

A JOURNEY TO IRONMAN

Charlie Eaton

Age on Race Day: 56

Race: Ford Ironman USA Lake Placid (Lake Placid, New York) July 26, 2009

Time: 14:18:45

At Lake Placid, New York on July 26, 2009, I completed 140.6 miles in 14 hours 18 minutes and 45 seconds. **Why did I set out to do the Ford Ironman Lake Placid?** About 5 years ago Rich and Dorinda Miller invited me to join them at Lake Terramuggus in Marlborough, Connecticut to do a sprint triathlon, a ¼ mile swim, 11 mile bike and 3.1 mile run. I had been running regularly since 1986 and swimming in High School made it easy to start doing laps at the new pool at the Mansfield Community Center (MCC) which opened in late 2003. I had biked a lot in my younger days so I dragged my bike out from the seventies and put some miles on it. I completed the Terramuggus sprint and remember clearly that the transition (T2) from the bike to the run felt worse than any marathon I had ever run. Over the past five years I completed many other sprints at Terramuggus and Lake Placid and in 2007 and 2008 I did two ½ iron distance triathlons, the Musselman in Geneva, New York and the Half Vermont Journey in Salisbury, Vermont. It was Dave Kloss who convinced me to join him for the first 1/2 iron distance race, the Musselman. That was a great weekend and one filled with memories of the cabin and campground, pasta with venison sausage and nerves ready to break on the car ride to the starting line. That weekend we talked about Ironman and Dave was thinking ahead to doing Ironman in a few years.

Still why an Ironman..... Go back several decades and it was 1982 and I was watching Julie Moss in great physical distress after a large lead over the second place women at the Hawaii Ironman Triathlon. She eventually crawled to the finish line and was passed within feet of it by her pursuer—ask anyone and they could not tell you who won that day, but they remember Julie Moss. I cannot say I got up from watching that and wanted to do an Ironman but this image of Julie stayed with me for all of these years. Forward to 1999, and we are up at the cottage on Lake Champlain and we hear there is a new Ironman in Lake Placid. We did not go to see it but we were there afterward and saw all of the banners hanging on buildings. There was still a sense of excitement in the Town. The restaurant we ate in gave me the Ironman banner and I brought it home (I hope I can find where I stored it). I thought about how awesome these athletes were, but I did not go out and start riding or swimming.

In 2006, after completing a number of sprints, I went to the Lake Placid Ironman race and saw Brian Usher go by twice on the bike. It was awesome to see someone I knew and all the other athletes in action. In 2007, I bought my first bike since the seventies, a Cervelo Soloist, an aero-dynamic road bike with the ability to convert it to the tri angles needed in the aero position by turning the seat stem forward. Spike and Matt at the Ski Rack in Burlington, Vermont really helped me zero in on the best bike for my goals. At that time I told Spike I might do an Ironman some day. He told me if I was to only own one bike it should be a road bike, as training on a tri bike is a lot tougher on the body.

It was all of these experiences and knowing I was not getting younger (56 as of race day) that some time last year it clicked and I signed up for Lake Placid. Maybe too, it was the quotes that hung on the refrigerator up north that had spurred me on in marathons, “*Only those who attempt the absurd achieve the impossible.*” Or “*That which doesn’t kill us makes us stronger.*” F. Nietzsche. I know that the encouragement of my young friend Asher Kach, who was himself an Ironman, completing Wisconsin, was key to me finally signing up. I asked him after the May, 2008 Vermont City Marathon how I could do this when I felt so bad at the end of my seventh marathon and he said “*If you think about it that way you would never do an Ironman. You cannot think about it. Charlie, I know you can complete one.*” Arriving at 9:00 a.m. in Lake Placid the day after the 2008 Ironman, a little ambivalent and not really worried whether I got in or not, I got one of the last spots. That year the registration sold out at the site following the race on Monday. I had not really convinced Lisa that this was a good thing, and it cost more than either of us imagined. But I was in.....

Now the question was how was I going to train so I could complete this coveted race? I knew I needed to increase my bike miles. I had not biked much at all before I ran Vermont City at the end of May. My swimming since 2003 and my running of 22 years would give me the base I needed in these sports, but in biking I fell short. I quickly increased my time on the bike by riding with friends and running partners who liked to bike and also by joining the Thread City Cyclers (TCC) club. By the end of 2008, in about 6 months I had accumulated 2,000 miles on the bike before winter set in. I actually found only a few triathletes to train regularly with, my faithful friend Asher and Mike Magouirk. There were occasional rides and bricks (a brick is when you ride and immediately run after getting off the bike) with other athletes wanting to start triathlon, like Sarah Lomonaco and Sean Manning. A lot of athletes of one sport became my partners last year in training on the run, or on the bike and or in the pool—so many I would fill a page with names so I apologize if I have not mentioned you personally.

