

LEVEL C1

The Baker Who Survived the Titanic

How a Tumbler of Spirits Became a Titanic Legend

In April 1912 Charles Joughin, the Titanic's chief baker, sent bread to the lifeboats, stayed behind on the sinking ship and somehow survived the freezing Atlantic. Using his own testimony at the British inquiry, Sean and Olivia ask whether his famous drink really kept him alive.

Key words

- inquiry
- provisions
- under oath
- testimony
- in passing
- own up to
- forcibly
- retelling
- cling to
- buckle
- lurch
- flatly
- tread water
- mishap
- piece together

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How to use it

1

Listen to the episode on YouTube.

2

Read the transcript and learn the key words.

3

Do the activities, then check the answer key.

Includes the full transcript, key words, activities and answers

Listen to the episode on the Aprendos YouTube channel

Key words

These words appear in the episode.

Key words	Meaning	Example
inquiry <i>noun</i>	An official investigation into an accident or a serious problem.	<i>After the train crash, the government ordered a public inquiry into safety on the line.</i>
provisions <i>noun</i>	Supplies of food and drink, especially for a journey.	<i>We packed enough provisions for three days in the mountains, including far too much chocolate.</i>
under oath <i>phrase</i>	Having formally promised to tell the truth, usually in a court.	<i>Witnesses who lie under oath can end up in prison themselves.</i>
testimony <i>noun</i>	A formal statement about what you saw or know, given in a court or an official investigation.	<i>Her testimony about the colour of the van helped the police find the driver.</i>
in passing <i>phrase</i>	Briefly, while you are mainly talking about something else.	<i>She mentioned in passing that she'd been promoted, as if it were nothing special.</i>
own up to <i>phrasal verb</i>	To admit that you did something wrong or embarrassing.	<i>Nobody in the office would own up to eating the birthday cake before the party.</i>
forcibly <i>adverb</i>	By using physical force, often against someone's wishes.	<i>The two fans who ran onto the pitch were forcibly removed by security.</i>
retelling <i>noun</i>	A new version of a story that is told again, often with changes.	<i>In every retelling, the fish my uncle caught gets a little bigger.</i>
cling to <i>verb</i>	To hold on to something very tightly, often because you are afraid.	<i>On his first day at nursery, my son clung to my leg and refused to let go.</i>
buckle <i>verb</i>	To bend or collapse because of too much weight, pressure or heat.	<i>The old shelf buckled under the weight of all my cookbooks.</i>
lurch <i>verb</i>	To make a sudden, uncontrolled movement, usually forwards or to one side.	<i>The bus lurched forward and half my coffee ended up on my shoes.</i>
flatly <i>adverb</i>	In a firm and direct way that leaves no room for discussion.	<i>My sister flatly refused to lend me her car again after the scratch I left last time.</i>
tread water <i>phrase</i>	To keep your head above deep water by moving your arms and legs, without swimming anywhere.	<i>Our swimming teacher made us tread water for two minutes before we were allowed to get out.</i>
mishap <i>noun</i>	A small accident or piece of bad luck that is not serious.	<i>Apart from one mishap with the tent, the camping trip went surprisingly well.</i>

Key words	Meaning	Example
piece together <i>phrasal verb</i>	To understand something gradually by joining separate bits of information.	<i>The next morning, we tried to piece together what had happened at the end of the party.</i>

Full transcript

The Baker Who Survived the Titanic: How a Tumbler of Spirits Became a Titanic Legend

