



Abandoned Ship: An Intimate Account of the Costa Concordia Shipwreck

Benji Smith

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On January 13, 2012, the Costa Concordia — a thousand foot long luxury cruise ship, twice the size of the Titanic — ventured into shallow water and smashed into the rocks of a tiny island off the coast of Italy, throwing the four thousand passengers and crew members into a state of chaos. The captain and officers all abandoned ship, leaving the few remaining castaways to fend for themselves as the boat toppled onto its side and water flooded into the passenger decks.

In the wee hours of the night, newlyweds Benji Smith and Emily Lau feared for their lives, desperate and terrified after a malfunctioning lifeboat left them stranded on the sinking ship. By this point, the other lifeboats had all gone. They had been left behind.

This thoughtful memoir — hailed by The Daily Telegraph as "a compelling, minute-by-minute account of the chaotic evacuation" — tells the remarkable story of the couple's harrowing escape, as they clung to a rope and rappelled down the hull of the doomed vessel.

But the astonishing story continues, as they find themselves stranded in Rome and ignored by the United States Embassy. With only the clothes on their backs, they relied upon the kindness of strangers to help them find food and shelter, clothing and medical attention. And finally a ticket home.

But even then, in the safety of their own home, they would find their sleep haunted by nightmares and their days crippled by anxiety and insecurity. And even as they struggled to overcome PTSD, they would simultaneously find themselves in a battle with the news media to even have their story told.

Praised by Newsweek/The Daily Beast for its "honest reflection and frightening detail", this gripping, triumphant story is ultimately a spiritual tale, the story of a pair of survivors who find hope and meaning in the aftermath of a tragedy.

Abandoned Ship: An Intimate Account of the Costa Concordia Shipwreck Details

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From Reader Review *Abandoned Ship: An Intimate Account of the Costa Concordia Shipwreck* for online ebook

Marcus says

The author spends too much time grinding axes. There is about 10-15% of this book that is about the events, and the rest is the author describing how wonderful he and his wife are, and how un-wonderful everyone else in the world is. And throws in some self-satisfied atheism for good measure.

Rebecca McNutt says

This is probably the scariest book I've ever read this year, both because the author actually lived through this harrowing experience and also because it really makes you wonder about the captain of the Costa Concordia and the blatant disregard for the safety and well-being of others. The book also begs the question, are we going too far in building these enormous luxury vessels if we can't handle them?

This disaster occurred in 2012 and took over four years to actually dismantle the large cruise ship for environmental reasons. Beyond that though is a story of the people who remember their vacation interrupted by madness and chaos, both those who sadly didn't make it and those who survived. For Benji and his new wife, they were shocked to find nothing but mistreatment and a disorganized and seemingly impromptu rescue effort which didn't even commence until the ship was already filling with water. Therein lies the true horror of *Abandon Ship* - as if the boat crashing off the coast of Italy and passengers/crew being told to stay put until after dark wasn't bad enough, the captain was later brought up on charges and didn't even help to assist anybody else in getting off the Costa Concordia - instead he was busy trying to save himself. To be fair to the guy, at least he did have the decency to move the boat to a place where it wouldn't sink as quickly and more inland, but still the negligence involved here is very bizarre and sad, especially considering that there were young children on-board. This book really makes you consider that whether you're boarding a boat or a plane or a train or even a city bus, the ones taking the wheel might not always have your best interests at heart.

Abandon Ship isn't entirely sad, though. It's also a powerful and inspirational tale of resilience, love and hope, and how these things always manage to prevail no matter how dire the circumstances. Back in 2012 I was fourteen years old and had no internet access or TV channels so it was only very recently that I discovered this tragic incident had even occurred (now I kind of feel like an idiot because apparently the media coverage was quite extensive). I'm glad to know by reading this that some people were able to overcome the worst of the experience and that this survivor was able to channel the whole ordeal into an amazing memoir. Hopefully this book will inspire others to help their fellow human beings out and work together when disasters strike in the future. I'm also glad to know that both the author and his wife made it out alive and that they're able to share a life together beyond this mess.

Erin says

A captivating, heartfelt memoir of the tragic events on the night of January 13, 2012. Written from first hand experience, Benji and his wife were aboard the Costa Concordia as it hit land and began its descent into the

sea. He displays how the staff was untrained and not knowledgeable about the emergency procedures. Benji, his wife Emily, their family, and many other people were stranded on this cruise ship after the life rafts were deployed. Being stuck on a rope for hours worrying about whether they were going to live or die, Benji recounts these difficult situations and does a great job at engaging the reader. He makes you feel as if you are on the ship with them.

