**Presenting: The Water Beckons**

**July 22, 2019, Le Chalet Basque**

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Hello everyone. Thank you all for being here. It really means a lot to me. Thank you all very, very much.

So, about the dress: This is not from my usual wardrobe. A few weeks ago, I went to Santa Cruz to visit my mother and asked her to help me shop for a dress for this presentation. I was specific. It had to be blue, kind of flowing: reminiscent of water. I wanted it to be, you know, conservative, professional, something I could use for my Rotary Club talks. She mentioned Macys, Kohl’s, Ross - Dress for Less, but first she took me to her favorite second-hand store.

I said, “Absolutely not” when Mom pulled this one out, but she said, “Look, it’s a mermaid! You can always take off the ridiculous bow.” I reluctantly put it on. Well, it fit and really made me feel like a mermaid. Then the cashier told us it had a blue tag, therefore, was on sale: %50 off!

So, here I am, dressed as a mermaid to introduce my new book all about how I returned to the water, to competitive swimming, after a 40-year hiatus. I am very proud to present: The Water Beckons, A Swimmer’s Story.

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In 2013, Carol Callahan, my wonderfully smart, kind and patient editor, who helped bring to life my two previous books, If These Tables Could Talk, and Turning the Tables, made a suggestion. She said, Sherry Issa and I have been talking and we know what your next book should be. People our age (!) are interested in what we did when we were young. Tell the story of how you got

back into competitive swimming!” The Water Beckons is that story. I hope you’ll find it entertaining. It is rated PG, but you’ll still find a few shocker risqué bits, and some jokes, because I have a reputation to uphold.

After reading my first two books, a friend of mine dubbed me a Weaver of Memories and I continue along those lines with The Water Beckons. I weave memories of my youth with present day, all during the excitement and commotion of a National Championship swimming meet. I’m swimming my events while telling my story. As a side note, I wrote the book in the third person. Linda remembers this, and Linda did that. It’s a way to tell parts of the story that aren’t happening to me exactly, that are happening around me. I’ll be talking about myself today.

*Read: Page. 1: In the beginning: Linda, along with her three sisters and brother, started competing when they were young. They all attended a 2-hour swim practice every day after school. Most weekends were spent at meets. Swimming meets were family entertainment. With such a large family, (*there were five of us) *they became locally well-known in the sport.*

*But it was the summer of 1968 that really put the Hepworth name on the map. That year, the four sisters were all at the right ages to make up a 200-yard medley relay: one from each age group, doing their favorite stroke, for 50 yards. Jeri swam the butterfly in the 16 and under division, Linda wouldn’t turn 15 until that autumn, so she fell into the 14 and under age group conquering the breaststroke; Tracy at 12, was a champion in the backstroke. Jodie, representing the 10 and unders, brought it all home with the freestyle. They were proud to be their team’s winning relay for that one summer only.*

*The real test came in August when the Hepworth Relay won first place at the Westchester, N.Y. County Championships. With plenty of heavy competition, the win instilled a lot of pride in the Hepworth clan. Later that year at the awards*

*party, the team presented the family with a plaque imprinted with the date and all their names. Unfortunately, they misspelled Jodie’s name, so “Judie” has been an honorary member of the relay ever since.*

That event was a highlight of my young life. Decades have come and gone since that pivotal swim. I continued swimming and competing during four years of high school and all through college and had many successes. But in retrospect, those memories pale in comparison to the thrill of my sisters sharing in the victory. After college, my life as a waitress began and I moved away from the sport.

Forty years flew by. But I never forgot the pleasure of my family swimming together, bonding over our love of the water.

Jump ahead to 2008. I was busy. As most of you know, I was working lunches at the Hilltop Café and dinners at our wonderful Le Chalet Basque. Thank you, Roger. Thank you, Patrick. And the Hilltop closed! Uh oh…What am I going to do now? How am I going to spend my days?

All things happen for a reason. When one door closes, another door opens up.

These are common phrases people say to make someone feel better. But in my case, that is exactly what happened. Out of the blue, my sister Jeri called me.

