



Give Yourself a Gold Medal

by Judy Brodkey, M.S.W.

I love the Olympics and they are here! One of my favorite all-time movies is *Miracle*, the story of the 1980 US hockey team that won a gold medal against all odds. I have watched it dozens of times and consistently been moved by the struggles, determination, love and triumph of the story.

I've never had the privilege of attending the Olympics. The closest I've come was last year when I attended a post-Olympics extravaganza at the Rose Garden Arena featuring Gabby Douglas, Kyla Ross, Jake Dalton, and other members of the US national gymnastics team. Their athleticism and strength on the balance beam, pommel horse, high vault and floor exercises was jaw-dropping. I could not help but imagine what it would be like to have their talent.

When it comes to physical feats, my claims to fame are modest: running several 10k races; walking a half marathon; briefly steering a former America's Cup yacht in New Zealand; biking 500 miles across Iowa; and hiking solo a 100 mile stretch of the Appalachian Trail. I also had two ACL replacements, followed by the subsequent grueling rehab, which gives me something in common with some of the best athletes in the world. My only goal for the surgery was to be able to walk again without falling down, nothing as lofty as skiing an Alpine slope. Oh, I almost forgot. My most daring physical feat happened when I was a young girl. I was swinging on our swing set at the top of a small hill in our backyard, pretending I was National Velvet, the most gifted equestrian at the Grand Nationals. Just when the swing was at its apex and I was flying over some imaginary hurdle at the racetrack, I jumped and flew 20 feet in the air, landing at the bottom of the hill. The crowds were cheering in my imagination!

None of these accomplishments qualify me for much of anything and, truth be told, I'm more in the mood these days to hand out gold medals for other kinds of accomplishments. As the Olympics draw the attention of millions throughout the world, consider yourself on my collective team and give yourself a gold medal if you've ever done any of the following:

- Loved or supported someone (including yourself) through a serious medical condition, chronic health issue, or the challenges of aging
- As a parent, put your heart, mind and soul into caring for a young person in order to give them a good start in life
- Taken a big risk to do what scared you or intimidated you
- Spoken up or taken action to right a wrong or support someone else in doing so
- Created something meaningful as an expression of your true self, despite formidable obstacles
- Truly forgiven and released someone who hurt you or others
- Pursued love even though you were scared or hurt by it in the past
- Not given up on a major goal or dream despite setbacks, feelings, or mistakes
- Decided to let go of something that was previously a part of your identity
- Resisted others' negativity, jealousy, confusion, or apathy to do what is important to you
- Grieved the loss of someone close to you and gone on to care again... and again
- Pursued and sustained a commitment to a person, community, project, or dream that was important to you even when it was not easy or convenient

Did you answer “yes” to any of these? What additional criteria would you add?

I know a lot of gold medalists and you're probably one of them. So over the coming weeks, whether or not you find yourself watching the Olympics and rooting for some of the world's most amazing athletes, don't forget to give yourself an appreciative cheer. You're a champion where it truly counts!

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