

Episode 124: Josh was struck by lightning

Almost since the day I had the idea to start this podcast, I've wanted to talk to someone who has been struck by lightning.

I mean, the thought that you could just be going about your day, maybe walking through a parking lot to go get some groceries, or even at home, maybe in your kitchen – and suddenly you could be hit by 300 million volts. And you never saw it coming. You might wake up a few minutes later – or maybe several hours later – and still not know what exactly happened, until someone tells you.

But the reality is, a human being getting struck by lightning overall is pretty rare. I live in Florida, which is considered the lightning capital of the country. We average around 40 lightning injuries each year, which is still not many. And then there's the fact that some lightning strike victims don't survive, so they aren't around to tell that story. So I've been looking around for a while, for someone with this experience to come on the podcast.

And then, I connected with Josh. He lives not far from me, here in the Tampa Bay area. In the summer of 2022, just a few months ago, he was struck by lightning. A few people were with him at the time, and they saw it happen.

But getting help was kind of difficult, because when Josh was struck by a bolt of lightning, he was on a boat – 100 miles offshore, in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico.

Scott

You were out in the Gulf of Mexico in an area called the Middle Grounds. Where is that? Why is it called Middle Grounds?

Josh

It's basically the middle between Florida and Mexico - that's why the nickname. There's a huge rock ledge that, if you look on a map, you can see where the deviation of the floor of the Gulf of Mexico - it really starts to get deep at that point. It goes from 100 feet, 150 feet, 220 feet, to around 500 feet pretty quickly after that. I believe I might be wrong about the 500-foot part, but that's where it really starts to drop off and get much deeper.

Scott

And that's about 100 miles offshore. What was going on that took you 100 miles away from land?

Josh

My girlfriend, Meghan, fished in this specific old salt tournament. She's fished this 2 other times. I believe this is her third time with a buddy of ours, Glenn. We were on his boat. So she was fishing in this tournament. She's 25 weeks pregnant. It just happened to be that I wasn't busy on the weekend of this tournament and I was able to fish the tournament and co-captain in the tournament with my buddy, Glenn. I wasn't going to let her go out on the water and be 100 miles offshore while being 25 weeks pregnant. So that's what allowed me to be out there - not being busy and the reason I was out there is

because, like I said, my girlfriend was pregnant. I didn't want to didn't want her to be out there without me.

Scott

How many people were on the boat?

Josh

We had 7 people total on the boat. We had 5 girls fishing and then myself and Glenn as the captain and co-captain of the boat.

Scott

So it must have been a pretty good-sized boat then. How big was the boat?

Josh

It's a 39-foot Stamas. It comes out to about 42 feet after the platform and motors are measured out.

Scott

You knew Glenn and, obviously, your girlfriend Meghan. Did you know the other people as well?

Josh

No, unfortunately. I didn't know any of them. I had heard of Sherri, who is Glenn's sister, but I had not met these ladies at all. Unfortunately, the first time that they met me was at around 11.30 that night. I'm tired. I'm grumpy. I'd already been on the water earlier in the day catching bait with my son for the tournament. Their first impression of me - I couldn't imagine - was not pleasurable because, like I said, I was just tired and grumpy. When I look back now, I'm like, "Man, I should have been a little bit nicer and a little bit less ornery. I can only imagine what their impression of me was, when they first met me.

Scott

Well, they got to know you a little bit better later on, so you kind of made up for it.

Josh

Yeah, absolutely.

Scott

So you guys had finished fishing and were headed back in.

Josh

Yeah, it's about 3 hours at 30 knots close to what we call the Middle Grounds. So we got out. We hit some rain out in the middle of the Gulf. There's no "Oh, this is the way the weather's going to work." The weather is mother nature. It works the way it wants to work. You just have to be abreast of that and understand that the fluctuation in the weather can go from beautiful sun to an absolute nightmare in no time.

Scott

Even though this is a pretty high-tech boat, there's no kind of warning system for weather or storms that are coming in.

Josh

Yeah, you have the radar. This boat, especially, has a full radar system where we can see where the weather is, where it's going, and what it's doing. The issue that we have in this specific instance is we have two storm cells that are converging and coming together. We were headed due east, going back into John's Pass to weigh the fish in. If we were to deviate from our course, we would have to go 50 miles north and 50 miles south, and have another 100 miles to still get back into the weighing station. The issue with that is fuel consumption. If we're adding 50 miles, and then we're deviating the course around that, it could add another 75 to 100 miles onto the trip. Then, at that point, we're going to run out of fuel. What we saw in front of us were rain clouds - just rain clouds and not a super crazy-looking thunderstorm. It wasn't anything that we've not gone through before. It wasn't something that we were, "Oh my gosh, we're gonna freak out. We got 15-foot swells or 8-foot swells." It was a general thunderstorm here in Florida and a little bit of rain. There's always lightning - nothing that we've not encountered before on the water.

Scott

When this happened - when the lightning actually struck - you happened to be recording video on your phone. Were you recording something in particular or just documenting, "Hey, here we are. We're having fun. We're coming back in"?

Josh

Yeah, I know that we had been taking pictures and photos of the trip before we left and while we're fishing. I do videography for my own personal charters. At this moment, we fished all day long. We know we have 2, possibly 3 winning fish on the boat. There are no ifs, ands, or buts. We were in this storm in the rain clouds and all the girls were in the back of the boat. They're there along the transom after the boat. I just wanted to record the waves that were going through the rain that we're going through. You can look at the waves that we're going through - it's minimal at best. I was scanning across Glenn and his sister, Sherri. The rest of the girls were at the back of the boat hunkered down on the beanbags covered up with towels to help them stop from getting rained on. I was scanning to go over to them in what looked like a moment of defeat. We're in a rainstorm coming back in. In my mind, the video that I'm gonna put together for this victory would be, "Here we are coming in getting rained on through a rainstorm. We're going to be going to the way ends," and then make that transition to the way ends where we are celebrating victory with, at least, two or possibly three winning fish for the tournament.

