

‘We're Not Afraid to Die...if We Can All Be Together’
Gordon Cook and Alan East

SUMMARY

A dream to duplicate the round-the-world voyage

The narrator, a 37 year old businessman and his wife Mary dreamt to voyage around the world like the famous Captain James Cook. For the voyage, they have been perfecting their seafaring skills for the past 16 years. They have got a professionally built, 23 metre and 30 ton wooden-hulled boat, Wavewalker. The boat has been tested for months in the roughest of the weathers.

The beginning of the voyage

In July 1976, the narrator, together with his wife and kids (son Jonathan, 6 and daughter Suzanne, 7) sets sail from Plymouth, England. The initial period of the three-year journey (from the west coast of Africa to Cape Town) proves to be quite pleasant. Before heading east, they employ two crewmen, namely, Larry Vigil and Herb Seigler to help them tackle one of the world's roughest seas, the southern Indian Ocean.

The second day they encounter strong winds and alarming waves. By December 25, they manage to reach 3,500 kilometres east of Cape Town. Despite the bad weather, the family celebrates Christmas on the boat. However, the weather worsens with the passing time.

A catastrophe- the attack of the huge wave

On the early morning of January 2, the family faces strong, mighty waves and screaming winds. They attempt to slow down the boat by dropping the storm jib. They carry out life-raft drill and prepare themselves for the worst case scenario by donning life jackets and oilskins.

Later in the evening, a ‘perfectly vertical’, huge, tremendous wave hits the deck of the boat throwing the narrator off the boat. He accepts his ‘approaching death’ and begins to lose consciousness. The boat is just about to overturn when another huge wave comes and turns it right back. The narrator grabs the guard rails and sails into the boat's main boom. He suffers injuries in his ribs and mouth.

Fight for survival

Realizing that the ship had water in its lower parts, he instructs Mary to take the wheel, while Larry and Herb pump out the water. He checks on the children in their cabin, where Sue informs him about a bump on her head to which he does not pay much attention.

The narrator begins waterproofing the gaping holes. Most of the water now deviated to the side. However, their hand-pumps block due to debris and the electric-pump gets short-circuited. Fortunately, he finds a spare electric pump and connects it to an out-pipe in order to drain out the water.

They keep pumping and steering all night long. Even their Mayday calls are not answered as they are in a remote corner of the world.

Injuries of Suzanne

Sue's head swells, her eyes go black and has a deep cut on her arm. On being asked about her injuries, she replies to her father that she did not want to bother him when he was trying to save them.

Desperation to reach the land

The family manages to survive for 15 hours since the wave hit the boat. The water levels are controlled to a considerable level but they still have leaks below the waterline. They decide to rest and work in rotations. The wave had left Wavewalker in a considerably bad state. Since it is not in a condition to make them reach Australia, they decide and hope to reach the nearest island, Ile

Amsterdam, a French scientific base. Unfortunately, the chances to reach the island are very slim unless the wind and seas subside. Besides, their supporting engine had also been damaged.

January 4 and 5

After pumping out the water for 36 hours continuously, they take a sigh of relief as just a few centimetres of water is left to be pumped out. They decide to hoist the storm jib as the main mast is destroyed and head towards the supposed location of the islands.

Having found some corned beef and crackers, they eat their first meal in two days.

However, their relief is short-lived. The weather starts changing for the worse and by the morning of January 5, they are again left desperate.

Courageous Jonathan

As the narrator goes to comfort the children, he is left spellbound to see the fearlessness of his son, Jonathan, who says that he does not fear death as long as they all are together. This fills the narrator with determination and courage to fight the sea.

The ongoing struggle

He tries his best to protect the weakened starboard side. That evening, the narrator and his wife sit together holding hands, feeling hopeless and thinking that their end is approaching. But still with all the moral support that he receives from his children, he continues his efforts. Fortunately, Wavewalker sails through the storm. He works on the wind speeds in order to calculate their exact position. While he is thinking, Sue gives him a greeting card expressing her love, gratitude and optimism.

Though he is not very convinced, he instructs Larry to steer a course of 185 degrees saying that if they are lucky they can hope to find the island by the evening. He then goes to sleep with a heavy heart.

Ultimate victory

Fortunately, they sail on and manage to find Ile Amsterdam by evening. On being informed about this, the narrator's joy knows no bound. Jonathan calls him the 'best captain' and the 'best daddy' in the whole world. Soon, they get off-shore and struggle to reach the island with the help of its inhabitants.

Stepping on the land after such turmoil fills the narrator's thoughts with cheerful and optimistic Larry and Herbie; supportive Mary; a brave seven-year-old girl who did not want her parents to worry about her head injuries and a six-year-old boy who is not afraid to die.

Answer the following questions in 30-40 words.

1. Give a brief description of the narrator's boat. How was it equipped and tested?
2. How did Jonathan react to the desperate situation they found themselves in on 5th January?
3. How did the narrator respond to little John's words? What do his actions reveal about his character?
4. How did Sue try to enliven the gloomy atmosphere?
5. Why did the narrator search for an island so eagerly?
6. Why do you think did the narrator call Ile Amsterdam, the most beautiful island in the world'?
7. What did the narrator think of on landing at Ile Amsterdam?
8. How can you say that Suzanne's injuries were serious?

Answer the following questions in 120-150 words:

1. What efforts did the narrator make to save the ship and its passengers?
 2. What damage did 'Wavewalker' suffer as a result of bad weather?
-