The Moral Logic of Survivor Guilt

Nancy Sherman

We have learned from returning war veterans—especially those of the last decade—that the emotional reality of the soldier at home is often at odds with that of the people they left behind. Friends and families of returning service members may be grateful or feel relief this holiday. Meanwhile, many of those they’ve welcomed home are likely struggling with other emotions. Is the sense of responsibility soldiers feel toward each other unreasonable?

High on that list of emotions is guilt. Soldiers often carry this burden home. Survivor guilt is perhaps the most well-known kind. In war, standing here rather than there can save your life but cost a buddy his. It’s random luck, but you feel responsible. The guilt begins an endless loop of “what ifs” or “if onlys.” These thoughts tell you that you could have or should have done otherwise. In fact, you did nothing wrong. These feelings are, of course, not found only on the battlefield. But, given the great amount of loss in war, they hang heavy there and follow soldiers everywhere. And they raise the question of just how unreasonable those feelings are, and if they aren’t, of what basis there is for their being reasonable.

Capt. Adrian Bonenberger, head of a unit in Afghanistan, pondered those questions recently as he thought about Specialist Jeremiah Pulaski. Pulaski was killed by police following a deadly bar fight shortly after he returned home. Back in Afghanistan, Pulaski had saved Bonenberger’s life twice in one day. When Pulaski needed help, Bonenberger couldn’t be there for him. “When he was in trouble, he was alone,” Captain Bonenberger said. “When we were in trouble, he was there for us. I know it’s not rational or reasonable. There’s nothing logical about it. But I feel responsible.”

But how unreasonable is that feeling? Subjective guilt is the term associated with this sense of responsibility. Subjective guilt is thought to be unreasonable because one feels guilty despite the fact that he knows he has done nothing wrong. By contrast, objective or rational guilt describes guilt that matches one’s actions. Objective guilt is the result of real wrongdoing. Guilt is appropriate because one acted to intentionally harm someone or because one could have prevented harm and did not. A person is to blame,

1. this holiday  This essay was originally published the day before the Fourth of July (Independence Day).
here, when he could have done something other than what he did. And so he is held responsible or accountable, by himself or others.

But as Bonenberger’s remarks make clear, we often take responsibility in a way that goes beyond what we can reasonably be held responsible for. And we feel the guilt that comes with that sense of responsibility. Nietzsche is the modern philosopher who well understood this phenomenon. “Das schlechte Gewissen,” (German for “bad conscience”) was his term for the consciousness of guilt where one has done nothing wrong. Bad conscience doesn’t occur where we would most expect it, he argued. For example, we don’t always find it in prisons where there are actually “guilty” individuals who should feel bad about doing wrong. In “The Genealogy of Morals,” Nietzsche appeals to an earlier philosopher, Spinoza, for support. “The bite of conscience,” writes Spinoza in the “Ethics,” has to do with an “offense” where “something has gone unexpectedly wrong.” As Nietzsche adds, it is not really a case of “I ought not to have done that.”

But what then is it a case of? Part of the reasonableness of survivor guilt (and in a sense, its “fittingness”) is that it depends on a moral significance that is broader than moral action. Who I am, in terms of my character and relationships, and not just what I do, decides whether I am a good person. Of course, character is expressed in action. Certainly, when we don’t “walk the walk,” we are lacking. However, character is also expressed in emotions and attitudes. Aristotle in his “Nicomachean Ethics” insists on this point. “Virtue is concerned with emotions and actions,” he declares. Good character is found at the middle point of both. Moreover, many of the feelings that express character are not about what one has done or should have done. Rather, they are about what one cares deeply about. Aristotle doesn’t talk specifically about guilt. However, it is the emotion that best expresses the conflict between the desire or obligation to help and the inability, through no fault of one’s own, to do so. To not feel the guilt is to be numb to that conflict. It is that conflict that Bonenberger feels when he says he wasn’t there for Pulaski when he needed him.

The sacred bond among soldiers originates not just in duty, but in love.

In many of the interviews I’ve conducted with soldiers over the years, feelings of guilt and responsibility tangle with feelings of having betrayed fellow soldiers. At stake is the duty to those soldiers, the duty to hold intact the bond that enables them to fight for and with each other. The soldiers share the kind of “sacred band” that the ancients memorialized. They embody the Marine motto semper fidelis. But it is not just duty at work. It is love.

3. semper fidelis (SEHM puhr fih DAY ihhs) Latin phrase that means “always faithful.” It is the motto of the United States Marine Corps, a branch of the military.
Service members, especially those higher in rank, routinely talk about unit members as “my soldiers,” “my Marines,” “my sailors.” They are family members, their own children, of sorts, whose safety is their responsibility. To fall short of unconditional care is experienced as a failure to be faithful. Survivor guilt piles on the unconscious thought that luck is part of a game of give and take. To have good luck is to take it away from someone else. The intense pain of guilt is a way of sharing some of the bad luck. It is a form of compassionate suffering.

Many philosophers have looked to other terms to define the feeling. What they have come up with is “agent-regret.” British philosopher Bernard Williams coined the term, but many others have used it. The classic scenario is not so much one of good luck (as in survivor guilt), but of bad luck. Typically, agent-regret has to do with accidents, where again there is little or no blame for the harms caused. In these cases, people may have technically caused the harm through their actions, but they are not morally responsible for what happened.

But in my opinion, the idea of agent-regret does not account for how subjective guilt feels. Despite its use of the word “agent,” which suggests someone who acts intentionally, it sounds as passive and flat as the phrase: “regretting that the weather is bad.” Or more tellingly, as empty of human compassion as the message sent to military families: “The Secretary of Defense regrets to inform you that ….”

Indeed, the soldiers I’ve talked to, involved in accidents that took their fellow soliders’ lives, didn’t feel regret for what happened. They felt raw, deep guilt. And the guilt remained long after the military ruled that they were not responsible for their fellow soldiers’ deaths. In one horrible case in April 2003 in Iraq, the gun on a Bradley fighting vehicle misfired. The blast blew off most of the face of Private Joseph Mayek who was standing guard near the vehicle. The accident was caused by a broken replacement battery that the commander in charge had approved. When the vehicle’s ignition was turned on, the replacement battery in the turret (a Marine battery rather than an Army one) failed to shut off electric power to the gun. Mayek, who was 20, died.

The Army officer in charge, then Capt. John Prior, recalled the terrifying scene for me. He told me of the failed attempts in the medic tent to save Mayek’s life. He then turned to his feelings of responsibility: “I’m the one who placed the vehicles. I’m the one who set the security. As with most accidents, I’m not in jail right now. Clearly I wasn’t extremely responsible. But it is a series of errors. Any one of a dozen decisions made over the course of a two-month period and none of them really occurs to you at the time. Any one of those made differently may have saved

4. “The Secretary of Defense regrets to inform you that …” first sentence of a scripted message spoken by United States military officers when they report the death of a soldier to that soldier’s closest living relative.
his life. So I dealt with and still deal with the guilt of having cost him his life essentially. ... There’s probably not a day that doesn’t go by that I don’t think about it, at least for a moment.”

What Prior feels is guilt. It is not simply regret that things didn’t work out differently. He feels the awful weight of self-blame. He feels the pain of the victim and of the survivors. He feels the need to make moral repair. If he didn’t feel that, we would probably think less of him as a commander.

In his case, moral repair came through an emotional, painful connection with Mayek’s mother. After the accident, Prior and his first sergeant wrote a letter to Mayek’s mother. And for some time after, she replied with care packages to the soldiers and with letters. “Oh it was terrible,” said Prior. “The letters weren’t just very matter of fact—here’s what we did today. It was more like a mother writing to her son.” Prior had become the son who was no longer. “It was her way of dealing with the grief,” said Prior. “And so I had a responsibility to try to give back.”

In all this we might say guilt, subjective guilt, has a saving side. It is a way that soldiers impose moral order on the chaos and awful randomness of war’s violence. It is a way they personalize the effects of war for themselves, for their buddies, and for us as civilians, too.

But if that’s all that is involved, it sounds too moralistic. It makes guilt appropriate because it’s good for society. It is the way we all can deal with war. Maybe, instead, we want to say it is fitting because it is evolutionarily adaptive in the way that fear is. But again, this doesn’t do justice to the experience of guilt. The guilt that soldiers feel isn’t just morally practical or evolutionarily useful. It is fitting because it gets right certain morals and values of a soldier’s world. Good soldiers depend on each other. They come to love each other. They have duties to care and bring each other safely home. Philosophers, at least since the time of Kant, have called these “imperfect duties.” Even in the best circumstances, we can’t perfectly act with them in mind. Duties to others need to make room for duties to self, even in a soldier’s life of service and sacrifice. Even soldiers need to practice self-forgiveness and self-sympathy. These are a part of full moral repair.

5. Kant (1724–1804) Immanuel Kant, German philosopher who was a foremost thinker of the European Enlightenment.
A group has gathered to tell stories. It is getting late and wind is rustling past the windows. The last storyteller, whom the narrator calls “the seventh man,” begins to tell the story of the largest wave he has ever seen.

