

An Ode to the Y and Swimming

Two things I've always disliked (but now like)

I've lived in Eugene for 15 years, and for most of those, I avoided the Y. I had been a member for months here and there: When getting back into shape after pregnancies and delivering babies, when getting my mind back into shape after losing pregnancies, when I needed a place to go with young children that wasn't my house.

But for many years, I disliked the Y. The weight room was too crowded, the pool was too hot and I ran into too many colleagues I didn't want to chat with while sweaty and red-faced.

I thought about the Y again when I broke my foot in late summer 2025 and was placed in a large, uncomfortable and unwieldy boot. The doctor made clear that running, hiking, biking and weights were out of the question.

There was only one thing left: the pool. I was desperate for exercise and I had a sense that the Y was where I needed to go.

Just as I have disliked the YMCA for many years, I have also disliked swimming. I've done it on and off for 25 years: when training for a triathlon with my mom, when recovering from prior injuries, when

a doctor explicitly told me to do it. But I certainly didn't like it. I'd count down my laps like a prison sentence. The monotony of staring at the black line at the bottom of the pool felt like torture. If I was swimming indoors, the space felt too hot. If I was swimming outdoors, the water on the initial plunge felt heart-attack-inducing. For decades, when I swam, it was because I had no other option.

So here I am, a couple months into my foot injury, and I want to publicly celebrate two things that I distinctly disliked before my injury: the Y and swimming.

Why have I come to like the Y? Initially, I arrived each morning grumpy and churlish. I hobbled in, only to have friendly people (mostly older than me) greet me at the front desk by name. Then I'd hobble into the locker room where I'd scowl while older ladies commiserated by sharing their own prior experiences with boots. Then I'd hobble a bit further to the pool area, where I'd gather a kickboard, buoy and water jogging belt and inevitably someone poolside would ask how my foot was doing.

When I finally slid into the water, I'd see that in the lane next to me was a man with a single leg. Sharing my lane were a rotation of grey-haired ladies who used walkers, wheelchairs or canes to get around. In the smaller pool was a paralyzed man who

needed an attendant with him to safely be in the water. There were no hard bodies here. There were just bodies — many of them soft, injured, hurt, being nursed back to their own form of normal. They were the bodies of people who wished me the best for a quick recovery.

As I showed up day after day, week after week, others showed me small kindnesses. Some nice ladies offered to return my kickboard so I didn't have to hobble across the wet pool area. One day, a younger-than-me lifeguard grabbed all my swimming accessories for me as soon as he saw me arriving, setting them carefully by my preferred lane.

At 6 am on a Friday morning, I was almost destroyed by this small gesture. How infrequently we see such thoughtfulness in our day-to-day interactions! I realize that what I've described are almost stupidly simple gestures — essentially meaningless except to the person on the receiving end. I doubt that the person who helped me even remembered it. Yet we experience such acts so rarely that it's stunning when they occur. I've come to like the Y because it's a space where such acts do occur, and where we can reflect on the small, kind gestures we're offered.

If that's why I've come to like the Y, why have I come to like swimming? One

answer is because I've forced myself to like it. Since there is nothing else I can do for exercise for many months, I've decided I'll like swimming. Another answer is that I've found something to enjoy. It is deadly boring, but meditative. My mind wanders and is under-stimulated for an hour. There is amplified quietness as my ears fill with water, and the inspired feeling as my body propels itself underwater.

I've also had the pleasure of making improvements and being aware of those improvements. I notice that I can swim more laps than the day before and I can kick harder without pain. Rarely are we given the reason and space to pay such close attention to our own bodies, how they feel, and what they need. Unaccountably, an injury, plus the Y, plus swimming, has provided me with both the reason to pay attention and the space to do so.

To be clear: I don't recommend that anyone break their foot. But, if you end up in a situation where the things you usually turn to for comfort aren't available, I encourage you to consider liking something that you've previously disliked. My broken foot has allowed me to move two things from my dislike to like list. Thank you, YMCA, for being full of relentlessly positive people, for providing the pool I needed for recovery, and for offering a space for so many others in our community to find what they need.

