

## Ralya Ragin, Mercer Class of 2020

In this edition of Caspersen Rowing Center Happenings, we are profiling Ralya Ragin, a member of the Mercer Rowing Class of 2020. Ralya has been a member of Mercer Rowing for 4 years, her entire high school career. Currently, Ralya continues working out with her Mercer teammates in a virtual environment including fun zoom calls and their continued intense team workouts.

Mercer builds a strong, connected community and Ralya has relied on her teammates for support, including the push to achieve more, especially to pull a faster erg piece. Until this pandemic, she thought that she needed her team physically around her to make that happen, as it had so many times over the past 4 years. In fact, what Ralya has learned about herself speaks volumes about her maturity, work ethic and the impact of Mercer Rowing in her life.



Last week Ralya surprised herself by pulling a 2k on her own and achieving a Personal Record (the coveted PR for short). Listening to Ralya tell the story, it's clear that all of her hard work over her rowing career is now internalized and she has more resolve than ever to be her best. She's incredibly proud and excited to be headed to Monmouth University (West Long Branch, NJ) in the fall to major in Marine Biology. Monmouth U doesn't have rowing but they do have water. Ralya will be taking the skills and life lessons gained at Mercer with her and is excited about new opportunities. She might even try surfing.



Ralya joined Mercer initially because her swim coach suggested that she try rowing during an off season. When she started as a novice, she felt welcome and bonded with teammates and coaches to find Mercer Rowing "like a home, a family" from the start. It turns out she really loved rowing from the first time she saw Mercer Lake. She is drawn to water. Going to college on the coast and majoring in Marine Biology is an extension of that love which has been nurtured through rowing.

Rowing has impacted Ralya in many important ways and she's grateful for the experience. She finds rowing test pieces really stressful but learned to disassociate from worrying about them and instead to focus on what she had to get done. She became better at school, too, thanks to the mental toughness she's learned at Mercer. Ralya figured out that if she was "in her head too much, it doesn't help anything", and found that "it's crazy how much a teammate or coach just telling you that you've got this makes a difference." Coach Matt instilled in her that "Every piece is a learning piece, use each one. You didn't fail, figure out what happened and how to move on. ***It's just another day in the office.***"

The Class of 2020 went to a virtual season this spring and faced challenges due to Coronavirus pandemic. Ralya described it this way, "We've been through a lot as a team but nothing like this. Even with all races cancelled, we're still finding a way to work hard, stay together and turn it into a positive. We knew we could accomplish great things together, but we as individuals can do remarkable things on

our own, too!" Remarkable accomplishments like pulling her best 2k erg score ever, in a room by herself.

Ralya misses her team in person and looks forward to a moment of togetherness with her MJR teammates before they head their separate ways in college. She is proud of all of their hard work and accomplishments and said, "We really did it." The sky is the limit for Ralya and the Class of 2020!

