

# The Windswept Journal

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## Ask

I wasn't afraid of the water, not exactly. I went with my family to the beach at the state park and was always the first to walk out into the lake. In up to my waist, I'd squat down till my chin touched the water. I scuttled around on my knees and pretended I was swimming. I dared not go farther out. Soon the other kids came up and passed me as they headed into deeper water, shouting and playing out where the waves formed. Not me. I couldn't swim. But I wanted to learn.

It was such a simple problem. I could have asked the neighborhood boys to give me a few pointers, to let them teach me to swim at the public pool. I thought of asking Billy, a boy close to my age. He might be the friendliest of the group. But Billy spent all his spare time in his basement, a dingy place I didn't like.

I could ask George, the leader of the neighborhood kids. He was certainly the strongest and the loudest. But George wasn't easily approachable because he was often larger than life.

George had the habit of heroically describing himself in the third person, using a voice like that of a radio announcer.

While making the play in a ball game, he would narrate: "George is dropping back, way back, he's got the ball. He's got it." The announcing of his feats was not limited to baseball. He helped his older brother deliver newspapers.

"George rolls up the newspaper and tucks it into the shape of a rocket. George winds up, swings around and lobs the paper up on the second floor porch. Perfect Throw! Customer Satisfaction!"

Or even making a sandwich for a sibling. "George is laying down the peanut butter at a perfect right angle to the next layer of jelly. Flip! Slap! A perfect slice down the middle and served on a paper plate to a grateful little sister. Customer Satisfaction!"

George shaped his mouth into a large "O" and forced his breath out to make the

most eerily life-like sound of a pleased crowd at the stadium roaring their approval.

I suppose I could have asked any of the kids ... but the truth was that I would ask no one. Asking for help showed I didn't know something. I was supposed to be the smartest kid in my neighborhood for my age and among the smartest at school. I read book after book, everything that passed under my nose. I did well in my classes, had an encyclopedic mind and could spell with the best of them. Effortlessly, numbers stayed in my head. I was a walking telephone directory for friends and family and was worth having around if you needed to make a lot of calls. But those were the only endeavors at which I excelled. I played ball but not very well. No one ever wanted me on their team. In bicycle or foot races and any other competitive activity calling for strength and stamina I did poorly. My intellect was the only thing I possessed that brought me honor and praise. I seemed to know everything. I had to know everything because I had nothing else going for me. My currency was knowledge, and although I was probably unaware of it, I was attempting to build my own island made from books.

The year before, 1952, all of us boys in the neighborhood tried out for Little League. My turn at bat was seared into my memory. I couldn't bat even a slow ball pitched to me by a kindly man who was trying to save me from death by embarrassment at my first and last baseball practice. I stood at home plate swinging at each pitch as the ball apparently disappeared or moved away from me every time I swung the bat. Everybody laughed at me. I mean everybody, even a few parents. George finally came up to the plate and pulled the bat out of my hands. He got away with it because the adults were glad to see the show end and let me slink away to the bench. Ordinarily I could swing on a ball and hit it. Not under pressure, however, and of course not very far. I promised myself it would be the last time I allowed myself to be seen failing. After that, not wanting to appear stupid or naive prevented me from asking for help for a long time.

So, not surprisingly, I didn't seek any assistance in my neighborhood about anything. I didn't show weakness. Instead, I used my strengths to help me in my quest. I used my head. But after all, it was only the head of a ten year old.

Still, I was far from dumb. At ten years old I had top honors in the fourth grade and just before summer vacation I finished a paper for extra credit on the Great Inventors of All Time. I wrote of men who had forged new paths to knowledge and brought about our modern world, who had improved the lives of countless millions in the centuries to follow. Surely I could apply myself successfully to the problem at hand.

Soon a plan of attack occurred to me. I'd teach myself to swim. It couldn't be all that difficult to discover the secrets of staying on the top of the water. Lots of animals and little kids knew how to do it. I'd use the Scientific Method, just like Pasteur, Marconi and the Wright Brothers. From hypothesis and observation to ... I can't remember what came after them ... I should certainly be able to work out the details.

First I would do the basic research. It would all be from books, of course, except for a conversation with my father. He would never laugh at me. He never laughed at anything.

"How can I learn to swim, Dad?" I said to him as he sat in our living room and read his newspaper.

"We're Irish," he said. "We don't swim."

"Why not, Dad?"

