

TALES OF THE RIVERMAN 122

Attacked by the person you were trying to rescue. Drugs, Drink, Panic.



George brought this man who was fortunately not struggling, from the centre of the river to the quay wall ladder.

You try never to be in the water beside a drowning person. They will do anything to keep their head above water, even try to climb upon you. This was drummed into me during practice sessions at the Young Swimmers Athletic Union in Whitevale Baths. Terrific training, though little did I know at that time, how important it would be to me in later life. You always have a floatation aid with you to offer to the drowning person. Don't let them catch hold of you. The many times that I have swam out with a lifebelt and had the drowning person hold on to it, or just pulled them through the centre of it. As taught you always calmed them down, to convince them that if they lay still and held tight to the lifebelt, you would get them safely ashore. All these hours, weeks indeed years of practice, came to the fore, and stood me in good stead.



Practice sessions and awards taken at Whitevale Baths.

If possible, always use a boat.



Rescue at the Glasgow Bridge

Even in a boat you have to be careful. Dad, (Bennie), rescued a woman who had razor blades in her hand and I rescued a youth who cut himself

with the razor blades he had in his pocket. Twice I had a finger broken by some poor demented soul, trying desperately to get out of the water. I was extremely cautious and careful when I grabbed a man supposedly with a gun and a knife, and lifted him into my boat. Twice that I know of Bennie was bitten by someone he was trying to rescue. One man was having an epileptic fit when he sunk his teeth into Bennie's helping hands. Fortunately, Bennie managed to prise the man's teeth apart. I had bricks and bottles thrown at me as I rowed in to rescue a young man. Rumour was that he was a drug dealer, thrown into the river by a baying mob who did not wish him to be rescued. I only saw a fellow human being in distress and fortunately no missiles hit my head.



Cameras were seldom present at rescues. Everything happened so fast.

Then you have the bravadoes, the drunk swimmers who think they do not require rescuing, but you know from experience that they are going to freeze, cramp up, to tire, and suddenly sink. You stay close, then you make your move, grab hold of them and lift them into the boat while keeping them under control. So difficult. I chased a drugged man around for some time keeping as close as I could so that when he finally went down, I was able to reach down into the water and bring him back up and into the boat. I remember, one day, grabbing Bennie's legs as he leant right over the stern of the boat to catch a man who was in the process of sinking. Recently my son Chris had to lean right over the stern of the boat to catch a woman who had just suddenly started to sink, while I was ready to hold Chris if he had overbalanced, as I had with Bennie.

Bennie was about to lift a young man who was drifting downstream, into the boat, when the man suddenly went berserk trying to punch Bennie and pull him into the water. Bennie with his incredible strength, just kept hold of the man until he quietened down and was lying still. When Bennie once more tried to lift him into the boat, the man suddenly sprung to life again, and attacked, punching, kicking and pulling. Bennie caught him by the hair and every time he became violent, Bennie shoved his head below water. I will always remember Bennie saying, so you want to drown, do you? and shoving him under. This went on until the man quietened a little. Bennie still could not lift the man into the boat, but was able to place ropes around him, and pass them up to the Police on the quay wall. who lifted the still struggling man from the water. While the

Officers were lifting, the man was tugging on the ropes, trying to overbalance the officers, and have them fall into the river. Glasgow Police Officers are too wise to let that happen and soon the man was in custody. Thankfully no member of the public or police officer, had entered the water to try to rescue this man before we arrived.



Another day a young man was hanging onto a lifebelt, but this wasn't just a man needing rescued, this was a youth on drugs or drink who was violently resisting any attempt to remove him. Another who had tried to pull the Policeman, who had thrown him a rope, into the river. He tried to climb into our boat to fight, and threatened to turn the boat over, but Bennie again dealt with him and he was soon out of the water. We had a similar occurrence when we were asked to remove a drugged or drunk man from off a small boat on the river. This man had stolen a small boat from the RNVR Carrick moored at Custom House quay and was sitting in the middle of the river with a "carry out" shouting abuse. I was in the boat with a police officer and Bennie. Bennie knew exactly how to deal with this madman, who was threatening to sink our boat, and he was soon towed to the side where police removed him into custody.

We have had people try to push or pull us into the water, to shoulder a police sergeant over the side. You just have to be ready for anything. It is one thing lifting someone who wants rescued into a boat, it is another thing trying to bring from the water someone who thinks they do not require help, shouting, swearing, trying to punch or kick you.

A young man chased by police, carrying stolen goods, entered the river to try to swim across and escape. He did not like me trying to get him into my boat, but I did. While trying to calm this man down, and dodge his punches, I managed to manoeuvre the boat to the banking. A policeman waded into the water and joined me in the boat, game over for the young thief. I later retrieved the stolen goods from the river bed. After one rescue it took five Police Officers to carry the fighting man, to a Police vehicle. I could go on and on.

Drink Drugs and water are a dangerous mixture.