

## The Sinking of the Sea Diamond

by Mike Poirier  
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**The sinking of the Costa Concordia has drawn inevitable comparisons with both Titanic and other maritime disasters. In this verbatim interview by Michael Poirier, a young survivor of the April 2007 Sea Diamond sinking, Zak Hayes, recalls the experience of evacuation at sea.**

Zak: I am 16 years old, from from Winston-Salem North Carolina. I have one sister and numerous pets including 2 dogs, a cat, and a cockatiel. I enjoy swimming and have a pool in my backyard.

**2. Why did you book passage aboard the Sea Diamond?** Our school takes an annual trip abroad usually to Europe. I went last year to Germany, Italy, Switzerland and Austria and I decided to go again this year. Myself and a group of 144 Students, Parents, and Teachers traveled to Italy and Greece. 77 of those 144 including myself went on the cruise.

**3. What was the cost of sailing on the ship?** I know that the cost for the 9-Day Tour without the cruise was \$1946, and the 14 day trip with the cruise that I went on was \$2527. I do not know the exact price but the cruise itself and the extra accommodations after the cruise were about \$580 or so. I could find out the exact price on Monday when I go to school and let you know.

**4. When did you depart for your trip?** I left on March 25th, and returned on Saturday April 7th.

**5. Was this your first cruise?** No, I went on a Carnival Cruise leaving from Miami and going to Key West and Cozumel, Mexico last fall. I believe that was a 5 day cruise.





**6. What did you think of the ship when you boarded it? The passenger accommodation? The public rooms?** Well we roomed with 4 students to a room so the passenger accommodations were a bit cramped, but what can you expect when you have student rates. I thought the ship was very nice though, It seemed very clean and organized and fairly new.

**7. What was your cabin number and what deck were you on?** I was in room 3245 and that was on deck 3. One level above the 2nd level which was actually flooding after it happened.

**8. Could you describe sail-away?** No there wasn't a band or confetti I don't think, there could have been and I just could have missed it.

**9. What did you do to occupy your time aboard the ship?** Myself, my girlfriend (Samantha Putman) and two friends usually would hang around together. We laid on the top deck at the rear of the ship and tanned then we would go to the Jacuzzi and steam rooms. We also spent time in the cafe on deck 7.

**10. What ports were you headed for and how many did you get to?** We went to Mykonos, Patmos, Rhodes, and Kusadai? (I'm not sure about the spelling but that was a port in Turkey) We were headed to Santorini when it happened which was our last port of call on the next to last day of the cruise. I believe we were 15 minutes away when it happened.

**11. Did you make any new friends while aboard the ship?** Well we weren't really allowed to roam about wherever we pleased we tried to keep close to our chaperones at most times so no I personally didn't.

**12. Where were you when the ship struck and what were you doing?** I was on the 7th deck in the cafe having a chocolate milkshake. I remember I was sitting at a table with 2 other guys from my group. We were very close to land, and you could see cliffs out the window. I remember all of a sudden the ship started to shake, and it sounded like the bottom of the ship was scraping for about 10 seconds.

**13. What was your impression of the noise?** Well like above it sounded like the ship was scraping on something.

**14. How badly did the ship list when it happened? Did it begin to heel over immediately or was it slow?** It all happened so fast, but it felt like it actually rocked back in forth pretty violently for a few moments, and then it settled down onto the one side at a pretty slanted angle. It then stayed in that position. I remember we all jumped up and were starting to panic, but the waiters and waitresses and crew members told us everything was alright, and that it "happened all the time." We then sat back down, and I actually finished my milkshake, then the people from the lower levels started running up the stairs some of which were wet from the knee down. Then we all started screaming and panicking and everyone raced up the stairs screaming. Glasses did begin to fall off of shelves and break after the ship started to list. Items were thrown around a bit in my girlfriend's room when it happened and when it started to tilt she told me.

**15. Were you able to return to your cabin to retrieve any items and if so what condition did you find your cabin?** No I did not. I remember my girlfriend's room was about 10 or 15 doors down from mine, and she was in her room with one of her roommates when it happened. She told me that when it hit she actually fell and hit her head on the wall but didn't know what was going on. One of her friends snuck down through the crewmembers who wouldn't let people down and she told them to get their life jackets on and come upstairs. My girlfriend didn't believe her at first then she saw people running with life jackets. She told me she could actually hear water rushing in on the floor below.

**16. Did you at anytime see water flooding the ship?** I personally did not see it, but after being stuck on the top deck waiting to be rescued for 3 hours people from all levels including level 2 told me that the water there was ankle deep and in some parts knee deep. When we left we went back down to level 3 and exited the site opposite where it struck the reef. I don't think anyone but the crew exited on the side where it was struck. And my room was not under water at that time I could see Sam's room from the staircase as we were going down and it wasn't and my room was 15 or so doors down.

**17. Did you believe the ship would really sink or that the evacuation an precautionary measure?** No, I seriously 100% believed the ship would not sink. They told us the "situation was under control, and

the ship was not taking on any more water." I was then assured after I was off the ship that my luggage and items would be "put on a barge and shipped to Athens and when I got to Athens if it wasn't there yet it would be shipped to the United States."

