

# ODYSSEY OF A MIDDLE-AGED MARATHON SWIMMER

## PART 2

Bob WEIR, 1991

### 1. LAKE ONTARIO AFTERMATH

The severe injury to my left shoulder that occurred on the crossing of Lake Ontario in 1989 prohibited me from doing almost any freestyle swimming for four months afterwards. To keep a feel for the water, I practised with the Pickering Masters Swim Club by doing almost exclusively breaststroke, with any freestyle being simple drills only. In the meantime, I was going to regular physiotherapy at York University which lasted for three months. Slowly the arm improved and, eventually, the only lingering effect of the trauma was some numbness in my left hand, which still exists to this day.

I was not able to compete in any Masters swim meets during 1990, but I stayed involved in Masters swimming, firstly by continuing to train with the Pickering Masters, secondly by becoming President of Masters Swimming Ontario and, thirdly by officiating at Masters swim meets.

### 2. THE TORONTO MARATHON

Missing the competitive aspects of Masters swim meets, I decided to train for the 1990 Toronto Marathon, a run of 42.2 kilometres (26.3 miles). Just over half way through the run I suffered strained hip muscles and aggravated the ileo-tibia band that stretches from the hip to the left knee. The running was very painful, requiring frequent stops to stretch and flex. The last five miles was half walk, half slow jog. But I finished.

With my usual determination and clenching back the pain in my hips, I finished the Toronto Marathon in a time of 4 hours and 16 minutes, coming 917th overall out of 1,289 competitors, and 82nd out of 112 in my age group. While I had hoped to do the run in 3 hours 45 minutes, I was happy just to complete it. Despite the injury, I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and might possibly do another one some time.

### 3. SOLO SWIMS OF ONTARIO

Having swum Lake Ontario, I wanted to give something back to the sport of marathon swimming, to be able to encourage others to attempt the feat, and to be part of their achievement. For these reasons, I agreed to join Solo Swims of Ontario, becoming Vice-President at the ensuing AGM, and later a Swim Master.

Solo Swims of Ontario (SSO) is a government-sponsored body that provides a service to anyone contemplating a solo swim across Lake Ontario. SSO was set up as a result of a coroner's inquest into a drowning that occurred on an unsupervised and ill-prepared swim across the lake in 1974. SSO focuses on safety guidelines, and has specific rules and regulations that a swimmer must abide by in order to receive sanction for the swim. SSO assigns a "Swim Master" to every marathon swim it sanctions. The Swim Master is the official charged with ensuring the swim meets required safety guidelines. This person has final say when the safety of the swimmer or the crew is threatened and has the power to terminate the swim at any time for safety reasons.

During the summer of 1990 I went along as Swim Master-in-Training when an Italian, Paolo Pinto, attempted the lake. He made it and, at age 53, became the second oldest, shunting me down to third.

At this point I became an Assistant Swim Master and, later that summer, I accompanied one of my Etobicoke Olympium Masters Aquatic Club colleagues, Colleen Shields, on her successful swim of the lake. Colleen, at age 38, became the oldest female. I then became a fully fledged Swim Master.

I had my first assignment when my other E.O.M.A.C. colleague, Rick Wood, who crossed Lake Ontario two weeks before I did, intended to do a double crossing at the end of Lake Erie, a round-trip distance of 25 miles. Despite a nerve-racking period when we crossed three times through a sailboat race, and despite Rick's bursitis in one shoulder, essentially reducing him to one arm (I know what swimming like that means), he made it and became the first Canadian male to accomplish the feat.

All of these successful crossings increased my resolve to get back to marathon swimming the next summer.

#### 4. INITIAL PLANNING

The two years prior to my swimming of Lake Ontario I had participated in the annual 'Cross Lake Couchiching Swim, a distance of 3 1/2 miles, and thus I had become familiar with this lake. Also, one summer I competed in the 2-mile race across Lake Simcoe's Kempenfelt Bay on which Barrie is situated, so I became somewhat familiar with that lake as well.

Then I met Kim Middleton who served on the Board of Solo Swims. Kim had been the first and only person to swim from Barrie at the bottom of Lake Simcoe to Orillia at the bottom of Lake Couchiching, a distance of 26 miles, and which she accomplished in 1988.

In addition, since 1989, I had been developing an increasing friendship with Dave Murphy of the Barrie Trojans Masters because, for many of our races, our times were very close and the competitive rivalry was exciting. Dave lived on Lake Simcoe and, owning a boat, knew the lake intimately.

