

Brookins makes daring rescue of ex-Marine at Hot Springs

Reprinted with permission from the University of Oregon newspaper, the Oregon Daily Emerald. Students Ben Brookins and Carrick Flynn are graduates of Vernonia High School.

The Sunday before spring term began, four University students went out to the Umpqua Hot Springs. The relaxing evening quickly changed course when two drunken men showed up and one, an ex-Marine, fell into the strong rapids

of the river, sweeping him 75 feet downstream in less than 10 seconds. One student jumped into the freezing water at the strongest point of the current, risking his own life to save another's.

"It was so fast; I remember saying 'grab my legs, grab my legs,' and before I finished saying it the second time, he had grabbed me," said Ben Brookins, the University junior who

saved the ex-Marine. Brookins held onto a log with his arms while the man clung to his legs.

"He would have died if Ben hadn't caught him, and it didn't seem Ben was going to," said Carrick Flynn, a junior who was there.

The students arrived at the hot springs, which are about 65 miles east of Roseburg at 8:00 p.m. that night.

The normally quick walk to the pools turned into a 1.7 mile, 45-minute-hike when the group discovered the bridge was washed out by an unusually high water level in the river.

The foursome only had one small emergency flashlight they had grabbed out of Brookins' car. With that they made it to the pools safely, where they enjoyed the warm water and talked about their spring breaks.

Thirty minutes after they began soaking, two semi-intoxicated men showed up. They said they were camping nearby and knew of a shortcut the students could take instead of repeating the long hike back to the car.

Throughout the next hour and a half, the men's words became more slurred and the pile of empty beer cans grew. The ex-Marine and his friend, a firefighter who specializes in white-water rescue, offered the students sips of beer, and when they didn't accept, the men chugged some for them.

When the group left, the students were concerned for the ex-Marine, who was "really drunk and stumbling," Flynn said. He added that Brookins offered to hike back the long

way with the drunk man, but there was only one good flashlight between the six of them.

"It was really dark at that point, and it was hard enough going up and we didn't want to go back," said Tammy Chang, a first-year Ph.D. student.

The students soon discovered the shortcut was a 30-foot fallen tree reaching from bank to bank and resting five feet above the rushing river.

The firefighter crossed first. Even though he was drunk, the students said he was still coordinated enough and they weren't worried. Each of them followed safely, clutching the wet bark of the log with their hands or feet.

Before the ex-Marine began to cross, Brookins and the firefighter walked down 75 feet to where another tree had fallen. The two took off their shoes and stood on the log, just in case anything should happen.

The man crossed slowly, crawling on his knees and singing loudly – to the woods, he told them. When he was two feet from the end of the log he stopped.

"I was standing there to help pull him over the roots of the fallen tree, but he just kneeled there for a minute singing a song at the top of his lungs," Flynn said.

Meanwhile, Brookins and the firefighter were back on land putting their shoes on, since they assumed the man had made it across safely.

"Just as he lifted his arm, after he was singing, is when he lost his balance and then just fell over," said Sharanya Kanikkannan, a junior who was

shining the little flashlight across the log for the man while he was crawling across. "I scanned the edge of the bank and saw him float by."

Kanikkannan screamed to Brookins, who couldn't see anything beyond the black of the forest and the spray coming off the fast-flowing water.

"It was amazing how fast he floated away," Flynn said. "When he hit the water he was gone."

"I had looked up because I had heard the splash," Brookins said. "I don't remember much, to be honest. I ran in and said 'Grab my legs,' and then I was cold."

Brookins said the current was so strong he couldn't pull both of them up, so the firefighter grabbed him and the ex-Marine, wet and in shock, attached to him.

"He absolutely would have died," Flynn said.

"The water was freezing, it was dark and he was drunk," Brookins said. "A second away or had I not gotten there that second..."

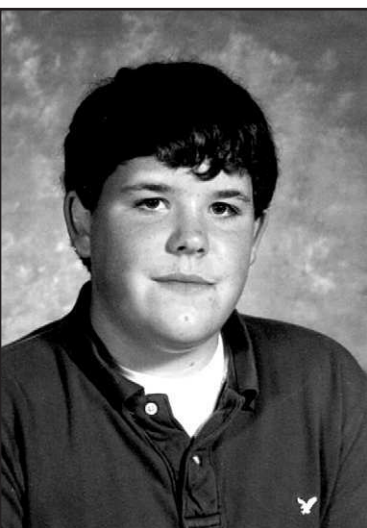
The group took the ex-Marine back to his camp site, where they started up a fire and helped him into dry clothes.

He didn't say much besides, "Dude, you just totally saved my life," Flynn said.

When the students left the man they had saved, he was sitting by the fire, looking into its flames quietly. The foursome haven't talked to him, but said they found him on MySpace, where they saw pictures of his children.

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Kibben completes Eagle project



Wes Kibben, Life Scout, completed his Eagle Scout Project on April 28, at the Natal Grange School House. Kibben is the son of Colonel Charles and Myrrhina Kibben of Vernonia and is a 10th grader at Vernonia High School.

Natal Grange School House is a historic site and was operated as a school until the 1940's. Boy Scout Troop 201 cleaned, painted, restored and beautified the school and its grounds to complete the Eagle Project and as part of the SOLV Clean-up Day.



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Keyboard spray cleaner known to kill

The Oregonian recently printed an Associated Press article about a 14-year-old Salem boy who died after inhaling from a can of spray cleaner

used on computer keyboards.

Cans of keyboard spray contain difluoroethane, similar to freon. The slang term for this inhalant is "dusting." The chem-

icals in the spray can cause death by cardiac arrest or asphyxiation.



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