Melissa Graboyes is a Y member, a swimmer, a trail runner and teaches at the University of Oregon.

slant — Sometimes stunned

BY EW EDITORIAL STAFF

>> This week in the hell in a handbasket that is life under the Trump administration: Robert F. Kennedy is merrily dooming children by dialing back federal recommendations on vaccines (no, Denmark ≠ the United States) and in a line straight out of *The Onion*, said at a press conference, “We are ending the war on saturated fats,” as he stuck red meat and dairy at the top of a new food pyramid (in other news, who knew we still had a food pyramid?) Then there's the whole oil-induced capture of Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro and his wife. As the *Weekly* goes to press, news broke that a 37-year-old woman in Minneapolis, tentatively identified as a legal observer, was shot and killed by a federal officer during an immigration enforcement operation Wednesday. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey called the Department of Homeland Security's version of the events that led to her death on Jan. 7 “bullshit” and told ICE to “get the fuck out of Minneapolis.” The killing took place less than a mile from where George Floyd was killed by the police in 2020.

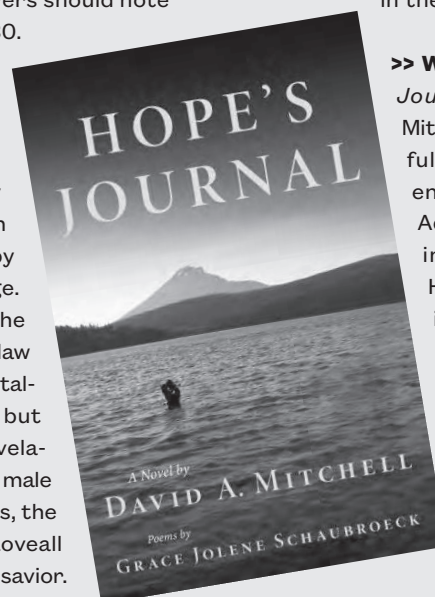
>> Attacks on Oregon's mail-in voting: A U.S. Postal Service rule took effect Dec. 24, saying that mail might not receive a postmark on the day USPS takes possession of it. This means if an Oregon voter mails their ballot before Election Day, its postmark may not be applied until after Election Day. So ballots placed in the mail by voters before the deadline — “during the ballot grace period” — may not be counted. Meanwhile, the U.S. Supreme Court is getting ready to consider a case that could eliminate ballot grace periods nationwide.

>> In last week's Slant we noted that former KWAX classical music radio announcer Peter Van de Graaf has a new gig, hosting “Exploring Music” at WFMT radio in Chicago, but we failed to also note that “Exploring Music” broadcasts every weeknight at 7 pm on KWAX. Classical music lovers should note Van de Graaf starts hosting March 30.

>> We're a little concerned about the State of the County — to be clear, not just the state Lane County is in but the Jan. 5 gathering led by outgoing Lane County Commission Chair David Loveall and dominated by folks from New Hope Christian College. We don't disagree with the idea that the county is dealing with an underfunded law enforcement system, a struggling mental-health system and a housing crisis, but from the rock band referencing “revelation,” to the prayers, to introducing the male commissioners before the female ones, the event gave weird evangelical vibes. Loveall saying, “Government isn't the people's savior. I believe some 2,000 years ago somebody already took that job,” didn't help, and what's up with referring to “feeding the beast of a toxic charity system” when it comes to helping those in need?

>> Sheldon Pool is hosting a BIPOC youth water safety and lifeguard cohort 6:30 pm to 7 pm Tuesdays and Thursdays Feb. 9 through March 19. A disproportionate number of Black people cannot swim and die from drowning, according to the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention, back when it was reporting facts. The MAGA and vituperative social media account LibsofTikTok got wind of the program and are attacking it. Take a moment to tell Sheldon Pool “thank you” for looking out for the community in these trying times.



>> What we are reading: In *Hope's Journal*, Eugene author David A. Mitchell takes the reader on a delightful journey through several eras encompassing three generations. Adventure and romance intertwine in this metaphysical love story. Hope is the grandmother who inspires with her soul-baring journal. She includes mind-bending poetry while she documents the 1918 flu pandemic. Forest activists Rad and Lily take the reader through the dramatic scenery and landscape of the Pacific Northwest, interweaving tales of Bigfoot. The author

immerses us in the hippie culture and drama of the annual Rainbow Gatherings that still occur today. Readers get a first-hand account of alternative events such as the Oregon Country Fair that we enjoy near Eugene every summer. During their travels and adventures, we experience the beginning and growth of Lily and Rad's sweet, metaphysical love. Visual images and rituals make the reader want to find their own special lover. Find a copy at DavidaMitchell.com (Review by Geneva Miller).