

Sami Nickerson

Schroeder YMCA Swim & Dive Team

My family has been a part of the YMCA for 30 years. First starting in North Carolina, my mom was a lifeguard at 19 years old. Later in her life when she met my dad, he proposed to her at a YMCA swim meet. Then along came me, before I was even born I was learning the ways of the YMCA. My mom took a "Mom's Water Aerobic" class where she met other moms that lead us unborn babies to inevitably become the "water babies". After I was born, and years after that, I was enrolled in the preschool at the YMCA, then became part of the swim team. I remember I was in the group called the Flying Fish. Along with swimming I also attended summer camps at the YMCA that took me all over the place and taught me about anything that I was interested in and more. I remember my favorite part about every camp was being able to go and play in the lake and most of all sliding down the giant inflatable slide. Years later, we moved to Wisconsin and still found our way back to a YMCA. I started diving with the Schroeder YMCA Dive Team. This team has helped me carry on the principles of the YMCA that will be forever integrated into my life.

Each value of the YMCA has impacted my life in various ways. Starting off with respect, this trait is a huge part of me. I strive to give everyone the respect they deserve, I was first taught this in preschool when the teachers taught us to listen when others are speaking and use our good manners when anything is given to us or if we were to ask for something. Next is responsibility, to me this means being accountable for all of my actions and reactions. This trait is very meaningful to me today because being responsible means that people can rely on me to always be on time, and to be there when I'm needed. Learning and understanding the trait of responsibility has made me a productive member of society. During my sophomore year I helped at the Ronald McDonald house, and since then have taken any chance to volunteer in my community. Now, honesty is a hard pill to swallow. This trait is probably the hardest one I've had to learn. I am a very honest person now but as I was growing up it was hard for me to admit mistakes, or take the fault for a broken lamp, and especially telling my parents when I didn't do so well on a test. Now, as I've experienced more in my life I have learned that while telling the truth is hard, losing the trust of someone that you've lied to is even harder. The last trait of the YMCA is caring. I am a big carer; I don't like seeing other people get hurt, or animals being hurt. I'd do anything to keep people safe from harm. I have a big heart and anyone that knows me knows that I care deeply for them. I definitely think that I learned this from the YMCA, my preschool teachers always cared so much for me that as I've grown I want to show people the same kindness that was shown to me. Overall, the YMCA has been a huge part of my life, upbringing, and has made me who I am today. I am truly grateful that I have been with the YMCA for my whole life.

My name is Grace Roseen and I have been swimming for the Chippewa Valley YMCA Swim Team for eleven years. My swimming story is full of highs and lows. When I was 10, I won the 50 freestyle every time I swam it. I was seeded first at the state meet and not once did I doubt that I was going to win. Then I turned 11 and at a swim camp realized I was a little fish in an Olympic sized pool. Competition became faster and I didn't drop time in the 50 or 100 freestyle for three years. During this time, I learned about discipline and resiliency. Learning to wake up early to jump in a cold pool before school or going through grueling two-a-days is a challenge. Doing this without complaining was life changing. I built a "shut up and go" attitude that allowed me to be a leader on the high school swim and soccer teams and helped me persevere in putting out my best work when facing challenges in school, sports, and life. Quitting swimming was never an option. I loved the sport and team, but there were times I wanted to scream because I was tired of working hard and not getting better. Swimming has a way of teaching humility, patience, and that hard work will eventually pay off in ways we may not expect.

Some years I didn't make it to state individually but was blessed with talented teammates who helped me make it on relays and encouraged me, so I was fortunate enough to experience state every year. Though I was at a standstill my freshman year, I made it to high school state on the 4x50 free relay my sophomore and junior years. People had been talking to me about going to nationals since I was in middle school, and finally this dream seemed very doable. We had fast girls! Well, that didn't quite go as planned either. Our fastest swimmer decided not to swim for CVY after high school season. The goal of nationals faded. It hit home that swimming may be an individual sport, but it is important to always be there for my team.

I've found joy and peace talking to younger swimmers, encouraging them, and helping them manage their nerves. I used to get super nervous before races, but I've found that swimming is something we do for fun and doing my best is all I need to do. I've also learned that doing well in swimming is great, but practicing and spending time with my teammates at meets is the best. The bond you form with someone you spend countless hours with in a cold gym between races and who's splits you know by heart is irreplaceable.

My senior year, my relay missed high school state by .01 seconds. Yet again, I was humbled. Our 4x100 freestyle relay made it! I wasn't on that relay. Though I missed state, I was genuinely happy for my teammates. I love my swim family. Knowing that my teammates' hard work paid off and our school would be represented was awesome. My high school swimming career may not have ended exactly where I wanted it to, yet I still swim YMCA because I can't imagine not swimming. Being able to push myself, distance myself from life's problems, and spend time with my teammates is something I can't get enough of. I am thankful for everything swimming has taught me, for my teammates and coaches, especially my head coach, Cathy, for helping me become a better athlete and person.

## Ann Van Hout - Oshkosh YMCA Swim Team (OSHY)

In writing my college application essays and numerous scholarship essays, I find myself reminiscing on the countless memories and lessons swimming has taught me. To say I don't know who I would be if it weren't for my time swimming for a YMCA team would be an understatement. Swimming on a YMCA team has been my life for the past twelve years. I began swimming for FCYST at the ripe old age of five and remained on the team until last year when I switched to OSHY. For a time I contemplated not swimming anymore; I hadn't swam a best time in some of my best events in four years and I was disappointed, frustrated and unhappy. Then Coach Jay Coleman opened a door for me and invited me on a team travel trip to Texas. It was over that trip that I realized how blessed I am to swim for a YMCA. Upon returning from the trip, I not only knew I wanted to keep swimming but I knew I needed to keep swimming for a YMCA.

