

## CROSSING ON THE QUEEN MARY 2

Monday, August 22, 2011. The day started very early for we had to catch an 8:35 AM flight to New York LaGuardia. Cunard<sup>1</sup> was there to meet us and we were soon in a van tightly packed with 8 other passengers. The van driver talked on his cell phone as he wove through New York Traffic. He took us to the Brooklyn Cruise Docks and there the Queen Mary 2 lay.

My first impression was that she was enormous. She is certainly the largest ship I have ever been on, with over 2500 passengers. She is also supposed to be the most luxurious ship afloat. She does make cruises but she is an ocean liner instead of a cruise ship, built for the North Atlantic crossings. The term liner is used to distinguish her from the old sailing ships that tacked or zigzagged their way across the Atlantic. An ocean liner goes the straight line. In the heyday of liners there was a certain racing spirit to see who could cross in the shortest time. The SS United States<sup>2</sup> set the record at somewhat over five days. Without competition, the QM2 travels at a more economical pace taking a little over six days in each direction.

Elizabeth has traveled with Cunard before and she was offered a very low fare to travel to Southampton<sup>3</sup>. In fact when I tried to price the fare to return business class from London (I don't do oceans in the back of the bus), it was going to be much more expensive than what we were paying for the ship. Thus we decided to do a round trip on the QM2.

I immediately went on a diet and lost six pounds in anticipation of the eating extravaganza that lay ahead. The next problem was the clothes for there would be four formal nights each direction. It has been perhaps 15 or 20 years since I have been on a cruise and I feared I had outgrown my cruise wardrobe. Fortunately I found enough in the back of my closet that still fit.

At the pier we got Elizabeth a wheelchair and it made check-in go very smoothly. He pushed us all the way to our stateroom, 5-154. I can remember in the old days when people could come aboard and give you a send-off. It would have been nice to invite my sister or John Wright, but when I checked I was told security made it impossible. So there will be no streamer throwing to a crowded dock of spectators.

The first time I went to Europe with my Grandmother we crossed on the Greek Line, SS Olympia. In those days ships were the only way to get there. Airplanes made them obsolete and it is only Cunard who still offers a regular schedule of crossings. You can "cross" on a cruise ship doing a positioning cruise but that is much more informal than this will be.

We checked out our cozy stateroom with twin beds, unlike the Dnieper River last year when Elizabeth and I shared a double bed. We even have a balcony.

We then went in search of lunch. The decorations in the ship are amazing with murals and pictures everywhere. Even the elevator doors are etched glass. It's a bit unsettling that our stairwell is decorated with scenes commemorating the Titanic! We found the cafeteria area on deck 7 and had delicious shrimp salad sandwiches in a window overlooking the Statue of Liberty.

Then we explored further. The sundeck has shuffleboard and even a simulated golf experience near the small pool. There is a shopping area with all sorts of expensive looking shops like H. Stern and Hermes.

Back at our cabin we met Dexter our steward who brought our suitcases in from the corridor. It was time to unpack.

I walked the length of the ship to find cyber space, only to find I could have signed up for the WIFI right from our stateroom. I also discovered more and more little nooks and crannies where you

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cunard.com/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS_United_States)

<sup>3</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southampton>

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could play board games and do jigsaw puzzles. There are shops, very expensive ones, but at one I was able to buy double A batteries for our alarm clock that is not working. (When Elizabeth went to set it, the wheel came off and disappeared but fortunately we found it the next morning),

It was a beautiful day in New York and we sailed out passed the Statue of Liberty. I stayed on deck until the Verrazano Narrows Bridge<sup>4</sup>. This suspension bridge connects Staten Island with Brooklyn.

We went into dinner and found a nice North Carolina couple, Evelyn and Frank. The rest of the table was an English family Anna and Adrian, with Adrian's Mother, Joyce, and 6-year old William.

I ordered a smoked trout mousse with Waldorf salad. The mousse was very good the salad looked like coleslaw and not a nut was in sight. Roast beef with Yorkshire pudding followed this and I capped it off with Crème Brule. I am glad I went on a diet and lost some weight before I came.

Elizabeth went to the show but I was worn out and headed for bed.

