

Story of Son in Pool and Live Saving Techniques

Now you may not know, but in the aviation world, accidents often happen when a string of unlikely events line up just right. Imagine layers of Swiss cheese where each layer is a separate safety measure, and if the holes in the cheese slices match up, a disaster can slip right through. But during my decade in Spain working on improving their air traffic control system, I experienced the complete opposite of this Swiss cheese model in action.

I traveled extensively and was away from home and my wife and four small children over 50 percent of the time. And in those 10 years, there was only one day that I came home early from work, and that was the first hole in the first slice of Swiss cheese. On that day, upon arriving home, I walked downstairs into the formal salon.

Not something I usually did, but this allowed a hole in the second slice of cheese to line up with the first. Then I happened to look out the window and I noticed through the trees that the normally locked gate to the fence around the swimming pool was ajar. Another perfectly aligned hole in a third slice of cheese.

So I went running downstairs, out the back door, and over to the pool, only to be greeted by a sight that has to be any parent's worst nightmare. There was my three-year-old son, who did not know how to swim, floating motionless face down in the pool. Well, I quickly pulled him out of the pool onto his back and his eyes opened wide.

His face had an expression that said, am I in trouble? He was conscious and breathing, neither his face nor his lips were blue, and he didn't even cough up any water. He had simply held his breath and I just happened to show up before he ran out of bed. A perfectly lined hole in the fourth slice of cheese.

So a series of circumstances aligned perfectly, but in this case, to avert a disaster, not cause one. There are no coincidences in my life. And in this photo here behind me, Matt in front is four years old.

He has no memory of falling in the pool. He loves the pool and now he can swim like a tadpole. Today, Matt is 40 years old.

So what does it take to save a life? Well, first being observant and then to be willing and able to act and to do so. But there are dangers that are much more prevalent that we all should be prepared to respond to. For instance, the Heimlich maneuver has saved over 100,000 lives in the last 20 years.

I'm familiar with it, but I've never used it. I've never even seen it applied. Well, let's take CPR when it's administered by public bystanders, for example.

Around 164,000 cases of cardiac arrest in a year are administered CPR by a bystander, which saves about 74,000 lives a year. Now my company required me to be trained and keep current in CPR, but I never used it, nor did I ever see it applied. Let's change the subject.

I struggled personally with mental health issues for over two decades, including depression, atypical bipolar, and suicidal thoughts twice. I was treated with meds, psychiatrists, various

stays in mental hospitals, but a caring family, a wonderful Christian counselor, a friendly editor, a 12-step program to recover from anger and codependency, and several other coaches all combined to finally address the root issues rather than cover up the symptoms. Thank God I now have over six years with no meds, no psychiatrists, no hospital stays, no depression, no bipolar episodes, and no thoughts of suicide.

Now, while I've never used the Heimlich Maneuver or applied CPR to someone, I have intervened four times when someone was thinking about suicide, and they're all still with us. But after I returned from Spain, I lost a friend and four different co-workers to suicide. I had traveled and worked a good bit with one of the co-workers, both domestically and internationally.

While we're living in hotels without family, well, he and I spent a good bit of time after work talking, often over an adult beverage. We shared personal things with each other that we had never shared with anyone else. Now, I had also stood in front of over 120 people to share some of my struggles, my bad choices, failures, some of my character defects, and overcoming and recovering from those.

But I had never shared any of that with this co-worker, because I simply had no clue he was dealing with his own deep struggles or had any mental health issues. That's why I want to make people aware of the need to be prepared to address someone with suicidal thoughts, to be prepared to save a life. My desire is to get this message to the general public that has never had to deal with or been exposed to suicide or suicidal thoughts, and perhaps does not realize the importance and the benefit of being prepared.

I'm fortunate that a national expert on suicide prevention, Lou Kuhn, has agreed to collaborate with me. Lou also found himself in a dark place thinking of suicide. His son had had some basic training in suicide prevention in the Air Force and recognized a change in his father's routine, and he intervened, which allowed Lou to recover.

Lou, a retired Army chaplain, has intervened with over 2,000 people thinking of suicide, and they're all still with us. He has also trained over 29,000 people in suicide prevention, including many first responders. He also has a book that details his methodology, and he has formed a non-profit organization, StopSuicideUSA.org. Please go to the webpage, BePreparedToSaveALife.com, where we have many resources.

There's a video of my interview with Lou Kuhn where we discuss the myths around suicide, like those thinking of suicide want to die. They don't. They want to escape the pain and the hopelessness, or the myth that asking someone if they are thinking of suicide, it might plant that thought if it's not already there, or it might make matters worse.

It won't. We have other video interviews and testimonies, and we have many free resources available for download, like transcripts of all the videos in both English and Spanish. There's a page on the benefits of humor to both mental and physical health.

There are uplifting notes that have saved lives. For instance, there was a British woman whose life was saved by two strangers when she went to a bridge to jump off. That prompted her to return to that bridge and start leaving encouraging notes on the bridge, and that saved eight lives that she knows of in the first month.

There are also links to Lou's book and his organization, StopSuicideUSA.org. There's also a page on all the many ways that you might help us spread this word, which could be as simple and easy as just sharing and broadcasting this very video. Again, please go to BePreparedToSaveALife.com, and remember, suicide is never the right answer. If you are thinking of suicide and don't have someone to talk to, please call 988.

Counselors are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and it's free. Thank you very much.