

Memoir of an age-group triathlete

By Don McIntosh

I cringed as I anticipated the bang of the cannon. Before I knew it, I had started to swim. I don't even remember hearing the cannon.

It was August 27, 2006 and I was starting Ironman Canada. Ironman Canada is a long distance triathlon held in Penticton, BC, Canada every year since 1983. It is one of the Ironman series of races around the world that began in Hawaii in 1978 as the result of a debate about who was fitter – swimmers, bicyclists, or runners. The race is a 2.4 mile (3.8 km.) swim, a 112 mile (180 km.) bike ride and a 26.2 mile (42.2 km.) marathon run. Fifteen men participated in the first race and 12 finished it. Today, there are 22 official Ironman races around the world with more than 40,000 participants every year. Each year, many of the races are full to capacity as soon as they are announced. To get into Ironman Canada, it is necessary to line up the day after the race to get into the following year's event. It sells out that day.

Triathlon is now a sport which is recognized worldwide and its Olympic debut was in Sydney, Australia in 2000 (a Canadian, Simon Whitfield, was the gold medalist). The Olympic distance is about one-quarter the distance of the Ironman: 1.5 km. swim, 40 km. bike, 10 km. run. It was called the Olympic distance much earlier than 2000 because it had long been the objective of the International Triathlon Union (ITU) to have that distance accepted as the Olympic event. Each sport takes its distance from existing events already on the Olympic programme (1500 m. swim, 40 km. road cycling race & 10,000 m. run). It has been the distance for the ITU World Championships and most national championships since about 1990. The Ironman races are in another category and most of them are connected to the World Triathlon Corporation (WTC) which runs the Hawaii Ironman -- technically the Ironman World Championship. WTC administers the Ironman brand and licenses many of the other Ironman races around the world. Non-licensed races at this distance are not allowed to call themselves "Ironman" races. They also organize a series of half Ironman races (dubbed 70.3 for the total number of miles involved).

Ever since I was an overweight teenager, I have tried to remain active. I was not involved much in sports in my youth. In high school, my sports were golf and curling – not exactly strenuous. Between the ages of 14 and 16, I lost 40 pounds and gained four inches in height. I have been able to swim as long as I can remember and when I was in university (1960-64), I did some more swimming, began the Royal Canadian Air Force 5BX exercise program and did a little running and cycling during the summer months. During graduate work in the US, I got little exercise other than the 5BX routine which had become a daily regimen and remains so today. I estimate that I have done something like 400,000 push-ups over the years.

In 1972, I found myself at Memorial University of Newfoundland in St. John's, Nfld. Feeling the need for some exercise, I went to the university pool. The first time it just about killed me to swim four lengths of the pool. I kept at it twice a day that week and, by the end of the week, I was swimming 1000 metres. It was all about the breathing and rhythm.

The following year I worked at the University of Guelph and continued to swim at the pool regularly. In 1985, my first wife and I separated and, feeling the need for exercise and a social connection, I joined a Masters swimming group at a local pool. In many sports, Masters usually refers to people over 40 who want to remain active.

In swimming it can apply to any age. But, of course, by this time I was over 40. I entered a few Masters swimming meets for fun and then participated at the first World Masters Swimming Championships in Tokyo in 1986 with a group of people from Guelph. 3400 people participated in this event. I didn't exactly set any records but I came back inspired and motivated to improve.

My swimming never did get much faster but I have been able to maintain pretty much the same speed for 20 years now. I took up cross-training – adding running and bicycling. I even bought a half-decent bicycle and began to think about triathlons.

My First Triathlon

I first participated in a triathlon in 1987 at the age of 45. Like so many others, I had seen the famous 1982 Julie Moss crawl across the finish line on ABC's Wide World of Sports coverage of the Hawaii Ironman. That is said to be the defining moment for triathlon.

Triathletes remember their first triathlons fondly— the excitement, the nervousness, the fear. After more than 100 triathlons, I still remember mine vividly. It was a 1 km. swim, 40 km. bike and 10 km. run in July, 1987 at a park in Waterloo, Ontario. I arrived at the site full of anticipation. Unschooled in the art of transition, I had planned to change completely between each part of the event. At the Ironman, they provide a tent for changing. When I discovered that there was no tent, I asked one of the volunteers what I should do. She said just to go ahead and change—no one would care.

After the swim in a muddy pond (this was before the days of wetsuits and aerobars), I exited from the water to the transition area. I noticed another athlete stripping down and heard a spectator say, "Now there is a real triathlete." So I figured I was OK. In the crowd who would notice anyway? Now there is a rule against nudity. Does anyone really care?

