

**Lessons from media reporting of natural
disasters:**

**A case study of the 2011 flash floods
in Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley**

Amanda Ann Gearing

Bachelor of Business (Communication - Journalism)

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Research) School of Journalism

Faculty of Creative Industries

Queensland University of Technology

August 2012

Keywords

Journalism as creative practice, journalism as research methodology, reporting, disaster, trauma, survivors, rescuers, narrative journalism, online social networking, social media, post traumatic stress disorder, posttraumatic growth.

Abstract

Practice-led journalism research techniques were used in this study to produce a ‘first draft of history’ recording the human experience of survivors and rescuers during the January 2011 flash flood disaster in Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley in Queensland, Australia. The study aimed to discover what can be learnt from engaging in journalistic reporting of natural disasters. This exegesis demonstrates that journalism can be both a creative practice and a research methodology.

About 120 survivors, rescuers and family members of victims participated in extended interviews about what happened to them and how they survived. Their stories are the basis for two creative outputs of the study: a radio documentary and a non-fiction book, that document how and why people died, or survived, or were rescued. Listeners and readers are taken “into the flood” where they feel anxious for those in peril, relief when people are saved, and devastated when babies, children and adults are swept away to their deaths.

In undertaking reporting about the human experience of the floods, several significant elements about journalistic reportage of disasters were exposed. The first related to the vital role that the online social media played during the disaster for individuals, citizen reporters, journalists and emergency services organisations. Online social media offer reporters powerful new reporting tools for both gathering and disseminating news. The second related to the

performance of journalists in covering events involving traumatic experiences. Journalists are often required to cover trauma and are often amongst the first-responders to disasters. This study found that almost all of the disaster survivors who were approached were willing to talk in detail about their traumatic experiences. A finding of this project is that journalists who interview trauma survivors can develop techniques for improving their ability to interview people who have experienced traumatic events. These include being flexible with interview timing and selecting a location; empowering interviewees to understand they don't have to answer every question they are asked; providing emotional security for interviewees; and by being committed to accuracy. Survivors may exhibit posttraumatic stress symptoms but some exhibit and report posttraumatic growth.

The willingness of a high proportion of the flood survivors to participate in the flood research made it possible to document a relatively unstudied question within the literature about journalism and trauma – when and why disaster survivors will want to speak to reporters. The study sheds light on the reasons why a group of traumatised people chose to speak about their experiences. Their reasons fell into six categories: lessons need to be learned from the disaster; a desire for the public to know what had happened; a sense of duty to make sure warning systems and disaster responses to be improved in future; personal recovery; the financial disinterest of reporters in listening to survivors; and the timing of the request for an interview.

Feedback to the creative-practice component of this thesis - the book and radio documentary - shows that these issues are not purely matters of ethics. By following appropriate protocols, it is possible to produce stories that engender strong audience responses such as that the program was “amazing and deeply emotional” and “community storytelling at its most important”. Participants reported that the experience of the interview process was “healing” and that the creative outcome resulted in “a very precious record of an afternoon of tragedy and triumph and the bitter-sweetness of survival”.

Table of Contents

Keywords	i
Abstract	ii
Table of contents	v
List of tables	viii
List of abbreviations	ix
Statement of original authorship	x
Acknowledgements	xi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Aim	3
1.3 Outputs of the research	4
1.4 Scope of the study	4
1.5 Significance of the research	5
1.6 Rights and obligations of reporters	6
1.7 Ethical clearance	8
1.8 Participants	9
1.9 Thesis structure	10
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY	12
2.1 Introduction	12
2.2 Qualitative research design	12
2.3 Journalism as creative practice and research methodology	13
2.4 Case study research	16
2.5 Narrative journalism	17
2.6 Research interview techniques	19
2.7 Refining interview techniques	20
2.8 Documentary and manuscript production	21
2.9 Conclusion	22
CHAPTER 3: ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING	23
3.1 Introduction	23
3.2 Are you ok?	25
3.3 Citizen reporting	26
3.3.1 Citizen-initiated warnings	26
3.3.2 Citizen reporters	28

3.4 Crowd sourcing from social networks	30
3.5 QPS direct	32
3.6 Networking the recovery	37
3.7 Socially networked grief	38
3.8 Conclusion	38
CHAPTER 4: REPORTING TRAUMA	40
4.1 Introduction	40
4.2 Post-disaster trauma	42
4.3 Interviewing traumatised people	44
4.4 Emergency response	45
4.5 Personal benefit of sharing stories	45
4.6 Posttraumatic growth	46
4.7 Posttraumatic growth experienced by reporters	50
4.8 Minimising trauma to disaster survivors	50
4.8.1 Timing	51
4.8.2 Flexibility	51
4.8.3 Empowering the participants	52
4.8.4 Emotional security	52
4.8.5 Listening without interrupting	52
4.8.6 Access to counselling	53
4.8.7 Commitment to accuracy	53
4.9 Why do survivors speak to reporters?	54
4.9.1 Lessons need to be learned from the disaster	55
4.9.2 Desire for the public to know what had happened	57
4.9.3 A sense of duty to make sure warning systems and disaster responses are improved in future	59
4.9.4 Personal recovery	60
4.9.5 Financial disinterest of reporters in listening to survivor stories	61
4.9.6 Timing	62
4.10 Managing self-trauma	64
4.11 Conclusion	65
CHAPTER 5: LISTENER AND READER FEEDBACK	68
5.1 Introduction	68
5.2 The power of eye-witness accounts	69
5.3 A better understanding of how people experienced the disaster	70
5.4 Helping communities adapt to climate change	73
5.5 A difficult story that was well told	73
5.6 Public recognition of the trauma, losses and bereavement	75

5.7 Emotional impact	75
5.8 Recognition by audiences of the courage of survivors to tell their stories	77
5.9 Compelling journalism	78
5.10 Story-telling as a therapeutic catharsis	79
5.11 Conclusion	80
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH	82
6.1 Introduction	82
6.2 Online social media	82
6.3 Reporting trauma	83
6.4 Why do disaster survivors choose to speak to reporters?	83
6.5 Self-care for journalists in disaster zones	84
6.6 Community awareness of flash flooding risks	84
6.7 Long-form journalism	85
6.8 Further research	86
REFERENCES	88
APPENDIX	97
ABC Radio National script “The Day that changed Grantham”	

List of Tables

	Page
Table 2.1 Weerakkody's six-step research method and their application in long-form journalism	16
Table 4.1 Reasons for volunteering to speak about disaster experiences to the media	59

List of abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
EMQ	Emergency Management Queensland
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
QPS	Queensland Police Service

Statement of original authorship

The work contained in this exegesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the exegesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: **QUT Verified Signature**

Date: 24 August 2012

Acknowledgements

A project of this magnitude is only possible with the generous cooperation of many people. I am deeply grateful to the many flood survivors, rescuers and bereaved family members who agreed to be interviewed during my research. I am also grateful for the financial support of the Adrian Scott Rural Journalism Scholarship and to Adrian Scott for his interest and encouragement in the project.

I gratefully acknowledge the guidance and encouragement of my supervisor, Dr Angela Romano, throughout the research and preparation of the book and exegesis. Thank you also to UQP publisher John Hunter for his professional guidance in the writing of my book, *The Torrent: Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley 2011*. Thank you to Radio National executive producer Claudia Taranto for commissioning and editing my documentary, *The Day that Changed Grantham*, and to Radio National sound engineer Louis Mitchell for composing and performing original music for the sound track.

Amanda Gearing

August 2012

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

If people don't tell people what happened, the next time it happens there will be just the same awful consequences.

Jean Warr

Helidon (Personal interview, July 20, 2011)

2011 was a momentous year. In Queensland, it will be remembered for record flooding which covered 70 percent of the state. At the height of the disaster, on January 10, 2011 an extreme rainfall event caused flash flooding in Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley, resulting in 21 deaths, comprising 16 adults and five children, and the destruction of houses, businesses, towns, roads, bridges and railway lines.

Reporters converged on the scene, producing news and current affairs stories that almost instantaneously propelled the event into global news headlines. Citizen reporters used online social media to warn family and friends of the impending floods moving down the catchment of the Lockyer Valley. Journalists reporting from the disaster zone were visibly shocked at the loss of life and the devastation. Global audiences flocked to YouTube and Facebook and were shocked by the pictures of flash flooding washing away cars from the

streets of a city on top of a mountain, lifting cars off a major highway and sweeping houses off concrete slabs in the Lockyer Valley.

In the weeks after the flood, as mainstream media focus shifted away from the disaster zone of Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley, hundreds of survivors in small rural communities were isolated, without clothes, food, home or possessions. Gradually, roads were re-opened and power supplies and phone lines were restored, food and clothing donations arrived and the shocked and traumatised survivors began to rebuild their lives and homes. The state-wide flooding resulted in more than 56,000 insurance claims and payouts totaled more than \$2.55 billion (van den Honert and McAneney, 2011, 1149-1173).

Flash floods kill an average of 5,000 people around the globe each year, more than any other type of natural disaster, and have the highest mortality rate of any natural disaster (Hydrologic Research Center, 2011). In addition, extreme floods affect 500 million people per year, mostly in areas of high altitude and the tropics. The International Panel on Climate Change predicted in 2007 that global warming would cause increased intensity of rainfall in many areas of the world in the future. The first major deadly flash flood in Queensland was a wake-up call to the public, emergency services, the government and the media.

1.2 Aim

My aims in undertaking the research are to explore what lessons can be learnt from engaging in journalistic reporting of natural disasters, using the Toowoomba and Lockyer Valley floods as a case study. The sub-aims are:

- a) to provide the flood survivors of this event with an opportunity to talk about a disaster which has had profound impacts on them and their families and communities;
- b) to use journalistic techniques to produce a ‘first draft of history’ recording the human experience of people directly involved in the disaster;
- c) to provide a better understanding of the range of reasons why traumatised disaster survivors may choose to speak about their experiences;
- d) to contribute to the knowledge-base of journalists to assist them to interview people who may be suffering post trauma symptoms; and
- e) to create professional journalistic products which would help to raise community awareness of the risks of flash flooding and protective and preventive measures which individuals, communities and governments can take to mitigate future risks; and
- f) to extend the current knowledge base for journalists working in disaster zones.

A key impetus to gather the stories was that many young children and babies had been affected by the disaster. I felt obligated to record eye witness accounts of the event so that when the children affected by the disaster were old enough, they would be able to read personal accounts of the disaster which in some cases had claimed the lives of several members of their family.

1.3 Outputs of the research

The outputs are a non-fiction book, a radio documentary and a scholarly exegesis:

- a) *The Torrent: Toowoomba and Lockyer Valley January 2011* published by University of Queensland Press and released on 3 January 2012, (Gearing, 2012) of 65,000 words,
- b) a 50-minute radio documentary *The Day that Changed Grantham*, broadcast on October 15 and 19, 2011 on 360documentaries, ABC Radio National (Gearing, 2011a), and
- c) an exegesis (19,500 words).

1.4 Scope of the study

The scope of my project was to spend several months interviewing survivors, rescuers and bereaved family members in order to document the human experience of the people who were most severely impacted by the floods. Whilst the focus of the project was on a relatively small geographic area, the

application of the information provided by eye witnesses of how the event occurred might be useful further afield in regions with a similar topography.

1.5 Significance of the research

The research project is significant because it gathers insights gained from an eight-month reporting assignment with a large number of survivors of a disaster which has affected nine rural and regional communities. The interviewing over a protracted time of more than 100 survivors provided an opportunity to refine interview techniques in order to minimise trauma to participants and to recognise the importance to trauma victims of being given the opportunity to tell their story and the possible therapeutic outcomes for survivors of being heard.

The willingness of almost all the flood survivors who I approached to participate in my flood research also made it possible to document a previously unstudied field – why disaster survivors wanted to speak to reporters. The information they offered provides journalists with new information about the psychological disposition of trauma victims towards speaking to the media. Children in some of the survivor families asked their parents if they could be included in the research interviews. Ethical clearance was obtained to allow children to be added to the participant group, with parental consent. Children were interviewed with a parent present.

Feedback from the participants of the research and from the public to the radio documentary and the book recognised the significant contribution of journalism in the recovery of survivors and of the role of the media in mobilising appropriate, timely, targeted recovery efforts in the wake of a disaster. One comment from a member of the public, Ben White, noted that the radio documentary on Grantham was ‘Community storytelling at its most important.’ The book will remain an historical account for future generations to trace the history of what their relatives or communities experienced during the 2011 floods.

1.6 Rights and Obligations of Reporters

The Media Alliance Code of Ethics (1997) sets out the continual tension journalists experience between their duty as reporters to the public’s right to information and their duty of care to news sources. The preamble of the Code emphasises reporters’ informative role:

Respect for truth and the public's right to information are fundamental principles of journalism. Journalists describe society to itself. They convey information, ideas and opinions, a privileged role. They search, disclose, record, question, entertain, suggest and remember. They inform citizens and animate democracy. They give a practical form to freedom of expression. Many journalists work in private enterprise, but all have these public responsibilities. They scrutinise power, but also exercise it, and should be

accountable. Accountability engenders trust. Without trust, journalists do not fulfill their public responsibilities.

Paragraph 11 describes the responsibility of journalists to balance their reporting duties with their duty of care for individual news sources arises that when a news source is suffering from some form of grief. “Respect private grief and personal privacy. Journalists have the right to resist compulsion to intrude” (MEAA Code of Ethics, 1997).

During my reporting prior to undertaking this thesis, a few survivors who I approached did not want to participate in media interviews. However, most survivors expressed a surprising willingness and urgency to speak about the disaster because they felt compelled that the public should know what had happened, despite the pain of sudden traumatic loss of their husbands, wives and children, homes and possessions. Many survivors were bewildered that they had managed to escape alive despite the ferocity of what the Commissioner of Police dubbed the ‘instant inland tsunami’ that had caused death and destruction without warning. I observed that some survivors exhibited ‘survivor guilt’, finding it difficult to accept that they had lived when others, especially young children, had died. In the days and weeks immediately after the disaster, I observed survivors wanted to publicly thank their rescuers, to ‘get the story out’ to the rest of the country, to alert people to the need for emergency food, clothing and housing; to demand improvements to early warning systems, and to ensure as far as possible that if a similar happened, people would be given adequate warning.

1.7 Ethical clearance

Ethical clearance was obtained to undertake interviews with adults and children, from QUT's Human Research Ethics Committee. Potential participants were given information about the purpose of the research project, the voluntary nature of participation, the audio recording of interviews and their possible use in a radio documentary and lodgement in the ABC Radio National archives, expected benefits of the study for participants, the risks of emotional distress and contact details for free counselling support. Participants were informed they would be identified in the book and thesis and that anonymous participation was not possible. In addition, they gave consent for the data collected in this study to be used in future studies, such as possible longitudinal studies into the recovery of flood survivors.

While the data gathered was all available for publication, I used personal discretion in omitting material that was gruesome. Participants were informed they could see a draft of the research findings if they wished. A small number of participants took up this offer.

Participants were also invited to contribute photographs and video footage of the disaster. A separate release was signed by participants who contributed visual materials, granting consent for these to be used in the research outputs and in the mainstream media.

1.8 Participants

Participants were invited to volunteer their participation in the flood research study. Each participant was recorded in an interview at a time and place acceptable to them. Participants in the study were included the following groups of people:

- a) 87 flood survivors at Toowoomba, Spring Bluff, Murphy's Creek, Withcott, Postman's Ridge, Helidon, Carpendale and Grantham,
- b) seven family members of flood victims,
- c) 41 civilian rescuers in the disaster zone,
- d) 16 rescue agency staff in the disaster zone, and
- e) two reporters who were in the disaster zone during the floods.

Many of the people who participated in the research had not spoken to the media and had not made submissions or statements to the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry.

I formulated a series of questions that I needed to be able to answer to enable me to write an account of what had happened and why:

- a) What happened in each place which led to people's lives being endangered?
- b) Why did so many people die?
- c) Could their lives have been saved? If so, how?

- d) How did many other people survive?
- e) Could anything have been done to prevent the trauma of people being caught up in the flood?
- f) What have individuals learned from this disaster?
- g) What can authorities learn from this disaster?
- h) Can extreme weather warning systems be improved?

1.9 Thesis Structure

Reporting disasters involves journalists working in difficult circumstances, being confronted by disturbing stories and images; and interviewing traumatised people. This study of a large number of survivors of a disaster affecting nine rural and regional communities offers insights based on reporting in the disaster zone in the eight months after the disaster.

The following chapters trace the progress of the research project from the selection of methodologies to its completion with the production of a radio documentary and publication of the book. The following chapter sets out the methodology for the research. Chapters 3 and 4 report on two aspects of disaster reporting. Chapter 3 focuses on the use of social media by reporters in disaster zones, and Chapter 4 examines the theory and practice of trauma reporting and sets out the research findings relating to why survivors agreed to participate in the research. Chapter 5 reports on the listener and reader feedback

to the radio documentary and the non-fiction book. Chapter 6 sets out the conclusions of the study and offers possible subjects for future research.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explain the research techniques chosen for this study. ‘Researchers in the arts, media and design,’ according to Haseman (2006, 98), ‘often struggle to find serviceable methodologies within the orthodox research paradigms of quantitative and qualitative research.’ Practice-led research emerged during the mid-1990s as a strategy adopted by researchers who began their research with ‘an enthusiasm of practice’ and pursued their research through their ongoing practice (Haseman, 2006, 98). A synthesis of research methods suitable for use in a practice-led research project were adopted in this study in order to capture and synthesise data at the macro and micro level as well as to gather data from different sources and perspectives. The investigative techniques, interview methods, synthesis of material and narrative writing style are all similar to those I have used in my journalistic practice as a print and electronic for 18 years.

2.2 Qualitative research design

There are two broad categories of research: qualitative and quantitative. A qualitative methodology allowed the research to focus on depth rather than breadth of data. During interviews, the primary questions were open questions designed to elicit as much detail and personal insight as participants wished to give. Their perspectives and insights were captured in the writing of the book

using extensive quotations to allow each person to speak with their own voice and from their own subjective experience, giving readers insight into the person's motivations and actions. The exposition of what happened was presented without critical review, as seen in phenomenological research. Denscombe (2007, 78) notes that 'The phenomenologist's task, in the first instance, is not to interpret the experiences of those concerned . . . the task is to present the experiences in a way that is *faithful to the original*' (italics in the original).

