

Survivor 2014

Contrary to what's popular I never liked Diana Nyad
in my mind overrated white woman
ex-olympic swimmer most recently swam from Cuba to Florida
privileged
thrill seeker
daredevil
doing voluntarily what so many people of color
are forced to do while attempting to gain freedom
drowning in boats, falling overboard, terrible accidents,
falling into the jaws of sharks, those waters a meat fest
for predators, slavers
Sometimes I think about slavery and think if only those waters
could tell the tale
I've always wanted to say to those people who go on the reality-show Survivor for kicks
try being an artist and make it your career choice
or how about a single mother or father trying to raise a family
on minimum wage living in an impoverished area
try being someone who comes to America and
doesn't speak the language whose entire survival rests upon
learning english
arriving in a strange land, on strange soil, estranged from everything
you have ever known
like hitting your head against a glass door, or mirrors
like optical illusions that used to be in the old fun houses
or how about being uninsured and being sick for a number
of years
weathering that storm
or insured but burdened with a costly illness
health plans don't cover
or like so many of my students who are bullied to the point
they have nowhere to turn and no longer have knowledge
of their own name
No I never liked Diana Nyad
until one day I caught a clip of her on Ellen
I caught the part where she talked about her friendship
with Superman Christopher Reeve who in real life suffered
paralysis from the neck down.
He looked at her in later years after she'd retired from swimming
said he feared she wasn't living her own dreams, that
she was an Olympian
And something about her conversations with him motivated her
to try again, to listen.
Maybe through her I saw the frayed ends of my own un-lived dreams,
my own fear that caused paralysis
And so by the end of that conversation with Ellen

where Diana talked about returning to her Olympic Self
by swimming from Cuba to Florida at age 60 challenging
every notion of what it means to be an athlete, a woman,
and the stereotypes of aging I was crying
by the time she looked into the camera and said
Never give up
Don't ever give up on your dreams