

Truly, I went into this intending to steer clear of troubled waters. I just didn't realize how shallow all the water was. I didn't consider that they might lay themselves wide open --without me even considering an attack on their intelligence, or intending to insult their values.

The Sailboat was in some ways a perfect environment. For most of the two weeks I had plenty of time to read and write. And contrary to my usual life situation, there was little to draw me away from the task of writing. I had no particular interest in socializing with two of the other people present and the conversations I overheard provided fine stimulus to my writing.

Journal entries in italics, otherwise these are memories

Acknowledgements:

I wish to thank Captain and Master of the Rhein Bridge Ozren Pajkuric and Chief Officer Ernesto Escobar (shown in this photo) for sharing with me their



Chief Officer Ernesto Escobar,

ship-board home and their thoughts. These two men spoke freely about their political views, their homes and families, and countless other things over the eight days I was aboard the Rhein Bridge. When I told them I was a writer they asked if I would send them a copy of what I had to say about my experiences on their ship. This story is written for them and all of the men on the ship,

not only so they can read it, but so that my American friends can learn about them.

In addition, I thank the several other officers I had frequent opportunity to converse with, and the many crew members who were invariably gracious; sometimes quite literally "to a fault." I could have had more conversation with them had I been more forward. All acted as though my presence was not just welcome, but somehow a special honor. I don't know if this is because I am American, or because they had saved my life, or because their parents and culture had raised them well. This story is written for them and also their families. The questions friends have asked since I came home remind me of how much misconception we Americans have of the "big bad world" out there.

I offer my apologies up front. No one appreciates seeing their spoken words placed on a page. Even a direct quote can be a misrepresentation if the tone and inflection are missing. Feelings and intended meanings, groped for among the words of a second language, are easily misconstrued, and I'm sure I did it many times. As we shared conversations our goal was to learn more about each other's country, from this rare opportunity of a personal view. In recording this experience I hope to represent accurately their intended meanings and feelings. I am certain in many cases I have fallen short of this and apologize in advance. I have no desire to injure by misrepresentation any of the good men aboard this ship.

In return, I left them with impressions of myself and therefore all Americans. I hope my frequent sardonic or ironic comments were properly interpreted. **Joe has a comment here...**

The italicized words are directly from my journal.

My Story

I want to tell you all about the layout of the ship – the part people live in and elsewhere. And the engine room. The food. The navigation systems. Doing laundry. The party. Where the ship is registered, who owns it, how it is managed. And I will, but mostly I need to tell you about the people; where they are from and why, and what we talked about and why. How long they are on these voyages. Their families.

I will try to keep it chronological...

Boarding

It was raining lightly the morning the sailboat rendezvoused with The Rhein Bridge. Though apparently named for a bridge over a European river, the people who work on this ship pronounce its name as though it were a weather term, rather than a river. (For readers familiar with the Northwest, it rhymes with Bainbridge, an island in the Puget Sound.) Here is a picture I took as we approached it's side.

I freely admit it; my first impressions were larger than life. The sudden and total change in my environment left me reeling. First, the movement stopped, and so did the sound. Or to be more precise, the lurching movement and the sound of whistling rigging and smashing waves.

In an instant, size and scale changed and measurable distances grew from a few feet to hundreds of feet. From a place where my presence was openly resented to...total strangers, dark-skinned foreign men, grasped my hands and

arms and pulled me aboard. Concern and curiosity welcomed me. This was serious business and a dangerous situation, but they had been asked to help, and so they were.

They spoke English to me, but the hand and body language they used was of people who know that these are the essential fundamental communication devices we all rely on in an emergency. I was told to follow; their hands turned me in the right direction. With touching concern, they helped me through doors that were hatches to be stepped up and over; up one little ladder – their hand tightening over mine say “hold on tight”; to a tall ladder of metal bars – their faces say “yes, up here, be careful”; and out through a hole, a hatch in the floor. I am standing on a floor, a deck, but within the ship; I cannot see outside. The essence was their business-like concern. The compassion of people who are confident of their skills: professionals. I knew I was safe with these men.

Now he is walking a half step in front of me, his left hand is extended back to me again, for mine to grasp, and I do. We are inside the ship. He leads me through halls lined with pipes and doorways that seal with a half dozen twisting handles on each door. Everything is metal; enclosed, smallish spaces. I could not retreat if I wanted to -- we have made so many turns down and through white painted metal passageways. Leading the procession ahead of us, others from my rescue party are opening doors. There is a roar and blast of heat; I am in a different place. Here the many pipes don't just lie up neatly against the walls. In a moment I am suspended on a catwalk in what can be no other than the engine room. It is cavernous, bright white with paint and lights, but the loud roaring defines everything. Far below me, against a background of more white painted metal I see a row of pale green machines that look freshly painted, and men dressed in white coveralls. I hear, though do not see, hissing steam from pipes. I see, but do not hear, the rattling of the wire that holds the insulation on some of these pipes. Can the roaring really be coming from those pretty green machines?

On the Bridge

In another moment I am in a tiny elevator and now the ship has changed again. A room, a spacious office with computers on desktops and pictures on the wall. Three, four more steps up a stairway, and I am standing on the bridge. I've seen movies. I know what the bridge of a ship looks like. It is full of windows and you can see everywhere at once. I – a sick woman from a sick sailboat; a nobody lifted from a heartless cradle in the center of a cold expanse of nowhere -- I am now standing...on The Bridge of this magnificent and powerful ship.

I, in my Heidi-layers of clothes with very dirty hair and unspeakable hands. And a handsome man, the very model of a modern Major-General, as Gilbert and Sullivan have already described him for me, smiles like a friend and offers his hand.

Then he offers his tall captains chair. He suggests a cup of tea and I nod. As a young man speeds away to fulfill this request, I call after him "with sugar?" I know it's ok for me to ask for this. I know my request will not offend any of these men.

The captain says he knows what it is like to be out in a small boat – the motion, the noise. In a single glance, without actually even asking me, he assumes my sickness will disappear with the sailboat. A cabin has been prepared for me when I am ready.

First meal --Lunch

Two hours later, freshly showered, I am sitting at a dining table and my life aboard *this* ship has begun. I am going to Panama. Without blinking an eye, the Captain tells me we will arrive September 1, at 4 AM. Is this a joke? Can any ship travel with this much precision?

The also sails as a hobby. He has a small sailboat he takes out on the Adriatic Sea.

Introduction to Captain Pajkuric

The Captain and Master of this vessel, Mr. Ozren Pajkuric, is Croatian. I felt honored to be able to make a good impression on him by knowing where Croatia is. With partial credit to Walt Disney for imprinting forever the name of a certain breed of dog onto my brain, I also remembered the name of the region that is his home: The Dalmatian Coast.

Hey, I have a degree in Geography. When I graduated from PSU in 1980, I joked that I now qualified for employment as a world traveler, should such a career exist. I have in fact been blessed with lots of opportunities for travel, though none of them paid jobs. And while I can't remember a person's name until I have embarrassed myself a dozen times, I am a whiz with geographic names. In a very definitive way, I had now redeemed my sheepskin for something truly valuable: the captain's appreciation for my apparently rare knowledge of Croatia's location.

Like all of the officers on this ship, the captain is married and has a family. With two grown daughters in college, the captain's wife is also a stay-at-home-mom, like myself, for the same reasons I am, but more so. Ozren is at sea four months at a time, with two months off between contracts. It would seem that he and Joe earn comparable salaries, which means a stay-at-home wife is a luxury they can afford. Ozren expressed that though his wife might have preferred her own career, this was a joint decision. When your husband spends this much time away from home, a wife does double duty for the children when he's gone, and she wants to be at home when he is home. One daughter is studying for a

career in the tourist industry; the Dalmatian Coast, once governed by Italy, is still a major tourist destination. Another daughter goes to college somewhat more than an hour's drive away from home, and has an apartment in this other city. I can't remember her career plans, but they could be the same as any young person's in America. Ozren's father was a mariner also, captaining the very different freighters of another era, but it would seem that neither of his daughters wants a marine career.

He and I had many conversations; we were each anxious to compare the details of life in the other's home country.

Other Croatians

[\[Photo here\]](#)

The other two people around the European officer's dining table were Chief Engineer Boris Rados and First Engineer Ivica Pavletic. You are probably pretty impressed that I can remember how to spell these names. I did actually learn the Captain's name while on board the ship, but these I got these two names off the ship's roster. I knew them as Chief and First Engineer. They are REAL engineers too. They actually run a real engine: that one I saw on the way in.

