A CAPTAIN'S DUTY

Somali Pirates, Navy SEALs, and

Dangerous Days at Sea

RICHARD PHILLIPS

with Stephan Talty

ONE

10 Days

PIRACY FIGURES UP 20 PERCENT IN FIRST QUARTER OF 2009: A total of 36 vessels were boarded and one vessel hijacked. Seven crew members were taken hostage, six kidnapped, three killed and one missing—presumed dead. In the majority of incidents, the attackers were heavily armed with guns or knives. The use and threat of violence against crew members remains unacceptably high. Waters around Somalia continue to be notorious for hijacking of vessels and the abduction of crew for ransom.

—ICC International Maritime Bureau Piracy Report,
First Quarter, 2009

Ten days before, I'd been enjoying my last meal stateside with my wife, Andrea, in one of the most beautiful towns in Vermont. All you see from the front door of my converted farmhouse are rolling green hills, munching cows, and more rolling hills. Underhill is the kind of Vermont town where young farmers propose to their local sweethearts by spray-painting rachel, will you marry me? on bales of hay. It's a place where you can walk for three minutes and be lost in a forest so deep and thick and silent you'd think you're going to trip over Daniel Boone. We have two general stores and one Catholic church, St. Thomas, and the occasional tourist up from Manhattan. It's as different from the ocean as the other side of the moon is, and I love that. It's like I get to live two completely different lives.

As a merchant mariner, I often work three months on and three months off. When I

come home, I forget about the sea. I'm 100 percent into being a dad and husband. When our kids, Dan and Mariah, were young, from the moment they got up to the minute they went to bed, I'd take care of them. Neighbors and friends would ask me to babysit, so I'd have five or six kids in tow. I'd make dinner: French toast by candlelight, my specialty. I'd do Rich's Homework Club. I'd take the kids on class trips. Whatever I do, work or home life, I do with everything I have.

When I leave my family, it's for a long time. You need to do something special for them before you ship out, because it might be the last time you see them. When he was growing up, my son, Dan, would goad me, "Oh, I don't have a dad. He's never home. Guess he doesn't love me." We'd laugh about it—Dan is exactly like I was when I was nineteen: a smart aleck who will find your weakness and hammer it home until you give in and laugh. But what he said about my never being there would come back to haunt me. Because there's a kernel of truth there. My daughter, Mariah, and Dan would see me every day for three months and then I would be gone to some far-flung corner of the world. It didn't matter to them that there were other merchant mariners who stayed onboard even longer than I did, that I knew one guy, a radio operator, who was aboard one ship for two years straight.

As a sailor, you have to put your real life on your kitchen shelf and pick up your merchant marine life. Because on the job, you barely have a personal life. You're on call twenty-four hours a day to do whatever the ship needs. You eat and sleep and work and that's pretty much it. It's like you've died and gone to sea. Then you come back and take your real life off the shelf and start living it again.

You develop rituals to get through the transition from land to sea. Sailors have a phrase, “crossing the bar,” which means leaving harbor for the unknown on the oceans (it also can refer to the death of a sailor), and you have to get yourself mentally prepared to go across. It’s a stressful time when fears start creeping into the minds of your loved ones. It was probably the dangers of my job that were on Andrea’s mind that cold March—pirates, rogue waves, desperate people in third-world ports. All the while, I’d be thinking like a captain, running through a checklist with a thousand things on it: What repairs do I need to see to? Are the guys on my crew dependable? I used to start doing this a month before I left, which would drive Andrea around the bend. Now, after thirty years at sea, I wait until I hit the deck of my ship.

Andrea and I have a tradition when I’m getting ready to leave. First, we argue. About nothing at all. In the weeks leading up to my leaving, Andrea and I always have arguments about little things, about the car or the weather or her hitting her head on the old ship’s bell that hangs near the clothesline in our backyard. She must have smacked it three or four times while putting up fresh laundry to dry, and she always comes in and yells at me to take it down. (It’s still up there, too—sentimental value.) But in those weeks before a job, we get on each other’s nerves, which is nothing more than her being anxious about my leaving and me being anxious about leaving her.

