



Local Legend *Let's swim!*



Local Legend Eric Kinney, Endurance Open Water Swimmer

Is this a One Time Thing?

I was a runner. I ran in high school and college. I felt burnt out from running. I ran marathons and half marathons and many 10K's. I did a handful of triathlons. I was running 70-100 mile per week up until my mid 30's. I was looking to complement my running with swimming.

I was first introduced by a friend, Jennifer T (no longer with the team) to Menlo Masters swimming in my mid 30's. Before MM, I had never been part of any organized swimming group. Rebecca Pinto was the first person that I met on MM. We swam together the first few months. She made fun of my baggy swim trunks.

In 2022, I convinced myself to try and swim 100K for February Fitness. I had barely made it to 50K for the previous 15 or so years. I had been swimming 3 days a week for just 60 minutes. On the first Saturday, I met Abby Bergman. She convinced me to do a third workout with her, meaning 3 hours of swimming. She politely crushed me, but was encouraging. She and I ended up swimming 4 days a week and 10K each Saturday together after that. On February 28, 2022 she asked me a question that changed my perspective on swimming- "Is this a one time thing?". At first, I could not answer

her, I was too tired and my goal had been met at 120K. I initially took February Fitness as a one time goal, but I had lost 7 pounds during the month and it felt great!

Initially open water swimming was very difficult for me. I had never sighted before and found myself swimming zig zag and got lost on one swim at Coyote point. Janet Renner, who has 30 years of open water swim experience, said that “that was the scariest open water swimming event to happen in her life.” I found myself alone about $\frac{3}{4}$ a mile from shore. Story for another time.

Abby invited me up to South End (Aquatic park in SF) in May, 2022. She and I have swum up in SF almost every Sunday since. Sometimes she and I ran 4-8 miles before the swim. Given the cold water, I started with 15 min swims, but later was able to swim with her and her pod for over 3 hours (that took many months). I also started wearing a wetsuit. My sighting drastically improved. My long distance running mindset fit perfectly with the long distance swimming mindset.



Moving out the Goal Posts

2022:

- Swam Lake Del Valle, Santa Cruz, and the 10-mile solo La Jolla swim.
- Completed my first open water race, the Santa Barbara 6-mile ocean swim, finishing in 2 hours 30 minutes and placing 7th, with my daughter Sabrina and her finance Peter as support kayakers. Abby had me well prepared.

2023:

- Swam the Portland 11-mile Bridge Swim
- Completed the Catalina Channel (21+ miles) in 13 hours 33 minutes, overcoming jellyfish stings, exhaustion, and cold. I was not ready. Tim has told me - “Eric you are punching well above your weight”. I had swum a few night swims, but my longest swim had been only 6

hours. Thank you to Mike Fero and Stephane who crewed for me. I could barely move after getting back to the boat. I was bleeding from my upper right chest, left thigh (jellyfish sting) and right knee. I fell down a few times and smashed my knee on some rocks as I tried to stand up in Rancho Palos Verdes. After my mom watched the video of me struggling to walk and bleeding after climbing back on the boat, she told me to not swim that again. I was in the ER three times in the week following my Catalina swim with bacterial infections. I still have a scar on my right upper chest from my beard hitting my chest for 13 hours. Nevertheless, it was a fun learning experience.

- Completed the NY 20 Bridges Swim (28.5 miles) around Manhattan in 7 hours 59 minutes, enjoying the iconic course despite 5 weeks of post-swim illness. I am really satisfied with that swim. I felt really bad for Abby. She was drenched by rain on the boat and had no bathroom for the 8 hour swim.
- Returned to the La Jolla 10-mile swim and struggled. I was still exhausted and depleted from the Catalina swim. Lisa Sheeper convinced me to wear a wetsuit the last 3 miles and Tim, Stephane and Abby took turns swimming next to me making sure I finished.

