



Marathon News

VIDEO: 34 MIGRANTS RESCUED BY COAST GUARD FROM SINKING VESSEL AFTER KCB CHARTER CAPTAIN'S CALL

By Alex Rickert - November 10, 2023

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Thirty-four migrants aboard a sinking vessel are now in the hands of the U.S. Coast Guard, thanks to a Key Colony Beach charter captain's watchful eye.

Captain Marty Lewis was 11 miles offshore in the Atlantic on a trip for his fishing charter company when he discovered the vessel barely at the surface Friday morning.

"Marty was the first one on the scene," Lewis' wife Katie, who co-owns Main Attraction Sportfishing Charters with her husband, told the Weekly Friday afternoon. "He did what he was supposed to do and called it in to the Coast

nearby, ready to take passengers aboard if one began to struggle while the Coast Guard made its way out.

"I've seen a lot of Cuban rafts offshore with a lot of people on them, but never this bad," he said. "Usually, you see them out there and they don't want you to even help them – they want to make it to shore. These guys were like, 'Yes. Please call the Coast Guard. We need help.'"

"They literally stuffed their shirts with ... whatever they could find floating," he recalled. "My mate that day could speak Spanish, and he asked them how long they'd been out there. They said 'four days,' and for two of those they were sunk. I can't even imagine being in the water for two whole days. I'd imagine by the end of that day, they would no longer be with us."

"I guess we're kind of numb to this, only because we've seen it so many times," Katie added. "To be honest, it hasn't happened in a long time, but we've also had calmer weather lately, so they saw their window, I'm sure."

All migrants aboard the sinking vessel were accounted for with no reported injuries, according to a Coast Guard report later in the day. Their country of origin was not immediately released. The Coast Guard's standard policy at present for interdictions at sea near the Keys is to repatriate migrants to their country of origin or return them to the country from which they departed, officials said. These migrants may be declared ineligible for legal immigration parole options.

"We were in the right place at the right time," Marty concluded. "If I had been looking left instead of right, we would have never seen them."



ALEX RICKERT

Alex Rickert made the perfectly natural career progression from dolphin trainer to newspaper editor in 2021 after freelancing for Keys Weekly while working full time at Dolphin Research Center. A resident of Marathon since 2015, he fell in love with the Florida Keys community by helping multiple organizations and friends rebuild in the wake of Hurricane Irma. An avid runner, actor, and spearfisherman, he spends as much of his time outside of work on or under the sea having civil disagreements with sharks.