I hopped on my bike and headed out on the course. Early in the course was a 90-degree turn in the road. As I approached it, I heard a volunteer say, "Don't go on the grass." Not knowing exactly what that meant I went around the corner too quickly and found myself on the grass. At first I thought, "This doesn't seem too bad." Then I looked up and discovered a ditch directly ahead of me. I rode straight into the ditch and went head over heels into the mud. Lying there and momentarily wondering what I should do, a man came up to me and said, "I am a doctor. Lie still. I am going to examine you to see if your neck is broken." "That's all I need." I thought. After a few minutes of discussion, we mutually decided I was probably OK. He put the chain back on my bike (should I have been disqualified for that?) and I headed out on the course. After that the 40 km. ride was slow but uneventful. I did realize, however, that I had sprained my ankle coming out of the toe clips (remember them) so I wasn't sure I would be able to run.

As I arrived back at the transition area, the leaders of the race were finishing the run right next to the bike racks. Spectators were cheering them on and the transition area was empty. I was going to have to change again in full view of everyone. I thought, "What the hell." I changed and started the run hobbling on my sprained ankle. After about one km., I was still moving so I decided to keep going. Some volunteers said to me, "What happened to you?" I didn't know what they were talking about until after the race. When I had fallen off my bike, the bridge of my glasses had cut me across my nose. The right hand side of my face was covered with mud and blood.

I managed to finish the race in less than three hours, which was my goal. Afterwards I headed off to the hospital to have my neck X-rayed to see if it was cracked—it wasn't. Why have I gone back more than 100 times to do this again? Only another triathlete knows for sure.

The night before that first race I purchased one of the new Timex Triathlon watches to keep track of my times. It took me four races before I remembered to start it at the beginning. For a time after that, I kept track of my times. Now I just don't bother.

I did races regularly after that – typically about five per year around Ontario. Graham Fraser (now the owner of North America Sports that operates Ironman Canada and several US races) put on a series of races that were very well organized. They even had them at Guelph Lake. I could do two races a year just a short drive from home.

In the spring of 1992, I was riding my bike along an unfamiliar road heading downhill at about 50 kph when I saw a sharply angled railway track ahead of me. My front wheel caught in the track and I flew off my bike. I picked myself up and thought I was OK. Thank God for bicycle helmets. A kind driver stopped and asked if I needed help. After a moment's consideration, I accepted his offer of a ride and he drove me home. I had broken my collarbone. That put a hitch in my triathlon participation that year.

Unfortunately that was the year that the Triathlon World Championships were held in Muskoka, Ontario. Unable to participate in the citizens' wave, I was a spectator. I had the opportunity to watch triathlon legends like Simon Lessing who won the race, Brad Kearns, Thomas Hellreigel, Mike Pigg, and Canadian Mark Bates. Spencer Smith and Cameron Brown were juniors at that race! Among the women, Michellie Jones won her first world championship there and then in 2006 won the Hawaii Ironman World Championships – 14 years later. Canadian hall-of-famer Joanne Ritchie was second. Karen Smyers and Canadian Heather Fuhr competed and both have since won the Hawaii Ironman race.

I continued to participate regularly in triathlons from 1993 to 1996. In 1996 I had my best times and had a chance to be in the Canadian Championships in Welland, Ontario. There I was able to participate in a race with people like Mark Bates and Peter Reid who finished first and third. Peter Reid subsequently became a three-time World Champion Ironman). Even Simon Whitfield was in that race as a junior and finished about fifth. I believe that Lori Bowden (two-time World Champion Ironman) also competed in that race but, sadly, I have not been able to locate the official results. Although I finished near the bottom of my age group, I enjoyed the event and had a good result for me including one of my best run times. One of the beauties

of triathlon is that you can participate in the same event with people of far superior abilities and be inspired by and learn from them.

In 1997, I moved west to British Columbia. Because it was a major move that year, I participated in just one triathlon at Locarno Beach. That meant my first ocean swim. The swim was cold but a wetsuit helped. Then 55 and at the beginning of a new five-year age group, I was first in my age group because there was just one other person in it. Another of the beauties of triathlon is that if you persevere until you get older, you increase your chances to do well in your age group no matter how fast you are. I often say that, at my age, it isn't how fast I go, but who else shows up.

The following year I learned of a very sad event. On New Year's Eve 1997, a lawyer in Squamish, BC named Bob McIntosh who was also a prominent triathlete was brutally murdered at a party. Although I did not know him nor am I related to him, I immediately connected with his story. In 1998, the Squamish Triathlon made its debut as a memorial to Bob. I have participated in every one of the Squamish Triathlons since - from 1998 to 2008 - sometimes finishing second or third in my age group (in 2008 I finally finished first in my age group because I was the only one in it. In 2007, Peter Reid won the race. Even though he has now retired from professional racing, he still keeps active in the triathlon lifestyle. I spoke to him there and he was kind enough to correct my recollection of the 1996 Canadian Championships in Welland, Ontario. I thought that he had won the race but he remembered that he was third and that Mark Bates won. He also recalled that Simon Whitfield was in the race and finished about fifth. I hadn't remembered that.

