

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is an article former RMSKC president Larry Kline wrote about first aid and its importance in outdoor activities like paddling. He sent it around earlier but we're publishing it again in the *Mountain Paddler* because it has an important message and we want it on the RMSKC website for future readers.

Larry introduced his piece with this hair-raising disclaimer:

"By all accounts I should not be here writing this article for a long list of reasons, the first four of which occurred before I was 15!"

THE IMPORTANCE OF FIRST AID TRAINING

By Larry Kline

WHY IT IS AMAZING THAT I, LARRY KLINE, AM STILL ALIVE:

- My brother slammed my head between a car door and door frame, although he says he doesn't remember!
- My mom combed matted blood from my hair for three days after I was hit in the head by a flying discus.
- I was hit by a car driven by my Sunday school teacher as I dashed out from behind the Good Humor ice cream truck.
- On a 10 cent dare, I broke my left leg jumping off the garage roof wearing my Superman cape.
- A falling sailboat mast hit my head requiring treatment for a concussion.
- I was hit by another car while riding my bike 15 years ago; a new helmet saved my melon.
- Later in life I was atop nearby James Peak when electrical current buzzed my upheld hiking pole.
- A similar episode occurred just a few years ago with a fellow club member. While on a 14,000 foot peak near Leadville in dense fog lightening crackled all around us.
- Nearer home, while riding my bike on a barren roadway in a lightening storm, a bolt hit a nearby power pole and sent twinges through my handle bars. I immediately dove for the ditch.
- Boating wise, during my grad school years, I capsized in fast current in a brushy narrow channel and my bow line tangled my foot under water holding me at neck level just barely allowing me to breathe as my water-filled whitewater kayak kept pushing my head under water.
- Another time I was on a club trip on Yellowstone Lake as the group set off paddling whilst lightening, threatening black clouds and high winds moved through the tree tops. I reluctantly followed (gotta stay with the group, right?) and then came to my senses, paddled like crazy 100 yards to a large grove of trees, jumped out and ran into the woods ducking for cover as I went.

WHY AM I TELLING YOU THIS?

Because in mid-May, 2012, I took an intensive two-day *Wilderness First Aid* class at the Keystone Science School and learned how to administer a bit of first aid, and got a sharp appreciation of the consequences of screwing up. It was put on by NOLS [National Outdoor Leadership School] and we 30 participants enacted more than a dozen "real life" scenarios. It really made me appreciate the near catastrophes I avoided in the mishaps noted above.

I took the class because I figured I survived the first 60 plus years of my life and wanted a fighting chance to make it another 30 in one piece. After all, I was going to lead an RMSKC trip to Merritt Reservoir the next weekend and was planning on climbing the tallest peak in Slovenia in September after an August solo hike on 50 miles of the highest section of the Colorado Trail.

LET ME SUMMARIZE SOME THINGS I LEARNED:

Back country/ wilderness accident situations are defined as those occurring more than one hour's travel from the site to a hospital. This hour includes time for assistance to arrive, time to evacuate the victim to a waiting vehicle and for actual transport to the hospital. Certainly, many of our outings, even at Chatfield or Dillon, would fall under this set of circumstances. 911 help is a long way off.

When you set off from shore either solo or in a group of two or three, or your larger group later splits up for some reason, you have immediately set limits on how you can respond to an emergency and how you can effect an evacuation from that situation. This amounts to planning by default. Recognizing this should shape your safety planning for your next outdoor adventure.

Assemble a well-stocked first aid kit and bring it with you on EVERY paddle, and know how to use each and every item in it. (Yes, during the class I had a few "Oh, that's how you use that" moments.) When an incident happens, everyone can bring out their kits and pool resources. For example, simply taping a sprained ankle takes a 3-inch diameter roll of tape; cuts can bleed profusely and require gobs of gauze; broken bones and joints take splints and padding. No one kit will have all the supplies to do these big jobs. Every participant should bring a first aid kit because, in an emergency, the group will need to pool resources.

Let your Trip Leader and everyone in your party know of any ongoing medical problems you have. You should type a short description of the symptoms of your condition and the treatments needed if you become incapacitated. Doing so may save your life and will let your fellow paddlers act calmly in getting the help you need. In one scenario I played the role of a completely unconscious victim. It scared the crap out of the solo responder at my side, even on the second day of the class. Don't do this to your paddling friends. Your life may be the one lost. Scary but true: while leading a Loma Westwater trip, a past club member once told me she knew how to do a wet exit when in fact she had never done one because she was afraid she would drown practicing due to her asthma.

Take a Wilderness First Aid class; the \$200 tuition is a great insurance policy on your life and that of your friends. Encourage your paddling buddies to do the same. I plan on retaking the class to more fully imprint the knowledge in my brain.

NOLS CLASSES AVAILABLE NEARBY THIS WINTER:

<http://www.nols.edu/portal/wmi/courses/wfa/co/>