From behind his newspaper he said, "I never tried, to be honest. But we're solid built, very thick bodied and we don't float." He lowered the paper and looked at me. "Besides, the Irish were seafarers, and sailors never learn to swim."

"They don't?"

"No," he said. "If your ship went down, you'd just prolong the agony of dying."

"How do you mean?" I said.

"Well, you'd be swimming around out there on the ocean for half an hour worrying about it. And *then* you'd drown. Best to get it over with, I think."

"You mean just die if our ship goes down?"

"Sure," he said. "Gotta go sometime."

"I wouldn't want to die."

"Then don't get on a ship," he said.

I didn't tell him many of the kids in our neighborhood were Irish and they all swam like sea otters.

I followed up with a close study of the chapter on water in my Cub Scout Handbook and then I rode my bike to the library to search for more information. As I walked through the large brass doors into the main hall of the century old building, it occurred to me I was standing in the most comfortable place on earth for me. I couldn't quite recapture the urgency to learn about swimming. I'd have rather stayed cooped up back among the shelves of books all day long. Especially now that the librarian allowed me free reign of the complete library.

"You're supposed to be in the Children's Room, young man," said a new librarian I didn't recognize when she caught me in the Medical Section under the sign, "Adults Only."

"I couldn't find anything about swimming there," I said, "except for water safety rules."

“What more did you want at your age?”

“I'm learning to swim,” I admitted.

“You should take lessons.”

“I am ... sort of.”

She leaned over me and saw I had a medical dictionary open to a page showing a naked female torso. She put her hand over the image.

“And what does this have to do with swimming, young man?”

“I was in 'S' looking for 'Swimming.’”

“No, you're not. You're in 'R.' 'Reproduction.’”

“I mean I'm in 'R' looking for 'S.’”

“How about you go looking for the Children's Room again?”

But I was finished with the books. What the Scientific Method called “a review of the literature” had not been very helpful, except for what I'd learned about Reproduction. Someday that information might come in handy. However, it was now time to move my study to the field for a series of observations.

Most mornings during the summer the boys from my neighborhood headed out Burrstone Road to the public swimming pool about a mile away. They wound their swim suits up in towels and tucked the rolls under their arms. I waited ten minutes and then mounted my bicycle to follow them.

The pool sat behind a 1930's Art Deco style building with a high fluted clock tower above the main door. The tower rose majestically on one end of a rectangular grassy park that rolled down to a baseball diamond at the other end. Wide paved walkways ran through the grass in the center of the park. Along the front of the property a fairly busy street was marked by huge pot holes. On the way to the pool, I could hear tires slam into them from time to time. Along the back of the park was a patch of woods with maple and oak trees.

I crossed a strip of grass and climbed up one of the maple trees to overlook the pool. There I could hear the splashes and shouts drift my way as I spied upon the neighborhood boys. Mostly they jumped from the diving boards and swam to a ladder no more than twenty or thirty feet away, repeating the process over and over. I kept an eye on the entire pool, too, from the shallow water where the little ones hung out to the deep end that got most of my attention. I hoped to figure out how the swimmers were able to move through the water without sinking.

Their arms and legs appeared to help them to swim when moved in certain ways.

The method looked easy enough. But I wondered if there was more to swimming than met the eye. I wanted to know as much as possible before I jumped into water over my head.

After watching people in the water a couple of days from my perch among the leafy limbs, I had no reason to doubt I had discovered everything there was to know about staying afloat. I decided to put my knowledge down on paper and call it my Theory of Swimming. I got the first part of the name from a book I'd read called The Theory of Rain. The well illustrated book was for older children and was about a boy who thought he could predict the weather. The story was supposed to have been written by a youngster like myself and the author offered sure-fire methods for weather forecasting. Each time I used them I predicted only tornadoes and hurricanes ... usually every week. Never a spring shower or light snow ending by morning, only calamity. No one believed me, and eventually I didn't believe the forecasts either. Almost every time I followed the book's flowchart while I observed the cloud type, wind speed and direction, temperature and month of the year, the answer came out, "Tornado: Take Shelter Now," or "Hurricane: Bring lawn chairs indoors."

From my fourth grade extra credit project I knew how to construct a proper report of a new scientific finding. Of course, swimming was new only to me. Here was my Theory of Swimming, the complete edition.

**I. Hypothesis:** a human being can swim if he finds himself in deep water and moves his arms and legs in the correct way, and the waves are not too high.

**II. Observations:** After three days of sitting in a tree and observing the local swimming pool, this is what I saw in each area of the pool.

