

Pass It On®...

53 Olympic Gold Medals.

How one athlete overcame a genetic disorder and a tragic accident to become a treasure worth more than gold.

Karissa Trinchera was born prematurely, a start that increased her odds of developing more slowly than typical children. Soon after, doctors discovered she also had Stickler Syndrome, a condition that causes vision, hearing and joint problems. She also experienced a traumatic brain injury. The bleak diagnosis was discouraging.

"They were kind of giving up on her," her mother says of the doctors.

But Karissa and her parents pushed forward. Swimming began as a sensible physical activity, but Karissa fell in love with the water. She trained harder. She made the varsity swimming team in high school, the first special education student to do so. The competition thrilled her, and she began competing in the Special Olympics. She earned 48 gold medals in her career.

And then tragedy struck again.

Karissa was in a car accident, hit by a distracted driver, severely injuring her shoulder. Surgery and rehab were difficult. With significant damage and six pins in her shoulder, doctors told Karissa that she would never compete again.

At the time, with 48 gold medals, her goal was to reach 50 medals. She pressed forward, training and preparing for more races. When she did compete again, her gold medal tally reached 53.

It was a special time for Karissa, and an emotional time for her hometown of Elk Grove, California. One of Karissa's best friends growing up was Officer Kevin Tonn. He was killed in the line of duty, and Karissa pledged her talent and her time to supporting law enforcement. Her last medal was dedicated to another officer she knew who was critically wounded. Her last act as a Special Olympics swimmer was to give back to the community she loves. She wants everyone to know of the selfless sacrifice of law enforcement officers.

After a long and successful career, Karissa moved with her parents to Idaho. But she isn't slowing down. Unable to swim competitively, Karissa has taken up a new athletic endeavor: equestrian sports. With the help of her parents, Karissa has adopted a racehorse that suffered a leg injury. It's fitting that the two work together, beating the odds and preparing for the next competition.

Win or lose, it doesn't really matter. Karissa is winning at life. Doing the most with what you have and caring for others is the real victory. Karissa's philosophy of life is to do your best and to try new things. And while plenty of people will doubt you and tell you it can't be done, a spunky girl with an infectious smile will tell you otherwise.

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