Common themes emerged as more stories were recorded:

- a) the importance of life over material possessions;
- b) feelings of guilt by people who survived;
- c) the importance of relationships in giving survivors the will to live both during and after the flood event; and
- d) anger at the lack of warning given by authorities about the impending danger.

2.3 Journalism as creative practice and research methodology

Lindgren and Phillips (2011, 75) describe two types of journalism research: 'journalism as creative practice' and 'journalism as research methodology'. They describe 'journalism as creative practice' as being long-form journalism, such as radio or television documentaries and books, along with analytical reflections on their creation which 'illuminate and articulate aspects of journalistic theory'. What may appear to be creative practice, is classified as research due to the level of research undertaken in order to create the creative

work. The breadth and depth of my research enabled me to construct a narrative of the event which captured how the flooding differed in each locality; how and why people died; how people survived; and to draw together suggestions from survivors for improvements to preparedness and emergency responses by state and local authorities in the future.

Lindgren and Phillips (2011, 76), by contrast, recognise that journalism can be a research methodology itself, in which information is gathered and presented, to fellow academics and/or to the public. The sequential gathering of information by journalists is similar to qualitative scientific and social research methods. First, a problem (or story lead) is identified, research (literature review) is undertaken to define the problem, an approach to the problem (or journalistic output) is selected, information is gathered and analysed and the findings are reported. There are clear similarities between Weerakkody's (2009, 42) six-step model for undertaking research media and communication projects and the journalistic approach, especially in the creation of long-form journalism. Table 2.1 sets out the six steps of the model and the corresponding steps in my research and creation of long-form journalistic products.

Table 2.1 Weerakkody's six-step research method and their application in long-form journalism

Weerakkody's model	The Torrent/The day that changed Grantham
1. Selecting and narrowing the topic	Selecting aspects of the disaster to document that was both logical as a concept and manageable by one person in a year.
2. Conducting the literature review	Surveying journalism research literature, reading and watching media coverage of the disaster; attending relevant sittings of the Floods Commission of Inquiry.
3. Developing the research design and plan	Writing the proposal for the Master of Arts (Research) project; writing the ethics application for the research project, writing the radio documentary proposal to ABC Radio National and the book proposal to the University of Queensland Press.
4. Choosing suitable methodologies and data collection methods.	Audio interviews were selected as the best method to ensure accuracy of information (compared with handwriting interview notes) and to minimise trauma to interviewees (compared with video recording the interviews which would require survivors to be confronted by a camera).
5. Data collection and analysis	130 survivors and rescuers in the disaster zone from Toowoomba to Grantham were interviewed in the eight months following the floods. The stories were transcribed and compiled into chapters to tell the story in chronological order.
6. Reporting the findings	Writing of the radio documentary script, rough-cut editing of the audio material for the documentary and the writing of the book.

Investigative journalism research methods are also recognised as academic tools for research (Pearson and McLean, 2010). The investigative skills journalists bring to their everyday work: their inquisitive nature, wide general knowledge, interview skills, substantial networks of expert contacts, their incisive and analytical management of facts and arguments and their grasp of current affairs combine to form a combination of research skills which enable them to discover and analyse new information.

2.4 Case Study Research

Research which examines the complexity of a single event is a case study. Denscombe (2007) found the case study a valuable research method to explain the subtlety of real life situations, drawing out the rich detail from different perspectives and to gather insights from the people who experienced the event. Case studies, according to Yin (1994), are a form of research which also allows the researcher to examine questions in order to give explanations about causal influences. Case studies also examine individual and group phenomena – such as how the interaction of individuals and groups contributed to the survival of many people.

The lack of ability to make generalisations from a case study is a recognised weakness of this type of research method. Lester (1999) cautions that the suggestions made by interviewees therefore cannot be simply transposed to other locations. In this case, however, the geographic location of this flood on a mountain range and its eastern foothills is similar to other geographic locations

along the east of Australia because of the Great Dividing Range which spans the three eastern states of the Australian mainland. Findings relating to risk of similar events and the need for improved warning systems may therefore apply to similar cities and towns along the Great Dividing Range in Australia and possibly to other similar geographic locations overseas.

2.5 Narrative journalism

Story-telling is a fundamental element of human history which is reflected in journalism. From earliest times, people have told other people stories or ‘news’. From as early as the time of Plato, before 400BC, there are records of people who witnessed events ‘reporting’ what happened to others who wanted to know the fate of people they knew. In an English translation of “The Dialogues of Plato” by Greek scholar and translator Benjamin Jowett first published in 1871, Socrates is surrounded by eager listeners upon his return from a battle:

Chaerephon, who is a kind of madman, started up and ran to me, seizing my hand, and saying, How did you escape, Socrates?

(I should explain that an engagement had taken place at Potidaea not long before we came away, of which the news had only just reached Athens.)

You see, I replied, that here I am.

There was a report, he said, that the engagement was very severe, and that many of our acquaintance had fallen.

That, I replied, was not far from the truth.

I suppose, he said, that you were present.

I was.

Then sit down, and tell us the whole story, which as yet we have only heard imperfectly.

The exchange between Chaerephon and Socrates illustrates that people have long-recognised the importance of seeking reliable eye witnesses of significant events to find out about those events. The Toowoomba and Lockyer Valley research adopted the same approach of deep listening to eye-witness accounts.

Kenyon and Randall (1997) find that a cathartic expression of emotion occurs from the process of telling the story as well as from the content of the story. Bauer and Toman (2003, 61) also note that talking about what happened and enabling survivors to talk about what they saw, smelled and heard helped to re-engage their cognitive processing, by ‘gathering the scattered pieces of sensation and emotions into a coherent and organised narrative’.

By contrast, the absence of news can cause great anxiety. For people within the disaster zone, the inability to access news became a major problem. Spring Bluff resident Craig Ritchie (pers.com. 2011) was virtually isolated at his house, with no power or communications for more than a week after the flood.

We didn’t have power here for ten days and it was the news of how everyone else was going that affected me because I didn’t know Ipswich and Brisbane were about to go under. It’s the news that I missed most out of everything: power, communications; I just had to rely

on the people who were coming up here to see if I was alright, for a bit of news.

2.6 Research interview techniques

Gillham (2005) outlines three main types of interviews used by researchers to gather qualitative data:

- a) Structured interviews (prepared survey questions),
- b) Unstructured interviews (open questions), and
- c) Semi-structured interviews (both open and closed questions)

This research employed semi-structured interviews with open questions, incorporating the prepared questions but also adding extra questions to elicit more detailed information and as wide a range of responses as possible. Flood survivors were asked:

- a) When did you (or your family) come to live here?
- b) What were you doing on the day of the flood?
- c) Did you have any warning that this was not going to be an ordinary day?
- d) What happened that you realised you were in danger?
- e) What did you do?
- f) What happened next?
- g) What could you see and hear around you?
- h) Did you think you would survive?
- i) Why do you think you survived?
- j) How and when did you make contact with the rest of your family?

- k) As you reflect on what happened, what lessons do you take from his disaster?
- l) As you reflect on what happened, what lessons do you think our authorities need to take from his disaster?
- m) What changes do you think need to be made?

As the research progressed and I became interested why so many people were willing to participate in research interviews despite their frightening experiences. I added an extra question to some participants who had endured especially traumatic or life-endangering events:

This is a voluntary research project – why did you decide to talk to me about your experiences that were at times very frightening?

2.8 Refining interview techniques

The large number of people (33 of the 120 interviewed) who had had near-death experiences provided an opportunity for me to refine my interview techniques with flood survivors. Processes of refining my interview technique were modelled on the process described by Renata Tesch (1990) in her ‘transformative’ process of experimenting with different techniques, observing the outcome, adjusting the technique and then adopting a refined plan. Tesch summarises her method as a simple four-step process which repeats itself: Plan → Act → Observe → Reflect → Plan. The balance between questioning and listening changed as the research progressed. At first I interjected with questions when I needed clarification but I found that listening to the whole narrative at first had several benefits, including making the interview process

emotionally manageable for those interviewees who had had near-death or other frightening experiences. Research findings on improved interview techniques for use with traumatised people are reported in section 4.8.

2.8 Documentary and Manuscript production

Preliminary research design, formulation of questions and ethics clearance documents were almost completed when a publisher agreed to publish my proposed book on the floods, for release by the first anniversary of the event. A manuscript deadline of September 2011 was set, in order to allow the publisher to meet a tight schedule for editing, typesetting and printing.

Given the deadline, I allocated a week for each location to find survivors, record their stories, transcribe the recordings and weave them into a chronology. Some survivors and rescuers, who were not available immediately, were recorded later and added into the chapters, as the new material became available. The manuscript deadline was extended by two weeks which gave me extra time to research and write the ‘Aftermath’ and ‘Rebuilding’ chapters, and arrange for an artist to draw the maps.

The radio documentary *The Day that Changed Grantham* was also scripted to a tight deadline, using the recorded interviews I had conducted with Grantham residents. From my script, I made an audio rough cut and paper edit. ABC 360 executive producer Claudia Taranto cut the final audio track from my paper edit script at the ABC studios in Sydney. Mrs Taranto travelled to Toowoomba to record my narration at the ABC Southern Queensland studio. Sound effects and

music were added at the ABC Sydney studios by sound engineer Louis Mitchell, who was so inspired by the material that he volunteered to compose and perform original music for the entire program.

2.9 Conclusion

The combinations of research methods chosen facilitated the production of the journalistic outputs and the journalism research into why disaster survivors chose to speak to reporters. Journalism was used as a creative practice and as a research methodology to undertake a case study into the complexities of an event by gathering narratives from the people involved.

Chapter 3 Online social networking

3.1 Introduction

Dave, I live in an area that is equally not used to being so saturated I just know that 56mm in an hour here would produce a flood of frightening proportions and one likely to put lives at risk. Falls higher than this in the immediate area are likely. I repeat my question ... Does someone in . . . Grantham . . . need to know what's possible? Who do we tell?

Neil Pennell (WeatherZone online forum at 1.42pm on 10 January 2011)

Until the advent of the printing press, news and information primarily spread via word of mouth. Invention of the printing press led to the organised dissemination of news via traditional newspapers, radio and television media that, according to Dennis McQuail, (2000, 55) were 'largely one-directional, impersonal one-to-many carriers of news and information.' The mass media continued a similar mode of communication until relatively recent history, when the advent of the computer age, mobile phones and online social networking technologies have facilitated an increase in the amount of news that travels by word of mouth, multi-directionally and person-to-person.

During major disasters, residents are sometimes the only people who witness events or are in a position to be able to record live pictures of the event as it unfolds. Bowman and Willis (2003, 47) noted that the dynamics of new news technologies mean that for the first time in history, members of the public can now publish words and pictures online more immediately than traditional outlets can gather and disseminate news and pictures. When many people record the same event, 'multiperspectival news' emerges (Gans 2002, 103). Facts are presented from a wide range of perspectives, in contrast to the traditional reporting of 'both sides of the story' where commonly only two opposing perspectives are presented.

Whilst most bloggers are focussed on micro-local events, if the events that happen are of state, national or global significance, news blogs can quickly attain a global audience. Early examples of global news blogs include the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York on September 11 in 2001; the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; the Boxing Day 2004 tsunami in Sumatra and the London Bombings in July 2005, (Bruns, 2006). By 2009, it was common for first reports of disasters to come not from traditional media outlets but from local residents using social networks such as Twitter (Shirky 2009). The technical development of a video camera function being added to mobile phones in recent years has enabled members of the public on the scene of unexpected events to video events as they happen and upload them almost immediately to the internet. Onlookers with mobile phones have become eye-

witness recorders of events ranging from the personally significant to the globally significant.

Online social media played vital roles during the Toowoomba and Lockyer Valley floods for individuals, citizen reporters, journalists and emergency services organisations. The six important roles social networking media fulfilled before, during and post-disaster were:

- a) Individuals used social media as an emergency communication system to find out if family members or friends had survived.
- b) Citizen reporters in the disaster zone used social networking to convey warnings and emergency information and to report the event.
- c) Reporters and media organisations used social networking sites to report the event and generate and follow news leads.
- d) Emergency services organisations used social networking sites to deliver news and emergency information directly to their audiences
- e) Individuals and organisations used social networking sites to coordinate emergency supplies of food, clothing and other assistance
- f) Individuals and families created 'tribute pages' on social networking sites in memory of those who died.

3.2 Are you ok?

Hundreds of people who were unable to contact family members in the disaster zone used online social networking such as Facebook to try to get information from the disaster zone to find out who was alive and who had died in the

Lockyer Valley. Intense two-way communication between flood survivors and their family and friends outside the disaster zone is recorded on the Facebook group 'QLD Floods – Withcott, Murphy's Creek, Postman's Ridge – Community Support' created on 9 January 2011. 'Fiona' posted to the Facebook page that she was 'trying to find information about Ken Smith of Twidales Rd, Helidon Spa. If anyone has heard if Ken is ok could you please let me know, my uncle Len from Canada is concerned.' The reply came six hours later: 'Thanks everyone Ken called my parents this morning. Cheers.' The traditional role of police to locate missing people and confirming their safety was being replaced by social media networking amongst the community. Similarly, journalists linked into the social networks were able to source information and make contact with families who were looking for missing people.

3.3 Citizen reporting

During the flood disaster, the flow of information from the media to the public and vice versa became a dynamic system, with audiences turning to the media for emergency information and the media appealing to audiences for eye-witness information, photographs and video footage which was then broadcast to the public.

3.3.1 Citizen-initiated warnings

McDougall (2011) has highlighted the increasing importance of volunteered and shared information during disasters. During the Lockyer Valley flood,

members of a social network site, WeatherZone, volunteered and shared information providing site-specific warnings to small Lockyer Valley communities. Forum members used the Bureau of Meteorology website's radar images of a storm cell, which developed suddenly at about 11am, to give specific warnings to people about the unfolding disaster, even though the Bureau did not issue specific warnings for those areas. As a citizen reporter, I posted warnings based on the intensity of rain and the amount of flooding near the top of Mount Lofty that I observed from my house. I posted video with a voice-over warning that Brisbane could be at risk of flooding in coming days. My citizen journalism report was the first warning that many people had of the onset of the disaster in Toowoomba and was many hours earlier than specific warnings issued by authorities.

Strikingly accurate flash flood warnings for specific towns in the Lockyer Valley were given via the Weather forum more than three hours earlier than the official Bureau of Meteorology warnings were issued for those locations. The disaster was unfolding faster than authorities could provide adequate warnings. An implication for journalists covering disasters in future is that socially-networked people in disaster zones may prove to be more reliable sources than emergency services spokespeople who lack situational awareness.

The brief text messages sent via Twitter were a useful way for Brisbane residents to pass on information about the looming flood. Axel Bruns and his colleagues (2012) found a spike of Twitter traffic of more than 600 tweets on

the hash tag ‘qldfloods’ on the evening of 10 January in response to the Toowoomba CBD flooding. Tweets on the qldflood hash tag increased in frequency over the following day as the flood approached Brisbane peaking at 1,100 tweets per hour:

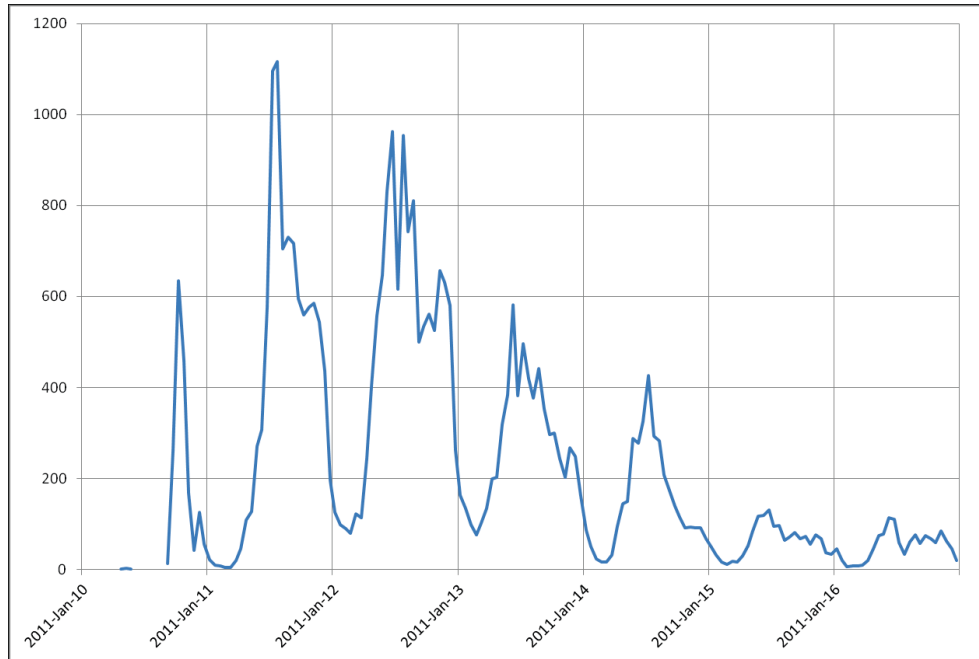


Figure 3.1 #qldfloods tweets per hour, January 10-16, 2011 (Bruns et al 2011, 23)

3.3.2 Citizen reporters

Dan Gillmor describes how audiences, who were once passive consumers of news produced by reporters, are now producing news themselves using new media platforms. Journalism has made the transition from ‘journalism as lecture’ to ‘journalism to conversation’ (Gillmor 2004, xxiv; also Hermida 2010). The three distinct groups - journalists, newsmakers and audience, as described by Gillmor (2004, 237) - became blurred during this disaster because

some audience members volunteered themselves as newsmakers. Several Toowoomba residents who witnessed the flood in the CBD took video footage which they uploaded to YouTube or sent to other people to warn them about the flood. In some cases, emergency workers were alerted to the disaster by people in Toowoomba before they were alerted by the emergency services for which they worked.

Veteran reporter and digital journalism researcher Alfred Hermida has observed (2010, para 11) that there has been a shift in the relationship between journalists and the public:

The shift from an era of broadcast mass media to an era of networked digital media has fundamentally altered flows of information. Non-linear, many-to-many digital communication technologies have transferred the means of media production and dissemination into the hands of the public, and are rewriting the relationship between the audience and journalists.

