

## The Titanic : Our Story

by M. E. S. and E. M. E.

[1912](#)

SUNDAY morning, April 14, 1912, was a beautiful clear day, high wind and cold. Elizabeth and I wrote letters before service, remarking at the service that they did not sing the hymn "For Those in Peril On the Sea." Then read the chart and noticed we had made a run of five hundred and forty-seven miles. After lunch we spoke to [Penrose](#), our room steward, about the run and he said it was nothing to what we would do on Monday, when they expected to do five hundred and eighty.

We spent our afternoon reading, had tea on deck, then went to see the restaurant before going down. [McElroy](#), the purser, was walking on the boat deck when we took our last walk before dinner. We had a delicious dinner with souvenir menus, our steward bringing us many views of the ship. We spent our evening in the reception room listening to a fine musical program, many whom we knew sitting about us. About nine-thirty we went up to the lounge, a most beautiful room with open fire. I, having finished all my books, got the library steward to lend me Sir Ernest Shackleton's book of the South Pole and I spent half an hour looking at pictures of icebergs and ice fields, little realizing that I should ever see similar ones. At ten o'clock we started down to bed and on our deck D found Mr. and Mrs. Thayer, with whom we sat until quarter of eleven talking of our wonderful trip. We then said good night and turned in, I remarking to Elizabeth that we had but two more nights, and neither of us had had one bit of discomfort from seasickness.

I was sound asleep when at quarter before twelve I was awakened by a terrible jar with ripping and cutting noise which lasted a few moments. We both were much frightened, sitting up in our beds and turning on the electricity. Our door was on the hook and we soon heard voices in the hall so that Elizabeth put on her wrapper, slippers and cap and ran out. I was bitterly cold, and, shivering from fright and cold, sat undecided as to what to do. Our steward came down to close the port and I asked him if the order had been given to close all the ports, but he said "No, it 's only cold, go to bed; it 's nothing at all." Before Elizabeth returned I decided to get dressed as I had seen a gentleman in one of the rooms opposite pull his shoes in from the passageway. When she came in she told of many people outside half-dressed, one woman having a thin white pigtail down her back and a feather hat; also that some man was fastened in his inside room unable to open his door. He was much worried, calling for help, and young Williams put his shoulder to the panels and broke it in. The steward was most indignant and threatened to have him arrested for defacing the beautiful ship.

I had my shoes nearly buttoned, and she said "Why, Martha, are you dressing?" and I said I

should feel much safer with my clothes on and could go to bed later if all was right. She then decided to dress also. We did not hurry, and dressed fully as if for breakfast, putting on our burglar pockets containing our letters of credit and money. I determined also to do my hair and put on a lined waist and old winter suit as it was so cold. While Elizabeth was doing her hair the ship suddenly settled, frightening me very much, and I urged her not to take pains but to hurry.

Just as I was wholly dressed and she hooking her waist [Mr. Thayer](#) appeared at our door, which we had opened, and said he was very glad that we had dressed. He thought there was no danger, but we had struck ice and there was much on deck and he urged us to come up and see it, saying we would find him and Mrs. Thayer on the deck. I put on my fur coat over everything and Elizabeth said she thought she would wear her watch, which reminded me that mine was hanging by the bureau and I quickly put it on. I took my glasses and small change purse, also a clean handkerchief and was dressed as if for breakfast. We then left our room, leaving the electric lights on, also the electric heater so it would be warm on our return. We closed the door and started down the long passageway and up the stairs.

On the next deck we met the Thayer family, who seemed to be waiting for us, and started up to go on the deck when a steward called "All back to staterooms for life preservers." We turned around and I cannot remember that we ran, but we walked quickly to our rooms and Elizabeth climbed up, pulling down two life preservers from off the top of her closet. We said then we felt it must be serious if they had ordered the life belts, and we were much frightened though very quiet. We again went up the stairs, with our life preservers in our hands and once more joined the Thayer family. We quietly read the notices of "inside front" and "inside back" and put them on over our heads, Elizabeth tying mine and I tying hers. We put ours on over our heavy coats. After our life preservers were on, Mrs. Thayer suggested getting Jack's coat, and Elizabeth and I followed to the steward's room, and when Mrs. Thayer took the coat we each took our steamer rugs, not knowing why, but simply that we were there.

