

THE COURAGE TO SUCCEED

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I have never heard my name pronounced in such a sexy way. Thank you.

Good morning. I do a lot of public speaking and I often say to my boyfriend, "Come on. Come with me. We'll have a couple days of fun." No matter where I am going, he listens to who the group is and then says, "You go ahead. You go on your own. I'll see you when you get home." But then I was on the speaker phone the other day and I said to the woman who was organizing this event, "What is the group like? What do they do?" Then another question I came around to was, "What is the ratio of men to women?" She said, "Oh, that's probably about 99 to 1 men to women." My boyfriend said, "I'm coming." (Laughter)

Many of the groups I speak to are very uptight corporate groups. They really live by the corporate credo that what you wear is very important. They call me months ahead of time before the talk and want to make sure that what I am going to wear is very appropriate for the group. They want to know what kind of language I'm going to use because they don't want any obscene language whatsoever. Sometimes you even have to sign a little letter saying you will never use any obscene language in the group. So this is my quick way of thanking you very much because, number one, looking around the room this is probably the first time I have ever been the best dressed person in the room. (Laughter) So I thank you for that. Also at the hotel last night I watched the second half of the Kansas City game with a bunch of you guys. It really makes me very comfortable to know that I am with a group that not only doesn't mind, but pretty much prefers obscene language. (Laughter)

Anyway, as you know, I got involved in this nutty, eccentric sport of marathon swimming. What does that have to do with your world and what you do? It doesn't have anything, but the real truth is life is life, isn't it? It doesn't matter where you work or what you do. In the end, we are all just trying to do the best we can with our days, our communities, and our families. The truth really is that I would love to sit down in a chair here and have every one of you come up and take about a half an hour like I am going to do to tell the story of your life and what you have learned so far.

People read these quotes by Winston Churchill and all those quotes have nothing to do with what we do. It's what you learn from your grandfather, from your uncles, and from the people in your life who really gave you the wisdom to get through the tough stuff. I would love to hear all of your stories because we are all living the same life.

So I have a life story that involves this eccentric sport, but it's really what I extrapolated from that. I am not in that sport anymore and I am still living by the same philosophies, the same ethics, and living with the same passion.

So I want to tell you a story, but I don't want you to feel like it's a swimming story. It's not; it's a life story.

I grew up down in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and I had this Greek Egyptian father. When I was a real little kid just beginning to get a sense of identity of who I was and what my dreams might be and who I might be in the world, he said, "I want to show you something." He took out the dictionary and turned it to the letter N and turned it to the word "Nyad." My name! I knew how to spell my name at that point and I looked in there and there it was in black in white in the dictionary - the definition of oneself. Well, he read out what the definition was. Definition number one was in Greek mythology the Nyads were the little nymphs that used to swim to protect the Gods in the fountains and the lakes and rivers. They were the female swimmers in Greek mythology. Definition number two was more modern. The Nyad was a champion swimmer. Well, all I fixated on at age five

or six was the word "champion" My father very much believed in destiny. Now your name is in the dictionary and this is what you are going to be.

Sure enough, by the age of ten, I had met a coach who happened to be an ex-Olympic swimmer from the Melbourne Games in 1956. He was an ex-all-American football player from the University of North Carolina. He was pure fire. He was the most charismatic character and role model I had ever met. He said I was going to be the best swimmer in the world. I believed him.

By the age of ten, I was so serious that I was swimming six hours a day. You know yourselves, you have kids, and you remember when you were a kid that you don't talk a ten year-old girl or boy into doing anything for six hours a day. You do it because you have the fire for it yourself. I got up at 4:30 in the morning every day, Christmas included. My eyes were red and swollen. They didn't even have goggles in those days. The chlorine exposure was tremendous. I had a thirst and a vision that I was going to stand on the Olympic platform and bow my head and receive a gold medal and be the best swimmer in the world.

