



ORINDA AQUATICS

2022

Graduating Senior Letters

Quote: "Your true character is revealed by the clarity of your convictions, the choices you make, and the promises you keep. Hold strongly to your principles and refuse to follow the currents of convenience. What you say and do defines who you are, and who you are... you are forever." Unknown (senior gift)

ORINDA AQUATICS

MESSAGE TO PARENTS

We would first like to acknowledge the parents. We very well know the commitments and sacrifices that you have made and will continue to make. The kids are truly fortunate.

Congratulations to you on raising the class of youth in students, athletes, and people. It truly does not get better this – in terms of academics, athletic performance, and personal integrity. Their achievement is a by-product of your love, support, and sacrifice.

You have raised and created young men and women who have profoundly impacted our team, their peers, the community, and now – the swimming world. You are true partners and the silent heroes in this success story and the “we” in “we did it”.

While the kids are recognized, they are truly an extension of the foundation, support, and opportunities that you have created.

Against the backdrop of elite academics, year-round training, and all that encompasses a teen life, they have become grounded young men and women with a healthy perspective on life. They are funny, interesting, engaging, resilient, compassionate, highly intelligent, and painfully humble, and a joy to be with.

It is people like this that define our team (to the world) and make it special and unique - leaders in the pool, on the deck, in the classroom, and in life. Thank you very much on behalf of the team and the staff. Donnie & Ronnie

“You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.” — Kahlil Gibran



GRADUATE OVERVIEW

20 graduates -

- Academics Excellence
 - Athletic Excellence
 - Leadership and Character
 - Service
-
- Average GPA 4.0
 - Academic All - Americans
 - Scholar Athletes
 - Merit aid recipients
 - Swimming All-Americans
 - National-level achievement
 - Leaders/Team Captains
 - Volunteers

Banquet Introduction to Team

It is with tremendous pride and excitement that we resume our traditional team recognition and honor our extraordinary graduating class. While the past few years have been challenging in countless ways, we have been fortunate to continue to train, and thanks to the monumental efforts of Jane Healy and Laurel Purewal, to compete. This event will be the remaining aspect of the program that we resurrect, and quite possibly the most significant.

We believe that the real power of the program is in the unseen. It is not in performance or achievement, but in personal growth and in relationships. This is powerfully evident in the senior letters included in this booklet. We see the cycle continue year after year, with seniors moving on, and looking back, and junior swimmers excited, engaged, and just learning of the grander process.

This program is extraordinary for a number of reasons. From a performance basis, in our size range (150, with 50 age-group swimmers), we have been the top performing team in USA Swimming for nearly two decades, with criteria ranging from total team performance (Virtual Club Championships), to JO, Far Western, Sectional, and Junior National qualifiers, to elite academics, and on to collegiate participation *and leadership*.

Orinda Aquatics does not have the luxury, or the inclination, to make this a “numbers game.” In our world it is a *life* game, and each experience is critical; critical to the collective culture, and critical that there is impact beyond the pool for every member. The primary reason this team matters, is that we are not simply attempting, but proving that character and integrity can and should be the very foundation of youth sports, and of youth life for that matter. From training, to dryland, to travel, our swimmers demonstrate this. In the words of Steve Jobs, this is our “dent in the universe”, and we are profoundly grateful that you have chosen to be a part of this endeavor and this mission.

And in the vein of gratitude, we cannot express enough how appreciative we are of our staff, who have made coaching a life commitment, and to our parents, including our unparalleled Board of Directors, our invaluable parent committee chairs, and for all of the support given to the team, the staff, and to these incredible athletes.

Very sincerely,

Donnie & Ronnie

**“Character is that which reveals moral purpose,
exposing the class of things a man chooses or avoids.”**

Aristotle



Orinda Aquatics Class of 2022

A Strong History of Collegiate Swimming and Academic Success

First	Last	College	Swimming	Previous Team
Henrik	Barck	Harvey Mudd College	Swimming	Pacifica
Gabriella	Bensadoun	Cornell University	club	Claremont
Michael	Brennan	Skidmore College	Swimming	OCC
Emma	Bustamonte	Westmont College	Swimming	Dewing Park
Nick	Chang	Carleton College	Swimming	Blackhawk
Christopher	Devlin	Cal		Sleepy Hollow
Lexi	Fok	Pepperdine University	Swimming	Larkey
Mac	Follmer*	Cal Poly	Swimming	LMYA
Nicky	Glenn	Cal Poly	Swimming	Marin
Sydney	Griscavage	Cal	Swimming	LMYA
Lauren	Healy	Westmont College	Swimming	Miramonte
Christine	Mlynek	US Naval Academy	club - TBD	Springbrook
Connor	Ormsby*	Cal Poly	Swimming	Blackhawk
Lydia	Osborn	University of Chicago	club - TBD	Las Trampas
Jenna	Ravarino	Vanderbilt University	Swimming	Scottsdale
Tommy	Roder	Cal	Swimming	Scottsdale
Regan	Stambaugh	Grinnell College	Swimming	MCC
Amber	van Meines	Harvard University	Swimming	East Coast
Théo	Yavuzr-Judd	Gap - OA	swimming	Emeryville
Sydney	Zhang	UC San Diego	club - TBD	Richmond

* gap year

“Today’s children are the future leaders in business, politics, and sports. People in such positions of authority encounter ethical dilemmas on an even grander scale. It is imperative for teens to learn about ethics and wise decision-making today in order to equip themselves for tomorrow.” Life in Perspective



“Life is not about warming yourself by the fire. Life is about building the fire. And generosity is the match. If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap, but if you want happiness for a lifetime, help somebody”.

Larry Lucchino

Graduating Senior Introduction at the Banquet (Don Heidary)

This senior group is truly extraordinary, and not for their athletic performance, which would be the primary determinant in most sports teams, or for the countless achievements and activities - but for the depth of character, the resilience, the humility, the engaging personalities, the humor, and yes, impeccable academics.

Thank you very much for the Senior Letters. They were powerful examples of life through the vehicle of sports - of finding meaning, relevance, and growth in the ALL of it. Everything you depict should be the essence and experience of every child-athlete. Thank you for exhibiting it and articulating it so well.

Our message back has hopefully been delivered every day, in support, care, love, guidance, humor, and yes, coaching.

We are so proud of you - as athletes, as people, as leaders, and as young adults who will take a character message into a society that desperately needs to hear it, see it, and feel it.

We implore you to be leaders on your teams and campuses, because you can very well be the “small group of thoughtful citizens” that Margaret Mead wrote, “can truly change the world.”

It has been an honor and a blessing to work with each one of you.

Senior Letters

Regan Stambaugh - Grinnell College, swimming

Campolindo High School, MCC

- Academic All-America
- Scholar Athlete (4.0)
- Sectional Qualifier
- Coaches' Award Winner (perennial)
- OA Group/Team Leader



I've found that the most impactful nugget of wisdom I discovered over the past five years with Orinda Aquatics was the importance of gratitude. As a kid, I rarely lived in the moment - I had a large imagination, and big dreams, and wasn't it truly more interesting to live in a world where everyone was a fairy on land and a mermaid in the water anyway? I shed the pretending as I got older, but I still struggled to embrace my reality. The place I was as a freshman was not where I wanted to stay forever, and I longed for the day when I was faster, stronger, smarter, and more respected. Things came easier in rec - popped times happened every season, and I was always the fastest at practice. Joining Orinda Aquatics was humbling, to say the least. Not only was I suddenly in the middle-to-back of the pack, but improvement proved elusive. That yearned-for day, that faster, stronger, smarter Regan, was a lot further out than I thought - but the self-imposed pressure to become her was still there and increasing with every failure. Naturally, (and I'm sure many others have experienced this), this was quite discouraging, and as I approached mental burnout in sophomore year, I experienced a resurgence of a chronic illness AND shoulder problems, adding physical injury to insult.

And then, the world shut down. I was forced to stop putting my body and my mind through grueling morning practices, double days on top of unit exams, weeks upon weeks with no sleeping past 6:30, and I took time to heal. Not many teenagers get a glimpse into how they'll view high school retrospectively while they're still in high school, but if Covid gave us anything, it was a unique perspective. Doing nothing was nice for a month, but then I realized how much I missed swimming - a discovery I would have been shocked at months earlier. Frankly, it blew my mind how much I had taken my teammates and practices for granted.

When we started practices again in June, I finally understood how fortunate we all were to have the opportunity to race and train together. I was determined to treat each practice like a gift, and an opportunity to take advantage of. When intrasquad and dual meets began to make their way into our season, I kept my expectations for myself low - I knew we had lost significant training, so I told myself I would merely do my best and be thankful to race again. It was only then, liberated from self-imposed expectations and full of gratitude, that my times began to improve.

