

One of the greatest athletes the world has ever seen and probably one of Australia's most unsung heroes. Read this biography and you'll understand why.

Alan Jones AO, Leading Australian Radio Broadcaster

# Dangerous

**THE SHELLEY TAYLOR-SMITH STORY**

# When Wet



**SHELLEY TAYLOR-SMITH • IAN COCKERILL**

**INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER!**

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**SHELLEY TAYLOR-SMITH**  
**with**  
**IAN COCKERILL**



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## • TESTIMONIES •

"Shelley Taylor-Smith is one of the greatest athletes the world has ever seen and probably one of Australia's most unsung heroes. Read this biography and you'll understand why." **Alan Jones AO, Leading Australian Radio Personality**

"No matter where you are in your life or sporting career this book will give you the kick in the butt to never give up on yourself."

**Janet Evans, 4-time Olympic Gold Medallist, Legendary American World Record Holder 400m, 800m & 1500m Freestyle, Businesswoman & Mother of two.**

"An inspiring read for anyone, whether a fellow long distance swimmer or an armchair fan with a passion for inspiration. This book will provide you a great understanding of the length's anyone can push themselves to when they have a goal in mind, and exemplifies the importance of having a tough and disciplined mindset. A great read".

**Patrick Hollingworth, dual Rottneest solo swimmer and Mount Everest climber, Perth, Australia**

You do not have to be a swimmer to understand the power of Shelley Taylor-Smith. Her insight and passion are obvious, but the fact is, Shelley wanted to make the world better, both on an individual basis and on a global basis. In the water, as on land, she encountered obstacles – and pushed right past them. It was occasionally difficult and frustrating, but her determination and persistence set in motion a more inclusive, better world for those who follow. Her legacy – in which she beat her male competitors so consistently – led to the international governing body to create equal prize money for both men and women in the sport. Shelley's greatest achievement will live on throughout the waterways of the world.

**Steven Munatones, Editor-in-Chief, Daily News of Open Water Swimming, Founder, [www.OpenWaterSource.com](http://www.OpenWaterSource.com)**

An extraordinary story of attitude and determination and how you can overcome obstacles at every stage in life. This book is impossible to put down, as it not only describes what it takes to be a World Champion, but because it shows that every single one of us has the ability to be champion in our own right. A must read for anyone wanting to take on their personal goals, and succeed!

**Shaun Jessop, Perth, Australia** Company Director, and born-again, thirty-something, ocean swimmer, Rottneest Channel Solo 2011

I read “Dangerous When Wet” training for the Rottneest Duo swim and found the book to be not only inspirational from the perspective for my upcoming endurance event, but also for everyday life. Reading about Shelley’s determination, ability and hardships not only spurred me on to compete, but also inspired me to reach goals I previously believed were unachievable.

**Laurie Levy SC, Barrister, Rottneest Channel swimmer, Perth, Australia**

As a long distance freestyle swimmer Shelley’s story has inspired me as I prepare for my own English Channel swim for September 2011. Her thought-provoking goal setting helped me set my sights on where I want to go and how to execute them in a structured manner. This has been invaluable for me in both life and business – thanks Champ!

**Paul Newsome, Head Coach, Rottneest Channel Solo swimmer, [www.swimsmooth.com](http://www.swimsmooth.com)**

Get ready to be enlightened by Shelley Taylor-Smith. As a fellow female swimmer I was encouraged and inspired to follow my dreams and goals. You will learn that it is possible to push yourself beyond what you thought possible whether physically or mentally – in the pool or life. Combining motivation and humour; Shelley’s life is an example that regardless of your lack of natural talent, if you’re prepared to work hard & stay focused, nothing can stop you. An incredibly influential woman who shows gender does not matter in the sport of open water swimming. I would recommend this book not only to women, but anyone who needs to understand that mind over matter, truly is the key to success.

**Lexie Kelly, Cayman Islands, USA.** Flowers Sea Swim Coordinator, US Masters Swimmer, Open Water Source etc.

We love your book! It’s been a great inspiration and insight into the open water swimming history and community.

**Penny and Chris Palfrey, Townsville, Australia**  
[www.palfrey-marathon-swims.com](http://www.palfrey-marathon-swims.com)

A great book for anyone interested in being the best they can be at their passion. Shelley describes her champion mindset and how it propelled her to become arguably one of the greatest marathon swimmers in history. Shelley's book has inspired me to continue my quest to become the best open water swimmer I can be and has given me additional tools to handle adversity in long, challenging marathon swims.

