



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on June 16, 2016

Alligator Attack: Could the Tragedy at Disney Have Been Prevented?

A Nebraska family faced an unthinkable horror Tuesday evening. Their two-year-old son, Lane Graves, was taken from them by an alligator. The Graves family was vacationing at a Disney resort when the alligator attacked the young boy on the edge of a man-made lagoon.



The boy's mother and father, Matt and Melissa, who were right there with him, rushed to intervene. The father struggled with the alligator, but real life is not Hollywood. The powerful reptile took the child and disappeared into the water. Lane's four-year-old sister witnessed the whole thing.

A search and rescue operation began that lasted into the next day. By then, it was considered a recovery effort. After more than 15 hours, Orange County Sheriff Jerry Demings admitted what everyone already knew.

"There's no question [the family] will lose a 2-year-old child," Demings said during a press conference Wednesday afternoon. "It has been 15 hours since, we are working on recovering the body of the child at this point. The ultimate goal is to bring closure to the family."

That closure began just more than an hour later, when Sheriff Demings and a Catholic priest delivered what Demings described as a "tough message" to the Graves family: Divers had found Lane in six feet of water just 10 to 15 feet from where he had been taken. He was intact. He had been drowned by the alligator.

Even as the story began to unfold, there were questions about what precautions were taken by Disney and the child's parents. Could this tragedy have been prevented? [Who is to blame?](#)

Some on social media were quick to blame the parents. How could they let their child play by the water by himself like that? The first part of the answer to that is, they didn't. They were right there with him. As a father of four, this writer is well aware that everything can change more quickly than one would think. Which parent among us has never looked away — for what seemed like just a moment — and then realized that in a department store filled with strangers, you have no idea where your small child is? In that moment, almost any parent would watch that store burned to the ground to have their child back. Nothing else matters.

There is no question in this writer's mind that Matt Graves loved and wanted to protect his child. He fought a seven-foot-long alligator, risking life and limb, in an attempt to save Lane. Yes, they let their child play by the edge of the water. Just like many — if not most — of the families who visit the resort do.



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In fact, one mother — frustrated with the quick judgment of many on social media — posted pictures of her own three-year-old son playing by the water in the same area. The pictures were taken 30 minutes to one hour before Lane was attacked by the alligator.

In her [post](#), Jennifer Vendetti said:

I took these pics at the exact spot this happened betw 8 & 830, the incident happened at 9. Helicopters flew overhead til 1 am and were back around dawn. I can't imagine anyone could sleep knowing that the helicopter was searching for a missing child taken by an alligator. I can't help but wonder if we played with him, did I talk to his Mom?? How does one go home without your baby in tow? I've already seen posts criticizing the parents. I can assure you alligators were not on my mind at all when Channing was in the water. It's a tiny beach, surrounded by pools, water slides, a restaurant and a fire pit. I can't conceive that an alligator would be in such a busy, small space. #judgelesspraymore

Vendetti also posted that while there were the standard “no swimming” signs, there were no signs warning of the presence of alligators. This writer recently vacationed with his family on Edisto Island, South Carolina. Among the amenities at the resort where we stayed, there is a miniature golf course and playground. About 20 feet away is a lagoon. All along the edge of the water were signs that warned us of the presence of alligators. Why did Disney not take that same precaution?

When Lane was taken, he was 10 feet from the shore. This writer cannot imagine that a father who would — without hesitation — rush to fight an alligator to save his child, would have ignored signs warning of dangerous animals and allowed his child to play there anyway.

Alligators are extremely dangerous. They are fast and powerful predators. Even when attacks are not immediately fatal, bites — even with medical treatment — can develop fatal infections. That Disney did not warn guests of this great danger is simply incredible. The *Washington Post* [reported](#) that Disney plans to “thoroughly review the situation for the future,” according to a Disney official. Hindsight is 20/20. It's a shame Disney didn't practice a little foresight.

George A. Kalogridis, president of Walt Disney World, issued a statement Wednesday which said:

There are no words to convey the profound sorrow we feel for the family and their unimaginable loss. We are devastated and heartbroken by this tragic accident and are doing what we can to help them during this difficult time.

On behalf of everyone at Disney, we offer them our deepest sympathy.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) said that it is still conducting its own investigation to determine if any of the five alligators that have been trapped and killed are responsible for the death of Lane Graves. In a statement provided to *The New American*, FWC said:

FWC's active investigation continues into the tragic death of Lane Graves.

FWC is analyzing all of the evidence collected so we can be as certain as possible that we have caught the alligator responsible.

Once the investigation is complete, the results will be made publicly available.

Any questions related to signage or operation of the park should be directed to Disney.

FWC Chairman Brian Yablonski also provided a statement to *The New American* in which he said:



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As a father myself, it's hard to imagine what the family of Lane Graves is going through. On behalf of the entire Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, we grieve together with Lane's family, and we offer our continued support now and forever. They are now a part of our extended FWC family, and we will continue to stand with them.

The Graves family will return to Elkhorn, Nebraska, to put their lives back together without Lane. There, in that small town of 7,000, they will have the comfort of their close friends and family and the support of their fellow parishioners at St. Patrick's Catholic Church, where a prayer vigil was held along with the 8:30 a.m. Mass Thursday, which was attended by nearly 150 people.

Meanwhile, Disney World has temporarily closed all the beaches around the resort to conduct "a swift and thorough review of all our processes and protocols." And perhaps put up signs warning people that there are dangerous animals in the water.



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