

South Pacific Cruise  
Cunard Queen Victoria  
48 days - February 17 – April 5, 2015  
San Pedro, California - Roundtrip

Long day getting from Twin Falls to Long Beach on Monday Feb 16. Departed at 6:30 am for a short flight to SLC. Security at the Twin Falls airport was a huge pain. All luggage hand searched and it took LaRue at least 15 minutes to get through security with the artificial knee. Full pat down, then wands with pads taking samples and put through an analyzer. Then a full search of her carry-on with everything opened and inspected. Then again wands with pads taking samples and analyzed. I am sure the flight was much safer with the white haired old lady thoroughly sanitized.

Had a four hour layover in SLC which gave us time for a very nice breakfast at the Market Street Grill between concourse C and D. Was amazed at the quality and reasonable price. The entrée's were only about a dollar more than we pay at home! While waiting to board the flight to Long Beach they announced the flight was overbooked and they needed 2 seats that would be compensated at \$400 each for a future flight. Nobody volunteered, and after we thought about it we did not need to get to Long Beach so early. So, we volunteered our seats for a departure 5 hours later which would get us to Long Beach at 6:30pm. The gate lady was thrilled and asked us to standby until she got the plane away from the gate. Then she brought us vouchers, and with a big smile said she got us \$800 each, for a total of \$1600 for future travel. Also, first class seats to Long Beach! Made us happy and she was happy.

Had a nice lunch at our favorite little Italian place, Il Villagio, on the D concourse by gate D4. Really good and reasonably priced for an airport. Still got to Long Beach and our hotel at a reasonable hour. Our taxi driver was sociable (a Cambodian) and we asked him to pick us up Tuesday about noon, and take us to the cruise terminal. Had dinner at a nice Italian place next to the hotel.

**Cruise day 1 - Tuesday. February 17, 2015**

The taxi arrived about an hour late. We were not concerned as our check-in time for the ship was 2pm. No problem or hassle checking in and boarding. The cruise originated in Southampton, England. It stopped in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida and came

through the Panama Canal to San Pedro. It will return after New Zealand via the same route.

The Queen Victoria is class and luxury, and impressive. No garish or glitzy typical cruise ship stuff. Nice subdued colors, marble and paneling. Our muster station for the emergency drill was conducted in the main dining room sitting down rather than standing outside in the wind.

We have late second seating for dinner at the same table every evening.. We had time to spruce up and enjoy the complimentary French champagne on ice in our stateroom. Our dinner companions are Simon and Lucy from Quebec. She was a nurse and he was in foreign diplomatic service. Kind of intimidating but nice. Then George stormed in and is quite gregarious. He is Scottish lives in London, and is a lecturer on Cunard cruises. However, for this cruise he is on holiday. Then Mary Ann showed up. She is also from London (not together) and from the way she was attired and painted up I would guess she is a Soho business lady. All are Cunard regulars and talked about world cruises and know everybody and everything about the Cunard Lines, Queen Mary 2, Queen Elizabeth, and the Queen Victoria. They were quite intrigued that this is our first time on a Cunard cruise ship. The trouble is they all talk fast, in low tones, and with accents difficult to pick up.

Dinner was elegant with all the silver lined up properly. I had to watch the others to make sure I picked up the proper fork or knife. We both had a very fancy appetizer of cold salmon and shrimp cake, a very light green frizee salad, sea bass, and a very good dessert. Our table is on the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier of the dining room. The way it is arranged it is like a small uncrowded fancy restaurant. From where I was facing I could only see a few tables.

After dinner we made our way to the Queens theater in the bow of the ship. The atrium had a string quartet on a balcony entertaining and then there was the grand ball room with ball room dancers impressing each other. All kinds of fancy shops to stroll by and hardly anybody around. The Queen's theater is 3 stories with private balconies for the high rollers. It is pure luxury. Really good show with an American country western guy (to my surprise) singing the oldies. Not many people in the audience, but those that were there really liked it. We did.

## **Cruise day 2 - Wednesday and a day at sea.**

Smooth sailing at 12 knots as it is not far to San Francisco. I got up early and had a nice walk on Deck 3 which goes completely around the ship. Three laps for a mile

and I did 9 laps. About 20 or 30 walkers and a couple of joggers. Nothing much to comment on. LaRue had room service bring coffee, bran muffins, and fruit so we had that before going to the main dining room for breakfast.

Fairly standard breakfast with a British flair. We were at a table with a couple from Kansas, two ladies from Chicago, and Ken and Eleanor that met while cruising. He was funny. Had to have frosted flakes. When they came he picked up a spoon and started to eat. The waiter grabbed the spoon and stuck the proper spoon in his hand. We all got a good laugh.

More good people at lunch today. I had turkey medallions and LaRue had pork escalope.

Dinner was at our assigned table in the main dining room with our crew. We both chose a prawn appetizer, a green mixed salad, and the grilled sirloin steak. Not a great steak but not too bad. I wore my blue blazer with the Scotland and Air Force Security Service patch. George, from Scotland noticed and was impressed. Good conversation with these people if you can keep up and understand them.

Went to the late show which was an entertainer impersonating singers from the past. He was backed by the 8 piece house band and they are very good.

### **Cruise Day 3, Thursday.**

I made it out at 6am as we were scheduled to arrive in San Francisco at 7am. We were just crossing under the Golden Gate Bridge. It was still dark so could not see too much. I did my walking on deck 10 which goes around the ship and is out in the open air. It was getting pretty light by the time we pulled into pier 27. The ship is pointed at the Trans America building and our cabin on the starboard has a view of the Embarcadero, the piers down to Fishermans Wharf. the Golden Gate in the background, and Alcatraz to the right. Quite a spectacular view as I sit here and write this. Kind of overcast and cool this morning.

Can't help but think about where we would be if I had taken a job here in 1969. An engineer that I did work for at Lawrence Livermore Lab took the job of managing the pier maintenance function for the Port Authority of San Francisco. He wanted me to come to work for him and develop a software system for managing all the pier maintenance. The job was mine if I wanted it. We spent all day touring the piers and meeting the workers. There were some good perks also at Fishermans Wharf as that was in his domain. The idea of commuting into the city every day and the

enormous complexity of the job (and probably the fear of failing) convinced me to stay in Livermore. Wonder what it would have led to though.

Had a leisurely breakfast in the Lido deck buffet then debarked. We walked down to Pier 39 that has shopping and restaurants. Was glad to see the old historic Eagle Café still operating after more than 100 years. Then we continued on down to Fishermans Wharf and looked around and decided on a nice lunch at Alioltos. LaRue had freshly caught fish and chips and a cup of clam chowder. I had a prawn salad. We enjoyed the sourdough bread and real butter also.

On our way back to the ship we got a couple of bottles of wine to test the system of getting it aboard. Not a word was said when we went through security. The sun came out on the walk back and really warmed up. With tired feet we were glad to get back on the ship and home. Time for a nap and then spruce up for dinner. Then some special jazz entertainment by a local musician, Mitch Franco and the Big Band.

We went up to the Commodore Lounge for martinis on the top of the ship on deck 10. You hear of \$1million views, but this was a \$10 illion view. We were above the bridge looking forward with a 270 degree panorama of the city. To the right was the pier area, Alcatraz, then Nob Hill, and Coit tower. The financial district and the Trans America building were straight ahead, then sky scrapers to the left, then the bay bridge with the fading and cascading light system along the cables. Could also see all the way back to Treasure Island and the start of the new section of the bay bridge. Probably one of the best views we have seen from a cruise ship outside of Rio. We had the most forward seating by the big windows and were mesmerized. Had a 2<sup>nd</sup> very dry martini up and will skip the wine with dinner.

Went to dinner and only Simon and Lucy from Quebec were there. George and Mary Ann were no shows and were probably in the city as sail away time is scheduled for 10pm. I had very good red snapper and the rest had excellent rack of lamb. Appetizers and desserts are so complicated in their description that I cannot recreate it here. So, all I can say is that we had good stuff.

After dinner we went to see the local entertainer that I thought was a jazz performer at 7pm. I was mixed up and it was a Frank Sinatra look alike. Listened for a while then decided we were missing the views of San Francisco.

We went topside for sail away at 10pm and enjoyed the sights as we departed and cleared the Golden Gate bridge. Looking up it looked like we were going to scrape

the bridge we were so close.

## **Feb 20\* Day 4 fri At Sea**

Clipping along at 21 knots this morning with fairly heavy seas and a strong crosswind. The sea is a deep blue with small whitecap. I went out walking at 7am on deck 3 and the ship was listing a few degrees, and it was very noticeable.

More nice people at our breakfast table this morning. A Spanish omelette was the special of the day. I asked the waiter if it was a Spain version or the Mexican version, which he could not answer, and looked a little stunned. I was going for eggs benedict but decided to go for the Spanish omelette. Bad decision. Looked like a frittata with just a few specks of something in it. LaRue had kippers and Scottish potatoes (good).

Went to a presentation on Honolulu at 10am then followed that with a lecture at 11am by actor and celebrity lecturer Robert Powell on "A Celebration of Charles Dickens". There is something scheduled every hour to give people options. Classes on everything under the sun. After the lecture we started back to our cabin on deck 2 instead of our usual deck 3 route and found all kinds of new shopping. A nice little bookstore with a special on books for \$5 each and we got 5 books. One I picked up is "Good Eating Pasta", your complete guide to cooking perfect pasta every time. Tons of good recipes and pictures. Whetted my appetite.

At lunch I had spaghetti carbonara (high calorie version). Larue had the fish on the spa selection. The spa selection has a 3 course fixed menu that lists the calories, fat, and fiber content. I have had it on 2 occasions, and it has been good. Our table companions were a very nice Chinese lady from San Francisco by way of South Africa, and a father and son who are in the grocery business in Minnesota. All were seasoned Cunard cruise veterans (seems to be the norm with this cruise).

Also, saw the duty free shop while on our book buying spree. Discovered that we can get 1 liter of premium vodka for \$20 two times. It is for consumption in the cabin during the cruise. Also, no restrictions on bringing stuff on board as long as the quantity is small. A pretty civilized policy for a cruise ship company. You can also buy at cruise ship prices any size bottle of booze.

Have failed so far to say anything about our cabin. It is pretty much standard cruise ship size (about 195 sq ft interior) but has a larger balcony depth wise. It has a king size bed, a small couch, desk, chair, coffee table, telephone, tv, etc. The bathroom

and shower is smaller than some ships we have been on, but the amenities are very nice. All in all it will do (has to). Our stewards name is Wilson which is an old familiar name in our family, as we named our dog Wilson after we acquired him while living in Las Vegas.

Tonight is formal night and the Captains cocktail reception precedes dinner. It was a very nice reception in the Queens Room (which we call the grand ball room). While standing in line to get in we were talking to the couple behind us and they were from Boise! We were wondering if we would meet anyone from Boise. Though they did say later they moved from California and live in Eagle. Eagle is kind of a joke with us as we met a pretentious gal awhile back that said she lives in eeeeeagle rolling out pronunciation and making a big deal of it. LaRue has a high school friend that lives in eeeeeagle also. The Captain said they have 47 nationalities in the crew of 1000. The ships capacity is 2100 so that is a good ratio.

We had everyone at the table for dinner. George was in fine form. He is a little bothered as he thinks LaRue doesn't like him. So, they had quite an interchange. He really is a blowhard and can be obnoxious, but he is entertaining. His specialty is old movies and the old movie stars and that is what his lectures are about. He talks as if they were old friends and according to him he has met some of them. Several friends of his stopped by the table to talk. So, we guess he is for real.

His "companion" is going to join the cruise in Sydney and he wants us to accommodate him/her? at the table. Simon suggested moving to the Captains table as it is only used one day a week. He went off to check as we were departing the dining room.

Dinner was good with some surprises. There are several selections of appetizers, entrée's, and dessert but it is difficult to know just what you are ordering. LaRue had an excellent appetizer that was a duck confit that was shredded and formed into a cake with a spicy sauce. I recognized French onion soup so had that. For the main course we both went for the sautéed prawns with roasted vegetables in baguettes and carrots in a tomato sauce. The roasted vegetables in baguettes was ravioli stuffed with spinach! Kind of a classy Chef Boyardee. It was good but not what we expected. Another menu entrée that George had was turkey, dressing, cranberrys, and pigs in a blanket! Looked good but a rather strange pairing.

Simon was so funny at the Captains reception. They don't have wine at dinner, so we have been wondering. He came by our table at the reception with a glass of wine in one hand and he said they drink OPW, then said "that is other peoples

wine”, and off he went to get another glass. We sort of suspected that.

We went to the late show which was a big production with a lot of singing and dancing. In my estimation was it not all that good. Rather a stodgy safe show for the old people, I guess. Clocks went back 1 hour so a little more sleep.

## **Feb 21 Day 5 Sat At Sea**

Pretty calm sea today with maybe 2-3 foot waves and not much wind. It made walking a lot easier. Had breakfast this morning with an English couple from York. His accent was so thick we could hardly understand him. They get off in Sydney and will spend a month with their son and family who live there. They use cruise ships for transportation.

Strolled around after breakfast and watched fencing being taught in the Queens Room. Went shopping and saw a cap in a shop with “Keep Calm and Sail On” on it. Believe I may have to have it. Then I will have to find a shirt that I saw back home with “Keep Calm and Drink Vodka”.

Will go to a presentation on Port Apia at 12:30, have lunch, and do some reading. There is always high tea at 3:30 which we have not attended yet. Seems like we always fall asleep while reading and miss it. The captain's announcement at 12 o'clock today said we have 15,000 feet of water under our keel.

Got an obnoxious New York couple at lunch, so did not linger after eating. Will avoid them from now on. Also, had our first repeat couple at our lunch table, a couple from Kansas. So had all Americans for a change. Seems to be a lot of Americans on this cruise. I had green pea soup with malt vinegar and gambled on a fish something with fries and peas. It turned out to be really good fish and chips. LaRue went for the spa selection of a chicken breast and butternut squash soup.

At dinner George confirmed that he had been over served yesterday and was a little out of control. George and LaRue got along better. He told a lot of stuff on the Royal family, and they are not squeaky clean! Mary Anne also had a few tidbits about her encounters with royal family members.

After dinner we went to the late show which was an older gentleman and his harmonica. The theater is on 3 levels and has 8 boxes (for the suite passengers) on each side of levels 2 and 3. We always head for the same place on level 3 as the seats are big, lots of leg room, and there are always seats. As we walked in an

attendant asked if we would like one of the boxes, and of course we would. So we had our own private box looking down on the stage. Guess the high roller suite people were skipping the show. The old harmonica player was rather good and did a great orange blossom special.

## **Feb 22\* Day 6 sun At Sea**

Sunny day and temperature getting warmer at around 65 degrees this morning. I shed the wind breaker and wore shorts while walking. The sea looked calm when I started out, but there are large swells pitching the ship fore and aft with a little roll included. Made it difficult going around the bow and aft ends. Two couples walking side by side with walking poles in each hand that made it tough to pass. The sea is a deep blue which indicates deep water. Do not expect any whale sightings out here as we are probably not in the migration pattern. The last sighting was between LA and San Francisco.

Breakfast with a great couple from Florida and we visited a long time after. They are using this voyage to get to Sydney to catch the Oceana Princess for South Africa, as he doesn't like long flights. Interesting thing about the breakfast menu is that there is English bacon and streaky bacon. Streaky bacon is like ours and the English bacon is no fat, but not quite the same as Canadian bacon. An English guy yesterday explained exactly where each comes from on the hog. We also have beans and grilled tomatoes on the breakfast menu.

