

# Wisconsin YMCA Swimming

## 2013 Jon Brenner Scholarship

Jon Brenner spent nearly 30 years coaching YMCA swimming, including 18 seasons (1991-2009) with the Lacrosse Area Family YMCA Wave. He was a soft spoken man who loved what he did and accepted any and all who wanted to swim. He was genuinely interested in and appreciated each swimmer, regardless of ability. Jon's career was cut short in January 2010 when he died of brain cancer at age 54.

In Jon's memory, the Wisconsin YMCA Swim Coaches Association is awarding six scholarships worth a total of \$2,100 to graduating high school students. The scholarship amounts are \$500, \$400, and 4 x \$300. Eligible swimmers must be graduating from high school in 2013, planning to attend a four-year college or university in 2013 and be a current member of their YMCA swim team. Scholarships are awarded based on a short essay judged by a panel of YMCA swim coaches, parents, officials and YMCA staff.

Forty-two athletes applied this year. Below are their essays:

### Essay #1—Olivia Revolinski, OSHY

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In my ten years with the OSHY swim team, I have been blessed to experience the YMCA core values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility. It is these core values that became the foundation further teaching me how to prioritize, trust, and how to push myself to limits I never thought were possible.

Often times our coaches have said, "Practice is an option." Personally, I have always taken this phrase as a challenge using it as an inspiration to make every possible practice, believing that in the end it will only make me a stronger and more dedicated swimmer. It was my years of high school swimming that truly taught me how to prioritize study time, extracurricular activities, and pool time, while still perusing my personal goals in swimming. These goals have always been to achieve state qualifying times, but in our house, schoolwork and grades have always preceded swim practice. Therefore, it became clear that good study habits would equal success in the classroom, which would translate to more time in the pool; allowing me to work on achieving my state qualifying times.

For some, achieving state qualifying times is less challenging. Unfortunately, that has not always been the case for me. Like every swimmer, my swimming career has had its ups and downs. While the ups feel great when I am in the midst of them, I still have my lows, and try to stay optimistic when faced with them. Like most, I have experienced times where I wanted to give up, but after thinking this through, I quickly realized what a great part of my life would be missing. For example, in my sophomore year of high school I wanted to return to soccer. But after 2 months of workouts and games, I recognized my passion for swimming was far stronger

than any black and white ball kicked in front of me. I knew it was time to get back in the pool and help make that high school swim season the best it could be. With the help of the OSHY team, my swimming was back on an upswing, providing me with my best season of high school swimming in four years.

I believe three trusting relationships are necessary for a successful season: the coach, yourself, and, most importantly, God. Through my ups and downs, I have sometimes questioned coaching styles; however, the end result is always positive, not only for me, but a majority of the team. When it comes time to trusting me, I have a difficult time because I can easily psych myself out. When I start to doubt my own capabilities, however, I know there is always something that I can do to relieve the stress; pray. Whenever I step up on the blocks, I say a prayer, giving all glory and honor to God for the opportunity to swim. Prayer has always calmed me down, because I know that God has the power to determine the outcome of my race. Whether the result is good or bad, I will always give Him praise for allowing me to compete.

My years on the OSHY swim team have taught me so much; not only the true meaning of every YMCA core value but also, how to prioritize my time, how to push myself to limits, and how to keep my trust in God. I know the traits I have learned from the YMCA swim team experience will help me become a well-rounded adult and help me make mature decisions later in life. I am so grateful I have been through the YMCA swim team program.

## Essay #2—Natalie Neuwirth, SPDY

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When I was younger, I was competing at the YMCA state meet, but I didn't have a coach or team with me. Jon Brenner took me under his wing for the weekend and treated me with the same respect and care he gave his regular athletes. Just in one weekend, Jon, probably without realizing it, had taught me the values of being kind, generous to others, and to welcome everyone with open arms. Being a part of my YMCA swim team and meeting people like John Brenner has changed my life and shaped me into the person I am today. Being on the Stevens Point swim team (SPDY) has created opportunities, friendships, and the chance to establish connections with coaches that I'll never forget.

I've always been very passionate about athletics, playing 3-4 different sports at a time when I was younger. The relationships that I built on SPDY were different the other sports I competed in; I got to experience the feeling of a family rather than feeling like I was just another teammate. The friendships from swimming and the memories we've shared are things I am going to treasure for the rest of my life. I've met my best friends here and have created friendships with athletes from other teams that I know would never have happened if I wasn't part of the YMCA swim program. I've never been in a sport with a friendlier atmosphere and even though we are all competitors, we don't treat each other that way.

If you asked me what I wanted to be when I was younger, I would have said a professional swimmer. I couldn't dream of being paid for something I loved to do. Now, after deciding that I am going to continue to swim in college, I am finally able to live that dream. Being a member of SPDY has opened up so many doors that I never knew existed. From Maryland for YMCA Nationals to Colorado for the State Games of America, being a swimmer has allowed me to travel all over the country. It gave me the opportunity to meet new people, participate in competitive events, and helped me create memories with the best teammates I could ever ask for.

The last people who have impacted me are the unbelievable coaches I've been lucky enough to have in my life. Although I've had numerous coaches, there are lessons to learn from each. Justin Stoffel gave me impossible goals that became my realities; he pushed me farther than I've ever been pushed before. Nick Hansen taught me that winning a state title was the same as winning a heat ribbon when I was eight and that each victory was important, no matter how small or how big. Aaron Heiss showed me the fun side of swimming and got me to love the sport like I did when I first joined. Eric Demrow has been like a second father to me and has helped lead me in the right direction for my future swim career. Without the guidance and direction of these coaches, and many others that helped me throughout my swimming career, I wouldn't be the same person, in and out of the pool, that I am today.

Lifelong friends, opportunities to see the country and the mentorship of strong adults in my life have given me the tools to consider how I would like to "give back" in some way. While thinking of that coach who helped me keep going on days when the chlorine seemed thick and the water seemed cold, I'm now excited about what my future may hold. Will I console a five year old when her favorite pink goggles fall off or teach a science lesson to a class of 8th graders? I'm not sure what path my life will take, but I am confident that my involvement with YMCA swimming will help me make sure it continues in a positive, healthy and great direction.

## Essay #3—Trevor Manz, Eau Claire

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For nearly twelve years I've swum at a competitive level as a part of the YMCA. As rewarding it has been (state championships, All-American Honors, scholarship opportunities), swimming has its hardships. Many decide that the exchange of time in the pool for social and school activities is unjustified. My experience with the Eau Claire YMCA has taught me the exact opposite.

I am fortunate to be on a YMCA swim team. A team in which respect, encouragement, enjoyment, and smiles are abundant on a daily basis. The YMCA creates a group that focuses on success not as an individual achievement, but as a result of universal team support. The atmosphere produced at a YMCA swim meet is unlike any other. There is not a single race that a team is not cheering hard for their own. I have swum in countless meets during my "career," including many USA meets, and none compare to the supportive presence that the YMCA encompasses.

YMCA swimming revolves around the core values of honesty, respect, care, and responsibility. Our YMCA coaches work to transfer these ideals to athletes of all ages and expect the older athletes, including myself, to model proper behavior for the younger swimmers. I remember being fascinated by the "older boys" when I was younger, hammering them with question after question, and wanting to *be* just like them. The "older boys" were not required to answer any of my questions or go to the end of my lane to cheer me on during a race, but that's what they did; that's what the YMCA had taught them to do. This emphasis on core values along with an importance on my Christian faith has shaped me into who I am today.

The YMCA also teaches me to place a significance on involvement in the community. Several years ago, I began coaching swimming for the Special Olympics and later the "Mini Marlins" swim team at our YMCA. For three years now I have coached the cognitively disabled along with new swimmers in a sport I love. I believe that it is extremely important to give back to a community, or in this case, attempt to create a similar atmosphere to what I experienced through the YMCA. I'm grateful for the opportunity to share my own affinity with the water with others and hope that they are able to find a similar enjoyment.

YMCA swimming teaches incredible discipline and time management. Because I can spend sixteen hours a week in the water, swimming forces me to be organized in school as well as manage relationships successfully; it prioritizes my academics and relationships with people who matter the most. I am better prepared than many with keeping a "level head" and focusing on my goals. Aside from contributions to much of my academic success, the YMCA has also opened many opportunities. I've been fortunate enough to travel, compete, make new friends, and find success in ways I could not imagine otherwise. I am lucky to be surrounded by coaches and teammates who encourage me in and out of the water and blessed to belong to the Eau Claire YMCA community.

## Essay #4—Kristin Zablocki, GBY

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YMCA Swimming has been a huge part of my life since I was seven years old. I started out at the Sheboygan YMCA but spent nine years with the Green Bay YMCA. The things I have learned in my time with Y Swimming have made me the person I am today.

From the beginning I was expected to work hard at practice. Discipline is something I learned from Y Swimming. The expectations set by my coach, Dave Korst, carried over into other aspects of my life. In school I learned to push and challenge myself academically. Many times it is difficult to balance everything but I've learned that I can rise to the occasion. My coach has pushed me to work hard at practices and attend them all. Like many swimmers, I have had to miss out on other things that my classmates got to do, but I never minded spending more time in the water, and I never felt as though I was missing out. As I got older, I stopped going to practice because I was expected to and started going because I wanted to. Swimming is something I look forward to and that I love.

YMCA Swimming has also affected my character over the years. I've learned a lot about empathy and this has helped me with all of the different types of people I have met through swimming and throughout my life. I have learned to be proud of my accomplishments but also be humble because while I may be having a good day, someone else may not be. My teammates know that I'll be there for them regardless of how they swim or even how I swim. Through my successes and failures in swimming I have also learned resiliency. If I had a bad race I have learned to bounce back quickly and keep looking forward. This has also helped me in other areas of my life. I know if I fail at something I can only change the future, and it doesn't help to dwell on the past. The YMCA has also provided me with many opportunities to volunteer over the years. In addition to the Strong Kids Campaign, I have helped several other organizations that I otherwise would not have without being a part of the YMCA.

During my years on GBY I have gotten to know my teammates very well. I can't imagine how different my life would be had I not met many of these friends along the way. While some of my teammates are no longer swimming they will always be a part of my Y family. One of my happiest days was winning the 9-10 200 free relay out of lane one at Y state with my best friends. While two of those girls are no longer swimming I would imagine it is still one of their favorite memories as well. Another great memory was swimming the 200 fly at Y State with one of my teammates. Neither of us had the national cut and it was our last chance. Before the race we talked about how we needed to push each other and at the end of the race it didn't matter who won, it only mattered that we both got the cut.

In addition to spending time with my own teammates I have always enjoyed meeting swimmers from other teams. While I am the kind of swimmer that always wants to do well, I like to see my teammates and opponents do well, too. Being a part of Y Swimming has taught me to respect and appreciate both my teammates and opponents. Good sportsmanship is a huge part of what makes Y Swimming so special and it really shows in the camaraderie that is shared between swimmers, even among those from different teams. Two years ago I had an awesome opportunity to get to know a group of people through the Natalie K. Bolin Swim Camp. This camp brought together 17 swimmers from Wisconsin to celebrate Natalie's spirit and life. We went to Ely, MN to do all of Natalie's favorite things that she had been doing with her OSHY

swim team for years. One of those things happened to be a 17.5 mile hike on the Grand Portage Trail, which was a huge challenge to someone like me whose exercise was pretty much limited to water at that point. Both the mental and physical challenges of this camp brought everyone closer together and inspired me to make some positive changes in my life. I left camp with a new perspective and began to think about how I could become a better person and honor Natalie's memory.

Y Swimming is a huge part of my life and I don't know where I would be without it. I am thankful for my parents and grandparents for helping me so much and encouraging me through all of my years of swimming, along with all of my teammates. I am also grateful for my coach and all of the opportunities I have been given through Y Swimming.

## Essay #5—Alex Nennig, SSTY

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Being a part of Schroeder YMCA swim team has changed my life in many invaluable ways, all of which I am thankful for and have made me a better person. YMCA teams are truly something special, bonded by these core values and love for the sport of swimming. Schroeder and its coaching staff have not only provided a nourishing environment for me to grow up in, but also contributed very much to my life and my successes. I cannot imagine my life without these experiences Schroeder has provided me with. For years, the core YMCA values of caring, respect, honesty and responsibility were painted on the wall of the Schroeder aquatic center. It served as a daily reminder of the positive qualities, which I aim to carry out every day with each person I encounter, as well as the remaining chapters of my life.

The YMCA environment provided by my coaches was centered around care, not only care for my swimming, but also care for who I am as a person. It's so great to have a coach genuinely care about how each and every athlete is doing that day. This environment fostered me to care about my teammates as well. Feeling a part of the team is such a great feeling, and being on a YMCA team embodies this for each athlete as opposed to just being a member of the team. We are family, tied closely with these caring relationships.

