



# THE SOUTH ENDER

HANDBALL, ROWING, RUNNING & SWIMMING

October 2019

A Publication of the South End Rowing Club

[www.serc.com](http://www.serc.com)



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The South Ender is the newsletter of the South End Rowing Club, published three to four times per year since 1931. We publish material by our members that reflects the ideals, purposes, and accomplishments of the South End.

You can find digital copies of this and past issues, many in color, at [serc.com/about/newsletters](http://serc.com/about/newsletters).

It's our members who make this newsletter, so please send articles (up to 650 words), poems, jokes, and high-resolution photos to [newsletter@serc.com](mailto:newsletter@serc.com).

We reserve the right to edit all submitted material, but we'll be nice about it, we promise.



# Letter from the President

*By Simon Dominguez, SERC President*

Hi South End members,

I just wanted to remind you that our club is led by a board of directors whose job it is to run the club on behalf of all members. You can see all of our current board members and commissioners listed on the inside front cover of every issue of this newsletter.

Have you ever wondered what goes into running a club that is almost 150 years old and has over 1,600 members? One way to find out is to attend one of our monthly board meetings that are generally held on the second Wednesday of each month at 6:30 p.m., upstairs in the Day Room at the club. All members are welcome to attend these meetings. We publicize the agenda for each meeting at least 48 hours before the meeting so you can see if there are any issues that you might be interested in hearing about.

Each board meeting begins with a section that we call "Members' Moments." If you have any issues that you want to address the board about, you have five minutes to talk at this time. Please be advised that should you want to do this, then you would need to let the board secretary (currently **Josh Sale**) know at the very latest by the Friday afternoon before the meeting, and tell him what you would like to discuss. If the meeting is already fully booked up, your request might be pushed to

the following month, but we will always do what we can to give you time in front of the board as soon as we can.

Attending a board meeting is also a great thing to do if you feel that you might be ready to step up to serve at some point in the future. We have positions open every year and need more good people to help run the club. Please come and see what is involved if you feel that you might be in a position to serve on our board. Also feel free to reach out to me or any of the board members and commissioners listed in this issue if you have questions on any of the individual positions and what they involve.

Regards,

Simon

## The Plaque is Back!

	DC	SERC
<b>Row</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>233</b>
<b>Swim</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>214</b>
<b>Run</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>Bonus</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>608</b>



Photo by Suzanne Greva

# The Runner's Block

By Kevin Whalen

Big congratulations and thank you to everyone who supported and competed in this year's interclub triathlon victory against our neighboring Dolphin Club. At the running event, our spirit and gusto were felt throughout the course. There was a massive welcoming sea of red and loud cheers at the starting line and our glorious SERC flag waving at the finish. **Aaron Burby** was the fastest SERC member for the second year in a row and won first overall, with shoes borrowed from a locker mate! Next year, Aaron will win the race in bare feet.

For anyone interested in land-based activity, our running group departs from the SERC Day Room at 6:30 p.m. every Tuesday night. We encourage members of all levels and abilities to join! A typical workout consists of a warm-up run (1 mile), stretch, set of drills, and cool down back to the club, traditionally followed by ice-cold beers. The workouts are designed to challenge the fast, nimble runners and be accessible to folks just getting (back) in the game. The last Tuesday of each month is a "fun run" and you can always count on beers and camaraderie to follow.

Speaking of last Tuesdays of the month, October 29 is a special one! It is Halloween themed and

we dress up in costumes and creepy crawl (at a respectable pace) between local watering holes.

Have you ever gawked at the beauty of Mt. Tamalpais from the sandy South End beach in awe of the utter majesty of it all? Ever thought to yourself: "Could I make it there, from here?"

Good news! The inaugural Top of Tam event is Sunday, October 27. The course begins at the end of the SERC dock, goes across the Golden Gate Bridge, and picks up the SCA trailhead through the Marin Headlands and up to the East Peak of Mt. Tam. Registration is required for runners—however, contact me if you'd like to volunteer or meet us at the summit.

Check the club calendar on [serc.com](http://serc.com) for the latest event details.

Finally, we are looking for race directors for 2020 who can think of safe and creative run routes. Contact me with ideas and/or questions about how to get involved! [running@serc.com](mailto:running@serc.com)

Kevin Whalen

Run Commissioner 2019

# Vitamin Sea

By Janie Bryant

“Hey, do you know how to light the oven?” I look over onto the patio to see **Sue Free** and **Sian Llewellyn** kicked back with glasses of wine early on a recent Thursday evening. “Possibly,” I reply. To their next question—“Do you want a glass of wine?”—I respond with a firm yes.

Taking off my handball gloves, ready to sit a spell, I learn that Sue and Sian are cooking for Boat Night. Sue takes another sip of wine before hollering at a few passersby in wet swimsuits, inquiring about their oven lighting abilities, but my reply remains the closest to a solid yes that she will receive. “So what happens if I can’t get it lit?” I ask. Of course, being Sue Free, she is undaunted and explains that cheese sandwiches can be eaten cold, and tomato soup too for that matter. “Boat Night dinner doesn’t have to be an extravaganza,” she states and bobs her head for emphasis.

