



Until the Sea Shall Free Them: Life, Death, And Survival In The Merchant Marine

Robert Frump

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A devastating disaster at sea . . . an officer who refuses to hide the truth. . . a courtroom confrontation with far-reaching implications . . . *The Perfect Storm* meets *A Civil Action* in a gripping account of one of the most significant shipwrecks of the twentieth century.

In 1983 the *Marine Electric*, a “reconditioned” World War II vessel, was on a routine voyage thirty miles off the East Coast of the United States when disaster struck. As the old coal carrier sank, chief mate Bob Cusick watched his crew—his friends and colleagues—succumb to the frigid forty-foot waves and subzero winds of the Atlantic. Of the thirty-four men aboard, Cusick was one of only three to survive. And he soon found himself facing the most critical decision of his life: whether to stand by the Merchant Marine officers’ unspoken code of silence, or to tell the truth about why his crew and hundreds of other lives had been unnecessarily sacrificed at sea.

Like many other ships used by the Merchant Marine, the Marine Transport Line's *Marine Electric* was very old and made of “dirty steel” (steel with excess sulfur content). Many of these vessels were in terrible condition and broke down frequently. Yet the government persistently turned a blind eye to the potential dangers, convinced that the economic return on keeping these ships was worth the risk. Cusick chose to blow the whistle.

Until the Sea Shall Free Them re-creates in compelling detail the wreck of the *Marine Electric* and the legal drama that unfolded in its wake. With breathtaking immediacy, Robert Frump, who covered the story for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, describes the desperate battle waged by the crew against the forces of nature. Frump also brings to life Cusick's internal struggle. He knew what happened to those who spoke out against the system, knew that he too might be stripped of his license and prosecuted for "losing his ship," yet he forged ahead. In a bitter lawsuit with owners of the ship, Cusick emerged victorious. His expose of government inaction led to vital reforms in the laws regarding the safety of ships; his courageous stand places him among the unsung heroes of our time.

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