

Parents...

Congratulations on raising the class of youth in the world; of students, of athletes, and of people. Their discipline, maturity, respect, and humility is the by-product of your love, support, and sacrifice. You have raised and created young men and women who have profoundly impacted our team, their peers, and the community, and they will undoubtedly influence future generations and the world.

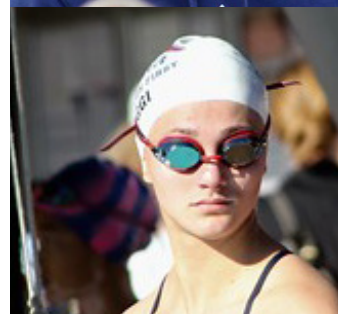
You are the silent heroes in this success story and the “we” in “we did it”.

Thank you and congratulations!

You are the bows
from which your children
as living arrows
are sent forth.

- Kahlil Gibran,
Lebanese-American novelist and poet
(1883-1931)

Maddie Smith
Margaux McDonald
Taylor Thomas
Ryan Lenahan
Aidan Vollmar
Emmie Appl
Alex Oh
Amelia Vollmar
Dalen Schnayer
Carla Leone
Sky Griffin
Luke Vandenberghe
Valeria Reggi



Margaux McDonald

Miramonte High School - Sleepy Hollow Swim and Tennis

Swimming All-American
Academic & Scholastic All American
State Finalist (3rd – 100 Back)
Summer Junior National Qualifier
Team Captain – high school and OA

Princeton University
swimming



FAVORITE QUOTE: "The future belongs to those who prepare for it today" - MALCOLM X

FAVORITE COACH SAYING: Its a slippery slope. If you don't streamline off the wall you might be robbing a bank by next week. -Ronnie

BEST MEMORY (SWIMMING): Achieving my first junior national time at summer Far Westerns while my friends were supporting me.

BEST MEMORY (TEAM): Running through multiple terminals in the Phoenix airport to catch our connection flight while everyone was worrying about ruining our taper. We made it just before they closed the doors.

LESSON LEARNED (SWIMMING): Hard work and dedication pays off.

LESSON LEARNED (LIFE): Integrity is doing the right thing even when no one is watching.

BEST "RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS" TO ANOTHER: Paying for peoples breakfast after morning practice if they forgot their wallet.

BEST "RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS" FROM ANOTHER: When I broke my goggles right before I swam the 500 free and a girl gave me hers to wear... they turned out to be prescription goggles.

"Character First": a phrase we have seen written on caps, shirts, posters, and emails. When I began swimming for Orinda Aquatics eight years ago I don't think I could have imagined how much it would shape the person that I am. "Character first" influences my actions regularly. I strive to embody it with the decisions that I make in all areas of my life. This program has taught me much more than how to swim back and forth for hours at a time. It has taught me skills I most pride in myself, and that I will carry with me into my next chapter.

I can only appreciate how impactful Orinda Aquatics has been after reflecting on the journey that I have had. When I started swimming in Matt's group at age 10, I didn't necessarily have a master plan for a decade long commitment to swimming, however I am beyond grateful for the opportunities available to me today as a result of the experiences and lessons I've learned. The environment that the hard working and dedicated group of teenagers cultivate has become my home and where I feel most accepted and appreciated. Orinda Aquatics has been a place where I have felt valued in and out of the pool no matter my race time or how fast I swam in practice. The relationships and friendships that I have made through this program are irreplaceable.

Besides learning how to push my body to it's limit in the pool, this program has taught me other valuable lessons. The weekly Friday afternoon meetings where Ronnie and Donnie discuss what it means to be a "character first" athlete and person have inspired me to question my actions and endeavor to become the best possible version of myself. I have learned not to be satisfied with giving less than my best effort. I work to push myself out of my comfort zone because that is where the most growth occurs. And most importantly, just because others may be complacent doesn't mean I have to be.

On the pool deck and in the water the "character first" attitude is shown by everyone. Being a part of Orinda Aquatics teaches you how to be selfless and want to do well not only for your own personal benefit but also for the benefit of the entire team. I am proud to be a part of a program where kids want to be huddled around the end of their teammates' lanes cheering in the pouring rain. These supportive actions make me feel like I am a part of something much bigger than my individual times that flash on the score board when my hand hits the wall.

As I prepare to embark on the next chapter of my life and move 2,900 miles away from home, I would like to thank a few people that have been important to me. Maddie, you are the best training partner and friend I could ask for. I would not be the swimmer or person I am today without you. Every day I could count on you to push me to my limit. You were there to encourage me when I was at my worst and give me a hug when I was at my best. I have never met someone as dedicated to swimming as you are, and it inspires me to want to get better and to love the sport as much as you do. I will be cheering for you next year from across the country. Maren, I am incredibly lucky that we were able to share a portion of our swim journey and I could not be more proud of you even if you're now Ronnie's favorite! Thank you, Matt, Marc, Kevin, Sophie, Dom, Donnie and Ronnie for coaching me these past eight years, and for making the environment welcoming and enjoyable. Thank you, Donnie, for showing me what it means to work hard and have unwavering character.

