

Misguided fishing trips
and other near disasters

© 2013 Luther M. Maddy III

This material is copyright and all rights are reserved by the author.

This book is dedicated to my mother and father. They provided me with a childhood full of experiences; some of which were memorable enough to write about. They also waited patiently for many years for me to find something I could succeed at. Even now, they still keep hoping, but they are beginning to face reality.

Contents

Learning to fear the water	1
My father's boats	10
Trout fishing with my hero	26
My one and only hang gliding lesson	37
I buy a boat	46
I sell a boat	56
Forgetting to fear the water	64
I try my hand at ranching	74
The fish are bigger in the ocean	97
Catch and release duck hunting	111
My glasses try to kill me	119

Learning to fear the water

Just like any other sixteen year old, I was fairly sure I was invincible. And, as is the case for most sixteen year old males, I rarely considered the consequences before acting. Such was the case during my second trip to the Island of Oahu.

During my first visit to Hawaii, I was only ten and still under the close supervision of my parents. My most daring adventure during that trip was wading waist high in the calm waters of Waikiki beach. My parents were there, watching carefully and constantly reminding me to stay close to the shore

At least that's what I thought at the time. Now, however, upon further reflection and hypnotherapy, I have no memory of my parents being on the beach at all. It occurs to me now they simply dumped me, my sister and two cousins off at beach that day and went shopping. After all, there were lifeguards posted along the beach, so why should they waste precious time worrying about us. Perhaps they told us not to go too far out into the water as they waved goodbye, telling us they would be back in a few hours.

At least we weren't alone on the beach that day. My cousins; Roger, two years older than me and Kaylee, two years younger were there with us. They had been living on the island for some time and visiting them gave us an excuse to travel to Hawaii and a place to stay while we were there.

"All right kids," I heard my mother yell from the sidewalk after we had been enjoying the sandy beach and water for hours. "It's time to go."

The four of us dutifully ran towards our parents.

"My, you two are sunburned," my aunt commented as we hopped into their waiting car.

“We’ll put some butter on you two when we get home,” my mother suggested.

Neither skin cancer nor sunscreen had been invented yet. Or if they were, my parents worried about neither. And, after several hours of baking in the Hawaiian sun, my previously lily white, never had my shirt off before skin was as red as a boiled Dungeness crab. That evening, my shoulders blistered like a toad’s skin. The severe pain did not start until later that evening and did not end until the next evening.

My second trip to the islands was different. No longer was I under the constant all-seeing, protective eyes of my loving parents. This time, I was ready to stretch my wings and my boundaries. I was nearly an adult and did not need them hindering my progress toward that goal.

My cousin, now eighteen, was the perfect tour guide. The day before, I went with him and a couple of his friends to visit Waimea Falls. There, with his strong, prodding encouragement, I jumped off a rock into the pool below. Granted, the rock was less than six feet above the water, but this was a giant leap of faith for me. It was a courage builder and I now envisioned I was as brave as the cliff jumpers I had seen on television.

After jumping off the rocks a few times, we hiked above the falls. There we found the stream that fed the falls. We also found millions of mosquitoes that wanted to feed on us.

On this trip to Oahu, we once again stayed at my cousin’s home. The home they had now was considerably nicer than the apartment we stayed at during our last trip. This residence was in one of the nicest areas of the island. The estate consisted of a main house and a smaller guest cottage. My cousin and I stayed in the small guest cottage and the rest of the two families stayed in the main house.

This beautiful, ocean front property was nestled along the foot of Diamond Head. The coastline behind the house consisted of jagged volcanic rocks. The constant splashing of the waves on those rocks was amazing. But, being only sixteen, the beauty of the coastline was not high on my list of interests. At that age I was more interested in the beauties along the coast than the coast itself.

The black volcanic rocks closest to the shore formed a natural barrier from the most violent waves which broke farther offshore. In contrast with the churning, splashing surf over the rocks, just out the back door was a calm, rock free channel leading to the larger, breaking waves a few hundred feet offshore. I reasoned I could paddle a surfboard through this channel and have a clear path to a surfer's paradise. Granted, I had never actually been on a surfboard before, but becoming a cliff jumper yesterday gave me all the courage and expertise I needed to become an expert surfer. I was determined to surf the waves. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

That morning, I rose before my cousin. Having already been here a few days, I knew it would be sometime before he woke. More than likely he was sleeping off some adult beverages or the effects of smoking the dried leaves from some of the highly valued plants he and his father carefully tended and guarded on the back porch.

