

# A Swimmer's Story

CURATED AND WRITTEN BY JESSICA WAHLSTROM

If you or someone you know is a victim or survivor and needs help, please reach out to us, we are here 24-hours a day.

She's swimming again. Most days she swims laps in a pool near where she lives. She is also doing longer swims like she used to, in open water. **It feels good to stretch and float, to glide, after so many years spent on dry land.** She's working again as well, using her skills and experience, her training and education. She is traveling and exploring. **She is trying new things. She is excavating parts of herself that have been buried, waiting for her to return and reclaim them.**



She didn't realize that she was being buried while it was happening. The descent — deep and then deeper — was gradual, slow, almost imperceptible. Her partner was charming and likable, their courtship exciting and fast. Even his efforts to control her seemed charming at first, subtle. He told her that he would take care of her. He encouraged her to leave her job for the sake of their family. She became dependent on him financially. He soon controlled all finances entirely. He discouraged her from participating in activities and relationships that she had built and sustained — had been sustained by — for years. **He controlled her health care choices. She felt as if she'd slipped out of her body. She stopped moving in the ways that her body could. She stopped swimming.** After their children started school and then moved away, grown, she sat alone at home all day. She stopped trusting her instincts, her thoughts, her feelings. For years, she sensed that she was disappearing, sinking, disconnecting from the world.

When she was connected to Center for Safety & Change several months ago and told them about her experiences, she felt as if she was being looked at, listened to, and lifted for the first time in years. For the past several months, with the support of the Center's mental health services, she has worked closely with a counselor to process what she has been through and to plan for what is next. She credits the therapeutic support that she has gotten from the Center for helping her to find and strengthen what she needed to climb out of where she'd been buried. Recently, she decided to move away from her marriage and her house and all of the things inside of both, understanding that she would leave much behind but profoundly aware of all that was waiting for her. **Life isn't easy, but there is an ease that is returning to the way that she approaches it, even the hard things. She is reclaiming what had been taken from her, repossessing her agency, reentering her body and life.**

You can get back into the water if you want, if you have the chance. You can decide when to inhale deeply and dive, when you want to head back up to break the surface, to emerge. You can decide when you want to float — weightless — for a while. **You can feel at home again in your body, appreciating the way that the muscles in your back continue to push your arms forward, reaching, opening to what lies ahead. ▲**