Swimming for a YMCA team led me to train under eight different coaches, in five pools and with countless teammates. The one constant – the unending amount of support and learning opportunities. When asked to write about what I love most about OSHY I explained my favorite moment. I can think of any number of difficult sets my teammates and I were asked to do that I genuinely wasn't sure I could complete. But looking back, I don't remember what the set was, what stroke I did or what my breathing pattern was. I remember the words of encouragement my teammates and I would yell to each other in between intervals. I remember sprinting down the pool and taking a breath to see both of my coaches yelling, jumping up and down and waving their arms like crazy to cheer us on. My athletic talent wasn't what got me through those workouts, it was my teammates and coaches.

Just like my teammates and coaches have supported me, they have also taught me new skills and life lessons. While I learned the skills of blowing a perfect bubble ring, scoring a goal in water polo and, of course, the perfect dolphin dive technique, I also learned the skills of teamwork, sportsmanship, hard-work, punctuality, responsibility and countless more. Every fond memory I have about swimming has taught me a lesson. From the van full of girls that rode down to North Carolina together for YMCA Nationals to the group of swimmers huddled up in sweatshirts watching the steam roll off the Erb Park pool, every memory had a lesson. Whether the lesson was how to be patient on a fourteen hour car ride or how to not complain about how cold the pool is, each lesson has helped me through various challenges in and out of the pool and will continue to help me in college next year.

The thought of leaving for college next year is both exciting, as I will encounter new opportunities, but sad as I leave behind my many teammates, coaches and friends that I have made through swimming for the YMCA. I've gone from debating quitting the sport to committing to swim for the University of Saint Thomas next year. Thanks to my 12 years of YMCA Swimming, I am prepared and excited for the future. Each lesson, relationship and memory I have will stick with me for years to come and I am eternally grateful to every coach, teammate and friend who has encouraged me become the best swimmer, and person, I can be.

Mackenzie McGrath  
Oshkosh YMCA Swim Team

Growing up, my parents encouraged me to try many different sports in order to find the one I loved. It didn't take me very long, by age six I was signed up for the Fox Cities YMCA Swim Team. When my parents signed me up, it was the first step to shaping me to who I am today. When I joined the Fox Cities YMCA Swim Team, I soon became a part of a second family. It taught me at a very young age that you have to work for what you want. For example, watching the older kids make it to state gave me determination, by age eight I had worked hard enough to achieve a few state cuts while placing second at my first YMCA state swim meet. That was only the beginning for all I knew. By the age of nine, my family had moved to Hortonville, with the closest swim team being a club team. I had then made the decision to switch to North East Aquatics team. While being there, I soon realized the dynamics weren't anything like the Fox Cities. After a season of trying it out, I realized Fox Cities was where I needed to be, like I said it was my second home with my second family. My decision to go back meant that I had to now commute twenty-five minutes to practice each way. Some people might look at that drive negatively, but it had taught me time management. At a young age, I knew I had to try my best to get my homework done at school, because I would have a fifty minute round trip drive, a two hour practice, and maybe even dry land at night, which doesn't leave much time for homework. It might seem like as a kid I'd be missing out on things that regular kids would be doing at night, like going to schools games and hanging out with friends, but it helped me learn about sacrificing. This taught me that I might have to give up some activities other kids do, to do what is most important in my life, which is swimming. I soon realized what the word dedication meant in swimming. "Through long hard practices and years of going without a best time you still keep pushing yourself each and every day, because you know when you hit a best time all those

practices will be worth it". That taught me about work ethic not just in the pool, but in school and at work as well. I also learned from a previous swim coach that, "Why even attempt to do something if you're not going to do it 100%". With my coach saying that to me at a young age, I tried to apply it with everything I have done: including balancing swimming eight times a week, earning a 3.9 cumulative GPA and working. It has now given me the opportunity to continue to swim at St. Cloud State next year. I cannot be more thankful for the YMCA and everything it has taught me in the last 12 years of swimming. With that being said, I decided to work at the Fox West YMCA as a swim instructor, because I want to positively influence someone's life by introducing them to swimming, as it has had such a large impact on me as a kid and still to this day.

I was eight years old when I first joined the Green Bay YMCA Swim Team. As a homeschooled student with ADHD, I had great difficulty concentrating on my work, and very few opportunities for interaction with other kids my age. My swim instructors at the Y recommended trying out the swim team, so I decided to go ahead and sign up. It turned out to be one of the best decisions I ever made.

The first thing I noticed after joining the team was how much the coaches really cared about the swimmers' experiences. From the very start, they put forth an effort to make me feel at home, respecting me as a person and supporting my personal goals. They were always there to encourage me during those difficult sets, pushing me to the limit of my mental and physical capabilities. My coaches impressed into me that no matter how tired I felt, no matter how much I wanted to just lie down and give up, I had to keep going, fight the pain, and train my mind to overcome, to surpass, to succeed. The older swimmers on the team showed me what I could achieve with years of hard work, helping the coaches out and encouraging me to pursue my goals passionately. A couple of them took me under their wing and became my role models as a young swimmer. I made it one of my goals to follow in their footsteps when I was older. As I advanced through the skill levels on the team, I became aware of my responsibility to mature as a leader, something my head coach stressed very often. I realized that I was now in a position to have a positive effect on the experience of dozens of young swimmers, just as the older swimmers had done for me. I did my best to set a good example for not just the younger swimmers, but for my peers on the team as well.

This past year, I had the opportunity to swim for the Green Bay United high-school swim team. I had wanted to swim high-school for a couple of years previously, but I didn't get the chance until my senior year. Within the first couple of weeks, I could sense a difference in atmosphere from the Y team. The emphasis was now on swimming for points instead of time, and personal goals were not as important. Discipline was lax, and the coaches, although supportive, were nowhere near as encouraging and inspiring as my head coach at the Y. I found myself eagerly awaiting my return to the Y team, which I have come to regard as a second family.

