

HOMeward BOUND

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October 30, 2010

0422 I awake, out of a deep sleep, which I was sincerely hoping to have gotten on this eve before departing for the “New World”, as it was referred to centuries ago. But this world they spoke of, is where I am from.

Unknown to me at the time, my trusty and loyal 1st Officer, Nicolas Migeot, AKA “The Frenchman”, was also struggling to stay asleep. The day’s planned activities were most assuredly to blame. We were due to be towed by tug boats from the Marina Genova Aeroporto, in Genoa Sestri Ponente, to the commercial, sister port of Genoa Voltri, where the transport ship was berthed since the day before.

It was no surprise to learn that Nicolas was already awake. He is a fully qualified and experienced Captain. That usually means that we would both be equally anxious about the way things would go today.

By the time I was showered and dressed, Andreas, my Chief Engineer, was in the galley, making an espresso, along with the two men who were hired to help us this day, Federico, and Fulvio; both from Italy. Federico is an experienced commercial sailor, and had already assisted me with the delivery of the Mirage from San Remo to Genova Sestri, earlier this week. I didn’t even realize just how thankful I would be by the end of today that Federico was on board with us.

The tugs were due at the boat by 0600, for what should have been a simple, 1-hour long tow to the ship. 0600 came and went without any sign from the tugs, however. Finally, at 0620, we spotted the tugs navigation lights in the dark silhouette of the port behind it. But, he wasn’t coming to our boat; he was going right past us. As my crew ran down to the face dock to signal him, I received a call on my Italian cell phone. It was the tug Captain. He had no idea where we were, in spite of a confirmation telephone call we had the day before.

When he finally arrived at our bow, we noticed that it appeared that there was no second boat to tow us, so a 30 minute period of total confusion ensued, during which, the tug Captain finally docked his tug next to us, and came aboard to speak with me.

I must say, that in the year and a half that I have been here living in Italy, no matter how frustrating it might get with the persistent confusion and “Keystone Cops” style the Italians exhibit on a regular basis, I can never get very angry with them. First of all, they are usually very funny to watch, whether it is intentional on their part, or not. Secondly, they are almost always genuinely very nice people, and I have always liked them. They tend not to take themselves very seriously.

Soon, we were tied to the tug by our bow, and after we made it clear that we were ready to go, the tug Captain called me on my cell phone. I answered, wondering why he didn't just call me on the radio. He very politely asked if I would "switch channels to 10...one zero". Of course I did, and went on with everything. Pretty quickly, however, the crew's radio had traffic. It was Nicolas, up on the bow, telling us that the tug Captain wanted me to switch my radio to channel 8.

I finally gave my radio to Federico, and asked him if he would take over the communications between the tug and the Mirage. He agreed, and soon we cast off our two forward ground lines, and our last stern line. The tug began to pull us off, and with a couple of very close calls, barely missing hitting the sailboat off our starboard side, and then swinging wildly over towards the larger motor yacht off our port side, we were finally off, into the inky black darkness of the pre-dawn morning.

I didn't get a moment's rest, as within minutes, we noticed a large commercial ship was suddenly very quickly pulling out of their slip across the harbor, and from all appearances, were not going to wait for us to get out of their way.

Federico called the tug captain, and after an exchange that sounded anything but friendly, Federico, turned to me and said, "They see it". I looked at Federico for only a moment in silence before he added, "I have to be, how do you say...diplomatic", and then smiled. I smiled, and replied, "Yes, I understand". I didn't need any translation of his conversation with the tug Captain.

We continued to weave our way across the dark harbor, apparently unnoticed by the large freighter, now far ahead of us. I looked at my watch and noticed that it was 0700, and that was the time I was supposed to have been floating around behind the ship, waiting for the "load-master" to let us float on. The official loading time was not supposed to begin until 0830, which I thought was absurd, especially with an 800 Euro per hour tug attached to me.

I went to the wheel house and turned the VHF on to channel 17, which is the frequency used by the ship. I didn't hear any traffic, so after a minute or so, I started back down the stairs to check on our progress and my crew. As I made the first few steps, I heard the radio crackle to life. "Mirage, Mirage...this is the Yacht Express. Do you copy, over?"

I raced back up to the wheel house, and grabbed the hand set. "Yacht Express...this is Mirage; go", I answered. Jonathan, the load-master, then called back, asking what my location was. I explained the situation, and waited for him to reply. He surprised me when he informed me that we would board upon arrival to the ship. This was very different from our loading in Ft. Lauderdale, where we actually did wait around like a

bunch of idiots in Port Everglades, from 0700 to 0830, while we imagined the ship crew having coffee and donuts.

As we were heading for the breakwater, which marked the entrance to the western harbor, in Voltri, I heard Jonathan come back on the radio with a warning to all of the yachts waiting around, to look out for a very large container ship, currently underway inside the harbor, headed for sea. It was a very large ship, and I certainly didn't want our tug Captain to venture out in front of the container ship, unknowingly. I asked Federico for advice. He smiled, and called the tug. There was a brief, and high-pitched response. Federico turned to me and just said, "They see it". We both smiled.

We slowed a little, and in the light of one of the most beautiful dawn skies I have ever seen, we noticed all of the other yachts, which were now hovering around the harbor entrance, waiting for their turn to be called. I was very cognizant of the fact that we were loading first, in our "bay", on the starboard side. I was also thinking of how we were supposed to be there at 0700, which was 45 minutes ago now. The ship had no choice but to begin loading boats into the port bay, while they waited for our arrival.

Jonathan seemed unfazed, and perfectly happy, which made it unnecessary to offer apologies, although I planned to speak with him later, given the chance, and tell him what a cluster-fuck we had that morning.

After another, smaller commercial ship passed outbound from the harbor, we were had the tug disconnect from our bow, and reconnect to our stern, from which they would tow us into the extremely narrow opening of the ship. I was not expecting things to go well, and at Jonathan's suggestion, had Andreas fire up the center main engine, which would give us the bow thruster going in; something I would be grateful for in a few minutes.

There was a little wind earlier that morning, as we departed Sestri harbor, but the wind had died down now, as we all watched in tense silence, while the tug Captain slowly made his way into the ship's starboard bay. There were the usual line handlers on both cat-walks, waiting to take our lines. The tug would go in as far as it could safely navigate, and then disconnect, and back out, with very little room along out starboard side.

As we slowly crept backwards, I eased the bow back and forth as needed with the thruster. I looked over at the sea of unfamiliar faces of the ships' crew, and then came across a smiling face. It was Andrey; my friend, and the Chief Officer of the ship! We exchanged greetings, and shook hands, as I passed so close to him that I could easily do it.

The tug Captain did an outstanding job in the end, delicately threading the needle, into, and then out of the ship's bay, without further incident.

We were secured into the exact same spot we had when the Mirage was shipped over to the Med in 2009. The remainder of the day was spent watching and listening to the Italian divers, whose job it was to secure every boat to their respective blocks. After they gave the all clear, the ship pumped out all of its ballast water, and rose out of the harbor by about 12 feet. Once all the yachts were high and dry, the crew of the ship got to work immediately, making all of the “sea fasteners” to hold each boat in place for the long journey across the ocean.

The crew of the Mirage got the electrical shore power cables handed up to the ship’s electrician, who immediately connected both our cables to the specially suited outlets that were waiting for us. Then, while I attended an orientation meeting for all of the “riders”, the crew of the Mirage located nylon-reinforced hose, which was attached to the air conditioning system inside the engine room. After connections were made, one hose was connected to the ship’s sea water supply spigot nearest the Mirage. The other hose was a discharge, which was directed over the side.

I paid the two Italian day workers, and thanked them. Then I sat down with Nicolas, and signed over some travel expense money. Finally, I thanked everyone, and said my goodbyes, afterwards watching them each climb off the boat, and walk off the ship to their waiting car on the dock.

I now had the boat to myself. I wasn’t hungry, as Andreas had earlier gone out and gotten us all “kabob”, as he calls it, spoken in his abrupt Russian/German accent. It was very symbolic, as “kabob” was the very first food I had after making landfall in Italy, 18 months earlier. Now, I was able to collect my thoughts, and make some last-minute phone calls, and write some last-minute e-mails.

I made several phone calls, and had already written several e-mails, as the weather began to turn for the worse. I was in the middle of a conversation with John Springer, when I heard a loud thumping noise coming from the top of the boat. Realizing that something was obviously terribly wrong, I shouted “Holy shit!”, to John, and told him that I had to go, and would call him back.

I got my jacket on, and headed out the port side entry door, which had been already dogged and locked for the trip. Once out on the port side deck, I slowly made my way forward, in what felt like a hurricane force wind, with driving rain pelting my whole body. Suddenly, I was very startled, as I literally bumped right into one of our largest fenders, which had been blown by the wind until it landed up on the deck. It had been hanging over the side.

Once I moved the fender out of the way, I continued forward, where I immediately scaled the front of the main deck house. I crawled up the non-skidded section of the house roof on my hands and knees, until I reached the windshield. Thank God my crew

had non-skidded the slanted windshield window frames. I slowly and carefully crawled up the window frames, on my hands and knees, in the gale force winds and rain. Finally, I was on top of the wheel house, where the sunscreen for the windshield had gotten caught on a couple of small radio antennas, which were the only things preventing it from blowing completely off the boat, and the ship.

Very slowly, I grabbed a fistful of the sunscreen in one hand, and then slowly backed myself down the windshield, careful not to be blown off the boat, as the wind now grabbed the sunscreen as well, and tried to blow us both off. As I got to the cabin top, I kept my backwards crawl going, until I finally reached the foredeck. Once safely back on level decking, I stepped on the sunscreen with one foot, to prevent it from blowing away, while I opened the hatch to the chain locker. Once opened, I quickly stuffed the huge, soaking wet, sunscreen down into the chain locker, and closed the hatch.

As I walked back inside the boat, I already knew that I would not be able to call John back for a little while. That is because my entire body was shuddering from the cold. I was soaked to the skin, and I needed a hot shower before hypothermia set in. I was actually saying the words, “need a hot shower” over and over again, until I finally started to feel the life-saving heat on my body from the shower water.

I felt much better within minutes, and re-dressed myself, before going back up to call John and tell him what had happened. No one who hasn't been on the dock ship, sitting for three days in Martinique without any air conditioning, would understand why that sunscreen was so vitally important to me. I hadn't the slightest concern for the owner's wallet when I rescued it. Rather, I knew that without it, the wheel house would boil like a pot roast in the oven.

I celebrated my success with some contraband beer, and finally called it a day at around midnight. It was a very long day, and I was completely exhausted.

October 31, 2010

I awoke at precisely 0700, to the unmistakable sounds of Andrey banging his hammer under my boat. This was a ritual which I remembered only too well from my last trip on the ship. Every morning underway, Andrey walked the ship's deck, pounding his hammer on the wedges of wood, keeping the blocking secure under each yacht.

I quickly slipped back into dreamland after Andrey mercifully left me, and went to pick on someone else. I re-awoke at 1145, and was in no hurry to get up, but then realized that I had had enough rest, so got out of my bunk, and got dressed.

I spent most of the early afternoon, writing e-mails, and making a few very last-minute calls. Nicolas called me. We discussed the weather forecast for the Mediterranean,

which was not looking good. I also told him about my death-defying stunt from the previous night. We laughed and talked some more. I told him that I was submitted for a 150-foot Palmer Johnson, and would keep him informed. We said goodbye once more and hung up.

Andreas and I spoke about some final details, and I thanked him for the very thoughtful souvenir gifts he brought to me the previous day, and gave to me before leaving. It was a San Remo coffee mug, key chain, and postcard. Very simple, yet very nice.

I hadn't heard anything from the Sardine since she landed in Rome, around 4 PM two days before, so I tried calling her, but got her voice-mail. I then decided to send her an sms, or text, message, letting her know that I was concerned after never hearing from her again. She called a few short minutes later, apologizing for the delay in calling me. She told me that she was just recovering from the jet lag of the long and grueling airplane ride from North America.

I was relaxing around 3:15 PM, when my portable VHF startled me. The ship made a general announcement that Italian Customs was aboard, and all the riders were instructed to appear immediately in the atrium. I panicked.

I had been hearing rumors since arriving on board that the days of drinking were long over on the ship. I had beer, and was smart enough to stock up before leaving Italy, but I was now scared, not of punishment, or a fine, but of being deprived of my favorite beverage for the entire length of the three week journey. I had three cases of beer in my cabin, and after being told to report immediately to the atrium, I instead, went to my cabin, and took all three cases of beer down to a guest room, where I "hid" them in a closet. Now, I could say officially, that a guest had left them there. It might not have gotten me out of trouble with the Customs officer, but it was worth a try.

I then marched all the way up the stairs to report in. I already noticed other yacht crew streaming out of the atrium, as I approached. This seemed puzzling to me. So, I went into the room, where I was immediately greeted by a very stern-faced, and very blad-headed Customs official. He had an equally scary looking cohort, whose job it seemed was to add some element of Halloween to this traditional holiday afternoon.

I was recognized by the man so quickly that I was sure he was "after me", until he confirmed my identity, and then extended his hand to mine, to shake it. I was thinking, 'this is surely not the actions of a man preparing to arrest someone', and offered my own hand back, hoping that cuffs were not then quickly slapped onto my wrists.

A few short seconds later, I was heading back to my refuge on the Mirage. I had cheated certain death twice in 24 hours now, and I was feeling good about my chances.

I was also thinking to myself, 'Just because you're paranoid, doesn't mean they aren't really out to get you'.

The rest of the afternoon was uneventful, with very gloomy skies continually dumping rain on my decks, but never enough to wash away the soot from the ship's exhaust. I broke out the wash-down hoses, and proceeded to rinse off as much soot as I could. After a little while, I noticed that where I had started rinsing off was again covered with soot. At this point, I put the hose away, and gave up.

Later that afternoon, I was thinking of finally giving up my silent, and surely largely ignored protest of the poor quality of food I was sure was being offered on the ship's mess deck. I looked at my time schedule, given to me at the orientation briefing, which stated 1800-1900 for dinner. It was still early, and I alternately checked both my wristwatch and the digital clock on my laptop computer.

Suddenly, I realized that they didn't match! My computer showed 4:17 PM, and my watch said 5:17 PM. Something was terribly wrong! I pondered calling the ship on my VHF and asking what time the ship was officially on, until the thought occurred to me that every single yacht crew would hear me asking what they surely would have considered a stupid question. Everyone knows that you set the clocks back every fall, right?

So, instead, I hatched a much simpler plan. I walked out on the aft deck and asked the security guard what time it was. I didn't think to remove my own wristwatch, as I pointed to it, in an effort to get the young Ukrainian crew member to understand what I was asking him for. I acted very smart, and thanked him for telling me that it was "half past 4", which immediately made it clear that not only was this young lad fully fluent in English, but that he was probably aware that I had a watch. I don't want to know what he thinks of me now.

Dinner time came, and at about 5 minutes to 6, I started my long climb to the mess deck. I was met by the two crew from the "Kimberly". John, who was obviously the Engineer, and Kyle, who was so new to yachting that he was only a few weeks into it, walked into the mess hall, only to be greeted by another young Ukrainian crew member, who promptly informed us that we were 30 minutes early, in spite of the fact that our orientation paperwork clearly stated 1800-1900. The crew member hurriedly pointed to the laminated sheet pasted to the mess room bulkhead, where it clearly stated 1830-1930. So, we walked back out, and noticed that the atrium was still open.

This 'atrium' room, was originally constructed as a full-on bar, when the ship was built a few years ago. Unfortunately, a yacht engineer on the maiden voyage, was discovered near dead, lying on the cargo deck of the ship, late one night, and the bar was closed forever afterwards. On my previous trip, the doors were padlocked from the outside, lest

anyone get any wild ideas, of possibly bringing their own booze, and drinking it there, whatever difference that would have possibly have made.

John, Kyle and I sat in the 'atrium' and got to know one another. John is from Vancouver, BC. So, I told him about my sister. Kyle was from South Africa, and I asked where, and he told me. I told him about my former deckhand. Finally, it was close to 6:30, and we decided to go back to the mess hall.

We sat down, and I had a very nice, if not too complicated, bowl of soup. Afterwards, the steward brought my dinner, which was a very nice stuffed bell pepper, with a cream sauce on the side. I was impressed, and immediately told my companions that I felt it was a huge improvement over the last cook they had.

Soon, a young crew member from the boat next to Mirage sat down with us. The conversation was already about the Mirage's worn out engines. Something was bothering the newcomer about my explanations, and finally he asked, "Who is your Engineer?", to which I replied, "Do you want to know his name?" he looked annoyed now, and said something which I took as condescending and critical of either Andreas' ability to keep the engines maintained, or my ability to manage the same. I decided that we were probably not going to be best friends. I should have asked him how old he was, and when he replied "What does that have to do with it?", I would have answered, "Exactly!".

I politely excused myself, and John and Kyle followed me out.

November 1, 2010

0700 brought Andrey and his hammer, tapping away. This morning it was decidedly softer, and didn't bother me as much. I rolled over and went back to sleep.

I dreamt that when we arrived in Ft. Lauderdale, Tony wanted the boat available for a broker's show, which would have required the boat to have been prepped 'to the nines', which logistically impossible under the circumstances. However, dreams, like real life sometimes, don't always make sense, and neither did this. Anyway, we were moored stern-to, over somewhere near the Bimini Boat Yard on the 15th Street canal. I was going around the boat looking at the various people on board.

Suddenly, I saw Ed McMahon! I am not sure if he is even still alive anymore, but he looked better than he has in years. He was conversing with someone else, who looked like a broker, and trying to keep up with a baseball game on TV. I decided to go up to the flybridge (told you dreams make no sense), and arrived there just in time to witness the departure of a large yacht moored off to our port side. The Captain on that yacht seemed to depart from his slip faster than I would have, and as I followed his

movements, as he moved out so quickly, I suddenly noticed a much smaller power boat, who was trying to back in, between my boat and the now departing boat, at the very moment the big one decided to abruptly leave.

The wake turbulence caused by the departing yacht was so powerful, that it caused the smaller boat to lose all control, and as the skipper on the smaller vessel tried to regain control by revving his engines higher, it served only to propel him faster in directions he could have never predicted. As the smaller boat was pushed towards the back of Mirage, towards the dock, I noticed that it was clear that he was spinning completely out of control. Then, the inevitable occurred. The smaller boat's stern crashed into the port aft side of Mirage with a thunderous sound, alarming everyone on Mirage, except me.

I re-woke at 11:30. I decided that I had slept enough. My 'displaced cartilage' in my left rib cage had been hurting me for some time now, and sleeping made it worse. I rolled out of my bunk, and after a quick shower, went up to look at what the day had to offer.

The skies continued to be dark, gray, and gloomy, with lots of rain. The sea conditions were much better than I had anticipated. I went into the Mirage wheel house and checked our current position and speed. We were off of Toulon, in the south of France. We were making anywhere between 10.5 and 11.5 knots, depending on what moment I decided to glance at the GPS numbers. The oddest thing was our direction, which was northeast.

There was only one explanation. If we are going northeast, it must be to avoid extra-rough seas. This area we are crossing now is infamous, or notorious, whichever you like better. The Gulf of Lyon, or Gulf of Lions, translated, is the outlet from the central plains of France, where extremely strong winds, called Mistral, are born. When a Mistral blows down the central part of France, and crosses over the water of the Mediterranean Sea, the results are always bad for mariners, and are also hard to predict, making them a nemesis for yachts, which are normally ill-equipped for such surprises.

I checked our "trusty" magnetic compass, and was horrified to see that it was reading southeast, or about 157 degrees. Then I also noticed that the new auto-pilot was reading the very same thing. I was then glad that we were not depending on those two pieces of equipment to get us anywhere safely.

OK, I just went back into the wheel house, and looked at the mag compass again. This time I realize my folly. We are sitting aboard the ship with our bow pointed towards the stern of the ship. In other words, the mirage is going exactly 180 degrees opposite of the ship, and I can now say that the mag compass seems to be working very well. In my defense, it isn't often that you find yourself navigating in reverse, with time to check your compass heading.

I went down to the engine room and activated the EVAC system, which seems to require a troublesome length of time to build up vacuum. That could be due to the low level of effluent in the holding tank, however. Andreas has told me before that the pumps work better when there is more in the tank.

We are headed west once again. There must be a bad system out in the Atlantic. That's all I can imagine as we are going close to half-speed. The trip over to the Med ,18 months previous, was at a steady 20 knots for most of the journey.

My answer came a little later. The forecast for the Gulf of Lyon must have been accurately bad, as the Captain of the ship was heading northwest to get in the lee of the land. We started clocking winds that were steady at 30-35, and gusting much higher. I was glad I didn't replace the sunscreen yet. The Jacuzzi cover was billowing up like a Jiffy-Pop, and the tender cover was flapping wildly, but holding. I was very glad that I decided to resecure all of them before leaving.

I left the Mirage an hour earlier than dinner time, to go see if I could decipher the e-mail system on the ship. I walked up to the deck where I thought I remembered being shown the room where the computers were located for our use. Unfortunately, my memory wasn't sharp, and I doubted the location where I was first headed, which was correct. Instead, I popped into a crew recreation room, where a ship crew member was more than happy to pause his "Scarface" DVD, long enough to direct me to the correct room, two decks above us.

I found the room, and sat down at one of the two computers there. After settling in, I finally noticed that it said the computer was "locked" and unavailable for use. So, I got up and moved to the one beside it. I inserted my USB stick, and prepared to navigate what was bound to be an interesting path to the e-mail. I found two different e-mail programs available, and eventually decided to try an e-mail to Andreas on one of them.

I had very little confidence that I successfully sent the e-mail, and so was reluctant to try any more, until I spoke with someone who knew. I walked out, and before heading to the mess deck, which would surely not be open until 1830, I decided to re-familiarize myself with the location of the officer's laundry room. After looking where I thought it was first, and discovering it not there, I finally realized that it was on the opposite side of the deck, and eventually found it. On my previous voyage aboard this ship, I used the general crew laundry on a lower deck, specifically meant for dirty work clothes. It was easier, and probably more efficient.

Finally, I made my way slowly down to the mess deck, where I ran into two yacht crew, who happened to be leaving at the same time. I immediately wondered if we had somehow lost standard time, somewhere between Genova and Marseilles. But these two had not eaten, and were in fact planning to eat aboard their boat, the Benetti in the

aft port corner of the ship. The taller one introduced himself as...something, which was quickly followed by his apparent nick-name; Blocko. The other lad was introduced as Trifle, which was apparently, and perhaps unfortunately for him, not a nick-name, but instead his real, given name.

We compared notes on the quality of the mess hall food, which they hadn't sampled yet, explaining that they were dutifully consuming everything left aboard their yacht, "before it goes off", as Trifle added. I told them that the previous evening's dinner was as good as the best dish I had the entire trip 18 months ago, and they looked at me with a mixture of surprise and wonder.

A few minutes later, a bright-eyed, and fresh-looking lad walked up, and introduced himself to the rest of us. Antony, from New Zealand, was the sole crew member on a quite large Heesen, called "Yalla", which is owned by an Arab, who kept it on display, (along with himself), for half the season, in St. Tropez. Blocko and Trifle excused themselves, and Antony and I walked into the mess deck at exactly 1815. The cook pointed quickly...to the soup and salad already out for us, and we sat down to eat.

A few minutes later, we were joined by the "couple" off the 130-foot Mangusta, "Lady Shiela", which was indeed owned by the same person who was the first owner of the last yacht I captained. Small world. Anyway, Jeanine, and Allen (I think), sat down and Allen and I began talking like we had known each other for years. He had a slight accent, which sounded Irish. We discussed the half dozen or so Benetti mega-yachts being built presently in Livorno, that had owners who were all in hot water, financially.

A few minutes later, my "friend" from the previous night appeared. I nodded at him, and he at me. After he bantered back and forth with Antony in their native Kiwi conversational style, we finally learned that Yalla had 18 crew, at which point Ben, (my new friend, from Como-II), and I, both stopped eating, and just stared at poor Antony. I asked Antony to repeat himself three times, until he finally said "Eightenn...one eight", and which point Ben asked "Why so many?", which wasn't what I wanted to know. I was more curious as to where they all fit.

Finally, the answer came. There were 6 or 7 rotational crew, and a "chase boat", which had 3 or 4 crew, I can't remember. In any case, I found it odd that Antony was the designated "rider" on a 47-meter yacht, as a Deckhand with only one season under his belt, and a total crew of 18 to choose from. We didn't discuss this point, and I probably will not bring it up.

At the end of his dinner, Ben politely, more than genuinely friendly, invited me for beers on some other yacht. I was not all that interested in going up and down other yacht's rickety aluminum ladders, while a near gale was blowing outside, but I "politely" asked for a rain check. I also asked him if the beer originated from the duty-free stores room, to

which he replied, “no”. That adds more gravity to the situation of rationing whatever beer I had. I was sure that anyone with beer, would be unlikely willing to give it up for almost anything in trade, whereas, I had both beer and Vodka. I was going to slowly ask around, as non-chalantly as possible, if anyone else had beer they might be willing to trade for booze. Surely someone had an unwanted stash of beer, and a thirst for Vodka.

I got up to leave the mess hall just as my friend John, the Engineer from “Kimberly” walked in. I told him loudly that we walked in earlier at exactly 1815, and were served, shaking my head. He quickly replied that 1815 was the time dinner was supposed to be served, according to the newly posted laminated paper on the bulkhead behind him. I was now totally confused.

I made my way back down to the cargo deck, in the pitch black, howling wind, and driving rain. After I boarded Mirage, I went up to the wheel house to check our progress on the Transas, which is our digital chart system. Sure enough, the course was taking us well north of the rhumb line. I then sat down in the sky lounge to start writing, when a loud clanging and knocking began right outside the window behind me. I opened the curtains, and saw the radio antennas all flailing around in the wind. I went outside to take a closer look, and decided that it was smarter to let them destroy themselves, than risk my neck climbing over the sheer side of the wheel house, and dismantling the antenna to store it.

As the waves on the ocean grew, the ship took a few consecutive jolts to the starboard bow, shaking the Mirage like a toy. I decided to go put two Peroni’s on ice. It would be a long night. I will be glad when the course changes to a southerly direction.

I have noticed a dull ache in my upper right chest since last evening. I know that heart attacks are usually felt in the upper left chest, however, so I wasn’t panicking...yet. I also didn’t feel any numbness in my left arm, or like someone was standing on my chest, so I was trying not to worry too much about it, and hoped that it was just gas.

The activities of the previous evening, with the wild rescue mission to save the sunscreen popped back into my mind, and then much more slowly, “popped” back out of my mind. (Not entirely)

The Captain called all of the yachts at about 2340, to warn that there would be “excessive rolling” coming up, in about 10-15 minutes, when they changed course. This might have struck any of my fellow riders as odd as it did me, because we were already beam-to the wind and waves for the past 8 hours. If anything, changing course to the south would greatly improve things. The Captain is obviously not accustomed to the effects of the sea on a smaller boat, like ours, otherwise, he would not felt compelled to say anything. We were all bracing for some weather anomaly, which would have produced beam seas after changing course 90 degrees. Oh well. He meant well.

November 2, 2010

There was a mild noise of tapping, at about 0830. I don't know if Andrey was sleeping in this morning or not, but whatever the reason, it was welcome after two days of rough weather. The ship had been riding so smoothly all night that it practically felt like I was sitting at the dock this morning. I rolled over and slept for another hour and a half.

At 1000, I decided that I had had enough rest, and I rolled out of my bunk. The first thing I like to do is go to the wheel house and check our location, our course, and our speed. We were getting closer to the Balearics, and our speed was relatively slow, considering the near ideal sea conditions. We were steaming along at a neck-breaking 11 knots!

I decided that before I showered, that I would attempt some exterior maintenance, while the hay was there for the "makin". I went out and started to straighten up the mess that was left by the crew during the trip from San Remo to Genova. The extra lines, and dirty ash trays, were among the few things that needed stowing and cleaning.

I went up to the sun deck, where I discovered that one of the alfresco dining seat cushions had escaped from under the poor canvas cover, meant to protect and keep it dry. That same cover was put to a strength test the previous evening, however, and I was surprised that everything was still on board, much less undamaged. The cushion did have some soot in the fabric covering, which I attempted to clean with the hose, before storing it below, in the engine room, where it wouldn't find it so easy to wander off again.

The soot and sea water combination from last night's storming conditions had taken their inevitable toll on the exterior paint already, and I was very depressed to see how quickly things had started to get out of hand. I rinsed with a lack of enthusiasm that I had hoped to have at this early point in our long journey. The soot, salt water, and stains were all well encrusted onto the exterior at this point, and the fairness of the day was not withstanding the deceptive rolling we were still experiencing. That meant there would be no death-defying high-wire acts today. My well-being, and my life, were not worth the risk to keep some uncaring multi-millionaire's boat from needing the regularly scheduled buffing and polishing that it had gotten out of pure necessity over the past three years I had been aboard.

I made a valiant effort, and the boat looked much better as a result of my efforts. I left the hose hooked up, "at the ready", for easier wash-downs in the coming days. After everything looked much better, I went in and took a shower, and got some clean clothes on to go to my first lunch since starting the trip.

I went into the mess hall, and there were already people eating. I sat next to Allen, from Lady Sheila, and there was a new guy to his right. I found out later that the new guy was

on a boat named “G G”, but when he introduced himself as Bryant, I was puzzled, because I had already looked at the only name on the crew rider list for G G, and it was Robert. Oh well, maybe there was a change of mind right before the ship left. Anyway, I overheard Bryant speaking with Ben, from Como-II, and discovered that he is from Charleston, South Carolina. Finally, another American! I wasn’t sure if I was the only one or not.

We discussed many things at lunch, including the use of the pressure washer, the internet, and e-mails, and the weather from the previous evening. The meal was some kind of meat, very well done, and dry, but not bad tasting, especially after adding a little salt. The yellow rice and corn combination was very good. The drink du jour, was their typical, heavily watered-down fruit juice.

By the time we were all back on the cargo deck, Ben was already happily wielding the pressure washer. He gave the hose a good tug, as I watched him for just a second. I went aboard the Mirage, and started doing a mental checklist of sorts.

I ventured down into the engine room and noticed that A/C just cycling off. The thing that caught my eye was that, number one, the temperature was still at about 16-17 degrees Celsius. That was typically too high for cut-out to occur. The other thing I noticed was the outlet temperature was flashing the code “A-C”, which was definitely not a good sign. In the morning, I had been almost absent-mindedly wondering why the boat felt slightly warmer, but attributed it to the sunshine, which was something we hadn’t seen in days.

Now, I was truly concerned about my precious A/C system, and promptly went about a haphazard method of trouble-shooting, to determine the cause of the problems. I started by switching the number 1 compressor to VFD, which stands for **V**ariable **F**requency **D**rive.