Scott

We're going to have that video up on the website so people can watch that. It's pretty incredible. That video went viral, of course, too. You have that video to watch yourself right now. Can you just take us through what exactly happened while you were videoing?

Josh

The video is around 17 seconds long. What it doesn't show is where I was at and what I was experiencing while I'm unconscious. I'm hit in the face with lightning. So, I have no idea what's happening at the beginning of the video. I was panning over at Glenn. The camera was focused on Glenn and moved over to Sherri. When it gets to Sherry, that's when the lightning hits the outrigger. After we got back in the boat and looked at the boat, it hit the outrigger and it went out of the aft courtesy light that lights up the back deck. From that point, it exits the light and then hits me in the face. That's when I went unconscious. You can watch the video. When you're watching the video, though, it's filming my knee. It shows Sherri's foot and then it also shows my knee.

At that point, I am in a realm in a place that I can only describe for the religious - it's what I would consider purgatory or a place of silence, but it was the loudest, most deafening place I've ever experienced. I'm gathering my thoughts and my understanding of what happened because I could see the lightning hit my face and I felt it in my ankle. I was watching the lightning and watching my ankle from the perspective of "I was watching myself." In this short period of time, it feels like eternity. There's no explanation for the amount of time that I was gone. Like I said, I was sitting or crouching down in this blackness, in this dark place. The understanding of, "I don't know where I'm at, but I'm not where I'm supposed to be. Where am I going? Where the fuck am I going right now? Where am I at?" I have no fucking idea what is happening. Then, it clicked and I was like, "Holy shit! I'm fucking dead! I'm dead!! I'm dead!!!" I was screaming at the top of my lungs and just fighting. You'll see in the video where the video starts to shake and the camera kind of went up away from my ankle up onto the boat. That's when Glenn's sister, Sherri, grabbed my phone. In that moment, I can feel myself screaming at the top of my lungs, "No, this can't be happening!"

(Silence. Deep breath)

I'm with my girlfriend who's 25 weeks pregnant, who will be giving birth to my son. As I'm going through this process, I'm thinking about my oldest son that is six years old at the time, and my only objective and only thought process is, "I have to get back to him and make sure that my girlfriend and my soon-to-be child are safe. But if I am gone and I am in this place that is again the most deafening place you could ever experience, the loneliest place you could ever be, but full of just— I can't get the words of where you are, what you're encompassed by, and the enveloping feeling of not being alone but being alone in the same sense. I was screaming, "Fuck, there's no fucking way! No, no. This isn't gonna happen. I am not doing this. I refuse to allow this to happen. I can't be here. I have to get home. I have to see my son - because my son was supposed to be at the weighing station and be a part of the celebration. My mom was going to bring him." All these things were going through my mind in this place. "I'm not going to allow it to happen." This feeling of something being there... the comfort that started to form... and then I felt something hit my shoulder, but the words that were said when they were spoken reverberated throughout my entire body, and it was, "You have more to do." Something hit my shoulder and I woke up.

When I woke up to this just insanity, I'm deaf and I'm blind, but I could smell something. I can't move. I'm now, like, "Holy shit. You've got to get moving. What's going on and burning? There's burning on a boat 100-miles offshore. If fiberglass starts to ignite, we are so fucked and dead. At least one of the people on this boat is going to die. There are no ifs, ands, or buts. I couldn't move. I was trying and doing my damndest to move and get up, and I heard in a very muddled voice, "Struck by lightning. Struck by lightning. Struck by lightning. Struck by lightning."

As I was starting to stand up, I could smell it. I was trying to get my wits and my vision started to come back. The ringing that was in my ears was starting to go away. I could see and hear again. I heard, "No, Josh. You were struck by lightning. Are you okay?" That was Sherri looking at me going, "Calm down. You're okay." She's trying to stay calm in the situation where all hell is about to break loose.

Sherri

I was right there with Josh when it happened.

Scott

This is Sherri.

Sherri

A lightning struck. I took a second to figure out what just happened. I looked down and Josh was on the floor. He did not look well. His eyes were open. I asked, "Did you get hit?" At that point, I noticed his nose had what appeared to be dirt. After a few moments, I realized it was a singe mark from probably the lightning. He responded and slowly got up, and my attention turned to everyone else and the fire that was on the outrigger.

Josh

There was black soot all over my face. What I was smelling was the inside of my nasal passage that had been fried from the lightning strike that hit me in the face. At that point, I was trying to compute where I was at and how long I was out for. I didn't know where I was at. I don't know. I was still just in a shock and awe state of mind, like, "What is going on?" Glenn was trying his damndest to get the boat to start but the boat wouldn't start. Again, I was lucid at that point of "What are we going to do? What am I going to do?" I was like, "Yeah, ship. It's not a big deal. This boat's gonna start. It probably has a fuse. It is what it is. We're alright. We're good to go."

Scott

Was anyone else injured?

Josh

No one, to my knowledge. You read my mind. I missed one part of the video because I don't have the volume on. When the outrigger was hit - it's made out of graphite - the lightning melted the outrigger and you can hear a tap-tap-tap in the video. That outrigger hit my girlfriend in the head. So that's the closest to anyone being injured. Tanya said that she felt the lightning and she felt static electricity. She felt like she was actually hit by it - I don't know if she was hit indirectly - but no one else on the boat was injured or touched by the lightning other than myself.

Scott

Was there a sense of panic? What were the other people doing when you regained consciousness?