As a member of Triathlon BC, I have participated in their provincial series and have finished it several times, sometimes even placing in the top three in my age group. From 1997 to 2001 I worked at BC TEL/TELUS in Burnaby, BC and commuted to my office by bike 20 km. each way. I rode a hybrid bike with fenders so I could ride in almost any weather. The only things that stopped me were snow, ice and heavy rainfall. That was a major part of my bike training and allowed me to increase my bike mileage to over 10,000 km per year and save on gas and pollution as well. My bike, which had been a weakness for me, became a strength.

Some of my more memorable triathlons were on Vancouver Island. In 2002 and 2003, I participated in the Nike International (ITU) triathlons in Victoria, BC. In 2002, Hunter Kemper from the US won and Canadian Simon Whitfield, the inaugural gold medalist in the 2000 Olympic triathlon in Sydney was second. The following year Simon won the race. The elite athletes in those races were a who's who of Olympic distance triathlons.

In August of 2002, I ferried to Vancouver Island once again to race in the Self-Transcendence Triathlon. We were returning from a wedding in Seattle and traveled overnight to Nanaimo where my son, Kyle, was racing in a triathlon in the BC Summer Games. He was just 12 at the time and was racing against 15 year olds and did quite well. The following day, I did my race. Standing on the beach at Elk Lake waiting for the start, the strap on my swim goggles snapped and the goggles flew off. I ran back to the transition area to get my spare pair of goggles and the strap on them broke as well. I had to swim without goggles. It was lucky that it was a fresh water lake.

The first year I did the Vancouver Triathlon (2002), it was raining and cold. The bike ride is four times around Stanley Park. At the end of the first loop, I had a flat tire.

First, I ran back to the transition area to get a jacket because I was cold. When I tried fixing the flat tire, I couldn't inflate the first tube so I had to use the second one (I always carry two). I managed to get the second one to work and continued on my way. Because of the rain, I had to remove my glasses to see what I was doing. I left them on the ground. I continued on but couldn't see very well. Near the end of the last loop, my tire went flat again. With no other tubes, I continued on the flat tire for the last two or three kilometres. I did finish the race and I did find my glasses. Some races are more eventful than others.

Being a long-term triathlete is not without its risks and some injury is almost inevitable – like my bike crash in 1992. In 2002, I developed a foot problem. I had some pain in the centre of my instep. Two doctors said it was either arthritis or a stress fracture. After a period of no running, it appeared to be arthritis. The sports specialist suggested an orthotic and glucosamine which seemed to fix me up and I was able to return to running. But I think the time off resulted in a general slowing of my running. It now takes me about 10 minutes longer to run a 10k than it did in 1996. Of course, some of that can be attributed to age although my swimming is about the same and my biking is better than in 1996.

In the middle of the season in 2005, I experienced a problem with my right leg. My calf became very sore after running a short distance. My doctor suggested not running for six weeks. That wasn't really an option. At the advice of a fellow Ironman participant, I consulted Rob Neilsen, a chiropractor and fellow triathlete in Surrey, BC who practises Active Release Therapy (ART). This technique applies pressure to injured tissue to break up the scar tissue. I was back to running with no problems after two weeks.

I have a nemesis in my age group named Brian Parkinson who is just months younger than I am. He typically beats me by 20 minutes in an Olympic distance triathlon so when we are in the same race together I know that I can't place better than second. In 2005, he and I were the only two competitors in our age group at the North Shore Triathlon in North Vancouver. It is a sprint distance triathlon (about half the distances of the Olympic triathlon) held on the May holiday every year. During the race, Brian unfortunately had a flat tire on his bike and had to go back to his car in order to fix it. That meant I placed first in my age group (although not by much). As it happened, that was a qualifying race for the BC provincial team that would participate in the Canadian Triathlon Championships – and I got to go. The championships were in Kelowna, BC so they were accessible. If they had been any further away, I probably would not have gone because of the cost involved. I traveled to Kelowna for the race and finished 15th out of 22. Not a great record but good enough to qualify for the right to represent Canada at the World Championships which were in Hawaii that year. I opted not to go because of the cost. Simon Whitfield and Samantha McGlone won the overall pro races.

In 1999, I had travelled to Penticton to watch the Ironman Canada race to see if I might get inspired. Even watching Lori Bowden win the race, I was more intimidated than inspired.

Because Kelowna is near Penticton and the race was just a week before Ironman, I decided to camp near Penticton for the week, ride the bike course and watch the race to see how I felt about signing up for the 2006 Ironman. I rode the bike course in short segments of out and back stages covering about 70 to 80 km. per day. I thought, "This isn't exactly easy but it is doable." During race day, I watched from

several perspectives. I rode my bike to points along the bike course and watched at the turn around for the run. I saw the leaders finishing after less than 9 hours. Chris Lieto won and Simon Lessing whom I had seen win the 1992 ITU World Championships in Huntsville was fourth. I watched people get off their bikes after 9 hours (4 pm) which is about when I would expect to be finishing the bike. Many of them were walking. I thought, "There is no shame in walking." I watched people finishing the race at around 9 pm and saw the joy and satisfaction in their faces and the incredible support they were getting from enthusiastic spectators and volunteers. I found myself getting in line the next morning with 2000 other people to sign up for the 2006 event. My conversations in line were very helpful. One person recommended the chiropractor for the leg problem I was having. The advice you get varies as widely as the people who give it. One recommendation I thought made sense was to walk the aid stations and hills and try to run as much of the rest as you could.

