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CN&R
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SECOND & FLUME

by **Melissa Daugherty**
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Bleeding heart

Were people always so crass?

That was one of my first thoughts when I started seeing memes about the lives of the people aboard the ill-fated vessel attempting to view the wreckage of the Titanic.

To wit: "If I were a billionaire stuck at the bottom of the ocean I would simply pull myself up by my bootstraps." That one went viral the day before the Coast Guard announced the sub was found in pieces. Ugh.

That's the world we're living in today, I thought. Heartless. But then again, the cruelty goes both ways.

As stated, other than an apparent fascination with the famous shipwreck, the passengers of the sub had at least one thing in common. They were extremely wealthy. Each reportedly paid a literal fortune to get a look-see at the giant hunk of decaying metal by boarding what turned into a water-logged sarcophagus.

Aboard is a loose term in this context. Sardined into a bathroom-size tube seems more accurate, based on videos I watched of the deep-sea craft, the so-called Titan, which lost communication with its operations center shortly after descending.

Over the couple of days various emergency crews searched for the crude submersible, I imagined how terrified its passengers must be at the thought of running out of oxygen. I was especially concerned for the 19-year-old who'd gone with his dad. I couldn't stop thinking about him—just a kid.

Being stuck next to a century-old underwater graveyard is the stuff of nightmares. In that context, it doesn't matter whether you're a billionaire or a pauper. The ocean doesn't care about one's power, fame or fortune. That was true when the captain of the Titanic cruised the North Atlantic on a moonless night, subsequently running into a massive iceberg, albeit the majority of rich passengers got the lifeboats. And, sadly, it's true in the case of the aforementioned mini sub, a vessel of highly questionable soundness, according to myriad reports.

After four days without a trace of the craft, authorities found what was left of the Titan not far from the shipwreck. They surmised that a "catastrophic implosion" had occurred, likely not long after having launched, killing its passengers and their captain instantly.

I wouldn't think of making light of their demise, and I certainly don't think they deserved to die, but I get why people are disgusted. The trip cost \$250,000 per passenger, a grotesque amount to satisfy morbid curiosity.

Indeed, if you ask me, there's something a little ghoulish about an obsession with the Titanic. And while I realize people are free to spend their money however they see fit, using obscene amounts for a high-risk adventure is an invitation for criticism.

Thing is, in this time of historic income inequality, the general public is over such displays of wealth. And there are just too many in our faces every day, like American oligarch Jeff Bezos' frequently photographed \$500 million superyacht.

People are fed up with the fact that wages haven't kept pace with inflation, that CEO salaries are on average 400 times larger than those of their rank and file employees, and that Congress hasn't raised the minimum wage since 2009. Eventually, something's got to give in this absurdist neo-Gilded Age.

So, yeah, I can understand how it would be difficult to muster sympathy for a handful of dead billionaires when you're struggling to put food on your table. Still, the "eff around and find out" mentality—the lack of regard for these people and therefore their grieving families—is just, well, a little too cold for my warm bleeding heart.

Melissa Daugherty is editor-at-large for the Chico News & Review