athens (OH) to Hanover (PA)**

A FAMOUS SPORT MAXIM SAYS THAT IT IS MORE DIFFICULT to stay on top than to get there³. Daniela Genovesi entered West Virginia on June 26th, right after having lived a defining moment in her life as an athlete: overtaking American Janet Christiansen and taking over the leadership of the RAAM. By the time she passed Ellenboro, a town of just under 400 inhabitants, where the 44th checkpoint was set and the first entering the state, her outlook had already changed completely. It was time to cross the line between arriving and staying on top, maintain the leadership in the race.

³ Said by Mia Hamm, an American retired professional soccer player, two-time Olympic gold medalist and two-time FIFA Women's World Cup champion.



Dani had signed up for the RAAM with the prospect of being the first South American to complete it; now, on the eve of crossing the finish line, she was the lead woman in the race. There was no way to avoid thinking about it when she arrived at Grafton, a slightly larger city, with its more than 5,000 inhabitants who are proud of the fact that right there, on May 10, 1908, Mother's Day was invented. Luckily, she had no time to visit the shrine dedicated to the day - remembering her two male sons who had remained in Brazil, one of them still a baby at the time, would definitely not have been a positive psychological stimulus for what still lay ahead.

West Virginia is known as the Mountain State because all its territory is in the Appalachian Mountains area - a range that runs from Canada to the Mississippi River. At Grafton, which is only 312 meters above sea level and was Dani's last stop on June 26th, the most radical ascent of the RAAM began. Dani would not reach the more than 3,000 meters she had climbed in Colorado, but would have to face a ferocious steep hill until Gormaniana, the next checkpoint, which she reached in the early hours of dawn on the 27th, right on the road that crosses the Appalachian Mountains.

Not that biking uphill was a problem, Dani is particularly fond of this kind of cycling. She guides groups of students or solo cyclists more than once a day to Vista China (the one steep climb in Rio that is a must for anyone who wants to be called a cyclist), a beautiful tourist spot overlooking the lagoon and the ocean and which has about half the elevation Dani was about to face. In addition, the conditions were imposing an extra load on her legs: she had been cycling for 15



hours when she began to climb. It grew dark, thundery and cold - the temperature would drop from 15 to 9 degrees Celsius along that patch of fog and wet ground.

In order to face all of this, Dani needed concentration. First, she asked the team to turn off the sound of the support car. Then she used a tactic that she was increasingly applying: Dani got off her bike and dozed off for 15 minutes.

DANI'S NAPPING INTERVALS were also planned by the team. Falling asleep while still on the bicycle is one of RAMM's biggest risks. Several athletes have already suffered serious accidents while on the bike, leading to their departure from the race because they did not resist, the lack of sleep accumulated due to the several sleepless nights.

It was Captain Rafael Campos who informed Dani how long she would have to doze off each day. "I saved up, tried not to waste all my dozing off hours or even half of them on the first stops," she says. "When sleepiness would hit me, I immediately signaled to pull over and said I wanted to sleep." It was then up to the team to find a quiet place. It was best to use the motor home's double bed, with the air conditioning on. If that was not possible, the solution would be to use the chair that always awaited her at the stops, with a washcloth holding the side of her head and a parasol on the other.

In line with the schedule, Dani managed to get through the 11 days of her participation in the RAAM without slumbering once on the bike: "I was terrified of falling, so I would



rather stop.”. And she didn’t waste much time. Her naps took a maximum of ten minutes, and ten more were devoted to whatever else she was needed, such as changing clothes and having a bite to eat.

Only the quality of sleep was hard to maintain. “Sometimes I would just black out, other times I couldn’t stop thinking about going back to the race, with my restless mind,” she recalls. With the build-up of sleepless nights, the need for a nap, or a break was increasing, yet there was no pre-determined time: “At first it was only at night, but over the days it came late in the morning, in the middle of the afternoon ... and then at night again. It was inevitable and unpredictable.”.

When she began to climb the Appalachian Mountains, Dani took every ten-minute nap she was entitled to. Between Gormanian and La Vale, already in Maryland, the state where the finish line was, she slept for the third and last time in the motor home.

When Dani reached the point chosen by the team, she only thought about taking care of her knees, which had suffered again with the uphill stretch. She asked the team doctor, João Felipe, for an intravenous anti-inflammatory and analgesic in order to help get rid of the pain. Showering at this point was not important. Dani took off her sweaty clothes and went to bed, but not before going through her stretching session with master Orlando Cani.

Amid all this rush, she bumped into a couple who had just joined the team, greeted them with warm hugs and said she needed to sleep because she was tired and in pain.



CARLOS ALBERTO MARTINS RIBEIRO IS THE CEO of *Cimento Tupi*, one of the largest cement companies in Brazil. His company's name was stamped on Dani Genovesi and her team's t-shirts at the RAAM and not by chance. Carlos Alberto was the main sponsor for the RAAM project and dream, providing funds and almost everything else, beginning with the purchase of the Specialized Tarmac bike that had just been parked by the road in the Appalachian Mountains. Carlos Alberto and his wife Maria happened to be the couple Dani had bumped into the previous night with no time nor strength to talk to, despite her longing and desire to tell them millions of things, right there at the motor home doorstep.

Dani and Carlos Alberto had met in 2001, when she was taking up road cycling and was experiencing an important professional change. Since graduating, Dani had only worked with calisthenic workouts. "The gyms in the 80s and 90s were just studios where the physical education teacher was often the owner himself," she recalls. One of these teachers, Almir (who taught at the gym above the Carinhoso nightclub, where her mother had taken her to work out for the first time), would end up being Dani's first guru, to the point of being chosen as godfather of her firstborn son Victor. "He was responsible for structuring my joints and muscles with his unique method. I worked with him for almost ten years."

By the end of that decade, Dani was beginning to worry about her professional prospects. That was when another very important person in her life came into the scene: taken by a friend to a spinning class, a sensation in the fitness centers at that time, her first teacher Glorinha de Moraes, the pioneer of



that sport modality in Rio. “Glorinha was to me my second mother in both my athletic and professional life. She is forever in my heart”, Dani emotionally says. “I was by her side during her last years when she was fighting for her life. Sadly, she passed away. It was a replay of what had happened to my dad.”.

Glorinha saw potential in a clumsy student, who at the end of the first class found that she had a full-on baby rash due to the effort on the bicycle. She arranged Dani with a replacement position at *Estação do Corpo*, one of the main workout centers in Rio at the time, where she worked as a coordinator. “I felt like a countrywoman arriving at the big city, but I got used with the lights and sound and went on”, recalls Dani. At the gym, in her class was Carlos Alberto Martins Ribeiro, who would eventually hire her for good.

Being in close contact for ten years working together, turned their relationship into a friendship. Carlos Alberto followed Dani’s early years in mountain biking competitions and saw a simple entertaining activity be transformed into a career choice, with great sacrifice for a family that lived solely by their jobs and couldn’t afford to invest in the best equipment. He thus became an occasional supporter.

The professional relationship further strengthened when Dani set up a sports consulting company with her friend, Giselle. Carlos Alberto liked the idea of offering healthy living options to his employees and was the first to sign up. *Cimento Tupi* was company’s first customer, which works to this day without loss.

In 2009, the student and client invited Dani on an unforgettable trip with a group of friends: they witnessed one of



Lance Armstrong's seven victories in the Tour de France and made their way to Santiago di Compostela by bicycle, led by Dani. In the end, they signed a sponsorship commitment for participation in the RAAM. "My body was bouncing inside, I hardly slept that night, I couldn't seem to believe it, but it was true!" She recalls, still enthusiastic today. "Carlos Alberto won the RAAM with me."

