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Lost At Sea

By Scott Baxley

INTRODUCTION

You've seen those ads on TV or in the Brochures. Those big, clean white ships traveling to exotic places where the sun always shines and the seas are clear and blue. The sounds of steel drums and reggae music waft peacefully through the air. Cold drinks and tasty snacks are there for the asking. Maybe you've even taken one of those relaxing cruises for a week or two. You probably met a few of those people that cook, clean, and keep you entertained (and even photograph you). Who are these people? And what kind of lives do they lead down there in the bowels of ships sailing the oceans? Well I was one of those people who photographed you, and those other crewmembers were my friends. We were all in the same boat, lost at sea, and away from our homes and family.

I went to all those places many times over and lived with the crew. We suffered and laughed together. A life at sea is not what you think, but probably better!

People always ask me how I got the job working on ships and, more often, how could I ever leave such a job? Easy, my time on ships took me many places but there is still no place like home. How I got there is a story soon to be told to you but the fun really started after I got aboard. You may ask "Isn't it like the Love Boat?" Well no, it really wasn't anything like that. That was television for God's sake. I just wish that I could have a cabin like the one that Julie had on the Princess. The few times that Ann and I went on ships as passengers we didn't even have that nice of a room. I was lucky to have a porthole and my own bathroom. I always had to share. Yes, the Doctor really does have as nice a place to live (and they do chase girls) but that is the exception. The Captain has spacious quarters but he is rarely able to spend much time there. The guys on television always seem to have spare time and they were always well rested. No way! I routinely worked 60 to 70 hours per week. We rose early and stayed up late. Three hours of sleep was rare. Mostly the crew could only hope for a catnap during the day. We also had to deal with the fact that we lived in a moving hotel, with only so far to go at sea. Those ships seem big, but after a few weeks I got accustomed to every square inch. In short, each and every crewmember worked very hard but there are a few good points I feel that I should mention.

The travel was great! I always got some time off in ports. I went to almost twenty countries outside of the United States. The crew was from all over the world, and I made some very good friends. There was a lot of beach time to be had in the Caribbean. I never paid rent, utility bills, or needed gas money. I also got meals. Sometimes this wasn't so great, the food varied so wildly between companies. On my

first ship there came a point where the Doctor ordered me to leave the ship for a few days just to eat some food that would give me my energy back. I was almost malnourished from the stuff they served me there. On my last I ate everything that the passengers did, and I really enjoyed it! You just can't imagine what those waiters ate after they served you your steak and lobster. There are many levels of status on ships, and your waiters were not high up on the list. Sometimes I was, but the Photographers were generally considered a nuisance. Nonetheless, my boss Bob Harrow took good care of us by negotiating with the companies that owned the cruise lines. Julie ate better than any Cruise Director that I ever saw. There was always the option of spending my own money and eat the local food of whatever port we were in that day. Of course, this was often since most places not only had great food but there would be few passengers.

Not that I didn't like passengers. They were not only the reason we were there in the first place, but they paid my salary by buying my photographs. Still, it was hard to get away from your job when you lived in a finite space alongside of your customers. Let's face it; the crew just simply had more fun. My motto was "Work hard and play harder!" Since free time was such a luxury, I used it to it's full potential. You just can't imagine the kind of parties that I witnessed below decks. There were times when a mass of crew could sustain a party for days. People would come and go but the crew blew off a lot of steam, and drank a lot of beer. This was better than college! I could just as quickly say that I could remember very few times when it interfered with anyone's job. No one was going to crash the ship. You would not be in danger, but your servers would be much happier.

We also went places together on shore. Many were the times when a group of us would snorkel, swim, or just lie on the beach. Did I mention that the Caribbean has a lot of beaches? Yes, I frequented many. We also went to a lot of "special" bars that you will hear about as you read the pages. Some places claimed many a good crewmember as road kill. I'm not sure why this happened with such alarming frequency, but I guess that a continuous seventy-hour workload just led us there. Funny how that works. Sleep was just not that important. Coming to a port several times over the months really gave me an edge over the regular tourist. There were people that actually lived in these places, and I got to know them too. I saw a lot of the back alley places that the average visitor could never see. I don't think that the average person could even handle a lot of those places without a complete mental breakdown. I guess that is the gist of it. The passengers were there to be pampered and not think about anything for a week or so. We were there to stay, and we had to think for ourselves since no one else would. Living on a ship was a lot like living on an edge. You might think that we were taken care of completely, but a lot of things could happen that made any crewmember shudder at the thought. If you want to upset any crew, ask them about missing the ship! You get a few beads of sweat from that one. Imagine your home drifting away from you as you stand there helplessly watching. You get the idea. In short, working on ships could be both fun and boring. It could be calm and leisurely or it could be 70 hours of work. I could see beautiful ports, or some dives with beaches. The lack of sleep just smoothed everything over. It was the best of times and the worst of times (where have I heard that before?). As a passenger, you get a week or so of rest and fun. You cannot imagine just what goes on below you, and a

week could only scratch the surface. If you wonder just what we do, I'm here to tell you some of the things that I did. Read on and enjoy the stories from a portion of my life that was really full of adventure and grief, and lack of sleep (did I mention that before?). I only hope that you enjoy it as much as I did!

From 30 Below Zero to 80 above, in 12 Easy Steps

In the Rocky Mountains, the peaks rise to over 14,000 feet.

The forests stretch for hundreds of square miles, without as much as a dirt road. The few people that do live there hug the valleys, leaving the high country to the animals. Forget about Denver, it is not much different than any other big city. Denver is not Colorado. What is Colorado are those spaces so wide open that you can actually get lost and never get found. In those mountain areas, the only sign of people can be a simple jet trail in the sky. The few blinks of an eye that we called summer saw the mountainsides filled with wildflowers and clean air. This is where I lived, and spent countless hours wandering the forests. This is where my story begins.

