Episode 166: Suzanne was stuck on the boat

(Hey, this is Scott. Hang around after today's episode, for a big announcement about the podcast. Okay – on with the show.)

There are some people whose dream is to live on a boat and just spend their life sailing around the world.

In fact, there's a company called Villa Vie that's hoping a LOT of people want to do that. They have a cruise ship that holds 924 passengers, and they're offering a never-ending cruise that goes around the world every 3 ½ years. You can actually buy one of the cabins – starting for as little as $100k. And you own that cabin! Kind of like a floating time share I guess. But you also have monthly maintenance fees – that's $3500 per month. So far, more than 30 people have put down a deposit to purchase a cabin.

I've gone on a few cruises, and it can be a great way to vacation. But I don't think I'd want to spend years living on a cruise ship. Like most things, spending time at sea is wonderful, but in moderation.

Today you'll hear from my guest, Suzanne. When she was just 7 years old, she and her family got on a large sailboat and sailed away from their home in England. What she didn't expect was to spend the rest of her childhood there.

Suzanne told me about growing up on a boat, the good and the bad, and how she finally escaped.

Scott
As a 6-year-old child, would you say you were pretty happy?

Suzanne
Yeah, I would. We were living in a house in the center, near the center of England. I was going to school. I had a dog, Rusty, that I adored. I had a best friend called Sarah. I was enjoying school. That was fun. I had been at school for a couple of years by that point. I had a younger brother and was living in a house in a small small town in the UK. Everything seemed pretty normal. I remember being happy. I remember kind of playing in the garden on the swing. I remember doing a little bit of horse riding, going and staying over at my friend's house - all the normal things that you would expect you'd be doing as a six-year-old girl.

Scott
At that time, you were six. Your younger brother, Jon, is a year younger than you, right?

Suzanne
That's right.

Scott
And your two parents– when you were 6, your dad called a family meeting and made this big announcement. Do you remember that? I mean, at six years old, do you have the memory of that specific day?

Suzanne
I do, because it was such a momentous moment in my life. I remember us all sitting around at the kitchen table in this house that we were living in Warwick, and I remember my father basically announcing that he wanted to sail around the world and this was before he'd found a boat, but he was utterly determined to do it. I had no doubt in my mind when he said that we were going to do it. I mean, I thought my father could do anything and it wasn't a question for discussion. This was something that was going to happen. This was a big adventure that he decided that we were all going to go on together.

Scott
Yeah, when you're that age, the kids don't usually really get a vote, right? But you said you didn't even have a boat yet. How did he know how to sail or how did he expect to learn that?

Suzanne
So he'd done some sailing - he'd done short-distance sailing. He had owned various small boats and he'd been to and fro across the channel from the UK to France and back. He'd been down to the Canary Islands and back a few times. He'd never cross an ocean. He'd never done satellite navigation, but he had sailed around the UK, so it was not impossible for him to come up with this idea. And as you say, as a 6-year-old child, I didn't really dispute it in the slightest. This was my father. He announced a big adventure and, of course, I was going to go with him.

Scott
Yeah, you were definitely going to go, but you had some hesitation about this plan.

Suzanne
Well, it was less hesitation about the plan and more of I knew I was going to leave a lot behind. In particular, the things I knew I was going to leave behind or miss were my dog that I was very attached to - Rusty, a water spaniel, who I never saw again - and my best friend Sarah. I had other friends as well, but Sarah was kind of my kind of best friend. My doll house, which I'd only just got for Christmas– actually, my father had kind of actually painted it crossing the channel and I was very attached to that. Obviously, I was also going to leave behind all my other relatives. So, everything I knew. I remember being in two minds about the whole thing because I knew how much I was going to leave behind, but my father promised me that we would be back in three years when I was 10 and everything would be waiting for me.

Scott
Looking back now, do you think your dad really intended at that time to be back in three years?

Suzanne
I do. He had the whole voyage plotted out. The whole idea was that he was going to follow Captain Cook around the world because it was the 200th anniversary of Captain Cook's third voyage around the world, and my maiden name is actually Cook, so he had this idea that we were going to honor Captain Cook by following him around the world. I think also, to be honest, it was a bit of an excuse to raise money for this trip because we weren't a wealthy family. There's no way he could have afforded to sail around the world without getting sponsorship, which he did. But while we were following Cook, we had - at least, this was the intention setting out - a pretty prescribed route that was going to take us all the way

around the world, and we were going to get to Hawaii after about three years, and then we're going to come straight back home through the Panama Canal back to the UK and back to a normal life.

Scott
It sounds exciting to me. I mean, was there a small part of you that was a little bit excited about this adventure you were going on?

Suzanne
Oh yeah, no. My father, of course, kind of talked the whole thing up. “This was going to be a massive adventure. We were going to see more countries in the world than any of our friends would see. We were going to have adventures along the way. We were going to see whales and dolphins.” I know my mother was very heavily sold on. All the wonderful seafood she was going to get to eat once we hit the South Pacific. We're going to see incredible islands. The whole thing was going to be a massive adventure, and I believed all that. Of course, I trusted my father who I adored as a kind of hero, that this was going to be this incredible adventure, and then I was going to come back again.

Scott
When the sailing finally began, you were 7 years old at that point. And the boat that you guys got was called Wavewalker. Can you describe that boat?

Suzanne
It was pretty big. It was quite big, but she was a very unusual boat. She was a one-off boat that somebody else had built as a bit of a dream boat. She looked like an old galleon in a way with a kind of raised deck at the back, a poop deck at the back with a smaller mast at the front and a bigger mast at the back. She was 69 feet long, which is quite long for a boat. On the other hand, six feet at the front was the bowsprit - almost like a kind of plank at the front. There's no space down below underneath that. And she was an incredibly narrow boat. Down below, there was nowhere near as much space as you might expect. Down below, you had a number of bunks, which were kind of one on top of the other. You had one table that sat about four or five people. One was kind of the kitchen galley. Most of the time, we only had one working head or toilet. There was a second one, but it almost never worked.

My parents had an aft cabin in the back, which had another couple of berths. So down below, there wasn't a lot of space. I mean, there was no private space. All I ever had was a bunk and, obviously, we had the kind of shared toilet that we could use.

Scott
You had mentioned that the planned route was to follow Captain Cook's route. You guys sailed around the world in what you termed “The wrong direction.” Why is that and what does that mean?