It's nearly impossible to be thankful all the time - sometimes things are just hard, and it's healthy to acknowledge that. But I've tried to maintain an attitude of gratitude throughout senior year, and honestly, it makes everything a lot easier and more fun. *It's easier to work hard when you believe yourself lucky to have a challenge. It's easier to be a humble servant when you're thankful for the people and organization that you're serving. It's easier to emerge from mental breakdowns and burnouts when you have the perspective that gratitude gives you. And, probably most importantly, it's incredibly fulfilling to make memories untainted by what-ifs and I-wishes.* I've made countless memories of that sort with this team, and I will cherish them forever.

This team, amidst normal high school turmoil and the additional Covid disruptions, has been a constant through my four years of high school, and I am eternally grateful to everyone who gave me this stability.

Thank you to the Senior 2/3 group - your spirit and camaraderie make me want to get up in the morning. You all inspire me daily to push myself past my comfort zone, and I don't know if I'll ever find a group that feels as much like family as you all.

Thank you to my senior friends, for sticking by my side for the past five years. You've motivated me and been constant sources of unconditional love, and I would be utterly lost without you to ground me and make me laugh every day.

Thank you to my coaches - to Marc, for seeing past the frilly tankini on day one of MCC practice and urging me to "come to the dark side" and leave rec, and to Donnie, for your patience and wise advice, both in and out of the pool. Without your steady faith in my abilities, I know I wouldn't have been able to be nearly as successful.

And of course, thank you to my parents. You have supported me in every way imaginable throughout my swimming career - not only driving me to and from practices and meets, but by dedicating countless hours to volunteer positions, filming my races, helping me analyze my times and performances, and above all, believing in me, even when I did not believe in myself.

Thank you so much. I love you all. Regan

Favorite quote	"You NEVER take another man's cow" - random guy on the side of a road in Africa
Favorite coach saying (or bad joke)	"Set the pacer at 46 and just see what happens" - Donnie (very funny, Donnie)
Best memory (swimming)	Swimming 200 back in finals at spring Clovis when I got Sectionals, and everyone was cheering and being really supportive
Best memory (team)	At Spring Clovis in my sophomore year, there was one guy swimming the 400 IM all by himself in finals, and our entire team got behind his lane and cheered him on
Best lesson learned (swimming)	Failure isn't, and shouldn't, be viewed as a determinant of your abilities and potential. It's a good lesson and a builder of your resilience, and it's not a permanent outcome.
Best lesson learned (life)	At the end of the day, it's not numbers or awards that count; it's the connections you made with others, the people you've impacted, and the moments you've shared with them that create fulfillment.
Best "random act of kindness" to another	Driving those without licenses and buying them food (Starbucks, breakfast, etc.). I love getting to know younger teammates in the car and over a meal :)
Best "random act of kindness" from another	When I was an underclassman, Maddie Smith was a constant source of support for me. She always said hi in the halls, gave me advice on classes and swimming, and she still checks in with me to see how I'm doing. She was pivotal in making me feel like I mattered on OA.

I love everything
 about the topic character
 First - I can't imagine
 living w/out other wat.

Christine Mlynek, United States Naval Academy

Acalanes High School, Springbrook

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Congressional Nomination to the U.S. Naval Academy - Scholar Athlete - Coaches Award Winner - Member of the National Inaugural Class of Female Eagle Scouts - Academic All-America (qual) 		
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It is difficult to determine the impact Orinda Aquatics has had on me because it has shaped myself and my life in so many ways. After two years of swimming recreationally I joined Orinda Aquatics in seventh grade. I was passionate about swimming and had big dreams of going fast and going pro. By the end of my freshman year in high school, these dreams had been squashed. I was an average-at-best swimmer. Along with losing my competitiveness in the pool, I lost my passion for the sport. I was ready to step away from swimming.

Now, as cool as it would be to say that I began working twice as hard in practice and started dropping time in races, I didn't. Instead, my values shifted. Swimming success dropped in my list of priorities as my duty to be a good teammate and person rose. This alone tethered me to the team for the rest of high school.

I count myself incredibly lucky to have grown up on this team in such an exemplary environment. From weekly meetings on being a good person, to Donnie's handouts (all of which I kept), to the motto of the team being "Character First", the message of integrity was grounded into me. The single most important thing Donnie ever said to me was "how would the person you wish to be act today".

So far, this kind of mentality has carried me through the most demanding points of my life. Making decisions has become easy and drawing a line between right and wrong has become simpler.

I would like to express my gratitude to the coaches for fostering the culture of the team, the parents who make this viable, and the teammates who bring out the best in others.

As I step away from this sport and this team, I carry with me not just lifelong friendships, terrific memories, and a few good races, but the hope that I have had a positive impact on my teammates.

I cannot thank you enough. Christine

Favorite quote	"If you think your life is hard, how easy would you like it?" - Donnie
Favorite coach saying (or bad joke)	"There is too much casual, unproductive social time." - Ronnie
Best memory (swimming)	Swimming on relays at Clovis... we always came up with the best relay team names
Best memory (team)	Cheering for a swimmer on another team racing 400 IM by himself

Best lesson learned (swimming)	Be a good teammate
Best lesson learned (life)	Nothing is more valuable than integrity
Best "random act of kindness" to another	Staying for Gabriella's mile... just for her to add time
Best "random act of kindness" from another	Regan lent me her fast suit for my very first peak meet

"It's not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are." unknown

Emma Bustamante – Westmont College, swimming
Campolindo High School, Dewing Park

CSF Scholar/Scholar-Athlete Coaches Award Winner (perennial) OA Group/Team Leader Campolindo Leadership Equity Council Academic All-America (qual)		
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This is a thank you letter to you. I want you to know that you have given me the best last five years that I could have ever imagined. I have tried my best to articulate what you all mean to me, but I know this letter could never do it justice.

While contemplating earlier today what I was going to write about in this letter I was stumped. I racked my brain for an extraordinary story to share or an experience that would encapsulate what our team means to me, but I could not think of one that was fitting. It came time to leave so I got in my car and drove to Campo for the first of our theme week practices. We set up the pool together, and everyone chipped in as usual, but I still could not think of what to write about. We had our routine pre-practice meeting and then began swimming. An hour passed, we had finished the first main set, and my lane mates and I were doing our usual round of congratulatory post-set high fives and fist bumps- swimming in such a positive environment every day is usual for us. It was then that I had an epiphany about what I would write.

The reason I did not know what to talk about in this letter was that I wanted a story. Our extraordinary team, though, was not shaped by a fleeting moment but by something quite contrasting. Our team's unique culture is explained not by a single extraordinary event, but by every action we take, every day: like when at the end of every set I touch the wall to find smiling swimmers prepared to give me a fist bump or a high five, or how without doubt when we finish practice there are always numerous "nice job guys!" echoing through the gutter.

I finish sets to find my teammates staring back at me utterly exhausted from pushing themselves so hard, but the thing is, they push me too, and I push them. *That* is what is so extraordinary about our team: we push each other to not only be the best swimmers that we can be but also the best teammates and people. This is what makes every ordinary moment on the pool deck truly extraordinary, and why our team is so special to me.

I first must say thank you to my family. You support me unconditionally in all of my endeavors whether they are related to trumpet, swimming, academics, or life in general. You have come to my swim meets for fourteen years, woken up at four in the morning to drive me to practice, and the whole way you exuded support and encouragement, and made sure that I knew that you were proud of me no matter what. Your support has enabled me to accomplish my goals and even get recruited to swim in college! Who would have imagined *that* at my first meet when it took me three minutes to finish a lap of freestyle :) I love you so much and have an endless appreciation for all you have done for me.

To my teammates, I hope very much that you all know how happy I am to be your teammate, and I would like you to know the immense amount of gratitude I have for you all. You have been a second family to me and I love every one of you so much. Thank you for being my training partners and friends, and thank you for sharing so many laughs and hugs, and high fives with me. We have grown so much together. To my younger teammates, I know you will continue to grow as people after our class departs, and I cannot wait to come back to visit and see what amazing people you will grow to be.

Donnie, you have taught me to act with kindness, and integrity in all that I do. I hope that you know how appreciative we *all* are to have you as a coach. Through the meetings, handouts, and wonderful clipart and inspirational quotes that you attach to every workout, I have learned so much not only about who I am and what I believe in, but who I want to be and the impact I want to have on others. Above all, thank you for being a friend and a mentor, and for being there to support us wherever life takes us.

Ronnie, thank you for making us laugh and always taking the time to help me, whether it be with my stroke or to give me guidance in life. Thank you both for counseling me through difficult decisions I have had to make, and difficult times that I have gone through. You both have been integral to my development as a person and swimmer these past four years.

