

## **“In that ship I realised I could die”**

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“The worst moment was hearing the ship’s seven sirens, when the boat started to tilt-up on the other side.” Claudia Caimi is 16 years old and she was on board the Costa Crociere ship, Costa Concordia, which sank near the Isola del Giglio in Tuscany, after having hit a rock. Claudia Caimi lives in Cogliate, a small town near Saronno and she attends the third year, class F, at Liceo Grassi in Saronno. (The pictures in this article were taken by Claudia and her cousin)

She was on holiday with her aunt, uncle, 17-year-old female cousin and male cousin.

They were part of a group of 11 people, 9 from Cogliate, 2 from Misinto, who faced the cruise that became tragedy. “It has been a terrible experience I wouldn’t wish on anyone. I really don’t think I will forget it, not even the details, above all people’s screams” tells the still-agitated Claudia, who came home to Cogliate in the night between Saturday and Sunday.

The girl speaks quickly, still unbelieving what happened, but knowing that she is a survivor. “We were at the restaurant, around 9 p.m.” – she remembers -. “We had just finished the starter, the waiters were about to serve the main courses. Then, suddenly, the bottles on the table rolled away, dishes and glasses fell, the waiters spilled the risotto down their fronts. Some people fell down, then that terrible noise, the thump.”

Claudia doesn’t stop telling the story not even a moment: “the ship immediately started to tilt-up, then the lights went off. Only for a while, but for us it seemed to be an eternity. People started to shout. I didn’t realise, I didn’t think it was really happening.”

The restaurant is on the third floor of the ship, the same as where the lifeboats are. “This has been a fortune. They helped us going out and we were on the deck, it was very cold and I was wearing a T-shirt, we couldn’t go back to our cabins, there was no time. They told us to keep calm and that they were trying to solve the problem. The ship started to straighten up. An animator explained to us that they were shipping water on the other side, in order to straighten it up. But then the ship started to tilt-up on the other side, in a worrying way, too worrying. Than we heard the sirens, for seven times. It was the signal for the evacuation of the ship, a sound that I will never forget.”

But the mishap does not end. Claudia tells us that she lived her worst moment when she was on the lifeboat. “They helped us going aboard, a lady with her baby in her arms lent me her jacket, she noticed I was freezing. I saw people throw themselves into the sea in order to save themselves. Some lifeboats had already left. After we went aboard ours, the boat stopped, a sudden tug. The ship was tilting-up and we were hanging down on the sea. For the first time Claudia stops, then she starts again: “In that moment I thought we couldn’t have survived. People kept on wanting to go aboard on the lifeboat, even on the roof, increasing the load. I could understand it, maybe I would have done it too. Everybody was in a panic. I wanted to call my parents and talk to them.” The lifeboat then started again to go down. Claudia tells also what she saw after the rescue. “Frozen people who were fished out of water, some crowded in a school. They ask us to warm the ship waitress’s feet up. Then, before I could call my parents in order to say I was fine, they tried to calm me down. I was in a panic, but when I called my parents, I realised I was safe.”

“Now I have backache, maybe due to the thump, when the lifeboat stopped. I have already with me that woman’s jacket and I would like to thank her. She had in her arms her baby, but she helped me” Claudia ends. At the end of the story she appears to be calm.

“I don’t know if I’ll go to school on Monday. Maybe I have to do an X-ray to my back. Then I have to go to Carabinieri (members of the Italian military corps who have civil police duties), because I don’t have my documents anymore. They suggested to me to talk, speak about what happened, I don’t know if this helps me. Up to now, it does. But I won’t forget what happened, the fear of not coming back home

anymore”.

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