



I did it. I finally did a full ironman triathlon. Now my life is complete. 😊

Well, maybe it's not all THAT, but it was a really big goal of mine for a really long time. It had to be, right? I'm a goal-oriented person, and I love competing in triathlons. So I had to go for it! This was the second time I signed up for an ironman... I had signed up for Ironman Florida in 2004 (for 2005), but a running injury and life circumstances didn't allow me to train for it. I had to bow out gracefully a few months before the event. So when I heard about this new event, closer to home, same time of year, smaller, not as expensive (I never liked name brand things anyway – what is the difference between Ironman® and an iron distance event besides a few hundred dollars, anyway?!), I thought hmmm... maybe I could do it this year! My plantar fasciitis that had kept me from running for a year and a half seemed to be well in remission if not gone. My life had finally stabilized (or so I thought). So I went online to register and wouldn't you know, it had just filled up! But there was a waiting list, still with only a few people, so I thought, "Perfect, I can sign up now and decide for sure if and when my name gets to the top of the list!"

During the time between putting my name on the list and getting the e-mail saying that there was an opening (several months, I believe), I must have changed my mind back and forth a hundred times. Obviously, the "pros" list was finally longer than the "cons" list (or else it felt like it was), and I ultimately went for it.

Probably the best thing that happened at this point was when my friend, fellow triathlete, swimming buddy and colleague, Steve Kwiatkowski, hooked me up with the well-known coach and writer, Gale Bernhardt, and her ironman training program called "13 weeks to a sub-13-hour ironman" in her book entitled, "Training Plans for Multisport Athletes." Steve knew my haphazard style of training and my preponderance for trying to do too much, and that I needed the guidance and advice and proven training plan of someone I would respect. I will always be grateful to him for this wonderful gift.

So apparently there is some real validity to the "build, build, recover" 3-week strategy, because I made it through the training injury-free (though there were some worrisome spots in the second build week, sometimes), and I made it through the ironman. In fact, I came in just under 13 hours! And I never thought that was going to happen. I

just wanted to finish, and I knew that I'd probably ending up walking much of the marathon. It wasn't until I completed a 20-mile run in 4 hours one month before the event that I realized I might actually be able to have a respectable marathon time. Anyway, this is supposed to be about the event itself, so let me get on to the actual day!

At 4:00 AM my alarm went off, and I knew this was the day I had been working toward for so long. The day before had been spent putting appropriate things in marked bags (swim-to-bike transition bag, bike-to-run transition bag, special needs run bag for halfway through the run, special needs bike bag for halfway through the bike, and the post-event gear bag), and putting some of these bags in marked bins and setting up my bike at the T1 transition area. The bags would all be delivered to appropriate locations except the swim-to-bike transition bag, which we hung on racks at the entrance to T1. There was also a pre-event gear bag to put things in that we had with us just before the swim. So I had that bag and the post-event gear bag with me that morning. I got dressed and lubed up, ate a big blueberry muffin and a banana and drank 2 Boost drinks and some coffee, and filled a thermos with coffee as Gale had suggested to try to keep warm before the swim, and gathered my things. Then we got on buses at the hotel in downtown Wilmington that would take us to T1. At T1, we got body-marked and then boarded buses to the swim start. The logistics of a point-to-point triathlon can be overwhelming, but they really had it very organized. (We were mailed booklets ahead of time that I read through several times trying to figure out how on earth this was all going to work!) So everything was going really well. The only problem was that it was 50 degrees outside at best, and that the water temperature had gone from an advertised mid-70's over the last couple of weeks to a frigid 65 degrees. I had only a sleeveless wetsuit and 2 swim caps (thank goodness Gale gave me this tip, too)! I had no idea the misery that awaited.

The morning was beautiful. We got off the buses at the swim start and used flashlights to get around and take care of final business (like would you believe the guy sitting next to me on the curb found a nail clippers which reminded us to trim our toenails in preparation for the marathon? What a Godsend!) until we were told to walk out onto the beach. It was actually quite a hike to the point of the island where we were to start the swim. The sun started rising and the sky and waterway glowed as in a dream. It was one of the most beautiful sunrises I have ever seen. We all walked across the mat under the "Start" archway to the edge of the water, and the National Anthem was played. I teared up with emotion that I was actually here, ready, for this, my once-in-a-lifetime ironman event. At shortly after 7AM the gun went off and we all ran into the ocean. The extreme cold of the water absolutely took my breath away... I was gasping and running into the water... I couldn't breathe... I tried to start swimming but the water stung my face and I still could barely breathe... I started swimming with my head out of water toward the buoy where we would turn and head straight along the coast... and finally, thank God, my breath came back and I was able to bear putting my face in the cold water and swim. Someone knocked my cloudy goggles askew, so I had to stop