I remember when I was 12 that same Greek Egyptian father who had told me about destiny and, sure enough, when I had started swimming, he said, "You see." Well, he called me into the bedroom when I was about 12 so I was two years into this serious, dedicated routine. He spoke to me with a very thick accent. He paced around with his arms around his back and he said, "You know, your mother and I are very worried about you. You don't go to church anymore on Sundays. You are getting up at 4:30 in the morning, every morning. Your eyes so swollen your mother has to pack your eyes in ice at night. You don't eat dinner at home anymore. We don't know what to tell our friends where you are. We think you are a fanatic." I got up and I said, "That's right, Dad. You know why? Because this kid is going to Mexico City to the Olympic games and until I get there, this is exactly how I am going to live." He said, "I know, I know. I tell you, your mother and I, we figured it out. You are a fanatic. I just called you in to give you the key to the house because we can't live like this anymore. Good luck." (Laughter)

So my parents in their way didn't understand, but they were very supportive. They let me on a very long leash and just said, "Good luck. "

A couple of years went by and I got better and better. You know how it is if you are good at something; you get a little pat on the back and you get some support from your peer group. Then you want to become even more dedicated. It came to be that when I was 16 years old I won the United States Nationals. I was the best in the United States. Later that summer, I broke the world record for the 100-meter back stroke. I was the best in the world! I wasn't a skinny ten-year-old girl anymore saying, "That's right, Dad, that's what I am going to do." I was a mature athlete who had been down a pretty long road already and given up quite a bit of childhood and adolescence for this dream.

Two things happened in the summer of 1966, I guess this is when the word champion in our lives -no matter what we do - really comes up. Everything is great and everything is easy when it all just comes in your lap and you barely have to work for it, but when the obstacles come along and you still dig down, then you build character.

I first came down with something called viral endocarditis. It's a virus that surrounds the endocardium, of the heart. That was tough. I had lost a lot of weight and I was in the hospital for a while and at home. A sport like swimming is a conditioning sport. If you miss a month or two or three or four, it's very difficult to get back to your previous level and everybody else has been passing you by.

Just so you can appreciate it because I know a lot of people realize what weights are, I am not that big a person. I am 5'6" and 125 pounds, but I used to take 30-pound weights to do shoulder flies because for swimming you have to have tremendously strong shoulders. I used 30-pound weights for repetitions.

When I got out of that sick bed at the end of four months, I couldn't lift five-pound weights, not once. I couldn't get one repetition of a five-pound weight up. So I had a very long road in front of me. It was a depressing year and I was way slower than my times. It was 1967 now. I was only a year away from that Mexico City dream I had. Then all of a sudden that summer, things started to come back again. I started to feel a little bit of zip off the block. I was almost back to my old times. I wasn't winning the U.S. Nationals, but I was coming in fourth and fifth that summer.

Then at the state meet in 1967 - it's difficult for me to talk about even though it was so long ago -my life changed. I have just begun to talk about it and decided it's important if you are going to take a look at your life that you have to be honest about it. If anybody else is going through the same situation with your children or kids that you know, I feel it's important to talk about it as well. You can't stop anything by keeping quiet.

I was a member of a high school team with a bunch of very talented swimmers. We were all very close to that coach I told you about. We used to babysit his kids. We were part of his family. Then the afternoon of the state championship meet, I was over at his house and had taken a nap to get some rest before the finals. In an unforgettable span of perhaps two or three minutes, I suffered a violent, as I said, unforgettable rape at the hands of that coach - that coach who supposedly loved me like a daughter and cherished my future and my person. To say that I was in shock would be an understatement.

To tell you the real truth, I don't think I even knew what happened. I was a naive kid who hadn't been into boyfriends yet at all. My whole life was swimming.

I lost that night at the state level. I lost at the state meet and all the kids on the team knew something was wrong. They thought I was coming down with the flu or something. At the end of the meet all those kids, my teammates with whom I usually would be right in the thick of things, and the captain of the team over on the other side of the pool getting on their sweatsuits and celebrating, about to go out for pizza and coke. Well, I went into the diving well and went to the bottom of the pool. I don't know why, I think it just has to do with something like that vague word of character, but I screamed, "No" at the top of my lungs. If I had been up at the surface, you could have heard me around the world I think. I think that "No" was just in defiance. It was just an attitude that said this didn't happen to me. This isn't going to ruin my life. I was like a tough little soldier and I just pretended it didn't happen and I swept it under the rug.

That year went by and all of a sudden I wasn't the first one at practice anymore. I had always been the first person at practice and the last one to leave. Now I wasn't the first person there and I wasn't the last person to stay either. I was afraid. I was afraid to be around him. I was afraid that the other kids might know something. Life changed. That great mentor was no longer the person I admired.

