

## CHAPTER 5

### For Gail, Nathan, and Molly

We entered lock #2 at Hastings MN. When the Lockmaster, that is the man in charge of the lock and dam, saw us he wondered what it was that he saw. He asked us a few questions and when he heard us say that we were headed for New Orleans he almost fell into the lock. It didn't look like we could make it out of the lock or even to Hastings just one mile down stream. As we left the lock after the loud whistle I could see him shaking his head. He also told us that he would notify the next Lockmaster that we were on the way. This became a great way to communicate. All of the Lockmasters looked forward to our arrival, especially after we made the first few locks in one piece.

Hastings was our first stop. Before we went ashore we were assigned a buddy. This was to keep us together and if we ever needed help we could rely on our buddy. Before we were allowed to roam the town we had to complete our chores. They ranged from carrying gas and food and water to tying up the raft. Remember a river is always moving unlike a lake, so if you don't tie up your craft it will get away from you.

My buddy was Eddie, a skinny red haired kid just a little taller than me. He was what you may call a laid back kid. He was so nice that I can't imagine him getting into any trouble. Unless he got a kick out of the pigeon stunt I don't think Eddie was much of a problem to society. Eddie and I got along great and usually stood lookout together. Eddie was the boy who spoke up and said why not give the raft trip a try. We did a lot of exploring and when we did go ashore in the towns the first thing we did was look for pop bottles. Pop bottles were worth only .02 cents then, but we could usually pick up enough bottles to buy a candy bar or bottle of pop to stick in our footlocker for later in the day or in the middle of the night.

Fifteen boys therefore 7 teams of buddies and one left over. If there ever was an odd amount of items such as food candy or pop we played a game we called "Horsengoggle." Any boy who want in on the goodie would stand in a circle with the others and one boy would count to three. On the count of three each boy would hold up 1 – 5 fingers. The fingers were totaled up and the horsengogglee if you will, would count from one to the number of fingers, starting on his right the person that he ended up with received the item. As there was no way to cheat in this "game" it was the fairest system we had and there was never any argument over who won

Each buddy team was responsible for their own tent pitching. Putting up your tent or rather mosquito net was fairly simple. First you would find a nice level spot of ground. Then one or both of the buddies had to find two steaks to keep the netting up. After chopping something that resembled a tree you would put the netting over the poles and put sand all around the edges. You also had to hurry and get your belongings into the tent before the mosquitoes did. Then if you were fortunate, it did not rain and then all you had to do is fight off the sand fleas and chiggers. One thing we learned right off the bat was not to camp on the west bank of the river, because if you did and there were no clouds the next morning the sun would cook you like a hot dog. So unless we were really soaked from the day before we would make camp on the east side of the river.

As I have mentioned each of us had a mess kit, canteen, sleeping bag and other items such as a pocket knife, a drop line for fishing, some of us had cameras, and a 10-12 foot piece of rope. We made this rope ourselves back at the weekend place. We made this rope from baler-binder twine used on the farm to bale hay. It was a very simple process.

First we would place an old chair outside and attach a 1x6x16 board to it. The board had three holes drilled through it and another board of 1x2x24 also with three holes in it. We would then place three coat hangars through the holes and bend them so that they had a hook on one end and you could turn the smaller board like a handle. We then took the twine and tied it to an end hook and ran it to the length we wanted. This had to be somewhat longer than the finished length because the rope would “shrink” as it was twisted. We would run the twine back and forth several times until the desired width. 6 strands = 1/4 inch 12 strand = 1/2 inch and so on. On the far end one boy would stand holding a Y shaped stick. As the twine was spun it would automatically come off the other end and the finished product was a nice strong rope. Before the rope was used we would singe it with fire to burn off all of the fine threads that stuck out. We were experts at this. It was a tedious task and after what seemed like a few million feet of rope we didn't look forward to making any more. As I said each of us had our own rope, which I will call line from now on, because once on the water rope is called line. We also had two 50foot lengths and several spare lines. These long lines were used to tie us to the beach and night. Each corner of the raft had a line for docking and we had two anchor lines.

We made our own anchors, out of all things, old coffee cans. We would fill the bottom of the cans with rocks and we mixed cement and poured it over the rocks to the top of the can. Then while the cement was still wet we would insert a piece of wire that was use for wiring a house, it had a loop in it so we could attach our lines. These anchors were great for rowboats but we had three tons of raft and crew. As we were to discover these anchors weren't worth the rocks that were in them.

Remember we are not even finished with our first day. So stay tuned you won't believe what happens next.

Dean Felsing, Crew member of the Unsinkable

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