Chapter Sixteen

A QUESTION OF LIFE OR DEATH

WE TRY TO MAKE OUR LIVES SAFE. FOR EVERY HAZARD there are warnings and barriers, for every bold assertion there are fallback positions, for every fallible device there are back-up systems and redundancies. Children go forth to play girded with armor for their head, face, teeth, elbows, knees, and any other part that may suffer assault. I've seen a step ladder with eighteen warning labels pasted to it, another with a six-part lesson on how to avoid falling off, with attendant diagrams. If all else fails, we go to court; when a piece of bridge masonry fell through the top of a convertible, the driver sued the car company for making a cloth top that wouldn't keep out falling masonry. So when we talk about questions of life or death, we usually don't mean it.

There do come times, though, perhaps only once in a lifetime, when we're really up against it, when there's no manual or guide or precedent, when we really do have to answer a question of life or death. The crew at Madison Spring Hut had to do that one evening just as they were serving dinner to a full house; they were all college age and they were up against it.

MACDONALD BARR
AUGUST 1986

Madison Springs Hut is one of the great rallying points on the Presidential Range; few places can match its spectacular location and none can be reached by so many trails—there are eleven direct routes to the hut. On August 24, however, MacDonald Barr was primarily interested in climbing to the summit of Mount Madison, which rises 556 feet above the hut.

Don Barr was serious about this kind of thing, and as he started up the trail in Randolph that day he was a candidate for his Ph.D. in geography from Boston University. Beyond that, he loved it. As his wife Yvonne said, "He was the kind who would go the extra steps for a big view or to just see the stars. The mountains were an extra dimension in his life."

The gentlefolk of Randolph's classic age would understand. As Don Barr started up the Valley Way, he was directly across a broad meadow from the site of the Ravine House, which was the home away from home for the generations of vacationing Boston academics who spent their summers in Randolph and built that extraordinary network of trails on Madison and its adjoining peaks on the Presidential Range. They'd go anywhere for a pleasing outlook and a pretty waterfall, which is why they built so many trails.

Don came from a long line of military men. He'd grown up on a number of military posts in far-off climes, but his home base was in Pueblo, Colorado, and he learned the vigorous life there; in fact, he had a reconstructed kneecap as a reminder of an early rock-climbing fall. He settled in Brookline, Massachusetts, to make his own life and after his first college degrees he worked as a civil engineer and city planner for about fifteen years. He continued to believe in the active life, and as a member of the Brookline Town Meeting during the 1970s and as a city planner he pushed for the development of bike paths around Boston. He also went whitewater canoeing and hiking and rock climbing in the nearby Quincy quarries when he could. He and his wife had a daughter, Heather, and a son, Tavis, and as the children grew up these outings were an important part of their family life.

But on this late August day they hadn't made their big summer climb yet. Don had been busy that summer finishing his PhD. in geography and looking for work in the new field of geographic information systems, and he'd be

taking another job soon. The Barrs had already taken a combined business and family trip to the West, and the Madison trip was probably their only chance for a New England hike this year.

Don was acquainted with the White Mountains and their upland lodgings. He'd taken Tavis on a hike up the Southern Peaks and they'd stayed at Mizpah and Lakes of the Clouds Huts, he'd taken Heather on a different Mount Washington trip, and planning for family hikes was careful and enjoyable, it was actually the beginning of the trip. They began thinking about this year's White Mountain hike before they went west, and while plans were afoot Don called the AMC to see which one of their huts would have room for a party of three on the night of August twenty-fourth. Madison Spring Hut would, and he made the reservations.

Heather Barr was in Germany that summer, so the three would be Don and Tavis Barr and Christian Steiber, a German exchange student living with friends of the Barrs. Don and Tavis didn't know him very well, but he was added to the roster so he could see another part of American life before he went home. Don was fifty-two, Tavis was thirteen, and Christian was sixteen. They got an early start from Brookline on the twenty-fourth and reached the parking lot at the beginning of the Valley Way Trail at about noon. Don knew that the weather report was not promising, and he and the boys got their gear organized under lowering clouds.

Up on the heights, the weather was treacherous. On the twenty-third, the Mount Washington Observatory recorded mild southwest winds in the teens and 20s rising to a peak gust of 53 a little after 6:30 P.M., but the temperature ranged from 47° down to 39°. This is the kind of summer weather that can presage trouble for hikers who confuse August in the valleys with August on the Presidential Range. In fact, it was on August 24, 1938, that Joe Caggiano died near Madison Spring Hut, and on August 23, 1952, Raymond Davis hiked across the range to his death above Tuckerman Ravine.

On the twenty-fourth, the summit observatory recorded a wind moving steadily into the northwest with a morning average in the 50 mph range. This is a veering wind and it's a good sign; an old sailor's adage promises, "Veering is clearing." My father always called it a northwest clear-off, a promise so eagerly awaited that my generation saved time by calling it an NWCO. This was not the pattern that was developing this day.

The usual plan for an overnight climb to the summit of Madison is to hike up one of the many trails to the hut, spend the night there, and then go to the summit and down to the valley the next day. Don knew the weather report was not promising. Thinking back to that day, Tavis says, "He felt that if we didn't see the summit that day, we wouldn't see the summit. I think maybe he wanted to leave in the morning for somewhere else." So Don decided to climb to the summit of Madison in these marginal conditions before they got worse, then descend to the hut for a good dinner and a cozy night and see what the next day would bring.

Only two trails lead directly from Randolph to the summit of Madison. One is Howker Ridge, which starts almost a mile east of the Valley Way and follows the high arc of the ridge to the summit. It's a spectacular trail, but it's four and a half miles long and would take about that long in hours, too. The only other direct route is a combination of three trails: the Valley Way, the Brookside, and the Watson Path. This route is three-quarters of a mile shorter to the summit of Madison and, like the Howker Ridge Trail, the last mile would be along rough terrain above timberline, with no protection at all from the weather. And, again like the Howker Ridge, there would be another rough and fully-exposed half-mile down to the hut.

Given the late start and the poor weather, the prudent approach would be to stay on the Valley Way, which provides the shortest, easiest and most sheltered route to the hut; in fact, it stays below the crest of the ridge and also below timberline until about 100 yards from the door. Then Don and the boys could see what the next day brought; and even if the weather went against them, they'd have a wide choice of trails back to the parking lot where their car was. They wouldn't get to the summit of Madison, but it would still be a fine and memorable hike. The three of them talked this over and Don decided to stick with the Watson Path.

The Watson Path turns off the Brookside, which turns off the Valley Way. The beginning of the Valley Way is enchanting. It leads over very moderate grades through a cathedral grove of ancient evergreen trees, with the many pools and cascades of Snyder Brook just a few steps away on the left. Remembering the day, Tavis says, "It wasn't raining, but just kind of humid, but in almost a nice way, a blanketing kind of humidity. It wasn't very steep and it was very pretty."

After almost a mile they came to a seven-way junction of trails, an eloquent testimonial to the enthusiasms of those nineteenth-century academics in their summer pursuits. The Brookside is one of the choices. True to its name, the trail runs along the brook up Snyder Ravine and the AMC *White Mountain Guide* mentions its "views of many cascades and pools" and calls it "wild and beautiful, with cascades, mossy rocks and fine forest." It's a mile and a half long and the early going is right beside the brook; then the trail joins an ancient logging road relicked from the original forest cutting early in the century. It follows this easy grade for more than half a mile through a beautiful mature birch forest, the usual succession after a timber clear cut.

The Snyder Ravine finally pinches in, the logging road ends, and the Brookside runs close to the brook and becomes more of a scramble. Soon the trail turns away from the brook at Salmacis Rock and becomes steep and rough. The Watson Path enters from the right on a short and almost flat connection from the Valley Way, and Don Barr's group could have made this quick change to a sheltered trail better suited to the day, but they didn't. Typical of the Randolph Mountain Club's affection for natural curiosities, the Brookside soon comes to Bruin Rock and then Duck Fall, and after a few more strides the Lower Bruin departs on the right for another chance to join the Valley Way, and the Watson Path bears away left. Don Barr turned left.

So far, the hike was a damp but enjoyable riparian reverie, but then everything changed. The Watson Path is a misleading choice. The contour lines on the AMC trail map do show that it's the steepest of the alternatives to the Valley Way, but the 100-foot contour interval is necessarily an average calculation and it does not show that the steepness comes in clumps and the footing is much rougher than any of the neighboring trails. The climb out of Snyder Ravine is the price hikers pay for the gentle walk along the old logging road down below; it's an exhausting and frustrating grind, and not often chosen for a repeat visit.

