

# Gratitude with Ashley

by Ashley Kaltwasser, 3X Ms. Bikini Olympia

I have always been an athlete. I have also always been super competitive. Even in Elementary School, I've always wanted to be the best! At that age, I remember I wanted to prove to the boys that I could run faster, jump higher, do more chin ups and jump rope faster than all of them. Setting the school record for these events also motivated me to strive to be the best I could in gym class.

In High School, what made me the happiest was training and racing for my High School track team. Whether I won a track meet, broke a school record in my race or even set a personal best for my event, it gave me such a rush of excitement. I remember, I never cared about being "popular" or "cool." In fact, I didn't even have very many friends at all and I was OK with that. I was more of a loner because what made me happy wasn't how many people liked me, it was the feeling of accomplishment. My love & success in the sport of track and field earned me a scholarship to run the 400 meter hurdles for a D1 college. I also participated in the pentathlon during the indoor season.

To be honest, during College I had lost my love for track. It wasn't as fun in college as it was in high school. I had a lot more responsibility and it felt more forced rather than practicing and training on my own terms. There was much more pressure to perform and I became disinterested.

Towards the end of my college career, I stumbled on the NPC Bikini division. I thought "This looks fun, I've got to try this at least once!" It was a new challenge for me. I began training for my first NPC Bikini competition after I was done with track. I completed my first contest prep in only 8 weeks to prepare for my first show. This was because track had already gotten me into pretty good shape for The NPC Bikini standards at that time. I ended up falling in love with the bikini competition world.

Starting off, I wasn't the best. I was a little clueless about everything (posing, tan, hair, suit, conditioning, etc) but each show I got better. I researched bikini YouTube videos, I worked on



Photo by Blue Line Eflex

conditioning and eventually I became successful in this sport. I earned my pro status, won the Bikini Olympia 3x and I've had many great opportunities that came from being a successful Bikini competitor. It's been quite an exciting journey and I've surprised myself how far I've come.

Growing up, I never thought I'd leave Akron, Ohio. In fact, before competing I had only been on an airplane once before. And now, I am jet setting across the world, doing what I LOVE. I have had so many amazing memories from traveling. I've given multiple seminars, competed in multiple different countries and traveled the world and met so many amazing athletes and future competitors. I've been to some amazing countries such as; Japan, South Korea, India, Sweden, Germany, Spain, Italy, Finland, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Russia and Romania, just to name a few.

Looking back on it all, I often question myself, "Wow, how did you get here in life?." I mean, this wasn't the direction I thought my life would go. Who ever would've thought that competing (and all the opportunities surrounding it) would be my career? Through it all, I didn't just accomplish my goal, I've exceeded it. And you know what? Exceeding your goal is 100x more rewarding.

I never expected my love and hobby to become what I do for work. And to me, it truly doesn't feel like work at all! I enjoy what I do so much. I swear, I wouldn't want to live my life any other way. I am so happy in life. It's like I've been living on cloud nine for years now.

People often ask why I compete so frequently. There are many reasons why I do, but the main reason is I just love it! I love the challenge of the journey, the adrenaline rush that comes from being on stage, the memories, the lessons learned and the friends that I have accumulated throughout this sport. The feeling is like none other.

I am truly grateful for the life I live. As cheesy as this sounds, I feel like Cinderella sometimes. What truly keeps the fire alive and my motivation high, is gratitude. I realize I am in a unique position where I am able to travel, compete as often as I want and have access to these opportunities. But most importantly, I will never forget where I came from. I promise I will make the absolute most of my time here in the IFBB Pro League. I refuse to live a life full of "woulda, coulda, shouldas".

There is one more thing I must add to this story...  
**I AM JUST GETTING STARTED!**

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## What is one of the best things about competing in the NPC?

As a contest prep coach, I get to see a lot of people start their journey in the sport of bodybuilding and while it's exciting to see them step on stage for the first time, it's equally exciting to see them years later as a seasoned athlete and see how far they've come. While some have remained amateurs and some have turned pro, many of them have ventured to travel with this sport.

Some have traveled to compete in far away places at some of the most exciting shows. One trainer even took his whole team to compete at the Arnold Classic Spain and then they all enjoyed the sites for a few days afterwards. I know others who have chosen their show so they could compete and then enjoy a beach vacation. Taking it one step further, some competitors meet up with their new found bodybuilding family at different shows throughout the year making this sport one of the most fun and certainly worth all the hard work and effort. It's a lifestyle that has many rewards!

So what show(s) are you going to do this year? Have you thought about making it a destination competition/ vacation? Ever thought about competing in Puerto Rico or in the Bahamas? Have you thought about competing somewhere you can enjoy the food or the nightlife afterwards, like Louisiana, New York, Miami, or Vegas. Looking to see your favorite sports team play on the road, visit some classic travel spots in the mountains, or head to the coast to go fishing — I bet you can find a show to combine that with. Better yet, visit Orlando, California, or Texas and take the whole family to an amusement park.

There are so many ways the sport of bodybuilding can open doors to many places that you may have never thought to visit and now you can know that anywhere you go, your bodybuilding family is right there with you.

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