

Start of interview - Richard

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Int. Why don't we start by you telling me a little bit about yourself. Like where you were brought up, your childhood

RICHARD So I was raised in [city]. I would consider relatively poor household. There were five kids and both parents worked full time to try support us and we were very unsupervised. Like we would have, from say eight in the morning through till about six at night, um we did our own thing while we were in school. Um had a pretty amazing childhood I reckon. Like just very free to go and do stuff. We would build rafts, go down the [name] river, we'd play up at the lake, we'd go and chase possums and eels. Very much an outdoors lifestyle and dad took us a little bit he'd take us on, like he introduced us to, and had a little wee twenty two rifle, we used to go and, to support ourselves, we used to go and shoot possums and skin them and then sell the pelts sort of thing

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And so I grew up, I had a twin brother and a brother who was basically a year younger and so we had three boys who were, we weren't evil kids but we were naughty and part of it was having a real lack of parental supervision. And so [brother] grew up with a lack of respect for authority I reckon and not liking rules, and not liking being told what to do because most of the time we could do our own thing. And the few times we were exposed to, to sort of people trying to influence us, I wouldn't say we rebelled against it but we didn't like it. And I see that in myself today. This trait of you know, just because a policeman says you can't do this, doesn't

mean that's right or wrong, and I don't like that at all, I don't like being told what to do

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Um I then, at the end of school, at a loose end and I just went to university cause all my friends did. So I did a bachelor of science majoring in applied maths and then still didn't really know what I wanted to do. I came to [city], did a bachelor of engineering um mechanical. And then, about seven or eight years later I did a diploma of commerce and then about ten years, or a few years after that, I did a Master of business administration in [city]. So it's my academic shit out the way. Ah got a job, um leaving university with a BE, I got a job as an oil exploration engineer and I worked through the Middle East and the North Sea. Um and that was an extraordinary company. Like in one year I was typically earning about a quarter of a million dollars US after all my tax was paid. Like it was, you know, a high salary um, got a lot of confidence, got quite cocky

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in that company. Like that company teaches you like you're basically the fighter pilots of the oil industry and it was really good at making you, like you get by with whatever you've got. Like I was for example, I worked in Libya and I had a base of about six or seven operators and basically my job was to go out and run these jobs with very basic equipment. Like we were running electronics, running explosives, radioactive sources, a lot of quite difficult and quite complicated equipment but all you've got is what's in Libya at the time. Very hard to ship electronics in and out of Libya. Um and so I got really good at getting by with whatever you've got and became a little bit of a sort of master of all things. Like if you give

me a piece of equipment I can break it down and figure it out and put it back together. If I've got a problem with one of my workers whatever, it sort of, it turned me into a generalist. So I'm maybe not amazing at anything, but I'm good at lots of things. And with my, with my technical background from my studies,

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I'm very good technically. So I can understand stuff quite well. I see today with my work as an activist, those skill sets are really really helpful and I often, I look at other people that I work with and I wish that some of them came with similar skill sets because it really does make you effective as an operator to do whatever mission you're trying to do. So when I finished up in the oil industry, I came back to New Zealand, I started a small high tech business called [name of company] with some other engineers. So we developed cameras that guide robots. So you'd have a, like for example, a, on a production line, you might have a, a production line could have these, manufacturing these cups and they'd come floating by our system, could take a photo of this cup and say right, has it got a handle, is it the right shape, has it got any chips around the lip, has it got any major defects. And if it picks up any flaws, it would knock it automatically off the conveyer, for example. Just a very basic application

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So I started that business with three other engineers, grew that up to, we had about thirty employees um, went to Australia. We were trying to, we were starting to do a lot of work in Australia and I wanted to set up a distribution up there. Went to Australia and set it up, and it was were I did my MBA. And this is at the time, up until now, I wouldn't have had a single thought about animal rights or

about conservation or the environment, not an inkling. Um but when I was doing my MBA in [city], the um, to finish off the degree you could write a thesis on pretty much anything you wanted that had an economic impact. And I did, the thesis I wrote was alternative fuels for road transport and because I worked in the oil industry for a long time, I had an interest in renewables. But having been inside that industry, there was this unease about fossil fuels

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And keep in mind this is around 2002, 2003. There was no, there was no talk of climate change or things like that but I knew a lot about the finite nature of fossil fuels and in those days we had about fifty years of oil left and about, after that, another thirty five forty years of gas left, and that is it. Like, when you're inside the industry these numbers are well known. Outside the industry, no one really knows but inside, we all, we all know cause we have all the logs that kind of prove it sort of thing. And so in the back of my mind for a period, there'd been, I'd say, maybe unease about fossil fuels and our dependency on them. So I wrote this thing, alternative fuels and road transport. And through writing that, took me about, maybe nine months, I became a real convert to bio diesel and ethanol, and not as a silver bullet for transport and for energy but as a first step towards sustainability and transport

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Transport's a tough one, if you took oil and gas out of the equation, how the fuck would you get here today, for example? How would you fly up from [city] you know, like, oil and gas underpins our transport industry. Other industries can sort of survive without oil and gas, but transport no way. So I decided, I wouldn't call this activism, I'd call it maybe promotion. I'd decided to do something to

promote bio diesel fuel. And in those days, no one had heard of it, in those days it was like, bio diesel what's that? And so I spent about a year trying to figure out in my mind what I was going to do to make bio diesel. Cause up until now, you know my life has been maybe a little bit unusual, to work in the oil industry making quite big money but still mainstream. Now suddenly I've decided I'm gonna do something to promote bio diesel

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And so I had the idea, I wanted to do something that was transport related, so I decided I'm gonna build the coolest something, car, boat, truck, helicopter, plane, train whatever. Something to promote this fuel that this vehicle or vessel will run on. As I started looking around at all these different options, helicopters and whatever, and I end up, the cool thing about a boat is it's very free, as long as it floats, you can build whatever you like. It doesn't, you can build whatever size you want, there's very few rules that dictate how you build it. If you wanna build a plane, then pretty much you gotta stick to this set of rules that limit what it can be and perform and everything. So anyway I remember thinking, I probably could build the coolest boat in the world. Um and what started off as what I thought as a six to nine month project, it just ballooned out to like, in the end, it was almost like four years. Um, oh well in fact longer. So anyway it took me, after a year, I had my mind on it, I'm gonna build the world's coolest boat and I'm gonna set a record for a power boat to circle the globe

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It then took a year to raise the money. So I put in about three quarters of a million which is pretty much all the money that I had and then I loaned another three quarters of a million, and we got

about one and a half million in sponsorship. Built this really cool boat um and started running promotions. And this is where, like I wouldn't call it, it wasn't so much activism but it was promotion. And so we would, we would take the boat you know, we took it in, say, [city], and you'd have on a good day, you'd have probably about a thousand people would walk through the boat. And it started off simply about bio fuels but what happened was, I had all of these crew coming along and I attracted a lot of green environmentally minded people to the cause, and they all had other ideas about, you know, hey it's not just about the fuel. You know, like so we started running the boat vegetarian for example. Um and we started to promote that message. Like we'd have you know, we might have in a day, three or four schools might come down, bring their kids and take them through the boat. And as part of our talk we tried to promote this message that

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you know, you need to start thinking about all of the things you do, but it doesn't mean you need to lead a shitty life. Like you can still lead an amazing life and you can be better on the planet at the same time. And so we used what we were doing as an example, so we had the fuel in the boat was bio diesel, the lubricants and the hydraulic fluids are all made from um, from vegetable oils. Um we had what at the time was an amazingly efficient engine. The whole ship was very efficient. Like it set a record for efficiency, like an amazingly efficient boat. When we came to town, we'd never rent cars or anything. We'd use public transport. We'd always support local foods as much as we could. So we started this idea of just promoting to people, to schools and to people who were interested in what we were doing, we'd promote this idea about um, about, thinking about all of the things you do in your life and looking at it

from an environmental perspective. Is there a better way that I can go do this? Can I, do I really need to bulldoze this house?

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Or can I maybe make do and just put in a new kitchen or um, and I started to realise like, there's a lot of stuff I'm shit at but there's a few things that I am good at. And one of those, I am good at connecting with people. You know if you put me with fifty kids, I can get a fair bunch of those kids starting to align with me. And so I started to realise I had this ability to connect with people in front of a camera. And so like in terms of, if media came down, I got quite good at doing sound bites and giving media good copy so that they would follow our story. And I started having this big group of people that would sort of follow me on things. And so you know there was a, I guess, a growing awareness about my ability to lead people and my ability to influence people. Um, and so the [conservation organisation] program, we had a lot of sponsor obligations. They funded half of the boat and provided fuel and all sorts of other resources

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And with that was this promotional tour. So over, over a period of three years, we had a hundred and eighty thousand people walk through the boat. Um it became probably the most photographed boat in the world. You know like it was, like, if you were to, your average American has seen it a couple of times you know, on the TV or in newspapers or whatever. And every city we'd go to, it was very media friendly. You know, a photogenic boat. It took us six months and we got a handle on media and how to, not guarantee it, but how to get you know, pretty decent media coverage in cities and that. And so then we ended up, we got the record in 2008, we

had to finish off this tour around, so we did, the last tour was through Europe and then across the Atlantic, cross Pacific, down Australia and then back to New Zealand. So this was middle of 2009 and it finished off all of mine obligations. Now what's happened over these three years

