

## 2017 YMCA Short Course National Championship Devotion Offered by Kevin Ryle



Good Evening, and welcome to the second night of swimming at the 2017 YMCA Short Course National Championships. My name is Kevin Ryle, I'm a junior, and I swim for the Upper Main Line YMCA. Tonight, however, you won't hear my story, you will hear the story of an inspiring young lady who has greatly impacted my YMCA experience and has shown me that YMCA swimming is not all about the times you go, but helping others.

Alexa Gibney was just like every other 10 year old girl. She did well in school, played soccer, loved bunnies, and of course, swam at her local YMCA. However, everything changed in 2011 when she passed out suddenly and went into a coma for 9 days. When Alexa woke up, the doctors told her family that she would be in constant recovery and would never be the same again. Today, Alexa is a sophomore in high school and still struggles through basic tasks, like dressing herself, getting out of the pool and even putting on her cap and goggles. Through intensive rehabilitation, Alexa has improved her motor skills and continues to make progress every day, but like the doctors said, it will be a lifelong recovery process. She may have lost some of her mobility and cognitive function, but she never lost her determination and kind-spirit. Alexa shows up to practice every day, smiling and laughing her way through our somewhat impossible sets, all while making our teammates smile with her constant jokes. To me, Alexa is not only my best friend, but a role model. Everything she does inspires me, whether it is watching her drop over 10 seconds in her 50 free in 1 year or even getting out the pool by herself for the first time. In fact, she has inspired me to break out of my comfort zone. 1 year ago today, I watched my teammate give a devotion and I thought that I could never stand up here and share something so personal. But seeing Alexa accomplish so much recently has made me want to try new things, so here I am. On behalf of Alexa, I would like to thank the YMCA for creating a positive, tolerant and welcoming environment for all. Through enforcing the YMCA core values of respect, responsibility, honesty and caring, the coaching staff at UMLY has helped Alexa lead a somewhat normal life and has helped facilitate her recovery.

I would also like to thank my wonderful teammates for being so supportive of Alexa and all her endeavors. Ever since she moved up into our senior group, every single team member has been willing to help her out in anyway, so thank you to my UMLY family for being as amazing as you are. Although Alexa's life will forever be altered, she has made lifelong friends to support her through anything. Alexa—if you are watching this, I want to personally thank you for making such a positive impact on my life. Thank you for showing me how to persevere through any obstacle. You have forever changed me as a person. You continue to



amaze each and every one of the swimmers on UMLY with your undying courage and ability to make people smile. And for all YMCA swimmers here tonight and watching at home, I encourage you to live by the YMCA core values and reach out to help someone in need. Who knows, maybe you will meet your best friend, like I did.

Now please bow your heads in prayer

Lord, give us the strength to swim fast this week. Guide those who are victorious towards humbleness and those who do not succeed towards resilience. In Your name, we pray, Amen.

Thank you and good luck to all swimmers tonight!!