

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF RICHARD J. OBA

The SYDNEY MAE II chartered a 12 hour tuna fishing charter on 9/19/05. The passengers were: William Harris, Virginia Strelow, James Parker, Paul Turner. The skipper was Richard J. Oba, 50 ton licensed master. We fueled the boat with 200 gallons of diesel fuel at the Salmon Harbor Marina fuel dock. After fueling we crossed the bar at about 0830 hours on a heading of 290 degrees. At about 50 miles from port we encountered jumping tuna and proceeded to troll for tuna. We trolled for about five hours and caught two tuna. During the day I noticed that the swell size was increasing and heard on VHF radio that Depoe Bay's bar was closed at about 1600 hours. I was not able to hear the bar report for Umpqua River. As I had intermittent cellular service, I was able to contact the Umpqua River station for a short time to hear that the bar was also closed. Explaining that I was out tuna fishing the original responder said that there might be a possibility of an escort across the bar later that evening. I said I would call back when I got closer to see if the bar would settle down for the flood tide.

After finishing tuna fishing, I set the boat for a trip to Coos Bay but after talking to several people on the cell phone about their visual observations of the bar at Winchester Bay, I changed course to approach Winchester Bay. I spoke again to the Umpqua River station and they said they would send someone out to look at the bar. Later they called back and said that the bar was still closed. As the flood tide was to begin at 2001 and at the speed and course I was on, I would have reached the bar at about 2015.

Upon approaching the U buoy, I slowed the boat down to about 5 knots and motored toward the #2. At the U buoy and until the wave struck the boat, the seas were light and variable with no swell. Seeing and feeling the light and variable seas and having seen the ocean lay down on the outside, I thought the seas had laid down near the bar. I spoke to Patrick Sullivan on the VHF. He said he fished the bar and saw it get ugly during the day. He suggested that I go to Coos Bay. After his conversation, I spoke to the station on the cellular phone and they said the bar was still closed. I agreed and was just going to head the boat to Coos Bay when an enormous wave developed unexpectedly directly to the stern of the boat swamping the cockpit and pitching the boat sidewise. I could not take any evasive actions as it developed so quickly.

The boat floated for a while and four passengers, Virginia Strelow, William Harris and James Parker were able to escape to the bridge. None were wearing life jackets because we were not going to cross the Umpqua bar. I tried to free the ring bouy for the passengers but it was caught in other rigging. Remembering the life raft, I swam forward to trying to pull on the painter line to inflate the life raft. Nothing happened. I tried to swim down to release the pelican hook but was unable to do so due to the pitching seas and boat sinking. My personal automatic inflatable PFD did not deploy and I had to shed my coat and inflate the PFD with the mouth tube. By that time I had drifted considerable distance from the rest of the group and the boat finally sunk. Upon sinking the raft did deploy. But the survivors were unable to grab the raft and it floated away.

After the boat sank, I could only hear one voice. I called and was able to determine it was James Parker. He had been able to grab a floating life jacket. I swam toward him and we rafted together. We saw the 47 MLB make one pass in our direction. I was able to turn on the water light on his life jacket and we yelled. Finally as we were drifting into the surf, the MLB saw us and rescued us.