

## Excerpts below are from fellow triathletes of Team Eschelon

**Dear Mike,**

I'm just writing to follow up on my note from the other day - I was really moved by all of the responses I received and wanted to share some of them with you. What was most compelling to me was that John had only entered into this world of triathlon a few years ago, but profoundly touched so many lives in that short time.

From everyone's accounts, he dove into everything he did with his entire heart, confidently tackling any challenge with enthusiasm and a youthful sense of curiosity. I even received e-mails back from many of you who were very inspired by John despite not knowing him personally. As I said, please feel free to contribute any messages you'd like and I will pass them all onto John's family.

A common thread running through the reflections was the notion that we spend a lot of time exercising, sometimes solo, often begrudgingly, but we really need to be thankful for having the ability and resources to push ourselves to the limits in athletic training and competition as we do. More than anything else though, we should be grateful for having close friends and family to share our lives with - to celebrate with us after our successes and help us through our disappointments.

I must say that the last five years that I have served this club have been an awesome experience. Bringing together such a gang of misfits, all of you with unique talents, personalities, and quirks (I love y'all for it) has been extremely rewarding. I cannot accuse any of you of not following your bliss and living with passion, and I've learned a ton from all of you. Hope you keep it up.

So it's been a great ride...but it's time for someone else to drive - stay tuned for Phil Gerhardt's "grand re-opening" newsletter! We hope to catch up with you all soon.

-Mike

### **From Peter Dominick:**

I wanted to thank you for taking the time to post the thoughtful and personal note about John Fischer. I considered John to be a good friend and I imagine your note means a lot to his family.

I was glad to be able to share in John's adventures in our sport and was always thankful for his support of my own efforts. When John turned his attention to triathlon, I had been involved with the sport for many years. I was at a point where I was losing some of my focus and appreciation for the privilege of being able to do what we do. Without a doubt John's enthusiasm and commitment, re-energized my own efforts.

As I am sure you are aware, endurance training can be a lonely and solitary endeavor. John was one of those people who instinctively was able to transform the training experience into something communal. I don't mean just in the sense of getting together with others to work out. I know he did that too but because of our schedules, he and I were only able to train together on a few occasions over the years. Instead, for me, he created that sense of community in the ways in which he shared his own experiences and goals, sought out the advice of others and always passed along what he was learning about how to be a better athlete. In those ways, John was with me on a lot of workouts and I like to think his participation in my efforts will continue for a long time.

Since he passed away my wife (Cookie) and I have been remembering some of the fun and inspiration John brought to our own lives - I wanted to close with two examples of why we sometimes referred to him as "The Bull." On the day before the first time he did your race, he put in a four hour ride from his home in Hunterdon County to the race course and back. He still finished in the top half for the race.

Then there was the time he and Cookie teamed up for a competition conducted by their employer's fitness center (They both worked for Sanofi-Aventis). The month long competition called for teams of two to log as many combined miles of running on a tread mill and riding a bike trainer as they could, but it all had to be performed at the Fitness Center. They both had business trips scheduled at different times during the competition but did not want to fall behind. In order to seal their victory, John literally got off a plane from Paris, drove straight to the Fitness Center and put in a 20 mile tread mill run before going home. Needless to say, they won the competition and the "coveted water bottles" awarded to the top team members.

Again, thanks for passing along the sad news to other members of the Paramount Adventure Club and for the opportunity to share some memories about our friend.

### **From Jennisse Peatick:**

My husband and I, and our team, recently had the great pleasure of meeting John Fischer. He was a very kind man and we all liked him very much. We are all very sad and shocked to hear of his passing. Many of us will be going to the

services tonight and the funeral later this week. I am copying the whole team on this e-mail. If we have any words, we will be happy to send them to you.

All the best, thank you for thinking of us, hope to see you soon,

Jennisse Peatick  
Echelon Coaching, LLC

### **From Peter Ricciardi:**

I want to thank you for your well considered and thoughtful letter in regards to John's passing. John was a friend of mine, first met as he struggled through Master swim classes at the Bridgewater YMCA. He later became an active Western Jersey Wheelman, and a member of Paramount Adventure.

John was a powerful athlete and he enjoyed the ultra distance adventures as I do. We are a small group of local athletes. We spend time together doing something we are passionate about and in the process we come to know each other quite well. Our conversations along the way are lively and cover every topic imaginable. Jokes and ribbing ring in the woods and fields as we pass and

John's contribution to our circle was genuine. He will be sorely missed and I pray his wife and daughter are well.

### **From Sarah Piersanti:**

I received email exchange between you and Team Echelon (I am the swim captain for Team Echelon). I met John and Diane in September at Jerseyman, communicated through e-mails, and then only two weeks ago, had the great honor of giving a swim clinic that John and Diane attended. I spent some time talking with John and Diane before the clinic started during the latter part of a meal, and was automatically drawn to them by how incredibly sweet and down to earth they both were.

