

Never Mind the Congested Highways, I'll Just Swim from New York to New Jersey!

By Susan Kirk

In the summer of 2012, myself and three relay mates successfully completed the 28.5 mile circumnavigation relay swim of Manhattan Island. We had a fabulous day-long adventure out on the water and the thrill of capturing a water-level view of Manhattan will never be forgotten. It was a day filled with such raw emotions -- anticipation, excitement, fulfillment, awe, passion, community, and the sheer joy of being one with Mother Nature! Once achieving this goal, it wasn't long before we were asking ourselves "What's next? We need to have a new open water swimming goal!"

And so on December 1, 2012, I furiously worked at completing my application, which includes an essay, qualifying swim information, crew information, and medical forms, for the famed Ederle Swim. What is the Ederle Swim you might ask? It is an epic 17.5 mile marathon swim from Manhattan (Battery Park) to the sandy shores of Sandy Hook, NJ. The swim is named after the legendary open water swimming pioneer and my hero ~~ the iconic Gertrude Ederle ~~ who was the first woman EVER to swim across the English Channel. The Ederle Swim, which is hosted by NYC Swim, is limited to a small field of about 25 swimmers, so the race is on to fully complete your application as the event fills up within hours and enrollments are approved on a first-completed, first-accepted basis. The wave of excitement reached its crescendo when the email of acceptance arrived in my inbox! Woooo-hoooo!!! Let the training begin!

The training plan was put into place with my open water training buddy and dear friend Lynn as she was also accepted into the Ederle Swim. For the next 8 months, we would focus our training for the culmination of our open water season, the Ederle Swim, to be held on August 18th. We built in a few longer training swim events, the USMS 10K Open Water National Championship held in Las Vegas in May and the 10-mile Kingdom Swim held in Vermont in early July, to gauge our progress with building up our distance base and endurance.

I was ready to get going with the training plan even though the first several months would be spent swimming indoors in a pool rather than the open water due to our snowy and freezing cold winter weather. The first few weeks were going as scheduled when the unimaginable happened in mid-December -- I sustained a serious and complex lower leg injury which landed me in a cast, non-weight bearing and on crutches, and out of the water! What an unexpected blow to the training schedule! After 6 weeks, I finally was able to venture back into the water ever so gingerly as I was still in a boot, on crutches, and non-weight bearing. Soon, I mastered the art and balance of swimming one-legged freestyle, including one-legged flip turns, and could slowly begin to rebuild my endurance in the water. My longtime lane mates were awesome with their flexibility to accommodate my freestyle-only workouts and were particularly cognizant of my personal space bubble surrounding my injured leg.

Finally, May arrived and the cold showers had paid off as we were able to incorporate some rather chilly lake swims into our training regimen. It was fabulous to move away from the walls of the short course pool which continually aggravated my injured leg. The open water venue was delightful and provided the opportunity to crank up my mileage with much longer swims logging a total of 47 miles in May, 75 miles in June, 50 miles in July, and 63 miles in August. I was definitely glad that I am a swimmer and not a runner as I could swim longer than I could walk with my injured leg.

The excitement was building and August 18th couldn't arrive soon enough. I was ready to take on this Ederle Swim!

"A fabled course, a swim pioneer and icon, and a variety of swim conditions come together in this legendary marathon swim. From the shores of Manhattan through bustling New York Harbor and under the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, this 17.5 mile swim ends with a beach finish in Sandy Hook, New Jersey. Along the way, swimmers see the Statue of Liberty, Governors Island, the beaches of Staten Island, beautiful lighthouses, the supertanker thoroughfare that is the Ambrose Channel, and

a multitude of other sights.” (From NYCSwim.org)

The swim began with a 4:45am check-in time....yes, it was still dark outside! As the sun rose, I began my final preparations ensuring that my paddler had a starting supply of all of my prepared feeds, final cleaning of my goggles, making sure that all of my other belongings except for my cap and goggles went on the support boat and that I had a Mylar blanket for the Zodiac ride if needed.



During the summer training months I experimented with a number of concoctions and methods of feeding and settled on a combination mixture of mostly an electrolyte replacement and hydrating drink with a unique ratio of complex carbohydrates (Performance) and a very small amount of protein powder mixed in an 8oz bottle.

Additionally, I would supplement with a Cliff Shot Energy Gel or some bites of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich as desired. My feeds were scheduled to regularly occur every 30 minutes. My stellar crew, Sarah and Rosanne (fellow NJ Masters Swimmers), boarded the support boat along with the boat captain

John and they and my kayak paddler, Pat, all began their journey down the mighty Hudson River to the Battery where I would be starting my swim. All 21 swimmers were boated down to the start of the swim in the Zodiac. It was a great opportunity to bond with the other swimmers before we each began our individual journeys.

The swim started off without a hitch and the epic swim had begun. The first few hours went like clockwork. Swim 30 minutes, stop and feed, swim 30 more minutes, stop and feed and repeat. I was enjoying the fabulous sights along the way. As a right-sided only breather, I was watching Lady Liberty (the Statue of Liberty) every stroke for quite some time! A very cool experience!



As open water swimmers, we must share the waterways and sometimes it is with massive supertankers! The approaching supertanker below necessitated an all-out sprint from the Brooklyn side of the Verrazano Bridge to the Staten Island side of the bridge to be clear of the ship's perimeter waters that can suck a swimmer underneath. WHEW!! I am not a sprinter nor do I have many fast-twitch muscles, so I had to dig really deep to make this sudden course change. Finally, a safe distance away, I could resume my usual cruising cadence (65 strokes/min) and get back to enjoying the swim.



We encountered a few bumps during the swim, but our patience, perseverance, and adaptations contributed to the success of collectively achieving the common goal -- safely completing this open water swim challenge! We were a team out there and I could not have successfully completed this swim without the unwavering support and encouragement of my awesome crew, amazing paddler, and experienced boat captain who were on the water with me and my beloved family who were there with me in spirit!



And now, I'm back to the question of what's next? The power of setting personal goals may just show how much determination and commitment one has. It did for me! Happy open water swimming!