

One Was Rescued . . .

*By a Woman Who Is Inept at Rowing,
and Invalid Daughter with Hurt Spine*

MRS. BERTHA FITCH and daughter Ahlene, former Omahans, have "the shudders" these days, every time an airplane roars over their little cabin and trailer on the lonely beach at Lake park, South Bend, Neb.

Recently they saw a plane crash into the lake. They rescued one man, vainly tried to save another.

Newspaper accounts of the accident told of the death of John Schwindt, jr., a student flier, and minor injuries to Morton Fitzpatrick, instructor, both of Lincoln, when their training plane got out of control over the lake, hit a power line and crashed.

Accounts did not tell of the heroism of Mrs. Fitch and her daughters. Friends who have brought the story of their rescue to the attention of The World-Herald declare it is all the more amazing because of two factors.

1. Ahlene is an invalid, afflicted with spinal trouble.

2. Mrs. Fitch is afraid of water, cannot swim, is inexperienced at rowing a boat.

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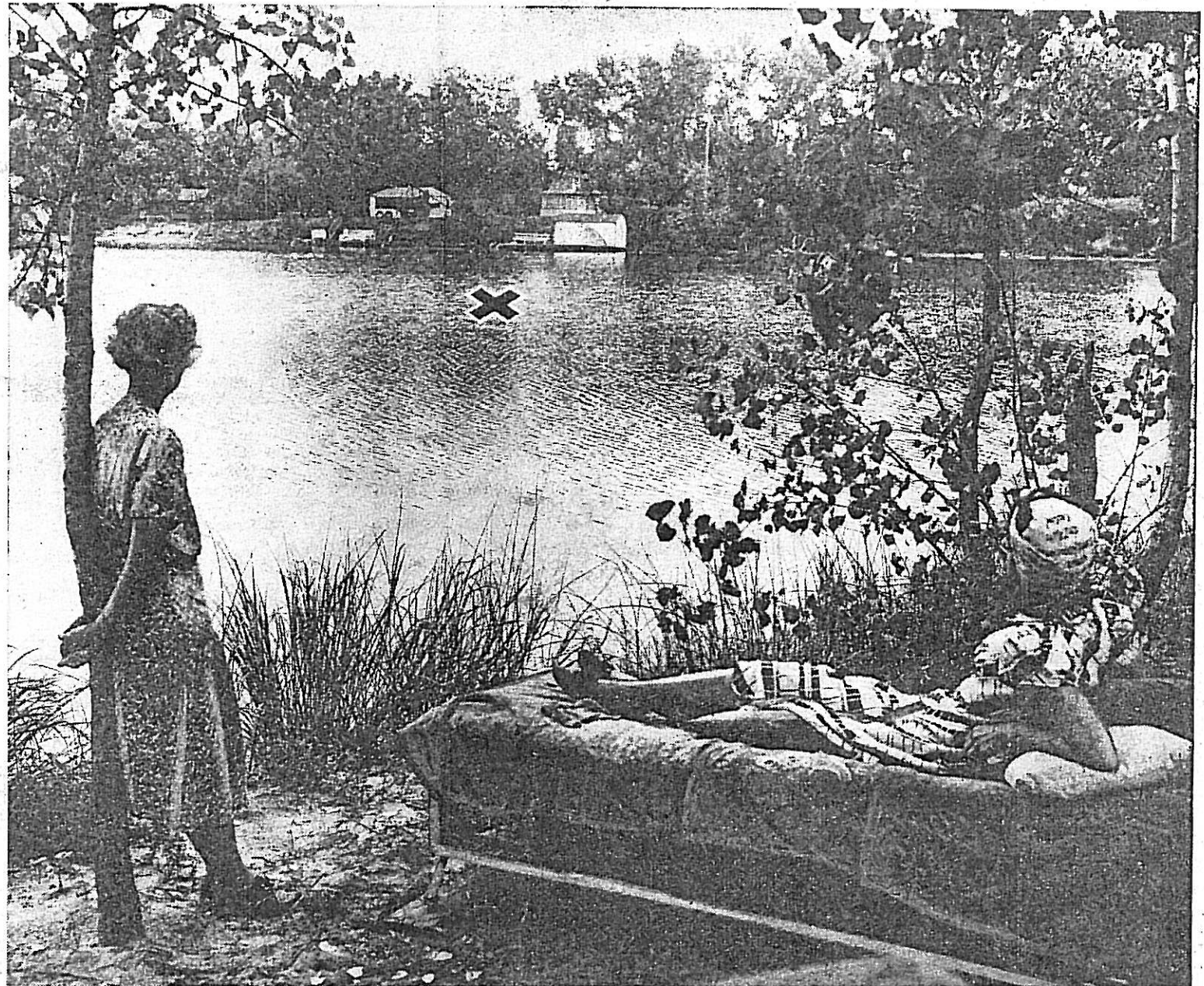
Plane Crash in Lake

NOW living at Elmwood, Neb., the two spend their summers at Lake park. Ahlene former student at the University of Omaha, swims for her health. Her arms are fairly strong; she walks only with great difficulty.

Ahlene spends much of her time at a portable typewriter, working on short stories. Her ambition is to be a writer. All of the quotations which follow are direct excerpts from a graphic account she wrote of the accident.

