

SUNK...BOMBED...SHOT...

but the "Cat" still lives!!!

THE
TITANIC
DISASTER

As told by
Gus Cohen
(A TITANIC Survivor)



I decided to emigrate to America in 1912, because the occupation I was in (the printing trade), was in a depressed state in England.

The TITANIC sailed on her Maiden Voyage and was stated to be unsinkable. The tonnage was 46,328 tons, and I believe the displacement was 52,000 tons. The fare was £8.00 Single, and in those days the dollar was worth 5/- (more so), in all, it cost \$32.00 (what a difference to the cost today!!).

We started out from Southampton on April 10th and my father saw me off at the dockside. (Incidentally, my father was killed by a German Bomb in the 1940's) In those far off days, Maiden Voyages were not considered strange and there were not many people to cheer us off when the boat sailed. I think there was a bad omen when we started, because, as you know, shipping berths were not made for huge boats as the TITANIC, being the largest liner in those days. When the ship left the dock, one of the liners, close by, the SS NEW YORK, snapped its mooring chains (caused by the TITANIC turning round to move off,) and it drifted close to the TITANIC. However, there was no collision, and we continued on our way.

I traveled Third Class, and I believe there were six people in my berth, all comprised of English people, who eventually were drowned. We had a fairly good time traveling towards New York, and of course, we played cards and various games to occupy our time. The journey was going fairly well, but I remember on April 14th, it got very cold and I remarked to various passengers that we must be near icebergs. I was laughed at and told I was fancying things!

On the evening of the disaster, we were enjoying ourselves in the lounge of the Third Class, and later went to my berth at 10:30 p.m., to sleep for the night. At 11:45 p.m., we were awakened by a crash, but did not take notice of this because we thought something happened in the Boiler Room and we went to sleep again. We were awakened again by the Master-at-Arms (who are really Security Officers) and told to put on lifebelts.

I did not worry about putting one on, because I thought, like many others, the boat would never sink. So far as I can remember, I don't think we had any boat drill. Nobody, outside of some officers could tell us what happened at the time, at least, we were not told of any damage. At this time, we heard the band playing from afar. Realizing there must be something wrong, I went on the Third Class Deck and saw great lumps of ice, and then realized we had struck an iceberg! But we still did not realize there was any danger!

Suddenly, there was an order to man the lifeboats, and as usual, it was women and children first. As I was a youth, at that time, I had to fend for myself. I realized that I had to find a lifebelt, which I did. Now, was the time to save myself! I went back to my berth to find some of my belongings and as I walked through the gangway, I was told by some Merchant men, that things were serious, so I decided to go back on deck.

As soon as I did so, all the bulkheads were closed to keep the ship buoyant. While walking to the deck, I saw quite a few people praying and holding rosaries. I thought to myself, I will pray when I am rescued! Also, a lot of people were walking around at a loss as to what to do. As there were a lot of families emigrating, they all stuck together and were not separating from each other, because they did not want to be parted from their parents, brothers, or sisters.

In this case, I was glad that I was traveling alone, so I had to look after myself...thank goodness! I was not married at the time, but I was very worried if my mother or father heard I was drowned. At this time, the boat was tilting to one side and I realized the precarious position we were all in. It was no use to keep on the Third Class Deck, because I could see that the First Class Passengers were looked after first.

I tried to get to the First Class Deck, but was barred by sailors from going there. Eventually, by various means, I did manage to get on the First Class Deck...by then, things were hopeless! The TITANIC was at a very sharp angle and I realized it would not be long for the boat to sink.

There was no direct communication to other boats, except by wireless telegraphy, and by this method, and by Morse Lamp, the SOS went out. Signal flares were sent up by the TITANIC and the fog horn also blasted away, but, of course, to no avail. But we still thought we would have help from other boats. At the time, we knew the OLYMPIC (sister ship to the TITANIC), was not far away, going in the reverse direction. We eventually found out (when we arrived in New York), that it was hundreds of miles away, so we had false hopes!

Now, I knew things were hopeless, and although there was no panic (and I can vouch for this..although reports say otherwise) I knew it was time to really act. Not all lifeboats were full and many left half full. I realized that no more lifeboats would be used--I do not realize the reason why--I had to do something!

While holding the rail and looking over the side of the ship, I heard one of the sailors in one of the lifeboats shouting for me to jump. It was about 200 feet high from the water where I was standing. I was a lad and did not realize the danger, but I knew I must do something. I was standing near the davits with the ropes hanging down, and did something of which I did not realize the danger. I climbed on the davit, crawled across and jumped for one of the ropes. I was wearing gloves and that saved my hands, partially.

I clutched the ropes and when I got to the end of these, I still found I had to jump into the sea and was kept up by my lifebelt. After being in the water several minutes, I was picked up. The boat that rescued me had many women and children, but was not filled to capacity--it could have taken a lot more! I found out later, that Mrs. Astor was in the same boat.

We could see the TITANIC which must have been at an angle of about 30 degrees and all the lights were still on. I was given an oar, and we had to pull away fast because we thought the suction would pull us down. When we were at a safe distance, we heard the first explosion...it may have been the boilers, I don't know. Then came the second explosion...what this was I cannot tell. Then the TITANIC sank altogether!

For several minutes, all was quiet, and then I heard cries of people drowning, which is never out of my ears! Our boat picked up several men from the water. I believe one or two died of exposure. Then the bung of my lifeboat began to leak, so my job was to bale the water out. We sailed through the night in a calm sea. We were lucky, and every star we saw in the sky, we thought were lights from boats; but they were only mirages. All the lifeboats kept together by order of some officer who we later was informed as 2nd mate Lightoller.

At about 6 a.m., when it became light, we saw a boat in the distance, which we found out to be the CARPATHIA. We reached this ship by rowing to it. All those who were in good health (if this was possible) had to climb on board this ship by rope ladder.

I had lost all my money, baggage, a few coppers, etc. My valuables, which included a farewell watch from my Boy's Club (to which I belonged) were with the purser who drowned. I was only wearing my pants, boots, and overcoat! I had lost all addresses of friends I was going to, but hoped I would be looked after when I landed.

I would like to add at this point, that the orchestra on the TITANIC was not playing at the time when I jumped from the ship, because I distinctly remember them standing about with their instruments.

After the CARPATHIA picked us up, a few other liners came near us, but were too late to save any survivors. We eventually arrived in New York on April 18th in the evening, and we were given clothes and money by people connected with the TITANIC Relief Fund. Of course, we passed by all the formalities of Ellis Island.

I was taken by an organization to a hotel and they cabled to my parents in London, that I was saved. I heard afterwards, that there was a lot of rejoicing from my parents, relations and friends. They were mourning the loss of me because my name was distorted in spelling and my actual name did not appear on the survivors list. As a matter of fact, my parents thought I was drowned and did not receive confirmation of my survival for five days, until I sent the cablegram which was paid for by the organization who looked after me.

After being in the U.S.A. for some time, I returned to England and served in the First World War as a volunteer, in the British Army. I was wounded twice in 1916, being shot in the back of the head and also below my left eye of which I am blind in this eye. I was discharged in 1916 with a disability pension.

Since then, I had some narrow escapes! We were bombed twice with direct hits from German Bombs (one at my place of business), but managed to come out of this all right in the second World War. I also had a train accident and went out the wrong side of the train in the "black out", which was operating at the time. My friends call me the "cat" because a cat has nine lives, and I have escaped, very narrowly, many "close calls".

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