

What SWIMMING Taught Me

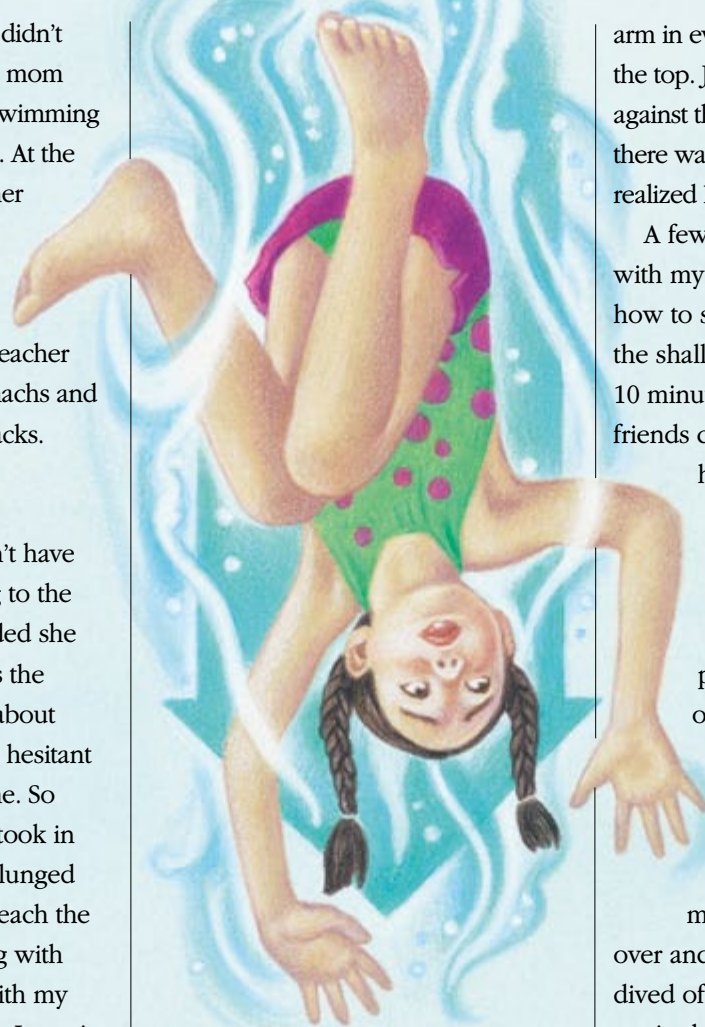
Swimming taught me that all peer pressure isn't bad. Sometimes it helps you succeed.

By Marissa Thompson

I was seven years old, and I didn't know how to swim, so my mom enrolled me in afternoon swimming lessons with my friend Angie. At the end of each lesson, our teacher would take us out into the center of the pool to practice our strokes. We were always safe in the middle since our teacher supported us under our stomachs and we wore "bubbles" on our backs.

Peer Pressure at the Pool

One day Angie and I didn't have our bubbles on, so we clung to the side of the pool. Angie decided she wanted to try to swim across the corner to the adjacent wall, about four feet (1.2 m) away. I was hesitant at first, but then she dared me. So even though I was scared, I took in as much air as I could and plunged under the water, hoping to reach the other side. Instead of floating with ease as I had done before with my back bubble, I began to sink. I was in a state of panic. I knew I was going to drown. Then I remembered what my teacher had told me a few weeks earlier: "If you lose control while swimming, just stretch one of your



arms straight up out of the water, and someone will come help you."

With this thought in mind, I stretched my arm in the direction I thought was up. I didn't feel any air. I stretched my

arm in every direction, never finding the top. Just then my head bumped against the side of the pool. Angie was there waiting for me. I guess she hadn't realized I was "drowning."

A few weeks later I was at a lake with my family. Still not knowing how to swim, I waded around in the shallow water. I was there about 10 minutes when I saw one of my friends coming into the lake. I was horrified. "What if Stephanie finds out I can't swim?" I thought. I'd be so embarrassed. So I quickly dropped to my knees and began to pretend to swim—I walked on my arms while kicking my feet. Stephanie jumped in the water and began swimming for real. This only added to my embarrassment. After a while she came

over and talked to me. Then she dived off in another direction, leaving me in the wake caused by her perfect, coordinated strokes. I resumed my fake swimming, feeling foolish.

After a few minutes I decided to stop being so scared and try to swim. I was in shallow water, so I lifted my



arms from the ground and started dog paddling. It worked. I floated. It was only for a few seconds, but I floated. I did it again and again throughout the evening. By the time we left, I could dog paddle across the entire lake.

Peer Pressure Is Powerful

When I think back on these two experiences, I'm amazed by the power of peer pressure. One day it almost made me drown; another day it motivated me to learn to swim. That's how it is with peer pressure—it can either be negative or positive, but it's always powerful.

Peer pressure was one reason the Pharisees wouldn't believe in Christ's words: "They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:43). In his dream Lehi saw people who were ashamed of the Lord because of those who were mocking and pointing from the great and spacious building (see 1 Nephi 8:26–28).

I'm familiar with this negative side of peer pressure—the side that makes people turn away from what they know is right. I've been mocked because of my Latter-day Saint standards. I've had friends who have

wanted me to shoplift clothes, cheat on exams, and be cruel to other people. Instead of wanting me to float and succeed, it was as if they were anchors pulling me down, trying to drown me.

But I've also had friends who have motivated me to do good things—things that have made my life better, not worse. When I was in the eighth grade, my friend Ali convinced me

to try out for drill team for the next school year. This wasn't an easy feat, since the thought of trying out for an activity as a new freshman in a big high school terrified me. Ali convinced me to do something worthwhile that I might never have done without a little encouragement from a friend. And because of this friendly peer pressure, my adjustment to high school life was a lot easier.

Good friends motivated me throughout high school and into college, giving me the courage to run for student council, work for good grades, and nourish a testimony of the gospel. These friends were positive influences in my life. They wanted me to succeed, and they helped me grow.

These experiences have taught me that not all peer pressure is bad, as many people tend to think. It depends on the type of pressure and from whom it is coming. I've learned that when I surround myself with the right kind of influences, I'm less likely to sink into the ways of the world. Positive pressure from the Church and from friends with high standards is the force that has acted like a back bubble in my life, keeping me afloat. **NE**