



Meet the GTD swimmer John Vranesh (55-59 age group)

I do hope you enjoy John's story as much as I have. Anyone who brings "glow in the dark sticks" to swim practice has a sense of humor! I especially like the story about his son's swimming event!

I am a CPA, currently the Chief Financial Officer of Pacific Stevedoring, Inc. My company is expanding despite the economy, so quite busy, but fun. I am pretty much doing what I thought I might be doing at this stage in life, but at 55 years old, I'm hoping retirement (from accounting) is not too far away.

I have a wife, Linda and children Sarah and Colin. Our family enjoys boating (so we're in the water or on the water most of the time!) We like to anchor overnight in the San Juan Island and Canada, where we fish and crab and swim (of course).

Swimming is my cornerstone. The people I swim with are some of the best people on the planet, as are most swimmers that I've met. Three years ago my shoulder gave out and I was out for two years. Surgery fixed it (mostly), but I forgot how important swimming was for my whole mental and physical well-being. This spring I celebrate my 50th anniversary of turning out for "swim team". Ironically I am still swimming in the same 25-meter pool, Mercerwood Shore Club.



I swim with the Mercer Island Redwoods Masters three times a week, typically about 4,000 meters a day. From July through October I swim in Lake Washington (the lake is always open). The rest of the year is in the pool.

Last year Tom Grandine, one of our better swimmers, swam 1

million meters, and inspired many of us to participate in GTD. Now we are all hooked on it. My advice to other GTD participants: when you go on vacation, make sure there is a lake or pool nearby. Falling behind the pace (projected miles) is no fun. My goal for 2009 is 500,000 meters

I like to make swimming fun. Last month the cover (bubble) came off the pool and it was still dark out at 5:30 in the morning. I brought glow sticks for everyone to wear while swimming.

When I was 18, I swam around Mercer Island (16 miles) in one day to raise money for cancer research in memory of my Father, Michael. 37 years later we are still making that swim and raising money, except we no longer do it in one day. If any GTD swimmers are in the Seattle area in late July, come join us!

Here is an amusing swim story: When my son was 7 years old and on swim team, the coach would write his events on his arm with a black felt-tipped pen. Once he dove in after the starters gun went off, forgot the event, and immediately started to read his arm to find out what event he was on. The crowd went crazy.



Meet the GTD swimmer Karen Zeliff (40-44 age group)

Karen was motivated to swim by many different factors. This is a very inspiring story!

I grew up in Southeastern Massachusetts. My first house was walking distance to the town beach. My second house had an in-ground pool with diving board and slide. It was a great place to grow up...even though we could only swim in mild water from July 4 - Sept 4th. I have a family who swam and boated all the time. Everyone who lives on the ocean knows how to swim.

I have two sons. Both swim in the summer at our neighborhood pool on the team. They are in it for fun and have a lot of friends at the pool.

I didn't start swimming "for real" until I was 39. I had never been on a swim team. My last lesson was a semester in college 20 years ago. I was motivated to start for two reasons. First, my son is in Boy Scouts and I'm a Boy Scout leader. I learned that not only youth, but also adults could do the Mile Swim event at scout camp. I was curious if I could do that. So I started training a year in advance. I thought swimming a mile by age 40 would be a good goal.

Around that time, I had given up the medication to treat ADD. As you may know, it's hard to concentrate when you have this condition. I learned that swimming was much better for me than any drugs to keep me focused. When I'm in the lane, I only think about breathing, and counting. Life is simple. It's pretty close to meditation too.

I swim with the Dynamo Masters club, which is 3 miles from my home. The pool is great and the lunchtime crowd that I swim with are great people. I've seen a lot of coaches come and go, but Maria has really helped a lot - mostly in motivating me.

Well, long story short: Year 1 - swam a mile in the pool after 3 months of training, so I knew I could do it in open water later on. That summer, my son and I both earned the Mile Swim patch. I also earned BSA Lifeguard certification at the camp. So now I help plan all the water activities for my son's troop and make sure that all the adults on trips near water have the training to keep everyone safe.

Year 2, I started GTD. I also went to 3 different scouts camps on 3 different lakes in two states. Did the mile swim at all 3. I liked the one where I had my own personal chase boat best. Unfortunately, I could swim faster than my scout could row, so I didn't make any record time there. But it was a lot of fun. That summer, I also completed my first open-water swim, the Dam Swim for Drew in Lake Murray, SC. That was 2 miles, and I really enjoyed it. I finished 100 miles in GTD in 2008 and was very proud of myself.

