

Kirk Jones

KIRK JONES grew up in the town of Canton in the north-central United States, close to the city of Detroit. On October 20th, 2003, when he was forty years old, Kirk went over Niagara Falls and survived. In the past, ten people had gone over inside containers, or protected in other ways, and survived. And, in 1960, a seven-year-old boy went over accidentally and lived. But Kirk went over in his ordinary clothes and he went over intentionally. He was the first person ever to do this without being killed.

Kirk's father, Ray, was a successful businessman. He owned a factory in Canton. When he finished his education, Kirk took a job in his father's factory. He stayed at this job and he continued to live in his parents' home.

In the summer of 2003, Ray decided to sell his business. He was getting old, and besides, the business was not doing as well as it had in the past. He and his wife, Doris, had decided to retire in Oregon, far away on the Pacific coast. Kirk planned to stay behind in Canton.

Before separating, Ray, Doris and Kirk decided to take a last trip together. They drove to Niagara Falls—about 250 kilometers from Canton. Kirk felt a bit depressed during the trip: he was losing his parents after living with them for his whole life, and, to make matters worse, he had lost his job when his father sold the factory. While the family were in Niagara Falls, Kirk started to think seriously for the first time about an idea that had crossed his mind occasionally in the past.

He knew that in the past hundred years or so fifteen people had gone over the falls as a stunt. They'd all protected themselves, by getting into barrels or big rubber balls—or in some other way. Kirk had a feeling, though, that if you went over in the right spot, you could survive without any protection. He had always felt insignificant because he'd never married or had a career or accomplished anything important in his life. He liked the idea of doing something spectacular that would impress people and make them notice him.

Eight weeks later, after his parents had left Canton, Kirk was feeling worse and was even thinking about committing suicide. He didn't really want to kill himself, but, at the same time, he didn't want to keep living in the way he had been. So he decided he would go over the falls. If he died, it didn't really matter. If he lived, he would have the satisfaction of having done something special—and, perhaps, afterwards, his life would be better.

So on October 18th, Kirk and his friend Bob Kruger drove from Canton to Niagara Falls. Kirk had \$300 his parents had sent him in his pocket. Bob brought along his video camera. When they arrived at the falls they crossed the border and found a motel on the Canadian side. Then they bought some vodka and had hamburgers for supper. The next day they spent some time driving close to the falls so Kirk could look for a good spot to go into the water. In the evening they went to a strip club.

In the morning they got up early and had a few drinks of coke and vodka. Then they headed for the place that Kirk had chosen. Kirk left a note for his family in Bob's car along with \$30—all the money he had left. Then they left the car. Kirk climbed through the guard rail that runs along the Niagara River and Bob walked a short distance in the direction of the falls, carrying his camera.

After he got under the rail, however, Kirk hesitated. He felt he didn't have the courage to jump in. He stood there for a while and finally decided he wouldn't go over the falls after all. He was