

[00:00:00] **Stephen Calabria:** From the Mount Sinai Health System in New York City, this is Road to Resilience, podcast about facing adversity. I'm your host, Stephen Calabria, Mount Sinai's Director of Podcasting.

[00:00:12] On today's episode, we welcome Kevin Hines, a storyteller, author, and filmmaker. Due to the pain of bipolar depression, Kevin jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge when he was 19 years old.

[00:00:23] He survived, and now he advocates around the world for suicide prevention. He was also a big part of getting a net installed around the Golden Gate come. We're pleased to welcome Kevin to the show.

[00:00:37] Kevin Hines, welcome to Road to Resilience.

[00:00:41] **Kevin Hines:** Thank you for having me. I'm glad to be here. Nice to meet you.

[00:00:43] **Stephen Calabria:** Our pleasure. So could you give us a brief primer on your background?

[00:00:49] **Kevin Hines:** Sure. Born in abject poverty in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco in the 1980s. Lived in and out of crack motels with my birth parents, taken in by foster parents, many different homes in a short amount of time.

[00:01:03] Take it away from my birth mom at least five times before that. My birth brother and I in one of the foster homes filled with neglect both contracted a vicious strain of bronchitis. He died. My only full blooded brother. I bounced around from home to home.

[00:01:18] Unlike my poor brother, I got very lucky. I landed in the home with Patrick and Debra Hines, eventually. They made me their son. They are my mom and dad, and they gave me a beautiful childhood and adolescence for my traumatic infancy, where I was fed Kool Aid, Coca Cola, and sour milk, my first diet, ravaging my gut, destroying my brain.

[00:01:38] I ended up living this great childhood and wonderful adolescence, but at 17 and a half years of age, my brain broke. I had a complete mental breakdown in front of 1, 200 people at my theater show, playing one of the leads at Archbishop Reardon High School.

[00:01:52] From 17 to 19, it was a very rocky road, skyrocketing into mania, falling into depression weekly, At 19 years of age, I couldn't bear the brunt and the weight of the pain I was experiencing any longer.

[00:02:06] And because of that epic, lethal, emotional pain, and because of bipolar depression, I leapt off the Golden Gate Bridge to attempt to take my life. A suicide attempt, a means of suicide attempt, that is 99.9 percent fatal.

[00:02:21] **Stephen Calabria:** What was the cause of that breakdown that you had during that performance in school? Was it kind of building to that point or had something happened that day?

[00:02:31] **Kevin Hines:** It was building to that point. I was becoming more and more psychotic, hearing auditory hallucinations, having visual hallucinations. But say nothing to my family and friends. living inside a paranoid delusion that I didn't know what it was at the time or how to articulate myself about it.

[00:02:49] I certainly didn't know how to express the severity of my symptoms that were occurring. I kept them inside. Obviously my family knew something was wrong. I was acting erratically, I was acting unwell, but they had never dealt with something like this.

[00:03:02] They didn't know the extent of it. And because I hid so much of it from them, I became a danger to myself at nineteen.

[00:03:10] **Stephen Calabria:** And so that all came to a head in the year 2000. If you would take us to the day of September 25th, 2000. So how did the day begin and what were you feeling on that day?

[00:03:24] **Kevin Hines:** September 25th, 2000. Let's take us back to the 24th. The night of the 24th was the night that the idea of suicide culminated for me. My favorite teacher, Mr. John Finnell, my hero, my mentor, my friend, a second father figure to me, took his life seven months before that.

[00:03:43] And it devastated me and it made suicide an option. Well, it wasn't his fault, not at all, but it opened up the idea to me. I had never thought of it before that. And on the 24th, I sat at my desk and I penned a note, a suicide note, to my family, my friends, my girlfriend at the time.

[00:04:02] I told them I loved them. I said, I was sorry. I asked for their forgiveness. On September 25th, my father desperately tried to help me. He

knew I was unwell. He did not know I was suicidal and I kept it from him and I buried my pain. I silenced my pain.

[00:04:21] Which is what so many of us have become so good at, silencing our pain and our traumas and our struggles so that we don't become a burden to other people because we believe we must be.

