



CASE STUDY: Preventative SAR #2 - Gone Fishing

In the following case two men endured a great deal of physical suffering and mental anguish as a result of being unprepared for what could happen. They had no means of alerting, providing accurate position information, or signaling would-be rescuers. In addition, their survival equipment was inadequate. Personal flotation devices beyond the minimal "seat cushions" properly worn and flares would have greatly improved their situation and chances for a more rapid rescue. They are indeed lucky to have survived to relate their tale of survival... it was not without personal cost as the listing at the end shows.

The Situation

On June 28, 1999, two men ages 44 and 31 went fishing in the younger man's 12-foot aluminum motorboat. They departed about 11 a.m. on the Wading River, floating down towards Long Island Sound fishing for bluefish.

About 2 hours into the trip as they approached the sound, a 3-foot wave smacked the boat and it began taking on water. Both men jumped out and tried to bail the boat, but to no avail and the boat capsized. At this point they realized they were in trouble. Not wearing lifejackets they were left treading water and hanging on the boat the best they could in the rough seas as it drifted further out into the sound.

In an attempt to improve the boats stability and keep it afloat they released the motor, got rid of other gear, and cut away the anchor. As the gear scattered they noticed one of the blue seat cushion/flotation devices float away. They hung onto the remaining cushion. The owner (31 year old) was a good swimmer, his guest only a fair swimmer.

To help them stay afloat they removed heavy clothing and cut away their boots. They then decided it would not be a good idea for both of them to stay with the boat, and the owner, being the better swimmer, was the logical one to swim to shore for help. Swimming against the tide he made little progress for 4 hours, then the tide changed and helped propel him shoreward.

About 7:15 p.m. he neared the shore at Wildwood State Park and started yelling for help. A 57 year old man taking a walk on the beach heard him, and as he yelled he was cramping up, the man on the beach grabbed a large piece of wood and swam about a half mile out and got him back to the beach. The Coast Guard and police were notified and immediately began a search for the remaining man.

The search continued until 2 a.m. when it was halted to wait for daylight. The 44 year old guest remained with the boat. The 12 knot winds continued to push him farther out from

CLASSROOM 1: Case Study: Preventative SAR #2 - Gone Fishing

shore, the boat bobbing in the waves dragged him under the water and continually bruised him. Using a rope to hold onto, he eventually was able to tie off to a lobster trap which stopped his drifting. He had rope burns, cuts, bruises and had difficulty seeing. He was also getting cold.

The search resumed at dawn and shortly after sunrise a Coast Guard helicopter spotted the remaining man, hoisted him from the water and delivered him ashore where he was taken to the hospital. He was treated for hypothermia.

Other Information

- The owner had to swim for 6 hours to reach shore.
- The guest was in the water 18 hours.
- They made a pact as they separated to think about their children and not give up.
- The owner promised to come back for his guest; the guest promised not to give up.
- The owner reported he kept seeing his children's faces.
- The owner knew if he died, no one would be there to save his friend.
- The guest alternately thought the owner did not make it, then that he would.
- The guest reported he thought many times throughout the night that he would die; that he would leave his kids 18, 15 and 7 years old, without a father; he didn't want to die, he wanted to see his kids again.
- The guest ended up with bruises, cuts, rope burns and a stay in the hospital for recovery from hypothermia.
- The guest said he might go fishing again... but only in the fish market

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