The benefit for readers of receiving information from news bloggers is that the bloggers are directly engaged in the news events, or at least have first-hand information. On January 10, 2011, residents in the disaster zone posted photographs of the flood on social networking sites. One of these, Jiaren Lau (2011) created a news blog with photographs and very detailed text about her experience of the disaster. While she was not a journalist, her report demonstrated her in-depth knowledge of the city of Toowoomba, its geography at the top of a mountain range and included text about her experience of the event and photographs she had taken.

Freeman (2011, 69) describes how media organisations and emergency services are using social networking technologies in addition to television and radio, to provide information to citizens during disasters. At the outset of this disaster, media organisations began crowd-sourcing information. Toowoomba's ABC radio station was taken off networked programs from Brisbane and began broadcasting live by putting to air callers who phoned in with eye witness accounts of the disaster as pedestrians and cars were being swept from the streets. The callers were able to name the flooded roads to warn other motorists and give the locations of landslides that had cut highways. Television news reporters browsed YouTube for videos of the floods that were being uploaded and used the vision to compile footage for their news bulletins because road closures meant news crews could not access Toowoomba or the Lockyer Valley by road.

3.4 Crowd sourcing from social networks

The increase in the speed of newsgathering and the advent of the crowd-sourcing paradigm have greatly impacted the way reporters operate in disaster zones. Instead of relying on the traditionally 'authoritative' sources such as police and other emergency services for information, crowd-sourcing via online social media allows journalists to source video footage, photographs and information directly from eye witnesses in the disaster zone. Alfreda Hermida (2010) has observed that with the advent of online information technologies, 'journalism, which was once difficult and expensive to produce, today

surrounds us like the air we breathe . . . The challenge going forward is helping the public negotiate and regulate this flow of awareness information, facilitating the collection, transmission and understanding of news.’

Journalists in the Toowoomba/Lockyer Valley disaster zone quickly realised that emergency organisations which had no warning of the impending disaster had virtually no situational awareness and therefore could not provide authoritative information in time for news deadlines. Journalists and news organisations turned to their own social networks and to social media networking sites to gather information, photographs and videos that were being posted on the Internet (Gearing 2011c). Social networking sites did not replace real social networks and news contacts, but they expanded the reporter’s networks and enhanced their ability to find and follow news leads. In some instances, information posted on social networking sites was broadcast overseas before people very close to the disaster zone were aware of the flash flooding. In some cases, people in the disaster zone received phone calls from family or friends overseas who had seen videos broadcast on television news overseas, asking if they were alright before the local people realised there was a local flash flood emergency.

The advent of the social media not only adds to the traditional tools of the reporter but increases the power of them exponentially since everyone who witnesses an event may have pictures and video footage. Media organisations

made general invitations to readers, listeners and viewers to submit photographs and videos of the disaster.

A huge shift of audiences occurred in Queensland from newspapers, radio and television to online content during the January flood disaster. Media agency Universal McCann found that during January 2011, the public traffic to Brisbane's Courier-Mail website jumped from an average of 500,000 unique browsers to nearly 1.6 million (Canning 2011, 29). Page impressions increased four-fold, from 10 million to 40 million. The competitor Fairfax-owned brisbanetimes.com.au news website registered similar increases in demand and the Australian Provincial News website recorded an increase in use during the month of 295 per cent (Canning 2011, 32).

3.5 QPS direct

Writing as recently as 2010, Hermida predicted that Twitter might be overtaken as a vehicle for 'ambient' journalism - news that is participatory and pervasive in the social environment - by other digital technologies such as MySpace and Facebook. The social media sites have quickly gained very large shares of the market, attracting organisations to the 'eyeballs' they attract. In Queensland, authorities such as the Queensland Police Service are using Facebook and Twitter to deliver news directly to their audiences.

QPS Media and Public Affairs Branch executive director Kym Charlton began the Facebook account in May 2010 without any media launch. During the

following eight months it grew steadily to more than 7,000 users (Charlton 2011, ii). The number of users more than doubled in two weeks as natural disasters threatened, beginning with Cyclone Tasha which threatened the Queensland coast from Christmas Day 2010. When the Fitzroy River peaked in Rockhampton on January 5, user numbers jumped to about 12,000 (Charlton 2011, iii). The practical information posted on the QPS Facebook page became vital information on January 10. Chris Griffith reported that when police posted at 9.17pm warning for people in all low-lying communities near Toowoomba to ‘move to higher ground immediately’, it received 94 responses from Facebook users asking for specific information about what to do (Griffith 2011, 32). The QPS then replied with specific directions that enabled people to know where and how to go for help. QPS Facebook user numbers soared that day to almost 18,000 (Charlton 2011, iii).

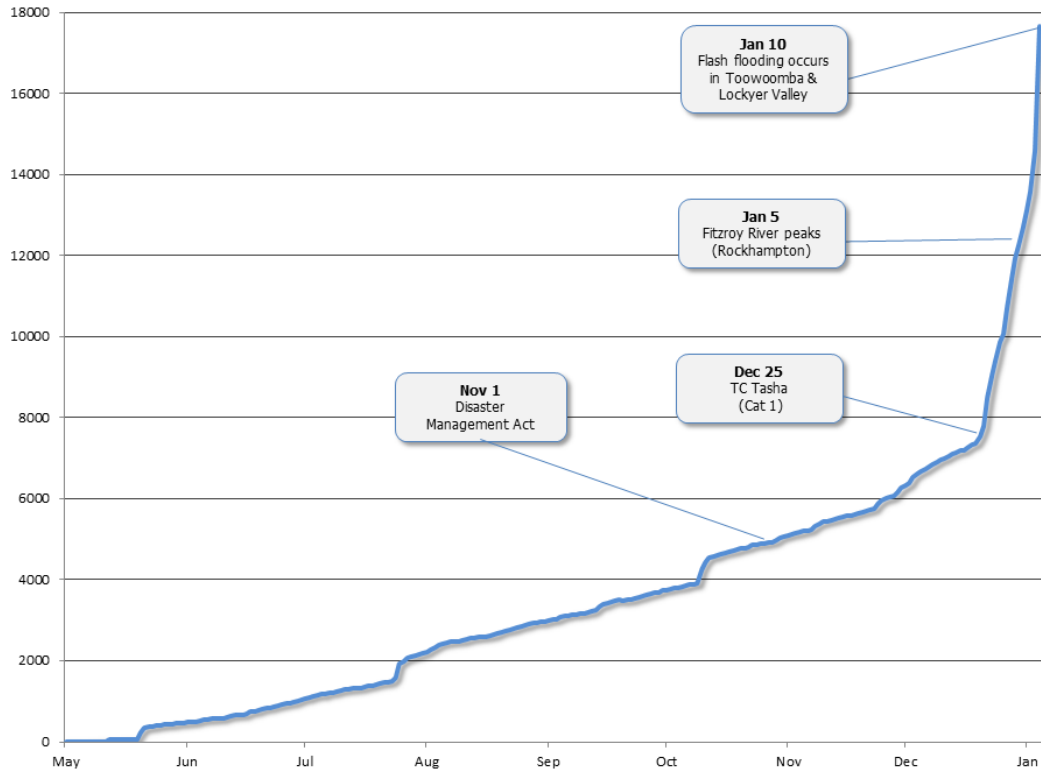


Figure 3.2 Number of QPS Facebook ‘Likes’ from May 2010 to January 2011 (Charlton 2011, iii)

Striking as the growth in user numbers had been, the growth was to be eclipsed by far by the growth in user numbers during the Ipswich and Brisbane floods and Cyclone Yasi. At the height of the Cyclone Yasi emergency in early February the site had more than 170,000 followers (Charlton 2011, iv).

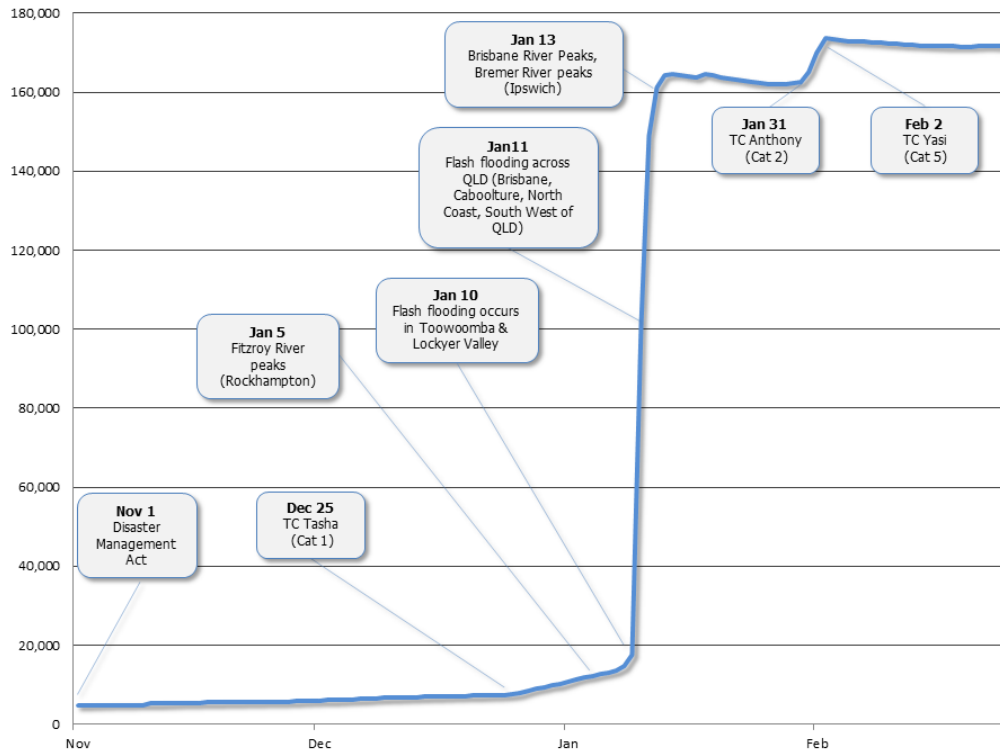


Figure 4.3 Growth of QPS Facebook ‘Likes’ from May 2010 to February 2011 (Charlton 2011, iv)

Charlton (2012, iv) listed the benefits of social media in the disaster:

It is immediate and allowed Police Media to proactively push out large volumes of information to large numbers of people ensuring there was no vacuum of official information

The QPS Facebook page became the trusted, authoritative hub for the dissemination of information and facts for the community and media

Large amounts of specific information could be directed straight to communities without them having

to rely on mainstream media coverage to access relevant details

The QPS quickly killed rumour and misreporting before it became 'fact' in the mainstream media, mainly through the #mythbuster hashtag

It provides access to immediate feedback and information from the public at scenes

The mainstream media embraced it and found it to be a valuable and immediate source of information

It provided situational awareness for QPS members in disaster-affected locations who otherwise had no means of communications.

Based on her experience of the QPS Facebook page, Charlton advised other emergency organisations to establish social media capabilities before they are needed. Charlton (2012, vii) was adamant in her belief that emergency organisations should embrace social media: 'If you are not doing social media, do it now. If you wait until it's needed, it will be too late.' She also recognised the need for speed and the elimination of the usual hierarchical approvals for external communications: 'Rethink clearance processes. Trust your staff to release information.' Charlton also emphasised the role of social media as an information gatherer: 'Do not use social media solely to push out information. Use it to receive feedback and involve your online community.'

3.6 Networking the recovery

Bowman and Willis (2003, 13) note that in the new media eco-system, online communities discuss and extend the stories created by the mainstream media. Bruns describes this process as one where media consumers move from being only 'users' to becoming 'producers'(sic) - a hybrid of producer and user. Once engaged in 'producing' news, many citizens begin also to engage in the democratic process, becoming 'producers' not only of news, but also of democracy (Bruns 2006, 11). I observed that flood survivors with no previous media experience became actively engaged with the media as willing representatives of their towns, repeatedly agreeing to be interviewed to update the news media on the progress of the searches for missing people and the need for food, clothing and emergency supplies. Various individuals volunteered to speak to reporters about the emergency needs of their communities. They realised the quickest way to obtain action from local, state and federal government agencies was via media coverage. Unsurprisingly, the locations which had the highest level of media coverage received the most government assistance. For example, Grantham was the first location in Australia to be 'moved' to higher ground, residents were offered a free land swap – to exchange their (virtually worthless) flooded land with a newly-developed block in an estate above flood level adjoining the town.

3.7 Socially networked grief

Facebook became the conduit for a huge outpouring of sympathy for the families of the children who died in the floods. Relatives, friends, local community members, people around Australia and people around the world posted messages of sadness, love and support to grieving families of the children who died. The public messages of sympathy provided information reporters could draw upon. Reporters were also able to make contact with relatives and friends, reducing the necessity for dozens of reporters to phone or door-knock families seeking information.

3.8 Conclusion

The advent of online social networking has enabled people to communicate globally with virtually instantaneous speed. Online social media played vital roles during the Toowoomba and Lockyer Valley floods for individuals, citizen reporters, journalists and emergency services. The six important roles social networking media fulfilled before, during and post-disaster were:

- a) Individuals used social media as an emergency communication system to find out if family members or friends had survived.
- b) Citizen reporters in the disaster zone used social networking to convey warnings and emergency information and to report the event.
- c) Reporters and media organisations used social networking sites to report the event and generate and follow news leads.

- d) Emergency services organisations used social networking sites to deliver news and emergency information directly to their audiences
- e) Individuals and organisations used social networking sites to coordinate emergency supplies of food, clothing and other assistance
- f) Individuals and families created ‘tribute pages’ on social networking sites in memory of those who died.

Reporters working in disaster zones can improve their reporting ability by tapping into online social media to gather and disseminate news using the new media tools available through social media, as used by individuals, citizen reporters, media organisations, emergency services and relief agencies.

Chapter 4 Reporting trauma

4.1 Introduction

There were journalists who were very understanding and others were just leeches. [Reporters] were coming in and spending time in [the evacuation centre] quietly and listening. They camped out in there, eating and drinking with people. They had no ID on them. One was sitting up at the [Grantham Primary] school when I was having a good cry [with a woman who had just been told she had lost three members of her family] and he was sitting there very quietly listening to everything but didn't tell me who he was.

Then he said, 'Could I quote that?'

I said, 'Absolutely not. You were listening in to a private conversation. You have no right. If you had told me you were a journalist I wouldn't have said those things that I've said to that person knowing you were listening. If you quote that, look out.'

Lisa Spierling (pers. com 2011)

This chapter will examine the reporting of trauma by journalists in disaster zones. Given the focus on best-practice reporting, I will also explore the benefits to traumatised disaster survivors who chose to speak about their experiences for this study. Finally, I will make recommendations for avoiding

or reducing trauma when interviewing people who may be suffering from post trauma symptoms.

Journalists are often amongst the ‘first-responders’ to emergencies involving death or injury, heading towards a scene of injury or death when the public are directed away from the scene and barred from it. Reporting on trauma is a challenging and confronting task, especially during disasters where there are multiple casualties. Austin and Godleski (1999, 897) describe the three common types of trauma experienced by people in disasters:

The first type of trauma is the experience of terror or horror when one's own life is threatened or one is exposed to grotesque or disturbing sights. The second type is traumatic bereavement, which occurs when beloved friends or family members die as a result of disaster. The third occurs as a reaction to disruption of normal living, which is a common element of virtually all disasters.

Many of the participants in this study described one or more of these traumas, and several experienced all three.

Reporters working in disaster zones are often working to tight deadlines, following leads, gathering stories, checking facts and writing and filing copy. Developing the discipline of sitting with survivors and hearing their stories without feeling rushed by deadline pressure is a skill which must be developed in advance for effective reporting of survivor stories as well as to minimise

harm to survivors who are willing to be interviewed. Several flood survivors reported feeling ‘used’ by journalists they encountered in the first few days and weeks after the disaster, but despite their negative experiences, they still agreed to participate in this study.

4.2 Post-disaster trauma

While journalists working in disaster zones are not qualified to diagnose medical conditions, they need to be aware of the risks to traumatised people of interviewing them. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is one of a constellation of mental health problems which can be triggered by stressful situations. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) found that only a minority of people exposed to traumatic events develop longstanding psychiatric disorders. However, of those who do, Freedy and Donkervoet reported (1995, 23) that PTSD is the most common type of mental health problem that may follow exposure to a traumatic event.

PTSD is described by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (2012) as a condition which is triggered by exposure to a traumatic event in which a person was ‘confronted with an event or event that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury,’ to themselves or other people and during which they experienced ‘intense fear, helplessness or horror.’ The traumatised person experiences PTSD as the re-living of the trauma by recalling it, by dreaming about it or by acting or feeling as if the traumatic event is occurring again. The September 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Centre in New York focussed attention on the need for improved crisis

responses to large groups of people who simultaneously experience trauma. Professional crisis responder Ann Bauer and therapist Sarah Toman (2003, 56-71) found that immediate crisis counselling or 'psychological first aid' could improve longer term psychological outcomes, just as medical first aid improves medical outcomes. They found that survivors could be assisted through early post-trauma symptoms such as flashbacks, by understanding their initial reactions of shock, denial and numbness which block out sensations such as sight, smell and sound. Several flood survivors described post-trauma symptoms such as continuing to hear the sound of the flood water, continuing to 'see' the flood water, being unable to drive across wet roads, being unable to sleep, being frightened or anxious when hearing rain on the roof or seeing rain.

Given the risk of causing distress to someone who may be suffering from post trauma symptoms, journalists need to carefully assess the risk and make a professional judgement on whether to invite the person to be interviewed. Despite having endured traumatic situations and even traumatic bereavement, some people may be willing to be interviewed. Several of the participants in this study agreed to participate in in-depth interviews even though it meant them having to recount, sometimes for the first time, very frightening experiences. Surprisingly, several of the participants agreed to be interviewed even though they had not yet spoken about the event to their husband, wife, children or other close relatives or friends. In some cases the participants had not spoken about the circumstances surrounding the death of a family member.

In two instances, children who had not spoken to their parents about the disaster, first spoke about their experiences during an interview. In both of these instances, the parents expressed gratitude that communication about the event with their child had been facilitated by the research interview.

