

THE MAIDEN VOYAGE: THE QUEEN MARY 2 VOYAGE FROM SOUTHAMPTON, ENGLAND TO FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

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(Photos by the author)**

This commentary was written immediately after sailing onboard QUEEN MARY 2's January, 2004 Maiden Voyage and, with an eye on increased perspective, 7 months after that in August, 2004. It was originally written in chapters for the online Ocean Liner discussion group, Liners List and was subsequently published over two editions in the British Ship Publication "Sea Lines," a short time later. It offers a personal look back at my greatest ocean liner experience and provides some fun details of just how wonderful it was to take part in the QUEEN MARY 2's "real" Maiden Voyage.

Fellow Liners Lister George Prince, whom I only briefly met attending the "final farewell" party on the SS NORWAY on September 5, 2001, offered me the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to join him and two others on the Maiden Voyage of the QUEEN MARY 2. George had the incredibly good foresight of plunking down a deposit for an inside four-berth cabin about as early in the scheme of things as possible. George's wife, Lisa, was hardly taken with the idea of a two-week voyage in those cramped confines and elected to stay home. Imagine my shock and appreciation when George offered me a quarter share of that voyage.

Filling out the roster, George offered passage to my good friend, Charles Zuckerman, better known to those on Liners List as Doctor Chaz, and another veteran Liners List member, Ben Lyons. Having roomed with Charles on previous voyages on REMBRANDT and REGAL EMPRESS and having sailed a few times with Ben, I knew this was going to be an unbeatable combination, not only for the intelligent ship chatter, but an incredibly entertaining group, too.

Fate would play a hand before any of us had parted with a single dollar. After crossing on the QE2 in December 2002, when I took a break from being the caregiver to my wife who was having a battle with cancer (I know, I know, all of you out there saying "how could you?" Well, I DID fly her mom up from Florida to stay with her!) I promised her I wouldn't sail "solo" again. I stayed true to that promise, and informed George that I couldn't go on the Maiden Voyage. George replaced my spot with a friend from Chicago, (a rookie on his first voyage ever! Imagine trying to live up to this experience again!) Juan Alegria.

I kept my promise to my wife. That is, until around June 2003 when my daughter Alexis, a ship enthusiast herself, learned that I had cancelled out of the Maiden Voyage opportunity. At dinner one night, she turned to my wife, now fully recovered, and remarked incredulously, "Mom, how could you not let him go??" Unfortunately, I no longer had a spot on the roster.

Fate intervened again.

A short time later, Ben contacted me and mentioned the possibility existed for him to interview with Cunard Line for a potential position aboard one of their ships. He was going to be interviewed for an Officers spot on the QE2. Ben suggested that perhaps I could replace him in the cabin in the event that he was fortunate enough to pass muster and be hired. Well, that's exactly how things turned out. Ben

was hired by Cunard and expected to be sailing with the QE2 on her World Cruise in 2004, precluding the opportunity of sailing on the QUEEN MARY 2 Maiden Voyage. George agreed to allow me back in the fold. It was only in October 2003 that Ben learned he wasn't going to be making his Officer debut on the QE2, but rather would be joining us on the Maiden Voyage as a member of the QUEEN MARY 2's ship's company! Fate had a field day with this voyage. My wife had no choice but to sigh and nod her approval! My daughter is enjoying her Honda Civic!

The excitement grew daily as the Carnival/Cunard PR machine ground out all of the exciting details of the new ship. The day before my 13th birthday, on September 20, 1967, the QE2 was launched. I was living in Trieste, Italy at the time and I remember a feature article that heralded the new ship that appeared in the International Herald Tribune. At that young age, I couldn't understand the implications of the possibility that she'd be the last ship designed for service – at least partially – on the North Atlantic run.

Having lived through the utterly depressing period of the '70s, my ship interest growing by the year, I was only too sensitive to the withdrawal of so many great ships – many snatched from service before their time. I hardly paid any attention to the new-wave vessels of the late '60s and early '70s, the CCL quartet, the Royal Viking trio, even the two new "Cunarders." "How could they be Cunarders without a dark hull", I reasoned.

No one here needs an education on what was to follow. A multitude of ships, a virtual cornucopia appeared. Passenger shipping was going to survive after all. No, make that "thrive." But the North Atlantic, other than QE2's marvelous run, remained untapped.

I had the good fortune to meet Stephen Payne when he was enjoying some quality down-time as a passenger aboard the QE2 in July 1996. Looking more like a vacationing accountant than the premiere ocean liner designer he already was, I found him to be a wonderfully entertaining and engaging fellow. Sailing again with him on the QE2 in 1999 after the announcement of Carnival's QUEEN MARY project, I had the opportunity, along with many others, to pepper Stephen with questions and of course, recommendations, about the new ship. He also gave us some insight to the early plans of the ship, maintaining the necessary confidentiality that such a project would demand. It was a marvelous opportunity. Not only was he incredibly enthusiastic that his employers would support his recommendations, but he also assured us that he was going to – in fact – design a transatlantic liner and NOT a cruise ship! "Yeah, right", we all snickered cynically under our breath. "Everyone knows there won't be another transatlantic liner." "There's no money in it." Stephen would appear from time to time in New York. At one talk held at the South Street Seaport, before the keel had even been laid, he provided additional details: the ship would have pods, not fixed props, she would offer the necessary verandahs demanded by today's cruisers. "Verandahs, on the North Atlantic?" She would have a terraced appearance, more along traditional lines. Skeptics abounded. And ever on, Stephen's insistence that this would be a great ship, built for transatlantic trade, not just another cruise ship, insisting, insisting, insisting..... and damn it! He did it!!!

The last time a longest & largest passenger ship made its first significant voyage a commercial voyage was NORMANDIE on May 29, 1935. Almost 70 years had passed since that event and despite three entertaining and social days in London preceding our train to Southampton the anticipation level was reaching a fervid peak.

As Charles and I made our way to the quay in Southampton on January 12th our very cooperative and excited cabbie did us the favor of roaming to the end of the pier for our first views of the QUEEN MARY 2's perfect bow. In the days leading up to the Maiden Voyage, I couldn't adequately picture in my mind the absolute hugeness of the ship. The longest ship I've ever seen up close is the FRANCE/NORWAY. Sailed on her often. She's big. Very big. The largest ship I had ever seen up close was the QUEEN ELIZABETH. She was big, too. Very big. In my mind, that was what "huge" was.

This ship is some 67,000 tons larger than the QUEEN ELIZABETH. To put that in some perspective, that's GREATER BY any of the Ballin trio, AQUITANIA, or every other transatlantic liner except for the 1,000 footers!!! Sure, I've seen the VOYAGER class in photos and from a distance and yes, they are tremendous in size. But I just couldn't visualize in my mind, a ship as large as the QUEEN MARY 2. And, externally, her size is not adequately conveyed.

Stepping aboard her, however, as we did on the afternoon of January 12th, is entering a different dimension of ship. She doesn't try to Wow you. As someone mentioned, no individual space aboard is there for "Wow power". It is the sum of her parts that makes her the special ship she is. Not only in the design of her compartments, but the ease of access, and the ease on the eyes. Entering her Grand Lobby you're immediately struck with her size. One of my first acts was to give her the "column test", the gentle tapping of knuckles on a column to measure the strength of construction. She failed. That was the last failure aboard this ship. Yes, the column sounded hollow – I'm always hoping for a dull thud. No ship has yet to give me that!

So here's the four of us, squeezing all of our luggage and belongings into a 194 square foot inside four-berth cabin. Darned if we weren't going to enjoy "Tourist Class" on the World's Longest & Largest! The ship's passageways, to me, represent the best example of how long she is. Her modern design has eliminated, regretfully so, "wandering" hallways. These are straight as a board, they run the length of their respective decks (and they're not nearly as cramped as some of the pictures I had seen beforehand) and I would wager if one could bowl a bowling ball hard enough and straight enough they could reach the other end without resistance. The ship IS loaded with wood veneer. For the most part it works beautifully, giving hints of the great and varied woods her predecessors offered their passengers and crew. One slight criticism is the yellow burl wood effect in Stair tower D. I've never seen bright, shiny, yellow wood!

Each of the stair towers is represented by a different rug color with spots resembling those of a leopard: A-green, B-red, C-grey, D-yellow. The two smaller towers, far forward and far aft, the A & D towers, resemble stair towers found on most ships: A set of stairs in the middle flanked by one on each side. Three elevators provide very fast access between all 13 decks, including Deck 1 which contains the medical facilities and tender embarkation areas. It's the middle two towers that are most impressive. In addition to the "regular" stairways, there's an additional one, just as grand and just as wide as the usual. Six elevators provide the express service here. It may as well be a land-based grand hotel. That's how big these stairwells are!

Sailing from Southampton was simply the stirring experience we had all hoped it would be! Ben had explained to us that the ship would move slowly stern first towards Mayflower Park so we camped ourselves on Deck 8, port side, filled with anticipation. It was a very chilly night. The temperature hovered around 40 Fahrenheit and began to drop as our wait for the promised fireworks continued. British flags were passed out and the atmosphere, in a word, was "giddy". Smiles abounded. Our group

included Liner Listers Ted Scull, Jon and Janine Miller, Karl Zimmerman, Anne Hunt and Ben's mom, Jane Lyons, all reacquainting with the numerous folks we had all had the pleasure to sail with previously. It was hard not to become choked up with emotion. Traditional and patriotic English tunes blared over the ship's loudspeakers. Pomp and Circumstance. Here was the moment, the QUEEN MARY 2 was just about ready to sail on her Maiden Voyage, and we were all a part of it! It truly was one of those life moments that are just very hard to describe and which you can't really do justice in describing. Ben, off duty for a spell, had joined us in his Third Officer uniform adding a nice touch to the whole experience. The numerous small craft and ferries surrounding the ship were kept at bay by a dedicated group of security boats. Throughout the voyage, in each port, the ship was surrounded by numerous security craft. We could see crowds lining the ferry railings and many deep in the Park and I was wondering exactly where Liners Lister Ann Hayes was in the mob!

