

Titanic Survivors Recall the "Night to Remember"

by Edward C. Burks

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GREENWICH, Conn., Sept. 9—"It's all right. We just grazed an iceberg."

That was the reassuring message of a crew member of the Titanic, a lively 98-year-old survivor recalled here today at a memory-charged meeting of buffs and survivors of history's greatest peacetime maritime disaster.

Mrs. Edwina MacKenzie, who was not reassured by the crew member's message, and six other Titanic survivors were here to tell again the story of that icy "night to remember" when the 46,000-ton White Star liner was ripped open by an iceberg on her maiden voyage to New York in April, 1912, "stood on end, fully lit" and plunged to the bottom.

One of the survivors, 80-year-old Mrs. Margaret Devaney O'Neill of Clifton, N.J., produced some awed comment by pulling out her steerage ticket for the voyage, clearly printed with her accommodations in Cabin Q41.

Four of the seven told of continuing to sail the Atlantic afterward, although Mrs. O'Neill did wait 40 years for her next voyage—on the Mauretania in 1952.

The occasion of the meeting was the 10th anniversary of the founding of Titanic Enthusiasts of America, a 250-member group scattered across the United States and several European countries including a large number of shipping and professional people.

As the years go by, a few new fragments come to light about that night when more than 1,500 people perished in the North Atlantic. Of some 700 survivors, fewer than 30 are believed to be still living.

Mrs. MacKenzie, who at the time was 27-years-old Winnie Troutt of Bath, England, tells of being handed a tiny baby boy by a distraught father before going into her lifeboat, No. 13.

Plans Were Changed

There was a miraculous reunion of baby and mother, who had been in another lifeboat, on the rescue ship. But Mrs. MacKenzie had not known until last year the rest of the story.

It was then that she found out the name of the baby boy, and that he had died of influenza when he was 20 years old.

Mrs. MacKenzie, who is now a widow after three marriages, is president of a club for older people at Hermosa Beach, Calif., and drives a red Pinto.

She had been booked to sail on the Olympic from England on April 13, 1912, and superstitious girlfriends had brought a real horseshoe to put on the table as good luck symbol for anyone so unlucky to sail on the 13th.

At the last minute a strike forced cancellation of Olympic's departure, and she was transferred "luckily" to the giant Titanic.

In the lifeboat with another women's baby, she saw the great liner sink, one row of lighted portholes after another, gently like a lady."

Oarlocks Tied Up

Mrs. O'Neill, who at the time was a 19-year-old girl immigrating to America to seek her fortune, remembered having to reach out and help push the lifeboat away from the side of the great stricken ship as it was lowered. It kept banging against the side.

When the lifeboat was at last in the water, they found that the oarlocks were fastened tightly with rope. But she had with her a small penknife only three or four inches long that her brother had given her as a "going away" present from Ireland. And with the tiny blade the ropes were cut and her lifeboat was "going away" from the Titanic.

Among the guest here at the two-day meeting attended by 140 members of the association was Walter Lord, author of "A Night to Remember," the detailed story of the disaster from which a motion picture was made.

Meeting at the Sheraton New England Motor Inn here, members of the organization set up an entire room of Titanic exhibits—old newspaper clippings, models of the ship, photographs and fragments from both the Titanic and her lifeboats.

Mrs. O'Neill displayed the seven-inch long metal pennant that had been taken from the side of her lifeboat and presented to her at that time because her penknife had saved the day.

Titanic Enthusiasts of America, whose members range in age from 7 to 90, was formed for the purpose of "investigating and perpetuating the history and memory of the White Star liners, Olympic, Titanic, and Britannic."

The association's address is P.O. Box 53, Indian Orchard, Mass., and its president is Robert H Gibbons.

French Documentary

A French network television team, compiling a documentary of the great days of the ocean liner, has been here to film all proceedings.

And the Canadian Broadcast Corporation has a long playing record of the disaster including interviews with surviving passengers and ship's personnel that is to be offered to the general public later this year. The record, "Titanic," will sell for \$6.98.

Mrs. MacKenzie, who now regards 13 as her lucky number, recounts that she has made a total of 13 Atlantic crossings by ship, 10 of them since the Titanic.

Frank Goldsmith, now retired at 71 and living near Mansfield, Ohio, was a 9-year-old boy that night. He remembers stuffing some gumdrops like seasickness pills in his pocket before going with his mother into the lifeboat. At first "it was exciting," he recalls.

He saw the ship from 1,500 feet away turn bolt upright and then sink slowly. Then he was terrified at the thought that his father might not have been saved. His mother held him to her as the boilers exploded and the ship went down. His father was lost.

The association had recently discovered a survivor previously unknown to it, Mrs. Frances M. James of Stamford, Conn., and the tiny women also came to the meeting. Six decades after the disaster, Mrs. O'Neill can still "hear" the cries and screams from those left on the liner as it took its final plunge.

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