A variable frequency drive does an amazing, and extremely useful, and sometimes necessary job of reducing “start-up” amperage draw, or load. When large electric motors, like the ones found in our A/C system, start up, they initially draw a very high amount of amperes, or “amps”, as most people refer to them. Variable frequency drives allow a large motor to start very slowly, and they eliminate the “spike” in amperes that normally accompanies the initial start sequence. This is especially useful when connected to shore power electricity, which can be very limited, or sensitive to amp spikes, which can then trip the circuit breakers.

I watched as the number 1 compressor energized, which was what I had fully expected it to do. Unfortunately, it started to make an odd sound, which was all that was needed for me to become very alarmed. I walked quickly over to the electric panel, where I was horrified to see the voltage had dropped well below the 10% normally allowed for safe

operation, and the amperes were up at exactly 100, which was puzzling as well as alarming. First, the compressor should not be drawing that many amps, but that could have been explained by Ohm's Law, with the drastic drop in line voltage. Secondly, there should have been a circuit breaker tripped after we exceeded our allotted 60 amps, (which, by the way, has never been satisfactorily explained to me).

In any case, I ran back to shut the compressor off, in far less time than it took me to write this. I was immediately concerned that the compressor might have been damaged while running with far less voltage than recommended. I was frankly surprised that it didn't have some sort of protection built-in for under-volt situations. However, until recently, there was also no protection built-in for loss of raw water, (sea water), cooling flow. So, maybe I shouldn't be too surprised that under-volt is not protected for.

I then noticed that the blue light was energized, which indicates that the flow of either the chilled (or heated) water loop inside the boat, or the raw water cooling, was interrupted. This was exactly the sort of thing we had recently installed. I was initially wondering why all of a sudden, the flow of water had become an issue. The temperatures of the inlet and outlet water were high when the number 2 compressor stopped, or "cut-out", but there was water flow at that point, or it would not have been able to run at all.

Confused, and alarmed by the strange behavior I was witnessing, I decided to place a SATCOM call to Andreas. After several attempts, we could not hold a connection, and I could barely understand anything Andreas said. Now, on a good day, in person, I sometimes have difficulty understanding Andreas. Over the telephone, Andreas is extremely difficult to understand. If Andreas is speaking to me over the telephone, and starts laughing, I understand nothing he says at all. This SATCOM reception was terrible, however, and it wasn't Andreas' fault. The only thing I could get pieced together out of the conversation was something about a book over the engine. I finally realized that he must have been referring to a manual for the A/C, located in the little book case he has over the front of the port main engine.

I went down and found the book. I found the code "A-C" in the book. All it says is "A-C" refers to line voltage. That's it!! That is the only description given in the entire book about that code. It doesn't say increase the line voltage, decrease the line voltage, or anything helpful in the least way. So much for that idea.

I took a flashlight and shone it underneath the hoses, and saw no bubbles or air in the supply line, but when I did the same to the discharge line, I could easily see that there was a flow problem. I saw very slowly moving bubbles in one section, and a huge water pocket just a foot away!

I decided that it was time to go down to the cargo deck and take a look at our raw water cooling supply and discharge lines. These are two very large, nylon-reinforced hoses, which I described earlier. What I found was that first of all, the entire cargo deck was wet, which was odd on such a nice day. Then I discovered that the discharge hose was kinked, and that the open end of the hose was up on the deck, instead of directed over the side, where I had originally placed it. Regretfully, I had not secured it properly, and probably last night, during the rough weather, the hose was blown up onto the deck.

I quickly pulled the end of the hose back over to the side of the ship, and watched it for a few seconds, thinking that it looked weak. I knew then, that I would be getting dirty, so I went back up into the boat and changed clothes, grabbing my work gloves as I came back out. The hoses both needed some straightening out, to relieve the kinking which was undoubtedly restricting the flow of water to the A/C system. I also decided that I was far too cautious with the ship's sea water supply pressure, and opened the valve much wider, allowing a very liberal amount of water to flow through.

After fixing everything to my satisfaction, I headed back to the boat. Just as I crossed underneath the stern of the boat, I glanced quickly over at the grounding cable, which was attached to one of our transom zinc anode fasteners. This had been a huge problem during our previous voyage, as the ship's electrician had assumed that what appeared to be zinc anodes in this exact same spot, were in fact made of zinc.

This had been a long-standing argument between the "manager" and myself, as these "zincs" had not had any wear in the entire three years I had been aboard. I pointed out these suspect anodes to the manager during our first dry-docking under my command, back in late 2007. The manager almost hysterically defended the suspect anodes, to the point where I was even more convinced that something was wrong.

The suspect anodes were left as they were, until this past winter, when I was finally allowed to replace them with real zincs. The issue came to a head one day, when I was casually browsing through a zinc catalogue in the Italian shipyard, looking for mass produced replacement zincs, in order to save money on having either custom zincs smelted, or being shipped all the way from the US, which would have been outrageously expensive. It was after almost giving up on seeing our proper zincs in the catalogue, and just before I closed it and set it back on the counter, I saw something that made me stop.

There, on the very last pages in this catalogue, were the exact same "anodes" that we had on our transom. The exact same, down to the shape, size, color, bevels on the ends, mounting bolt hole pattern, everything! Except they weren't zinc anodes at all. They were in fact "grounding plates". This immediately explained why they never wore

out. They weren't supposed to; they weren't zincs! They were grounding plates. Case closed!

Anyway, the clamp for the boat was now attached to one of the fasteners for one of my new zincs, and I looked down to the deck, and saw that the other clamp appeared to be just laying on the deck, unattached to anything. I have since surmised that the sea water (read salt water) discharge hose, which had been blown up onto the deck, thereby flooding the entire surface of the deck with salt water, had provided a very minimal electrical connection for the loose clamp, lying on the deck. That made it possible for the A/C to run, barely.

I squatted down and grabbed the clamp, and re-attached it to a piece of steel, wiggling it a few times to ensure the best possible connection.

Finally, I climbed up the filthy dirty ladder, one last time, and checked everything in the engine room once again. The blue light was extinguished, and I flipped the switch for the number 1 compressor to VFD. Nothing happened for a few minutes. I decided that at some point in the future, I would try to reset the entire A/C system, which might clear all the history, and allow the system computer to call for compressor number 1 first again, like it is supposed to.

I tried the SATCOM again, and got Andreas, this time with both of able to understand each other comparatively clearly. Andreas confirmed my suspicion about resetting the electronics to get the system to call for compressor number 1. I will do that at some point in the future. I asked if he had received my e-mail from the ship. He hadn't looked at his e-mails yet, so we won't know if my attempt worked or not.

The radio came to life, and the ship's Captain made an announcement that today's safety drill is being postponed due to rough weather.

I decided to skip dinner. That was a decision I thought about more than anyone would have in a different situation than I. I decided to watch some DVD's in the main salon. I watched the entire first season of the American version of "The Office". The episodes were sometimes very funny, but often embarrassing. I eventually stuck two Peroni beers in the ice, and put "The Bone Collector" in the DVD player.

While I was watching the movie, and just beginning my second, and last beer, the radio started crackling with numerous calls from a yacht named "Touch", going out to several other yachts. I realized that I did not know anyone from Touch, and felt a little left out, and reminiscent of the old days, from my first trip on this ship. After listening in to the repeated requests to switch to channel 68, I realized that there was a party afoot.

I went back, somewhat contentedly, to my movie, until all of a sudden, the radio asked to speak to all riders. I answered, not even thinking that it might be an invitation. But, an invitation it was, and I was immediately invited to what I thought I heard was a 70's party. I wasn't sure I heard that correctly, but accepted nevertheless. I quickly changed into nicer clothes, grabbed a half-full bottle of Grey Goose, and headed down to the cargo deck, with my still nearly full Peroni.

I made my first walk aft on this trip, and quickly found "Touch", which was sitting alongside Zoom. I climbed up their ladder, not needing the gloves I purposely brought for that reason. My ladder was filthy and nasty, and I was unpleasantly surprised to see how sparkling clean and new looking the ladder was for Touch.

I climbed up, unswayed, and was immediately greeted by two guys smoking on the aft deck. I already knew Tim, or "Blocko", as he introduced himself to me. The other was James, and he was from the other Heesen, "Perle Noire". Both greeted me warmly, and ushered me into the boat, where I met the hostess of the evening, Rene. Rene, from South Africa, was in the right business. Her hospitality was amazing, and she actually admitted to enjoying the work of making us all happy. She was dressed as a late 60's Carnaby Street sort of girl.

I was asked to participate in costume, so I donned an Elvis fake hair piece, and felt welcomed by everyone. It turns out that it was Ben's 26th birthday, and he was dressed like a pimp, with a purple and leopard suit, from head to toe. Almost everyone had some sort of costume on. Ben noticed my Peroni immediately, and asked about it. I was happy to see that the other James, who was the host, with his girlfriend, Rene, was making use of the Grey Goose already.

I found out that the dock ship was only using one of its azimuth drives. Apparently, there is a broken ring gear in the other one, and it will not be possible to repair until after the completion of our entire voyage. This ship seems to have a lot of mechanical issues, and I am concerned about the trans-Atlantic portion of the voyage now. Also, apparently some, if not most, of the other Captains were informed that the ship was "crippled" before loading.

Anyway, the food was amazing, and the drinks were plentiful, with what appeared to be a fully-stocked refrigerator. The rules were obviously not only ignored, but they actually admitted to purposely stocking up. I finished my Peroni, switched to a Corona, had a Heineken, and then finished off two Budweisers of all things. It turns out that a couple of boats have Bud on board, and they aren't drinking it, yet.

Antony was there, along with "Trifle", whose real name is Trythall. He was having a little too much fun, and was escorted home later by his crew mate, Tim. Rene, was assisted in the galley by the stew from Zoom Zoom Zoom; Emma. Emma's boyfriend was the

first mate from ZZZ, and he is Dutch, with a name that is pronounced a little different from the way it is spelled. As close as I could get, through the din of the party revelers was Adrian, but I am sure that it is different.

The group was a very jovial one, and everyone was treated like they not only belonged, but were best friends. Rene was very friendly, and her better half, James, was my typical example of not judging a book by its cover. Unlike Rene, who looked extremely well put together at all times, James had a more relaxed look, and was wearing a Hawaiian sort of getup, that I thought matched his appearance.

Allen and Janine were both there, from Lady Sheila. Allen was very friendly, and seemed to be really into the party spirit. However, it was Janine who surprised me. Unlike Allen, who is Scottish, Janine hails from South Africa. Janine seemed to talk with me very easily, and her resemblance to the blonde intern doctor on the comedy show "Scrubs", didn't hurt. She was charming, without being forward, or shy. I found her delightful.

There were a few riders absent from the party. Noticeably was John, from Kimberly-II, unlike Kyle, who did attend. There was also Bryant, from G G, and one fellow from James boat, the other Heesen. I sat next to one other guy at dinner, who I have not seen since. I am not sure which boat he is even on.

At one point, I had really had my fill, after watching the others do Tequila and Jagermeister shots. I wandered out to the aft deck, where I found James, Blocko, and young Allen, in a heated discussion about the breakdown of the British Empire. Allen was proud to be Scottish, and made it clear that he was insulted to be thought of as English. However, he was a true blue British Empire lover, and felt very strongly that the United States entered WW-II, and offer assistance to Britain, only if Britain would disengage itself from all of it's world-wide interests, holdings, colonies, or whatever you want to call them.

Tim noticed me approaching and in spite of his size, and obvious intellect, was noticeably nervous about my sudden participation. However, within seconds, Tim saw me smiling, and keeping quiet for the moment, which made him relax, and then eventually encourage Allen to stick his foot further into his mouth. Allen was unrepentant however, and if anything increased his rhetoric. This amused both Tim and I, and finally, Time wanted a statement of some kind from me.

I simply asked Allen if he thought the US was doing anything different than the UK, in their so-called efforts to advance third world countries. He surprisingly admitted that he agreed, which amused us further. What Allen might not have been ready to hear, was the shared philosophy that it turns out Tim and I both had. That was that both the US

and the UK have gone around the world trying to “help” other countries, whether it was to that country’s detriment or otherwise.

Tim went on to add that the invasion, if you will, of America was by UK pilgrims, and the short period of time between then and WW-II was relatively insignificant, in the whole scheme of things. Tim argued with Allen that the aboriginal people inhabiting what is now called Australia, needed the influence or “assistance” of the people of the UK, about as much as the aboriginal people inhabiting the North American continent did; our contention being that neither was in any need.

Allen suddenly did not like the direction the conversation was going, and dismissed himself, proclaiming “This conversation is over” to both of us. Tim looked at me, and we both smiled, and laughed after Allen returned inside.

I looked over and saw Rene speaking with Janine, and walked over to them. I politely thanked Rene profusely, and said I was leaving. She was ever gracious, and we gave each other a couple of quick pecks on each cheek. Then, I turned to Janine, who was smiling and wished her a goodnight as well. She went to shake my hand, and I took her hand and tugged ever so gently, which prompted a repeat of the kissing.

Rene was suddenly summoned on her portable radio by James. She excused herself, very graciously, explaining that she was needed in the engine room, to help pump out the sewage. I was surprised, and asked where they planned on pumping it to. She quickly replied that James was pumping it out, over the side of the ship. I was astonished, as this was not probably done frequently, and I doubted how kosher it would have appeared to the Captain of the ship. nevertheless, she said good night, and hurried down the steps to the engine room.

When I walked around the port side of “Touch”, there was James, standing there, talking to Rene on the radio. There was an awful smell of sewage, and I looked up to see some sort of home-made concoction, using some rags, pipe reducers, and a garden hose, stretched from their overboard discharge outlet in the bottom of the hull, going over to the starboard side of the dock ship, for some reason.

Things didn’t appear to be going extra smoothly, and James was none too pleased by it. I wondered how many times they had performed this routine before. I smiled and was going to say goodnight to James, and shake his hand, until the other James, looking down from the deck of Touch laughed, and pointed out that shaking hands might be something better to be left for another time. I looked and noticed that James had gloves on his hands, and for a good reason. I wished him luck, and he asked how I dealt with it. I replied that I didn’t need to, as I had plenty of room in my tank. He then finished our conversation with the warning, “Then just don’t have parties on board!”

I smugly walked back to my boat, wondering if Allen would be treated as well, when they returned back to Lady Sheila.

I finished watching "The Bone Collector" DVD, and then went to bed. Ben had returned before the movie was finished, and closed his side entry door with a loud thud. I figured that he was in for a long rest.

November 3, 2010

I heard faint tapping at some point, but barely noticed it, and fell back asleep. Then at 0820, I heard the unmistakable sound of a power failure. I had the forced fresh air supply and extraction fans on, and it was very noticeable when they stopped. I wasn't sure whether power was tripped at the ship breakers, or if it was just on the Mirage, but in either case, emergency lights would quickly drain batteries, so I reluctantly rolled out of my bunk.

I dressed in just shorts and a t-shirt, and went to the engine room. The weather was the best that we have had yet, and was absolutely gorgeous outside. The sky was clear, the sea was flat calm, and the temperature was balmy compared to before.

When I arrived in the engine room, I was happy, if not a little perplexed to find power still available from the ship. The voltage was fine, so I reset the switches, and re-energized the power on board. I checked the A/C, and made sure that it cycled on and off. Then I cycled the EVAC.

I went back outside, and realized that if the presently clear, sunny and warmer conditions were to be continuing for any length of time today, the boat would quickly heat up, especially the wheel house, without the sunscreen in place. So, I walked out to the bow, where I had not stepped foot for a while, and retrieved the sunscreen from the chain locker, where it had been stowed hastily on Sunday night.

It was damp, but at least it was fresh water. I carefully drug it up the wheel house windshield, where I very cautiously inched my way around to the windward side of the boat, to re-attach the sunscreen. I quickly discovered that I had it backwards, and reversed my steps until I could safely rearrange it properly. Once I had it in place properly, I suddenly decided that I needed to give the forward half of the boat a fresh water rinse. So, I drug out the hose and nozzle, from the bow seat locker, and proceeded to drag it carefully up to the windshield, where I started a satisfying rinse down.

I spotted Andrey, and we spoke briefly. He said he had been on "vacation", which must mean that he had a couple of days off, or something. I told him that we still had some catching up to do, and asked when he was on watch. He told me that he had the same

watch as before, which is 4-8. I asked if I needed special permission to come to the wheel house, and he said “no”, only during drills, or when a pilot is on board.

I finished my wash-down, and went in to write some, and check on status on the Transas. I stopped writing to get a shower before lunch.

I was met by Bryant in the mess hall, and we began talking easily. I found out that he bought a house recently in Delray Beach, and he knew exactly where the Delray Harbor Club is. We went on to talk about many things, including my house, hurricanes, and insurance, before being joined by Ben, who smiled at us sheepishly.

Soon, Kyle joined us, and John, from Kimberly. Janine and Allen walked in a little later. Everyone was all smiles, and whatever was upsetting Allen the night before was far from his mind now, apparently.

John spoke with the Wartsila rep, who is apparently on board for insurance, in case anything goes further amiss with the main engines. It seems that this morning’s power failure was caused on the ship, by a generator transfer that did not go seamless, as had been planned. Bryant said that the entire ship was “dead-in-the-water” following the failed power transfer, and when he had checked his electronic chart, the ship was down to 2 knots.

We all walked back up to the pool deck and walked out around the pool, where the view was very nice, with Cartagena, Spain off to our starboard side. It was a beautiful day.

I did a little writing, and then went to the engine room for some checks and equipment cycling. I cycled the EVAC, and got tired of waiting for it to stop, so I eventually shut it off manually, and went in search of dry toilets. I found three, which was very bad indeed. If this is how things are going to be, then I may end up shutting the valves to the guest toilets, as Andreas had suggested.

I tried compressor number 1 again, as number 2 seems to cut-out at way too high a temperature. This time the amps went up to somewhere between 75-80, before it shut itself off again. The volts were at about 190 during operation. I knew that I was going to have trouble with this compressor, and decided that I would see if I could re-program the staging to set compressor number 2 cut-in and cut-out to lower numbers. 11 or 12 would be a good cut-out. 17 or 18 would be a good cut-in.

I went to dinner, and met up with the crew from ZZZ, Como, Lady Sheila, and eventually Kimerly-II. We had a nice conversation, and I was able to talk more with Adrian from ZZZ, as he sat directly opposite me. There was a very nice cake served for dessert, which is a first for me on this ship. Janine was interested in the cake, along with the other crew, but I was the first to try it.

The conversation turned to DVD's, and it seems that among my fellow riders, almost all of whom are foreigners, American television series are quite popular. After naming several program names that she liked, Emma finished by adding that "we" especially liked the show Ugly Betty, and then decided to try the dessert cake. Janine quickly asked Emma what it was like, to which Emma replied "Ugly Betty?", to which everyone got a big laugh from.

I visited the bridge after dinner, and saw my friend Andrey on watch, by himself. It was a gorgeous evening, and we made small talk easily, catching up with each other on some personal subjects, as well as some explanations for the e-mail system now onboard. Andrey also explained that there was no incident prompting the new rules about alcohol. According to Andrey, it was a corporate decision, involving nothing to do with any previous incidents aboard the Dockwise ships. There was some kind of merger at the upper level, and DYT apparently inherited their alcohol rules. Andrey went on to clarify that no one really cared if people individually had a drink or two in their rooms, after hours, but the Captain would no longer be "bringing the beer to the BBQ". I said that it was fair enough, although I truly felt that I could really enjoy the freedom of unlimited beer sales from their duty-free locker, I knew that there were at least a couple of incidents on my last cruise that would warrant a complete zero-tolerance policy.

I went back to the boat, and did some computer work, before turning in.

November 4, 2010

I heard the very faint tapping again at around 8 something. Then the radio blared to life with Allen repeatedly calling the bridge, having experienced some electrical problems. Later, ZZZ called as well, and Allen chimed in, asking them to see if there was any connection with their problems. For once, it wasn't me having these problems, although I do remember clearly hearing BJ's voice 18 months ago, when they also had numerous problems holding power.

I was tired from the long day before, and I chose to sleep in. By the time I woke, it was 1145, and I was not going to even try to make it to lunch. I wasn't starving, and didn't feel like cleaning up just yet.

The day was clear and bright, and when I looked out the north, Gibraltar was clearly visible, a few miles off the starboard side of the ship. There were also many other ships transiting the straits, so it was interesting and enjoyable to sit and look at them all passing by.

I had turned off the air handlers in the upper level the previous evening, but now, even after an hour or so, the air conditioning didn't seem to be cooling very well. I decided to take a look and discovered what looked like a very poor raw water discharge flow.

I made an attempt to call Andreas on my Italian cell, which would have worked if he had answered it. Unfortunately, I was forced to leave a voice-mail instead, which frustrated me. I did however, receive a SATCOM call from him moments later. Before I received Andreas' call, however, I placed a quick call to Giovanna, which she answered immediately. We discussed her visa application, and she sounded stressed and nervous. I was a little surprised that after four days, she still hadn't been able to process it, especially with the assistance of her lawyer friend, Francesca.

In any case, it was good to hear her voice, and I hope that it was good for her to hear mine. I felt bad at that point that I hadn't contacted her somehow earlier, but it would have had to have been on the SATCOM, which I didn't like using except for emergency. I tried to reassure her that everything she was doing was right, and she asked me for my US contact details, including address and telephone. I was going to tell, but she smartly suggested that I send it via SMS, using my Italian cell, so after the call, I did.

We concluded the call after I established that she had indeed been in contact with Andreas. I haven't told anyone yet that I probably won't make it for Thanksgiving. I really don't want Giovanna stuck in a fucking airport hotel somewhere in south Florida, while the entire population is sequestered in their homes for the holiday, and the streets look like a ghost town. That might be more of my own feelings than hers, however, as it is my holiday, not hers. Anyway, I told Andreas that I would really like it if she didn't have to spend the day alone, in a foreign country.

I got Andreas' SATCOM call after I was through speaking with Giovanna. He and I discussed the EVAC and the A/C systems. I made a few notes, and then I asked if he had heard from Tony. He said he had, and that Tony had planned a meeting some time next week.

I finished speaking with Andreas, and I got one last SMS from Giovanna. It said that she had her appointment for the visa at the US Embassy in Rome, tomorrow. She also thanked me for the help, and said "Ciao". I felt a lot better, and I really hope that she will get what she needs there tomorrow, without any hassle. Now, if Tony doesn't try to screw her out of her pay, or something equally annoying or stupid, I will be surprised, but happy.

I went to work on the A/C, following Andreas' suggestions. However, upon taking a closer look at the raw water discharge hose, I was immediately shocked and became angry. The hose was nearly collapsed. I couldn't imagine why that would be, unless someone had purposely closed my sea water valve. In any case, I immediately went down to the cargo deck and checked the hoses, and the flow out the discharge. The flow looked ample, if not slightly weak. The hose looked slightly kinked and squashed though.

I decided to open the valve some more, and I watched the water coming out of the discharge hose. Right away, I saw what looked like a lot of air in the line, which makes the water look white, similar to what your kitchen and bathroom faucets at home look like, due to the diffusing screen normally installed right at the opening. I knew that air in the line was bad, and I waited several seconds for the color to change, but it didn't, so I opened the valve a little more. Now, the color changed rapidly, and soon I was looking at a nice transparent stream of solid water flowing out the end of the hose.

I went back up into the engine room, and I tried compressor #1 again. I went over to the electric panel, where I watched a very pleasing display of 55 amps, and 195 volts, on the two gauges for that bus bar. This was fantastic! I went back to the condenser and put my hands on it. Just like its supposed to be; cool under the belly, and warm, not hot, on the top. Hallelujah!

I was very pleased with the results, and went to work on the EVAC system with a spring in my step. The four valves on the tank top of the EVAC were all in the "open" position. I was going to have to close all of them, and then open one at a time, and go around the entire vessel, checking every head, to see which ones worked, and which ones didn't.

I climbed up over the mess of plumbing associated with the fuel transfer and centrifuge systems. I had to watch where I placed my feet very carefully, or I could do some very serious damage. I was paying very close attention to this, so much so that I forgot about my head, and clocked myself into an air vent, so hard, that it caused me to curse loudly.

Finally, with paper pad, and pen, I went around the boat completely, four times, checking every toilet, every time I closed one valve and opened another. The results were surprising. Only the two middle valves went to toilets on board. I haven't the slightest idea where the other plumbing goes. Nevertheless, we now had enough information to make a diagram, and I closed first the two valves that appeared to be useless, and then finally, the one valve that went to toilets I knew I would not be using, leaving only one valve open in the end. I shared the line with starboard aft guest room, the starboard forward guest room, and the day head. Perfect! The day head was the only other head I was hoping to keep open.

I now returned to the electric panel, re-energized the EVAC breaker, and walked back over to the system, where I could witness the vacuum gauge. I was amazed! The vacuum went from zero to 0.78 in a matter of a few seconds, and the pumps shut down! I am definitely on a roll today!

I went back down to the cargo deck for a little 'walkabout'. I hailed Ben, as I walked by his boat, Como. Ben was fully protected in a white suit and respirator, painting some fresh anti-fouling to his chine area, along the starboard side of his boat. I continued aft, where I ran into James #1, and James #2. James Woods, from Touch, was prepping his

shafts for an application of Prop-Speed, and James #2 was pressure cleaning the bottom of his boat; Perle Noire. They both stopped to speak with me, and it was during our conversation that James #2 mentioned that the ship was prone to changing sea water pressure at will, for no apparent reason, and with no warnings. Note to self; check the discharge more frequently!

I returned to my boat, and cleaned up for dinner. I met with the usual suspects in the mess hall, and talked quite a bit with Adrianus again. The food was very good, and I reminded whoever cared, (and maybe for the last time) how much the food improved since my last trip. I had leftover cake from the previous night, but took an uncovered piece which had dried out. I ate it anyway.

I left everyone to go try e-mails again. Without internet service restored at his house yet, Andreas was unable to verify any receipt of e-mails from me yet. I sent him an e-mail, describing the day's engineering feats. I also sent several more to various friends and family members.

The ocean had become much rougher since passing through the Straits, and I was thankful that we were going "downhill", or "with it", meaning with the wind and the waves, as opposed to heading directly into it, or any variation of the same.

I watched "The Departed", which was a gritty police movie, set in Boston. The cast consists of an almost endless list of actors I don't care for, including Alec Baldwin, and Martin Sheen, but two of my least favorite actors, Mark Wahlberg, and Leonardo Di Caprio, were actually very good in it. Afterwards, I went to bed. Once in bed, I tried to sleep, but I started thinking of everything wrong in my life, and became simultaneously restless and depressed. I decided that anything was better than lying there wallowing in depression, so I got back up.

I was surprisingly sleepy, for the apparent inability to sleep. Nevertheless, I went back upstairs. First, I tried in vain to run the wheel house computer, which hasn't worked since "crashing" during the middle of game play, while I was still docked in Genova. I went to the engine room, fetched a couple Philips screwdrivers, and removed the CPU for a closer look, and to disconnect the power cord, in case that helped. It didn't. The CPU would light up, and the fan would go full speed, but that's all. The mouse is dead, and the signal to the monitor is dead.

Dejectedly, I went back down to the main salon and started to watch several other movies, which I had downloaded from Giovanna's hard drive before she left. Nothing looked good at all, so I eventually settled on watching "Henry Poole" again. I made it to about the halfway point before growing sleepy enough to think I could sleep again, and I went to bed.

November 5, 2010

I slept in again, missing lunch, which I could care less about. However, I knew that it wasn't good to get all turned around. I really liked the idea of going to bed at night, and sleeping while everyone else is, and being up and about during daylight hours.

I decided that today was laundry day, a decision which was helped greatly by the fact that I was about fresh out of fresh clothes. So, I began the sorting and pre-wash stain removal spraying in the crew mess on Mirage, before lugging everything up to the ship's laundry. The tricky part is trying to go down a rickety aluminum ladder, grabbing with one hand, while trying to keep your laundry bag over your shoulder with the other hand, while the ship is rolling from one side to the other.

I wasn't even off the aft deck of the Mirage, before I heard the distinct sound of a helicopter nearby. Suddenly, it was right in front of me, moving aft along the starboard side of the ship, having apparently just buzzed the wheel house of the ship immediately before. I stood and stared at it, as I tend to do with all helicopters. The markings looked distinctly military, which didn't surprise me one bit. We were quite a ways off-shore at this point, headed to seaward of the Canary Islands. I watched as the helicopter continued to circle, at what seemed to be very close proximity. The distance eventually increased, but the bird didn't fly away. I was becoming concerned. Maybe we would be boarded? Maybe they were doing a routine check? Maybe we had a sick or injured person needing a medevac off the ship?

I proceeded down the ladder, and began my long journey up the stairs to the laundry. The helicopter continued to circle, increasing its range. Then I noticed something that really disturbed me; the ship was turning to starboard, and noticeably so. This was no subtle course change; this was beginning to look like a 180, back in the exact direction we had just come from. I spotted some ship's crew, who were as perplexed as I was. I decided that I should at least lighten my load and ditch the laundry, just in case we were going to be boarded.

The ship's crew I referred to were pressure cleaning the pool deck area. The pool was full of water and being used before another hour had passed.

I put my laundry in the machine, and got it going, before heading back out to see what was happening. By the time I had returned to the exterior decks, the ship had obviously done a near complete 180, and I decided to go up to the bridge and check it out.

I carefully entered the wheel house, cognizant that things might not be all that hospitable to a yacht "rider" at this moment, if there truly was an emergency of some kind. I noticed a casual and calm demeanor amongst the crew there, and proceeded to walk in cautiously. They looked at me with detached interest. I spotted the Captain. I

asked him “Is anything wrong?”, to which he replied, “No, not really. They want us to change course.” There was some mention of ‘they don’t want us to see something up ahead’, and the word “incident” was used. I then joked about it being a very nice day, and better than yesterday, for making a turn like this, and he smiled and agreed.

I proffered that they might be holding military exercises, and he readily agreed to that possibility. I thanked him for the info, and left quickly, as I am sure that he doesn’t like pedestrians and gawkers in his wheel house any more than I do. It truly was a beautiful day, and the slight rolling was the only indication that we were out at sea, I mean other than the fact that no land was visible.

I headed to the officer’s office, where I sat down at the computer and checked e-mails. My trusty sister, Swellin, was the only person who had responded to my e-mails from the day before. I now had at least confirmation that the e-mails were being sent out promptly, which was reassuring. Now, if everyone else would get their act in gear, it would be nice.

I wrote Sue a news flash about the sudden course change and the helicopter, without mentioning the word “incident”, so as not to cause any undue panic somewhere else, like in Paris, with my mother, God forbid. I also decided not to share this obvious delay with anyone associated with the Mirage, as it could easily serve to further jeopardize Giovanna’s situation, both with pay, as well as employment. If I discover much later this was ‘all in my head’, that will be fine with me. I just don’t trust Tony.

I made my way out of the office, as the cook was coming in to use the computer. he is a very young-looking chap, and always has a smile. He does at times appear to know something the rest of us don’t, but that is likely not the case, and I was going to get an example very quickly.