“It just barely missed me, but in my place it swallowed everything that mattered most to me and swept it off to another world. I took years to find it again and to recover from the experience—precious years that can never be replaced.”

The seventh man is a stranger to the group. He is plain looking, except for a scar across his right eye and a strange expression on his face. The narrator explains that the seventh man looks as though he has been trying for a very long time to find the right words to say something. The seventh man describes his hometown, a seaside village in the Province of S, and his best friend, whom he calls “K.”

K. was a frail, skinny little thing, with a pale complexion and a face almost pretty enough to be a girl’s. He had some kind of speech impediment, though, which might have made him seem retarded to anyone who didn’t know him. And because he was so frail, I always played his protector, whether at school or at home.

The seventh man explains that K.’s speech impediment makes school difficult, but he excels at painting. The seventh man believes K. would have become a great artist if he had continued to paint as an adult. One year, when K. and the seventh man are still children, a typhoon (a powerful storm) approaches town. The seventh man’s family prepares emergency supplies and boards up their windows. After an hour, the storm seems to subside.

“We’re in the eye of the storm,” my father told me. “It’ll stay quiet like this for a while, maybe fifteen, twenty minutes, kind of like an intermission. Then the wind’ll come back the way it was before.”

I asked him if I could go outside. He said I could walk around a little if I didn’t go far. “But I want you to come right back here at the first sign of wind.”

As the seventh man roams town in the strange tranquility of the eye of the storm, K. sees him walking by and together they head for the beach. The ocean is calm, but the seventh man feels uneasy anyway. As a feeling of panic bubbles up within him, the seventh man attempts to call out to K.

1. speech impediment (ihm PEHD uh mehnt) n. obstacle to speaking clearly, such as a lisp or stammer.
“I’m getting out of here!” I yelled to K. He was maybe ten yards down the beach, squatting with his back to me, and looking at something. I was sure I had yelled loud enough, but my voice did not seem to have reached him. He might have been so absorbed in whatever it was he had found that my call made no impression on him. K. was like that. He would get involved with things to the point of forgetting everything else. Or possibly I had not yelled as loudly as I had thought. I do recall that my voice sounded strange to me, as though it belonged to someone else.

The seventh man’s fears come true as low rumbling and gurgling sounds begin to fill the air. K., however, remains focused on the thing he is looking at. K. seems unable to hear the sea’s growing violence. The seventh man knows he should try to save K., but his fear causes him to run away from shore. As he flees, he calls to his friend again.

“Hurry, K! Get out of there! The wave is coming!” This time my voice worked fine. The rumbling had stopped, I realized, and now, finally, K. heard my shouting and looked up. But it was too late. A wave like a huge snake with its head held high, poised to strike, was racing towards the shore. I had never seen anything like it in my life. It had to be as tall as a three-story building. Soundlessly (in my memory, at least, the image is soundless), it rose up behind K. to block out the sky. K. looked at me for a few seconds, uncomprehending. Then, as if sensing something, he turned towards the wave. He tried to run, but now there was no time to run. In the next instant, the wave had swallowed him.

The seventh man scrambles out of the path of the giant wave as it breaks onto the shore. The wave then pulls back out to sea, taking so much water with it that it uncovers a large stretch of sea floor. The air is again eerily silent, and there is no sign of K. A second, and equally enormous, wave comes barreling down towards the shore. Frozen with fear, the seventh man prepares himself to be swept up by the wave.

The moment the wave came before me, however, it stopped. All at once it seemed to run out of energy, to lose its forward motion and simply hover there, in space, crumbling in stillness. And in its crest, inside its cruel, transparent tongue, what I saw was K.

The seventh man loses consciousness. When he wakes up three days later, he is terribly sick. For a week, he lies in bed in misery. Meanwhile, the town searches unsuccessfully for K.’s body. His parents desperately patrol the shoreline for any sign of him, but they quickly realize that the body is gone. They do not blame the seventh man for their son’s death, but he is haunted by nightmares of his friend.

K. was always there, lying in the wave tip, grinning at me, his hand outstretched, beckoning. I couldn’t get that picture out of my mind. And when I managed to sleep, it was there in my dreams—except that, in my dreams, K. would hop out of his capsule in the wave and grab my wrist to drag me back inside with him.

2. crest n. top of a wave.
The seventh man begs his parents to allow him to move away from the seaside village. He leaves for Nagano Province, where his father's family lives. After finishing the rest of his schooling, the seventh man gets a job in the city of Nagano. He makes friends and lives a full life but continues to have the same nightmare.

I stayed away from my home town for over forty years. I never went near that seashore—or any other. I was afraid that if I did, my dream might happen in reality. I had always enjoyed swimming, but after that day I never even went to swim in a pool. I wouldn't go near deep rivers or lakes. I avoided boats and wouldn't take a plane to go abroad. Despite all these precautions, I couldn't get rid of the image of myself drowning. Like K.'s cold hand, this dark premonition caught hold of my mind and refused to let go.

After the seventh man's father dies, his brother cleans out their old house before selling it. He sends the seventh man a collection of K.'s paintings, which he finds in the garage.

Most of them were landscapes, pictures of the familiar stretch of ocean and sand beach and pine woods and the town, and all done with that special clarity and coloration I knew so well from K.'s hand. They were still amazingly vivid despite the years, and had been executed with even greater skill than I recalled. As I leafed through the bundle, I found myself steeped in warm memories. The deep feelings of the boy K. were there in his pictures—the way his eyes were opened on the world.

Though he admires the paintings, it is painful for the seventh man to revisit his memories of K. He wants to throw the paintings out but finds himself unable to do so. He begins to look at them every day. In doing so, the seventh man starts to feel differently about the day of the typhoon. He wonders if he was wrong to think that K. had been trying to pull him into the wave. He decides to return to the village and ends up at the beach.

I lowered my bag to the sand and sat down next to it in silent appreciation of the gentle seascape. Looking at this scene, it was impossible to imagine that a great typhoon had once raged here, that a massive wave had swallowed my best friend in all the world. There was almost no one left now, surely, who remembered those terrible events. It began to seem as if the whole thing were an illusion that I had dreamed up in vivid detail.

Standing in the water, he feels a change occurring within him. A darkness is lifting and moving on. He again admires the waves of the ocean and his past and present seem to be blending into one. He slips into the water and is unable to get to his feet, but he is unafraid. His days of fear are over and his nightmares cease. He leaves the group of storytellers with one final piece of wisdom about fear.

“It comes to us in many different forms, at different times, and overwhelms us. But the most frightening thing we can do at such times is to turn our backs on it, to close our eyes. For then we take the most precious thing inside us and surrender it to something else. In my case, that something was the wave.”

3. premonition (prehm uh NIHSH uhn) n. feeling that something bad will happen.
On April 18, at about 6:30 a.m. local time, an avalanche swept down off the west shoulder of Everest and killed 16 climbers. To anybody who’s familiar with Everest climbing, it should come as no surprise that all of the men were Sherpa porters. Sherpas are Everest’s workforce. They are the real backbone of the climbing industry there. The men who were struck were carrying 80-pound loads to Camps I and II. Or they were on their way back to Base Camp. Without the hard work of the Sherpa porters, it would be largely impossible for Americans and Europeans with slightly above-average physical health, and well above-average wealth, to climb the world’s tallest mountain.

Increasingly, the climax of adventure tourism—the summit of Everest—comes at too steep a cost. In the August 2013 issue, I wrote a story titled “Disposable Man.” It was about the commonness of Sherpa deaths on Everest. Today’s avalanche was the worst accident in the history of the mountain. Add to this the April 2 death of Sherpa Mingma Tenzing, who was working for the Peak Freaks expedition. There were at least a dozen serious injuries from the avalanche. So 2014 stands out as the bloodiest year in Everest history. And this is all before most teams have even set foot on the mountain.

Yes, something needs to be done.

There’s no question that guiding on Everest is morally troubling. But shutting the industry down would anger the outfitters, tourists, and, most of all, the Sherpas. That last group would lose jobs that pay between $2,000 and $6,000 per season. This is in a country where the average income is $540 per year. If, say, 1 percent of American college-aged raft guides or ski instructors were dying on the job—the death rate of Everest Sherpas—the guiding industry would vanish. But Himalayan climbing is understood to be extremely dangerous. And people who play the game still hold onto its romantic roots in exploration rather than its current position as recreational tourism.

The answer isn’t decreasing, or ending, the climbing business on Everest. The solution is increasing the value of a Sherpa life. Because right now,

1. Camps I and II. n. campsites on Mount Everest located at 19,500 feet and 21,000 feet.
2. Base Camp. n. located at 17,500 feet on the south side of Everest in Nepal; where the true climb up the mountain begins.
despite what anybody may feel in their heart, the industry clearly values life on a two-layered basis: Westerners at the top, Sherpas at the bottom.

