



# Open Heart, Open Mind

By Dr. Linda Hancock

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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Clara Hughes grew up in a Canadian family that had a lot of problems. Even though her father was a respected university professor, his drinking caused havoc for Clara, her mother and sister. He never encouraged Clara, even after she had become successful in sports.

After Clara was older and had moved away from the family's Winnipeg home, she realized that her mother was actually an abused woman. Her sister, also had suffered from the way that her father treated the family and had mental health issues of her own.

When Clara was sixteen years old, she watched a speed skater win an Olympic medal on television and decided that one day she wanted to do the same thing. At the time, however, she was partying, using drugs and alcohol to mask what was later diagnosed as depression. But nothing was going to stop Clara from reaching her goal. She was a determined and committed individual who was willing to train and push herself no matter how difficult that would be. She not only won medals in both the Winter and Summer games, for speed skating and for cycling but has become an international humanitarian.

Since her youth Clara has struggled on a career and on a personal level. She suffered from depression, disordered eating and inappropriate partying behaviours. Disagreements and relationships with her coaches plagued her. As a Canadian athlete, she was not provided with as much funding as athletes from some of her competitors. She was also lonely.

When Clara was in a low period of her life, she met Peter who later became her husband. He was a calm and positive influence on her. Together, they planned outdoor adventures, some of which were physically and mentally grueling that they enjoyed during times when Clara wasn't training or competing. Clara greatly looked forward to being alone with Peter immersed in nature and away from the crowds.

Besides winning six Olympic medals, Clara has been awarded many honours including the Order of Canada. She has also been inducted into Canada's Hall of Fame and is on the Canadian Walk of Fame.

Clara has been committed to breaking down the stigma of mental illness and has served as an advocate for social causes. She has particularly enjoyed her charity work with Right to Play which involves traveling to third-world countries in order to teach and promote sports to children.

Clara's book "Open Heart, Open Mind" is a very honest work that made me wonder how she was able to focus and push herself to victory considering all the difficulties she encountered. She never allowed her mental illness, self-sabotaging behaviours and negative influences to totally overpower her though. Over the years, she saw doctors and therapists and even learned how to forgive herself, her family and those who had hurt her.

Clara is a role model for those who wish to succeed in the world of sports and for those who face mental illness.

Today Clara and her husband, Peter, live in Canmore Alberta. They continue to enjoy hiking and cycling.