Suzanne
Well, Captain Cook, on his third voyage, was going in search of a northwest passage around the top of what we now know as Canada and, in doing so, the way in which he wanted to get there from the UK was to sail from west to east because he felt that was kind of the best way to get there. Now, most people who sail around the world sail from east to west. If you sail from east to west, the winds go that direction near the equator. So what you do is you go all the way around the world from east to west. You are sailing fairly near the equator. The winds tend to be much gentler because you're up near the equator. The seas also tend to be much better because there's quite a lot of land that breaks up the

waves. So generally that's the way in which everybody goes. They go kind of through the Red Sea, through the Mediterranean, kind of round the world around the equator.

Captain Cook went the other way. Because he was going the other way to catch the wind, what you have to do is go very far south and that meant, to follow Captain Cook, we had to sail all the way down from the UK to South America and then across the southern Atlantic Ocean - which is the most dangerous ocean in the world - and then from South Africa to Australia, which probably is the most dangerous ocean in the world, the Southern Indian ocean - an ocean which I was talking to a sailor the other day. They'd never heard of somebody trying to cross the Southern Indian Ocean with small children on board.

Scott
And your dad was the only one in the family who knew how to sail. Did he initially plan on doing this all on his own? I know you had crew members from time to time.

Suzanne
Well, his initial plan was to take some crew on board who were going to part-pay for the voyage, but what happened was they all dropped out before the start of the voyage because they decided the voyage was going to be too dangerous. So when we set sail from the UK, we had three crew on board. One of them actually knew how to sail, Owen, because he had actually sailed on a kind of cross-ocean trip to get to the UK. He was an Australian. The other two were novices. So we had my father who had some sailing experience around the UK. We had Owen, who had quite a lot of sailing experience. We had two novice crews - my brother and I were seven and six years old, so we're not really going to do very much sailing - and my mother, who turns out hates sailing and gets very badly seasick. So she disappears into her cabin for several days every time we set sail because she's so badly seasick.

So my father's plan, given that he knows my mother gets very seasick and we're so tiny, is that he will take a few crew with him from each port, but what becomes clear as well after a while is it's very difficult living with other people on the boat. I mean, that's part of the whole story. It's a very confined space. So they fall out with the crew quite often. So quite early on, unfortunately, we lose Owen. He only came with us as far as South Africa and then, after that, we really only had novice crews on board.

Scott
And in the most dangerous ocean in the world.

Suzanne
That's right. When we set sail from South Africa to cross the most dangerous ocean in the world - the Southern Indian Ocean - we had on board only two novice crew members, Larry and Herbie, who'd never sailed before.

Scott
Unbelievable. You mentioned your mother - that's one of the things that I found interesting about this whole thing. Did she know ahead of time that she was prone to seasickness?

Suzanne
I'm assuming that she did because she had done some sailing with my father before we went. I mean, she'd been on a few of these voyages. She also knew that she didn't like sailing because she wrote in her diary about not really liking sailing and not liking getting wet. I don't know if she knew quite how badly

seasick she would get. Obviously, I don't recall a kind of conversation with her about it before we set sail, but she did know that she didn't like sailing. So she really went on this voyage. Because if my father was going to go, she was going to go with him even though she really didn't want to go and she didn't really want to be there.

Scott
Can you talk about when you encountered the capital letter W - the wave? That was in the Indian Ocean, right?

Suzanne
That's right. We set sail from South Africa. So we're still in our first year of travel. We've gone down to South America, across to South Africa. We set sail from South Africa with these two novice crew on board and about a week out of South Africa– this is a 6-week trip to go from South Africa to Australia. So, about a week and a half into it, we hit a terrible storm. The waves started building up and they're getting bigger and bigger and bigger. The problem down there is there's no land mass to break up the waves. So they just continued to build and, eventually, we're sailing in waves that are 30 feet high.

My father was trying to get the boat down each wave in a perpendicular way. So the boat is perpendicular to the wave, because if you at all twisted it, the boat would flip. I mean, that's how dangerous it was. He started towing lines off the back of the boat to try and slow the boat down. Eventually, what happened was several waves combined together, we believe. My father looked behind himself and saw this enormous wall of water which was 90 feet high. It was as high as our main mast, which was 60 feet high and kind of way above it, so he kind of estimated it was kind of 90 feet high. This wave was so enormous that it curled over the boat, which was 69 feet long. It hit us halfway down the boat - kind of 35 feet deep from the back of the boat, from the stern of the boat - went straight through the deck, out the side of the boat.

Now. I was a little girl still. I was standing downstairs in the galley in the kitchen with my mother, helping her to try and make some food because we hadn't eaten for several days, really. I mean, in a storm, you can't really do anything. I was kind of picked up when this happened - flung against the ceiling of the cabin and against the wall of the cabin. I broke my skull, fractured my skull, broke my nose. My father was flipped overboard but came back on board with his light harness, but I was really quite badly injured when the wave hit.

Scott
And you're out in the middle of the ocean. What was the plan at that point? I mean, he couldn't really tend to you because he still had to sail the boat.

Suzanne
That's right. I mean, the other reason why the sailing was so dangerous is we were sailing alone. We weren't sailing with other boats. We also had very limited communication facilities on board. We had the ability to send out a Mayday, which he did, but got no response to it. Otherwise, we just had a radio that could only be used close to shore. So there was no way we would get a hold of anybody with that. I mean, equipment in general was incredibly limited on the boat. This is before satellite navigation. So all we had was a sextant really and didn't even have a fridge on board - I mean, very basic. So we were incredibly lucky that, about three days later, we came across a tiny atoll in the middle of the Indian Ocean.

And if listeners kind of look at the Southern Indian Ocean, they'll see there's almost nothing in it but, if you really zoom in, you'll find a tiny little atoll called Île Amsterdam. We were incredibly lucky. My father guessed which way we should navigate - because he couldn't see the sun or the stars, we couldn't work out where we were - and we found this atoll about three days later. But by that point, my head was enormous. I mean, my head made this fractured skull. I had a huge blood clot on my head that became absolutely enormous. When we found this island, it had a tiny little French base on it with a doctor. He operated 6 or 7 times on my head but, unfortunately, didn't have any suitable anesthetic, so it was all done with no anesthetic. So, I remember it being incredibly painful. Again, I was still a little girl of seven years old. So not only do I have the trauma of being shipwrecked in the middle of the ocean, but then these multiple operations on my head, and neither of my parents joined me for those. My mother didn't like operations. She said that she hated blood, so she wouldn't come in with me. My father was kind of busy trying to patch the boat together. So as a little girl, as you can imagine, at this point, I was really quite traumatized by the whole experience.

