

The Picnic Table, Blue Pool and Cliffs of Themyscira

by

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by Teresa K. Howes, photo by Betty L. Lancaster, Mother
Dedicated to Debbie and Teri Dillon, Author of *No Pressure, No Diamonds*, and my Mother.



where just a moment ago it presented me with my queen-of-the-world throne. It is cage-like trap! I peer through the table's cross legs to see if anyone observed my inverted dive. Blood oozes from my mouth. I scream—THAT scares me more than anything, the sound of my own shrieking. Slowly a beet red color starts at my toes and quickly flushes over my entire body's skin and warms my face. This new emotion, EMBARRASSMENT, introduces herself.

"What happened," a well-meaning adult, asks.

I answer in big gulps of air: "I . . . fell . . . underneath . . . the picnic . . . table and missed . . . the pool."

Laughter erupts. Mother pulls me onto her lap and folds her arms around me. She holds the cold ice cube wrapped in a cloth on my tongue. I let go of struggle, and "*Learn to Be Still*," like Don

Henley of *The Eagles* sings or as the Tibetan, His Holiness, The Dali Llama, calmly encourages me. Mother's skin is kind and smooth as her beautiful cheek touches upon my forehead. Fear's rigidity washes away; much needed oxygen fills my young lungs and I breathe.

In the future, I approach blue, 12-inch-deep pools with dubious confidence. The ascension to the ethereal Wonder Woman high cliffs and immediate descent into the well-earned loss of childhood "look at me-ism," while nearly biting my tongue into two shocked my ego into humility. In that nano second of slight injury, my brain connected to my body. This first, clear 4-year-old experience, impresses upon me that my feet honestly landed upon the human path of pleasure and pain—all at the same time.

Bright blue sky and happy yellow sun, we all splash about in the child-sized plastic swimming pool with a slickery floor. If you slip and grab the sides to break your fall in this aqua fed, round, with sharp edge, the result is like a paper cut.

I slowly submerge my entire body and face (mouth, nose, eyes, and ears) underwater and spy on adult toes. Like a quiet frogman from the 60's television show *Hawaii 5-0*, I pretend to sneak up on someone lurking in a coral reef. The afternoon air is heavy and hot. The frosty water makes my teeth chatter and my skin is prickly like a plucked chicken. A blast nonetheless.

My best friend Jimmy-Pat and I, our pint-sized selves, knew no bounds in this child's haven of swimming. This first childhood memory is as clear as a Tibetan singing bowl's tone sounding the first meditation of the day. It wakes me up into the world giggling and laughing delighted at I know not what.

Jimmy-Pat and I pull the robin's egg blue, small pool toward the barnwood red picnic table. Who cares whose

idea, we're gonna dive like big people! I gaze up from the poolside, the table looms ten feet above the ground and casts a shadow over our 12-inch deep, small body of standing liquid. I defy earth's gravity. In no time, like Wonder Woman leaping to the highest cliff on Themyscira, I land upon the picnic table top now converted into a diving board.

The splintery wood planks under my feet cause me to tippy toe to the table's edge. I hear from somewhere through the brilliant elation of my rise to power: "Jump, Teresa, jump," Jimmy-Pat exclaims. Giddy with anxious excitement, finally, at the top of my world—my balance lost. I slip falling down, down, down between the table, the legs and its bench . . . "think, think, think." Sudden pain shoots through the middle of my tongue. This little four-year-old body hits the squishy grass like a golf ball lands in a sand pit. I find myself underneath the dark wood

