

## **Fisherman's Last Words Might Have Been "I Love You"**

### **Local News**

Posted by: David Haviland

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Warrenton, OR - At 38, Jason Bjaranson was starting to figure it might be time to get out of commercial fishing on the Pacific Ocean. He was starting to think he should buy some life insurance, and had second thoughts about making what proved to be his last trip. But he had a family to support, and the bills were piling up.

So he kissed his girlfriend goodbye through the window of the truck, told her he loved her, and did what he has been doing his whole adult life - went to sea to make his living at one of the most dangerous jobs anywhere

But he and three others on the Lady Cecelia never came back.

The 70-foot trawler went down in the night this past weekend, probably in a matter of seconds, 17 miles off the rugged coast of southern Washington. When the Coast Guard reached the scene hours later, there was nothing but an oil slick, an empty life raft and some crab pots to mark where the trawler disappeared.

There had not even been time to get off a flare or distress call. That job was done by the Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon, or EPIRB, a device mounted on the roof of the boat's cabin that sends out a signal if it comes into contact with water.

The ping hit the Coast Guard station at Warrenton, Ore., at 3:37 a.m. on Saturday and a Coast Guard helicopter found the slick and the life raft in less than two hours.

The Coast Guard found no survivors in concluding a search of 640 square miles.

"My brother was very fleet of foot," Adam Bjaranson, a TV host for the Portland Trail Blazers NBA team, told The Associated Press. "If he couldn't get in his survival suit in 13 seconds that leads me to believe something happened very fast."

The sinking is under investigation by the Coast Guard, but just what happened remains a mystery. Bjaranson said he has heard speculation from Coast Guard personnel that the Lady Cecelia could have been hit by a rogue wave, while other fisherman have said it might have been struck by a passing cargo ship.

A rogue wave "is possible," said Coast Guard spokesman Petty Officer Shawn Eggert, "depending on if it hit them at the right angle and the weight of the boat was distributed just so."

The life raft could have deployed itself.

Missing are skipper Dave Nichols of Warrenton, Ore., deckhand Jason Bjaranson, 39, of Warrenton,

Ore., deckhand Luke Jensen of Ilwaco, Wash. and NOAA Fisheries Service observer Chris Langel of Kaukauna, Wis.

Representatives of the owner, Dale Kent of Bay City, Ore., did not return a call for comment.

What the family believes may have been the last contact with the crew of the Lady Cecelia came when Nichols called another boat fishing nearby to say he had made his last tow for bottom-dwelling groundfish with the huge net on the steel-hulled vessel, and would deliver 70,000 pounds of fish in the morning to the fish processing plant in Warrenton.

Commercial fishing is considered to be one of the most dangerous jobs. From 2000-2010, 545 commercial fishermen died while fishing in U.S. waters, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Jason Bjaranson lived with his girlfriend, Amy Mallory. The two of them have a 2-year-old son, Talon. Mallory tends bar at a local restaurant.

She said Bjaranson had fished for years with Nichols, who was a good fisherman, but didn't feel good about going on the Lady Cecelia.

"He had hesitations about the safety of the boat," Mallory said.

The NOAA Fisheries Service Northwest Fisheries Science Center in Seattle oversees the fishery observer program, and director John Stein said he was not aware of any safety concerns with the Lady Cecelia. If Langel had any, he could have refused to go out on the vessel.

But Bjaranson was also worried about losing their house if he didn't work, Mallory said.

She said he told her: "I'll be OK, babe. I think I'll get off the boat and find another job. Because I don't feel right about it anymore."

At 6 a.m. on Saturday, she was awakened by a phone call from another fisherman. "Amy, Jay's boat went down," she quoted him as saying. "You need to call the Coast Guard right now."

Mallory said Nichols had been scrambling to fill out his crew after a regular deckhand was a no-show. He was sitting at the bar where she worked, drinking soda and eating chicken wings, calling around. Someone told him about Jensen, who had fished in Bristol Bay, Alaska, and was eager to work. Nichols picked him up in Ilwaco, Wash. Mallory picked the two of them up and delivered them to the boat basin along with Bjaranson at about 1 a.m. Thursday.

Earlier, the observer had run the crew through a check of the safety gear.

"I want to get to the bottom of it," Mallory said. "Because my son doesn't have a dad. Jay's mother doesn't have a son. Adam and Boomer and Jeff lost their brother. It's just been a nightmare."

Bjaranson's last words to Mallory were a text message from his cellphone as the Lady Cecilia chugged out to sea.

"He told me he loved me and didn't know what he'd do without me. He told Talon he loved him. And

that was all."

- JEFF BARNARD Associated Press