
CASTAWAY
BILL O'BRIEN

MY NEW ZEALAND STORY

The Diary of Samuel Abraham Clark
Disappointment Island, 1907

Written by Bill O'Brien

SCHOLASTIC
AUCKLAND SYDNEY NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO
MEXICO CITY NEW DELHI HONG KONG

Author's Note

Sam Clark, the author of this diary, is a fictional character. However, his account of the sinking of the sailing ship *Dundonald* and the subsequent survival of the castaways is based on historical fact. All other characters depicted in the diary who were aboard the *Dundonald* are based on actual people.


AUSTRALIA
Sydney
NEW ZEALAND
Bounty Islands
Antipodes Islands
Auckland Islands
Campbell Island

This diary belongs to me,

Samuel Abraham Clark

If anyone finds this diary, do not read it!

Please return it to:
Harrington Cabinetmakers,
Macandrew Road, Dunedin, New Zealand

Chapter One

February 9th, 1907

I am sitting on the open deck of the *Monowai*, recording my first-ever diary entry. The crossing from Dunedin to Sydney is expected to take six or seven days. Our send-off was very exciting. Most of the passengers threw coloured streamers to well-wishers down on the quay. As the gap between ship and shore widened, the streamers broke while women waved hankies and men waved hats. I've never been on a ship this big before (only launch trips on the harbour). I hope we don't strike rough weather as I have heard so many stories about the effects of seasickness. For now though, I am full of hope for the adventure ahead but also feel sad as I watch the familiar hills around Dunedin's harbour pass by.

Later the same day

In a way it was weird leaving the port. I've never been further than the harbour entrance before. I don't know if it was a good omen, but a giant albatross swooped down from Taiaroa Head as we passed by. It looked magnificent as it glided effortlessly on the air currents.

I must admit to having a lump in my throat as we passed Aramoana. Mum, Dad and I went there often – all dressed in our Sunday best, with Mum in her long frock and bonnet, and Dad in his suit, tie and hat. Along with many others we would board an excursion train at Dunedin for Port Chalmers. From there the launch trip out to Pilot's Landing at Aramoana was always fun. After a day's picnicking it would be back home again in the evening. Sadly I'll never be able to do that again. All I have are memories of some great days.

At dinner I shared a table with a Mrs Forbes-Patterson and her daughter Priscilla. Priscilla's 14, a year older than me. She's very pretty and laughs a lot. I will be sitting at their table for every meal.

February 10th, 1907

At breakfast this morning I bolted down my porridge and took an apple out to the deck. My accommodation isn't much to speak of. I share an eight-berth cabin and my fellow travellers are a mixed lot. There are a couple of New Zealanders and an Australian. They seem all right. There's also an Irishman and a Scotsman, but they don't get on at all well. I hope their arguments and insults don't turn into a fight. The other two are a couple of Chinamen. Judging by their clothes I think they might be

gold prospectors. They don't speak a word of English so keep to themselves.

I've never owned a flash, hard-covered diary like this one before. Mrs Harrington gave it to me along with four new pencils just before I went up the gangplank of the *Monowai*.

"Take care of this diary," she said to me. "Record your adventures carefully so you can share them with your brother when you find him."

Best of all is the oilskin pouch the diary came in. Printed in gold on the pouch are my father's initials: D.I.C. – Daniel Isaac Clark. "Yes, Sam," Mr Harrington said, "it was your dad's. I found it in the factory workroom. It's only proper that you have it."

The pouch is the only thing I have to remind me of my parents. I'll try and make an entry in my diary every day from now on. And I'll make sure the diary and pouch never leave my side.

Evening

I saw Priscilla and her mother today at dinner. Mrs Forbes-Patterson is prim and proper and I don't think she wants her daughter mixing with the likes of me. If only she knew me better. Priscilla asked me where I got my diary. I told her about the Harringtons and how kind

they have been to me. How Mr Harrington paid for my fare from Dunedin to Sydney, and how he has a friend in a shipping line there who owns a sailing ship – the *Dundonald* she's called. He has arranged for me to be taken on as a cabin boy to work my passage to England. There I will try and meet up with my brother Joseph. He's all the family I have left now.

I suspect they don't really need a second cabin boy on the *Dundonald,* but I'm grateful for the opportunity. I haven't seen Joseph since he came home for a brief visit six years ago. He couldn't get home for our parents' funeral. He probably doesn't even really know how they died. I can't wait to see him. I know he works on ships sailing between England and America, so he shouldn't be hard to find.

Mrs Forbes-Patterson wanted to know what happened to my parents. Her lips went all tight when I told her I didn't want to talk about it.

February 11th, 1907

The weather is still fair. I have become used to the slight rolling of the ship. So far the wind has stayed down and the waves are quite gentle.