How would I train? I had the book of all books on triathlon, *The Triathlete’s Training Bible* by Joel Friel, but it was so complicated I would have needed a Kinesiology lab to be tested to follow it. It was some time in October that I was coming into the MCC and I saw a car with a sticker “**140.6.**” – that is the total miles in an Ironman (2.4 mile swim; 112 mile bike; and 26.2 mile run). I was working out on my upper body looking around the room to see who looked like an Ironman. There seemed to be only one person it could be. So I walked up to this 30 something guy and asked him if that was his car. Christian was his name and he said yes, but it was not him but his wife Dot Burnworth who had completed the 140.6, in fact twice. She was swimming while he worked out upstairs. I met her after their workouts and she told me she had signed up for Lake Placid also. She also told me about the book she had used for training, “**beIRONfit**” by Don Fink. She said she followed it and was surprised how well she did. I told her about the master’s swim group and she joined up for Friday mornings (a day I did not participate). I gave her my email and asked if she would email me hers in case I had questions. That was the last I saw her or heard from her until sometime in the winter.

We crossed paths again at a spinning class early one morning and she gave me her email address. I emailed her and ask a few questions of her and she was very helpful. It was

later on March 24th when a bond that is Iron tight would begin. Dot was swimming several lanes over and for some reason someone came into her lane and she switched to another lane. It happened several minutes later again. Then she saw me and asked if she could swim with me. She asked if I was doing workout number 6. I said yes. We completed most of the 2700 yards together. And from then on we swam two times per week most weeks together. Those early morning would not have been easy without Dot. Both of us made a commitment to get up early and it was easier when we had committed to one another to being there. In our workouts we did not have much time to talk except for 400 yards of kicking each workout. I asked Dot lots of questions during this time. She kept telling me I would do fine, the training had been successful for her and I too would experience success. She said I would be surprised.

What was key in my training? The whole Ironman relies on aerobic or fat burning – you will not have enough glycogen reserves left in your muscles after you complete 2.4 miles of swimming and 112 miles of biking to complete the 26.2 mile marathon unless you train mostly at the lower heart rate zones to maximize your aerobic capacity. So this is what I did. Starting my official 30 weeks of Don Fink’s competitive training program on December 29, 2008 through July 25, 2009, I logged 78 hours of swimming completing 115 miles, 32 hours of spinning inside, 135 hours on the bike outside completing 2,090 miles, and 126 hours of running completing 749 miles; a total of 371 hours and 2,953 miles, not including time on my core and upper body (which I stopped in March because it was just too much time). I averaged 12.4 hours per week in the three sports taking one day off each week, with the peak week totaling 21 hours. A total of 325 workouts in 30 weeks.

This time came with sacrifice, particularly for Lisa. I still made it to work every day but waking early and coming home late, not to mention falling asleep around 9:00 p.m. many nights and being cranky quite often, took its toll. Lisa warned me in no uncertain terms not to think about doing another Ironman. The thing that did not happen was the breakdown of my body. I believe this is a triathlon benefit, by not doing the same repetitive motion of training one sport, especially as one gets older. I know my body could not have trained 20 hours just running or just swimming. I think almost every marathon I trained for had me in physical therapy for at least 3 weeks. A contrary view was my Doctor who told me I was fit but he did not support me doing Ironman. A message he left me on my cell answering a question about taking aspirin during training he concluded saying “*in your self destruction that you plan.*”

The training would not have been possible without many people. Their partnership and support carried me on race day. I am particularly thankful to Asher and Dot. Asher did the Half Vermont Journey with me last summer and many training sessions in all three sports including when we traveled north to do one loop of the Lake Placid bike course with the last 15 miles in a torrential thunderstorm in 65 degrees. He moved to New Zealand before my training ended, but he still emailed encouragement and his call to me the week before the race was special. He told me many times I would do great, that all of my hard work would pay off. And Dot’s wisdom and encouragement were there to the end. Besides the regular swimming together, she did a training ride of 100 miles of the Lake Placid 112 mile bike course with me on July 5th. The bike section is considered the

toughest in the U.S. Ford Ironman competitions so practicing it was important. It was special being able to participate with Dot, seeing her during the race on the bike and the run.

So what about the race day and week leading up to it? First I am totally surprised at my time, 42 minutes faster than I ever thought I could do it. Dot and Asher were right! But what about the Ironman demons...those awful things that happen to triathletes minds, bodies and spirit during the event? I must say other than some mental issues that occurred as I got closer to realizing I would be done with the bike and would face a whole marathon, I did not have any demons during the race. But there were lots out on the course: triathletes in distress bent over their bikes or stopped on the run unable to move; the bikes that broke down; the accidents and heat exhaustion that required EMT's and ambulances; the mental issues that only deep sighs or gasps would let on what was going on in their minds.

