

World Cruise Part 1: Georgia to American Samoa

The World Cruise

Part 1: Georgia to Pago Pago, American Samoa

Miles Traveled this leg: 11,998

Monday, January 9, 2006

Dateline: Gainesville, Georgia

My husband, Gary, and I started our adventure in Gainesville, Georgia at Latitude 34.17 degrees North, and Longitude 83.53 degrees West at 5:00 a.m. in the morning, when of course our personal positions were mostly horizontal and snoring as the alarm went off. We had long dreamed of a trip around the world, but of course when we were still working, our employers more or less expected us to show up every day, and so it was a dream postponed until retirement, and we wasted little time in booking it once that occurred. We had a limo pick us up at 6:00 a.m. and were anticipating seeing our neighbors outside, standing at the end of their respective driveways waving white hankies to see us off, but it was quite dark out and we could easily have missed them. We had an uneventful flight, which is always the best kind, and flew to New York City with our 8 bags of "essential stuff" – 2 checked and 2 carry on apiece. We had hoped Delta would be forgiving and excuse the overweight bags, but this was not to be. We had to pay an extra \$25 apiece for 3 of the 4, and the 4th was so close, the skycap at curbside gave us a break.

Dateline: Pier 92, New York, NY

Latitude at New York, 40.45 degrees North, Longitude 74.0 degrees West.



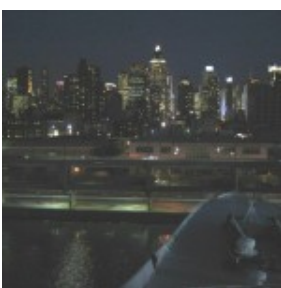
QE2 – An
Iconic Luxury
Liner

We arrived in New York to find a mild winter day and were taken to our ship, the Queen Elizabeth 2. Although seasoned travelers that we perceive ourselves to be, we still both uttered a simultaneous “wow” as we pulled up to the dock. The ship was quite regal, in her berth at Pier 92 on the Hudson River in Manhattan. This is her 24th World Cruise and will be the last time she sails from Pier 92. Future cruises will be from a new dock in Brooklyn, but somehow this will not be the same. This is a cruise of tradition and nostalgia for the luxury of a bygone era.



The Start of a Great Adventure

Our scheduled departure of 4:45 was moved to 6:00 p.m. since we were still taking on fuel at departure time. As it turned out, this was actually good since we were able to see the lights of the city blink on and sparkle as we cruised by. New York is one of those cities that seem to look more glamorous in the dark. (Like those women in the country song, "I Never Went to Bed with an Ugly Woman, but I Sure Woke Up with Some".) Our trip downriver and through New York Harbor was the first of many "goosebumps moments". We were bundled up and out on deck so as not to miss any of it. We had our escort of two tugboats, but we also had a New York Harbor Fireboat with all five onboard pumps shooting jets of water high into the



Leaving the Manhattan Skyline Behind

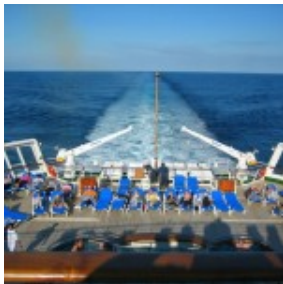
air saluting our departure. The captain acknowledged the fireboat with several blasts from the ship's horn, which for some reason is called a whistle. With the glittering lights to our port and Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty to

starboard, it was definitely misty-eyed moment. Now this would seem a real nostalgic time, leaving America's shores for a long journey, but we were saved from outright blubbing by the knowledge that we would be in Florida with all the snowbirds in two days' time, and besides a gourmet dinner awaited us.

Tuesday, January 10, 2006

Dateline: Atlantic Ocean

Position at Noon EST Latitude 33 degrees North, 74.9 degrees West, 155 miles east of Cape Fear, NC



Our First Day
at Sea Off the
North Carolina
Coast

Today was an "at sea" day so it was time to put our much talked about and little acted upon intensive exercise program into effect. Ten laps around the boat deck are equal to 2 miles so we donned our "tennies" and shorts and walked briskly around. It was quite breezy, but warm enough to shed jackets and sweatpants after 3 laps. Given the ratio of anticipated calorie intake to calories burned, we think we may have to up our distance to 400 laps per day. So far the clothes will still zip, and the shirt buttons will still button, but there

are a lot of miles and a lot of food between us and the finish line. We are prepared to move to all lycra formal wear by mid-cruise unless we are able to figure out this metabolism thing.



A Nice Welcome
in Our
Stateroom

We did a lot of exploring of the ship, between our meals, naps and reading. The QE2 was built in Scotland and made her maiden voyage in 1969. She is 963 feet long and has a beam of 105 feet so there's not much pitching and yawing going on at sea (at least so far, although two of us occasionally do some individual pitching and yawing after a few cocktails.) Gross tonnage is 70,327 tons (of course at the end of the cruise with all the passengers porking it up at the Midnight Buffet, this could increase substantially). Full capacity is 1800 passengers, but we are carrying around 1600. All rooms are full since some passengers are traveling solo. Just over 600 are American, with slightly fewer UK residents. The only other nationality of any size is about 100 Germans. Approximately 1/3 of the passengers on board will do the full world cruise. The demographics of passengers are overwhelmingly Caucasians who are old to very old with a scattering of partly old. Youngsters like Gary and me are so rare as to be an endangered species, especially those of the high mobility persuasion. However this in no way cramps our style and actually has several advantages. E.G., there is always plenty of room in the bars and lounges after 8:00 p.m.

and the stairwells, unlike the elevators, are never crowded. The crew to passenger ratio is 1:1.5, so as you can imagine, the service is excellent. For those interested in such things, the ship has 9 B&W diesel engines, 5 propellers which are each 6 meters in diameter and a top cruising speed of 32 knots, which according to QE2 propaganda makes her faster than the QM2 which is touted as the fastest in the world. We typically cruise closer to 28 knots on long stretches.

Today's activities included getting registered for the Internet (they have wireless, but there is no free lunch here. You have to use a logon ID which is associated with your room number). I take it their Internet Service is as good a profit center as the casino since they charge anywhere from 30 to 50 cents a minute depending on which package you buy. We think we shall defeat the system, however, by using Internet Cafes when in port. Other activities included signing up for some of the tours we wanted to make sure we could get on (Petra in Jordan, Taj Mahal in India, Kyoto, Japan to name a few) More on these later. We also had to work in 3 meals, naps, a movie, reading and catching up on email. Gary also played bingo and in a poker tournament. He was aced out by a little old lady at bingo. He won a T-shirt at poker with the same little old bingo lady snagging all the cash there too. What a grueling schedule! We'll have to get some rest soon.

Wednesday, January 11, 2006

Dateline: Ft. Lauderdale, FL

Latitude at Ft. Lauderdale 26.05 degrees North, Longitude 80.06 degrees West.

When we awoke (crack of 8:30) the ship was already docked so we did our 10 laps, had breakfast, showered and went ashore. We didn't plan any activities for today except shopping for some special items. Many of our shipmates headed to the Galleria Mall, but we hopped in a cab and headed for the liquor store and a grocery store for wine, booze, diet Coke and an extension cord. We have a small refrigerator in our room and decided we should do our own sunset cocktails (more money for the Internet that way). The extension cord is to accommodate the various appliances we brought that require 110V and there are only two outlets in our room on either side of the bed. However, this minor inconvenience was easily solved with the \$3.00 extension cord. We had lunch on board (more on meals later) and spent the afternoon lolling about on deck. We left around 5:30, delayed this time by arriving passengers who weren't arriving on time, but again, it gave us a chance to enjoy our wine on the sun deck and watch the comings and goings in Port Everglades. We loosed our lines and headed out to sea just about sunset for our run to Curacao.

Thursday, January 12, 2006

Dateline: Bahamas Banks

Position at Noon, EST 21.5 degrees North, 76.5 degrees West, 15 miles off the coast of Cuba (no sign of Fidel, but we can see his mountains)



Life is Good at Sea

Today was another day at sea and we observed our sea routine – eat breakfast, do our two miles, find a good deck chair and relax until lunch. Then our paths diverged since Gary decided to attend a few special events. He attended a lecture on Astronomy which he says put him to sleep, a lecture on Curacao which he said was interesting, and then he played bingo with a gaggle of little old ladies and suffered a serious drubbing, as the Brits like to say. It was so serious, he had to drown his sorrows at a wine tasting. I believe I was in the old napping, reading rut for the afternoon, but I did take time to build my address book in Webmail so I could send my travelogue out easily (if not quickly, given the data speeds on board).