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is I've been on this amazing boat, travelling the oceans, and I started to see shit happening. One example was, I was in, we went into Fiji when a cyclone came through, and there was about thirty different, thirty Chinese trawlers all turned up. These were tuna trawlers, so they're using what's called a per se net which is, they tow a big net which envelopes like a purse and then they pull in the bottom and get all the tuna out. So anyway, we're in Fiji and there's thirty something tuna boats come in and I went up and chatted to one of the fisherman. I said, where are these boats fishing? He said, well you know, every time we have a cyclone they all turn up here but you know, none of them have got quota, none of them allowed to fish here legally but we don't know where they fish. Um and so you know, I was just interested at the time anyway. Then the cyclone finishes, the boats set off. We leave a couple of days later

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And we come across, we come across three of these boats all fishing illegally within Fijian waters. Now back in those days, this is 2006, if you went fishing for yellow fin in the [town], typically in a year there, they would catch about five hundred over the summer period. Last year I believe they caught nine. They're all gone. And so there was a whole series of anecdotes and stories like that that I came across. What the fuck? How the fuck can you have thirty

boats all fishing in Fiji and in surrounding waters and not having a major impact on it? Came across bottom trawling, we came across a boat fishing illegally in the Kermadecs, which is a marine reserve. I started doing spear fishing, I picked this up in Australia about 2000, um and there was a couple of places, I went out on a place, Maneuver Reef, middle of nowhere and the most unbelievable marine life I've seen anywhere

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Went back there three and a half years later and all the big fish were gone. And so these things started to eat away at me. I started out promoting bio diesel fuel and at the end of three or four years, I basically decided, you know, marine conservation is where I wanna dedicate my time. Um and so I had this very cool boat, I had a lot of debt and I was looking for ways that I could bail out of my debt. If I had to sell the boat then I was ok with that. And when we did the tour around Australia um, one of the journalists asked me, you know you've only got a few months of your tour left and then you know, what are you gonna do? And I was like, I've been thinking about going down to battle Japanese whalers in Antarctica um, and one of my crew was a big follower of [animal rights organisation] at the time. And he had the first two seasons of (TV program) on his laptop and we'd watched these in the boat. I remember looking at it thinking, man that's pretty cool

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Um and so I sort of decided I wanna get into marine conservation, I've got this Japanese whalers, it happens in my backyard sort of thing. So I said to this journalist, I might go down and fight the Japanese whalers, not really knowing what was involved. And it started some discussion on a [animal rights organisation] forum

about, hey this guy Richard, he's got this amazing boat and man, that would be a fantastic asset to [animal rights organisation]. Um so in the end, someone from [animal rights organisation] called me up and said, I'm gonna give you the number for [name of activist], have a chat to him, we'd really like to get your boat on the campaign. So I flew over, met with [name of activist], met with his financial guy and we put together a deal where they would effectively buy the boat off me for what it owed me and I would captain the boat for a year for them. Um so this is where a transition happens from being simply a sort of advocate for maybe thinking about your fuel and other things,

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to being an activist. Like [animal rights organisation], they are activists. And um you know I was quite looking forward to it um, really looking forward to it. So we, we pulled the boat out of the water in [suburb] here, stripped it down, modified it, changed it around to making it a bit more suited to taking to Antarctica. Um and then we went down, so this is 2009, and we had some, we had a few incidences. We, our job was to disrupt the whaling. There's various ways you'd do that from trying to get their propellers failed with big ropes, firing rotten butter on their deck and lots of other stuff. We were pretty naughty down there, aye? And we were pretty effective. The boat got re-named the [name of boat] as part of the deal and you know, we were certainly making it quite difficult for the Japanese to operate yeah. And then on, it was [date], um, one of the things that happened was

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this is weird, so it's illegal to re-fuel a vessel in Antarctic waters below, anything below, sixty degrees south, you can't refuel. But I

was, but [name of activist], [animal rights organisation] does re-fuel their vessels below sixty degrees south and basically we lose a week if we travel north and re-fuel and go south, let's just re-fuel here. Um but what had happened was, the captain of the [name of boat], he was supposed to re-fuel me, he refused, cause it was south of sixty degrees. I was the loyal servant, I was simply doing what I was told. So I called up [name of activist] and so he said, look um, just go as far as you can and then I'll come down and re-fuel you in a couple of days. So we were basically out of fuel and we got, we had the Japanese security vessel who we had already messed with on a few previous occasions you know, they came in and basically ran us over. And we were, we were almost stationary in the water as they came in on us, my guy driving, he tried to turn to starve it but we just didn't have the speed on to be able to get away and they ran us in half

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Um you know, it did break my heart. You know it was a boat, I managed it from the very start, it had been my idea to build this boat and it was an extraordinary vessel, I'd captained it for four years and it did break my heart. And then probably what made it worse was, the boat was salvageable but I got the order to sink it. And so I went in with the captain of the [name of boat], we went in and we scuttled it. So we opened up the seacock's to allow water to flow into the engine room, opened up all the hatches so she would sink. She'd never sink completely but we knew she'd get pretty low in the water. Yeah so we did that and then there was um, I'd had a, I was pretty determined going down there to have a whole bunch of tactics that, even by [animal rights organisation] standards were pretty radical. Like we had for example, I wanted to take down a fifty calibre gun and lace the bullets with cyanide

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And ah or lace them with something that resembles cyanide. And then when they transport the, when they harvest whales, they shoot a whale, it dies, they then tow it and they transfer it to the processing ship. And it's towed in the water for a period of minutes where it's just a dead whale being towed in the water. So my idea was to come alongside the whale and shoot these bullets in the whale and it would, you then run a campaign in Japan that you know, hey these bullets have been poisoned with cyanide and you don't have to use cyanide, you could use wasabi, looks the same. It's just playing with their minds. The Japanese are fucking anally retentive man. Like if they, they're so particular about their food, their food quality. And I knew it would really gain traction with media. Anyway [name of activist] said I couldn't take the firearm and do it but he said I could take a bow and arrow and do it. And so I got this great big hunting bow that I took down but then he also, he emailed me, he had concerns about the cyanide

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So I started thinking about other things we could use and one of the possibilities was a radioactive isotope, like a tiny little thing. Like you've got radioactive isotopes for example, on the watch dials you know. But all you've gotta do, it's more the threat that hey, there is radiation inside this whale and another one I came up with was period blood. Like the Japanese, their attitudes towards food, and the thought of, these guys have put what inside this whale? How are they gonna tell this blood from that blood. So the idea is, that whale is, there's a hundred thousand dollars' worth of whale, every whale that you can shoot an arrow into, it's unlikely they will continue to harvest it. So it's hurt them a hundred thousand dollars.

But the bigger hurt would be the campaign, if it got traction with media in Japan, would be a reduction in consumption of whale. And at the end you know, Japan has got to decide to stop whaling be it through reduced consumption or through a government decision, one of those

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two has to happen and there was already signs in Japan that consumption is reducing on whale meat. So I remember thinking this could, I had ideas on setting an explosive up on their prop, I ran explosives when I worked in the oil industry. Like a pretty small shaped charge you could, all you've gotta do is bend one of those propellers by a few inches and the boat becomes basically disabled. They could maybe travel at four or five knots so they could, they could sneak all the way back to Japan but it would no longer be able to harpoon, to harpoon whales you've gotta do absolute minimum fifteen knots but twenty, twenty five is better. With a small explosive charge on their propeller there's no way they could do that. So I came in with all these quite radical ideas and [animal rights organisation] were like, oh shit Richard that's a bit too out there, that's not, we can never use weapons, and so I was a little bit like a muzzled dog there. I felt like really hamstrung they kept saying no you can't do that, you can't do this

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Um and it was quite frustrating and you see that in activist groups a lot. You, you have people start off with one group and then you know they get right into it but often the group has other priorities. So [animal rights organisation] you know, very conscious of their funding sources, they were a registered charity in the US. If they get real radical then they're gonna be branded as a terrorist

organisation and they'll no longer have funding. So you know, I'm not saying they're right or wrong, it's simply a different way of looking at it and they've got a lot more that they're considering whereas all I wanted to do was fuck the Japanese whalers over, you know. So anyway the, we got run over. One of the tactics I had was, all of my crew had made a commitment and we had this thing we called whale rider. And I wanted to have one of my crew go back to Japan as a prisoner. It wasn't going to be me cause my job was to get my boat down to Antarctica and back. Now that I had no boat I no longer had that obligation

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And so we had this thing called whale rider. What it was, when they transfer a whale, there's an interesting legal thing that happens, if you, if you catch a fish, you legally don't own that fish until it's inside your vessel. So if you've got a fish on the end of the line, it's not your fish from a legal perspective but as soon as it gets inside your vessel, it is your fish. You can argue a similar thing happens with whales. So they don't actually physically own that whale until it's inside the processing ship. So they are towing a whale along in the water, you get someone to jump on that whale and claim ownership of that whale. The Japanese then pull this whale inside their processing ship, that person hasn't physically boarded their boat, he's physically climbed aboard a whale and the Japanese have pulled the whale in. So my objective was to get that guy on the boat without them getting in trouble for boarding the boat without permission. But then have [animal rights organisation] refuse to take the man which would probably force them to take the man back to Japan

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And I figured that they'd probably get deported under immigration but it would be a big story. So I had this thing called whale rider. And then after the boat was sunk pretty much all of my crew ended up going on the [name of boat] back to port but I decided, I'll go and do this, I'll go and board one of their vessels. And I didn't, I didn't mind getting in a lot of trouble. Um and I knew, one of the things with, you know, as activists, media is our biggest ally. You know often all we're trying to do is get an issue in the public domain so that there's debate about it and hopefully debate that's more favourable to our, what we wanna achieve and save the whales, or whatever cause there is. So media is such a big ally and organisations survive or fail based on their media profile