As a result of all of these factors, a swim of both Lake Couchiching and Lake Simcoe evolved naturally. And, I wanted to do a swim that no-one else had done.

#### 5. CHARITY

In April I mentioned my plans to Dave Murphy and he was very enthusiastic and genuinely wanted to be a part of the swim and its organization. I said that I wanted to use the swim as a means of raising money for Barrie's Royal Victoria Hospital. Since Dave is a doctor at the Royal Vic, he thought it was a good idea but, even better he thought, was to raise money for Big Brothers of Barrie, of which he had recently joined the Board of Directors. I readily agreed since it didn't really matter to me, as long as any money pledged went to a worthwhile cause.

## 6. SPONSORSHIP

The crossing of Lake Ontario had cost me about \$1,200 and, while a swim of Couchiching-Simcoe would probably be much less, the thought of obtaining a sponsor was appealing. First I approached Lehman's ESSO Service at Broadway and Bayview in Toronto. This is where I had been taking my car for the past ten years and I had expended a considerable amount of money there. I had requested between \$500 and \$1,000 as a sponsorship. Fred Lehman never hesitated in agreeing to sponsor me with a sum of \$500. In addition, Fred had a 38-foot cabin cruiser, the Knot-E Lady, moored on Lake Simcoe and, if he were available, was interested in participating on the swim.

I also tried Home Hardware for sponsorship but, despite knowing one of the dealers, he declined the opportunity to sponsor individually and also was not able to put together a dealer consortium.

## 7. TRAINING

As in 1989, my readiness for a marathon swim was built upon my training for competitive Masters swim meets. I had participated at both the Ontario and Canadian Championships, after which I began long distance training in earnest towards the end of May. This involved a shift in emphasis from short distance sprints to long and boring continuous sets. On most days, I did either three or four timed one-kilometre swims, but sometimes just swam the four kilometre distance without stopping.

My experience when training for Lake Ontario taught me that it was necessary to build up the aerobic training and get the mileage in and not worry about anaerobic training which benefits sprint swimming.

For the first month I trained at the Etobicoke Olympium during the day and supplemented it with the occasional work-out with my Etobicoke Masters swim club at night.

In mid June, when the 50-metre open-air D.D. Summerville Pool at the foot of Woodbine Avenue opened for the summer, I went there most mornings. This pool was supposed to give me the benefit of training in cold water but, to my disgust, I learned that heaters had been installed and, consequently, the water temperature was considerably warmer than I would have liked.

About the same time that I started at Summerville, I did some swimming in Lake Simcoe on week-ends with Dave Murphy along to accompany me. This provided the advantage of getting to know wind and wave patterns on the lake, at least in what would be the last stages of the up-coming swim.

The main differences between Lake Ontario and Lake Simcoe were that Lake Ontario, being a larger body of water, was colder, and the waves on Lake Ontario tended to be big rollers spaced far apart, while on Lake Simcoe they were smaller and more compact and, as a result, choppy. I prefer the Lake Ontario rollers as a swimmer can swim up and down them, but choppy close-together waves just batter away, destroying rhythm.

The other part of my training schedule involved weight gain. During the spring, for a number of reasons, my weight dropped from 170 pounds to 159. Pretty skinny! As the long-distance training commenced, I began to gorge myself, particularly on ice-cream milkshakes, and by drinking my own "brew-on-premise" beer. It was a real struggle, but I finally got back to 170 pounds. I couldn't put on any more, and it was with this weight that I began the marathon. This contrasts with the 190-pound weight for Lake Ontario. I am puzzled as to why I was able to put on weight that year and not this.

## 8. THE TRIAL SWIM

As part of Solo Swim of Ontario's sanction requirements, it is necessary to complete a trial swim to test the swimmer's readiness to undertake a marathon. The trial swim must be one-third of the actual distance to be swum, to a maximum of ten miles. Since my swim was to be 35 miles, I was required to do a ten miler. I chose to do it in Lake Simcoe.

On July 3rd, I swam the last ten miles of my forth-coming swim. This provided me with the advantages of swimming in the actual lake I would be challenging as well as familiarizing myself with landmarks along the way, particularly those at the end of the swim. Of special note was Dave Murphy's house, situated right on Lake Simcoe, almost exactly seven miles from the finish. The end itself was marked by two condo towers, a perfect set of beacons to aim for.

The trial swim was used to check out different types of goggles and also to try different kinds of foods and feeding bottles.

Good progress was made for eight of the ten miles, but the wind came up at the last, blowing southeast, or diagonally across me from the left. Good practise for what would lie ahead. I finished the swim in 5 hours 20 minutes. My thanks to Jack Ramsden and Dave Murphy for accompanying me.