Dom, it was great having you as a coach my sophomore year and I really appreciate all the support you gave me. Thank you for always pushing me to be better. Marc, I cannot believe it has been eleven years since you coached me at my first polar bear clinic. You have helped me so much to get to where I am today, and I am so grateful to have had you as a coach for so many years. If not for you I would never have joined the team, which was one of the greatest life-changing decisions that I have ever made; thank you so, so much.

Donnie, Ronnie, Matt, Marc, Dom, and Kati, thank you for allowing me to be a part of Orinda Aquatics. Moreover, thank you for all the hard work you have put into fostering the "Character-First" culture that is so deeply ingrained into our team's environment; you have given us something that is truly very special.

With much love, Emma

Favorite Quote:	" I believe that men are here to grow themselves into the best good that they can be - at least, this is what I want to do." - John Coltrane
Favorite Coach Saying:	" And he said; "You NEVER take another man's cow!!" -Donnie
Best Memory (swimming):	Open water swimming with Gabriella
Best Memory (team):	The entire pool singing Kokomo together
Best Lesson Learned (swimming):	You never know that you can work harder until you do.
Best Lesson Learned (team):	<i>I have found myself, for the past five years, excited every single day for practice, and I know it is because my teammates have created an environment in which I know I am always going to be valued, loved, and supported. The lesson I learned from this is that I should always make an effort to be my kindest and most caring self so that I can make every one of my teammates feel the same way.</i>
Best "Random Act of Kindness" to Another:	Making sure to introduce myself to new swimmers so that they feel like a part of the team
Best "Random Act of Kindness" From Another:	Gaby Rego used to drive me to morning practice when I was an underclassman

Lauren Healy – Westmont College, swimming

Campolindo High School, Miramonte Swim Club

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic All-America - Coaches Award Winner (perennial) - Senior Group/Team Leader - Scholar Athlete - California Scholarship Federation Life Member 		
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Short, small, really awkward and really shy, I showed up my first day on the pool deck with nervous excitement. Little did I know, taking those first steps onto the Soda pool deck as a member of Orinda Aquatics would be the best decision I had ever made in my short twelve years of life, and the following six as well. Man, I am already tearing up.

Immediately welcomed with open arms, I quickly fell into a routine of school, eat, swim, eat, sleep. Through this unchanging routine, which many could view as tedious, I grew to love and appreciate balance within a lifestyle. I learned how to skillfully handle school, swimming, and social life - albeit with the major advantage of my best friends also being swimmers. They often make fun of me whenever I download another planning app.

meticulously plan out my study and swim schedule. However, **the diligence swimming has taught me is completely unmatched, and I will forever be grateful.**

The friends and teammates I have met during my time on OA are extremely special and will definitely be the friends I can see myself with in thirty years, catching up and laughing over our experiences on Orinda Aquatics. I hope that they know that I am crying as I write this, and that I love them and will miss them with my whole heart. The bonding experience we have had through Orinda Aquatics is something that I know is special, and I will never forget. To the Senior 2 and 3 group that I train with daily, I will miss you all tremendously as well. I am grateful for how we have bonded over the last months, after being disconnected throughout Covid. Watching our group begin to blossom back to the “normal” high performing and high character kids makes me confident that the team is being left in good hands. I cannot wait to come back and watch the next group leaders take charge.

Some injuries and seemingly continuous health challenges seriously took a toll on me, and even my love for the sport of swimming. I even considered quitting multiple times. However, **what kept me coming back was my absolute love for the team and the coaches.** Coach Donnie, I want to thank you deeply for all that you have done for me and for being such a steady, guiding force throughout the years. You always calmed me down at meets and practices when I got inside my head. You believed in me, even when I saw very little in myself. Most importantly, you seriously **shaped me into who I am today and gave me a strong sense of character and resilience.** You inspire me every day, and one day I strive to have a fraction of the wisdom you possess.

Although I joined in 2016 as an energetic, competitive middle schooler, eager to be the fastest in the pool, I learned so much more than just swimming. I am so grateful to my parents for putting me in such a fantastic program, and being behind me 110%, 365 days a year for 6 years. It has been such a blessing to also have a community of parents within the team that have mentored me along the way as well. Their support combined with the community of Orinda Aquatics has taught me life lessons that I know have prepared me for what lies ahead. As I take my next steps as the new girl on a new pool deck, I know with confidence that my years on OA have prepared me greatly and will be remembered fondly.

With love and happy tears, Lauren

Favorite quote	“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.” - Mark Twain
Favorite coach saying (or bad joke)	“Is this a round table meeting?” - Coach Donnie
Best memory (swimming)	50 free at Clovis
Best memory (team)	Emma walking on to the pool deck EVERY DAY with a big smile (even in the morning, and in the rain) - Donnie
Best lesson learned (swimming)	The best lesson I learned about swimming is to never doubt yourself, even if it seems like you have plenty of reasons to do so. You can always perform so much better than you expect of yourself.

Best lesson learned (life)	The best course of action to take throughout life is one of integrity, kindness and diligence. It may be difficult, but it is the most fulfilling.
Best “random act of kindness” to another	Trying to encourage and lead others. Reaching out when I know that people are having a difficult time and trying to make everyone feel like a part of the team!!
Best “random act of kindness” from another	My first meet, Lizzie Follmer coming up to me and introducing herself. On my previous team, all the younger kids were constantly ignored by the older kids. That simple action made a lasting impact on me and my family.

Christopher Devlin – Cal

Miramonte High School, Sleepy Hollow

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic All-America - AP Scholar with Distinction - Miramonte Social Science Department Award - CSF Lifetime Member 		
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Seven years. How should I translate the past seven years of my life into a single page? My time with Orinda Aquatics has taught me many important life lessons, but one resonates within me the most: swimming has never been about what you accomplish; **swimming has always been about who you are.** Individuals are not defined by their times and accomplishments but by their words and actions. I have come to realize that the sleepy morning practices, raining winter meets, and strenuous dryland training were **all just opportunities for self-growth.** As this chapter of my life comes to a close, **I have learned that gratitude, conviction, and character are the main ingredients in the recipe for a rewarding life.**

Gratitude is an attitude that we all carry. I know my swimming career would not have been possible without the love and support of my parents and my swimming coaches. To my parents, thank you for both being my two biggest cheerleaders. To Coach Tony, thank you for beginning my swimming career. To Coach Matt, thank you for the Baby Bird jokes and the permanent mark you left on my breaststroke. To Coach Donnie, thank you for the dedication and love you pour into swimming every day.

Being appreciative and grateful each day has always put my life into perspective. The average mindset asks: why is swimming practice so hard? The grateful mindset asks: why am I so lucky to swim? Swimming has taught me to live with a mindset of appreciation, and this has motivated me to work harder and find more enjoyment in life. No one ever said swimming, or life, was easy, but I now know that living with an attitude of gratitude enriches our experiences and brings new meaning to each day.

In these past seven years, I have also learned the power of conviction. Growing up in the age of social media, text messages, and cancel culture, the urge to fit in has always been strong. Growing up as a shy kid, I always seemed,

to melt into the background. However, when I joined Orinda Aquatics, I was astonished by the swimmers who strove to be different; who strove to be better; and who strove to be the best version of themselves. I was inspired. After my first day on this team, I strove to also be better. I learned to say no to the paradigm, to be true to myself, and to live a life with unwavering conviction. I have seen many trends, slang, and fashion come and go. However, I have remained unchanged and continued on my course to be a better person and hard worker. I know times always change, but I also know I will continue onward in life with conviction regardless of what happens around me.

By swimming with Orinda Aquatics, I have learned what it truly means to put "Character First." Donnie and Ronnie have long spoken to others about living life with integrity and conviction. Through these discussions, I have come to realize that character is the essence of life because it is through character that we build meaningful relationships, inspirational connections, and memorable moments. Donnie and Ronnie have also both spoken about the notion of character being black and white. The many decisions I have had to make in school and swimming have demonstrated to me that character is a black and white matter. We can either choose to live with character or no character. There is no in-between. Through swimming, I have learned that living a life without character is not a worthy life, and for this reason, I choose to always put others first and to live a life of character.

My time with Orinda Aquatics may be coming to a close, but I know I'll keep the lessons I learned with this team for the rest of my life. No matter where I go in life, I'll always bring the gratitude, convocation, and character that I found in Orinda Aquatics.

