

GARY'S SWIM FOR LIGHTS WAS AMAZING

by Tom Kenworthy

On February 26, 2011, I witnessed something I have never seen before and chances are I'll not see it again. I went to Portsmouth NH to watch Gary Sredzienski swim, the almost four miles, from Odiorne Point (Rye, NH) to Whaleback Lighthouse (Kittery, ME) to Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouse (New Castle, NH) to the Kittery Town Dock at Kittery Point ME. You will see events like this on TV, read stories and see pictures of it in the newspapers, but believe me, it is not the same as when you witness something like this in person.

It was a beautiful sunny day with calm seas and a slight but extremely cold breeze. About 1:20 p.m. Gary was escorted by Bob Trapani Jr. Executive Director of the American Lighthouse Foundation (ALF) and William Marshall from Friends of Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouses (FPHL) to the water. After addressing the crowd that gathered to cheer Gary on, he continued and entered the frigid waters of the Piscataqua River to start his swim to Whaleback Lighthouse. The water temperature was about 38 degrees F while the air temp was 27 degrees F. Gary was accompanied by the NH Marine Patrol with FPHL Chairman Ross Tracy on board, the U.S. Coast Guard and his support boat with Jim Varn, the boat's operator, along with crewmen Kent Allyn and Jeremy D'Entremont, as well as Doctor Larry Schlemann. It was low tide and the strong current forced him off course forcing him to swim upstream, to Whaleback Lighthouse. Arriving at Whaleback, Gary was good to his word (he said he wanted to touch the tower if possible) leaving the frigid waters climbing up the dangerous rocks surrounding the lighthouse and touching it.

Now he was heading toward Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouse in NH and it seemed to me that the breeze started to get stronger and colder making it necessary for some of us to seek refuge in the lighthouse itself. As Gary came closer, we left the cold comfort of the tower walking over the slippery rocks that surround the lighthouse, cheering Gary on while taking as many pictures we could. Gary swam his way past the cheering kayakers and a couple of small boats heading towards Kittery Town Dock at Kittery Point, the finish line.

Our small convoy then hurried to make the short but winding drive to the same point as Gary, only to lose the unofficial race to him. As we arrived at Captain & Patty's at the town dock, Gary was alongside his support boat donning his Creature from the Black Lagoon mask, to be towed on a boogie board the last 25 or so yards, giving everyone a good laugh.

Arriving at the boat ramp, Gary was handed a small accordion as he walked up the boat ramp into a waiting vehicle. He laid down in the back being covered up with blankets by his some of his land support team and drove away to rousing cheers and applause.

Many, if not all of Gary's supporters had reservations for the celebration party at Captain & Patty's restaurant (it was sold out). About an hour had passed when Gary arrived to another rousing applause and started to entertain us by playing his accordion with his band the Surfs.

I have never seen or heard an accordion being played like Gary played it. All types of music were played by him and the Surfs. Believe me, they got the place rocking. I don't know how he did it but he played for about 2 ½ hours taking very short breaks in between. He left, I'm sure exhausted, but managed to wave thanking the crowd for coming.

As I said, the day was something to be witnessed. I'm glad I was part of it.

For a short video of Gary's amazing swim, please click on the following link.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5y8QKqfSiM>

The goal of this was to raise \$10,000 for the lighthouse preservation and education mission of American Lighthouse Foundation and Friends of Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouses. With your generosity ALF and FPHL have raise \$9,200. Thank you.

If you wish to make a donation please or purchase a commemorative T- shirt shown below, please click on: <http://www.portsmouthharborlighthouse.org/events.php?p=swimshirt>