

Ironman Hawaii *By Debbie Bozeman*

To all our many friends and supporters ALOHA. Today is October 28th, 12 days after Ironman Hawaii. We stayed in Kona for a week after the triathlon to recover and see the many beautiful sights we didn't take in our first week there. After 5 days I have finally unpacked our bags and feel like I am almost back on Va. time. Yesterday I swam 1600 meters and ran 5 miles afterwards. During my run I began to reflect on our experience in Hawaii.

UNBELIEVABLE, AWESOME, ONCE IN A LIFETIME EXPERIENCE!!! Even that can't express the feelings of being a part of The World Championship of triathlons. Most of you know that Steve and I were able to participate due to the generosity of his friend and 6 time Double Ironman Finisher Dr. Jim Gills, who most of you know owns the Ironman Corporation. When we got the word last January that we were in I immediately began swimming. First on my own and then with the masters swim group at the YMCA. We didn't have to qualify to get in, however we still had the same cutoff times as everyone else. That meant 2 hours and 20 minutes I had to be out of the water. You're thinking, "piece of cake", well not for me! I learned to swim when I was 27 years old in February and in October of that same year completed the Ironman Hawaii for the first time. Surprisingly, my time was 2:02 in 1982 and 2:03 this time. In the 22 years since I completed the first Ironman Hawaii my swimming had been very sporadic. I went ten years at one point and never went to the YMCA. I also had a couple of bad experiences in open water swims. So, my swimming wasn't very good at this point and I had a lot of anxiety about being in open water.

Steve and I had already planned to do the entire event together, which meant that he would be by my side for the swim. This was a huge comfort, but at the same time, I had to overcome my fears and improve my swim times. With a lot of hard work and the coaching skills of Pricilla Bettis, (if you need help with swimming she's the one) at the Y, I worked on my stroke technique all year. Steve and I did a couple of half Ironman races to prepare for Hawaii. The first one in June, the swim went well, the last one in September the swim was terrible. The Duke half is in a lake but any one of the 6 other Lynchburgers that participated will tell you the water was unbelievably rough that day. At one point I thought I wasn't going to make it. The water was really rough and I was choking on water. I had to mentally calm myself down, I also told myself that I wasn't doing Ironman Hawaii. I would finish this swim and that was it! Of course once I got out of the water and finished the rest of the race with a decent time and second in my division I knew I couldn't give up our dream of finishing Ironman Hawaii together.

I was reading *The Power of Positive Thinking*, a book my son Rick gave me to help me believe in myself and my abilities to once again complete the Ironman distance. I must say for me, the book and prayer got me through the swim in Hawaii, along with my loving guide next to me. I had told everyone that as soon as I got out of the water I would have it made, and that was pretty much how the day went for me.

We arrived in Kona on Saturday afternoon with no luggage or bikes until Sunday afternoon. No big deal we just took it all in stride. We went to the pier on Monday and swam a part of the course. It went really well, the water was clear and as I tell everyone it was like swimming in an aquarium. The beautiful fish and bright surroundings were very calming, unlike swimming in dark murky lakes. We ran 4 miles after this and my confidence really got a boost. We swam one more time and the water was a little choppy but I knew I could do it.

RACE DAY- Saturday morning we got up at 3:30 to get a close parking place (we would have to take our bikes and all our stuff to the car when we finished) and to be at the pier for the 4:45 body marking to begin. We got through that quickly and arranged our things at the bike for a smooth transition. After 2 or 3 bathroom visits and lots of water and a gel pack we were ready to begin. As we walked towards the pier with 10 minutes to start I repeated some of my positive thinking mantras to myself. "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength", "Focus on your technique, not your fear". The starting

line was officially about 100 yards or so out in the water. I was not going out there early and have to tread water until the gun went off! So Steve, myself and quite a few others went in from the shore. It took us about 2 minutes to swim to the starting line, but we were off and swimming.

THE SWIM- We're moving along nicely, you can see things passing by beneath you so you know you are making progress. At the beginning we saw underwater cameramen taking pictures. I felt very calm and relaxed, you can tell by my time I wasn't pushing myself. Steve did breast stroke most of the time because his free style is so much faster than mine. He was my eyes as far as navigating the course. We got to the turnaround boats in 1:01, so we knew then we had it made! We actually passed a few people on the way back!! Two hours and 3 minutes from the start we're out and jogging to the change rooms. I was ready for anything now!!