It came to the Olympic trials in Mexico City and I really hadn't had the big speed that I'd had two years ago. Sports are funny that way. You peak and you don't know why, but sometimes you can't reach that peak again. Somehow, to tell you the truth I think it was by the grace of God, I made it into the final eight. The Olympic trials were at Long Beach. Eight people are going to go for the three top spots. Three people would then get to go to Mexico City and wear the navy blue U.S.A. sweats and would get to swim for the United States and march in the opening ceremonies. The rest of us were going to go on with the rest of our lives.

I remember it like it was yesterday. Walking down that pool deck to that 100-meter back stroke, a one-minute race, more or less. I was so full of fear that I was almost paralyzed. I wasn't blinking, my breath was caught up tight in the top of my chest. You know how it is when you are afraid - you can't do anything. A friend came to me and said the most brilliant words of wisdom I have ever heard. It maybe wasn't very poetic, but it was brilliant. I now try to live my life every single day according to these words. She was a 16-year-old girl. She grabbed my shoulders when she saw what was going on and she shook me and said, "Diana, Diana, wake up. You've got the weight of your world on your shoulders. I see you have this dream, but you can't think about all that big stuff. You have to get it down like the tennis players say, you just watch the fuzz of the ball. You don't think about the big picture or the match and the tournament. You have to think about something small to focus on. How about a fingernail? Why don't you just blast off the blocks with your guts and your heart and your shoulders and your will and dig in and when you finish, don't look up at the electronic scoreboard. Don't look around and up and down the pool. Close your eyes and close your fists and say, 'I couldn't have done it a fingernail faster.'" She said, "If you can say that and mean it, I guarantee it won't matter what happens."

Well, all of a sudden, she was right. I got rid of the weight of the world. I decided to think about all of that stuff later. I just started to focus in on a sliver of a fingernail. I got up to the blocks and my breath was now deep instead of shallow and I had some courage. I felt the strength and I blasted off the blocks with my shoulders and my heart and my guts and my will and I dug in. When I hit the wall, I had no earthly idea if I was first or eighth. I closed my eyes and I closed my fists and I said, "I couldn't have done it a fingernail faster," and I meant it. I looked up at the electronic scoreboard and I was sixth. I didn't go to Mexico City after all that. But, you know what? That 16-year-old girl was so right. I went over and shook hands with the three girls who made it and I marched into the locker room and I looked in the mirror and I said, "You know what, it wasn't just that 100-meter race, you did it all for ten years, every single practice, every meet, you did it so you couldn't have done it a fingernail faster. And that's okay."

I then marched on to the rest of my life. I went off to college and graduate school like everybody else, but there was still a fire in the belly. I had this talent. I could move through the water and I had so much desire left. It wasn't bitterness for not making it. It was just desire. I wanted that Olympic experience. There were no college scholarships for women at that time.

My speed had peaked and fallen off a bit. Then a friend came and started talking to me about this very wacky sport of marathon swimming. He told me the men swim together with the women. There is no differentiation in the genders in this sport. That kind of intrigued me. He said that the waters were always cold with very rough seas. Basically he said to me, "Diana, this sport touches on masochism to a certain degree. I just think this would appeal to you." (Laughter)

I found myself later that summer, after training and getting back in shape again, standing on the shore of Lake Ontario. Now I don't know if you know Lake Ontario, but you swim from Niagara on the Lake across 40 miles to Toronto. The water is 48 degrees. You dive in and your fingers spread and your jaw clenches and it's pure willpower alone that will allow you to continue. I was standing on the beach about five minutes before race time getting greased with ten pounds of wool fat lanolin which is a singular experience unto itself. (Laughter)

I noticed there was a big, burly muscular group of Egyptian guys over on the shore. The sport is very popular in Egypt. There was a tall, lanky, muscular group of Argentine guys over there as well. They were also getting greased down and ready. With about two minutes before the race, the best woman distance swimmer in the world came swaggering across the beach to introduce herself to me. She was a Dutch woman and was 6'1" and weighed 182 pounds. She looked a little more like a linebacker for the Chicago Bears than she did a swimmer. I just thought briefly that the beach shook as she walked. As she got up to me, she took an index finger and

jabbed it in the grease on my chest and she jabbed it with every syllable. I had a bruise this big for a month afterwards She said, "I hear you are very good swimmer. Well, you are not going to beat me."

