

ONE
WHITE WATER RAFTING



“I sought the Lord and He answered me;
He delivered me from all my fears.” Psalm 34:4

*Cold...So Cold. Oh, dear Lord ...What happened?
...I'm in the water ...can't breathe! Help me! Can't see
...can't get my head up. What's on top of me ...I'm under
the raft ...Oh, dear God, help me ...I'm trapped ...Help me!
...Help me!*

Seemingly there was so much of life I hadn't lived, so much I was pushing myself to experience. I had always been sensible. I made sure to approach things in a logical, safe and reasonable manner. I had been a mommy most of my life. My children were my life. My thought processes, my visions, my emotions, my priorities started and stopped with what was best for my kids. Now, however, at the age of 47, my body clock was striking every minute with a painfully loud jolt. I was disillusioned by a recent divorce, and the camera of my life was zooming in on 50, snapping shot after shot so quickly I was beginning to lose myself in the frame. I made resolutions to start taking risks, jump into life, have fun, laugh more.

A dear friend suggested that my daughter, Mandy,

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and I go on a white water rafting trip down the Poudre River in my home state of Colorado. Now, I'm not particularly strong or athletic. I'm not a great swimmer. Boats and rushing water are a little out of my comfort zone. But here, staring me in the face, was one of those "now or never" experiences that would pass me by if I sat down to weigh out all the reasons I should and should not go. I was determined to be spontaneous, daring and fun. I thought it was about time to display my adventurous side. I was sure I had an adventurous side... *surely I did.*

It was a beautiful Sunday morning. We would have to miss church to get to the meeting place on time. I didn't miss church often but this seemed to be one of those special occasions for which I could make an exception. I can remember thinking my priority that day was to find a pair of shorts to wear over my swimsuit because at my age the great cover-up was an art. I knew I would be the oldest person on this trip. I had at least 10 years on most of them. I really didn't want to look "un-cool."

When everyone else in our group was laughing and teasing, trying on helmets and life jackets, I was actually listening to the tour guide. I don't know, it seemed like the "respectful" thing to do and you know...what if there was an emergency of some kind, I should know how to save one of these crazy young people who didn't think it was necessary to listen. In just a few short minutes I soaked up a lot of information and gained a great deal of respect for the guide. He seemed knowledgeable. He said he had been down this river over 100 times. He sounded trustworthy to me!

As we approached the raft I scouted out what I thought would be the best seats for Mandy and me. She had been



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on several rafting trips all over the country. She was the one with experience but my ‘mommy mode’ was kicking in and I wanted us to be sensible and safe. It seemed reasonable to me that we should try to stay close to the tour guide. I wanted to hear his instructions, and I wanted us to be the first ones he would help in case of an emergency. It turned out to be a good choice, at least at first, because the people at the other end of the raft were responsible to push off shore and then jump into the raft. I wasn’t sure I would have been agile enough to handle that little task, at least not gracefully. As it turned out I got to take my place, tuck my foot into the strap, get situated and watch the people at the other end push us off. Mandy was at my left and the guide was at the point of the raft, right behind us.

All was well until we actually got wet. It was late August but the water was freezing. There was no “getting used to it gradually.” In the first two minutes we were soaked. We had no time to whine, however, because after the initial shock of cold we began to hear orders shouted out by our navigator, “Row left, row right!” I was a little slow on the uptake but soon fell into the rhythm. This wasn’t just a joy ride. Each one of us had a job to do. There were a couple of short, calm stretches when I could actually just sit still, look around and enjoy God’s beauty. During those moments I remember Mandy telling me to hang on and scoot in toward the center of the raft. She asked me over and over if I was okay. Okay? Of course I was okay, I was cool, I was spontaneous; look at me, I was actually participating in life, not just watching from the sidelines.

Roughly an hour into our trip we approached the

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biggest drop of the entire course. We had been told about it, told what to do, how to do it, and I was ready. Despite our efforts to turn our raft slightly to the right, we hit the drop head on, causing the front to dive. That action in turn caused the back of the raft (the safest end by my earlier estimation) to shoot straight up in the air, out of the water. I don't remember what happened next, although later I would see a Kodak account of the whole ordeal because there were cameramen posted along the banks taking shots to sell to the rafters at the end of the tour.

My next conscious moment was the sensation of being propelled through the water at a high rate of speed. I couldn't see. I could hear only the rushing of the water. There was something heavy on top of me, holding me down, preventing me from rising to the surface. *Oh dear God...I'm under the raft.* I frantically began to flail and claw at the smooth, slick rubber on top of me. My arms were everywhere. I was trying to find something to grab hold of so I could stop. I needed to stop so the raft would get ahead of me. I needed to get my head up. Nothing I did made a difference. My body continued to rush down the river at the same speed as the raft and I couldn't get out from under it. I was completely trapped.

I had always heard that in times like this your life flashes before your eyes like a slide show. That didn't happen to me. I missed that particular slide show because I was too busy struggling. I was fighting like I'd never fought before. HOPE was happening. It wasn't something I consciously pulled to the forefront of my mind. It wasn't something I initiated or forced. HOPE automatically, instantly took over. *I will make it out of this...I won't*

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die in this river...Please God, help me. Please God, help me.