I worked at the Crested Butte Ski area, running a small lab processing film. I got the job in college and I stayed for a couple of years after I graduated. The job was nothing really; the real deal was getting a free unlimited ski pass. I could ski any day, anytime that the lifts were open. My boss was a great lady named Carol Case. She hired photographers to shoot pictures of the tourists at scenic spots on the mountain. I processed and printed the film for her. This took most of the afternoon but my mornings were open to practice the fine religion of chasing the perfect turn. This was everyday, even with the worst weather. I became one with the mountain, and it cherished me as much as I cherished it. If you are not much of a skier, you just can't understand. If you are, think about doing it everyday! Yes, life was pretty good during the winter. Even after four years of this it took a lot to even consider leaving, but I did.

I can't remember the exact moment when the thoughts of warm beaches began to seep into my consciousness, but it did. I guess, more than anything else, I just got tired of the cold. The winters there usually brought 300 or more inches of snows with temperatures that most often dropped to 30 or 40 below zero. There weren't many paved roads and any travel was treacherous at best. The prospect of actually freezing to death was a real concern. Just don't get caught alone beside a deserted highway. Any driving always began with digging out my car from the snow, and waiting for 30 minutes for it to warm. You can see why my mind reached for something else. Still, I loved the primal beauty of the Rockies and the miles of open forests. It took a lot for me to want to leave.

Riding the Silver Queen Lift one morning it occurred to me that there were people in minimal clothing somewhere, and they were laying on a beach with a tropical sun overhead. They were there at that precise moment, getting tanned while I froze. The only problem was getting there with the limited funds that I had saved (very limited), and a beat up car with 140,000 miles on the odometer. How can my photography experience get me away from all this? Cruise ships that were the key! I could work as a photographer. I knew that some people, somewhere, were doing it. Somehow I would become one of them. I really can't tell you exactly how, but I did it! I chalk it up to fate

leading me down a path from which I could not stray. I was destined to sail the seas and meet my wife, Ann. There was no other way. Riding that lift in the cold and wind, I caught a glimpse of my future.

No one that I knew had ever done anything like what I planned to do. I had no guides or rules to follow. All I could do was take one small step at a time and just keep the faith. After dumping my 1968 Ford Falcon (actually it was stolen), I boarded the plane and was off to Florida. My mother had suggested that I move in with her for quite some time. She had moved to Florida years before and I guess she just missed my brother, Rick and me. She had just remarried, and had an apartment with an extra bedroom, and so I settled in. I did find a job soon after I got there working at a dinner theater called "Medieval Times". If you have never heard of the place let me tell you about it. The theme centers on a castle in Spain during the Dark Ages. There is a Count and Countess (Kings and Queens are English), various members of the court, serving wenches, photographers (that's me), and six knights that fight each other in various jousts until one wins. Each Knight has his own section and the people in it cheer for him. Dinner is interesting; there is no silverware (it wasn't invented yet) and you eat with your hands. They do take credit cards, and your photos are available for purchase before you leave. It was an unusual job, but I enjoyed it and the costume they gave me. Every employee wore a costume, and the pay was good.

In the meantime I plotted. The Sunday papers were filled with ads for the ships that sailed out from south Florida. I collected them all. I called each and every one and asked about their photo concessions. They were all polite and helpful, and soon I had a list of seven different businesses that operated on various cruise companies around the world. The next step was to call or write each one to find what they were looking for, and become that person. It only took about three months before one of them actually called me. My future boss, Bob Harrow, seemed interested and asked for my resume (at that time a massive four paragraphs long). Funny, I could never understand half the things Bob said, but somehow I got the message. This ability would serve me well later when I would live in close quarters with actual foreigners. He told me to wait and he would find a ship for me, eventually. The months passed slowly. I worked at the Castle in the meantime. Occasionally Bob would call me or I would call him, and we would talk about how great it would be for me when I actually got hired. One fine day came when Bob sent me to Tampa to meet an actual manager that ran one of his photo shops on a ship called the Scandinavian Seas. This particular ship was part of an immense fleet of three that operated out of Florida. They were the seafaring colossus called "Sea Escape".

Sea Escape

The company called SeaEscape had three ships. These were the Scandinavian Sky, the Seas, and the Sun. They were all old ferry ships bought from Europe or Norway. None of them were in that great of condition, but they didn't have to be. Their main purpose was to sail the three miles that it took to be in international waters. Here, they could practice real live gambling; unhindered by the stuffy American laws that prevented anybody from having any fun. Most of the year they operated as one-day ships, but later they would sail to Freeport in the Bahamas. People could purchase packages that included hotel stays there. The ship would act as a ferry, bringing them there and back. They would also have the casino, of course. Most of the time, one ship would sail from Tampa, another from Miami or Ft. Lauderdale; the other would sail from Port Canaveral. They were cheap, that was their biggest advantage over the many cruise lines operating from Florida. They didn't get the classiest of passengers. Most were young, and they just wanted to party and gamble.

I found the ship with little difficulty, since it was several times larger than anything else in port was. It was also easy to spot the brilliant SeaEscape logo painted on the side. It was kind of its own billboard. Once I got to the ship, there was the small matter of getting aboard. I had just assumed that they would not let just anyone come aboard, but there was no one at the gangway and I just waltzed right on in. This really doesn't happen in the real world, but there again was that little bit of fate guiding me down paths wide open for me. This also led me right to the lab. Usually a person could look for hours to find a little closet like space like their lab, but I walked right up to it. It was even more eerie that the manager was in the lab right then, not really doing anything but just hanging out. I had made the false assumption that he would know that I was coming. I didn't know Bob well enough at that time to realize that the manager didn't have a clue just whom in the hell that I was. His name was Rick, and he was one of the few Americans that worked as a manager. He was a really nice guy, and he took it well that Bob had sent me without telling him. I would find out later that this was normal and expected behavior from Bob. We talked for about an hour. I really hit it off well with him. He didn't know that I was only interviewing with him just to meet someone from the company. It was a shock when he informed me that he didn't need another photog at that time. Oh well, time to call Bob again.