Sue shares that she spent 15 minutes collecting the needed groceries at a cost of \$54. She prefers to do most of the meal prep at home and only about the final 20 minutes in the Cookshack—just the finishing touches. She shares her soup recipe with us and explains that she just tossed together the ingredients and went “vvvup in the Vitamix” in her kitchen to create it. “You just have to make sure you have enough room in your fridge at home and at the club.”

She likes to limit the stress and take in the sights and vibes of being at the club on a weekday evening, being an early morning swimmer. “It is a whole different way to experience the club,” she remarks.

We three eventually do get the oven lit and as the music of CCR, Pink Floyd, Queen, and the Eagles fills the space, the smells of baking fill it too. “You



Photos by Sian Llewellyn and Janie Bryant



can never have too many cheesy pieces of bread,” Sian notes.

Time for us to head back out to the patio to polish off the cooks-only bottle of wine before it is time to ring the triangle (small thrill). I stroll over to ask Boat Night regular **Joe Amato** what meal he likes best. He leans back from sanding and replies, “Whatever, it is always a surprise, fun to be surprised.”

Sue rings the triangle and the hungry, appreciative crew files into dinner.

Once seated, the conversation falls to wondering about the logistics of running our next regatta while Sharkfest is underway. “Are they bringing in sharks or depending on local sharks?” rower **Steve McDonald** queries, showing it is always helpful to have some swimmers at the table.

Many Boat Night cooks have found that it is most agreeable to cook with a buddy. Learning and teaching about recipes and splitting up the work can be a good way to go. **Darlene Comstedt** and I had such fun last time we cooked together that we are planning our next dinner. Inspired by Darlene’s Say No to Scurvy T-shirt, our menu pretty much wrote itself.

**Emily Gable** came over from the handball court when we needed an extra hand wrapping the vitamin C-rich spanakopita. We had a good time, the Boat Nighters got fed, Emily was later invited to go for a row in the barge, and Darlene was invited for a group sunset/full moon picnic row.

Good things can come to Boat Night cooks, and as **Mya Krikorian** commented to me at a recent happy hour, “I have never cooked for a more appreciative group.”

# Top 10 Reasons to Cook for Boat Night

*By Darlene Bagley Comstedt*

1. Fun with friends
2. Curing maritime nutritional deficiencies (*see below*)
3. Trying out new recipes and revisiting old favorites
4. Test your "Price is Right" shopping skills to ensure you don't go over the \$60 budget
5. Because we all should learn how to turn on the oven
6. Proximity to one of the best views of the sunset in San Francisco
7. It's how you can contribute to boat night if you have no technical skills
8. Eternal love and gratitude from those who do have technical skills and who contribute said skills at Boat Night
9. Did we mention fun with friends?
10. Why wouldn't you?



## Maritime Nutritional Deficiencies to Address at Boat Night

*By Darlene Bagley Comstedt*

1. Rickets (vitamin D deficiency)
2. Beriberi (vitamin B1 deficiency)
3. Pellagra (vitamin B3 [niacin] deficiency)
4. Scurvy (aka "limey") (vitamin C deficiency) (Janie and I addressed this one already)



Photo by Mary Riley

# Becoming a South Ender

By Robert Telle

*Editor's note: Robert is a SERC member who lives in Hanover, Germany. He is a rowing coach there and has come to love SERC as much as the rest of us.*

When I heard about the Norm Petersen Regatta, I was able to organize my training in cold Germany. Since I cannot row on the lake here in winter in Hanover because of the cold conditions, that meant a lot of erging and gym work.

When I landed in San Francisco on the evening of March 1, 2019, I went with my friend **David Nelson** right onto the water. It was so nice to be in the club again—and for me it always smells like lasagna. It feels like a piece of home for me. The anticipation of the next day was great in me.

I got up early in the morning (a sign of a true South Ender) and everyone met at the club. The boats were prepared, the kitchen steamed, and again the tides were determined. The conditions that morning were ideal. The water shallow. No wind, though it was a bit gray. I had the chance to row the Maas Double Mike Alvarez with **Eli Rubel**.

The starting signal was at 7:45, and Eli and I rowed synchronously and powerfully. We remembered the September trainings together when I lived in the city for a month. Towards the Golden Gate we made the turnaround and went back to the finish. Meanwhile, both pillars of the bridge were illuminated by the sun, and I knew we were winning. An incredible feeling



From the left: David Nelson, Eli Rubel, Nancy Sorrell, Robert Telle, Kellee Adams, Michelle Choy.

to participate in a regatta in the bay and see the city lying there right next to it. On the way back we saw the fierce fight of the Maas24 singles. With 36:21 we took the victory in the class. That's when I feel I became a South Ender.

After the races, we met for a celebratory breakfast. It was so nice to meet my friends and talk about our experiences of the race. Everyone felt good and had fun.

