

“In the Flow”

The UU Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes

March 17, 2019

**Time for All Ages: Musings on Swimming**  
**By Kathy Burnell**

I love swimming, but I hate getting wet! I feel so uncomfortable getting into chilly water. But when I'm the swimming teacher, I have to be brave to show the kids that getting used to the water just takes a little time, and everyone can do it! Some kids just jump right in, no matter how cold it is. Others like to get in bit by bit. (We're all different, aren't we?) When I was teaching swimming at Conway Lake in the summer, on an especially cold day we would sometimes have to play games, like “Bear and Shark”:

“Oh dear, I see a bear--everybody into the water” and I would lead a mad dash into the lake as far as my knees. “Oh no, now there's a shark in the water: everybody out! Run for the woods!” Then, “Help! Here comes the bear again: back in the water...” and so it went, in and out, until we were all wet from the running and splashing.

I love teaching swimming because, of course, it's important for all people to be safe around the water, but also, when you can swim you can experience the world of water that has been such a wonderful part of my life, ever since my early years, growing up in Hong Kong.

I remember the thrill of running and jumping off a pier into the ocean, screaming all the way through the air until we hit the water, and then carefully avoiding the sharp barnacles when getting back up.

I remember one time on a camping trip in high school while swimming at night every single movement in the water created a swoosh of thousands of green sparks. It was magical! I learned later that this is called phosphorescence. It only happens in certain places at certain times, and I was lucky enough to see it.

Another time I was in a bay, surrounded by small baby jellyfish, very colorful, with pinks and blues, not poisonous, just slimy!

More recently, when my sister and I swam across Aziscohos Lake, near Rangeley, ME, loons emerged very close to us and hung out for a while. Now, I have enjoyed trying not to disturb loons from a canoe, but there was something about being in the middle of a lake, with nothing but our human bodies, swimming in the world of the loons that has stuck with me, and would qualify as a “peak experience,” in my book.

What do all these experiences have in common? A connection to nature. That sense of awe that individuals experience in many different realms. You may not love the water as I do, but I'm sure each one of you could summon up “peak experiences” when asked to.

Swimming has taught me humility and the value of persistence. That hard work can lead to

swimming efficiently, relaxed and in rhythm. It wasn't always so. As a kid, I never had swimming lessons and so although I was totally comfortable in the water, my stroke techniques were not very good. However, in college, I took and passed a Red Cross Water Safety Instructor course, so when I got a fat envelope inviting me to be a coach in the Peace Corps in Morocco, I chose the sport of swimming (because the only sport I was actually qualified in--field hockey--wasn't an option.) One day in Morocco, as I was walking down the street,, I was surprised to overhear a conversation between some guys behind me: "Oh, there's that American swim coach. Her crawl stroke is pretty good, but her breaststroke is awful!" The truth hurts, but I already knew that, and I had already embarked on a lifelong quest to improve.

I'm still trying to improve. Even now, the quickest way I know to get my heart pumping is to attempt the butterfly stroke, and yet I have gotten good enough at it to revel in the diving, dolphin-like motion.

These moments illustrate how alive and joyful swimming makes me feel. Now, if I could only swim without having to get wet first!

### **Meditation** With Ingrid Albee

I invite you to get comfortable and close your eyes so you can visualize yourself in this guided meditation.

The day is so hot you sweat while sitting in the shade.  
In your mind, see your favorite swimming spot.  
Get on your bathing suit.  
You get yourself to that favorite place.  
You place your towel in a place where it is handy, won't get splashed on or sandy.  
You take off your sandals.

You get in the water, head included!  
Immediately, you feel the coolness.  
If it is not too frigid, you move in the water, feel it against your skin.  
You take a few strokes, easy and gentle while you enjoy relief from the heat.

The surface of the water is calm, the ripples from your body go out all around you; no motor boats, no other boats, not even anybody else. Just you and the water and what you see around you: mountains, trees, water striders. You hear a loon's call in the distance.

After a while you turn over and swim with your eyes to the sky and watch the clouds; you see them changing and find their shapes look like something out of a children's story book. A bald eagle is soaring, its bright white head and tail against blue in the sky.