Josh

I would say, for probably 10 minutes, I was looking around and trying to assess what was really happening, the danger of where we are, and how much trouble we were really going to be in because this storm that we were going through was nothing I've not encountered. I've been in storms 10 times worse than this. The only difference is I wasn't 100 miles offshore. I saw the panic really starting to set in once we couldn't get the boat started - we were really stuck and there was a good possibility that we were not going to get this boat started.

We started to get life vests out just in preparation because, in this type of scenario, more often than not, what the lightning strike will do is ground itself to the brass fittings of the boat and the hole and blow them out. When they blow out, you're having 3-6 inch holes in the boat that are just there. In the end, you have water that you cannot stop from coming back into the boat. So, at that point, I've gotten into the bilge area of the boat below deck. I was down there looking around. The girls really didn't know what to look for and Glenn's a really big guy - I'm the guy too, but Glenn wasn't able to get down there. So I was down in this boat. I was not really familiar with Glenn's boat, but I'm familiar enough with the electronics of a boat - this is considered a yacht. I was down there looking around. Nothing's fried.

There's no evidence that anything's fried. I found the switch panel or the breaker panel underneath the boat and did everything I could to try to get this thing to start back up.

When I was down there, I was maybe 10 minutes after being hit in the face and being gone. I was down in the bilge area trying to keep my composure, and I was, "Hi, motherfucker. It's time. You were somewhere. You'll be able to talk about that and think about where you were at later on, but we've got to get home. Now you have six other people on this boat that you have to get home." At that moment, I knew that I had to take responsibility and control the vessel. From a mental standpoint, I had to because - as you asked, "Was panic setting in?" - yes, panic was setting in amongst everyone in the boat.

Scott

This is what kind of struck me about this story. This is not your boat...

Josh

No.

Scott

But you are certified as a Coast Guard master captain...

Josh

Yes.

Scott

You've also got years of martial arts training...

Josh

Yes.

Scott

I know, typically, when there's a group emergency, one person usually emerges as the leader. Why do you think that was you?

Josh

I've had hundreds and hundreds of employees over my lifetime. I've experienced life in a different thought process. I've gone through life and I've experienced life. I know that the one thing in life that is most important is you have to make it happen. There are no ifs, ands, or buts. And I'm completely malleable. There's a quote from Bruce Lee, "Be water." You become the cup. You become the rock. You become the sand. Water is malleable. That's my thought process in life. I'm going to hit something, but I'm going to absorb everything that happened and learn from that. At that moment, it's not my boat. They were people that I've known for, honest to god, 8-9 hours at that time - maybe a little bit longer. Let's say it's 12 hours for argument's sake. I've only known these people - with the exception of Glenn and my girlfriend - for 12 hours and here I am. It's time to buck up. It's time to make shit happen. There's no "Why did this happen?" It's not that I was waiting for anybody else to take charge and take control of the situation. It's just who I am. It's my thought process. In my Nordic heritage, it's what we call the observers. It's absolute insanity that no matter what happens, you're taking control.

If Glenn would have said to me, "Hey, man, we got it. We're good." We worked in tandem throughout this entire scenario at times. But when it came to the girls - taking control of the girls and trying to control their emotions - it was something that's just innate. It's an innate ability that I have to absorb their emotion, absorb their anger, and talk to them in a way that they're going to understand. Again, I don't pussyfoot. I don't hold back. I don't give a shit about your feelings. I really don't. If you want to argue with me about your feelings, that's fine. I understand you have feelings and emotions - so do I - but the facts of this scenario - and all scenarios in life although this one's a little bit more severe - is, "If you deviate, we're gonna die. It's over and done. We are so fucked. You have no clue. You have zero understanding that - not even two hours ago - an hour ago, we were taking pictures of huge grouper and red snapper and having a hell of a time. Everybody was catching fish. We ended the day by catching Vinita and Blackfin tuna and we were 'Holy shit.' That's a great time. It was 30 minutes ago now. Now we're gonna die. So shut the fuck up."

So I got out of the bilge area. That's where I come up and saw Glenn fuckin distraught. He really, really panicked. I could process the information. I've known Glenn for a while now. The irony behind this scenario is the first time he took Meghan fishing, my first question was, "Do you have an EPIRB or satellite phone if you're going to be going off 100 miles offshore?" His first response was, "Absolutely, I have an EPIRB. It's always sharp. It's ready to go."

Scott

Can you describe what an EPIRB is for people who don't know?

Josh

EPIRB is an emergency response indicator beacon or positioning device. Once you buy it, you're supposed to register it - put some phone numbers, email address, and blah, blah, blah. You hit the button and that sends out the emergency response to the Coast Guard. We're literally 100 miles offshore and the Coast Guard gets that response. They call the phone numbers to make sure that it's not a false alarm. They called both phone numbers and neither one of the phone numbers responded - they didn't pick up the phone. Then, they had to send a text message that this is the United States Coast Guard. This is a possible emergency. We need to be in contact with you. Please give us a call ASAP. The Coast Guard had already left the Coast Guard station in St. Pete. They were on their way to us. That emergency response beacon gives the Coast Guard a pretty accurate idea of where we're at from the time the response beacon goes off to the time that they get to us. It made life a little bit easier and also made life easier in controlling the situation and emotions.

Scott

Right. Because now people have hope. "We're putting out a signal. Coast Guards are on their way." Did that kind of calm everybody down at that point?

Josh

No, not really.

Scott

Because you're still 100 miles away out there?

Josh

Yeah, we got out of the bilge area and encountered more rain. We had gotten down into the galley of the boat - like I said, that's where we're getting all of the life jackets out and getting life jackets on.

Everybody got their life jackets. I was looking at the girls that are in the boat. Again, I want them to understand the seriousness of the situation. The severity was not, like, "Oh my gosh, it's okay." You have to understand that we're about to die. So I got all of the life vests out and I said, "Alright, girls. Now we have all the life vests ready to go. Anything that floats - tie them together. Tethered other life vests together. I need a pile of all floatation devices. Get them together."

