

Out of the Blue : Sharing insights and positive perspectives about the sport of swimming from those that have lived the experience. By Cynthia Owens



After I finished conducting research for this month's *Out of the Blue* article, the words of one of the most well-known radio announcers of all time, Paul Harvey, came to mind, "and now you know the rest....of the story!"

My interview was with a gal with whom I swam briefly, back in the 1970's. I remember her being a good swimmer, with great hair, and as someone who was nice to everyone on the team. What I did not know, until now, was the depth and breadth of her accomplishments. I find myself rather awed not only by Janet Stewart Hennessey's prolific career in the pool; but by the lessons she learned from that experience!

She started swimming in 1965 at age 9, for the Santa Barbara Swim Club, where she held records in the 11-12 year old 50 and 100 yard breaststroke in the Southern Pacific Association. She qualified for her first National Championship at age 13, in the 200 Breaststroke and 200 I.M. Then, she went on to be a finalist in then next 9 National Championship competitions in which she competed. Events included 200 IM, 400 IM, 200 Fly and relays. From there she earned world rankings in both IM's, and placed 6th in the 1972 Olympic Trials in the 200 IM, and 9th in the 400 IM.

In 1973, as a senior in high school, her family moved to northern California, and she joined SCSC. Within just one year of training with George Haines, Janet was qualified in every National event except the backstrokes! After graduating, Janet attended Stanford University, where she earned her B.A. in Psychology in 1978.

For the last 15 years she has lived in Scottsdale, Arizona with her husband of 23 years, John. They have a 20 year old daughter, Jennifer, who is a junior at Pepperdine University. Today, Janet is a Commercial Real Estate agent in Scottsdale, lover of fine food and wine and an amateur cultivator of roses.

I recently had the opportunity to catch up with Janet and ask about her thoughts on swimming.

Q. What has swimming meant to you?

Swimming defined my life growing up. It was the means by which I developed self-assurance, dedication, accountability, goal setting, close friendships, and the ability to be a gracious winner and loser. I was fortunate to have participated in international competition and travel throughout the country. My accomplishments also aided my acceptance to Stanford because they demonstrated my ability to define and successfully accomplish my goals on a highly competitive level of sport.

Q. When you think of your personal experiences growing up at SCSC, what comes to mind?

Originally from Santa Barbara Swim Club, (Dick Roth, 1964 Olympic Gold medalist from SCSC, was my coach) we moved to Santa Clara during my senior year of high school. I ended up graduating from Santa Clara High School and swimming for George during 1973-1974. The impact during those two years left an indelible mark upon me to this day.

George welcomed me with open arms and I always felt a part of the team even though I had not grown up as an age grouper with the rest of the kids. I remember George assisting me with my stroke during lunch breaks at school. He always made the time to help if we wanted to put in the effort. He was the one who told me I could do a certain time by Nationals and, "by George", I did!

Also, for the first time in my swimming career, I had a large team with which to train. Though at times daunting, practices included training with the best in our sport and also developing incredible friendships with so many fabulous swimmers. The amazing element of those friendships was how we all bonded together again

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at the *SCSC 55 Year Reunion* in 2006, after over 30 years of going our separate ways! I learned that the development we all shared as young teammates truly lasts a lifetime.

I swam my best under George and was a member of the 1974 Women's National Championship squad for short course and long course seasons. The pinnacle of my career was when he chose me to accompany 8 other SCSC swimmers and himself to San Remo, Italy in July of 1974. It was an incredible honor for me to represent our club and one that I will always cherish.

I am so proud and grateful to have been a very small part of the SCSC extraordinary history which still is thriving today.

Q. Did you always dream of making the Olympic Team? Why or why not is having that dream important?

Absolutely! Growing up, I would pour through the Swimming World Magazines devouring every word, time and split of the swimming elite, especially Olympians.

Making an Olympic team is such an awe-inspiring goal especially when the games only occur every four years. That being said, timing regarding age, mental maturity and a little luck is imperative in hopes of making the team. There are so many hurdles along the way and goal setting was a necessity in hopes of attaining the ultimate prize, a berth on the Olympic team.

I accomplished making the 1972 Olympic Trials finals, competing in the 200 IM finishing in 6th place. I have perspective on that now, but at the time I felt as such a complete failure for not making the team even though I accomplished my best time. I was devastated; however, the lesson to be learned from the disappointment of not reaching my dream was yet to come.

I joined SCSC in the summer of 1973 and actually had a difficult transition in the process. I loved the team but the shift from a very small program to the most successful program in the world was at times overwhelming. I was lost and discouraged after the summer came to a close and I considered retiring for good. George Haines changed all that along with my teammates enabling my confidence to grow and result in the best year I had ever had in 1974.

My disappointment at the Olympic Trials in 1972 and subsequent poor showing in 1973 taught me resiliency and the ability to rise from adversity to achieve goals I never thought possible. That tenacity has carried me through many trials and tribulations in later life and is most likely the best life lesson I have learned from my swimming career. By not having my Olympic dream fulfilled and my subsequent defeat in the Trials, I might not have learned this valuable lesson.

Q. What advice do you have for swimmers just beginning their journey?

I believe that it is so important for children to be part of something bigger than themselves. The swim team was that vehicle for me. My advice to those beginning their journey is to have fun with your teammates and the sport, however, constantly set goals for yourself and strive your best to achieve them. The wonderful part of our sport is that each child can be successful with their own personal accomplishments while competing within the framework of a team. The accomplishment of fulfilling your personal dreams will set you up for success in life's many challenges for years to come!

Out of the Blue is a regular monthly feature in our club newsletter to showcase stories of inspiration, motivation and humor from those who have strong ties to our great sport