

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Detective Senior Constable Stuart Gray and Mr Thorualdur Hreinsson, that's H-R-E-I-N-S-S-O-N, and the first name is spelt T-H-O-R-U-A-L-D-U-R, and I believe you like to also be called Ollie.

A Yeah.

Q2 O.K. On Saturday, the 10th of July, 1999 at the Eden Police Station. Time on my watch now is 4.57pm. For the purpose of the record, Ollie, could you just please state your full name?

A Thorualdur Hreinsson.

Q3 O.K.

A That's right.

Q4 Now I'll just get you to slow down when you talk, O.K.?

A All right. Yeah. Good.

Q5 O.K. Now your date of birth?

A 26th of February, '57.

Q6 O.K. And your current address?

A 17 Phillip Street, Eden.

Q7 O.K. And your occupation?

A Fisherman. Yeah.

Q8 O.K. You drive a trawler, is that right?

A Yeah.

Q9 Are you the skipper of that trawler?

A Yeah. I'm skipper of the trawler.

Q10 O.K. And what's the name of that trawler?

A Josephine Jean.

Q11 Josephine Jean?

A Yeah.

Q12 O.K. Now what sort of boating or sea-going experience do you have?

A Well, we have about 18 years' experience in the North Atlantic sea and about 10 years in Australia.

Q13 O.K. And what areas do you mainly fish in Australia?

A Oh, we fish from Montague Island and out, down to Gabo, Victoria and down to Tasmania.

Q14 O.K. Now what size is the Josephine Jane, can you tell me about the Josephine Jane?

A She is 70 foot long.

Q15 O.K. And how many crew?

A Three.

Q16 Three crew?

A Yeah, me, me and two, two deckies.

Q17 Two deckies. O.K. Now if I can take you to the 28th of December, 1998 - - -

A Yeah.

Q17 - - - or 27th, 28th of December, 1998?

A Yeah.

Q18 I believe that you were involved in a rescue.

A Yeah. Yeah.

Q19 An attempted rescue.

A Yeah.

Q20 And that was on the boat, Milintinta?

A Yeah.

Q21 O.K.

A That's right.

Q22 I wonder if you could take me through what happened from the time that you were called, I think Lachlan Marshall might have called you?

A Yeah. Yeah.

Q23 Can you take me through that?

A Yeah. We, I have some, some called on the boat and I got all the ... Mayday calls on, on my M.S.F, it's like a fax, fax machine.

Q24 I see.

A Um - - -

Q25 You're right.

A There was few, few Mayday calls coming from south, from south of Gabo.

Q26 Yeah.

A Where that and Josephine is old wooden boat, so there was, it was not possible for us to go, go down there in that sorts of weather. We were fishing out here in front of Eden because further south was bad, it was that bad that there was nowhere for us to go, go down there, so we just went out here for do couple of shots. I think so if I remember that it was about between 5.00 and 6.00 in the afternoon from, the Mayday come from the, from the Milintinta. She was about 40 miles east, east nor'east off, off Norah Head so I finally find out where, where she was at It was very messy, it was dark and Lochie Marshall contact me and, and say, O.K. what are you doing

Well, we just then stop and we had the gear on the deck and he said, Well, go for it, go and see what you can find them, and the first positions what we got, I turned the boat around and it was steaming to that position and that's mad, what, that can't, it's not possible, this, that is only on the land. So we contact them again. I can hear them on the radio and they can't hear me.

Q27 Mmm.

A Can't hear So then we, I, I talk to Eden Coast Patroller and they, they can talk to them, and they ask me ... send up the fleas.

Q28 Flare.

A Flares, yeah, sorry.

Q29 You're right.

A There was cargo ship. What was that called? Union He saw the light and, and he, he give me ... the right position and we was, well, then we start steaming out there. So there was, in close, for me was O.K. there was, there was not really bad weather. The weather further out got, got worse and worse. So we come, so we come until we saw the boat and I saw that straight away as she was getting pretty low on the water, she was taking in water, and water breaking all over her. It was pretty rough out there, the weather, and easing off a bit. The crew on, on the yacht was completely buggered when we come there. There was only the owner of the ship, an old fellow about 60 years

old, so it looks like he have a little bit of interest to, to rescue the yacht and, and himself. The rest of them were only, well, they don't anything. Well, that's not really right, there was other prawn trawlers who was trying to help them and I'm not really sure what's happening the boom hit him and he had a broken or damaged shoulder anyway - - -

Q30 Mmm.

A - - - come on the boat. So we give them a rope and we start towing it - - -

Q31 Yeah.

