

My Near Death Experience on The Nooksack River

by Kalin - Friday, February 19, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/my-near-death-experience/>

I floated on my inner tube through the freezing water on a hot summer's day. I paddled to the left, toward the biggest rapids and coasted through. I saw my friend, McLean, up ahead on his own tube. He called to me but I couldn't make out what he was saying. He pointed to the shore. I looked in that direction, hoping to see something interesting, possibly a nude sunbather like last time. But no, only a lonely deer, prancing along the shoreline.

We neared a fork in the river. The right channel was slow and shallow and looked as though we wouldn't be able to pass through without carrying our tubes. I didn't feel like walking.

The left was considerably deeper and faster.

Directly in front the waterways were separated by a little island of rocks. A few yards beyond, a log jam. The left path turned sharply around the massive pile of debris into a fast and narrow channel, choked on the far left by another large pile of logs.

More enjoyable, but no doubt more dangerous than the right.

McLean was still ahead of me so he made the decision. He chose the left.

I needed to stay reasonably close to the left shore—but not too close—in order to navigate the narrow waterway. I paddled frantically.

After a few moments, I noticed McLean paddling in the wrong direction. I paused. He passed quickly by the entrance to the right channel. Instead he headed toward the log jam as frantically as I was paddling in the opposite direction.

All the warnings of kayakers trapped under logs sprang to the forefront of my mind. My mom had tried to talk me out of this, based on this specific concern.

As his feet hit the dividing island, he leaped from the tube and scrambled onto shore as the powerful water dragged at his tube.

He had chickened out.

I looked ahead again and saw the channel turning rapidly away from me. In the distraction, I had forgotten to paddle into proper position.

The white wave to the left, crashing over a massive stump, seemed to loom over me.

Frantically kicking and pushing, I reversed direction toward McLean. Halfway there I realized I was not going to make it. I looked back to the left. It was too far now, but I couldn't go forward either.

I watched myself heading toward the logs in the middle of the river.

I remembered all the dangers on a logical level. I'd been in similar situations but never in water this powerful. Still, I was confident in my abilities to get out before being pulled under.

I positioned myself with my feet forward, ready to leap off as soon as they hit the first log.

I waited. It seemed to take minutes for those few seconds to pass.

My feet hit and I pushed forward. The water rushed over the back of my tube and down my shirt. Before I knew what was happening, I was off the tube and submerged. My mind went blank.

I closed my eyes. Half a second later I reopened them to see the gravel at the bottom of the river as it slapped against my face.

I noticed myself spinning and turning in seemingly random directions. I watched confused images: the logs, gravel, stones, as well as other things of my own imagining: places, faces, and people I've never seen before.

The spinning stopped quickly and I found myself on my back, staring up at the logs a few inches from my face. They rushed past so fast I could not distinguish one from another.

I was trapped. This was my whole kingdom now, consisting of me and my dead logs and the remaining sixty seconds of my life.

Anything I ever wanted to do in life I now had to do before my brain ran out of oxygen.

I stared up in the darkness and imagined I could see the blue sky. I saw McLean, standing on shore, frozen with shock, mouth gaping. I tried to wave but I couldn't make my arms work.

By my best guess, I had been under water for about three seconds. It felt like I'd been there my entire life. I couldn't imagine being anywhere else. I tried to drift away from it by thinking about being at home, on my couch, watching TV... but that was a different world. I never could have existed in that world.

I looked back at the figure of my friend I thought I could see. I watched the future. He waited and waited, safe on dry land in another world. I never emerged, and he waited until giving up and running off to find a phone. I could see him further in the future as I was dragged out, dead for an hour or more.

Then I watched the past. As the images flooded through me, I noticed my surprise that it was actually happening. My life was flashing before my eyes. I thought that was something invented for television and movies.

I tried to concentrate on the images, to find some deeper meaning to them. They kept coming, comforting

me, taking my mind off the situation.

It was all going to be okay. I had lived a good life, and this was the way it was going to end.

I watched the blur of logs speeding past my face.

Then, suddenly, something was different. Brighter.

I'm dead now. This is the transition... this is the light.

My foot dug into the rocks and I felt water splashing my face.

I jerked upward and screamed as the sunlight washed over me.

I looked down river. It widened rapidly as it connected with the right channel. After a few moments I was able to stand up. It took all my strength to hold against the current of the knee-high water, but despite the effort I walked toward the shore in a daze. My stomach hurt... the kind of pain you feel before an important oral presentation or a big test... but it slowly faded as I headed toward the shore and sank into my new reality.

The river roared behind me, deafening. The sound churned and bounced in a detail I had never heard before, as though I could hear each individual droplet slamming against the rocks.

I looked at the sky as I neared the shore and became more confident in my step. The blue pierced my eyes, contrasting with the bright white clouds. The trees seemed to be painted with the a child's magical brush from a more vibrant alternate dimension.

Even the rocks overwhelmed my senses with their neon-gray. I could see every pore, every grain of sand.

I stood on the shore for a long moment, the world twisting and churning about me. I looked up to see McLean calmly walking toward me, around the logs that moments earlier had encompassed my existence, carrying an inner tube in each arm.

My body tingled and I looked down, feeling waves of wondrous sensation washing through my flesh.

My fingertips pulsed.

I brought my hands up to gaze at them. Protruding chaotically from every angle of my fingernails were splinters, bark, and wet, mashed wood.

As McLean reached the sandy beach, I chuckled and rapidly lost myself as it built into uncontrollable laughter.

My [blog post about this near death experience](#)

PDF generated by Kalin's PDF Creation Station