

Wednesday, July 27, 2005
Morning Devotions
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When I first came to swim with Leaning Tower YMCA in Niles, Illinois my family was going through a very difficult time financially. To be honest, we didn't know how much longer we would be able to afford swimming. This was an especially hard fact for me to face because swimming was one of the only things in my life I thought I could control and keep from changing. Fortunately, a family on LTY that we knew told us about the Y and its strong swim program and urged us to meet with the coaches and see if they would be able to accommodate my family and our needs.

The coaches explained that there was a scholarship program to aid struggling families with financial problems. The Y and coaches made sure that my family would be able to become members of the Y and join the LTY swim team. I cannot describe the incredible gift my family was fortunate enough to receive. I still can't believe the amazing opportunity we were given; I mean we finally had a place where we knew no matter how bad our situation could get we would never be turned down.

Coming from a pretty small swim club, it was somewhat overwhelming to come to a team with 12 coaches, 2 trainers, and witness the camaraderie amongst so many swimmers of so many ages. I truly admire the coaches on this team; they are some of the hardest working people I have ever met. They aren't just there to make sure we excel as athletes, but they also care about us as individuals. They will do everything they are capable of to make sure that each and every swimmer's needs are met. With all the hours they dedicate to the team, it often seems like the coaches are with us more often than they are with their own families. However, the coaches aren't the only ones who keep the team running. Our trainers make sure that every ache and pain is looked at both physically and mentally. If a friend is in need they are always there to save the day.

As if these incredible people weren't enough, and unbelievable group of teammates came with, to complete the package. The team welcomed us with open arms. Every since, my teammates have become some of the most important people in my life. The team is an amazing group of kids and I am blessed to have them as my brothers and sisters. I love you all. You are the reason I have grown so much as an individual in such a little time. You inspire me everyday to make me want to be a better person. You have taught me the real meaning of friendship, love, and support. Leaning Tower swim team is a place where you can be yourself, a place where becoming a well-rounded individual is just as important as achieving one's goals.

I would like to congratulate each and every one of you for making it here this week. Only you truly understand the dedication, drive, and perseverance it takes to compete among some of the best YMCA swimmers in the nation. P.H. Mullen once said "To be a swimmer is to be willing to exist in a paradox, that you may win a race but fail because a time isn't fast enough. Or you may finish dead last but feel victorious because a best time is achieved." So I ask of you to absorb this week's experience and take it all in. But keep in mind all the people who helped you along the journey in getting here.

To all the parents, thank you for your commitment to your child's dream. Without your love and support none of us would be here. And to our coaches who led the journey and guided us along the way, thank you. It truly takes somebody special to do what you do. To devote so

much time and have such big plans for us swimmers is a remarkable thing. I would also like to thank all the people behind the scenes who make this whole national experience possible. From the meet director and committee, to the officials, and volunteers; you all do a phenomenal job, year in and year out, making sure this competition runs smoothly and brings us together on the roots of one idea: our love for swimming.

Following an old YMCA tradition, I would ask everyone to join me as I say our blessing

Gracious Lord,

We thank you for bringing us all together to share a week of exciting competition, the opportunity to meet new people, spend time with our teammates and families and enjoy the sport we love. We ask that you give us the strength to rise to our challenges, face our disappointments, and fulfill our dreams. We thank you for the opportunity to participate in a sport which allows us to grow as individuals, make lifelong friends, give back to our communities, create memories and learn lessons that we will carry throughout our lives. We ask that your light and love continues to watch over and bless us. Amen.