

CHAPTER 6

For Dr. Titus P. Belliville

Lock and dam #3, Red Wing, MN. The Lockmaster was waiting for us. The Lockmaster from Hastings had sent word. The gates were open wide and we passed through in 15 minutes. We were getting the hang of it.

Just below Red Wing, the St. Croix River enters the Mississippi. You can actually see the two rivers mix. If you ever visit Prescott, Wisconsin make sure that you go to the riverbank and watch these two great rivers blend together.

From Red Wing to the Minnesota border is the most scenic of any on the entire river. With the high bluffs and egrets, blue herons, and eagles. We also saw many animals like deer, raccoons, porcupines, and snakes.

We did not stop in Red Wing as we were running late and the weather was starting to turn bad. We would look for a campsite on Lake Pepin. This lake is really part of the river that runs for 21 miles and is just over 2 miles across; it's big and very little current.

For lunch the first day we had packed our own from home, but that was gone and we were hungry, tired, and wet. The storm came upon us so fast we didn't have time to get to shore. You could not see across the deck. The staff passed out the life jackets and we tied down everything that was loose. We had our lights on and hoped that we would not get run over by a barge. Then came the cry of "Shear pin" and our steering cable broke again. We dropped the anchors. They lasted three minutes. They were too small and light to hold us in place. The raft spun slowly around several times. Suddenly we came to a halt. In the middle of the river we were now out of the channel and hung up on a sand bar. We were lost. It was weird to be in the middle of a river and yet be only ankle deep in water. It was too far to swim for help so we decided to ride out the storm on the sand bar.

We had some bread and peanut butter and we ate that up. Boy was it goo. We had our sleeping bags over us to keep warm and we had to sit and wait. Remember the roof of our cabin was made of canvas, well, it leaked, I don't know what else we expected with the 8000 nails we used to keep it in place. Several hours later the wind died down and we decided to get the raft off of the sand bar. All hands except the driver went over board. The raft was way too heavy for us to move but with all of us in the water it made just enough difference so we could rock the raft like you would a car stuck in snow. After about 20 minutes we got her free. Big deal, we were still lost and it was about midnight.

We headed for what we thought was shore. But we did not know if it was Wisconsin or Minnesota. We also during this time had to have crossed the channel at least once, This is not very smart because barges run all the time and in any weather. It is a miracle we didn't get run over. Then someone yelled for us to shut up and turn off the engines. Low and behold through the night we could see a flashlight and could hear a voice calling. We headed for it and it was Jack our leader he had been searching for us for hours. What a relief. We pulled in to shore to a place we learned the next day was Wacouta Beach, on the Minnesota side of the river. We made camp and slept like rocks. Like rocks that were still going up and down that is. We didn't have our sea legs yet, but that would come.