

Benjamin Georgia
Green Bay YMCA Swim Team
Coach Jon Brenner Swimming Scholarship
February 28, 2017

I believe that being a member of the Green Bay YMCA swim team has changed the course of my life and helped to shape me into the person I am today. When I joined the Green Bay YMCA swim team at the beginning of my freshman year of high school, I was coming from a difficult middle school experience where I was bullied for three years. My self-esteem was eroded and I had difficulty making friends because I didn't trust people my age. I had been competing with a swim club but really didn't feel good about my progress, it seemed that I had plateaued and I felt that I would always be just a mediocre swimmer. All this changed when I joined the Green Bay YMCA team.

The first thing that changed when I joined the team was my ability to make friends. Swimming gave me a starting point for finding people with similar interests. At the YMCA, I was in a setting where I felt safe, which helped me move out of my comfort zone to approach people. The team also provided opportunities to do activities outside of swimming, such as manning water stations for marathons, holiday bowling parties, and awards banquets. These activities helped me to get to know my teammates and build rapport. Because of the Y team, I now have friends from various high schools in the Green Bay area and consider myself not just a part of a team, but part of an extended family as well.

Being a part of the Green Bay YMCA swim team also helped to build my confidence in my swimming abilities and become a better swimmer. My coaches push me and always challenge me to push myself. I find myself swimming with strong and highly competitive swimmers which pushes me to work even harder. As a result, I am more competitive and

achieving the goals that I set for myself in the pool. This confidence has led me to consider a swimming career beyond high school. I am currently in contact with swim coaches from the three colleges that I have been accepted to and feel confident that my swimming career won't be ending as I graduate high school.

Four years ago I never would have thought I would be where I am today. I have a lot of close friends and have proven to myself that with hard work and dedication, I can achieve the goals I set for myself both in and out of the pool. I contribute much of this personal growth and success to my participation in the YMCA swim team.

Emelia Selky

Schroeder YMCA

Word Count: 467

How Being a Member of a YMCA Team Has Affected Me

Being a swimmer for a YMCA team has shaped me as both an individual and an athlete. I think what has stuck out to me most about YMCA teams are the role models they provide you with, the idea of "team first" that they express, and the type of athletes and people that they produce. I am unbelievably thankful for the opportunities that have been given to me due to being a YMCA athlete throughout my life.

When I was an age group swimmer I looked up to the "older kids" on the team more than anything. I remember the kindness and support that they showed me, hoping that someday I would grow up to be as "fast" and as "cool" as them. It is amazing that YMCA teams can

produce such amazing role models for younger children on the teams. Now being an “older kid” I try my best to go out of my way to show acts of kindness to the younger athletes of the team, because I remember being younger and how great of a feeling that was. I like to think that the coaches and athletes of YMCA teams have made me become a role model to younger children as well.

Along with looking up to the “older kids” I have always viewed my coaches as some of the biggest role models in my life. With that said, how they behave and the things that they tell me have always have had a large impact on me. When I was an age group swimmer for South Eastern Aquatics YMCA, I remember my coaches expressing how it is important to focus on your team and to always support them no matter the circumstances. Having this idea expressed to me by people that I looked up to had a large impact on me inside and outside the pool. It taught me to always support people no matter if they were better or worse than you. When I became older I switched teams to Schroeder YMCA. Our head coach, Dave Anderson has taught us “the Schroeder way” (be great, act with integrity, expect success, team first). Thinking about these aspects of the sport has helped me stay calm and confident going into big championship meets. Outside of the pool “the Schroeder way” has helped me stay focused in school, and has helped me how to work out other problems that I have faced throughout my life.

Without being taught the things that I have been taught from YMCA teams I do not think that I would be as prepared to go off to college as I am now, and I am thankful that I was given the opportunity to swim with such supporting coaches and athletes.

Amanda Klaeser

YMCA Scholarship

Oshkosh YMCA Swim Team

The Sport That Changed My Life

Home is where the pool is. Throughout my eight years swimming, the pool has always felt like a home to me. When I think of where I am most comfortable, it is in the pool. No matter what is going on in my life, the pool will always feel like home. Swimming competitively through the YMCA has shaped my life in ways I could never have imagined. This program has taught me so many important life lessons and introduced me to some of my best friends. Without this program, my life would be drastically different.