Scott
I was traumatized just reading about it. I mean, we'll talk about your book. You've detailed all these things, but you had - and this was over a period of several days - multiple surgeries. So after the first time, you knew what it was like to have surgery when you were awake with no anesthesia. You just endure the pain. Then, the next day or a couple of days later, you had to make that trip back to that surgery room and you knew it was going to happen again multiple times. Why didn't your dad, at that point, think, “Okay, hang on. My family is in danger.” Do you think he ever had that thought?

Suzanne
I don't think he did. I mean, my father has written his own account of the first year and a half of our voyage, which covers the shipwreck and covers us getting all the way to Australia and then his decision to keep sailing. At no point in that book does he ever really say that he considered not sailing or express any sort of regret or serious concern for the welfare of the family. My father was absolutely passionate. This was his dream. This is what he was going to do. He was going to be a hero. He was going to be recognized for doing this incredible voyage and, to some extent, my brother, me and almost my mother as well were all along for the ride. So long as we weren't getting in the way of that, there would be little consideration for us. This was really about his dream and what he was going to do.

Scott
Throughout this whole story, I detected sort of a cloud of misogyny throughout. If it was Jon, your brother, who had been injured, do you think anything would have changed? Was it because of the fact that it was you and you're the girl?

Suzanne
You're right. There was a huge amount of misogyny, which becomes more and more evident as the tale goes on, actually. I don't remember too much misogyny at that early stage but, of course, I may not have noticed it because I was only 6-7 years old. I don't know if I would have spotted it. There definitely was a, “You're a little girl.” I mean, that’s the reason why I was standing in the galley at the point where the wave hit, whereas my brother had been sent up to the front of the boat to get a tool for my father. There were very gender-defined roles, which became even more extreme as time went on.

Certainly, as time went on, I became very conscious of the fact that the concern for my welfare was much lower than the concern for my brother's welfare. The concern for his education was much greater than the concern for my education. I was expected to kind of work down below cooking and cleaning,

but he wasn't. He was expected to kind of have fun. He was a boy. So all of that became very clear later. I don't remember it then, so I really don't know. I actually have a suspicion that my father would have continued almost regardless of the voyage and that the voyage was the overriding priority that he had.

Scott
And you said during the storm, he was actually flung overboard. How did he describe that when he was writing about it - because you didn't even know that right away?

Suzanne
No, I mean, he was flung overboard because he was on the wheel. He surfaced and he actually thought that was it because he couldn't actually see the boat - he wrote in his book - when he kind of came up above the water. He said that everything kind of went through his head, kind of, and he thought about why he'd started the voyage, and he talked about what he'd kind of done to kind of get to that point.

He'd actually met a gypsy in the UK who'd read his fortune before setting sail, who'd predicted that he was going to live to an old age. So one of his overriding thoughts he wrote in his book was, “She was wrong. I always knew she was wrong. I never believed in fortunes.” The odd thing is, for me, reading his account, that he never said that he thought, “Maybe I shouldn't have been here. Maybe I shouldn't have brought two little kids and a wife who doesn't like sailing into the most dangerous ocean in the world.” He doesn't think, “What will they do if I don't get back on board? Have I just not only sacrificed myself but sacrificed my family?” None of that is kind of present in his book. It's really very much about the voyage and the decisions that he made to get to that point. You could argue that a lot of explorers and people of that nature will make huge sacrifices and, arguably, you would never want to be a member of their family. I mean, even Cook himself basically set sail multiple times, left his family behind, was eventually killed in Hawaii, and never came home, and we admire these people often. I think it's very hard to be a member of their family because the family really doesn't get a lot of consideration.

Scott
Beyond the physical dangers, kids are supposed to see a doctor for regular checkups. How often did that happen?

Suzanne
Well, basically, pretty much never. I mean, I saw the doctor when I was operated on Île Amsterdam. Then, I remember once seeing a doctor– I mean, we're now talking about a span of a decade that I was on the boat. I remember once seeing a doctor in Queensland, Australia because I started to get very bad asthma on the boat. The boat, as she started to decay and get older, became dustier and dirtier, and I was expected to sweep the cabin floor down below. It was another one of those tasks my brother was never asked to do and it used to make me incredibly wheezy. Unfortunately, my mother thought that was just an excuse.

Eventually, I managed to see a doctor in Queensland and was diagnosed with asthma and I was once hospitalized with it because it became so bad when I was in Sydney. Apart from those two times, I never remember seeing a doctor. I don't remember seeing a dentist in the whole 10 years. I have a vague memory that my father went to the dentist in Hawaii once, and I saw a dentist very briefly, but there was basically no medical care, no kind of dental care, and often very limited food on the boat. Sometimes, we ran out of water on the boat, but that's not even getting to some of the other things I'm sure we'll talk about with friendships and all sorts of other things that you can't do when you're trapped on a boat.

Scott
Yeah, and that is my next thing. A big part of childhood is making friends. Was that ever even possible? I mean you did stop at some places.

Suzanne
That's right. We stopped a few times. We stopped in Hawaii for a while and I made friends there - and I talk about them in the book - Sandy and Heidi. We stopped in Australia at one point and I made friends there because I finally managed to get to school for a little while but, for the vast majority of my childhood, I didn't have other friends. I didn't have friends to play with. I had my brother but once we got a little bit older– because my parents, particularly my mother was so different in how she treated us, my relationship with my mother massively deteriorated and she really seemed to dislike me and was very unpleasant to me on the boat. She used to call me names and not speak to me for days or weeks on end, whereas my brother was a little bit of a little prince on the boat. He could do no wrong.

So the effects of treating two children in such different ways is really interesting. It kind of forces you apart because I knew that if we ever had a conflict I'd be punished and he wouldn't be, whereas I think if we'd both been treated in a similar way in a difficult situation, we would have come closer together. So, on the boat, because I didn't really have him, I was really incredibly isolated. So I would create imaginary friends. I started writing a diary very extensively, and I would pretend the diary was a person. I would talk to the diary because I would have nobody else to talk to.

I tried to write to the friends that I'd occasionally found in port but that was very difficult because, first of all, as a child, it's very hard. I mean, it's not immediate. You want to talk to people about the things that are happening to you then. Sometimes, people have said to me, “Well, surely you saw other kids on other boats.” Occasionally, we did, but the problem is, particularly as you become an older child, you don't want to see a friend, you don't want to meet another child for a day and have a playdate with them, and then you both sail off in different directions. That's even assuming that you happen to meet another boat with a child of the same age and ideally the same kind of gender as you are. What you want is a friend that you can build a relationship with, that you can kind of share things with and talk to about all of your problems. No, I didn't have that for most of my childhood.