Christopher

Favorite Quote:	"Change the world with your smile, but never let the world change your smile." unknown
Favorite coach saying (or bad joke):	"If you're not early, you're late" - Coach Matt
Best memory (swimming):	Swimming 200 IM at Clovis by myself while having the entire team cheer for me
Best memory (team):	The long bus rides to and from the Clovis meets
Best lesson learned (swimming):	It is not about your times but the journey to accomplish your times
Best lesson learned (life):	Anything worth having in life requires hard work and dedication
Best "random act of kindness" to another	Helping a stranger at a meet who spilled her coffee and dropped many of the items she was carrying
Best "random act of kindness" from another	Henrik letting me borrow his cap right before my race since mine broke while I was trying to put it on

Henrik Barck – Harvey Mudd, swimming

Campolindo High School, Pacifica

- Academic All-America (qual)
- NCS Finalist
- Scholar Athlete
- Coaches Award Winner
- OA Top Ten

**HARVEY
MUDD
COLLEGE**



OA has set the course of my life ever since I moved here in the fourth grade. From the junior 1 group to a high school senior, I have learned something valuable every day that I have been here. Since I cannot even begin to express the countless ways this team has shaped me, I will highlight a few aspects I am most grateful for.

Firstly, OA taught me passion and perseverance. Even though passion and perseverance go hand in hand, they are very different things. My passion for this sport was developed by the people I engaged in it with. Coaches that emphasized pacing and technique, teammates that made practice something to look forward to, and my ever-supportive parents all made me excited to improve and love the hard work required to succeed.

Most of the time, my passion for the sport made persevering easy. No matter what, there will be days you don't want to get in the pool and days that you aren't motivated to push yourself to new limits. In those moments, the same people who make you love the sport help you push yourself. When you see their determination to improve, you remember that you can do it too and put in the extra work. The mental toughness I've developed helps me in every facet of my life, and I owe it to this sport and this team.

OA's supportive culture taught me boundless lessons about leadership and community. As I went from mentee to mentor these past years, I began to understand just how precious this environment is. When I was a freshman, everyone extended kindness and support to me, expecting nothing in return. I thrived in that environment and felt loved and accepted. I looked up to the people that were older than me and tried to emulate their ideals.

You may have heard the saying, "it takes a village to raise a child." That is what being on OA feels like. Like an entire village of people are there to support you. And it only works if everyone is a part of that village and supports all their peers. These last few years, I have filled the role my mentors played in my life and hopefully passed the things they taught me to my friends that will still be here next year.

I will never forget the lessons and values I learned on this team or the fond memories and experiences I've had. I'm so grateful for everything my parents, coaches, and teammates have given me these years. This team really is something special, and I'm so glad to have been a part of this group of amazing people. I will miss you so much, but I'm excited to share everything you've shown me wherever I go.

Henrik

Favorite Quote:	"What you do today determines who you will be tomorrow" - John Spence
Favorite coach saying (or bad joke):	Henrik, double the food - Ronnie
Best memory (swimming):	Breaking my goggles right before my 400 IM at western zones, borrowing someone else's and getting a best time.
Best memory (team):	When we had almost 10 relay teams at Clovis in the spring.
Best lesson learned (swimming):	What you put into something is what you get out of it.
Best lesson learned (life):	Helping other people is more gratifying than personal success.
Best "random act of kindness" to another	Invited someone to dinner with all my friends.
Best "random act of kindness" from another	When Jalen took the bus home from Clovis to keep me company even though he could have left much earlier.

“Live a life of purpose. Do so by filling your mind with truth, your heart with love, and your days with genuine care and kindness.” Unknown

Lydia Osborn – University of Chicago

Campolindo High School, Las Trampas

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic All-America (qual) - National Merit Finalist - Sectional Qualifier - Published two novels - Coaches Award Winner 		
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The worst day of my life was at an OA meet. This is a fact I tried hard to forget in the months afterwards, but in the end I've embraced it as a part of my experience here. The realization that allowed me to embrace this is that a lot of the best days of my life have also been connected to OA, and to the people and family that I've found here. When I say OA pulled me back from the brink of giving up on this sport and falling down a rabbit hole of anxiety, I don't mean the training or the hope of future time improvements. I mean the friends and coaches who supported me and reminded me why I still loved this team despite the hard times. **The struggles are what makes the good times good, and I wouldn't be nearly as happy as I am now if I hadn't experienced my 'worst day'.** I only truly realized how grateful I was for that day a few months ago, at our spring Clovis meet, where I was there to work and cheer, not compete. I was sitting on the floor of the meeting room, eating frozen yogurt (highly recommend), surrounded by my teammates as the coaches recapped the highlights of the day. The old, familiar feeling of need crept in, the need to be acknowledged and celebrated that I felt so often as a younger swimmer, and I expected that the knowledge that I no longer would be would hurt. It didn't. **Sharing in the pride and happiness of my teammates brought me more joy than my own successes in the water ever had, and I was content in the knowledge that I had left the world of competition for something better; supporting my teammates.**

I stopped competing in January of this year, and it was one of the most nerve-wracking decisions of my life. Being a part of the OA community had become a huge part of my life at that point and I knew that I wasn't ready to give it up, so the possibility of being an outsider on the team terrified me. It shouldn't have, considering nothing I'd seen from OA would indicate that they would ever do something like that, but it did. I mustered up my courage and told the coaches, and the next meet I had a job taking splits and helping my teammates and it was like nothing had even changed. I have never been happier with my place on the team and I'm so grateful that OA is an environment that supports its swimmers even when they feel they can't participate in the main purpose of a traditional competitive swim team. That's why I wouldn't really define OA as a competitive swim team, but more as an integrity-focused youth group that bonds and teaches through swimming. OA has been my family for a long time and I'm convinced it will continue to be till the day I die; that's how strong the bonds we form here are. Everyone on the team can be relied upon to uphold the standard of excellence that the athletes who came before have set.

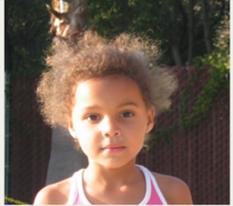
So while my role on the team has changed over the years, I wouldn't give up a single second of my experience in OA for the world and **I shudder to even imagine the kind of person I'd be without it.** I'm forever grateful for the opportunities and the lessons that this team has given me, and for the family I found along the way. I can't possibly list everyone here who's made a difference in my life, so here's this; Thank you to my coaches, family, friends, and every single person who welcomed me onto this team and made coming to practice to nearly die every day feel like a treat. You are the reason OA is great, and I know that whatever the future brings this team will continue to be great because of you. Lydia Osborn

Favorite Quote:	"When the roots are deep there is no reason to fear the wind." Unknown
Favorite coach saying (or bad joke):	"That doesn't go there" -Matt
Best memory (swimming):	When Tay and I tied in the 100 fly at Zones my freshman year with good races for both of us.
Best memory (team):	The bus ride down to freshman year Clovis. We watched old swimming videos and did trivia and generally messed around.

Best lesson learned (swimming):	Discipline will get you farther than talent or luck.
Best "random act of kindness" to another	Giving advice to other swimmers at the coaches area/check in.
Best "random act of kindness" from another	Buddy gifts/cards during junior/senior meets and buddy days.

Sydney Griscavage – Cal, swimming

College Preparatory School, LMYA

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Junior National Qualifier - NCS Finalist/Swimming All-America - Scholastic All-America - Academic All-America (qual) - OA Top Ten 		
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Dear Orinda Aquatics,

Woven into every part of my life is swimming, and more specifically, Orinda Aquatics. It's in the ever-growing stack of red, white and blue tee shirts homed in the "OA" section of my closet. It's the constant selection of bars, stacked and set aside for morning practice, in our cabinet. My mom had a bumper sticker or two at some point, my dad has washed many a teriyaki-infused shirt after a Sunday morning on the grill at Campo, and there is almost always a suit hanging to dry over my door. Even my bookshelf is speckled with goggle pieces and yellowed caps.

But beyond the tangible things, Orinda has affected my life in a much more significant way. The "Character First" mantra from a distance seems like it could be any other gimmicky team slogan, in line with all the other generalized calls for leadership and work ethic that any team would want. I remember realizing, almost immediately after I joined, that it was no false promise. I joined as a member of Junior 1, the lowest level of the entire team, fresh off rec ease and expecting much of the same competitiveness without commitment that rec swimming delivers.

Instead, at the very beginning group of the team I found a small but fiercely dedicated band of swimmers, also reflecting the top-down leadership that is essential to the structure of the team and fostered by generations of swimmers. Even though they were only thirteen or fourteen, the more seasoned members encouraged us to kick that extra black line or start the drill lap from a float instead of a push to maximize the time to practice the skill. I was taught to celebrate the victories of my teammates as my own, and to laugh my way through a dreary, rainy meet. In rec, I had thought swimming was focused on winning, times, and my own personal success; on OA, despite the individuality of the sport, swimming is deeply team-centric.

As I've grown and shifted groups and teammates, the core value of reliance on your fellow swimmers has stayed the same. Before each main set there's a tumult of shifting as people move to match up and encourage the person next to them to crank the last round a little faster, always trying to push each other and in turn themselves. E

when we swim isolated races in practice for time, the group will gather around each lane to cheer on those swimming, setting aside personal exhaustion.

