



# ***The Healing Powers of Swimming and Secret Santas***

**Story by: Vicky Thomas, Director  
Services for Students with Disabilities  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

*Lives changed in March 2020. I celebrated my birthday March 12<sup>th</sup> and on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, our routines abruptly ended. Many of our favorite healing activities changed – time with friends and swimming for me. Friends stopped gathering and pools closed for swimmers.*

*Seven years ago, my husband and I began swimming laps at the YMCA pool. Our daughter wanted her wedding in our backyard with her father escorting her in his formal Army officer uniform. The pants had slightly shrunk since his retirement and he was determined to fit them. Together we committed to swimming, he fit into the pants, and we continued the routine. At my annual physical my nurse practitioner asked about my exercise, and when I shared our swimming plan, she added it to her routine and joined us in the pool in the early mornings.*

*Admittedly, getting up early and jumping into cold water wasn't always pleasant. Joining my husband and locker room mates provided some incentive, until the lockdowns. Our pool was closed for ten weeks, and when it reopened, we returned with excitement, willingly wearing masks, and socially distancing. The front desk staff and lifeguards were glad to see people. My nurse and another lady joined me in the locker room. But it was different than before. We were happy to be there, catch up with each other, return to our routines. When the holidays approached, my husband and I decided to expand our usual greeting card tradition with distant family and military friends, to our nearby neighbors and friends. We brought cards and Kind bars to the Y staff and shared photo cards with our swimmer friends.*

*The Kind bars must have worked. One morning someone brought in a huge Secret Santa box for a fellow swimmer. The front desk person asked us if we knew the last name of this Secret Santa swimmer, because she had asked her to take the box out to the Taxi that our fellow swimmer used each morning. The Secret Santa happened to be my nurse, so we told her the name. The front desk worker reacted, "No, I know the name of the person getting the gift – I want to know the name of the Secret Santa." We assured her that was her last name. She was surprised that both swimmers had the same last name, and it's not a common name.*

*The next day Secret Santa told me that she noticed that the name on the return label on our locker room friend's card was the same as her name. They unraveled the story and discovered that they were related. I was touched by the generosity of a Secret Santa and the coincidence that connected two friends who were truly family. In pandemic times perhaps such coincidences have deeper meaning. It was the simple everyday things shared with others that provided healing for me – Kind bars, friends, and swimming.*

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**Artist: Erin Hisey, Assistant Professor  
Department of Music and Theatre Arts  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

**View all the pieces in the *Healing Reflections* [online gallery](#).**