

Four-year-old's near-drowning a chilling lesson for family

If Camden had been in the water 30 more seconds he'd be dead, doctors said.

TUSTIN • Oh, to be 4 years old on a perfect summer day.

There are lizards to chase, bugs to catch and water balloons to throw at your brother.



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And that's pretty much how Camden Cockerill spent July 8 — right up till the moment everything went black.

The temperature hit 82 degrees. By late afternoon, Camden, 4, Justin, 10 and Aidan, 15, were splashing in the backyard pool while their parents, Cash and Jamie, grilled steaks for dinner.

After, the kids jumped back in screaming, "Ice cream!"

So Cash checked the freezer



ANA VENEGAS, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

and returned to ask what flavor.

"Where's Camden?" he asked.

"We don't know."

That's when Cash saw his 4-year-old son underwater.

The boy had completed swim lessons and loved searching the pool bottom for his latest fascination: bugs. So for a moment, Cash thought it was just Camden being Camden.

Camden Cockerill, 4, of Tustin, center, swims for the first time after his near-drowning last week, with brother Justin, 10, and dad Cash, right.

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PHOTOS: ANA VENEGAS, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Jamie Cockerill, from left, with children Aidan, 15, Camden, 4, Justin, 10, and husband Cash at their backyard pool in Tustin.

CAMDEN

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Then a jolt of panic raced up Cash's spine.

Camden was not swimming.

He was floating.

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"Grab him!" Cash yelled to Aidan

Within seconds, Aidan held her brother's limp body, screaming, "Oh my God."

Jamie was running from the kitchen screaming, "Camden! Camden!"

And Cash was leaning over his son – who had stopped breathing – saying, "We need to do CPR."

Cash and Jamie each had taken cardiopulmonary resuscitation classes, more than a dozen years earlier.

Jamie blew breaths into her son's mouth. Cash performed chest compressions.

Back and forth. *Fifteen seconds.* Back and forth. *Thirty seconds.* Back and forth. *Please!*

Camden's belly was bloated. His eyes rolled back. *Forty-five seconds.*

Then...

A cough. Vomit. A breath.

Aidan had called 911 and within moments, paramedics arrived and loaded Camden on an ambulance.

He was alive – but unresponsive.

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Orange County has seen 172 drownings since the start of 2009, including 14 this year.

A 3-year-old Rancho Santa Margarita boy drowned July 4; and a 2-year-old Placentia boy drowned July 8 – the same day Camden was found floating near the bottom of his pool.

"Southern California leads the nation in drownings," says Dr. Paul Lubinsky, of Children's Hospital of Orange County. "It's a huge problem, and it's not always bad families or negligent people. It's just a momentary lapse of supervision."

Lubinsky believes in two remedies: Barriers or fences to prevent children from walking out the back door into the family pool unchecked. And constant – repeat *constant* – adult supervision whenever a child swims.

"We have something called a 'pool watcher tag' that you hang around your neck," he says. "Whoever's got that, it's their responsibility not to answer the phone, not to go inside, not to drink. They are there only to watch the kids."

Lubinsky was one of three doctors who treated Camden at CHOC.

They took chest X-rays. Put him on a breathing machine. And anesthetized him for the night.

About midnight, a nurse saw Jamie Cockerill crying and hugged her.

"He's going to be OK," the nurse said.

But really, no one knew. Camden might never walk, or talk, or pick up a bug again.

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At 10 a.m. the next day, doctors took Camden off anesthesia and removed the breathing machine.

They asked him questions; made him touch his nose; kick his feet. He was groggy but everything worked. His body and brain were fine.

"When I saw that, I screamed and clapped so loud I scared the nurse," says Cash. "I started bawling."

So did Jamie, who jumped into bed with her son to hug him.

Now she wants others to

know what she didn't.

"So many parents – Cash and I included – assume that once your children can swim, they're safe in the water," Jamie says. "And they're not."

Jamie posted her story on Facebook. She sent copies to Camden's preschool to hand out. She even set up a certified CPR class in her backyard for friends, family and neighbors.

As she discusses all this, Camden runs up in his favorite shark-patterned swimsuit and green goggles. He has no recollection of what happened.

Till now, Jamie has refused to let him back in the pool, giving his lungs – and her fears – time to recover.

But it's time.

"Our new rule is, if our kids are in the water, we're watching," she says. "Even if it's Aidan, who's 15. They're not allowed to go in the pool anymore without a water watcher."

All eyes are on the boy who doctors said would've died if he'd remained under water another 30 seconds.

Without hesitation, he cannonballs into the water and swims down looking for bugs.

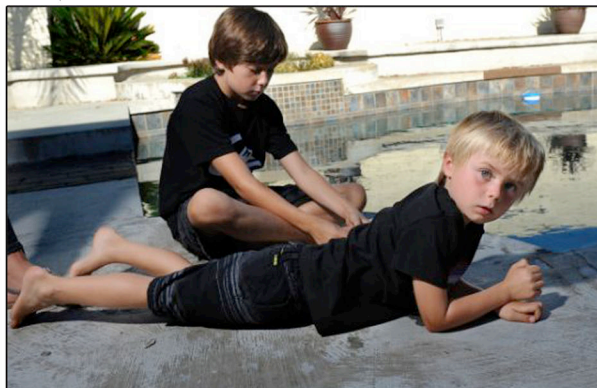
He pops up, then dives down again. Just Camden being Camden. So lucky to be alive.

Oh, to be a 4-year-old on a perfect summer day.

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Camden sits with his brother, Justin, by his family's backyard pool where he nearly drowned last week.