

RESCUE STORIES

STACY O'DONNELL – THE MOTHER OF THREE GIRLS RESCUED BY HUNSTANTON RNLI

HUNSTANTON VOLUNTEERS RECEIVED A CALL TO HELP THE THREE SISTERS WHO WERE CLINGING TO A BUOY AFTER BEING SWEEPED OUT OF THEIR DEPTH. TWO OF THE SISTERS LOST GRIP OF THE BUOY AND WERE SWEEPED FURTHER OUT TO SEA, IN WHAT HAD BECOME A LIFE OR DEATH SITUATION.

Helmsman Michael Darby said: "This incident was the most serious one we have attended for some time, and the prompt response by the volunteer crew undoubtedly saved this young family from a grim fate."



Stacy, the girls' mother said "I just want to say a massive thank you to the crew and what they have done for my daughters; if they had been one minute later I don't know what could have happened. My eldest daughter and one of the twins had drifted quite far away. The last thing I said to my daughters was "don't forget sun cream", we just weren't aware of how dangerous the water could be."

ALAN BATEMAN – RESCUED BY CHISWICK RNLI



DISTRAUGHT ALAN BATEMAN STRUGGLED DESPERATELY IN THE THAMES AFTER JUMPING FROM HAMMERSMITH BRIDGE IN A BID TO END HIS LIFE. THE SHOCK OF THE FREEZING WATER HAD IGNITED HIS WISH TO LIVE, BUT HE NOW FACED AN EXHAUSTING BATTLE AGAINST THE TIDE TO PADDLE TO SAFETY.

However within minutes the Chiswick Lifeboat crew had given him a second chance by pulling him to safety. Crew member Steve Alexander, said: "It was a sense of relief that we spotted him, because literally all we could see was the top of his head sticking out of the water."

Years later Alan reunited with the crew who saved him, pictured above. He said: "What I don't think they understand is how appreciative the general public are of the RNLI; I think it is just a wonderful organisation. I certainly can't thank them enough for giving me back my life really."

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BRIAN O'CARROLL – RESCUED BY ARKLOW RNLI

“WE WERE MAKING GOOD SPEED TOWARDS MIZEN HEAD AND HAD INTENDED TO ROUND IT AND LAND AT BRITTAS BAY BEACH FOR LUNCH. WE WERE SAILING A LASER PICO, THE WATER WAS RELATIVELY CALM AND THE NORTH WESTERLY WIND WAS REASONABLY STRONG AND CONSISTENT: PERFECT SAILING CONDITIONS AND A FINE DAY.”



“About 500m from the Head the sea started to become considerably rougher, the wind picked up and switched to a north north easterly direction. The change in conditions caught me off guard and the boat capsized.

Capsizing is not uncommon in dinghy sailing and righting is normally a straightforward procedure. We were quickly back onboard but the escalating weather and sea conditions prevented me from regaining control and we capsized again. This time, my sister ended up a short distance from the boat. I told her to come back. When I climbed back aboard, I noticed that she was now around 6m from the boat. I didn't think much of it. We often lose water bottles and hats overboard and they are recovered within seconds.

“I wrestled with the boat for a few minutes, trying to beat into the direction of the strengthening wind, tidal current and waves. However, these three combined factors made the task impossible.

“Meanwhile the tide and the wind were carrying me and the boat further and further away from Kate.

“I was beginning to have serious doubts about my ability to get back to her and I was starting to get very worried about the wild conditions that only 10 minutes before had been ideal. This worry and torment affected my ability to concentrate and capsizes became more frequent.

I thought she was gone for good.

“About 20–25 minutes and 10–12 capsizes later, I was utterly exhausted and in a state of panic. At times, it took 10 seconds or more to spot Kate in the swell and this added to my terror.

“Each time it happened I thought she was gone for good. She was now 200–300m away and the boat was in tatters after the hammering it had taken. It was no longer sailable. Eventually, I made the most difficult decision of my life and left the boat. I knew from training and experience never to leave the boat. I had run out of ideas and I was utterly desperate. I jumped in knowing that I was already exhausted and looking at a 250m swim in severe conditions, against tide, wind and wave. In short, I felt I had little chance of making it.

