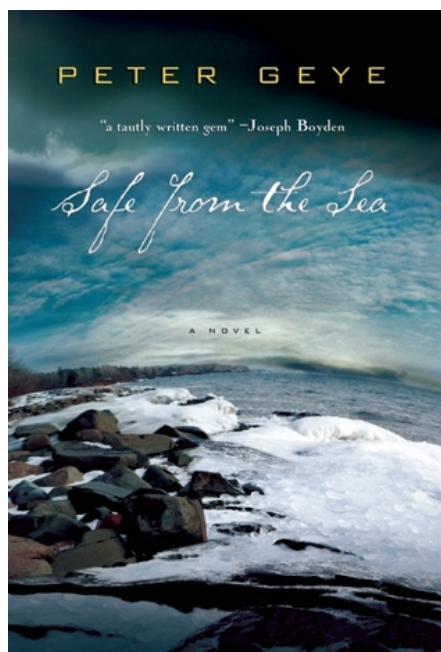




Safe from the Sea

Peter Geye

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Set against the powerful lakeshore landscape of northern Minnesota, *Safe from the Sea* is a heartfelt novel in which a son returns home to reconnect with his estranged and dying father thirty-five years after the tragic wreck of a Great Lakes ore boat that the father only partially survived and that has divided them emotionally ever since. When his father for the first time finally tells the story of the horrific disaster he has carried with him so long, it leads the two men to reconsider each other.

Meanwhile, Noah's own struggle to make a life with an absent father has found its real reward in his relationship with his sagacious wife, Natalie, whose complications with infertility issues have marked her husband's life in ways he only fully realizes as the reconciliation with his father takes shape.

Peter Geye has delivered an archetypal story of a father and son, of the tug and pull of family bonds, of Norwegian immigrant culture, of dramatic shipwrecks and the business and adventure of Great Lakes shipping in a setting that simply casts a spell over the characters as well as the reader.

Safe from the Sea Details

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Author : Peter Geye

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From Reader Review Safe from the Sea for online ebook

Patricia says

Set in Misquah, Minnesota near the shores of Lake Superior this is the story of correcting past history of stoic pride and neglected love for the deceased wife and two living adult children, Noah and Solveig, by a stubborn and strong willed Norwegian man, Olaf Torr.

Olaf worked for the Superior Steel company as an ore boat captain. On November 6, 1967 the ship Ragnarok, went down with twenty seven of its thirty crew. Four made it off the ship but only three survived. Olaf was one of the survivors. He carried his remorse for the loss of the ship and men and guilt for surviving. He became withdrawn from his family and spent more and more time on ore ships on the Great Lakes. Olaf is now elderly and dying. He asks Noah to visit him after nearly five years of estrangement. Noah lives in Boston and owns an antique map business. He and his wife, Natalie, have been unsuccessful in having a child. Noah goes to Misquah and confronts the memories of his past ski jumping with his father and grandfather, fishing in the northern lakes, and the beauty and solitude of the North Shore.

Father and son come to terms with the past and Olaf shares the story of the fateful night of 11/6/67 and the impact it had on him and his family. His final request is for Noah to bury him in the lake where fate prevented him for joining his shipmates years earlier.

This is a haunting and beautifully told story of redemption, forgiveness, and setting past wrongs right. A story of a father and his love for his wife and children. Oh my heart sang from the descriptions of Lake Superior and the mystery and majesty of its nature.

Mark says

Safe from the Sea, by Peter Geye, 2009. The central historical event of Peter Geye's first novel is the sinking of the oreboat Ragnarok during a hellish November storm on Lake Superior. The story unfolds during a estranged son and father's week together on the North Shore of Superior, as winter rolls in in early November, 35 years later. The ending is powerful – I knew it was coming, and it still blew me away. Throughout, the writing is tight, clear, compelling and the pace of the storytelling keeps you moving and wanting more. As I write this, having just finished the book, I am remembering the many images – of the fire-and-ice end of the Ragnarok, of an old man's dying, of snow and ice and the lake. Geye's scenes are so true and memorable – this is truly a great piece of writing.

Erika Robuck says

This is my kind of book--a family story of love and redemption, a tragic past, fishermen, fathers & sons. The connection between generations and the land is paramount. I highly recommend it to readers who enjoy Hemingway's THE OLD MAN & THE SEA or his NICK ADAMS stories.