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But in Japan we'd had virtually zero. Whaling was a non issue there. And I'll give you an example, in New Zealand, a similar cause would be abortion. Like it happens in New Zealand, you've got a very small group that is very pro-abortion, you've got a very small group that's staunchly anti-abortion but for most Kiwis it's a non issue. We know that it happens but it's not something that we would debate, it's not something you see in the papers or online. It's just kind of a non issue. Whaling was the same in Japan. It just wasn't something that they thought about. Japanese were like, fucking whaling yeah it happens but they don't really think about it. And so to try and change that, despite, to give you an idea, the sinking of the [name of boat], it made page five in the Tokyo Times. Page five? Like it was front page news around the Western world. In Japan, all it received was four paragraphs and the last thing, I remember the wording was, [name of boat] is now believed to be suffering from navigational difficulties

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Fuck off, my boat was rammed and almost sank. You know, navigational difficulties? And so there was this kind of alliance between the government, the coast guard, media and the whaling business. Japan is a really unusual society. Like no other society I've ever come across. Very patriarchal, dominated by males and dominated by old men especially. And they are the men in power and they run the coast guard, they run the media, they run the whaling business and they run the government. And so this alliance has kept a real tight handle on media and how whaling's been portrayed in Japan. And the only whaling issues you ever saw was the odd little story about trying to promote whale meat as good for your health and as a nationalistic food and all that sort of stuff

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Um and I remember thinking we need to get someone back into Japan to take the story there. So I thought, fuck I'll do it. So then it became a mission, how am I gonna get back to Japan and on one of their vessels. And so from a legal perspective, the Japanese, the captain of the [name of boat], under maritime law, he was guilty for the sinking of my boat. Like he was an overtaking vessel and he's the portside vessel and in both of those cases, he has to give way to me and he didn't, he just basically turned into us. So I remember thinking, if I got on that boat, ah if they were to take me back to Japan on that boat, it would either force them into prosecuting him for the sinking of my boat or they would just want me out of there as quickly as possible and I'd be deported under immigration. Um so that became the mission, board the [name of boat] and go back to Japan. And I knew it would stir up the media there

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I had no idea how much but I knew it would certainly get the story in the public domain within Japan. And so I made man about six or seven attempts went out on the [name of boat], in the small boats, they were pretty tough boats, they've got anti-boarding spikes along the side, they've got nets, they've got what are called impulse guns, which is like a, it's a crowd control device that shoots out pepper spray but it shoots it out over like a twenty square meter area. You know, so they're pretty well, so if you come up, the only way you could get on was if they didn't know you were about to board. And during the day the Japanese are really vigilant on their boats, it is quite hard. But I remember thinking man at night we might have a chance of, we had a lot of technical gear on [conservation organisation] so we had night vision goggles and lots of technical gear. We had a jet ski. Um so in the end the mission became, board the [name of boat] off a jet ski in the middle of the night. Um and so I put that together with [name] who was my engineer on the [name of boat]. Super capable guy

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ex military, real hard guy and perfect for this kind of mission. So anyway, the two of us put this mission together and in the last minute they made us take an [TV program] cameraman. But I did, [TV program] was running this hit TV show and I knew it would be a good story for them. So we, and three people on a jet ski is really difficult. So anyway, we went out and first attempt failed, fell in the water, [name] turned around, found me. Second attempt amazingly pulled it off. And I look back on it like an extraordinary moment. Like I remember when I, when I stepped onto that vessel, I remember just hiding out the back, it was still pretty dark and you just hide in the shadows and fuck I knew I'd created history. Like it was an extraordinary feeling. You know I spent the best part of several

months trying to make this happen and then suddenly here I am. And it's funny how you know, your life can change. On that second boarding, I was within a second or two falling off and I probably only had, it was quite tiring doing what we were doing, I only had maybe three or four attempts in me and

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it was fucking hard. Like for me to do that, pull that off, was a small miracle, you know. And ah when I got on I knew my life would never be the same again and it's changed even more so. And so then I waited around for a few hours, presented myself to the crew on day break, I had a, I had an arrest warrant to arrest this guy. But the trouble is from a legal perspective, as soon as I step on his boat, I come under Japanese law now, not New Zealand law or US law. And so my arrest warrant wasn't worth the paper it was written on really. Um I had a bill for three million dollars that I handed over for the sinking of my boat and there was a letter that had in Japanese my demands. So I was demanding this. I never said in the letter, I want you to take me back to Japan. Cause if I said that, they never would, they would have transferred me to coast guard or something. But I said, I want you to take me to New Zealand or Australia and I will not transfer to any other boat. And so pretty much they did exactly what I wanted, they took me all the way back to Japan

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Took twenty four days. And they got to Japan and they had, it was a big story, like it was the number one story for three days when I first arrived and then when ah, when the trial came up, it was number one story again and then on sentencing. Like when we went into dock, there was eight news helicopters in the air flying

around, filming it you know and it was an amazing amount of media. We had, I wasn't allowed any, I was considered quite a dangerous prisoner apparently and I wasn't allowed any visitors until I came off communications ban which took about two months. And then at the end of that two months, I was allowed one visitor for twelve minutes a day. And so on the first day, forty seven different journalists turned up and I had to pick one. So I picked a guy from the Asahi news, Asahi TV, which was the biggest TV network. So I picked them and so each day there would be, there was gradually less and less turning up as I worked my way though. And then some of them would start coming back a second time

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I had one journalist who I still correspond with now, he was one of the few that sort of understood my position. Like the media there was very, a lot of it was quite anti, you know like, they portrayed me as a, you know, as an eco-terrorist and I don't consider myself a terrorist by any means. Like you know, I'm an activist and I'm a conservationist but you know I thought, but that's often what happens, a lot of mainstream society might look at what we did and think, fuck that is radical but I don't see it that way. Um they might look at it as being really dangerous and it was, there was a certain risk there but they were calculated risks and if you don't understand those, it probably does seem really really dangerous. But there was an interesting thing that happened on the, the first couple of, when I was getting taken back to Japan, all of the media were super negative about us. And then on the second or third day,

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they took us down to the [name of boat], they wanted us to re-enact how I boarded it. And I wasn't hiding anything like, I'd confessed to

basically everything. Um so anyway, I went down there and so they got, and they wanted me to instruct the Japanese to perform what I'd done, how I got on, the route I'd taken around the boat and all of that. So anyway they got these three guys on a jet ski and the first guy, they keep flipping it, it's hard on a jet ski with three guys, they keep flipping it, and this carries on for about fifty minutes and I'm like, look guys you don't need three on there, just put two. So anyway they get two on the jet ski and the first guy comes up and he tries climbing up the side and his arms aren't strong enough. He clings on for about twenty seconds, next thing he lets go and he falls down beside, between the jet ski and the hull and he smashes his face on the side of the boat as he comes down. So he ends up busting his nose, so there's blood pissing everywhere. So he comes out so then, and there's like ten helicopters in the air filming all this shit. It was a circus. So then they get another, a younger guy to come up and he tries the same and he can't get up either so

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then there was this, you could see the penny dropping in a few of them. They're thinking, fuck you know we've got you know, coast guard who can't do this on a stationary boat in a port in Tokyo. Fuck this guy pulled this off in Antarctica, in the middle of the night, in two meter waves, fuck you know, we may not like this guy but fuck it is extraordinary what he pulled off. And so they ran a story, is Richard the last samurai? And then in the end, they concluded no cause I lacked integrity but there was a certain um, there was a certain shift in public perception towards me after that. And there was a, I'd say, a little bit of respect for what I'd actually managed to do and the story got a little bit of traction. So there was a fractional sort of softening of media there and then, as soon as I started having journalists coming through, coming to see me. Every

weekday I'd probably have one journalist with my twelve minutes, and three minutes of pleasantries and then five minutes of, the Japanese are like that

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Then there's be nine minutes, I'd sit there blah blah blah and after a few days I just got good at it. And so, I think that, you've gotta make your story really simple. They will pick out a couple sound bites and that's what they'll run with and so the bit I focused on, I said, Antarctica is the backyard of Kiwis and Aussies and it is offensive to us what you guys do down there, deeply offensive. And the idea of offense resonated with Japanese so they don't like to be offensive and they don't like to be offended either you know, and I had offended them and gone down and disrupted their whaling business. But you know I kept trying to say, look, this is not anti-Japanese, this is not a racism thing. If the Koreans or the Russians or China, anyone else is down there whaling, I'd be opposed to that as well but you guys are the only ones down there. And this is not Japanese territory, it's New Zealand and Australia's backyard and it started to get a bit of traction. Um and amazingly in 2010

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whale consumption in Japan halved, the year before it dropped ten percent, the year after it dropped a further ten percent but in 2010, which is the year I did my prison there, whale consumption halved in Japan. And I'm not, I'm not claiming total responsibility for that. I think there were a series of factors that contributed. Certainly the, it was the overall amount of media we got in Japan. The first time there was debate about whaling within Japan, yeah. And so you know, a lot of people say, do you think you really did make a difference? I reckon I did. Um certainly I wouldn't claim the whole

fifty percent but you know I reckon I was part of a team that certainly did put a big dent in whaling. If you were to go to a whaling industry executive and say, what's the worst thing that happened in the whaling industry in the last twenty years, they'd probably say that fucking Richard coming back to Japan. Because what happened was that the old men alliance in Japan lost control of the media on that

