

Thompson, Robert

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Eleven Year Old Saves Woman from Drowning

By HARRY MULHALL
Staff Reporter

LATTA -- At 11 years old, Robert Thompson is a nimble thinker in an emergency.

For that reason the mother of two young children is still alive — rescued by the Belleville youngster from certain drowning in the deep-flowing Moira River here.

And Mrs. Hedi Stroempl, 31, of Tweed, is also leading the praise being showered on the boy by all the adults involved in the drama.

But Robert — son of Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Thompson, 220 John Street — has a laconic explanation for it all:

"I wasn't calm. But there

was nothing else I could do, really."

The incident happened yesterday when Mrs. Stroempl, returning home from Belleville with children Anna 7, and Peter, 8, stopped by to visit the Thompsons in their summer trailer here.

Robert and other youngsters were swimming in the nearby Moira, at that point more than 100 feet wide, deep and with a current running toward a mill dam.

Mrs. Stroempl decided to go swimming herself and went into the river. Near mid-stream she suddenly developed a leg cramp which spread rapidly through her body, paralyzing movement.

She apparently cried out, but no one heard her.

The youngsters continued romping nearby, oblivious of the sudden danger threatening the woman.

"Nobody heard her — all the kids are young and were having a good time," explains Robert.

Then the Stroempl children noticed their mother had lost her bathing cap, and mentioned it to Mrs. Thompson watching from the bank.

Mrs. Thompson glanced across the river and for the first time realized her friend was in danger.

Calling to Robert he threw him an inflated inner tube.

He broke away from his play-

mates and headed out to the drowning woman.

Reaching her, he automatically put into practice some of the rescue lessons he says he learned during swimming lessons at the Belleville YMCA.

But, in this particular situation, they were of little avail.

The youngster was too light weight to keep the adult's head above water and simultaneously tow her to safety.

However, he didn't panic in the predicament.

Instead, he calmly let the drowning woman go under once more. As she rose to the surface he clapped the inner tube over her head, pressing it firmly around her neck.

Then towing and pushing, he

brought Mrs. Stroempl to the safety of the river bank.

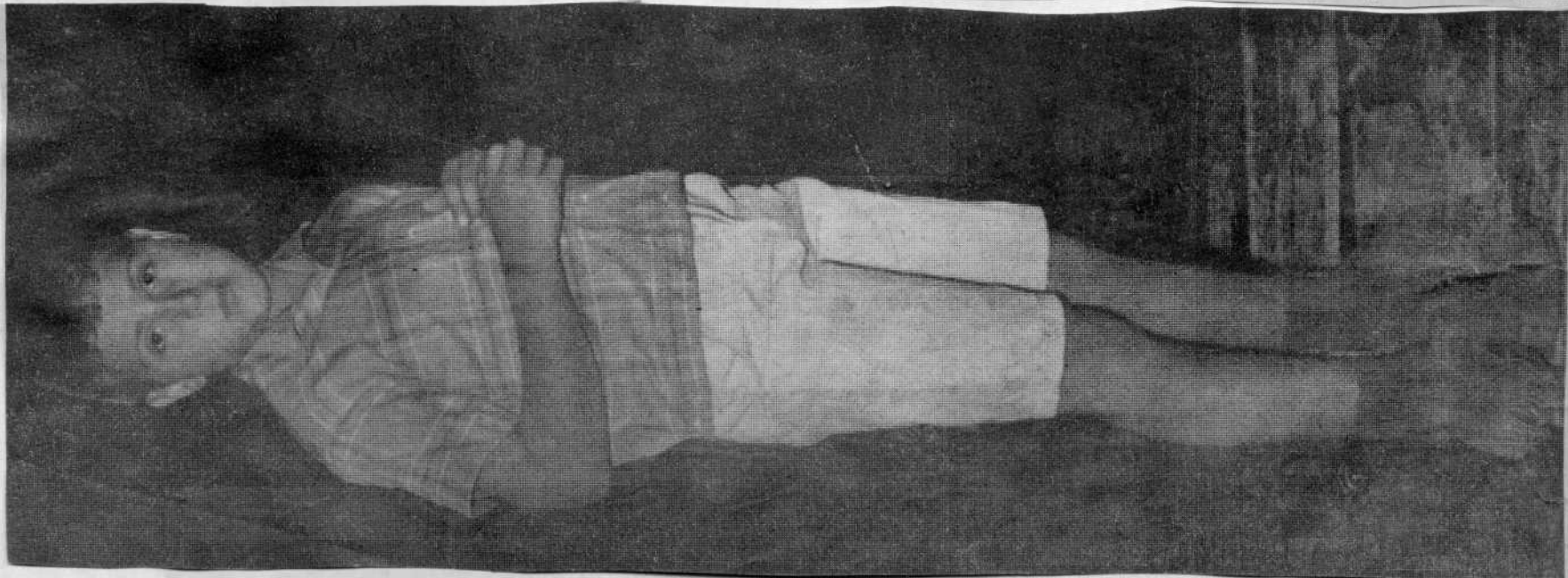
She spent the next three hours resting near the Thompson trailer with her husband — summoned from the Tweed lands and forests office where he is a research forester.

She believes sunstroke may have induced the cramps which threatened her life.

George Stroempl was loud in praise for the 11-year-old — and his cool thinking under stress.

"He did a man's work here today," said the forester.

Said OPP Const. Shane Halvorsen: "This woman would have been a goner, I'm telling you, if it hadn't been for this boy."



"Nothing Else I Could Do..."