

Swimmer Profile –David Faulkner

By Elaine Krugman



As I have gotten to know my fellow Georgia Masters swimmers over the past ten years, I have learned the paths that have led them to swimming are as varied and unique as each of our members. For some, it's to lose weight, and for others, swimming is a stress reliever or just a way to have fun. Perhaps for you, it's all of the above. We all have a different story to tell.

Atlanta Rainbow Trout's board secretary (and former Swim Director), David Faulkner, found his way to Georgia Tech's pool as a way to cope with a heartbreaking loss. "The reason I joined the swim team—my mother died unexpectedly in the beginning of '97, and I needed something to be involved in besides work. I was reading *Southern Voice*, a gay newspaper, and it said, 'Would you like to swim with a gay-friendly Masters swim team?' It was the best thing I could have done, because exercise is very good for your mental health, and it's really helped me deal with

losing my mom," David explained.

Swimming was a natural fit for David because he grew up in Miami with a backyard pool and learned to swim at an early age although he didn't join a team. "I never competed in a swim meet until the age of 39," David said, adding that his first swim meet was at Georgia Tech, after joining the team in 1997.

That first Masters meet experience was one to remember for the new competitor. As David recalled, "In one of my events, it was a false start, and I didn't hear [the whistle]; so, I kept swimming. All of a sudden, I swam over a thin rope, and I'm thinking, 'What in the heck?' Then, a short time later, I swam over another rope! And, when I got out of the pool, my friends said, 'Didn't you feel that rope?' And, I said, 'Yeah, and what was that all about?' When there's a false start, and you don't hear it, they drop a rope, so that's how you know it's a false start. Nobody ever told me that! It was funny. I laughed, they laughed." At the conclusion of that meet, David remembered thinking, "This is a blast, this is so much fun!"

And, since that first meet in 1997, he says he has been in so many meets that he has lost count. "I have competed in six Gay Games, and I've been in a bunch of IGLA's (International Gay and Lesbian Aquatics). IGLA's are every year except on the fourth year when the Gay Games happen. They were started in San Francisco by Dr. Tom Waddell. He was a physician, and he was gay, and he thought there should be a sporting event geared for gay and lesbian people. The first one was in 1982 in San Francisco," David said.

In addition to the Gay Games, a worldwide sport and cultural event that promotes acceptance of sexual diversity, David competed with fellow Atlanta Trout member, Henry Griesbach, in the 2nd annual Tel Aviv Games in Israel, in March of 2019.

For David, it was a return trip to the country he had traveled to with his mom as members of Friendship Force, a non-profit organization in Atlanta. He had fun memories of being shown the country by their host family and being taken to float in the Dead Sea, a very unique "swimming" experience!

At the time of our February interview, David was preparing to travel the following week to Melbourne, Australia, for the next IGLA meet. (In 2002, he participated in the Sydney IGLA meet and swam in the Olympic pool used for the 2000 Olympics.)

The IGLA meets are an annual highlight for David. When asked about his favorite Masters Swimming memory, he replied, “Swimming in the IGLA meet and being involved when we hosted IGLA at Georgia Tech... We are encouraged to host someone (from another city) to keep expenses down, so for both IGLA meets, I hosted somebody in my condo...They encourage all of the people that sign up for IGLA to sign up for a hosted dinner. It’s a great way to visit, socialize outside of the pool while attendees are in your city, or you are in their city. The social component is really fun.”

According to David, that social component is the most fun following competition on the final day of the meet when the “Pink Flamingo” takes place. As he explained, “Teams are encouraged to do a skit, and you have to sign up in advance. There is a time limit on the skit; and, part of it has to be on the pool deck, and part of it has to be in the water. You can imagine with a lot of gay and lesbian people, it’s going to be very campy, there is going to be a lot of music involved; and, most gay and lesbian people are liberal, so it’s going to have a political bent to it... They have judges, and when it was here in Atlanta, the judges were well known drag queens, so it’s funny as all get out!”

In addition to traveling the world to compete in IGLA and Gay Games meets, David enjoys swimming in local competitions, especially the Spring Splash and St. Nick’s meets that his team hosts each year.

A fierce competitor David is not, though. As matter of fact, he doesn’t set race time goals or any goals other than to just have fun. “If I have a fast swim, I’m happy, but, if I don’t, well, I’ve done something healthy for the day,” David explained about his approach to competition, adding, “I just love being in the pool environment and swimming for fun... I just get up there and do my best.”

Doing “something healthy” for himself is important to David, especially considering his late father’s medical history. “My dad had heart disease and had his first heart attack at the age of 39 and had a fatal heart attack at 51. I am super healthy. I have no blood pressure problems... I know how good swimming has been for me. I have no heart disease. There are so many reasons that [swimming] was good for me.”

One of those reasons is that swimming is such a good de-stressor. David is a Senior Event Planning Manager for the Hyatt Regency, in Atlanta. “I can put in a full day at work and then I go to practice; and, if I’m stressed, I can do 50 yards, and I don’t even remember why I was stressed. It just relaxes me so much.”

In addition to swimming, David gets in other exercise to keep him mentally and physically healthy. “I walk a good bit, and I do some biking. I should do some weight training, but I’m super lazy on that. I just don’t. The older you get, you lose muscle, and weight training would be very good for me, but it’s a time issue as well,” he said.

David’s current activities seem to suit him well and keep him happy, though. “A lot of my really good friends are on the swim team. I realized that people that join the team want to live a healthy lifestyle. They’re drug-free— they might have a drink or two, but they don’t drink excessively. It’s just a great environment; I just thoroughly enjoy it.”