

Why do some of us sink and some of us float?

I confess. Buoyant I am not. I am, though, looking forward to a summer of outdoor fun with Finn and Theo, my five-year-old nephews, who are learning to swim.

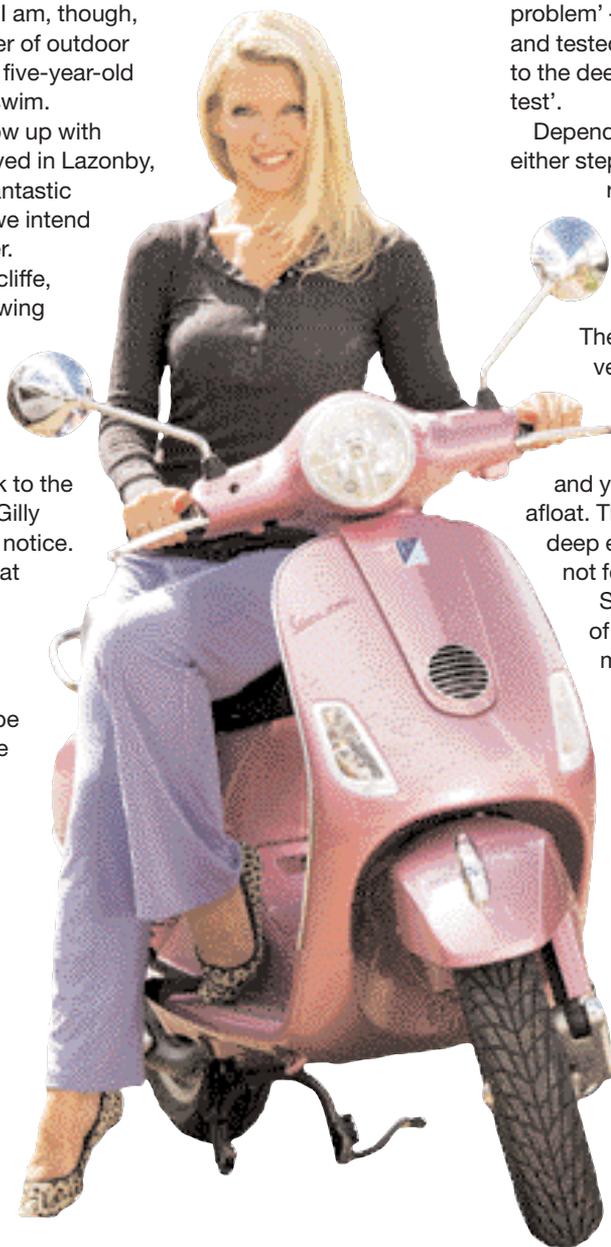
We were lucky enough to grow up with wonderful grandparents who lived in Lazonby, the Eden Valley village with a fantastic outdoor pool – the same pool we intend to frequent this coming summer.

Father, who grew up in Rockcliffe, learned to swim simply by throwing himself into the River Eden and admits to only once being fished out. As a natural himself he would chuck us into said pool, and expect results. Like a brick I would sink to the bottom. I am sure Joanne and Gilly sank too, but I was too busy to notice. I worked hard to stay alive in that pool. Joanne, I remember, was very good at underwater swimming. Her eyesight being poor, she mostly had a look of blurred terror and preferred to be submerged and oblivious. None of that, quite rightly, would be recommended today. Her boys are being taught in a more advanced age.

Fast-forward a good number of years and I found myself teaching 'aqua aerobics'. With enthusiasm that initially outweighed my ability, I stood frozen in fear at the poolside, wondering what to do with a couple of dozen expectant faces peering up. I assumed this would be a breeze – it was aerobics in the pool after all. I was at this time something of an aerobic queen. The pool offered new challenges. I assumed everyone was like me and able to anchor themselves to the pool floor. Not so.

Lesson learned. My classes became the stuff of legends. We knew no bounds, me on the outside, them on the inside. I bounded with more energy than I knew what to do with while they, red-faced and gasping, gave it all they had. We filled the pool with laughter and buoyancy aids. Our particular favourite: the 'woggle', a huge polystyrene sausage.

They didn't know my guilty little secret – that I was a sinker (that is until now). And I could always tell when one of my newbie's had 'my



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problem' – that sinking feeling. I had a tried and tested formula: off we would head down to the deep end and I would conduct the 'float test'.

Depending on confidence levels you could either step down the ladder – less nerve racking – or keep hold of the sides and push off. We had lifeguards. If you chose the ladder then you would walk down and feel the 'pull' as you got lower and lower. The sinkers would not feel any pull, or very little. This would indicate your buoyancy. If you pushed yourself from the side, the chances were that your legs would drop down and you would need to kick hard to stay afloat. This can cause cramp which, in the deep end, is potentially life-changing and not for the better.

So why do some of us sink and some of us float? It is because of our muscle/fat ratio. If you have high muscle density you are more likely to sink. This is not to be confused with being a light build – you can be very lean but not necessarily muscular. The Olympian swimmers will have the muscle/fat balance just right and a huge lung capacity. It's something I am not short of, but it still doesn't allow me to float.

So what is the solution if you sink? Use a pool that has one depth, and power walk. Or use a buoyancy jacket (which is not the same as an inflatable rubber ring) and march through the deeper water.

Sinkers find it easy to anchor themselves in shallower water. Use this to your advantage and push floats through the density of water.

This works so well and will give you amazing upper body definition in no time at all.

If you recognise yourself as a floater you will take great pleasure from swimming – lucky you! You could add some extra intensity with weights or resistance clothing. You could, on the other hand, enjoy your great fortune.

With the longer days fast approaching and the outdoor pools being prepared to open it is a perfect time to mix up your workout. I can't wait to watch Finn and Theo having the time of their lives.

Just no splashing, please. ☹