6  Want to know what a Sherpa life is worth? You only need to review the numbers that I reported last year. They get lower pay. They get lower standards for rescue insurance. They get lower payments on accidental death coverage in general. And, perhaps most significantly, the amount of time that Sherpas spend passing through the deadly Khumbu Icefall\(^3\) and up the Lhotse Face,\(^4\) ferrying loads for mainly Western expeditions. Sherpas do this so that tourists can arrive fresh. Tourists want to limit their exposure to the hazards of the mountain. Several organizations, including the Juniper Fund and Alex Lowe Charitable Foundation, have made admirable efforts to teach Sherpas the latest climbing, rescue, and first-aid skills through projects like the Khumbu Climbing School. But the hazards of the mountain remain.

7  Last June, after I'd finished reporting “Disposable Man,” the Nepalese government announced that it would double the amount of insurance that high-altitude porters were required to carry, to $11,000. But for about $200 per policy, at least one Kathmandu\(^5\)-based insurance company will cover Sherpas for $23,000. Even that is clearly not enough to cover the loss. What’s left instead is a patchwork of charity. Some families find help from climbers to send their kids to school and others don’t.

8  The change I’d most like to see would start at the very beginning of the tragedy, when outfitters describe what has happened to these men. At this point, the words they use sound repetitive. A typical blog post on an outfitter’s website follows a predictable pattern, like this one from earlier this month: “Our team is overwhelmed with sadness. Our prayers go out to his family at this extremely difficult time. Tea lights have been lit, we hang our heads in sorrow.” But after sorrow should come an understanding of the deep sense of responsibility that is tied in to hiring somebody to do such a dangerous job—for an end result that’s ultimately meaningless.

9  In the media, the dead are always referred to as Sherpa “guides,” largely as a result of a poor translation to English. It’s generally a misleading job title for the men—and one or two women—who, each day, lean into their pack straps and haul supplies up the mountain for paying tourists.

10 As guides and Sherpas begin to wake up today in Nepal, they’ll devote themselves to finding the remaining bodies. They’ll wait for hours, shovels in hand, under the same serac\(^6\) that killed their friends. The Buddhist

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3. **Khumbu Icefall** (KUHM boo) dangerous area between Base Camp and Camp I, where ice often shifts and snaps off over the heads of climbers.

4. **Lhotse Face** (loht SEE) n. 3,700-foot wall of ice on the southern face of Lhotse, the fourth-highest mountain in the world; connected to Everest and in the path of climbers.

5. **Kathmandu** (kaht man DOO) n. capital of Nepal.

6. **serac** (suh RAK) n. sharp ridge or block of ice among the large cracks in glaciers.
tradition is strict about needing a body to cremate if the dead person is to find a speedy rebirth after death.

In the days to come, there will be 16 different puja funeral ceremonies, most of them in the small villages of the Khumbu Valley. In every village, there are already houses with missing men. Their photos, usually faded, smiling, and standing on the top of the world, are still hung for visitors to see. Now there are 16 more.

7. puja (POO jah) n. (in Buddhism) expressions of honor, worship, and devotion.
In this real-life account, British explorer Ernest Shackleton and the crew of the ship *Endurance* are stranded on Elephant Island in the Antarctic Circle after their ship sinks. In this section, Shackleton and five crew members get into one of the ship’s lifeboats—called the *James Caird*—and go to look for help 800 miles away at the South Georgia Island whaling station. The diary entries kept by the crew of the *James Caird* record their brave and dangerous journey.

“The tale of the next sixteen days is one of supreme strife amid heaving waters,” wrote Shackleton.

The men dress as warmly as they can to protect themselves from the extremely cold and wet conditions. But, as crew member Worsley records, their clothes are not waterproof. The deck, or upper part, of the *James Caird*, is made of canvas, and the men must eat their meals and try to sleep in the small space below the canvas. The *James Caird* has no motor. The men must sail the boat and navigate, or find their way, using simple instruments to note their position relative to the sun and stars.

It is notable how many of the British polar explorers were experienced sailors. Not only had Shackleton served twenty years in the Merchant Service, but each member of the *James Caird*’s small crew had so many years of experience at sea that there was not question about their expertise.

By the end of the first day, the *James Caird* had sailed forty-five miles from its starting point at Elephant Island. The men settled into a routine, in which one group of men sailed the boat while another group ate and slept below the canvas deck. But sleep was difficult in the cold, wet, cramped conditions.

“Real rest we had none,” wrote Shackleton. … There was nothing to relieve the long hours of darkness, from six at night until seven in the morning. … On the first night out, the cries of penguins coming from the dark sea reminded the men of lost souls.

Using basic instruments and the position of the sun or stars was very difficult in the stormy, overcast weather. While trying to find their way, the men had to battle the conditions. For example, on the third day of sailing, strong winds and waves threatened them, and water entering the boat had to be pumped out to stop the boat from sinking:

“We were getting soaked on an average every three or four minutes,” wrote Worsley. “This went on day and night. The cold was intense.” Particularly hateful was the task of working the pump, which one man had to hold hard against the bottom of the boat with bare hands—a position that could not be endured beyond five or six minutes at a time.
The men also had to battle ice that formed on the boat. The spray from waves froze onto the boat’s wood, canvas, and rope lines. As the ice built up, it affected the way the boat steered, and the weight of the ice started sinking the boat. The ice had to be chipped off. The work was very dangerous, as the men could slip and fall into the water. Worsley describes a time when his crewmate Vincent was chipping ice, and the boat made a sudden movement:

“Once, as the boat gave a tremendous lurch, I saw Vincent slide right across the icy sheathing of the canvas. ... Fortunately he managed to grasp the mast just as he was going overboard.”

After several days, the conditions begin to take a toll on the crew. The men were soaked and frostbitten. Even moving became very painful. Hot meals were the only relief from the suffering, and Shackleton, as the leader, made sure that each man was okay.

“Two of the party at least were very close to death,” Worsley wrote. “Indeed, it might be said that [Shackleton] kept a finger on each man’s pulse.”

The difficult voyage also took a mental toll on the crew, but they managed to keep their spirits up with humor and joking. For example, Shackleton and a crew member named Tom Crean often joked with each other. And despite the physical and mental suffering, Worsley realized that he was part of a great adventure and managed to keep his sense of humor.

Of McNish, there is little record. Shackleton stated only, “The carpenter was suffering particularly, but he showed grit and spirit.”

As the crew sailed on, they met a powerful wind that lasted for forty-eight hours. When it finally lessened and the sun came out, they were able to use the sun’s position in the sky to learn their position for the first time in six days. They discovered that they had traveled 444 miles since leaving Elephant Island. They had gone more than half the distance to South Georgia Island, and success seemed possible. But the good weather didn’t last, and finding their way continued to be a great challenge.

Worsley was now increasingly worried about getting his observational sights for their position. Since leaving Elephant Island fourteen days earlier, he had been able to sight the sun only four times. “Two of these,” he noted, were “mere snaps or guesses through slight rifts in the clouds.”

The crew did their best to plot their course to South Georgia Island and to deal with the harsh conditions, which now included extreme thirst: One barrel of drinking water could not be used because sea water had leaked into it. But their spirits were lifted on the fifteenth day of their journey, when they spotted seaweed and then birds, which told them land might be close. In the early afternoon, land was spotted!

“Our glad but salt-rimmed eyes saw a towering black crag with a lacework of snow around its flank,” wrote Worsley. “One glimpse, and it was hidden again. We looked at each other with cheerful foolish grins. The thoughts uppermost were ‘We’ve done it.’” The land, Cape Demidov, was only ten miles distant, and it was on course with Worsley’s calculations.
Despite seeing land, the crew still faced dangerous winds that kept them from being able to land.

“Our need of water and rest was wellnigh desperate,” wrote Shackleton, “but to have attempted a landing at that time would have been suicidal. There was nothing for it but to haul off till the following morning.” As he well knew, making landfall could be the most dangerous part of sailing.

The crew now faced terrible weather that threatened to crash the boat into the shore.

Rain, hail, sleet, and snow hammered down, and by noon the gale had become a full-fledged hurricane whipping a mountainous sea into foam and obscuring every trace of land.

“None of us had ever seen anything like it before,” wrote Worsley. The storm, he continued, “Was driving us, harder than ever, straight for that ironbound coast.”

To avoid being driven into the land and crushed, the crew battles with all their strength to set sails and pump water out of the boat. But as soon as they clear one danger, they are put into the path of another.

“I think most of us had a feeling that the end was very near,” wrote Shackleton.

But the wind changed suddenly and moved the boat away from the cliffs that threatened them. The hurricane they had fought for nine hours started to end. The next day, they steered toward King Haakon Bay. When they found an entrance into this bay, the wind was against them, so they had to try five times before they could sail through the entrance and into the bay.

Standing in the bows, Shackleton directed the boat through a narrow entrance in the reef.

“In a minute or two we were inside,” wrote Shackleton, “and in the gathering darkness the James Caird ran in on a swell and touched the beach. ... It was ... a splendid moment.”
This version of the selection alternates original text with summarized passages. Dotted lines appear next to the summarized passages.

