

A Bi-Monthly Publication of your Arizona Local Masters Swim Committee

Just Another Day at the Pool –NOT!

A real life story of heart-ache and triumph, by Brian Duffield

I woke up thinking Tuesday, May 23rd would be just like any other day, beginning with my morning swim at Ford Aquatics Masters in Tucson. Unfortunately, I would be VERY wrong!

I've been swimming my entire life: age group (starting at age 7), high school, college (Virginia Tech) and years of Masters swimming in Maryland before moving to Arizona and swimming with Ford Aquatics in the mornings for the past couple of years. I do one outdoor swimming event every year. It used to be the Great Chesapeake Bay Swim in Annapolis, MD. Now I've found the Pacific Ocean more to my liking with the La Jolla Rough Water Swim.

The reason I swim is to stay in shape. I used to say, "I swim so can eat cheeseburgers and drink beer". Now I say, "I swim so I can eat."

Over the past few months, not long after turning 40, my 6'0", 195 lb frame began feeling a little more sluggish in the water than I was used to. Being a swimmer, and not very bright, I chalked it up to getting old and out of shape and thought that I should therefore swim harder and more often. I challenged myself to keep in the 1:10 lane, regardless of how I was feeling. In retrospect, this was not a super idea. A few times even, especially in the past 60 days, my performance in the pool was so poor that I needed to get out early and live to come back another day. On its face, this was one of those days.

During my after-workout shower/recovery at the pool, I suddenly collapsed to the floor, cutting my chin open and beginning a seizure. Fortunately, there were a couple other people in the Men's locker room who witnessed this and ran to get help. My pulse and breathing were slowing quickly and within a minute or so my heart went into ventricular fibrillation (a rapid, spasm-like movement of the heart that stops blood flow throughout the body.)

What followed was a series of fortunate events. There was a defibrillator at the pool and a Tucson Fire Captain in the pool that morning who knew exactly what to do. After a shock from the defibrillator, my pulse began again, seconds before the responding EMT unit arrived. Fortunately, we were only a couple blocks from the only trauma hospital in Tucson and the EMTs were able to stabilize me before reaching the doors of the ER. Doctors have told me that the proximity of the defibrillator at the pool deck and the quick action that was taken are major factors in my outcome and quick recovery. My pulse had only stopped for a short time before being shocked by the defibrillator, therefore limiting the damage that can occur throughout the body when there is no blood flow.

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Once at the hospital, the fortunate events continued, beginning with a clearly focused and skilled ER team. They used a new "cold suit" technology to lower my core body temperature into the low-90's inducing a mild hypothermia [to aid my heart's recovery]. The Cardiac Cath team persisted for 60 minutes in attempts to place the stent, with a little shiver help from me, before giving up and having to cut me open. After spending 24 more hours in a hypothermic, semi-comatose state they began to raise my body temperature. Three days later, I awoke completely confused and weak, but with no neurological damage or lasting heart muscle damage.

My repeated use of the word "fortunate" is deliberate. Without these events and more lining up for me that Tuesday morning, I would have had a totally different outcome. I know how lucky I am. There are events like this every month with varied outcomes and I'm still befuddled why mine turned out the way it did.

I had had a 100% blockage of the LAD that morning (Left Anterior Descending, the main artery that leads to the front and bottom of the heart muscle). I'm told there's a good chance some degree of blockage had been going on for a while because the supporting veins had grown and extended to support the lack of flow from the LAD. Why the total blockage that morning....? No one knows.

Now, two weeks later, I'm back at work and getting stronger every day. In fact, I feel so good, it's hard to believe that this bizarre event ever happened. I'm taking 5 different pills every day. I have an altered diet that watches saturated fats and simple carbohydrates and I am beginning to exercise again. I'll be back in the pool mid-July.

There's no question that after an event like this you look at life with a new set of glasses....but I honestly believe you can't get those glasses without the event. There's little chance that I would be making these changes in habits and attitude without a life jeopardizing event to push me that direction. If we could all have the benefit of going through the mental change without the physical pain, life would be a better place for everyone!

