

# The Triathlete Hour Ep. 48. - Kathryn Bertine\_mixdown

**Kelly:** Welcome to the Triathlete Hour. And this week we have a fun episode with Kathryn Bertine.

Now, if you're like me, you've heard of Kathryn because she spearheaded the successful campaign to get a women's Tour de France race-- Now a one-day event called La Course-- which she also raced in. And she produced the documentary *Half the Road*.

She's been an editor for ESPN writing their popular column on trying to make the Olympics in any sport, any country, just go out and make it happen. Something she actually lived through too. And she also wrote a book about it. Another book about her years as a professional figure skater... And now she's here with her latest book *Stand*, about how to be an activist and the behind the scenes story of the toll it took on her personal life as she fought for equality in women's cycling. But what you might not know about Kathryn is she started out as a pro triathlete before switching to cycling and she tells us what it is she still loves about triathlon, some of the details of how she worked to make change. And after all that upheaval, what it was like having a massive crash mid race that left her nearly dead in Mexico. And coming back from that. It's an interesting conversation because Kathryn is always an interesting person.

And before we get to that Laura Siddall joins us for Sid Talks to talk about some of the big news coming out of triathlete magazine this week also, who gets to race during COVID. And is that fair?

And what we think about all the indoor racing happening right now. Now, if you want some more tips on indoor safely, be sure to go check out our training and gear podcast, Fitter and Faster, which is all about indoor cycling this month. Now, one note: Sid and I recorded this at the end of last week before Ironman New Zealand this upcoming weekend was canceled and we talk a bunch about the racing opportunities available in New Zealand and Australia right now. And they do have a lot more races than most places in the world. But of course they're still dealing with the last minute COVID cancellations, just like everyone. So take that with a grain of salt.

Now, all of that after this short break.

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All right. We're back with Laura Siddall for Sid Talks and Laura, I know you had some questions for me about our big news this week ... Pocket Outdoor Media, which is the parent company of Triathlete, also owns Women's Running, VeloNews, Backpacker, Yoga Journal, and a whole bunch of stuff.

We bought Outside magazine this week and we have now rebranded as Outside. And I know the reason this kind of came up on your radar and a lot of triathletes' radar is obviously to buy Outside... It takes some money. A little bit of money...

**Laura Siddall:** You're searching down the back of the sofa for that one.

**Kelly:** And our CEO raised a round of funding and a good portion of that funding came from Sequoia Capital. Which is the investment firm founded by Mike Moritz. And that name may sound familiar to everybody because Mike Moritz funded the PTO, the professional triathlete's organization, and yes, Mike Moritz will also be on our board now.

And so I know a lot of triathletes were asking me this week: So does he control you guys now? Is he, is the, does the PTO own you now? Are you going to be only covering PTO races? No more Ironman?

Not gonna happen, guys.

**Laura Siddall:** Yes. You're narrowing down your broad appeal of activities and endurance sports to just PTO races. *[Exactly.]* That's the business motive.

**Kelly:** Yeah. I mean, so, obviously anybody who knows how venture works and funders work. They don't really--

**Laura Siddall:** Look, Mike Moritz is a big name in venture capital and investing.

He has a lot of companies he invests in. I'm sure there is an interest from Crank Start Investments and becoming more involved in the PTO and triathlon as a sport. And I'm sure there is some interest there, through Mike, but he's a businessman and he's got investments in a lot of other companies as well. So yeah.

**Kelly:** It's exciting. And I think for sure, part of the reason his firm and the one Next Venture, if people know that it's connected to Specialized, part of the reason a lot of these firms were interested is because they see a growing boom in kind of what we call, the active lifestyle, the multi-sport lifestyle, people getting outdoors.

And I do want to reassure people like, yes obviously for sure with somebody who cares that much about triathlon on our board, yes, they will be paying attention to Triathlete, but they're...nobody on a day-to-day basis is involved in telling us what our coverage is or anything like that.

That would be crazy. That'd be weird. I've actually never spoken to most of our board members. Yeah, it'd be weird to start. So I just want to reassure everyone. We'll see how that goes, but it is, it was a pretty busy, exciting week.

All right. So speaking of things and seeing how they're going to work out ...New Zealand is getting racing again. Australia is getting racing again. We're hearing all about them racing. I feel like it's kinda not fair!

**Laura Siddall:** Especially at this time of year, I would be in New Zealand and like gearing up with the New Zealand races and Australia... It was. It was Wanaka last week, a couple of weekends ago.

And it's like the first time in seven years that I've not been there. We've got Iron Man New Zealand and Topo [Tour te?] coming up this weekend. Australia had the Husky long course last weekend, by the time this gets released and there's races in Davenport, I should say, in Tasmania for the ITU.

So there's... There's lots going on down there, which is, it's great to watch, but you're kinda like, oh it's... and it's great for the athletes down there. Cause they've not been able to go anywhere I guess. And I guess that's the plus and the minus, they haven't been able to get out or in, but at least they've had, they're having a race season.

Yeah. I think the

**Kelly:** thing that's interesting to me is one where we always like laugh when they're just like going about normal life. You've seen Instagram posts and it's just like completely normal. But it's also. I don't really know how to feel or judge these races, cause they're only competing--

There are really good athletes in Australia and New Zealand and they're certainly very competitive, but they're smaller. And I mean on the pro side, people are winning prize purses, and PTO rankings based on this, but it's not fulfilled. And on the amateur side I heard God which race, Ironman, Cairns? Carnes? They headed out the same number of Kona slots, but it was like 600 people in the race. So how does that work?

**Laura Siddall:** I don't know the full stats, but I did hear it was about one in three, got a Kona slot from Cairns last year. And we've got Ironman New Zealand and I have a feeling it's very similar going forward to that, into that race.

There's four pro women down to start Ironman, New Zealand, which is, great for New Zealand that there's, there's four women there ready to compete. Although I think that's small for a New Zealand representative in normal years anyway. I think there are a few other athletes in there who have pulled out or injured or whatever.

And then, yeah, there's one, there isn't one slot up for grabs for the professionals. But for the age groupers I think there's a lot more slots going up for grabs for Kona. And yeah, it's going to be interesting to see how that affects the rankings. We had Challenged Wanaka a few weekends ago and New Zealand had a short shutdown and it meant that or a lot locked down, it meant that age groupers from Auckland couldn't travel to Wanaka, which is in the South Island of New Zealand, Auckland's in the North Island. But the pros were allowed to which allowed to, which allowed Beck Clarke, who actually came second at the race to travel. And, she was saying on an interview that, yeah, she hadn't been able to race.

That's like her PTO ranking she doesn't get and obviously prize money and all that. And I'm like, but how are we doing this? Because the rest of us aren't racing. So we don't, we're not getting any PTO rankings. I'm certainly not in the moment. And Wanaka was a new race. So how do they do the, how do they make ? [Kelly:It's not a new race, but they changed the course and everything...]

**Laura Siddall:** Quite significantly, real tough course, what used to be one lap and it's gone to five laps. From what I saw, there was a lot of congestion, which there would be on a five lap, but I've heard it was successful. But yeah. So how you rate that?

**Kelly:** Oh yeah. How do you judge it? Everyone's been telling me, for example, like Kyle Smith, I got that name right, right?. It's he's the next hot new thing. And people like tourists and told me that people until. And, maybe he is totally fair, but

I don't know how to, and he outraced Braden Currie by eight seconds for the win, but I don't know how to judge that when he's only racing in New Zealand, only racing against Australia, New Zealand fields, we haven't seen him at an international level yet.

And so it's just, it's really hard to judge all.

**Laura Siddall:** Or have we seen him? In a race where he's got other athletes about him. So he's on his last five, 70.3 or middle distance races. And it, and I do think he has a real talent and someone that we do need to look out for. And that the way he went wins, the race is he's a ridiculously good swimmer. He's got an ITU background. He just bikes hard from the gun. And then his running -- [K: he holds on. He holds on is what you're saying.]

**Laura Siddall:** He holds on. I think that will improve. But he, so he's won his last few races in that same fashion. And the last couple of races he's had Braden Currie running him down where he's got off the bike probably with like a three minute, maybe four minute lead and it's come down to eight seconds at the end.

