



Climbing for Life

I am not afraid of dying, I am afraid of not living.
-Kelly Perkins

There are many people who dedicate their time and resources to raise awareness about important causes through sports and physical activity related pursuits (Tour de Cure, Race for the Cure, etc.). Then there is Kelly Perkins who, without the heart transplant she received in 1995, would not be here to promote organ and blood donation, or to inspire others to reach new heights, literally.

Kelly knows first hand the value of being active, and she has used her passion for outdoor activity and her life experience to promote her message. The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports (PCPFS) is pleased to work with Kelly and her team as she embarks on what she hopes will be a life-altering climb for thousands of Americans.

Transplant Recipient Climbs El Capitan

Who: Kelly Perkins and her husband, Craig

When: September 5-9, 2005

Why: Increase participation in organ and blood donation

Stay Informed: Follow their progress online at:

www.fitness.gov

The Perkins Profile

Kelly talks about...

Her favorite activity/ sport: "Climbing and yoga strengthen my whole body and take some of the burden from my heart," Kelly says. Most cardiovascular activities are very difficult because of the lack of nerves going to her heart (a result of her transplant).

How she became a nature enthusiast: "I grew up in Lake Tahoe in the Sierra Nevada mountains, but I didn't know I loved it so much until I moved away. Only then did I realize the comfort and calm the mountains and great outdoors brought to me."

Her first mountain climb: "With an extensive history of backpacking, I would always find the tallest peak and make my way to the top." Her first significant climb was to the top of Mt. Whitney (in California). That was her first climb before her heart condition and her return trip was after her transplant. "Having stood on top with two different hearts gave me a great sense of accomplishment."

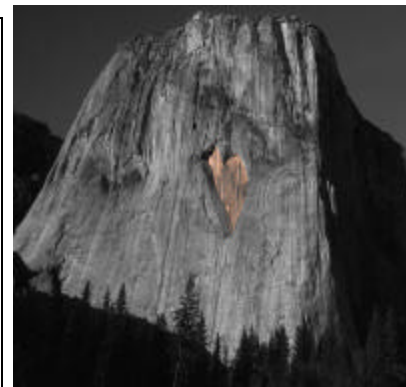
The most magical place she's been: "The Matterhorn in Switzerland. It's *brehtaking* in every sense of the word."

Who and what inspires her: "My husband, Craig; my (heart) donor; and my deep desire to be healthy and leave behind a legacy."

Climbing: "You have to put it into perspective. When your focus is in front of you, you're never that far off the ground."

Her vision for September 10, 2005: "I will be giddy with excitement as this has been a huge undertaking that I have been working towards for the past two years." For Kelly, a successful journey means she and her team returned safely and learn that their adventure inspired others to take action by exercising their hearts through fitness, good diet, and organ and blood donation.

Her favorite foods: "Craig's grilled wild salmon, sourdough bread, and watermelon."



What is Cardiomyopathy?

Cardiomyopathy is a disease in which the heart muscle becomes inflamed or enlarged and doesn't work properly. In Kelly's case, this was the result of a virus she contracted that damaged her heart and caused it to beat much faster than normal (her resting heart rate was up to 190 beats per minute). Cardiomyopathy can also be caused by high blood pressure, artery or heart valve diseases, or congenital heart defects. For three years after her diagnosis and prior to receiving her new heart, Kelly's active life and healthy diet helped keep her alive.

Wise Words:

I don't focus on denying or restricting myself as much as nourishing my body with good, healthful foods.

- K. Perkins

How Does She Do It?

- **Activity.** Being active is a #1 priority. At 44, Kelly has a heart and she's using it. To prepare for this climb she has been doing 1.5 hour sessions of Ashtanga Yoga, one of the most intense yoga practices, 5-6 days each week; rock climbing in a gym or outside 3-4 times a week; and hiking or walking 3 days each week.

- **Strength.** Not only does Kelly have an inner drive and determination, she's got the muscles that make her body work effectively and efficiently on the mountain. She's lifted weights and done Pilates, but yoga has brought about the greatest increases in her mental and physical strength.

- **Balance.** Kelly's life is all about balance. She listens to her body when it's telling her she's a little off center. If she's tired, she takes it easy. If she's feeling strong, she carefully pushes herself. Kelly is also disciplined about taking her medications. She starts her day with her intensive yoga practice when the medications in her bloodstream are at their lowest level. As she says, "Exercise in the morning jump starts my heart and increases my overall cardiac output (circulation)." Staying properly hydrated, as well as eating a balanced diet full of fruits and vegetables and high quality carbohydrates and protein are also essential to keeping her healthy and active.

Did you know...

About 74 people receive an organ transplant each day. However, approximately 17 people die each day because of the shortage of organs available. (www.organdonor.gov)



El Capitan has a natural heart shaped formation on its southwest face and is one of the most famous climbing walls in the world.

The PCPFS has goals to reach new heights too. Since 1956, the Council has promoted physically active lifestyles for all individuals regardless of age or ability and we look forward to celebrating our 50th anniversary in 2006.

One new focus is our work with the federal land management agencies, the CDC, and Indian Health Service to promote "public lands for public health." Kelly Perkins is the living, breathing embodiment of this slogan as she embarks on her climb of El Capitan and shows us one way to be active in America's great outdoors!

Back on Track

For Kelly, being healthy isn't a once a week pursuit. *It's a lifestyle!* After her transplant, she lost 20% of her body weight and weighed a mere 89 pounds. Getting back to the activities she liked doing was challenging, but the rewards were even greater. She started her recovery by taking three to four 10-15 minute walks each day. Slowly, she increased to 30 minute walks twice a day. With time, she and Craig embarked on walks up hills and gradually added weighted backpacks to help build Kelly's stamina. After two years with her new heart, she added Pilates to strengthen her torso/core, which was especially weak from her surgery. In year three, she added weight lifting. Lifting weights wasn't her favorite routine, but it helped her gain the strength she needed to start doing the activities she enjoys most—yoga and climbing.

You're it.
Get fit!

Push yourself to a new height and earn a Presidential Award. Visit www.presidentschallenge.org, create an activity log, and get active doing any one of a hundred activities including rock climbing, hiking, walking, or yoga.

Learn More:

www.donatelifecalifornia.org Information on the California donor registry

www.ctdn.org The California Transplant Donor Network

www.givelife.org The website of the American Red Cross

www.organdonor.gov Information on organ and tissue donation from the Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

www.fitness.gov Information from the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports

www.mypyramid.gov The Dietary Guidelines for Americans from the U.S. Department of Agriculture

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