Read: Pg. 124: *“I’m so glad you’re home! I have great news. Do you remember that I told you I’d been swimming extra hard at my practices? Well, I’ve qualified for the Nationals, and the rules say that if one person qualifies, they can build a relay. Linda, I want to get our family swimming together again and revive our* famous Hepworth relay *at the Nationals! I’ve been talking to Tracy and Jodie, and they are on board with the idea. Our brother Mark’s been swimming. He also qualified, so he’ll be there too. The meet will be held in Fresno, California, close to where you live. It will be great! It’s going to be on Mother’s Day weekend. Let’s make it a surprise for Mom! What do you think?”*

When I heard those words, “the famous Hepworth relay,” my mind went straight back to the summer of 1968. I took it as an omen. This was exactly why my time had been freed up. There was no hesitation. Just like the relay event in 1968, I was not going to miss this.

It was October and the meet was in May. 6 months: plenty of time to prepare, I thought. I had to find a pool and start swimming.

At first of course, I couldn’t even swim one length of the pool without having to stop and catch my breath. But muscle memories are amazing and soon I was doing 100 laps and more. I was feeling pretty good. Two of my sisters, Tracy and Jodie live 3 hours away, so when we could, we got together to discuss our mutual progress. There were new techniques shown on the internet. We had to learn a different backstroke flip turn. A surprising change for me, the breaststroker of the family, was a new rule now allows your head to be completely submerged in the breaststroke. That used to be illegal. We had a lot to learn and a lot of work to do.

The months passed quickly and on Mother’s Day weekend, May 2009, the Hepworth sisters got into the act, so to speak. All four of us swam our hearts out, one at a time, working together as a unit, just like the old days. We recreated our relay, 40 years after first emerging onto the scene of competitive swimming, and the exhilaration was overwhelming. I emerged from the pool knowing I was once and always a swimmer.

We posted a time of a little over 2 minutes. Months of preparation, countless hours of effort and training, getting all worked up with anxiety and anticipation: all for a 2 minute event. It almost defies explanation, this love of swimming.

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After that amazing adventure with my family, I continued going to the pool on my own for a few months and soon felt confident enough to enter a local meet at USF. I saw Sharlene walking around looking official with a clipboard.

I knew Sharlene from my days at the Hilltop. I was surprised to see her and blurted out, rather abruptly, “You coach?” She answered, just as surprised, “You swim?” I was then introduced to the Mud Sharks! I’ve been swimming with them for 9 years now, going to practices faithfully, and to as many meets as I can, considering my work schedule.

In fact, this past weekend, just yesterday, The Mud Sharks were in full force at the Long Course Championships held in Moraga!

Fast-forward to 2014. The Summer Nationals were coming up again. Jeri said, “Let’s both enter the 500-yard freestyle and swim it together.”

500 Freestyle: 20 laps of the pool. Jeri does these distance events regularly. I prefer the shorter events, the 50s, 100s and 200s. The 500 is a challenge for me.

But then I remembered Carol and Sherry’s suggestion and immediately thought completing a 500 along with my sister, twenty laps translated into 20 chapters; Hmm… that could be a nice way to tell the story of my family’s swimming life. I began training for the event, and writing at the same time. It’s taken over 5 years to finish...had to have it just right!

How do I convey what it’s like to compete? How do I prepare? What do I think about when I’m swimming? Will I be able to describe it so that it’s understandable, even if you aren’t a swimmer? All these questions came to mind. I decided to take it lap by lap, event by event. In the book I swim the challenging 500 free, a 200 backstroke, a 200 breaststroke, a relay with my sister, and I finish with a sprint: 50-yard backstroke. As I’m swimming my laps, I’m explaining what

I’m doing while daydreaming, reminiscing about my life and how I got to where I am now.

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Preparation always begins with the swim practices. I grew up going to swim practices: hours in the pool, hundreds of laps, challenging laps, repetitious laps, training for the meets. The ritual of practice—sometimes difficult, but never boring—is the necessary price to pay for excellence. And sometimes, I’m known to provide some amusement for my teammates.