This culture of driving for perfection and leaving each practice completely spent did not appear by pure luck; it's the result of years of leadership and dedication from past swimmers who set the standard and pulled their teammates up with them. When I entered the senior group, I was taught work ethic by watching the older swimmers around me, who were dissatisfied with any practice that didn't leave them heaving on the side of the pool, and who understood that the strength of a team isn't only measured in the speed and drive of its fastest few but depth and consistency throughout all levels and ages.

It has been incredible to be part of this team, but it wouldn't be what it was without the dedication from the coaches. I was first coached by Marc long before OA back when I did rec swim with LMYA, and when we reunited when I first started with Junior 1, he taught me to never be relaxed or lazy with my potential and the opportunity I'd been given. I remember getting pulled out of the pool one Saturday practice where he lectured me, honestly, about how my swimming would only be as good as the effort I put in, but that with that effort I could do anything.

Entering Donnie's group, I was once again taught to throw myself into practice. Although he has a deep kindness and understanding for each swimmer's situation, and cares about us far beyond just the pool, he refused to let us make excuses for lazy practices or swimming under our capabilities. Only a few months into his group we were tasked with the Challenge Set, which was basically 20x100 on a competitive interval. Immediately, I assumed I would be unable to complete it, already falling into familiar excuses. But Donnie, proposing the set to me, never voiced any assumption other than that I would be able to do it, and well. Under his careful stroke guidance and watchful eye, I developed a love for the sport and an understanding of the fundamentals. But most importantly, he instilled both in me and the rest of the team an understanding of the importance of the team motto and defining character and moral uprightness in our own lives. Just as with the Challenge Set, there was a set expectation that not only would we hold true to the beliefs outlined in the weekly meetings, articles, and the example set by fellow swimmers, but that we would strive to be our best people in every aspect of our lives. Because there was no space to be anything else, I never considered another path.

I have spent the majority of my time on OA in Ronnie's group, during which I developed the core of my person in terms of work ethic, leadership, and community. Like Donnie, Ronnie has always set high expectations, which would be intimidating if he wasn't so dead set on getting you to achieve them. I entered Senior 4 as a freshman, thirteen and still nursing a sprinter's fluctuating cardio and sometimes lackluster approach to practice. I was nervous to match up with the older kids and I had accepted the 50 may actually be my only race ever. But through his extremely, extremely hilarious sense of humor and wisdom... Okay but honestly, I am so thankful to Ronnie for inducting me into the group and encouraging me to always attack each set or race to my fullest capacities. As a member of the group, I learned how to go beyond my own mental caps, nurtured by Ronnie's demands for each turn, underwater and lap to be faster better snappier; you name the adjective, I've probably been yelled it from his silent but alert post along the side of the pool.

Outside of swimming itself, Ronnie has been deeply understanding of me, staying hours after practice to discuss an injury or recommending methods when I dealt with severe racing anxiety. Each time I pulled myself out of a pool halfway through a 200 free frustrated and dejected, I would be greeted with a joke and a plan; Ronnie never made me feel like I was hopeless, and for that I am so, so, thankful.

Thank you again to the wonderful coaches, and for everything you all have done for me and the team. Thank you to my teammates who have made coming to practice (even at 5am or in the face of a monster set) something I look forward to every day. And thank you to my parents who have dedicated themselves to the team and the sport just as much as I have; you both are what made this experience possible. You have comforted me after tough races and when I felt lost in the sport, and you have always, always believed in me. I love you both so much!

Love, Sydney

Gabriella Bensadoun - Cornell, club swimming

College Preparatory School, Claremont

- Academic All-America (qual)
- National Merit Program Commended Student
- Coaches award winner (perennial)
- Senior Group/Team Leader
- OA Top Ten - Mile



I wanted to take this time to thank everyone.

Dom: It's hard to put into words what you've taught me, but I think you've helped me become more sure of myself and more willing to be who I am. Thank you.

To Marc: Thank you for being the very first person to welcome me to the team. I was switching sports after 9 years of tennis, and you made me comfortable enough to invest in something I was bad at. In the end, I owe everything that OA has given me to you. You are an incredible coach and person, and I am so happy to have been able to swim with you in Jr. 1, Sr. 2, and Sr. 3. I hope that I have given you a fraction of the good memories you have given me, and I can't wait to be one of those swimmers who comes back to say hi to you. Thank you.

To Donnie, thank you for being like a third parent to me. Without OA (or more accurately, without you), I'm not really sure what kind of person I would be. From the start you believed in me and supported me in everything I wanted to do, and you never treated me as anything less than an equal. I have valued my time as your student more than you can know, and I do not go a day without thinking about what you have taught me. You have helped me define my morals, my integrity, and everything else that I will live my life with.

It is because of you that I first started trying to apply these to my everyday life, and the reason that I can now make decisions without a second thought. I still have a lot of growing and understanding to do, but I find myself incredibly lucky to have been able to figure out who I want to be with your help. Though I know that I have not yet done everything I can do to make you proud of me, I hope that at some point I did enough. You give me the strength to try to be better every single day, and the acceptance to be ok with the fact that I'll never get it quite right. I love you so much, thank you for everything.

To Ronnie: Though I was never in your group, I always saw the effort you put into your swimmers, and the team. I am so grateful for you making OA possible, keeping me on my toes, and never taking me too seriously. Thank you:).

To my parents: Thank you for everything. I'm far too hard-headed to ever show or express my gratitude as much as I should, but I hope you know that it's there. Whether I say anything or not, I see the effort that you have put into raising me, taking care of me, and giving me everything I could ever want or need. Thank you for being there with me through everything, even not getting my license. I love you both so much, thank you.

To all the people who I can't wait to come back and visit, I love you all. Singing Sweet Caroline together will never leave my mind. Every single day you make practice worth all the pain, and now, you're the ones who make me sad to leave and go somewhere new and cool and awesome. I'll never forget all the people who gave me Kokomo, Lofi, A-O-K, Lauren-the-red-nosed-reindeer, 1950, Upside Down, night-night, weasel pictures, gabrismellsca, sunscreen, hair ties (sometimes from the bottom of the pool), and every other song, joke, and nickname. Thank you for pacing, racing, mornings at hotel buffets, nights at the theatre, and weekends in the team area. Thank you for making it perfect, and above all, thank you for giving me something that I'm devastated to be leaving behind.

And finally, to the younger swimmers: I didn't realize how much joining this team would shape who I am. As a freshman, I would see the seniors lead the team, and it set an example that I was proud to follow. They showed all

of us the value of hard work and the potential to form connections with our teammates. Now, as a senior, I have tried to be the example myself, and it has been the most rewarding thing I have done on this team. I hope that you all have the chance to become a role model for the younger kids, and that you'll use the opportunity to give them an example they're proud to follow. As you go through high school, your time here will go by way too quickly, and there will be many moments that are not ideal. Through everything, look to emulate those you respect, and don't forget that you have coaches who care about you and teammates who are some of your closest friends. This whole time I have tried my best to commit to the team culture, and in return it has given me a family that I will have for the rest of my life. Thank you for everything OA. Love, Gabriella

Favorite quote:	"I'll lift you and you lift me, and we'll both ascend together" - John Whittier
Favorite coach quote:	"The only problem with your breaststroke is your kick and your pull" - Coach Marc "Would I bet my life? No. But, would I bet my car? Yes." - Ronnie
Best memory (swim):	Racing Emma in the 1,000 free at Clovis
Best memory (team):	Hangout every day with everyone on the team
Best lesson learned (swim):	The progress you make is directly tied to the amount of work you put in.
Best lessons learned (life):	Culture is everything. Other people working hard and trying to be better motivates you to do the same, and you can then be the example for other people. There are amazing people all around you. Reach out and learn something.
Best "random act of kindness" to another:	I try to help with little things. Whenever someone has a question about the workout or how to handle something, I try to be there for them to help with whatever they need and give advice based on my experiences.
Best "random act of kindness" from another:	When I first joined the senior group, Bernave Twyman was incredibly sweet to me. He would always invite me into his lane and would explain parts of the set I didn't understand. I don't think he thought of what he was doing as a big deal, but he was the very first person to ever make me feel welcome in the senior group, and I still remember it four years later. Since then, I have always tried to follow his example and be inviting to new swimmers.

Nicholas Chang - Carlton College, swimming

Head Royce, Blackhawk

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scholar Athlete - Sectional Qualifier - Pacific Age Group Record Holder - NCS Consol Final - Academic All-America (qual) 		
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Although my time on Orinda Aquatics has been short, the last three years on this team have had a **major impact on my life**. I joined the team at the start of my sophomore year in high school eager to improve my swimming after many years of competing on my old rec team.

