

# {LOCAL SUCCESS} ——— *kelly walsh*

New Orleans attorney Kelly Walsh began swimming in childhood, but it wasn't until she was studying for the bar in the summer of 2007 that she became inspired to pursue long distance, open water swimming. In an effort to clear her head, she would regularly swim at her gym. During her swims, she noticed an 80-something year old man who would swim long distances without stopping, far longer than she was able to.

"I thought, 'There's no way this 80-year-old man can swim longer than me,'" Walsh said. So, Walsh began efforts to improve her endurance. Her first goal was to be able to swim for a mile without stopping. It took a month of swimming every day, but she was able to hit that goal.

And so she continued to work on her long distance swimming, with no particular goal in mind other than to unwind after work. In August 2008, she heard about the 1st half-Ironman event that would be held in New Orleans in spring 2009 and that people could register for just one individual leg of the event (either the swim, run, or bike). It was then that she decided to try her first ever competitive long distance, open water swim.

In order to train for the event, she would swim in Lake Pontchartrain for a mile and a half 2-3 days a week. She didn't have a group of people to train with, so she had to resort to having friends accompany her to the lake and watch her from the shore in case she faltered in the open water and needed help.

After successfully completing the 1.2 mile swim at the 2009 Ochsner Ironman 70.3 New Orleans, Walsh stopped doing the long distance swims for a short while. Eventually, she realized that she would need to continue competing in order to motivate herself to do the work. "I'm one of those stubborn people and I like to challenge myself," Walsh said. "I knew I wouldn't get into the lake as much if I didn't have something to work towards."

So, Walsh set her sights on not just the 2010 Ochsner Ironman 70.3, but also the one mile event at the Great Chesapeake Bay Swim. She successfully completed both events, and now plans to enter the 4.4 mile swim at the Chesapeake event next year. Her training regimen consists of 1-2 swims every week in Lake Pontchartrain (she currently swims a mile, but is working towards a mile and a half) and 1-2 swims a week in an indoor pool.

The time constraints can be challenging, especially since Walsh works as a lawyer and plays in two kickball leagues in the evenings, but she is able to manage. Some days, she wakes up at 5:30 a.m. to go for her swim. Other days, she goes in to work at 7 a.m. so she can leave work in enough time to take an evening swim. "It's just a lot of schedule juggling," Walsh said.

But, in the end, Walsh, now 31 years old, feels it's worth it for two reasons: the mental challenge and the distraction her swims provide her from the stresses of everyday life. "You can't think about anything else when you're swimming other than swimming," Walsh said. And her competitive side appreciates the mental challenge long distance, open



**"It's easier to get over the fear when you have other people with you,"**

water swimming provides. Swimming a mile through laps in an indoor pool is one thing; swimming far off the shores of Lake Pontchartrain is another thing entirely. There, she faces unpredictable waters and can see how far she is from land and safety. "I get nervous every time I go for a swim. It's not a controlled environment."

For newcomers looking to get into long distance, open water swims, Walsh recommends a buddy system. Finding a group of swimmers to tag along with will help conquer fears a rookie may have of swimming that far from shore. "It's easier to get over the fear when you have other people with you," Walsh said.