YMCA meets, apart from always being a great time, also allowed us to see all different teams from across the state. With any type of competition, rivalries between athletes and whole teams will arise. However, being on a YMCA team has taught me to respect those I am racing against. Whether it is telling them good luck before the race or high fiving afterwards. I have been taught to have good sportsmanship no matter what the outcome. My team has taught me to be grateful for my great swims, but also for the successes of others.

Honesty has also been an integral part of my life as well. Especially in the relationships with my teammates, coaches, and family, trust is vital. It is very important to be on the same page with your teammates, particularly when you are in a leadership role such as captain. To be the best athlete you can be, a close relationship with your coach where cooperation and collaboration is involved is a must. Swimming for a YMCA has shown me the importance of honest relationships and I will carry that with me as I form new relationships in college.

As a senior athlete on my team, I have found that the younger kids look up to my group. This has taught us responsibility to act our best both in and out of the pool. Our actions need to set a great example for our younger swimmers. I remember Coach Matt disciplining a group of us when I was like 9 or 10 years old for our misbehavior in the locker room. At the time I did not appreciate or understand the punishment, but now I can look back and see how he taught me a valuable lesson. I AM a role model to the younger swimmers on our team. I now have stepped up to the plate and tried to direct our younger swimmers to hopefully better decisions. I also am showing them by working hard in the pool and supporting each other at practice, it creates not only an environment of success both in and out of the water, but hopefully it gives them a LOVE for the sport as well.

Swimming for a YMCA team has taught me the core values of caring, respect, honesty, and responsibility and their positive effect they have on everyday life. I am a better person after swimming on a YMCA team since I was very young. I am so grateful for all of the experiences

swimming on Schroeder has provided me with, and I am going to carry these attributes with me as I start a new journey at Denison University in the fall.

## Essay #6—Ethan Bott, SSTY

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Being a part of the Schroeder YMCA swim team has been one of the single most enriching experiences in my life. Since I've joined the Schroeder YMCA swim team nine years ago, I have grown from a shy and reserved kid to a confident and energetic young man. Initially, swimming was just another activity and was nothing special to me. However, as I continued to swim, I found that swimming wasn't just for exercise, but a valuable time to practice hard and work as a team. It has provided me with a group of people I can call my family. It has set me up well for my adult life by teaching me many life skills like hard work, perseverance, teamwork, and the importance of friendship.

Swimming with the Schroeder YMCA swim team has taught me many beneficial life lessons that will affect the rest of my life. Through the seemingly impossible, hard, and long workouts in 30 degree water, I developed the ethic of a hard worker. Although though I hated swimming in the freezing water, I had to persevere and work that much harder to stay warm. Along with the encouragement of the coaches I've learned that I can be a hard worker not just in freezing cold water, but in life as well. I will face many more challenges in life other than cold water and swimming at Schroeder has most definitely prepared me for that.

Another invaluable lesson I have learned from swimming with the Schroeder YMCA swim team is the importance of teamwork. Many times during practice, teamwork alone got me through practices. If I was just having a bad day or if my toes were freezing off, there was always someone to encourage me to keep at it or work harder. Through water polo games, practices, relays, and meets, I was able to fully grasp the significance of teamwork that will prove vital in my future.

The Schroeder YMCA swim team taught me that friendships are crucial to one's life. Because I was home schooled through most of high school, swimming gave me more opportunities to interact and make new friends. I discovered that friends are more than just a person to talk with, but someone who can actually care and love me. It opened my shell and allowed me to be honest to others and love them as well. I was able to trust others, which developed our bond even closer. Swimmer friends are more than just friends. I found that outside of swimming, they would support me in any way possible. They are the some of the most incredible people that I have ever met. The many life long friends I have made on the swim team have affected my life in the most positive way.

The impact the Schroeder YMCA has had on my life has been huge. Ever since I joined the team, I have learned many life lessons that I can use and apply to the rest of my life. Through the swim team, I have learned to work hard (especially in cold water!) and to value friends and teamwork over anything else. My experiences with Schroeder has made me into the person I am today. Without the Schroeder swim team, my life would be dramatically different. I want to thank everyone on the Schroeder swim team because they are more than a swim team to me, they are my family.

## Essay #7—Erika Jensen, GBY

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No one could have ever predicted that I would become a swimmer. At age five, I lived in Florida and had a pool in my backyard. Perfect for a swimmer - if I was one. Of course, it would be three long years before I was even comfortable putting my head in the water, never mind being able to swim.

It was not until I moved to Massachusetts that I learned how to swim. Within a few months of learning, I was in a summer league. During that first season, I made a few friends from the local YMCA, and decided to join them on their team that fall. I grew close to the girls my age, and my experiences with these teammates and my coaches are not only what shaped me into the swimmer I am, but also the reasons why I am still in the sport today.

When I moved to Wisconsin, I started off on a club team. I thought that the move alone was the only transition I was going to have to make. It took me some time to realize that no matter what I did, that team was not going to do the same for me as the Andover-North Andover YMCA had done. After my freshman season of high school, I switched to the local YMCA. My own excuse was that I wanted to train harder, something the Green Bay YMCA practically guarantees. But dig a little deeper and you will find a much more emotional reason behind it all. At my sectional meet that freshman year, I got to talk to who was then only a mere acquaintance, but now is one of my closest teammates. We were talking about the upcoming club season, and she seemed much more excited than I. She gushed about her team, talked about how much she wanted to go back, how much she missed her coach. I, on the other hand, could not say any of that.

Her words that day set off a whirlwind of emotions. I had gone from being perfectly content on my team to switching over to the YMCA within a few days. While I would like to say that I have never regretted changing, I cannot. But, if I had the opportunity to do it over again, I certainly would not change what I have done.

The YMCA team gives me a sense of community. I have a small family, and, after numerous moves, few close friends. I never thought that I needed that many people in my life; I was always comfortable being independent. But I love what I have now. I love that I have a group of people in my life that know what I am going through, understand what the sport is like, respect me for the work I put into swimming. I have friends that share the same goals, maintain the same values, dedicate themselves the same way. At school, I have a group of people that can sympathize with me. But at swim practice, I have a group of people who can empathize with me. Sometimes, just knowing that I am not alone makes the difference.

In Wisconsin, the YMCAs are closely interconnected. I enjoy knowing the swimmers across the state, often even more so than other swimmers from my own home city. I love always having someone to talk to, someone I can spend time with at any meet, as if the other YMCAs were merely an extension of my own team.

The connections continue past the state level. For the past couple of years, I had the honor of attending the YMCA National meet. Not only did I get the opportunity to be rewarded for my performance, but also the chance to see my old teammates, my old coaches from my first YMCA team. Because of that, I am now heading into the final stretch of my club career feeling

as though I have finally come full circle, back to the place where it all began ten years ago with that little girl who finally learned to put her face in the water.

## Essay #8—Elliott Tauscheck, Sheboygan

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My first experience at a team sport had been hockey. However, when a multitude of skaters sped toward me with sticks in their hands, I quickly decided this wasn't the sport for me. Like most kids, I enjoyed swimming, so at seven years old I joined the YMCA swim team. It wasn't long before I knew I loved this sport. Looking back over my years swimming at the YMCA, I can see the impact it has made on my life.

Swimming is such a great sport because you can see yourself steadily improving. The coaches at the Y were not focused on if I won a race, but rather noted my improvements and celebrated with me if I got my best time. If it wasn't my best swim, they encouraged me to "shake it off" and keep trying. This valuable lesson has taught me to not give up; that sometimes improvement comes slowly. I can't expect to reach my goal without hard work.

I have made many friends throughout my years on the swim team. I fondly remember many weekends spent with them at swim meets: watching movies in each other's rooms or playing "cops and robbers" through the halls of the hotel. Many of these friends, I am still close to today. Respect, caring, and responsibility was always stressed as a member of the YMCA swim team. This was evident at meets, as teammates stood at the end of lanes cheering each other on. When it came time for high school swimming, some of my Y friends were on opposing teams. Yet we often found ourselves at the end of lane lines cheering again for each other. Our camaraderie extends beyond the team.

My time spent on the YMCA swim team has been an invaluable experience. It has taught me responsibility: your teammates count on you, you need to show up on time and be ready to swim. It has boosted my confidence and taught me perseverance: you need to work hard to reach your goals. Lastly it has taught me caring and compassion. I have had many dedicated coaches and met many life long friends who I will always respect and care about. My personality and character has been shaped from being on the YMCA swim team and I am thankful for the lessons and experiences that I take away with me. I am confident it will help me throughout my life.

## Essay #9—William Wong, SSTY

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The pitter patter of water dripped from the rusty shower head as a young petite version of myself waddled into the immense locker room of the West Suburban YMCA. The never ending rows of dull colored lockers seemed to surround my seven year old self. Terrified, I gingerly crept around looking for the specific lock that fit my key. Finally, after swerving around several giant lockers, I found it: Number 225. Quietly, I put on my swimming suit and placed my now wrinkled clothes onto the hangers. Navigating out of the maze of lockers and showers, I arrive at the chlorinated pool. There, I see my instructor, Paul, paddling around in the water, waiting for me. I quietly walk up to him, carefully avoiding touching the water. At a young age, I was deathly terrified of the pool. Horrible, evil monsters lived under the water, waiting to devour me in one bite. I was the perfect size: small and weak. So, like every time, Paul would try everything to get me to enter the water. First it was small motivational talks, then it became bribery, and finally it ended with food. However, I stood adamant. I wouldn't step foot into the pool.

Fast forward a decade later, I casually walk onto the bulkhead, put on my cap and goggles and gracefully dive into the water. What happened to the crippling fear? Over time, as I continued to take more and more lessons, my instructor finally convinced me to tackle my fear. So, led by Paul, I gingerly placed one toe in the water, carefully looking for any suspicious creatures waiting to devour my foot. Once clear, I slowly inched my body into the pool. Suddenly, I stood shocked as my entire body was submerged! Paul thrust his arm high into the air, shouting, "You did it! I'm so proud of you!" Stunned by what happened, my brain couldn't process everything. After standing there stiff as a board for what seemed like hours, I actually began to enjoy the water. There weren't monsters waiting to eat you alive. In fact, it was a whole new world where I could just peacefully relax or just have fun.

Because of the YMCA, my swimming career began. If it wasn't for Paul's constant motivation, I never would have tackled my fear. Instead, I probably would have been sitting at home watching TV. But luckily, through his instructions, I began to love the water. Every single day, I begged and cried to my parents to let me swim. So, after being annoyed with my continuous requests, they enrolled me at the West Suburban YMCA swim team where I could frolic around in the water to my heart's content. And, after moving to Mequon, I was able to join the amazing Schroeder Swim Team. These two YMCA swim teams have provided me an amazing place to pursue this passion of mine.

Swimming back and forth across a pool for ten years can be quite tedious and boring. But the amazing swimmers I've met from these two YMCA teams have made this sport so exciting, invigorating and enjoyable. Looking back, I wouldn't change one thing about it. The great memories of early morning swim practices, long dry land activities, and our quick talks in between sets at the pool have been absolutely unforgettable. To Paul, my coaches, the swimmers and every YMCA staff, I can't thank you enough. You have all taught me to face my fears, to be passionate about my sport and to just laugh and enjoy yourself every single day. As I leave for college next year, a part of my life will suddenly be closing. But, I'll know that the memories and lessons taught will be cherished forever.

# Essay #10—Michaela Klump, Woodson Y

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To swim or not to swim. It was an easy answer for me: to swim. Being part of the YMCA and swim team has helped develop me much further than just a swimmer; they helped developed me into the person I am today. They have shown me how to be good leader and a good role model. They have shown me how to set and achieve goals and overcome “mind” obstacles. They have given me the confidence to continue when I did not succeed. The values I have learned through the YMCA and swimming will carry me forward through my college years and my adulthood.

As a senior, I look back at my life and everything has revolved around swimming. The pool has been my second home and my team has been my second family for as long as I can remember. We have succeeded together and we have failed together but most importantly, we were there to support each other. “Individually, we are one drop. Together we are an ocean.” ~ Ryunosuke Satoro. As a team, our strength showed that anything is attainable with a little encouragement, especially from the end of a lane, and a pat on the back.

I remember my first day of practice with the Woodson YMCA team. Being new, I didn't know what to expect. As a scared little 11 year old, I had my arms wrapped around my waist as I walked onto the pool deck. Coach Soja looked at me, smiled, and said “Don't you worry, we don't bite too hard.” I laughed and thought this is going to be fun. It was! Those simple words of “Don't worry” taught me to trust and have faith in myself and others.

Through my swim career, I have been taught not to give up or to say, “I quit,” because something was too hard or I did not accomplish my goal. Swimming, goals, and life are a journey and you must decide how you want it to evolve and what you expect to accomplish. You cannot do anything without doing something. With the caring attitudes and values of my coaches and team members, I was able to achieve most of my goals.

My senior year on the high school team, at sectionals, my 200 free relay team swam our very best times. All of our 50 free times were 25's and under; we missed state by .01 seconds. We were so disappointed on not making it to state but at the same time we were so happy for doing so well. Sometimes life lessons are about enjoying the moments and knowing you did the best you could.