Had breakfast with Priscilla and her mother. Mrs Forbes-Patterson seemed to be in a bad mood so I just

spoke to Priscilla. She told me she's returning to England to attend a private school. I told her it didn't sound much like my school. I can't say I enjoyed my school days. Most of the time I felt hemmed in by the high windows of the classrooms. The teachers obviously didn't want us to be distracted. All we got to see was a bit of sky. And it was impossible to nod off on the uncomfortable chairs, even for those who had been up since 5 o'clock helping milk the cows.

My teacher, Mr Donaldson, was all right, I suppose. He was a bit strict on discipline though. He would even give you the strap for making spelling mistakes. Poor Reggie Aldsworth. He was hopeless at spelling and got strapped every day. Didn't make him any better at spelling. Perhaps the discipline of school will help me at sea. Everything at school was done to command so maybe life at sea won't be that different.

Lunchtime at last. I'm starving!

After lunch

Priscilla's mother was more pleasant at lunch today. Perhaps she enjoyed the slices of mutton and steamed vegetables. Or maybe the apple pie that followed made her sweeter.

Mrs Forbes-Patterson (that's such a mouthful) asked

me about my schooldays and what I was going to do with my life. I told her that I had passed the Standard Six Proficiency and I think she was quite surprised.

I remember those examinations. I was really nervous. We had to sit the exams in front of school inspectors who looked even sterner than old Mr Donaldson. Getting Proficiency meant I could go on to secondary school. Without it I would have had to stay at primary school until I was 13 and then find a job.

At school I was pretty good at manual training, just like my dad. He worked for Mr Harrington as a cabinetmaker. He was a really good cabinetmaker. Dad's speciality was fine furniture, like writing desks with tiny drawers and roll-down lids, with wonderful inlays of all different woods. He was a real craftsman. I thought I might follow in his footsteps, but Mum thought I could do better. She said I was a natural at mathematics.

After secondary school, Mum reckoned I could go to the University of Otago and become a doctor or lawyer. I think Priscilla's mother was quite impressed with that. She wouldn't be impressed with my brother Joseph. The day he turned 13, Joseph left school and it wasn't long before he was at sea. That was eight years ago and he's only been back home once in that time.

I thought Mrs F-P was going to ask me again about

my parents, so I made an excuse and left the table. Maybe I'll see Priscilla on her own later.

February 12th, 1907

The sea's a bit higher today but I'm quite comfortable. I think it's fun trying to time my steps with the ship's rolling and pitching. I don't feel sick either. Some of the other passengers do though. Quite a few have been throwing up over the railings. I wonder if it gets rougher than this?

February 13th, 1907

At lunch today Mrs F-P said Priscilla was lying down and didn't feel hungry. I bet it's the rougher weather. We sat alone and she asked me where my parents were. I told her they were both dead.

It happened only five months ago. I was just a new boy at Otago Boys' High School. Dad had been sick and off work for several weeks. Mum had to look after him as well as run the house; we weren't so rich that we could afford domestic help. Not like Mrs F-P. I bet she's never had to boil water in a copper to do her washing. Or light a coal range to cook meals and heat water for a bath. I reckon Mrs F-P has a pretty easy life. But not my Mum. If Dad didn't get better, she thought she might have to

find a job in a clothing factory and work six days a week.

I told Mum I would leave school and get a job, but she would have none of it.

On the morning of September 7th, I helped get in wood for the copper and coal for the range. Then I sorted the washing for Mum. That's when I noticed Dad's handkerchiefs. They were all stained with blood.

Later, at school, the Rector came to my classroom and called me out. I thought I must have done something wrong and my knees were shaking. He took me into his office and a policeman was standing there. He didn't beat about the bush. He said, "Son, there's been a fire at your house. Both your parents are dead."

I still don't know what happened. Perhaps Mum lit the fire for the copper and then went to lie down by Dad. I know she was tired – I had heard her up all through the night helping make Dad comfortable. Maybe a log rolled out onto the floor and set the house on fire. Ours was a typical little wooden house. It wouldn't take much for it to catch fire.

So that's it. That's how my life was turned upside-down in the space of one terrible day. From being a happy boy with wonderful parents one day – to an orphan with nowhere to live the next.

Mrs F-P didn't say much, although I thought I saw

a tear in her eye. Before long she made an excuse and hurried off. I was glad when she went. I didn't want her sitting there feeling sorry for me.

February 14th, 1907

My cabinmates are saying we are getting close to Australia. Should see the coast tomorrow. I can see why my brother loves the sea. It's so peaceful. But then I'm a paying passenger. It's bound to be different, working on a sailing ship.

This afternoon

I've spent some time with Priscilla today. Normally her mother is hovering close by but today she's nowhere to be seen. I let Priscilla do most of the talking – she seems to enjoy it! She's a lucky girl. Her father's a bank manager and they have a home in Dunedin and another in England. She has two horses of her own and in England they have maids, cooks and all that. Mr Forbes-Patterson even owns a motor car. They seem to be very rich. It's a wonder Mrs F-P allows her daughter to talk to me. Of course, if my parents hadn't died, I might have grown up to be a famous surgeon. She wouldn't mind me then.

