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# Alisa Camplin

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# ONLY THE

**Alisa Camplin's path to becoming a world champion aerial skier reads like a mythical tale of heroism: not even doubting naysayers, numerous serious injuries and massive debt couldn't hold her back from achieving her dream....**

Words: Louisa Deasey

Photo's from High Flyer, courtesy of Mike Ridgewood & Anti-Cold

Ten years into her skiing career, Alisa makes a triple twist somersault look so smooth it's easy to forget she's doing the equivalent of jumping off a ten-storey building. But this is just one of the many paradoxes of this pint-sized athlete with enough guts to fight twenty lions.

Aside from motor cross driving and parachuting, aerial skiing is one of the most dangerous Olympic sports, with athletes risking quadriplegia or worse every time they jump. Unlike other skill-based pursuits such as diving or gymnastics, aerial skiing also has the added challenge of throwing uncontrollable variables such as visibility, wind speed and direction into the mix, as well as being a sport so expensive it's usually only relegated to the affluent.

For Alisa Camplin, who knew "from age 5" that she wanted to compete in the Olympic arena, all these challenges only made her more determined to win.

With a childhood passion for athletics and gymnastics, Alisa enjoyed sporting accolades early but knuckled down to finish high school and start a degree in Information Technology.

During her first year at university fate stepped in when a friend took her along to an aerial skiing show. Paying \$5 to try aerial flipping in a harness, a young Jacqui Cooper was so impressed with Alisa's skills she pencilled her phone number down and asked if she'd like to try going professional. The next day, Alisa dialled the number and asked what she had to do to sign up.

The rest as they say, is history.

Well, not quite. Most people consider 19 fairly old to start training in a new sport, aiming to be an Olympian. Most skiers aren't also studying full-time and taking on four jobs just to pay for their lift tickets, season passes and transportation. Others would balk at the thought of nine-year-old kids performing better on the slopes and being the only one in borrowed gear, skipping the usual weekend

university fun of nightclubs and socialising in exchange for ritual humiliation on the frosty slopes of Mount Buller.

**Only a deeply held childhood dream could motivate someone to overcome such challenges.**

"Hanging off every moment of every Olympics ...really inspired the deep rooted craving to make it happen", says Alisa of what drove her to begin a seven-year project to reach the Olympics.

Snapping up a prestigious job at IBM upon graduation meant Alisa was able to save her annual leave and her holidays to attend Canadian Winter meets in December and January, but the costs of the sport meant she still had to take out many supplementary loans. In the early days IBM and Bolle were her only supporters.

Choosing such a difficult and expensive sport would test every facet of Alisa's commitment - if she had been even a little more superstitious she would have surely quit when she landed on her back some two years later, the first time her family had seen her jump, making her mother sick with fright and her dad try to persuade her to head back to a promising career at IBM.

Nevertheless she stuck with it, eventually moving up to 25th in the world rankings by 1998 after suffering concussion. Years, debts and serious training later, Alisa landed her first major sponsorship with OneTel - which then collapsed leaving her in massive debt just six months before the Olympics.

Though Alisa is certainly a realist, the power of her personal dreams explains why she kept on going.

"I wasn't going to let money get in the way of something as sacred to me as getting to the Olympics", she says.

# BRAVE



# ONLY THE BRAVE

The same techniques used to dissuade fear in the face of dangerous jumps are what lead her to persist despite serious disbelief from those who saw her train in the early days.

**You always look at what you can control, focussing on all the steps you can take to get to where you want to be.**

In 1997, Alisa finally started to improve her jumps and completed her first somersault.

"I spent hours in the gym before work, did more jumps than anyone else at the water jumps on the weekend, and took private trampoline lessons twice a week after working all day at IBM".

Going the extra yard clearly contributed to her eventual Olympic gold.

"In the final summer before the Olympic Games, I believe I did about eight hundred more training jumps on water than anyone else."

Wanting to feel the inner calm that comes from knowing you've covered every possible option for things going wrong, Alisa didn't stop at mere practise.

"I trained after no food or without any sleep, just in case I was unexpectedly nervous at the Olympics and couldn't do either. I jumped in an alternative uniform and with different equipment, just in case something suddenly went wrong with mine... I practised to the sound of a full crowd at the MCG so I wouldn't be daunted by the noise on the day..."

This innate trust that her hard work would eventually pay off lead Alisa to the coveted gold medal at the Salt Lake City Olympics in 2002, then break a world record with her score at the World Championships in 2003, and win the World Cup!

**"The pleasure for me comes from knowing you've put in the work and have done your absolute best."**



Alisa says the Olympic feeling of discipline and inspiration should be carried over to many parts of our lives.

"I always say there should be 15 Olympics in your lifetime – whether that be starting a business, having a career or having a child or whatever...it's that sense of creating something, applying yourself and achieving the outcome you so desired."

Alisa also says she has learnt over the years that the real measure of Olympic spirit is sticking to your personal standards, regardless of the eventual outcome.

"Winning is about personal improvement, exploring and challenging our current limits, and becoming better people. Yes, in sport, medals are handed out at the end of the competition, but the real personal satisfaction doesn't come from beating other people, it comes from knowing you dedicated yourself entirely to it and continually sought the best from yourself day after day after day."

**It's not about someone giving you a medal and saying 'here, well done', it's you looking in the mirror and saying "you know what? I've done okay today..."**

## A Mind Fit To Fly

In October 2005 Alisa underwent her second knee reconstruction after blowing out her knee during training for the March 2006 Olympics.

A successful knee reconstruction recovery generally takes around 6 - 7 months for a healthy person, but Alisa broke records with just 59 days of intense physio, ice baths and visualisation before jumping on water in December 2005.

