

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



Imagine sitting at a Far Westerns meet on a sweltering summer afternoon, watching event after event drone on. At some point, a heat of the 13-14 girls 200 I.M. is in the water, and from the first stroke it is apparent the swimmer in the center lane is going to dominate this race. Suddenly everyone is on their feet cheering. You look up, and a *world record* has been broken....at Far Westerns!

On July 22, 1966, in Los Altos, at Far Westerns, a freckled-faced 14-year-old named Lynn Vidali was swimming the 200 IM, in that center lane. Needless to say, she made her entrance onto the world stage that hot summer afternoon. Maybe the only one who was not surprised by her performance was Lynn herself! You see, Lynn's dream of being

in the Olympics began at age 12, as she watched Donna de Varona (also an SCSC alum) capture 2 gold medals and the heart of the world at the 1964 Olympic Games. That day Lynn marched into the kitchen where her mother was cutting onions and announced "Mom, I'm going to make the 1968 Olympic Team." Her mother's perfect response was "That's good, Linnie," and she went on cutting her onions. Four years later, Lynn accomplished what she'd set out to do, and so much more.

At age 16, Lynn not only qualified for the '68 Olympic Team; she also won a silver medal in the 400 I.M. At age 20, she went on to also earn berths at the 1972 Munich Games in *four* events; the 200 I.M., 400 I.M., 100 breaststroke and 200 breaststroke; earning a bronze medal in the 200 I.M.

Although she was a world record holder and qualified for the Olympics in five events, her proudest moment was at age 16, standing on the awards platform with fellow SCSC teammate, Claudia Kolb, to receive her Olympic silver medal; with her parents and brother there to see it.

Almost unbelievably, Lynn's greatest disappointment was that she did not accomplish what she'd hoped to. Her goal was to be the fastest 200 I.M.er the world at the '72 Munich Games, and take home the gold. She was the number one seed going into finals; and a gold medal looked almost certain. Unfortunately, the clock kept ticking after the world record came and went. Lynn had gone out hard in the first half of the race, taking the lead by 1 ½ body-lengths, but she was unable to hold it, and finished a 'disappointing' third place. But, Lynn Vidali was never one to be defeated by disappointment!

Today, Lynn Vidali Gautschi is a swim coach, PE teacher, swim instructor and entrepreneur. She has two grown children; her daughter, Ronni is a star water polo player at San Diego State University and her son Ryan was also a premier polo player at UCSB, and now resides here locally.

I recently had the opportunity to catch up with Linnie and talk to her about her swimming.

Q: What has swimming meant to you?

Lynn: Swimming has been a part of my life since I was 5 years old. I swam competitively from age 7 to 27 and I have coached from age 17 to 57, with some time off for starting my family. In May I will be a young 58, and my swimming career continues to grow. This year I coached water polo for the first time, and found it fun and challenging. One of my most personally satisfying endeavors is water-proofing little ones every summer and helping kids get started on their first teams.

Swimming kept me focused, helped me overcome issues of low self-esteem, and got me through the teenage years without too much drama. Being good at something really helped me plan my life. Swimming made my relationship with my family a strong one. We worked together so I could train and move to Santa Clara. It seemed like everyone in my family did without, except for me. I am so thankful, even to this day.

Q: When you think of your personal experience at SCSC, what comes to mind?

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Lynn: I think of George Haines, who was like my dad and I loved him so much. I think about the friendships I made and how many of them are still strong. Pokey Watson Richardson was then, and still is, one of the dearest friends in my life.

One experience that stands out in my mind was when I first came to Santa Clara with my dad to ask George if I could be on the team. Now, at 14 I had broken a world record and was beating some of the Santa Clara stars. I vividly recall a group of probably five world record holders standing about 25 yards from me just staring, as if to say "Look who wants to swim here." So, even as a world record holder, I found the thought of joining SCSC, with its incredible depth of 'stars' and its reputation for being the best swim club in the world, nearly overwhelming! I was so intimidated and just wanted to skip the whole idea. But after a few practices it was OK!

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

Lynn: Yes, I did have that dream from the time I was 12 and watched Donna de Varona win her Olympic medals. I think it is extremely important because the dream is where the journey begins, and it is in the *journey* that the treasure is found; not so much in the actual goal or achievement.

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

Lynn: Everyone has two arms and two legs and if you work hard, dream hard, set goals high, you, too, may be an Olympic athlete. It is not an easy journey! Every athlete will grow and learn more when things don't go according to plan. But just know that the "ups" will come! Every athlete needs to keep an open mind, stay firm in their beliefs, and steadfast in their commitment. That is how you reach your best potential; which is different for everyone.

No one knows for sure if they will be an Olympic athlete. However, one thing I know for certain is that the journey will leave you a much better person, even if the total dream doesn't come true. You will never know if you don't try. Personally, I never wanted to live my life by saying "What if....."

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. Contact Cynthia Owens at: cowens@santaclaraswimclub.org