**Jen Schumacher, California, USA**

The book is both an inspirational and memorable read for me as I have been fortunate enough to have shared many aspects of the "STS" passionate life experience and purpose! Thank you Shell Bell!!

**Leith Weston, Perth, Australia.** STS Supporter & Dear Friend of 30+ years, Rotto Channel Duo Partner 2001, Former Lady Razorback, Arkansas Swimmer & Teammate.

I really enjoyed the read as it inspired me to have the courage to try a new challenge in my life and succeed. It was so motivational and truly a page turner. It taught me about focus, goal setting, overcoming obstacles, and perseverance . I can't wait for the next book!

**Victoria Rian, Indianapolis, USA.** Teacher, 10K National Champion 40-44 age group 2010, Catalina Channel Crossing 2010 & Long Island Sound 25K 2009.

Shelley coached me in 2010 and 2011 for Rottnest Channel swim and read Shelley's book in 2009. I found her story to be a great source of inspiration and a reminder to myself to toughen up on my far more humble swimming goals. If you are trying to do something that requires dedication and perseverance, stories such as Shelley's are well worth the read."

**John Edwards - Perth, Australia.** Rottnest solo '07, '09, '11 and duo '10, Legal Manager, Iluka Resources.

Shelley's biography, seminars and performance coaching programs have given me the added tools to succeed in completing 20km open water swims, Ironman events and focus in everyday life. Thanks Shelley, now I'm also dangerous when wet!

**Trevor van Aurich, Rottnest Channel Solo swimmer, triathlete, Director, JCA, Perth, Australia** [www.jcalogic.com](http://www.jcalogic.com)

Shelley's story teaches you that long distance swimming is about mental toughness. Losing my niece from ovarian cancer whilst being coached by Shelley for the 2010 Rotto Channel swim was the tipping point and where everything I'd learned from Shelley fell in to place and guaranteed the one thing I could control, my mind! I've now achieved two solos and raised nearly \$9000, which I couldn't have done without Shelley's game plan.

**David Fairclough, Fish Biologist, Husband and Dad, Rottneest Channel Swim Solo 2010 & 2011. Perth, Australia**

Your book & cd changed my life. I took on an opportunity of a life time and competed in the Rotto Channel Swim in a team. A large part is due to you helping me believe in myself and my abilities. My husband was right; you are a legend.

**Julie Covich, Perth, Australia**

Your book was fantastic and I am grateful for your story that has led me to believe I can overcome problems even when I'm at a very low point in life. Your book gave me inspiration to start again and move on

**Shelby Aramini, Bunbury, Australia**

Reading this book gave me a new outlook on life. Not only has it changed the way I look at the negatives and hurdles in my life but I remember the struggles that Shelley pushed through. You go Shelley, you have inspired me!

**Karena Nicholls, Lawyer, Wollongong, Australia**

I believe the Shelley Taylor-Smith story is one of the most inspirational I have read; filled with courage and one which provides hope for all Aussies.

**Danny Smith, Victoria, Australia**

I took your book home last night and we had a power failure. You should've seen my kids how they were trying to read the book and look at the photos in candlelight! We could not put it down.

**Odette H., CBA, Manager, NSW, Australia**

I love reading your book. I can't believe you knocked almost six minutes off the men's record in the '91 Atlantic City marathon swim - which stood since '79 - WOW! Love the two phrases: "If you don't quit you'll make it" & "Stuff it and flush it." I am now implementing them in my life.

**Steve Bell, UK**

I was captivated by your book and unable to put it down. Having been a swimmer myself (not at your level however) and a fan of Dawn Fraser my emotions coupled yours throughout the storey and I mentally lived through the build up and the swims with you.

**Jenni Hill**, Victoria, Australia

After reading your book and listening to the cd; I'd have to say, it's the best dollars I have spent in a very long time. What inspiring stuff! Shelley, you are AMAZING! Your story has just blown me away, with the all inspiring energy you've supplied. I found myself so absorbed in your story that I laughed. I cried. I ached. You are a true blue Australian!"