Andrea is an emergency room nurse at a hospital in Burlington and she’s a fierce, opinionated, loving Italian girl from Vermont. I love her to death. We’d met in a Boston

dive bar, the Cask ’n Flagon, down near Kenmore Square, when she was in nursing school and I’d been around the world a few times already as a young sailor. I noticed this cute frizzy-haired brunette girl sitting at the bar, and I just had to talk to her. Andrea was talking with the bartender, since they’d just discovered they had mutual friends. Then, as she tells it, this tall guy with a beard appeared out of nowhere and sat down next to her.

“You have a problem,” I said.

Andrea thought, Well, he’s cute enough. I’ll play along.

“What’s that?” she said.

“Being the best-looking woman in every room you walk into.”

“Thanks,” she said. “There are three women in here. Not a huge compliment.”

I laughed and stuck out my hand.

“I’m Rich,” I said. “As in ‘filthy.’” That was one of my better lines in the early eighties.

Andrea cracked up. Then she let me buy her a drink.

Years later, after we were married, Andrea told me that she thought I was funny and easy to talk to. Like most people’s, her only knowledge of the merchant marine came from Humphrey Bogart movies. I guess that’s why she let me tell her so many stories. “You made it sound intriguing,” she said.

After we met, I had to ship out and Andrea didn’t hear from me again for months. She moved to a new apartment after her first year at nursing school. Then one night at about 1 a.m., there was a rap on her door. When she opened it, there I was, smiling like I’d won the lottery. She was floored. She figured I must have walked all over Boston, trying

to find her new address. She wasn't far off.

Andrea was twenty-five and very focused on school. Nursing was going to be her life. I was on her radar, but only a blip on the edge of the screen. I would ship out and she would get postcards and then letters from these ports all over the world. Then I'd come back to Boston and take her out to dinner and the movies and pick her and her friends up at seven a.m. the next morning and drive them to their first classes. All the while, I'd have a new batch of stories to tell her about storms off Cape Hatteras or typhoons or good or crazy shipmates.

To me, it was just life on the seas. But she loved getting the postcards and the sudden reunions. "It was romantic," Andrea says to this day. "It really was."

The night before I shipped out for the *Maersk Alabama,* Andrea and I jumped in our car and went to our favorite restaurant, a place called Euro, in the nearby town of Essex. Andrea had the shrimp scampi and I had the seafood medley and we drank a bottle of red wine we brought with us. It's cheaper that way. I'm three quarters Irish and one quarter Yankee, but that one quarter controls the money. I've been known to be tight with a dollar, and I don't mind saying so.

The next day, March 28, Andrea dropped me at the airport, like she always did. There was nothing out of the ordinary in those last hours together. "Everything is going to be fine," I said. "I'm sure you're going to get a blizzard as soon as I leave, so just think of me lounging on deck in the hot sun." I love snow. There's nothing I like more than

looking out my back window at the fields and trees covered in white. She laughed. “See you in June,” she said and gave me a kiss. She usually stays until my flight leaves; that’s a tradition that started when Mariah and Dan were young. They would stand at the window watching my flight take off and wave at their daddy, just milking that last moment of togetherness for everything it was worth. But the kids were in college now and Andrea was on her way to work and she couldn’t wait. It was the first time that ever happened. I thought about that later.

I love the sea and being a merchant mariner, but you meet a lot of oddballs on ships. I think a lot of it has to do with leaving people behind for so long. It can mess up your head. Marriages break up. Girlfriends find new guys. Sailors get “Dear John” e-mails in the middle of the night on some lonely stretch of water miles from anywhere. Sometimes, a crew member will disappear, just jump overboard in the middle of the ocean, never to be found. A lot of it has to do with the strain that comes from being away from loved ones.

