

Heidi Renner

July 12, 1957 - February 25, 2012.

Prepared by Martha Renna (Heidi's Mom), Mary Lu Renner and Janet Renner (Heidi's Sisters)

Heidi Renner: Swimmer and Menlo Masters member since September, 1996, Devoted Mother, World Travel and Adventure seeker, Reading Teacher, Tutor for children with dyslexia, People Person.

As an adult, Heidi wrote a paper entitled "Swimming for My Life". "At the age of eight, a stroke (cerebral occlusion) ravaged my body. Being the youngest individual to have survived a stroke up until that time, and given that the effects of the stroke appeared to be so devastating, my odds of survival were rather slim at best....The years of physical and occupational therapy were on the tasks of daily living to prevent the atrophy of my limbs. In later years, I found that P.E. in school was a constant struggle. When, as a freshman in a high school tumbling class I gave myself simultaneous black eyes, I was humiliated...My two sisters, as a consequence, never really encouraged me athletically. They saw first hand how much it saddened and frustrated me. However, they never discouraged me from sport." The dystonia she suffered following the paralysis left her in a state of recovery most of her life.

Heidi discovered her love of swimming in August 1996 on a trip to Maui to visit her sister Janet, also a masters swim coach. Heidi decided to try a workout and jumped in with both feet! After her first 50 meters she climbed out, out of breath but intrigued. When she returned to California she found the absolute best masters coach and team! Within a year Heidi had competed in numerous local, regional and even international swim meets and open water swims!

"I love swimming especially, because it gives me a grace that has eluded me since I was eight. As a child watching my sisters, with all their grace and power, only served to make me more determined when my time came. I have a lot of catching up to do, but as long as I am in the water, loving the feeling of gracefulness, I will continue to improve...." And boy, did she!!

After Heidi's passing we received from Donia Bijan, a fellow teammate, a beautiful card which so eloquently summarizes Heidi, her swimming and the type of person she was. Excerpts are included below.

"Heidi swam an elegant backstroke, extending her arms in long powerful arches like a painter gone mad with his brush-coloring crescent moons blue with sweeping motions across his canvas. So when I picture her now, it is always in the pool, on her back, her eyes looking up at the clouds and migrating birds, swinging her arms in that carefree look-at-me-I'm-a-bird way.

"...I was a rookie masters swimmer and she welcomed me warmly in the predawn hours. Heidi made sure she knew who she was swimming with - no anonymity allowed, waiting for us at the wall to make sure we all knew the warm-up, but more importantly, to say hello, and always, always, greeting us with, 'It's so nice to see you.' And an hour later, when we heard Coach Tim call, 'That's a wrap,' she'd look in your eyes and say, 'Thank you for swimming with me.' Really.

"Our friendship was limited to time spent at the pool and in the showers, but what struck me was that Heidi didn't waste time on small talk, delving into conversations about travel, marriage, your new baby, movies and, being an avid reader, books. She talked to everyone indiscriminately and earnestly like the

child who waves hello from his car seat to people in adjacent cars. And sometimes, you would almost be annoyed with this goodwill ambassador, but not for long, for she disarmed you with her open smile. Because it wasn't so much friendliness, but her genuine interest in knowing what you cared about, who you were underneath the swim cap and goggles. She asked good questions and listened for your answer with her head tilted, as if what you had to say was all she cared about.

"When Heidi had a stroke, we swam, filling our days with yards. What else were we to do? Some people pray. Some people swim. We did a lot of both - convinced that if we swam hard enough, long enough, she would come back to us. One thing I've learned about swimmers is that we're a dogged bunch. Fill a three-foot hole with water, we'll jump in and try to do laps.

"They say that when loved ones die, they leave a hole. Heidi's loss, on the other hand, has filled us with a capacity to love we didn't know we had - our hearts have grown fonder, of each other, of water, of trees, rain, sun, clouds, grueling workouts, warm showers. We've become like the mad painter, filling our canvas with blues, imitating her arc."