**Mary Prowse**, Surf Beach, NSW

The opportunity to read 'Dangerous when Wet' was fantastic preparation for my 10<sup>th</sup> Duo Rottneest Channel crossing. You helped me mentally achieve my goals when the times got tough during the race. Your greatest line in the book, for me, which I used in my head the whole way through the race, was "If you don't quit, you will Make It". Your book inspired me to complete a solo crossing. I look forward to being inspired as you coach me to achieve this goal.

**Shane MacDermott**, Perth, Australia, Managing Director, Westbury Investments

The obstacles Shelley faced and how she applied her positive thinking and energy in this very tough but lonely sport is bloody amazing. I read the book at a time in my life when struggling with a marriage breakdown, financial problems and depression that affected my normal positive outlook on life and my two beautiful young children. My wake up came after a serious car accident and thinking I was a failure and could not succeed. Shelley, thank you for teaching me that I can't do it on my own. Your book reminded me during my recovery where I came from, what I enjoyed and more importantly how to get back to it. Many a night after the accident I would dream of swimming again, gradually I started to BELIEVE it and more amazing I ACHIEVED this and much, much more. Thanks Shells

**Jodi O'Connor**. Rockingham, Australia. Mother of Joseph & Amy, Assistant Head Coach - Rockingham Swimming Club. 3 Solo Rottneest Channel Crossings.





## • DEDICATION •

**In Memory of my Mum, Irene Taylor (dec) and my Dad, Mervyn Taylor (dec)** who nurtured the creation of a strong and assertive woman with the courage, confidence, self belief, passion and Aussie willpower to stand up for what is right and just.

**To all the dreamers, goal setters, go getters...** who dare to dream, dare to believe and dare to achieve your birthright.... becoming the Champions you were born to be! I applaud you. The world is a better place because of you. The world needs you to shake the person next to you and wake them from their snooze... to get up, get over it and get on with it.

**Remember: if you don't quit... you will make it!**



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## ● ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ●

In writing these acknowledgments I am reminded of the overwhelming support and encouragement—which I now refer to as ‘my balcony people’—that has sustained me through my swimming career and my life.

In particular to Dad, my hero, whose mere presence and character were an inspiration. His wisdom and optimism taught me commitment, perseverance and passion. Your spirit lives within me and drives me continually.

To my mum and Nanna, thanks for devoting your time and energy to my swimming when I was such a keen youngster. To my brother Michael and sister-in-law Lesley and nephew Myles, my aunties, uncles and cousins, I thank you all for your love and support.

To my wonderful and loving sister Liz and brother-in-law Andrew, I thank you for your unconditional love and keeping me level-headed and helping to keep my feet on the ground.

To my other hero, Mal Brown—thanks for teaching me, by example, that winners are those who give 100 per cent regardless of placing.

Now to my coaches: May Pitcher, thanks for teaching me to swim, and Ray Pitcher, who coached me to my first swag of state medals. Kevin Duff, thanks for believing in me and my dreams and never holding back my enthusiasm and drive to succeed.

To Bernie Mulroy, a coach of enormous wisdom and patience—I thank you for embracing marathon swimming with enthusiasm. I would never have achieved what I have without your constant guidance and support. Coach Colin Raven, assistant of Ray Pitcher, Kevin Duff and Bernie Mulroy, I say a huge thanks for guiding me through my tormented teenage years and supporting me through 25 years of swimming. I will always remember you for your honesty and integrity.

To coaches Laurie Lawrence and Graham McDonald, thanks for picking up the pieces and helping me keep on track after a year of chronic illness and CFS. Graham, we did it after commitment and persistence, I would never have got there without your belief in me.

To the Legend Coach, Graeme ‘The Grub’ Carroll—our union as coach and swimmer in the H<sub>2</sub>O, and brother and sister out of the H<sub>2</sub>O, has been enriching and rewarding. Your unique, easy-going, refreshing character together with your honesty, trust and integrity brought out the best in me. WOW! what a team.

To Coach Dave Ferris in New York, I thank you for making me a ‘swinger’, alleviating all my shoulder problems and enabling continued success.

To Nancy, Tammy and Grub as trainers/handlers in my swims—you deserve the accolades as much as me. I could never have made it without your loyalty and belief in me.

To all my competitors—male and female—thanks so much for helping me to be the best I can be and pushing me to my potential.

To my fellow teammates of Aquaclub, Warringah Aquatic, Long Island Aquatic and Arkansas Razorbacks and Palm Beach—Currumbin over the last 25 years—I thank you for your camaraderie in a team sport like no other.

