



Orinda Aquatics



Team Banquet 2013-2014



Putting Character First

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

OA College Bound

"Today, why not go out on a limb? That's where the fruit is. You know this. In life, if you don't risk anything, you risk everything."



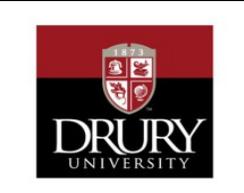
"When we dream alone it is only a dream, but when many dream together it is the beginning of a new reality." F. Hundertwasser



OA Graduating Class of 2014

Average GPA – 3.7

Name/HS	In the Beginning!	College	Mascot!	Notes
Talbot Jacobs CPS		Brown Swimming		Swimming All American Academic All America Scholastic All American Jr. National Qualifier HS Team Captain
Hannah Grubbs Campolindo		UCLA Swimming		Swimming All American Junior National Qualifier NCS Finalist Runs Harbor House Charity
Annie Larsen Miramonte		UC Santa Barbara Swimming		Swimming All American Virginia Hall Inspirational Award Winner Two year HS Team Captain Grand Prix Qualifier
Jordan Owyoung CPS		UC Davis Swimming		CPS Female Student-Athlete of the year/HS Team Captain Coaches Award Sectional Qualifier/JO Finalist
Gabe Osler Miramonte		Notre Dame Swimming		Swimming All American Scholastic All American Jr National Qualifier HS Team School Captain
Allison Stevens Campolindo		UC Santa Barbara Swimming		Swimming All American Junior National Qualifier NCS Finalist DFAL Champion
Cassidy Fuller Campolindo		Washington & Lee Swimming		Grand Prix Qualifier Coaches Award Scholar Athlete
Erin Schoenfeld Miramonte		UC San Diego Swimming		Academic All American Swimming All America Two year HS Team Captain Grand Prix Qualifier

<p>Megan Schussman Miramonte</p>		<p>M.I.T. Swimming</p>		<p>Academic All American NCS Top 16 4.0 Student (throughout HS) Sectional Qualifier</p>
<p>Elise Goetzl Miramonte</p>		<p>Cal Poly Swimming</p>		<p>Swimming All American HS Team Captain NCS Top 16 Sectional Qualifier</p>
<p>Alex Shieman Campolindo</p>		<p>Drury Swimming</p>		<p>Swimming All American Jr. National Qualifier NCS Finalist</p>
<p>Anya Nugent Campolindo</p>		<p>Hamilton Swimming</p>		<p>Coaches Award Winner Far Western Qualifier Academic All American Scholar Athlete</p>
<p>Lucia Brammer Bishop O'Dowd</p>		<p>Lewis & Clark Swimming</p>		<p>Presidents Award for Academic Achievement Scholar Athlete Far Western Qualifier</p>
<p>Paige Matherson San Ramon</p>		<p>University of Alabama Swimming</p>		<p>National Qualifier Swimming All American NCS Finalist NCS Team Champion</p>
<p>Mitchell Carlson Campolindo</p>		<p>Puget Sound</p>		<p>Eagle Scout NorCal Leadership Conference Campolindo Varsity</p>
<p>Bryan Liao San Ramon</p>		<p>Cal State Pomona</p>		<p>Far Western Qualifier League Top 16</p>
<p>Christine Lum Redwood Christian</p>		<p>U.C. Berkeley</p>		<p>Coaches Award Winner Academic All American Far Western Qualifier</p>

<p>Miles Kalbus Miramonte</p>		<p>UC Irvine Water Polo</p>		<p>High School All American Sectional Qualifier NCS Top 16 Miramonte Top 10</p>
<p>Annika Jensen Campolindo</p>		<p>USC Water Polo</p>		<p>First Team All American WP East Bay Player of the Year NCS Team Champion</p>
<p>Sam Mladjav Bishop O'Dowd</p>		<p>UC Santa Barbara Water Polo</p>		<p>Far Western Qualifier All-League Water Polo</p>

“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.”