She swaggered off and now there was no doubt the beach was trembling with every step she took. I said to my trainer, "I'm not going in. These people are animals." I just realized for the first time or so that I wasn't going to have my own lane. This was going to be a big mass exodus into the water. The gun went off and I went tearing down the beach swearing in Arabic like all the other guys. Well, I got into that freezing water and the day went by. You are never allowed to touch the boat or hold on or use any kind of flotation device, but you can stop and get sustenance from the boat. They also hold up a huge blackboard and tell you where you are and how much time to go. They take different tacks to see if they can beat the currents and the winds. People were dropping out and people were dropping back.

Well, I finished third among the men that day. There were 200 men swimming in this race. I also finished first among the woman. So the Dutch woman later that day announced her retirement from the whole sport. I mean, this is great power! I retired someone out of the sport and I just loved it.

I couldn't believe it, but I started traveling around the world. I can't believe how long it lasted, but I did it for ten years. I went from swimming down the Nile and the Ganges and across the Bay of Naples in Italy to swimming off the coast of Argentina and Mexico. The earth is four-fifths water and basically during the year we swam most of the lakes, rivers, and oceans.

Well, talk about building character. When you are in a plane flying over Lake Ontario and you see how unforgiving that body of water is and that your little measly body and your tremendous never-say-die willpower will not give up on that Lake, it stays with you. It stays with you as far as I can tell at this age for the rest of your life.

Since you can't do these things forever, it's time to grow up and get a job and move on. I was just about 30 years of age and I decided to do the biggest, most egocentric unforgettable swim that has ever been done. All of these other swims I had done were races and I decided to do a solo swim. I wanted to do something nobody else would ever even contemplate. I decided to do 100 miles in the open ocean. The record at that time was 60 miles and my trainer said to me, "That's great. We could do 62 or 65 miles. Why do we have to bump it all the way up to 100?" "No," I said, "I want it to be fantastic. Almost undoable."

We started to gather together the nautical charts of the earth's surface in my apartment. We threw out the Antarctic and other unrealistic places and we came down to Cuba. It's so magical. Since 1959, everybody in this country knows where Cuba is. It's 102.5 statute miles from Key West to Havana. You would have to go from Havana to Key West. I wanted to finish in my country anyway.

I started to get in shape for this. I thought I had always been in shape, but this was going to be something different. It was probably going to take two non-stop days of swimming in the open sea across the Gulf Stream, which is kind of a river that flows within the sea. I got a lot of people researching it. I got some research money together. The second largest species of sharks in the world swims across the north coast of Cuba, so there had to be some precautions taken there.

I started to swim every day. If you know the Florida coast at all, I was swimming from Miami to Fort Lauderdale. It was a stretch of 32 miles and I swam it every day. The English Channel is 21 miles. It's cold, but it's short. It's 21 miles. I was swimming 32 miles every single day to get in shape for this. That would take somewhere from eight to ten hours depending on the currents and the tides. I also did 1,000 sit-ups consecutively every day.

At the end of a year's training, I was in shape, and I had a crew of a 52 people who were shark experts who have been trained by Jacques Cousteau to watch out with sonar for the bodies underneath. There were NASA experts who knew about the intake of glycogen because I was going to be in there for so many hours. I was going to lose a lot of body weight and I had to keep up my glycogen level. I had navigational experts. This is 103 miles as the crow flies, so every little bit that you are off going left and right, etcetera, you are going to end up swimming many more miles than planned. So I had the America's Cup navigator volunteer his time to set me a course and change that course every 15 minutes to go from A to B as quickly as possible. All I had to do was gain some weight. Well, I sat in my hotel room in Havana thinking positive thoughts no matter what comes my way. No matter how many hours I am in there, do not give up. Don't give in to the pain. Don't give in to the discomfort. Don't give up on your beliefs. I was trying to gain weight to put on a little extra before the swim. The navigator chose the day and we came down in the morning and I saw white caps. I had been in this sport a long time and you don't ever start with white caps. If they come up later, you don't blame anybody. Well, I got on the walkie talkie with the America's cup navigator and I said, "Rich, what the heck is going on here? There's white caps." He said, "Don't worry. There's a little easterly coastal breeze this time of year off Cuba. Go for it." He's the America's cup navigator and I have my six trainers on the beach with shrunken shoulders and thumbs because we all knew better, but I can't do everything. He chose the day. We only had visas and money enough for this one effort this year. We had trained for an entire year. It was tremendous dedication and sense of adventure for setting history.