I asked if he had noticed the helicopter. He said he had not. I proceeded to inform him that we were turning around to change course at the direction of the Moroccan military, for some reason, perhaps exercises. He hadn’t even realized this. He thanked me for the info, and I left. I headed down the outside stairs, and made it to the forecastle deck, three flights down, before I heard the cook calling for me. He asked if that was my flash drive in the computer, and I said it was, and thanked him for chasing me all the way down to tell me.

After retrieving the flash drive, I went down to the cargo deck and spotted Ben finishing up his anti-fouling job. I told him about the diversion, and then went to check on my A/C discharge line. Afterwards, I climbed back aboard, and went to check the Transas. We had not in fact done a complete 180, but were instead heading almost due north. That was close to a 180, however, as we were on a course of SSW before turning.

I also discovered that the CPU of our new boat computer had fallen over onto the carpeting. I heard it last night, while I was watching a movie, and didn't know what it was until now. The fall hadn't improved the computer's performance.

I knew the wash time for my laundry could be shorter than what I am accustomed to in the Mirage, so I decided to go back up and check it. Sure enough, it was finished, and steaming hot. I pulled it all out, and deposited it all into the available dryer. It was after 4 PM, and that meant Andrey should be on watch. I figured that I would go visit him, and get the straight story on the course change.

Sure enough, Andrey greeted me warmly, and welcomed me onto the bridge. I immediately asked about the course change, and Andrey explained that it was a "live fire exercise". I was sure that was what it was, and Andrey went on to tell me that we would only be going north for another 10 miles. We had already gone 10, so, it would not be a total loss for the day, but we surely lost all of the afternoon's progress.

I told him that I could show him my pictures, if now were a good time. He agreed quickly. So, I climbed all the way back down to the boat, and grabbed my computer. Then I climbed all the way back up to the top again. It was a real workout!

Andrey was very attentive, and seemed to really enjoy all of my pictures, and the general "show & tell" exercise. We talked for about 45 minutes, and I said I needed to collect my dried laundry, so as not to irritate other crew. We shook hands and said our goodbyes.

The clothes were indeed done, having so much more efficient machines made the whole process much shorter and convenient. I packed up all of my freshly folded clothes into my net bag, and headed back down to the boat. By the time I was back on board, and had stowed my clean laundry, and then gone back up to the wheel house of the Mirage to check our progress, Andrey had already made his turn to the west. We were once again headed in the right general direction.

I went to dinner without cleaning up, but no one seemed to notice or care, which was great, and possibly sad, but more likely great. I sat down to a meal on the ship for the very first time with Trifle and Blocko, which was an unexpected comedic surprise. The two of them play off one another in an almost rehearsed way, making me almost feel guilty that I hadn't paid to see it. They were very entertaining.

This evening, as luck would have it, Allen and Janine showed up with such precision that Allen had to sit at the opposite corner of the table from me, while Janine, who I might add was looking more "fetching" than normal this evening, sat right next to me. Janine was wearing a very flattering pair of blue jeans, which did nothing to hide her features. Several times during dinner, when there was a humorous incident, I saw

Janine glancing sideways towards me to see my reaction. At some point during the dinner, Janine casually mentioned to me that their supply of Bud was less than she had originally thought, but was still about 12 bottles.

I happily offered to make the best offer for their Buds, and she brought rum up as the first choice for Allen, at which point Allen proclaimed that he actually “liked” Bud, to which I shot back that I had better up the ante, which was a pun to the planned evening’s Poker party on ZZZ. They all laughed. Janine suggested that they could “come round a little later”, and I politely declined, stating that there was no urgency, but I really wanted to straighten up the boat first.

I left them, and headed up to the officer’s office. I checked my e-mail, and was glad to see several waiting for me. Giovanna’s worried me. Apparently, the idiots at the US Embassy in Rome were giving my poor little Giovanna a very hard time about her visa request. In her e-mail, she asked me to produce another letter; this time describing the engine repair, and estimated time of 6 months. I sent her a reply, stating that I was unable to produce, and send, another letter, like I had before. However, I told her that I would probably have to get Tony involved. This wasn’t the worst thing, as Tony by now would have likely conveniently forgotten that he had agreed to let Giovanna come to America at all, much less at her former salary.

I headed back to the boat, and typed up a new letter, very quickly. I knew that if I was going to get any real help from the crew of the ship, it would be more likely from Andrey than anyone else, and Andrey was due to get off watch very soon. When I had the letter typed, printed, signed, stamped, and finally scanned, I raced back up to the bridge with the scanned letter on my flash drive.

I was glad to see Andrey, and he was more than happy to assist me. The deal was that I could not send an attachment on an e-mail from me to Giovanna directly, from the ship’s e-mail. For some reason, it had to be first send from the Captain’s e-mail address, to the corporate headquarters, who would then hopefully forward it to their agent in Genova. The agent would then supposedly forward the e-mail to Giovanna.

I thanked Andrey, and slowly made my way back down to the boat. I was starting to really worry about Giovanna, and whether there was going to be a real problem for her to get her visa. I started to feel very frustrated, and eventually annoyed. I knew that Tony would eventually have to be involved, and I didn’t want to speak with him. I decided to call Andreas and ask him to relay some info to Tony. I told Andreas to tell Tony that the US Embassy was asking Giovanna for a plane ticket. If that was true, it was the first time I had ever had a crew member asked this.

I also wanted Tony to do something that would prove he still intended to honor his word, and let Giovanna come over to join the boat. Andreas agreed to call Tony, and we

concluded our call. A little while later, the SATCOM rang, and it was Tony. He wanted to know “what this is all about”, and continued to tell me that he thought that this whole crew issue was already decided, meaning that none of them would be staying with the boat. I knew this was going to happen, and I became very angry. I reminded Tony that he told me that not only could Giovanna stay, but at her current salary. Tony then tried to argue the salary issue again, trying to get me to agree that I had approved that Giovanna would be paid 2500 in US dollars, instead of Euros. I again reminded Tony that he had already agreed to keep her salary the same, and he continued to complain about it. I finally came right out and accused him point blank of going back on his word.

That apparently got to him, and he reluctantly agreed, and finally admitted that he remembered agreeing to it previously. I was so angry that I could have said some very unpleasant things to him at that moment, but it would not have been good for me to do. We continued to speak about the bottom paint, and Johnny Helfrich. For some insane reason, Tony started talking about paying Johnny a daily rate, which would have been astronomical over a 6 month period. I suggested that he reconsider, and think of paying Johnny a monthly rate, which would cut costs tremendously. Tony agreed, at least for the moment.

After the conversation was over, I began to think that Tony’s way of thinking probably was that Johnny would only be working part-time, which is the only reason a daily rate would be less expensive than a monthly rate. I was sure now, that Tony was likely thinking that we would only need Johnny a day or two each week, and that is probably what he will try to get Andreas to agree to, when the discuss it next week.

At 2200, I changed my watch to the new time, setting it back one hour, to 2100.

I was very wound up, and had a couple of extra beers, while I tried to relax. I watched some videos, including Neil Young, and finally went to bed.

November 6, 2010

I heard very faint tapping on the supports under the boat around 0800. Then, a short while later, Andrey’s voice came over the radio. He called me and I answered. He had a transcript of the e-mail that went out to Giovanna, and wanted to leave a copy of it on my aft deck. I agreed, of course, and thanked him. Then, I rolled over and went back to sleep.

I awoke several times more, before finally getting out of my bunk at about 1145. I went to the engine room and cycled the EVAC, while checking the A/C. Everything looked fine, so I headed up to the wheel house to check our position and progress. I took a photo of the course diversion, which was still saved on the Transas screen. I started to straighten up the interior of the boat, in case I were to have guests later.

At exactly 1500, the ship started turning to the north, for no apparent reason. I am going to start calling these maneuvers "Crazy Ivan's", as that is what they remind me of.

A little while later, we went back to our original course. I will have to ask Andrey about it when I visit him later.

At around 1630, I cleaned up thoroughly, and at about 1700, I headed up to the officer's office, to check on e-mail. There were several there, including two from Liz. I was disappointed to see that Liz had sent me two e-mails with attachments. I felt bad, but I remember specifically telling her before I left Genova that I wouldn't be able to receive attachments after I left. She must have simply forgotten. I certainly appreciated the gesture on her part. Fresh reading material in this day and age is very precious.

I read an e-mail from Holly, which said that she had spoken with Mom, but the subject of Sierra never came up, so therefore, Holly believes that Mom hadn't met with her. I was annoyed, because I thought that I had asked Holly to find out, not to tell me if she happened to hear it mentioned. I was counting on Sierra's opinion of me to bolster my position with the manager upon my return to Florida.

I got one from Sue, with the usual descriptions of the latest gadgetry she was using to direct operations on the space station. I made sure that I responded to Sue, letting her know that I did indeed look forward to her e-mails, for obvious reasons. I also replied to Holly, asking her to please bring Sierra up with her next time. I suppose it can wait. God knows that Mom will be able to answer that long before I ever make it to Florida. I also told Sue that I found it incredible that Holly worked for a major communications firm.

I had some extra time before dinner, so I headed up to see Andrey. When I arrived I was greeted with the unexpected presence of the Captain, who was still on the bridge for some reason. I greeted them both, and thanked them both profusely for all of the assistance in getting the e-mailed letter to Giovanna. They were very nice about it, and acted as though nothing was more important. I mentioned the beautiful weather, and immediately regretted it. The Captain instantly knocked his knuckles on the imitation wood grain Formica counter top next to where he sat. Some sailors are very suspicious when people mention the weather. I knew that.

I also decided to ask about the sudden course change at 1500, and I got a very suspicious sounding reason from Andrey, which I took as, "I can't tell you the real reason", so I dropped it. Since the Captain was sitting, and looked as though he wasn't headed anywhere soon, I politely excused myself, and headed back downstairs. It was still only 1800, so I just stood at the port side of the swimming pool, and looked out over the ocean, and the other boats on the deck. Nothing was moving, except the tiny solitary figure, on the sun deck of ZZZ. I looked for another moment, until I realized that it was Emma, obviously on a treadmill, doing her walking.

I overheard Trifle, whose real name is William Trythall, call Lady Sheila on the radio. I remember thinking that he sounded a little exasperated, and louder than necessary. Allan answered him with a very normal sounding voice. Trifle, or Will, asked to go to 68, Allan agreed, and I switched as well. Will let go with a litany of profanity that triggered a laugh from Allan, but the gist was that Will was asking where Allan was, and wanted him back on Kai. Allan replied that he was “going to eat”, and would be returning in about a half hour. I looked, but I could see neither Allan nor Janine walking on their boat, the cargo deck, or the stairs leading up to the mess deck. I presumed they were on their way, or had already made it inside.

After a few more minutes, I finally decided to head inside, and see what was happening. I was the only rider in the mess hall so far, though. Ed, the Wartsila rep, on board for the sole purpose of insurance, since we were on only one of the two azimuth drives, joined me momentarily. We made good conversation for a few minutes while we were virtually alone. I mentioned the 1500 course change, and he had no knowledge of it, but was very curious. I asked him if he had seen the movie “Hunt for Red October”, and when he replied that he had, I told him that I was going to start calling the unexplained truns “Crazy Ivan’s”. Ed laughed, and thought that was very clever.

Soon, Emma and Adrianus joined us. We all spoke for a bit about different things, until I mentioned that we were the only riders present. Emma seemed mildly surprised at first, asking if they hadn’t simply already been and left. I told her that wasn’t the case. Emma then went on to describe the previous night’s activities aboard ZZZ, when they hosted the “Poker Night”. Apparently, things went on far longer than Adrianus wanted them to, and he described how he had to try and force them all to leave. Adrianus added that at his age, he needed a good solid day and a half to recover from something like that.

I described the radio conversation between Will and Allan, and Emma added that the others were all likely still “partying”, apparently continuously, since the previous night. Also, according to Emma, some of the guys took things a little too seriously, and got into arguments, or fighting of some sort. Emma went on to say that it would be the last time they hosted anything. I could understand why, and I told her so. I was not sorry I missed it.

I spoke with Adrianus about his power problems. He didn’t seem to have any idea why he was experiencing issues, but in the conversation, Emma interjected that she was only running one washer and one dryer. I was stunned that she was able to use even ONE dryer, and let her know so. She seemed unfazed by my comment. Apparently they don’t think that the use of an electric dryer is the cause for their power failures. I added that I had everything trimmed to the bone on Mirage, which I learned from experience on the previous journey. I also brought up my tank capacities, and mentioned my gray was high. Adrianus asked if I had separate systems, meaning black and gray. When I

answered affirmatively, he shrugged and suggested that I just dump it. I told him that it would go all over the deck, as I didn't have any kind of hose rigged. Emma looked straight at me and said "What do you think everyone else is doing?" OK, I guess it's an option. It might have to be, in any case.

Before I had finished, all three crew from Kimberly-II walked in. After nearly a week on board, the only time I had even laid eyes on the mystery man, was during the life boat drill. John and Kyle sat at the other end of the table, and Jacques, sat next to me. He was nice enough, if not a bit unkempt. He looked as though he had been living in the woods somewhere. Honestly, between Jacques, and both James, I thought there might be a contest going on. Jacques was very pleasant, however, and I spoke with him briefly. Kyle described Will's condition, which was apparently passed out on his aft deck. I thought to myself that it was only a mere 45 minutes earlier that he had that radio conversation, and pondered the young man's condition.

I headed back to the boat, and decided to do some writing, and watch a movie. I watched "Perfect Stranger", which I had seen before, but only once, and a long time ago. It was a better movie than I remembered. I stayed up quite late, but decided on no beer for once. It turns out that I don't think I need it anymore, so I will be able to ration it for the remainder of the trip.

I finally went to bed around 0230.

November 7, 2010

I awoke to another very smooth day. It was nearly impossible to tell that we were underway. I heard Kimberly-II ask to OOW, in this case the Captain, if they could go onto the catwalk, to tie a line to it. Not surprisingly, the Captain stated that he would send the Bo'sun to them. I went back to sleep.

I finally got up at lunch time, and went to cycle the EVAC. I noticed that the low level alarm had finally stopped showing. As much as it was probably better for the vacuum, I was still aware that we were already a week out, and had barely made it to the Canary Islands. I also made a mental note to ask Andreas why the gray water level would be so high, so quickly. I thought of the ice maker, but couldn't imagine that being the cause.

I went up to check out progress, and noted our course and speed were relatively unchanged. No Crazy Ivan's in the middle of the night apparently. I started thinking about the e-mail I sent to Liz, and I was regretting it more and more. I was upset about Giovanna's visa, Tony's attitude, and my plight. None were excuses for being tactless with the one person in the world who seemed to truly care about me. I needed to apologize to her.

I eventually got cleaned up, and went to the officer's office to use their computer. There were two from Giovanna, which I saved for last. I read one from Sue, which was both very nice, and annoying, at the same time. I had obviously not described Sierra to her very well. I was hoping that she would understand better than what it appeared she did. I felt compelled to dispel a few myths about Sierra, and clear the air.

I opened Giovanna's e-mails with trepidation. There were two, which bothered me for some unknown reason. I decided to open the older one first. It had a very nice, and simple thanks for the efforts made to get her the letter. She went on to say that she was now feeling more confident about getting the visa tomorrow, in spite of her earlier concerns. She mentioned that she had not heard from Tony at all yet. The most important part was the mention of the letter I had sent.

Apparently, I had understood incorrectly. The letter was something she felt that she needed at the point of arrival in the US, not at the embassy in Rome. I was relieved and a little irritated at the same time. If I had known that, I would not have raised the alarm like I had two evenings ago. I wasn't that upset that I had my 'go around' with Tony, but I never like representing a point that is incorrect, or groundless. In this case, I think I could be forgiven for the misunderstanding, but I didn't like it. At least Giovanna hadn't e-mailed to tell me that Tony had hassled her so much that she quit.

I noticed that the pool area was set up for a BBQ, and Andrey confirmed that, when I visited him later. While I was writing a response e-mail to Sue, the fire alarm went off, and I, being a Captain, immediately felt compelled to report to the bridge. It is from years of experience, and in spite of the ship's crew not needing me there, I went, nevertheless.

Andrey was very busy answering alarms, and alternately talking on intercoms, and portable radios. I made eye contact with him, and he had a twinkle in his eye, but didn't stop. The Captain showed up momentarily, and as he reached the top of the stairs to the bridge, we made eye contact, and I tried not to think that the look he gave me was out of annoyance at my presence. As much as I want to, and need to, go to my own wheel house during any emergency, I also knew that there was a good chance that the cook had set off the alarm down at the BBQ grill. Andrey flashed the "OK" hand signal to me, with a little smile, as he hurriedly followed procedure with the Captain, and I took that as my excuse to leave.

I went back to e-mailing, and decided to visit Andrey after I was done. At 1810, I walked up and all was calm again, with Andrey alone on watch. A beautiful sunset was in the making, and I walked around the front of the bridge windows, surveilling the bridge. Andrey caught me, and motioned me in. I walked to the open door on the starboard side, and we talked. As I had expected, the cook had started the BBQ fire right next to a

generator ventilation duct, which was sucking outside air into it, for cooling. The duct has a strategically placed smoke detector, as no one was thinking of BBQ grills when they designed it. I guess it is the same on ships as it is on yachts. Andrey and I had a good laugh about it.

After Andrey made a general announcement, inviting everyone to the BBQ, I decided to excuse myself, and go join them. The food was very good, and I sat down next to Allan, across from Ed. James Woods offered me a cold beer, and I gladly accepted. It was a far cry from the BBQ's we had on the last trip, but it was good anyway.

The conversation was good, and after a while I excused myself to check e-mails. Emma protested, telling me "But we're not through with you, Russ", to which I felt guilty enough to answer with, "OK, I'll be right back".

I checked e-mails quickly, as there were none, and decided to check in with Andrey again. Unfortunately, I found the Captain on watch, "watching" a movie, on his computer. I politely thanked him for the BBQ, which he responded to accordingly.

I kept my word, and sat between Rene and Adrianus. The conversation was very good, and I politely turned down Rene's offer of another Heineken. Emma offered me some red wine, but I turned that down as well. I am not nearly as well-equipped to return the favor on this trip as I had been previously. In the middle of conversation, Emma mentioned that she was rather quite enjoying herself on her "cruise". Rene pressed her for explanations to which Emma started to describe how great it was, emphasizing the fact that she had Adrianus with her "to share it all with", to which Rene countered with "Why don't you just rub in it in a little more, why don't you?". I added "Yeah!", to which everyone laughed.

Emma was in the middle of some point in the conversation, and made a comment that was something along the lines of "...typically American; I want it, and I want it now!". I piped in, declaring that her stereotyped opinion was not typical of all Americans. I believe that Adrianus was probably very cognizant of the implications of the exchange of words between Emma and I.

I defended myself, which, looking back on it might not have been necessary. Frequently, when foreigners are very comfortable around you, they often forget that you are American, perhaps because you don't act like their version of an American, and then they slip, and out spills a bigoted remark. I suppose that it could be viewed as them not seeing us as the stereotypical Americans, and as such, some sort of convoluted compliment. However, if no one else makes it clear for them, that they are carelessly spewing their rhetoric directly in front of an American, I will always happily remind them myself.

I finally excused myself a second time, this time checking e-mails once more, before going back to the boat. We were passing La Palma, one of the islands furthest west in the Canary chain. We could see a couple of the light houses off the port side.

I will be glad when we finally start to head west, instead of south.

I checked the Transas a little while later, and a course change had been mad, this time to WSW. We had been going SSW since passing through the Straits of Gibraltar, until now.

Finally!, We're heading west!

All night, it seemed like, Ben, from Como, and Will, from Kai, were calling each other on the radio. Unfortunately for everyone else, the radios are kept on, and by our sides, 24/7, for emergencies. That means that not only did everyone hear the two on the radio, we had no choice, unless we decided to shut our radios off, which I did, finally, sometime after 4 AM.

I had fallen asleep several times, only to be re-awoken by one of these two idiots. On top of that, one of them was making this radio call, several times; "Motor Yacht Kai, Motor Yacht Kai, this is the Yacht Express, Yacht Express, over". The OOW on the bridge of the ship heard this of course, and correctly tried to answer the call, giving the caller the benefit of the doubt that they were actually calling the ship, and had either forgotten, or never been trained properly on proper radio procedure. Each time the OOW answered, there was no response from the caller. The end result is ultimately a "prank call", whether or not it was intended to be, notwithstanding.

November 8, 2010

I awoke sometime shortly after 0800, and remembered that my radio was off, so hoping that the previously described antics had ceased, I turned it back on. I rolled over and fell back asleep.

At around 0815, the radio crackled to life, and it was John from Kimberly-II, calling ZZZ. He asked to meet with Adrianus on his aft deck. I had a feeling that I knew what was going on, and within minutes, I would be proven right. John called Mirage at 0820, and asked to switch to 68, after which, he asked me to join them on ZZZ. I agreed, and I asked for a few minutes to get ready.

When I walked over to ZZZ, John was on the cargo deck finishing up a cigarette. We both climbed ZZZ's stern ladder, and were greeted by Emma, who seemed anxious. We found our own way down to the crew mess, where Adrianus joined us. John started by saying that he wanted to perform some sort of a half-assed courts martial. I was

guessing that he was either prior military, or a wannabe. Adrianus and Emma were smart enough, and confident enough, to immediately point out the fallacy of John's idea.

I finally chimed in after I had heard enough, and warned John that Adrianus and Emma were correct, in that the guilty parties, along with the ones who might not be guilty, would not take him seriously. Emma made a suggestion that the matter be brought to the attention of the Captain, or 1st Officer, Andrey. John reluctantly agreed, after backing down from his plan to form an ad hoc lynch mob. I agreed with Emma, and John finally offered to be the representative, and go up to the bridge.

I was offered a nickel tour by Adrianus, and I accepted. The bridge on ZZZ was great, and very simple, with vertical windshield glass, and plenty of room. There were the ever-present touch-screens and LCD displays, so common these days. It made Mirage look like a hold-over from the 60's. He also showed me a very nice book that had been printed especially for the ZZZ, which showed all of the systems, along with photos. It was remarkably comprehensive, yet easily read. I wanted one! I also liked their engine room, which in typical Trinity fashion, was cleanly and neatly organized.

As Adrianus was finishing up the tour in the ER, I heard one of his A/C compressor frequency drives wind up. After about 20 seconds of running, he lost all shore power. I don't know why this keeps happening to poor Adrianus, but I strongly suspect that he is simply drawing too much amps, and he doesn't want to believe it. They have already admitted that they were using a clothes dryer, so I know that they are on the edge.

After he called the OOW, we walked back aft, to the swim platform, where we saw young Will busily painting anti-fouling on the bulbous bow section of Kai. We both chuckled, and I thanked him for the tour, and offered one on Mirage, which he accepted, for a later time.

When I climbed down, and started heading back, I noticed Bryant preparing to polish his starboard prop, so I walked over to say hello. We exchanged pleasantries, while discovering that we have missed each other daily, due to him going up for only lunch, and me only for dinner. He asked about American DVD's, and I told him that I had some. We agreed to have a meeting later in the day, and said goodbye.

I met John at the back of my boat, and he had just come down from speaking with both the captain, and Andrey. He said that they sort of threw their hands in the air. I compared it to a neighborhood nuisance, and calling the police. I proffered that the ship's crew might do something after someone either hurts themselves, hurts someone else, does some damage, or dies. John understood, laughed and agreed. I then told him my electrical nightmare story about the Time.

I tried to go back to sleep, but I couldn't, so I got back up, and began a wash-down of the aft deck, transom, and swim platform. I saw Ben, who greeted me. He was doing something very dirty, which involved going in and out of various parts of the boat, and going underneath. As I was washing, I heard my radio, and it was the Captain. He was calling all the riders, and stated that there would be a "safety meeting" on the bridge, at 1700 this afternoon. Ben was on his swim platform at the same moment, and he looked at me with wide eyes.

Ben has odd facial expressions. I have noticed that he only smiles with his mouth, and rarely shows his teeth at that. It looks ungenueine, whether intentionally or otherwise. Unlike some people; for instance Giovanna. When she smiles, her entire face, including her mouth, her eyes, and her eyebrows, all move and complete the smile. There is never any question about how she is feeling. She wears her heart on her sleeve.

I packed things up at 10 of, and went inside to change out of my dirty work clothes. I then headed up the long climb to the mess deck. I was first in, and was quickly joined by Jacques, and Bryant. Jacques immediately complained about the trouble-makers who were the reason for our "safety meeting" later. I sympathized, but purposely didn't add gasoline to that fire. John soon joined us, with Kyle, and soon afterwards, Allan walked in with Janine.

At a point when I was almost done, Tim, (Blocko) waltzed in, looking as though he had been scraping barnacles off the bottom of Kai. I was immediately ashamed that he was so indifferent to the mess deck policy of clean clothes only. Not two minutes later, Ben repeated the exact same scene, looking like his shirt was dripping with hydraulic oil.

I quietly leaned forward and told Bryant that I was ready to leave. He just as quietly agreed, and we silently stood and left with no further ado. We went to the Mirage, where we raided the DVD case. Bryant was very thankful for the DVD's, and I offered him a quick tour. We went to the wheel house, and the engine room. Afterwards, he left to get back to work, and I decided to do some writing.

I went back out after a short while to tackle some more washing. I moved up to the sun deck, where the scene was near catastrophic. There were soot stains everywhere, in addition to bird feathers, and what looked like bird droppings. It was disgusting.

I got my hose and started spraying. A lot came off just with water, but a lot did not. The staining was very bad in some places, especially along the outboard side of the davit.

The safety meetin at 1700 was looming closer, so I finished up in time to get myself all cleaned up. I was ready early, so I went up to check my e-mails. I was happy to see one from John Breaz, warning of USDA inspections. I also got a very nice one from Lynne Tracy. Holly sent me a quick one, trying to explain her way of divining information from

Mom, hinging somehow on the supposition that Mom has free calls to the US. I am not sure how that would verify whether or not she had met with Sierra, but I am well past trying to discuss it any further at this point.

I did not get an e-mail from Giovanna, which concerned me. I sent her a friendly reminder that I was waiting nervously for news about her visa status.

I went up one level, to the bridge, a few minutes ahead of schedule, for the safety meeting. By 1700, everyone was there, except for one of the main perpetrators; Will. Tim claimed that Will had bad headaches, which could easily be true, if only from the vast quantities of alcohol he has apparently consumed over the past few nights, and days.

The Captain appeared on the bridge, and the meeting was called to order. Andrey gave the lecture, which was a little “light-handed”, for my tastes. I still believe that everyone got the point, and hopefully, there will be no more shenanigans from now on. Andrey stated that it was a “dry vessel”, but admitted that people were drinking, which he didn’t have a problem with until he started to hear the abuses of the radio frequency used for hailing and emergencies; channel 17. He went on to state that the voices on the radio were obviously very inebriated, and let his concerns be known.

There was also a brief mention of people attempting to connect the pressure washer to an electrical outlet not necessarily correct for its voltage. Andrey warned sternly that the ship could easily have up to 480 volts at an outlet appearing to be 220 volts. The point was clear, at least to me. God knows with the others who were there. The meeting was over after a brief statement from the Captain, and everyone seemed to want to stay, and mill around, for some reason. Maybe because they don’t visit the bridge that often.

I went back down to check e-mails, while I waited for dinner time. I wasn’t keen on going all the way back down to the boat, and turning around in a little while to climb all the way back up. There were no e-mails, and I let myself become even more concerned. I was imagining Tony getting involved somehow, and screwing everything up. He is fully capable. Giovanna knew very well that I was waiting to hear her news, so it bothered me that she hadn’t sent anything.

I became restless waiting in the office, so I decided to go back up and visit with Andrey again. He was on the intercom, so I waited patiently out on the starboard wing. I noticed something I hadn’t on my previous voyage. There were analog gauges on each side of the bridge, viewable from the wing control stations. These gauges indicated the pitch and direction of each Azimuth drive.

Andrey got off the phone and immediately apologized for keeping me waiting. I told him that an apology was unnecessary. I was just there to have a little conversation. We then

had a great conversation, about many subjects, including his tolerance for coffee, and anything else which might raise his blood pressure. He did offer me one, which was actually very good.

I mentioned my friend John Breaz's yacht, "Sea Gull" had gone on a recent trip with the Yacht Express. Andrey remembered it, and smilingly corrected me by calling it "Sea Gull of Cayman". I told him about how John was taking over slowly as the new Captain, and that the older Captain was still there. Andrey told me that the Captain rode over on the ship. I stumbled around with Andrey for a bit, trying to figure out how he could have come to that conclusion. He finally insisted on looking up the name of the person in question on his computer. As I had suspected, it was neither John nor Knot. In fact it was James, or Jim, as I remember hearing it from John. Jim was the engineer, and now I was wondering how Andrey might have arrived at a conclusion that Jim was anything other than engineer. I would have to remind John of this over a beer some time.

In any case, I told Andrey that John had e-mailed me that apparently, the Dept. of Agriculture in the US was cracking down on arriving yachts, for food and plant violations. It sounds like federal governments worldwide are looking for ways to feed their coffers. Andrey seemed doubtful that they would be searching any yachts on the ship. He basically let me know what the standard procedure was upon arrival, which apparently has never involved USDA going around the yachts, looking for contraband. I silently wondered if that also applied to Customs.

He did mention that Australian Dept. of Agriculture forced several yachts to pay to have certain barnacles removed before they were allowed to float in their waters. He described the bore scope type of cameras they used to look up inside the sea chests of these yachts, to look for marine organisms. I told him about the Zebra Mussel epidemic in the Great Lakes, back home. He told me that he used to sail the Great Lakes, but didn't like the colder months. He also told me that it is standard procedure for ships now to exchange ballast water between ports, usually as far away from land, and in as deep of water as possible. He pointed out that the Yacht Express was exchanging ballast water as we spoke. He said that they were doing this very carefully, tank by tank, so as not to alter the stability of the ship while underway at sea.

We also discussed the Dockwise vessels, and how DYT was a small branch of Dockwise, solely dedicated to yachts. Finally, it was time to go back down, to dinner.

I joined Allan, Janine, Antony, Ed, and Ben. We all had a good conversation, and Allan and I discussed the "Bay of Pigs" incident. He had just started watching the movie "The Good Shepherd", which mentions the incident. I told everyone that there had been 20 meter waves up in the English Channel yesterday, and earlier today, which explained the residual swells we were currently experiencing.

I was commenting on how much improved the food was on this trip, compared to the last time I crossed, and we were all sort of still sitting and talking, even after finishing our meals. Janine looked over towards the open pass-thru, and almost whispered "ice cream". Suddenly, we were all being served a very nice treat of ice cream, and it was very good indeed. I joked that I had better never leave the dinner table too quickly in the future, lest I risk missing another treat like this.

