

We were clinging to the side of the cliff, trying to find something to hold on to, keeping our backpacks from falling over the edge by leaning them against the rock face. We noticed an old piece of nylon rope, frayed and faded with age, a loop tied in it, hanging down from above us. The loop was about five feet above the ledge, so we could reach it, but we couldn't see what it was tied to or where it might lead.

A senior level management meeting was required. We had more risks to assess and decisions to make. Once again, we had no alternative other than to retrace our steps, so really, no decision to make. Somehow or other, we would have to attempt to climb up this rope, ever higher on the cliff and ever farther from the sea-lashed rocks below. I had very little trust in that piece of twine. It looked like a leftover from one of the original shipwrecks. The strands were fraying, the color bleached and it wasn't very thick to begin with.

My buddy, the little guy, said he would try it first. We were able to reach the rope with our hands, but it was a long, I mean long, step up to get our foot in the loop. After that, we had to find a way to grab the rope and pull ourselves up, hand over hand, in order to even see what to do next.

I held onto Gord and guided his foot into the loop as he lifted his leg as high as possible. I needed to provide a brace for him so that he could get up without tumbling backwards off this little sliver of a path. I managed to push him from underneath – no picture available of this maneuver, thank goodness – so that he reached the rope above his boot and pulled himself up while I provided a hand from below. The rope didn't break as he found another foot loop above the first one and finally had some leverage to power himself up the slope. He disappeared over the top and continued to use small trees and undergrowth to find handholds and eventually reach the top of yet another sharply angled slope. Only then was he able to disentangle himself from that forlorn length of rope and stand on terra firma.

When Gord went up, he took a length of rope with him from our supplies and tied it to the sturdiest tree he could find. That was harder than it sounds, because these were all small trees holding onto a thin layer of soil and trying not to blow away during the ocean gales. The next step was to get the backpacks up to the same level Gord was on, so he threw the rope down and I tied his pack to it.

We couldn't see each other because he was back about ten feet from the edge, standing on a steep pathway that sloped toward me and the twenty-foot drop from there to the rocks below. Gord was actually about another twenty feet above me, and fortunately the rope was just long enough to allow him to pull the overburdened backpack up through the rocks and dirt. The rope came back down

and I tied my pack on and watched as it scraped and bounced up the hillside, leaving me stranded on my thin little wedge of cliff face, wondering.

We had packed some quarter-inch polypropylene rope at the suggestion of one of the guidebooks, but being the penny-pinching person that I am, I bought it at a discount store, thinking we would only be using it to tie up tarps and clotheslines. We were about to put it to a much bigger test.

Here we go with faith and trust again. I thought I just had that lesson an hour ago! I'm about fifty pounds heavier than Gord and I didn't like the look of that old piece of rope that we had to climb up on. What were the chances it would hold me? Gord threw the other rope back down to me and shouted to tie it around my waist. This would be interesting – I flunked knots in Boy Scouts and always buy slip-on shoes for a reason. Not to put too keen a point on it, but I was about to tie a knot that my life, as I knew it, might depend on. Then I was supposed to figure out how to raise my foot high enough to shove my boot into that loop on a piece of rope that looked older than me. Gord had tied the other end of our rope around his waist, and expected to be able to hold my weight if I slipped or if the other rope broke.

This is sometimes known as an “oh shit” moment. Life seems to be like that. We go through periods of tranquility and ease, then through times of fear, hard work and struggle, and then get confronted with “oh shit.” The solution is the same. First faith, then

trust, then a deep breath and step out into the abyss. That's a lot easier when there's no other alternative, but I wasn't thinking of that at the time.