For me my demon was not on race day but before. Despite what Dot or Asher said I worried from the night I signed up to the night before the race about the things I could not control. My daughter Julie was in France all year for school and she knows me well. She emailed me in early June and said: *"How's your training going...bet you're already losing sleep from the nerves but don't worry because I will be there!"* I worried about how I would wake up at 3:00 a.m. at the cottage, go to the bathroom, eat a big breakfast and travel to lake Placid safely without a car break down, to arrive in time for body-marking (numbers everywhere, #1824 for me). I worried about the bike breaking down and worse case not being able to fix it. I had a chain break and tire blow out just two weeks before the race and fixed them myself. Thankfully having every major drive chain component, tires and cables replaced in the last 2 months preceding the race and almost weekly tune ups and check ups near the race day by Dave and Dick at Tolland Bicycle paid off—such awesome mechanics and friends of triathlon and biking. Also, I think saying nice things to my bike when I racked it at Lake Placid the day before the race helped. And I worried about the weather. Last year's race was bad. In the 60's with heavy rain all day into the evening dampened and ruined the spirit of many. Hypothermia was an issue in last year's race. All week the forecast for Sunday was supposed to be bad again this year with an 80% chance of heavy rains and thunderstorms all day. They even talked about delaying or canceling the swim if thunder was present—how would we be Ironmen if we never swam? On Saturday my stomach was in knots, and not sleeping well Friday night, I was finally at the end of my mental strength. For a little while I wasn't sure if I was coming down with something, but my Lisa, the nurse, said it was just nerves.

Earlier in the week, I had many well wishers as I left work for vacation including a big embrace from my boss Paul McDowell. As I left his office he called me Ironman and I turned and said *"not yet."* Then there were those who called me, voice mailed me, texted me or emailed me like: my sister Pam Eaton and nephew Will Baafi, sister Deborah Virella, Dave Kloss (multiple texts as he and I had shared a bond from Musselman and I know he wanted to be with me), my Mom, Rich and Dorinda, Amanda Lawrence (she's doing Lake Placid next year—ladies look out...), Cheryl Cunningham (a fellow triathlete and aspiring Ironman), Dave Hoyle (a triathlete and my physical therapist who I did not

need during this training), Asher, J.P. Lacombe, RunStorrs' track coach Ken Rawn, Rob Powers, Robin Hoagland, Rick Friedrich, Matt Raynor, Carmel Cuyler, Karly Richards, Aimee Morey-Oppenheim, Charlie Chatterton, Tom Andrix, Dianna Hyland, Paula and Keith and Erin and Kyle Enderle, Dave Grant (he wrote: "*Relax on the Swim, Be careful on the bike, Endure the run....you WILL do it.*") and maybe some I missed....sorry if I did! There were lots of other friends, fellow athletes and co-workers who were thinking of me or tracking me on race day. I am humbled by all of this.

Several told me they would be praying for the things I could not control. I knew the prayers to God of many fellow athletes like Dorinda and Rich, Carmel and John Cuyler and Dave Kloss would zero in on the things an athlete could not control. Others like my Mom, good friend Terry Grant, co-worker Glen O'Keefe and Vince Gierer and friends at St. Paul's were what I could count on for general safety prayers. I had done my part. God knew this and my body was prepared. It was up to Him for the rest. And He did come through!

Race day begins....Getting to sleep around 9:00 p.m. I woke many times to use the bathroom—hydration was good on Saturday. At 2:00 a.m. I awoke and could not get back to sleep. I lay in bed until 3:00 a.m. and then got out of bed. Feeling pretty good I followed my plan and made a full breakfast, 3 poached eggs and an English muffin. I drank some diet coke for the caffeine—a bad habit of mine—followed by water. After the bathroom routine I went outside in flip flops and ran up the road a couple hundred feet to get everything moving. One more bathroom time and I showered—it helped me wake up. I woke Lisa up at 4:10 a.m. and she gathered her pre-packed bags and we were off at 4:26 a.m., 4 minutes ahead of schedule.

The 1 hour ride had begun. I remembered how nauseous Dave Kloss and I were in the car ride before Musselman and I did not want that this morning. I needed to relax. I turned on Julio Virella's (my brother-in-law) CD *Unbroken*. It is very relaxing music and we played it all the way to Lake Placid. My stomach cooperated—it liked the music! I think we passed two cars the first 30 miles and then a few were following us as we made our way into Lake Placid. We found a parking space very close to the transition area where our bikes are and where we change and store our bike and run clothes. It is located at the Olympic Speed Skating Oval. It had rained all the way to Lake Placid. I was resigned to racing in the rain and only hoped it would not be too cold. As we got closer to the Olympic Village, with the high peaks on both sides of the road, I saw a clearing to the north east over Lake Placid. When we arrived the rain had stopped. Prayers answered.