My years on the YMCA swim team have shaped me as a person in more ways than I can count. More than anything else, however, I learned to set and focus on goals, to dedicate myself to achieving them no matter how long it took; to never give up on them because of what lay in wait at the end: an immense feeling of accomplishment, and a nod, a smile, and a fist bump from my coach.

Kirsten Williams

Northern Lights YMCA

### My YMCA Swim Team Journey

Not many people can say that they have spent almost their entire life at a certain place. For me, the YMCA is the place where I watched myself grow from the age of four to now as an eighteen-year-old. I started participating in swim lessons when I was just a small four-year-old girl. I transitioned from swim lessons to swimming on the YMCA swim team when I was ten-years-old. To be honest, I wasn't sure I was ready to be on the swim team. Growing up, I was more of the shy type that liked to stick to doing things by myself. However, joining the swim team has been one of the most influential things to ever happen in my life. It has truly helped make me the person I am today. It has helped me realize the love and passion I have for swimming, and it has led me to some of the best friendships I will ever have. If I had not joined the swim team, I don't know where I would be in life.

Swimming is more than just a sport; it is a way of life. If I am not home, I am at the YMCA pool doing what I love; swimming at practice or for fun, teaching swim lessons, or lifeguarding. If I had not joined the swim team when I was young, I wouldn't have realized how much being in the water means to me. I have grown as an individual by being a part of such a diverse group of individuals. The people on the swim team are both young and old, fast and slow. Nobody is seen differently based on their ability and everyone is treated with the respect that they deserve. They are given critiques and compliments and are praised for trying their hardest regardless of the outcome. This experience has taught me that it's okay not to be the best at something, as long as you are trying your best and having fun. Over the years, the pool has become my safe place and my home.

When people say that their team becomes their family, they are referring to a bond that cannot be broken. I have been swimming for eight years alongside three of my closest friends. We started off as the kids that had no idea what we were doing, or what we were getting ourselves into. We didn't even know each other's names. All we knew was that we needed to stick together if we were going to make it through. Since that first swim team practice as a ten-year-old, the bond between the four of us has not been broken. I consider them to be my family because they have seen me at my worst and at my best, they have seen me cry and they have seen me filled with joy, and they have seen me grow as both a person and an athlete. We have been through a lot together including winning our high school swim team championship twice. We did all of this together and it wouldn't have been possible if it hadn't been for the YMCA swim team bringing us together all those years ago.

As I progress through the rest of my life, I will always remember the memories of my time swimming on the YMCA swim team. I will look back and use all that I have learned and

experienced to help guide me in making the right decisions. I will continue to become the person that I have always wanted to be.

Erin Cain  
South Eastern Aquatics

The four core values of the YMCA are such important values to live by in your daily life. With them you can become a well rounded successful person. As a member of a YMCA swim team has helped me in many different aspects in my life and to become a better person.

First, it has helped me be more respectful to my peers, friends, teammates, family, and any adult. Being respectful to others is important because you never know what a person is going through in their life so being respectful and kind can go a long way and mean a lot to a person.

Secondly, it has helped me become a more caring person. Caring for my friends and teammates has become a huge part on my life. I got injured in November of 2016 right after high school swim season and was not able to practice or compete the fall/winter season of that year. In my time off I would go to practice to check up on my friends because I missed seeing them daily. I also volunteered with the younger swimmers at their practices twice a week and helped the kids with technique and to be a role model on the pool deck. Once I got back in the water I used the caring and support I learned while being out of the pool and applied it when doing hard sets to be able to motivate my teammates.

Next it has taught me honesty. Honesty is a big part of swimming because if you are not honest with yourself during sets then you will not get faster. If you do not try during practice then at your big meet at the end of the season you probably will not get faster which is not anyone's goal.

Finally, it has helped me become more responsible. As a teenager you have a lot to be responsible for being in charge of your education. Part of being responsible is time management, if you do not know how to manage your time as a student athlete then you are going to have a tough time in school. Growing up in the swimming community has also given me a chance to be able to take care of myself because my parents will not always be around to hold my hand and tell me what to do. Responsibility also helps you gain trust from your peers and adults. If they see that you are responsible enough to do the task they ask you to do then they will start to trust you with bigger tasks to accomplish.

The biggest thing I have learned about being on a YMCA swim team is that if you are doing something you truly love than is it really worth you time. I have swam competitively for nine years and I can say that I have truly enjoyed every single part of it from my teammates to coaches to travel meets to training trips I have enjoyed it all and I could not be more grateful for the opportunity to have done it for so long.

I am Caleb Plumley. I am on the Northern Lights YMCA Swim team. I have been swimming since 2005. Aside from school and family, athletics have been the center of life for pretty much my entire life with swimming being at the center of my athletics. I have played football and soccer. I have practiced Taekwondo and ran in track, but the sport of swimming and the people I have met through swimming have been the biggest factor in building me into who I have become today. Through the YMCA swim team I met a man that has pretty much become a second father to me. Coach Jim Lindstrom has been with me through my failures and my successes. He is a man of few words, but when he speaks, I listen. He has pushed me to be a better person and a better swimmer every single day he stands on deck. He is the one that taught me that I can do anything I set my heart on, but only if I am willing to work my butt off and sacrifice other parts of my life for it. Through this work ethic I have learned how to be disciplined. I have learned to get all my school work done in a timely manner so that I can be in the pool every day, to make sure that everything going in my body is going to help me become strong and not hurt me, and to decide to go to bed on time in order to recover instead of hanging out with friends and family. I learned to be dedicated in droughts of success. It is extremely difficult to work hard in the pool every single day when the only result achieved is defeat and failure. Swimming has taught me discipline, dedication, and so many more qualities that I could go on about. These qualities are fantastic, I will keep them for the rest of my life, and they will continue to impact my life and make me a better person for the rest of my life, but a lot of people have these qualities. Where swimming has really made a big impact in my life is in the development of my character. Swimming has taught me how to humbly win, but even more importantly, how to graciously lose. The development of my character is how being on a YMCA swim team has affected my life and will continue to affect and help me for the rest of my life.