Well, we start off and eight hours later we are in an eight-foot sea. Are any of you boaters? Do you know what an eight-foot sea is? If I am swimming at surface here, we are talking about waves that are breaking up at the second set of lines on this wall. In an eight-foot sea, you are no longer swimming smoothly across the surface to give your body a break. Your legs should be just kind of trailing lightly in the ocean, but now I'm driving the legs so I can get up on top of those swells and get some oxygen.

Did I mention the sharks? They like to see you from the boat. They like to see you all the time and when you are in an eight-foot swell, sometimes they don't see you for five, six, seven, eight, or ten minutes at a time and they get very nervous. I can't tell where the heck I am going because I can't see the boat. I am turning 60 times a minute this way and I don't see the boat for five, six, seven, eight minutes. So I'm going all over the place. At the eighth hour my trainer stopped over the swells, and it took awhile, but we had basically this conversation, "Diana, You've got a bad attitude. You are swearing at Rich every other stroke and losing a lot of oxygen." I yelled back, "I tell you what. You remove Rich from my sight for all time, not just for this swim, but for all time, and I'll get a better attitude."

Now we are in a 30-knot wind. I am trying to swim at three degrees north northeast from Havana to Key West. The wind is coming out of the east at 30 knots. It's a tremendous sea and we dug in with great attitude. There were problems. At the 12th hour, the NBC boat sank and all of their people and materials had to be brought over onto our vessels. (Laughter)

As I told you, I was never allowed to touch the boat. I was never allowed to hold onto a rope or sit on a kickboard or use flippers or any kind of flotation, but I swam over close to the boat every hour. They would call me with a police whistle signal. They would give me a cup of hot sustenance or glucose or they would put a tube in my mouth and I would tread water to take it in. During that short 30-second pit stop, you urinate or do whatever you have to do. They give you information from the boat and I know things are tough. They are all sunburned and they are all seasick. And I'm not feeling so great myself. We are making progress, but I have been told that I am swimming okay to the north, but the wind is blowing us to the west.

You must reach land. You can't just get out and say, "Do you remember the time I swam to latitude 38, longitude 56?" You have to reach land. That is the cardinal rule in the sport. Unbeknownst to me, land, as we went, was becoming more and more unreachable. We were getting blown into the Gulf of Mexico past any reachable land. We got to the 25th hour and the 30th hour and the 35th hour and the 40th hour. Well, I guess they prayed and every atheist on board converted to something or other. They tried unique navigational configurations. They tried everything. Well, finally at 41 hours 49 minutes, my trainer, again with the bullhorn, yelled across the swells and we had a very emotional conversation by which I yelled and pleaded and cried and she yelled and pleaded and cried. She told me that land was no longer reachable. So now it was just an act of cruelty to keep me in the water because we weren't going to make it anywhere.

Well, I was handed up. I had lost 29 pounds. Even with eating glucose every hour in the really heavy surf, there was so much duress on the body that I couldn't keep up with the weight loss. I had lost 29 pounds, so I was down to 101 pounds. I was very, very skinny for my height. I was handed out to a Coast Guard captain for safety and he was going to take me back to Florida. I had never met him before and he had never met me. He had joined our group 12 miles into international waters so he had been with the swim for almost the whole time and witnessed everybody's courage and everybody's efforts.

I think he pretty much summed it up with a statement not just about me, but about all of us. He had me cradled in his arms for just a minute while they were getting some blankets ready on the deck. He looked like what I thought all sea captains should look like. He had a big shock of silver hair and big pools of blue eyes. He was sturdy and well built. He was holding me and our faces came very close for just a second and he got all choked up. I saw the tears in his eyes and I was pretty beat. I was just lifeless. Then he said to me, "Honey, if we ever go to war, I want you leading our army, all right?" It was just his way of saying that this was a phenomenal effort. We all knew that if we had a different navigator to choose the day and we had a little better break in the weather, we could do it.

So it took a while to heal up, but I did heal up. We gathered that whole group together again. We got rid of the navigator and got somebody else into that position. (Laughter) The next year was 1979 and Cuba was closed to Americans in terms of visas. We could not get in there whatsoever and I was disappointed because that was the magical geography I wanted to cross. However, we were ready to do the swim and ready to set the world record of 100 miles. We decided to go to the Bahamas. The Island of Biminis lays about the same distance off Florida as Cuba does, but it's out to the east. So now the swim is going to be straight across the Gulf Stream trying to break across that river and into the coast of Florida somewhere around Jupiter or Stuart, Florida.