I left with Antony, and headed back up to check e-mails one last time. Antony said good night, and headed down the stairs, instead of up one level, which is what he was meant to do. I heard him back tracking as I climbed up to Deck "C", where the office was. I made one last check of e-mails. Nothing. I decided to write Andreas, and first thank him for the response on the gray water, but also to ask if he had heard from, or about anything to do with, Giovanna. I let him know that I was concerned, as today she was supposed to learn her fate. I left, and walked back down to the boat.

I wrote, and had a couple of beers, followed by some nice wine. After a few hours, I went to bed and slept very well. It had been a long day, especially after only about 4 hours of sleep the night before. The radio was silent, and I was grateful to John on Kimberly, as I fell into a deep, relaxing sleep.

November 9, 2010

I awoke to the sound of none other than John, calling someone. I rolled over and fell back asleep. I slept in, and finally got up when it was too painful to remain in my bunk. My left rib cage has been bothering me a lot lately. When I first noticed it days ago, I had first pondered the idea that I had aggravated an old injury. I had displaced a cartilage in an automobile accident back in the late 80's. In any case, prolonged periods of lying in my bunk seemed to be more and more painful lately, and I find that sleeping in begins to be impossible without a great deal of pain.

I went to the engine room, to take a look at everything, and cycle the EVAC. The first thing I noticed was a bright yellow light on the A/C panel. Compressor #1 had an inverter fault. I could easily reset the inverter, by squeezing around behind the A/C control panel, and simply pushing a little, unlabeled button on the small LCD control panel, located on the inverter itself.

My bigger concern was the reason why it failed. I saw that the water temperature was up where it used to be, right below the point where the system calls for compressor #2, so I decided to see if I could reproduce the sequence of events that caused the inverter failure. First I switched off the control for compressor #1. Then, I squeezed around the back of the A/C system, and reached up high to inverter #1, pushing the reset button. Right away, the fault lights extinguished, and the green lights lit, indicating that everything should be OK to operate again.

I went back out to the front, and switched the control for compressor #1 to VFD. It cranked to life right away, and I decided to go over to the electrical panel right away, to see if it was drawing too many amps. I don't remember exactly what the amperage draw was, after I solved the raw water flow issue days ago, but they were creeping up to around 77-79 now, as I watched the gauge. I waited anxiously for it to complete its cycle, and it finally did, with no other apparent issues. I then cycled the EVAC, as I had been waiting, not wanting to risk a power failure, in spite of the fact that the EVAC was on the other bus bar, and therefore the other power cable. I wasn't sure if a combined amperage might, or might not, be possible to trip the breakers on the ship, and I didn't want to risk it. There was certainly no urgency.

I willed myself to stay put on board, instead of running up to the office and checking e-mails. Whatever happened to Giovanna, it wasn't likely going to change whether I got up there now, or in a few hours. I decided to do some interior housekeeping.

Before I started my work, I checked the Transas. We were still on the same course, set by the Captain two nights earlier, when making the gentle turn to WSW, after being abeam of La Palma Island, in the Canaries. The heading was direct to Martinique, and I checked the range. It was 2129 miles. At our average speed of 10 knots, that is approximately 8.9 days, so let's call it nine.

I vacuumed all of the main and upper level, and used the non-powered attachment, to reduce amperage draw. I also used the broom and a dust pan for the crew stairs and crew mess. It felt better to have the floors cleaned. I heard the vacuum slow once, and shut it off immediately, thinking that I must have plugged it in to an outlet on the same bus as the A/C compressor. I heard what I thought was the compressor running, so I went down to the engine room to have a look. It was indeed running, and I decided to check the amps. This time, as before, the amps were greatly reduced. I saw them top out at 65 this time, which was a solid 10 amp reduction.

It is interesting to me, that I have seen this pattern, where after the compressor cycles a few times, the amp draw goes down. I will ask Andreas if he can explain it someday. As I am writing this, I hear what I believe to be a strange humming noise emanating from the starboard side air handler in the sky lounge. I am probably getting paranoid and hyper-sensitive to everything now, but you know what they say; "Just because you aren't paranoid, doesn't mean they aren't really out to get you."

I decided to go down to the cargo deck and inspect the raw water discharge flow. It wasn't abnormal, but after what happened earlier, I felt compelled to increase the flow slightly, by opening my supply valve a little more. It probably did nothing more than give me a psychological feeling of security, but I didn't care. I also noticed that I had a little bit of water coming out of a discharge drain, located at the waterline, just at the forward

part of the engine room. It was a small amount of water, but I couldn't recall noticing it before, and I was making a mental note of it.

I heard some noise, sounding like someone was using hand tools, coming from the other side of my bow. I walked over, thinking that I might run into Bryant, but in fact, it was Allan and Ben, working on Allan's new zinc anodes. Ben was helping Allan, as the mounting holes were obviously not aligned with the studs on Allan's KaMeWa's. This hardly surprised me, as zinc anodes, or just "zincs", are frequently mass-produced, and one size does not always fit all.

I stood to their side, long enough to make my presence known, but neither said a word to me. Finally, likely more out of nervousness and awkwardness than politeness, Allan greeted me. I returned his greeting, and when Ben said nothing, I went about my way. The subject of zincs made me think of the small patches of paint missing from our own bottom, which Andreas had mentioned to Tony. I decided to take a closer look. Upon closer inspection, it appears that my description to Tony will fall in line with what I think is either a current problem, or at least a former one. Ha! "Current" problem. I made a funny. Let me explain.

Electrical shore power has been a potential source of trouble for metal-hulled boats for years. "Potential"; ha ha. I crack myself up sometimes. This is electrician humor, for anyone not getting this. The problem lies in grounding, bonding, which is similar to grounding, and electrolysis, or damaging stray electrical current, which can eat through an aluminum or steel hull. The signs are not all identical, but if you have ever seen bottom paint on a metal hull just pop off in an isolated spot, for no apparent reason, there is a good chance that there is an electrical problem to blame.

I looked at the many little spots where paint was missing, and I made a much closer visual inspection this time. What I saw looked like someone had been welding on the hull. Around the spots where the paint was gone, the area sometimes looked burnt, and the edges of the surrounding paint also looked like they were under high temperature. The truth is that the boat has been sitting in the water, in San Remo, where it would have been a relatively low temperature. However, electrical damage like this produces a very similar looking result.

I decided that since Tony has no intention of hauling the boat in the near future, I would take pictures. So, I went back up and got my camera, my reading glasses, and a flashlight. I walked all the way around the underside of the boat, inspecting, and taking many photos. The more I saw, the more I was convinced that we were dealing with stray current. In a couple of places, it looked very much like someone had struck an arc with an electric welder. The images clearly showed the surrounding paint peeling back like it had been burned from someone holding a torch to it for several minutes.

I decided that “Trash Separation Day” was upon me, so I started to pull it all apart, gathering several containers into the galley for the big job. I put all of the plastic in one bag, started putting all of the glass bottles and metal cans in another, while sorting through the less pleasant “floating dunnage”, and “food waste” into other containers. The remnants of our last meal as crew was definitely ripe, and I was disgusted with the smell and texture of the bits of food left over. Nevertheless, I have only myself to blame, and continued separating. Finally, I had a decent collection of plastic in one big bag, and an assortment of glass bottles and metal containers in another. I put the tiny bit of food waste in a very small plastic bag, knotted it close, and put it back into the covered trash bin. The paper products and other “floating dunnage” were left in the open top trash bin, now positioned alongside. I grabbed the two bags and marched off the boat, and up one level to the ship’s containers. There, I deposited the contents of each bag into their respective new homes.

Now, I really not only needed a shower, I really wanted one as well. So, I headed in that direction. After I got cleaned up and dressed in nice clothes, I did some writing. At about 1700, I decided to head up to the office, and check e-mails. I noticed that the deck was all wet, but this is not unusual, so I didn’t pay too much mind. I continued up to the office, and as usual, had it to myself. I checked, and I had several e-mails. Two from Andreas, which I thought was odd. One from my sister Sue, one from Liz, and one from John Breaz. None from Giovanna. That was worrisome.

I read Andreas’ two first. The first one was my e-mail to him, concerned about Giovanna, which had only a copy of the e-mail that Tony apparently sent to her, at some point yesterday, unlikely of any assistance to her visit at the embassy. I have no idea when he allegedly sent this email message to her, as there was no date or time of day on my copy. He also stated that he was “informed” that she was “working with Italian Customs”, which is not true, and I have no idea why he stated that. He may not be always the most obviously clever person in the world, but for someone in his position, at his level, and with his years of education and experience, it surprised even me that he thinks Customs **anywhere** would be involved in immigration issues.

He did put in writing that he wanted her to join the boat at the end of the month, which was somewhat reassuring, although I would like to know if any other correspondence has been exchanged between he and her. I am very wary of his intentions, and efforts to side-track my plans, and go back on his word.

Andreas’ second e-mail was his personal response to both my questions about Giovanna, as well as the gray water tank level. He did say that the galley ice maker does indeed drain into the gray tank. However, he was starting to be concerned as well about the high level. The bottom line is that I can, and will pump it if I have to. I was just trying to figure out where all the water was originating from. I asked him if Tony had

scheduled a meeting yet with the shipyard, and to keep me informed, as the way I put it, he was my only source of information. Hopefully he will keep me in the loop. He isn't the world's greatest communicator, and picks and chooses what and when he decides to share with me.

I read Liz next, and she seemed a little down. The weather was apparently crappy, and I let her know that I would be happy to have it, if I was there to share it with her. I also took a second to correct what seemed like a misunderstanding about my choices of riding with the boat or flying home. I guess I didn't explain it to her, that I had only two choices, ride with the boat, or quit, and fly myself back.

I read John next. He followed up with a weather report. He seemed to think that a bad system was headed "east", from Haiti. That sounded odd, but a lot of tropical systems were acting strangely this year. I told him about my conversation with Andrey the previous evening, and how Andrey was convinced that the person riding with John's boat had said that he was the Captain. John will find that either amusing, or irritating, but interesting, either way.

I read Sue last. She was also mentioning the weather there. She wasn't happy that apparently the AIS tracking website had lost the Yacht Express. I wasn't sure if her hypothesis that it utilized land-based systems was correct or not, but I decided that I could at least give her our current position, course, speed, and miles to go to Martinique. I also made what I hope will be the last comment about Mom and Sierra.

I had some time before dinner, so I decided to visit with Andrey. He was busy on the telephones, so I waited quietly out on the port wing, and watched the sea and the sky, as the sun became obscured by clouds. After a few minutes, Andrey welcomed me, and we spoke for a little while. I told him of my concerns, and tried to make light of them.

Finally, I decided to head down to the mess deck, at 1815, which was when I normally went. The official posted time for dinner is 1830, in spite of the fact that I had previously been there earlier, and just helped myself to salad or soup in the past, with no problem from the crew. Usually, I am the first person there, but tonight, the entire first table, where I have always sat, was occupied. I saw John and Kyle from Kimberly, Allan and Janine from Lady Sheila, Ed, and Ben.

I quietly got my salad and sat down at the empty table next to theirs. I felt strangely obvious, in spite of there being no real reason for it. After all, "John the Complainer" was sitting there next to Ben, the "complaineé". I did overhear snippets of their comparatively quiet conversations. Most of the subject matter was concerning visas. Also, most of the stories were about incidents in the United States. Mind you that not one of the occupants of that table were US citizens. Their apparent irritation with boardings by the US Coast Guard, in US waters, went unanswered by me. I quietly

decided that I was isolated enough, without separating myself even further by defending the US Coast Guard's right to board yachts in US waters, and question foreign nationals regarding their legal status to work there. Kyle was even chuckling as he described how they covered up the true identity of an illegal crew member, by telling the Coast Guard that she was a guest.

I finished my meal, walked over to sign in on the daily "sign-in" list, and walked out, without having exchanged a single word with any of them. I felt very alone, and I wondered how much of that feeling I was personally responsible for. After all, I was in a very similar frame of mind starting my last journey. Wasn't I?

I decided to try one last time for e-mails. There were none, so I simply walked out, and began climbing down the whole way to the cargo deck. In order to access the cargo deck, the normal path is to leave the inside stairwells on the Forecastle Deck, which is one level above the mess deck. I opened the watertight door on the forecastle deck, and began the rest of my journey using the exterior stairs.

As I approached the lower levels, I was reminded once again of the water leaking out of one of my discharge drains. I could hear what sounded like loud cascading splashes of water, and I decided that I had better investigate it. I walked over to it, and knew exactly what the first thing I should do was; taste it. If it was salty, I had a raw water leak, which could be disastrous. If it was fresh, I could have either another mystery to add to my gray water level/ice maker drain issue. Or, I could have a fresh water source leak somewhere on deck, which was more likely.

I reached out and got some on my fingers. I brought it to my mouth and tasted it. It was fresh. I had already been fairly sure that this drain was a deck drain, so my most likely culprit was a deck hose fitting, or a hose itself. Just then, John and Kyle walked up. I explained what I was doing, and John agreed with my suspicions. I said goodnight, and went up to the boat, stopping on the main deck only long enough to remove my relatively clean socks. It wasn't my first day at this.

As soon as I climbed the steps to the sun deck, I could see the water shining in the light. Obviously, there was a leak here. I suspected the hose connections. I walked around to the spigot, but what I found surprised me a little. It wasn't a fitting, per se, but an adapter hose, which I had until now thought was a sturdy nylon-reinforced hose. I will look at it closer tomorrow, in the light, but the hose looked to have completely separate inner and outer sleeves. In any case, there was a large pin-hole, which was spraying water a good three to four feet over to the area outboard of the crane.

The immediate solution, and the thing that I should have done the other day, was to shut off the spigot. So I did. Problem solved.

Ben called Allan, and invited him for some 'table tennis', but Allan declined, having no doubt, better things to do tonight than play with a small plastic ball and a paddle.

I sat down at the computer, and had a glass of wine.

At 2000, the SATCOM rang, and I was certain that it was Tony. It was, and we discussed a variety of issues, including Giovanna. He was much calmer this time, and so was I. He had apparently found out that Giovanna had indeed gotten her visa. I still cannot figure out why she hasn't told me, unless for some reason, her e-mail didn't get through to the ship. Tony broached the subject of Giovanna's pay again, this time trying to strike a balance with me, between the floating exchange rate between the US dollar and the Euro, and something that might make sense, even to Giovanna.

I told Tony, honestly, that I would wait one more day to hear from her via e-mail, as I was reserving the SATCOM for emergencies and speaking with him. He praised me for keeping an eye on that expense, but the die was cast. He wanted some sort of pay cut, and he was adamant that there would be no continuation of her pay in Euros. He was also adamant reducing her pay, partially because of the exchange rate. The fact was that, according to Tony, the Euro was currently back down to 1.3 something.

Tony expressed again, that he had studied the salary charts, and for deckhands, we would obviously be paying above the upper limits of the scale. However, due to the agreed increased job responsibilities, and titles, he would be renaming her roles, and agreeable to rate of pay much higher than regular, or even experienced deckhands. I knew that he was partially doing this to reassure himself that he was doing what he thinks he is being paid to do, cut costs everywhere, all the time. I was fairly certain that he also was at least a little apprehensive of being questioned by Mr. Hubner at some point.

Probably according to plan, he wore me down, and I reluctantly agreed, finally, to speak with Giovanna, with permission to use the SATCOM, to come to some resolution about this. I agreed, based on the premise that the final deal would be amenable to all parties. I told Tony that I would wait one more day to hear from Giovanna by e-mail, after which I would call her directly. He approved of my plans. I felt the burden of being the person who would now have to deliver the bad news to Giovanna. Now, by default, instead of it looking like Tony was going back on his word, I was going back on *my* word. Would she understand? Does it all really matter in the end? I want a new job, but I also need the time to take care of personal business, and wanted the time I am owed, to take vacation.

Tony acted surprised that I wasn't more informed, being that, as he said it, I had been "copied" on all of his e-mails to Giovanna. I asked Tony what e-mail address he was copying me with. He didn't seem to understand, so I point blank asked if he was copying

to my mirage e-mail address. He finally understood, and the answer was affirmative. I politely, (as politely as I could), tried to explain to him that I had no internet access on the ship, and therefore, no way to access my Mirage e-mails. He still seemed confused, so I tried to explain how the system works. I think I could actually *hear* his eyes glazing over, so I cut it short.

I also discussed many other things with Tony, and the conversation went fairly well, and went tremendously, compared to our last conversation. He tried to get me to reassure him about the appearance of the exterior paint. I basically refused. He said that now that the boat was out of the water, and that I could stand next to the boat, how the section of the aft starboard hull looked like. I tried to explain to him that standing on the cargo deck put me so low, that I could not see it at all. He laughed, and I am not sure why. He laughs at moments when almost any other person would not laugh or find a situation humorous. He pressed me to tell him if I thought that the paint now looked better or worse. I refused. I told him that it looked the same. He tried one more time. I held my ground, and repeated that it looked “the same”. He struggled to arrange the words of his inquiry a third time, but finally gave up, and mumbled something about him thinking that it would “pass muster”, meaning Mr. Hubner’s approval. I remained silent. I never accepted the final paint job. Tony stepped in, and took all control of that, and all responsibility along with it.

I made sure that Tony knew about the hot spots on the hull, that I had catalogued earlier today. He asked what he could do for me while he was in Florida, which would start tomorrow. I asked if he meant boat business. He said “no”, and that he was referring to my personal affairs. I told him that he really couldn’t do anything, and that I needed to be there for that. He proudly stated that was all “solved now” and I immediately started laughing at his comment. He was unsure why I was laughing, and started to sense that he had missed something.

After I stopped laughing, I told him that since I had been asking for emergency leave since last July, I hardly considered things “solved” now, as I made my way back to the United States on a slow boat to China. He saw my point, and admitted that I was right.

I wasn’t *un*happy that we concluded our conversation on positive terms, and I am sure that he was also glad. It is not now, nor has it ever been, my intention or desire, to upset, or disagree, or argue, with Tony. It just happens.

I stayed up for a while, working on the computer, and trying to relax. I heard the “table tennis” players return from their games, on the upper deck of Como. Especially clear was James’ voice, from Perle Noir. He had a habit of expressing himself loudly, and suddenly, especially after drinking. The outbursts were not often enough, or loud enough to disturb me, and the music could have been louder without bothering me, as I

could barely hear it, but noticed that they were playing CCR, which is from my generation, not theirs. I guess great music is timeless.

I finally went to bed, sometime after midnight. I was unable to hear anything from next door, once I was ensconced in my cabin.

November 10, 2010

0620, and I was awake, for some reason. I had had a vivid dream, involving my good old friend, Gary Roberts of all people. He had me as a guest at his home in the Keys, but it was a different home this time, and it was a 2-story duplex, on the ocean side.

I tried, but I couldn't go back to sleep. My lower left rib cage was very sore, and I was beginning to think that I had cracked a rib at some point recently. I don't remember how, but with all of the rolling around the first few days at sea, I bumped into a lot of things, and bruised myself plenty of times.

I finally gave up trying to go back to sleep, and decided to get up. I rolled out, and went up topside to check the weather. It looked like one of the best days yet, but there was still a swell that was rolling the ship gently back and forth. I decided to do several things this morning, including laundry, and fresh water replenishment.

I began with the fresh water, which required some thought. The fitting on the ship was larger than a standard wash-down hose, so I had to scrounge around in the plumbing parts Andreas kept under the bed of the starboard aft guest stateroom. After a lot of searching, which also netted a lot of trash, Andreas, I luckily found the exact adapter that I needed. With Teflon tape in my pocket, and a large wrench in hand, I went down to the cargo deck. The fitting was such an easy fit, that I considered adding an extra few wraps of Teflon tape, but decided to see how it worked first. Once I had the adapter firmly in place, I screwed on the quick-disconnect fitting, which would accept our hoses.

I went back over to the stern, where I had already draped one end of our fill hose over the edge of the swim platform. I grabbed it, and drew it around the front of the little boat along the outboard wall of the cargo deck. I was very pleased when the hose reached the entire way to the spigot, and I connected it, and opened the valve. I went back up and checked the level gauge, just so that I would have some sort of reference point.

With the fresh water tank now filling, I decided to get some laundry done. I sorted the whites from the colors, and decided that I didn't have a full load with only my personal clothes. So, I checked in the hampers, and was surprised to see that someone had dumped a whole pile of black Mirage t-shirts in there since I last looked. It was either Nicolas, or Andreas, and I suspected the latter. I grabbed the whites, and threw two

bags together. I only took the one bag up first however, as going up or down a ladder with a laundry bag over one shoulder, on a rolling ship, is a bit of a dare-devil act.

I went to the crew laundry, as the machines are commercial, which makes them more efficient, and quicker. I dumped the first bag in, and started the machine. I decided to go and check e-mails, since I was almost all the way up, by that point.

Finally! Giovanna sent me an e-mail! I opened it right away. It was strange, as she never mentioned her visa, but only wanted to show me a copy of an e-mail that Tony had sent to her. I suppose that this is one way for me to see what he has been doing. Her e-mail contained very little personal information, and consisted mainly of the copy of Tony's. She did mention that she was leaving for Sardinia "tomorrow", but I checked the date, and it appeared that she had sent it yesterday. That means that trying to get ahold of her today could be challenging, to say the least.

I sent her an e-mail, asking her why she hasn't yet told me that she got her visa, not letting her know that I had been told by Tony. I also told her that we (she and I) were going to have to work on coming up with a figure for her salary, in US Dollars, which would be then fixed. I informed her that we had until Friday morning, and that I would eventually try to call her to discuss it over the phone. I am not looking forward to that conversation.

John Breaz responded to my e-mail about his engineer impersonating a Captain. He also advised me to save some money for my eventual arrival. Liz sent a sad sounding e-mail, about isolation, and Marylyn going to Panama. I responded, telling her that I was very grateful for her friendship. I also asked why she thought Marylyn might be regretting her trip to Panama. Sue sent a long e-mail, and finally "got" why I was interested in Mom meeting Sierra. I was really starting to wonder about her. I thought I had made myself clear, but I obviously had not, because she seemed to really respond in a way indicating that she really understood now. I was glad, because I was struggling to explain it to her, and had just about given up.

I went back down, and checked the water level. It was still filling. I did some odd chores for a little while, and then went back up to the laundry to put my clothes in the dryer, and set the timer for 30 minutes. When I returned to the boat, the water tank was still not full, so I went down to the cargo deck and opened the valve completely. I went back up to the boat and sorted some more laundry, stuffing another bag full of whites, leaving the darks for another time. I headed back up to the laundry room at about 1100, with the second load of laundry, which gave the dryer the 30 minutes I set it for. The clothes were dried and waiting for me, but someone else had filled a washer, and the other was done and waiting for its owner, while a third had obviously dumped his clothes in a pile, obviously waiting his turn for a washer as well.

So, I folded my clean, dried clothes, and bagged them, grabbed both bags, and headed up to the officer's laundry. I was suitably disappointed. This was my first time using the officer's laundry, and as clean and neat as it was, the machines were toys, compared to the crew laundry. I reluctantly filled **two** of the small machines, and set the timers, after figuring the hieroglyphics out. I knew I would be waiting all day for these to finish. I returned to the boat, and finally decided to shut off the water fill hose. The level was very close to full, and I didn't want to continue monitoring it.

I sat down for a few minutes, and it was time for lunch, so I locked up and climbed back up. I was getting some exercise today, that's for sure!

I was first into the mess hall today, at about 1150, according to their clock. I dined alone until 1200, when Jacques and Kyle ambled in. They sat across and next to me, which was reassuring. Maybe I don't have leprosy after all! Bryant joined us next, and John rounded out our table. Allan walked in next, with Janine. They sat at the next table. Ben showed up, in his dirty painter's clothing, oblivious to the mess hall rules. He is a hard worker though. He was up early this morning, rinsing away any evidence of the previous evening's activities on the sun deck.

I told Kyle about my water leak resolution. Jacques, out of nowhere, began telling anyone who would listen, his theory on how to retire early, using compound real estate purchases. This would not be acceptable table conversation in the US, where anyone who tried that in the last 10 years is likely broke right now. I listened, bemused by the innocence he seemed to exude. He might be able to pull it off in South Africa. Maybe their economy and housing market aren't in a shambles, like the United States is now.

For the hell of it, I threw out that if I had purchased gold when everyone told me to, I would be rich right now. That brought some laughs, and John picked up the ball, by telling us about stock trading. Jacques quickly chimed in. Bryant finally piped up with his take on it, and Kyle was pretty quiet.

Right before I was ready to leave, Emma waltzed in, dressed so nicely, that I wasn't sure who she was at first. I get so used to seeing everyone in their crew uniforms, that I guess I wasn't prepared to see someone dressed differently. Loud enough for all to hear, I told her that I thought a movie star had arrived. She laughed, and seemed to enjoy the compliment very much. Adrianus was right behind her, and also laughed. He seems to be a very good-spirited man.

I excused myself, signed in, thanked the cook, and went up to check e-mails, and laundry. There were no e-mails, and the laundry was still going, and going. I returned to the boat, and did some writing.

I decided that 1315 was enough time for the washers, so I headed back up to “C” deck. I was sadly mistaken, and the machines were still running, but I could see that the cycle was supposedly close to “spin”, so I decided to wait right there. They did spin, if you could call it that. When I grabbed my clothes out of the crew washer, earlier, my full-sized towel was stuck to the overhead of the drum. The G-force is so great in that machine; I literally had to peel my towel from the drum, even though it was at the 12 o’clock position. That is definitely one of the reasons why the dryer takes less time.

I finally figured out how to open the toy washers, when the cycle completed, and the power light went off. Maybe I didn’t figure it out, but after several tries, it allowed me to open the door. I switched everything from the washers into the dryers. I grabbed what I thought was part of my clothes from the first washer, and went back to get the rest, except there was no more! I forgot how tiny they were. I set the dryers on 100 minutes, which seems like a ridiculously long amount of time. Oh well.

While I was all the way up there, I thought I would chance a look at the e-mails. I was very surprised to see two; one from Giovanna, and one from Liz. I opened Giovanna’s first. She was at the airport getting ready to board her plane to Sardinia. She gave me a time estimate for when she expected to be at home, which was 1900 her time, 1700 ship’s time. She gave a very thoughtful answer to the salary question, stating some facts from the exchange rate trend, etc. She also mentioned that to keep her 2500 Euro rate, she would like to start by asking for \$3600 a month. I know that Tony will balk, but I will remind him of his verbal agreement, and her increased responsibilities. It is basically a promotion, without a raise in pay.

Liz explained the Marylyn thing, and it was so humorous, that I laughed out loud, which felt very good, and I let her know that.

I went back to the boat, did some chores, and returned to the officer’s laundry after 1500. The clothes were done and dry. I folded them, bagged them, and made my way back downstairs.

At precisely 1700 ship’s time, 1900 Sardinia time, I placed a call to Giovanna. She didn’t answer, but I got her voice-mail, on which I left her a message that I would try calling her in exactly 30 minutes. The time actually went quickly, and I tried again. This time Giovanna answered. It was good to hear her voice, and we talked briefly about the fact that two attempts to e-mail me with the good news about the visa had failed. She told me that the message came back, marked as “undeliverable”. I made sure that I told her how pleased I was that she did indeed obtain the visa. She told me that it was a 10-year, which is perfect.

After some more small talk, I got to the point. Giovanna knew that I would be calling, as we had successfully exchanged e-mails about her pay situation. She had already

provided me with a figure, and a brief explanation on how she arrived at that figure. I had no disagreement with her way of thinking, but I tested her resilience by playing devil's advocate. She held her ground with me, but I knew that Tony could be very persuasive. I informed Giovanna that after we concluded our conversation, I would be going immediately up to the office, and send Tony an e-mail. I told her that I would include her figure, and that I would support the figure with extenuating circumstances.

I instructed her to be ready for a call from Tony, just in case. She mentioned that she had already been on the phone twice with Tony, and the experience had left her with an unfavorable opinion of the man. I was hardly surprised. She also mentioned Stacey, and reminded me that I had a less than glowing opinion of her. Giovanna described my remarks about Stacey as not being "the most clever girl". I laughed, and kept her going. She was ready for the fight, and I told her that it might **be** a fight. I listened while she justified her position, but the one item I would not try to use in my argument was when she mentioned the hardship and expense of being so far away from her family. That would play into Tony's hands, and he would then try to justify hiring a local person.

We exchanged some pleasantries before hanging up, and I told her about the broken propulsion unit on the ship, comparing it to the Mirage. She definitely understood the irony. She asked about the weather and sea conditions. I described the first few days of hell, as we left Italy and passed France. I gave her my best estimate for the arrival in Florida. We said goodbye, with the understanding that I would be calling her back, either later tonight, or tomorrow.

I locked up the boat, and headed directly to the office. I took my USB stick, as I would be copying the text of the e-mail I would be sending to Tony. I wrote the letter, and Bcc'd Giovanna. I wanted her to have a transcript, to refer to in case Tony called her, and tried to hassle her. I made sure that I hit all of the key points in the letter, and I asked Tony to respond via e-mail, to prevent any misunderstandings. The truth is that I don't trust him anymore, and for good reason. I made sure that I reminded him that he had agreed to keep Giovanna's salary "the same", back when we were still sitting in San Remo. I mentioned that I had confirmed this with him, **prior** to informing Giovanna. I copied the letter to my flash drive.

I hit the "send" button, and that was it

I decided to visit Andrey, and make sure he knew that Giovanna had gotten her visa. he was very glad as I would have expected. We spoke of many things, and I skipped dinner, as I had eaten lunch, and would like to avoid over-eating. We were in deep conversation, to the point where Andrey forgot to illuminate the cargo deck. We finally said goodnight, and I thanked him one last time for all of his assistance with Giovanna.

I checked for a response on the computer in the office on the way down. There wasn't one. I climbed back down to the boat.

Later, I went to the engine room to cycle the EVAC, and noticed that there was an inverter fault again, on compressor #1. I wasn't suspicious this time of raw water flow, so I simply switched off compressor #1, reset the inverter, switched it back on, and went to watch the amp gauge. Everything seemed well within acceptable parameters, so, when the compressor cycled off, I cycled the EVAC.

Tony never called. I would check the e-mails in the morning.

November 11, 2010

Veteran's Day, and also my brother's birthday. It was so calm, that I could hardly tell I was underway. I woke up after a very long, and good sleep. In my dreams, I was in Panama, on Mirage. A local Captain, operating a nice looking yacht, of about 75 feet, was trying to do a pivot turn, right off the starboard side of Mirage, and he apparently lost control, and put a very noticeable dent in the side of Mirage. The name of the yacht was "Sports", for some reason, or not. Even in my dreams, the Mirage gets damaged from other boats.