At that moment, the severity sunk in for them - the terror that was on their face was, "Oh my gosh. He's preparing for the boat to sink." One of the girls said, "So it's that serious?" I said, "No. It's more serious than that. I want you to understand what I'm about to say to you. I'm not screaming this. I'm not yelling. I'm as calm as I possibly can be." I looked at them all and I said, "If you deviate from anything that we're about to do, if you question anything that I say, or if you hesitate for a moment to do what I tell you to do, I want you to understand that you're going to die. If I get any thought that you're going to stop me or anybody else on this boat from getting home, I will put you out. If you're going to hinder our ability to survive, you will not make it home. That is the severity of what we're about to go through. If the boat capsizes, do not swim away from the boat. If you leave the boat for any reason whatsoever, understand that you're going to die. I'm not coming to get you. Glenn's not coming to get you. If any of you leave to go get that person, you're going to die as well. It's over. It's done. Don't leave the boat. You stay here. The boat's not going to sink. If it capsizes, we stay on the boat. We have the EPIRB deployed. We have the EPIRB deployed. If you stay here with the EPIRB, you stay here with the boat, we're going to get rescued. It's only a matter of time. But if you do anything to panic, it's done. It's over. I'm letting you know now." And they're just like, "Holy shit."

Scott

Yeah, after hearing that kind of message, I assume everyone was compliant.

Josh

Yeah, very compliant. We did have Glen up the top of the boat. Sherri was up top with him screaming at the top of her lungs trying to get him back down to the galley. We had dropped all 500 foot of anchor line and we knew that the boat was still dragging from the way that the boat was rocking. The boat was rocking back and forth. It was going back and forth in the waves. We knew that the anchor hasn't caught yet. I don't know what was really happening with Glenn above deck - I don't understand - but I know that I can't stop him from doing what he's doing. To me, it looked like a full panic attack from the severity because he knew what the severity of the situation was. He has not said it. That's where he's up top.

Sherri finally got him to come down into the deck. Then, we have 7 people in a small confined area that, I would say, is probably 20 foot by 10 foot, at best. It got really tight quarters. The girls started getting seasick and people were throwing up below deck. It's just like, "This isn't happening. I am claustrophobic." The way that the boat is lined up below deck— it's a little area where you have the head and then a bedding area that is maybe 4 feet from the bed to the ceiling, if you will. I took that area - that's where all the flotation devices were. I needed to make sure that I had the flotation devices because I didn't know how well the girls on the boat had computed the fact that we needed these flotation devices. I can say it all day long, but they're not prepared to jump off the boat. They're not prepared to grab everything that floats and get out of the boat with that. So I positioned myself in the galley to make sure that I could go and I would be the last one out of the galley with all the flotation devices to give us a raft.

The boat actually did sink to the bottom of the Gulf. They're looking at my girlfriend now who is also getting seasick. After the seas had settled a little bit and the anchor had caught, and we weren't going and rocking back and forth, the girls were like, "How are you so calm?" My girlfriend was 25 weeks pregnant. Meghan was like, "I just look. He's here." And she pointed to me as I was laying on the floatation devices. I was drinking very warm tequila out of the bottles, and it's not that I'm drinking to get hammered. I'm not doing a shot at a time. I was literally taking the bottle, taking the cap off, and just putting the tequila to my lips to give the persona of how relaxed I was and how calm I was. I didn't care. I'm okay. I was giving them the understanding that we're not freaking out. I was not freaking out. I just told you that we're about to die, but I was not freaking out and made it end with, "If he's not freaking out, we shouldn't be freaking out." That was to help quell the emotion and draw everybody back in and give them the understanding that we're okay. But the severity is much worse and if you deviate from the plan, if you deviate for whatever reason, you're taking your life into your own hands.

Scott

Did you detect that the boat was taking on water at all?

Josh

No. Luckily, the design of the Stamas boat was impeccable. It was great. The circuit that's called the bilge pump that removes the water— that actually stayed on. When I was underneath the boat and looking at the bilge, I knew that we were not taking on water. We don't have excess water. The boat was not, like, rocking. When your boat takes on water, it actually sways. It's not a crashing rock up and down - it's a swaying fluid motion when the boat takes on water. We never had that feeling. I knew we weren't taking on water. Most importantly, the bilge pump would read the rainwater that would get into the hole of the boat - the bilge pump was removing that. When I was underneath the bilge area, I believe I counted 15 12V batteries, so I knew that we were on a separate circuit. The bilge pump was working. I have 15-plus batteries, so we can be out here for days and it's okay. We have plenty of ice. We have plenty of food. We have close to 300 pounds of fish. Like, we're good. And we have EPIRB. So again, I knew we were fine because I direct wire this bilge pump if I have to, and get rid of any water that's coming into the boat because the hole is completely impacted. We're there anchored up. We're going to be alright. We don't have anything to worry about.

Scott

That says a lot about that boat manufacturer.

Josh

Yeah, well, the reason I believe that I was struck was I was on the ground plate that's below the decking. From what I've been told, there's a ground plate that runs from the aft to the bow of the boat. That takes the lightning strike and directs the lightning strike to the back of the boat and out of the side of the boat. That's what it did. It operated perfectly. I believe I was actually standing on that, and that's what helped - I was grounded to that. That's what helped the lightning pass through me.

Scott

Yeah, that's why you felt it leave your ankle...

Josh

Yeah, exactly. I believe, if I were to have been hit and I wasn't standing there, I wouldn't have made it. I think that's what helped me. But I'm not a physicist, so I really don't have a great explanation for that.

But that boat was designed to take a lightning strike and stay afloat, and also continue to pump out water when the water comes in from either the waves or the rainstorm.