Tuesday, August 23. The good news is that it looks like the rebels are finally about to rid the world of Gaddafi<sup>5</sup>. He will not be missed.

We went to breakfast and I ordered hot chocolate but it was luke warm. I also tried the lox and bagels. It is so nice to have tablecloths and hovering service instead of the more common buffet.

They are offering watercolor lessons and I remember how much I enjoyed them many years ago on another cruise. The class lasts 2 hours each day and had a \$25 cost for supplies but it was really good. Doug Jamieson started us sketching ovals and then we progressed to colors. I had never heard such a good talk on how to mix colors, even during my years of trying oils. I almost completed a watercolor of a gannet.

I only wanted soup for lunch for my body is already rebelling against all the rich food.

The Elizabeth and I went to bridge. It is about as far from our stateroom as can be and I feel badly that Elizabeth has to walk so far with her bad hip. There were 11 tables and the level of play was pretty good for a ship so we had a good time. However only playing 14 boards the result was somewhat a bit of luck. We were just below 50%.

Next I went to a question and answer program on the I-pod. I don't think the man understood my question. "How do I have multiple windows on the I-pad? I am sure this could be done and will have to ask Apple later about it. I was reminded how to close the many programs that might be open and thus speed the machine up. I left before the program was over.

After washing my hair I prepared for our first formal night. I had a sequined blouse from many cruises ago but when I tried to wear it I could not make the hooks and eyes stay closed so will not try again.

We went to the Queens Room for the Commodore's cocktail party. There was a long line to get in so Elizabeth and I snuck in the back door and found seats in the handicapped section where we had a good view as Commodore Christopher Rynd<sup>6</sup> introduced his staff.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verrazano-Narrows\\_Bridge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verrazano-Narrows_Bridge)

<sup>5</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muammar\\_Gaddafi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muammar_Gaddafi)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.qm2.org.uk/captain\\_cr.html](http://www.qm2.org.uk/captain_cr.html)

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Fr dinner I had a wonderful calamari salad. I think it is the first time I have had calamari that was not fried. Then I had a filet mignon with ice cream for desert.

Our entertainer tonight was Jordan Bennett who sang many familiar show tunes for our enjoyment.

Wednesday, August 24. I had eggs benedict for breakfast before going to art class. Today the subject was a cat and I could relate to that. Doug told me it was good enough to sign and I did but I really don't believe I have talent for this.

We had lunch in the dining room and I found a Philly Cheese cake on the menu. It only slightly resembled the original but was very good with French fries

We played bridge again, with twelve tables, which sees to be the capacity of the room. A couple of pairs were even turned away.

Another formal dinner was followed by the troupe doing an Italian night. The dancing was very good and there were beautifully costumes. We really enjoyed the show.

Thursday, August 25. We have settled into a routine. I do Art in the morning and bridge in the afternoon. Today I did a landscape but was not as pleased with it as the cat<sup>7</sup>.

We had lunch in the dining room but it is too much food. At bridge we found we had placed 4<sup>th</sup> the previous day and today we won with a 62% game.

We explored the ship a bit more and found the spacious library, the largest afloat. I can believe it because it seemed almost as big as our branch library at home.

We when walked the length of the ship to the Queen's room and afternoon tea.

Tonight's show was a pickpocket. He was amusing as he robbed various passengers of watches belts and ties but the final act was somewhat put on as he found one man's tie that kept getting longer and longer and stripped one man of his underwear and another of his shirt.

Friday, August 26. We did another landscape today, this one of some northern clime with pine trees reflected in a lake. It was a little better than yesterday but I think I am better at objects.

At bridge we were second, so we are finally catching on to the mixed competition. Some of our opponents are very good; others are beginners.

After dinner there was the welcome party for all the repeat passengers, over 600 of them. I arrived at the door before Elizabeth without my invitation. They asked to look at my door key and once I showed it I was ushered in. It seem that a mistake has been made for my key shows I have reached platinum level in the number of cruises I have been on! I really only got to go because I am traveling with Elizabeth who has been on four previous cruises. One lady got the prize for having been cruising over a thousand days. It reminded me of Rosemary on the Royal Viking. I wonder if she has a life!

Saturday, August 27. I went to Art class but ended up walking out when I got so far behind and the picture looked like a mess. Doug kept saying we could fix it but it was giving me a headache trying.

