

College Personal Statement

Six times a week around 5:30am, we ritualistically assemble into the cold, dimly lit, locker room at the Esplanada Park Pool. One by one, we slip into our still damp drag suits and then make a mad run from the locker room through the chill of the morning air to the pool, stopping only to grab a pull-bouy and a kick board. Coastal California cools down overnight to the high 40's. The pool is artificially warmed to 79 degrees—the conflict in temperatures creates an outpouring of steam from the water's surface casting a scene more appropriate for a werewolf movie.

Thus starts another workout. 4500 yards to go, then a quick shower and five-minute drive to school. Another 5500 yards is the destiny for the afternoon. We start over again tomorrow. The objective is to find another 1/10th of second. The end goal is to have that little, unexplainable difference at the end of a race that separates success from failure, greatness from mediocrity. Somehow we accepted the pitch, otherwise we'd still be in bed now.

One mile up the road, there is a similar session at Berkeley's pool with group of the fastest swimmers in the world. They'll push even harder as what ensures their greatness is measured in 1/100th's of second and not the coarseness of 1/10th's. Somehow they have gotten beyond 'thinking about' the pursuit of greatness, having already achieved it. But from someone, who has yet to ascend to the absolute apex of the sport, questions create an extra burden.

My first swimming race was when I was 10 years old. My parents fearing eminent injury redirected my athletic direction away from ice hockey. Three weeks into the new swimming endeavor, I somehow convinced my coach to let me enter the annual age group zone meet. To his surprise and mine, I pulled out an "A" time. National "Top 16" awards through the various age groups, club records and finally National First Team All-American in the 100 fly and Second Team All-American in the 200-Medley Relay cemented an achievement in the sport. Now elevated to the Senior Championship meet series means the competition include the world class. Making finals will not be easy from here. These 'successes' were only separated from failure by tenths of a second. Yet the fine line between total commitment and tolerance continues to present friction.

This year my grandmother was hit with a reoccurrence of cancer, this time in her lungs. A person driven by good spirits and independence now faces a definite timeline. On the other side of the Pacific Ocean, my grandfather in Japan also contracted the disease, in his stomach. His situation was corrected with surgery—for now anyway. In between the laps as I search for fractions of a second, they have had to search for an extension to their lives. This comparison in struggles seems to blur the relevance of our respective goals.

As in swimming, life's successes appear to come in small increments. Sometimes a newly learned skill applied to an existing base, a little extra effort a put on top of extreme training routine, a 'good' race day, or just showing up to a workout when you body and psyche say "no" may separate a great result from a failure. What lies in between is compromise. The underlying willpower to overcome the natural resistance is what aligns one's efforts to create the energy to overcome the static. While life is finite, it is not clear that the achievement has limits, if approached in steps.

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