I have taken what I have learned from swimming and have applied it to coaching the last two years on the Woodson YMCA swim team. I had one little girl who hated diving. I coached her with the same principles that I was taught. I encouraged her every time she got up on the block. One day at practice everything just clicked. She stepped up on the block; I asked her if she wanted help. She said, “No I am going to do this myself.”

I backed up and watched her dive head first into the water in streamline. She was so excited and I was so proud of her. After weeks of hard work and dedication, she accomplished something that many kids are afraid of, diving head first. It made me proud to be her coach and assisting her on diving. It made me think back to my years of swimming and feeling the accomplishments that I have made. My heart leaped with joy to know that I had contributed to making a difference in her swimming career.

I know my years on the YMCA Swim Team are coming to a close and it is time for me to start a new chapter in my life. I will take every ounce of knowledge and values that the YMCA, my swim coaches, and swimming have taught me and apply it to my future. I hope to stay involved with a swim team by coaching and sharing the knowledge and lessons that my coaches have shared with me.

# Essay #11—Sarah Olver, SSTY

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As a child, you live in a world where people stay forever. Nobody ever gets sick or leaves you with a broken heart. I used to be a part of this world until one day everything came crashing down. On one September evening, my mother gets a phone call and immediately breaks down. My elderly next door neighbor, Jean, had a stroke and was not doing well. To me Jean was more than more than a neighbor; she was another grandma that was always there. She would give us gifts at Halloween instead of candy, she always remembered my birthday, and she often came over too just catch up over tea. In elementary school, I even took her to grandparents' day because my biological grandparents lived too far away. She was MY Jean. But now she seemed to be slipping through my fingers. I was told that I had to choose, if I wanted to say goodbye for the last time or to remember her healthy and happy. I did not know what to do, so I went the only place that I felt safe, swim practice at Schroeder YMCA. Schroeder has given me the opportunity to discover who I am as a person and gave me the family environment that I am proud to be a part of.

The day I received news about Jean, I practically ran to the pool. I could not bear the weight of my heavy heart so instead I swam. The outside world started to fade away as I lost myself into a set. Suddenly, my coach Dave Anderson pulled me out of the water knowing something was not quite right. Trying to be strong, I said everything was fine...just fine. He gave me the "I know you better than that" look which broke me. I finally let out everything that I had been keeping in. My tears mixed with the chlorinated water dripping off as my body shook. Dave listened and looked at me and said everything was going to be okay. He told me to make my decision on what I will regret the least and that either way he trusts me. It was Simple as that...then to get back into the water. Somehow, I felt better. I believed him, everything would turn out. I took this advice and still apply it to my everyday life. Dave had confidence in me that I did not have at the time. He showed me who I was: a confident, strong, individual who can make hard decisions. Without Schroeder YMCA team, I would not have had that support.

I decided to visit Jean. Even though she did not remember who I was, I felt relieved I could say goodbye. Little fragile Jean sat in her hospital bed while I held her hand silently. This was the last time I saw her. Dave pushed me to make a hard choice and I cannot thank him enough for that. Schroeder YMCA swim team has taught me so much and I continue to learn more every day. I am proud to identify myself with this team because I know that Schroeder YMCA swim team will continue to be a positive impact on people's lives.

## Essay #12—Anna Schmitt, FCYST

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I have been swimming on the Fox Cities YMCA Swim Team for 10 years. I started as a 9-year-old who just really enjoyed swimming. As I became older I started taking swimming more seriously and soon it became my passion and a sport I participated in all year round. Swimming is both a team sport and an individual sport, which is one reason why I feel it fit so well with me. My success is determined by how hard I want to work. Swimming has given me confidence and the desire to be better. This desire led me to make a difficult decision when I began high school. In order for me to swim on a high school team, I needed to open enroll to a different high school and leave my friends and my “normal” behind. With the support of my YMCA swim team and parents, I knew this was the right decision for me.

Throughout the years my teammates have become some of my best friends. We always find a way to make even the hardest practices fun and the meets where we don’t do so well a good time by cheering and supporting each other. In the past few years I have watched many teammates make the decision to move away from my YMCA team and join a USA swimming only team. It was difficult to watch some of my friends leave a team they participated with for so many years and that I had grown to love so much. The team has persevered through this transition and in the end it brought the people who stayed closer together. Being one of the only older swimmers left on the team, this gave me the opportunity to become a leader towards the younger kids.

Being on a YMCA swim team has given me the opportunity to establish good values and traits. The YMCA swim team encourages hard work, discipline, teamwork, dedication, and leadership. These are all values that have become very important to me due to being a part of the YMCA. I also learned how to have good time management because being on this team kept me very busy. The core values of the YMCA are caring, responsibility, honesty and respect. My coach makes it a point to incorporate these values into practice everyday. She brings kindness and understanding to our team and encourages us to work hard while instilling a love for the sport. She goes out of her way to give us every opportunity to be successful. I feel she demonstrates these attributes because she is an employee of the YMCA.

Participating in YMCA meets all over the state has given me the opportunity to meet and become friends with swimmers who were a part of other YMCA teams from around the area. In 2009 the swimming community of Wisconsin experienced a great tragedy when Natalie Bolin of the Oshkosh YMCA Swim Team was killed in a car accident. Having swam alongside OSHY for my entire swimming career it was a difficult time for our team. Even though this was a terrible thing to happen some good did come out of it. All the YMCA teams in the area became so much closer and looked to Natalie as a hardworking, positive role model who portrayed values encouraged by the YMCA. February 20th was the 3-year anniversary of her death. The amount of people wearing her favorite color, purple, in remembrance was incredible. This just shows the difference and affect that one young girl can make.

Being a member of a YMCA swim team has affected my life in many ways. It has taught me great discipline, hard work, and time management. It has allowed me to become successful in a sport without taking all the fun out of it. I am so thankful to the YMCA for giving me the opportunity to be part of such a wonderful team and meet some incredible people, many of

whom have become my best friends. Most importantly, the YMCA has shown me how much of an affect one person can have on an organization and the importance of teammates in a time of tragedy.

# Essay #13—Ian Gordon, Pabst Farms

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During my first USA Swimming Junior National's meet last year, I realized what makes YMCA swimming so special, and it has little to do with swimming. I arrived the first day at Junior Nationals expecting for the meet to begin as it does at YMCA Nationals, with a celebration like the Parade of Athletes. Instead, the meet started with the 200 fly. I quickly learned the meet was solely about swimming fast. The only conversation among athletes was about how fast each other's times were. If you didn't swim fast enough in the warm up pool, you were simply swum over. In contrast, YMCA Nationals is about celebrating everyone's accomplishments of just making it there, having fun, laughing, and meeting athletes from around the country, as well as competing at a high level. Basically, for me YMCA swimming is about family. It is a place where you develop as a person, build character, make friends, and learn life lessons.

I started swimming at the YMCA at Pabst Farms in Oconomowoc when I was seven years old. At the time, I didn't have very many friends at school. I would walk around the playground by myself instead of playing football or basketball with the other kids. I was quiet and shy, and not very outgoing. As soon as I started swimming at the YMCA, however, that all changed. I made many very close friends, who were just as goofy as I was. I became very social and loud, sometimes even obnoxious, the foil of the kid I was before. Along with close friends came my self-esteem. As I became more confident in myself, I was more willing to do things that I was uncomfortable with. When I was eight years old, some girls decided to perform the YMCA dance on the blocks at the beginning of the YMCA state meet. As the song began, I noticed that the block in lane eight was unoccupied. So I climbed up and danced the Macarena in front of all of the parents, coaches, and swimmers (much to the embarrassment of my parents). In just a year, I had become a much happier, much more confident person, solely from swimming on my YMCA team.

As I grew older, my YMCA family grew bigger. I started meeting swimmers from other teams in the state, and cheering for them. As I got to know them better, we soon became friends. Many swimmers on my team know that if I'm not sitting with our team or swimming, they can find me sitting in the bleachers with the mass of Schroeder swimmers or under the bleachers with Green Bay. Three years ago I participated in the Natalie Bolin swim camp. It was an amazing trip, and I was able to share a life changing experience with fellow YMCA swimmers from around the state. Now, swim meets feel like a huge family reunion, as I imagine myself walking around talking to all of my cousins that I haven't seen in a long time.

Swimming for a YMCA team has taught me valuable lessons that I don't believe I would have learned on other teams. I've learned that hard work is required to achieve my goals, but that it is also important to be relaxed and happy while working. If you don't stay in a positive mood, you won't enjoy the work you are doing and it becomes a chore. The YMCA atmosphere helped tremendously with this. During practice, my coaches stressed hard work and dedication. However, when it came to competition, they never put too much pressure on me to swim fast, and were never upset if I didn't swim my fastest. This has always allowed me to have a positive outlook on swimming, and kept the sport fun.

When I continue swimming in college next year, I know my YMCA family will still be there cheering me on, being goofy, and offering encouragement. I will take with me to the University of Minnesota the confidence, memories of friends, and positive outlook on life that I gained from swimming at the YMCA. I'm sure that when I see some of my YMCA family at college meets, I won't hesitate to talk to them, and hopefully bring some YMCA ambiance to a highly competitive environment.

## Essay #14—Leah Bolin, OSHY

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After some deep thinking... I have come to two conclusions as to how my family sank into the sport of swimming: The first is that my siblings and I descend from some sort of fish-like ancestors. The second is that the allure and the nature of the YMCA swim team program are so welcoming and supportive, as it encourages us to pursue our greatest dreams while using the core values of honesty, respect, care, and responsibility. Even though the first option would be fascinating, the YMCA deserves a great amount of credit for my family's success in swimming and life as well, for it has molded not only our ambitions and goals, but our hearts and minds too.

At four years old, just shy of three feet, the Oshkosh YMCA Dolphin Swim Team gained a new Bolin on the team... a fourth Bolin. Although I am not pleased to admit it, I did not have a burning passion for swimming when I first started like all the other kids; I joined the team merely because I graduated from swimming lessons with flying colors, and I am guessing my mom was aiming for convenience. With my first memories being at most fourteen years ago, I do not have the clearest recollection of the first years of my swimming. Yet, I do remember that once I became an OSHY Dolphin, I not only fell in love with the sport but also the team. Growing up on the Oshkosh YMCA Swim Team provided me with a second family and an automatic support system. Whenever it was a bad day, I could always count on returning to the YMCA at night to spend a few hours doing what I loved most with the people I loved most. As we grew up swimming together, my teammates and I suffered the same losses and celebrated the same victories, which ultimately formed a bond between us that was unbreakable and everlasting. Also thanks to the YMCA, I have countless memories of trips taken to various swim meets, long treks up to Ely, Minnesota for swim camp, and unforgettable events that took place at practices that I will hold near to my heart forever. One of the most special memories I have of swimming is the day I swam the Bolin relay with my sisters Ashley, Stephanie, Natalie. I was twelve, and I can remember laughing and joking before the race with my sisters. Even with how unfocused we were, we managed to qualify for YMCA Long Course Summer Nationals, which was very exciting. Yet, like every swimming career, mine was never perfect. Despite all wonderful times, it has not always been easy. As I grew older, the glory days of swimming took a turn into murky water and my life flowed in a completely unprepared direction.

As December of 2008 neared to an end, the storm clouds began to roll in. The unexpected news of our father's death struck my sisters and me hard and fast. My former head coach, Jay Coleman, became the knight in shining armor to us during this painful period. Jay devoted a great deal of his time and effort to helping my family as we struggled to make it through our grief and despair. He filled a void in our lives and became more than just a coach; he became the father figure we were now missing. There are multiple life lessons that I have learned that I credit to him for he always managed to weave them in with swimming, along with the YMCA core values of honesty, respect, responsibility, and care. Although Jay and I do not see each other daily anymore, he has left a handprint on my heart that will remain there forever. Slowly, with Jay's help, my family and I recovered from the blow as best as we could.

Yet, soon after the sting of losing my dad began to slowly fade, tragedy arrived at our door once again. Upon returning home from Madison from the boy's high school state swim meet in February of 2010, my life twisted into a nightmare. The car that my sister, Natalie, and I

were traveling in with two of our teammates skimmed a patch of ice and collided head on with a semi-truck just as we were approaching Oshkosh. I vaguely remember the chaos of sirens and shouts as they pried us from the crumpled mess of a Jeep, along with the surging pain of my physical injuries that amounted to a broken leg, a concussion, a few scrapes, and a lot of bruising. However, that pain seemed so miniscule compared to what I felt the moment my family and Jay told me that Natalie had been killed instantly. I distinctly remember Jay sitting next to my hospital bed on one night following the accident, holding my hand and comforting me. I do not think he will ever know how much I appreciated having him there to tell me everything would be okay. Yet following the accident, Jay was not the only shining star; there was an outpour of love from our community and the YMCA.