Scott
What were the good things about growing up on a boat? I mean, it wasn't all bad, right?

Suzanne
No, it wasn't all bad at all. I think there are definitely ways to do this in a much more positive way because there are some very good parts of it. I mean, first of all, you get to see a part of the planet that a lot of people never get to see. It is incredible to me, in a way, how few people get to really spend time on the ocean. If you spend time in the ocean, you get to see– as my father originally promised, we saw whales and dolphins, and phosphorescence in the water. We once sailed past a volcano that was exploding kind of out of the ocean. I remember the lava running down the sides and exploding when it hit the water. You get to go to an incredible different assortment of different places, cultures, and people, and meet them. I think, to this day, I have a real appreciation of the fact that there are many different ways for people on this planet to create civilizations and ways of living which are equally valid, and I grew up with that kind of understanding along the way. So there were some very positive things about this in moderation.

Scott
Your education– you were “homeschooled”. How did that work?

Suzanne
Well, basically I didn't, and this is one of the problems. I think if anybody had asked my parents, they would say that my mother was teaching us, but the reality was she wasn't. Of course, this is incredibly hard for somebody outside of a family unit to see, and even more so when you're on a boat where nobody can see what's happening inside a boat. In fact, I don't ever remember anybody asking. The reality of it was that when we first set sail from England, my mother had a pile of worksheets - math and English worksheets - and she was a primary school teacher.

Slightly sporadically over about the first 18 months or so, she would occasionally give us a worksheet to work through, but she was incredibly impatient with me when I was doing the worksheets, but we did do them and I liked doing them, but then she kind of stopped. She said, “Well, I don't really feel like teaching a kind of more senior curriculum, so I'm not going to.” So we had quite a few years where we had no education at all, and I was desperate to get an education. I remember being desperate to get an education. I was writing my diary about being desperate to get an education.

People have said to me, “But surely you were getting the university of life. Surely you were just seeing stuff and that's an education.” From somebody who experienced it on the other side, I would argue very strongly against that. I wanted to be a scientist. Sitting on a boat where all you've got is a kind of slightly motley collection of books that we traded in the secondhand stores, which often were a kind of collection of romance books and a few kinds of science fiction books. You can't teach yourself chemistry, physics, or mathematics. I couldn't answer all the questions that I wanted to ask about the world. I didn't understand what's in the air, what makes the air, and why are the stars up in the sky. Just explain to me how the world works. I couldn't work that out, and I was desperate to get an education and desperate to have friends. It was just very hard for a long time on the boat and it wasn't something that my parents regarded as particularly important.

Scott
I know a lot of kids would be excited about never having to go to school. How did Jon feel about that? Did he care?

Suzanne
Jon cared a lot less than I did. I think he– by the way, it's very interesting. I've had quite a few expo kids contact me since my book came out and of the ones who contacted me, most of them are women. I don't know why it is that girls seem to find this world very hard to cope with, but it may be that girls mature a little bit earlier, perhaps. I hate using generalizations, but they may have a kind of desire for education that kicks in earlier than boys and a desire for those deeper friendships that kick in earlier than boys. Girls are definitely more vulnerable. I realized quite early on when I started to kind of hit puberty that I couldn't go ashore on my own because I would be very vulnerable. So I had to often stay on board because it would be too dangerous to go ashore on my own.

As a boy, you have much more freedom, so it's a much more fun life. My brother was allowed to be on deck working the sails, whereas I wasn't. In fact, my father only had one set of safety equipment that a boy could use, and he gave that to my brother. So I had to kind of stay below. So I don't think he felt the same overwhelming desire to get an education that I did. To be honest, he was still denied an education. Whether or not a child wants an education, I personally think - and I'm a parent myself - that we have an

obligation as parents to give and encourage our children to get an education because it massively affects their life chances if they don't have that.

Scott
Yeah, that's one of the basics of being a good parent. You mentioned that as you were becoming a teenager, you really had no private space - one working toilet for all the family and all the crew. This really baffled me. You had to share a cabin with adult crew members - you being a teenager - and these were strangers. Your dad didn't see that as dangerous at all?

Suzanne
No, he never did. In fact, I remember at one point I was very distressed about it because we had one particular– this time, I was about 15 or 16, so I was very conscious of my vulnerability by that time because enough things have happened to most girls by that point, even if they're relatively mild, that you're very conscious. Even if nothing really bad has happened, you've got to be careful

We had this trip and I talk about it in the book where we had a male crew. By this point, my father was taking multiple crew on board. They're all novices and none of them can sail. What he was doing is he's charging them to come on the boat. So he effectively turned Wavewalker into a kind of traveling hotel in order to fund this voyage, which by now has gone on multiple years past the original promise of it being kind of three years. I was expected to cook and clean for all these crew with my mother, which was taking kind of hours each day. But what worried me even more was my brother basically said, “I want to kind of take the cabin that only has kind of two berths and I refuse to share it with you.”

Of course, to any kind of listeners who've been in that kind of family unit situation where you have a very favored child and a very unfavored child, unfortunately, if you're the favorite child, I suspect the inclination is to kind of play on that. So he didn't want to share a cabin with the unfavored child. Therefore, my father said, “Well, you'll have to share with the crew in either one of the other four berth cabin or the two-berth cabin.” And I said to my father, “But they're all men. I mean, they're all grown men.” He said, “Well, that's not my problem. It's Jon's turn to have the small cabin and he doesn't want to share with you. So you'll just have to get on with it or share a cabin with your mother.” Anybody who kind of reads the story and gets to this point will realize that sharing a cabin with my mother is a pretty kind of horrific thing for me to have to do because of the way in which she was treating me by that point but, for me, that was a better thing to do.

To share with a group of adult men that I didn't know– I mean, I had enough awareness to know that was a kind of dangerous thing to do. So that's what I did. Of course, that meant that my mother was very nasty to me while I was sharing a cabin with her, but at least I was physically safe.

Scott
Eventually, you figured out that going home after 3 years was obviously not in the plans but, obviously, you couldn't leave. You're on a boat. There's nowhere you could go and you're still just a teenager. You finally convinced your parents to allow you to enroll in a correspondence school. How did that work?

Suzanne
Well, so what we did is I convinced them to let me enroll in an Australian correspondence school. The way in which it worked was they gave me a whole pile of lessons and books. They were quite incomplete. So the problem was that I wanted to study sciences, physics, math, biology, and so on, but a lot of those courses were not properly written. So they were kind of half-written courses. So that was

kind of problem number one. Problem number two, of course, is if you're going to do correspondence by post, and we have to remember that we're pre-internet and, of course, we have no communication devices on the boat, really, so I can't ring anybody or anything like that, and we don't have an address. So what I would do is I would work on these lessons when I wasn't expected to do chores on the boat, and then when we hit a port, I would post these letters back to Australia, and then I would go and ask my father, “Where are we going next?” and I would ask my school to send the lessons back to the next place that we were going to be.