NOTES

Pi is the main character in this story. He is a teenager whose family owns a zoo in India. The family leaves India and is sailing to Canada with their animals when a storm sinks their ship. Only Pi, a hyena, a zebra, an orangutan, and a tiger named Richard Parker survive on a lifeboat. The hyena kills the zebra and orangutan, but it is killed by the tiger. Pi builds a raft to stay safe from the tiger, but he knows that he must find a way to feed it so that it doesn’t eat him. So he tries fishing.

I decided to try my hand at fishing, for the first time in my life. … I read what the survival manual had to say on the subject. The first problem arose: bait. I thought about it. There were the dead animals, but stealing food from under a tiger’s nose was a proposition I was not up to.

Pi finds a fishing kit, but without bait, he cuts his leather shoe into pieces and tries to use the leather scraps as bait.

The whole shoe disappeared bit by bit, slight tug on the line by slight tug on the line, happy freeloading fish by happy freeloading fish, bare hook by bare hook, until I was left with only the rubber sole and the shoelace.

Pi fails in his first attempt at fishing. He begins to worry that if the tiger runs out of food, it may decide to eat him next. Pi wonders again what he might use as bait to fish, so he goes back to the lifeboat to look through the storage locker for bait ideas. He finds nothing, but the tiger has leapt across the boat, and Pi thinks it is about to kill him. However, the tiger is interested in something in the locker:

It was a fish. There was a fish in the locker. It was flopping about like a fish out of water. It was about fifteen inches long and it had wings. A flying fish.

Pi picks up the fish and throws it toward the tiger, realizing that this might be a way to tame the tiger and save himself. Before the tiger can eat the fish, however, the fish escapes back into the water, and Pi’s fear of being eaten returns. Luckily for him, at that moment, an entire school of flying fish flies by, hitting him and the tiger.

They burst out of the water, dozens of them at a time. … Many dived into the water just before the boat. A number sailed clear over it. Some crashed into its side. … Several lucky ones returned to the water after a bounce on the tarpaulin. Others, less fortunate, fell directly into the boat. …

Many of the flying fish hit Pi as they fly through the air, and he gets cuts and bruises all over his body. But after the school of flying fish passes, Pi realizes that there are several fish in the locker and many more in the boat. He wraps one fish in a blanket, grabs a hatchet, and goes to the raft. Pi intends to kill it and use it for bait, but he has never killed anything.
Several times I started bringing the hatchet down, but I couldn’t complete the action. … A lifetime of peaceful vegetarianism stood between me and the willful beheading of a fish.

I covered the fish’s head with the blanket and turned the hatchet around. Again my hand wavered in the air. The idea of beating a soft, living head with a hammer was simply too much.

I put the hatchet down. I would break its neck, sight unseen, I decided.

Pi wraps the fish in the blanket and tries to kill it by breaking its neck. But as the fish struggles, Pi imagines what it must be like for the fish, so he gives up several times. But he realizes that he must do it, and he doesn’t want to make the fish suffer. Crying, he is finally able to kill the fish. He cries over the dead fish—the first living thing he has killed.

I was now a killer. I was now as guilty as Cain. I was sixteen years old, a harmless boy, bookish and religious, and now I had blood on my hands. It’s a terrible burden to carry. All sentient life is sacred. I never forget to include this fish in my prayers.

Now that the fish is dead, Pi finds it easier to accept—it looks like the dead fish he has seen in the market. He chops the fish up and uses it as bait. This time, Pi’s attempt at fishing is successful, and he gets a bite on his line from a large fish called a dorado. However, Pi struggles to reel in the large fish.

The dorado exploded out of the water, tugging on the line so hard I thought it was going to pull me off the raft. I braced myself. The line became very taut. It was good line; it would not break. I started bringing the dorado in. It struggled with all its might, jumping and diving and splashing. The line cut into my hands. I wrapped my hands in the blanket. My heart was pounding. The fish was as strong as an ox. I was not sure I would be able to pull it in.

With great effort, Pi manages to get the large fish onboard. He kneels on it and holds it down with his hands as it struggles forcefully. In a great mood about his victory, Pi admires the beauty of the dorado. This time, however, he has no problem with killing. Using the hatchet, he kills the dorado without hesitation.

Killing it was no problem. …

You may be astonished that in such a short period of time I could go from weeping over the muffled killing of a flying fish to gleefully bludgeoning to death a dorado. … But in point of fact the explanation lies elsewhere. It is simple and brutal: a person can get used to anything, even to killing.

Pi pulls the raft up to the lifeboat and drops the dorado into the boat. The tiger begins to eat it, and, as Pi pushes the raft away from the boat, he blows his whistle several times to remind the tiger of who gave him the food. It is Pi’s way of beginning to tame the tiger. Pi cleans himself up, puts away his fishing gear, and enjoys his supper, feeling better about his situation.
I was tired, but still excited by the events of the last hours. The feeling of busyness was profoundly satisfying; I hadn’t thought at all about my plight or myself. Fishing was surely a better way of passing the time than yarn-spinning or playing I Spy. I determined to start again the next day as soon as there was light.
Typhoon Haiyan, which killed more than 6,000 people in the Philippines last fall, reminded us how much suffering and damage nature can cause. It also reminded us how important it is to invest money in stronger structures and be ready to respond.

As climate change and growing cities expose more and more people to natural disasters, governments around the world want to make sure their roads, buildings, and public services can resist floods, storms, and earthquakes.

Here are seven lessons, based on years of experience, on how to reduce risks:

1. Identify the risks. Indonesia has shown how this can be done. There, the government and partners developed InaSAFE, a free interactive computer program. It allows local officials to ask questions that help them find out exactly how much damage a disaster might cause. If an earthquake hit tomorrow, for example, how many schools would be affected? How many students would be at risk? By helping estimate the number of people and facilities in danger, the tool helps decision-makers better prepare for, and respond to, disaster risks.

2. Make it clear that prevention is possible and often easy. Early-warning systems are among the most inexpensive solutions to reducing the worst effects of disasters. The solutions can be as simple as buying megaphones to alert communities. Or they might be highly advanced. For instance, Japan’s earthquake technology can stop Shinkansen high-speed trains so they do not go off the tracks when an earthquake strikes.

   • For every dollar put toward early-warning systems, as much as $35 is saved in damages. In addition, the systems protect many lives. When Cyclone Phailin hit India in the fall of 2013, a new early-warning system, along with several cyclone shelters, kept 900,000 people safe. Forty people died in that storm—a tragic number, but far fewer than the 10,000 who died in a storm of the same size in 1999.

   • Sometimes the solution is as simple as making sure that drains aren’t blocked. Blocked drains are one of the most common causes of urban flooding. Likewise, if the infrastructure is well maintained, roads and bridges won’t fall apart with the first heavy rain.

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1. infrastructure  *n.* basic physical and organizational structures that help cities, states, and countries operate.
• It’s difficult to know how much damage or loss of life these safeguards can prevent. But everyone should know the value of being prepared and hold public officials responsible for funding safety measures.

3. All public funding and plans should be guided by detailed risk calculations that use recent models. The 2010 earthquake in Haiti, with a magnitude of 7.0, killed more than 220,000 people. Just a month later, the much stronger earthquake in Chile, with a magnitude of 8.8, caused only about 500 deaths. What was the difference in Chile? Chile used updated, strict building codes that considered the country’s high risk of an earthquake.

4. Give everyone information about dangers posed by storms, earthquakes, and other disasters. Tools such as the World Bank’s Open Data for Resilience Initiative enable countries to collect and share information on risk. These tools also allow people to share knowledge to help others create safeguards.

5. Healthy ecosystems save lives and money. An investment of $1.1 million in mangrove forests in northern Vietnam provided a barrier against the floods and storm surges of Typhoon Wukong in 2000. Loss of life and property in that area was much less than that of other areas. (The forests also save Vietnam about $7.3 million a year in dike maintenance.)

6. Find political champions. In tight financial environments, every government needs people to keep the focus on managing the risks of disasters. Countries can learn from Peru, where the head of disaster risk management reports directly to the prime minister. That individual also works closely with the ministry of finance. In New York City, former Mayor Michael Bloomberg personally fought for funds to prepare for climate change.

7. Rebuild with better construction. Once a disaster happens, there’s an opportunity to improve buildings and infrastructure. After the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia, rebuilding even brought about an end to the 30-year conflict in Aceh and created the foundations for a more successful future.

Even as climate change increases the risk of natural disaster, cities can be made safer, if public policy makers carefully prepare.
It’s hard to remember your manners when you think you’re about to die. The human species may have developed an elaborate social and behavioral code. But we drop it fast when we’re scared enough—as any stampeding mob reveals.

This conflict is at work during wars, natural disasters, and any other time our lives are on the line. It was perhaps never more movingly played out than during the two greatest sea disasters in history. These were the sinking of the Titanic and the Lusitania. A team of behavioral economists from Switzerland and Australia have published a new paper in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS). It takes an imaginative new look at who survived and who died aboard the two ships, and what age, gender and class say about how well social standards hold up in a crisis.

