

Thank you for saving lives
at sea this winter!

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Coastguard Supporter Newsletter | Winter 2018

You're helping our volunteers prevent another tragedy like 1968's Wahine disaster.

It was a disaster that shocked the nation. More than fifty people died when the ship they were sailing on, the Wahine, encountered one of the worst storms in New Zealand history. Parents lost children. Children became orphaned. Rescuers on shore held people in their arms as they took their last breath.

Now, thanks to you, Coastguard volunteers are on standby around our shores to help prevent tragedies like this from ever occurring again. But it wasn't always like this. At the time of the Wahine disaster, Wellington had no dedicated rescue team.

"The Wahine tragedy is at the heart of why we were established 50 years ago. It's why we're here to help save lives in and around the waters of Wellington Harbour," says Coastguard Wellington President Vicki Rowland.

In 1968, the Wahine passenger ferry made its way from Lyttleton to Wellington with 734 passengers on board. Conditions were turbulent, but rough seas in the Cook Strait were nothing new.

As the ship went through the narrow funnel of the harbour entrance, it was hit with powerful winds reaching 150 km/h. It was no match for the storm. Huge waves slammed into the Wahine, knocking the passengers off their feet. The starboard propeller was ripped off and the port engine stopped shortly after.

Shirley Hick was one of the passengers on board. She was travelling with her three children, David (6), Alma (3), and Gordon (1).

"It was scary," said Shirley. "It was a little bit rough the whole way, and as we got closer to Wellington it got a lot rougher – very rough actually."

(Continued over)

Coastguard volunteer Graham Weakley scatters flowers to remember the lives lost in the tragedy.

Photo credit: Alex Paterson.

Young volunteers save four lives - including two dogs!

SEE INSIDE...

Remembering those lost in the Wahine Tragedy. (Continued)

When the call came to abandon ship, Shirley and her children raced to the lifeboats, only to find them all full. Shirley was desperate to save her children. She managed to convince some passengers and stewards to take her children onto separate lifeboats without her. It was the only way she could try to save them.

With all her children off the sinking ship, Shirley jumped into the freezing sea. She floated helplessly in the water for a while before being pulled into the Aramoana lifeboat.

"We'd only been in the lifeboat for a few minutes when the huge waves flipped it over, and I was in the sea again."

By this point, the men on the Aramoana lifeboat realised Shirley was pregnant and were determined to save her.

"I kept telling them to let me go, because I'd lost my kids and I wanted to die," says Shirley. "But they had no intention of doing that. It was only through them that I survived."

After the terrifying ordeal, Shirley arrived at Wellington Hospital. She found her youngest son Gordon already there. Though alive, he had inhaled a lot of water and had suffered severe brain damage.

Shirley found her other son David safe at another hospital. "Davy floated across the harbour to Eastbourne Beach by himself on a piece of wood," says Shirley. "The weather was so rough, he had no clothes on by the time he got there."

Shirley was reunited with two of her children. But tragedy struck when she found out her daughter Alma didn't survive the journey.

"The lifeboat she was on got away, but a wave took them, and tipped it over. She was knocked on the head and drowned."

Sally Smith is a proud supporter of Coastguard and was there the day the Wahine sank. Like you, she donates so that nothing like this will ever happen again. Sally witnessed the horror from shore with no way to help.

"I watched the disaster unfold and wanted to help but was told to stay out of the way. I watched as a string of potential rescue boats launched into the breaking sea stern-first. They were swamped and rendered useless through stubborn ignorance."

We asked her why she donates to Coastguard.

"If Coastguard had been available those who drowned in the Wahine would have had a better chance of survival."

Thank you so much for your support.

Now, 50 years on, we remember the disaster which remains New Zealand's worst maritime tragedy of modern times.

The crew from Coastguard Wellington were at the recent commemoration to show their respect for the lives lost in the tragedy.

"*If Coastguard had been available those who drowned in the Wahine would have had a better chance of survival.*
Go Coastguard!!**"**

"We wanted to recognise how far we have come in providing a better response to marine incidents in the Wellington and Cook Strait area," said volunteer Vicki Rowland.

Since they were founded, Coastguard Wellington have helped thousands of boaties keep safe – all thanks to you.

Without your generous support, Coastguard volunteers wouldn't have the training, equipment, and vessels they need to save lives at sea. To ensure nothing like the Wahine disaster ever happens again, Coastguard relies on your generosity to stay vigilant around the clock.



Terrified passengers arrive soaked on shore after the sinking of the Wahine. Photo credit: The Evening Post, 1968.



On-shore rescuers help one of the lifeboats that managed to escape the sinking ship. Photo credit: The Evening Post, 1968.



Young volunteers save four lives after flash flood almost drowns couple and dogs.

Your donations provide key lifesaving skills for our brave volunteers - thank you!

A young Kiwi couple, Sarah and Jason, were out walking their dogs by the Waimakariri River. Their dogs scampered to and fro, happy to finally be out in the sun after heavy rain had kept them indoors.

What the couple didn't know was that a massive torrent of water was barrelling towards them. A heavy rainstorm the day before had dumped a whole heap of water upriver. It started with a trickle but within minutes the river had become a raging flood.

Jason, Sarah and the dogs were completely caught out. The dogs started paddling but the current was too strong. To the couple's horror one of the dogs suddenly disappeared under the water.

So, in a panic, Jason and Sarah scooped the dogs up and waded to their vehicle as fast as they could. Sarah remembered how they "chucked the dogs in, started driving, and just like...boom! Water up to the doors, water was coming in everywhere. We couldn't move."