At this point I would also like to say a big thank you to **Nancy Sorrell** and Eli Rubel as well as all the organizers.

See you soon—and with sporting regards from Germany,

Robert

# Two South Enders Win Handball National Championships

By Lou Barberini

At the 69th annual National United States Handball Association Championships in June, **Juan Carlos Ocampo** went through the 50 B's bracket without surrendering a game to win his first national championship. Juan Carlos is known around SERC for spearheading the SERC's women's handball program.

**Tom McGrath** (also SERC) teamed up with Augie Herrera to win the 55-year-old doubles national championship. McGrath and Herrera went through two rounds before facing multiple national champions Zamora and Valenzuela in the finals. McGrath and Herrera crushed the SoCal team 21-6 and 21-5.



Juan Carlos Ocampo



Tom McGrath (SERC), Herrera, Valenzuela, Zamora

# South End Women Compete in Concord Handball Tournament

By Lou Barberini

In the second annual Ken Hofmann Memorial Handball Tournament, South Enders **Anna Sojourner, Emily Gable, Mee Lee, Heidi Barberini, and Annette Tran** traveled to Concord to compete in the open tournament. The event was held on June 1 and 2 and honors developer and former Oakland A's owner Ken Hoffmann.

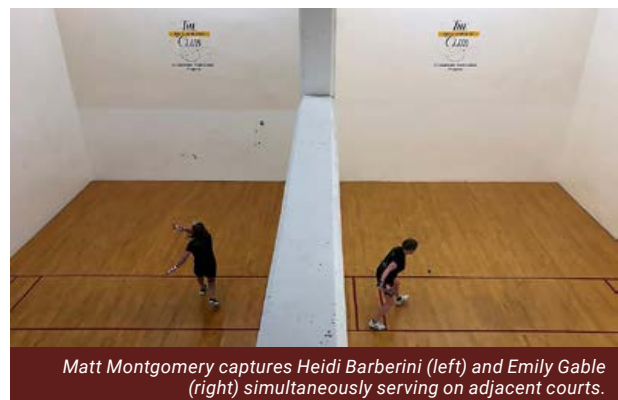
Anna Sojourner finished in fourth place in the Men's B/C consolation round.

Emily Gable lost in the finals of the Women's/ Men's 70's bracket. Emily beat Ken Moeller 14,(19),4 and Annette won (13),14,7 before falling to Aki in the finals.

Mee Lee and Heidi Barberini advanced to the finals of the consolation round of the same bracket, with Mee pulling off a squeaker in the tiebreaker.



Annette Tran, Emily Gable, Mee Lee



Matt Montgomery captures Heidi Barberini (left) and Emily Gable (right) simultaneously serving on adjacent courts.



# Making a Difference – Spring Break in the Bahamas

*By Gary Emich*

How in the world, in a country composed of over 700 islands, can fewer than 20 percent of the children know how to swim? It's not as though I'm talking about inhospitable, cold waters but rather the warm, amazingly clear and blue waters of the Bahamas.

Drowning deaths in the Bahamas are the second leading cause of accidental death, with only traffic accidents causing more. The rate of drowning per 100,000 inhabitants is six times greater than in the United States, and an astounding 17 times higher than in the United Kingdom.

As a lifelong open water swimmer, I was honored to be selected as one of the volunteers for the 2019 SwimTayka swim project on the Bahamian island of Bimini. The goals of SwimTayka are straightforward:

- Help poor communities around the world
- 1) teach children how to swim with the ultimate goal of saving lives, and
- 2) educate children about the care of their open water and preserve it for generations to come.

In its third season, the week-long program is open free of charge to any children who want to participate. This year 35 kids joined in, ages 5 to 17, with swimming abilities ranging from "I'm a rock—watch me sink" to marginal at best.

Each morning, the aspiring swimmers sing the Bahamian national anthem and then break into three groups for a 90-minute pool session. Two of the groups focus on being "drown-proofed," i.e., learning how to float and feeling comfortable in the water. The third group works on improving swimming skills and techniques.

Following the pool session (and snacks, which the kids love, love, love) there is an environmental segment organized and led by Save the Bays—a Bahamian member of the Waterkeeper Alliance. Waterkeeper is

composed of over 300 chapters worldwide (including our very own San Francisco Baykeeper) that share a common mission: to fight for every community's right to drinkable, fishable, and swimmable water. Guest presenters also include members from the Dolphin Communications Project and the Bimini Shark Lab. The two common themes of each environmental

session are care for the ocean and beaches and preservation for future generations (hopefully creating a cadre of environmental stewards).

The highlight of everyone's day (children and volunteers alike) is hearing, "Who wants to go to the beach?" Without

fail, the universal response is an excited chorus of yays and yeses. The beach segment includes beach cleanup along with individual and team-building games and activities. But the real treat is hopping in the ocean and practicing pool drills along with having free time.