Merchant mariners always talk about Jodie. Jodie’s the guy who’s at home screwing your wife while you’re out on a ship. He’s eating your food, driving your car, chugging your beer. Jodie’s going to be sitting on your couch when you arrive home, asking, “Who are you?” When a guy calls his wife and she doesn’t answer, we tell him, “She’s out with Jodie.” As much as we joke about it, Jodie is all too real. Guys get home and their apartment is cleaned out, their bank balance reads zero, and their fiancée is gone

without leaving a note. It happens to some sailors over and over again. Every time I heard about Jodie it made me feel more thankful that I had Andrea at home. Jodie never visited my house.

But I'm not going to lie, some sailors just start out crazy—especially the cooks. I'm convinced there are very few normal, well-adjusted cooks in the entire U.S. Merchant Marine. Not one, except for my brother-in-law, Dave. But you do have your share of eccentrics among the rest of the crew, too. I've served under an old-salt captain named Port-and-Starboard Peterson who in fog as thick as pea soup would refuse to use radar *because it would hypnotize you into crashing into another ship*. The radar was evil, you see. One guy wore half a mustache for an entire three-month trip. Another demanded to be called Polar Bear when we sailed toward the North Pole and Penguin when we went toward the South Pole. This guy collected so many T-shirts from the different ports that you could barely push open the door to his quarters. I knew another seaman who showed up at the boat wearing a wolf-skin coat with the head still attached. Sailors are a breed apart, that's for sure.

It's been that way forever. The merchant marine is the first of the nation's services. We were founded in 1775, before the army and the navy. In all our wars, including World War II, guys who just couldn't live with the navy's regulations ended up onboard cargo ships. They didn't see the point of having a crease in their dungarees or saluting every officer onboard; they just weren't made that way. It's no accident that many of the Beat writers like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg were former seamen. The need to wander and the need to rebel go hand in hand. We're a bunch of misfits and renegades and

damn good seamen.

When I'm taking ships from port to port, books on the history of the merchant marine or World War II are always piled by my bunk. We were the first to die in World War II—seventeen minutes before the attack on Pearl Harbor, a Japanese sub strafed the lumber hauler SS *Cynthia Olson* and sank it, over 1,000 miles north of Honolulu. Thirty-three sailors jumped into lifeboats but were never seen again, because all hell was breaking loose on navy ships a thousand miles away. And the merchant marine suffered more casualties than any other service in World War II. One in every twenty-six sailors died while doing his duty. Crewmen torpedoed along the Atlantic coast drowned in engine oil while sunbathers watched from the shore. Men in the North Atlantic froze solid to the floors of their lifeboats after their tankers went down. Enormous five-hundred-foot ships carrying ammunition and dynamite to the front lines were torpedoed, blowing up in explosions so violent they never found a trace of the tons of metal or the hundreds of men aboard. They just disappeared into thin air. Which is fitting, really. The merchant marine has always been the invisible service, the guys who brought the tanks to Normandy, the bullets to Okinawa, but no one ever remembers us. What General Douglas MacArthur said was true: "They brought us our lifeblood and paid for it with their own."

But when the boys from the cargo ships went home, there were no ticker-tape parades, no G.I. Bill, nothing like that. They're still trying to get recognition so they can live out their lives with dignity. There's a bill before Congress that will guarantee them standing as World War II veterans and pay them a small stipend, but it's taking so long

to get through the political process that most of the guys will be dead before it's passed. That's a shame.

When I was coming up in the service, I met guys who'd served in World War II and had ships shot out from beneath them. And I remember what one guy told me: "I was in the merchant marine when the war broke out and I saw ships going down left and right. I got so scared I joined the navy." He was just playing the odds. Being a merchant mariner was a good way to meet your maker in those days.

A lot of us have a chip on our shoulder. We're patriots. We have a proud tradition. We're rugged individualists with a few mixed nuts thrown in to keep it interesting.

