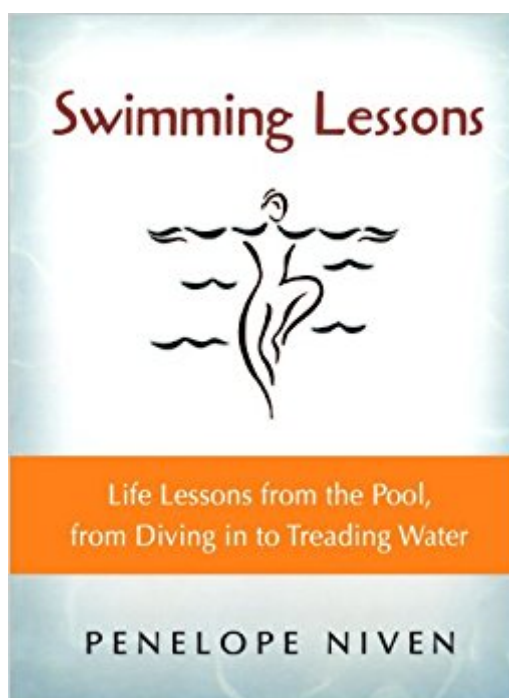


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Swimming Lessons: Life Lessons From The Pool, From Diving In To Treading Water



Synopsis

At age forty-four, Penelope Niven was at a turning point in her life. In need of a change for both body and spirit, she decided to learn how to swim. While discovering the restorative effect of the water, she also began to notice that the lessons she was learning in the pool drew remarkable parallels with the lessons of life. The way in which you first get into the water, for example, is similar to trying anything new—you can jump in feet first, or dive in headfirst, but first you have to have some idea of what you're actually getting into. From floating to treading water, forward strokes to the backstroke, *Swimming Lessons* combines the familiar lessons of swimming with personal anecdotes and apt observations to stirring effect. Sensible, touching, and personal, this appealing book will be invaluable to any reader facing a life change or simply looking for a little bit of inspiration. A Harvest Original

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Biographer Niven uses her later-in-life swim training as a metaphor to structure this affectionate, if sometimes unfocused, rulebook for living. "As I found myself middle-aged and simultaneously being outfitted with braces and bifocals," she writes, "it came to me that I had nothing to lose" by learning to swim. Starting from simply getting into the water—one can jump in feet first, dive headlong or tentatively slide in, she notes—and moving on to floating, swim strokes and, finally, swimming alone and in the ocean, the author discovered that modern life and swimming hold parallel lessons. Niven's interweaves her newfound wisdom with words from her favorite writers and biographical subjects (Carl Sandburg, Thornton Wilder), her upbringing in tiny Waxhaw, North Carolina, and her

subsequent years as a wife, mother, divorcée and writer who only signed her first book contract in her 40s. Since overcoming her anxieties about water led her to simultaneously dive into her dream of writing, she includes intriguing writing prompts following each chapter. Many of her anecdotes are enjoyable reading, such as her parents' hospital bed feud over whether to be cremated or buried, or Aunt Geneva Walkup Rone's belief in a world map that contains only four places: "Heaven. Hell. Waxhaw. And Off Somewhere." Niven is occasionally over-jubilant in celebrating her daughter's insights or her father's dignity and good humor; a few well-chosen quotes would do better than the constant adoration. Still, the book, like Niven's preferred backstroke, "forces the vision upward" and will inspire readers. With b&w illustrations. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

This inspirational collection of musings draws significant parallels between learning to swim and facing a variety of challenging life situations. Learning to swim at age 44, Niven was immediately struck by the "profound life lessons embodied in the principles of swimming." Initially getting into the water is akin to undertaking any new endeavor, from a new job to a new marriage; learning to float in the water is as necessary and fulfilling as learning to open yourself up to joy, trust, and hope. As she explores the inherent similarities between life and swimming, she offers some practical self-help tips for those struggling to navigate the often-turbulent waters of everyday life. This delightfully original primer is recommended for those attempting to tread water both in and out of the pool. Margaret Flanagan Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

My mother really enjoyed this book and thought it had some good insight.

Wonderful expression of life lessons

A wonderful book! A great author. We will miss her!

With *Swimming Lessons*, biographer Penelope Niven has proven that not only can she get at the heart of other people's stories but also that she herself is as interesting a subject as anyone she has written about--maybe more so. And as with her many other superb books, *Swimming Lessons* is written in her signature lyrical style but with the added personal bonus of her generous good humor. I have found myself repeatedly re-reading passages of it for the sheer beauty of the language or for the ready smile it brings to my soul. For example, Niven advises us to "Learn the constructive art of

Checking Baggage." After listing the numerous kinds of bags she routinely takes on vacation, she says, "When I go swimming, I take my purse and a large swimming bag bursting with items I consider essential for preparing to swim, swimming, showering after swimming, and dressing to go home after swimming. I would not think of setting off on a trip or a swim without all my stuff. But I certainly would not think of carrying all my stuff every moment I am traveling or swimming. I load my luggage and shopping bags and cooler in the car. I lock my swimming gear in the locker in the dressing room."You don't have to carry all of your baggage all of the time. You can't. If you spend all your energy hauling the baggage around, you'll be too exhausted to move forward, or even to float. Check the baggage. Compartmentalize... I can't swim and, at the same time, carry my towel, my clothes, my shampoo, my hair dryer, and my car keys. I can't write with all my mind and heart and, at the same time, focus on my concerns about my parents' health; my daughter's grief over her father's death; my grief over his death; my brother's ongoing recovery from a stroke; my students' struggles to get into graduate school, get published, get jobs; and my world's struggle for peace, prosperity, justice, survival. When I write, I write...When I swim, I swim. I entrust the other endeavors of my life to the safety of the locker."Furthermore, it is Niven's so-called "overjubilance" that strikes a fresh chord in our discordant world, post 9-11. We should be so lucky that there is at least one among us who has the good sense to go overboard with her love and enthusiasm.Do something good for yourself. If you can't quit smoking, then at least read this book. You'll be overjoyed you did.

helpful

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