

I survived the Estonia tragedy

Night between 27 -28 September 1994



My experiences as a survivor of the Estonia disaster the night 27-28 September 1994

Background

In the days around the 20-27 September 1994 We were a happy bunch from the Pentecostal Church in Jönköping who would go on a mission trip to Estonia with pastors Leif Svensson and Lennart Karlsson and Pentecostal Bible College from Jönköping Sweden.

I went myself at Bible school 1990-91 but was able to go on the trip through an invitation by Leif Svensson. Among other things, we would sing and play at meetings in Tallinn and I was as a musician. I got to know most during the trip and we had a couple of unforgettable days, but many strong impressions. Beautiful appointments, interesting field trips in an orphanage and we got the opportunity to sing for the prisoners in a prison.

We were billeted in a very interesting place. Paldiski (I think it was called) who was a former Soviet submarine base. From there directing, among other u-137, which ran aground in Karlskrona in Sweden 1981. It was an event in Sweden that was about to trigger a war between Sweden and the Soviet Union, 1981st



We had meetings in the former Communist headquarters. It was a great theater and it was very public at each meeting. Pastors Leif Svensson and Lennart Karlsson spoke. We got to meet many people from different backgrounds. It was obvious that many were hard up and has lived under a harsh repression. And it was wonderful to be about giving people hope, and we had brought clothes and other items from the collections through Erikshjälpen and we gave it to various orphanages.

There were days that never came to forget. After this trip, I have a special feeling for the Baltics. Has also been in Latvia.



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estonia>

The journey home

After several intense and wonderful days in Tallinn, it was time to go home again on 27 September. I was tired after all the impressions you have received and looked forward to a relaxing voyage with good food and duty free shopping. Before the accident, I always thought it was fun to ride with ships on cruises, I might add. But for some reason I felt not so good and anxious hours before departure. Some wondered what was wrong with me. It was just like you could feel that something bad was going on.

That evening it was time to board the MS Estonia and we have accommodated us in our cabins. Some of our gang wanted to go and eat smorgasbord, but I thought it was a bit expensive, and contented myself with a light meal in the café. I and friends go there and sit and eat. Our "tour guide" Leif Svensson and Lennart Karlsson joins the party and we sit there and have fun few hours. Talking a lot about the day what we experienced. This would prove to be the last time I met Leif and Lennart.

It was getting late in the evening and was close to eleven. Then I found myself with some friends in the karaoke bar where there was a karaoke contest. Some of us got up and tore off a few songs.

But I noticed that the ship began to swing significantly. There was a storm outside and hearty waves. The longer time went on, the more accelerated the boat and struck hard against the waves and it slammed firmly into the hull. The glass began to fall down at the bar. The mood was anxious, and some began to lose their cabins to be felt seasick. When we would go somewhere you had to keep itself well to not fall over. Sometime between the hours of 00 and 0030 I decide to leave the bar and go up on deck. I feel severe nausea and need some air. I get myself a little worried that it just seemed to get worse and worse with the waves and thought:- How will this end?

I go out into the foyer and go to the stairwell outside the duty free shop. Just when I should take the first steps on the stairs as the whole vessel suddenly heeled to several times and will immediately receive approximately 30 degrees of heel. All start screaming and I see people rushing out of their cabins. Some naked. Many are difficult shocked and panicked. The first thought I get is that this does not happen. It is not real but I may soon face the facts. I will of course shocked and frightened, but I get a huge adrenaline rush and filled with fighting spirit to survive. I put in a sort of state of combat readiness and start thinking about every single thing to do. A mistake, it's over for me. Now afterwards, I get amazed at myself that I could think so clearly despite the shock and so on. Some people can become paralyzed with fear when there is something. I was the opposite and suddenly knew what was required.

I rush up the stairs oehört soon but may lean my body forward because the ship heeled to come up. In the meantime, I hear people screaming, the alarm sounds and a panicked voice shouts out "Mayday, Mayday. I hear also how objects in the duty free shop begins to move on and crushed. People die in front of me when they fall headlong into the stairwell.

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When I get out on the deck turned out that I am one of the first to come out. One crew member stands and throwing life jackets. A life jacket will air spirit in me and I catch it and take it with me. After a while I turn over and get to see my companion Daniel standing at the railing. He shouts at me and grabs my hand as I come up. He tells me that we leave the ship and jump into the lake. I am hard to reach I want to wait a bit and think. He decides himself to jump. Naturally, I am still a moment at the rail and wait out until the ship has settled down about 90 degrees. Then I decide to leave and now the ship down so I start walking on the vessel wall and look a little further away to a lifeboat that is stuck in the hull. I'll take me there and sit in it. But I am not alone. We get many of the boat and there is crowding and pushing. Some are drunk and aggressive and there are fights. Naturally, I try to protect myself for not getting the bottom and be "mashed". People lie to each other more or less. It was the law of the jungle which was.

