

The Golden Gate Swim: In Their Own Words

*Compiled and edited
by Nancy Friedman*



Brian Gilbert

"Each Year Was Different"

– Mike Garibaldi

I joined the club in 1970. Back then you had to be a member for a year before you could do the Golden Gate Bridge swim. I had my first Gate swim against a reigning champion, Ed Duncan, who had swum at Cal. He beat me by a few seconds. I had no clue what was going on – I didn't know the course. I beat him the next year and went on to win everything for the next 13 or 14 years. Each year was different. One time we went north to south because of tide conditions. One year the water temperature was 48 degrees.

I've done other big swims – out and around Alcatraz, to Angel Island and back, Sausalito to San Francisco – but the Golden Gate Bridge was always #1. Going across that little opening, working out the tides ... it's just a

"What the hell was that?"

– Brian Gilbert

The Gate swim I remember most vividly is one of the first ones I piloted. I was in the middle of the group of swimmers, and fairly new to the experience. All the pilots were watching the swimmers intently, and suddenly we heard a tremendous whoom from the middle of the cluster. Naturally, we all turned around and saw a column of water descending from the middle of the pod. We and looked at each other, and someone asked, "What the hell was that?"

Lou Marcelli was one of the pilots, and he rowed over to the spot. He looked down and said, "There's a stiff in the water. Tell Frank [Drum the club president at the time] to tell the Coast Guard."

Someone, I never found out who, had decided to memorialize the swim by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge.

The ancient Greeks memorialized heroism by sacrificing cattle. What greater memorial than to sacrifice oneself?

challenge, and it's always been dear to me.

Editor's note: Mike Garibaldi took first place in the Golden Gate swim a total of 13 times. He now lives in Oregon.

"Just Do It!"

– Carol Block

In the fall of 1981 I was thinking about turning 40 the following year. I wanted to make it special. Somewhere I read that the artist Joan Brown had marked her 40th by swimming across the Golden Gate. I thought this would be perfect for me as a native San Franciscan.

The article mentioned a swim



Carol Block

club at Aquatic Park. In early January 1982 I knocked on the Dolphin Club door. I was let in. I announced my goal of a Golden Gate swim and was told "Just do it!"

I returned the next day prepared to swim. I got to the first buoy and the pain relented so I swam to the flag and back. I swam every cove and out-of-cove swim that spring and summer, but first I had to improve my strokes. My kids, age 10 and 12, were on a swim team so I asked their coach for help. Two weeks later I was tuned up and proficient in all four strokes.

The morning of the Golden Gate swim the fog was low and dense, bringing concerns about safety. Caution was cast aside and we started from the west beach under the bridge. Making it to the south tower seemed daunting but the rest went well until we had to board the Boston Whaler at the end of the swim. A rope net was cast over the side – tough with cold hands to grip! I yelled out "I didn't train for this!"



Lorna Newlin