

Haley Chasin with the spoils of victory from breaking the Moloka'i Channel world record (photo by Tanya Perez).



# FLOW STATE

CARLSBAD'S HALEY CHASIN BREAKS THE MOLOKA'I CHANNEL OPEN-WATER SWIM WORLD RECORD.

WRITTEN BY WENDY HINMAN



Chasin takes a dip in her hometown waters of Agua Hedionda Lagoon (photo by Tanya Perez).

What if what others see as our disadvantages were really our superpowers? We take for granted that a 7-foot-tall center or a 300-pound nose guard have the advantage in basketball or football—but their size can be a disadvantage when flying coach. It's a matter of positioning. Haley Chasin broke the world record for the Moloka'i

Channel swim this year. "I'm on the spectrum," she says right up front. "I want to inspire others with mental disabilities." Perhaps her ability to hyper-focus was an advantage when she was alone in deep and dark waters for a 26-mile swim. Perhaps we need a new scale. Normal is ordinary, but Chasin is extraordinary.



SWAM

When we sat down with Chasin, she had just returned from Lake Tahoe. The original plan was to swim its girth, about 12 miles, on the Thunderbird course. But having done that, and being in swim zen, she turned around and swam back. Why not? “The altitude was a challenge,” Chasin says of something open-water swimmers usually don’t have to deal with. It took her six hours one way and 11 the other because she turned into a headwind.

Asked about the water temp, she said it felt about the same as the time she swam from Catalina to the mainland. Yes, she’s done that. “Once I get into the groove,” Chasin says, “I warm up from the core out.” She already completed the SCAR Arizona Challenges. That’s swimming four lakes: Saguaro Lake (9.5 miles), Canyon Lake (9 miles), Apache Lake (17 miles, and the coldest) and Roosevelt Lake (a 6.2-mile night swim).

Chasin is coming off her world record-breaking swim of the Moloka’i Channel, also called the Kaiwi Channel. It is 26 miles, from Oahu to Moloka’i. She swam those miles in 11 hours and 59 minutes, breaking the 12-hour record. She became the fastest woman to do this and the second-fastest human.

The Moloka’i has been dubbed by Hawaiians as “The Channel of Bones” for the unique challenges it constantly offers. Kaiwi means “bone” in Hawaiian. The channel has a history, not quite on the level of the Bermuda Triangle, but people have gone missing. The wind blows fiercely between these islands where water runs a couple of thousand feet deep. Big waves and unpredictable currents have to be considered in calculating the risk. Oh, and it is known to be shark infested.

Even with all that, conquering yourself can be the hardest thing to reckon. She didn’t see any sharks. She did get stung in the face by a jellyfish, but her biggest challenge was her stomach. “I threw up a few times,” she says. This was like a runner hitting the wall. She felt like quitting. But what Yogi Berra said about baseball is also true for swimming; it’s “90% mental. The other half is physical.” It’s easy to get too much into your head in dark waters. “You have to trick your mind,” Chasin says. You have to be in your head and out of it. She sings in her head, she imagines stories. “I like the suffering well part.”

During the Moloka’i, her coach, Dan Simonelli, hollered that she was on pace to break the record. Asked if that was helpful or not, she said she had reminded herself, “Pain is temporary, success is forever! I like winning.” When the discomfort gets really discomfoting, one her favorite self encouragements is to say, “This is the best #!%#@\* day of my life!”

SWIM

In the yacht rock song “Cool Change,” the lyrics say, “I was born in the sign of water, and it’s there that I feel my best.” These could be life lyrics for Chasin. Growing up in Carlsbad, she said, “I have been in the ocean since I was 3.” It was a typical beach life. She participated in Junior Lifeguards and the Oceanside Swim Club. She swam competitively for Carlsbad High School her freshman year and then her dad moved her to Coronado High for higher levels of swim competition.

Of her dad, she says, “He was my inspiration for everything. He taught me to swim, surf and scuba dive.” Chasin is also a dive master. “Water is life” seemed to be a family motto. “My dad had me in every swim activity.” Every vacation was near a



body of water. “He would paddle for me,” she says of his companionship on a stand-up paddle board or kayak while she was swimming. Her dad passed away in 2020. But he left her in flow to great success. “I swim for him,” she says. She added that Simonelli looks like her dad. He explained that her paddler provides food, water, navigation and safety. There are no black lane lines on the ocean’s bottom.

If her dad had her vacationing near water, being educated near the blue just made sense. Chasin went to the University of Hawaii at Manoa. She graduated with a degree in marine biology and is passionate about making others ocean aware. And if boredom can be something she has to sing out of her

head, sea life is a potential distraction to slowing her down. Like the giant sea bass on her Catalina Channel Swim. What has she seen on her swims? Not just turtles and dolphins and beautiful fish. Chasin can rattle off the phylum, class, order, family, genus and species of what she sees, all with a wonder that pulls you in.

SWUM

Losing her father was not the only setback Chasin has had to overcome. While on a run, training for a triathlon, she was hit by a car. It was that sketchy crosswalk on Jefferson, and the driver had the sun in his eyes. Sidelined with a six-month recovery for a concussion, back, knee, teeth and hand problems, she couldn’t run. Leslie Nicholson, a member of her support team, said to her, “You need to get back in the pool. Let’s go swimming.” Working to get back into life taught her lessons in working through pain that easily translate into endurance athlete realities.

Chasin has swum some amazing spaces domestically: Swim Miami, SCAR, Thunderbird, Alligator Lighthouse Swim and the Around Coronado. She has set her sights on The Oceans Seven. These are marathon swims styled after the Seven Summits that mountaineers climb across the globe. She has already swum two of the seven, the Kaiwi (Moloka’i) and Catalina channels. In April, she takes on the Cook Strait, 22 miles between the northern and southern islands of New Zealand. The English Channel is set for September 2026, followed by the North Channel (between Ireland and Scotland) in 2027. The others to come would be the Strait of Gibraltar (between Spain and Morocco) and the Tsugaru Strait (between Honshu and Hokkaido, Japan).

If you’re thinking, “that’s a lot of calories,” Chasin burns 700-800 calories per swimming mile, so she easily rips through her favorite Carlsbad spots to refuel in hyper-focus. Breakfast: The Village Pie Shoppe, Richard Walker’s Pancake House and The Daily News Cafe. Mexican: Norte and Garcia’s. Italian/Gourmet: Vigilucci’s and Jay’s. “And always Gregorios.” It’s the reward for suffering well. If you see her in any local eatery, know that she is celebrating an incredible story. If you see her in the headlines, know that she has dug deep inside and turned what some call a disadvantage into her superpower.



a) Chasin with Coach Dan Simonelli before she jumped into her Catalina Channel swim. b) Chasin with University of Hawaii master swimmers-turned-cheerleaders for her Moloka’i Channel swim. c) Meredith Novack (front left), one of Chasin’s college swim coaches, joined the team at the Moloka’i swim. d) A night swim photo, taken by one of Chasin’s support kayakers. e) Boat crew Shelley Oates-Wilding, Terry Dietz, Chasin (holding her world-record certificate) and her boat captain, Mike Twigg Smith (photos courtesy of the Chasin family).