Jayme says

Safe from the Sea takes place on a small lake north of Lake Superior near Duluth, Minnesota. It is the story of an estranged son and father who reunite when Olaf, the father, calls Noah, the son, to say that he is sick and needs his help. Noah goes home, a place he hasn't been to in years, and together father and son try to put

the pieces of their memories together in the little time they have left.

Geye has painted a visual masterpiece in this quiet and dignified book. Place is a key element in *Safe from the Sea* and Lake Superior is a critical character. Lake Superior is a dark, mysterious, dangerous, and well-respected lake. The Lake is unpredictable and in *Safe from the Sea* we witness her power when Olaf finally tells the story of the harrowing ship wreck that he survived and why he came back a broken man.

Safe from the Sea is a hauntingly, moving book about guilt, regret, and failure, but it is also the story, about how in the end, there is only family, love, and forgiveness. Highly recommend.

Jeanette says

This was an easy read that held a strong attachment to place and nature. That aspect was absolutely at 4 star level.

But for me, the story line was 2.5 star. It's a man's tale. Told to his son. And, IMHO, both of their conceptual horizons were either rather limited in communication or this author didn't peel back the layers or flesh out the back story to proper illumination. Not for me, anyway. You "got" the immense baggage left by the survivor experience, but some other aspects of Olaf? Like the more than considerable selfishness from youth. And voids of years he contexts at status quo. And his relationship to his daughter? She wasn't told any history, but she's the one who actually got some medicine for relief.

And I also thought the son's situation of being able to leave his job for length and the eventual method for the father's body? Well, the second is against the law even in Minnesota. For good reason. And the first went beyond my reality believability. And the ending was pure Hallmark card Lifetime caption. My enjoyment was in the Superior and ship's yarn for this one.

Teresa Lukey says

This is an extremely touching novel, very much like *Crossing to Safety*. I kept thinking it was like *Angle of Repose*, but that is a Wallace Stegner novel on my to-read list, not my read list. My bad!

At the start of this book, Noah is contacted by his father, Olaf. Olaf informs Noah that he needs help getting his remote cabin ready for winter and although Noah and his father have been estranged for several years, Noah immediately commits. When Noah arrives at the cabin, he can see that his father is quite ill and they begin a process reconciliation.

Olaf was on a ship that sunk, some 35 years earlier, where only 3 of 30 people survived. Olaf, who has internalized the events, tells Noah the story of the Ragnarok's demise. The sinking changed Olaf in ways the young Noah could have never understood, but now adult Noah understands why his father remained distanced after the sinking. Prior to hearing the story from his father, Noah had disdain for his father's actions and really had no interest in being a part of his father's life. After the story, the slate is cleared and Noah has a fresh understanding of his father.

This story is about the last days of Olaf's life and his special burial request that is sure to bring you to tears. This is a slow read, set in Northern Minnesota, that is so touching it is well worth your time.

Bernadette says

Peter Geye wisely sets his first novel in an area he knows well -- Duluth, MN and on the unpredictable shores of Lake Superior. After years of estrangement, Noah returns to reconnect with his dying father, Olaf, one of three survivors of an ore-boat wreck 35 years earlier. Geye brings to life the Northern Minnesota landscape, its immigrant Norwegian culture, the sailing community and loss of the taconite industry with an keen and compassionate eye. Olaf's telling of the story of the shipwreck gave me chills. I felt like I was right there in this isolated spot in the woods with a father and son as they fish, chop wood, shovel snow, laugh and cry while working to resolve their long-time issues. As a Minnesota native I found this a remarkably good read.

Jana says

This was the perfect book to prepare for visiting the Great Lakes this fall, a place I have only glimpsed once from Chicago. First, this is a story family relationships: estranged father & son; also the son's relationship with his wife. The flashbacks of the father telling his tale of survival in a ship on Lake Superior are haunting.

Musical accompaniment: Gordon Lightfoot's Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0DqPS...>

I look forward to reading his second book:

Joni says

Peter Geye brings to life images of maritime history from a time when the ore ships plied the waters of the Great Lakes feeding the great industrial heart of America.