Then the fireworks began. A fantastic display, each brilliant burst accompanied by a chest tightening explosion, rapid fire, rising high on the port side of the ship, trailing streams of light seemingly onto the vessel herself. The show lasted about 20 minutes.

Finally, her engines were fired, the mermaid pods churning up Southampton water and the QUEEN MARY 2 set off on her first voyage across the Atlantic!

And we, the most fortunate 2,519 passengers, set about getting to know this vast, comfortable ship.

The weather report for the next 48 hours was perfect, as far as our group was concerned. The forecasted hurricane-force winds and driving rain expected for the sailing happily never materialized, the low losing power as it swept inland across Britain from the west. Didn't matter. The forecast remained "choppy". Winds might even approach 70 mph. As we gained speed sailing down the Solent, it was clear that we were going to have the opportunity to appreciate her qualities as a sea-boat. Once into the Channel, and moving south towards the Bay of Biscay, the QUEEN MARY 2 was providing a demonstration welcomed by most of our party. Her wonderfully streamlined hull began a slow but steady roll that would accompany us for much of the next two days.

But I'm getting a bit ahead of myself.

Waiting for the start of the promised fireworks display and departure festivities, the poor first seating folks had to endure numerous announcements stating that the dining room was ready to receive them. One, two....even three announcements toned through the ship. Eventually the staff realized that no one wanted to miss the departure events. Our hour and a half delay was caused by poor timing in loading luggage onboard, forcing the schedule back. Now they couldn't get anyone to show for dinner! The third announcement stating that first seating had only 15 minutes to go, was met on deck by uproarious laughter, no one expecting for a moment that anyone would prefer sitting in the majesty of the Britannia dining room to missing the Maiden Voyage departure! Even the best laid plans can go awry!

Looking forward to our 8:30 2nd sitting, our "gang of four", George, Juan, Charles and myself, went about gauging just how tight our living situation for the next two weeks would be as we retired to the cabin to prepare for dinner. It was tight. Movement about the cabin was aided by choreography that even George Balanchine would've appreciated. Our extremely efficient and cheerful cabin steward, Jonathan, hailing from the Philippines and Norwegian Cruise Line became an instant ally. We had to explain to him that leaving the top bunks down, as seemed to be the planned modus operandi was going to leave us all with many lumps on the head. Jonathan stowed the top bunks in their secondary position,

against each wall. Evidently the uppers on QUEEN MARY 2 won't fit completely into the ceiling if they're replete with pillows and blankets. Jonathan's solution of pressing the two uppers against the bulkheads eliminated one of the hazards. He couldn't eliminate another hazard. The designers have provided the lower bunks with night tables complete with reading lamp and stowage. Us upper-bunkers, George and I, enjoyed a small cabinet and settee area indented into the wall behind our heads that allowed us to file our various reading material, contact lens drops, and the like. The only problem was that there remained a foot of space between the head of the bunk bed and the cabinetry. When you have four grown men sharing such a small space it is best to retain one's sense of humor. Through our pre-cruise emails we had established that we all enjoyed a good "snore" while sleeping. Of course, I'd never admit to it, always sleeping through it, but Charles insists that is the case! So we came prepared with earplugs and blinders. One night one of my pillows, earplug attached, rained down on Charles through the space. He gave me an earful in the morning about my lack of caution and cheerfully reprimanded me to keep my pillows bed bound! This temporary disturbance didn't prepare us for the next evenings' challenge. George enjoyed Stephen Fox's thick work, "Transatlantic," on the voyage. As a matter of fact, I noticed numerous passengers enjoying this work and I had brought it along as my second book, expecting to burn my way through "The Da Vinci Code" in no time! George enjoyed reading before bed and had fallen into a deep sleep failing to store "Transatlantic" in the space behind. Around 3:00am we were jolted from our slumber as Juan yelped out, "my jaw, I've been hit in my jaw!" We were up in a flash, lights on, wondering what the heck was going on. George's book had fallen, clunking Juan flush on his jaw, bloodying his mouth and waking us to a collection of moans and yawns. Juan was swollen for a day or so, but our collection of dormitory humor and yucks enabled us to survive these close quarters. The rule, closely followed, was if you were up early you got the heck out of there freeing up floor space for those that followed. It worked like a charm – taking most breakfasts in the dining room our staggered starts never compromised our ability to arrive on time.

Our carefully balanced dining room preparations (for dinner only, breakfast and lunch was always open seating) had been well-planned in advance and we were all very pleased to see that Pauline Power of Pisa Brothers Travel had done her yeoman work in ensuring our two tables of six and four were, in fact, adjacent to each other. Britannia does not offer tables for 10 in any configuration (other than the Captain's table) and our party expected to play musical chairs throughout the voyage. Tables 266 & 267 were perfectly located on the 2nd Britannia level on Deck 3 set just in from overlooking the well on Deck 2 below. Britannia is a spectacular dining venue. Seating close to 1,300 in two seatings, the lower level is spread out to the flank of each side of the ship. The central area soars to the top of the 2nd level. Moving to each flank brings you to the large insulated windows looking the 15 or so feet to the rapidly moving sea below. During daytime, in the choppy seas we encountered in the Bay of Biscay, crossing seas broke against these windows, worrying those that hadn't benefited from Stephen Payne's assurances of their strength. It's amazing how fast a 150,000 ton ship can move through the water from a view only 15 feet above the waterline. That same view from over 70 feet above around Deck 11, offered a much slower pace. The view from Deck 2 resembled a rapidly moving speedboat! The Upper Level of Britannia offered three terraced sections. The lowest, the one we were fortunate enough to be in, had the highest ceiling. We all commented, especially that first night, how easy it was to hear your neighbor, impressed by the seemingly flawless acoustics of the room design.

The force 8 we encountered in the Bay of Biscay, accompanied by stinging spray and rain, offered great views of the churning sea. From a distance, the QUEEN MARY 2 must've been an imposing sight. We encountered several small freighters whose size I'd estimate in the 300-400 ft. range. They were having a devil of a time in the 20-foot troughs we encountered. Usually about a mile or so to port or starboard they'd appear ahead of us and rapidly drop abaft as we'd flank them at our consistent 23-24 knots. As tossed as these ships were, I felt a certain jealousy watching them disappear and reappear, shipping water off their bows only to plunge again between the waves. They had the enviable opportunity of watching us cutting through these seas with ease. We must've made quite a sight! The QUEEN MARY 2 rolled quite nicely and smoothly, there were a few missed dinners both nights. According to Ben, she only required one set of stabilizers to counter the motion. The seas changed and she began some very mild pitching by Wednesday. Standing on deck, watching the huge ship pitch, the horizon to the stern rising and falling with each plunge was memorable. There was no unusual noise resulting from the pitching, something I experienced in '98 aboard the ROTTERDAM VI. QUEEN MARY 2's hull cut beautifully through the storm-tossed sea, winds reaching a reported 70 mph. Our only regret was missing two days of enjoying her ample decks, and Commodore Warwick, during his daily noon-time announcement assured us that Madeira, our first port call Thursday, promised a better weather outlook.

Wakened very early by the growing crescendo of snoring Thursday morning, a quick glance at the TV monitor confirmed our arrival. In our blackened inside cabin, we'd leave the monitor set on the bridge-cam, the volume set to "mute" overnight, which gave us some indication of not only the time, but the day's weather. In the distance I could make out the lights of Madeira and I scrambled to the deck. Already a growing fleet of small boats had gathered. Police boats ran nervous circles around the QM2 as we approached the harbor breakwater. A fireboat's plumes became visible as the days first light allowed outlines to be made out. Just inside the basin, the QUEEN MARY 2 performed as delicate a pirouette any ballerina could perform, nimbly reversing her position and slowly moving stern first to the pier. Tying up around 7:00am, the first sunshine we had seen since Southampton began flickering it's warmth over the Madeira ranges that offer beautiful backdrop to the port of Funchal. With brightening skies came our first evidence of the interest this ship would generate, especially on the European side of the crossing! All along the Funchal waterfront, was thousands of Madeirans, turning out to greet literally what was the biggest thing ever to come to town! Along the pier we were welcomed by numerous luminaries and what would become a welcome status quo, brightly costumed locals dancing, singing, and musically greeting us in every way they could. Security was very tight controlling access to the breakwater. Lines of buses, at the ready to transport passengers to their preferred shore excursions waited, as well as some there just to bring us around into town. As we stepped off the gangplank onto the pier, we each received a small bottle of Madeira wine issued especially for the occasion. The label reads: MAIDEN VOYAGE QUEEN MARY 2 * FUNCHAL MADEIRA 15-1-2004. Naturally, this went right into my curio cabinet complementing the sealed single malt scotch whiskey container I've got from the QE2!