“You were born to be a success. Although to *be* successful, you must plan to be, prepare to be, expect to be, and work to be, every day.”

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*



Where are they now?

– some OA alumni updates

Kristine Lewis (Cunnane) - Cal Women's Associate Head Coach

Back to back National Championships. Recruited and coaches the world's top athletes (best class in the nation in 2014). Former UCLA Team Captain.

Katie Arnold – USA Swimming National Team High Performance Consultant, Colorado Springs. Former UCLA All American.

Andrea Ward – UC Santa Barbara

4th at NCAA Championships – finishes stellar career with extraordinary performance (100 Fly 51.4) – led in the pool and on the deck (six school records, an elite athlete driven by integrity, humility, and compassion).



Brooke Woodward – Emory Student-Athlete of the year

"The best team person I have ever coached" – Jon Howell, Emory University

Rachel Cleak/Jill Jones – Cal Poly Senior Team Captains

"I will miss them more than any other swimmers I have ever coached. They completely changed our culture." Tom Milich, Head Coach – Cal Poly

Caroline Lukins – New Columbia Assistant Coach (named 7/14)

"For all those that have coached Caroline or that have been teammates with her, we know that she just gets it. Tough in workout, understanding in the locker room, and widely admired on campus, Caroline has much to share with the team." Michael Sabal-Head Coach

Chris Peterson – 2014 Master's National Champion 50 Free,

UCSB Ph.D. program in Mechanical Engineering

Courtney Whyte – 2014 Notre Dame Team Captain

Aly Levin – 2014 Williams College Team captain

Jenny Hu – 2014 Tufts School record

Senior Letters

Paige Matherson, University of Alabama

Most of these letters start off with words reflecting countless years of everlasting memories and friendships made at Orinda Aquatics. My letter will start off the same with one exception. I have been on the team for only a few months. This exception however will not take away from the memories and friendships I will remember forever.

Joining Orinda Aquatics has been the best decision of my life. I cannot begin to explain how grateful I am to be a part of this program. While it was certainly a missed opportunity not to have been part of this team earlier in my swim career, the impact over the past few months has been incredible. From my first day with this team I realized OA was about more than just swimming. It was about preparing individuals for their future by developing the whole person and not just the swimmer. I can honestly say this team has changed my life and is helping me be a better person.

Ronnie recently asked me what I like about OA. I told him I love having a team that will always watch out for me and where the coaches and teammates motivate me and believe in me. I also said if I am having a bad day or just need someone to talk to the coaches are there for me. These are just a few of the things that I love about the team.

“Thank you” to my teammates at OA. Thanks for being good friends and allowing me to be part of your team.

Ronnie and Donnie thank you for helping me feel good about “me” and welcoming me to the team. Words cannot accurately describe what your support has meant. I know that from this experience I will value myself more for the person I am and not just define myself as a swimmer. I will laugh more and swim more confidently because of you. Thank you.

Jordan Owyong, U.C. Davis

Before joining Orinda Aquatics, I never had a sport to truly call my own. I realize now that none of the many sports teams I had participated in cultivated anything close to the unique culture of OA, from its familial warmth to the endless supportive energy. Of all the teams I have been on, OA stands out as exceptional; no other team valued character and integrity above all else and produced such impactful, caring leaders.

Ronnie and Donnie, you are unparalleled in your ability to create a caring environment in which you help each and every swimmer reach their full athletic potential. Perhaps most importantly, you have instilled in all of us the value of striving to become high-character members of society. Your efforts have fostered not only an impressive swim team but also a close-knit family. OA has made swimming and being an athlete a deep-seated part of my identity. Rather than simply being an activity I participate in, swimming has become a part of who I am.

On our daily workout sheets, I've seen this quote a few times: “While the ego cries out, ‘but what is in it for me?’ the awakened heart asks simply, ‘how can I help?’” (*The Way of Mastery*). I believe this is the foundation from which you build such an impressive team. Striving to make each other better athletes, instead of concentrating solely on ourselves, is something that you have imbedded in me, and something which I hope to pass on to others.

