**7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you’ve already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.**

For some reason, my brain keeps humming “I’m Lovin It” whenever I swim. McDonalds has been with me my entire life. I have to eat McDonalds in every country I visit, every time I win and lose, and this story begins with a loss.

Entering middle school, my school’s swimming coach was scouting out potential candidates. I was immediately excited and signed up for the try outs, but I simply did not make the cut. Days later, I sat down at McDonalds accompanying my friends who returned from swimming practice, and frustratingly listened to all their complaints about practice while munching on my chicken nuggets.

Ever since I could remember, I was obsessed with the water and would float for hours at the local public pool every day. So to get in, I decided to stop floating and start swimming. I spent lap after lap replicating the movements of Olympic swimmers and grilling my lungs. On one occasion, I had fallen off my bike and badly scraped my knees, yet I still carried on. Chlorine, sweat and pain was not going to stop me from making my own passionate ends meet.

The frustration of not making the cut was not unfamiliar. That day at McDonalds I remembered the struggles my parents went through, working back to back jobs at the supermarket in the freezing winter without even a coat. Even as we slept on couches, my parents were happy to skip their meals and put their happiness aside so that I could happily eat my chicken nuggets.

At the next try out my heart was racing, but when it was time to jump into the water, I knew that I was at home. Sprinting suddenly did not feel like anything, and my heart’s excitement just dragged me to the other end. After this hard fought battle, I finally made it into the team and we began training to qualify for regional swim meets. After continuous weekly practices I made it into my region’s top three.

But due to financial struggles, I was unable to attend national and international swim meets. Knowing that this would limit my other teammates who could finance these trips, I knew that letting go of my active role in the team would allow the team to have better results. It was hard to let go, but after re-watching a video of my coach shouting for me at a race and a glimpse of smile in his face as I touched the finish line, I wondered how it feels like to help someone winning a race. Since then, I made it my main priority to motivate my teammates to be at their best. If I can’t help my team in a race, I will help all I can from the side line.

I would show them diving tricks, take their lap times, loudly cheer and commend them while they were swimming, but most importantly I alleviated the mood. Knowing from personal experience all the pressure that the school, team and their families place on their shoulders, I always made sure there was a fun atmosphere when practicing or at races.

I always made sure there was music playing around, and I would be the loud one in the group who sang first. I remember at one local swim meet, the venue was playing Michael Jackson’s “Smooth Criminal”, and there I was singing on the top of my lungs and doing the moonwalk in front of strangers and my teammates. It was a great time because the entire team joined in while everyone else was simply confused. I made myself approachable, and because of this they were able to honestly give me their thoughts that I could deliver to the coach, whether it would be about the strategy or our participant list. I always made whatever happened, we had to come back with a trophy, and we did. We ended up making the top 3 on both the local and regional level.

At the end of day, where we celebrate our wins at McDonalds together, I realize that whether it be my parents letting go of their happiness, or me letting go of my dream, some detours are okay and may lead us to finding a greater journey to finding a new type of win.

Word count: 717 (woop) (i dont know what to cut down)