I cleaned up, got dressed, and grabbed some darks to do in the ship's laundry. I saw Allan sunning himself on the pool deck, talking with Ed. Ed had his back to me. I waved, and Allan waved back. I met the mess deck steward in the crew laundry, and greeted him. The machines were both running, but he told me that it might only be another 10 or 15 minutes. I said no worries, and I headed up to the officer's laundry instead. I passed Andrey on the way out, and he looked like he was ready for the pool, dressed in a bathing suit. When I arrived in the officer's laundry, none of the machines were in use, so I put the clothes that I could have all fit in one of the crew machines, into two of the toy machines, and set them running.

I went up one deck to the office, and checked for e-mails. There were none, so I sent one to Jan, asking her to please contact Tony, and have him check all of his e-mail folders, in case my message went to a "junk, or "spam" folder. I grabbed my detergent, and headed back to the boat. Hopefully Tony didn't get the e-mail, and isn't playing some sort of power-play game with me. I don't want to go by his "word" alone anymore, and he may be reluctant, or outright refusing, to agree to anything in writing. Maybe he didn't appreciate the tone of my e-mail.

I headed back down to the boat, once again passing the pool. This time I saw Janine lying there, in a very fetching black bikini. She turned to me as I passed, and smiled. We exchanged greetings, as I kept walking for the stairs.

At exactly 1100, I had my very first power failure of the trip. I was at my computer, when I heard the air handler stop in the sky lounge. Then, before I even stood up, the power came back on, at least the air handler started again. The ship may have been switching generators, causing a spike, or fluctuation of some kind. I decided that I had better go check the engine room anyway, just in case the A/C was acting up.

Upon first glances, the A/C was in great shape. The temperatures were 12 and 11, so the system had obviously just shut down on its own, having reached the set point programmed into it. I decided to have a look at the electrical panel, in any case. I am glad I did. The entire left side was dead. The air handler in the sky lounge was obviously on the right side. I called the bridge, and asked for an electrician. They responded, and within a few minutes, he appeared, coming down the exterior stairs.

While I was waiting on the aft deck, just outside of the engine room entrance door, I heard a compressor start up, and I was puzzled, because the left side was dead, and compressor #1 was on the left side. It didn't occur to me that compressor #2 would be running, as I had thought it would have waited for a higher temperature, but I was wrong. I went down a few steps, and I could see that Compressor #2 was indeed running. I started back up the stairs again, and having only run for less than a minute, it shut down. I went back and looked at the temperatures, but they hadn't changed significantly. Then I saw the code "A-C" flash in the outlet temp display. I thought that if compressor #1 fails, I will be in deep shit. Compressor #2 seems to have "issues".

After I explained that we had lost power on one cable, he went out onto the starboard catwalk, where he opened the weather-tight electrical box, which contains the circuit breakers. He signaled me to check my panel, and when I went down and looked, I had power again. I quickly reset, and re-connected the left side. Everything came back to life, and I went back up quickly to give the electrician the "Thumbs-up" signal, and thanked him.

I decided to check on my laundry, and check for e-mails. The machines were still powered on, and obviously near the end of their cycles, but there was no action. I didn't like these machines, and knew that they were queer, but I decided to check e-mails, and then check back. There were no e-mails, so I went back to the laundry. Still nothing. I decided to go to lunch, since they did have power. Maybe they just needed a little more time.

I was early, by about 12 minutes, for lunch, but as usual, I helped myself to the fresh salad bar. I sat and ate in silence, until Emma and Adrianus walked in. Emma was dressed nicely again today, and as they walked towards the table, Adrianus spoke and said, "I want to sit next to Russ", which was very nice. However, instead of him sitting next to me, Emma did. Then, before Adrianus sat down, he pulled out a small digital

camera, and started snapping photos of the mess hall. Then, he made it clear that he wanted one of Emma and I. I happily obliged, of course, and as he focused, Emma startled me by wrapping her arm around me.

After he sat down, we discussed my power failure. He mentioned that he had heard me call the bridge about it. I then moved on to different subjects. Emma mentioned that she was going to start working on "Touch", which caused me to do a double take. They realized that I apparently didn't know the full story, and they described the situation on ZZZ, where she had been supposed to start in the Caribbean. Apparently, she was day-working in San Remo, leading up to their departure for the ship. The idea was to take one of the other stew's place, while she had a serious operation, involving bone marrow transplants, and her brother. I believe that they were referring to the petite Italian woman I had seen many times. They then told me that the operation was called off, for some reason, and then, that either the Captain, or the owner, decided that they could not do without this other stew. A last minute conversation between Adrianus and the Captain involved the excuse that couples were not permitted, in spite of the fact that I believe the Captain's wife is aboard.

I described my battles with the manager to keep one last remaining crew member from the previous season. Bryant joined us, and sat directly opposite me, as he has previously. We spoke of many things, including gray water, black water pumps, Browards, and electrical problems. I finally excused myself, and said I was headed back up to the officer's laundry to try and figure out why the machines aren't cycling all the way through. Adrianus made a point, that the power failure I experienced earlier could have affected the machines, and resetting their power might help. Emma suggested just turning the knobs to the spin cycle. I thanked them both, and headed off.

I went back up, and sure enough, nothing had changed. I knew that I had to do something, so I tried advancing the dials. That produced an unsatisfactory result. They just made a lot of noise, and finally, after about 5 minutes, they shut off. I tried the doors, and they were still locked. I wasn't happy. I decided to try Emma's idea. I located the menu, and found the correct letter corresponding to spin. I moved the dial on each washer to that location, and they dutifully began to spin. It wasn't dramatic, but it was successful. Finally, the machines shut off, and I played the same game of trying to unlock the silly little doors. When I finally was able to, I switched all the clothing over to the dryers, and put them both on 100 minutes.

I then went to check for e-mails. Nothing yet. I hoped that we weren't experiencing the same problems we had when Giovanna had her issues with the ship's e-mail. I returned to the boat, and checked on the A/C. Compressor #1 was running, and I went to go check the volt and amp gauges. It was drawing almost 80 amps! The volts were also low, which could make it a "chicken or the egg" question. However, in this particular

case, I could not tell. I was concerned, so I quickly checked the raw water hoses. There were no visible bubbles in either line, so I let it go for now, and made a mental note to bring it up with the crew of the ship, as even when the compressor cycled off, the volts were still 6-8 volts low.

As I sat down in the sky lounge, and began writing, I heard a voice call out my name. I yelled back, and went down to look. It was Allan, holding a bag full of cold Budweisers. I welcomed him in immediately, of course. I ushered him around the card table, so that he could "shop" in the liquor cabinet. I immediately offered the two partially full (sounds better than partially empty) bottle of rum that I had mentioned to him days ago. He gladly accepted. I offered him a second look at the selection, telling him that I didn't drink spirits at all anymore, other than the occasional Rum Runner.

We spoke for quite a while, and I finally offered him the 25 cent tour. He happily agreed. We walked around, and while we looked at everything, we also began talking about the situation on the Lady Sheila, which was interesting. He realized that I wasn't entirely happy about my situation, and I learned that he and Janine were new to the boat, and that their previous French Captain was fired right before the boat loaded onto the ship.

I gave him my e-mail address, and we both agreed to stay in touch. Lady Sheila was going all the way to Ft. Lauderdale, which I hadn't remembered correctly, for some reason. I think I learned that upon meeting Allan, but had forgotten.

After Allan left, I quickly put the Bud in the sky lounge fridge, and then decided to check the laundry. I met Andrey and the Captain by the pool, on the way up. Andrey was preparing for his daily ritual of getting a hydro-massage. He described it to me the previous evening, while we spoke about ailments. He had been on the receiving end of a loose sailboat rig, 2 years ago. It smacked him across the chest, so hard that it warranted x-rays, and left very dark bruising for weeks. Now, he tried to get a daily hydro-massage, by having the pool water drained, and then re-filled, using the connection to the ship's fire main, which pumps clean sea water into the pool at an alarming rate, accompanied by a tremendously loud noise.

I went up, and one dryer was finished. I opened it, but the clothes were still slightly damp. I closed it, and started it again, but for only 20 minutes. The other dryer was still running, but for some reason, everything was already dry. I folded them, bagged them, and went to check e-mails. Nothing yet.

I went back down to "B" deck, and thought that it would be silly, and tiresome, to climb all the way back down to the boat, and all the way back up here again, in only 15 minutes, so I decided to wait. I walked across the hallway, and into the officer's lounge. There was an eerie absence of reading material, in spite of the abundance of bookshelves. I did finally discover an old copy of Dockwalk, from June or '09. I read it

cover to cover, and decided to check the dryer again. Everything was dry this time. Once everything was folded and bagged, I headed back down.

From the top of the stairs, four flights up, I could already hear the fire main blaring away from the noise of discharging a high pressure, high volume of sea water, into the pool. When I opened the watertight door on the forecastle deck, I walked over to the now, only partially filled pool, and witnessed Andrey's hydro-massage in action. He was on all fours, in about a foot and a half of water, and the blast from the water was hitting him squarely, in the middle of his back. I watched for a few minutes, and he adjusted the spot where the water hit his back, by moving his body.

I went back to the boat, and I heard the A/C compressor running. For some reason, I decided to check on it before I went in with my clean laundry. Compressor #2 was running, and there was no inverter fault on #1. I was puzzled. It was my understanding that the compressors were staged, so without shutting #1 off, or having a problem with it, I couldn't imagine how #2 would suddenly start before #1. I watched it for a moment, and decided to have a look at the amp gauge. No sooner had I walked over to the panel, I heard the compressor shut down. I immediately went back over to look at the temperature. It was still high, at around 14. And, as I had expected, the code "A-C" flashed in the outlet display. I did have a split second to look at the amps before it shut off, and they were low; around 55. That's perfect. If I could only get it to run without all of its inherent idiosyncrasies, I would be very happy.

I decided to leave it be for now. As long as #1 wasn't "cooked", or displaying any other problems, I decided to let sleeping dogs lie. I put the laundry away, and went about my business. After a little while I needed to cycle the EVAC, so I went back down to the engine room. This time, #2 was running again, but instead of shutting off at 14, it brought the chilled loop right down to 11 degrees! I was astonished, but not entirely optimistic. #2 has a mind of its own, and I can't trust it totally. I felt like Bruce Dern, in the movie "Silent Running". I was practically at that point.

After I settled down again in the sky lounge, I was sitting there wondering if I should check to see if the SATCOM was off. I decided not to check it. I wanted an answer from Tony in writing, after all. Suddenly, the phone rang. I knew it would be Tony. It was, and he sounded tired, for some reason. He was already at the airport, waiting to board his flight, and his first question was "How is the weather", to which I replied that it was OK, with as little enthusiasm as I could get away with.

He asked if I could get "the news", and I bit my tongue, because I suppose that it was possible to get some sort of news, if it was only verbal, or via an e-mail. I said no, and told him that we don't have television or internet, except for e-mails. He then told me about a cruise ship fire, down off the west coast of Mexico. Apparently 5000 people had

no electricity, running water, or working toilets. The partially broken down dock ship seemed much better by comparison. It didn't escape me that Tony might have mentioned it for that very reason.

He moved on to tell me about the highlights of his meetings, and I listened patiently to what he had to say. We discussed the shipyard, MTU, ZF, ABS, and John Helfrich. Apparently Geoff Balmer wasn't very complimentary about Johnny's mechanical abilities. He gave him a big fat zero on mechanical aptitude. That wasn't good news. Andreas and I both like Johnny, but he has a reliability problem. He sometimes doesn't answer his phone, and fails to return voice-mails, and e-mails. I knew that from personal experience. I guess that we wouldn't be using him, but Tony informed me that he would give Andreas and I the final say, which surprised me.

We finally got around to Giovanna. Tony surprised me by sounding resigned to standing by his verbal agreement, but (there's always a 'but'), he wanted to know where the figure of \$3600 came from. I lied and told him that Giovanna arrived at it using a direct currency exchange rate. He sounded a little disturbed by that, and used the tactic that "today's" exchange rate was something like 1.37, and that would make 2500 Euros less than \$3600 USD. I didn't argue with him. Instead, I pointed out that I am at a slight disadvantage due to the fact that I have no access to the current exchange rates.

I was very surprised when Tony started talking about the advantages of having a "known quantity" like Giovanna, and her level of experience, not only in yachting, but on the Mirage. He basically reiterated all of my points to make my argument, and at that moment, I knew that I was finally close to winning this long, hard battle with him. He admitted that a "know-nothing" deckhand would never be the right answer, and that we would still need someone for the interior, and to cook. I was quiet, but agreed on queue.

Tony asked me if she would accept \$3450, and I said that I would certainly find out, but that I was optimistic. I knew that Giovanna had started a little high, but it was not my intention to take advantage of her. I knew why she started high, and there were some sound reasons. Tony asked for a call back, following my discussion with Giovanna. I suggested that since he would be flying, and e-mail would be more appropriate. He agreed readily, and we said goodbye.

I called Giovanna and did my best to explain to her what Tony was thinking, and why. She countered with some valid points, which had heretofore gone unmentioned. She brought up her federal taxes, her doctor costs, and the bank fees that were charged whenever she received a wire. She was trying to cover for these things, and I didn't blame her. We talked about some things like US bank accounts, and how they were viewed by the US Immigration people, and the need for a different visa, if she would by

some chance establish that sort of thing. The people at the embassy had apparently done a good job of scaring her thoroughly, or she was being cagey, or both.

We talked about injury and illness coverage. I told her that the boat had always covered this in the past. She pointed out that she had no contract, and was just being cautious. I understood, and told her so. Overall, Giovanna sounded more amenable to the whole situation than what I suspect she was trying to sound. In other words, she needed some reassurance that she would not end up an indentured servant. She sounded much better as we continued to talk more. I suggested that she write me an e-mail with a list of her concerns, and send it to me right away. She agreed, and said that she was 45 minutes away from internet access. I told her that I could wait that long with no problem.

She also sounded tired. I sensed a bit of resignation in her voice, and it saddened me. Tony sounded tired, Giovanna sounded tired, and I knew that I was mentally exhausted from this.

I told her that I would send an e-mail to Tony, explaining those concerns, and that we would work everything out to everyone's satisfaction.

I called Andreas next, and asked how things went with Tony. He went over most of it, and I knew that I would have to pry whatever else I wanted to know out of him. We spoke about Johnny. Andreas mentioned Geoff's analysis of Johnny, and it wasn't good. Andreas also told me that he had left 5 phone messages for Johnny the other day, and that only earlier this afternoon Johnny returned his calls. I agreed, and told Andreas that Johnny had also been unreliable in the past. Andreas told me that Tony instructed him to seek other crew, and possible day help. He also mentioned that I was to get final approval. I was starting to feel like a Captain again, even if it was a little bone.

I told Andreas about the A/C, and the gray water gauge. I then asked him if he and Tony had discussed Giovanna. He said that Tony had said that everything was all set, and that a plane ticket was going to be purchased next week, Andreas thought. I told Andreas that the plan was to book the flight tomorrow, and that Tony was still trying to cut Giovanna's salary. I didn't get into the details of exchange rates, etc.

Finally, as we were about to conclude the conversation, Andreas remembered something. He said that Tony had mentioned to him that I sounded "burnt out". Andreas told me that he responded to Tony's comment by telling him that he wasn't surprised, as I had not had a proper vacation in years. Andreas went on to tell me that Tony had mentioned that I would be getting whatever vacation and time off that I needed or wanted. That sounded like good news.

Andreas wished me a safe trip, and I asked him to say hello to all of his family. We hung up. I got one of my newly acquired Buds out of the sky lounge fridge, and had a mini celebration.

I made a decision to have two meals today. I was going to have dinner, after already having lunch. I went up early, and checked my e-mails, and was surprised to already see an answer from Giovanna, waiting for me. I opened it, and she surprised me again, by not listing a whole bunch of concerns. Instead, she had a short message; capitulation was in the air, on both sides now. I was the only one who seemed to be still standing strong, and holding my ground. I “seemed”, because the truth is that I figured that I had to be just about as worn out over this than they were, if not more. I was tired.

Instead of the list of concerns, Giovanna admitted that she understood my position. She briefly explained how she realized that the exchange rate had changed between when she converted, and when Tony did the same. She simply stated that she was just trying to make sure she was getting as close to the 2500 Euros as possible, but she knew that it could go up, or down, and that it would. She added, “I don’t want take any advantage”, but she didn’t have to tell me that. I knew that already. Giovanna is an honorable person.

Giovanna mentioned an exchange rate scenario, where, as she described it, “If the dollar became strong I’ll learn less the 2500”. I was a little fatigued, but I had to re-read that statement a few times before I knew that it was completely incorrect. I made a mental note to myself to point that out in my response to her. the only remaining item of concern mentioned was the bank fee. I have no idea why she would be paying anything but a fixed amount, for the exact same amount being wired each time, but it will now fluctuate, as it will be an amount in US dollars, instead of Euros.

In conclusion, Giovanna said, “If you think I’m wrong let me know or tell me what is better. Wait news from you Giovanna”. She was ready to make a deal.

It was close to dinner time, so I decided to go down and have a meal, before writing what I was hoping would be the last in this battle across the ocean.

I sat down across from Ed, and John sat next to me. I can’t remember who else sat at our full table, but the next table was filled with the younger crowd, including Allan and Janine, Ben, and their group. Ed surprised me by coming “out of the blue” with a question about “the Italian girl’s visa situation”. His interest was not purely vicarious, or to be nosy; he was dealing with his own visa issues. I replied that she had indeed gotten her B1/B2, with 10 years on it. I went on to say that her last hurdle will be passing through US Immigration when she arrives by air, later this month.

I went on to tell the group adjacent to me, that I was 99% sure that I was going to seal the deal on her salary arrangements, by sending one last e-mail to the manager, after

dinner. Everyone wished me good luck. I had soup, salad, and dinner, which seemed odd to me, even as I was eating it all. It was almost like I was eating my last meal, and I guess there was something psychological about the relationship it plays in my subconscious with the entire affair I was working so hard to finalize that night.

As I was finishing up, I could hear Allan telling his friends that they should come over to the Lady Sheila for some drinks. I heard the word rum in the invite. I knew where the rum came from. I was certainly not offended if he didn't invite me as well, and at some point, clearly after we had all finished for some time, I mentioned aloud that I had a very critical e-mail to go write, and we almost all got up from our chairs simultaneously, and headed for the door.

Allan caught John and I, as we were stepping in and out of the galley, to deposit our drink glasses, and thank the cook. He made a point to invite us both over for drinks, mentioning "beers" in John's direction, almost as an afterthought. John mumbled something like "sounds good", with more enthusiasm than I thought was usual. I thanked Allan, and said that I had work to do, and wouldn't guarantee my presence, but that I would try. He looked happy that I might make it, and we all left the mess hall.

As everyone else exited through the watertight door, on the next deck higher, I continued upward, towards the "C" deck, and the officer's office. I trudged up the stairs, feeling some kind of mixture of optimism and pessimism about what I was about to attempt to do. When I arrived, and sat down in front of the computer, I thought for a few moments about writing the e-mail to Tony, before deciding to respond to Giovanna first.

I wrote her quite a letter. I started by stating that I understood **her** position as well. I also told her that I didn't think that she was trying to take advantage. I then went into a lot of detail about how we had all taken this whole issue "a long way", including how Tony had started off in the beginning by pretending that he didn't think the crew would even **want** to stay with the boat. I mentioned that I after that point, had fought Tony every step of the way, to where we found ourselves today. I said I was optimistic, but that it wasn't over yet.

I went on to tell her that if I could get Tony to add some compensation to his figure of \$3450, to cover her bank fees, maybe we could arrive at a figure that we could all agree on. She had mentioned Italian federal taxes, but I told her here, that Tony wouldn't be interested in that, as it is an individual's responsibility how they handle their taxes.

Before I ended the letter, I added that I truly felt that the workers in the US Embassy in Rome purposely, and intentionally, tried to scare her. Even if they were technically correct, it was uncalled for, and I knew it had shaken her up quite a bit. I tried to reassure her that it wouldn't be so bad. I concluded with a statement I paraphrased from a movie that has been on my mind since Giovanna declared her loyalty to me, back in October. The movie was "Jerry McGuire", and I finished my letter tonight by saying, "Please help ME, to help YOU decide, if we can make this happen."

I hit the “send” button, and began work on what I now hoped would be my last letter to Tony on this subject. I started it by asking him, politely, to please read my message thoroughly. I then said that I always put a lot of thought into correspondence with him. This was in direct reaction to his repeatedly admitting that he hasn’t fully read an e-mail from me, including the last one I sent, which never ceases to irk me.

I then told Tony that from what I have learned, the workers at the US Embassy really shook Giovanna up good, scaring her half to death about being caught lying, or breaking the immigration laws, and getting past the immigration officer upon arrival to the US. It was important to me at this point, that Tony realize that part of Giovanna’s concerns were never voiced, or explained, to Tony. All he had heard to this point was “Dollars” and “Euros”. I was trying to add the “human element” to the mix.

The bottom line was that she was concerned that her salary would nose-dive, right alongside the value of the US dollar. I added that she was concerned about accident and injury issues, and told Tony that I had informed Giovanna about the Jones Act, but that a letter from him, describing how the “boat” takes care of the crew, would possibly be very reassuring to her.

I went on to let him know about the bank fee issue, and that I had promised her that I would speak to him about it. I added that if we could possibly come up with a “fixed” amount to add to *his* figure of \$3450, that I believed that we could be very, very close to a deal. I went on to comment on Johnny Helfrich’s reliability, (or lack of), the shipyard projects, and arranging the tow boats.

I concluded with a brief remark about how I wish Mr. Hubner could be made to realize that I wanted the “very best for the boat”, which included “proper maintenance”, and “people like Giovanna”. I finished by thanking him for giving the entire letter his full attention. Positive reinforcement. I knew that Tony would be in the air, flying back to Michigan from Florida, as I sent this e-mail, so I wasn’t waiting for a response to it tonight.

I logged off the computer, and began to climb down the long flights of stairs to the boat, silently wondering if I had done “my best” to resolve this issue. I was still uneasy about it, but I had to let it go, and let the pieces fall where they may. When I reached the boat, I was weary from it all, and I opened one of my new Buds, in a sort of sign of resignation. I looked at my watch, and added 3 hours to the time, knowing that it would now be 2320 local time in Sardinia. I remembered that Giovanna had told me a few days ago that calling up to 2300 would be acceptable. I decided to risk waking her up.

After a few tries, the call finally went through. Giovanna answered. I greeted her, and told her that I had sent her an e-mail, and that I had sent Tony the e-mail that I had promised her earlier. She told me that she was in the middle of answering my e-mail when I called. I told her that she should finish it, and send it, after we hung up.

I went on to tell her how I worded my letter to Tony, including my thoughts about the embassy workers. We spoke amicably for a little while. Finally, I asked her if we

rounded the figure up from Tony's \$3450, to \$3500, would she consider it. She agreed, adding that she started out high, predicting Tony's desire to try and negotiate lower. I admitted that I had thought she had done that, and that it sounded like a good strategy.

She made a comment that \$100 or \$150 either way, would not amount to a deal killer; she still wanted to work with me. I was very happy to hear that, and silently hoped that Tony would agree to the increase at the "compromise" figure of \$3500 by the next morning. She thanked me for everything that I had done, and made sure I knew how grateful she was, and that she realizes that I had fought long and hard for this.

She added that no other Captain would have done this much for her. As noble as that sounded, I quickly admitted that I was actually being very selfish. She either believes me, which is perfectly fine with me, as I believe we have a mutual admiration, or she doesn't, which would mean that she really thinks I am that noble. I can't really lose either way.

Before we hung up, she wished me a safe journey, and I said "Buona Notte", and "Ciao". Her "Ciao" was the last thing I heard before I hung up. I was relieved, as I now truly thought that this deal was nearly 100% complete. All I needed was Tony to agree to \$3500, and it would be over. I would ask him to send something in writing to Giovanna, if he agreed, to confirm it. I grabbed another Bud, and almost opened it, before reconsidering, and decided to visit my neighbor on Lady Sheila. I wasn't planning to do anything more than make a short appearance for politeness sake, but you know what they say about the best plans of mice and men.

I grabbed my bottle opener, and my Bud, and headed over. I was greeted by Janine, Allan, Ben, and Will, who were all finishing up a game of poker. Ben noticed my Bud, and asked if I needed an opener. I quickly pulled mine out of my pocket, which started an entire evening's worth of homophobic rhetoric from the obviously troubled young man. Everyone tried to ignore Ben's prattling on about it, but he just wouldn't let it go, and we all decided to have a laugh with it, in spite of the fact that it was clear that Ben was clearly homophobic, which frequently indicates that an individual has mixed feelings about homosexuality. I was hardly surprised.

Ben had always seemed to be a little too anxious to be "manly", and with the boxing "heavy" bag dangling from his bow davit, (boy, now **there's** a list of double-entendres!), he had already seemed to me to be set on demonstrating to anyone and everyone, that he was a "man's man".

Janine offered me a tour, clearly, and perhaps decisively, interrupting the 'drinking' card game we were right in the middle of, much to Ben's chagrin, who was clearly bent on seeing himself, and everyone else, get "shit-faced", as he termed it. Without drinking hard liquor, there was very little chance of myself getting "shit-faced", but it was clear that Ben, Allan, and Will were going to "give it a go". I didn't care, but when I accepted Janine's offer, by letting her know that all I really wanted to see was the engine room,

and the control station at the helm, she went over to the side of our table on the aft deck, and opened the hatch, leading to the engine room.

I left the card game, and climbed down the ladder for a look. Allan saw what I was doing, and quickly decided to join me. I could hear Ben protesting vehemently from his seat on the aft deck. While Allan graciously gave me a somewhat “guided” tour of the engine room, Ben could be heard continuing his litany of homophobic remarks in our direction. This guy was really fixated on it! Allan and I largely ignored Ben, which didn’t slow Ben down one bit. Not being at all in doubt of my own sexuality, I wasn’t as bothered by Ben’s remarks as I might have been, say 30 years ago, when I was his age.

When Allan and I returned to the aft deck, Ben continued, accusing the two of us of running off to the engine room to have a little “kissy-kissy”, as he put it. It was somewhat humorous, if not totally revealing of Ben’s obvious insecurities. Allan did the exact right thing, and ignoring Ben completely, offered to show me the helm. It earned him a loud cry of protest, as Ben watched us walk away.

The rest of the night went pretty well, until, after obviously too much to drink, Will said something, in response to a remark made by Ben, which apparently set Ben off completely. Ben started to loudly criticize Will for being out of line. I hadn’t actually heard the remark either had made, which led to the disagreement, but it was now obvious that Ben was nearing a physical reaction. Allan, Janine, and Will, all tried to calm Ben back down. I didn’t, and simply watched as Ben allowed himself to be calmed back down, without any help from me.

As things seemed to simmer down, Janine decided to take control of the IPOD situation, and put on an old Beatles song that she said was her favorite song; “When I’m 64”. I was a little surprised that someone her age would appreciate a song that old, but I guess some songs are truly timeless. She was quite pleased with herself, as she sat and listened to it, ignoring the protests from Ben.

At one particularly clam point during the evening, Janine looked over at me, from across the table, and told me how nice the breeze felt. Her eyes were half-closed while she said it, as if necessary to emphasize the effect the cool breeze was having on her. I smiled, and agreed with her about the breeze.

There was some very funny conversation later, about what exactly produces the tides on the face of the earth. Will said it was the Moon, while Allan insisted that it was the Sun. I remained silent; smiling at them all, while Ben finally chimed in with his belief that no one really knows what causes the tides. Janine had stayed out of it, like I was doing, but finally, following one of Allan’s repeated declarations that he had been taught what he believed was the Sun’s influence, Janine made a remark about not believing everything she had been taught as a child. Allan took a quick moment to address Janine, telling her that her point was duly noted, but that her people were taught that black people were inferior to white people. Janine looked mortified, and became sullen.

The three boys continued arguing, with Will being the most animated, but closely followed by Allan. Will continued to acquiesce to Allan's theory, but also never gave up trying to give at least **some** credit to the Moon, which was beginning to make me laugh. Allan kept looking over at me for support, and finally started to plead with me, saying, "Help me out here, Russ. What I am saying is true; right?" I would just laugh, and they would all go at it for another round.

It had started to rain, which was something we all seemed to be happy with. Janine smiled broadly, as she pointed out the obvious to the rest of us, in a cute, innocent way. We all stopped and noticed it, making happy comments about it.

Finally, they all stopped arguing over the tides, and Allan looked directly at me and asked, "Russ, what do you think. Am I right, or am I wrong?". I took a breath, and told them all that it was my opinion, that the Sun had a greater influence on the tides than most people realized." This got a very appreciative nod from Allan, who immediately looked from Ben to Will, with a satisfied look of vindication. I then continued by stating, "However, in spite of that often overlooked influence of the Sun, I believe that the Moon has vastly greater influence over the tides." This got a very noticeable and positive reaction, from Will.

Allan looked defeated, but voiced his disagreement very politely. Ben reached his limit shortly thereafter, announcing his departure. Janine acted surprised, or disappointed, but it was an act, and I think she was relieved to see him finally go. Ben made a point of shaking my hand before he left, looking directly into my eyes, and holding it, as some sort of acknowledgement of my having passed a test, or something. I haven't spent that much time with all of these people, so it would be fair to say that they don't know me very well at all.

I stayed for a little while longer, sitting next to Janine, facing aft, and watching the rain fall. Allan and Will started playing with the IPOD's, each putting a song on, and then playing "air guitar" wildly, until the other would stop the song, to put on another, after which they would repeat the "air guitar" again. This was done over and over. I promised Will to give him a copy of some of my music at some point, grabbed my bottle opener, and said good night.

I stayed up for a while, back on Mirage, playing music. I finally went to bed after 0200.

November 12, 2010

I awoke at about 0900, and rolled over and went back to sleep. I dreamt that John Breaz was driving a very crazy looking vessel, that was all black, and all hull, with no superstructure. He was in what appeared to be Newport Harbor, in Rhode Island. It was a sunny afternoon, and I could see John climb up to what could only be described as a wing station, where he carefully maneuvered this weird looking vessel off the dock, and heading out of the harbor.

I awoke again at 1200, which I immediately realized should be about 0900 in Michigan. I thought that Tony might be just getting to work, as he had a late flight the night before.

Within seconds, the phone rang, and I knew it was Tony. I answered, with my uncustomary "hello", which I usually reserved for my private phone, but considered an appropriate answer on the SATCOM, as Tony and Andreas were the only two people in the world I would expect to be hearing from on that phone. They were the only two capable as well. I didn't recognize Tony's voice at first, and told him so.

He said that he received my e-mail, and in typical, and predictable fashion, asked me "What's the bottom line on all this, Russ?". I simply asked him if he would be willing to round up his figure by 50 dollars. He did the simple math in his head, making it sound as though he was doing complicated algebra, and concluded out loud, "That would make it 35 hundred." I agreed, and he asked me if that would be acceptable to Giovanna, and I promised him that it would be. He agreed, and said that it was then final. I asked him to have Jan send a copy of it, in writing, to Giovanna, as she would find it very useful when going through immigration. He agreed, and said that it would be taken care of immediately.

