

Today is September 12th and we are back from the grand adventure. But, lets step back to last week and put things in order.

As I have done since my high school days, I set my alarm for 4am and was up a full hour earlier at 3 am. Never seems to matter when I go to bed, I nearly always get up an hour earlier than whatever I set on the alarm. It is now September 4th and all the packing and preparations are done. All the little details finally fell into place and we are ready. Having arranged with a neighbor to get us to the airport, I called to make sure she was up. Got her SUV parked in front so I could load the walkers on the roof and the luggage inside. I minor hold up. I accidentally locked Trish's keys in her suitcase and we had to find those before we could get underway. Found them, repacked the luggage and off we went to McCarron Airport.

My first hurdle was yet before me. The TSA checkpoint. After passing in our checked bags, we proceeded to the security check point. I handed my passport to the TSA Agent and he looked at it, then looked at me. He had the blackest 'if looks could kill' look on his face as he looked at my passport again and looked back at me. At that point I said, I have alternate id if you need it, that is just my legal self. Having no directive as to passenger apparel, he waved me through as he handed my passport back to me. I smiled and kept on going. Only one hurdle remained for me at the Customs station in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Flying over Tonapah



I took numerous pictures of the clouds below us enroute to Vancouver drawing location references from the in flight map available on the seat display unit. I will post some of the more interesting photos throughout this story. I took a picture of clouds over Tonapah, still in Nevada, four over Portland Oregon, 2 approximately 140 miles out of Vancouver and 2 more over Everett. Five more pictures over Vancouver up to the final approach. We were wheels down at 9:43 am in Vancouver and ready to start the next stage of our grand adventure.

Somewhere over Prtlnd Or



over Everett Wa – Hi
Annie & Paul



Landing at Vancouver BC



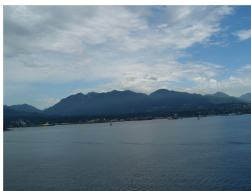
Vancouver, BC

After getting wheelchair assist for Karen and Tricia, and a porter to help collect our luggage, we moved on to the Canadian security check point. The Agent did not give me a black look but did look questioningly so I said I had my driver license and he asked to see that. Again, no evident directive as to how people should be attired, he passed me through. Next stop, Customs. Every thing went smoothly there and then we added the plane to ship transfer tags to our luggage. This allowed our luggage to get to our staterooms ahead of us. Unfortunately that did not happen as ours was among the last to make it to the ship. This engendered a minor medical emergency which was remedied easily.

In the meanwhile, after a short-lengthy wait for others to get on the bus to the ship, we were underway once more. At the wharf, we had another brief wait for wheelchair assist and then we proceeded down the gangway, where we had our identifying photo taken. This photo was then linked to our cabin key cards so that our identities could be confirmed upon leaving and returning. For the duration of the cruise, that cabin key card was our entire means of identification and on board payments.

Shortly before sailing, there was a mandatory emergency drill. This took all of 15 minutes and, as far as I know, no one was debarked for failure to participate. We spent the remainder of the afternoon resting in our suite. The weather was fair so we opened the door to the patio outside our suite. Along about 6:20pm our cabin steward came by to introduce his counterpart for the late shift. When I opened the main door, however, I found myself in a serious wind tunnel and within a few seconds I was a totally shivering icicle. After I closed the main door, I quickly closed the patio door and climbed under the covers. It took more than a few minutes to thaw out. Memo to self: do not open the main door with the patio door already open while on a cruise.

Docked – from patio



On ship 1



On ship 2



Along about 8:40pm we were on deck 4 where we met fellow mariners, Mike and Ann from England. A thoroughly lovely couple. We chatted some and went on our separate ways.

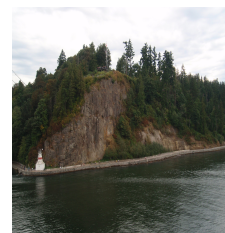
getting



under



way





We took the elevator nearest us and got off at deck 9, the highest point the elevators can get to. We stepped off the elevator and outside just as the foghorn sounded yet again. There was a horn directly above where we came out on deck and even though it was expected, being so close to us it still made me jump. We both took pictures here and elsewhere as we explored parts of the ship. There were many interesting artworks and artifacts about the ship and I got pictures of many of them. Later, when the fog lifted, I took some pictures off the patio thinking that this must have been what Noah saw after the rains. Water everywhere as far as the eye could see.