After they think the nightmare is over, they are only faced with much more than they could have ever expected. While there were very hospitable people willing to go above and beyond their jobs, or people willing to take in strangers and help them the very best they could, they were shipped and bussed to random locations without being told of anywhere they were going, they were turned away from the police, and they were pushed aside from the embassies.

"Abandoned Ship" was an extremely suspenseful book. Benji and his wife really persevered through such extreme stress and anguish but they were able to overcome.

I received a copy of this book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

The author was also nice enough to send along his wife Emily's CD "Isle of Lucidity" which was absolutely beautiful. She is very talented and has a fabulous voice. This was Emily's way of coping with the shipwreck and she composed this with such honesty. I enjoyed the CD and have listened to it several times.

Jenny Karraker says

This book told the story of Benji and Emily's experiences when their honeymoon cruise turned into a disaster when the ship crashed on rocks and sank. It seems they were more upset by the lack of help they received from both the Hong Kong and US embassies than by the actual experience itself. The boat sank on a holiday weekend, and people at the embassies didn't want to be disturbed or bothered by helping their fellow countrymen. In contrast to the professionals (embassy personnel, police, cruise ship representatives), the local hotel owners offered free food and housing for the disaster victims, and friends of a friend of a friend were especially helpful. This couple also were disillusioned with the media's coverage of the event, for the media just wanted the sensational details about the sinking of the ship, not the irresponsibility of the embassies in offering so little help. Call me a cynic, but the media just seems to want to crank out the next disaster story to hook their viewers, so why the surprise that they didn't want to go in depth on the story? It must have been an appalling experience. However, I did not like this main character. He'd left his former wife and kids (one with severe disabilities) over religious differences, which he was well aware of before he married. On their trip, several times he talked about how he'd like to bring the kids on a similar trip, but after the sinking he didn't even call them to let them know he was ok; he asked a relative to do that. Throughout the whole narrative, I just heard, "I . . . I . . . I . . ." He seemed totally self-absorbed, which I suppose is typical in such traumatic events. I can't imagine that he'd done much international travel before, because he was so naive about the Italian way of doing things. Unfortunately, we often discover that people aren't as helpful as we'd like when we encounter difficulties in our travels, but that's the risk we take when we travel. Can you imagine being on that cruise ship whose electrical system recently broke down and they were stranded 8 extra days without air-conditioning, food, and working toilets? Having taken many groups of high school student overseas for cultural exchanges, you learn to anticipate problems, be flexible, and roll with the punches. Sometimes the worst things make great stories years later. I'm glad Benji and Emily were both able to go through counseling and get some closure on their issues.

Michael says

This book is a compelling first-hand account of the Costa Concordia disaster. I bought this book and read it from cover to cover in one sitting because I couldn't put it down. Benji Smith tells the story of how he and his wife escaped the sinking ship and were abandoned by nearly everyone they hope would help them. The story is a very personal journey, an exploration of some of the highs and lows of humanity in response to this tragedy, and some of the lessons we might learn from it. The author's writing style is very engaging. After finishing this book, I felt almost as if his experiences were my own. I'm very glad I read this book.

Matthew Timion says

When I read books I want them to have meaning. I want them to affect me. I want to *feel* something.

At first, and I will be the first to admit, I didn't know what Benji Smith was doing with this work. I thought to myself, "why is he talking about the waitress? Why so much time talking about the musician? Why a chapter about his kids and former religion?" I kept reading anyway because I knew this story was about a shipwreck.

And it was. The *actual* shipwreck was only a part of the story. If you are reading this wanting blood and carnage, death and sorrow, then you'll find it, but it's not the focus of the story.

The *real* shipwreck occurred afterwards. It happened after the real ship started sinking.

And I paused, and thought, and connected all of the pieces Benji Smith laid out for me to put together. The picture was much grander than the ship sinking. The half submerged cruise ship was just the beginning.

Because of the author's writing style I felt like I was there. I envisioned everything happening. Having seen the author and his wife on television after the event I pictured them. My mind filled in the missing pieces with clips from the movie *Titanic* and my own experiences in life.

And then the real *shipwreck* happened. And it kept happening.

I can say this isn't a rant piece, nor is it a piece about what everyone did wrong. It's a real life story about the very people who experienced it. When their emotions were raw, so were mine. When they were happy, so was I.

