

Throughout much of my junior high school career, the majority of my writing assignments have been about swim. However, I will mention that I didn't truly start writing about how much I loved swimming until sometime in fourth grade... which just happened to be the year I joined spy. I wrote stories about swimmers missing events, poems about what it meant to be a swimmer, and even an acceptance speech for being "The Best High School Swimmer of the Year." Based off of the title of that award, you can tell I wrote the acceptance letter in middle school... Obviously I didn't know a thing about high school sports.

When I began swimming in high school, the writing about swimming stopped, as there wasn't time to write. The swimming world became more serious. There were now two swim seasons going on throughout the winter and a total of 7 championship meets within a 2-month period. All I did was eat, sleep, swim, and throw in some studying. I have been the most disciplined throughout my high school experience simply because of the time management, dedication, and perseverance it takes just to be a swimmer and a part of this sport.

As I began high school swim, my freshman year was perfect. I had 0 expectations and my relay ended up qualifying to state, which was a whole other experience in itself. Sophomore year rolled around and I began dry-land training with a new trainer that only cared about results. I was told time and time-again that I wouldn't begin truly performing until Junior year championship time. Not being able to drop time or compete at my strongest level until Junior year was something I tried my best to accept, but honestly could not go forward with and I stopped dryland training right before high school championships began. It was the slowest I had been in a while and I'm almost positive that I had 0 PRs that season. The one thing that made me the most angry with myself and my choice of a dryland trainer was the fact that I barely made it into D2 Districts with my breaststroke. Something I knew I was capable of as I had done it the year before. At this point and time, swim had become a love hate relationship for me. After club championship season came to an end, I chose not to take part in summer swim as I had worked the hardest I'd ever worked throughout the winter and had nothing to show for it except for unusually slow times for myself. I almost ended up giving up swimming completely that summer. I was ready for my 5 hours nights 5-6 times a week to become freetime. I was ready for all the hard work to stop. I was ready to never see a scoreboard with my slower times on it again. And truthfully, I was ready to stop crying about every single meet I had. Very few knew that Swim was beating me up and unfortunately winning at this time. This is when my coaches, parents, and friends stepped in.

Mickey talked to me about how she knew exactly how I was feeling, and that she would be able to help me, but only if I continued to swim. And John had continued to push at the end of my sophomore year, when I was feeling the worst about swim. Since he didn't let up on me, he prepared me for the countless obstacles I have yet to face.

Luckily for me, beyond Mickey and John, I have the best parents ever. My mom and dad were understanding as to why I needed a mental and physical break from swimming at that point, but they also encouraged me to try again, to reflect on why I swim, and to overcome these obstacles and fight back. All summer, the only thing I could think about was how and why I began swimming in the first place.

I began summer swim when I was 6 years old. I was nothing special, just a kid who needed something to do in the summer. I wanted to win like any other kid and earn the rainbow ribbon. I was never sore about losing because I never cared about how I swam. But one day, I competed against a girl who beat me in a race I actually thought I'd win. My competitive instincts kicked in and I was not happy about this 25 yd loss. My mom shared with me that this

girl participated in winter swim, thus having an advantage over me. Then, there I was as an 8 year old at MCY the following winter.

I began swimming because I love to compete and the feeling of the adrenaline rush. This was something that never left my mind throughout the summer leading into junior year when I was somewhat struggling with my swim relationship. I kept thinking about how much I'd miss my SPY teammates and coaches, if I were indeed going to throw in the towel and stop swimming. SPY had become my foundation, my support system, and had taken me in as soon as I had joined, even if Mickey had to literally assign someone to me to make sure I finished to the wall.

After taking the summer off of swim training before my junior year, I still hadn't decided yet if I wanted to continue high school swim, but I did know that I was too competitive to only do high school training if I were going to continue with my swim career. However, without the support of my club team pushing me on and being my biggest competitors, it was obvious I'd never be able to train on my own at the level I did with SPY. Once again, my competitiveness and love for my teammates won out and I decided to continue high school and club swimming my junior year, which was definitely the right decision for me.

Right when I was finally back in the groove, inching closer to my national cut, knowing it was within reach and would be attainable at AA's... everything was shut down. Being that close to my swim career goal and watching the seniors realize they were done broke me down and allowed me to get a good look at how much I loved swimming. Swim was a part of my identity.

As my senior year swim season began, I was finally able to relax and enjoy the memories I was making. Although my senior year was nothing I imagined, my coaches and parents helped me make the best of it. The team was much closer this year, mentally, but physically not more than 6 feet of course. I felt like I actually had a connection to everyone, especially when we got to practice with both senior groups on Thursdays.

Being on SPY showed me the true definition of "coach" and how coaches were supposed to act. Always supportive, no matter what their swimmer was going through. Whether it was a rough season and I wanted to quit, or my senior season where I finally achieved my national, Mickey and John have always been pushing me forward to compete and swim the best that I can. To the coaches, thank you for understanding when I needed to take a step back from swim and reevaluate myself, and for supporting me the moment I mentally and physically came back. Thank you for calming my fears this season when I didn't drop time until championship season. Thank you for believing in me and boosting my confidence when I would compare myself to other swimmers who would knock me down. And thank you for teaching me all the lessons a coach could possibly teach. You have been a major part of my life since I was 9 years old. I have been a student and swimmer of yours for 50% of my life at this point. Know that I will take and use all of the lessons I have learned from you both.

To my teammates, although we act as if we dread practices, I know we all enjoy being around each other. From making bubble rings while we waited to do our flip turns, to joking about all the things we'd rather do than a Hickory set... this is the one and only team I know I will miss with my whole heart. We boost each other up during long meets, become each other's biggest competitors during championship seasons, and I know we will continue to support one another in college. Goodluck to my teammates that I'm leaving, I can't wait to support you all the way from South Carolina as I know you will do amazing things. My advice to you is stay strong, don't give up, set attainable goals, and remember why you love this sport. And to the

seniors..... I'll be missing you the most... I am excited to see what the future holds for us! I'm eager to watch those who are swimming in college!

Lastly, thank you to my parents. I would never be where I am today without you and everything you've sacrificed for me. Living in Troy gave me an option to be 5 minutes away from a local swim team. But when I wanted to move to the next level, a 45 minute drive one way, you made it happen for me. You drove me countless mornings and nights, and the 30 hours a week I spent in the car on the way to swim or in the pool actually swimming became 30 hours *you also* had to endure for me. It would've been so much easier for you to say no and stick to our home Y, but you both wanted me to compete at the level you knew I was capable of. Because of you, I am a 4 year state qualifier. Because of you, I have a team I love with coaches who do the most for me. Because of you, I own 5 high school records. And because of you guys, I know what it means to make sacrifices for the ones you love. I doubt either of you imagined that after all the other sports you two were a part of, you'd end up with a daughter who loved to spend entire weekends in a hot natatorium with almost no air circulation. Not to mention all the time you had to spend figuring out schedules because you also have a son who likes to compete in three different school sports and club sports as well. All in all, there's not a single chance I'd be anywhere close to the person I am without your love, support, and sacrifice.

Now, as I close one chapter of my life and begin writing the next, I'm off to the University of South Carolina where I'll get to put all the lessons I've learned from swimming to use. Thank you. Love you guys!