



A bride-to-be just days away from walking down the aisle miraculously survived a near drowning after a diving trip went wrong. UK couple Gareth and Sophie planned to exchange vows during the Kiwi summer period, but three days out from the big day she was pulled unconscious from the sea floor off the Coromandel coast.

Whitianga's Cave Cruiser owner Steve Miller, told the Mercury Bay Informer he treated the couple to a day of diving near Great Mercury Island on Monday, January 25. After finding a spot, Gareth and Sophie followed divemaster Richard Miller – Steve's brother – down the anchor rope to a scallop bed. Steve and another woman remained on board.

Moments later, Sophie resurfaced, but Steve said "she didn't look happy" and despite throwing her a life ring, she disappeared under water. Richard was still underwater and immediately followed Sophie. By the time he reached her, she was on the sea floor 18 metres below the surface.

She was unconscious and non-responsive when they breached the surface. Steve made a mayday call to the Whitianga Coastguard as his brother began CPR on Sophie while still in the water. "Her face was covered in blood at this time. We had no idea what had gone wrong," Steve said.

The group worked as a team, Jo continued with rescue breathing, while Steve did chest compressions and Gareth stayed on the radio with the Coastguard, giving them progress reports. The trio managed to revive Sophie in about five minutes before the Auckland Rescue Helicopter reached them. "The moment that her eyes came back into focus was amazing. It's something that will be burned into my memory forever."

Once the rescue helicopter arrived, Sophie was in better shape and was talking. She was flown to Auckland City Hospital in a serious condition.

She walked down the aisle and married Gareth on Friday, January 29.

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