

From grade school to Ironman

The travels of Kevin Withers

By DONNA DANIELI

Kevin Withers has travelled more before his thirtieth birthday than most people will travel in a lifetime. It seems that all roads eventually lead back to Georgetown for the popular grade eight teacher.

"To be here surprises me and the people I grew up with," laughs Kevin. "I was always the guy who was going someplace else."

Although Kevin is just completing his first year as a full time teacher for the Halton District School Board, trace his career back a few years and you'll find that teaching stints in Japan and the Persian Gulf have left him with a unique set of experiences to share with his students.

He began teaching with a two-year contract in Japan, in Ena and in Takayama. "I love travelling and that's a country that, as a tourist, I wouldn't last long in," Kevin explains. "It's just too expensive." At his contract's end, Kevin spent eight months travelling through China, Mongolia, Tibet, India, Iran, Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria, an experience that would have a profound impact on his perception of the world. "That experience changed me completely as a person," he reflects sombrely. "I had never really seen poverty before that trip and I learned alot about people. Everywhere I went, I was well received." Of particular surprise for him, was the reception he found in Iran. He describes the people as "phenomenally friendly" and recounts tales of three days spent as a guest in a stranger's home. "The politics of Iran aren't reflected by the people," he contends. "I learned a lot about perceptions through the media on that trip."

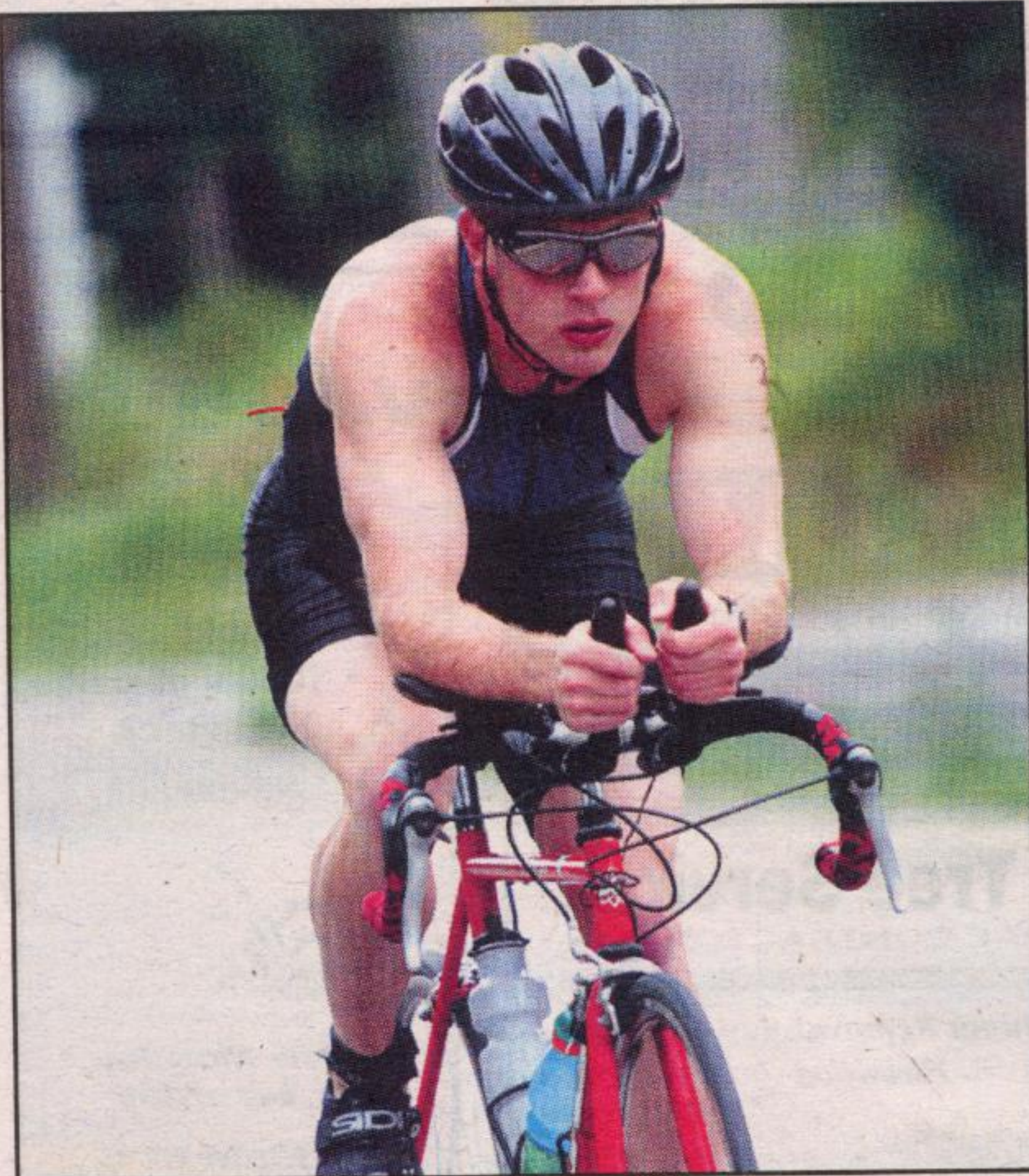
Kevin returned home with a new commitment to teaching as a career. After graduating Teacher's College at York University, he signed on for a two-year contract in Bahrain, an experience he only half mockingly vows to write a memoir of someday. "I faced insurmountable obstacles there," he explains grimly. "We had no resources, only two or three textbooks from the seventies. They didn't like you using the Internet or photocopying because that was an expense." Kevin signed on to teach grade four, but quickly found himself responsible for teaching grades one to four, and creating the curriculum as he went along. "They had our passports and wouldn't give them back," he says of the administration at the private school at which he was hired to teach. "I had to sneak out at midnight to come home. I had to pretend that I was meeting my dad on a business trip." He has filed complaints about the school and the conditions the teachers worked in since returning home and is justifiably proud of one change that he was able to incorporate during his two years there. "My legacy, the one thing I achieved, is that after my letters and phone calls, those kindergarten students no longer have to write final exams that account for 75% of their final marks. That was unacceptable." Still, Kevin looks back on all of his travels (and travails) as an important part of the lessons that have shaped his life. "I'm so glad to have done the things that I have done, but all that does is show you how much there still is to do," he points out.

