

# RANGEFINDER

\$5.00/SEPTEMBER 2008 ■ THE MAGAZINE FOR PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS

The Land  
of Light



# world changers

By Tamara Lackey

So, what defines a world changer? I'm sure it's different for everyone. For me, it's a person who is actively trying to make a substantial difference—or is already changing the world for the better—in ways that we have not seen before. These are people who, through their lifestyle and achievements, are helping to change cultural norms that used to define who could do what.

Simply put, they personify the breaking of barriers. And they are actively using their bodies to do so.

In writing this article, I was genuinely honored to meet, photograph and closely observe those who are making ripples in history. Each is unique. Raised in different parts of the world, some were born with varying physical abilities. Others have nearly endured death before torpedoing to the top of their chosen sport, while others have simply stayed the course, systematically increasing their skills, abilities and personal bests over time. Differences aside, there is one commonality enabling these men and women to overcome obstacles that others consider impassable: a flat-out refusal to quit.





## Charlie Engle

Charlie Engle lives his life in extremes, and yet, in great balance. A producer on *Extreme Home Makeover*, Charlie's passion is racing. But not just recreational racing. He has finished and even won some of the most hard-core and extreme events in the world, like ultramarathons [often 50 or 100 miles] in the great expanse of Mongolia, in the jungles of the Amazon and in the aptly named Death Valley. There was also ultracycling across America and the Eco Challenge in Borneo before Charlie and two other runners decided to take on a goal that they were told was impossible: running across Africa.

To be specific, running across the Sahara desert, possibly the most unforgiving place on Earth, with an ecosystem that is considered extreme at best. Sweltering daytime heat, with highs of 110 degrees, drops to freezing temperatures at night, with lows of 30 degrees. Yet run across Africa they did, at the pace of two marathons a day. They encountered significantly varying terrain and serious obstacles, including



a 21-day sandstorm, swarms of locusts the size of small birds, traveling bands of armed rebels and even active minefields. Every single day, Charlie told himself he just had to run until lunch; he'd decide then if he could actually continue.

All in all, Charlie led the trio of runners across nine ecosystems and six countries, covering 4500 miles in 111 days—without

a single day of rest. They went through a total of 75 pairs of sneakers as they each burned 10,000 calories per day. But what was the most painful statistic of all, according to Charlie? A whopping total of two showers the entire journey.

The point of the run? To raise awareness and promote clean water initiatives across Africa by utilizing the attention they were



generating. To do so, Charlie co-founded H2OAfrica.org, created with the intention of supporting sustainable, integrated water programs. As he and his team discovered first-hand throughout their grueling experience, access to clean water lies at the crux of many challenges facing African people—health and education, of course, but also human rights.

The humanitarian expedition, narrated and executive-produced by Matt Damon, was filmed and will be released this year as a feature-length documentary, *Running the Sahara*.

Next up? On Sept. 13, 2008, Charlie will begin a new epic journey—running across America. He and a fellow runner will need to cover nearly 70 miles a day for 45 consecutive days, starting in San Francisco and ending in Times Square, New York City. This will also be their attempt at a world record, the fastest crossing of the United States on foot.

This time around, he has partnered with United Way. With childhood obesity at

an all-time high, Charlie is determined to do everything he can to bring about a systemic change in the way America approaches health and fitness. Why all this effort to generate awareness? “Whenever I get a chance to talk to people, I use the opportunity to say that we all have a social and moral responsibility to use the gifts we have to make life better for other people. I went to the Sahara desert hoping this would make me a better person, and that’s what happened. My focus is less self-centered, and now that I’ve seen the problem for myself, I have no choice but to do something about it.”

### **Scott Johnson**

Scott Johnson was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis at the age of three months old. By the time he was 29, he was told that he needed to get a double lung transplant or he would die. His lungs had been completely ravaged by the disease and couldn’t support his bodily functions any more. After a bout with bacterial pneumonia,

his health deteriorated rapidly. For two months he waited in a hospital bed, falling in and out of comas, learning that organs were possibly becoming available—only to watch those possibilities fall through again. His options for survival seemed to be deteriorating and he just didn’t feel like fighting anymore.

Finally, on Sept. 11, 2001, he was told that a strong pair of lungs had become available and could be his—but because of what happened on that fateful day, and the resulting ban on flying, Scott was not going to receive those lungs in time. His doctors saw the news as the final blow—a death sentence for him. Miraculously, though, Scott held on until September 15, when they finally did arrive.

Lying in a hospital bed for months, in a pretty dark emotional place, Scott reflected on all the things he wished he could have done with his life and created a list. He resolved that if he got a second chance at life, he would do every one of the things on that list. At the top: complete a triathlon.



But after the surgery, Scott had to start at the beginning. He was so weak that he couldn't even eat or talk, and he weighed only 94 pounds. And because his muscles had atrophied, he had to begin the long process of learning to walk again.

While that took a while, after he succeeded in basic walking, Scott started to swim. Then bike. Then, eventually, he started to run.

In 2003, Scott finished his first triathlon, and he was hooked. Before the transplant, Scott felt like he was breathing through a straw. Afterwards, he could breathe freely. He could feel his body's strength. So he set his sights higher and completed two full seasons of triathlons before deciding he was going to attempt an Ironman race—2.4 miles of swimming followed by 112 miles of biking followed by 26.2 miles of running: the granddaddy of endurance sports.

