

## Meet the GTD swimmer Elaine Howley (30-34 age group)

*You're going to meet someone who likes very cold, long swims (you know the kind with no line on the bottom and creepy crawlies down there!)*

I work as the executive editor in charge of the books department for a management consulting and publishing firm in Wayland, MA. I write and edit books and newsletters about how architects, engineers, and environmental consultants can better run their firms and what market opportunities exist for them. It's pretty dry work, but I am getting to write a lot, which is what I wanted to do.

My favorite projects are the freelance writing I've been doing for USMS SWIMMER magazine (I have a feature in the current July/August issue) and the work I do for New England Masters Swimming-- I am editor of their bi-monthly newsletter, NEM News, and it's so much fun to put together and get to learn about what everyone in our diverse region is up to in terms of swimming.

I am married, but no kids yet. Life is extremely busy. Between balancing the 45-50 hours minimum that I work per week, a coaching engagement in the fall, my freelance work, spending time with my husband and friends, and all the swimming, well, it does get a little hectic sometimes.

I never really had a set "vision" for what I wanted to be when I "grew up" (I should say it is debatable whether I've actually "grown up" yet.) But I am very excited that I'm gaining traction in my freelancing career and I'm thrilled with where my swimming and volunteer work with NEM has taken me, so overall, yeah, I'm pretty psyched about where I am with my life and what I'm doing.

Swimming is primarily a hobby-- actually, a passion-- but I am deriving some professional benefits from it. With any luck, I hope to continue more in the direction of integrating swimming with my work.

My parents had me in the water learning at 18 months, but I've been swimming competitively since I was five. I started swimming out of sibling rivalry, really. My older brother was a very good swimmer right from the start and I was forever in his shadow. I always wanted to be faster than him, which never really happened, but I do have more endurance.



I compete in open water swimming events, primarily very long, cold-water marathon swims. I just got back from the 2009 Manhattan Island Marathon Swim around New York City held on June 6<sup>th</sup>. That was an awesome 28.5 mile race. There were 25 solo swimmers who started, and I took 17<sup>th</sup> overall and 8<sup>th</sup> for the women, so I'm

*Elaine swimming at Manhattan*

definitely not the fastest, but had a good time in the back of the pack.

I swim almost every day, and it's one of those things that I think a lot about, read a lot about, and work on every single day. I swam in college, then took about 5 years off for Peace Corps and graduate school, and coming back to Masters swimming was like coming home again. It's good for my health, my mental well-being, and social life. It's central to my life, gives me structure, balance, and discipline and has been the source of an incredible number of positive experiences and influences. On average, I probably swim about 6 days a week, but it depends on the week and what else is going on. During the week, I usually do about 4,000 yards or thereabouts, swimming about an hour or so. On the weekends, though, I do lots of distance work and often go to the beach and swim for hours. I have a couple of Masters teams that I work with here—Wellesley Masters and the West Side Swim Club-- and a group of open water friends who I swim with. But I love going out to the lake after a tough day at work and just quietly swimming for an hour or two on my own.

My favorite stroke probably is freestyle these days, since that's pretty much all I do. I was a 200 backstroker in college. My favorite distance? Probably anything over 10 miles! I definitely prefer open water, and I much prefer the ocean to anything else. I do a lot of my open water training in Lake Cochituate in Wayland, MA because it's close and I have an awesome group that I swim with there, but I love going to the beach- Plum Island, Nantasket Beach in Hull, and other places for a "real" workout.

I started with GTD in 2007- just stumbled across it one day at the beginning of February (just in time to get my yardage for Jan in, which I was already tracking), and I thought to myself, "Finally, something I will do really well at, since it's not a speed-based competition." I'm not the fastest swimmer out there, so it's nice to be recognized for the gifts I do have-- endurance and persistence. Also, I am in training for my first attempt at a solo English Channel crossing scheduled to take place this August, so GTD has been a nice way to track my mileage (I love the Excel tracking doc) and has been a good way of keeping me honest as I train. I think GTD is just a wonderful way for swimmers to stay focused.

