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06

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U GOT THE GUNS





From a great career in management in Hong-Kong to pro rider! Guess what she likes better?



Gabi Steindl, an Austrian girl of 28, is a well know face on the pro tour, she's been following it for 3 years. Although some professional kiteboarders have never had a very standard life and don't know what 8 to 5 working hours are like, Gabi came from a really good "normal" career with plenty of responsibilities and \$\$\$, to become a pro rider! She explains all that this issue, in her article "Life changing".

How was your previous life?

Well, my plan as a teenager always was: 'study as fast as possible, move abroad to a biiiig city and have an even biiiiiiiger career'. So I did. I studied Tourism & Marketing at Uni in Glasgow, Scotland and moved, with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in my pocket, to London, where I worked successfully for almost 3 years. Starting off working for an airline, I soon changed jobs and worked for a financial publisher in the city until I accepted a transfer to the company's offices in Hong Kong. How exciting!!!

However, I soon got bored with the

finance-industry - talking to bankers, lawyers and other people of that kind just got so booring!?! - and landed the job of a lifetime: I became 'Global Marketing & Circulation Manager' of the leading regional media group for adventure travel & extreme sports, a magazine with the title 'Action Asia'. A pretty damn cool job!!! I had a secretary twice my age (I was 25 at the time) and travelled all over Asia promoting the magazine, talking to all different kinds of people about what I love to do most: extreme sports & travel.

Obviously, apart from traveling I spent many, many hours a day in the office. In

Hong Kong, one lives to work and work is life!! I would say, about 12 hours per day, 6 days a week. I was responsible for a lot of different things: managing and coordinating the global distribution, marketing, event sponsoring, trade shows etc.

What made you quit your job?

Honestly, I still don't really know why I quit this absolute dreamjob (for me, personally, THE most perfect career from a 'normal conservative career point of view')...

I just know that it in was 'Action Asia' that I first read about kitesurfing and saw

my first pictures... ever since then my mind was set: I had to learn that! Or in other words: this was the beginning of the strongest obsession I have ever had and it is still growing more and more every day I spend on the water.....

Plus: all my childhood and teenage years I dreamed of surfing (wave surfing) and living by the sea. Posters of surfers were plastered all over my room...however, for a girl growing up in Austria, hundreds of miles away from the nearest beach, surfing was only a dream.

Living in Asia, and discovering this new sport, I felt like I had to realize my childhood dream, and this 'new sport' kitesurfing was my ticket and excuse ...

It was a bloody hard decision and people declared me as 'crazy'. So did my father, he was pretty frantic, wondering 'why he financed my studies ... in order to become a surfer??' You can't blame him though, especially as I told him about my idea when he came to see me in hospital after my first kite-experience in Morocco (more about that later!!).

Leaving Hong Kong was hard ... living there was just such an experience, and Hong Kong for me, is still THE most incredible and crazy place in the world!

How did you prepare for your new life? Did you save some money, prepare an itinerary, have some precise plans in mind?

Prepare...NO WAY!! I never planned on doing anything like that!

During a business trip to Bali, I booked a kite course, which unfortunately consisted mainly of videos and playing with a stunt kite on the beach due to a lack of wind. Nevertheless I got severely infected with the kite-virus and bought my first (second hand) equipment, which I took back to Hong Kong. On several other trips through Asia I was hoping to find some wind to try for real; it never happened...

I got really fed up with waiting so I quit my job, left Hong Kong, decided to live my dreams and went to Morocco where I finally got to try for real! My dream came true in the most perfect setting: in Dakhla (at that time still a secret spot), a turquoise lagoon with dolphins, surrounded by sand dunes, 2000 kilometers into the southern Moroccan Sahara.

Going upwind on my second day on the water assured me to 'go for it', to see how good I could get and to do what it takes in order to become a kite professional and compete in the World Cup the following year.