I threw on my trunks and a t-shirt. I did not want to repeat the sunburn episode of my last visit here. I then headed into the main house where I found my mother, father and aunt sitting at the kitchen table. My uncle was likely at work in Honolulu or working in his garden.

"I'm going surfing," I announced to all who would listen.

"OK," was all I heard.

I was beginning to have second thoughts about the wisdom of my planned undertaking. I really wanted some strong cautions from my loving parents. Perhaps they could at least offer some warnings, or beg me not to go through with my stupid plan. After all, I had never been surfing before. What was I thinking? I would have easily changed my plans had I received any encouragement to do so, but none was offered.

“There’s a board on the porch,” my aunt offered. “Have fun.”

My parents nodded in agreement but said nothing more.

Not wanting to show the cowardice I was beginning to feel inside, I grabbed the largest of the three surfboards leaning against the back of the house and headed down to the rocky shore. Once there, I carefully surveyed the white foamy surf on the rocky reef in front of me. I examined the open channel about thirty feet wide that created a clear path to the breakers. I also noticed, but thought little of, the current in the channel rushing out to sea. As each wave receded, massive amounts of water ran down the rocky reef and into the channel. The channel created an unencumbered path for the water to follow out of the reef and back to the sea. The result was a constant current of water rushing from the shore, out into open water.

Thinking the strong current out would provide a quick ride to the breakers encouraged me to hop into the water and mount the surfboard. At the time, I did not consider that the strong current might make paddling back in to shore slightly more difficult than going out to sea. I was, after all, sixteen.

Without the need to paddle, the current began pushing me quickly out to the breakers. It appeared strong enough to push me beyond the breakers and into the open sea, perhaps even to Australia. Realizing how fast I was moving out to sea caused

me to lose the little courage I had mustered to hop into the water to begin with. As I approached the breaking waves, I saw they were much larger than they appeared from the shore.

As waves began to crash violently around the rocky reef on both sides of the channel I floated, I decided I had enough surfing for one day. I decided to turn around and paddle to the safety of the kitchen and, hopefully, some breakfast.

With the goal of reaching shore in mind, I turned my board around and began paddling, something I had not yet done on the journey thus far.

I paddled but noticed I was making little headway. I paddled faster and traveled a few yards toward shore. When I stopped to catch my breath and survey my progress, I noticed myself heading backwards, rapidly toward the breakers.

What I lacked in intelligence, I compensated for with determination. I paddled with all my might. When my arms grew too tired to continue, I slid down the board and kicked my feet. As I got closer to shore, the current pushing out to sea lessened as did the volume of water flowing in the channel. I began to think I might reach the safety of the shore very soon.

About fifty yards from shore, I realized the severity of my situation. The little strength and endurance I had earlier were now long gone. My cramping arms and legs could do little more than keep me from heading farther out to sea, but I was making no progress toward shore. I could do little more than hold a nearly steady position about 50 yards offshore. I needed help and I knew it, but there was none to be found.

After finishing breakfast, my mother decided to go outside and watch me catch a few waves.

I saw her standing on the shore watching me. I yelled at the top of my lungs but to no avail. I then

began frantically waving to get her attention. She returned my wave and headed back into the house.

“How’s Monty doing?” my aunt inquired as my mother returned inside.

“I guess he’s done,” my mother offered. “He’s coming back in.”

Expecting my soon arrival, my aunt became curious several minutes later.

“He should be in by now. Is Roger with him? Where was he?” my aunt once again inquired.

“He’s right behind the house and I didn’t see Roger with him,” my mother offered.

“Oh no!” my aunt said, finally realizing my predicament. “If he’s in the channel, he won’t be able to get back in. The current is too strong. I thought he was going with Roger, not by himself.”

It would have been nice to have been warned of this before starting my first independent study surfing lesson. But, perhaps the independent part was a misunderstanding. I want to at least imagine they assumed my cousin was with me. The alternative is not very appealing.

Soon, my mother, father and aunt were on the shore yelling and frantically waving their arms. Having no idea what the commotion was all about, I waved back.

Eventually I understood what my aunt was trying to communicate. She kept motioning to her left, my right and I am sure I understood the words “go around”.

