

ForeWord Reviews

TRUE CRIME

Damned to Eternity: The Story of the Man They Said Caused the Flood

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Da Capo

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On July 9, 1993, Jimmy Scott's arms and back ached from lifting fifty-pound sandbags all day. He and scores of other volunteers had been working against time and the rising waters of the Mississippi River to secure the levee that protected West Quincy, Missouri. When he left the levee that day, he felt satisfied that his work would help save the community if the swollen river rose any more.

One week later, however, Jimmy's life changed dramatically when the levee broke, destroying everything within a 14,000-acre radius, and he found himself charged with intentionally creating a catastrophe.

In riveting prose and fast-paced narrative, Pitluk, who teaches at the University of Texas, offers a compelling tale of a young man trying to turn his life around and a town not willing to forget the boy's past crimes. Pitluk recreates day-by-day the unfolding disaster and traces in great detail the events in Scott's life that brought him to this juncture. Pitluk narrates the tale of a small town boy who falls into the wrong crowd and whose parents are too busy to pay attention. Jimmy has various scrapes with the law, including a jail term for arson, but when the floodwaters rise, he decides to help out and change the town's image of him.

On the day the levee breaks, the men in charge of the sandbagging effort ask him to check for leaks. He finds one and reports it, though those in charge tell him to keep an eye on it. Not long after, water crashes through another spot.

When a television reporter interviews him about his volunteer effort and the break, he mentions moving sandbags to repair the leak he's found. When the local police see the interview, they arrest Jimmy, charge him, and convict him. Even those he considered his friends turn evidence against him.

Today, Scott (prisoner #1001364) works in a prison hospice, and wonders about his family and his future. He remains the only person ever charged under Missouri's law of "Intentionally Creating a Catastrophe."

Pitluk's spellbinding tale of a town's rush to judgment is a harrowing parable of justice

gone awry.