



In her own words...Sam Reilly

I struggled awake as the cool air whipped at my face.

“unghhhh...” they moan tossing and turning- I slipped from my sleeping bag shivering in the dark and pulled on some layers of clothing over my PFU’S. I bolted from my tent to the warm fire, that’s when it hit me...

This was states.

*Excitement burst from my veins like white water! “Wake up! Wake up! It’s states!” I scream, running around like a wild animal. My smile burned my cheeks it grew so wide. **The mindless zombies arose from their crypts moaning the early morning grumbles.** The light was getting ready to peek but the stars were still clear, I glanced to the sky and picked a star, I pressed them closed and made a wish, this was states.*

States, mouth-watering excitement, leg burning sensation and mind zapping powers. Raider competitions are the roughest of the tough, but nothing compares to the grueling danger faced in a state championship competition. Why do we do it? Is it the endorphins? The six-hour adrenalin rush? I think we all can agree that the main reason we do it is for the growling smile on the sergeant major face when we win.

I trudged through sand and blasted some motivating music into my ears, my legs were shaking fear. The first event was the pt test- two-minute pushups, two minute, sit ups and a two mile run. “Come on Sam, states, states, states, fight, fight, fight,” I told myself. Deep breaths flowed from my lungs, the smell of fear floated around. The presence of our team was strong. I knew her team better than a

fish knows the school. I pulled out my earphones as we approached the “battle field” where the test would be taken and tossed them to a trusty alternate. Tara was screaming about one thing and Sarah was mumbling about another, Swope was asking mindlessly about nothing and Chantel was listening sweetly, Kylie and Faith were saying their prayers and Carey was stretching her legs. Every girl on the team was completely different in our own special way; it’s what made US so special. It made us a unique family working together for one goal...first place.

The push-ups began and I was first up, I wanted to die. Fire burned in my veins and numbness tingled in my head. Lactic acid screamed in my legs and fatigue was settling in my arms. I wanted to give up and just fall to the ground but a series of screams me on. The team was cheering me on, giving me their strength with everything in their heart. They knew that in just a moment they would be doing the same exact thing. Motivated to push as hard as possible and the time stopped. I stood up and brushed the sand from my shorts. To my right I caught CSM Daly grinning eagerly. To my left I could see CSM Collis from a mile away, smiling ear to ear, hope and strength sparkling his eyes. We had to win, not just for us, but for them. They devoted their lives to our team, now it’s our time to give it back.

After all... this is states.

The sit-ups flew by with a trail of sweat and tears, the first for the day. We were lined up in the sand for the 2-mile run. Every single one of us pacing like horses before a race. The smell of sweat singed my nose like rotten oranges and we all crouched in position...GO! We galloped off searching for the difference between energy and pace. This mass of raiders raced towards that one goal, like a pack of wolves and one rabbit. At first the run wasn’t so bad, people were scattered about the trail cheering us on, but, as time passed the pain started catching up. My legs growled at the sand as it scratched between my toes and teased the muscles in my legs. My breath staggered, it hurt, and it hurt so bad, pain incomprehensible when all you’re trying to do is move your legs again and again. I glanced ahead spotting Tara in the distance, gliding freely over the sand with ease. Distressing me more. I reached the one-mile mark and knew I had to pick up the speed. At that moment all I wanted to do was stop, stop and walk away, be done.

“Come on... no one will notice...” the little devil whispered In the back of my head, fire kicked my legs with each piercing step. I glanced up once more and saw Sarah running ahead, remembering her painful injury. Pssh, this was nothing compared to the pain she was feeling, she was truly hurt and still brought herself out here to fight. I had no room to talk racing against that brut. Suddenly I could her shouts in the distance there was only but half a mile left, once more I had to pick up the speed. I passed about five girls struggling ahead and spotted the next five opening their strides. My turn, I shot ahead. Sprinting as fast as I could, flying past them with freedom. I fell across the finish line; my heart was racing; now that was painful.

The best thing about a raider competition isn’t the competing... It’s the food. I rubbed my stomach, yawned, smiling as the salty bacon, creamy biscuits, and tangy juice pleasantly settled in my stomach. I sat up from the pile of cadets napping in the shade, Joey’s iPod humming in the air. Now that’s what I call breakfast. I lay back down then quickly remembered what was next. The three mile obstacle course... dun dun dun...

