

A Seasoned Swimmer in One Easy Lesson

Paul C. Semenchuk

When I was growing up in the Niagara Peninsula in Southern Ontario, nobody gave us farm boys swimming lessons. Either you learned on your own or you didn't swim. The day came when I, apparently, learned to swim. Well...sort of. At the time, I wasn't thinking so much about learning to swim as simply getting off the bottom of Lake Ontario and joining the church group on dry land.

I was seven, so the well-meaning deacon who tossed me into deep water must have assumed I knew how to swim. He probably saw me fearlessly frolicking in the shallower water and thought I could handle deeper water. He was playing with other children, and I was just one more kid to throw into water well over my head. Having done so, he obviously didn't bother to see if I came up. No one else was paying any particular attention to me, either.

My parents were on shore, chatting with friends in the shade of a user-friendly old oak tree. And, besides, they knew I could take care of myself. At least, I must have given them that impression. At seven years of age, I was still alive, wasn't I? Anyway, that day, I didn't disappoint them. To be more accurate, they didn't know what happened or what nearly happened to me. I never told them. It didn't seem all that earth-shaking at the time. An inconsequential underwater event - nothing to dampen anyone's spirits.

Well, let me see. Where was I? Oh, yes, while I was explaining my parents' location to you, I forgot about my own - the bottom of Lake Ontario. When I opened my eyes, I could see the gray sand right under me and that's about all. The visibility distance was a murky few feet.

When it finally dawned on me that the dear brother knew only how to throw children into the water, I quickly came to the conclusion that I was not to expect anything further from him. So, what were my options? Lifeguards didn't exist in those days, at least not at our primitive, idyllic setting. I knew that the Coast Guard occasionally cruised the shoreline. But I was sure they had no knowledge of my whereabouts or, for that matter, of my existence.

I realized that I was running out of options, if not time. By the way, all of this submerged reasoning was going on with a complete absence of panic or even concern on my part. (I thought of my "Rain Barrel" experience.) In fact, I was thinking that this was an entirely new experience for me. I was fascinated by the unique circumstances, but I also felt I should rejoin the group for sociability's sake.

It didn't seem right to prolong my disappearance any further. Although all of these thoughts were going through my head, it really didn't take as long as you might think. *It just takes time to tell.*

But which way should I head? Propelling my hands and feet the best way I knew how, I headed in the direction of muffled voices. Soon, I saw feet and ankles and legs, and I knew I had made the right move.

The only disappointing aspect of this entire episode was that when I finally poked my head above water among the bathers, and then when I waded to shore, it was clear that no one had missed me. *Hey! I could have drowned!* But I didn't tell anyone. Besides, how many of them would have believed a seven-year-old's near-watery-grave story? How many of them would have bothered to listen? I'm telling you, because I believe you believe. Well...at least you listen. And that in itself is commendable.