

One of my favorite sports is swimming. On weekends, mother gives me a ride to the Aquatic City Spa, which is equipped with steam rooms, water slides and both indoor and outdoor pools. My coach set up a deal with the Spa owners so that she could have lessons there with the help of one of the Spa's own coaches. My coach used to swim for China's official team, but settled down to teach in Taiwan after getting married. She is tall and lean, with sinewy muscles tracing her arms and thighs, she is ruthless in the water and could dive from the platform so gracefully that the water barely ripples. She also upgraded my swimming gear from amateur to professional, complete with slick silicon cap, designer goggles and a sleek, streamlined suit that shows off my back. When I complained that the professional swim suit was far too "revealing", she explained how its design would offer less friction when I was swimming, effectively increasing my speed. I listened to her advice, along with her criticisms for my freestyle, backstroke and butterfly,

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and she has taught me more than I could have imagined.

I began swimming when I was five. Mother would always drag me to the car after my afternoon nap, and drive me to the local pool. I absolutely detested swimming then, it was just a slower way of drowning as far as I was concerned. My swimming coach back then was named Big Bear, and he was gentle and kind, but just requiring me to let go of the pool reduced me to inconsolable sobs, for I was mortally afraid of the water. It seemed like an endless expanse of choking substance, waiting to squeeze all the air out of my lungs. I eventually overcame a bit of the fear to learn to paddle about with a board, and the floating motion of the backstroke. When I entered elementary school, Mother enrolled me for a tougher training regime at a pool owned by a private school. My coach was called Shark, and he had strict disciplines and high standards when it came to swimming. If we sneaked a rest between laps, we had to do ten extra rounds. Tests were held every week to see if we had learned enough to earn a stamp on our cards and rise up to the next level. Surprisingly, the discipline suited me. Meeting the demands of Shark was so tiring that it left absolutely no room for fear, and I began to find movements under water natural instead of restricting. But the physical demands took its toll and Mother found my current coach for me after schoolwork also started getting heavy.

Mrs. Chau has taught me the intricate details of underwater movement, how a small movement can alter your entire course and how relaxation helps with speed. Swimming has brought me a lot of joy, but most of all, it has taught me that if you conquer your fears, you can discover a whole new world.