
Post Christmas Cruise December 27, 1998 - January 3, 1999 San Juan - Aruba - Curacao - Tortolla

December 27, 1998

We left home at 4 a.m. this morning on our chartered limo-van to the Miami Airport, about a 2 ½ hours journey. We arrived a bit before 6, before the Tower Air Lines staff arrived for our boarding. Our flight from Miami to San Juan was comfortable and uneventful. We left a modest rain in Miami to arrive to bright sunny skies in San Juan.

We took a brief cab ride to the Pan American Pier where the Norwegian Dream awaited us. Judy could not find her small camera at home so we picked up a disposable one at the pier for \$10. What a pleasure to not have sales tax. We had set our watches an hour ahead and await our luggage from the porters. We will then go up and have some lunch.

After lunch we listened to the Dive-In adventures in snorkeling and then had dinner. The food is great. I started with shrimp cocktail and had Wiener Schnitzel with German potato salad and Austrian cake for dessert. Cappuccino flows freely and we imbibed on our first real cruise meal. We were sitting right above the loading pier so we watched the last passengers boarding looking for two who would be Rob & Tricia. As we were eating we saw a young man and woman enter who matched their profile. After finishing we rushed down to their room to greet them but they were not there. Their plane was to arrive at 4 p.m. and it took us only 1 ½ hours to arrive from the airport so at 7:30 we started to be concerned. Reception was aware that their flight had been delayed from Atlanta and with 70 passengers on board they would be waiting for them.

We listened to the shore excursions explanations and picked out ones that we were interested hoping to share these features with Rob & Tricia when they arrived. That night was the first evening's entertainment and introductions of the cruise personnel. There is a banjo player in the entertainment crew who is excellent. He played "dueling banjos" with the orchestra and his own rendition of "Flight of the Bumble Bee." He was very good and quite entertaining.

At about 10 we were set to sail from San Juan. We took a quick look for Rob and found the suitcases outside the door. We were pleased that they were on board. We walked around the top deck looking for them as we sailed out of the harbor. The wind starts to blow and the ship rocks back and forth as soon as you reach the open water. The skyline is a beautiful sight with the buildings lit up and the fort on the point was illuminated

After we pulled out of the harbor it was Party Time! The cruise director called us to the center of the ship by promising free gifts. The first was given to a young lady who was the first to show a tattoo in an unusual place. The sports director offered a gift to someone who would do five push-ups. That was me. Another gift was given to someone who had a picture of a Disney character. One was given to someone who would sing. We then made a Congo Line and danced around this ship. This helped us get our sea legs. Dancing was easy as the ship rocked even if you didn't. We did the Electric Slide line dance and learned a new one, "Hitchhiker." We were quite well warned up and tired having gotten up so early so we went down at about 11. We were surprised that Rob's luggage was still outside the door. We figured that they went to dinner instead of the send off party.

My gym teacher would have been proud (and surprised) to see that I had won a prize in sports for my push-ups. Tricia would have been pleased to see Judy and me doing the line dance. Alas neither were there for our debut.

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We prepared for breakfast and asked each other whether we should invite Rob and Tricia to join us. We decided that they would probably prefer sleeping in. As we walked past their room we noticed the door was ajar. We knocked and called in but there was no answer. I pushed the door open and there was no evidence that the bed had been slept in. The luggage was gone. We called reception and found that they had missed the connection in Atlanta and had taken a different plane to San Juan. They got to San Juan only to find that the ship had sailed off. The luggage went directly and was loaded on board. We were told that 70 people were affected by the inclement weather in Atlanta and 56 passengers were not on board when we left the pier. We received a fax from our travel agent that they were flying to Aruba and would meet us when we arrived there. We are confident that they are surviving and have been well taken care of but are disappointed that they have missed the first two days of activities and are not with us as planned.

Breakfast was nice. One of my favorite foods is bacon and because of its high fat, sodium and preservative content, I generally only eat it when served in a buffet. (Its too expensive to buy as a side dish.) Of course, there was all the bacon I cared to eat and because I was likely to eat another six breakfasts before disembarking, I took it easy today and only had five pieces with my scrambled eggs and French toast. The sweet roll was nice but standard.

After breakfast we returned to our stateroom to prepare for the mandatory life boat drill. Having attended the lectures we made our final decisions on the tours and dive trips to sign up for. We were waiting to discuss the selections with Rob & Tricia but could wait no longer. I signed up for a scuba trip in Aruba, a one tank dive (which is plenty for me) and I expected that the kids would want to be on board at the outset and get their gear unpacked, clean clothes and explore the ship as we did on the first day. Judy doesn't scuba so I would be on my own anyway. We will meet at a central place downtown at 1 p.m. to conclude our day together. The Curaçao snorkeling trip was sold out so we are on the waiting list for it. We also signed up for the Kayak trip in St. Thomas. We understood that Rob wanted to play golf that day and having already shopped in St. Thomas this would be a good alternate activity. I understand that Tortola is a good beach island and one does not need a tour to go to the beach. The lecture today said that Cane Beach was the nicest, a 15 minute taxi ride from the pier. I planned to go there for the beach day.

