

Like a fish out of water

The nine fidgeting, bathing suit clad children stand next to the New Jersey City University indoor pool in a tight group, barely able to stay still long enough to listen to Coach Tom Lee, the college's aquatic director and instructor for my daughter's first-ever swimming class. "Toes grip so you don't slip," he cautions the youngsters. Little fledgling swimmers, jumping into the water from the pool's edge, one by one.



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Jersey Mom

I watch Reyhan, her long dark hair tucked tight under her bathing cap, wearing a new bathing suit from Target — size 7 already — jostling for position to get her splash in. "Awesome," Coach Lee tells her, not even daunted by the spray of water that covers him from her hearty splash. I don't want her to see me looking, silently rooting her on, a lump in my chest as big as an apple because I'm so proud she's not afraid. Not afraid of

the water like I used to be.

When I was a kid, my summertime pool was in the state park near my house. It didn't matter to me that I didn't know how to swim. I was perfectly content to splash around in the shallow end of the pool.

Reaching junior high school, I found out that swimming classes were a mandatory part of the physical education curriculum. Of course there had to be other sixth-graders like me, I thought, kids that didn't know how to swim. I was wrong. Already a nerdy, gangly-limbed kid, I felt even more out of place nervously hanging on to my little yellow foam kickboard, gasping and sputtering across the three-foot end of the pool while the rest of the class practiced smooth, graceful laps and beautiful dives that delivered their bodies like sharp knives into the blue water on the deep end.

While I survived gym class, to this day I never learned to swim confidently — and the feeling of that school time failure still echoes in me today.

I watch another little boy in Reyhan's class, his face scrunched up in a grimace, holding the sides of his tummy as he tentatively edges closer to the pool, eyes wide, searching Coach Lee's face for a way out. I know just how you feel little guy, I think to myself, and my heart goes thump. But then there's that strong hand that guides him into the water again and again with just as many reassuring chants of "Awesome."

"All the fish out of the water," shouts Coach Lee, as another swimming class ends. Dripping wet, Reyhan bounds up to me asking if I saw her jump. "Of course I did," I tell her, hugging her little shivering shoulders.

And I also saw your jumps, little guy, and I'm rooting for you, too.

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