[00:04:31] If I had told my dad on the 25th what I was thinking or that I needed help right now, my father Patrick Kenneth Hines, or my mom, if I told her, Debra Jo Hines, would have moved heaven and earth. He'd keep me safe from myself that day.

[00:04:48] But I believed that if I told them what I was going through, that they would somehow abandon me, and I've lived with abandonment issues my whole life.

[00:04:56] Every time somebody I love dies, I feel like they're leaving me on purpose, and I can't shake it no matter how much therapy I do, and I do a lot of therapy. And that's because of losing my brother, because of my birth parents, and again, I was taken from them.

[00:05:07] All of those things played a huge pivotal role in my abandonment issues. And on the 25th of September, I lied through my teeth, I buried my struggles, I silenced my pain because the pain was so great to bear, I couldn't hold it upon my shoulders any longer, and thus I orchestrated a day to get out to the Golden Gate Bridge to take my life.

[00:05:28] And what I say to people today is that I recognize now what I wish I knew back then, that my thoughts don't have to become my actions, they can simply be my thoughts, they don't have to own, rule, or define what I do next. I didn't know that back then.

[00:05:46] I didn't know that if I looked in the mirror, any mirror anywhere, and said, my thoughts don't have to be from my actions, they can simply be my thoughts.

[00:05:54] If I found anyone around me and said four simple, but very effective words, I need help now. And I use the sheer probability of the number of people I turn to, someone would be willing to empathize with my pain.

[00:06:07] I told myself on the bridge before I jumped, absolutely no one cares. Now that is the greatest lie I have ever told myself. Everybody cared. Every

member of my family, every one of my friends, all of my acquaintances have been there to tear me from that rail to safety.

[00:06:25] When I ask audiences around the world, thousands of people in the audience, and I ask them, how many of you, by honest to God raise of hands, had you seen me on that bridge on September 25th, leaning over that four foot nothing rail, that ease of access lethal means, crying profusely white tears to the waters below, how many of you would have cared?

[00:06:46] And every single place I go, no matter what country, no matter what language, no matter what continent, everybody raises their hands.

[00:06:55] **Stephen Calabria:** So, if you would take us to the moments leading up to it, and then the action itself. You drove to the Golden Gate Bridge, is that right? Or you, you got on a bus?

[00:07:06] **Kevin Hines:** I got on a bus. I got on a bus at the 7th, in the very back row in the middle seat, looking out upon everybody, and I began to cry. Softly, moderately, waterfalls flowing from my eyes, and then I began to yell aloud, on a crowded bus, at the voices I was hearing in my head.

[00:07:20] Leave me alone, I don't wanna die, why do you hate me so much, what did I ever do to you? I'm a good person, and everybody's staring at it, saying nothing. And you have to understand, all I wanted at that moment was for one person to see me, say something kind and compassionate.

[00:07:36] I wanted someone to Say, are you okay? Is something wrong or can I help you? I would have told him everything and begged him to save me. But nobody said anything. Nobody said a word except for one man.

[00:07:49] One man on my left says, apologies to him, while smiling at him, laughing at my pain, what the hell's wrong with that kid? And I believe that is what's wrong with some of society today.

[00:08:04] This human ability we have to see someone, anyone in the greatest lethal emotional pain they've ever experienced, but feel nothing for them except sheer and utter toward them. And that's where I disagree. I think that if we're nothing else on this planet.

[00:08:18] We are each other's brothers and sisters keepers. We're meant to be here, to give back to those we know, those we love, those we don't know from Adam, and those we don't even like.

[00:08:29] What we're not meant to do is hurt each other with our words or our actions, and it happens all around the world every single day in some of our own homes, especially now in this climate.

[00:08:39] And, when I did what I did, I didn't want to die. I didn't. I believed I had to. And those are two categorically different things.

[00:08:49] **Stephen Calabria:** So you got off the bus and then you started walking. Is that right? You walked to the edge of the bridge.

[00:08:57] **Kevin Hines:** Well, I walked for 40 minutes back and forth across the bridge walk, begging myself to call my family, begging myself to ask someone for help. But I couldn't say the words, I couldn't get it out of my head.

[00:09:10] And the voices I was hearing. The auditory hallucinations told me I had to die, that I had no option, that it was inevitable. And they would win the day. At around 10 a. m. on the 25th, I leaned over the rail. A woman approached me and asked me to take her picture several times.