At about 11 we took to the sun. An hour on each side would take care of us and prepare us for the water activities that would occur later in the week. I read my bridge Bulletin and started on my second book, How to Develop Your Child's Intelligence. Recommended by my friend and optometrist, Dan Fleming, it discusses the techniques that can be used to increase a child's ability to read through exercises designed to facilitate the complex intellectual activities that are employed in interpreting squiggles into concepts and experiencing them vicariously.

Later that afternoon, I took advantage of the casino lessons on blackjack and their introductory offer of \$15 of chips for \$10. The chips they sell you cannot be redeemed, they must be lost. Of course one's winnings can be redeemed. After 25 minutes of fun, I was ahead \$7.50 so I quit. If Judy signs up, I may give it another go.

I went to the gym in the late afternoon to work legs. It was crowded. When there are 10 machines and 10 people in the room, it is definitely too small a facility. Nevertheless, I did my workout of 10 sets of 10 reps, supersetting leg extensions with leg curls. I am sure that I will feel that tomorrow as I do not regularly do leg extensions.

This evening is formal night so we prepared for dinner, our first at our assigned table and the first with our waiter, Erlite, from the Philippines. He is a congenial man but his English is such that one must concentrate

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waiter, Lito, from the Philippines. He is a congenial man but his English is such that one must concentrate to understand him. They have a nice arrangement on the wine. You may buy a bottle and use it throughout the cruise. They vacuum pack the remaining and serve it to you the following night without further charge. I bought a bottle of Blue Nun as I thought that Rob and Tricia would enjoy it as well as me.

This evening's dinner was the Captain's welcome meal. I selected escargot, lobster bisque and lamb kabob. The escargot was nice but could have used more garlic. The lobster bisque was in a brown base. I prefer the cream base that I had at The Black Pearl the other day. The lamb kabob was a disappointment in that the lamb was lamb meatballs, rather than cubes of lamb. It was served with something that seemed like uncooked grits. I had my first Portobello mushroom, but I don't find that it has much taste or flavor. Though I had had praline ice cream before, I don't recall ever having eaten a praline. I did last night for the first time. I am getting old, I find things too sweet. As a child, sugar by itself was not too sweet.

A short nap before the evening program and off to "Broadway." The singing and dancing spectacular was fantastic. I was beaming throughout the whole presentation. There were two very talented gymnasts who were part of the dance team. The ballerina and her male associate were excellent. He picked her up and twirled her around and around and never seemed to get dizzy. The selection of show tunes was excellent, it was complete enjoyment. I am sorry that Rob and Tricia weren't here to enjoy it. On the other hand, Rob doesn't enjoy shows like I do so, for him, he probably didn't miss much.

In our formal attire, we took a romantic walk around the promenade deck and dreamed that we were on the Titanic before we retired to our stateroom to plan the next day.

December 29, 1998

I prepared for scuba diving and Judy prepared for breakfast and to meet the kids. We were to dock at 8 a.m. and we expected them to be ready to board the ship and go to their luggage, being without it for four days. As my dive trip left at 9 I went off to view the coral and the ship wreck on which it was growing. We would meet at 1 in the town area.

The scuba trip was nice, not a heart stopper but very pleasant and clear conditions. We dove at 50 feet for about 35 minutes, making our way on the ocean floor around the vessel. There were plenty of coral formations and little fish that live off and around the coral. The ship was in good condition after being submerged for almost 50 years. I liked being able to tell that you were in a certain room of the ship. Often wrecks are so blown up that they are more like fragments than a submerged vessel. I returned to our ship a little before 1 p.m. and planned to wash my face, get a hamburger and go off to meet Judy, Rob & Tricia downtown at the appointed hour. Judy surprised me by being in the room when I arrived. She said that she had waited two and one quarter hours for them to board and they were not there. So she went to town to look around and buy some things and returned to the ship for lunch. Checking with reception we found that they had not checked in. We asked them to page them. The receptionist said that they were not permitted to make private pages over the loud speakers. We implored him to ask for them as we had not seen them for two days. He complied hoping that they would return the page and come to register. We heard nothing so we went to lunch.

When we returned to our room there was a note on our door, "On the fourth day after Christmas, our travel agent gave to us, 4 missing bags, 3 extra flights, 2 hotel nights and a boat we watched sailing away. Glad to be here, Rob & Trish." At last we knew they were on board though we still had not seen them. We went up to the sun deck to catch some rays. The sun is bright and hot but the breezes make it a pleasant occasion. We found lounge chairs near the dancers who did the wonderful show last night. On our way back after an hour, I told one how much I appreciated their show. He was pleased.