Layout of the Mess

The Filipino officers shared the other round table in the Officer's mess. This is for convenience. The cook prepares a menu for each nationality and the tables are spread accordingly. "Meals are for relaxation and [native language] conversation." Ozren explains that there are no firm rules here. Younger officers often eat with the younger crew, rather than with the "old men." And visa versa. A wide doorway connects the Crew's mess. As near as I can tell, the major difference is the shape of the tables; crew members sit at rectangular tables.

The nearby kitchen is large, full of stainless steel, and well appointed -- as any commercial kitchen might be. It includes recycling bins for plastics, cans, paper, glass, and food waste, and a conveniently located grinder the size of two bushel baskets and connected to a chute, for those things that do get sent overboard when the ship is out on the high seas. As I learned from the garbage pollution notices posted on the sailboat, everything that is tossed must be ground to a size of less than one square inch. I don't know if these are international laws, or a variety of local jurisdiction laws. For some reason I felt confident these people obeyed the law, though I myself broke it at one point. If they did break the law, I would never have known. Anything we tossed overboard would have soon been behind us in our foaming wake. [\[KitchenPhoto here\]](#)

They have been at sea a week, yet there is fresh fruit and lettuce. The center of each of these two round tables rotates; With a little railing round it, the movable portion holds condiments and shared items, a pitcher of ice water, cold sliced

meats, cheeses and spreads, the freshly baked rolls. “This is a Japanese ship” says the captain – as though that explains everything I see. Implication was that Japanese ships are of better than average quality. [Table Photo here]

It must have been Emmanuel, the young Second Officer [Emmanuel Photo here] who was responsible for hoisting me aboard and leading me to the bridge. After the Captain and two engineers, he and all the others on board, with two other exceptions, are from the Philippines. The exceptions are two young cadets, officers in training, from the Seychelles. There are only 24 people (now 25, with me) on this ship. [Photo of Thomas here]

After lunch I returned to my cabin and spent the rest of the day writing Advice to Would-be Sailors, and catching up my journal for these past 24 hours.

Day 2
August 24
Wednesday

I had lost weight on the sailboat -- ten or fifteen pounds at least. So though I was still a little shaky from my stressful sailboat ordeal, that adrenaline soon blended into the adrenaline of excitement with my new surroundings. In the morning of my second day I asked Third Officer Aniceto Elicanal for a tour of the ship. He said he would take me after he completed his mid-day watch. After lunch Aniceto led me down from the 6th floor bridge to the First Cabin Deck, also called the Public Deck.

Names & Language

But let me interrupt this tour to first say something about names and language. When the captain first introduced himself, it was unclear what he said his name was. While his English is near perfect, my ears are not well-tuned to receive foreign accents. All the officers and crew have a remarkable command of this language that is used in apparently all international air and sea transport. My lack of a good ear made communication a little difficult, but hand-waving is something I AM good at, so I think we usually muddled through ok. Past experience tells me it is best not to know for sure. I sincerely hope I did not do irreparable damage to the American image I left with these good people. But more on that later.

My hand-waving skills don't apply to understanding names and it was a few days before I found the ship's roster. In the meantime I think it was Aniceto I asked, “how I should address the captain?” He said we call him “suhar.” My poor feeble ears. Finally I got it. *Sir*. Why don't they just say it that way? Maybe

because they say it right and we don't? I don't know. Since it comes from the old French and Latin, *senior or seior*, or modern French *monsieur*, there seems plenty of justification for this single-syllable slurred "suhar" pronunciation. However, I could not however bring myself to say "sir" that way, so I just addressed the captain, as Captain.

Other than that, how they addressed each other was something I more or less missed. At least once I heard the captain call the Chief Officer, Chief, but this wasn't until I had finally memorized several first names (on the 3rd or 4th day). I hope they were not offended by this familiarity; no one seemed to be, especially when I applied the name to the correct person.