A group of us opted for a waterfront walk and a cable car ride up to the surrounding hillside. The real treat was coming down. We broke into groups of two and enjoyed a scintillating "Carros de Cesto", a Toboggan ride, Madeira-style. Two almost Venetian-like "gondoliers" masterfully manipulated wooden toboggans. Their heavily rubber-soled shoes provided both the thrust and the braking power as the toboggan was slid down the smoothed side streets leading back into the village. It was a bit of jarring ride and Charles and I really didn't want to dwell long on how many of these might have left the road in their 100-year-old history! Charles humorously remarked, "It won't kill us, it'll only maim us" as we joggled down over the cobblestone streets. Unfortunately, in what had to have been a deal worked out with the local taxi drivers, the ride ended about four kilometers too soon. Despite guarantees by the cab

operators that we'd tucker out long before reaching our destination, our group sucked it up and basically "rolled on foot" down the hill into town!



Funchal, Madeira, the first port of call, where residents turned out to view the new flagship (1/15/2004).

Passing one storefront on the Rua F. Ornelas we noticed it's front window festooned with numerous drawings and paintings local children had done of the QUEEN MARY 2. It was all a part of a competition with the winner receiving a visit to the ship. This was just one more indication of the importance the cruise trade has for maritime islands such as Madeira. The crowds remained along the Avda das Comunidades throughout the day looking off towards the QUEEN MARY 2 prominently back-dropped across the harbor. We dined aboard a landlocked former sailing yacht, advertised to have been The Beatles Mediterranean vacation yacht in 1966. The crowds remained to see us off when we cast off at 6:00pm sharp.

That evening our group of ten were fortunate to dine in the Todd English restaurant onboard. Dining room service in Britannia had been showing signs of improvement since the first night when desserts took up to an hour. Throughout the voyage, though, portions there were typically small and I think we were all looking forward to a heartier meal.



QUEEN MARY 2 at Funchal, Madeira (1/15/2004).

Todd English (it's since been renamed "The Verandah.") is really a very attractive dining room. Access is gained either from the Deck 8 pool area, starboard side, or all the way to the aft section of the Deck 8 starboard passageway. Dining in the Todd English restaurant on this voyage was totally free. (I believe the Todd English experience will become extra-tariff at some later point in the inaugural season) The only problem was you could book a table only once per cabin over the course of the voyage. There was only one table for ten and it occupied a private room with large curtained windows overlooking the deck space aft. Three or four waiters and waitresses doted upon us and we kept the wine steward going throughout. The service and presentation was absolutely superb. And the food, well the food was to die for. One appetizer in particular was incredible: the ricotta ravioli with black truffles! Oh, magnifique! I opted for the sirloin steak. I'm a huge fan of Peter Luger's Steakhouse in New York, arguably regarded as America's finest steakhouse. This is no stretch of the truth: the sirloin I enjoyed in the Todd English restaurant that night on the Queen Mary 2, with Funchal fading behind us, was just about on a par with those I've enjoyed at Luger's! Grilled to a "rare" perfection, the flavor and texture and juiciness was other-worldly. And it must've tipped the scales at around 18 oz., fully equal to 3 or 4 portions in Britannia!

Some of you might be wondering why I haven't touched on the entertainment onboard. The fact is I'm not big on shipboard entertainment, preferring to generate my own amusement and the company of others. I had made it a point to catch Dame Shirley Bassey's performance the night before, hoping to hear her sing what was an old favorite, the theme song from the 1964 movie Goldfinger. And she did. It was her first song. Dame Bassey was said to have been a bit seasick so her debut was held over one night. Originally, she was to perform Tuesday. The seas had mellowed a bit by Wednesday night. It was an SRO crowd and I figured why should I take up the space better appreciated by another, so off I went! I understand she did magnificently with the rest of her program. I understand she left the ship in Madeiras. Another night, George, Juan, Bob Pelletier, and I figured we'd take in the variety show. Consisting of a revue by the Royal Cunard Singers & Dancers with a look back to the Disco Era (an Era I generally distained even while living it!), a mildly amusing Comedian, John Martin, and an medley of piano hits performed by "Harry", convinced me why I generally pass these shows up in the first place. I think too, the Royal Court Theatre is my least favorite space on the ship. While sightlines seem to be very good, the seating is very cramped together. You have rows of theatre seats with additional chairs cast in the walkways between the rows making movement through the rows very difficult. Illuminations on the other hand, is a marvelous and spectacularly laid out presentation hall. Tripling as lecture hall, movie theatre, and the first Planetarium at sea, the amphitheatre layout is perfect. The section of seats directly below the fabric planetarium ceiling recline with the flip of a switch. The only negative was several of these chairs were out of service, and since it only seated some 800 at a time, there were standing room only crowds for the numerous Maxtone-Graham presentations. I attended one of the hourly Planetarium shows, "Infinity Express". The 22-minute (or so) presentation struck me more as a promotion for some greater work but I understand other shows, such as the "Stars over the Atlantic" were better received. I spent zero time in the G32 disco, located all the way aft on decks 2 and 3, and I enjoyed the Queens Room for tea most afternoons, but it was dreadfully crowded and very warm for the Captain's cocktail party our third night at sea. To me, that was an ongoing problem on the ship: room temperature. I'm aware that on many ships, passengers complain that the air conditioning is too good. I felt the QM2 could've knocked the internal air temperature down another 5 to 7 degrees and it would've been perfect. Not all in our little group concurred; perhaps my vodkas did have a little something to do with that at night!

Friday found us docked, bow in, on the outer reaches of the Santa Cruz de Tenerife breakwater. Security appeared as tight here as it was protecting us in and about the breakwater in Funchal. There, some jogger had actually breached security. In typical "simpatico" fashion, the police waved the fellow through in Funchal, after it was obvious that they weren't going to keep up with him! Our walk into town would be a healthy jaunt. The QUEEN MARY 2 was beautiful in the morning sun. Again, as in Madeira, local dancers entertained as we disembarked onto the pier. Samples of local cigars were handed out, emblazoned with a tiny ship bow view, QM2, Porto de Tenerife, 15-01-04. Two veterans were docked ahead of us: Festival's chartered FLAMENCO (ex. SPIRIT of LONDON, ex. SUN PRINCESS, ex. MAJESTIC, ex. STARSHIP MAJESTIC, ex. SOUTHERN CROSS), soon to be arrested, looked to be in excellent condition given her advanced age. Thomson's THOMSON SPIRIT (ex. NIEUW AMSTERDAM, ex. PATRIOT), her "happy face" funnel logo smiling down on us interested observers, belied her previous incarnation as US Line's "ill-fated" PATRIOT, the stars of her previous livery still prominent despite her white-washed funnel. Many of their passengers were moving in the opposite direction, preferring to spend their time gazing at the mighty QUEEN MARY 2. There was to be none of the traditional flaked paint along "our" waterline, despite our heady 23 knots over two days in a rough Bay of Biscay, her paint job remained as pristine as it was the day we left Southampton.



QUEEN MARY 2 at Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canary Islands (1/16/2004).

Our group today consisted of "half the gang of four", Charles and myself, Jane and Anne, Ted, Karl, and a welcome addition for today's activities, Liners Lister Bob Pelletier. Departure tonight was scheduled for 11:00pm giving us a full day to pursue our mission to explore the island. With accomplished travel writer and frequent Tenerife visitor Ted Scull in command, we went about plotting our itinerary. Santa Cruz is a lovely town. You're immediately struck by the clean streets, the organized and recently redeveloped port area, and the wonderful Spanish architecture which would be equally at home in a city twice its size. Our destination was Mt. Teide, not only Tenerife's highest, but the highest of Spain's substantial mountains. A volcanic eruption in the Middle Ages rendered half the island uninhabitable, and thusly it has remained. Believed to be dormant, she retains a prominent peak, accessed by a large cable car. First we had to find transportation. Warned that our rentals were due back by 7:00pm we piled into two small Fiats and began navigating out of town along the Avenida Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera past the amazingly modern civic auditorium and surprisingly, onto a six-lane superhighway. Climbing above the city, wonderful vistas opened looking back towards Santa Cruz. Soon we were at our exit and onto the beaten path cutting clear through the center of the island en route to Teide which beckoned to us in the distance.



This page: THOMSON SPIRIT at Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canary Islands (1/16/2004).



FLAMENCO at Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canary Islands (1/16/2004).

Still climbing, the little Fiat chugging with each switchback turn, we noted our progress through the forest of Aguamansa passing 2,000 meters. Soon, we were above the tree line as we entered an area bereft of substantial growth. Old lava fields became the norm as we passed 4,000 meters. Finally, we arrived at the cable car base of Mt. Teide. Warned by the attendant that temperatures near the peak were below 0-degrees centigrade those of us that had never experienced Teide borrowed jackets brought by the more prepared. The view at the top, over 16,000 feet above sea level was other-worldly. Immediately below, for as far as the eye could see, was the deadened earth of rust colored lava. Far beyond, out towards the Atlantic was cloud cover, its' cotton luminescence contrasting with the bright blue sky above. Breathing was labored and we hardly stayed more than a few minutes. Soon we were packed back in the Fiats and making our way back toward town, using an easterly route down from the peaks through the clouded mountainside. After a short drive we were in the small town of La Laguna. Decision time. It was only about 5:30, it had been a tiring day and we were prepared to return to the QM2. Intrepid Ted would have none of it. And are we glad he wouldn't, as we detoured onto secondary roads stretching deep into the northern reaches of the island. Our approach after this ride would be into Santa Cruz from the opposite side from where we had left. This road turned and twisted without guardrails, even more than our access to Mt. Teide. Thick vegetation was the rule, the road often

splitting through dense growth literally cut through the sides of the mountains we were traversing. We pulled over at one vista stop. I don't know if Ted had planned this or not, but it couldn't have been better scripted. While we were under cloud cover, there, well below us, framed by two smaller hills, was the QUEEN MARY 2, absolutely brilliant in the afternoon sun, far below, at least two to three miles distant. It was quite a moment. It took us the better part of the next hour to negotiate our way around, back, through, coming down from hills, entering Santa Cruz. 7:00pm was approaching rapidly. The sun was setting. Our rentals were due back, now!