Read: Pg. 49

One morning, I put on a favorite swimming suit. I’d worn it more than a few times and it had lost some of its elasticity, but I liked it and thought I could get away with wearing it a few more times. After all, it was only for practice.

That particular day however, Sharlene informed us that we were going to practice starts and turns. Getting ready for a meet meant diving into the water from the starting blocks, instead of just pushing off the wall. On the first dive, my loose suit was immediately pushed down by the forward impact. I knew right away what had happened but being a pro, continued swimming along naked from the waist up, with the bunched fabric of the bathing suit producing a terrible drag in the water. Finishing the one-lap sprint and quickly covering up, I was hoping nobody had noticed. But that was not the case! One observant teammate mentioned out loud that I would have gotten extra points at a meet with a wardrobe malfunction like that. I retired that particular suit.

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In this sport, near-nakedness is commonplace and we all get used to it. I remember a cartoon I saw in a magazine many years ago. The first picture showed a woman go­ing into a dressing room on the beach. As she was changing her

clothes, a man opened the door, mistakenly think­ing the room empty. The woman, dressed only in her panties and bra, screamed and tried to cover up. The last picture of the cartoon shows the woman emerging from the dressing room wearing a very small bikini, showing much more skin than when she was wearing her underwear.

That cartoon put it into perspective. Be­ing caught by surprise in your underwear is not always fun and usually embarrassing. Bathing suits however, no matter how skimpy, can be perfectly proper. An old popular song comes to mind, “It was an itsy-bit­sy, teeny-weenie, yellow polka-dot bikini...”

As a kid, I went skinny-dipping. I loved the water, always felt comfortable in the water. When the time was right, my sisters and I took off our clothes, and ran quickly from the house, across the lawn to jump into the lake. We were supposed to be secretive, but the thrill of breaking the rules and running naked in the dark was just too much fun. Instead of whispering our intent, we made a lot of noise, laughing and tripping over the grass to get into the water before we were caught. It was exciting because it was prohibited, and I soon found out why.

One night we were splashing around, not being very discreet. One of my sisters got out of the water to retrieve a towel and noticed a pair of shoes sticking out from under the hedges lining our property. The polished leather was shin­ing brightly in the moonlight. Douglas, who lived next door, had apparently crouched into the bushes and was spying us. He was a young man and there were four naked girls swimming in his back yard. Could anyone blame him?

Loud screams of fright and righteous indignation emanated from all four of us as we grabbed our towels and went running back into the house, as upset as the cartoon woman in that beach dressing room.

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As I’m swimming my events, I’m describing each stroke and what it takes to swim them correctly: The freestyle, or crawl; the backstroke; the breaststroke and the amazing butterfly. The butterfly may be the most difficult stroke to swim, but is undoubtedly the most beautiful to watch. I have a love/hate relationship with the butterfly. When I get the rhythm going, it feels great but it is so very tiring, I can’t go very long. So, even though it’s difficult, I love to swim it.

Read: Pg. 191

*And for something new at that meet, Linda swam the butterfly leg of her team’s relay: 50 meters in a long course pool, one very long lap with no turns. It was only the second time as an adult, she had swum butterfly in a competition. She did surprisingly well. Instead of tiring in the middle, she felt her energy surge, taking 2 seconds off her previous time. It was exhilarating and she even told Sharlene that it was fun. Linda pauses to think here. Did she really admit to her coach that a butterfly event was fun? The excitement of swimming well must have clouded her brain! Sharlene acknowledged that she should never have told her that. She’ll expect Linda to be doing the butterfly from now on!*

*At the next meet, with excitement and nervousness, Linda asked if she was slated to swim the butterfly leg of the relay. Sharlene very diplomatically acknowledged that Linda’s butterfly time was 44 seconds. Yes, yes, nodded Linda with pride. Then Sharlene continued, “Your teammate Martha swims it in 36 seconds.”* Oh…so, Martha will be doing the butterfly. That made sense. I could not argue with an eight second difference. The point in all of this is to enter the fastest swimmers, especially in a relay.

