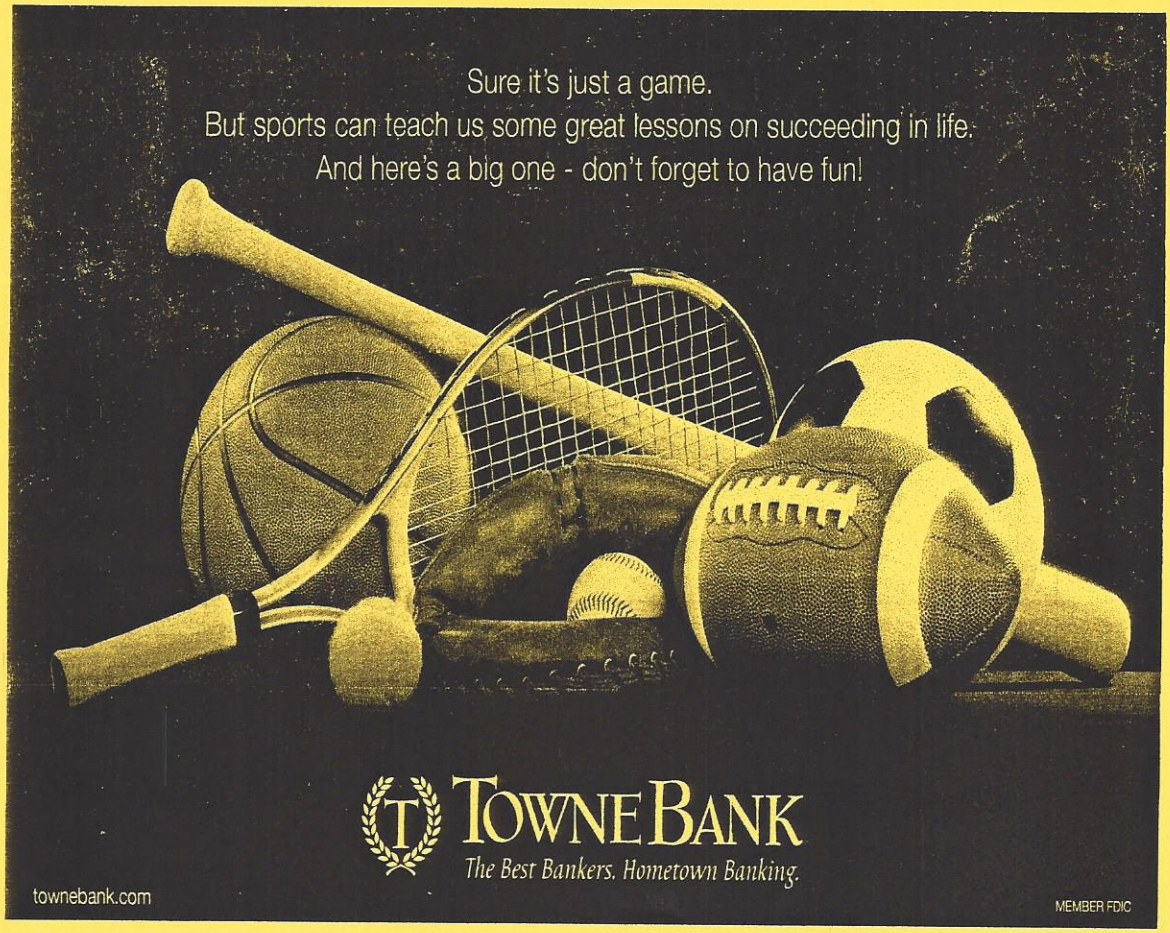
Bill Peak Memorial Scholarship Essays

Proudly sponsored by:



Sonora Curliss

How Swimming Has Affected My Life

I have always been the fish of my family. From swim lessons, swimming on the local YMCA swim team, Old Dominion Aquatic Club, and my high school swim team, I have always loved being in the pool. I love that swimming has been a great thing I can do to de-stress myself. Most importantly, I love that swimming is something that will always be a part of me.

Swimming has taught me the true meaning of every second. It has taught me that even one or two seconds can change everything. Not only when it comes to swimming, but also in my academic and social life. Through swimming I have learned to balance my time, appreciate the good times, and learn from the bad.

