

Meet NC Masters Swimmer Bernie White

Bernie White was a project manager for software companies for many years. His career path - like that of many people - was a series of mergers and/or acquisitions (IBM, Check Solutions, Carreker, Check Free and finally Fiserv).

For the past 30 years, Bernie has been involved in swimming, first as a coach for 10 years. This is where he honed his "project management" skills and then as a Masters swimmer, where he started to compete.



Here is Bernie's story:

"My biggest fear is getting beat by folks 10 years my elder or more." I was at a meet in Raleigh and some swimmers were looking over the seeding for their event. One of them said: " here is a guy 65 years old, with a really fast time that must be a typo." I chuckled, little did they know that "guy" held world records, and he beat both of them.

Here is my definition of a "Masters Swimmer": generally calm in nature, a swimmer is a creature whose tolerance and compassion enables it to exist, and even thrive, among ordinary people, a sub-species. Through research, it is known that these creatures do more before 7:30 a.m. than most creatures do all day. Unlike their cousins (the Non-Swimmers), they are perpetually clean from head to toe. A higher life form; extremely compatible with water.

Over the 20 past years, the competition has gotten faster, so I decided that I just have to outlive the competition. Then two years ago, the local age group team brought in one of the top coaches in the country along with a dozen elite swimmers, e.g. Cullen Jones. We were talking and found out that they have a dry land coach and thought that would help break up the monotony of swimming every day. In preparation for our national competition, three of us decided to use their dry land coach.

Be careful what you ask for. Below is paraphrase of this experience:

For my 65th birthday, my wife purchased me a week of private lessons at the local health club. Though still in good shape from when I was on the varsity chess team in high school, I decided it was a good idea to go ahead and try it. I called and made reservations with someone named Tanya, who said she is a 26-year-old aerobics instructor and athletic-clothing model.

My wife seemed very pleased with how enthusiastic I was to get started. She suggested I keep an "exercise diary" to chart my progress.

Day 1: Started the morning at 6:30 a.m. Tough to get up, but worth it when I arrived at the health club and Tanya was waiting for me. She's something of a goddess, with blond hair and a dazzling white smile. She showed me the machines and took my pulse after five minutes on the treadmill. She seemed a little alarmed that it was so high, but I think just standing next to her in that outfit of hers added about 10 points. Enjoyed watching the aerobics class. Tanya was very encouraging as I did my sit-ups, though my gut was already aching a little from holding it in the whole time I was talking to her. This is going to be GREAT!

Day 2: Took a whole pot of coffee to get me out the door, but I made it. Tanya had me lie on my back and push this heavy iron bar up into the air. Then she put weights on it, for heaven's sake! Legs were a little wobbly on the treadmill, but I made it the full mile. Her smile made it all worth while. Muscles ALL feel GREAT.

Day 3: The only way I can brush my teeth is by laying the tooth brush on the counter and moving my mouth back and forth over it. I am certain that I have developed a hernia in both pectorals. Driving was OK as long as I didn't try to steer. I parked on top of a Volkswagen. Tanya was a little impatient with me and said my screaming was bothering the other club members. The treadmill hurt my chest, so I did the stair monster. Why would anyone invent a machine to simulate an activity rendered obsolete by the invention of elevators? Tanya told me regular exercise would make me live longer. I can't imagine anything worse.

Day 4: Tanya was waiting for me with her vampire teeth in full snarl. I can't help it if I was half an hour late; it took me that long just to tie my shoes. She wanted me to lift dumbbells. Not a chance, Tanya. The word "dumb" must be in there for a reason. I hid in the men's room until she sent Lars looking for me. As punishment she made me try the rowing machine. It sank!

Day 5: I hate Tanya more than any human being has ever hated any other human being in the history of the world. If there were any part of my body not in extreme pain, I would hit her with it. She thought it would be a good idea to work on my triceps. Well, I have news for you, Tanya: I don't have triceps. And if you don't want dents in the floor, don't hand me any barbells. I refuse to accept responsibility for the damage. YOU went to sadist school, YOU are to blame. The treadmill flung me back into a science teacher, which hurt like crazy. Why couldn't it have been someone softer, like a music teacher, or a social studies teacher?

Day 6: Got Tanya's message on my answering machine, wondering where I am. I lacked the strength to use the TV remote, so I watched 11 straight hours of the Weather Channel.

Day 7: Well, that's the week. Thank goodness that's over. Maybe next time my wife will give me something a little more fun, like a gift certificate for a root canal.

By the way, I survived, loved it and have done very well since that day. I achieved my goal of getting into the top ten nationally.

I retried in Dec 2010 to "go swimming". Two highlights for me were: attending the US Olympic swimming trails in 2008 and a family cruise in 2011.

Bernie