But this debut novel is so much more. Classic themes of redemption, reconciliation, and family ties, are set against the awesome power, magnitude and beauty of the north shore of Lake Superior. "Safe from the Sea" is also a riveting adventure tale and a heart-rending love story.

One of 3 survivors of the tragic wreck of the ore boat Ragnarok, Olaf, 35 years later, knows he is dying and reaches out to his estranged son. Noah returns to the cabin built by his grandfather to care for his father.

In the final weeks of his life Olaf relives the story of the wreck for the first time and acknowledges his feelings of guilt and regret while Noah discovers that things are not always as they seem.

This is a stunning narrative, by a talented new author. I am excited about telling our "Winter Texan" visitors from Minnesota about this book.

Kmalbie says

Well, if you are from the Great Lakes AND a boater, this is a must-read. Beautiful father-son story about a freighter captain who survived the sinking of his freighter on Lake Superior.

Melissa says

"Olaf nodded up at the sky. 'He taught me some things about navigating. Just basic stuff, but I was hooked. He said that a true seaman could sail around the world without anything more than a watch and a sextant and the sky to guide him. I didn't even know what a sextant was, just figured you knew where to go if you were in charge of one of those boats. I never reckoned there was any science to it. Wolf taught me how to take sun sights, how to chart our course, how to estimate our position using dead reckoning when the sky was cloudy and the shore out of sight.' He paused, cleared his throat. 'Now it's just a bunch of satellites telling you where you are and where to go. Back then it was still something beautiful to steer a ship.'" (pg. 62)

Noah Torr's relationship with his father Olaf has always been a tricky one to navigate. In this novel, Olaf's a crusty, weathered former sailor who is somewhat of a local legend along the remote northern Minnesota shoreline where he lives, haunted by his surviving a devastating 1967 shipwreck that killed all 27 of his 30-member crew.

It's a story that Olaf has been reluctant to tell, but now that he's dying and his son Noah has returned home (ostensibly to "help him prepare the cabin for winter"), he unburdens himself of the secrets and guilt that he has carried for nearly four decades since the accident. In the process, father and son begin the rocky process of trying to understand and accept one another before it's too late.

Yeah, the troubled-father-and-son-making-amends-on-one's-deathbed story has been done before, but it's a theme universal enough that it doesn't flounder in Peter Geye's hands as an author. For starters, Geye apparently knows his stuff (or has done a tremendous amount of research) regarding several key areas of the book. The descriptions of the northern Minnesota coast and its waters, as well as of boats and shipping and the shipping industry, are incredibly well done - not to mention the characters' hardy Norwegian heritage and Noah and his wife's Natalie's infertility struggles. I'd be surprised if much of this did not originate from Geye's own life - which is more than perfectly fine, particularly since *Safe from the Sea* is Geye's debut novel.

More so than the story and the writing (which seemed to me to be perfunctory and matter of fact, but is perhaps designed to be such to reflect the characters' personalities), *Safe from the Sea* is a story with a strong sense of place. As the reader, you absolutely feel as if you are right there in the fierce winter storm with the ill-fated sailors, even if you (like me) have barely set foot on a boat. Like Per Petterson's *I Curse the River of Time* (which I didn't care for much at all), you physically feel cold reading this novel.

(Our air-conditioner broke a few hours after I finished this and the temperature was a toasty 83 degrees inside our house. This would have been the perfect book to read under such conditions, believe you me.)

Safe from the Sea is one that many bloggers love, many calling it "stunning" and "gorgeous." I'm in the minority here and am not going quite that far (it's not going to be one of my absolute favorites of the year, as it is for many of my blogging peers), but it was a satisfying enough read for me, one that I appreciated, and definitely one that will make me seek out Peter Geye's work in the future.

Jill says

Safe from the Sea is small in scope – a mere 241 pages – but it is gripping in its messages and intensity.

It begins simply: Olaf Torr, an officer and one of three survivors of a Lake Superior ore ship dubbed the Ragnarok that was lost in 1967, is dying. He reaches out to his estranged son Noah, who travels to Olaf's Northern Minnesota cabin – not to reconcile but through a sense of duty. Noah has long held resentments about his father's drinking and his inability to hold the family together after the tragedy.