By now it was mid-afternoon and on Mount Washington the wind was in the 70 mph range; the summit temperature dropped from 49° early in the morning to 32° at noon, it held steady at freezing all afternoon, and the heights were in the clouds with intermittent rain. Madison Spring Hut is above timberline in the col between Adams and Madison, four miles across Great Gulf from the summit of Mount Washington, and conditions at the hut were not much better: afternoon temperature sank into the 30s, the wind

was in the 50–60 range, and there was a harsh driving rain. Hikers arriving at the hut were severely chilled and their numbers climbed into the forties as prudent people caught above timberline on the range made for shelter. The numbers rose to the hut's capacity of fifty and the hut crew kept busy warming them and watching for hypothermia.

The Watson Path climbs out of Snyder Ravine on the north shoulder of Mount Madison, and Don Barr and the two boys kept scrambling upward over the steep terrain with its loose stones and root traps, a tough piece of work under the best of circumstances and a severe test in the rain and cold of this afternoon. About three miles after leaving the parking lot they reached timberline and a stretch of peculiarly discouraging terrain; there's a hump that looks like the summit, then three more crests and then another hump, each of which brings false hope. By now, hikers are wondering if there's ever going to be an end to it. Tavis says, "I don't think the map showed where timberline was. So we looked at the map and saw one major topographical bulge before the summit and then the summit and then the hut on the other side. So we looked and we figured, Okay, this is the first bulge and the next one will be the summit." To make matters worse, the trail leads over large angular rocks that tend to shift and tilt underfoot.

Madison Spring Hut is open from early June to early September with a crew of five, but there's always one person on days-off, so in practical terms it's a crew of four. The line-up had changed on this late-summer day. Liz Keuffel had been the hutmaster, but she left just the day before to return to her teaching job for the academic season; Emily Thayer had been assistant hutmaster, so this was her first day in charge.

Emily was no shrinking violet. She'd grown up in a large and enthusiastic family of hikers; her grandparents and parents and aunts and uncles and cousins and two brothers all gathered at their summer place in Whitefield, just west of the Presidential Range, and her memories of childhood were filled with heroic outings on the heights. Now Emily had finished her junior year at Middlebury College in Vermont, this was her fourth summer working for the AMC, and she'd reached her full strength at 5'8".

Lars Jorrens, Alexei Rubenstein, and Dan Arons had been on the Madison crew all summer with Emily, but Dan was on days-off this weekend. It was a good day not to be at Madison Spring Hut and for those who were there to stay indoors, and Emily kept looking out the windows at the dark

swirling mist on every side and wondering about people who were out on the range.

Emily knew about bad weather on the range. During one of her childhood summers a throng of relatives set out from Whitefield to climb Mount Jefferson. They started up the Caps Ridge Trail, which is the express route of the Northern Peaks; it starts at the 3,000-foot high point on the Jefferson Notch road and runs straight up the ridge 2.4 miles to the 5,715-foot summit of Jefferson, a delightful climb, but one that's studded with the steep rocks of the "caps" and runs above timberline for most of its length.

The weather went bad when they were near the top of Mount Jefferson and the grown-ups decided that rather than go back down through the weather on the difficult trail they'd come up, it would be better to march the family troop down the summit cone of Jefferson, across the ridge of Mount Clay, around the headwall of Great Gulf, and on up to the summit of Mount Washington so they could take the cog railway down. A family photo album preserves the image of Emily sitting in the summit hotel, twelve years old, soaking wet, and glumly reflecting that the celebrated wisdom of grown-ups might not be all it's cracked up to be. In fairness to the senior Thayers, it must be said that agile children enjoy steep rocks a lot more than grown-ups do, and they also have an instinctive faith that their skin is waterproof.

Now, eight years after that stormy day on the range, Emily turned on the radio to hear the regular 2:00 P.M. call from AMC headquarters in Pinkham Notch. Hut crews take turns cooking on a daily rotation and this was Emily's turn; all huts have a reservation list so they can plan their meals, and the 2:00 P.M. call provides news of late cancellations or late additions that will require adjustments in the kitchen. This day the call did not include any cancellations and Emily had an immediate thought, almost a reflex: "We're going to be going out—we're going to be going out." That is, they'd have to answer a call from distressed hikers.

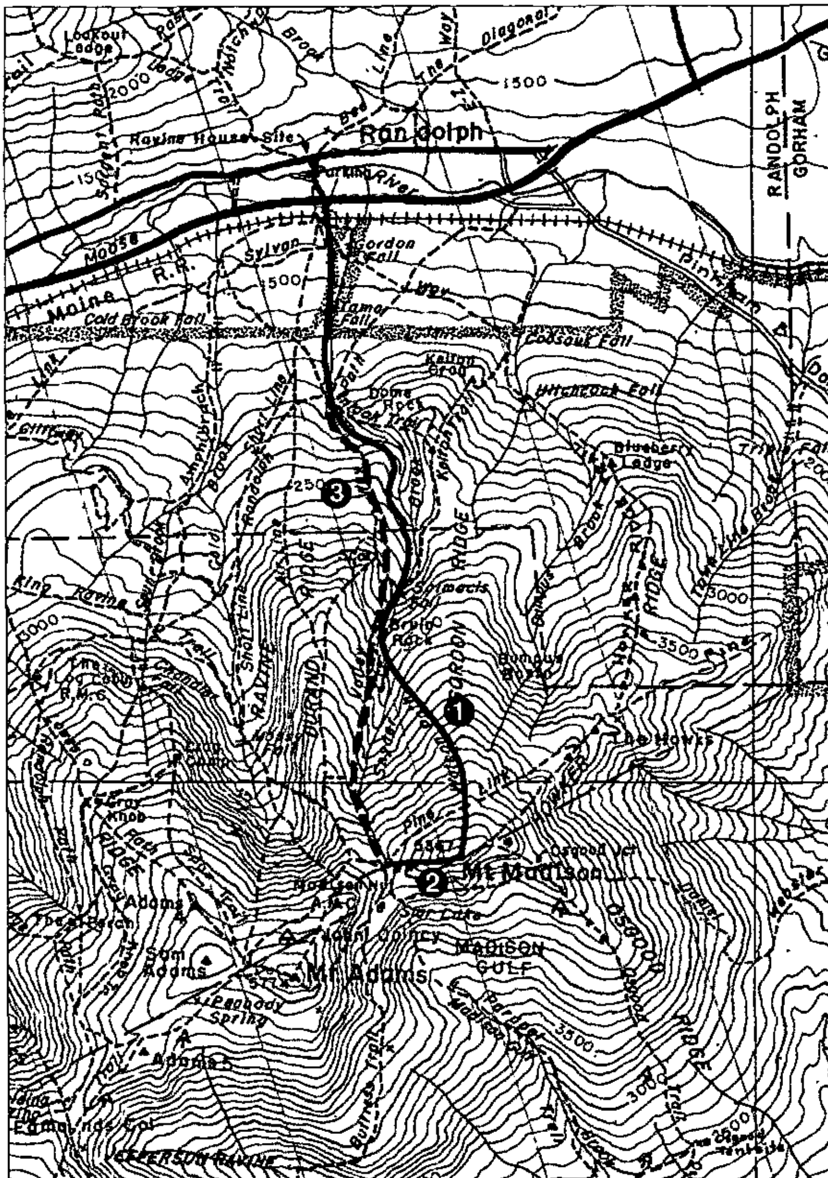
It seemed to Emily that there had been an unusual number of emergency calls that summer. Twisted ankles and tired hikers are a matter of course and crews take them in stride, but extra dimensions had been added this summer. There was, for instance, the German shepherd dog. One day a man came in and said that his dog needed help out on the Parapet Trail, that he couldn't walk anymore.

The Parapet is a nasty piece of work. It was cut in 1951 to provide a foul-weather route around the summit cone of Mount Madison and the 0.7-mile length leads over large angular boulders and through dense dwarf spruce growth. When the 1951 trail crew got through, it was so difficult to negotiate that the Madison Spring Hut crew thought it must be a rough draft, a sketch to be refined and finished later. It was never refined, and Emily's crew loaded the dog into a litter and spent a very unpleasant time hauling it back to the hut. The owner called for a helicopter lift to the valley; he said he'd pay for it, but this was not arranged and the hut crew had to take care of the dog for three days while the owner went to the valley to look into other arrangements. Finally the dog got a ride down in the cargo net slung below a regularly scheduled supply helicopter.