All of my physicians have said that my physical condition with my swimming regimen played a major role in the positive outcome. We all know that swimming is good for you and is one of the best exercises you can do for your body....but now I can confidently say that swimming can also save your life!

My advice: talk to your pool about getting a defibrillator, watch your diet and swim smart!

Editor's Note: Kudos to Brian for pulling through so valiantly, and to the whole swimming community for coming to his rescue and supporting his family throughout this frightening ordeal. Thank you, Brian, for sharing your story with Swim Arizona readers. Let's all make a concerted effort to prevent, detect, treat and manage heart disease in ourselves and our loved ones. Man can not live by swimming alone. The rest of this issue is dedicated to educating our members about heart health.

Is YOUR Heart at Risk?

Cardiovascular diseases kill some 950,000 Americans every year, but as many as two-thirds of these deaths are preventable. Many people's risk of a heart attack can be reduced by making lifestyle changes and taking medication.

Risk factors for heart disease:

- family history,
- high blood pressure,
- high blood cholesterol level,
- cigarette smoking,
- diabetes mellitus,
- sedentary lifestyle,
- obesity,
- advancing age, and
- being male

Physicians routinely monitor their patients' blood pressure and blood

levels. At-risk patients (or those who request it) might also be given an electrocardiographic stress test, which tells how adequate the blood supply to the heart is and how much physical strain it can safely tolerate. Contemporary physicians and exercise physiologists also might help a patient work out a detailed exercise plan, focusing on aerobic activities (like swimming) that increase lung capacity and the heart's ability to work at higher levels.

Evidence shows that even after age 50 and even if heart disease has already developed, healthy lifestyle changes — stopping smoking, eating a healthy diet, exercising sensibly, and lowering cholesterol and blood pressure levels with medication — may improve the odds for a longer, more active life.

Source: American College of Cardiology

Tips for a heart-healthy diet

- Eat less fat (especially butter, coconut and palm oil, saturated or hydrogenated vegetable fats such as Crisco, animal fats in meats and fats in dairy products).
- Use nonstick vegetable oil cooking sprays instead of oils.
- Buy lean cuts of meat, and eat fish, skinless chicken and turkey instead of beef.
- Try low-fat snacks that have been baked instead of fried, such as pretzels.
- Choose low-fat dairy products, such as skim milk, and low-fat cheese, yogurt and margarine.
- Try to limit how many sweets you eat.
- Eat no more than 4 egg yolks a week (use egg whites or egg substitutes).
- Bake, broil, steam or grill foods instead of frying them.
- Eat fewer "fast foods" (burgers, fried foods), which are high in fat. Instead, eat more fruits, vegetables and carbohydrates (rice, pasta, breads, grains).
- Drink low-calorie beverages, such as water, unsweetened tea or diet soda pop.

Source: American Academy of Family Physicians

Mark Your Calendar

July 9, Sun Devil Masters "Worlds Tune-up Meet" ASU

July 22-23, LCM State Meet, Brophy East (See entry form attached.)

August 4 - 12, Fina World Master's Championships, Stanford University.

September 3, September 23 and October 3. Tempe Open Water Series at Tempe Town Lake, email info@racelab.com.

September 10, 76th Annual La Jolla Roughwater Swim. www.ljrws.com.



Throughout the year, Arizona Masters participates in several major events. These events generally follow this schedule, dates and times vary, however. For an up-to-date listing of upcoming events, please visit the official website.

January: USMS One-Hour Postal (SCY)
 February: Polar Bear Meet (SCY)
 March: Sun Devil Invite (SCY)
 April: Short Course State Championship (SCY)
 May: USMS Short Course Nationals (SCY)
 June: Grand Canyon State Games (SCY)
 July: Long Course State Championship (LCM)
 August: USMS Long Course Nationals (LCM)
 September: La Jolla Rough Water Swim
 October: Fall Classic (SCM)
 December: Southwest Zone Championship (SCM)

See entry forms in this newsletter or visit www.arizonamasters.org

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