But there are always the deck chairs in which to lounge while you wait. The QE2 had the old teak chairs that have foot rests and really comfy cushions. The crew puts them out every morning and puts them away every evening. They also have some of the dreadful plastic ones in the pool area, but these are a poor second choice for those of us who spend enough time lounging to deem ourselves expert in these matters. By the way I don't think I ever used the word "dreadful" before coming on this cruise. I must be going native. The next thing you know I'll be saying "lovely" instead of "great" – but the language barrier – that's another story. It's true everyone speaks English, but those accents and some of those expressions take some getting used to. You never hear things like "hunker down", "fixing to" or "git 'er done" around here since there aren't many "bubbas" on board.

Friday, January 13, 2006

Dateline: Caribbean Sea

Position 16.2 degrees North, 72.9 degrees West, 110 Miles south of Haiti

Today was another day at sea so our routine is somewhat the same, but somehow is never dull. We did mix in a movie in the ship's theater to our usual reading, napping routine. I also have been working on a Sudoku puzzles. They tend to drive me crazy (which is a fairly short trip), but I can't quite leave this one unsolved. I seem to get a lot of mileage from it since I haven't solved it in almost a whole week. I eventually abandoned the effort – it's too much like work.

Rather than go on and on about napping and reading, fascinating though it may be, let me write briefly about service on board. We had the good fortune to be upgraded to the next level above what we paid for, which gives us dining privileges in a truly excellent restaurant. Unlike many other cruise lines, Cunard continues to firmly embrace the class system. To put it into perspective, out of 1600 passengers, approximately 1,000 dine in two sittings in the Mauretania Dining Room. (these would be the common folk). Out of the remaining 600, approximately 300 dine in the Caronia Grill, which is the level for which we paid (these would be the merchant class) and the remaining 300 are spread over 3 really intimate restaurants with truly 5 star service and gourmet menus (these would be the nobility) Since we were upgraded to this level far above our "station", we have to try to blend

with the gentry. I must confess that we haven't achieved the true pinnacle – that would be the Royalty – those Highnesses who dine in the Queen's Grill. However, we are allowed Queen's lounge privileges where have elbow-rubbing privileges with Royalty and, we can look into their windows as they dine – sort of like in Elizabethan times when courtiers would go to the palace to watch the Queen dine. I'll provide more details later about the actual food which is fantastic even by my nit-picky standards. As for Gary, he never met a meal he didn't like, so his fantastic and mine sometimes are not the same.

Since we have been so fortuitously elevated to the "Nobility" we found it necessary to put our egalitarian leanings aside and play the role of Duke and Duchess to match the treatment we are receiving. We have a reserved table for two for every meal with no fewer than 4 waiters buzzing about at any given time. The china is Wedgwood, the silver is Sheffield, the crystal is Waterford. We don't have to take our meals there, but we are so spoiled by all the folderol, we can't enjoy lunch anymore without the sterling silver chargers, snowy linen tablecloths and napkins folded a different way at every meal, not to mention the little crumb removing thingies that I don't know the proper name of. (You know the little things they rake crumbs off the table with? I mean a Duchess should know these things) Also when we dine with the masses, we find no one shows us to our table and offers us a wine list. All we can say is that we hope the Red Neck Yacht Club of Lake Lanier will take note of these fine touches for our upcoming summer outings. We can't help but wonder who will bring the cucumber sandwiches with the crusts removed? Who will be making the hand dipped chocolates? Who will unfold our napkins for us?

Seriously speaking, I would say the service on board compares

to the best Ritz Carlton or Four Seasons. Cunard calls it White Star Service, and like the Ritz they have a list of rules posted to which all staff adhere. And, speaking of adhering to the rules, being the Duke and Duchess also requires we maintain a certain level of decorum which, as you know, is not at all natural for us. We and only hope we are not found out by those born to the silver spoon.

Saturday, January 14, 2006

Dateline: Willemstad, Curacao, Dutch Antilles

Latitude at Willemstad, 12.06 degrees North, Longitude 68.56 degrees West



We docked around 8:00 a.m. this morning and would be in port until 5:00 p.m. Since Gary and I had been here a few times before (although it was in the late 70's), we decided to free lance. The island has changed a lot in 30 years – 3 cruise ships in port, small shops, sidewalk cafes everywhere, a lot of renovation taking it the way of the US Virgin Islands. It is not as commercial as St. Thomas today, but more like the St. Thomas of 30 years ago. Curacao is one of 3 islands in this section of the Dutch Antilles – Aruba and Bonaire are the other two. The Netherlands also has 3 other islands further north in the Caribbean – St. Maarten, Saba and St. Eustatia.



Musicians on the Streets of Curacao

The town of Willemstad has retained, and even improved on with extensive renovation, its traditional Dutch charm. The structures are reminiscent of Amsterdam (tall and narrow), but are painted in rich pastels rather than earth tones. We were told that originally the buildings were all painted white to reflect the heat of the sun, but that one of the governors had severe migraine headaches exacerbated by the glare of hot sun on white stucco, so he decreed pastels to be law. Curacao (the Brits call it Cure-Ah-Sew, and the Americans and the locals call it Coor-A-Sow) has a large natural harbor and a huge Shell refinery. Since the island is only 35 miles off the coast of Venezuela, it's a natural place to refine and export their oil. In addition to the architecture, another point of interest is the Floating Market. The climate in Curacao is too dry to farm, so farmers from Venezuela bring over all sorts of produce and sell it from their boats (using the term loosely – they hardly look seaworthy.)



At the

Floating Market

We walked around the town, admired jewels (me more so than Gary) in the local shops, bought some limes from the Venezuelans for mix-it-ourselves gin and tonics, bought a hand-made mask for our collection at home, checked email at an Internet Café, and had lunch on the waterfront before returning to the ship. It seemed no one in Willemstad recognized the Duke and Duchess and gave us our due so we were glad to return to the QE2 where white gloved waiters serving afternoon tea welcomed us back with just the right touch of deference (i.e. stopping just short of sucking up). We watched our departure



The QE2 Docked
in Curacao

from Curacao shortly after 5:00 on the boat deck promenade as we sailed off into the sunset heading for Panama, bidding *Ciao* to Curacao, as a Duke or Duchess might say – (although I was well into adulthood before I knew it was pronounced “chow” like the dog or the dog food).

Sunday, January 15, 2006

Dateline: Caribbean Sea

Position at Noon Atlantic Standard Time, Latitude 11.32 degrees North, Longitude 74.56 degrees West, 25 miles North of Baranquilla, Columbia

Today was another full day at sea traveling west across the Caribbean Sea to the eastern entrance to the Panama Canal, which actually faces north. We had a leisurely day today (another one), more eating, drinking, reading, napping, playing cards, etc. and of course we did our laps on deck. We are traveling with the wind now so there is no sea breeze to speak of, so it is quite warm outside on deck when walking briskly, so we've resolved to walk in the late afternoon when it's cooler.

Since meal taking seems to consume up to 4 hours of our day, it seems appropriate to spend a few lines on food and food service. It doesn't have to take all that long since we could always grab a quick bite in a restaurant called the Lido, but we've grown accustomed to the coddling by the staff in our own restaurant, the Britannia, and we get downright snippy at the thought of having to stand in line for food. We're going to milk this Duke and Duchess gig for as long as we can. I also should take a moment to identify the "crumb raker thingy" mentioned earlier. One our wait staff tells me it is called a "crumber", although I have it on good authority that Fuller Brush has this product advertised as a crumb scraper. I'll have to get one for use at home, if I can get Gary to figure out how to run the thing. Anyway, back to the food – it's really, really good and is always well-presented, and what's supposed to be hot is hot and what's supposed to be cold is cold. I'm sure "Jimmy" our maitre'd would order lashes applied

to any wait staff who failed to ensure appropriate temperatures. There are reportedly 120 chefs on board, each with several sous chefs/assistants .

Breakfast in the Britannia is always from the menu and essentially the same, but again, comparable to a 5 Star hotel's restaurant. Juices are freshly squeezed, bread and pastries are freshly baked and there is a selection of hot and cold cereals (they even offer grits here), as well as omelets, eggs any style, all sorts of breakfast meats, and all sorts of fresh fruit including raspberries, blackberries, mango, etc. They also offer pancakes and waffles, but alas not real maple syrup so in that regard they don't have a thing on Waffle House. My only other disappointment here is I regret to disclose that they have inferior peanut butter – too dry – but I'll just have to learn to cope.

Lunch is a full blown meal with a different menu each day with appetizer, soup, salad (served American style before the entrée or Continental style after the entrée, depending on your preference), entrée and dessert. Each menu offers 6-8 appetizers, 2-3 soups and salads, 6 entrées, and 4-5 desserts. Plus if you want anything else, just ask and you will receive if it's on board. In fact our assistant maitre'd (Sanjay) and our wine steward (Balu) are both from India and they frequently order selected Indian delights for Gary as a side dish (samosas, Chicken Masala, and other curry dishes.) Something about Gary just makes people want to feed him.

Dinner is beyond full blown with all of the above, plus a cheese course. Gary has had a different soup every day and reports them all to be excellent. Of course he reports everything he has eaten as excellent, with some he admits,

more excellent than others.



Sunset at Sea

The wine cellars on board are really first rate with an outstanding selection. The wine list is more the size of a wine book – novel length. We are told that the ship serves 1,000 bottles of wine a day. We are only drinking 1 or 2, so I don't know who all those other heavy consumers are. If we don't finish a bottle, they will re-cork it for us to have at our next meal (except when the next meal is breakfast – our rule, not theirs). As I write, I think I smell the Pork Cutlet stuffed with Stilton and Cheddar, served with Cider Gravy and Roasted Apple Slices wafting down the corridor. Dinner is served.

Monday, January 16, 2005

Dateline: Panama Canal, Gatun Locks

**Position at Noon, Eastern Standard Time, 9.11 degrees North,
79.5 degrees West**



The Panama Canal

Today we bounded out of bed really early (early for us anyway, not for working people) at 6:00 a.m. to watch our approach to the entrance to the Panama Canal, (a.k.a. The Big Ditch). At only 9 degrees from the equator and with the ship moving very slowly, it was already pretty steamy on deck. Per Panamanian law, we took on a pilot for the entire journey through the canal, a distance of 50 miles, and learned that this is one of the few instances where the captain of a vessel surrenders the helm to a non-crew member. The entire transiting process took about 7 hours, and then there we were in a totally different ocean. The canal is



A Tight Squeeze in the Gatun Locks

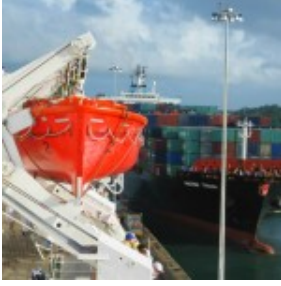
made up of 3 sets of locks with two chambers each, a man made lake and a "cut" which is a narrow canal. We were in the first locks with a giant container ship in the other chamber going the same direction we were. Reservations are available for a

limited number of ships and are made as much as a year in advance. Big ships typically go through in the morning. Smaller vessels typically "queue" up and go in as space is available. The first locks are called the Gatun locks and there are a series of 3 that raise the ship approximately 85 feet to Gatun Lake. This is a man made lake created from a river that was flooded to save an



Entering Gatun
Lake After
Clearing the
Gatun Locks

enormous amount of manual labor. Ships follow the old river channel which the dam has made deep enough to accommodate them. The locks themselves are 108 feet wide and 1,000 feet long. At 105 feet wide, QE2 fits in the locks with an extra 3 feet total on both sides to spare, and then at 963 feet long, we have a whopping 37 feet to spare length-wise. From the lake we entered the Gaillard Cut (also called the Culebra Cut). This cut was originally only 275 feet wide, but was widened to 460 feet in 1963 which allows large ships to pass each other. On the Cut we passed only one village, Gamboa, and also crossed the



Ships Going 2 by 2 through the Locks

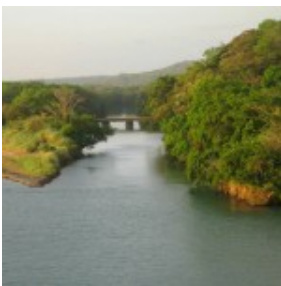
Continental Divide. We also crossed a river which provides all the water to the Canal and Gatun Lake, and in fact, the entire Canal is fresh water. From the Cut, we entered the Pedro Miguel Locks (it is only 1 lock) to start our descent toward the Pacific and then proceeded to the Miraflores Locks, comprised of 2 locks to take us to sea level. From there we entered the Pacific and anchored just off Panama City where we took on fuel from a tanker.

The Canal is now administered solely by Panama, turned over by the US in 1999, and it is a great economic boon to them. Ships pay tolls based on weight (by cash or bank transfer, no checks, no AMEX) based on weight. A large cruise ship will pay in the neighborhood of \$250k per transit. Despite the seemingly astronomical cost, it is still more cost effective than going around Cape Horn which typically takes 2 weeks. The cheapest transit cost is reportedly \$36.00 for a swimmer who transited the canal in 10 days in 1928.



A Mountain Cut Away to Make the Canal

The Panama Canal was started in 1904 and finished in 1914. The most sophisticated equipment they had back then were steam shovels. Most of the workers came from the West Indies, primarily from Barbados and neighboring islands. They did use dynamite, but often with disastrous results since they didn't have a lot of technical knowledge in those days. The survivors of the dynamiting apparently benefited from a lot of on-the-job training. The original attempt to dig a canal was made by the French in 1894. They had just successfully completed the Suez Canal, but the principles applied to that project, did not translate well in the



The French's Failed Attempt at the Canal Dig

isthmus of Panama, mainly due to topography. In Suez they were working with sand at sea level. In Panama they proposed

digging a sea-level channel fifty miles long through a small mountain range. They would have to dig down 85 feet on over half the isthmus just to get to sea level and then dig another 30 to 40 feet to create a canal that would accommodate a ship's keel. Plus this would need to be about 100 feet wide. Now they didn't have calculators in those days, but still it shouldn't have taken them 18 miles of digging (which is what they accomplished) to figure out that this is a really bad idea. Another hazard, in addition to the dynamite, was the mosquitoes carrying malaria. It is reported that the French lost 20,000 workers to the combination of accidents and disease – over 1,000 per mile. The United States bought the rights from the French to continue digging, sprayed for mosquitoes and changed the plan to a lock system which is still working today.

Tuesday, January 17, 2006

Dateline: Panama City, Panama

Latitude at Panama City 8.5 degrees North, Longitude 79.29 degrees West



The City of
Panama from
the Anchorage
on the QE2

Today we went ashore via “ship’s tenders” (a.k.a. lifeboats) since we anchored offshore. We are anchored at a different spot from where we were yesterday. Apparently the ship sort of cruised around Panama Bay during the night (probably more secure than sitting in one spot, or so we imagine). We took a tour of the Miraflores Locks which we had transited yesterday. It was really interesting to see the operation from shore. We were treated to several large cargo ships heading from the Pacific to the Caribbean. There is a virtual reality area which makes it look as you are at the helm of a container ship transiting the canal (very



The Miraflores
Locks as Seen
From Land

interesting experience), and a lot on the history of the “dig”. There is also an area that shows how the locks work – it used to be gears operated by motors, but it is now hydraulic. There is also a small museum showcasing the flora and fauna – fauna in this case includes some really large bugs e.g. cockroaches the size of little poodles. We visited a few sites of colonial Panama City and also drove by the now defunct Albrook Air Force Base. Panama is really a beautiful



A Panama Hat in Panama

place, reminiscent of Puerto Rico – very tropical, rain forest, Spanish speaking etc. We also had an opportunity to do a little shopping at a crafts market and bought a few treasures. Gary now has a genuine Panama hat and looks quite dashing in a Humphrey Bogart sort of way, although you might have had to have been there and have had a rum punch or two to see the resemblance. As Bogey and the Duchess headed to dinner, the scent of Coq Au Vin with wild mushrooms and grilled potatoes filled the air.

Wednesday, January 18, 2006

Dateline: Pacific Ocean

**Position at Noon, EST, 7.7 degrees North, 84.7 degrees West,
18 miles South of Costa Rica**

Today, a sea day, was a frustrating exercise in trying to access the internet. They use satellite communication for connectivity at sea and so it is sometimes not as reliable as we have come to expect as our due with high speed access. Not willing to succumb to frustration or stress, we gave that up to pursue other sources of entertainment, which are quite plentiful. Gary is much better at taking advantage of the offerings than I am and he is a man of many interests. (This sounds much better than saying he is easily entertained).

Today he went to a cooking demonstration by two of the chefs and he has attended several different wine tastings, which they have at least twice a week.