But we never make the headlines.

On that trip to the *Maersk Alabama,* I had one of those history books packed in my carry-on luggage, but I sat on the plane thinking about what I had to do once I got aboard. My flight left at 3 p.m. I was headed to Salalah, Oman, on the east coast of the Arabian Peninsula, where the ship was loading up its cargo holds. I've flown as long as forty-two hours to get to a ship, and this time the journey was nothing unusual: Burlington to Washington, D.C., D.C. to Zurich, Zurich to Muscat, Oman, where I crashed at a hotel for ten hours. The next morning, I headed straight back to the airport for the flight to Salalah. I left Vermont on March 28 and arrived at my destination on the thirtieth. Wherever there's work as a merchant mariner, you go. Joining me on the trip was Shane, my chief mate and an able-bodied seaman, who was also headed to the *Maersk*

Alabama.

I rolled out of bed on March 30, my brain cloudy from jet lag, and jumped in a car that took me to my ship. The *Maersk Alabama* was sitting at the dockside, its two cranes swinging containers onto the deck, when I walked up the gangway, boarded the ship, and went up to my office to meet the relieving captain, who debriefed me on what was going on. The captain left and I dumped my gear in my quarters, which were connected to an office, one floor below the bridge on the starboard side. To get from my room to the ship's bridge, all I would have to do is walk down the hallway to the center door. Opening it, I'd be in the chimney, or central ladder way. One flight up and I'd be on the bridge, the command center for the whole ship.

The house was what we call the seven-story superstructure at the stern (or rear) of the ship. A small condolike structure, it contained our living quarters, our mess hall, and our hospital. The top level was the bridge, where large windows ran from the ceiling to about waist-high and were met by a metal wainscoting that dropped to a special antifatigue rubber floor. (Watches are kept on the bridge, where a mate and an AB, or able-bodied seaman, are constantly scanning the horizon, so you want them to stay alert.) It looked like a greenhouse in there, with views for miles in every direction. In the middle of the bridge was the conning station—that's where we steer the ship from—and a flat electronic console filled with navigation aids. That's where you'd find the radar. Radar doesn't look like the cathode tube setup you see in Humphrey Bogart movies. These days it looks more like a TV, with ships still appearing as a small blip, but now with data streaming down the right side of the screen: the speed of any vessels, CPA

(closest point of approach, which tells you the point at which you're going to intersect with that approaching ship), and time to CPA. On the port side stood a chart table, where the second mate—the office man on a ship—does his work. There was a GMDSS, or Global Maritime Distress and Safety System, which gave us continuous weather updates, a small electronic station, which replaced the traditional radio operator, and a computer.

Starboard there was an all-important piece of equipment: the coffeepot, my first stop every morning.

Port and starboard, doors led off to the bridge wings, walkways eighteen feet long that we used while maneuvering or docking. These wings allow you to see down the sides of the ship and avoid banging into the piers or another vessel. Above the bridge was the flying bridge, an open platform that marked one of the the highest points on the ship.

Each deck below the bridge was designated by a letter. My quarters were housed on E deck. The chief engineer's, too. The engineers' and mates' rooms were on D deck. C deck held quarters for the crew, while B held more space for the ABs and the vessel lounges. A deck housed the mess, where we ate our meals, and the hospital. On the main deck was the ship's office. Dropping below the deck into the belly of the ship, directly below the house, sat the engine room. Forward of that were the enormous cargo holds, with tanks holding ballast, fuel, and water underneath. Behind, or aft, of the engine room, under the main deck, was the after steering room.

I spent the next few hours going over the *Maersk Alabama* with a captain's eye. The first

thing I noticed was that the ship had let the security slip a little. I could see doors open all over the ship. The engine door, the bridge door, the cargo scuttle that led into the holds—they were all key points of entry for any intruders and they were all standing wide open. Even though we were in port, they should have been secured. The pirate cages were unlocked, too. Pirate cages are steel bars over the ship's ladder ways that come up from the main deck to the superstructure on the exterior of the ship. After you climb up a ladder, you're supposed to lower this screen of welded bars over the hole you've just come through and lock it. These screens are designed to keep any intruders from ascending the ship to the bridge.