- SEAN** It's two in the morning on the fifteenth of April, 1912. The Titanic's stern is rising out of the sea, and a small man is holding the rail from the outside.
- OLIVIA** On the outside of the rail?
- SEAN** On the outside. He's tightened his belt and moved a few things from one pocket to another. A little earlier, he had a drink.
- OLIVIA** Of course he did.
- SEAN** Weeks later, a lawyer asked him what happened next. He said, "I was just wondering what next to do when she went."
- OLIVIA** And he lived to tell a lawyer about it?
- SEAN** This is Aprendos English, level C1. I'm Sean.
- OLIVIA** And I'm Olivia.
- SEAN** He lived, and he claimed his hair barely got wet. Before I tell you who he was, though, have a guess at his job.
- OLIVIA** Hanging off the stern that calmly? He must have been one of the officers...
- SEAN** ...wrong. He was the chief baker.
- OLIVIA** The baker?
- SEAN** The very same. His name was Charles Joughin, and he was born in Birkenhead, near Liverpool, in 1878. He'd gone to sea at eleven and had been baking on White Star liners for years before he moved over from the Olympic, the Titanic's sister ship.
- OLIVIA** So by 1912 he was hardly a nervous kid on his first big voyage.
- SEAN** He was thirty-three, with a wife and two small children at home in Southampton. He earned twelve pounds a month, and he had thirteen bakers working under him.
- OLIVIA** Thirteen bakers, just for bread.
- SEAN** He was off duty that night and asleep in his bunk when the ship hit the iceberg, at twenty to midnight. When the British **inquiry** asked whether the shock had woken him, he said, "I felt the shock and immediately got up."
- OLIVIA** No hesitation at all.
- SEAN** Nobody gave him direct orders, but at around a quarter past twelve word reached him that the crew should put any spare **provisions** they had into the lifeboats...
- OLIVIA** ...and a baker's spare provisions are bread.
- SEAN** Precisely. He sent all thirteen men up to the boat deck with four loaves each. In his words, that was "forty pounds of bread each as near as I could guess."
- OLIVIA** Hang on. Forty pounds in four loaves would make each one the size of a small suitcase.
- SEAN** That's what he said **under oath**, and I'm not going to argue with a baker about bread.
- OLIVIA** Neither am I. So the first thing he does in a disaster is feed people.
- SEAN** Well, almost the first thing. According to his own **testimony**, he then went down to his room for a drink.

- OLIVIA At quarter past twelve?
- SEAN That's drink number one, and there's a second one coming. He mentioned it almost in passing: "I went down to my room for a drink, as a matter of fact."
- OLIVIA "As a matter of fact," as if he were owning up to a second biscuit.
- SEAN By about half past twelve he was up at lifeboat number ten, which the crew list had put under his command. He described the scene as orderly, with the Chief Officer, Henry Wilde, in charge of loading the boat.
- OLIVIA So the women and children just got in and off they went?
- SEAN The boat filled about halfway, and then...
- OLIVIA ...they ran out of room.
- SEAN The opposite. They couldn't find anyone else willing to get in. Guess why.
- OLIVIA They wanted to stay with their husbands.
- SEAN Some may have, but he gave another reason. "They ran away from the boat and said they were safer where they were."
- OLIVIA Oh, that's awful, because you can see their logic. The deck feels steady and warm, and somebody's asking you to climb into a little boat hanging over a black ocean.
- SEAN And the sea, as he put it, was "just like a pond," so nothing looked like a disaster yet. He went down one deck with three or four other men, and he said they "forcibly" brought up women and children."
- OLIVIA Forcibly? You mean they actually carried...
- SEAN ...up about ten stairs, yes. By then the ship was leaning to port, so the boat was hanging a yard and a half away from the side. His words are, "We threw them in."
- OLIVIA They threw people across the gap?
- SEAN There was no other way. One woman tried to step across by herself, missed her footing and fell between the boat and the ship...
- OLIVIA ...no.
- SEAN A steward called Burke caught her by the foot, and she was pulled in on the deck below. Joughin never saw her again, and I couldn't find out what became of her, so I won't guess.
- OLIVIA Okay. So once the boat's full, the man in charge of it gets in.
- SEAN That's your second wrong guess. Wilde picked two sailors and a steward to row, nobody gave Joughin the word, and he stayed on deck. Later a lawyer asked him why.
- OLIVIA And?
- SEAN "I would have set a bad example if I had jumped into the boat."
- OLIVIA Honestly, Sean, I think I'd have jumped, and felt terrible about it forever.
- SEAN I'd like to think I wouldn't, but nobody who's never been tested gets to boast about it.
- OLIVIA Fair enough. So boat ten leaves, and he's standing on a sinking ship without a seat.
- SEAN So he goes back down to his room for drink number two. By then, according to Encyclopedia Titanica, there was enough water on the floor to cover his feet.
- OLIVIA And this is the famous whisky. Every article I've read says...
- SEAN ...that's the legend. The transcript tells a slightly different story. A lawyer asked him, "Drink of what?" and he answered in one word: "Spirits."