Scott was inspired and fully believed that this was why he had survived. Now was his opportunity—to inspire others with cystic fibrosis to see possibility, to raise overall awareness for the importance of organ

transplantation and to make a difference in this world by doing what he already loved.

He lined up to race Ironman New Zealand once and Ironman Florida twice. Though he was unable to finish the first two races, finally, in his third Ironman attempt, Scott Johnson finished the Florida race and became the first-ever double lung transplant recipient in the world to complete a competition of that distance (and he's got the tattoo to prove it).

His words of wisdom to those with cystic fibrosis waiting for organ transplants or to others battling serious health issues? Scott says, simply, "Hold on. You don't know what might be around the corner... Just don't give up."

### **Winnie Tonui**

After 10 years of marriage; of cooking, cleaning, fetching water and firewood, giving birth to two children, helping herd cattle and farming land in their Kenyan village, 29-year-old Winnie Tonui told her husband that she wanted to become a professional runner.

To pursue her dream would mean leaving her two children and their Kenyan village of Olereut. It would also mean asking her husband to be the sole caretaker of their family, a highly unusual arrangement in their traditional African village. People would talk. But she would have to leave, at least for a while, to truly be able to make a go of it. Her husband told Winnie, "If you want to run, you run. Do not worry about what other people say. If you want to run, you run."

According to people in their village, running is for children. In their esteemed Kalenjin tribe, world-renowned for producing the greatest Kenyan runners, if you have not achieved success as a child, there is no point in running as an adult. Still Winnie remained undeterred. Every day, after having made four 2-kilometer trips carrying a jug of water the size of a typical water cooler, she knotted up her skirt, held it in her hand and ran through the village.

Without proper footwear, though, her feet were sore and swollen, especially after



ALL PHOTOS COPYRIGHT © TAMARA LACKEY

the daily 8K trips for water. Even worse, she was losing weight while women in her culture are usually expected to gain it. And since she wasn't a professionally trained runner, she was the topic of much discussion in her village, the object of open ridicule.

But her husband believed in her.

So Winny entered her first race, a local competition for older school children. Since it wasn't timed, the only way she could stand out was to win the whole thing. She did.

One month later, she won a 5K race at a district meet. Suddenly Winny was taken more seriously and was offered the chance to come to America and compete internationally. Her husband agreed to take on all of her responsibilities at home. While waiting to travel, deadly riots spreading through Kenya made it impossible for her to fly out, delaying her opportunities and making what she was seeking even more uncertain.

But eventually the chaos subsided, and Winny was finally able to leave Africa. On April 21, 2008, her dream to run professionally became a reality when she won the Dismal Swamp Stomp Half Marathon in Virginia—her first race outside of Kenya. Five days later, she won the Franklin 5000 race in North Carolina. On top of both victories, Winny picked up a sponsorship from Spira athletic outfitters.

And now? She looks to what is next, hoping to win more prize money to take back to her family and inspire other women in her village, in her country, and

around the world to overcome the barriers that they perceive are stopping them from following their adult dreams.

### Kelly Bruno

Kelly Bruno was born with a birth defect. At the age of six months old, her right leg was amputated below the knee. At nine months old, she was fitted with her first prosthesis. And at 13 months old, she was already walking with it.

Early in her life, Kelly decided that her prosthetic limb would not be a deterrent to an active, achievement-based lifestyle. In high school, she became one of the fastest runners on her cross-country team, averaging sub-seven minute miles, and placing in the top four on her team.

At the age of 23, Kelly has already competed in and finished two Ironman competitions, three Half Ironmans and a series of multi-distance triathlons.

"It's kind of cliché," says Kelly, "but I can't quit. That four-letter word really doesn't exist in my vocabulary." She proved that spirit on the Uwharrie Mountain Run, a race defined by its rocky and hilly terrain. Many were surprised that she took on such a challenge.

And while she raced well, unbeknownst to her, a bolt had been loosening in her prosthesis throughout the distance of the arduous course. About 200 meters from the finish, she took a step and wiped out. When she got back up, she realized that her prosthesis was completely useless. But the finish was a short downhill, and she didn't want to stop at that point. So

she literally hopped 150 meters on one leg until collapsing, and then she crawled the remaining 50 meters. Onlookers were shocked to see her finish, literally on hands and knees, bleeding and exhausted, but determined.

It's that dedication and motivation that Kelly brings to work with organizations such as the Wounded Warrior Project, a program built to honor and empower severely injured servicemen and women. Kelly is a powerful example of how incredible life can be, even after such a jarring loss. She also donates her time to the Triangle Amputee Support Group, acting as a source of constant positive support.

Kelly's take? "I'm not an underdog because of my leg. It's just an obstacle; everyone has their own obstacles. Whatever yours is, just don't quit."

One of Charlie Engle's favorite quotes by author Marianne Williamson pretty much sums up the mindsets of these incredible individuals:

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you *not* to be?"

---

*Tamara Lackey loves the high-energy mix of working with gifted associates in her North Carolina studio, shooting editorial assignments and speaking at seminars and workshops throughout the country. With work in 30+ publications, including Vogue, O Magazine, Elle, & Martha Stewart Living, her book The Art of Children's Portrait Photography releases in Fall 2008 (Amherst Media).*