

Early morning and shared pleasures

New Year's Eve and the usual slightly over enthusiastic view of life at 1 p.m. in the morning, having survived another long night before the bells chimed at midnight.

My neighbour was discussing her swim the next morning and debating the likelihood of rising in time to strike out at 7 a.m. in the pool.

I was impressed. Before I knew it I was making a date to join her next morning.

My five year old pair of bathers disintegrated in the pool on that first slightly alcohol fused morning. They just sank silently down below my knees. I crept quietly into the change rooms and was not sighted again until it was time to drive home. On my next visit I was fully kitted out.

It is an interesting experience to toddle off at 7 a.m. 3 mornings a week clutching swimming cap, goggles, towel, earplugs and flippers. I am exhausted before I start, just making sure everything is in the bag and I'm ready to go.

I drive with my neighbour who is somewhat more svelte than me, and doesn't use any of the accoutrements I feel necessary to don before I gingerly let myself into the water.. .. except for the flippers.

I have just started using flippers. NOBODY challenges a pair of flippers. Whoever wears the flippers rules because (a) they are SO fast - faster than a speeding bullet. I am a positive Thorpie in the pool with my new snazzy dark blue and yellow size 7-9 flippers (\$30 at Clark Rubber) and (b) they are very heavy and would break your nose if you swam too close to the back end of them, let alone the back end of me.

And because we're country folk we all share our lanes very politely....except for the really serious flippered variety. We move aside for them because they can be quite scary.

I keep going because, like a recent convert to Catholicism, I fervently believe that I am doing myself a power of good. I am also comforted in the realization that everyone looks a variation of everyone else, so it is a wondrously non-threatening situation. In other words, we are generally closer to 70 than 60, can laugh at ourselves, and cellulite is not in our vocabulary. We come in all sizes and shapes, and have all manner of strange strokes as we power through the turgid water, but at the end of the hour we all know we are SO MUCH BETTER FOR IT.

I can vouch for the improvements in the ankles, am no longer walking like an old woman (which I definitely am not), but I can only surmise what other goodies it might be doing for me.

I don't let myself dwell on the hundreds of bodies that used the pool the day before, but console myself with the thought that I am almost the first in the pool the next day after it has been filtering furiously all night!

While I do my twenty laps I allow myself to drift into a state of meditation. It has the effect of allowing me to enjoy that underwater state of dreaminess while carefully counting the laps as the best part comes next.

After the laps are completed I walk up and down the pool. We call out across the lanes, chat about last night's television, discuss briefly the day ahead and I lift my face to the early morning sun as I walk the walk. This is the time for gentle exercise and relaxation. The pool is outdoors, the water is solar warmed so it is a gentle heat even when the outside temperature is cool.

While we oldies are slowly making our way up and down the pool a bevy of early morning youngsters are training very seriously in the closed off lanes, a section designed to allow them to

ignore us and concentrate on their future.. They are beautiful, lithe, slim and athletic, and very good at their strokes. I want to cheer them on as their coaches shout out instructions.

I want to cry out to them' We were you once. Enjoy this while you may. This is not for ever!

They don't see us. We are invisible.

I console myself with the knowledge that we have done things they haven't even dreamed of. We have been the lucky generation. I do hope they are as lucky. Life feels really great at 7 a.m. in the morning. The possibilities for the day are endless.

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