I led off with the backstroke, Martha did the butterfly, and we won a medal! I’ve gone on to swim the 50 butterfly in more individual events, and have now improved my time to 40 seconds but still have a long way to go to catch up to Martha.

Besides learning the different strokes, there are the dreaded flip turns! I talk a lot about flip turns because they can make or break a race. I lost a race many years ago because of a flip turn.

Read Pg. 25:

*She was keeping up with Laurie, a very fast, younger swimmer on her team. The event was the 200-yard freestyle, eight laps of the pool. It was unusual that Linda was keeping up with one of the fastest members of their team. Both were swimming as hard as they could. Everyone was watching, Linda knew, because she could see their coach waving his towel in the air, and hear shouts of encouragement from all the spectators.*

*When she turned her head to breathe, she could see Laurie’s arms moving quickly, right there with hers. Now they were going into the last flip turn of the event. Linda was exhausted and regrettably did a slow, open turn. To this day, she does not know why she made such an amateur move. Her justification at the time was that she felt tired and really needed the extra breath of air.*

*An open turn involves swimming to the edge of the pool, stopping to hang on, bringing the legs up and then pushing off. This is a four-step process. In contrast, the flip turn, when done properly, does not stop any forward propulsion. The swimmer moves near the wall, somersaults, maintaining momentum in a half circle, and continues in the other direction.*

*While Linda was “resting” for that split second on the wall, her adversary Laurie flipped, pushed off, and was already a few strokes ahead. The crowd groaned, and went silent. The anticipation was gone, just like that. It was as if the thrill of the intense competition had been suddenly stolen from them. Linda limped home, clearly in second place. She learned a major lesson that day. She had quit, sort of, and vowed to never give up again.*

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It’s amazing that I can remember a mistake from so far back in the past, like it was yesterday.

A lot of interesting memories surfaced as I was writing this book. It became apparent how important my family has been to me, sister/family connections that I have taken for granted all my life.

Read Pg. 28

*She thinks of the family farm where she grew up, and her aunt and uncle’s pool where parties were held with her grade school classmates also enjoying the water. Many young children were frolicking in the pool when a commotion arose. During a game of “Follow the Leader” one of the young party guests jumped off the diving board following everyone else. She had neglected to mention to anyone that she could not swim. The supervising adults dove into the pool right away to save the struggling girl. She was pulled to safety, and while everything was calming down, there was another unanticipated splash.*

*The almost drowning victim’s twin sister repeated the act, jumping off the diving board, also not being able to swim! After another successful rescue, the pool party abruptly ended. Needless to say, the fact that the two twin sisters, both non-swimmers, followed each other into danger like that stayed with Linda and cemented into her brain the power of family, and especially sister connections.*

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As the book was coming together, I realized how important water has been all my life. Not just for swimming; my memories include a bath. A famous bath I took with my sister Tracy, when I was about 7 years old. Because it demonstrates more family bonding in the water, I included it:

Read Pg. 36

*When they decided to take this particular bubble bath, the two young girls thought that this particular occasion called for the entire bottle of bath soap, which made lots and lots of soapy fun. It was even more fun to use all the extra foam to start “washing” the walls of the bathroom. They first started using the washcloths, but soon dropped those in favor of only their hands. This resulted in more creative patterns of soap on the walls.*

*This was not a bath for relaxation and meditation; they became entranced. The effort to cover all the walls was rather strenuous. The sisters thought their work called out for accompaniment, referring to the concept of “whistle while you work” they had learned from Disney films. They began loudly singing their version of “I Dream of Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair.” Linda doesn’t remember who thought of it first, but one of them realized that their backsides would cover more area. They then started rubbing the walls with their entire backs and bums, keeping their movements in time with the music, such as it was. They dubbed this new form of entertainment “wall dancing” and had a discussion about how cabaret singers could adopt this new technique to sing their sultry songs.*