I sat there after reading the book and thought about the bigger picture of my own life. I pondered, I reflected, and I told myself to re-prioritize.

That's what I want out of a book, and this one delivered.

Laurel says

I'm not quite sure how best to say this, but I think everyone should read this book - it's a memorial for those that died, it's a beautiful story, but I think most importantly that it really just deserves to be read.

People need to know, to understand, to prevent. Or, at the very least, to be aware of the kind of apathy and indifference that is out there. The kind we don't see when we don't need to see its polar opposite.

Dammit, I've been reading the last half of this book for the last 2 hours solid, crying off and on for the better part of it, but I feel like I'm just not getting the words right to do it justice.

It's beautifully written, it's a story that needed telling, and more importantly, it need to be listened to - please read it.

Interestingly, the author's wife (Emily Lau) has also composed an album of music called Isle of Lucidity as her way to tell the same story. It's also beautiful all by itself, but I just wanted to say that I appreciate it so much more for reading the book and truly understanding where the music came from. You can find her album here: <http://www.amazon.com/Isle-Lucidity-E....>

I highly recommend listening to the album while reading the book.

Emily QQ says

I understand why some people who are looking for a nautical novel/ship wreck review would find this book disappointing; this book is much more than just a ship wreck story. It is a well-written memoir about a very personal journey following a traumatic experience. Benji Smith, the writer, offers an insider view to the complicated and fascinating world of adventure, misfortune, and finding meaning amidst all these chaos.

This is the essential story without the media hype. He even discussed several major governmental and media organizations in his book in great details. He also invoked several other episodes in his life prior to the ship wreck to illustrate several points he is trying to make. All very interesting, and reminds me of some personal challenges that I have had in my life.

I laughed, cried, and sighed through the book. Smith's writing style is casual, detailed, yet refreshingly honest. I appreciate how sincere the writer is in sharing this story, instead of just giving in and sharing the "popular version".

I highly recommend it.

Judy says

Thank you Goodreads and Benji Smith for the gift of this book which I received in a Goodreads First Reads giveaway. This memoir by Benji Smith details the harrowing experience that he and his new bride, Emily Lau, endured when the cruise ship Costa Concordia wrecked off the coast of Italy on January 13, 2012. While there has been lots of information about this shipwreck in the news over the past year, Smith presents a very eye-opening, firsthand account of what went on before, during and after the wreck. He recounts the terror that he and his wife felt while they were waiting to be rescued and the total ineptitude of the Costa Cruiseline in not having safety measures in place and failing to aid the survivors after the ordeal.

This was a very compelling read, but I thought the book could have been better edited. There were a number of errors and typos.

Cayt Landis says

I won this book from a giveaway on Goodreads.

I remember hearing about the crash of the Costa Concordia and thinking about what it would possibly be like to go through something so traumatic. I was very excited to read this account since it would put me right in the middle of it. I also received the CD Isle of Lucidity by Emily Lau, music based on the shipwreck. It is a lovely CD and goes well with the book. I recommend listening to them together, as I did.

Abandoned Ship: An Intimate Account of the Costa Concordia Shipwreck is the memoir of Benji Smith, a survivor of the disaster. He and his wife, Emily Lau, were aboard the Costa Concordia for their honeymoon when it hit a coral reef and began to sink. They endured a series of really terrible events, surviving a sinking ship, making it to the safety of the shore, being stranded in a foreign country with nothing but the clothes on their backs, and, finally, dealing with the acute stress inherent in any such a situation.

Reading this book allowed me to feel like I was on the ship, experiencing it first hand. Benji Smith's writing style is unique and intriguing, weaving the facts together with philosophical ponderings and meaningful thoughts that give great depth to the story. I felt like I could connect with each person introduced and it was very effective in getting across the magnitude of the events and the importance of working together and not giving up in the face of the insurmountable. There were many points in the book where I teared up, from sadness and happiness alike.

The most interesting and terrifying part of the book, however, is not the crash or the escape, but the utter lack of responsibility taken by the cruise ship company and the lack of care by the embassies, countries, and companies involved. This book tells how the survivors of this shipwreck were essentially abandoned and left to fend for themselves, not only by the captain who abandoned ship after causing the crash, but by nearly every form of authority involved. If you read this book for no other reason, read it to be informed about what large corporations and faceless governmental organizations, including the American embassy, do to help those who are in need (or, in this case, do not do).