Alec Jeffers

When I joined the YMCA team, I knew that I was joining a team that was about more than just swimming. Before I made this choice, I was a pretty stubborn 13 year old that didn't really like to listen to other people and just did things his own way. I also was never all that excited about swimming but swimming was more of a chore that my parents made me do, which means that I definitely just went through the motions everyday at practice. However, when the decision was made to join the Green Bay YMCA, little did I know there was a big change coming.

As soon as I joined the team, Coach Dave made it very easy to challenge myself. If I were to take a 100 swim off I could be sure that he would let me know and this helped motivate me a little more. In addition to the coach's motivation tactics, there were always people around my speed always trying to race which brought many friendly rivalries onto the pool deck. All of the above helped me gain interest in the sport of swimming, however, like I said, the YMCA team is about more than just swimming. Every time I came to practice the coaches preached the YMCA core values. Caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility. I quickly caught on to these values and started implementing these characteristics into my life. This wasn't just a swimming concept. It was something that improved my behavior and maturity, no matter where I was, in school or at home. Another thing that helped improve my character is the opportunities the team gave to have us all together outside of the pool such as holiday parties and volunteer work.

I can honestly say that without the YMCA, I might have struggled a lot more in my life. I think that without the YMCA core values being stressed to me by the coaches, I might have needed some sort of reality check before I realized that I needed to improve. I also would have struggled a lot more in school without the YMCA teaching me the importance of hard work and constantly motivating me. And as far as swimming goes, I don't think I ever would have caught interest in this sport if it were not for the YMCA who constantly made practices fun and enjoyable despite the fact that each one took a pretty huge toll on my body. If it weren't for the great times that the YMCA gave me on the pool deck I probably would not be swimming and I definitely wouldn't be choosing to swim 4 more years in college.

## **Swimming On SPDY – Alexander Morrow**

Being a member of the Stevens Point Dolphin YMCA (SPDY) swim team has been a huge honor. I feel being a part of SPDY has prepared me for my future, just like how my school has prepared me. I was taught the meaning of hard work, and how it can pay off. I learned how important it is to treat others with respect, and how it will benefit me. How to keep myself healthy, even after my swimming career. I have SPDY to thank for these life lessons.

When I started out on SPDY I wasn't the best swimmer on the team. I had no natural talent, and I really struggled. But I kept working hard! I started doing morning workouts, on my own. I devoted more and more time towards swimming both in and out of the pool. Now I have five cuts for the Schreader A+ Championship swim meet, four cuts for the YMCA State Championship meet, and one cut for the USA State Swim meet. This helped me prepare for the future because there will be challenges, I will have to face. If I work hard I will be able to overcome them. I have SPDY to thank for helping prepare for when I face these challenges.

As I swam on SPDY I meet some of the nicest people, I ever meet. These people all treated me with respect through some of the hardest parts of the season. Through this experience I learned the meaning of respect. If I treat others with respect, I will be treated with respect in return. This lesson helped me prepare for the future because when I start going off to college and start my professional career, I will meet new people. To be a good college student and employee I must show respect if I'm to get along with peers and co-workers. Swimming on SPDY has helped me prepare for when I meet these people.

Throughout my time on SPDY I learned how to stay healthy. I know how to keep a healthy diet, and how to exercise my body. I know after college, when I'm no longer swimming competitively, I will be at a higher risk of developing an unhealthy lifestyle. Swimming on SPDY has prepared me for when that time comes by showing me, healthy ways to keep a diet and exercise in a healthy way. I will have a less of a chance to develop an unhealthy lifestyle, because of this lesson SPDY has taught me.

Swimming on SPDY has been one of the best experiences in my life. It has taught me how hard work can pay off, how to treat others with respect, and how to keep a healthy lifestyle. I feel these lessons will all help me when I spread my wings and move on to pursue my professional career. All I can say to SPDY right now is thank you so much.

Madelyn Hammer

Green County YMCA

Jon Brenner Scholarship

You arrive at the edge of the water, and you already face your first challenge - do you take the leap in or not? Being a swimmer, I know I have to take the jump at some point, it's the factor of getting over the shock from the freezing cold water. Blinded to these endless mind-over-matter challenges, I chose the sport of competitive swimming, but I later learned that the overcoming of these struggles would affect my life in all aspects, not just my attitude and ability to perform in athletics. Going on my tenth year of swimming - with more than half of those years being for my local YMCA - I can't help but look back and realize how the sport has morphed me into the person I am and has given me countless potentials.

My coach always told me swimming was 90% mental and 10% physical; even with all the wrenching physical difficulties that travel with the sport, I can attest to the countless amounts of times my races came down to that one mental piece. For almost two years, I only dreaded to look up at the clock after my races to see how much time I had added. I got to the point where this sense of dismay only lead my mind to create boundaries pushing me towards a path of giving up. I got up for my first race at a high school sectional meet my junior year knowing the previous year I got in my head, I let everything go - every expectation. When I looked up at the board as I finished, I couldn't believe it after two years I finally had gone a best time. This pattern of relief continued throughout the year into my YMCA state meet. Those two years where the most mentally building of my life, they taught me how to cope with difficult stressors and high expectations. Today, I can now help other athletes around me and even classmates get through challenges their minds bring to them all because of this life changing experience due to swimming.

A few years ago I was chosen by my coach to represent the Green County YMCA Gator athletes as a voting club athlete representative for the Wisconsin Swimming LSC. By going to annual Swimposium meetings and banquets, I got to voice the opinions of the athletes and families on my club team on a statewide level. I decided I wanted become more involved, and I therefore applied to become a state athlete representative. With this position, I have learned how the government behind the Wisconsin Swimming LSC works, and received the opportunity to voice the concerns of all the athletes, officials, and members within Wisconsin on a national level. Without the possibilities given to me by my YMCA in parallel with USA Swimming, I would have never known all planning that goes into making the basic athletics of swimming function. Through these positions, I have gained important leadership skills attributing to my goals in aspects along with athletics, such as academics and daily life.