When I first joined the local YMCA swim team, I never thought I would make it this far. I was a shy kid, with only a few friends, who mostly only swam because her older sister did. As I kept with the sport, I began to realize how much I actually loved the sport. With my growing love of the sport, I began to work harder as well as become more social. Eventually, I was no longer the shy girl who had one or two friends, I was an outgoing person who had finally found her place on the team. I found that swimming was my home. It was the one place I could go, where no matter what my day was like, I would leave with a smile on my face. There is nothing more fulfilling than finishing a tough workout. To this day, I still find myself excited to go to practice everyday and work hard.

Being on a YMCA team, I grew up learning the YMCA Core Values. Respect, honesty, caring, and responsibility are the four main values that I grew up following. Over the years swimming for the YMCA, I've learned so many important lessons. I've learned that swimming is a team sport. To succeed as a team, everyone needs to be there and working hard. Swimming is a

mentally tough sport, and to be a successful and unified team, teammates need to support each other. This includes showing each other and everyone around us the YMCA Core Values. Over my years swimming, I have learned and demonstrated these core values. I have learned to care for my teammates when they are having a rough day, practice, or meet. I have learned to respect my teammates and coaches, even if I disagree with them. I have learned to be honest with myself when I don't go the time I wanted or didn't practice hard enough on any given day. I always make sure to be honest with my coaches and teammates so that they know I am trustworthy and someone they can depend on because that is what makes a team strong. Most importantly, I have learned to manage responsibility and hold myself accountable for all my actions, both positive and negative. I have also been able to demonstrate these values outside of the pool as well as in the pool. Whether I am at school with my peers and teachers, or at home with my parents, I try to uphold these values.

I have never been more thankful to have the opportunity to swim for a YMCA team for my entire high school club swimming career. Being a part of a team, I was able to emerge from my shyness and become a well rounded individual. I've been lucky enough to have amazing teammates who I know will be lifelong friends even as we go our separate ways and I continue onto college. I have never been more grateful for the life lessons, morals, and adventures being apart of a YMCA swim team have given me.

Jon Brenner Scholarship Essay
David Vowels - Schroeder YMCA Swim Team

Ever since I started swimming for the YMCA at Pabst Farms when I was 7 years old, the YMCA swimming program has had a major impact on my life. Now that I am swimming for the Schroeder YMCA swim team, the YMCA continues to have a major impact on my life. I could

never have imagined what swimming would do for me over the years. Swimming has become a safe place that is my favorite part of every day, helped me find a renewed sense of confidence, and taught me what it takes to set a goal and work hard every day, both individually and as a team, to achieve things that originally seemed impossible. From the first day I hopped in the pool as a little kid, I have loved nearly every minute of this sport. This love was fostered by my first swim coach, Jessica Diel, and the love I developed for this sport as a young kid has carried me a long way. The first time in my life where my love of the sport helped me more than anything else was the year I was in 6th grade. That winter my dad got radiation poisoning from radiation treatment for thyroid cancer. He got so sick that he was put in an induced coma for a week and nearly died. However, thanks to my YMCA swim team, both my family and I were able to stay afloat. At practice my friends helped take my mind off of my dad and helped me have fun. Swimming helped me let out my anger, my sadness, and my stress. It wasn't just my teammates that helped, the parents on the team came together for my family. They made us meals, gave my brother and I rides, and even helped clean our house since my mom was always at the hospital. If it wasn't for my YMCA swim team I don't think my family or I would've made it. I will be forever grateful.

