

Karam Sandhu

Manchester Swim Team

What Swimming In The NHSA Has Meant To Me

To me, swimming is much more than a sport, it's a way of life. Sure, at six o'clock on a Saturday morning, you may hear a muffled "Let me go back to sleep!" from beneath a mountain of blankets. And sure, on a Friday evening, the most enticing thing to do might be hanging out with school friends and catching a movie. But while I may groan at the thought of a frigid plunge into an over-chlorinated pool during the time most "normal" people are eating dinner, truth be told, there's no other place I would rather be. After all these years of swimming, I live for the pool and all its chlorinated glory. I live for the twelve hours of quality time I get to spend with my swim family each week, as we chat up a storm during kick sets when the coach isn't looking, or create miniature tsunamis in the pool with our kick boards. I live for the burning sensation in my arms during a pull set, which although painful, proves to me that I am getting stronger and more determined. My aching muscles rebel in unison, yet my mind pushes me to persevere. At school, I proudly wear my chlorine cologne as a badge of honor, since an infinite number of showers could never wash away a symbol of hard work.

From winning my first medal with the summer swim team at age six, to being the varsity swim captain, the thrill of this sport has captivated me. Swimming is a metaphor for life. It is filled with ups and downs, physical and emotional highs and lows. Although it is unpredictable at times, persistence and tenacity will always pay off in the end. In fifth grade, life threw me curveball when I ended up the Boston's Children's Hospital with a life-threatening pulmonary hemorrhage. Being just a short month after one of my best swim races, I was devastated to learn that I might never be able to set foot in the pool again. In my recovery stage, I watched my teammates with admiration for their athletic capabilities, but also with envy as they sailed effortlessly through the water in a way I no longer could. But the negative feelings I had disappeared as quickly as they came. My envy turned into determination as I did the best I could to get back into the pool and practice as soon as it was safe. My admiration grew into a deeper attachment as everyone on my team - kids, coaches, and parents - sent me heartfelt cards, gifts, and even visited me in the hospital. Through all the darkness, my swim family became my inspiration. It was the swim community that helped me get back on my feet and rediscover my passion for the pool again. Nothing could keep me away from my fun-loving teammates who

have always been there for me, through the good times and the bad. I hated the doctors' endless stream of pills. I hated the tedious physical therapy sessions. But being able to tear through the water doing freestyle or fly? That was my kind of therapy.

Years after the incident, through sheer will and determination, I have defied the doctors' expectations and medical restrictions, and have become the varsity swim captain of my high school team. Since then I have grown faster, stronger, and more enthusiastic about the sport than I have ever been before. My swim career in the NHSA has taught me the everlasting values of camaraderie and perseverance. The strong work ethic and discipline that come with this sport have filtered into other areas of my life helping me balance my responsibilities. My teammates are my extended family. Together we have learned to deal with the adversity, pain, and success that come with this sport and with life.

Through every painful kick set, every two hour practice, and every six hour meet, the sport has continued to teach me the value of hard work and dedication. With each wheezing breath and aching pull, I have trained myself to stay competitive with my teammates and competitors from other NHSA teams. I have had the honor of traveling to New York with my swim family for the Eastern Speedo Championship Series, where other competitors from New Hampshire teams became my friends. I have been able to experience the long-lasting friendships the NHSA establishes between swimmers, whether they are teammates or not. These are opportunities I never dreamed would be possible eight years ago, and it has been the NHSA that I can thank for all these wonderful experiences.

I know that next year a part of me will be missing when I am not enduring the trials of each practice or arguing amongst the kids in my lane about who will be leading the next set. But this team, this family, that I have been a part of all my life will always have a close spot in my heart. That special chlorine bond will always connect us. Rather than complain about not going out on a Friday night or sleeping in on a Saturday morning, these are the kids who thrive on hard work and dedication to the sport. These are the kids, who despite swimming for three hours a day in the summer, will still make time to hangout between practices at...wait for it...*another pool*. But hey, who doesn't love a good pool party? That feeling of satisfaction I have every night before I sleep, as my body recovers from another day in the pool, I owe to the sport of swimming and the NHSA.