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## Learning to Float

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# LEARNING TO FLOAT

*Janet Ruth Heller*

Rixie taught me how to swim  
When I was five and she was seventy.  
She held my frightened body  
In her marathon arms  
And promised me that I would float  
In water eight feet deep.  
"Your body's like a boat,"  
She said and turned me on my back.

I gazed up at her wrinkled face  
And trusted her dark eyes.  
"In a minute, I'll let go.  
Just relax for now. Remember,  
Your body's like a boat."

I lay still and thought of the ships  
plying the blue and green waves of Lake Michigan.  
I had never seen one sink.  
"I'm letting you go."  
I floated quietly in the pool  
And Rixie's serene face smiled.

Fifteen years later,  
I taught poor children to swim  
Using the same metaphor  
And the same honesty.  
"Your body's like a boat,"  
I told them and held them gently  
Until they could relax and float.

Forty years later,  
I face crises every day.  
I lose a friend, I lose a job,  
And I let despair drown my hopes.  
But then Rixie's words return:  
"Your body's like a boat."