

High school athlete saves drowning man

A 16-year-old Mississauga high school student says he's surprised at all the media attention he received Monday after he braced himself against raging Credit River waters to save an Orangeville man from drowning.

James Hart, a Grade 10 student at St. Martin's Secondary School, spent most of Monday nursing severely strained muscles and granting interviews to newspapers and television crews about his dramatic Sunday rescue.

"I just happened to look down in the river and there he was coming up," Hart said. "He looked up and me and screamed for help. I reached back and grabbed onto a tree and then I put my foot on a rock to brace myself. Then I grabbed him by the collar of his wet suit and held on the best I could until help arrived."

Hart, a scuba diver and football player at St. Martin's, was taking part Sunday in the Credit River Cleanup Tube Race, an event staged by the Mississauga Scuba Club.

Peter Hewer, 72, was on an inner tube just ahead of Hart. At a bend in the river just south of Eglinton Ave., Hewer's leg got wedged in some underwater roots. He was yanked from his inner tube and sucked underwater by the crush of the current.

Seconds later, Hart rounded the same bend.

"I've taken part in the race before and I knew that was a sort of a place where you had to be careful," he said. "The current pushed my tube up like a hoop with me sitting on the edge. That's when I reached back to grab onto something and he just popped up in front of

me and then went under."

Hart blew his emergency whistle to alert his mother, Margaret, and uncle Paul Burgener, who were in a nearby raft. At the same time, two other rafters, Mark Dams and Nancy Van Loon, both of Mississauga, came upon the scene and jumped into the water to assist.

By that time, Hart had been, "Holding on for about five minutes. I didn't think about it at the time, but I sure feel it today. All my muscles are sore."

Dams swam across the flooding river and scrambled up a steep bank to make an emergency call for help from a residence. Mississauga Firefighters arrived swiftly and using an inflatable boat, ferried Hewer, a Second World War commando, and his rescuers, to safety.

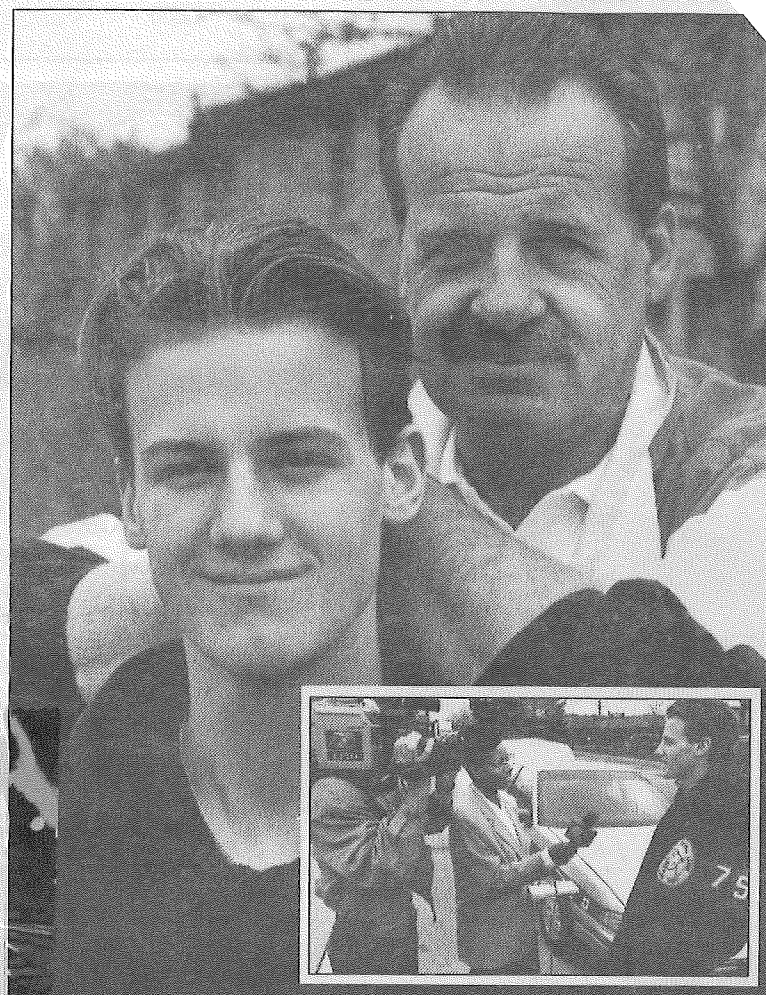
Hewer suffered a dislocated knee and other leg injuries which have put him on crutches. Unable to walk, his wife said, "Peter is very grateful to James for what he did. He's very thankful for his quick thinking."

Hart's father, Jan, a spotter for the race, said, "I'm not surprised by what he did. Not a bit. He's always been interested in scuba diving so he's familiar with the water, and he's a standout football player."

But James says he really didn't know he had heroics in him.

"I wasn't really thinking about what I did. I just realized that if I didn't grab his wet suit he might drown," he said.

And as far as all the media attention is concerned, he added, "I'm sort of surprised, but I'm glad everyone is so interested."



Staff photos by Rob Beintema
Greatest Canadian hero...James Hart, 16, shown with his father Jan as well as a television crew from CFTO, was the focus of media attention Monday after he rescued a 72-year-old man from drowning in the Credit River on Sunday.

HART, James April 27th, 93 MN Peel Biography Book