[00:09:28] I did. In that moment, I thought nobody cared, and I leapt off the Golden Gate Bridge. Instantaneous regret for my actions the moment my hands left the rail. When you hit the water from that height at that speed, you've added 15, 000 pounds of pressure.

[00:09:45] That's why most people die upon impact. I lived. I was almost drowning. A sea lion is affectionately named Herbert kept me afloat till the coast guard boat arrived. Witnesses saw it. People took pictures. The sea lion circled beneath me, bumping me up into the coast guard boat arrived by.

[00:10:04] I believe a miracle saved my life that day. I know people have differing opinions. That's fine. Believe what you want. I believe God saved my life that day. I'll always believe that. I have a strong faith. You believe what you want. That's fine.

[00:10:18] People watching, people listening. I don't push my narrative on anybody else, but I'll tell you this in the water, on that Coast Guard boat, those incredible Coast Guard officers who sometimes have a thankless job and who also go through severe PTSD from what they've experienced, what they've seen, they looked at me and told me, do you understand how many people we pull out of these waters that are already gone?

[00:10:44] He says, we've pulled 26 dead bodies from these waters and only one live one. You, they said in our, in our entire career, we've brought 57 dead bodies from these waters and only one live one, you. I can tell you, Stephen, that gave me the greatest point of perspective I've ever received in my life.

[00:11:01] Because I knew in that moment that I had to fight for my wellness, no matter the pain I was in. I'm a lot of pain, physical, mental, brain, pain. But it's okay. I need no pity. I took those actions. I did that to myself. I take responsibility for what I do today.

[00:11:18] So, on that boat I recognized that I will never attempt to take my life again, no matter how often I think about it. And I think about it thousands of times a year. I consider suicide thousands of times a year.

[00:11:29] It plagues me. I have chronic thoughts of suicide. They'll never take me. I'll never die by my hands, because I have the tools and the techniques to stay here whilst among suicidal ideations. And the two things I do, I already told you.

[00:11:41] My thoughts don't have to become my actions, they can simply be my thoughts. And I need help now. And I don't stop saying that until someone is willing to get me to safety. So I'll never die that way.

[00:11:52] **Stephen Calabria:** What were the days immediately following the jump like, and what were the next steps to rebuilding? I mean, how do you rebuild a life after something like that?

[00:12:03] **Kevin Hines:** Slowly. Very, very slowly. I went from a wheelchair to a walker to back brace. And then a back brace and a cane in the physical hospitalization.

[00:12:15] I was just grateful. I was grateful that when I called out to God, He answered. Had I died that day, my father told me that if I died, he would have died. I think of all the families of Golden Gate Bridge jumpers who are deceased.

[00:12:30] I vividly remember after I did the film *The Bridge* with Eric Steele, after my father and I were featured in it, I was wearing this coat that Eric Steele had made for all the people in the film. It's a big swimmer's jacket that said *The Bridge* on the back.

[00:12:44] Pouring rain on Montgomery Street, San Francisco. I was walking down Montgomery Street and a man grabbed my right shoulder and flipped me around like that, huge guy. He must have been 6'5 6'6

[00:12:58] And he looked at me while crying and said, my son died and you lived. Why? And I really thought he was going to kill me. It was a terrifying moment. And then he just hugged me and he just held me there for a good five minutes.

[00:13:13] He wouldn't let go, and just crying on my shoulder. People are walking by like, what is happening, but I just, I just held him. I'm grateful for every moment I get past the day I left off that bridge.

[00:13:26] **Stephen Calabria:** What were the physical effects also?

[00:13:29] **Kevin Hines:** I shattered my T12, L1, L2 low vertebrae in the shards. I missed severing my spinal cord by two millimeters. Two millimeters away from certain death. Every day I wake up, often in excruciating physical pain, is a gift. It's a gift. I get to be here.

[00:13:50] And I appreciate every moment. I take nothing in knowledge for granted. And I do my best to be kind, compassionate, loving, caring, and empathetic to everybody at me. I don't always meet the mark, but I try.

