

CAN-DO CALIFO

Masters Phenom Margery Meyer Just Gets Better With Age

At a time when most people think about retiring or taking it easy, Californian Margery Meyer decided, at age 64—with a cholesterol reading of 385, arrhythmia and no background in competitive swimming—to become a world-class competitor.

It began in 1987 with a phone call from Meyer's daughter, Marguerite, a Masters swimmer in Muscle Shoals, Ala., who encouraged her mother to enter an upcoming swim meet that happened to be taking place in California. Although Meyer

faithfully logged 500 yards in the pool a few times a week, she wasn't a competitive swimmer. Yet, she had an innate

competitive drive and the idea of a meet stirred her adrenalin. With coaching from her daughter via telephone, Meyer agreed to enter the event.

But this wasn't just any swim meet—it was the USMS Short Course Nationals in Stanford, Calif.

Up until this point, Meyer had already led a full and exciting life. After growing up on a sheep ranch in Napa Valley, she attended Mills College in Oakland, Calif., and then spent three years in New York working as a secretary. It was there that she met Bruce, a medical student who would become an orthopedic surgeon. They married in 1947 and had two children—daughter Marguerite and son Calvin.

The Meyers now reside in the north central California town

A member of the Noblesville Adult Swim Team, Inc. (NASTIs) since 2002, Raena Alexis Latina is a free-lance writer living in Indianapolis.



RNIAN

by Raena Alexis Latina >>> Photos by John Segesta



MARGERY MEYER, 83, began her competitive swimming career in 1987 at the urging of her daughter, **MARGUERITE**. As of this printing, she has set 49 world records in the pool.



of Carmel, some 120 miles south of San Francisco. They spend their summers on Rancho Mallacomes, the same sheep ranch from Margery's childhood.

"My great-grandfather settled there in the 1850s after driving cattle from Tennessee across the plains," she says. Originally 15,000 acres from a California Land Grant, the ranch was initially divided among three relatives. As time passed, further divisions were made, with the Meyers' property now at 2,000 acres. "We're very lucky to be stewards of this beautiful land," she reflects.

Growing up on a ranch,

Meyer was accustomed to an active lifestyle. "But there was lots of cream and butter," she remembers. Through her swimming regimen, Meyer has lowered her cholesterol, no longer experiences arrhythmia and maintains a light weight for her 5-foot 5-inch frame. "I weigh 120 pounds, unless I indulge in too much brie," she says with a laugh. "Really, I'm conscious about good nutrition. Fortunately, I don't have a sweet tooth."

She does enjoy an occasional glass of wine. Beringer Vineyards leases part of her ranch and produces a respectable cabernet sauvignon from the grapes planted on the property. "We've been doing this for 35 years," Meyer notes. "We get a percentage of the crop and they give us a grower's price." Not a bad deal.

To complement the peace and quiet of ranch life, Meyer

enjoys family outings, theater, concerts and lectures. An advocate of lifelong learning, she continues to take classes including piano, French and Spanish. "I'm always into something," she says. "I seem to have the energy to do all these things. Of course, swimming is an energizer."

Meyer concedes that she has a competitive nature. Growing up, she says, "I did all the other sports, but not swimming." She played baseball and basketball as a child, and tennis in high school and college.

"I was never much of a team player," Meyer says. "I enjoyed tennis. It was wartime and there wasn't much competition; it was for fun." Meyer played in a beach club when she and

"I found something lurking deep that gave birth to...a potential I didn't know I had."

Bruce moved from New York back to California. She also enjoyed skiing and hiking. "I tend toward the individual sports," Meyer notes.

In preparation for her first swim meet in 1987, Meyer increased her yardage by four laps a week. Finally, she achieved about 40 laps (1,000 yards) three times a week. Her daughter introduced the concept of intervals, where Meyer learned to "work hard" with segments of rest. Gradually, her stamina increased.

For her first swim meet, Meyer recalls a present from her daughter. "It was a new, tight, Lycra Speedo racing suit," Meyer wrote in 2000. "She said I couldn't wear my cotton-flowered, spaghetti strap model with the pretty flared skirt. I felt naked! She also told me I had to ditch the swim cap with the rubber tendrils and chin strap!"

