

ADVENTURES

along the
Jersey Shore



ALL SIX ORIGINAL STORIES
PLUS AN EXCITING NEW NOVELLA

Storm Warnings

Dave Hart & John Calu

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Preface

If you disregard for a moment the picture of two frightened little Jersey Boys traveling back and forth to LBI through the Pine Barrens with their families every summer, passing by the ‘Painted Rock’ while listening to tales of the Jersey Devil and other local lore, then this series began at the dawn of the new millennium, quite by accident.

The plan initially called for a three-day boat ride over Memorial Day Weekend starting at Barnegat, down the Intracoastal to the Delaware Bay, and up the Delaware River to the Falls at Trenton, our hometown. But Mother Nature had other ideas. The night before our scheduled departure a grinding Nor’easter blew in, scuttling plans for the lengthy nautical journey.

Happily, serendipity intervened. The Tuckerton Seaport was poised to have its grand opening that very weekend. When the weather cleared, an informative and engaging introductory visit to the newly recreated maritime village (which includes a replica of the original Tucker’s Island Lighthouse doubling as a museum) eventually led to a pleasant and insightful drive out along the narrow connected wooden bridges of Great Bay Boulevard, culminating in a shorter boat trip from Toms River to Atlantic City. The improvised adventure resulted in the recording of a song “Spirit of the Bay,” and the writing of a screenplay entitled “The Treasure of Tucker’s Island.”

The screenplay was read by a big-time Hollywood producer and former Trenton-area resident with Disney connections who gave us some sage advice: “This would make an entertaining book.” Needless to say we took his advice to heart and the rest, as they say, is history. More than a decade later we are still writing ... books!

While most of these stories have appeared in print previously, their availability has been limited. With this new compilation the “adventures” have undergone rigorous updating and re-editing, and are for the first time collected in a single volume, which includes an entirely new story—*Storm Warnings*—written especially for this publication. We truly hope you will enjoy the adventurous romp with us through the mysterious Pine Barrens and along the ageless Jersey Shore.

Onward and upward!

Acknowledgments

Words alone cannot express the sincere gratitude we have for our friend and mentor, John B. Bryans, the tireless Editor-in-Chief and Publisher at Plexus Publishing Inc. His faith in us and his dedication to enhancing our craft, along with his relentless determination to help our series reach a wider audience, are the reasons our adventures continue. His insights and candor are only matched by his skills and pure passion for the writing. We are forever in his debt.

We would also like to express our heartfelt thanks to our family, friends, and faithful readers.

Adventures Along the Jersey Shore would not have been possible without the efforts and support of Peg Papp, Norma Neimeister, Nancy Ellor, Victoria Ford, Mike Pippin, Janie Hermann, Shelly Hawk, Linda and Jim Stanton, Randy Russell, Rich Klupp, Tim and Paul Hart, Jaelyn Wood, Joan Ruddiman, Jenny Bryans, Barbara Solem, Rob Colding, Tiffany Chamenko, Chris Stopero, and Joe Weinbrecht.

Thank you one and all.

❧

The Treasure of Tucker's Island

1

Storm Warnings

The storm had been brewing for nearly an hour. Strong, gale force winds blowing in from the southwest had come up suddenly and caught them by surprise. They had left Trump's Atlantic City Marina later in the afternoon than they had planned. Hard rain pummeled their sleek new boat. High seas and wind threatened to swamp her on this, her maiden voyage. Audrey and Dick Hanson struggled to keep their retirement investment afloat and maintain a straight course for safety through the narrow Beach Haven Inlet.

By his own reckoning Dick considered himself an experienced seaman. He did have a few seasons of sailing under his belt. But the sturdy canvas sails he was used to handled quite differently under these circumstances than this new, high-powered toy, and he was only now finding out.

For her part Audrey Hanson knew very little about boats or the moods of the sea. She had been busy fondly recalling the more pleasant points of their A.C. junket, the scrumptious buffet luncheon and the entertaining lounge act, in a vain attempt to forget Dick's more than trivial losses at the blackjack table when the storm's fury broke upon them. At first Dick Hanson thought it would blow over. Then he felt sure their new high-speed water rocket could outrun the storm. By the time he realized that neither would happen it was too late to put back into the marina.

