

Jon Brenner Swimming Scholarship Sara Mayer Woodson Y Northern Swimmers-Woodson YMCA Word count: 598 I have been a dedicated YMCA swim team member at WYNS for the past ten years. Being a member of the YMCA swim team my life is centered around the YMCA's four core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility. Each of these values have affected my life in different ways both in and out of the pool. I am passionate about the value of caring. I show a caring attitude in my extensive volunteer work with various organizations such as the YMCA, Key Club, DECA, the National Honor Society, and Peyton's Promise. An organization I spend most of my time with is Peyton's Promise. Peyton's Promise is a non-profit student lead local organization that collects food for local food pantries. I value caring towards others which the YMCA swim team has taught me in the drives I run for this organization. I have coordinated two annual multi-school district drives for Peyton's Promise for the past six years. The first drive is called "Hunt Down Hunger" which is a food drive that collects over fifteen tons of food for over ten local food pantries. The second drive is called "Pop Tabs for Sophia" which is a pop tab drive that collects over five hundred pounds of tabs yearly for the Ronald McDonald House in remembrance of my cousin who needed a critical life saving organ transplant and spent most of her life at the Children's Hospital and the Ronald McDonald House. As I leave for college I will be passing these two drives down to younger YMCA swim team members, who are also advocates for this organization. Being a part of the YMCA swim team allows swimmers to gain the caring attitude they need in order to run these drives. I not only am a member of the YMCA swim team but have been inspired by the values and setting of the YMCA to work there as well. I show the YMCA's core value of honesty in the work I do as a lifeguard, swim instructor. The YMCA swim team has given me the opportunity to help my community by volunteering to teach log rolling lessons, and swim lessons for those less fortunate throughout the years. I show the value of respect which the YMCA swim team has taught me throughout the years by acting as a strong leader to my team members. I was selected as a captain for both my high school and YMCA swim team for my strong leadership, work ethic, and ability to work well with others due to the respect that shines through my personality each and every day. The YMCA teaches its young members to love your neighbor as yourself, which I hold true to in the respect I give to others. The value of responsibility has affected my life in my student athlete setting. Many know being a student athlete can be challenging, however the YMCA swim team has taught me to take responsibility and learn key time management skills to be responsible for everyday tasks that are presented my way. I would not be where I am today without the influential coaches, teammates, and YMCA staff inspiring me in and out of the pool. Being a part of this amazing team for the past ten years has allowed me to be passionate about the values of the YMCA which I have been able to incorporate into my everyday life. I hope to be able to continue to live out the values of the YMCA swim team as I plan to continue my swimming career at the University of South Dakota.

Mia Strazny Manitowoc-Two Rivers YMCA Swim Team To sum up thirteen years of swimming into a single word: family. Not only is swimming a family sport with the tendency for every child within a family (including my own) to be a swimmer, but it creates a whole new extended family. My very first and longest-lasting friendships were formed in the pool; to my first coach I was and still am "little fishy"; but most significantly, YMCA swimming cultures a greater community beyond athletic rivalries. I distinctly remember making my first swimming "frenemy" as I liked to call it back in 2011. She swam for the Northern Lights YMCA. We were always excited to race each other, yes, but we were more related to just see each other, hang out on gym floors, and simply be friends. Despite having since lost touch, I remember those times fondly. Seven years after this first significant "rival" friendship, I found myself nervously preparing for my YMCA-Nationals debut swim at the Greensboro Aquatic Center in 2018. A girl from Ohio spontaneously approached me and introduced herself with more enthusiasm and bravery than I could have ever summed up at the time. She happened to also be the only swimmer from her team to ever qualify, and - out of all the swimmers - would be racing in the lane next to me. We also found out we even share the same birthday. Four years later, despite having only met in person once, we are still very close. Swimming evidently has never really been about rivalries. In fact, it has never been about the competition at all. When I attended the Natalie Kate Bolin Swim Camp through the Oshkosh YMCA, I fully realized the true significance and impact of swimming. Four years of NKB Camp have truly changed my life. Even though most of the swimmers at camp were from the Fox Cities area and already knew each other, I instantly felt a part of the family. Coming from a small team with few swimmers my age, this inclusion changed my perspective on swimming. I also remember being immediately impressed by how humble and accepting all campers were, whether they were Division-1 college commits or fairly new swimmers. Ability never created a division: we all supported and cared for each other. The deep intimacy of this swimming family is a connection only NKB campers could possibly fathom. These people became my closest friends, my most supportive teammates, and the camp leaders became coaches of mine beyond camp or even the sport. I feel incredibly blessed with this experience and the personal growth and knowledge that developed from it. My entire life has revolved around swimming. If I just focus on the competition aspect I might only remember stress, pressure, determination, and accomplishments. For too long, I was engrossed in this competitiveness; I was so high-strung that a bad race would result in a bad attitude and tears. However, becoming a part of a greater YMCA swim team, with supportive teammates extending all over Wisconsin and even reaching into Ohio, my perspective on swimming evolved dramatically. No longer was the tone of each meet defined by the outcome of my race but by the faces I saw cheering from the sidelines, the multitude of different teams' coaches watching and critiquing me as they would with their own swimmers, and the presence of my own small team - always by my side. Despite my nostalgic reluctance to leave my entire childhood behind next year, I feel truly prepared to join a collegiate swim team, given the fundamental meaning of swimming I found through the YMCA.