About 2 thirds of the way to Honolulu and sure is a big ocean out there. You can look at the horizon and see the curvature of the earth. Have not seen another ship since the first day out of San Francisco. Seas are slight to moderate this evening and the ride is fairly smooth. Internet service is extremely slow. Used 15 minutes getting my update sent so did not have time to edit what I pasted in. The tabs and paragraphs were squeezed out so things kind of run together. Not good for a perfectionist or hacker either.

The lunch menu was full of really strange items. I finally went for the turkey meatloaf visioning meatloaf as we know it, but made with turkey. Well it was a turkey pate' and a pale pink. Not appetizing but did not taste too bad. LaRue had a salmon cake.

Formal night for dinner and a tux was the predominate attire for the men, except me and my standard cruise blue suit. Simon and Lucy both had tuna but it was overcooked for them and became a big deal. The maitre' d arrived looking very



concerned and Simon gave him a lecture and “told him to line up the kitchen staff and machine gun them”. Not very diplomatic for a career diplomat. I was surprised they made such a big deal over it. I had a chicken breast stuffed with sausage of all things and it was ok. LaRue had pheasant which she said was good. The chocolate souffle with hot chocolate poured over the top and was quite good. George and Mary Ann had some gossip among themselves about some crew members. There is no doubt about George. His partner will join him for a couple days in Australia then they board the Queen Mary 2 which will be in Sydney at the same time as us. The QM2 or “the Mary” as they call her continues on around to South Africa and back to Southampton. A strange duo stopped at our table to talk to George and were complaining that they have not had any table mates since the first day. I can see why.

We skipped the late show as we saw the solo artist on another night.

## **Feb 23 Day 6 mon At Sea**

Up early and fairly calm seas and a lot warmer outside. Went up to the Lido buffet on deck 9 and grabbed a half cup of coffee and a small pastry to get the day started. Since the wind was not a big factor went up to deck 10 to walk at 6:45. I was the only person and walked for 40 minutes. Then went down to deck 3 for 2 or 3 laps and there were only about 10 or 15 people there. An old lady scare crow passed me jogging. I recognized her as the lady that gave the lecture on handwriting, body language, and jury selection.

Will be in Honolulu tomorrow after 4 sea days. I just read a book about the WW2 ship USS Indianapolis that carried the atom bombs from San Francisco to Honolulu on its way to Tinian Island. It set a record to Honolulu of 72 hours that still stood at the time the book was written. We will be around 96 hours and have been cruising at 21 knots.

Went to the Golden Lion Pub for a British pub lunch. Had fish and chips with smashed peas and chips and a pint of Stella Artois. Nice ambience and nice fish and chips. The smashed peas were good. The food is free. You just pay for the beverage. Then had the dessert of the day that we did not need but had anyway. It was a rich chocolate gooey cake sitting in a pool of hot melted chocolate.

The pub is across from the casino which is very small with just a few tables and maybe 30 or 40 slot machines. Never see more than a few people there, so the casino jobs would have to be very boring. Then stopped at the duty free store and

got a liter of our favorite before dinner beverage that we are allowed for the 1<sup>st</sup> 20 days of the voyage.

Sure is a different atmosphere walking around the ship. Instead of loud people sitting around with buckets of beverage it is quiet people (mostly gray, silver, or white hair or no hair) sipping tea listening to a pianist or a string quartet. All through the ship there is interesting memorabilia and pictures of the old cruise ships and clientele. Very interesting seeing what the old cruise life was all about. One quote from an advertisement for the original Queen Mary built in 1936 -- "imagine a telephone in your room that you can just pick up and order room service". We spent a night on the old Queen Mary in Long Beach a couple of years ago. It was quite an experience and I think there were ghosts lurking about.

Went to a presentation this morning on Suva, Fiji where we will be in a few days. Fiji consists of 330 small islands of which only 100 have inhabitants. A castaway would not have much chance of being found as Amelia Aerhart found out.

For dinner I had chicken noodle soup as an appetizer. It was broth with 3 glass noodles and a sliver of chicken all the size of a skinny toothpick. Broth was good though. LaRue had some kind of chicken pate type thing that she really liked. Then I had English roast beef, boiled potatoes, and peas along with yorkshire pudding. Get a lot of peas with this cruise. I will be peed out when this cruise is over. LaRue had red snapper over a bed of pasta noodles. Mine was ok but euro beef leaves something to be desired. LaRue's fish was not to her liking. Simon had an issue with his salmon being overcooked, so he had another conversation with the maitre' d. Not as dramatic as the night before and he said he was under orders from Lucy to not over do it. For dessert I had key lime pie which was really key lime cake. LaRue had 3 kinds of ice cream that everybody raves about. George entertained us by singing the soundtrack songs from South Pacific. He is really good and entertaining. He also sings in an impromptu choir that has been organized by some of the passengers.

Great late show as it was the American country western guy again doing Johnny Cash, and others. He gets off in Honolulu. Clocks go back an hour tonight.

**Feb 24 Day 8 tue**

**Honolulu, Oahu, H**

**arr 7am dep 5pm**

Arrived ahead of schedule. I planned to be up early to watch our arrival, but we were already docked when I got up at 6:30am. We look right at Diamond Head as we look out from our patio. Not doing any organized tours as we have done those

before.

Had a nice quiet breakfast at a table for two in the main dining room. Will get off later and probably catch the hop on hop off bus and ride around then shop a little. As I write this an announcement came over the loud speakers that debarkation is delayed because of computer problems. Also have seen a lot of customs and border people swarming around on the dock. Just announced things are up and running again at 10:15am so will get going.

Got off and rode the hop on hop off all afternoon. Went up by Diamond Head then stopped at Kahala Mall which we got off for a while because LaRue saw a Macy's! So, we did some sightseeing at Macy's then caught the next bus for a tour around the city. A little rain off and on but it does not seem to bother the locals. A lot of homeless people living in parks and tents in various places, especially around China town. Was able to get into a store and buy supplies for our wine cellar. They came aboard with no problems. Was surprised that the prices were quite reasonable. Gas is \$2.93 for low octane.

Sail away was at 6pm. Sat out on our patio and watched our departure from Pearl Harbor and the sights of Honolulu. Saw a few small whale spouts just off our balcony but did not present themselves. Must have been napping. The sun set in a big orange ball forward and off to our left. Kind of scary thinking about all of that remote ocean to cross out there ahead of us. Our neighbors (from Connecticut) were out and enjoying a drink and we talked to them. They do not fly and take trains, bus, and ships when they travel. Came on Amtrack from Connecticut to LA to catch the ship.

Simon and Lucy did not join us for dinner as they sent word down that Lucy was coming down with a cold. That gave us an opportunity to discuss (gossip - the Brits love gossip) them. George is irked they are cheap skates. We knew it, but does not bother us in the least.

LaRue, George, and Mary Ann all went for an exotic appetizer (not sure what it was) and rack of veal. I had oxtail soup and beef and red wine tortellini in a mushroom sauce, which was quite good. When the entrees came out everyone gasped and thought that was not the veal they ordered. In fact it was. It looked like an inch and half thick bone-in rib eye and served with a side of mint sauce. Mary Ann's was too done, and George's was too rare, so they swapped. By then another one was brought out and the maitre'd was swarming around us checking on our happiness. Worked out fine and everyone was happy.

Had quite a conversation during dinner and an hour after mostly dominated by George. He went through his life growing up and problems with his mother (an actress), his fathers early passing, and siblings. He is theatrical and mimics the voices of them all. He said if there was a pill available when he was a teenager to "make him normal" he would have taken it. Now he is what he is and happy. Pretty captivating stuff and we were about the last to leave the dining room. He seems to be comfortable with us, so we hear it all. Was late so we skipped the late show.

## **Feb 25 Day 09 thur At Sea**

Pretty heavy sea this morning and difficult walking. Did a couple laps on deck 10 with nobody out. Then down to deck 3 for a few more, and decided enough.

Our steward arrived with our morning tray and sitting it down he said, "a little something for you". LaRue handed him a dollar bill "and said, "here's a little something for you". He came back with, "quite proper". We notice that they seem not to expect anything. Probably would like a lot more! Never sure what to do.

Had breakfast in the main dining room with people from Arizona who have lived in Boise and a couple from Reno. Then headed off to a series of 4 lectures. The first was a presentation on Port Vila, Vanuatu. It was the New Hebrides islands and also known as the Sandwich Islands up until 1980. It consists of 83 islands with 68 populated. They stretch 800 miles, with about 250,000 people.

The second talk was retired Colonel Stephen Bauer on his book, "Social Life in the White House", and precisely what goes on at a state dinner. He served longer as a military social aid (6 years) than anyone in the White House. His job was to escort and introduce guests and visitors and keep things moving. Very interesting. He wrote a book that ticked off Nancy Reagan and the tenure policy was changed to 4 years maximum.

Lunch was in the Lido deck buffet. Was going to have pizza but the line was long. Then they prepare your pizza to order and have to cook it. No quick service for a slice of pizza. I gave that up and had the standard buffet stuff. Then off to a 4<sup>th</sup> lecture of the day by retired Commander Jeff Tall, Royal Navy on "Submarines and Naval Warfare". Wow, what a pace and finally back to the cabin at 3pm for a some R's (riting, reading, rest, and refit for the evening). Still 3 more sea days before Apia, Fiji. Skipped high tea for a nap. Did not intend to go anyway

Lucy and Simon rejoined the table for dinner. She was hoarse, but hopefully not contagious. Of course, she sat by me. I had corn and potato chowder and a rather nice looking sirloin steak with a red wine reduction, crispy potatoes, and green beans. A trio of ice cream for dessert. The steak was nicely cooked but being euro beef the taste and texture is slightly off for me. The crispy potatoes were steak fries as we know them and not crispy. LaRue's appetizer was some other soup, Vermont turkey, and dressing. Then the ice cream trio. George said he will not be at our table for 2 or 3 nights as he has worked out an arrangement to dine with some friends that are in the suites. We all said "good we can talk about you when you are gone". I decided I was going to see if I could find out if he gets free passage when he is lecturing and asked him how it is done and he came back with, "that is something you do not ask". I said I guess, "it is whatever you can negotiate, heh?" He smiled in the affirmative.

My thought is there are so many lecturers that they all could not get free passage. It is probably the ego and prestige thing, and a chance to promote and sell books if they have one. There was no late show so we stayed at the table and talked with Mary Ann as we like her, and she does not get to talk much. She worked for British Telecom and cruises often. Cunard has 4 levels of cruisers and she turns into Diamond, the top tier with this cruise. Said she has met the queen and got so flustered that she forgot to curtsy. She also had an encounter with Princess Margaret at the theater. The front row seats were not occupied so she decided to move to those seats. Later Prince Margaret arrived and she was in her seat. Margaret just sat down in another one. She said Margaret brought a box of chocolates with her with the papers removed so she would not make any noise getting into them.

## **Feb 26 Day 10 thur At Sea (cross the equator)**

We cross the equator today or tomorrow and not sure when. Going to be a big celebration for the first time polywogs. With this clientele I doubt if there will be many.

Getting a lot warmer and worked up a little sweat walking this morning. Seas are fairly calm.

Nice breakfast in the main dining room then off to a lecture at 10am by the Royal Navy commodore on submarines in WW1. Then another talk at 11am by the doctor about herbal supplements and what is good and ones not to take. He says to not take ginkgo bilboa. Then at 12:15 the second talk by the military social officer on

“Social Life In the Nixon Whitehouse”. This is really fascinating stuff. The white house staff was very fond of the Nixons and it was a very emotional farewell.

Got to the main dining room just in time to get lunch. We both had lentil soup and tempura vegetables with Japanese rice and wasabi. Really quite good but very slow service as they had a big run on the tempura vegetables. With all of the visiting with an English couple and a couple from Georgia we did not get back to the cabin until 3pm and the day almost over. The dining room was really cold (it all gets blamed on the Americans) so turned up the heat in the cabin to get warm. Went out on our patio and we are approaching rain clouds with visibility only about a half mile. Looks like our first storm so we shall see what happens.

Light rain all evening. At dinner I had the spring roll appetizer and prime rib and LaRue had the spring rolls and venison. Mine was ok and a perfect medium rare but not much in the way of flavor. Of course the baked potato was no where near our baked russets. Larue liked her venison. I guess we broke the barrier with Mary Ann as she talked nonstop all evening. We had a discussion over an item on the lunch menu that nobody knew what it was. It was “mange toot” as an accompaniment and everybody stayed away from it. Simon and Lucy’s first language is French and knew what it was but could not come up with the English word for it. They described it as a flat bean. Mary Ann thought about it and said it was snow peas.

The late show has been moved to 7pm from 10pm for the late diners and the early sitting remains at 8pm. The change was to “accommodate the wishes of the Americans”. It was a good show with an Irish flutist and “penny whistle”. The only downside was the early diners came barging into the front row seats causing a ruckus as he was going into his finale. Irked us all.

The menu is really difficult to sort out. They describe things in French, Italian, and high British version of English. We are somewhat familiar with menu French but we are in the dark on most things. It is easy to get the main item but the sauces, presentation, and preparation is often a big mystery. Makes it interesting, but with a lot of surprises. Even the Cunard regulars are commenting on the absence of lobster, crab legs, frog legs, and escargot on the menu and we are 10 days into the cruise.

**Feb 27\* Day 11 fri  
28**

**At Sea (cross the international dateline - lose Feb**

Up early and the only person walking on deck 10. Still dark, then the sun came up in the South? Smooth seas and fairly clear with wind coming over the bow, and just a slight roll and pitch. While getting a cup of coffee a steward was filling the cream and milk containers and he was pouring from containers labeled Gossner's in Logan, Utah. Small world. We also saw them on our South America cruise, so they must be doing something right.

Looks like another busy day as we see at least 3 lectures we want to attend. Decided to skip breakfast and be content with a banana, muffins, and coffee in our cabin. Life is tough. Just checked the video route map and we are at north latitude 01 at 8:20am. Will be crossing the equator before too long. Outside temperature is 81 degrees and humid. I just conducted an experiment and the water is draining counter clockwise in the sink.

The first lecture was the White House military social officer guy on "The Ford White House". Learned a lot of good tidbits as being the senior officer he had very close encounters with the president, 1<sup>st</sup> lady, and important guests. He talked about Queen Elizabeth's visit and state dinner. Captain and Tennile was entertaining and their last number was a new song on something about muskrats and their sex lives. The Queen was not amused and the entourage moved quickly on to the dancing part. Gerald Ford begins with dancing with the Queen and amused laughing begins. It turns out the song was, "The Lady is a Tramp". After the talk we went to the bookstore and bought his book and he autographed it. Next was a talk by the retired head of the Australian Army on foreign relations and Australia's role. A little on the boring side. Returning to the cabin we saw George in the book store and got caught up on his activities last night. He is busy and he says we may have the Captains table one night next week to celebrate Lucy and Mary Anne's birthday as well as his. Meantime we cannot discuss it with the others.

Waiting for 12 noon when the Captain blows the ships horn 5 times and then makes his daily announcement. The horn is impressive. Was in the talk on Sleep when it was announced we crossed the equator at 12:30pm and there would be a ceremony by the pool at 2pm. Am not sure if we felt the bump when we crossed.

Had lunch in the main dining room then hurried up to the pool area for the ceremony. Did not have my camera with me so did not get any pictures. It was quite a mess as they dumped and smeared gooey stuff all over the participants and then everybody in the pool while King Neptune read the ritual. Made a mess out of the pool and the pool area. It was jam packed and hard to get a good view.