## 9. PREPARATION

The attempt was to be made on July 20th. I assembled my crew. I wanted Cam Kamula as Swim Master and Doug Taylor as Swim Coach. Both were instrumental in my completion of Lake Ontario and I needed and wanted their experience, particularly as they knew my capabilities.

Jim Sarjeant would come along again, too. For me, it is vitally important to have my close friends with me, even if their involvement is minimal. Just their presence on the swim is very important to me. Friends have an enormous impact and their encouragement provides a major psychological lift when the swimming gets tough.

Jim's girl friend, Sue Morgenstern, agreed to be Chief Cook and Bottle Washer. Ian Pooles would come along as part of the crew; his sailing experience would be useful. Bryan Finlay, a Masters swimmer from London, and a marathon swimmer in his own right doing the breaststroke, was pleased to join the crew. Bryan brought along his son, Graham, who has his NLS (National Life Saving) certificate. He proved to be by far the best Zodiac driver and, as it turned out, the key person on the support crew.

Dave Murphy did a tremendous job of organizing the swim. Through Big Brothers, he obtained, at no charge, from Sandy Cove Marina, a 14-foot aluminum boat with a 9.9 horsepower motor, and walkie-talkies to be used for communication between the boats. Dave also contributed his own boat, a 21-foot inboard-outboard Grew, called "Sandman". Dave also secured a "lead" boat, the 26-foot "Sweet Talker", which belonged to his friends, Gabby and Paul Coe. Gabby and her friend, Hannah, would crew the Sweet Talker.

Through his Sears Canada contacts, Ian Pooles was able to get me, for free, a dozen and a half sweat t-shirts, on which were emblazoned "BOB WEIR 35 MILE SWIM, WASHAGO TO BARRIE, JULY 20, 1991", as well as a similar number of tote bags. I gave these to all the crew and support personnel.

A special thank you to Greg Bell, who willingly loaned me his cellular telephone. It was the only link with the outside world during the swim.

#### 10. FEEDING

I planned to have two different liquids, a cold followed by a hot, usually every half hour, but sometimes an hour apart. (The planned Feeding Schedule is presented in the Appendix.) My thinking is it is better to have frequent small feedings rather than few large feedings as this will maintain energy levels better and replace quicker liquids lost through exertion and sun exposure. Dehydration is a major problem to be avoided, especially in the latter part of a swim. Another reason in favour of feeding often is that the kidneys tend to work overtime in cold water and frequent urination literally pisses the heat out of the body.

My foods consisted of the following:

Lucozade, a carbonated high-energy glucose drink;

Ensure, a high calorie milkshake full of necessary vitamins, minerals, and electrolytes;

Boost, Blueberry Boost was my favourite and, like Ensure, it is in milkshake form and is full of vitamins and minerals;

Oatmeal, with brown sugar;

Milk and Molasses, molasses adds iron, potassium, and calcium;

Beef Broth Soup;

Chicken Broth Soup; and

Peaches; chopped up canned peaches, which slithered down. Yummy!

#### 11. MEDIA ATTENTION

Dave garnered considerable interest in the swim from the Barrie newspaper, The Examiner, and the Orillia newspaper, The Packet & Times. Frequent articles were written in both newspapers. The Barrie television station, CKVR, also was a great booster. Through Dave's efforts, I appeared on the CKVR program, Summer Scenes, hosted by Jayne Stafford.

At the taping of Summer Scenes, I met Lorne Hailstone of Orillia. He volunteered to assist me promote the swim and offered to accompany me in a houseboat on the Couchiching portion.

## 12. JULY 20, 1991

Saturday morning. The weather forecast was for severe thunderstorms late Saturday night throughout south-central Ontario, including the Lake Simcoe area. Although the expected thunderstorm activity was wide-spread, if we listened unquestionably to the weatherman all the time, we would probably never do anything. What if the thunderstorms were a mile away? Or never came into our area at all? Besides, Bryan and Graham would have already have left from London.

We assembled at Dave Murphy's house just north of Barrie on Lake Simcoe at about 10:30. Soon after, we proceeded by boat and car to Washago, the starting point. It was a hot, hazy day. Earlier, Dave had reached Lorne Hailstone by phone and Hailstone informed him that the kitchen facilities on the houseboat were broken and there was no way to heat food.