So 1986 rescue demands on the Madison crew had been heavy, unusual, and not necessarily rewarding. Now, on the afternoon of August twenty-fourth, the people who'd been hiking across the range from the Lakes of the Clouds Hut began coming in. The wind was gaining in strength and they were cold and wet and almost everything they had with them was soaked, so the crew kept busy getting them supplied with warm drinks and putting them into whatever dry clothes could be found; the crew dug into their own reserves of clothing and Emily even contributed her favorite original Chuck Roast fleece jacket, which she never got back.

August twenty-fourth also brought a new crew member to Madison. Kari Geick belonged to an active family in Kent, Connecticut, and she was an equestrienne of very considerable achievement. After college Kari spent four years with the biology department at Tufts University working in animal behavior; then she decided it was time for a career change and planned to relocate in Colorado. She'd hiked on the Franconia and Presidential Ranges and she had a little time before leaving for Colorado, so after she left Tufts she went to the AMC headquarters in Pinkham and asked if they had any openings for end-of-season fill-ins. Liz Keuffel had just left the Madison crew so Kari was hired on the spot and she went right on around to Randolph and hiked up the Valley Way.

Late in the same afternoon, Stephanie Arenalas showed up at the hut. She'd worked for the AMC the previous two summers in several connections, she'd been on the trail crew and on the storehouse crew managing supplies



1. MacDonald Barr went up via Valley Way, Brookside, and Watson Path
2. Died on summit of Mount Madison
3. Evacuation via Valley Way

for the huts, but she was not on the roster this summer, so she'd come to the mountains to pay a surprise visit to her friend Liz Keuffel at Madison.

Stephanie hiked up the Madison Gulf Trail, which rises from the bottom of Great Gulf south of the hut and provides the most difficult of all direct approaches to the hut. It's a strenuous but wonderful climb in good weather, but this day the trail was more like a brook bed and the top section was steep water-soaked ledges, so Stephanie reached the hut exhausted, wet to the skin, and severely chilled. Then she learned that Liz had just left. Stephanie knew the ropes, so, in the time-honored tradition of the huts, she stayed to lend a hand.

Don Barr and the boys were still pushing up the Watson Path. Timberline is about 4,000 feet here, with another 1,363 feet to the summit of Madison. The northwest wind was blowing straight onto the ridge and its violence was heightened by the topography: they were climbing the northernmost ridge of the Presidential Range, the terrain turns a corner here, and a northwest wind starts into the long accelerating venturi of Pinkham Notch. Tavis says, "At that point it might have dropped thirty degrees and the winds became a lot faster. It was a little breezy as we were getting up to the timberline but all of a sudden there were the fastest winds I've ever been in. I was out in a hurricane in Boston and the winds on Mount Madison were faster than that." Don's group was not prepared for this; they had long pants, hats, sweaters and light jackets, but no real protection against heavy weather, and the bare rocks gave them no protection at all.

"We were in the clouds and we kept pushing on," says Tavis, "because we thought we were almost there the whole time, we kept seeing these bulges and, 'Okay, maybe that's it.' You get this series and each one you think, 'Well, that's it, we know the hut's right on the other side.' So that's why we didn't turn back."

There was still a chance for an escape. A little more than halfway up this discouraging summit climb, the Pine Link Trail crosses the Watson Path at a right angle. The Pine Link is almost level here and it continues level and then descends slightly to the hut. Tavis says, "We debated taking that and then decided we were probably close enough anyway that we should just go over the summit and get to the hut, that that would be faster. At that point we were basically guessing where we were based on the topographical markers, and we were wrong about where we were."

Tavis remembered that his father had said where the timberline would be. Don Barr would be interested in that kind of thing, it's something that geographers think about. But it turned out that his calculation was about 300 feet too high, and this is revealing. Timberline averages 4,000 feet all around the range, but it varies with several factors. One factor is exposure, and timberline on the northwest shoulder of Madison is lower than Don expected because the weather is harsher here than in most places, and harsher than he expected.

Don and the boys kept pushing on toward the top, but they were going slower and slower and stopping more and more often. Tavis says, "We didn't have any backup clothing, we had T-shirts and sweaters and windbreakers. I didn't carry along a hat and dad actually gave me his hat and then it blew right off my head."

Tavis was only thirteen, but he was already taller than his father and notably slender, a physiotype well-known among teenage boys in their growing years. Christian had a hood on his jacket, he had a solid athletic frame, and he seemed to be managing the conditions fairly well, so he told Don and Tavis that he was going on ahead and he disappeared in the fog. Now the cold rain was in their faces and Tavis tried to wrap his hands in a bandanna, but it didn't work very well. He also realized that his father had changed, he was panting in a way that he'd never seen before.

Tavis also remembered a video his grammar school class was shown before they went on a hiking trip. "It was on hypothermia and I remembered that at a certain point you stop realizing that you're cold. And I think that's just about when my dad got to that point. I wasn't at that point yet. I had started to go numb, but I was quite aware of my condition. At that point he had difficulty walking or moving. I was kind of the unsteady you are when you're drunk. I could maybe not run in the straightest line, but I could run." Finally Tavis saw a cluster of trail signs—he'd reached the top. His father was about twenty feet behind him so he went back to tell him. All his father said was, "Oh, good."

"We got past the summit together, my dad was at the summit, but not for much after that. By that time we realized that it was really too late. We both knew we were hypothermic, by the time we were at the summit it really was the fastest way to go straight to the hut, but it was just too late. He was still lucid enough to know. I think we stopped for just a second to look around

and that's just about when his lips were going white. That was the sign that he was really in bad shape. I knew I was in bad shape, I could feel it, but I was still—I would say drunk, but lucid."

There was no lingering on the summit of Madison. "My dad was pushing on. If I reminded him that he was hypothermic and needed to keep pushing on, he would say, 'Oh, yeah, I need to do this.' And I just kept saying, 'We need to keep going—we need to keep going.' He kept trying, and there was a point at which he just visibly couldn't walk anymore. He found a crevice and covered himself up as best he could, and at that point I just started running."

The summit of Madison is not a sharp peak like neighboring Adams, it's more of a short narrow ridge with the trail running just below the crest. Tavis sensed that the storm would get worse before it got better, "but it was so painfully obvious that there was nothing that I could do. He was trying very hard to walk and he couldn't. My choices were either to stay there with him or move on and I didn't really see any benefit in staying there with him. There wasn't—I couldn't really—I didn't have anything to give him."

Down at the hut, dinner was almost ready and yet another group of hikers straggled in. They were soaking wet and they were beyond cold, they had the slurred speech and muddled thinking of hypothermia, so the crew put them into their own bunks in the crew room and made them drink fresh-brewed liquid Jello—the sugar and heat of the dessert is a favorite restorative with hut crews.

It was now 6:00 P.M. and the crew turned their attentions to serving dinner to a full house of hikers; actually, a bit more than a full house. They got everyone seated and just as the soup was going out to the dining room the kitchen door burst open and Christian Steiber lurched in.

Kari Geick was surprised, the weather was so nasty that she couldn't get over how anyone would think it was a good day for a hike. Christian was very much reduced and he tried to tell them urgent news, but it was difficult to learn much about the situation because he had a heavy German accent and imperfect English, and he was further choked by fatigue and cold. The crew did understand that there were two people behind him and going slowly, but they didn't learn how far away they were, how bad their condition was, or even what trail they were on. Trails approach Madison Spring Hut like spokes aimed at a hub and the crew guessed the people were on the Osgood Ridge because that's the only major trail that approaches on the kitchen-door side

of the hut. So they got Christian out of his wet clothes and into a crewroom bunk to warm up, and then they waited for a little while.

Here, too, there were complicating factors. The need for help is subjective and it's liable to misreading. For instance, earlier that summer a woman came in to one of the other huts and reported that her mother was out on the range and having chest pains. This is an automatic danger signal and the crew started up the trail at a fast clip. When they reached the afflicted woman, it turned out that the shoulder straps on her pack were too tight.

The crew waited for a few minutes to see if anyone would come in after the German boy, but no one did. Emily was thinking, "Oh God, we've got dinner all underway here . . ." Then she told Lars to make up a pack of useful gear and see if he could find anyone on the Osgood Trail. Lars pulled on as much wool and polypropylene as he had, then a hat and rain jacket with a drawstring hood, and he put his mittens in his pack along with a blanket and extra clothes. He took the small high-band radio and Thermos bottles filled with hot Jello, and at 6:15 P.M. he started up the Osgood Trail toward the summit of Madison.

