



Lisa Amorao Water Safety Class

September 3, 2022

Presented by James Matthews

OuterBarWaterSafety.com

Lisa Amorao passed away while swimming in Monterey Bay in May 2022. In response to this tragedy, fellow Southender Zina Deretsky organized a water safety class sponsored by the South End Rowing Club and presented by James Matthews of Outer Bar Water Safety. The compiled class notes below are good reading material for both newbie and seasoned swimmers. We thank Zina and SERC for sharing this important material.

All sketches (except for the top two) done by Zina
Content may not be copied or reproduced without permission

The six areas necessary to consider for preparedness and prevention of disaster that I list below summarize much of what we spent the morning portion of the class discussing.

A huge take-home point was:

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION IS WORTH A POUND OF CURE

These don't match up the sample **GREEN AMBER RED (GAR)** scoresheet that James shared exactly, but I thought they matched what we do as swimmers.

GAR is a way to assess risk of a situation.

You can go through each of the following topics in a given situation.

Each topic gets a score where 1 is lowest risk and 10 is highest.

You then total the score.

If the total lands in 0-20, you are in the **GREEN** zone and things are good.

At 20-40, you are in **AMBER** and you should consider what changes you can make to your endeavor to lower the score a bit.

Should the score fall into **RED**, in James' profession, they are not allowed to deploy their boats. And in our situation we should call the swim

6 AREAS OF PREPAREDNESS/PREVENTION

I. PERSONAL READINESS (TEAM FITNESS)

Team fitness is affected by every member of the team

Before a swim it's good to check in with yourself and everybody there:

- How rested are you?
- Have you eaten?
- Hydrated?
- Is your mind on the task? (i.e. did you fight with your girlfriend the night before? Or similar)
- How much training have you done?
- Have you practiced your rescue drills?
- How sensitive to the cold are you right now
- Don't think about "usually I can swim 3 miles", be honest to yourself in the NOW

II. PLANNING

Make a swim plan and stick to it

Pick an ENTRY POINT and an EXIT POINT

Pick an alternate entry and exit point if things don't go as planned

ONLY CHANGE THE SWIM PLAN IN THE WATER FOR REASONS OF SAFETY

Make a head count in and head count out

Pair up so your buddy knows where you are, or

HAVE A DESIGNATED SAFETY PERSON

HAVE APPROPRIATE EQUIPMENT

- Swim buoys
- Fins
- Cell phones
- Flares (?)
- Lights in the buoy if at night
- Blinkies
- Know where the club's paddle board is
- Use the "Can" floatation device on the end of our dock
- Radio
- Hand signals
 - Fist over head = "I'm okay"
 - X with fists over head = "Swimmer went down in this area"

III. ENVIRONMENT

Learn your area; Be aware of:

- Tides, currents
 - Mooring balls do not lie (aren't swept by wind, show current well)
- Wind
- Cloud cover, sun
- Animals
- Traffic
- Other potential dangers

Talk to people who know the area better than you

Be aware of not only how things look NOW but also how they'll look when you're finishing the swim

IV. TEAM SELECTION

This parameter is a measure of the cumulative experience of the entire team.

Are you newbies?

Do you have some folks who really know the route well?

V. EVENT COMPLEXITY

Is this a HUGE ORGANIZED multi-layer event (like the Alcatraz Invitational)?

Is this a MEET UP? (not too organized where one must be self-sufficient)

A SMALL GROUP swim of well communicating swim partners?

A HETEROGENOUS group of varying abilities – **SWIM TO THE LOWEST LEVEL OF SKILL in the group**

Or a SOLO swim?

VI. COMMUNICATION

DEVELOP AN EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

AGREE ON WHO IS CALLING THE SHOTS (decision flow chart)

Part of good communication is a productive **DEBRIEF** after the event

- WHAT WENT WELL?
- WHAT WENT LESS WELL?
- WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FOR THE NEXT EVENT?
- **It is important to do this without shaming or blaming**

The debrief gives everyone an opportunity to share their experience and their **FEELINGS** throughout the event.

It is a very good idea to write down the debrief and keep a collection of them.

Time erases key details from memory if you don't have a record.

WHAT GETS US IN TROUBLE

This class made it a revelation that **FEELINGS** drive a lot of processes that can get us in trouble.

