

# THE SWIMMER

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Frank Perry's surrealist gem *The Swimmer*, penned by John Cheever, chronicles middle-aged, bronzed bon vivant Ned as he swims from one swimming pool to another in order to return to his suburban Connecticut home. The tapestry of Ned's life is revealed in the film through a series of poolside interactions with former friends, business associates and lovers. These grow increasingly strained as Ned swims on. By the time he arrives home, it's clear Ned has had a mid-life crisis and lost all that is dear to him.

At its core *The Swimmer* examines the swimming pool as a visual analogue of the ideals and expectations associated with suburban 1960s America. Ned earnestly searches for his moral compass only to find it at the exact moment he realizes he was the architect of his own demise. Kitsch aside, it's a timeless narrative.

And it's unsettlingly relevant today. The results of clinging to outmoded values when the truth is just below the surface are in no short supply: the banking crisis, degradation of the environment, loss of faith in institutions. There's difficulty, or unwillingness, to look away from the sparkle and sheen of a pool drenched in summer sun.

## THE SWIMMER RE-IMAGINED

*The Swimmer* is a TV-hour documentary that humorously re-imagines the essence of Perry and Cheever's vision in non-fiction form. Instead of sloping, verdant hills of Connecticut the landscape is an oasis-metropolis in the desert: Los Angeles. The pools and characters in this story will be hung on a narrative spine that illustrates the rise, fall and rebirth of a Hollywood star; the Tinsel Town equivalent to Ned's journey.

But things won't get too glum. Our version takes the conceit of 1968's *The Swimmer* and paddles it away from the deep end and towards a comical, irreverent place. Along the way we'll explore all facets of the city through the wavy lens of its swimming pools - from California Modern architecture, to segregation politics, to copious sex and drug use, plus art, design and the natural environment. The glitter and the underbelly will be on equal show. Our journey begins in the arid environs of the far east of this sprawling megalopolis and lands us comfortably at the Pacific Ocean, the city's westernmost edge.

And, of course, we need our Ned. Someone has to, literally, swim us pool-to-pool through the cultural traffic of this incredible city.

## THE PRESENTER

The presenter in *The Swimmer* will be a veteran and star of the entertainment industry. Someone who has had their share of both triumphs and less glamorous moments but never, at any moment on the ride, lost a sense of humor. Think Ricky Gervais or Larry David. Think Chris Rock or Sarah Silverman. Now imagine them in bathing suits. We want someone who is world-wise, quick-witted and can move elegantly between the disparate communities crammed in this urban landscape. We'll be exploring the city with its veil off and envision an equal level of openness and authenticity from our presenter.

In 1968's *The Swimmer* Ned has a passionate intuition that he must go on his swim; there's something unresolved that he must investigate. He takes the plunge and the people from his social circle serve as a catalyst. They jog Ned's memory and reveal to him beautiful details of the life he's forgotten, giving him new perspective and even uncovering darker corners that Ned does not want to revisit.

Likewise, our presenter will go on their own emotional journey via a meditation on their path through show business. Honest poolside interactions with complete strangers will serve a function that compliments the gathering of historical and cultural information about Los Angeles. In a way, our presenter will be meeting incarnations of people from their own past, former versions of themselves, and will explore dynamic periods of life in a way that is organically informed by the pool and the characters with which they interact.

## tone + identity

*The Swimmer* is inspired by the best that off-beat presenter-led documentaries have to offer. Humor, irreverence and sincerity are the touchstones of the films of Louis Theroux, Nick Broomfield and Mads Brügger. This tongue in cheek approach makes their incisive observations that much more easy to appreciate. Subject matter that would otherwise feel bleak in the hands of a journalist becomes revelatory and life-affirming when tackled by these artists.

In the fiction realm, Ricky Gervais' *Extras* handles celebrity cast members with a delicate balance of hilarity and compassion, allowing the audience to laugh at painful truths without compromising on humanity and respect. This is the tone our film will have.

*The Swimmer* is an idiosyncratic original work that hybridizes a surrealist fiction film with cinema verite. It smashes celebrity against the vox pop. And provides a poolside vista from which to examine one of the most influential cities in the world. It's a culture bath that asks the audience to bring their sense of humor, their wit and their sunglasses.

## HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Just to the east of the verdant and palm tree lined metropolis of Los Angeles proper, the natural landscape of the city, the desert, lingers on the edges, forever jealous of its wealthier and groomed sibling. If it were not for the hundreds of artificial waterways snaking their way into the city, the desert would finally win its incessant battle and rightfully return everything to sand. And so we begin our story here, so close to the city and yet completely removed. It's from these parts that countless aspiring artists set off for the lights of the big city. Amidst this arid solitude and the massive, prehistoric granite boulders that litter the area, we see a door open from within the very rock itself.

This is how we meet Garth, a majestic, Zeus-like figure whose massive head and jet-white beard loom large. A former Mormon missionary turned holistic guru of sorts, Garth lives and champions all things natural. For the last 30 years, Garth has lived out here and built from scratch and found objects an exquisite home, complete with a spring fed pool and sauna, all of which blend perfectly with the sun drenched rocks that tower above. Reclining in the turquoise colored water of his pool, Garth, a comical philosopher-king, tells our presenter of the unquenchable allure of Los Angeles and the almost mythical legend it has become.

Knowing full well the odds are stacked against them, why do millions of people head west in search of fame and glory?

## HEADING FOR THE BRIGHT LIGHTS

Along the disused dirt track leading to Garth's, a massive stretch limo is seen, helmed by Recai Iskender, a Turkish transplant to Los Angeles. If Borat and a mad scientist were somehow genetically combined in one person, Iskender would be him.

Named after his nation's most famous kebab, Iskender is a former career diplomat from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ankara who, for reasons slightly unknown, has wound up as a limo driver for the last four years. Iskender is not just any driver however; he navigates one of the world's only stretch Mini Cooper limousines complete with what he insists on calling his own "mini-pool." This absurd little body of water, at best a large jacuzzi, rests in its own raised platform at the backend of the bright pink, six-wheeled vehicle.

Iskender explains his unique role in the world of Tinsel Town. Day in and day out, he fulfills the chauffeured fantasies of countless young arrivals and wannabes. Want to go to all the hot spots of Hollywood and see the houses of the rich and famous? Iskender is your man. Curious to know where we are headed, Iskender learns of our presenter's mad voyage west and relishes the challenge. He knows just where to take us.

## IN THE BIG CITY

Welcome to LA! Everyday legions of people show up in LA having come off of a train, bus or car with little more than a heart full of big dreams. They are actors, musicians, writers. The lot. And if they've made the effort to come this far they want to get to the top: fame, fortune, creative success. Or... at least the rooftop.

The rooftop pool at the W Hotel in Hollywood is a magnet for people with Hollywood aspirations. The promoter publicizes it as a "sexy poolside affair with House music and Hollywood's elite." Summer parties are packed to the brim with people who are recent transplants and want be part of "the scene."

There we'll meet Buck. He is an aspiring actor who is handsome, goes to the gym a lot and has just moved to LA. He's also never had a professional acting job in his life. It's a perfect opportunity for our presenter to meet someone who is naive and might need some guidance. Our industry-worn presenter can see the wide-eyed hopefulness of an upstart and relate tales of their first days in the city, its energy and its sense of promise.

Being one of the nation's top pool parties what better welcoming committee is there than a pool filled with young, beautiful, nearly naked people?

## NOWHERE BUT UP

One of the best indicators of the demographic layout of Los Angeles is staring back at us through her pools, or lack thereof. The maze of aqua marine puddles and glinted reflections that you can trace from the roof of the W Hotel demarcate the haves from the have-nots.

Yes, you can make out the odd rundown motel sporting an uninviting, cement laden pool but by and large, these ponds of leisure are the domain of the wealthy and white. The morass of greyed concrete and sun-bleached dirt that stretch out westward from underneath you have no signs of lush, verdant gardens. It is a pool-less sprawl for the most part. Within this no-man's land of sorts we meet Pam Curtis, aka White Girl, on Figueroa Avenue in the heart of South Central, the notorious and gang-riddled ghetto of LA. Pam is by no means white and definitely not a girl.