Swimming on a YMCA swim team is still the highlight of every day. I am a strong member of a strong Schroeder team that works hard and has fun together every day. But, there was a time when I wasn't as confident as I am now. When I first started swimming I had friends and I had fun, but I wasn't as confident as I could have been. That changed for me with the amazing experience I had up in Ely, Minnesota at the Natalie Kate Bolin Camp hosted by the Oshkosh YMCA swim team. Thanks to Coach Jay, all of the camp counselors, and the Bolin family, I was pushed out of my comfort zone. That week helped me grow more as an individual than anything I had ever done. I learned more about what it truly meant to be a swimmer and how to be a great teammate. I learned about Natalie and her story, which was a good reminder of the important things in life. I was forced to step up and come out of my shell in order to gain the full experience of this camp. I am filled with gratitude for the lasting impact Natalie's story has had on me and my character. When I started swimming I was just a kid who had no idea what the word swimming really meant. Now, thanks to the YMCA, I have grown into a high level athlete who has developed an immense love for this sport and who has come a long way in growing both as an individual and as a teammate.

Jon Brenner 2017 Scholarship Application
Sam Chumas, Eau Claire Marlins

I joined my YMCA swim team when I was eight years old. Being part of the Y swim team has taught me lessons and skills that I could not have learned anywhere else. Swimming has taught me how to set goals and accomplish them, how to be a realistic and reliable team player, and how to be a good role model. Swimming with the Y has had a valuable positive effect on my life.

Knowing how to set personal goals is an essential life skill. Unfortunately, many people do not learn that skill until they are grown up. Luckily, I was taught how to set sensible long and short-term goals when I came to my first swim team practice. The coaches explained to me that each day we would learn a new stroke or drill. I made my first goal right there: learn all the strokes. My coaches explained that setting good goals is the key to success, not only in the pool but in your life as well. At the start of each season, we would write in journals what we wanted to accomplish. Writing down everything helped us think about it for the rest of the season. Setting goals doesn't just make you more organized; it helps you accomplish things. My coaches have helped me see that I can always improve.

In addition to setting goals, swimming has taught me to be realistic and to find the role I'm best at. My Y team has produced some extraordinary swimmers; some hold numerous state, national, and collegiate records. I am fast—but not that fast. Last year, I got to swim at Y Nationals. Next to my name on my registration form, there was an asterisk and a note that said, "Relay Only Swimmer." I've learned that my best role is being a team player. I'm proud that I am reliable and consistent. I usually swim the third leg for my relay, and I have done things in that position that I didn't believe I could do. I've helped my relays accomplish many team firsts, including getting on the podium at Y Nationals. Although I'm not the fastest on my team, I can still contribute.

Recalling my first practice at the YMCA pool, I realize I was a poor swimmer back then. I noticed the "big kids" were fast—and that they were kind; I practically thought they were superheroes. This memory has stuck with me as I have grown up on the swim team. I am one of the "big kids" now, and I know that whatever I do, I have little eyes watching me do it. The special thing about the YMCA swim team is kids of all ages get to swim together, sometimes even on the same relay! I know that the younger kids are the future of the sport. Someday, they will want to be just like me.

I have been on my Y swim team for ten years now. There, I have learned much that I use both in and out of the pool. I will likely "retire" as a competitive swimmer in the coming months, but I will take with me all of my lessons, experiences, and memories. I know the benefits of healthy living, goal-setting, hard work and practice, following the advice of good coaches, watching good role models, and focusing on the role I can best fill. Whatever my future brings, I will be more prepared for it because I was a YMCA swimmer.

Skylar Lassen
Green County YMCA

I started swimming when I was nine years old for the local summer swim team and began swimming for the Green County Gators when I was eleven years old. I decided to start swimming for this team because of how much I loved the sport and wanted to further my

abilities as a swimmer. Over the past six years of being a Gator I have greatly improved due to the hard workouts and my dedication in the pool. Swimming for the Gators swim team has taught me many things including work ethic, kindness, and respect.

Being apart of this team has affected my life by teaching me how to work hard and dedicate my life to something. Swimming is one of the hardest sports in the world and if you want to be good at it, you have to dedicate your whole self to the sport. From the second I walk into the pool until the moment I climb out of it, I am 100% committed to working hard. This has become a habit with everything I am involved with. Whether it's swimming, school or work, I am 100% committed to doing my absolute best and not wasting a second.

