



KELLY'S CORNER

by Jan Kelly

Swimming & Celebration

The 12th Annual Provincetown Harbor Swim for Life AIDS Benefit and Community Festival is set for Saturday, September 11, 1999, at 9:30AM from the Boatslip. That is the swim, but there is a whole weekend of celebratory events. On Friday there will be a *Celebration of Life Concert*, on Saturday *The Mermaid Brunch* directly after the swim and the *Festival of Happiness* at Herring Cove Beach after the Brunch.

Last year's event raised \$90,000 from 210 swimmers. This year's event benefits the Provincetown AIDS Support Group, Provincetown Positive PWA Coalition, The Provincetown Life Ministry, Helping Our Women, Outer Cape Health Services, The Family Tree Project and The Art Archives. Also on Sunday, September 13, the Cape Cod Whale Watch will donate the proceeds from their 10 AM Whale Watch, specially priced at \$15, 6 years and under free.

Among the swimmers this year will be Gracie Johnston of Benson, Vermont. Gracie is the media director for the Rutland Herald and the Times Argus. Gracie, a highly successful professional member and past president of the Rotary Club, has been the chair for the United Way of Rutland County Fund Drives, a Board member of that organization, on the board of the local Chamber of Commerce and has been involved in the Vermont Cares AIDS Walk – impressive!

And what is Gracie to us beyond a visiting swimmer? Much more. Gracie Johnston is about to swim her eighth Swim for Life and is about to go well over the \$10,000 mark. A rundown:

1992	\$150
1993	\$640
1994	\$760
1995	\$1240
1996	\$1737
1997	\$2739
1998	\$1761
1999	<u>\$1500</u>
	as of mid-Aug.
Total	\$10,527

And there is more, more money and much more about Gracie.

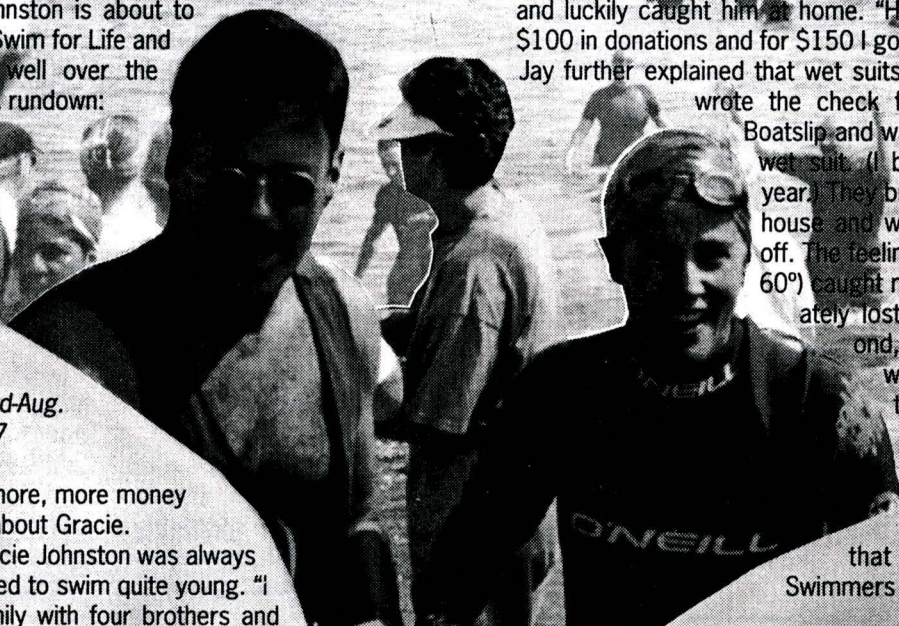
As a child Gracie Johnston was always athletic and learned to swim quite young. "I grew up in a family with four brothers and

the only way to get away from them was to swim constantly under water. Swimming was my way to have lots of fun with my brothers. At the time, I always swam faster and farther out than they did."

As Gracie matured and grew, swimming was ever part of their routine and pleasure. Completing the Red Cross Water Safety Instructors Course successfully, she not only became a beloved and effective swimming instructor but furthered her skills and interest to lifeguarding. Years of respect and enjoyment of the water have been a natural balance for her. "The water has always been important to me. Its beauty is immeasurable; its refreshment is not only thirst quenching, but also a powerful healer. Swimming relaxes the body and soul all at once. It's like someone cradling you in his or her arms. A place where you are safe—I can't honestly say warm—and a place where you are refreshed. I swim for exercise and see swimming not as a race, but as a journey along life's path."

After college and lifeguarding for years at a Massachusetts camp, Gracie kept up her swimming skills at the many small pools that Vermont has to offer and did quite a bit of lake swimming. In early September 1992, Gracie and her partner arrived in Provincetown on a Friday morning, eager for a weekend of fun. Many of the stores sported posters for the Swim for Life. She thought "This sounds like fun." So she called Jay Critchley and luckily caught him at home. "He explained that I needed \$100 in donations and for \$150 I got a Swim for Life Tee shirt. Jay further explained that wet suits were available. I willingly

wrote the check for \$150, arrived at the Boatslip and was semi-fitted in a medium wet suit. (I brought my own the next year.) They brought us over to the lighthouse and waved a flag and we were off. The feeling of the cold water (under 60°) caught me off guard and I immediately lost my breath. After a second, I began to swim and the water poured in the neck of the wet suit. I swam with others and asked where we were going. I chose not wear my contacts under my goggles and that was not a wise idea. Swimmers willingly pointed the way



and finally I swam with a guy named José from Boston. When we arrived on the shore the clapping and cheering was unbelievable. The crowd did not diminish, but remained just as strong until the last swimmer arrived. The Brunch was held at someone's home and was amazing with so many donated goodies from local businesses. The entire day brought much joy to everyone who participated with so many volunteers willingly giving their time, talent and energies."