Thank you Matt and Marc for initially welcoming me onto the team and giving me the confidence to move on to the Senior group as well as for preparing me athletically for the rigors of swimming as a Senior.

Sophie, thank you for all the time you took to massage my knees, whether it be before, during or after practice. Thanks for being my friend. I will especially miss our pseudo-intellectual conversations analyzing American culture. Kevin, you're cool too!

Thank you Donnie for your dedication to this team and to swimming in general, and for always keeping us inspired with new quotes and articles. Believe it or not, much of your words have sunk in. And someday, I vow to hold myself above the weather and manage to stop shivering!

Ronnie, there's so much I'd like to thank you for. I want you to know I truly appreciate and value all the time you've spent with me, from our riveting conversations about the meaning of life to working on my form after you've put in all those hours at regular team practice. Thank you for your never-ending advice that I promise to always remember. Thank you for never giving up on me and leaving the cord uncut. Thank you for being a coach, a friend, and a mentor.

I'm getting ready to set off into the big, exciting world—not alone because I'll always hear you two in my head—as a different person than I was just a few short years ago. You have changed me. I will never really know how much, but I do know that it was for the better and for that I will always be grateful. Love, Jordan

Hannah Grubbs, UCLA

It's a little surreal to sit down and write my senior goodbye letter. As an underclassman, writing this letter always seemed so far away, and being Me, I had already planned out exactly what I was going to say in my head. But now that I actually have to write this, I'm at a loss for words.

To say Orinda Aquatics has shaped my life would be an understatement. There are no words to express the appreciation and gratitude I feel toward everyone involved in this one of a kind team, for helping me become the person I am today. When I tell people how much time I spend at swimming, I often get the question, “don't you feel like you're wasting your time” but looking back at my 7 years on OA and my 4,876 hours in the pool (give or take), I can honestly say that it was anything but a waste.

OA has shaped my life in more ways than just swimming. It has given me confidence to dive head first into challenges, in and out of the pool. I have also been exposed to the most influential and amazing people, who I can say with confidence, will be some of my best friends for the rest of my life. My life would be worlds different if I had not stuck with swimming. To be honest I would probably be part of the high school party scene, doing anything to fit in with my peers or trying to fill emptiness. But swimming for OA gave me the tools and confidence to stay away from what was “cool and popular” and really lead a life of character.

Orinda Aquatics has helped me realize that it's easy to focus on the tangible aspects of swimming, the times, the place, and the race. However these are not the things that define us as athletes. It is how we choose to look at tough situations in a positive light and tackle hard sets straight on. It is how you congratulate your teammate when they have a great race and yours might not have been as good. And while swimming's tangible aspects might help decide what college you go to or if you're on JV or varsity, it is the un-tangible aspects of swimming that matter in life.

Matt: Thanks for kind of forcing me into joining year round. And though it was really embarrassing when I was training with the junior group for JO's in fifth grade, and I had to “go to the bathroom” just to rest because the practice (which I later found out was a taper practice) was too hard, I'm glad I stuck with it. You helped me develop my love for swimming and I cannot thank you enough.

Marc: Thank you for the positive feedback I always got from you and always making swimming fun. I'll remember hanging out in the coaches' area with you at swim meets, and giving you a hard time for watching the “Hills”. I promise next time I'm at Starbucks ill get you your Grande Tuxedo mocha with no whip cream.

Kevin & Sophie: Welcome back! It is great having your coaching *and* friendship. Thanks so much for all you do, and for your passion for swimming and the team.

Donnie: Thank you for always reminding me to look at the big picture, and to do the right thing. You have helped shape me as both a person and a swimmer. And although I won't miss your long turn master sets, I'll miss your presence on the pool deck next year.

Ronnie: I honestly don't really know what to say. You have given me so much in these past years, and I really don't know if I can ever thank you enough. Thank you for always believing in me and never “cutting the cord”; (even though I specified that the cord was gold and couldn't be cut). You have truly been one of the most influential people in my life, not only helping me grow as an athlete but a person as well. I'll miss you next year and I hope you'll miss me, even though you'll probably be able to hear me all the way from LA.