Lunch was with a couple from the interior of Australia and cattle ranchers, a couple from Philadelphia, and couple from England that we have eaten with before. I went for something I could not recognize on the menu called "pipe regatte amatricana" figuring it was pasta. It was a pasta shell in a brown burnt tasting tomato sauce with strange stuff in it. Worth the try, I guess. LaRue went safe with chicken and a little stuffing. The dining room was cold. It felt good getting out in the sun for the ceremony. Checked tonight's menu and escargot and surf and turf is on the menu!

One day at sea tomorrow before Apia, Samoa.

Believe I was successful in getting my update sent. Then response went to nil and could not get any of my emails read, so gave up after 15 minutes. Lots of unhappy people with the internet service, especially those people that depend on the internet for their livelihood, like the day traders. I feel so bad for them!

Nice dinner at formal night and had surf and turf. Small portions and enjoyed the lobster, small filet mignon, small potato serving that looked like a steak fry but shredded like a tater tot, and some vegetable. You do not over eat as the portions are about 2/3rds or less the size we have seen on our other cruises. This is a good thing though. Lucy was under the weather again, so was a no show. Simon was pushing the envelope exhibiting his French/Canadian personality (obnoxious). I think Lucy keeps him reigned in. Have noticed that Simon and Lucy only have an entrée and it has always been fish, whatever kind it is. Once in a while a very light dessert.

After dinner we attended the late show which was a big song and dance production depicting life in early Victorian England. It was rather strange. Getting back to our cabin we found nice personalized certificates commemorating our crossing the equator and the date line.

Tonight the date goes forward 1 day and we wake up to Sunday rather than Saturday and loose Feb 28.

**Mar 01 Day 13 sun At Sea**

Going through rain squalls early this morning. Could walk on deck 3 as it is mostly under the deck above and under the life boats where you just dodge around the drips. The sea is still fairly calm so glad for that. We hear it can be really nasty between Australia and New Zealand and Simon says one time they had 40 foot waves that crashed onto the upper decks. He thinks we have a different route on



this crossing and I hope so, as we have never seen anything over about 20 feet and that was bad.

Had a nice breakfast in the main dining room with a younger gal from south England and a couple from Cheyenne, Wyoming. She was intrigued that I put Tabasco in my v8 juice. No lecture we want to attend until 12:15, so returned to the cabin. Really big rain squalls off in the distance and looks like it is closing in ahead of the ship. It is a nice 82 degrees outside. I went out on the balcony to read and LaRue went off to a fashion show.

The Captain said in his noon announcement that we would be passing close to a small atoll today where about 400 people live. There is no airport and the only access is by boat to Apia which we don't reach until in the morning. He also has a tidbit each day about the early sailors and explorers. They would bring cages of crows with them and when they needed to find land they would let some crows loose. They would fly to the nearest land, and they would follow that heading. That is where the term "crows nest" comes from.

Went to the talk by the white house military social aid on the Carter Years. He decided to leave after a year of Jimmy Carter then said he came back as an advisor in the Reagan and GW Bush eras.

George was back for dinner and Lucy also. George was really entertaining. Looks like we get the Captain's table (a special one at the front of the dining room with a big world globe behind) on March 17. Mary Ann is working on getting a ships officer to attend. We will see what happens. Larue had a salmon pate like thing for an appetizer and a rather nice looking rib steak. I had a Mexican empanada for appetizer and abergine and spinach lasagna for the entrée. Do not know what the abergine is or looks like, but did know the spinach. The late show is back to after dinner and was a couple doing an acrobatic and dance thing.

**Mar 02      Day 14      monday                      Apia, Samoa                                      arr 8am**  
**dep 5pm**

Up early walking and enjoying our entrance to Apia, Samoa. Rather small port city. Ppulation 35,000 with mountains rising behind it. Rather prominent was a Mormon Temple. Debarked for the City Highlights tour at 8:30 on small 20 passenger busses. Traffic drives on the left. The temperature is 90 degrees and the humidity is about the same. Our tour guide says it is like this every day of the year. Looked like it could rain but it never did. The main highlight near the end was a tour of the

big home and now museum where Robert Louis Stevenson lived and wrote books. He died at the age of 44 in the 1890's and is and buried on the mountain behind his big estate.

At the end of the tour we got off in the center of the city and walked about a mile and a half back to the ship. LaRue saw an elderly guy with a white shirt, black pants and a familiar looking name tag and stopped to talk to him. He was Elder Jackson from Provo and here for 18 months with the Mormon Church. Said he taught at Twin Falls High School years ago. A street vendor tried to sell LaRue a fan and he was wearing a Utah Valley College volleyball T shirt. We stopped to have a very good Samoan beer. That is because the Germans civilized the place and occupied it until the end of WW2. It was Western Samoa then. They pronounce Samoa as Sam oa instead of Sa moa. America Samoa is about an 8 hour boat ride away. The locals are friendly and nice and most wave as we go by!

Now I have interesting tale to tell. After I booked this cruise almost a year ago, and several times since, I have told LaRue we are going to see someone we know on this cruise. You know what she replied.

Back in Hawaii we were getting a snack in the Lido Buffet and I saw a guy wearing a T shirt with Livermore on the front. We both remarked that he resembles our old neighbor, Mel Hambrick, in Livermore, Calif back in the 60's. But this guy is stooped and old. The lady is sure not Vicky. Mel was ramrod straight German heritage with a crew cut, was the stay at home type, and disliked travel. It upset his system too much. Was going to talk to them but they disappeared. While waiting for our tour departure this morning I saw the same guy wearing a PG&E cap and I remarked to LaRue that is where Mel worked. Saw them later coming out of the old cathedral and I scrutinized the woman and I told LaRue she resembles Vicky from the side of her face, but she disagreed. By then I was convinced, so when we saw them at Robert Louis Stevenson's house LaRue asked them if they lived in Livermore and yes they did. Then, do you or did you live on Colleen Street, and sure enough they did (and still do). They did not recognize us and had a really baffled look on their faces. Sure were surprised when we told them our last name. First thing Mel said was "I remember when you came home with the new chair on top of the station wagon and drove into the garage and smashed it to pieces". That is a story I would like to not remember.

They are almost right below us on the ship and got on in San Francisco and get off in Sydney and spend a few days. The background on this story is that we moved from Las Vegas to Livermore, Calif in December 1965 and moved into a new house

at the same time they were moving in across the street. We moved to Richland, Washington in 1971 and they came to visit us once. The trip upset his system so much he could not wait to get home. We saw him last in 1986 and Vicky was traveling in Europe . He said he stays home while she travels.

We paid around \$16,800 for the Livermore house and he says they now sell in the \$700,000 range as fast as they are put on the market. They are still there, and he says a realtor calls him almost daily and would buy it over the phone. He says they will not sell and not move.

My premonition was uncanny. Now I have to watch for the couple from Reno. After eating breakfast with them the first day I said later to LaRue he sure resembled my friend that I went to Weber College in Ogden with back in 59-61. They moved to Reno after we graduated from junior college. Wouldn't that be something?

Departed at 5pm and backed way out into the ocean with 2 tugs on our side to keep us off the reefs. Do not see any sea birds and none since leaving Honolulu. Did see one bird as we backed out but do not know what kind it was. Later we have a huge island (Savai'i) off our starboard side. Not much habitation (45,000 and 1600 sq miles) and some fires burning on it. It has mountains that must be 5,000 feet high and the jungle grows down to the sea. Only a few buildings here and there. Sure is nice to be sailing within 5-10 miles of land with something to look at.

At dinner everyone had very good cod and I had a so-so sea shell pasta in a tomato sauce. The wine steward got on George for not buying his tickets to the wine tasting event from him and let him know he did not appreciate it. So, George suggested that we buy tickets to make up for it. No way we are paying \$47 dollars a piece to taste a few sips of wine. We prepaid our wine with a wine package when we boarded which gives a very good selection at a small discount, so we have not even looked at the regular wine list. We asked to look at it and it is impressive. Cheapest I saw was \$30 which is a good price for a cruise ship and the highest price I saw was \$3200. Of course 15% gratuity is added to those prices. Our goal is to keep the wine expenditure under 4 digits so we skip it some nights.

The late show was an Irish violinist virtuoso backed up with the ship's orchestra. Quite good. We always go to the same area up in the back on the highest level where you can easily slip out and go if you don't like the show. Usually the same people are there so we chat before the show. One couple from Philadelphia we see a lot and he always calls us "hey Idaho". They are Ronnie and Bonnie so it easy to remember. He has a rather rugged and rough look and at first you are not sure

about him. Reminds me of a big city cop or fireman. Very friendly and out-going. Clocks go back one hour tonight.

### **Mar 03 Day 15 tuesday At Sea**

A sea day and the seas are slight this morning with sunshine and big clouds on the horizon. Passed by a small island on the port side while I was out walking. Very slight wind and about 82 degrees and humid. Our speed is only 15 knots as the distance to Suva, Fiji is about 600 miles from Samoa. Very pleasant walking on deck 10.

Interesting people from Pennsylvania and Arizona at breakfast. All veteran high end cruisers. One guy will be home 3 days and off on another cruise half way around the world. Our cruise experiences are nil compared to these people, so we listen a lot. LaRue went off to a lecture on skin care at 10am. Going to the lecture on Submarines in WW2 in the Pacific at 12:15. The Captain in his noon announcement said we are passing a small island with 600 inhabitants with a strange name that means "happy coconuts".

Met up with Vicki and Mel Hambrick and had lunch in the main dining room and caught up on the old neighborhood. Their son Gary works for PG&E in or around Vallejo and daughter Sheri lives in Napa valley. Still hard to believe. Mel is still Mel but at least he is getting out and traveling with Vicki. He just tags along like a good dog.

Formal night and clocks go back an hour again during the night. Nice dinner. I had sautéed prawns and jasmine rice from the spa selection. Mary Ann had it for an appetizer then had rack of lamb. She also orders a big side dish of steamed vegetables that she shares if you want some. That lady can eat for a Brit. LaRue had rack of lamb also. Then we had drambuie souffle for dessert. Noticed a little change in the service. It seemed to me a breach of etiquette that the waiters always take the orders in sequence, instead of ladies first, and serve the same way. Two nights ago I commented on this and Simon and George both raised their eyebrows. Thought maybe I was wrong. Last night the waiters attended to the ladies first and then the men. Do not know if they overheard me or Simon or George said something to them. But I also get my entrée last. Also have noticed entrees are not overcooked after the issues we had earlier.

Went to the late show which was a big song and dance show. Surprised to see one of the four lead singers and dancers was our Cunard representative on the bus tour

we took in Samoa.

**Mar 04 Day 16 wed**

**Suva, Fiji**

**arr 9am dep 5pm**

Up early walking and watching our slow arrival into Suva. It is on the largest island named Viti Levu. The city is 194,000 with the total population of Fiji at 850,000. Most live on this island. Fiji covers a vast area with 322 islands with inhabitants on only 110. High solid green mountains. Hot day starting at 86 degrees this morning. Our tour is not until 1pm, so had breakfast in the main dining room. LaRue had the special, 2 sunnyside eggs with a dollup of salmon caviar on the top. I had 2 eggs over medium and hash.

Got off the ship at 9:30 to explore around. The city looks modern from the ship, but it is pretty much 3<sup>rd</sup> world. Found a market and got some wine and then found a huge fruit and vegetable market. Quite an experience. Food stalls everywhere selling prepared snacks. Most had a sausage or fish with a boiled egg and cucumbers wrapped in saran wrap and sitting in the hot sun. Price was about \$1US. Found an internet place by the ship and paid \$5 for unlimited access. Got my emails sorted out then the power went off. Says it will be back on late this afternoon, so did not get this off. Will try later when we get back from our tour.

Finally got the last update sent as we departed Fiji and it was a hassle between the docks internet and the ships internet. I see it finally went twice.

For the tour I could not decide whether to wear my cleanest dirty shirt since it is so hot and humid. Finally decided to wear my new and ugliest shirt that I threw in at the last moment, just in case. Turns out we both like it. Wardrobe management is a huge issue on a 48 day cruise. We brought 3 large suit cases and a wardrobe foldover bag. The plan is to do some laundry along the way. However, the ship laundry is very expensive. One shirt is \$5. There is a free self service laundry on each deck but there are only 3 washers and 3 dryers in each so it is a problem of getting one. People have had their cruise cut short because of fights over the machines. So there is no "one and done" on things you wear. A story about a stolen dress that reappeared on another lady is going around. I am sure it is one of the urban myth category stories.

Nice tour of the area. Matilda, our tour guide said we are lucky as no rain yet today. She commuted 9 hours by boat from her home on another small island to be our tour guide, which she does part time. It is hot (around 90+ degrees) and humid and it is like this year round. People had bedding, mattresses, and clothes outside and

even on the roof drying out. She said they will get rain tonight.

Went to a museum with all kinds of artifacts, the highlight being the rudder from the HMS Bounty. The people here have a different look. So many sailors shipwrecked here from all over. Then workers were brought in from all over. They called it "black birding". Very strong Indian (dot Indian) look and lots of Indian restaurants.

Had quite a sail away given us by the Police band, which probably numbered 20 or more. They were really rocking it, and the ships bridge responded with blasts from the ships horn. At the end 5 blasts from the ships horn and we began moving out.

The people are friendly and everyone waves as you go by on the bus. The homes are open to the world and even people in their houses would wave. Tapioca grows every where here, and is a daily staple for their starch.

As we sailed out we saw mountains off in the distance that looked like the Sawtooths and Tetons. Must have been 8-10,000 feet high, and that is from sea level. Some sheet lightning off in the distance.

Believe it would be a good place to spend more time. We stopped at the 100 year old Grand Pacific Princess Hotel for a native refreshment and it is really grand, It is where William and Kate stayed. While it is rather 3<sup>rd</sup> world around the port area the rest of what we saw was fairly decent. Like a couple from Texas said "it is like Mexico 30 years ago". The largest "church", as the tour guide called it, is the Mormon temple up on the hill overlooking the city, and near the US embassy.

At dinner LaRue and George had the smoked salmon for an appetizer, and the rack of pork. Simon and Lucy to our amazement had the same. The rack of pork was a thick pork chop they said was good. George said the smoked salmon was the best he has ever had. Mary Anne went light for a change with the smoked salmon and had them bring an English salad, which was greens and calamari. Seems I am always different as I had Russian consumme' and a vegetable fajita for the entrée. We were tired so skipped the late show comedian.

**Mar 05 Day 17 thur At Sea**

Got up to go walk and when I got topside it was pouring down rain. Went down to deck 3 and was able to dodge around the drippings. Lasted about 20 minutes then out of it and has been sunshine since. Quite a few people walking, but mostly old ladies, passing me. Cannot figure this out. I think it must be payback time for the

old ladies getting even with old men. One little grey haired lady resembles a bull dog from behind (that is all I see of her after she jogs by). However, as she goes by I get a glance at the side of her head and she looks like Barbara Bush.

The sea is slight and it is a smooth ride. We have been very lucky so far. Another busy day at sea with lectures all morning. I am skipping the first one of a cooking demonstration then going to a session with the Captain and Engineering Officer answering questions. Then a presentation on Brisbane, a quick lunch, and then a lecture by the White House social aide.

Interesting breakfast with an old couple from Connecticut, a younger couple from Santa Barbara, and a couple from north of Sydney in a coal mining area. The old boy from Connecticut was pretty funny. LaRue finally told him his head is bigger than his tush and he fortunately thought it was funny. The Australian couple own a small Winnebago that they like. He called a 30 footer small. Everybody, except me were ordering prunes. The funny old boy had so many the Australian asked him if he planned to leave the cabin today. It must take a lot of prunes with this age group and length of cruise.

