

Central Area Swimming Scholarship Essay

I vividly recall my first day of being on Aurora Swim Team. I was excited to be there but terrified at the same time. Never before had I been asked to work as hard or as technically as I was that first day and as you can imagine, it scared me out of my six-year-old wits. Therefore, hardly halfway through the practice I panicked on one of the breath-control sets and got out of the pool in tears - my parents and I decided that maybe we'd try again another day. The next week I was back in the pool, becoming gradually more comfortable with the other swimmers and my coaches, all of whom encouraged me to be mentally strong, try hard, and most importantly, never back down. Such ideas were a huge obstacle for me in the beginning of my swimming career, but as I learned to overcome them during the next few years I realized that it's having dedication and perseverance that make a person strong and successful.

From the time I began swimming to where I stand presently, it's interesting for me to reflect on how the roles of people in my life have changed. I started out as a "little kid" on my team, and always looked up to the "big kids" who encouraged and motivated me to become a better swimmer while still having fun. Now I'm the "big kid" who has made a point to be as kind and positive to the younger swimmers now as other people were to me when I was young. My coaches used to be people I was somewhat afraid of, but now I have learned to communicate with them on a daily basis with no need for fear, only respect. I was voted as team captain for my senior year of high school swimming, and up until that season Dimond had never won both the girls' and boys' State Championship titles together. When we learned that we might have a shot at it for 2015, there was nothing that could stop us from achieving it. I'll never forget how my coach reacted when the boys finished and we had secured both titles - he simply stood where he was, his fists raised above his head in victory and his eyes shut. Honestly, I still tear up when I look back on that day, simply because I am so proud of my team and how hard we worked to earn such a great honor.

To be a leader, one can't simply turn away from something because it's "too hard" or it's out of their comfort zone, and I think past challenges presented in swimming have significantly contributed to my acquisition of leadership skills and my ability to apply them to my life. For example, I used to be unusually timid and rarely talked to anyone except my friends, but after I began volunteering at swim meets and getting familiar with the swimming community, I learned that being outgoing and communicative were extremely important and highly valued. If I volunteered as a timer I had to make sure the correct swimmer was behind the block, which often required direct communication with someone. In other instances, I collected the lane timer sheets after each event and couldn't simply stand and wait for the timers to figure out I was waiting - I had to step up and make my presence known. Because of this I have experienced immense growth in my ability to talk to my teachers and even get involved in my community. I contributed 50 hours of service to DHS Key Club, and participated in a school theater production in 2014 which seemed to be way out of my league, yet ended up being the most fun of any school activity I've done. I've also been a valuable member of a mission trip to Honduras and a volunteer for many community organizations over the years. Including Girl Scouts in which I completed the Silver Award, and Anchorage Youth Court where I have served as a bailiff, defense and/or prosecuting attorney, and judge since 2013. I've also volunteered at the Food Bank of Alaska, Downtown Soup Kitchen, and Special Olympics.

I learned very quickly that hard work at swim practice was the only way to get desirable results at a meet; this newfound knowledge carried over into even my schoolwork. I distinctly remember the summer after my freshman year of high school swimming. I had really enjoyed swimming for Dimond High, but I was determined to swim my sophomore year significantly faster than the last. I worked way harder than I'd ever worked before - not only in the pool but at school as well, and when the high school swim season came around again I swam best times at almost every meet. About every day I wanted to cry or throw a fit during practice on account of whatever set we'd been told to swim, but I had to remind myself through various means that it wasn't going to kill me - I had to be strong mentally as well as physically, and I had to persevere to reach my goals. That year was also the first time I achieved a GPA of 4.0 at Dimond and I had never been more proud of myself. I've earned an academic letter and held a GPA above a 3.5 for all four years of high school - this has enabled me to graduate with honors and pursue a degree from an honors college.

Swimming has granted me experiences to shape my character, which helped me be successful in school, in my relationships with others, and in my ability to do things I might not initially be comfortable with, and I wholeheartedly believe that had I not discovered what determination and perseverance entailed at such an early age and been given such unique experiences, I likely wouldn't have grown out of my shyness and insecurities to be as strong as I am today.