

## The Sixth Sense by Jessica Potts

During the hot days of summer, I received a call from one of my captains stating that he came across an overturned boat in the middle of Charlotte Harbor. A feeling came over me that this vessel did not break away from a dock or mooring, but rather had passengers that were in need of help. I immediately called Coast Guard Sector St. Petersburg and notified them of what our captain was dealing with on scene. I relayed there were no passengers in the vicinity of the boat, but the vessel was drifting North overturned at a fast pace and there could potentially be people in danger.

Wind was out of the south at 25-30 knots with clocked gusts up to 50 knots, with an approaching cold front. Waves were in the 3-4 foot range. It was like a washing machine in the harbor. No conditions to be in on the most capable of vessels. I just had a gut feeling that the passengers on that boat were no longer around the vessels location. Our crew searched the waters for about 45 minutes in the location of the vessel and found nothing but a floating cooler and scattered debris.

About ½ mile out of Shell Cut, conditions began to get real spotty. Water was pouring over the starboard gunnel and bow and it took everything I had on and off the throttle to maintain control of my vessel. I instructed my Captain to scan out into the harbor as I began an east and west pattern moving down current to the



location the boat was found about 5 miles away. We were soaked and visibility was terrible, like we were searching for a needle in a haystack. For that matter, we didn't know if there was anyone in the water. I turned the towboat to starboard and all of a sudden we saw a couple arms in the air. I smashed dead into the wind as I got in position to rescue two people out of the water that were flailing their arms in the air. I put the towboat in neutral and we grabbed the arm of a young female and pulled her over the gunnel. We then reached down again and grabbed the arms of a young man pulling him aboard as well.

I grabbed the VHF microphone and hailed Coast Guard Sector St. Petersburg. "I have 2 passengers on board and am transporting them to the medics on standby at Lavenders Landing."

The passengers at that time began to tell their story. They were looking to fish at Turtle Bay and underestimated the conditions. Once they were about 2 miles north of Bokeelia their boat began to take on water and abruptly capsized. Their cell phone got wet and they had no VHF to communicate that they needed help. They left the boat to try and swim to shore miles away. In the conditions we were experiencing, swimming directly into sustained 30 knot winds and current, was impossible. They had been in the water for three and a half hours at the time of our rescue.

Thanks to a sixth sense and willingness to respond, our crew was able to turn a possible tragic day into a lifesaving situation.

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