And Braden we know is no slouch athlete. He's one of the big wet best in the world over the half and the full distance as well. But it'll be interesting to see Kyle. Like how would you compare? They're obviously having-- there's some great athletes in New Zealand, but put him under a different scenario where he maybe isn't out of the water on his own because there's more people in the field he's having to manage the surging and whoever else is on the bike around him maybe, and then have to run shoulder to shoulder with somebody in a foot race. We haven't seen that now. Yeah, he could probably do very well. I guess it's exciting a little bit the same with Hannah Wells as well, she's been up and coming over that half distance for the last few years, but has only ever raced domestically. She didn't go over to Nice. I think when the last 70.3 worlds was, so we haven't seen her really race outside of New Zealand. She's actually going to debut her full distance in Topo and we'll probably. With the greatest respect to the other one, we'll probably greatest respect to the other women will probably win on debut and get a Kona slot.

**Kelly:** Right.

**Laura Siddall:** She's again, a fantastic athlete. And it would be great to see her when the world opens up and put her in with another race. And I still think she'll do very well, but yeah, it's hard.

**Kelly:** There are like two issues there. One on the one hand, it's going to be very interesting for everyone, not just pros, who gets to race and who doesn't.

How does this affect Olympic qualification? I know is a huge factor because what I've been hearing from like USA triathlon board people is South America is not gonna have races for a long time. That's not happening anytime soon. So how did they qualify for races? How did they travel? How do we get them to the Olympics and the Olympics happens?

And then for age groupers how is any of this going to work this year? How are you going to get a Kona slot? Here in the U S Ironman Texas is set to go off next month, April. I think that's, and usually that's a big race. I have not heard a lot about it. It's

full. As far as I know But, yeah, I mean, and this is just buzz, but I've heard a ton of people preparing for St.

George, preparing for Tulsa. [Yes!] but I don't really know of any I don't know what's gonna happen with tests. So I think it is going to be interesting, to see how that all plays out. And then, the other half of what you're saying there. We do get used to racing locally, racing in our home town. It's comfortable. It's nice. And then we have to go to Kona or go to another place or fly[?] and it's a different ball game,

**Laura Siddall:** Yeah. And they're building up a great resume like of races and wins...Locally which is fantastic for them as athletes. And maybe that's a lesson for up-and-coming pros to do, to stick local, get the wins, get everything on the board.

And then, when you're at that right level to be able to be really competitive, like really into the front, then go broader. Yeah. It's.. I'm just struggling. Cause it's New Zealand.

[laughing, overlap]

**Laura Siddall:** Last weekend in Monaco, everyone was sending me video messages from like my homestay kids. And I've got a friend that does the adaptive race. She's got a form of cerebral palsy and she was in one of my race suits. So as she crossed the line and I was like, she said, her mum sent me a video. I'm bawling my eyes out. And it's, and I'm also, I'm in Boulder now and it's snowing and it's summer over there!

**Kelly:** Right. Right. It is snowing. It's a thing, though, for sure. Like the taking your skills and And your low like that ... You always find your route, you got your route, you got your pool, you got your everything, and then you go somewhere else. And it's totally, I know a lot of people, age groupers, amateurs, pros who struggle with international ironmans. Like never can nail an international iron because everything changes. You can't find the foods you like. It's tricky.

**Laura Siddall:** Yeah. There's a reason that when I'm racing a full distance, I like to get that at least a week in advance. Like just to get like the first few days again, sort of find your bearings, get settled, get everything set up in your room or your hotel, or, home-stay accommodation wherever you're saying and get those first few days of training in because then for us as pros it normally gets a bit hectic towards the race anyway. And so if I'm more comfortable or familiar, I've ridden the course, I know where transition is. I know how long it's going to take me to get there. I know where I'm going to park in the morning. All of those things that go through. To try and take out all those risk factors.

Now I know, I appreciate for age group, cause it's not... You can't necessarily do that and take two weeks in advance off for a race, but it's what we have to do. There's a reason why people go to Kona and train for training camps. Okay. It's nice weather, they go to train on the course. So it's familiar with them, for them when they come to race and things like that.

**Kelly:** Oh yeah. I ended up house sitting for two months before Kona and it's the only reason. And I literally remember thinking, thank God I saw this course beforehand because it's so hard. If I've seen this for the first, I would have just not even know what to do.

**Laura** It's funny as well. I speak to a lot of people who race challenge rope, and they look at the Roth, sorry, give it the proper name. I was going to be like rope challenge Roth. Let's go back to that one. And yeah, so I speak to a lot of people and they look at the race times because it's a fast course.

And they think that they come with the expectation that the bike course is flat and fast, and then they ride it if they've had chance pre-race. But if not on race day and afterwards, they're like, oh, wow. That is not a flat course. That is a really hard course. And it's got a lot more elevation than people know about it in Roth.

They just look at the time and think, oh, it must be flat because it's fast. Now it has really tough hills in Roth, but it does have some great descents, which you can pick up a lot of speed. The road surface is amazing and it might be a smudge on the shy side of of distance. [Kelly: it's fine!] but not that much, Oregon is maybe one on one I've raced anyway. But again, that goes back to that being familiar with a race is if you're not expecting it to be something-- a hilly course, and that's what it is.

**Kelly:** So we're advising, these are pre COVID problems, obviously not really a problem right now. And obviously I think this year, we're all just going to be happy to get in whatever races we can get in. I'm pretty much only driving to races for the foreseeable-- if they happen. Future people problems. These are problems for future us.

**Laura Siddall:** People go, can you remember what it's going to be like? Remember that year when we used to travel to a race?

**Kelly:** The only racing that I think that has been happening lately besides the New Zealand is Zwift racing! Zwift Pro Series. And we did a little story about, the last series wrapped up-- it was a little different because they didn't have run bike or -- God, I can never remember.

**Laura Siddall:** Bike, run, bike. So it was it was an individual TT on a hill. So first where they take off drafting and then it was a, I think between 6 and 8 K run on the treadmill. And then the last bike race was a crit race. So lapped course collecting points, every lap and that sort of thing. Yeah.

**Kelly:** And you didn't do it because you've been injured, but it did seem pretty brutal, kinda hard. Also, there were a lot of technical issues with the running. I saw there were some simple things, like the running is a little more technically complicated, I think. Cause you have to have a foot pod. And then I did see like Paula Findlay and Eric Lagerstrom and he was posting on Instagram that he had to hold her treadmill in place. Cause it was moving across the garage and she was running so fast.

**Laura Siddall:** He needs to slow down! The idea of the treadmill is not to make it move across the board as well. As the article says, Zwift racing is brutal. There is no... Let up. It's not real world racing. It's from the garnet's[?] max efforts.

And so it's really tough. And when you do the three races in a row, how they've done it with Zwift. It, it's funny. I did the previous series and...Loved it and hated it at the same time. Hated it. Cause it's just horribly painful, but loved it. Cause



actually you get such a boost. One, it was great to connect with the other women race[rs].

You just get a boost in fitness. I do think, I like that Zwift -- they're trying to explore options. They're trying to support the pros. This series, there was prize money each week. Whereas in the last it's been points collected over the four weeks. So I think that was a real bonus, so that for the women racing, but I think, and I think I like them pushing it, trying to bring the run in, but I think it did cause quite a lot of technical issues where people yeah. People on the run seem to have more issues than they, than the bikes, like switching over your connections and that sort of thing.

**Kelly:** Yeah. There was even one guy I'm like trying to, somebody emailed me about all this there's one guy who missed a. Oh, Anthony Costes. He missed the run cause he couldn't transition his like tech fast enough, but then missing the run actually left him refreshed enough to win the second bike. So then he ended up finding a new strategy.

**Laura Siddall:** Exactly. So like the first, I think the third that was not in the first week and yeah, missed it with technical issues and then just absolutely smashed out all the points in the crit race and still then won. The nights or the series of races overall, which was like, I've got to admit, that's not really fair.