Mom, Dad, Will, and Andy: thank you for supporting and loving me, even though I can be a little crazy sometimes. Through your love and support, I have been able to pursue my passion and I cannot thank you enough. I'm going to miss you guys so

much next year, that I'm even coming to terms with the fact that Mom wants to become a "Bruin Groupie". All My Love,
Hannah Grubbs

Cassidy Fuller, Washington & Lee

This is an essay I wrote for college. Thank you for giving me the inspiration to write this.

Character First. Coming across the Orinda Aquatics swim team, the first thing noticed besides the sea of bright red t-shirts, is the phrase "Character First" plastered across shirts, caps, swim bags. More importantly, it is demonstrated by all of the team members. At the end of my senior year I will have been a member of this team for eight years. These eight years have transformed me as a person in various ways. I have blossomed as a swimmer, achieving times I never thought possible, pushing my body to its limits and further. Even more than that, I have become a better person.

Every Friday afternoon, after a grueling week of swim practice, school, and more swim practice, a normal teenager would escape home to relax and recuperate. Several times, I found myself envying these teenagers, but more often than not, I actually pity them. While my friends are bombarded with useless propaganda by various media outlets, I go to an OA team meeting. Although each meeting has a slightly different focus, they all center on the same theme of "Character".

I, along with fifty other swimmers, dive into this theme, exploring all aspects of what it means for a person to put "Character First". We often read articles about famous athletes from around the world who have overcome adversity to achieve success. This adversity ranges from a teenage boy who is the sole income-earner for his family, to a young swimmer who overcame cancer. Through every article, I gain another perspective on sports and life. Never give up, persevere, no excuse is a good excuse and always be humble, are just a few of the countless lessons I have learned through these stories. Another common topic that our team often discusses and debates are articles exploring moral values that often escape teenagers, such as cheating, lying, or respecting parents.

For many years, I took these meetings for granted. As I opened my eyes more to the world around me, I could see more clearly how not only teenagers, but adults as well, would take everything they have in their lives for granted and neglect to put character at the forefront of their life and their decisions.

It is my hope to be able to promote this "Character First" view of life to everyone I meet. Even though the message may be simple, it has made a lasting impression on not only my life, but also on every member of my swim team. Being on Orinda Aquatics has taught me the value of trust, humility, integrity, and hard work, just to name a few lessons. Reading article after article about regular people who do extraordinary things because they are the *right thing* to do has made me reflect on my own actions. If these people can change the world, then there is no excuse for me not to try.

Character has shaped my life for the better. It has opened my eyes up to a better way of living. I hope that I as continue on with my life past high school, I am able to fully live a "character first" life. At college, I will continue to do my best to live this type of live by example and help and encourage my new classmates and team members to do the same. Cassidy

Talbot Jacobs, Brown

As my time on Orinda Aquatics draws to a close and my time as a collegiate scholar-athlete comes nearer, I feel flooded by both emotion and memories of all the wonderful times I have had as a part of this team. One in particular that stands apart happened back at Sleepy Hollow. Ronnie was coaching our afternoon workout, and being the polite 7-8 I was, I thanked him for his time. As I was talking to him, he said to me, "Talbot, I bet I am your favorite coach ever." Perplexed, I asked him "why is that?" Ronnie then says "because I don't yell at you." Boy, have things changed since then. I guess after Ronnie got a true dose of me come freshman year, that whole favorite-coach ambition flew out the window.

My favorite memory with Ronnie came at the winter Junior Olympics in Pacifica. Being a fall swimmer who had decided to continue swimming with Orinda Aquatics until that meet, my experience in races longer than a 50 was anything but sizable. As one might imagine, on night one, the night of the 500, I had butterflies in my stomach and a serious confidence crisis. Looking to alleviate these worries, I went to go talk with Matt and Marc, hoping that they had some advice that would magically make me drop time and avoid being in pain. Once Matt had finished giving me technical advice, Ronnie, who was sitting next to him, turns and says to me, "Talbot, I want you to repeat this. I am amazing." Completely missing the attempt to boost my self-confidence, I quickly replied, "Ronnie is amazing."