A - - - very slow. I was only, I was only doing 1 knot, and there was about 40, can't remember really, exactly what, 45 to 50 miles from the spot in to Twofold Bay. I remember there was a woman on the boat, she called up the radio, say, Can you go any slower? I say, Well, that is very hard to adjust, I can't go any slower. Then we, well, she say something, I can't really remember what she was on about. But she say, Well, how long it take us to go, to get to Eden? 'Cause going that speed, it would take us about 50 hours. So I think that she don't like that, that very much and and she, she said, We are very, I remember, she said, We are very tired, what can we do, what should we do? I said, Well, there's not much we can do at all, only wait. And she said, Well, we can't, we can't bail the water any more, we are, we are sinking. Can we come on the boat, on your boat? I

say, Well, wait a minute, 'cause if something happens, then we lose the yacht. Wait then til there was, til there was more people coming on the radio and, and asking what if come on the boat. It was pretty hard to get them on the boat anyway in 30 to 40 knots and 5 metre sea.

Q32

Mmm.

A

5 or 6 metres, probably. And in the end I said to her, Well, we'll have to take you over but I said, Well, I asked them if they have a life raft. Oh, yeah, they have a life raft. So I said, Well, be bloody careful go in the life raft, and I come on the side with you and drift the life raft over after everyone is in, in the, in the life raft, cut the rope and make sure that you, you drift off by the side of me. So that was, that was pretty good, they have nothing, no disaster happenings there. We, we picked them up and oh, they was completely buggered, they, they lay on the floor and some of them got straight down to the was dead.

Q33

Mmm.

A

And then we start, we start towing them again and I see that the yacht was taking more and more water all the time. And the rope break, because we had the rope from the yacht into my main towing wire. So that break so I was thinking about it was there any chance to, for one of my crew to, to get over to the yacht, but it was too dangerous. There was - - -

Q34 Mmm.

A - - - there was no way I, no way that could happen, so
- - -

Q35 Mmm.

A - - - what actually before the crew of the yacht
come onto, onto my boat, they break the ropes once
before that and we, we give them a rope again.

Q36 Right.

A And after they break the ropes that one time there was
all the crew, all the yacht's crew was on, on the boat,
we spent about half an hour looking around there
was I saw that if we can put the rope back on it,
that we're never going to make it so, so we left it
there.

Q37 Right.

A And start steaming to Eden, and we come to Eden just
after, just after 2 o'clock in the afternoon, I think
.....

Q38 Right. Did you see the Milintinta sink?

A No.

Q39 Right. O.K. Was it light when you left?

A Yeah.

Q40 It was light? O.K.

A Yeah.

Q41 And when they hopped in their life raft and went from
their boat to your boat, what was the distance
approximately that they had to drift across?

A 50 metres.

Q42 O.K.

A Well, that is roughly, that's as good as - - -

Q43 Yeah. And you were, there was no problems as far as you were concerned?

A No, they did everything what I told them to do and there was no problem with that at all.

Q44 All right.

A I tried to I turn around so that we still had the rope over to the yacht, so I turned, turned around to come beside the yacht - - -

Q45 Yeah.

A - - - and, so the life raft drift over very, very easy. It was drifting little bit away, then I had to put it into gear so, so they come right to the side of, of my boat.

Q46 Yeah. O.K.

A Mmm.

Q47 O.K. Now what was the wind speeds, do you think, then at that stage?

A Oh, probably be about 30, 35.

Q48 O.K. Now from your experience, what, what strength winds have you experienced in that area previously?

A Oh, we had, coming from Tasmania not, it's not really, 'cause that's south west, out here is, you don't get, well, if you are close to the land so we are most of the time in, in the sou'wester, you don't get much here, and out there til you are coming from maybe 40 to 50 miles - - -

Q49 Yeah.

A - - - off the coast - - -

Q50 Yeah.

A - - - it, well, I don't really know, the wind can do
 bloody anything there if it want to.

Q51 Mmm. Mmm.

A 50, 50, can get up to 50, 60 knots that don't
 happen very often.

Q52 Yeah.

A Well, not from the north, because we are not much out
 there.

Q53 Yeah. Now from your experience in sailing around the
 world, when I say sailing, boating in various parts of
 the world, would you say that that area's a dangerous
 area?

A It can be, yes.

Q54 Right.

A It can be, can be, can be dangerous, well, it is
 dangerous for people, people with no experience of, of
 sailing.

Q55 Right.

A And further south when you go, when you pass Gabo
 Island and you, then you are in the open sea, it can be
 very, very bad down there.

Q56 Mmm. Mmm. So do you have any views in relation to
 last year's Sydney to Hobart, from your point of view?

A Yeah.

Q57 Please tell me.

A I think so there was, oh well, I don't really know what I can say about it, that it was absolutely crap.

Q58 Mmm. But what do you mean, crap?

A There was, well, we really don't need all that here, we fishermen here in Eden, we, we know that the weather was going to be very, very bad.

Q59 So how did you know that?

A Weather forecast.

Q60 Right. Do you, do you recall the weather forecast down here?

A Yeah. We get the weather forecast here and we get the weather forecast for, for Bass Strait.

Q61 And what was the forecast, do you remember approximately?

A I can't remember really what the forecast was. If I remember right, there was gale force warning for, for Victorian coastal water east of Wilsons Promontory.

Q62 And what's a gale force warning mean?