On Saturday of this week, I'm swimming the Low Country Splash, a 2.4-mile open water event in Charleston Harbor, SC. This swim will be my longest and most challenging. I haven't been to practice consistently over the past 6 months, so I hope I'm ready. I had to start working again, since the economy has been so lousy. I'm slow, but like a tortoise... I can finish! Charleston is a fun place anytime. I'm looking forward to it. I really hope the water isn't too cold.

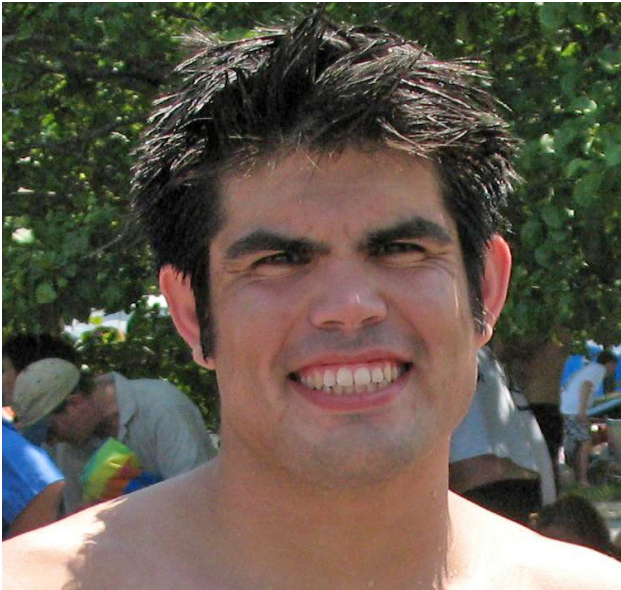
This just came in after Karen's swim, and it certainly needed to be shared:

Well, I did it. 2.4 miles in 73 minutes. There was a current working somewhat in my favor, so I finished a lot sooner than I would have in a pool. The water temp was 70 degrees, so I wore a wetsuit to be safe. It was REALLY cool swimming under the Ravenel bridge. A lot cooler than swimming up to the aircraft carrier. In fact, I hadn't realized that the carrier looks small compared to some freighters...which thankfully were on the other side. A Carnival Cruise ship came into the harbor the next day. Boy, am I glad she wasn't coming in when we were in the water. That ship could be seen for miles around.



Meet the GTD swimmer Jeff Strahota (25-29 age group)

This is the story of a very athletic person who not only loves swimming, but who is also a triathlete and plays hockey, just to name a few.



I'm single, no kids, and just living the dream! I've got one sister and one brother, both younger. Presently unemployed, I've spent my career in the foodservice industry working way behind the scenes in the Supply Chain/Procurement area providing data analysis and negotiating contracts. My area of expertise is frozen bakery, and yes, I did get to eat a lot of free food, which was part of the reason I got pretty intense with swimming once I started working.

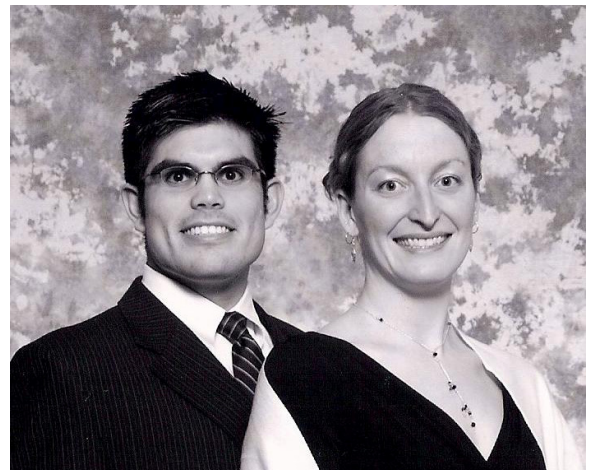
I remember getting swim lessons as very wee lad, but I started out swimming with our local summer league team at age 5 because we liked the coach, who also happened to be teaching my siblings' and

my swim lessons. That was the only swimming I did until I joined my high school's team in my Junior & Senior years. Over the two seasons, I made some really incredible improvements, for which our coach (also a Masters swimmer) awarded me the Most Improved Swimmer award my senior year, an award that to this day may be my favorite swim accolade.