High up in the Macizo de Anaga mountains northeast of Santa Cruz de Tenerife, the QUEEN MARY 2 is bathed in the slowly setting sun at the Muelle Sur (1/16/2004).

Traffic was building. Something we didn't anticipate was now becoming clear: the island was converging on Santa Cruz for the evening's fireworks display, in honor of the QUEEN MARY 2. At our main access route into town diligent policemen were rerouting traffic. Suddenly we found ourselves passing the turns we needed to get back to the rental agency. Panic, in a controlled, almost fun way, was the order! Moving back along the Avenida Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera, the beautiful auditorium now only marking our confusion, we lost Ted in the lead car. We were on our own. Sitting in my navigator's seat, I barked orders to Charles. Go right! Stop, go. No, go there! To the end! Go around the circle, if it lets us. Oh shoot! No turns. Uh-oh. Now it was dark. We drove completely around one traffic circle and backtracked. "Try this", I'd say. "We can't!", Charles would reply. It was really something right out of the Disney "Mr. Toad's Wild Ride." Miraculously we spied a familiar road. How we arrived at it, I don't think any of us can say. I bolted and ran the block to the rental agency. Miracle of miracles, Ted's car was in

the area too, and Jane Lyons was sitting there. No way was this place closing at 7:00! Finally, both cars made it back and we joined the throngs heading towards the waterfront for the evening's festivities. There was electricity in the air as we hiked our way back to the ship. Again, as in Madeira, QUEEN MARY 2 was the story- she was all the action, and tonight the action was starting around 11:00pm. We were all tired from our incredibly wonderful shore excursions but judging by the huge crowd gathering along the Avenida de la Roche, the "Riva" providing a perfect vantage along the waterfront, we were in for something special.

For me, it became a memorable evening.

In such close quarters throughout the day, I was running solo that night. Anticipating something of a lesser scale display than what sent us off from Southampton, I marched up to Deck 13, expecting it to offer the best vantage point for the fireworks to come. Climbing above the deck on the covered hot tub, I stood, waiting for the show. Stephen Payne appeared and smiling, he asked if he might join me on my little "perch". Always room for more, I responded. So began a couple of hours spent with, and really a high point of the voyage for me, the fellow that designed the darn thing! As I've mentioned in previous installments, I've known Stephen for several years and we're both very comfortable dispatching with any scripted conversation. I'd say our talk here was very much along the lines of two guys just hanging out, enjoying the Maiden Voyage, and really quite candid in content. I needled him a bit about the Blue Peter and did he really still wear the one he had been sent so many years before, writing in to the BBC program of the same name. Well, he happened to be wearing it and as Stephen proudly showed it off. I got a nice close up of his prized and sentimental pin!

We stood and took in the sensational fireworks show. It was truly a professional exhibit. After a bit we decided to retire to the Commodore Club for a drink and here is where the conversation turned from casual to serious. I was determined to learn from the man, and he was very forthcoming. He exhibits very little "ego." I asked how he had kept it in check given the incredible scope of this accomplishment and he said that there were so many involved that it was impossible to develop a swelled head. I did ask if his parents were "enjoying this", were they getting some mileage out of it back home? With a smile on his lips, he assured me they were. I am not the most technically oriented person. My questions had more to do with the historical aspects of QUEEN MARY 2 and I'm sorry if some of the following disappoints a few of you. I wouldn't have known the proper block co-efficient questions to ask, the "economy of scale" queries would have fallen short, the mermaid pod's did not fill the following palate. I wanted to know the nuances. I wanted to know which reincarnations, he, as a true traditionalist, intended and succeeded in building into this great ship. So we began: "NORMANDIE, there is a lot of NORMANDIE in this ship," he began. The whaleback on the bow for starters. The great glass panels in the 2 and 3 deck galleries amidships. The sheer scale, the lack of crowding. The rounded superstructure forward is reminiscent of QUEEN MARY and QUEEN ELIZABETH. The ceiling heights, too, were similar to those grand Atlantic liners. The Commodore Club, done with the QUEEN MARY's Observation Bar in mind. The Britannia dining room, obviously taking a page from the QUEEN MARY First Class dining room. ROTTERDAM: the two aft gas turbine vents, high up above Deck 13. I thought these were designed after the FRANCE' aft posts. "No," Stephen corrected me. "All ROTTERDAM." Then it was obvious. Coupled with the wide expanse of deck space aft on Deck 12, this was ROTTERDAM! Her First Class sports deck was very reminiscent of this space on QM2. Too bad ROTTERDAM didn't offer the delightful opportunity of movies under the stars as we enjoyed a couple of nights on the QM2. Surrounded by stewards taking drink orders, snuggled in our "steamer rugs" on the wonderful thickly padded teak deck chairs, movies were played against the white superstructure. QUEEN MARY 2's "lengthiest" Deck 7 outside promenades could have been almost any number of great transatlantic ships of the past. With one huge

difference: her lifeboat machinery is erected above the deck, leaving an unbroken promenade lined with wonderful teak padded chairs, two-deep, as you've no doubt already heard—"able to accommodate four walkers across!" P & O even snuck into it: moving aft on Deck 7, both port and starboard, there's a short bit of covered outside promenade, complete with great cuts punctuated with teak railings, very reminiscent of so many great P & O white ships! ROTTERDAM is further represented as Deck 7 wraps around inside the forward superstructure. My favorite spot on the ship, which I happily occupied for a couple of hours every afternoon during the soon-to-come four days across to Barbados, was another throwback. Two small docking wings aft on Deck 8 extended nostalgically over the side. Extended outside of the QE2-esque screens on Deck 8, I could sit contented in a chair (no full-sized deck chair could fit!), feet up on the railing, the sun sparkling on the sea, catching the slipstream with a smile on my face at 25 knots or more, so happy to be partaking of that experience! It truly was my little "heaven on earth", and it too, is such a throwback to so many ships over so many generations. OCEANIC & EUGENIO C. are represented too, according to Stephen. The stern treatment, transoms supporting the rounded bulk of her near-cruiser stern, there to provide the Mermaid Pods with the necessary entry in the water, were designed with these two near-sisters in mind.

Eddie Squire, a retired NYC Staten Island Ferry Captain, joined our conversation. I didn't mind. I had the opportunity to talk ships with Stephen Payne. At our leisure. A rare opportunity. Soon, the three of us, the lights of Santa Cruz de Tenerife disappearing at the stern, took a walk around 7 Deck. Stephen led of course, pointing out other subtle things about "his ship" (my words, not his). It was truly an honor to share the time with him. The education continued. By 1:30am, we were at Staircase C on 7 Deck. Time to retire. Tomorrow was Las Palmas, Grand Canarias, and the greatest spontaneous reception I've ever enjoyed on a ship!

Andy Warhol put it best: "we should all have 15 minutes of fame."

We would enjoy nearly 10 hours of "fame", each and every one of us, as the QUEEN MARY 2 arrived in the capital of the Canary Islands, Las Palmas, on day 5 of our Maiden Voyage.

We docked in the industrial port of Las Palmas by 8:00am. Surrounded by a myriad of ferries and other merchant ships and just a few naval vessels nothing could prepare us for the day that followed. I had no expectations and I had no plans at all for Las Palmas.

My roomies had all mustered early, and cabin 4217 was deserted when I stirred around 9:00am, my latest rising through the entire voyage. I had no idea where anyone was, what anyone had planned for the day, and frankly, I didn't mind.

I plopped myself down on the desk chair in front of the cabin TV, and absorbed the situation. The passenger ship terminal was located at the end of the "El Muelle", the very modern inner arm of the port facility. Directly in front of us teeming crowds of curious natives and tourists flooded the dock. Again, the QUEEN MARY 2 was turning on an entire island, and it was immediately evident that electricity was in the air.



The author with Dr. Stephen M. Payne, OBE RDI, designer of the QUEEN MARY 2 and at the time the VP, Chief Naval Architect, Carnival Corporate Shipbuilding, high up on Deck 13 waiting for QM2's Tenerife departure (1/16/2004).