and empty them and put them back on. But this was good, because they stayed clear from then on and at least I could see. But it was so cold. I peed to try to warm myself up!! It helped. But my arms were stinging... I was so cold. I thought, "oh my God, I'm in trouble. I have to swim for over an hour in this..." and the only saving grace was that we had a current to help us along. All of the instruction I had received about taking it easy on the swim and staying in Zone 1 went out the window. I swam as hard and fast as I could maintain. I just had to get out of that water. I just had to get out. I just had to make it to the bike. There was a boat with a big orange wind sock indicating the turn toward the dock. It was only another 500 meters or so. I had tried to appreciate the beauty of the sun coming up behind the houses, the boats docked on one side and watching us on the other, the incredible sea of green swim caps, but my survival instinct was the loudest voice... "GET THIS OVER WITH!!!" And finally, finally I got to the dock lined with ladders. I pulled myself up as best I could – I was shaking – I couldn't stop shaking. I ran to the wetsuit strippers and a woman just about pulled me off the bench trying to take off my wetsuit. Another man had to come help as well. (I think they need to have some more experienced wetsuit strippers in the future... I could have done this better myself if I hadn't been shivering so badly and if my hands hadn't been so numb!) They told me there were warm showers and chicken broth, but I didn't understand where. All I saw were the showers they had set up for us to run through to rinse off the salt water, so I stood under those for a bit. It was cold water but it felt somewhat warm. I wrapped my wetsuit around me and ran with numb feet over the coarse pavement for about 3 blocks to T1. I just hoped I wasn't damaging my feet too badly! I grabbed my bag from the rack and went into the women's tent. It was much too small. It filled up quickly but I had a good spot toward the back. If only it had been heated! I was so cold, I STILL could not stop shaking. I tried to pull out my towel and cycling clothes... I tried to take off my swimsuit... I tried to dry off... I tried to find my shorts... I tried to put them on... everything was so difficult... I was shivering so uncontrollably. Other women came and went, and I was still struggling to get dressed. Finally, finally, I had on 2 pairs of socks, shorts, sport bra (yeah, that was the hardest thing to get on!), undershirt, jersey, armwarmers, shoes, and I packed my swim stuff into my bag, grabbed my helmet and gloves, and came out of the tent. I put my bag in the pile and ran toward my bike. But why run? I had already taken so long. What did it really matter? I just needed to make sure everything was ready for this 112-mile bike ride. I really did need to take my time. So I did. Although I had completed the swim in 1 hour flat, it had taken me over 20 minutes to transition to my bike.

But oh, how it felt good to be on my bike!!!! Even though the air was still quite cold, my feet were numb, and I was still shivering, now I knew I could finally warm up and enjoy myself! The sun was shining and there was hope. The only problem is that I STILL couldn't get myself to take it easy and stay in Zone 1 as instructed... I still had to do something to get warm! So I rode somewhat hard. I knew better than to blow myself up, though. I kept my heart rate in the 130's, which is pretty much Zone 2 for me. And I passed people, hoping that I wouldn't be setting myself up for being passed right back at the end of the ride. I'm sure they thought I was going too hard. Well,

okay, I probably was. But thank God I was on my bike! This is the part I knew I could handle. I had done at least 5 century rides in the mountains over the summer – I thought I could do this flat 112 with no problem.

Well, I had another think coming. This ride turned out to be a good bit harder. The course was nice, the roads were smooth as advertised, but it was very flat and very unforgiving. There was a bit of a wind, which always feels like a horrible headwind to those of us cyclists that are so used to drafting! But I will never draft in a triathlon. I always look at those who draft in triathlon as pathetic cheaters with absolutely no pride. So I am careful to follow the rules... 3 bike lengths back until you're ready to put on the steam and pass in 15 seconds. The bad thing is that I don't like to slow down, so I kept putting on the steam to pass people over and over and it wore me out! Finally I hung back from someone who had a similar pace. I passed the first two aid stations at miles 15 and 30 but then soon regretted it... finally at about mile 40 I could wait no longer and started looking for a place to pull off and relieve myself! I finally did find the perfect place where I could hide behind the trees. I came out and got back on the bike only to see the next aid station just around the corner! I slowed down and grabbed a banana and headed on. And of course then I had to pass again all of the people I had already passed who had gotten ahead while I had stopped to pee! 😊

One thing I did follow my instruction about was eating and drinking. I ate and drank and ate and drank and ate and drank! I had 4 bottles of Accelerade, another blueberry muffin, a power bar, and a bunch of gummi bears with glyconutrients in them (called Ambrotose – put out by a company called Mannatech), which I consumed liberally. I didn't have to stop for my special needs bike bag at mile 60 but stopped at a later aid station to use the portapotty and fill two bottles with water, eat another banana, and continued on. So that part was fine.