He knew Dani's temper quite well and knew there would be a better time to hug her. At that moment, the entrepreneur Carlos Alberto Martins Ribeiro was just another member of a kind of parallel team, made up of friends and collaborators who could not participate in the entire race, were not officially registered, but showed up to offer support at times when they could get rid of other professional obligations.

THE SPONSOR WAS PRESENT ON THE RACE'S START LINE, offering out of his generosity to pay for the team's last dinner at a nice Oceanside restaurant, with an uplifting speech. "He said he trusted Dani and knew she wouldn't make a mistake," recalls leader Alexandre Abreu, an old acquaintance of Carlos Alberto. "Then he looked into my eyes and said if something went wrong it would be our fault but meaning it would be mine - good thing I knew him well!"

Abreu had in his family another member of the parallel team. His wife, Ana, who was mentioned before, could only help before the start of the race, taking care of the supplies. During the race, film producer Laura Grant and businessman



Alberto Ribeiro eventually added a third car to the convoy. She was filming the documentary “Dani Genovesi, a challenge of strength and endurance”, already edited and released; and he, the athlete’s greatest supporter and responsible for the logistics that allowed the formation of the structure, recorded the crossing in photos. The two were always ready to help, pick up team members on the way, provide services that the back-up or support car and motor home couldn’t afford (such as picking up Crico and Roberta at Wichita’s airport) and provide moral support, even with a simple sign held out at night by the road.

Reporters Cesar Augusto and Luciana de Michellis, who covered the race for TV Globo’s Spectacular Sports show, also got into the mood. Due to their official duties and limitations determined by the regulations of the RAAM, they could not effectively be part of the team, but they ended up, like everyone else, getting emotionally involved.

DANI ARRIVED IN LA VALE A LATER THAN 8 AM ON THE MORNING OF JUNE 27TH. On her way to Hancock, a small town of less than 1,800 inhabitants, stuck in the narrowest part of Maryland where the next checkpoint was, a sequence of five uphill climbs of 350 meters with up to 8% inclination awaited. Those climbs over the last few miles are responsible for a good number of withdrawers in the history of the race.

Seeing her team, her friends and family making such a big noise on the roof of the motor home, already in the mood for



the arrival, she was bothered and asked for silence. She felt out of focus, without rhythm. Realizing that the navigation in this section was simple, she decided to cycle alone. She enjoyed the sunny day for about 40 or 50 kilometers of solitude, watching deer cross the road, and was soon hoping that the team would reach her.

The reassuring message came from Crico: the climb, for an athlete like her, was no big deal. And as everything that goes up must come down, soon a downhill led her to Hancock, where she stopped for lunch and rest for 45 minutes. The worst was over, at least as the geography of the RAAM goes.

DANI HAS UNDERGONE SURGERY ON HER LEFT KNEE. Tearing of the meniscus and ligament, common injuries to those who have spent their lives practicing impact sports like her. But surprisingly, her knee had behaved well so far. The pain in her knees that had worried her at one specific pint in the race was a much more prosaic one, caused by hyperflexion on a trip to a makeshift bathroom. At this point, reaching the end of the race, in a house condominium between Hancock and Rouzer-ville checkpoints, with easy up and downhills which required a lot of shifting, the alarm went off.

There were less than 180 miles (less than 290 kilometers) to the finish line and, for the first time since the start, Dani seriously considered the possibility of not reaching the finish line. She cried again, this time mixing worry and pain. “I cycled slowly, and my knee hurt,” she recalls. “I cycled fast and



my knee hurt too. So, since the option was hurting either way, I opted for the fast cycling.”.

Upon arrival at Rouzerville, where a detour from the state of Pennsylvania began, she smiled at the team, which was surprised by her good humor. But soon asked to rest 15 minutes in the chair and to be left alone and quiet. Beyond her knee, she complained about the groin blisters that had been bothering her since the Arizona desert. Doctor João Felipe examined her: her general medical condition was almost like that of a normal person at rest.

Dani got back on the road, mentally calculating how long it would take to reach the finish line pushing the bike. And only managed to keep the knee pain hidden until Hanover, the fiftieth of the 53 RAAM checkpoints and the last of that day. In the town of less than 15,000 inhabitants, named after the capital of Lower Saxony, the team forced her to stop and rest for four hours.

DANI'S ADVANTAGE OVER HER OPPONENT IN SECOND PLACE was comfortable. The team had heard that Janet Christiansen had stopped to rest between checkpoints 45 and 49. To achieve the historical achievement of winning the RAAM as a newcomer, Dani Genovesi just needed to maintain her rhythm. Her team was there waiting for her outside the motor home. When she woke up from her last rest on the crossing, Dani had another stretching session with Master Orlando Cani, got on her bike, and cycled as if her left knee had never hurt before.



“At first it even creaked a little, but just for a while and then after warming up, it went away,” she jokes. “I think what I really needed was to get some rest.”. This way, Dani’s biggest scare, which she carried with during the more than 11 days and 4,800 kilometers, was over. The worst of it all was that it had made her believe that she would not be able to cover the few miles left to reach the end, stayed behind. The rest of the way was a celebration of the long journey.





Carlos Alberto Ribeiro: student, friend, supporter and sponsor.



Knee pain panic!





The waiting.



Everyone waiting, openminded and openhearted for Dani.



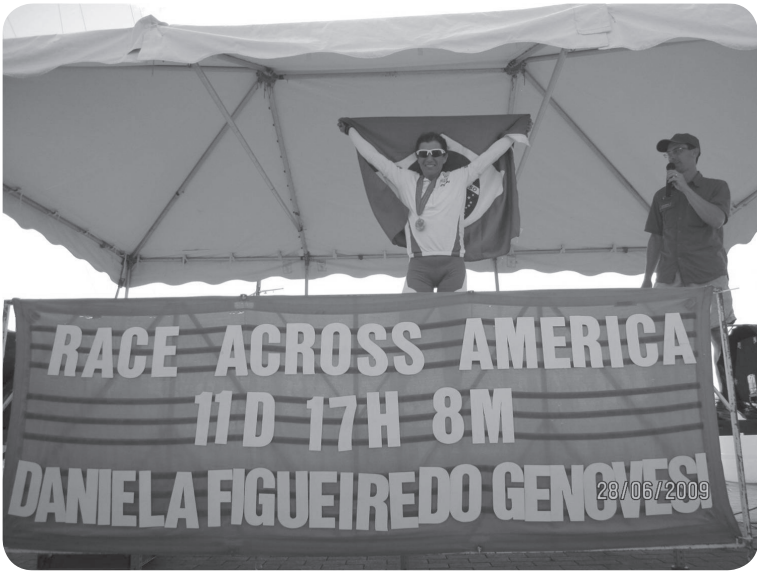


Everyone thrilled and celebrating!



“This victory is OURS, Dani!” – a hug from your friend, student, supporter and sponsor. (Carlos Alberto Ribeiro)





Dani pictured at the podium.



The team joins Dani at the podium.





12 VICTOR

June 28th, 2009

From Mount Airy (MD) to Annapolis (MD)

DO YOU REMEMBER HOW YOU WOKE UP on the day of your SAT results? Or maybe on the morning of your wedding? Dani Genovesi did not have this privilege on this given date of the race for she was cycling when the clock struck midnight turning June 27th into June 28th, the Sunday when she would complete the RAAM, cycling across Hanover, Pennsylvania, and Mount Airy, the next-to-last checkpoint already in the state of Maryland, the last on her route crossing.

