**Latest News: 15th February 2020**

By Mike Fonfe´ following a phone call

**SAVED FROM DROWNING BY JUST 5 LESSONS**

***Five swimming lessons save three girls from tragic drowning***

A 5 Minute Read

The Sri Lanka Women’s Swimming Project, [www.icanswimcanyou.com](http://www.icanswimcanyou.com), has just earned a Sinhalese Buddhist ‘merit’ for saving Madushika from Galle, from drowning after she had only received just five lessons. The Project pioneers teaching swimming in a way that directly addresses the cause of drowning which, simply put, is suffocation by water. As the famous drowning prevention expert, Dr. Frank Pia, said over fifty years ago: ***People don’t drown because they cannot swim; they drown because they cannot breathe***. Taking the **A** and ***B*** from the **AB**C of First Aid, the Project ***makes guaranteeing to*** ***keep the Airway open and Breathe*** the top priority skill to be learned by new swimmers. This means **learning to float face-up ahead of all other swimming skills**. Learning to float more-or-less motionless is not difficult, however, it is not instinctive and has to be learned by one-to-one, careful hands-on coaching, by the teacher in the water with the student. Luckily for Madushika, she had already mastered Float-and-Breathe and learning this saved her life. Here’s how:

Madushika had earlier only received five lessons from the Project, which gives free survival swimming lessons to women and teenage girls at the JETWING Lighthouse Community Pool in Galle, Sri Lanka, every Monday afternoon. Before Madushka had fully learned to swim, she moved away to another job. However, she could float on her back confidently and could propel herself along safely on her back by kicking. On the day in question, a typical holiday day-out bus trip to the countryside, as many town dwellers do, Madushka had gone into a handy hillside stream to cool off with her friends. Unfortunately, one girl slipped and, as she went under, to save herself, she grabbed the long hair of her sister nearby and pulled her down. The sister, in turn, then grabbed Madushka’s hair and all three were now underwater, in the beginnings of a triple drowning tragedy.

Luckily, Madushika was underneath the other two and pushed them up to the surface, where they were then grabbed and rescued by others on the side of the fast-flowing stream. Madushika, however, was still under water and was being swept along downstream. No one else would enter the water now because they couldn’t swim and were themselves too frightened of drowning and, in panic, had absolutely no idea what to do next. In what should have been Madushika’s last moments, her previous training popped into her mind’s eye ‘*as in a film’*.

She remembered the skills she had memorized and mastered in Christina’s Project and rolled over onto her back underwater, kicked her way to the surface and floated on her back to breathe again, from which position the others were able to reach out to grab her passing hand and drag her out. What Christina really appreciated was that Madushika then phoned her survival swimming coach at the Women’s Swimming Project and thanked her for saving her life.

The Sri Lanka Women’s Swimming Project is now run by Sri Lankans under local leadership. Everyone was naturally delighted to hear that the little training Madushika had received was enough to save her life. Since then, the now-recovered Madushika and nearly drowned sisters have been invited to return to the free lessons in Galle to become fully water-safe. As mentioned earlier, the Project is unique because it makes learning to Float-and- Breathe the absolutely single, most important, first, aquatic skill to be learned until it is instinctive.

While many other learn-to-swim programs focus on swimming distance and speed, the Sri Lanka Project measures all its progress on how long one can survive for. The Project’s ***I Can Swim, Can You?*** standard for totally safe swimming pool swimmer is to be able to jump into deep water; come to the surface; float on their backs breathing in a totally relaxed, energy-free, position for 10 minutes; then swim 100 metres of any combination of strokes without touching any supporting surface and, finally, climb-out, unassisted, over a 30 centimetre ledge above the water. Of course, anyone who can float and rest for ten minutes, can also easily cover far more than 100 metres, since they are able to rest at anytime without exhausting themselves further by treading water.

Another great benefit of Float-and-Breathe is that students who can float indefinitely are also fully relaxed, in the perfect body position, flat on the surface, ready for streamlined swimming and, consequently, can quickly transition to efficient and graceful stroke swimming in no time at all, compared to conventional methods. Christina Fonfe´ was awarded the British Empire Medal in 2014 for her pioneering services to the thousands of women and teenage girls in Sri Lanka who learned to Float-and-Breathe First, then Swim. Those who learn fastest become student swimming teachers and the most able of those are then qualified, also for free, as internationally recognized, certified swimming teachers, who are then able find employment anywhere in the world.

***Can’t Swim? Don’t Drown. Learn to Float-and-Breathe First. Then Swim.***