Finally, Bob called me back two days later. He had a ship for me. It was no surprise that he was sending me to another Sea Escape ship. This one was the SKY. Currently, it was sailing from Ft. Lauderdale but it would soon leave for Port Canaveral. This was a really good way to ease me into a new life since I would be close at home, and in familiar territory. Go to Port Everglades Bob told me, get settled in, and get to work!

Everyone at the Castle knew I was leaving. It was no secret that I wanted to sail away. Most never really thought I could pull it off, and most really wanted to go with me. It was a really big step. A lot of people say that they would like to leave their life behind and sail the seas, but the reality of it was something completely different. There would be no TV, no sports, no cars, no newspapers, and I could not even cook my own meals. I would leave everything behind. This did not bother me much since this was normal for me. I never did like routine, and an uncertain future was just what I needed.

The last couple of nights at work were nearly unbearable. I couldn't sleep. All I wanted to do was move on. The people at the Castle were some good friends, and I would miss them, but now they cheered me on to leave them behind in their own land bound lives. They didn't have the time to throw me a party or any kind of formal goodbye. Really, the last night was uneventful but I felt like I was going to explode before I could get it on. I was to finish at 11pm, then sleep for a couple of hours before I was to drive way down to south Florida. The early morning arrived. I didn't sleep more than about 12 seconds that night. The car was already packed and ready. My route was set, and I shoved off. The pre-dawn drive was lonely and cold. It took hours. It seemed like days. Finally, I turned off the turnpike and drove to the docks. There in the bay was my ship. It really was not much to look at, but it was the most beautiful sight in the world that morning. I was really early, and the waiting made it even more unbearable. There was one old guard at the entrance to this gigantic parking lot. There was enough space for hundreds of cars, and that meant thousands of passengers. It was almost totally empty. The old guy seemed used to crew coming in on his shift; he pointed me right into the crew parking lot. I guess a lot of them had cars they left there for trips away on land. Through another gate ahead of me I saw the ship. In the dim morning light, it was bright and lively. There were people milling about everywhere. I grabbed my one suitcase and headed to the lady at this second gate.

She didn't have a problem with someone showing up at six in the morning, presenting himself as a new crewmember. She pointed me right to the gangplank. There was an officer checking ID's. He knew I was coming, and he quickly guided me to the purser not more than 20 feet away. She was an English woman about 45, and very hyperactive. She wanted to finish with quickly. Peter was paged, and he came less than 30 seconds later. Eagerly he shook my hand and told me how glad he was to have me aboard. It was then that an ugly reality hit me. You needed more identification than a driver's license to go into international waters. This seems obvious to me now, and it probably does to you too, but for a kid from Colorado it didn't even occur to me. I couldn't sail until I had at least a birth certificate. This I did have, back in the closet of my bedroom in Kissimmee.

Peter also asked about my equipment. Bob had asked me about this, too.

In my possession I had one 35 mm Minolta, two zoom lenses, and a bag to haul them around in. Bob had told me that this was more than adequate, and that the manager always had more to use. Peter was not amused. He explained, in thick English, that everyone used only Nikon cameras. I found out later that was not true at all, but I had to take his word for it then. Actually, the whole thing turned into a big laugh. It seems Bob does that sort of thing all the time. We talked about it for a few minutes as he told me a couple of stories. He had some real losers come aboard. Peter never knew what he was getting. I guess he liked me well enough. He just told me to go back, get a passport and a Nikon, and meet the ship four days later at Port Canaveral.

The drive back that morning was one of the loneliest I had could remember. Not only was I disappointed, but also I was tired from staying awake for almost a full day (not to mention 500 miles of driving). I was determined to get what I wanted. After sleeping for a few hours at home, I went straight to the record office in the very town I was born in, to get an official birth certificate. This was surprisingly easy. The whole process took less than an hour. The next step was to get a passport. None of

my family knew where to get one; no one they knew had ever tried. Fortunately, there was an office just a few miles away. What a quiet, lonely place that office was. There were three women inside, working busily on some projects. They were more than glad to work on an actual passport. Once again, this took only a few minutes. The sweetest of the ladies told me that I could get it in two weeks. Talk about fate; try to get a passport in two weeks now!

The next step was the camera. This was easy enough, as there was only one camera shop in the area, right there in Auburndale. I spent the last of my money on the only Nikon FM he had. It had the normal, 50mm lens. Bob had told me that would be good enough. That didn't occur to me again that maybe it wasn't until I was ready to leave the next morning. This time, Peter really would have to provide some more stuff if he wanted me to work for him. My nervousness lasted about 30 seconds. I knew that this was what I wanted to do, and I was going to find a way. Technically I was already crew; they just didn't make it legal yet.

This Time Its For Real!

The next morning I left to join the ship, again. It was a morning that I would never forget. The Florida sun rose over a cool spring morning of mist and haze. I know this, since I was so excited and apprehensive I got up well before there was any light. This was to be a very important day for me. Its not often in life that anyone can get up one day and completely change his or her life forever. This was what was on my plate that 14 of February. I had everything that I thought that I would need packed into one seriously ugly suitcase. How small it seemed for passage into this new world! It was the only time that I would ever again board a ship with so little. For now, I was ready. I was way ahead of schedule, and I made it to the port well before the ship did. The sun was still barely over the horizon and the land and sea were barely lit with the orange glow of a new day. The port itself was not impressive. The ship's docks were along a small channel carved inland from the sea. A small passenger terminal sat on the banks. It looked more like a branch of a bank than some place to set sail for adventure. I didn't know whether to make a deposit or to leave my past life behind. It didn't really matter at that point since the land crew had not even arrived yet. Next to the terminal, the channel led out to the Atlantic along a jetty that jutted out about 150 feet into the water. There was a small park built into a cove. Picnic tables and a few small shelters littered the park. There were people hanging around there, probably leftovers from the parties of the night before. The smell of stale beer filled the air. I parked my car anywhere that I could, walked out onto the jetty, and waited for life to begin and my ship to come in.