This was going to be something different. Having enjoyed my first leisurely shower onboard, I plodded my way through the various Kings Court breakfast offerings. I filled a plate with scrambled eggs, a melon medley, and Wilshire sausages -a strange English concoction of pork and wheat grain- not very appealing to the eye but not nearly as heavy on the stomach as American link sausages. I found a comfortable teak deck chair starboard side overlooking the newly refurbished dock. Already a large crowd had gathered. The pier appeared to have been recently extended to accommodate all of QUEEN MARY 2's length, and then some. A tall fence paralleled the ship, offering only two gated and secured gaps for access. An attractive modern pier shed extended the length of the shorter northern side. Appearing almost brand new, it appeared to offer better facilities than you'd find at New York's PST. Surprisingly, no one was camping out on the 2nd level porch that overlooked the festivities on the pier. A tent-like open-air enclosure covered the outdoor exhibition area at the pier head and it was here that local dance troupes, choral groups and a full orchestra performed to the delight of the passengers and the assembled throngs. In the early part of the day, passing clouds drizzled on us, but no one seemed to mind. Looking down from the Deck 11's Observation Deck forward, I spent a lot of time soaking up the scene before me. The entire pier by 11:00am, from the park where folks gazed and photographed our entire starboard side, to the pier where everyone craned their necks up to engage shouts of appreciation with passengers on Deck 7, was filling. It was time to wade into the masses and soak up some of this good will. I decided to avoid the crowds packed tight near the amidships exit. I literally snuck out through the

aft, Stairtower 4 access, and quietly wandered into the crowd. Towards the stern section of the ship a group of Las Palmians (??) were working hard at creating a work of art on the pier. As passengers returned to the ship, they were presented with a beautiful artistic poster heralding this momentous arrival: An artistic rendering of a bow view of the QUEEN MARY 2 on her "Viaje Inaugural" arrival in Las Palmas. Native fellows were hard at work, perfectly recreating the in huge form the poster right there on the pier, in what appeared to be colored salt or sand. As the afternoon wore on their diligent work became an amazing highlight. Measuring appx. 30 ft. by 50 ft. they completed the masterpiece with plenty of time to spare enabling all of us to get perfect photos looking down from Deck 7.

Using my well-honed New York City gait, I maneuvered myself through the crowds: good looking Spaniards, whole families, gorgeous women, handsome couples, Germans, British, natives and tourists, all moving more towards the pier than away, all convening to view the QUEEN MARY 2. Photo ops abounded. Families scrunched together for that perfect shot with the Queen as the backdrop. In the park across from us, on the pier extension, high above in the extremely modern El Muelle building everyone wanted to soak up the festivities: local singers, the orchestra, the fun, the crowd sounds pulsing. Having left my little dog at home, and not having been there for over a week now, I was tempted to play with the numerous well-groomed animals owners brought with them. Children squealed in delight, the Police had their hands full trying to separate sightseers from local cabs as all tried to gain access to the pier. The sun had broken through and the crowds continued to grow and grow. I didn't go far. At one point I did scoot across from the waterfront, one street into town. The place was deserted. It was QUEEN for a day! The action was on the pier and damned if all weren't going to enjoy it!

Coming back to the ship through the "main" "gated" entrance, I walked through, adulation on either side, hands reached out, wanting to touch me, or anyone else en route back to the ship. One older pensioner pleaded with me, pointing to a poster held by another, "more," "more" "please." I shrugged. I didn't even have one for me at that point. Finding my place online, entering the ship, I took my poster. I wandered again through the MARY, finding a great spot starboard side aft to watch the creative men completing the grand replication of the poster on the pier.

Looking down from Deck 7 to the gate below, I was enjoying the notoriety each passenger enjoyed as they returned to the ship. It was time to give something back. Everyone was enjoying the interaction with the crowds, but at this point, it didn't appear that anyone was fulfilling their requests for something, anything, from the ship. I went down to the Purser's Desk on Deck 2. I pleaded my case with the young assistant: "It's time we gave something back to these people. Here they are, turning out in droves, making us all feel so special and we're not giving anything back in return. You've got to give me a stack of postcards to distribute among the children on the pier." The assistant toed the company line responding in his thick English accent, "Ahm sorry sir, guests are only allowed six cards per request." "You've got to be kidding," I pleaded. "Sir, if we gave a stack to everyone, there just wouldn't be enough cards to go around." "Geez, man, let's just give something back. The island is putting on a fireworks show for us. That's not being paid for by Cunard (I assumed). These people deserve something. You've gotta give me more than six cards. Oh come on?..!" He said he'd give me eight. I countered with 12. It was the silliest negotiation I've ever been a part of. Disappointed, I walked away with 10 and b-lined it to the yellow gate not knowing if I was about to start a stampede or what! When the crowd spied me stopping, looking into their numbers, they realized something was about to be distributed. "Me? me? sir...please? please?" hands reached towards me over and through the security railing from both sides and I carefully found the smallest and lowest in the crowd, making sure my cards found a small, but secure reception. Unfortunately, adults had much longer reaches and the children recessed below them

making it difficult to get the cards to them. The first five met with my hoped-for recipient. The next four went to two old men and I must admit, a couple of rather attractive young women. I had one left. I scanned the noisy, but very nice and respectable group all yelling for me to give one to them. I found my target. A young child, gorgeous little boy, couldn't have been more than six years old, was standing on the bottom rung of the yellow gate, his hands wrapped securely around the top rung so as not to lose his balance. He looked terribly sad, realizing that if he took his hands off the rail and reached for a card, he would topple from his perch and be swallowed up in the crowd. I approached him. Hands thrust in my face, I ducked them and slid as securely as possible my last card into his curled fingers wrapped on the gate till it stuck. His face opened into the brightest smile, the most beaming smile. This moment was by far my most enjoyable moment of the entire trip. The look on that young lad's face just lit up the world, and the significance of my finding him just cemented the entire experience here in Las Palmas. My work was done, my cards were gone. I turned to take a final walk around to the park facing the ship and as I left the gate area several of the crowd actually applauded me! APPLAUDED ME??!!! I dissolved into the crowd with the biggest smile on my face.

I don't think I was the first person to reciprocate to the local folks and tourists that were assembled. By the time I was back on the ship, it seemed every passenger was bringing something to the crowds! One fellow gave himself to the audience, just leaning himself into the arms and hands and let them all just give him a group pat, similar to a US football player jumping into the stands to enjoy the adulation after a touchdown. I later heard that wiser folks gathered up handfuls of stirrers, each with the Cunard crest, to distribute. Some gave up their posters and these were very prized souvenirs for the locals. It was the closest thing to a "love in" I had seen since the early '70s!

By sailing time a band in formal whites had arrived which was soon followed by an impromptu conga line of happy revelers. Facing the ship and we on the ship looking down on the hoards below chants were being sung which seemed to be akin to European football chants complete with hand gestures. We on the ship picked up on it and reciprocated. The crowd roared its approval. The cruise director on the ship ran up and down the promenade on Deck 7, trying to motivate us into doing "the wave." Thankfully, we remained classier than that! Smiles on both sides abounded. Everyone on the ship was commenting on how warm an experience this was. Several yelled "Viva Las Palmas, Viva Gran Canaria". The crowd roared in response. It was truly a memorable experience. People from all walks, just enjoying the moment. And the QUEEN MARY 2 was the centerpiece.

Sailing time. Darkness descended. Camera flashes from three sides followed our very slow movement astern and away from the pier. Now we all anticipated the fireworks. Would Las Palmas outdo Tenerife?? We knew there were several barges, some said five - others four, spread through the dock area. There was a long delay. We wondered if perhaps there wasn't going to be a fireworks show. Nestled where access to the pier met the waterside park was what appeared to be a partially submerged barge. Soon, it began to spew little sparks, appearing as if the fireworks programmed on it were also submerged and therefore unable to ascend. Mini bursts spread immediately over the water. There was no report in any of these tiny explosions and we looked at each other thinking that poor little Las Palmas' fireworks show had sunk into the harbor. I felt terrible thinking that all of this little island's efforts to provide us a memorable departure were going to fizzle. How wrong could I be?

After about five minutes of this diminutive display, the QUEEN MARY 2 still moving astern out of the immediate harbor area, barge number two ignited. Now, we were aware of the genius behind the display. Each barge was going to increase in size. The first, at water level appeared to be a dud. The second reached only 10-15 feet into the air, the next soon to follow, higher still and by the time the

fourth or fifth had reached it's stride we were treated to another world class display! It was a fitting sendoff from an island that had given us it's all. Las Palmas and our reception there remained a topic of discussion over the next few days as the QUEEN MARY 2 turned southwest and began our crossing of the Atlantic. Barbados was four days away and we would all settle into that wonderful routine that marks every Atlantic crossing.

After 8 full days including three absolutely fantastic ports and five perfectly beautiful days at sea we were gaining some great perspective on this ship.



The crowd awaiting the departure of QUEEN MARY 2 on the Puerto DeLaLuz, Las Palmas, Canary Islands, after a day of festivities (1/17/2004).

(This next chapter was completed 7 months after the Maiden Voyage in August, 2004)

And I, after putting together a rather lengthy chapters on the QM2's earliest days on her "real" Maiden Voyage have the benefit of perspective as she enters her 8th month of service. My memories are still sharp and I now have the benefit of that tremendous perspective.

Had I completed this in the early days of February 2004 our Liners List discussions would still be debating the spotty Britannia Dining Room service. Our discussions would take sides who was to blame. Months later, that's no longer an issue. As the ship and her crew have matured her reviews have consistently been positive, with only an occasional negative report. The food was never at issue. The service was. It should no longer be. I know many that have sailed in her in the days and months following our January voyage. The vast majority have extolled her virtues: the food, the service, her sea-keeping abilities, the tender service showed great improvement. Her Maiden Westbound arrival in New York City was an event on a scale only New York could provide. Her tandem QUEEN ELIZABETH 2 departure, a once in a lifetime experience for those onboard either ship, and for those onboard the numerous harbor craft, will not be forgotten. Again, perspective.

But I digress. This is to be the final chapter of the greatest Ocean Liner in the world Maiden Voyage and I shall begin again from here.

