

'YOU ARE AN IRONMAN'

Fairfax woman tackles tough races after brain cancer

Survivor competes in Ironman, sets sights on Boston Marathon

By Alana Goodman
Special to The Examiner

The bedside clock in the intensive care unit read 2:15, but BethAnn Telford couldn't tell if it was morning or night. She had awoken after undergoing surgery on a brain tumor, alone and restrained to a hospital bed.

"All I could do was watch that clock, and that third hand — tick, tick. I'll never forget that," she said. "I knew after all those hours watching the clock, there's no way I can live like this."

A competitive athlete for years, Telford, 40, was unwilling to resign her life when she was diagnosed with brain cancer and underwent surgery in 2005. She was determined to not only to learn how to walk, talk and move again — but also to compete again.

Just six weeks after her surgery, she ran a 5K (three miles) through the streets of Camp Hill, Pa. Now, five years after her diagnosis, she has competed in numerous races and is preparing to run in the famed Boston Marathon on April 19.

But her comeback hasn't been without challenges. Telford walks with a cane after a recent operation, is blind in one eye and had her bladder removed because of her illness. Still, she completes all of her training sessions and races with a partner, who is sometimes tethered to her for safety reasons.

Telford, who moved to the Fairfax area seven years ago, is driven



COURTESY PHOTO

BethAnn Telford was diagnosed with brain cancer in 2005 but by 2008, she was able to race the Lake Placid Ironman in New York. She plans to run the 2010 Boston Marathon.

to keep pushing herself when she thinks about others who have undergone similar struggles. "I've lost lots of friends. My cousin I lost in three days to a brain tumor," she said. She draws inspiration from working with cancer patient advocacy groups, and raised more than \$52,000 during the Race for Hope in 2009.

Her thoughts were with these other cancer patients when she took on one of her most intense physical challenges two years ago: the 2008 Lake Placid Ironman in New York, a triathlon that includes a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike and 26.2-mile run. "I just had to keep thinking about the people who couldn't do it ... [such as]

one little boy who has an inoperable brain tumor. Those people aren't going to make it," she said.

At the starting line for the Ironman, surrounded by expert athletes with professional trainers, Telford said she began to doubt herself. "But then when the gun went off, it was just like, OK, let's take one thing at a time."

She completed the race in 14 hours, 33 minutes and 46 seconds, and her parents were waiting for her at the finish line.

"[The announcer said] 'BethAnn Telford, you are an Ironman,'" she recalled. "I can still remember the song that was playing ... and [I was] going around the Olympic oval. And it was just as if I had just started a 50-meter run. I didn't feel anything."

Telford wakes up at 4 every morning, and works out until she goes to her job at the Government Printing Office at 8:30. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, she does aerobic exercises, and on Tuesdays she goes to a spin class with a friend. When she's preparing for a race, she also trains in the evenings and swims on the weekends.

One of Telford's goals has been to compete in the Boston Marathon, but after qualifying for the race in the fall she discovered that it had filled the night before. She was devastated.

Several weeks later, she received a call from a Boston Marathon official informing her that she would be competing. Telford was ecstatic and asked the representative if she could tell him her story. He told her he already had her story on his desk — in e-mails, letters and packets sent in by her area friends.

"I have a great, great group of people," she said. "And they're pushing for me."

PLAN NOW: SWIMS

Washington-area residents who don't want to travel too far to swim in open water, without walls, lane ropes or black lines on the bottom of the pool, have plenty of options for racing this year. Although the Chesapeake Bay Swim, the premier open-water race in the area, is already full, there are other options. Plan to sign up soon because these fill up quicker and quicker every year.

» **May 2:** Nanticoke Triathlon, Bivalve, Md. The Nanticoke River Swim & Triathlon Association holds this open-water swim and triathlon early in the season. Swimmers can choose between a 3-mile and a half-mile swim. The water temperature is expected to be 62. Info: nanticoke river swimandtri.com.

» **May 30:** Jim McDonnell Lake Swims, Reston. This is the first open-water swim in the immediate Washington area and serves as practice for triathletes and Chesapeake Bay Swim competitors. The weekend offers both 1- and 2-mile swims on Sunday, with a clinic and practice swim on Saturday. Info: restonmasters.org.

» **June 5:** Potomac River Swim. This is a 7.5-mile swim across the Potomac River, starting at Hull Neck, Va., on the Northern Neck and ending at Point Lookout State Park. Info: artemis.crosslink.net/~cherylw/pr2008i.htm

» **June 13:** One-Mile Bay Challenge, Stevensville, Md. Though the 4.4-mile swim across the Bay is full, the 1-mile version on the eastern side of the Bay is an option. Note: Registration opened Feb. 1; it will close at 530 entrants. You must be able to finish the swim in 40 minutes. bayswim.com.

» **July 10:** Maryland Swim for Life, Chestertown. The annual event is held in the Chester River on Maryland's Eastern Shore. Swimmers can pick from one, two, three, four or five miles; a picnic is held afterward. Info: swimdcac.org.

» **July 10:** Chris Greene Lake Cable Swim, Charlottesville, Va. The 2-mile swim along a cable in Chris Greene Lake has been held since 1977. Info: cables swim.org.

Yoga instructor once restricted by pain takes scoliosis to the mat

By Sam McManis
Sacramento Bee Writer

SACRAMENTO, CALIF. — To see Kim Wagaman on a yoga mat — her supple spine stretched, her limbs angled with apparent aplomb — is to witness a body perfectly aligned and in harmony with itself.

She's a yoga instructor, so such flexibility is a given. Right?

Not in her case. Wagaman, 34, once was so restricted by scoliosis that she spent most of her teenage years in a neck-high brace.

The curvature made her spine look like a winding country road. She also had a smaller curve high in her neck and was showing the beginnings of kyphosis, a rounding of the shoulders.

"I made a conscious effort to hide the back of my body," Wagaman

recalls. "I'd enter a room at a party and position myself with my back to the wall. There was all this insecurity and denial. And there's this drive to fix the issue."

In Wagaman's case, that drive put her on an unusual path to confronting the condition. Her parents had ruled out spinal-fusion surgery as too invasive.

So as a junior in high school, Wagaman chose to send the cumbersome brace, which she had worn 23 hours a day, to the back of her closet and look for more promising alternatives.

For her, the better way turned out to be yoga. In her early 20s, Wagaman started practicing poses and movements, and she went on to study with a leading practitioner of yoga for people with scoliosis.

Over time, Wagaman found that



SHNS PHOTO COURTESY THE SACRAMENTO BEE

Kim Wagaman holds seminars for scoliosis sufferers, teaching poses and stretches to ease the painful condition.

tweaks to standard yoga poses — a change of hand positioning, a more pronounced shoulder twist, a deepening of breath — not only eased pain but strengthened muscles around the spine and led to better structural alignment.

The weight bearing down on her

left leg no longer is heavier than on her right side. One hip no longer is higher. Wagaman has trained the right side of her rib cage to return to a standard position.

Her spinal curve hasn't gone away, but Wagaman says her adherence to yoga has delayed further complications and has taken away whatever bodily limitations she had.

"A lot of us have the concept from our society and culture that we're deformed, not right as we are," she says. "We try to work through that. You have to accept that your practice is going to be different than others' in terms of poses and expressions."

"As your awareness becomes more finely tuned, you begin to sense where you are in space, feel more keenly what your body is doing." — *Scripps Howard*

