



A FLICKER OF HOPE AND COURAGE

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I grew up watching movies about superheroes with red capes and special powers, dreaming that I could be one of them, like Elsa or Wonder Woman. However, then I woke up to reality. What exactly is a superhero? Not everyone necessarily has magical powers, but aspiring to be a hero can be anyone's story. The only limits are the ones you put on yourself. I personally was lucky enough to have a true hero in my life – my swim coach: Marilyn. This woman isn't only a hero in my life, but someone I look up to with admiration. Marilyn Early is a strong, kind, and powerful woman. Although it wasn't always easy for her, she set an example for young women like me.

Marilyn's story started when she decided to swim at a young age for fun. The problem was that it wasn't as fun as she expected. She hated the boring practices and the frigid pool. She hated the feeling she had in the pit of her stomach on the way to competitions. But even though Coach Marilyn hated it, she never gave up. She never quit the sport because she believed in her own grit and determination. She knew the value of doing things that you might not always like. Sometimes you have to push through and keep going, despite obstacles that stand in your way. You might not always be passionate about your sport, your job, or your life, but staying strong when you don't feel motivated is an important life lesson. In the end, Marilyn's drive for success eventually led to her loving the sport and swimming for Michigan State University.

Marilyn isn't just strong; she is also kind and empathetic. When I was struggling with a decision about whether or not to competitively swim, she took the time to listen to my hesitations. She made me feel valued and appreciated when I needed it the most. Coach Marilyn was the push that got me up the hill. She wouldn't let me quit until I expressed my anxieties and fears, so she was able to understand what I was going through in my own heart and mind.

Marilyn doesn't just exhibit kindness to humans but also animals. She and her husband John adopt and foster many dogs from the Humane Society that have gone through traumatic experiences. Most of these dogs are ones that would not be adopted easily, but

Marilyn gives them the love and attention they need. Her dedication to unwanted animals makes me love our rescued dogs even more. She has modeled the importance of caring for things that might be forgotten.

My definition of a hero is someone who models strength and kindness. Coach Marilyn possesses these traits and puts them into action through perseverance, listening, and dedicating her time to others through coaching and adopting dogs. I am grateful to know someone like her who inspires me to have grit and help others in my life. Thank you, Coach Marilyn.