I knew what my aunt was talking about. Several hundred feet to my right was another break in the reef. Here the large waves crashed on huge rocks just before the shore. At this spot, there would be no strong undercurrent. But, since going that direction meant the possibility of being dashed against the large jagged rocks, I had no intention of complying with her request. I was just fine here, thank you.

“He can’t hear us,” my aunt assumed. “I’ll go get Roger to lead him out.”

My aunt roused my cousin from his slumber. He grabbed his second favorite surfboard, I had his favorite, from its perch behind the house. He jumped into the water and was beside me in no time.

“You can’t get out here,” Roger stated the obvious as he grabbed my board.

“I know,” I gasped in near total exhaustion.

“We have to go around,” he said, pointing to the rocky fury to my right.

“There must be another way. Those rocks will smash us. Can’t you tow me in?” I asked, not too proud to admit fear or laziness.

“There’s no other way. I’ll help as much as I can. We’ll be careful.”

Roger then guided me and my board out into the breakers. I barely had the strength to hang on, let alone paddle, but I tried to assist while he paddled both our boards past the breaking waves and then to the right toward the huge jagged rocks and crashing waves.

As we inched toward the shore, the crashing waves became too much for Roger to handle two boards.

“Paddle for the shore as hard as you can. Stay on your board. It will keep you floating!” Roger yelled his instructions hoping I could hear them above the sound of waves exploding all around us.

I heeded my cousin’s advice to the best of my ability. Unfortunately, I had little ability left. As the next huge wave crashed on me, it ripped the surfboard from my grip and sent me tumbling toward the rocks below the surface.

Realizing I was about to be smashed onto the rocks or drowned within a few seconds, I mustered the tiny strength I had left and began pushing myself toward the surface. As I was just about to break the surface and get a much needed breath of air, another

wave rolled over and pushed me further into the depths.

I did not think I would reach the top again before drowning. It dawned on me, under the waves, that my first attempt at surfing would be my last. Then, I suddenly felt my foot hit the rocky bottom. I kicked with all my remaining strength to push me to the surface.

Somehow I reached the surface and filled my lungs with the salty wet air. I then managed to float the waves until I reached a small patch of sand. Finally safely out of the water, I lay down exhausted.

“Where’s my board?” Roger asked, expressing his strongest concern as he was suddenly there beside me.

“I,” I started but had to pause to suck more air into my lungs. “I couldn’t hold on. I lost it.”

Realizing I was not dead or in danger of becoming so, Roger began searching for his favorite surfboard. When he found it, several yards down the beach it was still in one piece. However, the huge dent it now sported meant it was no longer usable. I had ruined his favorite surfboard.

It was then that I noticed the pain in my left big toe. There was a chunk missing from it and a small amount of blood oozed from the wound. That was my only damage. I fared far better than the surfboard.

I limped the quarter mile or so along the shore back to the house. In all honesty the limp was more show than necessity. I felt I needed to draw attention away from the damaged board.

“Well, that was quite an adventure,” my aunt said as we walked within hearing distance. “You should have never tried to swim back into that channel.”

“I’m glad Roger was there to rescue you,” my mother offered. “What were you doing out there by yourself anyway?”

I decided reminding them all that I had told them I was going surfing was of little use. I held my tongue.

“You remember when he almost drowned when he was two?” my father asked my mother.

“I sure do,” she said turning to look at me. “We were at the beach. I guess you ran off because the next time we saw you, you were face down in the water.”

“Really?” I asked, once again seeing a pattern of parental neglect around water.

“Yeah, I ran over, picked you up. I shook you a little and you were fine. It was a close one though,” my father added.

“Thanks for helping me Roger,” I said looking down a little. “And, uh, I’m sorry about your board.”

“Glad I was there and don’t worry about the board. It’s all good.”

I offered nothing but an apology in return for destroying his favorite surfboard. I was, after all sixteen.

My father's boats

I was born in Southern California three years after Disneyland opened its gates to the public. My father migrated to California from Ohio at the age of eighteen. My mother migrated to California from Oklahoma as a child with her family during the dust bowl years. Unlike my parents, I was a native Californian, something I took great pride in as a child.

Even though I was born there, I did not spend much time in Southern California. By the time I was three, my parents had moved to the Central California coast, known for its fertile farmlands. We were not farmers, but agriculture was a big part of the lives of almost everyone living in that area in those days.