In the end, to release the lifeboat from the ship and we are sliding into the water. I began to prepare myself that it was cold. The temperature was about 10 degrees in the water. I have been lucky to not fall in but discovers, however, that the lifeboat is leaking and I have to switch to a safer life raft. Fortunate enough to discover that behind me is a life raft with a roof and decide to take me over there. I get help to pull me over to the new raft, and when we arrived so it was relieved that we managed to get out from the ship and survive so far.

Right as it is so, the waves that wash us away away from the sinking ship. I see in the moonlight what happens outside. Now I see MS Estonia sinking and the boat is a signal for the last time. Just like a dying man says his last words. The ship was standing up like a church tower and sank. In the end she was gone. Again I was filled with thoughts that this does not happen. It is not fair. They displace the horror. But I must realize that it actually happens and I wonder how many of my friends who survived. Now begins the next phase. The struggle for survival and rescue. (Continued on page 5)



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MS_Estonia

The struggle for survival and rescue

Now begins the struggle to survive and be rescued. The relief was great that we managed to escape from the ship and does not put on any injuries. We are a total of 17 people in the raft and we are at each other to keep the body heat. A guy is at the door and shoot flares. Another man, a Russian lies to himself and seems unresponsive. He is totally absent.

Hours pass and the time to get many thoughts inside. I am torn between hope and despair, between death and life. Helicopters start coming and when you hear the sound fills you with hope and joy of salvation and as they fly by. When one thinks that they will find us not. We will die. So keep it on while it will big waves over us and every time we think that now we are drenched.

I'm starting to think about my family. Wonder how they have it now. Have they heard what happened? How will they take it in case I do not survive? Much such thoughts going through my head. And I thought of death. How it will be? Will I meet my loved ones who have gone before me? Life began to play like a movie for a head. What have I done to my life? I'm done with life? The answer to that last question was no. I started praying to God in the middle of all the misery. I said that let me survive, not only for my own sake but for my family's sake as well. I'm not done yet.

My parents were on winter vacation in the mountains had heard the news that Estonia sunk and their first thought when they heard it was that I could not survive it and started planning my funeral and so on. I will return later on when I get in touch with family after the rescue

After many hard hours at sea, discovers a Finland ferry us at dawn. It was about the 0530th When the guy at the door said we have only been discovered by a ship, I started crying with relief and said that now will save. The wind was still strong and rescue would be dramatic.

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Salvation

At 0530 detects Finland ferry from Viking Line MS Isabella us and begin a rescue operation. The first attempt trying to lift our raft with a crane but a bit up in the air gaps cable and the whole raft going down into the water with a loud bang and the raft fails. I go out of the raft and end up with your upper body under the water. I am thinking now it's over. It's just to take a short drink, it's over.

But then I feel that a rescue diver grabs my hand and help me get up on a new raft. We remain on the raft for a while until you decide to try again by sending an escape raft with a water slide like you have on passenger aircraft. I jump over to the new escape platform and know where to begin forces now running out of the body. You start to get very tired. But in the end they pull us one by one with ropes up the slide and I enter the ship. I was scared! When they said the words you are saved only when I felt the pain I had in my body. Could not feel the pain before because I was so focused on survival.

They put me up on a stretcher and took us all rescued in the restaurant turned into a crisis center. There were plenty of staff who were summoned to take care of us. In my eyes they became angels. When I came in they took off my clothes soaking wet, dried to me and put me into a sort of foil and put rolled into my blankets. I got a lot of massage and a hot drink. In this mode, I was really cooled down and it had to quickly get heat.

All the time they made sure there were staff next one. I got not only a physical first aid, but also a psychic. I got to talk a bit about what happened, how I feel and so on. Got a lot of food and drink. Had lost some weight and strength due to the effort. It was a fantastic response I received

A singer in a dance band that would play on board was involved and helped, I got to talk much with her, too. Her I will never forget. The hugs I got warmed almost into a frightened man's soul, I can promise. She was an angel.

The staff made sure I had the opportunity to call home. When I called home said my brother, who guarded the phone at home there were many who had contacted him after the news of what happened to me. At first I did not utter a word because I was crying but then I said that I have passed me and on my way to Helsinki. He rang through to my parents who were in the mountains but sitting on the train to Stockholm when they heard the news of Estonia through the media.