As my previous swim training with kids has been one-on-one, having a dozen active, enthusiastic youngsters was challenging at first. But as the week progressed I noted an improvement in their swimming skills, although the boundless energy and excitement and their inevitable tendency to drift towards total chaos and mayhem never abated. After all, I reminded myself, they're in the water having fun, not in a classroom.

Have we made a difference? Only the future will tell. But there were very proud smiles on everyone's faces at the awards ceremony—which awards, by the way, were handed out by Robert Kennedy, Jr., founder and president of Waterkeeper Alliance.

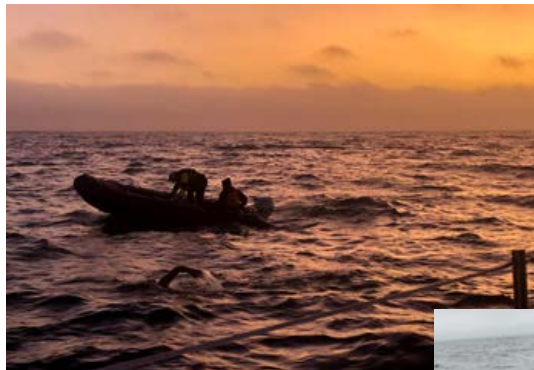
Volunteering with SwimTayka is truly a unique experience and an opportunity I'm so glad to have had. To find out more about SwimTayka and their learn to swim programs in the Bahamas, Brazil, India, Mexico, and Peru, visit [swimtayka.org](http://swimtayka.org).



# Ken's Monterey Attempt

By Ken Mignosa

Monterey Bay was an excellent training swim that was stopped by Mother Nature. The wind was supposed to pick up, along with big swells, around 11:00 a.m. or so on August 23. However, the wind picked up before first light, sometime around 4:00 a.m. To be honest it was a really windy swim throughout. The kayaker was pulled after the first hour of the swim because it was too rough for a kayak. Two people on a Zodiac were pulled after about four hours because they were too seasick to continue. The entire crew on the Nomad (Brian Thom's sailboat) was seasick and vomiting and really miserable.



By the time I called it, there were sustained 8-foot swells going one way, sustained 12-knot winds gusting stronger

going another way, the current going against me (as it had throughout the swim), and I was cold with no way to warm up via my swimming. I also knew at that point that we were at the beginning of increasing winds. Conditions were only going to get worse, and I still

Sometime after first light I passed over the Monterey Bay Canyon, and the water temperature dropped from 62 to 52. At that point there had already been sustained 8-knot winds, gusting stronger, for a couple of hours, and it just got stronger. I was only getting a breath on about 60 percent of my attempts, and the rest of the time I got a face full of water. In the final hour or two of the swim I had to stop every 30-50 strokes to cough out the ocean, and get a couple of good breaths before continuing.

As a result of the trouble breathing, I couldn't move enough to maintain body heat, which made me cold, and it also made my kidneys angry. Feeds were also problematic because of the wind and swells and jellyfish. I couldn't tread water vertically, or I'd be kicking jellyfish. So I took my feeds on my back—kind of like a sea otter—and while I could seal my mouth around the bottle I ended up inhaling seawater through my nose.



had about 20km to go! And that is how my Monterey Bay swim attempt ended.

**Lisa Amorao** (kayaker), **Gretchen Fermer** (kayaker), and **Amy Gubser** (crew chief) made up my crew, and they are all South Enders. I'm grateful to all of them—the crew are the heroes of any marathon swim, and this one especially! I am also grateful to the Monterey Bay Swimming Association (MBSA) observers, **Joel Wilson**, and Orry Korb.

Photos by Robin Rose, Lisa Amorao, and Gretchen Fermer.

# Newly Promoted Pilots

By Josh Sale and David Brown

As the club grows (we're now at 1,500 members) it means we need more volunteers to keep the wheels turning. And pilots are the mother's milk of open water swimming. So unless you want to spend your days splashing around the cove and Ft. Mason, remember that we always need more new pilots.

Also, we always need more pilots to support our growing swim program (and to a lesser degree the rowing program).

Please see the Pilot's Corner of the club website ([serc.com/swimming/pilots-corner/](http://serc.com/swimming/pilots-corner/)) to learn how you can become a pilot, or reach out to our Pilot Coordinator **Sarah Roberts**.

## Neil Heller, Senior Pilot

At the South End, senior pilots are lead pilots who have expressed a willingness to help mentor up-and-coming pilots. I'm pleased to announce that Neil Heller has stepped up to this important role. When you see Neil, please thank him for his service. —JS

## Sarah Roberts, Lead Pilot

When some task comes up at the club that requires a steady hand, one of the first names that crosses people's minds is Sarah Roberts. In addition to volunteering where needed, Sarah has been perfecting her piloting skills. No surprise, Sarah has quickly risen through the piloting ranks and has now been promoted to lead pilot. With this certification Sarah is qualified to lead all club swims and nutcrackers! —JS



Photos by Allen Luong

## Brian Ip, Pilot

Brian exudes a calm confidence (spiced with dry wit) that makes him a favorite of both swimmers and his fellow pilots. It's great to have him moving up in the ranks. —JS

## Van Cornwell, Pilot

At this point, probably every swimmer has had a chance to come into contact with our 2019 swim commissioner and experience his calm but confident demeanor and easy laugh. In addition to being an awesome swimmer, turns out he's also a gifted pilot. Van was promoted to assistant pilot in February, and then to pilot in July.

