

## We Are Not Afraid To Die...If we can All be Together

- By Gordon Cook and Alan East

### A critical summary:

This short story is about the writer narrating his thrilling journey across the sea on board his Wavewalker and about how optimism raises one's spirits and helps one overcome stress and difficulty. The narrative describes on how determination and strong will power helps us overcome all forms of stressful situations. Optimism helps to reduce "the direct stress". This can be verified with the instance where the level of perseverance rose in the author after seeing the caricatures of him and Mary, drawn by the children. His motive was to travel around the world through sea just like Captain James Cook, which he wished to complete in three years. He was with his family, his wife Mary, his daughter Suzanne and his son who was only six years old.

The first phase was about 105,000 kilometres up to the South African seaport of Cape Town, which passed off very pleasantly. The second part of the journey was for 150,000 kilometres. This phase was completed in Australia. On 25th December, the writer's ship was in the southern Indian Ocean, 3500 kilometres to the east of Cape Town. The family celebrated their new year

(1977) on board the ship. Next came a phase when the ship was caught in the stormy seas. The weather suddenly became very terrible. The writer thought that their ship would ride over the waves but were heavily caught amidst the stormy situations at the sea. There was water everywhere and they found the ship to be sinking. The condition was extremely helpless and very pathetic. Water was gushing in from everywhere. Debris was floating across the cabins. The electric pump was also not working as it had short-circuited. They had to keep pumping and steering all night long. The writer's daughter's head had swollen and she had a deep injury. However, the bravery of the strong-willed children is noteworthy in the story.

On January 4, they breathed a sigh of relief after having survived 36 hours of continuous pumping. However, their relief seemed to be quite short-lived because by evening that day the sea again witnessed bad weather. This is the turning point of the story when we see the author consoling the children. It was quite amazing that the children exclaimed "...we aren't afraid of dying if we can all be together." This led to the building energy and enthusiasm inside a very extremely fatigued writer. He decided to heave and fight the sea. Next day saw a very bright morning. He was welcomed by his children who exclaimed "You are the best daddy in the world." He rushed to the deck and to his amazement, gazed at the stark outline of Ile Amsterdam. It seemed to him to be the most beautiful island in the world. They anchored off shore for the night and then were welcomed by the 28 inhabitants of the island the next morning. All along, the only thing which filled the writer's mind was the undeterred courage which his wife Mary showed, his daughter who didn't worry about her head injury and his son who wasn't afraid of dying.

### Short Answer Questions

1. What was the object behind the writer's undertaking the journey?

Answer: The writer undertook the voyage along with his wife in order to duplicate the round-the-world voyage made 200 years earlier by Captain James Cook.

2. Describe the boat which was made for undertaking the voyage.

Answer: The name of the boat which was made for undertaking the voyage was 'Wavewalker'. It was a 23 meter, 30 ton wooden-hulled boat which had been professionally built and the writer and his wife had spent months fitting it out and testing it in the roughest weather they could find.

3. What are Mayday calls? Why was the ship getting no replies to its Mayday calls?

Answer: Mayday calls are distress signals sent through the radio by ships facing troubles in the sea for getting help from other ships passing nearby. The ship 'Wavewalker' was not getting

replies to its Mayday calls because the boat had reached a remote part of the sea where other ships did not go.

4. What did Sue say when she was asked by her father why she had not complained much about her grave injuries at the first instance?

Answer: Sue had been injured badly when the wave had hit the ship. Her head had swollen alarmingly. She had two very big enormous black eyes and she had also showed to her parents a deep cut on her arm. When asked why she had not complained about her injuries earlier she replied that she had not wanted to worry her parents when they were trying to save them all

5. Comment on the mood of the sea on 2nd January 2010? How did the writer and his family and the crewmen prepare for that?

Answer: At dawn on January 2, the waves became gigantic. As the ship of the writer rose to the top of each wave, they could see the sea water rolling towards them and the noise made by the wind and the spray of the wave water was painful to their ears. In order to slow the boat down, they dropped the storm jib and lashed a heavy mooring rope in a loop across the stern. Then they double lashed everything and went through their life raft drill, attached lifelines and wore oilskins and life jackets and waited for the worst things to happen.

