

n August of 2019, The High Plains Drifters Fly Fishing Club of Denver, CO. sponsored a fly-fishing trip to Iceland. A very dear friend of mine was on the trip, fishing in a lake when he stepped off a ledge in the lake, went down and drowned. Their guide was unable to reach him in time and resuscitation measures failed. When the group tried to contact his family, no one had any contact information for his wife and family. Several calls to Denver, through members of the club, they were finally able to reach his wife. When the group packed up his belongings in the room where he was staying, they discovered his wading belt laying on his bed. He forgot to take it with him and put it on. Could possibly have saved his life.

Fast forward to Wednesday, September 10, 2025, one of my friends and I decided to fish downstream of Salida, CO on the Arkansas River. I had been previously wearing breathable hip waders which fasten to my pants belt. For some unknown reason I decided that day to wear my pant waders with a built-in safety belt. While wading in the river, I elected to walk in the water around a large boulder instead of climbing up the bank around the boulder. My feet went out from under me, and I was on my back in the river struggling to stay afloat. I was wearing a Patagonia sling pack, and it was behind my back, and I was unable to turn over to right myself. The pack soaked and filled with water holding me down. While struggling to right myself to get my feet back under me to stand and/or crawl out, I noticed my waders full of air had ballooned and kept me up, like a flotation device. I was able to kick my legs over and crawled out on the bank. IF I had elected to wear the hip waders instead, I have no doubt that they would have filled with water and pulled me down to an uncertain ending. I am going to save the hip waders for small stream fishing!!