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# FOREWORD



The sea has sparked the imagination of mankind like no other feature of our planet. Mountains we can climb. Deserts we can traverse. But the sea is unconquerable, incomprehensible and omnipotent. Yet the great salty deep is also mystically attractive. We can sit for hours watching the onrushing waves. The ever changing seascape complements our thinking processes. There is great pleasure in reading a book by the shore. And from Homer to Herman Melville great writers have known that nothing engages a reader like the epic struggle between man and this mighty primordial element.

Nick Starace has presented us with the story of his life interwoven with his interaction with the sea. From his childhood days fishing with his father off the coast of Long Island, to his seagoing days and currently as a licensed U.S. Coast Guard Captain, Nick has recounted the extraordinary life of a sailor with briny blood in his veins and a character as straight as the masthead. Nick's education at the United States Merchant Marine Academy, his service as an officer on the legendary liner, the SS *United States*, along with

naval action in the Taiwan Straits during the Quemoy artillery barrage and years building leviathan supertankers around the world have provided grist for many a fine yarn. But there is more to this book. The author has given us an insightful, running commentary on the events which transpired in the macrocosm during his lifetime.

Memoirs are among my favorites in the world of *belles lettres*. It is a joy to read the story of life's adventures in the words of the one who lived them. From the perspective of a historian, an autobiography is a primary source. It is evidence without the inherent distortion of hearsay. At various times in my life I have devoured the books which great men and women have written about themselves. Almost every writer on historical subjects has an ax to grind. When we read autobiography we don't have to puzzle about the writer's subjectivity.

Alas, in our time the memoirs of statesmen have been largely debased. Ghost writers have usurped the voices of the principal actors on the world's stage. Thus when we read the autobiography of a contemporary political figure we are taking in nothing more than an authorized biography. We look in vain for the personal touch, the unexpected insight. Furthermore, today's state memoirs are crafted with consummate political correctness and complete avoidance of fundamental controversy. Their historical significance is often nil. For this reason the serious student of today's autobiography looks to the writings of keen observers, regardless of their immediacy to the sources of power in society. The *Diaries of Samuel Pepys* and the wonderful *Education of Henry Adams* are great, early exemplars of brilliant personal accounts penned by sensitive witnesses to history. It is to this group of observant memoirists that Nick Starace belongs. He has lived through the halcyon

days of America's nationhood and into the era of faceless globalization where our national identity has been effaced in a universal marketplace for oligarchs. Nick Starace's social, political and economic analyses are always interesting and well reasoned. They form a delightful point of departure for generalized discussion. Were I a professor of Contemporary American Studies, Nick Starace's autobiography would be an important part of my syllabus for the senior colloquium.

I have known Nick Starace for a quarter of a century. We share a passion for fine automobiles and other things mechanical, as well as an undying affection for ships, those saucy conveyances which have allowed us and our ancestors to traverse the great waters. Nick is a deep thinker and it has been a pleasure to converse with him about the meaning of things. I have been glad to count him as a friend. In reading Nick Starace's fine volume I have come to know many personal details of his life which he had not shared with me before. Becoming acquainted with the details of his diverse experiences I was struck with a sense of inevitability that he should offer me the honor of writing this foreword. Many of his experiences have paralleled my own to an extent that I never knew. When I finished reading Nick's manuscript I felt a heightened sense of kinship to this extraordinary man.

My parents knew Nick Starace. My mother, in particular, was a person of impeccable breeding and great discernment. She was the daughter of a Swiss mechanical engineer and a Russian noblewoman. She was brought up in China from 1923 until 1938. I vividly remember her comment to the effect that Nick is a consummate American. "He is a perfect gentleman; completely at ease in any company. Yet for all I know he might be descended from either Virginia plantation owners or steerage immigrants.

That is the essence of being an American.” She took Nick’s persona as a supreme testimonial to our democratic educational system that had forged our national character, self assured, but never overbearing. Nick is a former naval officer, international executive and world traveler. In every guise his country can be proud of him as an interpersonal ambassador. Nick’s affection for the distant lands where he has worked and lived, as well as for those which he has only visited, reflects his own open and friendly spirit. My mother could not have shared Nick’s love of Japan. She could not overcome the knowledge that the Japanese had used the same exquisite skill with which they vivisect a carp when they would interrogate a Chinese civilian or an American prisoner during the Second World War. But it is good that terrible memories should be put to rest in the interest of universal amity.

A great book improves its readers, expanding horizons and deepening understanding. Nick Starace’s memoir tells us a great deal about America and the world in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond. When our protagonist begins his narrative before World War II the United States of America was a nation possessed of a democratic ideal yet firmly anchored in European culture. With an ideological foundation established by the framers of the Constitution we assimilated the best and the brightest individuals that the Old World had to offer along with a healthy infusion of African and indigenous American stock. The product of this evolutionary process was the strongest, most industrious and most innovative nation state on the surface of the planet.

Alas, in the course of the second half of the twentieth century, America seems to have lost her bearings. A healthy and unified nation state has been replaced by

a political entity, which is merely an economic system rooted in cosmopolitan globalization. A hearty people have degenerated into a mass of cogs trapped and exploited in an oligarchic marketplace. One is tempted to opine that America as a nation, as a culture, as a component of western civilization, has ceased to exist.

But Nick Starace gives us hope for the future and consequently the strength to soldier on into the new millennium. Nick's life fraught with challenges, obstacles, tragedy and triumph teaches us that we as individuals and as a society can persevere and carve out a positive future. Nick learns from his experiences and confirms the validity of the fundamental verities on which America was built.

It has been an unmitigated pleasure to have known Nick Starace. It is enlightening to read his book. I am deeply honored to have been asked to write the foreword to this important memoir of a great man with real class.

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