For a flavor of the type of entertainment offered, here are a few highlights:

Movies – they have a “regulation size” movie theater and show films usually twice a day. There are also 4 channels showing movies continuously on our stateroom TV. Movies range from old classics such as *North by Northwest*, *Casa Blanca* and *Strangers on a Train* to more recent classics such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Murder on the Orient Express* to current releases.

Music – They have a nightly show with different performers each night – singers, pianists, etc. with a wide range of musical repertoires. They are very professional and consistently and remarkably good. Many of the performers have appeared and do appear on Broadway and in London theater venues. The ship has a troupe of singers and dancers that perform 5 different shows (musical reviews) on a given segment of the cruise. Performers typically are picked up in one port, give two performances (one early, one late) and get off at the next port. There are also various lounges featuring jazz, classical music, etc. with live performances. Some of the performers are comedians who are also quite good. We made the mistake of sitting in the front row for one who recruited Gary to be part of his act. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending on how you look at it), he misunderstood Gary’s name to be Derek and called him that several times on stage. Now everywhere we go people want to chat with Derek. I am usually the one to tell them, that’s only a stage name and persona.

Gary says he didn't correct the comedian after he'd called him Derek half a dozen times since he figured that would only make things worse.



A Leisurely Sea Day

Reading – The ship has an excellent library so maybe I didn't need to bring the 15 paperback books I packed. I was very pleasantly surprised to find so many current best sellers on their shelves. So far I've read 4 books, two of mine and two of theirs. Gary is on his second book, but he keeps getting distracted by his other activities. The ship has scores of great little "hidey holes" to get lost in a good book. If it's not too windy, the boat deck has great lounge chairs where you can lie in the shade or sun yourself like a giant lizard.

Talks and Lectures – The QE2 also rotates speakers between ports so there is always a series of experts giving talks on everything from working in the White House, (this guy has a book out called At Ease in the White House) to how to buy precious gems, to astronomy, to destination talks on upcoming ports.

Games – there are all sorts of games on board to play individually, and of course many are organized such as

trivia, bridge, canasta, darts, deck games and of course bingo. (Gary got his bingo genes from his mother – she was a fanatic – and we know she would be proud that he’s carrying on the family tradition. They do have Scrabble which I do love to play, but I’m usually too busy writing this fascinating travelogue to dabble in Scrabble. Gary and I had a running cribbage match going for the championship of the world.

Fitness – there is an excellent fitness center here and neither of us has used it. They have free weights, machines, water aerobics, dance lessons and also a spa with a full range of spa treatments to which I plan to treat myself one day when I have the time. I am happy to report that we still walk 2 miles (minimum) each day around the boat deck. As part of our Battle against the Bulge, we also have decided to forego using elevators on this trip and we climb no fewer than a zillion stairs each day. It’s 4 flights up to our restaurant, 5 flights up to the outside deck to walk, etc. Who needs a Stairmaster?

Thursday, January 19, 2006

Dateline: Pacific Ocean

Position at Noon EST 11.5 degrees North, 94.0 degrees West, 290 miles south of Guatemala

Today was another day at sea and the roughest one so far. Walking today both inside and out is a challenge. We have all of the staggering of a serious bout of drinking with none of the buzz. We are, however getting our sea legs and have been little affected by the pitching and rolling, other than the occasional careening into walls. Swells are running about 15

feet. Our captain tells us that the rough water and unsettled weather is due to three strong currents coming together – the Humboldt from the south, the Equatorial from the west and the Northern Equatorial from the north.



A Stressful Voyage

Gary was at last victorious after repeated tries at bingo and won \$50.00. He also enjoyed the sampling of 5 French wines today at the wine tasting. I seem to be in the travelogue writing and reading rut, but I am really enjoying myself. I suppose I do need to get out more and take advantage of what's being offered. On the other hand, I think I should do what I want to do, i.e. Eat, drink, read, write and repeat *ad infinitum*.

Also of note, is the hygiene program on board. Cunard is fanatical about preventing any outbreaks of bacteria borne disease on board (in particular the Norwalk Virus) and has little squirt bottles of Purell-like stuff everywhere, and we dutifully extend our paws for the requisite dab of Purell before every meal and every time we re-board the ship, every time we use the onboard computers, etc. There is a really ludicrous aspect to this when we have formal nights and there is our maitre'd in his tuxedo (with tails no less) dispensing Purell to his bejeweled clientele.

Friday, January 20, 2006

Dateline: Acapulco, Mexico

Latitude at Acapulco 16.50 degrees North, Longitude 99.53 degrees West



Taking the
Tender Ashore
in Acapulco

With the ship at anchor in Acapulco Bay, Gary and I had a quick breakfast and took a tender ashore and began exploring on our own, which is always fun. We always seem to manage to see both the highlights and the low lights in any given destination. We walked to Fort San Diego which was built by the Spaniards to defend their colony first from pirates and then by other imperialists (Holland, England, France, etc) trying to take over the town. The bay forms almost a complete circle and provides a natural harbor with only a narrow entrance on the Pacific. The fort was situated so that the cannon were trained on the entrance



Acapulco Beach

and could blow up any ships that came in. Unfortunately, if you were a Spaniard defending the fort, there was an earthquake in 1776 that reduced the fort to rubble so it had to be rebuilt and Acapulco had no defenses for several years. Nevertheless, Acapulco has never been successfully invaded (unless you count the tourists). We continued our walk around the harbor where Gary drooled over a few yachts and we toyed with the idea of chartering here and quickly decided, well maybe not. Mexico being Mexico, those of you who have visited hear will appreciate the wisdom of foregoing a yacht charter here.



Cliffs of La
Quebrada

In the afternoon, given our elevated status to nobility rank, (they call us Grill passengers since we all dine in one of the 3 "Grill" restaurants) we were offered a special complimentary tour of Acapulco which included a private performance of the famous Cliff Divers of La Quebrada. For those of you who are old enough to remember, there was an Elvis Presley movie where

Elvis (obviously the younger Elvis – not the one from the Jelly Doughnut Years) took the plunge himself. Movie buffs will no doubt call the name to mind immediately. I want to say it was *Acapulco Rock*, but then again maybe not. For those of you who missed the movie and have no idea what I'm talking about, here's the drill. There are some rocky cliffs here called La Quebrada (which I think translates into "ravine" or "broken" , perhaps referring to a crevice where waves crash with great force. Young Mexican men, and now a few women are doing it as well, climb up the cliffs (136 feet at the top) and dive off. Duly impressed tourists fork over the pesos in the form of a tip after the performance. We had margaritas from the terrace of the classic old hotel, El Mirador, which was here long before Elvis's time.



Our Hostess at
the Villa
Arabesque

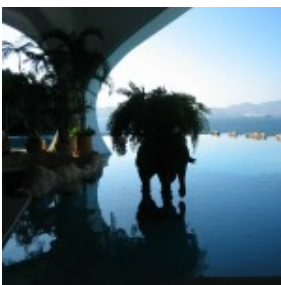
From La Quebrada we were taken to a private residence called Villa Arabesque where we were treated to a really lavish cocktail hour (more like 2 hours) with a mariachi band, dancers, margaritas and other cocktails, but the real treat was the villa itself. It is way over the top in terms of gaudy, but nevertheless it still impresses. The Villa Arabesque is situated just south of the city past the Las Brisas area, built on a cliff side with stunning views of the bay. The whole place is decorated (this is the part that's way over the top – think Vegas or Hollywood) in an Arab Oasis

motif, including white kneeling camels that provide seating,



By the Pool at
the Villa
Arabesque

lush gardens with all sorts of blooming tropical plants, several infinity pools, waterfalls, and so forth. The villa has 9 guestrooms and 12 or so bathrooms, all decorated to look like a sultan's private quarters. The villa was built back in the 1950's when Acapulco was a mecca for Hollywood stars and foreign royalty. The current owner inherited it from her sister-in-law who was an Italian baroness. The owner actually hosted the event and mingled with guests making small talk. She is supposedly 75, but she looks pretty young, thanks to the miracle of cosmetic surgery I suspect. She did seem to have trouble with her lips. She must



The View of
Acapulco Bay
from the Villa

Arabesque

have ordered up those Angelina Jolie pouty ones when she had her face done, but she seemed to have rather haphazardly applied her lipstick, coloring way outside the lines. She was nevertheless dressed with panache, a stylishly slim and petite person in an Arab get-up, but more of the harem belly-dancer than the modest Muslim matron variety. In any event, it was a truly memorable evening, sipping cocktails and nibbling hors d'oeuvres with the "almost" baroness as the sun set over the infinity pool. It's good to be Duchess! (an almost duchess that is). It's out to sea tonight for our trip to Los Angeles, our next port of call.

