

Deep Water

- William Douglas
(1898-1980)



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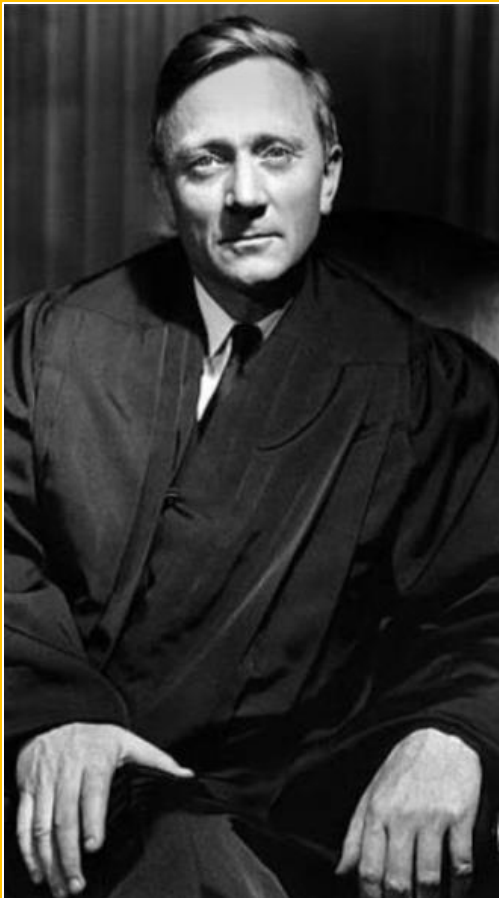


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About the Author :

William Douglas was born in Maine, Minnesota. After graduating with a Bachelors of Arts in English and Economics, he spent two years teaching in high school in Yakima. However, he got tired of this and decided to pursue a legal career. He met Franklin D. Roosevelt at Yale and became an adviser and friend to the President. Douglas was a leading advocate of individual rights. He retired in 1975 with a term lasting thirty-six years and remains the longest-serving Justice in the history of the court. The following excerpt is taken from *Of Men and Mountains by William O. Douglas*. It reveals how as a young boy William Douglas nearly drowned in a swimming pool. In this essay he talks about his fear of water and thereafter, how he finally overcame it. Notice how the autobiographical part of the selection is used to support his discussion of fear.





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Introduction :

Deep Water, an excerpt from “Of Men and Mountains” is a **psycho-analytical study of fear**. It reveals how fear can paralyse a normal person mentally and also, the ways to overcome it. The lesson emphasises the significance of **one’s desire to fulfill one’s passion supported by meticulous planning and the ‘never say die attitude’**. The title ‘Deep Water’ is quite justified as it reveals deep psychological imprint of fear in author’s mind.





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Background of the story :

In his autobiographical account Deep Water, author William Douglas recollects a horrifying experience of drowning at the Y.M.C.A. swimming pool during his childhood. The incident left a deep psychological imprint in his mind. He was so terrified that he avoided water for a long time. However, he was passionate about swimming. He made up his mind to overcome the fear of water. He hired an instructor and fulfilled his desire. The entire episode emphasises how courage and determination help an individual to accomplish his goal. The incident taught Douglas the larger meaning of life.



Deep Water



Theme – A real-life personal account of experiencing fear and the steps taken to overcome it

Sub-Theme – Psychological analysis of fear

Plot – Aversion to water–Experience at YMCA pool–Impact-Training Session – Overcoming the fear – the realisation

Characters:

William Douglas- the narrator and protagonist

Douglas' Mother- a concerned mother

An eighteen year old boy – careless, thoughtless, muscular

The Instructor- highly skilled, intuitive (insightful)





Deep Water



SUMMARY

The story talks about how terrifying memories of childhood may haunt even the adult mind and the shadow of these frightening experiences continue to lurk in the mind and rob one of all the confidences. It is imperative to make deliberate planned efforts to get over that fear which otherwise can lead to a lifelong constraint. William O. Douglas had a desire to learn swimming since childhood. At the age of three or four, he was knocked down and buried by a wave at a beach in California. He developed a great aversion to water. At the age of ten or eleven he decided to learn to swim with water wings at the Y.M.C.A pool since it was safe at the shallow end.

