

# TSUNAMI-LIKE WAKE



## On the Hudson

**PICTURE THIS:** You own a beautiful piece of sandy beach, right on the Hudson River that has been in your family for generations. It has become a tradition to take your family to this beach for picnics, fishing, and just plain fun. Well this story is all about that piece of property and a terrible tragedy that possibly could have occurred there.

The situation that I am describing here is not that unusual, (I have heard and seen written accounts of it happening over the years) as I have also experienced it but certainly not to the extent that these folks did.

What is unusual is that the victims of this particular incident are very articulate in their description, have followed through in great detail, and are pointing out and incident that is extremely dangerous when it occurs.

As you can see by the photo Dick Duncan holding the striper, the surface of the water behind the man, is flat, no wind disturbing the surface.

In my experience these types of waves occur when a ship passes between two points that are fairly close to each other with a narrow deep channel between them. In the upper Hudson River this type of channel stretches for miles before you reach the Port of Albany.

Here is what happens: The ship having a deep draft, (the depth of the ship is down roughly 28 feet in a 30 foot channel) pushes the water out of its way as it

by **John H. Vargo, Publisher**

moves forward and after it passes the water reacts by filling the void, and then, rolling back up onto the shallow shore.

Thus you go from a flat, calm surface, to a high volume of water hitting the shore line without any warning whatsoever. The speed of the returning wave is directly related to how fast the water is replaced, based on the forward motion of the boat that created it.

Here are three eyewitness accounts of this occurring on May 2 of this year.

### From Sarah Elia

On May 2, 2018, I went to Coxsackie, New York to go fishing with my family on the Hudson River just south of the village. It's a quiet and tranquil place. We brought a lot of supplies with us to enjoy the afternoon on the beach. We set up a grill, hung a hammock and set up our folding chairs. We brought lots of fishing supplies and a lot of food. I rested on the beach while I watched Anna, my 3-year-old daughter, play along the shore and search for sea glass. It felt like the ideal spot to bring her to play. It is a quiet, private area where the water is calm, except for the occasional small wake when a boat goes by. So what happened toward the end of our day was really shocking. We were standing at the water's edge,



**Sarah, her husband Yoshike Miyazawa and daughter Anna.**

the tide had been slowly coming in. We watched a particularly large barge and tug go by (I recall that it had maroon and black on part of it) and soon after it passed, the water swiftly receded. I had never seen water go so far out into the river so quickly. We were so surprised about it. I held Anna's hand and we chased after it going out into the river. My mom screamed at us to come back. She said that the water would come back "in a wave like a tsunami". At that moment, she couldn't have predicted what had happened only seconds later. The sound of the incoming wake grew louder coming up from the south as the barge had been traveling north. We saw it toward the south end of the beach and quickly ran inland expecting to be splashed a little bit and maybe get our feet wet. But the water came faster than expected and suddenly it was at our ankles. Yoshiki, my husband, was behind us and told me to hold on tight to Anna. At this time, I was four months pregnant. I hadn't picked her up since I became pregnant back in January. Without thinking, I swept her in my arms and ran toward the embankment less than 20 feet away – there was only so far that we could go up to the ledge to this wall of land. Before reaching the embankment, the wake had caught us and we were up to our necks in water. If Anna hadn't been next to me within these moments, she surely would've been helplessly underwater. The water came in hard and my husband grabbed onto my arm. I glanced over to my mother and her boyfriend Dick, concerned about their well being. I watched Dick stand up, or perhaps was pushed up by the force of the water, faced the north and was knocked over face first into the water with his arms stretched out. My mother was

just south of him trying to grab hold of something and move inland but was also knocked over and engulfed into the water. The water then receded and left our bodies completely soaked. The water came in again hard. I watched as all of our belongings on the beach were swept into the river. Everything. Mortified, we checked on one another to make sure everyone was ok. Anna was crying. My mother and Dick were both on their hands and knees in shock and drenched. My husband checked on them and then ran into the river to try and retrieve our belongings. All I wanted to do was get off of the beach as quickly as possible with Anna. I didn't care about our belongings. Still holding onto her, with her cold, wet legs wrapped around my body, I ran north of the beach, climbed up the bank, and back across a field to our car. I didn't put her down until I got to the car. She was soaking wet and afraid. I took all of her clothes off so she wouldn't get cold. Fortunately it was a warm day, in the 80s. The others returned to the car. Yoshiki had to help mom as she was having a hard time walking and she was bleeding. Dick was limping. Their keys went missing with the wake and we all had to squeeze into our car. When we got back to Saugerties we drove to the Coast Guard Station on the Esopus Creek and reported the incident. I kept thinking about Anna though and that if she had not been next to an adult when this ferocious wake hit, the water would've just grabbed her and sucked her small body into the River. What if her young cousins had joined us that day running along the beach out of arm's length from an adult? They would have been sucked into the river by the monster man-made wake only because the barge was going too fast! This was not an act of nature, it should never have happened, and it could have been prevented with basic safety precautions.