Earlier in my triathlon career, I often joked that I wasn't old enough for Ironman yet. I guess, at the age of 63, I ran out of that excuse.

At the registration tent, I paid my \$575 to sign up. This seems like a lot but, in comparison to the cost of equipment, the training time, etc., it amounts to very little. I probably spent that much on shoes in the year between sign-up and the event. I had been training for 19 years for this. A BC fitness magazine called "Impact" whimsically estimated a cost for doing an Ironman at \$14,000. That is a conservative estimate. I know people who spend that much just on their bicycles.

My Ironman training consisted of swimming three times a week with my masters group at Hyde Creek Pool in Port Coquitlam and running three or four times a week, extending my distances from 10 km. to 15 km. then to 20 and 30 km. I rode my bike almost every day when the weather allowed and extended my rides from two hours up to six hours. I read some books on training programs and followed their general guidelines but did not follow a rigorous program. I went with how I felt each day.

I wanted to do a half Ironman for the training and chose to enter a new one held in Maple Ridge. The swim turned out to be a bit short but it generally went without a hitch and I managed to complete it without any great difficulty. The following week I did the Squamish triathlon (tradition would not allow me to miss it) without any problems. Things were going quite well.

I did notice during the half Ironman run that the balls of my feet began to burn after about 10 km. Although I did tough it out, I worried about how this would affect my Ironman. I tried several different pairs of shoes and none of them really seemed to help. A new pair of orthotics did not seem to make much difference either. My estimated times were 1:25 to 1:30 for the swim and seven hours for the bike ride. Counting the transition times, I figured that, if I finished the bike after 9 hours (4 pm), I still had eight hours left to walk the marathon before the midnight cut-off time. I estimated my best time for the marathon to be five hours which would allow me to finish the entire event in 14 hours. I would be ecstatic about that time. I would feel very good about finishing in 15 hours and satisfied to complete it in anything less than the 17 hour limit.

Two things worried me most – nutrition and the long run after all the other activity. Some of the best advice I received about nutrition was to train using the nutrition

you planned to use in the race. I trained with a mixture of gels and energy bars – Power Bars and Clif Bars. I felt not long before the race that I could cope with the nutrition but the run continued to be a concern because of the problem with my feet.

Greg Timewell is the proprietor of Tri-Action Sports in Port Moody, BC. He has been a competitive triathlete in many local and international events. I believe that he could have been a champion triathlete if he had chosen that route. He just loves bicycles and has a faithful clientele of triathletes in Greater Vancouver. In 1993, I had purchased my first really good bicycle – a Trek 2100 with aerobars. I rode it until 1998 (a total of perhaps 25,000 km) when I began noticing a 'clunking' sound as I went over bumps. I took it to Greg who diagnosed the problem as a separation between the seat tube and the bottom bracket. That model was made of carbon fibre tubes with aluminum lugs and the bonding had broken at the bottom bracket. Trek not only made good with their lifetime guarantee but replaced the frame with a full carbon fibre 5200 frame complete with the US Postal Service decals. It was the frame that Lance Armstrong rode in his first Tour de France victory. Of course, with the new frame, I had to update all the components as well which Greg did with his usual expertise. I happily rode and raced that bike for the next five years. I never left the bike out of my sight except when it was locked in the garage but one day I returned from a ride and removed the wheels in order to clean the bike. I left it sitting in the garage with the door open and went inside for a few minutes to get some cleaning rags. When I came out, the bike was gone. Apparently some thieves had cruised into our gated town house community looking for something to steal and spotted my bike sitting there. The fact that the wheels were off made it easier for them to pick it up and throw it into their trunk. A neighbour got the licence plate number but the police report showed it to be a stolen vehicle. I never saw the bike again. Fortunately, I had the bike insured and was able to replace it. Although Greg is not a Trek dealer, I preferred to deal with him so I purchased a new Cervélo P2K from him. Cervélo is a Canadian company with a growing reputation for producing quality, state-of-the-art triathlon bikes. Although this is an aluminum frame bike, it fits very well and is very comfortable for long rides. It is my first true triathlon bike and is the bike that I rode in the Ironman race. Greg's commitment to quality, his gentle reminders about bike maintenance and his regular training tips keep me going back to him as a dealer and friend. Larger companies could learn a lot from Greg about customer service.

