

Horatio G. Spafford (1828-1888), IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL

The author, Horatio G. Spafford (1828-1888), was a Presbyterian layman from Chicago. Among his close friends were several evangelists including the famous Dwight L. Moody, also from Chicago.

Spafford's fortune evaporated in the wake of the great Chicago Fire of 1871. Having invested heavily in real estate along Lake Michigan's shoreline, he lost everything overnight. In a saga reminiscent of Job, his son died a short time before his financial disaster. But the worst was yet to come.

Horatio G. Spafford was a successful lawyer and businessman in Chicago with a lovely family — a wife, Anna, and five children. However, they were not strangers to tears and tragedy. Their young son died with pneumonia in 1871, and in that same year, much of their business was lost in the great Chicago fire. Yet, God in His mercy and kindness allowed the business to flourish once more. On Nov. 21, 1873, the French ocean liner, Ville du Havre was crossing the Atlantic from the U.S. to Europe with 313 passengers on board. Among the passengers were Mrs. Spafford and their four daughters. Although Mr. Spafford had planned to go with his family, he found it necessary to stay in Chicago to help solve an unexpected business problem. He told his wife he would join her and their children in Europe a few days later. His plan was to take another ship.

About four days into the crossing of the Atlantic, the Ville du Harve collided with a powerful, iron-hulled Scottish ship, the Loch Earn. Suddenly, all of those on board were in grave danger. Anna hurriedly brought her four children to the deck. She knelt there with Annie, Margaret Lee, Bessie and Tanetta and prayed that God would spare them if that could be His will, or to make them willing to endure whatever awaited them. Within approximately 12 minutes, the Ville du Harve slipped beneath the dark waters of the Atlantic, carrying with it 226 of the passengers including the four Spafford children.

A sailor, rowing a small boat over the spot where the ship went down, spotted a woman floating on a piece of the wreckage. It was Anna, still alive. He pulled her into the boat and they were picked up by another large vessel which, nine days later, landed them in Cardiff, Wales. From there she wired her husband a message which began, "Saved alone," Mr. Spafford later framed the telegram and placed it in his office.

Mr. Spafford booked passage on the next available ship and left to join his grieving wife. With the ship about four days out, the captain called Spafford to his cabin and told him they were over the place where his children went down.

According to Bertha Spafford Vester, a daughter born after the tragedy, Spafford wrote "It Is Well With My Soul" while on this journey.