

# **Hannah Deschenes, EST**

## **What Swimming in the NHSA Has Meant to Me**

For 12 years, a drippy pool deck has been home to me. The pungent smell of chlorine has been my perfume everyday. I've gotten used to the goosebumps the chilly pool water gives a swimmer every hour of every practice. I look forward to the rush that comes with a drive off the blocks into the lanes below. Being able to swim with the NHSA has meant everything to me. It's become a lifestyle that I've grown used to, and without the opportunity I would be lost. I am so thankful for every moment I get to spend living the life of a competitive swimmer.

When I was five, my mom dropped me in the water for the first time. It was love at first stroke. At my first swimming lesson, my instructor taught me how to blow bubbles out of my nose in the pool. Most five year olds are terrified of the water. While all the other students in my lesson cried and whimpered about how cold the water was, I could do nothing but enjoy myself. I pretended I was swimming across the ocean like a mermaid, searching for lost treasure or making fish friends. When you're young, as long as you can do a bob and blow bubbles underwater, you pass swim lessons. For a while swimming seemed all too easy to me. That was before I joined a real competitive swim team.

When I turned six I was old enough to be on my first real swim team. My first practice marked the start of my new life. From then on I took part in the challenge of learning to swim all four strokes legally, and how to race in a meet. I learned what it meant to be a real swimmer who practices every day and puts up real times at big meets.

As I grew as a swimmer, I grew as a person too. Being on a swim team taught me what it means to have a second family; a group of friends that mean so much to you, that to each other you're considered brothers and sisters. The people who I've practiced next to all my life, the ones who've suffered through the hardest sets with me, and learned the most technical drills next to me are the people who inspired me to keep swimming every day. Any success I've had in the sport of swimming, I owe to all of them.

Swimming competitively also taught me the art of patience. And that not every attempt made can be successful, but that good things come to those who wait, and also those who practice hard. For all the times I've raced, I can only name a few times I've been completely satisfied with my final outcome. But I've learned every goal missed was a step closer in building me into the swimmer, and the person I am today. I can truly say that is an outcome I am satisfied with.

There's no way for me to completely sum up what swimming with the NHSA has meant to me. When I look back on everything this organization has helped me accomplish I realized I could not thank them enough. Knowing that this summer's season will be my last brings with it the greatest feeling of melancholy. Although my day of competitive swimming in New Hampshire is ending, everything I've gained from my many seasons of swimming have meant everything to me as a swimmer and as a person.

## **GRANT LEVASSEUR, ESC**

### **What Swimming in the NHSA Meant to Me**

I can remember the exact moment when I knew that I wanted to swim. I just finished swim lessons and the swim team when about to take over the pool. They were all goofing off as the dove in and I couldn't believe how fast they went. I wanted that. The next year I joined the swim team. For most of my 12 years as an NHSA swimmer I had been the young kid in the group with kids older than me. I was that kid who just wanted to be friends with everyone. I looked up to the older kids. I didn't just admire how fast they were. I saw the comradery that they had between each other and also with our coach. I wanted to be like them. Swimming and the NHSA allowed them to form these bonds and let me do the same thing. Swimming became my passion. It helped me change from that annoying kid in practice to the leader that I am today. That was the most I ever struggled in practice. Every day I would push myself to keep up with the boys older than me. These were kids with Junior National cuts, but I would hang in there. Every practice I would show up excited to prove myself. My coach even remarked that I would always be smiling as I hopped down the stairs for practice each day. Every NHSA States I'm trying to chase down their records that they broke only a year or 2 before. Swimming taught me what hard work was and the importance of dedication. Now I am the older kid. I get to lead the lane now. I need to be the role model and swimming in the NHSA that long has prepared me to do that. My coach and I are very close now. I know that I can talk to him about any problem I have. He'll even ask for my feedback about sets sometimes. This bond with my coach gives me extra confidence in my training. I use my coach more now than I ever have. Just like many of those who graduated before me, I will definitely stay in touch with him after I graduate. To this day, friends outside of swimming joke that whenever they invite me somewhere, my answer is, "I can't. I have practice." When I do actually get to have a life outside of swimming, I am usually late because of practice with crazy swimmer hair and goggle marks still fresh on my face. My hair gets so dyed from the chlorine that I have perpetually bleached hair. My barber has a heart attack from how bad my hair is after so many hours in the pool. I never have to worry about body odor either because I

always smell of chlorine. I would not give up any of this. The chlorine and crazy hair show how hard I worked to become the swimmer and person that I am.