February 15th, 1907

I see the coast of Australia close by. Just as well, for the *Dundonald* sails in a couple of days and she won't wait for me.

I laid out my kit last night. The Harringtons have been really generous. They took me in as a member of their family. It says a lot for how well respected Dad was.

The funeral was a blur to me. I recall hundreds of people being there, but remember little else. In the weeks afterward I often cycled down to the Southern Cemetery to place flowers on the grave. I miss Mum and Dad. I hope I can do things in life that would have made them proud.

I lived with the Harringtons for four months but felt I couldn't stay any longer. They have four children of their own and another on the way. Their house only has three bedrooms. Katie is 12 and Emily's 7; they share one room. I shared with the 10-year-old twins, Billy and Fred. They're okay but can they talk! They just won't shut up.

Having me to look after as well wasn't fair on the Harringtons. That's why I wrote to Dad's brother Clarence in England to see if I could visit. I don't really know Uncle Clarry and Aunt Gwen but they wrote to me after the fire and said they would help me however they could. I don't mind travelling all that way alone and

it will put me in a better position to find out Joseph's whereabouts.

I might be only 13, but if Joseph could go to sea at that age, so can I. I read in one of his few letters that he's already made third mate. Not bad for 21!

After the fire all I had were the clothes I was wearing at school that day. A Benevolent Society gave me some more clothing but everything else has come from the Harringtons. They even gave me this kit for the *Dundonald* trip. It contains an oilskin coat, a pair of sea boots, a blanket, a metal plate and a mug with 'Sam' painted in red on the side. I have a lot to thank the Harringtons for.

That evening

We landed at Sydney this afternoon. I had time to say goodbye to Priscilla and her mother. I'll miss their company – especially Priscilla. I was surprised at Mrs F-P. She shook my hand and said, "Good luck, Sam. I hope things work out for you." I think she really meant it.

Tonight I'm staying in a boarding house. Sydney is so big and busy and I'd love to go and explore the dockside, but I'm too tired. Tomorrow I go aboard the *Dundonald*. I think I'll get some rest now. From the little I know about crew work on a sailing ship, I think this might be my last comfortable sleep for some time.

February 16th, 1907

I'm sitting on a grassy knoll overlooking the harbour. I've never felt such mixed emotions. Part of me wants to run away, fearful of the adventure ahead, and part of me feels excitement. I'm excited by the unknown and the thought of finding my brother somewhere on the other side of the world. But for now I will quietly sit here with the warm sun on my back and the firm earth beneath me. After we set sail tomorrow it may be many months before I stand on dry land again, so I'm making the most of it.

A short while ago I wandered along the busy Sydney waterfront. Ships of all descriptions are at berth and although today is Saturday, the place is a hive of activity. Large cargo nets full of produce swing on cranes over the sides of the ships down to labourers waiting on the wharf. The clatter of horses' hooves and the rattle of train wheels mingle with shouts from men directing heavy loads onto carts.

In the distance I can see the *Dundonald*. How magnificent she looks. Her sleek metal lines and four masts tower above the local trading ships. There are other deep-sea vessels in port but none of them match the *Dundonald*. She's a real old-fashioned sailing ship, although she's still young, built only 16 years ago.

An old sailor at the boarding house told me the

Dundonald is a doomed ship, but I don't know whether to believe the tales of seafarers. From the little I've had to do with them I already realise they are a superstitious lot. Sure the *Dundonald's* been unlucky. Ten years ago, on a voyage from San Francisco, she collided with another ship, which went down. A few years later she caught fire, and another time tipped right over in a storm! She had to be towed into a Far Eastern port.

But the *Dundonald* is fast. She's sailed all over the world, carrying cargo from England to China, Japan and South America. She's tied up here in Sydney after breaking a record by sailing from Peru to Australia in just 45 days. The sight of her four great masts silhouetted against the skyline draws me to her like iron filings to a magnet. I'm sure I will be all right. The *Dundonald* will do me nicely.

Later the same day

Seeds of doubt have crept into my mind. After boarding what will be my home for the next few months, I was shown where I was to sleep. I thought I would get a cabin but George Ivimey laughed at me. He's 14 years old and is a deck hand, training to become an able seaman. On board a ship, able seamen do all the work with the sails and steer the ship. Below them come ordinary seamen, who are less capable, and then deck hands. I'm regarded

as the lowest of the low – cabin boy. But I don't mind because I'll have company in Albert Roberts. He's also a cabin boy and he's the same age as me. He comes from Cardiff and has been with the *Dundonald* for about five months.

George showed me to my sleeping quarters and one look made me feel shaky at the knees. "It's called the forecastle, or fo'c'sle for short," he said, saying it like "folk-sul". It is a cramped space beneath the deck, right in the bow, or front, of the ship. We had to bend down through a small hatchway to get in. Inside there isn't much headroom and most of the men have to stoop. It is filled with rows of bunks, each only two feet wide.