**II.1. Shallow part of pool.** Mostly little kids here. They weren't swimming. Once in a while a big kid got in and ignored the little kids. The water came to about halfway between his knees and waist. Why he was there I don't know, but I guessed he was practicing to swim. In fact, I think it was the same kid on three different days. Anyway, he fell forward into the water and seemed to push off with his feet. He made swimming motions with his arms and legs and swam about twenty feet each time.

**II.2. Middle part of pool.** Water about four feet deep. Mostly junior high school kids here. Boys tried to push girls under water and were thrown out of pool by lifeguard. Stupid, but it kinda looked like fun. No one even tried to swim. I don't know if that's because they had other interests or because of the water's depth. More on that later.

**II.3. Deep end of pool.** Water about 16 feet deep under the diving boards. Here everyone is swimming (and not drowning.) They jump off the diving board and land under water at the bottom of the pool, and then come back up and swim to a ladder and

climb out of the water. They do this over and over. No one jumps in the water from the side of the pool, only from the diving boards. More about that later.

**III. Impressions.** I saw the same kind of stuff every day. Some boys wanted to swim, but most just kept cannon-balling into the pool from the sides in the four foot section. Girls my age and older sunned themselves by the side of the pool or got in the water, where they stood and waited for boys to drown them. They screamed, but not in a way where anyone believed they were really worried. Kids swam at the deep end and one kid swam at the shallow end. No one swam in the middle. I suspect they can't. I mean my theory is that humans can swim in shallow or deep water, but not in between, although I'm not sure why. And I also suspect that in the deep end, people can swim only if they use the diving board.

**IV. Progress:** I should be able to swim with success if I use the following method, now and forever to be called The Me Method. Here it is:

1. Get in the water.
2. Push off with feet braced against something.
- 3a. Get entire body up on the surface of the water.
- 3b. Do not let legs sink.
4. Push forward with feet.
5. Use arms and hands to pull water out of your way and behind you.
6. Keep kicking legs and feet

That was it. I now knew how to swim, even though I hadn't tried it yet. But I had figured it out. Pretty much.

I wrote my paper during the heat of a July afternoon as I lay in a favorite spot under the huge old lilac bushes in our back yard. The slightest breeze rustled the leaves and helped the air to sound cooler. Over and over I pictured my arms and legs moving while I pushed the water behind me and zoomed ahead in the pool. Admittedly, Step 3a., getting my body up on the surface, was a little hazy and I wasn't sure how to do it. But I reminded myself of the feats of great men I had read about for my extra credit paper. Most had not worked out all the details when they embarked on their journeys to fame and fortune. Alexander Bell hadn't envisioned long distance telephone calls when he shouted, "Watson, come here. I need you." Thomas Edison was just playing around with a needle and a cone of paper when he invented the phonograph. Even a ten year old saw courage mattered as much as knowledge or vision. The trick was not to be afraid, I told myself. I looked down the line of lilac bushes strung along the

driveway behind the house down to the decrepit old garage my father never put his car in. He was afraid the building would fall down some night in a windstorm, his car the first victim. Dad was always afraid of something.

The next day, I decided to test out The Me Method of Swimming. I waited until later in the morning when I knew the local boys would not be at the pool. I took one of the older towels from our bathroom, wrapped it around my swimming trunks and headed through the kitchen toward the back door. My mother stopped me and asked where I was going.

“Swimming,” I said with a practiced look of innocence on my face.

“Do you know how to swim?” she asked.

“Yes,” I said, “I’ve been studying it. I’m going over to the pool to practice.”

Mom came across the kitchen and put her arms around me. A short woman, she pulled me against her chest. I inhaled the wonderful smell of cinnamon for supper’s apple desert. “Promise me something,” she said. “Before you get in the water, tell the lifeguard what you’re doing and ask him to watch you.”

“OK, I will.”

“And practice swimming in the *shallow* end of the pool.”

“OK, I will.”

“This is important,” she said softly. “If you find you can’t swim, ask for help.”

I gently pushed away from her and left the kitchen, going out the back door without comment.

The pool was behind the clock tower building and was surrounded by a tall wire fence. I’d never been inside the building or the pool. This was it, I told myself. Do or die, although I certainly didn’t want the latter. It occurred to me to wonder why anyone really needed to swim. I supposed I could stay off boats and never have to worry about drowning. Or sail away without being able to swim. After all, people traveled on airplanes and they couldn’t flap their arms and fly. Still, knowing how to swim might be useful. But then again, I could slip in the bath tub some day, knock my head, pass out and drown in the tub. Knowing how to swim wouldn’t help in that case.