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Margaret Sankey says

This horrifically confirms what I already thought about discount cruise ships--they're the perfect storm of badly trained staff, unaccountable crew, bad procedures and lurking disasters, all under a flag that prevents you from ever getting satisfaction or redress. This is an inside account of the Costa Concordia travesty, and Smith is well aware that if he'd been with infirm people, or children, or just a little less lucky, things could have been even worse. All the organizations who are supposed to take care of things failed enormously (the cruise line, the embassies, the humanitarian organizations), had no clue how to inform people of vital information and expected stranded people with no money or passports to take care of themselves while the Italians dicked around and shrugged. The only people who come off well here are the local coastal folks who dealt with the immediate emergency as well as they could and the embassies of non-superpower countries who sent out help immediately (the Irish ambassador was apparently a particular gem). Since I know it is well within the job description to help people in these circumstances, you can only really say *fuck you all, you miserable bastards*. Perhaps this was not a good book to read while at the airport.

Krista says

Ok- I do not usually write a review on a book that I did not finish, but this is an exception. This book deeply saddened me. I do understand that this man went through a horrible ordeal, but I found the book to be just a bitter diatribe on how he is angry at everyone. I was saddened at the many opportunities that he had to help others on the ship and he seemed to just let them fend for themselves. I was even more saddened about his spiritual journey. He openly admits his lack of a need for God. This author seems angry at everyone, Costa, the government, God... I do hope he finds answers and can let go of his bitterness, but I just couldn't continue reading.

Jennie K says

looking forward to reading this .may take it on my next cruise !!
update

A compelling and fascinating account of a dreadful tragedy.
Benji certainly made the events come alive for me & although some of his writing could have done with editing I can understand why he wrote the book the way he did .Overall it was enjoyable reading & yes Benji the cats did kill the mice !

Jjudyfl says

I won this book from GoodReads. thank you. I'm not sure how to react to a book like this. As with any well-written book, I felt like I was there.

I read what I expected to find here, the play by play of the sinking of the Costa Concordia cruise ship , and how 2 brave passengers, Benji Smith, and his new wife, Emily, physically survived being abandoned by the boat's captain, officers, and crew. They were misinformed, mistreated, misguided, and abandoned in so many more situations than just that sinking ship.

There is such a disastrous story here that occurred for far longer than the hours and hours they clung desperately to a rope - and each other.

(With every page, I pictured my own cruise along these very same waters, safe, and happy, in a massive sized ship. My ex husband and I had been delighted to discover our captain was the same PROFESSIONAL we sailed with on a previous cruise. A thorough and well carried out fire drill had been performed.)

There was nothing professional about their cruise. NO FIRE DRILL! NO SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS! NO EMERGENCY PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW!

This book upset me. I could list all the ways they were mistreated and mishandled both at sea and on land, but everyone needs to read this book for themselves Read it BEFORE a cruise. Read it INSTEAD OF a cruise. , but READ IT. READ. READ IT.

This book does not end where I expected it to end. Both Benji and Emily stayed shell shocked from their experiences. I felt chapters 56 - 67 were written because they NEEDED to write them.

Post traumatic stress disorder doesn't just effect returning soldiers. I sincerely hope this couple continues to survive, and, in time to heal.

Ty Wilson says

I remember when the Costa Concordia sank off the coast of Italy. I remember seeing the picture of the liner laying on its side in the water. I remember being stunned that a ship that size would sink in today's world. But as I am not an avid news watcher, I never paid that much attention to the details of the disaster. I heard vague reports of either alcohol or drug use by the captain or the helmsman...or whoever drives one of those cruise liners. I won this book in a First Reads giveaway and had it for a couple of weeks before I got around to starting it. Once I did the pages just flew. Benji Smith gives an account of the disaster from a passenger's viewpoint in clear and concise language. I felt like I was there with passengers as they struggled to escape the sinking vessel. I breathed a sigh of relief when they finally were off the side of the ship and into a rescue boat.

But then a strange thing happened. The book kept going and I discovered that the sinking cruise liner was only the beginning of the troubles for Benji and his new bride Emily. The rest of the book is the true heart of the story. What came after was an odyssey of indifference and annoyance from the very people that are supposed to help when a tragedy occurs. I'm sorry that Benji and Emily had to go through what they did, but by telling their story perhaps changes will be made. Maybe we'll start to hold people accountable for their lack of humanity. Maybe I'm just an optimist and you can't fight the system, but I believe if enough people hear this story then change is possible. I wish everyone could read this book.
