

The Nautica New York City Triathlon What a Blast!!

On July 18th, I competed in the New York City Triathlon. It was a huge highlight for me, and such fun for my husband, Tom, and I to compete in the same event! A runner for more than thirty years, I started competing in sprint triathlons for several years ago, but was intimidated by the longer "Olympic Distance", a .9 mi. swim, 25 mi. bike and 6.2mi. run. When our friend, Ken Shiff, told us how great the NYC Tri was, I caught the bug to try an Olympic. This race opened at midnight last October 31st, and closed out in six minutes, so we were extremely lucky to get in.

My training went going along well until five weeks before the race, when my left knee suddenly swelled up and a neuroma in my right foot flared up, causing severe pain with every step. I was hobbling around, dejected, not knowing which side to limp onto, and was sure I would not even be able to start the race. Three weeks beforehand I couldn't even bend my knee enough to mount the bike. I thought, "I've been training for this for a year and I want to DO IT. I don't want to be a weenie!"

Fortunately, time, rest, physical therapy and a cortisone shot worked their magic, and I was able to ride 15 miles the Saturday before the race, then run almost a mile the next day. I knew I would, at least, be able to ride. Once we got to New York, everything just seemed like a dream! The expo was big, bright and busy, and we did our best to support the sponsors by buying as many logo articles of clothing that we could fit in our luggage. The quality of the organization was absolutely fantastic, and everyone was very helpful and friendly. I was really glad to be a participant rather than a organizer because the logistics were staggering. (How many hundreds of times have I said how glad I am to not be a race director? Triple that for a triathlon!)

Race day started in the dark of night, with the chorus of five alarms we had set, plus the wake-up call, all going off at 3:30AM. Tom left the hotel at 4:15 to walk to the transition and check on our gear, while I stayed and obsessed over tiny details until 4:40, when I walked out and closed the door behind me with great trepidation. Last year, when Ken was singing the praises of the event, I was not picturing myself walking alone on the streets of New York in the pitch dark. Any small town girl knows that is complete insanity! But there I was, walking down the dark city street with nothing but a mesh sack containing my wetsuit, cap and goggles, and with a twenty dollar bill stuffed into my bra. No cell phone. No credit card. No ID card. Wearing a skin-tight body suit and tevas.

To calm my jitteriness and act like this is perfectly normal behavior, I started singing "New York, New York". No sooner was the first line out of my mouth, than I caught a glimpse of something moving and gasped when I realized it was a man sleeping in a doorway, not five feet from me! OK, so I just sang in my head after that. I walked to Broadway, passing a few more sleeping people (at least, I was really hoping they were sleeping) and found a spot from which I could hail a cab. For some, I'm sure this is no biggie, but it was the first time I have ever hailed a cab in my life! Thankfully, it was really a cab and the driver was not an axe murderer, so I did arrive at the entrance of the park.

No surprise - it was still pitch dark! There was one guy standing at the entrance wearing a reflective vest, so I had to assume he was a race official. I asked him where to go and he told me to go to the right and down the path. So, like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, I started on down the lonely path through the forest, except I did not have Lion, Scarecrow and Tin Man with me. I realized that I would kill my daughters if they even thought of doing something this stupid! Halfway down the path I was still completely alone (except maybe for the maniac who was surely hiding in the bushes waiting for some foolish, unsuspecting, scantily clad woman who was then quietly singing "New York, New York"). I turned and saw that a woman had entered the path and was a couple of hundred feet behind me, so I ran back to her to have some company. We introduced ourselves. She was one of the psychologists, there to man the "Psychology Services Tent". Yes, it's true.

Along with all of the myriad details NYC Tri provides, they have a team of psychologists at the start, presumably to tell you: "Yes, you are insane, but it's OK because here are a few thousand people who are as crazy as you, so get out there". Or, maybe they get a lot of new clients from the race, but she didn't mention that. She did say that she, also, hates the part where you have to walk through Riverside Park by yourself in the pitch dark. She brought a flashlight.

There were lights and a smattering of people at the swim start area, but now I could see the water. The Hudson River was choppy, white-capped and foreboding, and the wind, blowing against the current, made it look as if the current was going the wrong way. Uh-oh, I hadn't planned on swimming against the current. But, as the sun came up the wind lessened and you could clearly see the current going in the right direction. People were saying that it was much less than anticipated - only about one knot. Their tone made it sound like bad news, but I have no concept of how fast 1 knot is, or 100 knots. Athletes were starting to file in from their 1.7 mi. trek from the transition area. I met up with Tom for a couple of minutes and we got to wish each other luck, then I saw fellow team-member, Bryan Lyons, too.