"Who sleeps in here?" I asked George. "Everyone," he told me. "Everyone, that is, except for the officers."

The closeness, the noise and the smell are overpowering. There is no privacy and little ventilation. I have heard that the most uncomfortable place in a ship in a storm is near the bow – and my bunk is crammed right in the sharp end of the bow. I gazed at what was to be home and felt depressed. A small amount of daylight comes in through a thick, round window by my bunk. The only other light comes from oil lamps hanging from the ceiling.

Later we were told to get our donkey's breakfast and

go below. George could see I was confused and winked at me. "Your straw-filled mattress," he whispered.

Already I can see I'll have to quickly learn the strange language of these men of the sea.

Chapter Two

February 17th, 1907

I awoke this morning full of excitement but with a hint of concern. I slept quite well on my donkey's breakfast, but it's going to take some time to get used to being so close to so many men.

My first job was serving breakfast for the crew. In the mess, cook makes the breakfast and the cabin boy serves it. Thick porridge, lumpy and sticky, but steaming hot. I expected that there would be plenty of complaints, but no one seemed to object to the glue-like substance that I slopped into their tin plates. After smothering it with sugar and milk they ate heartily, laughing and joking all the time. The same thing happened with the curried rice that followed the porridge. If this is what we eat in port, what is the food going to be like once we are at sea, miles and weeks from fresh milk, fruit and vegetables? I dare not think.

After breakfast George showed me around the ship. "Don't worry about what things are called," he told me. "You'll soon get the hang of it."

I overheard a group of sailors discussing our departure.

Some of them think that leaving port on a Sunday is unlucky, but it seems today is the only day we can get towed to the harbour entrance. Sailors certainly are a superstitious lot.

Because it's a Sunday, Captain Thorburne conducted a short religious service and everyone prayed for favourable winds and a safe voyage. Then came a most unusual ceremony – the selection of the watches. The sailors work 'watches' of four hours on and four hours off, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It must be exhausting work, with little sleep. I'm lucky. Although I only get a meagre allowance, at least my duties only last from six in the morning till six at night. The life of a sailor is starting to seem quite unappealing, and we haven't even left the dock yet.

There is a strict hierarchy on the ship. Captain Thorburne is the master mariner and his word is law. He's responsible for the ship, its cargo and all aboard. On this voyage he has his son Jimmy with him. He's a sickly looking boy. A doctor has suggested he go on a sea voyage to help him recover from some illness or other. As he's the captain's boy, I don't expect I'll have much to do with him.

Then come the officers: the mate, second mate and third mate. The first mate, Mr Peters, is responsible for

ordering the daily work of the crew. He seems a nice man and everyone treats him with respect.

I watched the men split into watches. The port watch is the mate's team and the starboard watch is the second mate's team. Depending on how senior you are and the watch you are in, you get to choose your bunk on the port or starboard side. Because I'm just the cabin boy, my bunk's already sorted out. Right up the front.

The ship's been cleaned from stem to stern and miles of ropes are neatly coiled on the deck. We're ready to go!

Later the same day

We were towed to the entrance of Port Jackson where the towlines were released. The day is fine, with a fresh breeze from the northwest. What a magnificent feeling – the *Dundonald* scything through the waves under full sail. Watching the sailors at work is inspiring and I wish I could join them. Their teamwork is amazing as they haul on ropes to raise and lower the sails.

Our progress across the ocean depends on one thing – wind. And to get the best out of the wind takes a lot of teamwork. Sail work is supervised by the officers and takes precise timing and teamwork. Over centuries, sailors have perfected their methods and it's great watching the sails get set. Able seaman Charlie Eyre has a fine voice

and he leads the men by singing sea shanties. I have heard sailors' songs back home, but thought the practice of working to them had died out years ago. But it hasn't. The men worked, Charlie sang, and when they all came in with the chorus it sounded great. I could feel the *Dundonald* respond every time another sail was set. The breeze would fill the sail with a loud crack and the ship would lurch forward. Even carrying 36,000 bags of wheat, she seems to glide effortlessly over the ocean. I have a feeling I'm going to enjoy this adventure.

Before going below to help prepare the evening meal, I glanced back at the rapidly disappearing Australian coastline. Ahead lie thousands of miles of ocean and it may be months before I see land again. It is a sobering thought.

February 18th, 1907

Not the best night's sleep I've ever had. I'll probably grow accustomed to the closeness and smells of the fo'c'sle, or the glory hole as it is called. But what I will find hard to get used to is the constant changing of the watch. The first watch begins at 8 o'clock at night and goes through to midnight. But every half hour a bell is rung. One dong at half-past eight, two at 9 o'clock, three at half-past nine and so on until 8 bells at midnight. Then the next watch

get up from their bunks and go aloft. The other men come to bed and make a fearful racket fossicking around in their sea chests and taking off boots and coats. No sooner do I get to sleep again than the bell rings – once at half-past midnight, twice at 1 o'clock, and so on. At 4 o'clock in the morning the bell rings eight times and it starts all over again. Men grumble as they get up from their bunks to change places with what sounds like a herd of elephants coming below. And I have to be up on deck just two hours later at 4 bells. How on earth will I get used to this?

