

Suzann Mouw- White Bear Lake, MN

Here's my story for Ironman #4:

Why an Ironman #4?

The beginning of ironman-distance racing wasn't exactly a planned event. Winning the national championship long course in 1987 and being awarded airline tickets to Europe led to our first ironman-distance triathlon in Nice, France. In 1988, we married and decided to do our first Hawaii Ironman for our honeymoon. I remember USA Today ran an article titled "Honeymoon Gets Physical". Interestingly, with our wedding plans and a trip to Hawaii, the budget was tight and I decided to forego a diamond in my wedding band (my engagement ring had a big one anyway) and bought a set of HED race wheels instead! In 1991, I returned to the Hawaii Ironman – gotta love that race!

Then, in 1994, I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma and underwent a year of chemotherapy. About a year after treatment, I had my first recurrence (second time). Hodgkin's is a cancer that they tell you 95% of the time patients will not have a recurrence so I really thought I was done this time. So...I signed up for an Ironman for the following year, Ironman Canada in 1997. Then I had a second recurrence (third time) and finished another year of chemotherapy and radiation in February of 1997. I lost some lung function from radiation which continued to decline and started recovering by the first part of July. Rather than fax a medical letter requesting a refund for my race entry fee, I completed a couple of long rides and some running, and completed Ironman Canada. It was a rewarding experience, made even more special when Mo and friends earned the loudest spectator award. They grabbed every single pot and pan from the condo and obnoxiously banged them together at several points along the course.

At this point I was even – 3 Ironmans and 3x Hodgkin's. However, about a year later, I experienced my third recurrence (fourth time for treatment). I knew I had to get my head on right and stay positive this time. Hence, the idea was born that "if I have to endure a fourth round of chemotherapy, then I *get* to do a fourth Ironman!" It has been eight years since I finished my last treatment.

Why now, in 2008?

- It's our 20th anniversary and 20 years since my first Hawaii Ironman.
- It's been 10 years since my last Ironman.
- My mother-in-law said, "why *wouldn't* you do it this year?" (I didn't have a reason.)
- When I saw my oncologist last September and mentioned we were heading to Madison to *watch* Ironman Wisconsin, he said, "That doesn't sound like the Suzann I know." Code for "why aren't you doing it?"
- I feel ready to fulfill a personal commitment.

BUT the biggest reason of all, it's a celebration of sorts. Not a race, but a day to celebrate that I *get* to do my fourth Ironman!! A celebration to cap off a year of fun getting back into the sport of triathlon and hanging out with so many great people in a sport that I think is one of the best ever!