Swimming has also taught me to deal with things when they do not go my way. I personally have really learned this through swimming every year that I have swam. Every year I have had a new factor affect my swimming such as; new coaches, teams, standards, regions.

To me, life is like the 500 freestyle. You have to pace yourself, but also work at it and build on every lap. Sometimes you may have a bad flip turn, or catch a cramp, or maybe if things get really bad you could lose your goggles while swimming, but all you can do is continue to swim. Swim until you see the red at the end of your lane and then finish strong.

As a senior with a few months left of high school I am approaching the red at the end of my lane. It is time for me to finish strong and finish with everything I have. However, this is not my last event, I have many more 500's ahead of me in life: college swimming, studies, new coaches, new teammates, teachers and classmates along with just life in general. New challenges are in store for me, I can count on my love of swimming to help get me through the challenges. Swimming will always be a part of me, and I will continue to finish each race in life strong.

Hunter F. Dominick

"How Swimming Has Affected My Life"

The most memorable event of my swimming career is my Christmas present from last year: winter training camp, which is our equivalent of boot camp. We swam over 100 miles through five days while maintaining no contact with the outside world as we were not allowed to bring any electronic devices. Our only source of comfort was each other.

This year's training camp was military-themed, so we were forced to wear military boots wherever we went, whether that be the dryland drills on the beach or the "formal" dinner at the local seafood buffet. The coaches also determined what clothes we would wear for the week; they supplied us with two t-shirts, one sweatshirt, one pair of shorts, one pair of socks, and a whistle. The whistle, which we had to wear around our necks throughout the whole camp, including while we were swimming, was for us to blow if we wanted to give up and go home. Following the first practice, I was tempted to blow that whistle.

At the end of that first practice, I vomited and just nearly missed my coach. Although this near-fatal incident elicited a round of applause from my teammates, I began to question whether I should blow the whistle and go home. My teammates convinced me otherwise, so I trudged on.

The next few days only grew worse with ten hours of swimming and three hours of drylands a day. Some people broke down crying in the middle of the practice. I, however, was only crying on the inside.

Then, it was the infamous "Jumbo Day," the halfway point for the camp. We swam for nearly ten hours straight with our only break being the 20-minute drive over to the next pool. After we finished our practices for the day, we played a team game of laser tag while still wearing our uniform and boots. This game reminded me why I still swam: the camaraderie. Even though we were tired and hungry, we still managed to have fun without losing the competitive instinct.

At last, we reached the final practice. I was ready to go home. As I touched the wall at the end of the final swim, I immediately starting smiling because I survived. The pain was over, at least until practice the next day. When I was finally reunited with my parents, I was overjoyed to see them, and I immediately embraced them. I did not realize how much I would miss my parents.

At the beginning of my swimming career, I never would have imagined attending training camp, but a few short years later, I survived. All my hard work had finally paid off. I used to struggle to swim 100 meters, let alone 100 miles, but now I am a state swimming qualifier. Whenever times are hard, I think of what I accomplished at training camp. Compared to that week of agony, my current troubles are trivial.

Logan Eubanks

How Swimming Has Affected My Life

I learned to swim before I even knew how to run. Ever since I can remember, I have loved the water and always wanted to be swimming or playing in the water. I began competitive swimming when I was about ten years old; my first swim team was the YMCA Gators and I swam on the team for about two years. After those two years, The Gators swim team was dissolved and I had a choice to make; do I continue my training as a swimmer and join a new team I had never heard of before, or do I quit swimming altogether and try a new sport.

After deciding to join ODAC, my new journey as a competitive swimmer had begun. Once I began swimming with ODAC, I quickly realized that I was needed to change the way I do most of the things in my life in order to continue to swim. I had six practices a week, five school days, and hours of homework to do every night. In order to keep up my grades and still swim, I had to learn how to manage my time effectively. Time management is one of the biggest things that swimming has taught me. Swimming has taught me to respect the people around me; this skill will come in handy later in life when I begin my career where I am in close contact with my co-workers, superiors and others. Swimming has shown me that disrespecting a coach or a supervisor will get you nowhere but into trouble and negatively affect everyone around you as well as yourself.

