

DIANA NYAD



The Miami News - MICHAEL O'BRIEN

Nyad: 'I'm talking about a heroic thing. I'm talking about winning my own Olympic medal in a stadium where no one has ever been'

A free spirit tries to plunge into history

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The door to the penthouse in Miami Beach's Montmartre Hotel was wide open.

The pink couch was buried under an avalanche of suitcases, blouses, shorts and socks. The shelf between the dining area and bedroom was lined with bottles of vitamins, B-15 to E. The tabletop was hidden beneath cans of tomato juice, bags of nuts, mineral water, a glucose bottle, Oreo cookies and half a bagel. The kitchen sink was surrounded by cups, glasses and bowls.

From the bathroom doorknob hung nearly a dozen sheer swim suits. Stacked on the floor, not far from the bed, were stacks of New York newspapers, a variety of magazines, a bottle of vaseline lotion and a can of Sustagen, a high protein chocolate drink.

The Montmartre penthouse is the newest world of Diana Nyad, a 28-year-old who is considered by nearly everybody to be the best distance swimmer in the world.

Diana sat on one of the double beds Tuesday afternoon writing a five-page letter on a yellow legal pad. She was wearing white shorts and a blue knit shirt emblazoned with a tiny alligator. She is small, her legs deeply tanned, her hips thin, her shoulders broad. She has brown eyes and a punk haircut, complete with hair bristled in long spikes.

A hotel room is too confining for Nyad. Four walls are not her style. She is not a domestic: Her universe extends beyond most others — atop mountains (she's climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro), across continents (she's bicycled 3,000 miles over Africa) and through oceans, riv-

If you ever get the urge to swim from Cuba to Marathon in a shark cage, you first might consider the training schedule that Diana Nyad has put herself through over the past 11 months:

First three months

Run 10 miles every morning in 62 minutes.
Swim sprints in pool two hours every day.
Play squash three or four hours a day.
Lift weights twice a week.
Eat 5,000 calories a day.

Fourth, fifth and sixth months

Run 12 miles every morning in 74 minutes.
Swim four hours a day.
Skip rope half an hour a day.
Play squash two hours a day.
Lift weights twice a week.
Eat 8,000 calories a day.

Seventh, eighth and ninth months

No running.
Skip rope half an hour each day.
Swim six hours a day.
Play squash an hour a day.
Lift weights three times a week.
Eat 10,000 calories a day.

Tenth and eleventh months

No running. No skipping rope. No squash.
Swim seven hours every weekday.
Swim long-distance every weekend (8, 12, 16 or 24 hours straight.)
Lift weights three times a week.
Eat 12,000 calories a day.

ers, and lakes. She's swum down or across the Nile, the Rio Plata, the Red Sea, the Bay of Naples, Lake Ontario and even around Manhattan.

On July 21 she plans to begin a swim from Cuba to Marathon in the Florida Keys — a grueling, 130-mile journey that will take more than 60 hours. If she makes it, it will be the longest swim in history.

It is already one of the costliest.

The custom-built, motorized protective cage (40-by-15 feet) being built at a Fort Lauderdale boatyard will cost \$42,000. Then there's the entourage of train-

ers, navigators, weathermen and friends. And a couple of good boats.

Altogether, she figures, the swim will cost at least \$104,000.

That's why Diana Nyad was writing on the yellow legal pad Tuesday; it was a plea to George Wallach, her manager. She needs money. Now.

Guts she has; backers she doesn't.

Colgate recently donated enough money to pay for

See DIANA, 5C



The Miami News - MICHAEL O'BRIEN

Nausea will come early, maybe hallucinations; and the cap will rub her neck raw

DIANA, from 1C

her shark cage. Her Montmartre penthouse, along with two others for her trainers, have been donated thanks to Wallach's influence. The hotel is ideal since it is on the ocean, making training a backyard process.

NBC-TV, which is negotiating for exclusive rights to her story, promised to pay her \$10,000. But that money can't be collected until the swim has been completed. So Diana Nyad has used her own savings, gotten loans from friends, begged and borrowed but is still short — about \$44,000 short.

She contacted the manager of the rock group, the Bee Gees, on Tuesday too. She had a plan.

(The monotony of marathon swimming makes the mind wander, sometimes even hallucinate. In previous distance swims, Diana has sung to herself or counted strokes. This time, she'll also use a Paser, a four-ounce audio receiver glued inside her bathing cap, equipped with an earpiece.

