

Recovery: Each family member has been profoundly changed

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Boyd says she never heard anything about the notoriously dangerous current in the waters off the peninsula. The waves looked calm. The kids were confident, experienced swimmers, who had always looked out for one another.

"It wasn't really even swimming — it was playing in the water," Boyd said. "I never thought twice about it."

After making sure the other adults were watching the kids closely, Boyd left briefly to run an errand. When she returned, she stopped to watch the kids playing for a moment before she even got out of her truck.

"I turned and said to my brother, 'We should get them out soon. It's been a while,'" Boyd recalled. "I looked back and didn't see any of them. It was that fast."

In that instant, a rogue wave had knocked the children off their feet.

By the time they caught their breath, a powerful rip current was pulling them out to sea. No matter how hard they swam, they couldn't seem to get anywhere.

Later, Junior told his family that Lindsey had assessed the situation, and told him what to do.

I'm going to push you toward the shore. Swim as hard as you can. Don't look back. Get help.

She propped both feet against the small of his back and used all of her strength to shove him toward shore. A few moments later, Boyd and her brother, Jordan Boyd Sr., were stunned to see Junior coming out of the water, many yards from where he'd gone in. As they raced to meet him, they could tell something was terribly wrong. Boyd told her mother to call 911.

Badly shaken, Junior said, "They're drowning! They're drowning!"

It took 30 minutes for surf rescue swimmers with jet-skis to find Kenny, cold, stunned and moments from losing consciousness. Lindsey had disappeared beneath the surface.

At first, Kenny did not recognize his mother, who feared he might stay that way forever. But in the ambulance, the world came back to him, one question at a time.

Did the dog have her puppies yet? Why did the man take my picture? Did they find my sister?

As afternoon wore into evening, Coast Guard vessels combed the water, while helicopters dived overhead. Lindsey and Kenny's father, Jeremy Mustread, who lived out of state, arranged travel for the following day. Friends dropped everything and began driving toward Long Beach.

After Kenny was released from the hospital, he and Boyd sat huddled together at the beach, talking, waiting. Kenny told his mother his story.

Exhausted, Kenny had told his sister he couldn't swim any more.

"Get on my back," she told him. "And I'll swim to shore with you."

They almost made it. When Lindsey could finally touch the ground again, she told Kenny it was safe to let go. Reluctantly, he let go of his sister. Almost instantly, another powerful wave hit, separating the two. Neither had the strength left to fight it any more.

"Kenny, just float on your back. Just float on your back," Lindsey called as the water pulled them apart.

"And that's the last time he saw her," Boyd said.

At sunset that day, a boy about Lindsey's age stood alone, thigh-deep in the water watching the boats and helicopters. Further down the beach, a group of young children frolicked in the waves while their mother stood on shore.

Once the sun went down, the search was called off, but Boyd and family friends stayed for most of the night, combing the beach for any sign of Lindsey with flashlights.

All the next day, while Boyd kept her vigil on the beach, her best friend, Amy Crandal, kept watch over her.

"She stood right outside that truck, told me when to drink when to take a bite of food. She stood there. She would have stayed there forever," Boyd said.

On July 5, Lindsey's body



DAMIAN MULINIX — EO Media Group

Lindsey Mustread's school photo from the 2012-13 school year, when she proudly displayed her cast on her right arm.

returned to shore and the family returned to their home in silence.

Blame and burden

In the year since her death, the members of Lindsey's family have plumbed the depths of their grief and the strength of their love for one another. Each of them has been profoundly changed by the experience.

For the first four months, neither of her boys would hug Boyd or tell her they loved her.

"They all wanted to blame somebody, and from July to October, I let (them) blame me. All I cared about was making sure they were OK," Boyd explained. "I tried to carry that burden for them."

She said Kenny can get mad and lash out at her at times.

"He needs to be mad at somebody. I took him there, and I didn't bring his sister back."

Willy has often been a calm, steady source of strength during the most harrowing moments of Kenny's grieving process. But some days, the idea that he could have saved Lindsey if he had only gone to the beach consumes him. There are stretches when he disappears into himself, or disappears altogether.

In October, the family moved to a new house in Port Hadlock on the Olympic Peninsula, and Boyd had to pack Lindsey's room. But when she started, the months of caring for everyone but herself caught up with her. She ended up in bed for three days, unable to function.

Boyd lay there alone, trying to think of a way to discreetly put an end to all that guilt and anguish. But again, Lindsey's fighting spirit saved a life.

Boyd says that when she finally figured out her plan, Lindsey's voice sounded in her head, telling her all of the things she had told her daughter when she was discouraged.

"She was right there telling me 'Really? You're gonna quit?! The season's not over yet! You can't start but not finish.'"

Slowly, she began to move forward again.

"I never again thought about finding a way out. I'm finding a way to make Lindsey's life meaningful."

Kenny has always had a keen interest in disassembling things like fans and videocassette recorders — testing them, trying to understand how they work, what makes them fail, how to build them better. Since Lindsey's death, Boyd has often felt like Kenny was applying the same tests to his bond with his mother.

How far do her powers of love and protection extend? What, if anything, could make them break?

While on vacation in San Diego in February, Brandy and Willy stood in a grocery store parking lot for two hours, desperately trying to coax Kenny to let them back into the rental car where he'd locked himself.

He begged them to take him back to Port Hadlock, then made them promise not to.

"We pretty much spent the rest of that vacation in that hotel," Boyd said.

Both boys began sleeping for 12 to 15 hours at a stretch and it was nearly impossible to wake them. In the afternoons, Kenny would intentionally run and jump into the hotel pool in front of his mother, or pretend like he was drowning.