An hour or so passed while I sat there. At one point, a couple of the terminal workers arrived and turned on the lights. I took the opportunity to properly introduce myself as a brand new crewmember. A little bit groggy, the two ladies pointed me to a locked parking lot. "Leave your car there" was about all that I got from them. I guess it was just another day of work for them; it was much more to me! I parked and locked the car and dragged my suitcase into the lonely terminal. After a cup of coffee the women were much nicer. They let me know that the ship was running a little late, but I was welcome to wait inside. Instead, I wandered around the park, and drifted back to the jetty to watch the sea for my new home. It took another 45 minutes before I could see the little white dot that appeared on the horizon. In minutes it got larger, and I could

make out the ship as my own. In an instant, it grew much larger and dominated the view. While I watched, the rest of the terminal crew arrived, as well as a few of the passengers. Things really livened up in those few minutes. I didn't have the time to feel much except for pure excitement. Sitting there on the water, smelling the sea and watching a new day begin, I actually felt my life change and a new life open before me. My new home made the turn for the channel. It was huge! Bigger than anything that I had ever seen before. Really, most ships are much larger, but it seemed like the biggest ship ever that cool morning.

I went back to the terminal. The activity reached a more frenzied pace as more and more passengers arrived. There would be over 700 passengers that day, and a lot of them were here now. Needless to say, the crew was busy checking them in and they didn't have much time to talk to me. That didn't stop me! I introduced myself to anyone that would listen and chatted with anyone that stopped moving for more than three seconds. They were nice about it. They could have easily brushed me aside but they tried to be nice. I still miss those people. As nice to me as they were that first morning, they were even nicer later. Of all the embarkation crews that I would meet, these were the best. Not only were they our main link to the outside world, but also they were also caring and friendly and they helped the crewmembers as much as they could. They would be as much a family as anyone on the ship itself. They simply loved the ship's crew and their jobs. I could see that the passengers were pushy and rude, but they treated them just as well. For a low budget, one-day ship they were great with everyone.

By this time, the ship had docked and a few of the crew spilled ashore.

This was my cue to go on ahead and drag my suitcase and my nervous butt onto the ship. Peter, and the other Photographer Suzanne, waited there for me. The atmosphere was much more cordial this time. Now I was for real and I had proper documentation to show that I was a true American and a sailor. The purser was also much more friendly and it took just a few minutes to check me in. I was to shoot embarkation right off the bat, and that was to happen in a matter of minutes. I was to get to my cabin, change, and get my camera gear together and be back in less than a half an hour.

Suzanne would take me there. She led me down flight after flight of stairs as we descended deep into the bowels of the ship. I had never really thought much about where I would live and that was probably a good thing. Once we got to a door marked "Crew Only", and went through it, the bright carpeting disappeared. The nice artwork and decorations on the walls vanished also. The halls immediately dulled to old carpets and dirty floors. There were people of many nationalities not American drifting around. Most of them were not dressed. The sounds of reggae and Latin music wafted around the walls. There was a definite stench in the air, a mixture of diesel fuel and unwashed bodies. There was also the smell of stale beer. My first impression of home was not so great, but it worked for me.

Around a few corners we reached my new cabin. As the door opened my room revealed itself to me as not much more than a closet. There was a small bed, one clothes chest with two drawers, a corner to hang more clothes, and no sink or running water. I would share a bathroom and showers with the other crew that lived on the deck with me. I would have to see that later. Now I had to get dressed and come up to work.

Suzanne vanished and left me on my own. In a pattern that would repeat itself, I wanted to spend as little time as possible in that room. Five minutes later, I wandered around, trying to find my way back to the passenger areas and the outside world. I took a few wrong turns. At one point I found myself in a large room that I would never again see as long as I was aboard that ship. It's not that it was so bad, but it was just a place that was so hidden that I could never again find it! A nice Jamaican man in uniform showed me the way out, as much to get me out of his hair as much as friendliness. After a few more turns, I did get to passengers areas again. Without any more trouble I was out and ready to work. At least I thought that I was ready to work, the reality would be much different than the dream (as if it wasn't already). Peter and Suzanne led me out into the sun to start my new job.

It took just a few minutes to discover one bare, shocking fact: Peter could be a real prick. The passengers would walk up smiling to the little white line that he had fashioned on the floor. I watched as he stopped every one of them and shot their photo whether they wanted it or not. He was pushy. I stood there and watched for maybe 30 minutes. In that time I heard curses and dirty English phrases that I had no idea even existed. Most of the people were oblivious to everything and just posed and went on their way. Then there were the people that just didn't want to stop. Peter would not allow anyone to pass. You can see the friction coming from a distance. There were at least two episodes of out right yelling. Everyone in the terminal just went quiet and watched. Peter always won, even if that meant the threat of physical violence. Some of the more pushy people saw this from a distance and were prepared. It didn't matter; Peter always won. What was even more shocking was that he was putting on his best behavior since it was my first day. He got much worse later.

That was the first half-hour of my new job. It got even more interesting after that. It was my time to go and shoot for real. My assignment was to stand outside along the path and photograph the people with the ship as a backdrop. At first it seemed like I got the better part of the job, outside in the air. That feeling vanished with the air conditioning as I walked into the bright, Florida sun. We didn't have mega rolls in our cameras where we could shoot off hundreds of shots. No, we used regular 36 exposure rolls that needed to be changed at quick intervals. Not only was I supposed to shoot everyone, but also I had to change the film myself. This meant stopping the crowds, and entertaining them until I was ready. It didn't help at all that they were already pissed off from their encounter with the evil Peter. Another photographer was the last thing they wanted to see besides their first drink. My actions varied those first couple of hours between steadfastly shooting everyone and saying "screw it" as I re-loaded. That is when Peter would come bursting out of the terminal cursing at me for loosing revenue and slacking off. He sweated a lot and he had bad teeth and bad breath. It kind of worked with his attitude. I was very sedate my first couple of days, but that would turn to shouting matches later.