*Covered in bubbles, scrubbing the walls and singing away, Linda and Tracy were lost in their own little dream world of soap and water. That’s when Linda suddenly noticed a looming shadow, and saw Tracy’s feet fly through the air. Neither had heard the door open nor see their Dad come into the bathroom to see what was causing all the noise. He was not happy about the artwork that he called a mess, and reacted by picking Tracy up and getting a towel around her, attempting to clean off some of the extra suds. There were a few stern words and necessary cleaning that took some time, but ever since then, Tracy and Linda have had an affinity for bubble baths and their song.*

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You’ll see as you read that I was born in New York State, and then my family moved to Florida, with a much different climate. Florida provided many watery delights. It rains a lot, almost every day. Because of the amount of rainfall, there are deep ditches along the roads to collect the runoff, filled with water, and God knows what else.

Read: Pg. 74

*This was no concern to Linda at the time as she and her new playmate Taffy, devised a game. They collected a large pile of oranges that had dropped from the neighbors’ trees, donned their bathing suits and climbed into the water-filled ditches along the road. From their hidden positions, they rolled the oranges across the road, one at a time, with the object of getting the orange all the way to the other side, avoiding passing cars. Whenever an orange successfully made it across the road, that was a time for celebration and points were accrued. But if the orange got hit by one of the cars’ tires, always associated with a funny squish noise, well, that was hilarious. This was a win/win situation for the pre-teen girls.*

*Looking back, Linda thinks,* Really? Did I do that? I actually played in drainage ditches? *At this point in time she certainly knows the danger in such an activity. There are water bugs and water snakes in Florida, not to mention whatever grime was draining from the roads. At the time, the water appeared clean, clean enough anyway, that the stupidity of what she was doing did not occur to her. Now she is a bit horrified at the idea. Her parents did not know of this particular game; they would have put a stop to the fun.*

It is amazing what kids will do to entertain themselves, and to be honest, I still smile when I think of the hours of fun we had hunkered down in the drainage ditches.

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See what’s happening? I’m supposed to be telling you all about a swimming meet and what’s going on and I’m getting caught up in my memories. All throughout the book, as I’m swimming, I have to keep pulling my thoughts back to the competition. Where am I? Oh yeah, Freestyle, Lap 12, 8 more to go. Good thing I have counters helping me to keep track of the laps. I’m doing so much strolling down Memory Lane, it’s a wonder I’m getting through these events at all!

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Another prominent theme emerged as I wrote: The fact that I was never one of the best swimmers. My sisters all swam faster than I. Perhaps it’s because of all the daydreaming I’ve done, and still do, while I’m swimming.

Read: Pg. 253:

A while back, I ran into a woman who knew my family’s swimming history. This lady, not meaning to offend, asked how I felt about the fact that all my sisters could beat me. Although the comment stung, it was the truth.

Soon after that meeting, I found an old newspaper clipping from 1972. My sister Tracy was pictured after winning second place at the Nationals in the grueling 400 IM. The article also mentioned her gold medal finish for her participation in the 800 freestyle relay.

Later in the article, my other sister Jodie and I are mentioned for our performances in the 500 freestyle. Jodie placed 7th with 6:03 and I came in 12th with a time of 6:16: my youngest sister beat me by 13 seconds. 13 seconds is an eternity in swimming.

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Although it’s not the best scenario for me to be behind the other swimmers, it is not unfamiliar territory. In the beginning, when all my family began swimming competitively in earnest, I decided against it. At the time, I just wasn’t interested in working that hard. It seemed too difficult to learn how to swim all the strokes, the dreaded flip turns, the brisk early mornings, etc… I could go on and on about the hardships. So I stayed home while my brother and sisters went off to practice for a few months. When I finally decided to join them and learn how to swim like a pro, I was quite a bit behind. I’ve been behind, trying to catch up, ever since.

