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Alert kids sense danger in Triangle

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

Two pilots whose private plane crashed in the Bermuda Triangle Feb. 24 can credit their rescue to the keen sense of hearing of Farmington's 6-year-old Rebecca Weary.

The Flanders School first-grader was stargazing on the deck of the MS Sunward with her family on a Caribbean cruise when she heard faint cries for help.

"We were looking at stars because in my classroom we have something we do with stars and stuff. When we were looking, I heard someone calling 'help, help,' and whistling," said Rebecca, who will long remember her Norwegian Caribbean Line cruise through the Bahamas.

"I asked my sister (10-year-old Lauren) and she heard it too."

"My mom said it was just our imagination, but some grownups later caught on to what we heard," added Lauren, a Flanders fourth-grader.

Ronald and Joyce Weary at first disregarded their daughters' insistence.

"I figured it was probably a couple of drunken sailors they were hearing," Mr. Weary said.

"They were asking me if I heard anything, and I was telling them, 'come on now, we're looking at stars. Let's find the Big Dipper.' But they wouldn't give up and kept pestering me," said Mrs. Weary.

"With the drone of the motors it was very difficult to hear. But when we listened really hard, we did hear something and decided to notify someone."

Within 10 minutes, the rescue effort had swung into action. A life preserver was thrown overboard to mark the sound's origin and the ship turned around.

Searchlights had pierced the darkness for more than 15 minutes when a speck in the water appeared.

"We zeroed right in on the fellows," said Mr. Weary. "It was about 8:30 at night and the water was like a mirror — clear as a bell. My daughters were very excited."

"My mom said we may not want to look, but we didn't and we looked anyway," Lauren said. "As we got close, we could hear them say, 'Can you believe it? We made it after going through all this stuff.'"

"Two men got saved," continued Rebecca. "They were yelling 'hurrah, we're saved.' One man was holding another man in his lap who had a broken nose and a cracked rib. They didn't have any paddles, they were just using their arms."

ON BOARD, MIKE MOORE, 30, of Orlando and John Meissner, 42, of Neptune Beach, Fla., told the crew they were alone in a small plane that crashed during a squall two days earlier.

For more than 48 hours they had tossed around in a rubber raft which managed to stay afloat despite waves that crested at 15 feet during the storm.

"They had seen many other boats go by, but none had heard their cries for help," said Mrs. Weary. "Their raft was the size of a six-person dining room table and was half filled with water. It wasn't very stable — they didn't even have oars."

Crew doctors then examined the men and found them to be in good health, aside from their severe hunger and Meissner's broken nose and cracked rib.

"Nothing appeared to be too wrong because we saw them walking around in the dining room after they were issued fresh clothes. They looked really good," Mrs. Weary said.

"We discovered we had sailed through the same squall the pilots were trying to fly through," she added. "It came up so suddenly our crew said there wasn't time to warn people to take their Dramamine. Dishes were sliding off the dining room tables, and lots didn't make it for dinner that night. But it all had a happy ending."

The episode ended amid plenty of media attention at 7 a.m. the following day in Miami when the rescued Floridians disembarked with the rest of the MS Sunward passengers.

RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Recalling their adventure at sea and how their stargazing led to the rescue of two downed pilots are (from left) Rebecca and Lauren Weary.

Hard times spur pickets

By Craig Piechura
staff writer

Union carpenters can't find much work these days, so they're looking for places to picket.

John Harrington, business agent for Carpenters' Union Local 982 of Detroit, ordered an informational picket line to go up in front of the Botsford Inn Wednesday because the contractors building an addition to the motel wasn't on the union's list of approved union contractors.

The picket line was ordered removed the following day by union district council officials who met with the general contractor and resolved the dispute over union dues payment, Harrington said.

John Anhut, owner of the Botsford Inn, said he hired a union contractor, and any problems between the contractor, subcontractor and the union is no concern of his.

"I hire a contractor to do a job," Anhut said, "I don't go behind his back."

He called the picket line "a damn annoyance" that hurt business.

The addition going up on the southeast corner of the property is going to house executive apartments for business persons who move to the Detroit area and need a place to stay until they find permanent housing, Anhut said.

The question about the status of carpenters on the Botsford Inn project came up when Harrington visited a job site directly behind Botsford Inn at the House of Botsford apartment complex. Carpenters there are rebuilding an apartment unit that burned to the ground in a Dec. 9 fire. The union contractor on the apartment job is Valerio Maroncelli of Dearborn Heights, owner of Val Construction.

HARRINGTON SPOTTED the carpenters working at Botsford Inn and ordered the picket line when he didn't find Eicholdt Construction of Brighton on his list of approved contractors affiliated with the building trades.

About a dozen out-of-work carpenters showed up and began walking in front of both Botsford Inn entrances. The union representative said close to 70 percent of all union carpenters in the Detroit area are out of work at the present time because of the lack of building activity.

