

Bozeman Masters: A TRIumphant Journey!

By Lori Rosolowsky

Five years ago, there is no way I could've written this story.



Lori spent her 58th Birthday at the Teddy Bear Classic Swim Meet, 2019. People in photo Left to Right Back row: Paul Grigsby, Dana Greene, Guro Lindgren, Connor Flanery. Front row: Sue Harkin, Lori Rosolowsky, Janelle Munson-McGee.

So, some background is needed.

In 2016, we moved from Doylestown, Pennsylvania to Bozeman, Montana. In PA, I swam in our local outdoor pool for the three summer months that it was open, and that was it. (Indoor swimming didn't do anything for me.) I've always been active (yoga, biking, running, skiing), but summer swimming was my treat --I shun the sun, but the beautiful skies reminded me of being a little kid. I'm a singer-songwriter and pianist, so I'd compose lyrics in my head or visualize jazz scales in all keys. Otherwise, I'd either work out my problems, or maybe brainstorm a cure for cancer. You know, stuff like that. Keeping a mostly steady pace, swimming was my meditation in motion.

Sometimes at the outdoor Doylestown pool, I would see a group of three friends with matching swim caps; they'd share a lane, and I saw they had a paper covered in plastic with a workout on it. Never had a clue what they were trying to accomplish.

Had no idea there was a technique to swimming either. Although one day, someone came up to me and suggested I wear fins to help my stability--or something like that--honestly, I don't remember what they said. As a teen and young adult, total strangers would occasionally give me free swimming advice. I'm sure I appreciated it, because I love to learn. I guess "Swimmers Don't Let Other Swimmers Completely Suck Forever...."

Oh sure, in those last years in PA, I would sometimes race against the clock to get my heart rate up. Never even thought about what the kids were learning at team practice. (The only thing about them that I cared about was that, from 4 to 6 pm on weekdays, adult lap swim was over, and they got the lap pool).

Then, in July of 2016, we moved to Bozeman.

That November, Caitlyn Blodgett, another newbie in town, told me about swimming at the swim center, and said I would LOVE it! So I joined. I did not love it. I hated it. I thought to myself, "Why, of all the sports and exercise I do, did I pick an individual sport that I suck at?" It was pretty miserable. I couldn't keep up with the others who were chatting while doing kick drills. I'd drag myself there every other Sunday or so. The winter of 2016-2017 was one of the worst of my life. A lot of stuff plunged me into that depression and swimming wasn't helping.

Then, in April of 2017, Molly Hayes said to me in the locker room, "Lil Lori, there is a swim meet in a month, and *you* should do it!" She always called me Lil Lori. I said, "Molly, there is no way I am swimming in a meet. I have zero interest in that." If you know Molly, you know that she doesn't take "no" for an answer. I told her she was like a "gateway drug." ;)

Shortly after, Coach Janelle called me up and said, "Lori, I'm looking at the state records, and there's one you could win, because there's no record for that event." (I guess that's what can happen when you live in a landlocked state with more cows than people, haha. I have since befriended our state's beloved "P. Springer" who was this mysterious swimmer who won everything in my age group! Yay, Peggy!). Anyway, I can't remember what the event was--a 50, 100 or 200 something. Not butterfly though, because I'd never even tried that stroke. Janelle's phone call was life-changing! Suddenly, I was IN! I was touched, motivated and inspired that my coach was paying attention to me in that way (she always coached me at practice, but now she was talking to me as if I were an *athlete*)! I had a goal!

The next day, I went to the swim center at noon, and then again to practice that night. I did a few double headers in that month. For the 2017 May Classic, I signed up for the maximum number of events allowed. We did some relays too. I was now a competitive swimmer. Well, to be precise, I was a swimmer who competed. "Competitive" doesn't exactly describe my race results!



L to R: Sue Harkin, Lori Rosolowsky, Liz Ann Kudrna, Molly Hayes, Edie Pinkham

In July, I did the 2017 Montana Women's Triathlon in Helena, a great race for newbies like me (since it's a sprint and in a pool, not open water), but of course there were some elite women there too. One of them is my dear friend, Liz Ann Kudrna. Liz Ann is a Challenged Athlete. What an inspiration! The night before the race, we loaded up her van with all our equipment, and at 5 a.m. the next day we rode up together.

I won my age group (55 to 59), even though I got a wee bit lost on the bike route.

Fast forward to Summer, 2019.

