



Hippie Chick by Joseph Monninger

Subjects: Survival; Manatees; Shipwrecks

Book Lists: Florida, Gifted

Props: Sailboat, note, manatee



The day it happened was November 17th, a Friday in the late afternoon. The person it happened to was 15-year-old Lolly (short for Lollipop) Emmerson. She is a free-spirit, what others call; the hippie child of a hippie woman. She enjoys drawing, reading, kissing her boyfriend Nicky, and sailing—especially sailing in the Florida Keys in her very own Boston Whaler, a sturdy sailing vessel she has named Mugwump. (*Show sailboat*)

In the late afternoon of November 17th Lolly made a decision that changed her life forever. People asked her afterward why she went sailing that night. And she's not sure. After her boyfriend left, she hadn't jumped up, done a sailor's hornpipe (*Do a sailor's hornpipe dance*) and started throwing off her bowlines. No, she had sat on the dock for a while. Then she had begun to prepare the boat almost unconsciously, automatically. She just . . . went sailing. She had left a note telling where she had gone. (*Show note*) And she knew her mother wouldn't worry because she trusted her sailing skills and she always wore her life jacket. She had sailed about a half hour and had passed Kehler's Point. She examined the horizon, the descending sun, and decided it was time to turn back, to come about.

(*Bring out sailboat and demonstrate with explanation*) If you don't know anything about sailing, coming about can be tricky. You have to change the angle of the sail to the wind, so if the wind blew behind you to begin with, you must swing the sail to starboard to bring the bow around to port. The boom, which anchors the bottom of the sail, swings hard. It takes a little while to get the feeling of coming about, but once you get the knack it, it becomes instinctive and automatic, like driving a car or riding a bike. You don't have to pay strict attention because your muscle-memory skills kick into gear. And that, probably, caused her downfall.

She wasn't paying attention, the jib luffed, a wave suddenly lifted and rose to her starboard. With a massive shrug, the Mugwump turned almost

perpendicular to the surface of the ocean. Then for an instant, a long, horrible instant, she knew something had gone terribly wrong. She jumped away from the boat as it turned and jammed into something under the water. She heard a horrible, grinding sound.

Although Lolly tried to do everything she had been taught to do in such a situation, she made mistakes. It could have happened to anyone, but it happened to her. She tried to recover her boat, to stay with it. She knew rescue teams could see a boat much better than one lone person in the vast ocean. But while she tried to climb into the boat, she hit her head—hard. (*Put boat down*) She lost consciousness. When she woke, she was alone, hurt, bleeding, and no longer near her boat. Surprisingly, she didn't scream or cry. She didn't accuse herself of being stupid or poorly prepared. She accepted what had happened. She accepted that she was alone and that her legs dangled in the dark, dark sea, and sharks could have her. There was nothing she could do to change it, so she accepted it. After all, death is not the worst thing. That's when she heard the first blow.

Imagine the darkness, the waves, and the sound of breathing. She turned slowly. She could no longer feel her legs. Her body shook with the cold of being immersed for so long. She spotted movement and listened. A moment later she heard a breath, a short explosive blow. Dolphin, she thought. Come to me, she whispered. Please help me. And he did. But it was not a dolphin. His huge body suddenly appeared beside her. She felt no fear. A thousand years and a thousand seas had brought him to her. She reached her hand to him and slowly, painfully, crawled on top of his wide back. (*Bring out manatee*) It was a manatee. And he had come for her.

A manatee. Was she saved? This beautifully told story of a girl, who survives because of the help of those large gentle creatures called manatees, will touch your heart. (*Hold up book*) Read *Hippie Chick* by Joseph Monninger.