Van has extensive experience with motorized craft from his time in Florida and Hawaii and it shows in his easy command of our inflatables. So the next time you see Van, please thank him for being our commish and for stepping up to being a pilot. —JS

## Lee Bruno, Pilot

Lee has been volunteering for a lot of swims as an accompanying pilot in this last year. He requested to be promoted to pilot and got a solid unanimous vote of yes from the senior pilots, so he has been promoted. He has worked hard in obtaining this status and this is well deserved, as he is a competent and experienced pilot. —DB

## Marc Glomb, Accompanying Pilot

Marc complements his South End pilot training with small craft experience gained with LA County lifeguards. Sadly, his puppies weren't able to take the exam, so they will have to content themselves with retrieving radios that have fallen into the water. —JS

# Comebacks

By Jody Hayes

I miss my swims. I could use the grounding, the all-over exhilaration, the immersion in nature, the new mind. Fellow swimmers, in their black phantom-like caps or their orange hot heads, dive into the foam with a whoop. After four months away from cold-water swims to take care of an urgent medical matter, I am skittish. As I walk into shallow water, it feels bitterly cold on this breezy day in January. Did I really used to swim in this? As I return to the cove, its tides and animals, what trials and triumphs will I encounter?

Reports in the media and stories in the locker room paint a new picture: Our formerly friendly sea lions have taken back part of San Francisco Bay. For years our aquatic companions, our benign fellow swimmers, now one or more of them are biting human swimmers, sending them to the hospital.

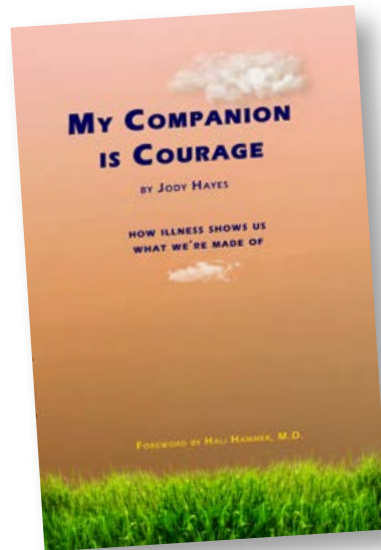
I have to see this for myself. As I enter the water, my partner Bill, already in the cove, shouts out, "It's ICE!" The bay has gotten colder and is now around 49 or 50 degrees F.

Once I join Bill, we look out toward the opening, and what do we see but a big, healthy sea lion. It might be friendly and it might not be, but given recent media reports of bites, I'm not taking chances. Bill stays in the area. I pray the sea lions leave my Bill alone.

I swim toward shore in a hurry. In so doing, I get caught up in a large wave that drags me. Now a diagonal wave drags me, then another. (I'd heard in the sauna that a major storm in Japan might affect our own bay, and now I see that it is.) Unlike calm, rolling waves lapping on shore, today we have high waves breaking hard on shore. I go under. I can neither stand nor swim.

Only a few inches away, a woman in a yellow bathing cap is somehow standing on solid ground. She shouts above the loud surf, "Put your arms around my waist." I am not too proud to accept help

and be a receiver. Now she walks backward toward shore with me glued to her front. In a few seconds we are back to hard sand and safety. When I can finally get to my feet, I see that I am scraped up. After thanking the kind stranger and heading for the sauna, I wonder, "Is this the end of my winter swims?"



I can't blame the sea lions for reclaiming their share of the cove, but this new habit has sent several swimmers to the hospital. I consider my first plunge this year a setback. There is probably a downside as well as an upside to any sport or passion.

A week later, I am motivated to try again. I miss the bay. This time, the water has warmed a couple of degrees and no longer feels like ice. I wear my black neoprene swim gloves as much for psychological advantage as for warmth. I ask Bill to swim just ahead of me so I don't collide with any swimmers as I do the backstroke. And I find that staying parallel to shore and close to the beach, the water is a little warmer than it is close to the opening, where I usually swim but which sea lions have now reclaimed. New and it works.

Oops—trouble ahead. Bill is a faster swimmer and gets away from me. Flood tide is so strong that I find that I am going backwards. But as I learned recently in a sauna conversation, if you can vary your speed as you swim—increasing it at will—you are tapping into your power and not just your endurance. So I "pour it on," digging deeper and faster and doing eggbeater kicks to move forward. I am singing to myself a Jimmy Cliff song, "You Can Get It If You Really Want." Pushing the intensity for about seven minutes allows me to catch up to Bill and energizes my workout.

