

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

How a Father and Son Survived the Devastating Flood Caused by the Remnants of Hurricane Ida

Competitive sailor used life jackets and other gear to swim to safety, save a man who couldn't swim

By *Scott Calver*

Sept. 2, 2021 7:49 pm *ET*

Griffin Gigliotti, a competitive sailor, has practiced how to ditch a sinking boat. The 18-year-old high-school senior put that know-how to use to escape a Chevy Suburban rapidly taking on water during [flash-flooding in the Northeast](#) caused by the remnants of Hurricane Ida.

Mr. Gigliotti and his father, Greg Gigliotti, had returned from a sailing competition in Spain and were headed home to Norwalk, Conn., from John F. Kennedy International Airport late Wednesday. Their ride-hail driver exited congested Interstate 95 and wound up on a residential street in Larchmont, N.Y., where a normally placid brook had become a [raging river that flooded nearby roads](#).

The rising waters swept up the Suburban and jammed it against a fire hydrant, said Mr. Gigliotti and the driver, Sohail Mian, who goes by Rocky. Soon water began seeping through the Suburban's floorboards. It rose higher and higher. "Griffin, we gotta ditch," Mr. Gigliotti recalled his father saying.



Father and son had their sailing gear and began filling their waterproof backpacks with passports, wallets, laptops, phones and other valuables, sealing them shut with electrical tape. The pair handed one of two life jackets they had to Mr. Mian, 56, who said he couldn't swim and worried he would drown. They tied a rope to the life jacket Mr. Mian wore. "I see water is coming into my seat, up, up, up, up, up. I start shaking," Mr. Mian said.

Floodwaters outside Michael Keating's home.

PHOTO: MICHAEL KEATING

At a nearby house, Michael Keating and his family spotted the Suburban and could see the light of the cellphones inside it. "We were yelling, 'Are you OK? Are you OK?'" They said, "No, we're not; we need help," Mr. Keating, 48, recounted.



Sohail Mian PHOTO: SOHAIL MIAN

The water had risen above the steering wheel when they fled through the truck's open windows, said Griffin Gigliotti. He said he put on the other life jacket, climbed onto the Suburban's roof and plunged into the murky water. Father and son swam to the Keating home, guiding Mr. Mian through water around 5 feet deep. The Keatings gave the men dry clothes and offered them couches for the night.

The Gigliottis mopped up water they brought into the house, using candles for light because the power had gone out in the storm.

The next morning, the Gigliottis helped set up a generator, Mr. Keating said. On Thursday evening, he said, Greg Gigliotti brought the Keatings dinner and a bottle of wine.

Mr. Mian said he doesn't know whether the Suburban is salvageable. For now, he said, that doesn't matter. "Thank God I'm safe and came home," he said.

It was "the ultimate father-son bonding experience," said Griffin Gigliotti. With a day's hindsight on the storm that killed at least 41 in the Northeast, he has a better grasp of how dangerous the situation was, he said. "Things could have gone very, very differently."



Greg Gigliotti with Griffin, 18, left, in August 2021.