

What Swimming in the NHSA Has Meant to Me

When I jumped into the pool for my first swim team practice eleven years ago, I had no idea that I would be entering into a marriage agreement with the sport. I was seven years old. Do seven year olds even know what *marriage vows* are? I probably did not. Nevertheless, *from that day forward*, I was committed to swimming for life.

I had no idea that middle school drama would become so overwhelming, or that high school, and homework, and everything to do with college would test the level of stress I could handle. I had no idea that swimming would become something for me *to have and to hold* on to. Practices became my oasis. While I was swimming the only thing that mattered was swimming. All of life's other problems had to wait until I got out of the pool. Swimming became my ultimate stress reliever, even though it was only for a couple of hours a day.

I had no idea that there would be not be enough hours in the day for me to go to school, complete my homework, swim, hangout with friends, eat, and sleep. It has gotten to the point in my life where my friends don't even ask me if I'm free on a weeknight because they know my response will be "No, I have practice". Swimming has taught me how to manage my time wisely. That might mean that I have to multitask by eating on my way to swim practice, or get in my Netflix binge-watching sessions while I do homework. Sometimes it means I don't really get a lot of sleep, if any, one night, and I make up for it with caffeine the next day. *For better or for worse*, I have become a master at finding extra time in the day to get everything done, all thanks to my swimming schedule.

I had no idea that I would tear a muscle in my shoulder swimming backstroke in lane 1. I had no idea that getting pool water up my nose every single practice would give me season-long sinus infections. I also had no idea that swimming would teach me how to be a healthy person. September through March I'm sore, I'm tired, I'm sinus-infected. I also drink a ridiculous amount of water, eat a ridiculous amount of food, and spend a ridiculous amount of time

exercising. Because of these things, my friends constantly make fun of me for being both the sickest and healthiest person they know. Swimming has taught me how to listen to body, *in sickness and in health*, to understand what it needs.

I had no idea that I would fall in love with swimming. I had no idea that my team would become my second family. I love swimming and I love my team unconditionally. Until this season, I don't know if I really could have said that with as much conviction as I do now. Thinking about leaving the NHSA, my coaches, and my teammates brings tears to my eyes every time without fail. (I'm crying right now.) These are bittersweet tears though. I'm sad that I won't be able to walk onto the pool deck and immerse myself into my practice group every day. But, I am also extremely happy and grateful to have had my life touched by so many great people. I know swimming has allowed me to make friendships and connections that I will have *to love and to cherish* for the rest of my life.

I had no idea that I would have experiences swimming in the NHSA that would stay with me *until death do us part*. The pool will always be a part of who I am. Not just because I will never be able to get the smell of chlorine out of my skin no matter how many showers I take or stinky lotions I put on. It's because of the stress- and time-management skills, the ability to understand my body, the friendships and connections. These are all things I gained from swimming in the NHSA that I will have for the rest of my life.

Eleven years ago, I had no idea that swimming would take over my life. So, what does swimming in the NHSA mean to me now? Quite simply, **everything**.