It also affect me by connecting me to people who I never would have met without the team. Although swimming is one of the only sports that limits chances of having a social life outside of the sport, it gives you friends that you know will be there for you through the best and worst times of your swimming career and life. My teammates quickly became my best friends, and we always help push each other through the worst sets of the practice and encourage each of us to do our absolute best.

Finally, I taught me how to respect others, inside and outside of the pool. Swimming is not an easy sport. And as individual as the sport is, you have to remember that everyone in that pool is trying to do the same thing that you are: improve their time and make it to the finish. So, I have made sure that every time I get behind the blocks to wish my opponents good luck, and make sure that at the wall after the race, I congratulate them on their swim, even if I beat them or they beat me.

All in all, I am overly thankful to be apart of this team because of how much it has affected my life. It has taught me how to be a better person, a good teammate and opponent, how to be committed to something, and has given me friendships that will last a lifetime.

Annah Van Gheem – Green Bay YMCA

Each year, since I was 10, I would spend the car ride to Schroeder for YMCA State reading the essays that the seniors from that year had written. It inspired me to achieve my goals. And when I didn't accomplish my goals, it gave me courage to continue swimming for another year. I would also reflect on one of my coach's favorite words: leadership. I thought about what kind of team leader I wanted to be and I imagined what I would write in my essay as I prepared to finish my Y swimming career. Now that the time is here, I'm not sure how to summarize the most influential part of my life into 600 words. I think my Y story starts with a postcard and ends with a picture.

The postcard was written to me by someone I idolized and still look up to. It was sent to me when I was 10 from a Green Bay Y teammate competing at Y Nationals. At 10, I struggled with swimming and there were probably not many people who thought Y Nationals would be in my future. However, as soon as I received that postcard I hopped on my computer to look at Y National qualifying times. The 100 fly seemed like my best chance and I made it a goal to qualify for the 100 fly at Y Nationals, all because of a simple postcard. I came close to the cut at 12, then again at 13, and at 14 it was my last chance to go to Y Nationals with the teammate who sent the postcard. After 2 time trials at Y State and 3 years of being close, I just couldn't get there. Like many of my friends, I contemplated quitting or switching teams. The Y taught me respect and responsibility along with perseverance. I knew I would be disappointing myself, my coach, my parents, and maybe a young swimmer who looked up to me if I were to switch teams or quit.

The next part of my story is only possible because of what I learned from the Y. After achieving a national cut the following year, and sending postcards to young swimmers like the one I received, I decided swimming was not enough. I needed to use the confidence Y swimming provided and fulfill other YMCA missions including youth development and social responsibility. I began coaching and embracing my goal as a leader of my team. I remembered how much a high-five or conversation meant to me when I was younger, and tried to build relationships with many of the young swimmers on my team.

As for the picture, it was a hand-drawn pool with the artist as the swimmer and me as the coach. The young artist might be a future National 100 butterfly swimmer. Since I received it and hung it on my door, it is the first thing I see when I wake up for a tough morning practice, or the last thing I see before leaving for a big meet. This picture inspires me to keep going just like the postcard inspired me to get started.

YMCA swimming taught me more about life and leadership than anything else ever could. I

learned life can come full circle and it takes one act of kindness to change a life forever. As I head to college, I promise my teammates I will always be around the Green Bay YMCA and only a text message away. And yes, the postcard and the picture will come with me to college.

Race Archibald
Green Bay YMCA

I have been a part of the Green Bay YMCA Swim Team since I was 12 years old. I originally swam on a different club team, but switched along with some other friends. I saw it as a greater opportunity to grow as a swimmer, and I got more out of it than I thought. I created new friendships, expanded my opportunities and also got better as a swimmer. Being a part of the YMCA has taught me to be more independent, and to be helpful to others. Throughout my time at the YMCA, I have seen not only myself change, but others as well. Being on a YMCA team is unlike anything else. There are more meets offered which give you more swimmers to compete against, and possibly get to know them.

The YMCA has taught me about teamwork, leadership, and dedication. These are three very important qualities to have as an individual that have helped shape the person I am today.