Well, Gracie says she was "hooked" on this wonderful event and getting ready for the swim became one of her priorities. She began asking friends and family to sponsor her and they willingly pledged after she explained how the money is used. So many Vermonters have donated to Swim for Life through this woman. Gracie Johnston realized she would never be a fast swimmer, so she made her goal to raise as much money as she could each year. Her fellow Rotary Club members have willingly supported Gracie's efforts since her first swim. She has been asked "Why not raise money for Vermont AIDS projects so the money stays local?" Gracie responds that she has been involved with The Vermont Cares AIDS Walk for many years and is contributing to Vermont on so many levels from all her years of fundraising for multiple charities. Gracie continues, "Most of the money stays local but I believe that our community is much broader than where we live."

Celebration and generosity are important factors of Gracie Johnston's life. "I've had the opportunity to watch the Swim for Life grow with more participants and more dollars raised over the past eight years. The entire weekend, starting with the Friday night *Celebration of Life* event to the close with the bonfire on the beach is exhilarating and wonderful.

In 1997, Gracie raised her highest amount. "people were especially generous that year. I also remember that I swam to shore and did not hear the clapping, but saw everyone in motion. I thought my earplugs may have been pushed in too far. My friends quickly realized that I didn't seem 'quite there' and was especially cold. They rushed me to the E.M.T.s who are always on hand and found that my body temperature was 88°. I had been warned about hypothermia, but I didn't have

the initial signs and thought this would not happen to me. They followed procedure and quickly raised my body temperature to 94° and got me warm and all ended on a positive note, thank goodness! And last year '98 was a better swim for me."

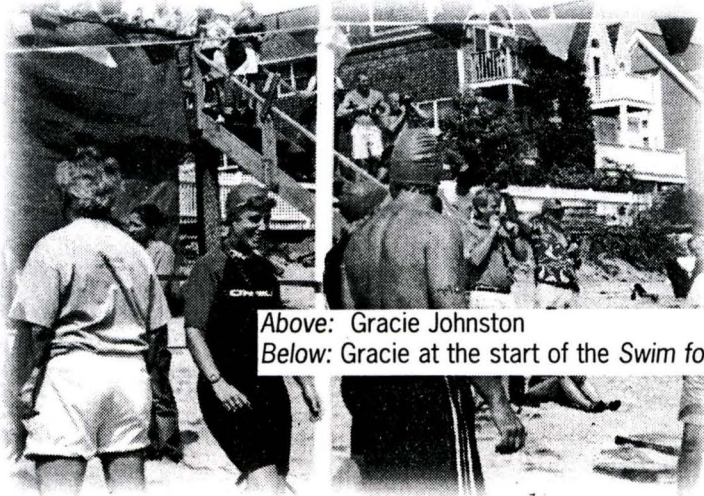
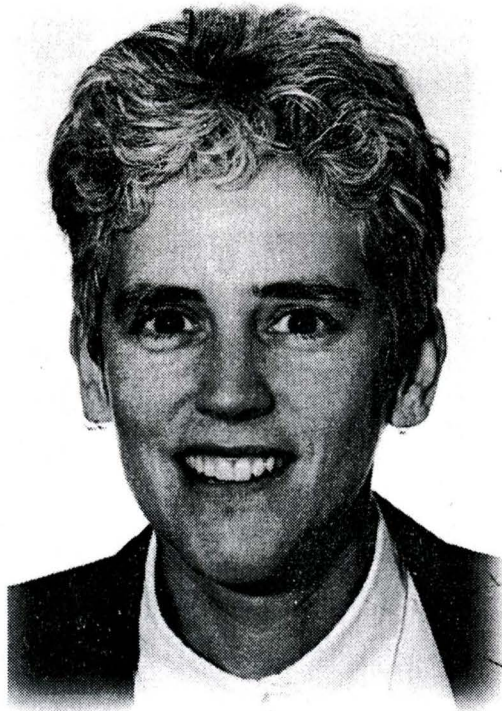
Gracie Johnston is a compassionate and giving human being who accepts challenges of life that help our world locally and globally. She is an ever-growing, ever-adjusting unselfish individual. Her next challenge will make you even more misty-eyed than the courage to return to the swim after a bout of hypothermia. Gracie Johnston and her partner, Linda McDevitt are in the process of adopting a Cambodian child. Think of this. This is not giving to a cause for a day or once a year or for a brief period of time. This is a lifelong commitment to unselfish giving. "This year, my partner Linda and I have some interesting changes happening in our lives. We are adopting a baby from Cambodia. She is 10 months old and her name is Teany. We hope to travel this fall to Cambodia to bring her home. And she'll be taking swimming lessons before you know it. So this year, I Swim for Life for so many and celebrate the life of my daughter."

Many friends ask Gracie why she continues to do the swim each year, far from home, cold water, so much fundraising work besides the actual "swim". Gracie's answer is easy.

"It's a way for me to give back to my community, become refreshed, realize what life is all about and

have a blast all at the same time."

So join us at the Swim for Life, Saturday, September 11th at 9:30 AM at the deck of the Boatslip. If you help us every year, welcome back. If this is your first year, welcome. You will have the opportunity to observe Gracie Johnston and so many other brave and caring swimmers on a joyous day. There are so many bits & pieces that volunteers are always needed. You can choose your task and you can choose to help locally, globally and have fun.



Above: Gracie Johnston
Below: Gracie at the start of the Swim for Life,