

What swimming has meant to me.

Gerry Chapman

Co-Captain, UNC Swim Team, 1971-73

Swimming has been a constant throughout my life. At Brookwood Hills pool in Atlanta, I took lessons when I was about 3 or 4 and despite taking a big breath of water one morning instead of air, I kept with it. Every summer I spent virtually every day at Brookwood, and found a sense of belonging, good friends and skills that kept me safe.

My dad passed away unexpectedly when I was 7, and I was fortunate to have a series of strong and positive male role models in my life through both swimming and diving (short career there). Chester Graham was a highly inspirational coach who took me from age 11 to my sophomore year at Marist in Atlanta where our team won three straight George State Championships against all other schools at every level. I also swam with Pete Higgins during those winter months until I started at Marist. Pete and Pat McKeown continued that mentoring process, with Pete coaching me to a National Long Course yards record at age 12 in the 50 free, and later taking me to my first Long Course National Championships in Oak Park, Ill., in 1968. Pat coached me for two years at Marist and all four years at UNC where I won one ACC title (400 IM) and qualified for NCAA's my freshman and senior years. Pete and Pat gave me great insight into stroke mechanics, training strategy and race psychology. Dr. Pat Earey, the head coach at UNC, was another great mentor and role model. Pete, Pat McKeown and his wife Carol, and Dr. Earey also spent time with me outside the pool, talking with me about important issues, and giving their time to me without being asked. I have no doubt that their interest in me got me through Marist as well as through UNC.

After graduating from UNC, my co-captain, Bobby Nagle, and I served as assistant coaches for one year. That experience gave us the chance to donate a full year to the UNC program, doing our best to serve as coaches and mentors to the team members. The program was in transition, and we did not always succeed with each swimmer, but the leadership experience was priceless.

Now that I swim in the Greensboro Swim Association's Masters program, I have a regular opportunity to work with great coaches, compete against other swimmers, and have the team experience that is such a positive and supportive influence (and makes it so much easier to work out hard).

Swimming also has given me a small but loyal group of life-long friends that stretches back over 53 years. I see those friends (David Eldridge, Mike Eddy, Andy Chandler, Ray Stang, Chris Davis, all still in Georgia) often and they are like brothers to me. Many others with whom we swam made up a family of bright, talented and supportive swimmers. I benefited from knowing every single one of them.

This sport gave me a constant connection with my brother, John, who is two years older and always faster. I tried to keep up with him and follow in his footsteps, both as a swimmer and an assistant

coach. UNC and UT competed against each other while we were in school there, and both of us were grateful to have the opportunity to spend a little time with each other during the school year.

Most importantly, swimming brought me into contact with my wife of 40 years, Linda. We met at UNC through one of my teammates there (she roomed with his girlfriend and now wife). Over the years she has put up with and been supportive of my masters swimming and the summer swimming of our children, Mandy and John. Both of them had good, although brief, swimming careers, and for years during the summers they kept me close to the pool. Their athletic careers in gymnastics (Mandy) and soccer (John) were strengthened considerably by their years in the pool.

Recently I was asked to serve on the Organizing Committee for the North Carolina Swimming Hall of Fame. The HOF has been inactive for quite a while, and Hill Carrow, one of my teammates at UNC, invited me to be on the committee charged with re-starting the HOF. North Carolina swimming has a proud and accomplished history, so this is a great opportunity to bring our state's swimming history back to the public eye in a very important way.