



The star-crossed life of an All-American - Steve McGrain (1950-2010) was a swimmer, a surfer, a dreamer...

by Jim Harmon

The exuberant Matthew McConaughey look-alike in the photo at right is Stephen Vincent McGrain, one of the most talented athletes in Nassau County history. In August 1972 McGrain was 22 and a newly minted graduate of North Carolina State University. This was his sixth summer as a Jones Beach lifeguard, and he beamed for the camera after helping his colleagues at Field 6 win that season's inter-beach competition. If beers were not already being passed around, they soon would be.

Few members of the corps were as strong in a pool or the ocean as McGrain, who grew up in Westbury and learned to swim at the Town of Hempstead's Carman Avenue pool. Recruited by the swimming powerhouse Plainview-Old Bethpage High School, he won New York state titles in the 100-yard backstroke and the 200-yard freestyle, set a state record in the 200 and was twice named a high school All-American. At 5 feet 9 he was not on the scale of the Spitzes and Phelps who would come to dominate the sport, but with sinewy arms and the chest and shoulders of a bodybuilder, McGrain was sheer power in the water, and held in awe by

Steve McGrain

Written by Administrator

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competitors across Long Island.

“He was such a stud,” recalls attorney Roy Lester, an all-county swimmer at Long Beach High in the late 1960s who had a Newsday picture of McGrain taped on the wall in his room and lost, by a lot, every time they went head to head in the backstroke.

Offered a full scholarship by N.C. State, McGrain quickly mastered longer freestyle races, won four individual Atlantic Coast Conference titles as a freshman and sophomore and was named a collegiate All-American. He studied biology and zoology, and as far as anyone knew, he was prepping for medical school. He became an accomplished painter, wrote poetry, dabbled in Buddhism and Hinduism, lifted serious weights. In his summers on the beach he did all of those things unless there were waves, when he surfed.

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