

Deputies save child's life

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By Kathy Hedberg of the Tribune

Two-year-old from Kamiah was caught in the Clearwater River current when passerby called 911



Kayla Ladd, 2, of Kamiah sticks close to her parents Monday after her close call Friday on the Clear...



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KAMIAH - As two Idaho County sheriff's deputies dove into the Clearwater River Friday to save a 2-year-old girl who was swept away in a current, one impulsively threw off his shoes and the other kept his boots on.

Those were decisions that, moments later, made the difference in critical minutes to save her life.

Lt. Doug Ulmer and Deputy Carlos Martinez were summoned to the scene about 6:42 p.m. after 2-year-old Kayla Ladd of Kamiah was spotted by a passerby floating in a life jacket under the Kooskia bridge.

Moments earlier Kayla had been playing at a popular beach and swimming hole north of the bridge near the Kooskia Elementary School.

Kayla's mother, Jodi Crutcher, said the family, including Kayla's 5-year-old sister, Trinity, were enjoying the day at the beach with friends and family members. Kayla was wearing a life jacket with a head support and had been out in the water for a while when an older child dragged her farther into the river, and she was caught in the current.

"She was following her cousins and she had a life jacket on and my glasses fell and I couldn't save her," Crutcher said Monday, still emotional after the event.

"An Indian guy jumped in the water and tried to save her but he couldn't."

Crutcher said she does not know who alerted the sheriff's office. A dispatcher at the Idaho County Sheriff's Office in Grangeville said a male passerby spotted the girl floating in the river and called 911.

Deputies Randy Long, an advanced emergency medical technician, Ulmer and Martinez sped to the scene but were unable, at first, to locate Kayla.

"She was, maybe, a half-mile downstream," Martinez said. "I drove past, not seeing her, then turned around and saw her floating down the river. I decided to pull in to the old rodeo grounds on U.S. Highway 12 below Kooskia - it was the only place to get into the river.

"She was about three-fourths of the way across the river. After we waded in the water we had difficulty locating her (again). Then we saw an arm move, so we knew she was OK at the time."

Ulmer said Crutcher was hysterical, wanting to know if her daughter was still alive and how the deputies planned to retrieve her.

"You could see the child in the river and she was moving at a pretty good pace," Ulmer said. "I didn't know if she was alive or what was going on. Carlos was there and we were watching her, trying to gauge her speed. We knew we were going to have to swim for her."

The deputies began stripping off their gear, gun belts and clothing. Ulmer took off his shoes because he knew he needed to be barefoot to swim. Martinez left his boots on.

The deputies started swimming - Ulmer making faster progress than Martinez.

"When I caught up to the little girl she wasn't moving and I yelled at her: 'Can you hear me?' " Ulmer said. "Then she started moving around as I swam up to her."

The deputies said Kayla was blue, cold and foaming at the mouth from the water in her lungs. She was not crying, Martinez said, but making a low, moaning noise.

Ulmer hoisted her to shore, but he was unable to move any farther because thick underbrush, timber and blackberry bushes choked the bank. Martinez, who still had on his boots, grabbed the girl and began thrashing through the thicket. He made his way up the bank to a railroad track, then beyond that to Down River road. When he got there he flagged down a vehicle and managed to call for the Kooskia ambulance team.

Long intercepted the party and hauled them to the ambulance.

Kayla was taken to Clearwater Valley Hospital, where her core body temperature was 88 degrees. She stayed there for a couple of hours and was later released to her parents.

At a reunion Monday morning at the Kamiah City Park with the deputies who saved her, Kayla was wide-eyed, but quiet about her adventure. When asked if she had been frightened, she said yes, and then hid her curly head against the leg of her father, Fredrick Ladd.

Ladd was working at the time of the accident and said he was "terrified because I was told she drowned."

Sheriff Doug Giddings presented Kayla with a pink stuffed animal and the family posed for pictures with the deputies.

Ulmer and Martinez said parents should make sure their children always wear life jackets when playing around the river. Martinez added the water is cold and parents should be aware if their children begin to turn blue or show other signs of lowered body temperatures that they've stayed in the water too long.

"I think if she would have re-entered the water again it probably would have been detrimental to her," Ulmer said. "It was an interesting deal. But the most important thing for all of us is, the little girl is all right. It was amazing that she survived."

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