

Allen Lim on balance & struggle & white picket fences



Allen Lim discussing Life, the Universe & Everything at a surprising industry seminar.

I seem to have a fondness for the Midwest in the winter. Usually Trek (near Madison, Wisconsin) but today I find myself in Minneapolis for Frostbike, a conference/show of extraordinary quality put on by another of our major suppliers, Quality Bicycle Products (QBP). Yesterday was a productive combination of workshops and seminars.

Today it was more workshops and more time looking at cool product, but the real gem came at the end when I attended a talk by Allen Lim, inventor of "Skratch" sports drink. I thought he was going to talk about the sports drink, figuring it would be good to learn about the latest research and whether Cytomax should forever remain my drink of choice (the short answer is yes). But that's not what was on his mind. He talked about mid-life (40, which seems so young to me now!), and in 2005 trading in a life of continuous change and lack of "balance" for a white picket fence with the love of his life. And you're thinking this is a happily-ever-after story. Uh... not quite. His wife was raped and left for dead during a trip to Europe, and upon physically recovering, turned to heroin and cocaine. The marriage didn't survive. OK, why are we hearing this? Because Allen doesn't believe in white picket fences.

From that story of tragedy he went into sports, specifically cycling. Now keep in mind I'm not so good with names so I really didn't remember all the connections between Allen Lim and Floyd Landis and Lance Armstrong. But this wasn't about them either. He did make light of the ridiculous notion that Lance's downfall was so shocking that it was destroy cycling, mentioning that it wasn't likely the doping scandal in the Olympics race-walking competition was going to cause people to stop walking. But then he came to his real message.

"Be uncomfortable and never stop trying to figure it out. But you never will. If anybody tell you you're supposed to be comfortable they're just trying to sell you a load of s__t."

He told a story about Michael Creed, a very talented racer who almost but never did quite make it to the top of the game, going to someone about to quit during a stage race and telling him "I know it hurts. I know you want to stop. But this is the only way."

His message was that life isn't supposed to be easy; the human body is designed to suffer, the mind is designed to be challenged. Some will embrace that and accomplish great things; others will choose an easier way and define happiness as finding "balance" in their life. Allen Lim makes one thing clear. He doesn't believe in "balance." He believes in pushing the limits for what you choose to do, regardless of the effect on other parts of your life. Or, to paraphrase Nietzsche, That which doesn't kill me makes me stronger.

As much as I can relate to Michael Creed and Allen Lim's view of struggle and challenge being a good thing, his extremism on the subject helped me to recognize that it's not a message that can, or even should, be embraced by all. I can't let everyone off the hook though; I doubt that game-changing accomplishments will ever come from seeking out the white picket fence

lifestyle.Â --Mike--