So I think they had to do a bit of jiggering as they went through to say, no, you have to get a score kind of thing to be eligible at the end of the night for the prize money. But yeah, I think it was, and I was thinking like, if I was doing it in Girona, my bike is in like the living room, my treadmill was in another back room.

So I was like, thinking, how am I logistically going to get cameras? Because I don't have that many devices and you seem to have, you've got like backups and everything's on charge, so it doesn't run out of battery. And I wasn't quite sure then how I was going to transition in time and because you've just done a flat-out TTF it.

So you're breathing through your--

**Kelly:** And then you're like, all right, I'll pick up all of your stuff.

**Laura Siddall:** Oh, get the camera set up, get the iPad up, then go and smash out a 8k run at max effort or whatever it is. And then get back to the bike to do the crit race. So yeah.

**Kelly:** Honestly, I, one of my things I'm obsessed with is people's, we're now calling them wattage cottages instead of pain caves from last week's episode.

But people, I, cause I don't even quite understand how people have.. One computer running for Zwift and one running for Discord. And then they have the TV episode running and then they.. it's too much for me. I don't totally get it

**Laura Siddall:** My network would be like what I remember when I was in the UK last year in lockdown, I was at my sister's house and I was in the garage, for my bike sessions and Zwift and I struggled to connect to the app. Just to chat to people and have Zwift running because like my sister was working from home on the network, my brother-in-law was working from home. My nephew was on the

computer online all day. And so we just had all that and I was like, Oh, this isn't going to work.

**Kelly:** This isn't going to happen. And then my husband, I was, cause I just got on Zwift and just been testing out all these things. I didn't realize there was an app I needed in addition to that. And then my husband comes in and goes, and then he comes in and he's like--cause I had it like sitting on a stool and I was looking at my phone! And he's like, you know that's not very economical. It's going to hurt your back... Different problems.

**Laura Siddall:** It is! Like now I have, it's you've got to have almost like a stand in front. And then if it's like Zwift races, you've got to have a camera and it's got to be at a certain angle. So you've gotta have something else. Normally, if you actually took a photo of standing back of the room setup and there's like shoe boxes per-- a phone perched on a shoe box with a plant pot behind it and a music stand or whatever, holding something else up.

**Kelly:** Yeah, I saw Sarah True post this week. Brought up, she's at her sister's or something that she has her bike set up in between the bathroom door and the bed, and that it's not classy, but it gets the job done. And I really identified. I was like, I appreciated that, yes, the super fancy stuff is nice, but all of us have, I think--

**Laura Siddall:** Nikki Bartlett, the British pro. She uses an ironing board at the front of her bike and has everything on the ironing board.

**Kelly:** So yeah. Tell us guys, we always, I always ask this, send us pictures of your wattage cottages, pain caves. We like to share them on social. I think it's really interesting. I think a lot of people also decked theirs out this year. So send us in, let us know what works for you and thank you so much for chatting with us. Again, Sid Talks gives us all the scoop. [No worries. Thanks Kelly.]

All right. This week, we're talking to Kathryn Bertine, who just came out with a new book, *Stand*: a memoir of activism, but this is your fourth book. You're a former pro figure skater pro triathlete pro cyclist turn documentary filmmaker. I actually first came across you when you did the ESPN column "So you want to be an Olympian" which is very like the premise was go out and try and be, find a sport, find a country. And I think this is so funny because I think so many of us who are athletes are like, oh if I just found the right country the right citizenship and the right sport. How did you even get that gig though? I was so jealous at the time.

**Kathryn Bertine:** So my background is in journalism and in creative writing. And at that point I had a book under my belt and I was freelancing for ESPN so that my in had been created through freelance, but usually what I was assigned back then was smaller things, 500 word pieces on an athlete, or an event. So when they came to me, when ESPN came to me in 2006 and said, Hey, we've got an assignment for you. I was like, great. Who is it about what's it on? And they're like we want to know what it takes in this day and age, this modern day and age to get to the Olympic games?

And I was like, oh, that's great. Yeah. What a great question. And I said who am I profiling? And they said, oh no, you're going to be our guinea pig. We want you to



see if you can get to the 2008 Beijing Olympics. You've got two years. Go. And okay--At that point I was racing professionally as a triathlete.

Mostly I did half Ironman and Ironman races. But I kinda dabbled in all of the different distances to find out which one was my strong point. And as much as I loved racing Olympic distance, my swim time was still three minutes off the top tier pros. And my run too.

So I was like, I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna make it to the Olympics in Olympic distance triathlon. But, huh. How interesting that in triathlon, my strongest discipline is the bike. I wonder what road cycling is like, or even track cycling, except BMX. What's it like? So that's what started me on that. That track. And I did try a few other quote, unquote, fringe, sports-

**Kelly:** --I was gonna say, I thought you tried pentathlon, and handball--

**Kathryn Bertine:** Yes. Of which there are no bikes in those sports. And I just, I. Oh, a props to the amazing women who are in those sports and they are so strong. The sport is actually incredibly strong, but we just don't see much of it in televised in the US. But team handball over in Europe, these women are making six figure salaries playing it professionally.

So it's just, it goes to show that different countries have different sports. And I tried some of the ones that we Americans thought, you know, are fringe sports, and they're so hard, so incredibly challenging. And I thought, okay, I really need to stick to something that I at least know how to do.

And I knew how to pedal a bicycle, but I, of course I had. I never done anything on a road bike before triathlon and the TT bike is very different. And yeah, so I was like, okay I guess I gotta see what this is all about. And along that journey, I'll spare you-- It's all in the book as good as goals, right?

Cause that's it's a long journey, but what happened? Spoiler alert that I did not make it to the Olympic games in what ended up being 18 months riding my racing, my bike, but what happened was-- I came actually quite close to qualifying *and* I fell in love with cycling. So when the, when the journalism assignment stopped, I was like, oh no no... I'm still going this is amazing.

And because I had access to races, I was usually guest writing and trying to work my way up to that pro level. I thought like these women are amazing. I think I might be able to make it to the professional ranks. And I want that. That's not part of the journalism, so let's see if I can get there.

**Kelly:** That wasn't an assignment from your editor.

**Kathryn Bertine:** No, it wasn't. It wasn't, but that's where it actually stems into the activism side. Was that. As I was trying to qualify for the Olympics, my focus was on the racing itself, but what I noticed behind the scenes and I kept asking why is it like this? was the fact that at all the bike races that I went to. The women, first of all, we weren't even allowed to all the bike races that men were allowed to. The ones where we did race, we were usually half the distance of the men's race. And at the professional ranks the prize purse was a fraction compared to what the men were making. And coming from triathlon that made no sense to me, right?

I'm like, wait a minute. Women race the same events, the same distance, the same prize purse. And it made no sense that it would be like having ironman for men and half ironman for women.

**Kelly:** There's a growing debate over like some of the women's events, heptathlon for instance, like we don't necessarily want to change that and lose all the history.

There's definitely like a growing debate around that. But cycling has this like weird history of the women do lesser events. They don't have a three-week tour. They don't have that many multi-day events period. It's very weird.

**Kathryn Bertine:** It is. It's weird. And sometimes that's the paradox of tradition is that, you want to celebrate that it's been around forever and how wonderful! But for those sports that don't adapt as they grow, then that tradition becomes oppression. And this is a perfect example of how and why that is whereas triathlon, which is relatively young, especially Ironman. What is it now? 45 years, 40 years. That's right. I'm 45. Okay. I knew it was somewhere around there, but that's still, that's pretty darn young for a sport and, that's, so it made so much sense and I'm so glad that when it was formed that yeah, of course, men and women had access to these events.

Wow. That was it. That was a very modern way of thinking about it. I'm sure plenty of people doubted that the women could do it, but at least they had access to it. So yeah. So cycling really fell into the rut of traditionalism and that's where I was not okay with that. Not as a journalist, not as an athlete, I'm like this doesn't make sense.

So that's really what started. It turned the page for me, of, once the assignment was over and I wanted to be a bike racer, I also started thinking to myself, okay if I can get my foot in the door of sports journalism once again. And I should say once again, because if you remember in 2008 and 2009, we had that huge economic crash.

