

Swimmer Profile –Dodi Thomas

By Elaine Krugman



It was September of 2016 at the Southside Seals Pentathlon that Dodi Thomas competed in her first U.S. Masters Swimming meet, and by the end of 2018, she already had **74** sanctioned races behind her. This is one enthusiastic competitor!

Although Dodi swam on her high school swim team, it wasn't until 52 years later that she joined Georgia Masters and returned to pool competition. Her prior swim racing had been in sprint triathlons, beginning with one she competed in with her daughter in Acworth. Dodi still competes in a triathlon at least once per year.

A life-changing event is what motivated the athlete to return to pool swimming. As Dodi explained, "My husband passed away, and I didn't want to just sit around; I wanted to be active. I always enjoyed sports."

Sitting around doesn't suit this 72-year old. When she is not training with the Northwest YMCA Grayfins, competing at a swim meet, or racing a triathlon, Dodi is running a 5K race, playing tennis, or playing pickleball. She is one busy lady! As a matter of fact, Dodi's frequent participation in those other sports is what keeps her from swimming more often. "The only thing that deters me, sometimes, is that I do have other activities that I am involved in. I feel good about being able to do

different things. I love swimming, but I also love tennis and being able to run, still. I'm fortunate my knees haven't given way or things like that, because I just love outdoor activities. If I was focused on just one thing, I would probably be more motivated for swimming. I do enjoy all the different sports, and I think I would get tired if I was just concentrating on one," she explained.

What was it about swimming in particular that attracted Dodi to USMS? She has always loved the water. During her grade school years of 6th to 12th grade, Dodi lived in Puerto Rico with her family where her father worked for the government. In addition to being on the swim team, she spent a lot of time in the ocean. It was what all the kids in Puerto Rico did in their free time. "I love the water. I'm sort of like a fish when it comes to the water," she said.

It was former Grayfins coach Muriel Cochran's encouragement, though, that inspired this fish to join Georgia Masters. After Dodi started doing triathlons, she enrolled in a triathlon training class at the YMCA. "Muriel was coaching me for the triathlon, and she was telling me about the Masters swim program, and so I said, "I would like to do that!"

Dodi jumped right in to competing at meets, and the very next year, in 2017, she wound up ranking first in the state for her age group in several events. “It was such an exciting thing to know I was able to accomplish that,” she said, reflecting back on her favorite Masters memory.

In addition, this talented Grayfin became a USMS All-American for Long Distance in the Middle Distance Open-Water category (70-74). That was accomplished when Dodi swam the 2.4 mile open-water race in Chattanooga.

It is no surprise then that when Dodi is racing in the pool, she prefers the long events. “I like swimming distance like the 1000 and 1650. I also enjoy the 100 IM. I have done the 200 IM, but my butterfly is terrible; so, once I get through the butterfly, I feel a lot better! I just enjoy the water. It does something for me. It makes me relax and feel good that I can get in there and swim; and, go the distance.”

Competing in the pool after 52 years away from the sport was a bit of an adjustment, though. As Dodi explained, “First of all, it was just getting back into the strokes, and improving the different strokes, since it had been so long since I had done anything. Freestyle, you don’t even [swim] it correctly when you’re doing it for pleasure a lot of times, so my goal was to learn correct techniques in order to improve my swimming...What they’re teaching now is different... from what I remembered 60 years ago. It’s not difficult; it’s just developing that pattern. It’s more of a memory process with your muscles.”

To learn the strokes, Dodi has been watching swim technique videos and enjoying reading *Swimmer*, USMS’s magazine. In addition, became a certified USMS Adult Learn-to-Swim instructor. “I am not certain how I will use the certificate, but I know there will be opportunities to use it to help others,” she said.

Meanwhile, in addition to working on improving her strokes and race times, Dodi is having a great time in Georgia Masters. “I enjoy the team camaraderie, and not only that, but the people at events. They are all so friendly and encouraging. Even the officials. I think it’s great, the attitude and the spirit that is there at the different meets,” Dodi said, adding, “Another nice thing is all the other people you get to know at these different places. Then, you see them again. It’s not necessarily a one-time thing. You get to know them a little better. Just knowing you have a safe place to go when you’re older, or, like me, a widow. There, you feel safe, you feel comfortable, and at the end of the day when you have done a meet, you feel like you have accomplished something. There are so many positives that it’s a good thing to do, and I recommend it for anybody.”

One thing Dodi wanted to make sure to add about Georgia Masters is her appreciation for the organization’s leadership. “It’s so helpful to receive the e-mails that the Georgia Masters Board of Directors sends out] with updated information on swim meets and events. That is a helpful thing they do for the members, sending out [those e-mails] and keeping us informed. I’m always so afraid I will miss something, but I don’t, because they are so good at keeping us so informed. I appreciate that. I don’t know if they know how much we appreciate the things that they do, and I really do appreciate everybody who has a part in it. That’s what makes an organization work.”