

To Survivor, Titanic Marked Close of Era

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By JEFF MILL
Courant Correspondent

WESTERLY, R.I. — Life aboard the world's largest and grandest ship of its time had been "a bore" for 8-year-old Marshall Drew.

Asleep in the cabin he shared with his aunt and uncle, Drew "distinctly

life people led aboard that ship — that whole way of life — was changed. The sinking smashed that era."

Fellow Titanic survivor John B. Thayer expressed much the same thought in remarks quoted by Wyn Craig Wade in his 1979 book, "The Titanic: End of a Dream."

Wrote Thayer: "There was peace, and the world had an even tenor to its ways.

... It seems to me that the disaster about to occur was the event, which not only made the world rub its eyes and awake, but awoke it with a start, keeping it moving at a rapidly accelerating pace ever since, with less and less peace, satisfaction and happiness. ... To my mind, the world of today awoke April 15, 1912."

Marshall Drew had been visiting relatives in England when he, his uncle, James V. Drew and his wife, Lulu, boarded the 885-foot-long Titanic.

It journeyed first to Cherbourg, France, and then to Queenstown, Ireland, before setting off on its maiden voyage to New York. It never arrived.

"People always ask me if I was cold, but I wasn't. I had a blue chinchilla coat I was very proud of," Drew said.

He said he was scared only after the lifeboat his uncle had placed him in began its slow descent to the water 70 feet below.

Drew doesn't remember the signal rockets the Titanic fired in a desperate attempt to attract the steamer Californian, which had been halted by the ice less than 20 miles away.

He remembers the Titanic's band playing on the slanting decks and the music drifting over the water.

When the bow of the ship dipped beneath the waves, the 1,500 people left on board had to struggle against the increasing pitch. The liner dipped lower until it was at a 90-degree angle with the water's surface.

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It was poised against the black night sky for possibly two minutes before settling back to a 70-degree angle. The Titanic, with a 300-foot gash below the water line, then began its plunge to the ocean floor 13,000 feet below.

There was little reaction in Drew's lifeboat as the ship disappeared. "Everyone was just so awe-stricken really that it was just deathly quiet," Drew said.

The silence lasted only for seconds. Thrown off the liner as it disappeared, as many as 1,000 people were thrashing about in the ocean.

"It was so quiet, and then across the water came the cries of the people in

the water," Drew said.

In a matter of minutes, the cries began to fade, leaving only the sound of waves lapping against the lifeboat, an officer's whistle in the distance and oars breaking the 28-degree water.

As the sky lightened, the wind came up, chilling those in the boats. But Drew, asleep in the lifeboat atop a pile of life preservers, was oblivious.

He woke as the Cunard liner Carpathia arrived and began to retrieve the survivors. The Carpathia had "come like hell" from its position 57 miles away and arrived 70 minutes after the Titanic sank.

Drew remembers being surrounded by ice. "When I woke up, for 360 degrees all around, there was ice. Someone took a count and counted at least 25 bergs that stood 100 feet out of the water."

The children in the lifeboats were

"hoisted up in a canvas bag and dumped out on (the Carpathia's) deck," Drew said. "A lot of kids were crying, but I said, 'Why cry? It's a free ride.'"

As soon as he landed on deck, Drew "did what any other 8-year-old kid would do: I made a beeline to one of the saloons to get something to eat."

Because of confusion aboard the Carpathia, Drew was listed as a victim of the Titanic's sinking. A book published shortly after the sinking carries that notation.

The subject of the sinking was never mentioned in the family, probably, Drew says, out of deference to his aunt, who lost her husband in the tragedy.

His aunt later remarried and settled in Westerly, in the house next door to

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Marshall Drew, 78, who as an 8-year-old survived the crash of the Titanic, sits at his home in Westerly, R.I., at a table of books that recount the night the ocean liner sank after hitting an iceberg.

remembers this thud and then the cessation of vibration." The White Star liner RMS Titanic had had a fatal 10-second encounter with an iceberg in the North Atlantic.

Seventy years later, Drew still remembers the ship's lights blazing, the long lines of bulbs slanting at an increasing angle as the liner dipped lower into the icy North Atlantic.

From lifeboat No. 11, Drew watched with his aunt Lulu as the ship tilted up out of the water. And still the lights blazed. Then, as the ship began sliding out of view forever, the most forward of the four funnels gave way in an apparent explosion.

Drew, 78, says he doesn't remember much after that. He curled up in the lifeboat and went to sleep.

In the 28-degree water around him, men and women and children cried out in fear and desperation. In a little more than a half-hour, the cries stopped. As Marshall Drew slept, 1,517 people died.

Only 706 people were saved. Seventy years after she sank, the Titanic, which, with her sister ship, the Olympic, was the first of great modern ocean liners, still casts a powerful spell. Books, articles and movies on the sinking proliferate.

More than 300 members and another 400 to 500 guests of the Titanic Historical Society will meet in Philadelphia this weekend to discuss and debate the sinking.

Drew offers two possible explanations for people's continued fascination with the Titanic.

"One thing is the 'what ifs,' speculation about how the tragedy may have been prevented, he said.

A retired New York City high school arts teacher, Drew says the sinking also marked "the end of an era. The

As 'Lucky One' Slept In Lifeboat, 1,517 Died

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the small cottage Drew has lived in since retiring 16 years ago.

Drew, his silver hair falling to his shoulders, his mouth framed by a small moustache and wispy white goatee, said he never thought much about his status as a survivor. "We never made much of it. All that came from the outside."

Marshall Drew is a small man with an intense appreciation for life. "I've been very lucky, not just in the fact that I survived the Titanic, but even more that I have been able to do things that can benefit people. I guess I do trace that back to the Titanic in a way.

"My daughter talks about karma, about things that are meant to be. Well, I've been lucky."

Sometime today, a Coast Guard C-130 from Gander, Newfoundland, will turn in a circle over latitude 41° 46' North, longitude 50° 14' West, the exact location of the Titanic's sinking.

A wreath will be cast upon the waters in memory of the people and the era that died 70 years ago today.

This year, one more member of the

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Titanic's passenger list will join the earlier dead. In keeping with a request made in his will, the ashes of Frank J.W. Goldsmith, who died in January, will be sprinkled over the site.

On that April morning 70 years ago today, Goldsmith's father put him into one of the last lifeboats to leave the ship. Young Goldsmith survived; his father died.

Today, they will be reunited.