

## A story about a caring family and a boat rescue

by Clay McDermott

In my four years experience in law enforcement I have run across every type of person imaginable. Whether serious criminal or menial violator, I've met them all. However, every once in a while another type of person comes along and leaves a distinct impression—the caring person. I had the opportunity to meet a family of caring people last October, and it's a shame that this family's recognition took so long to come about.

October 9, 2004 was a gray, chilly day with winds gusting 15 to 20 knots. A few people were out enjoying late fall fishing, while others were considering whether or not to go out. On Skilak Lake, swells and whitecaps were rolling and the wind was howling. At Upper Skilak boat launch, Doug Morris and his son Kraig were contemplating taking their boat out and heading toward the upper Kenai River.

While on the boat launch and scanning the lake, Kraig notice some objects in the water about one mile southwest of their position. Kraig could tell that the objects were moving, and initially thought it was a dog or some kind of animal. Kraig and his father Doug braved the weather and motored in the direction of the objects. As they approached, they were able to determine that the flailing objects in the water were people. In fact children!

Doug and Kraig pulled four children (ages 7, 8, 10, and 14 years) from the frigid waters of Skilak Lake. All the children had life vests on. All the children were cold and approaching hypothermia. It was determined they were in the water for approximately 2 hours. Doug asked the kids if there was anyone else in the water, and the oldest told them her father tried to swim to shore, about one mile away. Doug and Kraig located and pulled aboard an exhausted and hypothermic adult male. Exhausted as the father was, both Doug and Kraig guessed he would not have made it to shore. If he had, he would have been too cold to do anything to help the children, or himself. The father also wore a life vest.

Doug and Kraig Morris returned to the boat launch and tried to take care of the victims until help arrived. They knew they had to get them out of the wet clothes and into a warm environment. The family truck was

started and the children and father were given what dry clothing the Morris family had with them. In addition, Doug's wife Marne brought clothing and blankets from their home in Sterling.

I think it goes without saying that anyone would rescue stranded boaters floating on the sunken hull of a vessel. But after pulling them out of the water and bringing them to a warm environment, Doug and Kraig returned for the submerged vessel. They spent the time and effort to locate it, to search for and find almost all of the personal belongings on the vessel that went into the lake, and to tow the vessel back to the launch. OK, so maybe that is something some people would also do. However, Doug and his family were not finished, and I think their continuing actions distinguish the Morris family from others.

The Morris family stayed and continued to support the victims of the accident. They bailed the boat, and help load the boat onto the trailer and the packs, fishing poles, and bags into the back of the pickup truck. Most importantly, the Morris family never asked for anything in return, never spoke a bad word about a potential tragedy caused by lack of judgment, and never complained when the tragedy their heroism prevented wasn't reported in the local paper. The Morris family went out of their way to comfort, support, and assist perfect strangers in a time of need. And after my brief period of interaction with the Morris family, it was clear to me that this is the type of people they are—caring, supportive, and willing to help others.

As I said, I've met all kinds of people in my short career in Law Enforcement, and I have seen things that never cease to amaze me or cause me to wonder, "What were they thinking?" But every once in a while an event takes place when people either step forward and help out without care for their own safety, or else simply stand by and make criticisms.

The most memorable moments in my career have not been the day-to-day encounters with uninformed perpetrators who do something incredibly unintelligent, but rather the caring actions and personalities of the Morris family and other like them. It's a rewarding experience to meet people like the Morrises and it's nice to know such caring families still exist.

The Morrisses should be praised and lauded for their unselfish actions, as well as thanked for averting a potential tragedy with the loss of five lives.

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