I'd captained the *Maersk Alabama* once before and I knew her pretty well. She was a container ship, one of the workhorses that carry the Toyota you're driving, the plasma TV you're watching, or the Reeboks you're wearing. (Without the merchant marine, there is no Walmart.) Merchant mariners don't get to sail the beautiful ships of the world, the yachts and sloops and the rumrunners. We don't get to stand at the helm with a gin and tonic in our hands. We work trawlers, barges, bulk carriers, tankers. The *Maersk Alabama* was built in China ten years ago; it was 508 feet long and 83 feet abeam and painted blue on the hull and beige on the superstructure, like all the ships owned by Maersk. Two 40-foot cranes, each six stories high, were placed fore and aft, which enabled us to quickly load and unload the containers that sat on top of the deck on any given trip. Her top speed was eighteen knots, powered by a single diesel engine, and her capacity was 1,092 TEUs, or twenty-foot equivalent units, which meant she could carry approximately 1,092 of the containers you see stacked at ports or being pulled by tractor trailers across

America. This ship was like a thousand other vessels out there, but for the next three months it was going to be my home, my job, and my responsibility.

We were on the EAF4 run (East Africa 4), which went from Salalah, Oman, to Djibouti in the Republic of Djibouti and Mombasa, Kenya, on the Indian Ocean. Sometimes we'd include Dar es Salaam on the trip, but this time it was only three stops. I'd always found East Africa to be a good run, relaxing even, compared with hauling cars from Yokohama to the United States on a nail-biting schedule. The trip promised sunny weather, interesting ports, a solid ship. It was one of the best runs I'd ever been on, and I felt lucky to have it.

We were carrying seventeen tons of cargo, including five tons of supplies for the World Food Programme, what we call "handshake food": grain, wheat, peas, the essentials for survival. From those ports the food would be trucked hundreds of miles into countries like Rwanda, Congo, and Uganda, landlocked places that can't get the stuff any other way. Every piece of merchandise—every lightbulb, every pair of shoes, and every gallon of gas—that ends up in those countries has to go through two ports, Mombasa or Dar es Salaam. I later heard from one Catholic relief outfit that had twenty-three containers onboard the *Maersk Alabama* destined for Rwanda. They told me it was their entire six-month supply for the refugees they cared for and if it was delayed or hijacked, some of those desperate men, women, and children would have starved to death.

When you get on a ship, you want to hit the deck running, but you can't. There are ten thousand things to get ready when you're setting sail, starting with the basics: What time do we eat? Are the cranes working? Are there any pipes leaking? Is the third mate sitting in his room saying "Redrum" over and over again? I've always said that all ships are different but working on a ship is always the same. You have to learn the vessel first, and you have to grab someone who's getting ready to leave. Even though they're dying to get off the ship and fly back to their family and kids or their girlfriend and a three-month supply of beer, you have to find out what's been happening or you're lost.

I met my crew. I'd worked with my chief mate, Shane Murphy, before. He was young, physical, and very hands-on. Shane was a straight shooter who looked like a Boy Scout and thought like a captain. We'd met in odd circumstances on our first trip together. He was going through the Oman airport heading to the ship when the customs officials decided to "temporarily confiscate" his CDs. It happens all the time, and the CDs often end up in the customs official's own collection. Shane blew up and was arrested for "insulting a public official." After three days in a roasting hot jail cell, we'd been able to get him out and onto our ship. He was a good shipmate and I knew I could count on him in an emergency.

