



Orinda Aquatics Class of 2015



Letter to Parents

We founded Orinda Aquatics over twenty years ago, with the intent of creating something different, and something that would hopefully change the lives of young athletes. We believed unequivocally that in the process of developing young athletes, it was possible to build great leaders and cultures. As our overt focus is on swimming and the inherent pursuit of success, our deepest pride is in the backdrop and foundation of this program, and this extraordinary group. We could not be more proud of this organization and what it stands for, and our commitment to the greater lessons of life through sport, our commitment to putting character first, and our commitment to the community and to helping others. We sincerely hope that we have either had, or at some point will have, a positive effect on your children outside of the pool. Orinda Aquatics has truly blended success and culture in a powerful way, and the teams' mission is now recognized by USA Swimming, ASCA, NISCA, and coaches around the world. It is our mission to show that integrity can be the most powerful force behind an athlete's and a team's success. And you have done that.

From a developmental perspective with young athletes, our focus and philosophy has been to develop well-balanced, efficient strokes that will support them as they grow, develop, and train and compete at higher levels. After thirty-five years of coaching, we not only believe this is the best way to develop young athletes, but should be the only way. From a personal perspective, we hope to develop true leaders in sports and in life, to foster an environment that would support kids of all ages, to rise above the social fray and pull, and to make positive decisions and life choices.

As you and your children move on through the sport, we would encourage the emphasis to be on those things that promote a healthy long-term swimming career and a healthy life. The *time* that a swimmer achieves only provides a glimpse of the process. It does not reveal work ethic, efficiency, team commitment, humility, a desire to pursue the sport, or a willingness to persevere in challenging times (which there will be). Be vigilant for these things and even be willing to abandon (early) success for the virtues and life lessons which *can be* obtained on a daily basis, with proper perspective. In sum, keep the focus on effort and attitude, on teammates and team success, and your child will succeed on a level that will be much more profound than a swim, a meet, a season, or an award. While many parents want early success, the real pursuit should be early *growth*.

Keys to Success for the young athlete

- Goals setting should be "top-down", beginning with effort, attitude, and attendance.
- Efficiency and technique will be more importance in the long run than performance in the short run
- Emphasize the *race* over the time
- Make your child's driving purpose to team commitment and to "*making a difference*"

We sincerely thank our swimmers and parents for supporting our team, our organization, and our message. As we close out our 2014-15 season, we look back at the great careers and commitments of our graduating class and look forward to a new and exciting season ahead.

Very sincerely, Donnie and Ronnie

"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*

"Have the courage to say no. Have the courage to face the truth. Do the right thing because it is right. These are the magic keys to living your life with integrity."

W. Clement Stone

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

Aristotle



"Life's most urgent question is: What are you doing for others?"

Martin Luther King, Jr.

To the OA swimmers: "Respect your parents, eat your vegetables, *always* wear a seatbelt, and do what you love. -Eric "E-Tang" Tang, OA Class of 2006

OA Graduating Class of 2015

Average GPA - 3.7

Name/HS	In the Beginning!	College	Mascot!	Notes
Mary Ashby Campolindo		Columbia Swimming		Team Captain OA and HS National Qualifier Multiple NCS Champion Swimming All America Scholastic All American
Ryan Birdsall San Ramon		Colgate Swimming		Team Captain (OA & HS) Far Western Finalist Scholar Athlete Summited Mt. Kilimanjaro
Paul Cane College Prep		Georgetown Club		Swimming All American Scholar Athlete Sectional Qualifier HS Team Captain/Most Inspirational
Matt Cohen Miramonte		Brandeis Swimming		DFAL Finalist NCS Qualifier Far Western WZ Qualifier Scholar Athlete
Collin English Berean Christian		Johns Hopkins		Team Captain OA and HS Scholar Athlete Coaches Award Far Western Qualifier
Katie Erickson Campolindo		Harvey Mudd Swimming		Team Captain OA and HS Futures Qualifier Academic All American Swimming All American
Lucy Faust Campolindo		Bates Swimming		Team Captain OA and HS Sectional Qualifier Scholar Athlete Coaches Award winner Open Water Champion
Mackenzie Flath Monte Vista		USC Water Polo		Academic All-American Scholar Athlete NCS Champion - Water Polo All NCS - 2 nd Team
Will Gittings Miramonte		Occidental Swimming		High school Team Captain DFAL Finalist Far Western/WZ Qualifier Eagle Scout/Scholar Athlete

