



Download an electronic copy at SwimmingWorldMagazine.com

the POOL'S EDGE

MOTIVATION ■ TECHNIQUE ■ TRAINING IDEAS ■ EQUIPMENT USAGE



FRIENDS FOR LIFE

BY KARLYN PIPES-NEILSEN

Swimming, with its lifelong friendships, offers us a tremendous gift.

The first time I saw Laurie Purdy, I envied her. It wasn't the cool nylon suit she wore or that she was popular with her San Diego teammates. What I envied was the pink heat/lane card in her hand giving notice to every 8-and-under girl that she was the fastest seed in the 50 free. I wanted to be that fast, too, so I hoped that one day Laurie and I would be friends.

Fast-forward to 2008—39 years later. Laurie (now Laurie Vidal) and I have just pushed each other during a challenging 5,000-yard workout with the Walnut Creek Masters. Both of us are exhausted, but before we leave the pool, we make plans to swim the next day—probably just as hard.

People swim for many reasons, but whether you are 9 or 79, many of us swim to be among our friends. Not just any friends—these are our swimming friends, and they hold a special place in our heart.

Here are a few thoughts about swimming friendships.

Memories: Some of my most vivid childhood memories are swimming-

related. As swimmers, we spent huge amounts of time together surviving our teenage years while attending endless workouts, marathon meets and team travel trips. Gather a few swimming buddies together, and it won't be long before the "remember whens" start flying.

Swimmers are different: Face it—we swimmers are a different breed. Five a.m. swim practices, going to school with wet hair, turning down social engagements due to swim meets or training, being dead-tired all the time—the list goes on. Yes, we make sacrifices for our sport, but what we get in return is the knowledge that we can do *anything* if we set our mind to it. Not a bad trade-off.

Survive the struggle: German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said, "That which does not kill us makes us stronger." Sounds crazy, but it is during this "survival of the struggle" that we learn the most about ourselves and each other, creating a bond that is hard to duplicate anywhere outside the pool. Swimmers also have mutual respect for

each other, as they know it takes hard work, dedication and perseverance to make it to the very top.

All ages: On a swim team, you have friends of every age, not just the students in your eighth-grade class. Sure, there is a team-pecking order with every kid knowing who is older, who is younger and when someone is aging-up. You also make friends with kids from other teams by creating relationships outside your geographical area.

One big family: Swim teams are like huge extended families. I had a whole bunch of surrogate parents who were willing to drive, feed, house and cheer for

me just like they did for their kids. I am still friends with many of these wonderful folks, and I recognize that they played a meaningful and memorable role in my life.

Frozen in time: When I swim with Laurie, my eyes do not see a middle-aged lady with a high-powered job and two kids. I see a tall, funny, 14-year old girl who was on my relay team at junior nationals when we broke a bunch of 13-14 NAG records.

The water is my long-time friend, too, for when I am in the water I am ageless. What a tremendous gift swimming has given me. ♦

To find out more about Karlyn Pipes-Neilsen or Aquatic Edge Inc., please visit www.aquatic-edge.org or email Karlyn at aquaticedge@hawaii.rr.com.



[PHOTO BY KARLYN PIPES-NEILSEN]

ABOVE » Swimming friends hold a special place in our heart.