

## Diving into the blue

Former bodybuilder throws herself into Lake Ontario swim challenge

**SCOTT RADLEY**

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She looked stunned when the idea was first mentioned. Swimming across Lake Ontario? Seriously? Her?

She was no swimmer. She could float, she quips. But she'd never been on a school swim team or even done laps in a pool. So when the suggestion came up, she couldn't believe it.

Particularly because she was the one who said it.

"I have no idea where it came from," Thie Convery says.

Nor does anyone else, really. It was that far out of the blue. That day when she was asked what challenge in life she'd tackle next, the 43-year-old financial planner from Dundas may as well have announced she was dying her hair pink and becoming lead singer of a punk band.

Not that she doesn't have a track record of throwing herself into activities in a rather huge way.

Seven or eight years ago, she decided to become a bodybuilder. She'd always been one of the chubbier kids growing up -- her words -- so this was a way to sculpt her body into something new. More than that, it was a massive test of discipline, self-control and effort.

But she did it. Turned herself into a rock-hard specimen willing to stand on a stage in a tiny bikini and pose for judges. With confidence.

It's not that the sport became tiresome, but that kind of training takes a toll. Cutting weight, eating right all the time and constantly having to work incredibly hard to make tiny improvements is taxing.

So, of course, when it came to finding her next challenge, she blurted something that took just as much effort and even more time.

Not to mention, she had no idea if it was even possible.



Ron Albertson, the Hamilton Spectator

The day after her surprise announcement, she headed off to Christie Conservation Area to see what she could do. She lasted 30 minutes in the water. Barely. Doing a stroke you won't find in any Olympic competition.

"It was head up, modified dog paddle, breast stroke, side stroke," she laughs.

But having not drowned, she decided she'd go for it. She found a coach, learned a proper energy-saving technique and started training. To the point where she's sometimes in the pool for nine hours straight now.

"I'm there longer than the staff," she says.

Her longest swim so far has been 27 kilometres. She'll have to almost double that to make the crossing from Niagara-on-the-Lake to Marilyn Bell Park on the CNE grounds.

But she says it won't be a problem assuming conditions are somewhat favourable. She's done the distance over two days already and she has until Aug. 6 to make it happen.

Other things have been trouble though. Starting with changes to her body.

She doesn't deny she enjoyed the way she looked as a bodybuilder. So when this loopy idea popped out of her mouth it was an emotional and psychological commitment, too. Because the body type of someone who's going to be in cold water for close to 24 hours in one stretch has to be different. Fatter mainly. You have to bulk up to prevent hypothermia and to give the muscles stores of energy from which to draw strength and endurance.

Several times when she's standing in front of the mirror, she's had to convince herself it's OK that she's nearly 30 pounds heavier than her competition weight.

"My favourite part of this is how much I get to eat," she says.

She admits she has no social life now since training, work and sleep take every minute of the 24 hours she's been allotted every day. And she's really tired of smelling like chlorine.

Her biggest anxiety though?

On her way home from the dinner where the idea arose, she started recalling something she'd heard years before about long-distance swimmers in Lake Ontario having to contend with eels.

Hard work she could handle. Cold she could deal with. Adding fat, she could wrap her head around. But eels latching onto her? That's gross.

"The next morning, the first thing I Googled was eels in Lake Ontario," she says.

Turns out their population is only 3 per cent of what it used to be. That's the good news. The bad? There's talk of restocking the lake to balance the ecosystem.

Convery pretends to shudder.

"As long as they wait until after August."



Barry Gray, the Hamilton Spectator

## CHARITY SWIM

The Convery's swim across Lake Ontario is a charity swim to raise money to help eradicate polio in those corners of the world where it remains a problem. She's hoping to raise \$150,000, which would immunize a quarter of a million children. For more information, visit [swimtoendpolio.ca](http://swimtoendpolio.ca).

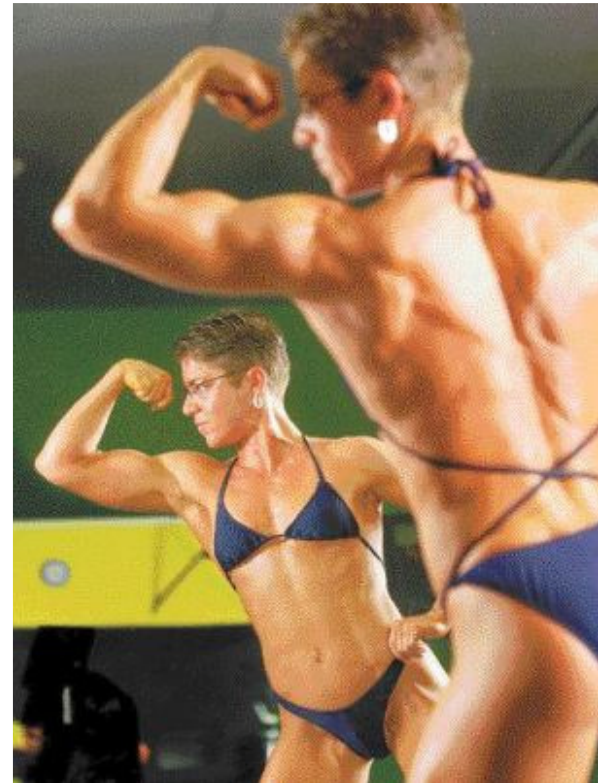
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