I arose very sleepily this morning at 6 o'clock, being careful not to wake my snoring comrades. I thought they would be grumpy if I did. I'm amazed at how they can sleep so soundly, yet somehow know to wake when they hear eight bells. Why not six or seven?

Today I had a run-in with Mr Smith, the steward. He's the personal assistant to the captain, and is also the ship's cook. I couldn't believe my eyes when I first saw him. He's a monstrous man, well over six feet tall and must weigh more than 20 stone. They say he's the heaviest man at sea. It seems that whenever the captain wants something done, Mr Smith gets me to do it. I don't think he likes me much.

Most of my tasks are in the kitchen, or galley as it's

called on a ship, and the mess (which is what they call the dining room), so I can't keep out of Mr Smith's way. Whenever the officers are around, Mr Smith is polite. When he is talking to the seamen, he's blunt and quite rude. But when it comes to me he is really nasty. He just shouts orders and expects me to know what to do. Today he raised a soup ladle and threatened to belt me with it if I didn't wake my ideas up. I haven't done anything to upset him. Well, not that I know of. Perhaps he's just taken a dislike to me.

A strange thing is that Mr Smith isn't called steward or cook – he's called the Doctor. It seems that all cooks at sea are called the Doctor. (I sure do have a lot to learn.)

I spent most of today cleaning pots and pans and preparing potatoes, carrots and cabbage for the Doctor to cook. One of my other duties is to scrub the tables and chairs in the mess after every meal. I also have to wash the dishes – they are made of tin, which is just as well, because in rough seas I won't break anything. After breakfast this morning I had to clean the captain's cabin and make his bunk. I'm sure Mr Smith's meant to do this but who am I to argue? Besides, I'm too tired to complain. With any luck I'll get a better sleep tonight.

February 19th, 1907

I didn't sleep much better. I don't think I will ever get used to those bells! We must have struck some bad weather, as my bunk was rolling and dipping at about 4 o'clock, when the watch changed. I felt quite sick for a time but then managed to doze off. It took a lot of effort to rise this morning. Thankfully the seas have calmed a bit. I now know what seafarers mean when they talk about getting your sea legs. It's a strange sensation, walking along the deck in a rough sea. You go to put your foot down and suddenly the deck seems to fall away beneath you. Or it may rise up sharply or roll from side to side, so that you stagger about like a drunk.

February 20th, 1907

There's never a spare moment during a watch, especially with a shifting wind. The men are constantly hauling on ropes to trim or brace the sails at different angles to get best advantage of the winds. Every time the ship changes course, which is frequent in a head wind, the sails have to be adjusted. It wasn't anything like this on the *Monowai*, where smelly coal smoke belched out of the funnel all day, and there was always a constant thump, thump, thump of engine and propellers.

I've made a friend amongst the crew of 28 – Jakko Andersen from Sweden. He's an able seaman and I can tell he's an excellent sailor just by watching him. Tonight, after I had served tea in the mess, I took Andersen's meal to him. It's the same as we had last night and the night before – pea soup followed by cold meat and mashed potato. I dare say it's what we will have tomorrow as well. Andersen was at the wheel, just nearing the end of his shift, and the wind was freshening from the southwest. We were heading straight into it and the waves were increasing in height and coming at us from all directions. I love the slapping of waves on the iron hull and the thud as the bow crests a wave and falls into the troughs. I looked at Andersen. He was a picture of concentration. Standing on the quarterdeck, his feet widely planted, he looked as if he could take on anything. The wind billowed his shirt and his long blond hair flowed behind him. His eyes flicked from the compass to the horizon, to the sea, and back to the compass. Every now and then he would glance at the sails to be sure there was no vibration or flapping.

A sudden gust of wind pushed the *Dundonald's* bow to starboard and I could see Andersen's fingers tighten on the spokes of the wheel. His knuckles whitened and veins in his powerful forearms stood out as he wrested

the ship back on course. Despite the exertion, there wasn't a flicker of emotion on his face – just that same intense concentration.

I would be prepared to go anywhere with Andersen. I hope he is at the helm when we go around Cape Horn, at the bottom of South America.

I can hear Mr Smith bellowing my name. I'll finish this later.

