

## **The Power of Prevention**

### **Kids Swimming**

#### **Norma and Ken's Story**

As rescue workers in the Phoenix metro area, my husband and I have seen more than our share of tragedies. But by far, no tragedy can quite compare to a most preventable tragedy—drowning. There's no way to grasp the severity of the situation, the degree of the panic and disbelief until you've had a desperate mother, pulling at your hair, scratching your arms, in utter panic screaming "Save my baby!" It's a surreal experience in which you do what you've been trained to instinctively do...sometimes with success and unfortunately, sometimes without.

This was what my husband and I dealt with numerous times on the job. You can imagine, then, how we felt when our own child, Kaylyn, at the age of 2 ½ refused to go to swimming lessons. There were plenty of people who told me she must not be ready. Give her another year. Wait until she's a little older. But in my mind, every day—every hour—I waited meant gambling with my child's life.

Children have a natural curiosity for the water, even children like Kaylyn who didn't want to go to swimming lessons. They go near it, they touch it, and since a large percentage of every child's body weight is in their heads, kids are top heavy. Children who fall in a pool head first while grabbing for a small floating toy or bug are very unlikely to have the strength to get their heads above water. That's what leads to drowning.

**I was determined to take preventative measures. Kaylyn was going to be water safe, despite how much she screamed, cried and even threw up in the early phase of her lessons. To my husband and me, it was a matter of life and death, not one of choice. So we brought Kaylyn to Hubbard's literally kicking, screaming and crying. I got plenty of looks from other parents who thought I was being cruel, but I didn't care. My child was what mattered.**

**The chaos lasted a few weeks, then something happened. Thanks to the patience and the perseverance of the Hubbard instructors, Kaylyn stopped crying. She began learning. She began smiling. And within a month, she was swimming. Sure, I could have pulled her out of the water and "waited until next year" as some of the other mothers suggested. But to me that would have just reinforced Kaylyn's fear. Next year would have just been harder. Her fear would have been one year bigger.**

As a parent, you have to make some tough decisions. Was it easy for me to watch my child cry and scream during her first swimming lessons? Of course not. But I knew it had to be, and I knew Hubbard's could help her not only learn to swim, but enjoy the water. That small amount of inconvenience and pain has paid off. Today Kaylyn is a real swimmer who knows how to roll over and float if she gets tired and has a true love of the water.

I hope no one has to witness the tragedies my husband and I have seen in backyard pools—especially with their own child. But I do hope people understand that sometimes prevention isn't fun or easy, but that prevention saves lives.