Lisa waited for me as I went to change for the swim and get my body-markings. I took off the garbage bags I had rigged over the important parts of my bike to keep the heavy rain off during the night. A fellow triathlete loaned me his pump, actually he assisted me in pumping my tires, as they seemed to have lost a little air. Did I tell you that my prior experience was that long-distance triathletes were not the friendliest bunch and pretty much stayed to themselves, something I attributed to all of the long hours they spent in training; they did not have time for others. Well Lake Placid changed that impression and this man was the first of many examples of what probably only those in the armed

services or in crisis, experience—the “*we are all in this together and we want everyone to survive.*”

I met Lisa on the street with wetsuit in hand and we walked toward Mirror Lake where we would swim. We do not actually swim in Lake Placid. Mirror Lake is right behind Main Street. Thousands were there...2,258 started the race (2,051 finished) and there were countless times more spectators. Lisa was very energized by the whole thing. I was glad because it took its toll on her the past 30 weeks. She got caught up in the event. As she walked with me she told me it was time and she didn't see the tears well up in my eyes. I am not sure if it was fear of what she said or just thankfulness to have my number one partner with me at the start. Probably both. We dropped off the special needs bags up the street—these are for the half way point of the bike and run. I had many contingencies stored like tubes and CO2 cartridges in case I had several flats and used the two on the bike and cheap rain coats in case it rained, along with some extra warm clothes for running too, as it would get colder as the sun went down.

On our way back to Mirror Lake, I stopped in the road and pulled on the wetsuit after I applied body glide to my neck, legs and arms—it makes it easier to rip off the suit after the swim and prevents chaffing around my neck from the top of the zipper. We walked to the chip reader where you must be recorded. They need to account for every racer to make sure they return safely from the Lake. It started to pour. I did not care as I was in the wetsuit. Lisa now zipped me up and I gave her a kiss and hug. I cannot remember, but I think I told her I loved her. Now I was in a big line and Lisa was gone. I asked a couple of racers the routine about coming out of the water after 1.2 miles and then re-entering it for the second 1.2 mile loop. I went through the chip reader and swam to the east side of the shore, about 150 yards. They say it is best to stay on the cable that the buoy markers are attached to—it is like a lane line—so you do not have to look up to stay straight (looking up hurts your neck after a while). I hung out in the muddy eastern shore until a few minutes before the start. After the National Anthem I headed to the starting line hanging over the water from west to east, treading water. Before the race I remembered the words of Brian Usher to me this past winter: “*Just enjoy yourself.*”

The gun went off and I set my watch and started swimming. I headed toward the left to the cable but the 2,258 swimmers made it hard to fight for position. I stayed about 15 yards to the right of the markers and swam mostly my own race without the benefit of much drafting. I took the first turn wide as the congestion was incredible and then I tried to cut in again, but it was not enjoyable so I stayed wide. It started to rain very hard and no swimmers cared, duh...Every once in a while I told myself to relax and lengthen my stroke and glide to conserve energy. Then a strange thing happened. Anyone who did Masters at MCC would know the sound of Asher breathing, a guttural grunting as he breathed out. Everyone in the pool could hear it. I started to do the same and was kind of laughing to myself thinking the swimmers around me might think a creature was around them. I did this most of the remainder of first lap and again on the second.

As I approached the beach the music was playing and announcements geared for spectators were being made. I could hear it and got excited to be done with 1.2 miles. I got into the shallows at the edge of the beach and walked up calmly to the beach and went through the timing check. Re-entering the water I adjusted my bathing cap and

goggles, as the cap seemed a little tight. The next lap was uneventful except when I returned for the final stretch one of the many kayakers who guarded our lives pointed to me to move a little more to the left as we approached the finish. I lifted my head and said a big “*thank you*”—the first of hundreds of thank you’s that came from my mouth that day to the volunteers. He looked surprised and smiled, like what is this guy doing thanking me while swimming.

I finished in 1:18:36 ahead of my goal of 1:20. There were strippers waiting on the beach, those who pull your wetsuits off for you. I did not sit down at first and he politely said it is easier if you sit down to rip it off. I complied and thanked him and with wetsuit in hand ran through a packed crowd to transition about ¼ mile away. They had mats on the grass and roads to protect our feet. People were cheering and it felt great. I did not see Lisa as she had positioned herself up a hill to better see the swim race. But she did see me.

Now for the chaos of transition that never happened: I found my bag quickly and went to the tent to change. A helper was very anxious to take away my bag with swim wear replacing the bike clothes, helmet and shoes. I stopped at the porta potty and quickly ran around to the bikes where I heard my number announced and waiting for me was my bike. I went through the timing chip reader with the bike and mounted it. The cleats that sometimes gave me problems in training worked flawlessly. I was on my way down a hill with a hair pin turn so we were all using our breaks, the last time I used my breaks on that first loop. The next 2 miles were flat and just like my plan I took it easy so that my stomach could get rid of some air inhaled on the swim and get settled from the swim. After passing the Olympic ski jumps we climbed for a number of miles. I was glad most triathletes were not pushing the hills and were settling in, consistent with my own plan to not get too excited early. The no drafting rule did not seem to matter climbing the hills as dozens of bikers were bunched together and spacing 4 meters between bikes was not easily possible.

