
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Miraculous survival

The logo for BBC Learning English, consisting of the letters 'BBC' in a white box above the words 'LEARNING ENGLISH' in white text on a dark green background.

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Dan

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English – the show that brings you an interesting topic, authentic listening practice and six new items of vocabulary. I'm Dan...

Neil

And I'm Neil. In this episode we'll be discussing miraculous survivals.

Dan

Have you ever had a **near-death experience**, Neil?

Neil

A **near-death experience**, meaning a situation where I very nearly died? Well, I once fell off the side of a mountain, but I was saved by a tree.

Dan

That's incredible!

Neil

Why do you ask?

Dan

Well, I recently heard a story about Alcides Moreno.

Neil

Who's that?

Dan

He's a window cleaner. He cleaned the windows on the sky scrapers in New York. Except one day, he fell.

Neil

Oh my goodness.

Dan

Yes. And what's more is. He survived.

Neil

Wow! How far did he fall?

Dan

Ah, well, all will be revealed after this week's question. According to the BBC, what chance of survival does a human have when falling to the ground from around 3 storeys?

- a) 30%
- b) 50%
- c) 70%

Neil

And by storeys, you mean the entire floor of a building including all its rooms. Well, I think it's got to be b) 50%

Dan

Well, we'll find out if you're right or not later. So, do you want to hear the story?

Neil

Of course!

Dan

Well, on the 7th of December, Ecuadorians Alcides Moreno, and his brother, Edgar, went up to the top of the Solow Tower in New York to clean the windows like they did every day.

Neil

And how tall is that building?

Dan

It's 47 storeys.

Neil

And how did they usually clean it?

Dan

Well, they used a **scaffold**, which is a structure of interconnected pipes and boards that creates a frame or shape

Neil

Ah, so in this case there was a platform which was attached by cables, or large metal ropes, and hung over the edge of the building and which the window cleaners could raise and lower.

Dan

Exactly. So, as usual they filled up their buckets and climbed on to the **scaffold**.

Neil

And...

Dan

Well, unfortunately the cables were loose, and the scaffold fell from the building. Both brothers fell 47 storeys.

Neil

That's terrible! What happened next?

Dan

I'll let Jo Fidgen, presenter of the BBC show Outlook, explain

INSERT

Jo Fidgen – BBC Outlook presenter

When firefighters arrived on the scene, they found a crowd of **distraught** onlookers pointing towards an alleyway. Edgar had landed on a fence and couldn't be helped, but Alcides was found crouching in a pile of twisted metal still **clutching** the controls of the scaffold. He was breathing...even trying to stand up...

Neil

So, firefighters arrived to find a group of **distraught**, which means extremely worried and upset, people showing them where the two men had come down.

Dan

Yes, and though, unfortunately, Edgar didn't survive, Alcides was found **clutching**, or holding extremely tightly, to the controls of the scaffold.

Neil

Did I hear correctly that he was trying to stand up? Did he escape the accident **unscathed**?

Dan

Unscathed means without any injury at all. And, no, he fell into a coma for 3 weeks and needed 24 pints of blood.

Neil

I'm speechless. I don't understand how he lived.

Dan

You aren't the only one. Listen to what Dr. Philip Barie, from New York-Presbyterian Hospital, said about the whole incident.

INSERT

Philip Barie, New York-Presbyterian Hospital

I don't know what adjective you'd care to use: **unprecedented**, extraordinary... if you are a believer in **miracles**, this would be one.

Neil

Wow. So he can't explain it either. He said it was **unprecedented** which means never happened or done before.

Dan

Yes, and he also said that this was a **miracle**, which is an unexplainable positive outcome to a bad situation that people say was the intervention of a god.

Neil

I guess we'll never know. But one thing I can know is the answer to this week's question.

Dan

Ah, yes. I asked you what chance of survival does a human have when falling to the ground from around 3 storeys?

- a) 30%
- b) 50%
- c) 70%

Neil

And I said b) 50%

Dan

And you were exactly right. Well done.

Neil

Wow! It's a first!

Dan

Shall we look at the vocabulary then?

Neil

First we had **a near-death experience**, which is an experience where a person very nearly, or could easily have died. Have you ever had one, Dan?

Dan

When I was 14 I fell out of a canoe into a river and got stuck between the boat and a rock with my head underwater. I thought it was the end. But, some people pulled me out. Then we had **scaffold**. A **scaffold** is a structure of interconnected pipes and boards that creates a frame or shape. Name a place that you might see **scaffolding**, Neil.

Neil

They are usually put up around houses when builders are working on the roof. Then we had **clutching**. If you **clutch** something, it means you hold it extremely tightly. There is a well-known idiom that uses this word. Sound familiar, Dan?

Dan

Ah, **you're clutching at straws**, Neil, which means you are trying to find a reason or hope to succeed when it's extremely unlikely. What was after that?

Neil

After that we had **unscathed**. If you are **unscathed**, you are uninjured. We often talk about **escaping** something **unscathed**. Have you ever **escaped** an accident **unscathed**?

Dan

Well, when I was 6, I fell through a hole that some builders had made while doing renovation. I hit the ground in the garage, but somehow I **escaped unscathed**. Maybe, I bounced? Then we heard **unprecedented**. If something is **unprecedented**, it has never happened or been done before. Can you think of an example, Neil?

Neil

Neil Armstrong walking on the moon was **unprecedented** in 1969. And, finally, we had **miracle**. A **miracle** is an unexplainable positive outcome to a bad situation that people say was the intervention of a god. The adjective is **miraculous**.

Do you believe in **miracles**, Dan?

Dan

Well, I've never seen or experienced one, but when you hear a story like this, it's difficult not to. And, that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. Please join us again soon!

Neil

And we are on social media too - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. See you there.

Both

Bye!