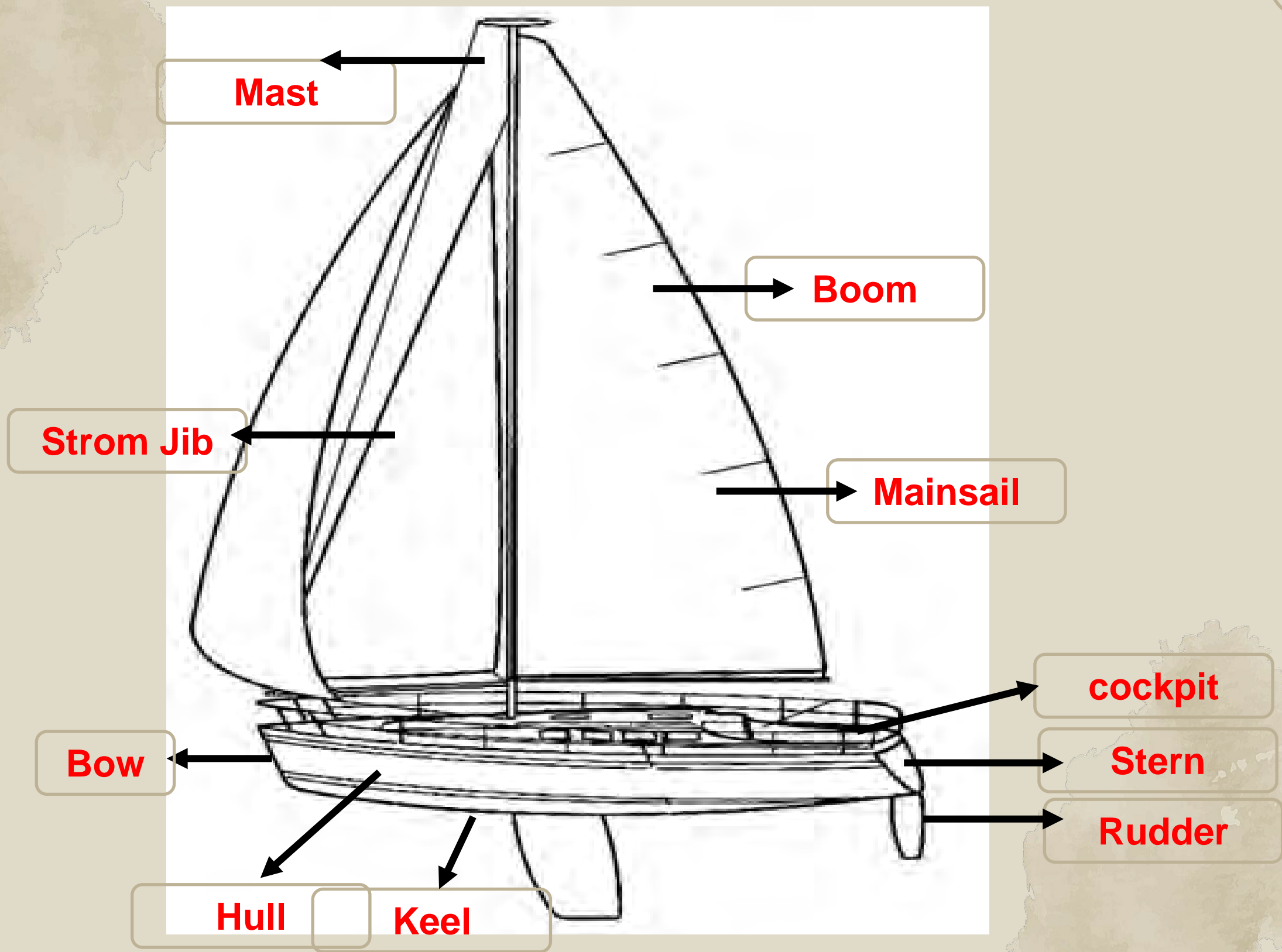




**“We’re Not Afraid to Die  
If we can all be together**

**+ *Gordon Cook and Alan East***





**Honing: to make sharp,  
improve**

➤ **honing** our seafaring skills

**Ominous: sign of evil**

➤ **ominous** silence

**May day: distress call  
for help**

➤ **Mayday** calls

➤ **pinpricks** in the vast ocean

**tousled: untidy**

➤ **a tousled** head






**Sail**



**Captain James Cook**

IN July 1976, my wife Mary, son Jonathan, 6, daughter Suzanne, 7, and I set **sail** from Plymouth, England, to duplicate the round- the-world voyage made 200 years earlier by **Captain James Cook**.



