

Entry 38

Subject: Swimming Pool, Napa Valley College

What started as a place I had to go after school quickly became the place that shaped who I am now. The Napa Valley College swimming pool was never really supposed to be a place that felt like “home”, but my perspective really changed on that. It’s not even on my school’s campus, but somehow over the past four years, it became one of the most impactful places in my life.

As a freshman at Justin-Siena, I didn’t really know what to expect when deciding to join the swim team. I just knew that every day after school, I had to get myself to a completely different location just to practice. Whether my friends and I were carpooling with the upperclassmen or taking the bus, we always showed up together. Some days we were excited, but honestly, a lot of days we were scared of being in such a new environment. But what made it different was that no one ever let each other quit. If one person was struggling, someone else would step in and help them. It was never just about swimming or who had the fastest times, it was about showing up for each other.

Being on that pool deck, we created our own kind of routine and sense of family. We shared lanes, pulled off the pool covers together, moved lane lines, and just had fun together. Even though it wasn’t technically our pool, we treated it like it was because we were grateful to have it. That space gave us a place to grow, and we didn’t take that lightly and respected it. Over time, it started to feel less like just a practice space and more like a second home. It’s where I built friendships that go beyond just being teammates. When you’re swimming next to the same people every single day, pushing through hard sets and long practices, you really get to know each other (the good, the bad, and the frustrated). You learn how to support people even when they’re struggling, and you learn how to push yourself because you don’t want to let your team down.

The pool also connects to the bigger Napa community in a way I didn’t fully realize at first. It’s not just used by us, it’s shared with college athletes and younger swimmers too. During the summer, when we help with swim camps, I get to see little kids just starting out, and it reminds me of why I fell in love with the sport in the first place. Being able to give back in that same space makes it feel even more meaningful. What makes this place irreplaceable isn’t just the pool itself, it’s everything that happens there. It’s where I’ve had some of my hardest days but also some of my best ones. It’s where I’ve learned discipline, how to push through things even when I don’t want to, and how important it is to have people around you who care.

Now that I’m about to graduate, it feels different being there. I notice things more, the routine, the people, the small moments that I used to not think twice about. It’s bittersweet knowing that a year from now I won’t get to start a new season with my team. The Napa Valley College swimming pool might just look like a place where people practice, but for me, it’s where I found a community, built the best friendships, and grew into a stronger version of myself. It’s a place that didn’t start out as mine, but somehow became one of the hardest things to leave behind.