Soon we were near the 9 kilometer (5.6 mile) down hill where some bikers go 50+ miles per hour. My Garmin recorded my top speed at 45.6 miles per hour. This first 56 mile lap was particularly bunched up so passing down hill was congested. I still sailed down with out breaking and came into Keene thankful for no tire blow out or collision with other bikers. My Sister Deborah Virella promised to be at the intersection of route 73 and 9N, so I yelled her name out while concentrating on the tough turn. I saw her and saw her cheering but later found out she never saw me. I was uplifted knowing she was there for me. The next 10 miles I was in the aero bars cruising over 20 miles an hour with a slight tail win, the first time I rode the course with out a head win on this road. I did the 56 mile loops 4 times in the past year and always had northwest winds. Today the weather was coming from the southwest.

I reached the next turn to route 86 feeling strong and began the shorter but steeper climb of the course. It was a good time to talk to fellow racers who were very friendly, proving my Ironman nasty image wrong. I shared with several guys about how my wife really had had enough of this Ironman thing and was clear I was not doing another one ever, I mean ever! But I explained that when she was in the village yesterday and today she got

excited and very supportive. One racer said he got divorced over triathlon and his brother was served papers while at Lake Placid two years ago. How sad I thought, but how right Don Fink was in his book when he said you need a family meeting and total family agreement to train at this level. I rode on feeling thankful for the wife I have and even though we had our moments our marriage did not suffer.

We made it to the fifth section – I broke the bike section into 6 parts: the climb out of Lake Placid, 9 kilometers downhill, flat 10 miles from Keene to Jay, up hill to Wilmington, Hazelton Road and the 12 mile climb from Wilmington to Lake Placid. Hazelton is an out and back ride of 14 miles but evenly up and down so aero bars were used a lot. This was the second section of Road recently paved. The first was in the middle of the steep downhill and was done because of the Major from the local State police unit who lobbied for Ironman bikers and all bikers who use this 56 mile route heavily, 6 months of the year. At about mile 38 I heard someone calling *Charlie, Charlie, Charlie*. Our numbers have our names on them but mine says Charles not Charlie. Who was this? It was Dot. I was glad to see her and know she was doing well. We briefly told each other how we felt. I told her I was sick of the food and I was purposely slowing down my pace to conserve in the heat. She reminded me she had told me that I would hate the food by the end. She told me she had pushed too hard on the bike and probably needed to slow down too. And then she pulled out ahead. I saw her for about 3 miles but then lost sight of her.

I finished this section and moved to the 6th section which is a constant climb for 12 miles along the raging West Branch of the Ausable River and Whiteface Mountain, the Olympic mountain. Even though the scenery is breathtaking, this became my least favorite section because I was so close to Lake Placid yet I had to slow down as I climbed, so it seemed to take forever. After passing the last aid station, each is about 10 miles apart, I was excited for the last and steepest climb because we were soon to see thousands of fans and begin the last lap. I made it up the last hill strong and turned onto the road along Mirror Lake and felt like I was in the Tour de France with hands outreached cheering wildly for all of us. Words like *you are strong, get going, way to go*, being screamed as we came to the Olympic Arena cross road and back out on the course. On the way out of the Arena the Higgins, Mike, Kassandra, and Corey, were waiting and cheering. I heard all the cheering but did not see them, as this was one of the most dangerous hairpin downhill sections of the course and I had to focus. These neighbors at the Lake were special to be there on race day.

Again, I segmented the race and looked forward to the 9 kilometer downhill. It was getting hotter and there had been no rain since the swim. The sun was out of the clouds and sweat was beading on all athletes. Salt stain clothes were the norm. I had trained the nutrition aspect just as much as the three sports. Some say nutrition is the 4th sport of triathlon and they are right. I was focusing this second loop on drinking as much Endurance Gatorade and water as possible, taking my Hammer Endurolytes, salt and electrolyte pills. I took 18 of these pills during the bike ride and each time it got harder as these large pills were starting to make me gag. But I kept it up and also kept eating Power Bars, Power Gels and bananas. I was getting sick of this food. Two Special K Protein bars, Peanut Butter, were a great change from the nasty other stuff.

One thing hit me in a big way this second loop. Rich Miller, friend and UConn track coach, had called me from a trip in Virginia before the race and left a message that said: *“Trust your training; trust both your mental and physical preparation; don’t get overly anxious and just trust and have confidence and go out and do the best you can. Good luck.”* These words rang loudly in my head. I knew my training had worked well, with only one bonked training day because I did not do nutrition well on that day. So two things happened, I slowed down a notch to conserve for the run and I kept eating and drinking the yucky food and drink.

When I got to about 80 miles I realized this trust in what I knew and what I trained had paid off. It was also this section of the bike when the text message Dorinda Miller had sent me came to mind. *“Go with God by your side.”* I had prayed earlier before the first descent down the steep hill and now I felt God’s presence on this last loop of the bike.