Like my parents, I too roamed the nation looking for a place to call home. As an adult, I have lived in South Dakota, Mississippi, Kansas, and Idaho. And, with the exception of a few unfriendly bumper stickers in Idaho, the place of my birth has never been an issue anywhere I have lived. It was not until I married a woman from Southern Utah, at the age of 48, that I heard derogatory comments directed to me because of my home state. I was still a newlywed when I first heard the term “prune picker” in reference to both me and my fellow Californians.

I never picked prunes, or plums for that matter. Nor did I pick apples, apricots, or almonds. I did pick strawberries as a grade-schooler for a few days one summer. I quit immediately after getting my first paycheck. I was not a particularly fast strawberry picker and getting paid by the crate meant I was earning less than six cents an hour. I also recall my parents dragging me and my sister out into lettuce fields across the highway from our home to glean a few heads after the harvest. We picked lettuce while they stayed in the car watching closely

for potentially angry farmers. I even picked up broccoli and cauliflower that had fallen onto the shoulder of the road from the trucks hauling the harvest to processing plants. Growing up on highway 101 meant there was almost always some variety of vegetable road kill on our dinner table. Yes, I had entered a few farm fields, but I never picked prunes.

During my life I have been called many things. Terms directed towards me included: Okie, gringo, shorty, fatty, nerd, geek, and several other terms I will not include here. Prune picker was a new term. I suppose I took more offense to this moniker than I should have, but it probably fit more than I wanted to admit.

I spent most of my childhood living in an ancient ten by fifty foot mobile home less than a quarter mile south of the official boundaries of Prunedale, California, along US Highway 101. I spent too many years of my adulthood there too. But, since I'm not particularly proud of that fact, I'll move on.

We often claimed we could see the ocean from the porch of the trailer we called home, and we could. On those extremely rare afternoons when there was no fog and the wind was just right, we could see waves breaking on the shores near the Salinas River Beach with the naked eye. This beach was a mere seven miles away, and granted, it did take a very strong pair of binoculars to verify the occasional miniscule flashes of white on the horizon were actually breaking waves, but they were indeed.

It may have been that ocean view that caused my father to settle at this location where he and my mother ran a furniture store and barbershop right next to our trailer. My father, you see, had a very strong affinity for water. Perhaps it was growing up poor in rural Ohio where he spent many hours in the creek that ran near the back of his house. Or, perhaps it was being stationed on a Navy destroyer

during the Korean War. Regardless of the reason, his love of the water translated into a very strong desire to be a boat owner. And for some reason, probably financial, he was determined to construct his own watercraft, using the least expensive materials available. His boatbuilding materials of choice would have probably been considered refuse by most other people. Creating and launching a raft built with his own hands was a lifelong dream of my father.

The memories of my earliest childhood are somewhat hazy so I cannot attest to what happened before I was about ten years of age. But, as I stretch back deep into the recesses of my repressed memories, I remember one raft my father created. I also now realize its launch could have cost me my life.

“Quick! Grab the rope and bring him in! The bleach bottles are breaking loose!” my father yelled as he dashed along the water’s edge to where my grandfather stood holding a rope.

That rope was my lifeline.

“I’ve got him,” my grandfather assured as he quickly pulled on the rope. The raft I was sitting on began moving toward shore. Oblivious, I rode the disintegrating raft in to shore. I was ten when my father sat me on that homemade raft and pushed me offshore into the waters off Dinosaur Point in the San Luis Reservoir. I was about twenty feet offshore and unaware of the potential danger when the raft began to rapidly break apart.

I was not wearing a flotation device or a helmet on that raft. I am also sure there was no seatbelt used for me or anyone else in the pickup on the long trip to the reservoir that day. If memory serves me properly, I probably rode standing up in the back of the pickup, holding on to its cab for stability for the entire two hour ride to the reservoir. Those were happier times and no one worried about safety precautions.

My father constructed that raft from very inexpensive materials. He crafted the floor of the raft from a discarded pallet. Then he fastened several bleach bottles below it for buoyancy. Making a homemade raft seemed like a very good idea at the time and it probably would have worked had he used waterproof material to secure the bleach bottles to the pallet. As it was, the tape he selected was not up to the task.

“Now, remember,” my father began placing his hand firmly on my shoulder to ensure he had my attention after I was safely on shore. “There are some things we don’t need to tell your mother.”

“Like what?” I asked, not entirely trying to be rude.