4.3 Interviewing traumatised people

News reporting inevitably involves reporting about trauma. Mark Brayne (2007, 4) offers many commonsense suggestions for journalists at the scene of a traumatic event or its aftermath, including being patient despite the pressure of deadlines; being prepared for a range of shock reactions from victims and survivors; and approaching people with care, respect and kindness. He warns that reporters should be aware that the interviewees are unlikely to be media-savvy and therefore it's important to introduce them to other members of the news crew and explain what will happen with the story or pictures. Brayne emphasises the need for accuracy despite the difficulty that people's eye witness recollections can be unreliable when they are suffering severe stress. US public affairs officer Ami Neiberger-Miller (2008) who assists families of deceased American servicemen through the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, emphasises the importance of building rapport with survivors before asking more difficult questions about the circumstances of a death, to respect the wishes of the family, for example, regarding photographs. Neiberger-Miller recommends that reporters directly approach victim families:

I think we would really like reporters to approach us and ask. Don't be afraid! . . . Many of the families are

open to talking to journalists and to photographs, because they want their loved ones remembered, and their sacrifice honored, but families need to be treated with sensitivity.

4.4 Emergency response

Reporters play a public role in reporting disasters, which facilitates community assistance to be mobilised in response to human suffering and need. Accurate and timely reporting can help to target community responses. The reaction from Australian and overseas media audiences to the compelling stories of the devastation in the Lockyer Valley was spontaneous horror, swiftly followed by sympathy and generous and ongoing offers of manpower for the recovery and generous donations of emergency supplies and financial assistance. In my reporting on the region, I noted that survivors in the disaster zone were overwhelmed by the generosity of the public to their plight. Yoder's (2008, 25-31) study of disaster recovery mechanisms in the aftermath of the 2007 Virginia Technical College Shooting notes similar mechanisms to those observed in the wake of the Lockyer Valley disaster: a strong desire to help; offers of social support; and community resilience and healing.

4.5 Personal benefit of sharing stories

Social workers recognise the therapeutic benefit to survivors of telling their stories, even when those stories are traumatic. Norman (2000, 317) found that 'sharing traumatic stories, including the possibilities of positive by-products and personal learning, appears to benefit victimised individuals'. Survivors

could be supported by the social worker using language of surviving and thriving, of positive change and growth for the individual and for their communities (Norman 2000, 317). While reporters are not therapists, it is important to recognise that for survivors who want to tell their stories, the telling is not necessarily a re-traumatisation. Instead, the telling of the story can be a positive experience for the survivor, especially if the reporter draws out aspects of their resilience, their learning from the experience or their learning on behalf of their community.

Several participants in the study gave their reason for participating as the need for 'lessons to be learned'. Most of the participants in the research were deeply grateful that someone was willing to listen to them, to record the stories and to compile a book about the event. They expressed a strong need for what happened during the disaster to be documented so that it would provide a permanent record for the communities affected and also so that what happened could be better understood further afield.

4.6 Posttraumatic growth

Much research finds that survivors of trauma, such as people who have lived through war, may simultaneously exhibit symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder but also posttraumatic *growth* (eg Mattoon 2010). Posttraumatic growth is a combination of positive changes experienced by survivors of trauma. These can include improved relationships, a greater appreciation for life, a greater sense of personal strength and spiritual development. Tedescki

and Calhoun (2004, 2) found that trauma survivors themselves often identify the paradox that despite their losses, they have experienced valuable ‘gains’:

Much like earthquakes can impact the physical environment, traumatic circumstances, characterized by their unusual, uncontrollable, potentially irreversible and threatening qualities, can produce an upheaval in trauma survivors' major assumptions about the world, their place in it and how they make sense of their daily lives. In reconsidering these assumptions, there are the seeds for new perspectives on all these matters and a sense that valuable - although painful - lessons have been learned.

Flood survivors interviewed in this project often spoke of their new-found appreciation for life and the relative unimportance of material goods which they had found could be taken away surprisingly quickly. As I listened to the stories of survival and rescue I drew out detail about the consolations people recognised, for example that although they had lost their home and possessions, they and their children had survived. In those families where lives had been lost most people had found consolations in their own mind, for example Bess Fraser who held onto the belief that her sister and nephew would have been struck unconscious by the collapsing roof of their house and had not suffered distress as the house was swept away. The reporting of the consolations that survivors held onto drew sympathy and admiration from audiences, as reflected by feedback to news reports, the radio documentary and the book.

Social work therapists are taught to listen for, and to identify strengths and survivorship, in the stories of their clients. This, according to Norman (2000, 308), assists survivors to begin to establish a foundation for healing from a traumatic experience. Reporters in the Toowoomba–Lockyer Valley disaster in most cases were in contact with survivors before any counselling agencies. While reporters have no therapeutic qualifications and should not attempt to ‘counsel’ survivors, it is helpful to recognise the possibility that telling stories of survival can have positive effects on people and be capable of empowering victims by emphasising their strengths which played a role in their survival. During the flood research, a child who had survived the flood had not spoken about the disaster for several months but spoke in an interview with me about his distress when he thought his mother had been killed. His mother, who was present, was not only grateful that her son had been able to talk about his fear but was relieved that she could then obtain professional medical care for her son.

During interviews with other survivors, I drew out information about the resourcefulness of many people to survive or to rescue others. These skills were quite wide-ranging and included:

- a) practical skills, eg climbing buildings, cutting fences, swimming;
- b) situational awareness, eg understanding creek locations and past flood heights;
- c) strong social networks, both real and virtual,

- d) weather awareness - the ability to understand and respond to local weather forecasting information; and
- e) emergency equipment, eg ropes, boats and chainsaws

The willingness of reporters to listen to interviewees was appreciated by several flood survivors and in some cases led to immediate problems being identified or resolved. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004, 3) found that 'listening - without necessarily trying to solve - tends to allow patients to process trauma into growth'. This may explain why survivors of this disaster found that 'being heard' by a reporter who was interested enough to listen to and record their story without making any judgement on the story, was found to be helpful by research participants. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) found that therapists who listened to the story of the trauma and its aftermath communicated the highest degree of respect for the patient and encouraged them to see the value in their own experience, paving the way for posttraumatic growth. Grantham survivors Peter and Marie van Straten, who had been in hospital after the disaster and therefore unable to speak to the media about their ordeal, found the process of telling their story therapeutic when they were interviewed for the first time six months after the disaster. Mrs van Straten recognised posttraumatic growth in herself by that stage, commenting that: 'I hope with all my heart that my story is going to help somebody. I need people to know that out of horrible things, good things can come.'

4.7 Posttraumatic growth experienced by reporters

Reporters can also experience posttraumatic growth through their reporting of trauma or violence. Reporter Donna Alvis Banks was traumatised when she was sent on April 16, 2007, to a school where 33 children had been shot dead (Banks, 2008). She was later haunted by the sound of mobile phones that were ringing as parents and friends of the dead children tried to contact them. However, after this experience she resolved that although violence would continue to happen, the issue for reporters was ‘being prepared for [stories involving violence], trying to find as journalists how we can help a community heal by the way we handle these stories.’ Banks recognised in herself posttraumatic growth: ‘I do think it's changed me as a person. It's made me grow. I think you can grow from trauma. It's made me seek out the good that happens in the worst situations, and there is a lot of good and a lot of human dignity.’

4.8 Minimising trauma to disaster survivors

Several well-recognised techniques were used to minimise trauma to participants in this study: selecting a suitable time for the interview; being flexible to find a suitable location for the interview; empowering participants to know they did not have to answer questions which could upset them; listening without interrupting; providing the emotional security of stopping the interview if participants became upset; by offering access to counselling and being committed to accuracy. Each of these will now be explained in more detail:

4.8.1 Timing

Journalists and news organisations strive to be first to report breaking news. This drives journalists to attempt to speak to people affected by disasters as quickly as possible; however very few reporters consider the consequences for interviewees of being interviewed when they are in a state of shock. Research by the Melbourne-based Centre for Advanced Journalism has found that more than half of the 30 survivors of the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria on February 7, 2009, who had been interviewed after the fires, did not recall being interviewed. However, they told researchers that the subsequent coverage had affected their lives, sometimes in a negative way (Aedy, 2012). Gawenda (2012) concluded that the interviewees had been in such a state of shock that they had not been able to give informed consent to being interviewed. He said this pointed to the need for more research into ethical questions raised by interviewing traumatised people, so that journalists could clearly define for themselves what they were not prepared to do in order to get a story.

Some participants in the flood research who were not ready to be interviewed when they were first approached, were invited to participate later. In each case, these interviewees were willing to participate.

4.8.2 Flexibility

Interviews were conducted at the preferred location for interviewees. In some cases this was their home or a friend's home but in some cases it was their workplace or my home (which is in a quiet location and therefore suitable for

recording). Some interviews of rescuers were conducted by telephone because the participants were interstate or a long distance away.

4.8.3 Empowering the participants

Each interviewee was told before the interview that they did not have to answer any questions they did not wish to answer. None of the interviewees refused to answer a question.

4.8.4 Emotional security

During interviews, if participants appeared distressed I stopped the recorder and offered for the interviewee to cease the interview or to have a break. In each case, the participant chose to continue with the interview.

4.8.5 Listening without interrupting

During my initial interviews I interjected with questions during the participant's initial discourse about what happened on the day of the flood. I experimented with allowing the entire discourse of the event to be completed before asking any questions for clarification. At the end of the participant's narrative, I asked questions to clarify details about what had happened, their reaction to what happened or what they were thinking as events were occurring. I found that delaying questioning until the participant had completed their whole narrative allowed the interviewees to manage their level of emotion and to pass over disturbing parts of the story as quickly as they wished. At the end of their narrative, my questions revisited parts of the story which were more emotional.

Participants managed to respond to these questions, giving much more detail about the event or their reactions and were much better able to regulate their emotional responses.

4.8.6 Access to counselling

Participants were given the contact details of counselling services that were available, including Lifeline 24 hour telephone counselling; Floodlight, a post-flood counselling offered in the community by Queensland Health; and counselling available through Queensland University of Technology for research participants.

4.8.7 Commitment to accuracy

Several participants mentioned that previous media reports about the floods had contained inaccuracies. The publication and broadcast of inaccurate reports was very distressing and upsetting to the survivors. In some cases the inaccuracies were due to communications infrastructure problems associated with the disaster. In other cases the inaccuracies were errors, for example inaccurate spellings of names which, in some cases, had still not been corrected a year after the event. Participants in the research were offered the opportunity to check my draft of the chapters in which they appeared. This offer was taken up by several emergency services staff and some survivors and relatives of victims. This allowed for corrections to be made to the book manuscript.

4.9 Why do survivors speak to reporters?

Despite having conducted many ‘death knock’ interviews in my career, this was the first time I clearly recall several interviewees stopping me as I left them, hugging me, and with tears in their eyes, taking my hand and thanking me for hearing their story and begging me to continue the task of gathering the stories of this disaster. I was surprised the first time this happened but more surprised as similar thanks were given by other interviewees. These moments drove home to me the importance of journalism and of the privilege journalists have in being trusted with such important stories.

In designing the research I included a question to find out *why* participants who had been through traumatic situations had decided to be interviewed. The responses provide an important glimpse into an under-researched topic: the reasons why traumatised individuals decide to speak to reporters. Participant responses fell into five categories (see Table 4.1):

- a) Lessons need to be learned from the disaster;
- b) Desire for the public to know what had happened;
- c) Sense of duty to make sure warning systems and disaster responses are improved in future;
- d) Personal recovery; and
- e) Timing

Table 4.1 Reasons for volunteering to speak about disaster experiences to the media

Why did you volunteer to be interviewed about your experience during the flood?	Number of respondents n = 30
Lessons need to be learned	6
Desire for the public to know what happened	9
A sense of duty to make sure warning systems and disaster responses are improved in future.	4
As part of my personal recovery	10
Financial disinterest of reporters in listening to survivor stories	2
Enough time has elapsed for me to be able to speak	2
Total	33

4.9.1 Lessons need to be learned from the disaster

Some of the survivors spoke about very frightening ordeals during the flood. Several were moved to tears as they related their story but they were determined to continue so that their story could be documented in order for lessons to be learned from the disaster. Gilbert Kilah of Grantham, for example, had clung to a telegraph pole in the torrent for an hour and a half, not knowing

the fate of two teenage girls who had been with him and terrified that a large object might hit the pole and cut off his fingers. Gilbert Kilah narrowly escaped with his life and realised the flood could have been much more deadly if all the creeks affecting the town had been in flood on the same day and that authorities needed to be aware of the risk:

I'm surprised that so few (people) died. There are lessons to be learned from all this. It had the potential with rain falling in a wider catchment area to be five or six feet deeper in Grantham. If all the creeks had flowed at the same time and at the same rate, I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you. Simple as that.

Helidon teenager, Angela Emmerson who took part in the research, was close to Helidon bridge where the Perry family car was swept off the Warrego Highway and the family was filmed on the roof. Angela Emmerson was willing to recount her ordeal in the hope other people could learn from her experience:

If someone else can learn just one lesson from what I've told you then that might save someone's life. It was horrible for me. Yes, I survived though. If I can save someone else's life from them hearing this, then that's great. And being able to tell your story, makes you think that people care and they want to know what's going on which is also great.

4.9.2 Desire for the public to know what had happened

The public sharing of stories has been found by various researchers including Wilson, Leary, Mitchell and Ritchie (2009) to benefit survivors such as soldiers returning from war zones, by improving public understanding of the experiences of veterans and their families as the soldiers readjust to civilian life. Several participants in this flood research volunteered that the major reason for speaking about the disaster was to improve public understanding of what had happened. They felt that despite there being substantial coverage of the disaster, there had not been enough detail given so that audiences could understand the complexity of the disaster and how severely it had affected people in the various small townships and rural districts.

Some flood survivors said they had been overwhelmed by the generosity of both relatives, friends and strangers who took them into their homes, gave them accommodation, food, clothing, goods, financial support, use of heavy earthmoving equipment and other practical help. They used the opportunity of being interviewed to place on the public record their heart-felt thanks to people who had helped the communities affected by the disaster.

Helicopter pilot Brian Willmettt rescued his neighbour at Postmans Ridge but a friend who lived nearby died when her brick house was swept away. Brian Willmettt told me that ‘history is history and it’s got to be told’:

I think if history is going to be recorded it’s got to be accurate as well. I’ve told you what I believe happened . . .

Talking to you helps me honour Sylvia. To get emotional about Sylvia honours her.

In Helidon, Jean and Lloyd Warr, scrambled to the roof of their house as the water suddenly started flowing through their house and rose higher than the gutters. Their concern was for the tragic loss of life in the Lockyer Valley. Despite the distressing ordeal she endured in re-telling her story, Mrs Warr felt a responsibility to let people know what had happened:

If people don't tell people what happened, the next time it happens there will be just the same awful consequences. We will be in the position again where too many people will die for stupid reasons.

Craig Ritchie from Spring Bluff spoke of the importance of telling the public how those affected by events were feeling.

It really helps with public donations. It really just shows people that we are all vulnerable. We'll all pitch in and help each other. It's extremely important to get that news out there. We didn't have power here for ten days and it was the news of how everyone else was going that affected me because I didn't know. I didn't know Ipswich and Brisbane were about to go under. It's the news that I missed most out of everything – power, communication – I just had to rely on the people who were coming up to see if I was alright for a bit of news.

4.9.3 A sense of duty to make sure warning systems and disaster responses are improved in future

Withcott publican Neil Simpson who witnessed dramatic rescues spoke of the importance of searching for ways for ‘preventing this horrible thing happening ever again. If I can give one little bit of information that helps a bit, that would be great.’

In Murphys Creek, Nelly Gitsham was rescued by her neighbour after risking her life to save a horse. She told me:

I’ve got no problem with talking because if my story is out there then maybe the state can look back and say ‘there’s a person who didn’t get warning, like everyone in Murphy’s Creek and all the poor people in Grantham who lost their lives. Maybe they should do something else about it.

Matthew Keep spoke publicly about his ordeal to highlight the system failures which resulted in the deaths of his mother, mother-in-law and his two-year-old daughter, Jessica, at Grantham (Gearing 2011b).

There has to be a level of accountability for local governments to adhere to frameworks that are determined at a state level. To say that they will get it right for the future holds little comfort for my family; they should have had it right to start with. This was one of the biggest floods to take place in Queensland’s history and yet no-one knew about it.

4.9.4 Personal recovery

In the months after the flood, survivors who had found that doing an interview in this flood study had been a cathartic experience, encouraged other flood survivors to do so too. Several research participants introduced me to people who they knew had important information to contribute to the flood study and who might benefit from the opportunity to talk about their experience. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) found that ‘listening - without necessarily trying to solve - tends to allow patients to process trauma into growth’. This may explain why survivors of this disaster found that ‘being heard’ by a reporter who was interested enough to listen to and record their story without making any judgement on the story, was found to be helpful by research participants. John Mahon clung to the gutter of his Grantham house for more than an hour until a helicopter airlifted him to safety. Mr Mahon told me that talking about his ordeal had helped him recover:

I think talking to people and telling my story helps me a lot. You relive it again but it helps me get over it. Talking to reporters and other people has helped me get through it.

Murphys Creek resident Sue Patterson commented:

I think it’s very beneficial to be able to talk it out. I think that as you talk it helps you sift through things in your own mind. It’s very healing.

Similarly, Marie Van Straten, who was in her Grantham house was dragged two kilometres by the tsunami, explained that she needed to feel some good might come if her story would help someone:

You can help people more when you've been through something like that but if you withdraw into yourself and don't talk about it, you don't help yourself and you don't help anybody else either. I'm really happy to be able to do this.

People did die. For a long time I wouldn't laugh or even smile because I felt, what gives me the right to enjoy life when people around us died? I need people to hear my story and know that you can be a better person by having something really horrible happen. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy much less someone that is close to me. That's why I want to tell the story now.

4.9.5 Financial disinterest of reporters in listening to survivor stories

Survivors found that speaking to people about the flood who had a genuine and non-financial interest in listening, was more helpful to them in their recovery than talking with helping professionals such as psychologists. Flood survivors who had felt 'used' by daily media reporters found the journalistic outputs of the research to be empowering and cathartic.

Danny McGuire said:

It's better talking to you than to a psychologist because I can talk to someone without paying them to listen to me.

Postmans Ridge resident Rod Alford expressed a similar view:

I find it more relaxing talk to you than the highly educated professionals. They tend to be more financially focussed – they are watching their clock and say ‘time’s up’ – would you like to make another appointment? And I think ‘you bastards – you’re caring and sharing for two hours – but only because you’re being paid.’

