

I WAS ACTUALLY THERE



ABC
COMMERCIAL
Australian Broadcasting Corporation

HISTORY IS PERSONAL

I Was Actually There is a gripping and powerful documentary series that explores defining moments of Australia's recent history through the eyes, ears and voices of those who experienced them firsthand.

Employing the unfiltered and up-close interviewing style that made *You Can't Ask That* an international hit, *I Was Actually There* assembles the recollections of witnesses both big and small, of people at the core of the action and of others standing on the sidelines.

Along with carefully chosen archive footage, much of it unseen or previously overlooked, *I Was Actually There* weaves conversational fragments into cohesive narratives, bringing intense moments back to life. Each episode reveals new ways of seeing the past, challenging what we think we know.

Ultimately, the series helps viewers see that while history is usually told from specific perspectives, the actual truth of any event is made up of overlapping, individual views. What you saw depends on where you were standing.

SEASON 2: 6 X 30'
DOCKER MEDIA
FORMAT AVAILABLE



EPISODES

Episode 1

Black Saturday Bushfires

As temperatures hovered in the mid 40s, bushfires of unprecedented size tore across Victoria. One hundred and seventy-three lives were lost, thousands were left homeless and entire communities destroyed. *I Was Actually There* collects personal stories from survivors, first responders and community members who faced the catastrophe. They share the terror and heartbreak of that day, as well as the extraordinary resilience and luck required to make it through.

Episode 2

Australians in 9/11

James Dorney was working on the 92nd floor of the World Trade Center South Tower. He saw the North Tower erupt before his eyes. While most were running away, Channel Ten correspondent Michelle Stone, in New York for the US Open, raced toward the chaos. This episode offers a range of unique perspectives on the events of September 11, from expatriates, family members, journalists, photographers and first responders.



EPISODES

Episode 3: Cronulla Riots

On a hot December Sunday, racial tensions boiled over at Sydney's Cronulla beach. After footage of the riots was splashed on TV news bulletins, outraged young men from the city's west retaliated with attacks on beachside suburbs. It took 48 hours for community leaders and police to quell the violence. But the event, and the deep-seated issues it highlighted, reminds us how easy it is to let the racism genie out of the bottle, even in a place as supposedly chilled out as beachside Cronulla.

Episode 4: The Dismissal

It was a move that shocked the nation. Fifty years ago, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam was dismissed by the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr. The government was dissolved and an election called. *I Was Actually There* looks at the day through the eyes of the senators, MPs, colleagues, aides, journalists, and protesters swept up in the chaos. Half a century on, views on the legitimacy of Kerr's actions are still strongly held – and no other event has divided the nation in quite the same way. Our constitution remains unchanged... could it ever happen again?