Lars was a good person for the job. He was twenty-two years old, he'd been hiking in the New Hampshire mountains since he was seven, he was six feet tall and 155 pounds, and after a summer of packing loads up to Madison Spring Hut he was exceptionally fit and strong. Now he found Tavis Barr on the Osgood Trail about 500 feet from the hut.

Topography is important here. Timberline is not a precise location, it's more like a zone, and Madison Spring Hut sits in an open field of rock and grass and moss that's inside a ring of scrub growth that protects the lowest part of the trail for about 350 feet above the hut. Tavis was sitting on a rock just above the top of the scrub growth.

The boy was completely exposed to the wind and driving sleet. He was cold but he was coherent, and he told Lars that his father was farther up the trail. Lars asked him how his father was getting along and Tavis said he didn't exactly know. Tavis remembers that Lars had quite a number of things with him, and when the hutman tried to give him some warmer gear, he said, "No, my dad's going to need them more than I do." He did take some hot Jello and a pair of gloves, but Lars couldn't learn much more about Don except that he'd been going slower and slower and Tavis thought his father was dying up there and he came on ahead to find help.

Lars judged that Tavis was certainly uncomfortable but not in serious trouble at the moment, and he asked the boy if he could hang in there for a while longer. Then he tried to tuck him into a bit more sheltered position in the rocks and started up the trail. Lars judged the wind to be about 60 mph and the fog had cut visibility to seventy-five feet. Tavis hadn't said how far up his father was, but Lars was familiar with the terrain, it was his summer backyard, so he made a fast climb even though the gusty tailwind knocked him down several times. It got noticeably colder as he came closer to the summit and the rain turned to sleet and added a sandblast effect to the misery.

Don Barr was lying in the middle of the trail on the near end of that short summit ridge; he was in a level place in the trail that gave no protection at all from the wind and he was in very poor condition. Lars couldn't tell if he'd fallen or if he simply lay down, but he was only semi-conscious and mumbling incoherently and he didn't seem to understand what Lars said to him. Don's condition had put him beyond reason and he resisted Lars' efforts to help him; he'd stiffen up and try to protect his body, and he wouldn't take the hot Jello and he wouldn't let Lars put any clothes on him. Lars tried to drag him and he tried to roll him, but he couldn't move Don at all. Lars tried to get through to him, he put his face right down with him and tried to talk to him, but Don barely registered the presence of his Samaritan, he'd just groan.

In fact, Lars could hardly manage the extra clothes himself. Don was wearing jeans and a light jacket and they were soaked, so Lars immediately started to pull extra gear out of his pack. The first thing was a hat. The wind tore it out of his hands and sent it spinning away toward the valley.

Lars did not have a large supply of emergency equipment: "I didn't have a tent or anything, no sleeping bag. I brought a blanket to warm somebody if they were moving—I didn't anticipate that the guy would be lying down and not able to do anything. What we understood was that they were coming along and I was just bringing up a Thermos of hot Jello, which is always a good thing. I had a flashlight and a blanket and some extra clothes—I just ran out the door hoping I could get these folks in, so I wasn't equipped to deal with somebody that couldn't move."

This is always the difficult choice: to wait for a while in hopes of getting more information and making a better-informed rescue, or to go out as quickly as possible and see what can be done. Reports of trouble are often

MacDonald Barr collapsed on the summit of Mount Madison in the great storm of August 24, 1986. His son Tavis was able to reach the patch of dwarf spruce just above Madison Spring Hut. It took two crew members 40 minutes of hard work to bring him in from there, but they could not help his father.

fragmentary and vague, the trouble might be a twisted ankle or a heart attack, and Christian had given the hut crew very little to go on.

By now it was 6:45 P.M. and the situation was critical and moving quickly to lethal. The wind was rising into the 70–80 range and sleet was mixing with the driving rain; the sun was still shining somewhere, but the Northern Peaks were smothered in dense storm clouds. Then more bad luck joined the emergency: the radio Lars had with him was not on the same wavelength as the radio at the hut.

Joe Dodge was an expert and enthusiastic promoter of radio since his childhood. He retired from AMC duty at Pinkham Notch in 1959, and, following his lead, the Pinkham office and all the huts were equipped with two-way radios in 1964. In accordance with the standards of the day, this was low-band equipment in rather large cases containing eleven batteries, and

there was a solar charging unit. And, since there was only one radio at each hut, they could not be used as base and remote in emergencies.

Twenty years later, the goal was to provide each AMC facility with two new high-band radios of light hand-held design. These, with a repeater on Cannon Mountain, would put all the AMC huts in contact with headquarters in Pinkham and with each other, and they were suitable for base-remote operations. These radios are expensive and the system was being completed piece by piece with money raised through donations and the sale of various small items such as bandannas. In 1986, Madison had one of the new radios and one of the old low-band models, which meant that both their radios could talk to Pinkham but they couldn't talk to each other.

When Lars left the hut he took the high-band radio, and after he'd done everything he could for Don Barr he pulled it out of his pack to call Pinkham and heard an urgent conversation already going on. Two hikers had been overtaken by the storm on the flanks of Mount Washington, they were above timberline and somewhere between Oakes Gulf and Boott Spur, but they were well-equipped and they did the smart thing, they pitched their small mountaineering tent in a sheltered spot, battened down the hatches, and settled themselves to wait for better weather.

These hikers were overdue on their planned arrival and this had been noted, so search parties were deployed and Lars could hear them talking to each other. In fact, the whole hut system was listening. The eight AMC huts are spaced about a day's hike apart and Peter Benson was listening from Zealand, three huts away at the edge of the Pemigewasset Wilderness. Jennifer Botzo was hutmaster at Lonesome Lake at the far end of the chain and she could hear the exchanges clearly. Suddenly she heard someone break into the talk on Mount Washington. "This is Lars on top of Madison," he said, "this is an emergency." Jennifer could also hear the wind roaring around him.

Peter Crane heard him down at headquarters in Pinkham Notch. It was 6:55 P.M. and the main building was filled with the hubbub of a full house at dinner. Peter was carrying a high-band radio and he heard the call from Lars, but the message was indistinct. The problem was not in the electronics, it was in the air; his words were masked by the blast of the wind, but Peter understood that there was trouble on Madison. In keeping with his careful nature, he began a log on the evening.

Peter was one of the ranking veterans on the Presidential Range. In the fall of 1977 he took the caretaker job at the Harvard Mountaineering Club cabin below Huntington Ravine and the following spring he began work with the AMC. He spent three summers in different huts, three off-seasons in remote caretaker positions, two winters at the shelter in Tuckerman Ravine, and in the spring of 1984 he was appointed assistant manager at the AMC headquarters in Pinkham Notch. By the summer of 1986 he was on the "Notch Watch," one of two people detailed in 24-hour shifts to deal with problems that might arise in the valley operation or emergencies on the heights.

Peter brought more than wide experience to the job; he was also a person of remarkable calm. Now Lars said that he'd done all he could for Don Barr, he said he couldn't move him, that he'd tried to drag him and even roll him, but the man just stiffened up and it wasn't working at all.

Hut crews are housekeepers, not ambulance personnel, and Lars was not feeling very confident, but after just a few exchanges on the radio he felt stronger. "Peter was great. I remember his voice being very calm and that was Peter—he was very good for this kind of situation. I summarized the situation and said there was nothing more here, but there's this kid down below and he is still able to move, from what I can see, and I think we need to get him in, and then maybe we can come back up and try to get this guy down the hill, but I can't do it myself. Peter said, 'You make the call. We don't want to lose you up there—you do what you can.' He asked if I could move him and I said I could not." Peter told him to shelter Don as well as he could and get back down to the hut for reinforcements.

Then Peter asked Lars if the low-band radio at the hut was switched on so he could speak to the crew there, and Lars said that he didn't think it was. This was not a mistake; those old units were in semi-retirement and it was not standard practice to leave them on. At this point Emily and her crew had only the sketchy news brought by Christian Steiber and the situation might be relatively easy—a man was a little way back on the trail and Lars could take care of him with hot Jello, a blanket, a helping hand, and an encouraging presence.