Any advice for other GTD swimmers? Hmm, not really, other than just make sure that you're enjoying what you're doing and making it worth the time you're spending. I try not to do junk yardage just for the sake of being able to write down another mile. My goal for 2009 is 750 miles. I fell just short of that in 2007 with something like 712 miles (I think), as I met my husband in August 07 and started coaching a high school team in the last 3 months of the year-- both events changed my swim schedule a bit. :)

**What's something real fun to know about you?** Gosh, I don't know! A non-swimming quirk is that I absolutely idolize Madeline Albright, and when I was at Georgetown, I would purposely detour by her townhouse a few blocks off campus anytime I went into town just in case I would see her coming or going, which I did once. I then got to meet her in the summer of 1997 at the American Embassy in Prague where she was giving a talk. It was pretty cool. Shook her hand and everything.

My hobbies are writing, painting and drawing. Recently my husband and I have become mildly addicted to our Wii system, which is less of a hobby and more of a time suck! I just love the golf target practice game and some of the retro Atari games they've re-released.

My favorite swim story so far is probably my Catalina story. Swims to cross the 22-mile Catalina Channel off the southern coast of California generally start at about midnight. I had practiced swimming in the dark, but this was going to be my second time in the Pacific ever. We motored out to the island (a queasy ride for me and my husband) and the boat pulled up to within about 50 yards of the island. It was pitch black out. They put my husband in a kayak to help guide me along next to the main support boat and he just about disappeared into the dark-- all we could see were the glow sticks attached to his head and the kayak. So at this point, I'm nervous, and queasy from the ride, and sweating bullets as it starts to sink in what I'm about to do. And they say, ok, in you go! Just before I stepped off the swim step, a school of flying fish went swooping by, chased by a pair of sea lions. So I naturally start thinking about what might be chasing the sea lions, and start freaking out. I really hesitated on that swim step before jumping, asking myself whether I really needed to do this or who's idea it had been in the first place. Afterwards, my crew told me that was the only time they doubted whether I would finish the swim because I hesitated so much to start. Finally, I saw my husband out there waiting for me, and I jumped off the boat. I had to swim through a kelp bed to get to the shore (the swim is done dryland-to-dryland, so I had to swim up to the island, get out, and start from behind the water line.) I was swimming head up, hyperventilating and screaming the whole way to the island and the kelp pulled at me and I imagined all



*Elaine and her husband Mark, just before she enters the Catalina Channel*

sorts of horrible creatures lurking in it waiting to eat me. I got to the shore, took a few breaths, found a pretty rock that I deposited in my suit, then started back towards the water. Once I got past the kelp again, I started to relax and that's when I noticed one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen-- the bioluminescence in the water. I'd read about it, but had never seen it before. It was so calming and peaceful. The night seemed to fly by, and I couldn't believe we were done already when I approached the shore just under 11 hours later. It was an incredible experience that I will always treasure. I honestly think that jumping off the back of that boat was the scariest thing I've ever willingly done, but I survived and prospered, which has been a really good life lesson for me.

3 adjectives about me: determined, gusty, and enthusiastic. My friends would probably tell you that I'm nuts, that I'm a bit obsessive-compulsive when it comes to training for my events, but that I like to have fun. Work hard, play hard! I am grateful to have a lot of good friends, both within the swimming community and outside of it.

*Elaine has a blog at: <http://blog.talesofthebeerbaby.com/> where you can find out more about her and the channel swim.*

## Meet the GTD swimmer Matt Bronson (40-44 age group)

*Matt also loves open water swimming – he was privileged enough to spend time in Hawaii where he could really enjoy his favorite hobby. This is another great swimmers' story!*



I am retired from the United States Air Force after 20-plus years. When I retired in 2005, my family returned to Spokane, Washington where I met my wife. I now work for the Air Force as civilian at the USAF Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape School in Student Administration. My wife was able to return to her teaching job teaching 1<sup>st</sup> grade. My two young daughters will be starting 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and kindergarten.

