

# Into the DARK



Jack Thayer (above) was thrilled to be aboard the most luxurious ship in the world.



**Author's Craft** You are about to read two stories about the same famous historical event. The first is nonfiction. The second is a poem. As you read, pay attention to how the author of each gives you information about the event.

LOOK FOR WORD NERD'S 9 WORDS IN BOLD



**I**n just a few hours, the *Titanic* would be at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

Some 1,500 people—men, women, and children—would be dead.

Yet at 11:00 that evening, April 14, 1912, there was not the slightest hint of doom in the air. Jack Thayer, 17, had come outside to admire the brilliant sky before going to bed. The stars were shining so brightly that they reminded Jack of diamonds. The ocean was perfectly calm. All was quiet except for the steady hum of the ship's engines and the whistle of a gentle breeze.

"It was the kind of night," Jack would later recall, "that made one glad to be alive."

Indeed, this bright and curious boy from Philadelphia had much to feel glad about. He and his parents were returning from a two-month trip to Europe. Everywhere Jack looked, he saw signs of a fast-changing world—a world made brighter by new electric lights, made faster by motorcars and powerful steam engines, made safer by breakthroughs in science.

Jack Thayer, 17, was on the voyage of a lifetime. But then disaster struck. As the *Titanic* began to sink, he was separated from his parents and lost almost all hope for survival.

# WATER

BY LAUREN TARSHIS

The *Titanic* was a symbol of all of these changes—the biggest, most elegant, most technologically advanced ship ever built. How lucky Jack felt to be on its first transatlantic voyage.

Even the Thayers, a family of great wealth, were dazzled by the ship's **grandeur**. Their large first-class cabins were as fancy as rooms in the finest hotels. There was a swimming pool with heated ocean water and an exercise room staffed with a professional trainer. Delicious meals were served on dishes **etched** with gold.

Jack, with his **dapper** wool suits and worldly confidence, mingled easily with the tycoons he met in the first-class lounge and dining rooms. He especially enjoyed his conversations with Thomas Andrews, the designer of the *Titanic*. Andrews was modest. But he couldn't deny that the *Titanic*'s maiden voyage was a magnificent success. In three days, the ship was due to arrive in New York to great fanfare.

**HISTORY  
POEM CONTEST!**  
Turn your favorite historical event  
into a poem—and win big! See page 9.

## “Unsinkable”

It was almost 11:30 when Jack went back to his cabin, which was next to his parents’ suite. He called good night to his mother and father. Just as he was about to get into bed, he swayed slightly. He realized the ship had **veered** to the left—“as though she had been gently pushed,” he would later say.

The engines stopped, and for a moment, there was a quiet that was “startling and disturbing.”

Then Jack heard muffled voices and running footsteps. He threw on his overcoat and slippers, told his parents he was going to see what was happening, and rushed outside. Soon he was joined by a crowd of first-class passengers, including his father. Jack wasn’t worried. Indeed, there was a mood of adventure, especially after news spread that the ship had struck an iceberg. The men in the crowd joked and puffed on cigars as they craned their necks and squinted into the dark night. They all wanted to see the object that had dared interrupt the voyage of the great *Titanic*.

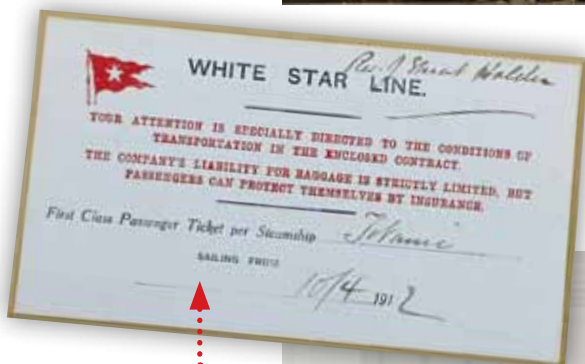
“Nobody yet thought of any serious trouble,” Jack would recall. “The ship was unsinkable.”

That’s certainly what most people believed: that the *Titanic*’s state-of-the-art safety features—16 watertight compartments to contain flooding—would keep the ship afloat no matter what. So it was with no sense of **urgency** that Jack and his father roamed the ship, trying to find out when they would again be under way.