Deck Tour

It took me a few days for my adrenaline to drop, and to gain some sense of the very simple layout of the ship, but I will explain it here for you now. [\[Drawing of ship here\]](#)

superstructure

The superstructure is the part of the ship that sticks up above the hull. On the 18-year-old Rhein Bridge, the superstructure has a relatively small footprint but stands 6 stories high, The smoke stack and radar booms extend higher. On an ocean liner the superstructure covers virtually all of a ship's deck. On the classic freighter it covered a much smaller proportion of the deck in the center of the ship with a post and booms at either end for lifting cargo out of the holds. Containerships let shore-mounted cranes do all this lifting and the deck is covered with a simple 3 dimensional array of containers. The superstructure on the Rhein Bridge stands at about three-quarters of the way back from the bow. It is the width of the ship, but taller than it is deep. (deep=front to back. Oooh, "deep." One of those words I don't like to use when on a boat.) A simple design, the center hallway runs across the width of the ship and an elevator takes you up and down most of its approximately 10 "floors". (There is also a small wing attached to the port side of the superstructure.) ([drawing here](#))

The mess (dining room) and the cabins (the rooms these men call home) all face the front of the ship. Rooms off the other side of this hallway would all face the stern. But most of them are not really rooms at all, just storage closets. One large closet was a library. It had shelves holding some magazines and a collection of books, many of them short books designed for young men with low reading skills. All the reading materials I saw were in English. As I was saying, Aniceto took me down to the First Cabin Deck. This is the main deck, the deck at the top of the hull, and therefore it is outdoors. We walked its entire length, a loop around the ship. The containers are stacked 4 layers above this deck, obliterating the view from all front or back windows in the

superstructure below the Fifth Cabin Deck. Hence, my cabin, on the fifth cabin deck, had a front facing window with a fine view. [\(photo here\)](#) The Captain and Chief Engineer have corner cabins on this same deck. Chief Engineer's cabin is on the port side; the Captain's is an entire suite, on the starboard side. They each have unobstructed views forward as well as to the side of the ship.

All other officers and crew have similar cabins on the fourth cabin deck or below, so, unless they have corner cabins, (at one end of the hallway or the other) they don't get to see anything except a wall of containers out their windows. These are opening windows by the way. A series of large twisting bolts, much like those on the hatches, could be used to open them, but I suspect it is rarely done. The superstructure is air conditioned throughout.

The Containers

Back to the deck tour. I was required to wear a hard hat on this tour. The containers are bolted down with a series of diagonal turnbuckles that use really big hardware. One of the jobs of the seamen is to regularly check for tie down pieces that have loosened due to the engine vibration. There are slot canyons between the rows of stacked containers to provide access for this job. Later I saw a safety reminder in Columbia Shipmanagement's daily newspaper regarding use of hard hats while outdoors. They were reporting that an officer on one of their ships had recently escaped injury as one of these pieces of hardware had come loose and fallen within inches of him.

Containers were not only stacked on the deck beside us, but the array extended right over our heads to line up with the ship's exterior hull. Fortunately, I wasn't really aware of the triple-high stack over our heads at the time; I noticed only that it was a covered passageway Aniceto and I walked along as we looped the ship's perimeter. [\[Photo here\]](#)

Later I realized the hold (the storage area below the deck in front of the superstructure) also must have been full of containers. (Aft of the superstructure, the engine room consumed all the below deck space.) Ozren says he doesn't really know much about what is inside most of these, but from insurance settlements it is apparent the cargo value can run to the millions of dollars per container. Picture how many iPods or cameras might fit into one.

We walked aft first where there was a layer of wide open deck (though still below stacks of containers) and the engine noise dominated everything. Many windlasses filled with rope were ready for tying the ship to a wharf. The ropes were six inches in diameter and the coils as tall as me and more. Each coil probably 6 feet by 8 feet. The noise drove us away and up the other side of the ship. I met the ship's electrician, a young man repairing a light fixture. Later we passed a group of seaman scraping paint in preparation for more, and then the room labeled "paint store" where many stacks of 5 gallon cans lay in wait for them. [\[Photo here\]](#)

As we walked forward I saw that the rib-reinforced hull is apparently about 16 feet taller than elsewhere. Then, as we entered the most forward part of the bow, I saw this part of the hull is extended another sixteen feet higher yet. The chain lockers are round tanks sitting on (or extending through?) this deck. We went up a stairway to a small forward elevated deck where the anchor winches are. This little bit of deck has no containers hovering over it. [\[Photo here\]](#) Shafts 3 feet in diameter pierce the front of the hull at an angle and the anchor chains run through them. A spare anchor is strapped upright to a nearby wall; the weight stamped on its side is 8775K. At the time I noted that the stamped characters are about 2 1/2 inches tall and as I measure my photo and calculate, I see it must be about 16 feet tall. Resting on the upper deck it reaches almost to the top of the upper bow extension. [\[Photo here\]](#)

