



Left for Dead: The Untold Story of the Greatest Disaster in Modern Sailing History

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In August of 1979, Nick Ward began the 600-mile course of the UK's Fastnet Race with perfect weather. Within 48 hours, the deadliest storm in the history of modern sailing had blasted through the Irish Sea. By the time it had passed, it had thrown one of the world's most prestigious races into bedlam and taken the lives of fifteen sailors. Ward's boat, Grimalkin, was capsized again and again, and the skipper lost overboard; after hours of struggle, three of the crew fled the boat for the liferaft. Nick and his crewmate Gerry, both injured, unconscious, and presumed dead, were abandoned on the beleaguered yacht. Gerry died a few hours later, and Nick was left alone to face down a storm that has become legendary among sailors and racing fans alike. "Left for Dead" is Nick Ward's harrowing and inspirational memoir of how he survived that dreadful night. After his dramatic rescue, Ward was overwhelmed by media and decided in 1980 not to speak of the incident again. It wasn't until this book's coauthor, Sinead O'Brien, approached him about the story that he began the personal writings that became this book. Here at last is the untold true story of an accident that has intrigued lovers of the sea for almost thirty years.

Left for Dead: The Untold Story of the Greatest Disaster in Modern Sailing History **Details**

Date : Published August 7th 2007 by Bloomsbury USA (first published 2007)

ISBN : 9781596914551

Author : Nick Ward

Format : Hardcover 208 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Biography Memoir, Adventure, Autobiography, Memoir, Maritime, Survival

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Ken says

Just read the first couple of chapters. Ward was a lifelong sailor, from age 7 or so he was racing dinghies and keelboats. The sea and her traditions were are like blood and breathing to him.

The most telling parts of the book are when he brushes up against his dismay and amazement that his crewmates left him, never visited him in the hospital, never spoke with him after his recovery.

It's not great writing. You can see that his co-author's heavy editing is necessary to keep him on track and in readable prose.

Reading this book has me headed to the marine supply store today to get a couple of new lifejackets and an emergency boarding ladder.

Jerry Smith says

I am reluctant to award 5 stars here on Goodreads. I was uncertain whether to do so here, but the fact is, this book was, to me at least, a page turner that I couldn't put down. I have seen some critiques of the writing style here, and I guess you can tell that Ward is not a writer by trade. However this is totally rendered moot in my view.

This is a realtively short book, but one that I read in a couple of sittings. There is a limited preamble where we learn about NW and the development of his love for sailing in general, and fascination with the Fastnet in particular. This is perfect in its brevity and in what it tells us about the author and his early health struggles. NW perfectly judges the fact that his readers want to know who he is, but are primarily interested in the account of the storm.

That account is compelling, told in a matter of fact way that really brings it alive. He provides the details we need - the smells, the sounds, the fear, the panic the uncertainty, the hope and the despair. What I particularly liked about the account was the the two themes of the story that are set in the context of the storm. The first of these, that runs through the whole narrative, was the fact that his crew mates abandoned the yacht, thinking that Ward and another crew mate were dead, when in fact they were only unconscious.

This has obviously left the author bitter and angry (understandably so) although he does seem to have come to terms with it, even if he doesn't seem to speak to those who left to this day. The second, poignant theme is the fact that he spent the last day of his ordeal in the boat with a dead colleague with whom he had a one way conversation through all those mose difficult hours. Ward credits this man with his survival, even though he was dead for much of the time.

It's a great story, compelling, well told and vivid. Highly recommended even for those, like me, who don't sail. I do remember this race from my childhood, and it is good to look back at it from the perspective of one who battled through it, lost friends and ultimately survived his ordeal.

Sophie Godley says

Never sailing. Ever. I love disaster story books. I love how the perspectives get warped and changed and everyone remembers differently — loved this story - incredible survival.

