

Falling into Lakes & Other Misadventures in P.E.

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2.3 miles in circumference, and requiring about 45 minutes to walk all the way around. Students and townspeople alike walk or jog around it for pleasure, for exercise, or to walk their dogs. Legend has it that if a girl walks around the lake three times with her beau, either he will propose, or she can throw him into the lake. I never had the occasion to test the truth of that legend, but I did sit by the lake and walk around it many times in my four years there.

A few days later, I proudly showed up to the first session of the sailing class. The first class was held indoors to cover the basic terms and concepts, safety rules and regulations, and how to tie various kinds of knots. It was in the second session that we would actually set sail. There were probably twenty of us, paired up so that each sailboat would be maneuvered.

The sailing class sounded like an excellent way to enjoy even more of the lake—actually being *on* the lake, rather than just walking around it or sitting by the shore.

There was one problem, however. Since sailing involved being on the lake, anyone taking the class would first have to pass a swim test. Even though we would be wearing life jackets, reasonable precaution (not to mention liability issues) meant that the sports center was not going to allow anyone to go out on one of their boats unless they knew how to swim. Did I know how to swim? Well, sort of. I had learned when I was 5 or 6 years old. Fifteen years had passed since then. Don't they say that swimming, like riding a bike, is something you don't

forget? My friend Erin, a member of the Wellesley swimming and diving team, agreed to give me some lessons.

But there was one more problem. Having been raised on South Asian modesty mixed in with the mother's milk means that I really wasn't comfortable wearing a bathing suit. Even the most modest one-piece swimsuits worn by grannies still reveal too much. But I wanted to go sailing on the lake! So I somehow cajoled the lifeguard on duty into allowing me to use the pool fully clothed, with some nonsensical plea about cultural sensitivity, even though this wasn't normally allowed.

How outlandish I must have looked sloshing around the pool in a T-shirt and track pants, and how many curious or bewildered glances I must have attracted from other swimmers, I will leave to the reader's imagination. My friend Erin was totally patient and nonjudgmental about the proceedings, and the lifeguard only occasionally cast a confounded glance. In any case, my unprecedented pursuits paid off, and I obtained a little blue card certifying that I had passed the swim test, and could now engage in water sports on the lake. Hurrah!

A few days later, I proudly showed up to the first session of the sailing class. The first class was held indoors to cover the basic terms and concepts, safety rules and regulations, and how to tie various kinds of knots. It was in the second session that we would actually set sail. There were probably twenty of us, paired up so that each sailboat would be maneuvered by two people. Like a brood of eager ducklings, we trooped down to the pier to where the boats were moored. It was a gorgeous day, the surface of the lake resplendent with the late morning sun. I was so eager to be on the water that I was the first to step

into one of the boats. The instructor had already covered how to embark and disembark safely, so I knew what to do. I swung my right leg over the edge of the boat and planted it firmly inside, then shifted my weight onto my right leg so that I could take my left leg off the pier. Except that putting my weight on one side of the boat meant it instantly tipped and I fell ignominiously into the lake. Did I mention I have two left feet?

The lake was relatively shallow there since we were close to the shore, so I wasn't in danger of drowning, and in any case we were all wearing life jackets. I clambered back onto the pier with my clothes dripping wet, acutely aware of twenty astonished pairs of eyes focused on me. I excused myself from the class, and took the path back to my dorm, my sneakers squelching loudly with each step, hoping other students passing by wouldn't wonder why I was completely drenched from head to toe. Needless to say, after squelching back to my dorm, I never went back to that class. I dropped out—or should I say washed out?

So the first quarter of my fourth year passed by, leaving only three quarters, which meant I would have to spend the rest of the academic year fulfilling my remaining three quarters worth of physical education.

I have no idea what possessed me to sign up for African Dance. Perhaps it was the drumming that drew me in. I had been playing drums with Yanvalou, an Afro-Haitian drum and dance ensemble, since my first year, and I loved drumming. Occasionally, the drummers would try dancing just for fun; invariably, they tried to get me to try a few steps, but I was mulish in my refusal to make a fool of myself. So I still have no idea what possessed me to sign up for African Dance, even though I had two left feet and was extremely averse to making a spectacle of my clumsiness.

Even worse, African dance lacks the prudishness of either the west or the east, and involves, shall we say, a lot of hips. As in, it accentuates the hips, pelvis, and buttocks. As in, the basic posture is to squat down so your posterior sticks out in the air, and you have to be ready to swing and shake

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