**Kelly:** If you remember the *last* terrible economic crash, yea.

**Kathryn Bertine:** I know I can't believe that was what, 12 years ago, but when that crash happened ESPN pretty much put all their freelancers... We were shipped out to the forest, and so I was like, shit, I don't know if I can say that on a podcast. I was really like, Oh no, now I've got to scramble, find other forms of work.

And hopefully when the economy thaws, I'll be able to step back in. And it was during that time. So then I, I was teaching at the local community college here in Tucson, Pima Community College, and I was waitressing and I was trying to make it to the pro ranks of cycling. And then I thought to myself if I can get to the pro ranks *and* if I can get my foot back in the journalism door, sports, journalism, then I would have quite a platform to be able to advocate for change.

So that's that kept me, that kept me really motivated, especially when you're working crappy jobs, and you'd rather be doing anything else. And at this time too, I was about 33 years old and I had long paid my waitressing dues, during my teenage years and college years. And here I was again, just trying to get by.

And and that's also when I started emailing ASO, which is the owner of the tour de France honorary sports organization is the parent company of the Tour de France. And I formed proposals too. Like, it wasn't just a random email. It wasn't like, "Hey, let women into your room[?] race"

**Kelly:** I was going to say, like it's, we'll get to that in a second. Cause your whole memoir is about how to actually affect[*effect change*] change. Cause a lot of us could say, Hey, I think there should be a. Yeah, week long race. It doesn't mean it's going to happen.

**Kathryn Bertine:** Exactly. That's, social media, we see that all the time. I think this, I think that, that's not the most key, effective way to create change, but I did, I kept emailing and saying, listen, I'd like to sit down with you. I have a proposal. This would actually be in your financial interest to include women. It will increase your ROI, and I'm sure at the time they were just like, Whoa, Who is this chick, right?

Some woman in Tucson has a proposal. Yeah, sure. Delete. Or who knows if it ever made it to the inbox I kept trying. And it really wasn't until a few years later. That was 2008-9ish. And it wasn't until 2012 when things began to change a little bit and I guess maybe one of the key components that I talked about in *Stand* is that activism really, ultimately, if it's gonna get anyone anywhere, it has to be inclusive, a team element of some sort, you can't create change alone.

You can bring your ideas to the table, but there, you've got to surround yourself with people who share your viewpoint and your mission and your passion and strength in numbers. It all took a turn for the better in 2012, where I did actually land my first pro contract in cycling, which was a miracle. I was 37.

**Kelly:** You decided you want to be a pro cyclist at 31. And were like racing for St. Kitts and Nevis. Cause you had to like make your own national ...create the national team.

**Kathryn Bertine:** I pretty much was the national team at that time.

**Kelly:** Yeah. It's not exactly like the the age at which people decide to become professional cyclists. And cycling is very complicated. Like it's not like pro-- triathlon's much more straight forward. You qualify you race. That's how it goes. Cycling ,you need a contract. There are rules. There's like the age 25, age 28 rule where the average age has to be at so by definition, you're not 28 and they need the average age of the team to be under 28.

**Kathryn Bertine:** That was probably the worst rule that existed in cycling. And it was very behind the scenes right? And it was other cyclists that had to educate me. I'm like, why is this so darn hard to get a contract? If my results are actually pretty good, what's going on? And they did explain to me that about this age median rule that women had to average below 28 on a UCI team. And that made no sense for so many reasons, but specifically science was proving that women excel at endurance events in their thirties, even forties, and Kristin Armstrong had already won, I think by that point two Olympic gold medals in the time trial. And she was in her mid thirties.

So where was this rule? Why was it there? And of course my journalism side was like, this makes no sense. Why? There was no good answer for that.

**Kelly:** I thought... that rule existed on develop development men's teams too.

**Kathryn Bertine:** Exactly. It existed on the development men's team. There--there are two levels of professional racing, that world tour, and then something called the pro conti. Pro continental. And so for the pro contis, they had instilled that rule. However, over on the women's side, we only had world tour. We didn't have a two tiered split. So they simply in their backward stance on equity, they're like I guess if we have an age median rule it should be for both men and women, but that was completely disconnected because they didn't actually have two categories for women. So they just said all women have to be under 28, not the junior women, but all women. And that's where unfortunately yes that answer did unveil itself, but it still made no sense. And we're like, wow. Some lame brain thinking over there in the UCI. So it's a lot to fight against, and and I did, I got this contract. And also in 2012, well actually just at the tail end of 2011. I was hired as a senior editor for ESPN W. The W side of ESPN had just started. And I had written an essay and they said oh, we're launching this new side, step on board with us. And so that happened. So I'm like, okay, great. Now I've got both sides. I've got the journalism, I've got the cycling contract. Now I can help effect change. And so I brought the idea to ESPN. Saying, listen, this is by the way, this is why an ESPN 30 for 30 documentary series was thriving.

It was big, people loved it. However they loved men's documentaries. Cause there were only two or three that were out about women. I think, Venus and Serena. And, but the numbers were so skewed and I was like, huh, there aren't any about women's cycling. There's just nothing. And now that I've been in this sport and I know all of the inequities. How great would it be to expose what's wrong, but also celebrate what's right. And how amazing this sport is and how incredible the characters are, so I pitched a proposal to ESPN saying that let's make a documentary film and talk about the inequity and how to fix it.

And my editor. Who was my senior editor. I was senior editor, She was editor-in-chief and she shut it down. She was like, direct quote: Kathryn, cover your ears, but does anybody even *watch* women's cycling? In that same tone, you know.

**Kelly:** I was going to, I'm going to, I'm going to tee this up for you.

Cause that's the..right? The argument is always because like we have a lot of same friends, heard a lot of times. The argument is always people don't watch it there, so it won't make money. It's just like simple math. Therefore you need to get the advertisers and the sponsors before you can get on TV. And so they, they don't put it on TV because nobody will watch it. Do you know what I'm saying?

**Kathryn Bertine:** Oh, I know we call that the pentagram of blame. Yeah. That's in Stan too. Yes, exactly. And chicken and egg, I took it up to the pentagram side and there's different sides, but it really is. It's true. Like where does that change happen? But I actually said. To, to my boss. I said, you're right. People don't watch women's cycling because they can't see it. There's no visible platform for it, but you're ESPN! You can create that. And by all means, do it as a test market. See if anybody watches, if you don't believe it, then I, okay, go ahead and do a market

testing. But the fact that they were even shutting down that idea of just saying, Oh, does anyone watch it? No, they don't. Therefore we're not interested. And it really, it didn't sit well with me, and I knew... my gut knew that they were wrong because I knew enough about this. Sports fans are sports fans. And at the highest level, those fans don't care if it's a man or a woman, they just want to see a game played really well. And cycling as you. And I know, and triathlon, it's got such a worldwide influence of fans across the world, love cycling and triathlon. So this particular editor really didn't have any knowledge of that. And I said, okay. I said to myself, fine. If you're not going to make this documentary ESPN, then I am.

**Kelly:** Did you know how to make a documentary at the time?

**Kathryn Bertine:** No. I didn't know how to make it. I knew I had a video camera, like a VHS camera from my childhood. I love that thing. I made home movies all the time. Did I make ever anything professional? No, of course not. I didn't know how to do it, but I also, at least was wise enough to know that anything I don't know how to do. I've got to find somebody who does. [Okay.] And again, that element of teamwork, if you're gonna make change happen. Oh, my God. Can you imagine if I tried to film the whole thing on my iPhone and pasted it together and it was like hey world, check this out. I would be... yeah, we wouldn't be sitting here today.

**Kelly:** Yeah, that was ultimately the documentary *Half the Road*, which was pretty well like widely watched pretty well received. It was everywhere for a few years there.

**Kathryn Bertine:** Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, that's the short story is it took two years. We started in 2012.

We, it came out in January of 2014 and it proved ESPN wrong. Cycling fans wanted to see this film, and now we have the the data and the demographics. I crowdsourced for this film. I didn't know what crowdsourcing was. Oh, crowd funding. Okay. Private funding therapy. Nobody. I had no idea what that was.