Safety equipment is everywhere. Firemen's suits, labeled Chemical Suits, are ready to be stepped into. Canisters the size of oil barrels hold life rafts. Picture instructions with English text show how you clip it to the ship, then throw it into the water. It inflates automatically. Fully loaded with mariners presumably, it gets pulled down beneath the sea as the ship sinks, but then will break free and float to the surface. Boarding one would be an act of faith, but in distress at sea, I have observed that kind of faith is easy to come by. [\[Photo here\]](#)

There are EEBD boxes -- Emergency Escape Breathing Devices in smaller print -- the illustration is of a gas mask. The Escape Door is labeled; arrows point to the big red-orange lifeboats. Most labeling is in Japanese as well as English. Hatch handles are labeled with arrows that point to O or S, for open and shut, I presume. Up front here I see the simple traditional red-orange life ring: Rhein Bridge - Panama. And there are also immersion suits, just in case you're on your own when the end comes. The illustrations for their use make them look bulky and warm. It is not just that death comes rapidly in any water much cooler than body temperature°, but help comes slowly as the vast expanse is traversed and then searched. [\[Photo here\]](#) [\[Photo here\]](#) [\[Photo here\]](#)

Various oil spill cleanup materials were stored on the main deck, under the shelter of the upper bow deck.

Inside we walked past the infirmary (that place I wasn't sick enough to need) which was locked up tight, so I never got to see in. Aniceto showed me the high-ceiled gymnasium with a tall wall of windows that look out across the sea. [\[Photo here\]](#) This is on the Public Deck and in a small port-side wing of the superstructure. It contains only a ping pong table (tied in place to the floor), a dart board, and some weight lifting benches. But after some snooping I found closet full of musical equipment and other odds and ends. Outside this wall of windows is one of the two large red-orange, and seriously enclosed, lifeboats.

Nearby was the laundry room the crew used. A handful of washing machines [and dryers?] gathered from round the world, they were clearly purchased in whatever port the ship had been in when the previous one failed, and their operating instructions presented a variety of languages and styles. This room, above all others, showed this ship to be occupied by a bunch of men, and working men at that. Oily overalls draped freely amidst a clatter trap of laundry machines and an unswept floor. Of all the rooms totally available to me, it was the only room I chose not to explore. I laughed at myself for averting my eyes whenever I walked by it on my way to the gym. I think I was afraid I might go in and try to clean it up! [\[Photo here\]](#)

I saw the carpenter's shop and other rooms where there was evidence of work going on. There was an officer's lounge with couches, a TV, and an electronic piano keyboard; and a more casual crew lounge. Up by the bridge was a rather elegant conference room with a dozen upholstered chairs around a long table. It had big paintings on the walls and a kimono-dressed doll (a geisha?) in a glass case.

There is also a huge crane that is used to carry supplies and equipment aboard the ship. I have a picture of it, but can't remember where I was on the ship when Aniceto showed it to me, and now can't even imagine where it could be located. Probably it was directly aft of the superstructure. [\[Photo here\]](#)

After seeing all the outside marvels, and these many interior rooms of the superstructure, Aniceto offered to take me to where I had been brought aboard. This was only yesterday, but seems like a week ago. He took me down one more level to the Mid Deck, also known as Upper Deck. This is the muster station, where we would all gather in case of an emergency.

In short order we were walking around the perimeter of the ship again. Only this time we were a level below our previous route and inside a protected hallway – the place you want to be if you need to travel the length of the ship in rough weather. [\[Photo here\]](#) I saw doors to the side thruster compartment, and into the cavities of the double hull and the hatches of various styles that seal them off. And then down to the little room where I was brought aboard. Its hydraulic doors were shut tight, the wooden embarkation ladder coiled up overhead; from outside the ship now it would look much the same as any other part of the hull.

Aniceto enjoyed giving me this tour. He was friendly and seemed happy to wait while I gawked and took pictures. It was he who thought to take my camera away from me long enough that I could have a picture of myself going up one of the ladders used the day before. I wish I had been thinking enough to take his picture next to the spare anchor.