## From Karlyn Knaust Elia

On Wednesday, May 2, 2018 at 3:30 PM a northbound Articulated Tug Barge (ABT) sailed past our property on the Hudson River at Coxsackie, N.Y. while my family and I were enjoying the lovely spring afternoon fishing and picnicking on the shore. Shortly after the vessel passed by, our peaceful outing became frightening and dangerous. When I saw the water receding dramatically I alerted the family to move away from the shore but within moments we were awash in tsunami-like walls of cold water. The ferocity with which the water hit us was stunning. Multiple wakes approximately five feet tall knocked us down and pulled us under. We were tossed around and hit with debris. We were underwater for 10 to 15 seconds and unable to help one another.

My partner, a skilled mariner and former Saugerties Lighthouse Keeper, and I were both underwater as waves continued to tumble us around. My pregnant daughter swooped up her 3-year-old daughter and grabbed onto her husband to maintain footing. They were in water up their necks.

The wakes created by the ATB were the largest and most dangerous I have ever experienced on the Hudson. All of our picnic items and fishing gear were swept off the beach and into the river. Some of it was recovered that day and some of it was permanently lost. A heavy wooden folding chair was totally destroyed. I have a badly bruised right leg and my partner is still limping due to a severely twisted knee.

The wake was enormous apparently due to the fact that this large vessel was traveling too fast where the river is narrow.

Our property is located at the south end of River Road in Coxsackie. It was formerly the site of an icehouse where barges tied up at the dock to load their product. It has been in our family since 1925. The icehouse is no longer there and we use the property recreationally.

The author of this letter has the coordinates' the AIS report including time speed an destination of the barge an tug involved in this incident. It is her wish that one of many authorities or government agencies do something about these incidents!

**To my readership:** *There are two sides to every story and there certainly is in this regard. There is a very fine line between operating a tug and barge or even a ship under the conditions that occur in the close quarters of the Hudson River. I have many friends that are 100 ton or higher captains. One or two have given up their jobs as captains as the responsibility of operating these ships rests on their shoulders and theirs alone. In many cases, what happens to them while operating a ship cannot be controlled by the captain. Engine failure, or breakdown of a mechanical part for instance or in the case of operating the ship or tug under extreme or even mild conditions. What the general public is completely unaware of is the forces of nature such as tides, currents, wind an weather that play a significant part in the daily operation of the vessel. So before conclusions are drawn these types of situations must be studied in great detail. I regret having to bring this situation to the attention of the general public as there is far too much negativity published regarding the Hudson River.*

## From Dick Duncan

May 2nd was an idyllic day on the shore of the Hudson near Coxsackie. There was a clean stretch of beach where 3 year old Anna could discover objects that delighted her. Beach glass, razor clam shells, bottles with no messages inside them. All the stuff that kids find fascinating on a Hudson River shoreline.--

We'd just finished roasting hot dogs on the charcoal grill and were fishing for bait to use for stripers. Numerous catfish were caught before a small white perch was landed. I quickly baited a large hook and sent it out into the river. A short time later a young male striper was on the beach. Alas, it was just shy of the 18 inches so after a quick snapshot it went back into the drink, hopefully to lend its DNA to the next litter of bass babies. It wasn't long afterward when a northbound barge appeared pushed by a tugboat. It was apparent that this boat was in a hurry. I watched as a fisherman in a nearby boat bobbed around violently.

As the unit sped by, doing about 12 knots by my estimate, I noticed that the water was being sucked off the beach, but still I wasn't sufficiently alarmed. I knew that a good-sized wake would be coming so I looked about to see that everything was up from the shoreline and seemingly safe. I had a rod a reel nearby propped against a tree but guessed that the wake wave might come up the handle a bit, but probably not get to the reel.

I was sitting on a driftwood log, largely unconcerned, still enjoying the delightful afternoon and the pleasant scenery. What happened next still makes me shudder. The size of the wake wasn't obvious to me as it approached from the south because of tree branches that overhung the water about 25 yards away. When the wake did arrive and was nearly upon me I was immobilized and in awe. This wake was climbing in height as it approached, until it was over my head. At age 79 I was unable to leap up and make a dash for higher ground, so I just sat there as this enormous wall of water hit me like a liquid bulldozer blade. The next 20 seconds are a blur, as I was hurled from my perch and tossed about in the maelstrom. I didn't have any idea which way was up but when the crash and roar of the wake receded I found myself about 25 feet away. Dazed and confused I staggered to my feet. Upon seeing that everyone else was at least present, I grabbed my phone and held it up and shook it in an attempt to salvage it. A glance at the river revealed that most of what we'd brought to the beach was now floating away. A recovery operation was quickly conducted and much of our gear was returned to shore. But missing were fishing rods, lure boxes, net and car keys among other things.