The whole Oshkosh YMCA Swim Team expressed their care and concern for us in multiple ways; coloring rubber ducks, writing letters, making posters, visiting with teddy bears, bringing us dinner and flowers. The YMCA helped me to get back into my old routine as best as I could and aided me in realizing that life goes on even with a broken leg and a broken heart. Furthermore, a memorial fund and a swim camp were set up in memory of Natalie through the YMCA, both of which still survive today with the help of my new head coach David Mail. Even though David was not here during the time of the accident, he has done a great job of taking the reins of our team and all that is associated with it to instill leadership, hard work, and dedication. I am not able to express how grateful I am for Coach Jay Coleman, Coach David Mail, the rest of the YMCA staff, and the families of my swim team. Without a doubt I know that if we had not been a part of the Oshkosh YMCA Swim Team, my family and I would not have made it through this cluster of bad luck.

I can proudly say that due to the Oshkosh YMCA Swim Team, the experiences I have had and the relationships I have formed in my life have shaped me into who I am today. I am blessed to have an organization like the YMCA in my life, especially when the waves roll in and I am not able to tackle them alone. Although my fourteen years on this swim team will soon be coming to a close, I will always carry the concepts learned and memories made on this team with me, along with the YMCA core values of honesty, respect, care, and responsibility. I am looking towards my future with high hopes as I continue to dive deeper into a sport I love, to strengthen the deep bonds I have formed through this team, and most importantly, to share the true meaning of being part of a YMCA with all I encounter.

## Essay #15—Abigail Raatz, SSTY

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As I have been with the Schroeder YMCA Swim Team for almost 11 years, I have been in an environment that is positive, supportive, fun-loving and many other good things. I realize that this environment does not come automatically from being within the YMCA, but the coaches and staff, even the members, must uphold the standard that has been set. This standard is established in the YMCA's four Core Values and the YMCA's Mission Statement. My coaches and the families that make up our team contribute to, and I assume, enjoy the environment that we have.

I have heard about some club teams who have not held to this Christian standard and in doing so have driven swimmers away. These swimmers had been picked on and excluded and have ended up coming to Schroeder. I am not saying we are perfect. We could be better. But as the standard is higher, it seems we have an easier time being the way we are. It has a lot to do with influence and expectation. (Peer pressure is not always a bad thing.) When you are in a place with people holding to good values you would feel out of place doing differently. That is another reason it is good to have these values guiding our environment. If the standard had been lower and the majority of people had not cared about raising it, then it would be much harder to live by the good values.

Because I have been raised with high values, my YMCA swim team has been a natural fit for me. We are expected to help out new swimmers, encourage each other and be kind to each other, whether or not we have gotten to know the new swimmer yet and no matter their skill level. Swearing is punishable by 10 push-ups. The same is for pulling on the lane line during a kick set.

Because the YMCA has a family atmosphere, the parents have even developed good friendships. Many of them work out together during practice, or are around watching the younger kids. They hang out together and root for each other's kids. This contributes to our team atmosphere. We are all in this together.

The friendships I have at the YMCA go back to when I was a toddler. I began coming to the YMCA when I was three months old, and learned to swim with one of my future teammates when I was two. Over the years I have built many friendships; now these include almost the whole high school team and many of the younger kids. These friendships have encouraged me when I wanted to quit. There was a time when I thought the only thing good about me coming to swim was my friends. I had no interest in the sport and probably would have quit had it not been for them. They have also reminded me of the importance of not exclaiming over how well I just swam and how fast I am. Doing that would only have hurt my relationships and would have made me feel terrible in the long run.

God has truly blessed me at the YMCA, and I hope that many others have the same opportunity I have had.

# Essay #16—Kalyn Hedeem, Dodge Cty

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I became a member of the YMCA of Dodge County swim team nine years ago and have been an active participant ever since. I am now a senior in high school, and it saddens me to think that this will be my last year on the team. Swim team has had such a massive impact on my life and has made a vast array of opportunities available and possible for me. I truly believe that if it weren't for swim team, my life would not be even remotely similar to what it is today and who I am becoming.

I was nine years old when my cousin and best friend convinced me to give swim team a try. At that age, swim team was more about developing my strokes, forming friendships with my teammates, and learning how to set goals and work hard to achieve them. The competitions were fun and I learned to overcome the disappointment of disqualifying and how I could improve for the next time. In a similar way, I learned that life can sometimes feel like you've been thrown out of the race, but rather than giving up, you analyze the mistakes and move on. I believe that the mistakes you learn from in life, make you stronger as an individual.

Now, as one of the older and more advanced swimmers on the team, I have enjoyed serving as a positive role model for the younger swimmers. For the past two years I have been privileged to be one of the co-captains, and being in that position, I have had opportunities to plan activities and games that encourage team building and bonding. I enjoy getting to know my younger teammates and watching them grow and become stronger swimmers.

As the season winds down, I realize how much swimming has affected other aspects of my life as well. Because of swimming and my passion to help others, I was inspired to become a lifeguard at the YMCA. Through this position, I have learned more about the importance of water safety and how consequential it is to know how to swim. This is one of the reasons, as well as my love for working with kids, that I decided to become a swimming lessons instructor in addition to lifeguarding. I absolutely love teaching the little kids how to swim and how to be safe when they are in and around the water. Besides being a lifeguard at the YMCA, I am also a lifeguard during the summer at McCune Beach in Waupun. I have also recently been offered to take over the position as head coach of McCune's swim team for the summer. I am looking forward to being able to share what I've learned from my swim coaches over the years with future participants.

Swimming for the YMCA has also taught me that being active is crucial to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Swimming, for me, is a safe and effective way to relieve stress at the end of a long day in school. I enjoy being able to dive into the cool, refreshing pool and let my body unwind as I surge through the water. Swimming is a sport and activity that I will be able to enjoy for the rest of my life and I'm glad to have been introduced to it at such an early age.

The skills I've developed through this sport, such as sportsmanship, goal setting, and planning are all traits I will be able to utilize in college as well as in my future career and work place. Being a part of the YMCA swim team has enabled me to form lifelong friendships, both with my teammates and my coaches. The sport has also empowered me to make a difference in other's lives as a swimmer, role model, lifeguard, and instructor, both on the team as well as other places I will venture in the future.

## Essay #17—Brooke Douglas, NLY

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I began swimming for the Delta Dolphins Swim Team during the summer session of 2005. I was 10 years old and loved to swim but had never swam competitively. I still remember the thrill of my first swim meet and the sheer panic I felt when my mom struggled to put my swim cap on. Thank goodness for some seasoned swim parents who stepped in to show us the way. To me, that is the true meaning of the swim team. It is the cohesiveness of the swimmers and their families and the friendships formed throughout the years. It is working hard, being responsible, encouraging others and even letting them encourage me. I have met some of my closest friends through the YMCA swim team program.

Another fond memory I have is when my swim coach, Tom Desy, had the confidence in me to sign me up for the 200 backstroke event which I had never swam before in competition. I was a nervous wreck behind the blocks, but another swimmer who was more experienced in swimming long distance in competition was there to encourage me. Right before my event was to start, she sensed my nervousness and told me that I could do this. She was right, I don't remember how I placed in that race but I remember that I swam hard and finished strong. It has never been about being first to me, but rather it is about the spirit of competition and the camaraderie of my teammates. After the swim meet was over, and everyone had left, I got a text from her congratulating me on how I did. It felt great to be a part of a team sport where I was challenged to be the best that I could be while being supported and encouraged by such high quality people. I loved being a part of a relay team and cheering on other swimmers. I loved the atmosphere of the day-long swim meets, with sleeping bags spread out all over the gym floor, and congregating with friends from our own Y team as well as friends from other Y teams.

Swimming is a lifelong sport and I will be swimming long after my years as a member of the Y swim team is over. I also know that just because I haven't done something before, it doesn't mean I can't do it! The friendships that I have established through the Y swim team have lasted over 7 years and will continue for years to come. Being a part of the swim team has been about more than just swimming. It has been about the human connection with my teammates and coaches. I thank my coaches and teammates for the best memories throughout the years. I cannot imagine going through life without being a part of the Delta Dolphins (now the NLY). It has taught me discipline, team work and responsibility.

# Essay #18—Emma Holbrook, Marshfield

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Through my many years of YMCA swimming I have not only gained life-long friendships, but also valued lessons of hard-work and determination that will build a solid foundation of success for my future endeavors.

YMCA swimming has accentuated my leadership skills, teaching me the importance of hard-work that I can utilize in my future as a collegiate swimmer. For nearly eleven years I have dedicated an enormous amount of time practicing, and training to become the best swimmer I can be. I have attended three national YMCA competitions; the 2010 YMCA Long Course National Championships, the 2011 YMCA Short Course National Championships, and the 2012 YMCA Long Course National Championships. Having the opportunity to compete at these high-level meets is such a rewarding experience, and has enhanced my swimming performances. YMCA swimming has taught me to take risks, and to be the best I can be, with the support of my coaches and fellow swimmers. Throughout practice I not only push myself to the best I can be, but I also push my teammates to work their hardest to be successful. As a YMCA swimmer your swim team becomes a second family, building great friendships and lasting bonds. Ultimately YMCA swimming has taken me to great lengths, and has garnished lasting friendships that I will cherish the rest of my life.

Stroke after stroke, turn after turn, meticulously perfecting every aspect of my swim to drop milliseconds of time may seem like a tedious task, but for me is an exhilarating and rewarding experience. From the age of six, swimming has become not only part of my daily routine, but has shaped my character as a whole. YMCA swimming became a mode of stress release for me, a way to forget all of my daily problems I face, and to focus solely on swimming. The essential values of YMCA swimming, and the congregation of various teams from around the state with individuals dedicated to the sport of swimming makes every competition exciting. Through YMCA swimming I have learned to challenge myself by going that extra distance to make a certain cut, or to break a certain team record. This idea of resilience has helped to shape my character, making me the swimmer I am today. Ultimately combining stroke perfection with hard-work and determination fuels my drive for success as a collegiate swimmer.

In my future as a collegiate swimmer the valuable lessons that I have learned through YMCA swimming will drive my determination to great lengths. YMCA swimming has given me numerous memories that I will cherish my entire life. The values of YMCA swimming will hold true for me for the rest of my life, not only in swimming, but in my character as a whole. I will greatly miss YMCA swimming; I am very blessed to have had this opportunity, but ultimately the memories and experiences will last a lifetime.

## Essay #19—Katy Beckstrom, MQTY

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When I was younger, sports weren't something that came naturally to me. I struggled to fit in on most team sports I tried—soccer, basketball, skiing, and softball; you name it, I've probably tried it. I was tall and skinny, with legs and arms that seemed too long for my body. I didn't have a lot of confidence in myself and my social skills with others. One day, a friend of my mom's said she was taking her daughter to try out for the Swim Team. My mom relayed the message to me and encouraged me to go, and I decided to try it, since no other sport was working out for me. As soon as I got in the water, something "clicked". Of course, I was terrible at first. My idea of trying to go fast was just spinning my arms and kicking my legs as fast as I possibly could, which usually resulted in no forward progress at all. I got better, though.

Mid-way through my first season, my technique was much improved and I had met dozens of new friends. At this point, there were two teams in Marquette with a bitter rivalry between them. The split had occurred the year before I joined, so unlike some of my veteran teammates, I had no hard feelings towards those on the other team. I managed to make friends with some of the swimmers on the other team at meets, including someone who would later become my best friend. I swam on the swim team all throughout middle school, and then joined the high school swim team.

Now as I look back on my time as a swimmer, I can't imagine where I would be today if I hadn't taken my mom's advice to join the team seven years ago. Then, I wouldn't have ever thought of myself as any kind of athlete, capable of being physically strong and accomplishing goals that I set for myself. Being on the swim team taught me that I could be someone I thought I couldn't be: an athlete. I have so much more confidence in myself now. I've met people from all over the Upper Peninsula and Wisconsin that I would never have had the opportunity to meet if it weren't for swimming.

The swim team has become my second family. My coaches are like several sets of extra parents, for better or worse, but mostly for better. Every day when I walk down the hallway at school, I am amazed at the size and comradery of the swimming community. I see them in every hallway and we always exchange friendly waves and smiles. Almost all of my friends are on the swim team, and they are a very strong positive influence in my life. During the spring of my sophomore year, my dad passed away after a struggle with cancer. My swimming friends came to the funeral and the support they gave me was incredible. Their presence was one of the most comforting things I have ever experienced. I have so many memories that I'll cherish for the rest of my life because of my experience on the swim team, and many friends that I have no doubt will be my friends for life.