And somebody had to explain, Kickstarter and Indiegogo. And I was like, whoa! But sure enough, we built a budget for that film. And it was made because we had we reached donors across the world, 16 countries with an equal split of male and female donors supported *Half the Road* again, showing look, this isn't some women's film made by a woman director. Like they, no one cared about that. It was about. You know the sport itself. So that was awesome. And even to this day, here we are now at seven years later. I still receive royalty checks-- small, but I still receive royalty checks because people are still downloading *Half the Road* because it's relevant, and it's we actually when we debuted in 2014, We got picked up by a distribution company because they saw the value in it. And we screened across the world! Entered 10 film festivals, one, three or four, and these were festivals that were not like, this is a bike, like a bicycle film festival.

These are, the bigger picture of it all. And so we felt really happy that we'd reached our goal of... this isn't so much about cycling as it is about people being unequal and fighting for what's right.

**Kelly:** So as you were competing, cause that's one. Okay. So another thing you, like you're competing, you're racing as a pro cyclist and you're seeing things that are wrong.

Now there's a side where it's like, whoa, you're just complaining, right? Like you're like you just want to be more popular. Like you're not as big a deal as Chris Froome, get over it. And I feel like one, like how do you navigate that AND race AND deal with all the advocacy? And it's a lot of things at the same time.

**Kathryn Bertine:** It was a lot. It was probably like the most exhausting stretch of my life. I think what kept me motivated was because we kept gaining traction, more people were like, You're right. This isn't right. We need to fix this. Of course, along the way, though, there was so much opposition and pushback that I wasn't prepared for in my tiny brain of trying to be a documentary filmmaker for the first time.

I really truly thought, okay, women just want to have equal access to the same races that men do and, and to be paid the same and to have the same distances. And, in my head that made so much sense. I was not prepared for how many people felt the opposite and said, no no, you're not equal.

You know this, no this is a man's world and we're not on board. And I think what got me really in, in a couple of tough positions was the amount of women that stood in the way, I come up with a term that I use in *Stan* called sister blocking, when women deliberately stand in your way, because they don't agree with your view and rather than just chalk it up to a disagreement, they actually try to block that type of progress. I use the example where in 2013, my director on a professional team that I raced for did not like it, that that I was speaking out about inequality and cycling. And in her mind, she thought sponsors will drop us, be quiet, keep your mouth shut, just smile and wave, and she was very worried about that. And she said, if you keep talking, Oh, she also thought that making *Half the Road*, she actually thought I was making like a film about myself. No matter how many times I tried to show her the trailer or tried to get the point across, no no no. I interview other people in this film. Every now and then I'll pop up as a narrator, but I'm not this isn't about me. But she, I think in her mind interpreted that this was a vanity project of some sort.. And, oh my gosh, Kelly, it's so hard to ask somebody to see or visualize something that is being made.

It's not done yet. So they can't, they don't actually have any sort of tangible or visual proof, but you're asking people, just trust your idea, trust your mission. And not everybody will, so she took that road and. Is that if you keep talking about this stuff, I'm going to bench you.

**Kelly:** --which she did--

**Kathryn Bertine:** I raced once in 2013.

And then I went to other, local type of races by myself as a, an independent of St. Kitts and Nevis, but I was benched from racing with the team for that whole year.

**Kelly:** The other thing she said to you was that you're nobody, right? Like you're not a big deal. You're not a big name. How, which is probably a similar thing to what I



was just saying a second where people like “so just get better, be better and then people will care”. How do you deal with that?

**Kathryn Bertine:** No, you're right. It's not about there. I think for any athlete in any sport, talent will only get you so far as opposed to the things that we don't always see, the roadblocks that might be out there, the people that stand in our way or that's exactly it.

I had... I was a good cyclist, training camp will prove that I was doing very well. So to be benched despite where my fitness and abilities were, it was very deliberate. You know that like we're benching you because we don't like what you have to say. When I say we, it was really just one person, it was the director. I had an amazing group of teammates. They were fantastic. The sponsors were great. And I always really liked to articulate that. Because we can't make it seem like, oh, the whole team was against me. It was really one person, but she was in a position of power. She was the one who made the decisions. And I think it's important.

We need to see that. I've seen that happen in so many other sports too, when Mary Cain disappeared from the running world, and now we understand that it was really the decision makers above her that made her life hell. And it wasn't like, Oh, all of a sudden she had no talent.

It was the very opposite of that. Yeah, I think it's important for us that maybe keep an eye out on our favorite athletes and check in on them. Check in! Exactly. It's one thing. If somebody broke their leg, okay. Now we know why you're out for the season, but if they're, maybe it's good for us to take a deeper dive and find out what's going on.

**Kelly:** Another thing that with a lot of the really top performers, so I talked to a lot of pro athletes is they don't want to get involved in things that are going to drain them emotionally, mentally, spend time, like they're like, I don't have the energy and time to spend on that.

I need to just focus on training. They don't want to get distracted. And so on one hand, how did you do that? How do you keep training? And I can try it-- And you also got some pretty big names. You got like Chrissie Wellington to pitch in. You got to Emma Pooley. [Kathryn: Marianne Vos--]

**Kathryn Bertine:** That was the nucleus of our pressure group. We called ourselves La Tour Entier which means the whole tour, women should be at the whole Tour de France. That's actually where the whole teamwork element comes in is that during making-- while we were making *Half the Road*, I interviewed Chrissie Wellington. I interviewed Marianne Vos and Emma Pooley.

And for those who don't know cycling, they are both Olympic champions and world champions multiple times over. And you all know Chrissie. So when I interviewed them, I asked every single person I interviewed. Do you want to see women race at the Tour de France? And the response was an overwhelming yes from everyone. But I knew we were onto something when those three particularly said, yeah, this is insane. I can't believe, they were very very vocal and supportive of it. And I said, okay, maybe ASO wasn't listening to me when I was pestering them. But I think they just might listen to the four of us. And that is where we banded together and

we created the petition on change.org. And it wasn't just like saying, Oh, yeah, women should race at the tour de France. It was a petition, but behind the scenes, it was a website, a manifesto. What we were asking was for a meeting to sit down with ASO and say, hey, we're not asking you just to change this race. We want to work with you and help and make it better and make this a unified effort. And that's when the petition took off and almost a hundred thousand people signed it. This was also a really big deal change. Change.org was still relatively new back in 2013. And it was a little bit more effort. Today you can just hit click sign, right back then you had to enter in a few more data points and so to get a hundred thousand signatures was a huge deal. And the demographics to that, I saw the same thing that we saw for *Half the Road*. It was worldwide participation in this. It was an equal split of men and women.

And the majority of the people who signed that petition weren't even fans of cycling. They were just fans of equality, and people would comment like, oh, I don't really even watch bike racing, but what do you mean? There are no women allowed at the Tour de France?

**Kelly:** Probably not a good way to start to try and give it to ASO. I don't watch bike racing, but we'll watch this one.

**Kathryn Bertine:** Yeah, exactly. Very true. But we also took the bold move of checking the box that every time somebody signed a petition ASO would receive an email. So that was really fun, Chrissy and I had a great back and forth about that.

Cause she's like, I don't know, they might get really annoyed. And I was like, I sure hope so. So they did, they got annoyed, but in a good way. And eventually we...that amount of pressure from the world responding. And then of course, thank God. The journalists jumped onboard and on our side they started pestering ASO, like well what do you think about this petition? What is your feedback? What are your comments? And for two straight months, no comment, but behind the scenes we did secure a private meeting, secret meeting the secret meeting. Yes. I always say it with a French accent. Sorry. It's terrible. ~The secret meeting~ and they, and ASO issued a gag order on us.

They said, yes, we will meet with you, but no one can know about it. And we're thinking like okay. A hundred thousand people signed the petition. So they'll probably find out someday, especially if someone writes a book about it. Especially if someone writes a book about it seven years later.

Yeah. It was just so silly the amount of secrecy, for something like that. So we did, we met with them on October 1st of 2013. And it was one of my favorite parts in the book was how the four of us got to Paris. Marinne Vos and I were racing world championships in Italy, and we had to take an overnight train or drive the family caravan.