But then Jack and his father saw Andrews



While Jack Thayer and the 353 other first-class passengers dined in fancy restaurants (above), nearly a thousand second- and third-class passengers ate in cafeterias like the one below.



**First-class tickets cost \$4,000 (about \$90,000 today).**



Many third-class passengers were on their way to America to start new lives. Their rooms, though cramped and much less fancy than those in first class, were far more comfortable than on other liners.



standing with several of the ship’s officers. Andrews’s grave expression sent a stab of fear through Jack’s heart. If anyone understood the *Titanic*’s true condition, it was the man who knew the ship inside and out.

And the truth was terrifying. The iceberg’s jagged fingers had clawed through the steel hull. Water was gushing into the ship’s lower levels. “The *Titanic* will sink,” Andrews said. “We have one hour.”

That, though, was only half of the horrifying story. As Jack would soon learn, the *Titanic* had only 20 lifeboats, enough for about

half of the passengers and crew members.

The *Titanic* was 800 miles from New York. The temperature of the ocean was 28° Fahrenheit. **Immersed** in water that cold, a human body goes into shock almost immediately. The heart slows. The skin begins to freeze. Death comes within 80 minutes.

For those who couldn't escape by lifeboat, there was almost no hope of survival.

## Lost in the Crowd

Jack put on a warm wool suit and a sweater. He tied on his life preserver and slipped into his overcoat, then he rushed back up to the deck with his parents. What they found was confusion and deafening noise—people shouting, distress rockets being fired into the air. Jack was with his parents and his mother's maid, Margaret Fleming. They were soon joined by a young man named Milton Long, whom Jack had befriended at dinner earlier that night. The group made their way through

the ship, hoping to find a lifeboat.

Suddenly, they were in the middle of a surging crowd of panicked passengers. To Jack's horror, he and Milton were separated from his parents and Margaret. He searched **desperately** but could not find them. He became convinced that they had all boarded a lifeboat, leaving him behind. And there were no lifeboats left.

Jack and Milton were on their own.

Amid the noise and panic, the screams and shouts and explosions, Jack and Milton tried to **bolster** each other's courage as the ship continued to sink. "I sincerely pitied myself," Jack said, "but we did not give up hope."

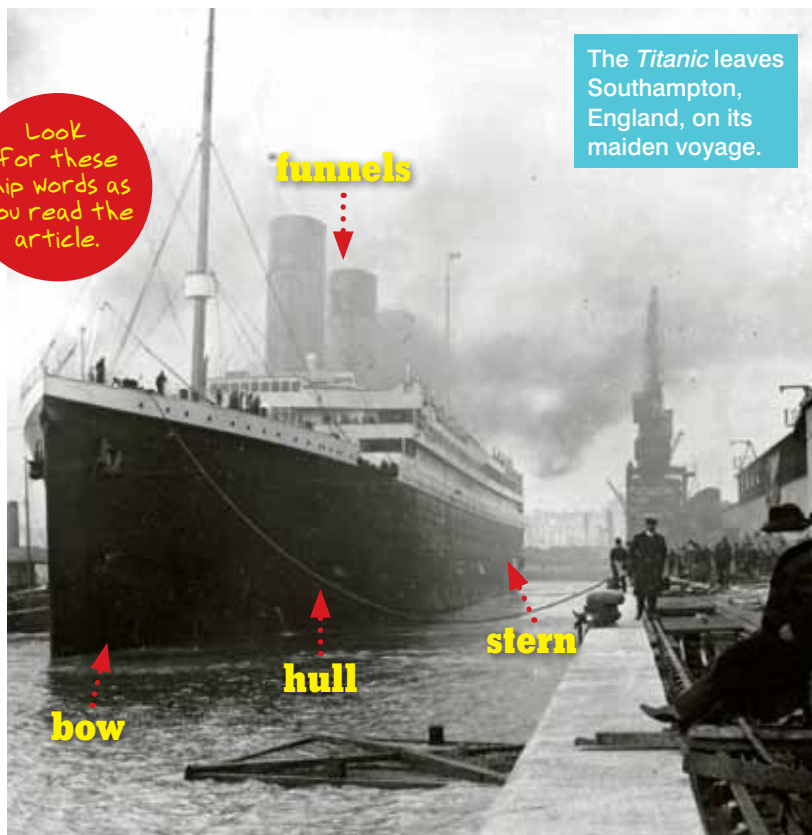
They determined that their best chance for survival was to wait until the ship was low enough in the water that they could jump in without injuring themselves.

