

I DECIDED TO TAKE SWIMMING LESSONS IN THE EARLY MONTHS OF 2003. IT WAS A DIFFICULT DECISION AS I HAD NO EXPERIENCE AND A FEAR OF WATER FROM A VERY YOUNG AGE. IT WAS MORE THE FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN, AN UNCERTAINTY THAT MADE ME NERVOUS AND ANXIOUS. IT WAS ALSO THE FEAR OF DROWNING AND BEING IN DEEP WATER. EVEN THE SMELL OF CHLORINE MADE ME NERVOUS.

MY WHOLE APPROACH TO SWIMMING WAS RIDDLED WITH SELF-DOUBT. RATHER THAN EMBRACING AND ENJOYING IT, I DISMISSED IT AND DECIDED IT WAS TOO DIFFICULT. I KEPT THESE EMOTIONS WITHIN FOR A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF TIME AND NEVER DISCUSSED IT WITH ANYBODY. I SIMPLY AVOIDED GOING TO A POOL OR THE BEACH. FOR INSTANCE RIGHT THROUGH PRIMARY AND HIGH SCHOOL I POSTPONED LESSONS AND MADE EXCUSES. IF I WERE TO ATTEND CLASS, I DELIBRATELY LEFT MY GEAR BEHIND. POSTPONING LESSONS MADE IT WORSE, THE SELF DOUBT AND FEAR GREW. IT WAS A SNOW BALL EFFECT.

AT THE AGE OF 31 I THOUGHT I WAS TOO OLD TO EVEN CONSIDER PURSUING SOMETHING THAT HAD CURSED ME FOR SO LONG. HOWEVER I DECIDED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. I HAD TO CONVINCING MYSELF THAT THERE WAS NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT, AND THAT IT WAS MIND OVER MATTER.

THE FIRST STEP WAS MEETING PAUL NEWSOME WHO WAS TO BECOME MY SWIMMING INSTRUCTOR. PAUL ENCOURAGE ME FROM THE VERY BEGINNING. HOWEVER THERE HAD TO BE CONDITIONS. WE NEEDED TO USE A SMALL POOL, IT HAD TO BE SHALLOW, AND IT HAD TO BE A ONE ON ONE SESSION. THE POOL ALSO NEEDED TO BE ENCLOSED SO THAT ONLY PAUL AND I WERE VISIBLE. THIS WAS IMPORTANT FOR MY CONCENTRATION AND CONFIDENCE.

WE WERE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO FIND A HYDROTHERAPY POOL THAT CATERED OUR NEEDS. I DISTINCTLY REMEMBER THE FIRST LESSON. NERVES WERE THERE WELL BEFORE WE STARTED. HOWEVER I HAD FAITH. IT WAS THIS FAITH THAT WAS PERHAPS THE TURNING POINT. I REMEMBER ENTERING THE POOL EVER SO SLOWLY ALL THE TIME CAUTIOUS AND A LITTLE APPREHENSIVE. BUT I REALISED THAT BEING WAIST DEEP IN WATER WAS NOT A PROBLEM. THIS WAS AN EXERCISE IN GETTING FAMILIAR WITH A NEW ENVIRONMENT. PAUL WASN'T GOING TO ALLOW ME TO DO SOMETHING THAT WAS OUT OF MY LEAGUE.

IT TOOK A FEW LESSONS TO SETTLE IN BUT I STARTED TO FEEL CALM AND I STARTED TO LEARN THE BASICS. WE WERE ABLE TO BLOW BUBBLES, FIRST OUT OF WATER AND THAN ON THE SURFACE. PAUL WAS AN EXCELLENT GUIDE, ENCOURAGING, DEMONSTRATING, AND ACKNOWLEDGING MY LIMITS.

LEARNING WAS THAN PROGRESSIVE. FROM BLOWING SURFACE BUBBLES CAME THE NEXT BIG STEP. BEING ABLE TO PUT MY HEAD ENTIRELY IN THE WATER AND BLOW THE SAME BUBBLES. THAN CAME A NUMBER OF FUTHER PROGRESSIONS, SUCH AS MOVING IN WATER WITH SUPPORT, FIRST AS SIMPLE AS WALKING AND BLOWING BUBBLES AND THAN USING BOARDS JUST TO MOVE ALONG ALBEIT SLOWLY. WE WERE CONSTANTLY BLOWING BUBBLES, LEARNING HOW TO REGULATE BETWEEN AIR AND WATER.

AS THE FEAR WAS DISSAPEARING AND CONFIDENCE GROWING, WE WERE STARTING TO LEARN A NUMBER OF STROKES. THESE STROKES INCLUDED BACKSTROKE, BREAST STROKE, AND FREESTYLE. THEY HAVEN'T BEEN EASY AS THEY REQUIRE A CERTAIN TECHNIQUE AND RHYTHM. OUR MAJOR EMPHASIS IS FREESTYLE. IT'S THE MOST PRACTICAL STROKE AND IT'S ALLOWED ME TO CUT THROUGH THE WATER EASIER.

PAUL'S LESSONS ALSO INCLUDE A VARIETY OF OTHER SMALL DRILLS INCLUDING DEEP WATER SWIMMING, DIVING, DOLPHIN DIPS, AND LUNGES. ALL DRILLS HAVE BENEFITED SOME ASPECT OF MY SWIMMING. ONE OF THE MORE RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS HAS BEEN ABLE TO GO ALONE TO A POOL AND RECAP OVER WHATS BEEN TAUGHT. I REPLICATE THE LESSON AND ATTEMPT ALL STROKES. NERVES ARE OCCASIONALLY THERE AS I STILL FEAR SOMETHING MIGHT GO WRONG. HOWEVER IT'S MORE CAUTION THAN ANYTHING ELSE.

IT'S NOW BEEN APPROXIMATELY 2 YEARS SINCE THE DAY I STARTED AND I HAVEN'T LOOKED BACK. THE JOURNEY HASN'T BEEN EASY AND THERE HAVE BEEN DAYS WHEN I WANTED TO QUIT. HOWEVER IT'S A MATTER OF ERASING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AND FOCUSING ON THE CHALLENGE AHEAD. I KNEW I WOULD IMPROVE IF I PERSISTED. PERSISTANCE IS THE KEY AND TO NOT GET DISCOURAGED BY SETBACKS. AN INSTRUCTOR IS THERE TO HELP IF YOU DO GET BOOGED DOWN. PAUL FOR INSTANCE WOULD ALWAYS USE A NEW TECHNIQUE OR RECAP ON THE OLD THINGS IF I STRUGGLED.

I STRONGLY RECOMMEND ANYONE WHO CAN'T SWIM OR IS A WEAK SWIMMER TO REALLY CONSIDER LESSONS. IT'S NOT EASY BUT THE AMOUNT OF PERSONAL SATISFATION AND CONFIDENCE ONE GETS FROM CONQUERING THIS HURDLE IS ENDLESS. TALK TO AN INSTRUCTOR, FEAL COMFORTABLE WITH THEM, GET AN UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IS REQUIRED. CONQUER THE FEAR, HAVE FAITH, AND BE CONFIDENT. I'TS A MATTER OF GETTING OUT THERE AND SAYING YOU CAN DO IT.