

NASCAR'S VICTORIOUS WOMAN

Last week NASCAR announced that it will build its Hall of Fame in Charlotte, N.C. With that decision made, the committee can begin choosing who will be in the first class of inductees. Janet Guthrie could surely be one of those honored as a victorious woman of NASCAR.

In the late seventies, Guthrie made front-page news and stunned the sports world when she became the first woman to compete in both the Indianapolis 500 and the Daytona 500. For many years, men tried to keep women, like Guthrie, out of serious racing. Until then, car racing in the United States was - exclusively - a male sport. Women were relegated to "powder puff" programs that the races occasionally held for its feminine contingent. Organizers often cited "insurance" as a reason why women could not be a part of the main events.

Even when, in 1974, a promoter agreed to allow women to participate, it would only be if she had a doctor's certificate, issued by a hospital that same day, stating that she was not pregnant. If the certificate was not issued on the exact day (it could not be dated even one day before), or did not include the explicit words "examined by a doctor," then the woman was denied an application.

In 1976, when car builder Rolla Vollstedt announced his intention to enter Janet Guthrie into the Indy 500, sparks flew. Male drivers complained long and loud. They protested that a woman didn't have the strength or endurance. They grumbled about a woman's lack of emotional stability and carped that their lives would be endangered.

The fans weren't any better. In her autobiography, Guthrie talks about large signs held high in the stands. One read, "JANET GRAB THAT POLE...illustrated with a barber-pole striped phallus. Another placard showed a big, sloppy pair of boobs." The crowd taunted and screamed for Janet to sign it.

In spite of the obstacles both on and off the track, Janet Guthrie persisted. Eventually, she amazed the men who would have kept her out of the competition, and earned the respect and acceptance of professionals and fans alike. With courage and dedication, she paved the way for other women to compete, including Danica Patrick, winner last year's Indy 500 Rookie of the Year Award.

In 1980, Janet Guthrie was inducted into the International Women's Sports Hall of Fame along with Amelia Earhart, Billie Jean King, Mildred "Babe" Didrikson Zaharias and other notable women athletes. Her helmet and driver's suit have a place of honor in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

During Women's History Month, let's acknowledge and celebrate the victories of women like Janet Guthrie, who found a passion, challenged the norm and beat the odds. As we do, we can also ignite a little passion for ourselves by asking a few victory-making questions:

1 – **What would be a victory for you?** Challenge your personal status quo. *If you knew you wouldn't fail,* what would you do with your life that you haven't already done? Would you like to go back to school and get a bachelor's or some advanced degree? Do you dream of starting your own business? Do you want to race cars, fly a plane...or something else?

2 – **What's stopping you?** Fear of failure is one of the greatest reasons why we don't take action toward making our dreams come true. For many women, the fear isn't just about not achieving the goal, but also risking the disappointment that we couldn't stretch ourselves enough to meet the

challenge to be and do more than we – or others – think we can. When we aren't supported by others who tell us we can't, we sometimes fear that we might prove them right.

Just before she qualified for the Indy 500, Janet Guthrie had those same feelings. She was scared. Her advice to herself? “So you're scared. So? Go ahead, let yourself feel scared for a while. Let it out in the open.” So, go ahead, express your fears. You might be surprised by how often just acknowledging them out loud enables you work through them.

3- **What jazzes you?** Too often, when busy with everything else in our daily lives, we don't pay attention to what makes us feel good...to what would inspire us to take the risks that create personal victory.

When she hit a rough spot, Guthrie told herself, “I must find the space in my mind where there's joy in putting the car through the turns. I've been there before. I'll find my way back.”

What's the “joy” space in your mind? You've been there before. Has that space been vacant for too long? What can you do to get it back? Like Janet, you *can* find your way back.

4 – **What is one step you can take today?** Sometimes, just one act is enough to give us the courage to get on our victory path. What would that single step be for you?

In my book, *Victorious Woman! Shaping Life's Challenges into Personal Victories*, each woman's victory began with a solitary, seemingly simple act. For Toni it was filling out an application. Lilly made a phone call, Pattie got a physical, Alisa did online research and Maureen stopped by her local daycare. By themselves, those first steps might seem like nothing to the casual observer. But for those women, and the other women of *Victorious Woman*, they were the beginning of wonderful life-changing experiences.

What step toward victory will you take today??

5 – Tell yourself you can **DO it**. You *can*. Refuse to be caught up in the agendas of everyone else.

Ignore the ever-present advertising and desperate television soap operas that subliminally tells you that you are less than if you aren't tall, thin, pretty and perfect. BE MORE of who you *really* are.

In tribute to the victorious women who paved the way, **take a risk today by doing something positive for yourself that you have been putting off doing, and then celebrate your efforts in a special way**. Be your own VICTORIOUS WOMAN and pave the way for your daughters and the other women who follow.

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