The issue was that there weren't that many places - by this point, we were in the South Pacific - that actually had a proper post office. So often, we would only get to a town with a post office every six weeks, a couple of months, or every three months, and sometimes my father would change direction. We would be heading towards Samoa and all my lessons would be coming back to Samoa and we'd get halfway there and he'd change his mind and we'd go to Fiji. So I would never get them back because the post offices would destroy them if they weren't collected. Of course, on the boat, I had to fight for space with the crew and fight for time because I had to do the chores. So there were loads of things that were making it difficult but I had this burning desire to educate myself because I knew that was my only escape route from the boat.

I mean, I didn't know if it was going to work. I mean, it's a bit like sitting in a prison cell, braiding a rope, and not knowing whether it's going to be long enough to get you out the window and down to the earth, but you haven't got another alternative and you know it's a possibility, and that's what it felt like for me with education. And of course, the other thing was it was something I could control in this world where I had no control over anything. I didn't even have control over where we were going. In fact, most of the time, I didn't even know what we were going next. My father often wouldn't tell us where we were sailing next. The schoolwork was something that was mine and so it really did become a lifeline.

Scott
Can you talk a little bit about Teddy and Barnaby?

Suzanne
Ah!

Scott
We can see each other even though the listeners can't see us, and there's a big smile when I mention those names. When I heard about them, I was thinking they were there for you, sort of, like in the movie Castaway, where Tom Hanks had Wilson. Is that an analogy that would work?

Suzanne
Yeah, no, absolutely. I remember seeing that movie and feeling exactly the same way. Teddy was my teddy bear that was with me when we first set sail from England, and he survived the whole voyage. In fact, he's upstairs. I'm talking to you from my house in London and Teddy is sitting upstairs on a sofa upstairs in one of the bedrooms, and he's sitting with Barnaby, who also came back to England with me. I always think of Barnaby as being a bit more useful because Barnaby only came on board in Australia after we were shipwrecked. In fact, the Barnaby story is amazing. There were lots of articles in Australia about this family being shipwrecked and this little girl who was very badly injured. This man ran a toy factory and he appeared down on the docks one day with a bag of toys for my brother and a bag of toys for me because he also read that we'd lost all of our Christmas presents - because they were all swept away by the waves - and in that bag was Barnaby. There were some other things as well, but Barnaby

was in that bag and Barnaby stayed with me all the way through and I would talk to them. I mean, in a world where you don't have anyone to talk to, these animals take on real human dimensions.

I also made up imaginary friends, so that was very helpful. Then, this is even more bizarre, possibly, to the listeners. The boat herself was a bit of a human-ish presence. I mean, boats are always referred to as women. She had a slightly kind of maternal presence. So, in a way, the boat was also a person in a world where I didn't have a lot of relationships or people to talk to because my mother really wouldn't talk to me a lot of the time, certainly, once I was past about 12 and my father was generally busy sailing. So I had very little time.

Scott
When you were 16, you were left by your parents in New Zealand - you and Jon who, at that time, of course, was 15 - what was your feeling about this? Were you glad to be off the boat and taking classes, or did you feel abandoned by your parents?

Suzanne
I felt abandoned because what happened was they left Jon and me behind and they continued sailing, and they promised they weren't going to do that. What was supposed to happen, what they promised to me was that my mother was going to keep sailing on the boat with another skipper because they wanted to keep on taking these paying crew and my father was going to stay with us and look after my brother and me in New Zealand. I was going to have to keep on doing this correspondence but they wanted him to go into normal school because they were very concerned about his education. As my father said to me at one point, your brother's education is very important because, at one point, he's going to grow up and have to look after a family. So they were very concerned that my brother should go to school because he hadn't been educating himself really. Then, at the last moment, my father turned around and said, “I'm going sailing as well” and he disappeared, leaving me and my brother on our own and making it very clear that my role here was to cook and clean for my brother and look after him and, in effect, be his parent to the extent that I could as a 16-year-old girl with a 15-year-old boy while, of course, I was still trying to educate myself by post.

He also left me with the responsibility of running his business trying to find these crew who were going to go on the boat and pay him money to sail and I really struggled. I mean, I struggled so much that I think actually– and I've talked quite openly about this. I think, halfway through that year, I effectively had a breakdown. I ended up ringing something which, in the UK, is called ChildLine and, in New Zealand, is called YouthLine. You effectively ring up and speak to a counselor. I remember just describing to her my situation. “I'm a 16-year-old girl. I'm here living on my own with my younger brother. I don't know any adults in New Zealand apart from somebody in Auckland who lives hours away who I can't go and see because my car will never get that far. I can't cope with all the things that I'm being expected to do. I've never really lived for any long period of time away from my family. I don't know any of my relatives. I'm living in a foreign country. I don't even have a visa that's valid for me to stay here very long. In fact, the New Zealand authorities tried to throw me out twice because they discovered that I was there as an underage child. So I really struggled.”

I mean, I have to say, the woman who I rang up on this counseling phone call was incredible. I mean, I've talked about this a little bit since it is amazing how powerful it can be when you're in a very desperate situation just to have somebody who will listen to you. That's what she did and it was incredible. In fact, I think it was almost the first time in my entire childhood that an adult had stopped and listened to me, just to take an interest in me, take an interest, and just listen to me for as long as I needed to talk. I did a

lot of crying as well, I think, and then that really helped me get myself back together, at least enough to get through the rest of that time in New Zealand and to keep studying.

Scott
One of the things I noticed in this story about your dad is he never has the option of giving up. It's like, “No, okay. The boat's destroyed. We're out of money. I don't know where we're going next, but we'll figure it out. It'll all work out. No worries.” Do you think some of that was passed on to you because you were in a really stressful situation there as well and somehow you got through it?

Suzanne
I think you're right. I mean, the funniest thing about all of this is, as you mentioned, it was a very gendered world. But the very odd thing about it is the person who was most like my father is me, and I've always kind of recognized that. I mean, now, I hope that I haven't used that determination the way that he did. So, I do apply it to myself. I kind of put a lot of pressure on myself to achieve things and do things, and there are so many things I want to kind of do right now. I feel very passionate about getting other kids to get access to education, so I push myself very hard. I have children of my own and I've never kind of denied them an education. I mean, I've tried to give them the sort of childhood that I would have wanted, but you're right. I think there's a lot of my father in me and a lot of those characteristics are huge strengths if used in the right sort of way.