Always experimenting, I enlist two other new helps today. I remember to do deep breathing as I do the backstroke, which warms my toes, a technique a club swimmer had suggested. Also I try using a mantra. The one I choose for today is, "Swim with me,

Jesus." Doing deep breathing while saying a mantra has calmed me throughout my healing journey. And it calms me today.

Feeling warmer, I stroke along, reaching my arm ahead of me, then feeling from fingertips to waist that delicious stretch. I turn my goggled head from side to side as I swim, sometimes underwater, feeling like a submarine. Joyful now that I can enjoy my sport again. My immersion is complete. As I reach shore, my friend Cecile calls out, "You've got that glow."

Adapted from *My Companion Is Courage* by **Jody Hayes**, published by Amazon/Kindle, April 2019.

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## About the Writer

**Jody Hayes** is an author, teacher, social worker, and swimmer at the South End Rowing Club. Her first book, *Smart Love*, sold over 60,000 copies in the United States and was translated into Spanish and Italian. (The Spanish language version was called *Amar Sin Cadenas. To Love Without Chains.*) *Smart Love* was published by Penguin in the United States.



Jody's second book is *My Companion Is Courage: How Illness Shows Us What We're Made Of*, published in March 2019 by Amazon. She began writing this book as soon as she heard the serious diagnosis—to help herself and others make progress along their healing path. Having taught anger management to men enabled her to advocate for herself in the often intimidating setting of healthcare.

Toward the end of her healing journey, her doctor encouraged her to get back in the water saying, "Swimming will change the trajectory of your healing. We human beings don't always do what we're capable of. If we're not pushing ourselves toward our passion at a certain point, we don't heal completely." One chapter in the book focuses on the author's comeback swims at the South End Rowing Club.

In her new book, Hayes speaks to anyone who faces a health challenge as she once did and aims to make their hospital stay one of dignity, humor and strength.

# Alcatraz: A Love Letter to SERC

*By Mimi Rosenheim*

Congratulations to the 600+ swimmers in this year's Alcatraz Invitational. It was an early, cold, and choppy swim but there were so many smiling faces at the finish.

I arrived at 4:45 a.m. and helped with body marking, collecting belongings, and soothing nerves. At the finish line I made it my mission to cheer for everyone. So many amazing people finished quickly despite the challenging conditions but my favorite part was cheering for the swimmers who finished at the 50+ minute mark. The look of satisfaction mixed with exhaustion and awe of what they accomplished makes being a part of the mighty South End Rowing Club and the event so special to me. We had old swimmers and young (11 years old!), and even a blind swimmer with his escort (now THAT is badass).



Mimi (left) and Mollie.  
Photo by Mimi Rosenheim

But the sweetest moment of the morning was when a woman crossed the finish line in tears of relief. I took one look at her and burst into tears myself. I seemed to be the only one so tried to stifle my emotions until I looked over at fellow swimmer **Mollie McKenna** who was also in tears. We had a nice cry together.

The families of the swimmers should also be acknowledged for what they go through to support those of us who push ourselves to do what some consider to be a tad insane. One spouse was in tears as her husband finished and could be overheard saying, "Now you'll never do that again, right?!" And I escorted two spouses to the club when their husbands didn't finish because they were boated in and deposited in the sauna. So, thank you to Larry and Walker who kissed me goodbye in the dark of morning to support those novice and experienced Alcatraz crossers.

# The First Channel Swimmer

By Mikael Rosén

Calais, August 25, 1875.

The crew of the ship belonging to the British Royal Mail was hanging over the rails singing “Rule Britannia.”

The object of their song, a man with a large mustache wearing a red-and-white-striped, torso-covering swimsuit in knitted wool, now tried to stand up at the edge of the water. Matthew Webb had just finished swimming across the English Channel in 21 hours and 45 minutes. His swim would have been 21 miles if he'd followed a straight line. Instead, the 27-year-old captain in the Royal Navy had swum over 39 miles, according to the notes of the boats accompanying him. Webb missed the goal by a half mile and was too tired to stand up. Still, victory was assured. Supported by a cousin and two Frenchmen, he was able to walk the last few meters to the beach of Calais.

Captain Webb, who had a hard time staying awake, got a comfortable room at the Hôtel de Paris. Before he went to sleep, he was given hot wine. A doctor examined him and registered jellyfish burns on his arms. He also noted that Webb had a normal body temperature, but that his heart rate was very low. When Webb woke up five hours later with a high fever, he drank a little bit more of the hot wine and was able to go back to sleep. When he woke up in the morning, he was in good shape, albeit a little bit sore.

Swimming across the English Channel launched a celebrity status larger than what was common at the time. Everybody wanted to meet Captain Webb: mayors, royalty, fans, and his aunt. People wrote songs about him, he became a cartoon character, and he was offered money to perform exhibition swims. The best means of exposure in the nineteenth century was matchboxes, which is how the text “Captain Webb Matches—British Made—First Channel Swimmer” came to adorn the boxes of match manufacturer Bryant & May's. Comedian Peter Sellers would later come across this box and use the stern face of Captain Webb as a model for his character Inspector Clouseau in the Pink Panther movies.