You turn again and swim toward the white water lily. It has a sweet fragrance that you and the dragonflies go nuts over. The weeds tickle as they touch your legs and arms.

Ahh, finally the fragrance – breathe in through your nose and take it in – try to remember it and take it with you in your mind. When you think you can hold on to that fragrance, start to swim again – yellow pollen left on your nose.

You decide to head back doing the crawl; you get into a rhythm with your breathing and going side to side, your legs kicking continuously, each time you breathe out you hear the bubbles of your exhalation. It feels like time goes away as you are in this rhythm.

Before you know it, you are in shallow water. You pull yourself along, with your arms and hands on the pebbly bottom, getting as close to the shore as you can get before you stand up, climb up the shore, grab your towel and dry.

Your body now cooled for the rest of the day.

Open your eyes – you’re back at UUFES. I invite you to light a candle if you choose.

### **Swimming Against the Tide**

By Barbara Lubin

Several months ago, I read a sweet heartwarming novel by Libby Page, entitled *The Lido*. Do you know what a “lido” is? An open-air, public swimming pool. The term is used more in Europe it seems for these pools. The book is a fictionalized account of a real place, the Brockwell Lido outside London, and a real story about that pool. In the novel, there is an 80 something year old woman who, for most of her 80 years and for almost everyday of those years, swam at her local lido. And when I say everyday, I mean all year round – an OPEN to the elements pool! She made life long friends there, she met as a youngster the young man she later married and she enjoyed seeing the young families and little children enjoying the pool too.

Alas, the lido was failing to stay profitable enough to sustain itself and the town council was looking for a buyer of the property. A developer was on the horizon that would turn it into a resort with a “guests only” pool usage. A profits over people solution. The older woman was dismayed as she recalled the closing of the local public library during a time she worked there.

Along comes a 20-something journalist from the big city, with issues of her own: panic attacks, low self-esteem, to cover the story of the lido’s closing. The older woman convinces the younger one that swimming will ease her anxieties, and soon the young journalist becomes immersed in the story and with the locals. She takes it upon herself to stage a protest sit-in by barricading herself in the clubhouse of the lido for the last days it will remain open.

The older woman, feeling she hadn’t done enough to stop the library closing earlier in her life, decides to take action of her own. With the help of a college student who works at the check-in counter of the lido, she reaches out to several corporations about investing in the public pool with advertising, good for the corporation’s image of good will and good for the local community.

Now to the factual account of the Brockwell Lido. It opened in 1937, struggled but stayed open during WWII, then declined in usage and was closed in 1990 by the local Council as a cost-saving measure. It remained closed until 1994, when two former Council employees won a contract to manage the lido.

Here's a quote of those two people: "It was a time when we let as many things happen as possible just for fun, not necessarily making money, giving people a chance to try things out." Well, mounting maintenance costs forced the closure again in 2001. This sparked a campaign by local swimmers who got over 4,000 signatures on a survey of lido visitors supporting the pool. That year the Brockwell Lido Users group (BLU) was formed as a pressure group to save the Lido. With the backing of over 1,000 local Lido lovers and swimmers, the BLU demonstrated to the Council the passion that local people in the community had for their Lido.

A steering committee partly made up of the BLU set out to find investors to save and preserve the Lido for future generations. Fusion Lifestyle won a 25-yr contract, had the Evian logo painted on the bottom of the pool with an investment ultimately for 3 mil British pounds and a ½ mil from the English Heritage foundation. Improvements were made over the years and now the Brockwell Lido remains open 7 days a week all year round for those who enjoy cold water swimming. Membership is not required, it is pay as you use. People won over profits.

This week many of us learned of another example of Swimming Against the Tide. Sixteen year old Swedish activist Greta Thunberg became an inspiration for youth climate protests in cities around the world. Last summer, Greta began staging sit-ins outside the Swedish Parliament every Friday making the case that investors in her country were putting "profits before planet" and not considering the long term effects of climate change: economic inequity that leads to wars. Surely you have seen the images of tens of thousands of students, too young to vote, cutting classes on Friday to march peacefully in the streets and gather at the State legislative buildings.

First, I thought they are swimming against the tide. But then, I said, Wait! The ARE the tide! They are the tide.