I looked up in the sky. Maybe a storm was coming and another day might be better for throwing myself into deep water. There wasn’t a cloud in sight, but a storm with thunder and lightning could still come up at any moment and make swimming dangerous. I had worked the Theory of Rain flowchart yesterday and it said a hurricane might soon be bearing down on us. Oh, what was the use? I couldn’t get out of the promise I had made to myself to learn to swim at any cost. The Theory of

Rain was wrong. I didn't need to worry about a hurricane. My Theory of Swimming wasn't wrong. It had to be right. I couldn't think of any reason why it wasn't right.

I walked through the brass plated front door and a pretty teenaged girl asked for a dime and shoved a wire basket at me. I joined a line of boys and followed them. Soon I was in a room where they were getting undressed and putting their trunks on. I watched them closely so I'd know what to do. They put their clothing into the basket and headed out another door. I did the same and came to a counter where an attendant handed me a brass tag on a wrist band to wear. He reached for my basket.

I didn't let go. I remembered I'd brought my Roy Rogers Secret Decoder Ring with me that wrote underwater. I had seen the offer on the back of a cereal box and immediately became enthralled with the idea of writing notes to my aunt and cousins while sitting underwater. Of course they'd be short messages. I didn't have the lung capacity for a long letter. My older brother suggested I just fill the kitchen sink and hang over it while I breathed and wrote as long a letter as I wanted.

"And as long as you're there, do the dishes," he said.

But that couldn't compare to the idea of actually sending Aunt Martha and the girls a note from beneath the surface of the public swimming pool ... after I dried out the paper.

"Wait," I said to the teenaged attendant. "I need to get my ring out of my pants."

"No jewelry allowed in the pool, kid."

"But I need to get it. It writes underwater."

He pulled the basket from my grasp. "Move along, Shakespeare."

The teenager put my basket up on a shelf with the others. The boy behind me pushed on my back and I was shoved away from the counter.

Following the line of boys, I came next to a tiled room where ten shower heads were arranged five on a side. Ten boys at a time, we each stood under the shower and pulled a chain descending from high on the wall. The water was brutally cold as it cascaded down on my head and shoulders. I immediately bolted from under the stream, but a fat old guy in a T-shirt and green janitor pants pushed me back and made every one of us stay under the shower until the stream ended automatically in half a minute.

I followed the line of boys and began to hear the shouting and splashing of a few hundred over-excited youngsters jumping around in the water. I was getting scared again. I wished I'd gone to the bathroom before I left the house, a reason to turn back now. Or hurry up and get in the water to relieve myself. Years later I'd hear the man who injected chemicals into the water looked out at the pool to judge the number of boys versus girls before determining the amount of chlorine powder to wallop down the pipe.

Up ahead at the front of the line, a doorway led outside to the pool. A teenage lifeguard was asking each boy to spread his toes, for what I didn't know. I looked down

at my feet. Whatever the next test was, if my toes flunked I could go home and forget about this swimming thing. Something about The Me Method of Swimming was beginning to bother me and now I felt I'd be much more comfortable at home reading my Cub Scout Handbook for a third time. It was always more comfortable to read about something rather than do it. Maybe in the calmness of a sunny morning out on the front porch in an old wooden rocker the haziness of step 3a.. would clear up and a solution present itself. I still wasn't sure how to get my body up to the surface of the water.

My toes passed the test and I was outside. The noise was ear-splitting ... kids screaming and jumping into a pool already filled to the brim with other children. I thought of the Bible scene where Moses and all the people of Israel ran or were chased into Red Sea and were trying to move ahead to the far shore. Here in the pool, nobody went anywhere. The kids just kept getting out and jumping back in. A few of the younger children cried for reasons known only to them. Most of the kids my age were laughing and some coughed water up from their lungs. There was a great deal of what my grandmother called "carrying on." Hundreds of us were under the care of a few 15 and 16 year old lifeguards.

Although I had convinced myself I could swim ... theoretically ... I decided to follow Mom's suggestion about starting at the shallow end of the pool. I mimicked the boy I'd seen swimming here the past few days. In water that came almost to the top of my thighs, I fell forward, pushed off with my feet and made swimming motions with my arms and legs. Eureka! I swam a few feet. I was elated. I had figured out how to swim. All by myself. I fell into the shallow water and swam again. And again.