In Odenton (MD), the second to last checkpoint, the team took advantage of checkpoint number 52 to pay the punishments accumulated along the way. There were 30 minutes to deduct. And it turned out that the little town of 20,000 inhabitants had the perfect tourist attraction for the team.



A bike shop turned into a museum by its owner, who likes to buy rarities like a bike made from bamboo and the ones RAAM champions used in the race (Dani received a good offer for one of her own bikes, but he bravely resisted). And she had a kick out of watching seven of her teammates pedaling a weird device, where everyone is arranged in a circle, facing the center, and only one person controls the steering.

Less than 90 kilometers from the arrival of a 4,800-kilometer race, a cyclist and her team were having fun – cycling.

IT WAS 8 AM ON A SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 28TH, 2009, when the “Theme of Victory”, a song by maestro Eduardo Souto Neto who has already touched many hearts and has been played in a number of Formula 01 Brazilian victories, started playing at a gas station in Annapolis, the capital of the American state of Maryland. But this time, the “anthem”, as we call it, the famous “pam-pam-pam”, was for the Brazilian woman and champion on wheels (in this case, two): Dani Genovesi. This was Checkpoint 52, the next to last of the Race Across America. Time was no longer counted, and from there on, the cyclists were escorted for four miles, just over six kilometers, to the finish line.

Dani got off her bike still focused on the race, as if she had stopped at a checkpoint in the desert, on the mountains, on the hot plains, on the roads between the corn and wheat fields she had faced for the past 11 days. She passed her teammates without realizing that among those happy people who honked



and threw confetti and ribbons, there was a different face. She was then told that her firstborn son had come from Brazil and was there to embrace her.

Victor Figueiredo Genovesi was born on March 11, 1991, the result of an unexpected pregnancy, as would happen again with his two siblings. He came into the world at a time when his mother, Daniela, had begun to follow in his fathers' steps, as a jiu-jitsu fighter. The dedication required in his early years would lead Dani to take a break from her career: Victor was born with a congenital condition that prevented him from having normal bowel functions. Corrective surgery could only be done when he was ten months old. During this time, doctors always left him with a sort of manual drainage which Dani had to deal with. "There was no other way. I would wash my hands with alcohol, wipe my finger to clean him up, and then disinfect the finger I had just used," recalls his mother, who today sees the situation more lightly. "And we spent a fortune with diapers!"

Victor fully recovered after surgery. And he didn't have to grow up too much before understanding that Dani would not settle and stay put. From an early age, he became accustomed to accompanying her in competitions - long before cycling, the Jiu-Jitsu one, which he discovered that genetics had left its trace. A student of his father since the age of three, he started competing early and became a junior world champion. And, on the eve of his graduation in economics (Dani never allowed her son to drop out of school because of sports) he already decided which career he wants to pursue. Victor would only trade the calculator over the mats if he failed in supporting himself as an athlete.



Dani and Victor's hug at the gas station thrilled the crew. "The idea was to be a surprise, we didn't want to take her focus from the race," the son recalls. "I arrived without knowing the fright and panic she had been through. I was just watching the race over the internet from Brazil, and occasionally talking on the phone with my father and sister." The youngest, Antonio, was unable to join the family because he still didn't have an American visa. He waited back home with his grandmother, not fully understanding the tremendous meaning of his mother's achievement.

SHORTLY AFTER THE HUG, DANI GENOVESI REACHED the Annapolis pier. With 11 days, 17 hours and 8 minutes, she became the first Latin American woman to complete the Race Across America and the ninth newcomer to win the race. By the time she crossed the finish line, the only competitor remaining in the women's solo race, American Janet Christiansen, was a hundred miles away - 160 kilometers from arrival at checkpoint 50.

The champion received awards, hugs and kisses, gave interviews and went to do what she lacked for the last 12 days: sleeping all afternoon. Finally, she could rest her body and mind. The feeling of that moment fits into a simple and powerful phrase, said among the many cafes in which she told her story and perfect for ending her book on the crossing: "Reaching the finish line answers all questions as to why."





Victor's surprise at the finish line.



Family celebration!





Acknowledgment of achievement ... exhausted but happy.



Epilogue

September 2017, after conquering the long-awaited, dreaded and harsh Race Around Austria (RAA), I opened the archive of this book and reread it; maybe I was going through one of those crisis of the 50s, looking for goals for the next year ... in that moment of thinking about life, a very productive season of challenges and Ultra's had just ended, having achieved good results and with great chances of winning the third world title.

I could become, for the third time, the world champion of ultra-distance cycling. My list of world-challenging ultras was coming to an end. Was it then time to stop? I had already completed some of the most desired and challenging competitions/crossings: United States (RAAM), Italy (Dolomitica Ultracycling and Race Across Italy), Ireland (Race Around Ireland) and now Austria! I started experiencing that feeling of emptiness, present after great victories, and I know how difficult it is to deal with this it. When we lose, soon there is no room for anything else: we identify where we went wrong, why we lost, see how to improve, train and train. Returning to a routine post-defeat is much easier than after winning maybe because you immediately have a new goal.

I was afraid that everything that happened to me between 2011 and 2012 would repeat itself (my silent depression), so I read this book swallowing the letters, the words, remembering every minute, every stage of the RAAM, doing a self-analysis of all my life after this great victory.



When suddenly a spark ignited inside of me... Could I complete the RAAM 10 years later, better than I did in 2009? Well, well, I thought to myself, Daniela, wake up! Before wanting to complete the RAAM in a better time than before, you must DO the RAAM again, to survive, complete the crossing. Since then, that desire or rather the courage to face this very hard crossing again had never arisen within me.

I was afraid at first, then doubtful, then courageous and willing to try; everything I felt in 2008 (when I decided to face this challenge). I will have many obstacles, but we will identify them and find the solutions, it was how it was done in 2009, why would it be different now? After all, I'm much better at ultras than 10 years ago, even though I have the weight of my age, I feel more experienced, more prepared. That was on a Sunday afternoon. I slept restlessly; I didn't say anything about my new yearnings to my family (they're tired of seeing me suffer so much in ultras). I kept that will within so I could mature the idea without much interference, even if it is interference from people who love me and want what is best for me. Finally, I managed to fall asleep.

On the following day, I went to work. I arrived for the first class at 6:15 am (at this time, on a Monday, one can't expect much talk). Monday mornings are days in which body and mind are adjusting to the routine of the week. I had been reading a book all Sunday afternoon, my head was pounding with a million thoughts ... it was hard to concentrate on work, I forgot the sequence of the exercises. Something different was happening inside of me. I forced myself to focus on what I was doing when, already at the end of the class, Alessandro (my



student) asked me, “Dani, don’t you think about doing the RAAM again?” This question sounded like an alarm clock, I said: “Wow! I always think about it but I’m afraid something might go wrong in 2009 everything went so well ... will I be that lucky again?”. We continued with the class, and I went on with my day with a “kind of thrill on my nerved”, as we say in Portuguese (*pulga atrás da orelha*⁴) ... and by the end of the day, that thrill, that feeling only got stronger.

That afternoon I finished reading the book, and I thought: almost 10 years have passed, nonetheless I still feel good, enjoying cycling, training, competing. Why retire? Just because of a number 5 (five) followed by a 0 (zero)?