When Peter finished his talk with Lars on Mount Madison he called the weather observatory on the summit of Mount Washington and asked them to try to raise the Madison crew on the observatory's low-band radio, but the summit could not establish contact. Immediately after this, at 7:00 P.M.,

Lars called Peter again and said that he could not find any place nearby that offered more shelter than the one Don was in, and that he hadn't been able to move him anyway. He emphasized that Don was shaking and convulsive.

Peter understood that they had a dangerous emergency on their hands and the moment Lars' call ended he called the Androscoggin Valley Hospital, eighteen miles from the Valley Way parking lot. The AVH staff is familiar with mountain emergencies, so Peter brought them up to date on the Madison situation and asked them to stand by, and they advised him on treating Don.

That call was at 7:10 and at 7:15 Peter called Frank Hubbell at SOLO, an organization thirty miles south of Pinkham Notch that specializes in training emergency personnel. No live voice answered at SOLO and Peter left a message on their machine. Then he called the Mountain Rescue Service in North Conway; he didn't know how many AMC staff would be available for emergency duty and he wanted to put MRS on standby.

Peter also called Troop F of the state police and asked them to engage the Fish and Game unit responsible for the area. Carl Carlson of Fish and Game called back at 7:25 and said that he was putting additional necessary people in the loop. Then Peter called Bill Arnold of the very active Randolph Mountain Club. Bill was one of the Forest Service men at the Dolly Copp campground on the northern flank of Mount Madison and Bill said he'd call Gary Carr about further Forest Service involvement. Then Peter called Mike Pelchat, the state of New Hampshire's manager of its interests on the summit of Mount Washington. All that was done by 7:35.

Meanwhile, Janet Morgan was organizing a team of AMC staff in Pinkham Notch. They had warm clothing, rain gear, heat packs, Thermoses, and headlamps with extra batteries, and they also had oxygen to be administered by Brad Ray, the Forest Service ranger in Tuckerman Ravine and a veteran of thirty years of mountain emergencies. Finally, Peter impressed the nature of the situation on the AMC crew, he reminded them of the first rule of search and rescue: that they could not help the victim of a life-threatening emergency if they became victims themselves.

Up at Madison Spring Hut, Lars didn't come back and he didn't come back and Emily was thinking, "Oh man—what is going on?" The Osgood Path rises directly from the hut to the summit, Lars was young and strong and he had good clothes, but as night came on the conditions were so severe on top of Mount Madison that he was barely able to get back down himself. The

wind was in the 70s and gusting into the 80s and it was right in his face. His body did not obey thought, it obeyed cold and wind, and Lars staggered and lurched down the summertime trail he knew so well until he found Tavis.

"He hadn't moved, obviously he was stuck and he was getting pretty incoherent. I thought, 'Alright, I've got to try get him in. It isn't that far to the hut, so give it a try.' I stood him up and I tried to move him but we were getting pushed over, flattened, and we'd be flopping around and I'd try to get him up again. He was very stiff, he was not helping much at all at that point, kind of a dead weight or even worse than that, he was a sort of resisting weight." Lars wasn't sure of Tavis' mental state, "His speech was slurred and I guess he recognized that I came back down alone and he asked 'How's my dad?' and I said we're going to go back up and get him."

Lars got back to the hut at 7:40. He went in through the kitchen door and found Emily and said, "We've got to talk—there's something serious going on out there." The kitchen and the dining room and the crew room were all crowded with people and Emily didn't want everyone in the hut overhearing what Lars had to say, so she hustled him and Alexei down the aisle between the dining room tables and out the dining room door and into the dingle that serves as a wind break, a dank shelter with the space of two telephone booths. Lars said, "There's a guy dying up there." He used a strong intensifier and this all happened so fast that Emily hadn't pulled the door shut behind them. She shot him a warning glance as she latched the dining room door and at the same time she said to herself, "Oh my God—we've got a major thing going on here."

The dingle didn't provide much shelter, so Emily had a hurried conference out there. Alexei was hopeful; he hadn't been out in the storm and he didn't quite believe it could be that bad. The crew had been out in some pretty bad weather that summer and his feeling was, "Come on, are you sure we can't go out there?" Lars was pessimistic about Don Barr's chances and he hadn't been able to move Tavis along either, but the boy was much nearer the hut and in better condition, so that was the priority. By now the guests knew something was going wrong and several of them said they were ready to go out and help, but Emily didn't think she could put any of the guests at peril out in the storm.

Lars called Pinkham from the hut and the connection was still poor, but Peter Crane got more information about the situation on the summit. He learned that there was another person about a tenth of a mile from the hut

who was also hypothermic, but could probably walk if he was strengthened against the high winds and slippery footing. Peter backed up Emily's plan that two or three people should help this second person down to the hut. Lars was used up and Emily was needed to keep things moving in the hut and to oversee the developing situation out in the storm, so Alexei and Kari were the ones to go. They'd take chocolate bars, more clothes, and hot Jello, and do everything they could to bring Tavis in.

Alexei had just graduated from high school, he was 6'1" and after a summer at Madison his lean and rangy frame was almost a twin to Lars. Kari was 5'3" and slender, but her many years of riding and the requirements of handling powerful thoroughbreds made her much stronger than her small presence might suggest.

Kari and Alexei left the pots and pans for other hands to finish and got ready for the storm. Kari put on all the pile clothing she had, then wind gear, a hat and gloves, and an extra jacket; then she and Alexei made up a pack with reinforcements for Tavis and took their turn in the storm. There was still enough daylight in the clouds for them to see, but the air was a maelstrom of stinging sleet and the battering wind was still gaining strength. About 500 feet from the hut they spotted Tavis sitting on the rock. He was not on the trail as Lars said he would be, he was a ways off to one side and they were lucky to spot him.

Tavis was so badly chilled that he had difficulty talking, his speech was slow and slurred and Kari remembers that all he said clearly was, "My dad's up there—my dad needs help." Kari felt it was important to stay positive and she said, "We came to help you. You need help now and we came to help you." They got extra clothes and mittens on him, and even though he was having difficulty swallowing they got some warm Jello into him.

Looking back on that night, Kari says, "He had pretty much seized up by that time and he was very, very cold. The winds were very high, it was right around dusk, it was right around freezing and it was raining. The rain was beginning to freeze on the rocks.

"Tavis couldn't walk. Alexei and I could sometimes get on either side of him and haul him along and we did a lot of pushing and pulling and hauling. We kept saying, 'We've got to keep moving, Tavis, we've got to keep moving.' Up on the rocks he would literally get blown over, so we tried to keep a low profile. He didn't have the strength to stand up, anyway."

At first they were out on large, rough and exposed rocks, then the trail entered the scrub. "It was better down out of the wind. We could be on either side of him as much as possible and we tried to get him to walk, but he had extreme cramps in his legs."

As Alexei remembers, "It's not the kind of thing where you hold his hand and walk him down the path, it's a scramble. It was difficult to figure out a method of bringing him down, aside from picking him up and putting him on our backs, because he wasn't able to move very well. His legs seemed almost paralyzed, almost like cerebral palsy.

"So we were trying to encourage him. It was kind of sliding and it was very messy, me pulling on his legs and Kari pushing him from the back, skidding him along." They bumped and scraped on the rocks and tried not to get lost themselves because they had to go where the rocks and wind would let them go rather than where they thought the trail was. Then the terrain finally eased a bit and they got Tavis up on his feet, but he could not stay steady.

It was almost dark, and in the ruthless conditions even the best intentions and surest orientation might not be enough to avoid moving with the pressure of the wind, which would take them across the slope and away from the hut, but the light from the windows was a lighthouse in the fog. The Osgood Trail leads north of the hut, so they cut across the clearing and headed for the kitchen door. Alexei was new to this. "It's August and I didn't maybe think it was a life or death thing, you have this concept that it's summer and he's pretty close to the hut, it's no big deal, but you have this winter storm . . ."

Lars was worried; he knew what it was like out there and it seemed to him that they were taking a long time for the short distance they had to go. "After a while I was beginning to wonder when they were going to show up. I was full of adrenaline when I came in, and when I finally stopped and rested I was pretty cold and shivery and soaked to the bone, and I wasn't in any shape to go right back out again."

Alexei and Kari spent forty minutes moving Tavis that tenth of a mile back to the hut. Inside, conditions were at full stretch. The two hikers who came in without reservations could not be turned away, so the accommodations were two over capacity at fifty-two and a full dinner had to be served, cleared away, all the pots and pans and table settings washed up, and makings for the next day's breakfast started. There was wet clothing hanging from every projection and nothing dry to put on, there was no heat beyond the stray

BTUs that slipped out of the kitchen while the crew was preparing dinner, and the hut had been buried in supersaturated clouds all day. The arrival of Christian and Tavis, both in dire need of restoration, called on an account that had already been fully spent.

