



press clippings

publication - telegraph & argus

date - april 4th 2008

for more information about water babies please contact head office on:

tel 01404 548 348 email info@waterbabies.co.uk

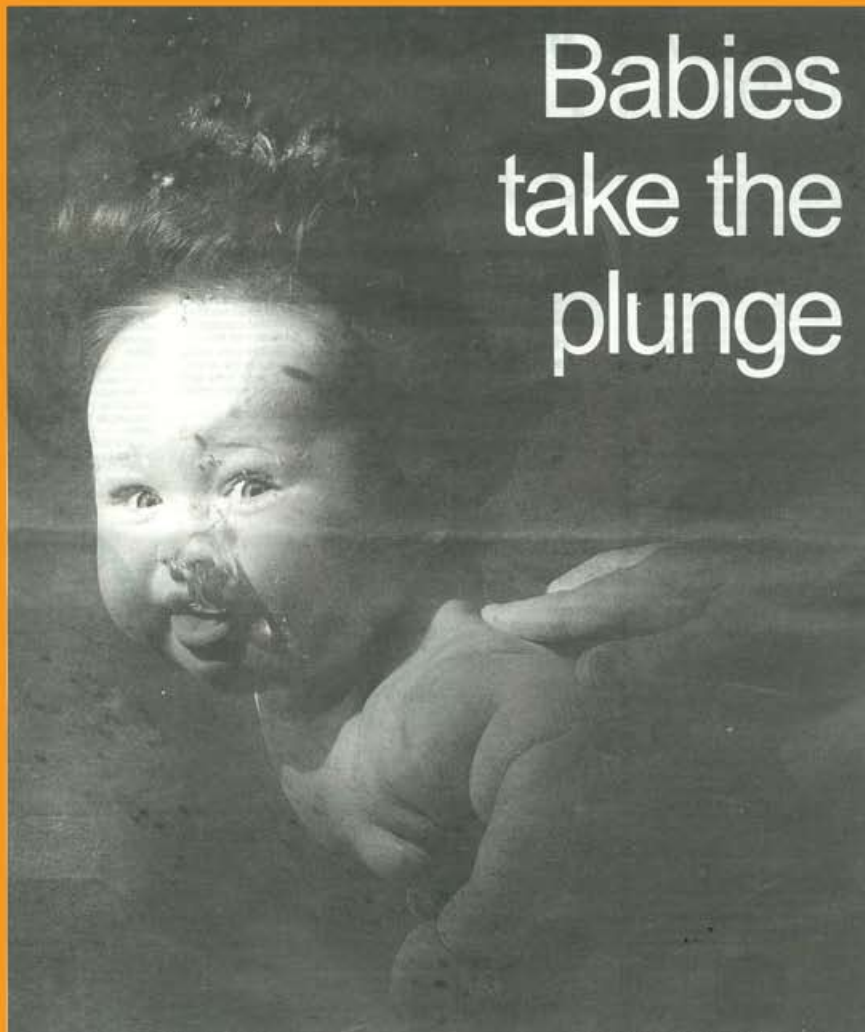
Telegraph & Argus

April 4, 2008

FRIDAY FAMILY

telegraphandargus.co.uk

Babies take the plunge



There was a sea of smiling faces as chuckling babies bobbed up and down, parents grinned, wide-eyed with adoration, as they savoured every precious second watching, learning and assisting in their infants' underwater experience.

I felt my tummy flip in empathy with the parents as they watched their little ones disappear under water; but not one of the babies emerged coughing, spluttering or even crying. They were wide-eyed with amazement and clearly loving being in the water.

My introduction to Water Babies came five years ago. I'd been invited to a pool by Gainsley couple Jess and Paul Thompson who were in the throes of nurturing and developing their Water Babies organisation throughout Yorkshire.

REAL LIVES

Water babies

by Sally Clifford

They never had a grand plan. Paul developed the idea after taking their daughter on a swimming programme during his 'new man' phase!

He had given up his job as a chartered surveyor in favour of spending more time with his family. Taking daughter Inani on a swimming programme gave him the idea for Water Babies. He was already a qualified scuba diver

instructor and, through the programme, he had been trained to teach swimming and had taught part-time.

He and Jess had always wanted to run their own business. Discovering that the water baby experience was already a success in other areas of the country gave them an enterprising idea.

They arrived in Yorkshire after literally sticking a pin in a map. Before that, they had lived in London after being forced back there when the Caribbean village they had spent six months living in was wrecked by a hurricane. They started hosting Water Babies sessions at pools around the region. Using word association, movement, games and songs, Water Babies encourages the development of a

● Continued on Page 24



SALLY CLIFFORD talks to a couple who have set up

Water good way to learn to swim

REAL LIVES

How Paul and Jess Thompson have nurtured a bright idea into a global franchise which teaches babies swim

● From front page

baby's natural swimming skills. Sessions are informative as well as fun, and the gentle structure provides a complete physical workout. Learning to respond to commands aids a baby's development too. Babies have an affinity with water, having spent months in the womb suspended in fluid, so in their early days floating in warm water seems natural. "One of the reasons babies are so perfectly designed for swimming is that they have a special reflex which kicks in as soon as their faces are submerged," say Paul and Jess on their Water Babies website. "This 'gag reflex' means no water

enters their lungs, making the process completely safe. The reflex is strongest in babies under six months."