Paradoxically, Captain Webb's successful channel crossing caused a swim safety crisis. His achievement resulted in a drastic increase in drowning accidents as cocky men throughout England tried to swim across bodies of water in order to win bets or win the hearts of young women.

Matthew Webb didn't stop swimming after he defeated the channel dragon in 1875. His further achievements include staying afloat in a tank at the Horticultural Hall in Boston for a staggering 128 hours in the summer of 1879.

Even though he made his living swimming, he was still not guaranteed any income. He would, for example, swim 10-hour sessions in a 65-foot pool for six consecutive days where the entire prize sum of \$420 was awarded to the swimmer who completed the most laps.

Another major challenge was swimming across the border between the United States and Canada below Niagara Falls. Webb was no longer the fit young man he'd been when he'd crossed the English Channel eight years earlier, but he needed the money to support his growing family. The immensely rich railway companies of the time had offered a \$10,000 reward to the swimmer able to defy the currents and sharp cliffs at Whirlpool Rapids. In today's money, the reward was a bit over \$200,000.

On the afternoon of July 24, 1883, Matthew Webb was ready to transform his life and the life of his family. The stream he was going to cross was a little over 100 yards. Initially, everything appeared to be going according to plan, but after 10 minutes, the large audience could no longer see any mustache or red-and-white-striped swimsuit.

Matthew Webb's body was found four days later, face down in exactly the same position as he had been swimming. His teeth were clenched and his eyes were staring wide open with an expression of anxiety. One of his toes was missing a nail and a four-inch deep wound in his head led the doctors performing the autopsy to conclude that he'd hit his head on an underwater rock and most likely lost consciousness. Below the water surface, the great weight of the water had knocked out his neural system and prevented him from breathing and using his arms and legs. According to the definition of the time, the great canal swimmer had not drowned, but suffocated.

On Matthew Webb's tombstone, it says “Nothing Great Is Easy.”

Excerpted from *Open Water: The History and Technique of Swimming* by Mikael Rosén, published by Chronicle Books, June 2019.



# Women Rowers of 1895

By Bob Barde

In 1857, a San Francisco newspaper asked, "Should Ladies Be Taught to Swim?" (Answered, somewhat surprisingly, in the affirmative.) Over 30 years later, sportswriters (all male, of course) discovered that women might also be quite capable of rowing.

The rowing clubs didn't make it easy for them to do so, but there were fleeting moments when it seemed that women might be accepted into the "fraternity" of rowers. One such occurred in 1895, reported by the *San Francisco Call* on December 16:

## THE NEW BOAT-WOMAN:

A Ladies' Annex Is Now Attached to the Pioneer Rowing Club

## BLUE SWEATERS AND BLOOMERS

Ambition of the Long Bridge Grace Darlings to Beat Their Brothers at the Oar.

The old boatmen, oarsmen and waterfront men generally on Long Bridge yesterday were startled by seeing a jaunty four-oared barge manned, or rather womanned, by a quartet of young ladies, pull out from the Pioneer clubhouse and go slipping away over the choppy seas. They drew a long, sweeping stroke, feathered high and moved on the sliding seats in perfect time. The girl at the tiller-ropes trailed a straight wake behind the rudder and proved herself to be fully able to govern the stroke of her crew.

The fair oarswomen are: Miss Hattie Collopy, bow; Miss Rose Collopy, forwardwaist; Miss May Kenny, afterwaist; Miss Alice Brennan, stroke and captain; and Lillie Druyer, coxswain. The crew was organized by Miss Alice Brennan, the well-known champion lady Whitehall rower of the coast. She and Miss Kenny are the nieces of James Brennan of the Pioneer Club, who is the instructor of the ladies' annex. The Misses Collopy are sisters

of George and Richard Collopy, members of the Pioneer crack racing crew.

These Grace Darlings of Long Bridge have adopted a pretty uniform, composed of dark blue sweater, ornamented with the letter "P" on the breast, the neatest little blue bicycle caps imaginable and blue bloomers that are a vivid dream of beauty and a joy forever. Blue leggings and soft racing shoes complete this natty sailor costume.

The barge pulled well out in the bay, and after a sharp spin toward the Union Iron Works returned to the boathouse, coming alongside of the float in the most graceful style.

"I don't think we yet possess the ambition," said Miss Alice Brennan, after stepping ashore, "to snatch any laurels from our brother-rowers,

but there is no telling. The new woman will get to the front even in her boat." And the young lady, her cheeks aglow with the exercise, looked a determination to get her four-oared barge just into that position.

"You see we girls have to work all week and have no time to practice except Sundays. We are all fairly

expert on the wheel, but I believe the boat is better exercise than the bicycle. The oar gives play to all the muscles of the body, while a wheel does not, notwithstanding the loud assertions of the cyclery man. The girls like the exercise."

The young ladies have been made honorary members of the Pioneer Boat Club, and their presence in the boathouse is calculated to boom rowing in that organization. Steps have been taken to form a ladies' annex in the other clubs, and when the rowing season opens visitors along the water front will see a number of boats pulled by the girl crews.

