

The Titanic Sinks Again, On TV And Movie Screens

BY MOIRA MACDONALD
© 2012, The Seattle Times

SEATTLE — We all know how it ended.

No one alive has first-hand memories of the sinking of the Titanic, which will have its 100th anniversary on April 15. The last survivor, Millvina Dean, died in 2009 — and she was an infant at the time of the voyage. But all of us have an image of it; perhaps from James Cameron's 1997 movie "Titanic," perhaps from earlier movies like 1953's "A Night to Remember," perhaps from reading one of the multitudes of books published about the disaster, perhaps simply from recognizing the tragedy that set the events of "Downton Abbey" in motion. (The wildly popular British miniseries kicked off its first season with news of the sinking of the Titanic — and thereby the death of the estate's heir.)

We've heard the stories of heroism and cowardice; of unpreparedness and panic; of not enough lifeboats; of a moonless night and calm, icy waters. And we may know the chilling numbers: approximately 2,200 people on board (estimates of passengers and crew vary), bound from Southampton to New York, of whom more than 1,500 died.

The story has always held fascination for many — and now, with the anniversary looming like an iceberg (let's just get that metaphor out of the way right now, shall we?), interest is stirred up even further. Titanic is, it seems, everywhere. Cameron's multiple Oscar-winning film, starring the young Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet, is back in theaters; this time in remastered 3D. Julian Fellowes, creator of "Downton Abbey," has scripted a "Titanic" miniseries, airing on ABC this weekend and telling the story of the disaster from the perspective of a number of different characters. New documentaries about the remains of the Titanic have begun airing on the National Geographic Channel; new and reissued books about the disaster abound.

The appetite for all things Titanic seems insatiable — remember how the movie dominated multiplexes for months in early 1998, with fans returning multiple times to watch people drown or freeze to death in excruciating detail? — and a little unsettling. While the currently booming Titanic industry is hardly the first to benefit from a tragedy, it does give us pause to remember that there wouldn't be much money, or much of a legend, if everyone on board had survived. The stories of Titanic require us to get attached to characters who we then see die; to watch them entering a beautiful ship with bright optimism, as those real people did a century ago, that turns out to have been terribly misplaced. And while these characters are often fictionalized for the screen, the story is no less real for the changing of names: people's husbands and wives and mothers and fathers and children died on that icy night, and you wonder why we're so drawn to reliving it.

Perhaps it's because the Titanic's fate seemed to be a sort of snowglobe of humanity: the best and the worst of us, brought out by disaster. There are despicable stories of behavior that night: third class passengers were, for a time, kept behind locked doors while the ship sank deeper and the wealthy were ushered into lifeboats; survivors in the water, clinging to wrong-side-up boats, reportedly tried to push away others who sought safety; at least one wealthy passenger was alleged to have bribed his half-empty lifeboat's rowers to pull away from desperate swimmers. Many of the lifeboats were launched only partially full — despite the fact that Titanic had far too few lifeboats to begin with — and very few returned to look for survivors.

Yet there are other stories from that dark night, illustrating a better part of us; some of which break our hearts. Consider Isidor and Ida Straus, for example; a wealthy New York couple (he co-founded Macy's department store) who famously died together on shipboard, last seen holding hands in side-by-side deck chairs. She was offered a place on a lifeboat (the women-and-children-first policy was mostly adhered to during the sinking) but refused it, reportedly saying to her husband, "Where you go, I go."

And some stories simply fascinate, such as the "Titanic orphans": two small boys thrust by their father onto the final lifeboat, who became the only children to reach safety without their adult guardian. (Their father drowned; their mother, who

was not on the ship, traveled to New York to claim them.) Or the cabin stewardess who survived the Titanic — rescuing a baby in the process, whose mother later snatched it back without even a thank-you — and later went to work on a second ship that sank, Titanic's sister ship Britannic. (She survived that one, too, and later sailed on five world cruises.)

Or the heroic captain of the Carpathia, Arthur Henry Rostron, who hurried his ship to the rescue and, by making all the right decisions, saved hundreds of lives — and the unknown Carpathia passengers who gave up their cabins and fed and clothed the shivering survivors. (One of them was a little girl, made immortal by a photograph taken with Captain Rostron, who famously gave all her spare clothes to the Titanic children. Her made-for-Hollywood name, according to the handsome new coffee-table book "Titanic: The Tragedy That Shook the World, One Century Later," was Marjorie Sweetheart.)

