

Jennifer Beals' Post-Triathlon Report

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From Jennifer Beals

“My goodness—what an amazing day.

I wake up at 4:00am in the complete DARKNESS. Make my way to Second Beach—my iPod blaring a combination of country music, Gwen Stefani and Amy Winehouse to wake me up. The park, the beach are both in complete darkness as I set up my bike, my cleats, my socks, my numerous gels (God bless the makers of GU gels) my running shoes, my running hat, my capris and shirt, my biking jersey, my jacket, my goggles (prescription, if you must know), my swim cap, my towel, my little bucket to get the sand off my feet, and my La Mer face cream (my friends got a good chuckle out of that last relatively useless article). In short, I have more changes than Cher at a Vegas extravaganza—except no Bob Mackie to wriggle in and out of but a wetsuit that would seem glued to my body when it came time to take it off.

Check in, get body marked—the kind woman who engraves my body with the number "207" in Magic Marker asks me if I wanted smiley faces in the "0"s. Sure, why not? A little sense of humor never hurt anybody.

It is now 5:30am. My friend Sandra arrives. I know this is not a terrible hardship for her because she is ALWAYS up at 5:00am as she is training for a 7-day cycling race in the ALPS. I bow down to Sandra who has been helping me train—she is an endless font of information regarding nutrition, prescription goggles, compact cranks and the mysterious, esoteric uses of PAM Cooking Spray. She is possibly the kindest, most patient person I have ever met, which comes as no surprise because I met her through Rachel Shelley, also one of the kindest, most patient people I have ever met.

The heroic Alexandra Hedison arrives around 7:00am. Along with Sandra, she walks down to the beach with me. I look out at the buoys in the water—the buoys that indicate the distance of the swim—and I cannot believe how FAR AWAY they seem. We're standing on the beach, along with a couple hundred other people, some of whom must be thinking the same thing (HOLY SHIT THAT'S FAR AWAY!).

I get in the water to "warm up." Yep, the water's cold. The first lap around the buoys and back to the beach is 750m. For the Olympic distance we have to do two laps. The first wave to go out is the Under-40 Men doing the Olympic distance. The horn blows. They're off. And they're fast. Five minutes later, the horn blows and the women doing the Olympic distance dive in. That's me. And you know what? It's Heaven. I have never felt so relaxed during an open water swim. There are pockets in the water that are warm. I actually stay with the pack, rather than lag miles behind, which is a miracle. And I feel relaxed and happy to be in the water with all these other people who are attempting such an amazing feat that will at some point require them to feel pain and to dig deep to overcome that pain.

I complete the first lap without incident. Then, as we are coming along the second lap, I start to get passed by some of the Under-40 Men in the Olympic distance. One man swims over me. And you know what? It's fine. I just think, "That's okay, I know you're in a hurry, you're competitive and that's fine." Then a woman clocks me in the head and I think, "That's okay, you're just in your own trajectory, and maybe a little panicky so it's okay." Just so you know, this is not my normal response when being struck in the water. I don't know what's happened but I feel unbelievable calm. Before I know it the swim is over, and frankly I want more. But onto the bike.

I struggle to get out of the wetsuit—Alex and Sandra there, cheering me along. Get my bike gear on, pause for a quick application of face cream (I am still, after all, an actress) and off I go for an ENDLESS bike ride. I am the slowest cyclist of all time, but I make it around the course. Four loops through Stanley Park. By the time I get out to the course it is already littered with gel packs from other riders—like condom wrappers in the Bois de Boulogne—evidence of a different kind of effort. At the

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bottom of the hill is a group of people cheering on their friends and family. I see a sign saying, "Go Jennifer." I wonder if it's for me—and then I see the Obama sticker on the upper right corner and I realize it *must* be for me. And then it hits me—here is a group of well-wishers whom I have never, ever met, cheering me on. I am so moved and so uplifted I cannot even begin to tell you. This is the spirit of the event for me—helping people you have never met—cheering on people whom you may never know. Every time I come around that corner I look forward to hearing their cheers.

The rest of the ride is quite quiet, apart from the sound of tri bikes going by at the speed of light. I take the time to think of Judy Shepard, her love for her son, her continued love of justice and love itself, if that makes sense. She has extended her mothering to all of us—to make the world more conscious, to make the world safer, and perhaps one day, to make the world more loving.

I pull my bike in and get dressed for the "third act"—running hat and running shoes—and head out for the run. I feel confident in my ability to run. The first 5k are tricky. I can't feel my feet, which have yet to recover any kind of meaningful circulation since the swim. I start to cramp a bit but I just ask it to go away and it does. My body can be so accommodating at times. Where the mind goes the body does so often follow.

After the first loop of the run I start to feel more relaxed. The second 5k is really sweet. Not as sweet as Pablo's smile, but sweet. I feel kind of elated. I start thinking of the scene Elizabeth Berkley and I had done two days ago and how brilliant she was.

Pretty soon I can see the finish line—Pablo, let's just bring this on home—I hear someone cheering me on—and I just start sprinting. It is this transcendent convergence of determination, focus and celebration—it is like flying. I cross the finish line and there are the sweet faces of my friends, Elizabeth Berkley, Mia Kirshner, Greg Lauren, Alexandra Hedison, and my beautiful family.

I did not "win." I was not fast. But I succeeded. I succeeded because I was able to keep my mind calm in moments of adversity. I succeeded because, quite simply, I persevered.

I am deeply aware of the fact that this is not simply my accomplishment. No one can accomplish anything completely on their own. On the path there is always someone there who has been a support, whether it is a parent, a teacher, a friend, a family member or a stranger who has inexplicably extended herself/himself. There is always someone. The person who taught you to read, to run, to sing, to dance, to love, to learn—to keep on going. That is a collective effort. Life is a collective effort. And every moment of every day we can be that for one another even if it is simply by sending good wishes someone's way. I thank you deeply for all your good wishes.

Below are the most recent tallies of our fundraising efforts for the Matthew Shepard Foundation, Children's Hospital Los Angeles and the I Live Here Foundation. Thanks to your incredible generosity, we've nearly met our fundraising goal of \$5,000 for each charity. But we can't stop here! I encourage everyone to pass [this link](#) along to ten friends who might not have been to OurChart or read about the work of these incredible organizations. We'll keep the links available here and continue to update you on total donations.

- Jennifer“