Since then I have learned that instead of being told of your accomplishments, it is far more rewarding to sweat for them instead. As Ronnie and Donnie always say “prepare the child for the path, not the path for the child.” My time on Orinda Aquatics has instilled in me determination, perseverance, and character, firmly cementing my moral compass in the proper direction. Orinda Aquatics has taught me to listen to the voice inside, to not let peer pressure and other outside negative influences lead me astray. While “Character First” teaches one to be a high character student-athlete and teammate, it more importantly teaches one to be a high-character person in life, with no compromises or exceptions.

If I had to leave one piece of guidance or advice for fellow teammates, it would be that Ronnie, Donnie, Matt, Marc, Kevin and Sophie are not just your coaches, but your friends and role models as well. We are all fortunate to have the opportunity of such high caliber athletic and moral coaching, and I am certain that under their tutelage, all of you, not just Ronnie, can and will be amazing.

I have been blessed to have such supportive teammates, coaches, and parents. I feel prepared for the journey to come, and know that without their guidance and love, I would be much worse off. Sincerely, Talbot Jacobs

Elise Goetzl, Cal Poly

Dear coaches, parents, and fellow swimmers,

The culture of Orinda Aquatics has undoubtedly made me a better person. I joined the team in the hopes of becoming a faster swimmer, however, my character development far overshadowed the swimming itself. Two years ago I found myself dozing off during an English lecture and made the rash decision to dedicate myself to year-round swimming. Never for a second did I regret that decision; I only wish I had joined earlier.

It is easy to say something has changed your life, yet almost impossible to explain why. Maybe because without the dedication the coaches put into my career, I would have never gotten into the college of my dreams. The people and the culture of the team not only solidified my love for the sport, but pushed me to excel in something to a degree I never thought possible.

Only on Orinda Aquatics can one find a coach who consumes five brownies within a thirty-second time period, or a coach who pulls you out of practice to watch a Glee star sing on YouTube, or a coach that offers me his coupons to Super Cuts, and then persuades me to sit with lonely kids at lunch. Orinda Aquatics is the only team in which a coach would drive to a swimmer’s home at ten o’clock at night to drop off a gift, or convince a D1 college swim coach into recruiting a limited-ability swimmer based on her sense of humor. I could name countless unforgettable things Ronnie and Donnie have done, however none of which could fully describe the profound impact they have had on me. And a very sincere thank you to Matt, Marc, Kevin, and Sophie for your unconditional support and invaluable friendship.

The parents often get little recognition, however, they are truly the backbone to such an extraordinary team. The parents of Orinda Aquatics are a driving force behind the success of the swimmers and I cannot say thank you enough for your dedication and commitment.

To my fellow swimmers, do not make your time on this team solely about your swimming accomplishments, because in the end you will find that those numbers are insignificant compared to the journey. When I am older I will look back on high school and not think of the swim meets or the medals, but rather I will remember the incredible relationships I made and the person I became. It will be impossible not to miss the kick sets I never made or the breaststroke laps I simply found amusing, but I know that because of this team I will never take the path of least resistance or give Ronnie the opportunity to “cut the cord.”

I became the person I had always hoped to be, and I cannot thank this team enough for providing the environment to do so. With love, Elise

Gabe Oslter, Notre Dame

Dear Ronnie and Donnie:

I remember Ronnie speaking glowingly about how he was forced to scramble for a dictionary when reading Clay Sanders’ farewell letter. I resolved to make mine even more sesquipedalian when the time came to pen or type my very own senior

missive. However, sitting here now with a blank screen blinking resolutely, I feel the urge to fill it not with fancy words, but with emotions. These three stand out in my mind: confusion, love, and gratitude.

When I started swimming at OA, I was confused. I didn't know what my aquatics future held. I felt like I was stuck in purgatory in two sports, water polo and swimming. I made the decision to give swimming all of my focus during the winter and spring of my sophomore year.

