

A memorable finish to Freeport triathlon

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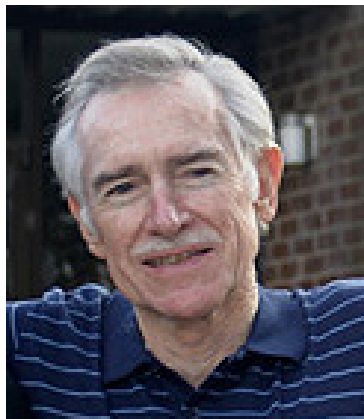
My race plan went well in the Freeport Summertime Blues Sprint Triathlon on Sunday, Sept. 6, until my run. I thrashed through the 500-yard, open water swim in Old River without drowning or swallowing too much river water. I finished the 15-miles out and back over the Intracoastal Waterway Bridge

out to the Quintana County Park. I headed out on the three-mile run stiff and slowly but felt good at the one-mile mark. The Velasco Bridge was a challenge, but I made it. On the last mile on the levee, my body betrayed me.

I felt a sharp pain in my back from my osteoarthritis, pain that hunched me over and made me feel I might topple face first. With a quarter of a mile to go, I had to stop at the light poles to stretch my back. A truck driver collecting cones stopped beside me to offer me a ride to the finish. It was a tempting offer, but I declined. After all the effort, I vowed to cross the finish line if I had to crawl the rest of the way.

With about 200 yards to go, a band of triathlete angels rushed to give me water, support and encouragement as I contin-

ued to stagger from light pole to light pole. I was unaware that word had spread that I was recovering from cancer surgery and radiation; a crowd had gathered to cheer me to the finish. They gave me a standing ovation when I staggered across the finish line, probably the ugliest finish in the history of Brazosport area racing. EMS volunteers sat me down, gave me water, poured water



over me to cool me down, and took my pulse.

I was the last finisher except for a contestant who had bike trouble and ran the last part of the bike route then finished the run route.

My finish was embarrassing but memorable. Many congratulated me and praised my courage as a cancer survivor. One finisher said I was “her hero.”

Congratulations to area locals for stronger finishes than mine.

Abbie Artley of Lake Jackson didn’t stumble across the finish line ugly as I did; she finished the race 20th out of over 170 participants and first in the overall female competition in 1:14:53. Her husband Donnie finished 41st overall in 1:19:30.

Chris Sustala, who finished first in the contest last year, finished fourth overall this year and first in the 35-39 age bracket in 1:07:21. Michael Tarabay finished 14th overall and first in the 30-34 age bracket in 1:12:52, and Kayle Wells, 35, finished 18th overall in 1:14:41. Andy Sar-

gent, 36, finished 82nd overall in 1:29:37, Peter Norris, 55, finished 84th overall in 1:30:32, and David Wade, 51, finished 99th overall in 1:34:08. Cliff Wilson finished 147th overall and first in the 70 and over age bracket in 1:49:41. Rene Miles finished 70th overall and second in her 45-49 age group in 1:27:12, and Jennifer Nicholas, 42, finished 156th overall in 1:54:15. Karen Wells, 35, finished 161st overall in 1:58:21. I finished second in the 70 plus bracket by default because I was the only other competitor in the age group.

Oftentimes those of us who go through the crucible of cancer, even a 70-year-old, mediocre, end-of-the-pack triathlete, inspire those around them unaware. I was touched almost to tears by the tributes and compliments paid to me despite my staggering, ugly finish. I shall treasure this triathlon finish, number 32 for me, and the support of my fellow triathletes forever.

Footnote. Triathletes, prospective triathletes and all those interested in physical fitness are invited to the charter meeting of the Lake Jackson-Freeport Area Triathletes (LJFAT) on Wednesday Sept. 16, at 6:30 p. m. in the Band Hall of Lake Jackson Intermediate School. For additional information, see www.LJFAT.com.

Bill Shaw’s running column appears in The Facts every other Monday. Contact him by e-mail at runwriter@sbcglobal.net.