Interesting tidbit in the Captains talk on a question on the worst seas he has seen. It was last year as they departed Southampton leaving on the world cruise like this one. Departing the English channel and entering the Atlantic they encountered 50 ft seas that lasted a long time. They could not stop in the Azores. He explained how they manoever to minimize damage. One time he had a rogue wave of over 18 meters or approx 54 ft.

We about freeze to death in the theater during the talks as they keep the public areas so cold. People bring their coats. We only had 45 minutes between the last 2 talks. We went to the pub for a quick pub lunch since it is close to the theater. Water was dripping from the ceiling all over the place. I guess the hotter and more humid it gets outside they crank up the AC to keep the interior cold. Condensation forms on the metal decorative ceiling. No concern by anyone - just move the food and drink out of the way.

Was looking off our balcony earlier and caught a glimpse of something way out there. Got out my binoculars and it looked like a cluster of 4 or 5 objects such as small power boats, but no wake. Looked like they were stationary. Was hard to get a good look as the binoculars kept fogging up. Had to leave for the next lecture so could not continue to observe.

Ho hum, another dinner. I had beef broth, veal escalope, and key lime pie. Everyone else had beef bourgnone(sp) and I cannot remember what else they had. I think my entree was better than theirs. Got a discourse from George about the decline of America and declining influence in the world. Sadly it appears to be the way it is, but don't like to hear it from a Brit. We just kept our mouths shut.

The late show was a young American tap dance duo and were quite good. Clocks went back 1 hour again during the night. Nice to get more sleep, but you have think about the return trip and lack of sleep.

**Mar 06\* Day 18 fri                      Port Vila, Vanuatu                      arr 8am dep 5pm**

Beautiful entry into Port Vila, Vanuatu this morning. Jungle on both sides. Many turns to negotiate into a small lagoon. Native ladies threw flower petals into the water prior to our docking at a small pier beside the jungle. Our information was that we would be tendered but we got the only available pier where container ships load and unload. Hot and humid as is normal in this part of the country, and a chance of showers. Capt Cook named the area New Hebrides in 1774 and consists of about 80 islands in a Y. Vanuatu means "Our Land Forever" in local Melanesian. English and French as well as local dialects spoken here. There are both English and French schools.

This is the maiden voyage into Port Vila by the Queen Victoria. The ship will probably be given a plaque commemorating the event for the trophy wall.

Our tour is not until 10:30 so had coffee and stuff on the balcony, then a late breakfast in the Lido buffet. The lagoon we are docked in is beautiful and just what you picture in your mind as a lagoon in the South Pacific. A perfect scene and beautiful water.

Back from the tour at 3pm and wore out. Our old neighbors Mel and Vicki were on the same tour and the same little 20 passenger bus so that was fun. It is primitive and 3<sup>rd</sup> world in a lot of places. The people look different than Fiji. All colors, white, brown, black, and maybe more.

Went to a native village where we all got out. After a while a fierce warrior came out and started blowing on a big shell. All of a sudden a large band of warriors charged us with clubs. They were thrusting and swinging them at us and just missing by a couple of inches. Scared the heck out of everybody. Then we went into the tribal shack to meet the chief who was really stern looking and sitting in his chair with a



big club. He talked in the native dialect and a big guy interpreted. Was quite impressive. The warriors joked about which of us was going into the evenings stewpot.

Did some more touring and on the way back to the bus LaRue and I got off in town. Found a nice place, the Anchor Inn, on the beach and had the local Tuskers beer at \$6US each, which was very good. I am sure we got took with cruise ship pricing but what the heck. A really good entertainer was doing rock and roll . Negotiated with a taxi driver named Tommy for return to the ship. Told him we were going to shop some more. Got two liters of Finlandia vodka in the duty free shop for \$28US then found a place called the Beef Place. Had fish and chips, another beer, and free wifi that actually worked.

Went back and found Tommy who was looking for us. Got worried when he stopped to pick up a friend who was a big bozo. We wondered if we would be turning off into the jungle instead of going to the cruise ship, but we made it. Fare for 2 miles was \$10US. He wanted to trade me a foreign currency bill with a 5 on it for a US 5 dollar bill but we declined.

Back on the ship and sitting on our patio waiting for the sail away and saw a bug crawling along like none we have ever seen. Very bright colors and resembled the box elder bug. Had to dispatch him as no bugs, birds, animals, plants, citrus, fruits or vegetables are allowed to be brought into Australia. In fact Australia customs and immigration agents sail with us the next 2 days to go through everything. Sail away was beautiful with all of the islands going by. The natives were honking horns and waving. Rain showers were forecast for the day, but they never appeared.

Dinner talk was all about what we all experienced in Vila. Never sure about George on whether he will be charming or obnoxious. He was OK but dominating. We all had the shrimp entrée that was good except George who had a fish entrée. The waiter also brought out a plate of extra shrimp so we had plenty.

George left the table than came back with 2 young men friends of his that he wanted us to meet. They are newlyweds and were obviously very uncomfortable being drug in for show. I felt bad for them.

The late show was the violin virtuoso again. We stayed a while and departed. Walking back to the cabin we look down on the Queens room and the big dance floor. The same ball room dancers do their thing hour after hour. Now we recognize the cruise ship escorts that are aboard just to dance with singles or any one who

wants to dance with them. They all wear the dress code of the day and have a name tag. A single lady across from us in the dining room had an escort one time with her for dinner. Kind of awkward as he did not eat and just sat there. When she is there alone it is difficult for the table of two next to her. It is obvious they want their privacy and do not include her in the conversation, as we would be prone to do. Most of the time they all sit there staring straight ahead. Our table is very active and noisy, and I am sure that upsets them.

## **Mar 07 Day 19 sat At Sea**

Another beautiful sunny day with smooth seas. How lucky can we be. Hardly anyone out this morning. We were wide awake at 6am and well ahead of schedule. The steward brought our morning tray a while ago but the coffee pot was just hot water. Would have been ok if we had tea bags, but did not have any. Not worth waiting for another pot. That's once, Cunard.

Entering the Coral Sea and have 2 days at sea before Brisbane. Full day of lectures.

We have to present ourselves between 1-4pm (for our deck) to the Australian authorities. I feel a long time standing in a line is ahead of us. Our tablemates told us it was a total disaster when the ship arrived in Ft Lauderdale. Everyone had to debark and stood in line up to 4 hours. The foreigners got pictures taken, retina scans, and the whole nine yards, Did not endear them to US Customs, the DHS, or the USA.

Had breakfast with a nice English couple from northern England and had a good visit. She said she saw a whale earlier. Not sure if whales are around this time of year? Sitting on the balcony for a while this morning and seeing sea birds that I cannot identify. One finally flew parallel to me as he overtook us (we are doing 18.5 knots) and left us behind. The body was an off white and the wings a rather golden color with a dark outline around the edges. Never seen any bird like it. Must have been about a foot long.

We have all kinds of lectures on this cruise but one I find lacking is a naturalist to explain the sea life and such. Maybe after Sydney when this cruise segment ends and the next one begins. But that means we start the return journey. Only Mary Ann at our dinner table is on for the whole cruise from Southampton and back to Southampton (105 days). Quite a few people doing Long Beach and back to Long Beach like us.

As we cruise day after day in this expanse of ocean I can't help but think "what if the engines quit?" The ship was in drydock in Hamburg for 2 weeks before this cruise to "address propulsion problems". Day after day at 21 knots and running like a top.

On the way to the lecture there is a big jewelry sale going on in the shopping arcade. LaRue saw a nice pendant and said only five ninety five. I said \$5.95 is a really good deal. She came back with that's five hundred ninety five dollars, but that is probably after it has been reduced 50%. Further checking and it was after the 50% reduction. So much for the pendant and on to the lecture.

Presented ourselves to the Australian immigration people the last hour of the designated time for our deck. Walked right through with no problems. They keep all passports until we depart Australia. Mary Ann said she got a lot of hassle. The lady officer said she looked much older than her passport picture and should get a new one.

Formal night and a nicer dinner menu. Obtained copies of the menus we have had so far. I will transcribe this one and send it as an attachment. Bear in mind this menu is the best we have seen with things we recognize. We both had the lobster and shrimp entrée. Sydney is the last stop for this cruise segment. We got the Cunard version of letting your hair down while the waiters and chefs did a big song and dance production.

On the way back to our cabin the ball room dancers were still going at 11:30pm, and all were escort dancers. Must get tiresome. No wonder they are all skinny.

### **Mar 08 Day 20 sun At Sea**

Beautiful sunny day at sea this morning. Sea is smooth with just a slight pitch fore and aft. Only one out on deck 10 except for a couple groups of smokers in the smoking alcoves. They are always there. No smoking allowed in cabins or balconys, so we do not have to contend with that potential problem. Deck crews on our balcony this morning patching rust spots and redoing the wood railing. The ship got a new coat of paint while it was in dry dock before this cruise but little rust spots are already forming in places. Feel right at home watching rust take over since I am a rust repair specialist on my 1951 Kaiser.

At breakfast this morning they were out of V8 and tomato juice. Said they would get more at the next stop.

Went to the galley tour this morning. Very compact and I do not see how they can offer so many entrée's from such a small area. The chef said there can be 18 chefs working dinner in the five station frying and oven area. Amazing organization.

Met Vicki and Mel our old neighbors for lunch today and had another good visit. Going through big swells this afternoon. Captain's announcement at noon said we are in the Coral Sea where the big Coral Sea battle was fought in WWII.

George is in the choir that was formed and they performed in the atrium on deck 1 in the afternoon. We were up on deck 3 looking down and Lucy was yelling "happy birthday George". Then the choir sang happy birthday to him, and he turned beet red. He was not at dinner as he was going to the French restaurant. We were to meet him in the Commodore Club after dinner, but he was not there yet.

I had steak a' poivre for dinner and LaRue had lamb. Went to the late show which was diva's imitating the stars. Clocks go back an hour.

**Mar 09 Day 21 mon**

**Brisbane, Australia**

Up at 6am to walk and watch our arrival in Brisbane. Still a long ways in as it is a huge harbor. Light overcast and 81 degrees that seems rather cool. Docked at 8am and we meet for our tour at 9:15am. We decided to get something to eat on the Lido deck and got to talking to a little old lady that lives in Marin County, Calif. They booked on impulse two days before we arrived in San Francisco. First time they have cruised and did not bring summer clothes or even know that you can book tours! Husband Jim was topside, so we did not get to meet him. She said he races sail boats in San Francisco bay.

Got a notice this morning that we will have a film crew aboard for the next 3 days filming for the "Today Show Breakfast TV Program". If you do not want your self filmed you have to file notice with the film crew. Assume the show must be the British version of the Today show. Anyway it should be interesting.

Got update 6 sent while we were out on tour in Brisbane, Queensland. Queensland is known as the Sunshine State. It is a beautiful city with the Brisbane river running through it. Nice bike paths, parks, gardens, and big city that is really clean and sophisticated. The whole area is very hilly and green. We went first to the Koala sanctuary where we walked among kangaroos, saw koalas, wombats, Tasmanian devils, turkeys, owls, turtles, a water dragon, etc. Visited a high hill overlooking the

city then had a tour throughout the downtown city area. Bus quit working for a while. It overheated and we sat across the road from the Mormon Temple for about 40 minutes. They got it going and we finished the tour getting back to the ship at 3:30pm tuckered out. Everything is expensive here. An Australian brand XXXX Gold beer was \$7 Australian (\$6.80 US and worth every penny). We got Australian dollars on the ship, so we were ready to rumble. It was a hot sunny day around 85 degrees.

George's partner Daniel joined the cruise in Brisbane. Another setting was added to our dinner table, squeezing us a bit. It is only a few days as they depart in New Zealand somewhere. Daniel is rather theatrical. Said he has a brother that lives by Boise in Wilder. We gave our very favorable opinion on Brisbane and were immediately disagreed with. Our dinner companions said Brisbane is not vibrant and busy and according to Simon too dry. Oh well they are from London and Quebec and what do we know. Most of the conversation was about the Queen Mary 2, its future cruise schedule, and how much George and Daniel's dinner tabs run in London. So I told them about my lunch tab in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1978 at the restaurant of the #1 chef in the world at the time. Kind of a puzzled look on their faces.

LaRue had tuna for the entrée and I had prime rib that was a perfect medium rare but no flavor. They all commented on my baked potato so it was my turn - "it ain't no russet, just a lousy little English thing". Interesting thing is they offer mustard with the prime rib.

The clock goes forward during the night so we skipped the late show. Last night it was the clock goes back and tonight the clock goes forward.

## **Mar 10 Day 22 tue At Sea**

Another beautiful morning at sea. While walking I heard a big splash alongside so stopped and looked, but saw nothing. Thought maybe someone went overboard.

While eating breakfast with a nice couple from Belgium I was facing the rear and saw a huge fin and back of a large fish. Looked like a swordfish or even maybe a huge shark. Only appeared one time. Sailing on smooth seas with a rain shower or two and you can see the coastline of Australia off on the horizon of our starboard cabin.

No ship activities scheduled today that we want to attend, so will be a quiet day

reading. Tomorrow is Sydney and the end of the cruise for a large number of people. Even the Captain departs and we get a new one. Ddid a little browsing through the shops this morning. They have a nice book store we like and also two well stocked libraries. Met Mel and Vicki for lunch as they get off tomorrow. They catch a small Australian ship for a trip around Australia then fly home. They flew to Auckland, NZ one time to catch a cruise and Vicki broke an ankle before the cruise started. They had a pub lunch in Brisbane with another couple and were really shocked at a tab of \$120. All Mel had was nachos and Vicki had chicken.

Not much on tv the whole cruise. We are usually on the music channels or the navigation channel. Get MSNBC, BBC, and strangely Fox News and no CNN. The ship prints a good little daily paper which is USA News for us. There are papers for other nationalities. All in all not too bad.

At dinner LaRue had red snapper and I had a mix up. I meant to order some kind of a taco but the waiter thought I pointed to the line above. I got a vegetarian pie. I stayed with it and it was pretty bad. At least I did not over eat. Also had creamy asparagus soup for an appetizer and crepes suzette for dessert. Larue had a salad for an appetizer and a fresh fruit plate for dessert. I asked Daniel how his brother ended up in Idaho and he said it was his desire to be a ranch hand and cowboy. That did not work so well and he is a carpenter. Daniel is an accountant and he and George have an apartment about 20 minutes from Heathrow airport. Still wonder about George. Whenever you question him about something he replies, "it will be in the book". His card says George McGhee, Stars Shine Bright, Film and Entertainment Lecturer. The late show was early at 7pm and we missed it.

### **Mar 11 Day 23 wed Sydney, Australia**

Arrive early AM in Sydney and we stay two days. We planned to be up for the entry but when we got up at 5:30 we were already in the final docking process. What a view. Our cabin looks out on the Harbor Bridge about 500 yards away and the other side looks out on the Opera House about 300 yards away. The downtown area is just off the bow of the ship. However, we move during the night to make way for the Queen Mary 2 which arrives in the morning. It is too high to go under the bridge, so it gets our spot. We move out to anchor in the bay and have to be tendered tomorrow. Second class to "the Mary" is the way I look at it.

Departed for our tour at 9:00AM and toured downtown, Bondi Beach, and the Sydney Oprah House which is a magnificent structure. Could take pictures everywhere if no rehearsals or performances were going on. We were ok in the

opera hall, but a pianist was rehearsing in the concert hall so all we could do is listen. Fantastic acoustics even for someone that can't hear. The budget to build the opera house was 3 years and \$7 million and it came in at 6 years and \$105 million. It paid for itself in the first year of operation.