Chris Nafis says

amazing what he went through

Donald Bratt says

A very thrilling, however, sad account from the Fastnet race 1979. Nick Ward is the last survivor in the race to be picked up from the boat Grimalkin after a heroic struggle for his life. 15 casualties overall were reported of which two are Ward's crew mates. Ward doesn't dodge for the the sailing terms, which makes the story very real, but could be a hurdle for non-sailors (there are explanations at the back of the book). Will be very careful when listening to the wheather forecast, next time I go sailing..

Christopher says

The first book in a long time that I simply couldn't put down.

The descriptions of wild seas are better than accurate - they actually take you there.

If you have been out to sea, it will take you right back there. It describes perfectly the way it can change in the course of minutes and how stomach clenchingly terrifying it can be.

Of course, Mr Ward has been in a situation that, thankfully, few of us have ever - or ever will be - in.

This, however, is more than simply a description of scary seas and "rough weather". It is about survival against the odds and a captivating hour by hour narrative of a harrowing story.

In summary, an excellent and gripping story with the most vivid descriptive passages I have read in many a year. Buy it!

Jerry Grayson says

This is the book that spurred me to finish my own book RESCUE PILOT. Having taken off at 0500 on that fateful day I had flown way beyond limits and was back on the ground by the time Nick was finally picked out of the water at 2100 that night. Reading the story from his freezing and watery perspective gave me

much food for thought and sent shivers down my spine. It was a special day when we met for the first time in order to appear together on the BBC Radio's series "The Reunion" which is online here <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05q5ynq> and I'm now proud to call him friend. Thanks for the impetus Nick!

Petra Eggs says

Five star book of the 1979 Fastnet race in which 15 sailors and 3 of the 4,000 rescuers died and which all sailors know about. When I read they were sailing downwind on bare poles dragging the warps I shivered. I've been in a bad storm too, four days, trying to get to Fernando de Noronha but we couldn't set a course and by the time we could we were so exhausted from fighting the storm, the four of us decided to sail directly to Fortaleza in Brazil.

That storm was like a gentle breeze compared to the force 10/11 storm that capsized 75 boats and sank 5 boats.

Proper review to come.

Meghan Visser says

Harrowing. I read this because it tells the story of a very famous sailing race disaster on a sailboat very similar to the one we own and are currently sailing. Made by the same designer, Ron Holland, and 4.5' shorter in overall length, the pictures were hauntingly familiar to our own boat. My husband asked WHY I would be reading about sailing disasters while we're at sea, but I couldn't stop. This is a tale too incredible not to finish. The detail the author (and crew member) provides is just incredible. Part of what comforted me in the reading is that Grimalkin did not sink. A truly incredible tale. How Nick survived is truly inspirational and the acceptance he shows toward crew members who abandoned him is humbling.

Jim says

I must have a thing for yachting disaster stories. This was another goody, with the added twist that a feud still goes on between the almost drowned and the saved. The bloke who wrote it is clear about his interpretation of events, and says it all in the title. Himself and a colleague were abandoned during the Fastnet race when it looked as if their yacht was sinking and a life-raft was launched without two of the crew in it – left for dead, except they weren't, they were just both knocked unconscious. One later expired while one survived to tell this bitter and frightening tale. He came through, but is left puzzled, depressed and angry over what his so-called shipmates did, and won't face up to.

Larry Jacobson says

There are only two ways I know of to actually feel what it's like to be in a force 10+ storm with 30-foot + seas: experience it for yourself like I have, or read Nick Ward's most incredible account in *Left for Dead*. I know his account is accurate because I've experienced it. Nick's descriptions of the waves, winds, and noises are brilliantly recalled and put into words in a way that places you right there on his boat in the middle of one of the most violent storms ever to be encountered on a small sailboat.

And his recounting of the emotions and senses he felt during the storm were enough to bring me to tears. He describes the smells, tastes, touch...the cold numbness that creeps into your fingers with such accuracy that I shivered while reading.

