

# **Letter of Support for Diana Nyad from Candace Lyle Hogan to the World Open Water Swimming Association**

Dear WOWSA, the World Open Water Swimming Association,

October 13, 2018

I am the only person who accompanied Diana Nyad on all five of her Cuba swims, from 1978 onward, including the 2013 swim where she succeeded in swimming from shore to shore. My name is Candace Lyle Hogan, and I was a member of the 44-person team (22 men and 22 women) that accompanied her when I witnessed Diana Nyad swim continuously, after stepping off Cuban land into Cuban water, till finishing on the afternoon of September 2, 2013 by walking out of the water onto the sand of Smathers Beach. There, as is well recorded in video and photographs, no one touched her before her feet left the water. My address is 31361 Mesa Dr., Redlands, CA 92373, USA; phone 909-499-8000. I am and was in 2013 fully employed as Product Engineer at Esri Inc., the leading maker of geographic information software, (their brand is called ArcGIS, The Science of Where\*), and I have worked and continue to work as Acquisition Editor and Writer for Esri's book publishing arm, Esri Press, on New York St. in Redlands, CA, as I have since March 2, 2006. If I may be of help to you or provide further information, please feel free to contact me at any time.

## **Absolute Integrity And Unassailable Character**

I observed Diana Nyad swimming for 46 hours of her 52 hours, 54 minutes, 18 seconds, 110.86-mile swim From Cuba to Florida in. Intermittently of course (I was writing in my notepad the reports we sent out on social media), but fairly continuously—I was there to observe and to support (I wanted her to be able to see me in case she ever looked over to her right—especially, at feeding times—so I stood most of the time on the deck's edge to write, wave, and watch, with occasional runs inside the cabin to give these reports to the computer guy to send). In and out for brief intervals, 10 minutes here and there, but always back out onto the deck. It's always a vigil for me. Our boat's Captain Jeff Smith's was remarkably consistent in keeping us trolling to the right of the swimmer and usually a little ahead so I could see her in the day and the red light on her cap at night. Thank you for the opportunity to confirm that at no time during the 2013 Cuba swim did I see or hear her leaving the water, touching a boat, using fins or any device, or receiving any help to keep her from sinking or to aid her in moving through the water. I never saw her use fins or be held up by anyone or moved forward by anyone or anything outside herself.

**I saw her much of the time, but I know her, too, so I am certain that she conformed, with her fullest intention and self-respect applied, to the highest standards of the sport of long distance swimming, a sport she regards as noble and expansive enough to serve as a crucible for the highest human aspirations. I would sign an affidavit and testify under oath to everything I say in this document and to Diana's fairness in heart, mind, and action and to her absolute integrity and unassailable character.** I have known her continuously and been close

friends with her for 42 years. No one knows me better than Diana Nyad. And I would say that no one knows her better than I do, although Bonnie Stoll could know her as well.

Note that during those 52 plus hours of the 2013 swim, my eyes were not on Diana all the time or within distance of literally seeing her all the time. For about 6 hours or 11 percent of that time, I was mixing protein shakes (all I ate) or I was sleeping (in that half-awake state of sleep in which I intended to be aware of anything important that might occur). I was on, not the escort boat Voyager, but the media boat often closest to the Voyager of any other boat (the kayakers home boat and the shark divers home boat and our boat jockeyed for position in a coordinated and appropriate manner throughout the swim, so my boat may not have been the second-closest all the time, but I'd say a lot of the time). I had my eyes closed resting for no more than 6 hours — cat naps I took incrementally and usually within earshot of Diana's primary escort boat, The Voyager, that she was swimming next to, along its starboard side, with enough distance between her and the boat to allow for her never touching the boat, either inadvertently or on purpose. (I have observed since the mid-1970s that it is vitally important to her even during training swims to not use anything to support her in the water for the duration, and certainly to stay far enough away from any support or escort boat so as to avoid accidentally hitting her hand. She is rigorous in performing training swims in a way that most closely resembles how she will perform in the event itself.)

## **Once An Investigative Reporter, Always An Investigative Reporter**

Note that I am a lifelong friend of Diana Nyad's but also a journalist (masters program at the University of California at Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism, early 1970s) trained in journalism during the period when the Fred Friendly ethics and integrity were drilled into us. It was in my capacity as a reporter, staff writer for Billie Jean King's *womenSports* magazine, that I first met and interviewed Diana Nyad in the spring of 1976. Even after becoming friends, I always sustained my effort to observe her (and everyone else) as objectively as possible, as a journalist would do. Journalists are practiced and capable of stepping outside themselves to be an observer—at the same time they are open and embracing of personal connection. This simultaneous and concurrent objective/subjective state, the result of one's intention to remain as objective as necessary for discerning reality and truth, is common among professional journalists, and I have applied this skill during all Diana's swims, including the 2013 swim whose integrity I am confirming. **Once an investigative reporter, always an investigative reporter, I find that my ability, developed over time, to connect professionally, in a transpersonal way, to any person has kept my perceptions as keen and accurate as humanly possible. All this to say that, while I adore Diana of course without reserve, love does not and never has thoroughly blinded me about anyone. It's a professional skill I've applied to discern reality from illusion and recognized truth as clearly, deeply, and quickly as possible, and I have continuously practiced this skill in both my professional and personal life.**