Once again, the story and thoughts of 2009 after the RAAM victory repeated inside my head: “Dani, now it’s time to stop, you need to rest”, “You’ve won it all, it is best to stop while you are at the top” ... and so it goes ... Stop. Stopping, at any time, represents change, and I am not ready to change, I don’t want to change! I love what I do, winning or losing, I am motivated to seek new challenges and strength to reach my goals and overcome the obstacles ahead. And most importantly: I love my daily life, I am happy as I am, I love my family, my children, dear friends around ... I don’t want to change! At least, not yet.

Rereading this story a few years later helped me. I was going through a moment of doubt and uncertainty. Reading made me think of going through all of it again, of moving on forward.

⁴ This expression would literally translate into a “flea behind one’s ears”, meaning a nagging sensation and/or feeling.



It motivated me to challenge myself once again, to face the biggest of all the ultramarathons, the greatest cycling race, the Race Across America. Dani Genovesi at fifty against Dani Genovesi of 2009. The “Challenge bug” had me good and I began to dream again of being in the RAAM.

I would have to be very cautious; so, it could not be the year after the Tour of Austria. I would need a super high energy, and more time for preparation. Both physical and psychological. I needed some time to convince and get the family backing me up ... Could I really finish the race once again? Will I be able to cycle through the 4,800km all over the US? I’m more experienced, more competitive in ultras, but what about the age gained during these past 10 years? And the money to cover the costs? USA is double the amount needed for Ireland and/or Austria, and I have no sponsors... but then again, I had no sponsors for either the Tour of Ireland or for the Tour of Austria. I raised funds for my two world titles, with the help of my team, friends, and students. The famous “passing the hat” or, nowadays, crowd funding could be helpful. I don’t make a living from cycling; I survive with my work. The costs of these ultras are very high and thus out of my standards, I know that. But I always have faith, I believe we will, my team and I, succeed! That’s it. It was enough to embrace this new fight.

Let’s go to war. RAAM 2019, here we come!

Wow, even at the age of 50, competing since the age of 15 ... I still surprise myself with my competitive nature.

Fact. Dani Genovesi is extremely competitive.



In putting together my own story, I discovered many things, good and bad about myself. But just by discovering, identifying, I'm happy. I feel that I am evolving, keeping the wheels turning. This enchants me on the bike: putting together a perfect wheel and tires takes a lot of work, but once well assembled, just let it spin and guide it in the direction you wish to go.

Sometimes we need to make a few adjustments here and there, but if your wheel has been well assembled, you can rest assured that it will overcome all barriers that arise and will take you to places you never imagined you could reach.

The year of 2011 was an unforgettable one in my life. After winning the first world title and being able to rack up three major titles in the world circuit in a single season (World Cup, 24H World Championship and 24H Challenge USA), I don't know why, I ended up in a depression crisis. I was happy with the titles but disappointed with myself. It was a year during which I made wrong choices and bad mistakes. I overstated the number of ultras events, overestimated myself, and at my last race of the 2011 season, with a title already secured, I could not complete the Hoodoo 500 (an 800km race in the region of Nevada). I had to withdraw. The cause: severe anemia. I was weak enough to pass out while still on the bike. It was hard to leave and even harder to get treated. This anemia resulted in a deep silent depression.

I am not referring to the type of depression where one will stay at home, without the will to produce something... the sports, the biking always helped me in this sense. My safe harbor, motivated or not, I will ride my bike and go out to train



or just to bike leisurely, it may be considered by some to be an escape, it may even be so, but it always makes things right at least, a little better. Cycling was and always will be, my best and most efficient medication. I need to keep moving.

Alexandre, seeing me discouraged, aimless, as he might never have seen, took me to accompany him on a business trip to Australia. We went. I needed to open my mind, look at my life from the outside. While Alexandre taught his classes, I went biking alone, exploring. During these bike rides, I changed my energy, recovered the urge to grasp a mighty challenge, wanting to get there again, my usual eagerness to fight was back! I opened the computer, set up a calendar, wanted to get that Bi-champion title. It didn't matter that it was without sponsorship; let's set the goal and look for solutions. I was motivated again. Goals to overcome along with new and challenging races to conquer.

The man I love, my husband, pulled me out of a dark and difficult place. He put me together again, rebuilding my confidence. He might not even know that. He will now have to read this epilogue. In 2009 at the RAAM, in the desert after the sandstorm was no different. We married too young, I got all my world titles from Jiu-Jitsu and cycling after our marriage and already with kids. Without the support and presence of my husband, I am convinced that none of this would have been possible or conquered. My family multiplies my strength.

There were other moments I lived through during the US crossing that are still with me today and have taught me a great deal... in 2008, Claudio Clarindo had already noticed



and warned me: “Dani you need to control your competitiveness in ultras because it might lead to failure and not to the extra strength you need to win. Before being competitive you have to think about surviving.” I’ll never forget this day, this conversation, these words, these teachings ... Clarindo, wherever you are, know that your passage through my life was extremely valuable.

Being competitive has always been part of my life. I’ve been competitive in many ways, in all of the sports I’ve practiced: when I was 15 years old and into racing, young and bursting with energy, besides always wanting to be better, my desire was always to be the best in all training sessions, not just on competition days. Although I didn’t understand much at the time, I would line up on Célio de Barros stadium tracks and, in the short and intense running series I never wanted to come last. I wouldn’t make it at first, but halfway to the end, I would take the lead. Then, when pursuing bodyboarding, the amount of competitiveness was even worse. Because I would be constantly tense, it would disrupt my performance and I would be out of tune with the sea, causing my performance to falter. That was when I met Master Orlando Cani and started Yoga (and I continue to this day). In Jiu-Jitsu dealing with my competitiveness was the most difficult of all modalities. Even as an adult, as a Physical Education teacher and understanding everything that happens to us (athletes), already married, with children, practicing yoga, with experience in Jiu-Jitsu (this occurred until I was a black belt), I would develop a fever on the eve of championships (as occurred in bodyboard tournaments), and I would become tense and I would lock myself at home with my husband and children.



Fighting all my demons and winning the championship, the fight, getting ahead, be at the top of the podium, getting where I wanted ... is a maximum ecstasy! No amount of money can be paid for achieving this feeling.

This feeling is replicated to this day, either in an ultra or trying to beat my own time up the Emperor's Table, a lookout just about 400m passing *Vista Chinesa*, and where I always train.

In cycling, competitiveness came in the best form of all the sports I practiced. In marathons and ultramarathon cycling, there is always alignment (as there was in athletics), but I'm not at sea fighting to stay above the water or asking Neptune to send me that good wave; I'm not in that "boiling state of mind" that happens while on the fighting mats, with the opponent wanting to rip my neck off; I am on the road, on the trail, on the mountain, or in the desert; I am free. The feeling of freedom that the bike provides is unique, although I am still suffering from anxiety on the eve of races. Yoga, breathing and other tricks are always necessary and already part of a ritual I have created, and which always helps me get through my anxiety. Sleeping well on the eve of a race is still complicated, but I'm not as worried and consumed with it as before, I don't get sick anymore. Because I know that once on the bike, after a few hours of cycling, I feel I can do everything, I get stronger. I can have fun, I can be competitive, I can get to know places and people, learn so many things, I can just go on ... go on my own, go far away, go wherever I want, go where I never imagined going before. And if I have the courage and strength, I will continue beyond the horizon.