With great anticipation and just the slightest touch of sadness knowing our sea-days were numbered, we all tucked into our bunks the night of Wednesday, January 21st. Tomorrow brought our Maiden Western Hemisphere arrival, the port of Bridgetown, Barbados, and most of us anticipated a similar greeting to those we had become accustomed to on the East side of the Atlantic.

I thought I was up early the morning of the 22nd, but George and Juan had risen at the crack of dawn and were already back in the cabin rummaging for more film as I rose around 6:30am. Their voices excitedly informed Charles and I that the EUROPEAN VISION was docked perpendicularly across from us in the protected harbor. Costas' lovely COSTA CLASSICA was tucked into the innermost pier, closest to the tourist center and the taxi hub. We were a bit surprised to see that "Ernie Roller's" CARNIVAL SPIRIT and Radissons' SEVEN SEAS NAVIGATOR had yet to arrive, knowing they were scheduled to join us. The VISION's presence was the biggest surprise. Festival Cruises had gone belly-up the day before, and all of their ships were instantly laid up. EUROPEAN VISION was still crowded with passengers all waiting to hear their travel fate, wondering how they were going to leave Barbados but they did have the thrill of watching us arrive for the first time in this former English outpost. At this early hour, many of her passengers were watching us and we curious were watching them.

Docked across from us at the quiet backwater her passengers must've felt a bit like quarantined Ellis Island arrivals, not offered any access ashore. We on the other hand, were the celebrity arrival, and we knew we'd be feted as such!

Hardly.

We tied up at the furthest point from the mall harbor facility, no doubt due to security concerns. A small bus pulled up next to us and out tumbled a 37-member brass band, whose tunes hardly filtered up to my Deck 7 vantage point. A small gangplank protruded from QM2's One Deck amidships. A harbor official in Bermuda shorts and carrying a small briefcase was the first Barbadoan to come aboard, no doubt extending the formal welcome to the largest passenger ship in the world to Barbados. It was

almost laughable! Happily, Radissons' SEVEN SEAS NAVIGATOR was an ever-growing white blip on the horizon, as she approached Barbados and turned our attentions from the underwhelming "official" greeting to more enjoyable ship pursuits.

The SEVEN SEAS NAVIGATOR entered the protected harbor area directly behind us gliding silently off our port quarter and then to our port side as she moved to tie up off our bow at the pier head. She was gleaming in the bright morning sun and numerous white bathrobed passengers were staring back at us from their beehive-like verandah suites.

The plan for the day was to hire a van, drive to the Northeast shore of the Island, and enjoy the afternoon at the Crane's Beach Hotel. Charles and others had visited Crane's on earlier cruises and he guaranteed it's Atlantic beaches to be among the best he had ever enjoyed.

Ben was fortunate to be on shore leave and we were happy to have him joining us. Before our planned excursion there was some ship photographing to do. Ted, Charles, Jon, Ben and I left the ship to cover the Barbados pier area. One interesting straight on bow view of the QM2 indicated that she had a slight list to port, straining a bit away from the pier. We chalked this up to some uneven ballasting. Walking past the SEVEN SEAS NAVIGATOR we chatted it up a bit with some of her passengers, all of which were very curious about our time aboard QM2. They spoke very positively of their Radisson experience. We unsuccessfully spent some time trying to convince the COSTA CLASSICA's security to allow us an onboard visit. Charles pointed out that the CLASSICA's hull was a prototype for the STATENDAM class, something that took a bit of convincing in her all-white livery and pronounced porthole profile. But such are the reasons why I like sailing with Charles! We continued out on the empty pier snapping great shots of the QM2 across the way. Charles and I climbed a large unguarded freight elevator and were planning on gaining an even higher vantage point of the QM2 until a security vehicle arrived and "suggested" we come down. We did. Our attention was diverted to the rapidly approaching CARNIVAL SPIRIT, just arriving outside the protected pier area. We were positioned right at her berth and we allowed the longshoremen some space all the while enjoying some great views as she swung round and "thrusted" herself to the pier. The SPIRIT's boxy Vista Class design conflicted with the nicely terraced QM2 profile. Taking shots of the QM2's bow, viewed directly under the SPIRIT's gave a very true indication of the two ship's significant differences. The QM2's graceful, sharp entry spoke of traditional transatlantic liner appearance, while the SPIRIT's less elegant bulkier entry was modern-day "cruise ship" through and through!

Time was getting short and we did have a Barbados agenda to maintain, so we met George, Juan, and Janine Miller at the pier shed and went to grab a van for the ride to the beach!

The 7 of us crammed into our hired minivan. The driver and one unidentified passenger, also heading to Crane's, completed the complement. As we wound our way past the EUROPEAN VISION across from the main port area we struck up conversation with the stranger. ABC-TV had joined the ship in one of the Canary Island ports and was beaming back daily highlights of the Maiden Voyage in time for their Good Morning America morning show. Lara Spencer was the features editor and she was very visible with video and sound crew in tow throughout the crossing. Charles had learned of their presence aboard and wondered if Charlie Gibson, part of the AM host duet that included Diane Sawyer, might've also been aboard. Turns out Charles knew Charlie. Not only was Charlie Charles' patient, he had also sailed with him during a Mediterranean voyage some years before and he was hoping they'd have the chance to reacquaint aboard the QM2. Striking up conversation with the stranger in our minivan, we learned this fellow was the Production Manager of GMA's (Good Morning America's) transmission from the ship.

Hearing that GMA was aboard, Charles had actually contacted him in his cabin, without previously meeting him, and learned that Charlie was in fact, not aboard. By sheer coincidence, both men were now sharing the same minivan! Charles informed "Dave" that he was friendly with Charlie Gibson and "Dave's" promotional wheels started turning. What a wonderful sidebar Charles might add to their QM2 broadcast. A "surprise guest" that actually was friendly with one of the hosts of the show! Dave asked Charles if he might like to do a special segment, titillating Charlie as to who this "mystery guest" might be. The groundwork was laid on the 40-minute ride to the beach. Dave would let Charles know the scheduling of his few moments of fame, when he would surprise host Charlie Gibson with his presence onboard via live transmission from the ship. This exciting development had the nervous Charles half-hoping it wouldn't actually find the time to be scheduled over the few days left.

We arrived at Crane's Beach and climbed down the rickety staircase from the hotel property perched high above the pristine white beach. A magnificent strip of perfect beachhead it was. The turquoise blue Atlantic broke with a 5-6 ft. surf onto the powdery Crane's Beach sand. For a small fee we commandeered a few chaise lounges and immersed ourselves in the bathtub-warm ocean. I live(d) on the south shore of Long Island, New York and only a short drive away is the fabled strip of sand called Jones Beach. It's a world-class facility with miles of pristine sand hard by a dark and usually rough Atlantic. I've swum at St. Thomas's gorgeous Magen's Bay beach, which, protected on three sides can hardly be considered an oceanfront property. I've waded through the surf at Waikiki on Oahu. The Del Coronado Beach in San Diego receives very high praise. Crane's Beach wins hands down! It's a glorious strip of beach and on this perfect day provided us with some of the greatest fun ashore that we enjoyed on this Maiden Voyage. We were all kids again. Charles, streamlined to begin with, had perfected his body surfing years earlier in the Hamptons on Long Island. He amazed us by riding these perfect waves, literally digging his bow (head) hard into the sand on the beach! It was a glorious afternoon.

Sated by our couple of hours in the sun, we climbed back upstairs to enjoy some of the Hotel comforts. While George and Juan set off exploring the property, the Millers, Jane Lyons, Ann Hunt, Charles, Ben and myself dined alfresco on the hotel balcony overlooking the beach, enjoying the local delicacy, flying-fish burgers.

The QUEEN MARY 2 wasn't scheduled to sail until 11:00 that evening from Barbados, affording passengers the full day to enjoy Barbados. We however, had to cut our time at Crane's short. Ben was scheduled back at the ship and we arranged our return drive to leave around 4:30. Dusk was settling when we got back to Bridgetown. Our van dropped us right next to where Ernie Roller was holding court with a large group of his friends off the CARNIVAL SPIRIT and several QM2 passengers. There was a very festive atmosphere around the Port bar, and some of our party remained behind sipping Margarita's with the CARNIVAL SPIRIT contingent. Everyone was aboard by 10:30. Having been spoiled by the magnificent firework departures on the Eastern leg of the Maiden Voyage, we hoped for something similar from Barbados. It was just a touch disappointing to note there was no special fanfare marking the evening departure. Having the lit CARNIVAL SPIRIT, COSTA CLASSICA, SEVEN SEAS NAVIGATOR and EUROPEAN VISION as the backdrop to our departure was colorful enough.

A full day at sea beckoned to us as we made our way to St. Thomas. We had fantastic weather each day since we left Las Palmas behind. Today was no different. One of the highlights was yet another John Maxtone-Graham Lecture in the stunning Illuminations, this one "Queen Elizabeth 2: A Fond Retrospective." As anyone that has had the pleasure to enjoy one of his lectures will attest, Maxtone-Graham is a glorious proponent of ocean travel. His dramatic delivery, his heartfelt emotions, his sentimental recollections convert the uninitiated from passenger to enthusiast and this voyage was no

different. John "performed" his "Only Way to Cross" in two parts, allowed us the pleasure of "meeting" Violet Jessup with a lecture that left you actually knowing the Stewardess that had survived not only TITANIC, but her near-sister BRITANNIC's foundering. He added the QE2 talk, and finally on our last day at sea "Second Queen Mary, a 21st Century Liner." Each session was standing room only.