Many athletes were bonking from the heat and humidity, keeled over on the side of the road with dry heaves or worse. I never passed a down triathlete without asking if they needed help. In this loop I got to know some more riders who seemed to be playing cat and mouse with me. One woman would pass me up a hill and I would get her down hill. I told her it was the weight factor. Her low weight made climbing easier and my heavier weight gave me downhill momentum. We all wanted desperately the thing we did not want going into the day—RAIN. A good soaking as we completed the last loop would have been nice so we could change to dry shoes and start our long run. The skies refused to open up.

It was also on this second loop that I needed to urinate (a good thing—some shared on the run they had not gone all day—a bad thing) and I finally decided it was best to go on the last food stop because the transition porta potties would be more crowded. I stopped and took my time. The volunteer looked at me and said I looked much better than most that were stopping. I said I trained hard for 30 weeks and it was paying off. He told me he wanted to do it next year and I recommended the Fink book just like Dot had done for me. He looked like he needed a base training before making this commitment and hopefully he would do so soon. I left bolstered knowing I looked healthy. Climbing the last hill I passed a woman whose physique would suggest this race was not for her. She was walking her bike up hill and was most likely only finishing her first loop. I said *“way to go girl”* but I think she was annoyed as she was soon to be disqualified. I guess I should have said nothing.

Now my mind was focusing on the marathon ahead. Following the Fink competitive plan, the most I had trained was a little over a 3 hour run. The longest bike was just over 6 hours. Did I have what it takes to do 26.2 miles? Then the words of Dot hit me—*“you will be successful because you faithfully trained all 30 weeks.”* I trusted those words believing in something I could not know. I also knew I had been strong after all bike to run bricks except one where I neglected good nutrition. So I came into Lake Placid with confidence and excitement knowing I only had one more sport to complete. I finished in 7:02:41 with an average speed of 15.9 miles per hour and elevation climb of over 7,000 feet. I hoped to see Lisa, Andrew, Julie, and Charlie and their friends Catherine, Maya

and Nolan. Unfortunately they were in traffic because of all the road closures. So I moved to transition and changed quickly to running clothes. I was probably one of the few who changed to a running shirt but I wanted to start out dry as it would be cooling down in several hours. Of course the shirt was trenched in a matter of minutes.

The run course goes out of town. There were lots of people cheering us on by name as our numbers had our names printed in large letters. I was telling people my name was Charlie not Charles, as they printed my formal name on the number. Charles was what my grandmother called me. I gave up correcting people after a while but surprisingly on the second loop some remembered my nick name. We ran down the bike course by the ski jumps where it turns left onto River Road, a road that follows the Ausable River with very few houses. It is 4 miles out on this road and 4 miles back. Other than volunteers it was lonely. I was having some mental issues wondering how I could do this 8 mile section alone twice. I rarely run without my many RunStorrs friends or colleagues at work and 16 miles alone is tough. There was a field by the river and along about ¼ mile there were wall to wall signs with words of encouragement from family members to loved ones racing. I tried to read all of them but was running too fast—a good thing at this point in the day—to read all of the signs. I actually stopped because I wanted to read one sign in its entirety. I remember a few like: *“If I can swallow that Cat Scan Dye you can finish the Ironman, or Dan the Ironman, and so many we love our so and so Ironman Dad or Mom.”* Right about mile 4 I saw Dot coming toward me and she yelled to me encouragement.

I was having problems drinking any more Gatorade even though they changed the flavor from lemon lime to orange on the run and I had stopped eating Power Gels, Power Bars, bananas and Endurolytes. They were just too nauseating. Fortunately, I switched to Cola and water and I ate some fruit, oranges and grapes and some pretzels. The Cola seemed to restart my digestive system and I felt the intake starting to renew my energy level. I headed into Town feeling pretty good and spurred on by the fans as I climbed the largest hill of the course. We had to go on another 2 miles out and back along Mirror Lake. There were a few swimmers doing our swim course even though the large buoys were already removed. It was cooling down and I had to decide whether I would use by special needs bag and add a layer. But it was still too hot so I skipped it and continued. I saw Jody a second time, a triathlete I had met at MCC. He did not hear me yelling to him. He was 13 miles ahead of me. You could not tell as the race went on if the runners were on their first loop or second loop. This became the first question most asked on the course.

As I headed out onto River Road for the last time I saw Dot. We both said hey....Then after she passed I heard this delayed scream *“Charlie, You Are An Ironman”* at the top of her lungs. I am moved to tears thinking back to that. But at the time I mumbled to myself *“not yet.”* Shortly after, I came to a Ford music and athlete billboard that flashed encouragement when it read your number. They were playing loud music and one lady was dancing. From the other side of the road, with renewed spirit after seeing Dot, I stopped and danced a little something.... The ladies manning the Ford station said loudly on the microphone, *“that’s the way to go.”* Then I faced the remainder of the long out and back. As I jogged the last miles finally to the turn around, I knew I had what I took

to finish strong and I encouraged everyone I passed or was passed by with “*we’ve got it.*” I also was calculating that I could easily beat 15 hours and if I could run real strong I might get close to 14 hours.

