

The following is Greg Peterson's story. In my opinion, he is an ordinary guy who does extraordinary things. His transformation is one of those extraordinary things. Whether you want to become a triathlete or just lose a few pounds, you can gain some inspiration from him and his story. He inspires me, I hope his story will inspire you!!  
Steve Galley

## The Transformation

My transformation really started about 8 years ago. Until around the turn of the century, I have enjoyed a daily dose (5-6 days per week) of basketball, riding dirt bikes, and all kinds of outdoor activities. Since my college days on the football field, I was able to maintain a constant weight between 195-205 lbs with some fluctuation during the winter season. Of course as we get older, our metabolism begins to unwind a little, but as active as I have been in my life I have never worried about it. In January of 2000, my orthopedic doctor told me that I needed surgery on my right shoulder. All of the years of sports—especially football had caused big problems such as rotator cuff being shredded and bicep tendons hanging by a thread. In March, I had four different procedures done to put it all back together. The normal 6-8 week recovery turned into 12 months because of the damage that needed to be repaired. It was a long year because I couldn't do the activities I once had enjoyed. Within about 4 months of lying around and constant frustration that I would attempt to counter at the dinner table, I gained about 20 lbs. Once I received clearance to participate in some serious activities again around April of 2001, I separated the same shoulder while riding a dirt bike. Not to be held back, I continued to race dirt bikes again.

In July of 2001, I came off a jump during a motocross race at the Deseret Peak Complex without my bike—it jumped out of my hands while I was in the air. I landed with all my weight on my right leg. I felt my right knee buckle and I slammed hard onto the ground unconscious for just a moment or two. This accident caused me to take a trip to the hospital with a severe concussion and a right leg that had to be immobilized. It took about two weeks for the swelling to subside enough for surgery. About the only thing left in tact was my PCL and a grade 2 MCL. Again, four different procedures to put everything back together including an ACL. The rehab was long and painful. Over the next few years, I transformed from an active athletic person to a bonafide couch potato. I tried to play basketball again and I tried running, but the pain in my knee was almost unbearable and with the added weight, the stress on other joints and my back took all

of the fun out of it. I could still ride horses and do other outdoor activities. But, in the fall of 2004 I was in a serious horse accident that fractured my lower vertebrae (S-5 and L-1). Here we go again, I thought. By the beginning of 2007, I had gained a total of about 75lbs. I had tried a few times to get back in shape the previous year by taking up swimming which I had not been to do for almost 12 years because of my shoulder problems. And, I also ran a 5k race for the first time since I was a teenager. The swimming wasn't too bad on my shoulder, but the running was really difficult and painful. Training was off and on and mostly off. One day I was talking with my orthodontist (I had braces for two years 2004-2006) at a follow up visit. My Orthodontist is about 5 feet 7 inches tall and weighs about 150 lbs. He told me how fat I was and that I should look into Triathlons. He was always teasing people, but all in good fun. Then, my son's \*basketball coach told me that I need to wear a XXL T-shirt, that XL was no longer viable for a person of my stature. It was all in jest, but I knew inside that I needed to transform. I went home that day and committed myself to permanent change.

As I searched online for I found a triathlon that would be held in March of 2007 in American Fork called the Ice Breaker. It is a sprint distance with an even shorter swim (400m). I decided I would do it and that I would make sure my orthodontist was there as well to see his fat patient finish! We both signed up. I started swimming a little more and I would run some on the treadmill, but not on pavement. I didn't own a bike and I had never ridden with clips before. I acquired a bike just one day before the race. I didn't sleep at all the night before the race. I hadn't competed in anything since my motorcycle accident. When I arrived at the American Fork Recreation Center, I noticed that compared to most everyone else that I was definitely much bigger. They have a special division for big people; it's called Clydesdale—just like the horse. Just before the race, they lined us up single file according to our estimated swim times. I was very conservative so they assigned me number 295 out of about 300 competitors. As is customary, your number is written on your left shoulder with permanent marker. As I was waiting in line, I saw my orthodontist as he was walking by. He saw the number and said, "295! Is that your number or is that your weight?" I said, "I hope you brought your game today because I will be right behind you all the way!" He was a swimmer in High School and was in really good shape. I knew that we would not meet until I finished the race. He finished the race about 20

\*This alleged incident is currently under investigation. The said basketball coach vehemently denies making such comment. ☺

minutes before I did, but as I crossed the finish line, he was there waiting for me. He put his arms around me and congratulated me on finishing the race. For the first time in years, I felt like I had really accomplished something meaningful. Even though I went home and slept for 3 hours because of exhaustion from having little or no sleep and the race, I knew I was on to something that day. From that time forward, I decided to train for more events. I ran into a fellow Silverwolf who has trained and finished several triathlons. His name is Shawn Whitaker. He had just completed the Viking Man (Half Ironman distance). We began training together in the summer of 2007. Having a training partner is critically important, especially if you are training for longer distances. They help keep you motivated on "on time" for scheduled workouts.

