

Creating A Climate For Change

LEWIS GORDON PUGH IS ABOUT TO DO SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY. From the looks of things, maybe even suicidal.

Clad in a Speedo and a swimmer's cap that displays the Union Jack, the British born extreme athlete is preparing to dive off a glacier into the frigid waters of the Arctic.

In the photograph he is captured at the very moment before his dive, in that split second prior to hurling himself into a habitat intended for animals much better adapted to an unforgiving climate.

"He swam for 20 minutes across the North Pole, which you're not supposed to be able to do because it should be frozen, as it has been for millennia," notes Tucson-based author/scientist/entrepreneur Jane Poynter, speaking with an engaging English accent. "During a swim like this, Lewis' core body temperature drops 10 degrees Fahrenheit. Most of us would die, but he has trained his body to give him a fever. He actually raises his core temperature before he gets into the water."

The photo is one of many startling images in Poynter's new book, *Champions for Change: Athletes Making A World Of Difference*.

The president and co-founder of Paragon Space Development Corporation knows a thing or two about making a difference. Born in Surrey, England, she has long been something of an adventurer, and her life story reads a bit like a film script. In the early 1990s, she was an integral part of the Biosphere 2 experiments that delved into how Man interacts with this fragile world, and how we can sustain life in various environments in the future.

It was a natural leap from those duties to helping to start a company that works with organizations such as NASA and the U.S. Navy to create space suits and dive suits that will help humans to survive in the most inhospitable of environments.

And now she has taken another big step, which she sees as part of a longer thread. "Paragon is about where life could be," she says. "Can we take life into space? And we also work in extreme environments, so how can we enhance life on Earth? This book is about our interaction with life on Earth. What are we doing to it, what does it do to us, and how do we live within that incredibly complex interconnected web of life?"

At first glance, it might seem strange to pair elite athletes with a book about climate change, but Poynter points out how it all fits. "I was introduced to this concept of bringing sports and the environment together by Dr. Tatsuo Okada who founded the Global Sports Alliance. There are very obvious links: when you're out cycling around, you don't want to be sucking in the smog from the car in front of you. People at the last Summer Olympics in Beijing, for instance, had a really hard time breathing."

Once she got rolling on *Champions for Change*, the project picked up steam quickly. "It started as a very small thing — almost a pamphlet. And then I started talking to some of these athletes, and hearing their stories, and what they have experienced environmentally, or what they are doing to help the environment and society at large. I realized, 'We have to do more than that. If we do something small, that's just insulting.' So I talked to the United Nations about it. They'd had an affiliation with the Global Sports Alliance for years, and they were really onboard."

The entire process of creating the book took less than a year, start to finish, and Poynter had to lay it out while athletes were still being interviewed. "I wanted to publish it in time for the Copenhagen climate



Photo by Shelley Welander/She.we Studio. Makeup by Michele Goldstein.

meetings, and the Winter Olympics, because we have a couple of Olympians in it," she says.

There are 38 athletes total, in pursuits ranging from IndyCar racing to surfing to skiing. Many of the names will be familiar to anyone who reads the sports pages — Cincinnati Reds left fielder Chris Dickerson, pro golfer Justin Rose, NASCAR driver Brian Vickers. Others have become icons, transcending their sport, such as surfer-turned-musician Jack Johnson, swimmer Natalie Coughlin (who performed on the TV show *Dancing With the Stars*), and Olympic snowboarder Shaun White, who is known to many who've never hit the slopes due to his endorsement deals.

Also in the mix are people who do unusual things, such as free diving, as well as explorers of various types, and two folks with a local connection: Paralympian Greg Hockensmith (who lives in the Old Pueblo), and cyclist Greg LeMond (who comes out here to train and to participate in El Tour de Tucson).

The other component of the book is educational, but not didactic. "I have brought in quite a heavy dose of science, but it's handled in sidebars so you don't have to swallow it if you don't want to. That's another reason why the book is so photographic. It has more than 100 photos, and I was very lucky that there were a lot of fantastic, world-class photographers who donated their work."

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The science facts, however, are intriguing. One picture shows a vast field of discarded plastic bottles. The accompanying text explains, "If this photograph were blown up to full size it would cover roughly seven baseball diamonds. It depicts the number of plastic beverage bottles that Americans go through in five minutes: two million."

Even if the numbers are a bit staggering, Poynter isn't an alarmist. "I'm not a big fan of environmentalists talking down to the rest of the world about what we should be doing. However, we're sort of in this Catch-22 because we need to understand what's going on. And the hope is that it will lead to some sort of behavior change, legislative change, business practice change ... and I think this is a great way of communicating some of those really astounding facts without having to be preachy."

Poynter also hopes that readers will pick up on the inspirational message of the athletes' stories, which demonstrate overcoming adversity. She believes that the book could be really useful in the schools, both for teaching science, as well as encouraging kids to read. She also plans to give copies away to underprivileged youth. No one is benefiting from the sales of the book (all profits have gone back into paying for costs), which was published by Global Sports Alliance USA, printed on recycled paper and with vegetable-based ink.

One big pat on the back for Poynter has been how enthusiastically the project has been embraced. "We had the launch of this project in New York at the United Nations, which was really cool. We had five athletes who are in the book come for that. The UN's Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information — who wrote the forward for the book — was there, and it was really an honor to have him step up and lend his voice to this."

And the voices will continue to be part of the dialogue about climate change and environmental concerns. Profiled athletes Shaun White and Sara Renner will both compete in the Olympics in Vancouver this month, and each will be looked to not only for how they do, but how they use their fame to address the problems of our beleaguered planet.

"Climate change is coming whether we like it or not," Poynter sums up. "Whether you agree on what the causes are, the fact is it's coming ... it's already happening. We need to figure out how to adapt to it." — *Scott Barker*

You can order copies of *Champions For Change: Athletes Making A World Of Difference* through Amazon, or at the *Global Sports Alliance USA* site: gsa-usa.org.

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