The bicycle makes the wheel of my life remain in constant movement. My wish is that you may assemble your own wheels and make your own life spin. Go ahead, follow through, go beyond your expectations. This might bring you to both obstacles and surprises you never envisioned before. But it is far better to have obstacles, to live through them, to overcome them or not, than to stand still without your wheel, without your life in motion.

Assemble your wheel and just go on forward. It is all you need for living.

Dani Genovesi



Testimonials

Legend has it that at birth, during delivery, the sound system of the maternity unit where Dani was born, loudly conveyed a speech by Sir Winston Churchill:

“Never give in, never give in, never, never, never... in nothing, great or small, large or petty - never give in!”

Daniela Genovesi born Figueiredo, today Dani! Dani Woman
Dani Mother
Dani Athlete Our Dani

An example of courage, dedication, and loyalty to her family, friends and sports.

The willpower, the power of concentration, her gumption in winning seem to erase her tiredness, her pain, while producing more and more adrenaline, a fuel Dani can manage and control, fundamental factors that make her a great champion.

A champion in surfing, Hawaiian canoeing, cycling, jiu-jitsu, and in life!

On the bike, I had the pleasure of watching her take off in Oceanside, California to Annapolis, Maryland in one of the toughest races of the sport, the Race Across America (RAAM). There are 4,800 km worth of uphill stretches, descents, sun, rain, heat, cold, high altitudes - adversities only surpassed by great athletes.



Dani won!

Dani's team won!

If I remember correctly, Dani arrived 11 hours ahead of the runner-up, after 11 days, 17 hours and 41 minutes.

Even after crossing the finish line, she was still focused, as if the competition was not over... until "she collapsed". She collapsed upon seeing her children, gently brought by a friend. One of the few surprises that made her "lose her way".

Dani Mother spoke louder!

After the RAAM, 10 years ago, there have been more and more victories, including 3 world titles in Europe.

Dani, I'm happy and proud to have participated in a little of everything you've ever done in cycling.

This year, a decade later, it was great to know that you will be competing in RAAM again.

Go Dani, Go! Never give in! Never!

Carlos Alberto Ribeiro



Dani Genovesi

I had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know Dani long before she was a World Cycling Champion. Throughout these 25 years of friendship, I could attest that she is certainly part of a select group of exceptional people.



When I define her as exceptional, I am referring not only to the various titles won in cycling, but mainly to the conciliation of success in different areas of her life. Starting with family, where in partnership with Gigi, she raised her children and built a beautiful family. Going through Dani's professional career, where with her charisma, from spinning classes where this cycling story began to private personal training times, she built a loyal group of students. Culminating in this incredible sporting success story, that goes from athletics, body board, jiu-jitsu to cycling.

Dani is a rare example of a combination of talent, determination, strength and willpower, transforming this woman of small stature into a giant.

I want to continue to have the pleasure of following the challenges and achievements of this exceptional person, who reconciling the roles of wife, mother, teacher and athlete only inspires us and serves as an example.

Success, Dani!!!!!!

Gilberto Sayão



Dani is a born athlete who has excelled in all the sports she has practiced throughout her life, despite covering totally different modalities.

She was Brazilian bodyboard champion, world jiu-jitsu champion and road cycling ultramarathon world champion, having won the Race Across America (RAAM), one of the toughest races in the world.



I had the privilege of being part of her support team at the RAAM in 2009 and closely followed the difficulty of that competition. Impossible to reach so high without talent, discipline, dedication and especially a strong mental force.

The cool thing is that behind a spectacular athlete, whose titles and achievements speak for themselves, lies a sweet person, with a giant heart, irrefutable character and who, even having to devote many hours a day to training, continues to be a successful professional, friend for all hours, wife and mother who knew how to build a wonderful family.

That's why Dani is one of the most admirable person I have ever met in my entire life.

Christiano Fonseca (Crico)



Warrior. This is the word that sums up Super Dani Genovesi. In fact, I could never think of Dani as “just” Dani. It never made sense to think of her without an augmentative or one of her features: Super Dani, Big Dani, Warrior Dani. Dani is to me the tallest shorty I’ve ever met. With our similar mental characteristics within the sports arena, our relationship has always been natural, automatic, easy to interpret what each other meant. Decisive, focused, excited about her goals and a family member, a successful businesswoman and a person who motivates and inspires everyone who knows her. Dani adds value to life, to everything and to everyone. Impressive also as she always overcomes obstacles, injuries, disappointments at an impressive speed ALWAYS coming back stronger. I stopped worrying about a broken arm, a busy schedule, and occasional (very punctual) failures in running the training schedule, because she always bounces



back to the top of the podium! ALWAYS! Keep flying high, Dani!
“Count on me”. Thanks Dani!

Hugo Prado Neto



Attending the 2009 RAAM was one of the most amazing experiences of my life.

Dani was a friend we had known for about 5 years and we had already participated in adventure racing together. I was her student, in fact I am her eternal student, I was aware of her ability, was almost sure she would complete that race, but witnessing it all live was so exciting. It is a very hard and intense race. It's almost 2 weeks without proper sleep, almost extreme exertion and pain everywhere.

What I found most amazing was the way she behaved in the face of all the difficulties, always very positive. But when things get tight, she is very concentrated and focused.

Watching her compete is a true lesson in what it is like to know about your body and its limits.

This year, 10 years after such an achievement, Dani wants to take on the RAAM once again and, no doubt, Crico and I will be there again.

Roberta Fonseca



I had read about the RAAM and was impressed. To my surprise, a short time later, Dani revealed her intention to participate.

Very excited, I tried to get to know the route in detail, because at the time, we did not have the technological resources



we have today. Each change of direction on the course has been observed and recorded in the Race Book. It was hard to get everything on the GPS, but it was worth the work. We had a few navigational errors, all of which were resolved in order to minimize Dani's loss of time and effort. After all, for those who cycle 400k a day, a small mistake can put everything to waste.

I also have a beautiful memory of when we shared our entire navigation spreadsheet with the team of the late Claudio Clarindo.

This race was not just the accomplishment of planning, it required constant adaptations. Team intermingling, application of resources and especially the discovery of everyone's limits, especially that of Dani, who has further expanded her limit.

Maybe she has no limit.

Alexandre Abreu



Dani is an athlete and, as all other professionals who live from the sport, does not have an easy life. It requires time, determination, physical and mental effort. You must wake up at dawn, face sun, wind, rain, cold. Moodiness, PMS, toothache, whole body pain. Falls every now and again, which may lead to breaking some bones. Dani is not only just a biker. She is a beast on body board, jiu-jitsu, Pilates. Has children, a husband, a mother and a dog. She practices yoga and meditation. She competed in the RAAM when no one knew what it was about and when they found out, called her crazy. Dani must make ends meet by the end of each month, she must be



a businesswoman, a manager, a teacher, a speaker. But what makes Dani's so unique, what makes us like her so much goes beyond all these qualities. It's her smile at the end of the day, it's her genuine willingness to help others, it's her professionalism, her drive, her competitiveness, the empathy, and a lot of love in her heart. It's all that makes her so special. Dani is someone who excels in everything she does, always has a funny thing to say, words of encouragement and a great affection for all who are fortunate to have her as a friend and as a professional. For all this we say that Dani is made of a different material from ours.

XXX

In 2011, after completing a 24-hour victorious competition in Italy, with cold, uphill's, competing fiercely with her rival, a normal being would need a few days of recovery. At the end of the race, I hoped that Dani would choose to enjoy the glory of victory and rest. That's why I always tell the story that surprises me to this today.

