Titanic: Reporter Landed Story Of A Lifetime

BY TIM O'NEIL

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ST. LOUIS - Carlos and Katherine Hurd of St. Louis were bound for Europe on a vacation. Killing time in New York. Carlos Hurd, a reporter at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, dropped by the newsroom of the *New York World* for small talk. He met city editor Charles Chapin.

Eight days later, it was good that Hurd knew Chapin's face.

The Hurds boarded the steamship *Carpathia* for Naples, Italy, on April 11, 1912, the same day on which the new luxury liner Titanic left Ireland on its inaugural run to New York City.

The Carpathia was an older, slower ship. The Hurds traveled second-class. The weather at sea was cold, the days restful.

At dawn April 15, Hurd was awakened by a strange sensation — the *Carpathia* had stopped. He dressed and met a stewardess, who pointed to a pitiful gathering

of shivering refugees.
"From the *Titanic*," the stewardess said. "She's at the bottom of the ocean.'

At the rail, Hurd could see "women, some with cheap shawls about their heads, some with the costliest furs, ascending the ship's side." In the distance were the "sharp and glistening peaks" of the ice field.

Hurd, 36, interviewed survivors and crew members, including Robert Hichens, who was on the bridge when the *Titanic*

ST LOUIS POST-DISPATCH/MCT This artist rendering is how the German artist Willy Stoewer visualized the nightmare of the sinking of the Titanic, as survivors struggled to get

struck ice. Hurd's wife, a church soloist, conducted additional interviews and assisted with his story, which he wrote in longhand on any paper they could find. The result was the first full account of the disaster, splashed across the pages of the *World* and the *Post-Dispatch*, both owned by the Pulitzer family (the first Joseph Pulitzer had died the year before).

away from the stricken liner.

Hurd's account ran 5,000 words on three pages. An accompanying story about women survivors carried his wife's byline.

How their scoop got to press is where Chapin's face comes in. The *Carpathia's* captain,

Arthur Rostron, was a genuine hero in the *Titanic* saga, having rushed his ship 58 miles at full speed toward the disaster. But he had no truck for reporters. Rostron wouldn't let Hurd send messages by the ship's wireless telegraph, and he withheld one to Hurd from a New York editor saying, "deliver to (Chapin) tug vour full report."

Rostron ordered crew members not to cooperate. As

Carpathia approached New York on the evening of April 18, it was chased by several tugs bearing reporters, many of whom sought to lure Hurd over megaphones.

Hurd wrapped his dispatch and tied it to a cigar box for buoyancy. Evading ship's officers to reach the rail, he spotted Chapin on a tug. Hurd tossed his package — and missed. Its binding rope snagged one of *Titanic's* lifeboats one deck below. A Carpathia sailor freed it and — to the cheers of Titanic survivors tossed it onto Chapin's tug.

Back in New York, the Hurds saw newsboys hawking a condensed version of the story in a World extra edition. The Post-Dispatch ran an extra that night and all of Carlos and Katherine Hurd's work the following day, April 19.

As with any convulsive event, survivors' memories often varied, Hurd wrote. But the essentials already were clear: The Titanic hurtled through the night at nearly full speed; there weren't nearly enough lifeboats; and a jovial disbelief among many passengers turned toward panic when they realized the unthinkable.

"The glassy sea, the starlight sky, gave them the feeling that there was only some slight mishap — that those who got in the boats would have a chilly half-hour below, and might be laughed at," Hurd wrote.

He spoke to a wealthy male New Yorker who confided, "God

Hurd's Account: "The glassy sea, the starlight sky, gave them the feeling that there was only some slight mishap — that those who got in the boats would have a chilly half-hour below, and might be laughed at."

knows I'm not proud to be here." Katherine Hurd's report, running on Page 6 of the *Post-Dis*patch, noted that "the steerage passengers were more keen to sensing the real danger than those in the first and second cab-

On the way back to New York, the Hurds shared their room with a French boy whose father had drowned.

Grateful editors gave Hurd a \$1,000 bonus, a huge sum at the time, and sent the couple back to the Carpathia for their trip to Eu-

Carlos Hurd worked at the *Post-Dispatch* until his death in 1950 at age 73. Katherine Hurd, mother of their three children, died in 1928 at age 49. Carlos remarried two years later.

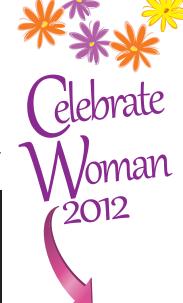
Carlos Hurd had grown up in Iowa, son of a Congregational minister, and joined the Post-Dispatch in 1900. He married Katherine Cordell, daughter of a prominent banker in Marshall, Mo., in 1906.

Carlos Hurd was a versatile reporter who covered almost everything, from the vicious murders of blacks by white rioters in

East St. Louis in 1917 to Veiled Prophet balls. He wrote about politics and government. He did book reviews and wrote many "bird lines" for the newspaper's Weatherbird.

He never boasted of his big scoop in 1912. Twenty years later, Hurd wrote a reminiscence of the event for a journalism magazine that is a clear, unas-

suming narrative. Two of his children followed him to the Post-Dispatch, including a daughter, Frances Hurd Statler, who later worked at the Missouri History Museum. She wrote a book, "Day by Day in St. Louis," and died in 2000.



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