

Excerpt from 'Writing the Wrongs of my Life'

Drowning To Music

'Thursday nights at six o'clock – it's only an hour – come on, it'll be fun!'

My friend sounded really keen to try Aquarobics, and I was always going on about getting fit.

'I hope it's heated,' I said. After an hour in water, it was a fair bet my skin would resemble the texture of a prune; hopefully this wouldn't apply to the colour! But three nights later, as I slid into the local pool, I purred with pleasure as the warmth enveloped me. All I needed now were some gentle jets massaging my body and I'd be in heaven.

There was a mixed assortment of women in the class and I was happy to note they all seemed around my age, which meant their bikini days, like mine, were long past. The last thing I needed was some nubile teen in a g-string and two material triangles stirring up the water next to me.

'Good evening, ladies, are we ready for some exercise?'

It was apparent our instructor exercised no less than fifteen hours a day; the body was trim, taut, terrific and of course, tanned.

'Is this your first time?' she asked, her head turning in my general direction. Without glasses, the edges of my world blurred, but as no-one else answered, I nodded.

'Good! Well, perhaps you'd like to go up to the deep end; that way you get more of a workout.'

Well that makes sense! I don't think anything would exercise my muscles more than trying not to drown while following her instructions!

'No, I'm just fine here, thanks,' I said, smiling sweetly.

'If you're not comfortable in the water, we have buoyancy vests,' she said.

I contemplated pointing out that you would have to be some sort of idiot to choose this form of exercise if you were uncomfortable in water, but this water was gurgling with impatience as the rest of the class wished me elsewhere.

'Here's good,' I said, sending a daggered glance in my friend's direction when I noticed she was enjoying the exchange immensely. And then the music started.

We were introduced to a few gentle warm up movements, and I could feel my body relax. Oh yes, this is my idea of exercise. I had never been able to do more than fifteen leg kicks at the gym before my muscles screamed for release, but somehow the water took all the weight. I was suddenly transported back to the 1940s Hollywood movies where Esther Williams rose, sylph-like from the centre of an

enormous swimming pool, dripping water, glamour and smiles. All I needed was a bathing cap adorned with coloured rubber petals and I'd be eligible for the synchronized swimming at the next Olympics.

'Now, ladies, some of us are not holding our tummies in.' Our nubile nymph's voice jolted me back to the present.

What! How could she tell? I thought everything below the water was hidden. And yes, once again her head had turned in my direction. Obviously there was to be no forgiveness for turning my back on the deep end and refusing a vest. Now the music was speeding up and so were the exercises, but as I kept time with the music, I kidded myself I was doing it properly.

'Come on, I want those feet right out of the water – one, two, one, two – kicking higher. I can't see them!'

Bitch - I'll show her! I gave an almighty kick and not only one but two feet left the tiled bottom of the pool as I flew up into the air and then disappeared underwater a second later.

'Are you all right over there?' I heard the commandant ask, as I surfaced and rubbed the remains of mascara across my face. 'Don't overdo it on your first lesson, will you.' Now she tells me! 'Everybody – bicycle legs to the deep end. Let's go!'

What is it with this penchant for 'the deep end'? I swear I'm just about to go off mine. But no, I will not be defeated. With dedicated concentration, I manage to perform my bicycle legs while remaining in exactly the same position, and even give the rest of the class a smug grin as they 'cycle' past. And all this to the tinny accompaniment of Cyndi Lauper sounding like a demented chipmunk telling us that 'girls just wanna have fun'. Oh yes, Cyndi, we do, but I'm not sure this is what we had in mind!

By this stage, our instructor decided other parts of our bodies needed attention, and was handing out foam dumb bells.

'Push your weights down, ladies, and feel those flabby arms tightening as you work.'

Now she was talking my language. Like most middle aged women, I had developed my own wing span which was threatening to send me skywards each time I hailed a taxi. But fifteen minutes later I had something else to worry about. I'd pushed those little pieces of foam into the water with such determination that I was starting to feel the beginnings of RSI along my forearms.

'Now, place one of the dumb bells between your legs, lean back against the edge of the pool and raise your legs just using your stomach muscles,' was the command echoing across the water.

I have to be honest - I didn't really put my all into this final exercise. No, it wasn't the strain on my stomach muscles (although I did feel a couple of twinges) but this time the RSI was threatening my inner thighs. The thought of my legs seizing up, with noodle firmly wedged between as I was hauled out of the pool, placed on a stretcher and taken to the closest medical centre, didn't inspire me to join in. Finally the music slowed down and we were into the warm down stage.

'You've all worked very hard tonight; go on, give yourselves a clap,' the instructor said.

Oh, how I'd love to, but I was finding it hard enough to raise an eyebrow let alone two hands. Tell you what though; I really worked up an appetite. Think I'll stop off and get some takeaway for dinner. It'll go well with Saturday night's left over wine.