Initially, I had decided to join Orinda Aquatics with the sole intent of reaching my full potential in swimming. But the moment I was welcomed to the team with open arms from my new coaches as well as teammates, **I knew that this decision would change my life**.

To the coaches, I am incredibly thankful that you have not only shared your incredible knowledge of swimming with me, but your invaluable life experiences as well. Your commitment to "Character First" is unwavering and has truly had a huge impact on me. **The team meetings we had after Friday practices often proved more valuable to me than the practices themselves. It is without a doubt that I have improved more as an individual than I have as a swimmer during these past three years on Orinda Aquatics.**

To my teammates (especially the Sr 4 boys), you have pushed me to become not only a harder worker, but a better teammate. I am constantly pushed to my limits at both practices and meets thanks to the endless amount of support and encouragement that you share. The positivity you all display is pervasive and is what makes Orinda Aquatics such a great team to be on. I am incredibly lucky and honored to be able to know and swim with all of you.

To my parents, you have consistently supported me through all my highs and lows, not only on OA, but throughout my whole swimming career. Mom, I know swimming hasn't really been your wheelhouse, but nonetheless you have made great efforts to support me both at meets and at home. The care and love that you showed me has continuously pushed me to keep swimming. Dad, I cannot express how thankful I am for all the dedication that you have put into my swimming career. You have given me the opportunities to train with some amazing coaches like Ronnie, Donnie, and Sean who have all helped shape me into the swimmer I am today. Yet, they do not compare to the best coach that I have been blessed to train with, You. I remember the many nights that you worked with me at Club Sport, patiently coaching me even in spite of many frustrations I had. Your commitment to my swimming has never wavered, even being stronger than my own at times. Every success that I have had over the years I owe to you. I am incredibly grateful for all the love and support that both of you have for me, even though I know I don't always show it. Thank you for everything that you have done for me and always being by my side.

Nicholas

Sydney Zhang - UC San Diego Campolindo High School, Richmond

- Scholar Athlete
- Academic All-America (qual)



My time on Orinda Aquatics is the experience that I'm most grateful for. **It has transformed the person I have become and solidified the values that I strive to uphold**, introduced me to teammates that I will consider lifelong friends, taught me what it means to be part of a team, and given me a wealth of support as I worked through the challenges of high school and adolescence. **Thank you, Orinda Aquatics, for teaching me to put character first. Thank you for being a central part of my life** for the past seven years. I am eternally grateful for this community.

I remember the nervousness I felt on my first practice with Orinda Aquatics, unaware of the strong team culture and scared of meeting new people and having to make new friends. Instead of feeling like an outsider who had just moved to Moraga, I was warmly welcomed by this community. During my first time on deck, I was shocked when Coach Kevin came up to me and asked, "You're Sydney Zhang, right?" I had no idea who he was or how some random guy knew my full name, but that simple question just goes to show the attention and care that every coach and the entire Orinda Aquatics community gives to every individual swimmer, no matter how well they know them or how fast they are. Thank you, Orinda Aquatics, for always welcoming me to the pool.

Ronnie, although I was never in your group, your emphasis on work ethic and your humorous insistence on conspiracy theories were always present at the pool. Thank you for the insightful team meetings and for instilling values that have become incredibly important to me in the team culture.

Kati, thank you for your generosity, for providing me tools to aid my injuries, and for taking the time to individually work with me. I looked forward to yoga dryland sessions and learning more from you every week.

Matt, thank you for your constant positive energy, technical advice, and support throughout my time in the Junior and Senior groups. It was in your group that I met many of the friends that have stuck with me through middle and high school; I'm forever grateful for the culture you and Marc created in those junior group practices that allowed shy, middle school Sydney to make new friends.

Marc, thank you for always encouraging me to work harder, for supporting me, and for trusting me enough to hang out with your daughter in the community room. You were the first coach at Orinda Aquatics that I got to know, and I'm grateful for your guidance as I learned about the team's practices and managed the frequent meets.

Dom, thank you for pushing me in practice, for your positivity and humor, for supporting me through injury, and for letting me talk to you about anything. I'm so appreciative of your honesty and willingness to listen.

Donnie, thank you for your endless support in and out of the pool. No matter what I was going through, you always asked how I was doing and made sure I was okay. Thank you for your individual coaching that improved every one of my strokes and enabled me to practice more at the peak of my injuries. Your belief and trust in me helped me believe in myself. The life lessons you've taught me and the countless handouts you've passed out, all which I've saved, have helped to shape my decisions and future goals. I am incredibly grateful for your kindness, and I hope that I can someday be just as unconditionally kind as you are. Because of you, I am more confident in who I am and what I value as I go into college.

To my parents, I am so thankful for everything you have given me. I know that without your sacrifices and hard work, I would not be where I am today or have the opportunities that I do. Thank you for unconditionally supporting me and teaching me to be better. I love you. To my teammates and friends, thank you for being like a second family to me, for cheering with me and for me, and for pushing me to be a better version of myself. I can't wait to see where you all go, and I know you have great things ahead of you. Please know that I am here for you and rooting for you; if you ever need anything, don't hesitate to reach out to me or your fellow teammates. I hope that you will cherish every second you spend here.

Orinda Aquatics is an incredible swim team, where I learned to train and push my body. However, what I will remember most are the friendships I have made here and the values I have come to appreciate. While I hope to find a swimming community or a few friends to swim with in college, I don't know if anything will compare to the Orinda Aquatics family.

I feel like I've been part of this community for a lifetime, and I hope that the relationships I've formed here last a lifetime, but it seems like just yesterday that I stepped into the Soda Center for the first time, unaware that this incredibly defining chapter of my life was beginning. I will treasure every memory and bond I've created here and every lesson I have learned.

Thank you so much, Orinda Aquatics. Love, Sydney

Favorite quote:	"In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity." - Albert Einstein
Favorite coach quote:	"Woah, what a baller, Sydney!" - Dom (I threw a buoy into the bin)
Best memory (swim):	Finishing my last Clovis with a good race in a time trial of only Orinda Aquatics swimmers
Best memory (team):	Cheering for my teammates with most of the team at the end of a lane at my freshman year Clovis.
Best lesson learned (swim):	You will always face challenges and setbacks (in swimming and in life) so it's important to take time to work through them while knowing that it's completely normal and okay to struggle a bit.
Best lessons learned (life):	Seize every opportunity and appreciate the small moments because you never know when you'll have the chance to experience it again.
Best "random act of kindness" to another:	Bringing a teammate boba at the end of a long meet.
Best "random act of kindness" from another:	Ariel gave me a hug before practice when she could tell I was having a really rough day.

Tommy Roder - Cal, swimming

Del La Salle, Scottsdale

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Swimming All-America - Scholastic All-America - Three-time NCS Champion - State Finalist/Jr National Finalist - OA Swimmer of the Year/Top Ten 		
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Dear Orinda Aquatics,

Joining OA in the fall of 2019 was one of the best decisions that I have made in my entire life. After my freshman swim season at De La Salle, I realized that it was necessary for me to make the move to year-round swimming if I wanted to compete at the collegiate level. I researched many teams, but I was immediately attracted to OA because that's where the "fast guys" swam. Little did I know, there is much more to OA than just fast swimming. In September of 2019, I joined the team in the senior 3 group. The training in this group was a significant step up from recreational swimming, but my coaches Marc and Dom helped make the transition smooth and welcomed me to the OA family. The different senior groups OA offers provided me motivation to progress in an appropriate manner. The morning that I got moved up to Senior 4 is a memory that will be embedded in my mind forever. Donnie firmly reminded me that being in this group was a privilege and not a guarantee. From this moment on I accepted the challenge and did not look back. The early mornings, harsh double days and early bedtimes for Saturday practice is a way of life that I cherish, not regret. The bonds that I have created in this unique lifestyle are

ones that cannot be broken. I know that my friendships formed on OA are ones that will last a lifetime.

Ronnie and Donnie are so valuable to Orinda Aquatics in different ways. I never had Donnie as a coach, but he has such incredible morals and has created such an incredible culture for this team. I could never put into words my deep appreciation for Ronnie. The guidance that he has provided me both in and out of the pool has immensely impacted my life. He believed in me at times when I doubted myself. At the end of my junior year, one week prior to a peak meet that would be crucial for college recruiting, we had a two-hour conversation. I was very worried about how I would do, and he provided me with the reassurance that I needed. I ended up having an amazing meet and dropped in every single event.