To give Peter his real due, He was a very good photographer. I couldn't argue with the quality of his work. He was almost too much of a perfectionist considering the speed that we worked. The fact that he shot everyone didn't make any sense until later (you will see!), but I am glad that he did. Those people bought those pictures and the harder that we worked the more that we made. This would become obvious later. Right then, I was in the hot sun shooting mostly drunken people going on

a cheap cruise to nowhere. Another bright career move! It did get better as I got used to it. I could duck for shade at times, and I kept a cooler of drinks. I also got better at shooting. I could move the people ahead at what seemed to be a great clip. Peter would still storm out every now and then. A couple minutes of high velocity yelling was all that it took for us to resume the job. Such as the first days went.

As much fun as embarkation could be, the hard part was waiting for me next. Just shooting film was one thing; processing and printing it was quite another story. Yes, we developed our own film on the ship (how else does it get done?). The lab on the SKY was nothing to brag about. It was to be found deep in the bowels of the forward part of the ship. We were so far forward that we were just a few inches of steel away from the water that met the ship at the sea level. I could hear the waves crash, even the small ones. We had to crank up the stereo very loud to drown it out. For some reason this didn't bother me in the least because now it gives me the willies just thinking about it. If that ship were ever to ram something, we would be the very first to go. There were other horrors more profound and immediate. We didn't have some neat little machine to feed the film into for processing. All our developing was done by loading all the rolls (in complete darkness) onto metal spools. A special device, which held ten rolls at a time, was used to dunk the film into the chemicals that developed the images. For those ten rolls, it would take 30 to 40 minutes of working in the dark before I could hang them to dry. Most days we shot 40 rolls. You do the math. The lab was not a fun place. It was also dirtier than any room I could imagine, with the accompanying smells. I didn't hang there any more than I had to.

After the embarkation film was done, I had a few hours to myself before the next shoot. For the first few weeks I used that time to lay in the sun and drink frozen drinks while writing letters. That didn't last long. As more time passed I could not sleep enough and I became more and more tired. I would sleep any chance that I could. This was a pattern soon to repeat itself on every ship. Right then, I was working harder than I had ever worked. There were benefits. A ship full of young women was an amazing sight to someone who had just moved from the wilds of Colorado. In the winter the women wore so many clothes there was no way to tell who or what a person was until you spoke. They still weren't interested in me, but at least they were half-naked. The sun was another positive. Just lying in that Florida sun with the sea breeze was almost all the reward that I needed. I did get paid, and I'll get to that later.

As I mentioned before, there was another job to do. For some reason, Bob had become infatuated with this chicken costume. There was really no significance to it; it was just a chicken. A six-foot tall chicken. The first time that I saw it I couldn't stop laughing. It was the most ridiculous thing that I had ever seen but I was game (bad joke). The way it worked was that my chicken and me would stand outside the only exit from the dining room at lunch. This would always work well since EVERYONE ate and they all came out the same door into a narrow hall where there was no possibility of getting past me. There were actually two doors but Peter had somehow managed to have that one locked at the critical times. I can remember the faces as the people got their first look at my Chicken of the Sea. Of course a lot of passengers were very drunk by now, but that didn't account for everyone. It was like a turkey shoot (another bad joke) and I used that time to get as many pictures as I could.

Louie was a short young man from Honduras. He had a wife and multiple

children. He primarily worked in the kitchen, but he dressed as a chicken for us in his spare time. He would make ten dollars a day for about 2-½ hours work. He didn't speak hardly any English, but he could squawk and strut with the best of them. Louie was a good chicken. He sweated a lot into a suit that never got washed. Most people didn't notice the smell at first. It took a fervent hug before it really set in. The convenient part was that it moved everyone right along and there were no lines. I wish all of our shoots could be that much fun, but most were just hard work. Louie and I had a good time together. The problem later was that his assignment was up and he later went home. No one else would touch that suit. Right then, we were on a roll. There was still the drudgery of developing that film, but after that was the real time off. I would have five or six hours to eat, sleep, and relax until the night's adventures of selling our pictures.

Is This Really Where I Live?

As I had mentioned briefly before, my cabin was a closet compared to living on land. There were no windows; there weren't even any windows close to any cabin around me in all directions. The only way that I can really describe the scene is that it was like the cubicles in a large office. The only difference was that I slept there and there was no carpet. It also got cleaned much less frequently. The bathrooms were shared. There were three shower stalls in one bathroom, and four in another down the hall. About 40 people used those seven showers. This wouldn't be so bad if they were just cleaned on a regular basis. I usually got up earlier than most so just getting a shower was not the problem. There was one really strange twist. The bathrooms had two big portholes on the wall facing me, as I would exit the stalls. When you are at sea or at Port Canaveral there aren't too many people to see you, but when we were docked in busy Ft. Lauderdale there were pleasure boats everywhere. As a coincidence, the portholes just happened to be few feet above the water line. We were in full view of anyone with a boat. A lot of the boaters came close just to see the ship but got more than they bargained for by looking in the showers. I could tell when a boat came by just by the shadow it made. It would darken the whole room as it would pass by. I didn't mind the shaving and teeth brushing episodes as much as the full frontal nudity part. The portholes were also just above the water in calm seas. When the waves got bigger, they would sweep over the glass and I would suddenly be under water. I could see jellyfish and seaweed as I shaved. Just as suddenly as it came, the waves would break into bright sunlight before the process started over again. Enough said of that. The main toilet in the area was also shared. I mean it was shared when it worked. This particular toilet had the annoying habit of exploding whenever the ship left the docks. I mean it really exploded. There would be residue of unspeakables hanging from the ceiling. Everyone knew about it and exactly when it would happen. That was the only toilet on the entire ship that would explode at that time and the engineers had no explanation. It just went on everyday and it was just an understood fact of life. I would use the clean, upstairs facilities that the passengers used.