<p>Kylie Han Bentley</p>		<p>Wesleyan University Swimming</p>		<p>High School Team Captain Academic All American Bentley Banner Award <i>(outstanding student-athlete)</i> Female Athlete of the Year</p>
<p>Margaret Hunger Campolindo</p>		<p>U of Washington</p>		<p>North Coast Qualifier Western Zone Qualifier Scholar Athlete DFAL/Mission Viejo finals</p>
<p>Will Inman De La Salle</p>		<p>Chapman Swimming</p>		<p>Honor Graduate De La Salle Youth Group Leader (4 yrs) Leadership Camp Counselor Varsity Swimming</p>
<p>Katie Lee Campolindo</p>		<p>Indiana University</p>		<p>Team Captain High School Coaches Award DFAL Finalist/FW Qualifier Scholar Athlete</p>
<p>Matt Lennon College Prep</p>		<p>Williams Swimming</p>		<p>Team Captain Swimming All American Academic All American Eagle Scout Futures Qualifier</p>
<p>Jack Madigan De La Salle</p>		<p>Fordham Swimming</p>		<p>Sectional Qualifier Swimming All American Scholar Athlete State Finalist 400 F.R.</p>
<p>Brittany Percin Stanford On-line</p>		<p>Cal Tech Swimming/WP</p>		<p>Nevada Swimmer of the Year Academic All American Malone Scholar Far Western Qualifier</p>
<p>Maddy Spiering Campolindo</p>		<p>Santa Clara</p>		<p>DFAL Finalist Coaches Award Scholar Athlete</p>
<p>Ariana von Ehrenkrook Trinity Academy</p>		<p>San Diego State</p>		<p>Varsity Swimming JO Qualifier Scholar Athlete Coaches Award</p>
<p>Erika Wolfram Campolindo</p>		<p>Cal Poly</p>		<p>Campolindo Varsity Scholar Athlete JO Qualifier Western Zone Qualifier</p>

*Candidate

“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

Promise Yourself -

“To be so strong that nothing
can disturb your peace of mind.
To talk health, happiness, and prosperity
to every person you meet.

To make all your friends feel
that there is something in them
To look at the sunny side of everything
and make your optimism come true.

To think only the best, to work only for the best,
and to expect only the best.
To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others
as you are about your own.

To forget the mistakes of the past
and press on to the greater achievements of the future.

To wear a cheerful countenance at all times
and give every living creature you meet a smile.

To give so much time to the improvement of yourself
that you have no time to criticize others.
To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear,
and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.

To think well of yourself and to proclaim this fact to the world,
not in loud words but great deeds.

To live in faith that the whole world is on your side
so long as you are true to the best that is in you.”

— Christian D. Larson, *Your Forces and How to Use Them*



Senior Letters

Lucy Faust, Bates College

OA Senior Poem

What does Orinda Aquatics mean to me?
A deep-rooted lifeline as a guiding tree.
My character grows and my times go down,
I am inspired by my teammates all around.
I still remember coming to visit O.A. --
My freshman year in the middle of May.
I was seeing double – Was it Ron? Was it Don?
Regardless, I discovered both I could lean on.
I never swam summer rec as a marlin or a shark,
And sadly, I waited too long to swim for Matt and Marc.
I was a foreign specie -- someone from the “other side,”
Yet soon I learned O.A. was worth the half-hour ride.
My first trip to Clovis affirmed my perceptions of O.A.
Every swimmer cheers, no matter the chlorinated spray.
No need for parents or caretakers in our rooms,
Room captains got all the food we could possibly consume.

In an individual sport like swimming it is amazing to see
That on O.A., one person's best time is everyone's victory.
Thank you to the loyal lap counters and those who cheer,
Peers make a difference as their own events draw near.
To the coaches- you are inspiring in the sun and the rain
To most adults, a hundred teenagers is an afternoon of pain!
Yet you choose to see the value deep in us all,
Despite our mistakes, you pick us up from each fall
You put each swimmer first -- day in and day out
And have guided me on my life's winding route
An example would be a story from a few summers ago,
As I was at a day-long junior meet, swimming so-so.
Matt was my lap counter, Sophie cheered and timed
Marc and Kevin took my splits and watched them climb.
A perfect example of what O.A. coaches will always do,
Despite the exhaustion, they made the effort to see me through.
Thank you for setting up such a wonderful swimming foundation
For your hard work and commitment, I only have adoration.

Donnie- When I joined, thank you for taking me under your wing
and tolerating me missing practice for rehearsals to sing.
My sophomore year when you cheered for me during NCS,
Despite your Miramonte obligations, you encouraged me nonetheless.
I felt valued that you saw my hard work had potential,
I am thankful for your character talks which have been essential.
They inspire me each week to make a genuine change,
Next year my Friday afternoons will be emptier and strange.
Ronnie -Thank you for helping my character above all,
Motivating me in the water and with a medicine ball.
You have dramatically changed my high school years
And told me exactly what I've needed to hear.
About the friends I have and the choices I make
and listening to my logic about my many mistakes.
No matter how many times in practice I get lapped,
You are patient with my strokes and help me adapt.

Your outpouring of love to swimmers is inspiring
I can't wait to finally hear about *you* when you're retiring

To my family who has put vacations and family time on hold,
Tolerated my foul mood when I come home, hungry and cold.
They have loved me unconditionally so I can follow my heart
And to pursue all of my dreams, -- it has set them apart

And most of all -- to my teammates I am forever grateful
For your laughs, stories, and dedication -- always faithful
You've pushed me in the water to go a faster pace
And to be a better person as you ground me into place
I won't forget the role models who've inspired me to change
I can only hope I've been influential in a similar exchange

You all mean the world to me
I wish you the very best
And with that I say goodbye for now
With love and memories in my chest

Collin English, Johns Hopkins University

There was a moment, four years ago, that I have always remembered. It was one of my first Saturday morning practices as a senior swimmer, and under the grim grey sky, I had a conversation with Ronnie. There are few things about that conversation that I remember, other than a discussion on those spectacular Berean swimmers that had come before me, such as Jill Jones and Chris Leon. In my memory it is clear as crystal, the moment when Ronnie turned to leave and said as an ending remark: "You have big shoes to fill". I have tried to fill those shoes ever since.

There was a moment, four years ago, that I have always remembered. It was under the burning sun of a summer practice that Donnie pulled me aside. Into my hands he put the workout from that day, and, before he walked away, told me to read the quote on the bottom. With slight confusion I looked down: "Only the mediocre are always at their best". I have struggled to not be mediocre ever since.

To the mindset of a headstrong freshman, these were comments and quotes that were meant to facilitate my athleticism. It was my dream to one day be as fast as Chris or Jill, and it was my goal to push my body beyond the point of mediocrity. I wanted to be stronger and faster; I wanted to be the best. But as my four years passed, my mind mellowed and became less headstrong, my dreams were not achieved and I began to question, and in this new situation I began to understand what Donnie and Ronnie had really meant.

Chris Leon had been more than a fast swimmer; he had been loyal, unduly committed, humorous, and a mentor. Jill Jones had been more than an athlete; she had been dedicated, kind, and a leader. And both lived with impeccable integrity. For a long time I had only seen the swim cap, but I had forgotten to read what had been written on it all along: "Character First". It is true that mediocrity can be found in athletics, but it is even truer that it can be found in character.

So to my coaches, Ronnie and Donnie, and to my fellow teammates, thank you for making me a better swimmer, but I thank you more for the lessons that will last me beyond the short limits of my swimming career; whether it be the work ethic that comes from finishing a threshold set, the discipline that comes from waking up early for morning practice, the social skills necessary to be positive that early, the integrity to make wise choices, or the ability to accept defeat and better myself from it.

I am not the one to judge whether I have filled someone's shoes, and I am not the one to decide whether I have somehow escaped the bounds of mediocrity. But there is one thing I have firmly determined: that this team has made me a better person, and as I depart after four years, I cannot help but feel grateful. Collin

Matthew Lennon, Williams College

Five years ago, when my family and I walked into this very same banquet, I was absolutely terrified. I had just joined the team and this banquet was my first team event. I knew no one, and looking out into a sea of unfamiliar faces I just wanted to go home. Right when I sat down with my parents at an empty table, a swimmer, someone I didn't know, came up to me and asked me to come and sit with him and his friends. While this gesture seems trivial and insignificant, it was anything but, and from that point on until today, OA has been my second home.

Matt, thank you for taking me in as an inexperienced eighth grader and teaching me how to practice and work like a true competitive swimmer. Your lessons and advice remain embedded in my mind, continuing to help me every day.

Donnie, the ease with which you lead a group of 70 plus swimmers every day baffles me and fills me with admiration. You are a true and amazing coach in the sense that you not only lead, but you also teach others how to lead at the same time. Your lessons of character are always incredibly profound and really bring me to realize how I can change for the better.

Ronnie, the three years I have spent with you have been some of the hardest and most trying parts of my life, but they have also been the happiest and most rewarding. You have taught me so much more about grit, hard work, and the real world than any teacher I have had in a classroom. Your zealous commitment to perfection is extraordinary, and has inspired me to be a better swimmer, student, and person and will continue to inspire me for the rest of my life.

The rare and amazing thing about Orinda Aquatics is that it not only teaches it's swimmers to be better athletes, but it puts a priority on teaching them how to be better people and how to make a difference in this world, something that is all too rare in most athletic programs. Tonight, as I look out at everyone at this banquet, I don't see any unfamiliar faces as I did five years ago. I see lifelong friends, and am filled with an immense happiness that I was able to be part of such an amazing program. Thank you for having a meaningful and positive impact on my life.
Matthew Lennon.

Katie Erickson, Harvey Mudd

When I moved to California three years ago, I imagined my time in Moraga would just be a brief transition between the life I had known in Charlotte and my future home at wherever I chose to attend college. Although everyone promised me I would adjust quickly, I was not convinced that I could make new friends and be successful. I cannot begin to express how different my experience was from my expectation that I would have to endure three miserable years of awkwardness; however, being on Orinda Aquatics quickly made me feel like I was at home again. Due to the generosity and compassion of swimmers, coaches and parents at Orinda Aquatics, I quickly made friends and memories that I know will last a lifetime. I have so many people to thank for my experience on the team

To the parents: I want to assure you that the investment of your time, energy, and treasure has not gone to waste. You are a legitimate part of a team that has evolved into a community that fosters incredible achievement among a group of motivated and passionate teenagers. All of the culture and success that abounds on the team is a product of your dedication to raising your kids to be good people and your commitment to both the team and the sport. Thank you for everything you do to help this team be what it is.

