

JUL 16

Posted 7:02pm

Base Camp: Key West



Below is a column Diana wrote for the [Key West Citizen](#). The Citizen is the local paper in Key West, serving the 25,000 residents of the southernmost city in the continental USA since 1876. the "basecamp" as it were for her Xtreme Dream expedition.



Such are the lives of Big-Nature explorers that they nestle in small towns and villages at the base of Himalayan mountains and Antarctic outposts for sometimes many seasons as they pursue their extreme expeditions.

Well, my expedition is the elusive, daunting swim from Cuba to the faraway Florida shore.

And so it is now the fourth summer that I, and my Xtreme Dream Team, have ensconced ourselves in this paradise town you call home.



We could never have found a more charming, helpful, cosmopolitan, engaging community as the one that has embraced us here in Key West. Every after-dinner stroll, every ice cream stop, every late afternoon escape at the [Tropic Cinema](#) produces new layers of contribution, new connections of use to the mission, deeper foundations of growing friendships.

Your professional community has stepped up, reached out, and given our crew boundlessly of their invaluable expertise and resources.



Dr. Patrick Rice, world-renowned shark expert out of KWCC, has taught us, for instance, that our electronic shark shields, which we attach to the bottom of our escort kayaks, are a valid line of defense to the large predators that follow us underneath way out in that wild blue yonder. BUT Dr. Rice says these animals, bothered terribly by the elliptical field of electricity at first, can adapt and come to not mind the current after a period of time. Dr. Rice has developed a very potent chemical block, picture it like a block of candle paraffin, that we attach to a chain in front of me. The block sloughs off its chemical as we move forward and that odor is absolutely vile to the shark's sensitive olfactory system.



Vanessa Linsley at Florida Yacht Charters and Sales is our Navigator, bringing a lifetime of experience and knowledge of the ocean to the task of crossing this tricky and unpredictable stretch of the Gulf Stream at swimmer's speed.

Jennifer Cornell of [Small Chef At Large](#), Denise at [Camille's](#), Cindy de Rocher at [Historic Inns of Key West](#), Carrie Babich at [Southernmost Hotels](#)...Commissioners [Teri Johnston](#) and [Heather Caruthers](#).....engaged citizen [Janet Hinkle](#), the irrepressible [Buco Pantelis](#).....honestly, I could continue for literally pages to tell you how many people have given so much of their time, their homes, their services. I am overwhelmed by the kindness and generosity that beams from this community.



It's been a lifelong Dream, this Cuba Swim.....35 years now since I first tried way back in 1978, as a brash, young 28-year-old.

I lived and trained in Miami that year. But in these current times, after retiring and literally not

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swimming a stroke for thirty years, now in my 60's, I have settled in Key West to train, to endure the anxiety of waiting for favorable weather and current conditions, and to live.

The night air is intoxicating here. The twilight saunters, taking in the wondrous, lush trees and the spectacular historic architecture, is sensual delight. Stopping to chat with locals sporting parrots on their shoulders, cyclists ambling to and fro, merchants always primed to shoot the breeze, it's all part and parcel of this picturesque place I have come to call home away from home.

[9 captures](#)

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My crew has begged me to pick another 100-mile stretch of ocean, fearing what we have to come to know as overwhelming out there, between here and Havana. I've considered it. The Maldives. Guam. The Gulf of Thailand.

But none of those crossings make my pulse race.

It's Cuba. It's always been Cuba.

There's a mystique, a history. And Key West is most definitely wrapped up in that history.



The other day I sat out on my porch in a teeming downpour, a forceful warm rain pelting the trees and rooftops in a tropical symphony. Cozy in my armchair, I was reading "The Paris Wife", a Hemingway tale. And I got to thinking about my time in Key West.

This Cuba Swim entails suffering. No other way. It has been grueling training. The organization has been monumental.

This is an epic passage. Swimmers have been trying, and failing, since 1950. But, along with the hardships and challenges have come the deep gratifications...and the delights.

And I count my time here with you as one of the great pleasures of my life.



I am going to boldly announce to you right here that at the end of this long journey, this summer, I am going to commit a crime of vandalism in your fair city. I am going to go to the buoy at the Southernmost Point and X-out the "90 Miles to Havana" sign with bold, white paint, replacing it with the accurate "103 miles." It is 90 nautical miles, a measurement none of us, other than ship captains, use. It's 103 miles to Havana. Trust me. I know.

And, by the way, I did see your April Fool's edition of the Citizen....lol

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Onward!

P.S. Have you signed up for my [7 Day Reboot](#)? Hop in! It's Free!

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