A Survivor's Story

Pop and I stood on the old weathered deck staring out into the pounding surf surrounding Wesleyville. He stared long and hard as if he was being swept away by the waves. There was nothing but silence between us and after what seemed like an eternity, Pop finally broke the silence with nothing more than a whisper. I had to lean in closer so that I could hear what he was saying.

"It was around midnight on April 20 1970. It was a spring night and there was a raging storm. A day earlier at 8:00 pm off Northern Cape Breton, the 27 year old MFV Enterprise sent out a distress call. There were eight men on board the Enterprise that night and they were never heard from again." Pop took a deep breath and continued with his story. "The Patrick Morris with Captain Roland Penney on the wheel helped search the area where the Enterprise sank, with little hope of finding anything. A little after 6:00 in the morning they noticed a body floating face down in the water. Captain Penney backed up the Patrick Morris. As he was backing up, a huge wave hit the back of the ship and broke the door. There were no passengers on board, just the 51 people helping with the search. My shift was over, so I was asleep at the time and I didn't find out what had happened until I was

awakened by the fire alarm. The lower deck was completely under water. I had to send out the SOS by morsecode, and while I was waiting for a response I went to get my life jacket. My heart was racing. When I came back Captain Penney was sending out a mayday signal. The experienced Captain Penney ordered us to get the lifeboat out in the water so it would not be sucked under by the sinking ship. Everyone listened to the captain and launched the life boat into the tossing and turning of the massive waves."

There was a long moment of silence and then Pop continued with his terrifying story. "I ran up to the edge of the deck. The last thing I saw was the Captain gripping the rail of the deck, frozen in shock. He was a man who took great pride in his ship and his job. Without thinking, I jumped off the sinking Patrick Morris into the freezing ocean below. The icy cold water sent streaks of pain throughout my body. I thought I was going to freeze to death because the water was so cold. I could not swim either, so I was paddling and kicking trying to get to the lifeboat. My feet were in so much pain from the water. The men held out the rope for me to grab onto and they pulled me closer to the boat. What they didn't know was that it tangled around my neck and as I thrashed about it was slowly strangling me to death.

When I was within reach they hauled me up into the lifeboat. We were being tossed around by the powerful waves in our tiny boat for two horrifying hours. A ship that was much bigger than the Patrick Morris called the Rhine Ore, came to rescue us. The ship's crew lowered huge nets over the side of the ship for us to climb up. The massive waves came up so high that they were leveled to the ship's deck. We timed it right so that when the lifeboat came up with the waves we jumped over onto the Rhine Ore. I was the last survivor off the Patrick Morris. The generous crew members of the Rhine Ore gave us dry clothes so that we wouldn't freeze and some food to eat because we were famished. One man gave up his bed so that I would have a place to sleep. This man became one of my closest and dearest friends and I still keep in contact with him today."

After Pop told me his story, I stood there in astonishment. I had always known that these things happened to people, but I didn't think that it would happen to my Pop. I looked back at Pop who was wiping away tears, and gave him a hug. "Pop," I said, "you have got to be the bravest person I know!"