

Hero Project

“Many people stand on this chord when contemplating if they will jump or not. Here is where our active listening skills are tested. We are a sounding board for them, allowing them to vent without shame, guilt, or feelings of being a burden.”

My definition of a hero is someone who shows great courage and devotes their time and energy towards a good cause. I interviewed Kevin Briggs, who demonstrates all the qualities of heroism and continues to in his everyday life. Kevin Briggs lives in Petaluma and worked on the Golden Gate Bridge, where he came across people attempting to end their lives. He has persuaded over two hundred people who go on that bridge prepared to end it all, to give life another chance. Without him, at least 1000 people could have lost someone in their life due to suicide and would have been negatively impacted. Kevin's only regret about becoming part of highway patrol was his lack of education in conversation dynamics.

"I can see looking in people's eyes, the pain and the hurt; that's what got my attention." He said. Kevin Briggs became a highway patrol officer because one of his friends wanted to but didn't want to do it alone. When he was accepted for the job, there weren't many people working on the bridge. He realized it was because of the suicides off the bridge, but that didn't stop him from accepting the offer. Kevin recognized that people needed help, which is why he continued working on the bridge. It's heroic that he would choose a job because he was interested in helping others, not himself. Kevin can understand the people who want to end their lives on a different level because he has struggled with depression as well.

"It hit me hard; we can do things at work, but when we get home, we struggle to deal with our loved ones, and I did," he mentioned. Kevin has been diagnosed with depression and PTSD from occurrences on and off the job. Kevin explained that you could be fine at work and then feel depressed once you get home. Once he was diagnosed with depression, Kevin realized that he needed help or that he wouldn't get better. "There's a lot of people who suffer out there, but until we decide to get help, we

will continue to suffer," he added. He found a psychiatrist through his doctor and got injections in his neck to try and reset things from his PTSD. Similar to Kevin, his son has also struggled with depression.

"I didn't see it for a long time, we get so busy and we're trying to do other things, and we fail to see what's going on inside our own homes," he explained. Many parents either deny their children's depression or fail to realize that they are struggling. Kevin had so much going on that he didn't notice his son's depression. Once Kevin knew his son was struggling, he was there for him and got him the help he needed. He acknowledges it can be tough to go through depression, so it hit him hard when the boy he raised was going through it. "It took me a long time to understand that my kid does suffer and how to treat him and be there for him," he noted. Kevin made sure he went down the right path, he's had to stay in the hospital and take medication, but in the past six months, he's gotten much better. Kevin says one of his most significant accomplishments was how good his sons have turned out.

"Everyone can help people; they don't have to be on the bridge. We can help them right here right now, so they don't get up to that bridge or a tall building," he said. Out of his many accomplishments, Kevin claims he's most proud of how well his boys have turned out and his successful work on the bridge. Although he is usually gone, his boys bring him pride. Kevin has been helping others improve their mental health for about 25 years, saving over 200 people from losing their lives. In this quote, he explains that anyone can help someone struggling mentally at any time so they don't end up in a dangerous situation.

"I could feel my face turning red. I had lost people to suicide on the bridge and been face to face with them when they jumped, but I was so focused on my job that in my mind, it was like a traffic fatality, sad, even heartbreaking, but in my line of work these incidents occurred, and that's the way it was" he explained. He was attending a suicide prevention class shortly after retiring from the California Highway Patrol in 2013, when a man came up to him and introduced himself. Kevin handled the case where his daughter was lost to suicide. He knew his answer wasn't what the man wanted to hear when he asked his opinions on the suicide barrier that was in the making. Kevin explained most people go to the bridge to appreciate the views and

celebrate life, so he insisted he wasn't in favor of it. "Kevin, I want you to think about this; you have a view on one side and a life on the other," he explained to Kevin. After that, he was deeply embarrassed and claimed he had forever changed his perspective.

"You may think you've exhausted all means; you may be tired and beat down but give it one more day," he stated. Kevin acknowledges the struggle is hard, but if asked to say one thing to someone about to jump, he would encourage them to give life one more chance. I interviewed Kevin Briggs, who demonstrates all qualities of heroism and continues to in his everyday life. I have learned many things from interviewing Kevin Briggs, but what stood out to me was that everyone is capable of helping others at any time. His work is truly inspiring, and it helped me realize that our lives are valuable.