Lastly, thank you Ronnie for nurturing my love for the sport of swimming and always keeping me on my toes with your unmatched humor. As I look back, my experiences include rapid improvement, challenging plateau's, sickness, and ultimately the self-satisfaction in what I accomplished over many years. You were integral in all I achieved, and I don't know if I will ever be coached by someone who cares about his athletes as much as you do.

Finally, to the younger swimmers, look forward to and embrace the years of hard work and growth ahead of you. Swimming for Orinda Aquatics is an experience that I would do over again in a heartbeat. Pay attention because it will be over before you know it.

Sincerely, Margaux



Maddie Smith

Orinda Park Pool - Campolindo High School

Swimming All American
Academic & Scholastic All American
Junior National Qualifier (7th Medley Relay)
State Finalist, Campo Record Holder
Team Captain – high school and OA

University of California Los Angeles
swimming

FAVORITE QUOTE: “The best preparation for tomorrow is doing your best today” - H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

FAVORITE COACH SAYING (OR BAD JOKE): “TBD” - Ronnie

BEST MEMORY (SWIMMING): Swimming my 200 IM at NCS

BEST MEMORY (TEAM): This was hard! I have so many amazing memories. Either river rafting with the team or sprinting through the airport to make our flight after Juniors in Washington.

BEST LESSON LEARNED (SWIMMING): Hard work pays off.

BEST LESSON LEARNED (LIFE): Cherish the people that make you the happiest.

BEST “RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS” TO ANOTHER: driving my teammates to breakfast before school and bonding with them during the car rides.

BEST “RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS” FROM ANOTHER: Not exactly random, but my teammates around me who always supported and encouraged each other during tough sets.

It is surreal writing this senior letter. This moment has come faster than I ever imagined, and now I reflect on the wonderful five plus years I spent with the team. As I think about myself moving on to the next chapter of my life and I experience feelings of both eager anticipation yet sheer sadness, I think of a quote that speaks so true to me and is comforting in the midst of my mixed emotions: “how lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard” - A.A. Milne. I am incredibly grateful to have been a part of something so special– not only a swim team, but a family and community. I will cherish the deep bonds and lifelong friendships I have formed. Orinda Aquatics has given me so much, and I will forever be indebted to this program. That being said, I have a million thanks to give and appreciation to convey. I have been so fortunate to be surrounded by such supportive and passionate leaders who have shaped me into the person I am today. I am thankful for my incredible support system; my selfless parents, coaches and teammates constantly provided me with wisdom, guidance, love and encouragement throughout my journey.

I was introduced to this team through such a positive and nurturing environment cultivated by Matt and Marc. You both are such integral assets to the program, and I am so fortunate to have discovered my love for swimming under your coaching and mentorship. You helped me build such a solid foundation and have been the people to support me from the very beginning. I have such fond memories of being in the junior group, and you helped solidify my passion for this sport while teaching me values of hard work and commitment from an early age.

Ronnie and Donnie, you are indisputably the heart and soul of this team. While I am grateful to have met both of you, I am even more grateful to have learned from you. Like you have for countless others, you have changed my life and made an impact on me that I will carry with me forever. I thank you, Ronnie, for the humor, wisdom, and unconditional support. I value our relationship immensely and I will always look to you as a role model and friend. Donnie, I thank you for your unwavering dedication to the team and your true embodiment of character and integrity on a daily basis.

I vividly remember my first morning practice with the senior group. A nervous little freshman, I felt in awe standing next to Megan Colpo and Jolen Griffin, who at the time, seemed like real-life superheroes to me. Regardless of being upperclassmen and some of the fastest swimmers on the team, they immediately took me under their wing and made me feel as though I was an integral member of the group. Throughout the practice, they asked me how I was doing– this was the first time I had ever woken up at 4:45 a.m. and done 5x800’s, so I was a little outside my comfort zone. Afterwards, they took me out to breakfast. Getting to know them on a personal level and developing these new friendships was one of the most rewarding and special connections I have experienced. Their sincere generosity deeply resonated with me and sticks with me to this day. These small yet genuine acts of kindness bring me to believe wholeheartedly in the ripple effect in a system of leadership. Their actions continually inspire me to strive to be an impactful leader as they were to me.

It is crazy to believe that here I am, four years later, writing this letter. While I am leaving and moving on to the next chapter of my life, it comforts me knowing my younger sister is just starting her incredibly bright future in the senior group. I envy her as she is just at the beginning of her journey and I am so excited to see where she takes her life with the amazing people she will be surrounded by and the opportunities she will be presented with. This has truly been the best four years of my life and I can confidently say that I would do it all over again if I could.

Words do not do my feelings of gratitude, love and appreciation any justice, but I thank you all for being a part of my journey.