### **Reflection**

By Ingrid Albee

The summer of 2015: I made a commitment and a challenge to myself to get in the water every day. Why? To see if I could do it. I was inspired by a friend who had done it. So I wouldn't get to fall and feel like I had missed opportunities to enjoy the water. Well, I did it.

Most often I'd go early in the morning. While I drove my car to Chocorua Lake, I had Edvard Grieg's Holberg Suite blasting through the speakers. I'd conduct the Praeludium with one hand and drive with the other, anticipating my favorite parts of energetic piece of music "Allegro vivace." Got me psyched to get in the water.

Already dressed in my bathing suit, I'd go in without hesitation and swim for about 45 minutes, dry myself off including getting off my wet bathing suit, wrap myself in a towel and drive home – again listening to Holberg's suite.

I often dunked myself in the really cold Swift River, a quick walk near our house. BURR!! But so invigorating! Private, no need for a suit.

A few times I swam with a friend across White Lake. We'd do the breaststroke so we could easily talk about our lives. These swims went by quickly. We kept our eyes out for loons, as once while swimming she had been attacked by a loon beating her with its wings.

Once I swam with Kathy Burnell. She is a fast swimmer and I breathed hard to keep up!

One hot day my plans to go hiking got changed – I had a whole day with no plan! I started swimming and the water was so nice I just kept going. Two and a half hours later I got out having swum along the shore around Chocorua Lake.

I'd swim before and/or after work from Albee beach on Lake Wentworth, thankful to the family who'd given this beautiful sandy beach for public enjoyment. Now there is even a bathhouse and toilets and outdoor shower!

I'd swim in Great East Lake at the family summer cottage. This is where I first learned to swim. The water is soft and clean. More algae is blooming perhaps due to warming climate...

I only did this swimming everyday for one summer, but every summer I do get in the water almost every day! Why? For me, being in the water and swimming at a leisurely pace is so pleasurable and easy, no stress on my joints. I am buoyant!

Immersion in this elemental water from which my evolutionary predecessors emerged brings me thoughts of birth and of death: birth from the waters of my mother's womb and the possibility of death from drowning. I have been witness to the bodies of two 15-year-old boys who tragically drowned: the image of their unblemished young bodies now lifeless; the swish of water in their lungs as we compressed their chests; the mother's wail. Life is fragile ... I'm reminded to be careful.

When I get out of the water I feel so refreshed. My body has cooled and this coolness stays with me, physically for a time and mentally whenever I recall the feeling of being in the water.

I think of my baptism in the Christian community – Grace Lutheran Church where I grew up and felt loved by others in my church family. For me, baptism (and water) reminds me that I am loved and am called to share that love with the world.

As I have prepared for today, I have had a lot of enjoyment recalling many memorable swims and events connecting water and my life. Some of them make me laugh – like the time I was a camper doing the mandatory swim test on opening day at Camp Calumet. I was wearing a pink, terry cloth bikini that my mother had made. I dove in confidently, but immediately felt my

bathing suit slip to my knees! Embarrassed, I pulled them up, if anyone noticed, they didn't let on!

Summer will come – there will be hot days. I hope you will find enjoyment and refreshment for yourself in the clean, cool waters we are so blessed to live near. Outdoor swimming is my favorite present from summer.

*A warm thank-you to the Sunday Service Committee for conjuring up this service as part of our water-y March and to Shana Aisenberg for collaborating on today's music – and especially to Margaret Rieser for making all come together: inviting and coordinating the speakers, putting together the order of service and holding the space for all on Sunday morning ~ Rev. Betsy*

Margaret's 3/18 thanks to Kathy, Ingrid and Barbara:

Thank you so much for your participation in our Sunday service. I love the way multi-person services come together. While all the parts are thoughtful, passionate and amazing, the way they come together to form a whole, with the various parts resonating and echoing and deepening each other always knocks my socks off.

I thought it was a stunning counterpoint to the grief resulting from the mass shooting [in New Zealand], and speaking for myself, helped me cope with my word- and help-lessness.

I spent yesterday afternoon tracking raccoons, mink, fishers and maybe otter (!) along an icy but defrosting, sparkling brook, thinking about and imagining the joy of moving through water. Such a life force.

Thank you all!