

## Survivor son watches father drown

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Anna Rushworth and Rebecca Lewis

A teenage boy was flown to hospital beside his dead father's body after a weekend fishing trip ended in tragedy yesterday.

Norman Thomas Dalebrook, 51, drowned while trying to free his 10.5m trimaran Skyliner after it ran aground in heavy seas near Whangarei.

The boat – named after Dalebrook's landmark Skyline cafe on State Highway 1 near Waipu – was anchored off Taranga Island during the outing with his 16-year-old son David.

When heavy winds and rain dislodged their mooring early in the morning, they leapt on to rocks in a bid to save their boat.

Dalebrook, 51, slipped, hit his head and drowned, one of two maritime deaths within six hours.

David, one of eight children, tried in vain to find his father in the dark seas but managed to launch an emergency beacon signal, which was detected at 7.13am.

When he spotted a Northland Emergency Services Trust helicopter overhead, David activated a flare to guide them in.

With most of the trimaran under water and waves lashing the windswept ledge, a winch was lowered to pluck him to safety. It was not until David was safely on board that a rescuer noticed Dalebrook floating nearby.

Chief pilot Pete Turnbull said the winch was lowered a second time to retrieve the body. "The son was on board the helicopter when his father's body was recovered. It was not a good situation."

Turnbull said the Bream Bay College student's success in activating the beacon and flare were critical to the rescue effort.

"He did a remarkable job in the situation he was in. He was very composed. I thought he was beyond his 16 years."

David was discharged from Whangarei Hospital after being checked over. He and his siblings were too distraught to talk about their father's death yesterday,

The family was well known in Waipu. Presbyterian minister, the Reverend Peter Dunn, visited them to find them "shattered and shocked".

Dunn said the family was involved with the church, and Dalebrook, who had been sailing for a couple of years, drew on his faith after the loss of wife Sharron from breast cancer six years ago.

"That was a big shock to him. It took him a while to get over it."

Julie Harbin-McKay has lived opposite the family for 14 years. She said Dalebrook was kind and protective and remembered one stormy winter night when he arrived on her doorstep wearing wet weather gear over his pyjamas to warn her of lightning strikes.

Another neighbour, Pam Strainger, nursed Sharron through her cancer and got to know Dalebrook well. "He was the type of guy you felt like grabbing and giving a big hug to."

Another, Sharon Paki, said he was community-minded and would put his hand to anything he was asked to.

"He was a great, great guy. He was on the PTA and all the committees at Waipu Primary School and he



Teenager David Dalebrook activates a flare after searching in vain for his father Norman. Photo / Community Owned Northland Electricity Rescue Helicopter

would pretty much help anyone."

Meanwhile, Halatoaonga Mafi, 32, died and his brother-in-law Paula Kilisimasi, 26, was treated for hypothermia after their dinghy capsized at Omana Bay, east of Auckland.

The Mt Roskill men got into trouble about 1.15am while fishing in their 2.1m fibreglass dinghy, about 200m from shore.

Acting sergeant Matt Tierney said Kilisimasi swam to shore and raised the alarm when he could not find Mafi, a father-of-five.

After an extensive air and sea search that lasted more than three hours, Mafi's body was found 50m from the submerged boat.

Tierney said the sea was "quite calm" and suspected alcohol was a factor. Neither man was wearing a lifejacket and both were "incredibly ill-equipped" to be at sea.

Maritime Police Sergeant John Saunders said the dinghy was cracked along the bottom and should not have been at sea. "It looked like the cracks had been repaired with standard silicone that you might use to fix a showerhead - it was a piece of junk."

Tierney said Mafi's death was a warning to anyone heading to sea unprepared.

"These guys had no navigation lights, no lifejackets, no radio and it was pitch black out there. It's a tragic accident and unfortunately they have paid the ultimate price."