Brittany Weber Dahl/Houser YMCA La Crosse/Onalaska, WI Swimming has been a part of my life for a very long time. I first started swimming with the Wave Swim Team in 2010 at age 7, but I had been with the Wave family for a few years prior. My older brother also partook in swimming and in a way it helped introduce me to the wonderful world of swimming. My brother did swim for a few years while Jon Brenner was still coaching. I do have a few fond memories of him. He was always soft spoken and whenever he spoke his words were filled with kindness. I do wish I had been old enough to swim under his guidance but his spirit definitely impacted my first few years of swimming. I would not have been able to be where I am today without swimming in my life. Swimming has become my forever sport, maybe because I started so young and in such a wonderful environment, but being in the pool feels like home. Being on a team like the Wave has shaped me into someone who has self discipline and respect, for myself and others. I was always encouraged to do my best in my individual races but the true spirit of swimming and my joy from it was with my teammates. Cheering for each other during weekend competitions, having a great time at practices, knowing that we all had each others' backs is a feeling that is irreplaceable and one that I will cherish for the rest of my life. The YMCA helped me find my individuality within a safe environment where I knew I could reach out to others and vice versa with my peers. In general, the YMCA was a home away from home for me. Outside of the pool I partook in dance classes, hung out in the teen center, and also took advantage of the workout area and equipment. The YMCA is a place I feel comfortable and know that the staff are always there to help. I believe that the YMCA and the Wave helped fuel my love for physical activity. With dryland training and helpful YMCA staff I definitely feel comfortable working out and staying healthy, using either their free range of weights and cardio machines or their wide selection of fitness classes. Personally, I have enjoyed cycling classes and yoga classes. I know that in my future the YMCA will be a place that I can go to and workout and not feel overwhelmed.

Hope Risa, Marshfield YMCA Swim Team

When I first joined my YMCA swim team almost eight years ago, I was a skinny girl who had just recovered from a snowmobile accident and didn't have a lot of friends. The YMCA swim team gave me a place where I could grow, get stronger, and meet some of the most important people in my life. My two best friends swim and my coach has come to act as a second father, listening to our problems in and out of the pool. Nothing compares to cheering for your teammates as they swim, your heart beating because you're nervous for them or your coach telling you they're proud, a gleam in their eyes. Swimming brings people together. My family has been swimming for generations with my mother swimming in high school and both of my siblings swimming. It brings my family together, those blood-related and the family we've found along the way. My team is a family. When I got older, swimming gave me a way to clear my head after school. It was a release, somewhere where the stress of being a teenager and a student couldn't reach. School brings in a lot of stress and competing gives me a way to focus the stress and frustration of life into something productive. Swimming gives you goals, something you think about day and night, and when you reach that goal you're on cloud nine. Unless you don't. I've shot for a cut and aimed for a record to miss by milliseconds. It hurts, but that's part of life. You learn to move on and look for new goals and learn from your mistakes. The ups and downs in sports are like those in life and I've learned how to ride them. I've also learned how to help people who are at lows. There isn't always going to rainbows and sunshine in sports and you might be breaking records while your teammate is hurt. For a year one of my friends struggled with back problems, forcing her into recovery. The entire team was there for her and I remember rubbing medical cream on her back after a race that broke her. The very next season, I was in her spot with my shoulders and my teammates were always ready to help fetch ice or pain killers. Teammates work together, fighting for each other because as much as swimming is an individual sport, you cannot succeed without the support of your peers. The pool becomes a home and it's almost a right of passage to work as a lifeguard or swim instructor. The moment you turn sixteen, you're being interviewed by the water supervisor who happens to be our coach and you join the swimming, guarding family. The swim team is home, bringing people together and lifting each other like a family because, in every sense of the word, it is.

Amber Nguyen Wave Swim Team La Crosse Area Family YMCA

When I was younger, swimming was an activity that involved great fun. When I turned 6 my parents put me on the swim team with no foreshadow of the impact it would have on my life. In the beginning, there was no pressure to win races or be fast. My relationship with swimming quickly changed as my teammates and I were moved to upper level training. Suddenly it was on: be fast. My teammates and I trained harder than ever before. The overwhelming pressure that was taking over our lives. Over the course of a few seasons, half of the swimmers --my teammates, my friends-- quit. They lost their motivation to train and were broken down. When I got to high school, I immediately understood the antagonizing struggle to show up to practice. I had difficulty juggling homework, extracurriculars, and practice; time was a limited resource. I began to feel drained, stuck in a never ending cycle. But I am just one of millions of swimmers voicing the struggle and perseverance it takes to succeed. Don't get me wrong, I wouldn't give it up for the world. I love all the fun my teammates and I have while suffering through 5000 yard practices and their support while you race. But it's a huge commitment. 13 hours a week commitment. Time that could be spent on homework, socializing, TV, or even just sleeping. Every week I continue to dedicate to swimming, I pay a hefty price. So why haven't I quit? I find myself asking this as I stand behind my lane, mentally preparing myself to jump in, cap tugging against my pony tail, skin dry and chlorine scented. As the night goes on and I complete more yards, do more turns, descend more 100's, and complain about sore shoulders, I lose more time. Swimming had taken a huge toll on my body: my hair was brittle, my shoulders slumped and my legs ached. I was exhausted from late nights of homework and practice. But when do you stop? Is it when it's 15 degrees below zero and you have to trudge your crocs through 7 feet of snow just to get into a freezing pool? Is it when your body cries for you to stop? Or is it after 1 practice, when school friends don't bother to hangout with you, when they've already memorized your line of excuses? I came upon my answer behind the blocks of the 100 breaststroke at a state meet. I was weary from racing and dying to go home to get some sleep. As the starter signaled the start, I flew off the blocks and dove into a state of euphoria. I was swimming fast, really fast, my arms pulling through strong. By the last 25, I was still pulling as hard as I possibly could. I touched the wall and ripped my goggles off to see and hear the cheers of parents, coaches and friends, lactic acid coursing through my veins, a national cut! The tireless cycles through training were worth every hour. Swimming has taught me valuable lessons and gave me the opportunity to experience an exhilarating lifestyle. I have learned to struggle and triumph through adversity, to keep on going when the end is not in sight, the power of time management and how to balance a healthy life schedule that is maintainable. But best of all, I have built a lifetime of friendships with my closest training partners, who push and cheer me on as I race the clock. That's what keeps me coming back, ravenous for so much more.

