

Marilyn bell



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Marilyn Bell

Marilyn Grace Bell Di Lascio is a retired long distance swimmer, born October 19, 1937, in Toronto, Ontario. She was the first person to swim across Lake Ontario and later swam the English Channel and Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Personal life

Bell was born in Toronto, Ontario to parents Sydney and Grace Bell. The family moved to North Bay, Ontario, then Halifax, Nova Scotia before returning to Toronto in 1946.[1] After her swimming career, Marilyn married Joe Di Lascio and moved to New Jersey, United States. They raised four children, Lisa, Michael, Jodi, and Janet. Joe died in September 2007.

Swimming career

Bell first took up swimming lessons in 1946 at Oakwood Pool, joining the Dolphinette Club coached by Alex Duff.[2] In 1947, Bell entered her first long-distance race: a one-mile swim at the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) in Lake Ontario.[3] It was at that first race that Bell first met her future coach Gus Ryder, who was coach of the Lakeshore Swimming Club. Bell soon joined the Lakeshore Club and started practicing at the indoor pool of Humber College in Toronto.[4]

1954 Lake Ontario swim

One September night, Bell started her swim across Lake Ontario from Queens Beach Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario to Toronto at virtually the same time as world famous United States long-distance swimmer, Florence Chadwick. The Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) in Toronto had offered Chadwick \$10,000 to swim the lake as a publicity effort for the annual
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exhibition. Bell, who felt the offer snubbed Canadian swimmers, took on the challenge without pay with the encouragement of Alexandrine Gibb, a Toronto Daily Star reporter. After several hours, Chadwick was forced to give up with stomach pains and vomiting, while 16-year-old Bell completed the swim, the first person ever to swim the thirty-two-mile (52 km) distance when she arrived in Toronto the next day.

A third swimmer, Torontonion Winnie Roach, also attempted the swim at this time, but failed. Bell swam for 20 hours and 59 minutes under gruelling conditions before she finally reached a breakwater near the Boulevard Club, west of the CNE grounds. The planned route straight across the lake was 51.5 km (32 mi), but she actually had to swim much further because of strong winds and the lack of modern navigation equipment. Waves that day were almost 5 m high, (up to 15 ft), water temperature was 21 °C (65 °F) and lamprey eels were attacking her legs and arms.

Bell kept up her strength with Pablum, corn syrup, and lemon juice with water, along with heroic encouragement from her boat crew and her coach, Gus Ryder. Radio stations broadcast hourly reports of her progress and rival newspapers published "extra" editions throughout the day. When she finally arrived at about 8:15 p. m., a crowd of 300,000 people gave her an emotional welcome at the Sunnyside waterfront. In an article, Bell later thanked the Toronto community for the support, especially Alexandrine Gibb, the Star reporter.[5] The CNE decided to give Bell the \$10,000 prize, and she was later given numerous gifts, including a car, television, clothing and furniture.

Other swims

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In 1955, she became the youngest person to swim the English Channel and in 1956, she swam the Strait of Juan de Fuca off the Pacific coast. She retired that year from swimming.

Awards and recognition

In 1954, Bell was named the Canadian Newsmaker of the Year by the Canadian Press, awarded the Lou Marsh Trophy as Canada's athlete of the year and awarded the Bobbie Rosenfeld Award as Canadian female athlete of the year. Bell was inducted into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame in 1958. In 1993 she entered the Canadian Swimming Hall of Fame and was named one of Canada's top athletes of the century. In 2002, Bell (now Marilyn Bell Di Lascio) was presented with the Order of Ontario.

The national Historic Sites and Monuments Board designated Bell's crossing of the lake a National Historic Event in 2005, and a federal plaque was erected in 2008 near the site of her landfall.[6][7] Another plaque is mounted on the base of a statue of a lion along Lake Shore Boulevard by the Government of Ontario Building of the CNE. Parkland near the location where Bell arrived is now named Marilyn Bell Park. In 2009, the Lakeshore Swimming Club of Toronto held the first annual Marilyn Bell Swim Classic, a meet sanctioned by Swim Ontario.

In 2010, a ferry boat to serve the Toronto Island Airport was named the Marilyn Bell 1. The name was chosen as the top name in a contest held by the Toronto Port Authority.[8] The story of Bell's historic swim was told in the 2001 made-for-TV film *Heart: The Marilyn Bell Story* with Caroline Dhavernas portraying Marilyn Bell.