## 13. THE START

I was at Washago at 1 o'clock and ready to go, but Dave would be at least another half an hour. Saul from The Packet & Times was treated to an extensive interview. Dave and the rest of the crew finally showed up about 3 o'clock. They had been delayed trying to track down Lorne Hailstone and, when he was, he announced that he had better things to do and wouldn't be accompanying me on the swim at all.

Many of my swim friends from Etobicoke Masters had journeyed up to see me off. That was very much appreciated. Thanks to Wendy & Keith, Charlie & Liz, Sue, Susan, and Marian.

Bryan Finlay greased me with Vaseline and, after a brief interview with CKVR, I set off at exactly 3:30 P.M.

## 14. LAKE COUCHICHING

Washago is situated right at the northern end of Lake Couchiching, a long shallow lake. At the top end, boats are confined to a narrow channel. Our plan was to stay away from the channel and swim in shallow water along the shoreline until we reached Geneva Park, a distance of about six miles. The 14-foot lifeguard boat would accompany me in the shallows, but Dave would be compelled to keep to the channel.

The water was very warm in the shallow water and it was interesting to watch the rock formations go by. At one point the water was no more than one foot deep; on another occasion, I swam through an extensive weed bed, which proved to be heavy going. The water was choppy with the wind blowing from the west, or my right side, and slightly behind me. With the chop on the water, it was difficult to establish a good rhythm and progress was a little slow.

Without the houseboat and with no kitchen facilities on Sandman, Dave was forced to drive to The Narrows, where the Sweet Talker was waiting, in order to heat up my food.

Past Geneva Park we were out in the main channel and, it being a hot, sunny, Saturday afternoon, there were plenty of boaters out on the lake. Many were speed boats which, when they rocketed by, created bothersome waves.

It was starting to get dark as we approached The Narrows.

#### 15. THE NARROWS

The Narrows marks the channel that leads from Lake Couchiching to Lake Simcoe. It is about one mile long and narrows to about 200 metres. Going over it is a C.N.R. train bridge and the Highway 12 bridge. The train bridge closes nightly at 9:30, and all large-sized boats must be through before the bridge closes. We reached the two bridges at 9:45 P.M. The car bridge is some 50 feet high and someone jumped off as I approached. I didn't see the jump, but I saw the splash. On the bridge were most of my Etobicoke swim friends, yelling encouragement. I yelled back that I would see them tomorrow in Barrie. Charlie added that I was not to be late for swim practice.

I had estimated that it would take me exactly 6 hours to reach The Narrows. In fact, with the choppy water, it took 6 hours, 15 minutes.

#### 16. LAKE SIMCOE

Into Lake Simcoe, and it was now dark. The water temperature dropped very slightly, but would not be a factor. It was a lot warmer than Lake Ontario was two years previous. Unlike Couchiching, Simcoe was calm. I started to make excellent progress. I felt strong and I was able to get a good rhythm going.

There was a bit of a problem establishing the Sweet Talker as lead boat, but this was soon rectified.

Just after 2 o'clock, it started. Off in the distance, to the south and east, there were the occasional flashes. An hour later, they were more pronounced. About 3:30 A.M., being past Eight-Mile Point and approaching Hawkestone, the Swim Master approached and, before he could say anything, I said we had better start heading to shore as fast as possible. It was about 800 metres away.

It was obvious we were in for the forecasted thunderstorms. My thinking was, if we could get near shore, the chance of being hit by lightning would be greatly reduced as the tall trees would afford a better target. Perhaps I could swim right along the shoreline or, if necessary, tread water for as long as it took for the storm to pass.

We were heading for the Hawestone<sup>k</sup> Yacht Club, which featured a red flashing light on shore as a guide. My spirits were down, as I knew it was over, and all of a sudden I felt very tired in the water.

## 17. THE FINISH

The flashes were on all four sides of us now. Then, there was a loud thunder-clap right over our heads. This was followed by another shortly thereafter. That was it. The Swim Master terminated the swim. I quickly swam to the Sandman and we all headed for shore, now about 400 metres away.

Although naturally disappointed, I accepted my fate instinctively. Not only was I at risk in the water, but more so were those in the aluminum boat. Most of the lightning was of the sheet variety, from cloud to cloud. But there was the occasional bolt lightning, and it could strike us at any time.

I had completed almost exactly 20 miles in a time of 12 hours, 21 minutes.

We all assembled at the Hawkestone Yacht Club and found the lodge open. Soon after arriving, the rains came down, very heavy at times, and the wind, she blowed. I felt good, and had I been able to continue, I was positive that I would have completed the swim.

