

Life

“a killer hurricane nearly drowned me!”

You want your life to be an *adventure*. That's what Anna, 20, thought when she tried to sail around Hurricane Sandy. But the storm killed more than 100 people—and almost took her life, too. as told to ashley mateo

a pirate's life

The *Bounty* was modeled after a ship from 1784, and it actually appeared in the movie *Pirates of the Caribbean!*



Bounty Sinks in the Graveyard of the Atlantic

I've never been the basic summer job kind of girl. But I love sailing, so when I was home from college last summer in Savannah, Georgia, I jumped at the chance to work on a ship called the *HMS Bounty*. It looked like something straight out of *Pirates of the Caribbean*... because it was! It was featured in the movie with Johnny Depp, and it was also a floating museum. Cool, right?

All last summer, I sailed with the *Bounty*, teaching the history of the ship to people in the towns where we docked. I started as a volunteer, but by August, the ship's captain offered me a part-time job, so I took a semester off from school—the opportunity was too amazing to turn down!

rough seas ahead

We were on a weeklong sailing trip along the East Coast when I first heard about Hurricane Sandy, which was being called the “Storm of the Century” days before it even arrived. You'd think the crew of 16 and I would be freaking out—even people on land were going into panic mode—but most of us had been on the water our whole lives. Plus, I had total trust in our captain, a seasoned sailor, when he said that we should sail around the hurricane to protect the ship. (Boats can get damaged while docked in bad storms.) I'd never sailed in such severe weather before, but I actually felt excited! And I was confident in the emergency procedures we'd been practicing. If things got bad, I knew how to make a rescue and get into a raft. . . . *fast.*

The winds didn't really pick up until 8 P.M. on Sunday, October 28. I went below deck to grab tools for regular maintenance, and that was when I realized we were in danger: Water was flooding the lower levels of the ship! Floorboards started popping up under my feet, and I could feel the boat tilting to the side. My stomach flipped—half because of the leaning and half because I was thinking, Oh, my God, this looks like the *Titanic*!

Back up on the deck, big waves were

crashing all around us. I didn't even have to say what I'd discovered down below—the captain already knew we were in trouble and was instructing the crew on how to keep the boat afloat the best we could. But even moving around the deck became dangerous—we had to set up lines of rope to grab so we wouldn't fall into the dark waters. Our efforts proved worthless against a storm so big, though, and at 4 A.M., the boat was almost completely on its side. That was when our captain yelled, “She's sinking! Get in the life rafts!” I didn't have time to be scared or think about what my family would do if I died—I just thought, What do I do next to survive? I put on my full-body life jacket and tried to pull myself toward the rafts.

That's when I saw it: The rafts had already sunk. The masts were just inches from the water. There was nowhere left to go, and all I could do was jump into the ocean and pray I wouldn't go down, too.

“All I could do was jump into the ocean and pray.”

girl overboard

As I plunged into 18-foot waves, I tried not to focus on anything but keeping myself moving—I knew I had to get away from the boat or I'd get sucked under with it. But all the ropes on deck (almost 10 miles worth!) were now in the water, tangling around my legs and pulling me under. I thought, This boat is going to kill me if I don't get away!

When I finally surfaced, I couldn't see anyone. But then I heard my friend Mark yell my name, and I felt a huge sense of relief—I wasn't alone! He'd found a raft, and together, we got it to inflate. I felt like we were going to be okay until I tried to pull myself up into the raft and it was so slippery, I fell right back into the water! I tried again and again, kicking my legs and grabbing at any part of the raft I could, but I couldn't get a grip. As the



mayday!
The *Bounty* sank after being overtaken by 18-foot waves and 70 mph winds.

waves kept barreling down and I slipped down the side for what felt like the 100th time, I was exhausted and frustrated. I just wanted to get out of the waves! It took an hour to get over the edge of the raft; when I finally flung myself inside, I thought, I did it, I'm safe.

Over the next two hours, Mark and I rescued five other crew members. I was so happy every time we found someone else, but I also kept thinking, Where are the other nine?!? With no other crew members in sight, there was nothing to do but wait for the Coast Guard, who we'd radioed before abandoning ship.

Finally, when the sun was peeking out, we heard helicopters and saw a Coast Guard member swimming toward our raft! He hooked each of us to a rope that pulled us into a helicopter. I almost cried when I saw other crew members inside! We looked beaten up, but we were alive.

after the storm

Back on land, I learned that our captain and a deckhand I was close with, Claudene, had died. I felt so guilty that I couldn't save them—but it was a miracle so many of us *did* survive.

I haven't gone back out on the water yet, but I want to. It's weird—when the captain insisted on doing all those safety drills, I remember thinking, I'll never use this. In the end, they saved my life! I want to honor him and Claudene by showing other sailors how to stay safe and to respect the ocean. I thought this sort of thing only happened in the movies, but I learned the hard way that nature is so much more powerful than we are—and it keeps me humble. **17**