

THE BIGGEST WAVE

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ILLUSTRATED BY TERRY CREWS

Woosh . . . whoosh. As Loni sat alone on the beach, the sound of the waves crashing on the shore nearly drowned out the voices coming from the beach house only 20 yards behind her.

Loni watched helplessly as her family struggled against the ocean's currents.

Loni's parents had picked her up after basketball practice to spend the weekend at her uncle's beach house. Going to the beach was always fun, and the best part was that her cousin Jamie was there.

But Loni had forgotten to take into account one thing: basketball tryouts. And the

new coach was tough.

"It's my fault," Loni muttered as she piled cool sand on her throbbing leg muscles. "I should have worked out during the summer instead of turning into a couch potato. Now I probably won't make the team. What am I saying?"

I probably won't even be able to walk until

basketball season is over!"

Loni tried to get up, but her legs felt as though they had turned to stone. She remembered a verse she had memorized for Bible class: "God is our refuge and



strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

"I could sure use some strength right now, Lord," she whispered as she pushed her hair away from her face and tried to get up again. This time she succeeded. She stood facing the ocean, her legs slightly spread to keep her balance.

Loni loved the ocean. She loved to look at it and listen to it. She loved the smell and taste of it. This particular beach was one of her favorites. It was great for swimming because it was only about four feet deep for about as far as you could see. And the crashing waves made it even more exciting.

Tonight, however, the beach seemed different. The wind was blowing hard, and there were ominous clouds on the horizon. The waves looked taller than ever. Not only were they taller; there were also more of them.

Loni's thoughts were interrupted by a bolt of lightning that almost made her lose her balance. She turned and hob-

bled back to the house as fast as she could.

Jamie was waiting for her. "Hi, cuz," she said. "Are your legs OK? Do you want to go swimming tonight?"

"Not tonight," Loni answered. "Looks like a storm is coming. We'd better wait for morning."

"OK," Jamie said. "Besides, I'm starved. Let's see if we can find some food in the fridge."

DANGEROUS WATERS

Jamie and her parents were already in the water when Loni limped out of the house early the next morning. The clouds were gone, and the ocean had calmed down a bit. Her family seemed to be having fun.

Loni's legs were still sore, but she managed to get into the water. She tried to swim using only her arms, but the waves were too strong for her aching body. They began to toss her back and forth like a rag doll.

Gripping the beach floor with her hands, Loni dragged

herself out of the water and sat on a sand dune to catch her breath. Her family was now a surprising distance from the shore. Loni could barely see them. She noticed that they were waving at her.

"I'm OK," Loni yelled as she waved back.

Then a cold chill went down her spine. They were waving because they were in trouble!

Loni stood up and desperately looked around. There was no one in sight. She knew she had to get help before it was too late, but how? The phone seemed to be the only answer. The pain in her legs was unbearable, but she forced herself to withstand it and hurried to the beach house as fast as she could.

She stopped in surprise. A Coast Guard jeep was parked next to the house, and two men in lifeguard uniforms were knocking at the door. Loni noticed with horror that in their vehicle they were carrying a big sign that read: "DANGER! Ocean floor excavations. Strong currents and whirlpools. No swimming allowed."

"Help! You've got to save my family! They're drown-



To increase its weight by one ton, a blue whale must eat 10 tons of krill, which in turn must consume 100 tons of plankton.

—Animal Ecology

ing!" Loni yelled.

The men wasted no time. They radioed their station, grabbed their floating gear, and rushed to the water. In a few seconds they were off, risking their lives as they swam toward her family.

Loni stood on the shore, trembling from head to toe. There was nothing else for her to do but wait—and pray.

"Dear Jesus," Loni prayed, raising her voice over the sound of the waves, "please, save my family. I don't want to be without them, Lord. I love them. Please!"

Now Loni couldn't see her family or the lifeguards. Tears blinded her eyes.

The Bible verse came back to her mind. This time she used it as her prayer. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble!" she repeated again and again.

Unexpectedly the ocean started to swell. Loni's eyes opened wide. A wave was coming—the biggest wave she had ever seen. It rose quietly, taller than a house. As it rushed toward her, Loni stepped back. The wave crashed violently on the dry sand just a few feet from her. Then, to Loni's surprise, it receded slowly, almost gently.

Loni could hardly believe her eyes. There on the shore, coughing and sputtering, lay her parents, Jamie, and the two lifeguards. The wave had snatched them out of the current and had brought them all safely to shore.

"Thank You, Lord. Thank You!" Loni sobbed as she and her family hugged and kissed on the sand.

Later that day Loni and Jamie sat together on the beach, a blanket wrapped around them. Loni couldn't stop shivering, not because she was cold, but because she couldn't stop thinking about what could have happened.

"How did it feel to know we were drowning?" asked Jamie.

"I felt absolutely powerless," Loni answered. "It was terrible."

"But you weren't powerless, cuz," Jamie said, looking at the waves. "You prayed for us. You brought us in."

"I didn't bring you in," Loni corrected. "It was God."

The God who is "an ever-present help." 