I loved serving in the Air Force and still miss it. It provided me with the opportunity to do many things and see a lot of the world. I met my wife in Spokane while stationed at Fairchild AFB and was fortunate to be stationed at Hickam AFB, on Oahu for the last six years of my career. Upon retirement, we returned to Spokane, keeping a promise to my wife.

Swimming took an active role in my life about the time I was 10 or 11 years old. I was not a strong swimmer prior to that time. The family doctor had advised my parents to sign my sister and me up for lessons to help my sister build cardio vascular strength out of concern for a surgery she had as a very young child. My parents thought the swim classes were to “waterproof” us, but they turned out to be lessons on how to swim competitively. We learned all four strokes, starts, and flip turns. My sister eventually stopped attending classes, but I asked to keep going.

In middle school we swam on the local youth sports swim team in Naples, Italy, during the summer. My father was in the U.S. Navy and was stationed there for three years in the late 70s. We traveled to other bases in Italy and Sicily at least once during the summer to compete in swim meets. The U.S. Military had leased the land inside a dead volcano and had turned it into a park with baseball,

football, soccer fields and picnic areas called Carney Park. It also included an Olympic-size swimming pool and golf course.

My father retired from the military about the time I started high school and we moved to Bellingham, Washington. I swam on the high school swim team and for a short period on the local YMCA team. The events I would swim each year would depend on the needs of the coach and the team. I swam backstroke one year, breaststroke and IMs, and the 500 Free my senior year. The YMCA pool we used was 20 meters in length with four lanes. Two of the lanes were used by the other high school in town and the divers timed their practice dives so as not to land on anyone circle swimming. This was the early 80s and Bellingham has since built an outstanding aquatic center, I hear.

I joined the Air Force right out of High School. Swimming was not a big part of my fitness program for a couple of years, until I transferred from George AFB in Victorville, California to Lakenheath in the United Kingdom. The base was blessed with an indoor, 25-meter pool in a small building that enclosed it. Swimming became a big part of my fitness regimen. I maintained that practice through transfers to El Paso and back to Lakenheath and on to Fairchild in Spokane. Spokane was where I first registered with USMS. I enjoyed competing in local masters meets and got a taste of competing in open water swims.



When the Air Force moved my wife and me to Hawaii, I was instantly in heaven. It seemed like there was an open water swim race every two weeks. I became a member of the Waikiki Swim Club that put on many of the events. I enjoyed helping out with clean-up and set up and I eventually was the race director of one of the events for a couple years. Swimming became a very important part of my life because the workout time gave me quiet time away from work and my family that was starting to grow. I also got to meet people outside of work which had become more difficult as years had gone by due to the requirements of my job and responsibilities. My family and I still miss living in Hawaii. I miss competing in the Waikiki Roughwater Swim, the North Shore Swim Series and all the other events I used to participate in too.

With family and work, swimming is designated as my hobby now. With my limited time for extracurricular activities, it is my only hobby. I am fortunate to have a pool located near my work so I get to swim during the two hour period before I start work on most days. I try to get around 5000 meters in before I report for work in the morning. The base does provide organized workouts

during a couple evenings but they really don't fit into my family's schedule. On the weekends I swim at a health club north of Spokane.

I have been lucky to participate in some excellent open water swims in the vicinity of Washington State. Swims like the Fat Salmon and Emerald City Open Water Swim in Lake Washington, the Long Bridge Swim, in Sandpoint, Idaho and the Elk Lake Open Water Swim Festival near Bend, Oregon. The Steve Omi Memorial Swim in nearby Coeur d'Alene, Idaho is a good swim for people to warm up to open water swimming.

The Inland Northwest LMSC puts on three or four meets during the year in Eastern Washington and Northwestern Idaho. For the past two years I have participated on the board of managers for the LMSC as a team rep and this year as Vice Chair.

I use GTD to help me set goals for the year, and try to improve my overall mileage by comparing months this year to months last year and before. I have kept workout log diaries for about thirteen years with all my workouts and meet and race times and distances. The GTD logs are much more convenient to view data quickly, but I still keep my hard copy dairies. I think it is an outstanding fitness event. I hope USMS continues to keep it as the event continues to grow.