One of the many opportunities the Oshkosh YMCA has presented is a swim camp I have attended for the past three years, the Natalie Bolin swim camp. It is named after a former Oshkosh YMCA swimmer who passed away in a car accident. The purpose of the camp is to honor the memory of Natalie. As swim season ends in August, she looked forward to this camp to be able to get together with her teammates and other YMCA swimmers to build long lasting friendships. The YMCA has kept this camp going for others to experience and have the same opportunity that she had. The camp takes place in Minnesota for a week in August. It is by far the most memorable and enjoyable experience I have encountered in my life. Over the course of the week, we embark on a variety of challenges and puzzles. These challenges not only wear you down physically, but mentally. Doing this for five straight days is no easy task. It takes a whole team effort to complete these challenges. It has taught me how to work together as a team. But it's the whole journey of it, and the bonding with the people around you which make it truly special. I have met new people I would have never thought I would get to know. There isn't anything else in my life I have done quite like it. I am grateful for the opportunity to have attended this camp.

This fall I will be attending Eastern Illinois University and will be swimming there. Swimming has been a big part of my life. One goal throughout my life has been to swim in college and it wouldn't have been possible without the YMCA swim program that has taught me to not only be a better swimmer, but a better individual. I have had an amazing experience swimming for the Green Bay YMCA and the core values and lessons I have learned will help me as I start the next chapter in swimming this fall at the collegiate level.

Elizabeth Holbrook
Marshfield YMCA Swim Team (MYST)

It was around the age of four when I told my mom and dad that I wanted to learn how to swim; who knew a couple of swim lessons at the YMCA would have dramatically changed my life. I fell in love with swimming and it has become a major part of who I am, teaching me so much about myself. 14 years later I still swim every day, not because I have to but because I still get that little rush of excitement and adrenaline when I dive off the blocks at a big meet or get a new best time after countless hours of hard work in and out of the pool. Hard work and perseverance are definitely two of the most profound characteristics I have gained from being on the swim team, that reflect in my daily life. Swimming allows me to set goals and attain them. I learned from swimming that each day is a new opportunity to get closer to what I want to achieve. When I swim, I am in control, and have the power to reach farther and push myself to limits I didn't know I had. Being a member of the YMCA swim team helped me in numerous ways, they have trained me to be the best swimmer I can be, but away from swimming the YMCA has given life skills that will take me places after my swimming career is over. The YMCA has taught me a lot about dedication and determination. Be the best version of myself, for myself, and for my teammates. Self-discipline, humility, and mental toughness are some of the most important qualities that swimming has taught me over the years. I owe so much to the YMCA and am thankful for every minute I get to jump in the pool and work with some of my closest friends.

Swimming from an outside perspective can be seen as an individual sport, but from an actual swimmer's point of view, swimming is a team sport. All swimmers understand each other and there is a common bond between all of us because we have all been through the same thing. Extremely difficult practices, spending 10 hours at a meet, and not always getting a best time are some of the things that we have all been through, and having someone else to share the good times and bad times with is truly incredible. I have built multiple relationships with fellow swimmers on my team and from other teams. Getting to go to a meet and seeing friends I only get to see three or four times a year is something I very much look forward to. Being a part of the YMCA is what allowed me to get so close to so many people. The YMCA has given me a place to go and be myself with people I love, and I am beyond thankful for every opportunity the YMCA has given me.

Katie Stephenson

Northern Lights YMCA

YMCA Scholarship

Jon Brenner Scholarship

Being a member of a YMCA swim team is so much more than being a part of a team. I cannot even begin to imagine a life before swim. It is my final year on my local YMCA swim team and it has been a year filled with gratefulness and reflection. Swimming is no longer a sport to me but instead has become a passionate lifestyle. When considering how to express the ways swimming has affected me I would have to admit it has completely sculpted me into who I am today.

Starting at the young age of 6 I made my first friends in the pool. I still reminisce and laugh about our sharpie tattoos and the bubbles we blew in the showers. My fondest memories of childhood include the pool. My coaches were like another set of parents. The older kids were my biggest role models while growing up, I wanted to be just like them. Now I see that my position has changed. The little ones follow me like I have 20 little shadows.