He fought the weather bravely and thought he had at last gained the upper hand, getting them nearly through the wave-tossed inlet, when their boat, the *Naughty Tails*, struck something hard and unseen. The boat scraped and skidded noisily along a hidden shoal.

"What was that?" Audrey called up to her husband from the cabin.

"I don't know," answered a worried Dick.

Audrey shrieked as seawater began pouring in through a hole in the hull.

Dick reached for the radio. "Mayday. Mayday!" he repeated into the crackling air.

Before he could raise a response, a bright light came in through the port window catching their attention.

"Oh, thank God!" Audrey exclaimed. "That was quick."

Dick and Audrey went aloft. A small motorboat seemed to have appeared out of nowhere and came up alongside their wounded craft. A dark, solitary figure in hooded rain gear motioned for the panic-stricken couple to climb aboard his boat. His face remained shrouded in shadow, as he offered them a hand and helped them onto his swaying launch.

"What about our boat?" Dick pleaded. "We can't just leave it."

"Wait here," the stranger ordered. "I'll tend to her."

The hooded figure stepped onto the *Naughty Tails* and disappeared below deck. The cabin was awash in seawater. Debris was floating on the surface as the boat pitched

back and forth. The stranger searched around, going through drawers and cabinets, pocketing valuables and other items of interest that he could easily conceal.

Stepping into the engine compartment, the stranger inspected the leaking hull. He yanked a fan belt from its post and kicked away at the floorboards until they splintered, letting even more water rush in.

Satisfied with his work he re-emerged up on deck and climbed back aboard his own boat.

“You saved us,” gushed Audrey huddled beneath her rain soaked shawl.

“Can you tow her?” questioned Dick.

“Too far gone,” replied the stranger. “She’d slow us down, maybe even drag us under with her. I did all I could.”

The hooded stranger untethered his boat, the *Mooncusser*, from the *Naughty Tails*, now listing heavily to one side, and sped off.

“What did we hit?” asked Dick. “It wasn’t on the charts.”

Looking back in the direction of their helpless boat, the hooded figure spied the sandy shoal of a small, newly forming island, spiking up into the Inlet.

“That’s old man Tucker’s Island, rising up from a dream,” the hooded figure replied in a far off voice.

2

Wick and Wisdom

Kelly Martin shivered as she removed her sweatshirt in the brisk wind. Several other teens around her, already stripped down to their swimsuits, were running in place and blowing into their hands to keep warm. It was late June. School had been out for almost a week but it didn't feel much like summer. Remnants of last night's storm left the day gray and overcast. A stiff breeze was blowing off the agitated Atlantic Ocean making the beach in the early morning hour unseasonably chilly and uncomfortably cold.

Kelly was one of only two female contestants trying out for the Long Beach Island Life Saving Squad (Ship Bottom Boro branch). The others were boys who, along with the leering and cheering returning veterans from the squad and a handful of curious onlookers, eyed the two young female recruits with a mixture of fascination and disdain.

Kelly was no stranger to such stares. At sixteen, her form was shapely and lithe. Somewhat tall for her age at nearly 5'7", and poker thin, her long auburn hair fluttered in the breeze as she retied her ponytail.

A fierce competitor, Kelly loved a challenge. Many a boy had felt threatened by her athleticism and then bowed to her competitive abilities. But there was no competition with her brother, Geoffrey. Younger by a year, Geoffrey enjoyed a good cerebral challenge and left the sporting events to his sister.

Next up was the beach flag race. A fifty-yard sprint across the soft sand to retrieve a stick with a brightly colored pennant attached to it. Speed mattered in this event. The flags represented injured swimmers in trouble on the shoreline. Time was precious. A few seconds could be the difference between a breath and death.

Kelly lined up with dozens of other aspiring lifeguards. Only six new recruits would be chosen for the Long Beach Island (LBI) Lifesaving Squad following the conclusion of the two-day tryouts.

She was ready. She had been training for this moment since she first learned she and Geoffrey would be spending their summer vacation with their favorite aunt, Sarah Bishop.