## Essay #20—Ryan Keast, GBY

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As a member on the Green Bay YMCA Swim Team, I have grown not only as a swimmer, but also as a person. The Y has shown me how to be a leader, which are very useful in today's world. I've only been a swimmer for the Y for a little over five years now and it has made a significant impact on me. I am more active and healthy than I ever was and it's all due to being on this great swim team. The swim team has made me stronger in the core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility. Caring for others has always been a major priority for me when I am at practice or at swim meets. I help younger swimmers if they don't know what event or heat they are in or give them high-fives for swimming well. I hope they look up to me and want to help others when they become seniors in high school. As a swimmer, I have also become more honest with others and myself. I admit to my mistakes and use them as learning opportunities. If the times I am receiving while racing are not the ones I want, I know that I have to be honest with myself and understand that I might be putting in little effort in during my practices. Honesty is the best policy, and when you're honest, things are easier. Respect is another major core value that I have developed over the years. As a swimmer, I must respect everyone, coaches, officials, parents, the facility, and other swimmers. By respecting these, I will reflect positively upon our team. Respecting the coaches is probably one of the more important things to respect. The coaches put up numerous amounts of hours to make the swimmers we see today. Without them, we won't get anywhere near our goals we wish to achieve. And finally, responsibility, and how the Y has taught me to be more responsible while on this swim team. On a pretty basic level, I have grown and now keep better track of my things. For instance, at meets, when fifty bags are all over the deck with items all over the place, I have to be making sure my stuff stays with my bag. On a larger scale, I have become more responsible for the team. I am now one of the "big kids" and have an obligation to be a role model to these younger swimmers. I am responsible for my actions and making sure other swimmers actions are positive. I feel responsibility is a key aspect in life if I want to succeed as a person. Overall, the Green Bay YMCA Swim Team has taught me the core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility that no other organization has. I love the swim team, and fully appreciate everything it has done for me.

## Essay #21—Kelsey Eaton, MQTY

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I have always been attracted to the water and loved to swim. Even when I was little, if there was a body of water in sight I wanted to go swimming. It was a wonderful experience to be weightless in the water and accomplish acrobatics impossible for me to do on land. Swimming has always been a big part of my life. I learned to swim at an early age and I could not wait to be a part of organized swimming. So I tried out and made the team and have been swimming competitively since.

I have learned much from organized swimming. Swimming has taught me about long-term commitment, and perseverance, and when the circumstances are tough and I just want to quit, the diligence to stick with the task at hand. I have learned to persevere and focus on the goal. I have learned the value of discipline, and to trust that all the hours put in at the pool will produce good results. I have learned to be positive even if I do not achieve the desired result, I can stay motivated by my goals. There are nights I would rather do other activities, but I always feel better once I am at practice. Often on the nights when there is no practice I find myself wishing that there were. I have learned that in order to achieve the result I desire, I must work hard.

I have discovered that hard work becomes easier with positive motivation. I have a coach that is so passionate about swimming that he radiates, and it motivates me so much that it makes me want to do the best I can do in everything I try. This experience has taught me that I can influence people by being positive and enthusiastic, in swimming and all my endeavors.

While goal setting and achievements are important, I feel that more importantly I have learned to be a good sport toward my fellow teammates and fellow athletes. The coaches I have had over the years have taught me how to be patient to deal with different types of people and difficult personalities, which is a skill valuable in all areas of life, one that is enthusiastically taught at the YMCA.

Many of the skills I have learned through organized swimming will help me be successful in the future in and out of the pool. Swimming may become a recreational pursuit, but I can not imagine my life without swimming.

## Essay #22—Michelle Witt, OSHY

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Walking into the YMCA at the age of 8 was a thrill. I loved being in the water and swimming every day. That love did not diminish over the past decade. Having been a part of the Oshkosh Community YMCA swim team for 10 years will be an experience I will never forget. Over those 10 years, the swim team has become my family. We all are one another's support system. Belonging to the Oshkosh YMCA swim team has made me a leader and also a responsibly individual.

I was taught that everyone needs to be responsible for one's self. Being responsible for yourself entails having time management. Time management got me through the many years of swimming. Having swim practice, homework, and work all in one night is stressful. Developing a schedule to be able to get all this done is what helps me do the best I can do. Being able to be accountable for everything I'm involved in, has made me a successful student swimmer. Responsibility has made me a successful leader on the team.

When I was younger I had many older girls that mentored me and it played a significant role in my life and swimming, so taking on this responsibility was important to me. I learned from them and now take what I learned and give that advice to the younger swimmers. Trying to help other swimmers when they need help on a stroke or just need help in life is something I am always willing to do. Also Just being there as a supporter at a swim meet or at practice.

Moving on to college I must leave my team, but what I have learned from my team, coaches at the YMCA I will take with me. I have encouraged many of my swim lessons kids who love to swim to join the swim team at the Y. I believe the swim program helps children for their future. I feel my future has been changed for the better being around a group of kids that have the same love for swimming as I do. Being a part of the Oshkosh YMCA swim team has made me the responsible leader I am today.

## Essay #23—Laura Josephson, Marshfield

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I started swimming when I was just five years old. After completing YMCA swim lessons, I joined the Mini Sharks program before moving up to the Sharks swim team. I have been on the swim team ever since, and continue to swim with my team.

Being on the YMCA swim team has shaped my character, as I have swam with my team for countless hours. I have learned the true meaning of the YMCA core values: caring, honesty, respect and responsibility, which have become part of me. I have also learned the value of hard work, leadership, and teamwork.

The swim team has taught me to care for others around me. Caring for my teammates, whether it be getting them through a tough practice, or simply sharing a pair of goggles, was always stressed as important. This concept of being a kind person has become part of who I am, and I have learned to reach out to my community as well. I volunteer weekly at the hospital in the Emergency department, and on the Pediatric floor and Pediatric Intensive Care unit. I have also spent time at the House of the Dove and Stony River Assisted Living. Volunteering allows me to care for others, as I feel it is important to give back to the community that supports me.

Through daily practice and in competition, I learned to respect everyone. Being on the swim team let me meet and interact with all kinds of people. Treating them with respect was just as important as swimming my best. This past summer I participated in a study abroad program in China, where I lived with my host family for six weeks. While in China I came to respect the Chinese culture, learning about our differences and similarities. The importance of respecting everyone around us started with my participation on the swim team.

Swimming also taught me to be responsible. Not only showing up to practice on time, but also remembering in to turn in meet entry forms on time taught me the importance of responsibility. I have also learned how to be responsible for a job. My passion for swimming inspired me to apply for a job as a lifeguard. Being a lifeguard gives me responsibility at the pool, perhaps the greatest responsibility there is--guarding swimmers' lives.

My swim team also taught me the importance of leadership. I started the swim team when I was young, and I looked up to the older swimmers. Now I am the role model for the younger swimmers, and am able to inspire them. The leadership skills I developed on the swim team carry over to my job as a swim lesson instructor, where I can teach children, getting them ready for the swim team!

Being a member of the swim team has also given me self-confidence. Having resolve and always believing in yourself is a concept that has always been instilled in us. After a tough loss in a race, I have learned to bounce back stronger than ever, an important skill in life.

The swim team has shaped my character and who I am as a person, teaching me to be caring, responsible, honest and respectful. The values I learned in swimming will be with me forever, and I am grateful for all the friendships and fun I have had on the swim team.

## Essay #24—Carly Johnson, GBY

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I remember my first practice at the Y like it was yesterday, so it is hard to believe it was already over three years ago. When I walked on to that pool deck, I had no idea that this team would end up being so influential in all aspects of my life, rather than just swimming. I knew my own personal reasons for starting with this team, and that was all they were: personal. My decision for joining this team was only about what was best for me, and I never expected to walk away from this team learning all the things that I have, making me the athlete and person that I am today. I never imagined that I would meet and build relationships with the countless other athletes and coaches, or that I would accomplish my goals. But most of all, I did not know it was possible to be surrounded by people as welcoming as those on the Green Bay Y swim team, and now I cannot imagine my life without them.

Not only was I unsure if this team could help me improve in my swimming, but I was unsure of whether or not these swimmers would accept me. Almost immediately, any doubts I had disappeared. I felt a sense of belonging instantly, and I knew that this team was the place for me. Over my years as a Y swimmer, I have built relationships with all kinds of people, and without them I do not think I would be the swimmer or person that I have grown to be. Already I have achieved so many goals, pushed myself to be the best I could, and became a swimmer I am proud of because of their presence. I can honestly say that all of this would have been much more difficult without the support and confidence of my teammates and coaches.

When I started swimming with the Y, I began attending morning practices at the crack of dawn. Before the sun even rose, I was up and off to the Broadview Y at 5 a.m. on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. Easy would be the wrong word to describe it. Every morning would consist of sets of 400's IM, 500's free, or just a slew of 200's. Each week was the same, and the lack of sleep caught up with me; soon I understood how it felt to be completely exhausted. Yet, I continued to do it; I was at every practice and gave it my 110% effort. I became dedicated, heart and soul, to my swimming career, and I loved it. My passion for the sport was higher than ever before, even with the sacrifices I was making. Being involved in the Y and the swimming program has paid off; I saw success not only in the pool but in my school work as well. My dedication to swimming went hand in hand with my academics.

Lastly, and most importantly, swimming for the Y has taught me that it is not only about what I get out of this team, but what I give back. My coach, Dave Korst, has stressed the importance of community service and involvement. We have volunteered for events like the Cellcom Marathon and New Years' Bank Eve. As much as I have accomplished in the water, the life lessons I have gained from Coach Dave will be what guide me through college and my professional life. Coach Dave has taught me the importance of the core values of the Y: respect, honesty, caring, and responsibility. These core values are now as important to me as my love for swimming.

## Essay #25—Sam Bowman, LaCrosse

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My name is Samuel Bowman, I started swimming for the La Crosse YMCA Wave in 2001, and I was fortunate enough to have Jon Brenner for a coach for eight wonderful seasons. Jon changed my idea on swimming because he made a mainly individualized sport a team sport by always including all of his swimmers, no matter their skill set. Jon not only taught me how to swim but also how to be a good friend and person by coaching the YMCA's core values as well as coaching swimming. The YMCA has taught me and teaches that it is so much more important to learn the core values of Caring, Honesty, Respect, and Responsibility than it is to swim fast.

I quit swimming in 2008 because I wanted to fit in and play basketball. After two seasons of playing basketball, I was sick and tired of spending my whole winter watching my friends play while I was sitting, bored on the end of the bench. I realized that I was wasting my time. In 2011 I started swimming again, but just for my high school team. In 2012 I made the decision to rejoin the Wave. I didn't know many of the swimmers; consequently, at first I thought I made a mistake, I wished I hadn't joined. The practices were too hard and the team seemed too fast for me. My mind was completely changed because by my third day it was like I had been a part of the team for years, and just like that I had an entire new group of friends and teammates who accepted me as a part of their team. Though I was quite a bit behind in speed, and endurance, all my new teammates gave me the encouragement I needed to succeed. With the great camaraderie of the team we qualified for YMCA Nationals, a goal that my teammates said hadn't really crossed their minds.

My YMCA swim team means so much to me, and without them I wouldn't be swimming next year in college. Without them, I wouldn't spend my weekends swimming with a great group of teammates, enjoying myself doing something I love, but sitting on the high school basketball bench as a benchwarmer. Without the Wave I would have never made these new friends who I will have for a lifetime.

Every day, when I get in the water, I thank God for the opportunity to be a part of this team. A team like no other that has changed my life in so many positive ways. The YMCA has made me a better person and a much more driven athlete, and individual. I will miss swimming for the YMCA next year, but I know that all the hard work, and time I spent as a part of this team was time well spent.

I will continue to live my life by the core values that have been instilled in me by coach Brenner and the YMCA long after I am no longer a part of this team.

# Essay #26—Andrew Niemiec, Pabst Farms

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Respect, family, work ethic, and values are just a few of the things that the YMCA at Pabst Farms Swim Team has taught me. I joined the swim team nine years ago. Having tried many other team sports I had not really found one that I loved. At eight years old I was just looking to improve my strokes and maybe make a few friends along the way. I in turn gained many friends and a great set of core values. The YMCA at Pabst Farms taught me responsibility and respect. I learned at a very young age that it was my responsibility to train as hard as I could to become a better swimmer. I took this responsibility very seriously. I learned to respect the coaching staff and my teammates. I have shown this by being one of the leading swimmers in practice attendance. I have always done what was asked of me. I feel this was showing the younger swimmers dedication. I believe in leading by example. By showing the younger swimmers to attend practice and respect the coaching staff their hard work will pay off. When I joined the swim team I did not quite know what to expect. I soon gained a work ethic like no one I know. I learned to be a very goal orientated. I made small accomplishments into bigger accomplishments one race at a time. I kept my goals realistic and attainable. I used this goal setting in my schooling as well. I have always pushed myself academically. I have ADHD and anxiety so school has always been a challenge. Swimming kept me organized and a very disciplined swimmer and student. I have reached many academic goals like being on the High Honor Roll and being accepted into the National Honor Society. I feel that the YMCA at Pabst Farms has become a second family to me. My coaches and teammates share in my triumphs along side of me. Swimming has become a huge part of my family's life. I have three younger brothers that are also members of the YMCA at Pabst Farms Swim team. My parents have taught all of us to do our best and work hard. I have worked extremely hard and I am very excited to continue my swimming career at UW LaCrosse next year. I am eternally thankful for my coaches, teammates and family for being my biggest supporters.