I thanked him, hoping that it was now over and done with. Then, before we could conclude the call, he reverted back to his ridiculous self, and asked, "Now, if Bill wants to come down and use the boat, will she be able to take care of him?" I said absolutely not, that she could not be expected to take the place of three other crew members, which flew directly into the face of the premise of our agreement, as Tony viewed it. He agreed quickly, and backed down. Fucking unbelievable!

I thanked him, and we concluded the call politely. I smiled to myself, and rolled out of my bunk.

After I showered and got cleaned up, I went to cycle the EVAC, and discovered that compressor #1 had an inverter fault again. I wasn't too alarmed, and simply reached around and reset it. I then started the compressor again, switching it to VFD, and went over to watch the amp gauge. It was better than I expected, and climbed to only 69 or 70 amps. It had gotten a little warm, as the system hadn't yet called for #2, but for some reason, it didn't go sky high on amps. I was satisfied with everything, and when it cycled off, I cycled the EVAC, and went back up stairs, where my banana taken from the mess hall the night before, was waiting next to my laptop.

I heard someone with decidedly good English diction, call Lady Sheila, saying that they were from the Yacht Express. Allan finally answered, at which the voice declared that the sea water pump was now running again. Allan responded, sounding a little confused, and said that he hadn't realized that it had even been turned off. The voice clarified his remarks, and explained that he was referring to the pool. Allan then responded with a chuckle, and I knew then, that it was Ed on the radio. Ed probably was

hoping that Allan would bring Janine up with him, and get another look at her in her black bikini. I laughed to myself, as I thought of his strategy.

At 1600 local time, I checked the Transas. We were approximately 1325 miles from Martinique, which is roughly 5 and a half days from us, at our current speed of 10 knots. The off-loading of the boats stopping their journey there would go much quicker than the time we stopped there in early 2009. That is because there will be no boats loading there; only off-loading, which goes much quicker.

At some time after 1700, I decided to go up and check e-mails. There were two from Giovanna, and one was only because she wasn't sure about the reliability of the delivery on the first one. The message was basically a very nice expression of gratitude for everything I did on her behalf. It was very nice. I sent her a new e-mail, explaining that I had already spoken with Tony this morning, and that he agreed to the \$3500. I also told her that she would be getting a purchase order, which would include the company name, her name, the date, and her new salary. I advised her to keep a copy of it with her, as she went through US Immigration after arriving in Florida. I reminded her know that my actions were very selfish, on my part. I was fairly certain that she would understand the comment as a compliment.

My sister Sue sent me an e-mail, and was responding to an earlier, more anxious e-mail from me. I answered that one as well, thanking her for hers.

I was surprised to finally see an e-mail from Eva, whom I had begun to seriously wonder about. I figured that she either had problems sending to me, or replying to my e-mails, or that she had lost interest. Neither was the case. She apologized for the delayed response. She described a physical ailment that sounded serious, and tried to dismiss, but I asked about it in my reply to her.

I still had time to visit Andrey, so up I went. When I arrived, Andrey was a little busy, and I noticed that the CCTV monitor was zoomed in on what appeared to be riders. I quickly discovered that there was a BBQ underway, that I had no previous knowledge of. Apparently, there had been some sort of a plan, as Janine had briefly mentioned something about a "Half-Way" party the previous evening, but I had thought was only a light-hearted suggestion. Maybe this was in the making for some time.

As Andrey concluded his immediate business, I watched the others on the cargo deck. I could see Ben, both Jameses, Rene, Emma, Adrianus, and a couple others. Eventually, I saw Allan sitting on his steps, tying his shoes, in preparation for joining the rest of them. They were playing cricket, from the looks of it.

When Andrey was free, he listened to me comment about the BBQ with unmasked surprise. He asked if I had not been invited, and I replied affirmatively, but that it didn't bother me that much. I wasn't that anxious for the activities, especially after last night.

I told Andrey the good news about the manager agreeing to the salary amount for Giovanna. he seemed genuinely happy, and I thanked him for all of his help with the letter I had sent for her. We moved on to some other subjects, including a refresher that no other yachts would be loading in Martinique. He still thought that there was a good chance that we could arrive in Ft. Lauderdale on Thanksgiving. I told him that I would sure like to slip away for the evening, if that was the case.

I asked Andrey if I could have a copy of the rider list, as I was writing a journal, and would find it handy. he obliged happily, and mentioned that tomorrow, he would try to arrange a group photo of the riders and the ship's crew together.

I finally excused myself, to go down to the mess hall for dinner. I was a little early, but helped myself to the salad bar, as usual. I saw a few other ship's crew come and go, and thought for a minute that I was probably going to be the sole rider eating dinner there this evening. I was wrong, when I noticed Antony walk in. He was all smiles, and joined me at the table. We began an easy conversation, which flowed from one topic to another. Antony walked right by the revelers at the BBQ, but said that he turned their invitation down, as the way he put it, he still had work to do this evening.

I mentioned that I was on Lady Sheila the previous evening, and brought up Ben's aggressive behavior. Antony didn't act surprised, and added that he knew about the poker night on ZZZ, where there was also aggressive behavior. When pressed, he admitted that he had heard that Ben was involved. I was hardly surprised, and we both agreed that Ben was "wound up a little too tight".

Soon, Ed walked in, and joined us. We all talked for a while, as we ate. Even when we were finished, we all sat there for a while, still talking. Finally Ed said good night, and after a little while longer, Antony and I got up and left as well.

I walked back up to the office, and sent an e-mail to Myla. Then, I got up and left, forgetting my rider list in the office. I went back down the port side stairwell, purposely avoiding the BBQ patrons. I felt that a night in was just what the doctor ordered. No one noticed my descent to the cargo deck.

I spent the remainder of the evening reading, and could hear the occasional outburst from the cargo deck BBQ, usually sounding like one of the James, but every so often a woman's voice would reach all the way to my ears.

At about midnight, a sudden rain squall came down hard, and I didn't hear any voices after that. At some point, I remember hearing the typically very loud thud of Como's port side entrance door close, indicating that Ben was probably in for the night.

November 13, 2010

My room felt a little warmer than usual when I awoke, and I immediately suspected that #1 had an inverter fault. What puzzled me was why the system wouldn't call for #2 at a

lower temperature. In any case, I needed to cycle the EVAC, so I went down to the engine room, and sure enough, the yellow light was on.

I reset #1, and switched it back to VFD. It wound up predictably, and I was glad to see that the amps never went any higher than 70. After it shut off again, I cycled the EVAC, and went back up to the main deck.

It was sunny out, but we were rolling a little bit more than before. I did some work on the computer, and got cleaned up later on the afternoon. At one point, I needed to go cycle the EVAC, and went to the engine room.

The temperatures were about 16 and 14, and I debated with myself for a second whether I should shut #1 off until I was done. Within literally the space of 2 seconds, I heard the compressor kick in, but to my surprise, it was #2. I was curious now to see how it acted, and went over to watch the amp gauge. Amps were normal for #2, which is comparatively low to #1. As I was ready to wait for #2 to bring the system down to temperature, it surprised me again, and cycled off, after having only cooled the system down a couple of degrees.

I decided to cycle the EVAC, while neither #1 nor #2 was running. Again, within 2 seconds after I had finished with the EVAC, and #1 started. This was weird.

I cleaned my bathroom air handler filter, and installed a Gel-Air pack. Somehow, in the process of moving things around, to access the air handler, I apparently re-injured my right shoulder. I had previously injured it when I had slipped going down the guest quarters stairs, back in September. I hurt very badly. It felt like I tore something.

I decided to go to dinner early, and check my e-mails first. I headed up the stairs a little after 1700, and at 1715, I was still going up, between "A" deck and "B" deck, when my radio came to life. It was Andrey, and he was announcing that the group photo would be taken now, and that everyone should report to the pool deck. I groaned, and reversed course, realizing at that moment that Andrey had warned me the night before that this would occur at about 1730. As I walked back down, I hoped that it wouldn't take too long.

John and Ed were the first to join me on the pool deck. John was the only one who, like me, had adhered to the rules to remove shoes on the freshly varnished pool deck grates. We made small talk together, as we all watched the other riders slowly make their way up. Honestly, I have seen people move quicker at a Billy Graham sermon. I mentioned to John that the appearance of the ocean was deceptive, as it was causing the ship to roll more than it had during the entire voyage. Ben showed up, with his head shaved. A few of the ship's crew had done the same.

When everyone was present, the photos were taken. Several were needed, so that everyone could be included, including each photographer. It was beginning to be quite humorous actually, and we were starting to really get a laugh from the Ukrainian crew,

as they took turns taking the pictures. Finally, at 1740Z, it was over, and the Captain thanked everyone.

I headed up to the office, and checked my e-mails. I had several. I read Giovanna's first. She informed me that she had both her purchase order, as well as her ticket. The dates were all set now. She would leave Sardinia on the 25th for Rome, staying two nights at Francesca and Umberto's. They would see to it that she was safely aboard the plane on the 27th. That was exactly what I hoped that she would include in her e-mail. I got another e-mail from Eva, and I responded to that as well.

Ed walked in, just as I was finished, and I made sure that he knew, so that he didn't feel compelled to leave the room, which most people did, out of courtesy. I headed down to the mess deck, knowing that I was early, but planning on feasting on soup and salad, before the main course. I stopped in a little known "WC", or water closet, which actually is a head, in the companionway to the mess hall, where I could wash my hands.

As I was standing at the sink, with the door propped open, I saw Emma and Adrianus walk by, with some other people as well. It seemed as though my going to dinner early was something the others felt like doing as well. I quickly joined them, and found a seat conveniently next to Emma, who had saved the spot opposite her for boyfriend, by placing a bread roll between the utensils. Ed joined us, as did John, and Antony, and Will.

At some point during the dinner, someone asked Will if he had checked on Tim. Apparently, Tim wasn't feeling well, and John made an off-handed remark about "self-inflicted" wounds, but Will quickly rushed to Tim's defense, and no one said anything further about it, other than Will, who explained that Tim was dealing with some sort of gastro-intestinal problem. I am sure that John had not changed his beliefs based simply on Will's comments, but he remained quiet about it after that.

Adrianus walked in a short while later, and took his saved seat across from Emma. We talked easily, about many subjects. Someone made a comment about the hardness of the rolls, and then someone else said something about using them to fight off pirates. There was laughter from everyone, but soon it was mentioned that the people from the country where the pirates were from likely were muslim, which allows people to stone the women to death.

The subject of how muslims treat women quickly escalated, and before long, Emma was bringing up the book and movie "Not Without My Daughter", which was a true story, based on an American woman, who married an Iranian man. Emma went on to say that she would never want to visit Iran, unless she was carrying bombs on her person. By the end of the conversation, Emma made it clear that gathering all of the men, and most of the women from "those countries", and just killing them all, would be a great solution.

The rest of us chuckled, but we all knew that she was serious, and my guess is that we didn't have that different a view from hers. We sat and talked well after we had finished

eating, as the conversation was enough to keep us seated there. At a point where it seemed that nothing was going to be added, I politely excused myself, which started a mass exodus.

Emma and Adrianus went towards the port stairs, and John and I went down the starboard side. At the bottom, I wished John a pleasant evening, and he did the same.

The sky lounge felt unusually warm this evening, and I was suspicious of the A/C, so I went to check it. The readings were all good, and the chilled water loop was down to 11 and 12 degrees, which was perfect, and also indicative of a cycle recently completed by a compressor. I shrugged my shoulders, which hurt like hell on the left, and went back up to the main deck. I decided that if the A/C in the sky lounge was having that much difficulty keeping up, in spite of the fact that the loop was at optimal levels, I might consider moving my computer down to the crew mess.

After packing everything up, I did move down. I still felt a little warm there, and started thinking of the small oscillating fan we had purchased last summer, to cool off the crew mess and galley, during the peak months, where the heat was really high. I went in search of the fan, which took quite a while. Before I finally found it, I had been through just about every cabinet and closet on board. I had discovered a very glittery, gold, cocktail dress in the port forward guest stateroom, which I immediately knew belonged to Sierra. I had meant to send everything to her in Paris, and forgot this.

In the starboard forward guest stateroom closet, where I finally found the fan, I discovered all kinds of things belonging to Sara, including books, a very fancy pair of underwear, which was carefully packaged in a clear plastic bag, two pairs of high heels, other clothing, a hat, and some paperback books. I suppose that the items could all be sent to her somehow, after we arrived in the United States.

I took the fan, and headed for the crew mess. Once there, I immediately plugged it in to the 220 volt outlet, located over by the clothes hampers. I switched it on. Nothing. I tried reversing the plug. Nothing. I tried all the buttons on the fan. Nothing. I grabbed a flashlight, and headed up to the top of the crew stairs, where the breaker sub-panel for the forward part of the boat is located. I found the breaker that was clearly labeled "Crew Mess 208 Volt Outlet". It was on. I tried flipping it off, and then back on. Nothing.

Finally, I decided to see if the fan was broken, by taking it to another 220 outlet. The first one I came to in the galley was behind the ice maker, above the counter. I plugged it in. Nothing. I was starting to get very worried now, as this fan would be a life saver. I moved across the galley to the last 220 outlet I knew was in the vicinity of the crew area, and plugged the fan in. It worked! At least I now knew that the fan worked. Why the two outlets were dead, was another problem, for another day, IF I could find the 220 volt extension cord.

Last winter, during the extensive shipyard period, we purchased a couple of 220-volt extension cords. I had seen each of them at least once. Now, I was hoping that they

were stowed somewhere on board. I started by going down into the guest rooms, where a lot of things from storage were stowed. I didn't see them, so I went out on the bow, and looking in the bos'uns locker, but they weren't there. I could see and hear that Lady Sheila was entertaining again this evening. I opened the hatch to the chain locker, and began what I knew would be a long search through a lot of extra stuff, which was all loaded at the last minute.

Finally, I located them both, and took the nice one. I went down to the crew mess, left the reel on the deck, and started pulling the cord out, unrolling the reel as I did, and began walking back up the stairs to the galley. I pulled it all the way over to the starboard side, where the coffee machine sits. I plugged it in, and quickly went back down stairs. I plugged the fan into the reel, and hit the switch. It worked! Yeah! Success!

I spent the remainder of the evening in the crew mess, in comparative comfort. I went to bed at a decent hour, and slept, in spite of the pain in my right shoulder, and lower left side. The right shoulder wasn't much of a mystery, but the lower left side was really worrying me, as I didn't really know what it was.

November 14, 2010

I awoke early, at about 0720, and felt uncomfortably warm. I wasn't really sure if it was the A/C, or just me, but after having some issue recently with the frequency drive inverter, I decided I had better get up and investigate.

I had been dreaming that I was working for Bob Gothier again, and for some reason, he wasn't being as much of a total asshole, as I had remembered him in real life. I remembered that I was on some kind of mission to show him something on a chart, which I never felt necessary in my experience with him. He was famous for saying "You're the Captain", which could mean that he trusted me 100%, or just as easily could have meant, "You had better be right".

Anyway, I headed down to the engine room, and sure enough, there was an inverter fault on #1. It never ceases to amaze me how warm the chilled water loop can get without the system calling for #2 to come on line. After I reset the inverter, I started thinking that I might have to reconsider my options with the A/C, if I expected it, or even *wished* that it would behave properly.

The first thing that crossed my mind was the programming, which Andreas said defaulted if the power was turned off and back on. I considered, briefly, shutting everything down, using the circuit breakers, but then thought that shutting off the chilled water pump might be a bad idea. What if it didn't start again? I would cook like a frog, as Andreas would say. Instead, I just turned off both compressors, and then all of the power to the controls at the A/C control panel. I waited a few seconds, for no particular reason, and then turned it back on. I switched the compressors both to VFD, and waited.

After a few, very long, seconds, compressor #2 kicked in, which was not what I was hoping, or expecting. I pessimistically expected it to cycle off prematurely, with an "A-C" fault code. I watched and waited, but it kept running, and kept cooling. Finally, it reached 11 degrees on the inlet display, and shut down properly. I was sort of pleased, but still concerned about #1's recent behavior, so I decided to check the raw water flow again.

I held the flashlight under the hoses, and I couldn't see anything, which could be bad, but, only if there was no water at all, which there had to be, because the blue light wasn't illuminated, and #2 just worked perfectly. In any case, I was still concerned about the flow rate, and I hadn't really checked it recently. So, I grabbed the hose and squeezed it, gathering far less information from this action than someone squeezing produce in the supermarket, I'm sure. Nevertheless, I was convinced, sort of, that the hose squeezed far too easily, and immediately headed down for the cargo deck.

When I arrived at the valve, things didn't look all that bad, but I told myself that I had thought that very thought before, and rectified a similar problem by increasing the flow. The issue was well known amongst the riders; the warmer sea water temperature was raising the values on everyone's A/C systems. I decided to be brave, (or reckless, but brave sounded much better), and opened the valve some more. I watched it carefully, anxious to observe some tell-tale sign that I had accomplished something.

When it wasn't readily apparent that anything positive had been done, I decided to open the valve some more. This made a visual difference. The discharge hose moved a little, and seemed to be reacting to the increased flow in a way that satisfied me for the moment, which is probably just as well, because I believe that it is entirely possible for me to blow the plumbing to pieces in my engine room with the pressure available from the ship's sea water supply system.

Feeling as though I had finally accomplished something tangible, I climbed back aboard the Mirage triumphantly. When I went back to check the A/C system, the temp was at nearly the level when the system should call for one of the compressors. I waited patiently. Compressor #1 kicked on, and I immediately went over to watch the amp gauge. I was actually joyful when I watched the amps go no higher than 56! This was an amazing accomplishment! In this warmer water, to have the amps that low was near miraculous.

I checked the hose fittings for any signs of imminent explosions, but only noticed a very slow drip, which could have been that way for some time, for all I knew. I certainly didn't want to think that I had caused the drip to start, even though there is a good chance I did. Psychologically, I needed to think that it was well within safe operating pressure. I made several attempts to tighten the hose clamps, however, with no luck. Andreas' tools were stored in some secret fashion, that doesn't allow an outsider to quickly locate an appropriate tool in a hurry. So, I used that excuse, and gave up.

As I was leaving, I noticed that the gray water tank level gauge was now actually reading 10% lower than it had in a week. This boat needs a refit; I don't care what Tony says. I shook my head in a mixture of amazement and disgust.

I decided to get cleaned up, do some laundry, and check my e-mails. After my shower, I packed up a large bag of whites, and headed out. It was about 1100. I stopped by the crew laundry, and was happy to find a machine empty. I quickly loaded the clothes, and started the big machine. I then proceeded up the "C" deck, to the office.

I had no e-mails from anyone, so I decided to write a few. I wrote Nicolas, John Springer, Liz, and my mother. My mother would probably get hers in a day or two, as I think that her trip to Paris was until the middle of the month, and it was just the 14th today.

I finished up, and went back down to check on my clothes. The washer was very close to the spin cycle, and I had 15 minutes until lunch, so I sat down and watched the machine go into spin. I heard the water tight door open and close several times while I was waiting, and imagined riders filing in for lunch. When it was finished, I dumped everything into an empty dryer, timed it for 30 minutes, which should be perfect, and left for lunch.

I was surprised to see that I was the only rider, and one of two people in the entire mess hall when I arrived. The door opening and closing must have been ship's crew. I was soon joined by Emma, Adrianus, Kyle, Ed, and Janine. Kyle was typically quiet, but the rest of us talked up a storm. The boys came in a little later, and all sat at the next table; including Allan, Ben, Antony, John and Jacques, who decided to make a rare appearance today. Maybe the food is finally running low on Kimberly.

Ed was amused by my use of his theory, which basically is that if something is going to go wrong, it should do so early on. His was for the propulsion drive, obviously. Mine was for my hoses and clamps on my raw water lines for the A/C system. Everyone was impressed with the fact that I was able to significantly lower both my amperage, as well as the loop temperature.

I went to sign in, and suddenly realized that I had forgotten to sign in for the last two days. We discussed how the ship's crew were very aware of who was here and who wasn't. I added that I had at least appeared once a day. Ed mentioned something about the cook probably noticing, which I agreed with, adding that my observation was that the ship's crew were very aware of all of the riders, and their habits, by now. Emma reacted to my admission that Andrey had been watching them closely the other day, when they had their BBQ on the cargo deck, for safety reasons, of course. I also said that Andrey knew each of the names of everyone who appeared on the grainy image the monitor had, as the camera was zoomed in on them.

Emma mentioned that it might be difficult with the "girls", as they all had long blonde hair. We got talking about hair, and at some point I mentioned my hair turning blondish

years ago, when I was a mate. Emma then related her extensive knowledge of hair and scalp ailments, and shampoos. I asked how she knew all that, and she replied that she had gone to school for beautician. I asked if she cut hair, and she apologetically said “no”. I turned to Ed and Adrianus, (which is also Ed’s real name), and said, “Not that I need one”, and everyone laughed.

We sat and talked well after finishing our meal, and when I finally excused myself to fetch my laundry, Emma lowered her voice and quietly asked if I was interested in coming by tomorrow evening for poker. I said I wasn’t much of a poker player, but that I could certainly come around and be socialable. That seemed to please her, and I said goodbye to them all.

My laundry was dry as a bone, and waiting for me to fold and bag it. I love the crew laundry! After doing that, I headed down the outside stairs, and began my way down. I noticed Ben giving Ed a tour on Como, which is something I am reluctant to do. Mirage is very likely to be the oldest, and unfortunately, the most poorly funded yacht, on the ship. I was embarrassed to show it.

I settled in for the afternoon, and remembered that the walk-in cooler had not been cleaned out yet. As both walk-ins, the cooler and the freezer, are sea water cooled, like the A/C system, we decided not to run them on the ship. The plumbing connections would have been a mess at best, and a complete failure at worst. So, Andreas shut them both down after we were ready to load onto the ship.

For some reason, the freezer was not a problem. Usually, the freezer is the worst of the two, as so many frozen food bits and pieces fall on the deck, or behind the shelves. This time, however, the freezer was absolutely no problem. I hadn’t given too much thought to the cooler. I should have. After ignoring it for over a week, I opened it one day, and found a lot of fungus growing everywhere. I quickly shut the door, thinking to myself, “I have got to clean that out; one of these days”. Today was that day; I decided.

So, with an arsenal of cleaning products in hand, a home-made labeled spray bottle that was marked “chlorine” leading the assault, I attacked, full-force. It never had a chance, and I quickly, and much more easily than I had imagined, got control of the cooler. I gathered up all of the cardboard, installed last July, when Tim was aboard. I then separated some other things, for either further cleaning, removal, or throwing away.

I put the two Champagne bottles up in my sky lounge fridge, for safe keeping. There were some canned items, which I cleaned and put in the galley reach-in cooler, and some water bottles that needed rinsing. I used the bottle marked chlorine, and fired away at all of the black mold, which did four things right away; 1) eliminated the bad smell, 2) killed the mold, 3) made it easy to remove, and 4) made me feel like I had accomplished something.

I felt much better afterwards, and took a break.

I decided that since I had perspired so much the previous night, while trying to sleep, that I would launder all my bed clothes. I prepared everything for leaving at about 1700. If the crew laundry were to be available, it would all be done by the time I had dinner. I gathered the trash from the walk-in cooler, and my laundry, and locked the boat on my way out. I headed up the stairs, and made my first stop one deck above, at the trash barrels, where I deposited what I had in the "Floating Dunnage" barrel.

When I arrived on the Forecastle deck, I walked into the crew laundry, and was very disappointed to see all the machines running, with back-logged loads waiting to go next. Reluctantly, I trudged up the officer's laundry, or as I refer to it, the "Devils' Nightmare". I put the wash in two machines, and carefully avoided setting the timers for even one second more than I absolutely had to run them, thereby saving myself an hour or two. I also noticed that the A/C on the ship wasn't working.

I went up one last level, to check my e-mails. There were two, and I answered them both. That didn't take very long, so I decided to visit Andrey. We talked for almost a solid hour. We enjoy each other's company, and the conversation flows easily. I asked him why my electrical box was open on the catwalk. He notified the ship's engineer, who was clever enough to have an excuse quickly, that he had been "airing it out". I could see Ben hammering away, boxing his heavy bag, on the bow of Como. 'Just as well', I thought to myself, silently wondering which came first; the aggressive nature, or the boxing. Andrey explained the nature of the broken A/C on the ship, and I finally excused myself, and went back down for dinner.

Ben, Allan, Janine, Antony, and Ed, were already seated at the first table. There was one empty chair, between Ben and Janine, and when I asked, everyone told me that no one was sitting there. There was a little conversation between Antony and Ben, and Allan and Janine. Ed and I were quiet, and at times, everyone was. It was almost odd. Janine finally commented on it, sort of nervously chuckling. Finally, Ben quietly rose from the table, excusing himself. Ed left quietly very shortly afterwards.

John and Kyle walked in next, and joined us, taking the seats left by Ben and Ed. Antony left next, and soon Allan and Janine followed. After quite some time, Adrianus and Emma walked in. They took the seats vacated by Allan and Janine. The conversation picked up quite a bit then. Finally, Emma announced a "pool party" tomorrow, on ZZZ, starting at 1400. Adrianus quickly added, "And, finishing sharply at 1800", and then smiled. I laughed, as I knew why he wanted to have an official ending time. I was also not prepared for any aggressive behavior, caused by someone's inability to control themselves after a few drinks.

I asked what I could bring, and Adrianus quipped, "Budweisers", with a broad smile. I responded with "I wish!", and we laughed. Then Emma suggested that I might be able to trade spirits for beers with James Woods, on Touch, who it was believed had loads of beer. I said that was a good idea, and excused myself to go to the Devil's Nightmare.

At least the machines had stopped, and were able to be opened, by the time I arrived back up stairs. I shuffled everything into the toy dryers, and checked my e-mails, one last time. It is just as well that I did, as I had no e-mails, but had once again left my USB drive in the computer. I pulled that, and grabbed my laundry detergent, and headed for the cargo deck, knowing that I would have to return, at least once more tonight, for my bed linens.

I checked the A/C on Mirage, and everything was still running smoothly. I waited until 2000, before going back up. I had set 120 minutes on the dryers, but there was a good chance that they might be close to done already. I made my way back up, and sure enough, the dryers were still running. However, I checked my laundry, and it was mostly dry, so I started folding, and realized that only one small section of my sheet was still slightly damp, but not enough for me to worry about.

I folded everything, bagged it, and threw it over my left shoulder, as my right was in too much pain. I decided for one last e-mail check, and headed up to "C" deck. There weren't any, so back down, all the way to the cargo deck I went.

I stayed up reasonably late, listening to some of my favorite music, in the main salon. I finally went to get ready for bed, which involved putting all of my clean bed linen back together, and taking a shower, before actually going to sleep.

November 15, 2010

I slept as late as I could stand it, but the pain in my lower left side, and my right shoulder, finally won out, and forced me to get out of my bunk. It was 1030, and it felt warm, which didn't alarm me, because it wasn't hot, just a little noticeable. I didn't need a shower from perspiring or anything, so I went to the engine room to cycle the EVAC, and check on everything.

Sure enough, the A/C was working just fine. It had to be the warmer temperatures, both in the air, as well as the water. The A/C would be struggling more and more, as we continued towards Martinique, and I was glad that I had it more or less 'dialed-in',

At 100, I decided to go up and check e-mails. I passed the pool, and Andrey was there, with Ed. Andrey asked when I was going to finally take a dip, and I told him that I really should. He jumped in, and then, as he was treading water, told me that the water was perfect. I excused myself, and headed inside.

There was one e-mail from Sue, which was very nice, and I answered hers. The only other e-mail was from Eva, which was a very curt reply to my last e-mail, asking her to please take care of herself, and that I had agreed with her daughter. She seemed a little irritated.

I was still too early for lunch, so I headed back down to the boat. It was really getting warm now, and the calmness of the ocean in appearance, belied the effect that the long period swell was having on the ship, as we continued to roll quite a bit.

At 1155, I headed back up to the mess deck. I found the room vacant of riders, and grabbed a salad, before sitting down. I was halfway through my salad, wondering if any of the riders were planning on eating lunch today, as there was the pool party in a couple of hours. My answer came in slowly. First Bryant joined me, and since we hadn't seen each other for a few days, we exchanged the same greeting of "Hey stranger", simultaneously, which caused us both to laugh.

Soon, Allan and Janine stepped in, and later we were joined by Ed, while the others sat at the next table. After Emma and Adrianus, Kyle and Ben sat down, Janine yelled over to Ben, who had taken a seat away from everyone at the next table. She asked if he smelled, referring to the vacant seat next to her, and the fact that he wasn't next to anyone else either. He cheerfully replied that he probably did indeed smell, but also needed room for his elbows while he ate.

The other evening, when I sat next to him, I did notice that he seemed a little rude with his elbows, but now I think, unintentionally. We talked about the weather, the heat, the preparations for arrival, and movies.

I finally excused myself, and went back up to check e-mails. Janine was apparently headed to the ping-pong tables, and I heard her exclaim that she was going the wrong way, as I climbed the stairs. There were no e-mails, so I headed back to the boat.

I checked the A/C, and did some writing. I kept an eye on the clock, and before I knew it, it was 1400, and time to go to ZZZ. I changed into my swim trunks, thinking to myself that it was more to be socialable than to be out in the mid-afternoon sun, which was not a thought which I was actually embracing. I packed a bag with a towel, all of our hard cheese, and the last open bottle of Grey Goose, and headed off to the pool party.

I arrived to find several pairs of footwear already on the swim platform of ZZZ, and immediately assumed that I was not the first to arrive. Adrianus did say 1400, and it was 1415 already. I proceeded up the platform area, and heard a familiar sound. The sound was a power tool; actually a polishing tool. I looked up and saw Adrianus using it on a paint touch-up, near the ZZZ name. I was surprised, and ready to be embarrassed, as I clearly thought that it was today, and now, that they expected people over.

Adrianus, saw me, stopped what he was working on, and greeted me warmly. I showed him the cheese that I had brought, and he indentified one as Dutch, which he said that he particularly liked. He instructed me to proceed to the galley, where I would find Emma. Apparently all of the shoes belonged to the two of them. No other guests had arrived yet. I walked down the port side exterior companionway, and opened the door to the galley.

Emma was in there, and immediately greeted me with a smile, but I could tell that she was a little stressed. She had been preparing food for the party, and invited me to join her while she finished up, while Adrianus finished his project, and put his tools away.

Emma had cooked up quite a bit, and was just finishing as we talked. The reason, she surmised, that no one else had stopped by yet, was that some of the crew were still working. She pointed out the cake that she had made for Adrianus, and I was reminded that it was his birthday today, hence the party. I was glad that I had at least brought the Grey Goose now. We kept talking like we had known each other for years, and finally, Adrianus came back in and informed us that he would change into some “board shorts”.

Eventually, Janine walked in and we all greeted each other. Adrianus came back up, and then left to do something up on the sun deck. Janine and I helped Emma by taking some platters up. When I arrived up top, behind Janine, I could hear her greeting someone, who turned out to be Ben. Allan was with him, and we all started to get comfortable.