Much love, Maddie

Ryan

Lenahan

Campolindo High School - Moraga Ranch

Academic All American

Futures Qualifier/Jr National Relay

Team Captain – high school and OA

Campo Class President (four years)

Eagle Scout/Merlone Service Scholarship



**Boston College
swimming**

FAVORITE QUOTE: Two roads diverged in a wood and I took the one less traveled, and that has made all the difference. -Robert Frost

FAVORITE COACH SAYING (OR BAD JOKE): “Baby steps” -Ronnie

BEST MEMORY (SWIMMING): Swimming at the Texas pool

BEST MEMORY (TEAM): The spirit and cheering for finals and relays at Western Zones

BEST LESSON LEARNED (SWIMMING): You have to take one step back to take two steps forward.

BEST LESSON LEARNED (LIFE): Don’t compromise your values to achieve your goals.

BEST “RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS” TO ANOTHER: Pacing Isaac through his mile with encouraging thrusts of the counter.

BEST “RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS” FROM ANOTHER: Aidan always being willing to count and time for me



Although my career with Orinda Aquatics has been unconventional to say the least, the lessons and experiences that OA has given me are truly invaluable and have shaped me into a materially better person. My first glimpse into the swimming world was my freshman year of Campo swimming when I swam my first 500 (very slowly I might add) and unlike just about every other JV swimmer that has been coerced into their first 500, I actually enjoyed it. Later that season I was approached by Matt Armanini who asked me to consider joining OA as my emergence in distance was clearly not going to translate to the OMPA and my sprinting ability was, and still is, a work in progress.

As I started to build up my training base I saw drastic improvement very quickly, eventually dropping a massive amount of time and earning the Varsity Most Improved Award my Sophomore year. While this rapid success was very enjoyable it instilled a falsified sense that this type of success was normal and was something that I could expect in the future. When I was brought up to Senior 4 I was introduced to the real world of swimming in which struggle, failure, and disappointment is a staple of the sport.

When I came into Senior 4 Ronnie broke the news to me that my stroke was a solid 2 out of 10. I was surprised and slightly disheartened as my feeling of success started to diminish but instead I tried to use this as motivation to keep working on my stroke and get that number up little by little. The next year and a half consisted of constant trial and error. I tried endlessly to fix my stroke only to come up short of my expectations much more often than not as Ronnie kept reminding me that you have to take one step back to take two steps forward. While this period of time was without a doubt the most physically and emotionally trying time of my brief swimming career thus far, this is when I learned the most about myself and how to handle oneself in the midst of failure. Swimming has taught me to get knocked down, to get hurt, and to have tears in my goggles, but to still step up to the next race. Regardless of how frustrated I am at the end of a race I still have to humble myself and congratulate the person next to me no matter how hard it is. Learning to be happy for others even in the midst of my own let down or frustration is harder than any threshold set could ever be, but through the lessons of swimming it is becoming easier and easier.

This year was what I had been training for. Everything was falling into place and for the first time I knew that I was more than prepared for success. I had massive aspirations both for myself and for the team as a whole and when COVID-19 came and caused the season to be cancelled I was initially crushed. I thought that everything that I had worked for had simply vanished and it was out of my control. As the days of quarantine became weeks and then months I came to reflect on my experiences with Orinda Aquatics and I thought of the quote that is posted on the locker room bulletin board that I had read countless times: “Prepare the child for the path, not the path for the child.” While I was and still am very disappointed that our season was cut short, I realized that it truly is the journey that you learn from not the destination.

When I joined OA I had no idea what I was in for, but now I can confidently say that it has been one of, if not the best decision of my life thus far. I have learned so much from being a part of this team and I am truly grateful for everyone that is a part of this outstanding organization. Ronnie taught me the incredibly difficult lesson of patience as he kept pushing me and had faith in me even when I didn’t have faith in myself and for that I am truly grateful. He taught me this, while at the same time building me up and providing unwavering support and encouragement that helped make me always keep going and want more. I learned what it really means to work hard from Isaac who is the best training partner I could possibly ask for as I would not be anywhere near where I am today without his much needed yet sometimes harsh encouragement. Most importantly, I want to thank this team as a whole for teaching me how to support one another both in times of success as well as struggle. These lessons that I have taken away from my experiences with Orinda Aquatics are so much more valuable than any time, race, or meet ever could be as I know that they will serve me well for the rest of my life.

Sincerely, Ryan



Tay Thomas

Pleasant Hill Dolphins - College Park High School

Futures Qualifier

Scholar Athlete

Team Captain – high school and OA (Coaches Award)

North Coast Consol Finalist

College Park Golden Falcon Award

Pepperdine University
swimming

FAVORITE QUOTE: “Life is only as good as your mindset”

FAVORITE COACH SAYING (OR BAD JOKE): “I think Lexi is the more mature one out of the two of you” Marc

BEST MEMORY (SWIMMING): When Aidan and I both got sectional cuts within minutes of each other.