- OLIVIA Which could be anything.
- SEAN Then he got more precise. He said, "It was a tumbler half-full," and when the lawyer asked whether it was a tumbler half-full of liqueur, he said yes.
- OLIVIA Liqueur? So the legendary Titanic whisky might have been something sweet and sticky you'd have after dinner?
- SEAN We simply don't know, because he never named it, so the whisky seems to have crept in with later **retellings**.
- OLIVIA I'm adopting "a tumbler half-full" as my official unit of courage.
- SEAN Keep it handy. When he came back up, every boat he could see had gone. So he went down to a lower promenade deck and started pushing deck chairs out through the big openings in the ship's side.
- OLIVIA Throwing deck chairs into the ocean? That definitely sounds like a tumbler half-full.
- SEAN I thought so too, but wooden chairs float, and he threw about fifty of them. Then a lawyer suggested, rather kindly, that he'd done it to give other people something to **cling to**...
- OLIVIA ...and he agreed and looked very noble.
- SEAN He said, "I was looking out for something for myself, Sir."
- OLIVIA That might be the most honest sentence anyone has ever said at an inquiry.
- SEAN Most witnesses would have taken the compliment.
- OLIVIA He had company, actually. Thomas Andrews, who designed the ship, was reportedly seen throwing deck chairs into the water near the end.
- SEAN The designer? I didn't know that. Joughin, meanwhile, went into a pantry for a glass of water, and while he was drinking it he heard a crash. He said it was "as if part of the ship had **buckled**," and then, "It was like as if the iron was parting."
- OLIVIA The ship was starting to break apart.
- SEAN Then came a rush of feet overhead, as hundreds of people ran towards the stern. He followed them, and suddenly the ship **lurched** to port and threw the whole crowd into a heap.
- OLIVIA Everyone except him?
- SEAN Everyone except him, by his account. He climbed onto the starboard side of the stern and took hold of the rail from the outside, which is where we began.
- OLIVIA So at that point I assume he jumps, so that the ship doesn't drag him down with her...
- SEAN ...no, he just stays there. The stern slides under, and he rides it down like a lift going to the ground floor.
- OLIVIA Wait, didn't the stern stand straight up in the air first? That's the famous image from the 1997 film.
- SEAN Other survivors described something like that. Joughin **flatly** disagreed. Asked whether that picture would be accurate, he said, "It would be absolutely wrong," and he called the final moment "a glide."
- OLIVIA Like stepping off an escalator.
- SEAN It's twenty past two in the morning, and the sea is about minus two degrees. Salt water can get that cold without freezing.