Ronnie’s deep coaching experience has provided him with the skills to know when to push his swimmers and when to back off. There is a reason that OA swimmers don’t burn out, and much of that is credited to the style of coaching at OA. Due to this I am fortunate enough to leave the pool motivated and wanting more every single day. Ronnie’s knowledge about technique is out of this world, and he can always find something to work on. Outside of swimming, Ronnie is always there for each of his swimmers. Whether the topic is family life, crypto currency, or politics, I feel that I can come to Ronnie about anything. He has become an amazing mentor for me, and I look forward to keeping in touch with him for the rest of my life.

Orinda Aquatics has not only helped me achieve my goal of swimming at a very competitive division one college, but also shaped me into the person who I am today. If I could go back, I wouldn’t have wanted it any other way.

Tommy

Favorite quote:	“He who sweats more in training will bleed less in battle” - George S Patton Jr.
Favorite coach quote:	“Did you lose weight?” - Ronnie
Best memory (swim):	Winter Junior Nationals Championship Final walk out
Best memory (team):	Carlsbad Sectionals 2020 (first travel meet with OA)
Best lesson learned (swim):	one cannot be spoon fed success in the sport of swimming
Best lessons learned (life):	failure is the key to success
Best “random act of kindness” to another:	make those around you smile. If you can make someone around you happier and improve the quality of their day, I see that as a great success
Best “random act of kindness” from another:	Zach Le-Nguyen and Isaac Kim would force (or encourage) me to train up with the senior 4 boys and do backstroke in the distance free sets during our combined morning workouts when I was new to the team. They were both much faster than me and got nothing out of helping me but still did it anyways. However, this meant the world to me and made me feel special and important and truly set a foundation for my training habits.

Jenna Ravarino - Vanderbilt, swimming

Carondelet High School, Scottsdale

- Scholastic All-America
- Junior National Qualifier
- NCS Finalist/OA Top Ten
- Swimming All-America
- National Honors Society



When I decided to go year-round, I didn't really have any knowledge of the year-round teams in the area or what set them apart. However, after reading through the OA website and talking to other people it seemed like Orinda Aquatics stood out. Orinda Aquatics was different in ways such as the character first mentality, as well as the concept of being "one team" and the coaches caring for each and every swimmer. Donnie, you have done an incredible job of encouraging us to act as one team, getting to know all of our teammates and living life with the character first mindset.

Immediately after joining the team, I was welcomed and felt like I had a place in the group. I learned to be positive about every workout and treat my teammates with the utmost respect and kindness. Shortly after joining the team, I began having shoulder pain. Thankfully, the coaches were so understanding and supportive throughout my injury process. Poor Ronnie had to sit through a doctor's appointment where I cried for over an hour.

I was not in a great place mentally and physically, I was sad about my shoulder and felt that because I joined year-round so late and was setback by my shoulder that I should just quit swimming, but thankfully I did not.

The coaches helped me to rehab my shoulder, stay positive and not give up on my goals of swimming in college. Dom kept the energy in the Senior 2/3 group so high that I was determined to get back to practicing with my teammates. Marc made PT on the pool deck 100xbetter by joking around with me to lift my spirits as well as letting me hang with his younger daughter! Donnie reminded me that I had a whole team supporting me and to stay positive, and as Ronnie puts it, "I was a bird with 2 broken wings and he nursed me back to life". Which seems about right, whether it was books, articles, YouTube videos or stories from his past, Ronnie helped me see the bigger picture, stay focused on my goals and work hard to reach my potential.

After about 8 months of rehab, I was ready to get back into hard training when at that same time COVID hit and everything went into lockdown. While that wasn't easy for any of us, emails from the coaches, zoom talks from alumni and workouts kept us united and motivated.

As time went on, I not only grew as a swimmer, but as a person. Surrounded by such amazing teammates I grew with compassion and respect for everyone around me. I became more thankful for the little things after hearing Ronnie and Donnie's stories about those who were much less fortunate than us. I became more positive and excited about workouts thanks to Dom and Marc's energy. I became happier being part of such a unique team. OA has undeniably made me faster and is the reason I accomplished my goal of being recruited to swim in college, but more than that, it made me a better person. So thank you to all my coaches and teammates for making OA and my swim career so special.

With love, Jenna

Favorite quote:	“There is no passion to be found playing small, in settling for a life that is less than one you are capable of living.” Nelson Mandela
Favorite coach quote/bad joke:	Calling me a “beige belt” not black belt!
Best memory (swim):	Swimming the 500 next to Lila for the first and last time.
Best memory (team):	On the last night of Junior Nationals everyone came to Sydney, Amber and I’s room and we stayed up listening to music, laughing and talking.
Best lesson learned (swim):	Working hard in practice prepares you for your races mentally and physically.
Best lessons learned (life):	Treat your coaches, teammates, friends and family with the utmost respect and kindness.
Best “random act of kindness” to another:	When Adriana had a headache, I gave her my new glasses to help her with the lightning.
Best “random act of kindness” from another:	Lexi gave me her towel instead of using it herself after practice when I forgot to pack one

Nicky Glenn – Cal Poly, swimming

Tamalpais High School, Marin

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Junior National Qualifier - Scholastic All-America - NCS/State Finalist - Swimming All-America - Scholar Athlete 		
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My time on OA has been a truly life changing experience. The foundation of the team in which you have both constructed lies on the pillars of, Respect, Integrity, Character, Development, Unity, and Responsibility. In the last two years I have grown to know how important those words are.

I joined Orinda Aquatics in the start of my junior year, straight out of covid. My initial reason to join was due to the status of my previous team, we were left without a pool to practice, coaches to be there, or swimmers that were truly interested in continuing. When my training partner of 10 years moved to Arizona I knew it was time to leave. I had heard about the Orinda Aquatics program for years and knew their reputation for being one of the best clubs in Pacific Swimming. I had visited Soda Aquatic Center many times for different meets over the years and absolutely loved the pool. But it was 38 miles from my house each way. At least an hour of travel time one way and those are days when traffic was light! How was I going to make that work every day! I didn’t think I could do it.

But after a lot of coaxing from my previous coaches and countless parents, I decided to give it a try at the beginning of September 2020. My first practice was with two other swimmers from my previous club team. I swam alone, in

the first lane away from the scoreboard, and I watched. I watched the function of the team, a system I had truly never seen before. When 3:40 hit on the clock, everyone was in the water, not a single swimmer was late on deck. The workout was distributed and placed on the end of each lane; it was a perfect system. I remember speaking to Ronnie and saying, "I've never seen a program run so well" His response was, "it is construct in a way that if I walk away from the pool deck, the workout continues all the same". I saw this in action, with him walking towards another pool to another group and the effort stayed the same.

I found myself at the back of the pack, out of shape, slowest in the pool, struggling just to finish the set. The thing that stuck with me was, at the end of each lap, people hit the wall smiling, music blasting, announcing when the next set would start. For the first time ever, it felt like everyone was there to succeed, everyone wanted to be there and was desperately trying to become better.

Although it wasn't just the drive to succeed that put smiles on the faces of the many swimmers in pain, it was the laughter from one another, the bond between teammates, the encouragement of the coaches. It was a true sanctuary which I had never experienced. I could not stop complimenting Ronnie and Donnie about what they had made. After that very practice, even though I had yet to make any friends or really talk to anyone, I knew this is where I wanted to be, where I needed to be, I was fully ready to commit, and I did that night and I never looked back.

It was the greatest decision of my swimming career. It felt as if it mended a void, something that was missing, the fun of coming to workout, the drive to succeed, everything I used to feel in swimming that had weathered within me. I am forever grateful for Ronnie and Donnie to bringing a new light and fire and passion within me for swimming. They made me love it again. Ronnie saw my passion and my potential, and when I say this I mean it because I've seen it firsthand. I know what it looks like when a coach genuinely does not care about his swimmers or truly wants to even be on deck.

However, Ronnie and Donnie truly do and they're willing to always give to each and every single one of their swimmers. The only thing they ask in return is for the same level of commitment, which establishes a connection of respect between swimmer and coach. That is what built the very atmosphere that I truly fell in love with during that first practice. Now when it comes to my swimming career it was definitely shaky. I went a total of 13-15 peak meets in which I ended disappointed, upset, and truly feeling like I wanted to quit. Ronnie and Donnie told me "it's okay to underperform, but it's not okay to stay there. We are going to help you but what are you going to do to change the next result?"