The female crewmembers had their own share of the deck. They were just around the corner from my cubicle, separated only by a small distance and a tapestry that served as a door to the hallway. They got special treatment and their space never smelled as bad as ours did. They also had the best parties. Too bad that I never had a whole lot of time to spend there. My cabin was mainly used as a bed, and that was just about it. The parties were never much of an event down there. The place was just too

dismal. Being a day ship helped also that the passengers left later and the crew had the ship to themselves. Those parties were on the pool deck; one bar reserved for us late night people. The dorms could be very quiet at times.

There was a crew bar down there. It was tucked away in a dark corner right over the propeller shaft in the back of the ship. I think I went there that first afternoon and had two beers with Peter. I could drink upstairs in the sun, so the dark crew bar had little appeal. There was a lot of the crew that was not allowed to go upstairs when there were passengers. Actually, the customers never saw most of the crew. They worked below in the kitchens, laundry, freezers, food storage, or as engineers. These guys were my neighbors. I really liked them but it was nice to lie out by the pool and drink frozen drinks. They walked around half naked and un-bathed below those decks.

Since SeaEscape was a one-day ship, the food did not have to be very good. The fact that it cost as little as 30.00 to come for a day were another clue that it may not be a culinary experience. The passengers got much better food than we did. Our little galley was at the top of the ship, far to the back. All of the people that worked upstairs ate there. All of the entertainers, the cruise staff, and officers shared their meals. It would seem to be a good time to relax and socialize but it could be pretty tense. The officers (those guys with the uniforms) had their own little corner, only separated from the rest of us by 10 feet and a wide chasm of social inequity. The officers ran the ship. No challenge. We would sit and eat, and watch them. Yes we would laugh and joke at times, but there was always that space between us. The rest of us got along just fine. As I said before, the food was bad. Really bad. So bad that the Doctor ordered me to take a vacation so I could nourish myself. I didn't get enough nutrition from their food. I ate out as much as I could when I got days off. Breakfast was probably the best meal since at least I could get fresh fruit and boxed cereal. The coffee would surely kick-start your ass in the morning.

There were some real positives to working on that ship. The port of Canaveral was actually very beautiful. I would be shooting embarkation in the blazing sun and see sea turtles swimming in the water only a few feet away. There was the occasional manatee also. They were big, slow, ugly things that really looked like sea cows. They all had propeller marks on their backs. They were just too slow to get out of the way of the boats. I got to like them in my time there. There were also a variety of sea birds as well as larger land birds that hunted in the swamps around us. The sunsets were great too. I saw a few too many sunrises and they were just not as much fun. The rocket launchings were the best feature. We were as close as was allowed to the shuttles. I saw two Shuttles go up in the time that I worked there. The first was before we sailed and the ship was in port. The view as the rocket ascended was just astounding. I could even see the solid rocket boosters as they separated from the main engine. In just a few seconds it was gone but for the rockets falling with the parachutes out to sea. The sound took only a few seconds to reach us, as well as a burst of heat. By then, there was just the long trail of smoke behind a little white speck that disappeared into the blue sky. The second launch came while we were anchored two miles offshore. That time it flew almost straight over us. It arced over our heads and off to the right before it vanished into space. As good as the shuttles were, the Delta rockets were even better. Since we were almost always in the dark as far as news goes,

we usually didn't hear about those launches and they took me by surprise a couple of times. I was shooting embarkation when this rocket just launched a couple of miles to my right. There I stood with a perfectly good camera and I was just so frozen that I didn't even get a shot off. I could feel the heat and the noise was almost unbearable. The whole thing was just a little disconcerting since it was so unexpected. I mean this rocket just seemed to launch at random. If we just read the newspapers then we all would have known in advance. That was part of the experience. We really didn't go on great travels since we just anchored offshore but we were still isolated and in a world of our own.

This leads me to the next aspect of ship life. I repeat; the officers ran everything. Most of the poor crew was from far flung places of the world and they did not even have their passports. The Purser kept them locked away so the crew could not just leave the ship whenever they wanted. They usually signed up for six months to a year. In that time they worked everyday. No one has days off when the ship sails. You can't just call in sick; they know where to find you. Most of the crew could be found in surprisingly small areas. I have already mentioned that most of the crew were never seen by the passengers and this ship was worst than most. They could get off late, after the passengers have disembarked. They would hang around the outside of the docks until the wee hours of the morning. Even a few hours in the fresh air was worth the loss of sleep. It was during these am meetings that I met most of the people I knew. Since a lot of the crew either didn't know English, or they butchered it, communication was basic at best. Hell, they didn't have to know English to do what they did. I miss those warm nights out there on the docks of Port Canaveral. This was the time when every one could relax and just have some laughs. No one would bother you out there in the grass outside.

The Captains of ships usually don't like having too many people aboard. I know this sounds strange since the ship companies want as many passengers as possible to sail. It's just that most of the Captains (as well as most of the navigators) came from cargo vessels, and thus dealt with few people in casinos and other drunken activities. Many considered it a pain in the ass to socialize and mingle. Things have changed much in the last few years as far as that goes, but not at that point of time. They were at least nice enough to share this ambiguity with most of the crew. They weren't necessary in the navigation process either. I was lumped into the wasted space department, even more so for photographers. The officers (all of them but the bar manager) hated the photographers. The perception was that we had really easy jobs and that we hardly worked. It was obvious that they knew little about my job except that we made them large sums of money.

