

RELEASED: Thursday, February 4, 2016

Australian Story: Sea of Doubt

Airs Monday, February 8 at 8pm on ABC & iview - introduced by ABC journalist Emily Bourke

When Coffs Harbour handyman Andrew Witton sailed out of Sydney's Pittwater in 2006 it was supposed to be the trip of a lifetime. Instead he was dead just a few months later, vanishing inexplicably from the deck of his beloved yacht *Kaileia* in a remote and inhospitable part of the Pacific Ocean.

"Every time I think about Andrew it grates on me. What really happened – if only the boat could talk to you and tell you the whole story. It's just an absolute mystery." – Hamish Dickson, sailor

"Never, never knowing what happened to Andrew, how it actually happened is the hardest part of all." – Louise Witton, Andrew Witton's sister

"I'm not pretending to be an angel. But I'm not a murderer... I lead an adventurous life. I'm not going to abide by all laws, no. But I do have good morals." – Simon Golding, crew mate & convicted drug smuggler.

According to the last entry in Andrew Witton's boat log, the day he disappeared was calm and clear with very little wind.

By coincidence, a few weeks later friend and experienced sailor Hamish Dickson arrived in the Galapagos Islands to find Andrew's boat deserted and stripped. Hamish reviewed Andrew's final log entry: *"Someone that's been at sea for 40-plus years falls off the side of his own yacht in flat, calm conditions. It's pretty unheard of. In saying that, it is possible,"* he told *Australian Story*.

There was only one witness on the day Andrew Witton disappeared: his crew mate, Simon Golding. The men had been friends and fellow residents in Coffs Harbour.

Simon Golding's account of what happened has remained to date the only testimony of Andrew's disappearance.

But Andrew's family, led by older sister Louise, unearthed compelling information, questioning Simon Golding's version of events.

Since Andrew's disappearance, Simon Golding has been involved in a separate matter in relation to drug running across the Pacific. In one of Australia's biggest cocaine hauls, along with others he was convicted of importing nearly 400 kilos of cocaine, with a street value of at least \$160 million.

The program includes an exclusive interview with Simon Golding, recorded before his imprisonment, in which he maintains his innocence and bewilderment over Andrew Witton's disappearance: *"I did not push Andrew overboard,"* he says. "I never liked Andy's boat. I could quite easily go to any marina and pick out a boat of my choice and take it."

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