And Emma Pooley was finishing up her PhD and Chrissy took the chunnel from, from London to like ...we got there for that meeting. And that's when we started creating La Course by tour de France. And everything was behind the scenes. And this is very apparent in *Stan* that we did the lion's share of the work, but the amount that we had to convince them that people wanted to see this race was a shoc.

**Kelly:** So it was kind of a combo of all it's like social media pressure, the petition, the documentary, getting big names on board is key. Then you have to make an actual proposal, right? You can't like, and then you have to go in like, lots of meetings, lots of many meetings. I'm trying to think what... public shaming helps. There's a lot of steps, to all this.

**Kathryn Bertine:** And I always like to use the term public shaming, but also benevolent shaming. an embarrassment that will work in your favor as opposed to name calling and, being I don't know, childish and angry, instead flip it.

Like shame on you ASO. It's 2021. What are you doing? And make it make an actual point, a valid point that, the return of investment for this race was that, shame on you for not starting this. [Now let's make the numbers] exactly rather than just denting. And that takes work.

Cause what we all want to write is, oh my God, you guys are so dumb. Like just put the race together, and it's okay to feel that on the inside, but you gotta get it out there. So yeah, we, even the Tour de France petition itself, I think we did something like seven or eight drafts before we felt that it was absolutely perfect.

And that's key. And if anything, maybe that's where I got to use some of my strengths in journalism, because if you put Chrissie and Marianne and Emma and and myself next to each other, my athletic hallmarks pale in comparison to these amazing women. And they brought their visibility, their voice. They're also very smart too. They're amazing. But if anything, I have the capability of organizing, writing the first draft, getting everybody's opinions, writing the second drafts. We did that as a team and then also very much, the organizational aspect for me, that's a strength that I have.

I'm a good organizer, and if you're gonna, if you're gonna launch a committee to do something, someone's gotta be the organizer. As I call it in the book, they were all the superstars and I was the bus driver, so someone's got to drive the bus and that's where I want people to realize that we all have that capability.

So I, if someone ever thinks, oh, I'd love to see something changed, but I'm not famous or wealthy or an Olympic gold medalist. So I guess I can't really do anything. My, my biggest hope is I say, oh no, you can do something. You can be the organizer, the recruiter, the bus driver, there is a role for everybody that feels that impact of wanting to make change. If you feel that, then you have the ability to do it.

**Kelly:** I'm going to go back to the like... How did you possibly continue training through all of this?

**Kathryn Bertine:** Okay. So I can tell you this, that 2013, was it a really bad year for two reasons. One is because my director didn't race me with the team. So I sought out as many individual races or guest riding opportunities that I could. But where it, where I really suffered was that she was very verbally abusive. Calling me a nothing, a no one, who you are and what you do doesn't matter. And even though I was at that point, I was what, 38 years old. But. It really hit me, even though I'm a grown adult, I still felt like a little kid just being told, you suck basically. And I raced that way. My confidence was shot. I was trailing along at the back of the

Peloton. Not because I was as weaker as an athlete, but because I really ingested that idea of maybe I don't deserve to be here.

I don't belong here because that's what I had constantly been told. So yeah, that was a really crappier of racing. I still went out there. I had some good results here and there, but I know that it wasn't, I never imagined at the start of the activism role at standing up and fighting for what we believe that it would have such a negative effect on my training and racing.

I thought it would be the opposite, you know. I thought maybe that empowerment feeling of we're doing stuff, we're getting it done. This is amazing. I had a bunch of life hurdles that were coming down the line in 2013 and 2014. Those two years were relentless. And it took a lot of rebuilding emotionally and physically to get back to where I was able to have my best season at the ages of 40 and 41. So I did make a comeback from that, but getting over that mental barrier of thinking you're a no one, that took a lot of work.

**Kelly:** Yeah. It's very optimistic of you to think that it was going to be empowering. I would have been like, ooh, this is going to be rough.

**Kathryn Bertine:** And I think, you can, in the beginning, when we're all racing in whatever sport we do, and the going gets tough. Your brain is either going to say quit or no no no, you got this, and so I think that's what my brain was trying to do. Oh, this is challenging. And I feel like shit, but I can do this. I got this. I just didn't prepare for how exhausting that was going to be. Physically or emotionally.

**Kelly:** Obviously you're kind of known for basically the profile you were on the few years ago you're known for figuring out a way, right?

Like you were supposed to run in college you didn't like the coach, you learn how to row, you rowed instead. You were supposed to be a professional figure skater and the company went under. So you were like, screw it. And you went with Hollywood on Ice. You just kinda make it up and figure it out every step of the way.

But a lot of this book *Stand* is kind of about all this stuff. Like you were this huge public figure and that was like your M.O, but there's all this stuff going on. Like you had severe depression, you went through a divorce and there was all this stuff going on, behind the scenes that I don't think you really wanted people to know about at the time. How does, cause it would have affected the whole perception.

**Kathryn Bertine:** You're right. You're right. At the time. Obviously I'm comfortable talking about it now seven years later and but that's also why it took me so long to write *Stand* too. I had to get to that place where I was able to be like, okay, step onto that vulnerability tightrope. But until then, yeah. I think part of the struggle was when you have that public persona of oh, okay. I stand up for justice. I'm strong, that's one face. But the other face, the other side was the fact that I was truly flailing in my personal private life. And I can't say that I consciously made this choice, but I must've said just push it down, push it down. Don't let what's happening in your private life affect your public gains in activism, because this was all happening during the year of 2014 when *Half the Road* had just come out. We were working diligently behind the scenes with ASO to create La Course by Tour de France, which was going to happen in July.

My book, at that point that's... my third book was coming out. So it seems like this amazing year of progress for visibility of women's cycling and my husband left unexpectedly in the middle of all of that happening and it was such a shocking situation that it definitely sent me into a tailspin of depression. And I actually like to talk about this point that, in my generation, we were brought up... no one talked about mental health or depression, or if anything, depression was always seen as something that was clinical. Something that you take medication for. And it's something that you're born with. And that is a TYPE of depression, but it's not the only depression that's out there. And there are so many branches on the tree of depression and what was affecting me or what was happening to me was very much a situational depression. The loss of a marriage, the unexpectedness of everything happening all at once.

Something that I just wasn't prepared for in any way or shape. So what people aren't educated enough. And especially myself at that time, was that situational depression can be just as deadly and dangerous and devastating as any level of clinical depression at its lowest. It's all just a, just a different term, but a very same affliction.

It can happen. But I was like I'm not depressed. I don't have a diagnosis. I'm not depressed. And it wasn't until later, where it kinda came to light. No I'm in a bad way, yeah. Yeah. That's we talked about that in the bicycling magazine article [and the book].

Yeah. And I think it was the bicycling magazine article that maybe gave me the courage to try writing a book, because I do talk about that. I talk about a very near, near brush, or near miss with suicide and. I was so scared to talk about that in the article. But when I did, I got the most incredible feedback from total strangers who were like, oh, thank you for talking about this. I thought I was the only one really, and that, that really flipped the switch for me to say, Oh my God. Okay. Maybe we need to talk about this more. And maybe when we put that vulnerability out there a little bit people won't feel so alone. So that's where where we went. We being the voices in my head and I, we decided to make a change.

**Kelly:** Do you think it... I don't know the answer to this for sure. But do you think it's more common with athletes or not, especially at a high performing level?

**Kathryn Bertine:** I do. I do. I think whether a high performing level or whether professional or amateur, that doesn't matter as much as the fact that athletes are driven or driven people, and then the higher that drive, the more competitive.

Absolutely. I think that there is a direct connection between mental health and the physical prowess of an athlete. I really do think and hopefully. Those levels stay very balanced. So I don't want that to come across as "oh yes, all cyclists and triathletes are depressed". That's not it at all! But it's saying that I think we all have on the spectrum... If we can put our body through 140 miles of racing, then I also think that we can put our minds through incredibly difficult challenges, whether we want to or not, but there is a definite direct connection where... we're willing to push with our body, then our minds probably have that amount of depth to them as well.