Scott

And the manufacturer of the boat is— did you say Stamas?

Josh

Yes, Stamas Boatworks, I believe. I know the boat's Stamas out Tarpon Springs, Florida.

Scott

How long did you have to wait before the Coast Guard showed up? They were coming out by helicopter...

Josh

Yeah, they came out via helicopter. I have an exceptional vision. At 39 years old, I have now probably somewhere around 2018 vision. But when I had my vision taken years ago with a piece of metal in my eye, I had 2012 vision at that point in time. We were sitting on the boat. The rains have dissipated. We were above deck. We're freaking out. The body language of everyone on the boat, except for myself and Meghan is very tense. You could cut it with a knife. It was so tense - how tense everyone was. It was like a fog that was over a boat. I was looking down south. I knew where we were at approximately. We finally got our heading. The anchor holds and we have our north, so I know what direction we were now and I know where the hell the helicopter is going to come from. I know that. So I was looking south of the boat and I saw, in the foreground, a rectangle flash of light. That wouldn't be a boat. If it was a boat, it would be a cruise ship. But if it was a cruise ship, we would see it. So I saw this flashlight. I looked at everybody and I went, "Guys, there's something over there. I just saw a flash of light." Then, I realized immediately that I fucked up because - that's a false hope - they're doing a grid search. I could see the Coast Guard doing a grid search and not coming directly to us. That's what I assumed that they were doing from the way that the flashlight was. Nobody could see it. Nobody really paid attention to it. So I was like, "Alright, I'm not even gonna mess around. I'm not going to say anything. I'm not gonna bring it up again."

It was around, I believe, an hour and a half from the time we hit the beacon to the time that they were on to us in the helicopter. You asked earlier about panic. That's when I knew how panicked everyone on the boat really was. That's how I knew how panicked Glennn was - the relief of seeing this helicopter and everyone being like, "Oh my gosh, this is amazing! This is awesome! We're safe!" My mindset was in a totally different area. My brain was still there scrambled from everything that had just transpired - that relief of pressure and "We're here safe and ready to go." It was an eye-opening situation for me - how condensed everyone's emotions were because it was an explosion. Everybody started crying. Everybody was happy. Like, "I'm over here and I'm legitimately pissed off. Like, I'm mad now that the helicopter's here. I'm mad. I'm upset. I'm pissed off when I should be happy." Like I said, we had three winning fish on the boat and I knew that we weren't going to be bringing those fish home.

Scott

So the helicopter was there. The Coast Guard has arrived. They obviously are professionals at this. They know exactly what to do. What was the process for getting everyone from the boat to the helicopter? And could it accommodate that many people?

Josh

I was very surprised that we were able to get everyone on one trip. It was tight. It was really, really tight, but we were good. They radio to us. Our VHF was actually working - again, that's on a separate circuit. I can only assume that it's on the same circuit that the bilge pumps were operating on and was not struck by lightning somehow. They were radioing us back and forth and they wanted to know the severity, if there were any damages, and if anybody was hurt on the boat. They kind of glossed over the fact that I was hit by lightning. I felt fine. So there's nobody that's injured on the boat. They dropped the diver and the diver came up. My girlfriend was going home. Meghan was going home. I wasn't leaving the boat unless everyone was leaving the boat. There was no possible way I was going to leave anybody on that boat.

There was a discussion that Glenn was possibly staying with the boat until Sea Tow or Boat Tow US or whatever tow service we could get there to the boat to tow the boat back in. There was a discussion that he was staying on the boat and I wasn't going to allow him to be on the boat by himself - zero chance. We had that discussion. Sherri, his sister, was pleading with Glenn to get into the helicopter and, "Let's go home. Let's get everybody home. We can get the boat another time." I made the promise to her that I would be the last person off the boat. I was going to make sure that Glenn was going to get into the water because I knew if I got in the water and into the helicopter, I couldn't make him get off the boat.

We were sitting there talking back and forth and I went, "Man, I made your sister a promise that you're gonna get into the helicopter before me."

He went, "The captain goes down with the ship. The captain is the last one off the boat."

"But Glenn, let's be honest. I'm the only one that's a captain on this boat."

He looked at me and he smiled. He was, "Josh, I promise. Get in the water. I'll be in the helicopter."

So I quickly ran up to the front cooler - or the back, I don't remember which cooler - got the cookies, ate a couple of cookies, jumped in the water, and then we were all in the helicopter. Then, Glenn came in right after that. We took a ride back to St. Pete's Coast Guard station.

Scott

I can imagine how conflicted he would be by not just the fact that you always hear that "The captain goes down with the ship", but he's also leaving a million-dollar boat behind.

Josh

Oh, yeah, absolutely. Again, back to watching him panic, he was all over the boat and looking for things. I don't know what he was looking for. The severity of what he was going through was on a different level because he got 6 other people on the boat that he's now responsible for their lives. From the complexity of that thought process that he's going through, I can only imagine that immense pressure because it's going to affect everyone. Multiple people are going to be affected by this if we don't get back home. So he's back to the million-dollar boat. I really think it clicked with him. It's a boat. It's insured. Let's go home. I have a fishing rod and reel that I brought out and I left that on the boat, and that was one of my oldest rods and reels I've had. My grandfather gave it to me 30 years ago. I've had it and I fished with it all the time, but I had to leave this rod reel on the boat and I was like, "Oh, well, see you later."

Scott

It's just a thing...

Josh

It's just a thing. It's a sentimental thing, but at least we're going to be home. We're all going to be able to get back home to your family, and it'll be good. Glenn and I have become very good friends before this. When he told me that he was coming in and getting off the boat, I knew that he was coming. He wasn't gonna stay out there alone if I was getting off the boat as well. So the relief of seeing him get off the boat and into the helicopter was something for me. I was, "Thank you, Jesus for getting him, in his stubbornness, and getting him off the boat and into the helicopter."

