

Swimmer Profile: Nicole Taylor

By Elaine Krugman

At the time of our early October interview, the Covid-19 pandemic was in full swing across our country and in the White House with a predicted second wave on the way. The usual Swimmer Profile questions I had prepared to ask Nicole Taylor just seemed so unimportant and irrelevant, considering all that is happening outside of the pool or open water.



Although we began with those usual interview questions, it was the topic of Covid-19, and whether it has affected her, that resonated with me and is surely on the minds of many other Masters swimmers: “I have not been sick from [Covid-19]. I don’t consider myself a worrier, but I do feel more concerned about some of the long-term issues that people are having [from the virus]. So, that is something I have thought about with swimming. If I did get [the virus] and recovered, would I have issues with my lungs or my heart? Obviously, I really want to stay safe and not get it! I really need to be active, because it is something that brings me so much joy and peace,” she said.

It was only just three or four weeks prior to my interview with Nicole that her Swim Atlanta team had begun training again under the coaching of Georgia Masters Board of Directors Coaches Chair, Pat Eddy. “I still feel like I’m getting into the swing of things,” she said about readjusting to her pool workouts, something she has had to do at other times, since returning to swimming as an adult.

As Nicole explained, “There have been points over the past five years I have had to take time off. I took a year off while I was doing my residency... Any time that there was business or work, health issues, or during the summer time when my kids are home; I have found mentally coming back has always been a challenge. So, I try to I give myself patience and grace; and, realize that this is just the new starting point and where I am right now in life. It’s up and down, and that’s ok. It’s ok to start fresh and start new, to be in a different place physically, and then to get to a stronger place again.”

Fortunately, however, at least the environment at the Swim Atlanta pool seems safer than where many of us are swimming. Describing the pool environment, Nicole said, “With kids still in school and out of school, and all over, our numbers have been a little bit lower; so, everybody is spread out. In the morning, there are two or three people per lane; but, I go at lunch time, most of the time, so there is just a handful of us. We each have our own lane. Everybody has their own boundaries or comfort zone. I feel much more comfortable being outside, so I’m grateful our pool is outside; but, we still try to keep distance between us.”

On average, this seven-year United States Masters Swimming (USMS) member swims three times per week, averaging 3,500 – 4,000 yards per workout. In addition, she runs and bikes on and off; and, she joined a boot camp this fall.

All of this gets juggled in between being a wife and a mom to her kids, ages nine and eleven. In addition, Nicole works as a hospital chaplain. Two years ago, she worked at it full time while doing a residency at Northside Hospital, so it left her no time to compete at swim meets. The year prior, however, this distance swimmer competed at the St. Nick's SCM Invitational and landed 5th in the 2017 USMS Top Ten (women's 35-39 age group), in the 800 Meter Freestyle.

When Nicole first returned to swimming in 2013, after being away from the sport since high school, she didn't have any goals in mind. As she remembered, "I feel like I'm kind of competitive, but I realized pretty quickly that there wasn't going to be getting back to any kind of high school shape again. It was more like, ok, let's just have fun." Rather than setting time goals, Nicole worked on just gradually increasing her speed and endurance.

What lured this exercise enthusiast back in the pool was a convenient set of circumstances. "At the time, I was on staff at [Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church], and when the church bought the property that Swim Atlanta began using, I was like, "Oh my gosh. They have a Master's team? How cool is that?!"

The close proximity of the pool led her to train with Pat Eddy, a distance swimmer who inspires other swimmers in that direction. As a result, Nicole has taken a liking to open water and competes at the Georgia Open Water Meet and Swim Across America each year. She was disappointed that both meets had to be canceled this year, especially since those are experiences she shares with her oldest child. "My daughter, who is eleven, she's swimming for Swim Atlanta. One of the things I have enjoyed about getting back into swimming again is swimming with her. We did the Georgia Games [Open Water Meet] together and Swim Across America together," she said.

In the future, Nicole has additional open water dreams. "I would love to be able to do some more open water swimming and longer distances," adding with a laugh that the big goal on her "bucket list" is to do the Swim From Alcatraz, the famous 2-mile swim in the cold waters of San Francisco Bay. Why? Because she wants the t-shirt!

What is it about swimming, in addition to the "cool" t-shirts, that draws this happy Swim Atlanta member to the pool and open water events? "Just the feeling of working out is a great feeling. Swimming, I love! I just love to exercise, I love to feel my body move; and, to get stronger and feel healthy. I guess it goes hand-in-hand, but with that, it has been a great emotional stress relief for me. My job can be very high stress, and the pool is always the place where I can go into my own head and work through things and challenge myself; but, I don't have the outside forces or pressures or things to deal with. It's where I can push myself or just relax and enjoy the water."

"I love having a place to connect with other people with whom I share an interest; and, be able to come together, encourage each other, laugh and have fun at a place that is separate from work

and family. Connecting with such kind and wonderful people from all over has been great. The other thing I love is having a coach! I love that somebody else has done the work and is there to hold me accountable and encourage me. That has been a great part of Masters swimming,” Nicole related.

Another benefit of being a Masters swimmer is what many of us describe as the “Master’s Prerogative.” This Masters swimmer described it as, “When I swam as a kid, I always saw my coaches as my authority. You’re a kid, and you do everything they say. I love Pat as a coach, and I love when he tells us what to do-- and, I do it 95% of the time. But, that little 5% where I can say, ‘Nah, I’m not doing that; I want to do something else. I will swim a couple laps, and then come back and try it again.’”

In our current pandemic environment, I think most of us are just happy to be in the water. Nicole agreed, “From what I have seen in some of the swimming circles, it’s almost like people are just grateful to be where they are. We’re grateful that we can go to the pool at this point, because for so long, we couldn’t be at the pool. Now we can be here, so we’re grateful for this... People still want to move ahead and go back to competing, but it’s like the longer this goes on—in some ways it feels like [the virus] is going to be around for a while.”

Nicole’s advice? “Be patient with ourselves, and have gratitude in the moment. Be thankful for the pool that we have to swim in, and just enjoy it. It’s going to take time to get back in shape and feel great in the water again. Enjoy being with teammates if you have them. Take it one step at a time; one day at a time. Don’t try to look too far ahead. Set a daily goal or weekly goal instead of too long term.”

That’s great advice during these difficult times!