Mike Perry was the chief engineer, a born-again Christian in his fifties who looked like a country-and-western singer and ran a tight engine room. I'd worked with him nearly three months before on the same EAF4 run. He was an ex-navy guy who was never afraid to argue with me if he thought he was right, which is something I've always

respected, even encouraged, in a chief or any crew member. Things happen so fast on a ship that you have to know your duty automatically; when a typhoon's threatening to rip your ship apart, or a pirate is closing at twenty-five knots, you either perform or you're dead. So he and I were gung-ho about training. There was just one difference: Mike believed everyone could be trained to a high level, which is a navy thing. I believed some guys were just too far gone to absorb even the basics, and you had to work around that. You could only train some guys so much; perfection was just not possible.

I was relieved that Mike and Shane were sailing with me. They were both strong leaders, proactive about training the crew and getting jobs done right, qualities that are too often missing in sailors these days.

I met the rest of the crew. The third mate, Colin Wright, was a stout Southern guy I'd never met before. There was also an AB who was in his sixties and really should have been tending his gardenias in a retirement community. His best sailing days were behind him. You often had to explain the most basic things to him, and sometimes even then he wouldn't get it. And I met a new AB who introduced himself as ATM. I demanded he get his passport and prove he wasn't messing with me. Sure enough, there it was, "ATM Mohammed." He was a Pakistani who'd won the lottery for an American visa. ATM was young, bright-eyed, and looked capable. The rest of the guys I shook hands with as the day went on. Onboard a ship getting ready to leave port, there's no time for more than that. Most captains will make an initial assessment of the crew. This seemed like a good crew, with the exception of one of the senior sailors.

The command structure on a merchant marine ship is a lot like the military's. The

captain is responsible for the crew, the ship, and everything on it. Period. Below him are three divisions: the deck department, run by the chief mate (simply called the mate on a ship); the engine department, run by the chief engineer (known as the chief onboard); and the steward department, run by the chief steward. The mate is responsible for cargo, security, medical, maintenance, storing, loading, safety operations, and anything short of a meteorite landing on the forward deck. Under him is the second mate (called the paper mate), who is responsible for navigation, maintaining charts, and seeing to the bridge's electronic equipment. He's the voyage planner, the guy who lays the courses down, labels them, and makes sure the light list (which gives us all the lighthouses along our route) and the Notice to Mariners are up to date. The third mate is in the entry-level slot. He takes care of the safety equipment and does anything the mate tells him to do. Beneath the third is the bosun, the leader of the able-bodied seamen and the foreman who actually puts the mate's orders into effect. The chief and his men (first, second, and third engineer) focus on what makes the ship go: the power plant and auxiliaries (compressors, pumps, and motors), as well as maintaining all the equipment on the ship.

Mark Twain said that going to sea is like going to jail with a chance of drowning, and he was spot on. You give up any idea of a normal, comfortable life when you step onboard. Merchant mariners aren't weekend warriors; we are there to work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. On the water, every day is like a Monday—a workday with more to come stretching out into the distance.

I have a tough reputation in the business. I'm known to be demanding, and I am. Each sailor has the lives of his crew in his hands, and I wouldn't allow them to be thrown away because someone wasn't prepared. Andrea's brother, who's also a sailor, told her once: "Onboard Rich is a different person from the fun-loving guy you know. You wouldn't even recognize him." I do like to have fun whenever I can, but not at the cost of neglecting what the ship needs. That's not going to happen on my vessel.

My first order of business was letting the crew know in no uncertain terms that we had to get the security profile right. The news out of Somalia was grim. Everyone knew that pirates there were wreaking havoc on the shipping lanes. The usual route around the Horn of Africa brings you within twenty miles of the Somali coast, but ever since 2005, when the pirates started terrorizing the merchant ships there, captains had been going out fifty miles, then one hundred, then two hundred miles to get away from these bandits. What was a five-day trip now takes ten. Ships don't double their sailing time unless there are some very dangerous people waiting for them. But no matter how far offshore ships were going, the pirates were finding and hijacking them.

