

## **Swimmer Profile –Elizabeth Giesecking**

By Elaine Krugman



There is a familiar pattern among many of the swimmers who join U.S. Masters Swimming in their 40's or 50's. Many swam competitively as a child, and perhaps even in college, then life got in the way. Children and/or careers forced swimming to take a backseat to more pressing commitments. Once the children were grown and out of the house, there was more time to dedicate to the activities they once loved.

Elizabeth Giesecking is an example of one who followed that pattern. An age group swimmer from 6th grade through high school, she didn't join Georgia Masters until fall of 2018. Although she had competed in club swimming while earning her bachelor's and master's degrees in chemical engineering at Georgia Tech, it wasn't until after her four children were grown that she got back into the sport on a regular basis. This time, she was pursuing a second career as a data scientist and earning master's degrees in mathematics education and statistics, at the University of Georgia, in Athens. Swimming fit into her class schedule, so she took advantage of UGA's world-class pool and returned to the sport she loved best.

Elizabeth currently works full-time from home (due to the pandemic) as a model validator (don't know what a model validator does? Google it.) and swims four times a week, two mornings at the West Gwinnett Park Aquatic Center, and two afternoons at the Collins Hill Park Aquatic Center.

It's understandable why this high academic achiever swam only sporadically during all those years, in between earning her master's degrees at Georgia Tech and UGA. Elizabeth not only had four children; but, she home-schooled each of them as well!

"I feel like I have had different lives," Elizabeth said in our recent phone interview, further explaining, "I had my regular college years, and then I had my home-schooling years; and, then I had my back to college and new career. I did some swimming during my home-schooling years... but you go through a lot of stages of life, and during some stages, swimming just didn't really work."

At times, Elizabeth found it difficult to fit swimming in with the various extracurricular activities her four kids were involved in. Now that her youngest is an adult, she has time to return to the activities she had enjoyed as a child— swimming and piano lessons.

When it comes to swimming, it's backstroke she enjoys the most. In high school, Elizabeth swam backstroke events in the Florida Junior Olympics, and she has set a goal of making National Qualifying Times in her new 55-59 Masters age group. "200 Backstroke is probably my best event. That's where I feel like I'm closest to making my [National Qualifying Time] goal. I'm not much of a sprinter," Elizabeth said, adding she also likes swimming IM's, because she gets bored easily and likes the variety.

To prepare for reaching her goal, Elizabeth is putting in some quality yardage. “My goal this year is to get in about 30 miles a month. Afternoons, I’m doing close to 4,000 yards, and in the mornings, it’s more like 3,000 yards to try and average out to that amount... When I was at UGA, that fall, they had ‘Swim Between the Hedges,’ and this was one of the things that really got me going. That was a good football year for them. For every touchdown they scored, you needed to swim 1,000 yards, and for each field goal, 500 yards. So, this was my weekly swimming goal, to try to get that much in.” That is what got Elizabeth started in making monthly and annual swimming mileage goals. Her 2021 target is to surpass her goal of 350 miles in the Go the Distance program. “Having long term distance goals are what keep me going,” she explained.

Since her return to competitive swimming, Elizabeth says, “I’m still improving, which is a good thing. At this age, you’re aging, but you’re trying to get in better condition, and really working on better technique is my thing right now; because, there is only so good of condition I can get in at this age. I was hoping it would be easier!”

It may not always come easy; however, Elizabeth thoroughly enjoys her time in the water. “I like the feeling of going fast. Just the gliding through the water; I like that feeling. It’s not necessarily how fast the time is; sometimes you just feel really good swimming. Feeling strong; it makes you feel good about yourself. Especially in May, when I first got back into the pool after two months [of lock down]; it was like, oh, this feels so good!” she said.

When I asked Elizabeth what she likes about Masters swimming, she replied, “Even more than worrying about my times at the meets, I enjoy getting to see other people, especially the older swimmers who are very inspiring. You see the older inspiring swimmers, you see the younger faster swimmers, you see some older faster swimmers; I find that inspiring. To me, I like that more about the meets than the actual competition. The actual competition may or may not go as planned.”

Elizabeth’s favorite meet memory was competing at the Masters Pan Am Games, in her hometown of Orlando, where her parents still live. She remembered, “I was sitting with two sisters from different states, and then there was another lady from Utah that was sitting with us; so, there was this cluster of people from different places. That was a really neat experience, just meeting people from all over. I talked with some of the Georgia people that were there, too, that I had seen at different meets. I did improve my times, so I was happy with that.”

In addition to training and competition, Elizabeth is getting involved in Masters swimming as a volunteer. During our last Georgia Masters board meeting (virtually on Zoom), she was welcomed as a member-at-large addition to the board.

Back in September of 2019, Elizabeth had competed in the Southside Seals Pentathlon and stayed for the board’s annual meeting, because she was curious. “I wanted to see what was going on; I like to know what’s happening.” That led to her joining in on the 2020 annual meeting on Zoom. Elizabeth continued to attend the virtual meetings, which led to Britta O’Leary inviting her to join the board.

When I asked Elizabeth why she wanted to serve on the board, she replied, “I have a history of volunteering, in general. My parents were good examples of volunteering. My dad delivered Meals-on-Wheels until he was 90. He’s 99 and will be 100 in April. He is actually one of my swimming examples. He wasn’t fast, but he kept exercising and kept swimming until he was 91. He got injured and hasn’t done much since then. When I was young, he would drive me to my morning swim practice at 5:00 am. After he retired, he swam regularly, but he never competed and was

never fast; but, he kept at it. My mom has been a volunteer at church. I think she finally stopped; she's in her 80's. She was doing all of the bookkeeping for a couple of missionaries. I was a Girl Scout leader, a robotics coach, and a math team coach. I did all of these other things, and now my kids are gone. So, it's been kind of a history of when I get involved in something, I get fully involved."

We were all pleased she decided to get involved with Georgia Masters! Welcome aboard, Elizabeth!