When I came down to the shore this time, I saw a sea of glass like a skating pond. We were all so excited to have the luck of the weather that we decided to click off the quickest possible miles just in case something horrible came up. Once again, a couple of days went by and I never looked up. That's one thing you never do. You only breathe to the side and follow the boat that is setting the course because if you look up, all you are going to see is depressing horizon. You know what I mean? If you just see that horizon time after time, you just get depressed. So you look to the side and just go where they say you are supposed to go.

At the 42-hour mark, once again, it was the exact same time, I guess I had a little tantrum and I said something I shouldn't have said to my trainer. I hurt her feelings, I guess. Well, I looked up on the next stroke and she is giving me the finger. I thought, okay, maybe I was impolite, but we are not out here to be polite. We have to get something done and I said something I shouldn't have said. I'll apologize to her later. But I didn't think I deserved this. We were supposed to be a team. She is supposed to be on my side no matter what. I was angry at her and I thought, I'm not going to look at her for the rest of the swim. I am going to breathe over the other way. I am going to look at the boat that has all the press people on it. It had about 100 people with guys from Sports Illustrated I know and guys from a lot of other papers and news organization I don't know. There were 100 of

them - I'm not exaggerating. Fine, I thought, I'll breathe over this way. Well, the next time all of them - and they don't know me that well - give me the finger! All of them! I thought, that's it. Such ingratitude. How can people treat you this way? Have I been unsportsmanlike? I am not going to breathe for about 30 seconds and keep my head down and think about this.

I took a couple of strokes and I heard the police whistle which means stop. It's the signal for sharks which means stop in your tracks. It doesn't matter what you are doing, who's right or wrong, you just stop. So I heard the signal and I stopped and I looked up and through these fogged over goggles and those tired eyes, I started to see the flotilla of boats that were coming in and all the people who had come out to follow us during the day along with my own personal boats. Well, I started to see them and they were all pointing - the index finger this time - and they were pointing towards shore and they were chanting, "One mile! One mile! One mile!" I looked up and got my goggles up on the forehead and it wasn't the vision of the pyramids that my Egyptian father said would be at the end of the great marathon, it was condominium buildings all over the shore of Florida. (Laughter) What a sweet sight that was. It wasn't the fastest mile I had ever swam, but it was the sweetest. I came very close to the boat. I couldn't touch it, but I came close to all my friends and adventurers who had given up so much of their time. They will be friends forever for what they gave to me and we shared in history. I crawled up onto the beach and that was the longest swim ever done by either man or woman. It was 102.5 miles without a shark cage. That world record still stands today.

I got very lucky. I got hired by the Wide World of Sports. Usually you come out of sports and to be hired by network television you have to come from a fairly major sport, either football or world class tennis or something like that. But I was in this eccentric sport of marathon swimming. I had done a lot of television, though, and I had the gift of the gab, shall we say. I was hired by Wide World of Sports and had always wanted to say, "The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat," on the air.

Now I was working, making great money, had a great relationship, but something was missing. I was feeling kind of blue and a friend of mine said, "What's up with you? You have the tiger by the tail. Everything in life is on your side. How could you be down?" I said, "I don't know. I just miss swimming. I miss the intensity of it. I miss when I go to sleep at night knowing exactly what I want to do for the next five years and how I'm going to get there." She said, "That's not swimming. That's you. That's life. If that's what you want to do with life, if that's what turns you on, get intense about whatever it is you are doing. Go to sleep at night with a passion and a vision." She was right.

I started wanting to become a great communicator on television and work all the great shows. It may not sound like much to you, but very shortly after that I was given an assignment at the 1984 Olympics by ABC to cover swimming during the first week. Well, that was great. A lot of people watch swimming during the Olympic games obviously. I was very privileged to be there. However, during the second week, which meant more to me as a broadcaster, I was going to be the play-by-play person. You know what I mean? I was going to be the main voice or the person who introduces the event and gets you excited about it and gives you the history and takes you through all the events.

You work with a color commentator who is really from the sport. He gives the analysis. I was going to be the play-by-play person at the Olympics on canoeing and kayaking. So these are minor sports, nevertheless, this is live television and I had never worked live television before. This was going to cut my chops as a broadcaster.

Well, I get there and you are outdoors on a podium because you are going to watch the event on monitors located on the podium and the race starts 1,000 meters away. As they come down here, you are calling it off your monitors. You look up with the naked eye to the finish line right in front of you.