Saturday, January 21, 2006

Dateline: Pacific Ocean

Position at Noon CST 20 degrees North, 106.5 degrees West, 48 miles off the coast of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico

Today was a sea day and it's a good thing we enjoy them so much because we have 3 between L.A. and Hawaii and 4 between Hawaii and American Samoa. The seas have calmed significantly and it is literally smooth sailing. Around noon today we passed Puerto Vallarta, 48 miles to the east. We're a long way from home, getting further away every day.

I decided today I would take one of the many classes the ship offers and talked Gary into going with me. As unlikely as it may seem, I decided I wanted to learn more about Napkin Folding to enhance my entertaining at home. I didn't get any of those Martha Stewart genes so I had to learn the hard way

(I mean if you consider a cruise ship hard). In any event I felt I needed to impress friends for the upcoming season of boating with our local Red Neck Yacht Club (RNYC), with an upgrade to my usual contribution of chips in Tupperware and bottled salsa with wadded up paper napkins. As a point of clarification, the napkins are not actually in the salsa, at least not until later in the evening. In any event, I felt Gary needed to go to this class with me because he is so good at tying knots and what is napkin folding, if not knot tying without the rope. This may be a stretch, but in any event he agreed to go, and he and 23 ladies took instruction in this fine art. I must report Gary was the very best student by far and finished his assignments before anyone else and was indeed seen helping others subdue their damask napkins into the Tulip, the Bishop's Hat and the *piece d'resistance* the Bird of Paradise.

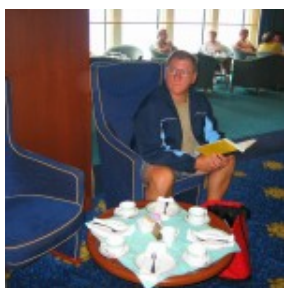
The ship's learning center offers computer classes in the basic Microsoft applications, email and web surfing that are always packed. The ship has wireless capability there and in a couple of the lounges, but I like to do most of my journal writing in our stateroom using an external mouse and keyboard where my fingers can keep up with my bright ideas that I hope my readers will find witty and charming. We have two good sized portholes in our stateroom so I can check on the view (water and sky have pretty much dominated the landscape so far today). Tommy, our cabin steward, who is from the Philippines, keeps our fruit basket full of fresh produce. Now I must confess that he does not peel my grapes, but I'm sure he would if I asked. His on-duty hours are from 7 a.m. to 11.p.m, but he has a pager and is available to us 24/7 if we should desire any bonbons or pork rinds in the middle of the night. (Don't think he could pull off the pork rinds, but I know Tommy would try). We also have a small refrigerator that we've stocked with Diet Coke and wine so we have it handy (and it's cost

effective too). The only thing missing so far is a microwave to make microwave popcorn, but I'm sure that has to violate some fire code somewhere. I'd hate to be microwaving a batch of Orville Reddenbacher and cause a ship-wide blackout. We may have to look for already popped popcorn in our next port of call, along with some real maple syrup and greasy (not dry) peanut butter. I guess it would be way too gauche to take my own food into the Britannia restaurant though. Also I must report tasting inferior pecan pie. They used molasses instead of light corn syrup in it. And while I'm whining, they had turkey and dressing, but it wasn't cornbread dressing. I think they could use a few bubbas on this ship.

Sunday, January 22, 2006

Dateline: Pacific Ocean

Position at Noon – Mountain Standard Time, 27.5 degrees North, 115 degrees West, 21 miles off the coast of Cabo San Lazaro, Baja California Peninsula, Mexico



Afternoon Tea
Served Daily

Today was our last sea day before Los Angeles and tomorrow we will have been on the ship 2 weeks with only 13 more to go. We can't believe how the time has flown. We still are really

loving the cruising life. Gary decided to branch out from his bingo games and entered a deck quoits tournament, in which he won second place. For those unfamiliar, it's a tossing game sort of like horseshoes combined with shuffleboard except you use a small circle of rope instead of horseshoes, which is the "quoit" and you try to land it on the highest number you can on a largish bulls-eye painted on the deck with concentric circles representing points of 5, 3 and 1. His prize was a certificate similar to "scrip" where you can cash little pieces of paper in for things in the on board shops. He's going to have to start getting really busy and really successful to have enough for a bauble for me from the jewelry store. The \$50 he won at bingo has already been consumed by the rapidly galloping, seriously out of control wine tab we are amassing. When we open a bottle at home, we always assumed it was some of those other people who drank all the wine, you know friends who drop by, friends on boat outings, family visiting etc. They must be the ones doing all the consuming. The harsh reality is – we have seen the true consumers and they are us (or is it more grammatically correct to say "we are they? That certainly sounds more like Cunard-Speak anyway.)

Another deck "sport" I should mention in passing is "golf", using the term loosely. They have a putting green, which isn't too hard in port, but at sea, it gives a whole new meaning to the term "undulating green". Then there's also the "driving range". This is set up so you tee a ball up and hit it into a net, so it's not too close to the real thing. After a mighty swing your ball ends up about 5 feet in front of you (on the other hand, I guess it is like the real game, at least for us duffers.)

And of course there is the casino. They have the usual slot

machines and video poker, but also have a craps table, blackjack and roulette. They also run a daily Texas Hold'em or other type poker game.

We've both been doing a lot of reading which has been wonderful. I'm averaging a book every two days so I'm glad the library here is well stocked. I only have 13 of my own left, but there is some pretty heavy duty reading there including Tom Wolfe's I Am Charlotte Simmons. I keep picking it up and putting it back down. Gary is reading a book I bought him at home called Sunday Money which is about NASCAR racing. He's going to donate it to the ship's library when he's through in case those bubbas we talked about actually materialize.

Monday, January 23, 2006

Dateline: Los Angeles, CA

Latitude at Los Angeles 33.43 degrees North, Longitude 118.16 degrees West



San Pedro
Harbor, Los
Angeles

We arrived shortly after 6:00 a.m. in San Pedro, California at Pier 93's Cruise Ship Terminal. Disembarking today we found to be a drawn out process due to very tight security. The entire ship, passengers and crew had to clear immigration. Unfortunately they only had 8 agents working and we were not able get off the ship until after 1:00 p.m. This port is a major "crew change port, with approximately 1/3 of the crew getting off the ship (about 300 people) and new crew members coming on board. We also had about 900 passengers leaving the ship and 900 new ones getting on. The bottom line was they had 8 immigration officers processing around 2600 people – (passengers and entire ship's company, a.k.a. crew). When you do the math 2,600 people divided by 8 agents x 5 minutes per passenger = very, very slow. We don't know why they didn't have more people since the port has been on the QE2 schedule for over a year. It wasn't like it was a stealth landing. We also had all sorts of law enforcement officers on board and the LA Fire Department had divers suited up ready to (presumably) intercept any Rambo-like terrorists who may approach the ship underwater, and that was interesting to watch.



The San Pedro
Trolley

We were able to meet our friends, Stu and Sharon, who were in California for a visit, for a late lunch/early dinner this afternoon. Gary and I had a glass of wine and watched container ships come into the harbor while we waited for them.

We had an added treat of seeing seals swimming in the channel (or they could have been sea lions – we weren't close enough to tell whether they had ears or not). We met Stu and Sharon at a place called the Crusty Crab and had a glass of wine. We decided to find someplace else because we were afraid the restaurant's name described what was in the bathrooms more so than what was on the menu. In the town of San Pedro we found an excellent Mexican restaurant called Marias, with equally excellent margaritas. They were so excellent, we found them to be nap-inducing and we skipped dinner on board (almost unheard of) to grab a quick 2 hour snooze when we got back to the ship. We watched preparations for our departure which was delayed, again by late arriving passengers, this time from London Heathrow. Around 10:00 p.m. Pacific time, the crew pulled up the gangway and cast off our lines and two tugs pulled us away from the pier, out of our slip and guided us into the channel. The tugs are essential since the channel is so narrow and heavily congested with other ships. The San Pedro area is home to a huge container ship facility and a fishing fleet, as well as many pleasure craft. There's no such thing as a minor fender-bender here.