My mind is a blank as to a trip we took to the boat deck, when I distinctly remember being beside the gymnasium on starboard side and seeing [Mr. Ismay](#) come out, noting the fact that he had dressed hurriedly, as his pajamas were below his trousers. After getting our rugs we were in the companionway of A deck when order came for women and children to boat deck and men to starboard side.

Elizabeth and I took each other's hands, not to be separated in the crowd, and all went on deck, we following close to Mrs. Thayer and her maid and going up narrow iron stairs to the forward boat deck which, on the *Titanic*, was the captain's bridge.

At the top of the stairs we found [Captain Smith](#) looking much worried, and anxiously waiting to get down after we got up. The ship listed heavily to port just then. As we leaned against the walls of the officers' quarters rockets were being fired over our heads, which was most alarming, as we fully realized if the *Titanic* had used her wireless to ill effect and was sending rockets it must be serious. Shortly after that the order came from the head dining saloon steward to go down to the A deck, when [Mrs. Thayer](#) remarked, "Tell us where to go and we will follow. You ordered us up here and now you are taking us back," and he said "Follow me."

On reaching the A deck we could see, for the decks were lighted by electricity, that a boat was lowered parallel to the windows; those were opened, and a steamer chair put under the rail for us to step on. The ship had listed badly by that time and the boat hung far out from the side so that some of the men said, "No woman could step across that space." A call was made for a ladder on one of the lower decks, but before it ever got there we were all in the boat. Whether they had drawn the boat over with boathooks nearer the side I do not know, but the space we easily jumped with the help of two men in the boat. The only gentleman I remember seeing at all was [Colonel Astor](#), who was stepping through the window just in front of me when the crew said, "Step back, sir; no men in this boat." He remarked that he wanted to take care of his wife, but on being told again that no men could go, he called "Good bye" and said he would follow in another boat, asking the number of our boat, which they said was "No. 4." In going through the window I was obliged to throw back the steamer rug, for, with my fur coat and huge cork life preserver, I was very clumsy. Later we found the stewards or crew had thrown the steamer rugs into the boat, and they did good service, Elizabeth's around a baby thinly clad, and mine for a poor member of the crew pulled in from the sea.

Our boat I think took off every woman on the deck at that time and was the last on the port side to be lowered. Only one man went down with us; the boat was lowered slowly, first at the bow, then at the stern, and very carefully. When near the water the man gave the order to "Let her go," but we all called "Not yet, it 's a long way to the water." On reaching the water they called from the deck to know who was in command, and a man answered "The quartermaster." They then said "Who else?" and he said "I am alone." Then they said "We will send you two more men," and shortly a boatswain and common sailor came down over the davit ropes into the boat. When we reached the sea we found the ship badly listed, her nose well in so that there was water to the D deck, which we could plainly see as the boat was lighted and the ports on D deck were square instead of round. No lights could be found in our boat and the men had great difficulty in casting off the blocks as they did not know how they worked. My fear here was great, as she seemed to be going faster and faster and I dreaded lest we be drawn in before we could cast off.

When we finally were ready to move on the order was called from the deck to go to the stern hatch and take off some men. There was no hatch open and we could see no men, but our crew obeyed orders, much to our alarm, for they were throwing wreckage over and we could hear a cracking noise resembling china breaking, which we learned later was the cracking of the boiler plates. We implored the men to pull away from the ship, but they refused, and we pulled three men into the boat who had dropped off the ship and were swimming toward us. One man was drunk and had a bottle of brandy in his pocket which the quarter-master promptly threw overboard and the drunk was thrown into the bottom of the boat and a blanket thrown over him. After getting in these three men they told how fast she was going and we all implored them to pull for our lives to get out from the suction when she should go down. The lights on the ship burned till just before she went. When the call came that she was going I covered my face and then heard someone call, "She 's broken." After what seemed a long time I turned my head only to see the stern almost perpendicular in the air so that the full outline of the blades of the propeller showed above the water. She then gave her final plunge and the air was filled with cries. We rowed back and pulled in five more men from the sea. Their suffering from the icy water was intense and two men who had been pulled into the stern afterwards

died, but we kept their bodies with us until we reached the *Carpathia*, when they were taken aboard and Monday afternoon given a decent burial with three others.

