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Battling cancer, stroke for stroke

By Jon Kingdon



David Miller at the Soda Aquatic Center in Moraga. Photo provided

Hellen Keller once said, "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all." It's a philosophy that David Miller has taken to heart.

A Buffalo, New York native and graduate from the University of Michigan, Miller worked in the health and fitness industry for 25 years doing everything from sales and marketing to club design, management and consulting. Miller originally came to California in 1986, lived briefly in San Diego before moving to Stockton, working for Abbott Laboratories. Miller then went on to work in Paris, Nairobi and Mexico City before returning to Orinda in 2013 and eventually settling in Montclair.

When Miller turned 50, his original idea was to do 50 triathlons in 50 weeks but the schedule could not be worked out. It was his sense of wanderlust that sent him off on a bicycle trek through all 50 states. So as not to be lonely, he brought along his pet weimaraner, Max. "My attitude was that I had to do something challenging. Max and I were like a little train going down the highway," said Miller. I had a mountain bike outfit with road tires. I was pulling Max in a dog carriage with a second trailer carriage carrying all my gear."

After this odyssey, Miller returned home and took on a number of jobs: "I've been tutoring French and Spanish, doing some translation work, working at a tennis club and as a lifeguard at the Campolindo High School's Soda Aquatic Center."

While working at the pool, Miller met a senior swimmer named Steve Steward, an avid daily swimmer who, on his own, committed to and completed a mission to swim 750,000 yards in one year. It was Steward's accomplishment that struck a chord for Miller, who set a goal for himself to swim a million yards the following year. However, for Miller, there had to be purpose to undertake such an effort.

That purpose was to raise funds for the Cancer Research Institute, which focuses on immunotherapy in the treatment of cancer. "As I was looking to start this project, I knew that the fight against cancer had to be the focal point," said Miller, whose father passed away from cancer, sister had a bout of cancer, and mother had three bouts of cancer - and the list goes on and on with other friends and family.

No matter how you look at it, a million is a big number and even bigger when you attach yards to it. Add in further roadblocks with the temporary closure of the pool, the coronavirus and the poor air quality due to the fires in the area and it became that much more of a challenge for Miller.

Since January Miller has been swimming laps 22 to 24 days a month for about 1 1/2 hours each day. Each length of the pool is 25 yards and he swims each length 160 times for a total of 4,000 yards a day. Fortunately for Miller, he has the ability to stay on track and not lose count of his laps: "This is my meditation as I watch the pace clock and I count my laps."

Though he began swimming Jan. 1, Miller's intention was to begin his fundraising campaign a couple of months later: "I was going to swim for a couple of months to show people that I was dedicated and it was a realistic goal and that I was on pace to make it successfully. However, with all of this year's complications, I had to put things off in setting up a way for people to contribute. Everyone had other things in their lives that became their priorities."

Miller's fundraising campaign became far more public on different levels starting Nov. 1 when the Aquatic Director at the Soda Aquatic Center, Andrew Morris, and the General Manager of the Chabot Canyon Racquet Club, Steve Squire, sent out emails to all of their respective members informing them of what Miller was looking to accomplish and what he was raising money for. There is also an announcement on the video screen at the Soda Center which periodically displays what Miller is doing.

In the short period since the fundraising campaign has begun, there have been more than 100 donors totaling over \$13,000.

Jonathan Winter, from Moraga, is a twice-a-week swimmer at the Soda Center and has come to know Miller well: "David is the person who originally encouraged me to swim more than once a week. He is always positive and encouraging and always makes the swimmers feel welcome. It's only recently that we became

aware of David's goal and I have contributed to his account."

Even when the pool was shut down due to the air quality issues and it was no longer heated, Miller did not let that stop him. "I did not lose much time at all," Miller said. "I simply pulled out my wetsuit. I might have lost a week here and there but I was able to keep swimming."

Miller is expecting to cross the million-yard finish line Dec. 27 and is hoping to have people swimming along with him. "There are 34 lanes in the aquatic center. My plan for the last day of swimming in this project is to invite or auction off the swimming lanes," he said. "I'm hoping that I will have 33 other swimmers that will donate \$250 to swim with me on the day that I reach a million yards."

To learn more about Miller and his quest, he has set up a website called Swimamillion.org. It reports his monthly progress, explains his reasons for such an undertaking, lists all of the relatives and friends who have dealt with cancer, some of whom have lost that battle, and a way to pay tribute to Miller's efforts by making a contribution to the Cancer Research Institute.

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