That moment came at about 2:15 a.m. The ship lurched forward, its bow plunging deeper into the black waters of the Atlantic. Jack and Milton shook hands and wished each other luck.

Milton went first, climbing over the railing and sliding down the side of the ship. Jack would never see him again.

Jack threw off his overcoat and, he later said, "with a push of my arms and hands, jumped into the water as far out from the ship as I could. . . . Down, down I went, spinning in all directions."

He struggled to the surface, gasping from the cold, his lungs near to bursting. He had been floating for only a few minutes when one of the ship's enormous funnels broke free. In a shower of sparks and black smoke, it crashed into the water just 20 feet from Jack. The suction pulled him under the water once again. This time he barely made it back up.





*Titanic* survivors wait for rescue.

But as he surfaced, his hand hit something—an overturned lifeboat. Four men were balancing on its flat bottom. One of them helped Jack up. From there, they watched the *Titanic* in its final **agonizing** moments—the stern rising high into the sky, hundreds of people dropping into the sea, the lights finally going out.

Then, in a moment of eerie quiet, the ship disappeared into the sea.

### **“A Wailing Chant”**

The silence was broken by the first frantic cries for help. People—hundreds of them—were scattered everywhere in the water, kept afloat by their life vests. The individual cries became “a continuous wailing chant” of terror and pain and desperation, Jack said.

Over the next few minutes, he and the others on the lifeboat managed to pull 24 men out of the water alive. The group was “packed like sardines” on the boat, their arms and legs tangled together. Freezing waves washed over them. Nobody moved for fear of slipping into the water.

**Only about 30 percent of the people on the *Titanic* survived.**

first faces Jack saw when he boarded the rescue ship was his mother’s. Margaret was also aboard.

The joy of their reunion was overwhelming—but so was the shock when Jack’s mother asked a simple question.


“Where is your father?”

As it turned out, Mr. Thayer had not boarded a lifeboat.

“Of course, I should have known that he would never have left without me,” Jack later said.

The *Carpathia*, carrying the *Titanic*’s 705 grief-stricken survivors, docked in New York City on April 18 and was greeted by a crowd of 30,000 people. Jack and his mother then returned to Philadelphia.

Jack went on to marry, have two sons, and attain a powerful position at the University of Pennsylvania. Years later, he wrote his own account of the sinking of the *Titanic*, dedicated to his father’s memory.

Today, more than 100 years after the ship’s sinking, stories of its survivors still fascinate and inspire. In this way, the mighty ship sails on. 

# HISTORY POEM CONTEST!

Poet Irene Latham turned the story of the *Titanic* into a beautiful poem. Let her poem inspire you to write your own poem and enter our contest!

## *Titanic Remembers, April 16, 1912*

By Irene Latham

My maiden voyage  
interrupted by an iceberg  
clawing at my hull.

And still my engines  
chugged, unsinkable  
unsinkable unsinkable.

Alas, my armor could  
not hold: I tipped like a top  
and dipped ever so slowly

lower  
and lower  
into the icy Atlantic.

Oh, my passengers  
and crew, how I failed you!  
Not enough lifeboats,

not enough time for rescue.  
In the end, what could I do  
but sink and hide?

It's true a ship cannot cry,  
but every day I mourn  
the many lives lost  
that bleakest  
blackest  
night.



# ENTER OUR POETRY CONTEST!

Pick an exciting event from history and turn the story into a poem. Your poem must include at least five factual details about the event. Send entries to "Storyworks History Poem Contest" by November 15, 2013. Five winners will receive a Storyworks prize. See page 2 for details.

**TIPS ON  
WRITING YOUR  
HISTORY POEM  
AVAILABLE  
ONLINE!**

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