

A Miracle Case

Shawnee Harkins comes out of a coma and into the limelight

by Julian Lopez | photos by Mindy Gribble

MANY OF YOU MAY already be familiar with the name Shawnee Harkins and, if not, you certainly will be. The moment I sat down to meet with the perky fitness guru and owner of Toned Fitness, I could instantly see why *The Advocate* magazine, *Playboy*, the Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center, and Hollywood would come knocking at her door, quite literally, with varying offers from one end of the spectrum to other.

Currently, the certified sports nutritionist and personal trainer can be seen on Dr. Phil's new reality show, *Ultimate Weight Loss Race*, airing on Wednesdays on CBS. In the show, Harkins, a head trainer, challenges and guides one couple (out of six couples total – each with its own head trainer) to help them lose the weight and change their lifestyle when it comes to food intake and exercise.

Also slated to air in January of 2009 with Harkins is a reality show, *The Hydra Executives*, where Harkins and 15 other contestants vie for a million dollar fund that goes towards establishing their entrepreneurial concept in Dubai. Currently, the show is under negotiations to be aired on either FOX or Showtime networks.

But before we continue enumerating all the successes of this energetic Long Beach resident, allow me to highlight key strides and endurance that led her to where she is today—successfully and spiritually.

The Dallas native had only been in Long Beach for a little over three months (approximately eight years ago) when a brutal hit and run acci-

dent left her in an induced coma for weeks. The doctor's claimed that she would pretty much be a vegetable the rest of her life. Harkins, however, surfaced from the coma but with severe complications that left her paralyzed from the neck down and having a speech impediment. Again, the doctor's claimed that Harkins would remain this way permanently. And *again*, Harkins managed to overcome even these harsh predictions. Harkins is now a part of the UCLA file of "miracle cases."

"It was an excruciating whole year before I even felt remotely normal, or at least as if I was going to be okay," Harkins explains. She underwent therapy all that time to help her physically recuperate. "One day, I forced myself to do one push up. It took me forever because I basically had no strength. Finally after that one push up, I collapsed and I started to cry. I cried because I realized that I was not supposed be there completing a push up... I was supposed to be dead. But God spared me and, for what it's worth, it made me realize that I could do anything. I honestly had nothing to lose."

Harkins's dream of becoming a firefighter was fully realized after extensive physical training and finally joining the academy. It wasn't long before Harkins graduated as a firefighter, defeating every last physical hindrance from her accident.

As a firefighter Harkins saved lives and served the academy. However, Harkins realized that she also had a desire to directly help others, with their physical challenges (something that

she was personally familiar with, and knew all too well).

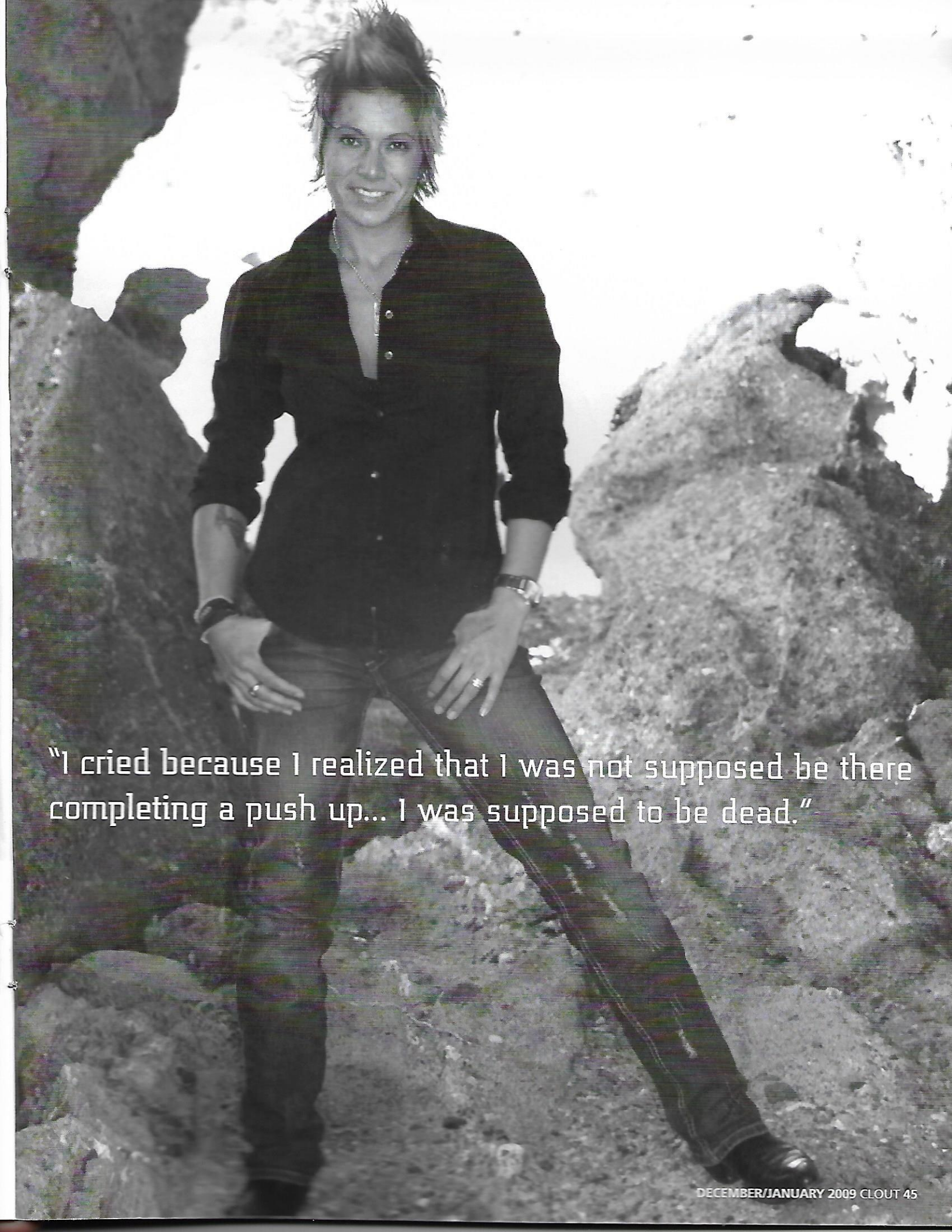
After enrolling at the National Academy of Sports Trainers, she became a certified sports nutritionist and personal trainer.