Sometime before the Ironman race, I developed a sore bum. It was a literal pain in the butt. It didn't seem to bother me on the bike which was certainly a good thing, swimming made it feel better and running didn't bother me so I continued to train. Three or four weeks before the race I went to see my doctor about it. He thought it was just the recurrence of an old problem and gave me some ointment. My son was competing in the BC provincial swimming championships in Kamloops two weeks prior to the race. I went to a clinic in Kamloops and the doctor there diagnosed my problem as hemorrhoids. I was relieved to think that it was treatable. I was in Penticton the week prior to the race and I went to another clinic there. The doctor there agreed it was hemorrhoids but I was concerned about the amount of pain I was experiencing by this time so the doctor prescribed some Tylenol 3. Right up until the morning of the race, I was not sure that I would be able to do it. I took a Tylenol 3 in the middle of the night before the race and took some extras with me. I didn't need them. Miraculously, I got through the entire event without any pain. The next day it was back and later that week was diagnosed as a rectal abscess which required draining and surgery to repair an anal fistula. The surgery was not scheduled until January 2007. I did not ride my bike after the race until the next

April. In January, 2007 I had my surgery and it was apparently successful. I had maintained a minimal level of fitness by going for long walks. By April, 2007, I was back to running, swimming and biking.

Ironman Canada 2006

At 7 am the water was calm and the day clear and warm. It was nice to start with good weather but it might get hot later. The race traditionally begins with a blast from a cannon. It was rather scary to think about being one of 2,400 people starting the swim at once. The swim turned out to be uneventful. I thought I was swimming rather slowly and I seemed to go off course a few times. I tried counting the buoys. The course was well marked with large, orange Schwimmenflugel buoys (invented by a German industrialist after his son drowned). The first one was 600 metres from shore and then they were placed at 150-metre intervals. The buoys were thoughtfully numbered. I tried to keep track in order to pace myself but, under the circumstances, my mind wasn't capable of the necessary higher mathematics. Serendipitously there was a tall construction crane in the town just beyond the swim finish so it was easy to sight the final stretch of the swim. I was pleasantly surprised when I saw my time was just under one hour and 25 minutes. It was great to have volunteers to pull off my wetsuit. This isn't done in shorter races and I always struggle with it. I took my time in transition. As a non-competitive participant, I have long viewed it as important rest time. I felt it was important to get some nutrition so I gobbled down a Clif Bar while I changed.

The first part of the bike course is flat with only one significant climb in the first 50 km. but I wished that I hadn't felt the need to wolf down that Clif Bar. I was feeling a bit uncomfortable. Luckily my uncertain stomach went away. At 67 km. the route turns north at Osoyoos and heads north up the Richter Pass – a 6% climb for 11 km. I needed to pee and I knew there were Port-a-Potties at the aid stations and there must be an aid station before the climb. Not seeing one, I dismounted and headed off the road where there was a building that I could pee behind. A spectator who understood exactly what I was doing because he had seen others do it warned me not to take my bike with me because I might pick up something that would give me a flat tire. He held my bike while I went behind the building to pee. Of course, just up the road was an aid station and by the time I got there I had a flat tire. When I was changing the tire, I discovered that what had caused the flat was a tiny thorn that had worked its way into my tire. A volunteer at the aid station explained that these were common in the area. Now I understood what the first spectator was talking about but it was too late. The volunteers were very helpful and found a good pump for me to use to re-inflate my tire which was far better than using the frame pump on my bike.

Shortly after I resumed my climb up the pass, I passed a cyclist with the name "Buder" on her race number tag. I am sure this was Sister Madonna Buder who is a 76 year old nun from Spokane, Washington who has been doing Ironman triathlons including Ironman Canada and Hawaii for many years. She usually wins her age group. Of course, now she is the only one in it. I thought to myself, "She is doing well." Unfortunately, I learned later that she did not manage to finish the race. Still she was back at the Hawaii race and she did manage to finish there about one minute before the midnight cut-off time. She is an inspiration to us all.

The remainder of the bike ride was quite smooth. I stopped a few times to pee and to eat but the infamous climb up to Yellow Lake (which is actually green) did not

seem so bad. The wind had increased by this time but, fortunately, it was from the south and helping. The last 20 km. past Yellow Lake is downhill and it was great fun flying down the hills at 60 kph with the wind pushing.

When I arrived at the transition area, I was pleasantly surprised to see that my time so far was 8:45. That meant that I had completed the bike ride in my target time of seven hours in spite of my flat tire and numerous stops. Again it was great to have the volunteers helping with my bike and sending me on my way. The spirit and the teamwork of the volunteers are amazing.

It was another gentle transition but I was actually feeling quite good as I began the run portion. I was able to run for several kilometres at the beginning which felt good. Early in the run, I watched Belinda Granger (who won the women's competition) running toward the finish not far ahead of Lisa Bentley (who was second). Lisa was the favourite in the race and made up a good deal of time on Belinda on the run but she must have had a problem on the bike.

