

The Journal

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30c (incl GST)

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SPECIAL ROAD TOLL FEATURE - PAGE 5

CAMERON LEADS BUSHRANGERS - SPORT

Cyclone wreck found

Tracy riddle solved

By Phil McLeod

A BOAT built in Dandenong that sank with a local man on board during Cyclone Tracy has been discovered 30 years after the massive storm devastated Darwin.

Divers last month discovered the wreck of the Darwin Princess — a 23-metre steel ferry built by Dandenong identity Max Curtain — at the bottom of Darwin Harbour. Of the 29 vessels lost in the cyclone that hit Darwin on Christmas Day in 1974, it was the last to be found.

It's believed that Mr Curtain's son, Ray, 28, took the Darwin Princess out to sea on Christmas Eve to ride out the storm. The vessel, which was

'Darwin was wrecked and in chaos when we arrived . . . we left . . . having to face the fact that we had lost Ray.'

Max Curtain

used as a tourist ferry, sank in the huge seas whipped up by Tracy's 300 kmh winds.

Police divers searched the wreck this month but failed to find the remains of Mr Curtain.



Doomed: The Darwin Princess that sank during Cyclone Tracy.

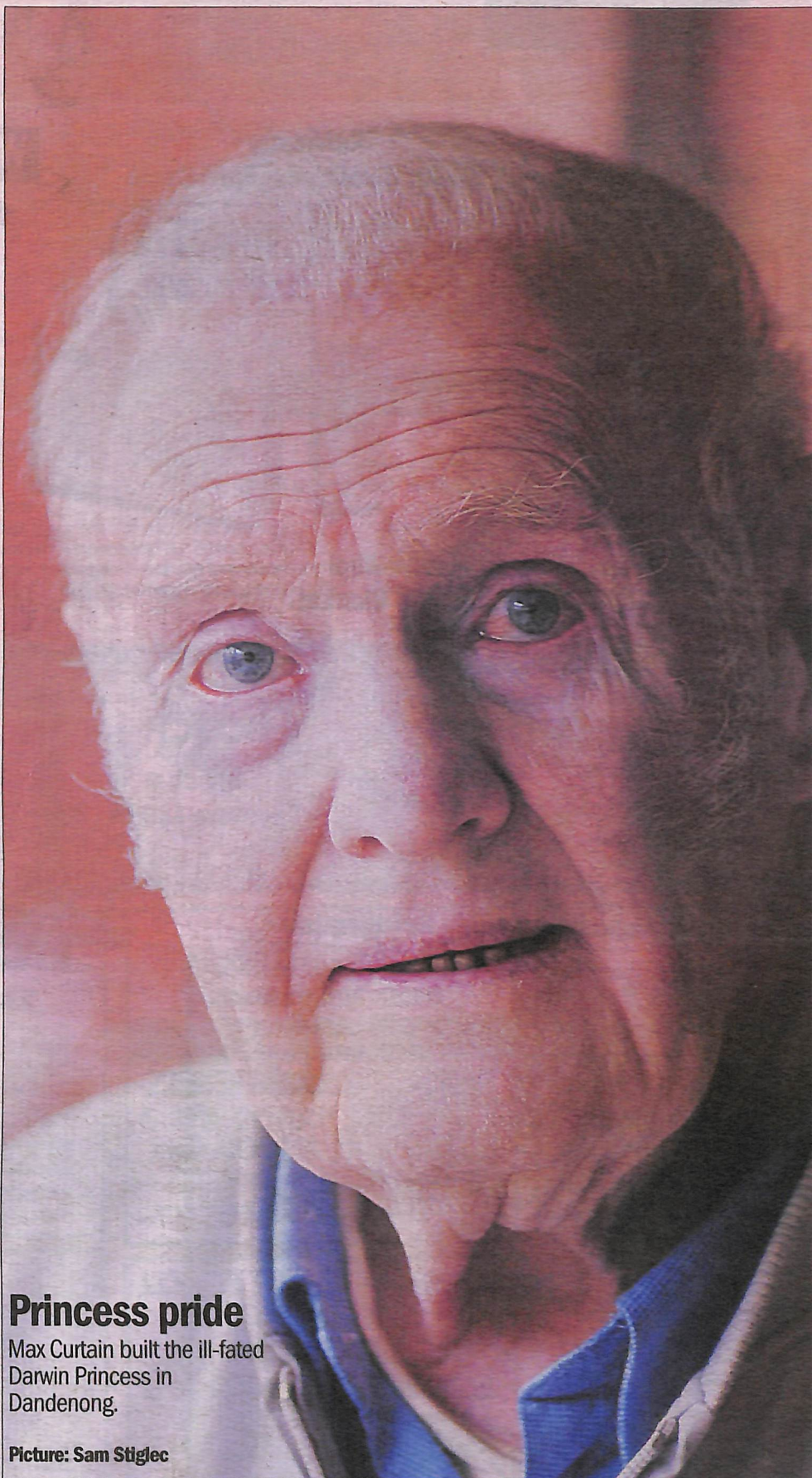
Northern Territory authorities have imposed a 150-metre exclusion zone around the Princess pending completion of coronial inquires.