The sun was still high in the sky, and it was hot. As we got our drinks, and started talking, we relaxed. ZZZ was in an enviable position on the cargo deck, and it seemed so serene compared to the location where Mirage was. There was no noise, no vibration, and no soot. I was offered a beer from Ben’s stash, and graciously accepted. I quietly asked Ben if he wanted some whisky, and he perked up and replied that he probably would, asking me what brand. I said “Jack Daniels”, and he smiled and said yes. I was both repaying him for the previous night, as well as trying to get more beer for today’s festivities.

After I had finished my beer, I excused myself, and went back to the Mirage to fetch a full, unopened bottle for Ben. I spotted James Cory on Perle Noire, as I passed by, and he saw me as well. We acknowledged each other, as I continued on. I realized, as I was walking around the cargo deck, that I was possibly putting gasoline on a fire, but decided to let fate take its course. When I returned, I made sure that Ben saw the bottle, and he did, stuffing it into his cooler, to cool it off. I wasn’t a whisky drinker, but cooling it off was new to me.

We were sitting around the hot tub, with our feet and lower legs in the cool water, when John Carter showed up, carrying some cold beers. I was surprised to see him, as this was the first “event” I had ever seen him participate in. He was smiling, cantankerous, and in a good mood. Out of earshot of John, Ben smiled and mentioned that John resembled his dad, a lot. We talked for a while, as the sun gradually lowered in the sky. The music was relaxing and light, which was orchestrated by Emma.

Eventually, Will and Tim walked up, bit stated that they had a little more work to do, and would return. James then showed up, and we talked for a while about his diabetes, which has held him back from captaining a boat, in spite of his extensive experience and qualifications. We had a good conversation, and he didn’t refer to me as “Rusty” for the entire evening.

Rene showed up, and was her usual smiling self. I wondered where James Woods was, until I overheard in the conversation that he had severely injured himself, falling down his ladder, all the way from the top. He apparently hadn't broken anything, but was in a lot of pain, and would not be coming over. Rene seemed to be very happy to be there, in spite of James difficulties. She was a real trooper.

Antony showed up, after having apparently given "Yalla" a complete wash down. Kyle showed up a bit later, and eventually, Will and Tim returned. The mood was a very pleasant one, with the sun hiding behind some clouds for a while, as we enjoyed the cool breeze that developed.

I ended up walking aft, and striking up, what would become a very in-depth conversation with Will. He told me his life's story, which was interesting, to say the least. He is very bright, well-read, and has pulled himself out of what sounds like a bottomless pit of despair in his native Cornwall. We spoke for a good solid hour, with me mostly listening, as he seemed happy to divulge very personal struggles. He is 20 years old.

Adrianus did something he knew was in violation of the ship's rules, and turned on one of his powerful deck illumination lights. This prompted the girls to start dancing under it, near Will and me. I watched the gleeful expression on their faces, and I told Emma that I wished I was having half as much fun as she looked like she was. She grabbed my hand and began trying to drag me out onto the floor for a dance, and I laughingly protested, with the excuse that I needed more beer. She stopped immediately, and went over to the fridge, where Allan had just put together 5 beers for the guys in the hot tub.

Emma came back to me, very dejected, and I told her that it was OK. However, after Emma started dancing with Janine again, Allan surprised me, by offering me his beer, which I questioned, and he explained that he would get a Rose instead. I thanked him, and was in the middle of taking my first swig, when Emma turned around and spotted the beer in my hand. I immediately tried to hide it behind my back, smiling at her. It was too late, though, as she caught me, and now insisted that I dance with her.

For some reason, I am guessing an extinguished lamp; no one was closing the door to the day head on the fly bridge deck, when they went in to use it. This provided a comedic interlude every 20 minutes, or so. Someone would stand guard, holding a beach towel as some semblance of privacy, while the other person took care of business inside. The girls were mostly doing this, much to the amusement of the guys.

I finally excused myself, and wished Adrianus a Happy Birthday. I then said good night to Emma, thanking her for the great party. We pecked each other on the cheeks, and then I said good night to Rene, and we repeated the kissing. As I turned to go, Emma grabbed and hugged me, kissing me again. I was startled, and forgot that my Ray Ban's were still hanging in front of me. They were squashed again. This will make the third time since January. Oh well.

I offered to carry a big bag full of empty beer and wine bottles for Adrianus, who followed me to the ladder, to help hand it down. I went to the forward end of the cargo deck, and walked up the long flight of stairs, where the trash barrels were. After I dumped all of the bottles in, making a huge racket, I went back down, and then up my ladder, to the Mirage.

I went to bed, after a quick shower, and felt like I might have no pain in my lower left rib cage. It lasted for several hours, before I awoke in pain. This time, I thought that I could feel it in both sides. I was becoming concerned.

November 16, 2010

I awoke fairly early, and wasn't sure but it seemed that I might not be in pain. I shifted around and tried going back to sleep. The more I tried, however, the more pain I found myself in. I finally got up, and decided to get something done. I decided to check e-mails, so I made my way all the way up to the top.

There were several e-mails. Andreas couldn't figure out why the 220-volt outlet wouldn't be working, as he also remembered that it was working just fine before. Liz was explaining her Thanksgiving options. Giovanna was just checking on me, because she hadn't heard from me a couple of days. Lastly, Myla answered my e-mail. Myla was back in France, and still jobless. She was planning to go home soon, and wasn't sure of her plans. She said that she never did actually run into Sarah Barber.

I answered them all, and signed off. I went back to the boat, and discovered a big mess. We had obviously gone through a rain shower, and it was just enough to mix with the exhaust soot, and create a black mud. I decided to do a wash down, but before I could finish stepping over the tie-down straps across the aft deck, I slipped and hurt my leg against the port control station enclosure. I swore, and hobbled into the boat.

I got set up, and began washing and rinsing the aft deck, transom, and swim platform. The work was somewhat satisfying, but also frustrating, with the stubborn staining that would not come out. Bryant hailed me from above, and I stopped to talk with him for a little bit. He asked if the clocks had been turned back, and I told him that they had been. We talked for a little more, and he finally excused himself, and said that he would see me at lunch. I think that he had just come from there.

I finished up my wash down, and went to get showered and cleaned up for lunch. I headed back up at 1150, and was the first rider there. Soon, Bryant walked in and joined me, after getting some soup and bread. Emma and Adrianus joined us next, followed by Ed. Ben walked in, and soon Tim, Antony, John and Kyle joined us.

Before leaving, I quietly mentioned to Emma, sitting right next to me, that I had their bag, if they wanted to stop over on the way back after lunch. Adrianus perked up, and they both agreed. I slipped off, and went back down to the boat. Soon, they appeared in my CCTV monitor, and I walked out to the aft deck to welcome them inside.

Emma liked the interior, and I showed them around. When we got to the port aft guest room, it smelled of gray water. I would look into that a little later. I was showing them the wheelhouse, when I mentioned the computer was broken. I didn't realize it, but apparently, Adrianus was a very competent computer technician. He took it all apart swiftly, and we spent a lot of time, while he made all kinds of tests, but to no avail. I apologized for getting him "roped into" looking at it for me, but Emma replied that he loved it, after which he added, "I would rather do this than a wash down". We all laughed.

Finally, I showed them the engine room, and we spoke for a little while longer until they left, and with bag in hand, headed back to ZZZ. I spent the remainder of the afternoon writing and working on the computer.

Finally, at about 1700, I headed up to check e-mails. Ed was on the computer on the office, and I greeted him. He said he would only be a few more minutes, but like so many others have done while I was using the computer, I didn't feel comfortable hanging around waiting for him to finish. Besides, I always have my friend, Andrey, one deck above the office, at this time of day. So, I told Ed, "no worries", and headed upstairs.

Andrey greeted me, and we talked about several things, including the time of day trash is dealt with on the ship. I told him previously that I had planned to get rid of some food, and he remembered. He said it would be better if I put the food in the waste barrels before 0800. That way, they would start to smell, from being in the heat for hours. I also asked about the condition of the Mirage hull, as far as being acceptable for inspectors upon our arrival. Andrey clarified his remarks by telling me that the case he told me about was strictly an issue in Australia only.

I overheard the riders calling each other about the off-loading briefing. They were all under the impression that it was tonight at 1800, but didn't know where. I pointed this out to Andrey, who quickly called all the riders on his radio, and informed them all that the briefing was tomorrow night at 1800, in the bridge, not tonight.

Finally, I asked about our ETA in Martinique and Ft. Lauderdale. We spoke about it casually for a few minutes, and then he dropped a bombshell. The plan was now to off-load immediately upon arrival in Ft. Lauderdale. I was very upset, but tried to hide that as best as I could from him. It wasn't his fault, after all. I had been hoping to spend Thanksgiving dinner with Liz.

The best plan, if we were still arriving on Thanksgiving Day, was to have the ship tie up, and I could sneak off for the evening, leaving the Mirage unattended for a few hours. The original plan was to begin submerging at 0600 the following morning. Now, if the plan was changed to off-load immediately, I would have to not only stay with the boat, but also have no groceries, no open stores to buy groceries, and be all by myself on Thanksgiving. This was going to really suck, if that was the case.

I finally excused myself, and went back down one level, to the office. I fired out an e-mail to Andreas, letting him know the possible schedule change, and my feelings about it, not that it is his fault either. Then I sent an e-mail response to my mother. I was glad that she had a good time in Paris, and had returned safely, but disappointed that Sierra flaked out on her. Oh well. I think that Sierra has depression problems. I finally headed down to the mess deck.

I knew that I was a little early when I got to the mess hall, but it seemed extra quiet. The salad wasn't even out yet. Neither was the mystery liquid we drank each night. Finally, I just sat there waiting for the cooks and the steward, but after about 5 minutes, I finally realized that I was 30 minutes early, instead of just 15. So, I headed off, not really sure where I was going for 30 minutes. I didn't want to go all the way back down, and then turn around and head all the way back up.

I finally decided to hang out at the pool deck. I was looking out, over the dark ocean, and the cargo deck, when something caught my eye. It was Antony, climbing up the starboard stairs. I waited for him to reach the top, and greeted him in the semi-darkness. He smiled and asked if this was where the meeting was taking place, assuming that was what I was waiting there for. I said that the meeting was tomorrow, and that he must have missed Andrey's radio call a little while ago.

We hung out together, talking about various things, until we spotted Allan and Janine, who stopped to deposit some trash, before climbing the rest of the way up to us. I greeted Allan with a "Happy Birthday", and he thanked me. We all stood there and talked for a bit, before being joined by Ben. Allan had apparently decided to quit smoking, and rum, all in one go today, in honor of his birthday. After that we all decided to go in, and down to the mess deck.

The conversation revolved around Ben's missing IPOD, or I-Touch, or I-Phone, or whatever it was. He was distressed, as everything important was on it; not simply music, apparently. Allan quietly suggested a "thorough" search aboard "Kai" was in order. I couldn't help but chuckle as I heard this. I think Will mentioned that he had three or four of the little devices. I could easily imagine a drunken party where they all got mixed up.

The other riders also talked a lot about the off-loading in Martinique, which was coming quickly. Not as quick as Janine thought however, as she didn't realize that today was still Tuesday, not Wednesday. She had a good laugh at herself. Janine then asked me if everything got sorted with Giovanna, and I replied that it had, and thanked her for her interest.

At some point, Adrianus, all the way from the next table, informed me that he had left two cold beers on my swim platform. I guess I looked stunned, as he smiled. I finally blurted out "What do I owe you?", and he said, "Nothing. It was for the tour." I then replied, "You can come by again tomorrow for another tour, if you like", at which point the whole group laughed.

I mentioned before leaving that there was an e-mail on the computer for James Woods. Adrianus speculated that Rene had been tasked with taking care of that, as he had overheard a radio conversation earlier about it. However, when I went back up, for one last check of e-mails, the message still had not been opened. I decided to let them take care of it, and not appear to be too involved in their personal affairs. I did happen to notice that the e-mail appeared to be from a family member, I suspect his father, as the name was the same, and the address had "gov.au" in it, meaning to me anyway, that his dad works for the Australian government.

I went back down to the boat, and by this time, had forgotten what Adrianus had said earlier, so I was happily surprised, and reminded, when I stepped to the top of my ladder, and discovered 2 cold Heinekens waiting for me, in the same red plastic bag I took all the cheese over to ZZZ the other day. I grabbed them up, and as I was about to turn and go inside, I heard Ben call from behind me.

Allan and Janine were both with him, and by all appearances, just heading back out, or down. I asked about Ben's I-whatever, and he still hadn't located it yet. I told him that it had to be around here somewhere. He looked worried and reiterated the data he had on it. I sympathized with him, mentioning that the cost of a replacement was trivial at that point, at which they all agreed.

I said good night, and headed inside to put my two beers on ice for later. I began writing, and time slipped away, until I had become quite sleepy. Not usually one to pass an opportunity to take advantage of that feeling, I decided to go to bed, in spite of the comparatively early hour of 2200. I was concerned about the all of the hard, little blisters on my hands. They were getting slightly worse, and for the first time, starting to itch.

I showered, and afterwards, started checking the medical supplies for Benadryl, or something like it. I didn't find that, but did find some of Cortisone, left over from my eye surgery. The magic of Cortisone was proven to me as a teenager, when I had a bad case of Poison Ivy. I quickly popped two of the very little pills, and washed them down with water. I climbed into my nice clean bed, which felt great.

I was certain that I was going to sleep well. That lasted about an hour and a half, after which, I was restless again. Cursing the inability to sleep, I decided to get up. I had been thinking about the food trash that would need to be disposed of at an unusually early hour for me, on this trip. The barrels were allegedly emptied at 0800 sharp, and I didn't want to wait any longer to empty the reach-in of all the food that needed to be thrown away.

I decided to go up and have a look. For some unknown reason, I had the munchies. I started with pretzels, and then got into a can of peach halves, before moving on to a can of tuna fish. I laughed to myself, thinking that this was the diet of a crazy man, or a pregnant woman. I guess I knew which one I was.

Somewhat content that I had properly surveyed the contents of the reach-in, and filled my stomach with a mixture of food certain to cause nightmares, I headed sleepily back to my bunk. This time I slept well. I was surprised that I had relatively little pain during the night. My right shoulder wasn't too bad, and my lower left back seemed to be giving me an unexpected break tonight.

Young Will never did come by. Maybe he still can't find his hard drive.

November 17, 2010

I awoke several times during the night, always checking the time on my watch, lest I be fooled by the light coming in from the portholes, which could be deceiving, as the fluorescents out on the cargo deck could imitate sunlight to a person only half awake.

Finally, at 0630, I had to use the bathroom, (for the third time), and thought that I should first of all, go cycle the EVAC, and secondly, throw away all the food. So, I got up, and went about my tasks.

The weather looked very rainy, which was a desirable thing, as I planned to scrub out the dishes that had cooked meat on them for the past two weeks, and wanted to do it in the galley sink, which drained over the side, rather than into the gray water tank, which not only had a limited capacity, but should never get food waste, lest it turn sourly septic, and foul smelling beyond belief. Rain was the perfect "cover" for this operation.

I went to the engine room, and after cycling the EVAC, located the blue Nitril gloves that I had spotted the other day, (no, the other week), when I was dealing with the EVAC. I pulled a pair off the brick of compressed gloves, and before I left, I added some water to the chilled water loop. I had not been keeping an eye on it, and it had dropped to just under 10 PSI. Normal, or ideal pressure, was 15.

That done, I headed back up to the galley. I blew into the gloves, to bring them to life, and pulled them onto each hand. I then opened the reach-in, and started grabbing stuff like it was illegal drugs, and the cops were on the way. I don't know why this had kept me up the night before, and was now making me act like a crazy person, but it was.

I opened all the cold cuts that Saija had thoughtfully purchased for us, before leaving. I grabbed the chicken and the wonderful sausage which Nicolas had thoughtfully cooked for me, but I had never eaten. I threw away Italian prosciutto, which would have probably irritated Giovanna, and maybe everyone else, but it all had to go. I wasn't going to eat it, and this was just going to cause trouble if I were to receive a spot inspection from the Department of Agriculture.

I swiftly opened all the closed containers, and dumped the contents into a large trash bag, one after the other. I discovered a TupperWare-looking container full of raw chicken, and was immediately glad I decided to wear the gloves. I went through all the shelves and drawers, until I was satisfied that I had gotten everything that would be

questionable. I placed all the plastic containers in a separate bag, and took both bags to the stern.

It still wasn't raining, so I was going to have to delay my wash-up in the galley. I headed carefully down the ladder, bags in hand, and then climbed up the stairs, to the trash barrels. I deposited the heavy food one first, where I noticed a small bag someone else had left recently. I then opened the "Plastic" barrel, and was planning to dump the contents of my bag, but it was nearly full, with neatly bagged plastic from other boats, so I added my bag to the pile and closed the lid. It was 0715. I had beaten the clock with a comfortable margin, and finally breathed.

I got a little cleaned up, and decided to check my e-mails. I had one; from Giovanna. She gave me her flight info. She was flying into Miami on the 27th, arriving at about 1430, from Charles DeGaulle in Paris. She also mentioned that is was getting cold in Sardinia, and how she would look forward to Florida. I warned her that Florida could get quite cold, especially in the three months coming up after her arrival. I advised her to pack some cold weather clothes, and that I would rather she knew now, than freeze to death later. I know how she is; she doesn't like cold.

I also told her my personal cell number, which I need to get a charger for, as soon as I arrive, or maybe have Andreas pick one up for me. I told her that I was looking forward to seeing her again, and getting her back aboard the Mirage. I told her to stay in touch, and that I would do the same.

Andrey walked in, as I was writing the response to Giovanna. He greeted me very cheerfully. I think Andrey is a morning person. I told him that I had relatively little pain last night, and before I left, I was checking my hands, as I had mentioned it to him the other day. I noticed that the blisters were not itching, and seemed to be drying out. I was happy to see something positive. I finished up, and wished Andrey a great day. His response was that "Every day is a great day", to which I replied, "I suppose it is up to us, isn't it?". He agreed, and I left him to continue his work.

When I returned to the boat, I immediately found the pills, and took two more. I hoped that this would be the answer to this problem. I did some cleaning in the galley, and emptied the dishwasher, putting everything away. I cleaned out the cereal containers, dried them, and put them on the window shelf.

I decided that I had better go around the boat and mark all of the circuit breakers, for the coming stop in Martinique. I knew that we would be going "dead-ship", and would be shutting all breakers off during that time, to avoid battery drain, and high amperage loads when re-starting everything.

At about 1125, I was considering heading up early for lunch, and write Andreas an e-mail, asking him to purchase a charger for me. I headed up the steps from the crew mess in Mirage, and unbeknownst to me, it was pouring rain; harder than I had seen since the Med. I quickly seized the moment, and started washing all the items waiting

for me in the galley. I wanted to use the sink with the direct overboard discharge, which would go virtually unnoticed in a heavy rain. So, I got to work quickly, and within literally 5 minutes, had everything washed and dried. I was pleased with myself today, as I was getting things done, and felt good about it.

I locked up, and headed for the Officer's office, as the rain had just tapered off, at 1130. I made it up all the stairs to the top deck, and sat down to write Andreas. There were no new e-mails for me, but there were now two unopened ones for "Touch". I made a mental note to remind Arjan, or Emma, who seemed to be in more "touch" with them, pardon the pun.

I finished my message to Andreas, and walked out at just about quarter of 1200, walking past the entrance door to the wheelhouse, just as the Captain opened it. I greeted him cheerfully, and he replied, seeming very at ease. I made it all the way down to the mess deck, and helped myself to a salad. I sat down and ate alone for my usual few minutes. The 3rd Officer from the ship ate by himself at the officer's table.

It occurred to me previously that I had witnessed this scene dozens of times before, including on my prior trip aboard the ship 18 months ago. The officers, who frequently dined alone at their table, reminded me of the final scene in "2001; A Space Odyssey".

Soon, Allan and Janine walked in. Bryant followed shortly thereafter, with Ben and Ed joining us a few minutes later. I asked Ben if he had found his electronic device, and he dejectedly replied "no". I mentioned that Will couldn't even find his hard drive, for me to put some music on it, and he had several of these I-whatevers. Allan, Janine and I, all agreed that a thorough search aboard "Kai" was in order. Ben was humorless about it.

We talked about TV shows and movies, the rain, and our imminent arrival, tomorrow. Finally, Allan and Janine were going to play ping-pong, and we all got up and left at the same time. Allan told me that he would see me on the bridge at 1800 for the briefing, and I went up one level, while they went through a door to the rec room.

As I made my way down the exterior stairs, I noticed that the sea had really blown up, and looked ferocious, but since it was going with us, we barely felt it. As I made the last flight of stairs, I saw Arjan and Emma walking towards the trash barrels, with fistfuls of trash bags. I helped them decipher the barrels, and they thanked me. When it was clear that I was not going up with them, Emma was surprised, but I explained that it was already 1235, and I eat at 1200, usually. She quickly produced a business card, on which they had all of their details written, such as name and e-mail, FaceBook, etc. I thanked them, and was once again on my way.

I was washing some more things in the galley sink, and I knew that the soap would be visible to anyone, if it weren't for the rain. Soap isn't a bad thing to hit the cargo deck, mind you; it could use a little soap. I just don't like discharging directly onto the deck, no matter the reason. As I was washing off a floor mat from the walk-in cooler, I had an unusually large amount of soap, as it was really filthy. While I rinsed it off, I heard what

sounded like someone knocking on the boat. The knocking first sounded like it was coming from the crew mess, but that didn't make sense. I suddenly froze, thinking that a ship's crew member was trying to get my attention.

I looked over my right shoulder, with my hands still in the sink, holding the very soapy mat. As I stood there motionless and silent, the noise came again. This time I could see that it was all of my freshly cleaned cereal containers, on the window sill, bouncing against the sill, as the ship shuddered. The rain squall had produced some rough sea conditions, which were hitting the nearly flat-bottomed Yacht Express in just the right way to cause the entire ship to shudder, every few seconds.

It was almost 1700, and I wanted to clean up before dinner, and before the briefing at 1800 in the wheelhouse. After I showered, shaved, and dressed in fresh clothes, I headed up to check e-mails quickly, before the meeting started.

Andreas replied to my e-mail, and told me not to worry about dinner on Thanksgiving Day, but I replied back that I didn't expect anything except that he be with his family that evening. I am not sure what he means. The schedule is still not 100% set in stone, so there is still a chance that I we could off-load the following day, which would be ideal.

I also responded to his mentioning that Tony was prepared to pay someone full-time all of a sudden. This was shocking, to say the least. After all of his bickering about having full-time crew, all of a sudden, he has no problem with it? I am totally confused now. I decided that after dinner, I would call Andreas on the SATCOM, and ask him what changed in Tony's way of thinking.

Andreas finally asked me about John Helfrich, and I decided that enough was enough. I replied that John was unfortunately very unreliable. I admitted that I liked him as a friend, but we were talking about a long-term commitment, and Johnny had a real bad habit of putting even the most trivial personal matters ahead of his employment responsibilities. I basically said "no way".

I sent my sister a quicker reply than I wanted to, but promised a lengthier one at a different time, due to the time for the briefing approaching so quickly. I signed off, and headed up to the bridge. At least half the riders were present already, and I took a seat on the bench next to Rene, who was dutifully studying the schedule for the next three days, which had been printed out for our convenience.

After Andrey addressed everyone, I quietly leaned over and told Rene that there were now three unread e-mails for Touch on the computer downstairs. She perked up and smiling her million dollar smile, thanked me and said that she was headed there next. Ben asked Andrey if riders would be able to get shore leave. Andrey said that he still wasn't sure. The schedule for the arrival in Florida was added at the bottom of the sheet, with two possible scenarios. One arriving on Thanksgiving Day, and off-loading immediately, and the other off-loading on the following day, which is obviously the better choice for me, not that it is a 'choice' per se.

There was also a complimentary group riders and ship crew photo, for each of us to take with us, as a souvenir. It was a surprisingly good picture, which I am not ashamed of.

With the meeting concluded, all the usual suspects headed for the mess deck, while James Cory, Jacques, and Rene went their own way. I sat first, and Kyle sat across from me asking permission first. While Kyle walked over to avail himself of the soup and salad bar, Antony walked up, asking if the seat across from me was available, and I mentioned Kyle.

The atmosphere was a little more tense at dinner this evening, as most of the riders whose yachts were off-loading were comparing stories of last minute work details. They all seemed a little but stressed, as they talked about how their plans would go, and where their yachts were going after unloading. I had it very easy, comparatively; I would have little stress, other than the whole Thanksgiving Day dilemma.

We finished up, and left half the group still talking and eating. I went back to the boat, and felt drained, for some reason. I stayed up, and had a couple of beers, wrote some, and watched my Shakira DVD, before heading to bed.

November 18, 2010

We were getting closer to Martinique now, and as I tried to sleep in a little, I kept hearing the radio, as various calls were being made, mostly to "Touch". Apparently, there was some plan underway to get James Woods off the ship as soon as possible, to have a doctor examine his injured ankle. He had been hobbling around for the past few days, since falling down to the cargo deck from his ladder.

I was happy that I wasn't experiencing as much pain in my right shoulder or left lower ribs, as I was lying in my bunk. The radio suddenly came to life again, except this time, it was a pleasure boater, with a distinct American accent, talking to some buddy of his about the ship that was coming into the bay. He went on and on, over channel 17, describing how interesting the ship was, and how it would be great if his friend could get an up-close look at all the big yachts on the ship.

Finally, I heard Andrey get on the radio and politely, but also firmly, ask that the pleasure boaters talking on 17 stay clear of the Yacht Express, and allow them to proceed into the narrow channel safely. There was no more idle "chit-chat" after that. I was fully awake by now, and decided to go up topside, and have a look at Martinique. I was surprised to see that the rain was so dense that nothing past about 100 yards was visible. I secretly hoped that it would continue to rain, or at least be overcast, for the following day, when we would lose our air conditioning for most of the day.

I followed our movements into the little bay on our Transas, and could tell when the ship was stopped, and had dropped anchor. After the rain let up, I decided to go up to check e-mails before lunch. I immediately noticed that the tables in the officer's office were all

set up for what looked like a meal. I guessed that the agent, and maybe the pilot would be invited to dine there later today. I went over to the computer. There was one e-mail for me, and it was from Liz. I replied to her, and was finished. There were still several un-opened e-mails for Touch, and I was surprised that Rene hadn't done what she told me she would do last night at the briefing. Oh well; it really isn't any of my business, so I didn't bother saying anything anymore.

I went down to the mess deck, and helped myself to the salad bar. It was looking a little better than usual today, with hard boiled eggs topping the salad greens. I made a nice salad, and sat down. As I began eating, I noticed that my taste buds were off slightly. I wondered what might have caused that, and pondered the thought that my Cortisone might have. I dismissed it and continued eating.

Bryant walked in, right on time, and sat down across from me. We chatted about various things, and eventually Allan and Janine strolled in, and joined us. As more people walked in and sat down, the conversation turned to the extra amount of soot falling down on everyone's boats this morning. The yachts being off-loaded were especially troubled, as the crew were obviously trying to have their boats in as good appearance as possible for the off-loading, and the Captains, who would be coming aboard tomorrow morning.

I mentioned the DVDs that I had loaned to Bryant, and he said that he was going to bring it up. He suggested that he give them back to me directly after lunch, if I was going back to the boat. I said that would be fine, and we eventually left together. When we reached the cargo deck, he offered to go retrieve them and bring them back, but I said that I would walk him over to GG, and save him the trip. He thanked me, and when we arrived, he offered me a tour.

GG is owned by one of the Merck pharmaceutical family members, and they are obviously "loaded". However, their yacht was very understated, and Bryant told me that he was the best employer he has had on yachts. It all sounded very nice. The boat was very nice inside, with everything well laid out, and thoughtfully designed. We exchanged e-mail and telephone info, and I was on my way again, with the DVD case under one arm.

When I got back to the Mirage, I decided to try calling Andreas on the SATCOM. I got his voice-mail and left a message for him to please call me back. He called back in a short while, and we discussed some of the subjects he mentioned in his e-mail to me, including crew, the A/C system, and Thanksgiving. I asked him if he had heard anything about Mr. Hubner possibly coming to the boat, and he said yes, he had heard the same thing I had, which was that he would be in Michigan for the holiday, and possibly visiting the boat directly afterwards. Then I lost the connection.

I decided to go down to the engine room and locate the valves and fittings that Andreas had described to me, before trying to call him back. I hunted around, and eventually found what he had described, but with a few extra valve parts, that confused the issue.

After a little while, I called Andreas back, and we went over some more things. I found out that the extra valve stem and flange assembly was bad, and I didn't need to do anything with it. He explained the conversion process once more, and it made much more sense this time, now that I had gone and had a good look in the interim.

I remembered this time to ask him about my cell phone chargers. He said that he hadn't gotten that e-mail from me as of early this morning. So, I asked him to please check his e-mails again today, and see if he received it. I instructed him to buy me two chargers; one wall, and one car, and put them on his company credit card. I explained that I would tell Tony about it later, but that since I used my personal phone for boat business, it was justifiable.

We went on to discuss John Helfrich, who I decided was going to be eliminated from the entire picture. I saw no point in hiring John to get the boat off the ship, especially since Geoff had said such negative things about his mechanical ability. Also, since John had been of so little help to me personally, after offering it. I added all of this to my thoughts from previous issues with his being unreliable for helping us move the boat, preferring instead to go somewhere for personal, and in my opinion, trivial matters.

Andreas didn't disagree with me, and we moved on to discuss the temporary crew that he had mentioned in our earlier conversation. I did not like the sound of the older South African he had mentioned, especially when he apparently was looking for a team position with his wife. I explained to Andreas that Tony had literally asked me for almost the impossible with Giovanna already, making me promise him that she would do the interior and crew cooking.

To have this guy, who was already way too old to be a deckhand, demand a double salary for he and his wife would not fly with Tony, and it wasn't with me either. I mentioned that he would also be untrustworthy, as he would eventually find the team position, and then leave us hanging. Plus, if we could have the younger South African live aboard, Giovanna and I wouldn't be stuck on watch all the time. I just instructed Andreas to explain the rules thoroughly to the younger man, especially about drinking.

I elaborated, purposely, to drive the point home, to Andreas' amusement, that I wanted him to tell the young man that I had recently fired two crew for that very reason, one being South African. I was not interested in having yet another member of the South African Mafia on board. Andreas was chuckling to himself, and I knew that he would do what I wanted. We finished up, and concluded our call.

While I was still talking with Andreas, I had looked down and noticed my shit phone sitting there. I decided to see if I could make it work. After several attempts, using all the roaming settings, I finally hit on one that worked! I decided to give Liz a call. We had a very nice chat, and before hanging up, both expressed how anxious we were to see each other again.