Within the first month, I began to notice that my energy level increased and that I was feeling better inside and out. I didn't lose much weight at first because I am not a dieter. Within about 60 days, I lost about 10 lbs and dropped 3 percent of my body fat with no dieting. The side benefit of losing the weight was that my joints and my back didn't hurt as much. The pain was subsiding. Going into the next event, I had a lot of confidence and planned to improve from my first attempt. My goal was to again finish, but this time finish strong. The training paid off and I was starting to have fun and relax. Even though I was a Clydesdale, I didn't care and no one else did either. Everyone was competing for his or her own personal victories—not the medal. By the fall of 2007, I had moved on from sprint triathlons to my first Olympic distance triathlon (1 mile swim, 24 mile bike, 6.2 mile run). I finished the race behind many in the pack, but I didn't care. I had yet again stretched to reach a personal best. A few weeks after finishing the Olympic at Lake Powell, I decided that I would like to reach another personal best by completing a Half Ironman Triathlon (1.2 mile swim, 56 mile bike, 13.1 mile run). I had already lost about 40 lbs just from training from March to October 2007. I was already a completely different person inside and out compared to where I started. The question in my mind was, "Can I take this another huge step further? What am I really capable of doing?" So, I called Shawn and said, "I'm doing the CA Ironman 70.3 in March of 2008. Are you in?" He said, "Are you sure? Do you know how far that is?" I responded, "YES! Are you in or out?" He then said, "Ok." From October to December, we worked on just keeping a base level of training. Then, in January we followed a prescribed training regimen which was a combination of Shawn's training the year previous and the training program recommended by Mark Allen, the world champion triathlete.

The training was intense and much more than I expected. Six days a week of 5am-8am workouts. 1.5-2 mile swims followed by 2 hours of biking were common. I would crash in bed at night many times by 9pm. I couldn't stay awake to check the weather. The first week of February I contracted Bronchitis and couldn't train for about a week. I then caught the flu and was down in bed for 5 days. It really put me back in my training regimen. I believe partly because the level of training was so much more demanding than I had ever experienced outside of collegiate sports. The long winter in Utah did help things either. Riding a bike outside meant braving freezing temperatures and dangerous ice—not to mention the impact of the cold on a lingering illness. By the time we were within 2 weeks of Oceanside, we had only ridden outside twice. Most all of the bike was indoors on the spin bike. I was on antibiotics for four weeks and didn't finish the last pill until 6 days before the race. I was still coughing up mucus and my ears seemed like they were continually plugged from the sinus pressure. Nevertheless, we didn't give up and we continued to train the best we could all things considered.

We arrived in Oceanside on March 27, two days before the race. We rode our bikes for the first time in ten days for about 15 miles just to get our legs back a little. We relaxed with our families the rest of the day. Friday was pickup registration day. In an Ironman, you are required to sign what seems like reams of paper for disclaimers that remind you that this sport can be challenging and dangerous at times. In addition to all the paperwork, you have to step on the scales to be weighed. As I stepped onto the scales, I thought, "Well, here I am, almost one year to the day of finishing the Ice Breaker. The fat guy with the number 295 at the Ice Breaker was now assigned a permanent Ironman ID#114753." The scale indicated that I was down officially 50 lbs from where I started one year earlier. I couldn't believe it. That accomplishment alone was good enough. As I reflected upon what had happened the past 8 years and especially the last year, I couldn't help but think that this race would be much more of a celebration than a competition.

## **RACE DAY!!**

### **CA Ironman 70.3 Oceanside, California—March 29, 2008**

Well, the Half Ironman is over and I am exhausted. I am still feeling the effects of the race three days after. Mostly fatigue and little soreness in areas I didn't know could be so sore. ☺ Here are a few things about the experience...

**Swim:** 47:01: The swim was so fun. We started from a treading position between two buoys. It was good to tread water for a few minutes because the water temperature was 59 degrees. I used my experience at "Camp Steiner" to get me over the jitters! Each age group was started in 3 minute intervals. The Pros went first at 6:40 am. I left at 6:57 am. My goal was not to set a speed record. It was to enjoy the whole experience. It was not a race, it was a celebration! A reward for all of the hard work it took to prepare over the past year. So, I didn't sprint. I just stretched out and enjoyed a long swim. While your in the ocean you have a lot of things go through your mind like, sharks, big fish, people swimming over you, goggles leaking water, not being able to breathe, and will I get seasick from these waves pushing me up and down as I swim. These thoughts only last a little while--I settled in and it felt like another day working out. It felt great. Coming out of the water and running up the boat ramp to the transition area was a breeze. I was worried that I would be very dizzy from being in the water for so long--but the training at 1.5-2 mile swims and then running up to the spin class paid big dividends. There was a volunteer nearby who helped me get out of my wetsuit and I then put on my bike shoes, helmet, gloves, drank some water and headed out for the bike.