In my experience, I'm young admittedly and sometimes I need a shock to understand the importance of what I'm being told. Boy did I get one. There are two meets in which it caused me to reevaluate my training. My first being Utah Sectionals Spring 2021. During this time meets were still up in the air. Any opportunity to swim you did it, not knowing when or if there would be another meet. So I took the opportunity to try and swim at a high level meet. However, in retrospect it wasn't the best decision. I was still new on the team and not in shape and simply I was not ready. I knew I was going to be competing against my past teammates and mentally that was very challenging for me since I felt like I needed to prove something. The meet ended in failure; I swam the 50 freestyle 4 times in an attempt to redeem myself but left disappointed. I spoke to many people, questioning everything and all advice ended in the same answer, trust the process. When the next peak meet rolled around, I dropped in every event I swam. A great accomplishment in my first year on the team. But I did not drop the times that I needed to be recruited my junior year. I was stressed I wanted it so bad but I didn't know what to do. I remember one night it really got to me and I was able to talk to my teammate and captain at the time Zach le-Nyugen. I looked up to Zach as many of us did. He was the perfect swimmer and an extremely intense high training athlete, everything I aspired to be. He told me you need to "trust the process", similar to what Ronnie was always saying, "Think bigger picture, I am training you for the next 6 years of your career not just this season, you need to trust the process." I went on to have a somewhat successful summer season, good enough to be recruited to Cal Poly but it still wasn't enough for me. Again, I had hit a plateau and could not get faster.

Going into December of my senior year I had the opportunity to attend Winter Junior Nationals. I still did not have the times but was able to go in the relay team. This was my moment. I thought I had trained the hardest I possibly could, and I was ready to swim at a high-level meet. I thought I would redeem myself at this meet and it would be one of the best of my life. However, the result was exactly the opposite. I did absolutely horrible. One of my

two worst performances, I was truly embarrassed and defeated. The feeling of anger at yourself for your poor performance at a meet is one of the most difficult things that swimmer has to face. That day I had a choice. I could either give in to my doubts and believe I was never what I thought I could be, or I could turn it around and do something about it.

I talked to Ronnie, and I said, "What can I do to never have that performance again, I know I am better than this and I need to prove it" and he responded with, "It's simple you need to train harder". At first, I was confused, I thought I had trained all the way to my limits, but then I thought to myself, bigger picture, the swim meet does not reflect the kind of swimmer I am. All that training isn't wasted, If I wanted to be more, I needed to train more. I needed to push past my limits, to become something I always thought I could be. I needed to do things I had never done before and I did it. I swam hard, I wasn't always the fastest, but I truly believed at the end of each day from that point on, I was giving the most effort. No one came close, it was the point where I was asking Ronnie to make it more difficult. I needed to be better.

Then March 2022 Sectionals rolled around. A meet which previously had been the bane of my existence (in previous years I had never performed well there) it was always cold, rainy, and stressful. However, something in me was different, behind the blocks I knew I was ready to show what I wanted to do all the way back at that the Sectionals meet in Utah a year ago

I swam my first drop of the meet on the relay, 100 yard back, to lead off and I dropped a full second. It was a sloppy race, but it felt good, I knew I was ready for the 50 the next day, my best event. I swam the prelims and dropped nearly half a second and broke 21 for the first time in my life and making my Winter Junior Nationals cut. I went on to drop more time in finals and made my Summer Juniors cut! Ronnie and Donnie both spoke to me and said we knew you had it in you. Having coaches never give up on you and truly believe you can perform and tell you exactly what you need to get there, is something I'll never take for granted.

I absolutely love OA. **My teammates have become family and my coaches are my mentors.** What I loved the best about making my time was the reaction of my fellow teammates. Cheering for me from the pool deck. They were just as excited for me as I was. It was something I will never forget. At the end of the day it took a village to help me reach my goals, great team mates, coaches and a supportive family. It was worth every minute of drive time, and I would willingly do it again and again. What you have given me I can never repay you. I will always have a special place in my heart for Donnie and Ronnie. You both not only made me a better swimmer but a better person with your support and belief in me. Thank you for everything you have patiently taught me I promise I will continue to make you proud.

Nicky Glenn

Michael Brennan – Skidmore, swimming

Head Royce High School, OCC

<ul style="list-style-type: none">- High School Team Captain- Western Zone Qualifier- Scholar Athlete- Academic AA (qual)		
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Dear Ronnie and Donnie,

I hope this letter finds you well! I would like to start off by apologizing for basically disappearing off the face of the earth suddenly last September after my already prolonged absence earlier that year. These past four years have been the most challenging, complicated, and, frankly, scariest years of my life. Seemingly every d

whatever support I had cobbled together from the day before was kicked out from underneath me as another insurmountable obstacle reared its ugly head. However, throughout all of the turmoil and strife I sludged through, I always felt that I had one true and unwavering constant in my life: swimming.

While I'm not going to sugar coat this and act as if I absolutely loved swimming, in fact, it was more of a love-hate relationship; I always knew what to expect. **There is no hidden catch with swimming**, no lies, no deception. Whatever you put into it, you got out of it. I learned this lesson the hard way as an emboldened and overconfident freshman when I dove off the wave of rec swimming success I was riding straight into the frigid waters of reality - aka the Campo pool at a morning practice. In combination with the shift into high school, my world was flipped upside down overnight. I was suddenly thrust into a new world with barely any semblance of where I had just come from, both in swimming and in school. I became reluctant to go to practice and would sometimes fight my parent's tooth and nail to quit I would stop on the wall at any opportunity and tried to miss sets whenever I could.

But on New Year's Day in 2019, I resolved that I would get off the wall and lean into swimming as much as I could and see what would happen. It wasn't until recently that I realized that if it weren't for **my friends who embodied OA's values**, I would have probably stopped months before I came to that resolution.

The friendships I made in Senior 2 when I struggled my most at OA are some of the strongest bonds I have ever made. While I initially slightly resented my friends for their unending enthusiasm for swimming, it quickly began to grow on me as I leaned further and further into training. Some of my most cherished memories are of my friends and I stretched out on the warm deck before a late afternoon summer double practice or on the bus ride back from Clovis when we were all almost delirious from exhaustion but giddy with laughter.

Unfortunately, Covid, of course, would change all of this. Covid affected everyone differently. Personally, Covid brought out the worst in me. While I have always dealt with mental health issues, the long periods of isolation and my demanding obligations pummeled me into a deep episode of depression that I almost didn't escape. Years upon years of pressure and expectations and mental anguish suddenly boiled over and consumed me. After a few weeks of downwards spiraling, I finally mustered up enough strength to reach out and get help. I entered into a long, long period of recovery, and one that I am still in today. During the early stages of my recovery, I began to do some serious introspection and soul searching and tried to figure out what was best for me moving forwards. The idea of taking time off swimming was a ludicrous idea to me, but one that I started to weigh heavier and heavier as time went on. I realized that an entire side of myself had been suffocated my whole life, and I knew if I wanted to keep existing, I needed to give the other side of who I am space to breathe, but I knew swimming would also always be a part of my life, and I am very happy to be back.

On a more serious note, **the lessons I learned while I was at OA shape my life daily and influence almost every decision I make.** Even though I had my struggles with swimming, I could not be more thankful that I spent the time I did at OA, and while it sounds cheesy, I truly cherish the friendships I made, and the ideals I now try to embody.

Lastly, I want to thank both of you for everything. I honestly could not have asked for better coaches and mentors throughout these tumultuous years. I will never forget your unwavering support and encouragement as I struggled both in practice and with my own issues. **You have set a standard of leadership** that I fear no other coach, let alone person, will be able to meet.

Michael

Théo Yavuzer-Judd – Gap Year, swimming

Campolindo High School, Emeryville

<ul style="list-style-type: none">- NCS Champion- State Finalist- OA Top Ten- Scholar Athlete		
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Amber van Meines - Harvard, swimming

Campolindo High School, USAS

<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Futures Qualifier- Swimming All-America- OA Top Ten- Junior National (relay)- Scholar Athlete		
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Lexi Fok - Pepperdine, swimming

Campolindo High School, Larkey

<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Sectional Qualifier- Junior National (relay)- NCS Consol Final- Scholar Athlete- OA Top Ten		
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“Do all the other things, the ambitious things – travel, get famous, innovate, lead, fall in love, make and lose fortunes ... but as you do, to the extent that you can, err in the direction of kindness”. George Saunders

Orinda Aquatics

A poem by Olivia Eukel

In a world
of greed
And persons
Who feed
Off of cynicism
And bond
Over apathy,
In the midst of all this
Lies a golden land
Of peace
That transcends
Fears and
Builds bridges -
And allows us to climb mountains.
And at the heart of this land
Of harmony
Is a jewel
Which reposes
In a place.
A place that
each of us possesses
The correct clues
To find.
A gem discovered
By those
Who are willing to search for it.

Being a part of Orinda Aquatics
Has forever amplified for me
The meaning behind
One of the most beautiful,
All-encompassing words:
Love.
This team has made it plainly
But profoundly
clear to me
That love
And love in *action*
Is the not-so-hidden
Gem of life.
And it's not so far away,
If only we continue to
dedicate our lives
To finding it
And acting upon it
Over and over again.