

## Going Under

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scene like that, but something told me I should see what I could do," he said. "When I got there, they already had him in the back of the ambulance doing CPR."

Wallowa County Hospital Ambulance Director Bruce Womack was working frantically to save Kennisen. In his 20-year career, Bruce has been called to several child drownings. All of them died, and Bruce feared Kennisen would be another. "He looked dead," he said. "To be honest, I didn't hold out much hope."

Dr. Euhus jumped in the ambulance with Bruce and his crew, and they tore off toward the hospital. Bruce worked to intubate Kennisen while Dr. Euhus assisted with CPR. When they pulled up at the hospital, everyone leapt into action. Deveen Boyd, MD, Kennisen's family doctor was waiting in the ER and he and Dr. Euhus went to work.

"Every EMT, every CNA, the anesthesiologist, the surgery team, the pharmacist, the nurses, and even a medical resident from OHSU - everyone was doing everything they knew to do," recalls Gail.

For an hour and thirty minutes, everyone poured every ounce of strength into reviving Kennisen. Nurses struggled to warm his frigid body while doctors tried desperately to resuscitate him. Still, they couldn't even get a pulse. The team pressed on, hoping for a miracle. In the midst of the action, someone called Air Life to see if the team was available.

Flight Nurse Brad Saxton, RN, was at Air Life's Northeast Oregon base in La Grande when the call came in.

"They put us on standby," he recalls. "Hearing the scenario though, I thought we should self-activate and fly over to Enterprise, just in case they needed us."

So when nurses felt the first flutter of a pulse, the Air Life crew was at Kennisen's side in seconds. Gail Johnson remembers

a mixture of joy and terror in that moment.

"I was almost frightened when we got a blood pressure and a pulse," she recalls. "I thought, 'what are we going to have now, a vegetative state?' He'd been down so long."

The Air Life crew quickly whisked Kennisen to the airport, trying to soothe Colby as they worked feverishly to stabilize her son. As the clinical crew worked their magic aboard the Pilatus PC-12, Colby watched

startling twist of fate, the doctor on call that day happened to be a cold-water drowning expert. As Colby waited helplessly at St. Luke's in Boise, Ken and the rest of their family made the harrowing four-hour drive to Boise.

When the family arrived, things didn't look good. Colby still has a copy of the doctor's notes predicting a grim outcome. "He said we'll give him 24 hours to see if any neurological recovery can happen at all," Colby recalls.

But Kennisen fought hard. After five days on life support, he began to give his family a faint glimmer of hope.

"They had him sedated, but he kept trying to push himself up on the bed and yank the tubes out," Colby recalls. "They'd said he wouldn't do that. I went to him and said, 'mommy's here,' and I put my arms around him and he went to sleep."

It was a dark time, but ten days later, Kennisen was discharged from the hospital. Today, the vivacious two-year-old shows no signs of neurological damage. Undersheriff Steve Rogers has a picture in his office of Kennisen frolicking on the beach just a few months after the accident. Gail Johnson and Bruce Womack have their own photos of Kennisen displayed prominently at their desks - a constant reminder that positive outcomes are possible even in the bleakest traumas.

"I've been a part of a lot of codes, but I've never been a part of anything like this," Bruce said. "You get one of these once in a career."

For the Knifong family, there's no question a miracle took place on that June day. "If I had known this was going to happen, I couldn't possibly have orchestrated it better," Colby said. "The care we received from everyone was beyond excellent. Everyone was in the right place at the right time to save Kennisen."



Photo by Gary Fletcher

The Knifongs spend a spring afternoon in Kennisen's sandbox.

helplessly. In the cockpit, pilot Julian Pridmore-Brown got the aircraft in the air.

"I told Air Traffic Control we needed to expedite this one as much as possible," he recalls. "They were really helpful."

Colby glanced nervously out the window as the plane soared over her home, headed for Boise. The Air Life team fought to warm Kennisen and maintain his vital signs.

"In some ways, the hypothermia can save people," explained Doug Ferguson, respiratory therapist on Kennisen's flight. "It shuts down the whole metabolic process and can actually preserve function. That was one thing that gave us hope."

The flight to Boise was lightning fast. In a

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