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It doesn't matter where you learned swim. It could be the largest lake in New England or the piddliest pond. If you are like me from the very first day you toddled onto the sandy beach or grassy shore you looked longingly out at the raft. That's where the big kids went to horse around, get in trouble with the lifeguards and, most important, ditch their younger brothers and sisters. My mother taught me to paddle around in the ocean when I was a baby. We spent most of August and a few July weekends on the Cape. My sister and I splashed and played on a small beach which was shared by some sort of neighborhood association. It was pretty informal. There were no lifeguards or swimming lessons. There were no docks or diving boards, no cabanas or cabana boys. And no raft.

I really learned to swim at a town beach in the Boston suburbs. There were still no cabanas or cabana boys but Morses Pond had sand, lifeguards, docks and a raft. Every spring the recreation department sold tags on elastic bands for a few bucks. You could only use the pond if you had a tag and they sold out fast.

Since she grew up swimming in the ocean, my mother found the pond a bit dicey. By mid-July it was neither cool nor refreshing. Mom would start to worry about ear aches, infectious diseases and who knows what. After a year or two, we moved up in the world and joined Lake Waban. The fees were a little higher (and still no cabanas or boys) but the lake was larger and stayed cool at least to the end of July. Then, much to Mom's relief we headed down to the chilly ocean waters of the Cape.

The Beach Director at Lake Waban ran a tight ship. She must have been a drill sergeant in an earlier life. Her name was Mrs. Something or Other and all the kids were scared of her. I think quite a few of the mothers, even my Dad, were scared of her. She wore a black Speedo bathing suit and she'd spent so much time in the sun that her skin looked like old shoe leather.

Mrs. So and So directed a platoon of black Speedo clad lifeguards and swimming instructors. (She probably had them swimming laps, lifting weights and running drills at dawn. I suspect they were afraid of her too.) Every kid on the beach signed up for swimming lessons. We learned to float, dog paddle, sidestroke and eventually mastered the crawl. Once we learned the crawl we could set our sights on the rafts.

There were two rafts at Lake Waban and Mrs. What's Her Name devised two brutally hard tests to keep us off them. As I remember it, we had to swim at least a thousand laps to earn the right to use the first raft. I'm equally sure that it was something like ten thousand laps for the privilege of swimming to the second. It took us all several tries to pass. Then, she made us take the test again at the start of every summer to prove that we hadn't forgotten how to swim over the long winter.



When my family built the little house near Pleasant Lake we gave up our membership at Lake Waban. Our new beach was decidedly more relaxed. There was no Beach Director, just a couple of teenagers to keep a somewhat diligent eye on a handful of kids and dogs. Yes, dogs were allowed. There was a kiddie area and a wonderful raft for bigger kids. I don't think anyone thought to administer raft tests. Still no cabanas but the view was superb, the water crystal clear and, in spite of a somewhat lax approach to lifeguarding, everyone stayed happy, healthy and safe. It was perfect.

I hope you are having a perfect summer.

Bon appétit!

Susan

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Quick & Easy Spicy Grilled Chicken*

An easy dish to enjoy at your next beach cookout. Prep the chicken in the morning and let it marinate in the refrigerator all day. Enjoy!

Serves 4

- 1/2 teaspoon each ground cinnamon, ginger, allspice and kosher salt
- 1/4 teaspoon each ground cloves, cayenne pepper and freshly ground pepper
- 2 tablespoons rum
- Zest and juice from 1 lime
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- Olive oil
- 1-1 1/2 pounds boneless chicken breasts

Whisk the spices, rum, lime juice, zest and garlic together in a small bowl; add enough oil to create a smooth paste and coat the chicken breasts. Add the chicken and toss to coat; let the chicken marinate in the refrigerator for at least one hour.

Pre-heat grill to medium high. Reduce the heat to medium and grill a few minutes per side or until cooked through. Remove from the grill, let rest for 5 minutes and serve.



* This quick and easy marinade goes great with pork as well as chicken.