In particular I would like to say thanks to the Schnarr family in New York who welcomed me into their home and hearts with such love and warmth. Together we conquered Manhattan Island numerous times.

To all my wonderful and amazing loyal friends—my ‘balcony people’. The never-ending unconditional support, phone calls, letters and faxes—there is so much to be thankful for. I love you all. To mention a few: my No. 1 fan, Alan Jones AO, Laurie and Barbara Smith; ‘KB’ Kevin Berry; Dawn Fraser; Des Renford; Laurie Lawrence; Alana, Clem and June Paull; the Laphams; the Whiteheads; the Mohr family; the Smiths; the Westons; Tracey and Dave Buchert; Muzz; Paul Kofod; Kim Dyke; Jerome Guerette; Karen Hartley; Richard Kersh; Will Howe; Jim Schoolcraft; the Flatleys; Nancy and Mike Warnock; Judy Howard; Bob McDonald; Roger and Val Parson; Mal Brown and family; the Brooks family; Tim and Greg; the Moyles; Richard Marsh; Keith and Van; Eric Mather; Wayne Staunton; the Andersons; Lindsay May; ‘Brucie’ Graham Bruce; Dr Robert Hampshire; Michael de Vere; and Trish and Ben Lake. I’ve got so many people to thank for making things easier for me. Domestic Appliances, John Whitehead & Associates, for all your professional and sound financial advice; Luis restaurant; Sheraton

On The Park and Sheraton Towers Southgate, my homes away from home; Marathon Physical Therapy (New York), Dynamic Energy Centre, Narrabeen Sport Medicine Centre, Fisher Road Chiropractic, Kingsley Physio and Tugun Physio, who spent countless hours trying to keep my body and its parts in working order; Australia Day Council (NSW), M&M Print, Oakridge Communication Group and Leigh Maloney P.R., for helping raise my profile and my sport; Queenscliff Squash Centre, Kooka's Hair of Balmain, Maxim Pure Energy Fuel, Sunspirit Aromatherapy, Metro Brick, Caltex Oil Australia, Carrerra; NSW Academy of Sport, for recognising my sport; TYR Sport Inc, for their enduring swimwear range; Qantas, Ansett, British Airways, Air New Zealand, Cathay Pacific, and Aerolineas Argentinas—without your help I would never have been able to defend my world titles; Ando and Bumpo at Laing & Simmons Commercial, who created a job to fit with my swimming schedule; Shane, Chris and Trent at Trent Nathan, who dressed me fashionably out of the water; GIO Australia, who have remained loyal and supportive; Ross Gardiner & Friends, Ford Motor Company of Australia, Craft Canoes, Grand United Friendly Society, Darling Harbour 'Harbourside' and Muirs Holden, for believing in me, believing in my dream, and being loyal to an Australian.

And of course I am deeply grateful to Ian Cockerill, who was the first to hear my life story and believed that it should be told.

Thanks for telling it.



FRIENDS ARE THE PEOPLE WHO LET YOU  
BE YOURSELF AND NEVER LET YOU FORGET IT .





## • FOREWORD •

Internationally revered, Shelley Taylor-Smith, seven-time World Marathon Swimming Champion, is a household name.

In South America hundreds of thousands line the riverbanks to chant ‘Shelley Shelley!!’ as she ploughs by, oblivious to their adulation—she is in another zone. After she races, children swarm, she smiles, signs, laughs, waves—she is of this world again.

This same scene has been repeated countless times around the world. Shelley Taylor-Smith is an international marathon swimming star. She is feared and respected by teammates and opponents alike. Many male marathoners detest racing her because of the number of times she has lowered their colours in open races—the male ego finds it difficult to bow to a female opponent.

However, for years this single-minded athlete was barely recognised in her native Australia. She was just another pretty blonde face in the crowd and only her closest friends knew her as the smiling assassin.

Now, through the sheer weight of her achievements, Shelley Taylor-Smith has opened the Australian public’s eyes to the world of marathon swimming—her world championship win in Perth, her Sydney Harbour triumph over all comers, and her amazing Sydney to Wollongong epic journey. Her persistence, longevity and single-mindedness have reaped personal rewards and recognition.

But Shelley is more than a marathon swimmer or a public figure. She is an educationalist and as such has been able to influence thousands of young Australians. She has taught them the value of dreaming, setting goals but, more importantly, acting on those goals—for without action the dream is merely a fantasy.