Particularly in this type of instance wherein both intersect. I am consciously making a strong effort to be fair, to be open but neutral, and to identify truth beyond doubt as much as I can before sending it out to the public. This was my reportorial job on the 2013 swim and I set

about it with journalistic integrity. I consciously set it as my intention to do this to the best of my ability, in the role as reporter from the “media” boat (of Captain Jeff Smith), the boat dedicated to getting word out accurately and in a timely way about Diana’s state and the progress of the swim. I worked with a team of three others, two of whom were going from boat to boat interviewing those closest to the swimmer (handlers, shark divers, kayakers, Angel the jellyfish expert, navigator, boat captains and Voyager drivers), writing their reports, and getting photographs and video. Two on this team of four, myself and the computer operator, stayed on the media boat most of the time so that we could send out their reports and mine. I took notes and wrote updates, all of which are available either online or in my files. I know these reports were sent forth at great difficulty in the midst of the great wilderness of the Florida Straits; I know that at least some, perhaps all, were received because I heard from people later in response on social media and by email, and because later perusing social media and Googling, I actually saw information I had written translated in a Chinese newspaper and elsewhere. (I have colleagues at work who were able to translate from the Chinese.)

## A Sixth Sense, As It Were

To be clear, at night and with the variable distances between my boat and the Voyager, I was not always able to see Diana with my eyes (although even at night, I could often see the light on her cap bobbing). As the person I person who accompanied Diana throughout all five of her efforts to swim from Cuba to Florida, starting in 1978, **I developed as best I could ways of staying in touch with her energy state regardless of the distance between us, a sixth sense, as it were.** I mention this because I purposefully took those cat naps on the side of the boat I was on that was closest to and facing the direction of Diana, in case that helped my perceptions of where she was and how she was doing. In this way, even at times of rest, I was often able to sense shifts in continuous motion, such as when her handler, Bonnie Stoll, signaled her to stop and tread water for a feeding. Invariably, during those brief but restorative rest breaks, even when in some state of sleep, I woke up in time hurry out onto the deck of my boat to encourage Diana by my presence and focused attention. I stood tall there. I waved. I yelled. I sent silent positive thought. Over the years, I have been so consistent in this effort to stand at the edge of a boat deck closest to her as much of the time as possible, and especially at times likely to contain scheduled feedings, that I feel she takes encouragement from simply *knowing* I am surely there, even though she can’t see very well through her goggles. (She sees pretty well though. Starting in 1977, throughout a year of pretty much 8-hour-a-day trainings before the first Cuba to Florida attempt in 1978, I accompanied her on a zodiac boat and my only job really was to meet her eyes on each breath, to keep her company. It’s amazing what expression can be communicated through goggles bleared by water, through a slight contortion of the already contorted mouth. She smiled at times and that brought tears to my eyes.)

## A State Full of Integrity

There are so few ways of supporting a swimmer’s effort—it’s such a lonely effort—that I have committed myself to doing these things during every swim, including training swims like standing and watching for long and/or frequent periods of time, sending healing thoughts,

holding positive images of her achieving her goal. These seem like small things, and I suppose they are, but when they are all you can do to support your friend in her admirable endeavors, you do them. And I did, almost with a consistency, commitment, and focus comparable to hers. Everything's relative, so I am not tooting my own horn or comparing my small part to her central role in any way. I am simply pointing out the level of determination and ability to focus that her determination inspired (and still inspires) in me. Even when my exhaustion cycled around, even during discomfort (hunger, moments of nausea), the usual aches and pains seemed to disappear in the face of my determination to do my best and send the positive thoughts that filled my heart to her and also to check in on her as best I could from where I was. In other words, I was committed to focusing on her and everything around her as much of the time as humanly possible, in the belief—hoping beyond hope—that this would help her. When this is the only kind of support you can give a swimmer, and it really is, you give it with all your heart and soul. I was not alone in this, though I was the most practiced. For example, for quite a few crew members, this was their first and only Diana Nyad swim; they were strangers. But not for long. I observed that their response began to mirror mine. Everyone became inspired to bring the best out of themselves in order to function well in their individual role. **That alone becomes a state full of integrity;** feeling inspired by someone else's courage lends courage to your inner self and motivation to be at your best, which in turn helps keep you alert and functional beyond what you presumed were your limitations. I'm sure you have observed this. And remembered it, as it is a heartening and uplifting truth to be able to recall in the inevitable times of challenge and struggle to come in one's life.

In 2013, 44 people accompanied Diana Nyad on her last Cuba swim (oh god, I hope it is her last; don't make her do it again just to prove it—again). Millions of people all over the globe followed her stroke by stroke over this great connector called the web. Hour by hour, from day into night into day again, people connected with their heart and minds. Many stayed up all night, their sense of hope, aspiration, striving hanging in the balance with her effort to accomplish what no one had done before, a thing declared to be impossible for any human being, let alone a 64-year-old woman. But just as I had over a lifetime, they had learned already in this time of quickening awareness, what this individual is made of.