6. What happened at 6pm on 2nd of January?

Answer: At 6 pm on 2nd January, the sea became silent and the wind dropped and the sky grew immediately dark. After that a very huge wave which was double the size of the other waves struck the ship with explosive power and damaged it.

7. List the steps taken by the captain

- a) to protect the boat when rough weather began
- b) to check the flooding of the water in the ship

a). Slowed down the speed of the boat- storm jib dropped- double lashed everything- went for life-raft drill- attracted lifelines- put life jackets.

a). Larry and Herb kept pumping water out- the narrator stretched canvas and secured water proof latch- covered the gaping holes.

8. How did they pass the first leg of the journey?

Answer: It was pleasant sailing down the West coast of Africa to Cape Town.

9. Who were Larry and Herb? What role did they play?

Answer: Crewmembers Larry Vigil was an American and Herb Seigler was from Switzerland. They were of great help. As a team they worked with the narrator- kept pumping water out of Wavewalker till the water level was brought under control.

10. Why and when did the captain send 'May Day Calls'? What was the response?

Answer: When nothing worked well after the gigantic wave had hit the Wave walker... impending disaster awaited- the captain sent 'May Day Calls'-no response as this part of the ocean is less traveled.

### Long Answer Questions

1. Highlight the tremendous courage and stoicism shown by the two children during the struggle of the ship to keep from sinking?

Answer: The two children Suzanne and Jonathon, who were aged seven and six respectively, showed tremendous courage and stoicism during the epic struggle, put up by their parents and the crewmen to keep the ship from sinking. Suzanne had been injured badly when the wave had hit the ship. Her head had swollen alarmingly. She had two very big enormous black eyes and she had also showed to her parents a deep cut on her arm. When asked why she had not complained about her injuries earlier she replied that she had not wanted to worry her parents when they were trying to save them all.

On January 5th when the condition of the ship was very bad, the author went in to comfort the children and his son, Jonathon, asked him if they were going to die. When he was assured that they would all survive somehow he told his father that they were not afraid of dying if they could all be together.

That very evening the badly injured Suzanne had patience and power enough even to draw caricatures of her parents with the words, "Here are some funny people. Did they make you laugh?" She had written a message also inside which said that she had loved them both and that card was meant to say thanks to his father and hope for the best. Such extraordinary patience, courage and tolerance shown by the small children on the face of an enormously dangerous situation gave courage and inspiration to his parents to fight hard for survival.

2. Describe the behaviour of the narrator and his family, particularly of his children Jon and Sue, during the Voyage.

Answer:

Value Points:

- When the gigantic wave hit the boat the narrator was badly injured - showed his heroic qualities- did not panic-used his seafaring skills
- used whatever tools available- saved all.
- Little John and Sue showed their bravery
- did not disturb parents
- cheered their parents up
- John's statement gives fresh encouragement to the narrator
- Wife and crew members worked as team- all survived.

3. How does the story suggest that optimism helps to endure 'the direct stress'?

Value Points:

- Last 16 year's experience helped a lot
- the gigantic wave broke the boat, Wavewalker, not their spirit
- If winter comes...can spring be far behind
- all worked as a team
- cheered themselves up
- encouraged themselves-used every possible measures
- worked very hard
- determined to succeed
- remained hopeful
- 'God helps those who help themselves'.

## Questions for Practice

### Long Questions

1. What picture does the lesson draw on lives at sea?
2. What are the different technical aspects of a boat that the lesson highlights?
3. What do you feel are the attitudes that help the passengers of the boat steer them to safety?

### Short Questions:

1. Do the children represent typical children or they are more than them?
2. Why was it felt that the Mayday calls would go unanswered?
3. What were the specialties of the Wavewalker?
4. What drove the parents of the children undertake such a voyage full of dangers?
5. Why was the ugly island, Ile Amsterdam, the most beautiful island for the passengers of Wavewalker?