2024:

- Swam SCAR (40 miles over 4 days across 4 Arizona lakes) with extreme conditions, including a 17-mile swim in 52–64°F water and strong winds. I stayed with team members Dave and Barb Breen. It was very demanding with a 50% finishing rate. The water temperature started at 52 degrees and got up to around 64. Lake Apache was the most difficult swim of my life (so far). It was a 17 mile swim starting at Roosevelt dam. The last 6 miles we had a 40 mph head wind. My buddy Alex (Kayaker from NY) was yelling at me to swim or quit. These 4 days gave me enough confidence to try and swim the English Channel.

Aqua Boys Rule!

I really enjoy swimming, both in the pool as well as open water. They both have their own challenges. Given that I do not have a swimming background, I do not know how to swim backstroke without pulling the lane lines and my breaststroke is illegal. My turns can also improve and my strokes need help. It turns out that my choppy stroke is perfect for open water swimming.

Each day going to Burgess is a great experience. We have the AQUA BOYS in lane 2 (you know who you are!). All of us are around the same age and have the same sense of humor. We get together quarterly at each other's homes to meet outside the pool. These guys really push me daily as do our friends in SF.

The mental toughness component is still something that I am working on. I recently failed swimming a 6 hour English Channel Qualifying swim at under 60 degrees. We started swimming at San Quentin Prison and swam up to the Golden Gate Bridge (about 8 miles). I swallowed too much of the SF Bay and could not stop throwing up. I got really sick at about 2 hours and only lasted another 45 min. I worry about this still.

It is a lot easier for me to stay longer or go harder with others. I find swimming very different from running. I can do a half marathon in my sleep, but to go beyond 90 minutes in open water without others is almost impossible. I need others to motivate me.

My Typical Week

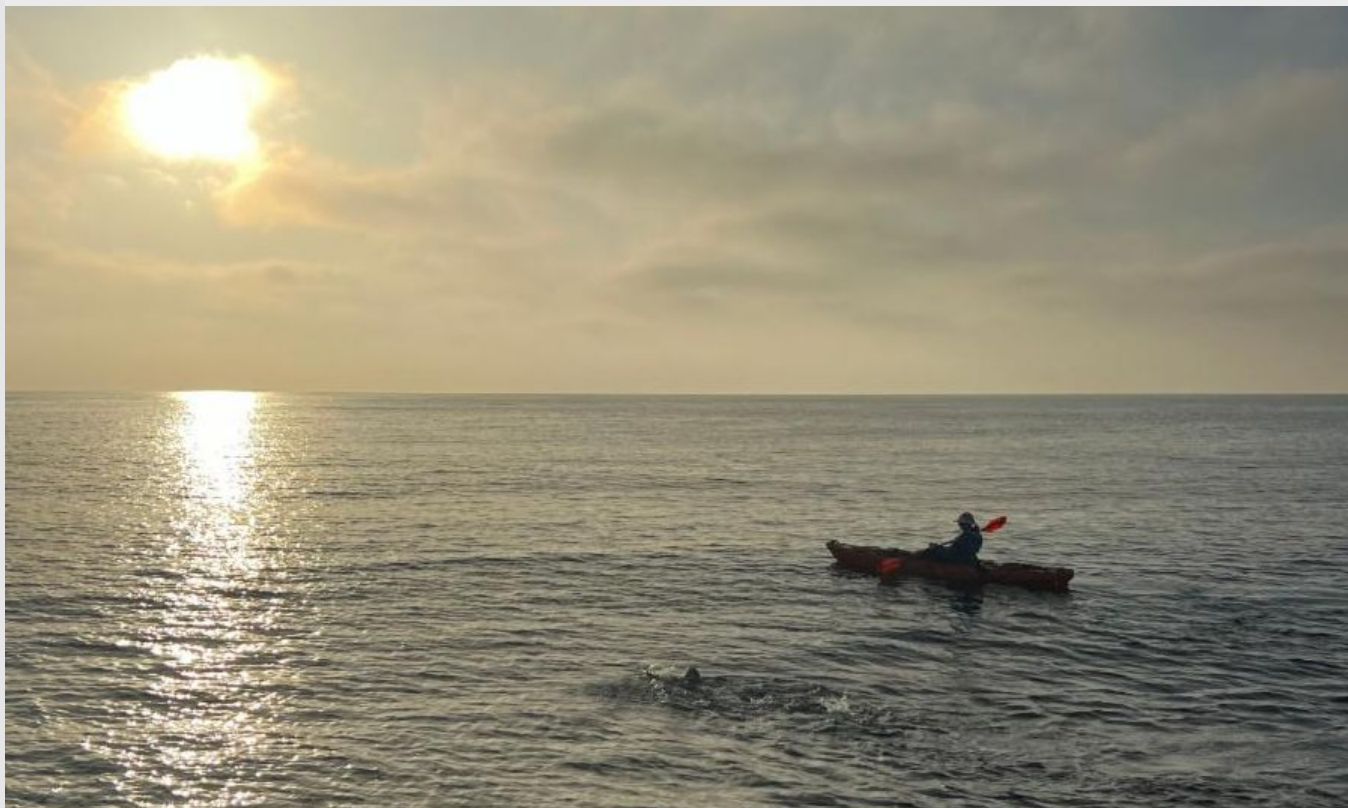
I swim 5 days a week, run 3 days a week and lift 3 days a week (yes, I have a fulltime job up in San Francisco and a family)