For the longest time, Mary and I — a 37-year-old businessman — had dreamt of sailing in the wake of the famous explorer, and for the past 16 years we had spent all our **leisure** time **honing** our **seafaring skills** in British waters.

**Leisure: free time**



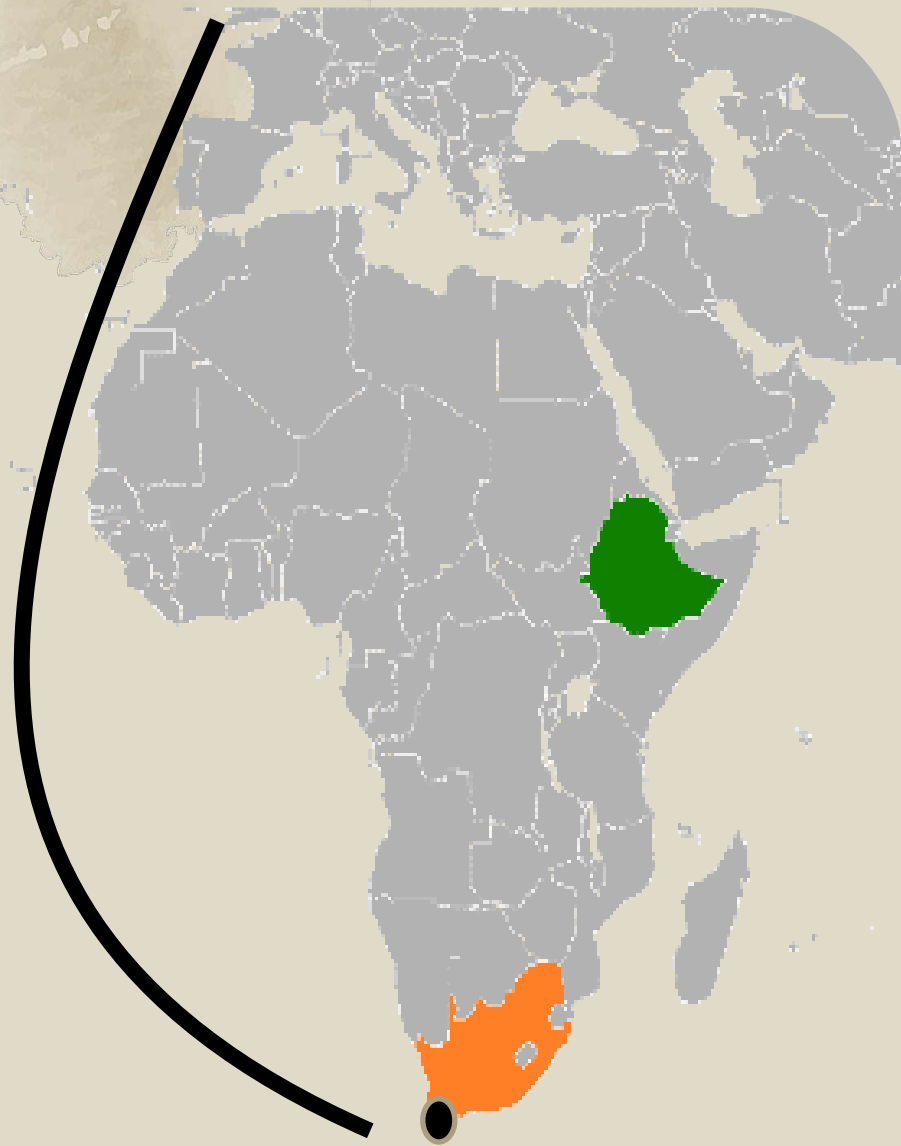




**Hull: Main body of ship**

Our boat *Wavewalker*, a 23 metre, 30 ton **wooden-hulled** beauty, had been professionally built, and we had spent months fitting it out and testing it in the roughest weather we could find.


The first **leg** of our planned three-year, 105,000 kilometre journey passed pleasantly as we sailed down the west coast of **Africa to Cape Town**. There, before heading east, we took on two crewmen — American Larry Vigil and Swiss Herb Seigler — to help us tackle one of the world's roughest seas, the southern Indian Ocean.



**Cape Town**



**Crew**



On our second day out of Cape Town, we began to encounter strong **gales**. For the next few weeks, they blew continuously. Gales did not worry me; but the size of the waves was alarming — up to 15 metres, as high as our main mast

**Gales: Very strong wind**







December 25 found us 3,500 kilometres east of Cape Town. Despite **atrocious** weather, we had a wonderful holiday complete with a Christmas tree. New Year's Day saw no improvement in the weather, but we reasoned that it had to change soon. And it did change — for the worse.

