



Cheating Death

By Cheryl Tinsley

God does truly work in mysterious ways. Actually, I refer to it as GMC's (God Made Consequences). However, either statement is actually difficult to fully comprehend until you have been personally involved in the mystery or the consequence.

In the spring of 1979, I was given the opportunity to join the summer staff of Lake Ann Baptist Camp (now a non-denominational facility) located just south of Traverse City, Mich. Even though I love the outdoors, I had no real experience in camping or rafting. Fortunately, the camp director, Eldon Brock, felt my love for the Lord, sense of humor and positive attitude made me just what he was looking for in a staff member. God had opened the door for me to work with young people in his beautiful outdoor arena.

During my first summer, I underwent two weeks of intense training in survival skills and first aid/safety before heading out to raft, bike, or backpack with campers who wanted a bigger challenge. This was also the summer I got to meet and work closely with a truly awesome young man named Dwight Herzberger from Jackson, Mich. He was a five-year veteran of the camp and

became like a brother to me before the summer was over.

The following year Mr. Brock asked me to come back and do it all over again, and a few weeks later, Dwight and I were back on our week-long wilderness trips – this time with a new team member, Mark Taube. During the first week of July, we were gearing up for another wilderness excursion, when the group that was scheduled had to cancel. As we were now free for the week, Dwight decided to explore Drummond Island to see if we could expand our backpacking trips there. We needed an even number of people for all wilderness excursions, so we located another counselor, Sally Coon, who had a couple free days, and headed out.

The island was beautiful and had many inland lakes. By Thursday morning, there was only one lake left for us to explore, but it was difficult to get to from where we had camped. However, it was only ½ mile away if we went by way of Lake Huron. Why not? The day was absolutely beautiful with not a cloud in the sky, but looks can be deceiving. Within minutes, even though we were within a few hundred feet of shore, our canoes were being swamped by whitecaps, and

we began to sink. As we went down, Dwight started to calmly pray, "Lord, we are in your hands. Help us with these elements, and the situation we are in."

Four young people were now desperately clinging to one canoe in frigid water. The waves were cresting between 3 and 6 feet high as we tried to paddle back toward the shore. This went on for at least an hour before we agreed to stop exhausting ourselves in futility.

I saw the concern in Dwight's face. Due to our survival training, we both fully understood the danger we were in – not only from our capsize situation, but especially from hypothermia. That concern however, never became hysteria on any of our parts. We focused on trusting in our Lord and Savior as the daylight hours passed into night. Through the constant battering of the wind and waves, we consoled each other in prayer and song. We talked about our families and other loved ones, and sometimes we just talked to God.

During the night, it had become obvious that Sally was suffering the effects of hypothermia more than the rest. A large wave hit, and in her weakened state, she was unable to retain her hold on the canoe. I

yelled for Mark to grab her, but she was already lost in the darkness. Shortly thereafter, Dwight also began to physically show signs of succumbing to the cold. Mark and I pulled him onto the canoe, but he became increasingly incoherent and kept trying to stand up. The next wave threw him from the canoe, and he too was lost to the water. As the hours passed, Mark became unable to hold his head out of the water. I was able to pull him onto the canoe, and just sat cradling his head as he too lost his fight for life. There really are no words sufficient for defining the emotions of this point in my life. However, there was a conscious decision made to try to survive.

Throughout the night, I had seen a red light flashing on nearby Cockburn Island, and I was convinced it was a lighthouse. As dawn broke on Friday morning, I started swimming for shore, praying for strength every stroke of the way. I swam for at least a mile, finally stumbled onto shore, and started walking toward the blinking light, which did turn out to be associated with a lighthouse, but only the remote box that turned on the light. There were no people or structures available to provide shelter, but God had given me a beautiful, sunny day that helped warm my near freezing body. I had enough strength to continue walking and trying to find help. Roughly 5 ½ hours later, I found myself staring at Mark's body off shore in the canoe he had died in. I had wound up exactly where I started.

I had nothing left at this point, so I just sat down on the shore and said, "Lord, I am exhausted, and I don't know what to do. Please help me to get some help now." Almost immediately I heard an engine. It was a boat! I started shouting and waving frantically for the operator to stop, but he didn't hear me until he spotted the canoe and cut the engine. Talk about being ironic. I now had a huge boat just off shore that could help me, but because of the rocks, they couldn't come close to shore. I had to go to them. I strapped my lifejacket back on and said, "Ok, here we go again Lord," as I once again entered the cold water and started swimming for my life.

The couple had to physically pull me on board. All my remaining strength was gone. While the authorities were being contacted, the