After rescuing our men we found several life boats near us and an order was given to tie together, which we obeyed. It did not seem as if we were together long when one boat said they could rescue more could they get rid of some of the women and children aboard, and those were put into our boat. Soon after cries of "Ship ahoy" and a long low moan came to us and an officer in command of one of the boats ordered us to follow him. We felt we were already too crowded to go, but the other three boats refused to stir, and our men, with quarter-master and boatswain in command, followed the officer and we pulled over to what proved to be an overturned boat crowded with men. We had to approach it very cautiously, fearing our wash would sweep them off. We could take only a few and they had to come very cautiously. The other boat took most of the men and we then rowed away, the cries soon ceasing.

The sea was smooth and the night brilliant with more stars than I had ever seen. We could see the outline of several bergs and scanned the horizon hoping to see the light of some vessel. Occasionally a green light showed, which proved to be on the emergency boat, and our men all recognized it as such. We all prayed for dawn, and there was no conversation, everyone being so awed by the disaster and bitterly cold. We found ourselves in the boat with [Mrs. Arthur Ryerson](#), her boy, two daughters, [governess](#) and [maid](#); [Mrs. John Thayer](#) and [maid](#), [Mrs. Widener](#) and [maid](#), [Mrs. Astor](#), her [trained nurse](#) and [maid](#), [Mrs. Carter](#), her two children and maid, [Mrs. Cumings](#), and [Mrs. Walter Clark](#) of Los Angeles, with many from second and third cabin besides the eight men whom we had pulled in from the sea. By a strange coincidence Mrs. Cumings discovered that the man whom she pulled in was her own bedroom steward. By this time our women, Mrs. Thayer and Mrs. Cumings, were helping two of the half-drowned sailors pull on the oars, as the boat was tremendously heavy.

With the dawn came the wind and before long quite a sea was running. Just before daylight on the horizon we saw what we felt sure must be the lights of a ship. The quartermaster was a long time in admitting that we were right, urging that it was the moon, but we insisted and they then said it might be the *Carpathia* as they had been told before leaving the *Titanic* that she was coming to us. For a long time after daylight we were in great wreckage from the *Titanic*, principally steamer chairs and a few white pilasters. Before leaving the *Titanic* they had been breaking off planks and throwing seats from the upper deck which we realized were thrown over for people to float on. We felt we could never reach the *Carpathia* when we found she had stopped, and afterwards when we asked why she didn't come closer we were told that some of the early boats which put off from the starboard side reached her a little after four, while it was after six when we drew under the side of the open hatch.

It had been a long trying row in the heavy sea and impossible to keep bow on to reach the ship. We stood in great danger of being swamped many times and [Captain Rostron](#), who watched us come up, said he doubted if we could have lived an hour longer in that high sea. Our boat had considerable water in the centre, due to the leakage and also the water brought in by the eight men from their clothing. They had bailed her constantly in order to relieve the weight. Two of the women near us were dying seasick, but the babies with us slept most of the night in their mothers' arms. The boatswain's chair was slung down the side and there were

also rope ladders. Only few, however, of the men were able to go up the ladders. Mail bags were dropped down in which the babies and little children were placed and hoisted up. We were told to throw off our life preservers and then placed in a boatswain's chair and hoisted to the open hatch where ready arms pulled us in; warm blankets waited those in need and brandy offered to everybody. We were shown at once to the saloon, where hot coffee and sandwiches were being served. We asked anxiously for the men and nothing had been heard of any of them excepting Mr. Carter, who was already on the *Carpathia* with Mr. Ismay, they having gone off together in a life-boat. Watching the other boats come in we found [Jack Thayer](#) who, it seems, was on the overturned boat, but got into the other boat and not ours. He had lost his father after the women left and could not find him. He picked up young [Long](#) of Springfield and with him decided to jump as the ship went down. After being sucked under twice he swam for the overturned boat, was pushed back into the water three times, finally finding a place and sitting there till rescued. He never saw young Long after they slid over the side.

The *Carpathia* was small and so crowded. We fortunately found friends on the ship who took us to their stateroom, letting us do our hair and wash our faces and hands. At about nine o'clock or later we had a regular breakfast. From the deck of the *Carpathia* we scanned the sea and such fields of ice only Shackleton's book the night before had shown me. The entire horizon for the complete circle had bergs stationed like sentinels.