4.9.6 Timing

The fifth reason given by some interviewees was that sufficient time had passed for them to be able to speak about their experiences. Whilst Post Traumatic Stress Disorder has been a focus of post-disaster research studies, there is also evidence that some people, while shocked and shaken, recover relatively quickly (Bonnano et al, 2010, 11-12) Bonnano et al argue that levels of resilience have been underestimated in post-disaster studies in recent decades and that practical assistance acts as a form of ‘psychological first aid’. Murphys Creek resident Susan Mouflih spoke to three reporters following the flood. She described how her ability to talk about the disaster increased over time. On the first occasion, within a week of the flood she spoke to a reporter but could not say more than ‘My brother saved my life’. In a second interview she was able to remember more detail of what had happened. When I interviewed her six

months after the flood she was able to give detailed information about what happened, what she was thinking about and how she assessed the events as they unfolded. This interview was arguably the most informative for news audiences and had the most potential to allow her to piece together in her mind what had happened in her mind. If not for the extended reporting undertaken for the research project, it is unlikely her story would have been captured in detail. While the imperative of news coverage is to be timely, there is also a place for the richer detail available from survivors once they have recovered to be able to relate the important detail of what happened.

Withcott resident Ben Burton related a similar experience. He had been asked for an interview by another reporter immediately after the flood but he had refused. When I approached him he agreed. He told me:

I do recall one or two days after the flood I was asked but I wasn't ready to talk. I was absolutely shell-shocked at the time. Six months later, I'm quite happy to talk to you.

The explanations given by the participants are consistent with the findings of Newman and Kaloupek (2004, 383-394) who reported that, 'Current, limited evidence suggests that most individuals make favourable cost-benefit appraisals regarding their participation (in trauma-focussed research studies). Although a subset of participants report strong negative emotions or

unanticipated distress, the majority of these do not regret or negatively evaluate the overall experience.’

Similarly, when the book was completed, several contributors were asked to read the chapters in which their stories were told and the rest of the book as well if they wished. Feedback from participants especially in the most severely affected communities of Postmans Ridge and Grantham was that reading the chapter in which they were included had been challenging but therapeutic to them as they resolved their experiences of the day. One participant made special mention that having his wife, who had not been at home on the day, read the chapter had helped her to understand what had happened and that in turn had helped him to feel that she understood what he and the community had experienced.

4.10 Managing self-trauma

As part of my work as a journalist prior to undertaking this thesis, I was assigned to undertake several ‘death knocks’ of bereaved families in the three weeks immediately following the flood. At the end of that time I was physically exhausted from the pace of reporting and emotionally exhausted from being confronted by so many deaths, especially of children. Lindgren (2011) acknowledges that journalists need to recognise the emotional toll on reporters of interviewing sick and dying patients and their carers. I have also noted that:

We might like to think we are bullet-proof emotionally because of our job but underneath we are human beings who respond through our emotions to the world around us. Foreign correspondents and war correspondents are not the only reporters who see and report trauma. Reporters in any front-line reporting role are exposed over time to trauma, for which they have little training, little or no professional support and sometimes little understanding from their work supervisors, whose work is focussed on filling news holes. (Gearing 2008, 28)

Research interviews with the flood survivors for this project were emotionally challenging at times; however, I found that listening to the survival stories was inspiring. The courage and determination to survive of people in dire situations was uplifting and cathartic. I was surprised when transcribing the stories by the amount of laughter in the stories as survivors were able to distance themselves from the precarious situations they were in, but which they had survived.

Editing the audio for the radio documentary was emotionally intensive and I was sometimes moved to tears as I worked. Transcribing the recorded stories and writing the book manuscript also moved me to tears many times. I was surprised that even by the end of the project when I knew the words of the stories and was editing the audio or proofing the manuscript, I was still moved to tears by them at times. This indicated to me that in capturing the stories and in editing them and committing them to paper, the stories had not lost their emotional impact. It indicated also that listeners and readers were likely to be

similarly impacted. This proved to be the case. Despite my emotional response to the material, undertaking the project has provided a catharsis for me in feeling that I have sincerely ‘heard’ the survivors and that in producing the creative outputs, I have honoured the trust they placed in me to tell their stories so that they could together explain the complexity of what happened on January 10, 2011 and also raise community awareness of the risk of flash flooding.

4.11 Conclusion

Journalists are often required to cover trauma and are often amongst the first-responders to disasters. Recognising that disaster survivors may be willing to be interviewed for a wide range of reasons is important for reporters to understand. Sometimes the people they interview might be suffering from post trauma symptoms. Reporters can minimise the risk of causing any additional trauma by respecting the survivors, listening patiently and reporting accurately. For some individuals, traumatic experiences may lead to posttraumatic stress disorder and/or to posttraumatic growth.

Journalists can develop techniques for improving their ability to interview people who have experienced traumatic events, for example by being flexible with interview timing, location, empowering interviewees to understand they don’t have to answer every question they are asked, and by providing emotional security by stopping an interview if a interviewee becomes distressed.

This study also provides new insights into why very traumatised people chose to speak to a reporter. Their reasons fell into six main categories: Lessons need to be learned from the disaster; their desire for the public to know what had happened; their sense of duty to make sure warning systems and disaster responses are improved in future; their personal recovery and the timing of the request for an interview.

Finally, journalists were reminded that self-care is important when reporting stressful events such as natural disasters in which there may be multiple casualties and people suffering from several forms of trauma simultaneously.

Chapter 5: Listener and reader feedback

5.1 Introduction

I thought that the programme on the Grantham floods was superb. The honesty and courage of the people in facing death, danger and terrible losses was really heart wrenching. It was a greatly effective use of radio to depict suffering and tragedy. The people spoke of tumult and disaster in matter-of-fact tones. What else could they do? It happened and they were there so they tell it simply as it was. Their humanity shone through. Thankyou.

Margaret Millar, 360 feedback,

ABC Radio National, October 21, 2011

This chapter is a collation of listener and reader feedback to the creative outputs of the research which provide a measure of achievement of the aims of the research. The six aims were:

- a) to provide the flood survivors of this event with an opportunity to talk about a disaster which has had profound impacts on them and their families and communities;
- b) to use journalistic techniques to produce a ‘first draft of history’ recording the human experience of people directly involved in the disaster;

- c) to provide a better understanding of the range of reasons why traumatised disaster survivors may choose to speak about their experiences;
- d) to contribute to the knowledge-base of journalists to assist them to interview people who may be suffering post trauma symptoms;
- e) to create professional journalistic products which would help to raise community awareness of the risks of flash flooding and protective and preventive measures which individuals, communities and governments can take to mitigate future risks; and
- f) to extend the current knowledge base for journalists working in disaster zones.

The first aim was achieved by the research process itself, while the other aims were achieved by the production of the radio documentary, the book and this exegesis, the broadcast of the radio documentary and the distribution of the book.

5.2 The power of eye-witness accounts

Extensive media coverage of the disaster on the day the flood occurred and in the days afterward were based primarily on the video footage taken by people in the disaster zone. Few of the shocked survivors were able to give personal accounts of what had happened, leaving readers with questions about what had become of people they saw in peril in the video footage. Several listeners to the radio documentary and readers of the book commented on the power of the eye

witness accounts in the creative journalism outputs of the research.

Melbourne's *Saturday Age* book reviewer Steven Carroll wrote that:

Television coverage of the Queensland floods of 2011 was comprehensive but what this kind of reportage does is give the inside story, from the point of view of those who were there. The images that emerge from this intensive study . . . are a mixture of the surreal and the graphically real. . . . the result, both moving and uplifting, is a vivid portrait of the disaster – in all its deadly swiftness – from multiple viewpoints.

Steven Carroll, *Saturday Age*,

Melbourne

5.3 A better understanding of how people experienced the disaster

Listeners and readers have indicated that the creative outputs of the research provided them with a better understanding of the disaster event and of the human experience of those involved.

Well, Norm and I have read your book. We must commend you on the book and your detailed accounts of the events of January 2011. This book will be on our shelf (once all the family have read it) for future generations of our family to read and realise what was endured by so many last year. Many friends have bought your book and now have a more informed account of those few days. Sometimes it is hard for us

to relate these things to people and now through your book they understand.

Once again thank you for relating everyone's story with dignity.

Warm regards,

Wendy & Norm Head, Toowoomba

Your book is the most comprehensive document I have seen that puts the human experience into what happened that day. It is very detailed and meticulously researched. I knew a little bit about some of the stories but you have taught me much more about those I was aware of and many I wasn't aware of.

One other aspect that stands out to me is the love and care for animals and how you have portrayed people looking out for them and not being prepared to leave them behind. It comes across in the book that the animals were as much a part of the many families as people.

The book is an important historical document which will be a permanent reference source for the future, researched thoroughly and written very quickly while memories are still fresh. I also think your book will be an important step in the healing process for many people.

David Hartshorn, Toowoomba Ambulance
Communications Centre supervisor.

I have just finished reading this book in a 24hr period. You have remarkably put these stories down onto paper in a clever way that made me understand the history of the places, the way the land lies and the fateful stories that put people in positions that both saved their lives or ended tragically. I have shared the stories with my family as I have read the book and together we have pondered the amazing feats of survival. The way some instinctively reacted with holding onto each other using monkey grips, how 4yo Jacob held onto the showerhead for 2 hours, how Madison climbed onto the lounge chair that stayed wedged within the house, and the premonitions that many heard and listened to. This book is a credit to the survivors and the rescuers and I know myself and my family has learnt a lot from it. What amazed me was the way you were able to piece the stories together in a way that it was through the eyes of the survivors and no guesswork on identities, but all the stories intertwined with unspoken words.

Laurel Hughes

Congratulations on a wonderful piece of journalism. It is very poignant and very human. Your ability to let the people tell the story belies your very creative thinking on the way the stories could be brought together so well. Best wishes,

Laurie Lephed

26 October 2011

5.4 Helping communities adapt to climate change

An academic, Professor Dr. Gail Whiteman, the Ecorys NEI Chair of Sustainability and Climate Change, at the Rotterdam School of Management in The Netherlands provided feedback that the program was important on a global scale, because it highlighted the need for local knowledge and ecological ‘sense-making’ by communities adapting to climate change:

It was a wonderful documentary, but overwhelming and painful. Thank you. I think the issue of local knowledge and rapid response across organizational scales is a key issue. I see the Lockyer Valley incident as an illustrative example of the need for rapid response to climate change which underlines the need for local knowledge and ecological ‘sense making’ in climate adaptation.

Dr. Gail Whiteman

Erasmus University

The Netherlands

5.5 A difficult story that was well told

Response to the radio documentary indicated that even the survivors who had been most emotionally affected by the disaster gained some sense of

satisfaction that the story, though difficult for them to tell, had been well retold by the documentary and the book.

Great job . . . well done,

Cheers,

Kempo

Mark Kempton, Manager, EMQ
Archerfield Base, Brisbane

Thank you very much Amanda for all your efforts. It is most appreciated. To have a record such as this is priceless.

I've had some comments from personal friends, all of whom thought it was very well done. I got a bit carried away listening to it all again but the whole show is a very precious record of the many people who displayed such courage and selflessness in the face of adversity.

This documentary is a very precious record of an afternoon of tragedy and triumph and the bitter-sweetness of survival. For most people an experience that will define the course of their lives for many years to come.

Trying not to sound too pompous.

Many Thanks

Frank King, Grantham

5.6 Public recognition of the trauma, losses and bereavement

The radio program and the book provided important public recognition of residents' trauma. It also illustrated their ongoing challenges to recover from losses and bereavement and to face the financial and emotional burdens of rebuilding their homes and communities.

When I finished reading it, I just wanted to get in my car, drive to the Lockyer Valley and ask, 'What can I do to help?'

Mary-Ann Armstrong
Brisbane

5.7 Emotional impact

Listeners to the radio documentary commented on the emotional impact of hearing the 'voices' of the survivors.

One of the most sensitive and heart-wrenching stories I have ever listened to. A credit to the whole team.

Lesley Moseley, 360
feedback, ABC Radio
National, October 19, 2011

This was an excellent presentation of these people's stories. I was on the verge of tears at times. Thank you very much for this piece. This is community story telling at its most important.

Ben White, 360 feedback,
ABC Radio National, October
24, 2011

Excellent program! Thanks to those who put it together and to those survivors who have the guts to tell their stories to the public in general. It sounded horrific when it was actually happening but to hear it from those who were involved first hand was amazing and deeply emotional for me. May all who suffered loss and grief find some kind of valuable meaning from the experience. May you also find a good deal of peace and understanding within your hearts!

Jack, 360 feedback, ABC
Radio National, October 16,
2011

I thought that the programme on the Grantham floods was superb. The honesty and courage of the people in facing death, danger and terrible losses was really heart wrenching. It was a greatly effective use of radio to depict suffering and tragedy.

The people spoke of tumult and disaster in matter of fact tones. What else could they do? It happened and they were there so they tell it simply as it was. Their humanity shone through. Thankyou.

Margaret Millar, 360
feedback, ABC Radio
National, October 21, 2011

Reviewer Martin Crotty (*Courier-Mail*, February 11, 2012) found the book:

. . . an intensely powerful and personal view of the impact of the 'torrent' as it made its way through the streets of Toowoomba, down the range, and through normally peaceful towns . . . This is the disaster up close and immediate. Gearing's rendition quickens the pulse and raises the hairs on one's neck.

Martin Crotty,

Courier-Mail, Brisbane

5.8 Recognition by audiences of the courage of survivors to tell their stories

Listeners also expressed their gratefulness to the participants for being willing to tell their stories.

I heard the second half of this documentary on the radio and went immediately to the website to listen to it in full. I found it incredibly moving and my heart goes out to all who were, and I'm sure are still, affected. I found myself crying as I listened to your stories which were both heartbreaking and uplifting. I had listened to the coverage intently at the time as I was worried about my family in Queensland and thought I knew what happened but hearing it told through your personal stories was even more powerful. I hope that telling your stories helped in some way - it must have been hard and taken a lot of courage to do so, thank you. And thank you to the people who put the program together, you have done a great job.

J. Gibson, 360 feedback, ABC
Radio National, October 19, 2011

5.9 Compelling journalism

Several listeners to the documentary and readers of the book found the material compelling. Brisbane radio broadcaster Robin Bailey (2012) on 97.3fm told listeners ‘Bob and I have read this book in a day. It is absolutely gobsmacking.’

Others commented:

I was supposed to go out this morning but I couldn’t
put the book down.

Professor Freda Briggs,
University of South Australia,
Adelaide

The Day That Changed Grantham was a compelling radio documentary that told the story of the flood with great skill and sensitivity. Amanda Gearing captured the voices of very ordinary Australians telling their extraordinary stories of trauma and survival so well. Her compassionate questioning and preparedness to spend time with the interviewees elicited remarkable material. She then wove those stories into a narrative that was effortless to listen to. Her strong journalistic skills came to the fore, even though this was a new medium for Amanda, the program sounded like it had been made by a seasoned radio documentary maker.

Claudia Taranto, Executive
Producer, 360 Documentaries,

ABC Radio National,

February 20, 2012

5.10 Story-telling as a therapeutic catharsis

Feedback from flood survivors and members of the public who heard the radio documentary or who read the book indicates that an additional outcome for some survivors, rescuers and emergency services staff, of being involved in the research, has been a therapeutic catharsis of their experiences. Several participants indicated that the documentary and/or the book had helped them and their family to understand the trauma that they had endured. These individuals related that once they felt their family ‘really understood’ they had been able to recover substantially themselves from the trauma. This was noted particularly in families where one spouse was in the disaster zone and the other was away from home at the time. Rod Alford commented that although he had attended counselling for several months, it was in reading the book that he had himself understood the complexity of the disaster and what happened to his neighbours. He also commented that by reading the book, his wife Wendy ‘really understood’ what had happened at Postmans Ridge. Grantham survivor Bess Fraser, who was only able to cope with reading the book three pages at a time, described the process of catharsis she felt in reading the book and her admiration of the resilience of the flood survivors:

Even though I saw it, I lived it, I smelt it, I heard it, reading the book brings it back, like you’re there again. So I know it wasn’t a nightmare. It was the truth. We’ve all been through it but we’ve all had different experiences. I speak to other

survivors in the community face to face and still only get snippets. Reading the stories I can put in the missing pieces and understand them. When I'm reading I question how on earth do these normal people find this strength? People don't know the strength they have until they are put in this situation. The book shows that people have an inner resilience that you don't know until you're on the hop.

Elizabeth 'Bess' Fraser, Grantham

Members of the public, such as Debra McErlean, whose spouses were survivors and/or rescuers, said they thought that reading the book would be 'healing' for their partners.

I will be making Warren also read it... I think for all of the people in Warren's position, this book will be healing. So thank you for putting it all together.

Debra McErlean, Toowoomba

Grantham mother Lisa Spierling commented on the therapeutic benefit for her children of being included in the flood research interviews. Speaking at the launch of the book, she commented that one of her children who had not spoken about his experiences during the flood for several months after the event, had given his first account during his research interview. His story revealed that he had feared that his mother had died. His mother was grateful that her son had been able to communicate the reason for his emotional distress which in turn enabled her to seek medical care for him.

5.11 Conclusion

Feedback to the creative outputs of the research indicated that audiences recognised the importance of hearing eye-witness accounts of the disaster

which helped them understand how the disaster affected people. The importance of the journalistic outputs was also recognised as being of global importance because it illustrated the need for local knowledge and ecological ‘sense-making’ by communities adapting to climate change.

Feedback from flood survivors who had been most emotionally affected by the disaster indicated that they had gained a sense of satisfaction that the story, though difficult for them to tell, had been well retold by the documentary and the book. The re-telling provided public recognition of the residents’ trauma, their ongoing challenges to recover from losses and bereavement and to face the financial and emotional burdens of rebuilding their homes and communities.

Several listeners commented on the emotional impact they felt when they heard the ‘voices’ of the survivors. A result of this impact was that audiences were moved to express their gratefulness to the flood survivors for being willing to tell their stories. The stories, whether retold via audio or print were compelling pieces of journalism which held audiences’ attention.

An unanticipated but welcome result of the radio documentary and book were the cathartic experiences of survivors, rescuers and emergency services staff who listened to or read the stories.