During the clinic, John asked me more questions than anyone, concentrating very hard and trying his hardest to take in every bit of information he could. He definitely tested my coaching abilities! The clinic would have not been the same if he wasn't there. Afterwards, I also spoke to him one-on-one and was very intrigued at his level of dedication to become a better swimmer. He was looking to get his Ironman swim time a lot better.

I had recently been informed by our triathlon captain Lani, that she had answered an email John sent her requesting my contact information about swim coaching. I was deeply touched to hear this. As a coach, I have learned that not all coaches can work with all athletes, but after the swim clinic, I knew John was an athlete that I could work well with, and I had expressed this to him after the clinic. In the thank you email he sent me, it was clear to me that he felt the same way, and learned a lot. I am so honored that John was looking to get help from me, a 20 year old college student.

I looked up to John as an athlete and teammate. Diane and John made a beautiful couple, and their love for each other was so obvious to the team. During Jerseyman, Diane sat in the pouring rain in her folding chair and poncho contently knitting while John raced. She also sat and watched during the clinic and followed along in the packet I had given her. John will be missed, and I send my deepest condolences to Diane and their family during this sad time.

### **From Peter Turek:**

Although I participated in a few races with John, and we were in the same age group, I never had the pleasure to meet him. He trained with the masters swim programs at Healthquest and Don Fink's sessions, and I'm sure that those of you who knew him found him to be a really special guy.

Last summer, John and I competed in the Randolph Tri; me in the relay division (with coach Don), and John in the AG55. Unfortunately, I did not have a chance to meet John at the post-race festivities, or to see him receive his award for finishing 3rd in the AG. A few days later, during one of swim workouts with Don's group, John made a funny remark: he said "thanks for keeping St. Peter out of the AG competition, otherwise, I would not have taken 3rd place." Needless to say, I was truly humbled by his comment.

I'm sure that finishing the IM Florida 2008 race had to be one of the defining moments of his athletic career. Kudos to John!! We've lost a good friend.

### **(MY RESPONSE)**

Peter, thanks for writing that note. You'll appreciate this - I have a funny followup to your story from an e-mail that John sent to me. You'll recall that I recently moved out to Clinton Township and was picking your brain for information on local gyms and clubs that might be worth checking out. I was also writing to John during that time, and at some point I must have asked him if he knew you.

Here's his response...

"You mentioned Peter Turek. I don't know him, but he is my nemesis. He's a fantastic triathlete - unfortunately in my age group. If I meet him, I will probably first kiss his feet, then break his legs!"

**(PETER'S RESPONSE)**

Thanks for that. It really puts John's special personality, and his perspective on life, in focus. One more thing: let's not forget that he coined the term "pre-geezer" to describe the AG55 that he competed in. I love it! Makes me proud to say that I also compete in the pre-geezer division.

**Comments from others:**

"Thanks for that tribute. Our club is so shaken up by his passing that we can't think straight. It is so nice to see that he was appreciated just as much in your group as he was here."

"This is such a devastating loss for his family and those who knew him. The worst part of my job is speaking to families when a patient has died, and this was more difficult than most. He obviously meant the world to his wife and son and will be missed."

"Thanks so much for your note. I didn't really know John Fischer but your note was compelling, and really made it clear what a loss this is."

"Sorry to hear the news about John Fischer. His story simply inspiring to even coach potatoes, let alone any active person. May his soul rest in peace."

"Thanks Mike. Life is so very fragile."

[More reflections posted online](#)

**John Fischer**



A family man and a clinical pharmacist by profession, anyone who has known John Fischer for a few years, knows he is an example to all on what goal-setting and determination can achieve. He's run 20 marathons since his first in 1997, but it was only since 2004, after reading Bruce Marshall's first Boston Qualifier story, that he got really serious about improving his performance. He started his quest to qualify for Boston by joining Weight Watchers to drop 40 pounds in weight, having already lost 35 in prior years just by running. He's now run two Boston Qualifiers, and finished marathons large and small - including Disney, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Steamtown.

But the most recent transformation is probably what is most amazing to all of us who know him well. He decided to tackle triathlons, bought a triathlon bike in March 2006 and participated in his first triathlon at the Half-Iron distance in June 2006. Since then, he has completed a number of local triathlons and has placed in the top half of all participants each time, in spite of being a self-described "pre-geezer". This all culminated in his recent completion of the Florida Ironman Triathlon (2.4 mile swim; 112 mile bike; 26.2 mile run) finishing with a marathon of 4:16 and an overall place of 664 of 2184 finishers. He attributes his success to the inspiration he draws from other HRH club members, and to the support of his manager, fan club president, and wife, Diane.

He is truly an inspiration to us all.

