

Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Monty Python

By Jon Blank

For many who suffered through high school English classes, the name of Samuel Taylor Coleridge may have only been an answer to a multiple choice poetry question. A few might remember that he penned "Kubla Khan" after an opium-induced stupor. But Coleridge's narcotic musings on Xanadu are perhaps less well known than his "Rime of the Ancient Mariner", wherein the salty seadog's crewmates pay the price for his skill as a bow hunter. The Mariner is cursed to walk the earth, reciting how he killed an albatross and was forced to wear its carcass around his neck as penance for the deed. Coleridge's vivid imagery and woeful tale stayed with me when I first read that poem, but the grim vision was replaced by a more absurd one when I saw a Monty Python sketch.



One of the Python's more ridiculous acts featured John Cleese as a salesgirl (!) shilling a tasty snack from an ice-cream tray. Rather than chocolate or vanilla, though, the flavor of the day is "Albatross". Though my depiction falls far short of the actual riotously funny bit, at least it's a lead to this month's partially self-congratulatory Chairman's Corner. I will remember the Albatross now for a very different reason.

On March 15, at a meet in North Bethesda Maryland, NC Masters Swimmers Erika Braun and Sue Walsh set world records in their respective age groups in the 50 meter short course freestyles. Walsh, arguably the greatest UNC-Chapel Hill and ACC swimmer in history, swam a 27.67 to better the women's 50-54 world record of 27.81, set in 2011 by Canadian Sarah MacDonald. In the same heat, Erika Braun just missed the world record of 26.22, but since it was already her own record, I suppose she could have been satisfied. Au contraire. Later in the day, Braun proved herself up to the task. She swam a 26.07 leading off a relay to break her own year-old record.

In that relay, the women's sprint world-record holders then teamed up with Jonathan Klein (who the cognoscenti know as the Svengali of NC Relays) and his Johns Hopkins collegiate teammate (yours truly) to swim the 200 SCM Mixed Freestyle Relay in 1:46.07. With that, North Carolina Masters Swimming now owns the 200 SCM Mixed Freestyle



record, shaving nearly a second and a half from the Rowdy Gaines-anchored Team BluFrog 200-239 world record time of 1:48.41. Messrs. Klein and Blank agreed afterward that our most important task on the relay had been not to false start.

Oh, I forgot to mention the name of the meet. It's the Albatross Invitational, sponsored by a club in the Potomac Valley Region. The club's name? They are the Ancient Mariners, of course.