To the junior group: You are all so awesome. Seeing your positivity everyday makes me lament that I did not move to the area soon enough to be in the Junior Group. Keep doing all that you are doing, because whenever a new group of freshmen moves up from the junior group, they are a lively, caring and hilarious group. Don't be afraid to reach out to the kids on the senior group, because even though we may appear to have everything together, we are just as afraid as you are of awkward.

To the senior group: I consider so many of you my very best friends, and without you there I know that getting up at 5 AM for morning practice would go from challenging to impossible. Thank you for being such incredible people that I have grown to care about *your* success over my own. You have inspired me to want to be the best possible

teammate I can be. Please continue to be your wonderful selves as you rise to become leaders and role models to new classes that will follow in your footsteps.

To the class of 2015: We did it! Looking at our class, I see so many things accomplished and so much success to come. Thank you to all of you for motivating me and going beyond what it means to be a teammate. I feel honored to be part of such an inspirational, high-achieving group. Although you have already attained so much success, I know that you all have the capacity and drive to do so much more. For all that you have done and will do, congratulations and good luck.

To the coaches: It seems the only thing you have not prepared me to do is adequately express my gratitude for everything you've done to make Orinda Aquatics the premier program it is today. I am amazed and grateful because of how you can simultaneously be so supporting of every swimmer while also challenging each team member to reach his or her full potential. You are all role models who delight in the accomplishments; personality and character of each of your swimmers while still encouraging us and guiding us to be better people. I hope I am lucky enough to encounter more people like the Orinda Aquatics coaches in my life, about whom I can say without a doubt are genuinely interested and dedicated to helping us achieve our goals in every aspect of our lives.

To the team: Thank you for your support as I have tried my best to fulfill my roles as a swimmer, friend, student, captain, mama duck, split taker, mathematical analyst, chauffer and most importantly, teammate. With love and appreciation, Katie Erickson

Brittany Percin, Cal Tech

Unlike the rest of the seniors graduating this year, I was not fortunate enough to call Orinda Aquatics my swim team until about two months ago. I grew up in a resort community near Lake Tahoe. Unfortunately, like many of the other teenagers in our area, many of my teammates that I had known for over a decade got into alcohol, drugs, and partying. You can listen to parents, coaches, and teachers tell you "make good decisions" and shrug it off. For me, it wasn't until I personally witnessed my teammates' downhill spiral that I understood what they were talking about. Work ethic dwindled, and, for some, partying took a drastic toll on their swimming. Furthermore, a wedge was driven between team members who partied and those who did not, making practices and meets miserable. Team camaraderie had vanished, taking respect and integrity with it.

This went far beyond the sport. From mere observation, I saw peers just as smart and driven as I was, fall behind in school, and make life-threatening decisions. As any future bioengineering major would do, I took to the books, and researched the effects alcohol and marijuana specifically have on the developing brain. I looked into the effects on neurotransmitters, and was astonished. This was not only a matter of "right" and "wrong," but more significantly a physical assault on mind and body. Alcohol and drugs are truly a destructive force. For me, I couldn't help but question, why work so hard in sports and school to throw it all away for a night of partying?

Unwilling to jump on the bandwagon of the local "culture", my family and I decided to make a change. We were all ostracized for standing up against the toxic culture, and began wondering if it was possible that rampant drug and alcohol abuse was tolerated *everywhere*. It was then that we found Orinda Aquatics. Here was a team that stood for everything we believed in; integrity, teamwork, dedication towards future success. And, at the head of the team, Ronnie and Donnie worked with constant vigilance to instill these values in their swimmers. I cannot begin to describe how validating it was to be welcomed into a community who shares my beliefs, when I had been told that I was wrong to believe teenagers could exercise restraint *and* live with character.

Through the ordeal of the past couple years, I have learned more about character than any lecture could have taught me. It takes great strength to stand up for what you believe in, and stick by it even when everyone is telling you to give up. For me, it was fighting a culture of alcohol and drugs, after witnessing firsthand the havoc it wrecks on people, families, and teams. My family stuck together through the fight, and grew closer together, showing me how important it is to have that supportive foundation. *Never* discount your family.

My reward for getting through was six months with an amazing team that shares my views. While I almost don't want to leave, I feel relieved knowing that my brother is in the more than capable hands of Orinda Aquatics, a team that will nurture his character, and treat him like family. I look forward to coming back for vacations and summers. Brittany Percin

Mary Ashby, Columbia

I'm not quite sure how I can possibly sum up the seven years that I have spent on this team. It feels like just yesterday that I began my first day as a sixth grader in the junior group. Even though my time on this team in the scheme of things has been very short, I know the lessons I have learned and the memories I have created will stay with me for the rest of my life. However, as I sit here writing this letter, I am at a loss of words to describe just how big a contribution this program has been on my journey through life so far.

