

Teens tell of ocean survival

Pair drifted for six days without food or fresh water

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SOUTHPORT, N.C. - Two teenagers lost at sea for six days without food or fresh water were spotted by fishermen more than 100 miles from where they started, clinging to their small sailboat.

The boys quenched their thirst with sea water and slipped into the ocean to cool off, but sharks chased them back onto the boat. At night, they used a single wet suit to keep warm.

"I asked God to take me," 15-year-old Troy Driscoll said as he lay in a hospital emergency room. "You're out there fighting for your life. We didn't want to fight anymore."

Driscoll and his best friend, 17-year-old Josh Long, were spotted late Saturday afternoon about seven miles off Cape Fear - six days and more than 100 miles from where they had put in off Sullivans Island, S.C., on April 24. The boys were sunburned, dehydrated and exhausted, but otherwise in pretty good shape.

"We were praying for a miracle and we got one," Charleston Coast Guard Cmdr. June Ryan said. "Everybody on the East Coast has been looking for these boys."

Shane Coker said first he would hug his little brother Troy - "then I'm gonna hit him and let him know how much he made us worry."

The teens set out on a 14-foot Sunfish on a blustery day when the National Weather Service warned small boats to stay off the water. They realized they were in trouble almost immediately and tried to swim back to shore, pulling the boat along with them.

Within hours, they were out to sea.

"We lost our tackle the second day," Driscoll told one of his relatives on the phone. "So we couldn't catch any fish."

The boys' hope waned as the week wore on. They stood on their Sunfish every time they saw a boat, waving their paddles and yelling. One night they were awakened by water splashing in their faces and found a large container ship bearing down on them.

"It was like some monster building in the water," Driscoll said.

At one point, the teens thought they had drifted across the Atlantic Ocean and were close to Africa. Instead, they were about 127 miles north - well outside the Coast Guard's search grid - but close enough to spot one more fishing boat.

They got up and made some noise. This time, they were heard.

"What we have is an absolutely miraculous story of survival that's going to be studied for years to come," said Richard Goerling, Long's uncle. "I think those two boys have a book to write."

The boys said they don't remember much about their rescue, but recalled that as they were pulled aboard the fishing boat, their rescuers asked what they wanted to do with the Sunfish.

"We told them we didn't want to see it again," Long said.

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