The Lusitania and the Titanic are often thought of as sister ships. In fact, they belonged to two separate owners, but the error is understandable. Both ships were huge. The Titanic was carrying 2,207 passengers and crew on the night it went down. The Lusitania had 1,949 people onboard. The death figures were even closer, with a 68.7% death rate aboard the Titanic and 67.3% for the Lusitania. What’s more, the ships sank just three years apart. The Titanic was sunk by an iceberg on April 14, 1912. The Lusitania was hit by a German U-Boat on May 7, 1915. But on the decks and in the passageways and all the other places where people fought for their lives, the ships’ final days played out very differently.

To study those differences, the authors of the PNAS paper—Bruno Frey of the University of Zurich and David Savage and Benno Torgler of Queensland University—examined Titanic and Lusitania data to gather the age, gender and ticket class for every passenger aboard, as well as the number of family members traveling with them. They also noted who survived and who didn’t.

With this information in hand, they separated out one key group. They looked at all third-class passengers age 35 or older who were traveling with no children. The researchers figured that these were the people who faced the greatest likelihood of death. They were old enough,
unfit enough and deep enough below the decks to have a hard time making it to a lifeboat. What’s more, traveling without children may have made them slightly less motivated to struggle for survival. It may have also made other people less likely to let them pass. This group then became the so-called reference group. The survival rates of all the other passenger groups were compared to theirs.

The results told a revealing tale. Aboard the Titanic, children under 16 years old were nearly 31% likelier than the reference group to have survived. But those on the Lusitania were 0.7% less likely to survive. Males ages 16 to 35 on the Titanic had a 6.5% poorer survival rate than the reference group. However, they did 7.9% better on the Lusitania. For females in the 16-to-35 group, the gap was more dramatic. Those on the Titanic enjoyed a huge 48.3% edge. On the Lusitania it was a smaller but still significant 10.4%. The most striking survival difference—no surprise, given the time period—was determined by class. The Titanic’s first-class passengers had a 43.9% greater chance of making it off the ship and into a lifeboat than the reference group. The Lusitania’s, surprisingly, were 11.5% less likely.

There were a lot of factors behind these two different survival descriptions. The most significant difference was the time. Most shipwrecks are comparatively slow-moving disasters. But there are varying degrees of slow. The Lusitania slipped below the waves 18 min. after the German torpedo hit it. The Titanic stayed afloat for 2 hr. 40 min. Human behavior varied on this basis. On the Lusitania, the authors of the new paper wrote, “the short-run flight impulse dominated behavior. On the slowly sinking Titanic, there was time for socially determined behavioral patterns to re-emerge.”

That theory fits perfectly with the survival data. All of the Lusitania’s passengers were more likely to participate in what’s known as selfish rationality. This is a behavior that’s every bit as me-centered as it sounds. It provides an edge to strong, younger males in particular. On the Titanic, the rules concerning gender, class and the gentle treatment of children—in other words, good manners—had a chance to show themselves.

Exactly how long it takes before politeness reappears is impossible to say. But simple biology would put it somewhere between the 18-min. and 2-hr. 40-min. windows that the two ships were given. “Biologically, fight-or-flight behavior has two distinct stages,” the researchers wrote. “The short-term response is a surge in adrenaline production. This response is limited to a few minutes, because adrenaline degrades rapidly. Only after returning to homeostasis do the higher-order brain functions of the neocortex begin to override instinctual responses.”

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2. **homeostasis** (hoh mee oh STAY sihs) *n.* state of balance between the different chemical and biological factors in the body or an organ.

3. **neocortex** (nee oh KAWR tehks) *n.* large upper region of the front of the brain where decisions are consciously made.
Once that happened aboard the *Titanic*, there were officers present to bring back a relative sense of order. They could provide information about what had just happened and what needed to be done next. Today’s evacuation experts know that rapid communication of correct information is critical in such emergencies.

Other factors beyond the question of time played important roles too. The *Lusitania*’s passengers may have been more likely to stampede than those aboard the *Titanic*. They were traveling in wartime and were aware that they could come under attack at any moment. The very nature of the attack that sank the *Lusitania*—the sudden crash of a torpedo, compared to the slow grinding of an iceberg—would also be likelier to cause panic. Finally, there was the simple fact that everyone aboard the *Lusitania* was aware of what had happened to the *Titanic* just three years earlier. They knew there was no such thing as a ship that was too grand to sink—their own included.

The fact that the two ships did sink is an unchangeable fact of history. However, while ship design and safety procedures have changed, the unpredictable nature of human behavior is the same as it ever was. The more scientists learn about how it played out in disasters of the past, the more they can help us minimize loss in the future.

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Survival Is Your Own Responsibility

Daryl R. Miller

PUBLIC LETTER

Alaska has long been seen as the last wilderness. It offers some of the most faraway and rugged mountains in the world. The quest for isolation and adventure attracts thousands of climbers from around the world into the backcountry—the Alaskan wilderness—each year. They go to test their skills and wilderness experience. Unfortunately, every year, numerous accidents and some deaths result from poor judgment. A hundred years ago wilderness survival skills were a way of life in Alaska. The rules were simple and harsh. Survival was your responsibility, no one else’s. We have grown socially and culturally unwilling to accept that basic education that determined that people simply learned or died.

Today, because most people, including most Alaskans, live in urban environments and grow up in an urban culture, wilderness skills are never learned. The result is that the wilderness-bound end up depending more and more on equipment. They depend less and less on their own ability to deal with dangerous situations in wilderness settings. Each year in this state, the National Park Service and other agencies perform backcountry rescues. Some of them should never have been needed. Many of these incidents are a result of people forgetting that the most important trip goal and concern is a safe journey out and back.

Some incidents stem from a lack of judgment. Some come from a lack of training. Outdoor skill should come from a long, guided learning process. That process presents the opportunities to deal safely with increasingly dangerous situations. But there are few opportunities for such wilderness exposure today. Many factors have been combined to change that. Technology has made it possible to call for rescue from almost anywhere. At the same time, it has made backcountry travel easier and faster. Technology has served to weaken respect for the tests Mother Nature can still throw at humans. Taking communication on a trip is being responsible. But basing how much risk you take because of that communication is careless at best.

Many times I have tried to warn climbers and backpackers of nature’s cold and harsh realities. The Alaska environment can be extremely unfriendly to humans. It is uncaring and unforgiving. On top of that, the scale of Alaska is easily underestimated. Most people set unrealistic expectations. Ten miles cross-country in Alaska is not like 10 miles on trail systems in the lower 48 states. It is more like 30 or 40 trail miles.
Overconfidence about the outdoors blinds people to these things. Lack of familiarity with Alaska's arctic and subarctic conditions and a sometimes total disregard for basic principles of safety simply worsen the problems.

I have seen this firsthand too many times. It is a sad and painful task to tell family and friends when someone is lost or dead in the mountains. Yes, accidents do happen. There are medical emergencies. And there are acts of nature. They are events for which no one can plan. But these are rare. Most accidents are caused by bad judgment. That judgment is made worse by Alaska's severe weather and isolation. Many accidents are a result of people's making bad decisions because of a lack of knowledge or a belief that they cannot be hurt.

An examination of climbing accidents in Alaska shows a great number of rescues involve people who have misjudged the results of their decisions. They were also underprepared for Alaska weather. The isolation of the Alaskan backcountry makes everyone vulnerable to a serious accident or medical emergency. Hazard evaluation in the wilderness is in part linked to the time you spend there. But there appears to be a refusal on the part of some to let experience teach them.

Some consider their success of the backcountry a reflection of superior outdoor skills. But most have never been tested in crisis. They forget that some crisis is necessary to sharpen skill. “Near misses” are those brief encounters with the reality of possible death. They are great learning tools if properly approached.

Errors in judgment are educational if they send the right message. For instance, turning around at the right time or choosing not to go on are decisions that will save your life time and time again. Unfortunately, our virtual-reality society presents some problems in understanding risk. To some degree, we have come to see it as a mission instead of a warning.

The “no fear” philosophy pushes people to travel in the wilderness regardless of the environment. But it operates on the incorrect assumption that difficulties and possible injuries are a low possibility. It assumes that rescue is just a call away. This is dangerous for the people seeking recreation. It is also dangerous for the people called upon to rescue them. People fail to make the right choices based on their abilities. They forget that prevention is the rule because treatment is often unrealistic or impossible.

My first climb on Denali in 1981 was one of the most upsetting and best learning experiences in my life because of the severe storms we encountered at 17,000 feet. As a mountaineering ranger for the past 13 years I have witnessed many terrible scenes regarding accidents. I have also seen some of the strongest wills to survive. Conducting many varied
and difficult backcountry patrols in Denali National Park I have saved these thoughts on surviving in the wilderness of Alaska.

