

Deadly Portland kayaking trip: Young women die in 'very cold' bay

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The two victims are a summer resident of Peaks Island and her close friend from college.



By [John Richardson](#) Staff Writer

PORTLAND – Two young college friends, one of them a longtime summer resident of Peaks Island, died after setting out for a short kayak trip Sunday and apparently falling into the cold and choppy waters of Casco Bay.

Irina McEntee, 18, and Carissa Ireland, 20, were found about 9 a.m. Monday by Coast Guard helicopter and boat crews about three miles off Cape Elizabeth and seven miles south of the kayakers' original destination, Ram Island.

The women, both wearing life jackets, shorts and light shirts, were severely hypothermic and unresponsive and had no apparent vital signs when they were pulled from the 48-degree water, the Coast Guard said.

A helicopter crew rushed them to Maine Medical Center, where doctors tried to resuscitate them before pronouncing the women dead about 9:30 a.m., according to a hospital spokesman.

Forty-eight degrees "is very, very cold," said Coast Guard Cmdr. Brian Downey. "Survivability is very short in that type of water condition."

The women set off from Peaks Island early Sunday afternoon, intending to paddle about one mile to Ram Island and return home by about 4 p.m.

They were paddling alone and were not connected with a separate excursion guided by Maine Island Kayak, as was reported earlier by The Portland Press Herald.

They were last seen on Ram Island by a caretaker on a nearby island, and by McEntee's parents, who could see the women from their summer home on Peaks, said Maine Marine Patrol Sgt. Daryen Granata.

"They saw them get on the island, but they didn't see them after that," Granata said.

The parents reported the women missing about 5:30 p.m., triggering an air and sea search of Casco Bay and shoreline searches of surrounding islands.

Searchers found the women's two 12-foot-long kayaks drifting near Richmond Island in Cape Elizabeth about 8 p.m. Sunday, and continued searching through the night.

Northerly winds and the current from an outgoing tide may have pushed the kayakers off course or caused them to capsize, the Coast Guard said.

Winds on Sunday afternoon were 22 mph at a buoy near Ram Island and a small craft advisory was in effect, said National Weather Service meteorologist Tom Hawley.

The two women were close friends who shared strong religious faith, as well as personal connections to eastern Europe.

McEntee was adopted from an orphanage in Russia in 1999 and spent summers with her family on Peaks, where she learned to kayak. Ireland was from New York but spent much of her life in Ukraine, where she learned to speak Russian.

McEntee and Ireland met at Pensacola Christian College in Florida, where McEntee enrolled as a freshman last fall.

“Carissa spoke a little bit of Russian to her,” said Robin Ireland, Carissa’s mother. “It kind of bonded them together.”

McEntee’s family lives in Georgia and has spent summers on Peaks Island for about the last decade, according to friends.

“It’s been nice to watch her grow into a very beautiful woman,” said Lynne Richard, an islander. “I know she loved it here. She was always full of adventure and fun.”

Richard and others said McEntee and her siblings also had Southern charm.

“We were Miss Lynne and Mr. Steve,” Richard said. “They were really nice, wonderful, polite kids.”

One of Irina McEntee’s two brothers, Oleg, died last year at the age of 16. Her parents, Jack and Gerri McEntee, could not be reached Monday.

“It’s just a sad thing,” said Tom Bergh, a longtime friend of the family and owner of Maine Island Kayak. He called Irina “a switched-on young lady” who was bright and genuinely friendly.

Although the women weren’t part of the excursion he was guiding, Bergh said he had watched McEntee learn her way around kayaks and the bay during her summers there.

“She’s not your average kayaker, who thinks of the ocean as a lake,” he said. “She had done that trip many, many times.”

McEntee and her family invited Carissa Ireland to join them for the start of their annual summer visit to Peaks. Ireland had just finished her junior year at Pensacola.

“(Ireland) worked three jobs to help pay for school, and it was just a nice break for her to come up and spend time with Irina’s family,” said her father, Michael Ireland. “Carissa called Saturday (with a video link) and showed us the place they were going to kayak to. We were so happy for her that she was getting this break.”

Ireland’s parents spoke about their daughter Monday by telephone from Ukraine, where they are Christian missionaries. Carissa Ireland was studying early childhood education in college, to continue her own missionary work with Ukrainian children, her parents said.

“She lived the life of a servant. She really did have a heart for children,” Robin Ireland said of her daughter.

Ireland’s parents, who are supported by a church in Rochester, N.Y., said they will return to the U.S. as soon as possible, and that they are strengthened by their faith.

“We believe God has a plan for our lives and God had a plan for Carissa’s life,” Michael Ireland said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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