Kelly offered a friendly smile to Abby, the other female trainee, as she took up a position next to her. Moss Greenberg, the self-proclaimed "oldest lifeguard on the East Coast" fired the starter's gun. Kelly was off and running at the sound of the shot. She was the first to grab a flag just nosing out a well-muscled boy named Curtis Wick, who sported a fresh buzz cut.

"Time," called Moss. Danny Windsor, a handsome, blond beach boy and returning squad member called out Kelly's time. Some of the other veteran lifeguards applauded and cheered when they heard her score.

"That was great, sis," said Geoffrey rushing over with a blanket. "You beat everybody."

"That's the idea," she replied confidently, wrapping herself up in the blanket.

The paddleboard event came next. Each trainee had to paddle out 100 yards on a full size surfboard, turn around a buoy marker, and paddle back in. Speed and endurance were tested here, and with today's surf being exceptionally rough, anything could happen.

Danny Windsor called for the group to follow him down to the water's edge. "It's time to get wet," he said with relish.

Kelly tossed the blanket to her brother.

"Good luck, sis. I'll keep these warm for you," he said clutching her sweatshirt and wrapping the blanket around himself to beat back the chill.

"Don't get too comfortable, Geoffrey," she said confidently. "I won't be that long."

Kelly hurried to join up with the others. Danny was already going over the last-minute instructions.

"Each of you grab a board and brace yourself. Today's water temperature is a balmy 54 degrees!"

"Okay, guppies," continued Moss. "This is where we separate the bluefish from the blowhards. Anybody can talk a good game. Now, let's see what you've got. Speed without endurance and I've got two swimmers in trouble."

Moss raised the starter's gun again. "Once around the buoy and get back in quick. The last ones in are the first to go. Are you ready, Danny?"

"Ready when you are," Danny waved his hand.

"On your mark, get set ..." Bang!

In her excitement Kelly lost her footing and stumbled momentarily as she dashed board in hand for the ocean. She dove onto the board belly first. The icy water stung her face and hands. As expected, Curtis Wick was out in front of the pack paddling furiously.

Several of the riders ahead of her got tangled up going around the buoy, so Kelly had to take the turn wider than she wanted. Wick still held the lead. Heading in, he was treading calm waters and expecting an easy ride in with the tide.

Kelly put everything she had into it but Wick seemed to have a comfortable lead. The wide turn around the buoy had thrown her slightly off course and she had lost some precious time. But the angle had also pushed her out into a large rapidly forming wave. The huge wave crested beneath her, lifting her high atop it. Kelly saw her chance instantly and in a sudden, bold maneuver she stood upright on her board.

The wave curled flinging her forward. As it broke, it caught Wick in a torrent of whitewash. Kelly surfed on ahead into the beach, first again. A bedraggled Wick took second with a three-way tie for third. Abby, one of several bunched up at the buoy, finished a disappointing ninth.

Geoffrey was the first to greet her. "That was awesome, Kelly. When did you learn to surf?"

"Just now," she replied dropping her board and slipping into her sweats.

"Creative finish," added Danny approvingly. "But what about your victim?"

Kelly glanced over her shoulder at Curtis Wick. "Oh, he'll get over it."

"She cheated! She cheated!" whined Wick as he waded in.

The crowd waited in silence as Danny Windsor conferred with Moss Greenberg.

"The rule simply states the guard's got to come in with the board." Moss pronounced at length. Then smiling he added, "Martin's the winner."

A rousing round of applause went up as the crowd rushed over to congratulate Kelly. Curtis Wick flung his board down and kicked sand in Kelly's direction. All Danny Windsor could do was smile.

"I swear. It was right over there," said a befuddled Dick Hanson, pointing to a vast expanse of open water beyond the inlet breakers.

"The stranger who rescued us last night called it 'Tucker's Island,'" added Audrey Hanson.

State Police Captain Jim Davis let out a low laugh. Looking over at his snickering sergeant, Wally Parker, he added, "It sounds like this stranger was having some fun with you."

"What do you mean?" questioned Audrey, "He saved our lives."

Captain Davis removed the binoculars from his eyes. "Well, that may be true ma'am, but Tucker's Island sank into the sea a long time ago."

"But what did we hit and what about our boat?" exclaimed Dick.

"Can't say for certain, since we can't seem to find her, but I hope you have insurance," said Captain Davis, as the police launch headed back to Atlantic City.