I had been researching canoeing and kayaking for six months. I had been to Romania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia, where all the great kayakers and canoers come from. I knew everything about it. I had been in all the boats to get an aesthetic feel of what the rhythm is like and what muscles it takes.

My color commentator has not only never worked live television, he has never been on television. He is scared to death. His skin was as white as this sheet of paper. With a minute to go before the broadcast, he is asking me if his beard looks all right. I'm trying to calm him down. I have all my notes taped around with all the little details about the sport, all the names, and all the phonetic spellings of the names because they are all bizarre. I had been interviewing the president of the Romanian Canoeing Association. I have his name down here also. They are coming down with last minute instructions in my headphones. "Diana, don't forget now, tonight is the night that Mary Lou goes for the gold at the vault, so tease that a little bit. Don't forget Howard Cossell is at boxing tonight. Get that going a little bit* "

So I am making last minute notes and I have never done this before. I'm trying to stay calm and with 30 seconds to go, Lenny, the videotape technician who is always a very cool guy comes sprinting out of the broadcast booth and towards us. We know something is very wrong. This guy starts grabbing my forearm real tight. He's nervous and Lenny comes over and says, "Guys, we have a really huge problem. Our video is screwed up. For the first couple of races until we can get to the commercial, you are going to have to read your monitors flipped vertically. So the people at home are seeing vertically different from you. Lane one is really lane eight. Lane two is lane seven. Lane three is lane six. (Laughter) This guy next to me is drawing blood now and I forgot my name. (Laughter) I was in a total panic. Lenny grabbed my shoulders and says, "Hey, aren't you the one that swam with the sharks and all that? Come on, get tough, handle it."

Those are two other words of wisdom that I always remember - handle it. That's just it. Don't analyze it, just handle it. I'm trying to get myself together and now they are coming on the headphones to me with "22, 21," and the producer comes on one more time and says, "Diana, we just got an interview with the president. We have to do it before the first commercial. So after the first race, Jay, you carry the ball," Oh, sure, he's going to carry the ball! "Diana, drop off your headphones and rush over and get the interview with the president." So I'm looking for my notes on the Romanian canoeing president and as they are counting down from "15, 14," I said, "That's fine. You just throw everything at us at the last second. Now I want the name of that president exactly pronounced and what he does." She says, "All right." They are still counting down, "ten, nine." She then says very slowly, "His name is R-o-n-a-l-d R-e-a-g-a-n, but I'm not sure what he does." (Laughter)

So I was not Jim McKay that day. But you know what? He and I, we got it together. We were okay. The point was that the friend of mine was tight. It wasn't swimming. Just like I said in the beginning. There was a lot of talk about swimming in this presentation, but it's not really about swimming, is it? It was about teamwork. It was about desire. It was about a future vision and knowing what you have to do day to day to get to that vision. It's about sacrifice. It's about pride and character.

It's the exact same life I am living today. I just turned 48 and I feel vital. I feel as proud of myself as I did when I was standing on those shores having looked back on a stretch of water that I beat and had seemed impossible to beat. It's just in a different venue.

The truth is it sounds corny but I mean it so genuinely that the words of that 16-year-old girl are honestly what I live by every day. I don't care whether it's speaking to you and looking around at your faces, and I thank you for your interest because I see it's there. I don't care whether it's sitting down to talk to my 14-year-old nephew about sex, because that's what is happening. It's so scary, but it's real life. I don't care whether it's my marriage or my job. I do every minute of every day I am awake so I can't do a fingernail better. I don't always win and I don't always get every job I want. Tragedy comes into my life just like everybody else. However, I know that

when the day comes for me to pass from this earth, I am going to look in the mirror just like I did missing the Olympic games from Mexico City and I am going to say, "You know what? You did it. You did it all so you couldn't do it a fingernail better." And it's going to be all right.

I thank you very much for your time. (Applause),

Mr. Shiloh: Thank you, Diana, for your really touching and emotional and inspirational speech. As a token of our appreciation, I want to give you a hat. It's not an expensive hat, but it's now a collectible. I don't know if you know this, but we are here representing four organizations who just a few hours ago decided to merge into one. We are now one team. We all know that life is a marathon run. Diana, thank you very much.

Ms. Nyad: Thank you very much.

Mr. Shiloh: At this time, we will have a short recess. Roadmasters will reconvene at 10:00 a.m. and B&B will meet in Room 4300. Thank you. (Recess)