THE BIKE- After 9 minutes and 45 seconds transition we're biking up Palani Road on our matching Softrides, courtesy of Jimbo Redmond(Thanks Jimbo, they were perfect for all the wind we encountered). What a rush to be out of the swim and the crowd cheering us as we left the pier. You do about 7 miles of the bike through town so you can ease into it. Next we're onto the Queen Ka'ahumanu highway. So far so good, no wind we're passing people and feeling great. I thought what trade winds, they aren't out here today. **WRONG!!** The next thing you know we have a strong head wind and as I heard later up to 50mph side gusts. These side gusts were really scary! I was holding my profiles with a death grip to keep my bike from blowing over with me on it!! From about mile 15 to the turnaround in Hawi it was pretty intense. There was an occasional let up from the side winds but for the most part it was a real battle to keep moving. At times we were averaging 9 mph on what seemed to be flatland. Before the winds hit it was about 20mph average. After the climb to Hawi you would think there would be a tail wind, I still remember from 1982 the same scenario, never a tailwind! For a short time we had a good stretch where we were flying on the way back, I looked down at one point and I was going 46mph. I thought this will help make up for lost time. It was short lived and the wind was back. I could never relax because out of the blue a side gust would hit you and you had better be holding on tight or you were going down. Another strange thing happened to Steve and I both during the bike, our feet started hurting. We could only surmise it was from pushing down so hard to move forward. Even with the wind I still felt really good. Steve was not feeling as good, probably because he couldn't drink as much as he should. The heat bothers him more than me and it was between 95 and 100 degrees on the course. After a while I would look in my rear view mirror and he would be drifting back so I just slowed down. After a hard fought battle we were almost to the bike finish and even though I felt good I was ready to get off the bike. Also, both our knees were really hurting from the extra push on the pedals. This concerned me as far as the run

coming up. Sore knees and feet, what a way to start the run!! We're **FINALLY** in the transition area racking our bikes and heading to the change rooms. Seven hours and 20 minutes on the bike, much, much slower than what we are capable of, but hey, you take what you get on race day.

THE RUN- Slower transition-15 minutes and 56 seconds. Steve had to lay down in the medical tent and have his foot taped up. He almost had a full blown blister on the bottom of his foot from biking. That's never happened before, running maybe but not biking. While he was laying there I put Ironman sports gel on both our knees and we had some ibuprofen and we were off!! Once again the crowd is cheering us on as we leave the transition area, if only they could follow you out into the darkness of the run and keep your spirits up!!

It was 4:30 when we started to run it would be dark by 6:00. The darkness would bring relief from the sun but out of town and it is pitch dark!! Steve was giving it all he had but he was really dehydrated by now and he couldn't cool off. He was putting ice under his hat at all the aid stations and drinking all he could hold. I felt so bad for him and at the same time I was feeling great, I think I could have run the entire marathon with no problem. Now it was my turn to give back to Steve the patience and companionship he has given me so many times in ultra events and always on the swims we have done together. If he hadn't swam with me I wouldn't even be in the race so I was happy to be by his side and

help him make it to the finish line with me (not that he wouldn't have made it, we all know what incredible mental toughness he has). After all we had been through what difference was 14 or sixteen hours. We knew we had 17 hours and together we would make it!

Surprisingly our knees and feet were never a problem on the run. We would "shuffle" as much as we could until Steve needed to walk. At times he was dizzy but after a brief pause he would move on. Oh yeah, I forgot to mention at mile 8 he started carrying his American flag and carried it proudly for the remainder of the event.

We had a great time together and as we approached Alii Dr. Steve got a burst of energy that carried us proudly through the cheering crowd to the FINISH!!

Our finish time was 16:24:47. My first goal was to make it out of the water under the cutoff and secondly finish under the 17 hour cutoff. MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!!!

As I was running yesterday I was actually thinking, " I felt great the whole time, I can't remember a moment when I was wishing I wasn't there, like I have done in other events. I even thought I wouldn't mind doing it again. Now that is unbelievable coming from me. The Ironman slogan this year was ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE and that is so true!!! Interesting statistic- The Ironman had an 88% finish this year, the lowest in the history of the race. I guess we were both pretty tough under the conditions we had. I was just happy that the swim conditions were good. If it had to be difficult at some point the bike is our strongest of the three so we rose to the occasion!!

Thanks to all our friends that cheered for us there in Hawaii (Al and Marcia Montgomery came from South Carolina to be with us, and Jacques Blais our Canadian friend that lives in Hawaii now). Also much thanks to all our local friends that trained with us and encouraged us all the way. We are truly blessed to have such wonderful friends and family that believe in us and support us in all that we do.

THINK WHERE MANS GLORY MOST BEGINS AND ENDS, AND SAY MY GLORY WAS I HAD SUCH FRIENDS. - W.B. YEATS

MAHALO (THANKS)