Shelley, by her actions, has and will continue to influence our youth.

Encore! Bravo! Bravissimo!

Good on you, mate.

LAURIE LAWRENCE OA

## • INTRODUCTION •

To dream anything that you want to dream . . . *that* is the beauty of the human mind.

To do anything that you want to do . . . *that* is the strength of human will.

To trust yourself to test your limits . . . *that* is the courage to succeed.

These three sentences sum up the Shelley Taylor-Smith I know and admire.

An incredible 90 per cent of her sport is suggested to be mental. In other words it is how you manage the images produced inside your head. The most awesome piece of technology on the planet—the neck-top computer. Nevertheless it works like all computers: rubbish *in*, rubbish *out*.

Somehow Shelley Taylor-Smith, the high priestess of pain, is able to filter, like a fish, the messages which bombard her mind. How else could she cope with her constant companion?

As a student of sport I am fascinated by what makes different men and women tick. That's where this book will hook you. Shelley's refusal to be ruled by the negative self-doubt of others charts the remarkable journey of a very special Australian . . . through at times dark, angry seas to some cherished destinations.

As a bright-eyed little girl with a wonky back, she dreamed of swimming glory, only to be told by 'others' without her passion to quit because she'd never make it. Those privileged to witness her attitude to non-dreamers (people who delight in trying to reduce those prepared to risk all and explore the limits of their capabilities) can understand her response . . . Enjoy proving them wrong.

How would you feel if on the verge of adolescence you had to wear a metal brace extending from your neck to your waist. Shelley put up with that brace for 2000 days. The only time it came off was to swim and sleep . . . and even today one leg is 7mm shorter than the other.

Parents can be a handful even for the most talented offspring . . . here she shares a wondering insight into her mother and father.

Shane Gould's three gold medals at the 1972 Munich Olympics were an inspiration to a nation. Unashamedly Shane's performances lit the fire in Shelley's belly—it has never stopped burning brightly.

'If you don't quit you'll make it!'

After two decades of exploring the edges of her mind and body's potential she overcame the bitter disappointment of missing selection for the 1976 Montreal Olympics.

Then in 1991, in front of a massive home town crowd at the World Swimming Championships in Perth, she won gold in the Marathon swim—her equivalent of Olympic gold. Australia embraced a new world champion. Her second mentor, the legendary 'big bad' Malcolm Brown, hero of the East Perth Football Club and laterly the Richmond FC in the AFL, was overcome with pride.

Unfortunately, the sport of marathon swimming is still not recognised at the Olympics but Shelley and her friends will continue to lobby FINA, the world swimming body, to have it included in the 2000 Olympics in Sydney.

The marathon marvel has been consistently beating men and women over distances in excess of 25 kilometres and loving it! A fierce competitor, she is comfortable in describing herself in the water as an 'aggressive bitch'. To be No. 1 in the world it is not enough to just dip the big toe in—only the strong survive.

Her story of survival in some of the most Godforsaken waters in the world, alongside clueless drivers in dodgy boats, is compelling to share—the after-effects of such torture often reduced hotel rooms to miniature hospital wards.

Shelley Taylor-Smith is a dream to interview. She's left me spellbound every time—a great raconteur, so many situations yet so little time. Fortunately, in this tome there's no shortage of time or the amount of water crossed.

Her darkest year was a period between late 1993 and '94, that revealed how, through her obsession with single-minded goals, she had to navigate painfully through a marriage

breakdown. On top of that torment she was confronted by a cancer scare. Fortunately, she's back in full training and smiling often.

The lady is both a hero and in many ways a trendsetter. She is unlike a lot of our elite swimmers: she has no mega commercial sponsorships. Stroke after stroke, kilometre after kilometre, Shelley Taylor-Smith unconsciously is inspiring men and women everywhere with her single-minded horizontal victories.

Believe her when she says 'Dangerous When Wet'. She means it.

So take up the challenge. Get wet, enjoy the swim and the read—even share her pain. You won't be disappointed . . . in fact you'll discover how the positive effects of willpower, dedication and belief can help us all achieve our dreams.

MAX WALKER



## THE • TOLL • OF • THE • BOWELS

LOSING CONTROL OF YOUR bowels ranks among life's more unpleasant experiences at the best of times. To lose control in the middle of a race watched by tens of thousands of people plumbs another depth altogether.