Mr Curtain, who owned and operated the now defunct Wedge swimming pool in Dandenong, said the discovery of the Princess had solved a 30-year mystery. He hoped that it would also provide the family with some sort of closure over the disappearance of his son.

'We got a telegram [after the cyclone hit] that Ray was missing with the Princess and that's the way it's stood for 30 years up until now.'

'If it's possible to get it [the wreck] up we will. At least the family may get something out of it and give us some answers.'

CONTINUED PAGE 16



Princess pride

Max Curtain built the ill-fated Darwin Princess in Dandenong.

Picture: Sam Stiglec

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Missing boat found 30 years on

FROM PAGE 1

Mr Curtain said the discovery of the Princess, which was built on his two hectare-plus property in Wedge Street, would also end rumours that it had become a ghost ship.

"We have heard all these stories that it [the Princess] was operating out of Singapore or that someone had sighted it here and there after the cyclone ... it

was all Darwin pub talk. It [the discovery] was the beginning of the end of all those rumours."

Mr Curtain said the Princess was found overturned about 13 kilometres from shore near the wreck of the Booya, a Dutch-built three-masted schooner that also sank during the cyclone and was only found last year.

"What I can gather is that he [Ray] was trying to get a line on the Booya ... to help it out and

they clanged together. It must have been a fearful storm."

Mr Curtain said he was having Christmas dinner with his family when he heard that Tracy had struck, and together with a family friend, drove day and night to get to Darwin.

"Darwin was wrecked and in chaos when we arrived. No one could tell us very much because a helluva lot of people were being evacuated ... they were

piling people on planes as fast as the planes could take off.

"It became pretty apparent that Ray wasn't going to suddenly turn up. Trying to get anything verified was hard, we left Darwin a few days later having to face the fact that we had lost Ray."

Police divers have conducted an initial search of the Princess but failed to find the remains of Ray Curtain, who is believed to

have been the only one aboard when it went down.

A Northern Territory police spokeswoman last week told *The Journal* that the search would continue during the region's dry season, which had just started. Two tourist fishing guides raised the alarm last month after their anchor was caught in an unidentified chain which led to the discovery of the Princess by two private divers.



Lost skipper: Ray Curtain.

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Princess built in backyard

THE Darwin Princess was built in the backyard of Max Curtain's home in Wedge Street, Dandenong.

Mr Curtain built the Princess for \$100,000 to work in tandem with another of his boats, the Edwina May, to ferry people and supplies to missions on the islands around Darwin.

"We were supplying the missions to all the islands around Darwin and soon realised that there was room for a bigger vessel than the Edwina May and we built the Princess."

Construction of the Princess was completed in May 1972 and was reported in *The Journal*.

The report stated: "It took 10 men working 10 hours a day more than eight months to build the Princess to complement Max's ferry fleet operating out of Darwin harbour."