- Everyone has a personal responsibility to maintain independence in the wilderness and should always base decisions on getting back on their own.
- Your best resource is the ability to think in a calm manner when a life-threatening crisis is happening.
- Prevention, not treatment, is what ultimately will save your life in the wilderness. There is a major difference between a gamble and a calculated risk. A calculated risk considers all the odds, understands the risk, and then makes an intelligent decision based on careful judgment. A gamble is something over which you have no control. The result is just a roll of the dice.
- You cannot make intelligent decisions in the wilderness if you do not understand the risks.
- Never give up. The will to live is a valuable strength. Sometimes people die simply because they fall short on determination.
- As a rule, if you die in the wilderness you made a mistake. Careless judgment has a sharp learning curve.
- Wilderness rescues in Alaska are often dangerous to the rescuers. Also, they are always dependent upon weather conditions.
- People do not realize the horrible impact that their accidents have on friends and loved ones.
- The requirement for misadventure is the belief that you are unbeatable or that the wilderness cares about you.

Denali National Park staff is dedicated to helping make your trip a successful and unforgettable experience. I hope that you will partner with us in maintaining Denali National Park and Preserve as the unspoiled natural environment that it is. Allow others to take away with them the same unmatched experience that you will no doubt take with you.

Safe climbing,
Daryl R. Miller
Retired Mountaineering Ranger
Denali National Park and Preserve
The Most Dangerous Game

Richard Connell

Sanger Rainsford is a famous hunter of big game, or large animals. He and another hunter named Whitney are sailing from the United States to South America. They will hunt large cats called jaguars in South America. Whitney surprises Rainsford by showing sympathy for the jaguars.

“Don’t talk rot,” said Rainsford. “You’re a big-game hunter, not a philosopher. Who cares how a jaguar feels?”

“Perhaps the jaguar does,” observed Whitney.

“Bah! They’ve no understanding.”

“Even so, I rather think they understand one thing—fear. The fear of pain and the fear of death.”

“Nonsense,” laughed Rainsford. “This hot weather is making you soft, Whitney. Be a realist. The world is made up of two classes—the hunters and the huntees. Luckily, you and I are the hunters.”

They pass Ship-Trap Island. Whitney tells Rainsford that all of the sailors fear the place. Whitney goes to bed. Rainsford hears gunshots from the island. He goes to the ship’s rail to see better. It is dark. He strains to get a good view of the island. Then a rope knocks his pipe from his mouth. He tries to catch it, but he falls into the sea.

For a seemingly endless time he fought the sea. He began to count his strokes; he could do possibly a hundred more and then—Rainsford heard a sound. It came out of the darkness, a high screaming sound, the sound of an animal in an extremity of anguish and terror. He did not recognize the animal that made the sound; he did not try to; with fresh vitality he swam toward the sound. He heard it again; then it was cut short.

Rainsford swims to shore with difficulty. Then he falls asleep. The next day, he can see that a large animal was recently hunted nearby. He follows the hunter’s trail through the jungle. He comes to a mansion. At the door, a large and dangerous-looking servant points a gun at him. His name is Ivan. Another man appears.

“It is a very great pleasure to welcome Mr. Sanger Rainsford, the celebrated hunter, to my home.”

Automatically Rainsford shook the man’s hand.

“I’ve read your book about hunting snow leopards in Tibet, you see,” explained the man. “I am General Zaroff.”

1. rot n. nonsense.
Zaroff is a nobleman and Cossack who left Russia after the revolution of 1917. After giving Rainsford a comfortable room, he and Rainsford eat together. Zaroff reveals that he is a lifelong hunter. He says he grew bored because the animals he hunted no longer had a chance against him.

“I needed a new animal. I found one. So I bought this island, built this house, and here I do my hunting. The island is perfect for my purpose—there are jungles with a maze of trails in them, hills, swamps—”

“But the animal, General Zaroff?”

Rainsford does not immediately realize that Zaroff hunts people. Zaroff says his ideal quarry must be able to reason. Rainsford is shocked when he realizes Zaroff’s ideal quarry is a person.

“I can’t believe you are serious, General Zaroff. . . .”

“Why should I not be serious? I am speaking of hunting.”

“Hunting? General Zaroff, what you speak of is murder.”

Zaroff says that he considers the men he hunts to be lowly men, not even as valuable as a good horse or dog.

“But they are men,” said Rainsford hotly.

“Precisely,” said the general. “That is why I use them. It gives me pleasure. They can reason, after a fashion.2 So they are dangerous.”

Zaroff tells Rainsford that the men he hunts come from ships wrecked off the island. They often come with the help of the lights he uses to trick them onto the rocks. Rainsford is shocked by what he is hearing from Zaroff. Zaroff explains that he sends a man out with food and a knife. If he cannot find the man in three days, then the man wins. If Zaroff finds the man during the three days, he kills him.

“Suppose he refuses to be hunted?”

“Oh,” said the general, “I give him his option, of course. He need not play the game if he doesn’t wish to. If he does not wish to hunt, I turn him over to Ivan. Ivan once had the honor of serving as official knouter3 to the Great White Czar, and he has his own ideas of sport. Invariably, Mr. Rainsford, invariably they choose the hunt.”

“And if they win?”

The smile on the general’s face widened. “To date I have not lost,” he said.

Rainsford refuses to join Zaroff in hunting a sailor that night. The next day he demands to leave. But Zaroff has other plans.

“Tonight,” said the general, “we will hunt—you and I.”

Rainsford shook his head. “No, general,” he said. “I will not hunt.”

The general shrugged his shoulders and delicately ate a hothouse grape. “As you wish, my friend,” he said. “The choice rests entirely with you. But may I not venture to suggest that you will find my idea of sport more diverting than Ivan’s?”

2. after a fashion in their way.
3. knouter (NOWT er) n. someone who beats criminals with a leather whip.
He nodded toward the corner to where the giant stood, scowling, his thick arms crossed on his hogshead of chest.

“You don’t mean—” cried Rainsford.

Rainsford is forced to agree. He takes his knife and food and heads into the jungle. There he creates a twisted trail that he believes no one could follow. He then sleeps up in a tree. He is careful to leave no trace below. But later that night Zaroff appears. He is clearly able to follow the trail. He stops below the tree, looks up. Then he leaves. Heading into the woods, Rainsford spots a dead tree leaning against a smaller tree. He uses his knife to build a trap. He wants the trap to cause a tree to crash down on Zaroff. Soon, Zaroff appears, following Rainsford’s trail. However, Zaroff sees the trap in time. He escapes with only an injured shoulder. He calls out to Rainsford telling him he will be back. Rainsford continues to try to get away. He comes to a swamp filled with quicksand. He digs a deep hole for another trap. Then he hears Zaroff coming toward the trap. Again Zaroff escapes, but his dog falls into the quicksand pit.

“Again you score, I think, Mr. Rainsford,” called the general. “I’ll see what you can do against my whole pack. I’m going home for a rest now. Thank you for a most amusing evening.”

At sunrise, Zaroff returns with Ivan and the dog pack. Rainsford tries one last trick that he learned in Uganda. He ties his knife to a young tree that will serve as a spring when someone comes by. But the trap kills only Ivan. As Zaroff and the dogs continue to close in, Rainsford can do nothing but jump into the sea. Zaroff arrives at the place where Rainsford jumped. He shrugs and heads for home. After dinner that night, Zaroff goes up to bed. When he switches on his light, Rainsford is standing in his room. Zaroff asks him how he got there. Rainsford says he swam.

The general sucked in his breath and smiled. “I congratulate you,” he said. “You have won the game.”

Rainsford did not smile. “I am still a beast at bay,” he said, in a low hoarse voice. “Get ready, General Zaroff.”

The general made one of his deepest bows. “I see,” he said. “Splendid! One of us is to furnish a repast for the hounds. The other will sleep in this very excellent bed. On guard, Rainsford....”

He had never slept in a better bed, Rainsford decided.

4. at bay cornered and forced to fight.
5. repast (ri PAST) n. meal.

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Chapter 15 Sharks and Bullets

This story takes place during World War II. Three American soldiers, Louie, Mac, and Phil, are stranded on life rafts in the Pacific Ocean. They have been floating for twenty-seven days with little to eat or drink. The men have no protection from the sun, and sharks have been circling the raft. Suddenly, a bomber plane appears from the east. The soldiers discuss their options and decide the risk of wasting precious emergency supplies is worth taking. Louie fires two flares and empties a container of dye into the water around the rafts. Using a mirror, he directs a beam of sunlight at the plane. The plane passes them by but then circles back toward the rafts.

And then, all at once, the ocean erupted. There was a deafening noise, and the rafts began hopping and shuddering under the castaways. The gunners were firing at them.

Louie, Phil, and Mac clawed for the raft walls and threw themselves overboard. They swam under the rafts and huddled there, watching bullets tear through the rafts and cut bright slits in the water around them. Then the firing stopped.

Afraid of the sharks, the men hurry out of the water. Both Mac and Phil need Louie’s help to get back into their rafts. Once above water, they sit exhausted and confused. Why had the Americans shot at unarmed men? As they gather their breath, the bomber plane loops back around. Louie hopes that the pilot has realized they are not Japanese soldiers and is coming to rescue them.

Flying about two hundred feet over the water, the bomber raced at them, following a path slightly parallel to the rafts, so that its side passed into view. All three men saw it at once. Behind the wing, painted over the waist, was a red circle. The bomber was Japanese.

