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SEP 27

Posted 10:45am

2012 Global Open Water Conference



This past week-end's [2012 Global Open Water Conference](#) on the Queen Mary was, for us ocean swimmers, like an NFL Hall of Fame week-end.

Nobody understands, nobody can hold the respect, that we do for each other. I was out of the sport for 30 long years, from 1979 to 2009 and had no idea how the numbers of swimmers competing and doing solo swims had burgeoned over that time.

These individuals are flexing their bodies and their incredible will in outrageous swims in every corner of the globe, from the Arctic Circle to the Amazon River.

I came away, my chest beating with pride, to stand among these great champions, all of them having achieved Xtreme Dreams, indeed.

First, below, is the greatest woman ocean swimmer of all time. Shelly Taylor Smith of Australia commanded the seas around the world for 20 years. Shelly not only set records in the English Channel, Manhattan Island, Italy, Argentina, Australia....but she regularly beat ALL THE MEN in the pro races. I have heard of Shelly's deep talents and iron determination for along while now. We have become email buddies over the past year. But I will tell you, in person, it wasn't her elite status as a swimmer that moved me. Shelly works overtime on behalf of young people in Australia who have had very rocky starts in life. Her slogan is "Love the Skin You're In".



Another phrase Shelly lives by, one that she lived out loud her entire career as an athlete: **"The only way you won't finish is if you quit."**

Right on, Shells!!

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Meet Craig Dietz. Craig was born with no limbs. Yet after literally 10 seconds with this guy, you feel no pity whatsoever. Craig lives a full life, is wholly independent, does 10-kilometer ocean swims with a flipper attached to his right vestigial foot, throws around a bounteous sense of humor and lives his life very, very large.



The next two photos are of legend Greta Anderson. (Check out her 1950 goggles in first image!) Greta was an Olympic gold champion for Sweden back in 1948 and then turned her talents to the sea. She swam the English Channel multiple times, as well as many crossings from California to Catalina Island.



Greta is now in her 80's, teaches swimming at her famous school in Southern California, springs up onto the stage like a 20-year old, and has literally defied the aging process. We all remarked that the footage of her famous swims was in such good condition. It was a wonder to see her stroking powerfully here on her double crossing to Catalina.



This Jamie Patrick, this year's winner of the Top Male Professional Ocean Swimmer. Jamie has done dozens of impressive swims but he pretty much "owns" Lake Tahoe. He has the record for the double crossing and is always putting his imagination into what he might accomplish next.

Jamie is also Mr. Nice Guy of the sport. He helps countless other swimmers chase their respective dreams. I've heard of Jamie for years and it was heart-warming to finally meet him.

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Sorry the iphone photo a bit blurry but wanted to introduce you to Nejib Belhedi of Tunisia.



Nejib is organizing a 1,400km relay in the Mediterranean from the coast of his home country toward the Middle East. A swim for Peace. Also, Nejib fb'd and tweeted me all during my swim to wish me good luck. I realized there were many foreign fans rooting for me but I hadn't known there was a cache of Tunisians sending good vibes as well. Thank you, Nejib!!!

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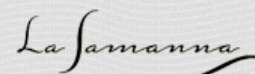
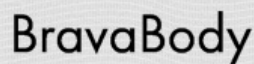


Now this is Martin Strehl who 10 years ago swam the length of the Mississippi River. But his Xtreme Dream was the Amazon. And sure enough, Martin braved all 3,274 miles of that deadly river in 2007. There were areas where the force of converging tributaries formed caverns of very dangerous waters. There were guys out protecting their tribal areas with BIG GUNS. And there were dangerous pirrhana fish....note the huge bite on Martin's back. And I thought jellyfish were demons.

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