

# I SURVIVED THE TITANIC

Ruth Becker was 12 years old when she set sail on the R.M.S. Titanic. This is her true story.



Crowded in a lifeboat, Ruth Becker (at left, with long blonde hair) stared in disbelief as the luxury liner *Titanic* slipped into the icy Atlantic Ocean.

“We could see the port lights go under one by one until there was an awful explosion. And then the ship seemed to break right down the middle and, after a bit, go down. We heard terrible screams and cries from the people who were going down.”

Thronged of people swarmed a ship terminal in Southampton, England, on April 10, 1912. Ruth Becker, 12, was among them, along with her brother,

Richard, 1, her sister, Marion, 4, and their mother. They were journeying from India, where Ruth’s father was a missionary, home to the United States. The children’s father planned to join his family later.

The Beckers edged through the crowd to board the R.M.S. *Titanic*, the largest ocean liner afloat. At noon it would depart for New York City on its maiden voyage.

## A FLOATING PALACE

“We were just dazzled when we got on this big lovely boat,” wrote Ruth one year later. The ship was 11 stories high and the length of three football fields. Once settled in second-class cabin number eight, deck F, Ruth explored the elegant ship. It seemed like a floating palace.

The *Titanic* steamed out of port and headed across the Atlantic. The weather was clear, the water calm. Passengers settled into a comfortable routine. Between meals, people played cards, read, strolled the decks, and talked. Ruth often took Richard for a spin in a stroller.

On Sunday, April 14, the weather turned cold. All day, radio operators received warnings from other ships about iceberg sightings. At 11:40 p.m. lookouts spotted an iceberg through the faint haze. It was 500 yards dead ahead. An officer ordered the ship to be turned and the engines reversed. Too late. The *Titanic* shuddered as its starboard, or right side, bumped into the iceberg, opening the hull below the waterline. Water gushed in. The *Titanic* was doomed!

## NOT ENOUGH LIFEBOATS

Radio operators telegraphed nearby ships for help. Stewards knocked on cabin doors, alerting sleeping travelers to trouble. “My mother had just gone to bed when she was awakened by the engines stopping,” described Ruth. Their steward told Mrs. Becker to get on deck. “We had to climb five flights of stairs to a room full of women,” Ruth recalled. “They were all weeping—in all states of dress and undress. Everyone was frightened—no one knew what would happen to them. But I was never scared. I was only excited. I never for one minute thought we would die.”

Officers were lowering lifeboats. There were enough boats to save only 1,178 of the 2,228 passengers and crew aboard. Women and children were loaded first. The only hope for the others was help from another ship.

On deck, the crew fired distress rockets. Mrs. Becker sent Ruth back to their cabin for blankets. Ruth returned to find officers loading women and children in a nearby lifeboat. “One officer grabbed my sister, another carried my brother into the lifeboat and yelled, ‘All full!’ My mother screamed. They let mother on, but they left me behind.



“My mother yelled at me to take the next lifeboat, and before I knew it, an officer picked me up and dumped me into a boat.” Seconds later, the officers lowered Ruth’s lifeboat, #13. As it neared the sea, spewing water pushed Ruth’s boat beneath the next one, #15, being lowered. People shouted, but #15 kept coming. An instant before the lifeboats collided, a man cut #13’s lines. It swung clear just in time.

Officers frantically loaded the remaining lifeboats. Passengers prayed. The band played somber hymns. The lights went out as the ship split apart. People screamed and jumped overboard. First the bow went down quietly—then the stern sank.

“There fell upon the ear the most terrible noise that human beings ever listened to—the cries of hundreds of people struggling in the icy cold water, crying for help with a cry we knew could not be answered,” Ruth recalled.

Near Ruth in the lifeboat a German woman sobbed. Her infant had been placed in another lifeboat. The baby was wrapped heavily in blankets. The woman feared that, mistaken for baggage, the blankets and baby would be thrown overboard.

## **RUTH FINDS HER MOTHER**

“We rowed for quite a while. Suddenly, in the early morning, we saw a faint green light. It proved to be the lights of the rescue ship *Carpathia*, which was sending off rockets. We rowed as fast as we could to it.

“I was so frozen the *Carpathia* had to send a swing rope down and hoist me up. A steward gave me brandy and hot coffee. But I could not drink anything, I was so worried about my mother.”

Ruth watched for incoming lifeboats. She searched rooms. Hours later Ruth found her mother, as well as Richard and Marion. All were safe. “The little German lady found her baby too. I never saw anybody so happy in my life!

“The women were hunting for their husbands, and when they could not find them,” described Ruth, “they knew they had gone down with the *Titanic*. It was an awful sight.”

The *Titanic*’s 705 surviving passengers and crew sat or stood wrapped in blankets aboard the *Carpathia*. No one else from the *Titanic* was ever found alive. More than 1,500 had perished.

## **EPILOGUE**

After their rescue Ruth and her family traveled safely to Michigan. They were joined by Ruth’s father a year later. Ruth went to college, married, raised a family, and taught school. She lived to age 90.

by Jennifer Kirkpatrick

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