



Barbara Anderson was just a young girl when she sailed on the *Lusitania* with her mother, Emily Anderson. At the time of the sinking, Emily (who was expecting her second child) was returning to England to visit her family in Darlington.



Ill with tuberculosis, Emily wanted to take advantage of the British health-care system to get treatment for her illness. Her husband, Rowland Anderson, remained behind. Because of the war, the factory where he worked (Winchester Repeating Arms in New Haven, Connecticut) was busily producing munitions. Rowland had a good job in the shop.

Rowland booked second-class passage, on the *Lusitania*, for his wife and daughter. Many years later Barbara said that her father could not have known about the warning from the German government. She told historian, Michael Poirier:

If my father had seen the warning from the Germans, he would not have let us sail.

Both Barbara, who was a month from her third birthday, and her mother survived the *Lusitania* attack and sinking. Their story is part of the record maintained at "The *Lusitania* Resource." Hereafter are some excerpts from that narrative:

On Friday, 7 May, Barbara and Emily were at luncheon when the torpedo hit. Young Barbara was leaning against the railing of the upper level of the lobby-converted-to dining room, clutching a souvenir spoon from the barbers' shop that had "Lusitania" engraved on it, while her mother was still sitting at the table. Barbara recalled looking down onto the lower level of the dining room and watching the people below scurry about in the resulting confusion.

Assistant Purser William Harkness helped Emily carry Barbara upstairs to the boat deck. There, mother and daughter saw people running all over. They were near the stern and Barbara was standing by the railing. Harkness scooped up Barbara into his arms and they "fell together" into lifeboat 15 as it was lowering.



The slanting deck was treacherous and Emily saw Margaret Cox lose hold of baby Desmond along the sloping deck until they too entered lifeboat 15.

The ship was sinking so rapidly that the men simply cut the ropes holding the lifeboat to the ship. The ship's funnels leaned menacingly over them and those in the boat rowed for fear of suction from the sinking ship. As the lifeboat rowed away, the ship went under, and soot from the funnels spewed all over the people in the boat. A wireless antenna threatened to drag down their lifeboat, but Harkness managed to heave one overboard and another snapped.

... Barbara remembered that she sat in the lifeboat facing her mother for a long period of time, seemingly lost. They were sitting next to wireless operator Robert Leith, who had related to Emily that he had been sending out distress signals for 14 minutes before the sinking forced him to leave his post.

Their lifeboat came across another boat with only 2 men in it, and First Officer Arthur Rowland Jones transferred some people from his overcrowded lifeboat 15 over to even the load. Jones then searched for more people to pick up from the water.

Their lifeboat was picked up by the fishing boat Wanderer, also known as Peel 12, and the survivors were taken to Queenstown.

Barbara held onto her engraved spoon the entire time.

Of the rest of the ordeal, Barbara only recalled taking the train through a tunnel and meeting her grandparents at the station. A reporter from the North Star interviewed Emily and wrote, "Mrs. Anderson looks none the worse for her terrible experience and her charming little daughter was prattling away merrily with the innocence of childhood". The first months in England were pleasant, but Emily's health soon took a turn for the worse.

In England, Emily gave birth to Barbara's baby brother, Frank Roland, on 30 September 1915. Frank only lived to be five months old and died 16 March 1916. Barbara never had a chance to see him.

Emily's tuberculosis worsened, and she moved to a separate cottage on the family property. Barbara was taken to see her on Christmas 1916, where Emily gave her daughter a new doll carriage. In Emily's last days, Barbara went to see her mother one last time, where Emily held out her arms and hugged Barbara, just holding her. Emily died on 11 March 1917. Barbara believed that the trauma of the Lusitania disaster killed both her brother and mother.

After the war, Barbara returned to the States. Her father filed a claim against the German government, on her behalf, through the Mixed Claims Commission. The young child was awarded \$10,000—as a result of that suit—but it is likely the Germany government never honored the claim since Barbara never knew anything about it.

After she graduated from school, Barbara married Milton McDermott (a lab assistant at Yale University) with whom she had two children (George and Elizabeth). Mrs. McDermott remained active, throughout her long life, including working in a cemetery office in East Haven, Connecticut until 1999. She had to quit that position when

cataracts in her eyes prevented her from driving to work. At the time, she was 87 years old.

When she died at the age of 95, on the 12th of April in 2008, Barbara Anderson McDermott was the last-surviving *Lusitania* passenger who was living in the United States. Only Audrey Warren Pearl, who was three months old at the time of the sinking, had outlived her. Audrey, who also lived 95 years, passed away on the 11th of January in 2011.

This image depicts Barbara Anderson McDermott, as she appeared sometime after the sinking.

Credits:

Image of the young Barbara Anderson, online via The Telegraph.

In-text images:

Emily Anderson, online via Encyclopedia Titanica.

Barbara Anderson (later Barbara McDermott) with pursuer, William Harkness, following rescue from the *Lusitania* sinking, online via Wikimedia Commons.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Barbara-Anderson-McDermott-Lusitania-Survivor>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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Media Stream



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Emily Anderson - Lusitania Survivor

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