

## **One Breath: Erica Griffiths**

Why did she feel so afraid? They had trained alongside each other for six years, strengthening their bodies and honing their minds to prepare for this day, this moment. They used yoga techniques, trying to maintain focus while relaxing and holding their breath. They wanted to be champions of inner stillness, able to ignore their brains quietly freaking out about the meagre supply of oxygen.

They sat quietly, waiting their turn to paddle out to the platform. This was no time for dark thoughts, Instead they ran through Sara's plan again. Float on her back and breathe up at the surface, long out-breaths to maximise the carbon dioxide in her blood; then rhythmically kicking her mono-fin down to 20 metres where the increased pressure would literally sink her like a stone; stopping at her goal of 103 metres; then pushing hard, back to the surface.

She didn't want to stop her, but she dearly wished for this challenge to be over. Sara hadn't slept well, her focus was off, dark circles emphasising her petite pretty face. Sara continued drawing air in, taking a final breath then folding her body downwards under the water. Emily watched her descent, knowing when the rush would begin, free falling silently out of the light into the darkness below. She knew Sara's body would be tingling with sensation, the nitrogen in her blood swinging her from feelings of inebriation to euphoria as she passed the 60 metre mark.

Emily was also a free diver, she knew the dangers. The pressure compressing your body, shrinking the air in your lungs, the overwhelming urge to breathe, the intense bodily discomfort and the seduction of weightlessly plummeting. She knew Sara would have her eyes closed against the darkness. She just prayed she

would fight the rush and open them in time to see the small disc at the end of the line.

The two-minute mark ticked by. Sara should be pushing upwards by now. She should be more than halfway, propelling to the surface. The seconds dragged. Emily tried to distract herself, thinking about Sara's pure joy in free diving. It was a process that brought her closer to her true self, she loved the deep stillness she felt after surfacing and never experienced the pressure in a bad way, describing it instead as 'being held by the sea'.

Three minutes. This was too long. She should have surfaced by now. Selfishly Emily thought I don't want to drive back to our families alone. A flash. Movement. Sara's head popped into the sunshine. 3 mins 26 seconds. She could see Sara struggling not to black out, one hand gripping the line, the other holding her prized tag reading 117 m. A new women's world record!

Sara slurred the required 'I'm OK', as she reached for her sister's embrace.