Very expensive here and the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest cost of living in the world. A hamburger at a kiosk at Bondi Beach was almost \$15US and at the Opera House was \$23US. High end eating places and sidewalk cafes everywhere. A nice one that we can see into from our patio would be as much as your mortgage according to our tour guide. We elected to come back to the ship and eat after our tour. Lots of new faces among passengers and crew. We hear there is a turnover of 1000 passengers here. As I sit here looking out our patio door I can see climbers going up the high arch of the Harbor Bridge. They go with a guide and have to pass a physical test and a sobriety test. I am told it takes about 3 hours.

Lots of new faces in the dining room. We have a new female assistant waitress and a new wine somelier. Had a pre dinner martini in the Commodore Club. Fantastic view with the city high rise buildings directly in front of us. Both had filet of sole for dinner. George and Daniel were absent as they were staying in the city. The late show was the 40 member Sydney Philharmonic Choir. After a while we were both nodding off so got up and left between songs.

### **Mar 12\* Day 24 thur                      Sydney, Australia**

We moved to our new location during the night to make room for the Queen Mary 2. Got up this morning and we were anchored in the middle of the bay! After I went out walking I understood why. The Australian TV channel 9 was doing the live "Today Breakfast Show" on deck 12, the small top deck, and the news helicopter was circling around overhead.

Good thing it is a nice sunny morning. Deck 12 is closed to all except for those in the suites, which is something I do not like, but that is a Cunard thing for 175 years. I had a good view from below on Deck 11 though. A newscaster was doing his thing there. Mostly standing around waiting for his cue. Looked like an older surfer dude.

We have a 5 star view from our cabin. We look straight out to the Harbor Bridge about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile away and to the left the opera house with the Queen Mary 2 behind it, the city center to the left, and on the right side of the bridge is condos, apartments, and such. Probably will never get another view like this. We are here all day and

depart at 10:30pm after a fire works show. We will tender into the ferry terminal by the QM2 a little later and decide what we are going to do for the day.

We caught the tender, a nice luxury tour boat, about 10am and docked at the Man-O-War Steps adjacent to the Royal Botanical Gardens. It was a short walk in front of the Opera House and on to the downtown pier area. After walking around a bit we got tickets on the Manly Fast Ferry to Manly. It is about as far as you can go back out through the harbor area. Passed by the Queen Mary 2 so close you could almost touch it, then by the Queen Victoria.

Manly is a nice town and where Manly Beach is located. The early explorers gave it this name because they thought the aborigine natives were "very manly". We had a nice lunch at a German Beer House facing the water. As mentioned earlier it is expensive here. Was thinking fish and chips but it was \$29 Australian for one order (about \$25 US). So, I had a Bavarian hotdog and LaRue went for a half rack of ribs and small green salad. Those 3 items and 2 Hofbrau Original beers came to \$64 Australian (about \$55 US). They do serve large portions. I could only come up with \$71 Australian so shorted the waitress a bit for a tip. We returned on the sightseeing boat with some stops on the way and got tendered back to the ship about 4pm. The return tender was an experience as it was one of the ships lifeboats, jammed full, hot, rough waves, and we smacked into the ship hard. Do not know how the mobility impaired people make it as that the step or two from the tender is a bit of a risk.

What an evening this was. We knew the QM2 would be leaving at 9pm and it was reported there would be some fireworks and then we would depart at 10:30pm. So, we decided against going to the dining room for dinner as we would miss the show. Since we have ringside seats on our balcony we decided on room service. Ordered 2 caprese salads of sliced tomatoes, sliced mozzarella, balsamic, sirloin steaks, onion rings, fries, mushrooms, and two desserts. We had wine from our wine closet. Had an excellent dinner on our patio looking out on the Sydney sights. Then the police boats and the QM2 started easing out and turning towards us at 9pm. What a sight, and then the fire works started going off. It looked like they were coming from the aft end of the ship but later you could see they were coming from a platform floating out behind the ship. The fire works stopped when the QM2 went by our bow and a little bit later a grand finale started up. I got it captured on video. When you think about the whole thing-- about us moving and anchoring out in the bay, the live TV morning show, the departure of the QM2, and the fire works -- it was a well planned event by Cunard and the Port Authority. Sure made our day and our stay in Sydney.



**Mar 13 Day 25 fri**

**At Sea**

Heading across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand and have three sea days ahead through open and rough water. Clocks went forward last night.

Rough seas this morning and overcast and strong wind. Could not walk on deck 10 due to the wind. Went down to deck 3 and was the only one out. Finally gave it up after 3 laps. Decided I better take a Dramamine as food did not look or sound too good.

You know the sea is acting up when you see barf bags by the elevators. The Commodore (the new guy on the bridge with the title Commodore instead of lowly Captain) said the seas will be higher tomorrow and there is cyclone activity ahead. They are watching it and will be the first to let us know. Not the kind of news you want to hear. A new series of lecturers aboard for this cruise segment and I see we have a naturalist among them.

Had lunch in the dining room and attended a couple of lectures, read some, and napped a lot. We decided to celebrate our anniversary a month late with dinner in the Veranda French Restaurant at an extra charge of \$25 US each. Really plush and elegant with the menu in French and English. The wine steward started right off recommending a \$120 bottle of a blush wine! Whoa partner you are on the wrong page and he then went for a \$90 bottle of a merlot. Told him to just leave the wine list and I will figure it out. Found a nice Argentina Pinot Gris for \$32 + 15% gratuity. For the appetizer I had escargot crumble on flat bread and LaRue had a salmon terrine. Mine was really an escargot pizza and surprisingly good. The main course for me was sea bass and LaRue had monk fish and scallops. My sea bass was more like a small trout. Both entrees were disappointing. For dessert I had armongac souffle and LaRue had a dark chocolate thing and ice cream (wonderful). Service was woefully slow and there were only 5 tables of guests. We were almost 2 hours getting through dinner. Will have fun with this experience with our regular dinner companions.

**Mar 14 Day 26 sat**

**At Sea**

Another rough day at sea, with early rain showers and high wind. I was the only person out on deck 3 this morning. Not sure I was supposed to be out there as the doors had "Deck Closed" ropes across. While walking inside I saw one forward door that did not have the rope so went out and did 3 laps. Probably not a good

thing to do. Then I had to find the right door to get back into the ship.

The Commodore announced at noon the seas are running at 3 meters (about 9 ft) and the temperature has cooled off to around 70 degrees F and the winds are a force 4. Most important though is that a cyclone is moving down the Eastern coast of New Zealand into our path and we would not be going to Akaroa (Christchurch) as scheduled. Another port (Picton) has been scheduled in its place. Will not get the great tour we had scheduled in Christchurch to the Antarctic Center. Disappointed in that.

Attended the Port of Wellington presentation and a lecture on dolphin intelligence this morning and had lunch in the Golden Lion Pub. I had penne pasta with a spicy tomato sauce and parmesan (very good) and LaRue had steak and ale pot pie (very good) with mashed on the side. She also had bread pudding for dessert and I passed on the dessert for a change. Believe some reading and a nap is in order for the late afternoon.

Formal night again. A lot of drama with George and the wine somalier who is new since Sydney. Kind of an English clod and George was all over him for bad service and not pouring wine for his partner. George was way out of line and Simon in his most diplomatic stern manner intervened, and he and George went a round or two. Then George made some smart remark about us having room service for dinner while in Sydney and LaRue let him have it. All in all a bad night for George. I had French onion soup and chateaubriand and LaRue had salmon something or other appetizer and the chateaubriand. LaRue liked hers and mine was just ok. That was the best answer I could give the maitre'd when he came around. He seemed a little concerned with our table. Did not help that George went off on him about the wine somalier,. We will see if a change is made as George demanded. I doubt it. The late show was a big production thing and after quite a while we realized we had seen it before, but stayed through it.

Mary Ann heard on the BBC News that Vanuatu was hit hard by a tropical storm with a lot of damage and maybe fatalities. Have not heard anymore about the New Zealand cyclone that is in our way. Clocks go forward again during the night.

**Mar 15 Day 27 sunday At Sea**

Seas a little better through the night and this morning but with some big swells and small white caps. Sea state is moderate and 20-25 knot head winds. Ships heading is 110 degrees and speed 18 knots.

Overcast gray day with temperatures around 70. Only a couple people out walking on deck 3. Harder and harder to get up and get going after losing an hours sleep due to the time change forward. The morning naturalist talk on earthquakes in New Zealand was cancelled due to sound problems so back in the cabin until the next talk at 12:15 on Auckland. Got a temporary fix to the sound problems so the port talk went off as scheduled. Felt like a pub lunch after the talk so we both had fish and chips in the Golden Lion Pub.

Just caught a BBC newscast on the Port Vila, Vanuatu devastation caused by Cyclone Pam. Really devastated the area and is billed as one of the strongest tropical storms to ever hit the South Pacific with winds up to 250 km/hr. We were there just 7 days before it hit. People were talking about just such a thing and how they are now better able to ride through bad storms. Some of the things we toured were really damaged. Now we appreciate the fact we are detouring around a cyclone approaching eastern New Zealand. We had some complainers, but they should now be believers.

Not sure at this time if we will be in a port tomorrow or not so may see if can get the internet to work and send this off.

Dinner was quieter than the night before as George and Daniel went to a specialty restaurant with friends. The wine somalier was the same guy. I had a consomme soup and the vegetarian entrée of tempura vegetables. All was good until I accidentally got the well disguised dab of wasabi all in one bite. Managed to keep some order of decorum until I caught my breath. LaRue had pork medallians which were good. Simon gave a lecture on why US wines are not as good as the rest of the worlds. Did not know he was an expert as we have only seen him drink wine at the Captain's reception and it was free. Just nodded boringly and kept our mouths shut. The late show was a young opera singer from New Zealand. Pretty boring for me.

**Mar 16 Day 28 Tuesday**  
**6pm**

**Picton, New Zealand**

**arr 8am dep**

In the port of Picton, Marlborough, New Zealand this morning instead of Akorua/Christchurch because of storms. It is in Cook's Strait between the North Island and the South Island. The strait is 18 miles across at the widest point. We are on the northern tip of the South Island and up a rather long fjord like waterway that is very narrow with steep slopes on both sides of us. We barely fit. Picton is

only 4000 people and you see nothing of it from the ship. The dock area is industrial and piled with fresh cut logs for export. The city is about 2 miles up into the canyon and you have to be bussed. However, with our tour we boarded directly onto our tour bus. Before debarkation the Commodore made a special announcement that everybody is to be back on the ship 2 hours earlier than planned because of severe weather ahead. Said we will be in heavy rain and heavy seas tonight due to the tropical storm. Saw last night the cyclone is near Auckland and moving south easterly towards our route. Our next port is tomorrow in Wellington on the tip of the South Island only a little ways across the strait. Do not know what we will be doing for all of that time.

Had a very nice tour. Traveled about 40 miles through Picton, and Nelson, to Blenheim (about 40,000 people). Area first looked like the Oregon coastal area with logging, sheep, and livestock. Then we broke out into flat land with vineyards and wineries one after another. Stopped at the aerodrome and Omaka Heritage Aviation Center. It is one of the worlds largest private collections of WW1 aircraft and memorabilia of Baron Von Richthofen, Hermann Goerring, Eddie Rickenbacher, and others. We only had an hour and could have spent all day. Then it was off to the Moa specialty micro brewery and a tasting of their specialty beers. After that it was a small high end chocolate factory. Looked like everyone boarded the bus with purchases and then back to the ship about 1:30pm.

As I sit here writing this at 2:45pm I hear winches running. Looking out I see they are lowering and raising all the lifeboats. Must be checking to see if they work! Starting to rain hard so it might be an interesting evening.

It is now 4pm and the Commodore just announced it will be bad tonight. We are leaving early to get through Cooks Strait in the daylight. Winds will be over 50 knots and very high seas, so take your motion sickness medication. The plan is to get into the Wellington harbor before it is locked down at 11pm. It does not reopen again until 10am tomorrow. All of the ships decks will be locked down for safety. We should minimize our moving about on the ship. So, we got out our strongest motion sickness pills, and ready to rock and roll!

Made our way to the dining room. The ship was listing badly and made it hard to walk into the elevator going up hill. George was in rare form again and hard to get along with, but also entertaining. I had chicken parm and Larue had lamb chops, and both were passable. Skipped the late show as was pretty drowsy after taking the motion sickness pills.

We lucked out with the weather and got into the Wellington harbor with winds reaching 53 knots the last reported. The waves stayed on the moderate side around 10-15 feet. It was not that bad, but glad to reach the harbor. We were safely docked at 10:30pm so the Commodore's strategy worked. Found out the Queen Mary 2 was getting rerouted also and came into Picton after we left for Wellington.

Spent an easy night docked and up early for our 8:15 tour of Wellington, which is the capitol of New Zealand. Wind blowing hard and a cool 55 degrees. Last week they had 100 degree temperatures according to our tour guide. Very nice tour of the city and surroundings and the National Museum where you could spend days. Our tour guide in the museum was understandable as he was from Louisiana. Nice city but difficult to get around as it is so hilly and narrow streets. The big tour bus made it rather exciting, and even the driver said "wow" on one near miss.

Tonight is our big night and birthday celebrations at the Captain's table. He will not be there but another ship officer will be. We received a nice printed invitation with the Cunard logo and shamrocks on it from our table mate Mary Ann (I see her name is Marianne) for a pre-dinner get together. It reads "Miss Marianne Parker invites you to join her for pre-dinner cocktails on 17 March 2015 at 7:45pm in the Commodore Club, deck 10". Sounds nice and hope she is buying.

Have been getting some intermittent free internet so I may see if this will go before we sail. Expecting another fairly rough night at sea with the wind we are getting.

Julie sent me the web page address for the article in the Sydney news about our meeting with "the Mary" while in Sydney. Very good coverage and just the way we saw it.

Tonight is the birthday reception for Lucy and Marianne in the Commodore Club and dinner at the Captain's table with a ship's officer.

Instead of proceeding up the eastern coast we will go back through Cook's Strait and up the much smoother Tasman Sea and the Eastern coast of New Zealand. It was a challenge walking from our cabin to get to the evening reception in the very front of the ship. We stayed in the hallway on our deck 6 and walked all the way forward so we could hold on to the handrail. It worked quite well.

The reception in the Commodore club was nice and it wasn't long before our ride smoothed out. We had a reserved area with several tables and nice easy chairs.

Hor d'ouerves were served and several bottles of champagne. Daniel brought food coloring for green champagne. He could not find green so had blue and yellow and was the chief mixologist making green champagne. He and George were decorated up. I wore a green golf shirt (with a tan sport coat, to satisfy the dress code) and we both wore our green and gold mardi gras beads we brought along. A Cunard lady (an acquaintance of Marianne) in charge of future bookings came by for the reception. Other guests that also attended dinner were a couple from Yorkshire, England and acquaintance's of Marianne who are booked in the suites. Very stuffy people that also have a home in Spain and let us know they have a son-in-law in the House of Parliament! Our ticket to the Captains table for dinner, the Hotel Chief Officer, arrived in full dress white uniform. More gold braid than an admiral and looked right smart. He is an affable Irishman and remembered names after being introduced. Cunard's policy is that ships officers do not mingle with the passengers except for official ship functions. We have only seen the Captain 2 times. It is a big deal to have an officer in your presence and it has to have approval from high up. Marianne pulled it off. The pianist played happy birthday and everyone in the lounge joined in. The pianist came by later to visit.

