

SURVIVAL ON SILVER LAKE

Alone,
in a small boat, on a dark lake cloaked in fog.
Her survival depended on overcoming fear.

By Denise Stamp Yannone

Jenna Jiles ran to the dock and stepped low into the little yellow rowboat.

"Thanks for watching Suzy while we were at the movies," called Mr. Bates from his blue front porch. "Sorry we stayed so long. If you hurry, you'll be home before dark."

"Good-bye, Mr. Bates. I hope I can break my record and cross Silver Lake in less than forty minutes."

Jenna tested the high beam flashlight. It worked. Next she placed the oars into the oarlocks. She unhitched the sailor's knot and cast off from the dock. Far across the lake she could see the little spot of land where her family's cottage nestled among the giant pine trees.

The oars kissed the water, and Jenna pulled with all her might. A little family of ducks swam off to the right, but she had no time to chat with them tonight. Jenna stared at Dead Man's Island—the halfway marker between the western shore and her dock. The last glow of the sun left the air chilled, like the dying embers in a fireplace. Gulls wheeled overhead, searching for night resting places. The birds hurried, as she did, to find shelter before darkness swallowed Silver Lake.

"They've turned on the dock lights for me!" cried Jenna to a passing loon as she spied the twinkle on the East Shore. "The lights will guide me home like the North Star."

Jenna rowed on, thinking of the hot cocoa she and Suzy had warmed. Suzy had plopped two marshmallows into each mug and laughed as they melted into sticky goo.

Suddenly Jenna jumped. Where were the dock lights? Where was Dead Man's Island? The lake had become too quiet.

"I can't see anything!" cried Jenna to the loons who made a ghostly sound like the wailing of a lost child. She hauled in the oars and switched on the flashlight. It's feeble beam barely showed her fingers in front of her face. Fog! Fog shrouded the lake more densely than the darkest night. The stars had been erased from the sky.

Sweat poured from Jenna even though the air felt as cold as the cave at the base of the North Ridge. Her hands froze on the oars.

"What should I do?" she cried. "I don't want to stay out here all night. Which way is our cottage?" She squinted at the mist.

Jenna felt suspended in a black hole of space. All her friendly landmarks had been swallowed by the fog. She was lost on Silver Lake.

"If I go any further the boat might find the rocks around Dead Man's Island. Those rocks will shred this little boat to bits," wailed Jenna.

The cold air sliced into her bones and the wooden

seat pressed hard against her thin clothing.

"Hello," called Jenna, cupping her icy hands around her mouth. "Hellooo, can anybody hear me?" Her only answer was the cry of a lonely loon. I'm still too far away from our dock, she thought miserably. They'll never hear me, and besides they couldn't find me in this foggy web. Hot tears fell.

"Don't panic," Jenna said aloud. The sound of her own voice steadied her. She searched in the bow of the boat for the rain slicker stowed there. She found the red slicker and wriggled into it. Then she switched off the flashlight to conserve the battery. I'll turn it on like a nightlight if I feel frightened, she thought.

"But I don't want to be stranded on Silver Lake all night," she gasped desperately as shaky panic began to grip her again. Fear surged up and began to choke off her breathing. Then she heard the echo of her father's gentle voice:

"If you're going to play on this lake, you'll have to learn how to survive out here," he had told her dozens of times. "The lake will be your friend if you respect its

dangers. Then you can enjoy its pleasures. I will teach you."

Groping again, Jenna located the life jacket she had forgotten to wear. She slipped it over her long brown hair and fumbled with the buckles.

Jenna and her father had canoed on Silver Lake in the moonlight. The whole family had fished by the light of the full moon on many summer evenings. She had never felt afraid.

"I can do it!" cried Jenna. "I can wait until the fog lifts. Then I will row home."

Jenna pulled the hood of the rain slicker over her curls. Carefully she crawled down into the bottom of the boat and pillowed her arm under her head. She tucked the flashlight next to her.

As she listened, Jenna realized that the lake never slept. She could hear the cries of the loons and the cracks and crunches of raccoons and porcupines as they stalked their dinner. A hooting owl found its mate. The water lapped against the sides of the boat, and it's gentle melody lulled Jenna to sleep. She slept soundly as the fog slithered away.

"Jenna, are you all right?" called her father from his canoe.

Jenna opened her eyes to a shimmering Silver Lake sunrise. She sat up quickly. Dead Man's Island sparkled a quarter of a mile away.

"I'm fine," she called. Her body felt stiff, but she sat tall. She had survived on the lake all night, and all alone.

"Can you row home?" asked her father.

"Sure can," called Jenna. "I can take care of myself now, Dad. You taught me how!"

Illustration By
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