When I got to the University of Maryland, I still had one year of summer league left and wanted to go out with a bang, so I joined Terrapin Masters at UMD to prepare. This was my first experience swimming year-round, and I enjoyed the workouts and my teammates so much that I kept at it and am still at it nearly 11 years later.

I do compete and enjoy doing so. It gives me the opportunity to set fitness goals and with each meet I get to see my progress. I have also had the opportunity to meet many friends through meets, including my girlfriend and fellow GTD-er Mollie Grover. USMS Nationals is a great event that I also enjoy going to, if only for the chance to travel somewhere neat!

Swimming is definitely a hobby, and while I would say it is a major part of my life, if the pools closed tomorrow, I'd find plenty else to do. Sure it would be disappointing, but there are plenty of other sports I wouldn't mind trying!!



I generally swim 3-4 days a week at the University of Maryland and we tend to do about 4500-5000 yards a workout. Our team's coaches are usually current or former UMD Swimmers, so we

get some really great instruction and intense sets from our coaches, who are learning from some of the top coaching. I'll swim anything in practice... sprint sets, kick sets, distance free sets, IM sets, stroke sets, long course, short course – you name it, I'll do it and like it, but that's not to say I may complain about it first!

I do both pool swimming and open water (with the occasional triathlon), and my best pool races are mid-distance freestyle (200 and 4/500 free), so I do tend to cater any "choice" towards the freestyle. All-freestyle workouts have their place, especially as I gear up for my open water swims, but I often find them boring and un-rewarding physically, so I have no problem substituting in a few IMs during some of those workouts. My favorite workout so far this year, however, was 4500 yards of freestyle: 3 rounds of 5x200 + 5x100 on a base interval that got 5 seconds faster each round.

I started GTD because Mollie was doing it, and I was interested in tracking my own yardage and identifying trends in my swimming. My goal for this year is to go further than last year! My advice for others is to make sure you're having fun while swimming. It makes it a lot easier to fight through rush hour traffic to get to practice if you want to go and have fun with your friends.

Most everyone in the swimming community knows me as "Muppet," a nickname given to me by a fellow teammate. I do have a full head of hair (among other places), so it works. The nickname helped attract my girlfriend, as her last name is Grover, who was naturally curious the first time she heard one of my teammates cheer me on at a meet.

Aside from swimming, I compete in a few triathlons every year, mostly sprints, and started playing hockey about 2 ½ years ago. The Swim/Hockey combo is pretty unusual, but it is a lot of fun and is great exercise – a game is about an 80 minute workout that consists of repeats of 1 minute sprint and 2 minutes rest – and is my substitute for running. I recently competed my first Olympic-distance tri, and while I did very well in the swim portion, I am most proud that I made it through the run without stopping at all.

With my love for other sports comes the added risk of injury. In 2004, I broke my wrist playing basketball, in 2005 I broke the other wrist while riding my bike, and in 2007, I badly sprained my MCL playing hockey. That second break was 2 weeks before LC Nationals in Mission Viejo, so if anyone remembers seeing a guy swimming with a full arm cast, that was me! The injuries provided some good incentives to train hard and I've always done really well the Nationals following one of these accidents.

Aside from sports, I have been playing guitar for almost 20 years. I had lessons in classical guitar for many years, so can read music pretty well, but I also have a pretty good ear for figuring out how to play something just by listening to it.



Meet the GTD swimmer Buddy Wolf (60-64 age group)

Buddy was afraid his story might be “boring”. I find it just the opposite! (Haven’t read a boring swimmer’s story yet by the way). See for yourself.

When I was growing up I loved history. I majored in history in college, continued my studies to get a Masters, thought I would end up teaching history but graduated when teaching jobs were scarce. I worked, went to business school and then to a corporate environment where I learned that discussing historical or political events is often not wise.

I worked in Card Products at Citibank and Chase in New York, Long Island, and Wilmington for almost thirty years. I was able to move between Credit, Marketing, Finance and Operations, which was both challenging and fun. The majority of my career was spent managing terrific project groups doing software quality assurance testing for production systems, database management, or list processing.

I recently moved to a privately held database company, where we develop and market products to consumer finance companies.