The storm lasted fully an hour, with one wave of lightning after another. I would not have wanted to tread water all that long. Dave called for a taxi and some went with him to fetch the cars.

There had been no problems on this swim. My shoulders held up well, just the normal discomfort from swimming a long distance. My hips and thigh muscles, although a little bothersome from time to time, also were okay. On the way back to Toronto, I was already formulating plans for another attempt in late August.

## 18. THE INTERIM

I didn't lose any pounds on the swim, and my weight stayed stable for the first few days, then it dropped four pounds. However, this came back fairly quickly.

The downer for me of not completing the swim was that I would have to keep on training and over-eating. I also wanted the time to get on with other things.

One pleasant divergence was that Dave Murphy and I had planned to participate in the U.S. Long Course Swimming Championships which were being held in Kentucky August 15-18. Neither one of us would be properly trained for the meet but, as I said to Dave before we went, "Let's go for a good time, not for good times." We both enjoyed ourselves immensely.

I did not fare well in the sprint events of 100 and 200 Free (not surprising since I hadn't done any sprint training) but, in the 400 Free I was seventh, and in the 800 Free I was first. I was a U.S. Champion!



19. AUGUST 23, 1991

To take advantage of less boat traffic on Couchiching, we set Friday, August 23, as the date of the second attempt. I revamped my feedings slightly. Almost all of the other necessary preparation was the same as the first time. Greg Bell again offered to loan us his cellular phone.

My Swim Master, Cam Kamula, would not be able to go with me on a second try. Marilyn Korzekwa, who has swum Lake Ontario twice, once in each direction, had previously volunteered to be Swim Master, but I had already contacted Cam. This time, Marilyn was it, and when I asked her, she readily agreed.

I was also really pleased that the entire crew, with one exception, were more than willing to go with me again. Ian Pooles dropped out, to be replaced by Charlie Lane from the Etobicoke Masters. Charlie would be responsible for media co-ordination.

In addition, as my parents intended to be in Toronto towards the latter part of August, my Father was anxious to join the crew.

On Friday morning, the weather forecast was favourable, calling for sunshine both days, although we were to expect a chilly night. No rain or thunderstorms were anticipated.

Again, we assembled at Dave's house. Dave told us that Gabby had injured her back and couldn't make the trip, but that her husband, Paul, would be filling in. Hannah was all set to go. Bryan related the story that the previous evening his house had been robbed, but that not much was taken. He wandered off to phone his insurance company. Charlie had arrived earlier, and since Dave was out collecting the walkie-talkies, he took off for Washago, getting there before 11 o'clock and then having to sit around waiting for us to arrive, which those of us by car did at about 1 o'clock.

A reporter from The Packet & Times was there and he joined us as we went off for lunch and to await Dave, Bryan, and Graham who were coming up in the Sandman. The rest of the crew were to join us at The Narrows, where they would be waiting on Sweet Talker.

I had forgotten to heat up my soup while I was at Dave's. I asked the young, ugly, and surly waitress if the restaurant could heat up a thermos of soup for me. I didn't tell her why. She asked the boss, who said no. If you are ever in Washago, don't eat at The Log Cabin. Later, two of my crew approached the Washago Deli and they were happy to oblige, and so I had a hot thermos of soup ready for the swim.

Beth Whittall from E.O.M.A.C. showed up, which I really appreciated. So did Brenda Jenkins who I had met a few weeks earlier. Brenda had phoned me after the aborted attempt on July 20th for advice on doing a long-distance swim. She told me that she was going to do a double crossing of Lake Couchiching, some 7 miles, although in a wet suit. I volunteered to accompany her on her swim and she took me up on it. She made it. Now, she was paying me back by being at the start of my swim and wishing me well.

## 20. THE START

As soon as the Sandman arrived, I started to grease up. Bryan was getting good at this and I was soon covered in Vaseline. CKVR again was there doing a spot for the late night News.

After the gas tank for the aluminum boat was filled up, we were set to go.

At 2:50 P.M., I started again, earlier than last time, but still later than the 2 o'clock start we had been aiming for. It didn't really matter, except that Couchiching was calm and a wind could come up at any time.

## 21. LAKE COUCHICHING

Deja vu. The aluminum boat accompanied me as I started swimming in the shallow water. The propeller on the Sandman had been damaged and had to be repaired at Pier 11, then the Sandman headed for the channel to parallel our progress.

The lake was fairly calm and I was able to get a good stroke going. It seemed to me that we were making much faster headway this time compared to the first attempt a month earlier. There were also much fewer boats joy-riding on the lake. It had been a good choice to go on the Friday. The water temperature was around 21 degrees (70F).