The friends I have made while swimming have been very influential in my life. Within the past two years I have decided what I want to do with my adult life and where I want to study and work. This decision has mostly been made through talking to my friends at swim about various career paths and the best course of action to take to ensure my success. My friends at swim have also influenced my political ideology as well since it is a frequent topic brought up during our conversations. Overall, Swimming has made me think and act the way I do now.

Johnson, Kara

How Swimming Has Affected My Life

When I was 9, I stepped onto a pool deck for the first time. I had never swum competitively before; my skills were limited to floating for survival. I definitely would not consider it swimming. But that first step really changed my whole life.

I had recently made a big move from Southern Texas to Virginia and had not really made any new friends. I wasn't exactly the most outgoing child either. I spent my first week of practice in the afternoon group at Great Bridge, quiet, reserved, and almost drowning. However, my coaches, Emily and Steve, were determined to make me a swimmer. And that did not just include me swimming an entire meet without getting disqualified and making simple intervals, but also becoming a fully engaged member of a team. Swimming's first influence on my life was not making me an athlete, but teaching me how to be a true teammate. I went from staring at my prune-turned toes to shaking hands to smiling at the competitor next to me, even if I had no idea who they were. I stopped hiding in corners at meets, wrapped in a towel and immersed in a book, and started hanging on the sidelines to cheer for my newly made friends.

However, I think swimming has had the biggest impact in my life in my personality. Without the amazing opportunities I have been blessed with in this sport, I would not have developed the physical and emotional resiliency that now define me. During my sophomore year, I suffered a shoulder injury that could have been the end to my swimming career. However, it encouraged me to work harder and figure out how to change my stroke to maximize efficiency and minimize pain. And then, during this past summer, I learned that my asthma struggles were a lot worse than I had thought. Switching between medications and

dosage threw off my game as my breathing became fairly inconsistent. But that still didn't stop me. I learned how to push through the obstacles to become a stronger person. The hard work and motivation then became a part of the rest of my life outside swimming. Swimming made me work a great deal harder before school did, so when the intensity of my classes picked up, I was prepared and preformed well. Swimming has also given me the chance to swim off all the stress and pressures from life- from grades to classwork to family- and relax. I can lose myself in the water, and let the repetition of the laps relieve me. Additionally, I have become more confident. Believing in myself in the water and then achieving those results easily rolls over to other aspects of my life. Now, I feel like I can have control of my life, and take advantage of that to be successful in my future. I am also a more driven individual. With swimming, I now feel like a stronger and more satisfied individual.

Without swimming, I would not be the independent and proud young adult I am. Swimming teaches so much, and dedicating yourself to a program like ODAC can transform your life during the most complicated years of growing up and prepares you for whatever life throws at you.

Allen Jones

How Swimming Has Affected My Life

I am a Competitive swimmer. Who would of thought that I would be one, but I'm glad and feel honored to be part of this sport. Through the sport of swimming, I've learned many important values that make me who I am today. It taught me dedication, responsibility, and to prioritize my time wisely. Swimming tested me physically and mentally and through my experiences, it became my passion.

It wasn't wether if I was good at sport or not, when I first joined, it was just for fun. I tried many sports throughout my childhood, but something about swimming made it different. The sportsmanship, the sense that you are part something, and the difficulty of the sport, made it like no other, and it stuck with me throughout my life. I've made many friends and memories through the time I have been swimming.

Swimming is a tough sport like no other, especially when its easy to give up and hard to stay on course. Becoming great can't just happen overnight, its something you have to dedicate yourself to day in and day out. Some people might think your insane for going to practice at four in the morning, but they don't understand the overwhelming sense of accomplishment after fulfilling an end of season goal by countless hours of hard work. whether the swimmer wants to drop a

hundredth or a couple seconds in their event, their not going to achieve it without putting in quality work and without a passion for the sport of swimming. Swimming fulfilled my burning passion to be the very best I can be. This push has made me realize the importance of dedication to short and long term goals and when done correctly, it will set you up for success.

