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This past summer, in August, something life changing happened to me and 22 other people who are on this pool deck right now. That life changing experience was being chosen to attend the YMCA Olympic Training Camp in Colorado Springs.

When I got my letter saying I was chosen to go, I was so excited, but I didn't know how great of an impact it would have on my life at the time. Going to camp I didn't know what to expect at first. All I knew was that I was going to be training for a week at the place where every Olympic swimmer has stepped foot into.

At the end of the trip not only did I become a better swimmer, I discovered something bigger than that. What I discovered was life long friendships that I will never forget. The friendships I had on the trip had changed my life forever. I had the chance to go to one of the greatest places in the country, but what impacted me the most were those people that were on the trip too.

When I arrived in Colorado the first thing I had to do was go find one of the other swimmers in the airport. So I thought to myself, "Alright now I have to go hunt down some guy I don't even know or even know what he looks like." Well, luckily he was the only person in the airport with a Speedo swim bag on his back. So I got him and found one of the coaches that was picking us up and we headed to the hotel.

When we got to the hotel, the head coach of the camp, Coach Mike, asked every single one of us to stand up and tell everyone what they personally want out of the camp. Each person's answer was the same, "I want to be a better swimmer and meet new people." Through out the week all 24 of us bonded and got to know each other very well. From just goofing off on the pool deck to dance parties in the cars to sitting through 2 hour classes together to the hot tub after practices, we grew closer to each other.

So as the week ended we all came together again and Coach Mike asked us to each say something we learned about each other. But we all didn't just say one thing; we had multiple things to say. All 24 of us now knew each other like we had been friends forever. When we had to say goodbye the next day; it was one of the hardest things we have ever had to do. We now had this strong bond together that we didn't want to let go of. So yeah, I became a better swimmer and brought tips back for my coach at home, but I think the friendships I made were far more important than that.

Through out the year, at our bigger meets, I had friends from around the country that I now knew and shared the same experience as me. As I finish my last YMCA Nationals ever, not only do I get to share it with my team, but I get to share it with 22 other people who were once strangers, but became my close friends after one week together. I want to thank them and our 3 coaches that were there that week for making my trip to Colorado a life changing experience.

Now everyone, please bow your heads. Dear Lord, thank you for bring us all here together safely to this National Championship one more year. Please guide us as we compete the rest of the week and help us swimmers and our coaches be the best they can be. Thank you for bring our parents and love ones here safely to watch us and help everyone to get back home safely at the end of the week. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.