

## Scared on the Colorado River

*by Kenita Gibbins*

The first day of our river trip was mostly a float excursion. Our guide told us we were on a little-paddled portion of the Lower Colorado River between Westwater Canyon and Moab, Utah. My husband George and I must work as a team. George does most of the work in the stern of the canoe. The scary part is he has low vision. I must watch for rocks looming in our water path. I must find the "v" in the river. When you play together in a white water canoe your bond as a team becomes more important than ever.

Day two our guides talked about where we were going to see the outfitters and unload the canoes. Unload the canoes? I thought uh-oh we have never done that before even though we were on our fifth trip with Centennial Canoe Outfitters.

We floated a while and then paddled to shore. I studied the river and we listened to our directions. Five canoe rowers made it and it was our turn. We cursed being caught immediately in a Class Three set of rapids. We were in trouble practically from the start. No one wants her canoe turned sideways when the white water starts hitting. I couldn't turn the boat by myself. George had begun the hopeless job of trying to bail. I saw we were swamped. We were going to turn over. I had no choice but to roll over the side. I immediately began to think, guides always say, "Get your feet facing downstream." I thought hells bells you can't turn your body downstream when rapid after rapid keeps hitting you in the face. They also preach, "Don't lose your paddle." Boy, I clung to my paddle. I certainly didn't want to lose my float cushion. I grabbed on to it. I kept trying to swim which is also ridiculous. I was getting tired. It seemed like forever before the water quit hitting me. Finally, I could get a good breath. I was relatively calm because when I went under the water at first I remember being amazed that the muddy Colorado River was clear underneath the reddish surface. I could see. It was like God was telling, me, "You are going to be okay."

I couldn't see that George was having a worse struggle than I. He held on to the sinking ship, literally riding down into a sinkhole and getting tangled. His scare loomed bigger than mine. He also became calm by the clear water.

At the end of the series of rapids, friends paddled out to me. The water wasn't as still as it should have been for their safety. I was able to throw stuff into their canoe and grab the back while they paddled to the shore. Our guide picked up George. The other guide rescued our canoe further downstream.

The last day we had to start sliding into swift water. We felt apprehensive. I asked George, "Does this mean we can't do rivers again?" I loved my man even more when he said, "No, Kenita we will not give it up until we are too old to get into the canoe."