Chapter 6 Conclusions and future research

6.1 Introduction

This research provided flood survivors of the January 11 flash flooding with an opportunity to talk about a disaster which has had profound impacts on them and their families and communities. Journalistic techniques were used to produce a ‘first draft of history’ recording the human experience of people directly involved in the disaster. The complexity of the disaster was revealed after speaking to more than 120 people who had been directly affected.

6.2 Online social media

A major benefit of the research has been to extend the current knowledge base for journalists working in disaster zones, especially in the use of online social media. The advent of online social networking has enabled people to communicate globally with virtually instantaneous speed. Online social media played vital roles during the Toowoomba and Lockyer Valley floods for individuals, citizen reporters, journalists and emergency services organisations. Reporters working in disaster zones need to understand how to tap into online social media in order to gather and disseminate news using the new media tools available through social media, as used by individuals, citizen reporters, media organisations, emergency services and relief agencies.

6.3 Reporting trauma

Journalists are often required to cover trauma and are often amongst the first-responders to disasters. Recognising that disaster survivors may be willing to be interviewed for a wide range of reasons is important for reporters to understand. Sometimes the people they interview might be suffering from post trauma symptoms. For some individuals, traumatic experiences may lead to posttraumatic stress disorder and/or to posttraumatic growth. The findings of the research contribute to the knowledge-base of journalists to assist them to interview people who may be suffering post trauma symptoms. Journalists can develop techniques for improving their ability to interview people who have experienced traumatic events, for example by being flexible with interview timing, location, empowering interviewees to understand they don't have to answer every question they are asked, and by providing emotional security by stopping an interview if a interviewee becomes distressed.

6.4 Why do disaster survivors choose to speak to reporters?

The unexpected willingness of a high proportion of the flood survivors to participate in the flood research made it possible to document a previously unstudied field – why disaster survivors wanted to speak to reporters. The study reports research findings that reveal why very traumatised people chose to speak to reporters. Their reasons fell into six categories: Lessons need to be learned from the disaster; their desire for the public to know what had

happened; their sense of duty to make sure warning systems and disaster responses are improved in future; their personal recovery, the financial disinterest of reporters in listening to survivors and the timing of the request for an interview.

6.5 Self-care for journalists in disaster zones

Journalists were reminded that self-care is important when reporting stressful events such as natural disasters in which there may be multiple casualties and people suffering from several forms of trauma simultaneously.

6.6 Community awareness of flash flooding risks

The creative outputs of the research: the radio documentary and book, will help to raise community awareness of the risks of flash flooding and protective and preventive measures which individuals, communities and governments can take to mitigate future risks. Feedback from the participants of the research and from the public to the radio documentary and the book recognised the significant contribution of journalism in the recovery of survivors and of their role in mobilising appropriate, timely, targeted recovery efforts in the wake of a disaster. Feedback from research participants and the public to the creative outputs of the research supports the contention that the aims of the research were achieved by the research process itself, as well as by the production of the radio documentary, the production of the book and this exegesis, the broadcast of the radio documentary and the distribution of the book. One comment from a

member of the public, Ben White, noted that the radio documentary on Grantham was ‘Community storytelling at its most important.’

Feedback from flood survivors who heard the radio documentary and the readers of the book indicates that an additional outcome for survivors, rescuers and emergency services staff, of being involved in the research, has been a therapeutic catharsis of their experiences. Listeners and readers have expressed their gratitude to the people who were willing to talk about their confronting experiences. The book will remain an historical account for future generations to trace the history of what their relatives or communities experienced during the 2011 floods.

6.7 Long-form journalism

Journalism practice in the mainstream media is driven by daily deadlines with print, radio and television news increasingly adopting a 24-hour news cycle. Practicing long-form journalism in which material is recorded over several months changed the journalistic process from one of obtaining the available stories each day to being able to pursue the most important and relevant stories, even when this meant waiting days, weeks or months for sources to be willing to be interviewed about their experiences. The resulting outputs are arguably more informative, in-depth and compelling journalism than could have been achieved under the time constraints of a daily deadline. The research process made it possible to take the time to develop the necessary trust and rapport with

traumatised flood survivors and rescuers which yielded intensely personal and compelling material.

Audiences recognised the journalism outputs from the research as being important to the survivors themselves, the community, the nation and even to the international research literature.

6.8 Further research

There is much scope for further research into why traumatised people choose to speak to reporters, a topic of great importance to the daily work of journalists. Questions arise as to whether the type of trauma to which a person has been subjected may make a difference in their degree of willingness to speak about their experiences. For example, would victims of ‘natural’ disasters be more (or less) willing to speak to reporters than victims who had been the selected target of a traumatic event, such as a sexual assault? If both groups were willing to speak to the media, would victims of ‘natural’ or random traumas such as natural disasters or accidents, be more likely to speak to the media sooner than victims of targeted criminal attacks? More data will provide useful insights for reporters to guide their assessment of when and how to approach trauma survivors.

The large volume of data gathered in this study could be used in future studies, such as in longitudinal research into the recovery of flood survivors. Participants who agreed to be interviewed for this research gave their consent for the audio recordings of the interviews to be lodged in the ABC Radio

National archives. They also gave consent for the data collected in this study to be used by researchers studying various disaster-related topics which might include psycho-social studies into the following:

- a) the effectiveness of the triple zero emergency call system during natural disasters;
- b) near-death experiences during natural disasters;
- c) the psychological impacts on individuals and families of multiple traumatic deaths of family members and friends during disasters;
- d) the psychological impacts of multiple losses of homes and possessions in small rural communities;
- e) the impact on spouse relationships of rescue during natural disasters;
- f) the impact of communication blackouts on parents separated from children, and spouses separated from each other, during disasters;
- g) the impact of natural disasters on social cohesion in small communities;
and
- h) individual and social factors which are predictive of posttraumatic growth of individuals and communities.

References

- Aikman, Amos. 2010. "Lives lost in flood response 'shambles' say emergency crews." *The Australian*, January 29. Accessed April 10, 2011.
<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/in-depth/queensland-floods/lives-lost-in-flood-response-shambles-say-emergency-crews/story-fn7iwx3v-1225996388371>.
- American Psychiatric Association. 2012. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Virginia: American Psychiatric Association.
- Austin, Linda and Linda Godleski. "Therapeutic approaches for survivors of disaster." *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*. 22 (4): 897-910.
- Bailey, Robin. 2012. "Robin, Terry and Bob in the morning." On 97.3fm. January 31, 2012.
- Banks, Donna Alvis. 2008. "The Dart Center." On *Media Report*, interviewed by Lisa Millar (broadcast February 21).
<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/mediareport/stories/2008/2168944.htm#transcript>.
- Bauer, Ann. L., and Sarah Toman. 2003. "A Gestalt perspective of crisis debriefing working in the here and now when the here and now is unbearable." *Gestalt Review*. 7 (1): 56-71.
- Boczkowski, Pablo J. nd. "Redefining the news online," *Online Journalism Review*. Accessed March 24, 2011.
<http://www.ojr.org/ojr/workplace/1075928349.php>.

- Bonnano, George, C. R. Brewin, K. Kaniasty, K and A. M. La Greca. 2010. Weighing the costs of disaster: consequences, risks, and resilience in individuals, families, and communities. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*. 11 (1): 1-49. Accessed August 14, 2011. DOI: 10.1177/1529100610387086
- Bowman, Shayne and Chris Willis. 2003. "We media: How audiences are shaping the future of news and information." Virginia: The Media Center at the American Press Institute, 2003. 47. Accessed March 20, 2011. http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/download/we_media.pdf.
- Brayne, Mark. (ed) 2007. *Trauma and journalism: A guide for journalists, editors & managers*. Dart Centre for journalism and trauma.
- Bruns, Axel. 2006. "The practice of news blogging." In *Uses of blogs*, edited by Axel Bruns and Joanne Jacobs, (Eds.), 11. Peter Lang, United States of America, New York, pp.11-22.
- Bruns, Axel. 2008. *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and beyond: From production to produsage*. New York: Peter Lang. Accessed March 28, 2011. <http://produsage.org/book>.
- Bruns, Axel, Jean Burgess, Kate Crawford and Frances Shaw. 2011. *#qldfloods and QPSMedia: Crisis communication on twitter in the 2011 south east Queensland floods*. Brisbane: ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation. 2012. Accessed February 21, 2012. <http://cci.edu.au/floodsreport.pdf>
- Canning, Simon. 2011. "Crisis brings huge shift in patterns to feed need for info." *The Australian*, January 31. Accessed March 28, 2011.

- <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/media/crisis-brings-huge-shift-in-patterns-to-feed-need-for-info/story-e6frg996-1225997092540>.
- Charlton, Kym. 2011 "Disaster management and social media – a case study." Queensland Police Service. Accessed February 22, 2012.
- <http://www.police.qld.gov.au/Resources/Internet/services/reportsPublications/documents/QPSSocialMediaCaseStudy.pdf>
- Crotty, Martin. 2012. "The Torrent" *The Courier-Mail*. February 11.
- Curran, James. 2007. "Reinterpreting the democratic roles of the media." *Brazilian Journalism Research*. 3 (1): 31-54.
- Denscombe, Martyn. 2007. *The good research guide for small-scale social research projects*. 3rd ed. Berkshire, UK: McGraw-Hill.
- Freedy J. R. and J. C. Donkervoet. 1995. "Traumatic stress: an overview of the field." In *Traumatic stress: from theory to practice*, edited by J. R. Freedy and S. E. Hobfoll, 3-28. New York: Plenum Press.
- Gans, H. J. 2003. *Democracy and the News*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gawenda, M. 2012. "Reporting on Black Saturday." On *Media Report*, interviewed by Richard Aedy (broadcast January 27).
- <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/mediareport/reporting-on-black-saturday/3796678>.
- Gearing, Amanda. 2008. "Trauma overload." *Walkley Magazine*. Issue 50. April/May.
- Gearing, Amanda. 2011a. *The day that changed Grantham*. ABC Radio National (broadcast October 9 and 15, 2011) Radio program.

- Gearing, Amanda. 2011b. "Flood victim's heartbreak: 'don't be complacent about the risk'." *Crikey.com*. August 5. Accessed August 10, 2011.
<http://www.crikey.com.au/2011/08/05/flood-victims-heartbreak-complacency-it-will-never-happen-again-not-an-option/>
- Gearing, Amanda. 2011c. "Toowoomba Floods." Online audio slideshow. *The Australian*. January 11, 2011.
<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/toowoomba-floods/story-fn7mdad8-1225989504384>
- Gearing, Amanda. 2012. *The Torrent: Toowoomba and Lockyer Valley January 2011*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press.
- Gillham, B. 2005. *Research Interviewing: the range of techniques*. New York: OUP.
- Gillmor, D. 2004. *We the media: grassroots journalism by the people, for the people*. California: O'Reilly Media.
- Griffith, Chris. 2011. "Social media had crucial role in floods: mobile apps offer a wealth of emergency information." *The Australian*. February 1, 2011. Accessed February 22, 2012.
<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/australian-it/social-media-had-crucial-role-in-floods-mobile-apps-offer-a-wealth-of-emergency-information/story-e6frgakx-1225997655521>
- Haseman, Bradley. 2006 "A manifesto for performative research". *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy: quarterly journal of media research and resources*, pp. 98-106.

- Hermida, A. 2010. "From TV to twitter: How ambient news became ambient journalism." *M/C Journal* 13 (2). Accessed June 15, 2011.
<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/viewArticle/220>
- Hight, J and F. Smyth. 2001. "Tragedies & journalists: A 40-page guide to help journalists, photojournalists and editors report on violence while protecting both victims and themselves." *Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma*. Accessed May 5, 2011. <http://dartcenter.org/content/tragedies-journalists-6>.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1970. *Logical investigations*. Volume 1. (D. Carr, Trans.). New York: Humanities Press.
- Hydrologic Research Center. 2011. HRC Global Initiative on Flash Floods. Accessed March 10, 2011. <http://www.hrc-lab.org/publicbenefit/index.html>.
- IPCC. 2007. Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Accessed March 10, 2011. http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr.pdf.
- Jonkman, S. N., and I. Kelman. 2005. "An Analysis of the Causes and Circumstances of Flood Disaster Deaths." *Disaster*. 29 (1): 75-97.
- Jowett, Benjamin. (trans) 2010 "Charmides." In *The Dialogues of Plato*. Great Books of the Western World. New York: Cambridge University Press, 6, 1.

- Kenyon, G. M. & W. L. Randall. 1997. "Restorying our lives: Personal growth through autobiographical reflection." Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Lau, Jiaren. 2011. "Flash flood hits Toowoomba CBD + photos of aftermath." January 10. <http://www.blog.jiarenlau.com/tag/toowoomba-flood-photos/>.
- Lester, Stan. 1999. *An introduction to phenomenological research*. Taunton, UK: Stan Lester Developments. Accessed May 3, 2011. <http://www.sld.demon.co.uk/resmethy.pdf>.
- Lindgren, Mia. 2011. "Journalism as research: developing radio documentary theory from practice." PhD diss., Murdoch University, Western Australia.
- Lindgren, M and G. Phillips. 2011. "Conceptualising journalism as research: two paradigms." *Australian Journalism Review*. 33(2): 73-83.
- McQuail, D. 2000. *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. London: Sage.
- Mattoon, L. 2010. "The gift of trauma: Stories of posttraumatic growth and spiritual transformation in war survivors from Uganda and Viet Nam." PhD diss., Institute of Transpersonal Psychology.
- Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance. 1997 "Media Alliance Code of Ethics." Accessed 15 February 2012. <http://www.alliance.org.au/documents/codeofethics.pdf>.

- Neiberger-Miller, Ami. 2008. "Media matters: Getting it right is crucial when dealing with grief." *International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies* 22 (2). Accessed February 21, 2012.
http://www.istss.org/source/stresspoints/index.cfm?fuseaction=Newsletter.showThisIssue&Issue_ID=78&Article_ID=1330
- Newman, Elana and D. G. Kaloupek. 2004. "The risks and benefits of participating in trauma-focused research studies." *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 17 (5): 383-394.
- Norman, Judith. 2000. "Constructive narrative in arresting the impact of post-traumatic stress disorder." *Clinical Social Work Journal*. 28 (3): 303-319.
- Pearson, Mark and Hamish Mclean. 2010. "Quantifying government media relations in Queensland." *Public Communication Review*. 1 (2): 18-32.
- QLD Floods – Withcott, Murphy’s Creek, Postman’s Ridge – Community Support*. 2011. Facebook Page. Created January 9.
<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/pages/QLD-Floods-Withcott-Murphys-Creek-Postmans-Ridge-Community-Support/133327426730144>.
- Queensland Police Service*. 2011. Facebook page. Accessed 24 March.
<http://www.facebook.com/QueenslandPolice>.
- Raphael, Beverley. 1986. *When disaster strikes: how individuals and communities cope with catastrophe*. Basic Books.

- Rushkoff, Douglas. 2003. *Open source democracy: How online communication is changing offline politics*. Utah: Project Gutenberg. Accessed May 12.
http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1477887&pageno=2.
- Shirky, C. 2009. "How cellphones, Twitter, Facebook can make history."
 Speech recorded at TED@State, US State Department, June 2009,
 Washington DC. Accessed March 24.
http://blog.ted.com/2009/06/16/clay_shirky_how/.
- Spratt, Michael. nd. "Covering the tsunami: Examining the lessons learned."
Media Matters. Accessed April 12, 2011. [http:// www.impact-kenniscentrum.nl/doc/kennisbank/10000_11077-1.pdf](http://www.impact-kenniscentrum.nl/doc/kennisbank/10000_11077-1.pdf).
- Stake, R. E. 1995. *The art of case study research*. California: Sage.
- Tedeschi, Richard G. and Lawrence Calhoun. 2004. "Posttraumatic growth: A new perspective on psychotraumatology." *Psychiatric Times* 21 (4).
 Accessed May 3, 2011. <http://www.psychiatric-times.com/ptsd/content/article/10168/54661>.
- Tesch, Renata. 1990. *Qualitative research: Analysis types & software tools*. London: RoutledgeFalmer. Accessed March 15, 2011.
<http://books.google.com.au/books?hl=en&lr=&id=SEpl7643WE0C&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=renata+tesch+1990+plan+act+observe&ots=QbJzcPJOVa&sig=qxxZpPabe1KiyNYgbSxOiXBurSk#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

- van den Honert, R and McAneney, John. (2011). The 2011 Brisbane Floods: Causes, Impacts and Implications. *Water*, 3(4), 1139-1148. doi: 10.3390/w3041149
- Weerakkody, N. 2009. *Research methods for media and communication*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, R. M., Leary, M. Mitchell and D. Ritchie. 2009. "Military veterans sharing first-person stories of war and homecoming: A pathway to social engagement, personal healing, and public understanding of veterans' issues." *Smith College Studies in Social Work* 79 (3/4): 392-432. doi:10.1080/00377310903130373
- Wimmer, R., and J. Dominick. 1997. *Mass media research: An introduction*. Belmont, MA: Wadsworth.
- Yin, R. 1994. *Case study research: Design and methods*. 2nd ed. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing.
- Yoder, M. 2008. "Helping in the wake of disaster: A graduate student's perspective in the aftermath of the VT tragedy." *Traumatology* 14 (1): 25-31.