I had met Officer Wayne Bebb and his partner of the Orillia O.P.P. on Brenda Jenkins' swim and I asked them if they would be interested in escorting me through The Narrows on my swim. They told me that, although they were off duty at that time, they would be pleased to provide an escort service. As promised, they picked up our flotilla about two miles from The Narrows and shepherded us right through to Lake Simcoe. Thanks a lot, guys.

I reached The Narrows at 8:45 P.M., just under six hours, and bettering my previous attempt by 20 minutes. It was already dark. Brenda was waiting there to cheer me on. That was nice. On the other side of the bridges was Sweet Talker with the rest of the crew, namely Doug, Jim, and Sue. Paul and Hannah crewed the Sweet Talker.

## 22. LAKE SIMCOE

If the water temperature was colder in Lake Simcoe, I didn't notice it. In fact, it was about the same. I wasn't at all cold. I had kept up regular feedings, usually every half hour, but sometimes going for an hour before stopping. I was taking the same liquids as used on the first attempt.

It was two days before the full moon and we were benefiting from its fullness. It shone brightly in the east, on my left side, as we proceeded southwards.

I felt good. No problems with shoulders or hips so far.

About midnight, the wind started to come up. It was blowing gently, at first, from the northwest. As it intensified, it veered a little and began blowing out of the north. I noticed an air temperature drop. Still, it felt warm in the water, and my arms were not cold on recovery. The wind was pushing up the waves, and although they were still small and coming from behind me, nevertheless, they disrupted my rhythm.

Gradually, as we got further down the lake, the waves had a bigger territory in which to build up size. The wind got stronger, the air colder, and the waves higher. The lifeguard boat began having trouble steering a straight course. I was told not to follow it but to key on the Sweet Talker which, as lead boat, had gone down the lake. To do this, I would have to raise my head and look up. When I did this, only once in about six tries could I actually see the Sweet Talker's mast. The waves were averaging 3-4 feet, cresting at 5-6 feet, with frequent breakers. They were still almost directly behind me. While this pushed me along, it was impossible to establish a rhythm and my pace slowed. It also made feeding more difficult, firstly to get to the lifeguard boat to receive and then to return the feeding bottle, and secondly to actually drink the liquids.

By 2 A.M. clouds starting rolling in and soon obscured the moon. I noticed my upper legs were cramping more frequently. I was able to alleviate the cramping by flexing my legs to get the blood flowing. But now I was doing this more often, and the cramping was starting to cause pain.

### 23. NIGHT CRAWL

We passed Eight-Mile Point and headed towards Hawkestone, which we reached around 3:15 A.M. We had lost the time we had made up on the Couchiching leg. Our Simcoe progress was slowing in the waves.

The waves were causing another problem: motion-sickness. I figured automatically that Doug, my Swim Coach, would be heaving. He told me later that he didn't up-chuck, but that he felt terribly queasy for quite a long time. Although I changed Cooks from my Lake Ontario adventure, I got another sicky. Sue heaved on more than one occasion. I knew it wasn't easy cooking in a narrow galley as the sailboat pitched in the waves. I saw Bryan get aboard the lifeguard boat in the middle of the night to relieve Graham, but ten minutes later I noticed he was gone and Graham was back driving again. Apparently, Bryan was feeling sick in the waves and when he had to put my food into a thermos, that did it. He puked over the side, fortunately on the other side of the boat from me. Bryan went to the Sweet Talker, and slept. In one wild set of waves, the boat pitched and Bryan fell out of the bunk straight onto the floor. The swimmer isn't the only one in pain in these escapades.

I also realized that it must have been quite chilly in the boats. I saw Charlie sitting in the lifeguard boat with a toque on his head, gloves on his hands, and wearing a winter parka. All of the crew were well bundled up. I learned later that the air temperature dropped to about 13 degrees (55F). However, the crew estimated the wind chill factor pushed the temperature down to about 8 degrees (45F).

Although I did not feel cold in the water, except for my arms, the parts exposed to the air, which were the back of my neck and the upper part of my back, felt quite cold. I thought of applying more Vaseline but trying to do that in those waves would be quite difficult. On a couple of my feedings, I felt myself shivering. Marilyn, the Swim Master, noticed it too. However, after having fed and once swimming again, the shivering stopped immediately and I did not feel cold. Neither my hands nor my feet were cold, unlike my experience in Lake Ontario.