**Atrocious: Horrifying, very bad**



Dawn and Dusk



Jib: A small sail

At **dawn** on January 2, the waves were **gigantic**. We were sailing with only a small **storm jib** and were still making eight knots. As the ship rose to the top of each wave we could see endless enormous seas rolling towards us, and the screaming of the wind and spray was painful to the ears.

**Gigantic : Unusually large**

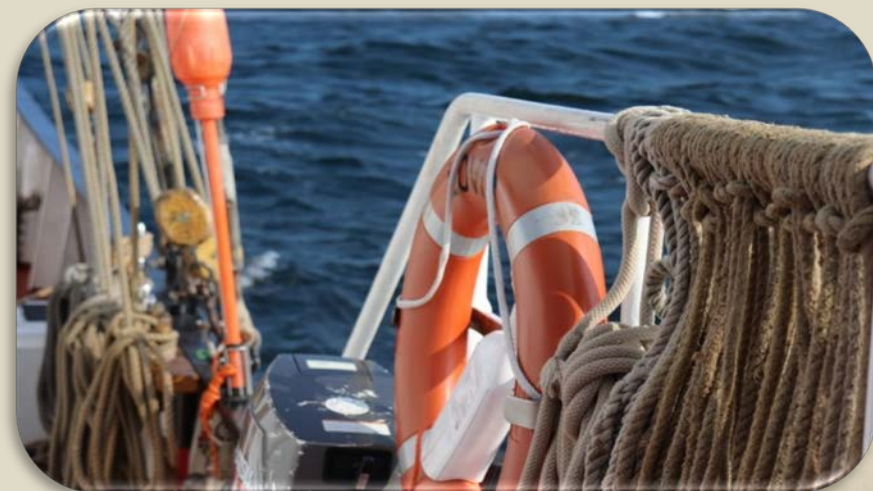


Mooring rope

To slow the boat down, we dropped the storm jib and lashed a heavy **mooring rope** in a loop across the **stern**. Then we double-lashed everything, went through our **life-raft drill**, attached **lifelines**, **donned oilskins** and life jackets — and waited