## Essay #27—Jaime Kohnke, SSTY

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The four core characteristics adopted by the YMCA are: Caring, Honesty, Respect and Responsibility. If I had my way I would add one more important characteristic to the list, Inspiration. I have been a member of the Schroeder YMCA swim team since I was ten years old. There are many things that I could say about how my team has provided me support and how we all care for one another. I could talk about how we have given back to the community by going to the Milwaukee's Boys and Girls Clubs and the inner city YMCA and have provided workshops on water safety. But I think the greatest thing that I have gained by belonging to the YMCA swim team has been the inspiration my teammates and coaches have provided me over these past years. I want to share part of a story I wrote when I was back in middle school and we were asked to write about someone who inspired us.

Inspiration

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You're in the lead, don't look now

You just touched first, holy cow

You tried your hardest it was fun

Can you believe it, you just won!

Early morning practice, I crawl into the front seat and try to catch a 15 minute nap before arriving at the pool. I can smell the chlorine in the air and my coach's coffee brewing in his office. I change into my practice suit, grab my goggles and cap and slowly walk out on the pool deck.

"Jaime, get moving," Adam says. Adam is one of the assistant coaches at Schroeder Aquatics Center. He swam for Poland in the 2004 Summer Olympics. He has a tattoo of the Olympic rings on his forearm. Adam thinks he's pretty cool. I just think he's a good coach who makes me laugh. He helps inspire me to go faster when I swim.

I have taken first in state for my age group in the past. My relay held the record for fastest in the nation for our age, but I've yet to take an individual gold at the national level. As I've gotten older, my times have gotten faster, but I still have a long way to go to be at the top of the podium. My dream is to someday swim for the USA in the summer Olympics. Adam is my inspiration for achieving this goal.

"Jaime, I said get in the water!" Adam yells at me. "I'm getting there, the water's cold," I say. "Quit making excuses, and start your warm-up," he tells me. "Well, it is cold," I say with a smile, as I jump up and get into the water.

Words cannot express the magnitude of the impact belonging to the Schroeder YMCA swim team has had on my life. I swim with some of the most amazing swimmers, not only in the state of Wisconsin, but in our country. My teammates have helped me push myself when I thought I didn't want to try anymore. My coaches, over the years, have inspired me as well. They have never given up on me even when I've wanted to give up on myself.

I've yet to achieve that goal I wrote about in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I've not reached the top of the podium at the YMCA National meet, but I have stood on top of that podium with my teammates at other meets. To tell you the truth, I would rather reach 1<sup>st</sup> place in a relay than standing there on my own. I guess that is the ultimate impact belonging to the Y has given me, it's not really just about me, it's about being part of something I would have never experienced had I not been part of this extremely inspiring team.

# Essay #28—Andrew Suchla, SSTY

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I believe that being a member of the YMCA Schroeder Dive Team has affected my life in many different ways. This team has been a part of my life for the last four years and it has taught me a lot through my experiences. It is not only a team to me, but become a part of who I am now.

The Schroeder Dive Team has taught me a lot of valuable skills in life. The first is determination, or the drive to push through anything that comes my way. When I mess up a dive in practice, or in a meet, my strong determination to succeed gets me more motivated to keep going. Not only has it motivated me as a diver but also in school. I am a high honor student and I will be pursuing further education at UW-Madison next fall where I will continue to dive. The Team has also taught me to be a better leader. It showed me how I can help to motivate others to keep striving to be better. The last thing that the Team has taught me is to love what I do. I always look forward to going to practice and doing what I love. I would much rather dive than do anything else.

The dive team has also helped me accomplish goals that I didn't even dream of when I started four years ago. My goal freshman year was to make it to the State High School Diving Championships. Not only did I make it to State my freshman year but I took 3rd place. Through hard work and practice, I was able to achieve the ultimate goal of winning State my junior year. Finally, in my senior year, not only did I repeat as champion but beat the 29-year-old state record. I have also accomplished qualifying for J.O Nationals last summer in all three events. I got the chance to compete against some divers who had qualified for the Olympic trials. Watching them gave me the motivation to become an even a better diver. If they can do, so can I. I hope with all the hard work I put in at Schroeder I will have another opportunity to compete again this summer.

Schroeder has affected my life in the best possible ways. I am so proud to say I am a part of the Schroeder Dive Team. I always recommend to the other high school divers to go to Schroeder if they want to improve their diving skills and become part of a great team. Thank you Walter Schroeder Dive team for all you have done for me.

## Essay #29—Rebecca Jaszczak, MQTY

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In 2005, my parents and I decided that joining the Killer Whales swim team would be something I would enjoy. I more than enjoyed it, in fact, I loved it. Every year since, I have been competitively swimming and it has impacted my life in many ways. Because of my knowledge and love for swimming, I decided to become a certified lifeguard, opening many job opportunities. Throughout my swimming career in high school I have been recognized for many awards and titles. Swimming with the YMCA has most importantly helped me to realize what I want to do with my future.

In my freshman year of high school I took a lifeguarding class at Houghton High with a co-swimmer of mine. This has given me several different lifeguarding opportunities. The one that sticks out to me the most was at the Michigan Tech SDC this past summer. I had originally been hired to lifeguard all summer, however they were short on water safety instructors and needed another person to teach swim lessons. I was asked if I would teach, because of my résumé stating all the competitive club swimming I had done. Parents and other teachers constantly compliment my teaching skills, but I give all the credit to Killer Whales. They are the reason I know how to swim.

Once I entered high school, I was eager to join the Houghton swim team. All four years I have been on the All UP's Swim Team. Since my sophomore year, I have won MVP three years in a row. I have also received many gold medals throughout my years on the high school swim team. This year at UP Finals I assisted my girls' team this year to win the UP Champions title with my three gold. Recently I was awarded All UP Swimmer of the Year.

Swimming with the YMCA has helped me to figure out what I want to do with my life. I have been swimming for eight years now and it has been great therapy for my back. Four years ago I was diagnosed with scoliosis, a curvature of the spine. Through swimming I have been able to strengthen my back and slow the curve. I realized that swimming is great therapy for any injury. Swimming has helped me to understand the importance of physical fitness and I want to share my knowledge and help others understand that too. I now plan on majoring in exercise science, getting a coaching certificate, and then going on to become a physical therapist.

If I had not chosen to join Killer Whales eight years ago, I do not know what direction my plans would be. I am very thankful for the support and hard work from all my coaches over the years. I love swimming and it is very much a part of me.

# Essay #30—Will Shecterle, FCYST

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I wake up, take a shower, and eat some waffles with a glass of orange juice. I meander my way back to my room, pull on my favorite pair of jeans and grab a shirt off the floor. My morning routine is pretty regular; once I've eaten, I get in my car and head off to school. I attend all of my classes and complete all the work that is asked of me. In this respect I am no different from any of the other 1,600 students who walk into Appleton West each day. However, there is one thing that distinguishes me and a handful of other individuals from the rest of the student body at my high school. I am a Competitive Swimmer.

This achievement, that goes unnoticed by most of my peers, is significant to me. The YMCA Swim Team has been a part of my life since the day I joined at the age of five. This sport has taught me the meaning of accountability and has provided me with a set of values to live by. I can attest to the amount of work that is involved in swimming and the determination required. The daily commitment needed for swimming has taught me the meaning of prioritizing my time and given me the drive to succeed in all areas of my life. Each and every practice, whether it was at Erb Pool at 6 AM in 60 degree weather during the summer or Lawrence University at 6 PM after a long day of school, has only made me stronger and more dedicated to this sport.

I am thankful for the strong bond that YMCA Swimming has created between my teammates, coaches and myself. These friendships have grown over the hours, days, weeks and years spent in the pool. I believe this sense of camaraderie is unique to swimming and the experience has proven invaluable. I have also continued the tradition of competitive swimming in my family; my three older siblings and I have been members of the YMCA competitive swim program since learning how to swim across the pool at the age of five. In addition, I am grateful for the sense of community that I have gained from joining the program first in Eau Claire (kindergarten and first grade) and later in Appleton (second grade through senior year). Being a competitive swimmer has impacted my life by instilling the motto of being prepared and always striving for the best in every aspect of my life. The ideals of swimming have challenged me to form the character for which I will always be grateful.

As I close my high school experience, I am grateful to my YMCA training and know that it played a huge part in my successes as a high school swimmer and scholar. I have achieved the honor of MVP freshman through senior year, have set several school records and have attended the WIAA State Competition in both individual and relay events; this year I was elected team captain by my peers. In addition to swimming, I have been a three sport athlete and have maintained a rigorous academic schedule including numerous AP classes. I have maintained a 3.75 or better grade point average and have been a member of numerous extracurricular clubs and organizations. These accomplishments have earned me admission to the University of Wisconsin-Madison this coming fall. I humbly appreciate being considered for the Jon Brenner Scholarship and thank you for your consideration.

# Essay 31—McKena Ramos, Sheboygan

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I cannot imagine what my life would be like today if I had not become a part of the Sheboygan County YMCA Swim Team. I have been swimming at the YMCA in Sheboygan for 14 of my 17 years. I started in swim lessons at the age of 3. I loved meeting my new friends and being in the water. But it was all about the fun at that age. But at the age of 5 things changed; I joined the Sheboygan YMCA Chinooks Swim Team. I was a competitor from the very beginning.

At five, it was all about the fun, of course. It was different than lessons. I was excited to see my friends and I got to be in the water longer than if I was just in lessons. I loved going to swim meets. I loved being competitive. I loved doing something that my school friends were not doing. But I was learning valuable lessons without even knowing.

At six I qualified for the YMCA State meet. From that moment on I knew that I could be a tough competitor in the sport of swimming. At the age of 8 years old I was a State Champion. Winning, not just competing, was in my blood. I was State Champion again two more times when I was 10 years old and qualified for state every year since. But I still had a valuable lesson to learn and the YMCA swim team taught it to me early. I had to learn how to lose.

My coaches were teaching me more than about taking turns, and waiting patiently, like in swim lessons. I was learning about discipline, responsibility, dedication, and commitment, just the thing that being a member of a team would teach you. I was also learning about kindness, respect, and camaraderie, which could only come from being on a YMCA team.

The lessons in dedication, responsibility, and discipline came from going to practice 3 to 4 times a week without fail, and getting to the pool deck on time. We were not supervised in the locker room; we had to get ready on our own. We had to be prepared for the weekends when we all got up very early on Saturday mornings while our school friends were sleeping in. We were all making the long car rides to a YMCA in southeastern Wisconsin just to get to the cold water for early warm-ups, happy that we had our suit, our towel and our goggles because we were taught to be responsible for those things.

The lesson in camaraderie was taught on our sleeping bags in a “camping area.” We spent weekends on gym floors eating Spaghettio’s and playing games to pass the time between events. We all spent so much time in the water that we always smelled like chlorine. But we never complained.

The lesson in commitment came from our coaches. They kept us focused. They had us write down goals. They celebrated our victories, and cheered us even when we didn’t achieve our best time, or win our heat. I learned about winning with style and losing with grace.

Now that I’m older and in the last season of swimming for my YMCA Swim team, I understand what the program has taught me. I know what it means to be truly dedicated to what you believe in and what you know you are capable of. I can set my own goals and be confident that I will achieve them.

Being a part of the YMCA swim team shaped me to be a role model and leader to others. It also gave me confidence in myself to do well. I am confident that my college experience at the

University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh will be so much less stressful and full of personal successes because of the lessons of respect, responsibility, commitment, and teamwork that being a part of the YMCA swim team has taught me.

## Essay #32—Nicolle Trudeau, NLY

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Swimming has been a big part of my life ever since I was eight years old. This year marks my 10<sup>th</sup> year on the team. Before I joined the Northern Lights (at that time we were called the Delta Dolphins), I would take swim lessons every once in a while, but I didn't fall in love with swimming until I tried it competitively. There is so much I've gained from being a member of the swim team. It has shown me how to reach my full potential and set goals for myself. It has shown me the value of hard work, persistence, and determination. Swimming has also given me the opportunity to meet so many amazing friends and coaches that I would have never met outside the sport. It has changed my life and shown me how to look at things differently.

Swimming is a sport that requires you to build yourself up to your full potential; you can't just expect to perform your best right away. It takes time and persistence to get there. Swimming has shown me how to be self-motivated, which can help me in real life situations outside of swimming. It has taught me how to set goals for myself that take a lot of work to get to, but aren't impossible to reach. I think swimming is a great sport because it can develop character and teaches many lessons that can be used later in life.

When I joined the swim team, I didn't know many people that were on the team. Now, I have developed many different relationships, not just with my teammates, but with coaches as well that I can cherish for the rest of my life. Going to swim meets on the weekends has also helped me with social skills. I have even developed relationships with swimmers from different teams.

The YMCA has been my second home for ten years now. Next year when I go off to college, it will be really weird not going to the YMCA almost everyday after school to go to practice. When I come home to visit, I know I'll be stopping at the Y to visit my old coaches and see everybody who is still on the team. Swimming has been a very important part of my life for so long and it's hard to imagine that it's almost over. It's crazy to think that I won't ever be a part of that team again. I have had so many experiences from being a part of the team that I will never forget.

