

# Marilyn Bell



**Ontario Aquatic Hall of Fame**

Inducted as Athlete in 1993

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In 1940, as a young child, Marilyn Bell had her first encounter with a large body of water while wading in the ocean off the coast of Nova Scotia. Little did anyone know then that one day she would become a household name in Canada.

Marilyn started her swimming career at the age of nine as a sprinter with the Toronto Central "Y" Dolphinets under coach Alex Duff. After joining the Lakeshore Swim Club, Gus Ryder soon recognized that Marilyn had one great asset, determination. For that reason he encouraged her to become a long distance swimmer.

During her relatively short career as a long distance swimmer, Marilyn had astounding successes. As an amateur swimmer, she won the one-mile junior and senior races at the C.N.E., and also received the Barker Bread Trophy for the amateur mile race. In 1954, after turning professional, she was the first woman to finish the 26-mile annual Atlantic City Marathon. Later, in 1955, she became the youngest person to swim across the English Channel, and in 1956 she was the first woman to conquer the Straits of Juan de Fuca. Yet, in spite of these remarkable achievements, the name Marilyn Bell is almost exclusively associated with her swim across Lake Ontario in 1954.

After hiding for four days near Youngstown, New York, on a yacht among a flotilla of ships hired by the Toronto Star, Marilyn entered the lake shortly after Florence Chadwick around 11:10 P.M. on September 8, 1954. The water was rough and the waves were estimated to be 14 to 15 feet high. The water temperature was a chilling 65 degrees, and lamprey eels were attacking her legs. Strong winds, in combination with the lack of modern navigation equipment caused her to swim an estimated 40 miles, which is twice the width of the lake. Florence Chadwick was unable to finish the swim, but Marilyn struggled on. After 20 hours and 57 minutes she touched a breakwater near the Boulevard Club, west of the C.N.E. She was greeted by an estimated crowd of 300,000 people who had gathered at Sunnyside Waterfront to give her an unbelievably emotional welcome. Marilyn Bell, who was a stranger to most Canadians the day before, had instantly become Canada's youngest heroine.

Even though many years have passed since Marilyn Bell became the first person to conquer Lake Ontario, nothing has dimmed the memory of this great event. She always will remain the "First Lady of the Lake."

### SUMMARY

- 1952 Winner of the Barker Bread Trophy.
- 1954 First place female in Atlantic City 26 miles Marathon
- 1954 First person to swim across Lake Ontario; 20 hours and 57 minutes.
- 1955 Youngest person to swim across the English Channel; 23 miles in 14 hours and 36 minutes.
- 1956 First woman to conquer the Straits of Juan de Fuca; 18.3 miles in 10 hours and 38 minutes.

Winner of the Lou Marsh Trophy, Medal of Merit, and many other awards and recognitions.