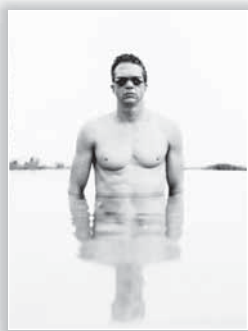


# ONE OF THE FASTEST MEN IN AMERICA (MAYBE)

by W. Hodding Carter



W. Hodding Carter,  
author of  
Off the Deep End

Editor's Note: *Maybe he's deluded, but W. Hodding Carter is determined to get to the Olympics in 2008 as a sprint swimmer. At the age of forty-five. It may not*

I was flexing my right bicep the other day, musing on what this swimming book has done for me (yes, at the age of forty-four I definitely have bigger muscles than ever before) when my wife slouched by with a basket of laundry she'd just folded. Unlike my great-grandfather, my grandfather, and my father before me, I can't make my muscle pop up and down like a gelatinous Mexican jumping bean, but still, there it was: taut, sturdy, and if I say so myself, quite eye-catching.

"What are you doing?" she asked, sweat streaming down her face. I think she'd just finished mopping the kitchen floor after helping a client get a protection order against her abusive husband. (Lisa is an attorney; she's constantly dealing with no-good husbands.) She set down the basket next to my crossed legs and stood up, placing her hands behind her lower back, forcing

be a reachable goal, but Carter has spent nearly all of his time preparing for it—and writing a book about it—doing his own kind of "research."

herself into a straight position. Wasn't it obvious what I was doing?

"Research."  
That's the beauty of writing a book like this—practically everything I've done the past few years and am still doing right this very minute is research for the book. Writing about writing about swimming? Research. Sleeping? Research. Stretching to get a bowl from the top of the kitchen cabinets? Research. Watching TV in the middle of the afternoon? Research. (I have to do it sometimes to recover from a workout.) Even not cutting my toenails is research, since I can see if the extra length makes me go any faster. All the faster swimmers have huge feet: Michael Phelps, Gary Hall, etc. (I think you and I could actually beat them if they had regular-size feet.) In fact, I've even considered making a trip to Siberia to consult

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with the famous Ilizarov Center to see about lengthening them. Ilizarov was this Russian Jewish doctor who was sent to Siberia not for punishment but to hide from the invading Nazis during World War II. He discovered that if he separated bones at the rate of one millimeter a day, they would grow more through in orthopedic surgery in the twentieth century—that and those you-choose-the-color casts, of course—yet for decades nobody believed it was true because how could an exile out in Siberia discover anything? Eventually, though, thanks to some clandestine surgery on the record-setting Olympic

high jumper Valery Brumel's tibia, Brumel became the first man to clear two meters, and the Ilizarov method of bone repair and lengthening became the world standard. How do you think Sun Ming Ming got so tall? Seriously, certain models (names withheld in hopes of a future date if my wife and I ever divorce), thousands of people with unusually short limbs, and many people with dwarfism have been treated by the Ilizarov method. Why not me?

How do I know all of this? Research.

Back to those muscles and our household laundry. I've been developing my muscles to a much greater extent than I ever did when swimming in college for two reasons: (a) I obviously like the way they look, and (b) my old college coach told me I should, and (c) (OK, *three* reasons) research conducted by

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—W. HODDING CARTER

the Counsilman Center for the Science of Swimming at the University of Indiana has shown that you can keep putting on muscle even into your eighties. The common belief that you lose 1 percent of muscle a year starting in your twenties is completely wrong. You can put on that much muscle and more for the rest of your life. And they really do come

in handy beyond the confines of the swimming pool. When Lisa, without a single scream or grunt of warning, hurled the wicker basket at me, I was able to deflect it with a quick contraction of my biceps, delts, and teres minor. In fact, my deflection was so spot-on and reaction so quick that it snapped Lisa out of her ill temper long enough for her to ask, somewhat out of breath (whether from doing our household chores, tossing the basket, or excitement over my basket-deflecting prowess, I don't know), "How'd you do that?"

And I, of course, answered her honestly and quickly, thanks to all the research I've been doing: "Research."

Speaking of which, did you know that the Romans believed people were well educated only if they could read *and* swim? Caligula couldn't even dog paddle and that's why, among a few other reasons, he was such an embarrassment to his fellow Romans. I thought about pointing this out to Lisa as I bent over to help pick up the laundry, but even I knew to save that gem for later. I didn't want her to think I was obsessed or something. ■