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WEEKEND BREAK

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'HOW DO YOU DIG DEEP?'

JULIE HAVELKA SWIMS THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA RIVER

Photo by Dwight Caswell

Julie Havelka, swimming through the mouth of the Columbia River in this photo, said she likes the challenge of any athletic event.

By **DWIGHT CASWELL**
 For EO Media Group

It's early morning, Monday, July 17, at Cape Disappointment and the fog is lifting as Julie Havelka, wearing a wet suit and bright yellow cap, lowers herself from the boat into the water. Turning her back on the Cape she begins to swim, strongly and steadily, toward the south bank of the Columbia River.

Havelka, who lives in Eugene, is a structural engineer and belly dancer. So what brought the 42-year-old to the treacherous waters at the mouth of the Columbia?

It started when, as an anorectic 16-year-old, she began working out at a gym. She met a powerlifter, Tod, now her ex-husband, and became interested in the sport.

"I like the challenge of any athletic event," she said. "I like setting a goal and working toward it."

For five years, Havelka traveled across the country competing as a professional powerlifter. Then she turned to strongman sports for four years, winning several events at the national level.

She liked that the events were held outdoors, and flipping tires and lifting logs and stones "had more variability in the lifting."

She retired in 2004 because, "in heavy lifting you only have so many years before you start getting hurt," and wrote a book, "Personal Best: How to Train for the Sport of Strongman," which is still in print.

She chose "Personal Best" for the title because, after years of competition, she discovered that she didn't like competing against other people.

"It's about how you become your best," she said. "I enjoyed learning that I could do this stuff, but the journey is the most important part."

Havelka found other journeys to take.



Photo by Dwight Caswell

Julie Havelka

She liked ice hockey, so she learned skating and still plays on a hockey team. She became a belly dancer, "because I thought Middle Eastern music was so beautiful I wanted to do something with it."

In 2012 she turned to swimming, which she hadn't done for 20 years, so she took lessons and found, unsurprisingly, that she liked the coaching and drills — the journey toward becoming as good as she could be.

Havelka's brother is an ultramarathoner. "I thought that looked interesting," she said. So in early 2015 she began running. "I wasn't sure how running would go after years of powerlifting," she said. Six months later she competed in her first triathlon.

But she still didn't like competing. What she liked was long distance running by herself. "It's very contemplative."

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Photo by Dwight Caswell

Julie Havelka arrives at Clatsop Spit after swimming from Cape Disappointment.



Submitted photo

Julie Havelka participates in a keg load event.



Submitted photo

Julie Havelka deadlifts more than 400 pounds.