I sat on a park bench and struggled into my wetsuit, the heat and humidity already making it sticky, then put the bag containing my glasses and sandals on the baggage truck. From then on everything, literally, was a blur. Making my way to the "Women 50 and Over" corral, I used my prescription goggles like a monacle, occasionally putting it up to one eye to see. The pros dove in and went by like a school of dolphin! There was no room in the corral, as it was only built for a small number of people, but that was no problem as everyone was friendly and orderly and we just filed through it when we were called.

Standing in line on the dock, I peered down and there was only about 4 feet of water between the rope that we were supposed to hold onto and the dock. Some women were already in the water and they held the rope out a bit so the rest of us could fit in. A couple of women made the mistake of jumping over the rope and the current quickly started to move them down river. They had to scramble back like they were in an Endless Pool and grab onto others who reached out to help them. I took a deep breath, said a little prayer, and jumped.

Before I knew it, the horn blasted and I was swimming away - really - swimming in the Hudson! For some reason the saltiness of the water surprised me but the water was relatively calm. I felt

that my pace was fine, after stopping a few times to fix leaky goggles. Was it a bad thing that spectators walking along the river were going faster than I was? I couldn't be sure. Then, "Goodie!", we were funneling into the finish area, and I could see the guys that were there to pull us out. I chose the most muscular guy I could see, who grabbed me and flopped me out like a just-caught flounder!

After a gingerly barefoot run and rinse off under the provided shower (we were told we'd have a "Hudson River Beard" in all the pictures if we didn't!) I found my bike with tires all pumped, courtesy of my very sweet husband, who had probably already been out on the road for a half-hour. Once on the bike and breezing along the Henry Hudson Parkway, I had a second to reflect and immediately started to cry! "I'm finally here, I'm really here, I didn't drown, I'm on the bike! Wait! Crying saps energy - Stop it and start acting like an athlete!"

The rules of triathlon dictate that you pass on the left, and racers who are about to pass you yell "On your left!" as they come alongside. My wave was one of the first and slowest waves. So, throughout the 25 mile ride I was passed by approximately 1,485,765 people, all of whom said that to me. Yes, there were only about 3,600 athletes, but I think they just kept riding circles around me. The only exceptions were, as it got later in the race, they were tired, so they just said "Left!". At first, I would jauntily reply: "OK, Thank you!" or "OK, have a great race!", but as miles wore on and fatigue set in, along with searing pain in my right foot, I reduced it to "OK." and then finally just gave a little grunt, in the interest of preserving what little oxygen I had left.

Oh! There was one exception to that....at around 22 miles, some guy said "Right"! I was a bit startled but didn't react because I was too tired to steer in any direction but straight and I just hadn't heard any other word for so long that I couldn't quite figure out what he meant. Well, he passed me on the left, so I guess he was foreign and "right" must mean "left" in the Romulan Star Empire, or wherever he was from.

There were some rugged areas where the road was potholed or had rumble strips, through which I had to try to remember to open my mouth a bit to keep my teeth from chattering and, and to lift up off the seat because, oooo, that would hurt. We'd been told there is a two minute penalty for losing your bike bottle. Now, how that could make much of a difference at the turtle pace I was doing is beyond me, but for some reason I got focused on it and kept worrying about losing my bottle. There were hundreds of them in the road, how would they know it was mine? Do they watch from a helicopter or satellite?

I slowly made my way down into the park to the transition area, because all the race officials were telling us to go slow and they had big signs that said "Go Slow". But other racers were still going fast (or, at least they were passing me). Later, I mentioned this to Tom who reminded me "It's a race, Lyn!" I've always been too much of a rule follower. There were lots of bikes there, which meant that lots and lots of people had left for the run, and I had no doubt that many of them, including Tom, were already sitting at the finish line enjoying the + 90° sunshine. It didn't matter because there were still loads of athletes behind me, too, and I was so thrilled to be still on the move!

I tore up a steep hill and out onto the road which was lined with a screaming, cheering crowd of spectators. My eyes starting filling with tears again as I was struck with excitement of it all! But, I brought myself back to reality and headed on to Central Park. The real Central Park! In New York City! Just a half-mile into the run, spectators were already saying "You're almost there!". I knew better. Yes, it was hot, well into the 90's, but pretty shady and the hills were not as bad as predicted. For awhile, I ran with a girl who had forgotten to leave her helmet at transition and carried it, and a bottle of water, for the whole 10K. I think she was a bit delirious.

The finish area was roped off for so long that it seemed like eons before I finally reached the actual finish line. Throughout that last quarter mile, I was completely focused on holding my bib number on straight because it had ripped off the number belt earlier, and I wanted to be sure there would be a finish picture! If there were no picture it would be like I'd never done it, so that was the key. Finally, I heard Tom's wonderful voice calling my name and there was the actual finish line! WOW! Reality set in. Yes! I did it! I really did it!

I'm sixty-one years old, a runner, mother of two, grandmother of five, wife of one.

I did the New York City Triathlon.

I AM A TRIATHLETE.