Peter Geye might have turned this into a cover-up saga, where long-time secrets of what happened on that tragic night are suddenly unveiled. But thankfully, Safe from the Sea is not that kind of book. As Olaf begins to narrate that horrific story ("We had the inferno blazing beneath us, the snow squall suffocating us, seas still washing the deck"), it becomes evident that people can do everything right and life can still go wrong. Sometimes, there just aren't any answers.

"The crew? They were just a bunch of anybodies," Olaf tells his son. Noah counters: "Isn't it more fantastic to think of the guys who died as little bit heroic, as swashbuckling sailors? As something more than a bunch of yokels from Great Lakes port towns?" Olaf answers, "It's real life. In real life, there're boys from port towns."

As Noah comes to grip that "the old man's crew of nobodies could take precedence over his mother and sister and himself" – how surviving can often mean "going under" again and again – he and Olaf begin to understand and appreciate each other for the first time.

Peter Geye obviously knows the Northern Minnesota landscape, which comes alive every bit as much as his characters. Olaf's dialogue and characteristics ring authentic. And Noah – a name associated with the biblical pre-flood patriarch who survived the flood – has spent his adult life procuring and selling ancient maps as a career. The one map he has always needed – a blueprint to who he is and where he stands as a son and potential future father – is explored with subtlety and insight here.

Alayne Bushey says

When Noah and his sister were young children their lives were forever changed when their father's ore ship burned and sunk in the tormented waters of Lake Superior. Though their father survived, much of him was left behind when the ship went down, and Noah's relationship with his father would never be the same. Decades later, when Noah is grown man with a wife living in Boston, his father becomes ill and Noah faces a tough choice: should he go to his father's side? The man who shut him out and all but left him so many years ago? Journeying to the northern Minnesota town of his youth, Noah faces more than just his father when he arrives. History comes back as Noah confronts the man who changed so many years ago.

Safe from the Sea is heartbreaking and sad, but also cathartic. Noah must deal with many issues by choosing to face his father again: guilt, blame, and a deeply rooted anger. The bond of family, for better or worse, makes us who we are, and Noah is the man he is today because of his relationship with his father. This is the story of a man facing his past, for both Noah and his father.

It's hard for me to review this novel because I'm torn in two directions. First is my loyalty to my own past, which also came from Minnesota. Geye's writing of the north and the harsh winters carries true emotional weight. Likewise, my whole family is also in Minnesota, while I am also in Boston, much like Noah and his

family are parted. Though I didn't leave under the same circumstances and return often, the bond Noah has to Minnesota touched my heart.

The other direction I am pulled in is that of a reviewer analyzing a novel. It's not because this is Geye's first novel that I feel why I do, because I read many first novels, but the writing of *Safe from the Sea* didn't grab me the way I wish it had. The topics did, the scenes and places, but the dialogue felt forced, and parts of Noah's relationship with his father and wife seemed contrived. Here is a situation where a man is facing the person who destroyed him and tore him apart. I see the word "anger" but I do not feel it. I see a scene of "longing" and "regret" but do not feel those sensations. There was more true emotion in the description of snow and ice than in the setup of Noah and his relationships, and that's the one fallback of the book.

Tammy says

I'm on a roll with Peter Geye. The climate & the landscape are characters in their own right.

Pamela says

Brutally honest, raw, atmospheric, character-rich, taut with emotions that are hauntingly painful yet lovingly beautiful.

"You end up as the line in a poem, as the face in a picture in a museum. Meanwhile, your crewmates are dead and you haven't talked to your wife - honestly talked to her - in years. And your kids grow up to fear you. And instead of making it right you let it ride. You drink in the raunchiest bars . . . And you lose all shame . . ."

Fathers and sons, even in the best of circumstances can drift apart and lose sight of what is truly important in life. Factor in years of silence, a tragic ship wreck, misunderstandings, and festering wounds of survivors guilt and remorse, it's a relationship of seemingly no hope.

Noah's father is a man of few words who has become bitter and reclusive over the years after living through catastrophic storms - the natural kind and those of his own making. He calls Noah home, claiming incapacitating illness. Going home. Not an easy thing for Noah to do. He has his own life in Boston, with his wife. They have their own challenges. Besides, going home is easier said than done. Facing the truth of all that's never been spoken is even harder. But sometimes you can't fully move forward without taking a few steps back.