At breakfast, we met Carol, a retired school teacher, and her husband Don. We missed our intended 10:00 meeting with Nina, who was traveling with her husband, also from Las Vegas but we later connected and planned to meet at 1:30. We met Nina at that time and had a great conversation mostly about our respective families and such.

Our shipboard shopping consultant, Lauren, gave a discussion on the shops in Juneau and which shops we should see along with tips on getting good deals and discounts.

Before I move on here, let me point out 3 things that are ever present aboard ship.

From the moment we got under way, you could hardly ignore the barely muted rumble of the massive diesel/electric engines that powered this floating city. The first day out of Vancouver, the sea was fairly rough and I got the sensation, both physical and audible, that the ship was alternately slowing down and speeding up each time it crested a wave and fell into the next trough. Of course, the ship was actually doing nothing of the sort but the sea made it feel that way. Last, though not an unpleasant sensation, was the side to side sway of the ship. This was always there, like the throb of the engines, and was more pronounced with the roughness of the sea and the higher up the ship you were.

We missed our dinner hour in the restaurant and so we ate at the Lido Restaurant instead. We had scheduled an early seating at 5:45 and the doors are closed by 6:00 for that seating. The Lido was more a buffet style except that you do not serve yourself for the first 48 hours aboard ship. This is a health and safety measure to prevent the spread of disease. An additional measure is the conveniently placed hand sanitizer dispensers throughout the ship most notable at rest rooms, elevators and restaurant entrances.

Thursday, Sept 5, was our first of two formal dining nights and so, dressed to the 9's we joined our table mates for dinner. Professional photos were taken and after dinner we had one of the staff use our various cameras to take group shots of us all. I will show here the photo of Karen, Tricia and I but out of respect for the wishes of the others, the group photo will not be displayed.



Seated around the table, starting with myself, were Karen, Tricia, Ellen from Vancouver, BC, her niece, Pam from Australia, Keith and Enid from England and Barb from Brandon Manitoba. We all introduced ourselves and conversation was free and easy as among old friends. It was a truly fabulous evening.

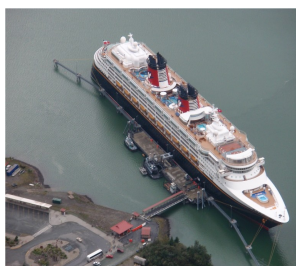
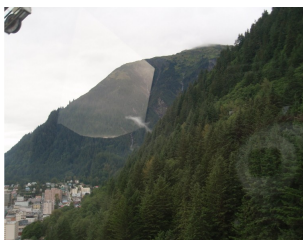
Later, there was a general announcement that there would be a time change of 1 hour back since Alaska is in the Mountain time zone.

Cruising along to our first port of call, Juneau, I thought I might post a few pictures enroute.



It is 12:20 on Friday, Sept 7. We are docked in Juneau and as I looked out from our patio deck, There is another cruise ship docked behind us. I believe this is one of the Disney cruise ships.

Our shore excursion for this day was the Mt Roberts Tramway. I got some good photos of the ships and scenery on the way up. Karen even got a got shot of the other cruise ship leaving.



While at the top, we got to see Lady Baltimore, a wild eagle found injured and nursed back to health. Unfortunately, Lady Baltimore can never be release from captivity because she is blind in one eye and one wing is damaged beyond repair so that she cannot fly. Karen got some good pics of Lady Baltimore.

Back on ground level, we began our hike back to the ship. We hit numerous gift and jewelry stores and acquired free and low cost gift items. As we were on shore come dinner time, we missed dinner in the restaurant but were too tired to even care. Instead we ordered room service and ate in our suite. The porter took away the dinner tray but again, tired and ready to sleep, we forgot to put out our in room breakfast order. By the time I thought of it it was already too late (3:15 am – order had to on the door before 2 am). Anyway, we went to bed in Juneau and woke up docked at Skagway, our next port of call.

