

56. 30 seconds.

My son, Darrel and I were on a short weekend break in the Netherlands to visit my relations and for Darrel to visit a few places in Amsterdam. We stayed in my uncle's summer house, an old converted wagon shed by the peaceful and tranquil banks of a little river, de Meije. On Sunday morning, we woke to the sound of gentle drizzle. Looking out of the window, I could see a thousand tiny pin pricks on the surface of the little river which otherwise would be as smooth as well polished glass interspersed with a few water lilies and the occasional graceful swan gliding by or a noisy goose flapping overhead.

The mist slowly dispersed and the clouds receded to reveal a glorious sunny day. Gerbrand my cousin arrived and together with Darrel, set about preparing a small rowing boat by removing its cover, fitting a small engine powered by a car battery and fitting the oars to the rowlocks. Darrel then went for a short row for practice and he seemed to be doing just fine and managing well. We set off with my Canon EOS 400 camera around my neck and a additional 200mm zoom lens.

The water was still calm and smooth like a mirror in which we saw the reflected blue sky and the occasional cloud drift by. Every so often we came to a low bridge when we would both have to duck down. Not only were the bridges low but also very narrow, so before reaching the bridge Darrel would have to give a few powerful strokes to pick up momentum which would get us through. On the odd occasion when we did not have the required momentum to glide all the way through, Darrel would have to push against the sides or underside of the bridge. I noticed the water lilies were being blown up by the wind but didn't think anything of it. I just took a few photos with the water lilies half out the water. We then went through a sort of lock and entered a small channel. This led us to a little lake which we had to cross.

On entering the lake, which didn't look too rough, We agreed to continue and I suggested that Darrel steer straight into the wind and waves to make sufficient headway so that we could then tack to the opposite shore before the wind. If we couldn't go up wind far enough, we would then just do an about-turn and head back where we had come from. After a while, with the bow into the wind we realized that we were not making any headway so I started the little battery powered engine to assist us. This made little difference. The wind and waves were just too strong and we soon drifted towards some reeds. Once in the reeds, with a lot of punting with the oars, we managed to get out of the little inlet into which we had been blown. We still needed to head further into the wind to locate the little channel that would take us home. We saw something of a small channel but soon realized that it was not the correct one as Gerbrand had told us there would be a signboard. The wind and waves were so strong that the boat turned and we were soon facing down wind. We had to somehow turn the bow into the wind to even think about making any headway so our intension was to tie up the bow onto a pole and allow the wind to turn us. At this stage we still had no desire

to abandon our mission. Once the bow was tied up onto a post our intention was to shove the stern away from the side. The waves kept pounding us and several waves came over the sides, slowly filling up the boat. The Lord was with us as we ended up alongside a short wooden jetty.

Two people came walking past at just the right moment but as they were not aware of our predicament they continued walking past. I realized that even if we shouted the passersby would not have heard us due to the wind so instructed Darrel to get out of the boat and run after them. Darrel looked at me with obvious deep concern in his eyes, not wanting to leave his Dad floundering in the boat. I assured him that I would be fine and again pleaded with him to get out quickly and summon help. He reluctantly obeyed his earthly father, got out of the boat and ran down the path to get the two people to return. As Darrel returned with the two, another two people miraculously appeared from the opposite direction. Now there were five people to help me and as they reached forward to take me by the arms I told them I was disabled and could not yet use my left arm and indicated they need to pull me out by my feet. One of the people pulled me by my strong right hand and soon I was safely on the jetty. Everyone helped to salvage what they could but thirty seconds later the boat slipped below the surface.

I was soaking wet from head to toe with my camera still around my neck. Darrel ran back to the house to get my wheelchair but by the time he returned I had already walked back almost a kilometer to meet him on the path. Once back at our house, I phoned Gerbrand to tell him what happened and he immediately offered to come and help to see if we could retrieve the boat. We used a neighbour's boat to get there but decided that it was too rough to attempt a recovery that day.

Afterwards, I asked Darrel why we continued when we both saw the wind was picking up and his reply was, "Dad, we were both born for adventure." On our return journey one of the neighbors' on our rescue boat asked me if I was afraid at any time. I can honestly say that at no stage was I afraid in the slightest I was only keeping a cool head, issuing instructions to Darrel and trusting my Lord. As you can see from this story, help arrived with seconds to spare. I have become accustomed to receiving help in the 11th hour that on each occasion my faith gets a little stronger.