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*Water was coming in everywhere.
We couldn't move.* **Flood survivor Sarah**

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Two Coastguard rescue vessels were launched onto the river as soon as the alarm was raised. They sped to the vehicle – knowing that one slip in the fast-moving river could be fatal. But with hearts in mouths, they plucked the couple to safety.

But what about the poor dogs?

Rescuing loved ones from disaster is exactly what our volunteers are there for. They headed back up river, dodging debris and risking their safety, but managed to rescue the dogs from the car too.

And it was just in time – the river was in full flood and submerged the vehicle completely within seconds.

Volunteers like Ben and Tim (pictured) spend many hours training for the worst. They're special Kiwis, but without you there's no way they could be ready for dire emergencies like this.

You see, what our volunteers do is often difficult. Fierce currents, wild winds, lashing rain – conditions that you or I wouldn't dream of venturing out in. By donating to Coastguard you're supporting volunteers who put others before themselves.

From Ben, Tim and all the volunteers saving lives at sea – thank you!



Coastguard volunteers Tim and Ben will save lives at sea long into the future, thanks to your contribution to their training.



Warwick Bayne, Volunteer -
Coastguard Wellington

Thanks for voting for our young volunteers!

Meet **Warwick Bayne**, 2018's *Coastguard Supporter Young Volunteer of the Year*. Warwick, 26, has already given hundreds of hours of his time to saving lives at sea. Now, thanks to you, he'll learn new skills on an exciting and engaging Outward Bound course. **Thank you for helping our volunteers be the best Kiwis they can be!**

Runners-up



Levi Peeters
Volunteer -
Coastguard Tauranga



Justin Lewis
Volunteer -
Coastguard
Marlborough



James Perham
Volunteer -
Coastguard Nelson

You saved a family from drowning.

Six people's lives were in danger when their yacht hit rocks and began to sink. But with your help, Coastguard Radio Operator Hemi Manaena was able to coordinate a huge rescue effort.

In the pre-dawn chill, six people, including two children were thrown into turmoil when their yacht struck rocks and began rapidly sinking off the coast of Whangarei.

Coastguard Duty Officer Hemi Manaena took their distress call.

"I immediately tasked the Westpac Rescue and Northland Rescue Helicopters and two Coastguard vessels from Auckland and Whangarei to the scene," says Hemi.

Hemi also began making a Mayday call over Coastguard's radio channel, so any vessels nearby would go to the aid of the stricken yacht. "With so many lives at stake in a deteriorating situation, we needed to get as much help to the yacht as we could - and as quickly as possible."

Before long, Hemi was at the helm of a massive rescue effort.

"As well as our own Coastguard rescue boats, the Mayday call was answered by a Defence Force boat, passing vessels and container ships."

"When a Mayday call is heard on the VHF radio, any nearby vessels are bound by international regulation to respond if they're able to," says Hemi.

Four of the sinking boat's passengers were winched into one rescue helicopter; the second helicopter rescued the others. The two children had hypothermia and all six people were taken to Whangarei hospital.

The Coastguard boat then checked the wreckage.

"That's where our role as Coastguard Radio Operators is so vital in getting the call for help out there and then coordinating the response. The sooner people know there is a boat in distress, the sooner we can ensure people are rescued and brought home safely."

"If help hadn't arrived when it did, the outcome could have been tragic," says Hemi.

"By 7am, only two short hours after the yacht struck rocks, the vessel was almost completely submerged and all but sunk."

The people on board the yacht helped the rescue effort by doing everything right when they started to sink.

"They had given Coastguard details of where they were going before they left, and they set off an emergency beacon when they hit the rocks. It helped us find them."

It's thanks to you that those six people lived to tell the tale. Without your donations, Radio Operators like Hemi couldn't answer calls for help and bring people home. Thank you!



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If help hadn't arrived when it did, the outcome could have been tragic.

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Hemi Manaena,
Coastguard Radio Operator

Coastguard Radio Operator Hemi Manaena was there to spring into action and save the family from drowning.



Five yachties rescued in turbulent seas, all thanks to you.

It was a horrendous night for five yachties trying to enjoy their holiday in New Zealand. They were 14 miles from shore in rough and stormy seas when their yacht started to sink. Worse still, one woman had been seasick for three days straight and needed urgent help.

Coastguard Hawke's Bay volunteer Henry van Tuel woke up to the sound of his pager at 2:30am. He leaped out of bed and joined the rest of his rescue crew to reach the stricken yacht.

"Was still a good hour to go before daybreak, the people were exhausted," said Henry. "One young woman was seasick for three days, she was in pretty bad shape."

The rescue crew tried to come alongside the other vessel to help. But the towering waves and churning sea made it impossible for them to get close to the yacht.

"We would have smashed into them if we got any closer. It was too dangerous to come alongside."

The rescue crew were able to get within three metres and talked the passengers into their inflatable life raft. It was 4.30am by that point and still dark; our volunteers didn't want them going directly into the water because if someone went under they might not be able to find them.

"There was a real potential for disaster," said Henry.

With painstaking care our volunteers were able to reach the life raft, and crew members helped the family aboard.

The work of Coastguard volunteers is hard. In the 2am darkness, lives can easily be lost in a terribly rough sea. But our volunteers are ready, thanks to you.

Your donations provide the training needed to cope with extreme situations like these. You saved five lives that night. Thank you.



Even President of Coastguard New Zealand and Hawke's Bay volunteer, Henry van Tuel, relies on your donations for his training and rescue gear. He can be seen here checking the life raft used in the rescue. Photo credit: Warren Buckland.



Patrick Holmes
Chief Executive Officer
Coastguard New Zealand

Thank you so much for helping our heroes save lives at sea!

Royal New Zealand Coastguard Inc is the charity saving lives at sea
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