I am married and have two sons, 29 and 26. The older son graduated from Tulane (my mother’s family was from New Orleans), worked in New Orleans until just before Katrina, and does software projects for a web company. He and his three-year old son (I’m a grand-dad-yikes!) live with us. My younger son graduated from B.C., lives in Boston, and will be going to Georgetown for a grad degree in Public Policy next year. Unlike their dad, both boys are very good athletes.

I’ve loved swimming for as long as I can remember. I learned to swim in a pool at Badger Camp in Westchester, NY, just outside of New York City, and our family had a pool, which I was in when not at Badger. Every now and then the family would get the chlorine mix wrong and I would end up with white hair for several days, which was disconcerting to my friends, but a small price to pay for being able to swim whenever I wanted.

When I got older, I went to a camp on a lake in Enfield, N.H. I liked open water swimming but hated the cold water. Even today it still takes me longer to get in the pool than almost anyone else I swim with.

I started competitive swimming when I swam for a small private high school in New York City in the mid-Nineteen Sixties. Because we needed swimmers, the criteria for making the team involved having breath sufficient to fog a mirror. We practiced at a neighborhood health club, where the pool was often obscured by clouds of steam and heavily chlorinated. This was before goggles, so our ride home on the subway involved trying to blend in with other red-eyed strap-hangers. We had a great time and I was able

to swim a variety of different strokes, but usually ended up swimming free style short distances and I.M. against other schools in our league.

I went out for swimming for my first two years at the University of Pennsylvania (it took me that long to realize I wasn't competitive). I swam distance events at Penn. Spectators could finish reading War and Peace or get through the Sunday Times and not miss my finish. Pool maintenance staff used to get annoyed because I was cutting into their time.

Generally my college swimming experience was good. The transition from a small high school to a large university was much easier with the support of friends from the team. I learned time management. Swimming showed me that hard work translated directly into better splits, but it seemed that no matter how hard I worked I wasn't going to advance to the next level so I stopped swimming.

I didn't swim for about thirty-five years, but started again several years ago when I transferred jobs and rented an apartment during the week in Wilmington and came home on the weekend. I needed to do something to keep my sanity, and the Wilmington Y had two nice pools very close to my apartment. I remembered how much fun I had swimming, so I joined the Y and USMS.

Around the same time, the current coach at Penn started Swim Team Alumni meets during Homecoming, and I have been going every year along with a small group around my age. After working in a corporate environment for so long and raising children, embarrassment means nothing to me anymore.



Last year I entered three US Masters meets in Westchester, and this year I swam in one. They are really fun, the swimmers are nice, and the format of seeding by time and then grouping by age and gender makes for fun racing and have resulted in several ribbons (even if some were because no one else my age was present).

When I started again a few years ago, I swam two or three times a week either in our health club or the Wilmington Y pool, usually forty laps free. I am now trying to swim every day, and try to do 3100 yds made up of a mix of free (200; 10 x 100; 50's) back (100's), breast (100's) and kick (100's).

I get to the pool when it opens (5am during the week, 6:30 on weekends). I swim alone, but usually the same people are at the pool every day and are really nice, as are the life guards (except when they open the outside doors). Although I do not have a coach, I have made adjustments to my stroke based on what I see from videos, and found Karlyn Pipes-Neilsen's video especially helpful.

I haven't tried open water swimming, but may try one or two events this summer in Long Island Sound. I've helped out with the Long Island Sound Swim Across America events for around ten years as a boater carrying swimmers and kayakers out to the start and providing an escort (I've rescued several kayaks, one power boat, and only one swimmer all this time).

One carry-over from business for me has been setting goals and measuring progress, but GTD has none of the downside that often accompanies that process in companies (rankings, embarrassment, difficult managers etc). GTD allows me to set my own goals, track progress against those goals, all the while doing something that I love and is good for me. In 2007 I swam 123 miles, in 2008 366, and my goal for this year is 400 miles.

Our family has always had pets. We have two dogs –a Bearded Collie and a Shit-Zhu- and an African Gray parrot named Amos who immediately picks up sounds and repeats them in inverse proportion to how obnoxious they may be. Our three year old grandson Haiden is living with us, so between him and the pets, our household is pretty active.

In addition to swimming, another life-long hobby has been boating. We have a small outboard motor boat, and I have a small sailboat called a Laser, which also has an active Masters class. Between swimming and the Laser, I am one of the few people my age who thought going from 59 to 60 was terrific because I moved to a different age group.