“Come on! Let’s go! Pull her up!! Come-on Tara, jump!” we all screamed as we worked as one, pulling Tara over the wall. She toppled over the side and we hastily scampered to the ground. I had volunteered to take the 20 pound backpack first, however that was before we started running. We took off, this thing was much heavier than I remembered. My heels sank into the sand with every step, feeling weak, I had to slow down. Now I was slowing the team down. I began cursing myself, ‘I can’t do this, and I’m too tired! It’s too heavy, I’m too weak,’ I whined as the oxygen escaped fiercely from my mouth, suddenly someone appeared in front of me, ready to pull. I latched on and did all that I could to focus on the team. We made it to the low crawl and pull the pack through the mud. From there Tara took the pack. She picked up the speed while I lingered in back, failing once more. I opened my stride in an attempt to keep up, all the sudden a sharp pain broke in my ankles, a familiar pain that had slowed me in the past. I came to a halt. Unable to lift my boots from the deep sand. Tears dripped from my eyes, why did it have to happen now! The team slowed to a walk, little Swope had fallen behind. Poor girl had been sick all week, we were lucky to have had her at all. We needed her, but now she needed us. Carey volunteered to carry the pack. We shouted encouragement and the “family” pulled together. We yelled, we screamed, we laughed. We cursed the clear sky and its hot air and scorned the sun as it beat upon our necks with fury. There was a half mile left and we were attached at the hips, we rushed through the low crawl once more and flew across the rope bridge. Before we could breathe we were sprinting across the finish line, one team, one family, and one goal.

During the three mile obstacle run every motherly instinct is at a rise, something about feeling pain equally makes us mourn for each other, bringing us together as sisters. We began that three-mile as a team and came out a family. We melted on to the picnic tables, barefoot and smelly, raging and moaning. Poor Kylie’s feet were oozing with blisters the size of quarters and it was only the second event. Next we had Rope Bridge...

“Far side ready! Nearside ready! Butterfly ready! Squirrel ready! Mule team ready... Eee Haw... GO!” we scrambled through the ropes, Tara let out a roar as she sprinted across the river. Her roar is so stupid, but Kelly Smith did it so that makes it a tradition, right? “Secure!” she screamed and in harmony we built a rope bridge 60 foot across, we flew across like it was nothing. When we were done, we held hands. “Time!” Carey yelled and the clock stopped at a record-breaking time. Hollers flooded the air, relief; we’d survived yet another battle. The next event was litter carry, 8 girls and one very heavy stretcher, sounds easy right? I think not. We crowded in a circle in front of the start line and said some prayers, the sun was hot and energy was on the low. Suddenly CSM Collis appeared with a proud grin on his face... “RAWR, GROWLL ARGHHHHH!!!” he yelled, imitating a bear! Laughter filled the air like sugary school children, just the medicine we needed. Now with more confidence we crouched down to the litter, the handle slipped from the sweat beading from my fingertips, the simple weight strained my arms, every girl took a deep breath, this was for the team.

“GO!” we took off running, like sprinters setting the pace. Tara, Sarah, Carey and I. Sure we could go faster, but it was Faith, Kylie, Swope and Chantel that kept it going. However there is something about Faith, when she took hold of the litter, she showed a strength I never knew she had. She fiercely pushed the team with a determination I’d never seen. Now this girl wanted to win. The sun was hot, our clothes were stiff from sweat and I had to pee. This task was so enduring, we were nearing the end, the sprinters in us kicked in, we picked up the pace yelling from the pain. We opened our stride and picked up a gallop like angry lions nearing that darn gazelle and flash! We were done; just like that we could breathe again.

We only had one event left and that was land navigation, we had a little time until then so in the mean time we napped once more munching on green salads and fresh fruit. Then our little nurses came to

the rescue with band-aids and cool wet towels we would have died without. Our alternates and the Houghtelings (Tara's folks) were always there for us.

Last event, land navigation was the last event. Kylie limped across the sand and let out a soft whimper, you know things are bad when Kylie lets out whimper. Lylie Gouriluk looks sweet and pretty, but she is a lion, man what guts she showed. Tara calculated with the compass and directed Faith in a direction while I walked outward to try and find the spot with my best instincts. A half hour passed and we were "lost", we stumbled aimlessly across the palmetto forest, searching for the hidden point. No joke, I saw a McDonalds Big Mac in a tree and tried to eat it along with the other mirage that popped up.

"Look!" we yelled, cheering at the piece of plastic. We wrote down the letter and headed for the finish line. An adrenalin rush came from nowhere, pushing us closer to the end. Perhaps it was because it was our last event or our bodies had given up on protecting us, but we ran across that finish line with smiles and sighs.

This was states and states were over. We animals, we raiders, we sisters survived.

Back to camp our team moved in one blob, Kylies blisters were gushing with blood and my ankles were so swollen they looked like tennis balls and burned to touch. Every single raider was covered in mud and whimpering for their mommies. That was the intensity that was states. And in all the chaos it was beautiful, one team, one goal and one battle. We bled together. We trained and trained for months and months for this. Our Sergeant Major devoted his life to making us warriors and trust me it wasn't easy. In fact, I hated it, it hurt and smelled horrible. All of it was worth it for the smile in our Sergeant Majors eyes as we accepted those first place trophies for SMA. We raiders are a family. It wasn't always pretty, and we fought and cried, again and again. We fell apart and came back together. But isn't that what makes us a family? Isn't this what makes us special? We are not some superficial team that looks good. We get dirty and throw mud, literally. We are sisters and blood never dies. "Just wait til' next year!"