“Well..., that the raft broke apart,” he began. “Uh, I guess we can tell her that. But we don’t need to tell her you were on the raft. OK?”

“What if she asks?” By that age I had convinced most people I was honest. And, I was, sometimes.

“Then tell her you were on the raft and that you had fun.”

“OK.” I had no problem with that.

With that we all loaded back into the pickup. On the trip back, I sat between my father and grandfather. As before, there were no seatbelts used. Soon after starting the pickup, my father lit a cigarette and my grandfather ignited his pipe. The cab eventually became so filled with smoke, my father opened his window to let enough smoke escape to see the road. In those days, second hand smoke was not dangerous. In fact, it was seen as healthy as it cleared out the sinuses of even the youngest vehicle passengers.

“How was the trip?” my mother asked as soon as we arrived home later that evening.

“Everything went just fine. Right son?” my father said, looking down at me sternly.

“Yep,” I began, gagging just a little after getting my lungs full of fresh air. “It was fun.”

“Oh, and by the way,” he began again, addressing my mother. “You don’t need to save any more bleach bottles for me. I think I have enough now.”

My mother was pleased with that statement because now she could save the plastic bottles for craft activities at church. When bleach bottles were not providing buoyancy for homemade rafts, they could be turned into excellent piggy banks. I had already made several in my short career as a piggy bank creator.

A few months after the unsuccessful launch of his bleach bottle raft, my father returned home towing a boat behind his pickup. This was a real boat, one made in a factory by experienced boat makers, a fifteen foot fiberglass boat with a fifty horse outboard engine.

My father purchased this boat from an acquaintance down on his luck. The acquaintance assured him the boat was in excellent condition. The acquaintance lied. The true condition of the boat was revealed the next weekend when my father launched his new boat for the first and last time.

Apparently, my father had better trailer backing skills than I possess because I do not remember any arguments breaking out or any doors being ripped off our pickup in the process. But, that story is in another chapter. My father easily backed the boat into the water and unloaded it. He and one of his brothers then hopped in, started the engine and took the boat for a test drive.

Being fairly young at the time, I cannot recall all the details of this fiasco, but I do remember the panic from the shore that ensued shortly after the boat was launched. The exact details of what caused the malfunction are somewhat sketchy, but the result was clear.

As my father tells it, as they neared the buoy marking the end of the no wake zone, he pulled back about half way on the throttle lever and gunned the engine to test it. Hearing the motor roar to life, he quickly pushed the lever forward to slow down. He knew he should leave the swimming and wading area before going full speed, but was just anxious to see if the motor worked.

However, the throttle did not respond to his second command and stuck at half speed. He panicked when he saw another boat in his speeding boat's path. He quickly grabbed the boat's steering wheel and shoved it hard to the right. As he shoved the wheel hard to the right, the cable that ran from that ran from the wheel to the motor came off track. Not realizing anything was amiss, he turned the wheel to the other direction to straighten out the boat with the throttle still stuck in the fast position. It was then that we realized the full magnitude of the situation. His boat was spinning around in circles at half throttle in an area full of other boats and young swimmers and he had no way to control it.

As he and his brother sat in the boat making fairly tight circles in the water, they wondered about their next course of action. Even at my young age I can still remember moms and dads running to the edge of the water screaming at their children to leave the water immediately. They also screamed, waved, and unleashed obscene gestures at my father. This sight would have been quite amusing except that the possibility of his boat colliding with swimmers or other boats was very real.

Not at all familiar with his new purchase, it took my father sometime to realize he could kill the engine by turning the ignition key to the Off position. As he came to his senses, he found the key and turned the engine off. Somehow, in the four or five times the boat circled, it managed to avoid crashing into other boats or drowning any swimmers. After

the engine quit, one of the boats that had earlier scurried out of their way offered to tow them back to the dock. They gratefully agreed.

Ordinarily, this event, like so many other experiences in my childhood, would have fallen into the “don’t tell your mother” category but unfortunately, she had been on the shore to witness the entire event. After this one voyage, that boat remained parked beside our mobile home for years. Several years later, after returning home as an adult, I noticed it was gone. Since my father rarely sold anything after purchasing it, I simply assumed someone stole it. I never asked though. That boat was something we just did not talk about.

While my father’s dreams of building his own boat were sidetracked for a short time by purchasing the factory made watercraft, its lack of functionality lit the creative spark once again. While in the planning stages, he pondered using various flotation devices, ranging from surplus military aircraft fuel tanks to empty paint cans. My father planned his next homemade watercraft project for over ten years.

