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A Swimmer's Prerogative

Swimming is an unnatural act. It involves immersing one's self in an alien atmosphere, potentially fatal, then immediately attempting to traverse it. In the water, the very laws of physics and gravity dissolve. It can allow the smallest woman power to carry a man full-grown, while slowing a person working at optimal strength to a pace of perhaps 3 MPH. The slightest detail can mean seconds of difference, down to the hair on your toes or the angle of your hand as it enters the water.

The swiftness and smoothness of a swimmer depends completely on technique, and never on brute strength. A good swimmer, no matter how fast or slow they are going, can always be identified by their grace in the water. Are they savagely chopping and hacking at the water, as if through a wild underbrush? Or is the water parting around them like wafts of clouds do for the wind?

Yet, after seeing their harsh forms on firm ground, you'd never guess a swimmer could move with such prowess anywhere else. An ideal swimmer is broad-shouldered with large feet and little or no curves. Basically, a man. So, to see a professional, female swimmer hunched in perpetual bad posture from her over-developed shoulders, a person would be shocked indeed. Though in such an unfamiliar environment, an unfamiliar body is not too unexpected.

From all this, we can see that swimming is a deceptive sport. It appeals to oneself because of its apparent grace and gentleness on the body. But endure two and a half hour

practices, hideously long meets, and freezing October nights at the outdoor pool and you'll think otherwise. Brutal sets will leave you gasping for air and clutching cramped muscles never before known of, let alone pushed to the max, while hunger will make you its slave, your body crying for replenishment constantly, never satisfied. Horrid competitions in the windy chill of fall will leave you shivering relentlessly under wet towels, having spent exactly four minutes of the six hour meet participating, generally swimming your toughest events.

This might all have been bearable, had I been good at the sport. However, my status on the team is that of long-time member and slow-time swimmer. Staying on the team won't get me scholarships. It won't get me the satisfaction of winning. It certainly won't get me respect from my peers through my "amazing" talents. Only laughter and pity could come out of my skill.

All of this has seen me through three years of competitive swimming. After the first season's end, I vowed to quit, all of the abovementioned terrors being motivation. Yet, still I return, year after blistering, brutal year. Heaven knows what brings me back. The cons far outweigh the pros, it seems. Nearly every year brings new torture and embarrassment. Whether it's accidentally flipping into the pool for a false start, or being forced to lose miserably at the 100 Fly. Again, and again, and again. Even down to losing my cap at the beginning of one of the longest races, setting my two foot-long hair free to fan out, choking and dragging at me as it pleases. And having the newsman there to tape my ungainly progress for all of Yakima to see.

But regardless of the trials, the time consuming, badly coached suckiness of it all, I still return. I want the comradeship that comes of swimming miles together or witching

about the new coach's attempt to shrink our heads. I want the spontaneous fun of random mud fights in the softball fields or yoga amidst stares in a cramped corner at districts. I want the happiness that being healthy and surrounded by friends, old and new, brings you. And I suppose if I have to deal with a few long practices and bad meets to get them, I will.