Scott

When you're loading everybody into the helicopter, at that point, you knew everything was going to be okay. You had those winning fishes on the boat. Did you consider bringing them with you?

Josh

100%. I absolutely did. Again, I was upset. I was upset, more so for the fact that my son wasn't going to be at this station. My son wasn't going to be able to see what this experience was like to win a fishing tournament or place in a fishing tournament, and just take in this awesome aura of just being outside, being an old Salty Dog and a Florida cracker, living and fishing on the water, and being outdoors in general. My son wasn't going to experience that. That's when I was thinking, "Man, we have the fish bags. We literally can get the three biggest fish that we have. We have plenty of ice. What's another 100 pounds of fish and some ice? We're fine. We have plenty of space on the helicopter. They said they can take all of us. I was strongly considering just putting the fish in the bag, bringing it to the back of the boat, and asking the diver if we can take the fish back home."

I asked the diver, "How long is it going to take to get back?" "Probably an hour and a half - two hours at the absolute most." I was calculating what time it is - it's 12.30 or 1.30. "We're gonna get back by 3 or 4. Shit, man. We can make this happen. I'm gonna be able to make this happen. Let's do it." And then I was like, "Oh shit, there's the negative connotation of the fact that I have been the arrogant asshole to take the winning fish and put it in a fish bag, and my concentration was just the winning fish because none of these idiots - I don't mean to offend anybody but, again, I don't care - respond to the fact that I or we as the boat were concentrated on having the winning fish delivered to the weigh-ins. I didn't want the negative thought process and the people to focus on the negativity - not the perseverance, not the fact that we had caught winning fish on the boat, we've been rescued, we had overcome being out on the water because we have the EPIRB device, and we were saved quick enough to get back to the weigh station. They would probably not allow us to weigh the fish anyways just because of the rule set - the fish has to be delivered via boat. They can't leave the boat and blah, blah, blah. But just to have that story of perseverance, like, "Oh my gosh, these guys actually went the extra distance and the extra mile to make this happen to show people that we can pursue and persevere over almost anything in life. It's a mindset." I went through all that and was like, "I don't want the negative because the negative is going to outweigh the positive of the situation."

Scott

Of course, that's the way Facebook comments work. People don't see the good there. They look at you and like, "Wow, you guys all could have died and all you were thinking about was those fish?"

Josh

Yeah, absolutely. I was not thinking of that. That was the least of my concerns. I thought, "Now that we're safe, we're good, and we're ready to go, what's another extra 5 minutes of me throwing fish on the helicopter and taking them into the weigh station?" Because the people in the tournament knew that we were in trouble because Glenn has fished in this tournament for years. They knew that we were in trouble because we hadn't gotten back to the boat, he hadn't moved back to the dock, and he hadn't radioed in or communicated with the directors of the tournament that we were not going to make it back. We're just going home. I think, the last time that they ran the tournament, all the fish that they were catching were good-sized fish but got cut in half by sharks. So they just went back to the dock or went back home. Anyways, that's where I was like, "Let's not do it so I don't have to deal with the nonsense of people being just inexperienced and just not having the understanding of what we had gone through." I decided to ice as much fish down as possible before we left - I had thrown ice on all the fish because we were preparing for the 3-hour ride back into the dock.

Scott

I think it was a good decision.

Josh

Yeah. I mean, again, it's been almost four months since this transpired. I look back and I'm still very upset with myself for giving a fuck about what other people thought. It was the best move at the moment, but I'm upset that I allowed other people to dictate what I was going to do at that moment because everyone on that boat, everyone in the helicopter would have absolutely been thrilled that the 7 of us would be like, "Holy shit, look what we've gone through."

Scott

Because they were there. They know exactly what happened.

Josh

Absolutely.

Scott

Was the boat recovered?

Josh

Yeah.

Scott

What's the process for bringing it in?

Josh

I've mentioned a couple of the tow companies - I'm not going to mention the names of the companies moving forward. Glenn was contracted with a tow company. Because we were over 99 miles outside of their tow restrictions, they refused to bring the tow, so he had to contract another company to come out. They did that tow process because they adhere to the DOT - you can only work eight hours. It took 2 boats to get out to the recovery. One boat went all the way out there and the guys that recovered the boat were telling us that the boat was in 8-foot swells. So when they got out there, they could hardly recover the boat in a safe manner. They got the boat hooked up and they finally got it moving. So they got out there. Then, they came back, and then they were met halfway with the second tow boat. It's a long process. They're only going 7-8 miles an hour at best. Most of the time, they're going about 5 miles

an hour in 8-foot waves - the 8-foot swells. So the guys that we're talking about were like, "Thank god you guys left. You would have probably fallen off the boat. You would have been seasick." At that point, I was like, "Thank God we didn't stay because, if we did, it would have been myself and Glenn crying, crying into each other's arms because of the just lightning storm that was going on." I think it took about 24 hours for them to get out there, and then get the boat back to the dock. When we got the boat back to the dock, we looked at the VHF radio antenna, I noticed it was missing. It had gotten struck by lightning again while it was out in the water waiting for the tow to come back in. Like I said, if you stayed out there - the VHF has a 20-mile radius line of sight - you really have no communication with anybody at 100 miles offshore. All you have is your beacon going off and nothing else.

Scott

That's literally what saved all of your lives.