His next raft building opportunity presented itself at a military surplus auction at Fort Ord, just a few miles from our home. The huge pile that caught his attention at this auction was a relief map of Fort Hunter Liggett military reserve. This was no ordinary map. This map consisted of at least three hundred, 40 inch by 80 inch rectangles. Each rectangular piece of the relief map was constructed of rigid poured foam and depicted a portion of the military reserve, complete with hills, valleys, rivers and ponds. This terrain board, as the military called it, filled almost an entire football field when it was put together and was used for war games and drills.

Each piece of this map weighed at least 40 pounds, depending on how high the mountains were on that section. Even at that weight, my father reasoned these sections would float because they

were constructed of polyurethane foam. As he carefully examined the massive collection of foam, he saw several sections he deemed flat enough to serve as the floor of a raft.

Fort Hunter Liggett consists of over 160,000 acres in all and is not on the must see list for most people. However, many people have seen portions of this military reserve, at least in the movies. Near the height of his career Mel Gibson starred in the war movie, "We were soldiers". This movie was supposedly set in Vietnam. However, the battle scenes were actually filmed at Fort Hunter Liggett. This movie was released in 2002.

Apparently there were not too many would be raft builders at the surplus auction that day. And since the auction was held almost twenty years before "We were soldiers" was made, no movie memorabilia collectors were interested in the map either. My father's initial bid of \$10 for all three hundred sections of the map was never challenged. However, the true cost of the map was significantly higher after adding the fuel costs and time of at least twenty trips in the pickup to bring his prize home.

And home is exactly where the three hundred foam panels of this relief map ended up. The tiny piece of land beside our trailer that served as pony pasture, mini-bike trail, junk storage, and Mexican pottery display yard through the years, now made way for the 300 panels of the Fort Hunter Liggett relief map. My father stacked the map foam next to the hundreds of wooden ammunition boxes from the Korean War he had purchased at another surplus auction several years earlier.

The ammunition boxes were great playthings for us as children. We stacked them and built forts, dog houses, and even a pigeon coop. As a teenager, I even considered constructing a bedroom from these ammunition boxes. Anything would have been a great improvement over the tiny opening in the hall

of the trailer that served as my bedroom. But, as has almost always been the case with me, I was just too lazy to pursue that endeavor. It is interesting to note that as soon as I left home to join the Air Force, my parents moved into a beautiful brand new house with three full bedrooms.

“Son,” my father grabbed my attention as I was walking into my house one day soon after he had completed stacking his map pieces.

“Yeah,” I answered quickly, trying to let him know I was busy. I had a business to run and car payments to make. I had even paid him rent twice this year. I was a busy man.

“I don’t want you using that foam for anything,” my father began. “I’ve got plans for it. I’m going to make a raft.”

My sister and I were both in our twenties and married when my father purchased these foam boards. Yet, we both lived in houses very near the trailer we grew up in. We rented these from my father. For my case at least, I used the term “rented” very loosely.

“OK dad. I’ll leave them alone,” I said as I walked into my house, uninterested in his new raft building plans. I had carefully appeared very busy while he recruited help to ferry the foam from the Army base to home.

My father did indeed have plans for the hundreds of foam boards. With these map sections he would finally be able to construct the raft of his dreams. Now, with enough flotation material to build a raft that rivaled the Titanic in size, my father set out planning his raft’s construction.

After considerable planning, my father began turning his mental picture into an actual raft. The design he settled on was three by three panels. This would result in a 10 by 20 foot raft, a footprint larger than most party barges. The planned size created

some logistical problems, mainly transporting the monstrosity from home to the water.

My father solved the transportation issues by deciding to make the raft modular. That is, he decided to transport it in pieces in his truck and then assemble it at the water's edge. To facilitate this modular design he punched holes in each foam board at strategic locations. Then, into these holes he inserted aluminum pipes. Where these pipes stuck out the ends of the foam, he fastened large washers and nuts to hold the raft together.

He strategically left one foam piece out of the raft. This was in the center, section of the back of the raft. This was reserved for the outboard motor. Here, rather than using a section of foam, my father created a wooden rectangle. He purchased a 15 horse outboard motor at a garage sale and planned to hang it off the back of the raft, attached to the wooden section. He completed the construction of the wooden frame by nailing an old window to the bottom. He sealed the frame and window with vast quantities of silicone caulking and was now very pleased that a portion of his raft would have a glass bottom.

