

Inspirational octogenarian trekker Erlinda Biondic ?felt great joy? when informed of her enshrinement in the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame



World record-setter Erlinda Biondic is a bundle of boundless positive energy?an inspirational octogenarian who walks seven kilometers daily from Aurora to Fairy Lake in Newmarket.

During our phone interview, the 85-year old Biondic described quite vividly the joys and sorrows of conquering the coastline of PEI during June and July to raise money for food banks in Aurora and Charlottetown. Our conversation about her recent 700-kilometer trek around the coastal roads of Canada's picturesque Island Province was peppered by timely insights from her 73-year old husband, George Biondic.

The two voices blended seamlessly as they delineated the highs and lows of long distance running and trekking. George, who is a decorated long-distance runner in his own right and preparing for a big racing season in 2026, and Erlinda shared their insights with a refreshing degree of candor.

It became evident in our hour-long chat that this indomitable husband-and-wife team is dedicated to one another.

?I did my events this year. George will do his races in 2026. Next year, I will be there for him just as he was there for me this year. We alternate years. George will do a six-day race in New Jersey. It's at a really nice venue at a State Fair. It's a family-run race. We know most of the regulars?although there aren't too many Canadians competing and only one or two Europeans. I raced in May and set a new 100-mile record in New Jersey. I've loved completing popular treks along Ontario's Bruce Trail, Spain's Camino de Santiago, and the Appalachian Trail.?

Tackling tough terrain is a familiar challenge for the eternally-youthful Biondic and she described the factors that moved and motivated her along the rural roads encircling PEI.

?What kept me going was the fact that people were relying on us to raise funds for the Aurora Food Pantry and local foodbanks on

the island. We were committed to completing the task and battle food insecurity. I just can't see myself as a quitter. Luckily, we came home in one piece. It was a really good experience. It's so satisfying that we helped other people both in PEI and back in Ontario. People have been so thankful for our efforts. I'd recommend a trip to PEI. The people were so helpful and nice. They greeted us when we were walking and the Islanders were very friendly. It's so beautiful along the coast?the greenery and the wide-open spaces. Everything is so clear. At night, we could hear the lapping of the ocean waves. We were lucky to have good weather, too, but there was a big drop in temperature between daytime and night time even in July.?

Despite the kindness of the Islanders and the scenic beauty of PEI, George Biondic offered insights into the practical challenges of the trek that Erlinda faced and the behind-the-scene duties she committed to on a daily basis.

?This was one of the toughest treks we've done?as tough as the Sierra Madre trek. We stayed at the Provincial Parks and we slept in the car for two months. Our car became ?the kitchen' and we ate early every day at a picnic table before putting in a day that often lasted from 4 a.m. to 10 p.m. Erlinda did all the cooking and we had some travel challenges without GPS. Small spaces don't seem to affect Erlinda, so we managed. We also used shelters and the showers at the parks. We put two sleeping bags in the back of our van and we had two vehicles?one had to be driven to the end of the route. It was time-consuming to look after the other vehicle after a long day on the roads.?

Despite the rigors and challenges that her husband George described in PEI, Erlinda outlined the euphoria ? the long-distance athlete's ?high' ? of completing a trek and the support she felt from the CBC: ?Afterwards, you feel good. You forget your aches and pains. It can be quite lovely to be with larger groups, but in PEI, we only saw two other running groups. 99% of the time, it was just the two of us?listening to CBC Radio really helped us pass the time and they interviewed us during the first few days. It was broadcast across the Island and they announced our daily treks which helped bring out the crowds.?

When asked what inspired her to become an ultra-runner, Biondic gives full credit to her long distance- running husband.

?At 74, I was exposed to the sport through George. He's the runner in the family. Through him, I've met so many runners and I thought, ?Maybe I could do this myself.' My first race was a three-day event and he thought I'd do 8-10 kilometers?. It's kept me healthy. It's a good feeling that I don't have to visit the hospital with illnesses that people my age often have.?

As an 82-year-old, Biondic became the oldest woman to complete 50-mile and 100-mile treks and broke the six-day world record by covering 403 km in 144 hours.

?I was so focused that I was breaking a record and George helped me to stay on target. There was a bell to ring to announce your record. I was so happy when I rang that bell after breaking that record. It was an amazing feeling, especially when it was finally authenticated a year later by the international governing body.?

In addition the great feelings of satisfaction that come from setting world records in ultra-running, Biondic searched for the words to capture the moment when she was informed about being inducted into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame.

?It's hard to describe. It's such a great honour. When I got the call from Melanie, I was speechless and felt such great joy. After all these years, my effort and work were rewarded.?

Erlinda Biondic will be inducted into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame on Thursday, November 6 during a ceremony and celebration evening at the Royal Venetian Mansion.

By Jim StewartLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter