

Mike's Lucky Ice Cream

by RV Staff Writer J.C.

Mike licked the last of the mint chocolate chip ice cream. It was almost time to leave. He jumped into the car with his parents and headed off to the Olympic-sized pool at the recreation center for the big swim meet.

When his race came up, Mike was confident. He was strong and swift. Mike climbed out the pool, smiling. He walked dripping over to his where his parents were sitting, cheering him on. He had just won first place, making him the fastest boy in his age group.

"Congratulations, son," his father said. His mom gave him a hug, even though he was soaking wet. With a grin and a wave, he grabbed his towel and headed off to change.

A week later, it was time for another swim meet. Like before, Mike decided to enjoy his favorite ice cream flavor before they left home. Mike remembered that the last time he had won a race, he also ate mint chocolate chip ice cream first. Maybe he'd win again.

As Mike climbed out the pool, his teammates patted him on the back. He's taken first place again in his race, this time for the backstroke. Mike was feeling pretty good.

As it turned out, Mike decided to have some mint chocolate chip ice cream before every one of the next few swim meets that came up. He began to think of it as his lucky charm. His parents didn't think it was a great idea to eat ice cream every time before swimming, but Mike argued that he needed to eat it to win.

After several months of placing in the top positions of every race he swam, Mike was feeling invincible. And he wouldn't admit it, but he was also starting to feel a little uncomfortable. All that ice cream was adding a few pounds to his athletic swimmer's build. Practices were getting a little harder for Mike to maintain the speeds he was used to getting.

It didn't take long after that for Mike to start coming in second place – and then third – and then last place in his races. The lucky mint chocolate chip ice cream had lost its magic. Mike didn't know what to think. He had been certain the ice cream ritual was helping him win.

On the day of his next swim meet, his mother sat down at the table with him. "Mike, I think we need to talk about this. We all love ice cream, but it's got lots of fat and sugar in it, and it's not healthy for your body to eat so much of it. A little bit now and then is fine, but this isn't working for you. Maybe it's time to quit the sweet treats for a while, especially before you go swimming.

Mike reluctantly agreed. He went to the swim meet, and didn't perform well. His father offered to go running with him a few days a week to help him feel better and strengthen his muscles. The extra weight soon disappeared, and Mike found himself breathing easier at swim practices.

It was the last meet of the season, and Mike wasn't sure what to expect. He'd been training hard with his dad, and staying away from the rich desserts he enjoyed so much. He felt healthy again, but he didn't know if he still had any speed in the pool.

As he dove into the water, he kicked his legs and stretched his arms as far as he could. He made the turn at the end of the lane perfectly, and was feeling strong. This race was a long one with several laps, so Mike tried to keep his energy level up even as he began feeling tired.

Whenever he came up for a breath, he could see he was gaining on the boy ahead of him in the next lane. Feeling determined to pass him, Mike found the power in his muscles he needed to surge ahead, and as his hand touched the edge of the pool, the race was over. He lifted his swim goggles off his head and looked at the times on the electronic board. He knew he wasn't last, but what was his time?

His jaw dropped as he realized he had beaten his own best time, and everyone else's too. Mike had won his race, and he had also qualified for the national championships. The audience and his teammates cheered loudly, and his parents were grinning from ear to ear. "Hey champ, let's go grab some of your favorite ice cream and celebrate!" said his father.

"Thanks, Dad, but I'll pass on the ice cream; it's not such a lucky charm after all!"

Questions

1. Why does Mike believe the ice cream is lucky for him in the beginning of the story?

2. What does "invincible" mean here: "After several months of placing in the top positions of every race he swam, Mike was feeling invincible."

3. What happened to Mike when he kept eating the ice cream?

4. Why does Mike really win swimming races?