These days, Kevin's journeys are of a more personal nature, as he trains to compete this year, first in the Boston Marathon, and then later, in the Ironman Canada competition. He'll travel to Penticton, British Columbia at the end of August to compete with thousands of other tri-athletes in an event that includes a gruelling 3.86 km swim, a 180 km bike race and finally a 42 km marathon. "I have no business making any predictions since this is

my first Ironman, but my goal isn't simply to finish - I'm too competitive a person to leave it at that," he says. "I hope that if everything goes well I'll be able to do it in under 11 hours".

As with much of his life, Kevin is using the Ironman experience to pass on valuable lessons to his students. He is using the competition as a way of raising awareness and funds in support of Type 2 Diabetes. "Diabetes is on the increase because of a lack of healthy eating and exercise," he points out. "I don't see a lot of kids motivated to stay active, and I'd like this to be infectious for everyone, either for fun or as a competition." He is awed by the support he has received from the students and staff at Brookville School, who held their own Diabetes Run, helping him earn pledges of \$2,800 towards his \$7,500 goal. "They're always asking my bike and about my times," says a thrilled Kevin Withers. "They're really interested in what I'm doing."

Anyone wishing to help support Kevin and his fight against Type 2 Diabetes can either contact him through the school at 905-854-2424 or can donate directly on line through the website at www.diabetes.ca. Look for the donations link and follow it to "Team Diabetes - Pledge a participant online". Once there, select the year 2005, the Iron Man 2005 event and the participant Kevin Withers. For more information on the Iron man competition, visit www.ironman.ca.



Kevin Withers

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CLEAN UP HALTON HILLS!



It is spring at last and now is the time to clean up our town and make it beautiful again. All residents, businesses and groups of all ages are asked to participate.

TWO WAYS TO PITCH IN!

Announcing the * Halton Hills 20 Minute Makeover *

On FRIDAY, APRIL 22ND at 2 p.m. employees and students are asked to go outside and do a quick 20 minute litter pickup of their premises or neighbourhood.

JOIN US ON SAT., APRIL 23, 2005

It's time for everyone to lend a hand!

Clean Up Day is Sponsored by *Tim Hortons*

WHAT ARE WE CLEANING UP?

- Roadways
- Parking Lots
- School Yards
- Business Areas
- Parks
- Gateways
- Valleys

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

- Youth Groups
- School Groups
- Businesses
- Neighbourhoods
- Churches
- Interest Groups
- Service Clubs
- Sports Organization
- Families
- Individuals

WE WANT YOUR HELP!

Participants are asked the Town Works Yard at 905-873-2601 ext. 2610 to register your clean up location or to be assigned a location. Also to arrange for pick up of collected trash.

Free gloves and bags are available at The Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce, the Georgetown and Acton BIA offices, The Acton Works Yard and The Central Works Yard at 11620 Trafalgar Road.

Special thanks to our Clean UP sponsors,






Following the CLEAN UP on Saturday, participants are invited to the Central Works Yard for refreshments courtesy of *Tim Hortons*, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Participants can also bring collected litter to the Works Yard anytime on the weekend.

The Town of Halton Hills annual **Earth Day Celebration** will be held on **SATURDAY, APRIL 30th** at the **Central Works Yard**

Further information is available on the town's website www.haltonhills.ca