Eventually, however, my feet began to bother me. Otherwise I felt quite capable of keeping going. I changed my socks and that seemed to help. I developed a pattern of going 3 or 4 km., stopping, taking my shoes off, massaging my feet for a minute or two and then I was OK for 3 or 4 more km. The idea of walking the aid stations and the hills turned into more walking than I would have liked. I was not the only one walking – most people were so it came back to me that, "There is no shame in walking." The plus of walking is getting to talk to people. I walked and struck up conversations with people from all over the world - people of all ages, body types and occupations who had interesting stories of their own to tell. Some were first timers like me and others were veterans. When I stopped to massage my feet, they would continue on, so when I resumed my trek, I would connect with someone new. It is wonderful to meet such people with whom you share a common goal. The first part of the run is quite flat but near the turnaround there are three significant hills which you run twice. It was one of the few times that I looked forward to hills because it was an excuse to walk. My friend Evan Fagan and my wife met me at the turnaround and cheered me on. Evan (who finished the race last year) said, "There are 800 people still behind you."

The last person I walked with was Richard Brass, a fit 54 year-old from Seattle. We both agreed that if we finished in under 15 hours, that would be just fine. Toward the end, I was feeling quite good (Did that mean that I probably hadn't put out enough effort? Probably.) so I thought I could run the last stretch. He said that he didn't know if his stomach would let him do that. I stopped once more to massage my feet and then ran to the finish. I expected to catch him along the way but I didn't see him. Later I noticed that he finished just seconds ahead of me – his stomach must have let him run the last stretch. All the cheering spectators and volunteers help everyone through the last two kilometres. I finished in 14 hours, 41 minutes and 44 seconds. Considering my flat tire and my 15 minute transitions, I was quite satisfied with that. I did feel that if my feet hadn't been bothering me, I might have been as much as an hour faster. Other than my feet, I felt good most of the day. As I finished, a young female volunteer came up to me to make sure I was OK. She said that I was her best friend for the next few minutes. She made sure that I was feeling OK and that I got my picture taken. She brought me something to eat and helped me get to the massage tent. God bless the volunteers.

I want to thank all the people who helped me along the way. My wife Pegi Furanna-McIntosh and son Kyle have continued to support me in spite of my insanity and Kyle actually competed in some youth triathlons when he was younger. Joe Hewitt and Lee Heffren were Guelph masters swimmers and triathletes. Joe and Lee both did Ironman Canada years ago and Lee was still doing it this year. Fred Ramprashad, Alan Watson, Bob Balahura, Jim Wilton, Trev Dickinson, Peter Dobos, Julie Bauer and Mike and Mary Cocivera were running buddies from Guelph. Rob Daniel, Evan Fagan, and Brian Parkinson (my nemesis) are BC competitors in my age group. My swim coaches were Tim Doherty in Guelph, Lauren Street and Yue-Ching Cheng in Port Coquitlam. And then, of course there are the thousands of fellow competitors.

Triathlon is one of the few sports in which someone like me (of a certain age and little natural ability) can participate in the same event with world champions rather than just watch. Triathletes are competitive but they are always friendly and supportive of competitors and fellow athletes – they are like a family. I am glad that now my surgery is over I am able to resume this madness.

In 2007, having recovered from my anal surgery, I did several triathlons including three Olympic distance races - the 10th anniversary of the Squamish Triathlon, the Crescent Beach Triathlon with its ocean swim and challenging bike course, and the Vancouver Triathlon at Stanley Park on Labour Day.

I returned to Penticton to watch Ironman Canada once more and to see if I was brave enough to sign up again. I rode the bike course the day before the race. It was rather windy and I thought it was tougher than last year. I watched the race. Kieran Doe – an upstart Kiwi – led the entire race and this time Lisa Bentley won it (she said later that it was only because Belinda Granger wasn't there). The next morning I signed up again.

In 2008, I did my usual line-up of warm-up races including the North Short Sprint Triathlon for the 11th year in a row. Surprisingly I had my best result in four years. I also competed at the Squamish Triathlon for the 11th year (I have done all of them so far). I won my age group for the first time as Squamish but that was because I was the only one in it. Unfortunately, the Crescent Beach triathlon was cancelled because of lack of registration

As I had done in 2006, I participated in the Maple Ridge half-ironman race (called Iron Mountain) as preparation. During the run, I began chatting with a young woman who was doing one of her first races. After a while, she indicated that I should go ahead. I finished the race in just over six hours which I was satisfied with. However, the problem with my sore feet had returned. I subsequently got new orthotics and chiropractic (ART) treatments for my feet.

And suddenly there I was back in Penticton. My goal was to try to reduce my time by about 40 minutes and finish in 14 hours. I would reduce my transitions by five to ten minutes each and not have a flat tire on the bike. That could save as much as thirty minutes. I hoped my run would also be faster.

A few days before the race, the water in Okanagan Lake was very cold but by race day it had warmed up. Peter Fargey (proprietor of Tri3Sports in Port Moody) suggested swimming up the middle in order to benefit from the drafting effect rather than swimming wide to avoid the crowd. I tried that and it worked. I was frequently in the middle of a group and sometimes seemed to be barely swimming at all but my

swim time was 1:18 – seven minutes faster than two years before. My transition was more efficient this time and I was off on my bike ahead of schedule.