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Once once media started running this story about me being this SAS trained assassin and so it became a big story. And so the whaling industry lost control of it. And then everyone wanted to come and have a piece of me. And then when they got in there they found, fuck this guy isn't actually the radical. Like and he's intelligent and he's articulate and he puts forward some valid arguments. We don't agree with all of them but you know and so, so that debate started um yeah. And then I got, I was there for four and a half months and then I got a suspended sentence, so I got five convictions. And I never really, I fought one conviction. They charged me with assault. There's no way I assaulted anyone but they, it was, what happened was, three of the guys had impulse guns and they tried shooting at us when we were on the small boats. And what happened was they were shooting into the breeze and the pepper spray came back over them and they blamed me. They said that I had fired a projectile at the front of the boat and the spray from that had come back and injured their eyes

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And we saw it on video and clearly they shoot themselves. But the Japanese legal system is very difficult. Like it's way different to say a New Zealand or Australian or US system. Like theirs is really

based on confessions. And the conviction rate is over ninety eight and a half percent. Like you don't turn up there and argue your case and get off. The only reason you get off is for a gross breach in procedure and the Japanese are very much into procedure. You gotta follow all of these rules if you do that then you'll be convicted but for example, someone not being read their rights, you can get off on a technicality but it has to be a gross breach in procedure. Um so there's no way I was gonna be found not guilty and even the assault charge, we didn't really fight it like I would've liked to but my lawyers they said to me, if you stand up there and you're still saying you're all innocent, you're gonna get five years

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And you'll have to do the full five years of hard labour. And you know it's funny I couldn't, when I got to Japan, I honestly thought they'd give me about, I'd be there for two weeks while they sort out immigration and deport me. I knew there was a chance of me doing longer time and in part, because I was the captain of the [name of boat] and that was the boat that had caused them the most problems. Um and also I was in the thick of everything like every time there was a boat going out to do some action, I was in the thick of it. And also too I was, I found a lot of the guys there they'd wear helmets and they'd wear like wet suit things over their head and it meant that, like it was cold down there um but it also meant that they couldn't be recognised. I didn't care and so I never wore anything over my head so they had all these video and images of Richard again, Richard again, so they had a lot of material that they could use against me

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So it meant it was quite difficult for me to plead not guilty really except for the, except for the assault, I was pretty fucked off about that. You know I've got an assault charge against my name and there's no way I assaulted anyone you know but the other four convictions I never complained. One of them was disruption of business, you know that's a badge of honour. You know, I felt like saying to the judge, of course I disrupted their fucking business it was my job, yeah. So when I came back from Japan, things between me and [animal rights organisation] had gone a little bit awkward and I think they saw me as being a little too radical for them. And you know, some of the ideas I had you know they, so they decided to basically boot me out. Um and that did hurt, did hurt. Here's one of the things you find with activists, we, in our society, especially Western society

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we've lost our tribes. Like, man is naturally a tribal species but we no longer have our tribes. And so we try and make up for it in different ways. So we might have you know, our basketball team or our rugby team or our football team or whatever. We try, that kind of becomes our tribe, and when our football team succeeds that reflects in a positive way on us. But it's not a string connection, it's not like, I'm pretty to go and lose blood over a football team or rugby team. You know some nut cases will. But there's a real lack of tribal links in society and so we make up for it in some ways. What happens a little bit with your activist group and certainly within [animal rights organisation] this is very strong, [animal rights organisation] your tribe. And you, you walk around with your black hoodie on with the [animal rights organisation] brand, and there's a certain pride that goes with that. And people, people like to belong.

And a lot of your activists, they kind of struggle belonging in mainstream society

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They don't accept the same norms that everyone else does and often they're looking for a tribe. And so often the people are a little bit unusual, different motivations, they don't, you know, often a lot of them have had problems as kids, didn't fit in at school, got beaten up, got harassed. Or just you know, often with, a chunk of them would be the awkward kids at school, don't fit into mainstream, don't wanna put all that make up on, don't wanna do the usual chase boys and drive cars and stuff like that. And so they're a little bit lost looking for this tribe. And organisations like [animal rights organisation] offer them a tribe. A tribe that's cool you know, and a tribe that maybe has a cause that they believe in. You know you see that, a lot of people today, just fucking aimless. They drift through life on this treadmill and you see some of them, they wake up one day

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it's like, what the fuck am I doing with my life? You know like, I own a car and I've got a house or whatever, what's the purpose of my life? And a cause like [animal rights organisation] gives you something bigger than just you and that's why for certain people um, it becomes almost their, for a period of time at least, all they wanna do is go and help [animal rights organisation]. Or you know, go and help [animal rights organisation] or go and help the Animal Liberation Front or [animal rights organisation] or [animal rights organisation]. Whoever it is, that becomes their tribe and they will bleed for that tribe. You know you look at what I sacrificed for [animal rights organisation]. I did five months in prison and willingly.

And there was always a chance I was gonna do a decent lag. And you know I could have easily ended up with two or three years there. I went along and did that willingly and did some, even by my standards, some quite risky things on behalf of my tribe and I accepted that quite happily

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Int. Can we just jump back. So when you did five months in prison in Japan, can you talk to me about that?

RICHARD
Yep. Um so they run this story about me being a really dangerous man. And what didn't help my cause was, I had a knife that was a gift from my two girls, great big hunting knife. And I used that to cut the net when I boarded the [name of boat]. Was a gift from my two girls. So I was determined to keep this knife so I hid it on the [name of boat] before I went and presented myself to them. And then when I was doing exercises on the upper deck, I smuggled it back into my room on the [name of boat]. So I had this knife in my room and then when we got to Japan, my plan was, I wanted a meeting alone with my lawyers in my cabin, before I got arrested. And it looked like this was gonna happen. So anyway, I'd had this knife, I put it inside my boot

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And then at the last minute, coast guard refused for this meeting to happen. So now I'm stuck with coast guard inside my room and I've got this knife. So anyway the main, the guy from the coast guard, he steps forward and goes, and his English wasn't very good but I could tell he'd practiced this, I'm [name], I am the Japanese coast guard, I arrest you, illegal boarding, Japanese vessel ah also I declare blah blah blah and he went through some charges against

me. And I said, I've got something to declare as well. And he goes, ah so? And so I reached down and I pull out this great big fucking knife and there's like thirty Japanese and there's this gasp goes around, how the fuck did this guy keep this knife hidden you know. And then the head of security suddenly [makes screaming noise]. And so that was on my first day in Japan. So then everyone's like, how the fuck did this guy keep this big fuck off knife hidden inside this boat for all this time

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And they'd already started running this story about me being trained by the SAS, which is all nonsense um and so that didn't help my cause. And then suddenly they'd put me in maximum security. And I was in the toughest ward in the country. We had um, so the inmate across from me, he was the head of the gas poisoning Tokyo. About twelve years ago there was a terrorist group in Japan that poisoned a whole lot of people with sarin gas in a Tokyo subway, head guy that's there. Next guy had raped and murdered thirteen prostitutes, next guy was the head of the second biggest Yakuza family, Yakuza's like mafia. The guy next to me on my side um, he'd killed six people with a samurai sword in a rampage one night. Like there was the who's who of Japanese fucking criminality and then there's this white guy from New Zealand who boarded a boat without permission. Um and it was fucking intimidating. Like I remember going down there, these are evil fuckers

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Real nasty bastards, aye. And when they took me to prison there was a few things that helped me. One was the, my security detail just to get me to prison, was over a hundred guards, just to escort

me like ten kilometres to prison. And so I get, I some into the prison, I'm in this middle bus, there's a bus of thirty guys in front, my bus with me and thirty, a bus behind me with thirty. And part of it was to protect me. Like there's a lot of protesters and that to protest against me when the boat came in. So part of this was my own protection, as well to stop me from escaping. So anyway, I come into prison and there's, so they're doing this induction and there's all of these inmates standing around with one or two guards amongst them. And then everyone is like, who the fuck is this, like with a hundred fucking guards? And some of them are escorting me so I'm tied to a guy here and tied to a guy here and then they're all like ushering me along, all protecting me and making sure I don't move and no one comes and has a go at me or whatever

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And so I had enormous credibility in prison. Everyone's saying, man this guy must be really evil. And so, and it continued while I was, while I remained in prison there, I would always have two guards with me, whenever I left my cell there was always two guards with me. Whereas most, a lot of the other inmates had none, some of them would only have one. There was only one other guy, the head of the Yakuza, he was the only other guy that got the same level of guards. And so all of them, you could see the inmates, and what happens in prison, there is this food chain, there's this hierarchy from the top to the bottom and at the top you've got the organised crime and your real violent offenders and no one messes with them. And then down the bottom you've got drug addicts, old men and kids. Japan has some pretty young people in their prisons and no one bothers messing with them but in the middle is where all the trouble happens. And so whenever

there's a new inmate comes in a ward, everyone's looking up to see where's this guy fit in?

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Like is he an opportunity to me, is he a threat to me, is he, is he about my level so I'm gonna have to deal to him and hopefully push him down a bit. And so what a lot of inmates try and do is they're trying to push themselves up to get up where they're considered a violent guy or psychotic. Like a lot of people in there pretend that they're psychotic. Or a lot of them will just be real subservient and try and push themselves down. Even some of the real subservient ones, they'll still get a smack occasionally but not as much as if you try to push yourself up to the top. Some pretty fucking violent events happen up there, aye. And so what happens with me coming in with this big security detail, man I've been pushed up the top. And then that night I was the lead story on the news and at six o'clock in the prison the radio comes on through the whole prison. And six till seven is news, seven to eight was talk back radio and eight till nine was music. And so at six o'clock the news was on and I'm the lead story and I was like, that's me motherfuckers.