Through my years of swimming, I just didn't learn how to swim, but I learned how to be a strong, responsible person, and through that I've discovered who I am as a person and without my time at ODAC, I know I wouldn't be half the person I am today. For whatever my future holds for me, I know I am prepared with my lifelong skills that I'll be able to apply thanks to Old Dominion Aquatic Club and I'm excited to tackle my next 4 years with upmost confidence and vigor.

How Swimming Has Affected My Life

Sarah Mandis

3:00 a.m. Suddenly awakened by my alarm, I roll over and wait a few seconds, wanting to turn it off and continue my much needed sleep. But I know I can't. While my friends get to stay in bed another four hours, I throw on sweats, grab my packed bag, and take a few granola bars for the road. I hurry outside through the cold air to begin the hour and a half drive to morning swim practice.

4:30 a.m. I pull into the facility's parking lot, sitting a bit to savor the warmth before walking through the morning cold to the pool.

4:40 a.m. I plunge into the chilly water and start the hour and twenty minute practice. Back and forth, back and forth for eighty minutes.

6:00 a.m. I'm the first one out when my coach announces that we are done for the morning. I run to the locker rooms and change in a hurry, trying to get on the road and back home as fast as possible.

7:30 a.m. Arriving home with fifteen minutes, I shower, change, and get my things together for the day. Packing the night before has become routine, cutting down on precious time I need in the morning to get to school on time.

7:45 a.m. Rushing out of the house, hair still wet, and throwing everything I need for the day into my car, I leave with just enough time to make it to my first period before the late bell.

I am already five hours into my day, and it really hasn't begun yet. For the next 7 hours, my life consists of rigorous AP classes and honors courses, along with all the typical teenage activities and high school drama.

Then it's back to the pool after school, and the cycle continues.

Sarah Mandis

Swimming is my life. Ironically, although I live less than a mile from the beach, I drive 90 miles to chase my passion and dreams of being a competitive swimmer. And sometimes twice a day.

Swimming has given me a completely different outlook on life than most teenagers my age have. It has given me tools to push myself and succeed, especially in school. I'm very competitive, so I push myself to be the very best student athlete I can be. Despite my busy schedule, I remain top ten in my class. Since I frequently miss days of school because of competitions, working during study block and after school with my teachers ensures that I keep up with school work and deadlines. Swimming has also taught me how to fail. Learning from failure and making adjustments and improvements has helped me to succeed in and out of the pool. I've had my fair share of failures in the pool, but that has helped me to deal with failure elsewhere. I learned, picked myself up and kept going and worked as hard as ever.

I have been accepted to the Savannah College of Art and Design, a prestigious yet expensive art school, where I have also been offered the opportunity to swim; however, due to the nature of the school, I have not been offered an athletic scholarship yet. Receiving this scholarship would greatly ease the financial concerns I have for attending this school. Setting goals and the process it takes to reach them is something swimming has also taught me throughout the years. Right now, my goal is to attend a four year university and continue my art and swimming careers. I plan on taking advantage of all the tools and gifts this sport has provided me in my collegiate endeavors and beyond.

How Swimming Affected My Life

"200 yard women's freestyle!"

Even though it is cold outside, the temperature in the aquatic center is warmer than many meets I have attended. So many thoughts are racing through my mind as I walk to the starting blocks. This is not my strongest event, but I know I can post a reasonably good time compared to the other events. I get a quick hug and a few words of reassurance from one of my teammates, and I begin stretching to loosen my muscles; an awkward kind of dance that would look strange except for the fact that all the swimmers are warming up in the same way. When I look to my right, I see a swimmer who has beat me in the past, and on my left is a swimmer I have never met. She is in lane five, so she must be fast. I wonder if she is a "natural" athlete like some or if she has really had to work at swimming like me. I have a few butterflies fluttering in my stomach, but I have been doing this my entire life and I know what to expect. Swimming has taught me work ethic both in and out of the water, and I am ready for this race.

"Heat one steps up!"

My mind wandered back to my very first summer league meet. Many of my teammates and I started out as little guppies because we had parents or siblings who were involved in aquatics. Who else would choose to get up before dawn every day of the week including Saturdays for over a decade to go to swim practice or meets? As kids, we never really had a choice. My mother was a swim instructor and coach long before I was born. I was literally swimming before I was walking! By the age of four, I was on a swim team, and I knew that if I tried really hard in my first meet that I would be rewarded with a Krispy Kreme doughnut. This was my first lesson in goal setting. From a young age, swimming taught me to set goals and

work to achieve them. I had many doughnuts before that one and many after, but that one tasted the sweetest because I earned it.