The bike leg was without incident – no flat tires or nasty surprises. The wind was from the south so it was against us during the section to Osoyoos but it was not a strong wind. Once we turned around, it was behind us and helped push us home. I was out on the run at about 3:30 pm – 30 minutes ahead of schedule and feeling good. My feet had begun to bother me toward the latter part of the bike and something made me change my socks to thinner ones at the transition. The early part of the run felt fine but I was worried about my feet. About 10 km. into the run, I was chatting with some people and a young woman said, “I know you. We ran together at the Maple Ridge Half-Ironman race.” Sure enough, it was Shelley Griffith whom I had met there. She and I ran the entire rest of the race together. We kept each other going and finished together. Thanks Shelley. Our ages were marked on the backs of our legs and one woman remarked that it was interesting to see 22 and 66 running together. We tried to recruit a 44 and 55 but they were not interested. My feet never bothered me and, while there was a certain amount of walking up hills and through aid stations, we kept going. We finished in 13 hours and 25 minutes – one hour and 15 minutes faster than in 2006. I was third in my age group – much better than I had hoped for.

The next day, people pointed out that being third in my age group would put me on the podium and that I should attend the awards ceremony that evening. I decided to delay my return for a day in order to do that.

It also might make me eligible to go to the World Championships in Hawaii. It is necessary to qualify for Hawaii and Ironman Canada is a qualifying event. There are a total of 70 spots which are allocated according to the number of people in each age group. There was just one spot available for my age group (65-69). There is a process the day after the race called rolldown in which the final assignments are made. I checked and discovered that the man who won my age group (Milos Kostic) had completed the race in 11 hours and 15 minutes – more than two hours ahead of me. But he did not need the qualifying spot because he had already qualified in Hawaii in 2007 by winning the age group there. The man who finished second was not interested so the opportunity came to me. Even though I had avidly followed the Ironman Hawaii race since 1982, this was something that I had never dreamed would be possible and I turned it down. It was partly the cost, the idea of going alone to Hawaii, the fact that I was feeling a bit tired and sore after the race and the thought of six more weeks of training was not exciting, but most of all it was just that I wasn't mentally prepared for it.

Thinking that I could still improve my time for the race and, with any luck, get another chance to go to Hawaii, I signed up for Ironman Canada in 2009. I think I need help.

I watched the coverage of the 2008 Hawaii race on the Internet. Milos Kostic won my age group again in a record time. That meant that once again he did not need to qualify. The man who was second in the age group did not sign up for 2009 so I figured that my chances were not too bad.

I continued to train on a regular basis. My goal was to shorten my transition times and my run time a little by reducing the amount of time I spent walking. I hoped to

finish in 13 hours and 15 minutes. I thought that would give me a reasonable chance.

In 2009, I entered several races as usual. The UBC triathlon in March (Sprint distance) went fairly well. I was second in my age group (out of three) because my nemesis, Brian Parkinson, was there. He has always beaten me except when he had an accident or a flat tire.

I signed up for the Delta triathlon which I have done several times (one year they wouldn't let me race because we couldn't find my name on the registration list – it turned out that I had put my last name where my first name should have gone and vice versa). This year I thought the race was on Sunday but it was on Saturday. I checked the website for times after the race had started. Not an auspicious beginning.

My next race was my 12th North Shore Triathlon in a row on the holiday in May. Of course, Brian Parkinson was there too and he beat me but so did Greg Sandkuhl from Whistler. New to the age group Greg had been at other races and I knew he was very fast. I asked him if he planned to do Ironman Canada and he said that he wasn't sure – it depended on whether he qualified. If he signed up for Ironman Canada and wanted to go to Hawaii, I was toast.

In June, I decided to sign up for the Iron Mountain Triathlon in Maple Ridge. Last year this was a half Ironman distance but this year it had been changed to an Olympic distance. I was first in my age group because I was the only one in it.

In July, I did the Squamish Triathlon for the 12th time. Of course, I had to do this race – it is now a tradition. There were two of us in my age group and I finished first.

One week later I did the Vancouver International Triathlon – a half Ironman distance race with the swim in English Bay off Jericho Beach, the bike was four loops around UBC with a significant hill on each loop and a nice flat run mostly along the beaches. I had some new shoes which were clearly not a good choice because my feet hurt but I finished and was first in my age group because I was the only one. Brian Parkinson was there but he did the Sprint distance.

That was my last race before Ironman Canada. For the next six weeks I focused on training for the main event. I actually tried a few open water swims in Sasamat and Bunzen lakes – the first time I had ever done any open water training. I gradually increased the distance of my run and bike rides up to 30 km. runs and 150 km. bike rides.

I discovered that Greg Sandkuhl had won the Canadian Long Course Championships at the Desert Half Ironman race in Osoyoos, BC and qualified for Ironman Canada. He signed up for Ironman Canada. This was not good news for me. And I also noticed that there were some other new people in the race that I didn't know.

The day arrived. There was no cannon this year for some reason but they still had the bagpipes. Some people can't stand bagpipes but they seem to stir my Scottish blood and Steve King was back at the finish line.