From year eight to year seventeen, each challenge and opportunity that swimming has given me has acted as a catalyst for my future. I would not be who I am today without every experience I have gone through because of my membership with a YMCA swim team. It

saddens me that my career with GCY is coming to a close, but my team's impact will continue to live on as I plan on taking with me all the outstanding memories and important lessons into my college career.

When I reflect on my journey and my life so far, I think of my wonderful family, my entertaining friends, and my passions that drive me in the classroom to succeed and discover the next wonder of our world. I think of possible travels, delicious foods, and happiness. I also think of competitive swimming; without it, my path in this world would be entirely different, and I would not be the person I am today in the slightest.

Growing up quite literally in the YMCA swimming program, from age four to age seventeen, I have seen it all. I have been a “manta ray” in the YMCA swimming lessons program, and I have been the timid eight-year-old trying out the competitive swim team for the first time. I have been the regional swimmer vying for my first state cut, and I have been on the podium at YMCA Nationals. I know what incredible victory feels like, and I also know what incredible heartbreak feels like. However, more so than my accomplishments in the pool, the personal growth and discovery that YMCA swimming has fostered in me over the years is what makes me proud to be a YMCA swimmer.

Over the years, I have discovered quite a few truths about myself staring at a black line as I pass back and forth over it, day in and day out. I have found out new things about me, discoveries about the type of person I am and the type of person that I want to be. When I first started swimming, I was the quiet, lonely girl that people would greet but not talk to. I had a fiery spark inside me, however, and instead of extinguishing the fire, the water stoked it.

Swim practice turned into a place where I could truly be myself. I could be wild, crazy, loud, and energetic, and the people around me would welcome and encourage it. I was respected, loved, and honored. It still amazes me to think of the person I am now and how I grew the seeds of shattering anxiety into the blooming self-confidence that I have today. I have YMCA swimming to thank for that transformation.

I also learned how to lead from my time swimming with the YMCA. Interactions with my coaches and teammates and personal reflection have taught me that a revered leader is not only strong and confident but also fun and energetic. Instead of displaying themselves as omnipotent and omniscient, this individual shows vulnerability and uplifts those they are trying to lead. I can fully state from experience that there is nothing like light-up shoes or a good speaker jam session to uplift, enlighten, and encourage those around; a little bit of fun goes the extra mile, and people will be willing to positively follow anybody’s example that way.

Not only have I learned about leadership and confidence, but I have additionally learned to respect and honor those around me. The YMCA draws in a very different crowd who I have not grown up with in my small community. These people range in race, religion, class, and background, and the perspectives that they bring to the sport of swimming and the culture of the team are unique. I have YMCA swimming to thank for opening my mind to understand different ideas and people and the importance that a shared passion and extenuating love have to unite this diversity. I have YMCA swimming to thank for my confidence and my happiness today and for teaching invaluable lessons that I will employ throughout my entire life.

Ryan Glover

Marquette Killer Whales

Growing up in a family with a history of competitive swimming has always been a source of connection (and maybe even a little competition) between my father and me.

I can remember him commenting that in his college years he “taught 100’s of kids to swim but couldn’t teach his own son (me)”. We would work on stroke technique, kicking drills, streamlines and back glides and the local pools or even at friends’ houses but for some reason, it was more about fun with Dad than it was taking a “lesson”.

I’m not sure if my Dad gave in or thought I was ready for the next step but I remember going to a Marquette YMCA “Killer Whale” introduction week. Looking back, I’m sure if it wasn’t for the fins that I would have made it one length. Since that day in span of 10 years I have changed a lot. From a young struggling young swimmer to a 3 year “All UP Swimmer”, winning numerous first place finishes, being on winning teams and being part of a relay team with a High School UP record in the 200 free.

One might say that my YMCA swimming career was a successful one and to that, I agree – I did have a great career. However it’s behind the scenes where I’ve had the most success.

Swimming teaches you a lot about yourself, how to be your best, how to work on a team, setting team goals and reaching for individual goals.

In swimming you can take a first place but still walk away feeling like you fell short. You can also take last place and walk away feeling like you had the best race of your life. While you’re competing against the swimmers against you...in the end, you are really competing against yourself. Challenging yourself to be better than you were the last time. Looking for ways to improve, learn from your mistakes and improve so you can do it better next time. It translates phenomenally to high school and real life where comparing yourself to your others is hardly important.

In order to be your best, you need to invest time and become dedicated to the sport. I learned that it was not on the coach to get me to my goals, ultimately it was on me. I learned from my coaches, took their advice but it wasn't until I was willing to put in the hard work that I started seeing the results I wanted.

Life is a lot like a relay team. It's made up of individuals with a common goal, each with their own strengths. In the end the race is won as a team, you cannot win it alone. However the race would never get off the blocks without the contribution of individual dedication, mental fortitude and physical preparedness. We can stand on our own strong but it's when we stand together does our true strength shows.

YMCA swimming has given me confidence, it's given me skills that I can take with me wherever I go. A majority of my personal development has come through lessons learned while on deck and in the pool, taught by my coaches, teammates, and myself. I'm beyond grateful for my YMCA swim team.

In my life, I never would have thought that joining the YMCA and participating in a sport could have such a positive influence on my life. However, when I began competitive swimming four years ago as a freshman in high school, this perspective became my reality. My life changed for the better when I joined the swim team because of the improvements in my weight and personal relationships, and the memories I have made along the way. My name is **Katerina Moratti** and this is my journey on how my life changed through being a member of the **Green Bay YMCA Swim Team**.

