

SWIMMING IS HIS HEART'S DESIRE

By Susan Hickman
Strive, July/Aug., 2006



When Richard Taylor's body hits water, he's in his element. He has the rhythm. He swims as though he can swim beyond the movement. In his own words, he's addicted to water.

"Swimming offers the cheapest and most effective release from stress, depression and restlessness. It buoys you up with a mysterious physical buzz," says Taylor, a local writer and English instructor at Carleton University.

"Swimming is my religion, my physiotherapy and my psychotherapy." The author of *House Inside the Waves: Domesticity, Art, and the Surfing Life*, a travel memoir of his year in Australia, Taylor is currently in the throes of tapping out a new tome "about swimming with writers, painters, actors,

politicians, environmentalists and other romantics in Canada, the United States, Britain and beyond” called *Water and Desire*.

“All my books and writing are touched with aquatic themes,” he admits. “There is probably no one in Canada who has as much aquatic experience on paper, or in an out of the water as I do. For decades I’ve been swimming and surfing all over the world. In *Water and Desire*, Taylor describes swimming was such greats as international marathon swimmer Vicki Keith, and in the footsteps, or rather swimming strokes, of the likes of Ernest Hemingway in Florida’s Key West, Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald in the French Riviera, and Group of Seven painter Tom Thomson.

But at heart, Taylor is in open water swimmer.

“If one believes the speculations about man’s aquatic phase of evolution, and if one reflects upon the webbings between fingers and toes, the more or less hairless, streamlined body, then swimming open water doesn’t seem so frivolous,” wrote Taylor in his 2004 article *Different Strokes*. It’s a healthy, practical mode of transportation that can also be erotic, dangerous, relaxing, philosophical, religious and obsessive.

“Often, open water swimmers are defiant romantics, free spirits more at home in water than on land.”

But when open water is closed for the season, Taylor hits the pool. He’s been swimming with Nepean Masters Swim Club at the Walter Baker Centre in Barrhaven since 1988.

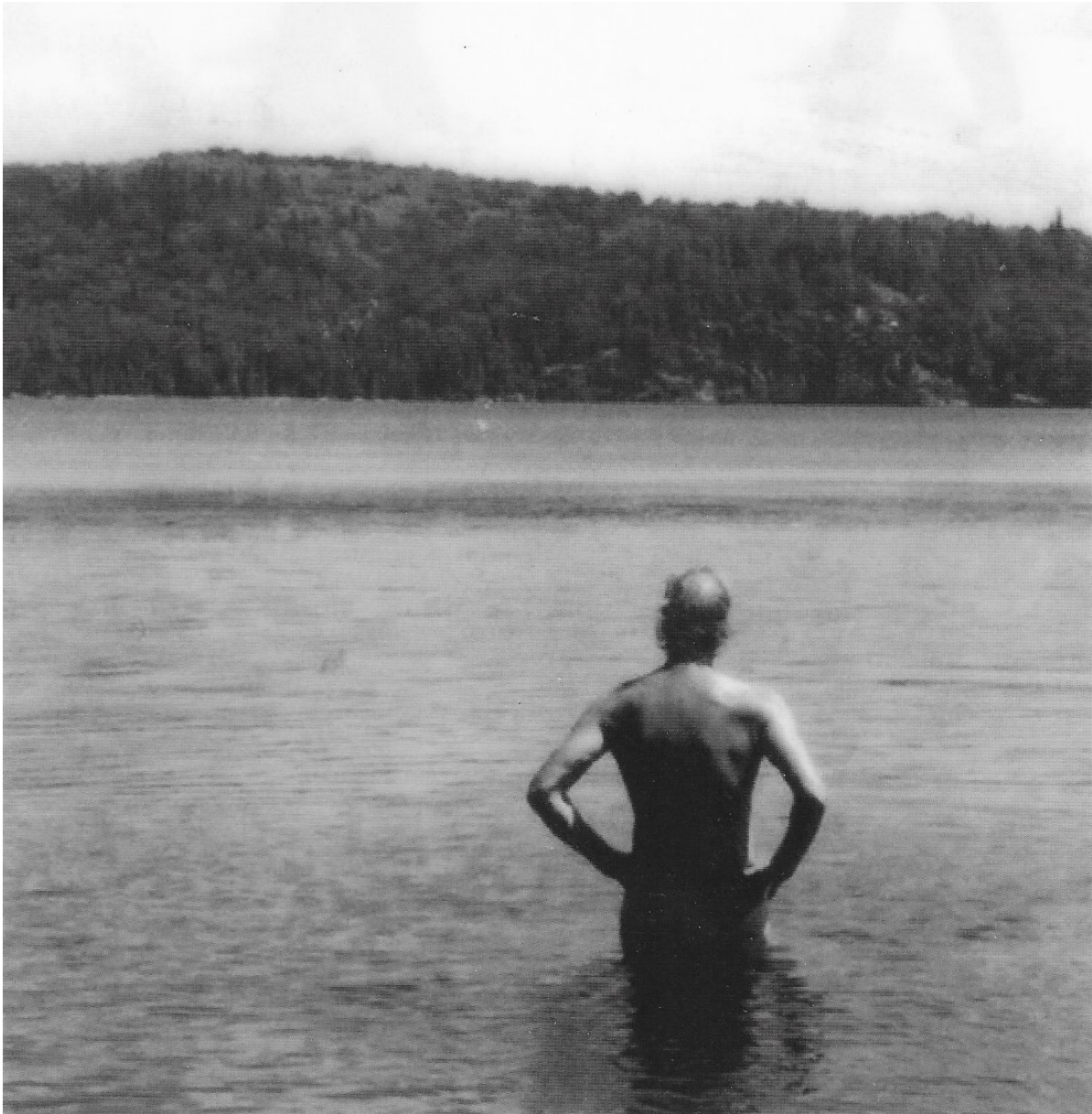
Formed in 1977, the club is the largest masters swim club in Ontario. Some 250 members, between the ages of 18 and 75, attracted to the idea of swimming for fitness or competition, work out at the 25-metre Walter Baker pool from September to early June. A summer maintenance program holds the interest of year-rounders who want to keep fit through swimming.

“We have great swim coaches who give us workouts each session,” Taylor explains. We swim about 3 kilometres three times a week. Some go into competition, others do it just to keep in shape and to ward off angst and the stress of living outside the water.”

While at this time of year Taylor is swimming the open waters of Ontario and Québec cottage country, during the fall and winter he turns out his

gruelling laps in the pool and competes at provincial and national levels for the 1500-metre freestyle “to keep an edge on.”

“That said,” he adds, I’m a huge promoter of non-competitive soul swimming for the average swimmer, especially in open water.



Richard Taylor gazes out at his next conquest