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Dominican Journalist Helps Connect Condiment Giant With Sailor Who Survived Weeks at Sea by Eating Ketchup

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Elvis Francois was given a medical examination following his 24-day ordeal lost at sea. By. THE COLUMBIAN NAVY.

A fisherman who survived on condiments and seasonings while lost at sea for over 20 days is receiving love from his community after returning home to the island of Dominica. After a ketchup behemoth began trying to find him, a local journalist's work ensured the connection was made.

Elvis Francois was working on his boat in St. Maarten in December, when changing currents suddenly dragged the vessel out to sea. He struggled to fix and mount the sail, but by then he had

gotten disoriented and was unable to navigate back to port. Mr. Francois called his friends but drifted out of range soon afterwards, losing signal. Unable to stay in contact, “there was nothing else to do but to sit and wait,” he said, in a video following his rescue.

After attempting to light a fire and failing, Mr. Francois said he steeled himself to endure what turned out to be a lonely 24-day sojourn on the open water. “Help,” he wrote on the boat’s hull, and turned his attention to survival. He bailed water out of his boat to keep it from sinking, and using a cloth, the adrift sailor managed to collect sufficient amounts of rainwater. However, Mr. Francois said that there was nothing edible on board except ketchup, garlic powder, and seasoning cubes. So that’s what he ate — for over three weeks.

“Twenty-four days, no land, nobody to talk to. Don't know what to do, don't know where you are. It was rough,” Mr. Francois [said](#). As hope dimmed, he began to think about his family back home.



Elvis Francois was provided with a medical examination following his 24-day ordeal at sea. (Credit: The Colombian Navy)

The 47-year old had drifted from St. Maarten to northwest of the La Guajira Peninsula when he spotted a plane passing overhead and signaled to it with a mirror. The Colombian Navy was alerted and co-ordinated with a passing cargo ship to pluck Mr. Francois from his vessel and bring him to Cartagena. A medical assessment on shore found that he was in good health, albeit several pounds lighter.

Enter ketchup brand Heinz. After news of Mr. Francois's ordeal at sea broke, the condiment giant decided to help him get a new boat, since he had to abandon his vessel upon being rescued. On February 14, Heinz posted a message to its [Instagram account](#), and launched a new hashtag, #FindTheKetchupBoatGuy. Two days later, they posted another message, narrowing down his location to his home country of Dominica, to where he returned from Colombia, and asking for help in tracking him down. Heinz posted again on February 17 saying they had "reached an impasse" in their search, again imploring for help in connecting them with Mr. Francois.

On February 22, Emerline Anselm, the Dominican journalist behind the Emo News platform, published an interview with Elvis Francois in his village of Anse De Mai. He told Ms. Anselm that, having arrived in Colombia with absolutely nothing, hers was the only contact he could think of to give the naval officials. He said that getting lost at sea and having to abandon his boat was just his latest piece of bad luck; two houses that he had been living in previously were gutted by fire, the sailor said. Despite his most recent misadventure leaving him once again starting from nothing, Mr. Francois was grateful to be reunited with his family. "I was not sure of seeing anybody again."



Ms. Anselm informed him that Heinz was looking to help him acquire a new boat. “With what is going on right now, I don’t know what to think,” said a stunned Mr. Francois.

The [interview](#) went up on Facebook at 2:25 pm. At 5:14 p.m. that same Wednesday, a comment from Heinz’s verified account: “Incredible. We've hopped into your DMs - let's get Elvis his boat!”

During the interview, Ms. Anselm also reminded the public that Mr. Francois did not have a phone with which to communicate. Two days later, FLOW Dominica had chipped in with a new phone and month-long plan. On Saturday afternoon, Emo News confirmed that a representative from Heinz had spoken with Mr. Francois via Zoom.

Now that Heinz has found their “Ketchup Boat Guy”, Dominicans await the fulfillment of their promise. Mr. Francois says that he hasn’t yet been back on the water since his harrowing ordeal, but hopes that day will come “soon.”