At the meet, in the warm-up pool, Marguerite quickly taught her mother how to do a backstroke start. Meyer was convinced that she would make a fool of herself. Instead, she ended up with three sixth-place finishes from among 20 competitors in her age group.

"It was quite a place to make your swim debut," Meyer recalls. "They had, I think, 2,000 people

in that meet. I didn't know what I could do. I just knew that I loved swimming."

At the Brisbane World Masters Championships the following year, Meyer swam on two world-record-breaking relays and had six individual medal finishes. And this was before she learned to do flip turns! After the meet, Meyer contacted Bob Walthour, the Carmel High School girls' swim coach, who taught her the maneuver. But Meyer continued to train solo, working on her skills by watching other swimmers and receiving pointers from her daughter.

Meyer excels at freestyle and backstroke. She also enjoys the 100 IM. "I'm glad I was finally able to learn the butterfly!" she exclaims.

"Major improvement came with finding a coach after five years of swimming on my own," Meyer says of Ted Trendt at Monterey Peninsula Community College. "I told him I wanted to set records, and that I would work hard," she says. "He accepted the challenge and gives me workouts and guidance to reach my goals."

And so Meyer set about perfecting her new passion. She notes, "I found something lurking deep that gave birth to



Margery's husband, **BRUCE**, is an experienced mountaineer who celebrated his 70th birthday by climbing the Grand Teton.

something in me...a potential I didn't know I had. I got a taste of it, and away I went! You really become addicted. If you don't get your exercise, you don't feel right, healthy, worthwhile."

In 1992, at age 69, Meyer swam the Lake Minnetonka Open Water Swim in Minneapolis, Minn. Each swimmer had a canoe escort that was color coded with a helium balloon tied to the bow. "It was the most festive and most colorful open water event I've done," Meyer says. At five miles, it was also her longest challenge.

Meyer then accepted an invitation to join five male friends in the Maui Channel Relay—a nine-mile open water swim from Lanai to Maui. Relay members swam in 30-minute increments for the first rotation, then in 10-minute rotations. "I swam 40 minutes in all for the team. It was lots of fun, a big, big race," Meyer says. She was the oldest female ever to participate in the event.

The following year, Meyer swam Maui again with an all-female team from The Olympic Club Masters group, with which she had begun competing. Meyer's daughter was also on the relay team. A few days

after that race, they flew to Honolulu for the Waikiki 2.4-mile rough water race. Meyer placed first in her age group.

"My mother's swimming accomplishments are truly inspiring," says Marguerite. "I was the one who got her started in competition, but now she is the one who keeps me interested. It's awesome to watch her train and compete."

Meyer's husband is also extremely supportive of his wife's commitment. "We have interests we share, and he has his own interests as well as understands and supports mine," says Meyer.

An adventurer himself, Bruce is an experienced mountaineer who has climbed in Alaska, the Himalayas, Africa and Mexico. He celebrated his 70th birthday by climbing the Grand Teton in Wyoming. Daughter Marguerite belayed for him. Meyer cheered them on. "I'm more of a hiker. I did go to the Teton Climbing School—for a day. That was enough for me!"

But not to be outdone by her husband, Meyer also decided

MEYER'S SWIMMING BY THE NUMBERS

"I've made 49 world records," says Margery Meyer. "I'm currently striving for 50. I don't know...I turned 83 in November. The best chance is when you age up!" In her swimming career, Meyer has had amazing accomplishments. But she was surprised to learn that she has 315 individual Top 10 swims on record with USMS: "I've never counted the Top 10s!"

Meyer's competitive career is impressive:

- 13 pool individual All-American honors
- 7 long distance individual All-American honors
- 5 pool All-Star honors
- 7 current* SCY National records
- 8 current* SCM National records
- 6 current* LCM National records
- 9 current** SCM World records
- 5 current** LCM World records

*USMS records recorded as of Aug. 17, 2005

**FINA records reported as of May 1, 2005

to celebrate her 70th birthday in style. With a few open water swims under her belt, she participated in the 1.5-mile swim from Alcatraz to San Francisco.