Selling our pictures was another adventure that seems to be warranted at this point. The regular ships that sailed two or more days usually had their own charging system. You would usually plop down a credit card at the start and you would then get a plastic card of your own. You would then use that card to purchase anything aboard the ship. We didn't have that luxury. Since we were only out for the day we needed cash and cash only. We wouldn't save the negatives either. You either bought the pictures we had right then or you would never see them again. We did this by setting up three large boards right outside of the show room and next to the gift shop (you know, where you buy cheap liquor). The pictures were not locked in any case, but just displayed on

shelves where just anyone could get to them. We protected our pictures like some moody mother bear would protect her cubs. We worked hard for those pictures, and this was the only way that we got paid. Cash only, please.

There were always the people that tried to steal them. I could see them coming. First, two or more of them would look my way and talk closely with each other. One person would be the one that snatched the photos while the others distracted us. It just never worked. Some people just walked away with them innocently enough, not realizing that we actually charged for them. Those were the fun ones that we chased down the hall or stairs. Funny how they always seemed to be the fast ones. There was one day where a storm hit us and we sailed any way. The passengers took it especially hard. As a matter of fact, even a lot of the crew got seasick that day. I must profess with pride that I never got seasick on any ship! That day hundreds did. The few of the deck crew that were able worked full time cleaning up the piles of you-know-what expelled by our passengers. One woman stumbled all the way up the stairs, through a long hallway, right up to photographs and just heaved over about 50 of them. Our profits were not good that day. Our profits were never good enough for SeaEscape.

The ship didn't trust us much either. It seems that since we were cash only, Peter would sometimes miss counting some of it. Sometimes I would get a little more than I really should, but mostly I never knew just where it went. SeaEscape must have found out about it at one time since there was always a purser watching over us. What they didn't consider was the type of person that they assigned to this task. Kathy would become a very good friend over the course of my stay. She was one cool lady and she didn't care if we took any money or not. She had no allegiance to the company or any of the officers. She was one of my favorite people. During the off moments we would talk. She had left ships to get married, but left her husband and the land after five years and she wound up here.

That is how I got to know the shop girls. They worked right beside of us in their little store. Our down times were pretty much theirs too so we talked and joked. They were, after all, my new family. Sarita Guzman ran the shop. She was from Jamaica and she could be both tough and extremely sensitive. I always found her fascinating when she was in a good mood. The other girls were petite little things from England. They all kept their accents either through habit or just to impress clients, I could never tell. There was one girl there named Caroline from the states, but she started speaking with an English accent too. I got to know the entertainers before they ever met me. Since we were right outside of the show lounge, we saw all of their shows over and over again. They didn't need to vary their act much since they had different passengers every day. It got to the point where I knew every lyric to every song in their Cats show. Gratefully I have forgotten them now. Anyway, the shows were really very good considering the circumstances. I actually enjoyed them the first 100 times or so. I also liked them as people. They would do some work during the day interacting with passengers but we mostly never saw them out side of the lounge.

That was what it was like to sell photographs on the Scandinavian Sky. "For Fun and Profit" meant something else here than it did back there on land. That was the crux of it. Seascape was in it for the money and we contributed a lot. The passenger's comments were hard enough to take at the time, but hearing the Hotel Manager read them to you from a stack of comment cards is another thing. You know

about comment cards, don't you? They are those nasty little surveys that the passengers fill out just before they left. It was a convenient way of stabbing us in the back. I wonder if those people really knew just how much turmoil they caused by those poisoned words. I was a pretty nice guy and I really didn't merit much abuse but I got it anyway. The Hotel Manager knew that we had to be pushy to make sales but he still had to run the poor manager through the mill every week just because he could. I guess I sound a little bitter, and I guess that I am, but most people really liked us. Just those few nasty people on every cruise seemed to ruin the fun for me after it was over. Not all officers were cold blooded either. There were those people that really enjoyed the social aspects and used it to their advantage. Even on one-day trips people still had that romantic notion of cruising, even if they could still see the port that they just left. This was the angle that worked for those social crewmembers that liked to meet the opposite sex. While the official law of the land was that the crew were not allowed to interact (you know what I mean) most did it anyway. The officers were the worst of the bunch. Since there were a lot of photographers getting many girls, the tensions were set. They also thought that we were lazy. Did I mention that officers hated photographers? There was one thing that Bob was very good at: he really protected his photographers. Anyone that unnecessarily abused us was eventually punished. He had a lot of experience with dealing with people who are pretty much outside the norm and was basically out of control. He should know he hired them himself. There was a lot that we could get away with because of that thin thread of retribution hanging over the heads of those that ruled the ship.

Another dark side of my life was Peter and Suzanne. They never made a good couple to begin with, but things got much worse. Sometimes they would fight for days. It would spill over into the work and even the down times. Everyone knew everything about it. There are no secrets on ships. If there was something about someone that I didn't know, all I had to do was ask anyone. Suzanne announced her resignation one morning, abrupt and final. At the end of the week she would be gone and it would be just Peter and I. This would never work (and it didn't). After Suzanne left the gangplank a few days later, Peter became even more evil than he had been before. I never realized just how soothing an influence she was until she was gone. Peter and I tried to get along and get the job done, but he was just a jerk. There would be hours where we worked together and not speak in anything but grunts and small sentences. This went on for weeks. We both pleaded with Bob to get someone else to help. When it got to the point that one of us would die by the hands of the other he relented and sent a replacement.