## Meet the GTD Swimmer Sonya McLaughlin (65-69 age group)

*Sonya is a swimmer, golfer, skier and biker. Here is another wonderful story about how being 65 years young does not mean just the rocking chair on the front porch!*

I grew up on Lake Washington in Seattle and from a very young age learned to swim. The year was 1947 and there were few pools. When I got a little older I would swim with my Dad along the shore to a marina that was probably 2-3 blocks walking distance occasionally. It seemed like real work! My brothers and I water-skied every day all summer and in the winter we snow skied (both competitively) When I was 16 I injured by back trick skiing and found out that I had scoliosis.

The Dr. said if I did certain exercises, it might straighten out. They didn't know much in those days!

Well, it did not and for the next 15 years, I kept herniating a disc until finally it would not heal.

Through a myelogram (yesterday's version of a MRI, I guess) they found a congenital problem that required a spinal fusion and two-level laminectomy. This was not fun as I had three small children.

Once we knew the fusion took, I started lap swimming. We lived on Bainbridge Island at the time and there was no public pool, only a private pool that was open only in the summer, but I found a woman who had a small pool (probably 20 yards) covered in her back yard. For a fee, she let people swim and so I would go almost every morning before the children woke up and my husband had to leave for work. I remember starting with 10 laps and kept increasing that number.

Finally a public pool was built at the high school and I started swimming there increasing my distance, keeping track on a chart in the lobby of the distance swam each time. I loved watching that bar go across the chart! Through the years and some interesting moves, I always found a pool close to home and continued to swim before the family woke up! We lived in Anchorage, Alaska for 4 1/2 years and I remember putting the dog in the car and heading for the pool at 5:45 in the morning. He kept the car seat warm while I was swimming! My daughter got interested in swimming while living in Alaska and she started in the 8 and under category and stuck with it through high school and so I became a "swim mom" and loved every minute of it. We still love to go lap swimming whenever she visits....she likes to go at 5:45 in the morning as well.....I prefer a little later now that I am 65 years old.

We now live in Bend, Oregon and the Juniper Swim and Fitness Center is a joy to swim at.

I always was interested in Masters but just couldn't get my act together. This January I saw an article in our local newspaper that talked about the GTD program and the group of women in Redmond who were participating. I thought to myself, "this is perfect!" and so I signed up.

I set myself a goal of 100 miles this year, which might not sound like a lot to most GTD participants, but I felt it reasonable. I have a passion for the game of golf and play at least 3 sometimes 4 times a week and I like to ride my bike (I have a 9 mile loop) once a week. In the winter, I still downhill ski at Mt. Bachelor but find as I get older that doing more than one of these activities in a day just plain wears me out. I am at about 55 miles right now.... on target for more than making my goal, as my swimming will increase Oct-Dec. Right now I go 2-3 times a week and swim 1 mile. It takes me 45-50 minutes. I find the older I get, the slower I am! Anyone have any thoughts on that?

I can tell you for sure that if it were not for all the laps I have swam over the years, I would not be playing golf or downhill skiing. Swimming has really helped my back be strong. The GTD program really keeps me on track and I have to say I like the old way of keeping track better than the new so I keep track both ways.

I am almost retired.... still do some volunteer work and I have a very small part-time business I do 4 weeks a year. We have 6 grandchildren, all learning how to swim and I thinking enjoying it a lot. My other hobbies are knitting, cooking, gardening and an occasional game of Canasta with good friends.

A memorable swim story took place two years ago in the Bay of Islands in New Zealand. One day we went on a hunt for dolphins in the wild and when we found them and determined it would be safe, we put on our snorkels and fins and got in the water! It

was thrilling to say the least but much harder than I thought it would be. Swimming in choppy open water with those creatures all around you was challenging. They like lots of splashing and noise and I found that hard with the snorkel.... kept swallowing water. I will never forget the experience and glad I did it!

What would my friends say about me? Probably that I don't act my age, have a very positive attitude and like to have a lot of fun!