We won at bridge today but there were only 8 tables.

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<sup>7</sup> Examples of my "art" is included with the other pictures at [meges.smugmug.com](http://meges.smugmug.com)

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Commodore Rynd and his officers invited us to a cocktail party at 7.30. This is after dinner but we shall manage. The good part was we got there after the line had stopped and were finally able to shake the Commodore's hand. Elizabeth tripped over her cane and landed in his arms, causing a good laugh by all concerned. We had planned to take in a movie but it was too late when we left the party.

Sunday, August 28. The last day before Southampton. I decided to skip the art class and Elizabeth and I went to hear a great talk on the Titanic, including details of how she was built. There were three ships built on the same lines and all three had bad endings. One was taken into the Merchant marine during WW1 and sunk. One had a bad accident that caused her to be taken back to Belfast for repair. And of course the Titanic we know about. We then had an early lunch and went to the planetarium show. It was all about galaxies and how they formed. The narrator talked in somewhat of a monotone and I found it had to stay awake.

Bridge had 10 tables and we came in third although we didn't think, we had scratched at all. So out of 6 days we scratched 5 times and accumulated 3 coupons each for prizes. When we checked out the prizes, we found them a bit stingy. For one coupon you got a key chain. For 3 you got a better one. It took 8 to get a box.

We had our last dinner with our table. They have been very pleasant but I have not liked the location of our table on the balcony. I requested a table downstairs for the return voyage.

Monday, August 29. We came into Southampton and Elizabeth and I decided to not even get off the ship. My big project was laundry. There is a very nice laundry room on our floor. Even the soap is free. This is the first bargain I have found on the ship. So everything is clean for the return voyage. There are 300 of us doing the round trip.

Elizabeth and I had lunch in the dining room with a New York couple, one lady from Oregon, one from New York, and one from California. It was very pleasant and we talked about all sorts of things, even politics. Finally at 2:30 it was evident the waiters wanted us out so we left.

There are bags in the halls and all sorts of new people who don't know their way around. Elizabeth mentioned to Dexter that we didn't get the complimentary bottle of champagne we had on the outbound voyage and he scrounged around and found us one. It is not my drink but Elizabeth enjoys it. Being in transit we did not have to go to the lifeboat drill. Elizabeth went to the sail-away party and was given a British flag.

I did the sail-away on our balcony while I dried my hair. A clean head seemed more important than anything else. There were many small boats escorting us out of the harbor and many sailboats coming in from what seemed to be a race for J-24s.

We went into dinner to find a round table for eight: Peg and Bob, from Sarasota, FL, Gail and Lee, from Toledo and Louise and Ryan, from Ottawa, Canada. All of us are on the round trip plan.

After dinner we went to see the welcoming show and enjoyed the dancing. We get to turn the clock back tonight, gaining back one of the hours lost coming over.

Tuesday, August 30. I decided not to do the art class on the voyage for I have missed many of the other activities. After breakfast I went and straightened out my Internet problem. Despite assuring me that my minutes would roll over to the return trip, they took them all away. I got them restored and was able to go online for the first time in 24 hours.

Elizabeth and I went to hear a retired British Airlines pilot give a talk on the early navigators. It was interesting to hear about the development of the early navigation equipment but there is something about the room for I soon found myself fighting sleep.

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After lunch we went for bridge and there were many new faces and 11 tables. We managed to come in fourth.

Then there was Commodore Rynd's welcome cocktail party and dinner. Two of the couples had opted to go to the extra cost restaurant so there were only four of us at dinner.

We skipped the singer entertainment in favor of reading in our cabin.

Wednesday, August 31. World Affairs Expert, Molly Williamson<sup>8</sup> talked on the politics of oil. It was a well delivered and gave me a lot to think about.

Following that I heard Martin Bell<sup>9</sup> give a talk about UNICEF with rather graphic pictures of the starving and maimed children of Somalia.

After lunch it was time for bridge and Elizabeth and I thought we had a terrible game but it turned out we came second.

After dinner there was a song and dance show on the theme of love.

Thursday, September 1. At bridge Maureen told me how good the new watercolor artist was so I collected my paints and tried it again. Geoffrey has a different way of teaching and I learned a lot of technique as we did a seascape. Elizabeth thinks I am doing great things but I feel I have a long way to go.

