

# River Rescue

## Part Two

**Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze**

©2003 Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze

Last issue: A tree that Bob-O was felling in Betchawannaland had injured him. He had called in his own rescue using our telephone/radio. Help had arrived. His broken leg had been stabilized, and he was carried up the mountain to the rescue vehicles. By this time, it was several hours after the accident.

### *Anticipation*

My friend Betty Ann and I waited for a “broken” Bob-O to be transported to us at the junction of McNeil Creek Road and Salmon River Road. From there, I would drive him for three hours to the hospital. CB radio traffic on the road channel had dropped to a minimum. People calling their mile markers on the river road made short, terse transmissions. When an emergency was in progress, channel 18, the road channel on the river, was used. To switch to another channel brought the possibility of missing a vital transmission. Everyone listened intently for news and any hint that they could help in the rescue effort in some way.

As we stood beside my car waiting, Betty Ann kept reassuring me that everything would be okay. A helicopter flew overhead towards Bob-O in Betchawannaland. A few minutes later, someone called me on the radio. Bob-O was going to be flown down to meet me at the road junction. That would save about an hour. Fine with me. The sooner I laid eyes on Bob-O, the better I would feel.

### *Complication*

It took another half hour to carry Bob-O to where the helicopter had finally been able to land. They loaded him in, with local EMT Nixie at his side. The helicopter was a small Bell Ranger, and with the two of them and the pilot, it was a tight fit. Nixie hated flying, but figured she was the EMT and needed to stay with her patient until she could turn him over to me. Bob-O and I had almost completed our EMT training, so I knew I could handle it from there.

Once the helicopter was airborne, Bob-O called me on his 2-meter ham radio. They weren’t coming down to me. They were going straight to Rogue Valley Hospital in Medford, Oregon.

The helicopter was from a logging company working elsewhere on the Salmon River. They had heard about the accident and came to help. They were like that. In any emergency in the woods, if a helicopter was nearby, they

had orders to perform a mercy flight, no matter whether it was an employee, a Forest Service worker, or a local resident. The pilot’s orders were to pick up the injured and fly directly to Rogue Valley Hospital. Do not pass Go; do not collect \$200. Just get there as soon as possible. Rogue Valley is *the* trauma center between Redding, California, to the south and Eugene, Oregon, to the north.

I watched the helicopter fly overhead. I waved. “I’m right behind you, Baby,” I spoke into the radio. I hugged Betty Ann good-bye and drove up the South Fork. As I passed Indian Creek, Sarah called on the radio. She would look after our dog, Amelia Airedale, until I returned—however long that would be.

I got to Starveout, and ran across the bridge to the cabin. I grabbed the checkbook and some clean clothes out of a laundry basket, petted the dog, and left.

### *Consternation*

Meanwhile up in the helicopter, Nixie and Bob-O were having their own drama. Nixie was terrified. She sat holding Bob-O’s leg up and the splint straight. The vibration of the helicopter had caused his leg to start bleeding again. Blood seeped from the splint over her hands. She looked Bob-O in the eye. “Bob-O,” she said tensely, “if you have AIDS, I will kill you.”

Bob-O assured her that he did not. Now the only thing to frighten her was the altitude. She started breathing hard. Bob-O borrowed her stethoscope and took her vitals. She took it back and recorded his vitals. And so it went for the whole flight. They ministered to each other.

### *Operation*

By the time I arrived at the hospital three hours later, Bob-O had already been in surgery for over an hour. Nixie met me, and we sat in the waiting room. Nixie’s husband Larry showed up to drive her back home. They stayed with me another hour till we heard Bob-O was out of surgery, and then they took off.

I had to wait some more before I could see Bob-O. He was awake, but very tired. Because of Bob-O’s asthma, the anesthesiologist had used a spinal block rather than a general anesthetic. He also let Bob-O know his displeasure with the fact that Bob-O had lain on the sidehill eating the remnants of his lunch waiting for rescue. That was another compelling reason not to use a general anesthetic.

Bob-O had broken both the tibia and fibula bones right at the boot line on his right leg. It was a compound fracture, with the bones poking through the skin. The surgeon put an external fixation device on Bob-O's leg. He drilled four stainless steel pins into the bones, evenly spaced along the length of his calf. A single long rod was clamped onto these, holding them in place.

This device was a real sheet shredder. It looked like a Yagi or old-style TV antenna sticking out of his leg. Once home, I had to use a length of black PVC pipe rising up and over the foot of the bed to make a half circle tent to keep the bedding off the leg Yagi.

The oddest thing was that while Bob-O's left leg was, and still is pristine, his right leg has suffered several wood cutting mishaps. There are scars from two prior chainsaw misadventures. The worst one, across the bottom of his knee, happened up at the old Black Bear commune.

They were brushing the area around the ranch in the spring. The chainsaw bucked back at him and hit his leg. His buddies carried him into the main house and laid him on the long wooden dining table. Geba, a midwife, had experience with stitching skin, so she stitched up his leg and they treated it with herb poultices. It healed very well and remains today only as a scar and a good story.

### Hospitalization

I stayed with Bob-O in his hospital room for eight days. He was on some pretty powerful antibiotics because the bone ends had stuck out of his leg for such a long time. From the time of the accident until he saw a doctor was five hours. That was with a coordinated rescue and helicopter mercy flight where nothing went wrong. In EMT training, you are taught that if you can stabilize an injured person and get them to a hospital within an hour of the injury, you have a really good chance of saving that person's life. They call it the "golden hour." There is no such thing as a golden hour on the river.

One of the nurses, who had never met us before, immediately sized up the situation, "Oh, a logging accident." We accused her of reading Bob-O's chart. She explained. Bob-O's injury was severe, but very localized. If he had been in a car accident, the rest of him would have been roughed up more. We were impressed.

### Proposition

Our good friend, Karen Perez, came to visit us at the hospital. I told her that Bob-O was done working in the woods. He wasn't fast enough to dodge that tree, and the metal in his leg wasn't going to make him any faster. His surgeon concurred with me. It was official.

Karen and her husband Richard had a proposition for us. Some friends of theirs were putting a house near them up for sale. Richard and Karen knew we were looking for land to buy. They had an amazing project going with a renewable energy magazine, and needed to devote more of their time to it, and less to running Richard's installation business. If we bought the house, they would hire Bob-O to run Electron Connection and would hire me to work for

*Home Power.* (Eventually, we purchased the installation business from them.)

Bob-O and I looked at each other. We would have a house and two jobs—jobs that were good for the earth and its people. In four years, Bob-O's son Allen would have to leave the river to go to high school. So we were destined to leave that place sooner or later. Well, when opportunity knocks, we've been known to throw the door open wide. We went for it.

### Revelation

Sitting in the hospital room, Bob-O and I thought the worst had happened to us. Bob-O was hurt, and unable to return to his job. I had no job and no real prospects for one on the river. Just when we thought we were playing a spent hand, we were dealt aces.

So when it seems like your luck has gone, and when good things go bad, just wait and keep your heart open. It could be the best thing that ever happened to you.

### Access

Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze is appreciating Bob-O, her diamond-in-the-rough, at their home in northernmost California. c/o *Home Power* magazine, PO Box 520, Ashland, OR 97520 •

kathleen.jarschke-schultze@homepower.com

