

Cassidy Fuller – Email to the Team (with Donnie’s Introduction.

See below (page 2) a college essay that Cassidy wrote, in the midst of her most challenging time.

I received the following email from Cassidy Fuller, a 2014 OA/Campo graduate. It is significant in many ways and I wanted to share it with you. Cassidy was an incredibly dedicated swimmer. She never missed workout, was the first one in the pool, craved the work, and loved the team. She was as good a student-athlete and person as we have ever coached. In her sophomore year of high school she developed an injury that became extensive (two surgeries) and left her on the sidelines, either watching, kicking, or taking splits for over two years and throughout the majority of her high school career. She spent four days in Clovis taking splits, twice. We had several conversations about staying with the sport that she loved and “giving it another try”. She did, over and over. She never gave in. She was admitted to Washington & Lee University as a great student and a *potential* swimming candidate. She continued to work through the recovery during her freshman year and was able to race again, albeit modestly. She just completed her Conference Meet in her sophomore year with the meet of her life, swimming 56.8 in the 100 Fly and 51.4 in the 100 Free), times *significantly* faster than anything she had ever done, and becoming a multiple conference champion and an NCAA Championship qualifier. Cassidy has become one of the greatest examples of resilience and fortitude we have ever seen. Few could have endured or persevered what she went through. It came from mental toughness and a willingness to not give in. She ended up being an extraordinary leader and role model in college, just as she was through her injury. Below is her email letting me know about her meet.

Hi Ronnie and Donnie!

*I know my mom was texting you this week but I just wanted to thank you two for always supporting me with my swimming career whether it was driving me to morning practice, taking me out to dinner and ice cream to talk, or helping me to stay positive through my injury. I just had the **meet of my life** where I had **zero pain** and I got to prove to everyone that anyone can overcome any obstacles in their way.*

My coaches think that I'm probably going to nationals in a few weeks in two relays, the 800 and 400 free. I never trained to swim either of those events all year so I was surprised when they asked me. The 400 free relay was right after my 200 fly at the end of the meet and I got out the pool after my fly, dead tired, and very happy with my meet. I know my coach would have understood if I said I was too tired to do the relay but you two both have taught me that there is never a good excuse. You've always said that being tired was not a reason to not swim fast and that we train for these situations when we think that we have nothing left; it's in these moments that we prove how strong and mentally tough we are. I went up to my coach after my 200 fly and told her I was ready for the 400 free relay and there was no doubt in my mind that I could do it.

For the relay, she needed us all to split 52's to qualify for Nationals. Earlier in the day I told her I thought I could go 52-53 (even though I had never been close to that). I went a 51.4. I got out of the pool (well crawled) and got to see my team cheering for my relay on the sidelines as we went the time we think we needed for nationals. There is a senior girl on the relay who gets to prolong her swimming career another few weeks because you both have taught me never to give up and to always put everything I have into every single one of my races.

Thank you so much for never giving up on me and never letting me give up on myself. I hope OA is going well and I really hope I can come and visit sometime this summer!

Cassidy Fuller

Cassidy Fuller College Essay –

“This is an essay I wrote for college. Thank you for giving me the inspiration to write this article.” Cassidy

Character First. Coming across the Orinda Aquatics swim team, the first thing noticed besides the sea of bright red t-shirts, is the phrase “Character First” plastered across shirts, caps, swim bags. More importantly, it is demonstrated by all of the team members. At the end of my senior year I will have been a member of this team for eight years. These eight years have transformed me as a person in various ways. I have blossomed as a swimmer, achieving times I never thought possible, pushing my body to its limits and further. Even more than that, I have become a better person.

Every Friday afternoon, after a grueling week of swim practice, school, and more swim practice, a normal teenager would escape home to relax and recuperate. Several times, I found myself envying these teenagers, but more often than not, I actually feel sorry for them. While my friends are bombarded with useless propaganda by various media outlets, I go to an OA team meeting. Although each meeting has a slightly different focus, they all center on the same theme of “Character”.

I, along with forty to fifty other swimmers, dive into this theme, exploring all aspects of what it means for a person to put “Character First”. We often read articles about famous athletes from around the world who have overcome adversity to achieve success. This adversity ranges from a teenage boy who is the sole income-earner for his family, to a young OA swimmer who overcame cancer that took one of her legs. Through every article and discussion, I gain another perspective on sports and life. Never give up, persevere, no excuse is a good excuse and always be humble, are just a few of the countless lessons I have learned through these stories. Another common topic that our team often discusses and debates are articles exploring moral values that often escape teenagers, such as cheating, lying, or respecting parents.

For many years, I took these meetings for granted. I believed that the people we read about were not necessarily remarkable, but normal people who just were lucky to have an article written about them. Then I opened my eyes to the world around me. Every day, I witness not only teenagers, but adults as well, who take everything they have in their lives for granted. They neglect to realize the amazing world that we are able to partake in each day. I am not saying that I am exempt from these moments of weakness, there are times when I find myself upset that my iPhone is not the newer version. When I find myself in these lapses, I recall various articles that have touched me in the past years. I have no right to feel entitled to a new phone when there is a homeless man who found over \$4 million dollars on the street and immediately called the authorities to return the money because it was not his to take.

Although I know it would be difficult, I wish I were able to promote this “Character First” view to everyone I meet. Even though the message may be simple, it has made a lasting impression on not only my life, but also on every member of my swim team. Being on Orinda Aquatics has taught me the value of trust, humility, integrity, and hard work, just to name a few lessons. Reading article after article about regular people who do extraordinary things because they are the *right thing* to do has made me reflect on my own actions. If these *ordinary* people can change the world, then there is no excuse for me not to try.

Character has shaped my life for the better. It has opened my eyes up to a better way of living. I hope that I as continue on with my life past high school, I am able to fully live a “character first” life. At college, I will continue to do my best to live this type of live by example and help and encourage my new classmates and team members to do the same.