

A TRUE inspiration.  
By Mike DeCinti

Nearly five years ago I found myself in a job I was not happy with, a town I was growing out of, about 40 pounds overweight and not physically active. One random Saturday afternoon I was lying on the couch watching TV, probably feeling sorry for myself, when I saw a special that changed my life. It was NBC's coverage of the Hawaiian Ironman Triathlon.

Triathlons are endurance events that are made up of three sports, usually swimming, biking and running. They come in a variety of lengths but are normally categorized as Sprint (the shortest), Olympic, Half-Ironman and Ironman.

The Ironman is considered by many to be the world's toughest endurance sport. It's made up of a 2.4 mile swim, a 112 mile bike ride, and a 26.2 mile run. It normally takes even the most elite athletes up to nine hours to complete. But it wasn't one of the world's greatest athletes who had this profound impact on me, but just two men who finished the race in just under 14 hours. Their names are Dick and Rick Hoyt and it was their story that had me in tears and drastically changed my life.

I don't need to tell you that completing this 140.6 mile race is not easy, but can you imagine completing it while towing another person behind you as you swim, riding your bike with someone sitting on the front and running while pushing someone in front of you?

You see the story of the Hoyts starts when son Rick, now 44, was born with his umbilical cord coiled around his neck cutting off oxygen to his brain. His parents were told that there would be no hope for his development and that he should be placed in a home. Dick, now 65, refused to listen and was determined to raise his son just like any normal kid. And although physically Rick is confined to a wheelchair with very little movement, his mental capabilities are normal, and with the help of a computer can even communicate. In fact, it was this mode of communication that led the Hoyts down their path of inspiration.

Hearing about a three-mile charity run for another paralyzed teen when Rick was just 15, he asked his father to help. So with a custom-built wheelchair and pushing his son the entire way, the Hoyts finished their first race. He discusses on their website ([www.teamhoyt.com](http://www.teamhoyt.com)) that his son said he 'didn't feel handicapped when they were racing' and from that point on, Dick knew what he needed to do. So for the next 30 years the Hoyts dedicated themselves to competing in events and have completed over nine hundred races, including 92 5Ks, 204 10Ks, 64 marathons and 206 triathlons (6 Ironman distances), with Dick pushing or pulling his son the entire way.

I did two things the day after I saw this television special. I went online to read more about the Hoyts and I made a personal decision to compete in an Ironman before I turned 40. And if everything goes as planned, I will accomplish that goal in 2008 two years

ahead of schedule. Now it would have been foolish of me to think I could get up the next day and do an Ironman or even run a 5k, but the important thing is, I did get up the next day and started to get physically active. I started small. I ran a mile here and there, started working out with weights, and became more aware of the food I was putting in my body. I slowly began to lose weight, became physically stronger and was able to run a little bit more as the months went by. My new outlook and attitude helped me decide to quit my job for something better and prepared me to move to a new state. I had a newfound confidence in myself that truly affected the way I lived my life and treated other people.

I printed out a picture of Dick and Rick Hoyt that day I went online and I keep that picture next to my alarm clock. On those days when I just don't feel like getting out of bed, I look at that picture and I'm reminded of what true dedication is. It's a man in his sixties who is waking up this morning as well so that he can go running with his handicapped son to help him feel normal.