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And then I got in trouble, you're not allowed to speak in prison there. This is, like prison there is way different to prison elsewhere. Like I'd been locked up in Guatemala, I'd been locked up in Libya, I'd been locked up in Japan. And Japan was by far the toughest, by far the toughest. And part of it is cause you can't speak, you're not allowed to speak to anyone. So I got in trouble over, you know, that's me motherfuckers. And the only people you could speak to was the guards if they asked you a question, you're not allowed to just start talking to them. Um and so prison there is definitely quiet

until there's a fight, as soon as there's a fight everyone's yelling and cheering and that sort of stuff. As soon as the fights over, back to deadly quiet. And that was the worst thing I found. Like I, prison did affect me, and I came out quite a different person. Um and I would say the biggest thing I had in there was not being able to talk to anyone. Like after, the first twenty one days, I got interrogated by the prosecutor for I think it was about ten hours each day

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And that was actually quite good. Like it kept my mind active, was kind of like, towards the end of it especially, he was a pretty cool guy, I'd like to go back and see him even though he was kind of my adversary. Um very talented guy and ah kind of got to know each other quite well. Like he would and, he would give you little bits about his family and stuff, you'd sneak in little bits of information and stuff. So the first twenty days was ok but then after that once the interrogations stopped, basically there was no visitors or occasionally you might have a lawyer. I wasn't allowed, I wasn't allowed any mail at that stage, I had no letters or anything so basically you know, twenty three and a half hours a day in your cell, then you've got half an hour a day in the exercise yard, and exercise yard was where the trouble happened up there like that's where most of the fights were. And also you had two showers a week. So Monday and Thursday was shower day and shave day. You'd have, they had a shower head about this far off the ground so you'd

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gotta get down, they have a little stool you could sit on and you gotta clean yourself before you get in the bath and so it takes you two minutes to do that and then I think you end up with about eight

or nine minutes in the bath. That was the most amazing thing. Like since Japan I fucking love baths and showers, I fucking love them. Like it was the only bit of sort of, was gonna say sensual but you know like, you're in the cell, the same colour, sights, smell, everyone's wearing the same shit, same shit food um deathly quiet so you're not getting any, no stimulation to your ears, nothing to your eyes, nothing to your nose apart from the smell of male humanity. You know like your senses get deprived, the bath is the exception and I remember the first day I clambered down in this bath, like holy fuck this is nice, you know. But that was where a bit of trouble happened too was around the bath cause there was four baths and there'd often be inmates waiting for the next bath and

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Cause in your cell no one can touch you. Like you're in a cell alone, no one can get in there. So and this is one of the things that starts to play on your mind, you get out of your cell and you are exposed to the other inmates and the first few times I can remember, my first day up in exercise yard I was shitting my pants. And my lawyer said to me, look if you're gonna get in trouble it'll happen in the exercise yeah. And I remember going up there and there was one guy eyeing me up and you kinda, it's funny in prison, you get, you spend a lot of your time trying to understand people and trying, and there's, especially like the people who are psychotic and the real violent people and that, there's a certain body language they give off and you could, after a while you could pick someone if there looking for a fight. You could just pick it. I saw one once when, I was coming, we were coming down from, the exercise yards' on the roof, so we were on, I was on floor eleven, floor twelve was the roof and that's where we exercised. So you walk up the stairs to get there

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So we walk down the stairs and as I was coming down the stairs, I looked down the hall and I could see there was a guy walking this way and he had a guard either side of him. I remember watching him and I could tell from his body language something was about to happen. Like you could see him, like he was stretching his neck, like he was, you could just tell. And then sure enough, there's ah two guys in front of me with one guard and as they go past, next thing this guy just reaches over and just hits this guy in the fucking chin and this guy, out to it. And then the guy stands there kicking him. And what happens on your floor, the guards aren't allowed to touch you on your floor. What happens is they press a buzzer and then it takes between generally a minute to ninety seconds for this group of twenty five guards to turn up. I call them the storm troopers but they were dressed in black, really intimidating and twenty five guards at any one time there's only ever about a dozen inmates out of their cells. And so twenty five guards could always come and sort it and they've got pepper spray and Tasers and lots of shit on them to deal to it

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But anyway, for ninety seconds, this guy is standing there, so the guy's got knocked out one punch, for ninety seconds this guy is just kicking him in the fucking head and in the belly. You know and of course everyone's cheering and carrying on. This guy, like he was well known in our ward. Like he was a fucking psychopath, fucking violent bastard. Ninety seconds kicking the shit out of this guy. And then the storm troopers turn up, drag him off and, and normally they'd take him away for generally one to two days they would disappear. I got told it was in the basement but I don't know exactly

where it was. Um and then he'd get brought back and like all bruised and broken and had the shit beaten out of him. You know but there were people like that who were determined to stay at the top of the food chain and they saw it as the price they pay was you know, they'd go and get beaten up by the cops but fuck he laid out that guy. And there was two rival Yakuza factions, this guy was one faction and this guy was another one

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Um and you know, this guy by getting beaten up you know, he's well down there, his life is gonna be even more shit now cause he's further down the food chain. And this thing of, when you spend every day wondering if you're gonna be smacked, it starts, it does start to affect you and there's a, there's a thing that, it's called snake eyes. And what happens is a lot of people in prison, you become actors, you're trying to pretend that you're this really staunch guy who would rip someone's head off or you're a pacifist you don't want any trouble and you just wanna keep your nose clean and you know, you'll kiss the guys shoes if you have to to keep out of trouble. Um anyway the guys who are pretending they're staunch, there's a certain trait that they get and what they're doing is there's a certain, they'll try and sort of saunter, they'll walk like they're quite physical

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Their arms will be slightly like this and so physically when you look at them, they look tough and intimidating. But what happens is their eyes, it's eyes that give them away, they call it snake eyes, snake eyes. And it's funny I saw, after a while, it took me a month or so, and I sub-consciously started picking up on it. I remember thinking like, I could tell that guy is faking it, could just tell and then after a

while I clicked on. It's his fucking eyes. And um, and it's interesting some people take that after prison. They leave prison and they've still got snake eyes. It's not something they went in with. And it's funny when I was, when I got released from prison, they put me on the flight and I was the um, I was kind of like the special guest on the flight. So Air New Zealand put me up to business class and I was a deportee so I had like a security guard to make sure I didn't try to escape back to Japan

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Like there was any chance of that. But anyway so I was seated on the plane first and word had gone round in departure lounge that Richard was on the flight, and it was quite big news at that stage. So anyway, I get on there first. Air New Zealand, all their staff welcome me on and I was pretty fucked in my head, I was screwed up but it was a very poignant time but I remember, so I sat down and like all these people with all these colourful clothes, and the smells, I can remember, I remember smelling, normally for me, like if women wear perfume like, they do or they don't, it's kind of not like, oh that's a nice one, and oh that's a bit fruity you know. Like it's, I might smell perfume but it's not like I'd notice one from the next whatever. I could smell the difference in all their perfumes coming down. Um looking at their clothes and anyway, one guy comes past, he's got snake eyes

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I could tell, it's funny. I had to take a double take, wait a sec, looks familiar, then fuck, he's got snake eyes, you know. Um, and I don't know if I have it, I don't think I have. Um but I've seen it, since Japan, I've seen it a number of times. And it may not necessarily be from prison. Like there's other circumstances that can lead to the

same, to the same thing. But generally it's from, you're in a, you're in a position where you're trying to pretend that you're real staunch and you're tough but you're nervous and you're looking out for trouble. Um and prison did change me. I came out, you know when I, I think it's difficult to do a long lag without being changed. And when I got out of prison I thought I was the same guy and looking back on it now, no way. I was screwed in the head. Um not majorly so but it did, for sure it changed me. In some I think good ways and in some, less so

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Int. *Can you elaborate on that?*

RICHARD

Um the positive ones would be really tolerant, really tolerant. Like you spend five months wondering if you're gonna get smacked up every day and you know, I remember I came back um, ten grand was gonna be transferred from a guy in the States, cause when I got out, I'd done five months with no income, had no money. So anyway, this ten grand was gonna be sent over from a guy in the States. You know I went down to the bank and there was a lady she said, sorry Richard the ten grand is not there. What the fuck, what do you mean the money's not there? And she goes, it's not there, I'm sorry there's not much I can do. Um and so I went outside and I went to, there was a little coffee shop, I went, sat down in this coffee shop, and I'm sitting there, I'm having this cappuccino and I'm thinking, if this is the worst thing that happens in my day, fuck life's pretty good. Compared to being beaten up and looking at a five year prison term and all this kind of stuff. Fuck if the worst thing is, some money hasn't turned up in my account, fuck this life's pretty good and

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I sort of say that to myself quite often now. I say, you know, let this be the worst thing in your day and I say that to other people, you know, I remember the other day, a guy was bitching to me cause he's got this car and it's got some ongoing problem with it. I was like, fuck bro let that be your biggest problem in the day, you know. Go and, go and fucking live in fucking West Africa for a month and come back and see how fucking important your car is then, you know. And so it has given me a real good sense of you know, worry about stuff that's worth worrying about but most of the stuff that we spend our lives worrying about neither here nor there. And you wanna, you know, if you're gonna worry about stuff, worry about stuff you can influence. If you can't influence, if you can't influence, it's not an issue. Today's sunny and tomorrow might be raining, there's no point complaining about the rain, it's just the weather you know. Or go and live somewhere else