Scott
Getting accepted into college seemed like quite a long shot for that to happen.

Suzanne
It was. Looking back, I think I realized even more now what a long shot it was. But when I was there, although I realized it was a long shot, the thing is I had no other option. I don't remember sitting around thinking, “How long of a shot is this?” or not. It was like, “This is my only shot. There's no plan B. It's not that I'm weighing up alternatives and odds of different routes. This was my only– there I am. I'm a 16-17 year old girl living in New Zealand. I'm an alien, so I can't stay there. I'm going to have to leave. I've never seen any of my relatives since we left England, 10 years before. I desperately want to go to university.”

I was really kind of craving kind of education. So what I do is I write to every university I've ever heard of in the world. Of course, I have nowhere to go to get the addresses, so I made up the addresses. So I wrote to London, England, and Sydney University - Sydney, Australia - Harvard University, Harvard America, London Oxford, Cambridge. They tended to be the elite universities, not because I thought I was elite but because those were the only ones I'd ever heard of. Somehow, even living on a boat, you've heard of a Harvard or an Oxford because, somehow, they're in the conversation or they're in a book, or they're somewhere.

Most of these universities wrote back and said, “Absolutely no way. We won't consider you.” I mean, Australia and New Zealand wouldn't consider me because I had a British passport. Harvard never wrote back because it turned out that Harvard University, Harvard America is not the right address, which is slightly unfortunate. London wrote back and said, “You're just too– it's just too crazy a story. We can't consider you.” But amazingly, Oxford wrote back and said, “Write us two essays” and I did. Then, they said, “If you can find a way to get back here, we'll interview you.” So I went and picked kiwifruit, earned enough money with a small contribution from my father to get a one-way ticket back, and basically bet everything on that one interview.

What Oxford did, what my tutor, Marian Dawkins did when I kind of turned up in her office and did this interview was she basically took a bet on me and she waived the entrance requirements, which apparently you could do but in extraordinary circumstances and basically let me in despite the fact that I didn't fulfill all the entry criteria, and I owe her a huge debt. I mean, it was a good bet. When I got there, I did well academically, but it was a huge bet on her. I mean, she didn't know that. I mean, she probably knew somebody that she believed was clever, but she made a huge bet on me. She could very easily have said, no. I'm very conscious of that.

Scott
Do you keep in touch with her?

Suzanne
I do. I do indeed. So I've seen her several times. I've talked to her. I've thanked her for it. In fact, I wrote an essay for my college magazine and she very kindly wrote a little bit on it as well. And in fact, just kind of talked about the fact that it's harder now to do that, like it used to be in the past. It's one of the consequences of the push that we've had in the UK to get university entrance to be more diverse. One of the consequences of it is that it's become a bit more bureaucratic - the entrance process. I strongly support it being more diverse but, unfortunately, one of the consequences is these wild cards are a bit harder to play. But yes, I have kept in touch with her, and I'm very conscious that I owe her and I owe my college at Oxford a debt because they together made a bet on this very strange kid who turned up and I was wearing a long wool skirt that I'd sewed myself carrying a photo album full of pictures of whales and dolphins that I'd taken off the boat. I mean, I was quite an extraordinary thing when I turned up for this interview.

Scott
She must've looked back on that and said, "Man, I am so glad I made that decision" because of the way things turned out. It's amazing. You learned how to sail a boat by being on the boat all those years, but you have since officially become a qualified and certified sailor. Why did you do that?

Suzanne
I think I had something that lots of people call imposter syndrome. I think I worried that here I was writing a book about a childhood at sea, but I hadn't really been back to sea very much since I'd left the boat, and there were a couple of reasons for that. One was when I came back to the UK, the opportunities to go sailing were very limited. I didn't have very much money. In fact, I was incredibly poor when I came back to the UK because my parents, shortly after I came back, disowned me. So I was poverty-stricken. So I didn't really have the sort of money that would enable you to go sailing. Then, I was busy getting on with my life, starting a career, reaching my husband, having kids, and so on.

But when I came to write the book, I felt I've got to– first of all, I need to reconnect with the sea to be able to write about it in a vivid way. Secondly, I had this imposter syndrome thing of, "Yes, of course, I know how to sail. I could, kind of. For me, it's almost in my blood." But I don't think I ever learned the correct language for it. I mean, we had our own language on the boat. Because we had so many novice crew on board, my father very rarely used the technical terms for anything because we would– for example, we color-coded the ropes on the masts so that my father could go pull the red, pull the red rope on the short mast or pull the red rope on the tall mast so people would know what they had to do. I didn't know the correct names of all the ropes but, if I was going to write a book, I needed to do that because I knew that sailors would read the book and they would expect that, so that's why I did it. I have

to say it was pretty touch-and-go - whether I would get the Yachtmaster qualification. It's a very tough qualification - far tougher than I had expected - but I'm glad I did.

Scott
I'm just picturing all of those novice crew members who would get on their next boat and none of those colors were on the lines. They don't know what to do at that point. I know you've said that by going public with this story and writing the book, you might sacrifice your relationship with your parents. Of course, you've just mentioned that they eventually disowned you. Do you have any relationship at all with them today?

Suzanne
No, none at all. I mean, my parents disowned me multiple times in my life. I mean, my father once threw me off the boat on an island. Obviously, he and my mom left my brother and me behind in New Zealand. He actually disowned me several times when I was in university, which meant that I was poverty-stricken because I wasn't eligible to get a UK grant for so long. Most recently, he walked out on me in 2019 after demanding - with quite a few swear words involved - that I shouldn't publish my book. He hadn't read the book but, of course, he knew enough about the story to fear that, if I wrote one - how I'd experienced Wavewalker - he might not come across in the way that he wanted to come across. Now, I knew when I started to write the book, this was a risk because my parents had never had any tolerance for anyone criticizing them, even in the most minor way. I once had a conversation with my father where my late husband had asked, “Who was it who really helped me get into university?” My father has always had this story that he told everybody that he got me into university. He was the one who got me into Oxford, which of course never was.

Scott
But in his mind, that's how it happened, right?