Well, the transition to year-round swimming was difficult. I remember trying to catch my breath in the showers after my first practice, shaking my head in amazement and horror at my far-more-comfortable teammates. But slowly and steadily I adjusted, and as I became more comfortable in workouts and at meets, my path became clearer. When I quit water polo it was not with a heavy, conflicted heart or any sort of guilty conscience—it was with a sense of hope, an amount of optimism I hadn't felt about athletics in years. OA provided me with that positive glimpse of the future.

I was then swept up in a torrent of good will and love from my coaches and my teammates—hey, from swimmers at other clubs! It was a good fit. With no polo to interfere with my swim technique and training, I started dropping time right and left. I was feeling more powerful and in control than I ever had.

School was awesome, especially once I got used to staying awake in first period. My confidence swelled like a wave, cresting through massive bests at NCS and sparking interest from colleges I had never dreamed of attending. OA was opening up my world. Things were great.

But no honeymoon lasts forever. After meeting with several coaches over the summer, and finding a school that seemed perfect for me, I confess that I got caught up in the future instead of staying in the here and now. Recruiting trips and a general lack of focus threw my training off-course, and a less-than-stellar performance at Junior Nationals was a stern reminder that this wasn't going to be easy.

Upon seeing those swims, other coaches may have panicked or gotten angry. Not Ronnie and Donnie. Like they had done all the years before, and as they continue to do today, they stood by me with a quiet confidence. That was just what I needed. Ronnie continued to push me in workouts and Donnie entrusted me with the captainship at Miramonte. Their faith in me meant more than anything. At NCS I felt I swam the absolute best in my life. More importantly, I have gained so much by watching Ron and Don's examples of how to lead.

Now I'm leaving. Sure, I'll be back in the summers. But it's not going to be the same; it can't be, as I won't be at Soda day in and day out, soaking my gloves on the freezing pool covers at 5 a.m. or being in the shed when I'm not supposed to be. My sights are now firmly set on Notre Dame, that's a life turn I would not be taking without the help of my coaches. I'm determined to do everything I can to be a productive member of the Irish.

I will constantly reflect on all the amazing experiences and fantastic opportunities I have had because of this team. And I guess that's what I'm urging you all to do—everyone, from all the great kids in Matt's junior group, to those who have graduated and are moving on. Take a moment and think of all the things you can file under "*Orinda Aquatics made this possible for me.*" Shout-outs to the dynamic duo Chris P and Kastes,, and a major shout-out to Martin. Peace. Gabe

Christine Lum, U.C. Berkeley

I will truly miss the coaching at OA. The past four years of being in the Orinda Aquatics Senior group have taught me to be diligent, patient, disciplined, and selfless. The lessons that I have learned have been indispensable. In my career here, I have seen great times as well as challenges, but I will always miss the camaraderie and the very special coaching. Thank you very, very much for being one of the warmest and selfless people I have ever met. It is apparent through your actions that you care about each and every swimmer, and I am so thankful I was able to experience your unwavering support. As I leave for college, your lessons about character and hard work will always be with me, and I will never forget your kindness and sincere concern. Thank you for teaching me how to always live with integrity. I can never thank you enough.

"I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers." Ephesians 1:16

Megan Schussman, M.I.T.

“Ice blankets the deck, the blocks, the flags, the lane ropes. Hot steam rises from the pool. And yet, standing just outside the pool, soaking wet in a swimsuit, trying not to shiver as icicles form in my hair, I smile.”

This is the introduction to an essay I sent to countless colleges. Colleges prompt their applicants to write about something that has shaped their life. As a result, readers from schools across the country got to read about this wonderful team that has shaped *my* life. Without Orinda Aquatics, I would not be the person I am today. Through the Friday team meetings, I have learned about focus, determination, and strength. Pre-dawn January workouts have shown me the true meaning of being “above the weather”. But most importantly, embracing our motto of *Character First* has helped me to define who I hope to be as a competitor, teammate, friend, and leader.