I don't know how or why, but my body shifted. I could label the happening by saying I probably hit a boulder, possibly my flailing limbs caught on some outcropping of brush or river bank at just the right moment to turn me. I'm sure I could come up with a hundred logical explanations, some coincidental event that just happened in the nick of time. I could tell it and claim it, even come to believe it as being just one of those "saved by the bell" kind of experiences. But why? Why would I want to explain it away or call it anything less than it was? I know without a shadow of a doubt, the force that turned my body that day was nothing short of miraculous. I cried out to God and he heard me.

Now I was floating sideways down the river instead of my previous feet-first fashion. Because my body shifted, I was able to raise my arms and push off the side of the raft. I was still floating under it, at the same speed, but now I could raise my head and clear my face at intervals and catch short snatches of breath. The sound of the rushing water was deafening. Now I was hearing something else though...it was my daughter; she was frantic. She was screaming, "My mom, my mom, my mom." Thank God. She hadn't fallen out; she was in the raft. Maybe others were as well. Someone would see me..someone would help me. *Thank you, Lord. Thank you!*

Later I found out I was the only one of my team in trouble. When we hit the drop, the guide had been thrown forward. His oar hit me square between the eyes and knocked me out—out of the boat and out of consciousness. I don't remember the impact or going into the water. The coldness of the water, the cold I had perceived

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as an imposition earlier, revived me, shocked me back into consciousness. The pictures show everyone was looking back for me but no one was looking in the area right around the raft. Then, captured in the shots you can see a head turn to the right. A young state trooper had spotted my bright pink helmet and thankfully he was quick to react. He reached down, took hold of my life jacket and pulled. I outweighed him by at least 20 pounds, but somehow, in one swift motion, I was back in the boat. *Thank you dear Lord, Thank you! Thank you!*

All the rafters wanted to stop and comfort me and I for sure needed comforting at that moment, but the raft was still moving and everyone had a job to do. The guide, now having regained his composure and his position at the point, was again barking out orders. I'm a total team player but I couldn't move. I just sat in the dead center of the raft. I was trying not to cry. I was trying harder to stop shaking, but my entire body was jerking violently. I coughed up river water for the next half hour. *Oh my dear Lord, I almost died down there...Oh my dear Lord.*

We were minutes from calm water and from our midway stop where a lunch break was to take place. I felt strange. I was stunned and confused. I felt I was having one of those "out of body" experiences you hear people talk about, watching everything around me from a distance, as if I weren't really there.

When the raft was pulled to shore, we were asked to get out and walk up the hill to where the lunch spread was waiting. Everyone gathered around my daughter and me. There were hugs. There were tears. Like a sheep, I blindly followed the other people in my group. Mandy was helping me and asking me question after question to check my



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responses. She suggested that we walk up to the resort and go to the restroom to wash the mascara off my face. I somehow made it up the path. We took my helmet off and began to wash my face only to find that it wasn't mascara but a bruise that ran from my hairline down to my lips.

I was battered, bruised and "knocked silly." I was so out of it I actually got back into the raft after lunch and finished the trip. By the end of the day I could barely move. The boulders and rocks in the river had beaten me up pretty badly. We bought the pictures the photographer had taken, as did many who were not even in our raft. To this day, looking at the pictures is difficult. I can hardly believe what I see.

I revisited that river often, in my mind and in my dreams. I talked to friends and family and found myself telling the story over and over again. I captivated my audiences with the amazing account of danger and rescue. I think talking about it helped me to deal with the trauma I had suffered. But more importantly it gave me the opportunity to give God the glory and talk about HOPE.

I learned that day that hope isn't just a butterfly emotion that drops in and impresses us on rare occasions. It isn't something that we observe and enjoy only to have it take flight and evade our grasp. Hope is a gift given to us by God; a gift that was meant to be un-wrapped, handled, and used throughout our lifetime. What a huge mistake it would be to underestimate its value...to re-wrap it and bury it in some bottom drawer, ever to be hidden and smothered by our doubt and unbelief. This gift of HOPE is our personal shield, our piece of armor. It upholds us in situations of grave danger; it shrouds and enfolds us even

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on the uneventful days. We must get acquainted with hope. We need HOPE...sometimes just to be able to get out of bed in the morning.

For me, this rafting rescue was the beginning of a series of rescues, a chain connecting one unbelievable event to another, a story of God at work in my insignificant, unworthy life. He, in his infinite mercy, has snatched us all from the grip of death time after time, most of which I'm sure we will never be aware of until we reach heaven's shore. I get chills when I hear stories of the 80 car pile-up that was missed because of lateness, a tragic plane crash, someone's scheduled flight, missed because of some incidental inconvenience, an injury that could have, should have paralyzed but miraculously did not.

I don't believe in coincidence. I believe in divine intervention. I know of six times in my life when I faced death head on; six times when I should have died, six times when God intervened and spared my life. I would like to share these incredible stories of hope and faith. I would like to talk about God Almighty, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, who has answered prayer, saved my life, and proved Himself to me over and over again. Together, let's focus on God's power, His mercy, His perfect timing, His incredible love and then together, let's give Him glory.