Strolling around the ship tonight before departure, we noticed a radical shift in the demographics. Most of the passengers we observed getting on seem to be mere youngsters (like us) and some even younger. This should bring the median age of the typical passenger down substantially. We actually have seen children in strollers, which was quite an oddity since all the other wheeled conveyances we have seen since leaving New York transported much, much older passengers.

Tuesday, January 24, 2006

Dateline: Pacific Ocean

Position at Noon (Pacific Standard Time minus 1 hour). 32.2 degrees North, 124.25 degrees West, 324 miles from Los Angeles.

We have a long stretch at sea in front of us, but the prospect of this is really pleasant since sea days are so relaxing and we typically have so much relaxation to accomplish in so little time. With the addition of the new young whippersnapper passengers, another stressful situation has arisen. All these youngsters are toting laptop computers and want to use the Wi-Fi network at the same time I do. I learned from our on board geek, Richard, whom I've befriended that the ship has only licensed wireless internet access for 10 people to use at one time. With all those California yuppies that boarded in L.A., the system is seriously overloaded with users. I thought I might have to set my alarm and get up in the middle of the night for access or else wait until we got to a port and go to an Internet Café. Life is hard, but we will bravely carry on.

I branched out a little today and tried my hand at paddle tennis doubles. I was fortunate to draw an excellent partner and he and I were undefeated so I have two more "scrip" to go toward the purchase of something fabulous, I'm sure. We also partook of high tea today. It is served daily at 4:00 p.m. replete with harp, or similarly refined music, white-gloved waiters, the crustless sandwiches I alluded to earlier and dainty little assorted pastries. This begins with a rather elaborate procession of the wait staff bearing silver trays and china teapots to tables already set for the event with china, silver and damask. As you may well imagine, bubbas at this event are conspicuously absent. Big bosomed matrons in pearls and brocade jackets with brooches on their lapels and chunky-heeled sensible shoes seem to dominate the High Tea scene. Unfortunately today Gary and I went to tea straight

from our respective deck sports and in our windbreakers and shorts, we didn't exactly blend, but we did give the British silver haired ladies something to "tut-tut" about.

The seas have been extremely calm, and in fact the captain announced when he gave our noon position that this is the calmest crossing he's ever experienced. Every sea day at noon the captain gives a long blast on the ship's horn and a bell is rung 12 times. This is a long standing Cunard tradition. The QE2 bell was taken from an old Cunard liner called the Carinthia which sailed in the early 1900's. The bell clanging is followed by information on our position, our speed and a weather forecast. On days in port, positions are given by Gary and his trusty handheld Global Positioning System. The weather has been very chilly (highs in the 50's) ever since leaving LA, so there isn't much deck activity except for our brisk walk. We're looking forward to getting into the tropical latitudes.

Wednesday, January 25, 2006

Dateline: Pacific Ocean

Position at Noon (PST minus 2 hours) 29.1 degrees North, 137.4 degrees West, 1,030 miles from Los Angeles, 1,211 miles from Hawaii

Today is our second day at sea after leaving Los Angeles. We are traveling what is called the "Great Circle Route" which interestingly enough means we actually travel north per the compass and make an arc following the curvature of the earth. The shortest distance as it would appear on a Mercator (flat)

map is not truly the shortest distance. But since the world is not flat, despite some staunch believers insisting that it is, it is best to consult a globe to chart the course. The most direct route yields a heading for 257 degrees for part of the journey, changing over to 250 degrees and then 248 degrees for the final leg.

Gary was victorious at bingo today, winning 2 out of 4 games from the little old ladies and bringing his total winnings to about \$250 dollars (a week's supply of wine if you go with the lower end selections). He reports he was soundly booed when he announced "bingo" for the second time in a single session.

Today we both played paddle tennis. Gary converted from deck quoits, having decided there is too little exercise and too much cut-throat competition from the little old ladies in that game. There is an organized paddle tennis competition every afternoon put together by Lisa, whose job included getting teams together and refereeing. Unfortunately the skies opened up shortly after we started and those calm seas became rough. We did some serious pitching and rolling in the evening hours and through the night.

I decided to take advantage of the exercise facilities today and took a Pilates Class to help justify those tempting desserts that call my name every night. The class was good, so in a fit of insanity I signed up for 9 more.

Thursday, January 26, 2006

Dateline: Pacific Ocean

Position at Noon PST minus 2 hours, 24.58 degrees North, 149.10 degrees West, 450 miles Northeast of the Hawaiian Islands

Today is our last sea day before reaching Hawaii. We are scheduled to arrive in Honolulu at 8:00 a.m. tomorrow. We should cross into the tropics around midnight tonight when we reach the Tropic of Cancer (20 degrees North latitude).

Unfortunately Pilates did not agree with me and today I awoke with a sore neck and back (must be my technique was off) Anyway, I used a bum back as an excuse to get a massage. This unquestionably was one of the best I've ever had. It made me think back and shudder at those Chinese girls in the Beijing Hotel, whom we thought were using broomsticks and pliers to work on us and may not have studied their craft as diligently as they should have. The massage I had was called a Sports Massage, which was a deep tissue massage which was pure bliss.

There were several really nice touches in the spa, like a room with subdued lighting, heated oil applied with just the right touch, a lavender scented mask for my eyes, very relaxing "New Age" type music playing, (you know the kind with the flutes, wave noises and dolphin clicks). With all this meditative ambiance, I had time to ponder this question: Since New Age music has been around so long, is it now "Old Age" music? Anyway, it was indeed totally relaxing and I not so much walked out of the spa as oozed my way out.

Gary is played paddle tennis this afternoon while I wrote in my journal since the massage did not totally erase my back pain. I think a deck chair and a few cocktails are required

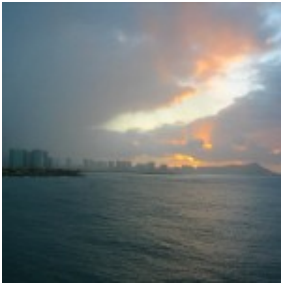
for full recuperation. For those of you who aren't familiar with paddle tennis, here's how it works. The court has a net the height of a tennis court and is laid out like a tennis court, but narrower than a singles court and much shorter, particularly between the baseline and service line. You play with paddles (thus the name) that are shaped like, but slightly larger and heavier than ping pong paddles and perforated throughout (for those of you who are old enough, picture the perforations in the principal's paddle at school before corporal punishment became outlawed). The ball used is a tennis ball. You only get 1 serve, not 2 and you play to 12 points and must win by 2. There are no "lets", i.e. if a served ball hits the net and bounces in, it is to be played. No overhead serves are permitted. You are not allowed to volley the first two hits, (i.e. you must let it bounce). After that you can rush the net and terrorize your opposition. You typically play doubles and draw cards for partners.

We are looking forward to being in Honolulu tomorrow. When we moved from Hawaii in 1972 we left on a P&O Lines cruise ship call the Orsova. It was fun to be going back now, 33 years later by cruise ship as well.

Friday, January 27, 2006

Dateline: Honolulu, Hawaii

Latitude at Honolulu 21.16 degrees North, Longitude 157.49 degrees West



Sunrise Over
Diamond Head

Today was one of those serendipity-filled days where the planets must have been perfectly aligned. We got up early to watch our approach through Mamala Bay, heading toward Berths 10 and 11 below the Aloha Tower around 6:30 a.m. local time, with the sun just coming up over Diamond Head. It was a little misty out, nothing serious, with an occasional shower of what the Hawaiians term “liquid sunshine”. As we approached our berth next to the Aloha Tower, a local musical group began serenading us with Hawaiian songs accompanied by hula dancers. This was another “goosebumps” moment, especially since we met and were



Approaching
the Aloha
Tower

married here and lived here another year after we were married. We left Hawaii in August of 1972 on a P&O lines Cruise ship called the *Orsova*. Like the *QE2* she was one of the grand old liners, filled with teak and mahogany and years of

tradition. The night we left, we also had a Hawaiian band playing for us, wishing us aloha (which means both hello and goodbye, and which is handy for passengers who get confused and don't know whether they are coming or going).



Waikiki Beach

We rented a car, and ended up with a convertible so we hopped in, put the top down and stepped back in time. Hawaii has perfect convertible weather, low 80's, although you might get moistened with a little liquid sunshine from time to time. The rental agency was in Waikiki (one of our old haunts), so we took a stroll down Kalakaua Avenue. (a.k.a. Memory Lane) and then on the beach. We both commented we felt like we were in our twenties again, although there seemed to be some much older people looking back at us from those reflective storefront windows. But what storefronts they were! Waikiki has changed dramatically for the



The Royal
Hawaiian Hotel

better since we lived there – then it had some seedy places along with the eternally classic and tasteful hotels (Royal Hawaiian, Moana) and it needed a good face-lift. Today it is wall to wall glitz (tasteful glitz) with the likes of Ferragamo, Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Armani, and Hermes lining the street.