But the couple say underwater confidence can decrease and babies who don't swim regularly can become fearful of water as they get older.

"We believe that using armbands can create a false sense of security in the water. Our philosophy is that you act as your child's temporary support as they begin to learn to swim.

Infants lack the strength, co-ordination and motor skills to swim on the surface until aged about three. However, with careful supervision and encouragement they can natu-

rally swim short distances underwater from very early on.

"We've created a course that will teach your child one of life's core skills: confidence in water and, ultimately, the ability to swim. But baby swimming offers you so much more besides.

"It's a chance for you and your baby to socialise with like-minded parents; a chance to do an activity together; the development of confidence on land as a result of increased confidence in water; the stimulation of a completely different environment in which your child can thrive."

Chatting with some mums after the class (dads and grandparents participate too!) I discover the sessions are fantastic for encouraging parent-baby bonding and they're a social experience too, particularly for new parents who are still finding their feet.

Attending Water Babies with her son Thomas spurred Carol Driver on to learn to swim. "I was 34 and my year-old baby learned to swim before me!" she laughs.

She says she never had the opportunity to learn when she was young and was determined her own children wouldn't miss out.

Seeing the benefits it brought to Thomas, pictured below, Carol enrolled her daughter Isabel and 11-month-old Seth. "I found my children became so confident, and not just in the water," says Carol, an accountant from Baildon.

"Water Babies is a time for bonding with them. In that lesson you are totally focused on your child. It is a special time for both of you. And it feels like you're part of a family."

Word-of-mouth recommendation led to the rapid development of the organisation. Jess and Paul have since franchised the business, and have just gone

● To facing page



Paul Thompson, a trained suba diver set up Water Babies with his wife Jess, pictured with their daughter Imani and son Jai

FRIDAY FAMILY: TRUE LIFE/HEALTH

a very successful scheme which helps babies take to the water

FACTFILE

● From facing page

global with the recent launch of Water Babies in Australia. They now have 25 franchisees and 160 instructors. Their workforce includes a number of key people based in Yorkshire, the county where Water Babies was born, who all share the couple's dedication and commitment to developing what is fast becoming a global phenomenon.

Three years ago the couple, daughter Immi and five-year-old son Jai swapped their Ilkley home for a stunning Art Deco style cliff-top home in Devon.

The couple are currently in the throes of setting up specialist Water Babies centres, custom-built pools for the under fives, throughout the UK. Paul is currently working on a pilot project for that. Once that is achieved there may be time for a break.

"Paul is in the middle of this huge exercise, he has been training every one which takes 150 hours over ten days. He hasn't had a weekend off in six years!" says Jess.

Since moving to Devon the couple have left their Yorkshire franchise in safe hands. Janice Walker worked for Paul and Jess from the beginning and when the couple announced their move to the West Country Janice took over the helm of Water Babies.

She and partner Arran MacDonald took over the Yorkshire franchise in 2005. They underwent rigorous training with governing body the Swimming Teachers' Association and Water Babies' own training programme, to become qualified swimming teachers.

Testimony to Water Babies' success is the national award for Britain's best swimming class and special commendation in the 'Best Baby Development Class' in the What's On 4 Little Ones awards.

The Thompsons are keen for others to benefit too; they have donated more than £140,000 to the charity Tommy's, which funds research into the cause and prevention of miscarriage, premature birth and stillbirth, raised through Water Babies' sponsored events.

● For more information visit waterbabies.co.uk or call (01943) 872556 or you can email: horseyhorseys@waterbabies.co.uk



Above, Madeleine Kaur swims underwater at Water Babies; below left, Janice Walker and Arran MacDonald, who have taken over the Yorkshire franchise; below right, Carol Driver's children – Isabel, Seth and Thomas – learned to swim at Water Babies



The idea of babies being able to swim independently underwater was first established in the 1960s.

Russian maverick Igor Tjarkovsky claims to have saved his daughter's life by raising her in a warm water tank after she was born more than two months prematurely. His groundbreaking underwater photos of babies and infants caught the world's attention.

Today the seed of his ideas, combined with further techniques pioneered in Australia, America and Scandinavia, are well established and immensely popular. Across the world, babies little more than a few days old enjoy the social and physical benefits of learning to swim.

The emphasis in the Water Babies sessions is on strengthening the bond between parent and child and the two of them having fun. There are also more long-term benefits:

● Swimming from birth is good for a baby's development and its early introduction will avoid them experiencing a fear of water that can develop later on in childhood;

● Water improves co-ordination and balance. Lack of gravity also means babies exercise more muscles more effectively in water than on land;

● One study found that swimming babies had advanced motor development, social skills and intelligence;

● Despite the gentle structure of the lessons, each half-hour session provides a complete physical work-out: strengthening the babies' heart, lungs and respiratory system, which aids development of the brain;

● Learning to respond to commands can make a baby sharper mentally and increases levels of understanding;

● Exercises involving moving independently in water and holding onto the side are good for babies' confidence;

● Regular swimming in warm water both relaxes babies and stimulates their appetite, leading to improved sleeping and eating patterns