- Monday, Wednesday and Friday: I run 8-10 miles and lift
- Tuesday - Thursday I swim double workouts (2 hours) with Menlo Masters (about 6500-7200 yards), I have been swimming in the Bay 3 times a week recently for cold water training. For doubles, I love having the second group in lane 2 try to break me in the second hour, since they are fresh.
- Saturday is either a 10K in the pool or open water up to 3 hour swim
- Sunday is a long Bay Swim and sometimes a run before the swim

Staying Fueled

Before 2012 I only drank water when I swam, now I consume all my swim calories as liquids or gels. I have fully migrated from solids to only liquids after my Catalina swim. After experimenting with a lot of products, I use Perpetuum, Hammer Gel and Cytocarb with electrolytes.

I eat 3 full meals a day. I avoid red meat. My daughter is trying to get me on a plant based diet. I found that I lost too much weight on that diet, but will try it again later this year. To maintain my weight I need to consume at least 4-5K calories a day. I eat healthy, but love ice cream at night.



My 2025 goals

- Lake Taupo and Cook Strait in NZ (Feb time frame) and the Strait of Gibraltar (June).
- My daughter is getting married in Barcelona in June 2025. I want to swim Gibraltar with two SCAR friends, Gabriella and Malena. We are looking for a 4th to join us.
- I am going to see how the English Channel goes or possibly delay.

Sounds fun? Here are some tips...

- Start with a small goal (For example: Feb fitness 50K or 100K, Trans Tahoe relay, La Jolla relay or a swim meet).
- Surround yourself with swimmers that are better than you. Surround yourself with people that are passionate about swimming and have goals, get yourself out of your comfort zone, challenge yourself.
- Find accountable, reliable people that are training for the same swims at the same level.
- Block the time off of the family calendar and make sure you are present for the time that is not individual.
- One needs to be structured for this lifestyle. I am very structured. I need to fit in my workouts with other obligations.

Teammate Gratitude

Abby has taken hours out of her schedule to talk about race strategy (good, bad and ugly- before and after), introduce me to other swimmers, suggest feedings and training plans. Having someone that has already completed these swims really helped me. We have swam 1,000's of miles together over the last 2 plus years. I have gotten her more interested in running.

When I'm not swimming...

I love to travel. We travel internationally each year. Some of our recent trips (last 5 years) have taken us to Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Egypt, Jordan, Peru, Costa Rica, Panama, Brazil, Spain, Singapore and China.

This profile of Eric Kinney was suggested by Stephanie Couch.

About Local Legends

Menlo Masters is gathering and sharing stories of extraordinary individuals on the team. We hope these narratives will connect us with each other and inspire us to swim often.

If you want to shine our warm spotlight on someone you know, please contact tasha@menlomasters.com

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