When I joined Orinda Aquatics at the beginning of my sophomore year, I had no idea what to expect. My first day, I watched as friends embraced and laughed together, hoping that someday I would be included in those cheerful chats. As it turns out, I didn’t have to wait for “someday” to come along – a few minutes after stepping onto the pool deck, Kelly Noah found me, took me under her wing (as I’m sure she did with many of my fellow seniors), and made me feel welcomed. The team’s supportive environment made me feel at home immediately, and that sense of home has never left me. It is because of the outstanding coaches and teammates that Orinda Aquatics is my home.

To my family – thank you for driving me to every practice growing up, for being the best cheerleaders I could hope for, and for supporting me in every aspect of my life, on and off the pool deck. I love you all.

To my teammates – thank you for being some of my closest friends, and the people I am happy to spend hours with every day. This team would not be the same without you, and I am so glad to have met each of you.

Matt – since I joined OA a little late, I was never in the junior group with you, but I am so thankful that you took the time to get to know me as a senior group swimmer. At each meet, I appreciate your words of encouragement, high-fives, and loud calls of “Shhhhhhhh-man”.

Marc – I probably wouldn’t have joined Orinda Aquatics without your encouragement. You made me feel welcome and comfortable when I joined LMYA, and continued helping me through switching teams when I joined OA. Thank you for supporting me for so long, and for being such a wonderful friend and coach.

Kevin and Sophie – as newcomers to the coaching staff, I had no idea you would become such an integral part of the team so quickly. Practices wouldn’t be the same without Kevin’s semi-painful handshakes and Sophie’s expertise on injuries of all kinds. Thank you for putting up with my crazy schedule, for being a *slightly* better van-driver than Ronnie on Clovis trips, and for teaching me how to be a better athlete.

Ronnie – I don’t know what I’m going to do next year in college without you there to tell me that I’m “the only one with a personality”. I promise, I’m going to teach my classmates about humor and sarcasm, and make sure they know how to tell at least a few jokes – even if they are physics based. Even though you make fun of me daily (I’ll bring my protractor with me next time I do bands so I can get that perfect 90 degree angle), I appreciate everything you have done to help me grow as a swimmer, person, and teammate

Donnie – through injuries, surgery, terrible attendance due to AP tests and college apps, and everything else, thank you for never giving up on me. I know the girl with the wrist-brace tan-lines didn’t seem like good candidate for varsity swimming, but I am so glad you took a chance and let me be a part of your team. You have taught me more about character than I could ever thank you for, and your life lessons will be held dear to me as I continue through college and beyond. From helping me through the college process to giving me advice whenever I may need it, you have always supported me, and for that, I thank you.

Orinda Aquatics is my home, my family, and my teacher. I am so grateful to have spent three years on this exceptional team, and I am sad to be saying goodbye. I will forever carry with me the lessons I’ve learned and the friendships I’ve made. Thank you. With love, Megan Schussman

PS. Ronnie and Donnie, I expect you to perfect swim/swam/swum by winter break. You will be tested upon my return.

Anya Nugent, Hamilton

Dear teammates, coaches, and parents,

I am not sure that I will ever be able to accurately describe my incredible journey on Orinda Aquatics in words. The strong bonds I have made, the powerful lessons I have learned, the challenges, and victories- all I owe to this team.

I began my journey on Orinda Aquatics as a scared and intimidated eighth grader; completely unaware of what the next 5 years would bring me. As I grew up, the fears and the insecurities went away- I began to see my team as my family, my teammates as my siblings, and my coaches as my parents. The pool became my home and the shelter to my hard work and determination.

Though I could talk for days about how Orinda Aquatics as a whole changed me, I must specifically thank all of my teammates who helped me along my journey. Without them, I would never have seen what true maturity, determination, and good ethics looked like. I would never understand the concept of getting through a hard set or waking up before the sun rises to go to yet another morning workout. I would never know what a real leader is, something I strive to be every day and am able to model after so many on this team. But most importantly, I would not have the same amazing friendships that I have built. The friends that I have made on Orinda Aquatics I know I will always be friends with, because I don't believe I can find a more impressive or inspirational group of people anywhere else. So thank you again teammates, for just simply being wonderful.