A 50, 60 knots.

Q63 Mmm.

A And that morning from, from that morning from we left port here to go out fishing while the yachts was coming down here, down to Green Cape and, and passing Gabo, it was 78 knots on Wilsons Promontory.

Q64 Mmm. Would you go out in 60, 70 knots winds in your boat?

A No. No way.

Q65 Why not?

A Oh, well, there's, there's easier way to die than - -
-
Q66 Mmm.
A - - - than do that. That is, that is suicide to go
out. Like, and not on, on the big boat, like a work,
work, big boat. That sort of weather on the, on the
little yacht, that, that is suicide.
Q67 Mmm.
A Absolutely.
Q68 Mmm. And of course, when there's big winds, there's
big seas too, is that normally the case?
A Yeah. Yeah.
Q69 Mmm.
A More wind, more the seas build up.
Q70 Yeah. Yeah. O.K. Now what, what qualifications do
you have as a skipper?
A Well, I was a skipper in, in Iceland, the first mate
and skipper on the big trawlers up to, up to 100
metres.
Q71 Right.
A Or - - -
Q72 So you're licensed to drive something up to 100 metres?
A Yeah. I have, I have one Icelandic skipper's
ticket unlimited.
Q73 Right.
A And I have been working since I was 13 years old on
the, on the trawlers and I actually did, it was 2 and
a half years in the Merchant Navy. Excuse me. And

after I come to Australia, I, I was deckhand and mate on the on those boats from Tasmania working south of Tasmania.

Q74 Right.

A And, yeah, I come here to Eden and work for Lochie Marshall from, from deckhand and mate for little work to, to I start skippering boat for him.

Q75 Yeah.

A And I was skipper on for him for, for a while and then I went to, went to Portland for a little while and run the boat in Portland and come back here, I've been working for Lochie on and off for, what can I say, 7 years, if I remember right, yeah.

Q76 Mmm. Mmm. Do you have any views in relation to whether they should've called the race off after it started, with gale force warnings?

A Yeah. I think so. They are, well, I don't know who can call the race off. If you were skipper on the boat, so you, you have to work it out for yourself what you are able to handle that weather and I don't know much about the yachts and, and there's not many yachts who can handle 70, 80 knots wind - - -

Q77 Mmm.

A - - - down in Bass Strait.

Q78 And seas as well.

A Well, yeah, wind and sea.

Q79 Mmm.

A So my, my point of view is, well, that was absolutely crazy.

Q80 Mmm. To continue on?

A Yeah. And 'cause I don't really know how that is, I think so no one really can call it off, and you have to, you have to be sensible, they have to be sensible, you turn around and go, go go into the shelter before you kill someone.

Q81 Mmm. Mmm. O.K. Is there anything you'd like to say? Anything else you'd - - -

A No - - -

Q82 Anything about that rescue or - - -

A No, not really. That, that it was only, no, it was normal rescue. I have, I have done that few times before.

Q83 Few times?

A Yeah. I had to, actually not, the Christmas before last I, I picked up, I was skipper on Miss Francesca and I picked up two yachts, one on Boxing Day and one just after New Year, I think, I can't even remember the name of them. I did, there was few, mre than a few rescues in Iceland.

Q84 Right. And did they thank you, did the crew thank you for rescuing them?

A Yeah. Yeah.

Q85 Do you know if, if they paid Lochie for, for the rescue or for fuel? Do you know?

A Yes. Lochie was paid, I think so, I don't really know how that works but I think so from the insurance company.

Q86 Right.

A Yeah. Probably about week ago, 10 days ago, he told me that. There was just enough to cover the fuel.

Q87 Oh, good. O.K. then.

A Another thing is, well, there's probably bad to say that, that if we have rescued the yacht, we are maybe get lots more, then we have got lots more money and human being body looks like they are worth nothing.

Q88 Yeah. Yeah.

A But if you rescue some fibreglass things - - -

Q89 That's right. Yeah. So you did receive additional payment for your work?

A Well, well, no, but I get my the crew get his off - - -

Q90 Oh, O.K.

A - - - off, off that payment and it's not going to be much and, and it don't cover the cost.

Q91 No. O.K.

A And cost on, on, loss of fishing time.

Q92 That's right. Yeah. O.K. Anything else you'd like to say?

A No. Well, I, I hope so if, if the weather condition is, next year is similar to, to what it was this year, I, I hope so that they don't, they don't do it again, because that is - - -

Q93 Yeah.

A - - - so that is suicide, that is, well, someone,
 someone have to be responsible for it.

Q94 Yeah.

A that case is the skipper on the boat and if I do
 that, if I go out there into weather like that and kill
 someone, I'd be charged for it.

Q95 Yeah.

A I'd be locked up for it.

Q96 Yeah.

A So - - -

Q97 Yeah.

A - - - why don't charge them?

Q98 Yeah. O.K. O.K.

A Ha!

Q99 Time on my watch is 5.17. This interview is concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED