

## **Episode 57: Gael crashed into a river**

Welcome to What Was That Like. I'm your host, Scott Johnson. This is a show where we talk to regular people - people just like you and just like me - who have found themselves in an extremely unusual situation. We'll hear their stories and get inside their head because we all want to know what was that like. More information about each episode at [whatwasthatlike.com](http://whatwasthatlike.com). Here we go.

It gets pretty cold in Mason City, Iowa in the winter. Just ask Gael - he lives there.

Gael is 18 years old. One day last December, on a particularly freezing day, he was on his way to a class. Just a routine day, driving along, and he's approaching a bridge that goes over a big river.

Except he doesn't make it to the bridge. Instead, he finds himself in the middle of the river, and the water is rising in the car. And somehow, during the crash, his phone got lost. But a young lady named Siri was still listening.

A warning about this episode, if you use an iPhone – during the story, Gael will use that lady's name. You know, the lady in the iPhone whose name starts with "S" and he tells her to call the police. So be aware of this, so that YOUR phone doesn't hear that instruction and make a phone call to your local police department.

And after today's story, we'll get a sneak preview of Raw Audio 3, as well as some of the reviews that have come in recently.

And now, let's hear what happened to Gael.

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**Scott**

Do you remember how cold it was that day?

**Gael**

It was really cold. I think we were on, like, -1. Yeah, it was freezing temperatures.

**Scott**

That is pretty cold. When you were driving that day, where were you headed?

**Gael**

I was heading towards Nyack, my college campus, where I was studying welding.

**Scott**

Was this a road that you traveled regularly?

**Gael**

Yes.

**Scott**

Okay, so you were obviously very familiar with it. Can you just take us through you driving down that road? Just take us through what happened.

**Gael**

All right. Well, it usually takes me about 30 minutes to get to school, so I have to wake up early. Anyways, I take Exit 90 California, if I remember correctly. I always take that exit to school. So I was heading towards that exit and I turned right. As I was going forward, there's a bridge that crosses the river there and I think it was called the Winnebago River. As I was driving towards it, I was listening to my music. As I was listening to my music, my jeep started to move a little bit onto the right side, so I tried to control it. Then, from there, I started to lose control and my whole jeep started shaking. There was a vehicle on my left side that was coming back on my side and I didn't want to hit it, so I had to turn all the way right. From there, I couldn't see anything. I saw everything blurry and I was just scared and confused. While all that was happening, my music was playing out loud - it was weird. It was like I was in the movie with loud music playing in the background while everything was going crazy. All I felt were bumps and everything was rough. Then, everything stopped once I hit something. It was a really hard hit on my head on the wheel. Once I stopped and tried to process everything, I heard, like, water sounds. My blurred vision went away. I turned around and I was in the river. I saw the water coming in my vehicle. So, the first thing I did was turn down the windows because I thought it was gonna sink and I was so scared about that.

**Scott**

Was the car, like, barely in the river? How wide is this river?

**Gael**

Pretty wide. I wasn't, like, in the middle of the river.

**Scott**

You couldn't just step out and go on the land because you were surrounded by water?

**Gael**

That's correct. I fell from a high hill. I was thinking that if I hadn't gone fast, I would probably turn over because it was pretty high from where I fell. Because I went fast, the Jeep didn't turn around.

**Scott**

So you're saying that, when you left the road, there's like a steep embankment that goes down to the river?

**Gael**

Yeah, it was tall. If I went slow, I would have turned over because, apparently, that happened to another guy that crashed in there.

**Scott**

It seems like this would be a place for a guardrail, but there's nothing there to block you from going from the road right over this embankment. So you went into the river but the car was at least still upright?

**Gael**

Yes. It was pretty terrifying. The water started to get in and I couldn't find my phone. I was wearing glasses at that time. I couldn't see very well without my glasses.

**Scott**

Do you know how to swim?

**Gael**

Yes.

**Scott**

How quickly was the water coming into the car?

**Gael**

Pretty quick because the current was also really fast.

**Scott**

So the whole river was moving pretty quickly. Was the car moving down the river or is it kind of in one spot?