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Go and live in LA if you really need a sunny day every day, go and live in LA, there's a price for that. Um so I've become very tolerant. I've become ah a lot more focused on my family yeah and my friends. You know I think I used to take a lot of that for granted and I cherished getting, because I wasn't allowed any mail for a long time, the only, the only correspondence I had with the outside world was my lawyers could hold up against the glass, they could hold up an e-mail or something and that was permissible. And so I'd get an e-mail from my dad or from ex-wife or one of my kids or whatever. They'd hold up against the glass and I'd just break down. And so it's given me you know, a much bigger appreciation for that. And it's, I'm a little bit more focused now. Like I think prior to Japan, you know, like I put together some cool stuff but it took a long time and

since Japan and when you're looking at a long lag, it does make you realise

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you know, we only get a very finite time on this planet. When I was sitting there, I was forty six and I'm thinking, shit if I get five years you know, I'm gonna be over fifty when I get out and that's like you know, thirty percent of my working life that's left, stuck in a prison. And so it brought this appreciation about the need to like, you wanna be effective, you wanna make stuff happen. And I don't think you should just drift through life, make shit happen. And I guess the other thing that's come out of it I guess, it's not really a change in me but it has been an enabler like, good and bad ways like it's, the fact that I've got five convictions is a double edged sword. Like you know, it made me a little bit infamous, more so than after I did the round the world thing

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And so if I wanna go and meet someone, Richard, oh yeah I've heard that name but some people say, I don't agree with your tactics like, and they think of me as being a radical or whatever. Um, some of the negative changes is um, less tolerant of um, might call it incompetence or people who like, a lot of the time, previously, if I had a couple of slackers on the team who weren't really that effective, I was a lot more tolerant of them. Whereas now I'm very focused on making stuff happen and I just don't have time for them. Um another thing is, I, especially on [conservation organisation], I was always real generous with my time. So if there's a you know, someone comes down at midnight and wants to talk about the boat or the fuel or whatever, I would sit there and talk with them for hours. Whereas now I just sort of a bit more selective on that. I still

try and be generous with my time but I'm a bit more brutal with it and just nah, sorry I haven't got time. Put them on to someone else kind of thing

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Maybe a little bit more selfish in that regard too. Like sometimes I'll look at it and say, is there something in this for me and a part of that goes back to you know like, we've got limited time, you wanna make sure you do the best with your time. Um yeah so there's been a few negative things. But overall, you know, I don't regret it, it was the right thing to do. And you know, did, shone the spotlight on whaling like never before. Like 2010 was the year the world woke up to whaling and I was part of that team. And I still think I was quite privileged and blessed to be part of it. It's funny, in losing the boat, I think you know, that led to me going to Japan and all these other things and um, I wouldn't swap it. You know it's um, it's had a big impact on

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you know, whaling will be finished within five years I reckon, they will finish in Antarctica at least. And I think, interestingly, what will probably stop it will be the international court of justice, the hearing between Australia, Japan and New Zealand happens this year, towards the end of the year. Um while I was in Japanese prison was when Australia finally announced that they were gonna take that action and I reckon part of it was spurred on by the circus that happened in the Southern Ocean and me being in Japan. It kind of forced the politicians hands to you know, fuck, you know, we've got the Japanese saying it's legal, we've got [animal rights organisation] saying it's illegal, what's the truth? The only way to prove that conclusively is to take it to the international court of

justice. Um and so I think we played a role in forcing Australian governments' hand to take that case to the international court of justice, yeah

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Int. Can we jump back a little bit. I just want to ask you about your time when you were on the [animal rights organisation], the things you witnessed, specifically the capture and killing of whales, can you elaborate on your emotions then or what you felt

RICHARD I never saw them harpoon a whale. Generally what happened was, the previous year, the Japanese had harpooned a whale with the [animal rights organisation] helicopter filming it and the footage went around the globe and it became like the highest rating episode on that season. So what happened, I only found this out later, the Japanese government had said to the whaling company, you can no longer whale if [animal rights organisation] is following you, you can't go harpooning whales. So I never actually, I never got to see ah the harpooning of whales.

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All I saw was the video footage from the previous year plus [animal rights organisation] had a lot of archival footage of stuff. And when I got involved with [animal rights organisation] um, I spent a lot of time researching Russians and Koreans and all the countries that had done whaling. I thought it was all background that would help me understand their industry and how they work and stuff. And like it is pretty barbaric. And I remember on, it was a very poignant day for us, we had um, we came in amongst the ice for the first time. We'd seen the odd iceberg but we started coming into almost like pack ice you know. And [name of boat] a very fragile boat. We

couldn't go actually inside the pack ice but there was like block here, block here, and we were kinda navigating our way through this. And what we started to get EMF transmissions, so on a VHF radio if you've got a piece of equipment like

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a big engine or a generator, these things, they omit a certain amount of electro-magnetic noise and you can pick them up on radio and it's hard to tell exactly what it is. But all of the way down there we haven't had a single transmission of anything except for when we came across the [name of boat] and the [name of boat] early on. So we knew that there was, so what we're doing is, I'd have the radio on scan and it would just be going different channels looking for stuff. And it kept picking up channel fourteen, channel sixty eight, and all you'd hear on channel sixty eight was like a [imitates clicking sound]. And so we started getting this noise, I remember looking, had a look at the charts, didn't look like an area where you'd have fishing boats and you can summarise from the charts and the depth contours, you can see what's likely to hold a whole lot of fish. Didn't look like there was gonna be a lot of fish there. Um, there was no bases near by. So bits of Antarctica have got research bases. There was no bases nearby so

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probably gonna be a whaler. And as we started to go through this pack ice or through this ice field if you like, the noises were getting louder. I remember thinking man, we are near the fleet here. And also we had some intelligence that the fleet was in this area within say about a fifty square kilometre thing. We knew the fleet was around there somewhere. And so we're all on edge and next thing these three humpbacks come up right beside us. So we stopped

the boat and one of them did what's called a peep holing where, we'd stopped the boat and this entire whale, this big humpback come up and put his head between the outrigger and the middle hull. I remember looking down and you could see this eye looking around. And he was, cause we were almost like a whale like, you could see he was really intrigued by us. And he come up and his eye fucking looking around and we were like, my whole crew was like, holy fuck. This is super cool

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And he hung around us for about half an hour. So in the end I told the, I had my guy turn the engines off. So we just sat there with the three whales peep holing us and looking at us. And then the whales headed off, we've been heading this way, the whales headed off this way and I remember thinking you know, these whales telling us something we don't know. And we ended up basically following them. We didn't really know which way the whaling fleet was. Um but then what happened about six or seven hours later, there was a wind shift and it started to push all this ice together so we had to back out of it before it actually came and impacted us. So we never found the fleet that day. Um but it's funny you have an experience like that, like I remember one of our crew saying, here's our clients. You know, and the Japanese didn't harpoon any humpbacks that year. They did have them down as a quota. They had on their quota they had fifty humpbacks whales but they never harpooned any of them that year. But it was um, yeah when you see those things, fuck I'd be devastated to see one

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being harpooned. You know I'm not, you know I'm not per se an animal rights person but ah, you can't watch shit like that and not

be affected by it, yeah. There was a, it's easy to just hate the Japanese rather than hating the Japanese whalers. And this is where you know I'd say there was a, before Antarctica there was a bit of a racist streak in me you know, over the Japanese whaling I reckon. A similar thing now with the Chinese. Like in terms of conservation when I look at, when I look at our work in Africa and Central America, the Chinese are the root cause of probably seventy percent of it. And it's easy to sit there and just hate all the Chinese but you know, when I got on the, when I got on the whaling vessel, on the [name of boat]. So I'm their prisoner right and man, they were super nice to me. Super nice. And yeah we had discussions about whaling and in some ways it is a cultural thing

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Like they used the argument like, they said, well, you know, what's the difference between a whale and a pig? You know the Japanese eat very little in the way of beef, chicken, pork very little. Little bit of chicken but not much. We had, out of all the meals I had on the [name of boat], so let's say I had about sixty meals on there, there was only one meal that had pork. All the rest was seafood, all of it was seafood. And it's not cause it's a whaling vessel, the Japanese have really little in the way of red meat in their diet, very little. But enormous amounts of seafood. One meal had five different types of seafood on it. Um you know, eating raw fish guts, jellyfish, algae, seaweed, all manner of fish and tuna and everything. For the Japanese seafood is big part of their diet. Um but when I got on board I had this hatred for the Japanese whalers, I get on there and this is on the security vessel which has all of their supposedly hard-core guys. Fucking nice guys

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You know at one stage the first officer, we're sitting down talking, he goes, he says, you know [animal rights organisation] we think of you as being all crazy psycho, he says, you're not crazy psycho at all. He goes, you're almost normal. I think it's easy you know, the Japanese were kind of my enemy but the real enemy is in fact, it's the government and the whaling business. Cause those are the two entities that perpetuate whaling. If you, if you put a job up in New Zealand, if you said, right, we're gonna go down to Antarctica and do some whaling and offered enough money, you'd have Kiwis going down to do it too. There's always poor people that will do whatever is their job. And the Japanese guys on that boat, they're all married with kids and just support their family. So I don't you know, whenever you offer money, there will always be people who are in a financial situation that wanna come and do it. And they're not, I don't hate those people

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In fact, I, you know, I really like the Japanese um, in many ways. There's a lot of attributes about their society that are quite memorable and you know, I look at our own decadent bloody culture and there's a you know, we've got a lot of issues that, we could learn a lot from the Japanese. But I don't agree with their whaling. I think the fact that they do whale in an area that they have no legal right to, is wrong. Um but the whalers themselves are not the enemy. You know the enemy is the government that continues to enable legislation that allows the whaling to happen and the owners of the whaling business who continue this business that by all accounts should have been closed down a long time ago

Int.

