



Georgia Masters Newsletter

Swimming in Georgia

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Swimmer Profile -- Cathy Jones



By Elaine Krugman

If I could choose to emulate (and, believe me, I have tried) the stroke of one of my Killer Whale teammates, it would be Cathy Jones's butterfly— and, she is a Backstroker! See her swim butterfly, though, and you would have to agree she has a beautiful stroke, even when she races the fly leg of a 400 meter medley relay, right after competing in the 200 Meter Backstroke. I will never forget when Malena Hankins led off in backstroke, I swam the breaststroke leg, and then I watched Cathy nail the fly leg of that relay in 2013 at the UGA long course meet, before Ashley Grindlay brought it home. We ended up ranking 4th in the country, thanks in part to Cathy being willing to jump into the toughest leg of the relay following her 200 race.

That's Cathy in a nutshell; always willing to swim relays when needed, even when it follows a tough individual event—which seems to happen at every meet! As a result, she has made the USMS Top Ten in relays

17 times, in addition to her six individual Top Ten swims.

Although Cathy is a 21-year veteran of the Georgia Masters Killer Whales, she is still a relative youngster in the 45-49 age group. Unlike many of us who leave the sport for several years before returning to the pool (it was 31 years for me), this avid swimmer had only left the pool for five years after graduating from Pomona College, in California, and leaving her collegiate swim days behind.

It was events surrounding the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta that first inspired Cathy to return to the pool. "I volunteered at a test event for the Olympics in 1995, and I volunteered at the Pan-Pacifcics. There was a Masters meet right around then, but I didn't even know about Masters. I remember meeting Lisa (Watson) and finding out about it..."

Cathy's return to swimming was easy for her. "I didn't really have difficulties coming back [to swimming], because I was still young," she explained, adding, "I swam for a while, but then I took time off to have a kid. It's hard to come back after you have a kid; you have to find the time." Another much more serious challenge kept Cathy from the pool. As she explained, "Not many people know this, but when my son was 2 years old, I had breast cancer. I stopped swimming for a year or two. I know a lot of people go through that, but to come back afterwards, the advice I have is to just keep doing it. I had been at Nationals in Savannah in 2004, and I found [a lump] a week later, but I kept telling myself, 'It can't be anything, because I was just at Nationals. I'm a Nationals swimmer,

and I got second place at Nationals. This can't be anything. It didn't go along with being a good competitive swimmer and having cancer at the same time. In my head, it didn't make sense."

Thanks to being a high-level competitor in top swimming condition, Cathy was able to heal faster after her successful breast cancer surgery. "My oncologist tells me she uses me as an example to all her other patients. I like that!"

Returning to swimming following her bout with cancer was difficult, however, because she had lost a lot of time in the pool from not being able to train during her treatments and recovery from surgery. "It was tough to build back up. I had stopped at such a high level, and then had all that time off where I couldn't do much of anything. After my surgery, I lost some range of motion, and it took a while to get it back," she said, adding that it was two to three years before she was able to swim at her top level again. "Five years later, I had reconstructive surgery, and it was really hard coming back after that, because I lost range of motion, and it was much more noticeable. I felt like a crab swimming, because I couldn't move my arm," she explained. Swimming was good therapy for Cathy, though, because she felt like she was back to being a "...normal person. I wanted to be normal again."

When I asked my teammate why she first joined Masters, and then returned after having her son and again after recovering from breast cancer, she replied, "I missed [swimming]. I missed the competition, and I missed the camaraderie." Cathy had competed in swimming from the age of nine all the way through college, so it was a lifestyle she had known and enjoyed almost her entire life.

What she didn't remember about her earliest swimming days, though, was competing against a now-famous childhood teammate back in California. "My mom remembers Janet Evans beating me in the 50 free by over half a lap." Yes, that Janet Evans!

Although Cathy didn't have Olympic dreams like Janet when she first returned to swimming and joined Masters, she had hoped to be able to swim the same times she swam in college. Reality set in, however, when it occurred to her that swimming six days per week (like she had in college) wasn't going to happen. Instead, Cathy is only able to work in three days per week as a Masters swimmer, averaging 3,500 yards per workout. On Saturdays, she trains with the Killer Whales, and then on her own twice per week. In addition, this elementary school teacher works in an occasional run or walk, a stationary bike ride, playing tennis, or a weekly "boot camp" workout.

Over the years, Cathy's race goals have also met with a dose of reality, just like it has for all of us as we age up and then out of competition age groups.

"When I [returned to swimming], I was younger than most Masters swimmers, so when I would go to meets, I would be winning, because everybody was older than me. You're winning, and you look like you're doing really well, but then you look at your times, and you're slower. You have to change your mindset. You can't look at your times, because you're going to be getting slower."

Still, this competitive swimmer does have a goal in mind. "I would like to try to do better than I did last year and slow the slide, I guess!" I asked Cathy what advice she had for other swimmers who want to achieve their goals. "You have to keep doing it. Keep going, and if you keep doing it, you're going to get better. Look for little milestones," she advised.

What is it about Masters that has kept Cathy "doing it" for over twenty years? "I enjoy the people. Everybody is so nice everywhere we go. Even up in Cleveland (where she attended a swim meet while on vacation), I didn't know anybody there, but everybody was so friendly. Swimmers are so nice! In [the sport of] running, you have the super good serious runners, and then the regular people; and, they don't really mix. But, in swimming, everybody likes everybody. They're friendly to each

other and give each other advice. At the Auburn meet, I was sitting with a team from Montgomery, and their coach was giving me tips on the 200 Breaststroke. I had never met him before!”

Looking back over her twenty years in Georgia Masters, there are some favorite memories about the people who make Masters so enjoyable for her. As she remembered, “We used to have the [Southside Pentathlon Swim Meet] in Peachtree City. After the meet, we would go to Karol (Welling)’s house and have lunch there. We did that for years, and it was always one of my favorite things. I would bring my son (who is now 15) and sit him on the [pool] deck in his stroller and leave him there while I swam my races. Everybody was so nice, and it was always so much fun.”

Since then, her son and husband, have supported her through her swimming and post-cancer journey, something she is most grateful about. “I appreciate my family for supporting me. They’ll come to swim meets. My husband will come to Auburn, or they’ll both come to Auburn, and they’ll sit there for two days just to watch me swim, so that’s been very helpful.”

Keep on swimming Cathy, especially butterfly! It has been an honor to be your relay teammate with you on several occasions, and something I look forward to doing more of in the future!