BEST MEMORY (TEAM): Always cheering with my teammates and seeing them at the end of my lane when I’m about to swim.

BEST LESSON LEARNED (SWIMMING): Everyday counts towards the bigger picture.

BEST LESSON LEARNED (LIFE): Sometimes you have to slow down to go fast.

BEST “RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS” TO ANOTHER: At sectionals this random girl broke her goggles right before her race (during finals) and I handed her mine.

BEST “RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS” FROM ANOTHER: Mrs. Percin stayed behind for time trials at sectionals to watch and take photos of my race when she could’ve have gone back to the hotel.

Seven years has gone by in a blink of an eye. That first practice I had no idea how much my life was about to change. Orinda Aquatics gave me a purpose throughout middle and high school. Not to just train hard every day but to work towards becoming a better person each day.

The motivation to work hard in practice comes easy when you are surrounded by others who want to do the same. You guys are not just my teammates but my family. Thank you to everyone for always cheering me on and for the endless amount of support. I could not have made it through some of those 200 fly’s without you guys. Whether it is in practice or in a race you never fail to motivate me to keep going and to push myself. A big example of this is Regan Stambaugh. Regan, you train through pain and do it while smiling and supporting others, you offer help with no hesitation and are an overall amazing teammate. Thank you for always giving me a hug after a race and motivating me. A huge thank you to the Senior 4 girls who always shout out motivation through a hard practice. You have pushed me to try new things. To Lexi Fok, you never fail to make me laugh when I have a hard day. Thank you for being there every time I was down.

To the coaches, thank you so much for everything!! To Matt and Marc, thank you for having the patience to teach me to slow down my stroke so it actually looked like I was swimming. Both of you made year-around an easy transition on the coaching aspect with all the jokes. Thank you for still joking around with me even after I moved on. To Kevin Lai, thank you for letting me say a fact of the day every day! To Matt Arminini, thank you for taking my swimming to the next level and bringing energy to the pool each and every day and believing in all of your swimmers. To Ronnie, thank you for taking my swimming even farther than I had anticipated. Thank you for pushing me even when I thought I was doing my best, this taught me that you can always do better. (Also thank you for letting me opt out of breaststroke!) To Donnie, although you never actually coached me in the pool you coached me so much in life. You showed me how important it is to be the best version of yourself every day. Everyone on the team sees how much you care about Orinda Aquatics. You influenced me to be a better person every day, to get out of my comfort zone and grow as a person. I will carry the words “character first” with me for the rest of my life. To Kati, thank you so much for always talking with me (I’m going to miss our chats) and trying to help manage my pain! Dom, thank you for supporting all of us even though we weren’t in your group. Thank you so much to all of you!

Lastly, thank you to my family for the endless amount of love and support. To the Fok family, thank you for “adopting” me as the fifth Fok child. I love you guys so much and can’t thank you enough for all the snacks and sibling time! I have definitely learned to go with the flow with you guys, and learned what it is like to have siblings! Curty, thank you for driving me and supporting me even when you weren’t asked. You’re the best stepdad anyone could ask for!! Mom, thank you for driving me to every single morning practice and sacrificing your time to get me around. I know sleeping in the car wasn’t easy especially in the winter. Thank you for always making sure I had everything to go for a meet and showing up to every single meet and race you could come to. (She only missed 7 meets in the past seven years and most of those were travel meets). You always brush it off with saying that it is your job as a parent but you have gone above and beyond with everything you do. You never give half effort when you do something, thank you for being my mom and my best friend. I love you so much!

Sincerely, Tay

Aidan Vollmar

Campolindo High School - Orinda Park Pool

Futures Qualifier
CIF State Qualifier
Jr National Relay
North Coast Finalist
Team Captain – high school and OA

University of the Pacific
swimming



FAVORITE QUOTE: "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." - Winston Churchill

FAVORITE COACH SAYING (OR BAD JOKE): "Be like Isaac" - Ronnie

BEST MEMORY (SWIMMING): Improving junior year, going to Junior Nationals, getting four futures cuts, qualifying for state junior year.

BEST MEMORY (TEAM): Practice with the boys, bonding with the whole team during travel meets

BEST LESSON LEARNED (SWIMMING): Before a race, thinking even one negative thought could make you crumble. Trust your training and feel unstoppable.

BEST LESSON LEARNED (LIFE): Being a good leader for someone can truly change their life.

BEST "RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS" TO ANOTHER: Singing Christmas carols at retirement home with the Leo Club, a youth organization of the Lions Club.

BEST "RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS" FROM ANOTHER: Tons of constant support from my teammates during my injury.