**Gael**

Just one spot, thankfully.

**Scott**

What was keeping it in the same spot? Do you know if it was on a rock or something?

**Gael**

I think so. Also, because of the weight of the Jeep because it had some tools in the back.

**Scott**

Okay, what made you realize that you needed to roll the windows down so quickly? I mean, have you had, like, emergency training in the past or something?

**Gael**

Well, to be honest, I've seen a lot of movies where people fall into the river, but they don't do anything. So the first thought that came to mind was, "Well, if that ever happens to me, all I do is just turn down the windows and make sure I remove my seatbelt."

**Scott**

Alright. So now you're thinking, "Okay, I need to get some help." Because you're stuck there, you can't do anything, right?

**Gael**

Yeah.

**Scott**

And you had your phone but you didn't know where it was?

**Gael**

I couldn't find my phone, so the next thing I did was say, "Hey Siri, call 911." Siri replied back, saying, "Calling emergency services in three seconds." I heard Siri on my left side, so I checked with my hand and I found my phone. From there, I called the cops.

**Scott**

So the phone had fortunately not gotten wet or underwater yet.

**Gael**

Nope.

**Scott**

That's when you dialed 911 and were able to reach someone.

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**911 Operator**

911. What is the address of your emergency?

**Gael**

I don't know. I crashed into a river and I don't know what to do.

**911 Operator**

Okay. What river did you crash into?

**Gael**

It's the one that's close to Nyack. I don't know.

**911 Operator**

Nyack? Okay. And what road are you on?

**Gael**

I'm not sure. I slipped on ice and fell into the river. I don't know.

**911 Operator**

So are you out of your car?

**Gael**

No, I'm literally inside the river and I'm inside my car.

**911 Operator**

Okay, I am going to try to map you out, so just stay on the phone with me. What kind of car do you have?

**Gael**

It's a jeep.

**911 Operator**

A jeep. Okay. Do you have water inside the jeep or are you sitting on top of the river?

**Gael**

Inside the river, but the water is getting in.

**911 Operator**

Okay, what is your name?

**Gael**

My name is Gael Salcedo.

**911 Operator**

What's your first name?

**Gael**

Gael.

**911 Operator**

How do you spell that?

**Gael**

G-A-E-L.

**911 Operator**

And what's your last name?

**Gael**

Salcedo. S-A-L-C-E-D-O.

**911 Operator**

Okay. And does your cell phone number that you're using right now end in (hidden information)?

**Gael**

Yes.

**911 Operator**

Okay. I think I got you mapped out, so just be patient with me. Then, that way, I can have help there. The sooner the better huh? Let's see. It looks like you were traveling on Thrush Avenue. Which direction were you heading in?

**Gael**

I was heading to Nyack.

**911 Operator**

Okay, that makes sense. So I'm gonna say you're at Thrush Avenue. Are you hurt at all?

**Gael**

No, but I am stuck in the middle of the river and the waters are getting in.

**911 Operator**

Okay, I'm sending the fire department out there, so the phone's gonna be quiet for just a second, Gael. So hold on, okay?

**Gael**  
Okay.

**911 Operator**  
Okay, I do have help on the way. How deep is it in your Jeep?

**Gael**  
The water is halfway in my jeep.

**911 Operator**  
Okay. Have you undone your seatbelt yet?

**Gael**  
Yes.

**911 Operator**  
Okay. Do you have electric locks or manual?

**Gael**  
Well, I have the whole window open.

**911 Operator**  
Your window is down?

**Gael**  
Yes.

**911 Operator**  
Okay, I'm just asking in case you need to get out of the vehicle. Sometimes the water - I doubt it's this strong because of the ice flow in there - will take your Jeep and float it. So if it happens and you need to get out, it's good to have that seatbelt undone in the water and the window down.

**Gael**  
Okay.

**911 Operator**  
So is the water reaching the window at all?

**Gael**  
No.

**911 Operator**  
Okay. The water that's coming in is seeping into your vehicle, then, at some place. So you're able to keep your phone out of the water while you're talking to me?