The moment that was the turning point in my life was when I began to lose weight. In my first season with the YMCA Swim Team, I wore a size 36 swimsuit and was about 150 pounds. Then, by the end of the season, I became a size 34 and about five pounds lighter. After that, I continued swimming year round, season after season, and lost a ton of weight. I am currently in my fourth season with the Green Bay YMCA Swim Team and am now a size 28 and about 120 pounds. The more I swam the more pounds I lost. I became healthier and continued to stay active. I no longer felt like I was homebound and was able to live the life I wanted to live. My weight loss changed me for the better by contributing to my home and school life and making me become a better me. I feel better physically, mentally, and emotionally and have more confidence.

The YMCA Swim Team program also changed my life for the better through my personal relationships. When I was younger, I struggled with making and maintaining friends. Over the years, I was cast aside by people who I thought were my friends; however, I moved on and got a fresh start with people who shared similar interests and accepted me for who I was. Those friendships continued to grow over the years as we kept moving together as a team. My personal relationships with other people outside of swim also grew stronger with every year that I have been on the swim team and my life is so much better knowing I have people I can count on. I finally feel like I belong.

I am happy with what I have achieved in these past four years on the Green Bay YMCA Swim Team. I have had many ups and downs, successes and failures, and made many memories with my swim family. Their love and support has changed my life for the better and I hope that I have had a positive effect on their lives as well. I cheer for everyone to have a personal best!

## **Garrett Wise LAXY Swim Team**

I can't remember a time when I wasn't a member of the Y. At the age of 4 I followed my two older brothers on to the Y swim team, even though I told everyone that "swimming wasn't my thing". Obviously I was wrong. I've been on the swim team for the past 14 years and I wouldn't trade a moment. I'm one of the few remaining members of my team that had the privilege of being coached by Jon Brenner. He was the person that really instilled in me the core values of the Y, respect, responsibility, honesty, and caring.

Swimming is a year round sport. I've learned responsibility by being able to manage my time with school, practice, and work. I've been a member of the high school swim and a state qualifier for the past 2 years as well as maintaining my honors classes in math, science, and foreign language. As a member of the Y National Swim Team for the past 4 years I've had to keep up my school work while traveling across the country to swim at the National Meet. A big responsibility.

I've learned to respect my coaches and teachers by listening to their advice and trusting that they are always looking out for my best interests. I may not have always agreed with their methods, but respect goes both ways and as we've worked together I was able to accomplish my goals not only for myself but for my team as well. Respect is not only given but earned.

Honesty is something I've had to work with for myself. Taking a look at myself and really seeing for the first time what I want to do with my life and how I can accomplish what I want. Things are not always as easy as they seem, but by taking a good, honest look at myself I now have a better understanding of this process.

Caring. I am lucky that I have a loving, supportive family. They are always there for me supporting and encouraging me. Over the past fourteen years I have grown to care for many of my teammates and coaches as well. We are a big family that I know I can always count on if I need them inside the pool or out.

As I finish up my last season as a member of the Y Swim Team I know that wherever I end up these values will stick with me. Remembering Jon not only as a coach but a well respected individual who I hope I can make proud. Thank you to the YMCA for making me the person I am today.

Taylor McFarlane

Northern Lights YMCA (Delta)

I started swimming for the Delta Dickenson Dolphins when I was 8. Throughout the years the other children on my team slowly turned into my second family. We went through team name changes (now known as the Northern Lights YMCA), mascot changes, and even merging with another team. I now realize that as more kids joined the team, my little swim family grew.

I still remember my first race...it was the 25 yard backstroke and all I did was cry because I was so scared. My mom made me swim the race and promised we could go home after if I was still scared. That race was the pivotal moment in my life where fear turned into love as I went onto states later that year to swim the 25 yard backstroke. I ended up getting 3<sup>rd</sup> place, but there were only three swimmers in the race. Even though I got last place, I came to realize that winning isn't the most important part of the race. As long as you go out and try with your best effort and never put other swimmers down, you're always going to feel like a winner. Swimming is an experience I will take with me forever. It taught me how to make friendships that last and how to use competition to make myself and others better as well. It also taught me how to deal with different obstacles placed in front of me. I've learned that the person next to me is not my enemy but rather the person who is going to push me to be better. When teammates would grab my feet in practice and pull me backwards, I chose not to view that as hatred but challenged myself to swim harder and faster. Swimming has had such a positive influence on me that I actually can't imagine myself not swimming.

I never expected to depend upon swimming and the YMCA community as much as I do today and in the future. I've worked as a Lifeguard and a Swim Instructor since the age of 16. It is strange how one place like the YMCA slowly turns into your home. The amount of time you spend there from swimming and working, as well as the people you work with really gives you a nice supportive environment. I love seeing the little kids enjoy swimming as much as I enjoy swimming. Without my job at the YMCA I wouldn't have discovered my love for working with kids and would still have no idea what career I'd want to pursue. Thanks to one particular preschool class, I've decided I'd like to be a Speech-Language Pathologist and work with kids whom have Down syndrome. I've chosen to take my true passions in life and combine them so I'll be swimming for University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point swim team while pursuing my education in Communication Disorders.

I truly believe that without swimming, all the friends I've made and memories that go along with them would be gone. I would like to personally thank swimming and the YMCA for providing me with a happy and healthy life. Without those two elements, my life would be 100% different as I wouldn't be the happy go lucky girl I am today.

Peter Martin

The YMCA has had a major impact in my life, giving me a place to grow from a toddler all the way to who I am today. Summer camps, indoor sports, job opportunities, lasting relationships, these are all just some of the many blessings the Y has given me. Nonetheless, the main focus of my time at the YMCA has been competitive swimming. I began swimming on the swim team at the Y when I was eight years old, and I have really never stopped. I wasn't the strongest swimmer growing up, as I was a level behind most of my friends my age until I was about 13.

Growing up, I made very close bonds with both coaches and teammates that I still hold today. I still remember sitting in my last few classes of the day in middle school, just waiting for it to finally be practice time so I could be with my swim friends. I have fond memories of all the away meets, especially the overnight trips, and my experience in competition prepared me well for my high school swimming career.