The other fun thing about the bike was that my mother and stepfather, who had been able to fly down to Charleston from Minnesota in order to come with me to Wilmington, surprised me by driving the bike course while I was riding. They then stopped a bit ahead of me several times and got out to cheer and take pictures! It was really funny because they were driving my car and I was initially quite puzzled to see my own car pass me on the road!

I think the main problem is that no matter what, 112 miles is a LONG WAY TO RIDE A BIKE. My back hurt. My knees hurt. One minute I felt okay and the next I was struggling. I had put my body into thermal shock before this ride, I had pushed my heart rate much too much during that and during the first part of this ride, and I did not have the amount of gas I thought I should have – or the strength after all of the tapering I did – and I was worried. I was tired. And then, to put the icing on the cake, my bike started to make the most God-awful racket! With every pedal stroke, “ka-CHUNKA, ka-CHUNKA, ka-CHUNKA”! I couldn't believe it. It had made some noise a couple of weeks before on a long ride and I had meant to take it in... but then I had

ridden in the rain the week before with no notice of it. And I had cleaned it and lubed it carefully. I figured it would be fine. But no. And everyone I passed or that passed me looked at my bike like it was about to fall apart at any minute! I patted my handlebars and said, "Come on, Bessie, you can make it!" And I prayed that it would. The last thing I needed on this day, this once-in-a-lifetime (for me) event, was for my bike to break down and keep me from finishing! I tried to make light of it, and said to one passer-by something a dear friend of mine has said: "You know how to fix this noise, right? Ear plugs!" And I just hoped that it was annoying and that's all. But I worried. I worried about the noise. I worried about my back. I worried about my heart rate. I worried about my numb feet (until they finally thawed out around noon). I worried about my knees. And I worried about the upcoming marathon.

The miles were ticking off, though not nearly fast enough. And the mile-markers they had posted every 10 miles were much different from what my computer said! When they said mile 50, I thought it was 52. At the sign for mile 60, I thought it was 63. At the one for mile 90, my computer said 96. So I was calculating... I would have to do what looked like closer to 120 miles to finish this darn thing! As it turns out, I was not the only one feeling this way, and it was not my computer that was wrong. This is something the organizers definitely need to fix!!! Anyway, it did, of course, finally end. I rode over the last bridge and turned toward the Battleship North Carolina where we had T2, the transition area from bike to run. I had not seen this transition area, but I had been assured that it would have my transition bag ready for me and be easy to navigate. I dismounted where they said to and someone graciously took my bike... but then I had to run back to it to retrieve one of my bottles to put in my waist-pack for the run! (I always run with a bottle of water. Even if I only run 3 miles. I always run with water. Even if there are aid stations every mile. I want to be able to drink when I want to drink!)

I found my transition bag and walked into the "tent"... but this was not very secluded! I needed to change my shorts and could barely find a private spot. This is another thing that the organizers, I'm sure, will fix for next year. Ah, the joy of doing an inaugural event... kind of like buying a first year model vehicle, which I'll never do again! But it was okay. At this point, I didn't really care. I was tired. Really tired. And my legs were sore. And I had to run a marathon! There were a couple of women chatting around me. I hardly acknowledged them. I didn't feel very friendly. It was kind of unlike me. But there I was. The only thing that kept me going was that I knew I had followed that training program to a T. I was, by definition, ready and able to do this thing! I came out of the tent and walked to the portapotties. A friend who had completed the half-ironman, Dan Riley, said hello and asked how I was. I think I said I was okay and went in to use the bathroom. He was there when I came out and gave me encouragement. I smiled and said, "holy shit," laughing and shaking my head, and slowly started off jogging. Oh. Ouch.

