Taking The Plunge

Winnie has been talking about learning to swim for almost as long as she’s been in the US. A few weeks ago she finally took the plunge and signed up for swimming classes. Of course, she also wanted me to sign up with her, so I could “help her out” with her classes.

We have two local county-run recreation centers with indoor pools nearby our house; Chinn Aquatics Center and the Sharron Baucom Dale City Recreation Center. Both are extremely nice facilities with beautiful pools and hot tubs, offered at a very reasonable price. These rec centers also offer an extensive catalog of fitness classes including swimming lessons.

After reviewing the catalog, Winnie and I opted for a class at Chinn Aquatics Center. Even though it was a bit further from our house than the Sharron Baucom center, the class schedule was a better fit for us. So, one evening in mid-May Winnie and I presented ourselves at the Chinn Aquatics Center pool for our first Adult Beginner swimming lesson.

I actually know how to swim and at various times over the years I’ve been a pretty good swimmer, depending upon how much effort I’ve made at practice. But I learned how to swim in a rather non-traditional way (which should surprise no one who knows me). I learned how to swim, and became comfortable in
the water, after I learned how to scuba dive. It seems when I was young I was afraid to put my face in the water, which dramatically limited the number of swimming strokes I could learn. I took lessons many times but could never overcome my fear of putting my face in the water. Until I was 19 and took scuba lessons.

I was in Hawaii then, in the Navy, and signed up for lessons at the base pool. I was able to dog-paddle and tread water well enough to pass the class swimming pre-requisite, but that was the extent of my swimming ability. Another class pre-requisite was purchasing my own snorkel, mask, and fins which, being in Hawaii, wasn’t hard to find. Then I took the step of having my diving mask fitted with prescription lenses as I was extremely near-sighted.

Having a diving mask with lenses that allowed me to see in the water was a game-changer. I overcame my fear of putting my face in the water, earned my scuba certificate, and then proceeded to learn how to swim. I ultimately became comfortable with several different swimming strokes.

Back to the present, on our first night of swimming class Winnie was extremely nervous. We were in a class of about seven people, all young adults (younger than me), all of whom were taking lessons for the first time. Our instructor Nathan was a pretty good instructor and provided a good mix of dividing his time to work with each person. He quickly saw that I knew how to swim and was there to help Winnie, which wasn’t a problem for him.

Over the few weeks of twice weekly lesson Winnie picked up the instructions well. She also dragged me down to the pool on the weekends for more practice, which left me no options other than to swim laps myself. It’s been several years since I’ve done any serious swimming, and the practice did feel good. Paying for use of the pool also gave us access to the rec center’s hot tubs which was a nice bonus.
Classes lasted for five weeks, a shorter session than normal but enough for Winnie to gain the basics. I have to say; with just a few weeks of classes Winnie was already a better swimmer than I was when I learned scuba diving. She also seems to enjoy swimming, which is really the only thing that matters.

We finished lessons a couple of weeks ago and have now signed up for regular recreation center membership, which is a first for both Winnie and I. Winnie is determined to become a proficient swimmer, and going with her is forcing me to get some regular exercise again.

So, we get to add to our list of things we enjoy doing together, which is always a good thing.