After my sophomore year of high school I moved from Sheboygan, Wisconsin, to Green Bay, giving me an interesting choice. Would I compete for a swim club, or continue swimming for the Y? I decided that I would continue swimming at the Green Bay Y because I already knew just how much benefit you can receive from swimming on a Y team. The beauty of the YMCA is that it is a place for people to grow both spiritually and physically, through good moral values. I also knew that swimming for the Y would benefit me socially as a newcomer to town, as I would meet many more people at the Y than I would just swimming for a swim club due to the diversity of the Y members.

Having been swimming at the Y here in Green Bay for about one and a half years, I have found great new friends, which was really nice at first when I didn't know many people. I feel confident that I am prepared to swim in college, as I will continue to train right up until I begin this fall. I have been challenged to the best of my ability, at times struggling through grueling workouts, but it has always paid off by making me a much better swimmer than if I only swam the high school season.

YMCA swimming laid down a great foundation for my leadership qualities as well. I found that as I grew older on the Y team with more experience, I had more responsibilities that included supporting others, specifically the younger generation. As an introverted person, swimming on the Y really opened me up in being able to work with people and in supporting people who have low confidence in themselves. I truly believe that swimming on a Y team made a big difference in making me who I am today. Though I was a relative newcomer to the team, I was elected one of the captains of my high school team as a senior. This was a great honor, and I felt well prepared for it based on my experiences at the YMCA.

I am so thankful for all the opportunities the YMCA swim teams have given me, and will honestly cherish all of the incredible memories and relationships I have made. I look forward to my career as a college swimmer, and I know that the YMCA has played a major role in nurturing my love

of the sport as well as honing my skills. Unlike many young athletes who burn out at a young age, I have never wavered in my love for swimming, thanks to the YMCA.

YMCAScholarship•Oshkosh Ymca•Gabby Mullally

Ten years ago I stood chewing on my goggles before my first swim practice. Shortly after tears followed. By the time practice was over I rushed to put away my equipment and get to the locker room. On my way out a boy yelled, "Don't you wanna go off the diving board?". Minutes later my disheartenment became joy jumping and I walked out of practice eager to return and to prove myself.

My social interaction was slightly limited in elementary school due to attending a smaller private school. My love for swim team blossomed because it provided a chance to interact with people who didn't mind that my hair was cut 'like a boy', or my 'weird' laugh.

As I got older I started going to larger meets. There I'd reunite with friends from over the years. There Maggie Werba, from the Oshkosh swim team, asked me if I'd ever heard of the Natalie Bolin swim camp. I hadn't. A few months later I'd found myself finishing up a moving week in Ely, Minnesota at Natalie camp. Kids from all over the country were there, and through some intense challenges (such as our marathon relay), and lots of sandwiches I knew I wanted more of this refreshing atmosphere.

After freshman year of high school swimming I switched to the OSHY. I soon picked up that the swimmers here loved to work hard, and even more than that they loved each other and their YMCA.

The past four years with the Oshy swim team created the biggest impact on my development. The team became a second home. Jay Coleman blessed us not only with his great coaching abilities, but mentoring/fathering abilities. Having a father in the Marines stationed a few thousand miles away hasn't been the easiest, but Coach Jay and the YMCA stepped to the plate offering a safe haven.

Sophomore and Junior year I went through a difficult time with family losses, high school drama, and endless heaps of AP homework. Yet, the idea of eight practices a week wasn't daunting. The pool transformed into my sanctuary where I could get away from all of the stress. Through all of Jay's mesmerizing stories and seemingly impossible trivia (can you name every presidents that starts with J?) I've realized our swim team promotes the same values whether you're gearing up for Y nationals, or a home meet; dedication, compassion, and determination. Morning practice is now all ages. Everybody cheers each other through grueling pace set or sprints. No one gives up, because this sport isn't just about individuals. It's about being there teammates and even competitors. Ymca Nationals is the only higher level meet that I've seen swimmers break their goggles, and swimmers from different teams rush up to help them, because we all share believe in being not only great athletes, but great citizens.

At the beginning of the year I wanted to give for all of the years the YMCA gave to me. I began helping coach the younger kids, running dry land, and listening to conversations on how butterfly should be referred to as 'narwhale stroke'. I've discovered as an older age grouper we hold responsibility to create an environment that encourages younger kids to be the best they can for themselves, their teammates, and their ymca. As I wrap up my final spring season of Ymca swimming, I may still chew my goggle, but I'm proud to have been a YMCA swimmer, proud of who I've become from swimming, and proud of who my teammates have become.

## Cassie Laibly Oshkosh YMCA Swim Team

No matter where you look, if you type in YMCA Swim Team into google, you will get multiple results discussing the basics of a team through the YMCA. No website, book, or article will be able to tell you what it truly means to be apart of a YMCA Swim Team. Looking back on my eleven years of swimming, I am faced with the ultimate challenge. How does one sum up swimming for a YMCA Swim Team? It then hits me, one word, family. A family unlike any other. One in which has a bond stronger than the scent of chlorine that is stained into the skin, one that can eat an entire grocery store after practice as an appetizer, one that spends more hours with their hair wet rather than dry, and most importantly one that has each others backs no matter the challenge, the clock, the yardage, or events that they face. The YMCA integrates four core values into their everyday actions; respect, responsibility, honesty and caring. These values are an essential part to any YMCA Swim Team and illuminates the team as a whole making them stand out from any other team. My past eleven years of swimming have been filled with both USA and YMCA swim meets, but the ones that stand out most, begin with a devotional, with races that start with a good luck handshake to fellow competitors, and ending in a time trials where a swimmer finally gets their cut they have been waiting for. YMCA swim meets are filled with swimmers who put others before themselves, cheering regardless if the caps are synonymous with each other. YMCA Swim Teams do not define themselves by specific teams, but rather a family as a whole. My past eleven years have been filled with making new friends from not just my team, but other YMCA swim team members, who are not just my competitors, but my role models. In 2010 my team, the Oshkosh YMCA Swim Team, lost one of our fellow teammates, Natalie Bolin. Natalie was the epitome of a YMCA Swim Team Member. She was a friend to all, a role model for us younger kids, and of course a wonderful swimmer. With the loss of such a beautiful soul it was seen not just within my team, but throughout all of the YMCA Swim Teams. After her loss, we wore purple swim caps and gave them out to many. Seeing the flood of purple swim caps flourish the swim meets, showed the immense bond YMCA swimmers have. Seeing such deep connections, resulted in an inspirational message the power YMCA swimming has. YMCA Swimming has taught me some of my biggest life lessons of passion, determination, but most importantly to be selfless. Through my years of swimming for my YMCA, I have learned the importance of teammates and how they truly are my family. Everyday I find myself striving to put them before myself because their results are my results. Together as a team anything is possible with teamwork. YMCA Swimming has been the greatest gift I have ever received. Walking away from swimming after my final YMCA State meet this March will be one the hardest moments in my swimming career, but a new future awaits for me. I am excited for what is to come in my upcoming years, and I am confident that no matter where my path in life takes me, I will forever be impacted by my time with YMCA swimming.

