

Learning to swim.

When I was a boy, there was a swimming hole on the upstream end of a Big Island, in the Mississippi River.

It wasn't exactly a "hole", but a deep place on the cross-channel which divided Big Island from Little Island.

The Big Island was about 60 acres in area, the Little Island was less than one acre.

These islands in the Mississippi were a bit over one mile from our farm.

Because the channel separating the two islands was crossways to the river, it had a very slow current.

There was a mature tree that stood alone on the bank of the big island.

A rope hung from the tree over the water.



The riverbank at the tree had a sharp, six-foot drop.

The whole affair was set up to drop the swinging swimmer into the deepest part of the channel.

On the far side of the cross-channel was a normal beach, with gently sloping sand.

I was twelve the first summer I visited the swimming hole.

I could not swim on the surface; I could only swim underwater.

I had learned to swim underwater by swimming in our farm's shallow ponds.

Mostly, I went to the swimming hole late in the day to clean off hay dust.

Bigger boys would threaten to throw non-swimmers into the river.

They never did.

I faked it by swimming underwater to the far side.

The channel was about 40 feet wide, so the first few underwater crossings were a stretch for me.

By the end of the summer, I could dive and dogpaddle on the surface passably well.

Every small town on a river had a similar swimming place.

All such places were challenging to get to, were for boys only, and were called bare a— beach.

We normally swam in our underwear.

Only rarely would anyone go naked, but that wasn't noticed anyway.

During several summers of swimming there, I never saw an adult or a female.

I always rode my horse Nevada to the swimming hole.

That was kind of a hit with the other guys.

Eventually, I took Nevada into the river but that is a different story.

Tom.