

Fearless Female Friday: Alexa Loo

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Alexa Loo is a two-time Olympic Snowboarder and was the first Canadian woman to win a World Cup medal in parallel giant slalom in 2006 in Italy. She was an athlete representative to the International Ski Federation and was a member of the AthletesCAN board of Directors. Alexa was a UBC graduate and was elected to Richmond City Council in 2014. She was born in Richmond and is working to make it a better place through her role in municipal government. She spoke to me ahead of her speaking engagement at G day in Vancouver.

You are speaking at G day, an event geared for girls aged 10-12. What were you like at that age?

I was small for my age. I was keen to try everything. I was undaunted by my lack of true ability in sports – I tried things and went for it. I had a certain level of obtuse going on. I have always been a bee in a bonnet person – I would have an idea in my head and go for it. I did gymnastics at ten and also signed up to play softball because nobody taught me to throw. People said I threw like a girl but didn't teach me, so I signed up for softball and learned to

throw.

If you could tell your pre-teen self anything now, what would it be?

It's not too late. I remember looking at little kids in martial arts going into the dojo thinking, "I wish I started that when I was young." I didn't learn to snowboard until I was 15 and didn't start racing until I was 21. It's never too late to be the best you can be.

What made you fall in love with snowboarding?

I skied from the age of 4. It was the freedom of it – having one piece of equipment. You could slash powder or jump off things. It seemed awesome.

What did competing in the Olympics mean to you?

After 11 years of hard work, it meant I finally made it. It was the ultimate graduation ceremony. I got to showcase everything I learned and invite the world to share in the experience and compete.

How can parents encourage girls to become involved in sports?

Make it a priority. The family that plays together stays together. Role model that being active is a priority for you; show them what's important to you and helps you be you.

How did it feel to step back from athletics at that level?

At some point the body starts wearing out. I don't hurt as much anymore. At that level, you are constantly driving towards something. Stepping back means putting that drive and that want into something else. I have a 2 and 3 year old so it's putting that drive into time with them and helping them grow as people. My interactions with them are my goal and being super supportive in practicing good parenting. On city council, I want to make Richmond as good as I can for my kids and everyone.

How did sports prepare you for politics?

I got into politics through snowboarding. Snowboarding is expensive so I would look for sponsorships. I realized athletics weren't adequately funded. I became involved politically with a group that lobbied the federal government for a minister of Sports. When we got a minister of Sports, we lobbied the minister for more money. It was about the level of effort compared to outcome in lobbying versus seeking out individual sponsors. What we achieved was a significant, permanent increase for all athletes and a 33% increase in my own athlete carding. I learned to put effort into changing processes and to change who I was talking to in order to effect bigger change. It was less daunting to ask for support for everyone instead of just for myself. Sports taught me to think big and to use my accounting and process skills to make a difference in the world.

How do you stay active now?

c Today I used a rowing machine. I participate in gymnastics with my kids. I have a chariot I drag the kids around in. I

go to the gym when I can and I get out and do stuff.

Do you get stage fright? How do you handle it?

I don't typically get it. I go back to athletic breathing exercises to get into my performance zone. There is fear involved in snowboarding; it's fast and about pushing the limit. I got into speaking while participating in snowboarding because there is nothing scarier than public speaking, but there's no risk of injury. It was part of my fear threshold training. You can also prepare. The more you prepare, the less nervous you will be.

What are you most looking forward to about participating in G Day?

I'm looking forward to sharing inspiration, me with them and them with me. I'm looking forward to supporting each other to be as awesome as we can be. It's valuable when girls get experience together, learning to support each other because we are sisters. G Day is the same day as the Vancouver Board of Trade's BC Women's Economic Forum. There are a lot of parallels between events: strong women supporting each other, networking, creating relationships. I'm taking part in that as a participant. G Day is important because I'm still doing that same thing 30 years later as an adult.

You can follow Alexa on [Twitter](#) and check out her [website](#).