

William Sloper's Account of the Titanic Disaster

by William T. Sloper

Ship to Shore

1984

"I walked into the palm court of the Carleton hotel on Pall Mall in the middle of the afternoon. The streets around the hotel and the hotel itself were deserted except for one group of people gathered under the shade of a sheltering palm whom I recognized as a family from Winnipeg Manitoba, by the name of Fortune who had been passengers to Egypt in January on the same steamer as myself. At once the young people started calling to me to join them for tea."

"During the trip from New York I became very well acquainted with the second daughter Alice, who was a very pretty girl and an excellent dancing partner. Soon after I joined them that afternoon in the Carleton Hotel in London, one of the first questions Alice asked me was, ' When are you going home '. I explained I had only the day before paid for a stateroom on the Mauretania for the following Saturday. Before tea was over I promised Alice to drop in at the Cunard line office the next morning and see if the company would refund my passage money."

"If Alice herself was not enough inducement, her assurance that she knew of 20 people who would be passengers on the Titanic who had been on our steamer in January."

"Sunday night we all enjoyed the glorious sunset from the decks of the Titanic. As the sun sank like a ball of fire into the sea."

"I returned to the library of the ship and sat down at one of the desks to write thank you letters to some of my London friends with whom I had visited during the two weeks I was there. A very pretty young woman approached my desk and introduced herself as Miss Dorothy Gibson. She explained that she and her mother were seated across the room hoping that they would be able to find another card player to make a fourth at bridge. Although I was not then and never have been a good bridge player I accepted to join her as soon as I finished my letter."

"At 11:30 we were still playing bridge when the library steward came over to our table and asked us to finish up our game so that he could put out the lights and retire."

"At the top of the stairs Dorothy announced that she would like to take a brisk walk around the promenade deck before going to bed. After saying good night to Mrs. Gibson and Mr. Seward I hastily ran to my cabin to don a hat and overcoat."

"Suddenly the ship gave a lurch and seemed to slightly keel over to the left. At the same moment Dorothy came hastily up the stairs and we ran together onto the promenade deck on the starboard side. Peering off into the starlit night, we could both of us see something white looming up out of the water and rapidly disappearing off the stern."

"As soon as the ladies returned, the four of us passed out onto the forward promenade deck. As we came amidship I asked the others if they didn't think we were walking down hill?"

"We found that in the few moments we had been walking around the deck 30 or 40 passengers had gathered, most of them dressed in night clothes and dressing gowns. At this moment the designer of the ship at whose table in the dining saloon Mrs Gibson and Dorothy had been sitting at mealtime during the voyage came bouncing up the stairs three steps at a time. Dorothy rushed over to him, putting her hands on his arm demanded to know what had happened. Without answering and with a worried look on his face, he brushed Dorothy aside and continued on up the next flight of steps presumably on his way to the captains bridge."

"We all took off for our staterooms to carry out the captains instructions. Returning for the second time to my warm, brightly lighted cabin where my room steward before dinner had laid out on the other bed my dinner suit and dress shirt.

I got my lifepreserver down out of the overhead rack still not believing I wouldn't soon return to the room to go to bed. As I passed through the door to rejoin my friends, Hugo Ross called out to know what was the matter."

"After trying to reassure him that I didn't think the ship was in serious difficulties, I left to rejoin my bridge companions" Standing in the shelter of the ships superstructure we helped each other adjust our life preservers while the terrific racket overhead caused by the steam from the ships boilers made it almost impossible for us to hear anything we said to each other. Shortly after we adjusted our life preservers the first officer said to the fifty or sixty passengers who in the meantime collected on the deck, speaking through a megaphone held to his mouth, ' Any passengers who would like to do so may get into this lifeboat '. After a few of the passengers standing between us and the first officer had been handed into the lifeboat by him and his assistants or had balked at getting into it and stepped aside, our time came to decide whether to get into the boat or pull back."

"Every passenger seemed to have taken a firm grip on his nerves. Dorothy Gibson was the only one who seemed to realize the desperate situation we were in because she had become quite hysterical and kept repeating over and over so that people standing near us could hear, ' I'll never ride in my little grey car again '. There was no doubt in Dorothy's mind in what she wanted to do and her mother was satisfied to go along with Dorothy. So with the help of the first officer, I handed Dorothy down into the bow of the lifeboat. Mr. Seward and the junior officer handed Mrs. Gibson down after her daughter. Luckily for both Seward and me, Dorothy held onto my hand and demanded that we get into the boat with them, ' We won't go unless you do ' she said. ' What do you say? ' I asked Seward. ' What's the difference we may as well go along with them '. Finding seats for ourselves we sat in the lifeboat designed for 65 persons for about ten minutes looking up into the rim of the faces of the passengers looking down at us trying to make up their minds to get in with us. After 19 people had finally made up heir minds and had been lowered into the boat the first officer asked for the last time through his megaphone, ' Are there anymore who would like to get into this boat before we lower away.? 'When no one else made the move toward him, he gave the signal to lower us away. Then began a jerky descent to the surface of the ocean 60 feet below. Fortunately for us the three sailors knew their business, for in a few minutes they skilfully launched our boat on the surface of the ocean without accident"

"The sea was perfectly calm - not even a ripple on the surface. For the next hour and a half we just sat there and drifted farther and farther away."

"Two hours after our lifeboat was launched, the sailors estimated that we had drifted more than two miles from where the Titanic was sinking. The ship remained until 2 or 3 minutes before she sank as brilliantly lighted as she was directly after the accident occurred and all the lights had been turned on. Then suddenly (like the house lights in a brilliantly lighted theatre just before the curtain goes up) all the lights dipped simultaneously to a pale glow. A moment or two later everyone watching in the lifeboats saw silhouetted against the starlit sky the stern of the ship rise perpendicularly into the air from about midship. Then with a prolonged rush and a roar like the ten thousand tons of coal sliding down a metal chute several hundred feet long, the great ship went down out of sight and disappeared beneath the surface of

the ocean. Then a great cry arose on the air from the surface of the calm sea where the ship had been. One of the sailors cut the ropes and divided the rugs among the women, some of whom were not too warmly dressed. The night air was very cold and Dorothy dressed in a summer dress with only a sweater and a polo coat pulled on over it soon felt the cold very much. I used Sunday night as an excuse for not changing at dinner time into my evening clothes. I had been wearing a brand new suit of heavy woollen material which had just been finished for me just before sailing by a London tailor. When I went down to get my life preserver I had pulled on a heavy Shetland wool v neck sweater and my winter weight over coat. With my life preserver I was clumsily dressed that after a few minutes of pulling an oar in the lifeboat threw me into a dripping perspiration. So I was glad to take off my winter weight coat and put it on Dorothy over her polo coat."

"It took us a hour to awkwardly row our boat to the side of the Carpathia. During the hour we had been rowing the sun came out of the ocean like a ball of fire. Its rays reflected on the numerous icebergs sticking up out of the sea around us."

"As we came alongside the Carpathia and our turn came to disembark it didn't take long for the 29 people in our boat to to be assisted up the stairway which had been lowered down the outside of the ship.

[Sloper also makes note of one lifeboat occupant to whom he gives a fake name but is really Billy Carter]

"One lifeboat came along side. One of the passengers was Willie Dalton and he had been returning with his wife and two pretty daughters from a hunting party held on the private estate of some Scottish nobleman. Dalton was standing in the lifeboat in his dinner suit with no overcoat or hat. As Dorothy had already been supplied on the Carpathia with a more suitable outer garment than my winter overcoat, I loaned it to Mr Dalton and he wore it steadily for the next four days returning it to me the night we arrived in New York."

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