Simply calling OA a swim team would be a major injustice to everything this team has accomplished. This program offers so much more than just an opportunity to improve in the pool-- it fosters an environment where kids can be nurtured into mature and independent adults that are ready to take on the world. My experience on this team has been just that. Through the years of hard work and living by the motto of *Character First*, I have grown into the mature and independent woman I am today and for that, I am infinitely thankful.

Thank you, Ronnie and Donnie, for always supporting me through my ups and downs. Your belief in me has enabled me to persevere when all I have wanted to do is give up. Without your mentoring, I would surely be on a different path than the one you have helped me embark on.

Thank you to the parents and family members that have contributed so much hard work to this team. Your dedication, whether it is heading the board of directors or timing at swim meets, should never go unnoticed. Our team would not function as smoothly as it does behind the scenes without your help.

As the years have gone by and my fellow teammates have graduated, I have come to know many extremely influential people in my life. These individuals, both mentors and friends, have been a key support system both in and out of the pool. Even though this letter signifies the conclusion of my time on this team, I will never forget the experiences I have had. Thank you OA, for all that you have done for me. With all my love, Mary Ashby

Paul Cane, Georgetown

Clovis 2015. 200 Breaststroke Finals. Heat 1 Lane 7.

As I stand on the block nervously tightening my navy blue Speedo goggles and fidgeting with my white Orinda Aquatics cap, I hear the announcer say, "In Lane 7, we have Paul Cane from Orinda Aquatics." A barrage of loud cheers and chants coming from the opposite side of the pool immediately startle me. All I can see is a sea of red at the end of my lane cheering for me.

Once the whistle blows, signaling it's now time to get up on the blocks, I'm surprisingly not thinking about my race. I'm not thinking about launching myself off of the blocks. I'm not thinking about taking six strokes a lap. I'm not thinking about gliding on my under waters. Instead, I gaze across the calm body of water, directly toward my teammates. I instantly think back to my first day on Orinda Aquatics.

Terrified, I walk into a room of at least seventy unfamiliar faces. I see over a hundred eyes staring at me – right away. Rather than having to play the role of the awkward new kid with no one to talk to (which I was truly dreading), I was greeted by handfuls of OA swimmers.

"Hi! My name's Megan L. Fun fact: There are eight girls named Megan on Orinda Aquatics right now." "Hey, my name's Dom. You're new, right?" "Hi! I'm Kelly Noah! You *have to* swim in my lane today!"

It was those small, welcoming gestures that made my first day and entire time on Orinda Aquatics so special. OA not only made me a faster swimmer, but it also taught me how to be a better person. I'm proud to reflect on my last four years swimming on Orinda Aquatics knowing how much this program has impacted me.

Matt and Marc, I know I never swam in Junior Group, but I've loved getting to know you these past four years. Sophie and Kevin, I'm so glad you both came to OA last year. Kevin, you were my favorite coach when I swam Polar Bears, so I was super excited when I heard you were coming back. You both make everyone laugh and are so fun to be around. Ronnie, remember when my mom hit your car my freshman year? I was embarrassed about that for at least two years after... Glad we got past it. And thanks for helping me get under 1:00 in 100 Breast. Donnie, you are truly one of the most selfless and humble people I know. Thanks for creating such a fun and safe environment where all swimmers feel welcome. Your infectious passion for both swimming and character rub off on everyone you come across; it's been a pleasure getting to know you throughout my time on Orinda Aquatics.

It's hard to say goodbye knowing the amazing people I'm leaving behind. I will miss this team immensely next year and I will always be grateful for my time on Orinda Aquatics. Thanks for everything. Paul

Ariana von Ehrenkrook, San Diego State

Words cannot really begin to describe how thankful I am for the short time I have spent with Orinda Aquatics. Coming from almost a decade of swimming on the same rec team, the switch to year round was one of the hardest transitions I have had to make. But I wouldn't change these past four years for anything. During my first practice, I remember struggling through warm-up and thinking, "What have I gotten myself into?" As time went by and training became even more challenging, I remember reconsidering whether or not to continue with year round swimming. But after seeing the determination of my fellow teammates and coaches, I realized that pushing on was well worth it. I think that is the biggest thing I will take away from my short time on OA – perseverance. Donnie – thank you for your constant encouragement and patience with me. Your dedication to this team is admirable and inspiring. Thank you for not just instilling in all of us the importance of having character, but being a great example of it. Thank you for all of your advice and help with the college process as well – I can't begin to thank you enough for your help! You are one of the kindest human beings I have ever met, and this team is truly blessed to have you.

Ronnie – thank you for letting me be the "honorary member" of the Campolindo swim team these past four years. I remember you teasing me about transferring to Campo my freshman year, and although that never happened, I really am grateful that you let me experience a little piece of high school swimming. Thank you for teaching me the importance of doing the little things purposefully. It's something that has not just helped me with my stroke technique but also with the little (and big) things in my life.

