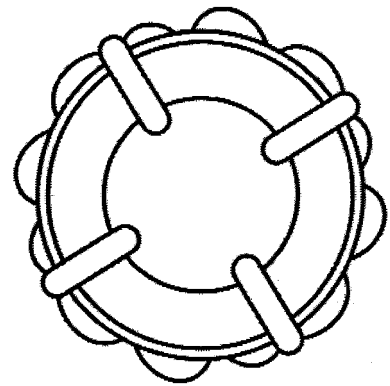


# Why I Always

*(most of the time)*

## Wear a PFD.

By Susan Martineau



It was June of 1995. The Western Slope of Colorado had received an enormous amount of snowfall the winter before. I was embarking on a rafting trip with a group of geology students down the San Juan River in Southern Utah.

The river was running high, fast and cold.

Growing up in Arvada, only blocks away from the local swimming pool, I spent much of my summer dipping in the chlorinated water. I took many lessons from the age of five on up mostly to assure my Mother that I wouldn't drown and to keep me out of her hair. I never understood that because I was a real quiet kid. Ha.

I was fairly comfortable in the water, although I never became a master swimmer. Even my brother and his friends with some of their dunkings did not scare me away from the water.

So when I took off in a raft with 4 people on board on a hot summer day, I didn't think too seriously about wearing a PFD. I did wear it though because I was with my son and thought I should set a good example. At that time he was so skinny he could barely float.

Off we went and spent a warm night on one of the San Juan's sandy beaches.

The next day we were to camp around Ledge Rapids.

As we neared the shore, I was to jump out and land the raft holding on to the rope. I made a leap, slipped and found myself slipping on the volcanic rock. Thinking for a moment I was still in control, I tried to pull the raft to shore. I had no footing and managed to pull the raft towards me and over my head.

At that point I pushed the raft away from me and decided I had better prospects floating on my own.

Of course all this was going on with my son and two other passengers giving me looks ranging from startled, to fear to confusion.

It wasn't very long before I was heading down river without the raft. The water was very cold and fast. I had a hard time

breathing. In fact I had to spend several minutes working on keeping my lungs moving. I was most thankful that I had my PFD on as I approached a mini rapid and pulled my legs in front to protect my head. I didn't have to think about keeping my head out of the water. I was just thinking about breathing. It took a few minutes before the raft caught up with me as I was tumbling down the river. I was making for the far shore, since there was no hope landing on the hard ledge with such a fast current.

The raft finally caught up with me, I was drug in and I sat shivering for some time while I calmed down, calmed my son down and patted my completely soaked PFD. It definitely had done its job.

Then, there was the time in 1994, when I went sailing down in the Sea of Cortez in February. We got caught in one of their three day blows and were trying to make a protected cove about three hours away. As my companion was bobbing on the deck and I at the tiller, well practiced with 15 minutes worth of experience, I was considering what would happen if he went overboard. I of course had my PFD on without a thought, but my friend didn't. He would have been really cooked if he had fallen in and left it up to me to turn around a 24 foot sail boat that was surfing down 10 foot waves.

Then, there was the time in 1997, when my son, now older, and I went to Costa Rica on a family oriented trip in December. I had opted not to sign up for the rafting trip, but was buffaloed into it because everyone else in our group was going. My initial concern was that I didn't know the river, I didn't know the guides and I didn't know the equipment.

Nonetheless with vacation-aided abandonment, my son and I embarked with the crowd into a three-day rain swollen river. We had grouped up with some German tourists and there was much chatter at the river's edge. The guides were deciding whether or not to go (all in Spanish), because the water was quite

muddy and there were a few logs rolling by. I think they decided to go, because they were all kayakers too and wanted to scope out the conditions before their afternoon paddle.

Off we went. We joined a family of four in a raft. We had the smallest child in the group with us, so we got the biggest raft and the best guide. Good planning on my part.

So off we went. In no time people were flying out of rafts, under rafts and back into rafts. I remember distinctly a German woman who was in the water more than in the raft with a complete look of terror on her face. One of the men in our group managed to get thrown out and stuck under the raft for a few seconds too long. At a half way point most of our group and many of the Germans walked back to the road. By that time my son and I were having such a good time that we stuck with it.

As it turned out my son had a dollop of detergent stuck inside his t-shirt that was foaming out the sides. Because he was at the age, where you don't reveal skin in public, he refused to take off the shirt. As it turned out he got a pretty nasty burn from it.

Nonetheless, off we went and forged down the river. With bubbling PFDs and muddy water. In our boat was the family, minus the older boy. He had opted to walk to the road. The younger boy age 6 was laying on the floor of the raft with hands gripped on the floor ropes.

The rest of the trip we spent paddling like mad and ducking jungle branches. My son and I had a good time and of course that day there was no question about wearing a PFD.

Then there was the time in 1998.....Enough. More stories later.

So most days when I'm on the water, I wear my PFD. Unless it's really, really calm and I know the area. You never know what might be happening down river or if the wind picks up.