Do you have views about governments in other projects that you've been involved in and are involved in?

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RICHARD

Yep. Um our work in Africa is, a lot of it, most of it would be legal. The exception would be the mission we ran in Namibia where we, we broke into a diamond mine and we filmed the clubbing of seals. And what happens in Namibia, this is under the radar, they club a hundred thousand seals a year, baby seals. They club them to death, skin them and the skins get sold into China to make leather jackets and women's purses. And before going in there, when we did the digging like, this happens inside a diamond mine which is owned by the Boers and because it's a diamond mine, it's really heavily policed. No one has ever managed to break in there and actually film it. And one of the reasons is, there's a twenty year prison term if you get caught in a diamond mine and many people have been shot, lot's of people have been shot breaking into diamond mines all through history. Like these diamond mines have been running in Africa for you know, over a hundred years and there's been a lot of people been shot. And so, and so in that case what we did was highly illegal

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A lot of my work today is working with legitimate governments and but that one there you know, the government they, it's a shitty little industry. Like they make, Namibia makes maybe a hundred and eighty thousand dollars, so they get about two dollars per pelt is what they make. So at maximum it's maybe worth two hundred thousand dollars a year. You compare that to their tourism industry which is worth billions. Like, what the fuck are they doing bothering with this shitty little industry, clubbing an endangered species, there's only like three quarters of a million of these things left and they're taking a hundred thousand babies a year. But there is, I'm

convinced there's corruption between the government, the owner of this business and the Boers. There's this unholy alliance. The Boers turn a blind eye to it and you know, they allow it to happen in exchange for government permits that allow them to continue their diamond mining. They don't own the land, they lease it

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You've got this guy [name], who's a Turkish Australian who controls the seal clubbing industry and it's this unholy alliance that allows this industry to perpetuate and the government is part of it. Um and in a lot of cases where you see, where you see situations where you've got endangered species being harvested, the government is very often at the bottom of it. Another example would be, a lot of our work in Africa is targeting foreign vessels that fish illegally in Africa. And um over fifty percent of them are Chinese and if you dig, the Chinese government often owns these vessels. But it's through certain holding companies, you've gotta dig quite a way, it's another government vessel, it's another one. So the governments are complicit in this. Um and it does make them a very tough adversary cause they're well resourced. And you know, the Chinese can be pretty ruthless in, in, and they would certainly consider you know, a lot of what I've done they wouldn't be happy with it at all

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Chinese for me, in terms of conservation of endangered species, Chinese are the number one enemy. Um and part of it is, you know, their number matter, you've got one and a half billion people all wanting to eat shark fin soup for example. How do you change the attitude of one and a half billion people? You know, we talk about, you gotta pick missions that you can win or battles that you can

win. Fuck it's nearly impossible to win that one to try and stop one and a half billion people eating shark. So that's why a lot of the focus is coming back to ok, we can't influence one and a half billion Chinese, maybe we could influence the governments of these countries to change their law to protect the sharks. But you've got China is busy putting in roads and factories and building stadiums and stuff. And so there's this battle for government influence, you need to put in a shark sanctuary or protect the great whites or whatever

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But the Chinese at the same time, come and say, oh we'll build a stadium for you but we want fisheries rights and you know, we want this and that sort of thing. And so there's this ongoing battle and especially in Africa. Africa easy pickings for the Chinese. Chinese got a lot of money at the moment and they are buying influence around the globe and none more so than Africa

Int.

Is that to do with lack of laws and corruptibility?

RICHARD

Yep um, the fact that the, you could buy just about whatever you want in Africa. Up until now, the Chinese haven't needed to worry about, about quota and permits cause most of the countries have no navy, they have no coast guard, a lot of them are busy dealing with civil unrest, civil war, famine, AIDS, all these other issues. Protecting their fishery man, that ain't on their radar. And so they just haven't bothered doing anything

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So these Chinese boats and Korean and Spanish and a few others, they come in and they've been trawling with impunity. Um and so we've come in and we've start to say, hey you know, firstly, you

know, you need to give us permission to come here and operate, so we would in some cases get permission to carry weapons, permission to arrest people. It starts to work kinda you know, although maybe we're activists, we're also becoming a legitimate arm of their enforcement and because they've got no inclination to do it but we might hand over some money. You know, the Minister of Defence often they are the centre of power in these countries. Minister of Defence who's got control of the army, he is the most powerful guy in the country often. Often it's not the Prime Minister. Um but anyway, you hand over a wad of cash and you'll have a permit that says, yep Richard can come here and carry weapons and arrest people, and do whatever. So the fact that it's, it's a corrupt system, cuts both ways

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It allows us to operate there. I could never do what I do in New Zealand or you know, I'd have to do it differently here. Like I can't go around with guns here and threaten people at gun point and taking their boats down um, cause the New Zealand government would never allow it. But in Africa, a couple thousand dollars I could normally buy a permit to do that sort of thing. So it allows us to operate but on the other side is, and this happened a while ago. We had a boat that we took down and it was a pretty dangerous take down. Took this boat, brought it into port. Um, handed them over to the authorities, next day the boat is gone. So we're down there, what happened? Oh we decided that he was fishing legally. What do you mean? And they'd paid some money. In the end, they'd paid about the equivalent of five thousand dollars. And you know, it was a stuffed decision for the country. Like, they could have easily got a hundred thousand out of that company, easily. One of the things we

play on is, African prisons are dangerous. Like your average HIV in an African prison is over fifty percent

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And if you're in there, nice Malaysian ass turning up in African prisons, you'll be fucked. Yeah so you will come out, if you're in there for a couple of months, you will be fucked and you will come out with HIV. And so, in one country we took a boat down and within hours, the agent of this company turned up. So we had a meeting with a couple government officials and I sat in on this meeting. And this guy is, we're in no hurry to settle this, we believe the boat has a legitimate permit and blah blah blah blah. And so I said, I said to him, do you know what the HIV rate is in African prisons? And this guy's like, no. It's over fifty percent, I said, those tight little Asian asses that have just turned up in prison, they're gonna be fucked over the next week, trust me, they will be fucked. You better go and sort out your fucking money or your men will be coming out with HIV

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And then suddenly this guy's face just went white and you know the next day they, I think about eighty thousand dollars got handed over to the government. How much went to the government I don't know like. But it was a lot of pain for the, for that fishing company, you know, lost eighty thousand dollars or whatever it was. Their boat was out of action for probably about three days by the time they got it back up and running again. And they'll be operating in another country now. Or maybe now they'll start negotiating and buying permits, I don't know. It's a cat and mouse game and the game is always changing and evolving as you start to catch them in one place, they move elsewhere but you know the hope is that, the

long term goal is that Africa does get control of their fisheries rather at the moment it just gets stolen from them

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Int. So in the near future, how do you see yourself as an environmental activist or how do you see yourself developing?

RICHARD

A lot of it, most of our stuff coming up this year, two ways, one is, almost all of the missions we have this year, we're working with legitimate government agencies. Um, and then the second part of it is, we've got a TV show that we're doing around our work. So we've got one episode which is filmed in Namibia so that covers the mission we did on the seal clubbing. We've got a second mission in Africa that's filmed and in editing at the moment. So the plan is, we'll hopefully film another ten this year and then that will become a twelve part TV series. One of the things that happened with (TV program) was, that TV show that's based around [animal rights organisation] activities in Antarctica, and I call it conservation by stealth. Like the show, it's got strong characters, it's got some action, good guys, bad guys, it's good drama, like you know, risky stuff happens. And whaling in the States has become the number one marine conservation issue

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Even though, if you look at it from a conservation point of view, whaling is well down the list. In fact, that a thousand whales get taken in Antarctica, if I was to rate it of importance, fuck it would be, wouldn't be in the top fifty, I don't reckon. There's so many other issues that are way more important. But whaling is important in that it's a flagship species. If you can't stop whaling, man we've got no hope to save this planet. You know, whales would be the most

lovable creatures we have in the oceans you know, dolphins might be second or whatever. Um so whales are important you know, I believe the fact that we can stop whaling in Antarctica. Um you know it's some big shit that you've won, you can move onto other things. And I do believe it's a battle that's winnable

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But anyway, so what happened was whaling has become the number one issue in the States because of [TV program]. And so it was a demonstration for me about, you get a hit TV show, you can influence a shit load of people. And I reckon what's happening in Africa and Central America in terms of the fisheries being plundered. In terms of what's happening with rhino, with black puma in Central America and other things like, these are stories that need to be told. And we need to get, you know, at the moment, public are all obsessed with fucking iPhones and plasma screens and all this kind of stuff, it would be nice to start getting the public caring about other issues as well. And I do believe a TV show can help that in a big way. Yeah so that's the two things, the TV series and then running cool missions, working with legitimate governments. The reason I've gone for the whole legitimate government thing, is there is, a lot of the governments really struggle on enforcement

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You know, they're facing a well-resourced enemy. So if you take the Chinese vessels in Africa, they're all armed, they're all going up and down with AK-47's. We had a case just a month ago, there's starting to be friction between the local fishermen and the foreign vessels. Local fishermen, little canoes and nets. Anyway, the local fishermen had started cutting off the long line boys so, two

fishermen got brought into shore with bullet holes in their head, dead. Um, had been shot. So these are difficult areas to operate in. And so a lot of the enforcement teams lack the tactical ability and skill set to take these boats down. When I say take the boat down, it's board the boat, arrest the crew and bring them back into port. And so largely what they do is, they know it happens but they're busy doing other things cause that's fucking hard to go and do that shit. And so part of our job is to train them, to up skill them, to give them some confidence, give them a bit of tactical gear, might just be a couple of sets of night vision

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So now they can become night capable. Maybe some decent weapons and training on you know, how do you go doing this stuff cause it is a specialised area. And so there's enormous amount of good I can do by working within the laws of these countries or you know, sometimes we break them a little bit but you know, pay a little bit of money and whatever. We're playing the game just like the Chinese are. Um and I, I've got no problem breaking laws if there's a big picture or it serves a goal and there's a big purpose but if I do that all of the time, I would lose my ability to go working with these governments. And so at the moment, I'm pretty concentrated on, on ah working with these governments of Africa and Central America. And there's a few other dodgy things in the pipeline but they might tend to be more low profile where we don't have our name out there or it might be done by you know, there would be not much in the way of it being tracked back to [conservation organisation] for example

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But where we still might provide some lads or some resources to help out

Int. In the way that you talk about your development, it seems there's an evolution happening

RICHARD Yeah

Int. So how would you describe that development from beginning till now?