The *California* [sic] came up to us at about eight o'clock and stood so close that the wireless could not be used, but for nearly an hour they wig-wagged and used the semaphore and finally the *Carpathia's* captain steamed away with the feeling that all boats were accounted for and the *California* had promised to stand by with the hope of rescuing any people then living. But we felt sure that Captain Rostron believed that he had everybody.

No one will ever know the kindness and consideration shown us by passengers and crew of the *Carpathia*. Stewards and stewardesses worked without sleep and were indefatigable trying to give help and comfort to the rescued. Passengers gave up staterooms and everybody took someone in where they had a vacant berth or sofa. The barber shop was soon sold out. Elizabeth secured a small comb, tooth paste, nail file, sponges and wash cloths, also a buttonhook. The purser was able to give us a small inside room with four berths that had only been used as a dressing room for many years. However, we slept there very comfortably and took Mrs. Cumings and Mrs. Astor's maid for the other two berths. We lived on deck as there was no place on the ship to sit.

Two days the sun shone, then came fearful weather with fog and thunder storm so that at times it seemed as if the Lord had intended us all to go. Captain Rostron was more than thoughtful, knowing how our nerves had already been under great strain. The fog horn was blown only when absolutely necessary and as soon as it lightened the least bit it was promptly stopped.

Our meals were remarkable. Of course, the saloon was set up always twice and sometimes three times for people to go, and while we had no appetites still the menu was the same as on all ocean steamers. Broth and tea were served on deck every day. The few of the rescued stewards from the *Titanic* gladly worked in the dining-room. The stewardesses, however, were



not asked to help. We found our woman, Mrs. Pritchard, was saved, but Penrose, our steward, I never saw after he told me to go back to bed, that it was nothing, and I am confident that his belief after thirty years at sea, that nothing could sink the *Titanic*, made him stick close to the decks.

When we reached the Ambrose Channel Lightship the pilot boat was bearing down on us. Also two tugs bearing large signs of New York Tribune and New York World. Then began such a scene as I never hope to witness. In the small pilot boat with the pilot in some way a reporter had secreted himself and when the boat came alongside the rope ladder this man fought with the sailors to get aboard. It was most exciting as Captain Rostron stood on the bridge with the megaphone ordering the men not to allow anyone but the pilot to come aboard and the two sailors who were trying hard to keep their small rowboat from being crushed against our side had at the same time to overcome this reporter and throw him back into the bottom of the boat. The tugs then began their rush. One of them struck us such a blow on the side that she jarred the whole ship and frightened us badly. The men on board the tugs were screaming through megaphones, asking names and asking for stories, offering large prices for any story that would be written and passed over to them. The captain, with the pilot on the bridge, soon got under way again and fortunately we left those tugs far behind.

Our stop at quarantine was very short. Dinner was served, but no one had any appetite. When we got up the North River small boats were as thick as bees. At the foot of the Cunard pier we stopped and a large lighter came alongside from the White Star Company to take off the fourteen lifeboats which Captain Rostron had taken aboard in case of accident to the *Carpathia*. While standing, a small newspaper tug which was under us caused us some amusement. A sudden rush of water frightened us, but on inquiry we discovered Captain Rostron had turned the hose on her and she was scurrying off at full speed and I trust the men were well soaked. We were soon off at the pier and among the earliest to leave the ship, as we had been on the deck all the way up and the gangplank was put on right beside us so we only had a few steps to walk.

The family were all close to us and we quickly got away, all going first to the Pennsylvania station, where I left with George, Helen, Ned, Jim Boyd and Dr. Christie. Elizabeth went with Tracy, Martha, Arthur, Mary and Angie to the Belmont, where they spent the night, going to Boston the next day. A special train was run to Philadelphia and we left at North Philadelphia, where Joseph met us with the motor and we got to Haverford a little after three in the morning.

Copyright Encyclopedia Titanica - **[www.encyclopedia-titanica.org](http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org)** 1996-2015 and third parties (ref: #9914), accessed 24th July 2015 12:29:13 PM)  
<http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/the-titanic-our-story-eustis-stephenson.html>