After a brief rest, I went up to the gym for my afternoon workout. Today was arms and shoulders. To my pleasant surprise, upon my return, Rob and Tricia were in our room. I couldn't wait to hear of their "adventure." They told us of their travail in San Juan and the reason that they missed the ship was particularly due to their luggage being taken on board without their being so advised. Their missing the ship was completely due to the negligence of the ship's staff! If they had only been advised of their baggage being loaded on board, they would have arrived at the ship in time. As it was they spent hours making baggage claim reports at both the airline they went on and the one they were scheduled for. What a shame. They booked their own room in the airport sleeze-bag hotel because Tricia was not feeling well. In the morning they returned to the airport to arrange their onward travel and arrange for a room in Aruba. The airline personnel performed miracles in obtaining a room for \$180 instead of \$480 and within the cruise ship's reimbursement allowance. Most of their day was spent in the San Juan airport standing in line and waiting for the agent's arrangements. Their flight went from San Juan to Curaçao and then to Aruba. They arrived late in the afternoon and had dinner before retiring, then the following day they spent touring the island. They arranged with a cab driver for \$25 to show them the sights. They said it was well worth it. That evening they enjoyed their room so well that they decided to sleep in late. They arrived at the ship at about 10:30, just after Judy had given up waiting for them. On board they were pleased to find their luggage intact and complete and were happy to change their clothes for the first time.

This evening was Caribbean motif. Along with the Caribbean fare there was a Caribbean dessert flambé parade. The waiters were marching around, some had potted plants on their heads and were doing limbo moves. Others were twirling napkins and there was really quite a good show. Everyone was clapping to the music and having a good time.

Following dinner was the comedy show at the Starlight Lounge. The comedian had his funny moments and would be considered good, but not spectacular, he was no Red Skelton. We enjoyed the show together, for the first time as a family.

December 30, 1998

Today was a beautiful, sun shining day in Curaçao. We disembarked the ship after breakfast ready to make our own way notwithstanding the snorkel trip being sold out. The port expert referred us to the tourist information center in the port and the young lady there offered us the phone to inquire about availability. We took a cab to the Sea Lion Hotel and Dive Resort. We spent the morning at the beach and went on a snorkel dive in the afternoon. We met a few others from our ship on board.

First the beach. The beach environment was European, many of the ladies were topless. Most of the men wore rather scant bathing suits. I was beginning to get too much sun so we rented lounge chairs and I sat in the shade. It was to no avail, my face is much redder than I had hoped.

We took a short ride out to the reef on the boat. Our instructions were to snorkel anywhere between the boat and the shore. There was a pretty reef with specimens of all of the coral that I had seen on the map in the dive shop. There were parrot fish and gars along with many nondescript pretty little fish. I think I saw more here than I did diving in Aruba though there was no wreck.

We took a cab back to the ship and prepared for dinner.

This was French motif. I had French onion soup, salad and Tricia and I shared a crown roast of lamb and filet minion. We all shared from an international cheese tray containing Camembert, Muenster and Bleu cheeses.

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Tricia selected the wine, she chose a Cabernet Sauvignon that was very nice with the meat. I enjoyed it a bit too much and went to rest before the evening entertainment. I got carried away resting and arrived just after the performance had started. Naturally, I was unable to find Judy and the crew so I just sat down near the front. This evening was a dancing play about a young dancer from Allentown trying to make her debut on Broadway. It was well done but I liked Monday's performance better.

Afterward we stopped in the casino. Judy registered for her \$15 of chips for \$10 as did Tricia and Rob. Judy has no interest in this so she gave me her chips. Rob sat down to play Blackjack. He was so lucky, he had won \$50 before he lost his second of the three chips. Shortly thereafter, his luck had turned and when he lost his third chip I stated that I had quit being \$7.50 ahead. When we left him, he was down to \$10 again. One must "know when to hold them and know when to fold them." Nevertheless, he certainly got his entertainment's money's worth out of those three chips.

December 31, 1998

Today we decided to take it easy, nurse our sunburns and stay out of the sun today. We found a young pair and played some bridge in the afternoon and got ready for our second formal night, the New Years Eve party. This evening, the star food was prime rib. We also had some bananas foster for dessert. The evening show was a young man who sang 60's songs. He sang well and was a good performer.

January 1, 1999

We landed in Tortola, the largest island in the British West Indies. The whole place is very small. We did the whole town on foot. We walked up to the botanical garden, stopping at an open air market on the way but because it is New Year's Day, it is closed. We walked past the police station and the legislature and supreme court buildings. They even have offices of Deloitte & Touche and KPMG here. Three major banks are also represented so this must be tax haven.