Luke Bousley Door County YMCA 2021 YMCA Scholarship Participating in the Door County YMCA swim team has taught me a lot about myself and the values I have. I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to participate on the swim team since I was 8 years old. The YMCA swim team has introduced me to the qualities I know and use in my everyday life: setting goals, working for my goals, and the importance of team. Goal setting is one of the most important values the swim team has taught me. From an early age my coach taught me how to set goals. The goals were to be achievable, yet push and stretch my abilities and talents to a higher level. From this experience, I've learned the importance of setting goals outside of swimming. Whether it is school, work, or in my hobbies, I set and accomplish goals on a regular basis. I set a personal goal to improve my skills in public speaking. I chose to pursue public speaking opportunities within my hobby of custom fishing rod building. With the help of a mentor who invited me to speak at my first custom rod building event, I was able to accomplish this goal. Prior to the event, I was anxious and worried. After I began speaking and saw the excitement on the faces of the individuals I was speaking to, I relaxed. I was able to accomplish this goal and expanded my opportunity and spoke at several additional custom rod building events throughout the midwest. My experiences with the swim team taught me skills which allowed me to be successful in this speaking event and accomplish my goal. Participating in the YMCA swim team has taught me the value of hard work. From an early age, I had to work hard for my goals. I learned very quickly that the more dedication and effort I put forth in practice, the faster I became. In my personal life, working hard for my goals has helped in the creation and sustaining of my custom fishing rod and repair business. From the beginning of the business, I learned running a business is hard and takes time. The value of hard work, learned from swimming, helped me push through and persevere. I learned that even though swimming is a mostly individual sport, the importance of team is incredibly valuable. The people on my team teach me, inspire me, and motivate me to become a better swimmer. Being part of a team also taught me the value of surrounding myself with the right people. Having people who believe in me and support me in what I do helps me succeed. An example of a team in my everyday life is the Custom Rod Builders Guild. I joined the guild in 2017 and most recently was appointed National Youth Program senior representative. Working as a team is very beneficial in the success of my program. The team skill I learned greatly assisted me in this endeavor. Being a member of the YMCA swim team has taught me the values of hard work, the importance of team, and the benefits of goal setting. These values have impacted my everyday life and helped create who I am today. The YMCA swim team provided me many opportunities and I cannot stress enough how valuable it was to have coaches who created a positive, safe, and educational environment for me and other swimmers. I believe the YMCA swim team has tremendously helped prepare me for the future, made me a better person, and taught me how to work hard for my goals in life.

Emma Siegersma
YMCA Scholarship
La Crosse YMCA Wave Swim Team

I have been swimming for 10 years, 9 of which being with the La Crosse YMCA Wave Swim Team. I never got the opportunity to have Jon Brenner as a coach as he passed away the year before I joined. However, I did get the opportunity to have many wonderful coaches after that. Being on a swim team that has unfortunately had to hire a new head coach every 2 to 3 years has been hard, training wise. However, one thing I have taken away from it is how to work with different people. I have been able to experience different coaching styles, develop flexibility, and learn how to work with those around me. Working with new people and those of authority has given me great leverage and experience that I will carry on throughout my life.

Being a member of the swim team has helped me to gain many great habits, both physical and mental. As physically challenging as the sport of swimming is, I have taken away many good routines. I not only swim many days a week, but I also lift/weight train. This has helped me to become stronger, healthier, and happier. I also tend to eat much better during the swim season. I will carry both of these habits on into college (where I will be swimming for the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse) because I know how big of a difference they make. Swimming has also taught me hard work, determination, drive, and goal setting. It has shown me how far hard work can take you and the amount of goals you can accomplish with it. I have also seen this trait spill over into my academics as well. Knowing I have practice each night, I get my homework done in a timely matter and have the drive to do it. My athletics and academics both seem to go hand in hand. Being a member of the swim team has seemed to create this great habit that can never be taken away.

The YMCA and the La Crosse Swim team have taught me leadership. One passion I have developed from this is coaching my own teams too. After being a part of the swim team for so many years, I started to teach swimming lessons and coach swim team in my hometown. I developed such a deep understanding and love for the sport that I wanted to do all I could to share it with others. I now work at my local pool in the summers teaching swimming lessons to kids of the ages 2-14. I also became the head coach of my local park

and recreation swim team. Both roles have given me the opportunity to not only teach kids an important safety skill but to also pass on to them some of those same experiences that have affected my life so greatly. Although I only coach a summer swim team, I am constantly encouraging my athletes to join the YMCA for it has affected my life and gave me so many amazing habits and experiences. I can't imagine being part of a better program growing up.