Phil and Mac are too tired to dive back into the water. They curl themselves into balls in the raft while Louie jumps overboard. From under the raft, Louie watches as bullets dart through the water. Using the raft’s cord, Louie attaches himself to the raft so the ocean current won’t pull him away. He looks down and finds himself staring into the open mouth of a shark rushing at his legs. In a flash, Louie remembers the advice of one of his army trainers. The old man had taught Louie to make a threatening expression and then to punch the shark in its snout.

As the shark lunged for his head, Louie bared his teeth, widened his eyes, and rammed his palm into the tip of the shark’s nose. The shark flinched, circled away, then swam back for a second pass. Louie waited until the shark was inches from him, then struck it in the nose again. Again, the shark peeled away.
Above water, the machine gun fire has stopped. Louie uses the cord to pull himself to the raft. Climbing abroad, Louie finds Mac and Phil still balled up next to each other. Both men have miraculously survived. The bomber returns once again. Again, Louie must dive into the ocean.

Four more times the Japanese strafed¹ them, sending Louie into the water to kick and punch at the sharks until the bomber had passed. Though he fought them to the point of exhaustion, he was not bitten. Every time he emerged from the water, he was certain that Phil and Mac would be dead. Impossibly, though there were bullet holes all the way around the men, even in the tiny spaces between them, not one bullet had hit either man.

The Japanese airmen make one last attack, dropping a bomb fifty feet from the rafts. Louie, Mac, and Phil brace themselves for the blast, but it never comes. Either the bomb has failed to work or the airmen have forgotten to load it with an explosive charge. The plane passes over them one last time, and this time, it does not return.

The men turn their attention to the damaged rafts. The bullets have completely shredded Phil’s raft. Nearly all of their supplies have drifted off. Two men could fit comfortably in their remaining raft, but now all three must squeeze together. Their remaining raft is losing air. One shark after another approaches the raft. The men use oars to fight them off.

If the men didn’t get air into the raft immediately, the sharks would take them. One pump had been lost in the strafing; only the one from Mac and Louie’s raft remained. The men hooked it up to one of the two valves and took turns pumping as hard as they could. Air flowed into the chamber and seeped out through the bullet holes, but the men found that if they pumped very quickly, just enough air passed through the raft to lift it up in the water and keep it mostly inflated.

As Mac and Phil pump air and fight the sharks, Louie tries to patch the holes in the raft’s air chambers. He grabs the patching kit but finds that water has damaged the sandpaper. As a replacement, he cuts grooves into the side of his mirror. He uses the mirror to roughen up the raft’s material so that glue will stick to it. For each hole, he must lift the raft out of the water, glue a new piece of fabric over the hole, then wait for the sun to dry the glue. For hours, the men work. The sharks try to attack Louie while he is distracted, so Mac and Phil must be ready with their oars. When they are not battling the sharks, they are pumping air into the raft. Big waves regularly splash into the raft and force Louie to start over. All three of the soldiers are extremely important to the long process. If any of them fail at their duties, then the lives of every one of them would be in danger.

Finally, they could find no more holes to patch. Because bubbles kept coming up around the sides of the raft, they knew there were holes someplace where they couldn’t reach. They had to live with them. The patches had slowed the air loss dramatically.

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1. strafed (STRAYFD) v. attacked something with machine guns from low-flying planes.
2. leviathan (lih VY uh thuhn) n. a very large aquatic creature.
The sharks lose interest in the inflated raft and swim away. For the first time in days, the men can sleep. They are, however, stuffed into the tiny raft. They have to sleep almost on top of each other. Moving around the raft requires each soldier to make room for the other. But the cramped situation provides an opportunity for Louie. He uses the deflated second raft to make a roof for the raft. It blocks the sun during the day and keeps them warm at night. What's more, the Japanese attack allows the men to guess their location in the Pacific Ocean.

Estimating the bomber’s cruising speed and range, they made rough calculations to arrive at how many hours the bomber could remain airborne after it left them, and thus how far they were from its base. They guessed that they were some 850 miles from the bomber’s base. If this was correct, given that they had crashed about 2,000 miles east of the Marshalls and Gilberts, they had already traveled more than half the distance to those islands and were covering more than 40 miles per day.

Using this information, Phil estimates that they’ll arrive at the Marshall and Gilbert Islands in three weeks. These islands are home to Japanese military bases, but just the idea of dry land is enough to give Phil and Louie hope. Mac does not share their good spirits. He is showing the first signs of failing health.

Chapter 16 Singing in the Clouds

Later in the evening, Louie is only one awake on the raft. He watches the shark as they circle the raft. He remembers hearing that a shark’s hide feels like sandpaper. Running his hand over one of the shark’s fins, he experiences that exact feeling. Beautiful, he thinks.

Moments later, the sharks seem to have disappeared altogether. When Louie leans over the raft’s edge to look for them, a shark lunges at his face. He manages to push it back into the water, but a second shark thrusts itself at him. He batters it with an oar.

Then the first shark lunged for him again. Louie was recoiling when he saw an oar swing past, sending the animals backward into the ocean. To Louie’s surprise it wasn’t Phil who had saved him. It was Mac.

Louie had no time to thank him. One of the sharks jumped up again, followed by the other. Louie and Mac sat side by side, clubbing each shark as it lunged at them. Mac was a new man. A moment before, he had seemed almost comatose. Now he was infused with frantic energy.

After several more assaults on the rafts, the sharks retreat. Louie and Mac collapse in exhaustion. Phil—awakened by the commotion—and Louie express their amazement and thankfulness toward Mac. Though his heroism seems to have taken all the energy Mac had left, he looks alive again.

Encouraged by their victory, Louie hatches a plan to get the men something to eat. Using the leftovers from a captured bird as bait, Phil attracts one of the smaller sharks close to the raft. Once the shark swims over, Louie grabs his tail. The shark pulls Louie from the raft and escapes. Louie launches a second attempt at an even smaller shark. This time, he makes sure to pull the shark’s tail out of the water. It works. With their few remaining tools, the men kill the shark. In his army training, Louie had learned that the liver was the only part of a shark that humans could eat.

Even with a knife, sharkskin is about as easy to cut as a coat of mail; with only the edge of a mirror to cut with, the labor was draining. After much
sawing, Louie managed to break the skin. The flesh underneath stank of ammonia. Louie cut the liver out, and it was sizable. They ate it eagerly, giving Mac a larger portion, and for the first time since breakfast on May 27, they were all full.

The soldiers’ good fortune does not last long. The small sharks seem to know not to approach the raft anymore. The men quickly become hungry again. Mac suffers worst of all. He can barely move, and the life seems to have drained from his eyes. A few nights later, a massive crash wakes the men from sleep. Something huge has struck the bottom of the raft. The men peer over the side of the raft. This shark is nearly three times the length of the raft. It is much, much bigger than any of the sharks they’ve seen. It is a great white shark. The shark appears to play with the raft, using its tail to push huge waves crashing over its sides. The men are terrified in drenched in cold water. Finally, the shark moves on.

That evening, Phil heard a small voice. It was Mac, asking Louie if he was going to die. Louie looked over at Mac, who was watching him. Louie thought it would be disrespectful to lie to Mac, who might have something to say or do before life left him. Louie told him that he thought he’d die that night. Mac had no reaction. Phil and Louie lay down, put their arms around Mac, and went to sleep.

Louie wakes up in time to hear Mac’s last breath. When the soldiers had first been stranded on the raft, Mac had panicked and eaten most of their food. However, in his last days, Mac had been responsible for saving the lives of Louie and Phil. The two remaining soldiers wrap his body and send it into the ocean. Louie tries to remember funeral prayers. He asks God to save Phil and himself.

One day, trying to pinpoint his earliest memory, he saw a two-story building and, inside, a stairway broken into two parts of six steps each, with a landing in between. He was there in the image, a tiny child toddling along the stairs. As he crawled down the first set of steps and moved toward the edge of the landing, a tall yellow dog stepped in front of him to stop him from tumbling off. It was his parents’ dog, Askim, whom they had had in Olean, when Louie was very little. Louie had never remembered him before.

3. Askim (As kim) the Zamperinis’ thieving dog. The family lived above a grocery, and the dog often ran downstairs, snatched food, and ran away. His name was a clever joke: When people asked what the dog’s name was, they were confused at the answer, which sounded like “Ask him.”
The men have been at sea for 40 days. Suddenly, Louie shoots up in the raft. He can hear a choir. When asked, Phil says he hears nothing. Louie removes the roof of the raft and looks up. In the clouds, he sees the outlines of people singing. The song is beautiful. Though Louie knows that the singers cannot be real, his mind feels completely clear and reasonable. Louie listens for a while before the vision fades away.

On July 13, the forty-sixth day at sea, Louie eagerly waits for the sun to rise. Phil had predicted that this would be the day the men would arrive at land. A storm is brewing. Louie and Phil enjoy riding up and down the tall waves.

To the west, something appeared, so far away that it could be glimpsed only from the tops of the swells. It was a low, gray-green wiggle on the horizon. Phil and Louie would later disagree on who saw it first, but the moment the sea tossed them up, the horizon rolled westward, and their eyes grasped it, they knew what it was.