She prepared for the event with workout swims in the ocean at Carmel Beach. "I wanted to see how long I could stand the cold water," Meyer recalls. "My husband went out with me the first time. I thought I'd been in a long time; I look up and he holds up three fingers—I'd only been in three minutes!" A friend also advised Meyer to take cold showers. "So, I took a few," she says. "That wasn't particularly fun!" But, she asserts, "When you have a goal, you figure out how you're going to reach it!"

Meyer is a firm believer in goal-setting. "You don't have to compete," she says. "The thing about swimming is it's all about you. It's an individual sport and it's up to you to achieve. Just set a goal. Anyone can learn to say, 'I can do it!' It's all about one's approach and vision."

It took Meyer only 48 minutes to complete the Alcatraz to San Francisco swim.

In addition to California and Hawaii, Meyer has traveled extensively in her swimming pursuits, attending meets in Australia, Montreal, Indiana, Florida, Oregon and North Carolina, just to name a few places. Meyer tends to make many of these swimming-focused trips with her daughter. "I've had just loads of fun with my daughter," Meyer says. Marguerite, who relocated to Santa Cruz, Calif., now swims for The Olympic Club as well.

"[Mom] is untiring in her endeavor to learn, to improve and to laugh and have fun," says Marguerite. "There is not a single person whom she meets, at the pool or away, who does not feel a little of her zest for life rub off on them!"

"Margery's energy is boundless," agrees The Olympic Club Masters coach Scott Williams. "She sets goals and has a great desire to excel. She doesn't let

age or anything else stop her."

Meyer enjoys the competition, camaraderie and friendship of Masters swimming. She attributes her success to discovering a profound satisfaction from achieving goals with her "can-do" attitude. "I found out that I can do it, I can improve, I can make records," Meyer says. "I began a new journey when I found Masters swimming. Renewed energy appeared along with this new activity."

That energy allowed Meyer to celebrate her 80th birthday with the same exuberance in which she celebrated her 70th. This time, Meyer, her husband, children and grandchildren spent two weeks camping at the Grand Canyon. "That was a fantastic experience," she says. "It was perfect!"

And life continues to be good for the Meyers, who celebrated their 58th wedding anniversary this past June. In August, Meyer competed in the 2005 USMS Long Course Nationals, held in Mission Viejo, Calif. "I did the backstroke in July at Santa Cruz," Meyer says. "So I chose all the freestyle events—50, 100, 200, 400, 800, 1,500—for Nationals this year."

These are the same events in which she happens to hold all of the national records and, except for the 50 free, all of

A TYPICAL MARGERY MEYER WORKOUT

Margery Meyer swims four to five times a week, more often if she's preparing for a competition. Her regular workouts are usually 1,500 to 2,000 yards in length. "Practice is whatever the coach puts on the board," Meyer says. "I leave it up to him." On the morning of her interview with *SWIMMER*, this is the workout (short course yards) she did:

Warm-up

••• 300 (200 backstroke, 100 breaststroke)

Working Set

••• 10x100s freestyle on 2:10

("The faster swimmers did 150s on the same interval," Meyer notes.)

••• 6x50s on 1:10 or 1:00

Cool down

••• 3x50s (Meyer did backstroke)

Total: 1,750 yards

the world records. Meyer finished in Mission Viejo with two second-place and four first-place honors.

Next summer, Meyer plans to compete in the 2006 FINA World Masters Championships. "They'll be held at Stanford, where I got started!" she notes. "Unfortunately I won't age up for that meet. It'd be wonderful if I could age up—I'll have a lot of competition."

Meyer has gotten to know her competitors well, and she has great respect for them. "Part of the greatness of Masters is the friends that you make and the people you meet," she says. "Masters swimming and all it

entails has really become a focus in my life right now. After 18 years, I would find this very difficult to give up. To continue learning in any avenue is to continue living, especially the older we become."

In that regard, when asked what special plans she has down the road for her 90th birthday, Meyer responds with a laugh, "I just want to get there!"

One thing is for sure: Like the fine wines produced on her ranch, Margery Meyer just gets better with age. <<<

When they're not at their Napa ranch, Margery and Bruce live in this historic 1921 house in Carmel.

