

Struggling with a challenge or goal?

We can help – especially if it seems impossible!

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I've been anticipating this day for months. Yet last summer, from my wheelchair, I could barely imagine it would happen.

St. Andrew's, July 7th. It's Race Day: my first since a bicycle accident left me unable to walk: bones broken, lung collapsed, and concussion. In a split-second, that accident took me out of the racing world into one focused on immediate primary goals like being able to successfully move independently from bed to a wheelchair, taking my first steps with a cane, then without.

Having been dependent on others and not even being able to walk, I will consider race day a victory if I can put the three events together, cross the line and complete the Half Ironman: 1.9 Km swim, 90 Km bike ride, 21 Km run. This triathlon is my medium term goal toward full recovery. My long-term goal is to be stronger and faster than I was before the accident.

What a day! St. Andrew's by-the-Sea became a resort town because its cool sea breezes attracted Montreal elite to escape the summer heat. Yet today record-breaking temperatures are predicted: 33 degrees Celsius, will feel like 43 with humidity.

We're off. It's mayhem. Every one makes a mad dash into the water at Katy's Cove. While I feel good, I know I need to protect my collarbone, the one injury that hasn't fully healed. Swimming around the loop the second time, I find someone fast to 'draft' behind. Mistake. I get whacked in the shoulder.

I decide not to be so aggressive. I tell myself there's no pressure. No one expects big results. I fight the urge to compete. I'm caught up in race mode. Again, I tell myself I'm just here to 'test the water'. I finish. I glance at my GPS watch and realize it's not working properly. I can hear people cheering. I exit the water and catch sight of the official clock: 33 minutes. I had a really good swim. I'm very pleased. I thought I'd be slower.

I hit the hill toward my bike. I see a buddy pushing hard up the hill. Hot days like this, we're all like a bunch of matches. Push too hard and poof – we burn our matches early and have nothing left to give. I worry he's burning his too early. I jump on my bike and within 2 or 3 minutes, I pass him. I talk to myself again, "you're not racing, stay under control. Placement and time are not important. Just complete the race. It's a race but you're not racing."

I keep passing people. As I reach the turn-around point, I see another friend in the lead. He's "smokin' it"! Makes me happy. I know I won't catch him but I realize I don't see anyone as old as I ahead of me. It dawns on me that I could be leading my age category. 26th out of the water and I've made up ground. I finish biking in 9th spot.

The RUN. It's SO HOT. Running jostles my shoulder. I work hard to stabilize my muscles. I know I'm not doing further damage at least. I just need to manage the pain. I talk to myself again. I remember endurance athletes are not

always the most gifted, fastest and strongest genetically but we're good at compartmentalizing, pushing pain aside. I think of my wife Gina who is superb at this. I wonder how she's doing in this Half-Ironman. It was even hotter in Hawaii during her World Ironman championship when she placed 4th among all women. I decide she's doing fine.

I need to focus. It takes all my mental strength. I focus on my breathing. I focus on my form. We're coming from Water Street, heading up the steep hill. I can see the Algonquin. I can see the finish line. I can't believe the heat. I can't believe it's finally over. I'm across the line. I complete it. I reach my goal.

I'm 10th across the line and finish 11th overall (men started before women). Gina comes in behind me and she's first among all women. Officially she finishes 10th. She's beaten me and I'm happy. I'm proud of her. I'm also pleased for myself.

My time is 5:14:20. I've come first in my age category. The victory is even sweeter given the conditions. I set my next goal: beat my best Half Ironman time of 4:49. There's work to do since I've already registered. It's early September in South Berwick, Maine.

Now that I've completed this Half Ironman and achieved my medium-term goal, I'm reminded of a gift a friend gave me following the

accident that quotes Earnest Hemmingway. And while I'm not always big on quotes, I particularly like this one: *"The world breaks everyone and afterward, many are strong in the broken places."* I agree and with the exception of my collarbone, it's also true.



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