



# Anna

the Adventurer

by Claire Delahunty

“Check out my hands!” Anna beamed up at her mum, Sue.  
“Just like yours and dad’s were!”

Anna’s mum beamed back. Her daughter was indeed sporting a magnificent set of calluses on her palms. Just at the base of her fingers, Anna’s skin was hardened and tough. She loved them. Her hands showed the hours and hours she spent each week gripping on to the oars as she rowed along the river.

“Are they Olympic hands yet, mum?” Anna cocked her head to one side, looking up at Sue.  
“They’re champion-hands already,” Sue said, “Because they show how hard you’ve worked.”

Anna hugged her mum tight around the waste, showing off how strong her arm muscles were and squeezing until her mum gave a strangled laugh.  
“You’re squashing me!”

Satisfied with a hug-well-delivered, Anna dashed off through the house to find her dad and show him her brilliant calluses. It wasn’t that she was a show-off or anything, Anna just couldn’t help sharing her enthusiasm. Ever since she was a little girl, she had known the story of her mum and dad.

They had both—both of them!—been Olympic rowers, and she had always been proud of them. Her mum and dad had rowed for Great Britain. They had been selected as the best in the world! It filled her with a delicious sort of excitement to picture herself doing the very same thing. Anna sometimes imagined the echoing cheers of the Olympic crowds with every stroke of the oars. She imagined people cheering her on, just as they had cheered her mum and dad.

By the time Anna turned sixteen, the calluses on her hands were like old friends that had always been there. She would rub her palms absently together when she was bored in class at school, or thinking hard about a math problem. She would also look down at those familiar palms to hide the fact that she felt left out when kids at school were all talking about some party they had been to, that she hadn't, because she refused to skip her early-morning training sessions. Her friends did their best to understand, but sometimes they scratched their heads and looked puzzled.

"Come out just this once Anna!" they would say. "You're going to miss all the fun. Everyone's staying over at my place, and we're not going to sleep—won't it be cool to stay awake until the sun comes up?"

Anna did her best to laugh and shake it off. She knew she had to see the sun come up on the water each day after a good night's sleep. She couldn't be a champion if she was tired all the time. She knew her mum and dad would always be proud of her, but she was more determined than ever to follow in their footsteps. She was a good athlete, and if she worked hard, she was sure she would make it.

Life was different by the time Anna had finished studying and left school and parties far behind her, but the way she threw her arms around her mum for hugs was just the same.

"You've still got those hard-working hands and those strong arms!" her mum remarked, after one of her trademark squeezes.

Anna smiled, and Sue could still see the outline of her daughter's face from years before, the excited child so focused on what lay ahead. But the image faded as her daughter sat down at the table with a heavy sigh.

"Oh mum." Is all Anna said.

The pair were silent for a while, blowing on the comforting, hot cups of tea clasped in their hands.

Finally, Anna spoke. "I don't think the dream is making me happy any more, Mum."

"The dream of rowing for Great Britain in the Olympics?" Sue asked, looking with concern at her daughter's crumpled face. Anna nodded.

"The idea of doing what you and dad did still makes me so happy," she explained, "but what I am doing to get there doesn't make me happy at all." Anna's mum nodded thoughtfully. She knew better than anyone what Anna had been working towards for years. Her daughter got up before anyone else was awake, to row for miles and miles in the freezing cold and the rain and the hot sun. She gave up fun things to train, she put her whole self into it.

"Well then it's simple, Anna." She said.

"It is?" Anna asked with surprise.

"Yes! Why don't you stop rowing for a while, and see if that makes you can happier. There are hundreds of other dreams you can chase!"

Anna felt her shoulders lighten, as if by magic. Suddenly, she shot up out of her chair, kissed her mother on the cheek and ran out the door, quick as a flash.

"Where are you going?" Sue called.

"To find a new dream!" Anna called back.

Many months later, Anna was back home, sitting at the kitchen table.

"Check out my wind-burn!" Anna beamed at both her parents, her face like a little pink panda with a red nose and red cheeks.

"It certainly is impressive," Anna's dad laughed, as her mum tried not to look too amused.

"I've cycled the Andes, and my face has become red thanks to the winds that whip across the mountains in South America!"

Anna's parents were used to their daughter's incredible journeys by now. She would often set off to pedal or walk or run through a new place on a different adventure.

"I think you've found your new dream," Anna's mum said, her voice full of pride.

"I think you're right," Anna nodded. "I didn't know you could be a professional adventurer, but it seems you can. In fact, that's what I am!" she smiled.

"I want to show other people that they can do anything they set their mind to. It isn't the dream I've always had, but I think it's better—it's a brand new dream, and it makes me happy."

**"Well," said Anna's mum and dad together,  
"then that's the very best sort of dream you can have."**



## Anna McNuff

Anna McNuff is a British adventurer who has cycled across all fifty states of the USA and run the entire length of New Zealand. She is a speaker and author and was named by the Guardian as one of the top modern female adventurers.

Anna is a former elite rower, and the daughter of two Olympians who spends her time encouraging others to grab hold of life and have their own adventures. She has just released a book called *The Pants of Perspective* – one woman's 3000 kilometre running adventure through the wilds of New Zealand.



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**What sport do you keep trying at?**

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**When did you last feel like you succeeded?**

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**What would you ask Anna if you met her?**

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