



RiverBender Blog: I Froze for Funds

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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There are moments in life where you take a good, hard look at yourself and wonder:
Why the hell did I do this?

I had one of those moments this weekend, standing in the middle of the frozen lake at Glazebrook Park. Visual clues, like the snow on the ground and ice in the water, had warned me that it would be cold, but this was truly nothing like I could've imagined. This is what it was like to participate in [Godfrey's 2024 Freezing for Funds event](#).

The Freezing for Funds event is similar to a “polar plunge” where participants wade into a lake to raise money for charity. This year's funds went to the YWCA in Alton, a super-worthy cause. Of course, I was happy to be a part of it. But still, standing in that lake, I had a few less-than-happy thoughts about the whole thing.

Rewind to a few weeks prior, and I was all talk. I had never done a polar plunge or anything similar, but I was still overconfident. How bad could it be?

Famous last words.

The day of the event rolled around, and I was a little less certain. Dan Brannan, RiverBender's content director, had offered me some advice based on his experience with triathlons. But now, confronted with the cold, I couldn't remember any of it.

I had no idea what I needed, so I headed out to Glazebrook Park in my swimsuit with a towel and water shoes, hoping this would be enough. My mother, who very kindly came along as emotional support, made me sit on a tarp in her car so I wouldn't get lake water on the upholstery. We cranked the heat and I hoped maybe if I sweated on the way there, the cold water would feel refreshing instead of horrible.

With live music, snacks and plenty of people, Glazebrook Park looked like the site of a festival. The only way you could tell it was something else was because of the ambulance parked beside the lake, just in case. Sobering!

Twenty or so people looked nervous and cold already, like me. Everyone else — people affiliated with the Village of Godfrey or the Alton High School Class of 1986, who organized the event, or others who came to watch — cracked jokes at our expense. I stripped down to my swimsuit, ignoring the fact that my legs were already purple and mottled with cold, and laughed along with them. Two inches of snow on the ground and I was going to walk into a frozen lake? That was, objectively, hilarious. At least, a hilariously bad idea.

When the countdown began, I stood on the shore of the lake and braced myself. 3, 2, 1, go. The mass of people took a few steps into the water and heaved a collective gasp.

The gray lake, so pretty with its ice and snow, was like walking into a concrete block and through air at the same time. My body was hit with a wall of cold so intense it was

breathhtaking, and then I kept moving. My brain slowed down. All I knew was step, step, cold. Someone yelped and I thought, “Same.”

I waded in up to my waist and stood there, dumfounded, watching as a few brave souls around me dipped their heads underwater. The mud squished beneath my feet, pitching me forward another step as I struggled to keep my balance.

And then it was over. We all turned around and crawled out of the lake, shivering and ecstatic. I wrapped myself in a towel and remembered that some people regularly take ice baths *for fun*. There are supposed to be health benefits! My toes felt like they were going to fall off.

My mother raised a teasing eyebrow at me and handed me a hot chocolate, bless her heart, and I got dressed as we waited to hear which nonprofit would receive the \$7,000 that Freezing for Funds had raised. When Godfrey Mayor Mike McCormick drew the winning name, it was worth it all to know that so much money would be going to help people in the community. That was really what the whole day was about.

But I was cold, and as I rode home shivering on my tarp with the heat all the way up and my mother subtly sweating in the driver’s seat, I couldn’t help but think about my “say yes” philosophy. I try to approach life with curiosity, and [I’ve written before about some of the predicaments](#) I’ve found myself in as a result. There have been some weird ones, for sure, but this was another strange day.

Mostly, though, I was proud I had managed to do it. Why the hell did I do this? To prove that I could, mostly, and (of course) to help a great cause. I’m still going to complain about it, but it was very much worth the cold.

As 2024 begins, I’m happy to start a new year of saying yes. There are all kinds of fun opportunities and experiences waiting for you, if you only agree to them.