

Never mind the sun setting

Posted on Sat, Oct. 16, 2004

<http://www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/9935797.htm>

SOFT-SPOKEN, BUT ALSO CALLED 'THE DOMINATOR'

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Mercury News

Advanced Grammar Directions

Use different colored pens to mark the subject(s) and verb(s) in each clause. If the S is separated from its verb by a relative adjective clause, draw a line from the S to its V. The first sentence (3 clauses) is marked for you.

Before the sun begins to rise off the coast of the Big Island in Hawaii today, Harriet Anderson will jump into the Pacific Ocean. She will swim 2.4 miles. Then she will ride a bike for 112 miles. Then she will run the marathon distance of 26.2 miles.

If everything goes well, Anderson, of San Carlos, will do all this in about 15 hours.

But here's the really amazing number: She turns 69 next week.

"It's just great fun," said Anderson, the oldest female finisher last year at the Ironman Triathlon World Championship, one of the world's toughest and most famous endurance events.

Yes, she said *fun*.

Anderson is a soft-spoken woman who modestly describes herself as "more of a sinker than a swimmer." She does not consider herself an exceptional cyclist or runner, either. Perhaps the most impressive thing about Anderson is that she seems so completely unimpressed with herself.

"I'm not able to go very fast, but I can just keep going," she said.

And going and going.

"She looks like the most unassuming person in the world, and you would never know that she is a fierce competitor,"

said Anderson's daughter, Linda Burt. "One year at the race they called her 'the dominator of her age group.' So we started calling her The Dominator because it's so not her."

A retired school nurse, Anderson not only has finished all 12 of her previous Hawaii Ironman events, she also has always finished among the top five in her age group. A living-room shelf is chock-full of Ironman trophies from years in which she won her division, including 2003.

Bob Babbitt, publisher of Competitor magazine and a six-time Ironman finisher, said Anderson is doing more than just racing against other triathletes, or even herself.

"Harriet is competing against perceptions that somebody her age should not be out there, but rather knitting, sitting in a rocking chair and playing mah-jongg," Babbitt said. "She's

saying, 'Forget that. I'm pushing myself to limits that people my age aren't supposed to reach.' "

Although Anderson might be an extreme example -- excelling at a race that covers 140.6 miles -- she is emblematic of how senior athletes are attempting more strenuous activities at older ages.

"It may be that people like her are very, very special," said Dr. Jeffrey Metter, a medical officer with the National Institute on Aging. "But I'm not convinced about that. We're hearing of more older people competing in events like marathons. It shows that older people who train properly can do these things."

The late-blooming Anderson never considered herself an athlete. She played tennis in high school and was a band majorette, but it was a college summer job working in Yosemite that provided clues of her fitness.

"All the guys would tell me that I was a good hiker," she said. "I guess I had natural endurance."

She would marry Gary Anderson, now a retired engineer, and have two children. Burt said her mom spent her free time assisting the children's athletic careers -- Linda was a figure skater and her brother, Michael, was a tennis player and runner.

When Gary and Harriet became empty-nesters, they joined a fitness-for-life class. Through that they met some runners and began doing 10Ks. Then marathons. Before Anderson knew it, she was trying triathlons, winning her age group in her first event in 1987.

"I got a prize, and that was really exciting," Anderson said. "When I was young I never did anything where I would get a prize. It's great fun getting stuff like a watch and

a T-shirt. So I'm kind of a kid at heart."

She competed in her first Hawaii Ironman in 1989, and ever since has been a regular because each time she wins her division, she earns an automatic berth to the next year's Ironman. It means she does not have to qualify for the ultra-exclusive race that Babbitt calls the Super Bowl of triathlons.

Anderson always finishes the challenging course within the 17-hour time limit. Last year she won her division despite the fact her training was interrupted months earlier when she was hit by a car -- totaling her bike. Luckily, she suffered only soft tissue injuries. This year, Anderson's preparation was delayed by a month when she was slowed by pneumonia.

Yet, she realizes she has been fortunate. Anderson has never suffered the sort of debilitating joint injuries that have

ended the triathlon careers of many peers, including her husband.

"A lot of us who started in our 50s, 20 years ago, just can't do this anymore because we've had injuries," said Gary Anderson, who no longer can run because of a herniated disk. "But she's pretty amazing. You would never know she's about to turn 69."

She trains six days a week. She has never had a coach, preferring to follow instructions from a triathlon training book. She also attends Pilates and body-shaping classes. Her diet is long on fruits and vegetables, and short on sweets.

"She gets up at 5 in the morning and goes for really long runs," said Burt, who also lives in San Carlos. "She'll say, 'Oh, it's just so nice and peaceful, and I can think out there.' Then I'll ask her how far she ran and she'll say, '15 miles.' Meanwhile, I just got out of bed."

Anderson was named the female Outstanding Age Group Athlete last year by the World Triathlon Corporation. This is like being called the Ironwoman among Ironwomen.

"In triathlons they write your age on the back of your calf so you can keep track of other people in your division," Babbitt said. "Imagine you're somebody in your 30s running along, and then Harriet Anderson blows by you wearing a 68 on her calf?"

But Anderson, wearing a sleek Nike sweatsuit, really did look like a kid in a candy store when she was showing off her high-tech bike recently. Anderson's helmet and outfit will match the yellow-and-black bike. She even planned to wear yellow nail polish today.

"When my daughter was skating, I'd make her dresses and bows and

everything else for her matching outfits," Anderson said. "Now she says, 'Mom, you're taking over where you left off with me.' "

Anderson wants to do triathlons until she is 70, and then she might retire. Burt said she'll believe it when she sees it. Her mother has been threatening to stop for years.

Burt added: "Out of the blue the other day, my 4-year-old son said, 'Mommy, I want to be an Ironman just like Grandma.' "

[Answer Key](#)

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