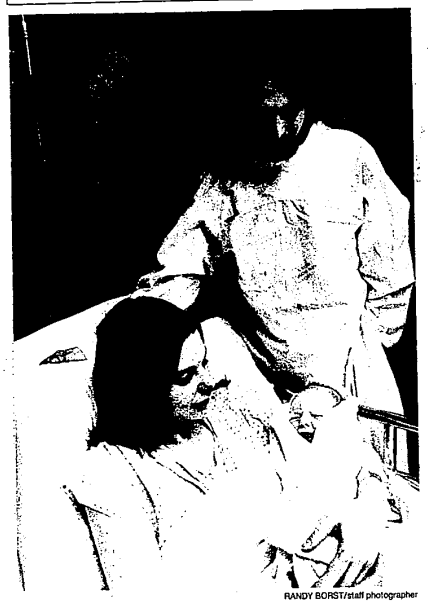
One of the picketers, Dave Fradl of East Detroit, said the last job he worked at was Detroit Edison's Bell River power plant, and that job ended six months ago.

Unlike other jobs, persons in the building trades don't work for one employer. They work from job to job for various contractors.

"A lot of our guys have gone down south," said Glen Wood, of East Detroit. "They're working non-union jobs — most of 'em. You have to eat. You go to the union hall and sign your name on the work list, but there's nothing available. The work list today is a big joke. Just a lot of autographs."

Union journeyman carpenters in the Detroit area make $15.50 an hour plus close to $9 in benefits when they are working, according to union officials.

Maroncelli, building contractor on the apartment job, said in a good year union carpenters make an average of about $13,000 a year. But, he adds, in the past three years the average is closer to $6,000.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

The happy parents of Mark Tice Jr., Cheryl and Mark, are relieved after the emergency parking lot delivery of their first offspring.

Parking lot delivery

Botsford has surprise guest

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

Providence Hospital was just too far away, as far as Cheryl and Mark Tice's baby was concerned Friday morning.

The Livonia couple, both 25 and 1974 Farmington High School graduates, were on their way to the hospital shortly after Cheryl's labor pains began at 7 a.m.

They didn't make it to their destination. Mark Timothy Tice Jr. was delivered by Dr. Thomas Steffens in the parking lot of Botsford General Hospital at 7:45 a.m.

"I was working in the emergency room when the father came in looking bewildered," said Botsford's Joanne Pawelak, a registered nurse. "He said his wife was going to have a baby and they were on their way to Providence but they didn't think they were going to make it."

Out to the parking lot with supplies and blankets raced Dr. Steffens, Pawelak, registered nurses Sandra Thompson and Wendy Wexler, and social worker Rozetta Bridges.

Minutes after Dr. Steffens spotted Cheryl Tice in the passenger seat of a blue Camaro, he delivered her six-pound, 15-ounce baby boy.

"It was the most exciting thing that's ever happened to me," said Steffens, a 28-year-old intern.

"It was only about 30 degrees outside, so the baby was blue with cold. But within two to three minutes he was breathing and wrapped in a blanket. The baby's OK and mom's OK."

"Unfortunately for the mother, the car had bucket seats," said Wexler. "So it was rather uncomfortable for her. She was in a state of shock and Rozetta was comforting the father, who had gone to pieces."

Things had calmed down considerably for the Tices a couple hours later. Mom and baby had been comfortably accommodated in a private room and dad was relieved it was all behind him.

"I'm just glad this is over with," said Mark, clad in a hospital gown.

"When Cheryl began to go into labor, I called the doctor. He never called back, so we took our daughter (18-month-old Stephanie) to her grandma's and headed for Providence. We stopped at Botsford because we knew we weren't going to make it."

Cheryl was feeling lots warmer.

"It was cold out there," she said while gazing with affection at her newborn son.

RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Telling about his birthing experience is Botsford intern Thomas Steffens, who came to the emergency aid in that hospital's parking lot.

Symbol of hope

Brotherton takes a pay break

By Craig Piechura
staff writer

State Rep. Sandy Brotherton, a Republican representing Farmington and Farmington Hills, joined a handful of state legislators who worked without pay last week to show a commitment toward solving the state's economic woes.

With the largely symbolic action, Brotherton joins Gov. William Milliken, Lt. Gov. James Brickley, Attorney General Frank Kelley, Secretary of State Richard Austin, House leaders Bobby Crim and William Bryant and Senate leaders William Faust and Robert VanderLaan in returning a week's pay to the state's coffers.

In Brotherton's case, a week's gross pay comes to $561 and about $400 is his take-home pay. So, the next paycheck Brotherton receives, covering a two-week period, he'll deduct half his take-home pay and return it to the state treasury.

"You can't tell them to take out a week's pay," Brotherton said. "They're not handled for that. The way the law reads, you can give it back but they can't take it in advance."

The gross weekly pay for Gov. Milliken is $1,346, says spokesman Bev Farrar. The gross pay for Austin and Kelley is $1,152 each; $961 for Lt. Gov. Brickley; $900 for Crim; and $865 for Faust.

Brotherton says he's "carrying the gesture one step further" with a pledge to refrain from spending more than half of the $10,000 he's allotted for annual office expenses such as postage, telephone calls and printing costs.

"THIS MAY HELP when they begin the process of balancing the budget," Brotherton said. "We're shooting for an April 8-9 date but I'm not too confident about that."

Brotherton admits the savings generated by the move won't amount to much in solving the state's fiscal problems.

"The dollar savings realized by the state through this gesture may not be all that much but I believe it is important for me, as an elected official, to set a meaningful example."

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