A misadventure : While sitting alone and waiting for others to come at the Y.M.C.A pool, a big boy came and threw Douglas into the deep end of the pool. Douglas swallowed water and went straight down to the bottom of the pool. While going down he planned to make a big jump upwards but came up slowly.



Deep Water



SUMMARY

Stark terror seized him. He tried to shout but could not. As he went down the pool for the second time, he tried to jump upwards but it was sheer waste of energy. Terror held him deeper and deeper. During the third trial, he sucked water instead of air. Light was going out and there was no more panic. So, he ceased all efforts and he became unconscious. He crossed to oblivion. When revived, he found himself vomiting beside the pool. He was in the grip of fear of water and it deprived him of the joys of canoeing, boating, swimming and fishing. Later, to overcome his phobia for water, he hired an instructor to learn swimming. The instructor taught him swimming piece by piece. He went to different lakes to swim and found tiny vestiges of fear still gripped him. He challenged the fear and swam. Swimming up and down the Warm Lake he finally overcame his fear of water. He realised that in death there is peace and there is terror only in fear of death. **Will to live is stronger than fear of death.**

Deep Water - Key-Points & Sequence

Author's plan to learn how to swim 1

- chose Y.M.C.A. pool to learn swimming
- pool safe, only nine feet deep and two or three feet at the shallow ends
- Yakima river not chosen because it was treacherous, claimed many lives
- author got a pair of water wings
- hated to walk into it with skinny legs
- But overcame his pride

Aversion to water resurfaces

- aversion to water
- the result of childhood experience
- his father took him to the beach in California when he was three or four
- the waves knocked him down
- terror in his heart



- ## 2
- years later unpleasant memories revived at Y.M.C.A. pool

- childish fear of water stirred once again

Began to gather confidence

- paddled with his new water wings
- tried to learn by aping other boys
- practised twice or thrice on different days
- gathered confidence

Douglas' misadventure in the Y.M.C.A. pool

- one day, all alone at the pool
- lacked courage to go in alone
- waited for others to come
- soon an eighteen years old boy arrived
- had thick hair on chest, bulging muscles and strong physique
- that boy tossed the author inside the pool
- Douglas fell into the water in a sitting position

Deep Water - Key-Points & Sequence

Douglas' plan to save himself

3

- went at once to the bottom
- frightened but not frightened out of wits
- planned to make a big jump upward and come to the surface
- to lie flat on it and paddle to the edge of the pool and save himself.

Douglas' experience of the fall

- went down to the bottom
- nine feet appeared like ninety feet
- his lungs were ready to burst
- hit the bottom
- summoned up all his strength
- made a great spring upward
- thought to come to the surface like a cork
- contrary happened, came up slowly
- opened his eyes and saw only water



Effort to survive

4

- grew panicky
- effort to grab a rope
- but his hands clutched only water
- felt suffocated
- eyes and nose came out of water but not his mouth
- swallowed water and felt choked
- his legs stiff and rigid like lifeless objects
- started his journey back to the bottom

Downward journey

- struck at the water
- lost his breath, lungs ached, head throbbed, felt dizzy
- still remembered the strategy to jump up

Completely terrified

- water all around
- stark terror seized him
- unable to scream
- felt as if paralysed
- his heart and pounding in his head made him feel that he was alive

Deep Water - Key-Points & Sequence

Another effort to survive

5

- terrified but did not lose reason
- jumped up with all his strength
- did not succeed
- trembled with fright
- his arms and legs did not move
- nothing happened and went down for the third time

Lost all hope

- gave up all efforts to survive
- felt relaxed
- fear and terror wiped out



- no panic, felt quiet and peaceful
- felt drowsy and passed into oblivion

Regained consciousness

- lay on his stomach beside the pool vomiting
- the big bully said that he was simply fooling