We drove to our old apartment houses (his, mine and ours are all within a block of each other) and then to a Chinese restaurant we used to frequent called McCully Chop Sui, doing business at the corner of McCully and King Streets since 1940. There were a few changes such as the menu is now in English as well as Chinese – it was formerly only Chinese and you can get a fork now whereas formerly it was chopsticks or fingers only. The fluorescent lights have been replaced by chandeliers (still tacky, but at least they are not fluorescent) and the formica tables now have linen tablecloths and napkins.) One thing that did not change from the early 70's was that we were the only Caucasians in the place. In Hawaii, Caucasians are referred to as haoles (pronounced how-lees with the accent on the "how"). Gary pronounced the food as good as he remembered (of course he only has two categories of food – good and fantastically good).



Punchbowl
National
Cememtery

After lunch we drove by the University of Hawaii, one of my two alma maters, visited Punchbowl Cemetery and drove up to the mountains to the Pali Lookout. The scenery still is as dramatically beautiful to the mature me as it was to the twenty-one year old version, despite having seen quite a few scenic vistas since then. We continued around to the east side of Oahu and stopped at my favorite Hawaiian beach at Bellows Field Beach Park. Bellows was an airfield used in WWII and is now used as a Marine and National Guard training facility, but the beach is open to the public. The sand there is much whiter and softer than other



Bellows Beach,
Eastern Shore
Oahu

island beaches (more powdered sugar, than granulated) and the water has that Caribbean turquoise-blue hue to it that comes from bright sunlight on clear shallow water over a bed of very

white sand. From there we stopped at Makapuu beach to watch the body surfers, and stopped at the Halona Blow Hole which is still blowing after all these years. As point of interest to movie buffs, from this vantage point you can see the beach (named Sandy Beach) where the very steamy love scene in From Here to Eternity was filmed, the one where the couple appear to wash up on the beach all entangled. Our next stop also was featured in a



Makapuu Beach

film, another Elvis extravaganza, called Blue Hawaii. The place where Elvis did most of his singing, as well as his dance gyrations, is called Hanauma Bay, which is formed by an extinct volcano with one side blown out, open to the sea. There is also a fish sanctuary where Gary and I both learned to snorkel. We went to Hanauma Bay quite often back then, but alas, made no Elvis sightings. This might actually be a good thing since by 1972, Elvis wasn't looking so good in his Speedo.



Hanauma Bay

Since sunset was rapidly approaching, we decided we'd like to watch it sipping a delicious cocktail from a nice beachfront table. We strolled into the Moana Hotel like the Duke and Duchess we are pretending to be and found a great table in the Banyan Court which faces west and is literally two steps from Waikiki beach with a view of Diamond Head to the left and the pink umbrellas of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel to the right. We had MaiTai's and ChiChi's (a.k.a. Pina Coladas) and shared an order of nachos (the latter is nowhere to be found on the QE2 – we're talking bubba food here). A Hawaiian band played as the sun set in the softest of pastel skies.



The Lion
Dancer and
Fireworks

Just when we thought the day's allocation of serendipity was all used up, we decided to take a taxi to China Town. Our taxi driver told us he would try to get us close, but that tonight was Chinese New Year and the streets would be closed to traffic. The streets were indeed closed so we walked toward

the noise – giant thumping drums, scores of people crowding around elaborately costumed lion dancers, there to welcome in the Year of the Dog. I only learned today that these dancers are supposed to be lions. I had seen pictures of them before and figured them to be sort of goofy looking dragons (in a cute, whimsical way). The “lion”



Chinese New
Year
Celebrants

involves two men and one costume, one to be the head and one to be the body. Wearing the goofy lion costume has its perks, since people routinely feed the lion dollar bills as he prances around. There are also fireworks (roman candles and firecrackers mostly) that are set up in the streets and wired together to make a lot of noise. The lions have a little dance routine where they appear to be attacking the fireworks – sort of gobbling them up or beating them into submission.

We left the celebrants and walked back to the pier. We left Honolulu with a fond farewell around midnight, but unlike the 1972 departure where we watched the lights disappear on the horizon, we were soundly sleeping for this one. We're not at all blasé about this, but we're 33 and half years older than we were the last time we sailed away, so we decided we were entitled to a good night's rest as we left this time.

Saturday, January 28, 2006

Dateline: Pacific Ocean

Position at noon Latitude 17.4 degrees North, Longitude 159.4 degrees West

230 Miles southwest of the Island of Hawaii, 2,028 miles to American Samoa

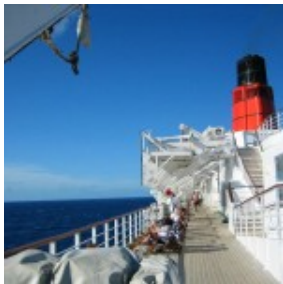
Today is the first of our 4 day journey to Pago Pago, American Samoa. We are going on a southwesterly course, much more south than west at a compass heading of about 199 degrees. We have strong "Trade Winds" out of the east on our port side and seas are "heavy", so there is some serious rocking and rolling going on today.

I decided I needed a pedicure, especially if my toes are to appear in any more photos, so I made an appointment, but little did I know I it would be with the Nail Technician from Hell, well maybe not from hell, but not from any accredited pedicure school either. She told me all about herself as she sterilized her implements of torture and began her fiendish work. In brief, she is 25 years old, has an 8 year old who lives with her mother and left Jamaica for the first time in her life to go to work on the QE2 on this cruise. She told me, as she vigorously pushed my cuticles back to around the first joints of my toes with a little metal putty knife looking thing (no orange sticks for this girl) that she didn't care about seeing the world, she just needed the money. She told me about her family as she filed my toenails in a most energetic fashion. It was so energetic in fact, that she was unable to restrict the file to just the nail. She was going to town on

the whole toe. Then as she got out her scalpel (I'm not exaggerating here) and proceeded to cut "dead" skin (well most of it was dead – the rest she killed) off my big toe, she also told me that in addition to needing the money that "Things were not good in Jamaica and she needed to leave the island". At this point, I told her no more cutting on the toes please, since I was pretty sure she must have left Jamaica on the lam, maybe under subpoena for a pedicure gone bad, real bad. With the ship pitching and rolling the way it was, I was getting very concerned about this scalpel business. Any way, she put the scalpel away and got out the pumice stone, and I relaxed since this is much more what I'm used to, but then she started sanding away and I had to look twice to make sure she hadn't fired up a Black and Decker electric sander. About the point when my heel heated up to around 370 degrees from the friction, I had to ask her to suspend operations. Once the smoke cleared from the sanding (small exaggeration here) we both looked down to see about an inch of raw skin on my heel oozing just a smidgen of blood. Without even missing a beat, she slapped some salve on and concluded I must have had a blister there. And I couldn't resist commenting, "Well I guess I do now", but I think the sarcasm was lost on her. Now on the upside, I must say she did a very good paint job on the toenails, and I could still walk and my limping was hardly noticeable.

I did decide to have a quiet word with the manager of the salon who was horrified. She had no idea that the hired help was torturing guests. Apparently she and her staff do their own toes. I suggested that in the future she have pedicures performed on her own feet as part of her interview process. I'm afraid my young pedicurist is going to be leaving us soon, and I sincerely hope she finds another way to support her child. As for me, I did get a full refund and I hopefully have saved my fellow passengers from Pedi-Torture.

Gary had a very dull time compared to my adventure and skipped bingo in favor of a darts tournament. His partner was an Englishman we suspect to be from the area bordering Scotland or perhaps Yorkshire with a brogue so thick you can't understand a word he's saying most of the time. We did finally understand that he's ex-pat living in Marbella, Spain. If we could understand him, we are sure he would prove to be a colorful character. We also think we may have been invited to Spain for a visit, but can't be sure about that. Gary also played paddle tennis, but I could not comfortably wear a tennis shoe, so I held down the fort at our deck chairs, with a good book for company.



Calm Seas

The weather is very pleasant now that we are in the tropical latitudes and so we spend a lot of time on deck reading and snoozing. We typically do our two mile deck walk at 5:30, shower and change and go to dinner at 7:00. Today however, we decided to have a bottle of wine and watch the sunset. Today's setting sun was mostly obscured by rain clouds, but we celebrated its setting nevertheless.

