Deep Water

William O. Douglas

I. INTRODUCTION

The lesson “Deep Water” is an excerpt taken from “Of Men and Mountains” by William Douglas. It describes how as a young boy, the narrator was nearly drowned in a swimming pool. In this essay he talks about his fear of water and thereafter how he finally overcame it.

1. Decided to Learn to Swim.

The narrator decided to learn to swim. There was a pool at Y.M.C.A. It offered him a good opportunity. Swimming in the Yakima river was quite dangerous. His mother had warned against it. But the Y.M.C.A. Pool was safe for swimming. It was 2 to 3 feet deep at the shallow end. At the deep end it was nine feet. The slope was gradual. William Douglas had an aversion to the water from the beginning. Once he stood at the beach with his father. A wave swept over him and knocked him down. He was buried in water. He was frightened. The Y.M.C.A. Pool revived those fears.

2. The Misadventure at Y.M.C.A pool

The narrator was alone at the pool. He didn't dare to go inside the water alone. Then came a big bully of a boy. He cried “Hi Skinny!” Then he picked the narrator up and tossed him into the deep end. He went at once to the bottom. He was frightened but not out of his wits. He decided to make a big jump from the bottom. He would try to come to the surface. He would lie flat on the water. Finally, he would paddle to the edge of the pool.

3. He grew panicky:-

Those nine feet were more likely ninety. His lungs were ready to burst. But when he hit the bottom, he gathered all his strength. He made a great spring upwards. He came up rather slowly. He opened his eyes but saw nothing but water. He grew panicky. He was suffocating. He tried to cry but no sound came out. He swallowed water and choked. His legs were paralysed and rigid.

4. Stuck under Water

A great force pulled him under water. He was getting dizzy. He went down endlessly. Then stark terror seized him. His arms would not move. He tried to call for help. Nothing happened. He sucked for air but got only water. Then all efforts ceased. He felt like sleeping. He crossed to oblivion. When he woke up, he found himself lying on his stomach beside the pool. He was vomiting. The chap who threw him in said that he was 'only fooling'. But the narrator had nearly died.

5. Fear Constantly Haunted Him:-

For days he was constantly haunted by the fear. He never went back to the pool. He feared water and avoided it whenever he could. Whenever he went near water, the terror would seize him. His legs got paralysed. Icy horror would grab his heart. The
fear stayed with him as the years rolled by.

6. Got an Instructor and Learnt Swimming:-
The narrator got an instructor. He went to a pool. He practised five days a week. The instructor put a belt round him. A rope attached to belt went through a pulley. On each trip across the pool a bit of panic seized him. It was three months before the tension began to disappear. He taught the narrator and then how to raise his nose and inhale. He repeated the exercise hundreds of times.

7. At Last He Conquered His Fear:
Next the instructor taught him how to kick with his legs. For weeks he did just that. At first his legs refused to work. But finally he could command them. At last the instructor made him a real swimmer. But he still feared to be alone in the pool. This went on until July. So he went to Lake Wentworth and dived off a dock at Triggs Island. He swam two miles across the lake to Stamp Act Island. The fear fled and he swam on. Finally he had conquered his fear of water.

8. The Experience-Left a Deep Meaning
It was a unique experience. It left a deep imprint on his mind. He could never forget it. It had a deep meaning for him. He had experienced both the feelings. The sensation of dying and the terror that fear can produce.