My public evacuation took place in a distant river in early 1993. A week earlier I'd sewn up my first World Series title. Now I wished *I* was sewn up.

My discomfort could be traced back to the 7 February final of marathon swimming's inaugural World Series. The swim was staged out of Santa Fe, one hour's flight north of Buenos Aires, in front of 100,000 delirious spectators and one Argentinian president safely ensconced on a luxury cruiser. El presidente had picked a sensible vantage point. I'd been here twice before and the last place you wanted to be was *in* the water.

The course flowed 57 kilometres down the grey-brown Rio Coronda (Coronda River), with shanties squatting ominously along its length. I say ominous because it didn't take much to figure out what sort of additives found their way into the waterway from these ramshackle dwellings. And if the shanties didn't get you, you could be reasonably sure the sewage plant would.

It was with that knowledge that I responded to the starter's gun with 29 other swimmers on that clammy Sunday morning. My trainer, Graeme 'Grub' Carroll, soon came alongside me in our boat and in short time we had established a break over the other women as I beat my way into the 20-kilometre per hour headwind. The only sour (and I mean *sour*) note in the early stages came during our passage past the El Vado sewage plant, when I swallowed a bit more water than recommended in the tourist guides.

The water wasn't the only thing sticking in my craw. Our boatman obviously didn't have a clue what he was doing. He kept running low on petrol and veering off without warning to top up his supply, leaving me to my own devices. Grub had

problems of his own. The combination of wind and currents was creating a huge wash which threatened to swamp the boat. Bucket in hand, Grub was kept busy bailing all day.

Despite all this, by the halfway mark I was making good progress. I had a two-kilometre lead over my nearest female competitor and lay in fifth place overall. Then came the second miscalculation. Somehow—don't ask me how—the boat driver contrived to miss a turn and took us 400 metres in the wrong direction before he realised his mistake. Now, 400 metres might not seem that much. But when you have to swim back against a current running at eight kilometres per hour, well, *it is*. Muttering darkly, I frantically fought my way back across the river and upstream, pulling myself through mud and weeds along the bank.

When I finally made it back to where we'd left the course, I found myself in eleventh place overall and my lead over the nearest woman cut to 100 metres. There was nothing for it but to start over again. I had just begun to regain my rhythm when the third misfortune struck. My boatman had gone in search of petrol once again, depriving me of my eyes in the river. Without him, I didn't see the tree trunk jutting from the shore in time. When I thumped into it dozens of leeches promptly attached themselves hungrily to my back and arms (I still bear the scars). As if that weren't enough, my El Vado cocktail began to take effect with two hours still to go. With the nausea sweeping over me and my stomach beginning to flip, I gritted my teeth and eventually held on to win the women's race by three minutes.

Some swim. As it turned out, I wasn't the only one who'd had a rough day. Most of the women had been allotted clueless drivers and dodgy boats. One girl's boat had sunk, another's had broken down, and the organisers had neglected to inform two girls that they'd missed a cut-off time. Both had battled on to complete the swim. To rub salt into the wounds, the men received three times the prizemoney and trophies twice the size.

I'd have made my displeasure known, if only I'd had the energy. Scarcely had I been able to acknowledge my world title when the diarrhoea and vomiting struck. I was due to swim in a race at nearby Parana the following Sunday and I couldn't

even move from my hotel for the next 24 hours. As much as I would have liked to quietly slip back to Australia, I knew that I'd have to try to front up. It was the first swim of the next season and, apart from being the race's debut on the World Series calendar, considerable expectation had built up around my appearance. In Argentina, this most macho of societies, they all wanted to see the señora who could beat men.

The ailing señora dragged herself out of bed and made the trip to Parana with Grub. On checking into a hotel I quickly set about turning my room into a miniature hospital ward. I was put on a drip, and doctors, nurses and translators formed a steady trickle of visitors. Apart from an Argentinian swimmer who helped with translation, none of my fellow competitors saw me for three days while the diarrhoea and vomiting continued to wreak havoc on my system. Confined to bed and a diet of bread sticks and rice, I lost four kilograms before the doctor came up with the right drip solution. After a further twelve hours my blood pressure finally returned to normal.