Sunday, January 29, 2006

Dateline: Pacific Ocean

Position at Noon Hawaiian Time Zone – Latitude 8.5 degrees North, Longitude 162.7 degrees West, 500 miles northwest of Christmas Island, 814 miles from Honolulu, 1,463 miles to Pago Pago.

Today is our second day of sea travel to American Samoa. We again took to our deck chairs and read and napped, conceding that this routine is rather addictive. Gary again played paddle tennis and he really enjoyed it so I'm hoping he will want to graduate to real tennis when we get home. However, he does report that he will have to have the same sort slow moving opponents that the QE2 affords. I decided I needed to get out of the deck chair while I still could and went to my second Pilates class, hoping to get the hang of it. This was much more successful and I am happy to report I am in no way incapacitated from it. Our Captain hosted a cocktail party tonight, (for about 500 people), but jaded travelers that we are, we decided to skip it and eat dinner earlier instead. This life at sea is just grueling.

Our sea days have afforded many hours of people watching, and what interesting people there are. Here are just a few of the more memorable characters (nicknames bestowed by me)

Lady Astor – She's not the genuine article, but she has the genuine attitude, and she has lived on the QE2 for the last 12 years. There must be some provision in the ticket purchase agreement that when you spend a certain amount of money on voyages, you get partial ownership of the QE2 and the right to boss other passengers around. She certainly believes this to be her prerogative. She often sports little hats like the

Queen herself wears and always has on makeup, a suit and matching sensible shoes. When you think about it, it is really an ideal retirement community alternative. Where else can you have 1,000 servants (ship's crew) at your beck and call and a fresh roster of 1600 new passengers to impress each year? This lady doesn't have any carry-over friends from previous cruises I'm sure. She bemoans the current state of affairs onboard and is often heard complaining "this isn't the way it used to be". She dislikes our captain for unspecified reasons, but we suspect she has taken her complaints to him in the past and he may have suggested an alternative mode of travel might be in order.

The Diva – this lady also lives on the ship, but not full time. She is a retired professional singer who still likes to sing for her adoring fans, most of whom we suspect are hard of hearing. She is reportedly 90 years old, a tiny little thing, and very sweet. She has written several books about her life, both as a singer and on the QE2 as an institution. The QE2 has a passenger talent show in which the Diva always performs. Her voice quavers as you might expect, but you can tell it was once beautiful. She also dresses the part, performing in a full length ball gown and long white gloves with bracelets, chokers and dangly earrings. The gown is sleeveless (which takes guts at 90 – probably more so than getting up on the stage) and is constructed in sort of wedding cake tiers and flounces. The overall effect is a Little Bo Peep look, only this Bo Peep has been definitely been around the block a few times. Gary says they don't let her carry the Bo Peep shepherd's crook because they need it to pull her off stage.

Fang – We never learned his name so we just call him Fang, and since he disembarked in LA, he will probably remain anonymous to us. Fang got his name from the marked absence of dentition,

which in North Georgia Walmarts, is not so uncommon, but here on the *QE2*, it is hard for him to blend. As if the missing teeth were not enough – at least 8 by our count, all in the front, he also favors the ultra-casual look (i.e. baggy shorts, flip flops and sleeveless tee shirts that the Brits call “singlets”, but in North Georgia, they’re called “wife-beaters” (you know how on TV when the police have been called to deal with a domestic dispute, the husband always shows up at the door unshaven, beer in hand, hairy belly exposed between his pants and the hem of his sleeveless tee shirt.) Given the dress code for dinner, we assume Fang either dines in the Lido, which is casual, because we really can’t picture him gussied up in formal wear, but stranger things have happened. Fang is from New Jersey and doesn’t like to fly, so when he got off in LA, he had plans to take the train back home. This was Fang’s 4th trip on the *QE2* and before he left the ship, he booked passage on the 2007 World Cruise. We found Fang quite puzzling and he left us with many burning and unanswered questions. I.E., What happened to his original teeth? Why is this man spending all this money on cruises instead of getting dental work? Does he actually have teeth, but chooses to keep them in the dresser drawer? Does he wear these teeth (a minimum of two bridges would be required) on formal nights? Does he maintain that wearing his “wife beater” shirts to dinner as a constitutional right (i.e. confusing the Right to Bear Arms with the Right to Bare Arms?) We don’t know the answers to these and fear we never will. Fang has left the ship.

Monday, January 30, 2006

Dateline: Pacific Ocean

Position at Noon Hawaiian Time Zone– Latitude 00.05 degrees North, Longitude 165.7 Degrees West, At the Equator, 1,350 miles from Hawaii, 921 miles to Pago Pago



The QE2 Lauderette

Today was the third day of our voyage to American Samoa. We decided to get up early (5:30) and hit the "Lauderette" since our dirty clothes bags are full. The ship has 12 combination washer-dryers for passengers to use. Their idea is that the occasional passenger will do what the Brits term their "Smalls" which includes all manner of undergarments, in the lauderette. Unfortunately the demand for laundry facilities far exceeds the supply, so even us Dukes and Duchesses have to deal with lines at the lauderette. Of course we could send it out and we do send out shirts and dry cleaning, but we figured we can take care of our own "smalls", and save the money for wine.

This big news today is crossing the Equator, which we did, as you can tell from our position above, just after noon today. I am able to confirm that our sink and tub now drain in the opposite direction than they did this morning. The ship also had an elaborate Crossing Ceremony which we chose to watch, rather than participate in. This ceremony dates back to the 14th century and became widespread once mariners confirmed that the world indeed was round and there was no danger in falling off if you sailed too far. The ceremony has quasi-religious and mythological roots and is essentially a play involving King Neptune and his Seaweed Court who are "crossing the line"

for the first time. In olden days those who have never crossed were called "Pollywogs" and would be coated with various nasty liquids from the bilge and were then suspended by the ankles and dunked into the sea. Once you have been initiated thusly, you become a "Shellback" and can help initiate the next batch of pollywogs. The QE2 Ceremony involved the play (very funny performance) by crew members, followed by the coating of volunteer passengers in their swim suits with various substances from the kitchen including chocolate pudding, eggs, spaghetti, tomatoes, etc. Instead of a dunking, they would be pushed into the swimming pool. Needless to say, the pool was drained and thoroughly scrubbed afterward.

There was also a call this afternoon for 0 positive blood donors to help in a medical emergency. Gary and I figured my pedicurist had cornered another hapless passenger and there had been a major scalpel accident. Gary volunteered as a donor since his type is right, but they already had enough donations. They do have a surgeon on board we think maybe there was an emergency surgical procedure. We have since heard that the patient is stable and does not require evacuation which is good because we are still out of helicopter range, nor do we have to go full speed ahead for the closest port which is also good since it would have been over 1,000 miles away as of yesterday afternoon.. We have noticed several new casts on arms and legs of fellow passengers and suspect some have not fared well in the rough seas (or else they had too much fun in the lounges one night) Who knows what kind of partying goes on after we go to bed?

Tuesday, January 31, 2006

Dateline: Pacific Ocean

Position at Noon, Hawaiian Time Zone (still), 8.1 degrees

South, 168.3 degrees West)

180 miles northeast of the Tokelau Islands, 407 miles from Pago Pago

This is our fourth and final day at sea and we were starting our 4th week of the voyage and still we are not tired of it yet. Today has been a whirlwind for Gary – a cooking demonstration, bartending lessons, a talk by the Captain (and no Gary cannot be allowed to drive the ship), bingo and a wine tasting. My day has been somewhat less turbulent by choice. Mine was breakfast, beat Gary at cribbage, reading, listen to a lecture by the mystery writer Mary Higgins Clark on where she gets her plots, lunch, reading, nap, writing in travelogue to be followed by deck walking, dinner and evening entertainment. Gary and I had planned a 4 segment World Championship of Cribbage, with one segment per month. He was soundly trounced for the January championship at 9 games to 4.

At this point we were getting very close to the International Dateline, which is at 180 degrees. We would actually cross it between American Samoa and Fiji. We will continue our course of 199 degrees to American Samoa which is taking us southwest, but not so far to the west as to have changed time zones in the last 4 days. A course due south would be 180 degrees and a course of due west would be 270 degrees. The weather has gotten cloudy with occasional showers, as we are told is the norm for this area termed the Inter-tropical Convergence Zone. Little did we know what lay in store for us in the skies above Pago Pago.

