



Looking for a Ship

John McPhee

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This is an extraordinary tale of life aboard what may be one of the last American merchant ships. As the story begins, Andy Chase, who holds a license as a second mate is looking for a ship. In less than ten years, the United States Merchant Marine has shrunk from more than two thousand ships to fewer than four hundred, and Chase faces the scarcity of jobs from which all American merchant mariners have been suffering.

With John McPhee along, Chase finds a job as a second mate aboard the S.S. Stella Lykes, captained by the extraordinary Paul McHenry Washburn. The journey takes them on a forty-two day run down the Pacific coast of South America, with stops to unload and pick up freight at such ports as Cartagena, Valparaiso, Balboa, Lima, and Guayaquil?an area notorious for pirates. As the crew make their ocean voyage, they tell sea stories of other runs and other ships, tales of disaster, stupidity, greed, generosity, and courage. Through the journey itself and the tales told emerge the history and character of a fascinating calling.

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