His incredible survival story is one that needed to be told and couldn't have been done any better. The story is so well written I couldn't put it down. Nick survived a harrowing tale and this book is an amazing telling of his personal story of willing himself to live. Unhesitatingly 5-stars, more than highly recommended.

Larry Jacobson

Circumnavigator and Author of the award-winning, *The Boy Behind the Gate*, How his dream of sailing around the world became a six-year odyssey of adventure, fear, discovery, and love

The Boy Behind the Gate Larry Jacobson

Rich says

A well told tale of a terrifying storm in the Western Approaches during the 1979 Fastnet Race. Nick was a young man in his 20s, crewing a 35 foot yacht - one of 5 crew plus the skipper. Tragically, the skipper and one crew died, of drowning 7 hypothermia. Nick was left on his own, frantically bailing for hours, while being battered by huge waves, and trying to keep alive knowing that he was becoming hypothermic. He had no knowledge of rescues by lifeboats, RAF helicopters, or other seacraft. However, after 36 hours or so with no food or water a helicopter fortunately spotted his dismantled yacht, and rescued him, and a deceased crewman. Nick Ward grippingly relates his state of mind as well as the physical events and surroundings.

Many years later he did complete a Fastnet Race - but is still left with questions about the events of a few days in August 1979.

Ngaio says

When a massive storm hit during the 1979 Fastnet yachting race a crisis resulted. Boats small and large were caught in the open and many were unable to escape. Nick Ward was on a relatively small yacht in the Irish Sea when the storm swept in, a dangerous situation which was compounded by the actions of his fellow crew and led to a lengthy ordeal. He was the last person to be rescued from a race which claimed fifteen lives and sank a number of vessels. The refusal of his surviving shipmates to discuss the events, with him or others, has put an element of mystery into the events and created speculation. In his memoir Ward discusses his sailing experience and his memories of the tragedy.

I had heard this disaster mentioned before I read this book, but I didn't know any of the details. I liked that Ward was reasonable about the events that occurred and tried to mitigate blame where he could, despite the

obvious hard feelings involved. He was gracious about his fellow crew members which I thought was classy of him considering. I liked that he had nothing but nice things to say about his captain and the way the man ran the boat. A lot of times in stories like these blame gets put on poor management or the owner cheapening out on safety equipment. It was really nice to see a case where everything that could have been done was done, even though that didn't save them.

The book itself, however, kind of dragged for me, mostly because the second half is just a blow-by-blow of trying to keep the boat afloat and I just don't have enough knowledge/interest in the mechanics of sailing for that to keep my interest long. I did find his explanations of how the storm affected the ship to be understandable and interesting. I felt I learned a lot about how sailor strategies.

I may have to hunt down some other accounts from this event to get a more varied perspective as he (obviously) has his perspective on what happened. People make decisions in the stress of the moment during survival situations that they wouldn't make if they could sit back and look at it, which makes retrospect very interesting for events such as this.

Overall I gave it two stars ("it was okay"). It might be a higher rating for someone who has an interest in yachting/sailing or the Fastnet race's history.

Marianne says

I read this book in one day. I couldnt put it down.....I do not sail, but have read many books about sea adventures.....This was a terrifying story that left me haunted by his experience. I found it captivating. A quick read. It reminded in part of the movie, "The Perfect Storm"

Maria says

Wow, what an amazing book. From a non-sailing view, this book took you into the world of sailing and left you reeling from the trials that Nick Ward endured. The descriptions of the storm winds and waves almost made me seasick and his capacity to keep bailing and talking to his dead crewmate so that he could live made him almost heroic. The lasting question of how he and his crewmate Gerry Winks could be left to die on the Grimalkin was never fully answered to his liking. But his completion of the 2009 Fastnet Race was cathartic and I found myself having a lump in my throat as I closed the book. I didn't cry as I am wont to do with books. Very proud of that.