Heath arrived one morning and I hated him from the start. Here I was struggling on a day ship, while he just came from the Rotterdam. As one of the Holland America ships, it was beautiful (or so I was told). Being on a ship like that would be heaven compared to this. Heath didn't care, he was kicked off that ship for something rude that he did and now he worked for us. He would curse, put down his old ship, and say how glad he was to leave it. I just never believed that anyone would let himself get kicked off such a nice ship. It didn't take long to realize that his attitude would spill over into his new job. He was lazy, and probably even ruder to the passengers than Peter could be. He was not even a good photographer. He would show up late, shoot the minimum of film, and then disappear to drink. He just didn't care. Peter and I would yell,

scream, and threaten him but nothing worked. Our revenues dropped dramatically. We all made much less money than Peter and I did by ourselves. The final straw came when he went out to a party after the ship came in for the evening and wound up getting arrested and thrown in jail. He missed embarkation before the judge let him out. There was nothing left to do but send him on his way. Anything had to be better than this. Bob and Rob seemed to expect our reaction. They had already set up his next assignment. He was to go to the American Hawaii Lines. He left immediately that morning and I heard all day from crewmembers of all sorts about how glad they were that he was gone. The changes in our lives didn't stop with him. The Harrows dropped Peter too. He was to go to a really small ship where he was the only photographer and he would only answer to himself. I would get another manager since I was not ready to take over myself. The Harrows held me in suspense all that day. They would not tell me anything about what was going to happen. I found out later that SeaEscape was both in dire financial straights and unhappy with our crew (duh!). They were to send someone nicer and with more experience. He came by taxi that very morning. He came from Vancouver, Canada. I liked Brian right from the start. He came from a rich family, but didn't want to rely on it. Bob said he had a reputation as a hard worker, and he was. He had also spent a lot of time on ships, so he knew what he was doing. What I liked about him was that he had fun. Everything was play, and he didn't get upset at every little detail. Oh yes, he loved Elvis. He slicked his hair back and spoke in an Elvis like deep voice. He loved to say "Thank-you very much" like the real Elvis did. I caught myself using it too. It got to be one of our favorite sayings. One of his first acts as manager was to get another photographer. Bob sent a rookie called Vinnie. He came from New York City, and he hadn't been much of anywhere else. It was also easy to notice that the women loved him dearly. On his first day, three of the girls in the crew asked me about him. It was a pattern that soon repeated itself. I admired the way that he handled it. As he told me, since he was from New York he was just another face in the crowd there. Here, he was noticed. Vinnie was a really nice guy. This was good since he also wound up as my roommate for a while until Brian could scare us up another cabin. The three of us hit it off immediately. After dealing with Peter, it was like a breath of fresh air. I also enjoyed the way that he had with women. I don't mean to harp on this, but I was fascinated by someone who could get women as easily as he did. He treated them well, too. Vinnie was not a mean person by any means and any of his exploits were glad to meet him and you-know-what. This left me with no chance for girls, but that was Ok. I worked too hard to worry about it. With a working crew and manager, the job went much better. We even had some fun shooting and selling the pictures. Brian was a very good printer and the lab work went so well that we were proud to display our art. The people still tried to steal them but it was more of a joke now than a pain. Brian also worked harder than Peter and that took a load off from Vinnie and me. We had more down time and I actually got caught up on my sleep. Yes, the next few weeks passed quietly and we all made more money with less hassle. I actually began to like the work. It helped very much that Bob relented to our prayers and he sent us a real film processor. Now all I had to do was feed the film in one side and it came out the other end, all finished. I loved that machine. It would even be fair to say that I worshiped it after all that hand processing. I kept it in

mint condition. That machine saved me hours of work. With that, life went on without as much trouble. There were many adventures and trials ahead, but for now things were pretty good.

I Jump Out Of A Plane

At that time, the ship sailed at 9:00 am and it returned about 10:30 pm.

This was our daily routine for so long. SeaEscape in its wisdom decided one day to do two sailings of six hours each on Saturdays. They also graced us with only one short sail on Sunday. This actually left us with the uncommon idea of having time off! A whole afternoon and evening seemed like an awful lot of time when we had been working all day, every day. Let's party! The nicer officers threw a party the first full afternoon. They set up a picnic in the park that adjoined the port. All that day we just ate, swam, threw the Frisbee and had fun. It was like a vacation. We could really let our hair down.

Bob worked in the casino. It would only be accurate to say he really ran the casino. He wasn't the manager but he did all the work. He was from Australia. He was tall, handsome, and he loved to risk life and limb in adventure. It was him that started a few of us down the road to skydiving. He signed up for classes at the airport in Titusville. He was going through a class to have himself certified as a solo diver. It worked like this: He would do 5 tandem jumps before he could do any solos. The instructor would strap himself on a person's back. He then steadied the fall and kept them from spinning and losing control. More importantly, it was he who pulled the ripcord at the correct altitude. Bob would learn how to do everything before he could ever be allowed to go at it alone. He had already done his tandems and one solo before he finally talked me and another casino guy into trying it for us. Gary was Bob's friend for quite some time now. He had known what he was into. He just hadn't brought himself to do it himself. When I agreed to do it, Gary agreed to finally go too. The three of us took a cab that day. I could feel the excitement. Never did I even consider backing out. It seemed like a lot of fun. I guess I figured if something actually did go wrong, it was a pretty good way to go. That day, we were having a good time.

The company that actually did the training had its office in a trailer right next to a hanger. The hanger was where they kept all their stuff. Inside the office I signed up for one jump, paid \$65, and signed the usual waiver to protect them in case I really did splatter (their word for not opening the chute). Outside I met my trainer. We each had one, Randy would teach me. Bob was already a good friend with his. Randy was a jolly old guy that obviously loved what he was doing. He said that he had done over 200 dives here and with the Army. I felt better. A little basic train on the ground and we were off.

The first time a person jumps in tandem, they don't have to do much.

Basically, it was done to see if you would both actually jump and not freak out on the way down. Jumping out of airplanes was not for everyone. We were led to our plane. It was one of those single engines, propeller things. It didn't look all that big. Inside there were two seats. The pilot sat in one; another guy sat in the other. He was young and happy. He greeted us warmly and sat down. The six of us sat on the floor in the back. Immediately the plane rolled to the runway and took off. The view was incredible right from the start. Florida is pretty flat and it didn't take much elevation to see the coastline and far inland. I couldn't help but to stare out the window. I could see roads everywhere. At first, I could see people inside the cars but that faded quickly with height. Soon, the

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