And I don't know about you, but I've certainly seen plenty of cyclists and triathletes who are running from something.

**Kelly:** Yeah. Oh yeah. Like I feel like I was always say, yep.

**Kathryn Bertine:** Yep. Yep. That's not a bad thing. It's only dangerous if that person just keeps running and never actually sits and says, you know what? Okay, I am running from something. Maybe I need to think about this. Maybe I need to reach out and find some other sources of help rather than just a 20 hour bike ride. Maybe there... And, we're all guilty of that. I talk about that in the book too. How during the toughest year of 2014 and 2015, I very much used riding as a tool to try to cope, either to think things through or to sometimes numb the mind, whatever it was, there was definitely a direct connection happening there.

**Kelly:** Yeah, one of my coworkers at trail runner likes to say running is *NOT* therapy. Like it's good. It has lots of rules, but it's not the same thing as an actual mental health professional [correct.] working with you.

**Kathryn Bertine:** Absolutely. Absolutely. Oh yes, absolutely.

**Kelly:** You also wrote in the book about, so you go through all this stuff.

Finally, --the tour, La Course, I was gonna say La Tour--, La Course happens, you get to race it and oh my God, everything's amazing. You go and you do this Bicycling article. And you're like, surely between now when we did the whole interviews and when the bicycling article comes out in three months, nothing else crazy will happen.

Surely! [I paid my dues, right!] Yeah. And then for people that don't know, you had a terrible crash, massive brain injury, like they thought you were dead. She's just ... to me, it's just wow, that's just another thing on top of everything.

**Kathryn Bertine:** It was it was the, yeah, the ultimate ... I can't even think of the right word for it. And that's a lot for somebody who is a writer, but it was, the ultimate, the pinnacle, the turning moment of sustaining this crash, which I have to say because people always ask I'm like do you remember the crash and no, I have no memory of the crash itself, but I have a very good account of what happened from what was told to me.

And I'll give you the short story, which was, this was in 2016. And by the way, I'm also having my best year, my best season, I had turned from using cycling as like a coping mechanism to something where I now was back in love with the sport. I was racing. I was. So strong too, from all the years of triathlon and cycling, finally culminating in this what was the best fitness level and strength. So I ..and my frustration, I was using that in the best way, like I was channeling in the right direction. 2015 was a great year. The start of 2016 was also a great year. And I was down at the Vuelta Femina[?] race in Mexico, UCI race, when you're in an Olympic year, racing is always feisty.

And when you're in the last mile of a bike race, it's always feisty. So crashes can happen and it's routine for that to happen, but what's not so routine is for the level of severity that goes along with these crashes and apparently a rider who's just ahead of me made a move, to attack and move up the side and then changed her



mind and swerved back into the Peloton in what was obviously a very dangerous way.

And she took out a whole mess of us. And I was the lucky recipient of being on the bottom of the pile. And I broke my skull twice and also my collarbone and a bunch of other things. But it, what happened was it sent me into seizures and the one thing that I'm very vocally proud of with the UCI is that at all the UCI level races, the professional level, we have to have a medic car with a doctor in the caravan following the race and he got to the site and he saw what was happening, that I wasn't coming out of these seizures and the ambulance was still too far away. And he made a decision to inject me with Ativan, which basically will slow down seizures. And they they were hoping that would buy me enough time to get to the hospital and they could do what they needed to do to do there in terms of the the neurology aspect of everything. I don't of course remember any of that. And I spent the next five days at the ICU in Mexico and then was airlifted back to Tucson and spent another couple of weeks in the hospital here. And yeah, it's wild that what should have technically killed me on sight [on site]?, after a year I was given the okay. To say that I'm now just as weird as i ever was.

**Kelly:** They gave you like an official...

**Kathryn Bertine:** Yep! They said no, you're good. You're 99% OK! Or like you used to be! I'm like, oh, okay. So I'm just as weird. Great.

**Kelly:** I got to tell you so my husband has. First off it's like national brain injury month in March, apparently. [Yes.] And my husband also had brain surgery, bad accident, like a year and a half ago. And there was a part in there where they do the thing where they come in, they ask you to name however many words you can start with F in 60 seconds and it rang so true. Cause I think he also ran out after four in the hospital where you're just like, And it's so painful to watch someone like not be able to come up with fox. Oh my God.

**Kathryn Bertine:** Right!, so I came up with some other F words, but you're right. And for me it wasn't painful. Strange because I was totally hopped up on morphine and everything else that you're given in an ICU unit for brain trauma. But I can only imagine what my dad and my friends were going through.

They had no idea at that point, what's going to happen here. Is she going to be a functioning, human being or not? So for them it was absolutely devastating. And for me, I was just like, get these things off of my wrists. Take out these IVs. Apparently I liked to pull the IV out because I didn't understand what it was.

And why am I here? And when you have a brain injury, you ask that question like every five minutes. So the nurses were sick of me and then that, that didn't come across as very warm and fuzzy. Yeah. It was an ordeal.

**Kelly:** But are you, I guess is a good, you're back out riding? I saw you like posting pictures on Instagram. You're back out on the bike.

**Kathryn Bertine:** Oh, okay. Yeah, absolutely. And then after I had healed, after a few months I was able to ride, it doesn't freak me out at all riding. Yeah. Because that was very, that crash was so race-specific. Yeah. A lot of people will ask, are you afraid to ride your bike or are you afraid of cars?

And those are not factors in what happened that day. And have they been then maybe, maybe I would, but no, what I really wanted to do was just to be able to get back onto the bike. And to, I wanted to race again, just so I didn't have to end my career on a brain injury. And that actually happened in late 2016.

So I did get one last race and I was a lot more conservative. Yes. Very conservative. Yes. Yes. And my teammates were great. They were like, no, we get it. And we're just happy that you're here. And so it was really, it was a nice. A nice moment and I way to do it. And then I know that not everybody gets to do that. And I really feel for the athletes whose life is altered and their careers are cut short because of one race or one game, whatever it might be, it breaks my heart.

**Kelly:** Yeah. And obviously we're learning a lot more about brain injuries now. It's it's actually like a fascinating field of... Just everything we've learned the last five years, even. It's crazy. So.

**Kathryn Bertine:** It is, I will always put in a plug for Concussion Legacy Foundation. I pledged my brain there. Notice I say pledge, not donate. Cause people are like how are you living? Like how does that work? I'm like no, I still have it right now. I pledged it after I died. It's all theirs.

But what I love about Concussion Legacy Foundation is that they are being very vocal about those, about traumatic brain injuries and CTE. And they're putting it out there hey, bad stuff happens and let's make sure that we know the warning signs or we fix equipment, et cetera, so that we..lessen these chances of anything happening. And I, to me, that's such a great group of activists, who are not willing to be like, oh no, just wear a helmet and everything will be fine.

**Kelly:** Yeah. That's not always going to work out, but you had to write this book then while you were like, not allowed to look at screens for a while.

I know they were like, how. Because I've watched somebody go through like writing a book would be very tough to come to do on a brain injury.

**Kathryn Bertine:** Yes. My, my writing life, I knew I wanted to write the story, but here's why it's good I didn't. I didn't succeed in writing in 2016 was because I needed this to ...I needed the whole storyline to marinate and to really take the time. And I think in 2016, I also wanted to prove no, I'm okay. I'm okay. I'm going to be fine. Everything's okay. But brain injuries do take a long time. And I wasn't allowed doctor said you have to limit your screen time each day. And I did, so I started a little bit before the accident actually happened.

And then I didn't go back to that until 2017 and. Then in 2017, I wrote what I consider the worst draft ever. And I think it's very important to acknowledge that because I thought that I could write the book. I thought I could write *Stand* as like a manual. Like here's what we did to effect change. So do A, B and C and you'll be an activist and it'll be great. And it was the worst draft ever. Cause there, there was no human connection. There wasn't anything. That was really interesting or formative in there. So I said, okay, there are a lot of good key points in here, but if I'm really gonna write about this story I need to hopefully try to be brave enough is to put the reality in. And what really happens when we stand on the front lines of change is that our personal life and our private life and our public life, they all get

braided together and you can't separate them. When you fight for a cause that is so near and dear to your heart, you take that with you and crazy things happen along that journey.