Maiden Voyages are always special events, and the token souvenirs one brings home just add to the occasion. We had already received a special Wedgwood ashtray, and sadly only limited numbers of the Southampton Daily Echo glossy publication were distributed to each cabin. George, being our host, was the lucky recipient of ours. There was no other choice. Throughout the voyage there was talk that we'd all be receiving a magnificent book partnered by Cunard and Maxtone-Graham, the complete story of the QM2, a new "builders book" that we'd all treasure. We couldn't wait. We had heard there was a problem getting them aboard first in Southampton when the luggage delayed our departure and later when they finally caught up to us at some port. Was it Las Palmas or maybe it would be Barbados! There was no doubt it would finally arrive, and we were so looking forward to it. 10,000 copies had been printed. Thousands had already been distributed at the inaugural parties onboard, the travel agent overnights, the Vigo visit. Onboard copies had been snapped up by crew, but the bulk had yet to be distributed to us, the most "worthy of recipients", the Maiden Voyage passengers. A few of the noteworthy among us were already talking of the detail the volume contained. We had seen none of it. We were beginning to wonder if we ever would. It turned out the bulk of these, earmarked for the Maiden Voyage never did make it aboard in Southampton. The luggage delay had voided their hoisting. Instead, they were packaged up and flown - not to Barbados in time for our arrival - but to Florida and eventually found their way onto the ship in time for the first two-night travel agent cruise, disappointingly cheating us of this expected benefit!

January 23rd was another sun-kissed day at sea, en route to our final port call, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands.

We were treated to a special presentation in Illuminations. At 11:00am Stephen Payne finally emerged from his successfully maintained low profile and presented himself front and center to the entire ship. His superbly slide-illustrated seminar entitled "Genesis of a Queen" packed the amphitheatre to the gunwales and he beguiled us all with a fascinating review of the creation of "his ship."

He started where Stephen always starts. When he was a child and his Blue Peter story. Phenomenal it is that this fellow actually realized the dream so many of us aspire to and never achieve. Using a vivid collection of videos and his superb oratory skills, Stephen recreated the entire process, from sketch to reality, the creation of today's modern transatlantic liner, the QUEEN MARY 2. Illuminations was hushed, everyone hanging on every word, every description. An occasional "here-here" would rise above the quiet when he'd strike a nostalgic vein for some of us "shippies", it was great. Personally, I was mesmerized. At lectures' end the room rolled with a long heartfelt appreciative standing ovation. Similar to the opportunity of having Joe Farcus hold court on the CARNIVAL DESTINY bridge on her maiden arrival in NY in 1996. She the first 100,000 toner ever as he signed plans doled out to us fanatics. We all stood in awe of Mr. Payne, accepting our applause and appreciation on a job extremely well done, providing so many of us with something we never thought we'd ever see again: a magnificent Transatlantic Ocean Liner. I know I felt the emotion and as I gazed about I noted others dabbing at wet eyes.

It was a wonderful experience.

We arrived in St. Thomas at 6:00am. Another brilliant Caribbean sun had greeted us and we had a very special itinerary planned. We had all been here so often, we needed a new itinerary, something unique, something special. Again, Charles my longtime roomie, came through. Security was especially tight here. Police mosquito boats buzzed the QM2 at the very first light. Her piers were already taken by a trifecta: Princess' DAWN PRINCESS, Celebrity's GALAXY, and the previous tonnage record-holder, at least with a share of the record, Royal Caribbean's ADVENTURER of the SEAS. We would tender in for the first time on our voyage. But first, before we even had a shot at going ashore, we all had to attend US Immigration Inspection. We had no idea tendering would seem so simple compared to this exercise! The line snaked it's way from the starboard side Art Gallery, through the Chart Room Bar, across the Gallery through Sir Samuels, hard by the fine wines in the cases, through to the Queens Room. Time? An easy hour, more for those that decided to sleep past the Deck 4 rising hour of 6:45am!

Having completed the exercise, we gathered in the Golden Lion Pub, waiting for our muster color to be called. And we waited, and waited, and waited. It extended at least an hour and a half - truly way too long - and finally, were able to enjoy a seat on Deck 1, waiting yet again, to board the tender, port Side, finally off ashore. Ben was there, seemingly swallowed up in his Cunard officer hat, on tender duty as we sped away from the QM2. Charles had the opportunity to chat again with the WABC-TV staff. This time it was Lara Spencer on the tender with us, and she implied that something was being planned for the Ft. Lauderdale arrival.

We made it to Charlotte Amalie's "Waterfront Drive" (actually it's called Kyst Vejen) and went about pursuing Charles' special itinerary. In the early '60s, as a kid, and later through that decade and the '70s, he had the pleasure of enjoying the St. Thomas Hilton. The hotel was perched above the western end of the city, above the yacht piers. On this day, Celebrity's HORIZON was tied up near there. Terribly, but fascinatingly, the hotel is only a shell of her former self. Sold in the late '70s, blown out by a hurricane in the '80s, today it's an abandoned hulk. Charles remembered it as a beautiful resort and we had the chance to tour her remains. The three of us, Charles, myself, and Anne Hunt, commandeered a taxi and while it took a few misguided attempts, we finally found the entrance to the old resort.

Her '50s Art Deco façade beckoned and our cab led us to the overgrown entrance. There is no longer any glass, any doors, any resemblance to it's former luxury, but it was so akin to stepping among the bones of an ancient liner, so similar to my July 2001 experience in Freeport, Jamaica, touring the out of service BIG RED BOAT II, REMBRANDT, and ISLAND BREEZE (among others) we were fascinated by the opportunity. Walking into the reception hall, Charles recounted it's former luxury. "Here's where reception was, this was the main lounge, this was the bar. Here are the shops." We stepped carefully between glass, wood, and ceiling tiles. Mind you, this wasn't an elephant from the '20s or '30s. This was a beautiful mid '50s modern place, done in Mid-Century art deco reminiscent of the original Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas. She was modern through and through but torn asunder by tropical storms and mismanagement. Hulks of old cars littered the public room interiors. An old nightclub, set inside the circular driveway was completely immersed by overgrown plants. Charles recounted how he had snuck in one night, decades before, and Anne and I could only imagine what it was like back then.

We took the desolate staircase down to the pool area. There it was, the deep kidney shaped pool, filled with tepid water from numerous Caribbean storms. We could visualize the lauded gentry filling the decks of the pool area, waiting for cabana boys to bring tall drinks. Torn and sad cabanas ringed the pool. We literally picked our way through the ruins. All of Charlotte Amalie lay in front of us, the hotel

had a truly superb venue above the town. It was a very sad visage of an era gone by. Only Charles could appreciate her former glory. We stepped our way around glass, wire, wood, through the lounge and reception to walk up to the ruined rooms. Receipts of bar tabs from the '80s littered the stairs. Walking through the 2nd floor balcony we poked into a couple of rooms. The hurricane that destroyed the hotel had eliminated every window. One room showed signs of occupancy, even today. Someone - no doubt homeless - had set draperies across both entrances to one of the rooms. Vividly colored, they provided privacy. We made no attempt to communicate, but were amazed that someone was still taking up residence.

At that point, we hurried out to meet our taxi driver. After a few hurried photos in the ruined circular driveway, some taking in views of the destroyed satellite receiver on the roof we returned to town and caught the tender back to the QUEEN MARY 2. It was a unique and strangely enjoyable visit to St. Thomas.

Making the ship in the late afternoon, we had plenty of time to enjoy QM2's deck pleasures. I went aft, on Deck 8, to the pool area. At the same time, a police flyer of the St. Thomas helicopter squad began buzzing the ship. And, kept buzzing the ship. So much so that he drew everyone's attention. This guy was hot dogging it big-time! Crowds gathered to catch his gyrations. I caught my very best Maiden Voyage photo and it had nothing to do with the QUEEN MARY 2. As the late clouds gathered behind us and the sun began its descent, I caught the darkened profile of this copter and hotshot operator against the setting sun. The sun's rays sparkled off the islands to our west, the pilot profiled in the glare. It was beautiful. The HORIZON seemed to scoot as she left the harbor, gaining speed aft of us, but near enough to provide great views of the QM2 to her passengers. As we prepared to sail, I went forward to the 11 Deck Observation area forward, meeting up with many other ship folk. We had the thrill of watching ADVENTURER OF THE SEAS, sailing out of Charlotte Amalie, cross our bows, honor us—the passing of the "largest" title—with several blasts of her horn. QUEEN MARY 2 responded in kind to acknowledge. It was something.

Unknown to us, Ruben Studdard, he of American Idol fame, had joined the ship in St. Thomas and would provide some entertainment as we sailed to our Maiden Voyage destination, Port Everglades. I was invited to a special table that evening in the Dining Room. Next to us was an empty 8-person table, its usual occupants no doubt enjoying their Todd English dining opportunity. Out beyond the Deck 3 Upper Level entrance of Britannia, we could see a group of folks, seemingly negotiating with the dining room staff. We had all been adhering to the recommended dress codes each night, and it appeared this group wasn't planning on donning jacket or tie. Sure enough, finally, they were led into the dining room, taking the large table next to us. It was Ruben's group of supporters, no doubt musician's all, and they plopped themselves down next to us as we grumbled quietly about their lack of attire!

Obviously, negotiations were such that the maitre'd did not want to allow the celebrity addition and his support staff to compromise of the specified dress code. Well, they were there and they were wearing "grunge"!