It was now Friday. I had not ventured out since Sunday and it was widely assumed I wouldn't show on race day. But when the doctor declared me fit I decided I'd make the effort. That night I surprised everyone when I turned up to the ceremony where swimmers are presented to the town. I must have looked like death. The following day I stayed in my room except for a light training swim. That night I couldn't sleep after all the rest I'd had, so I listened to motivational tapes instead. One line stayed with me: 'If you don't quit, you'll make it.' I adopted it for the swim.

I climbed out of bed at 4 a.m. We had a two-hour bus trip to the starting point at Hernandarias and from there it was 88 kilometres back along the Rio Parana to Parana. I've got to say my expectations were pretty low. I even wished my competitors well before the start. Yet, once the race was underway, I actually found myself leading the whole field in the early stages. That couldn't last, though, and soon swimmers started to pass me. It was pretty deflating. This was definitely going to be a long day.

As we reached the three-hour mark, Hungarian Rita Kovacs passed me to take over second spot among the women. Rita



had never headed me before and we still had seven hours to go! As if that wasn't hard enough to swallow, my body chose that moment to resume the torment of the past week. It was probably the sugar in the chocolate drink that kicked it off. Whatever the reason, suddenly my diarrhoea returned. And then the vomiting. As fast as Grub was feeding me, it was coming out one or the other end. You couldn't help wonder what the swimmers behind me were making of this, but in this water they were probably blissfully unaware. After all, I wasn't really doing anything out of the ordinary. You only had to look at the shanties along the banks to remind yourself of that.

Not that it made the experience any more pleasant. It's about as humiliating as it gets in this sport. I was lucky I had an understanding trainer in Grub and was sufficiently distant from the bank most of the time for spectators to be left guessing. Embarrassment aside, my main concern was to keep my fluids level up on a stinking hot day. I was stopping every ten minutes to take another drink, but it was like pouring liquid down a drain.

This went on for hour after hour. At some point I started to lose my marbles. Everything around me became distorted and enlarged. The tankers which plied this river were big enough as it was, but in my fragile state they began to look terrifyingly huge and menacing. The chop looked like tidal waves. Poor Grub's attempts to humour me seemed like treacherous unconcern for my welfare. I began to abuse him for his apparent flippancy in the midst of my misery. It was horrendous for him. Goodness knows what the hovering Red Cross boat made of all this.

In the rare moments I was lucid I clung to one thought. If you don't quit, you'll make it. And it looked like I just might when, after an eternity of pain and humiliation, Grub shouted out that we were rounding the last buoy. It had been a surreal seven hours since Rita had passed me. She had remained just out of reach the whole time and, just when I longed for someone to swim with, nobody else could catch up with me. It felt like a solo swim. With three kilometres to go Grub barked at me once more.

‘Rita’s just eight hundred metres ahead! She’s *dying*! Come on, you can catch her!’

From somewhere deep inside I dredged up a final, gut-busting effort. I started to haul her in, closing to 500 metres, 300 metres, 100 metres, 50 metres. But that was as close as I would get. Rita touched the wall at the finish and I followed her into third place. We turned to each other and I collapsed in her arms. The next thing I knew I was being lifted out of the water and hooked up to have my blood pressure and heart rate measured. I flopped forward like a rag doll.

Bed. That’s where I wanted to be now. Instead, the organisers were trying to steer me towards the stage to be paraded before the huge crowd. There must have been upwards of 50,000 people there. They would have to wait, though. I whispered that I had nothing left in the tank (or anywhere else for that matter) and was immediately ushered to a waiting ambulance.

That’s when things started to get *really* crazy. It had clearly been a slow week for the ambulance driver, because he sped off as though I was knocking at death’s door. There was a steep climb from the river to the town and it felt like I was lifting off a launch pad. Suddenly the back doors flew open and all the bags and equipment started tumbling out. The attendants had to grab my stretcher to prevent me doing likewise. A vision leapt into my head of hurtling down the hill and back into the river like some excerpt from a Jerry Lewis movie. After banging on the driver’s cabin the situation was retrieved, but not before Grub had a fit of hysterics. It seemed like a fitting finale to an extraordinary day.

Welcome to the glamorous world of marathon swimming.

It’s a world which has led me to many a success, some major disappointments and a few home truths. I’ll be sharing those with you. But, as with any autobiography, it’s not so much the details which are of value. It’s the insights and lessons a life can offer.