Just as swimming for the YMCA has given me many great habits and passions, it also gave me a second family and lifelong friends. Throughout my years with the LAXY, I learned the importance of a team even in a sport that is considered "individual". We as a team encouraged each other and pushed one another through practices and other events happening in our outside lives. The YMCA and the pool became a safe spot to get away and have a place where I could work hard with some of my best friends. Throughout my years on this team, many of my friends decided swimming wasn't for them. However, I to this day still have some of my closest friends and have the YMCA to thank for that.

I am pleased to introduce myself to you. I am Elizabeth Stratman and I am from Racine, Wisconsin. I have been a member of South Eastern Aquatics (SEA) since fifth grade. Swimming has always been a big part of my life. I started swimming lessons as an infant with the YMCA and eventually decided to join the SEA swim team to improve my swimming at a competitive level. That was one of the best decisions I have ever made because in addition to becoming a better swimmer, it has also opened the door to working with amazing people. I love and cherish all the friends I have made through SEA and I love all the coaches who are so dedicated to the team. Everyone is always so welcoming to new people who join the team, which is something I really love about SEA. Additionally, being a part of a competitive team really helps push me to improve my swimming. I use my teammates who are faster than me as motivation to improve. The coaches provide opportunities to race in practice to help us work on our racing technique. With the support of SEA, I have become a better swimmer and athlete. Being a part of SEA has also helped me manage my time and focus on school and as a result I have been on the honor roll throughout high school. I am a member of the National Honors Society and have taken advanced classes. Joining SEA started as something to stay active and to become more proficient at swimming. It turned out to be so much more because of all the relationships I have formed; I would not trade that experience for anything. The SEA swim team has played a vital role in my life especially over the last year. There were so many disappointments over the year including not attending school in person and not being able to participate in high school sports. As soon as it was safe to do so SEA found a way to start practicing again in June 2020. Not only was I able to get back in the pool and start practicing, but I could see my friends again. I am very grateful for that opportunity and it has helped me renew my competitive spirit. I am now moving on to college and will continue my swimming at Carroll University. I am extremely excited for that next part of my swimming career that would not have been possible without SEA. Thank you so much for providing this opportunity and for considering me for this important scholarship.

Andrew Engedal - OSHY Swim Team Forty Five Minutes I love the forty five minutes before swim practice. Every Monday and Wednesday, I would head to the pool directly after school, eating something small on the way there, and then hang out on the pool deck while the younger kids practiced. I looked forward to that everyday. Between school, practice, and symphony rehearsal, that was a period of calmness amidst a storm of difficulty. I loved the competitive thrill of swim meets and practices, always racing against myself and close teammates, but the moments outside of the pool held even greater importance. As I transition into a life without competitive swimming, I've never been more thankful for the community and support of my team. As a requirement before the first travel meet, newer swimmers have to learn how to juggle. Maybe Coach Jay just wanted an army of semi-aquatic jugglers to conquer the world, but I joined his plan nonetheless. In the time before swim practice, I'd try and fail miserably next to a wall, learning how to throw the ball straight while a couple friends and more experienced swimmers showed me how. I wasn't any good, but I kept trying. A lesson in coordination became a lesson in determination and, more importantly, learning to laugh and have fun while failing. I can only juggle for about ten seconds, but it was never really about just juggling; I enjoyed learning a new skill with my friends. When I wasn't practicing my juggling skills or playing mini-baseball with a kickboard, I would do homework or watch the other practices. In busy times, I gladly stepped forward to help younger groups, checking streamlines and beginner dives. On a day I wasn't helping, one kid interrupted my studying to have me watch his start. After bravely climbing up on the block and going for a dive, he ran over to my spot, where I gave him a big smile and a fistbump for all his hard work. I love the community and the feeling of mentorship that comes with being an older athlete, helping the younger kids find the same joy I had on my first day of practice. Part of that joy involves doodling on the team whiteboard. While I outgrew those drawings, I continued with the same excitement and curiosity by working through math problems on the same board. I really enjoy math, and I've gone through a couple of significant problems, each self-made and taking months to complete. Wherever I looked, I found support, whether it was from Jay after showing him an equation I was using to model a problem or from another teammate, listening to my newest successful step towards a solution. OSHY encouraged my other interests alongside swimming, pushing me to find what I love and stick to it. Commitment, engagement, and passion helped me grow up into a stronger, more compassionate person, and I'm extremely grateful for having such a great and supportive team to teach me these values. Although I never really got over defeat from 12 year olds, the competition I initially joined swimming for faded away and was replaced by camaraderie, and I hope my younger teammates become better than I ever was. In these past few years, I've realized swimming hasn't really been about racing, but rather helping others pursue their goals while having fun and being part of a broader community. The greatest challenges fall to the greatest teams, especially those built in and out of the pool.