I had asked Aniceto about going into the engine room before we started on this tour, and he told me that the Engineer said no, because I would need ear

protection and better shoes. But then, as the tour ended, he opened a doorway to a catwalk above the engine and we snuck in briefly to hear and see a second tantalizing sample, confirming that yesterday's experience was not an hallucination.

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Wednesday, August 24

2:15 pm

I took about 70 pictures in my one and a quarter hour tour. [drawings here in my journal of the special hole in the side of the ship and my boarding]

Lunch, dinner, breakfast, and now lunch again. Look at all those meals, one right after another, in a pattern! Such a change after our sporadic meals on the sailboat. The food is good and overabundant. I need to be careful to not eat so much.

The motor vibrates through the ship. It vibrates my bed and body, but did not keep me from a perfect night's sleep. I wish I'd brought my bed pillow from the sailboat though; I have a crick in my neck from this large foam pillow. I must think I'm a princess to complain about such a small thing.

I sent an email message to Joe this morning using the captain's email account. I had hoped to go to AOL.com, but a security code seems to be needed to get onto the internet so I haven't tried beyond the initial attempt.

I wrote a maybe-publishable version of why not to do what I did. The second half -- landing in heaven -- is still to be written.

10:43 pm

I just set my clock ahead one hour; we are traveling east.

It costs \$20,000 per day for fuel for this ship. Plus roughly \$5000 per day for crew and food operating expenses. Cargo is valued at many hundreds of millions of dollars. The loss of several containers by another ship a couple of years ago was valued at \$200 million.

Ozren says he is responsible for the \$4800 daily operating expenses via the German operating company (Columbia), and the Japanese owners (K-line) arrange and pay for the fuel. He says this fuel price is about a year old, and that it now certainly costs more.

I stayed up late (9:30 pm) talking to Ozren on the bridge. In the lighted area. A curtain is drawn at night to separate off the windows that span the entire front of the ship. This part of the bridge is kept dark and even then takes 2 – 5 minutes for my eyes to adjust enough to see the horizon and then the stars.

The lights that shine out onto the water all around the ship are not visible from the bridge. Otherwise they would ruin the watch's night vision, and make it impossible to see any other ships' lights. These illuminating lights are called Pirate Lights. I saw them labeled on a board of switches on the bridge earlier today. I hoped at first it was the L and R confusion Asians are often accused of and that it was a case of mislabeled Pilot lights. But no, they really are to discourage pirates; when it is dark, pirates can sneak on board more readily. There is also a map of the Eastern Hemisphere that outlines War Zones and areas where pirates are more likely to be encountered.

Thursday, August 25

1 pm

This morning I missed breakfast and went up to the bridge to find coffee and a cookie. After a while Captain Pajkuric came up and was happy to ask me more questions. "How come the US has never had a woman President? What about Hilary Clinton?" I had to explain that Hilary didn't have a chance. From conversations I've had with too many American women, it seems that in America, any woman who was smart and able to speak how she actually believed – or for that matter, capable of being a good politician – would automatically be disqualified. Her strength and intelligence would be seen in feminine terms as conniving and bossy, or she would be too unlike the "unfeminine" for most American voters. As evidenced by the intense hatred many women feel towards Hilary Clinton.

He truly seems to want to hear about America from my point of view. He asked how much it costs to feed a family of four per month, saying in Croatia the statistics say about \$1000 per month. I told him I think it is (or would be) for me about \$400, though I allowed that I was sure many people spent much more, and that it wouldn't surprise me that government statistics, as measured in the amount of food stamps a poor family of four might receive, could be as much as \$1000 per month. Likewise, he said, he thought this government number was much higher than reality in Croatia too.

So the captain/master Ozren Pajkuric, and the Chief Officer Ernesto Escobar (second in command) have been the people most interested in talking to me and of course, most interesting to talk to. They are the people who have the highest level of freedom to converse and express their thoughts – due to their rank on the ship. And I would also say that so far, I find their English more accomplished than the others. Though all speak some English, all signs are in English (and Japanese). English is a requirement for employment on this ship. I think the captain told me that. The two Croatian engineers: for some reason I don't know their names and don't remember being introduced to them, though it could have happened the first day when I was still in a daze. I have made it a point of learning the names of the bridge officers and addressing them by name.

