

In the swim

By **LEE JUILLERATH&N Regional Editor** | **Posted: Friday, September 26, 2014 12:00 am**

As a kid, Jake Klauder had dreams of playing professional football.

So, when he was 8 years old, one year younger than the minimum age for playing Pop Warner Football, he and a buddy lied about their ages. When the coach learned they were too young, Klauder and his co-conspirator were dropped from the team.

“It shattered my world,” he still remembers.

Not for long.

A few months later Klauder joined a swim team and, “Basically I never thought of playing football again.”

Swimming remains part of his life. Growing up in New Jersey, he was a captain of his high school swim team and swam in college. He follows international swimming competition and in 2010 attended the Pan Pacific Games in Irvine, Calif., “The poor man’s Olympics.” For several years he coached the Oregon Water Wolves.

When he and his family moved to Klamath Falls in 1991, part of the local attraction was the variety of mountain lakes.

“These are some of the nicest lakes in the United States,” he says of Lake of the Woods, Fourmile Lake and numerous lakes in the Sky Lakes and Mountain Lakes wilderness areas. He’s especially gaga about Crystal Creek — “It’s like Disney created it.”

In 1993, he swam the length of Upper Klamath Lake, from Agency Lake to Moore Park.

“I was really driven to do it,” he says, adding, “Since then I have never been swimming in Upper Klamath Lake.”

His interest in swimming persisted, but he’s mainly been an observer.

“I had not really been swimming for

20 years,” says Klauder, a Postal Service letter carrier.

That changed last January when he and his wife, Christine, signed up for a swimming tour in Croatia, a country along the Adriatic Sea. He planned to get in shape for the daily swims, about a mile in the morning and another mile in afternoon, but struggled.



Adriatic Blue

At left and below, Jake and Christine Klauder take a dip in the Adriatic Sea off the coast of Croatia earlier this year. The couple participated in a European swimming tour, book-ended by a week in Germany and Austria.

“My body really was not that cooperative.”

Training begins

He trained at the Ella Redkey pool, Lake of the Woods and Lake Tahoe, where he was dazzled by Tahoe’s clarity. Although he wasn’t in the shape he wanted, that didn’t stop him or his wife. The swim tour was book-ended by a week in Germany and Austria and a trip-ending, week-long cruise along the Danube River from Budapest. The week in Croatia was based at the island of Krapanj. Each day the Klauers, the only Americans in a group of 18, boated to swimming destinations, often off shore alongside islands.

“This was swimming the way God intended it, out in nature.”

Swimmers were divided into three groups and given florescent pink swimming caps to help keep them easily visible for escorts.

For the Klauers, the sights were remarkable, in and out of the water.

“Croatia is special and truly a marvel because it is so very primal. The coast is rock and sea, nothing more and nothing less. That’s a big part of what makes it so fabulous: clear, lovely waters surrounding a stony coastline and a myriad of rock-ringed islands. It is pure and unspoiled natural beauty,” he says.

Their time ashore was illuminating, too.

“The cities also have these fascinating, ancient ‘hearts of stone,’ which are curiously full of life and energy. These centers seem timeless, as they transport you to another moment of history,” he explains, referring to Croatia’s long history that dates back to the eighth century.

Unpleasant memories

In more recent history, Croatia was part of Yugoslavia until 1991. It was wracked by the Bosnian War from 1992-1996, but the country is becoming an increasingly popular tourist destination because of its history, ancient towns and miles of largely undeveloped coastline and myriad islands.

For Klauer, swimming opened an avenue for mental explorations.

“Swimming in these wonderful waters of the Adriatic was, for me, a time of rejuvenation and introspection. During the swim times I found myself reflecting a lot on my life, and wondering why anyone would be drawn to do this sort thing. At first you are overwhelmed by the schedule, but then it goes by too fast and you wish for more. You are heartbroken to say goodbye to the new friends you have made and spent an entire week with. You sort of want it to never end.”

‘Enchanting’ qualities

While he swam mornings and afternoons, Christine, 51, a first-grade teacher at Conger Elementary School, usually swam once a day. Like her husband, she was enchanted by the crystalline clear water and the country’s raw beauty.

“You could see so far below the surface. You could see fish. The light was radiating into the water,” she says of the sights through her goggles. And, of the landscapes they visited, “The country was beautiful, absolutely stunning.”

Ignited by their experience, the Klauders are considering another swim tour next summer, with possibilities including Montenegro and Lake Powell.

“The highlights were the friends we made and the magical quality of the water,” he says of Croatia and how that affected the act of swimming.

“When you swim you are horizontal. Almost everything else we do in life we’re vertical. When you’re swimming, especially in clear water, it’s like gliding over the surface ... It forces you to take a different perspective,” Klauder says. “It took me to a place I don’t think I can find any other way.”

lee@heraldandnews.com