

GIVING OURSELVES OURSELVES: A Story About Success

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I REMEMBER THE RACE WELL.

A warm August evening. Sun slipping behind trees. The stands were packed and movement on deck neared impossible. My team had gathered at the far end of the pool. Standing beneath the time-board, every one of them was red-faced.

"Go!" they screamed. The swimmer receiving this encouragement was now body lengths beyond her nearest competition. "Go!"

Katy and I had spent a year on this race. Since a disappointing performance at the same meet twelve months earlier, we had looked at every stroke, every breath, every turn. And when we finished this, we looked again.

Now these efforts were about to pay off. With ten meters to go, Katy appeared stronger than ever. At eight meters, the crowd rose to its feet. At five, the cheering hurt my ears. And at three, everything fell silent.

The scoreboard ticked off: one minute seventeen seconds, one eighteen, one nineteen.

The black screen went blank.

Katy's 1:18.9 was the fastest 100 Breaststroke ever swum by a girl of her age in our association. It exceeded her goal by almost a second. It even surpassed my expectations. 'What an incredible swim,' I thought to myself, while applause sparkled in the air.

Then I returned to the water.

Ann had not had a good summer. Overwhelmed by the dual demands of graduation and a full-time job, she had passed the season tired and frustrated. Some days I found her sitting at the end of her lane, crying. Other times I'd turn away for a moment, only to come back and find her gone. "Where's Ann?" I'd ask. Someone would tell me they'd seen her run into the change-room.

Best times had not come often in these circumstances. And this, the final meet of the summer, was offering no relief. "I'm going home," she informed me after the morning's 100 Breaststroke. Though her best time was 1:25, she had turned in a 1:31. "I just can't take it anymore."

Through the conversation that followed, I asked her to reconsider.

"What's the point?" she insisted. And then, quietly,