## Essay #33—Lindsey Eaton, MQTY

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I have loved the pool since I was little, spending as much time as I was allowed near or in the water. Organized swimming was a natural next step, and YMCA swimming has been a large part of my life from that point on. Along with the enjoyment of the water and the thrill of the competition, I believe I have learned valuable life skills that have and will continue to shape who I am. I have learned or have reinforced skills like leadership, sportsmanship, commitment, respect, the importance of teamwork and friendship while swimming with MQTY Killer Whales.

“Leadership is influence.”(John C. Maxwell) As one of the older swimmers on the team, I realize that I can be a role model. I have the opportunity to help set the pace and mood for the practice. I feel it is imperative that the older swimmers be able to read the workout correctly and be able to explain it to their teammates and motivate them in order for all of us to execute it. This has helped me develop leadership skills.

Swimming has taught me sportsmanship. While winning is important, being a winner is more than just getting first place. I have learned that a simple “good luck” or a high five to a competitor before or after race can change that competitor into a friend. So no matter win or lose, be a good sport. I think it is all a part of being a good person and sportsmanship is one of the things the YMCA enthusiastically encourages.

Swimming has taught me respect. Respect for my coaches, my teammates, my competitors and myself. Listening to the coaches and following their guidance is important. It can at times be difficult, but I have learned regardless of their age, they are still my *coach*, and I must respect them and trust their observations and their judgment. I have also learned the use of constant positive reinforcement and enthusiasm. When a coach has to correct me, they will always follow up with a complement. That keeps my morale up, and is a method I plan to use in future years.

YMCA swimming has also given me the opportunity to make new friends with other swimmers, and the coaches as well. I feel as if the swim team is one large family. We spend a lot of time together, we work hard together, we share in each other’s joy and we also share in pain, together as a team.

Swimming has given me the opportunity to build character and commitment. Competitive swimming has taught me how important true commitment is. If I want to excel, I must set a goal. Then I must put aside other things and focus. Even if that means sacrificing my weekends for swim meets and my summers for practice. That is something I had to learn the hard way. It is hard to take the summer off and achieve your goal in the following season. Swimming and competing against other swimmers my age and level has helped me develop a competitive edge, not only while racing, but also in practice. I think that a competitive edge is something wonderful to have.

Being a member of MQTY Killer Whales has truly impacted my life. I am looking forward to the future that I believe YMCA swimming has prepared me for.

# Essay #34—Tyler Christensen, Chippewa Valley

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I have been a member of the Chippewa Valley YMCA Swim Team for eleven years. Being a member of a swim team and the sport itself has changed my life. I have loved being part of a team, being coached by a lifelong mentor; competing with some of my best friends, and the sense of pride I obtained by swimming best times after months of hard work. The Chippewa Valley YMCA Swim Team has shown me nothing but love these last eleven years. It has blessed me with my personal hero Brian Bartlett, lifelong friends, and success in the pool. This love shown through swimming has not always been the easiest to take in. Love comes in multiple forms and one of those forms is tough love. Tough love is used by those who wish to teach you a lifelong lesson when you become too big for your britches. As I became faster in my early teenage years my head got bigger. I was this young, inexperienced boy who only knew success and didn't appreciate the beauty of the journey. I soon learned when you are on top there is only one direction to go, and that is down. I fell because swimming knocked me down and made my end of season success nonexistent.

I am no longer a little boy with a big head, but a young man who was captain of his high school swim team. One who carries the scars of failure and success with equal pride. I am humble and I am proud. I am strong and I am weak. I am a hard worker and I am a dreamer. I am the man I am today because swimming and its waters have shaped me into something unique and beautiful as the Grand Canyon. I credit all my success in life to my experience as a swimmer. The hard work that I use every day in practice to become stronger I have carried over to my running, biking and most importantly my education. I am graduating as the Chi Hi Class of 2013 Valedictorian, because of my ability to stick my head down and push through the pain. I am able to enjoy life's journey, not just the finish. Life itself is a journey composed of many sub journeys that you yourself decide to take. Every goal and every dream you have don't just happen. You work for it and in the end no matter what the outcome is, the journey will be with you, and that journey is the substance of life. The outcome is just a flash and I would rather enjoy the substance. If I was allowed to write a ten page paper, I would write till every inch of space was filled about what a positive experience the YMCA Swim Team has been in my life.

Swimming has changed me for the better, and for the better I plan on staying. My last YMCA State meet is coming up quickly and no matter the outcome, I plan on standing on that block before every race and taking it all in. All eleven years boil down to this one last meet, but as I said before, the journey is what I will remember 20 years from now when I am a swim coach. I will coach them as I was coached while remembering the quote from my hero Brian Bartlett, YMCA swim coach, "When you wrestle a gorilla, you don't stop when you're tired, you stop when it's tired, and I'm not tired yet, so keep on swimming." This quote has carried me through all phases of my life and will continue to guide me through life. No challenge is too great.

# Essay #35—Elizabeth Falconer, Sheboygan

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With its yellow walls and brown floor tiles, the Sheboygan YMCA is one of the oldest public buildings in the city of Sheboygan. Everyday about three hundred people file in and out, only adding more wear to the already ancient facility. The Sheboygan YMCA may seem just like any other YMCA. It has your average basketball court, workout room, gymnastics gym, lap pool, and cardio studio. Nothing of great significance or exceptional splendor, everything is completely unremarkable. That is, of course, the impression that the average Sheboygan YMCA user has. Most people do not know about the magic of the lap pool. They do not know of the moments of glory, the mountainous challenges, and the lifelong friendships that have been made, and will continue to be made, between the lane lines in this exceptionally average place.

I wasn't always a swimmer. In fact, I failed swimming lessons twice as a kid because I was afraid to swim from one side of the pool to the other. Swimming laps was definitely not "my thing". However, it wouldn't be until later in my life that this would all change. When I was in fourth grade my older sister Meghan had joined the Sheboygan Chinooks Swim Team. This was a new sport for my family, no one had ever been a swimmer before, but she had decided she wanted to try something new. Soon enough, she was spending her Saturdays in hot stuffy pools and would come home with colorful ribbons and shiny medals. At pick-up time I would see Meghan standing outside the YMCA after practice, laughing with all her friends, not wanting to wait until tomorrow's practice to see them again. It was things like these that made me wonder what was so special about this swim team thing? How could she be so excited to swim back and forth and back and forth in a deep, cold pool? I wanted to find out for myself, so I asked my mom to sign me up for the Sheboygan Chinooks Swim Team the next year. How hard could swimming back and forth be?

The following season was the most exciting and scary year of my life. I had to memorize all new names and faces, learn how to put on a swim cap without pulling my hair, master putting on a skin-tight racing suit, learn the difference between a whip kick and a flutter kick, understand how to successfully complete a flip turn, and so much more. At the end of the season, I had the worst times and the most DQ's of anyone in my age group on our team. To say my first season was horrendous was an understatement. There were so many reasons why I should have quit right then and there, but there was more to it than that. My swim friends and I had pushed through and completed many impossible sets each practice, spent our whole weekends at various meets playing cards and drawing in between our events, and chatting for hours after practices about boys, and school, and friends. As years passed, my times got faster and my relay teams advanced further. We swam in meets like USA State, YMCA State, Midwest Regionals, and even qualified for Nationals a few times.

As great as it was to experience so much success in a sport I loved, the most rewarding aspect of swimming on the Sheboygan Chinooks Swim Team was the intangible gifts I had received. I learned what it meant to be a true leader by keeping my lane swimming even when the workouts got tough. I had understood the true meaning of hard work through dedicating weeks of practice to lowering a time by just mere seconds. Maybe most importantly, I had

learned what it means to be dedicated to a team and the friends I had made. Being a part of the YMCA Sheboygan Chinooks Swim Team has helped form me into the person I am today, both in and out of the pool. And the lessons I have learned in this seemingly average pool are nothing short of extraordinary.

# Essay #36—Rachel Root, Green County

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My swimming career started at my local YMCA. After going to watch my brother's practices and meets, I was tired of sitting on the sidelines. I wanted to be part of that excitement. Since I was seven, I have been a member of the Green County Y Swim Team. In my first year of swimming, I was so thrilled when my coach put me on two relays that were headed to the state meet. Our medley relay received a third place trophy. After experiencing the excitement with my team members and feeling the atmosphere of a state meet, I knew that I wanted to come back again. It was the start of many meets and things to come.

I am probably considered a shy, quiet person. That is with the exception of when I am at a pool. Its environment is where I am most comfortable. I share something in common with other people in many different age groups at the pool. I have met numerous people as our team changed throughout the years. In addition, I have met swimmers and coaches from other teams from around Wisconsin and beyond. We have all started to recognize each other as the years have progressed. With technology, it has been easy to stay in contact with these new friends. I soon started to look forward to not just going to the meets for swimming but also to meet up with others. Swimming at the Y provided me with a family and support system outside of my immediate family members and school friends.

Swimming is something that is truly a part of me. I soon discovered that even on days during the "off season" of swimming, I would find my way back to the pool. As I was looking at colleges last spring and summer, I was unsure if I should continue to swim or not. One of my coaches said, "Rachel, you will be in the pool whether you are on a team or not, so you might as well be on a team". She was right. After I narrowed down my college choices based on my major and criteria, I started contacting swim coaches at these specific colleges. In the Fall of 2013, I will be a student athlete swimming at the collegiate level. Swimming at the Y, provided me with a passion for something that is not only healthy but also with the chance to continue to improve myself in many ways.

Swimming as a Y member has also opened up other pathways for me as well. With my swimming skills, it allowed me to obtain a job as a swim instructor at my local Y. I really enjoy being with young children and teaching in a small group setting. One of my favorite parts of teaching is watching a child's reaction when they have achieved something that was initially hard or scary. With additional help, they were able to learn to be safe in the water and to swim. By having this experience, I knew that I wanted to pursue working with children outside of the pool. In the Fall, I will begin pursuing a degree in Communication Disorders with the goal of becoming a Pediatric Speech Pathologist. Besides the many skills that swimming at a Y has given me, it has also helped me find a career path.

YMCA Swimming has provided me with many different opportunities. The experience in the pool led to a first time job and also to an interest in a future profession. It has given me the skills and the experience of traveling to the YMCA Nationals for the past three years. Y swimming has helped shape me into the person that I am today as well as given me a network of friends and a focus for my college career and long-term goals. The Y is where my passion for swimming began. Therefore, it is important to me to finish my Gator swimming career at the Y

state meet as I have done for the past ten years. Y Swimming has meant so much to me and the memories, experiences and opportunities will continue to grow evermore.

## Essay #37—Alex Delakis, Eau Claire

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I have been a part of the Eau Claire YMCA Swim Team for ten years now, and I've loved every minute of it. After all the dry skin, chlorine-crusted hair and countless remarks of "What smells like a pool?" as I walked into my classroom every morning, it is hard to see myself leave a program that has given me so much, not just as an athlete, but also as a person. It is through the morals taught by our coaching staff, friendships that I've made with other swimmers across the state, being with family members, bonds that I've made with the team and help with my self-confidence that I have realized how great of an opportunity it has been to be a part of a YMCA swim team.

Every time I walk into our YMCA, I can't help but notice four values painted on the walls of our gym: caring, honesty, responsibility and respect. Each word is given their own color and has a different lesson for us to all learn. Being on a swim team has taught me these four values. I learned what it is to be a caring person by looking out for my teammates and their feelings. I found that honesty really is the best policy and that I should always tell the truth to my coaches, teammates and parents. I quickly learned that the effort that I put into this sport will reflect how I do-responsibility. Also I learned how to be respectful to my competitors, teammates and coaches. By learning these values I was able to build up my character and become a better person.

Additionally, being on a YMCA swim team has taught me how to have confidence in myself. Through my hard work, I was finally able to feel like I had achieved something—something I did not learn from school. By going to practice every day, setting goals for myself and doing the sport that I love, I grew this confidence in myself-like I could achieve something if I put my mind to it. What also helped with that is that I got to swim with some familiar faces.

Swimming is a co-ed sport. This meant that I got the opportunity to swim with my older sister and younger brother while being on a team with others. I believe that being on the same team helped us grow unified as a family. At meets and practice we were always there to cheer and encourage one another.

Furthermore, while developing a bond with teammates, YMCA swimming gave me the opportunity to meet swimmers from across the nation. I really enjoyed meeting new people who shared the same passion for a sport as I did. We'd cheer each other on at meets, and, when we found time, go out to eat with one another. A good example of this sort of bond is the friendship that I developed about five years ago with swimmers from Wisconsin Rapids, Rebecca and Racheal Weiland. Becca and Racheal got to be a part of our team, because they didn't have a coach from their team at a meet. Our whole team got to know them and we all became immediate friends. Though they have both graduated now, I still keep in contact with them. In fact, while deciding where I wanted to take recruiting visits this year, I got some help from Becca. I visited her at her apartment on the University of Minnesota campus where she now swims, and we talked about what it takes to be a collegiate athlete, life at the U of M and how our seasons went this year. This friendship just goes to show you how the members of the YMCA swimming community can help each other out.

