

# Deep Water

by

*William Douglas*

## Additional Points

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- ✓ **Douglas' experience at California beach**, when he was three or four years old, developed an aversion of water in him. Even though he stood clinging tightly to his father, yet the waves knocked him down and swept over him. He was buried in water. His breath was gone. He was frightened. There was terror in his heart at the overpowering force of the waves.

- ✓ **When Douglas' was ten or eleven years old, he decided to learn swimming at the Y.M.C.A. pool.** It was safe as it was only two or three feet deep at the shallow end, and nine feet deep at the deep end; the drop was gradual. Secondly, it was close to his residence.

# SYNOPSIS

## **Douglas' drowning experience at Y.M.C.A. swimming pool**

Douglas' introduction to the Y.M.C.A. swimming pool revived unpleasant childhood memories at California beach. Again misadventure took place at Y.M.C.A. swimming pool when a big boy, probably eighteen years old, picked him up and tossed him into the deep end.

**I.**

He swallowed water. He was frightened. He planned that when his feet hit the bottom, he would make a big jump, come to the surface, lie flat on it, and paddle to the edge of the pool. But those nine feet seemed like ninety, and before he touched bottom his lungs were ready to burst. But when his feet hit bottom he summoned all his strength and made what he had planned. He imagined he would bob to the surface like a cork. Instead, he came up slowly. He opened his eyes and saw nothing but water. He grew panicky. He was suffocating. His legs hung as dead weights, paralysed and rigid. A great force was pulling him under.

## II.

He again went down, down, endlessly. His lungs ached, his head throbbed. He felt sheer, stark terror that knew no understanding, terror that knew no control, terror that no one could understand who had not experienced it. He was paralysed under water — stiff, rigid with fear. Only his heart, and the pounding in his head made him feel that he was still alive. And then his toes reached the bottom and he jumped. But it made no difference. He looked for ropes, ladders, water wings. He saw nothing but water with a yellow glow — dark water that one could not see through. He shook and trembled with fright. His arms and legs wouldn't move.

### III.

When Douglas started down the water a third time, he sucked for air but swallowed water. The yellowish light was going out. His all efforts to jump up ceased. He relaxed. Even his legs felt limp; and a blackness swept over his brain. It wiped out fear and terror. There was no more panic. It was quiet and peaceful. He felt drowsy to go to sleep.

**I crossed to oblivion, and the curtain of life fell.**

Douglas drew a deep meaning from his childhood's terrifying drowning experience at Y.M.C.A. swimming pool — “In death there is peace. There is terror only is the fear of death.” “All we have to fear is fear itself.”

## **How did Douglas overcome his fear of water?**

The misadventure at Y.M.C.A. pool filled a haunting fear of water in Douglas' heart. He could not go near water for years. The fear of water ruined his fishing trips and deprived him of the joy of canoeing, boating and swimming. He hired an instructor and learnt swimming. He went to a pool and practised five days a week, an hour each day. The old terror returned every time he put his head in water. It took three months before the tension began to slack. After learning from the instructor, Douglas tested himself alone in the pool. He was not sure that all the terror had left. To test whether he had overcome his phobia, he went to Lake Wentworth in New Hamp-



hire, and swam two miles across the lake. When he was in the middle of the lake, he put his face under and saw nothing but bottomless water. The old terror returned. But he fought with his terror all through with determination and strength. To do away with residual doubts, the next morning he stripped, dived into the lake, and swam across to the other shore and back. This way, Douglas had conquered his fear of water.

Thus, determination to overcome his deep fear, perseverance, courage, patience and most important 'the will to live' helped Douglas' overcome his fear of water and become an excellent swimmer.

✓ **How did the instructor build a 'swimmer' out of Douglas?**

The instructor took immense pains to drive fear out of Douglas' mind by making him hard, rigorous and systematic practice. He put a belt around Douglas, attached a rope to belt and relaxed his hold on the rope and Douglas went under water. The instructor taught him to put his face under water and exhale, and to raise his nose and inhale. Next the instructor held him at the side of the pool and had him kick with his legs. Thus, piece by piece, he built a 'swimmer' out of Douglas.