"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." - Winston Churchill

Coming into the program as an inexperienced but driven freshmen, I didn't even know how much I had to learn in my attempt to reach the next level. After all, my only experience with competitive swimming (besides my heated rivalries with my friends in other clubs) were the OA Polar Bears fall swim program, which included a yearly trip to the Junior Olympics meet in Morgan Hill. Through these few meets, I had a sense that my events were going to be 200 Breast and 500 free. My skinny frame was fit for a distance swimmer not a sprinter, so I decided to go with that. However, confusion about my events were the least of my concerns heading into the program. My last summer before at Orinda Park Pool was great and I had success at that level, leaving me anxious about being inferior compared to other new and fast competitors. I missed my rec friends I was wrapped in the fact that I had no relationships with the vast senior group, with many upper-classmen that seemed like giants to me. I sometimes felt lost and without connection. As I made some friends and went up from Senior 2, 3, and 4, I realized that it is likely that many swimmers joining the senior group may feel something similar to what I did, which is something that really digs deep with me. When I was selected as a captain this year I was thrilled for an opportunity to create bonds with teammates in all groups and all ages, in order to be the a great leader and influence for them. I would like to thank the coaches and my friends and teammates in grades above me for influencing me positively to help develop skills and morals to lead my younger peers with.

As a newly competitive athlete, learning my events and learning how to train consistently, the help of my teammates and coaches pushing me beyond my comfort zone was essential to my progress. During the lows of my high school swimming years, the great amount of support I had from Ronnie, Donnie and all my coaches were a main reason I recovered well. The ideals of leadership and positivity I received from them were what I used to stay connected and a part of the team even in the midst of a long term injury. Being out of the water also made me realize how grateful I am to be able to train and compete in the sport I love, something I think about every time I jump into the pool.

It is profound that a competitive swim program could transcend the expectation of athletic excellence and nurture an athlete's mind just as much. Being a part of a team that has trained the way I act and think has been an extraordinary experience, considering how my mental state had been before. As a less athletic and coordinated kid, it was a reflex for me to count myself out. Nerves weren't there to stop me from going all out in practices, but in front of the blocks I would crumble. I became so anxious about my nerves that I began to wear fast suits at dual meets and CBA+ meets, simply because I thought I needed every advantage I could get. While I don't know exactly when I broke out of this shell, I believe it happened because I realized I wasn't just training and racing for myself. When I was new to team the team, at every morning practice and every back to back race at a big meet, I would ask myself why. What was the point of doing all this work just to be crushed by my nerves when it mattered? I credit this aspect of growth to my boys, my teammates, and my coaches for helping me learn the importance of accountability in this sport. I learned that it wasn't just for my own pride, but for the success of the team and at times the success of the relay. While most times are individual, they would never be possible without the groups and teammates I was able to train alongside. Even though much of my junior and senior year I spent recovering, I cherish the times I could train and race alongside them, and I cannot thank them enough for that.

While many people have helped me on my path to where I am today, I have no idea where I would be if it weren't for my parents, as well as my amazing uncles, aunts, cousins and my loving grandparents. Without their love support, I definitely would not be heading to swim Division 1 in college, and I may not even be a swimmer.

My mom's the crazy screaming and cheering from the side of the pool deck during every single race is just the tip of the iceberg representing all she has done for my sister and I. Every meet, she'd make sure we were fed with our routine snacks even if she was late for her volunteer work, and would tape every single race no matter the significance. Even though some of the taping was of the flags or the bottom of pool due to how nervous she was watching the race, they all mean so much to me. During my most testing times during injury, she had my back every step of the way whether it was scheduling and taking me to physical therapy, scouring the internet for alternate options, and taking me to most of the appointments. I was able to maintain a positive attitude because I always knew she had my back. Being able to give her big hugs after all my races, good and bad, has been not just essential for me but also very comforting. Thank you for being my biggest fan, Mom.

While my mom has always tackled the huge swim mom role, my dad has always been supporting us every step of the way. When my sister and I were swimming recreationally at Orinda Park Pool, my dad became the head official for our swim team as a way to help and be involved. He volunteered to do this on top of running his own business from home, and still worked tirelessly for both. While my dad hasn't been to as many swim meets as he would have liked, it was only because he was working to provide for our family, and I have felt his support no matter where he was. I'll never forget all the times he woke me up when I didn't set my alarm for morning practice and took me even though I'd be late, as it was an amazing gesture that simultaneously taught me to be more responsible. Thank you so much for everything, Dad.

My sister has been my lifelong teammate. My biggest supporter and at times my competitor. We started swimming together at 5 years old, and she was definitely faster than me then. Even as we grew up into our own individuals, I am grateful that we have always shared swimming. When Amelia and I were 13, she decided to leave Orinda Park Pool to join OA, with hopes to improve into a higher level swimmer. I decided not to join her at the time, because I wanted one last summer with the team, but I hadn't realized how different it would be without her. Her presence at practices and meets was comforting to me, because she had always been there. Driving to practices and meets early in the morning wouldn't have been the same without her, not just because I can't drive, but because I consider her an amazing friend. From the car jam sessions, paying for my food when I forgot my debit card, to shoveling me to around to friends houses and physical therapy because I was too lazy to get my drivers license, I'll always remember those good times. Thank you for always being a great sister and friend.