Later the same day

Andersen enjoyed his meal and, as our chores for the day were complete, we sat and talked about the life of a sailor. He's a very patient teacher. He doesn't mind when I forget some of the queer names they have for things aboard ship. "It is easy to learn mast order," he said in his thick Swedish accent. "Foremast is one in front, mainmast is in the middle, and mizzen-mast is at the stern. Sails are a bit more difficult. Top sail is called sky sail – easy enough, ja? – then royals, topgallant, upper topsail, lower topsail and course sail. And small ones on the front like upside-down triangles, they are jib sails. Takes time, but you'll soon learn."

The language sailors use is certainly strange, and almost as foreign to me as Andersen's native Swedish. I'm sure that with help from Andersen and others I'll eventually

remember what splices, seizings, bends and cringles are, but just at the moment I'm quite confused.

"You're allowed to be," Andersen told me, laughing.

February 21st, 1907

Today has been monotonous. The winds have completely died away. The green ocean comes rolling at us in sweeping swells but there are no white caps. And no progress either.

Today was a good chance to talk to Andersen again. I asked him about some of the things my shipmates have been saying. Living in the fo'c'sle I hear all sorts of tales – some of them are probably true, but many sound far-fetched. For instance, Charlie Eyre reckons a man in prison has more room, better food and often better company than on a sailing ship. He told me that being at sea was like being in prison, only in prison you don't have the added risk of drowning.

And then Alf Findlow told me a story about life in the fo'c'sle. I thought he was only trying to frighten me for a bit of fun, but Andersen said the story is true. Just a few years ago the *Wellington*, a fully rigged sailing ship, was on her way from Picton to London. She struck an iceberg off South Georgia Island. Although she stayed afloat, two men asleep in their bunks right in the bow were crushed

and killed. My bunk is in the bow, and the further south we sail, the more chance we have of meeting icebergs. I think I know what I'll be dreaming of tonight.

Each sailor seems to want to outdo the other with tall tales of exotic places they've been and the near-calamities they've seen. Still, it's a great way to learn the language and customs of the sea. I told Andersen I didn't fear the sea. If the rough sea the other night was anything to go by, it will be easy.

He looked straight at me with his steely blue eyes. I felt uncomfortable but couldn't look away. "Listen to me, boy," he said, "we are plunging deep into Southern Ocean, right down to the Roaring Forties. I tell you, ocean will get so rough you'll think the waves are there just to devour you. And if we hit a hurricane going around the Horn, I promise you, you will be afraid – very afraid." His eyes pierced into mine and I felt a shiver run the length of my spine. "Don't ever, ever take the sea for granted. If you do, it will kill you." His leathery, weather-beaten face had lost all expression.

I didn't speak for some time. Andersen filled his pipe, lit it and nestled his back into the railing. I asked him why did we go so far south, if it's so rough.

"The winds down there blow from the west – all the way from Australia and New Zealand to South America.

They call those latitudes the Roaring Forties, and with good reason! Fierce gales, freezing temperatures, mist, snow. Biggest dangers are huge following seas and icebergs. I have seen an iceberg 50 miles long and 1000 feet high. Sometimes it's so cold the sails freeze solid, nearly impossible to grip. If we are in a storm, we just have to go aloft and get them down somehow."

He said steamers couldn't take the huge waters around the Horn, only sailing ships. He feared that the end of sailing ships was approaching.

"Now they are building canal across Panama. When it opens, ships going to America won't have to go around the Horn. Then all will be steamships – no place for sailing ships." With this, Andersen stopped talking and smoked his pipe in silence. His eyes became distant and I could sense his sadness. I made myself scarce and sat alone to record this in my diary.

February 22nd, 1907

Had a much better sleep last night. The ocean today is as smooth as glass but we haven't got any closer to our destination. Every sail is set on the *Dundonald* and the helmsman studies them continuously, looking for breeze.

Charlie Eyre told me an interesting thing today about the *Dundonald*. He and two other crew aboard, Harry

Laargerbloom and Walter Low, signed on the *Dundonald* in Peru on her voyage to Sydney. Two other ships, the *Ravenswood* and *Annasona*, left Callao bound for New South Wales ten days before the *Dundonald*. But the *Dundonald* overtook the *Ravenswood*, which arrived six days later. The *Annasona* never made it. She hit the Middleton Reef near Australia and was a total wreck. So the *Dundonald* sure is a fast ship. But you wouldn't think so at the moment. Mr McLauchlin, the second mate, says our progress is dismal. When we've not been becalmed, we have faced head winds every day this week.

When I joined the crew my only purpose was to get to England to find Joseph. But I'm beginning to like the sailor's life. I like the movement of the ship and the creaking and occasional flapping of the sails. Sailors seem a strange breed. They are brave, reckless and hard, but they are also very generous. Once I master their odd language and customs I might join them as a seaman, not a mere cabin boy. Last night I dreamt I was a real seaman, one who went on to be master of his own ship. Perhaps that dream will come true.

February 23rd, 1907

Mr Smith was his usual grumpy self yesterday. He shouted at me to get him a large pot hanging from a meat hook.