I also have to thank Ronnie, Donnie, and all the other coaches and mentors who constantly pushed me to work harder and be better. Not enough thanks could be given to show how appreciative I am to have them in my life; I honestly don't believe I would be the same person without them. Even in my darkest moments, they believed in me, and with their help I was able to achieve all of my goals. They taught me how I could be a leader, a "Character-First" athlete, and a better person; invaluable lessons I will carry on throughout the rest of my life and most certainly during my college career.

And last, but without a doubt not least, I have to thank my parents. Thank you for waking up at 4:50AM to make me breakfast and take me to morning practice. Thank you for always cheering me on during my swim meets, whether there was a torrential rainstorm or a heat wave. Thank you for never giving up on me and urging me to persevere when necessary. Thank you for allowing me to spend 5 years with the best team I could ever imagine.

Though I am now ending my journey with Orinda Aquatics, my experiences will continue to live on. I leave my team with tears in my eyes, but I know that these 5 years have prepared me for whatever else is to come. Thank you for the journey and the memories! Anya Nugent

Lucia Brammer, Lewis & Clark

Dear Orinda Aquatics,

Although I've only been on Orinda Aquatics for a short amount of time compared to others, it nonetheless has made a significant impact on me. When I started OA my sophomore year, I was terrified and extremely nervous. I didn't really know anyone and it seemed like everyone had been on the team for years. But I was surprised to find that everyone was so nice and welcoming! I've come to find that OA is like a family and I know that I can come to practice and be surrounded by friends and coaches that are always there for me.

Orinda Aquatics has played a huge role in my transformation from a grumpy teenager with no motivation to someone who realizes that hard work and integrity can help you achieve virtually any goal. Like Donnie has said countless times, in order to pursue a specific goal you must focus on yourself and who you want to be as a person. It all finally clicked this year; my senior year. I wanted to become a better swimmer and student. In order to do that, I set out to change my attitude and perspective. I started seeing each practice as a positive challenge. Even the limited time that I have after practice for homework soon started to turn into a chance to get better at time management. As said in an article that we recently read, "a positive attitude will put you back on the path to inner peace and happiness". It did. While I still have many things to improve on, I now know that it is never too late for change. As a result, I am a much happier person with more motivation and passion for what I do, and more confidence in myself. As I embark on a new chapter in my life, I have set a new goal to strive to be a good team member both on the swim team at Lewis & Clark and in the classroom. OA has given me the self-confidence to believe that I can do this.

Thank you so much to Donnie for all of the “good talks” and for being an awesome coach, to Ronnie for all you do for this team, to Kevin for always making me laugh and teaching me what a real handshake is like, to Sophie for being one of the sweetest people I know, to Matt for basically teaching me how to swim all those years ago at Sleepy Hollow (Once a Legend, Always a Legend).

Thank you everyone on OA! You guys are a big reason I enjoy swimming and coming to practice. I always have a blast swimming with you and I love the support that you all give each other. Please realize that there actually aren't a lot of teams like ours, especially when it comes to the environment and friendships that everyone shares. I wish you all the best of luck and all the happiness in the world for the next year! I'm going to miss you all very much! Thank you for everything. Lucia Brammer

Alex Shieman, Drury

Orinda Aquatics has been the place that I have spent the majority of my free time since middle school whether I was home or away from home. I've learned to enjoy myself through tough workouts and to respect others and stay positive. These valuable life lessons will definitely stay with me through college and the rest of my life. I feel confident going into college knowing that I am now a better person because of this team.

I'd like to thank my teammates for challenging me in the pool while building friendships that will last a lifetime. Thank you to the parents who put in the time to work shifts at the meets and bring breakfast after tough workouts. Finally, thank you coaches for being my mentors through high school and helping me throughout the college process.

Alex Shieman

“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.”