Unapologetically rotund and yet beautiful, White Girl is a heavily tattooed black woman. Everything about her begs disbelief. Pathologically gregarious, warm-hearted and hysterical company, White Girl is also a two time convicted felonist and a former crack-addict and prostitute of 20 years. Cleaned up for the last decade, White Girl's favorite escape nowadays is one of the few public swimming pools in LA, the Hawthorne Pool.

This part of the city was only officially desegregated in the 1970s so the pool does not see a great deal of caucasians let alone a rich and famous one. Pam shares stories of what it is like to literally live on the 'other side,' lending credence to the notion that truth really is stranger than fiction.

## LOST IN SUBURBIA

To say it's difficult to make it in Hollywood is quite the understatement. And it becomes harder when it seems like everyone around you, the waiter, the dogwalker, the barista, is trying to make it too. They all have the same dream. And they are all trying to keep up.

Only 15 minutes drive from White Girl and the Hawthorne pool, the ghetto butts up against the walled and gated neighborhoods of suburbia. Such is the architectural free-for-all for which Los Angeles is known. The suburb as a postwar ideal was thrown on steroids in 1950s and 1960s Southern California and vast tracts of the city are still like this. Los Angeles in particular was home to one of the biggest and quickest suburban expansions in United States history. The swimming pool was central to this model of sprawling development.

Take a plane into Los Angeles and have a peek through the window. They are all there: thousands of pools laid out on a grid. Someone must have been cashing in on building those pools. At the time it was a company called Anthony Pools. Now known as Anthony & Sylvan, we'll visit them and meet one of their salespeople, Janet. She's got a difficult job selling a luxury item in a shaky economy. Our presenter will go along with her as she tries to sell a pool to a family who really can't afford it.

Before our presenter swims through one of the prototype pools at Anthony & Sylvan headquarters they'll muse on what it was like being in the Hollywood rat-race. Was there a need to have had certain creative accomplishments by a certain age? Was it painful to watch other people nearby find success? Was it ever really possible to keep up with the Jones'?

## THE BIG BREAK

Come when or if it may, Hollywood hopefuls are searching for just the tiniest crack in the fortress that is the industry. A role, a hit, a gesture of mercy from a gate-keeper. The mythical “big break” is something that sets a performer’s career on a rapid upward trajectory, allowing them to pull away from the day-jobbing pack.

The pool at The Beverly Hills Hotel is the stuff of legend. Not just a place where stars go to retreat but a star-maker itself. It’s been said that, during his early years as an actor, iconic producer Robert Evans was spotted by Norma Shearer next to the pool. She successfully touted him for the role of her late husband Irving Thalberg in *Man of a Thousand Faces*. Tales of Vivien Leigh’s discovery on-site and subsequent casting in *Gone with the Wind* also float in the historical ether.

The pool is Hollywood’s playground. And Svend Petersen would know — beginning in 1959, he managed the pool for 43 years. Our presenter will hear how Svend opened up the pool after hours for The Beatles and taught Faye Dunaway to swim a freestyle crawl for *Mommie Dearest*. This is an opportunity for our presenter to share how they first made their own big splash in the town.

## PERFECTING THE CRAFT

It’s inspiring when an artist hits their stride - a synthesis where love of craft, pursuit of excellence, and pushing of creative boundaries leads to the great works in a career. The performer, in these instances, becomes inseparable from their work. It’s a case of “they were born to play that role.”

James Goldstein, it is safe to say, was born to be the owner and steward of the Sheats/Goldstein Residence built by the venerable John Lautner. It is a marvel of “California Modern” architecture and design. The house is nestled organically in its canyon environment far above the chaos of the city. A visionary-perfectionist, Lautner also designed the interiors, windows, lighting, rugs, furniture, and operable features of the home. The aesthetics of all the components function to serve the whole. The opalescent pool is sunk into a giant slab of concrete that extends towards the city skyline like an airplane wing. It is striking.

James is a contrarian businessman. Assumed to have made his fortune in real estate, he wears eccentric clothing, obsessively attends professional basketball games and has sworn he will never sell the home. James worked shoulder to shoulder with Lautner renovating and perfecting the home until the architect’s death in 1994. James will muse with our presenter on the nature and sacrifices of transforming visions into reality.