I was taught time management, compassion, sportsmanship, leadership, determination and competitiveness before I could even fully define what those qualities meant. These qualities were extremely helpful as I aged and watched many of my friends leave the team. Being young many of my teammates left in pursuit of the common adolescent entertainment such as school dances, football games, and social activities. However, I was determined, I knew I belonged in the pool. I will forever be grateful for the direction and encouragement my coaches and parents gave me to stick with swimming at a young age.

Along with instilling me the perfect ideals to be successful in life I have also been gifted with many wonderful opportunities through swimming. My favorite is the opportunity to give back to the sport that has given me so much. I give back to my passion and my community by teaching children and adults how to swim. Being a swim instructor has been one of the most

meaningful and personally valuable jobs I have ever had. I have found the only thing I love just as much as swimming is teaching kids how to swim. There is no better feeling than to watch that same spark of excitement that I had so many years ago ignite in a young child's eyes.

Now, as I graduate from high school I have the heart breaking thought of leaving my team. My coaches who have been there for me through every life event, they have watched me grow into the person I am today. I will miss running my fingers along the smooth backstroke bars, and feeling the rough blocks underneath my feet. I wonder how long it will be before my records are taken down from the board and I am just a mere memory of many of the other swimmers on the team.

I know swimming does not stop for me here, I wouldn't accept that. I have been blessed with the wonderful opportunity to be a part of the University of Wisconsin- Green Bay's swim team. I know I will be worked harder than I ever have been in pursuit of my degree and being a part of this competitive team. I hope to continue to give back to the sport that has given me so much by eventually becoming a coach. I was once told, "Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life," and it just so happens that swimming is what I love.

Lyndsey Welch

YMCA Marquette County

The first ribbon I ever received was for graduating from a "polliwog" to a frog through YMCA swim lessons. The glowing- neon ribbon still hangs in my room, as it was the seed to my ever growing love for the pool. I decided to join the YMCA swim team as a second grader. Then,

through great coaches I learned all four strokes and started competing in meets. By the end of my first year, I had made states in a relay which was a big deal for our little team. Being at the YMCA Schroeder pool as an eight year old from a town with a very small swim community (at the time), and one 6- lane pool shared by the whole city was very eye opening. After that all I wanted to do was work hard and be in the water.

This summer I made it a goal to swim across the Straits of Mackinac. I'd never consider the 5 mile open water swim if it wasn't for YMCA swimming teaching me to push myself. The swim was long and frigid cold. There were times I felt frustrated kicking and pulling against the strong current yet hardly moving anywhere. However, I thought about my team and coach; they supported me and my goal. Eventually I made it through the current and completed the swim.

That's the thing about my YMCA team; not only do we finish hard practices together, but we all support each other which means a lot especially during challenging times.

This is my senior year of high school; at the beginning of the season I made the decision not to participate in high school swimming so I could swim full time on the Y. There were times I second guessed that decision. I would see and hear things from friends about what they were doing, while I was swimming on a team where the next person closest to my age was four years younger. However, as the season is coming to an end I've reflected back on this year, and know without a doubt I made the right decision. I came home from practice every night 10 times happier than I would have during high school season. I also became a strong leader and supporter for all the young swimmers on my team as I watched them succeed throughout practices and meets; as one of my favorite memories of this year was helping and witnessing some complete their first dive off the block. I have also been offered (and plan to accept) swimming on the

collegiate level next year. I feel that choosing to swim for YMCA full time has offered me the best environment possible for my last year, while also adequately preparing me for my future.

Not only has YMCA swimming helped me find my passion, it has also shaped my ethics which lead me to achieve many goals that I wouldn't have had the confidence to do otherwise. The Y in my community has been a place for me to go to build strength, it has taught me how to work hard, be an encouraging teammate, and has granted me special friendships to last a lifetime. Lastly, being a part of this team and community has helped me out of the pool as well, making me an adequate leader with confidence all through school. I am very blessed to have spent my last 11 years swimming for YMCA and all the experiences and lessons it has provided me.