Except Ernesto, to my embarrassment, I called him Esteban the first couple of days.

Others besides the captain were interested in discussing politics with an American. I will be discrete here and not attribute any particular statements to particular individuals. I don't know if their political beliefs could get any of them in trouble, as can happen in the US these days. And I would probably attribute statements to the wrong people anyway.

Since the Captain doesn't eat a mid-day meal -- a weight control issue -- my lunches (after my first day on the ship) were somewhat awkward because I sat with the two Croatian engineers. I might have had long discussions with them, but didn't. They were not unfriendly as much as apparently uninterested. I will admit to saying something stupid though on my second day aboard the ship.

I was trying to explain Pacific Northwest weather. For starts, this is a stupid thing to explain to a mariner who has been all over the world, especially to coastal locations and knows what various coastal climates are like. I had meant to explain the difference between Pacific Northwest weather compared to interior, or continental climates. This is something my relatives in the Midwest, and even those in Florida or along the East Coast find so perplexing. They ask: How can you have cold rain? Why would it rain in the wintertime, but be dry during the summer? How can you sleep in the summer without air conditioning?

At one time my own questions of course were the inverse of these. But then I went to college and learned about dew points and the moisture content of warm air versus cold, marine influence and bunches more stuff, like Mediterranean climate. Southern California has Mediterranean climate, a tiny little dot of it compared to the entire Mediterranean coastal region. But aspects of this climate -- warm dry summer, comfortably cool wet winter -- extend all the way up the west coast of the US. (Slightly inland it becomes hot dry summer and chilly cool wet winter.) Most of the world doesn't enjoy weather anywhere near as benign, which is fine because it is hard to grow most crops in this climate without some irrigation. But for me, born and raised in this climate and sometimes suffering through one cool rainy gray dismal winter day too many, it is uplifting to remind myself that this is (more or less) Mediterranean weather. Well, ok, a variation. A distant relative of Mediterranean climate.

The Second Engineer from the sunny climes of the Mediterranean was very quick to point out that he had been to Portland and Seattle, and "you do not have a Mediterranean climate!" I was fool enough to argue the point, trying to illustrate that by comparison to Omaha.... Well, that is one place he hasn't been, and it was stupid of me to even try to cling to that line of reasoning. As lovely as my home is, it really can't be compared to the weather of southern California and to compare it to the actual REAL Mediterranean, is an absolute insult.

It took a few days to recover their interest in conversation with me. Of course, I was starting from an inferior position to begin with. I was an American whose help was requested, but delayed until it was too little, too late to save thousands of Bosnian people. I tried to explain that American Presidents may seem all powerful, but Bill Clinton, without the support of a Democratic Congress, was almost powerless for his last six years of office. I don't think they were unaware of this; the agony of remembering friends terrorized and relatives die needlessly cause anger and frustration with gawking bystanders.

I think it is safe to say that most of the men I spoke with on this subject think Bill Clinton was a great American President, and is seen as a good and honorable man to them even now. Why couldn't he help them in their hour (years) of need? I explained what political side I am on and that helped. I did NOT admit to being almost totally uninformed about the Balkan Wars (old or new). Nor did I say that after Vietnam, our invasion of Grenada, Panama, and the First Gulf War, I was terrified that we would come in with our six-guns blazing, become hated by all the local people, and find ourselves ineffective and unable to even extricate our troops. I promised myself I would go home and become better informed.

It was one of these Croatian Engineers who told Third Officer Aniceto that I could not tour the engine room without suitable shoes. When my father was building ships, tanks, boilers, power plants, and aqueduct tunnels, he was always required to wear steel-toed work shoes, so I was aware of the soundness of the Engineer's demands. At dinner therefore, I suggested I might borrow a pair from someone. Sitting near me, around the table, the younger man stuck out his foot to demonstrate the impracticality of the idea. They all laughed. True to the Slavic stereotype, these are men of gigantic proportions.

The Filipino men have much smaller feet. I figured I could borrow a pair of shoes from one of them; with thick wool socks I could conceivably wear their shoes securely. I was not about to give up on my quest to tour the engine room.

The Officers aboard this ship:

Captain and Master is Ozren Pajkuric

Chief Officer is Ernesto Escobar. He is second in command of the entire ship.