Suzanne
In his mind, that's what happened. That was based on the fact that we had one conversation before I flew back to the UK, where he gave me a bit of advice on interview techniques. He always thought that he got me into Oxford, and that was his story. I said, when my husband asked me, “Well, the person who really helped me get into Oxford was Roger, who was my biology teacher in the correspondence school, who, by the way, was an amazing man who would send me books in New Zealand, helps me with those essays. I mean, I owe him a debt as well.” My father was so angry at this answer that he got up, swore repeatedly, kicked one of my kitchen chairs across the kitchen, slammed it into the cupboards, and he and my mother stormed out of the house and we didn't hear from them for months. So I knew that if I wrote any sort of version of the past that had any sort of truth in it that was even the mildest way interpretable as a criticism, they would never forgive me.

In a funny sort of way, that was hugely releasing because I basically had to make a decision. I was either going to write the book or I wasn't going to write it. There wasn't a middle way. There was no middle way possible. I mean, there was no need for me to write the book in a nasty way. I don't think I have. In fact, a number of people have told me it's actually very mild towards them in some ways, but there was no point in me trying to make it in a way that would be palatable. Then, what actually happened was they reacted even worse than I expected them to. Sadly, my mum passed away in 2016 after I'd started kind of writing the book and she left me a very unpleasant letter where she threatened to try and destroy my husband's career if I publish the book.

My father walked out on me and my kids in 2019 by which point I was a widow because, sadly, I lost my husband, but I don't feel any regret about that. This was a choice that I made. I wrote the book knowing that would happen and realizing that, actually, the relationship that I was probably going to lose with them and it would be their choice, not mine. But the relationship I was going to lose with them wasn't a relationship that actually brought me very much happiness. It wasn't a relationship that I could rely on. I didn't know that they would ever be there if I needed them, and I didn't really think they particularly cared about me. So yes, I feel very happy with the decision that I took.

Scott
What struck me was that your parents were living their dream, particularly your dad, and weren't really considering the physical and social toll that it would have on you and Jon. Ironically, your mother often accused you of being selfish because you wanted to study and do homework instead of cleaning the boat, preparing a meal, or one of those tasks or chores that you always had to do. I don't know where I'm going with that - it's just a thought that I had.

Suzanne
I agree with you. I think there is a theme all the way through the book. In fact, if I had to pick, there are probably two really important themes that kind of come out of the book. The first one is this idea that, for me, my entire childhood was spent inside somebody else's dream and my father was following his passion. This was something he wanted to do. I think it was all about being a hero. It was all about doing something extraordinary and being recognized as that. This was his dream. What he didn't seem to recognize - or if he recognized, he didn't ever want to acknowledge it or do anything about it - was the people who were sacrificing for that dream were me and my brother and, to some extent, my mother. In fact, we had the opposite of freedom whereas he had kind of complete freedom on this boat. He could pick up the anchor and sail wherever he wanted, whenever he wanted to and, by the way, he often did that. My parents would fall out with somebody and they'd up the anchor and they would kind of sail away.

Every time we left a port, my father would throw all of the parking tickets in the water. I don't think he paid any taxes from the moment that we left the UK. So they lived this life. They could go anywhere they wanted at any moment in time and walk away from any situation that they dislike. What I had was imprisonment because I was on this boat. I had no say in where we were going as I often didn't know where we were going. I would sometimes beg my father to stop so I could go to a port where I knew there would be a friend or with somebody on another boat or somebody I knew and he often would not want to do that. I don't think he ever really took my needs into consideration. I mean, I don't remember a single time in my childhood when he changed course in order to help me or to do something that was helpful for me. So this was his dream and his freedom, and what it created was my imprisonment.

One of the reasons for writing the book is to kind of create this debate about, "Well, where do parents' rights have to have some sort of balance with children's rights?" I don't think it should be extreme either way but there's got to be a balance somewhere there in the middle.

Scott
And a good parent would recognize that there's a balance and find where that is. Do you ever see or talk to Jon anymore?

Suzanne

So I did for many years. My brother remained very close to my parents. In fact, when my parents came back to the UK, they all lived in a kind of house together. My brother and I never really fell out, but we were never very close because we were treated in such different ways as children, so we really remained quite separate for most of our adult lives. I think his experience on Wavewalker was really very different from mine because he was treated in such a different way to how I was treated and I completely kind of recognize that I don't kind of dispute that in the slightest. I feel slightly sad when I've tried to talk to him about what it was like to be me. He hasn't really wanted to have that conversation but, fundamentally, this was not about him. It wasn't his choice to be on the boat and it wasn't my brother who chose to keep sailing. So this, for me, is much more about the decisions that my parents made.

Scott
Today, you're the Chief Operating Officer of a large holding company based in the Netherlands. Do you attribute any of your business success to the challenges that you had in your childhood?

Suzanne
I do. There's quite a lot of evidence, interestingly, that people who have escaped from difficult childhoods often end up being very resilient people. I don't think you would ever want to go through the sort of childhood that I went through in order to become resilient, and a lot of children who have very difficult childhoods don't manage to escape or are very damaged by it. So I consider myself incredibly lucky that I managed to escape with no scars. I think I have quite a few scars, some kind of physical and some kind of mental, but was basically able to kind of get on with my life, and I have escaped with some real strengths and one of them is resilience.

For me, the way in which it plays out is when I've been really faced with a difficult challenge. For example, I had to step in and be the CEO of a very large company during the COVID years because the CEO who'd been there had to step out. It was very challenging. People were very stressed. But for me, when I'm in a situation like that, I can take myself back to being a 7-year-old girl sitting on a boat in the middle of the Indian Ocean with a fractured skull, with no control over my life, with years ahead of me with no control, and it puts everything into proportion because now I'm an adult. I'm not physically threatened. I can deal with this. I can work my way through it. So I find when I'm confronted by very difficult situations, I become very calm and very rash, and that has been a huge asset to me throughout my career. I can do that in those circumstances. The price I paid in my childhood was not worth this benefit but it definitely is a benefit that I kind of recognize.

Scott
I can picture you in a business stressful environment looking back on your childhood and thinking, “Hey, I can do hard things. I can handle this.” And you're obviously not just skilled in business, but you're also a very skilled writer. And I really enjoyed the book. Can you talk about your book and where people can get it?

Suzanne
Absolutely. So I think Wavewalker is now available in all good bookstores. It has sold out a couple of times on Amazon in the US because there has been more demand than HarperCollins had expected, which I suppose is a good thing. Frustratingly, it means it has occasionally gone out of stock. There's a big reprint coming later on this month, but it's still available in all good bookstores as you'll find it all over the place - all the indie bookstores as well. You'll find it on Kindle and Audible. I actually read it myself on Audible, which was a great experience actually, although I did end up hoarse for about a week

afterward. So it's widely available. I really hope that people enjoy it. And what's interesting is although the setting of it is extraordinary, I'm finding a lot of readers really relate to different bits of it, whether it's the interpersonal relationships that went on in the family or some elements of the places that we went to or some of the adventures that we experienced. So I hope people really enjoy it.