Then Stephanie Arenalas took hold. Tavis was hypothermic and barely able to speak, he was soaking wet, his muscles were going into spasm, and he'd been considerably battered as Kari and Alexei hauled him down over the rocks. Beyond that, his father was alone in the storm up above the hut and there was no way of helping him.

The Madison crew room opens off the kitchen and it used to be claustrophobic, with just enough space for two double bunks and a window. Then it was rebuilt and made into a much larger and more comfortable space, with a three-tiered bunk immediately to the left of the door, a double bunk on the adjoining wall, two windows and a table on the third wall, and then a hinged arrangement that's wider than the other bunks and can be used for extra sleeping space or as a daytime settee or folded up out of the way.

Christian was already in one of the bunks, so Stephanie and another crew member got Tavis out of his wet clothes, dried him off as well as they could and gave him warm Jello to drink, and put him into a sleeping bag with blankets over it in that wide folding daybed. Stephanie knew that Tavis wouldn't get any colder, but he wouldn't warm up very fast either. She knew that the 98 degrees of heat she could contribute were all they had, so she stripped down and got into the sleeping bag with him.

While the hut crew was struggling with the storm, Walter Wintturi of the U.S. Forest Service called Peter Crane and said that he was in contact with Brad Ray and three or four USFS people would probably be available to go up to the heights of Madison. Ten minutes later Dick Dufour of Fish and Game called Peter and said he was in touch with Carl Carlson. Five minutes after that, at 7:50, a radio call came from the hut telling Peter that Alexei and Kari were tending to Tavis.

Up at the hut, Emily and whatever other crew member who wasn't out on the mountain working on behalf of Don and Tavis were keeping things going for the guests. They'd set out the usual bountiful dinner, attended to refills and the other table needs, cleared off, and set out the next course. The hut was not very comfortable. There used to be a wood stove in the dining room, but that was gone now and there was no heat except the propane rings in the

kitchen and the natural furnace of the hikers' bodies, but the metabolic fires were running at a very reduced setting and the hut was dank and clammy.

At 8:00 P.M., a team of eighteen people left Pinkham in two vans to drive around to the Valley Way parking lot and start up to the hut. Forty-five minutes later Emily called Peter to report that Tavis was in the hut and being tended to, but he was very groggy and debilitated.

That left Don Barr alone in the night and the storm. Emily was in her first day as hutmaster and she was in a tough spot. The weather was still getting worse at the hut and she knew by way of the Pinkham radio relay that the Mount Washington observatory could not promise any relief that night.

On paper, the crew's main responsibility was the hut, but this night's responsibilities were already off the paper. One consideration was the carry itself. There were only four people on the hut crew, which is not enough for a litter carry. Emily knew about that. There's something about a rescue that fixes the imagination on heroic carries to safety, so when a call came to Pinkham during Emily's rookie summer there, she thought "Whoo . . . !" and she was quick to volunteer. It was an easy case; someone went lame on the Tuckerman Ravine Trail a short way above Pinkham and that trail is almost as wide and smooth as a country lane. Emily took her first turn at the carry, stumbling along without seeing her feet and trying to stay in step and keep the litter steady and match the level of her grip to the other carriers and it wasn't very long before she was thinking, "Oh man—this really sucks!"

The situation facing her Madison crew was much more difficult. The guests knew there was a tough situation in their midst and several of them came up to Emily with offers of help. They could help with after-dinner housekeeping, but Emily knew she couldn't ask them to go outside. She was thinking of the chaos that could overtake the evening, how there could be people with all degrees of strength and skill out on the rocks of the summit cone and no effective way of keeping track of them or coordinating their work. Even more to the immediate point, there was hardly a stitch of dry clothing anywhere in the hut. The storm was still gaining strength and the hut crew and volunteers alike would be wet and tired and more prone to hypothermia at the start of the rescue than anyone should be at the end of it.

At this point, Emily was the only one among the guests and the crew who hadn't been out in the storm and she was also the most experienced among them, which would make her the best candidate for a rescue team.

But at the same time, she was the hutmaster and she was wondering where her responsibility really lay. Should she lend her strength and experience to a rescue effort, or should she stay in the hut to hold things together there?

By now, Christian had gotten up and he was in the kitchen having something to eat. Tavis was in bed in the crew room and he was beginning to recover from his own hypothermia, he was saying, "Where's my father—where's my father?" Stephanie was still with him; she told him that they were doing everything they could to help his father, but at the same time she didn't want to give him false hopes, because his father was still out there on top of the mountain and alone in the lashing storm.

The hut crew was finally all indoors and they knew they were up against it, they knew they had to talk it over, they had to decide about MacDonald Barr. This led to another problem. There were people everywhere in the hut, they were finishing dinner and milling around in the dining room and the bunk rooms and some were lending a hand cleaning up in the kitchen. Christian Steiber was in the kitchen, too, and Tavis was in the crew's bunk room. So where could Emily gather her crew for a serious talk?

Madison Spring Hut is T-shaped: The kitchen and crew bunkroom are at the base of the T, the dining room is the rest of the leg, two big bunkrooms are the left and right arms of the T, and there's a bathroom at the back of each of the bunkrooms, women on the left, men on the right. It was after-dinner hot drink time, so Emily asked a couple of the helpful guests if they could keep the fixings coming in from the kitchen; then she called for attention and said that the crew would be busy for a while and could everyone take turns using the men's bathroom.

Then the crew gathered in the women's bathroom to talk things over. They knew the Mount Washington weather observatory had reported no signs of relief on their charts. On the contrary, the observatory crew said the storm would probably intensify through the night.

Emily and Lars and Alexei and Kari tried to think the situation through. Emily thought most about the wind; she knew it can be raining hard or snowing like crazy and hikers can still be all right; it fact, they can enjoy it. But it was the wind—above timberline the wind simply tears away every defense.

The Madison crew knew that Don Barr was in mortal danger, but mortal danger was everywhere on the mountain that night; once out there, everyone would be equally exposed. Lars remembers, "There was a little bit of

An AMC group at the original Madison Spring Hut, January 1906.

A group of hikers resting outside Madison Spring Hut in 1987. The original hut accommodated 12 hikers. Today, 52 people can sleep there.

bravado—'Oh, we can try it—it's our job, we're able to do these things, so let's give it a shot.' We'd all been out, though, and I think we quickly realized that all of us except Emily had just been out in the weather and we probably wouldn't be in such great shape to try again."

There was also the matter of numbers. Even in the best circumstances imaginable, even on a walking path in the valley with fair skies and sweet breezes, the four members of the Madison crew would have difficulty managing a half-mile litter carry by themselves. In the cold and dark and rain and rocks and wind, they would have no chance at all. There was no shortage of willing help among the guests in the hut, but they were there to take shelter, not to risk their lives. Beyond that, taking an unknown and untrained group out on a rescue brings its own hazards, both physical and ethical. The first members of the AMC group from Pinkham were already arriving and the Madison crew had seen them. Lars says, "We started seeing these folks coming in from Pinkham in various states of hypothermia themselves and certainly not prepared to go up on the mountain beyond the hut."

All these thoughts were in the women's bathroom and even though not all of them were said out loud, the hut crew knew that they'd decided. It was not a debate. Lars remembers, "We realized at that point we were making decisions to forget any hope of trying to rescue him or bringing him back alive. We knew that was weighing over us. But we also knew that it was ridiculous to try to go up there to get him. The choice had been made before us." No one asked for a vote or tried to persuade anyone else, but they knew that the risk to a rescue group outweighed the benefit to Don Barr, and Emily summed it up for them: The danger is too great, our resources are too small, and we're not going to go out tonight.

The valley forces were on their way, so at 8:55 Peter Crane called Emily for another report from the hut. Peter was in a position to launch the rescue on his own authority, but, as he says now, "Recognizing that there could be more than one answer to the question, I asked if a party would be going out from the hut. It's very easy for someone in a warm building ten miles away to ask other people to go out, and names like Albert Dow come to mind." Albert was a member of the volunteer mountain rescue squad based in North Conway, and four years earlier he'd been killed while trying to help two teenagers whose inexperience had led them into difficulty.

