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their ranch near Eureka. In the end, he went from becoming one of her biggest doubters to becoming one of her biggest supporters.

Holly Hoffman started her odyssey in May 2009, determined to land a spot among the 20 contestants chosen from among the 100,000 applicants.

Hoffman wasn't even going to send in her audition tape, believing the dream was so unrealistic and out of reach. But her husband persuaded her to mail the tape.

"If you wait for opportunities to occur, you'll be one of the crowd," she said. "Never jump to the conclusion before taking the opportunity."

A stunned Hoffman learned she remained in the running for the show after several rounds of eliminations.

Hoffman then received the call for which she had been waiting. She was chosen to fly out for final auditions. Once arriving on the scene, she endured a set of bizarre challenges set up by the "Survivor" producers to test the contestants and make the final cut.

The producers studied every small detail of the contestants, who even underwent a psychiatric evaluation.

When the smoke cleared from the process, a totally shocked Hoffman learned she was selected for the show and was headed to Nicaragua.

Hoffman was required to sign a contract stating if she leaked any details about the show or its outcome before its airing, she was required to pay the show \$5 million. Holly and Charlie Hoffman also were required to sign a contract releasing "Survivor" from any responsibility should one or both Hoffman's die as a result of the show.

Once arriving in the Central American setting for the show, Holly Hoffman embarked on an odyssey that tested every fiber of

her mental, emotional and physical fiber. She found herself confronted with situations in no way resembling her everyday life.

Hoffman was even taunted by a fellow contestant for her South Dakota roots. The Eureka woman didn't just get mad, she got even — by filling the contestant's \$1,600 pair of shoes with sand and throwing the footwear into the ocean.

Hoffman many times wanted to quit, but fellow contestant Jimmy Johnson — a former Dallas Cowboys football coach — asked her a pointed question.

"What would your family think if you quit on national television?" he asked her bluntly.

Hoffman knew the answer. "I needed to do what is right, not what is easy," she said. "There is no failure except no longer trying."

As she remained alive in the competition, Hoffman felt a strange mix of emotions as well as her physical exhaustion and starvation.

Hoffman experienced guilt, which she described as "anger directed at yourself."

She felt worry, which she compared to a rocking chair. "Both give you something to do, but they get you nowhere," she said.

Hoffman also learned a great deal from her alliances throughout the competition. "In life, you become who you associate with," she said.

She found her mental attitude played a major role in whether she quit, was voted off the show or remained in her running.

"We can be happy or miserable. It takes the same amount of work," she said.

The South Dakotan also took on a leadership role, becoming a strong role model and taking on a stronger sense of self-confidence in the process. "When you better yourself, you better others," she said.

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