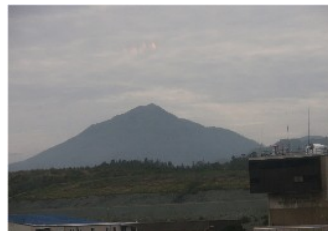


Our shore excursion had been canceled for being under booked and the funds refunded. We did go ashore, took a shuttle bus to the far end of town and walked back taking in the gift shops and jewelry stores we had planned to get to. Finally caught the shuttle back to the ship and were well in time for dinner.

I woke up around 6:25 am Sunday by which time we were well under way to Ketchikan, our next and final port of call for this cruise, with an interim stop at Glacier Bay where I took plenty of pictures. We arrived there shortly after 10 am and after a brief stop, the ship turned around and began the final leg to Ketchikan.



Monday morning, Sept 9, about 8:20 as we approach Ketchikan, we are starting to see small islands and other land masses. One such island had a small (perhaps only small relative to our ship) lighthouse on it.

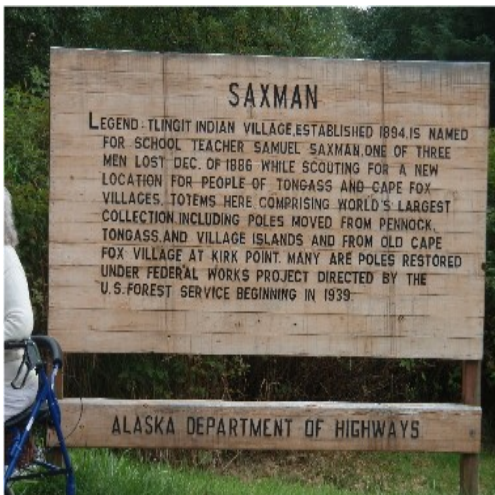


Karen had gone out earlier for a bite of breakfast while Tricia and I slept in a while longer. Not scheduled to dock before 10, I went to the Lido and had some juice and fruit, chatted with some people I had not yet met and returned to the cabin. Tricia woke with a raging migraine which made it impossible for her to take the shore excursion to the Saxman Native Village. Karen and I went and had a lovely time. It was a nice sunny day, only the second day of sunshine during the entire cruise. We boarded a shuttle bus for the trip to the village.

Our first stop was a general meeting hall for a short, 13 minute video on the village history. I took pictures of all the clan art work throughout the building before and after the video. Then we proceeded to the main meeting hall where we watched several tribal dances. Many of us were able to participate in the last dance wearing tribal regalia loaned to us for the purpose. We were instructed in how to perform this dance and had the honor of participating.



After the dance we went outside where I took pictures of the lodge and all the totems around in front of it. Our guide told some stories and gave a bit more of the history of the natives and their village. In the gift shop I even purchased a totem salt and pepper shaker set as a memento of our stay at the village.



Boarding our shuttle bus at the end of the excursion, we headed back to the ship. Some people got off for the lumberjack show, Karen went back to the ship and I made the rounds of the remaining gift and jewelry stores we had planned to visit. Then back to the ship.

Dinner was the second, and last, of the formal dining venues for this cruise. Tricia had recovered from her headache and went to a LGBT meeting at 5:30 while Karen and I, once again dressed to the 9's, met our table mates for dinner. Tonight even the chairs wore formal white covers.

You will note that I wrote NOTHING about what we ate at any given meal. Suffice to say that all the food was delicious and professionally served. Every one of us was treated as if we were royalty and, perhaps, we were, at least for the present. What was far more important to me was the respect, conversation and camaraderie shared with our fellow travelers. In time we may all drift apart as is normal in such things. Those wishing to remain in touch will do so and those who don't, well, we have good memories.