Peter finishes the thought: "But if those people can actually feel the buffeting of the wind and the stinging ice pellets and have to stare out into the dark fog—if they make the decision that that's excessive risk for them, then I think we in our warm places have to respect that decision, even though it could have grave consequences." Emily told him the difficult news of her decision, and he backed her up completely; he said she should not risk anyone beyond the immediate shelter of the hut.

Right after this exchange Peter called the AMC personnel regrouping on the Valley Way. He told them that twelve should continue up to the hut, stay overnight, and go to work at first light if conditions allowed. The other six in the mobile group should return to Pinkham to keep normal operations going, though that number was considerably below the usual complement. The group should be divided so the strongest members would go up to the hut and those with necessary duties at Pinkham should return. After this conversation, he called Don Dercole of the Forest Service and brought him up to date, adding that his personnel might want to stay in the valley overnight and be ready for an early-morning departure rather than squeeze into the overcrowded hut. He also called Carl Carlson at Fish and Game asking for a call-back on the telephone.

Then Peter called Emily again. The contrast between his strong experience and his mild presence can be disconcerting, and he tells of that dreadful night in a voice that is hardly more than a whisper: "There had been more time to reconsider, or perhaps to wind down a little bit on what had happened thus far. After that decision was made, that initial decision, they had the opportunity to rethink, to reconsider, perhaps to have either more worries go through their head that this was the right decision or to gain confidence within that decision, so I asked again if this was something that they still wanted to follow through with. I indicated that this was a very serious decision they were making and asked if they wanted to re-evaluate their situation and the weather conditions." Emily told him that the situation at the hut had not changed, and they would stay with their decision.

Alexei was still cold and worn from his struggle with Tavis, but it was time for his other duties. The next day was his turn to cook, so he was busy with the small things of hut life; he was laying out the bacon and mixing the dry ingredients for the biscuits he'd make in the morning, and thinking ahead to what he'd make for dinner. He decided on the entrée and he'd probably

make cheese bread. Emily taught him how to make cheese bread on the first day he cooked that summer, and he liked it so well that it was practically the only kind of bread he ever made.

Meanwhile, the crew was trying to keep Tavis in the picture, but they were being careful not to give him unrealistic hopes or unrealistic fears. He understood what they were doing. "At that point I knew that he was going to die. They made it sound like, 'We'll see if he's okay,' but you know, as a thirteen-year-old kid I thought they were just kind of delusioned. Now I know they were trying to put a good note on it, but . . ."

At 9:30 P.M. Peter called the Mount Washington Observatory again. They told him that the temperature remained steady at 32° with fog, rain, sleet, snow showers, and maximum visibility of fifty feet; the wind was averaging 79 mph, gusting regularly to the mid-80s and occasionally into the 90s. They expected no change over the next twelve hours except in the temperature, which might go lower. Peter knew that conditions would be only slightly less extreme where Don Barr was on the summit of Mount Madison.

Peter tried to raise the group of AMC staff on the trail at 9:30, but he couldn't get them directly, nor could he reach them through the RMC relay. The upper sections of the Valley Way run through a deep cleft in the mountain and the topography blocks most transmission angles into it. He kept trying and he finally got through to Charlie McCrave on the trail and brought him up to date; Charlie said that his leading group was pretty well up by now and they'd keep going to the hut and regroup there. Peter had been keeping track of the numbers and he realized that Madison Spring Hut was two over capacity before any emergency crews arrived. Now it would be getting critically short of space.

Just then a call came from Troop F of the state police; they had more powerful radio equipment and mobile units on the road, and through them Peter arranged for four Forest Service men and three of his AMC contingent to turn around on the Valley Way and spend the night in Randolph. Ten minutes later he called Carl Carlson, the veteran at Fish and Game, and brought him up to date on the situation.

The regular 10:30 weather transmission from the summit observatory reported no change in wind or temperature, with intermittent snow and heavy icing. Ten minutes later, more members of the Pinkham crew arrived at the hut with their radio and fifteen minutes after that the three Pinkham crew

who had turned around on the trail called from the parking lot at the base of the Valley Way and said they'd stand by to see if any more people would be coming down the trail. At 11:30 the last two members of the Pinkham group reached the hut and the five waiting in the parking lot were cleared to return to Pinkham.

Five minutes later Peter went to bed, but he did not rest. "You know there's someone up on the mountain and half a mile from the hut who most likely will not survive the night. It weighs on you." Up at the hut, everyone managed to find a bit of space to lie down and see if they could sleep. The crew room was full, the two big bunkrooms were full, there were people sleeping upstairs in the storage attic, there were people sleeping on the dining room tables and on the floor in places where they hoped no one would step on them. During the night the summit observatory recorded winds of 121 mph.

Emily went to bed in her crewroom bunk, but she did not sleep. She kept getting up, she'd go out to look at the night, she'd sit in the kitchen and think, "Could we do it?" There was wet clothing hanging everywhere and draped on every possible spot and she'd feel to see if it was getting dry. She even thought about how many for-sale AMC T-shirts there were—she could hand those around for dry clothes. She listened to the sleeping sounds of the people all around her in the hut, and most of all she kept listening to the constant roaring and rushing of the wind and she thought that sometimes storms just suddenly blow themselves out and she'd stretch to see if she could hear the slightest lessening that might bring hope, but she never heard it.

Stephanie was still with Tavis. "It was hard for me to know what he was thinking. I don't remember much sleep. I was staring out the window into the darkness and holding him and trying to reassure him that he was okay. People were coming in and out and there was the darkness and he was sleeping some. I was whispering to him and murmuring to him in the night, trying to be quiet."

First light came and at 5:55 A.M. Emily radioed Pinkham with a weather report: 42° and wind-driven rain at the hut, and the rescue group up there would be ready to start for the summit in five minutes. On consultation it was decided to send a carry party of nine to the summit and keep a relief group of five at the hut. Peter reminded the hut contingent that Don should be treated as any person in severe hypothermia: his wet clothes should be removed and

replaced with dry insulation, he should be protected from wind and further wetting, and any possible heat loss should be eliminated as far as possible.

Then Peter again made sure that Emily and everyone in her crew remembered the first rule of search and rescue: No member of the rescue group should risk becoming a victim. The litter group left the hut at 7:05 and they found Don Barr thirty minutes later. He was in the trail just below the summit of Mount Madison and the EMT people determined that he was unresponsive.

It was the second time up there for Lars: "The wind was still blowing pretty good, certainly not as high as the night before, the clouds had lifted and the angle of wind had changed just enough so when we got to the flat place where he was lying it was almost calm. He was just lying there with his hands crossed on his chest." Lars stood off to one side in that small island of quiet air, out of the way of the people tending to Don. It was his first death and he kept thinking that he was the last one to see Don alive, and now this. Then he saw Emily go over and kneel down beside him.

Emily was struck by the way Don lay there on his back with his hands crossed on his chest and she thought that he looked very peaceful and composed; this was such a contrast to what she expected that she almost spoke to him. She saw that his eyes were wide open and looking up into the endless sky, and she thought it was time for his eyes to close. Emily remembered all those death scenes in the movies where someone reaches out with a small gesture and brushes a person's eyelids down as a sort of final benediction, but now she learned that unseeing eyes don't close as easily as that.

The guideline among emergency teams is "Not dead until warm and dead," so this was still a rescue, not a recovery. They put Don Barr in a sleeping bag and added blankets and the weatherproof hypowrap, and they were careful to handle him as gently as they could, because when a person is in extreme hypothermia even a slight interruption can push the heart into crisis. They started down toward the hut with the litter, they were thinking, "Maybe there's a chance." The carry required everything they had—at one point the entire team was knocked down by the wind and they struggled to keep the litter from hitting anything.

Earlier in the morning Emily had sent a radio request for someone to start up the trail with dry clothing for Tavis and Christian, and a speedy volunteer was found for that mission. Tavis was in the kitchen while the crew was get-

ting ready to go up to the summit and Lars was watching him, "I could see in his eyes that he kind of recognized what had happened. But maybe there's still some hope, 'Okay, the rescue crew is going up and they're going to see what's going on.' We explained that hypothermia is one of those things where you can recover. We were injecting a little bit of hope into ourselves, that there is a possibility that he could make it. So I'm sure he was still holding out some hope, but he kind of knew that if his dad had been lying up there all night, things weren't very good."