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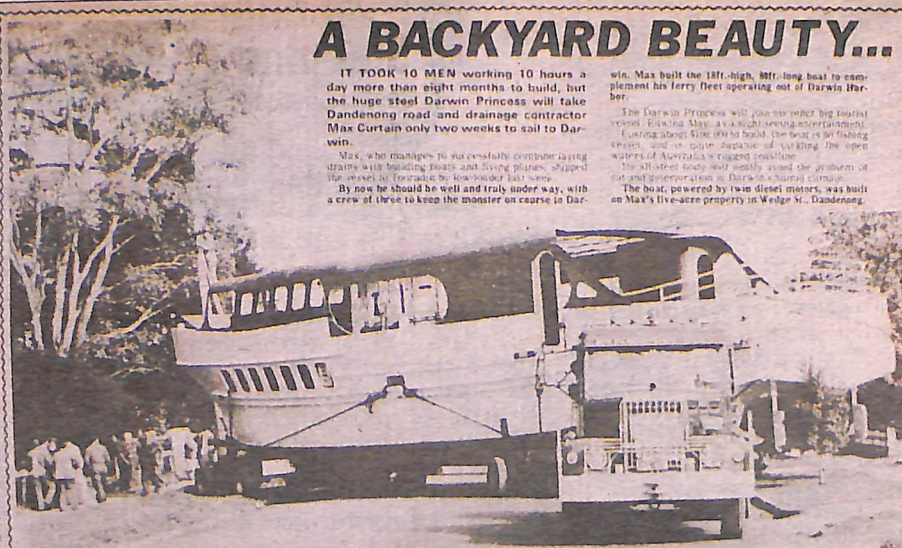
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Dry dock: The Journal's report on the Darwin Princess' departure from Dandenong.

A low-loader truck carefully manoeuvred the Princess out of Mr Curtain's yard and transported it to Tooradin where it was launched with

a crew of three including his son Ray, who took two weeks to sail it to Darwin. The boat left its Wedge Street

home in 1974 on May 30, which was the same date that divers first searched the wreck of the Princess this year.

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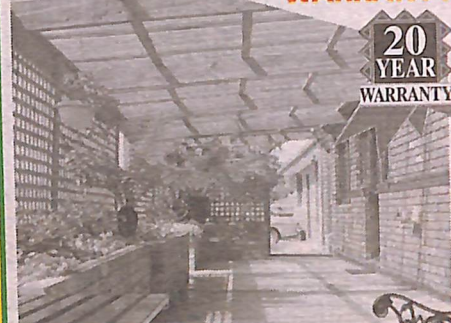
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Father denied permission to search for son's remains Tracy's final backlash

By Phil McLeod

NORTHERN Territory authorities have denied a request by Dandenong identity Max Curtain for divers to search for the remains of his son whose boat sank during Cyclone Tracy.

A Darwin-based dive company acting for Mr Curtain was denied permission to photograph the wreck of the Darwin Princess, which was discovered in Darwin Harbour last month after 30 years.

As revealed in *The Journal* [Monday, July 19], Mr Curtain's son Ray is believed to have perished after taking his passenger ferry out to sea to ride out the storm.

The Princess, which was built by Mr Curtain snr in the backyard of his Wedge Street home, was the last of 29 vessels lost in the 1976 cyclone to be found.

NT authorities last week denied permission for divers acting for Mr Curtain to photograph the Princess to try to find his son's remains because of a coronial enquiry.

"You would think that they'd [NT authorities] be a little more bloody humane if nothing else. It's personal reasons we want pictures of it and, to be quite honest, we're [the family] disgusted," Mr Curtain said.

