GCSE

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MONDAY, 12 JUNE 2023 – MORNING

ENGLISH LANGUAGE – Component 2

19th and 21st Century Non-Fiction Reading and Transactional/Persuasive Writing

RESOURCE MATERIAL FOR USE WITH SECTION A

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‘We save people. It’s just our job’

Last year, Aileen Jones became the first woman since 1888 to be awarded a medal for bravery by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) when she rescued two fishermen in a force eight gale. Reporter Louise France met up with her.

You would never guess, walking along Porthcawl’s seafront, that this is one of the most dangerous stretches of coastline in the world. But behind the volunteer running the Royal National Lifeboat stall, a notice states: “This station has saved 10 lives since January 2005.”



To be honest, neither would you guess that Aileen Jones, the slightly built, modest woman I met, is a local hero (a description she would most definitely wince at). This 42-year-old part-time teaching assistant and mother of two is rather embarrassed about the attention she’s received since 24 August 2004, when, in force eight winds and 10-foot waves, she was in charge of the lifeboat that rescued two fishermen. She has now become the first woman to be awarded an RNLI medal in 116 years.

Aileen, like others in the RNLI, is always ready to run to answer her alarm pager during the day or in the middle of the night. And, as she explains over several mugs of tea, she can think of nowhere else she’d rather be than out on the lifeboat.

Why does she do it? “It’s something that I want to do. It’s good. We save people. It’s just our job.” But doesn’t she get frightened? “If you’re scared, then you’re not the right person to do it. It’s nerve-racking but at the same time you want to do it.”

For a week last August, the weather was unseasonably stormy. As she arrived home from school at 11am, wondering what to cook her children for lunch, there was a radio call for help from a boat in distress. “As soon as my alarm pager went off, I dropped everything,” she remembers. “I knew a lot of people were at work, so I rushed to the lifeboat station. The rule is, if you’re first to arrive at the lifeboat station, you’ve got the responsibility of taking the boat out in those conditions, so that’s what I did.”

All they knew was that two fishermen, one of them with an injured arm, were somewhere near Nash Sands in their boat, *Gower Pride*. “It wasn’t a nice place to be. The boat’s engines had failed and none of the anchors would hold. Whatever the sea decided to do to them, the fishermen had no control over it.”

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Meanwhile, the lifeboat was frequently thrown airborne by the waves. Aileen recalls, “I came around the sandbank and thought we would not get close enough to the boat. It was just too rough.” Time and again, they tried to throw a rope over to the *Gower Pride* skipper, Gordon Woosnam. Finally, they managed it and began to drag the boat away from the sandbank, despite the fact that they were being tossed vertically in the water. “Imagine a seesaw,” says Aileen matter-of-factly, although I’m sure this doesn’t convey the horror of it. But then, just as they were making progress, the knot for the towline came undone and they were back to square one.

By this time, Gordon had refused to go on to the front of the boat because it was too dangerous. Aileen made the decision to try to manoeuvre the boat close enough so that one of the lifeboat crew, Simon Emms, could scramble on board. He waited for a gap between the 10-foot-high waves and managed to clamber across. Hanging on for dear life, he edged towards the front of the boat and finally attached another rope so the lifeboat could begin to tow the *Gower Pride* back to safety. The whole rescue lasted three-and-a-half hours.



How did she feel when she reached dry land? “You go through it in your mind – did I do the right thing? You can’t get emotional about it. It’s what we do, what we’re here for. It was just a bit rougher than average.”

Aileen may make light of it but three months later her bravery was rewarded by the RNLI. A spokesman for the RNLI said, “Mrs Jones used all her skills in leadership and boat handling in very dangerous conditions. Coupled with her own personal attributes of selflessness and bravery, Mrs Jones and her crew were able to save two lives.”

Louise France

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