



Top of High Falls, Philmont, NY

I remember one terrible day when my stepson came to visit us in Philmont and fell over the falls! It was the mid 1970s. We got a call, and they said, "You better come up to High Falls. There's been an accident." We had heard the fire whistle go off but of course, we didn't know what it was about.

My stepson, David, and my son, Tom, grew up together as brothers and best friends. They are a year apart, and they were about 8 and 9 when David's father, Russ, and I married, after my first husband had passed away. I brought my children and we moved to Philmont to be with Russ. David would come on the weekends or for a week at a time, and then the boys were together the whole time. They would go fishing and exploring all over Philmont, through the woods... They would go out the door after breakfast and be out all day, maybe stop in for lunch if they were hungry, and I never worried about them because the whole community knew them. Nobody ever worried. Everyone knew everybody. You sneezed at one end of town and they'd say, "G-d bless you!" at the other end of town! That was a good thing, too. It was a real community.

Well, the boys were always getting into something. On this day, they were about 14 and 15, and doing what they knew they shouldn't have been doing. Everyone knew not to be fooling around up by the falls. They'd been warned. But I think all the young people did it. That's kids for you!

There they were, walking across the top. They must have gone over a fence to get there, and at some point, David slipped and fell over the edge. Tom grabbed him and held onto him for as long as he could, but then he couldn't hold him any longer, and David slipped out of Tom's hands. He fell about 60 ft down onto the rocks below. He survived, thank goodness, but he had a broken pelvis and broken arm and elbow. I don't know who called the fire department. By the time we arrived, I remember everybody was there, standing on the bridge and standing around watching. The funny thing was that the guys on the fire company and rescue squad had just done a practice drill in how to rescue someone from falling over the falls! They made a chain of men all holding onto each other's arms all the way down to the water to get

David and then pass him up that way. They did an awesome job. Then, the police were at every red light stopping people to help the ambulance race to the hospital. He was in the hospital quite a while. But he made it, with all the help of everyone here in Philmont and at Columbia Memorial.

In fact, in the hospital, one of the nurses came out to me and said, "Is it alright if we cut his pants off? He wanted us to ask you first." He thought he'd get into trouble for ruining his pants! I said, "Cut them off!"

There was no talk of punishment whatsoever. I figured between Tom's feelings of guilt, and David's pain and the surgeries he had to go through, both boys had been punished enough! David never could straighten his arm after that, but he was just glad to be alive.

Of course, Tom felt horrible because he hadn't been able to hold onto David. But there was nothing he could do. I told him, "we all have a built-in self-preservation instinct. You didn't want to go over the falls with him." I'm sure he still thinks about it.

I'm just glad it ended so well. You don't forget something like that!

By Barbara Oles, long-time Philmont resident  
As told on Sept 29, 2019

My husband was from Philmont, Russ. His mother ran a small nursing home in Philmont across from where the Hilltop Hotel used to be. It was across the street right up the hill from there. I lived in Philmont

with him, lived in **St. Mark's church in the late 80s**. The ladies there always had a little second hand clothes shop, and they used to work during Lent doing the fish dishes, and on Community Day. That was a big deal in Philmont, Community Day. We made food for sale to benefit the church. It was a real community day.

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