

# Survivor of Titanic's Sinking 50 Years ago Tells Story Of Tragedy

by Jack V. Fox

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EDITOR'S NOTE: A half century ago, the heralded British liner Titanic sank on its maiden voyage with a loss of more than 1,500 lives. Among the few still-living survivors is Mrs. Margaret Schwarzenbach, who as a young Swiss girl made the ill-fated crossing. Her vivid recollections of the death of the "unsinkable" Titanic are retold in the following dispatch.

SOUTH NORWALK, Conn. (UPI) – Across the span of 50 years, a handsome old lady turned her memory back to the sinking of the great ocean liner Titanic and sought to recall the single most vivid recollection of that distant night.

Mrs. Margaret Schwarzenbach, now 72, was then a vivacious Swiss girl crossing to America for her first time on the maiden voyage of the "unsinkable" British ship in April, 1912.

"It is not the sights I remember best," she said slowly, "but a sound."

"It was the wailing of those left aboard in those last minutes when the Titanic went down. It wasn't a screaming, not a shouting. It was an eerie, almost moaning noise. I recall some Shubert phrase – "A wailing over the water – a song of death.'"

Mrs. Schwarzenbach, whose large home on exclusive Wilson point here overlooks the waters of Long Island Sound, remembers too, her joy when a British officer let her father into her lifeboat after he had said farewell in tears and called out, "Auf wiedersehen."

And she recalls with a smile that none of her family would likely have survived had she not been "the most seasick girl on the Titanic."

Mrs. Schwarzenbach then was Miss Margaret Freulich, 22 of Zurich, Switzerland, daughter of a wealthy silk manufacturer and importer. The trip was her reward for a fine showing in school examinations.

The first evening out everyone was gay and happy." She recalled. "But that night I became

seasick. So did my mother. We were in adjoining cabins and for the next three days we just lay in our bunks, knocking occasionally to each other through the wall.”

The night of the sinking, she felt better for the first time. She had dressed in a wool suit and sweater, eaten some supper and immediately became nauseous again. She fell off to sleep and then, through the wall heard her mother cry out: “A collision!”

The girl, her mother and father went up to the covered deck just below the boat deck. She recalls a Swiss banker friend joked with her: “Ah, Miss Freulich, it takes an iceberg to get you on deck.”

Mrs. Schwarzenbach said that within minutes she became violently seasick again. Her father was furious and told her she couldn’t be sick at a time like that.

I told him, “I don’t care, I’m going back to my cabin.” They went with me and it saved our lives. When we got there the English steward was standing in the hall and father asked if there was any danger.

The girl said, “Yes sir, there is. Take your lifejackets and go to the boat deck.”

I remember the steward was standing in the hall. He was pale as a sheet. But you know the English. He said to me, “Don’t be afraid Miss. Remember all those compartments. The ship can’t sink.” He was drowned that night.

When they reached the boat deck, she said, “two fat sailors” lifted her mother into a lifeboat and then hoisted her in alongside.

My father started instinctively to follow us,” she recalled. “The boat was not at all full. But the sailors said, “Ladies first, Sir.” Father moved back and called out “Auf wiedersehen.”

Then they started to lower us, with only women in the lifeboat and still plenty of room. One end stuck and we were hanging crazily there so they pulled us up again.

I started screaming for my father and tried to get back on deck. Other women began calling to husbands and sons and suddenly a British officer said: “Let the men in. Make haste.” I was never so happy in my life.”

They pulled away quickly from the stricken liner into the blackness of the bitterly cold night until all they could see were the rows of lighted portholes of the great ship.

We just stared at it and I remember my mother suddenly said, “I’ve been counting the porthole rows and there’s one less.”

Suddenly, there was a terrible noise over the water as the great engines broke loose from their moorings and the Titanic tilted up into the air and made a terrible plunge forward.

It was during those moments that we heard the awful wailing,” Mrs. Schwarzenbach said. “There was little to see. Occasionally you would see a match flicker as a man lighted a cigarette.”

After the ship had gone down, there was silence and then the cries of doom rose again from those left in the water.

I wanted to go for them, “ she said. “My father told me to remember I was not in the mountains. In Switzerland, when there is an accident in the mountains, you must go to the rescue. It is the code. But my father told me to remember the two British sailors in the boat were in charge. But we should have gone to them. We could have saved more.”

Not much later those in the lifeboat saw the lights of what proved later to be the freighter Californian. They screamed in unison toward the boat but it passed on.

Then dawn came,” Mrs. Schwarzenbach recalled. “It was a fantastic sight. We were surrounded by icebergs. They were on all sides and they were a pink color in the morning sun. But so many of them. The owners of that ship – how over-confident they were.”

The girl and her parents were picked up that morning by the liner Carpathia. In their boat had been a honeymoon couple – the only one of 11 newlywed couples aboard the Titanic to survive.

The next year, Miss Freulich herself was married to a young Swiss man living in New York. In subsequent years she and her husband made many crossings with their three children before his death in 1935.

It never made me afraid of the ocean,” Mrs. Schwarzenbach said. “In the last years I have made the crossings by airplane. It is not that I worry going by ship but a plane gets you there faster. And nothing is much lonelier than being by yourself on a voyage.”

Does she think often of the Titanic?

Oh yes,” she said. “It was the one supreme, unforgettable moment of my life. But I think of many more things.

I think of this flight around the world that Colonel Glenn made. That was the opposite of the Titanic. I prayed and I cried that he would make it. What a wonderful thing it was.”

## **Acknowledgements**

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