

The Daily News (Nanaimo)

'I asked myself how far I could jump': Shock: Gabriola man is stunned by accident that saw him leap from truck before it slid into the sea from ferry ramp

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Page: A4

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Illustrations: Photo: Glenn Olsen, Daily News / Randy Nicifore was tired on Wednesday but took time to relate his experience to reporters.

Standing in the snow outside the Coast Bastion Inn in Nanaimo on Wednesday morning, Randy Nicifore said he felt tired and bit overwhelmed.

Unlike other residents of the city, it had little to do with the weather.

On Tuesday night, Nicifore's pickup truck rolled off the ramp and into the harbour as he tried to board the B.C. Ferries vessel M.V. Quinsam from Nanaimo to Gabriola Island.

"I was loading, and everything seemed to be going as normal. The wind started to pick up," he said.

"I got a hand signal from the deckhand, saying 'stop, stop, stop!' He must have seen what was going on."

The Quinsam began to leave the dock, the ramp fell and Nicifore was left with his foot on the brake and the ocean in front of him.

"I didn't know if I was sliding. I just had my foot on the brake," he said. "I asked myself how far I could jump."

Nicifore opened his door to grab a handrail and pulled himself out of the vehicle.

"The truck got hung up for a second, then it fell," he said.

"There were foot passengers loading behind me, so they saw it all happen."

Nicifore said he was in shock after the incident and as he walked past cars waiting for the next sailing, his partner saw him and called his name.

"She works in town, and she was supposed to have a meeting and it was cancelled," he said.

"So there she was, waiting for the 8 p.m. ferry. I was so happy to see her. I didn't even know how I would contact her."

B.C. Ferries paid for the two to spend the night at the Coast Bastion Inn. Nicifore said he spoke with B.C. Ferries president David Hahn on Tuesday night and again Wednesday morning.

"We talked briefly. He knew about as much as I did," he said. "What went wrong, we don't know yet. I feel sorry for the ramp attendant."

On Wednesday Hahn praised Nicifore's cool-headed reaction.

"This guy is a great guy," said Hahn, who happened to be arriving in Nanaimo from Vancouver when he heard about the accident.

"We are going to try and get him a new pickup truck as soon as we can, and tools and a ladder. Whatever he needs."

Nicifore, a contractor, planned to spend one more day in Nanaimo, to talk more with B.C. Ferries and ICBC.

"There hasn't been a great deal of communication," he said. "But so far, I've been happy. It will all straighten out."

The ferry remained out of service on Tuesday night and through Wednesday, so ferry travellers stayed the night in hotels paid for by B.C. Ferries and spent the morning waiting for water taxis.

Susan Yates and daughter Susanna Furnell said they had planned to take the 8:55 p.m. ferry to Gabriola and instead ended up in the Dorchester Hotel for the night.

The two waited on Wednesday morning in a covered parking lot with other stranded passengers in hopes of grabbing the next available water taxi.

Yates said her daughter, in Grade 12, wasn't exactly heartbroken about missing a day of school.

"I'm a bit worried about work, though," she said. "I'm a librarian. I've been trying to work on things while I'm here."

She said she was satisfied with how the incident was handled by B.C. Ferries and admired their staff, and was only concerned she had not brought enough warm clothing for the unexpected delay.

Bud and Anne Marie Curtis, with sons Chad and Will, were in Nanaimo on Tuesday night for an air cadets event and had hoped to take the 9:55 p.m. ferry home.

"We didn't even know what took place," Bud said.

"They sent us to the Travel Lodge. We got toothbrushes and toothpaste. It's an adventure."

Bud said he was anxious to get home, to make sure fallen trees hadn't damaged their home, but would be without the car they would have to leave in Nanaimo.

"The boys are learning life skills," Anne Marie said.

"But we've got an outdoor cat, we need to get home."

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