As I embark on the next chapter of my life, I often find myself sitting and reflecting on all that I have experienced and what I have taken away from those moments. I have confidence that the morals that Orinda Aquatics have instilled in me will lead me in all walks of life that have yet to come. Whenever I face a fear, challenge, or setback, I'll always remember my favorite quote from the back of a Clovis shirt: Adjust, Adapt, and Overcome.

Sincerely, Aidan Vollmar



**Alex
Oh**

San Ramon - Head Royce High School

Sectional Qualifier
North Coast Qualifier
Scholar Athlete



Middlebury College
swimming



**Dalen
Schnayer**

Montclair - Campolindo High School

Sectional Qualifier
NCS Qualifier
Scholar Athlete



Whitman College
swimming

Emmie

Appl

College Prepreatory High School - Sleepy Hollow Swim and Tennis

Academic All American
Junior National Qualifier
North Coast Consol Finalist
National Cum Laude Society
High School Team Captain

Pomona College
swimming



FAVORITE QUOTE: “Only two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity, and I’m not sure about the former.” – Albert Einstein

FAVORITE COACH SAYING (OR BAD JOKE): [Talking about my breaststroke] “Would it make more sense if I graphed it for you? Your stroke is the cotangent of the arc of the...” – Ronnie

BEST MEMORY (SWIMMING): Getting my Junior Nationals cut at Clovis this year

BEST MEMORY (TEAM): Going out and eating dinner with the team the night of the last day of Sectionals.

BEST LESSON LEARNED (SWIMMING): Don’t just rely on achieving your goals to make you happy. Learn to enjoy the process.

BEST LESSON LEARNED (LIFE): It’s not about how many friends you have, but about the quality of the relationships you form with the friends that you do have.

BEST “RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS” TO ANOTHER: Giving my friend swim lessons so that he can compete on the triathlon team in college.

BEST “RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS” FROM ANOTHER: All of the times I received notes or help from classmates when I missed class or was struggling to understand concepts.

I often forget that I’ve only been on OA for two years now. Sometimes I feel as though I’ve been part of the team forever. I think this has a lot to do with how big of a role OA has come to play in my life and the lasting impact my friends and coaches have made on me. At any point in any given week, I always know that soon (usually no more than a couple of hours), I will be with my OA family again.

That feeling of consistency, of a steady support system, helped me through the challenges I faced during the past two years. Whether I was overwhelmed with schoolwork, stressing about college applications, or preparing for a big presentation, I always made time to go to practice and meets. I quickly learned how much better I felt after seeing everyone and spending time in the pool. For me, this came in two parts: the swimming and the social environment.

While on OA, I learned to enjoy the process of swimming rather than just counting on my successes to make the hard work pay off. Instead of only feeling accomplished after swimming a best time at a meet, I learned to also take pride in achieving a new best on a stroke set or kicking underwater for a longer distance in practice. With every tiny adjustment I made to my breaststroke, I felt excited. I knew that my stroke was improving little by little and that in itself made me happy.

Of course, the people I swam with also played a huge part in making the process enjoyable. There were many workouts I wouldn’t have been able to complete if not for the conversations, laughs, and motivational words shared between sets. There’s something to be said about the bonds you form with the people you match up with for a grueling stroke set. Those bonds feel unbreakable. I know the relationships I’ve made through OA are built to last.

I’m so grateful for the morals and values Ronnie and Donnie consistently preach through the “Character First” motto. Looking back, I think the girl who joined OA at the beginning of her Junior year had a pretty strong moral compass. But what she lacked was confidence and the ability to use and stand up for that compass. Being surrounded by so many similar-minded people with a willingness to do what’s right proved to be the perfect environment for me to come to terms with my own values and break out of my shell. By assuming more of a leadership position my Senior year, I was given the opportunity to embody my own morals while simultaneously upholding the Character First standard.

I’ve realized more and more over the past months that OA is a truly special team. It’s not easy to find a sports team where the top priority is you and your personal and emotional development and health rather than simply how well you can perform. I feel incredibly lucky to have found such a unique place, and I want to thank all of the people who play a part in preserving the team culture. To everyone I’ve ever practiced with, my junior group buddies, the parents who were always so kind to me at meets, my coaches, who were there with me every day, my family, who almost never missed one of my races, and the friends I made along the way—thank you. I will miss this team and the people who make it great dearly, but I will always look back fondly on the memories I made.

Sincerely, Emmie

Carla Leone

Great Britain - Campolindo High School

Academic All American

Western Zone Qualifier

High School Coaches Award & Most Improved

World Languages Senior Award

Coaches Award

University of Edinburgh



FAVORITE QUOTE: "People take different roads seeking fulfillment and

happiness. Just because they are not on your road doesn't mean they've gotten lost." - the Dalai Lama

FAVORITE COACH SAYING (OR BAD JOKE): "Don't forget to thank your parents and the people who helped you along the way"

BEST MEMORY (SWIMMING): All the Clovis trips. Especially my Sophomore year I had to swim the 400 IM time trial by myself, and the whole team was cheering.

