

AVOIDING THE WATER? WANT TO BE AT EASE IN THE WATER?

Miracle Swimming makes it easy to eliminate fear of the water

At a resort on Siesta Key, a group of individuals — a man and two women plus an instructor — are gathered by the pool going over notes and reviewing their lessons. They're from various places in the U.S.—two from the Atlanta area and one from Sarasota—but with a common goal: learn to feel comfortable in the water and thus enjoy swimming, floating or simply being in the water. It's part bookish, part hands-on, but always at a deliberate, gentle pace with no pressure, no coaching and no laps of any kind.

This is Miracle Swimming's approach — a carefully crafted (and tested) system to teach people to feel comfortable in the water. It's held at resorts versus at pools at community centers or places like the YMCA to add to the relaxed vibe that permeates the learning at Miracle Swimming.

"You have to be comfortable," says Melon Dash, the owner, founder and veteran teacher of Miracle Swimming explains. "Comfort is a big part of the experience from the water being a comfortable temperature, the depth being a comfortable level and most importantly the comfort of being able to be yourself as you learn," she explains. "And fun," Melon's instructor Theresa shouts from across the pool where she is starting the pool part of the day's learning.

There's a strong mindfulness component to Miracle Swimming that could be summed up in, "Don't think too much,"



Smiling faces means another successful "graduation" on the Essentials class for these three students. L-R Noah, instructor Theresa, Eni and Anne. Note the smiles as well as the fact they're in deep water.



Melon Dash is the creator of Miracle Swimming. She's a nationally ranked U.S. Masters swimmer and holds a Master's Degree in Education.



Melon created a tether and PVC attachment for each student which ensures that the student never drifts and thus keeps them feeling safe.

as Melon calls it. As humans, we tend to fear what we don't know and fear can sometimes lead to panic. The three soon-to-be-graduates of this five-day program are anything but fearful. They are relaxed, smiling — almost elated — to experience the

water for the enjoyable experience it can be without any mental hindrances.

Most of us love the water — swimming, diving, wading or just floating. But some have a fear of the water that keeps them from getting into the water past the shallow end. It can be an intense fear; for others it's an inconvenience when on vacation or taking kids or grandkids to the water or pool. Some simply have

little experience in the water and thus are not comfortable. And more than a few would like a way to overcome that fear, but not necessarily with swim lessons.

Melon, an experienced college swimming instructor, in 1983 created what she calls "The 5 Circles Teaching Method." She created it because she saw her students more concerned with survival than mastering strokes. With this novel new approach she also opened Miracle Swimming School for Adults. Since then thousands have "triumphed" by taking her classes according to her website.

Melon is a nationally ranked U.S. Masters swimmer and holds a Master's Degree in Education. Speaking with

her you find yourself talking more about mindfulness which is interesting because that's how her program works. You have to be mindful of your thinking, your fear, your surroundings, your breathing. Put another way, you learn to be in control in the water by being peaceful in the water.

Melon has offered the program in places like Dublin, Ireland, and Cheltenham, England, and closer to home in West Palm Beach in Florida, but also Palm Springs and Chicago. She has 65 licensed instructors

who also offer her program around the country.

Melon now teaches the advanced classes so Theresa is leading the beginner class today that consists of two women and one man (yes, it's co-ed). Anne, a Sarasota resident, calls Miracle Swimming's methodology "a gentle approach" and indeed it is. Students spend

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*Melon
Dash,
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as much time out of the pool as in. Eni, who hails from North Carolina, appreciates the individualized approach.

Every consideration is given to keeping students relaxed and feeling safe. No one is rushed if they're not ready. There are no "musts" or "have to's" and no testing and no competition. Ever refining her teaching, Melon created a tether and PVC attachment for each student. The tether hooks the swimmer to a set of plastic anchors that attach to the side of the pool. This is to ensure that the student never drifts and thus keeps them feeling safe.

A sense of safety is what's it's all about and is the core of the thinking behind Miracle Swimming. Thus no "get in the pool and start kicking" or "you're doing that all wrong" dialogue. Theresa leads the entry level Essentials 1 class and says, "When you're ready, try this move" as she demonstrates how to briefly turn your face into the water. They all do it in their own way as much as they want. After that, she asks them, "What would you like to do next?"

One of the students, Noah, is from Atlanta and admits she'd always be the one to watch the kids whenever she was at a pool. She's been around water, but wanted a "sense of confidence." She likes the class because it "speaks to the fears adults have" and has already signed up for the second stage of classes.

Eni, another student, admits he "never had the opportunity to swim." He'd go on vacations and dip his legs in the water, but wanted to feel comfortable in deep water. He'd see others swim and admire how graceful they were. He did his research thoroughly before choosing Miracle Swimming. He found many classes filled with kids and thought, "This is not going to work." He read about the program back in 2015 and when his wife took it, being that he called "the guinea pig," and decided if she liked it he'd take it. And he did.

For Anne, who, lives in Sarasota, she signed up for Miracle Swimming to "feel safe and enjoy the water without fear." She had enjoyed water sports as a youth and used to be comfortable in the water and wanted to regain that sense of being comfortable again.

The program is five consecutive days and sometimes they're in the pool for an hour or more after having instruction on

land. The water is intentionally warm to make it more relaxing and they do their exercises in the shallow end of the pool. A once-a-week typical swim class would never have the same results.

In informal, poolside classes students learn things like buoyancy and center of gravity, and each has a workbook they use every day before heading into the pool. According to Melon, "Other programs don't speak to the mental aspect of swimming."

Watching them on this last day of the five-day program, judging by the smiles, it seems they have all enjoyed the confidence they've gained and will take with them.

STORY: LOUISE BRUDERLE

ABOUT MIRACLE SWIMMING

They offer a variety of classes from beginner to more experienced, but most start with Essentials 1 which is the entry level class. Students learn to overcome the fear of putting your face in, putting your head under, sinking, running out of air, and losing control. Students can move on to move advanced classes if they want to to address deep water, being in the ocean and jumping off a boat.

The essentials do not include strokes. Melon explains that, "Strokes are for efficiency, not safety." She adds that the Essential class "Teaches the essentials of swimming, including how the water works. It's not about motion. You spend time in both shallow and—as you become ready—deep water. The ability to rest in shallow water paves the way for movement that's natural and comfortable. Confidence builds and you become curious to try it in the deep. All that's required is your full presence."

COMING UP:

- ✿ **August 15-19**
- ✿ **Location:** Jamaica Royale, 5830 Midnight Pass Road, Sarasota
- ✿ **Schedule:** Monday 9-noon and 3-6; Tuesday 9-noon; Wednesday 9-noon and 3-6; Thursday 9-noon and 3-6 and Friday 8-11.
- ✿ **Offered again** in Sarasota on September 19-23, October 17-21 and November 7-11.

Visit <https://miracleswimming.com/>.