The sense of shame will drive you further into trouble

Nobody wants to get the lifeguard called on them

But that's the lifeguard's job

In the Bay Area you will not be fined if the Coast Guard comes to get you

As you get cold and/or exhausted you go from thinking with your **FRONTAL CORTEX** with rational decision-making to the "Reptile" part of your brain. This is the part of the brain engaged when one panics.

ANECDOTE:

James told the recent story of him going out into perfect surf after he'd barely recovered from Covid, and had broken a finger. He hadn't even gotten out to catch the waves and got stuck in an area where they were just pounding him. One of them hit him so hard, he later understood he'd gotten concussed. **IN THE MOMENT** you don't realize your decision-making has gone bad.

He was driven by shame "all these cameras are pointed out to the gorgeous waves and I'm just sitting here". But after a while of really not getting anywhere he finally realized he was acting a bit strange, and got out and did the walk of shame. In his rear view mirror he saw how bloody his face was from the board hitting him.

WHAT HELPS IN TROUBLE

The opposite of panic is **CALM DEMEANOR**

STAYING CALM

SLOWING IT DOWN

Sometimes you can make an assist by coming up to a person in trouble and simply smiling.

Smiling and casual conversation are processes that occur in the **FRONTAL CORTEX**, so they take the focus away from the **HIND (Reptile) BRAIN** where the panic is/was occurring.

Tell them you like their hair or some pleasantries.

1. Who are you?
2. Where are you?
3. What day is it?
4. What happened?

Essentially, who, what, where, when. This establishes "Level of Consciousness" where we hope all questions are answered correctly. Additionally, the questions should be asked in a manner that would not warrant a Yes or No answer, i.e. don't ask "do you know what day it is?" Instead ask the patient to tell you what day it is.

Ask them to do simple math

RECOGNIZING DISTRESS

Has hair in their face

Looks dazed

Not moving

Is showing any indication of things being not quite right

NOT MAKING ANY PROGRESS

Signs of trauma

A capsized boat

NOTA BENE: What our norms are → comes from us

When James runs safety for groups like a recent outrigger canoe race,

He meets them BEFORE the race to ask what to expect while supporting them

He learns context

Like - they are trained to right their canoe if they capsize

This one could be close to drowning already: A sudden stop

- Looking towards land without progress
- Others swimming by them and they're not going anywhere
- They stop, swim more, look around to other people or land
- Take goggles off, lose steam

RECOGNIZING DROWNING

Sometimes exactly like in the movies: struggling/splashing to get above water

Then giving up

Clothes on, rolling in surf

Limp lifeless looking body

Wetsuits will float

And most bodies will eventually float

Upright in water

On edge of drowning: giving up, very weak

RESCUE TECHNIQUES

Techniques	Active	Passive	Submerged
Cross chest carry	X		
Shoulder tow	X		
Clothes tow	X	X	
Extended arm tow	X	X	
Affix buoy and tow by strap	X	X	

Techniques	Active	Passive	Submerged
Have person grab buoy and tow	X		
Spinal stabilization		X	
Rescue board roll	X		
Rescue board double roll		X	
Extend swim buoy			X
Line search			X