BEST MEMORY (TEAM): The open water swimming trips to Tahoe. I went my Sophomore and Junior year and it was so fun and a great way to try swimming in a different way while also getting to know teammates better!

BEST LESSON LEARNED (SWIMMING): Keeping a good head position in backstroke makes it so much easier to swim and increase stroke rate. Also, the importance of stroke rate.

BEST LESSON LEARNED (LIFE): To always reflect on why you are doing something and remember to have fun. It is okay to take a step back if you feel overwhelmed or in a bad place. It is important to always find fun in what you do because then it will make it worthwhile.

BEST "RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS" TO ANOTHER: Helping organize the video for the Fong family.

BEST "RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS" FROM ANOTHER: When I first arrived on the team all of the older kids made a really big effort to talk to be in between sets and dryland and it made joining so much easier.

I first tried out for Orinda Aquatics exactly four years ago. I was an incoming high school freshman, and since I was new, I joined the senior group summer practices. It was quite intimidating because everyone else was already in high school and seemed to have known each other for a long time. Coming in I knew OA had a good reputation for swimming, and I also knew a bit about their "Character First" slogan. However, my expectations were a fast team with kids that would maybe be friendly at first and then they would just go back to their own friends. I was quickly proven wrong. So many of the older kids talked to me, helped me through workouts, and were genuinely interested in me, and that has never changed. This atmosphere is what I find truly special about OA and is what helped me get through my high school years.

I started swimming in Atlanta, Georgia when I was 6 years old. There I swam on a rec team and I loved it. When I was 8 we then moved to Denmark and I wanted to continue swimming because it was a great way to make friends and learn the language. Then, when I was 11 we moved to England and I also continued to swim there. I loved swimming everywhere and always made great friends, however, teams would often focus so much on just swimming and rankings rather than their team. What drew me to OA was the emphasis on team culture (a term that I heard for the first time at OA) in a sport that mainly focuses on individual success. While many teams focused only on their fastest swimmers, OA has made sure to help every single swimmer grow both in swimming and their personal lives.

Our team building activities such as the rafting trip, Tahoe open water, yearly team building, and swim meets have all been ways in which OA has built a strong community. I have noticed that sports teams will sometimes plan such "team-building" activities once a year as a way to demonstrate to everyone around that they are placing value on the team, however, it is not always genuine. It might be one hour of activities and then every other meet or day on deck won't incorporate any inclusivity or team spirit. At OA even things as simple as doing the covers and lane lines before morning practice and stretching before a meet place an emphasis on cooperation and leadership. It was through these activities that I got to know my teammates and made new friends. The little things matter.

I cannot express enough how important these moments were for me. Sports can often be a competitive and stressful environment with a lot of pressure. Doing that while also moving to a different country and starting high school was a huge challenge, but I don't think I could have done it without swimming or OA. The pressures to get certain times can be overwhelming, but through OA I started to enjoy the sport again and I realized that swimming is much more than just times: it is about learning discipline, consistency, teamwork, leadership, independence, integrity, and obviously hard work (and a lot more that I could not fit all into this letter; it's a great sport!).

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the entire team and all the coaches. Sometimes the smallest actions can make a big difference for anyone having a bad day or hard time. I have made my best friends through OA, and made so many friends in different groups and grades. I also owe a lot of this to my parents, who always encouraged me to continue the sport and find the fun in what I do. Without their commitment and the commitment of the team I could not have had this experience: so thank you, and I am very excited to come back and visit!

Sincerely, Carla Leone

Amelia Vollmar

Campolindo High School - Orinda Park Pool

Western Zone Qualifier

Scholar Athlete

North Coast Qualifier

Coaches Award

Chapman University



FAVORITE QUOTE: "Someday, everything will make perfect sense. So for now, laugh at the confusion, smile through the tears, be strong and keep reminding yourself that everything happens for a reason." - John Mayer

FAVORITE COACH SAYING (OR BAD JOKE): "Be above the weather."

BEST MEMORY (SWIMMING): Dropped 2 seconds and got a far western cut in 100 fly at Clovis senior year

BEST MEMORY (TEAM): Cheering intensely for my teammates at Clovis.

BEST LESSON LEARNED (SWIMMING): Working hard at practice every day pays off at important swim meets.

BEST LESSON LEARNED (LIFE): Having empathy, integrity, and being kind makes a great person and will get you far in life.

BEST "RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS" TO ANOTHER: Grabbing boards and buoys for my lane and teammates.

BEST "RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS" FROM ANOTHER: During my freshman year, I was at a Saturday morning practice on my birthday and we were about to start dryland. Everyone was lined up to get a band from the shed and I was towards the back of the line. A senior realized it was my birthday and gave me his while he took my place in line so I didn't have to wait.

