A man pushed to his limits, forced to unearth every single fiber of physical and mental will, discovers he is stronger than he has ever known. No experience of mine better exemplifies this than my time as part of the Saint Andrew’s College swim team. Notorious for its daily two-and-a-half hour practices, swimming is more than just a sport. It is a badge of honor, a title that dignifies the beholder as a man unafraid to meet challenge and defy limits.

At the beginning of Grade 9, I was in a rut - caught in a vicious cycle of procrastination and fatigue.

Then I joined the swim team.

The sport that drew groans from the most veteran of swimmers exhausted both my body and mind every single day. But rather than dampen my will, swimming ignited my competitive drive. When others fell apart in practice, I only pushed harder, determined to outlast, endure and savor the accomplishment. My amazing coach, Mrs. Mccue, applauded my effort and for the first time in a long while, I was proud. I signed up for the most difficult race, 200 freestyle, every single swim meet. I had to prove to myself I was not afraid of challenge, not afraid to fight the battle that no one else would. And I did.

Five months of swimming transformed me. Balancing practice with school forced me to amend my habits. I saw a satisfying increase in marks. The physical effort I exerted each day honed my willpower and developed discipline. I started to exercise vigorously at home, performing chin-ups outside in freezing temperatures even after an exhausting day of school and sports. Throughout the season, I decreased my 200 freestyle by almost twenty seconds and my 50 freestyle by five. I had become a much better swimmer, but more importantly, a much stronger person, both physically and mentally.

Year after year, I returned to the sport I had grown to both love and hate. I attended a preseason training camp in Bermuda and was promoted to the First Team in Grade 11. I am proud to have never shied away from the 200 meter race. I have inspired teammates on the brink of exhaustion and seen them beam in awe at their own capability.

More than anything, my commitment to swimming has allowed me to blossom from a wandering child into the makings of a man. I have learned fortitude, teamwork, discipline and respect in the hot and cold, deep and shallow of the pool. I have learned to embrace challenge, not recoil from it, to take pleasure in treading the difficult path, for the accumulation of adversity only strengthens motivation.

On January 11th, I beamed in pride as I was picked as one of two co-captains of the swim team, the culmination of years of effort, resolve, and dedication. We who suffer and toil, achieve and triumph together, are knit together by an unshakable bond, a brotherhood that is called the Saint Andrew’s College swim team.