Swimming and the NHSA changed me into the person I am today. Some people say that we spend all this time training for just minutes of racing. There's so much more than that. It gave me skills that would last a lifetime. I taught me leadership, perseverance, dedication and so many more. I think that most important is how to have fun when it gets hard. I went from this annoying kid that used to drive my coach crazy to a mostly mature senior that only sometimes makes his coach mildly annoyed. The bonds I have formed through swimming in the NHSA with my friends and my coach will last a lifetime. Swimming and the NHSA let me work on being the best I could be and it gave me years of fun too.

## **MEGAN POREMBA, MST**

### **What Swimming In The NHSA Has Meant To Me**

I can still remember my first swim lesson when I was four years old. I was the only one in the group who always wanted to swim the entire length of the pool rather than get out halfway. I was so excited to be just like my three older siblings who swam for what felt like hours on end and always got out of the water with a smile on their faces. When I jumped into the water for that first swim lesson, I did not realize that, fourteen years later, I would still be jumping into the water everyday for practice, that swimming would shape me into the athlete and the leader I am today, and that the option to stop swimming halfway would end very quickly. Swimming is so much more than a sport to me and to every swimmer I have ever known. It's a way of life I am so accustomed to that the thought of quitting is heartbreaking and something I would never dare to do. Sure, I complain about waking up at six in the morning on a Saturday for practice or missing out on hanging with friends, but deep down I am proud of the chlorine scent I carry with me everywhere and the goggle marks permanently etched into my face. Squeezing my body into a suit three sizes too small may be painstaking and agonizing business, but there

is honestly no other way I'd ever want to get ready for a meet. The friends I have made through swimming are people I will have a special bond with forever. I don't have swim friends, I have a swim family. The people I get into the water with for two hours everyday are too close to call friends. The swim families I've had over the years are more incredible than I could've ever asked for or imagined.

When I moved from a different state to New Hampshire, I was scared out of my mind not because I would have to pack up my entire house or switch schools, but because I was leaving the comfort of my first swim team behind and moving to the unknown. I was beyond shocked when, after one week, I was completely integrated into my new team and felt like I had been there for years. When I switched teams again a couple years later, the transition was just as seamless and painless as the first. Nobody at school quite understands the closeness I have with my swim family and they definitely do not understand why

I'd ever spend an entire Saturday after morning practice hanging out with the same people I see everyday of the week. To me, it's just the natural thing to do. My teammates know me better than I know myself and have been there for me whenever I need it. Through my years of swimming, I have gained so much confidence in who I am as an athlete and as a person. Over a year ago, I began to feel small, sharp pains in my back that grew into a serious injury. I spent the entire spring in physical therapy, but, when I hopped into the pool for the first day of summer swimming, my back screamed with pain again within thirty minutes. Tears flooded my eyes as I slowly realized all of the work I had put in during the off season had just been undone. I had to cut butterfly, breaststroke, and even kicking with a kickboard out of my training. Every time I heard my teammates panting during an IM set that I had to

modify, I longed to feel the burn of butterfly or even to be able to fall behind in breaststroke like I always had. My confidence was torn down and I felt old and worn out, but I wasn't ready to give in just yet. I relearned how to swim my coach's practice, working harder in some sets to make up for the easier, modified sets. I cleaned up my turns and worked tirelessly on my starts to make sure nothing would slow me down. I feel like this past season I truly gave myself to swimming and did everything I could to get faster and be the best I can be for my team. I am so fortunate to have my coach and my team. They are such an amazing support system and have always been there for me when I needed it most. A year ago, I had no hope I would be able to swim in college. Now there is nothing that can stop me from continuing on with this sport and this way of life. Swimming is a part of who I am. The chlorine has mixed with my blood and runs in my DNA. When times got hard and swimming was frustrating, I used to say I would quit after I graduated high school. But now that date is rapidly approaching and the thought of quitting swimming breaks my heart. I've been swimming for longer than I can remember and I don't know life outside of it. Swimming is the perfect escape from a stressful day of school and every practice leaves me wanting more, just like my first day of it. Every time I get up onto the blocks, adrenaline rushes through my veins and I remember the love I had for swimming when I was four years old, always wanting to swim the full length of the pool.