My swim team buddies and I, including Guro Lindgren, Anne Hossner, Craig Henson, Phillip Luebke, and Connor Flanery, met up at Hyalite Reservoir for my first open water swim ever. That had been on my bucket list, since I had discovered that triathlon is often in open water. And, we live in gorgeous Montana, for goodness sake! Anne lent me her wetsuit, and Guro stayed super close to me. (Thank you, Guro!) The water temp took my breath away. So did the views. I distinctly remember thinking, "This is one of the top five exhilarating moments of my life." Not exaggerating. I found my rhythm and stayed close to shore. I was blown away by the ability of the others to swim down and across the reservoir--some with no wetsuits. Whoa.

I went a couple more times that summer, and, by that time, local Ironman legend Reneé Swinson had given me an old wetsuit of hers. That was cool. I felt like I'd inherited the Gear of Champions.

When Covid hit in March, 2020, the pool shut down.

In those early months of the pandemic (though, at the time, we didn't anticipate how "early" those days were), I remember thinking that swimming was the one thing I *really* missed. Although the world was falling apart and people everywhere were suffering, my

own life was pretty good. I'm self-employed, my family was safe, etc. But, I did miss swimming.

When the pool reopened in June, I headed to the Swim Center a few times. A little scared because of Covid. But glad to be back. With the July 2020 Montana Women's Tri cancelled, I decided to do one on my own. I rounded up a few friends to join me, and Julie Zickovich (fellow swimmer and also the tri coach I had hired right before Covid started) urged me to try the Bozeman Beach (aka The Pond) near MAP Brewery. I had never even seen the place. I envisioned a small pond with a lot of goose poop. Nonetheless, I agreed it would be good to check it out. Sue Harkin, one of my closest friends (on and off the team) met me there, along with Sarah Washko, a new friend for me.

Well, well, well. That was the BEST thing I did all summer.

Sue and I met there several times a week. We would swim to the Brewery ("Ireland") or that weird building that looks like Sherlock Holmes lived there ("England"), or the gazebo ("Japan"). We'd chat while kicking and drill and zig and zag, and sometimes hang out on the beach a bit to visit safely. This was my social life, Vitamin D fix, and swim workout all in one! Sue and Sarah gave me great tips. Caitlin Blodgett (the one who had gotten me into swimming in the first place) even returned for a few weeks (she has moved away). Talk about coming full circle.

For the Tri on July 19, 2020, Anne Hossner and Sherri Pearson, two fabulous swimmers, joined me for the swim. Well, we started out together, anyway. In a flash, they were well ahead. Sherri did the whole Tri with me, and my neighbor Wendy Newman ("the jackrabbit"), did the bike and run. The whole event was mostly a solo experience, as I lagged behind my fitter, stronger, inspirational friends. For the last 0.1 mile of the run, though, they graciously stopped and stepped aside, so I could finish "first." "Triathletes Let Their Less Fast Friends Finish First." Well, triathletes doing their own "Indie" Tri do that. In Bozeman, anyway.

During the last mile of the Tri, I asked myself "Why do I do this?" The second it was over, Guro and Julie who had come for support, said, "When should we all do it again?" In a minute, we agreed on September. It's amazing how quickly amnesia sets in after one completes a physically demanding event.



Lori's Indie Triathlon at the Pond on July 19, 2020

In August, I logged 21 swims or so at the Pond, and Sue probably logged 29. Guro and Sue hosted a big Challenge celebration for a whole group of us who participated.

For the Second Ever Bozeman Indie Triathlon (also a sprint distance) on September 13, 2020, eleven of us participated. Julie had arranged for a professional timer. It was a blast! Nobody let me win this time! :)

As soon as our thrice-weekly Masters practices resumed indoors on September 15 with Coach Matt Parks, I hopped right in. I've only missed two, and now I schedule my commitments around practice, not vice-versa.

So, here I am, on a surprisingly balmy Sunday, November 1, dashing off this story. There are still scattered snow piles around from the last several weeks of cold and wind. Remembering that I signed up for the series of three Virtual Sprint Triathlons sponsored by the MT Women's Tri organization, I realized that I should probably knock out the first one this week, which is predicted to be warm. Not sure why I signed up. Maybe the price? For \$15, you "get to do" three virtual races *and* you get a T-shirt! You can swim, bike and run indoors or out. So, after swim practice this morning, Sue, Debby and I were teasing each other about doing the swim portion at the Pond. Without a wetsuit.

"Because Swimmers Don't Let Other Swimmers Wimp Out."

I'll let you know....

--Lori Rosolowsky, November 1, 2020