The annual beach party was in full swing. Overhead a glowing new moon blazed brightly as if competing for attention with the roaring bonfire below. About sixty kids, some still in bathing suits, were crammed up against the stage where Danny Windsor was leading his band, Driftwood, through a rollicking rendition of Life House's recent hit "Hanging by a Moment." Kelly and Geoffrey Martin were grooving to the music and enjoying the whole scene. They had never experienced anything quite like this in their hometown of Teaneck. The freedom felt wonderful.

The song ended abruptly when the keyboard player, a carrot-haired boy named Tommy Sanders, stumbled off the stage. He ducked behind a sand dune and dropped to his knees. Kelly could hear him barfing up his guts before he passed out.

"Nice ending," offered Kelly as Danny jumped from the stage in disgust. "But shouldn't someone see what's wrong with him?"

"That's what you get when you mix keyboards with vodka and Red Bull," Danny replied slowly with a distracted smile.

Turning his head he tuned in to the first tentative chords of "Jump" by Van Halen wafting through the sound system. Danny looked up to see Geoffrey Martin noodling Tommy's vacant keyboard. The pace picked up suddenly as the drummer and the bassist joined in.

"Hey, isn't that your brother up there?" Danny asked Kelly.

"Yes, and he's strung out on Snickers and Snapple so you better sign him up quick."

Danny hopped back on stage, strapped on his guitar and joined in the jam. Much to the crowd's delight, the band ran through a medley of current hits in an impromptu audition of Geoffrey Martin. The young rock 'n' rollers loved it and pleaded for more when the tunes finally ended.

"Sorry folks," said Danny apologetically. "Tomorrow's a big day. Finals for the Life Saving Trials start at 8:00AM sharp." Then looking directly at Kelly he added, "Make sure you trainees get your rest. You're gonna need it!"

The crowd grumbled but began to disperse. Moss Greenberg and the other squad members doused the bonfire with large buckets of sand. The band packed up its gear.

As he was leaving, Danny pulled Geoffrey aside. "You free on Tuesday nights for rehearsals?"

"Heck yeah!" exclaimed Geoffrey enthusiastically.

An over-sexed young blonde named Wendy Barnes emerged from the shadows. She snuck up behind Danny and covered his eyes with her hands. "Guess who?" she giggled.

Without peeking, Danny put his arm around Wendy and led her away from the crowd, disappearing behind the sand dune where Tommy Sanders lay sacked out.

Kelly sat on the beach with her head and arms resting on her knees. She was exhausted. Unlike yesterday, today's Life Guard events were strenuous, made all the more difficult by the blazing sun and lack of shade. On top of that Kelly had forgotten her Gatorade and was feeling a little lightheaded. She and the other guard trainees were whooped. But there was still one more event to go: A simulated life saving.

For this all the trainees needed a buddy, someone to swim out 25 to 30 yards and pretend to drown. All the other trainees had paired up with someone. The day before, Geoffrey had volunteered to be Kelly's victim, but so far today he was a no show.

Moss Greenberg called out Kelly's name a second time. Everyone was looking at her. Kelly lifted her head slowly. Her eyes were puffy and almost tearing. She stood up and began to collect her things to leave.

Danny Windsor walked over to her. "So that's it? You've had enough. You're quitting with one event to go?"

"I don't have a partner." Kelly said dejectedly. "I guess Geoffrey had to work late. He was supposed to be my drowning victim."

Danny handed his whistle to another guard and peeled off his tee shirt.

"Okay, I'll be your victim," he said to Kelly. "Save me."

Before Kelly could protest, Danny was in the water and wading out into the ocean. About 25 yards out he turned to face the shore. Splashing and thrashing with exaggerated movements he yelled for "Help!"

Moss called out Kelly's name again and looking at her, blew his shrill whistle.

Kelly wasted no time dashing into the crashing waves. Danny went under and she had to wait until he surfaced again to make sure she was heading out in the right direction. She began to cut into the waves with long, efficient strokes.

Danny disappeared under the murky green water a second time. It seemed like he was out of sight longer this time, making it a little more difficult for Kelly to keep him in view. When he resurfaced his movements seemed less active. No more flailing about. “He’s really hamming it up,” thought Kelly.