Two underlying themes have bubbled to the surface in the course of writing this book. The first is about the positive effects of willpower, dedication and belief. They are doughy kinds of words, but no less important for that. My life is essentially the

story of a woman of limited talents who refused to be ruled by self-doubts or the doubts of others. A woman who set goals and who, with enormous input from those around her, achieved them. It never ceases to amaze me how much support people are prepared to lend to someone with a clear vision and direction in life.

I'm probably dancing around saying it, but it's about following your dreams. Not just following them, *pursuing* them and hunting them down. Dreams are hard won and that's why they're so valuable. In return, dreams help give us a sense of purpose. Broken down into achievable goals, they give us a reason to get out of bed each day. They help us to live life to the full. They challenge us to guard our individuality, because the non-dreamers delight in trying to reduce us to their level. Dreamers must be prepared to be different, to take risks, to explore the limits of their capabilities. I don't see it as an alternative. I see it as the *only* option for anyone who wants to lead a meaningful life.

The other theme underpinning this book may seem contradictory. It is a cautionary tale about the dangers of becoming obsessed with the goals which serve as stepping stones to our dreams. There is no question they are necessary. But when they dominate you to the extent that you ignore all other aspects of your life, you have a problem. *I* had a problem. Somewhere along the way to my dreams I forgot to tend to my relationships and my health. I forgot to stop and smell the flowers. It's a well-documented flipside to achievement and yet it's so easy to lose your way.

I went some way to regaining my perspective in the space of one dark year. Between late 1993 and late 1994 I had to contend with a marriage breakdown and a cancer scare. With my foundations crumbling, I had to rethink my priorities. I'm a changed person for it. Not that I'd necessarily do things differently if I had another chance. I firmly believe that I had to follow the path I did to arrive at the present point.

Besides, there are many things I'd never change. The emotions that welled up inside me as I stood on the dais to receive my World Championships gold medal in 1991, for example.

Now there was a dream come true. Not only had I won for my country, but I had done so in front of a hometown audience in Perth. In the absence of a berth for marathon swimming at the Olympics, this was my Olympic gold medal, the culmination of a quest which had begun nearly twenty years earlier.

I trust you enjoyed the complimentary first chapter of ***“Dangerous When Wet – The Shelley Taylor-Smith Story”***

**Does this sound too familiar?**

- ✓ Fed up showing up to the start of your open water swim competition wishing you’d at home in bed instead?
- ✓ Stand on the starting line afraid of looming mass start, swimming in a pack of 300?
- ✓ See the waves building and fear overwhelms you as there is no black line? **Or**
- ✓ Think to yourself: "Wow what a great triathlete I would be if there was no Open Water section!"

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*No matter where you are in your life or sporting career this book will give you the kick in the butt to never give up on yourself.*

**Janet Evans 4-time Olympic Gold Medallist, Legendary American World Record Holder 400m, 800m & 1500m Freestyle, Businesswoman & Mother of two.**

**S**helley Taylor-Smith has rewritten the record books and set new standards in one of the roughest sports imaginable — **marathon swimming**. Seven consecutive world titles, a world championship **gold medal** and head-to-head victories over the best men in the sport have marked her as one of the **supreme athletes** of the 1980s and 1990s. On her triumphant march through a career spanning twelve years she has earned a place in the Guinness Book of Records for the fastest swim (male or female) around New York's Manhattan Island and captivated Australia with her **record-shattering** swim from Sydney to Wollongong. **And she hasn't finished yet.**



Shelley has shared her story with Ian Cockerill: from her memories of growing up in Perth to her **drama-filled** reclamation of the 'round Manhattan record. Like Shelley herself this book is **spirited**, uncompromising and **right from the heart**. Behind her rise to success life dealt Shelley some heavy blows which are captivated in this **riveting story** of an amazing woman's life. Above all, *Dangerous When Wet* is about belief in oneself, triumph over adversity and the **power of positive thinking**.

*You do not have to be a swimmer to understand the power of Shelley Taylor-Smith. A woman ahead of her time, her legacy, where she beat her male competitors so consistently led to equal prize money for both men and women in the sport.*

**Steven Munatones, Founder of OpenWaterSource.com and Editor-in-Chief, Daily News of Open Water Swimming.**

*More than a marathon swimmer or public figure. She is an educationalist and as such has been able to influence thousands of young Australians. Encore! Bravo! Bravissimo! Good on you, mate.*

**Laurie Lawrence OA**

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