"Heat one begins!"

It happened so gradually that I am not really sure when swimming became my choice or my passion. Swimming was just a part of normal everyday life for most of my childhood, but at some point I realized that I was not a natural athlete. I have friends and teammates that I have competed against that dive in the pool and seem to set records with barely any effort. They are just naturally fast; a perfect storm of size, shape, proportions, and natural strength. I knew that the only way I could hope to compete with these phenoms would be to work harder on what I could control. It took dedication and determination. No more practicing three to four days a week, if the pool was open then I was going to be there. There are no short cuts in swimming. Swimming taught me discipline.

"Heat two begins!"

My heat is next. I think of the football games, dances, and parties I missed. Swimming taught me to make sacrifices. Swimming is all consuming, not only in time, but also in emotions. From the joy I felt when I achieved my first age group cut, to the sadness I felt after a poor swim, to the anger I felt when I missed a best time by less than a tenth of a second. Swimming has taught me to push myself mentally and physically beyond limits that most people will never know.

"Wooooo, the whistle sounds!"

I step up on the blocks, and adjust my cap and goggles one final time. This meet is different because it is my final high school meet. In a few short months, I will be headed to

college, and my life will change drastically. My entire family is my fan club, and they are all here. Anticipating what was coming next; I crouch and bend down my head, clear my mind, grab the edge of the blocks, and exhale. Waiting for the final beep…

Swimming has taught me discipline, time management, perseverance, responsibility, determination, self-confidence, how to overcome adversity, how to set and achieve goals, the importance of sacrifice, the value of hard work, leadership, and so much more. It has made me a better person. Swimming has affected my life in more ways than one could ever imagine.

Allison Pegram

"How Swimming Has Affected My Life"

It is early in the morning. The pool deck is warm and steamy. Eight years old and in my first swim meet. I'm standing behind the starting blocks, hearing "take your mark" over and over until I am next. I fix the straps on my swimsuit that is way too big, and tighten my goggles one final time. It is now time to step up. I hear the starter then the buzzer goes off. Suddenly my body is surrounded by cold, blue water. A rush overwhelms me, I feel alive and happy as ever. When I touch the wall, I know this is something I want to do for a long time.

With the expectation to excel both academically and athletically, my commitment to swimming has taught me the importance of time management. Balancing the heavy workload of school with three hour practices that are held sometimes twice a day, and finding time to spend with friends and family, and the important necessity of sleep can be quite an undertaking.

My dedication to swimming, and excelling within the sport drives my work ethic in the pool and in the classroom. My passion for this sport helps me leave all the problems that I may face during the school day at the door, so I can give my best effort, and to motivate and push my teammates to do the same. My passion for swimming made it easier to decline invitations to social events, in order to attend practice and spend time with my teammates.

There are many great things in my life that I can attribute to swimming. I have learned to value and cherish the ability to have a routine during the week when my schedule is nearing capacity. Exercise helps release stress and other emotions I may keep

to myself. And in racing situations, I must overcome all of the distractions, so I can perform at the top level of my ability.

The only suitable way to thank this sport for what it has given me is to give back. Throughout the year, I volunteer to help teach kids in my community how to enhance their swimming abilities. I also coach the neighborhood swim team that got me hooked on this crazy sport that I love so much.

Now it is 10 years later, and I am still in love with this crazy, time consuming, and absolutely amazing sport. The suits are now two sizes too small, and the meets are more intense. I am used to itchy, dry skin, sore shoulders, and crunchy hair and immune to the smell of chlorine. But every time I step behind the block, and do the same routine of stretches I have done for years, I think of that little girl. That little girl, whose passion and dedication for swimming has grown and flourished to the extreme since that first time she stepped on that block. My crazy team and I wake up hours before the sun to go to practice and returns back home from yet another practice and a long day of school once the sun says goodnight. And tomorrow I will wake up and do it all over again.