"After everything I went through, I knew that I wanted to help others with their physical state of beings. Meaning, that I wanted to help people sculpt their inside as well as their outside. It was important because I know what conquering these challenges could ultimately do for someone," she says.

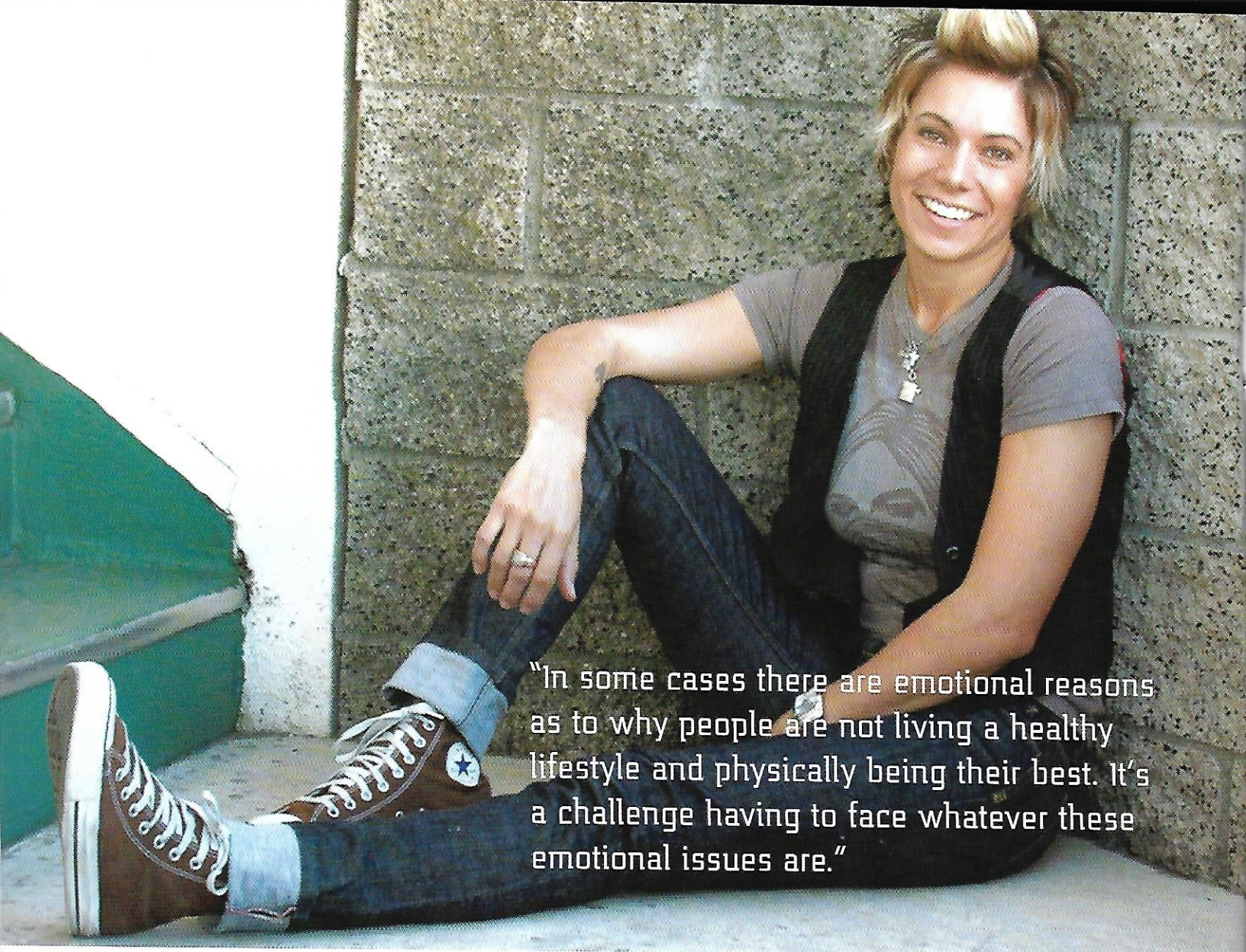
Although one may imagine that a personal trainer is simply there to help clients reach their ideal weight by guiding them with exercise and eating habits, there is so much more, as Harkins explains.