Shockingly, our delightful afternoon at the beach had turned into a violent, dangerous, cold and wet ordeal. We did our best to salvage whatever we could and began



Dick Duncan and Karlyn Knaust Elia just before the wve hit

our chilly and glum hike to the cars, only one of which could be started because of the missing key. I was limping badly because of a sprained knee and bruised ankle. I am only now, 4 weeks later, walking normally again.

As a former keeper of the Saugerties Lighthouse and a sailor on the Hudson for over thirty years I should have been wiser about the power of that wake, the likes of which I had never seen before. I hadn't adequately factored in the narrowness of the river, the south wind, incoming tidal current, and the speed and size of the vessel.

It's said that you can't teach an old dog new tricks but this old dog learned a harsh lesson that day that will never ever be forgotten.

**Waves under these conditions do not come in directly parallel to the beach but at right angles. Thus individuals may not even see the oncoming wave until it is too late.**

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## Hudson River Day Line

### REPORT OF BOATS AT DOCKS

teamer \_\_\_\_\_ Trip No. \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ 194

WEST SIDE	Time Slowed	Time Resumed	EAST SIDE	Time Slowed	Time Resumed
Columbia Yacht Club			Cornell Boat House		
West Park Dock			Navy Boat House		
Esopus Sun Oil Dock			Rhinecliff		
Kingston Point Dock			Barrytown (Standard Oil Dock)		
Hutton Brick Yard			Tivoli		
Terry Brick Yard			Germantown Landing Dock		
Ulster Landing			Oak Hill (Oil Dock)		
Turkey Point			Hudson Cement Works		
Glasco Brick Yards			Hudson Socony Oil		
Malden Brick Yard			Newton Hook		



THE PASSING DAYLINERS WERE NOTORIOUS FOR THEIR WAVES AS THEY PASSED. THEREFORE THE CAPTAIN OF THE DAYLINERS SUCH AS THE ALEXANDER HAMILTON, PETER STUYVESANT, AND OTHERS WERE REQUIRED TO FILL OUT THIS LOG TO PROVE THEIR SPEED AS THEY PASSED CERTAIN POINTS. TODAY AIS, (AUTOMATIC SHIP IDENTIFICATION SYSTEMS) prove out the speed, position and location of most ships that travel up and down the Hudson River.

**recordonline.com**  
 TIMES HERALD-RECORD

# Wave May Have Played Role In Rondout Drownings

by Paul Brooks, The Times Herald-Record  
 Posted Jul 26, 2001 at 2:00 AM  
 Updated Dec 15, 2010 at 5:53 AM

Esopus — Ulster County sheriff's officers are looking into whether the wake of ship on the Hudson River contributed to the deaths of three people in the Rondout Creek Monday.

The findings would help shed light on how the accident unfolded.

Sleightsburgh Park, a narrow hook of land that forms the south side of the Rondout Creek where it enters the Hudson, was the scene of Monday's tragedy. Four children and their baby sitter were swept into the water and a tangle of water chestnuts.

Nelson Oliveras, the 10-year-old who is one of the two survivors, said Tuesday that a wave from a large vessel knocked the group off the safe path into the deeper water and the floating vines.

Oliveras' sister, Alyssa Flores, 8, and brother, Mark Anthony Flores, 5, and the baby sitter, Sue Comer, 47, of Sleightsburgh, drowned as a result of the incident.

Without question, the waves from freighters and other large vessels on the Hudson have the power to sweep people off their feet.

Kingston Point Beach is on the Hudson River just north of the mouth of the Rondout Creek. A large buoy floats about 150 yards offshore. It marks the east side of the ship channel in the river, which brings ship traffic within what seems like spitting distance of shore.

"It depends on how big they are and how fast they are," said Paul Hintz, head lifeguard at the beach. "These ships are drafting 25-30 feet of water. Where is all that water going to go? It is going to go up on the beach."

On the Fourth of July, the wake from a passing freighter swept up the sandy beach 20 to 25 feet farther than normal. As the wave bounced around the cove where the beach lies, it swamped a bass-fishing boat, Hintz said yesterday.

The wakes are powerful enough to pick up and move the ropes marking the beach's swim area. The rope buoys are anchored with concrete weighing at least 150 pounds.

Kingston takes no chances. When a large freighter or tug boat passes the beach, life guards order swimmers out of the water and away from it. "That policy was established many, many years ago," said Ralph Vanacore, aquatics director for the city.

"This was terrible, a tragic situation," Esopus Supervisor Ray Rice said. "The river is a great recreational resource, but if you disrespect it, it will kill you in heartbeat."

TO THE READER: AUTOMATIC SHIP IDENTIFICATION WAS JUST COMING TO THE HUDSON RIVER WHEN THE RONDOUT INCIDENT OCCURRED TODAY AIS IS VERY COMMON AND SUPPORTED BY A NUMBER OF COMPANIES ON THE HUDSON RIVER