EPISODES

Episode 5

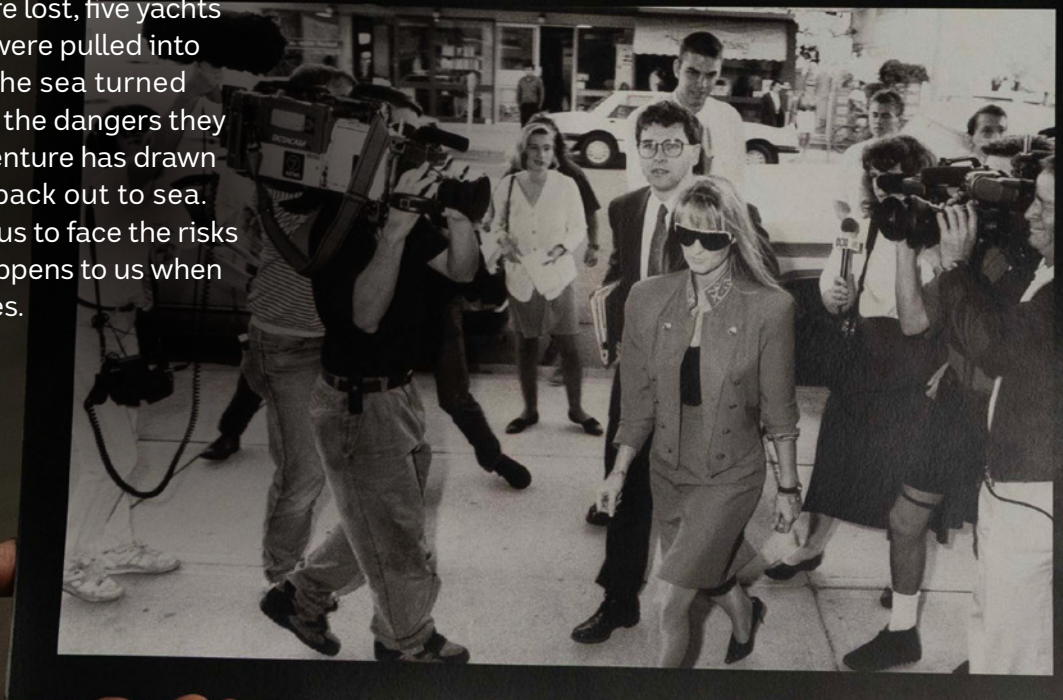
Fairlie Arrow Abduction Hoax

When nightclub singer Fairlie Arrow disappeared from her Gold Coast home in 1991, the tabloid media went to town. Arrow was reported as abducted, in the clutches of an obsessed fan. The nation was glued to its television sets. Spoiler alert. It was all a hoax. Once the jig was up, Arrow claimed she'd been trying to draw police attention to a stalker – but authorities were convinced it was all a bid for fame. And as dozens of national interviews followed, along with a men's magazine centrefold spread, Fairlie got her 15 minutes of fame and then some. More than 30 years later, she insists celebrity was never her motive. So where does the truth lie?

Episode 6

Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race

The 1998 Sydney to Hobart race was a moment when nature asserted its dominance with terrifying force. Mayday calls flooded the airwaves as the weather worsened, resulting in the largest peacetime search and rescue operation in Australian history. Six lives were lost, five yachts sank and hundreds of sailors were pulled into a brutal fight for survival as the sea turned violent and merciless. Despite the dangers they experienced, the spirit of adventure has drawn many of the affected sailors back out to sea. This episode asks what drives us to face the risks of the unknown – and what happens to us when those risks become nightmares.



CREATOR'S STATEMENT

Kirk Docker

We're interested in telling the stories of ordinary people, particularly those aspects of their lives that are misunderstood, judged, feared or simply hard to imagine. We like putting faces on screen that are often ignored or dismissed, hearing the perspectives from the lead actors, but also from the dancer at the back of the chorus line. And the stage manager. And the guy folding seats after the audience has left.

Striving for authenticity from our subjects, we bring a deep and empathetic curiosity, hoping to find new revelations, new ways of seeing, events in history that we thought we already knew. Our mission is to take an established truth about an event and through a variety of voices, present a new understanding of that moment, challenging the audience to consider that opposing truths can exist simultaneously, that the ways in which we deal with defining events are as individual as we are. There can be humour in the most tragic of circumstances. There can be gravity in the least serious of times. How someone has lived through an experience is almost always more complex, nuanced and often weird than we realise.

Season One of *I Was Actually There* was, gratifyingly, a runaway success with Australian audiences, resonating across generations and sparking conversations around the country. We hope Season Two will continue to engage people with their own history, to demonstrate the complicated nature of stories and storytelling.

For the younger generations, unaware of these episodes from Australia's past, we hope our work will be eye-opening, introducing them to significant events in a way that is both challenging and yet also easy to digest. For those who lived through the events, we hope to both build on and undermine their memories by adding human dimensions and complexities to what they might consider to be well-worn narratives.



PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

Josh Schmidt

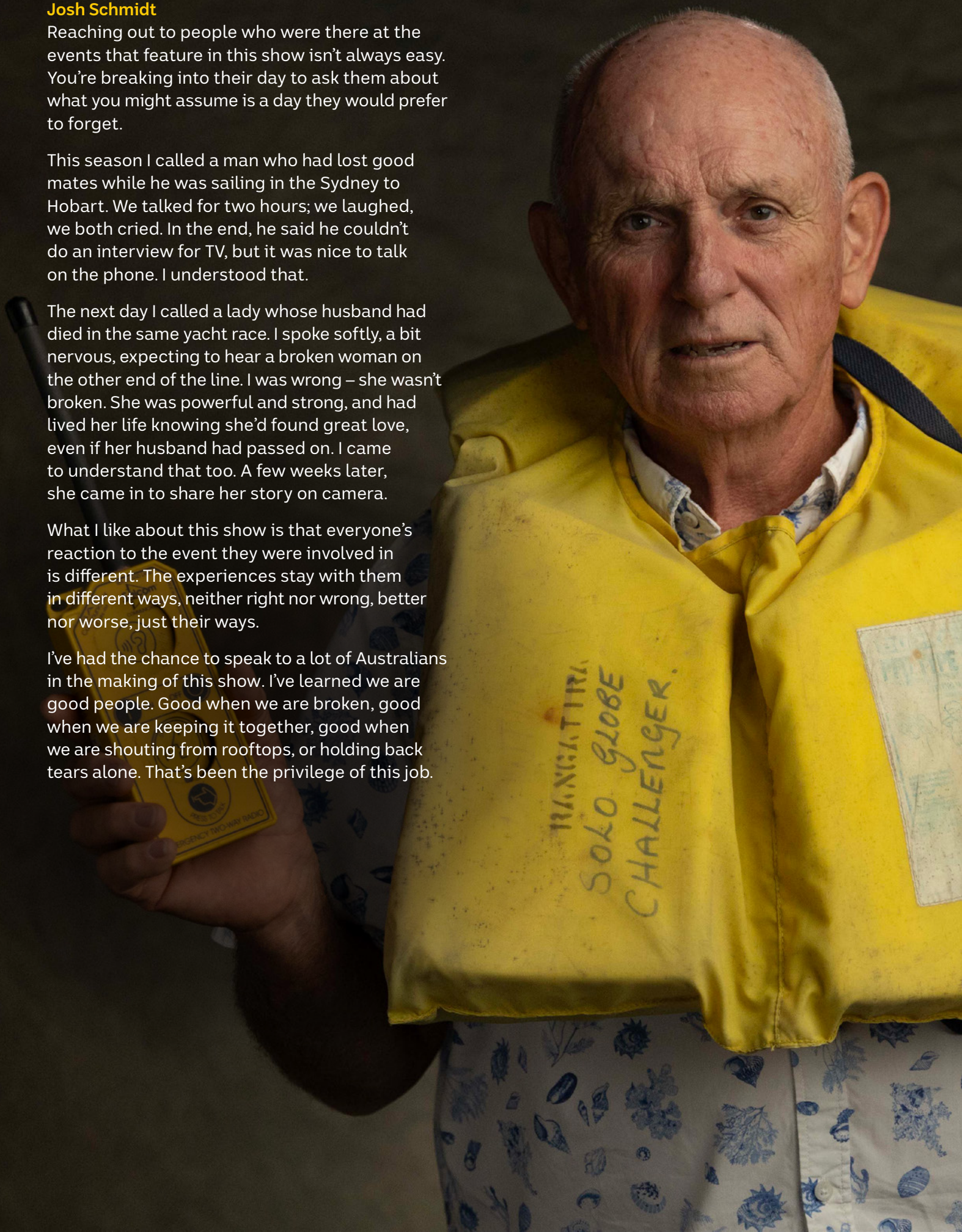
Reaching out to people who were there at the events that feature in this show isn't always easy. You're breaking into their day to ask them about what you might assume is a day they would prefer to forget.

This season I called a man who had lost good mates while he was sailing in the Sydney to Hobart. We talked for two hours; we laughed, we both cried. In the end, he said he couldn't do an interview for TV, but it was nice to talk on the phone. I understood that.

The next day I called a lady whose husband had died in the same yacht race. I spoke softly, a bit nervous, expecting to hear a broken woman on the other end of the line. I was wrong – she wasn't broken. She was powerful and strong, and had lived her life knowing she'd found great love, even if her husband had passed on. I came to understand that too. A few weeks later, she came in to share her story on camera.

What I like about this show is that everyone's reaction to the event they were involved in is different. The experiences stay with them in different ways, neither right nor wrong, better nor worse, just their ways.

I've had the chance to speak to a lot of Australians in the making of this show. I've learned we are good people. Good when we are broken, good when we are keeping it together, good when we are shouting from rooftops, or holding back tears alone. That's been the privilege of this job.



PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

Loni Cooper

I Was Actually There has an investigative element I really love. It can feel like detective work, digging back through the archives to find names and faces in old newspapers and then working out how to track those people down, sometimes fifty years later. Hearing a voice in an old newsreel and then, after days or weeks of searching, hearing that very same voice down a phone line...it's incredibly rewarding.

Sometimes people would prefer to leave history in the past. But other times, they've been waiting for years for someone to call them up, to recognise that what they've been through is important, that their story is worth being told.

This season I spoke to a man who was attacked at the Cronulla riots. It took weeks to find his details, as his surname had been misspelled in media coverage at the time. In the stories broadcast about him 20 years ago, he'd said he was planning to return to his home country after the violent attack. But it turned out he'd stayed here and actually lived not far away from me. Getting him on the phone and hearing that he was brave enough to relive what was a truly awful day in his life, was a powerful moment.

The courage and graciousness of our interviewees never ceases to amaze me. The generosity with which they share recollections of what might be some of the most difficult moments of their lives, in a bid to help others simply understand, is a constant source of inspiration. I hope our audiences see these incredible people in that same way.



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