Kevin – thank you for re-instilling in me the love for competing. I think I have improved most as a competitor over these last two years of training with you. Thank you for always pushing me to do my absolute best and never letting me settle for anything less. It's an invaluable lesson I have not just applied to my training, but also to the rest of my life. I'll keep you posted on your status as Transport Minister – we'll be in touch. ;)

Marc – thank you for encouraging me to join OA! Without your coaching early on, I can say without a doubt that I would not be the swimmer that I am today.

Matt – although I haven't been able to swim much under your coaching, I want to thank you for all of the work you do behind the scenes to keep this team running in such fine order.

Sophie – it has been really great getting to know you a bit these past two years. OA is really lucky to have you as a coach!

To my teammates – thank you for some of the best times I have had over these past four years. Thank you for pushing me to do my best every day and for including me in this incredible community. I am thankful for each and every one of you and I am so blessed to have been able to spend these past four years with you. Much love, Ariana von Ehrenkrook

Kylie Han, Wesleyan University

My Orinda Aquatics journey began in the summer of 2012 and one of my fondest memories was at my first swim meet with the team. The meet was about the start and the whole team gathered, in their red and blue, around Ronnie and Donnie to hear their wise words. While Ronnie was preaching about determination and focus, one teammate shouts out, “Ronnie, are you wearing two different shoes?” As the whole team breaks out into giggles and cheers, Ronnie joins in his own laughter, and, yes, he was wearing two different shoes.

I thought this moment perfectly embodied the spirit of Orinda Aquatics that has become such a major part of my life. Even though I have been on the team for only two years, from that moment at my first meet, I felt a part of the family. In that instant, I was surrounded with the warmth and laughter of the most supportive teammates, coaches, and friends. Before this point, I felt that making the transition from a small-town team to a large, highly-ranked team seemed like a real challenge. I felt that I was wearing two different shoes, similar to Ronnie. Yet, the transition of switching teams couldn't have been easier as it was filled with support, motivation and laughter.

Not only had my teammates and coaches made me feel at ease and welcomed, but they also shaped me into a better person instilling me with the values of character, humility, leadership, discipline and integrity. The coaches go far beyond just giving us sets. They are role models. Although I didn't have the pleasure of being coached by Matt and Marc, their dedication to Orinda Aquatics' age-group development is unparalleled. Kevin, Sophie and, of course, Cornelia have made going to the pool more fun with their humor, kindness, commitment and Cornelia's cuteness that brings a smile to my face every time I see her. Furthermore, Donnie and Ronnie's endless passion and commitment to centering this team on character is inspiring. Whether it is giving time to every swimmer, helping the senior's with the grueling college process and much more, their kindness is boundless and I know they will continue to make the world a better place. The coaches have helped me grow into the person I am today, and for that, I am blessed and thankful.

Orinda Aquatics has shaped my life and I will carry their message, philosophies and motto on in my future endeavors. I will continue to lead by example and spread character to the greater community. The Orinda Aquatics family has prepared me for what's to come and I'm so excited to see what's in store. Kylie

Jack Madigan, Fordham University

Swimming is often considered an individual sport. Of course, this is true in some respects. No one else can help me race. However, the impact a team has on the sport of swimming is not often talked about. I constantly struggle to explain how swimming is both a team, and an individual sport, to people. Although it is ultimately up to me when I get up on the block, I would not be ready without my teammates. Orinda Aquatics puts the team before anything else, and along with the motto of “Character First”, it has developed a culture based on support and respect. It is easy to feel alone in an individual sport, but Orinda Aquatics has transformed a group of “individuals” into a real team.

I have not been on Orinda Aquatics as long as many of the other swimmers on this team. Over the past 12 years I've trained with several different teams. I came to Orinda Aquatics last year, looking for a better team environment, before I had even heard the word “culture” to describe a team. Now the word “culture” is engrained in me and I will forever carry the values that I have learned as I continue on into college swimming, and in my life.

I would like to thank all the coaches, parents, and my teammates for showing me what being a team truly means. I'm lucky enough to have had coaches that have not only improved my stroke, but helped develop my character and values. I'm lucky for all the hard work that my parents and all the other OA parents have put into every drive to practice, meet, and social event. I'm lucky to have met all my teammates, who challenge me daily to be a better person and swimmer. I'll never go to another swim meet again without noticing other teams not in team attire. It's the little things, like our matching t-shirts, that demonstrate our desire to stand together rather than separate. I am very grateful to have experienced a group that's inclined to stand as a team, without even thinking about it.