It was about mile 16 that I met my third angel, Asher and Dot were my first two angels in this Ironman thing. His name is Ron Ottaway and he is 72 years old. We struck up conversation but soon it was evident we were to become Ironman kindred spirits. He needed me and I needed him as the next 10 miles would be mentally tough. I found out his goal was loftier than my just finish and maybe finish in 15 hours goal. He wanted to qualify for Kona, the Hawaii World Championship in October. He had to beat two others in his age bracket to do so. He thought they were both behind him and we spent the next 4 miles looking for his competition. Many people looked over 70 by this time in the run as they were exhausted. We thought we spotted them both with the closest competitor about 8 miles behind us.

We talked about our families and I found out this Iowan was still working part time in the broadband industry. He had completed 35 Ironman races and won the World Championship in Hawaii two years ago in his age bracket. Don’t be fooled, there are many competitors who are very strong at this age and this is no small feat. The older you get the tougher it is to compete against your own age group as it is the most dedicated who are still competing. As the miles began to pass easily I kept saying “*we’ve got it.*” And my spirits really improved as we got closer to the end the River Road section. The last stop on this road offered watermelon which Ron, I and others devoured. This too lifted our spirits. You really get sick of the same food all day. We learned later that someone at this stop had brought this as a special treat and it was not offered at the remaining stops. We headed passed the ski jumps and equestrian center on our way into Town. I suggested to Ron and we ended up making a commitment to finish hand in hand together. He said he would like that very much. We talked about who would be there at the finish to cheer us on. I told him how my family would be there. His wife would be waiting for him at the finish. I told him how Lisa forbids me to do another Ironman, but if I did one it would be Switzerland, in Zurich, where my oldest son Nate lives. We headed to the last hill as we came near Main Street and the excitement was almost too much.

I felt unashamedly strong and realized this was a lot easier than I ever imagined. I started to run faster up the hill and then stopped as Ron was trailing. I know the older you get the harder the hills are and I have experienced this with many younger runners sailing past me on the hills. Then smack in the middle of the road were Dot and her husband Christian. She told me she wasn’t feeling well and was heading to her cottage to recover; she was sorry she would not be there for me at the finish. She embraced me and told me how great I had done. She had finished in 12 hours 38 minutes and 13 seconds. Then Ron caught up. I told Dot I had a new friend. Then I moved up hill, stopping about every 10 yards to allow Ron to catch up. I was not abandoning my angel who helped carry me the last 8 miles with 2 more to go. Maybe I could have shaved off 5 minutes in the last 4 miles but I may have mentally bonked at mile 16 if not for Ron. We made it to the top and went on the last out and back along Mirror Lake. It was pretty dark and I

tripped on the spectator barrier support structure. A fan yelled to be careful. I was not fazed.

During the run I had heard many girls yelling Dad and I would look around thinking it was my Julie. This time I heard Julie yell and then I saw all of my children (except Nate in Switzerland) and their friends and they started to run along the sidewalk near Ron and me—they were waving their signs of encouragement. Lisa was there too but somehow I do not remember seeing her. Maybe my mental abilities were affected at that point in the race. Andrew said I should run faster because I could still talk. He said that was what I told him when I coached him in soccer. The family turned around to go to the finish line. Ron and I made it to the turn around and I said “*we’ve got it.*” Ron was tiring and he said, “*Charlie you have been saying this for 6 miles. Where is the finish?*”

We took one more cola with ice and headed downhill into the arena. We entered into the first Ironman arch and Ron grabbed my hand and pushed it skyward. We weren’t there yet as we had to run on the same speed skating rink that Eric Heiden set four Olympic records and one world record at the 1980 Winter Olympic Games. Our speed picked up and it felt effortless as the crowd cheered, although I really only heard muffled sounds as I waited to hear ***Charlie Eaton is an Ironman.*** We crossed the finish together and recorded exactly the same time. My run was done in 5:37:26, not close to my best marathon but this day was a bit longer.... The announcer was talking about Ron and then I heard it....I was an Ironman.

I saw my family and their friends off to the side cheering and then my attention focused on Ron who was not feeling well. A medical person came up to me and I told her I felt great. Ron had two medical people tending to him. I walked to my family, Marley too, and Lisa said “*I am proud of you.*” and “*I can’t believe I am married to an Ironman.*” My family remarked how well I looked—they expected much worse, like at the completion of many of my marathons. Lisa handed me a bottle of chocolate milk, as Dot had told her to make sure I got something into me immediately after finishing. It went down real well. Then I left and walked with Ron for 5 minutes and met his wife. I gave her my email so we could be in touch. And then Ron told the medical people he needed to embrace me which we did sweat and all. We were Ironmen. And we finished a race that seems so selfish in so many respects, all the training and so on, together in support of each other.