(From the accompanying boat, trainers will play tapes for her. She's tried it once already — listening to the Bee Gees' million-seller *Saturday Night Fever* during a 20-hour preparation swim through the St. Lucie Canal last week.)

She plans to listen to the tape again on the Cuba swim. Hence, the pitch to the rock group's manager.

"I'm not too proud to ask," she said. "I had all kinds of ideas. Maybe a Miami concert and they could give me the first \$44,000. I could pay them back after the swim. Maybe a concert in Cuba or on a boat. My schemes got wilder as I went along. But at least their manager told me he'd think about it."

Other people have made bolder promises — and then reneged.

Rocky Aoki, owner of Miami's Benihana Restaurant, offered her funds, the use of his Miami Beach house and a jeep. Unfortunately, when Diana took him up on the offer the funds were unavailable, the house was occupied by his wife and children and the jeep was nowhere to be found. A friend of Aoki's borrowed the vehicle several weeks ago and hasn't been seen since.

"But no matter what, this swim is going to come off," said Diana. "If I must go in the red that's the way it will be."

This swim, if it doesn't break her in the process (not only financially but physically and emotionally as well) could springboard her into a financially secure future of endorsements. After eight years of superhuman marathon feats, she'll finally be known worldwide and be able to capitalize on that recognition.

It's her last swim regardless.

"I've been swimming since I was 11 years old — four, five, six hours a day," said Diana. "Since I was 20, I've been a marathon swimmer. I've broken a lot of world records, been all over the world. I have tremendous athletic talent, good hand/eye coordination. But I have other things to do.

"I'm through with marathon swimming, it's become boring. You couldn't get me to swim around Manhattan again (which took her less than eight hours) for \$300,000.

"This Cuba swim isn't a marathon swim, it's a sports event. I want to finish my era in sports with a bang and this is something no other mortal could do right now. I'm talking about a heroic thing. I'm talking about winning my own Olympic medal in a stadium where no one has ever been. I have a whole Olympic Games to myself. It's a real ego trip. There are only a few historic moments like that and this is my chance to be one of them."

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The elevator door opened at the lobby and Diana, wearing a brightly striped swimsuit and sneakers, got out with her two friends and trainers, Margie Carroll and Jean Golden.

They walked through the lobby and out to the parking lot where their rented car, a battered, blue '73 Chevy — which Diana calls a "lemon that's seen one too many accidents" — was parked.

She lifted a heavy outboard motor from the trunk and had a friend carry it back to the beach where it was attached to a 10-foot rubber raft. While Margie got the small craft out into the water, Diana pulled a second swim suit on over the first, greased her neck, shoulders and underarms with vasoline, pulled a pair of goggles down over her eyes and a cap over her head.

The old people around the pool and beach sat and watched the swimmer go through her daily ritual. Occasionally, the old-timers whispered or shook their heads.

This workout was just a one-hour, loosening-up exercise. Diana would swim south for about 30 minutes, some 150 yards out, and then return.

She has trained for the Cuban swim since last July 1. It took her seven months to get clearance for herself and her crew of 16 (six trainers, 10 people handling the boats) to begin the swim there.

Her longest swim to date has been a 67-mile trek down the North Sea along the Dutch coast. That took just over 40 hours. This trip, if she has good weather and is able to keep to her usual pace of just over two miles per hour, should end sometime on July 24.

That is, if there are no problems.

A problem can be anything from nausea to hallucinations to unconsciousness. She's experienced them all.

Nausea can come early. It forced Diana to abort her first attempt to cross the English Channel. Bad weather stopped her second Channel attempt, and on the third, she was pulled out unconscious, after first pulling off her cap and goggles, screaming that a pack of gulls were attacking and devouring her.

Many times she's continued, vomiting every few minutes.

She figures she will lose 15 to 20 pounds in the Cuban attempt. She also figures her muscles will become so sore she will scream when touched and she knows the skin on the back of her neck and arms will be rubbed raw from her bathing cap and suit.

Her training swims the last few days have been in

choppy seas. Tuesday, she swam against the current on her way back to the Montmartre. Her progress was slow. In her 59th minute in the water, she was hit by a wave and suddenly swallowed two mouthfuls of water. She rolled on her back and began coughing. Some 30 seconds later, she rolled back over and began to swim again.

"Like today," she explained later, eating a vanilla yogurt on her patio. "if the waves are like that for 60 hours, with your head bouncing around, there's no way you can keep from swallowing water."

