

On Forgetting How to Float - a Logbook

08:12

The pool opens early, and the lifeguard looks offended that anyone would arrive this soon. Chlorine hangs in the air with a confidence that suggests it will outlast us all. I sign my name on a clipboard I do not read and step onto the tile, which is colder than expected and unapologetic about it. Somewhere in my body is the memory of floating. I know this the way you know a word in another language but cannot summon it on command.

I came here to relearn something simple. That was the plan, anyway. Floating looks effortless when other people do it. They lie back and let water make decisions for them. I have always preferred instructions.

08:19

The first entry into the water is cautious. I test the temperature with a foot, then another, as if the pool might change its mind. It does not. The water is steady, cool, and entirely uninterested in my hesitation. I grip the edge and lower myself in, shoulders tensing in anticipation of a problem that never arrives.

Swimming lanes divide the pool into reasonable expectations. I choose one at the end, far from anyone who looks competent. This feels strategic.

08:27

Floating requires trust. This becomes obvious almost immediately. My body refuses to believe that water will hold it without constant negotiation. I lean back, inhale, and feel my legs sink with quiet determination. My arms flail briefly, betraying the calm I hoped to project. The ceiling swims into view. I right myself too quickly and cough, annoyed at how dramatic that felt.

Around me, others glide past with smooth indifference. One person flips at the wall and pushes off without thinking. I cling to the lane rope and resent them.

08:41

I try again. This time, I approach it like a technical problem. Breath in. Chin up. Hips loose. Someone once explained this to me using physics. I remember nodding as if that helped. The water presses against my back. For half a second, it almost works. My ears dip below the surface. Sound dulls. The world narrows to breath and buoyancy. Then panic intrudes, loud and unnecessary, and I sit up again.

The lifeguard does not react. This is reassuring and mildly insulting.

08:56

I stop fighting and start observing. The water moves constantly, but gently. Small waves bounce off the walls and return, softened. The pool does not rush. It does not demand success. It waits. My shoulders drop an inch. I notice how the water supports my arms when I let them drift outward. I notice how breath changes everything.

I lean back without committing fully, like someone testing ice. My legs still sink, but less aggressively. Progress appears in fractions.

09:10

Something shifts. Not dramatically. There is no cinematic moment where I spread my arms and stare at the sky. Instead, I float crookedly, one shoulder lower than the other, knees bent in a way no instructor would endorse. It is not elegant. It is effective. The water holds me long enough for my breathing to settle.

For a brief stretch of time, I am not doing anything. I am being done by the pool.

09:18

I lose it again, of course. Muscles remember their old arguments. I stand, water sloshing around my waist, and laugh out loud because that feels appropriate. Floating turns out to be less about mastery and more about permission.

09:32

I try one last time before leaving. This time, I do not plan it. I push off gently from the wall and let momentum fade on its own. My body finds a shape that works well enough. The ceiling blurs. The noise recedes. I float badly, but undeniably.

09:40

When I climb out, the tile feels warmer. The clipboard waits to be signed again. I do not look at it. Outside, the day has started without me, which feels fair.

I did not relearn floating in any complete sense. What I learned instead is that some things return only when you stop insisting they behave. The pool did not teach me anything new. It reminded me that support does not always announce itself loudly. Sometimes it waits until you lie back and let it prove its point.