In my rush to please him I dropped the pot on his foot. Boy, did I get an earful! He was cursing my clumsiness and saying how the galley wasn't big enough for both of us. I nearly said there would be more room if he lost some weight, but I bit my tongue and said nothing.

At least he has a cabin of his own near the officers' quarters. He'd have something to grumble about if he lived in the fo'c'sle and had to go up on deck in all weathers every four hours. I can't believe people put up with the food and living quarters. I'd never tell them that though. I've quickly learned that sailors don't like shirkers. Although they moan a bit themselves, they get on with their work and don't take kindly to people who complain all the time.

My days are long but my duties are simple enough. I'm getting to know each man's likes and dislikes. For instance, I know that Charlie Eyre doesn't like much gravy on his mutton, but that Herman Querfeldt likes to smother his meal in it. Today he had gravy over his boiled mutton, potatoes, cabbage and carrots. I asked him if he wanted it on his stewed apples and rice as well. I don't think he quite got the joke.

We no longer have fresh milk on board, so our porridge is covered with golden syrup. Fresh fruit is also getting low and what's left isn't all that fresh. Still, the

sailors put up with what they get. The Doctor tells me the men have two choices for every meal – take it or leave it.

This morning the Doctor told me to go down to the stores and fill the flour tin from one of the sacks. As I shovelled, I saw something move in the tin. Looking closely, I gasped in horror – weevils were scurrying about in the flour. I ran to the galley to tell the Doctor but he just laughed. "You really haven't been to sea before, have you?" he said. "Where do you think the men get their protein from? Anyway, what they don't know won't hurt them."

I shouldn't be surprised. Charlie Eyre said to me the other day when I took him his meal at the helm, "Samuel me boy, remember this – the Lord sends the food, but the Devil sends the cooks."

I spent the rest of my day peeling vegetables. At dinner time I must have been thinking about the weevils because I didn't mash the potatoes very well. I soon learned that sailors don't like lumpy spuds and I got a right good telling off. Just for that, I'll keep what I know about the weevils all to myself.

February 24th, 1907

Today is the start of my second week at sea. Because it is a Sunday we had a short service and then it was back

to the usual daily chores. The only ones who didn't take part in the service were the helmsman and the man on lookout. We have another head wind so progress is slow. I hope my first deep-sea journey on a sailing ship won't all be this boring.

Later that day

Some excitement at last! After lunch most us were lounging about. The sea was quite calm. Several men were grumbling about the weather and our monotonous progress. All of a sudden I saw a large triangular fin slice through the water. I rushed to the side and looked down at an enormous shark lazily swimming by. It came from nowhere and as it cruised by it kept one of its cold, black eyes on us. Captain Thorburne bellowed for the Doctor to bring a chunk of salted pork, which the captain skewered on a large hook. The shark made a couple of inquisitive passes at the bait, then suddenly lunged, swallowing the pork and hook. Almost everyone on deck pulled on the rope to try and land the fearsome creature. The rope was three inches thick, but still looked as if it might break under the weight. Two sailors made a loop and expertly slipped it over the shark's massive head and we pulled it on board. What a fight that shark put up, thrashing about on the deck, gnashing its jagged teeth.

Its jaws were a sight to behold – I do believe I could have stood up inside them!

Sailors have a deep hatred of sharks and fear them like no other creature. One of our crew, a man from St Helena named Sam Watson, showed no fear though. Armed with a large sheath knife he darted in and, quick as a flash, opened the great shark's belly. He only just managed to leap clear of the thrashing tail.

I've said before that sailors are a superstitious lot. Charlie Eyre said that nailing the shark's tail to the jib-boom will mean fair winds for the rest of our journey. If he's right, tomorrow we should be pushed along over gentle seas with our sails full of fresh westerly breezes. What a change that will be from this dreadful pattern of head winds and calms.

February 25th, 1907

So much for Eyre's superstition. There is a strong wind today and it's getting stronger. But it's coming from the direction we want to go in rather than pushing us from behind. Rain is lashing us and the seas are getting higher.

I've never felt real seasickness before, but right now I don't feel too well. I think I'll go and shelter under an awning on deck to get some fresh air.

Same day

I'm feeling just a little better. Wondering if I'll ever become a real seaman though. Not because I got seasick, but because I've never really liked heights. From the shelter of my awning I'm watching the crew working up high. As the winds have increased, the mate has ordered the topgallant and topsails to be furled. Without hesitation, men are scrambling up the ratlines of the rigging to the yard stretching on either side of the main mast. Rain is lashing their faces. The ship rises up high in the air on the back of a wave, then comes crashing down with a shuddering thud.

I am having enough trouble on deck finding something to hold on to – the men furling the sails have only a foot rope to stand on. Each man braces himself against the wooden yard because furling in a wildly flapping wet sail is a very dangerous job. At any moment he could lose his footing and fall to the steel deck far below, or be catapulted into the churning, frothing ocean. If either happens, death is a certainty. But in a storm the sails have to be furled and tied. It doesn't matter how tired the sailor is, or how cold or bloodied his hands, the job must be done.