She was in her trailer, getting started on a story, when she heard a plane buzzing directly overhead. It sounded very low. She caught sight of it, saw it was just clearing the tree-tops.

"Two seconds later there was an awful ripping and tearing sound," she related. "I got outside. The plane crashed down into



This peacefully quiet scene at Lake park is not so pleasant now for Ahlene Fitch, right, and her mother. (X) marks the spot where a plane crashed into the lake, 50 feet from the far shore. No one was at home in the cabins.



Mrs. Bertha Fitch, left, and Ahlene.



Ahlene and her mother in the boat in which they went to the rescue of two men after the plane crash.

the lake, nose down. The back end was out of water."

She screamed to her mother. They got into a boat Mrs. Fitch started rowing. Ahlene was directing her as best she could, as the plane had submerged.

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Towed Men to Shore

THE plane was on the far side of the lake, 50 feet offshore from several cabins. There was nobody at the cabins then as Lake park has been closed to the public, and there were few regular residents in camp at the time.

"We hurried as much as we could," wrote Ahlene. "Cries for help came from two men floundering in the water. I called to them that we were coming, and to hold on."

"One man could swim, and he was apparently trying to hold up the other man. This one could not swim at all, and kept screaming for us to hurry."

Mrs. Fitch was straining at the oars. They were crossing at an angle. She could not see their objective, and Ahlene's back was beginning to hurt.

"Then came the part that still haunts me," Ahlene's account stated. "As we got within about

five feet of the man who was keeping himself and the other man afloat, his head went under. He released his friend. They were both under. I half crawled out of the boat and stuck my foot over the side, right under his face. He grabbed hold, and I pulled him close to the boat. He grabbed hold of the side.

"Then he choked out something about being all right, but to help his friend. He was floating near us, just under the surface. Reaching over, I grabbed his shirt, and pulled him close to the boat. Then I got hold of his head. Mother rowed to the shore."

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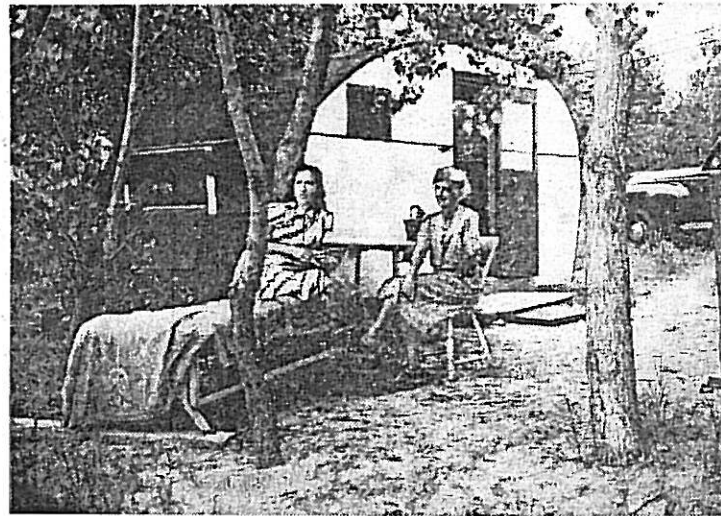
Desperate First Aid

AHLENE doesn't exactly recall the next few minutes. Neither does her mother. Things were too hurried . . .

Somehow they tugged and hauled and got the unconscious man up on the beach. The other man was helping, too, but he was ill. Ahlene realized they wanted help, quick.

She sent her mother to find someone, and to get to a phone to summon a doctor.

She started to administer first aid. She knew nothing about artificial respiration, except that her



The Fitch trailer. Both Ahlene and her mother have "the shudders" whenever a plane roars over the lake.

sister had done some practicing on her. She recalled some of the main points.

"I just had to do something," she wrote. "I got his head on his arm, and saw to it he hadn't swallowed his tongue, and started in. I didn't know how much pressure was needed, but I pressed as hard as the Lord would let me. I tried to count to keep my

rhythm. Also I remembered to 'let up' fast so air would pop into the lungs.

"The other man kept reaching over and pushing, trying to help. He was so wildly desperate to FORCE life back into his friend. He kept saying: 'My God, he can't be dead. I kept him up almost until you got here. He can't be dead!' 'It seemed hours, and mother

didn't get back. No one came. I knew people must be there on the grounds; I was so nearly dead I thought I could not keep working, and I felt to quit before someone else took over would be perhaps to let a man die. So trying to keep up a rhythm, I started to scream. Boy, did I scream! I bet that never in all his days will that one man hear any female scream with such piercing, blood-curdling shrieks. I wasn't afraid. I was desperate for help."

Help began to arrive. Mrs. Fitch had found that every cabin was empty that day; she got to a phone. People came, a doctor was finally located, and the Ashland fire department worked with an inhalator. But the man was dead.

It was pronounced death by drowning, but Ahlene believes the man also suffered head and body injuries in the crash. She is certain the man was alive when she and her mother started for the scene.

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Planes Bring Shudders

DAYS and nights are quiet at Lake park. Ahlene continues with her writing; her mother is painting some furniture. But when an airplane roars over, and there are many, they both have "the shudders."