

**IRENE  
VIRAG**

# Everybody out of the pool, alas

**W**e're observing an end-of-summer rite this week. We're closing the pool, and it is never easy. Once the cover is stretched in place, that's it for lazing on a float or swimming laps or stepping out of the water into the sunshine with a sense of temporary rejuvenation.

It's especially hard for me because I underwent minor foot surgery for a biopsy. Happily, I have nothing to worry about. But I couldn't get the dressing wet for most of August, including those hot, humid days when Long Island turned tropical.

Instead, I had to content myself with watching my husband from a poolside chaise longue or from the den window to make sure he didn't try to imitate Johnny Weissmuller and drown himself in the process. My husband thinks he has a cosmic connection to the king of the movie jungle, who wrestled alligators in tropical streams when he wasn't swinging on vines. Not because he's old enough to have seen the movies when they first came out but because he was in the Oak Room at the Plaza when Johnny Weissmuller let out a Tarzan yell to win a bar bet.

Big deal. I never saw Johnny Weissmuller in movie theaters, but I caught his films on television and once accosted him in the first-class section of a Florida-bound plane as I walked through to second class. He told me he ran a swimming-pool business. He didn't say anything about alligators.

Of course, we've never wrestled alligators in our pool, but we have had adventures in it with wildlife. I chased swans out of the water with a garden hose, and my husband used a net to extricate a big snapping turtle before it succumbed to chlorine. Once, while swimming, we noticed something we hadn't invited paddling around the perimeter of the pool like a rubber duck in a bathtub. It turned out to be a baby rabbit. We put it in a clearing to warm up and it hopped back into the brush. Then there was the time I spotted a discarded snakeskin alongside a nearby Japanese maple. I didn't mind not seeing

**See VIRAG on B15**

# Summer fades and, alas, out comes the pool cover

**VIRAG from B13**

the snake.

We used to keep the pool open into early fall but found it doesn't pay. More often than not, especially in recent years, the days grow cold in September. Trees surround three sides of our pool, and it's grand to float on your back and look through the greenery at the sky. But unless it's absolutely broiling out, the shade not only refrigerates the water but makes solar heating impractical. I'm willing, if not always eager, to scream and jump in, but my consort sprinkles water on his chest and shivers. Propane is the only option. In September, it takes an awful lot of propane to warm up the water. And then the leaves start falling.

Having a pool is not all laps

and floats. We found that out the spring we moved in. Ours is an in-ground pool. It's Gunitite and came with the house. It also came with some problems. First of all, the heater was broken. That wasn't so bad — compared to our closing fees, a few hundred dollars to fix the heater seemed manageable. But within a week, the pool guy told us the marble dust was flaking off. He showed us the flakes. They were big. The pool had to be resurfaced. That cost a few thousand dollars. It was my first lesson in the perils of home-ownership. In the years since, there have been leaks, two new heaters, weekly maintenance costs and the propane.

Sometimes, in moments of stress — like when something goes wrong the day before relatives are expected — I

mumble about filling the “damn thing” in and planting a flower garden.

But I protest too much. The truth is, we love our pool, which is not something either of us aspired to. We both grew up in neighborhoods where an in-ground pool would have been as alien as spoken Tibetan or helicopter pads. Our pool is neither fancy nor flashy, and, except for my husband's bathing trunks, there's nothing splashy about it.

The model is called “Mountain Lake” and it's correspondingly naturalistic. Before the resurfacing, the bottom was black and the dark water amid the trees was more restful than mysterious. Now the pool is a pleasant shade of gray-blue. The effect is still reminiscent of a lake. It's hard to believe

the water comes from a hose.

There's a diving board but you can't bounce on it — it's a slab of rock. When we first saw the pool, it was covered, and we couldn't figure out the stone obelisks on one side. They turned out to be handholds for a built-in ladder.

We have the trees and shrubs along the borders — my favorites are the Japanese maple and a Hinoki cypress. A rectangular stone-lined bed is devoted to potted plants such as bright cherry Callibrachoa and soft pink Nicotiana and an Abutilon with the palest of pale-yellow flowers. The former owners filled another small bed with red geraniums; you could see them from a kitchen window. I put a swan sculpture in the bed and I plant pink ivy geraniums in it.

For pool-siders, there are recliners and chaise longues and a small table and chairs. The pool is an ideal spot for parties and snack-times. For exercise and escape and for my grown stepson who comes by often and can make me laugh no matter what my mood. And who's always ready to jump in, no matter what the water temperature.

All of which lends a certain sadness to the appearance of the cover — even the new one we bought last year. Most people mark summer's departure by their children's return to school or by the arrival of Labor Day.

For us, it's the closing of the pool.

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