

Cherished Memories

Mary Lou Imbraguglio

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Instructor: Ms. Sarah Ross

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What began in my life as yet another effort in weight loss became one of my most coveted achievements. After the birth of our third child, and too many pounds that were not disappearing, we purchased a small above ground pool. While the kids splashed, I began my aquatic exercise program. Within a short time, I yearned to swim laps in a larger pool, and soon we were swimming at Southeastern Louisiana University's near Olympic size facility.

Setting my sights on becoming a long distance swimmer, I had indeed begun to lose weight as my fitness improved. I discovered a real satisfaction from swimming. As I learned to improve my stroke and lung capacity, I savored the quiet world that I was immersed in during my workouts. It became my special time to allow my thoughts to glide as effortlessly as my body did while my distance increased to an uninterrupted mile. I truly loved the permanent smell of chlorine on my skin. I was a swimmer.

The coach of the adult swim team invited me to join, and I was delighted to be considered an athlete of any kind. Morning workouts with the team were now interspersed with my evenings at the pool with my children, as I prepared to enter the world of competition.

Shortly before one meet, our coach had recruited several twenty year old, physically fit men to join our team. Having now competed a few times, I was no longer a novice, but still not a veteran. I fully expected this to be like most of my team practices, faster than the slowest, but not able to keep up with the more skillful swimmers.

The pool was unusually empty for the day before a competition as some chose that time to rest and restore in order to be in peak condition for the event. I only recall the coach, these new swimmers and myself in the water. As the coach called out the directions for each lap, his voice bounced off the walls that shimmered with the under water lights that seemed to move as the water ripples above. During that practice we were doing fast, short distances reducing to zero the number of breaths per lap.

Swimming, while simultaneously holding my breath, made me swim much faster than normal. I pushed harder to reach that never-ending distance to the pool's edge. My lungs felt as if they might explode if I didn't breathe. I gradually exhaled as my lungs expanded, leaving me more desperate for that first gulp of air.

I was kicking feverishly and digging deeper with each stroke to propel me further and faster. I felt, for that moment in time, as if I were flying. It was very exhilarating! As I grabbed the rough, gravel- textured concrete that is the pool's edge, I sucked in that delicious breath. Imagine my triumph at being among the first to reach the end of the pool, coming in second only to the coach, when the people I was swimming with were at least ten years younger!

In the years since then, I am more of a spectator than athlete, as my children have grown to accomplish their own spectacular feats. I am happy to share with them that pride in a successful personal challenge. In addition, I cherish the memories of their private victories along with my own special memory of swimming at the speed of flight.

Mary Lou Imbraguglio is majoring in General Studies. Mrs. Sarah Ross was her English instructor.

Mrs. Ross' Comments: *This English 101 essay is a very good example of a personal experience shared by the writer. She clearly describes an important episode in her life and vividly reveals a part of her true "self" to her audience.*