Madilynn Peterson South Eastern Aquatics Wisconsin & Upper Michigan YMCA Swimming Scholarship Being a part of a YMCA swim team has had an immeasurable impact on my life and has without a doubt played a large role in shaping me into the person that I am today. Since joining SEA in 2012, I have learned dedication, time management, and perseverance. Nine years of a sport comes with its fair share of setbacks and plateaus; nevertheless, I like to think that these challenges have taught me the importance of drive and dedication along with the idea that with time and effort anything can be accomplished. In turn, I have applied this dedication and perseverance to other aspects of my life such as my schoolwork. I am a full IB Diploma Candidate at my high school which is a rigorous academic program that combines high-level school courses with creativity, activity, and service requirements to challenge students to be well-rounded. In a typical year, only about twenty students finish the program and receive the IB diploma. The rigor of the IB program certainly requires a substantial amount of effort and dedication since it is a challenging program. I've noticed that when my classmates begin to struggle with the workload, I am able to persevere. I believe that my participation in a YMCA swim team has given me an advantage over my classmates because of the dedication and drive that being a member of SEA has instilled in me. However, what kept me coming back to SEA year after year was not an internal drive for state cuts or leaderboard positions; it was the positive atmosphere and team dynamic that we have created that have kept me in love with the sport for nine years. As cliché as it sounds, we are a family at SEA. Together we celebrate each other's victories, no matter how big or small, and are constantly pushing each other to be the best athletes and people that we can be. I am certain that this remarkable team dynamic is the direct result of being a YMCA swim team. Especially during the unprecedented year that we have had, SEA has allowed me a sense of normalcy. Even though practices looked much different than they did pre-COVID, being able to see my swim family every day made this year much easier. As I approach the end of my swimming career, I realize how lucky I am to have experienced something that makes it so hard to say goodbye. Due to the pandemic, my senior high school swim season was postponed to the spring. Since being a captain of my high school team was something I had dreamed about and looked forward to since day one of freshman year, it would have been easy to quit swimming right then and there with that disappointing blow, but I did not. Furthermore, when the postponed high school swim season rolled around a few weeks ago, I decided to not go back to Case for my senior season and finish out my last few months with SEA. Ultimately, I based my decision on where I would enjoy my time the most, which I knew was with SEA. The team dynamic we have created is something that can not be replicated anywhere else and I would not have wanted to spend my last few months with any other team. In conclusion, not only has being a member of a YMCA swim team taught me valuable skills such as drive and dedication, SEA has also given me my second family.

2021 Jon Brenner Scholarship

Name: Morgan Jayne Ball

High School: Medford Area Senior High

Graduation date: 5/28/2021

Club: Woodson Y Northern Swimmers (WYNS)

YMCA: Woodson YMCA

College: University of Minnesota – Morris (Fall 2021)

When I was growing up, my parents would refer to me as their “spirited child”, a strong-willed girl that was highly temperamental and full of energy. At a young age, the YMCA became my outlet to channel and release this energy in an environment that fostered positive reinforcement and healthy interactions. It would have been easy to dismiss a child like me as difficult, or a trouble maker. The YMCA embraced me as a valued individual and instilled in me their core values of caring, honesty and responsibility first-hand through their daily interactions with me.

I was first introduced to the pool at the age of 3 when my parents enrolled me in swim lessons at the New Richmond YMCA. Overnight I became a water baby, developing an intense love for the water that has stuck with me to this very day.

We moved around the State when I was younger, but no matter where we lived the YMCA remained the one constant foundation in my life. Now a member of the Eau Claire YMCA, I started to advance through each swim lesson level quickly. By age 6, the YMCA staff approached my parents to discuss an opportunity they had for me to join the Marlins and swim competitively. At the time, my parents thought I was too young, but before we could explore this option they divorced. My father moved to Michigan and my mother, brother and I were on the move again, this time to Medford, WI.

Several years went by, and while I eventually found my way back into the pool swimming for my local club and school teams something was missing. There really is nothing quite like the camaraderie, spirit and core values of the YMCA. Towards the end of 8th grade, I found my way back to the Woodson YMCA and have been a proud member of the WYNS swim team ever since. For the last four years I have been making the 2-hour round trip daily, 6 days a week, 9 months out of the year to practice and compete with the WYNS team – pausing only to compete in the high school season with the Medford Lady Raiders.

The Woodson Y Northern Swim team, coaches and parent network have been like family to me. In fact, every YMCA I have practiced in has made me feel like I was part of their family. There is something truly magical about the YMCA culture nationwide, especially for a kid like me that wanted to focus on swimming but due to family circumstances had to bounce around a lot growing up between Wisconsin and Michigan. Through vacations, annual summer visitation schedules, extended trips to see grandparents and college visits – YMCA’s across Michigan, Wisconsin and Nebraska have welcomed me with open arms and an open lane.

I have never met Jon Brenner, but I recognize his character in the heart and spirit of my coaches and in every YMCA I’ve ever been privileged to enter. Growing up and utilizing the YMCA network both locally and nationwide, coaches and staff members have truly given me confidence and self-esteem to not only achieve athletic goals (I will be swimming for the UMM – Cougars in the Fall), but I have also learned from the YMCA environment how to interact with people using their core values, values that have now become my core values. The YMCA has made me a better global citizen and given me the desire to pay it forward to others as I continue on my life’s journey.