- was taken to the locker room

6

- escaped death

Effects of this unpleasant experience

- walked home, but weak and trembling
- shook and cried on the bed
- could not eat that night
- haunted by fear for days together
- slightest exertion upset him
- felt wobbly in the knees and stick to his stomach
- feared water and avoided it

A few years later

- fear of water seized him
- unpleasant experience of his pool terrorised him
- joy of fishing, canoeing, boating, swimming marred by fear
- haunting fear of the water followed him
- every way to overcome the fear failed

Deep Water - Key-Points & Sequence

Decided to overcome this fear 7

- engaged an instructor in October to learn to swim
- a rope attached to a belt put around him
- the rope went through a pulley that ran on an overhead cable
- with the help of the pulley, went to and fro in the pool
- practised for weeks together

Douglas became a swimmer

- after three months' practice, fear started fading
- learnt to keep his face under and exhale and to raise his nose and inhale
- gradually shed part of the panic
- initially legs were stiff but gradually they relaxed
- in April, the instructor told him that he could swim
- could dive off and swim the length of the pool
- gradually became a swimmer

Efforts still continued 8

- tried to swim while alone in the pool
- shed off fear
- went to Lake Wentworth
- swam; two miles across the lake successfully tried crawl, breast stroke, side stroke and back stroke
- only once terror did return but he overcame it

Went to Warm Lake to test his confidence

- dived and swam across the Warm Lake
- back from the other shore
- succeeded in his experiment
- conquered his fear of water



A great truth dawned upon him

- peace in death
- terror only in the fear of death
- experienced both the sensation of dying and the terror that fear of it could produce
- this increased his will to live

Vocabulary

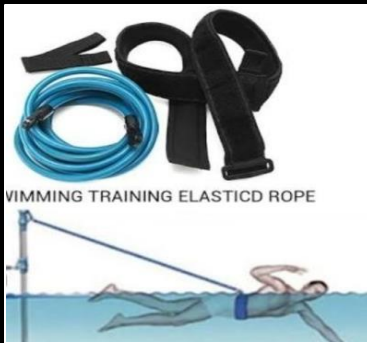
Deep Water



<i>Treacherous</i>	= that cannot be trusted
<i>drown</i>	= to die of being underwater too long
<i>shallow</i>	= not deep
<i>skinny</i>	= very thin
<i>subdued</i>	= controlled
<i>aversion</i>	= a strong feeling of disliking
<i>surf</i>	= foam produced by the waves of water
<i>terror</i>	= a feeling of extreme fear
<i>stirred</i>	= evoked
<i>overpower</i>	= to defeat or gain control
<i>revive</i>	= to bring again
<i>aping</i>	= imitating
<i>timid</i>	= shy and nervous
<i>bruiser</i>	= a large strong aggressive person
<i>specimen</i>	= sample
<i>rippling</i>	= moving like a small wave
<i>yelled</i>	= shouted loudly
<i>tossed</i>	= threw carelessly
<i>summoned</i>	= mustered, gathered
<i>bob</i>	= move up

<i>tinge</i>	= a small amount of colour	<i>haunting</i>	= to continue to cause problem
<i>clutched</i>	= held tightly	<i>wobbly</i>	= unstable, shaky
<i>flailed</i>	= moved arms and legs without control	<i>wading</i>	= walking through water
<i>paralysed</i>	= unable to be moved	<i>seize</i>	= take hold of
<i>rigid</i>	= inflexible, stiff	<i>handicap</i>	= disability
<i>screamed</i>	= gave a loud cry	<i>canoes</i>	= light narrow boats
<i>expending</i>	= using or spending a lot	<i>salmon, bass,</i>	= kinds of fish
<i>nightmare</i>	= unpleasant dream or a frightening dream	<i>trout</i>	
<i>irresistible</i>	= so strong that it cannot be stopped or resisted	<i>slack</i>	= lessen
<i>throbbed</i>	= felt regular painful movement	<i>exhale</i>	= to breathe out
<i>dizzy</i>	= giddy	<i>inhale</i>	= to breathe in
<i>strategy</i>	= plan	<i>shed</i>	= get rid of
<i>thrash</i>	= beat	<i>command</i>	= control
<i>sheer</i>	= utter	<i>terror-stricken</i>	= extremely frightened
<i>stark</i>	= impossible to avoid	<i>vestige</i>	= a small part of something that still exists
<i>shrieking</i>	= shouting loudly	<i>frown</i>	= to become angry
<i>pounding</i>	= making a beating noise	<i>scare</i>	= frighten
<i>grab</i>	= seize	<i>miniature</i>	= at a very small scale
<i>limp</i>	= lacking strength	<i>residual</i>	= something that still remains
<i>drowsy</i>	= sleepy	<i>stripped</i>	= undressed
<i>oblivion</i>	= a state in which you are not aware of what is happening around you; state of unconsciousness	<i>shore</i>	= the land along the edge of the sea
		<i>brush aside</i>	= to ignore