When I started writing this letter, I wasn't sure where to begin and how I could possibly fit five years worth of experiences on Orinda Aquatics on a single page. Then I realized that it's a good thing I can't write it all in one letter because I have had so many amazing things that have happened during my time on OA that it just won't fit. So I hope this letter can describe even an ounce of what it meant to be on this wonderful team.

When I first joined Orinda Aquatics as a 13 year old, I remember leaving my rec team with no regrets just knowing with confidence that the team was going to help me improve my skills in the water; however, I didn't realize how much it was going to influence my life and my values.

Within one year of being in the junior group, I had already begun to feel like I was a part of the team, and thank you to Matt, my first coach on OA, who helped me adjust to the switch. I was also experiencing more intense practices all year long rather than just in the summer which was difficult to adjust to. Beginning freshman year in the senior group, I was introduced to the early morning practices, 3 hour-long Saturday practices, and the high intensity of every workout while balancing it with school work which was a big shift. It may sound difficult, which it was, but it was the most valuable thing I could have ever gone through. The process taught me discipline, determination, and how to work for goals. I was in the Senior 2 group with Jill for both my freshman and sophomore year and I want to thank her for truly taking an interest in helping to improve my technique. For my junior and now senior year, I have been in the Senior 3 group with Marc, focusing a lot more on training while keeping up good technique. With his help, I finally got a far western cut in the 100 fly at my last Clovis. I couldn't have done it without having learned how important disciplining yourself in practice is or without the support of my coaches and teammates along the way.

Through the program, I have experienced so much joy not only from big races like my 100 fly but from the kindness and encouragement my teammates have given me. Orinda Aquatics is a swim team but it's not the swimming that makes us a team, it's the people. I have met life long friends through OA and I'm so glad I became a part of the team 5 years ago. Rather than focusing on the sad parts of saying goodbye to OA, I want to share the happiest moments I've had on the team as well as thank everyone who has helped me get to where I am today.

From attempting to shoot our workouts in the trash, to the loud "last one, fast one" yells into the gutter, practices could be so difficult and I'd still wound up laughing or in a great mood throughout the workout. During swim meets at the soda center, all the girls would be behind the blocks sitting in a circle before an event and we would all hype each other up before our races. It always motivated me so much and it was like we were all in it together even though we were swimming individual races.

Next, I want to start my thank-you's by thanking my parents because without them I probably would never have started swimming in the first place, or would have quit at a young age. Thank you guys for always driving me to practice, taping my races, supporting me, and being proud of me. Mom, I remember a specific moment when I was younger and still on OPP and I told you I wanted to quit swimming. You convinced me to keep at it and I'm very glad you did because I would have never been a part of this program. Dad, I remember when we first moved to Orinda and you took me down to a swim meet at OPP and you asked me, "Do you think you'll want to swim here Amelia?" Well, thank you for signing me up because that began my love for swimming.

To my brother Aidan, thanks for being the best twin out there and having my back. Thank you for being behind the blocks for my races and being the loudest one there. And thank you for always believing in me even when I doubted myself.

To Ronnie and Donnie, thank you for the continuous support over the years in and out of the water. Although you are swim coaches, you

both truly care about all of us and how we were doing in our regular life which I think makes you more than just swim coaches; you guys are true role models. Also, a special thank you to Donnie for being one of the most inclusive and caring coaches I've ever had. I'll never forget at the Clovis meet this year on Sunday after prelims, you had to leave early yet you were still on meet mobile checking times because you texted me congratulations after my 100 fly. It meant so much to me because it showed that you still notice and care about us even if you aren't physically present at a meet, so thank you.

To Marc, thank you for all the help and encouragement you have given me throughout my entire time with OA. My improvement over the years has definitely been influenced by you. To Dom, although you were new this year, it felt like you had been a coach on OA for forever. Thank you for lifting everyone's mood at practice with the speakers that blasted music constantly... and because I can never shoot my workout into the recycling can, thanks for reminding me why I'm a swimmer.

To Carla, Sky, and many more friends, thank you for pushing me to work harder in practice and giving me constant support at meets and in daily life. You guys are what made Orinda Aquatics feel like home to me and I could not be more grateful that I got to meet all of you through this program.

Lastly, to the entire team, thank you for cheering behind my lane, struggling through sets with me at practice, and being great leaders and motivators. You guys have made OA what it is and I'm so happy I got to be a part of it.

Sincerely, Amelia



Sky Griffin

Montclair - Campolindo High School

Western Zone Qualifier

North Coast Qualifier



Diablo Valley College
swimming



Valeria Reggi

Springbrook - Acalanes High School

Western Zone Qualifier

Gap Year



Luke VandenBerghe

Las Trampas - Campolindo High School

Futures Qualifier

North Coast Finalist

NCS Team Champion - Water Polo



University of Colorado
water polo