

Fifty Eight Is Pretty Great

On the new moon of April 29, 2014, I attempted and, by God's grace, completed my 58th career swim around the island of Key West. Before I speak about this swim let me briefly recount my previous few swims ...

I completed my 55th career swim on Saturday, June 8. That occasion was the 37th Annual Swim Around Key West (12.5 miles), and my time was 5:56:24. That was a blessed event and experience. My eldest son, David, kayaked for me and he did a typical fine job.

On Tuesday, June 25, 2013, I swam my 56th career swim. I began at 9:38 a.m. and finished 6:08:35 later. My support for the swim was a visitor from Tallahassee. Bob Rodgers, a student at Florida State University, had come to Key West with his Johnboat and I convinced him to be my support boat guy. Being up for an adventure, Bob obliged. Having found a man to support me and still being in pretty decent shape from my June 8th swim, I went for it and got it.

On Saturday, September 21, I swam in the First Annual Alligator Lighthouse Swim in Islamorada here in the Florida Keys. This is an Atlantic Ocean swim. It is billed as an 8-mile swim out to the old Lighthouse (4 miles), around it and then back to the start point. It is an interesting venue, and a challenging one at that. I used my Garmin GPS watch and I logged a 9+ mile venture. Any and all currents are hitting you at the side so there is no tidal boost. It is raw swimming. My time for this swim was 5:54:09. I called this swim the "**Over the Moon**" swim. The amount of moon jellyfish I swim through, around, over (and even under) was legion. I had a few brush ins with these critters (unpleasant). The moments when the waters were free of these strange creatures were precious and few. I enjoy the time I can just swim and forget the world. This swim afforded none of that! I was so happy to get out of that water.

While I wish the organizers well, I have no plans to swim in those waters again. You can see from my Key West island swim times that those nine miles took me about the same time as to swim the 12.5 miles around Key West. The difference is the tidal assistance we can experience around this island. I can't ever recall run ins with Moon Jellies in all my many swims around this island! I prefer the waters around Key West over those of Islamorada! My kayaker on this excursion was Douglas Weeks, a 25-year-old member of the church I pastor. Doug currently is the fastest runner in Monroe County.

Less than two weeks after the "Over the Moon" swim, I swam my "**57 Varieties**" swim on Wednesday, October 2, 2013. I was able to convince Doug Weeks to assist me again in the kayak. We started at 6:49 a.m., and a good long 6:34:48 later we completed the 12.5 miles. I must admit this time was very disappointing. Why was I in the water so long? The factors are numerous in an open water ocean swim. The tide height is always different, the wind, the chop of the water, my body, my mind, the time I take with my fueling, goggle problems, etc. I was in there longer than I wanted, but I will take it! On this swim, I once again used the Garmin GPS watch list to record my splits. I

disregard my personal, traditional mile markers and have good clean time splits for each mile.

That leads me to my **“58 Is Pretty Great”** swim. I prevailed upon Larry Batts to assist me as my kayaker support man. Larry was my kayaker in the tempestuous 36th Annual Swim Around Key West. He is an extremely accomplished kayaker at the young age of 71. As mentioned in my opening sentence, we launched from Smathers Beach (our traditional starting point for our annual swims) at 8:03 a.m. on April 29, 2014. The wind was out of the ESE blowing at 10-15 knots. We had a good chop as we swam the Atlantic side.

The closer I got to Key West harbor, the more I could feel the current pulling me in. As I entered the harbor, there were two huge Carnival cruise ships docked. One was situated at the Outer Mole Pier and the other at Pier B. We kept a nice distance from these behemoths, putting us out near the center of the Harbor. Larry stayed right on me to protect me in this heavily trafficked area. It is hard to see the final pier that leads into the Fleming Cut, so I relied on Larry's direction. It is always a joy to swim the cut as the water moves so swiftly through the narrow.

Once I got out from under Fleming Bridge, that 15-knot wind made itself known. It was a nice challenging leg out to Sigsbee, being tossed about. The water calmed as we skirted Sigsbee, being so close to shore. But once we came out from around Sigsbee, we hit the head wind. It seemed that every stroke was very deliberate, and as pulled my way forward, the bottom seemed to move slowly. But, move, I did. Every stroke leads to the next, and I made progress. I knew the closer I inched to the Cow Key Bridge, the wind would lessen, and, once under the bridge, I would find a nice ride through the Cow Key Channel until I landed in the Atlantic (about one mile).

I really counted on Larry to guide me to the bridge. From the exit around Sigsbee to Cow Key Bridge is difficult to site. Larry was also very good about feeding me every 30 minutes. Once we neared the bridge, I felt the pull toward the ocean. Under the bridge is mile 9. Larry noted that the water was high, determined by the water mark on the concrete wall of the bridge. We decided to chance going straight up the middle. It worked. I was not beached in shallow water, but that is not to say that the water was always comfortably swimmable. Making the turn to straddle the Atlantic shore is extremely shallow and calls for an altered stroke. It is such a joy to get into water deep enough the swim normally. That said, there are still areas in the final couple of miles where the water gets uncomfortably shallow.

I just swam on and completed my swim in 6:18:24. The air that day was about 82 degrees and the water about 81 degrees.

Upcoming goals: I hope to swim my 59th career swim on Wednesday, May 28 with a 7:30 a.m. start time.

If I am successful, my next swim would be my 60th on June 28, 2014, the 38th Annual Swim Around Key West.

