

How Long Does it Take to Drown?

By Emily Willis

It's strange, the pieces of information you hold on to, for a rainy day. The encyclopedia of seemingly endless information stored in your mind for moments like this. Because the truth is, your life doesn't flash before your eyes when you are about to die. Questions do. Trivia does. The mind is awake and aware of every moment, and does everything it can to find the answer to your problem.

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Drowning is not as picturesque or hauntingly peaceful as they often lead us to believe on television. There is no stillness, no poignant moments of long hair billowing artfully around your face. When something large, like an aircraft, crash-lands into a body of water it disturbs everything beneath the surface in an instant. An underwater eruption of dirt and debris: once pure water now opaque with filth and dirt. And so, as the icy water rises above your head, you see nothing but murky blackness. Your last scream fills your lungs not simply with water- but with mud.

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We pass others through life as complete strangers, never truly knowing each other until a moment like this. An impromptu excursion- a flight over the reef in a small "six-seater" plane with complete strangers. You swap Facebook accounts in the back of the plane. I know how you like to pose for a cute photo, and now I know the look in your eyes when you realize you're going to die.

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Did you know that a plane wing could crumple, like the paper planes we made as children? Did you know that a plane can cartwheel- and you may not even realize it has happened? You're too busy rationalizing, going over the useless trivia in your mind. The likeliness of a plane crash is next to zero, something you recall. If we had landed on solid ground we would have exploded.

Water is a much slower death.

What is it about air pressure again? Is that why the door will not open? The sensation of swimming, of treading water in a place there should not be water is confusing and overwhelming to your senses. As the nose of the plane dips lower, everything around you and within you has turned upside down.

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It's over your head, now- the water. You've never been religious, but could swear you heard a prayer scream from your lips as you took your last breath. You don't even know it, but you've reflexively clawed at the cage around you so that your nails are bleeding, the swollen, wrinkled skin around them torn. Instinct kicks in, and while your brain is frantically trying to accept what is happening around you, your primal body has reverted into survival mode. One hand rips ferociously at the door, while the other hand grasps your friend's chin- forcing her face above yours into the only pocket of air left, as you sink deeper still.

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You'll find that this is your only thought now. The burning pain in your lungs, the shocking cold of the water- everything has subsided. Now you float in a dark and murky existence and wonder how much longer you will have to wait before you die.

How. Long?

You will be thinking this when you feel, somewhere in the distance, the tug at your shorts. You will be wondering this until the moment you are pulled from the water- sputtering and vomiting the mud and filth that had permeated every part of your body. As you retch and cough you know that it is futile- that murky blackness is a part of you now, and forever.

I continually find myself treading that water- struggling to persevere. What do you say to the man who killed you and then brought you back to life? How do you resuscitate yourself when you never actually died? How long *does* it take to drown? I don't know, but it hasn't happened yet.