

A trembling Janet Wick gets carried ashore by rescuers after her fight for life in icy waters.



PRAYER SAVED MY LIFE

A vicious storm struck this pleasure cruise, but God was there, too.

by JANET WICK as told to John M. Ross

IT PROMISED to be a wonderful Sunday afternoon. A 25-mile cruise from Tacoma to Seattle, Wash., on a handsome 43-foot cruiser, with dinner served aboard! It was enough to make a 16-year-old girl tingle with excitement.

We met at the Point Defiance Yacht Club in Tacoma, after church services on April 26—the Johnson, Tayet, and Torgenson families, seven adults and five children. With the exception of me, everyone was related in some way, from Martin Tayet, 82, down to his four-month-old granddaughter, Janna Lynn. The Johnsons and their son Rolf were my friends.

The weather was not ideal—intermittent rain and a strong, chilly wind—but no one considered calling off the cruise. It was the first time the relatives had been able to join together for a family outing aboard Mr. Johnson's new boat, the *Lois Ann*, and everyone seemed anxious to make the most of the opportunity. After stocking the galley with food, we left the dock around noon.

The weather worsened as we headed up Puget Sound. The wind became stronger and the waves began to climb higher. But the sturdy *Lois Ann* seemed equal to the challenge, and we thoroughly enjoyed a chicken dinner, complete with homemade strawberry shortcake.

It was after dinner, around 2 p.m., when the first signs of trouble appeared. Rolf and I had gone forward on the top deck. The others were aft, sitting about the cabin or on the cabin deck, chatting. Suddenly the wind increased and five- to six-foot waves began to ride over the stern, flooding the cabin.

The ladies became very excited now, and called to Rolf and me to come down to the cabin and put on life jackets. We didn't budge. There were too many on the cabin deck already, and they seemed to be causing the boat to ride deeply and take on water. Mr. Johnson, the skipper, apparently agreed. He ordered everyone out of the cabin and forward. No one responded. Even with

the flooding, the cabin must have seemed safer than the exposed forward deck.

As she rapidly took on water, the *Lois Ann* began to rock violently. Mr. Johnson made his way forward with the white "disaster flag," handed it to me and said: "Wave this, Janet, so someone might see us." I clutched the rail with one hand and waved the flag with the other, but we seemed to be all alone. And now the thought suddenly exploded in my mind: we're going to sink!

Within seconds, one crisis piled upon another. Mr. Johnson tried to maneuver the boat into the wind to repel some of the waves, but the engine went dead—apparently flooded.

A terrible scream pierced the howl of the wind as another big wave struck, carrying Mrs. Johnson over the side. Without a life jacket, Mr. Johnson jumped in to rescue her. Just as he left the deck, the *Lois Ann* took another wave and rolled over on her starboard side and began to sink. Terrible screams came from the cabin, where the others had huddled in desperation.

Rolf and I plunged into the water. For the moment I didn't think of my lack of a life jacket, or of the fact that I was weighted down by a heavy car coat and shoes. I saw two-year-old Rodney Tayet struggling in his life jacket and I started after him. Rolf got to him first and handed him to Mr. Johnson, who was clinging desperately to the bow of the boat. Rodney's father, Fritz Tayet, without a preserver, was having a terrible time in the water. Rolf tried to help him. I never saw Mr. Tayet again.

I LOOKED AROUND and spotted only Mrs. Johnson, who was managing to stay afloat in her life jacket. Quickly I had a decision to make. Should I cling to the bow of the boat, still nosing out of the water, like Mr. Johnson was doing? Or should I chance it to Mrs. Johnson some 50 yards away? What if she wouldn't let me hang onto her? Would I be strong enough to return to the boat?

I set out for Mrs. Johnson. I'm a good swimmer, but I tire when I'm excited. In addition, my heavy clothing, the cold water, and the high waves made the distance seem like the width of the Pacific. Mrs. Johnson was in a state of shock, but she let me hold on. I peered through the storm around us, hoping to see a boat coming to save us. There was none. Now I turned to my last hope—prayer.

Ours is a religious family. My parents always have taught my seven brothers and sisters and me to pray when we need help or guidance. I've never hesitated to heed their advice. And now I was glad for that. I did not come to Him as a stranger.

"Oh, God, please help me," I begged. "Please don't let me die like this. Save me, please."

I prayed as hard as I could. Mrs. Johnson prayed, too. The minutes dragged on until it had been almost half an hour since the boat capsized. My strength began to slip away. I lost my grip on Mrs. Johnson and I went under for the first time. When I found her again I began to cry. Was this God's answer, I wondered. How much longer could I stand the angry waves lashing at my almost numb body?

I repeated my prayer in a louder voice, almost screaming to be heard above the roaring sea. I closed my eyes momentarily in meditation, and when I opened them again God's answer was before me. A hand was reaching out for me. There was a boat and a man—a messenger from Heaven.

"Hang on. You'll be all right," the voice said. "Give me your hand." Within minutes I was safely on the South Seattle Shore. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, Rolf, and little Rodney were saved, too. The seven others were not.

At the hospital a kind nurse patted my hand gently and said: "Young lady, you should never stop thanking your mommy and daddy for teaching you to swim."

I'm grateful they did, of course. But more than that, I'm glad they taught me to pray.

**Family
Weekly**

July 26, 1959

LEONARD S. DAVIDOW President and Publisher
WALTER C. DREYFUS Vice-President
PATRICK E. O'ROURKE Advertising Director

Send all advertising communications to
Family Weekly, 153 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.
Address all communications about editorial features to
Family Weekly, 60 E. 56th St., New York 22, N. Y.

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