

## Why We Swim

**Bonnie Tsui**

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Ten people drown every day in the US, one hundred around the world. Humans, the evidence shows, are not natural born swimmers. But swim we do. It's the second most popular form of exercise in this country, behind walking.

*Why We Swim* is Bonnie Tsui's answer to the millions of waterfarers who love to submerge in water: to play, to exercise, to heal, "to understand ourselves, that lost, quiet state of just being—no technology, no beeps—dating back to our watery human origins." A competitive cold-water swimmer herself, Tsui wades through the history of humans and swimming, including 28,000-year-old evidence of Neanderthals who feasted on mussels, seals, and dolphins; paintings of breaststrokes on the walls of a cave in the deserts of Egypt dating from 10,000 years ago; and samurai warriors adopting swimming as a military art. She also writes of Southeast Asian free divers who can reach depths of 200 feet when they're spearing fish, and of an Iclander discovered to have 14 millimeters of seal-like fat, enabling him to swim six hours to safety in 41 degree water after his boat overturned.

Profiles of Olympic swimmers, long distance swimmers, and others who swim in brutally cold water for therapeutic reasons punctuate the text, in addition to Tsui's own lifelong experiences in water. In all, *Why We Swim* is a celebration of the many varieties of joy that swimming brings to our oxygen-breathing species. That we choose to swim, knowing the danger, can only be explained by the pleasure it brings.

MATT SUTHERLAND (March / April 2020)

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