[Steve](#) is an amazing man – an Ironman and Ultraman triathlete himself, he announces at many of the races in BC including the Vancouver Marathon, the Vancouver Sun Run, the North Shore Triathlon and many others. He has an amazing research system (with the help of his wife, North Shore Triathlon race director Mick Maquire and others) and an incredible memory. He relates many previous race results for almost everyone who crosses the finish line. Even in the Vancouver Sun Run with more than 50,000 participants, he gives the impression that he knows everyone personally. One year, a few years ago, I was getting ready for the North Shore Triathlon and was wandering through the transition area in street clothes with no identification and Steve said, "There's Don McIntosh and today is his birthday." He was right and you could have knocked me over with a feather. He has announced at the Hawaii World Championships and had done Ironman Canada for many years. He hadn't done the finish line announcing at Ironman Canada for two or three years but was back this year and was warmly welcomed by all of the athletes.

I talked to Greg Sandkuhl and he said that he didn't want to go to Hawaii because it was too close to Ironman Canada (just six weeks later). That was good news for me but I couldn't help to notice the others in my age group that I didn't know who looked very fit.

I had a good swim which turned out to be my best at 1:16 and I did achieve my goal of shortening my transition times but the rest did not go so well. I felt fine on the bike and had no mechanical problems but at about 120 km., my legs began to feel very tired and I noticed that I was spending a lot of time in my lowest gear. People talked about the heat and the wind and the smoke in the air from forest fires in the area but I don't think those were major factors for me. The wind was against us on the last leg of the bike (last year it was with us) but I think the main problem for me was that I simply didn't eat enough. I didn't have a well worked out nutrition plan and, while that hadn't been a problem for me before, if I do it again, I will have a better plan. One of the toughest parts of the bike ride was a stretch coming back into Penticton with a slight uphill and the wind against us. When I got to transition, I wasn't sure I could even start the run, let alone finish it. I learned later that my bike ride had taken 7 hours and 10 minutes – 25 minutes slower than last year. Even without knowing that at the time, I know my chances of achieving my time goal were gone.

I did manage to start the run but it wasn't easy. In addition to my legs feeling very tired, my feet began to hurt. At about 5 km., I actually stopped to change my socks. I carried the first pair of socks in my hand for the rest of the race. It is always interesting to talk to people on the run but you have to be careful who you choose to talk to if you have time goals. At this time in the race, many people are walking and it makes it a little too easy to do that yourself especially when you are feeling tired. It is best to talk to someone who wants to run like I did with Shelley Griffith last year. Still I met some interesting people. For a while I walked/ran with a man from Australia for whom this was his 44th Ironman triathlon. He had done them all over the world and this was his second Ironman Canada and now one of his favourites. He planned to do six more in the next six months and three of them are in subsequent weeks with another just two weeks later. And people think I'm crazy.

Toward the end of the race I chatted with a woman from Calgary who has a condo in Penticton and knows the man from Australia and Steve King personally. It is always fascinating because everyone has a story to tell.

For much of the latter part of the race I ran/walked with Tom Gordon, an athlete from the Vancouver area who I had met a few times before. In the last two km., I decided to keep running but he had to slow to a walk. I did finish but my time was 14:30 – more than an hour slower than last year and almost as slow as my 2006 race – and I had had no flat tires or illness as an excuse.

After the race in the recovery area, I learned that my swim coach, Yue-Ching Cheng had also had a difficult race when the gearing on his bike stopped working properly so he spun at a very high cadence for the last leg of the bike ride and then, as a result, his knee gave him serious problems on the run. We had shared the goal of making it to Hawaii (he was second in his age group last year) but we had apparently both lost it.

There were 21 people signed up for my age group and 19 started the race. Just 11 of us finished. One man, Wally Wiwchar of Fort Saskatchewan, AB had an apparent heart attack in the swim and died. His family said that it happened when he was doing something he loved. It's not a bad way to go – when still healthy, hearty and fit. I believe this is the first time this has happened at Ironman Canada and when you realize that probably 30,000 people have done this race, that is not a bad record.

Surprisingly, one of the non finishers was Greg Sandkuhl. I didn't see him after the race so I don't know what happened. I was seventh. My chances of qualifying for Hawaii were now negligible but I went to the rolldown the next morning out of curiosity. I was chatting with some people before the announcement and learned that one of them was a man from Nova Scotia in my age group who had finished second. He was with his slightly younger brother who had already qualified for Hawaii and they wanted to go together. Because Milos Kostic didn't need the spot, he got it.

I did not sign up for Ironman Canada next year. I will probably continue to compete in shorter races for a while. Maybe when I am over 70, I will go back. This year there was just one man over 70 in the race. By the time I get there, there will probably be 10.

One of the highlights of the race this year for everyone was Madonna Buder who is now 79 and the oldest competitor in the race by far. Last year she missed the cutoff time of 17 hours by just two minutes but this year she finished ahead of the cutoff by six minutes. I was near the finish line at midnight when it happened. There were still hundreds of people there watching and cheering and when she finished the cheers were deafening.