RICHARD As a kid and young adult, and being from a family of hunters and gatherers, I had an appreciation for what our planet has to offer, and for me it would be snapper and crayfish and eels and possums and pigs. So I didn't know I was a conservationist or environmentalist

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But in my mind, I've got a great appreciation for all of that stuff. And then when I went through the oil industry, the oil industry is filthy. Like there's countless examples of where we would just trash the North Sea or the deserts, wherever we worked. The oil industry is appalling in its treatment of the planet and they would get away with whatever they can. And so working inside that industry, finding it distasteful, happy to leave it but now with this growing sense about fossil fuels and that, so it was over a period of many many years that I gradually thought, oh this bio fuels thing. And so, but once I started down that bio fuels route on this boat, it was that period of three years on the water and seeing all of these issues

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And just deciding, fuck I'm gonna do something about this. So initially it started off, I'm gonna do something about bio fuels but

then it's like man, here's a much better battle to be had and something where my skill sets and you know, what I've got, can add a lot of value. So there was that three or four year period on the [conservation organisation] boat and gradually getting more and more fucked off with what I was seeing until it got to the stage, fuck I'm gonna do something about this. Um and then it became a question of what's the best way for me to go doing this and [animal rights organisation] kind of fell into my lap. Like you know, they approached me and it was a good fit. Um and then the time in Japan, I had, you had to lie in your bed eleven and a half hours a day. Like I can sleep seven or eight hours in a day but I can't sleep eleven and a half

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So you've got you know, three and a half hours just lying there thinking and then during the day you've got to sit here, you can't, you've actually got so much time to think. And so I spent a lot of time in there thinking about, what do I want to do? It was one of the cool things in Japan, like it's rare in our life that we have a sustained period of time where all we can do is think and it has a positive role. I'd put it almost like a meditation or something. People go away and they just sit there and think about stuff, what do I wanna do? What do I care about? What do I think about? And so it was that period in Japan where I really solidified my views about what I wanna do. And I, I'm a marine conservationist, this is what I do. There's a few land things that are starting to come in now. And I think part of my evolution as an activist is, is looking at other opportunities if you like, where me and my team can add some value and certainly there's, you know, I mentioned the rhino in Africa and also the black puma in Central America where I think we'll have a role to play in the future

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Um and I think there's two kinds of development that happened here. One is in the skill sets and abilities that we have. Um and maybe I come, maybe I come from an unusual background like, um, very technical, very competent in getting jobs done in difficult conditions, developed and honed through the oil industry and then through that business automation and plants. I've got a very good handle on technology. And then also used to running teams of people in difficult environments. And then that got accentuated through [conservation organisation]. And where I am today um, there's a whole series of events and experiences that has made me very competent in a select group of areas. I'm not, you know a lot of people who I meet, they say, fuck Richard you're amazing. You know I'm not really. Like I've got a certain skill set that I'm very good at. There's lots of stuff I'm shit at. You know, like if you, if you look at really effective people um in almost any sphere, they're never a lone soldier. There's always, they're always part of a team

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And I'm very conscious of that. Like you know, great, great things are really achieved by individuals, it's almost always as a team. And I go back to that point about tribalism um, in terms of the skill sets that I have, good leader of people, good on ideas, ah, high threshold for risk but it's calculated. So I understand risk and how to reduce it sort of thing. Um, and technically good. So you know, I've got four things I'm good at, it's about twenty that I'm shit at. But those four in themselves can be quite powerful. You know to be able to think laterally, come up with ideas, think under pressure. Um, be good at leading people, leading people astray in some cases but people will follow me nonetheless. Um and so my

development has been on two sides. One is in terms of the skill sets and attitudes and aptitudes that I have and then the second half is my motivation and what do I care about and what makes me um, wanna go out and save seals in Namibia

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as opposed to go out and get a normal job nine to five and buy a new car kind of thing. And you know both of them have been this concurrent evolution that has gone on and put me in the position where I am today. And you know, the evolution continues. In ten years hopefully I'll still be doing this, I'd like to think so. I had a, when I was a kid I used to have a, it was a guy I mowed his lawns, I was ten or eleven. It was this old guy I don't know he might have been like, seventy odd whatever. But he'd led the most extraordinary life of anyone I'd met in my life up to this stage. And like, his lawn was massive, it used to take me four hours mowing this guys lawn. Anyway, I'd mow it for about two hours, he'd turn up with an orange juice and a couple of biscuits and we'd talk for half and hour

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And he was a really fascinating guy and I remember, and he'd led the most extraordinary life. And I said to him one day, I said, look like you have led such a cool life, how have you done it? And he said, Richard I'll give you one bit of advice that someone gave to me when I was a kid. He said you wanna find something you're good at and you enjoy doing, and then figure out how to make a living by it. And he said, forget about all the rest, forget about the money, forget about the cars, forget about houses. You wanna figure out what are you good at and what do you enjoy doing. And so once you've figured out that, he said, then find out how to make

a living from it. And that's kind of what I do now, took me twenty years to figure it out. You know man, I, you get to work on stuff you really believe in, it's almost impossible to just go back and work nine to five and sell washing machines or go back to the factory or go back or go back to selling real estate or whatever

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Like you get to really work on shit you believe in like, there's no going back, you know. And you know what I do today man, I found something, I'm good at it, I enjoy doing it, found out how to make a living by it. And the living can be pretty humble. Living the dream, yeah. I've certainly had a life less travelled, you know. Almost since I had that idea to get involved in bio fuels, building that very cool boat, travel the globe you know, round the planet on that boat. We had the coolest voyage. We did a Pacific crossing from Panama Canal all the way to Australia, went to Galapagos. On the charts you can pick an atoll that has no one living on there

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Generally if it's a relatively shallow atoll, it won't have a water table and that makes it hard for it to support man. Um and often the charts will show buildings. So you can look on your charts, oh this one's probably uninhabited. We'd find the ones on the charts that's got a lagoon, you can get in and get some shelter from the waves. So we'd come into a lagoon, anchor the boat, put all our stuff on a sea biscuit, swim to the shore, go and get a couple of crabs, get a couple of fish, get some coconuts, mangoes, paw paws. Have a cook up. Sleep under the stars. Have our own atoll, our own fucking island for a night or two, then we'd move on to the next one and the next one. We crossed the entire Pacific doing that. We stopped in some places. We stopped in Vanuatu, Fiji and a few places to get

supplies and you know, get back to reality and stuff again. But a most extraordinary voyage you know. So I've had amazing good days

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I've been shot at three times. Three times I've had people open fire on us in different situations. So I've had amazing good days and real shit days where I thought, fuck this could be my last day. Um, you know the time in Namibia in that diamond mine, like we were shitting our pants. Like we had, there were constant patrols there and we spent four days in this diamond mine dodging these patrols, thinking any day we might get locked up here. Um, in Japan that was quite difficult in that prison there. You know so I've had real shit days and times where I've been fearing for my life but I've had so many amazing days that make up for it. So my life is this roller coaster. All our lives are roller coasters in some ways. We have good days and bad days. And I think mine are more accentuated through you know, high risk or danger. Um but also you know, amazing days, rewards too. I wouldn't swap it, wouldn't swap it at all. I've been very lucky and blessed. But it's this journey where these cross roads come along the way like,

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you know, the thing that saw me go and build that boat, set a record to go around the globe. Like, I look back on it, it was a cross road. Like, I could have easily gone left or right or straight ahead. Instead I jumped in a helicopter and flew. Same for the going to Antarctica, couple of coincidences there. And so often our, where we are today, there's decisions fifty fifty. The red pill or the blue pill, which way are we going? Yeah. But I'm pretty grateful for the journey I've been on. Yeah it has been extraordinary

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Int. If you wanted to put a message to the world from where you are now, what would it be?

RICHARD Stand up for something. Too many people they just, they exist, they never stand up for anything. They consume a lot of resource on this planet, they occupy this planet, they breathe in oxygen and spit out CO₂ and yet they make no positive contribution to this planet. And everyone has a cause that they should be standing up for. Be it conservation or animals or humans rights or AIDS in Africa. Get a fucking cause and stand up for something

Int. Thank you for that, that's a very cool message.

End of interview