[00:14:02] **Stephen Calabria:** What support systems or individuals play the biggest roles in your journey to recovery?

[00:14:11] **Kevin Hines:** Well, I have to say, I met my father, Patrick, who lived with me for a long time, who I lived with for a long time, was my biggest supporter. He fought for me and with me for a very long time, even though he was going through hell doing it.

[00:14:27] He really did, try to make sure I was safe at every corner. Before that it was my mom. And today it is absolutely beyond a shadow of a doubt, my lovely wife, Margaret. Without her, I wouldn't be the man I am today. I wouldn't be the human being I am today. I wouldn't be alive a thousand times over without her.

[00:14:44] And she really is had my back like nobody else. We met in my third psych ward stay. I was a patient. She was visiting her cousin for me. It was love at first sight for her. It took a while. But we've just celebrated 19 years together, which is incredible.

[00:14:59] **Stephen Calabria:** Were there any role models that you looked to during your recovery?

[00:15:06] **Kevin Hines:** Yeah, yeah, , two specifically. When I first attempted to take my life, which most people don't know about. There were two times I attempted to take my life before the Golden Gate Bridge.

[00:15:19] Number one, I was in my room with the means, I put a chair up against the door, and I played a CD that I'd been having on repeat for a long time. And it was by DMX, Earl Simmons, Dark Man X, may he rest in peace.

[00:15:34] And as I was about to take my life, DMX was reciting a prayer. He always has a prayer in, in his, in his, uh, in his albums. And it went like this, Lord, I'm in so much pain. Please take me away.

[00:15:49] And then you hear God say, no, I put you here to do a job and your work ain't done. To live is to suffer, but you're still my son. And there will be a time when you shine as bright as the stars, but there won't be his or hers, just ours.

[00:16:04] And I put down what I was doing, and I kept the lock on the door, and I broke down. And I pressed repeat on that particular track, back when CDs were cool, and I came to a calm and realized I didn't want to do what I was doing.

[00:16:21] The second time, and now I've always looked up his lyrics, and I have all his albums, and I appreciate his words to no end, because they've always touched me and meant something that meant a lot to me.

[00:16:32] And people have said he was diagnosed with bipolar depression, but I don't know how true that is. The other person that I really looked up to besides my mom and my dad for saving my life, and who have always been my heroes.

[00:16:43] The other person I looked up to was Dwayne, The Rock Johnson. In high school, my dad got me a signed copy of his first book, The Rock Says. And in that book, there is a passage that reads something to the effect of, I defeated my depression to faith.

[00:16:59] And it goes on like that, but it's a passage that I highlighted in the book and every psych ward stay I would go to, I would bring that book for inspiration to keep going. And when I first read that passage, I was in the middle of trying to take my life.

[00:17:13] I read the passage, I put what I was doing down, that book saved my life. Dwayne saved my life through his words, just like DMX. And from there, I would bring it to every psych ward stay, and on the 5th of, not, let's see, the 5th of 10 psych ward stays now, I was in the psych ward reading that book in the common area, just reading that passage over again, to get through the day, and this young man of Mexican heritage comes up to me and goes, Hey, man.

[00:17:44] That book's already saved you. I need it. And it's signed by The Rock. I said, no man, I can't, I can't give this to you. And I didn't tell him it was signed. He goes, come on, please. It's helped you all these times.

[00:17:58] I'm really struggling. I need, I need something that's going to keep me here. I was like, here, and I handed him the book. I've never seen him or it again. But he did email me once to tell me that it's helped him immensely.

[00:18:13] And then he wrote me thanks that he didn't realize it was signed. But, those two people that helped change my life. And then there's one other thing that, currently speaks to me, more and more, in a moderate sense of contemporary, is that, I, I'm a big comic book lover.

[00:18:30] I've collected comic books for 20 years and I have a signed integrated copy of the first appearance of Deadpool. Now Deadpool was born in pain, he was born in pain, and he's attempted suicide and all these things.

[00:18:44] But his, that, the ethos of that and pathos of that character speak to me, and specifically when Ryan Reynolds took on the mantle of Deadpool in the films, learning about Ryan Reynolds' severe anxiety, and that he is terrified when he's outside of his house.