**Gael**  
Yes.

**911 Operator**  
Okay. Very good.

**Gael**  
Okay. I don't know. I was just driving normally and, all of the sudden, I lost control and ran into the river. The first thing I did is turn on the windows just in case.

**911 Operator**  
Very good. Yes. Were you driving tonight?

**Gael**  
Yes.

**911 Operator**  
And you were heading north?

**Gael**  
Yes. I was heading for my welding classes tonight.

**911 Operator**  
Okay. The deputy said he thinks he can see your car. He's still getting situated with his vehicle. You don't think you're injured at all?

**Gael**  
Um, no. Okay.

**911 Operator**  
Did your airbags deploy?

**Gael**  
Yes, there's a bunch of airbags all around the windows.

**911 Operator**  
Okay. Hold on just a second here. Is it just you?

**Gael**  
Yes. It's just me. It's my mom's car.

**911 Operator**  
He was heading northbound on Thrush when he went in. It looks like he's mapping out on the east side of the road and an officer or deputy has located him.

(Inaudible)

**Gael**  
Yes, I'm right here!

(Inaudible)

**Gael**

No, but I am stuck!

(Inaudible)

**911 Operator**

Okay. He's yelling at you. I'm gonna hang up with you. Okay?

**Gael**

Okay.

**911 Operator**

All right.

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**Scott**

How did you realize someone was there? Could you just see that the emergency personnel had shown up?

**Gael**

He yelled if someone was there, and I replied, "Yes, I'm here. It was like a police officer."

**Scott**

What did they do?

**Gael**

Well, they told me to calm down and not panic, so I try my best not to. I was also thinking if my jeep starts moving, I will get out of my passenger window and go on top of the Jeep in case the jeep starts moving from the current. Then, from there, 5 minutes later was when the firefighters came. They were trying to find out how to get me out. I just saw them through the window communicating on the bridge until they were putting on the water suit for this one guy. They started to get a rope and put it on the guy. That's when a group of guys came down from the north side of the hill to get me. The guy with the rope with the body suit was the one that came into the river and the guys on top of the bridge were pulling and making sure the current wouldn't take him. That's when he came to my door and told me to come down and that "This is the way it's going to be." I think that's what he said. He just told me that there is no other way. I put on my life vest and he told me to hold on really tight, so I did. The jeep was already filled with water. We had to open the door on my right side because the current wouldn't let me open my passenger seat door, so I had to go out on the other side.

**Scott**

You mean the driver's door was blocked, so you had to exit through the passenger side?

**Gael**

Yes, he opened the door. From there, the rest of the water came in and touched my legs, and it was really, really cold. Like, from there, I was starting not to feel my toes. Then, I had to put in both of my legs into the water and the water reached, like, up to my waist because I'm pretty tall. So from there, I hold on tight to the guy. I think I had my arms around him or on the rope - I think was the rope and he was behind me. From there, the guys on the bridge were pulling us to make sure we get there and I was using all of my strength to get there. I started to not feel my fingers while I was walking through the water. I fell a couple of times and slipped on the rocks because it was hard and the current just kept coming and coming, so there was a lot of force. I fell a couple of times and the firefighter behind me helped me out and made sure I wouldn't fall that much. Then, since I couldn't feel my fingers anymore, I couldn't use my hands to hold on to the rope, so I had to use my arms. My whole arms were, like, wrapped around the rope and made sure I don't fall. At the point I fell into the cold water, I started to feel my body go numb - I couldn't feel it that much anymore - so I used all my strength that I could to get to the edge and that's when finally we got closer. I was relieved and the guy pushed me to the land. Then, finally, the guys that were there helped us get out. From there, he took off the rope and everything. Two guys helped me get to the ambulance because I couldn't walk because I couldn't feel my legs or my hands.

**Scott**

Were you conscious that whole time - even in the ambulance?

**Gael**

Yes.

**Scott**

Is that probably the coldest you've ever been?

**Gael**

Yes, it was insane. I never experienced that cold in my life.

