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My First Cruise – Part Two

By
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I would like for everyone reading this to do me a favor... take a piece of hardened steel, 3 feet long, that weighs 10 pounds and place it in a tub containing 3 feet of water and tell me what happens. I already know the answer... it immediately sinks to the bottom. Do it over and over again and you will get the same results.

Keeping that statistic in mind... take a piece of steel, 3 football fields long, that weighs... oh, let's say 73,000 tons... that's right "tons," not pounds. Now let over 3,000 people of average weight stand on top of this piece of metal and then place them all in a body of water that's 30 feet deep. What happens? Does it sink to the bottom? It should but it doesn't. Surprisingly, through the magic of buoyancy and displacement... physics terms which are totally foreign to me... this huge hunk of metal and other stuff floats. Can you believe it? It actually stays on top of the water.

These are just some of the thoughts that accompanied me as I stood looking out from my balcony stateroom at the vastness of the Caribbean Ocean, knowing my swimming abilities were not much more than a trained rock, and the bottom of the ocean was over 2,500 feet below us. Would you call that fear? No... I don't think so. I call it reverence for something that is far above my ability to comprehend just how it works, but knowing it does.

As I mentioned in last week's article this was my first cruise, other than river jaunts and I had no idea what thoughts would occupy my mind during the voyage. I must admit the same thoughts kept creeping into my mind the first time I flew to Hawaii at 30,000 feet above the ground, across the huge and dangerously beautiful Pacific Ocean. In my opinion, the wizardry of God and His allowing man to harness the science of Physics is a vital part of an expedition of flight or ocean voyage. The wonderment of it all makes the experience all the more exciting and enjoyable.

Last Monday there were a total of 91 individuals from The Villages, together with approximately 2,600 from all over the world, who boarded the "*Sovereign of the Seas*," a Royal Caribbean ocean liner, and set sail for 4 nights of endless fun, frolic, frivolity and food on a cruise to the Bahamas. I don't have the names of all those on board but the names of those from our Village of Winifred were: Doris and Larry Parsons, Ed and Cathy Lacey, Tom & Mo Merlette, Jo and Carol Mrotek, Ed and Ginny Ryan, John and Sally Drake, Dave and Linda Duhaime, Dick and Susan Goodough, Charlie and Sheila Zebraski and Judy and I. We also had the pleasure of meeting 3 other couples as dinner table mates; Wanda and Bob from Polo Ridge Village, Cheng and Min from Chatham Village and Rosemary and Dick from Piedmont Village.

If you're wondering about the rumor that there is food available 24 hours around the clock... it's true. There is also non stop music of various genres and the nightly show productions were very professional and lively. For some reason the professional quality of all the entertainment surprised me... don't ask me why. A core company of young, fantastic dancers, singers and a live show band gave us great performances each night.

Our first port of call was the Bahamas Island owned by Royal Caribbean, CoCoCay. The weather was sunny as we went ashore on this little bit of paradise jutting its head above the waves. CoCoCay is 140 acres in size and is surrounded by the tri-colored crystal clear blue waters of the Caribbean. Royal Caribbean provides you the opportunity of a full day of snorkeling, wave runner riding, kayaking, scuba diving, eating (at no charge,) shopping (limited choices,) parasailing, mini-catamaran two person sailboats, hiking around the island or just soaking up the rays in one of the 3,000 beach lounge chairs provided. It's a beautiful place and should be visited.

Judy and I decided to do the snorkeling which we are somewhat familiar with, but we weren't prepared for the waves being generated in the bay by the wind whipping around the island. We had on a small life vest which they instructed us to inflate and of course the snorkel tube through which we could breathe, however the vest prevented us from diving deep into the water and we were pretty much at the mercy of the heavy waves. Unfortunately, the waves were blowing away from the island which resulted in Judy and I being washed out beyond the point and almost into the open sea.

We turned and swam back against the waves but we made very little headway so a slight sense of panic began to creep into our head, and rather than swimming with the waves we continued fighting them and began to kick harder and breathe faster. There were lifeguards riding around on wave-runners and we could have signaled one of them but you know how pride and stubbornness go together. Of course swallowing a couple of cups of sea water didn't help our attitude as the waves crashed over our tubes. To make a long story even longer, we kept swimming against the waves and after we both began to experience the beginnings of leg cramps we told ourselves to settle down and take it easy.... Don't panic! Don't panic! However, it was to no avail... we both drowned. Just kidding... we both made it back to shore safely and decided we had enough of the snorkeling adventure for the day.

The same gusty sea breeze was prevalent throughout most of the cruise which induced many to stay inside and enjoy the many entertainment venues provided. The Captain announced that due to the high winds there would be waves of 4 to 6 feet which should not affect the stability of the ship. However, the first and second night the rolling ship gave us just enough movement to make us feel that we had been drinking quite a bit, which we hadn't, and made our walking and/or dancing somewhat adventurous. Neither of us were affected to the point of becoming seasick but we did know that we had been on the ocean.

Our second port of call, the morning of our third day was Nassau, which I enjoyed watching from our balcony the ship back into port around 6 am. Such a beautiful island from the ship but time and a not too flourishing economy exposed the rough and shoddy side of Nassau as we took a taxi tour of the island. One stop we made on the island, and we encourage everyone to do so as well, was at the Atlantis hotel on Paradise Island there at Nassau. This is the Resorts International Resort which was developed and owned by Merv Griffin who later sold it to its present owner.

Luxuriously beautiful opulence is how I would describe Atlantis-Paradise Island and the developer had a wonderfully creative imagination to make this place come to life. Underground aquariums full of, seemingly, every species of sea life wind their way through a subterranean tunnel beneath the hotel and multi-million dollar yachts tie up in the hotels huge adjacent marina. Beginning rates are in the \$450 per night range and one of its claims to fame is that Michael Jackson spent a week there in a suite of 14 rooms which cost \$25,000 per night. Not too shabby in anyone's book.

The hotel's Casino is huge and is as opulent and big as the hotel to which it is attached. Huge hand blown sculptures and wall size frescoes adorn the rooms and hundreds of slot machines, and gaming tables just cry out to you to empty your pockets of any money you have in them. It is beautiful and I'm sure second to none in Vegas. As I said earlier, this is a must see on your travel agenda while on shore from the ship.

Meanwhile, back on board the ship, for those who don't like to make the treks ashore, piano bars, theatres, card playing, a library, duty free on board shops and a much appreciated, fully operational Casino of its own gave all of us something to occupy our time while on board. Space won't allow a complete description of everything available to you but suffice it to say, it's just like living at The Villages, if you get bored it's your fault.

With rare exception everyone I spoke with and those whose conversations on which I eavesdropped had a fantastic time and are looking forward to going on another cruise as soon as possible.

For those of you who still haven't taken a cruise because of fear of the "mighty deep" please hear my message today. So many times we allow fear, of various shapes, identities, and names, to prevent us from truly maximizing the joy of life we've been given. Rid yourself of that fear by taking a step of faith and venture out into the unknown depths of life all around you. You'll be glad you did. Bon Voyage through life!

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