

Parents must be held responsible

by BRIAN LOCKHART

A few years ago, I was acquainted with some guys who had a cottage, and they invited me up there a few times.

It was just a party spot, which is fine, but these guys took their partying a little too far. They were notoriously reckless boaters.

It was nothing for them to head out on the lake with a case of beer and return quite intoxicated. A few times, when it was time for a 'boat ride', I told them to have fun and said I wanted to stay on shore and do some fishing.

The truth is I didn't trust them in a boat and didn't want to be part of it when they hit a rock or another vessel.

I warned them that getting caught drinking while driving a boat would result in criminal charges as well as losing their driver's license.

'There are never any cops on this lake,' I was told.

The police aren't landlocked. They routinely go to different lakes and launch a boat and check out operators to see if they are obeying the laws required to operate a craft on the water. My thinking was, 'If you guys get busted, you deserve it.'

One weekend, they had more people up there, including a couple with a one-year-old baby.

'Time for a boat ride,' someone announced.

We piled into this boat, and the one-year-old was sitting on the mother's lap, wearing a little summer outfit.

As the skipper started the motor, I said, 'You can't take that baby on a lake without a life jacket. One rough wave and that kid will be tossed overboard.'

The mother suddenly had this look of realization about how much danger she was putting her child in.

She insisted the child be given a life jacket.

Suddenly I was the bad guy. I got the 'eye rolls' for making them turn off the motor and get an appropriate life jacket for the child.

I never went back up to that cottage. If I hear of a death on that lake due to reckless and stupid behaviour on a boat, I won't be a bit surprised.

I have never understood how parents can place their children in dangerous situations without giving thought to the consequences.

Last year, a family of Indian nationals froze to death in Manitoba in a quest to illegally cross the Canada-U.S. border when temperatures dropped to -35 degrees. The dead included an 11-year-old and a three-year-old.

This past week, eight people drowned on the St. Lawrence River while trying to cross illegally into the U.S.

The dead included four Indian nationals from the same state the family who froze in Winnipeg were from and a Romanian family, including a two-year-old child and one-year-old infant.

One person is still missing. Likely, he is the boat operator. Police don't know if he's dead or in hiding because he realized his rickety boat resulted in eight deaths.

What makes this so frustrating is these people weren't desperately trying to flee a war zone where they were in imminent danger and had to take a chance to save their lives. They were illegally trying to cross a peaceful border between two peaceful countries.

They were definitely being aided in the quest for illegal entry.

You don't just cross the border and then stand around in the parking lot of a 7-11, hoping someone will come along and offer you a place to live and something to eat ? and a coat for your freezing child.

Human smuggling is a big problem. Not only do many people end up dead in various ways at the hands of these traffickers, but innocent children are also dying because they have parents who are both stupid and reckless.

You don't place a one-year-old in an obviously un-water-worthy vessel and try to cross a main waterway.

It's time to bring down the law on the queue jumpers who risk their children's lives in various ways by trying to cross the border illegally.

If you endanger the life of your child, and that includes the boaters I know who were going to take a one-year-old for a dangerous ride, you can be charged under child endangerment laws.

The same law should apply to parents who endanger their children's lives by placing them in dangerous situations and the traffickers who provide leaky boats and dangerous crossing points for a price, and no regard for the safety of innocent kids.