**Scott**

Well, I can imagine the air temperature is around zero degrees. So it has to be a pretty fast-moving river if it's that cold but not frozen over.

**Gael**

Yes.

**Scott**

Do you ever see that river frozen over at all?

**Gael**

No, because the current was too fast.

**Scott**

You mentioned that during part of this - I guess, while you were waiting for the fire department to get there - you took some video?

**Gael**

Yes. After I called the police, I called my mom telling her that I fell into a river, that I don't know if I'm going to make it, and that I love her so much. My mom was so confused, like, "Wait, what?"

What do you mean? What are you talking about?" I just said, "I love you. If I'm okay, I'll call you again." So I had to hang up on her. Then, from there, I had to go to class so I sent one of my friends, Alyssa from welding class, like, a quick snap and said - Ryan is my teacher - "Tell Ryan that I was not going to make it." I snapchatted a bit of video - I was shaking, so my camera was shaking - and I just sent it to her. Then, from there, I put my phone away and just looked around and thought about what I was gonna do next. If the jeep is moving, I'll get out through the window. I was calming myself down because I was thinking, "If I keep panicking, I'm not going to be able to focus." Since I saw the Jeep wasn't moving, I calmed myself down more.

**Scott**

Did you talk to your mom later about what her reaction was when she got that call?

**Gael**

Yeah, she told me that she started crying because I'm the only child of my mom. My mom right now is my grandmother, but she adopted me when my mother died. I was the only child. So she was crying because I'm the only son who my mom gave birth to. She was crying a lot until later when I got my phone in the ambulance. I called her and said, "Hey, Mom, I'm okay. Please stop crying. I'm in the ambulance. I'm okay. I'm heading towards the hospital in Mason City." All I heard was her crying - like, she couldn't speak to me. I sent her a message saying that I'm okay.

**Scott**

I can imagine how she must have been so terrified from the time of that first call till the time she heard from you again. Did she even know where you were?

**Gael**

No, she didn't know.

**Scott**

So she's just waiting for another phone call that whole time.

**Gael**

Yes.

**Scott**

She must have probably been crying out of fear the first time, and crying out of happiness the second time hearing from you that you're okay.

**Gael**

Mmhmm.

**Scott**

When did you see her for the first time after this?

**Gael**

It was at the hospital.

**Scott**

Okay, so they took you to the hospital. Were you injured at all?

**Gael**

No, I just had a really bad headache and some of my body really hurt, but it was going away. It was just the cold that really got me.

**Scott**

You were probably in shock.

**Gael**

Yes.

**Scott**

Did you stay overnight in the hospital? How did that turn out?

**Gael**

Yeah, I just stayed for a few hours. The doctors were making sure that everything was okay and checking if I had broken bones or anything. Everything was fine, so they let me go home.

**Scott**

Can you talk about when your mom came to the hospital?

**Gael**

Yeah, when she came in, she was calm. She held my hand and hugged me and kissed my forehead and thanked God that I was okay. She wasn't crying, but her eyes were red. She was calmer because I called her and told her that I was okay. She was just really happy and relieved that I was okay, and she didn't care about the jeep or anything.

**Scott**

The car was hers, right?

**Gael**

Yes. When you were in the car, before you had gotten rescued, were you completely thinking about "How am I going to survive this?" or "Wow. My mom's car is messed up."?

**Gael**

I was thinking both.

**Scott**

What happened to the car? Did they pull it out?

**Gael**

Yes. It took them, like, a couple of days to take it out because we had to find a person to take it out but a lot of people didn't have the equipment to take it out. So, it took some time until they finally did. Well, the front was really messed up so we couldn't use it or fix it anymore. And when they took it out, half of the Jeep was just filled with frozen ice.

**Scott**

So where is it now?

**Gael**

In the junkyard.

**Scott**

If that's the worst casualty, I think you got off pretty good.

**Gael**

Yeah. Also, this might sound crazy but, before all this happened, just a few weeks before I fell in the river, I had a dream where I was driving and I fell into the water and drowned. It was weird because once I left after I crashed into the river, I was at the hospital thinking about that and I was like, "Okay, that was weird. I died in my dream, but I didn't in real life."