- OLIVIA** Can I tell you something? A couple of New Year's Days ago, my friends talked me into a polar bear plunge back home in Bellingham. That water was far warmer than minus two.
- SEAN** How long did you last?
- OLIVIA** About forty seconds. My chest locked up completely, and I remember thinking that I'd forgotten how to breathe.
- SEAN** Forty seconds, and he says over two hours.
- OLIVIA** That feeling has a name, because I looked it up afterwards. It's called cold shock. In the first minute you gasp whether you want to or not, and if your head is under at that moment, you breathe in the sea.
- SEAN** Which is what happened to so many people that night. Around fifteen hundred people died in the sinking, and almost everyone who ended up in the water died within minutes.
- OLIVIA** How many were pulled out of the water alive?
- SEAN** Only around forty, by most estimates. And the baker, who'd been wearing his lifebelt the whole time, was one of them.
- OLIVIA** What did he actually do out there?
- SEAN** "I was just paddling and treading water." He didn't try to grab anything until he reached a boat, and by then it was getting light.
- OLIVIA** Oh, I've got this part, because I've read a fair bit about Lightoller, the Second Officer. It has to be Collapsible B, one of the small canvas-sided boats, which washed off the deck upside down...
- SEAN** ...it's all yours.
- OLIVIA** Lightoller and a group of men spent the night on the upturned hull, praying together. Towards dawn the sea got rougher, so they had to stand up to keep it balanced. Around half past four, Lightoller took a whistle out of his pocket and called over two lifeboats, number four and number twelve. Number twelve became the last lifeboat to reach the rescue ship, the Carpathia, with seventy-four people in a boat built for sixty-five.
- SEAN** That fits his story perfectly. He said he saw what he thought was wreckage and swam slowly towards it. It was the collapsible, lying "on its side," with Lightoller and about twenty-five men standing on it.
- OLIVIA** And they made room for him?
- SEAN** There wasn't any. He tried to climb on and was pushed off, and when he was asked who'd pushed him, he said, "I do not know."
- OLIVIA** I'm not sure I'd want to know either.
- SEAN** So he hung around until he got to the other side, where a cook called Isaac Maynard recognised him...
- OLIVIA** ...a friendly face from the kitchens.
- SEAN** A friendly face, and Maynard held out his hand and kept hold of him. So the baker is floating in his lifebelt with his legs in the water, and a colleague is gripping his hand.
- OLIVIA** I think that's the picture I'll keep from this story, more than the stern.
- SEAN** Then a lifeboat came within about fifty yards and called out that it could only take ten more...
- OLIVIA** ...and he let go.
- SEAN** He told the inquiry, "So I said to this Maynard, 'Let go my hand,' and I swam to meet it."

- OLIVIA** After all those hours in the water, he still had fifty yards of swimming left in him. That's the part I struggle with, to be honest.
- SEAN** Then it gets stranger. Asked whether the water was very cold, he said, "I felt colder in the lifeboat, after I got in the lifeboat."
- OLIVIA** Which is exactly what makes me suspicious of the whisky, or the liqueur, or whatever it was.
- SEAN** When he reached the Carpathia, he said, "I was all right barring my feet, they were swelled." He couldn't walk up the ladder, so he went up the side of the ship on his knees.
- OLIVIA** On his knees.
- SEAN** So now for the big question, and I'll say what everybody wants to hear. The drink saved him, because a tumbler half-full warmed him from the inside and let him stay out there for hours.
- OLIVIA** Sorry, Sean, but the medicine points in exactly the opposite direction...
- SEAN** ...I knew you'd say that.
- OLIVIA** Alcohol opens up the blood vessels near your skin, which is why you get that lovely warm glow after a drink. The trouble is that you're sending warm blood to the surface, where cold water pulls the heat straight out of it. It also makes it harder for your body to shiver, and shivering is how you produce your own heat.
- SEAN** So he felt warm...
- OLIVIA** ...while he was losing heat faster than he would have done sober, which is why doctors link hypothermia so often with drinking.
- SEAN** My nan in Rotherham would be horrified to hear that. She treated every cold and every broken heart with a hot toddy, whisky and honey in hot water, and she lived to ninety-one.
- OLIVIA** Your nan was sitting by a fire, Sean. The North Atlantic is a slightly different situation.
- SEAN** Fine, but then how did he survive when nearly everyone around him died?
- OLIVIA** I think a few things were on his side. His head apparently never went under, so he may have avoided that first deadly gasp, and the lifebelt did the rest. The historians behind a detailed book on the sinking, *On a Sea of Glass*, doubt that he was really in the water for two and a half hours.
- SEAN** So they think he was lying?
- OLIVIA** Mistaken, more likely, because nobody in freezing water is counting the minutes. They argue that on the collapsible the top half of his body was probably out of the water. As for the drink, they think it had little or nothing to do with it.
- SEAN** I'll give you the timing, since people in shock are terrible at judging time. I won't give up the drink completely, though. If it kept him calm while everyone else panicked, surely that counts for something?
- OLIVIA** It's a nice theory, but nobody can measure calm from over a century away.
- SEAN** He always insisted he wasn't drunk. He admitted the drink, but he maintained he knew exactly what was going on.
- OLIVIA** The films didn't listen. In *A Night to Remember*, from 1958, George Rose plays him as a man who's clearly had a few. And in the 1997 film, the little baker drinking from a flask on the stern next to Jack and Rose is meant to be him.

