

## **Drowning in Competition**

**By Hannah Johnson**

I am the most competitive kid in the world. That's what my mom would say at least. I always fought tooth and nail to win, even if it was just a pointless, forgettable game. I just had to win. That was before my competitive spirit almost had me winning the game of who could live for the shortest amount of time. It all started at my summer daycamp, in which every Monday we went to the beach. However, the last Monday of July, 2014, would be a day I would never forget.

It was stiflingly hot on the rusted, mustard yellow bus as I rode with two of my best friends: Lizzie and Emma. I was wearing my new rainbow swimsuit and my legs kept getting stuck to the tacky, mud-brown bus seat. "Beach day stinks," an eight-year-old Emma groaned.

"I like beach days," I argued. "We can play mermaids, design our tails, and best of all - have water competitions!"

Lizzie was too busy holding her breath for as long as she could to respond, but she nodded in agreement.

"I'm totally gonna beat you both today," I claimed.

"No you're not!" gasped an equally-competitive Lizzie, completely forgetting about holding her breath.

When the bus pulled up to Silver Lake Beach, we all raced out to place our towels as fast as we could. My friends and I grabbed our goggles, lined up at the edge of the sand and began the charge, yelling, "Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!" as we hopped awkwardly between shaded areas, trying to limit the burns we got on our feet from the scorching hot sand. Once we reached the edge of the lake, we dived in, not caring about the cold. We swam until the point where we could barely touch, even though the rules forbid going past our shoulders in water.

“Whadu you wanna do first?” Emma asked.

“Water competitions!” Lizzie and I exclaimed excitedly, already eyeing up the possible race destinations.

We quickly proceeded to race each other, hold our breaths, and everything else our eight-year old minds could come up with until Lizzie proposed the next competition idea: “Let's do flips underwater!”

“No,” I retorted quickly. “I don't wanna.”

“Why not?” asked Lizzie. “It sounds fun to me.”

I embarrassingly muttered, “I... can't.”

“Really?” responded Emma in an unintentionally mocking tone. “But- they're so easy.”

I felt my face becoming red hot. “I just... can't.” There was no way I was going to tell them that I was too scared to try.

“I guess you could just spin underwater,” proposed Emma.

“That's unfair! She'll win for sure!” complained Lizzie. “She should have to do twice as many spins underwater if we want to make it fair.” Lizzie was obsessed with making things fair, but I didn't want to take any more of a hit to my pride, so I accepted her idea and we counted down to start.

“3, 2, 1!” We yelled unanimously as we took deep breaths and dove under the waves. I remember spinning normally at first, but then I remembered what a disadvantage I was at and picked up the pace. I closed my eyes as the world went dark with the spinning and dirt flying around me, and I began twisting as fast as I possibly could. After about a minute of intense spinning, I felt horribly dizzy and needed a breath of air. I should have spun around enough by now, I thought as I opened my eyes. That's when I realized, which way was up?

It was pitch dark as I tried desperately to see. I could only vaguely hear kids laughing and splashing and I tried to yell but I just swallowed water. I kicked around trying to find the bottom for surely I couldn't have gone too deep, but I couldn't find it. *Where am I?! How deep am I?! Did I*

*go past the swimming area?! Which way is up?! Why can't I see anything?! What's happening?! I can't breathe! I NEED AIR!* Thoughts raced through my head at a shocking rate as panic started to set in. I started thrashing violently as pressure gathered in my head, my chest, my limbs. Thrash. Water. THRASH. Water. THRASH! Still more water. I felt myself getting weaker and slower even though I was still in a panicked state. Swish. Solid! I grabbed the strangely soft and round object with both my arms and yanked myself up with all the bit of strength I had left. I opened my eyes and saw a very confused Noah looking down at the shivering mess that had just grasped his leg. In any other situation I would have felt humiliated. At that moment though, all I could think was *Thank God it's air! Breathe. Calm down. Oh God, what just happened?!* I let go of Noah and stood up on shaky legs and realized the water was only a few feet deep. I almost drowned when air was right above me. I shakily walked to the shore and collapsed onto the sand, thanking God for beautiful land.

When Emma came up to me and asked what I was doing, I could only mutter, “T-tired... probably won't go in w-water again today...” My teeth chattered. I could barely move. All I could do was sit on the sand and try to calm down and not think about how close I came to drowning. No one else asked me if something had happened and I didn't say anything. I didn't want that type of attention and I was confused at what had just occurred myself. I sat on the bus and stared silently out the window while my friends chattered about how many competitions they won. To me, those competitions seemed so stupid and pointless now, even though they were all I had cared about only a couple hours before. I didn't dare go into the water for the rest of the summer, and I never did another water competition.

While there is no point denying that it's much better to win than to lose, and effort is always important, it's also vital to choose your battles and realize that pride and value is far more than the number of competitions you win. I used to believe that losing meant disaster. However, I now realize that I am more likely to risk death trying way too hard to win a pointless game than I am if I take a catastrophic loss of 4-to-5 in the very official and elite sport of water competitions.