According to Harkins, one of the reasons people are not ideally at their physical best is due to an emotional setback. "In some cases there are emotional reasons as to why people are not living a healthy lifestyle and physically being their best. It's a challenge having to face whatever these emotional issues are, and I truly enjoy helping others to conquer these issues, because I was there," Harkins says, which makes her a bit of a psycho-therapist.

Harkins's job is to educate others on how to live a healthier lifestyle, and she eventually reached out beyond the limits of her studio, where her clients can meet, and even beyond Long Beach, which is her home. *Playboy* couldn't resist her hard abs and beautifully sculpted body. At first it took *Playboy* awhile to



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convince Harkins that she could be bold enough to pose for the magazine as its first open lesbian. But even after convincing her to at least be photographed (and see if she would then sign on as a Playboy bunny and travel with Hef's caravan) – never mind the substantial amounts of money that came with her agreement – Harkins thanked them and said no. "It just wasn't for me," she explains.

So what made her say "yes" to *The Advocate* magazine, where she posed nude, and without the compensation of hundreds of thousands of dollars?

"It was several things," Harkins nods assuredly. "But what intrigued me most was that this issue was going to be their Body Image issue. This wasn't about photographing people because they had great bodies, but about photographing the common individual because of who they are in life, and how comfortable they are with their skin. And that defined me better."

While Harkins admits that this was also a good business move for her, she also admits that this opportunity, in which her naked body gracefully stretches with partial frontal view,

demonstrates everything she endured to sculpt what doctors claimed could never be. It was her own personal success that was depicted in the photo.

"It was tasteful, and done beautifully," says Harkins. "And I'm proud of it."

While Harkins can now be seen on television on Dr. Phil's show *Ultimate Weight Loss Race*, not to mention the upcoming reality show, *The Hydra Executives*, (filmed in Dubai and funded by billionaire and creator of the show, Dr. Fa-jim, who personally offered Harkins the spot after being discovered by his talent scout) Harkins is also appearing in other places. Although *Ultimate Weight Loss Race* is currently airing its first three episodes on CBS now, the full series launches on January in 2009.

Harkins is also currently serving as the exclusive Celebrity Fitness Trainer for SheWired.com, a website launched by Regeant Media that offers complete access to fully-integrated, multi-platform online news and entertainment portals geared towards lesbians.

Recently, Harkins served as a headline speaker, along with Ellen Degeneres, at the Los Angeles

Gay & Lesbian Center Women's Health Conference. Other organizations have also reached out to Harkins for speaking or hosting engagements include GLAAD and Fitness Summit 09, a health conference hosted by Hitech Trainer, for people wanting to be in the health industry.

Harkins, unable to elaborate in too much detail about the results of *The Hydra Executives* (like who actually won the million dollars) did mention that her vying pitch against the other contestants' ideas involved opening an elite health facility (since there are none currently in Dubai). "There is a lack of health education in the Arab world, meaning there is not much emphasis on working out, or building gyms to support healthier lifestyles," Harkins says.

Although she cannot disclose if she won the million dollars that would fund her concept for gym's in Dubai, I did offer my services should she need an assistant to help her disperse this million dollars towards this realization. **CLOUT**

For more information on Shawnee Harkins, visit www.shawneeharkins.com... and remember, "Yes, you can!"