There was one full sea day left. Many of us took in Maxtone-Graham's "Second Queen Mary, a 21st Century Liner". I spent most of the afternoon on Deck 8 aft, on my little docking bridge that had become my most enjoyable spot onboard.

Around midday, the Commodore took to the intercom and alerted us all to that "small Disney ship" passing us outbound from Florida! Either the MAGIC or WONDER, I never figured out which afforded us some nice photo ops as she passed not far off our port side. The CARNIVAL LEGEND was next as she followed the Disney ship out to her 7-day Caribbean itinerary. Ruben Studdard would appear for two shows in the Royal Court Theatre, first at 8:45 for first sitting followed by 10:45 for second. I caught a glimpse of him during the second show, recording a snippet for my wife of his performance. We all dined this evening in one of the Kings Court partitioned restaurants, The Carvery. As large an expanse as the King Court is, and it's central placement making it such a crucial part of the ship's "traffic flow", it almost seemed as if we were in a private dining room. We dined at a long table for 10, only the second time on the voyage we all shared the same table, affording us views out off the port side. It was quite lovely and the fare was delicious.

This was the time that happens on every voyage, no matter how long or how short, the sad realization that journey's end is near and the wonderful experience we had all shared would soon be replaced by the stark reality of packing, final farewells, and the breaking up of our little group. We still had the excitement of our Port Everglades arrival to experience. I ran into Stephen Payne in front of the Deck 3 elevators aft outside of Britannia. Realizing this would be my last meeting with him on this voyage I asked him to favor me with his autograph by his name in the Maiden Voyage Passenger list we had been presented with that afternoon. He most graciously complied. It remains, most appropriately, the only signature on that particular document.

We all began the arduous task of packing, but there was still some "excitement" left and it wasn't only the maiden arrival. I was missing an issue of the Daily Programme, and Ted Scull very kindly said he'd leave my missing item tucked into the little mail box outside his cabin, opposite ours around on the port side of Deck 4. As I made my way around, I came upon the last thing I thought I'd ever see onboard: a completely naked female passenger cowering behind her luggage in the hallway. Not wanting to upset her further, I quickly ducked behind the doorway and yelled out asking if I could help in any way. She was banging on the cabin door. Evidently, naked, she had slipped her luggage out and the door closed with a bang behind her, trapping her in this moment delicato. "Yes, please get someone to open my cabin door. My husband is asleep inside!", she cried. I got on the phone in the stair tower and had no idea who to dial. There was no written guide to use and for all I still know it could only be used for cabin calls. It would be helpful for Cunard to post usage information by these phones for just such emergencies. (well, maybe not exactly "these" types of emergencies, thinking they would be very few and far between!) I tried dialing "0", hoping for some shipboard operator, but there was no answer. At that moment, another male passenger happened along. I warned him about the woman's plight before he entered the hallway and he volunteered to go to the purser's desk for help. Apparently, the woman's husband finally stirred and let her back in as our conversation was halted by the loud snapping-shut of her cabin door! It would have been a very hilarious moment had it not been for her extreme embarrassment!

We all planned to be up and out early for the momentous arrival in the morning.

After 10 absolutely glorious sunshine filled days we arrived off Port Everglades under a hot and humid gray cover. I had given tons of thought to where I wanted to be as we approached the cut into the harbor area knowing strategic location for a Maiden Arrival is something that needed to be considered and planned. In my early morning fog I completely abandoned my plan to take up a position on the Observation Deck forward on Deck 11. Instead I raced to the "propeller park" forward on Deck 7. Wrong!! The red, white, and blue plumes of seawater sprayed by the attendant fireboat welcoming us,

splashed across the deck, causing the QM2's immaculate white forward superstructure to become stained with the colors. Anticipating a change in wind direction, I ducked under the gunwhale for protection. Didn't work. My white shirt was stained red for the duration of the arrival. We quietly slid pass the Ft. Lauderdale beach. The crowd unveiled a large "Welcome QUEEN MARY 2" sign on the northern rock jetty, packs of people looking like so many ants scattering for the best view of the ship, sliding towards her Western terminal. By my count, 12 helicopters, at least one of them no doubt, part of the Good Morning America television coverage, buzzed all around us and I just waited to see a couple of them collide, their frenetic movements all over the sky. In a way, it was all somewhat eerie. It certainly didn't have the same warm (despite the temperature) feel of the Southampton departure. There, we were the largest ocean liner in the world, setting sail on her maiden voyage across the Atlantic. Here, it almost seemed we were just another huge cruise ship, making landfall at the very busy Port Everglades. The same sentimental and patriotic music blared over the loudspeakers. The little REGAL EMPRESS and ISLAND ADVENTURE, the ex. Greek and Russian ships along with the Italian MSC's sleek and streamlined LIRICA offered their passengers the chance of a lifetime to view the end of a record setter's Maiden Arrival. We didn't have their view. A naval destroyer, it's name documented elsewhere offered her ship's company along her starboard flank. It was a nice gesture as we cozied up to the pier. Carnival Chief Arison and other company glitterati were there on the pier to welcome us. It was very anti-climactic. Little American, British and Cunard flags were again passed out among us.

But... we were to have one final brush with fame. Charles had been told to meet Dave, the Good Morning America producer near the production booth, Deck 13 amidships. Sure enough, his television appearance was confirmed. This was going to be a final touch of whimsy to what had otherwise been a wonderfully formal and traditional experience. Our little group was instructed to muster on the Observation Deck forward. There, we watched as Lara Spencer concluded a live interview of Ruben Studdard for WABC-TV's Good Morning America.

It was about 8:50am, the show scheduled to end at 9:00am on the final broadcast of 9 straight days of remote reports from the ship. Charles was going to be the finale! As cameraman, soundman, and "talent" all convened on the port side Observation bridge wing, a few of us were asked to provide "background" for the shoot. Charles would be interviewed by Lara and Charlie Gibson and his broadcast partner, Diane Sawyer, would watch the remote broadcast on the studio monitor. All of this was to occur on a split screen for the viewing public. Now, adding silliness to the event, January 26 was designated "National Bubble Wrap Day". There had been some coverage of this "tremendous" event during the course of the earlier broadcast. My good friend Charles, Manhattan Dentist Charles Zuckerman, sophisticated traveler and man of the world, was asked to wrap himself in bubble wrap and to hold a piece of bubble wrap in front of his face to keep his identity secret until Charlie was given the opportunity to identify the "mystery guest". A group of us stood directly behind the interview providing the "passenger backdrop." Lara broke in with "OK, Charlie, before we go we have a special mystery guest for you. You know this gentleman well, let's see if you can identify him. She offered up a few humorous hints. Things along the lines of "he has seen you drool" (remember, Charles is Charlie's dentist in NY) and Charlie, looking up at the monitor in the studio stammered a bit and responded with an incorrect name. Lara, laughing, chided him for the wrong response, turned to Charles and said "mystery guest, please identify yourself?" Charles dropped the bubble wrap and Charlie immediately identified him as "oh, my goodness, it's Dr. Charles Zuckerman, my dentist, how are you sir?!!" It was hysterical. Charles nervously smiled and returned the greeting and we all got a huge kick out of it. It was fun. It was unique. It was the end of the Maiden Voyage. As we took the forward elevator down to Deck 4 to gather our carry-offs, a Australian woman who had joined us in the "passenger backdrop" asked Charles to sign her autograph book. It was a fitting climax.

It was over. Now we had to endure disembarkation. It was a horror. It's not like Port Everglades isn't home to some very well populated ships. Why the QM2's maiden arrival took a chapter out of the Keystone Kops, is beyond me. For a while, a few of us took up positions on Deck 7, waiting to be called. We watched as a security boat moved a lengthy waterborne security fence to protect the QM2's exposed starboard flank. It seemed a bit silly in all of the security hoopla, as it hardly covered the ship's entire waterline.

We made the executive decision to come ashore having tired of just hanging around on Deck 7. Big mistake. We sat in the shed for another hour or so, enjoying the lingering company of some shipboard friends, especially Paul & Misako Koroluk who languished along with us. Finally, Charles spied his luggage and speedily and apologetically bid me goodbye. I thought I was doomed for hours to come. It turned out my luggage had been sitting in a completely unidentified area for who knows how long? I might've caught my original flight back to NY hours earlier!

As my Jet Blue flight wafted off the tarmac back to New York, I caught a terrific view of the QM2 at her pier. Happily, my digital camera was available and at the ready.

What an extraordinary experience this had been. I can't begin to thank George Prince enough for giving me the opportunity of a lifetime. I owe George big time. Meeting Juan and sharing time with them was fantastic. I didn't even mind losing to George at basketball. My shipmates provided some of the most amusing and lovely shipboard experiences I've had in my 28 voyages and this was the longest single voyage I have ever enjoyed. New friends like Bob Pelletier only added to the experience. Old friends like Tom Cassidy are always a pleasure to sail with. Having had Ben Lyons onboard, sailing with Ben as an Officer after sharing numerous and fun social sailings with him was an added bonus, as was having Jane Lyons and Anne Hunt aboard for extra entertainment. The Millers, Jon and Janine were hugely fun, and benefiting from Ted Scull's knowledge and experience and Karl Zimmerman's friendship made this a voyage for the ages. Last but not least, my good buddy Charles Zuckerman, who I've now had the distinct pleasure of sharing four voyages with as well as his New York generosity, always keeps me laughing. And the QUEEN MARY 2? She was everything we had hoped for and I wish her 40 years of distinguished service.