



2011 USMS Summer LCM Nationals in Auburn, AL: This Was Where The Healing Began

By Shiana Barbosa

They say perception can make or break a person's outlook on life; I strongly concur. Nationals changed my perception and heart! I hope you are encouraged in some small way by what I'm about to share.

As a foster child athlete who had a US Naval Academy Nomination, was sponsored as a swimmer to attend the Bolles school in Jacksonville Florida, an accomplished triathlete etc... I decided to enlist in the USMC to understand that life and then go to the academy to swim and to become an officer. After graduating top of my class, 18 years old, with the highest honors from boot camp in the Marines I felt I had escaped the highly probable path of desperation and failure that so imprisons many of my foster sisters and brothers. I felt freer and more accomplished, accepted and driven than I ever had in my life. I had a new family in the marines, future goals of pursuing my athletic dreams and getting a higher degree of education.

This liberation didn't last long. Less than a month from graduating with honors, age 18 in the Marines and in uniform, I was struck by an alleged drunk driver at 7am while on my way to work. After waking from a coma and being told I would never walk again, my spirit was as crushed as were the disks in my back and my pelvic bone. My family in the marines was cut from me like the laceration on my kidney. My ability to compete, my career and dreams were immediately stolen. This was especially difficult to take because being "good" in sports was all I knew that made me more than just a foster child. If I couldn't walk and would have to bear all this pain, I could no longer be "good/ fast", so in my perception, I was no longer valuable or worthy.

Over the course of the past 17 years I have been healing in many ways. Last year, in Florida I made a post on my face book asking friends if they thought I could ever compete again with my age and disabilities. The numerous comments and words were so uplifting that I was encouraged to start swimming. I would swim when I could. I had to stop swimming due to pain, because I moved and got a new job. When I moved to NC, I knew I wanted to join an actual team. That is when I found New Bern YMCA. I swam with TRYM for about a month before the LCM meet in Goldsboro. This was my first meet since high school. I literally cried when I did not make the 50M qualifying time at Goldsboro. At the end of the

meet, I was graciously allowed to try again. I did another time trial but my body just couldn't go as fast as I was hoping. I still wanted to swim at nationals. I was so happy when I found out that I could enter the meet, 3 events, without qualifying times. I was a very late entry to the meet because I thought I wouldn't be "good" enough. There were many times I questioned my decision. Nationals was my 2nd meet since high school. Being nervous is an understatement indeed! In the end, I can't believe I had a second thought about going because it felt so right, satisfying and reviving to be part of something so wonderful with so many wonderful people!

2011 USMS Summer LCM Nationals in Auburn, AL: This is where the healing began. Ironically, I don't think any of my times at the meet were qualifying. I wasn't as fast as I wanted to be in any of my events. In all of the excitement during my events and my teammates' events, I didn't have much time to process what I was actually experiencing except that I never met my goals. They say hindsight is 20/20; I agree. My take on the meet is not one of defeat. Rather, I now celebrate my success as well as that of every other swimmer and supporter who was there...or even at home cheering us on! (Thank you to my coach and teammates for being there to call me when I needed you!)

I didn't realize it at the meet, but something was being mended in my broken heart and spirit. Healing came from the ambience and presence of so many amazing people! I was overwhelmed with emotions when I got there. Excitement and fear were so thick that my face broke out like I was 18 again.

When I first entered the pool, it was huge with amazing banners of great names of past and present Olympic swimmers hanging from the walls. Immediately, I questioned my decision on being there until I met all of my wonderful teammates from North Carolina. I just can go on and on about the level of camaraderie, support, laughter and fun we had together. Everyone should go to one of these meets to glean some positive energy and support from their fellow teammates. Truly, I was the slowest and weakest link on the team, but I never felt that way except from my personal disposition and internal self perception. In hindsight, I look back and see how much I smiled, joked, laughed, cheered for and was supported by my newly introduced teammates. I'm so thankful and happy I made it to this meet!

I especially enjoyed being part of a relay. I will never forget the 200 Women's Medley Relay because, at the end of the 50 fly, I swallowed a cup of water and misjudged the wall and had to dolphin kick on which added time to our relay. When I finished, gasping and coughing, I looked up and saw several people on the team clapping for me and heard their words of encouragement. I thought I shed some tears in the pool because I was disappointed in my performance which cost my team the gold, but hindsight perception leads me to believe it was because my team was there beside me...literally helping me out of the water with smiles on their face. Win or lose, fast or slow, they taught me a lesson of true friendship and camaraderie. Every person at that meet was valuable, smiled at and a winner for being there!

Watching others swim who were not on the team was a blessing too. When the crowd gave a 95 year old a standing ovation, the entire stadium roared at her last place finish, I saw the most wonderful side of humanity. They cheered for her as loud for as they did for those who broke national and world records.

Everyone swimmer there had a story and a dream.
Example: Roderick who was also an inspiration, because both of his legs were amputated yet he sprang from the board and swam with all of his might.

For me, healing began at nationals. I look forward to all future meets, especially in light of my new perception, because I pray that even though my body is now facing increasing remnant pain from old wounds from the accident, my heart and spirit will be touched, encouraged and blessed with just a little more healing. I would like to end this by encouraging everyone to come out to some of these meets and enjoy just being there! I look forward to seeing you all in the water!