Kelly came up alongside Danny, but instead of finding the big, blue-eyed smile and the patronizing wink she’d expected, she saw that his eyes were closed and his body limp. He was going under for a third time. She reached out her right arm and placed it under his chest. She raised his head above water the way she was taught and began swimming slowly, gracefully with one arm back to shore. Kelly was so intent on her technique that she didn’t notice the slimy creature that had attached itself to Danny’s thigh moments earlier. She didn’t see it slide off and slip away, narrowly missing her as it bobbed past.

Onward Kelly swam and still Danny did not move a muscle to help her. His six-foot frame felt like a sack of hardened concrete. She treaded water more slowly now as the fatigue and dizziness she had felt earlier returned to her aching body. Even with the tide Danny’s dead weight was a handful.

With Danny wrapped in one arm and treading water with the other, Kelly struggled to keep them both afloat. She kicked harder and felt the strain snake up her spine to her neck. She considered asking Danny to doggie paddle or kick lightly to help her, as she had noticed some of the others doing to help their partners. But she decided against it. If Danny was going to play it to the hilt, so was she.

Kelly was never happier to be on dry land again. She was so exhausted that she floated motionless for long a moment waiting for one last wave to roll them in closer to shore. Finally she hoisted Danny up and dragged him onto the beach. They fell together in a heap, side by side. Still Danny didn’t move. She rolled him over onto his back.

“Had enough?” Kelly asked straddling Danny and pounding on his chest.

Eyes closed, Danny gave no reaction. He lay perfectly still.

“Okay, buster, if you insist, but there are better ways to get a kiss,” joked Kelly.

She bent down, pinched his nose, parted his lips and began blowing into his mouth.

Suddenly Danny’s eyes flew open. There was a wild and crazed look in them. Kelly pulled away quickly. Danny sputtered and stammered until at last seawater gushed out through his mouth and his nose. He coughed and choked and heaved again.

“Help!” screamed Kelly realizing Danny was in trouble. “Something’s wrong.”

Immediately Moss and the other lifeguards came running over. Danny tried to sit up only to slump back down. Kelly lifted his head. Danny retched again.

Moss applied additional CPR. Danny tried to wave him off weakly. Then Moss noticed the purplish-red marks on Danny’s thigh. “Jellyfish,” he announced

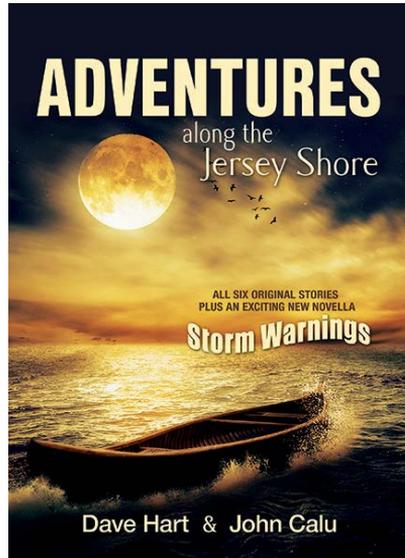
pointing. He called for the stretcher and Benadryl. They hoisted Danny on it and carried him way.

Feeling spent and depleted, Kelly collapsed face down into an impression in the sand left by Danny's prostrate body. Her cheek struck something hard and metallic. She opened one eye and spied a glimmering gold coin-like object on a shiny chain embedded in the outline made by Danny's head. Thinking it belonged to Danny, Kelly picked it up, brushed it off and turned to show it to the others. But everyone had moved on up to the Guard House, where a crowd was now hovering over Danny like attentive midwives. An EMT arrived and Danny was whisked away.

Kelly stuffed the medallion into her swimsuit and fell back onto the moist sand, giving her body a chance to unwind from the drama of the day. She shuddered at the thought of Danny nearly drowning and how silly she had been to think he was play-acting for her benefit. She began crying softly to herself.

Slowly, Kelly got up and waded out into the surf alone to rinse herself off. As she did she looked around suspiciously for jellyfish. Seeing none she dunked under a wave and, trying to clear her mind, she held out the medallion she had found and went to work washing away the sand and rubbing off the crusted barnacles until it gleamed like a sparkling jewel.

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