Appendix

ABC Radio National script “The Day that changed Grantham”

Announcer	<p>In Queensland’s summer of disasters, the hardest hit location was the Lockyer Valley, 80km west of Brisbane.</p> <p>The Lockyer Valley is a wide flat fertile valley known as the fruit and vegetable bowl of Queensland.</p> <p>Grantham was the epicentre of flash flooding which swept through the town killing 12 people and destroying 138 houses on the 10th of January.</p> <p>Reporter Amanda Gearing has gathered stories of loss and survival from people who scrambled to safety as Lockyer Creek became a torrent that leapt from the riverbed and poured across the town at speeds of up to 80km/h.</p>
Amanda	<p>Grantham is a small rural town of neat timber houses set amongst expansive vegetable paddocks. There’s a pub, a general store and a primary school. The local people work on the farms or in heavy transport mechanics, the local abattoir . . . others grow flowers supplying florists around the country.</p> <p>The enormity of what happened in two hours in Grantham on the 10th of January this year has changed the town forever. Before the flood they knew each other just to say hello . . . now when they meet they might hug and say thanks for saving my life.</p> <p>(Music)</p> <p>In the two weeks before the disaster, Sandy Creek which flows through the centre of town, had risen four times. Low-lying areas were flooded but no water had entered any houses. Local service station owner Marty Warburton was nervous, keeping an eye on the weather.</p> <p>Local service station owner Marty Warburton was nervous, keeping an eye on the weather.</p>
Marty Warburton	<p>I came over Sunday lunchtime, left my family at home on the farm. And by Sunday afternoon about six o’clock as it was getting dark Anzac Avenue started turning into ANZAC Creek and by the time it was totally dark around about seven o’clock we had knee-deep water all the way through the shop</p> <p style="text-align: center;">97</p>

	<p>. Basically I sat out the front of the shop all Sunday night on a chair sitting on top of a bucket and watched all the snakes and debris and stuff float down the main road – like a normal flood does.</p>
Frank King	<p>On the Sunday night before that Monday I was very worried about it. I stayed up all night worrying about the situation given the amount of rain which we'd had in the months preceding it. The whole situation was like a loaded gun ready to go off. And that's exactly what happened – it did go off.</p>
Amanda	<p>Frank King, a retired farmer.</p> <p>Local volunteer firefighter Danny McGuire was also concerned about the risk of flooding. He knocked on doors along Railway Street alerting people to the danger and offering to evacuate them.</p>
Danny McGuire	<p>A couple of families did take notice of me down in Railway Street on the Sunday night. They actually evacuated when they found out the water was still coming up as I said to 'em about eleven o'clock at night I can't get back in here again because the fire truck will be sunk completely, so it's up to you whether you want to get in or out but don't expect the swift water guys to come because there's none around . . . They actually got in their 4WD and left that night.</p>
Amanda	<p>On Monday morning, the water was receding and local shopkeeper Sandy Halliday re-opened the convenience store at midday. Customers crowded into the little shop for milk, bread, papers and lunch. Life was returning to normal.</p> <p>What they didn't know was that at that same moment floodwaters flowing down the gullies and creeks along the Toowoomba escarpment were converging into Lockyer Creek at Helidon, upstream from Grantham at Helidon. The river gauge shot up from four metres to 13 metres in 23 minutes and broke the gauge just after 2.30. As the torrent flowed towards Grantham it struck a bend, banked up and burst from the creek. Helen and Graham Besley were at their farm when the creek suddenly came up.</p>
Helen Besley	<p>My husband walked over towards the creek bed which was about 30 feet below . . . the farm house . . . and he said oo it looks like we're going to have a bit of water this afternoon .</p> <p>And . . . he said let's just get a few things together and go.</p> <p>I hobbled back into the house and I grabbed our tin with our</p>

	<p>passports and birth certificates and marriage certificate, I grabbed our wallets, I grabbed our mobile phones and I grabbed our medication and I threw that into the basket that I always carried with me when I went out.</p> <p>And before I could even pick up the basket my husband was at the back door screaming we've got to get out now.</p> <p>We backed into the flow . . . and we got level with the front door and a big wave of water went straight over the top of the car.</p> <p>While we were still in the car I called triple 0 . . . and he said we're really busy we can't come to you and I said 'well we'll probably drown then but this is our address and this is who we are.' And we were quite resigned to the fact that we wouldn't come out of it because it was just too quick and it was too deep. My mind just went blank.</p>
Jonathan Klaassen	<p>I was just at home. I was just chilling because it was too wet to go to work. I was flooded in. I got a call from my brother in the afternoon maybe around quarter past three I think it might have been and he was up on one of the back hills of Grantham at his mother-in-law's house and he asked me to come over . . . I said yeah, I'll come up in a little bit . . . I parked the car beside the railway tracks and walked up there.</p> <p>I was inside for maybe five minutes and then we walked out the front door to go down the creek and have a look and Grantham was under water – the whole south side of the railway line.</p>
Danny McGuire	<p>. . . Yelled out for my kids to jump in the truck. Yelled out for the missus to jump in the truck. I turned the truck around, put the kids in, put the missus in and by the time I hit the gateway the wave had actually hit us.</p>
Amanda	<p>Volunteer firefighter Danny McGuire, also a qualified helicopter paramedic, phoned 000, gave their names, address and told the operator to send helicopters.</p>
Danny McGuire	<p>Once it hit the truck all I remember was the truck getting spun around. It was going down the edge of the road and all I could see was a tree coming up and I thought well shit, I've got to get them out of here so I got Zac up in a tree and I turned around for Jocy and next minute I was sucked out. A couple of minutes later I found myself climbing up in a tree.</p>

	<p>Once that happened I knew they were gone straight away.</p> <p>When was it that you realised that Zac had managed to grab the tree that you put him onto and had actually climbed up and got out of that water?</p> <p>I was yelling out to him and I could just hear him over the rush of the water and everything. And once I found he was alright I just kept telling him to stay safe, go higher if he had to and someone would be coming for us.</p> <p>To me if Zac wasn't there, to me it wouldn't have been any sense in sticking around, so, yeah.</p>
Amanda	<p>Eight-year old Zac spent the next five hours in the tree, wet, cold, hungry and tired, knowing that his mother and brother and sister had all drowned in the truck just below him.</p> <p>Before the flood struck was at the general store, Sandy Halliday heard that the Warrego Highway was cut 10km upstream of the town at Helidon. It seemed impossible . . . so she phoned her sister Sue Turner, who lives at Helidon.</p>
Sue Turner	<p>I said, 'No, it wouldn't be over the highway'. I said, 'Have you seen how high that bridge is?'</p> <p>And she said, 'Can you go down and check it out? Is said, 'Yeah, I'll go straight down but you can kiss your pretty arse goodbye if it's over the highway at Helidon,' just jokingly.</p> <p>We stood there and watched this heap of water just coming and coming. And it was nearly over the top of the sign, the Sheep Station Creek sign.</p> <p>I grabbed the phone and I said, 'Sandy,' I said, 'You get your arse out of there. There is so much water coming your way. You need to get out.' She said, 'There's no water here! There's no water here!' I said, 'I'm telling you there's so much water coming your way.'</p>
Amanda	<p>Sandy shouted to the customers in the shop to get to safety. From there the message spread around the town like wildfire.</p> <p>Rob Wilkin ran up his street shouting at people to get out. He got his family in their ute and ran into a nearby house where local flower farmer Lisa Spierling, was unaware of the danger to herself and three of her children.</p>
Lisa Spierling	<p>I was at home baking. I was meant to be heading to Melbourne the next day so I was just doing some cooking for</p>

	<p>the kids. . . . and the children were watching a DVD. Rob Wilkin came screaming through the back door and basically just screamed get the fuck out. And at the same time he picked up Ilsa and ran out the door with her. So when someone runs out the door with your four year old you tend to follow them. And then just jumped into the back of his ute in the driveway.</p>
Ilsa Spierling	<p>He took me in the car. The water was coming in front of us and washing us away.</p>
Lisa Spierling	<p>It looked like a giant big milkshake . . . it was frothy and had a lot of debris in it. It was probably over a metre high. It was just rolling towards the house I'm thinking it was probably only a matter of a minute or so before it would have hit the front of our house. And without Rob coming to warn me it would have probably hit the front window of the house before we would have known it was there.</p> <p>(Amanda) What did the children do when they saw it?</p> <p>They just started screaming and smashing on the side of the ute Go! Go! Go! Go!</p>
Natasha and Brad Long	<p>(Brad) We started running back towards Citrus Street to get 'Tasha's dad 'cos he stayed at the house 'cos he was going to move the fridge up.</p> <p>We got to the corner of Railway and Citrus basically and the water rose from our ankles to our chest within a matter of ten seconds.</p> <p>(Natasha) I kept running down the street. My mum was there too by this stage.</p> <p>I was thinking 'I need to get back to my dad'.</p> <p>(Brad) There were two fellas on a boat there. They were still sitting in it waiting for the water to rise a bit. And they just kept screaming 'get to the railway, get to the railway'.</p>
Amanda	<p>Like Natasha and Brad Long, about 50 other people were unaware of what was about to hit the town. They had gathered at the railway bridge over Sandy Creek to watch the flood as they'd often done before. Petrol station owner Marty Warburton was there. A friend phoned him to warn him that a crossing of a creek upstream was higher than the record level in 1974.</p>
Marty	<p>Yeah, basically everyone standing down at the bridge with me</p>

Warburton	<p>heard me repeating the level of the water at the crossing and I still picture the looks on their faces like – yeah – you’ve got to be joking.</p> <p>I walked into the shop. There was no water going down the street there at that time. I was inside the shop for two or three minutes at the most and within that time it went from nothing outside to being waist deep inside the shop. That’s when I realised this was not a normal flood that was happening here just by the vibration and the movement in the water. All the previous floods have never ever felt like that or given me that feeling.</p> <p>It went from waist deep to treading water and a gap of about 6 or 8 inches inside the shop within probably a minute and a half.</p> <p>I could feel the button on my cap tapping the ceiling and that’s when I realised that today was probably the day when you’re going to meet your maker . . . I basically took a breath and duck dived out the front door and then I was lucky enough as the current swept me away I was lucky enough to grab the batten on the awning of the front of the shop . . . managed to hold onto that and it took me a couple of minutes to pull myself up onto the roof of the awning and watched everything unfold from there.</p> <p>When I first got up on the awning I remember seeing arms in the water. At first it looked like people were struggling in the water to swim so</p> <p>The first one I grabbed hold of their hand and . . . realised . . . there was nothing I could do and . . . the second one was too far away.</p> <p>. . . I realised that if you were in the water you had no hope because of the amount of debris . . . you had no chance.</p> <p>. . . honestly if the current wasn’t doing 70 or 80km an hour I’ll be very amazed. You stand out the front of the service station for 19 years you generally know when a car’s going past not doing their 80km/hr.</p>
Amanda	<p>As word from the general store spread, Frank King heard from his neighbour that Lockyer Creek had reached 13m upstream at Helidon Bridge. By looking at the Bureau of Meteorology web site he realised he and his son John needed to move their cars to higher ground.</p>

<p>Frank King</p>	<p>I was looking up to see John getting in his car and then I noticed some water coming across the road which was quite amazing because water normally runs up or down Railway Street, not across it.</p> <p>I looked up again and the water was over the bonnet of John's car and he was scrambling out the window.</p> <p>John's car and my own car got swept down towards me. He managed to climb out of his and climb on the hood.</p> <p>I clung to the car for a little while and we got washed down to a line of trees that were against the security fence along the railway and the cars lodged there for some time.</p> <p>A raft of weeds and grass and sticks got swept down and wrapped itself around me beside the cars and was threatening to pull me under the car. John still had hold of my right arm and I think he nearly pulled it out of its socket keeping me above water.</p> <p>And it was rising quickly all the time. I did manage to struggle free.</p> <p>About that time then the tree gave way, our cars got dislodged. He got thrown further away from the line of trees than I did. I got swept towards the line of trees and I was able to grab hold of a tree.</p> <p>I just put my arms around it and clasped my fingers together and locked them together and just didn't let go. I was determined not to let go.</p>
<p>Helen Besley</p>	<p>We were watching the hothouses, the big plastic sheds, we watched them crumble like dominoes they just went bang, bang, bang down like dominoes. And then we saw the big machinery shed behind the cool rooms – we saw that go and we saw the machinery go and it very noisy, oh so noisy.</p> <p>And then we withstood quite a few waves and then we were washed off the top of the car. I swum across on an angle to the greenhouses and I was holding onto the wreckage and I was trying to climb higher and higher in the wreckage to save my life but Graham went way past.</p> <p>After struggling and tumbling he just realised that he didn't have any hope. . . He didn't try to have hope. He just rolled over on his back and he said 'Lord, if it's my time, then take me, I'm ready.' And he just laid there and waited to drown.</p>

Amanda	Graham floated out of the main current and into a back eddy which carried him in a large circle.
Helen Besley	. . . he opened his eyes and he was back in the sheds with me and he was only about 50 feet away instead of being 50 yards down the track.
Natasha and Brad Long	<p>(Natasha) My brother and I, tried walking through the water back to dad at our house. . . . When a log hit me in the leg I thought I'm not going to be able to make it back there. And my brother, who is pretty strong, wasn't moving through the water either; we couldn't lift our legs to move through it.</p> <p>With neighbours, the brothers, screaming 'get to the railway line' we thought ok that's our only choice now because the water by this time was chest high. Brad and I, we made it to . . there's a big fence.</p> <p>We are hanging onto the little bit of fence that is left so it's an 8 foot high fence . . . we have about a foot that's above the water.</p> <p>I rang 000 and was screaming that I'm in flood water – we felt like we were going to drown . . . and they just said 'what state or suburb ?' . . . and I said 'Queensland, Grantham'. They said that three times and I repeated that three times and then he said 'police, fire or ambulance?' and said 'I don't care, just send anyone please, just help'. I think I actually swore at them and he hung up on me.</p> <p>(Brad) The water was already over my head. We kept bobbing up and down trying to get breaths.</p> <p>(Natasha) I rang 000 then . . .</p> <p>I couldn't hear them the water was so loud.</p> <p>I said, 'I'm sorry I'm going to have to go because I'm drowning.'</p> <p>A big bit of water came into my mouth and I was coughing it out and then something hit me and . . . there goes the phone.</p> <p>(Amanda) And what went through your mind as your phone was washed away?</p> <p>It wasn't even that important anymore to have that. . . . Nothing would matter because it was over.</p>

Frank	<p>The last I saw of John was he grabbed for a branch but it broke. Well because of the strength of the current you couldn't turn around the other way and look to see what happened to him. I just had to grab the tree . . . and then you were horizontal in the water because of the speed of the water and how quickly it was coming down.</p> <p>There was mud up my nose, everywhere. And some of the time it was . . . I'm sure it was liquid mud that was coming at you. I lost my trousers . . . at one stage they were wrapped around my ankles . . . I just had to kick 'em off because I was so frightened that something would hook itself into there and pull me off the tree.</p> <p>A lot of stuff did bump into the tree. I was able to avoid most of it. My biggest worry was sheets of iron because they've got potential to do a lot of damage.</p>
Amanda	<p>From the railway line Lisa Spierling could see Brad, Natasha and her mother Michelle and brother Brendan clinging to the fence. She was trying to calm the seven children who were with her and keep them all together.</p>
Lisa Spierling	<p>The children were screaming. They were hysterical. They were so scared. The older ones were trying to run away. And the little ones were trying to grab onto each other. I was trying to console the little ones and at the same time I was trying to yell out encouragement to the other people hanging onto the fence . . . watching them and then watching people getting swept along on the tops of cars . . . yelling at them to hold on.</p> <p>And then I took a few seconds out to look over to the farm and watched all the flowers as they started to float out of the shade houses. They started crumbling, the shade houses just started crumbling.</p> <p>I remember for a minute just thinking 'Oh my God all that hard work. . . 18 years of hard work is just getting washed away in a matter of seconds.'</p> <p>You were there and you were trying to work out what was the best way to get all the children and adults with you to the safest place.</p> <p>Well at first I was just telling them to stay where they were and telling them the water would never come that high.</p> <p>But it became apparent that the water wasn't slowing down and it was building up speed and it was coming, by that stage,</p>

	<p>not just from the south, the original wall of water, but then another wall starting coming across from the west. We knew we were going to run out of dry land so our only option was to head towards the higher ground at Grantham which was east.</p>
<p>Natasha and Brad Long</p>	<p>(Brad)As we were on the fence, Rob and Jimmy, the fellas on the boat, the brothers, they launched their boat. They had a 90hp engine on their boat and they had it flat and they weren't even moving in the flood.</p> <p>Brendan let go of the fence and put his hands up and one of the brothers pulled him onto the boat.</p> <p>Then the boat went back a bit and Tasha's mother put her hands up and she went about five foot with her hands in the air and they ripped her onto the boat and then about five seconds later the boat seized, something happened in the motor and it stopped. They were heading towards the railway and they just let the flood take them to the railway and they stopped on the railway.</p> <p>(Amanda) So you saw your last ray of hope for being saved go as the boat went away (Brad) Yes. . . Yes.</p> <p>We felt the fence rip up off the ground and we went back and it started to fall. So Tasha said 'we have to let go'. So we just basically let go.</p> <p>(Natasha) We were wading through railway sleepers, trees, logs, tyres, tanks (amount of debris was) just incredible. We just kind of had to push it out of the way while swimming.</p> <p>(Brad) We headed towards the railway and then on the railway bank there was heaps of weeds and we clung to them and then before we knew it, people pulled us out and we don't even know who they were.</p> <p>(Natasha) We didn't even see their faces.</p>
<p>Frank King</p>	<p>Early on in the piece Kristie Kundy . . . was walking back home along Nichol Street when the water arrived with a whole heap of pumpkin vines as it turned out . . . which entangled her and swept her down. I could see her head bobbing up and down and she was in distress but she got swept into Rebecca Kilah's house . . . as she approached the gates just opened and she got swept through, straight onto the verandah of Rebecca Kilah's house. That was a miraculous escape in itself.</p> <p>I could see people running along the railway line with children</p>

	<p>. . . some of them were in great distress. Some of them did sing out to me and I sang out to them. I just told them to keep running.</p>
Amanda	<p>Gilbert Kilah had taken his car to higher ground and rescued two teenage girls who were in a ute that was starting to float. They all scrambled onto his Toyota Prado.</p>
Gilbert Kilah	<p>I got the girls up onto top of there and I hung onto the back of the bonnet with me feet on the bulbar and we floated off down the street.</p> <p>We hit the stay wire on a power pole which tipped us on our side. One of the girls fell off and went underneath the Prado and come out the other side. I lost track of her. I went off the bonnet and ended up in the water. The other girl managed to stay on the roof as the Prado righted itself and floated off down the street. The last thing I remember is seeing her floating off down the street and thought what sort of a mongrel end are you going to come to?</p> <p>I managed to grab a power pole and hung on there for the next . . . I thought it was an hour but everybody tells me it was an hour and a half . . . probably ten foot above the ground . . . in the flood water.</p> <p>Because the power pole had an earth cable which runs to the ground I was able to put my fingers through the cable that goes to the ground.</p> <p>If it wasn't for that cable . . . I wouldn't be here.</p> <p>As the logs were hitting the power pole I was worried about my fingers getting cut off . . . that was terrifying.</p> <p>So I looked over my shoulder and I thought well the flow of the water, I'll try and get to some trees in the front of my yard which is five houses down the street. So I let go and I managed to grab the tree in the front of my yard . . . and I got sucked under the water and I knew I had a weldmesh front fence so I knew the fence was there somewhere so I just felt around with my feet. I managed to hook me toes in the fence and hang onto the branch with my feet in the fence and work myself up the branch and got my head above water. I got up on the fence, pruned my way up into the tree and got up in the tree for the next hour and a half until the water level went down so I could walk back into my house. I walked through water just underneath my chin to get in my house. Probably the worst time was wondering whether those girls had</p>