"Life is full of uncertainty and sport has thrown me a few curveballs lately, that's for sure. But you know what? You get some crap situations and you get some awesome ones, but you can make the best of anything."

Shrugging off the daily 10-hour physio she has been undergoing to get back into shape, Alisa explains, "I looked at the alternative – watching the Olympics rather than

# A HIGH FLYING CAREER:

1974: 10th November, An Olympian is born.

1983: Received the Premier's Award for the Most Outstanding Junior Athlete in the State for her performance in hurdles, 200m, 800m, long jump and discus.

1987: Began gymnastics, early training for the flipping and flying so useful for aerial skiing, progressing to become a level 7 National Stream gymnast.

1992: Finished High School in Melbourne.

1993: Started Bachelor of Information Technology at Swinburne University of Technology, completing the usually four-year degree in three.

1994: 'Accidentally' discovered aerial skiing after trying aerial manoeuvres at a ski show for \$5 a pop. Aerial skiing was her key to the Olympics.

1995: First competition with the big guns.

1996: Graduated from Swinburne and began working full-time at IBM for the next 6 years. First international trip with the National Development Team, and the only member to personally fund every dollar of her trip.

1998: Ranked 25th in the world after competing with the development team at the World Cup competition.

1999: Finishes seventh at the World Championships. Finally granted part scholarships from the Olympic Winter Institute of Australia (OWIA) and the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) and the Victorian Institute of Sport (VIS).

2000: Qualified for the Olympics, ranking fifth in the World Cup Finals.

2002: 18th February, wins gold at the Winter Olympics, becoming the first female Winter Olympic gold medallist in the sport of Aerial Skiing.

2003: Set new World Record: 207.31 [current World Record Holder] World Ranking: first.

2004: Governor's Award for Victorian Sportsperson of the Year, undergoes complete knee reconstruction #1.

2005: Undergoes radical knee surgery in a bid to become fit to compete at the 2006 Winter Olympics. Completes first water jump just 59 days after surgery.

2006: Competes at the Winter Olympics at Torino, Italy, winning bronze! As noted about Alisa's Olympic result on: [nbcolympic.com.au](http://nbcolympic.com.au) "Just competing in Torino was a big achievement, to win a medal was a sporting miracle!"

Career World Cup Podiums:  
10 wins, 5 seconds, 4 thirds

being there. I don't think I'd like that".

"I have to try. Otherwise I will be thinking - what if I could have made it?"

Writing her inspirational autobiography during her first knee rehab, planning to buy a home and one day run her own business, Alisa has many careers to choose from post-Olympia.

But for now, she's focussing on seeing just how high she can fly before she comes back to earth.

## On getting what you want out of life:

"Whether you are an athlete or not, it is vital to remember that we all have the free will to determine and direct our own destiny. Think about what you want out of life, and then make choices that lead you in that direction. Give your heart and soul to it, and don't compromise."



## REVERSE RESUME

2 fractured ankles

1 ripped achilles tendon

2 full knee reconstructions

2 torn knee ligaments

multiple broken ribs

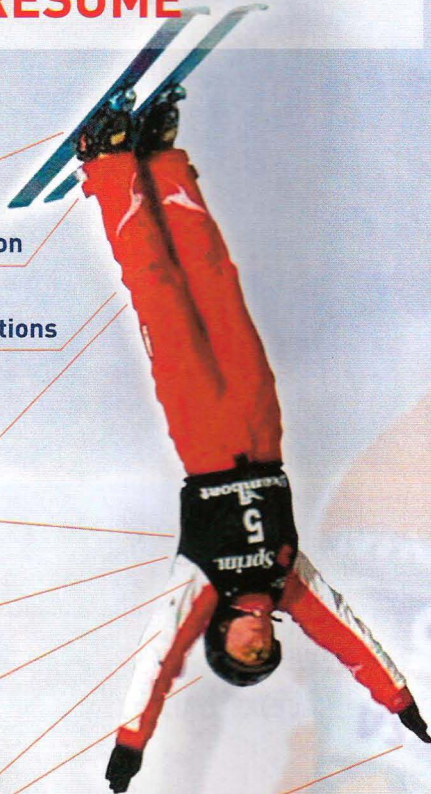
1 dislocated sternum

1 broken collarbone

1 dislocated shoulder

9 concussions

1 broken hand



# ALISA'S KEYS TO SUCCESS:

## Hard Work

"Hard work is investing in yourself."

## Self Belief

"When someone says, 'You can't', tell yourself, 'I can'."

## Tenacity

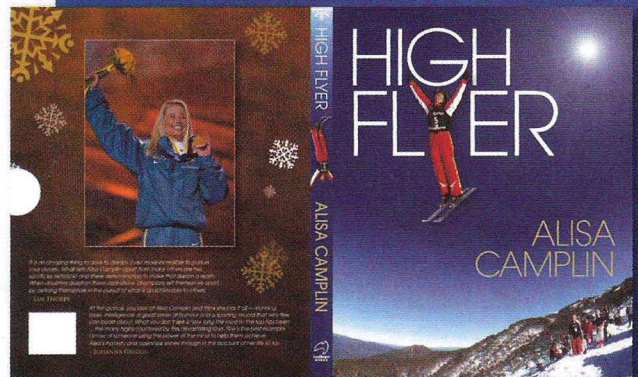
"No matter what happens, giving up should never be an option."

## Sacrifice

"You need to prioritise and make choices about what's most important to you."

## Sporting Spirit

"Maintain the highest levels of integrity at all times"



Alisa Camplin's Biography, High Flyer, rrp. \$34.95 is published by Lothian and available at all good booksellers.