**Scott**

So you think it was, like, a premonition?

**Gael**

I don't know.

**Scott**

Do you believe in stuff like that?

**Gael**

I don't believe in stuff like that, but I do think about it. It's just weird.

**Scott**

Have you driven that same road again since then?

**Gael**

Yes, but now I drive like really really slow when it's winter.

**Scott**

When you go past that point, you must always remember what happened that day.

**Gael**

Yeah, it's pretty insane just thinking about how I could have died or what could have happened, but here I am alive.

**Scott**

Raw Audio episode 3 is now live. It's only one 911 call but it's one you will never forget.

A woman in Oklahoma is home one night. Her husband's at work so she's alone. After midnight, a strange man is at her door, yelling and trying to break in.

**911 Operator**

He's at the garage? Is that attached to your house?

**Woman**

Nope, he is at the back patio door again. He's coming back here again.

(Loud knock)

## **Woman**

He's walking across back and forth on the porch. He looks to be an older man. I don't want to kill him.

## **Scott**

This Raw Audio episode is now live, so you can hear the complete 911 call, and what happened. The Raw Audio episodes are bonus episodes, available to patrons at the \$5 a month level. You get the past episodes and all the future episodes, and you can sign up for this at [WhatWasThatLike.com/support](https://www.WhatWasThatLike.com/support).

And it's been a little while since I read some of the reviews that have come in. If you're new to the show, you probably noticed that I never asked for reviews. A lot of podcasters think that the ratings and reviews in Apple podcasts help their show get found more in the search results, but that's a common misconception, so you won't hear me asking for reviews here, but they happen anyway. I do appreciate it when people go there and say something nice about the show or even criticize the show, as one did recently. Matter of fact, let's go ahead and read that one.

This was in reference to Episode 52, which is called these "Three people died." It highlighted three stories of people of color who had done nothing wrong, but were killed in their own home by police officers. In response to that episode, JohnEnvy51 wrote, "Concerning your June 2020 show, I listened to these shows to relax and maybe learn a thing or two. I don't tune in to be preached to or make me feel guilty for being Caucasian. You missed your mark." Really, I have to say I didn't create that episode to preach or make anyone feel guilty. I just felt like it was an opportunity to raise awareness of the issue and I love seeing how there is actually some change taking place. It feels like progress. I did get a lot of really positive feedback for that episode, such as MKFlorists who said, "We must all know what happens in cases like these. Thank you for putting it out there in such raw form."

Here are some other reviews that have come in. EdsGirl62 wrote a simple two word review, "I'm hooked." KM98654. wrote, "I have many podcasts I listened to on a regular basis and this podcast is one of my all time favorites. Interesting and engaging stories. Great questions asked by a host. He's a skillful interviewer as well as a really good listener. He often asked the questions I'm thinking. I'm so glad I found this podcast. I highly recommend it."

Then, we have Meowee69 who wrote, "I love this podcast. Scott is a very genuine host and the stories are super interesting." MidnightXCorps wrote this review titled, "I can't get enough. I absolutely love this show and all of its aspects. I listen to this podcast when I'm at work. I work as a housekeeper at a hospital. It's a lot of work to get done and I swear this podcast helps me get through my days better. I love how Scott lets everyone tell their stories, never interrupt, always does so much research, and care so much for the people he talks to. I can't wait to hear more."

Next, we have Courtney1000, who wrote, "Just found your podcast. I love it. The stories are amazing. Keep going and can't wait to binge them all." Finally, WendyWu from England wrote this, "This is an excellent podcast. Best one I've heard of this genre for a very, very long time. Thanks for being fabulous. Keep it up. Love the raw audio version. Brilliant. Want more of those 911 calls, please."

Thanks to all of you for your kind words as well as the people who email me or contact me on Twitter or Instagram or Facebook to comment on the show or particular episode. Please believe

me when I tell you it's much appreciated, I really enjoy creating the show for you, and I hope to be doing it for a long time. Speaking of that, I need to get back to work. See you next time!