We then marched off to the dining room getting there after everyone was already seated. We got a lot of attention proceeding to the Captain's table at the front center of the dining room. The table for 10 was nicely decorated with shamrocks, our names on place cards, and a nice little decorated green box with 2 bonbons for everybody. We were served a nice white wine with our appetizers, a nice red wine with the main course and I noticed both Lucy and Simon both enjoyed it. Do not know who picked up the tab for it. I had beef and barley soup and Thai curry beef with rice and chutney. LaRue had smoked chicken breast with chutney and tuna steak nicoise. The curry was too hot for some people but just right for me. Then a huge cake fully decorated with green frosting and a leprachan on top was wheeled through the dining room to our table. The whole dining room joined in singing happy birthday to the birthday women. Our normal table is on the floor above that looks down on the Captain's table and our neighbors up above were all looking down. As we were finishing up our regular waiter Rateese (from India - says his mother calls him Ratti) came down and helped clean up. He was all smiles. I told the Hotel Chief "he is the best". It was a great memorable evening. I made a mistake leaving my camera in the cabin as I did not want to appear to be a tacky novice. George said he would email me copies of his, and the ships photographer took a group picture that we will purchase.

George was not the center of attention tonight. I was seated next to him and we got to visit a little. He told me he worked for BBC for 22 years. Now he has to be careful

not to work to much. Daniel says George does a couple of lectures a month just in London. From the sounds of it they live quite well.

### **Mar 18 Day 30 Thursday At Sea**

Waves are not real big today, but big rolling swells of about 10 feet. Overcast and rain predicted. Did not get up until 7:30 due to the nights festivities and decided the ship movement was not conducive to walking.

Had breakfast with 2 couples from Connecticut and Santa Barbara and we were all at the same table once before! This is about the 4<sup>th</sup> time with the Connecticut couple. He usually does all the talking but today she did it all. LaRue asked him if he was ok. She sort of looks like the Queen and always with a wide brimmed hat. They are into their 80's and they did Wellington all day on foot. Looks like they could well afford a paid tour.

The Commodore's noon announcement was about the weather and that we will receive a card that we can give a donation to the Vanuatu relief fund. The donation will be added to our sail and sign account. The Cunard parent company Carnival Corporation has already given \$150,000 and are sending people from Australia to help deliver supplies. There are islands totally devastated and that have not been heard from yet. He also said the Queen Mary 2 tried to get into Wellington after we left but could not get in and are now headed to Auckland also. Last night I saw a big cruise ship coming out of Cook's Strait and heading that way that I thought might be "the Mary", so it probably was.

Seeing the western coast of New Zealand late this afternoon. Had a nice view of the Northern tip of New Zealand as we sailed around it from the eastern side. We went around the tip, and then turned south towards Auckland. Pretty rugged and barren. Seas were pretty tolerable all afternoon.

Last dinner with George and Daniel as they get off in Auckland tomorrow. I had a green salad and Salmon with roasted potatoes. LaRue had a chicken terrine appetizer and red snapper for the entrée. After dinner we all went up to the Commodore Club. George got up and sang a duet with the piano player, and after a while we got out of there. The late show was at 7pm which we forgot and missed it. No big deal.

**Mar 19 Day 31 friday  
8pm**

**Auckland, New Zealand**

**arr 7am dep**

In beautiful Auckland, NZ early. Looks like 4 big containers of supplies being loaded onto the ship. Dogs sniff and check out each pallet. The ship is only a block from the end of Queens street which is the main street with all of the big stores and everything. We just missed the start of a round-the-world sail boat race that began yesterday in Auckland. Sail boats everywhere here.

We had an early 4 hour tour of the highlights. We got off the tour bus at the ship then crossed over to Queens Street. All kinds of fast food and quick in and out places but were looking for a pub lunch. Walked by a McDonalds and the cheapest value meal was \$12NZ which is about \$10US. Finally asked some business people and they directed us to the Steamship Pub which is exactly what we were looking for. We each had fish and chips and 2 beers each and the bill without tip was \$76NZ or about \$64US. I only had \$70NZ and could have used a credit card but wanted to use up our \$NZ. They would not accept any of my Australian money or US money but gave me a 10% discount down to \$68NZ, so we made it work. The server did not get much in the way of a tip..

Got back to the ship at 4pm and the Queen Mary 2 arrived shortly after and is a short ways away. Her schedule was to arrive tomorrow, but not being able to go into Wellington caused her to arrive early. We do not sail until 12 midnight so I suggested a \$300 dinner in the city or a dinner that we have already paid for on the ship. The decision was easy. Our new table mate, Marc was there. He is a nice guy about early 60's from Connecticut and is a many time Cunard cruiser. Came over on the Queen Elizabeth and spent a month hiking on the South Island with a lady friend that flew over. She is a glider pilot so they did some soaring, and hiked the 55km Milner Trail together. Carried their backpacks but stayed in luxury accommodations every night. No cooking in cans over an open fire for them. Very nice guy and it was nice to have a very normal conversation with him and Lucy and Simon. Marianne was off to the special dinner somewhere for the "World Cruise" Southampton to Southampton bookings. I had ox tail soup and BBQ ribs, cajun chicken, and corn on the cob. Do not know where the cajun part was. LaRue had plaice fish and potatoes (so so). Can't remember the desserts. Simon's course side came out when he told Marc "we are looking for a husband for Marianne. Are you available?" causing us to roll our eyes. Marc said he was not. No shows tonight as we are in port.

**Mar 20      Day 32 Friday      At Sea**

A slight pitch and roll with sea state slight with small white caps, 20+ knot winds,



ship speed 21 knots, and heading of 55 degrees. Gave up walking on deck 10 and went down to deck 3 with a few people. Walking about the ship takes a concentration.

Breakfast in the dining room with English people, and an Australian lady. Special was Swedish pancakes that we both had. Not much there. Then hit 3 lectures in a row with a presentation on Papeete, history of lifeboats, and the story behind tides.

Our track today (from the navigator) is north-easterly across the South Pacific Ocean passing the Coleville Ridge. Later in the evening we will pass over the Star of Bengal Bank, which is part of a volcanic area known as the Kermadec Trench. It is one of earth's deepest Oceanic Trenches.

Nice lunch in the dining room with a couple from England (he is a retired pharmacist) and a couple from Sydney who emigrated from England years ago (he is a retired dental surgeon). I had spinach and chick pea fritter (awful) for an appetizer and fusilli pasta with tomato sauce and walnuts on top (yes walnuts) and not too bad. LaRue had a nice salad and turbo fish and boiled potatoes which was ok. For dessert I had citrus parfait with cherries (somewhat ok) and LaRue had coffee crème brûlée (very tasty).

First time on this cruise that Obama has been brought up. The dentist did it in a very civilized way as we were discussing terrorism and world events. We had resolved not to participate in political discussions but felt this one was ok for limited response. In summary, the other 2 couples said the world is watching and nobody can figure out where Obama is coming from with his wishy washy response or lack of it. We concurred.

The terrorism discussion came up since it was on the news about the cruise ship passengers being attacked and killed in Tunis, Tunisia. It hit close to home as we were there January, 2014 and I think we toured the same museum where it happened. We have had tight security around the ship but tour groups and tourist attractions are easy targets. Boarding requires 4 or 5 checks for identification.

At 6pm we are ripping along at 23.3 knots with 36 knot rear quartering winds causing a list to port. The ship is shaking a little. Sea state is up to moderate but the ride is pretty good. Noticed the barf bags have appeared by the elevators again.

Formal night tonight. Simon and Lucy sent word they would not be at dinner since Simon was not feeling well. It was just us, Marianne, and Marc. I had a salad and

surf and turf, and LaRue had escargot and surf and turf. LaRue did not care for the preparation of the lobster with a crust of something on it. While the filet looked perfect I thought it had a gamey flavor. All in all just an ok rating. We both had cherry jubilee for dessert.

Walking through the ship to the late show the ship was more alive and vibrant than we have seen it. Everyone out and dressed to the 9's. Looking down into the atrium a string quartet was playing on the second level. People in the atrium and on the grand staircases on each end of the atrium. Passing by and above the Queens Ball room it was full of dancers. Passing by and looking down on the casino it was loaded and going full blast. The show was an English crooner doing old show tunes. Amazed that nobody was in the first 4 rows and many empty seats all over before the show started. Going back through the atrium after the show a lady harpist in an evening gown was performing.

Crossed the dateline and we also lose an hour tonight. The instructions were to set your clock back 23 hours. Had everyone confused. I set my clock forward 1 hour since I don't have a calendar watch.

## **Mar 20 Day 32 Friday Again At Sea**

How about that. Another day the same day of the year as yesterday. Instead of having 2 days at sea, as shown on the itinerary, we get another day at sea doing what we did yesterday (or something like that).

Strong 40 knot winds (they call them trade winds in this area) this morning. Sea state moderate and doing 22 knots. Overcast with a forecast of rain, and the ride is a little bumpy. Temperature is 70 degrees and the sea temperature they say is a couple degrees warmer. Deck 3 was closed because of the wind. Walking was difficult, but doable on deck 10.

Went to a talk by James Bradley the best-selling author of *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Flyboys*. I have read and liked both. His father was one of the 6 marines that raised the flag on Iwo Jima, and is the second from the right in the picture. His father would never talk about Iwo Jima and James got the drive to write the book after his father died, and later finding his notes and souvenirs. He is a compelling and powerful speaker that really grabs your attention. By far the best speaker we have heard.

Had lunch with some people we like, Ronnie and Bonnie, and the couple from

upstate New York. Ronnie referees all high school sports in the Philadelphia area and they cruise during his off time. I had Bavarian lentil soup and a good old american hamburger and fries. LaRue had soup and tempura fried veggies with wasabi (my nemesis). LaRue had phouxo for dessert (crème puff thing) and I had cherry trifle. I cannot describe what was in the half I ate.

The internet worked a lot better this evening and it only took 7 minutes to get update 10 sent that was all prepared to go. Running through rain all afternoon and low visibility. Good afternoon for reading, a nap, and an ice cream cone about 4:30pm.

Uneventful dinner, except Marc said he was wait-listed for early seating, and it came through. Tonight is his last night with us. He was a nice change of pace. I had chicken consommé soup, and mushroom tortellini pasta and a British cheese plate for dessert. LaRue had salad, prime rib, and coffee brulee for dessert. Too strong on the coffee so did not eat much of it. Simon was on a roll and told a bad joke or two. The ship started getting jolted around a bit and hit some big bumps during dinner.

Noticed that the gentleman escort dancers in the ball room are looking tired and worn out. The late show was a juggler/comedian from Mexico that was not too bad. Looked more eastern European to me.

### **Mar 21 Day 33 sat At Sea**

Ship moved around a lot during the night and still doing so this morning. The outside decks are closed this morning, so got some inside walking on deck 3. Do not know the justification for closing them as I have been out in much worse. The winds are only around 20 knots and the sea state moderate, overcast sky, and a forecast of rain. Our heading is still 55 degrees and a speed of 22 knots. Top speed of this ship is around 23 knots which we have reached with a tail wind. Temperature is climbing and up to 77 degrees this morning as we are passing from sub tropical climate into tropical climate. Feels good to us. Been seeing South Sea Petrel sea birds who stay at sea for years before going to land to nest.

Interesting people at breakfast with an older asian couple. Upon saying we are from Idaho he said he came to america from Korea to a little town called Rexburg, Idaho and wondered if we knew where it was (we sure do). He was young and received a scholarship to attend Ricks College (now BYU Idaho) in the mid 70's . He also washed dishes at the Grand Teton Lodge in the summers. Said he just loved the area and wants to go back to visit but does not drive much anymore. He went on to

UCLA and Case Western in Ohio and settled in LA and married a Korean lady. She had the biggest diamond I have ever seen in my life. She was discussing retirement communities with a gentleman that lives in one in Santa Barbara, and she was trying to find out how much his cost. All he would say is it is very expensive. She said they are looking at one in Thousand Oaks with an entry price of \$1.5 million for 1 bedroom. Also, with a monthly maintenance cost of \$2-3,000 a month, and on up to \$5,000 per month depending on view, more bedrooms, garage, etc. On top of that you do not get anything back if you move on. I told her to move to Idaho and buy a ranch. Heck, you would own the ranch and could hire a cowboy to take care of the place.

Attended a presentation on Bora Bora and another one on "Harnessing the Ocean Tides" this morning. Funny thing is the lecturer has a slightly British accent, lives in Bristol, England where the tides are huge, but grew up in Albuquerque, NM. These talks sure keep you busy.

We went to lunch and saw Lucy and Simon waiting with a group of people. She said they were gathering to have a "French" lunch. We opted for a table for two for a change from having to make small talk. We both went for the roasted chicken, potatoes, and dressing which sounded great. No taste to the chicken, which was tough, and you could barely cut the roasted potatoes with a serrated knife. You could tell the half teaspoon of something was dressing as it had sage in it. I did have an excellent new England clam chowder and LaRue had an excellent salad for appetizers. For dessert LaRue went for the safe choice of the daily ice cream trio that is always excellent. I had the spa selection of raspberry and chocolate angel food cake. Out came this dense heavy chocolate fudge like cake with a drizzle of raspberry syrup. I didn't realize the couple at the next table were listening to my running commentary on these culinary delights until they started speaking up and agreeing with it all. LaRue said the ladies diamond ring was a monster and she thought they were newly weds, even though they have a few years on them.

Dinner was uneventful but good conversation. Simon wanted to get something going by making a comment about "your stupid presidents". We said we are not going there. He then said "I guess religion is out also", and we agreed. He likes to stir the pot. I had chicken consomme, penne pasta and prawns, and a lemon chiffon for dessert. LaRue had a salad, baby lamb chops (very little ones) and cherry jubilee. No complaints from anybody. Decided to skip the late show as our tour tomorrow is early.

**Mar 22 Day 34 sunday**

**Rarotonga, Cook Islands**

**arr 7am**

**dep 6pm**

Arrived at 7am in Rarotonga, Cook Islands and dropped anchors in the lagoon. We have to tender in. Temperature is 80 degrees and will get some rain showers off and on. We assemble for our tour at 7:45. Had coffee, juice, muffins and banana delivered to our room. Swells are rolling in making tendering difficult, especially loading and unloading. The swell causes the lifeboat to go a couple feet above then a couple feet below the step of the boat. Also, an opening you have to step across. A lot of mobility impaired people and I don't see how they make it. Had a nice tour of the highlights and went completely around the island. You can drive around in 45 minutes if you not sightseeing. The Cook Islands consists of 15 atolls of which 10 have inhabitants. Population of 20,000 and 10,000 live on Rorotonga (or Rora as they call it). The young people mostly leave for New Zealand. Polynesian's came here in 1500BC by canoe. Spanish voyagers came in 1500's, and Captain Cook in the 1700's.

Now back from our tour. A beautiful little lush green island with volcanic mountains rising up and covered with dense jungle. White sand and coral sea to look at from the beaches. They get their water by collecting rain water and each dwelling has a huge water tank. Diesel generators generate the electricity for the island. It is expensive as gasoline is close to \$9 per gallon. All goods are brought in from New Zealand 1600 miles away. Saw Mark on the tour and he said he misses our table in the evening dining.

It is Sunday so the shops are closed as well as the museum where we were to see the history of the famous black pearls of this area. Everyone was dressed up for church and some backyard cookouts and parties starting up. Saw pigs tied up to trees in the yard, as well as goats, and 2 cows. Wild chickens run all over. Interesting thing is when family members die they are buried in the yard. We saw one house with tombstones and the crypt under the car port. The cars parked on the grass. Coconut, banana, avocado, mango, papaya, pineapple, taro, sweet potatoes, tapioca, nono fruit, and bread fruit (used in place of potatoes) just to name a few, grow all over. We stopped at a place on a lagoon and the tour guide picked up coconuts and bananas, and served them to us. So many coconuts laying around that they rake them up and burn them. We picked up some white coral and small sea shells and hope we can get home with them.

