

Old Men and The Sea

In August 2014, my lifelong friend, Dave Radcliff, invited me to join a 20-plus-mile swim relay across Catalina Channel. As it had never been attempted by 80-year-olds, we would set an international record. I feared I wouldn't measure up, but I accepted.



Dave swam in the 1956 Olympics. Our teammates, all Masters Swimmers, compete in events around the world. I was, and still am, in awe of their accomplishments. To avoid letting them down, I increased my swim workouts to 3,000 yards per session.

Dave Radcliff (81), Don Baker (84), Graham Johnson (83), Bob Beach (83), Bob Best (82), Norm Stupfel (alternate), and I, Bill Spore (80), boarded the dive boat, Bottom Scratcher, on August 19, 2015. Our captain, Greg Elliot, briefed us on safety and played the bagpipes for us. Paula Selby, of the Catalina Channel Swim Federation, managed the relay in order to authenticate our record.

We left at sunset from San Pedro. The sea was rough enough that we stumbled around the boat. We felt, well, like 80-year-olds. But when we hit the water to swim, everything changed. It was like poetry in motion, watching my teammates swim smoothly through the channel below.

To start the race, Dave swam from the boat to Doctors Cove Beach, Catalina. Standing on the sand, he raised then dropped his arm, and dove in at 10:54 p.m. Everything was perfect - light wind, calm surface, gentle following swell, 74-degree water. Fourth in line, I high-fived Bob Beach at 1:54 a.m. for my first leg. Swimming in the dark was intimidating until I settled in. Kevin Eslinger, a world-renowned paddleboarder was on my left, a kayak was on my right, and a light was attached to my forehead. My first leg was a mile and a half.

Back on board, I ate a snack, put on warm clothes, got an hour of sleep, and warmed back up. When I awoke, I watched Dave, Graham and Bob finish their second legs, and swam again at 7:54 a.m. I covered another mile and a half. We saw flying fish, a curious seal, and a whale; thankfully, no sharks or cargo ships.



Following my second swim, the Palos Verdes shoreline became visible. As everyone completed their second legs, our loved ones came into view. Dave swam a third time - the final fifteen minutes - to shore. As he stepped onto the sand of Abalone Cove, stopwatches cut at twelve hours, fifteen minutes and twenty-four seconds - a world record!

We dove in and swam ashore to celebrate, and then swam back to the boat to ride back to Pier 22. That evening, we celebrated with all the standards: tough steak, self-congratulatory speeches, and wonderful commemorative gifts, created with love by our wives, including a colorful backpack decorated with a patch exhibiting a large "80+," the date, August 19, 2015, "Catalina Relay" and our team name, "The Old Men and the Sea," a name initially suggested by my wife, Grace.

Though I seldom compete as a Masters Swimmer, I have devoted much of my life to my favorite sport. It has contributed to my longevity and overall physical condition. More importantly, however, swimming has provided me with lifelong friends and invaluable experiences.

By Bill Spore, resident at [Carlsbad by The Sea Retirement Community](#)