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## SECOND & FLUME

by **Melissa Daugherty**

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## Hank & Jessie

*Melissa Daugherty is on a break this month. Enjoy this classic Second & Flume column, originally published Feb. 9, 2017.*

I'll do just about anything for my son, Henry. I was reminded of that during a trip to Bidwell Park after a recent big storm, the one that flooded the banks of Big Chico Creek and downed that giant 80-year-old oak tree on the north side of Sycamore Pool.

That day, my husband and I, with 5-year-old Henry in tow, bundled up and, like others suffering from cabin fever, set out to survey the scene. By then, the water had receded to just below the edge of the pool. Hank had brought with him Jessie from the Toy Story franchise. She's the cute, red-headed yodeling cowgirl doll—pull her string and she says things like, "Sweet mother of Abraham Lincoln!" and "Yodelaheehoo!"

I'd purchased Jessie the previous day, and Henry seemed pretty enamored with her. That's why I was surprised when he hurled her into the raging water, right where the creek ends and the pool begins. *You've got to be kidding me*, I thought to myself as I turned to my husband and he turned to our son, whose face instantly told us that he regretted his compulsion to see if she could swim.

Turns out, Jessie's a floater. Seconds after she started bobbing downstream, I dropped my bike to the ground and started sprinting. I was wearing boots that are better suited to horseback riding, and I'm completely out of shape, but somehow I caught up with her in a flash. Problem is, she'd drifted just out of arm's reach. I had to make a split-second decision—was I willing to get into the frigid, swift-moving water to save a doll?

Apparently I was, so long as I could hang on to one of the ladder rails. So, I ran ahead of Jessie, threw my gloves to the ground and prepared to hop in at some stairs about midway down the pool. Behind me, on a bench, a young couple watched me react as Jessie floated to the center. Moments later, a glimmer of hope emerged. The rapids started pushing her back toward the edge—yet not quite within reach.

I need something to grab her with, I thought. I ran up the bank to some of the branches and twigs left over from the flooding. The sturdiest one gave me an extension of an extra arm's length. By the time I turned around, Jessie was getting close to the end of the pool. If she went over the dam, that'd be all she wrote. She'd wind up snagged out of sight or maybe even make it to the Sacramento River.

A little girl, probably a year or so older than Henry, gasped when she saw the recognizable doll bobbing along. "It's Jessie," she lamented to her father. They froze in suspense after I sprinted past; a few others looked down from the footbridge feet away.

I got ahead of the doll by about 10 feet, dropped to my belly on the cold concrete, chest over the water with arm and stick outstretched.

The moment of truth .... Got her! Crisis averted.

Henry didn't get Jessie back that day. I put her in a cup holder on the ride home. After she dripped dry in the shower, I pulled her string. Her response: "Yeehaw! I'm so happy you're my friend."

*Melissa Daugherty is editor-at-large for the Chico News & Review*