As soon as I settled aboard the *Maersk Alabama,* I started getting e-mail bulletins from the Office of Naval Intelligence and various security firms about pirates: mysterious blips appearing on radar and giving chase, gun battles, the works. Ships, fishing boats, and yachts were being taken left and right. A great deal of the action was taking place around the Somali coast and in the Gulf of Aden, a deep-water basin 920 miles long and 300 miles wide that lies between Yemen and Somalia on the Horn of Africa. Something like 10 percent of all the world's petroleum supply is shipped via the Gulf of Aden, as

tankers bring oil out of the ports of Saudi Arabia, through the Red Sea, into the Gulf, then out to the Arabian Sea and on to Europe and America. A trillion dollars' worth of goods passes by the Somali coast every year. Essentially, sailors are bringing the world's most vital resource through the world's most unstable region, which had turned the area around the Gulf of Aden and the Somali coast into a shooting gallery. Anyone sailing there would be under constant threat of attack from pirates, who were getting smarter and more violent by the month. The total ransoms paid were soaring into the tens of millions a year, attracting desperate young men to the gulf like bees to honey.

And this was exactly where we were headed. Our next destination was Djibouti, which lies at the far western end of the Gulf of Aden. We had to sail in, unload, and get back out before the bad guys could get a bead on us.

I sent Andrea a quick e-mail saying I'd made it to the ship safely and we were getting ready to embark. I'm not one for phone calls. Too damn expensive. But I let her know I was aboard and thinking of her.

Andrea misses the days when I wrote her long letters or postcards. I'd always send her at least one long letter written over a week's time, telling her what ocean I was crossing, what the weather was like, silly stuff the crew was up to. In the beginning, I signed the first postcards "Rich." That's when we'd decided we were "in deep like," not "in love." It took a while to get more. Andrea still remembers the time she got one letter, before we were married, and at the bottom, it said, "Love, R." She was so struck by it. I guess that's when she first thought, "Oh, maybe he *is* serious." Andrea has kept every letter I ever wrote her.

I did call a few times from around the globe, and I always used the same opening line. Andrea would be asleep and she'd pick up the phone and I'd say, in this low, Barry White voice, "Is your husband home?"

And she'd say, "No, as a matter of fact, he's not."

"Good. I'll be right over."

I don't know when that started, but it became our private joke.

But it was the letters she really loved, especially the ones where I'd get all romantic. I wrote in one that "I miss the inside of your arms." How could she resist that? And in another, I said, "I'll be seeing you in the moon." I explained to Andrea how the full moon was always good luck for sailors, and when I looked at one, I thought of her sleeping under it thousands of miles away. So the full moon became ours, a way to be in touch with each other. And when our children were young, they would all look up at the clear Vermont night sky and the kids would shout, "Look, it's Daddy's moon." And Andrea would say, "That's right." And Mariah and Dan would look up at the moon and say, "Good night, Daddy, wherever you are." Andrea did anything she could to keep me connected to the kids' daily lives.

I'd always loved kids. One of my jobs before joining the merchant marine was working with schizophrenic children and I'd really enjoyed it. "Dealing with kids is good preparation for dealing with crews," I told Andrea. And it was true. I even instituted something called the Crying Room on my ships, a little mediation club for crew members who were having problems with each other. I'd write and tell Andrea about every session, how one guy would come into the Crying Room and yell, "He pulled a knife on

me!” and the other sailor would say, “Only after he swung at me with a wrench!” I’d listen patiently and nod and let the guys get their frustrations out. At the end I’d say, “Let’s shake hands and get back to work.” Not every captain does that, but I felt it made for a better ship.

When I left for the sea, Andrea always posted a picture of me on the refrigerator, along with a photo of “Daddy’s ship.” Next to it, there was always a list of questions for Daddy that I’d have to answer when I got home. But most of all, we had the full moon to share. Andrea cherished it because it always brought me close to her.