I left to gather my bags and bike and as I left the arena a pizza delivery for the food tent was coming in. I had not gone into the tent so other than the chocolate milk I had not eaten. I asked if I could have a piece of pizza, thinking no way would they do that. Sure enough the same helpful attitude I’d seen all day prevailed: “*Certainly. Help yourself.*” I met up with my family full of energy and ready to head home after being up 20 hours. On the way to the car Lisa said if I qualified for Hawaii she would let me go because she could accompany me. We got in the car and I turned on my Blackberry and the messages were binging. My voicemail was full so Asher could not voicemail me but he emailed me and then the entire RunStorrs email list and listed my stats (the mathematician, of course). Congratulations were flowing in. Paul McDowell had been watching the webcam for hours as he did not want to miss my finish. He texted me “*I always knew you*

were an Ironman but to see you cross the finish line....Awesome!!! I am super proud of you!!!”

I came home to the cottage and saw the note on the kitchen counter Julie had left and I had read in the wee hours of the morning: *“I love you Daddy. I know you can do this. You’ve trained all year, you’re ready. See you at the Finish Line.”* Cassandra and Corey Higgins and Matt and Sarah Wilkins, all friends of our kids at the Lake, were there soon after I arrived to congratulate me.

The next morning Lisa pulled out the gift Dot asked her to give me after the race. Dot, a potter, had created an original handcrafted mug with three words: *Charlie Eaton Ironman*. Very special, from a very special person. There was another message from Paul on email as he wasn’t sure I received his text message. He said: *“Watching you and the youngster (Ron) cross the line together was a thrill. You made us all proud!! I’m a lucky man knowing that I have a guy with the will, determination, guts and strength of an Ironman working in the Finance Division.”*

From the completion of the race and within the next two days there were congratulations from Mike Golden, the Cuylers, the Kloss family and Glen O’Keefe, all who also watched me finish on the webcam. Then there were the calls, emails and text messages after the news spread or they checked the website results. These were from: Terry Grant, Dave Grant, Catherine Kalonia, Diane McKusick, Bruce Gerber, the Wyatts, J.P. Lacombe, Cheryl Cunningham, Ken Rawn, Dorinda Miller, Lorraine Hall, Kim White, Andrew Russel, Doug Roberts, Jesse Blakeslee, Evan Johnson (a fellow Ironman who said *“I knew you could do it.”*), Roy gallant (he had planned to see the race as Ironman is a goal for him too, however, it did not work out for him to come up), Amiee Morey-Oppenheim (she ran several very long runs with me), Jeri Hepworth, Carol Jones, Sarah Lomonaco, Dino Mattessich, Anne Crone, Karly Richards, Rob Powers, Amy Kalisher, Vince Gierer, brother in-law Scott Zimmer, Jenn Hermann and Amanda Lawrence. I am sure once I return to Connecticut the list of congratulators will grow.

I was proud of my accomplishment. I had competed in Ironman with triathletes from 41 states and D.C. and 21 countries and was successful. *“By any measure, the Ironman presents the ultimate test of body, mind and spirit for professional and amateur athletes. And as the Ironman Triathlon has emerged into the mainstream sports light, the Ironman experience continually transcends pure sport. It centers on the dedication, courage and perseverance exhibited by athletes who demonstrate the Ironman mantra that ‘ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE.’ ”* (from official race program)

I am thankful for the support all of those I trained with, the masters’ swimmers, the bikers and the runners and all my family, friends and colleagues who do not do these sports, who cared that I wanted to achieve such an *“absurd”* goal. Special thanks to Asher and Dot! Most of all, I am thankful for my immediate family, especially Lisa, for putting up with me this past year.

Will I do another Ironman.....? *“Anything is possible.”*

CHARLES EATON

BIB	AGE	STATE/COUNTRY
1824	56	STORRS CT USA

SWIM	BIKE	RUN	OVERALL	RANK	DIV.POS.
1:18:49	7:02:41	5:37:26	14:18:45	1538	52

LEG	DISTANCE	PACE	RANK	DIV.POS.
SWIM SPLIT 1: 1.2 mi	1.2 mi (38:18)	2:00/100m		
SWIM SPLIT 2: 2.4 mi	1.2 mi (40:31)	2:07/100m		
TOTAL SWIM: 2.4 mi	2.4 mi (1:18:49)	2:04/100m	1399	42
BIKE SPLIT 1: 36 mi.	36 mi. (1:56:41)	18.51 mph		
BIKE SPLIT 2: 56 mi.	20 mi. (1:23:08)	14.43 mph		
BIKE SPLIT 3: 92 mi.	36 mi. (2:06:38)	17.06 mph		
BIKE SPLIT 4: 112 mi.	20 mi. (1:36:14)	12.47 mph		
TOTAL BIKE	112 mi. (7:02:41)	15.90 mph	1530	49
RUN SPLIT 1: 13.1	13.1 mi. (2:37:14)	12:00/mile		
RUN SPLIT 2: 26.2 mi	13.1 mi. (3:00:12)	13:45/mile		
TOTAL RUN	26.2 mi. (5:37:26)	12:52/mile	1538	52

TRANSITION	TIME
T1: SWIM-TO-BIKE	11:22
T2: BIKE-TO-RUN	8:27