Less than a day after the end of the competition, while in Venice, we spotted a gondola. As a normal person and still exhausted from being part of the support team, I looked at that bucolic scene and thought - it would be nice and relaxing to take a ride. I looked at Dani, who was enjoying the same landscape. And for seconds I thought about proposing a ride. Only she beat me to it: she looks at the gondolier and commented, "How cool, I would love to try rowing in such a gondola!".

Ana Abreu



I was introduced to Dani by my sister Roberta and my brother-in-law Crico who always spoke of her as a great athlete, warrior and a person who spared no effort to overcome sporting challenges and achieve performances comparable to those of men, even with small physical dimensions.

As an exercise and sports physician, I had the opportunity to do Dani's first spirometry assessment in 2008 and was really impressed by the results obtained, especially in the VO2 max obtained while cycling at the clinic with high capacity in watts. The results were exceptional!

The following year, she invited me to join the team that would be part of the support group during the Race Across America. I asked her for some time to think about it because it also involved a physical and mental challenge for me as well since it was a 12-day non-stop 5,000km competition. Further, I would hold a medical responsibility for getting Dani to the finish line as well as her entire team. After a few weeks and much reading about the difficulties that would arise in the competition, I responded positively to the invitation.

Dani, you showed me that results are achieved with confidence and unity. And this can only be achieved with perseverance, with faith, with gumption, with commitment and surrender, with believing that it will work, with the determination to sleep and wake up thinking of your goal, overcoming physical suffering, facing eye to eye everyone involved, with hugs and a lot of joy and good humor.

You and your sporting challenges motivate and inspire many people to pursue a better lifestyle, to be healthier and to overcome adversity.



And you do it all very naturally, lightly and with a lot of laughs!

It was a pleasure to meet you and be part of this chapter of your success story.

Thank you so much for trusting me and insisting until the end!

“Perseverance is the mother of good luck.” - Miguel de Cervantes

Kisses and good luck always!

Joao Felipe Franca



What is the meaning of Dani Genovesi?

I have known her for at least 20 years. We met at the *Estação do Corpo* gym academy. I was a spinning bike mechanic, she pedaled very hard on the bikes, until one day she discovered what it was like to cycle outdoors.

That is the reason for which we see so many cyclists on the streets these days.

Soon I made her buy a bike, and, evidently, a Mountain Bike.

She participated in her first Mountain Bike race and saw that it was a fantastic world! That was the beginning of a great friendship, she started a company, we got several students to start biking. We have such a true friendship that she even helped me through college so I could achieve my Physical Education degree.

Soon our journey began: many Mountain Bike races - 12hrs, Iron Biker and the famous Big Biker. We started



to excel providing support during long-term races, extreme events like adventure racing and other multi-sports, and soon we were participating in the Ecoemotion Pro, a 5-day race with all sorts of modalities: Running, MTB, Rowing and more.

I soon realized we would go far and beyond.

The first big challenge was the 800k biking race in São Paulo. That was tough, we travelled with a very simple car, with no AC and carrying three other people with us. Nevertheless, we not only finished the race, we won! There it was, the spark we needed to open our paths for Ultras, from there we tried to classify in the 24h competition in Fortaleza (Ceará, Brazil). We were not the most likely to win, nonetheless, Dani was the first South American to qualify for the RAAM.

From that point, an intense training program took place. Things became quite serious... We were a large in number team. We couldn't be sure of how long Dani was going to take to finish so we decided to rehearse what it would be like. The support team working together. While one group would follow her, the other group would accompany her from a designated point. She went through a heavy load of training.

Then we were ready and left to the US to complete the RAAM, a tough and exhaustive race, and she won! 11days and 18hrs.

By winning the race Dani realized that the sky has no limits. We immediately signed her in the Federation of Ultra cyclists. We aimed for the world title and we already have 3 or 4 today.

And we became experts in 24hrs races and in crossing, but we were short in terms of budget, an important factor.



Florida, Italy, Ireland and Austria...

These were competitions that varied between 600, 800km, reaching up to 2800km, and Dani was constantly evolving. I saw this improvement when she started training using a device to measure watts, and she was also decreasing her recovery time during. As Dani says, before participating in any competition, she will always ask me if I am able to go.

And now, 10 years later, we are signing up for the RAAM once again.

Mauricio Lacerda (Howhow)



When I think of Dani, two words come to mind: perseverance and focus. In order to become a complete athlete, one that accepts the challenge of completing strenuous races with the quality and precision she presents, is only possible because she has her body and mind under full control. The discipline she devotes to training for any competition is only less surprising than her good humor. After all, she will shed blood and sweat, but always with great joy.

Alessandro Horta



Willing to get back to biking, I was told about Dani Genovesi being the best coach I could possibly find. Unsuspectingly, without any warning, I went to her studio, where I noticed the lack of wall space due all the trophies in display. Dani greeted me with a welcoming smile, and, like magic, I was quickly doing the hardest training of my entire life.



Training with Dani is a privilege! Her passion for sports is contagious, she shares strength, joy and trust. She is profoundly generous and has personality unlike any other person, touching deeply down in our souls. Dani takes us “to infinity and beyond!!!”, just like Buzz Lightyear. She’s not from this world ... and I bet I will still see her as a superhero movie character !!!!

Fabrizzia Telles



I already knew all the stories of her exploits. They seemed to me stories of superheroes, the ones you listen to and think they are exaggerating, it just can't be.

A great friend, who cycled a lot, needed one person to complete the adventure racing team and someone referred Dani. Still a little doubtful, my friend decided to do a practice run to see if she would pass the “test”. He chose the ascent of *Sumaré*, which is one of the longest in Rio de Janeiro. To sum up, when he was still $\frac{3}{4}$ of reaching the end, Dani had already gone to the top and back so they could go the rest of the way together. I was part of the support team for this adventure race, which was almost a weeklong and EVERY time the team got to the support, she was smiling always smiling and had had time to spare.

Years later my carbon frame broke down near a race and even though I was a regular cyclist, I really wanted to perform well. As I was without a bike to train, some friends suggested going to train on a Girus Bike with Dani until the new frame arrived. I made the best time of my life and since then I am



there learning in gigantic, almost daily doses, to challenge our limits in every way.

After years of training all sorts of people for all sorts of challenges, from those starting out in the sport as well as those well-seasoned, it's amazing to see new challenges and the drive with which Dani dedicates herself to them. It continues to inspire everyone around her. So now that I know her both as an athlete and as a coach, I can assure you that she is IN FACT a superhero.

Fernando Moyna



Talking about Dani is inspiring! I admire her as a person and as a professional! A huge heart, radiant energy, pure soul that wherever she goes, she makes everyone happy! A woman of gumption, determination, values and faith! I am very proud to be trained by her as she is an example I both follow and respect! A person enlightened and blessed by God!

Kitty Mayer



This amazing small yet very tall person has covered miles and miles of ultra-distances.

I don't know anyone with thicker skin than Daniela Genovesi. There is no bad weather with this "legend" of the ultra-cycling world.

I was invited to complete the support team and accompany Dani on this challenge in 2014. It was all very straightforward, as in you will be the fourth person to complete the team.



Here we come Dolomitica: cycling ultramarathon!

It was me and the team: my first experience.

3 days in a car, where intimacy had to be forced, basically. That was my first ultra!!

We won the race and formed a team, thus creating an ultra-friendship, regardless of the distance.

Mission focused and enjoying it with Dani, who is always an inspiration.

Let's go RAAM.

Vivian Cambi



Sports... well, I ran a lot and that's all. Cycling? Not a chance, I hadn't seen a bike since I was a kid...