It was an island.

4. the forty-sixth day Since the men had floated across the international date line, the forty-sixth day was July 14.
The story opens at the break of a cold, gray day in the Yukon, where a man has left the main Yukon trail and heads onto a little-traveled trail. Although it is a clear day, it is gloomy because in this region during this time of year, the sun doesn’t rise very high.

But all this—the mysterious, far-reaching hairline trail, the absence of sun from the sky, the tremendous cold, and the strangeness and weirdness of it all—made no impression on the man. It was not because he was long used to it. He was a newcomer in the land … and this was his first winter.

The man understands that the temperature—fifty degrees below zero—means that it is cold and uncomfortable. But he doesn’t understand how fragile humans are—especially in such cold and unforgiving conditions. It’s so cold, in fact, that when he spits, his spit crackles in the air. The man, however, seems confident and is not concerned.

But the temperature did not matter. He was bound for the old claim on the left fork of Henderson Creek, where the boys were already. They had come over across the divide from the Indian Creek country, while he had come the roundabout way to take a look at the possibilities of getting out logs in the spring from the islands in the Yukon. He would be in to camp by six o’clock; a bit after dark, it was true, but the boys would be there, a fire would be going, and a hot supper would be ready.

The trail is difficult to follow because a foot of snow had fallen on it. A dog trots behind the man—a husky that appears much like a wild wolf. The dog has a better sense of the cold and the dangers it presents.

The animal was depressed by the tremendous cold. It knew that it was no time for traveling. Its instinct told it a truer tale than was told to the man by the man’s judgment. In reality, it was not merely colder than fifty below zero; it was colder than sixty below, than seventy below. It was seventy-five below zero.

The man continues on the trail for several miles and reaches the frozen Henderson Creek. He calculates his pace and how long it will take to get to a point called “the forks,” deciding that when he reaches this point at 12:30, he will eat his lunch. He marches on, thinking that he has never experienced such cold. He rubs his cheekbones and nose and regrets not having anything to cover them. However, he does not panic.

But it didn’t matter much, after all. What were frosted cheeks? A bit painful, that was all; they were never serious.

1. Yukon (YOO kon) n. territory in northwestern Canada, east of Alaska; also, a river.
As he travels along the frozen creek, the man watches his footing carefully. At one point, he stops quickly. He knows that water from hillside springs runs under the snow and atop the creek’s ice. Because the pools of water from these springs, which might be as much as three feet deep, are hidden beneath the snow, they are hard to see. A thin skin of ice sometimes covers the pools, and the ice itself is covered by snow. And if a person breaks through and gets wet in such cold, it could be dangerous.

That was why he had shied in such panic. He had felt the give under his feet and heard the crackle of a snow-hidden ice skin. And to get his feet wet in such a temperature meant trouble and danger. At the very least it meant delay, for he would be forced to stop and build a fire, and under its protection to bare his feet while he dried his socks and moccasins.

At 12:30, the man arrives at the forks of the creek. He attempts to eat his lunch, but just seconds after taking his mitten off, his fingers become numb, or lose feeling, because of the intense cold. He tries using his other hand, but he is unable to eat because of the ice that had formed on his beard. He then builds a fire to thaw out.

Working carefully from a small beginning, he soon had a roaring fire, over which he thawed the ice from his face and in the protection of which he ate his biscuits. For the moment the cold of space was outwitted. The dog took satisfaction in the fire, stretching out close enough for warmth and far enough away to escape being singed.

After eating lunch and warming himself by the fire, the man continues onto the creek trail up the left fork. The dog is disappointed and wants to remain by the fire. It knows that walking in such cold is not a good idea. It feels that it is time to find a warm place and wait out the intense cold. But the dog is loyal to the man and follows.

He was angry, and cursed his luck aloud. He had hoped to get into camp with the boys at six o’clock, and this would delay him an hour, for he would have to build a fire and dry out his foot-gear.

Aware that he is now in danger, the man builds the fire slowly and carefully. With wet feet, he knows he has to succeed in his first attempt at building the fire—an older man at Sulphur Creek had told him so. But he has to remove his mittens to make the fire, and now his fingers are numb. While walking, his heart had pumped blood to his fingers and toes. But once he stopped, the blood flow lessened, freezing his fingers and wet feet even faster. With effort, he gets the fire started, and he feels safe for the moment.

The fire was a success. He was safe. He remembered the advice of the old-timer on Sulphur Creek, and smiled. The old-timer had been very serious in laying down the law that no man must travel alone in the Klondike after fifty below. Well, here he was; he had had the accident; he was alone; and he had saved himself.
The man starts to untie his shoes so that he can dry his feet, but disaster strikes. He had built his fire under a tree, and the motion of pulling twigs for firewood causes snow from the overhanging branches to fall onto his fire and put it out.

The man was shocked. It was as though he had just heard his own sentence of death. For a moment he sat and stared at the spot where the fire had been. Then he grew very calm. Perhaps the old-timer on Sulphur Creek was right. If he had only had a trail mate he would have been in no danger now. The trail mate could have built the fire. Well, it was up to him to build the fire over again, and this second time there must be no failure. Even if he succeeded, he would most likely lose some toes. His feet must be badly frozen by now, and there would be some time before the second fire was ready.

The man gathers twigs and dry grasses to build a second fire—this time out in the open. He tries to remain calm, knowing that his feet are freezing, but his fingers are now frozen to the point that he cannot move them. This makes grabbing anything—including the matches—nearly impossible. Trying to separate one match from the bunch of matches, he drops the bunch in the snow. It takes a huge effort just to pick them up. He then tries to separate and light a match using his teeth. He gets one lit but drops it. Desperate, the man uses the heels of his hands to grab the whole bunch of matches.

Then he scratched the bunch along his leg. It flared into flame, seventy sulphur matches at once! There was no wind to blow them out. He kept his head to one side to escape the strangling fumes, and held the blazing bunch to the birch-bark. As he so held it, he became aware of sensation in his hand. His flesh was burning. He could smell it. Deep down below the surface he could feel it. The sensation developed into pain that grew acute. And still he endured it, holding the flame of the matches clumsily to the bark that would not light readily because his own burning hands were in the way, absorbing most of the flame.

The man manages to get some twigs lit, but he is now shivering, and this, combined with the complete lack of feeling in his fingers, means that he cannot build the fire. He catches sight of the dog and recalls the story of a man who was caught in a blizzard and killed a steer so that he could crawl inside the animal and survive. The man tries to call the dog over to him, but the dog senses fear in the man's voice and feels threatened. It moves away from the man. But, eventually, the man calls the dog in the stern voice it is used to, and because it is loyal to the man, it comes close enough for the man to grab it. However, the man can do no more.

He realized that he could not kill the dog. There was no way to do it. With his helpless hands he could neither draw nor hold his sheath-knife nor throttle the animal. He released it, and it plunged wildly away, with tail between its legs, and still snarling.

The man now begins to fear that death was close. In a panic, he runs up the trail. The dog, ever loyal, follows behind him. He tries to put thoughts of death out of his mind, but he also begins to think that the odds are against him.
His theory of running until he reached camp and the boys had one flaw in it: he lacked the endurance. Several times he stumbled, and finally he tottered, crumpled up, and fell. When he tried to rise, he failed. He must sit and rest, he decided, and next time he would merely walk and keep on going.

Running warms the man, but he realizes that running will not thaw out his nose, cheeks, hands, and feet. He also realizes that the frozen parts of his body must be expanding. This causes him to panic and make another wild run on the trail. He falls again and begins to shiver again. He knows that the frost is winning the battle, and in desperation, he tries to run again. He doesn’t get far before falling. He sits up and thinks about how he might meet death.

Well, he was bound to freeze anyway, and he might as well take it decently. With this new-found peace of mind came the first glimmerings of drowsiness. A good idea, he thought, to sleep off to death. It was like taking an anesthetic. Freezing was not so bad as people thought. There were lots worse ways to die.

The man begins to lose consciousness and thinks of the men at the camp finding his body. Then he imagines himself with them and finding his own body. As he continues to lose consciousness, he thinks of telling the old man of Sulphur Creek that he was right about the dangers of being alone in such weather.

The dog remains with the man throughout. After the man freezes to death, the dog still waits with him for a while.

The dog sat facing him and waiting. The brief day drew to a close in a long, slow twilight. There were no signs of a fire to be made, and, besides, never in the dog’s experience had it known a man to sit like that in the snow and make no fire. As the twilight drew on, its eager yearning for the fire mastered it, and with a great lifting and shifting of forefeet, it whined softly, then flattened its ears down in anticipation of being chidden² by the man. But the man remained silent. Later, the dog whined loudly. And still later it crept close to the man and caught the scent of death. This made the animal bristle and back away. A little longer it delayed, howling under the stars that leaped and danced and shone brightly in the cold sky. Then it turned and trotted up the trail in the direction of the camp it knew, where were the other food providers and fire providers.

2. chidden v. scolded.