Zachary Simonsen

Chippewa Valley Family YMCA

As I laid in the recovery room, I heard my parents and the doctor talking quietly. Worried as I had been a strong swimmer and athlete for many years and over the past couple months I had lost twenty pounds and became lethargic to the point that getting out of bed was a struggle much less swimming one length of the pool. My parents and Dr. Fish then came in and said the four words that would change my life. **“You have Crohn's Disease.”** I had never heard of the disease. I later learned that my body was literally fighting itself but I chose to fight back. I knew this disease would not define me...but my actions following would.

Although my teammates were wondering why I was in the hospital I kept it to myself. I simply didn't want sympathy. I just wanted to go back to my normal life. I chose to try and swim to the best of my ability and keep up with other activities. The hardest thing for me was the swim team. The practices were difficult for anyone much less with my disease. I didn't want any regrets so I chose not to quit but persevere. It was hard as I would have to stop because of the pain. This pain though excruciating was motivating in its own way. Even in the darkest times I

still knew I had a team counting on me and something to prove to myself. With my teammates still puzzled as to my sudden decline, I knew I had to share with them what I was diagnosed with. Sharing with them was very difficult but at the same time exactly what I needed. My teammates rallied around me and supported me. My swim family was the missing link to my success. I continued to push and with my teams' support I was back to being able to complete a full practice. After making it back to my previous abilities through grueling practices and painful months, I was able to compete.

I learned two important lessons from my swim team experience. First "Don't let your circumstances define you." No matter what I face in life, only I choose how it impacts me." Second, that you have to allow others to support you when you need help. My swim family is part of who I am. The friendships I have will be with me for life. We are there to support each other through the ups and downs of life. Swim team is more than swimming. It is the family that is created.

Sally Bowman
La Crosse YMCA

Being apart of the La Crosse YMCA swim team has affected my life both in and out of the water in significant ways. I have been swimming with the YMCA for 15 years, and have been around the LAXY team for 17. Jon Brenner was the first coach, and person, to help me understand what a passion truly is, and teach me how to make and achieve any goals that I wanted. He taught me that swimming isn't all about your times, or beating the kid next to you, but about improving yourself. The LAXY team has been raised on the morals that we are more than a team, but we are that of a family.

When I first started swimming, I was 4 years old and only doing it because my older siblings were already on the team. I have been around the pool since age 1, watching my siblings swim, and being passed from the arms of one swim mom to the next. Coach Jon used to give me caps, and tell me he couldn't wait until I could join the team. His kind words were the reason I joined the team the moment I passed swim lessons, making me the youngest swimmer to ever start on the Wave. I still remember walking onto the deck and having Coach Jon find me and tell me how excited he was to finally see me joining the team. After every single race I was so excited to run to Jon because I knew no matter how well (or how poor) I swam, he would be full of encouragement and positive words. Those words kept me going, even when I thought I couldn't anymore.

The summer before I went into fourth grade, we received the news that Coach Jon was diagnosed with cancer. I can still feel the pain when I think of how this event broke the people in my family, and everyone on our team. Even though our team moral was failing, Jon remained our

beckon of hope. He was struggling with something that none of us could even imagine, but he was always positive, and never let anyone see his pain. After Jon passed, our team struggled with remaining motivated and positive, but we knew that he wouldn't want us to dwell on the past, but would want us to move forward and continue our passions.

The older I have gotten, the more I can see the way that Jon, and the YMCA swim team have affected me. I know how to be a team player, encourage others, and socialize with people that I have never met before. Swimming is different in the way that every year your team changes, it will never be exactly the same as the year before. Being on a YMCA team is different because I feel we are more accepting, and more open to different types of people. Our coaches, teammates and parents have instilled the Y core values in us, and encourage us to use them on an everyday basis. We do many things together, with all age groups, to make us closer and grow as a family as opposed to a team.

The YMCA had been a second home for me for 17 years, and although sometimes I don't want to go to practice, I know that no matter what I'm dealing with my team will be there for me. The YMCA organization has taught me leadership and social skills, and also that sports and being competitive is important, but learning from those around you, and growing as a family, is what we are all here for.