"A small price for memories. Broken hearts or none, we have them all."

In some ways, this character-driven novel exploring father/son relationships is quiet and simple. However, it's as deep and wild and volatile and complex as Lake Superior itself. A fabulous story that still has my mind swirling! Oh, the ending! Bittersweet.... I must note, the language is often crass and irreverent - offensively so at times; like an icy tempest on churning waters. It's the significant factor that kept me from giving this five stars. Otherwise, highly recommended. A strong four-stars.

Serena says

Safe From the Sea by Peter Geye is steeped in rough seas, relationships, and a break in the weather. From water imagery to isolated wilderness, Geye takes readers on a descriptive and detailed journey of Noah and Olaf Torr's strained father-son relationship and the past that comes between them. Set in the northern regions of Minnesota near Lake Superior, Noah must confront his father when time is running out. While there is doubt about whether his father is truly ill and dying, Noah drops everything in Boston, including his wife Natalie and their fertility issues, to come to his father's aid.

"He took off his jeans and shirt, his socks and drawers, and stood naked at the end of the dock. Instantly the sweat that only a few minutes earlier had been dripping from him dried — seemed almost to encase him — as the wind curled around him. . . . From the instant he went under he could feel the water seizing him. Although he'd been anticipating something like it, he could never have expected the grip of the water. If he hadn't kicked and pulled for the surface the instant he was submerged he might have ended up sunk." (page 134)

Coming back to town brings back all the feelings of abandonment he felt as a child when his father worked on the Great Lakes with the shipping companies. Readers will be absorbed in the descriptive detail, leaving their living rooms and subway cars and entering the wooded forest near Olaf's cabin. The wintry wind will whip through their collars, forcing them to wrap scarves around their necks and feeling the ice freeze on their skin as Noah takes a bath in the lake.

Read the full review: <http://savvyverseandwit.com/2010/11/s...>

Marita says

"It's a damn strange thing, isn't it?" he asked. "This flimsy little watch, this soft metal chain." He looked up at Noah. "And that big old boat. Steel made from the ore of her predecessors, steel they'd made army tanks from. Almost a million rivets, two football fields long, eight thousand tons. One of them made it and the other one didn't."

When Noah receives a call from his estranged father to say that he is ill and needs help, Noah feels that he has no choice but to pack his bags and head to Northern Minnesota where Olaf lives on the banks of great Lake Superior. Little does Noah realise what a transformative experience this will be.

Once arrived, Noah is shocked to see how frail Olaf looks, but the latter refuses to consult a doctor or to tell him what the matter is. Instead, they tackle various tasks and soon Noah is totally immersed in physical labour and a life very different to what he is used to with his wife Nat (Natalie) in Boston. Noah is full of resentment and has long held grudges against his father, but he does his best to help, and not say anything wrong. Between them there are several topics that are never discussed. And so they work together, eat together and marvel at the stars and the Northern Lights dancing in the sky.

However, it is not long before an unmentionable subject crops up. Then the old man, normally plain spoken but not talkative, tells him a tale. It is the detailed story of the day everything changed for the family when the SS Ragnarøk sank on the 6th November, 1967, somewhere between Isle Royale and Thunder Bay. Olaf

was an officer aboard the “Rag”, and he was one of the three survivors. In Olaf’s pocket was a silver pocket watch upon which the following words were engraved: “YOU WILL COME SAFE FROM THE SEA”. It had been given to him by his loving wife.

Olaf first relates what happened on board ship and then later he tells Noah about their harrowing experiences in the life boat. Olaf explains why Red’s fate in particular haunted him all these years. As Noah listens to his father he first feels puzzled that his father should have been more concerned about the ship’s crew than his own family, but then he begins to understand. He begins to understand why his father is the way he is, why he was often away from home and perpetually drunk, why his mother turned to the man across the road for comfort, and why Noah and his sister Solveig were left alone and bewildered. Noah begins to treasure his time with Olaf, and he learns to forgive. And as he forgives, he experiences an incredible feeling of freedom.

