

Swimming Distance

“Jenny, do I really have to swim this? The distance is so long, and I don’t want to do two laps of butterfly! In the first event when I did butterfly, I choked on water!” I complained on a sun-drenched day.

I was at Petaluma High School, standing next to my coach, Jenny. It was my first swim meet, and I was having a pleasant time. Something was bothering me, though. You could blame it all on the next event coming up. I was not looking forward to it one bit. I had done fairly well in my previous events; however, I was edgy and nervous for this one. This was a 200-yard Independent Medley. It was a long distance because it included eight laps of four different strokes.

“Next event, 200 I.M. Girls, ages 11 to 12s,” Coach Patrick called through the speakers. He was the announcer for today, and his voice sounded different through the intercom speakers.

“Come on; you can do it! Go! Go! Go!” Jenny urged as I ran over to get ready. “I just know you can!” I heard her say.

This was it, the last event of today’s swim meet.

“Swimmers, step up,” called Patrick. He waited until the six swimmers walked up to their diving blocks. Quiver, wobble, shake, went my legs. Oh dear, I thought in my head as I waited.

It was only about five seconds before my head would touch the cool water, but five seconds felt long. The swimmers bent down and held the edge of the diving blocks. I guess I looked so ready and professional-like on the diving block, but inside my stomach was on the world’s biggest rollercoaster and my heart was the one who wanted to jump out into the pool. The water smiled gleefully at me. Come on, come on, it seemed to muse.

Beep! The buzzer went off, and everybody plunged into the shallow, still water, sending it into a million ripples and crinkles. It felt good, and I relaxed for a split second, but then remembered that this was a 200-yard medley. I started kicking and soon emerged out of the silky water.

Start with the butterfly stroke, I told myself going through the order again in my head as I swam. I pulled my arms back and did a stroke. Again, again, and again. I hoped not to choke on water this time. Soon the wall was in front of me. I turned and kicked off, starting my next lap of this stroke.

Next up, backstroke, I thought. On my backstroke start, I got water up my nose, probably gallons of it. Gagging, I resurfaced. At the flags, I counted five strokes, and then did a flip turn. More water ran up my nose. It felt like a hundred needles touching it.

When I pushed off the wall for the breaststroke laps, my legs were stones, wanting to sink lower and lower. I needed to catch my breath. But I can’t stop. Keep going! I thought about what Jenny had said. I know you can, I know you can.

Before long, I was approaching the wall for my finish. I heard a swimmer coming up behind me, but I wanted to get there first.

Kick, stroke, kick, stroke. We swimmers were all like sharks of the same species who wanted the prey first. I could hear everybody speeding up.

I touched the wall, mouth full of water. I looked up and climbed out of the pool. People cheered. I never thought I'd be able to do it. Sure I was trying to catch my breath and my legs were Jell-O, but I swam it. I swam 200 yards! I did it and got second place. Now I felt strong and confident. Thank you Jenny, my mind said, wishing Jenny would get the message.