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## UPPER MAIN LINE YMCA SWIMMING

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Good morning. I've been around this event as a swimmer or a coach for almost half of my life. Since I first came here as an athlete in 1988, I've been associated with four YMCA's. Over the time I have spent with those four programs, I've come to appreciate what a special event this is and what an amazing collection of people come to it each year.

I swam for the Freehold YMCA. Now they call it the YMCA of Greater Western Monmouth County. At Freehold, I made friends that I still talk to and experienced this meet for the first time. It was in Orlando then but the memories I have from those days are not centered on the place we were at nearly as much as the people I was with.

While I was in college, I swam for and coached at the Hamilton YMCA. From Sue Welsh and Jeff Lowe, my coaches at Hamilton, I learned two things: what an incredible impact a coach can have on an athlete and what it means to coach at a YMCA, realizing that coaches were educators whose investment in those around them went far beyond the swimming pool.

After college, graduate school, and some time spent teaching and coaching at a boarding school, I came back into the YMCA swimming universe with the New Canaan Y. Although I only spent a year at NCY, it was in Connecticut that I started to figure out that Y Nationals is not only a swim meet but also an experience that goes far beyond the sport. In my short time in Connecticut, I met people that I number among my closest friends in and out of the sport.

I wasn't looking for a job when I met Jim Ryan here on the pool deck in April of 2000. Two months later I moved to Pennsylvania. I quickly realized that the Upper Main Line YMCA is truly a special place. At UMLY, I found a mentor in Jim from whom I can say that I have learned more from than anyone else I ever met with the exception of my parents. At UMLY, I've made some of the best friends of my life. I'm lucky enough to spend every day with amazing coaches, athletes, and families that have pretty much adopted me as one of their own. While every day is far from perfect, I know that I have more fun on a daily basis than most people and that I can look up there at my team and know that I have one of the best jobs in the world working with some of the best kids you will ever meet.

At the end of the summer in 2003, I was once again not looking for a job when I was offered a chance to move to the major leagues. Middle distance coach at the University of Alabama. Amazing facilities, coaches, and athletes to work with. A chance to coach in the fastest league in the country. I had a good year. My athletes swam well and it was a great experience in many ways but something was missing.

Last Spring I came here as a college coach and while I was sitting in the stands, I came to realize how important the community of YMCA Swimming had become to me.

Somehow, for some reason, I was offered the chance to go back to the Upper Main Line Y. I didn't even need to think about it. Alabama was nice but the family that is UMLY Swimming and the community that is YMCA Nationals and YMCA Swimming are truly amazing. I came back to this meet this year and as my peers on the pool deck welcomed me back, I began to understand that the YMCA swimming community is something that can capture you in spirit, mind, and body. I know that I am not the only one to feel that way.

My time away from UMLY and YMCA Swimming made me realize that home for me is with the special collection of people that make up UMLY Swimming and this meet. Not a day has gone by since I came back that I have not thought about how lucky I was to be able to leave my home and return to it a year later. It is strange to think about it, but the Jewish kid from NJ has found a home in the YMCA swimming community and with the UMLY Swimming family.

Dear God....

As I look out among all of the swimmers, coaches and volunteers on this pool deck and as I look into the stands at all of the people who have come to cheer them on, I see not a collection of individuals but an incredibly vibrant community that comes together twice a year not just for a swim meet but for an opportunity to celebrate all that is good about the YMCA, kids, and competitive sports. Please help our athletes to do well in this meet and in life as they strive for excellence. Help us as coaches to guide them and serve alongside their parents as mentors and role models. As we enter into the final day of competition here in Fort Lauderdale, watch over all of the members of our family as we finish the 2005 Spring Championships and see everyone safely home. Please watch over us all until we come together again later this year and for many years to come.

Amen.