As Olaf feels the end draw near, he has further surprises to reveal to Noah and to Solveig who has arrived to be with their father. Olaf also has a special request, but will his children find the strength to grant him this last wish? I leave this for you to read. And not only are there surprises, but Noah now feels that there is hope for him and Nat, and he feels closer to her than ever before.

###

Peter Geye’s beautiful novel of tragedy, reconciliation and forgiveness transported me to the magnificence of the Minnesota lakes and wilderness. **Here are some quotes:**
(view spoiler)

Lake Superior as seen from Duluth, Minnesota, 2004 (Wikipedia)

Ti says

The Short of It:

A quiet, simple story about a father and a son. Told in simple, but beautiful prose, *Safe from the Sea* reminds you what it feels like to read a really good book.

The Rest of It:

Noah returns home to take care of his dying father, Olaf. The two have not been close for several years, so Noah is surprised at his father's request. Although the decision to return home is not an easy one and is not a decision his wife Natalie is happy about, he decides to make the trip back to the lakeshore landscape of northern Minnesota. There, the two grapple with their past and what brought them to this place in their lives.

Peter Geye's writing is simple and clean. There are no extraneous details to be found. Every word is thoughtfully chosen and blends seamlessly into the story as a whole. The characters are genuine and weathered to a degree, which makes them all the more endearing to the reader.

Most of the novel takes place in a cabin on the lake. Surrounded by the chill of winter, you can smell the fire in the wood stove, feel the crispness of the snow beneath their feet. This is one of those novels where the setting certainly adds to the story, but Geye manages to allow it to exist within the background, quietly. It doesn't compete with the rest of the story, and I found that the same can be said for any of the components within this novel. They all mesh beautifully with one another.

I really enjoyed *Safe from the Sea*. I found it to be deeply moving and well told.

Rachelfm says

Here's the genius of Goodreads: A reader you really respect (Lance Weller, who wrote one of my favorite books of the year, "The Wilderness") gave this five stars. I'd never heard of the book or the author, but when that review showed up in my newsfeed, I knew I had to put the book on hold. Bonus that I really love Minnesota and Lake Superior.

Peter Geye's characters are among the most memorable and moving father-son duos in anything I've read. The book is a tightly constructed swashbuckler of a tale. It's as satisfying as a 600 page epic but is extremely economical and clocks in around 250...while I read it in two short sittings it feels like I read several times that. I'll be thinking of these characters and their life circumstances for a long time.

I loved the subtle touch in handling the revelations surrounding the big tragedy at the heart of the book; other authors would give you 200 pages of hair-tearing foreshadowing but Geye manages to set the tone and the urgency and then actually deliver. There are so many lovely lines and observations about life and death just woven in as asides to the plot.

The story was as much about what happened to the characters as what happened in their perceptions and hearts.

I found the dialogue believable and setting urgently realistic...Peter Geye found so many chilling ways to tell us how cold it was. Usually those descriptors can lag, but this author creates a whole immediate world.

Mandy says

For the full review go to WellReadWife.com.

Safe From The Sea is Peter Geye's debut novel. Notice I say novel because you can't refer to this one as merely a book or a story. Geye's creation is a novel, and he is a skillful story teller. Geye tells of a son coming to grips with the imminent death of his father while at the same time trying to understand why his father emotionally abandoned his family in favor of alcohol years ago. It is a novel ripe with revelations and family secrets. Noah's struggle to come to terms with his dying father is very moving. In fact, about three quarters of my way into the book I was boohooing, and the tears lasted off and on until I finished.

Peter Geye received his MFA from the University of New Orleans and his PhD from Western Michigan University. It is obvious that he is well versed in the writing craft. Geye draws the reader in with a quiet subtlety and then BAM!- a major plot element occurs. Throughout the novel dialogue was sparse in sections; but the expositive third person narrative more than sufficiently satisfied my curiosity regarding each of the main character's back stories. In fact, towards the beginning the back story is told through a series of insanely well-crafted flashbacks. Later on, the rest of the back story is filled in through dialogue between Noah and his father, Olaf. Safe From The Sea took me to a completely foreign land. A place very different from the Mississippi Gulf Coast (where I live). Full of unusual names, a completely different climate, and a different way of life from the one I'm used to - the northern Minnesota culture/landscape is exalted by Geye and quickly becomes a character in itself.