We had lunch with John and Peg. It was lovely to visit with them without the other two couples at our dinner table.

Then back to the bridge tables. We managed to play 16 hands today instead of the usual 14. The group seems much more able than on the outbound cruise.

We had a lengthy dinner, and were almost the last table to finish. Gail and Lee were celebrating their anniversary and we were treated to a delicious cake.

The entertainment was Hamlet, which didn't really appeal to us so we ended up in the cabin looking at television. There was a Jack Nicholson movie and then we got to watch today's lecture on the development of the chronometer.

Friday, September 22, 2011. We went to the dining room for breakfast. The 'gal' from Kalamazoo was there. She is part of the Roads scholar group on board. Then there were two men from London. I had to excuse myself early to make the watercolor class.

Today was beyond me. We did a practice painting and then were supposed to do a finished one. My paper was either too wet or too dry and all I made were messes. The second one was a little better but not enough to please me so I guess that is the end of my art career. I find it too stressful!

Elizabeth and I ate in the dining room for lunch but the service was very slow and we had to rush to bridge. Found out we were fourth yesterday. Today we won – all our boards were positive. It is so difficult when you only play 14 boards.

We had hoped to go to the alternative dining tonight but they cancelled it because not enough people signed up, probably because of the repeat passengers party. So we returned to our

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<sup>8</sup> [http://fora.tv/speaker/9930/Molly\\_Williamson](http://fora.tv/speaker/9930/Molly_Williamson)

<sup>9</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_Bell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Bell)

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regular table. Louise, the French Canadian, talks all the time about their world cruises and how they win the trivia everyday, all this with her elbows and arms planted firmly on the table. She also eats a lot with her fingers and complains about the food and how greasy it is.

We went to the frequent travelers cocktail party, but did not spend much time there. We even skipped the show.

Saturday, September 3. We turned our clocks back last night. When we got to breakfast we found that we should not have. The restaurant was almost closing.

After the meal we decided to go to the galley tour but people kept lining up until not only was the side corridor filled but the main one as well. We inched along and had gotten as far as the dining room door when we realized it would be a long slow stand until we actually got to the galley. If I had brought my cane I could probably have managed but I had to give up.

We read until it was time to go up for lunch. This was followed by bridge. Not as good as yesterday for sure.

We had heard that tea on deck seven included clotted cream and went in search of it. Sure enough they had a huge bowl of it. I added it to the tepid hot chocolate they have on board and it was delicious, although not as good as what we got in Devon two years ago. I also had some sweets.

As a result I had little appetite for dinner. This was the last formal night where they had the parade of chefs and served us our baked Alaska.

The show was the best of the lot "Apassionata". Our favorite part was when they did the Russian dancing.

Sunday, September 4. The last day. I went to the navigation lecture but fell asleep in the illuminations as usual. Then we lunched at the King's Court where they were having a Dixie lunch. Elizabeth had fried chicken and pecan pie. I had Chinese and a delicious banana rollup.

We did not do well at bridge today, but have acquired about 2 1/2 points on the trip. We did do better than anyone else. I gave Elizabeth my coupons so she could get something nice. She ended up with a mug and a key chain.

After dinner we went to the entertainment. Stephan Weh and Marcel Dorn gave an entertaining and amusing concert with four hands on the same piano. They clowned around as they switched sides, playing all the time.

Monday, September 5. It sounded so easy. We leave the ship at 8:30, collect our bags on the dock and board the buses for LaGuardia. The only problem was that one bus broke down. All the handicapped were loaded on it and we waited over an hour until they brought another bus. Then all the luggage and passengers had to be shifted to the new bus. After an eternity we were off to the airport. There was no traffic but Delta was reached last and at each stop we waited while the luggage was sorted through and off loaded.

We checked in and taken through security. I inquired about a day pass to the sky lounge but thought \$50 a bit much so we camped out at the gate where they at least had tables for computer use. We did manage pizza for lunch.

Finally at four p.m. we took off for Atlanta. This is what happens when you let the ship make the air plans. If we had made our own plans we would have been home much sooner. I was exhausted when I finally got home.