Other accomplishments: The athlete formerly known as “Tin Foil Boy” became an Ironman for the second time on January 25, 2014. I participated in the 2nd Annual Bone Island Iron Distance race. I participated in the same event the previous year finishing in a time of 14:04. This past January I bettered my time by finishing in 14:02.

The below splits are based on my own personal, traditional markers:

Career Swim 55: June 8, 2013; Start 9:00 a.m.

White St. Pier: 19:45:20
Radar Dish (mile 2): 41:51:65 (1:01:36)
Mile 4 Marker: 49:18:65 (1:50:55)
Fleming Bridge: 24:29:21 (2:15:24)
Sigsbee Start (mile 6): 35:26:37 (2:50:50)
Exit Sigsbee: 44:01:88 (3:34:52)
Cow Key Bridge (mile 9): 47:11:43 (4:22:04)
First Pole: 1:14:45 (5:36:49)
Last Pole: 17:08:30 (5:53:57)
Beach Finish: 02:53:65 (5:56:51 beach finish time)
Beach Finish Time: 5:56:51

Career Swim 56: June 25, 2013; Start 9:38 a.m.

White St. Pier: 21:08:33
Radar Dish (mile 2): 42:14:42 (1:03:22)
Mile 4 Marker: 49:36:75 (1:52:59)
Fleming Bridge: 22:23:90 (2:15:23)
Sigsbee Start (mile 6): 41:35:23 (2:56:59)
Exit Sigsbee: 48:48:37 (3:45:48)
Cow Key Bridge (mile 9): 49:47:43 (4:35:35)
First Pole: 1:15:00 (5:50:35)
Last Pole: 18:00:30 (6:08:35)
Finish Time: 6:08:35

Career Swim 57: October 2, 2013; Start 6:49 a.m.

Times are based on the Garmin GPS watch:

Mile 1: 33:23:30
Mile 2: 32:07:61
Mile 3: 33:39:83
Mile 4: 27:34:78
Mile 5: 30:17:49
Mile 6: 40:05:61
Mile 7: 41:06:87
Mile 8: 39:52:66
Mile 9: 26:28:86
Mile 10: 22:20:06
Mile 11: 35:28:75
Mile 12: 32:22:42
Remainder: 11:86
Finish Time: 6:34:48

Career Swim 58: April 29, 2014; Start 8:03 a.m.

White St. Pier: 24:00:00
Radar Dish (mile 2): 46:33:00 (1:10:33)

Mile 4 Marker: 43:14:83 (1:53:48)
Fleming Bridge: 21:09:00 (2:14:57)
Sigsbee Start (mile 6): 44:35:25 (2:59:32)
Exit Sigsbee: 45:50:00 (3:45:22)
Cow Key Bridge (mile 9): 55:30:16 (4:40:52)
First Pole: 1:17:40 (5:58:32)
Last Pole: 20:11:31 (6:18:24)
Finish Time: 6:18:24

Skin Care Products Review: Skin protection is a big deal down here, especially if you plan to be in the water for 5-8 hours. The sun is fierce. I have gone with Zinc Oxide 20%, but over the swims have become disappointed in the covering. After reading an email from a swimmer, I learned that she has a pharmacist mix her a 40% dose. She said she paid some \$60 for a 1-pound jar. I asked about this at a Publix Supermarket Pharmacy. The chemist scratched his head and then looked at his computer. His face lit up and he motioned me to follow him. He led me to the baby products section of the store. He grabbed and held out two products before my eyes. Desitin and Boudreaux's Butt Paste. Both these products have Zinc Oxide at my requested 40%!

I bought the pound jar of the Desitin and a 4-oz. tube of the Butt Paste. In my "58 Is Great" swim, I used the Desitin. Larry applied it with a latex throw away glove I provided. I was pleasantly amazed at the protection it provided. The back of my calves on the completion of the swim appeared to be as covered as at the start. I did notice a bit of burn in the goggle area of my face (areas where Larry was not as exact in the application). I give high marks to the Desitin Maximum Strength Paste (40% Zinc Oxide) when it comes to protecting my skin. The pound jar of Desitin cost me \$15.59 (a big savings over \$60).

There are a few negatives. The Desitin is made with fish oil, which means there is a stink factor. While unpleasant, it is not vile. Once I was swimming, the smell factor played no part. Another negative is the stain you will inherit on your swimsuit. There is no way the white stains on my suit will ever come out. A third negative is the clean-up factor. I assigned my 15-year-old daughter, Jane, this role. Though unhappy, she managed to clean me up. You need vegetable oil and lots of paper towels. Then you will need to lather and rinse at least 2 times in the shower to wash the oil off. The positive is that your skin will feel pretty soft after it's all over!

If you want to avoid burning your skin in the harsh sun and salt water of the Florida Keys, this is my recommendation. My plan is to test the Butt Paste in my 59th Swim. The Butt Paste has no fish oil, but touts a lavender scent. I plan to review it after that swim. For the 4-oz. tube of Butt Paste, I paid \$7.99. I would think a solo swimmer could get two applications from a 4-oz. tube. Don't forget the disposable latex gloves, generic vegetable oil and a roll of paper towels!

Another tip: Before my kayaker throws the disposable gloves away, I have him/her put a glob of Vaseline under my armpits to avoid chafing. I realized in this last swim that Zinc Oxide 40% will suffice in this area. The Zinc product has mineral or petroleum oil in it, so save a step and use your zinc exclusively on your body AND under your arms.