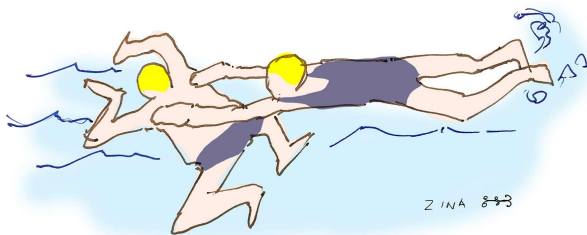
Cross-chest carry



Clothes tow



Shoulder tow



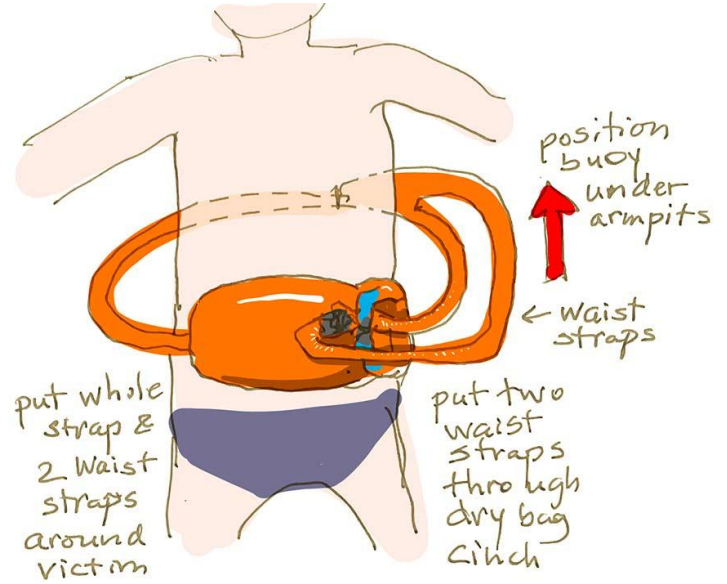
Extended arm tow



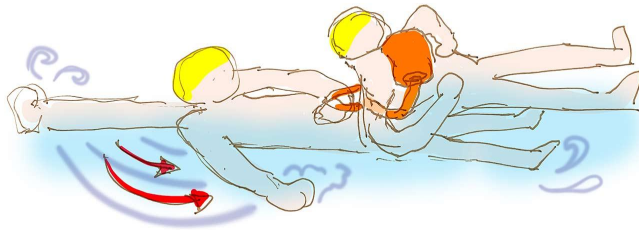
Affix buoy to victim by strap 1



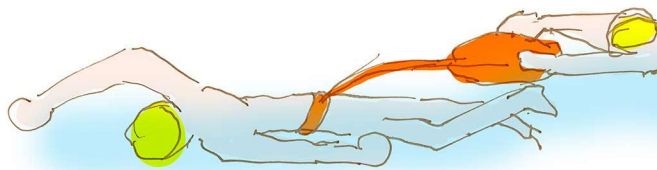
Affix buoy to victim by strap 2



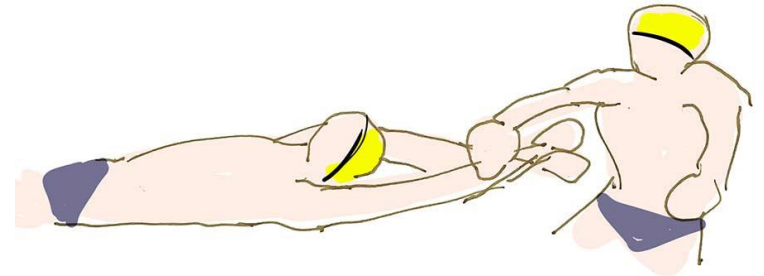
Affix buoy to victim by strap 3



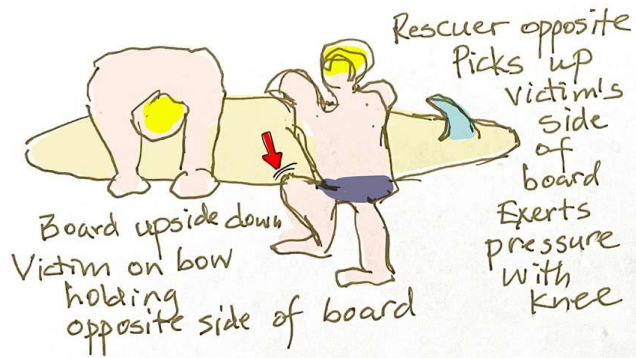
Active victim grabs buoy/no surf



Spinal stabilization



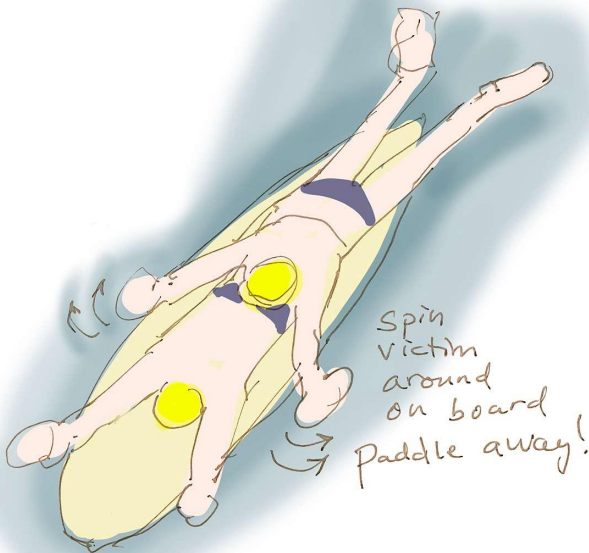
Rescue board roll 1



Rescue board roll 2



Rescue board roll 3



Line search

