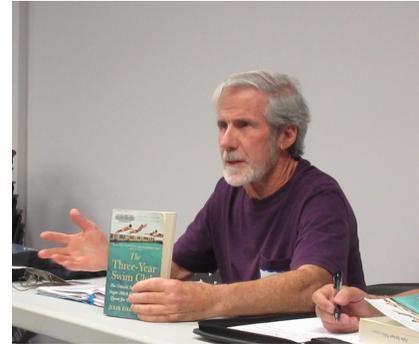


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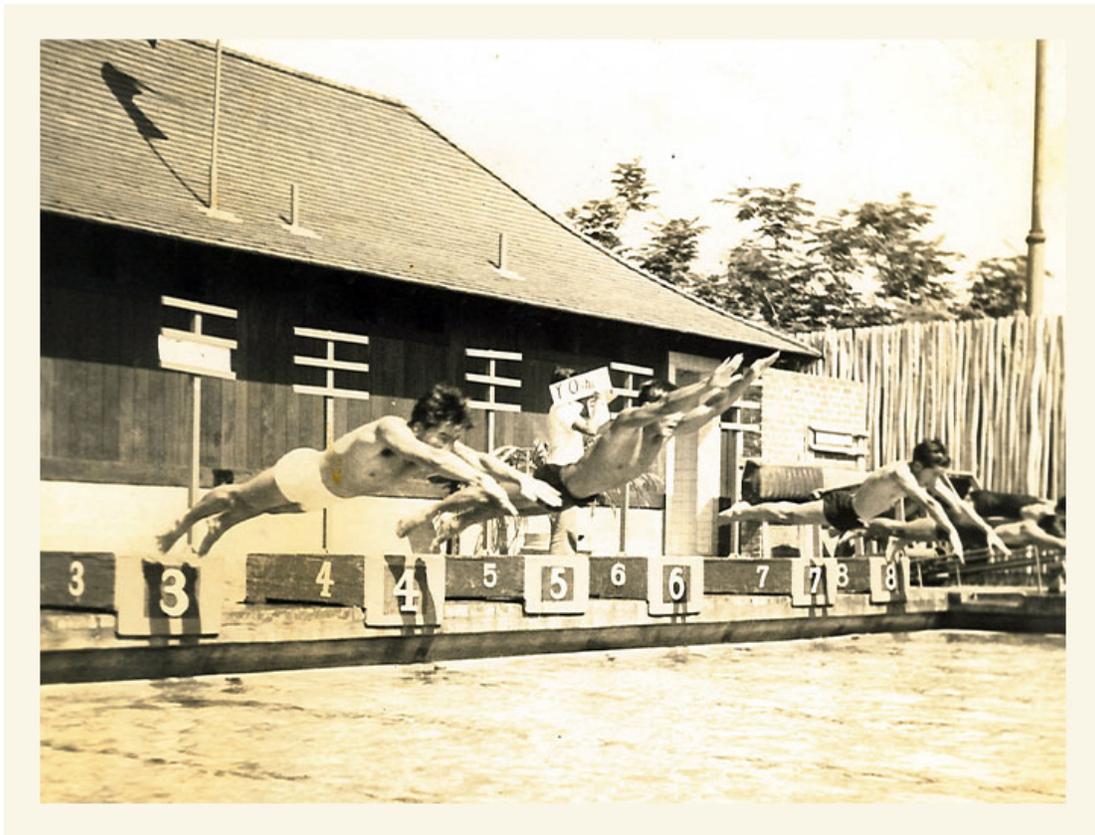
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***The Three-Year Swim Club: The Untold Story of Maui's Sugar Ditch Kids and Their Quest for Olympic Glory*, by Julie Checkoway**



Discussion Leader: Don Markley



Diving in, Camp 5 Pool, courtesy of the Alexander and Baldwin Sugar Museum
(Image from <http://juliecheckoway.com>).

Today's discussion thrilled. Don began by referring us to the question put to Julie Checkoway on page 417. "You could have ended this account in so many ways, the most obvious of which may have been with Bill Smith achieving his victory and gold medal. Instead, you end with Keo Nakama's endeavor to cross the Kaiwi Channel. How did you arrive at this decision?" In her answer, she explains that Soichi Sakamoto envisioned the Three-Year Swim Club in the classic three acts, three years, three acts. Reality is messy without classical heroes; reality has modern heroes, imperfect heroes. Checkoway realized "that in real life there is no clear ending; instead, the truth and the beauty of everything was in how Sakamoto's swimmers navigated open water, stroke by stroke, day after day, steady, steady, steady." Don claims that the last chapter of the book is among the best pieces of literature he has ever read and that the last chapter put the entire story into perspective. You may also like to view an [interview](#) with Julie Checkoway in 2015.

Checkoway, from a working-class family, graduated from Harvard College, the Iowa Writers Workshop, the Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars, and received a national Endowment for the Arts individual artist grant. While in Baltimore working for NPR, she became interested in the artistic process of artist Billy Pappas, who spent nearly ten years on one pencil drawing; the result: the documentary, *Waiting for Hockney*. Don segued, asking us what our process was in reading the book. Readers claimed that there were five books, that overlapping stories made it distracting, choppy. One reader suggested that it needed another title because the story was more expansive than just the swim club. Several readers did not finish the book. Then Don asked about the coach. His strengths? Among the positives – he professionalized swimming, and was highly respected (see Checkoway's answer on page 411) Readers found him abusive with OCD, and neglectful of his children... At this point, Gordy Dolinar, a new attendee to our club, silent up to this point, spoke up to share his remarkable story.



Soichi Sakamoto, who could barely swim, was his swim coach. Students revered Sakamoto as an ideal coach, teacher, mentor, and inspiration. Dolinar recalled that Sakamoto taught Barak Obama during his junior year at Puunene High School. Dolinar, from a plantation family, tells about the brutality of plantation life. He emotionally recounted how Sakamoto advised him to leave his swim team after high school and accept a scholarship in baseball, his true passion, rather than remain with his swimming coach; this is the act of a true teacher. Sakamoto opened doors for him. Dolinar thrilled to learn so much that Julie Chuckaway uncovered of which he was unaware. He did not find the book disjointed; rather, it was exemplary of Hawaiian culture as “talk story,” going from one topic to another. Readers embraced Gordy Dolinar with appreciation and, if I may interpret, some awe. In spite of the appearance of the descriptive “[the book] was a bit of a slog,” Gordy Dolinar’s presence brought this exhaustive piece of here-to-fore untold non-fiction to life. We were honored.

Thank you, Don, for your expert leadership. Join us May18, 2018, when we will discuss *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot led by Mary Marks. Happy reading!