**18. What was the attitude of the crew and the passengers as the ship was sinking? Any panic or nervousness?** The passengers on the ship were beyond panic, some were hysteric. People were screaming, crying, and you have to remember that MOST people had NO life jackets on. Our life jackets and the drill that we practiced told us to get our life jackets out of our rooms. When we got to the top deck they started handing them out and people were fighting over them. I had to wear a child's life jacket. I remember my girlfriend brought up an extra life jacket for a roommate that wasn't in her room and had it torn from her arms. She also gave away her life jacket to a girl who was crying and screaming that she couldn't swim.

**19. How long before you were able to leave the ship and how did you escape?** I think it took myself and my girlfriend who I finally found on the upper deck about 3 hours to get off. We went back down to the 3rd level where they had lowered a ramp from the cruise ship and latched it on to a ramp from a ferry. Well we had to go down to level 3 to get off the ship from the second highest deck where we were waiting outside. It was pitch black so we had to stick the water-activated cords from our life jackets in our mouth to turn on the lights, then we held on to the shoulder strap of the life jacket of the person in front of us and slowly went down the flights of stairs. We then walked across planks to get on the ferry, some people slid down a make-shift slide made of mattresses. I have a video of this on my you tube, and I have a photo as well. Some people from my group climbed down rope ladders, and others exited from a door on the side of the ship and climbed into life boats from there. Some people were actually using the lifeboats on the ship, but the crew had little idea of how to use them, and the doors to the life boats were painted shut.

**20. What was your impression of watching the ship sink?** Well after the ship sunk 1400 passengers were displaced. I remember waiting for at least an hour maybe more to ride a cable car up the mountain to get food. We had no money, some girls were in nothing but bathing suits. After we got food we returned to the bottom of the mountain and saw the ship on it's side. At about 1am we got down the mountain to the shore. We then waited in the freezing cold sitting on the street for the next cruise ship that was taking us to Athens to arrive. They passed out blankets but many people didn't get one. I used a bathroom towel and my girlfriend used a skirt that a woman gave her to wrap up in and keep warm. We waited for at least 3 hours to sign in on the check list and board the next ship. I think at about 4am we were in beds on the next ship. Then we woke up at 9am to get breakfast, then we waited in line for an hour to get our passports back, and waited in line for another hour to get the \$200 Euro the cruise line gave us. (I could go on about this story forever so I hope this is alright) But when you think about it, we were a group of 77, we all had 2 \$100 dollar bills and people didn't have change for us all. Half of our group then traveled to London including me where they do not use the Euro. I didn't spend any of my euro I had it exchanged when I got home.

**21. Did you know the two missing passengers?** I did not know the 2 missing passengers, but as horrible as it sounds I am so glad I was not one of them. In that situation with such chaos we were so blessed to only have 2 missing passengers. My heart goes out to their family.

**22. How long did you stay overseas before you were able to come home?** The day after the incident after we rode the other cruise ship overnight we arrived in Athens about Noon-1:00pm. We then headed to the airport and caught a flight to London. We spent a day there in a hotel and touring, most people spent this time buying clothes and girls in bathing suit bottoms finally found pants to wear.

**23. Is the shipping line being helpful in regards to loss of luggage and aborted cruise?** I'd love to say they were but it wouldn't be true. We honestly don't have much of an idea about what to do. I feel like I was lied to when they told me my luggage would be safe. I then saw on you tube the next day in London

at the hotel the ship sinking and going all the way under. My heart physically ached when I thought about the rosary beads I got my mother that were blessed by the pope, and the jewelry and clothing I bought my sister, and the wooden ship I bought my father which he collects all in bottom of the ocean along with my favorite clothes, and electronics. It is too overwhelming to even think about. I believe I lost over \$4,000 worth of stuff.

**24. Did you save any memorabilia from the ship? Postcard, menu, etc...?** All of those items along with my souvenirs are in my room. However I do have the boarding/charge card from the cruise ship and room key that has a picture of the ship and my name and cabin number on it.

**25. Would you ever sail again?** I believe in time I would, but I could want to room on a higher deck and I would definitely want an easier means of getting a life jacket.

**26. Will you be keeping up with the official inquiry as to the sinking?** Yes of course I will.

**27. Has the disaster affected you or your friends where you dream of it?** I know that the first day back to school we had grief counselors on hand and we all broke into groups. Some people have had nightmares about the events, others have had other forms of emotional distress. I have had a hard time going to sleep after the first few days but that has gotten better.

**28. Now when you watch a documentary or re-creation of a sinking, (such as *Titanic*, *Lusitania* or *Andrea Doria*) do you think your mind will go back to your shipwreck?** I'm sure it will, everything that happened that day is comparable to scenes from the *Titanic*. I kept comparing what was going on around me to the movie. I'm sure watching a movie such as the *Titanic* again would bring back some painful memories.

**29. Do you think the ship should be salvaged (and your items be recovered) or do you think it should stay there?** I highly doubt the ship will ever be salvaged but I wish it would. I'm sure most of the items if not all would be ruined from being in the salt water. I hope that people are not allowed to dive down and steal our possessions though and hopefully the spot is under security.

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Courtesy of Michael Poirier

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