Then, I discovered there is a surprising benefit to being behind. At a meet a few years ago, I was swimming a 200-yard freestyle race in a 25-yard pool, 8 lengths. For the 200, there are no counters putting plastic numbers down keeping count, so as I made a flip turn, I wasn’t sure whether I’d done 5 laps or 7. Oh dear. What am I going to do? The good news at the time was that I was behind the other swimmers. I watched as they came into the next turn, flipped and kept going. The question was answered. I now knew I had 2 more to go. The bad news was that I was really tired, and still had 2 more to go…

And here I am, in 2014, agreeing to swim along with my sister Jeri, at a National Championship! What was I thinking? She had always been a much faster swimmer than I. But……there had been a fun incident in Texas that gave me the impression that I could now, as an adult, somehow keep up with Jeri in the 500.

Although Jeri and I live across the country from each other, when there’s the opportunity, we go to swim practices together. One of those practices unexpectedly turned into a competition. We were visiting Mark in Texas and decided to go to the pool and get in a few laps. Jeri suggested we begin with a slow 500 as a warm-up. She deliberately used the words, “slow” and “warm-up” but that’s not how it turned out.

Read: Pg. 59:

*Apparently the competitive nature of the two sisters soon took over. Linda doesn’t know who started it, but as they were swimming along, they both began picking up speed. Each sister was watching the other closely, trying to stay ahead and they ended up racing, lap after lap. It was so impromptu and such a close race that all the other swimmers noticed, some of whom stopped their own exercising to watch. Twenty laps is a long race to a seasoned swimmer and to the uninitiated, not used to such a spectacle in a community pool, it must have seemed interminable. Are they ever going to stop?*

*The sisters ended on an outright sprint, Jeri finishing just slightly ahead of Linda. As soon as they caught their breath and were able, they started laughing. Their competitiveness had taken control and transformed what was to be a casual swim into an event. Apparently it was something to see; a sizable audience had gathered. Linda herself may have wanted to watch such a race if she wasn’t the one in it! It was a mutual decision that they had done enough for the day and their “casual, just for fun” swim practice was over.*

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As you may be able to tell, most of my memories of swimming are happy ones. However, I remember a meet many years ago held in the Long Island Sound, where I swam breaststroke. This meet was different because it was not in a crystal clear pool. The course was in the Long Island Sound, in open water with long docks, buoys and ropes set out to define the borders of the competition. The water was dark and murky, and I wasn’t sure I wanted to see the bottom even if I could have. But that wasn’t the main issue. Jellyfish will be the operative word here. Jellyfish seemed to squish between my fingers as I was trying to do my laps. I might not have noticed the little creatures if I were doing backstroke, or a very fast moving freestyle, but this event was the breaststroke.

To do the stroke correctly, you use your arms to pull forward, skimming the surface of the water. You then tuck your head down to streamline for the long push forward with the whip kick. In this case, my head tuck was right into a floating mass of small, transparent, squishy jellyfish: face first, of course. I remember that day as the only time I got out of the water and cried.

There are “open-water” swimmers. They are a hardy lot. They swim in the San Francisco Bay, under the Golden Gate Bridge and across the cold and deep Lake Tahoe. The jellyfish may not have bothered them. I personally prefer the clear confines of a well-maintained pool.

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This probably doesn’t come as a surprise to many of you, but I like to fool around and have some fun. Apparently, I’ve been goofy for some time! While I was writing about my days of college swimming, all I could recall were the many pranks I pulled. Apparently, swimming meets were repetitious and routine; I needed some amusement to keep myself entertained.

