

I grew up in Winter Park, Florida (near Orlando) where I learned to swim at the age of eight with the help of a lifeguard named Wagon Wheels. I was then coached by the local pediatrician named Dr. Dippy. My first ever race was a novice meet for first time swimmers. I came in fourth place. I remember it being my first time in the deep end of a pool. Because I came in fourth place, I was asked to be on a new eight-and-under relay team, which is where it all began. I don't remember how competitive we were back then, but my parents made sure that I attended all the meets in central Florida.

I swam for Winter Park Swim Association until I turned 10 when we moved to Clearwater. My mother drove Dea Loy, who is also being honored here tonight, and myself to practices at North Shore Pool in Saint Petersburg. I kept swimming for the Saint Petersburg recreation department, setting records and placing as high as fifth at Nationals. Coach Don Prokes approached my mom about me swimming for Clearwater high school and promised that he would train me like no other.

By then, I had begun making bigger waves and wanted to be in the best program possible. My decision to switch teams was a pivotal moment in my swimming career. Coach Prokes took me in and I immediately knew I had a coach who meant business. Coach Prokes put me on a regimen that included at least 60 miles a week plus a weightlifting program that was new to me.

As I improved, many records were set, but my highest recognition in high school was being named an All American, which is top 20 in the country. I was an All American in two events. I also won three state titles in the freestyle. I was awarded a four-year full scholarship to Florida State University where I became the ACC Conference Champion in the 400 individual medley. I was fortunate enough to travel all over the country from Long Beach, California to New York and down to Miami. I remember wishing my eight-and-under relay teammates could see how the slowest swimmer on their relay team was doing now. I very much enjoyed the victories, setting records, the competition and camaraderie, as well as the travel and experiences.

With this being said, swimming gave me so much more than all of this. Coach Prokes in particular gave me the confidence that I can do anything I put my mind to and the courage to face down any challenge that would come up later in life. The toughness and determination I learned from Coach has given me a lifelong advantage and molded me into the person I am today.

The love and support of my parents gave me the opportunity to learn these life lessons, which have lasted longer and been more important than any trophy, record or experience.

My greatest accomplishment in my life however, was marrying my wife Anne, who rewarded me with seven incredible children. Anne's never ending love and support have made me the luckiest man in the world.

Thank you Coach Don Prokes for taking me in and giving me the tools that I needed. Not only in swimming; but the tools I would need throughout the rest of my life. For that, I am eternally grateful.