

## The Amusement Ride in a Storm

*By Donna Bishop*

As a final adventure on our European trip Mother and I took a hovercraft to cross the English Channel from France to Dover, England. We were told this was a unique experience as this craft floats on air just above the water. A hovercraft is also known as an air-cushion vehicle or ACV. It is capable of traveling over land, water, mud and ice. It looks rather like a huge oval inner tube with a houseboat on top. The craft is operated by a pilot as an aircraft rather than by a captain as a marine vessel.

The day of our trip was overcast and a bit windy but there was no sign of a storm. About a hundred people, mostly tourists ranging from babies to the very elderly, waited to board the craft with us. The mixture of languages added an exotic nature to the group awaiting the channel crossing.

Mother and I were near the front of the line and took bench-type seats behind the pilot and copilot with a good view through the front window and also a smaller window on the side. As people boarded the wind seemed to be getting stronger and the sea in front of us was developing white caps. The pilot assured us it would be a smooth trip once we were airborne.

All aboard, the huge blowers pushed a large volume of air below the hull that is higher pressure than the air pressure above the craft which produces a lift. Additional engines provide the forward thrust. We entered the water rapidly picking up speed. The water was choppy causing the craft to be a little bumpy but we expected that to change. Suddenly the craft was swallowed by a huge wall of water that hit us head on and lifted our craft skyward. We could hear the pilot's radio telling him the channel was experiencing excessive winds and was being closed to travel. He had to make a decision to turn back or head for Dover.

Forward we went on the wildest ride of my lifetime. There was nothing amusing about it. We were tossed and turned side to side each time feeling like we would roll into the sea. Next gigantic waves slammed towards us raising us up like we were on the back of a wild horse trying to dump us backwards into the churning sea and then abruptly throwing us forward as we plunged down the other side of the crest. No rollercoaster was more terrifying nor a mechanical bull more bone jarring. People were screaming, children crying and many were sea sick. When our amusement ride ended, there was no request to do it again!