



Georgia Masters Newsletter Swimming in Georgia August 2018

Swimmer Profile – Muriel Cochran

By Elaine Krugman

Editor's note: Following my interview with Muriel and writing this profile, Muriel left the YMCA. In an e-mail, she said, "I quit the YMCA to assist my parents and son (in LaGrange,



Georgia). Muriel has relocated to LaGrange and hopes to start a Masters team there once she gets settled. She added, "I do plan to continue swimming and hope the Grayfins [team] continues to grow."

Muriel Cochran is a competitive swimmer I hadn't crossed paths with at meets until I aged up to her 55-59 age group last year. It wasn't until she started coaching the newly-formed Northwest YMCA Grayfins Swim Team, that I noticed Muriel and her new teammates

together on deck. Even when I aged up, we were racing different events, so we never even had a behind-the-blocks chat before a race. I took notice, however, when I looked at the race results at more recent meets. I also took notice when my buddy, Mark Rogers, left the Killer Whales to train and compete with Muriel's swim team. What was the draw?

Although Muriel is a new Masters coach and earned her Masters coaching credentials (along with Mark Rogers) in September 2016, she has done a great job growing her YMCA Masters program, in Kennesaw. The passion and commitment she brings to the pool each practice has inspired 23 swimmers to join USMS this year. The Grayfins, which offers free workouts and coaching for Northwest YMCA members, evolved from adult swim lessons she was

teaching at the “Y.” Management told her they wanted to start a Masters group and asked if she would be their coach. “I realized I love coaching swimming. I was teaching beginners how to swim. The neatest accomplishment is to watch someone who cannot swim a 25 [yards] to swimming a sprint and swimming open water,” Muriel said about her decision to take on the project. She had been teaching swimming at the “Y” for fifteen years and coached triathlon from 2010 – 2013. Feeling a bit burned out with triathlon coaching, this was a new challenge that she felt inspired to take on. “It was a new start. I had never coached [pool] swimming. Coaching for open water is completely different from coaching for swimming. I always wanted to be an assistant coach. I had to figure all of this out—how to do it,” the new Masters coach added about her challenge. Having been a coached Masters swimmer herself, on and off since first joining Masters in Chattanooga, in 1988, Muriel at least had experience from a swimmer’s perspective. Her mom, USMS member Rocio Lancaster, was (and still is) an avid swimmer who inspired her to swim, so Muriel swam most of her life.

Muriel began as a summer league swimmer as a child, and then swam year-around with USA Swimming at the age of 13. She had to quit when the family moved, but she returned to swimming in the 1980’s, competing in relay triathlons. About her return to competitive swimming, Muriel said that she decided to return “...for the love of it. For me, I had to have a goal. I just can’t go swim and do hard workouts unless I have a something to go for. Granted, meets drive me nuts; they tear up my stomach, and I get real nervous; but, I’m learning not to be that competitive anymore— that I don’t have to win. It’s just for the fun of it.” Although Muriel swims for the love and fun of it (and encourages her Grayfin swimmers to do the same), she does set a good example for her team by training hard herself, when she is able to get to the pool. Since she coaches her team from the deck, her workouts take place elsewhere. “I started swimming with Ryan Bried and Ace Aquatic Club, because the coach needs a coach. For a while I was really disciplined, and I could make myself swim 4,000 to 5,000 yards, four or five times a week. Now I can’t. I have way too many reasons of why I can’t,” Muriel said. Ideally, she is able to get in 3,400 – 4,500-yard workouts, four days per week with the Ace Masters team. In addition, she lifts weights twice a week. When it comes time for competition, Muriel coaches her team while also competing at meets herself. Asked about her favorite events, she said, “I like open water, because I can just set a pace and go; and, there is no wall to interrupt it. But, then again, I love swimming the different strokes. As far as distance, everything hurts, so I have no favorite one. I have no favorite event per se, but I always enter the 100 IM. It depends on what I feel like.”