Scott
I definitely enjoyed it. I actually, Walked into my local Barnes and Noble, which we happen to still have here and got it right off the shelf. Yeah, I would encourage people. It's wonderfully written with, of course, obviously, lots of details of the story that we couldn't go through here on the podcast. Suzanne, thanks so much for telling your story.

Suzanne
Thank you so much. I've really enjoyed it.

Scott
You can see pictures of Suzane and her family, and the boat they all lived on, in the episode notes at WhatWasThatLike.com/166.

Suzanne's story was brought to my attention because of listeners – on the same day, someone posted a link in the Facebook group, and another person messaged me directly, saying "Hey, this would be a great story for the podcast!". So if you come across something you think might work, please let me know.

I mentioned at the top of the show that I have an announcement about the podcast. So what's going on? Well, I want to introduce you to Meredith – my new producer. Meredith is a podcaster herself, and she's going to be helping me with putting some episodes together.

So, since you'll be hearing her voice in some segments, and you'll probably hear her doing some of the ads, you should know a little bit about her. She's from Nebraska but now lives in north Florida, she was named one of Podcast Magazine's 40 under 40 in 2022, and she loves hanging out with her husband at the beach. And something I didn't know about her – she knows sign language.

Meredith
I used to be a sign language interpreter, actually. I learned a few basic signs by myself with books when I was little. A church that I was going to offered classes, so I took some classes there. Then, by the time I got to high school, there happened to be a few deaf girls at my high school and we became friends. That's how I learned most of my sign language. But I became an interpreter when I invited the friend to church and just I sat next to her thinking, "Yeah, she's just going to absorb this message magically." She elbowed me so hard in the ribs and said, "Hey, are you going to interpret for me or what?" That's how I began interpreting. I later got ASL certified by the state of Nebraska and was a real interpreter.

Scott
If you're in the Facebook group, you know I ask a new thought-provoking question every Tuesday, so I asked Meredith one of those questions: When you were a child, what did you get the most excited about?

Meredith

I was obsessed with nature as a kid. When my parents' friends would come over, I would take them by the hand and drag them to my room to tour the nature museum where I would have a row of rocks and seashells lined up, each carefully labeled with their names. But if I didn't know their names - because, remember, this is pre-internet - I would give them a name, a human name. So you'd have, “Oh, this is a varied coquina, next to Bob the Rock.”

Scott
And Meredith’s podcast is called Meredith For Real, and she talks to guests about a lot of different things – sometimes things you might not hear about. I’ve been a listener to her show for a while. She calls herself the Curious Introvert, and I think her natural curiosity is something she and I have in common.

Meredith
I explore, with the help of a guest, taboo topics through nuanced conversations. So think of questions that you might be too afraid to Google like, “How do I know if I'm an alcoholic?” Or questions that just Google can't answer like, “Are trigger warnings helping us heal or making us fragile?” The goal is to inspire active curiosity instead of canceling or just snapping judgments. And yeah, it's very ADD-friendly since the topics are different week to week, but I do cover a lot of health and wellness, science and tech, love and relationships. Although some of the topics are kind of out there like aliens, I try to keep it brief and pretty tethered - tethered fun. How's that for a nerdy explanation?

Scott
So that’s Meredith. You can find her show on any podcast app, just search for Meredith For Real. I’m already enjoying working with her and she’s going to help me make What Was That Like even better going forward.

Graphics for this episode were created by Bob Bretz. Full episode transcription was created by James Lai.

And finally, we’re at this week’s Listener Story. Do you have a story? I know you do, because everyone does. It can be anything interesting that happened to you, that you can tell in about 5-10 minutes. Just record it on your phone and email it to Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com.

This one is from a listener who was at work, and the completely unexpected happens.

Stay safe, and I’ll be back in a week with our next Flashback episode.

(Listener story)

This took place in about 1994. At the time, I was editing TV commercials and this one was sort of like a high-end fashion brand. I also helped do the graphic design and animation - like sketching it out. The director was, like, a big deal, had won an Oscar for costume design on a big movie, and this was her first directing gig, so it was kind of a big pressure. We sort of do what's called “offlining”, which means we do a cut, but it's low resolution, it's not polished. We needed to polish up and really make the graphics look great and make them pop and just the best they can be, so we hired a video effects person who was,

like, one of the best in the city. This was in New York city. Everybody loved him. His name was Grant. I had a relationship with him and he was just great.

The next day, I showed up bright and early for the video effects studio to basically Grant sitting at a million-dollar console doing his work. The thing about Grant is, unlike many others, you don't have to pipe in, you don't have to give him direction, he just does it. So I was just going to lie there on the couch. The art director was there and one other person– and I'm not sure, it might have been Grant's assistant.

It was really boring. Hours went by and Grant was just doing his work, and we were just sitting there. It was after a few hours and Grant went *gasps & sighs in relief* And the art director said, “Yeah, it's like watching paint dry.” Then, Grant just threw back his head, his arms thrown back, and he slumped in his chair. They laughed because they thought he was continuing this joke, but I knew something was wrong. I got up and I went to look at his face because we're sitting behind him and his eyes were completely dilated. His skin was turning blue. I said, “Okay, Grant, we're going to deal with this.” Then, I got the art director to help me get him laid out on the floor. I don't know if maybe that was the wrong thing. I wasn't really confident about my CPR skills. So, I knew the people in the next room, I knew the editor, and I asked him if he knew, and he said, “Yeah.” I said, “Come with me,” and he went in with Grant. I went to the front desk, and I told them what's going on. “I'm going to call 911.”

The other editor kept working on him and eventually the paramedics arrived and they worked on him for a while. It was just a shock. The whole place– everyone's work stopped in all the sessions and all the rooms and he was taken out in a stretcher, but not with a sheet over his face, so I thought maybe he would be okay or he'd have a chance. Well, we obviously couldn't continue the session, so I ended up going home and I was shaking.

I did get a call from the owner of the company that Grant had died. I got a call from the big shot director. It was very nice. She asked if I was okay and how she knew Grant's work and how wonderful it was. She knew he was a popular and really nice person and people really valued him, and I really appreciated that because, otherwise, she could be pretty tough.

The part that I regret is when it was time for his funeral and I was getting ready to go and then I didn't - maybe it was because of laziness, selfishness or I just couldn't handle it unconsciously. I regret that to this day.