"I'm launching the raft Sunday," my dad proudly proclaimed at a mid-week family gathering. "Who wants to come along?"

"This Sunday?" I asked, now old enough to be wary of his homemade watercraft.

It was hard to share his enthusiasm for this raft for three reasons. First, as a result of many hypnotherapy sessions helping me reconstruct my traumatic childhood, I remembered now, with better recall, the bleach bottle disaster. Second, even if this raft did float, it seemed it would be difficult to fish from. And third, I was a young adult and excited about my own important projects, not those of my father.

“Yes, this Sunday,” he responded to my inquiry.

“I think I’m busy then,” my brother-in-law announced without bothering to ask the launch time. He was busy with his own life too.

“I could probably come along,” I agreed, responding to my father’s look of slight disgust, realizing no one else cared about his raft as much as he did.

“We’ll load up at 1:00,” my father directed this statement to my brother-in-law who had not yet been shamed into consenting to make the trip.

While I was not looking forward to it, Sunday afternoon arrived soon enough. I could not generate much enthusiasm for the launch of this monstrosity, but to please my father, I feigned interest.

On the afternoon of the launch I walked out my front door and strolled the few yards to the raft loading facility. Remember, at this time I was still living very close to home: just a few feet from the trailer I grew up in, right beside the barbershop/furniture store combination. I lived with my wife in a tiny 600 square foot house that I rented from my parents.

The eight years I lived in California after returning from the Air Force were not one of my proudest accomplishments. But, in retrospect, there are not many other years of my life I take particular pride in either. I would like to blame this on post-traumatic stress, but this would be very hard to do since I never saw combat and had a very easy job while serving my country.

As I left the front door, I stepped onto the parking lot of the furniture store. I then quickly turned right into the large driveway that led to a parking area and a place where truckloads of furniture were unloaded. As I rounded the corner I was surprised to see my father, my brother-in-law, and three of my father’s furniture delivery employees

standing beside a huge pile of junk. That pile of junk comprised the pieces of the raft I would soon risk my life on. I surmised the employees were there because my father wanted to make sure he had some riders as well as some help to load and construct the raft. I never asked if the employees were on the clock.

“OK, we’ll load the foam first,” my dad instructed his employees.

With the enthusiasm I lacked, these employees, two teenagers and one man just a few years older than me, loaded the eight pieces of Hunter Liggett Military Reservation and the wooden rectangular frame for the motor into my father’s truck. He used his furniture delivery truck, an enclosed truck about the size of a rental moving van, to carry the raft to the launch site.

“OK, now, get the pipes,” my father instructed pointing to a pile of pipes, all about 10 feet long.

After the pipes were loaded into the truck, my father ensured the outboard motor, gas tank and a box of large washers, bolts, and other connecting pieces were loaded as well.

“Jesse will ride with me,” my dad informed. Jesse was the oldest of the three employees and had become a family friend.

The delivery truck only had room for the driver and one passenger. My mother, who agreed to be interested as long as she did not have to ride on the raft, took the two other employees in her car. My brother-in-law and I hopped into my car. My wife and sister came along for the ride.

“Where are you going to launch this?” I asked, thinking it would be a very short lived raft if he decided to take it into Monterey Bay.

“Elkhorn slough,” he yelled as he drove out the driveway leading the convoy of would be raft riders.

Elkhorn slough is essentially a tidal salt marsh off Monterey Bay that begins at Moss Landing

and ends a couple miles inland. Before the 1906 earthquake, the Salinas River ran into the slough before it reached the ocean and the slough served as the river's mouth. The earthquake altered the mouth of the river, which now runs directly into the ocean a few miles away, giving us the "ocean view" from our mobile home.

Near the far reaches of Elkhorn Slough is Kirby Park. Here there is a small boat launch that in those days was used primarily by shark and stingray fisherman. In more recent times this launch area has become greener and is often used by kayakers wishing to embark on an eco-tour of the marsh. It was here that my father was headed to launch his raft.

I followed closely behind my father's truck and my mother followed in their car with the other two employees. I was glad my father had chosen to ask his employees to come on this trip. That meant I would not have to be involved in setting up or taking down of his raft. I could simply watch them do all the work and then, hopefully, enjoy the ride.