We were nursing our sun burns so we were afraid to go out much. Rob & Tricia said that their trip to Virgin Gorda beaches was the best beach they had ever seen. We saw "Men in Black," certainly one of the dumbest movies I've ever seen.

This evening was the captain's farewell dinner. We had Florida lobster and a baked Alaska on parade. I wish the food was better. I am not one to complain about food but it had no sparkle.

The evening's entertainment was superb. There was a stage review with the theme of water. They had water falling from the top of the stage into pans below and tubes with bubbles behind the stage, it was very well done, technically. The singing and dancing were also very good. We enjoyed it thoroughly.

Shortly before midnight there was a 70's night in the disco lounge. At the beginning there were four ladies selected from the audience. Judy was number four and went up, kicking and screaming, as it was. The other three contestants were in their 20s at best. The goal was to impress the judges and the audience in a lip sync of "I Will Survive." Judy had an advantage because the other girls went first. But she was fantastic. All her years of dancing on tables came back to her after 25 years and she was just great. She won, hands down, she was crowned the 1999 Disco Queen. She received a cup, a bookmark and a deck of cards. The other contestants won sports bottles. After the ladies performed the four men who were selected to be the judges were called to the floor to perform the John Travolta classic 70's dance song, "Staying Alive." They took off their shirts, did a break dance and really whirled. It was good fun. Judy and I danced a few songs and then turned in for the night.

We had a nice relaxing day in port.

January 2, 1999

St. Thomas is known for its shopping so off we went to shop. We looked at the precious gems and jewelry and sought tee shirts but bought none. The high point of the shopping excursion was a sales clerk in Diamonds in Paradise passing out cold. An ambulance was called causing a big scene, but as far as we could tell she was alright.

This afternoon we went on our second excursion, a kayaking and snorkeling trip to the Virgin Islands Marine Sanctuary. This was one of the best experiences of our trip. We took a cab across the central mountain range to the other side of the island. We received brief instruction on the use of the kayak and safety. We then departed in our kayaks on the lagoon to an area of red mangroves. Our guide explained the importance of the mangroves to the ecology of the island, particularly the coral reefs off shore. Many of the other islands in the Caribbean have lost their coral reefs because they turned their mangroves into airports and resorts. The most crucial use of the mangrove lagoons is to capture the sediment that comes down from the mountains in the rains. If this sediment escapes into the sea, it kills the coral reefs. The reefs are living animals and they require light to survive, the sediment covers them and they die.

We paddled on further and another guide told us about the reproduction system of the mangrove and its use in protecting the island from storm winds. She explained how all of the ships in the harbor were sunk in Hurricane Marilyn while only one boat was damaged in the mangrove lagoon. It had to be removed from the trees with a crane but otherwise sailed away, unscathed.

We paddled further and another guide told us about the wildlife in the water, particularly the unique jelly fish, the sand worms and the fish that hide in the roots of the mangrove.

Finally we paddled to the sea's edge and snorkeled in a area where we could see each of these phenomena operating on our own. We were given water and Snicker's bars at the conclusion of the snorkeling, boarded our kayaks and paddled back to the origin. We had a good group who asked intelligent questions and everyone seemed to enjoy the experience.

That evening was Italian night at the dining room. We bought our last bottle of wine, a nice Chianti to celebrate the occasion and enjoyed our last meal together as a family.

The evening show was a variety show with the banjo player, the comedian and singer entertaining us in sequence. It was good. We then returned to our staterooms to pack and put our baggage outside for pick-up during the night. We were to be out of the room by 8:30 a.m. so that they could be prepared for the next guests.

January 3, 1999

After breakfast we took a brief nap and moved out of our room. During the course of the cruise I had prepared a letter for Rob & Tricia complaining of their experience in San Juan and asking to be reimbursed for their expenses and requesting a replacement trip for their inconvenience and loss. We had gone over it during the cruise and adjusted the details to conform to their actual experiences. Last night I asked one of the ship's personnel to print the letter from the floppy I provided. When we returned to the stateroom the printed letter was waiting for us. We met with the assistant cruise director after the evening show and he read the letter. He

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was apologetic and sympathetic to our situation. He recommended that he make copies of the letter and provide one to the cruise director, the director of hotel (the king of the ship) and shore-side headquarters who would make the final adjustment. He advised us that the person named president on the cruise surveys was no longer presiding and gave us the name of the person to contact. He also suggested that we meet with Mr. DaSilva, the Director of Hotel on board. He had provided him with a copy of our letter. This morning, Rob and I went to see the "wizard." He was most apologetic and surprised that NCL personnel were not on duty until 10 p.m. as was their policy. He assured us that he would forward the letter to headquarters with his acknowledgment of talking with us and encouraging them to make the adjustment we requested. We were very pleased with the outcome of our meeting.

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