I often still wonder WHAT on earth I actually was thinking!!? I had absolutely no clue about the sport or the industry. I hadn't saved up money, nor could I think of anyone supporting this insane idea...!? Anyway..I just did it... which indeed is rather incredible especially given the following:

Returning to Austria from that once in a life time trip to Morocco, I had to have surgery on my left foot and spent almost 10 days in hospital, diagnosis: gangrene!! - during

one of the first days in Morocco, I got a cut on my left foot (I guess I was pulled over my board, but I am not sure...could have been a shell or something) and was stitched up in a military hospital by a doctor who, I'm sure, was close to a 100 years old, without any teeth, half blind, and without anaesthetics. Guess he didn't do the greatest of jobs...!?

Doctors at the hospital in Austria reckoned that if I had waited 2 more days before going to see them, amputation of my big toe would have been inevitable....bye bye big toe - man, it would have been hard to stay in a foot strap !?

Was it easy to give up everything?

Well, yeah, relatively, I suppose.... back then, I knew, I couldn't escape my desires and dreams ... so better to do it sooner than later!

How was the start of your new life? Any regrets?

Tough ... being all on my own in Venezuela (that's where I trained the first winter season before going to my first World Cup event) certainly was a challenge. Even more so after I got injured a couple of

times. I have also had to deal with quite a few injuries during the past 3 years (3 broken ribs, various sprains and strains, stitches etc...) which is a real bummer and so frustrating especially when it happens just before an event!

How is your life now?

Life is good but tough. The last 3 years, I have been constantly traveling, always on the move between competitions, training and other projects (trip stories, photo shoots, videos etc.). Yeah, I basically have been living out of my North-boardbag - the life of a kite-gypsy, without a home or base - which can get hard, especially when things don't go the way you want. Thanks to my sponsors North Kiteboarding and Fanatic Boards (who supported me ever since my first World Cup event!), Dark Dog Energy Drinks and Cult Clothing, I manage to get around all year. I am involved in as many contests, different projects and promotional activities as I possibly can.

However, I wish girls would get more recognition within the industry, i.e. better publicity and financial support to promote girls kitesurfing, there's definitely a female market out there. Plus, we definitely deserve it, just look at the level of female kite-



life changing

Gabi Steindl

times; one of my two kites exploded right at the beginning of

my 5 month training period; my only board broke pretty soon after; living off an extremely tight budget; learning a sport which I actually didn't know anything about at all (I never saw a video or anything...!) etc.

But regrets, I NEVER had ... only when I had this series of 'freak-accidents' right at the beginning of my time in Venezuela, I was wondering if I was on the right track? Both knees swollen for 4 weeks; quite a few stitches; a severe eye infection; a broken toe and another small incidents in the first 6 weeks, I said 'one more and I'm out-a-here' ... but nothing else happened (during my time in Venezuela anyway).

Is life the way you expected it to be?

Mhhh, yes and no... On the one hand 'yes': it's just so satisfying doing for a living what you love to do the most - reflecting upon the sensation I feel when I'm on the water, the places I've been and the friends I've made, I feel privileged having found something that I believe in so strongly and passionately!

On the other hand, I have to admit that the job that I have now is WAY harder than any job before and definitely not a stress-free, relaxing time on the beach. In reality I have several jobs, but as a 'one woman show': I'm a professional athlete, coach, travel agent, PR & marketing, author, sponsor-hunter, etc etc ... that can get pretty drai-

boaring now - kite-chicks do rip!! Being able to afford a tiny base somewhere along some coast with good wind in addition to what I do now, that's my aim in my current career

Do you feel like going back to your old life?

No, absolutely no. To be perfectly honest: there is no way back! After living this life, for more than 3 years now, at this point in time, I absolutely couldn't imagine going back to the routine of a 9-5 (or 8-20) job. Sitting all day inside with the exception of some meetings etc. would simply kill me... guess I would fade like a flower.

I am a hard working woman and often still spend long hours in front of the computer, as I did in my previous career. However nowadays, I do it at nighttime, after having enjoyed the day outside! I prefer working my a\$\$ off for myself and not for somebody else.

I have many ideas for projects and developments within the industry. That's how I see myself in the future after having achieved what I want in competition. I could easily imagine some small business somewhere, or working with my sponsors in other ways such as marketing & PR, development, team, coaching, etc.

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