Diana Nyad knows full well what lies ahead. "Every day I get to a point where I could say, 'Who are you kidding? You're going to swim 2½ days?' Today, two gulps of salt water and I was ready to throw up the yogurt I ate right before I started.

"And who knows, I'm not even sure I'll be to shore after 2½ days. I could still be 40 miles out by then. There are negative thoughts all around the place, but I've done my best to squash them down. They don't do any good. They serve no purpose but to bring on fear."

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By Tuesday evening, Diana was ready to get out of her room. The hotel is populated by retirees. ("People get up, have breakfast, sit in the lobby until lunch, then back in the lobby until dinner," she said. Then she grinned. "The conversations are always about the same. The lady says, 'It's water off a duck's back.' And the husband answers, 'No, it's water under the bridge.' And the wife comes back with, 'No, it's water off a ducks back.'")

Diana and her friends piled into the "lemon" and drove to Coconut Grove. "I hear a lot of young people live there, who jog and ride bikes," she said.

Fitness has been Diana's credo since her junior high and high school years at Fort Lauderdale's Pine Crest School. She set Florida swim records in the 100- and 200-meter breast stroke, and, though hindered by the effects of an attack of endocarditis (inflammation of the heart) two years earlier, she nearly qualified for the '68 Olympics.

Eventually, she wound up in a steak and seafood restaurant in South Miami. Her salad was big, her steak rare. She does not drink, even shying away from liqueur-flavored desserts.

Her dinner conversation showed a woman often funny and friendly — sometimes flip, sometimes naive, but always intelligent. She speaks five languages fluently, has studied at the Sorbonne, graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Lake Forest College in Illinois and is just a dissertation (on the Russian writer Turgenev) away from a Ph.D. in comparative literature at New York University.

Mixed with the intelligence is a bit of devilishness.

In 1967, she was kicked out of Emory University in Atlanta for, among other things, parachuting out of her fourth-story dormitory window. "It was the worst year of my life," she recalls. "I was just a rude bitch going through quite a few changes."

Another time, she was swimming at a pool in New York frequented by Cybil Sheppard. Everyone told her to come at an earlier time and meet the actress. Sheppard was told to be prepared to meet a great swimmer.

One day, Diana finally arrived early, wearing an antique burlap swimming suit, complete with bloomers and knee-length skirt. Sheppard was at the far end of the pool, wearing a new suit, goggles, and cap.

Diana belly-flopped into the pool and began her cumbersome way to the other end. The suit billowed with water and became quite heavy. Sheppard swam up and, after sizing Diana up, began the tale of her own swimming. She told Diana that she had nearly made the Olympic team.

"I let her dig herself in as deep as possible," Diana recalls. "And then I got up, slipped into a sheer suit, and zipped back and forth across the pool. When I got back to the other side she was gone."

When (and if) Diana gets to the other side on her Cuba swim, she has her actions planned.

"I'll talk to NBC (for the 10 grand), and then to whomever else is around," she said. "Then they'll probably cart me off to the hospital for a few days. After that, I'm going to take a little trip to Africa and look at the animals while I get back in shape for squash (she's ranked No. 14 in U.S. women's squash). By the time I get back, my book (*Other Shores*/Random House) will be published and I'll make a promotional tour with that. I'd like to eventually open a sophisticated fitness center in Manhattan."

Will that finally put Diana Nyad at rest?

"I went to the movies with a friend the other night," she said. "And while we were sitting there we were trying to figure what we wanted out of life. I came up with four things:

"I want to be known as the very best at something and have a reputation for that. I didn't say be the best because I've been that for eight years. I said be known as the best. I feel that pressure very strong.

"I want to have enough money that I can do whatever I want in my lifetime. That doesn't mean a million dollars, but just so I can fly anywhere I want, or help friends out when they need it.

"I want to have a small group of friends I feel very comfortable with.

"I want to have someone I am passionately in love with and have them love me passionately, whether it be for two years or five years."

But would reputation, money, friends and love be enough?

"I don't know," she said. "One of my biggest drawbacks is that I can't relax. I have to be embroiled in future projects."

As she wrote after her last attempt at crossing the Channel, "Life is passing me by. There isn't much time. I have some 75 years to live and a third of them are behind me.

"I feel pressured to do everything, to know everyone, to explore every potential, to press every extreme high and low..."