Read: Pg. 206:

*One of the nice perks of being on the team was that the meets were held in different parts of the state, and the college paid for overnight accommodations when necessary. During these weekend excursions, Linda was acquiring a reputation as the one to play practical jokes, especially on their coach Ms. Carmichael.*

*She remembered a particular meet when they were caught in a heavy snowstorm and had to spend an extra night at a motel. After dinner at a nearby diner, the team could not find the coach in her room. The girls went on a hunt and finally discovered her at the bar next door, obviously a bit tipsy. Perched on the lap of a*

*new male acquaintance, her legs and feet sort of danced in the air. This was shocking, but quite funny to the team, who had never before seen the coach in such a compromised position. Apparently Coach C had been drinking Rusty Nails. The swimmers were all underage; most had never heard of a Rusty Nail.*

*Linda now knows what they are-a delicious combination of scotch and Drambuie over ice. Three or four of them provide a perfect alternative to spending twelve hours in a small motel room with a group of 18-year-olds. Even though the swimmers were young and did not have a vast experience with alcohol, they understood that the coach would probably be under the weather the next morning after her scotch-fueled evening.*

*When morning arrived, the sun came out. It melted some of the snow, and the roads were cleared for the bus to carry the team back to their campus. Not surprisingly, Coach was sleeping later than usual. Linda decided to use this opportunity to play a very funny trick. She told the early-rising girls to gather as much snow as they could and pile it up in front of Coach’s door. They then called her room, waking her with the explanation that it had snowed even more during the night and they were stuck inside for another day due to the 6-foot drifts that had accumulated against the motel doors. Of course Coach rushed to the door, pulled it open only to find a thick wall of snow.*

*The loud hysterical laughter as well as the streaming sunlight through the adjoining window told the coach that she had been had! She was a good sport, though. In retrospect she probably did not feel like making much of a fuss, or scolding her girls. In fact, she seemed rather subdued on the ride home.*

*At another weekend meet, the team stayed in a residential hall of one of Western Pennsylvania’s oldest colleges. It was a large, three-story stone building, old fashioned in style with long corridors. The set-up was for two or three swimmers in*

*each dorm room with a communal bathroom at the end of the hall. The quaint place called out for exploration. Halfway down the hallway was a prominent metal cabinet that housed the fuses for all the rooms, each carefully numbered.*

I thought it might be entertaining to shut off some of the fuses, but really hilarious to shut off the fuse to Coach’s room. Surrounded by teammates urging me on, I was the one to pull the switch. There was a loud cry when Coach suddenly found herself in the dark.

Stepping into the well-lit corridor, she automatically pointed her finger at me. How did she know?

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Most of the medals I received in my early years of swimming came from relays. In other words, those successes were only from team efforts; I didn’t have many individual triumphs. In a fit of self pity, I once told Mom that I didn’t want to save any of those medals because I didn’t win them. They were only for relays.

Mom kindly reminded me that those medals could not have been won without my participation. I had done my part and earned those medals, and didn’t let the team down! They reside in my house, in the bottom of a trunk… somewhere.

Resuming my swimming career, those memories remained in the back of my mind, that I was never the fastest. I loved a comment made by Julia, one of my Mud Sharks teammates, “It’s not how fast you swim, but how you look up on the blocks.” Taking that to heart and to compensate for not winning, I usually wear a colorful bathing suit – or a mermaid dress!

Swimming on relays with the Mud Sharks helped me feel important and relevant. In 2010, I swam the backstroke on a 200-Meter Medley Relay along with my amazing Mud Shark teammates: Eric, Don and Gillian. We placed first! To add to the victory, our time was recorded as one of the top ten in the world that year!

I must tell you that I did not hesitate to send off for my patch to commemorate the event. I wear that Top 10 patch proudly on the sleeve of my team jacket, even though it’s “only for a relay.”

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Now I am very happy, and still slightly surprised, that I’m faring well against other swimmers in my age group. I earned four Top 10 medals at the Summer National Championships, held in Gresham, Oregon in 2016. Recently I won three 1st place ribbons and three 2nd place ribbons at the Pacific Masters Long Course Championships. After all this time, I can still swim, and swim well. The turtle is still going, even though the hares, at one time, may have been faster.

I wanted to capture the essence of a National Swimming competition and bring the reader along for the ride, actually along for the swim, while telling the story of my life-long connection with the water. I hope I have accomplished my goal.  
  
With love, may I present, The Water Beckons, A Swimmer's Story. I’m selling my book for $19.00, which includes the tax. Thank you all very much. Are there any questions?