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From: [Shelley](#)  
To: [Jeff](#) & BOTB Race Volunteer Board  
Subject: thank you--Bring On The Bay Swim  
Date: Sat, 18 Jul 2015 12:55:31 -0400

Hi Jeff,

Just wanted to take this opportunity to thank you and all the others for an excellent Bring On The Bay swim with swim angels. That was such a great adventure—I'll be back next year, for sure. (I'll even try to convince more blind swimmers to join in!).

As my way of saying thank you, I wrote a little race report—a little story about our adventure. I don't know whether you will be able to use it, but it might help. We Won With One team members had a fantastic time and we just wanted to extend our thanks and appreciation to you and the team who made this day possible.

Thank you soooooo much!!!!

Shelley Ann Morris

[www.wonwithone.com](http://www.wonwithone.com)

Welcome To My World CKCU FM 93.1

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## **Bring on the Bay—Bring on the Swim Angels**

As Ottawa celebrated the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Bring On The Bay swim on July 13, a small group of us from Won with One, our national blind triathlon team, decided that we'd accept the challenge. This swim is a key fundraiser for Easter Seals Ontario, an organization dedicated to assisting children with disabilities. Every effort was made to make the event as accessible and inclusive as possible, especially with the implementation of the Swim Angel Program.

As someone with a visual impairment, my online application to swim was thwarted by a 'captcha' (a visual verification used to differentiate between computers and people). I called the number listed on the website. Kristi Manuel from the Easter Seals Society took my information over the phone, circumnavigating the captcha and I was registered.

My friend (and guide for previous many races), George Hajecek agreed to be my Swim Angel. While we'd participated in numerous sprint distance triathlons and road races, neither of us had swam anything close to three kilometers. We would swim 'tethered' by a length of bungee cord that would allow George to keep us on track. Another Won With One athlete/guide pair, Richard Marsolais and

Peter Staniforth also signed up. On land, Richard is lightning fast as a marathoner and as a former Canadian tandem cycling champion. In the water however, he had his doubts as to whether or not he could complete such a long distance. Tim Scapillato, long-time athlete and guide and volunteer Won With One Board member, would be part of a duo of angels assisting a young woman with cerebral palsy and a lot of drive to take on her first three-kilometer plunge.

Regardless of our aquatic ability, we soon learned that would be well taken care of thanks to the BOTB inaugural Swim Angel Program. Jeff Mackwood volunteered his time and experience to launch the program after being inspired by acting as an informal swim angel for a friend who needed some support. Archangel Jeff (as he was aptly nicknamed), wanted to see others who need a little assistance would not be left behind on the shore. I had the honour of interviewing Jeff for CKCU FM's Welcome To My World, the weekly show by, for and about people with disabilities. This interview led to Jeff and a participant enjoying more radio stardom, as they appeared on CBC Radio's Ottawa Morning.

Swim angels were carefully trained. On the evening before the swim, angels and swimmers met for a group orientation. We met the other swimmer/angel pairs, including people who were recovering from surgery and those who were hoping to conquer swimming anxiety.

Every effort was made and every step was taken to provide all swimmers with a safe environment. Chris Wagg, a very knowledgeable lifeguard offered guidance and support to swimmers and angels alike. Numerous volunteers would keep a close eye on the swimmers, ensuring their safety and shepherding them along the route. A little pre-event swim allowed new angel/swimmer pairs to learn more about each other in preparation for the next day.

The warm, sunny day was perfect for an open-water swim. We all squeezed into our wetsuits – there was a lot of good-natured trash-talk among the Won With One teammates. Words like “prairie chicken” and “made of sugar” were thrown about. “Shell, you’re a mermaid.” said one teammate. “No, a Loch Ness Monster” laughed another. On land I move at the speed of the average glacier, but I’ve always felt at home and more comfortable in water—of the three triathlon sports, swimming is my favourite.

With one simultaneous jump off the dock at the Nepean Sailing Club, George and I were in the water and immediately started swimming. Keel boats were anchored at every hundred meters—we would count boats. Different strokes for different folks, George prefers the breast stroke while I’m more free-style. Still, we swim perfectly well as a team. If I start to get off-course, I feel a gentle pull on the tether and I am back in line. In the water we were surrounded by swimmers, swim angels and a variety of boats—even those who swim with trepidation would feel more confident with the assurance from the angels and the flotilla that accompanied us.

During the first half of the swim, the water was very choppy. We bounced along on the waves—what fun! Careful—incoming wave in the face! SPLASH! We had to time our breathing in sync with the waves or there would be an ensuing coughing, spluttering fit. I’m sure I drank some water along the way. In no time at all we were at the half-way point and the water was noticeably calmer. More boats to count but still I wasn’t tired. In the home stretch with land in sight—that’s when the indigestion hit. Pre-race nutrition is a serious business, and I quickly realized that how I fuel up before triathlon might not be appropriate for a 3K swim—this would be important to consider as I prepare for my first Olympic distance triathlon this September.

The Britannia Yacht Club was in sight. We would climb a red ladder out of the water. Strangely, the ladder kept drifting away as we struggled to reach it. I was told later that there was a little mini-current that was having fun with us swimmers—pushing us sideways just as we were about to finish.

Up, Up and up, we climbed the ladder and were met with cheers as water drained from our wetsuits. I felt a bit queasy and was content with a post-event plain bagel. A cheer rose from the crowd as the announcer exclaimed “Here comes Richard. Let’s cheer him on! Come on Richard! Looking good! Almost home!” The cheering grew louder as Richard and Peter made their way to the ladder. Richard completed his first 3K swim, and was met by hugs, cheers and high-fives from us. Other angelen swimmers followed; some needing a little assistance from the volunteers and boats.

Jeff Mackwood, Easter Seals Ontario, the Swim Angels, many volunteers and others had worked hard to make this day a success. We had a great time, and I am sure that we will be back again next year, and hopefully, we’ll encourage more blind swimmers to join us.