It was December 2014 and a mutual friend suggested I take a class with Daniela Genovesi, the champion of everything ... to improve breathing, performance, one of those things I had no knowledge of.

Wow, she's a champion in everything, he would say (jiu-jitsu, cycling, judo, etc...). As he is tall, would participate in the Iron Man, was an athlete, I thought, I'm not going, no way. I worked a lot, 12 hours a day from Sunday to Sunday, two children, took care of the house, I thought, this Dani must be like him, tall, strong, a super athlete. It's all she does, I thought, there is nothing for me here...

He scheduled the class and I did not go, it was December, I was in the restaurant, busy with so much work, had no time for another workout.



He rescheduled, and, once again, I was unable to show up.

His recommendation was, don't say that you are an athlete, if so, she will "kill" you with exercises, that bike is already heavy without any extra loads. Because I really wasn't an athlete, I just went to take the class, see what all the fuss was about.

When I got there, to my surprise, I saw a short, skinny, super excited woman, who gave me a training session that made me feel like the most sedentary person in the world. I left there having closed a package of classes, even though it was already the end of the year, thinking "So, this is Dani! A champion? She must have something to teach me after all!".

Her humility after a few days recognizing the good pattern I was cycling in and that I should go cycling in the street was unprecedented.

Dani discovered me, discovered the force and the strength that existed within me that I didn't know, she saw something beyond time, age, the ability that, in fact, I lacked. Dani suggested that I buy a bike, she believed in me, even though I didn't believe in myself, and I ended up believing through her eyes.

In April 2015, I fractured my hip (hamstring) due to stress while running. I stopped everything. It took me months to recover, I started learning everything again and Dani kept believing. In January 2016 I made my first 100km in Guapimirim with Dani and Veronica, another friend of mine. I will never forget this experience.

Then came the invitation to participate in the first ultramarathon (24 hours) in June 2016, (a total of 371km in



18hrs), and I just believed that it was possible with Dani. In February 2017, the second ultramarathon (520km 23:45), and I didn't stop there, and I never intend to stop again.

Dani sees what no one sees, and if you see it with her eyes you will be able to continue, you will reach the end, you will follow through with your purpose, "with blood in the eyes", as she would say (a common expression in Portuguese).

Dani can recognize something in people, a talent, a sparkle, no matter how old the person is, regardless of genre, race, if the person is heavier or very thin, child or grownup, I've seen her recognize, compliment strangers of all kinds, and not necessarily athletes. "Oh", she would say, "if these people understood what they could do, not only in sport but in life ...".

You don't have to become a super champion like her, but you are sure to excel, become a better person, and you will know that you can do it, because Dani will, if you let her, bring out the best in you.

Dani Genovesi, it was, and is a pleasure to meet you, a champion in ultras and in life!

Elen Casagrande



During my teenage years, when I practiced body boarding, I had already heard her name. I never forget the OP Pro in Florianopolis (Brazil), my homeland. When I met Dani, it didn't take long to realize that this was the same person. But how so? Body boarding champion, Jiu-Jitsu and all these cycling titles! I often joke, if I there is a long-distance spitting



competition, she will also win. This is our Dani Genovesi. A super athlete, determined, focused and extremely talented.

I learned with Dani that it is never too late and that with enough dedication, it is possible to conquer and excel in sports. When I signed up for the first 24-hour competition, everyone called me crazy and I thought I was a little too. How could I participate in something like this with the world champion as a fellow participant? I had never done this before! And there I went ... With your help, Dani I got my first podium and realizing that I was in fact capable was amazing.

Dani is today not only my friend, but my trainer and partner of a few adventures. Those I try to do with her, always learning that if you really want to achieve something and really dedicate yourself, anything is possible.

Dani Corona



Dani... oh Dani... Since I met you, you have always been number one in everything, in any class, and in all the competitions you participated in (and there were quite a few of them!). To name some of them: running, bodyboarding, Jiu-Jitsu and now, on the bike it could not be any different. A constant figure on the podiums, always in first place. I had the pleasure of living through and seeing many victories close at hand to this giant-hearted warrior, an example of determination, humility and compassion! Dani, to have been your partner changed my life, thank you for your friendship, affection and encouragement in the sports, always. Thank you for all this and much more! The distance between us never changed our



friendship, I am always proud of you, I admire you and follow all your victories! Go girl!!! You were born to shine! My Pisces sister that the world presented me with! I love you.

Louise Herbstrith



Dani is the epitome of a “Super Athlete”, in the purest of forms. A multi-champion in the several sports she decided to try ... always aiming to be the best in each one of them, with her unique dedication to a fast-paced training, as well as her strong determination to be the best and to win.

And she has always been a winner in each of the sports she has chosen throughout her life: Running, Bodyboarding, Jiu-Jitsu and currently cycling in various categories.

Congratulations Dani! I really admire you and your sports champion career!

Kisses,

Otavio Pacheco



Dear Dani, I have so much admiration for you.

In the early 1980s, as teenagers, when we met at Almirante’s gym, we quickly got on with each other and began to share a love for sports and for life outdoors.

While bodyboarding, Dani won the first championships, in Jiu-Jitsu, she achieved the black belt, in soft sand races in Ipanema, although I am 1.75 and she much shorter, Dani ran circles around me ... and so on. Her determination, eagerness and star quality are still present today in her victorious career.



Much admiration and pride in being part of your life.

Congratulations.

Kisses

Monica Lopes



My aunt is the strongest, toughest person I've ever met. Funny that growing up in this house with my aunt's influence made me think that this was the usual for adults, man or woman; when I was little, I would observe my aunt and she was always acting naturally, with that amount of training and work, often starting at 3 am and ending at 10:30 pm non-stop.

Over time, and with my teenage years arriving, I noticed that she is a person completely out of the curve, meaning out of the ordinary.

Her attitude on how to cope with everyday life was fundamental in shaping my character, noting that even if I am unconscious I cannot complain (much) about an exhausting day or the adversities of life, and the connection I can make as to why this happens is that I've had her as an example since I was young.

Not only was she amazing in bodyboarding, but also in Jiu-Jitsu, becoming a world champion (only one of her many other world titles), and after her early 30s she decided to start cycling and consecrated herself as the super athlete she is today. This is a priceless lesson, showing that if you really want it, you can do it. She is to me an example of what the human being is capable of with the right attitude and willpower.



Impressive how she also manages family life and always maintains her usual (or almost) good mood.

The example I have had of her all these years and the luck I have had to be close to and experience all this is priceless; she's "no fear" and "go for it" for whatever challenge she's aiming for.

Lucas Figueiredo



It's December 22nd, 2016, 11am and the phone rings: Luuuuuu, congratulations!

Wow, I thought, Dani calling me on my birthday ... I couldn't remember the last time this had happened, especially after the advent of Facebook. In addition to the congratulations for my birthday she asked when I was going to cycle with her. Oh my God, Daniela! I started in January 2017, and I was lousy at it (I still am because I don't have the slightest discipline, I miss training sessions...). But the strength that Dani has and gives us makes everything seem simpler. Our age difference is small, during most of our childhood we lived in the same neighborhood and she has always been the most present cousin. At the age of 8, I tore my hand and she was the only one to visit me and even took a box of chocolates. Dani is like that, always ready for her people – may they be family or friends.