I swam over to the middle section of the pool, pulled up and settled down on my feet. Water lapped over my shoulders and under my chin. I was surrounded by junior high school boys and girls. The boys were still trying to push the girls under, as they had been doing for three days so far. Sure enough, no one was swimming here. I moved away from them and tried to swim. My observation had been swimming was impossible in four feet of water, because no one could get their body up to the surface. So, Step 3a. of my Method wasn't working here in this section of the pool, and now I was beginning to understand why my legs kept sinking, why swimming in four feet of water was impossible for humans.

I waded over to a ladder and got out of the pool, then walked down to the deep end to watch the kids. No one jumped in the deep end from the sides of the pool, only from the boards. That was a big clue to support my theory, and only later did I notice the sign forbidding such jumps to avoid mid-air collisions with those diving from the boards.

After watching the divers for a while, something became abundantly clear to me. Swimming must depend on first falling forward into the water and then using your

arms and legs. Down in the shallow end of the pool I was already above the surface of the water, standing as I fell forward and swam. In the four foot section, no one could swim because they couldn't fall forward and get their legs up on the surface. Up here in the deeper section I could jump from the diving board and then burst out of the water and ascend high enough to fall forward and swim. It was all about starting from above the surface! It was the diving board that got a person that high in the deep end of the pool. Evidently, that was its purpose. From the board I'd jump high in the air, rocket to the bottom of the pool, bounce back up with a push of the legs and explode out of the water like a ballistic missile launched from a submarine, high enough to fall forward and swim. I figured no one was jumping from the side of the pool, because it didn't provide the momentum needed to come very far out of the water. I quickly looked down the length of the pool to confirm this discovery. Sure enough, at that moment, one little kid was swimming in the shallow end of the pool and no one was swimming in the 4 foot section. Kids jumped off the board and surfaced here at the deep end and swam to the ladder. That sewed it up for me.

**V. Conclusion, Theory of Swimming: It is possible to swim in shallow water, not possible in four feet of water, and possible in deep water only with a diving board.**

Today such faulty thinking astounds me and I can list a number of observational and logical mistakes almost no normal person would make, except a ten year old kid trying to convince himself he could learn to swim without anyone's help.

Across the pool I spotted George. I didn't see the other boys and assumed they had come and gone home earlier in the morning. I wondered what he was doing here. It was hard not to like George, frankly. Except for grabbing the bat away from me, he had never been nasty to me. He'd become a star Little League shortstop in the past year and I was in awe of his baseball playing ability. George was always at the top of his league. I hoped in a few moments he'd see me swimming fabulously across the water to the ladder and running back to the diving board for another jump. I fervently hoped that's what I'd be doing, brushing aside a vision of my lifeless body carried to a waiting ambulance.

I headed for the diving boards, trying to not look obvious. I was sure I had this swimming thing figured out.

"There he is," I said to myself in a deep announcer's voice, "moving toward the deep end of the pool."

I looked left and right, afraid someone would stop me.

"Some kids steal second base," said the announcer, "but this strikingly handsome young lad looks like he's about to steal an entire diving board! Whaddya think Artie?"

My imaginary announcer's sidekick was named Artie.

"Well, Ed, (my announcer was named Ed), the boy certainly looks fit, but a little

nervous. Still, I'll bet he executes a perfect swan dive."

"That's right, Artie, we're expecting this obviously well informed young man to come off that board and slice into the water like a sharp sword piercing the heart of a Barbary Coast pirate."

"Well said, Ed."

"I'm just quoting the young man, Artie, from his interview with John Cameron Swayze."

"That was great television, Ed."

Just as I reached the board and was climbing on, someone called, "Hey! Stop!" A lifeguard waved his arms at me. "Hey! Kid! You can't jump off the board until you show me you can swim."

Of course, I knew nothing of this rule. He might want an actual demonstration. Just hearing my Theory of Swimming or The Me Method would probably not satisfy him. And I had not brought written copies to the pool. I didn't know where he wanted me to prove my swimming ability, but I knew I needed the diving board to get the momentum to swim in deep water. Maybe he wanted me to jump from the side of the pool, but I wouldn't hit the bottom hard enough to bounce back up and come well out of the water. I supposed he didn't want to hear that either.

I was in a tough spot. I edged out toward the end of the board.

"Hey!" he yelled, now with his hands cupped around his mouth. "I said 'Stop,' you little shithead!"