I would like to thank Ronnie and Donnie for all that they have done for me. You both have helped me develop as a swimmer and a person. Thank you for creating a team that focuses not only on athletics, but character. It really does have an impact on my life and all my teammate's lives. You're sense of humor, kindness, and passion for swimming has created an amazing environment for young athletes to grow in. I would also like to thank Sophie, Kevin, Matt, and Marc, although I haven't been directly coached by you, you are guiding a team that is truly special. It's been my privilege to swim on OA this last year. Thank you. Sincerely, Jack Madigan

Matt Cohen, Brandeis University

My time on Orinda Aquatics has been short yet fulfilling. I joined the team during my sophomore year with an injured elbow and have worked my way up from there. I have come a long way and I owe it to the coaches, my teammates, and the parents.

When I started Orinda Aquatics I did not expect it to be fun and instead expected it to be just hard and demanding—nothing else. I was wrong. Also, my only goal in mind was to become a faster swimmer. Although that did happen, I can safely say that I am more grateful for everything else that has happened to me. This team has been the source of my closest friends. I do not know what I'd do or where I'd be without them. As for the coaches, Donnie and Ronnie have helped shape the person I am today. They are not just excellent swim coaches but excellent mentors as well. They always remind you of what the most important things are in your life and stress that your swim times are not one of those things. Donnie, I want to especially thank you for all you have done for me. You coached me at OA and in high school and I do not know where I'd be right now without you, and I don't think I'd be swimming in college if it weren't for you.

To all of the parents, I would also like to thank you for all that you have done and I think it is extremely important to acknowledge you for all of your hard work. You truly are an excellent support group and I don't think that anyone's experience on OA could be as great without your help.

Friends and teammates, I thank you for making my time on OA enjoyable. We have had many great experiences together and I cherish all of our friendships. Becoming friends with all of you is the best thing that has ever happened to me and I am lucky to have you all in my life. If I could do it all over again I wouldn't change a thing. I will definitely miss all of you after I leave for college. Again, thank you everyone! Matt Cohen

Erika Wolfram, Cal Poly

Thank you mom and dad for being my number one fans and supporting me through the entire journey. You two are incredible. Thank you Kevin, Ronnie, Donnie, and Marc for coaching me in the pool, but most importantly out of the pool. Thank you for the meetings when you shared stories about acts of character. Many times, I became inspired to be a young woman of integrity and character. Thank you for creating a swim team of high excellence and quality athletes. Most importantly, thank you for focusing on what matters most. Finally, thank you teammates. Thank you for your friendship and the joy you have brought into my life. Thank you for encouraging me throughout my journey of high school. Thank you for bringing me a smile and a hug after a day at school. You all are a huge reason that I wanted to continue being a part of the team. I love you guys!

A few years ago, it was a sunny September day and I was a sophomore in high school. The team was practicing in the diving pool that day. I nervously entered the pool deck, intimidated by the fact that these swimmers were so fast. However, as I began talking to Ronnie, I was surprised by his easy-going manner. He made jokes and I started laughing, but most of all he made me feel welcomed. So that day started the first of many on this awesome team. Looking back, joining Orinda Aquatics has been one of the best decisions of my life.

One of the best aspects of the team was that it remained constant. Though life raced all around me, this team was always there for me to lean on, through the good days and the bad; I was always able to look forward to practice. I always felt rejuvenated and renewed leaving the pool after practice.

The team has played an integral role in shaping the young woman that I have become. I loved being surrounded daily by a group of focused, motivated athletes. I think that it is incredible that our team is composed of many athletes who drive long distances to swim daily. That shows the motivation behind the athletes on OA. Together, we laughed and we cried. We were proud and we were devastated. We triumphed and we failed. Through this, we were all bonded by a common goal, to be the best swimmer we could be. Along the way to that goal, we made memories that I will remember forever. The times we all sang Happy Birthday and Ronnie made sure that the treat was 'okay' to eat. The days, when we hopped out of the pool and stood in our suits on the deck as rain was pouring down. The crisp mornings when my toes felt the frost on the grass as I retrieved my equipment bag. The team breakfasts after Saturday morning practice. Kevin's handshakes and pats on the back, and talking with Kevin as he encouraged and believed in my strength.

As my time on this team comes to a close, I remember a moment that established my thoughts about joining the team. It was my first morning practice, and although I no longer remember the reason, I do remember I showed up to the pool around 6:20 (late). I entered the pool deck that morning thinking I had made a rookie mistake, but Donnie just smiled and thanked me for coming. I was taken aback by his kindness, but soon came to realize that this team was established on kindness. This team has been a blessing in my life. Thank you to anyone who has ever or will ever be a part of this program, it is beautiful. Erika

Ryan Birdsall, Colgate

Orinda Aquatics has been more than just a team for me, it has been my home and my family for four years and I can't picture how my life would be without it. I have learned so much about myself and how to be the best the best that I can be to other people. I cannot express how grateful I am for all Ronnie, Kevin, Sophie and especially Donnie have done for me and all that they have taught me. The impeccable character that they have all displayed is more than enough to ensure that each and every person they work with will grow up to be an exceptional human being.

