

Salmon River Rescue

Part 1

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Sometimes the events of your life take you for a wild ride. I've found that when bad things happen, you need to keep your sense of humor and wait to see the next chapter of the mystery of life. Sometimes, when the worst happens, it turns out for the best.

Betchawannaland

After the fires of 1987 on the Salmon River, Bob-O was working with his partner, Pat, falling trees on a fire salvage job. It was way to hell and gone up McNeil Creek. The route was all dirt roads and took about an hour to get there. The area was locally known as "Betchawannaland" because of the distance, ruggedness of the road, and desolation. Once you were there, the next sure bet was, "Betcha wanna come home."

When on a falling job, Bob-O would get up at 4:00 in the morning. I would feed him a big breakfast. It was hard for him to eat that early in the morning, but later on the job, he would need the fuel. As he ate, I would pack his lunch and fill his gallon canteen. I always put a little grated ginger root into his water. When he stopped to drink, he would pound down a lot of water at once and the ginger root made it easier on his stomach. Since Bob-O's work was so hard, every small comfort helped.

Falling Out

After Bob-O left, I would go back to bed until I needed to get up and send Allen off to meet the school bus. On this particular day, after Allen had left, I put the finishing touches on a small dollhouse I had made for a young friend of ours who had broken a femur bone. She had been on a packing trip in the Marble Mountains with her family when a mule rolled on her. They packed her out in the night, and she was still in a body cast at home.

It was probably about noon when I left Starveout to go downriver to visit my friend. Her family lived over a small footbridge on the other side of the Salmon. They did not have a CB radio in their cabin, so for a couple of hours I was unreachable.

Tuning In

When I got back to my rig and turned on the radio, there was a lot of chatter going on for the road channel. I was able to make out that a rescue was in progress. Then, to my shock and dismay, I figured out that Bob-O was the person being rescued. I interrupted the talk on the radio. "Hey!" I said,



Bob-O at the site of the first US Trans-Atlantic wireless telegram, which was sent to Edward VII, King of England, on January 19, 1903.

"This is Kathleen. What's going on?"

Betty Ann called back, "Where have you been? We've been trying to reach you." She filled me in, and we made plans to meet at the old school where the rescue equipment was stored. I drove on downriver to Forks of Salmon.

Falling Over

Although I got bits and pieces of the story then, here is what happened. It was near the end of the workday for Bob-O. He was falling his last tree. He had an escape route planned. He cut the tree, it started falling, and he ran out his

escape route. The tree twisted and the top part fell onto other standing trees, which acted as a fulcrum and lifted up the butt end. The butt end of the tree then fell on top of the stump, and using it as a guide, slid back about 20 feet.

Unfortunately, it slid up Bob-O's escape route and caught him as he was running away. The tree butt hit him right at his boot line. It broke the tibia and fibula—both of the bones in his lower right leg—and poked them through the skin.

Bob-O told me later that he remembered being hit and being pushed to the ground. He lifted up on his elbows and looked around. "Boy, that was close," he thought. Looking down, he could see his lower leg and foot sitting at a right angle to his leg. "That's gonna hurt," was his next thought. He reached for the whistle all fallers wear around their necks. He waited a few minutes until he heard his falling partner Pat shut down his saw, and blew as hard as he could.

Triage

Pat came running. He uttered some choice words. Bob-O sent him to his pack for a handheld two-meter radio. This hooked him into our phone/radio system. He phoned in his own rescue. Bob-O and I were in the middle of taking an EMT course and beginning a fledgling river rescue group. He was able to describe his own injury with medical accuracy and set the wheels in motion for his own rescue.

He tried to call me first, but I wasn't home. Next he called Betty Ann. She wasn't at home, but he reached her at Forks School where she was the secretary. She called Nixie, the only EMT on the river at that time and got her going up to Bob-O with her kit. A general call for help on the CB got several different people headed up to Betchawannaland.

After one attempt to move, Bob-O realized that if he didn't move, it didn't hurt. So he stayed still. He knew it would be a long time before anyone could get there. He had Pat bring some leftover lunch from his pack and he lay there and ate it. There wasn't much to be done with his leg except cover it to keep any dirt from falling on it. Pat cannot stand the sight of blood, and luckily it wasn't bleeding much at all. After Bob-O assured Pat that he was going to be okay, Pat climbed the mountain up to the road where the crummy was parked to wait and guide the rescuers to Bob-O.

The Rescue

Bob-O was located about a quarter-mile down a very steep side hill. The felled trees and brush provided added obstacles. In a little under an hour the cavalry began arriving. Some people had been called on; others came because they weren't too far away and heard the call on the CB.

They all gathered at the crummy at about the same time. Pat led them down the side hill to Bob-O. Nixie, being the only EMT, was in charge. She gingerly straightened out Bob-O's leg. She covered the compound fracture with a sterile bandage and splinted the leg. That made Bob-O's leg start hurting and bleeding.

A Forest Service guy had responded and had a backboard with him. After Nixie was done with her first aid, they loaded Bob-O onto the backboard and six men began the long climb up the mountain. Bob-O is not a little guy. They had to stop about every ten steps and rest. Pat, who couldn't look at Bob-O's bleeding leg, would turn his back on him during the rests, but would turn back and heft the backboard up the torturous slope when the rest break was over. Nixie kept track of Bob-O's vital signs. It took a half-hour or more to carry Bob-O to the crummy.

The Plan

Meanwhile Betty Ann and I had gotten egg crate foam mattresses from the equipment room and, by putting the back seat down in my Volvo station wagon, made a transport bed. The plan was that I would wait for Bob-O to be brought down to the pavement where McNeil Creek Road and the Salmon River Road meet. He would be transferred to my rig, and I would drive him to the hospital three hours away.

Sometimes having a plan doesn't mean that things will go as planned. What I mean to say is, this plan didn't. As Betty Ann and I drove to the McNeil Creek turn-off, a helicopter, which had been working on another salvage sale, flew overhead towards Bob-O. All our plans were about to change. Find out what happened next in Part 2 in *HP97*.

Access

Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze is turning 50 and is okay with that fact at her home in Northernmost California. c/o *Home Power* magazine, PO Box 520, Ashland, OR 97520 • kathleen.jarschke-schultze@homepower.com