In the evening called at MS Isabella Helsinki and I was admitted for observation at a hospital. They did a thorough investigation and found that I had no physical injuries. Only a few superficial wounds in the face. I had a little fever but it went over during the night after I slept out. In the morning, got a lift by taxi to a crisis center had been set up in a hotel. There, I meet other survivors and some of my peers. This was a very emotional reunion with tears and hugs. There, we meet the emergency personnel and we will be interrogated by the Finnish police for accident commission bill that would exclude attacks.

Representatives of the Red Cross were on hand and they made sure we got what we needed. I had lost everything and was completely broke. Got new clothes on board the Isabella. Then

we got tickets to Sweden. The police drove us out to the airport and we flew back to Stockholm

At the airport met with staff from the care of us who saw to it that we got to the Huddinge hospital for an investigation and that we would have a rest. Where can I talk to doctors and psychologists who declared that it will be hard times after the accident. You may get a post-traumatic stress reaction. Indeed it became for me.

I had stress reactions such as palpitations, dizziness, tingling in hands, pain in the chest and make people believe that you can not breathe. It is very unpleasant to experience, and the first time, it can feel like you are going crazy or that you die. At the hospital they saw to it that I got help with the processing that is really important if we are to return to normal life after a major event.

At Huddinge Hospital meet my parents me up for the first time after the accident and there was a very emotional meeting, which is natural after such an event here. Their son was about to die. This was a crisis of the well. Such as this can affect the entire family when a family member suffers a dramatic event

At the department, I am treated in a very nice way and they were very friendly. It was wonderful to be pampered there. After one day I fly home by air ambulance to Jönköping and I met up with family, friends and local media. I escaped the worst of the media assault thanks guards at Huddinge Hospital.

In Jönköping, I get in touch with the Pentecostal Church, which had now become a crisis center where relatives and other survivors could approach. They make sure that I get professional help with crisis management and arranging memorial services of our lost comrades. We lost 15 friends in the accident. 13 students in Bible school class, and Leif and Lennart who was the leader.



I lit peace about my lost comrades and all others who perished. You ripped off too early. But I think we'll see one day again

The time after the accident

The day after the accident I started to feel strong emotions of fear and anxiety come up and I felt that did not air, but strong dizziness and tingling of the hands in a cold sweat. The heart started beating faster. They explained that it was the panic that can be affected by a strong trauma. They also talk about post-traumatic stress.

Now I began to feel very bad mentally and all the fear and agony came up now. Every day was a plague of constant panic attacks and I thought this, I never through. But I did because I got professional help with calls and medications for panic anxiety.

It was very painful to talk about experiences and watch television and in newspapers but it was necessary to be able to come back to life again and now I am living a normal life. Many try to suppress their experiences and refused to talk but it is a very destructive way to go. Experiences will arrive sooner or later, and once it arrives it will be very serious, and usually it can be triggered in conjunction with a new traumatic event and then it becomes like a steam boiler that explodes when it can no longer withstand the pressure. It is very important to process the grief and trauma. Unprocessed traumatic experiences can trigger both physical and mental illness.



I want to thank everyone who helped me during the difficult times during the accident. Medical personnel, police officers, crew of Ms. Isabella, the staff of the Pentecostal Church, friends and relatives and at last not least, my parents and my brother who supported me and took care of me. Unfortunately my mother is not remained with us longer. She passed away four years ago. I miss you very much mom!



Crisis theory

The famous Swedish Psychiatry Professor Johan Cullberg divides the crisis in different phases and it looks as follows

Crisis four phases

Shock phase.

In the initial stage. It may consist of hours or days, and expose humans of severe stress where the defenses mobilized. Emotions like anger and hatred, powerlessness and despair dominates.

The reaction phase is the next phase

It occurs when the meaning of what has happened begins to be understood and it is no longer going to deny it occurred. Along with the shock phase lasts reaction phase of 4-6 weeks.

This phase is a gradual return to the present. Now processed the significance of what caused the crisis, both in awake and in dreams. In this phase, the need to talk about what happened at its highest, and this is done once at once.

Putting words to the crisis is part of the process. Reorientation phase involves a greater ability to social life, new relationships and an openness of approach to the future. Together with shock phase lasts reaction phase in the 4-6 weeks

Processing phase

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New orientation phase involves a greater capacity for social life, to new relations and transparency in the setting to future



What I've been through, I would not even treat my worst enemy to be part of. Similar accidents will unfortunately occur. Therefore it is important that we are prepared to take care of people once the accident happens. I hope to contribute knowledge through my testimony and be helpful.

greetings your friend Erik Gemheden