



Stanford eCorner

Life Lessons from Luge

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October 19, 2016

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/4665/Life-Lessons-from-Luge>

Bonny Simi, president of JetBlue Technology Ventures, talks about how her willingness to take risks during college got her closer to her goal of becoming an Olympic athlete. Then known as Bonny Warner, she also discusses how the sport of luge requires both high precision and an ability to stay calm under extreme conditions — critical skills for life as well.



Transcript

- And I had this crazy dream and I kept thinking about it about being in the Olympics. Now I wasn't a great athlete, I was an okay athlete. I was in track and swimming in high school and I played field hockey and I hoped to get a scholarship and ultimately did end up with a scholarship here. But it wasn't something I was gonna go to the Olympics in. So would I really be in the Olympics? It was in the back of mind for about four years after I wrote those goals, it still was in the back of my mind, yeah I wanna be in the Olympics. So I was fascinated. And the next year the Olympics 'cause they come every four years was on, and I was thinking about it and low and behold, there was a magazine article to be a torch bearer for the 1980 Olympics in Lake Placid. I thought to myself, well I don't know if I can be an Olympian, but I can be an Olympic torch bearer and they were picking one person from every state. So there was gonna be 50 torch bearers. And you had to write an essay.

And I was from California. And I thought to myself, what are the chances? That I could be the one person picked from California. If I don't try, I won't get it. If you you're never gonna win the lottery if you don't enter. And I thought to myself, I'm really good at writing, so I can take the same college essay that I used to get into Stanford, rearrange it a little bit, and apply to be an Olympic torch bearer. And it worked. So that was my first exposure to becoming a T person. I came here my freshman year, I stopped out winter quarter, the first of many times I stopped out of Stanford. I went to Lake Placid as an Olympic torch bearer. So there I am at 18 years old in Lake Placid.

This is the opening ceremonies. And yes, I watched all of Eric Heiden's competitions and I was a hockey player, field hockey player. One of my fellow torch bearers said hey let's go, you know how to play hockey, why don't you come watch the hockey games? You know the US is gonna get smashed, but let's go anyway. I said, I've never seen an ice hockey game. My very first one ever was US Russia. While I was there, I had stopped out for winter quarter. So I had when the Olympics ended, I had nothing to do and no money to do it with. I didn't have to be back here til the end of March and the Olympics ended in February. Thinking about that goal I had in my mind, it's like well, should I check off that I had been to the Olympics? There was a sport that I saw called Luge. I thought you know, they had a beginners camp.

It was only eight dollars, even I could afford it. This is another one of those things of just taking those risks and just going for it. So I decided to apply for the camp and started competing in the sport of luge. Now in case some of you don't know what this is, this is kind of like little flexible flyer going down a hill except going really, really, really fast. It looks crazy. But people who are crazy and daredevils do not do well in this sport. Now thinking about this in life as well. If you're completely and totally crazy and you don't put thought and precision into what you're doing, you'll not succeed. So this was one of those metaphors for me and metaphors in life. Was to think about, you know, could I be precise? I could be precise.

Could I be playful? Yes. The other piece of this, this little sled, there are no shock absorbers on the sled, none. The shock

absorber in the human body. And if the human body if you're stiff, the sled will dig into the ice and you go slow. So this is truly, truly the sports metaphor for all you have to fear is fear itself. Because if you're stiff, the sled won't steer. And if you can't steer, you crash. So the idea was to be completely and totally relaxed, managing and being a precision while riding the sled. I say that this is one of the most purposeful ways for me as I grew up of learning how to really relax. Let's face it, I was getting ready for today's talk, was I nervous? Yes, but I thought to myself just relax.

When you relax, you speak better.