But perhaps what's driven so many to write about the Titanic and imagine that night is its most poignant legacy: its status as the "Ship of Dreams." It was the biggest, fastest, most beautiful ship ever built, and those who entered it were dazzled by its splendor. Some of the passengers were Gilded Age millionaires, with their own dreams in hand (Madeleine Astor, new wife of high-society legend John Jacob Astor IV, was pregnant with her first child); some were immigrants, thrilled by the idea of America and the changed fortunes its shores might bring. We all know that dreams sometimes shatter; Titanic is, perhaps, one of history's most devastating examples.

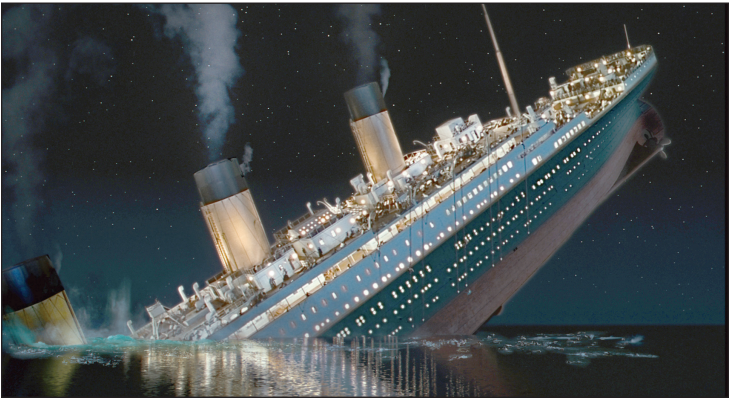
The film and TV versions of the Titanic story that work best are those that make those dreams real for us, if only for a moment, so we can remember

those people not just as numbers and statistics. Cameron's "Titanic," despite some wildly cartoonish supporting characters (stop sneering, Billy Zane!), works because we believe in its two passionate central characters played by DiCaprio and Winslet — they make this largest of stories a small, intimate one, just for a moment. (The movie's special effects, 15 years later, hold up surprisingly well; but the newly remastered 3D adds nothing of significance — you barely notice it.)

Fellowes' "Titanic" miniseries is disappointing; his characters, unlike those of "Downton

Abbey," aren't given a chance to appeal to us. They seem bound by their classes and by the series' confusing, time-shifting structure; by the time they're frantically rushing to the lifeboats, we still barely know them.

Jack and Rose, from the movie, are fictional — but surely Titanic contained a few real-life Jacks and Roses, who fell in love on the ship and were wrenched apart by tragedy. A century later, we still remember, gazing at their faces onscreen; wishing, only, that we could somehow change the ending.



PARAMOUNT PICTURES AND 20TH CENTURY FOX/MCT
The sinking of the Titanic, as memorably (and expensively) depicted in James Cameron's 1997 film blockbuster "Titanic," which has just been re-released in a 3D version in time for the 100th anniversary of the ship's demise.

hatch FURNITURE & FLOORING

Blowout!

Saturday 10am-6pm • Sunday 10am-5pm

Everything Must Go!

109 East Third, Yankton, SD • 605-665-4416 • 800-798-4663

www.hatchfurniture.com

hatch FURNITURE & FLOORING

"Your Home's Best Friend"



2012 Spring

DISCOUNT DAY

SAT. APRIL 14TH

ONE DAY ONLY

17% OFF

REGULAR PRICED ITEMS

- EXTENDED HOURS -
Saturday, April 14th Only!
8AM - 8PM

DISCOUNT APPLIES TO NEW LAYAWAYS!
No Discounts on Previous Purchases, Gift Cards, or Special Orders.
Subject to Stock on Hand. We reserve the right to limit Quantities.

THE FOLLOWING ITEMS ARE NON DISCOUNTABLE: Gift Cards, Under Armour, Stihl, Weber, Mini-Twist Bulbs, Snow Throwers, Holland & Green Egg. For a complete non-discountable list, please see sales associate. A SELECT GROUP OF ITEMS ARE DISCOUNTED AT LESS THAN 17%. ALL DISCOUNTS ARE TAKEN FROM REGULAR PRICE. SEE STORE FOR DETAILS. May not be used in combination with Bomgaars First Purchase Coupon. Resale purchases excluded.



bomgaars

What You Need... When You Need It

2300 Broadway • Yankton, SD
605-665-5694