Coach Jon Brenner Scholarship Emma Schneider YCV Barracudas As I reflect on my participation in YMCA swimming, I firmly believe it has shaped me into the person I am today. Paralleling my growth as an athlete in the water, I have built friendships to last a lifetime in addition to developing some of the character traits I am most proud of. Ten years ago, I joined the Chippewa Valley YMCA Piranhas Swim Team, because of my genuine love of the water despite my lack of abilities. Through the first many years, I bonded with my teammates who shared that passion. My family and I were welcomed into the team tight-knit community. In time, many of these swimmers became my peers and dearest friends, again exemplifying the value of community and support within the team. As I have grown older, and have become a peer leader on the team, I often remember those people and aim to continue that legacy. On my high school team this year specifically, going into the season we had no coach, our team began to wonder if there would even be a season. It became glaringly apparent that our team needed a solid core to build itself on. Myself and another senior set norms for the team's culture and began taking as many preparational steps as possible. In paying forward the support of others, we saw the team flourish once we had a coach, even going on to win our Conference meet. My dedication to the support has certainly evolved over time. After several years, I watched my friends continue to shed seconds off of their times each weekend, and I realized I wanted more out of practice than socializing. Fortunately, my coaches saw this mindset shift, and continued to push me in practice while focusing on improving my strokes. Sometimes, they would even stay after practices to fix the minute details of my technique. Namely after my seventh grade season, I decided I wanted to compete at the next level. I set my sights on qualifying for State the following year. Staying true to this goal meant making choices. At first they were small: choosing to chat less to focus on the set, then coming to practice earlier to be mentally prepared myself. Eventually, this made bigger choices easier, like eating a cleaner diet, and sacrificing social time with friends outside of swimming in an effort to be dedicated to my improvement. Throughout high school I have continued to sacrifice according to my priorities both academically and athletically. This grit and determination is now the foundation of who I am. The lessons of working hard, and supporting those around you shape decisions I make daily. As I say goodbye to my current team, I know I will carry these skills that have been honed through the support of my swim family and coaches, and my time in YMCA Swimming with me.

Myles Jensen Marshfield YMCA Tigersharks I have been swimming for 7 years now and never have I once looked back and said that I regret choosing this sport. Before I had swimming, I tried a mix of many sports and found that none of them quite satisfied the vision of what a team truly was in my head. When I first joined swimming, I found that everyone was willing to be friendly with me and supported each other no matter how fast you were, how old you were, or even if they knew you. Swimming was the one sport where everyone was equal in each other's eyes. I have created many lasting friendships through swimming, many of which have survived a several hundred mile move and not a lot of communication for the first two years. When I first moved to Marshfield, the one thing that I wanted was to swim for a swim team in order to have the same feeling of acceptance and a place that felt like the home away from home it had been in Nebraska. Many of my current friends were made within my first year of living in Marshfield and swimming for the YMCA. Not all of my friends are from the Marshfield YMCA which, in my opinion, is the greatest thing a sport has to offer to those who compete within it. I have met many people at away meets that I still keep in touch with. Everyone shows each other the same level of respect and courtesy that you would want to have shown to you and growing up this showed me and molded me into the young man that I have grown into. Those away meets showed me how I should act to not only my fellow swimmers, but also my neighbors, friends, and those who I may not know but still need help. Swimming has allowed me to set an example that younger kids can look up to. An example that works towards encouragement of each other, how to behave at practice, and hopefully be an example that the kids look up to for guidance and answers. I strive to show the same compassion that was shown to me when I first started swimming. That means that I help the younger children get to their events on time, encourage them after a race that may not have gone the way they wanted, and I congratulate them on their improvements no matter how big or small. Swimming has been with me through the ups and downs of life and I have found many great role models within the team, from coaches and other swimmers, to the parents that aren't just there for their kid but for everyone else's too. I will never forget the people that I have met from all the different teams I've swam against and I will have memories of good sportsmanship, comradery, and silliness that will last me a lifetime.

The OSHY Swim Family My arms burned as they desperately attempted to scoop water and push my body through the thick, chlorine filled substance; my legs ached from a simple flutter kick motion, while the wobbly lane line lazily allowed a wave to escape into the lane next to me. 100 yards, down and back, down and back... one 25 left, "push Morgan, push" I told myself. Midwest Regionals- as a seven year old, it was the biggest swim meet I had ever been to, and not a single person could begin to imagine how proud I was to be there. "Beat her, beat her!" I screamed as I miserably urged my body to push forward in an attempt to place ahead of the tall girl next to me. Throwing my head down at the fifteen meter mark, I held my breath as I pulled past hundreds of tiles on the pool floor, heart pounding, until I was able to hurl my hand towards the yellow touch pad. Coming to an abrupt stop, I immediately stared up at the daunting score clock hanging on the wall, only to see the girl in lane 4 had beat me. Disappointed, I struggled to climb out of the pool, legs feeling like bricks with arms seemingly made of jello. "Nice job!" an enthusiastic voice called, "I'm Elenor what's your name?" From that point forward, the girl from lane 4 and I were seemingly inseparable. From meeting new people, to giving back to the community, swimming has shaped the person I have become today. Swimming has taught me the importance of hard work and dedication, team work, and giving back. I'll never forget calling my grandma after my very first practice and exclaiming, "Grandma, I have to work my butt off to keep up!" only to hear a soft laugh on the other end of the line. From that day forward, I consistently showed up to practice, put my game face on, and worked hard until coach Jay gave us the okay to head out. Along with hard work, teamwork created unity within the OSHY swim team, which extended to a swim family as I grew up with my peers. Nobody was to be left out. Each swimmer had someone cheering at the end of their lane, everyone had a counter for their 500 freestyle, and before each meet the entire pool would be filled with the team chant: "O to the S to the H to the Y..." Our family grew as we traveled around the nation to swim in different meets and spread our spirit through Natalie Bolin- a former swimmer who passed away at 17 in a horrendous car accident. During the Pro-Ams meet in Louisville, Texas, my teammates and I went around handing out bookmarks and chapstick to other teams, enforcing the Natlie spirit in the world around us. Today swimming is my comfort, my security blanket. I know when I am overwhelmed with school work, extracurricular activities, or work I will always have my swim family to fall back on. Going to practice relieves stress and presents an opportunity to socialize with coaches and peers. Swimming is a sport like no other, friendships created are everlasting and memories are unforgettable. As I look back at my swimming career, I know I'll never forget the smiles created, hard work endured, and laughs heard by hundreds. I'll never forget the lessons learned that will carry me through the rest of my life, including my next chapter at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Through swimming I have obtained a foundation providing the skills necessary to be successful.