Our tour guide, George, was probably one of best tour guides we ever had. His favorite saying when describing something like bread fruit. "I like mine deep fried" in a low voice stretching out the deep fried. I got him to do it for me on video when we

were stopped. Said his wife is a dietician and won't let him have deep fried, so he goes to the take-out and gets his deep fried, again rolling it out in a deep voice. No McDonalds or any American fast foot joints on this island. George said the early Polynesians traveled in 80 foot dugout canoes to and from New Zealand 1600 miles away. They were experts at navigating by reading the waves, smelling the air, and watching sea birds, as well as using the stars. Our tour guide in Auckland said they could tell where they were by tasting the water. George pointed out the little airport and said the airlines only land at night (a tourist story, I think). He says that is so the pilots are not able to see how short the runway is.

Wow, as I write this something just slammed the ship hard and it moved and shook all over. Looked out our starboard side to see if a tender hit hard but no tenders there and things look normal.

For a late lunch I decided on a hotdog and onion rings at the aft outdoor grill. They have really good hotdogs and burgers. LaRue went for the full lunch assortment from the Lido buffet which is just through the door. I never see anything I really want on the buffet except for the salad bar. I wanted a slice of pizza to top off my hotdog. No line for pizza and they only serve a full pizza made to order. So I got the special of the day, Hawaiian, and d most of it. Not really good and not worth the wait. I have tried the pizza twice, and no more pizza for me (probably a good thing). So far, I don't think I have gained weight (clothes seem to still fit) but who knows until the day of reckoning at home.

Went up on deck 10 to walk and it must have been 90 degrees in the sun. Watched a jet liner take off and he used every bit of the runway just skimming over the trees. Once airborne he banked over us and gave his passengers a great view of us, so I waved. Glad we are starboard as we have a great view of the town from our cabin while the port side looks out on open ocean. We have been lucky getting the view side most of the times on this trip.

Had trouble getting underway at departure time as the anchor was stuck. Heard later they were contemplating cutting the chain, but it finally dislodged.

For dinner I had chicken and vegi roll with a drop of chili sauce, chicken cordon blue, and ice cream trio. LaRue, Simon, and Marianne had sea bass. LaRue also had a salad and ice cream trio. My cordon blue was good but, it had a red sauce on it that I did not like and scraped off. Have never seen that before.

The late show was an Australian lady singer who was good. She made mention of

my old favorite Slim Whitman but then sang a Marty Robins song disappointing me. Speaking of Slim Whitman I found a CD of his when we were in Scotland last year and it is now in my collection. My old 8 track of Slim Whitman somehow disappeared. (Julie?)

**Mar 23\* Day 35 monday                      At Sea**

The sea is quite smooth this morning with a little wind which you always have. A couple of Brits (I assume) walking clockwise on deck 10. There is a sign somewhere that says to "walk reverse clock".

Wanted to get the navigation stuff on channel 41 but it has not worked since yesterday. Our temp gauge shows the outside temp at 82 degrees F and I would judge our speed around 18 knots. The channel started working later and we are doing 17 knots. Slight overcast with big clouds that rise up on the horizon. As you cruise along on this big ocean you can't help but think of the explorers on the wooden sailing ships and the natives in the outrigger canoes. Our place mat on our tray this morning has the quote "It isn't that life ashore is distasteful to me. But life at sea is better" by Sir Francis Drake. It is amazing he could say that with the ships they had. Wish he could see us. The sea today has changed from a dark cobalt blue color to a lighter royal blue.

Went to the dining room rather late for breakfast and got a nice table for 2 by the window. Kind of distracting with the water rushing by your elbow as you eat. The breakfast special was a fried egg on ham, with grilled tomato, and hash-browns that we both had. Grilled tomato is always available at breakfast and lunch, and often dinner. I don't see how they can bring so many. The ham was really a smoked pork chop and was a good change of pace. The German lady next to us about drove me crazy stirring, clanking, and eating her yogurt with the bowl up in her face.

Went to a talk this morning by James Bradley the author of "Flags of our Fathers" and "Flyboys" on his book "Teddy Roosevelt and the Japanese Doctrine for Asia", which was informative and interesting. Afterwards we bought his book "Flags of our Fathers" and got it signed by him in memory of LaRue's brother, Gene, who was severely wounded on Iwo Jima. Bradley wrote "In Memory of Eugene Gibbs a Hero of Iwo Jima" and signed it James Bradley. Plan to give it to sister-in-law Wanda for a family memento. Also had him sign a book mark for my copy of his "Flyboys" book at home. I told him I enjoyed the book very much. Interesting that his companion (wife?) looked Japanese and she asked questions about Gene.

While there on the 3<sup>rd</sup> level of the atrium it turned noon and an officer rang the ships bell (that hangs by the railing) five times, saluted the bell, turned around and saluted the ocean, and marched off. Rather impressive. Then our Commodore Captain did his noon announcement over the ships sound system. He thanked the passengers for being patient through the past difficult weather conditions.

Attended a presentation at 12:15 on Hilo, Hawaii then had a pub lunch in the Golden Lion Pub. LaRue had fish and chips and I had steak and ale pie that was excellent. It had steak, pieces of bacon, mushrooms, pearl onions, gravy, with a puff pastry shell, a side of mashed, and some veggies. Really, really good. We shared the dessert which was a shortbread type of flat and hard biscuit swimming in a liberal dose of hot vanilla sauce. They use that sauce on a lot of desserts on this ship. An English thing, I suppose. We ate about half of it.

The dinner menu did not have many options for me. I settled on a vegetarian entree of potato pancake with a bean cassiolet on top. Rather bad. My appetizer was a shrimp and lobster cake and unremarkable. LaRue had lamb (again) and for an appetizer. For dessert we both had a strawberry thing on a straw pastry thing as a base. It was good and something we have never seen.

The late show was scheduled before dinner, and we skipped it as we were both into good books. It was a nice clear night and I believe we saw the Southern Cross star formation while out on our balcony looking at the stars.

**Mar 24 Day 36 tue Papeete, Tahiti, islands arr 9am dep 5pm**

Pulled into Papeete early. I was on deck at 6:30 as we came in between two islands, Tahiti Nui where Papeete is located and the smaller island Tahiti Iti. Both have big mountains going up to 7,350 feet. First people were here in 850AD coming from asia. Tahiti is in the Society Islands and is now part of French Polynesia. It is remote, being 4,100 miles from LA, 3,800 miles from Sydney and 5,900 miles from Tokyo. Papeete is a bustling little city with lots of traffic. The island is 80miles around.

Our tour was not until 1pm so got off and walked around and shopped just a couple of blocks from the ship. Everything in French with heavy influence and financing from France. Our tour was the Snapshots of Tahiti. The tour guide pronounced Papeete as papa-yay-tay. The stop I enjoyed most was the reconstructed home of James Norman Hall, an American from Iowa who co-authored "Mutiny on the



Bounty” and wrote a lot of well known books about flying in WW1, as well as South Pacific stories. He was a fighter pilot in WW1, an adventurer, and settled here to write. He spent 4 months shipwrecked on an atoll and wrote a book about it, “Tale of a Shipwreck” which I now have to read. Also, a stop at the beach where Captain Cook landed in the late 1700’s. That guy left his footprints everywhere.

The beaches here are black fine sand. Only about 20% of the beaches have white sand, and they are on the other side of the island. Our tour guide talked too long on everything. At the beach stop he got off on a long speech on area religion. LaRue, after about 15 minutes said “you haven’t told us a thing about Captain Cook“.

On the way back to the ship about 4pm we hit total gridlock and it took 1 hour to go about 1 mile. If we would have known we were that close we would have gotten off and walked. Not a good way to wind up a day in port.

We were the only ones to show up for dinner tonight. We both had a green salad and prime rib with twice baked potato. The prime rib was perfectly cooked medium rare, but I still think the taste and texture to be strange. I thought they would be out of the euro beef by now and would at least be using Australian beef. LaRue had ice cream for dessert, and I had an apple and pear tart. Not a tart as we know it but more like a shortbread biscuit with little pieces of apple and pear, and smothered with the signature warm vanilla sauce. Tired of that sauce.

**Mar 25 Day 37 wed Bora Bora, Society Islands arr 6am dep 5pm**

Thought I would be up to watch our arrival in Bora Bora this morning, but at 6:30 we were already here. Anchored between the main island starboard and a small island port side. The main island is 6 miles long and 2.5 miles wide and is just 20 miles around. James Michener called it the most beautiful island in the world. It is spectacular with the towering mountain behind the main village of Voiltape. The Tahitian name for the island is Pora Pora which means “First Born”. Captain Cook made his last of 3 visits here in 1777. He was later killed by Polynesian natives on a Hawaiian beach.

Had breakfast in the Lido where we got to talking to a great couple our same age, and same number of years married, that live in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Actually, they were English and immigrated to Canada. They spend the winter in New Zealand with their daughter and use cruise ships to get there and back. A neat concept.

Caught the tender around 10 and the boarding was easy and the ride was smooth. Just walked around looking and shopped. Language is French and heavy French influence. Very primitive with a somewhat paved but sandy road. A few pearl and souvenir shops. There are resorts up and down the beach a ways, but did not need that or need to pay \$100 for a 25 mile ride around the island. LaRue bought a black pearl and a couple of souvenirs.

Then we found a small café with free internet if you had lunch. What the heck. It was noon. It was the only sit down place we could see. Decided to share a pizza and a chicken caesar salad. Our waitress produced a bottle of Tabasco even without asking for it. A little pricey at \$57US plus 20% tip automatically included. But as I say, "what the heck". We saw Simon a little later down the street at a roadside stand visiting in French and haggling over black pearls. Told him about the pizza and the vendor said they only use the best French ingredients. Found out later the owner and chef is from Marseilles, France.

We saw a small food market and went in to check it out. We didn't think the prices were too bad. The meat counter looked good, and we were overall surprised, although things on the shelf were a little dusty. Not much in the way of dairy products and milk was the no refrigeration required variety. Llooked about like our food market we had in Arco. Hard liquor was about 4-5 times higher than at home, but French wine was very affordable.

Hard to believe we are leaving the South Pacific. The next stop is Hawaii, which doesn't sound so exotic anymore. Only 2 more stops and 9 days at sea and we are back to reality. The sail away was spectacular leaving Bora Bora with its big mountain behind us, and sailing by other small islands. We sat out a long time and finally saw a school of small dolphins, the first of the trip. Believe Bora Bora was our favorite stop on the cruise. Vanuatu and Rarotonga would be a close tie for second for me.

The dinner menu had Australian double cut Sirloin with 2 potato wedges and grilled tomato, which I had. It was much better beef than before. LaRue had a green salad, pork slices, and a pear tart with ice cream. We were totally shocked when Simon ordered a bottle of wine, the only one so far. He will stretch it out as Lucy does not partake. The late show was a lady show singer from London, and we departed before the end.

**Mar 26 Day 38 thu**

**At Sea**

A sunny day with temperature about 80 degrees, and a smooth sea this morning. Made walking pretty nice. Our heading is 357 degrees which means we are going directly North and a little bit west. I would have guessed that we would go Northeast to Hawaii.

Interesting this morning at breakfast in that a single gentleman at our table lives in Livermore, California. Also a single British lady that we have heard about that throws parties in her cabin for 18 friends. LaRue said "well your cabin must be larger than ours" and she said "no it is not big". Said she did not do a tour in Bora Bora because she is on a "limited budget", but then said she paid \$500 for black pearls from someone she met on the beach.

A lot of single people on this cruise, and they pay double occupancy - less the daily food allowance for no second person. I figure her fare from Southampton and back would have to set her back \$70,000 and probably more. She said her close friend is flying over and meeting her at the New York stop. Can stay in her cabin by paying 200 British Pounds for the 7 days of food (which by my calculation is approx \$50 per day). At lunch the other day it came up that there has been a little "dust up" as the Brits say over the fare for this cruise. A Brit lady says the Brits pay a lot more than Americans and it is not right. A Canadian at the table said the same thing for Canadians. He had gone to the booking office demanding to know the fares and got a very cold shoulder. So, it is rippling around. I am sure people lie about how much more they paid or how little they paid. A great guy from upstate New York that was at the table came up behind us later while waiting in line for our tour and said, "I paid \$9,000 for our cruise". I answered, "but I only paid \$8,000".

No activities this morning as the crew is going through simulated emergencies including fake smoke. Lunch was with a nice couple from Indio, California and a couple from near Southampton. Had a lot of laughs about life. An appetizer was roasted tomato soup with beans that we all ordered. When the soup came we all looked at each like we must have been served the wrong thing. It looked and tasted like minestrone with lots of veggies, Could not find any beans. Was good though. LaRue had fish and chips with smashed peas. I had sweet and sour beef with rice. Nice enough lunch with the ice cream trio for dessert.

Before lunch we attended the port presentation on Kahului, Hawaii and about got froze out. The guy in front of us was wearing a hoodie. After sitting in there you have to go outside to warm up or turn up the temperature in the cabin. A lot of people getting a dry upper respiratory type cough, which I think is the result of this. We just got a little touch of it.

It was formal night for dinner. Getting tired of formal nights at this point. The menu was not anything special, so all of us had the spa selection of sautéed shrimp, spinach, mushrooms, and side of white rice. Rather ordinary in my opinion. Our waiter did bring out an extra supplement of shrimp, as the portion was quite small. I had a pear tort for dessert and LaRue had a fruit plate. Marianne had 2 entrée's, the sautéed shrimp, then lamb chops, and 2 different desserts. Like I said before she sure can eat, but then she is good sized. Simon has a big problem with fat people and people eating too much. He has been harping on how fat the Polynesians are, and brings it up nearly everyday since we left Fiji. He dresses in "slim mode" with a black double breasted dinner jacket buttoned up tight, but is not exactly slim and trim when you see him in shirt and trousers (never short pants). Last night he added that "all rich people are slender or normal size". Who cares (except "See Moan", as they pronounce Simon). We just smile and let him broadcast his opinions. Lucy gets an aggravated look. One time Simon was sitting by me with LaRue and Lucy opposite of us and I said, "someone kicked me" ,and got a big laugh. Simon will not sit by LaRue as she gives him a jab when he gets out of line.

Mar 27 Day 39 fri

At Sea (cross the equator)

Beautiful day with sunshine, smooth sea, and hot. Temperature outside where the sun is shining on our patio is 94 degrees early this morning. Big celebration at 2pm for crossing the equator. The announcement is as follows -

*"His Imperial majesty, Neptune of the Deep, his Queen and Seaweed Court of multitudinous mermaids, able aides, and all other swimmers-on invite you to one of the oldest traditions of the sea. Our brave pollywogs from both guests and crew hope to win Neptune's permission to cross the equator and graduate to the rank of shellback."*

The head chef was on the morning TV interview show and said they have prepared a concoction of custard, egg whites, spaghetti, spaghetti sauce, and other soft runny stuff to smear on the polywogs. We saw it at the 1<sup>st</sup> crossing and it was awful looking stuff. Hope there are no leftovers for dinner.

Went to a talk at 10am by Sir James Carrick on "UK Diplomacy in the USA" which was interesting. One assignment was as the Consul-General in Chicago, and he was really effusive about the wonderful City of Chicago.