	<p>survived. I think I can remember seeing Holly on King's verandah.</p> <p>(Amanda) Then it was really Emma that you were worried about?</p> <p>(Gilbert) Yeah. 'Cos I had no idea where she'd gone. It might have been next day I found out she had survived.</p>
Amanda	<p>Inside Matthew and Stacy Keep's house, Stacy saw five members of her family swept away. She was still in the kitchen holding on, desperate to protect the baby in her arms and her unborn baby. With the water now dangerously high, Stacy realised their only hope of survival was to leave the house to try to reach higher ground. She clung onto a downpipe for about five minutes. Exhausted, she was torn away. As she and Jessica were carried away by the current, her head went under water but she managed to lift Jessica's head above the surface. She was swept to the railway line where her feet became tangled and she began to drown. Baby Jessica was swept from her arms.</p> <p>(Music)</p> <p>Fortunately a rescue helicopter had arrived in town. The crew's senior pilot Mark Kempton.</p>
Mark Kempton	<p>As we were approaching this rooftop with about 4 people on top of it, trapped by the water, a couple of the people started pointing towards a very small clump of trees, almost a mound of dirt stuck in the middle of this terribly fast-moving water.</p> <p>As we got closer I said to Darren 'hey mate there's someone there. There's a bloke down there. I can see him now amongst these little shrubs and bushes.' I'm not kidding the island in the water would have been four or five foot wide, if that, and it was almost getting eaten away as we flew towards it. So Darren winched Mark Turner down and we pulled this person up and as it turned out it was a female, a pregnant female, who we now know to be Stacy Keep.</p> <p>As I looked over my shoulder I could see she was pregnant. And I was trying to catch her eye as I was flying back to the landing point, just to smile at her and just to give a nod of the head and she had her head down. She was in it looked like she was in a lot of pain, in shock. She was just totally washed out and she looked absolutely distraught.</p> <p>When we went back and landed 'Parso' helped to get her out</p>

	<p>of the aircraft. As he was carrying her out she said ‘I’ve just lost my baby.’ Parso looked at her and said what do you mean? because he could see she was still pregnant and she just said to him she had just had her daughter Jessica swept from her arms while she was being tumbled along in the flood water.</p> <p>He came back to the aircraft and told me. I just felt sick to think that that had happened, that we hadn’t been able to get there to help her in time and it even upsets me now to think that one. It’s a really terrible thing to have happen.</p>
Amanda	<p>The people who had run a kilometre along the railway line had to then cross an open-slatted railway bridge to reach higher ground near the school.</p>
Lisa Spierling	<p>I had my own daughter Ilisa on one hip and I had my neighbour’s little girl, who was about 18 months old on my other hip. I was trying to run along in a pair of clogs, slip-on clogs. We were on cement sleepers and the big rocks and it was becoming very slow. Someone ended up coming and grabbing the baby off me so that cleared me up with one child but I realised in the end that I wasn’t going fast enough so I decide to put Ilisa onto my back like a piggy back and Ilisa kept yelling ‘Please don’t let me drown, Mummy. You won’t let me drown will you? . . . I said ‘don’t be silly, of course I’m not going to let you drown.’</p> <p>The shipping container was actually smashing up against the bridge and I thought it was going to come across the actual bridge because by that stage there enough water on the bridge to probably lift it over. I thought ‘great we’ve come this far and now we’re going to be taken out by a shipping container.’ But unbeknown to me there’s actually a fence along the edge of that bridge and it held for long enough for us to get over.</p>
Hahns Spierling	<p>We saw people in cars floating . . . on top of cars floating . . . jumping off cars trying to get onto houses.</p> <p>We saw cars go under the railway line with people in them, just sink and then smashing underneath the railway bridge. We felt it smash . . . like . . . vibrate.</p> <p>(Amanda) Did you think they would survive it?</p> <p>(Hahns) Probably not but we found them at the evacuation centres and every where.</p> <p>(Amanda) Once you saw them again were you surprised to see</p>

	<p>them alive?</p> <p>(Hahns) Yes. Surprised. Very surprised.</p>
Amanda	<p>Lisa's children were all safely across the railway bridge but they were anxious about their mother who was still helping other people across the bridge.</p>
Hahns Spierling	<p>We had to wait for quite a while . . . about two minutes for her to get across . . . but then she had to go through the water we went through. It was about chest deep when she got there, so it had risen that much in about two minutes.</p> <p>(Amanda) What did you say to her?</p> <p>(Hahns) Hurry up Mum it's coming up fast.</p> <p>Once she was passed the big thing was watching out for the big power lines zapping the water, you could see the blue strokes hitting it and just making huge sounds . . . huge zapping sounds.</p>
Ilsa	<p>Did you see mummy eventually? Mmm. Yes. I was happy again.</p> <p>What did mummy do? She hugged me.</p> <p>Did you hug her? Mmm. And Hahns hugged me and he started crying.</p>
Amanda	<p>After being in the water clinging to a tree for almost two hours, sixty-six year old Frank King was shivering uncontrollably.</p>
Frank King	<p>I started assessing my chances of getting into a tree and getting out of the water. It was so cold, the water.</p> <p>My arms just felt like lead by that time. I knew I had to do something.</p> <p>I took the chance to push myself to the next tree and I made it . . . just.</p> <p>About that time the helicopter arrived to get Rebecca Kilah, Kristie Kundy and Rebecca Kilah's children from the roof of that house just across the road. The force of the downdraft from the helicopter blew every ant and beetle in the tree down on top of me plus a couple of spiders that bit me.</p> <p>I decided I better get out of the tree and try and get myself</p>

	<p>home. . . . When I let go my feet did touch the ground, for which I was very thankful. The water was still up to my neck but I was able to make my way across to the bitumen</p> <p>I was amazed to see John was ok . . . he came out in the water to meet me.</p> <p>(Music)</p> <p>It took me a while to take in the fact that he had actually got home because boy o boy the current was just going past so quick it was hard to imagine that anybody could swim across it.</p>
Amanda	<p>As the water began receding, farm worker Jonathan Klaassen and his brother David went to see what was left of the town. They were coming back when they saw Stacy’s husband Matthew Keep running along the railway line back towards his flooded house. He was trying to find out what had happened to his children.</p>
Jonathan Klaassen	<p>We were probably three quarters of the way back when we passed Matthew Keep on the railway line. . . .</p> <p>He was very distressed and . . . wasn’t very happy.</p> <p>He was saying that his daughter was in the house.</p> <p>He started walking into the water to go over to the house and then he got caught by the current and washed downstream a bit.</p> <p>He said ‘No. Don’t go in, the current’s too strong’. So I ran upstream from the house about 100m and then I walked out into the water and went across . . . upstream of the house and kinda floated down to it and went inside and I saw his daughter on a lounge chair inside the house that was wedged up against a wall.</p> <p>She was talking about one of her little dolls or toys or something that got washed away and I’m like ‘yeah it’s gone. You’re not going to find that one’.</p> <p>I called back to Matthew and my brother on the railway line. . . I said ‘there’s a little girl in here.’</p> <p>I went in to pick her up and bring her outside and I noticed there was another voice in the house, so I asked her who it was and she said that it was Jacob. So I was like ‘right-io, ok’.</p>

	<p>I yelled out to him that I'd be back to get you in a little bit.</p> <p>As soon as I've got back outside with the little girl I've said 'mate, there's another child in the house, Jacob'. . . . I think he was crying actually because he thought Jacob had been washed out of the house. He went inside and got Jacob and then came outside.</p>
Amanda	<p>Four-year-old Jacob survived by swimming down the hall and into his parents' ensuite bathroom where he held onto the shower rose and stood on the taps. His sister Madison, who's 5, had saved herself by jumping from a floating couch that was being swept out of the house onto a lounge chair that was wedged in a corner. Madison called to her brother for two hours telling him to stay where he was because Daddy would be coming for them.</p>
Jonathan Klaassen	<p>. . . We were standing on the west side of the house, waving our arms trying to get attention of the chopper, for 15 minutes – half an hour. We thought they're not coming here so we may as well hop on the roof. We were just lucky that there was a big skip bin wedged under the patio and it had a corner that was sticking out so I held onto both of the children while Matthew climbed up and then passed them up and then I climbed up and we waited there for the chopper.</p>
Amanda	<p>Once Matthew had reunited their children with Stacy, he realised there could still be more people stuck in houses and he set off running back towards Railway Street. Jonathan and David saw him go and ran to catch up with him. They found Danny McGuire and his son Zac both still clinging to trees.</p>
Jonathan Klaassen	<p>We continued back in towards Grantham itself to try and find more people.</p> <p>And then we've heard a little boy in a tree, only just.</p> <p>So we found him and then 25 metres maybe downstream his dad was up another tree. And his Dad was yelling out 'just get my kid out, get my kid out'. So we told him to crawl down the tree . . . we had to get him to swing down by his arms so we could reach him cause he was too high even on the lowest branch. So he swung down and my brother grabbed him. Then he handed him to me and my brother took off his shirt to wrap around the boy because he was freezing cold. And then my brother went to help the dad down out of the tree.</p> <p>At that point we seen some lights coming down the road, so we thought it was the authorities, so we thought 'fuck yeah,</p>

	<p>we can get these people and give them to them so they could get evaced out' because we didn't have any transport, we were just walking.</p> <p>It was just some guy in a 4WD just trying to get through to Gatton.</p> <p>We are just like 'mate you can't get through, you are just going to have to go back through Helidon we know that there's an evac centre back there somewhere so take these people back'.</p> <p>He has actually told us that there's another 9 metre wall of water coming down that he had heard about.</p> <p>We were like 'let's get out of here quick. If there's another wave coming we're not going to be here, let's get out, let's get out'. We loaded them up into the vehicle. We got in with it.</p> <p>We got out as many people that we knew about that we could.</p> <p>The next morning the water had come up again but no where near as high as it was that afternoon.</p>
Amanda	<p>At the school, Lisa Spierling, acted as first aid officer, treating everyone who was sick or injured. By evening, 50 people were there, all shocked, cold and hungry - but alive. Local residents who hadn't been flooded brought food, clothing and bedding. Elizabeth Fraser was very worried about her sister Brenda and Brenda's partner and son. Their two-storey brick house beside the pub had been destroyed.</p>
Lisa Spierling	<p>Elizabeth had been sitting not knowing what was happening with her family.</p> <p>Last she'd heard from them they were saying the water was coming into the house. I kept trying to reassure her that until we knew what was going on there was always hope . . . and to keep hoping they were ok.</p> <p>But when the people had made it up later that night or early next morning from the pub they told her that the house had actually crumbled and disappeared. So then it was obvious unless they were very lucky they had died. So I just held her while she cried. . . . the realisation of what had happened. I think it hit us all at that stage because up until that moment we didn't realise that anybody had died. That was the moment that we realised the gravity that we'd lost people.</p>

Natasha Long	<p>(Amanda) Do you know what that message was?</p> <p>(Natasha) That message was . . . your dad's fine. He's ok. He's made it. So that was the best phone call we got. But within that message she said 'but your grandma didn't make it' . . . and, she said, and Jessica didn't make it.' I just burst into tears and vomited. I couldn't talk.</p> <p>We just had some blankets and just lay down on the ground and we just kind of cried. Because it was the first time we were able to stop and just think about things.</p>
Amanda	<p>At 1am, about nine hours after he had climbed onto the roof of his service station, Marty Warburton was still there surrounded by water.</p>
Marty Warburton	<p>It wasn't until the lightning started striking around again that I got a bit worried that I had to get off the roof. . . . The current had slowed down. So I basically tried to lower myself off the roof and all I remember is the gutter letting go and don't remember how I got from there to two doors back up the current to the house behind the general store there. I remember coming good on their verandah and Wayne opening up the door and looking at me like he'd seen a ghost and basically grabbed a hold of my Drizabone and dragged me inside as the back verandah half collapsed out from underneath us.</p> <p>(Amanda) What did he say to you?</p> <p>(Marty) Where the hell did you come from? We thought you were dead. We thought you were gone.</p>
Amanda	<p>The day after the flood, Danny McGuire was desperate to know if the bodies of his wife and children who had drowned in the fire truck were still in the truck.</p>
Danny McGuire	<p>I found from Stuart next morning, as I said to him 'I need to know . . . if they were found in the truck' and he made a phone call and he come back a couple of minutes and later said 'Yeah they were recovered in the truck,' so that put my mind at ease. At least I knew they were there . . . like some other people, they'll never be found and I couldn't live with that one.'</p>
Amanda	<p>Nine months later, the people of Grantham are still looking for answers to the question 'Why weren't we warned?'</p> <p>At the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry regional</p>

	<p>director of the Bureau of Meteorology, Jim Davidson, said that the Bureau does not have responsibility for warning of flash flooding because it doesn't have the local knowledge required. Councils are responsible for warning residents about flash flooding.</p> <p>He went on to say that the first he knew about flash flooding on the 10th of January was when he saw it on the television news. It was only then that he realised that what his staff thought was a faulty river guage had in fact been an accurate recording of the rapid rise from 4 metres to 13 metres at Helidon bridge.</p> <p>He told the inquiry the Bureau didn't know about the flash flooding because no one had phoned them to say there was a problem.</p>
Jonathan Klaassen	<p>(Amanda) Is there anything you'd re-write if you could?</p> <p>(Jonathan) Oh yeah, I'd go back an hour before it all hit and get everyone out.</p> <p>(Amanda) In your view every life would have been saved if you'd had an hour's notice?</p> <p>(Jonathan) Probably even less. Hell yeah. If you'd had notice you could have got everyone out of there. There's no reason anyone should have been there when it hit, if enough warning was had.</p> <p>All you really would have needed was a cop car or someone with a bull horn going down the streets, going 'get out', knocking on doors; it wouldn't have taken too much.</p> <p>It would have been easy.</p>
Natasha and Brad	<p>(Brad) If we'd had ten minutes.</p> <p>(Natasha) Yep that would have made the world of difference.</p> <p>(Brad) We know the lives in our families may not have been lost. They were predicting at 12.16, I think the earliest one was, that there would be a big wall of water hitting Grantham.</p> <p>And they said that they wanted to alert . . . alarm systems and all that but they can't . . . (Natasha) don't have the authority.</p> <p>(Brad) If they know that, that far in advance why didn't the BOM even issue a warning half an hour in advance, set that SEWS alarm system off on our TVs and radios down there</p>

	<p>then?</p> <p>Our next door neighbour said she was watching the TV up until it hit and she didn't hear anything.</p>
Marty Warburton	<p>My personal opinion is we need a little bit better monitoring stations in our catchments in our creeks . . . link that to sirens through the township and also I believe that the Bureau of Meteorology knew this was unfolding but there seems to be a lack of communication from there to our powers to be.</p> <p>We've got some of the best educated meteorologists in the world, we've got some of the best technology and that's what got me over here on the Sunday. I got on the BOM website so for a layman to use that tool to be a benefit I believe we need that link there between the Bureau and the government to hopefully implement an early warning system to give us 15-20 minutes warning – that's all it would take.</p>
Amanda	<p>Looking back, volunteer firefighter Danny McGuire is angry that authorities didn't heed his warnings to evacuate the town the night before, which would have enabled him to evacuate his own family. He is devastated.</p>
Danny McGuire	<p>Not real good in the gut because we shouldn't have waited for answers from up above. We should have just evacuated the place and got a kick up the arse for it later on but because there was only two of us pushing to evacuate the place it made it real hard against a couple of hundred. And without the police being on our side too, it made it real hard.</p> <p>(Amanda) Why do you say the police were not on your side?</p> <p>(Danny) They've got to go by protocol as well . . . they've got to wait for the SES to say what they can do. If the SES done their jobs properly instead of being up north and out west for the floods and a couple of them stuck around . . . we might have been in a different situation.</p>
Amanda	<p>The death toll in Grantham could have been far higher if not for two phone calls, one to the shop and one to the people beside the railway bridge.</p>
Marty Warburton	<p>Nearly every day I think how lucky I am. I personally believe if we were still standing in those two locations we wouldn't be here today. The force of that water smashed out double besser brick walls out of buildings so . . . there was 50 to 70 people that were congregating in those two areas that possibly wouldn't be here today, if we hadn't got that warning and</p>

	dispersed back to our properties.
Frank King	<p>Initially you're almost embarrassed that you've survived, when you hear of the death toll, you know. After that you're embarrassed that it didn't go in your house.</p> <p>You wonder why you should be left, unscathed sort of thing. . . Someone was looking after us I think.</p> <p>Really the only saving grace was that it did happen during the day because if it had happened at night time then very few elderly people or children would really have survived. Our death toll would have been horrendous really.</p>
Lisa Spierling	<p>The other family that you know is Stacy Keep and her family. What do you make of her survival?</p> <p>I'm just amazed that she did survive. She's just so tiny and she was heavily pregnant, trying to hang onto her little girl. And that water . . . I can't believe that anyone could have hung on like she did.</p> <p>Only a mother could do that. It was quite devastating for the family.</p> <p>I have lots of questions. I don't sleep at night I have that many questions.</p> <p>I just want to know – even if it's not what I want to hear. I just want the opportunity to hear what went so wrong and why why nobody warned us . . . when it's quite apparent now there was hours . . . hours that they could have come and warned us . . . and they didn't.</p> <p>I've always said you spend half your life collecting things and the other half trying to figure out what to do with them. Of course I'd be lying if I didn't say there was a few things that I realise that are gone and things that can't be replaced. It makes you realise that it doesn't matter what you have or how much you've got, as long as you're alive . . . each day and you've got your kids.</p> <p>I didn't bury my kids so I'm, yeah, very grateful.</p>