- SEAN** He'd have hated that, I suspect. He gave his evidence on the tenth of May, 1912, which is where all these quotes come from. Then he went straight back to sea, including more voyages on the Olympic.
- OLIVIA** Back on the sister ship, after all that?
- SEAN** He had a family to feed. And in 1916 he was baking on an American passenger ship called the Congress, off the west coast, when it caught fire.
- OLIVIA** You're joking. Another one?
- SEAN** The captain got the ship close to shore and not a single life was lost. According to a newspaper at the time, there was only one **mishap**, when a baker fell into the water while he was getting into a lifeboat.
- OLIVIA** Please tell me it was...
- SEAN** ...Charles Joughin, who was picked up without a scratch.
- OLIVIA** This man and the sea have a very complicated relationship.
- SEAN** Then came a much harder loss. In 1919 his wife, Louise, died in childbirth, and the baby didn't survive either. In the early 1920s he left his two children in Liverpool and moved to Paterson, New Jersey, and he became an American citizen in 1930.
- OLIVIA** Did he finally stay on dry land?
- SEAN** Not at all, he kept baking on American ships. In December 1941, three days after Pearl Harbor, the cargo ship Oregon was accidentally rammed by an American battleship off Massachusetts and sank. Seventeen people died, and Joughin was listed among the survivors.
- OLIVIA** So that's three disasters. Mind you, I've also read that he served on troopships in the Second World War.
- SEAN** So have I, but the list of his ships that historians have **pieced together** shows him on American merchant ships in those years. I'd call that one unproven for now.
- OLIVIA** Fair. He doesn't need an extra shipwreck.
- SEAN** In 1925 he'd married again, a widow from Leeds called Nellie, and they lived in her house in Paterson. She died in the 1940s, and his biographers say he never really got over it.
- OLIVIA** And the Titanic never quite let him go.
- SEAN** In the 1950s he corresponded with the American writer Walter Lord, who was researching his book A Night to Remember. It came out in 1955. A year later, on the ninth of December 1956, Charles Joughin died of pneumonia in a hospital in Paterson, at the age of seventy-eight.
- OLIVIA** So he never saw the film, or George Rose playing him.
- SEAN** He missed it by about eighteen months. He's buried next to Nellie in Cedar Lawn Cemetery, and on his death certificate, under occupation, somebody wrote "Baker on Titanic."
- OLIVIA** Forty-four years later, that was still who he was.
- SEAN** He stayed back when he could have gone, and he held on until someone came.
- OLIVIA** I keep thinking about Maynard's hand, and how he had to let go of it to be saved. So we'll leave you with this: was it the drink, or something else entirely, that kept Charles Joughin alive that night? Share your view in the comments.
- SEAN** The text of our conversation, including every line of his testimony we quoted, can be downloaded as a free PDF from the description. And if stories like his matter to you, you're very welcome to subscribe.

OLIVIA Spare a thought tonight for the fifteen hundred who never reached a boat.

SEAN Goodnight, everyone.

Did you understand?