Josh

100%. grant, we have what's called a Float Plan. We let people within the family and friends know the precise location - the general GPS coordinates - of where we're at, but that doesn't account for if we're moving or drifting. So the reality is, if we didn't have the EPIRB, we're adrift and sitting somewhere for 24 hours, 36 hours, 48 hours - who knows how long it would have taken them to eventually find us. We're a speck of sand on the beach. It's an immense understatement for people that really don't go out there and don't know how far you're going out and how secluded you really are. You're out in the ocean. People are under the misconception that you see all these boats out there. You don't see anybody. You don't see anyone. When you're 100 miles offshore, you're not going to see an abundance of people fishing. So having that EPIRB and being home within 3 hours or so after the lightning strike is something that I cannot reiterate enough how important it is. If you're more than 20 miles offshore, it's important to have some type of EPIRB device on your vessel or on your person. It's extremely important just for the sound of mind because you can research horror stories of people going 10 miles offshore and never being found again because of not having an EPIRB advice.

Scott

It sounds like that's probably the most important takeaway that you want people to hear from this experience.

Josh

Yeah, 100%. It's being prepared for what can happen. Back to the question you asked me, "Why did I become the leader of the group and take control at that moment?" It's the mental preparation as well. Being prepared and knowing that you have everything put together when something goes wrong - because it's going to go wrong, it's going to happen, it's only a matter of time. You're dealing with Mother Nature. You're dealing with things that are outside of your control. Having the mental understanding that you've done everything necessary to be prepared for when the boat breaks down or gets struck by lightning, just having that security keeps you in the ability to stay in a mental focus and move forward. So having the EPIRB device on your boat is the most important piece of safety equipment outside of having a fully functional bilge pump on your boat. That's the most important safety device you can have on your boat to get you located so that they can find you. You're not just floating out there hoping and praying to Little Baby Jesus that you're going to see the big bird in the sky coming to save you.

Scott

How long after this before you were back out on the water? And what was that mentally for you?

Josh

I got a couple of good ones there. My son's sensei - his name is Master Leo - just left for Nepal. He's gonna be running an endurance race in Nepal at Mount Everest. He's a maniac. I was on the water with Leo. This is getting close to scallop season here in the Pasco County area, and I wanted to get Leo out on the water. Under different circumstances, I wasn't prepared mentally for this, but it was a fitting situation for Leo. He's Hungarian and he has 2 modes of operation, which is "Go" and "Go harder." If I tell him I can't go on the water because of what I went through, he would have just told me in his Hungarian voice, "Who cares? You're alive. Make it happen."

So we got out on the water - I believe that was a Monday or Tuesday after this happened on Saturday. It's Monday or Tuesday the following week. So, within 72 hours, I was back on the water on my personal flat in my skiff that I do charters out of. The clouds were out there. You look at the lightning and it's a little-- I've never mocked Mother Nature. I've never mocked Mother Nature. I've never made fun of mother nature. The power of Mother Nature is immense and it's beyond our understanding. The respect that I had at this moment was like, "Wow, there are clouds over there. They're gonna form. Are we gonna get struck by lightning? Am I going to get struck by lightning again?" Because the likelihood of myself being struck by lightning goes up threefold.

I'm on the water and all these things are going through. I hate swimming. I hate being in the water. It's not something I like to do. I can freedive 3040 feet, but I don't like to be in the water because I'm afraid of sharks, if you will. I have respect for sharks. I have so much more respect for lightning and the fear of lightning is a reality. So we're out on the water and we had a good day. We saw almost like an omen. We got out on the water. We're gonna go to the beach. Leo and I are going to practice jiu-jitsu together. We're gonna go to the Anclote Island. He wanted to-- it's called rolling in jiu-jitsu. He wanted to roll on the beach, but we made a stop at one of the sandbars and it was almost like a message. There's a 10-foot plus Hammerhead in four foot of water chasing down other bait fish and stuff. We were following this fish around. This big shark came up next to the boat and swam away. We were on the boat or we were tracking the shark back down, and everybody on the boat was like, "Oh my gosh, look at this! This is so awesome!"

The whole time I was thinking about lightning. Then, there's the shark. Right before this happened - I run 40 charters out of Tampa - I spent 20 hours in thunderstorms with bachelor parties in storms 10 times worse than what we were in when I was struck by lightning. Everything started to compile - like, how much I put myself at risk of being struck by lightning on a regular basis. All I was thinking about the whole time that I've been around was the lightning and - my biggest fear in the water - this shark that is in the water. To say it was easy to get back on the water, I was going through the motions. Being on the water is not a problem - not an issue going through the motions - but that feeling that I had was just nausea all day long the first time I was back on the water.

That was June. At the beginning of August, just about a month later, I was running a kid's fishing trip and lightning started to come in. I was looking at my radar. It's coming in. There are no ifs, ands, or buts. We ran back to the dock and the lightning started hitting very close to where we were at, and my buddy that was at the dock was, "Man, go inside. Get out of here. You really need to get away because the PTSD was something that was setting in." Like, holy cow, I could feel it. I was getting lightheaded. So, it's there. I'm still in crabbing right now as well, so I'm still on the water for 5 days a week. You can't stop your lights for what happened yesterday. You have to continue moving. You just have the knowledge and a different perspective now.

Scott

Since this happened, you've had some good stuff happen too. Meghan was pregnant at the time. The baby has arrived, right?

Josh

Yeah, absolutely. It was triumphant perseverance going through that experience and her giving birth. We had a plan and it didn't go to plan - it went the exact opposite of the way we wanted it to happen. It's her body and her choice to do whatever she wants, and it went the exact opposite. But again, the perseverance and the fact that we have a healthy baby boy that's three weeks old now.

Scott

You run a charter fishing service here in the Tampa Bay area. Can you tell us what exactly what do you do, your website, and how people can contact you?

