

"My heart is moved by all I can not save:

So much has been destroyed

I have to cast my lot with those

who age after age, perversely

with no extraordinary power,

reconstitute the world."

-Adrienne Rich

The Swim

It came to me this summer that I needed to do something extraordinary. Something that scares me a bit, and moreover, that I think to be impossible. What first triggered this thought allows a bit more explanation. You see, I have never met this boy that lives in Nevada who has suffered from the most extreme cerebral palsy. He has undergone numerous surgeries- one which last year lasted over a month as he had to have his entire back re-opened because he had become infected from the first surgery (which fused a metal pole on his spine). This meant he had to lie on his stomach for six weeks with an open back as the wounds healed. I was told about this courageous young man by my mentor, professor, and friend Dr. Duncan. This 16 year old hero is his nephew. While I spent my junior year writing essay after essay, pouring hours into the Truman Scholarship application, Dr. Duncan was putting in the same selfless hours by my side. He was the only one from the beginning who felt I actually might have a chance at winning the scholarship, besides of course Mom and Dad! I was certainly an underdog in many respects. He assures me that I won it because of *me* not him, but I can assure everyone that realistically if he had not nominated me, helped me through the process, edited my essays, and drilled me for the practice interviews, winning would never have been an option for me.

So one can see how surprised I was to hear in the spring of 2006 in class that his nephew was suffering in a hospital bed, states away. I was overcome with feelings of regret (that I had not known about this and helped in some way) and sadness (that this boy is suffering and someone so close to the Duncan family). I am a "do-er" and immediately

my little wheels starting turning in my head. I had to do something but I didn't know what.

During a walk in the summer it came to me. I will swim *around* Big Birch Lake. For those who may not know this lake is sacred to the Nohner family. My Dad was raised on the lake and we have spent our summers there. My Grandma just recently sold her home to my uncle, and it serves as a kind of foundation for our family. We also own a cabin in the neighboring bay not far from Grandma's home.

My thought process went like this: "I want to raise money for this guy, I want to push myself to do something that I don't think I could do (in a small way sacrifice as he has had to sacrifice obviously in a much larger way), and make it a celebration of life." So I was told by a friend (thanks Ruthy!) to look online for swim workouts. Mind you, I have not swum a proper stroke since I was five years old and took lessons. So I typed in "distance swim workouts" on a yahoo search and boom, there was Dynoswim.com. This website is made for anyone who wants to enjoy the sport of swimming, novice, experienced, competitive, college, and masters alike. I emailed the head coach and founder, Dean Osterloh of Dynoswim, and asked if he thought this idea of mine (as I am a very novice swimmer, and admittedly out of shape gal) to make a serious swim around a lake in 2007 was a possibility. He said I sounded determined enough to do it, so he would help in whatever way possible. So, I purchased my first pair of goggles and swim cap. When I went to the local pool in June, I felt like such a poseur. I was swimming minimally, and was pumped if I lasted 30 minutes. I thought I was so good. Little did I know what would be in store for me.

As my workout assignments increased from Dean O. at Dynoswim I realized the meaning of sacrifice. Lay off the alcoholic beverages, wake up to swim at 6 AM if I can't make the night swim, and stay in the water no matter how humiliated I may feel even if short of breath after what is meant to be an easy warm-up!

By August Dean was saying that I needed to join a masters swim team. This was meant to help me so that a coach could monitor my progress and help with my stroke technique. The camaraderie of a team would hopefully be a nice support system too. As it turns out UD has its first masters team at the gym this year. They are very, very good. I have been with them for a few months now and although I can't make every practice I have been swimming at least twice a week with the team. My goal for the past two months was to swim an average of 12,000 yards per week. This means 4 practices of 3,000 yards. For those who may not know, a mile is 1650 yards.

Now I need to begin the hardest part of the training. This is the point of no return. I will have to commit myself to swimming 4,000 yards five times a week. I will also practice swimming in open water. Without the black line as a focal point it is easy to get dizzy in the water. Dean has told me that I need to work on being in the water as much as possible.

The goal of the swim has taken on many aspects. But I can say that it is rooted in love, it is meant to bring hope to others, belief and power to myself, love and support to a boy I may never meet, and a thank you to Dr. Duncan. Just as people say, when one begins to do volunteer work- the person always thinks that they will be doing all the helping and that they will transform lives. When, in actuality, that person learns more about themselves and gains more than they had ever imagined from the experience. Each day brings a new challenge, cold water, sick with a cold, have a test, it's a school break, I feel incapable of the set, etc.; but each little victory has been worth its weight in gold. No matter how far I am able to make it in August, it is my sincere hope that I can stand there that day and say that I did my best in training and on the swim, and that it was the process - not just the final swim which was a success.

Thank you for being with me, if there are any questions please ask away. Save the date for August 4th, 2007; it will be great to have you there. My family is able to host the members of anyone wanting to make the swim alongside of me. What has blown me away is that there are two others from Dynoswim who don't know me that want to fly

in and do the swim. Here are individuals that are so kind they are willing to give up a weekend, join a family they don't even know and swim around a lake!

If you feel you can contribute to being on the boat team - which will be steering the way for the swimmers and providing support/food/etc. do let me know. We have one physician who will be there at the swim, but any help for strategy and advice is much appreciated - as this is the first time I have done this! August 4th is indeed the fishing tournament on the lake, but after much consideration I think it may be a blessing in disguise because hopefully it will mean there are less recreational boats on the water causing more risks and waves. In the Spring I will have a more concrete measurement on the mileage circumference of the lake, but the estimate I believe now is that when taking the bays out of the equation it would be about a nine-mile swim. In total Big Birch lake is 13 miles. This Spring my family will circle the lake by boat noting exactly which shorelines they followed and providing a closer approximation of mileage. The swim will not include the other side of the pass (for those who haven't been to the lake the pass divides the lake essentially into 2 sections. We will be swimming one section). Because people may be interested in swimming with me and/or being present that weekend I know we will have to work around travel plans. I am attaching the map location of the lake. There are hotels in Sauk Centre which is about a 20 minute commute. I would like to make the swim on Saturday the 4th, with practices taking place Friday.

In conclusion, I will be taking pledges for the gentleman in Nevada. His back has healed by now but it is very uncomfortable for him to sit upright. Often he slouches side to side to ease the pain. His parents have to lift him in order to move him to wherever he needs to be. Any and all donations received will go directly to him. He is free to do with it what he wishes. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to those who have helped me along the way. Please email me if you would like more information, updates, etc.

With love,

Emily Nohner

Maps:

Click on the left hand side for Melrose & Sauk Centre. The red circle outlines the location of these cities. Big Birch Lake is 10 minutes from Melrose and 20 from Sauk Centre. <http://www.sitesatlas.com/Flash/USCan/MNFH.htm>

Lake:

<http://www.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&q=Big+Birch+Lake,+Melrose+MN&ie=UTF8&z=13&ll=45.766924,-94.750471&spn=0.052569,0.110378&t=k&om=1>

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