

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Beloved Ucluelet vessel engulfed in flames

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Her two-man crew escaped safe and sound, but a legendary Ucluetian vessel is resting on the ocean floor after going up in flames in an impromptu viking funeral.

Longtime Ucluelet local Clive Pemberton, 67, and his wife's cousin Tim Allen, 66, were rescued near Qualicum after their vessel *Trim* became engulfed in flames on May 23.

"I went down into the engine room, stuck my head in the door and basically all around the stack was on fire," Pemberton told the Westerly News. "I dumped the fire extinguisher into it, but that didn't put it out and there was so much caustic black smoke that I couldn't go for a second fire extinguisher."

He said he and Allen ran up onto the deck and called 911 before dropping the anchor to prevent the flaming vessel from drifting ashore and creating a bigger hazard.

He said he'd worked with the Department of National Defence and been involved with helicopter forestry crews, so is no stranger to tense situations, but "nothing quite so tense" as being on a flaming vessel about two kilometres offshore.

"We had our tender on the rear deck, which we couldn't get to because we were in dense smoke and there were flames coming out of the walkways on both sides of the boat by then," he said.

"We got onto the bow and dropped the anchor and realized we didn't have our life-jackets on, so we got a couple boat bumpers and got those at the ready in case we had to go into the water... The whole stern of the boat was just engulfed in black smoke and quite shortly we had flames coming out of the air intakes for the engine room. She lit up pretty quick and of course the smoke was just horrid, black smoke."

He added flames were billowing out of the pilot house on both sides, treacherously close to three 30-pound propane tanks.

"We were quite concerned that those could go up and blow us off the bow basically. That was the most tense part of it because we didn't know if we were going to have to jump in or get blown off," he said.

Neither of those options proved necessary however as the two men were rescued by the RCM-SAR Station 59 Deep Bay crew.

"The SAR rescue group was just amazing, absolutely top notch," Pemberton said. "They were there in a heartbeat. We didn't even get wet."

He said the rescue crew brought him and Allen to safety, but *Trim* was well past salvageable.

"She was just one huge fireball," he said, adding the vessel burned for roughly six hours before sinking



Clive Pemberton and Tim Allen were rescued from their burning vessel off the coast of Qualicum Beach on May 23. (Petra Hergt photo)

"She has an amazing, amazing history."

— Patricia Garland

around 6 p.m. "She's sitting on the bottom two kilometres offshore in 300 feet of water."

Pemberton and his wife Patricia Garland had lived on *Trim* for 20 years, but recently purchased a new vessel and gifted *Trim* to Allen.

The two men had picked up the vessel in Port McNeil, brought her into Comox to spend the night and were on their way into French Creek on May 23, where Allen would have taken possession of her, when she became engulfed.

Garland told the Westerly she had received a call from her husband telling her the trip was going well and he was about an hour from French Creek about 30 minutes before receiving a second, much different, call where he told her he was okay, but the vessel was gone.

"That was within about a half an hour of him calling me and telling me everything was fine. That's how fast

it can happen. It is very emotional. It brings home to you everything that you love and how easy it can be lost just that fast," she said.

She said losing the vessel was devastating, but the situation could have been much, much worse and she urges everyone to support their local Royal Marine Search and Rescue Crew.

"God bless them. We made a big, hefty donation. They saved my husband and my cousin's life. Clive's 67 and my cousin's 66, if they'd gone in the water, that would have been it," she said.

"The marine community looks after their own. They really do."

She recalled Pemberton pointing out the vessel to her in Ucluelet in 1997, suggesting he planned to buy it and convert it into a liveaboard for the two of them to live.

"I looked at him and said 'When hell freezes over' and he said, 'You better go get a coat,'" she laughed. "I left a very good job in Vancouver to go to Ucluelet to live with my husband on a boat that he had built for us to live on so, yeah, that is very painful because we loved her. It's a good thing Clive and I get along, we were together 24/7 on that boat.

We did a lot of adventuring on that boat."

She added *Trim* was well known in Ucluelet, recalling setting fireworks shows off the vessel in the harbour and hosting flame dancers on the roof.

"She has an amazing history long before us, but she also has an amazing history in Ucluelet," she said, "She had an amazing relationship with fire and that she should give herself a viking funeral somehow seems fitting for Clive and I and that's how we've accepted it... We have settled this in our minds. It was hard and I actually went and got a tattoo of her serial number and put it on my body. Everytime I lose something large, I tattoo it on my body; it makes me feel better."

She said *Trim* also helped out at shoreline cleanups and served as a rescuer herself on numerous occasions, recalling one particular summer where she, Clive and *Trim* responded to four emergencies on four vessels.

"She did a lot of good in her life. She helped save boats, she helped clean up the community, she was an entertainment source," Garland said.

"Boats have a life too. People look at these boats and think, 'Oh, that's a nice boat,' but it has a whole life and people that loved it and our memories are part of the fibre of the boat."

She said *Trim* was built near Prince Rupert in 1945.

"She has an amazing, amazing history. She was 77 years old," she said.

"Everybody knew *Trim*... People always came and looked at her. She was eye candy. She was a beautiful boat."

Pemberton and Garland are on the maiden voyage of a new 66' vessel with a plan to explore the Island and swing back to Ucluelet next year.

"We were very much attached to Ucluelet and we do look forward to coming back home one summer and hanging out," Pemberton said, adding his dramatic, fiery experience has not raised any trepidation about life on the ocean.

"I have a strong sense of adventure and that was something I'd never done before. I don't know if I ever want to do it again, but you don't write adventure novels by mowing the front lawn, you write them by going for cruises on boats and having some stuff happen."