Kelly McElvain

Schroeder YMCA

### Jon Brenner Scholarship Essay

Twelve years ago, I slipped into a black swimsuit, size 6 to fit my five year old body. I threw my hair up into a red silicon cap, the acronym SWAT running down the sides of my head. I suctioned my light blue goggles to my face, tightening the straps. Then with three robotic, muffled words “take your mark”, a quick flash and a simultaneous beep, my swimming career began.

At the start of it all, this sport made me happy. Because of it, I was able to create amazing memories with a team that was supportive, energetic, and passionate. However, as time progressed, this support, energy, and passion faded, and I considered quitting the sport that once made me so happy. I still loved being with my friends everyday, but the values of the team were no longer in line with my own. I swam not to win, compete, or be the fastest, greatest swimmer I could be. I swam to grow, create relationships, and be the strongest, greatest person I could be. So, last year I searched for a team that could give me this opportunity, one in which I could develop and learn and better myself. I knew that this was what I wanted from this sport, so I made the difficult decision to join SSTY.

Now here I am, twelve years later, slipping on a black swimsuit, size 26. Here I am, throwing my hair up into a white silicon cap, the acronym SSTY running down the sides of my head. Here I am, suctioning my light blue goggles to my face, tightening the straps. Here I am, on a team that has made me happy again, and impacted me in ways I never thought were possible.

Schroeder swim team has given me more than I could've ever asked for. It has given me the best coaches who respect me not only as a swimmer, but also as a person. It has given me the greatest teammates, who immediately welcomed me and became some of my closest friends. I admire this team and I admire these people. I admire the lessons I am being taught that go beyond the pool. I admire the environment, the smiles, the conversations, the values. I admire SSTY.

Coming to this team has taught me to be courageous, to not let fear restrict me, because taking risks and going beyond what is familiar can be empowering and liberating. It has taught me that change can be positive, and confirmed the notion that adjustments are an important step in growth and discovery. It had taught me that new friendships can be just as valuable as old ones. It has taught me to love this sport again.

Because of how impactful this team has been for me, as I move onto college in the fall, rather than of being fearful of change, I will welcome it. I hope to find a place like SSTY where there are mentors that I can look up to, and classmates and teammates that will hold value in my life. I know I will find a place where there will be new experiences; some will be challenging, some awesome, and some enlightening. I know that when all the good, the bad, and the in between is tied together, I will feel blessed, and above all thankful, remembering the tremendous, beautiful impact SSTY had on me at such a pivotal time in my life.

Joe Herrick

Oshkosh YMCA (OSHY Swim Team)

Eight years. Eight years of growing, fun, friendship, memories, challenges, commitment, and lessons learned. Eight years of swimming. When I jumped into the pool for my first practice I had no idea where this sport would take me. I had no idea that it would grow to be such a large part of my life and that it would give me a second family. Being on a YMCA swim team has allowed me to step outside of my comfort zone and realize that I'm capable of accomplishing whatever I set my mind to.

I first joined the OSHY swim team eight years ago because one of my closest friends convinced me to join it with him. I was very skeptical about joining and didn't want to join at first, but however, after the first week of practices I realized that I had finally found the place for me. Before this I had done other sports such as soccer and gymnastics, and while I had fun moments and memories from those sports, I felt that I never truly fit in on the soccer field or in the gym because I didn't have a deep passion for the sports. I only joined them because many of my friends participated in those sports. However, swimming was different for me. Almost immediately I discovered that I had a true passion for this sport, giving me a sense of purpose in my life that I hadn't found up until that point. The OSHY swim team was very inviting towards me and I met so many people that will remain friends for a lifetime. If I hadn't of joined the team I never would have met these people and created the countless memories that I have with them.

Being on this team has also taught me countless lessons about life along with these lasting bonds that I have made. This team has taught me how to try new things,

be bold and stretch my limits beyond what I thought was possible, how to deal with failure and use it as a motivation, how to truly work hard, and most importantly (in the words of my coach Jay Coleman) how to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. Throughout life I have encountered and will encounter many tough situations. In these situations it is easy to ignore them, runaway and fail at trying to overcome the situation, it is a struggle to overcome the task. However, being on the team has taught me how to approach these situations and become comfortable with the struggle of overcoming the daunting task, which is easily one of the most important lessons that I have learned in my life. Applying this lesson in my life is what has truly allowed me to be successful and achieve my dreams, all thanks to my YMCA team for teaching me this lesson

Joining a YMCA swim team has been one of the most important decisions in my life, as it has allowed me to meet phenomenal people that have become a second family for me and it has taught me how keep my head held up high in life and achieve my dreams, namely by being comfortable with being uncomfortable. While I may not remember all the swims and all the meets during my time with the team, I will carry with me these friendships and lessons that I have made and learned.