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My mother is my role-model and my best friend in my life,” says Missy Franklin, six-time Olympic swimming medalist, five-time Olympic Champion, and fellow Cal Bear. In her career, she has won a total of twenty seven international medals across the Olympics, World Championships, Pan Pacifics, and short-course World Championships.

Missy was born in California, but relocated to Colorado in her childhood. She was introduced to the sport when she was just six months old by her mother, who had never learned how to swim well and still fears the water. Almost instantly, Franklin fell in love with the water. She kept at it and swimming became a part of her daily life, like a home away from home. Missy exclaims, “I’ve dreamed of being an Olympian since I was a little girl! I think that’s when we have our most desires and aspirations. So, I imagined myself, at five years old, being on the Olympic podium. Just like a young artist thinks of winning a Grammy or a science wizard wants to achieve the Nobel Prize, our dreams at the very early stages in our lives fuel our journeys.”

An athlete has to always manage a dual life - one on the field, in this case in the water, and the other as a normal “human” living the usual humdrum of daily chores. Franklin mentions that it was definitely hard, and she did face challenges dealing with juggling the two acts. However, the support of her parents, who loved her for who she truly was, gave her the strength to keep going along in her journey to the top. Right from when she entered the Colorado Stars club swimming team with Coach Todd Schimtz at just seven years old, Franklin had to balance her academics and her time in the water. She had a naturally built talent for the sport with a frame that gave her the right edge to swim fast at great speeds. At just twelve years of age, she was locking heads with those who were much older than she. A year later, she was competing in the U.S. Olympic Trials for the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Despite not qualifying for the '08 Games, Franklin was already a star in her hometown. When asked about her grounded demeanor, she said that she maintained a largely “normal” life like anyone else in her grade at that time, or at least what seemed usual for her in her own terms. She would get up in the morning for her first practice, finish up and start her school work, and then she would be back into the pool for her evening round of training. She says, “It might not have been anyone else’s normal, but it was normal for me. I didn’t know anything different than that!”

The breakthrough moment for Missy came at the 2011 World Championships in Shanghai, as was pointed out in her documentary film “Touch the Wall.” In what was supposed to be a long ride from the US to the Eastern part of the world for just a 2 minute race, the 200m backstroke event to be precise, turned out to be a remarkable journey as she returned a hero with five medals. She says, “This was the first time that I actually realized that all those goals I had made for myself were some things that I could achieve not five or six years down the line but right at that moment. It all felt like a dream, and I couldn’t believe that it was happening.” All this occurred when Franklin was still in high school, something quite rare to imagine for the average human mind.

Post Shanghai, Missy had quite a run in her competitions leading up to the 2012 London Olympics. She went into the 2012 U.S. Olympic Trials with some prior experience from 2008. This time around, she was the one to reckon with, the most hopeful medallion for the eventual Games far from her 13 year old underdog self. When she made the team, she says that it was all a mental game from then onwards. She proclaimed that competing at the Olympics was really no easy task at all, and visualization was a key factor in her training. Besides this, trust was another important aspect, both in herself as well as in her coach. Sticking to her usual game plan, which worked the best for her, was what she did during this period leading up to the Games. At London, she finally achieved her not so long ago dream of being an Olympian and came back home with a scintillating four gold medals and one bronze.

With such an astonishing victory, one is bound to be wandering in another world. Missy was an exception. She went straight back to her high school in Colorado and was still inspiring all her friends, even dancing at her prom! She rejected endorsement offers worth millions and turned her eyes onto her passion for college, as she always wanted to pay close attention to her academics along with her athletics. However, she didn't shy away from appearing in Hollywood in a cameo for the film *The Internship* and in an episode of the show *Pretty Little Liars* as herself. Well, which teenager wouldn't want to do that!

"Being a part of a team was always the best part about swimming, and there was no other place than collegiate athletics where I could gain such a thrilling experience. No matter how much money I was going to give up, I would be creating friends for life, which was exactly what happened as five of my bridesmaids at my wedding were my teammates from Cal in 2019!"

When choosing colleges, Cal was at the very top of Franklin's list because of its rich swim program history for both women and men's teams. She also added that the rigor of academics at Cal made it all the more beneficial for her to join the Bears squad. Berkeley's unique atmosphere, the diverse class options, and the entire Cal family were the factors that led her to become a Golden Bear for the rest of her life. In fact, she says that she wasn't feeling strange about being an Olympian as she was far from the only one in the school, let alone in the swim team. Drawing from the influences of other Cal legends like Dana Vollmer and Natalie Coughlin, Missy felt as if everyone on the roster had the same goals and determination to work as hard as she, so it seemed all the more the kind of environment that she had hoped to be in.

On asking her about her journey at Cal academically with the rigors of swimming competitively, Missy couldn't stop giggling and said, "Managing the academics at Cal-Berkeley with swimming is by far, to-date, the hardest thing that I have ever done. It's not easy at all because you're held to the same standards as anyone else in the class, and that's what we want and why we go here. However, at the same time, we are also dedicating 4-6 hours of our day, and every single one, to train as well. So, trying to deal with it all was definitely a challenge. Yet, we were all in it together. My first semester was a struggle, and thereon I was getting more into the groove of being the best student as well as the greatest athlete simultaneously."

Missy spent two years at Cal, training on both the athletic and academic fronts and winning the Honda Sports Award, before she decided to relocate back to her home in Colorado and practice intensely for the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, while still continuing with some online courses from Cal. Her expectations weren't met in Rio as compared to her performance in London, which she had looked to build upon in the Brazilian city. She came back with

only one gold medal. Following the event, she returned to Berkeley and started training with the men's swim team under coach Dave Durden. In regards to this new experience of hers, she was extremely grateful to both Durden and the men on the squad, who she referred to as her "brothers."

However, she says that despite the inclusion that she felt in the team, the empty ladies locker room and being the only female on an all-male squad were at times difficult to deal with mentally. So, she decided to make a switch. As hard as it was to leave Cal, it was going to be in her best interest. She transferred to the University of Georgia, whose coach she had known since she was very young, and it had been her second choice before choosing Berkeley. She felt that it might be her only hope to perform at her greatest strength in the next Games, which as it turns out didn't happen at all as Missy retired from competitive swimming in late 2018 due to a prolonged shoulder injury. To which she replies that "Everything happens for a reason, and I have absolutely no regrets and wouldn't want to change anything."

As her competitive swim career takes a backseat, Missy's zealous spirit is not one to go away. She managed to complete her degree in religious studies from the University of Georgia in 2019. She is also continuing to work with her sponsored brands as an ambassador as well as signing on with some new ventures. As her life story is so remarkably inspiring, Missy motivates others by engaging in public speaking, adding onto her book *Relentless Spirit*, as well as building on her "philanthropic" side by giving back to the sport that she so dearly loves. She is affiliated with the Laureus Sport for Good and USA Swimming Foundations.

Reflecting on her entire journey, when one asks her about her fondest memories at Cal, she exclaims with passion that her favorite class was Abnormal Psychology, her greatest learning experience was under the Finance Professor at the Haas School of Business Steve Etter, and her most exciting place to be in was at Cafe Strada along with relaxing on the lush greens around the campus. To her fellow Bears she advises, "Just Be Present and Enjoy!"

Missy Franklin will always be a Golden Bear in the classroom as well as in a place that we can all relate to her with - the swimming pool.

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