

“One two three breathe left, Lap number seven. Keep going! I wish the water wasn't so rough. Where's the lane rope? I've been swept out of my lane! Stay calm, look around, big breath. Swim back under the rope!”

As a timekeeper at Randwick-Coogee Swimming Club, I've watched and timed kids and adults in the end of season mile swim at Wylie's Baths for 25 years. This year it was my turn. I was doing **my** mile. It was three days before my 60th birthday and my big debut **and** swan song into mile swimming!

I've always been a dog paddler with my head out of the water. Four years ago, Keith Little, the Australian Over 80 years 50 metre champion who teaches children to swim three afternoons a week at Coogee RSL Club, overheard me say I'd like to swim properly. Keith said if I went along to the pool an hour before the kids he'd teach me. Not wanting to be a wimp, the following Monday I fronted up and my ordeal began.

“One two three breathe left. Fifteen laps. There's Rosemary, Ron and Carolyn standing at the top end of the pool cheering me on. Rosemary and Ron have come all the way from Umina to watch me, I can't give up, I've got to keep going!”

I hated those swimming lessons, putting my face in the water, puffing and panting along the pool for short distances under Keith's instruction. I was all set to quit, when I overheard Keith telling people how he loved teaching adults to swim as they were so committed. Oh no! I had to be committed!

“One two three breathe left. Twenty two laps. Wow! All the other timekeepers and swimmers are up there smiling and encouraging me at this end of the pool”.

I graduated to splashing slowly along the black line the whole length of the pool, praying for the horizontal line to appear below to show that I was nearing the end.

“One two three breathe left. Twenty-six laps. Up one side of the lane and down the other. Someone up there is holding the scooping net. Don't tell me there are blue bottles in the pool!”

Sometimes the little kids would arrive early and jump into the next lane. They would race up and down with an occasional glance across at me struggling to do my 25 metres.

“One two three breathe left. Thirty laps. Crash, I've collided with someone. It's Sean, my eight-year old grandson. I've been swept across to the wrong side of the lane. Don't worry, big breath, stay calm, keep going!”

Finally I could swim twenty-five metres without stopping or puffing. A new world had opened up for me. I swam occasionally over the next couple of years until last October when I commenced swimming regularly at Heffron Park Pool. After swimming that little bit further each time, I decided to attempt the mile.

“I did it. Thirty-six laps! The whole crowd are clapping and congratulating me! What time did I do? One hour two minutes and twenty-one seconds. Oh no! So close! Now I'll have to enter again next year to try and break the hour!”

Maybe I'll even beat some of those little kids if I keep training!