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HOPING FOR SUN DIANE STRUBLE RECALLS HER HISTORIC 1958 SWIM THROUGH LAKE GEORGE

CAROL DEMARE Staff writer
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Diane Carol Struble remembers thinking the sun would never come up over Black Mountain at the break of the second day of her now-historic swim of Lake George 26 years ago. Struble, then 25, had survived a cold night in near frigid water, and she needed the rays to warm and re-energize her. She was still several hours away from becoming the first person to conquer the challenging 32-mile lake.

Now 61 and a Boca Raton, Fla., resident, Struble, who has been visiting her children in Queensbury, on Tuesday relived the 1958 swim.

"It was always my big interest to be so at home in the water that you could save yourself in any circumstance. I always felt that was more important than records or beating someone's time," said Struble, who got safety and survival training one summer at Girl Scout camp, but basically taught herself to swim.

On Aug. 22-23, 1958, Struble who was born in Ithaca but grew up in the Schenectady area and graduated from Scotia High School mastered the lake in 35 hours and 33 minutes and actually swam 42 navigational miles. The lake is 32 miles as the crow flies, but Struble had to maneuver around islands, and she zig-zagged the course from Ticonderoga Creek at the northern tip to Lake George village, where she triumphantly came out of the water.

As a youngster Struble camped with her family in the Adirondacks and recalled always trying to swim across the little lakes. At 17, she made an unsuccessful attempt at Lake George but didn't have proper guidance, and tried to do it from the village to the north end.

For the 1958 swim, she trained by swimming a smaller course the year before from the Sagamore Hotel in Bolton to the village and back, about 24 miles. In the early spring of 1958, to toughen herself to the cold, she would spend nights in a sleeping bag in the snow. And from early June on she spent eight hours a day in the lake.

Traveling up the lake by boat early in the morning of Aug. 22, 1958, a Friday, Struble said she kept thinking, ``My gosh, this thing is long. What am I doing?"

She pushed the men in the boat as far as she could. ``I had never seen the north end of the lake, and I insisted they travel all the way up. I wanted to be sure nobody ever came back later and said, `There's this little piece; she really didn't do the whole lake.'

``I knew I was going to do that whole thing if it was humanly possible," she said. ``I started way up in the creek. There's an island in midstream with a plaque on it they call `Diane's rock.' I think that's so special."

After downing steak and getting greased up, Struble waded into three feet of water in Ticonderoga Creek at about 10:20 a.m.

``In those days they didn't know," she said. ``They did foolish things before they knew the proper food for athletes was complex carbohydrates. I should have eaten a plate of spaghetti, not meat."

That first night she passed through the portion of the lake known as ``the narrows." The ``air was frigid, somewhere in the 40s, and the people in the boats were huddled and freezing to death. I was surviving in the water. I had

to swim hard or I would have stiffened up." They fed her a lot of hot food that night, she said.

At daylight on Saturday, Aug. 23, she was ``right opposite Black Mountain, the highest mountain around the lake. I needed that sun to start warming up," but the mountain was in the way.

Finally, the sun came over and warmed up the day. ``So I just lolled along and got myself warm," Struble recalled. ``I was trying to build up some more energy from all I had depleted from surviving the night. I knew once I lost that sun as I got into the evening, I would have to make a beeline for the end of lake."

One of her major concerns centered on the people in her guide boats.

``I knew there were going to be people in the boat that were going to freak out," she said. ``They were exhausted and they would start to get alarmed and start thinking they had to save me. That was my big worry. I didn't want crazy people reaching over and grabbing me and spoiling the whole thing. It had happened to people swimming the channel."

She gave explicit instructions to the boat crew that she wanted to be in charge, and ``they left me alone," she said. The only person to reach over was a doctor who gingerly took her pulse. ``It was 60, incidentally, and this was halfway down the lake."

One person instrumental in her success was her guide, Sylvester Kneeshaw, a real estate agent, who lived in Bolton and knew the waters like the back of his hand.

As the second day broke and it looked like she was going to make it, people started lining the shore and dozens of pleasure boats flocked toward the swimmer. All the boats made it tough going for a while.

`` We didn't have enough help to take care of that size a crowd of boats and keep them away," she said. `` The wind was blowing that exhaust right in my path. It was a while before (sheriff's boats) got them dispersed."

Fred Carota, a newsman from a Glens Falls radio station, was in one of the official boats and interviewed Struble as she swam. A speedboat then rushed the tape to shore, where a state trooper then hurried it to the station and there were hourly updates with Struble's voice.

`` People could hear me and follow the swim," she said. `` People knew I was going to make it, and they started coming in droves."

Shortly before 10 p.m. on the second day, Struble reached the dock on Beach Road in the village and got out of the water. A bronze plaque marks the site.

A crowd estimated at 10,000 greeted her. The cannons at Fort William Henry boomed. People stood on roofs of cars and buildings to get a look.

She wanted to swim up to the dock and climb the ladder. All she remembers was putting her hand on one of the rungs, and `` I felt myself just being lifted out of the water."

A blanket was thrown around her, she was hustled into a State Police troop car and whisked off to a motel.

She didn't sleep much that night `` I was so stimulated from going so many hours that I couldn't get relaxed." The next morning she flew to New York City and appeared on the `` Today Show."

The next year she swam around Manhattan Island in 11 hours and 27 minutes and made the front pages of all the New York City newspapers. She also swam a 35- to 40-mile stretch of Lake Champlain from Burlington, Vt., to Plattsburgh in 16 hours and 40 minutes in a violent storm and swam across Boston Harbor.

In the few times she's taken a dip in Lake George since then, she's noticed that the water is a lot warmer than the average 60 that she remembered. She attributes it to the pollution in the lake.

Today, Struble's exercise consists mainly of working out vigorously three times a week in a gym and taking yoga classes. She also has climbed 35 of the Adirondack's 46 High Peaks, something she does with her children and grandchildren.

Since Struble, three men, including a 17-year-old, have swam the same course, most of them in faster times but none with as much fanfare as she generated.

At the time of the Aug. 22-23 swim, she was divorced with three daughters, all under 5. Today, she is the mother of six and grandmother of four.

In a fairy-tale ending to her story, many years after the swim, Struble married her manager, Paul Lukaris, who owned Animal Land 4 miles south of Lake George village, and gave her the support she needed when others laughed at her.