Sara Morehouse Oshkosh YMCA A few years ago at the Natalie Bolin Swim Camp, coach Jay Coleman asked us campers what our greatest accomplishment was. I think I said something along the lines of having good grades, but looking back that was definitely the wrong answer. What I am most proud of is being a member of the Oshkosh YMCA swim team. My earliest memories of OSHY involve being terrified to talk to anyone other than my few friends, especially the coaches. Honestly, most of the first few years are a blur; I feel as though my swimming career started when I went to swim camp in Ely, Minnesota the summer after sixth grade. From the moment I accidentally stuck my bare bottom in my tentmate's face while changing into suits to swim across Cedar Lake, I was part of something bigger than myself, bigger even than swimming. Since then, being on the OSHY Swim Team has filled my life with joy, laughter, and light. So much more than just a team, OSHY became my second home, a place where it didn't matter if I was the fastest swimmer on the team, only that I came to practice each day with a positive attitude and a smile, ready to put in my best effort. The YMCA is a place where working hard is fun, and even on the days when it felt like my arms were going to fall off, I still smiled and laughed with my best friends. It wasn't all for nothing; swimming for OSHY has proven to me that dedication, discipline, and hard work really do pay off. I am a better athlete and student thanks to my time spent at the YMCA. Most importantly, I am a more compassionate and kind person because of the OSHY Swim Team. This is in great part thanks to the beautiful life and legacy of Natalie Kate Bolin, whom I never met but have always felt as though I know because of how her spirit lives on in the YMCA community, especially at the NKB Swim Camp in Ely. I have been fortunate enough to attend camp three times and each year has been full of endless laughter, new friendships, and personal growth. Camp has taught me many things, but one stands out. As Coach Jay best summarized in one of his many long talks, the world is not a zero-sum game. Working alongside my friends to complete intense physical and mental challenges, I realized at camp that one person's triumphs do not take away from another's, and being hateful will not lessen your pain. I have struggled with this, especially when watching friends swim faster and faster while I did not. I used to think being jealous or unsupportive would make me feel better, but it doesn't. Even though it's harder, the way to rise up is by lifting others with you. That's what Natalie's spirit means to me: having the courage to be kind, especially when it takes effort. Words are truly not enough to sum up how YMCA swimming has affected me, but overall I am a better person because I am part of the OSHY Swim Team. Every day, I strive to show kindness, to have an open mind and heart, and to just smile at people, because it will only make the world a better and brighter place. I will forever be thankful for the opportunity to grow into someone I am proud of at the YMCA, and I deeply hope to share the positivity and joy that YMCA swimming has given me for the rest of my life.

I've had the opportunity to swim for different clubs, each of them playing a role in shaping me in who I am today. My experiences have afforded me a clear vision of how the YMCA has had a tremendous influence in not only my development as a swimmer but also my role in healthy living and social responsible. Unfortunately I never knew Coach Jon Brenner, but from what I do know, his amazing legacy of imparting respect, purpose, confidence while having fun and creating meaningful memories is evident in Schroder YMCA swim team. Throughout my thirteen years of swimming, I have been on four club teams each having a unique atmosphere, but it only took one to repair the reputation of the sport that I fell out of love with. When I first started to swim at five years old, it was fun. There was little pressure. It was mostly about camaraderie and socializing with teammates while developing skills. As we grew older, pressures also grew and the sport I once enjoyed became a source of anxiety for me. I've encountered compassionate coaches, tough love coaches and self-centered coaches. I've experienced programs where every practice and every meet was a battle. A battle to see who was the best. A teammate winning meant that someone else was better than you, and that became unacceptable. This is not surprising considering the mindset that we were instilled with. Our coach wanted us to push each other to be better, but we were given the wrong impression. It was Walter Schroeder YMCA swim team that helped me develop a healthy attitude toward swimming, training and life. The difference was my coaches cared about me as a person. As I struggled initially with thinking I always had to swim fast to be of value, my team gave me a safe place to succeed and fail. I started to look forward to swim practice again. I am able to trust the process because of the environment and culture of the team. The coaches find value in everyone and take the time to get to know each swimmer individually. How they treat us is not dependent on how we perform. If we are struggling with something, they offer guidance and resources. Schroeder coaches (much like Coach Brenner) mirror core YMCA values of "caring, respect, honesty, responsibility and inclusiveness," through a coach-led but athlete centered program. Because of my relationships and experiences as a member of a YMCA swim team, I have developed skills that have prepared me for college swimming and life. By Sophia Remington Walter Schroeder YMCA swim team

Joe Skantz, Racine Family YMCA

Oftentimes, seemingly insignificant decisions we make in life end up flourishing into something spectacular. For me, this “insignificant” decision was to go out for competitive swimming. As a kid, I had always been bursting at the seams with energy, though I never truly found my niche. I had tried various other sports including soccer, basketball, track, and cross country. Prior to joining my high school team as a freshman, I had never swum a full length of the pool; however, I decided to try swimming in order to stay in shape before the upcoming track season. Fast forward to today where I have qualified for state and national level swim meets, and the sport has become one of the most influential, rewarding, and defining parts of my life.