As a family, we were usually always together, in the street, in the square with Claudia, André and a few other kids, in Grandma's house. I was there for all her achievements (and for the tough times too) in life and sports. Always smiling, always positive, always overcoming. Dani adds, unites, provides strength and affection. Finally, an addendum: she is obsessed



with sweets, will eat anything and everything and still maintains her thin figure! Hard not to admire right? Right. Dani, I'm very proud of you. As a daughter, mother (supermom), sister, wife, cousin, friend, and not mention, athlete ... you have truly earned all your achievements.

Cheers to the 2019 RAAM!

Luciana Figueiredo



My sister Dani...

I will never forget the difficulty I had in persuading my sister to change gyms (she was always very loyal to her master ... to her gym teacher. At the time, teacher Beth, girlfriend of another teacher, Alípio Amaral). I think it was when I convinced Dani to take a class with the great master Almir Sampaio, that she realized she could overcome so many of her limits!

In no time at all she was taking all the classes she could, any class, any time, using very heavy weights (the heaviest of any class) and executing all exercises with exemplary mastery!

That was when she decided she was going to study Physical Education. During that same time, she discovered bodyboarding... this was during the 80's.... but she was never satisfied with such a "small", calm ocean.

Everything was filled with adrenaline, at least for me...

Dani only liked it when the waves were huge! My God!

I will never forget a New Year's Eve in Saquarema ... There was an intense undertow and then it got a little better, mas the waves were huge! It was late afternoon, and I was already



thinking that we were leaving, but Dani decides to take on a battery of waves as a nightcap!

She is just unstoppable

I was waiting! The sea was huge! The waves were breaking hard! I couldn't see my sister anymore ... it was dark (at night) when she showed up ... what a struggle, let me tell you!

And then, Dani discovered Jiu Jitsu! Shae started practicing Jiu Jitsu (hidden from daddy ... he thought he was paying for ballet lesson!). And, I won't fool you, Dani did not settle until she became a black belt and world champion! (Then she settled down ... in Jiu-Jitsu at least!) She moved on to canoeing... until she discovered the bike ... it's been about 16 years, maybe? I don't know for sure ... But if there is anyone whose motto is FOCUS, DETERMINATION AND GRIT, it's Dani, my incredibly dear sister!

And the rest of the story, I think you guys already know...

Claudia Machado Figueiredo



Talking about my daughter, Daniela, is a hard task.

I was raised in a family that would always downsize family achievements. We could get 'spoiled' with too many compliments.

Perhaps it is because of this, that I find it so normal, the effort, giving her best, in the different sports. In repeating the way by which I was raised, I didn't tell her enough how much I rejoiced with all her achievements.

Since childhood, my two daughters have always been keen on sports, and Dani, who was always more focused, continuously excelled.



Until 2007, when her third son, Antonio, was born, I accompanied Dani on her many adventures. But, from then on, I started playing a new role: grandmother, helping to take care of Toninho. And I was truly happy with this!

Then, came the so called RAAM happened in 2009 – Antonio and I cheered from a far.

And all the cheering (even from a far) was worth it! She won! This daughter of mine really is something else. Now, come June 2019, and she is off to the RAAM once again!

My wish is that of success, Dani. Be happy!

Sylvia Alves Machado da Silva



She is a great athlete. I am inspired by her today and proud of her in the future. My mother is to me the best biker and will go down in history.

Antonio Genovesi



Writing any word about my mother, Daniela, is a difficult process and at the same time extremely easy. A thousand things come to mind, several adventures and unique experiences that I only experienced or had contact with because I am her daughter. However, trying to describe it with words is almost impossible, as words will never be suitable for such a unique person, but I will do my best.

My mother is above all, an example. She has a huge heart, she will cry for just about everything, but do not be fooled, it



is not a sign of weakness, but of empathy. She is always willing to help even when she is extremely busy, there is no bad weather with her, especially in terms of biking, and she always does everything with a huge smile. She is always teaching me, helping me grow, and I am extremely grateful to live with her and know that I still have a lot to learn from her.

I learn from her and my family through sport. I am not an athlete, but I owe all my values and personality to sports and the love and sacrifice relationship an athlete has with their chosen sport or sports. Accompanying my mother at the RAAM was something great and unique. I understood, something that I saw a lot at home, but on another scale, that nothing, much less a dream, comes without sacrifices. I shared with other extraordinary people the dream she had, her generosity and the confidence of sharing with us such a dream, and we gave everything we had to do justice to her every stroke on the bike.

And finally, I took care, best I could, in all stops (the few moments of rest in the race), of the person who took care of me all my life, identifying in those hours the intensity and reality of our relationship. We don't have to be perfect and superheroes, we have each other. Vulnerability is thus welcomed for we will always support each other and find warmth in each other arms when needed.

The pleasure and pride of being your daughter is enormous and beyond me.

With love,

Julia Genovesi



Most people believe that Dani Genovesi's greatest virtue is her unmatched resistance, which matches her to superheroes or fairy-tale characters. I have witnessed people describing her as an almost mythical being. However, for me, as your son (and I believe everyone who knows your story) it is quite different from that.

For me, what makes my mother so special, so dear and successful in her career as an athlete is just the opposite of what someone who doesn't know her thinks about her. It is the fact that you are as common as anyone else, a mother of three, married for almost 30 years, hardworking. You never had it easy, you always had to struggle to make things work, in every area of your life. In cycling it would be no different.

My father (both my mother's and I Jiu-Jitsu master) always joked that my mother was not talented at all, on the contrary - honestly, despite having been successful in Jiu-Jitsu (she achieved the Black-Belt World Champion IBJJF title), I truly believe my father. How can a person with no talent for an activity reach the highest level? Resilience, discipline, determination and a lot of competitiveness (fuel).

Do you know why she started racing MTB? Because she was a terrible biker! It is the truth! After a lot of competing, she started to gain confidence and moved to speed biking, because her dream had always been to compete in one of the RAAM editions. Anyway, I believe this is in the book, but just make my point.

Thanks to my parents I've always had contact with outstanding people, people who I look up to everyday. But none of them inspire me more than you mother; I saw closely that



with grit, drive, discipline, determination and some extra fuel (competition) anything is possible!

I love you mom!

Victor Genovesi



It's been so many years together, a life of many adventures, companionship, love and partnership. Daniela has always been a distinguished woman in any sport she has gotten into, she has never done an activity just to add one more to her list, but rather to be one of the best in all activities, always.

We built a beautiful family, shaped through sports, and it's been almost 32 years together and 29 years of marriage.

I am certain because she's been through so many different sports, her mindset has been built differently and has gotten her through the task of constant, hard and intense training.

Any race or competition will always be very difficult for any athlete, but the hardest task will always be the volume of training in preparation. Equally balancing training, work, family, husband and still being at the mercy of the risks this sport presents in a country that does not respect the cyclist is extremely demanding.

Over the years, we mature, we learn how to deal a little better with the crazy life around us, learning from our mistakes and successes and often going through a transformation in this process. Today we hardly recognize ourselves from a few years ago, we have reinvented ourselves.



Remembering 2009, when Dani won the RAAM, I'm sure she is now even better prepared, getting to know herself better and with an even stronger mindset to endure and overcome tough times that presents itself during a long race.

Through her influence I was able to practice other sports that added a lot to my life and made it possible for us to have new adventures. A happy life will always be motivated by adventures that will make you have an exciting life story to tell young people, thus encouraging them to live their lives with the same pleasure and joy that you bring to your own life!

I owe Dani many of the best moments of my life and her unique energy - constant motivator-, has made a big difference in my life. A love of a lifetime, an inspiration.

Alexandre Paiva Genovesi