[00:19:01] And knowing more about that, when I got to be a part of the Bring Change to Mind gala in New York, and I got to hear him really open up about how his anxiety affects him. He's talked about it in public, in the media, but the way he expressed himself when he's 20 feet away from me on stage, blew me away.

[00:19:21] And just anchored that work he's done, because what he said was if you see me outside of my house, and there he is sitting on the stage for hundreds of people, if you see me outside of my house, I'm terrified, I'm petrified and he was getting this big award, the Robin Williams Legacy Award for comedy and giving back to your community or communities around the world.

[00:19:40] And he is immensely inspiring to me, Ryan Reynolds, and the character Deadpool, by Rob Lightfield and, actually what made it even, put even more icing on the cake, just to end the story, my friend, Steve Lau, who's also a big comic book guy, he goes to all the Comic Cons and he's kind of a big deal out there.

[00:19:58] He walked up to Rob Lightfield, the creator of Deadpool, and he purchased a really special Deadpool comic, and he told Rob my story. And Rob Lightfield said, thank you, Kevin, for all you do.

[00:20:11] And I'll keep that sacred for the rest of my life because it means the world to me, knowing that he wrote a character and has such serious mental health issues and is also doing such good.

[00:20:20] **Stephen Calabria:** In retrospect, what are some coping strategies or techniques you've developed since that September day in 2000 that have been most effective for you in managing difficult times, and what would an example be?

[00:20:37] **Kevin Hines:** Sure, I'll give you a few. So, I'll give you the three E's that I came up with. do. And I have a 10 step guide to better brain, mind, behavioral, mental, physical, and spiritual health and well being.

[00:20:46] It's on my YouTube channel, youtube. com slash Kevin Hines, which has 800 videos all designed to better brain health and physical health. And so I exercise every day. I eat mostly anti inflammatory meals. I educate myself, the three es.

[00:21:00] Educating myself is probably the most important of those, because I educate myself as to my diagnosis, getting a Google Alert on Bipolar Depression, Bipolar Disorder, Mental Health, Psychiatry, Psychology, and Brain Health Issues.

[00:21:11] So I get all those Google Alerts, and I'm constantly devouring information. So I'm adding steps, tricks, tools, and techniques to better my brain health on a regular basis. I live this every day. I'm not playing around. I work tirelessly for this right here. tirelessly. And it helps me stay stable to the best of my ability.

[00:21:28] I would even keel. And so when you go to that YouTube channel and you find the art of wellness 2. 0, that's the name of the video, the art of wellness 2. 0. That is something that thousands of people use around the world

to better their brain health, and they say in a six to nine month period they see a dramatic improvement in their mental health.

[00:21:46] Why? Because the two most protective factors to preventing suicide are resilience and coping techniques. In these two, these strategies that I use in a routine in the regiment are coping techniques and they keep me stable for the best of my ability.

[00:22:01] **Stephen Calabria:** What advice would you give to others who may be struggling with similar challenges and are looking for a way out?

[00:22:10] **Kevin Hines:** My advice is, when you find a moment when you're well enough to do so, recognize that you have to put in the time, the energy, the effort, and the work to change your brain, to change your life.

[00:22:20] Don't wait for other people to fix you, don't wait for anybody to save you. You have to save yourself. If you can't avail of or afford therapy and treatment, you have to read every single study, book.

[00:22:34] Everything you can find about your particular diagnosis or struggle so you can survive it. You have to educate yourself and the people around you about how to get through the pain you're going through or else you're not going to get there.

[00:22:48] Hope always exists. It's always there. It's tangible. It's not intangible. It's not false. It's not made up. Hope exists. If you don't feel it, if you don't know it, you haven't walked far enough and worked hard enough to reach it. It may not be an action plan, but it is real.

[00:23:03] If you don't believe in it, you have to work toward it. And I think that a lot of people want this lubrication of their wellness. They want that exercise, that one pill that's going to solve their problems. That's not how life works. You have to do the work.

[00:23:15] You have to save yourself. Yes, did I want someone to walk up to me and say, are you okay? Is something wrong? Can I help you? Absolutely. I was not ambivalent. I was ambivalent on that bridge. I didn't want to die. I believed I had to, but I wanted to live.