Choose the correct answer.

1. What did Joughin do when word reached him that spare provisions should go into the lifeboats?

- ☐ He started baking extra bread in the ship's kitchen.
- ☐ He sent his thirteen bakers up with four loaves each.
- ☐ He carried sacks of flour up to the boat deck himself.

2. Why was lifeboat number ten only about half full at first?

- ☐ Many women ran away from it, saying they were safer on the ship.
- ☐ The officers were saving the remaining seats for the crew.
- ☐ The ship was leaning so badly that nobody could reach the boat.

3. What did Joughin actually say at the inquiry about his second drink?

- ☐ He named a whisky and said it had kept him warm in the sea.
- ☐ He refused to answer and insisted that he had not been drinking.
- ☐ He called it spirits and agreed it was a tumbler of liqueur.

4. Why did Joughin push about fifty deck chairs into the sea?

- ☐ Thomas Andrews ordered him to give passengers something to float on.
- ☐ He wanted something to hold on to for himself.
- ☐ He was trying to make the stern lighter so it would sink more slowly.

5. According to Olivia, why is alcohol dangerous in freezing water?

- ☐ It makes you shiver so hard that you use up your energy too quickly.
- ☐ It slows your heart down, so the blood can no longer reach your hands.
- ☐ It sends warm blood to the skin, where the sea draws the heat out.

Exercise 1. Who said it?

Complete the quote with a key word. Then decide who said it: Sean or Olivia?

1. "and a baker's spare _____ are bread."

Who said it? Sean / Olivia

2. "That's what he said _____, and I'm not going to argue with a baker about bread."

Who said it? Sean / Olivia

3. "'As a matter of fact,' as if he were _____ a second biscuit."

Who said it? Sean / Olivia

4. "We simply don't know, because he never named it, so the whisky seems to have crept in with later _____."

Who said it? Sean / Olivia

5. "That might be the most honest sentence anyone has ever said at an _____."

Who said it? Sean / Olivia

Exercise 2. What would you do?

Answer in one or two sentences. Use the two words given.

1. It's your flatmate's birthday. While they were out, you dropped their favourite mug and it broke. They come home and ask where it is.

Use: own up to · mishap

2. On a summer holiday you fall off a small boat into a cold lake, and your friends need a few minutes to turn the boat round.

Use: tread water · cling to

3. You are a historian. Three survivors of the same shipwreck tell you three different stories about the last hour on board.

Use: testimony · piece together

Exercise 3. Your turn

Was it the drink, or something else entirely, that kept Charles Joughin alive that night? Give your view in three or four sentences. Use at least two words from the list.

Answer key

Check your answers after you finish the activities.

Did you understand?

1. He sent his thirteen bakers up with four loaves each.
2. Many women ran away from it, saying they were safer on the ship.
3. He called it spirits and agreed it was a tumbler of liqueur.
4. He wanted something to hold on to for himself.
5. It sends warm blood to the skin, where the sea draws the heat out.

Exercise 1. Who said it?

1. provisions (Olivia)
2. under oath (Sean)
3. owning up to (Olivia)
4. retellings (Sean)
5. inquiry (Olivia)

Exercise 2. What would you do?

1. *I would own up to it straight away and explain that it was a silly mishap while I was washing up. Then I'd offer to buy them a new one as a birthday present.*
2. *I would try to stay calm and tread water so that my head stayed above the surface. If anything was floating nearby, like an oar, I'd cling to it until they reached me.*
3. *I would read each testimony carefully and mark the details that all three agree on. Then I'd try to piece together a timeline, and I'd be honest about the parts nobody can prove.*

Exercise 3. Example answer

I don't believe the drink saved him, even though every retelling of the story seems to focus on it. His own testimony shows a calm man who kept his head above the water and simply went on treading water until a boat came. His lifebelt did a lot of the work, and so did Maynard, who let him cling to his hand. If the spirits helped at all, they probably just stopped him from panicking.