This article is an excerpt from the book *South End: Sport and Community at the Dock of the Bay*, by

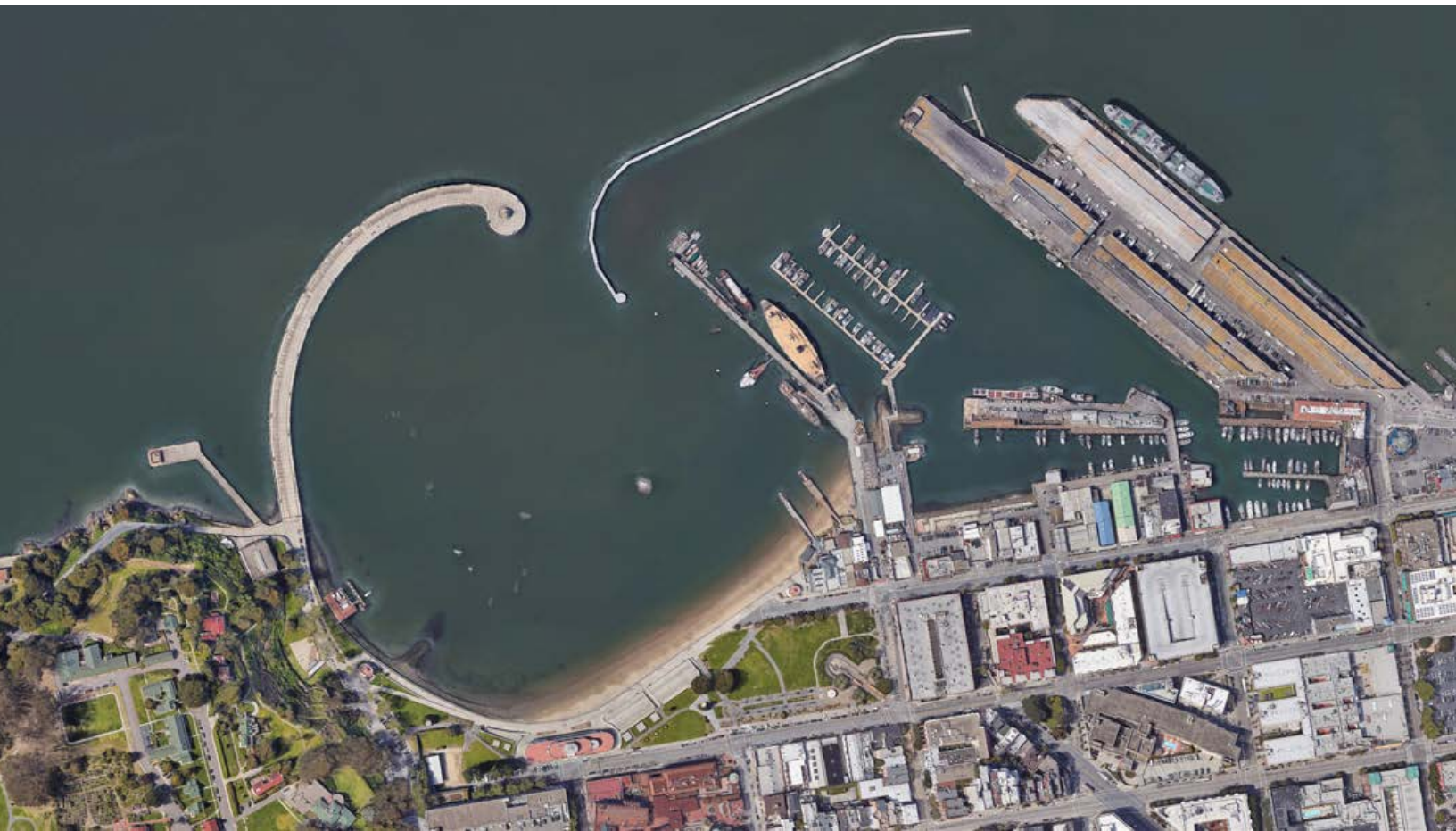
Bob Barde and Pat Cunneen.



Caption for Figure 7.4: "The Ladies' Annex of the Pioneer Rowing Club as They Appeared on the Bay," *San Francisco Call*, December 16, 1895



South End Rowing Club  
500 Jefferson St.  
San Francisco, CA 94109



## **Our Clubs, Our Park, Our Pier!**

Intrepid athletes from the Dolphin and South End Rowing Clubs were instrumental in establishing Aquatic Park more than 100 years ago. Today, the clubs need to be instrumental in the park's next chapter.

Join us for a look to the past and a view to the future. What's the plan for Muni Pier? Aquatic Park? Hear from Aquatic Park/NPS Superintendent Dave Brouillette, SF Supervisor **Catherine Stefani** (TBC), **Jeff Gunderson**, and other friends.

**Wednesday, Oct 23 @ 7 p.m. at the Dolphin Club**