Progress was slow. I tried to follow Sweet Talker but it was being blown down the lake and had to keep circling back. Most of the time, because of the waves, it was too far away for me to see its mast and I had to guess where it was supposed to be. It would have been a good idea for the Sandman to position itself mid way between the swimmer and the lead boat, but the Sandman had to keep jockeying between the two, as it had to pick up the heated food from Sweet Talker and deliver it to the lifeguard boat.

As the night wore on, the pain increased in my legs, hip joints, and lower back. This was exactly the same pain I experienced on the Toronto Marathon. Flexing helped, but the time between the painful stiffening of the muscles was continually shortening. About every 3 to 5 minutes I had to flex which slowed my progress even more. Once in a while I would stop and roll up in a ball. This provided instant relief. But as soon as I started swimming again, the pain came back.

#### 24. DAWN

Night swimming doesn't bother me, but everything is easier in daylight. Psychologically, the dawn provides a tremendous lift for everyone, swimmer and crew alike. By the time daylight arrived around 6:00 A.M., we were near Oro Beach Road, which marked ten miles to the finish and also the marker point where I started my ten-mile trial swim way back on July 3rd. With the waves disrupting my rhythm, my speed had been a slow one mile per hour throughout the night. I wasn't destined to go any faster for the rest of the swim.

The waves were still fairly large and, by now, were coming from the northeast, essentially following the curve of the lake. We seemed to be making slow progress. Dave came over, visibly agitated, and informed us that we were following the contours of the shoreline and not going in a straight line. At this point, Graham took over again as the lifeguard boat driver and our direction and progress improved considerably. My legs and hip muscles were still causing me a lot of grief. I tried to kick as much as possible, but it was painful.

#### 25. SUNSHINE

Around noon the clouds started to break up and soon the sun was out. At this point we were about five miles from our destination.

My sponsor, Fred Lehman, aboard the Knot-E Lady appeared on the scene, and soon other boats joined the flotilla.

About this time, the first of a continuous set of pacers entered the water to keep me company for the rest of the swim. I do not particularly like pacers but they do make feeding much easier as they fetch and return the feeding bottles from the lifeguard boat. Doug was the first one in, followed by Bryan, obviously feeling better in the water than he was on the boats. Then came Charlie, and after him, Marilyn.

The Barrie O.P.P. joined us for the last few miles, doing a terrific job of keeping boats away. The Knot-E Lady provided the swim crew with much appreciated hot coffee.

I could see the twin condo towers marking the end of the swim, but I focussed on specific landmarks along the shore, including the white boathouse, the tree bending out from shore, the lighthouse, and the tall apartment building.

Doug was back in again to pace.

## 26. THE FINISH

The last five miles had been tortuously slow. But now there was only about a mile to go. Bryan joined in again, so I had a pacer on each side of me. Doug barked out the distance. 1500 metres! 800 metres! 400 metres! Then he held up three fingers and, not long later, two fingers, yelling 200 metres! I could hear a multitude of boat horns blaring. With about 100 metres to go, I put on a feeble sprint. Then I saw the sandy bottom and, after a few more strokes, I stopped, rested on my knees, and held up both arms, with fists clenched. It was 3:58. The swim took 25 hours, 8 minutes.

While Doug took off the glow stick pinned to the back of my bathing suit, Bryan removed the goggles from my eyes. I stood up, turned around and gave the victory salute to the Knot-E Lady and to the other two boats that joined us for the last part of the swim. Marilyn threw a towel over my shoulders. I then ran out of the water to the waiting ambulance drivers. I asked them if I could have five minutes to thank my crew. Dave had asked the OPP to radio ahead and request a waiting ambulance to take me to hospital. This was strictly precautionary and recommended by SSO to all swimmers.

A crowd had gathered on the shore, probably attracted by the ambulance and thinking that someone may have drowned.

I recognized a few people in the crowd. Jackie from E.O.M.A.C. had driven up from Toronto, as did Doug's parents, wife, and family.

A reporter from The Barrie Examiner gathered information from Charlie. CKVR conducted a brief interview with me. My Father was the first to congratulate me, followed quickly by Dave. Charlie took some photos. I also gave Marilyn a hug for a job well done as Swim Master.

After chatting briefly with as many of my crew as possible, I headed for the stretcher and disappeared into the ambulance.

## 27. THE HOSPITAL

My Father came along in the ambulance and we went to The Royal Victoria Hospital. It was going to be interesting to compare my treatment at RVH compared to my mis-treatment at Toronto General two years earlier. Once at RVH, my core temperature was measured and found to be 35.1 degrees, which is just on the border line of hypothermia. I was wrapped in heated sheets and given an IV saline solution to warm me. It wasn't long before I felt hot and a second check of my core temperature found that it had risen to 37.7 degrees, which is 0.2 into fever territory. An ECG was conducted, and my blood pressure and pulse were taken on two occasions. Everything was pretty well normal, although all slightly higher than I usually record.