I'd come so far. I pictured myself flunking the swimming test if forced to jump from the edge of the pool, pulled out by a laughing teenaged bully as he yanked me up to safety by the hair on my head, held over the edge of the water, dangling there for all to see and laugh at. The teenager reminded me of an SS guard in a movie I'd just seen about Air Force guys held in a Nazi prison camp. I had wanted to go home only twenty minutes earlier, but now I was sure of my Theory and I intended to jump off the board and finally swim through deep water. If I flunked the lifeguard's test, I'd go home and stew all week over it. What would happen to me if I had to always ask other people to help me? It seemed so unfair when I absolutely knew I could swim if I could only jump from the board. And drowning seemed almost acceptable when compared to the treatment I imagined I'd get from the lifeguard.

What the hell.

I raced to the end of the diving board and jumped skyward. Coming back down I touched the board with my feet for the bounce. Getting the bounce on a diving board is a timing trick, but I didn't know that and I was quite lucky to hit the board just right and rocket back up into the air like an Atlas missile on my way up to intercept Sputnik.

For an instant in time at the apogee of my flight. I could see beyond the pool's fence over the grass and walkways and into the baseball field. It was like waking up in a bad

dream. How did I get here? I decided in that split second I really liked baseball and wanted to be over there improving my batting skills. A baseball career now seemed to make so much sense. Probably no one had ever drowned playing baseball. Maybe an outfielder way back by the river, but he should have worn a life vest. Below me the Prison Guard was calling me truly terrible names that I'm sure he could be fired for, had the town council been aware of how he treated visiting science buffs. I dropped back toward earth and lost sight of the baseball diamond. A bit too late I remembered I had to somehow roll forward to accomplish the perfect dive I had planned. I tried very hard to catch up with my falling body and turn it into a sleek sword as it hurtled out of the sky. But my stupid ten year old ass never got any higher than my head and I found myself in an uncontrolled dive. The water rushed up at me as I twisted around to face it. I slammed down like a dead fish slapped on the cutting block at the market. A perfect belly whopper. Down at the other end of the pool, it must have sounded like the crack of a rifle shot when I hit the water.

In no time at all I was on the bottom under sixteen feet of water, ablaze with pain all the way up my front. I tried to kick off toward the surface, but I guess I was upside down because my churning feet contacted nothing. How I got back up is a mystery, but when I arrived at the surface I hadn't the slightest idea what to do. So I just kicked and waved and moved every muscle in my body, as if this sheer burst of energy would levitate me out of the pool. When I wasn't swallowing water I screamed.

There was a final awful moment when I realized this could be it. No one noticed me and in a short time I'd swallow more water and choke to death. I was headed for the gates of heaven or hell. I felt I wasn't ready for either at ten years old. There was a lot of life left for me to live. I could not remember ever being as scared before. A picture came to mind of my father standing by the side of the pool, looking down at me and saying, "You're too thick bodied, you'll never float."

George saved my life, in more ways than one. He reached me before the teenaged Stalagmeister Schwimmerwacher and executed a sloppy life-saving maneuver. He swam with one arm out front, grabbing the water while his other arm held me in a headlock with my face underwater. He'd have drowned me if the pool ladder had been any farther away.

It turned out George had come late by himself that day because of a dental appointment earlier in the morning. We became friends that evening when one of the other boys began to bother me over my inability to swim and George stepped in to announce he planned to teach me the next morning at the pool. He told me to come by his house to meet him at nine. He told me there was now a special bond between us since he had saved my life.

"OK, sure," I said.

George and I palled around together until the end of junior high school when my

family moved out of the neighborhood, but I saw him occasionally in high school. He was a jock and I was a nerd, but he was my first close friend. He appreciated my intellectual pursuits and my ability to organize projects. I was also able to correct his misunderstanding of Reproduction. He had something out of order, if I remember correctly. When I saw him in high school he referred to me as his research assistant.

Without effort, George always asked when he didn't know something. I figured if he could do that naturally, I could somehow manage to do the same. And when we were ten and eleven, I learned a lot from him. There was so much to ask because he knew all these great things boys should know ... how to float and how to swim, how to crack open chestnuts, how to fold a newspaper and throw it up on a second floor porch, how to pretend to drown a girl in the pool, how to hit a baseball straight down the middle, how to wax up a toboggan for maximum speed ... and especially how to ask another person for help.

I never told George, but his example of asking for help was the lesson that more than once in the future not only enlarged my pool of experiences, but brought me closer to becoming a member of the human race. That more than saved my life. It made it worth saving.

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