

Michelle Warnky Interview

Intro by Calvin Landrus

If you are a follower of American Ninja Warrior (ANW), you know that climbers seem to do well. In fact, the first \$1,000,000 grand prize was claimed this year by climber, Isaac Caldiero. Another climber, **Michelle Warnky**, has done well and has been featured on ANW the last couple of seasons.



As you can imagine, Solid Rock has members who are interested in ANW and one of them suggested that I contact Michelle for an interview because she was a Christian. Well, it just happens that Nate and Sarah Moore, climbing chaplains that partner with SRCFC, work behind the scenes and were able to ask her if she would be interested in doing an interview.

Her answer was, “of course” because as it turns out she had been an SRCFC Member since 2007. She graciously agreed to answer a few questions. Also, we are proud to announce that Michelle will be our guest speaker at our Chandler Mountain Challenge at Horse Pens 40 in March 2016.

How did you first connect with SRCFC?

When I was in college in Kentucky, I heard that Chris Sharma and Katie Brown were going to be at the Red River Gorge for Rocktoberfest, which was a Petzl RocTrip too. While there, I found that Solid Rock was doing breakfast for the event and offered to help. I really enjoyed the prayer time we had together that weekend.

How did you get into being an “American Ninja Warrior”?

Some friends told me I should check-out the show. I did and thought it was awesome except I wondered if girls were allowed to compete. I started asking around and found out about a gym in New Jersey where I could go and try some of the obstacles. I got the salmon ladder first try and it didn't take me long to get up the warped wall, a nemesis for girls. After some networking in the scene, the producers of the show called me and wanted to know if I wanted to try out.

How has being a climber helped with being a ninja?

The upper body strength needed for climbing is very helpful in many of the stunts. And the learned ability to push through pain.



Speaking of climbing, how did you get into climbing?

I loved climbing things like trees as a child. For a family activity, we were going bowling but happened to hear that climbing at the gym was fun. So, we decided to try it and when it came time for a family activity the next time, we choose climbing over bowling.

Where did climbing go from there for you?

I started going regularly to the climbing gym and did some youth competitions. But it really has taken a back seat to first running track/cross-country in high school and college and then to spending five years in Kazakhstan teaching English-as-a-second-language with a Christian organization. Now, it's a part of ninja training. I have yet to really apply my skills to climbing hard outside.

You compete on ANW with a Bible verse reference on your legs. Can you tell us more about that?

It started during my last year of college during cross-country season when I was dealing with a leg injury that was hard to explain to my coaches. I decided to write a "healing" verse on my leg, not in a magical way, but in a way to honor God in my running. It seemed to help. After that, it became part of who I am and I would pray about what verse to write before each race. When it was time to run the course for ANW, I asked to see if it was OK to write and they said no problem. Now it's a tradition.

Has there been any kickback for having the verses so publically displayed?

I'm sure there are distractors but I haven't heard much. Actually, most of the other ninjas are pretty respectful of it. One time while I was putting a verse on, I was able to share the basics of the Gospel with a fellow competitor. Also, it helps that I wear it with humility as all know I'm not perfect.

When projecting a climb, we might blow a sequence but the vast majority of the time we can try again. How have you dealt with failing on many of the ANW stunts that have low percentage movements and where you only have one chance?

To be honest, that is really hard. I commiserate and relive the moment again and again. It's hard doing it in such a public format. I have had kids come up and ask me why I failed. Then you wrap up personal expectations of trying to become a sponsored athlete, it can be devastating. When the tears flow, I'm so glad I have a God I can turn to knowing that He is in control.

How has God helped you through those moments?

It starts with the story of redemption from our sins through Jesus Christ. Knowing we get to move forward in important areas of life after failure makes it easier to move on after disappointing performances. God has provided opportunities in the past and I know He will let me try again.

What kind of Christian influence is there in the ANW community?

When I went to my first finals in Vegas, I was really missing Christian fellowship but kept thinking there must be other Christians there. Then on the 3rd day, I met one. That led to finding out that the perennial star, Travis Rosen, was organizing prayer times at the finals. In Vegas this year, we had 35 join in, some of who are still not yet Christ-followers.

For the qualifying round in Pittsburgh this year you had Psalm 121 written on your leg and verse 3 starts with, "He will not allow your foot to slip." How was the verse evident in your run?

I still don't know how I made it across the Snake Crossing. I give God all the glory.