I feel quite useless looking up at the dizzying heights my shipmates work in. What an awesome view they must

have from up there! Part of me wants to go aloft and help and another part of me feels real fear. How they can do it in these wild seas I don't know. Yet when the job is done and they come back down to the deck, it is as if it were just an everyday job. They are hard men indeed.

February 26th, 1907

The seas are really big today. I don't feel at all well.

February 28th, 1907

The last few days have been the scariest of my life. I've been through my first storm at sea and I didn't like it one bit. The *Dundonald* was tossed about by waves of a size I had never imagined. Throughout the days, the wind strengthened and the waves grew ever higher, at times towering above the deck. Sail after sail was taken in until the masts were almost bare.

Captain Thorburne ordered all hands on deck, so no one got any rest. My friend Andersen was at the helm being helped by Querfeldt so that was some comfort. I watched the crew scramble up the masts to close reef, or roll up, the foresails and topsails. They worked quickly and I was mightily impressed at their agility, especially since I found it almost impossible to stay upright on the wildly pitching deck. It was almost dark when the

last sail was secured and everyone was safely back down on the deck. Rain was coming in driving squalls and the wind whipped the tops of waves over the ship. Men had to scream out orders to be heard. I was shivering, partly from the icy blasts of wind and water, but also from fear. I tried not to let it show, but I was petrified.

The noise was incredible. The wind fair shrieked, and every time a wave crashed on the deck the whole ship shuddered. Then I saw something I'll never forget. We seemed to slide down a roller into a trough with waves cresting all around. For a second the ship seemed to be perfectly still; then it started to shake violently. I glanced over my shoulder and found myself looking up at a mountain of water. For the longest time it seemed to hover, then crashed down on us with indescribable force. Two of the men on the starboard side were picked up and almost washed overboard. Only their lifelines attached to a stanchion saved them from certain death. Bruised and battered, they were carried below and placed on their bunks.

Captain Thorburne, Mr Peters, the two helmsmen and a lookout remained on deck. Everyone else was ordered below. The Doctor handed out ship's biscuits to eat as it was impossible to cook a meal. Anything not tied down had been thrown about the galley. I couldn't have eaten

anyway. I felt as sick as a dog and could do nothing but lie on my bunk. Twice I was thrown to the floor as the *Dundonald* fought against the terrible waves.

Earlier this morning I had my first food for a couple of days. I managed to eat some porridge, but the curried rice sent me running for the lavatory. I hope I never go through a storm like that again. Andersen says it was "a good 'un", but that it's nothing compared to rounding the Horn. He said there were more fierce storms to come so I should just accept it. "You can't get off and walk home," he told me.

March 2nd, 1907

Another stiff head wind and choppy sea, but the rolling of the ship has eased. Mr McLauchlin, the second mate, says we are in for another southerly buster.

March 3rd, 1907

Mr McLauchlin was right. During the night we were hit by a sudden squall from the rear. I hadn't been able to sleep so had gone up on deck. The squall came out of nowhere. Instantly the canvas sails were cracking like a stockman's whip. Charlie Eyre was on the wheel and the suddenness of the squall almost pitched him off his feet. For a brief moment there was utter confusion. Before the

men had time to reef in the sails, the *Dundonald* swung about and the ferocity of the storm hit her on her side. Sails flapped wildly and then filled with wind as the mizzen and mainmasts began to bend. I thought they must surely break as the ship lurched violently on her side, so much so that one of the sails hit the water. I hung on for dear life and thought we were going under. The top-gallant on the mizzen-mast burst with a deafening tearing sound and was shredded to ribbons. This eased the pressure somewhat and the *Dundonald* righted herself. Sailors on deck scrambled aloft and furled in the fore and main topgallant sails. Although they showed no sign of panic I could tell they knew we had been in a perilous position.

I came below and again felt sick and have been straining and retching for some time.

March 4th, 1907

Mist – heavy, rolling mist. And cold. What a miserable place this Southern Ocean is. We haven't seen the sun for days. Most of the time we can't even see a few yards ahead. Where only days ago sailors wore plain, buttoned shirts with sleeves and trouser legs rolled up, they are now donning woollen jerseys and heavy serge trousers. Not long after leaving Sydney they were content to climb the

rigging in bare feet. Now they don't go far without their long, leather sea-boots.

I've noticed when the seas are rough, the men sleep in full clothes. This is just in case they get called up on deck to help the watch on duty. They call this "turning in all standing". Because the winds are so strong and cold up the mast, many of the sailors tie yarn around their waists. This stops their clothes billowing out. They even tie rope around their wrists to stop water running up their arms, and around their legs to stop water going into their boots. They look most peculiar, but I'm not brave enough to laugh at them.

So much for the shark's tail nailed to the jib-boom – I hope it gets washed overboard.