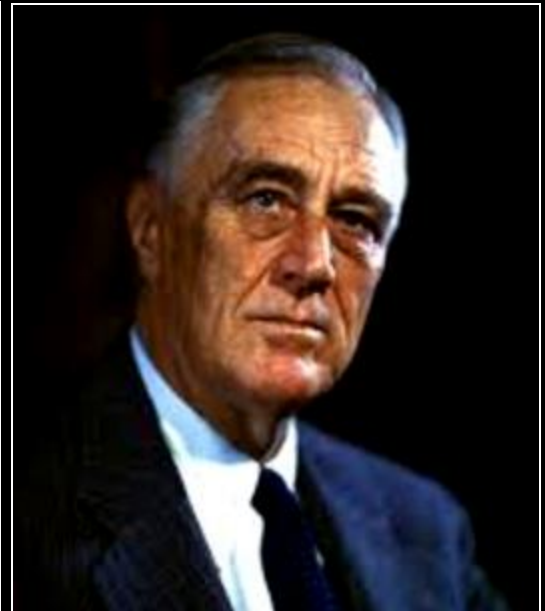
DEEP WATER – *down the memory lane...*



DEEP WATER – *down the memory lane.....*



“All we have to fear is fear itself”



Deep Water



POINTS TO PONDER

- Author's plan to learn to swim (Yakima, YMCA Pool)
- Aversion to Water resurfaces (California Beach)
- The start off at the pool (lack of confidence, aping, water wings)
- The misadventure
- Douglas' plan to save himself **
- Douglas' experience of drowning **
- Efforts to survive
- Ceasing all efforts (peace in death, mother's tender arms)
- Effects of the experience
- Determination to overcome the fear
- Training lessons by the instructor (bit by bit, synchronisation)
- Perfecting the art & Douglas the perfectionist - Lake Wentworth in New Hampshire, Triggs Island, Stamp Act Island, Tieton – Conrad Meadows, Conrad Creek (bay) Trail – Meade Glacier, Warm Lake
- The larger/deeper meaning of life (only thing to fear is fear itself)



DEEP WATER

ASSIGNMENT : QUESTIONS TO TEST COMPREHENSION

Short Answer Questions (30-40 words)

1. How is Douglas' childhood fear different from that of Kamala Das'?
2. What was the psychological impact of fear in Douglas' mind?
3. What is the larger meaning that the author draws from his experience?
4. Why was Douglas determined to overcome his fear?
5. How did the experience affect Douglas?
6. How did Douglas get rid of all the residual fear that he had of water?
7. What is the misadventure that Douglas speaks about?
8. How did the author develop his aversion to water?



Long Answer Questions (125-150 words) :

1. How did the instructor build a swimmer out of Douglas?
2. What were the series of emotions and fears that Douglas experienced when he was thrown into the pool? What plans did he make to come to the surface?
3. 'Deep Water' by William Douglas is a saga of perseverance and courage. Elucidate.
4. 'Deep Water' is actually a psycho analysis of fear and its long lasting impact on us. Explain.