Had a late fish and chips lunch in the Golden Lion Pub, but did not finish my smashed peas. Arrived too late to catch the live jazz band that entertained at noon. Afterwards we caught the equator crossing ceremony and what a mess they made of the polywogs. They even got the Commodore who went along good naturedly. He has probably crossed it many times. That was the first time that we have seen him and he came on board way back in Sydney. I just finished a book about the WW2 German U-boat 124. They surfaced during war time to conduct the crossing and initiation ceremony.

We officially crossed the equator at 6:32pm and the weather changed to rain squalls. Watched the position counter on the navigation channel go from Latitude 0.1 South to 0.0 then to 0.1 North.

The late show was scheduled for 7pm and we made it for a change. It was Bruce Morrison Presents 30 Years of Les Miserables. It was a historical review. We left early and went up to the Commodore Club.

Dinner was kind of routine. I had chopped bean salad, grilled cod, which was good and an apple tart. LaRue had green salad, roast lamb (again), and she said good), and a fresh fruit tart. I knew what the response would be, but I brought it up anyway. I threw out that I thought that on a long tropical cruise like this the dress code could be relaxed to be more informal, such as no jacket required on informal nights in the dining room, and short pants allowed in the Lido buffet. I got a shout down which I expected. It was "absolutely, no. Go cruise Norwegian". Matter of fact, we might. Nothing wrong with the poor peoples cruise lines.

## **Mar 28 Day 40 sat At Sea**

Running through rain showers this morning with a little higher sea, but still a good ride. Between rain showers when I was up on deck.

Skipped breakfast and just had a hotdog at the outdoor grill for lunch. Then went to a screening of Flags of our Fathers at 1:45pm, and a question and answer session with James Bradley, the author of the book.

Seas are running higher at 5-10 feet and the noon announcement says there is 15,000 feet of water under us . We are in the middle of the largest ocean in the world. Little birds everywhere that swoop down low on the water but never land or dive in it. Interesting thing is the water temperature is 2 degrees C warmer than the outside air. Feels cool outside with temp on our door saying 81F at 6pm.

Dinner in the main dining room. We all had shrimp cocktail for the appetizer (3 little shrimp with a drizzle of sauce). I had beef tortellini with mushroom sauce (good) and the others had sole with potatoes and a vegi (pretty good). I had angel food cake and a strawberry for dessert, and LaRue had sticky pudding with caramel sauce (both a little strange). No drama during dinner. The late show was 2 acrobatic dancers.

**Mar 29 Day 41 sun At Sea**

Wind blowing at 30 knots this morning causing some ship movement and difficult walking. Looks like a dramamine day in case it gets worse. Quiet day at sea.

Attended a lecture by James Bradley at 11am on his new book coming out "Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the China Lobby", which provides insight on why the Japanese attacked. The theater was freezing, so came back and put on sweat pants and a long sleeved shirt.

Had a nice lunch at a table for two in the dining room. Both of us had black bean soup and a salad to start and both really good. LaRue had tempura fried veggies, and I had a fish taco. We both liked what we had. Hard to eat a big fish taco the Brit way of eating.

Decided to try something different for dinner. The Lido buffet closes down one side at dinner time and offers alternative dining at an extra \$15 per person. They rotate between 4 menus - Bamboo (asian food), Coriander (Indian), Prime (American fusion), and Asado (a taste of South America). Reservations are required and last night was Asado so we decided to give it a try for a change of pace. We were trying to make decisions on an appetizer and an entrée and were told you get the whole menu, except for one decision of a salad or black bean soup. We had black bean soup at lunch, so we opted for the salad which was huge. The appetizer(s) for sharing were 2 beef empanadas, 2 crab and shrimp cakes, and 2 seafood ceviche's. Then the entrée(s) came out for sharing, and was 2 chicken skewers, 2 shrimp skewers, 2 lamb chops, 2 slices of sirloin, and 2 sausages. Dessert for each of us was a trio of a cake thing, a donut thing, and flan. I think we ate about a third of what they brought out. Probably will try the Bamboo option when it comes around. Since we dined earlier than usual we decided to skip the late show rather than kill an hour waiting for it to begin.

**Mar 30 Day 42 mon Hilo, Hawaii, HI**

**arr 7am dep 5pm**

In Hilo this morning and it was raining hard when I went topside. It did not last long. May get showers on and off today. Had to go through customs and immigration on the ship, and that went quite smoothly for us. The foreigners had a long line and were not looking too happy. We have seen the sights here , so did not book a tour.

The pier area is a working port, and not tourist friendly. Too far to walk to anything. So, we caught a shuttle bus and went to a big shopping center and spent some time shopping. Back to the ship by 2pm. Saw a T shirt with the message on it ,“Sorry I do not speak Spanish. I am Hawaiian”. I think half the crew was heading to Walmart to get stuff they need. I saw an asian crew member loaded with snack ramen noodles.

Nothing spectacular at dinner. I had penne arrabiata ,and LaRue had baked cod. Saw that Marianne had salmon and it was not on the menu. Discovered that salmon and steak is always available, but no mention of it on the menu. Nice to know after 43 days into the cruise. Marianne says she is booking next years world cruise on the Queen Elizabeth while on board in order to get a credit on her account. Simon says they will probably book also.

The late show was a British comedian and Brit humor is a little different.

### **Mar 31 Day 43 tue Kahului, Maui, HI**

In Maui, Hawaii this morning at Kahului which is just across the island from Lahaina. It is a deep water working port and not a lot here to see. Beautiful day around 75 degrees and sunshine. Rode the free shuttle (after a long wait) to the big mall nearby, and a big tour of Macy's. Had lunch at the Kona Grill that was all locals. That was interesting. The town is laid back and quite pleasant and would be a nice place to live.

Tonight we sail 5 sea days non stop to the port of San Pedro just south of Los Angeles. We have new lecturers aboard for this segment so there should be plenty to do. Will get this update off and then one more short one and this cruise will be in the books for good.

Saw a whale out in the bay just before we sailed. It came up and dived 3 times in the same area so believe it was the same whale. It was just the 2 of us at dinner. The others indicated they would probably do alternative dining. I had minestrone soup, and it was identical to the roasted tomato and bean soup I had at lunch the

other day. Also went for the sirloin steak with a whiskey sauce. Steak was much better in taste and texture, but did not need the sauce. Also, had a grilled tomato, fries, and 2 onion rings as well as string beans. LaRue had green salad and salmon with steamed veggies, and lemon crème brulee for dessert. I had apple strudel with the signature vanilla sauce.

The late show was a talented lady playing the flute. An hour of flute music put me to sleep.

## **Apr 01 Day 44 wed At Sea**

Day 1 of 5 on our way to California. Slight rain shower this morning then sunny and around 75 degrees today. Heading is 65 degrees and speed of 17 knots with fairly smooth seas. Attended two lectures this morning on “The Ocean Beneath Us” and “Exploration of the Pacific Ocean” both quite pertinent. Activities all day but not anything we really want to do this afternoon. Always High Tea at 3:30pm but way too stuffy and proper for me.

The Commodore in his noon announcement said “you may be hearing about a tragic accident on the Queen Elizabeth during tendering and he just wanted to assure us that “Cunard takes the passengers safety and health very seriously“. That is all he said and has everybody wondering what happened. BBC News is not reporting it. Some idiots thought it was an April fools joke! LaRue bought one hook line and sinker. A chef was on the morning television interview segment. He said he has some chickens in cages for fresh eggs, etc. He was worried in that one of his chickens had escaped and was running around the ship somewhere. She did not realize it was an April Fools joke until we were discussing it at dinner!

Formal night tonight and a Hawaiian themed dinner. Lucy and Simon were at the Captain’s table with the Chief Engineer and his wife who they know from another cruise. Marianne came from the Commodore’s welcome party for those that boarded in Hilo as well as the Cunard Diamond Level passengers. She said the Commodore thanked her for providing the impetus for starting the onboard Vanuatu relief fund. So far \$37,000 has been donated. LaRue had beet salad, Hawaiian blue marlin, and grand marnier crème brulee. I had bong bong shrimp, huli hili ribs, and chocolate brownie with chocolate sauce.

We have seen the stage production show and decided one time was enough. The clock goes forward 1 hour tonight.



**Apr 02 Day 45 thu**

**At Sea**

Strong winds this morning, and big white caps. The ride is not too bad. Navigation channel shows 30 knot headwinds, speed 17 knots, and sea state moderate at 3 meters or roughly 9-10 feet. The sea color is deep cobalt blue.

Been skipping breakfast lately in the dining room or the Lido as it is always the same. Been content with room service coffee, muffins and a banana. Then off to the talks in the theater.

Went to a talk at 10am on California, then at 11am an interview of the Commodore with a question and answer session. The Commodore, in answer to a question, said the incident on the Queen Elizabeth occurred in Cambodia. A lady was boarding the tender and stepped into the void between the tender and the fenders on the ship and fell into the ocean. Two crew members went into the water and rescued her, but she died later. When tendering that is the step I don't really like as everything is moving.

At 12:15 another talk on the "Deep Sea" then off for lunch in the dining room. Busy day as after lunch as we went to a wine tasting at 3pm. We debated whether to go or not since the fee was a little pricey but finally decided to go. It was unlimited tasting of 12 wines from 6 countries and about 70-80 people attended. It turned out to be well worth the fee. Our dinner wine somalier poured the 2 French selections and took good care of us. Was disappointed as the only California wine was a zinfandel rose that we did not care for. The young newly wed guys won the drawing for a bottle of wine and then our dinner somalier, Dayan, sang a really nice song to close things out. He was really good and wonder what our friend George would have thought if he would have been there.

Everybody back together for dinner and in good spirits and had good conversation. Marianne says she will really miss us when we get off in San Pedro. She has met some people on the cruise that live there. They told her to look for a restaurant on the starboard side as she sails back out. He told her there will be a celebration for her that she will recognize. LaRue had salad, leg of lamb, and chocolate pot of cream for dessert. I had broccoli soup, veggie and beans on tortilla chips (a vegetarian taco) with salsa, and a crepe with vanilla ice crème. Not too bad.

The late show was a young New Zealander singer and piano player that was pretty good. He said he is not traveling with his parents. Looked about 16. Clocks go forward an hour again tonight.

**Apr 03\* Day 46 fri**

**At Sea**

Fairly normal morning at sea with wind at 30-35 knots and slightly high waves. Quiet out walking this morning. Just had coffee and muffins and a banana room service .

Went to lectures. The first one at 10am was on "Herman Melville's Pacific - The True Story of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Whaling". The 2<sup>nd</sup> one was at 11am on "Islands - Learn Why These Unique Environments Have Been So Important to Biology" and the 3<sup>rd</sup> one at 12:15am was on "Los Angeles". They were all informative and good presenters.

Got to the pub in time for a pub lunch and catch the 5 piece jazz band performing. I had bangers and mash and LaRue had fish and chips. Observed a little more of something we have seen developing. Might as well reveal it here -- An older single lady is assigned a table by herself across from us in the main dining room. Early in the cruise we noticed a gentleman show up one evening and join her for dinner but did not eat anything. A few days later another one (with a pony tail) showed up, but he had dinner, and has been there a few more times. We figured it out that these are gentleman escorts since they dress alike and have name tags. We see them on the dance floor every night. They are on the cruise to dance with the ladies which is a Cunard tradition from way back. It is one reason why so many single ladies cruise with Cunard. Since they are Cunard representatives they are severely restricted in their activities. Way back somewhere we were in the Lido Buffet and I see one of the escorts at a table by himself and the single lady is several tables away. She sees him and comes up behind him and I hear her asking if he knows the cabin # of so and so. He seemed a little perplexed and said he was not sure if he had changed cabins but wrote down a cabin number for her. So today in the pub we see her and the pony tail guy having lunch together. She is drinking champagne and he is drinking coffee (probably Cunard rules), but every now and then he would sneak a sip of her champagne. Pretty interesting and totally relevant cruise stuff.

Finally got to the cabin at 2pm to get some reading and napping done. The dinner menu was rather strange. I finally settled on pea soup with Yorkshire ham and a pasta shell thing with mushroom sauce (barely ok) and no dessert. LaRue had a chopped shrimp something, dover sole, and orange sherbet.

The late show was for both the early and late diners, and was the crew talent show and was good. Our wine somalier, Dayan, led it off singing New York - New York.

Did a good job and got a big ovation. He was as good as some of the professional entertainers we have had. Clocks go forward 1 hour again tonight, for the third night in a row.

**Apr 04 Day 47 sat At Sea**

Hard to get up and get going after 3 time changes in a row ,and less sleep 3 consecutive nights. Smooth sea and 33 knot winds. It didn't seem that bad on deck 10 this morning. We are following the great circle route to San Pedro, CA

Attended 2 lectures this morning on "Real Stories of Survival on the Pacific Ocean" and "History of Hollywood". One more day at sea tomorrow. Time to start getting organized for debarkation. It will be strange living on solid land. I have noticed that whenever we have been in port and on land that it still rocks. It has been a great itinerary on a great ship and we visited places we didn't think we would ever visit. The time has gone by fast but thinking back it seems like a long time ago when we started this voyage, almost 7 weeks ago. Hate for it to end but it will be nice not to dress up every night for dinner.

Tonight is formal night and the last one. We also have an invite to the Commodore's farewell party before dinner. We only had the welcome aboard party and this one, so not much opportunity to sponge off Cunard. We will do our best to get our moneys worth.

The farewell party was nice and not that crowded. All of the senior officers were there in their finest uniforms. The Chief of Hotels that was at the birthday celebration and dinner recognized us and gave LaRue a big kiss. Several people had fancy masks as the Masquerade Ball followed.

Dinner was good and everybody congenial. Simon and Lucy even invited us to stop in if we ever get to Quebec City. I had tortilla soup (no resemblance of tortilla soup as we know it), vegetable lasagna, and skipped dessert. LaRue had an escargot thing, beef Wellington, and crème brulee (again and again). Everyone had beef Wellington except me. We all complimented our somalier, Dayon, on his singing at the crew talent show the evening before. He was really strutting around.

**Apr 05 Day 48 sun At Sea**

Last day at sea before arriving in San Pedro. Smooth seas with a slight roll, and 35 knot winds. Lower temperature of around 60 degrees making it feel real cool outside. The inside temperature is always cool.

Went to a lecture at 11am on the early fishing port days and history of San Pedro (learned it is pronounced San Pea dro not San Pay dro as we were pronouncing it). It has quite a history.

Had our last lunch in the dining room. I had white onion soup and escalope of veal and raspberry panacotta. LaRue had salad and escalope of veal and the ice cream trio. Others at the table were a couple from Santa Barbara who we have had before and an older lady from Las Vegas and her daughter who now lives in Germany. Rest of the day packing up, reading, and relaxing.

Final dinner together. Everyone had lamb chops (they said excellent but a little rare) except me. I had a chicken something that was rather suspect. After dinner we all went up to the Commodore Club for a farewell drink and good byes. A lot of talk about next years world cruises and the possibility of meeting again. For us Cunard is a bit too formal for long cruises. However, we do see the Queen Mary 2 on the radar for a transatlantic trip in the near future. She is the Grand Dame of cruise ships and a must do for us.

**Apr 06                      mon                      Debark in San Pedro, CA                      arr 6am**

Up early and had breakfast in the main dining room. Had to be out of the cabin by 8:30 and our debarkation was scheduled for 9. We hung around as long as we could figuring we would not be able to check in to our hotel that early.

At 10:30 the waiting areas were empty and the staff was looking at us so decided we better go. It was easy finding our bags as most were long gone. Caught a cab and got to the hotel at 11:30 and was able to check in. So, this cruise is in the books except for the flight home tomorrow. For lunch we went to Jack in the Box next door and a jumbo jack burger . Sure hit the spot. Tonight is a nice little Italian place that is also next door and a pizza.

The end