At 18:00 (6pm) we left Ketchikan for the return through the inside passage. Since I took many pictures on the way out, I basically vegged out on this and took no new pics. We did, however, check out the last minute deals at the shops on board ship. We bought pillow/blanket combinations for \$5.00 each. We also got extra locks for our luggage. Then we ended up checking out the photo gallery and decided to purchase the package all together as long as we could split the cost amongst us. Not only was that possible, but the gallery manager also managed to save us money on the purchase such that we came away with all our professional shipboard pictures AND a cruise dvd as well and saved money. Who doesn't like saving money?

Tuesday at 13:35 (1:35pm) I was once again at the Lido Restaurant. Some juice and more fruit, met more fellow travelers and even caught up with Nina and her husband. Funny thing though, I don't remember his name. Oh well. We chatted some and I showed some of the pictures I had taken at the Saxman Village including the pictures Karen took of me dancing with the natives.

Wednesday morning I was up around 1:30 and saw another cruise ship, all lit up, across the bay from us so naturally I took pictures.



On the final approach to Vancouver, with docking about 7am, I once again took pictures as we went under this bridge. Our bags, having been put out in the corridor the night before, were already for transport off the ship. All we had to deal with was the light carry ons and the walkers. Our ship board id cards were used for the last time to debark the Ms Volendam and all that remained was the ride to the airport. We collected all our bags dockside before being directed to a waiting taxi. The cruise line provided a voucher for the taxi that took us to the airport and the cruise was officially over. All that remained was the flight home.

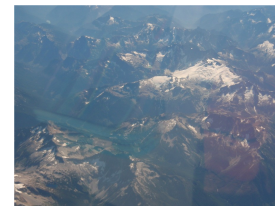
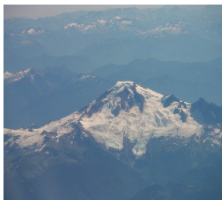
We were dropped curbside at the airport and there were no luggage carts nearby so I went inside and all the way to the far end of the terminal to get two cards for our luggage. When I got back to where Karen and Tricia waited, wouldn't you know that a whole train of baggage carts had just been parked along the wall nearby. Inside, as we approached one of the kiosks, we were directed instead to Customer Service where it was felt we could get our luggage tags and boarding passes more easily.

As I handed my passport to the man at the desk I said, my passport is at variance with my presentation. He looked at the passport and then at me and said, "You're telling me?" I then offered my drivers license which he also looked at and said I should present both at the ensuing stations, which I did. He very nicely took care of our checked bags and boarding passes, both for the first flight to Calgary and the connecting flight into Vegas.

There was a minor glitch at the security checkpoint. The other girls had each purchased a caribener knife/bottle opener which they did not put in their checked bags. It was 11:00 and our flight did not leave till 13:00 so after getting everything through security, I was allowed to take the knives down to a post office at a 7-11 and ship them out rather than allow them to be confiscated. US Security is a lot tighter than any other. So tight in fact that metal parts of my bra tripped the alarm as I went through the portal. A little overkill to be sure but I don't make the rules.

US Customs was the easiest station to pass through on the way to our terminal. I presented my ids and the agent was more concerned with my status as an American Citizen than with my appearance.

All hurdles successfully passed, we had a wait for our flight so we had a bite to eat and just chilled out waiting. Finally we were on the plane and taxiing toward the runway. I took a short video as we taxied into position and took off. Then I took numerous pictures of the mountains below us. The first leg of our journey home was under way.



With a three hour layover at Calgary, I decided to call ahead to our neighbor to remind her we were coming home that evening. I could not get through to her cell so I left voice mail on her home phone. When we got to Vegas, she was not to be seen so I again tried her numbers. The cell was not available but I did wake her up at home. Evidently she had some false information on her cell telling her we were to re arriving at 9:04 am instead of 9:04 pm. At any rate alternate transportation had to be arranged so we hired a Limo to get us home. The man had a good sense of humor and a great attitude. We got home in short order and shortly after paying the fair, we all crashed for the night. The trip home cost more than anticipated but was well worth it. Besides we were in good hands, I felt. We had just completed an Alaska Tour on a Holland American Lines ship and the limo drivers last name was, Holland. A fitting end to our grand adventure.