They had already decided, over the three recent tries that came before, to hope; to just say, well maybe; to think that perhaps there is something to it, this slogan of Never give up. Many had already applied it to their own lives before they ever knew of her; out of necessity and in crisis, they had persevered. Some were knocked down and deciding whether to struggle to stand up again or just let it all fall away. All you have to do is read the many many thousands of voices on social media calling out their encouragement, voicing their own reasons for hope now in spite of all their reasons for despair.

I could offer a more organized report of my observations if I had more time—quotes from shark divers and kayakers so careful not to touch her inadvertently or otherwise (this had been drummed into them by Diana before every swim and reinforced by experienced handlers like Bonnie Stoll and myself); their exclamations of wonderment at the fact that even they felt completely exhausted and got out for a break, she just kept on going and never took a break, never got out of the water. I could describe the many conversations I was privy to about how

she could put on herself in the water the jellyfish-protective bodysuit and mask with the least expenditure of energy. *[But she didn't do this. Candace seems willing, at the very least, to stretch the truth for her her buddy]* In expeditions that have never been done before, you confront obstacles never confronted before, and like a scientist, Diana devised a way to protect herself from box stings as best she could within the range and spirit of the traditional rules under untraditional circumstances. When people go where no one has gone before, they get to set the rules about how to overcome obstacles never seen before. Thus, the thin nonflotational body suit and uncomfortable mask (which cut her mouth and gave her more pain than anything else while obstructing her breathing), both more of a hindrance to swimming than a help. But she had been stung before in then waters, which threatened her life. Even on 2013's successful swim, patrolling just a few miles from shore Angel, the jellyfish expert, saw a box jelly in the water along Diana's pathway and had to scoop it out. I saw other kinds of jellyfish from the boat frequently, especially at dusk and dawn. And I saw the one Angel scooped out just a few miles from shore in a jar on deck.

I could describe the period when I was just getting to know Diana, more than 40 years ago, when I marveled over the intricacies of this esoteric sport she was telling me all about, and how a great proportion of the details she emphasized to me were around the rules, all intended to ensure the swimmer's accomplishment is all under her own steam. This was imprinted on me then and thus carried with me throughout the decades, this dedication to honoring the sport itself. During preparation meetings, I heard it multiple times reinforced by Diana and others to crew members, the importance of refraining from doing anything out of ignorance that might inadvertently compromise the swimmer's effort. In other words, I have been an old nag throughout the years, no doubt irritating more than one teammate I'm sure, with my unnecessary reminders to stay alert, be observant, be careful not to even try to help because you are going to feel the urge to give a hand inevitably, and you must resist it. Thus, I never saw anyone do it, not on any of the swims, and certainly not on this most important swim in 2013 where we set forth in and had mostly good weather, **not too horrible currents**, *[Candace seems to have missed the memo on currents]* and finally the best protection against box jellyfish stings. In other words, 2013 turned out to be the best opportunity to succeed at this so-called "impossible" effort. And because Diana had put in the training and had an excellent navigator—and because **Diana is authentic, the real thing, and a true hero for our time because she is true to herself**—she made it. Nothing can ever take that away from her or from the 44 who saw her or from the millions of people who felt her triumph as their own. Yet **I hope for the sake of our ability to believe in institutions and organizations whose self-appointed task is to "authenticate" such feats that you [WOWSA] meet the responsibility you've taken by recording Diana Nyad's triumph as "official."** In succeeding, entirely with her own continuous effort, to bridge the distance between two continents, she blazed a trail for others to realize that nothing is impossible.

## The Hunger For Hope

Right after it was all over, I remember standing on the shore barefoot, I'd lost my shoes, almost everyone had left. I had to wait for the boat I'd missed to return and ferry me back. Some kind woman on the beach brought the 3 bottles of cold water, it was all she had left, and I really

needed them in that blazing sun. Not all of the heat had been about temperature, though, in that moment when Diana walked onto the shore toward the screaming crowd. I remember feeling that heat, its intensity, as something not even the Florida sun could bring forth. I guessed if I had a name for it, it would be “hope,” more like **an extreme hunger for hope**. I remember thinking, as the crowd pressed in to greet her, how tightly the people packed themselves yet almost politely, it was frenzied but not scary. It was not like the crush to be near a celebrity; people were sobbing, crying and cheering at the same time. I drank some more water, I drank all of it, and then it struck me. I became aware of my toes feeling the sand, and realized that feet hadn’t stood on solid ground in more than two days. And then it occurred to me exactly in these words: The last time my feet were touching the ground I was in Cuba and now they are touching the sand in Florida, a hundred miles away with nothing but water in between. I rode a boat here and I am exhausted, absolutely spent, I can barely stand. But a *person* just swam all that way. A human being. I am a human being. I wonder how much more I could do feel know if I really set my mind to it?

Thank you,

Candace Lyle Hogan