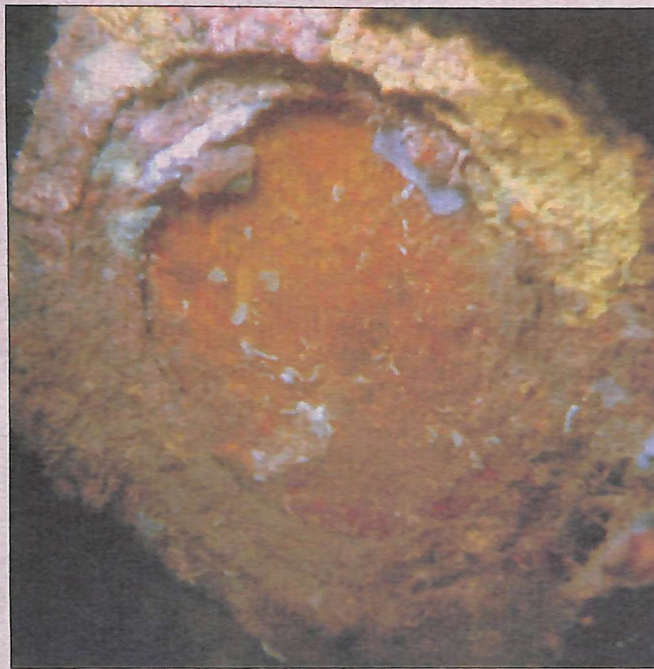
"We are talking about my son here."

"We've lived with not knowing what happened to him for 30 years and now they won't let us say goodbye ... the family needs closure and they are not giving it to us."

Mr Curtain is considering salvaging the vessel, which is built of a superior steel, amid calls for the wreck to be preserved as a fish-breeding ground.

"The greenies have got no bloody investment in the bloody boat. They can go and get some bloody war wreck and take them out there," he said.

Darwin-based Coral Divers, who first dived and provided the first photographs of the wreck before the authorities imposed a 15-metre exclusion zone around the Princess, were denied permission to further photograph



Deep secrets

Clockwise from above left: plastic seats on the wreck of the Darwin Princess photographed by divers; another diver's photograph of the radar screen of the Darwin Princess; Max Curtain, who has been denied a request to enlist divers to search for the body of his son; in happier times, the Darwin Princess ferry hosted parties on Darwin Harbour.



the wreck. Coral Divers director Sasha Muller said part of the wreck, thought to be the wheelhouse, may provide Mr Curtain his best chance of finding any remains of his son.

"There's some rubble off the wreck which we think is part of the front wheelhouse ... it would be the site of most interest to me if I was the father."

Mr Muller said the NT

authorities may be in breach of maritime law in denying Mr Curtain's request to dive to the wreck.

"I personally think Max has every right to access that site as

owner of the vessel," Mr Muller said.

"It's clear that the Princess went down in the cyclone so the cause of Ray's death can be clearly defined in that sense."

'Flash' funding

DANDENONG MP John Pandazopoulos last week announced black spot funding for a notorious intersection in Dandenong North. Mr Pandazopoulos said \$39,000 would be spent on the Stud-Brady roads intersection where 18 people have been injured in accidents over five years.

"The high number of casualty crashes at this site can be attributed to the speed of vehicles along Stud Road, combined with a lack of visibility on the south-bound approach to the Brady Road intersection."

Mr Pandazopoulos said the funding would be used to provide advanced flashing warning signs to alert approaching motorists to slow down.

Sleep loss

THIEVES broke into house a in Berwick and stole jewellery, computer, and entertainment equipment valued at \$4700 as the occupants were asleep. Police say the thieves forced the rear door of the Brisbane Street house about 5.15am on Saturday, July, 31. Information to Crime Stoppers 1800333000.

Name talks

RESIDENTS associations from Narre Warren North have been asked by Casey Council to attend a general purposes committee meeting to outline their opposition to the proposed name change of Narre Warren North Road to Casey Boulevard.

Well done

CASEY Council will send a letter to Pastor Max Walker from Cornerstone congratulating him on winning a Tattersall's Award for his work in the community.

Exit, please

THE Casey Hospital Reference Group will ask Casey Council to write to the State Government requesting that a sign be placed on the Monash Freeway to advise residents which exit they should use. They also asked for a slip lane in Clyde Road, Berwick, to allow for left turns into Kangan Drive and to the hospital. The hospital is set to open in October.

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