When I asked Donnie to write my letter of recommendation for college, his words brought tears to my eyes, in talking about compassion and caring as an integral part of being an athlete and a leader, and how he appreciated my commitment to those things. He has continually shown that things like humility, service and character should be present in every person's life, as they can and should become a life foundation. I can't thank Donnie enough for all that he has done for me and his help with shaping me into the man I am today. I will forever remember his lessons and utilize them every day to carry on the Character First motto.

My friends and family have also had a strong and lasting impact on me. From the countless hours that I have spent with my friends before, during, and after practices, to coming home to my supportive family, I could not have had a better support group. My parents have helped mold me with the same foundation of strong morals and character. My mother likes to say that it is her southern blood that expresses her morals but my father likes to take credit as well. Through their daily support of academics and athletics, they have really been invaluable and it is going to be very difficult to move away from them.

Additionally, my friends have been such a strong influence of the mantra, "don't *give in to peer pressure*." They know right and wrong, and I know that I can always trust them. They have helped lead me and keep me on the right path. They have become more than just friends, more than best friends, they have become my family.

Leaving them all will be very difficult, and I doubt I will ever meet a group of people with the same level of character that they have.

As I said, I cannot express how thankful I am for all that I have been exposed to over my years here. Everyone has been more than kind and have all shown the highest level of support and integrity. I truly wish everyone the best of luck with their time on Orinda Aquatics and beyond. Thank you all for an incredible four years, and go OA. Ryan

Will Inman, Chapman University

I have not been on this team for a long time, but it been a great and meaningful journey. I have met incredible people, people who care about not only their success but the success of those around them. The atmosphere is just amazing and it makes people want to be better people.

I began my swimming journey relatively late, at a late age of 12. I started on a very small rec team and I loved it. I switched to a year-round team my sophomore year of high school to become more dedicated and committed to the sport. After a while I began to realize that I needed a change. I came to OA because I heard about the culture and true friendship that comes from this team. I remember my first day; it was a couple weeks after my senior year began. When I walked on the deck, there were no familiar faces, and even though no one knew me, they were all so friendly. Every day since then has been a great day of practice and friendship. I truly love going to practice and being with such great people. Spending time at the meets with them is thoroughly enjoyable because we are cheering for each other and supporting one another.

Orinda Aquatics helped me find my buried passion for swimming. I have come to love swimming so much that I will be swimming in college, something I never really thought possible. And even though I am going off to college, I am never leaving the team. In addition to swimming, I will take the core values that OA has taught me and apply them to every aspect of my life: work, swim, friends, and family. The OA team is truly a family, and like family they are always there for you. I am glad to call Orinda Aquatics my swim fam. - William Inman

Will Gittings, Occidental

I can't thank you enough for the time and experiences I've had with this team. It's no exaggeration to say it has dramatically changed my life for the better. This team is truly one of a kind since its culture pushes every person on the team to be a better role model, leader, and teammate.

I never thought I would be swimming in college when I started high school swimming as a Junior Varsity swimmer my freshman year. In fact, I wasn't all too interested in swimming at all. But then I started a two week trial period a year later at OA. I think people were surprised by the decision, which only pushed me to work harder and improve as much as I could. Soon I was able to do the full workouts and keep up with my teammates in sets. By sophomore year I had the opportunity to swim varsity and actually qualified for NCS. This changed my outlook on swimming. It was no longer a way for me to be in shape or socialize; it was now a part of me as a person. I continued to work hard and continued to surprise myself. Making finals at DFAL's and actually competing at NCS were things I never thought were attainable.

That's what I think is so special about this team. It's not only for "stars", but also for people who are willing to persevere and try to improve themselves not only as an athlete, but as a teammate and person. I will always come back to visit, and when I do I hope to hear stories like my own about younger swimmers surprising not only their teammates or coaches, but also themselves. Thank you all so much for these past few years, I will always remember Orinda Aquatics. Will Gittings

***“Know who you are, and be it.
Know what you want,
and go out and get it!”***

Carroll Bryant



"You can be comfortable or courageous, but you cannot be both. By taking a leap of faith, you find out who YOU are truly capable of becoming." unknown

Some people come

in your life as

blessings.

Some come in your

life as lessons.

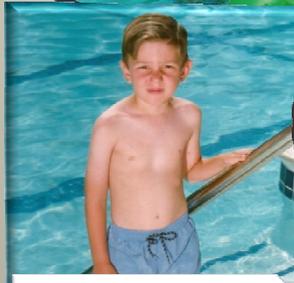
- Mother Teresa



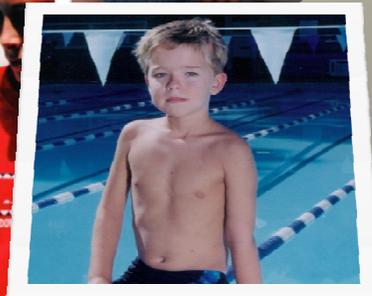
Thank you and congratulations!

Orinda Aquatics Class of 2015!

Can you name them!!



I'm not swimming the 200 Fly!



"If you don't go after what you want, you could spend your entire life settling for what you can get." Stegall