Asked what advice she has for those who would like to improve their race times at meets, Muriel replied, “What you practice is what you’re going to race. If you practice correctly, you will race correctly.” She emphasizes this to her team at practices and gives them plenty of

tools to help them achieve their goals. “Every week, I send out an email for my team on upcoming events, drills we will work on for that week. I have strokes of the month where we are just focusing on drills of that stroke, so they can improve...” Muriel uses the app, www.commitswimming.com to send out her workouts, so her swimmers can keep track and add notes. In addition, she sends out YouTube links to stroke technique videos she recommends by Go Swim, Phlex Swim, Swim Science, The Race Club, and Swimming Skills NT. She doesn’t recommend, however, that her swimmers necessarily emulate the swimmers in those videos. “Everybody’s different. Your body is different from their body. I don’t really want anybody to swim a certain style. I want them to swim the 1000 [freestyle] correct for their body, because sometimes you have to adjust to be able to swim. To be able to swim this long, you cannot be doing straight arm recovery like some of those Olympic 50’s sprinters. You can’t do that for any length of time without some type of injury happening. You have to adjust to what works for you... To prevent injuries, do a lot of drills, slow down, and really focus on what you’re doing,” she explained.

What about those Georgia Masters members that don’t compete but may be thinking of giving it a try? “I would say the best thing is to just go and experience a meet. Don’t swim in it; just go see what it’s like, because their biggest fear is what they will look like in a bathing suit. When they realize that there’s all sorts of sizes and skill levels, it’s like, ‘Oh, ok, I can do this.’ Muriel replied, adding “For my team, I gave them a taste of it. We hosted an unsanctioned meet. I encouraged all members to swim in it. When the meet was over, they realized what a Masters’ meet was like, hopefully they’re thinking about it [for the future]... I think if you can get into an unsanctioned, hosted meet, you’ll realize it’s a lot more fun than what you think it is.”

Muriel is thrilled when her swimmers decide to compete. “[The experience since becoming a coach] has been the most rewarding one ever...

When you just see people improve... it’s a good thing. And then, when you see them go and compete in a race, it’s awesome! Every time I have had a swimmer who has decided to cross that line, and dive into racing at a Masters meet; that is a memorable and happy moment for me.” Equally as thrilling for Coach Muriel, though, is seeing an adult break through their fear of the water, make the decision to learn how to swim, and

then succeed. As she explained about one of her swimmers, “Tina Carwile, when I first met her, she was one of the first participants (in a day-time adult swim class). She confessed to me that when she was little, girls had held her underwater; so, she had been terrified of the water ever since. Two weeks ago, she swam 2,000 yards! She has

overcome that fear of the deep end, and she is starting to learn the butterfly. Every lady that's in that (beginning) level just inspires me. They overcame a fear of the water, they walked out on the deck with their suit, and decided to blow bubbles."

Summing up how Muriel feels about teaching swimming, coaching the Grayfins, and being involved with Masters, she says, "I think it's just the friendship and camaraderie. It's being with other people and enjoying what they're doing and what you're doing. It's very, very rewarding, and that's what I look forward to." "I'm with people that support each other, and they help each other. They have fun at practice. That's another thing I like about it. I don't like doing always the same stuff. I think that's the way of the world; it's variety, and they enjoy it. Anybody that has come to this team has not been a mean person, or someone I wished had not joined... "It's not about me; it's about this team and showing people that swimming is a good sport to be in and it's good for them. It's a good environment."

When Muriel looks at future hopes for her team, she wants them to experience more of what that "good environment" is all about. "My favorite (Masters) memory is doing the [Ft. Lauderdale] Nationals with that team out of Chattanooga. That was the most inspirational thing watching those 90-year-olds-- I think the oldest one at that time was 98--swimming. This is the epitome of swimming; you can do it all the time... "Once my son is out of high school, I will be going to Nationals [again]. My dream is to take enough swimmers to Masters Spring Nationals and do a relay."