Second Officer is Emmanuel Abrazado

Third Officer is Aniceto Elicanal

These men mostly work upstairs, on the bridge. When they stand watch, especially at night, they have assistants who help watch for other ships and hazards, monitor their equipment, and walk the perimeter looking for pirates. Since I tended to hang out on the bridge or nearby, it was these deck officers with whom I spent most of my time. They were polite and generally available to converse. I hope I didn't abuse their hospitality too much. I enjoyed our conversations.

The Engineers, listed below run the engine room and have quiet air conditioned offices down there. Though it is true their offices weren't as clean and respectable looking as the ones upstairs, they too had plenty of computers and high tech equipment down there.

Chief Engineer is Boris Rados

1/A/E (First Engineer) is Ivica Pavletic

2/A/E Melchor Lemoncito

3/A/E Israel DeCastro

I do not have faces to go with Melchor or Israel, and was possibly never introduced to them.

Lest you be wondering, yes, I took a photo of the ship's roster. I hope this was ok. I only wanted to know everybody's name, but now I find I have their birthdates too. Nevertheless, this roster is interesting in that it shows everyone's rank aboard ship. **among those working in the Engine Room (or the Black Gang as Howard Pease, novelist, refers to them in his books) there are both a Chief and a First Engineer.**

After the 8 officers above, the next in rank is the Ship's electrician, then the Bosun. This is another person I may well have spoken with, but not known his title. Bosun, short for Boat's Swain (which is an even less helpful name) is such an exotic title. I really missed out by not talking to him to find out more about what he does. (I know I could research this and figure it out, but it just wouldn't be the same.)

There are then three AB, or Able Bodied Seamen, and two OS, Ordinary Seamen (one was OS 2 for second class I presume). Next came The Black Gang as Howard Pease, (my favorite novelist when I was about twelve years old), used to refer to the men who worked in the engine room: D/Fitter and E/Fitter and then two oilers and a wiper. (The fitters are a bit of a mystery, but Howard Pease wrote about the oilers and wipers.) I do wonder what these job titles still mean anymore. Are they still descriptive of the jobs they do? My father was a pipe-fitter, or a least a member of that union, a half century ago. And he also went to sea once, to China when he was 17 as a merchant marine, the same as these guys, only now there are few American ships and even fewer Americans serving on them.

Further down the roster, the cook's title is listed as Chief Cook. His name is Eulogio and he gave me his address when I asked for it -- should I ever get to the Philippines. The cheerful messman I saw three times a day as he served our meals, and once I saw him vacuuming the carpeted floor of the captain's suite. The Deck Cadet and the Engine Cadet are the last two names on the list. Both are from the Seychelles. Engine Cadet Thomas (accent on the last syllable of his name), was happy to show me photos he has taken of his home islands.

Of the 24 people who work on this ship, none were as old as I, and only 7 were born in the 1950's. The rest were the age of my children, with one born in 1984, almost two years younger than my youngest child. This will come as a surprise to no one but myself.

5:40 pm (Thursday, August 25 still)

I was just up on the bridge. We (the officers and I) do not normally go out on deck much it seems. Though the crew does, to do the constant maintenance of chipping paint and repainting, electrical repairs, and other maintenance too, I suppose.

Anyway, I sent my email of thanks to the US Coast Guard for their assistance in saving my life the other night. I copied it to Captain Pajkuric and Joe. Earlier today the Captain showed a sly smile as he told me he's responded to the USCG's several concerned inquiries, letting them know that I was making "steady progress" to a "full recovery."

He suggested that it was time to contact them myself to reassure them of my satisfactory condition. I am embarrassed that I had to be told, but I didn't realize they were so concerned about me. How nice! I haven't felt all that right about making myself at home in the Radio Office. Another time I will send a proper thank you to the K-lines and Columbia Shipmanagement Companies

I took a two-hour nap this afternoon and then felt guilty. When I went up to the bridge afterwards I heard that the CG has asked the Rhein Bridge to check out the site of a distress call from earlier today. It is right on the way, but we will not arrive until midnight. A long time, and it will be dark as well.

The other day Captain told me he normally naps during the day, getting sleep when he can, just in case he is needed at night. Well, tonight is the night. If I want to be awak at midnight (and I do!) then it is good that I slept today. A surprise.

This is a Japanese built ship. Therefore outlets are 110 volts, like at home. My battery charger will work just fine.