Voices basic 1 – Unit 3: Life’s stories

The Tacoma Narrows Bridge disaster

The Tacoma Narrows Bridge, dedicated in 1940, was the pride of the northwest.

Then the third longest suspension span became known as Galloping Gertie, as it swayed in the winds sweeping up Puget Sound. Four months after it was opened, those winds sent the bridge into a rhythmic dance of death. It literally shook itself to pieces. Caught in the middle of the bridge was a Tacoma newspaperman.

The bridge twists and sways in its death agony.

Since its opening engineers had studied ways to end its strange vibrations.

They claim to be on the threshold of success, but too late.

The reporter Leonard Coatsworth manages to fight his way to safety, most of the way on his hands and knees. He abandoned his car with a pet dog inside - the only life lost in the disaster.

The giant cables are under stupendous strain as the great roadway of the bridge whips about like some fluttering ribbon. These pictures have been acclaimed as some of the greatest ever filmed.

Here it goes!

The death of a six-and-a-half million dollar dream. Theories were many but the consensus was that the solid side railings were responsible. A twin bridge on the east coast, New York’s Whitestone, has side railings that allow the wind to blow through.

A footnote to history:

The bridge was torn down for scrap and a new one built, but Galloping Gertie will always be remembered.