**Bike:** 3:18:17: The bike was brutal. I felt great at first. It was mostly flat for the first ten miles or so and I averaged almost 25 mph. Then we entered the hills of Camp Pendleton Marine Base. Because the weather has been so severe this year in Utah, I was only able to ride outside on two occasions for any reasonable distance (40-60 miles). The spin classes helped a lot for the flats, but not for the hills. We climbed 8% grades and constant 4-5% grades for the rest of the bike course. My slowest speed was 4mph--grinding, pushing, watching people stop and lose breakfast on the side of the road while others had given up and were lying in the weeds not able to pedal anymore. Once we made it over one hill and got break going down the other side, we then had to go up another, or so it seemed...it really tested everyone's will to push on. Did I mention we also had a 15 mph headwind? Marines from the base lined the roads and intersections with water/Gatorades/gels and yelling at everyone, "You can do this! Don't give up! Push on!" No one said anything to each other about it, but all of us needed those words of encouragement-- Finally at about mile 43, we had a break from the hills on a downward slope. I pushed hard and then let off so I could coast a bit and let my legs rest. I reached a top speed of 39.5 mph. I was finally flying. Then, the road flattened again with a slight uphill climb. My average for the bike was around 17 mph. In addition to power bars, gels,

water, salt pills, and Accelerate, Hollie made me a PB & H (Honey) and whole wheat which I had stuffed into the back of my bike shirt. It tasted wonderful. It was just what I needed to finish the bike course and setup for the run. My strategy was to eat that sandwich about 5 miles before the end of the bike so that I would have some sugar in the legs to run a half marathon. It worked great. Although, I must say that when I reached the transition area, got off my bike and changed my running shoes, my legs were very fatigued. I have never been on a more difficult bike ride--ever.

**Run:** 2:25:22: My training partner had beat me in the swim by 14 minutes, but I was able to catch him at Transition 2 because he had problems with his bike. This was almost meant to be as we were able to complete the run together. With a few more liquids and some food in the belly, we set out for the run. The run is all mental. You can't think about how far it is that you are running, you have to think about the fact that you are 2/3 complete in the race and that if you can just finish this last part, you have conquered something that most people will never do in a lifetime. Maybe because they have common sense and you don't ☺. For the first time during the race, I had the urge to use the restroom. This was a good sign. I hadn't gone at all up to this point and was concerned that I was not hydrating enough. So, I stopped at port-o-potty and took a short break. We then moved on with confidence that we shouldn't see a lot of cramping. There were several aid stations along the way with water/Gatorade/cola/gels/wet sponges. We decided to use a marathon strategy to finish the race so that we could still talk and walk when we finish. It's called interval running and we use it in our training regimen once per week. You run for 4 minutes at about 75 percent of your max heart rate (we use Heart Rate monitors during the whole race) and then you walk one minute at 55-60 percent of your max heart rate. It teaches your body to burn both sugar and fat and extends your ability to compete at a constant rate. In fact, you generally will run a faster race doing intervals than trying to run the whole race without any walking. This strategy worked great for us. It slowed our average mile to around 11 min each--but our goal was not speed, it was finishing. When we finished the race, we still had some energy left to eat some food, chat with other triathletes and hang out with the family later that day.

Summary: Coming across the finish line was exhilarating knowing that I had accomplished something that I had never thought possible. I am not a swimmer, not a bike rider, and especially not a runner. But, I am a finisher. It's amazing to me how much this type of an event inspires so many people to do it. But, I know why. It's because

it mimics life. So much of what you experience in this event is similar to many of our life's experience. We don't know what lies ahead around the next bend or the next hill. And, there are so many reasons not to try. Maybe there are sharks in the swim. Maybe the hills on the bike seem insurmountable ...and then, just when we think we can't go anymore, we are then asked to run farther than we ever have before. Look at the pictures above and you will see many of the other participants started the race with much less than me. One has no legs, another only one, and yet another only one arm. None of them asked for change in venue or course, they wouldn't have it any other way. The question is, why do we settle when these folks could have given up a long time ago. But they didn't! They finished, and they finished strong! There is a great quote that I was given this past year that really encompassed for me why people don't give up, but they keep moving regardless of the obstacles in front of them.

**Here is something great that was given to me by a friend.**

"How many times a day do you bargain with yourself to avoid maximum effort? How often have you compromised somewhere between maximum potential and minimum daily requirements? "That is just human nature," you may say, but beware of a lurking danger! For it does not take long for the minimum to become the maximum that you are willing to do. When the minimum becomes the maximum, the sum of your life becomes mediocrity. That is the way countless generations have lost a portion of that characteristic called "excellence." All too often, we are willing to settle for a "comfort zone of mediocrity," caused by a diet of minimum commitment, minimum effort, minimum risk, and minimum accomplishment in life."

--Author Unknown.

**I am not done transforming. Thirty more lbs and a Full Ironman by the end of 2009. Who knows what's next...**