But, rather than scaring people away from activism. What I'm hoping is that, that and why I dived into that during that draft was that maybe people will be able to relate to this, or, and also anything that I did wrong, it'll give them a clear indication. Don't do that, in anything that I did.

Maybe they can use that to their extent in the future. So that's kind of, that was the motivation. And that was, so that was really 2018. I'm like, okay, I'm going to write the really scary, truthful stuff. Yay, vulnerability la la la.

**Kelly:** You did put a manual at the back though. That is like, follow these 10 steps. Well it's like 20 steps.

**Kathryn Bertine:** Was it 20? 22? I think it was around there. Kelly, I put that at the back because I didn't want to be one of those annoying books that like lists all these bullet points in the middle of a book. And it makes me sound like an expert. No, I think I should show everybody all my faults and flaws and then they can decide if I'm an expert at the end, I'll just... I'll do it that way.

And I felt as you know from reading that only a lot of those points only really makes sense after you've read the journey. So I could easily allude to those, but I did. I wanted people to at least take away this manual at the end and be like, Hey, if you're gonna go, step on that tight rope, dip your toes into the water of activism, then at least use this as a guide of what to, or not to do.

**Kelly:** And just like, final nail... they also, you didn't have a publisher for the book either. There was nobody who wanted to put, they were like no, no one wants to read this. So you also started your own printer ...imprint. I never know whatever that's called. And you published your own book.

**Kathryn Bertine:** Oh, sure. Yeah. Oh my gosh, Kelly, I have to tell you, I thank you for bringing up this topic because it's I think it's really necessary to talk about the fact that publishing this book was almost indicative of the entire storyline of fighting for change. To, to fill you in my first three books were all contracted through traditional publishers: random house, ESPN, Little Brown, these are big publishing names, right. And in the normal world, if you continue to write books, it's supposed to be a step ladder or a stepping stone, you move upward.

You've already proven that you at least have the ability to put something slightly worthwhile out there. And I have an agent, I have a literary agent. I had all the boxes checked. So when we turned in the book proposal, so it's not the finished book, but it's, here's what started, here's what it's going to be.

And that's usually how a writer gets in advance, so they can sit down and complete the draft as a paid job, really. We brought the proposal to all of those big dog publishing companies that had, had faith in me in the past and we actually took them to 25 different publishers.

And they all turned it down for the same reason. They said ... they were kind and saying, Oh, okay, Bertine can write. All right. But we don't want this, a book about

women who stand up and fight for change? Won't sell. It's not marketable. Nobody's reading that. There's no room on the shelf for this. And we were baffled because if you happen to think about, 2018, last few years... yeah.

Our social and political climate was proving that, the very opposite that actually people do want to fight for change and/or know what that's like, what is it really about? And women's rights, et cetera, all of that. So we couldn't figure it out. And eventually, I took a deeper look at that subject and it was that...In this modern day and age, since, especially on the rise of social media influence, publishing companies really just want to put out comparables to things that are already selling. They're looking to copycat what's already successful. So they did comps almost like in real estate, and they're like, okay, she wants to publish a book about women fighting for change. Let's see if there are any others out there. No, there are not, therefore this book won't sell. Rather than being like, hey, this is different. This is original. Let's try it. So after it's one thing, if you get just one rejection like that, but because they were all saying the same thing, I'm like no, I don't... no, this isn't okay.

So I had two choices. One was not write it. At all. And the other choice was to publish it myself and to found an indie label and put it out there. And so I did, so the comment that got me the most was oh, there's no room on the shelf. And I remember thinking really there's no room in the internet? It's all filled up? The shelves are too high? There's not enough space. Okay. So that, I had to, Oh, I had to keep a sense of humor and that's it, that's a major role of activism. You need a sense of humor. Otherwise you will die instantaneously. It's so bad. I was like, okay, I'm going to make a publishing label.

And so I'm like, I'm calling it New Shelf Press. And what I'm hoping is that in the future, how great, if we can get more books about people you have, not just women and minorities, but anybody, progressive men, whomever, but people who stand up and fight for change and succeed and do it. I want to hear these stories and I know other readers do too. Yeah, so founded it. And then again much like with the La Tour Entier and our pressure group, I had to go and hire an editor, a copy editor, a graphic artist, a tech guru, who I always like to tell the triathlon world that's Torsten Rod.

**Kelly:** Oh, really? He does your tech for you.

**Kathryn Bertine:** Yes! The tech guru. He's so great. He is the one who uploaded the formats of the manuscript to all three books, the ebook, the paperback and hardcover, because as it turns out like, elves and fairies don't actually make books, there's like printers and files and humans have to make books, and in the traditional publishing houses that was done for me.

So going and figuring out that and what a fantastic person to work with Torsten was amazing. And then the woman who designed the cover, Jen Bosco, she was a local Tucson age group triathlete, and I love these connections and yeah. It was just really wonderful to see that once again, the only reason *Stand* exists because of teamwork.

**Kelly:** So what... so one, do you run a publishing house now? Is that what's next for you?

**Kathryn Bertine:** I, I don't, I run my label which solely constitutes of one book at the moment. So do I want more books on there in the future? I would love that. So it's an idea that's percolating, but there are a few more books I would still like to write.

I'm not saying that we can't get, maybe something going and get some lift off for new shelf press. How great would it be? Kelly? If I were able to hire, 10, 15 people to actually create that label so that it could get more books onto the shelf for the rest of the world, I would love that. So it's percolating.

**Kelly:** So what is ... you've always got something cooking. What is next?

**Kathryn Bertine:** I will say this. I have another book that I would like to write. And the reason that I won't articulate it now is because it's really in the the simmering stages. And I don't want to be that person. Who's like well yeah, there's this book about this guy and then stuff happens, I'd rather if you like a really good concrete sentence, but this is how it is for writers. We have an idea of what we want to say next. In the future. I would also love to get back into the documentary game a little bit.

But in the meantime, the side career I have to writing is I run the Homestretch Foundation here in Tucson, which is a non-profit that assists female pro athletes who struggle with the gender pay gap. And we help primarily cyclists. And so that's my passion and it's awesome.

We've been around for five years and we've helped 70 athletes from 17 different countries. We've also had a few triathletes through the house too, which has been great. Frankie Sanjana came through. Yes... Asa Lundstrom, Maja Nielsen, yes, from Denmark. She's so great. She's awesome. We've had a few athletes ... now the triathletes have come in when we're done with the cycling season and they actually will train here and help supplement the the house...the cost of the house for the others. So we love that.

**Kelly:** Interesting. Okay. Yeah. You have so many different things going on. I feel like all the time. And usually I ask people like, what would you rather at the end of our interview, but here's my question for you actually. What would you like to say still see changed in cycling?

**Kathryn Bertine:** That's great. Easy answer. I would like to see more media coverage that is publicly accessible. Okay, media coverage has to be the next step in terms of locking in the sponsors and the value. And right now, unfortunately cycling has many kind of pay-per-view style networks, as opposed to just being able to pull it up and watch it for free.

And I'm hoping that we can help bridge that gap a little bit. So yeah, media is a big one. And obviously the Tour de France, the pressure is on and we've kept the pressure that they need more days added to La Course by tour de France. So those are the, I guess those are. A and B, but they're part of the same answer.

**Kelly:** Awesome. Thank you so much for talking to us Kathryn and ya know. Good luck with everything.

**Kathryn Bertine:** Oh, Kelly, thank you. Thanks for helping put these stories out there. People can be like, oh, what's that weird girl doing now? And maybe I will check out that book or that documentary, and if they become a fan of progress in cycling, that's because of wonderful people like you, who are giving us a voice. So thank you, Kelly.

**Kelly:** Thanks to Katherine and to Sid for chatting with us. It's always a fun talk. If you like what you hear, be sure to subscribe on Apple podcast, Stitcher, Spotify, or iHeartRadio, and leave us a review or share with a friend who wants to make change. In the meantime, keep training and keep listening.