"I don't think any part of him ever wanted to hurt me like that, but he didn't want to feel like he

was the only one hurting," Boyd said. "I don't understand it."

Willy was brave and steady in a way that still makes Boyd's heart swell. But she still cried almost every night.

"It was awful," Boyd said.

Looking back, Boyd thinks the trip was probably a necessary step in their healing process. She understands now that her grief over Lindsey made it hard to see how much the living members of the family were suffering from survivor's guilt.

'She was there'

Sometimes, seemingly harmless things can catch the family by surprise, leaving them feeling utterly gutted. On those days, it feels like it's last July all over again.

Boyd hadn't planned to celebrate Thanksgiving until Kenny surprised her by asking for a feast at the last moment. She got out of bed, made a late-night shopping trip and got to work.

But just before dinner, Kenny's father had noticed the plate the boy had set for Lindsey and asked him why it was there.

"That was the end of Thanksgiving," Boyd said. Later that night, she snuck down to the graveyard to give Lindsey her wishbone.

On Dec. 26, the three of them got into the car. They drove south in dead silence, stopping along the way to buy roses and balloons.

They ended up at Bolstad beach approach and Boyd and Willy watched as Kenny went to stand alone at the water's edge. They were later joined by close friends. The group tried to honor Lindsey by sending the flowers and a wreath out to sea, but the waves kept pushing them back toward shore.

Long Beach Police Chief Flint Wright, who was there for Boyd last summer on that terrible day, made arrangements for members of the surf rescue team, who had saved her son, to carry the items out to sea during a later training session. The whole group ended up at Scoopers ice cream parlor and the gathering unexpectedly began to feel like a celebration.

"We went up there for hot chocolate and ended up buying fudge and ice cream," Boyd said.

It's too soon for Boyd to know what the future holds for her family, or to talk about ideas like "closure" and "acceptance." People tell Boyd time will heal their hearts, but Boyd is still waiting.

The drive home from the beach that day became one of those unexpected moments when a little light found its way inside the darkness that has enveloped them this past year.

"You would have thought we just left some crazy party. The boys had the music going, they're singing, they're like trying to sit in the front seat with us," Boyd said. "It was totally different coming back. There was this feeling — this overall feeling in the car, like a celebration. We kind of let some of it go."

Looking back at some of the pictures from that day, she sees evidence of the presence they all felt at the water's edge: Strange gels or bright spots in the photos, sea foam in the sand that looked like it spelled out "I love you."

"She was there," Boyd said. "There's not a doubt in my mind."

"When I'm there, I feel it."

Victim's mom: Provide tourists with clear safety messages

By NATALIE ST. JOHN
EO Media Group

LONG BEACH, Wash. — Brandy Boyd's family anticipated their Long Beach vacation for months and drove hours to get there. When they finally arrived at the Bolstad beach approach with a car full of kids July 3, 2014, everyone was too excited to notice two small warning signs as they sped past.

Later on, people would point out the few public warnings about the swimming hazard. But by then, it was too late — Boyd's children, Lindsey and Kenny Mustread, had been involved in a drowning accident that cost Lindsey her life.

"I don't remember anybody ever ... saying anything to us. Nobody handed me a flier. I didn't know what a rip tide was until after the fact," Boyd said.

That's why she thinks it extremely important for local business and community leaders to come up with a set of clear, simple, attention-grabbing safety messages.

She'd like to see information about the drowning hazard "in every hotel room, every campground and the bathrooms." In order to reach the right people at the right time, Boyd stresses these messages also need to be shared on social media, in vacation planning materials and on the routes into town.

We have to educate tourists before they ever touch the sand, Boyd said.

"When you're driving down on the beach and the kids are with you, and they're talking about what we're gonna do and how much fun you're gonna have, you don't see the sign," Boyd explained. "Everybody's excited. You're not looking. And it's not very big."

Boyd thinks it's important to keep a tourist's mentality in mind when talking about safety. Hazards that seem obvious to locals aren't obvious to tourists at all. Boyd has good common sense, but without knowing about the undercurrent or the crab holes, she couldn't see any reason to keep three strong, responsible kids out of the surf. She points out a vacation is all about fun, so tourists can be a bit deaf to messages about what they can't do.

Instead of giving vague warnings — "SURF UNSAFE!" — or telling readers what not to do — "NO SWIMMING" — safety materials should tell visitors exactly what they can do to stay safe.

As an example, Boyd cites a notice about shark sightings her family saw in Ocean Shores many years ago. Its short, clear message was so simple that even her preschool-aged son could understand it.



Damian Mulnix — EO Media Group File
Surf rescue swimmers Julez Orr and Eddie Mendez carry Kenny Mustread to the shore after rescuing him from the ocean July 3, 2014. Mustread had been in the water for 30 minutes when he was rescued.

"It was out there. It wasn't hidden on a bulletin board. We were sitting there, so we talked about it," Boyd said.

Her kids decided not to go in past their knees that year, and it didn't spoil their vacation at all, Boyd said. She also thinks it's important to be realistic. It's difficult for many adults to tell excited kids they can't touch the water at all. But if Boyd had known about the dangers that day, she says she would have set strict limits, maybe forbidding them to go past their knees.

Boyd says local business owners shouldn't worry that talking openly with visitors about safety issues will scare them off, because a Long Beach vacation is about so much more than playing in the water. In fact, she said, she'd be more likely to patronize businesses that try to educate and protect the people who provide their livelihoods.

"Having warning signs is gonna make the parents more aware, not scare them," Boyd said. "... It's so important. If it saves one life, it's more valuable than selling that T-shirt or sweatshirt."

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