



Dear Fellow Alaskans,

I grew up in the community of Unalakleet, on the Bering Sea. I enjoyed many sports growing up: gymnastics, running, ice skating and cross-country skiing. I liked learning new skills and the feeling of being active, and I felt a sense of pride when I accomplished something through my own work.

I began skiing because I wanted to be like my older brother. A ski coach named John Miles, who helped establish ski teams in our school district, gave me my first pair of little blue, wooden skis. I would ski around the outside of our house – around and around and around. It felt so good to accomplish this!

When I was ten years old, I saw Mary Lou Retton win a gold medal (gymnastics) in the Los Angeles Olympic Games. I was so excited for her that I couldn't sleep. I replayed her perfect performance in my head, seeing her arms shoot up into the air in

victory. She scored a perfect 10 to win the gold medal. Can you imagine the accomplishment she felt? I wanted to feel that too! That summer, miles and miles away from Los Angeles, in the town of Unalakleet, I decided that I wanted to go to the Olympics.

My healthy lifestyle evolved as I became more excited about ski racing. I started training year round, and kept a training log. I noticed things that I did outside of skiing made a big impact on my energy level. In high school, even though it might be fun to stay up late with my friends, I'd struggle at ski practice the next day. I started making decisions that would be good for skiing, like getting plenty of rest, drinking lots of water and eating less sugar. I learned that being disciplined about things like nutrition made me a stronger person.

After ski racing in college, I left the sport in 1995 to pursue a career in finance and thought my Olympic dream was over. I landed a dream job trading stocks for a mutual fund company. The learning curve was steep and the hours were long. I worked 5 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day, and accessed overseas markets all hours of the night from my apartment. I carried a beeper 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. I traveled to New York and spent time on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. This job was thrilling, challenging and rewarding, but it came with a price. Physical activity was traded for long days at a desk; healthy eating was traded for meals eaten on the run.

Even though it was exciting, my body ached for physical activity. I began to think about skiing again. I missed feeling strong and healthy. I missed taking good care of my body.

I missed the sense of accomplishment earned from physical activity. I began to think about the goals I had set as a ski racer.

In August of 2000, I put my belongings into storage and headed back to Alaska. Once again, a healthy lifestyle became the focus of my life. I felt so alive! It was difficult to get back into elite shape, but those lessons I learned as a student came back to me: Being disciplined about things like nutrition and rest made me a stronger person. The sense of accomplishment from just doing the physical activity made me feel great!

After seventeen years and many wonderful journeys, my Olympic dream came true. In 2002, my I represented the U.S. in the Salt Lake City Olympics.

I retired from competitive ski racing in 2005. When I first left ski racing in 1995, I didn't stay active and I didn't eat well. It didn't make my body very happy or very healthy. This time, although I can't stay in elite racing shape, physical activity is on my daily "to do" list.

Now my goal is to instill the love of physical activity in my son. I want to be a good role model for him through my own physical activity and healthy eating. I want him to experience of feeling of accomplishment that physical activity brings. I want him to feel his strength growing as he makes good choices about activity and healthy eating. You can read more about my journey at www.aelin.net.

I hope that each of you gets a feeling of accomplishment when you are physically active, and when you make good decisions about healthy eating. These feelings will make you a stronger person. The activity and good eating will also make you a stronger person. Remember, it took me seventeen years to make my dream come true. You never know just where your dreams will take you and what you might experience along the way, but enjoy the journey. You never know what will happen!

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