

Babs (Barbara) Larsen - HOF Story – Class of 2018

Babs Larsen was born in Glen Cove, Long Island New York in 1947, but actually grew up in Toledo Ohio.

At around the age of 7 or 8, a pediatrician told her parents that Babs should take up swimming because she was so left handed. Note: Web MD did not provide a single reference for why swimming was such a recommendation, but understanding Babs' history, all would agree that the world is a better place as a result.

One of Babs' first coaches was the late, great Sandy Wilson. He taught Babs to swim and coached both at the AAU Toledo Club and in the country club league. One of Babs first swim meet memories is from when she was about 11. She was signed up for the 200 fly at the Ohio Association AAU Senior Championships. She finished in first place!!

Babs and her family moved to Richmond, Indiana to start 7th grade. Richmond did not have much of a swim program. So, her mother drove Babs and her sister 140 miles round trip to Indianapolis 3 days a week. When Babs's father was transferred back to Toledo six months after moving to Richmond, her parents rented a home from Dr Miles Barton in Indianapolis for three summers. During those summers "Doc" James Counselman's IU swimmers swam for the Indianapolis Athletic Club. George Breen (a 4 time Olympic medalist and former world record holder in three events); Alan Somers (a 1960 Olympic swimmer and a world record holder in the 4x200 relay); Mike Troy (a 1960 Olympic world record holder in two events including his signature event the men's 200 yard butterfly); and Chet Jastremski (pronounced Ja strim' ski) (a two time Olympic swimmer and a bronze medal winner in the 200 Breaststroke) particularly made an impression on her. George shared the same birthday as Babs and gave her her first Indiana University sweatshirt. Alan and Mike grew up swimming age group with the IAC and continued to mentor the younger swimmers, and Chet was from Toledo. By Babs' high school freshman year, she lived with the Barton's to train and then participate in the 1960 Olympic trials, where she placed 10th in the 400 free. In 1962 she was named to the AAU Long Distance team for placing 3rd at the National Championship held at Lake Placid NY.

So, to summarize her story so far: 1) Mom drives 140 miles three days a week so Babs can swim; 2) Dad gets transferred back to Toledo, OH, but that does not stop Bab's swimming; 3) Babs continues to swim with the Indianapolis Athletic Club, and hang out with Olympians; and 4) By her freshman year in high school, she places 10th in the Olympic trials; and 5) By 1964, she had more or less retired from AAU swimming. She went to 2 years of Junior College and then transferred to Indiana University. As many of us know, there was no such thing as Title 9 in the late 60's (which gave girls/women an opportunity equal to the boys/men to participate in sports in school). So, Babs swam for the 1968 Women's Club Swim Team, which was finally recognized by Indiana University in June 1997 as being so significant that it earned Babs the Varsity Letter "I".

By 1983 Babs had been married 14 years, had two children in school all day and returned to work as an educator. Fortunately for all of us, the siren song beckoned Babs back to swimming when upon completion of the IU Natatorium on the IUPUI campus in Indianapolis in 1982; a Masters Swimming Nationals was held there in August 1983. Babs' Master Swimming career

was launched. At her first meet back in to competition, she placed 3rd in the 200 back in the 35 to 39 age group.

Babs eventually joined the Jordan Y, which eventually became the IndySwim Fit. She hoped to use swimming as a way to maintain a healthy lifestyle and to age gracefully. Later Babs used swimming just to get through life's challenges.

She soon learned that Masters Swimming opened a whole new social experience from participating in organized coached practices and meets to volunteering hours to help the organization grow. There she met many life long friends. During this time, Babs held several positions in the Greater Indiana LMSC including Sanctions Chair, Newsletter Editor, and Registrar. She was also involved with the USMS on a national level as Chairman of the USMS Registration Committee during Mel Goldstein's Tenure as USMS President (1993 – 1996). In 1997, she was in the first group to receive the USMS Dorothy Donnelly Service Award.

As an Age Group swimmer Babs had a goal to improve her times by 1 to 2 seconds a year. As a Masters Swimmer she tried to improve her baseline swims each year. By age 65, her goal became to be only 2-5 seconds slower each year.

Babs participated in her first Minnesota Masters event in 1994 while still being in Indiana. She heard and then participated and won a Wayne Mulhern's organized Postal Swim event for the middle distance; times added together for a 100 of each stroke and followed by a 200 I.M.

By 2004 both of her children had married and had settled down in her mother's home state of Minnesota. It was in June 2008 that Babs and her husband, Chuck, moved to Rochester, Minnesota to provide moral support for their son who was facing a health challenge . During this ten-year+ period as a Minnesota Master, she achieved greatness on the MN LMSC "State" level, where she has set or broken over 100 individual pool records, currently still holding over 60, and participated in 25 relay record swims. On the national level, Babs has been on the United State Masters Swimming (USMS) individual Top Ten lists 67 times and accomplished 44 USMS Top Ten RELAY placements. Additionally, she has made the rare accomplishment of landing on the FINA (international) Top Ten Lists seven times individually and five times in relays.

One of her favorite MN Masters swim site became St Paul's University of St Thomas pool. This, she is quick to state, should not take anything away from the U of M's natatorium pool, but the UST venue and meet vibes are special.

Babs feels it a privilege to be a part of MN Masters swimming, where you can always find a pool to practice in with friendly folks, as well as an organized meet in which to participate. And she is a great communicator of such; bring many into the swimming fold.

Babs also feels privileged at this point in her storied career that she is setting MN "State" records especially after having her own health challenges in 2016. She likes the thought of setting records, so that the female swimmers that were able to swim through school, due to Title 9, will come after her and have a bar that they can leap over.