

LAND OF FIRE & ICE



- 1 With any significant event most people can tell you where they were when they first heard the news. Lars Pieteron is no different. He will always remember where he was on January 23 1973, a bitterly cold winter's day on the seas off the coast of Iceland.
- 2 Lars was dragging the last of the long fishing nets across the stern of a trawler when he heard a call from the Captain. He quickly tied the netting down and raced up to the cabin to get the news. There was a big problem back home in Vestmannaeyjar, their small home town on the island of Heimaey. The radio message had been rushed and the caller panicked, but the word "volcano" repeated over and over, was very clear.
- 3 The trawler had already heeled round to the north to start its run back to Iceland. It was

making good speed in the medium swell. Lars stood at the bow of the boat looking out across the dark sea, searching for some sign of the eruption. They were over a hundred kilometres from the nearest island, too far out to see what was happening. After straining his eyes, Lars gave up and joined the others below deck.

- 4 In the galley the older men talked of their experiences on the other islands where open fissures often oozed lava. One of the men told the story of the Lakagigar fissure that began erupting in 1783. He explained, in great detail, how it continually spewed fountains of lava across the countryside, dumping ash for hundreds of kilometres. It left a blue haze over the whole country. In all of his eighteen years, Lars could not remember hearing anything quite like this story. It sent a chill of excitement

up his spine and his thoughts leapt about. He could see himself as the hero, rescuing small children, or outrunning the lava flow in his dad's jeep. His wild thoughts paused. Would Dad even let him use the jeep? Wouldn't he need it to save Mum and his sister? Was the house under threat? Was his family going to be safe? He didn't feel that excited anymore.

- 5 At about eight o'clock that evening the call came from the bridge saying the eruptions could be seen through the first mate's binoculars. Ninety minutes later everyone could see it with the naked eye. Every minute the trawler got closer to home the explosions became clearer. Frequent radio messages announced that the town was being evacuated. There was a general appeal for all boats to return to help remove people from the island.
- 6 As the boat neared the island, Lars noticed the sea had begun to take on a strange orange glow. The massive fireworks exploding from the island's newest mountain were lighting it. The island itself looked almost black, lying between the orange sea and the piercing yellows and reds of the erupting volcano. By midnight the trawler had finally rounded the breakwater at Vestmannaeyjar. The harbour was full of people milling about. There seemed to be little panic and most were waiting patiently for their turn to board one of the growing number of boats that had raced to the island's aid.
- 7 As soon as the trawler had tied off, Lars jumped onto the jetty and raced along the bay. He was looking for his family. He checked



group after group but they were nowhere to be seen.

Whoomp! A huge explosion shook the ground. People screamed. A brilliant glow filled the sky as molten rocks roared through the air, falling just short of the town's outermost houses. Some people dived to the ground, their hands covering their heads. Things were not looking good.

- 8 Lars reached the end of the harbour and ran up the lane behind the shops. This lane led to his street. Through the orange glow he saw a group of people struggling to carry several bags, cases and doonas tied up with belts. It wasn't until he got closer that he recognised them as the elderly couple and their granddaughter, Anna, who lived in the house behind his. The girl, doubled over with the weight of a large case, looked up and smiled when she saw Lars, dropping the case behind her.

9 “They’re all fine,” she gasped. “They took your parents and sister on one of the first boats. A pregnant woman was going into labour, and your mother went as her midwife, so they took both families. They are all safe.”

A smiling Lars picked up Anna’s large case as well as two heavy bags. The little group reached the harbour quickly.

10 Lars was reunited with his family the next day in Iceland’s capital, Reykjavik, but he only stayed for a short time. He returned to Vestmannaeyjar with a group of volunteers who were going to do whatever they could to save homes and the harbour.

These, and other volunteers, remained and battled the volcano for nearly six months.

They were able to save most of the houses by regularly shovelling the ash off the roofs. This ash, if left for too long, would crush and destroy the houses. Lars also worked with a group who used hoses to pour tonnes of sea water on the advancing lava. In this way they were able to cool, and therefore slow the molten rock that was threatening to fill the town’s most valuable asset — the harbour.

11 At the end of the six months most of the town and its harbour had been saved, but not before the new volcano, now called Eldfell, had added over two square kilometres of rock to the island. Yes, 1973 was a year that Lars would never forget.

Questions

- 1 Lars worked on
 - a a boat.
 - b an island.
 - c a mountain.
- 2 How many people were in Lars’s family?
 - a two
 - b three
 - c four
- 3 How did the sailors find out about the volcano?
 - a They heard a rumour.
 - b They saw the eruptions.
 - c They received a radio message.
- 4 Why did Lars race along the bay?
 - a He was looking for friends.
 - b He was looking for his family.
 - c He was looking for people he could help.
- 5 Why was ash a problem in Vestmannaeyjar?
 - a It made a mess.
 - b It blocked the lava.
 - c It could crush a house.
- 6 Why was 1973 a year that Lars would never forget?
 - a He caught a record number of fish while out on the trawler.
 - b It was the year he helped save his home town.
 - c It was the year that they lost the harbour.

Vocabulary

Find words in the text that match the meanings below. The word is in the section shown in brackets.

- 7 Important (1)
- 8 The kitchen on a ship (4)
- 9 Section of the ship from where the captain directs operations (5)
- 10 A person who assists with births (9)
- 11 A valuable person or thing (10)

Alphabetical Order

The following words appear in the text. When placed in alphabetical order, which one would be **first**?

- 12 cold, captain, clear, cases
- 13 boats, board, breakwater, bring
- 14 seen, speed, stern, searching
- 15 eighteen, evening, eruption, explosions

Back To The Text...

- 16 What is implied in section 7?
 - a Conditions were getting worse.
 - b Everything would be alright.
- 17 Prediction: What is likely to happen in the future?
 - a Fishing boats would continue to work from Vestmannaeyjar.
 - b Most of the townsfolk would not return to Vestmannaeyjar.

- 18 The words *fire* and *ice* have been given coloured borders in the card title because
 - a it highlights the yellow nicely.
 - b it contrasts hot and cold.

Sequencing

Look back through the card to find what happened first. Choose **a** or **b**.

- 19
 - a Older men talked of their experiences.
 - b Lars tied the fish nets down.
- 20
 - a The trawler rounded the breakwater.
 - b The message came that the town was being evacuated.
- 21
 - a Lars found his family.
 - b Lars found Anna.

Think About This

- 22 Which set of words best describes Lars?
 - a courageous, foolhardy, clever
 - b young, reckless, idle
 - c community minded, brave, strong
- 23 In which section do we learn that the townsfolk had remained calm?
 - a 4
 - b 5
 - c 6
 - d 7

Challenge Option

Research: This text mentions the Eldfell volcano. List three other volcanoes.