Joining Southeastern Aquatics Racine Family YMCA Swim Team after only skimming the surface of competitive swimming early in high school ended up paving the way for self-growth for the remainder of my teenage years. The various lessons that I have learned, both mental and physical, are the takeaways that I value most as being part of Team SEA-Y.

Perhaps the most valuable lesson is one that I learned very early in my swimming career. Although new to the sport, I enjoyed a surprisingly successful freshman season - especially in sprinting - and considered myself a high-caliber swimmer when I joined the club. However, this practice made me feel otherwise. Even today, I can still feel the raw emotion and utter frustration I felt during that practice. I was quickly falling behind my new teammates, I was not performing at the level I expected, and I was thoroughly upset with myself. Just a few months prior, I thought I had finally found my “thing,” something I loved, that I was good at, somewhere I felt I belonged. But now, in a matter of minutes at this practice, almost all of my confidence in myself and my abilities had been destroyed. My coach sensed I was struggling, pulled me aside between reps, and spoke to me. His words sparked a realization that I have control over myself and my outlook, and with that, I can choose how I react to situations and I can choose my attitude at any moment.

From that point on, I truly recognized the extent to which I am responsible for my future. The greatest lesson that I have learned from swimming is that no matter what is happening in my life - hours of homework ahead, the band concert I must prepare for, the two IB research papers due next week - the most important thing that I can focus on is what I am doing in the present moment. Shut out all the outside noise. What is happening now? What am I feeling? What factors are in my control? What do I need to do in this immediate moment? This mindset helps me tackle my challenges head on. Since that practice, I have become more self-aware and conscious of what is happening around me, and make an active decision to integrate this mentality into my daily life.

Reflecting upon my experience with the Southeastern Aquatics YMCA swim team, I recognize that almost every conscious decision I make relates back to this skill set, as well as the several other lessons that I have learned and developed from swimming. Regardless of what happens, the opportunities for growth that swim has provided me as far as problem solving, stress management, and self-discipline will stay with me in my academics, swimming, and personal life, throughout my college career and beyond.

Natalia Badillo
South Eastern Aquatics YMCA
February 19, 2021

As I would rush to practice, late as always, my grandma always made sure to send me off and say, “*Échale ganas hija y que dios esté contigo.*” Imbedding an endless love of life, faith, and culture into my childhood, it carried over into other aspects of my life seamlessly. Most importantly, my abuelita’s life values aligned with those which my small, Racine-based YMCA swim team also succeeded in instilling in me.

Starting swim lessons at the mere age of two and a half years old, I absolutely hated the water. Anything that was blue and liquid made me cry, scream, and extremely enraged. It wasn’t until quarters were thrown into the cold pool that I finally realized that the old, five lane pool in my downtown YMCA was not as bad as I had previously thought. I spent the next three years rigorously going to lessons, as my biggest goal became to get to the last lessons group: the Sharks. I became obsessed with staring at the long black line at the bottom of the pool for hours on end and the refreshing feeling of jumping in the freezing pool early in the mornings. Reaching the Sharks group effortlessly, my lesson teacher knew that there was a fire waiting to be lit. Recommending the Racine’s YMCA South Eastern Aquatics team to my mom and dad in 2009, I started learning the four strokes at the age of 6 and swam my first 50 yard free at the speedy time of 1:10.24.

Fast forward to 2013, I qualified for my first YMCA state championship. The exhilarating feeling of touching the wall in my USA themed dolphin ugly was unforgettable. I sprung out of the water, smiled to my family and friends, and received the biggest hug from my coach. Never thinking I would feel that again, I went many years swimming at meets, qualifying for states, and swimming at YMCA championships. I was slowly, but surely, dropping time. However, in 2016 I suffered through countless amounts of self-doubt, as a shoulder injury and feelings of estrangement began to settle. I had hit a new low that I never knew was possible. It took faith, family, and support to realize that the YMCA pool truly was my home and without it, life was not the same. I took time to strengthen my muscles, do physical therapy, and re-find my love for the never-ending grind that was competitive swimming.

Discovering the same values and culture of success in my YMCA team’s senior group in 2019 that my abuelita instilled in me when I was young, I was able to qualify for YMCA Nationals in the 200 breaststroke at the age of 15. Overcoming the many hardships I had endured years before, being a part of the SEAY swim team has taught me that swim isn’t always about swimming, rather the relationships I create along the way. While I may never have the chance to repay the YMCA organization for everything that I have learned and the amazing relationships I have formed, I wish to become a role model for those who also have come to love swimming and everything the sport has to offer. Making me the resilient and hard-working woman I am today, I am so thankful for the invaluable gift of being a part of something bigger than myself. My toughest times have only led to the best moments of my life, and for that I am forever indebted to the YMCA and the team I call family.