Josh

You can contact me on Facebook and Instagram. My website is thenautiviking.com. I predominantly run a flats charter fishing for snow trout, redfish, tarpon, and grouper when the season is right and the water temperature drops down to get the fishing a little bit closer. I run a 26-foot Carolina skiff - plenty of room. It's charter fishing. It's not rocket science. The only thing that I can say that differentiates me from other captains in the area is I'm a relatively new captain as far as charter fishing. I've been a fisherman my entire life. I've lived in the Clearwater area most of my life. I know how to deal with people and talk to people. My goal in life and being a charter captain is to be known as a kid-friendly cap. So if you can put up with 5, 6, or 7-year-old and teenagers on the boat and keep people engaged in learning what the fishing aspect is and not losing your temper—

I've had so many stories of clients coming on my boat telling me stories of what they've gone through with other charter captains and it's disheartening because you've got these people that are paying you very good money to go out on a boat. To be chastised, talked down to, and reprimanded on a charter captain boat is just inexcusable. From my perception, you're supposed to be giving an experience - even if you're not catching fish all day long - from the time that they hit the water to the time that they leave the dock. You're selling an experience and you want to make this memory for your clients. So that's my perspective of charter fishing - just giving people an experience that they're going to have for a long time. In doing so, they're going to come back and they're going to hang out with me some more. They know that I'm a decent human being, I'm not going to yell and scream at them, just give the experience of a family event for you and your family, and be safe and know that you're going to get out on the water and come back home safe - having that experience.

Scott

Even though you may be one of the less experienced, you probably are the only one with a personal lightning strike story.

Josh

I don't know of anybody else that's alive today.

Scott

That's the problem - they don't survive, usually, to tell that story.

Josh

Absolutely. I don't know anybody else that's alive today that has been struck by lightning, who recorded their own lightning strike, and is here to tell the story and to give that experience of life and the importance of how finite our time is here, too. I wake up every morning and I get to do things now. I get to hug my son one more time. I get to hug my newborn son, which I might not have been able to do. That's the real perspective on life that she has changed for me. I am one of a kind. I've been asked out in public. People noticed and recognized me from the local news station to get the story. But again, the emphasis is on the fact that you can overcome something. You're not stuck to the life that you have right now. It may be a little bit rough and maybe a little bit of a hard time that you're going through, but it could be so much worse. You could have gone to the place that I went where most people don't come back from. You could be somewhere else. So smile. Have a good day. Keep the EPIRBs active - keep them charged - and keep fishing.

Scott

You can see Josh's video – the one he was recording when he was struck by lightning – as well as the Coast Guard rescue video recorded from their helicopter, in the show notes for this episode at WhatWasThatLike.com/124.

Female

Hi, Scott. I first wanted to start out by saying that I really enjoy the podcast and I really love listening to everyone's stories, the situations they find themselves in, and how they come out on the other side. It's very fascinating. I just finished listening to Episode 122: Ella was trampled by an elephant and I found the story very moving and felt very compelled to call in as a wildlife conservationist and an animal lover myself. I just wanted to encourage people to do research when they're traveling internationally and visiting these magnificent animals in so-called sanctuaries. Any sanctuary that offers rides or keeps the animals in chains is not a sanctuary at all, and it's actually rather exploitative to the animals. There are many sanctuaries in places like Thailand and India where the animals are free and they are truly rescued. They are free to roam and free to live out their lives in peace, safety, and comfort without the exploitation of riding and without the exploitation of being kept in chains to get close to them. Those are the sanctuaries that I believe should be supported and should be visited when tourists come to those countries to see all of those incredible animals. I just would encourage anyone who wants to travel to those places to really vet out the sanctuary first and ensure that those animals are truly free to live and free to be themselves and experience life the way that they should be experiencing life. Thank you for listening and I can't wait for the next episode.

Scott

I mentioned previously that I'm now on Tiktok, and I'm definitely having some fun posting these little short-form videos. I've actually only talked about podcast episodes in a few of them, even though that was the original plan. I'll still talk about podcast episodes there, but I'm kind of enjoying putting up random things like me telling stupid jokes, or my little dogs chasing a ball down the hallway. If you want to follow me there, my user name is WhatWasThatLike, with no spaces.

And of course, you can always join the thousands of other podcast listeners who are already in the What Was That Like Facebook discussion group. We do talk about podcast episodes there, along with a bunch of other things – but never any politics. That's at WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook.

And now I want to mention a correction. In the previous episode, titled "Alice's brother went missing", Alice was talking about her brother having problems with addiction, including meth. She mentioned that

he was taking methadone, and in my expert medical opinion, I said I thought that methadone was a drug used to help people get off of methamphetamine. And of course, that was completely wrong. It's actually used to help people get off of opiates. I want to thank everyone who emailed and messaged me to let me know about that mistake. I'd love to say it won't happen again, but I'm pretty sure I'll say something that's incorrect at some point in a future episode. If you hear it, please feel free to let me know and I'll tell everyone that I screwed up. Love you guys.

And now we're at this week's Listener Story. If you have an interesting story you can tell in about 5 minutes, or if you just have any comment you want to make, you can record it on your phone and email it to me at Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com. Or you can call the Podcast Voice Mail line anytime 24/7, at 727-386-9468. We end every episode with a Listener Story, so I'm always looking for new ones.

This week's Listener Story has a Christmas/911 theme.

Stay safe, and I'll see you back here in 2 weeks, with the last episode for 2022.

(Listener's Story)

Hi, Scott. When I was an emergency dispatcher back in the early 2000s, I was working on Christmas Eve. My officers were out searching for a parolee at large who was armed and dangerous. They had the helicopters out shining lights on the streets and neighborhoods where he was last seen. The search lasted for hours and he got away. The next night was Christmas. I was also working when I received a call from a young mother thanking me for the helicopter and the lights in her neighborhood the night before the commotion woke her toddler up. When she saw the lights out her window, she started pointing, jumping up and down, and screaming, "Santa Claus! Santa Claus!" The mom was so happy that we helped her child believe. I love it. I love your podcast. Thanks so much.