"I'll get as close as I can to the water," my father said as he maneuvered his truck near the boat launch. "That way, we won't have to drag the raft very far to get it into the water."

I was not prepared to participate in any manual labor. But, if required, I could probably pretend I was helping in the raft dragging process.

"OK, get the foam laid out first," my father instructed his helpers as I was content to watch the action.

Slowly, the raft began to take shape on the ground about ten feet from the water on the slightly sloping boat launch. My brother-in-law and I watched with great interest as the presumably hired help laid out the foam panels, inserted the pipes, and tightened the nuts holding everything in place.

“OK, let’s drag it into the water and then we’ll attach the motor,” my father instructed as we all began to drag the monstrosity into the brown brackish water of the slough.

Soon the raft was mostly in the water. My father grabbed a rope connected to the wooden frame holding the raft in place while two of his employees attached the motor to the back of the wooden frame. Satisfied, my father stepped on the raft and headed back to the motor. There, he pumped the bulb on the gasoline line a few times and then pulled the starting rope. The engine roared to life and in no time we were headed out to the middle of the slough, about 100 yards wide at that point.

As we floated along Elkhorn Slough on portions of Hunter Liggett, some minor issues with the raft became apparent. The first issue was steering. The raft’s construction did not allow it to cut through the water very efficiently and, without a rudder, the raft seemed to slide from side to side instead of going straight. Secondly, as the raft hit ripples in the water, each of the three sections of the raft rose and fell with each ripple. This was also related to the raft’s construction and made walking around on the raft very difficult. On a windy day with larger ripples or even waves, the resulting motion could have proven disastrous for the raft.

After a few minutes of trying to control the raft’s direction and watching each section rise and fall with each ripple, my father decided he’d had enough.

“OK, we’re going in now,” my father announced.

“Already?” I asked, sincerely beginning to enjoy the trip.

“Yep, I just wanted to see if it would float,” he answered.

“Oh,” I said, wondering why we were all riding around on a raft that not even its builder trusted.

After several failed attempts, our raft captain maneuvered the raft close to the boat ramp. Then, he twisted back on the throttle, picked up speed and headed to the boat ramp. As the raft crashed into the ramp, it's first section was out of the water on the ramp. My father then turned off the motor and we walked off the raft without even getting our feet wet.

"Thanks Luther," the hired help said, almost in unison, as they hit dry land causing me to wonder if perhaps they were here on their own time to show support for their employer and his project. It made me feel a little ashamed, but only for a short time.

I helped dismantle and load the raft with a little more enthusiasm than I had before the raft trip. So did my brother-in-law. Perhaps he felt some shame as well.

My father took great pride in his accomplishment of building this raft. For some time after this trip he was sure to tell anyone who would listen about his project and its successful launch.

The raft made it into the water one more time, about a month after its maiden voyage. Like the first voyage, the second was successful: so successful that it may have satisfied a great need in my father because it never entered the water again. In fact the only time the flat portions of Hunter Liggett moved again in the next twenty-five years was to move them from California to Idaho a few years later. Arriving in Idaho, my father stacked the eight foam map pieces at the side of his house and they still sit there to this day.

After moving to Idaho, my father did purchase a pontoon style party barge. It even had a steering wheel and maneuvered much better than Hunter Liggett. But, still, he can always look at the dusty dirty pile of foam beside his house and remember his successful voyages on his homemade raft.



Launch day

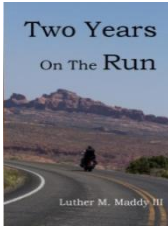


Home sweet home

Other Books by Luther M. Maddy III

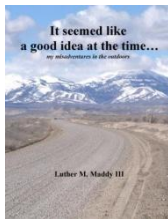
Available at all online retailers in print and e-book format.

Two Years on the Run



This is the humorous story of Luther adjusting to a new marriage after losing his wife of nearly 28 years. Much of this story involves motorcycle trips through the Western and Midwestern United States.

It seemed like a good idea at the time



This is a collection of humorous stories focusing on hunting and the outdoors. It chronicles Luther's misadventures in the outdoors and his futile attempts at becoming a successful hunter.

All Things Computed



This satirical computer book takes a fictional character from attempting to use a new computer to becoming a computer trainer. Its subtitle “The absurd ramblings of a computer trainer” is very appropriate.

Check out Luther's website at:

www.LutherMaddy.com