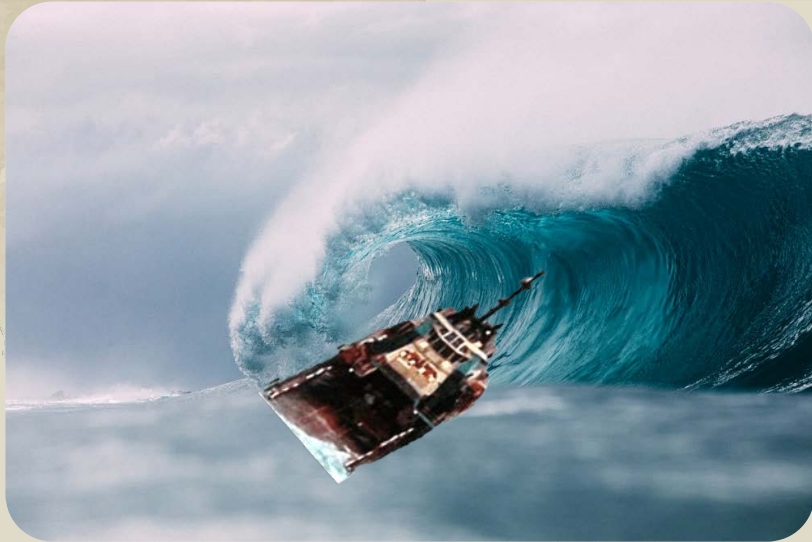
Oilskin



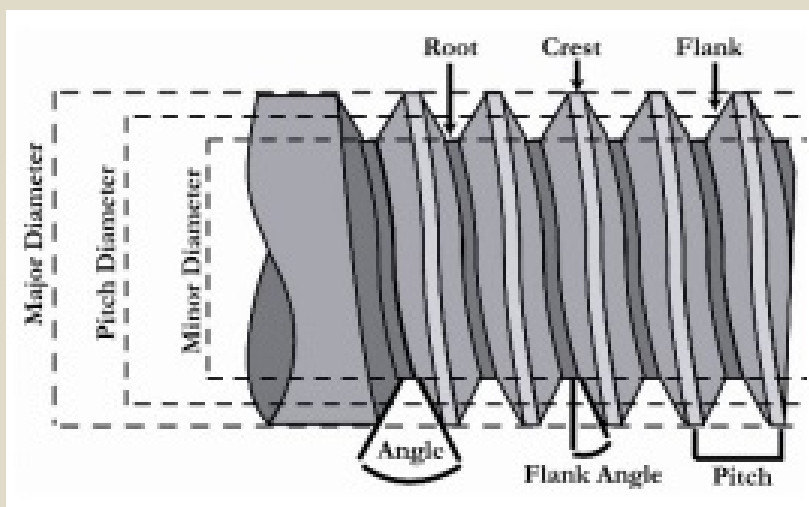
Lifeline



**Ominous: Sign of evil**



**Aft: the opposite part**



The first indication of impending disaster came at about 6 p.m., with an **ominous** silence. The wind dropped, and the sky immediately grew dark. Then came a growing roar, and an enormous cloud towered **aft** of the ship. With horror, I realized that it was not a cloud, but a wave like no other I had ever seen. It appeared perfectly vertical and almost twice the height of the other waves, with a frightful breaking crest.

**torrent: A current of water**



**wheel**

The roar increased to a thunder as the stern moved up the face of the wave, and for a moment I thought we might ride over it. But then a tremendous explosion shook the deck. A **torrent** of green and white water broke over the ship, my head smashed into the **wheel** and I was aware of flying overboard and sinking below the waves. I accepted my approaching death, and as I was losing consciousness, I felt quite peaceful.



**capsize: to turn upside down**

**Hurl: to through out from the mouth**

**taut: Stretch**



**Capsizing**

Unexpectedly, my head popped out of the water. A few metres away, Wavewalker was near **capsizing**, her masts almost horizontal. Then a wave **hurled** her upright, my lifeline jerked **taut**, I grabbed the guard rails and sailed through the air into Wavewalker's main boom. Subsequent waves tossed me around the deck like a rag doll. My left ribs cracked; my mouth filled with blood and broken teeth. Somehow, I found the wheel, lined up the stern for the next wave and hung on.



**Hatch:** an opening in wall  
or floor

Water, Water, Everywhere. I could feel that the ship had water below, but I dared not **abandon** the wheel to investigate. Suddenly, the front **hatch** was thrown open and Mary appeared. “We’re sinking!” she screamed. “The decks are smashed; we’re full of water.”

**Abandon:** to leave a place



**Bump**

I half-swam, half-crawled into the children's cabin. "Are you all right?" I asked. "Yes," they answered from an upper bunk. "But my head hurts a bit," said Sue, pointing to a big **bump** above her eyes. I had no time to worry about bumped heads.





**Damaged side**

After finding a hammer, screws and canvas, I struggled back on deck. With the **starboard side bashed open**, we were taking water with each wave that broke over us. If I couldn't make some repairs, we would surely sink. Somehow I managed to stretch canvas and secure waterproof hatch covers across the gaping holes. Some water continued to stream below, but most of it was now being deflected over the side.



**Dinghy: A small boat**

**forestay: A rope to  
support a ship**

More problems arose when our hand pumps started to block up with the debris floating around the cabins and the electric pump short-circuited. The water level rose threateningly. Back on deck I found that our two spare hand pumps had been wrenched overboard — along with the **forestay** sail, the jib, the **dinghies** and the main anchor.





**Electric Pumps**

**Mayday call: A distress call**

Then I remembered we had another **electric pump** under the chartroom floor. I connected it to an out-pipe, and was thankful to find that it worked. The night dragged on with an endless, bitterly cold routine of pumping, steering and working the radio. We were getting no replies to our **Mayday calls** — which was not surprising in this remote corner of the world.



**Bump**

**Sue's head had swollen alarmingly; she had two enormous black eyes, and now she showed us a deep cut on her arm. When I asked why she hadn't made more of her injuries before this, she replied, "I didn't want to worry you when you were trying to save us all."**



**Kneel: the base  
joint of a ship**

By morning on January 3, the pumps had the water level sufficiently under control for us to take two hours' rest in rotation. But we still had a tremendous leak somewhere below the waterline and, on checking, I found that nearly all the boat's main rib frames were smashed down to the **keel**. In fact, there was nothing holding up a whole section of the starboard hull except a few cupboard partitions.



Ile Amsterdam

We had survived for 15 hours since the wave hit, but Wavewalker wouldn't hold together long enough for us to reach Australia. I checked our charts and calculated that there were two small islands a few hundred kilometres to the east. One of them, Ile **Amsterdam**, was a French scientific base.