“On top of that, I was now at water level and I could rarely see Kate over the swell. I swam, unsure of direction or outcome. My plan was to reach my sister and attempt to swim a further 300m to land. I didn't fancy the odds. I thought about my unborn child, my wife and my parents and how I was going to explain to them that their youngest daughter was gone for good (if I was even able to make it myself). I pushed myself beyond all physical and mental boundaries.

“Strangely enough, I finally started to relax and accept the fate that was starting to appear inevitable.

“I can only assume that this was the result of some soothing chemical released by the brain when death is knocking loudly at the door. I was awoken from my now trance-like state by a loud voice. I was unable for several seconds to even register where the voice was coming from and what it was saying. I turned around and saw the large bright orange rescue boat of the Arklow RNLI. My spirit soared with a relief and elation that I had never felt in my life.

“When I regained the ability to listen and speak, I confirmed to the crew member that yes, there were definitely only two of us.

“I directed the lifeboat to my sister and asked them to pick her up first.

I will never forget their kindness.

“I watched the boat pull up alongside her and looked at the RNLI flag with a mixture of giddiness and great respect. I will never forget it. It was finally over – and not in the manner I had feared.

“I would like to sincerely thank the voluntary crew at the Arklow RNLI Lifeboat Station for dropping everything in their personal life on a Sunday afternoon to save my life and that of my sister. I will never forget their kindness and professionalism in our time of dire need. I would also like to point out that without the proper safety equipment, we would almost definitely have drowned, even with the best efforts of the RNLI.

“Thankfully, we had two good-quality wetsuits and well-fitting buoyancy aids. Finally, I encourage all who read this to give generously to the RNLI, which depends on donations from the public to maintain a well-equipped and very well-run rescue service.”

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ALASTAIR MERRILL – SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

“MY WIFE AND HER FATHER WERE RESCUED BY THE POOLE LIFEBOAT WHEN THEIR YACHT GOT INTO DIFFICULTIES IN HEAVY SEAS AND A THUNDERSTORM IN BOURNEMOUTH BAY.”



Photo: Alastair Merrill

“They both are highly competent sailors, but the sea can turn quickly into a very unforgiving place. Although the incident was over a quarter of a century ago, my wife still recalls vividly the towering waves and the sight of lightning so close that it looked like a thick hairy rope. And of course the immense sense of relief when the lifeboat appeared and towed them gratefully and safely back into Poole Harbour.

Thank goodness for the lifeboats!”



Photo: Rob Inett

JOHN GOODING – SON RESCUED BY CHISWICK RNLI

WHEN A FATHER SAW HIS TWO-YEAR-OLD SON FALL INTO THE THAMES OFF THEIR FAMILY HOUSEBOAT ON A FREEZING JANUARY DAY, HE DID WHAT ANY PARENT WOULD DO: JUMPED STRAIGHT IN AFTER HIM. BUT IN THE COLD WATER AND STRONG CURRENT HE SOON STARTED TO STRUGGLE TO KEEP THEM BOTH AFLOAT.

In the meantime, his wife rang 999 before attempting to get into their rowing boat to go and help. In her panic, she capsized the boat and all three found themselves in the water. Thankfully the Chiswick Lifeboat was there within minutes. Station Manager Wayne Bellamy explained: “It was so close to being a massive tragedy. The potential existed for an entire family to have died.”

Afterwards the father wrote to the station: “Just a brief note to thank the crew who warmed up me, my wife and my son after he fell in the river. Your speedy response and help, not to mention somebody’s woolly hat, were very much appreciated. I work onboard the [house] boat and see you patrolling day in, day out in all weathers. I’ve always been reassured by your presence. Thank you for being there.”



Photo: RNLI/Nigel Millard

If you would like to know more about this charity and how you can support it please contact thelifeboatfund@RNLI.org.uk.

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