

The Storm

by **Trenee Zweigle-Ybarra**



There's no way I can catch my breath! I'm gulping water instead of air, is this how it's going to end? I furiously paddled in the water, but the choppy waves were crashing all around me and I couldn't tell which way was land and safety. I'm so exhausted...I sank under the water again, feeling the panic rise to a new level.

It had started out to be a beautiful day when we left home, sunny with blue skies. Several of us had been taking scuba diving lessons for several months, and today was the big graduation day. We were so excited—going out in the boat for our final exam, the feeling of pride in ourselves and our buddies. On the long drive there was a lot of chattering about how the dive would go and when we would be getting our certificates. We didn't dare to think that anyone would fail, and loudly encouraged each other.

We arrived at the beach in great spirits, happily loading supplies and gear onto the large boat. We went out quite a ways from shore, trusting our instructor with all the details and not paying much attention. Later on we were all wishing we HAD paid attention, but perhaps it wouldn't have made much difference.

Finally the great moment came and we were setting up for the competitive dives. The rest of us were fidgety and bored while waiting our turns. We checked pressure valves, hoses, and everything else we could think of.

Suddenly without warning the skies became black, a strong wind came out of nowhere, and it began to rain. The boat began bobbing up and down, back and forth. I felt a fear inside which was rapidly expanding, but didn't know what to do. We frantically scoured the horizon for our instructor, but without warning a fog began surrounding us and we couldn't see anything past the boat. I could hear Mike shouting and wanted to pull him into the boat, but his cries seemingly bounced off every direction and I couldn't tell where he was. I reached out my hands—and was swept into the ocean! NO, this can't be happening. My mind was racing with fear, thousands of thoughts stabbing at me.

I'm so cold, spinning, thrashing, trying to grab onto anything...but there was nothing to grasp. The fog lifted enough that I could see the outline of the shore far

in the distance, some lights and a hill. Then I sank under once more and it was gone. I realized I was sinking farther down each time and knew I had to drop the weight belt. Then I prayed as never before in my life. “Lord, please help me—please save me and I will dedicate my life to You. Please hear and answer my prayers, please!” I tried to brush the salty water from my eyes—and there was the hill I had seen earlier, only there was a man in a trench coat standing at the top with his arms outstretched. Each time I sank or became disoriented I looked back and there he was, my guideline to the shore. I tried desperately to swim towards him, but the undertow was pulling me under. I tried to grab at some large rocks, but they were slippery and I couldn’t get a firm grip.

The wind whipped the waves, slapping me in the face and shooting stinging water up my nose. I kept praying while wondering if I would ever see those I loved again. I shook my head and tried to swim toward the man on the hill—over and over again. It seemed like forever and just when I knew I was so exhausted I couldn’t go on anymore, I felt strong hands dragging me over the rocks up onto the sandy cold shore. I had to wait quite awhile, but when I could finally speak in a whisper I said, “I want to go thank the man on the hill.” They looked at me questioningly and said, “There isn’t anyone on that hill—it’s a restricted area with razor wire surrounding it!”

I knew beyond any doubt that God had spared my life, and I thanked Him over and over. I have kept my promise to live for Him and try to help others in need, also in setting a Christian example. He has blessed me so many times as well as blessing those I love and care about. **THANK YOU LORD!**