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History Rewritten....to my GREAT Surprise!

Posted by admin on Jun 10, 2011 in Blog | 0 comments

Blog for diananyad.com 6/9/11

When I swam around Manhattan Island on October 6, 1975, I read about my own achievement in The New York Times and other NY publications the next day.

The paper of record at the time declared that I had both broken the 50-year-old record, for both men and women, in circling the Big Apple in 7hrs, 57mins, AND that I had become the first woman ever to swim around the most famous island in the world.

That crisp, sunny, early autumn day was one of the highlights of my young life. I was 25 years old. Feisty. Thirsty for adventure. And gliding down the mighty Hudson, the George Washington Bridge historic above, the Statue of Liberty glistening at the Southern end, was adventure of the highest kind.

Many people took the day off work as they heard about my quest. They lined the sea walls and I waved back to them as they shouted encouragement and Bravo's across the Hudson and East Rivers.

The athletic details of the day, being the fastest to date, and the first woman, weren't of any great significance to me. It was much more about the inspiration of the moment. My family, going back to the early 1800's were all from New York City. My grandparents, my mother, and I myself were all born in Manhattan. Not knowing much about my maternal grandfather, I discovered in my 20's, while coaching at Barnard, that he (George Warrington Curtis) was not only captain of the Columbia University Swimming Team in his day but that he was also the first person ever to swim across the Long Island Sound.

I was in graduate school for Comparative Literature at NYU in 1975 and when I came back to school in the fall, after a summer on the world marathon swimming circuit, such as the annual swim across the Bay of Naples, from Capri to Naples, Italy, a friend asked if anyone had ever swum around Manhattan.....and why didn't I do something inspired right here in my own back yard, instead of in foreign waters?

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Diana's Tweets



- @blkberryswirl Back at ya! Have fun, be safe and take in the New Year with a blast! 08:13:41 PM December 26, 2011 from HootSuitein reply to BlkBerrySwirl
- @angelasmith_ Yes, I love the holidays. Hope you had a great Christmas. 08:13:03 PM December 26, 2011 from HootSuitein reply to AngelaSmith_
- @h2ornrspf Thanks for the mention. Hope your enjoying the Holidays 06:06:35 PM December 26, 2011 from HootSuitein reply to H2OrnrSPF
- @marystan55 Your very welcome. Keep pushing ONWARD into 2012 and beyond! 06:05:12 PM December 26, 2011 from HootSuitein reply to marystan55
- Just in case you havent seen my video yet, I wanted to make sure I got to say Happy Holidays to all of my followers!

I checked with the Coast Guard as to the logistics and in planning with them, learned that in the early years of the 20th century, when the rivers of New York were much cleaner, there were men who did swim around the island. Women were never mentioned to me.

<http://t.co/J2fZgmde> 05:16:24 PM
December 26, 2011 from HootSuite

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expansion of the Hudson reminds me of that October 6, nearly 36 years ago.

So imagine my mind-boggling surprise, all these many years later, now that I am suddenly back in the marathon swimming world, preparing to swim from Cuba to Florida this summer, after not swimming a stroke since 1979, to hear that there were in fact one or maybe two or maybe even as many as half a dozen women who did swim around Manhattan back in the early days!!!!

The history is unclear. The dissemination of accurate information has not followed an empirical path. I am waiting for the most reputable historians of the sport to dig further and publish their research as to their collective best versions as to who did in fact circle Manhattan, when and how.

We need to learn more about one Ida Elionsky who may have made it around in some 11 hours back in 1916. As reporting from a myriad of varying subjects is more sketchy from those days, compared to our modern times, there are odd details to the stories written about Ms. Elionsky's swim. Details such as "she swam just 3 miles down the Hudson River, from 59th St to Houston Street, with her 265-pound brother on her back"!

We have some records about the success of one Amelia "Millie" Gade circling in 1921. And there are others who deserve research efforts, too.

After being recognized as the first woman to swim around Manhattan in both highly regarded press and swimming circles (no other than Gertrude Trudy Ederle entertained me in her home in Queens many times in the 1970's, never recounting any of the stories of her women contemporaries of the 1920's having swum around Manhattan), I am quite frankly stunned to hear now that this title is probably not mine to claim.

As a sports journalist and a feminist all my life, I take both joy and pride in honoring all great women athletes of all eras, but most especially those pioneers of early years who never found it easy to be strong, courageous, physical specimens in a male-dominated society.

I look forward to the unfolding of the true history of women swimming around Manhattan.

And, even though we don't yet know the absolute truth as to that history, I hereby relinquish my title as the first woman. Nobody can ever take the glory of that day from me. And the title of fastest at the time still goes under my name. But for The First Woman, this honor belongs to others.

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Diana Nyad's Xtreme Dream

"Diana is more than a swimmer. She's a beacon of hope to us all that we can dream big, live life large, and look back at all of it with no regrets whatsoever."

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Xtreme Dream. For Diana Nyad's representation please contact Pam Derderian