[00:23:28] My brain was trying to kill me. So yes, the people that are saying it well, need to reach out to those who may be struggling, reach out to their strong friends who they don't know are struggling and say, I've got your back.

[00:23:39] I'm here for you. What do you need from me? What can I do to help you get better? And if you're going through something, please tell me so I can support you. But the people going through it need to stop hiding it. You need to stop suppressing your pain.

[00:23:52] You need to stop damaging yourself because if you suppress and bury your pain, it's only a bubble and burst until you find yourself rageful, aggressive, angry, violent, using substances, having eating disorders, or having suicidal ideals or actions.

[00:24:09] We can all get through the worst pain we've ever experienced if we find a way to believe that it's possible.

[00:24:18] **Stephen Calabria:** Last question, there's been a new part added to the Golden Gate Bridge, in part because of your advocacy work. Could you talk a little bit about that?

[00:24:29] **Kevin Hines:** Sure, since my leap off the Golden Gate Bridge. I have advocated since seven months after my leave of the Golden Gate Bridge for the rail or net at the Golden Gate Bridge. My father, in 2006, after the film The Bridge came out, co founded the Bridge Rail Foundation with Paul Mueller and Dave Hull.

[00:24:46] Dave Hull lost his 13 year old daughter, Kathy, to the Golden Gate Bridge. I was a founding board member, so was Dana Whitmer, who lost her son, Matthew, to the Golden Gate Bridge.

[00:24:55] Sue's Story is on that board, so is Richard Carlton, and so is Ken Holmes, the Marin Coroner, all beautiful people trying to change the face of the Golden Gate Bridge.

[00:25:04] Not one more person will ever again dive off the Golden Gate Bridge, we are making a film called The Net to explore the history of the eight fights to raise the rail at the Golden Gate Bridge, the seven that failed since 1937's first fight with the Golden Gate Bridge Patrol of that era until now and its success.

[00:25:23] Nobody else will die there. And the culmination of our work, will be seen in the thousands of lives saved.

[00:25:30] **Stephen Calabria:** That's it for my questions. Was there anything else you wanted to say?

[00:25:35] **Kevin Hines:** You know, I want to say to people who live in America, who are watching or listening, suicide is never the solution to your problem, it is the problem. Suicidal ideation is the greatest liars we know, we don't have to listen to that.

[00:25:46] If you happen to be watching or listening to this and suicidal, text or call the 988 number to keep yourself here. Text CNQR to 741741, the crisis text line. If you are international, go to [suicide.org](https://www.suicide.org) for a helpline in your area.

[00:26:03] But what I'm asking you not to do is to not take your life. It's not the answer. It's not the solution. Suicide does not take the pain away. It only makes it impossible for things to ever get better.

[00:26:15] Do the work. Put in the time, put in the energy, make the effort to change your brain and change your life. And that is not something I made up.

[00:26:24] **Stephen Calabria:** Would you take it all away?

[00:26:27] **Kevin Hines:** Like, would I go back? No, I'm only the person I am today because of what I've been through and what I've done. I can't regret what I did. I have to move forward. That said, I don't wish what I did on anybody else.

[00:26:41] Don't learn the hard way, like I did. Never again silence your pain, and make a choice to commit to life.

[00:26:50] **Stephen Calabria:** Mr. Kevin Hines, thank you so much for your time, sir.

[00:26:53] **Kevin Hines:** Thank you for having me. Nice to meet you.

[00:26:55] **Stephen Calabria:** Nice to meet you.

[00:26:56] Kevin Hines is a storyteller, author, filmmaker, and survivor. You can find more of his work at [kevinhinesstory.com](https://www.kevinhinesstory.com) and on his YouTube channel.

[00:27:07] That's all for this episode of Road to Resilience. If you enjoyed it, please rate, review and subscribe to our podcast on your favorite podcast platform.

[00:27:14] Wanna get in touch with the show or pitch an idea for a future episode? Email us at [podcasts at MountSinai.org](mailto:podcasts@MountSinai.org).

[00:27:23] Road to Resilience is a production of the Mount Sinai Health System. It's produced by me, Stephen Calabria, and our executive producer, Lucia Lee. From all of us here at Mount Sinai, thanks for listening, and we'll catch you next time.