Given these points, being a member of a YMCA swim team has affected my life in such a positive matter. The experiences that I've had on my YMCA team have shaped who I am today.

During my time as a YMCA swimmer I've come to know that the qualities that the YMCA displays are of that of a quality person that I have had examples of my whole life because of the YMCA.

## Essay #38—Savanna Townsend, DCY

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The Sturgeon Bay YMCA has been my “home away from home” for thirteen years. When I was four years old I wished to be part of the Door County YMCA swim team just like my big sister. One year later, that wish became a reality. At age five, I began swimming competitively for the Door County YMCA Doorfins. Since then, I have never regretted joining the swim team. Countless memories and friendships have been made, numerous opportunities arose, and I have developed a wholesome work ethic as a result of belonging to the YMCA swim team.

Throughout the thirteen years of competitive swimming I have acquired and initiated lifelong friendships. Every evening of practice, I get anxious to converse with my teammates and coaches. Even if the workout is challenging, I know I am able to finish the swim set knowing my teammates are feeling the same pain. We form a special bond through this pain (which I believe all swimmers can relate to). The team friendships I created through this thriving program have transferred to lifelong friendships out of the pool as well. I formed friendships with swimmers from other teams also. I look forward to conversing with those friends at weekend swim meets. No matter the location of a swim meet, it seems I can always find a fellow swimmer to chat with.

Belonging to a successful, driven program has given me opportunities I never would have been able to take. One of those opportunities is traveling. Reaching the national level of competition has been an unforgettable experience. In order to travel to locations such as Maryland, North Carolina, and Georgia, one must meet the arduous time standards. Fortunately, I have qualified to compete at the YMCA short course and long course national swim meets. For many people this traveling opportunity may not be anything special, but because my family does not take vacations, traveling to these “big time” swim meets allows me to see parts of the country I would normally not visit.

Participating in the strenuous sport of swimming has aided in the development of my work ethic. Hard work will reap many benefits in life. Without the Door County YMCA swim team, my work ethic would not be as fervent as it is today. The effort and hard work I put into being a member of the Doorfins has shaped me into a strong-minded, independent, and dedicated young lady. Along with the characteristics I have acquired, I also benefit physically with every practice. Many swimmers and coaches will testify to the physical benefits of daily swimming. For me, swimming also clears my mind and gives me a sense of tranquility.

It was difficult writing an essay explaining how participating on a YMCA swim team has affected my life when, swimming *is* my life. I am grateful for being a member of the Door County YMCA swim team. Cherished relationships have been formed, opportunities were given, and a strong work ethic was developed because I was, and will always be a Doorfin.

## Essay #39—Gwen Hoenke, MQTY

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Swimming is in many ways synonymous with torture. The constant waves push on either side, making me feel as though I am literally fighting to stay afloat. By the end of my race, each stroke feels as though I am lifting a load of bricks. And yet, I have swum for seven years—now, as a senior in high school, I am not only a member of the High School swim team, but also am a member of the YMCA swim team. Why have I put myself through countless hours of pain for an extracurricular?

The simple yet true answer is that this pain has borne fruit in my life. The pain of swimming on the YMCA swim team has earned me an invaluable work ethic. Because I am on two teams, I expend a lot more time and effort on swimming than the majority of athletes. I have seen the fruits of this work—by being at all of these practices, I have been able to improve my times and techniques a great deal. I expend a large amount of time and effort at practices because I know that hard work and perseverance are two of the only things that will give me my desired outcome. My dedication on the YMCA swim team landed me a spot on the varsity high school swim team as a freshman. Without my hard work on the YMCA swim team, I would never have done as well on the high school team. Therefore, I have learned of the fruits of perseverance.

One of the largest things that YMCA swim team has taught me, though, is the importance of leadership through example. Because there are such a variety of age groups on the YMCA team, I have discovered firsthand how much the younger swimmers look up to the older swimmers. This has made me learn to always perform my best at practice, not only for my benefit, but also to serve as an example for the other swimmers. When the younger swimmers see how hard myself and other older swimmers work, they too are then inspired to perform their best everyday at practice.

Through YMCA swim team, I have also developed a newfound confidence. For instance, last summer I attended a swim camp out of Oshkosh, WI in Ely, MI. I learned of this camp through my YMCA swim team. The camp had been started in memory of a young girl, Natalie, from the Oshkosh swim team who had passed away in an automobile accident a few years ago. The goal of the camp was to unite people from an assortment of teams in honor of Natalie. Going into the camp, I did not know a single soul and normally would have felt uncomfortable in this situation. However, because we all had swimming as a uniting factor, I quickly bonded with the other swimmers. This camp gave me the confidence to connect with a variety of people not only in swimming, but in any given situation. Had I not been a member of the YMCA swim team, I would have never learned of this camp, which has helped me not only gain confidence but also allowed me to meet a variety of amazing people. It was an experience I will never forget, and it was made possible because of the YMCA swim team.

Through my participation on the YMCA swim team, I have obtained many traits that now define me, among them collaboration, perseverance, determination, leadership, and confidence. Ultimately, swimming has changed my life by allowing me to grow into the individual I am today. I will now carry these characteristics I have learned with me not only to the college I attend, but also through the rest of my life.

## Essay #40—Maddy Wergin, SEA

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For my entire life I have always had a standing fear of going out and trying new things. I never like drawing attention to myself, and I much rather be the shadows lingering in the background. This could have all stemmed from me being born three months prematurely. I was never suppose to walk or talk, and being diagnosed with cerebral palsy seemed inevitable. I stayed in the hospital for 57 days after I was born. I then went on to speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy and even special education for three hours every day for three years. Being in several different therapy's, I was always the center of attention. When I grew older I hated being the center of attention, and I always feel like everyone's eyes are on me.

Two years ago, I started competitive swimming for SEA, at age 15, an age when most people quit the sport. I was absolutely terrified of trying out for a new team, let alone a whole new sport. Of course SEA welcomed me with open arms and genuine smiles. I may never be the fastest or most skilled swimmer, but my teammates and coaches have always given me positive remarks and helped me along the way. This past summer I let out of my shell and attended our team's training trip in Panama City Beach, Florida. Two years ago, I would have never imagined myself being able to swim twice a day for 5 days. I eventually made it through our training trip, which built up my self confidence. I was more confident about myself because I then knew that people weren't just judging me on how fast or skilled I was, all my team and coaches wanted me to do was succeed and to give the best effort I could. I was so proud of myself for being able to conquer that week of swimming. Swimming for a YMCA team has also given me a very strong mind set. I now know that I can accomplish whatever I set out to do. I strongly believe in the saying "whatever doesn't kill you, makes you stronger." Joining the SEA swim team didn't kill me, it made me into a much more well rounded person. Going on our training trip didn't kill me, it gave me the attitude that I can accomplish anything I put my mind to.

My biggest fear of all wasn't just joining SEA swim team, or going on our team's training trip, it was stepping up on the blocks for a race. I was always so nervous for any swim meet that I never signed up for them. I always thought that when I was swimming that everyone in the stands, and everyone on deck was watching just me. I had such great anxiety about swim meets that I would make myself sick. One day, my teammates and coaches talked me into going to a meet. The one thing that got me through the meet was my Coach Neil, he said that meets should be fun and enjoyable. He told me that the only people watching me was him and maybe, just maybe my mom. I then realized that it didn't matter how I placed - all that mattered was that I tried my best. Now, it doesn't really phase me if people judge me because I know that what matters is if I gave my 100 percent best!

I'm planning on attending The University of Alabama where I want to pursue my masters degree in Sports Management, and earn a Law degree. My ultimate goal is to become a Sports Representative. When I become that, or where ever I go from here, I will take with me the four key elements of the YMCA: honesty, caring, respect, and responsibility. I am a fighter, a survivor and a miracle. I believe that I was placed on this earth for a reason. Being on a YMCA Swim Team has taught me how to believe in myself, given me the self confidence to go out a pursue new things, and how to make myself into the best person that I can be.

# Essay #41—Janna Check, SPDY

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It is five-thirty at night and a repetitive alarm goes off in my head, it is time to leave for swim practice. I get in my car and make the daily drive to the Stevens Point YMCA, step in the doors, grab two small rough white towels from the front desk, and make my familiar walk towards the locker room. As I get closer I recognize the ever-present scent of chlorine, and hear well-known voices yelling out to other practicing swimmers. I get ready for practice and walk out onto the pool deck, smile at a few familiar faces, and walk over to my lane, very anxious to hear what the set is going to be for the day. This has been my daily routine for the last ten years and I cannot imagine my life without it. When I joined swimming I found something that I had not discovered with any of my previous sports, I found a home that I never wanted to leave. Becoming a member of this team has helped shape me into who I am today and constructed some of my best qualities such as my ability to lead others, my responsibility, determination, and my dedication to myself, the sport, and others.

I have grown personally and mentally because experiences with my team have gotten me there. I have been given opportunities that previously I thought of as impossible. When I was only thirteen-years-old I was able to experience something that I will never forget – YMCA Long Course Nationals at the University of Maryland. The trip had its ups and downs and while my teammates and I were able to swim well, we had to endure a long power-outage that left us defenseless in the one-hundred degree heat for a few days. In addition to our misfortune pertaining to our living conditions, the meet itself was terrifying to me. My team and I were against other teams of fifty or more swimmers that had been there time and time again, I was intimidated. I had to overcome my fear and push out every negative thought from my head, and although I doubted my ability to do so, I was successful. Our small YMCA team of four girls came home as National Champions in the 200 Freestyle relay, and as a girls team placed fourth overall. Nationals was an amazing experience and helped me realize that I can achieve anything when I give it one-hundred percent, and that I will always have my teammates and family there to support me in everything that I do.

Being a member of the YMCA swim team has made me branch-out and attempt things that I would not have before. I do my best to be a role-model for younger swimmers on our team and always treat them with respect because I remember what it was like to be in their shoes. I try to implement my judicious personality traits every day, around everyone in my life. I plan to continue swimming at the collegiate level for the University of Wisconsin - Green Bay, majoring in Human Biology, with a minor in French. This will take responsibility and determination, which my YMCA swim family had definitely prepared me for.

Swimming at the YMCA has given me life-long connections, role models, goals, and a way to live happy and healthy for the rest of my life. I plan on continuing to live my life by those standards so that one day I can hopefully lead someone to live a healthy and successful life, just like someone did for me.

# Essay #42—James De Clerck, MQTY

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Swimming with the YMCA has been an amazing experience for me. I have had fun all along the way while making new friends and racing competitively. My involvement in YMCA swimming has given me opportunities to work towards my personal swimming goals. These include being best prepared for a strong high school swim season, swimming competitively in college and someday coaching swim teams of my own.

During high school, I have been driven both to do well personally and to support our swim team as best I can so that we can compete successfully. Since the high school season is fairly short, I began swimming my pre-season with the local Killer Whales YMCA team. The practices are challenging enough for an athlete to get into shape and get ready for the high school season. After swimming with the YMCA team for a month, I began the high school season ready to race and compete, while not having to worry about getting accustomed to swimming again. This preparedness has enabled me to get closer to my best times early in the season.

When I graduate, I hope to swim competitively in college while studying mechanical engineering. Compared to other parts of the country, the UP population is less dense. High schools here tend to have either small teams or no team at all. Yet, competition is important to prepare me for college level athletics. When I go to the state YMCA swim meets in Milwaukee each March, I get to swim against swimmers, from large competitive teams, who like me have aspirations of continuing to swim at the college level. I have achieved many of my best times swimming against the competition at these annual meets. I also have had an opportunity to swim the 1000 yard freestyle, which is a race that is available at the college level but not in high school. Last year, I swam this race for the first time and I did great, breaking Y records in Houghton in the process. By swimming this race and so many other ones at the YMCA state competition, I can see how successful I could be at the college level.

I have a goal of coaching swimming. I had the opportunity, through a local grant, to receive formal swim instructor training, and I really enjoy it. Over the years through the YMCA program and other teams I have swam with downstate, I have seen many coaching techniques and coaching philosophies, which have already influenced how I provide leadership on the swim deck. I draw on the best practices shared by YMCA coaches to give effective productive feedback on swimming performance and to inspire others to have lots of fun while swimming. My high school coach and team have recognized my usefulness by honoring me as last year's high school MVP and as a captain this year.

Swimming has been a wonderful and exciting adventure, largely due to the opportunities given me through the YMCA swim program. By preparing for the high school season through the Y, I have broken school and Y records and have helped our high school team win two UP finals, which Houghton had never won before. The YMCA has provide me with opportunities to prepare for college-level swimming and develop both leadership and coaching skills, which I can use both to coach swimmers and to apply to other pursuits in the future. Thank you!