
FRIEDMAN, SALLY. *Swimming the Channel*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996. Pp. 248. \$22 U.S., \$31 Can.

Sally Friedman did not swim the English Channel, yet her journal attests to an aquatic sports triumph and the endurance of a human spirit. Given the history of pseudo-biographical swimming books, Friedman's memoir is significant in the lack of self-promotion and the extraordinary degree of decent intimacy. The work exquisitely describes the intrinsic quality of sport as recreation and the measured distance of an emotional crossing.

Every swimmer, no matter what his or her accomplishments are, is eventually asked, "Have you done the Channel?" (Conrad Wenneberg, *Wind, Waves and Sunburn*, p. 45). The challenge of the Channel has served since the later 1900s as the marquee event for distance swimmers. The required mixture of physical readiness, tactical acumen, logistics management, and weather prognostications combine to make the "Channel Swim" the thing to do. Naturally, Sally Friedman, an accomplished distance swimmer, would want to do no less.

Her distance swimming training is clearly presented and comparable to others writing about the inordinate discomfort and pain endemic to marathon swimming (Diana Nyad, *Other Shores*, 1987, and Paul Jagasich, *Two Faces of the English Channel*, 1990). The journal meticulously marks the space and pace of her development of strength and endurance and especially the necessary adaptive process for cold water attempts.

Today's young swimmers' credos, embossed on T-shirts worn pool side, exhort: "NO PAIN NO GAIN," "IF YOU DON'T HURT YOU'RE NOT DOING IT," and "SWIM TRUE GRIT TRUE GUTS." The health and uplift books at an early period were equally as compelling if lacking in succinct slogans (John Bell, *A Treatise on Baths*, 1950; Captain Crawler, *Swimming, Skating, Rinking, & Sleighing*, 1878; Captain Davis Dalton, *How to Swim*, 1899; Annette Kellerman, *How to Swim*, 1918; and J. Randall, *Captain Webb: the Intrepid Champion Channel Swimmer*, 1875).

The day prior to departure for Sally Friedman's Channel swim her husband (in the comprehensive sense of the word) was struck by a truck and within a day died. The memoir with economy of stroke and dogged persistence has us bedside. Indefatigably the reader learns of her grief and resolution. Consequently, the journal is an expose of the potential of personality's definition through life-threatening exertion. The distance swimmer does not fear the water or the journey and consciously embraces the efficiency of pain as a crucible.

The book, *Swimming the Channel*, will elicit sympathy for Sally Friedman's loss and empathy for the inherent predisposition for aquatic sport; and compassion, as swimmers understand, "Because they are different," (Wennerberg, p. 78).

"And darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," (Genesis 1:2). No more profound elemental challenge exists for an athlete than to breathe upon the face of unfathomable depths and to endure the perilous adventures of the open water. "The long distance swimmers' quest recreates the primordial struggle of flesh and water" (P. Levi, *International Swimming Hall of Fame Marathon Swim Display*, 1992). Duration and the medium give the distance swimmer in practice and event experiences of sustained solitude neatly defined by acute impulses to survive. The work effectively shares a great channel crossing, from why me to why.

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