When Kari Geick was back in the hut after she helped rescue Tavis, she decided that her best part was tending to the domestic routine. Everyone else on the crew was between eighteen and twenty-two years old and they'd been together all summer; she was five years older than the oldest of them, but she was still only a few hours into her career with the AMC. She did understand housekeeping, though, and the hut was still in full operation, so she decided to concentrate her efforts on the dishes and pots and pans and other domestic necessities, and free the regular crew for the difficult tasks rising on every side.

The next morning she was struck by what she saw. The crew was tending to routine tasks but there was a stunned quality everywhere. Alexei was the cook for this day and he'd finished his part of breakfast some time ago, so he began the usual business of checking out the guests. "It was kind of surreal, taking their Visas and MasterCards at the same time as all these other things were going on." The guests were very quiet as they packed up and most of them changed whatever other hiking plans they had and went down the Valley Way, where they'd be sure of quick shelter.

Traffic was moving up the Valley Way at the same time. There were men from New Hampshire Fish and Game and from the Forest Service and still more from the AMC. Stephanie was devoting all her time to Tavis, but she heard members of the crew saying, "Rich Crowley is coming up—Rich Crowley will be here soon," as if that would change everything and they'd be all right.

Kari heard this, too, and she was impressed and puzzled. Then she learned that Rich was the long-time manager of the storehouse down at Pinkham; he took the hut crew orders and did the food shopping to meet their cooking needs and then packed it into cartons and delivered it to the base of the pack trail, and this day he was coming up with extra clothes for Christian and

Tavis. Then he reached the hut and nothing changed. Kari decided that Rich was the person who took care of the hut crews—that's what the storehouse man does, he gets what the hut crews need. So, in the awful strangeness of that morning, it seemed natural that he'd be the one who could set things right.

The crew was amazed to learn that Tavis was only thirteen; seeing his size, they thought he was probably seventeen. They were worried about his day; they imagined the ways he could meet his father being carried in a litter with his face covered, and they worked out a timing to avoid that.

At 8:43 further reserves were alerted in an AMC group staying at Camp Dodge, the old CCC station four and a half miles from the Pinkham Notch headquarters. The litter party from the summit of Madison reached the hut at 9:00, and an hour later Emily called Pinkham and learned that further reinforcements of eleven people from the Forest Service, Fish and Game, and the AMC had started up the Valley Way at 9:15. At 11:15, the litter team started down the Valley Way with MacDonald Barr.

Stephanie Arenalas stayed with Tavis through the night and through the early hours in the kitchen when everyone was up and around and she stayed with him through breakfast. She cooked some things to eat for the various people coming up the Valley Way to help and she kept Tavis occupied while the litter party came past the hut with his father. Finally she and Rich Crowley started down the Valley Way with Tavis and Christian.

Tavis hadn't been saying much during the morning; the crew thought he seemed a bit distant and disengaged, and they tried not to crowd him. Then on the hike down he seemed to be bothered by the clothes that had been brought up for him. There wasn't any underwear and the pants were much too big, so the crew had made a belt for him out of a piece of the rope they use to tie loads on when they're packing supplies up to the hut. He kept talking about the pants as they made their way down the Valley Way and Stephanie realized that she really didn't know what a seventh-grader should say at a time like this.

That trail was originally built as a bridle path with easy grades all the way from the valley to the hut, but that was ninety years ago and now it was severely eroded by the many generations of hikers and the rains and meltwater of all the years. The footway was filled with loose rocks and roots and wet places, and a very severe test for a litter carry.

An hour after the litter party started down, a call went to the valley contingent to start up with relief carriers, and another hour after that three more AMC crew members headed for the Valley Way to help. The combined litter crew reached the Valley Way parking lot at 3:40 P.M. and they were met by an emergency response vehicle from the Androscoggin Valley Hospital. Every resuscitation effort failed and MacDonald Barr was pronounced dead later that afternoon.

Rich Crowley drove Stephanie and Tavis and Christian back to Pinkham Notch in his car and Stephanie went into the AMC building with Tavis. There was a telephone booth near the door and he insisted on calling his mother; then he told her abruptly that his father was dead. Yvonne Barr already knew; she'd had a call from an official source.

Stephanie and Rich thought it was time for Tavis to be alone for a while, so they showed him to a bunk upstairs in the crew quarters. Later that morning Mrs. Barr arrived at Pinkham and she met Peter Crane and Stephanie out near the kitchen. Stephanie tried to explain what had happened and what they tried to do up at Madison, but then she had to walk away from Mrs. Barr. She'd done all she could do.

The Madison crew was in the habit of making a little talk to the guests at suppertime. That evening Lars made a larger talk than usual. He talked about his love for the mountains and his respect for them and he said that people are not infallible, they're fragile up in the mountains and there are times when things go wrong, not as a sacrifice but as a reminder of what can happen. He talked about the cold fronts that come through at the end of August and how people start at the bottom and when they get to the top it's a different world. He told them that they'd come to our nice cozy hut expecting all sorts of amenities and we provide that to you, but you have to get here first. Then he said that one of those times came just the night before . . .

When he finished, Lars said later, "They were all looking at me." Kari Geick was looking at him, too. It seemed to her that the talk was partly for the guests and partly for himself, that it was his way of finishing up the terrible night of MacDonald Barr.

Three days later Emily was back at Middlebury College; she was on the women's field hockey team and they had a pre-season training camp. Everywhere she turned there was laughter and cries of greeting and hugs of reunion and, "How was your summer?" and, "My summer was really great!" Emily

gave them her greetings and her hugs, but she didn't go into much detail about being in charge at Madison Spring Hut.

THE TWO CLIMBERS WHO WERE MAROONED ON MOUNT WASHington were exposed to the full force of the storm on August 24, but when the weather moderated they emerged from their tent and hiked down the mountain without any adverse effects.

About ten years after the death of MacDonald Barr, two women hit heavy weather while crossing the range toward Madison Spring Hut. They were exhausted and felt unable to continue, so they took shelter under a plastic sheet they had with them. The crew at Madison Spring Hut heard about them and, remembering the story of MacDonald Barr, they went out along the range until they found the women a mile from the hut, and then the Madison crew insisted that the women get up and hike on to the hut.

Peter Crane stayed with the mountains. The weather observatory on Mount Washington has expanded its work and now runs extensive educational programs on the summit and in its valley station in North Conway. Peter is Director of Programs for the observatory.

Emily Thayer suffered a severe knee injury two days after the start of the Middlebury field hockey camp and she missed the whole semester. She continued with seasonal work for the AMC for three more years as summer hutmaster or winter caretaker. At this writing her brother Chris is the White Mountain Facilities Director for the AMC and lives in Sugar Hill with his wife and two children. Emily married Peter Benson, who followed the Barr emergency on the radio at Zealand Hut, and they have two children. Peter is the New Hampshire Preserves Manager for the Nature Conservancy. Emily has not forgotten MacDonald Barr; "It's always hovering, it's always there." Since then, she has run many guided hikes for mountain visitors.

Alexei Rubenstein worked at the AMC's Greenleaf Hut in the summer of 1987 and had to deal with a fatal heart attack there. Lars Jorrens took advanced EMT training and went on to teach those skills at Keeping Track, in Richmond, Vermont. He married Jennifer Botzo, who followed the Barr emergency on the radio from Lonesome Lake Hut.

Kari Geick stayed with the AMC longer than she expected. The next summer she worked at Carter Notch Hut with Emily and Lars, she worked

as a winter caretaker at Zealand Hut, and she guided hikes for two summers. After that she worked in Alaska and spent three years in Antarctica, including two winters at the South Pole. Her first day of AMC work is still with her. "It shaped my life. With my mountaineering life, or life in general, I look at what can happen."

There was, for instance, the day in May 1999 when she hiked up the Zugspitz, Germany's highest peak. It's a popular tourist climb, and she and her friend took a return path that led over a snow slope lingering from the winter. It was late in the afternoon, the sidehill fell away steeply, and Kari knew the soft snow of the day would be glazing over and she didn't have the right equipment. She took a long look, weighed the consequences of a slip, and turned back to find another way down.

Tavis Barr has not done much hiking since his father's death. Then in April 1999 he was on a trip to California and spent a day in Yosemite, where he and some friends hiked up the path to the top of the park's signature waterfall. "There were people there who were casually out on their day hike," he said later. "I don't think they'd thought twice about it, they were going up in the same jeans and T-shirts that we were wearing. You can see the top of the falls from the bottom, you can see it's not cold. But I could see that they're not cautious enough. I brought along a down coat and a sweater and a hat and gloves. There was no reason I needed a winter hat and gloves up there at the top, but I still remembered."