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 clenching. If you clench 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 clenching 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 adjectives 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!