Jim and Sue visited briefly and, soon after, Brenda showed up, obviously disappointed that she didn't see me come in. She had figured that I would arrive around 5 o'clock. After she left, I slept for about 20 minutes. We had to wait for Dave to arrive with my car and clothes. My car was at Washago and Dave had to go back there to pick it up. Dave arrived around 7:30.

The hospital didn't have shower facilities available so I bundled myself up in a hospital gown to provide some protection from the remaining grease, donned my clothes, and left the hospital. Dad and I took turns driving back to Toronto, stopping at McDonald's on the way. We arrived home at about 10:30 P.M.

## 28. AFTERMATH

I suffered no ill effects on this swim. No shoulder problems, and my legs and hip joints were fine once the swimming stopped.

Similar to the first attempt, I didn't lose any weight on the swim or for the first few days afterwards, then my weight dropped 5 pounds all in one day.

I am unsure whether I will do a marathon next year, but in two years time, when I am 50, that might be a good opportunity to do Lake Erie.

The amount of pledge money raised for Big Brothers of Barrie was estimated to be at least \$3,200. I met with Don Lawson, Executive Director of Big Brothers, and enquired whether there was something specific, such as a computer, that the money could go towards rather than just be pooled into administration. Don said he would get back to me in due course. I also thanked him for getting me the aluminum boat and the walkie-talkies. I would be most happy to have again Big Brothers as my charity for any future marathon swim.

Bob Weir  
August 1991

LAKE COUCHICHING - LAKE SIMCOE SWIM MEALS

<u>ACTUAL TIME</u>	<u>HOURS GONE</u>	<u>FOOD</u>
2:00	0	
3:00	1	Ensure; Beef Broth
3:30	1 1/2	Lucozade (1/2 bottle)
4:00	2	Peaches (1 cup); Milk
4:30	2 1/2	Blueberry Boost
5:00	3	Ensure; Beef Broth
6:00	4	Blueberry Boost
6:30	4 1/2	Milk
7:00	5	Lucozade (1/2 bottle); Beef Broth
8:00	6	Peaches (1 cup); Blueberry Boost
8:30	6 1/2	Milk
9:00	7	Lucozade; Oatmeal
9:30	7 1/2	Ensure; Beef Broth
10:00	8	Lucozade; Oatmeal
10:30	8 1/2	Blueberry Boost; Milk
11:00	9	Ensure; Beef Broth
11:30	9 1/2	Blueberry Boost; Milk
12:00	10	Lucozade; Peaches; Milk
1:00	11	Lucozade; Oatmeal
1:30	11 1/2	Lucozade; Milk
2:00	12	Ensure; Beef Broth
2:30	12 1/2	Lucozade; Milk
3:00	13	Blueberry Boost
3:30	13 1/2	Peaches; Beef Broth
4:00	14	Lucozade; Milk

<u>ACTUAL TIME</u>	<u>HOURS GONE</u>	<u>FOOD</u>
4:30	14 1/2	Ensure; Beef Broth
5:00	15	Blueberry Boost; Oatmeal
5:30	15 1/2	Lucozade; Milk
6:00	16	Lucozade; Oatmeal
6:30	16 1/2	Ensure; Beef Broth
7:00	17	Lucozade; Peaches; Milk
7:30	17 1/2	Blueberry Boost; Beef Broth
8:00	18	Lucozade; Oatmeal
8:30	18 1/2	Blueberry Boost; Beef Broth
9:00	19	Lucozade; Peaches; Milk
9:30	19 1/2	Ensure; Beef Broth
10:00	20	Blueberry Boost; Oatmeal
10:30	20 1/2	Lucozade; Milk
11:00	21	Ensure; Beef Broth
11:30	21 1/2	Ensure
12:00	22	Lucozade

After this point, if I am still swimming (perish the thought!), just feed me: Lucozade.

Notes:

Pre-Mixed: Oatmeal, Beef Broth, and Milk

1. Oatmeal: just heat and serve in open cup with name on it
2. Beef Broth: just heat and serve in small bottle
3. Milk (with molasses): just heat and serve in small bottle
4. Peaches: serve in open cup with name on it
5. Lucozade: serve in big bottle with name on it
6. Packaged Soup: reserve; only use if necessary