But I was right. I was ready. I had trained. It hurt. It was hard. But I knew it would hurt. I knew it would be hard. I had fully expected this. And I also knew I could do it. I started my run/walk strategy: 9 minutes of running, 1 minute of walking. The run, mercilessly, started up a bridge. Then down, and up another bridge. The good thing was the view was great and the traffic was stopped all over the place, providing tons of spectators! And amazingly enough, even though they were a captive audience, they were supportive for the most part. They cheered. They smiled. They distracted from the pain.

The best part of the run course was after the second bridge, we ran down the riverfront in downtown Wilmington. And there were blocks and blocks of wonderful people cheering and clapping and encouraging us... Once again tears came to my eyes as I savored the experience and thought, "wow, I'm doing an ironman!" (The only problem is that my 1 minute of walking came during this time and I was kind of embarrassed to be walking so early on, but I knew I had to stick to it!) Then the course headed out of town to some neighborhoods, and then around a lake on a paved path. It was gorgeous. Finally, we went over one more bridge and back to the Battleship where we would turn around and do it again. The course was marked with miles 14-25 as well as 1-13, so you had to deal with the knowledge that some of those signs weren't for you, as much as you wished that they were! But then on the second loop, they WERE for you – those big double-digit mile markers. There were aid stations every mile which I took advantage of more and more as time and miles went on, in addition to my planned walks. My 9/1 strategy eventually looked more like an 8/2 or 7/3, but I was still running more than I was walking. I would run until my knees and legs were absolutely screaming in pain, and then I'd agonizingly move to a walk, and finally when the pain had subsided and I could motivate myself to go at it again, I would run. I was running around the lake for the second time when the sun was setting, and I thought again how awesome this day had been, from sunrise to sunset. What an amazing thing this was to be able to do this. After it got dark, it got a little unnerving at times. They had huge lights in some places on the course, but there were too many very dark places. They did have volunteers on bikes that gave me some reassurance, though.

Oh. Speaking of volunteers on bikes. They also had officials on bikes. If you look at my results, you'll see that although I claim to have come in at under 13 hours (12:55, in fact), my official time is 13:01. I opted to do something I know is against the rules. Nothing had been said about it in the pre-race meeting so I thought I'd just go ahead and risk it. I wore headphones on the run. I always run with music. I really like running with music. And I really DON'T like running without music. This was going to be an awful lot of running. Like 5-6 hours. So I opted for the music. Well, wouldn't you know it but one of these officials rode by me, stopped, looked at my race number, and wrote something down. I had been caught, I knew it. But you know what? All I cared about was that he didn't take my headphones away from me!! ☺ Thank goodness this was a USAT event and not an Ironman® event, and so penalties were recorded but not applied until after the event. The only thing I was afraid of was the

severity of the penalty... I did hope that it wasn't a disqualifier. But even so, what could they take from me? They could keep me from knowing my splits. That's all. They couldn't take a finish away. As it turned out, it was one 6-minute penalty. Well, it was TOTALLY WORTH IT!!! 😊

Anyway, I ran, I walked, I cringed in pain, I stopped at aid stations and ate bits of bananas, oreos, drank cups of water, Heed, used portapotties twice, ran, walked, and cringed. And I listened to music. And I watched the miles go by. At mile 24, I thought... I could just stop and walk now! But I still tried to run some. I walked up the last bridge and ran down the other side, and stopped leisurely at the last aid station. Then I started running toward the last turn toward the Battleship. Volunteers guided us in... "Stay between the white line and the cones... and watch out for the alligator!" Ha, ha, very funny. I stopped to walk briefly one more time (had to make sure I'd look good at the end, right?) and then jogged past the last row of spectators and volunteers, not feeling quite as emotional as I thought I would, until I turned the corner and entered the finish chute. Lights were bright. The announcer said my name, my home town, and the big "Finish" archway was just ahead. Tears flowed, just as they are right now as I'm writing this. This was it. I had done it. I had completed an ironman... my biggest athletic goal. It was awesome, just wonderful... and every other superlative you can think of!

I crossed the mat and broke down crying. The volunteers thought I needed a medic! My good friend, Melanie Stuart, and my mother were there to greet me and give me hugs. Dan Riley was there, too. It was awesome. I don't know how better to describe it.

So, I have been asked, "Will you do another one?" No. Emphatically, no. But I am so incredibly glad that I did it!!!!!!







Oh, and here's the tattoo I now have around my left ankle (lettering in black, W-dot in purple)! 😊



And here are my splits:

NAME	SWIM	T1	BIKE	T2	RUN	PENALTY	TIME
JANE WEST	1:00:35	22:01	6:05:20	8:59	5:18:55	6:00	13:01:47