Our only hope was to reach these **pinpricks in the vast ocean**. But unless the wind and seas **abated** so we could **hoist sail**, our chances would be slim indeed. The great wave had put our **auxiliary** engine out of action.

**Pinpricks:** very small island or piece of land

**abate:** Reduce in effect

**Hoist:** to lift with effort

**Auxilliary:** Extra, in spare



**Mast: Pole on a boat**

**rigging: Main rope  
used to control ship**




**storm jib**

On January 4, after 36 hours of continuous pumping, we reached the last few centimetres of water. Now, we had only to keep pace with the water still coming in. We could not set any sail on the main **mast**. Pressure on the **rigging** would simply pull the damaged section of the hull apart, so we hoisted the storm jib and headed for where I thought the two islands were. Mary found some corned beef and cracker biscuits, and we ate our first meal in almost two days.




**Respite: pause from  
difficult time**


But our **respite** was short-lived. At 4 p.m. black clouds began building up behind us; within the hour the wind was back to 40 knots and the seas were getting higher. The weather continued to deteriorate throughout the night, and by dawn on January 5, our situation was again **desperate**.



**Desperate: Seriously bad**



**When I went in to comfort the children, Jon asked, “Daddy, are we going to die?” I tried to assure him that we could make it. “But, Daddy,” he went on, “we aren’t afraid of dying if we can all be together — you and Mummy, Sue and I.”**





barrels of paraffin.

I could find no words with which to respond, but I left the children's cabin determined to fight the sea with everything I had. To protect the weakened starboard side, I decided to **heave-** to — with the undamaged port hull facing the oncoming waves, using an improvised sea anchor of heavy nylon rope and two 22 litre plastic barrels of paraffin.

**heave: to drag sth heavy**



**Sextant**

That evening, Mary and I sat together holding hands, as the motion of the ship brought more and more water in through the broken planks. We both felt the end was very near. But *Wavewalker* rode out the storm and by the morning of January 6, with the wind easing, I tried to get a reading on the **sextant**.





**chartroom**

**Back in the chartroom, I worked on wind speeds, changes of course, drift and current in an effort to calculate our position. The best I could determine was that we were somewhere in 150,000 kilometres of ocean looking for a 65 kilometre-wide island.**




**Caricature**

While I was thinking, Sue, moving painfully, joined me. The left side of her head was now very swollen and her blackened eyes narrowed to slits. She gave me a card she had made. On the front she had drawn **caricatures** of Mary and me with the words: “Here are some funny people.




**Caricature**

**Did they make you laugh? I laughed a lot as well.” Inside was a message: “Oh, how I love you both. So this card is to say thank you and let’s hope for the best.” Somehow we had to make it.**



**I checked and rechecked my calculations. We had lost our main compass and I was using a spare which had not been corrected for magnetic variation. I made an allowance for this and another estimate of the influence of the westerly currents which flow through this part of the Indian Ocean.**








**Conviction: a strong  
belief**


About 2 p.m., I went on deck and asked Larry to steer a course of 185 degrees. If we were lucky, I told him with a **conviction** I did not feel, he could expect to see the island at about 5 p.m.






**Tousled: untidy**

Then with a heavy heart, I went below, climbed on my bunk and amazingly, dozed off. When I woke it was 6 p.m., and growing dark. I knew we must have missed the island, and with the sail we had left, we couldn't hope to beat back into the westerly winds. At that moment, a **tousled head** appeared by my bunk. "Can I have a hug?" Jonathan asked. Sue was right behind him.



**“Why am I getting a hug now?” I asked. “Because you are the best daddy in the whole world — and the best captain,” my son replied. “Not today, Jon, I’m afraid.” “Why, you must be,” said Sue in a matter-of-fact voice. “You found the island.” “What!” I shouted. “It’s out there in front of us,” they chorused, “as big as a battleship.”**



**Stark: obvious, Absolute**



I rushed on deck and gazed with relief at the **stark** outline of Ile Amsterdam. It was only a bleak piece of volcanic rock, with little vegetation — the most beautiful island in the world!





**Optimistic: Full of  
hope**

We **anchored** offshore for the night, and the next morning all 28 inhabitants of the island cheered as they helped us ashore. With land under my feet again, my thoughts were full of Larry and Herbie, cheerful and **optimistic** under the direst stress, and of Mary, who stayed at the wheel for all those crucial hours.



**Most of all, I thought of a seven-year-old girl, who did not want us to worry about a head injury (which subsequently took six minor operations to remove a recurring blood clot between skin and skull), and of a six-year-old boy who was not afraid to die.**