

again to teach me to swim. His hands beneath the bones of my back. My cheeks and lungs puffed with air. With fear. When he lets go, I start to sink to the bottom of the pool.

My backside is heavy with the full-coverage swim-skirt that substitutes for the bikinis flaunted by other taut, tanned bodies. The skimpy fabric I am still too shy, too pasty, too afraid to wear. For I have never known that prepubescent innocence, confidence, of half-naked summers, when the neighborhood kids skipped back in wet swimsuits from the pool, towels streaming behind, skin uncovered, unabashed, glowing in the lightness of the sun.

The brown paper shade was yanked against the sun, my father's angry frame at the kitchen window darkening the room, blocking the view of the next-door neighbors' backyard pool, whenever children's squeals splashed against the glass. Or worse: Whenever, across the window screen, floated the form of their mother, languorous, lascivious, lounging on a long pool float, her brown breasts bobbing, half-uncovered, beneath untied bikini strings.

Fearsome female body parts that were to remain covered, according to my father, per God the Father (an incomplete list): The head (by growing long hair). The chest and midriff (by hiding all skin two finger-widths below the collar bone). The thighs and knees (by wearing a skirt or culottes; never the male-only clothing of pants). The breasts and genitals (of course).

1 Corinthians 11:13: "Is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?"

The face of a young woman, however, was to remain uncovered by makeup. Washed clean with water.

Approximately 400-800 gallons of water fill the average baptismal.