I then called my mother, and we also had a good conversation. Finally, as I was still talking with my mom, I could hear that the battery was dying, so I warned her, and she sped up, and we concluded the call. I put the phone on charge, and thought about who else I could call. I eventually tried Springer, with no success. Maybe he finally did die. Probably not though. More likely was that he had either lost his internet service again, or his telephone, or both. Talk about the “shoemaker’s children”.

I overheard on the radio, that James Woods had indeed broken his ankle, and would be getting a cast later today. That was startling, as the litmus test we all had, that of his being able to move his toes, was now invalid. Note to self; toe movement does not necessarily mean no bones are broken.

I lost my work gloves somewhere, and I eventually decided to check with ZZZ, since it would have been like me to take them, in anticipation of having to climb a dirty ladder, and on the way to a party, I didn’t want my hands filthy. Emma answered the radio, but said that she was on Touch, and that I should really check with Arjan, who was outside, washing down the boat. I said that I would, and she said she was switching back to 17.

I did walk over, running into Andrey on the way. He asked if I was going ashore, and I said that was not, deciding that my money was best spent elsewhere, and that I wanted to be fresh for early tomorrow’s ballasting operation. He agreed, and said that he thought I had “good plan”. I continued over to ZZZ, and eventually caught Arjan’s attention from the cargo deck, as he walked up his starboard side companionway, above my head. He said that he hadn’t seen my gloves, and then asked if I was going ashore. I gave him the same answer I had just given Andrey, and he smiled. We said goodbye.

I went back to the Mirage and started my search for the work gloves I had spotted over a week ago, somewhere. I would have sworn I had seen them in a box in one of the guest rooms, but after a fairly exhaustive search, I was denied any gloves. Finally, it occurred to me that I might have seen them in the chain locker, and I headed there with renewed optimism. Sure enough, I found them immediately. I took both pairs, and climbed back out, onto the foredeck.

I returned to the galley, where I inspected the gloves, and took the cleanest pair, and set them aside for tomorrow morning. I wrote a little, and then decided to get cleaned up before dinner.

After I showered and shaved, I put a clean shirt on and headed up to the office. As I rounded the very last corner at the top of the stairs, I almost bumped into Rene, who was heading back down. We were both startled, and greeted each other. I could tell that she was stressed. I asked how she was getting along, and she told me more about James’ predicament. He would be flown off the island for surgery, and I knew right away that his job was in jeopardy. I told Rene that if there was anything I could do to help, to please let me know. She smiled her million-dollar smile, thanked me, and left.

I checked my e-mails, and almost missed the one from John Springer. It was a good one, with all the ingredients that I liked and expected from John. He was fine, Chris was being “good”, for the moment, Dave feared an analysis from Lynne, which I found amusing, and maybe should not have. He hoped that I would be home by “Turkey Day”, and that he was going to drive down to the port to see two monster-sized cruise ships.

I wrote him back, and replied to almost everything from his e-mail. As I was saving it, the cook’s assistant walked in, and was uncharacteristically dressed in his orange cover-alls. He didn’t leave after he saw me there, and I had the feeling that his time was limited, so I asked if he was waiting for me, to which he replied “yes”. So, I said that I was almost finished. I saved John’s e-mail, and got up from the desk.

He immediately walked over and logged on. I left the room, temporarily, to give him some privacy, and so that he didn’t feel it necessary to hurry any faster than he was already. I waited in the hallway, around the corner. As he exited, I asked him if he was finished, and he smiled and said yes. I went back in.

I wanted to give Giovanna an update about everything, especially the person that we would likely hire full-time. I tried to put as positive a light on it as I could, explaining that it would give us the freedom to leave the boat simultaneously. I wanted to show her around Ft. Lauderdale, and unless Andreas were to come to the boat to cover for us, we wouldn’t be able to do that. I also gave her as many other updates as I could think of, and concluded by asking her if there was anything I could do for her.

I finally saved the message, and then pushed the “send” button. I grabbed my flash drive, and headed down to the mess deck. On the way down, I was met by a woman walking up, who was carrying a DYT briefcase, and I immediately knew that she was the local agent I had heard about. We greeted each other briefly and kept moving.

Ed was sitting in my spot, already eating his salad when I entered the mess hall. He waved, and I got my own salad, and even grabbed a bowl of soup, before sitting down across from him. I had not sit facing the wall for as long as I can remember, but Ed was in my seat, and I thought it would be rude not to sit across from him.

We talked about many things, including my comment about the speed the ship did on the trip to Italy in 2009, for which I quizzed Ed. I suspected that he knew better than to believe my claim that the ship was going 20 knots, and asked why he didn’t correct me on the spot. He smiled and actually admitted looking up the sea-trial data to confirm his suspicions. We had a good laugh, and talked about many things.

Someone entered the mess hall, and loudly greeted us, to whom Ed responded, but I had to turn around to see who it was. It was Andrey. He was smiling and acting jubilant. I suspected, and was right, that Andrey was exhausted. As Andrey walked into the galley, Ed and I got up, and started to head out. We each said something to Andrey as we left, and to Ed’s comment about “time for” something, Andrey responded, half-jokingly, “Time for some Whiskey”. I stopped and turned around to look at Andrey, as

Ed walked past me, on his way out, with an apple in hand. Andrey was still standing there looking in our direction. I walked back closer and asked, "Did you say time for whiskey?", and Andrey said "Yes". Somehow, I got the idea that he would like some, and maybe didn't have any, so I offered that if he ever wanted some, he could visit me. He said something about tomorrow's schedule, and not being a good time, and I reiterated my offer, and left.

I took an apple as well, and as I walked through the water-tight door on the fore-castle deck, out to the pool, I saw Ed, eating his apple. I stopped to talk with him, and started telling him how the lights were all on, now that we were anchored, and how one night after leaving Port Everglades, Andrey had forgotten to switch on the safety lights for the stairs and cargo deck, and I had to walk all the way down to the boat in pitch blackness.

As I was relating this whole thing to Ed, who seemed very amused, Andrey appeared, having followed us out. We all talked about what I was telling Ed, and had a good laugh about it, until Ed excused himself, and left the two of us. As I was going to leave as well, Andrey got a radio call, and when he was finished, I said that I was leaving as well, and would see him bright and early, or rather dark and early.

He apparently had reconsidered my earlier offer, however, and asked to take me up on it. I quickly agreed and had him follow me down to, and on board the Mirage. I let him look at what we had in the liquor locker, and he eventually settled on an un-opened bottle of Jack Daniels. I offered him a bag to carry it in, for discretion, and he thanked me. I gave him a brief tour in the wheelhouse, and eventually saw him to the door, once again telling him that I would see him at 0400. He left, after telling me exactly what he had planned, which was a nice hot shower, and a glass of that whiskey, before bed, with a big smile on his face.

I thought about all of the beer that was apparently still in the slop chest. Maybe Andrey could help me figure out a way to get to some, before I ran out of Peroni's. I was planning on having a couple of my Peroni's tonight, and hitting the bank early. I remembered not sleeping at this point on the trip before, and I figured I could easily get 6 hours of sleep between 2200 and 0400. I was wrong.

November 19, 2010

After nearly falling asleep very nicely, I started to toss and turn, and eventually knew that I was losing the battle for sleep, once again. I wasn't up at Dawn's crack the day before, and that didn't help, but I was very irritated when I came so close to sleep, and then have it reverse on me like this. I decided that there was no point in lying there, fretting about things, and got up.

I figured that I would watch a DVD in the main salon, thereby keeping me pleasantly (hopefully) distracted, and in view of the possible early-bird ship's crew, that might meander down before 0400, and surprise me. So, I picked a movie Allan had been discussing a week or so ago; "The Good Shepherd", starring Matt Daman, as someone

recruited early on in what was eventually to become the CIA. It was a fair movie, with more promise than punch, in my humble opinion. It served the purpose, however, as it was so damn long that by the time it finished, it was 0350, and ship's crew were actually already appearing. I shut off the TV, and got my gloves, ready for disconnection of all my attachments.

I was anticipating Andrey shutting off the sea water supply for the A/C first, but instead, the electricity was suddenly, and unceremoniously, shut off completely, at the stroke of 0400, with a radio greeting immediately following his little stunt. Maybe some crew can sleep through a power failure, but I never could. As soon as my A/C shuts off, I am wide awake, and ready for battle stations.

However, this morning, when Andrey had the power cut off, I was actually in the process of climbing gingerly over the top of the port main engine gearbox, and a whole host of additional obstacles, which would have hurt like hell to fall onto. I was saved by the fact that we have adequate emergency lighting, which illuminated the area I was in sufficiently enough to proceed.

I was cursing Andrey, as he came over the radio, obviously timing his call to all of us, to be following the interruption of power. But, as I cursed him, I was smiling, because I could tell by the sound of his voice that he was smiling as well, and playing with us. I continued, and disconnected my raw water hoses, disassembling the valve at the port side sea water discharge "tree". We call it a tree, as it has so many pipes welded to it, resembling a tree trunk with branches.

The process went very smoothly, and by the time I had the hoses both disconnected, and the plumbing reset for the configuration that is normally utilized, there was a heavy downpour of rain outside. This pleased me, as even though it was at least 90 minutes before we would see anything resembling dawn's early light, a rain shower would be very welcome, and refreshing, when there is no A/C to cool off the boat. I very carefully lowered both of the hoses out through the engine room porthole, using a small rope, which I would tie off inside the engine room, so that I could use it later to pull them both back up with. Not my first time around at this game.

Tim and Will, both from Kai, appeared suddenly on the aft deck of Como, with Ben. they were doing something to help Ben, it seemed. We all greeted each other in the still black as night morning. Tim said that it had been a pleasure, and I said likewise. Will ended up leaving his portable radio there, which then got more confusing later after Ben had misplaced it on the catwalk. A ship's welder gave it to me to hang onto, saying something in Russian, amounting to it being safer in my custody, than sitting out in the thunderstorm, on the catwalk. Eventually Ben came around in a brisk walk, and I handed the radio up to him, explaining why I had it in the first place.

By the time I had gone to the swim platform, and disconnected my electrical shore power cords, and handed them up to the electrician's helper, the rain shower was threatening to turn into a major lightning storm. I saw a few bolts come pretty close to

us, and it lasted a little while, but eventually quieted back down, by 0500. With everything disconnected, and tied off, I had nothing to do, except wait for the loadmaster to show up, and begin ordering the Captain to lower the ship.

The ship's crew had gone around all over the cargo deck, pounding away at the "sea fasteners" with giant sledge hammers, until they were all knocked down, having their welds broken with brute force. It is a very noisy affair, with a lot of banging crashing, and booming down below my boat. Once the work ceased, the ship began taking on ballast water, and slowly started sinking.

I had nothing to do for a little while, so I went inside and grabbed a laundry bag full of dirty whites, and headed up to the crew laundry. I checked e-mails after that, and when none were there, headed back down to see how it was going.

By 0700, the loadmaster was on board, and along with him was a team of divers. This group looked much more humble than the last group we had in Martinique, 18 months ago. That group had obviously considered themselves to be experts, and all acted like they were God's gift to the world. They were incompetent, however, and caused us a huge delay, which was almost unbearable, in the sweltering heat. This group of divers also had a woman, who at first appearances, looked as though she was going to go in with them.

I knew from past experience, that these divers all typically had little modesty, when it came to changing out of their street clothes, and into their bathing, and wet suits. I have no idea why divers are like this, but I have witnessed it many times in the past. Knowing this, and looking at the woman with them, I had nothing better to do than pull up a chair, and wait for the show.

That would not be the case, however. She was the translator. She was *really* cute though, like a larger and older version of Giovanna, and had the nicest French accent.

I ended up getting a chance to speak with the loadmaster, who introduced himself to me as Frank. Not Patrick, who loaded us in Port Everglades 18 months ago. Not Pascal, who Andrey incorrectly remembers loading us in Port Everglades 18 months ago. And, not Jonathan, who loaded us in Genova, and was supposedly, meeting us in Martinique. In any case, Frank was a seemingly very approachable guy, even more so than Jonathan. I quickly took the opportunity to ask about the off-loading schedule for Ft. Lauderdale, and he said it would be on Friday, the 26th. I was very happy, as I would finally be able to tell Liz some good news. I asked if it had been his decision, and while he hemmed and hawed for a few seconds, I mentioned that if it had been his, he was my hero. He immediately took credit, and we both laughed.

The ship was now almost fully submerged, and we only had to wait another 30 minutes or so, before the divers were told that it was time to suit up, and go in. The four men jumped in, and the woman kept an eye, and an ear open for each and every movement they made, and statement they needed passed to the loadmaster. Meanwhile, the crew

from all of the yachts began to be ferried over to the ship, filing aboard, one after the other, until by 0830, all of the yachts were fully manned, (or womaned). Andrey gave out repeated warnings over the radio to all the crew on the yachts to NOT start any engines or generators, until he said that it was OK to do so. The divers apparently take a dim view of some unthinking Captain of Engineer, starting a propulsion engine, which then could easily and quickly become a “meat slicer”.

As crew all rushed around, getting their gear aboard their respective boats, and helped get their tenders prepared to go, several crew came by Mirage to say goodbye, including young Will, who I knew felt bad that he had never gotten any of my music or videos before he left. I gave him my e-mail address, and he agreed to stay in touch, reiterating what Tim had told me earlier, that they were headed for Ft. Lauderdale in February for a refit.

Emma was hugging and kissing Arjan over off to the side, as she would be temping on Touch for the next two weeks, and would not be sure when she would see Arjan again. After they broke apart, Arjan saw me looking in their direction, and gave me smile and a salute, which I gladly returned. Emma had to go right past me on the center catwalk, to get to Touch, and as she passed me, we said goodbye, with her adding that if I was looking for crew to let her know. When she finally walked away, she told me that she was going to really miss me, and blew me a kiss from the catwalk.

By 0800, the divers were done, which was great, because it meant that we were right on schedule. Andrey waited until every diver was safely out of the water, and back up on the main level, before letting everyone know that they could now start their generators. I was very anxious, having done this before, to keep the generator running as long as possible, and run the A/C. I started the port genset, and was pleased that it picked up its raw water prime instantly. However, right before switching the load onto it, it died. I tried to re-start it twice, and finally decided to try the starboard. It started and ran just fine. I switched the load onto it, and started switching all the breakers back on. Other than having to manually prime our own sea water pump, everything worked perfectly when I energized the A/C.

As the yacht crew struggled to get all of their systems going again, after being all shut down after 18 days at sea, the words finally came over the radio that “Yalla” was expected to get going. The person who answered that call on Yalla sounded very stressed, and was probably having issues. That they were also basically in everyone else’s way, was not a fact that was lost on them. The pressure was on!

I decided to go throw my laundry in the dryer, and I also took my camera, as the view from the superstructure of the ship would be the best place to watch everything from.

Yalla finally called back and let Andrey know that they were ready, so Andrey had his deck crew help them out a little on each side; some positioned on the Kimberly-II, and some on Kai. Finally, with the first boat out, each boat was expected to follow, in a carefully choreographed succession; all by Andrey’s radio commands. I knew that I

wasn't going anywhere, so wasn't stressed at all. I decided to go up to the far upper deck, and take photos from a bird's eye view. I checked my e-mails first, and then headed out the door, for my little perch. I had a perfect spot. No one was looking where I was, and I had the best view on the ship.

Kai got underway next, as John on Kimberly-II was apparently having serious difficulties with his port engine. There must be something going around. First the Mirage, then the Yacht Express, and now Kimberly-II. Eventually, the Captain called Andrey, and told him that he would back out with only his starboard engine and bow thruster. From his tone of voice, and how he eventually managed the maneuver, he looked like he was perfectly comfortable with his circumstance.

The whole back row was gone now, and it was time for Perle Noir to go. Captain Nick was a buddy of my former mate, and a very edgy Captain, named Richard, who had been running a boat docked next to Mirage in the summer of 2009. Nick was likely still friends with my former mate, whom I fired for gross misconduct, and I was relieved when Nick apparently saw no reason to bring the subject up, as he came over to shake my hand, after spotting me on the aft deck of Mirage. Nick did a very graceful entrance with me, and an equally graceful departure on his brand new 37-meter Heesen.

Captain Heinz called from ZZZ, saying that he was ready to leave if the ship was prepared for that. Heinz is extremely comfortable handling the ZZZ, and I knew that he would have had absolutely no problem squeaking it out past Touch, without touching Touch, but Andrey slowed him down quite a bit. Apparently, the plan was to let Kai's tender go next, with young Will at the helm, as Kai was out in the harbor circling around while it waited for him. Then Andrey said that Touch would go next, so in essence, told Heinz to cool his jets.

Will was being "helped" by the ship's deck crew, who now had his lines so screwed up, that I would have been very frustrated with them, had I been in Will's place, but he didn't seem fazed, and finally drove right out. Touch left without incident after Will's little boat was clear. Finally, Heinz was given the green light, although I think Heinz sees it as more like a "green flag", and started a very rapid reverse, giving extra meaning to the boat's name; "Zoom Zoom Zoom".

Apparently, I am not the only person who thought that ZZZ was owned by some big time Mazda car dealer. That was not the case, however. ZZZ was owned by a husband and wife team of designers of something. Arjan didn't tell me what they designed; (maybe Mazdas!)

Next on the schedule to leave was GG. Bryant was out on deck, looking fully prepared. The Captain eased it very gently back, along the starboard side of Lady Sheila, and then finally out of the ship. Irina was actually due out next, but their Pilipino Captain was apparently struggling with an engine issue, and asked for some more time. That prompted the movement to the next on the list, which was out only sailboat of the group. This ended up being the biggest cluster-fuck I have seen in a long time.

Whoever the person was, that was at the helm of this nice 45 foot sailboat, he had absolutely no clue (clew? ha ha!) what he was doing. From all appearances, his rudder was stuck in a position all the way to port. I couldn't explain his lack of ability to control the movement of this simple-looking boat any other way. By the time he finally made it out of the ship, I caught Andrey on the long walk back from where they finally let their grip loose from holding this person's hands all the way to the very stern.

A asked Andrey as he passed me if there was a problem with the steering on that boat, and he quickly, and loudly proclaimed that there was only a problem with the operator of the boat, not the boat. I laughed, and he smiled.

The final boat to leave from the port side bay was a very interesting, and futuristic looking craft, that had finally explained a mystery for me. The boat was made by a very innovative builder from the southern hemisphere, called Wally. Mr. Atwood would have loved Wally's; they look just like the tank-test model he had made, which I had to tow around behind the Time's tender in Lyford Cay harbor, to the amusement of the onlookers there.

The morning we all boarded in Genova, I remembered hearing the loadmaster call out a familiar boat name; "Rose Hearty". That was the unique sounding name of a very large Perini Navi sailing yacht, which is owned by Rupert Murdoch. By the time I arrived to the ship that morning, I had forgotten all about the big sailboat, as I had my hands full. I remembered it later, during the trip, and finally figured out that this Wally tender, or "chase boat" as they are being called, was part of the "Rose Hearty" fleet. It was a very stealthy-looking thing, appearing to be made more for a clandestine attack than as a sailboat's dingy. The person driving it out this morning had witnessed the ridiculous behavior of the previous "captain", and was having none of that, opting instead to back out rapidly, without the need for anyone pulling him with mooring lines.

The only boat left was Irina, which started out directly in front of Mirage, starboard side to, along the center catwalk, and finally being managed to get pulled down to the very aft corner of the starboard with the ship's crew doing all of the work by hand. The crew made a couple of very comical mistakes as they accomplished their goals, however. They put one of their own on the aft deck, to supposedly throw a line over to another ship's crew member, on the outboard starboard catwalk.

The throw was excellent, and if he had only tied off his end of the line, it would have been perfect. But he didn't, and it embarrassingly went straight into the water. After several more tries, and to the amusement of the rest of us watching, they finally had it secured at four corners, and pulled it all the way back. Eventually, they were asked, or ordered, to move at least out of the ship, and tie alongside the outside, so that the ship could start the slow process of de-ballasting.

Andrey called me suddenly, asking where I was. I was ordered to shut my genset off, which I did, reluctantly.

The pressure was now off, and the relaxed mood of the ship's crew was making everyone seem more happy, and smiling. Frank was flirting with the diver woman, and I didn't blame him. She didn't seem to mind one bit either. We were all relaxing, and the occasional shower now didn't dampen anyone's spirits. Of course I was more than happy to have the rain and cloud cover, with no A/C running inside. I wasn't spending much time inside the boat anyway though.

At one point, when the divers had asked the woman for something in French, she turned to Frank and Andrey, and asked for a hammer, to which Andrey instantly turned away to get, and she added, "also a wood knife". Andrey was already on his way back with the hammer in his hand, and stopped short, with a perplexed look on his face. As he stood there for a moment, trying to process the translation in his head, from French to English to Russian, Frank interjected himself. He asked her, "A what...? A wooden knife? You want a knife?"

She kept trying to say the right combination of words, which got funnier by the second. She then tried, "A wood saw". Frank turned to Andrey, who was still standing a few feet away holding the hammer, and said, "A wood saw. Andrey, we have that; right? A wood saw?"

Andrey immediately agreed and headed off again.

It occurred to me, sometime during this whole exchange, that Frank had both Milton Berle's voice, as well as his comedic timing. It was really starting to get funny.

She tried again, this time saying "wood scissors". This stopped all of us, and we all started laughing hysterically. Bless her heart; she was a real good sport about it.

By now, even the French divers in the water were laughing at the scene above their heads. We were all now trying to figure out what exactly she wanted, and suggested that she tell us what it does, or what it is for. She described taking this mystery tool and shaving a wooden wedge. The object apparently was to take a wooden wedge, which is basically something that is already geometrically and purposely fabricated to be a "one size fits all", and shave off a little bit of it.

I yelled "Chisel", which instantly made me sound like Snoop Dogg, for some strange reason. Frank looked at me, and replied "Chisel??". I said, "Yeah, chisel. You know, like a wood chisel, you would use in a wood shop." Frank now looked even more puzzled than before, if that was possible, and mumbled something about the concept of a wedge, to which I started laughing, and so did the divers.

Andrey walked up now, with a metal chisel in one hand and a hammer in the other. I saw him look way down at the divers, holding the two potentially very dangerous objects in his hands, and since I was closer now to them than all of them up high on the catwalk, I offered to "hand them" to the divers, and he agreed right away. The divers

were all still laughing from the confusion earlier, but at least were very pleased to finally receive exactly what they wanted.

When everyone paused for a few moments, Frank made a funny remark about the “precision dive team that DYT had at their disposal.” We were all starting to laugh again, when I added that, “The Germans better watch out if the French are getting this precise”, to which we all laughed some more.

Suddenly, one of the younger ship’s crew members walked by with a scooping net. In other words, this was a long pole, with a round net fitted to the end, to retrieve things floating in the water. I watched him go past me on the center catwalk, and commented on the “onion bag” that was employed as a makeshift net, and started everyone laughing again. The divers were not concentrating on their work anymore, and were also laughing again. Frank turned to me, and not so quietly tried to tell me that it “wasn’t like we don’t give them a budget or anything”, and Andrey started to laugh too.

Everything struck us funny after that, and finally, the boats were lowered to their respective supports, and it was over. The order was given to pump all ballast, and get the decks dry. I went about my business, getting all of my utilities re-connected, and my A/C plumbing re-configured for the ship again.

At some point, I struck up another conversation with Frank, more serious this time, about the ladders that were used to board the yachts. I suggested that they were inadequate at best, and downright dangerous at worst. He agreed, and offered an explanation of the company thinking the ladders as very expendable, and not wanting to invest a lot in something that would never be perfect for more than one boat, due to height and things like that.

I also mentioned why we didn’t all just shrink-wrap all of our boats, turn everything off, lock the doors, and get on an airplane. Frank thought about it, and told me how shrink-wrapping smaller boats was a fine idea, but the larger yachts had a lot of problems with it. Apparently, I was not the first person to consider this, and some tried it. From what Frank then told me, it was largely unsuccessful. the larger boats have far too many high structures, like antenna and radar masts to cover, which when hit with strong winds, ultimately shredded themselves to pieces, leaving a trail of expensive plastic in the ocean. Not practical, and not legal.

Frank went on to describe the ill effects of having some of these larger boats sealed up in what amounts to Saran-Wrap. As soon as he started to describe the interior wall coverings and endless other items being affected by the lack of proper air conditioning, it was sounding very familiar to an experience I had previously had on the Time. It is true; these boats are not made to be sealed up and left in the hot sun. the moisture will immediately cause havoc with almost everything inside. Over a three week period, it would likely be disastrous.

When I received power again, the electrician asked me to go check it, and I did, finding the proper voltage represented on our gauges. I tried re-setting, and re-connecting power. Nothing! I tried again. Nothing! What the hell was I doing wrong? I had a moment where I thought that I swapped the cables from one outlet to another, that something went wrong. I decided to call Andreas. He started with the basics, and quickly advanced to phase rotation. I couldn't believe that I missed something as normally obvious to me as phase rotation! But I had. Both rotation lights were red.

I told Andreas that the rotation was indeed reversed on each cable, and that I couldn't understand how I missed it. More importantly, I couldn't understand how it got reversed while it was simply unplugged for a couple of hours. After all, we didn't take the caps off and change the pin connection sequence. Andreas tried to describe how to reverse it back to "green", or normal, or proper, rotation. What ensued was a five minute conversation of misunderstandings that got Andreas laughing, as he tried desperately to explain how to reverse the rotation, in what can only be described as an accent thicker than Henry Kissinger's.

I finally got it right, and we were both very happy. I told him how to find Smallwood's uniform shop, and he was on his way there right now, to look at crew CV's for our new "helper". We concluded the call on a happy note.

I hooked up my fresh water supply hose, and heard a wailing siren, which one of the senior deck crew kiddingly tried to make me believe was coming from Mirage, but I knew better. I did walk around until my suspicions were confirmed; it was Lady Sheila. I have no idea what was going on aboard that boat, but neither did Allan, who responded after a minute of the siren, to Andrey's radio call.

I was out of things to do, until the sea water pump was turned on, and I was very dirty, very smelly, and soaking wet from the rain at this point, so I decided to take a cool shower. I put some of my freshly cleaned clothes on and decided to relax in the crew mess for a bit. I went back out to look around a little, on the now cavernous and comparatively empty cargo deck. It was better than sitting inside right now.

As I was wandering around, carefully walking in my Crocs, as they can slip easily on the smooth wet deck, I saw one of the younger ship's crew, sort of taking cover from the misty rain, under the bow of Como. We acknowledged each other, and finally he called me over, rather sternly. He said in his broken English that I should go put my "runners" on, rather than get caught by the Chief Officer wearing such flimsy shoes. I agreed immediately, partly because he was actually correct about the shoes, and partly because it never seems like a good idea to irritate the crew of the ship.

I briefly considered his command of the English language enough to have me ask if he remembered back in Genova, when the Second Officer yelled across the entire ship at him in Russian, asking "Why the fuck did you wake me up at 0400 when I didn't have to be awake, mother-fucker?", and see if he thought that I should go remind the 2nd Officer of that exchange. He probably didn't remember Andrey reprimanding a few of them for

swearing in Russian in front of Andreas and I that day, explaining that we could understand it. But I decided not to, and instead headed back to the boat.

After I got reasonably comfortable in the crew mess, Andrey came on the radio, and informed us that the sea water pump was now running. He asked for us to set our individual flow to the desired settings, using the valves, and to then acknowledge after we were satisfied. I jumped up excitedly, and headed down to “the valve”; the big green, happy valve. I opened it cautiously at first, testing the result, and knowing that I would have to force some air out of the system.

It started to look good, but I could still see bubbles in the discharge hose, so I opened the valve a little more. I continued to do this several more times, until I had no bubbles at all, and a very healthy discharge flowing. I went back up to the engine room, and energized the A/C components, starting with the chilled water pump, and then the compressors. Everything seemed to be good, and the temp was very high, at 23 and 24 degrees. I saw that the system had called for both compressors, and after #1 was up and running I started #2. I went over to the panel to watch.

Then they both stopped, and I panicked. I turned them both off, and waited a few seconds. The system called for #1 only this time, and I switched it on. Everything seemed OK after that. I tested both in the “on” position again, and it all ran smoothly. I was psyched!

I looked at all of my pictures from earlier now, and started sorting them out. It wasn't long before dinner, and I wanted to check e-mails as well, so I cleaned up, and headed up. There was one e-mail from Liz, and she had accepted one of the invitations to dinner for Thursday, which was disappointing, especially after hearing the great news earlier today, but I understood, and told her so.

I headed down to the mess deck a little early, but today seemed like one of those “exception” days, and sure enough, food was available early. I had heard from Andrey that Allan and Janine went ashore, but nothing about Ben, who I suspected went with them. I told the steward that I might be his only rider customer tonight. he almost seemed to understand me.

I ate alone, helping myself to soup, salad, and the main course. I may have over-indulged. As I sat there, I thought again about Liz, and I understood why she didn't want to wait and take a chance that I might, or might not, make it there on time with no problems, especially after hearing the possibility of missing the whole day with off-loading. I was feeling lonely sitting here now, and it wasn't even Thanksgiving. I took a pear on my way out, and headed back to the boat. I was proud that I had made it for this many hours, and hoped that I would sleep soundly tonight.

I felt a little nausea when I returned to the boat, most likely from eating too much, and getting air trapped inside me. I wasn't going to be comfortable trying to sleep yet, so I

decided to watch a DVD or two. I started with a very odd movie about addiction and morality, with Peter Weller starring, but co-produced by the female lead Baltazar Getty.

If that movie didn't make me feel strange enough, I certainly topped it with my next choice; "Touch the Void". This was recommended to me by Bryant, after I had loaned our DVD's to him for a few days. He described it to me, and I thought that I was prepared for what I was going to see. It was extremely well done documentary about two supposedly proficient, ambitious mountain climbers, attempting an absurd climb in a remote corner of Peru. The story was sobering, and the cinematography was stunning.

November 20, 2010

I finally crawled into my bunk, and drifted off to sleep, having spent the previous 38.5 hours awake. I slept reasonably well for 4 hours, after which I noticed the temperature in my cabin seemed abnormally high. I was immediately suspicious of the A/C system, and didn't want continuous problems for the remainder of the time I wished to sleep, so I dragged myself out of my bunk, and went to investigate.

There was a young ship's crew member standing watch under the atrium; most likely for either unauthorized boarding, or shore party persons from the ship, or the yachts, that might be still ashore.

I went to the engine room, and immediately noticed that #1 had an inverter fault. I reset the inverter, and switched #1 on again. It ran perfectly fine, drawing nominal amps. I cycled the EVAC before I did it, so my job was done at this point, and I headed back to bed.

At about 0800, I awoke, and realized that we were underway again. I also noticed that my cabin temperature was at 77 again, and I wasn't as motivated to go do anything about it this time. I rolled over and went back to sleep.

By 1130, I was awake again, having gotten the better part of 10 hours sleep by this point, and felt the temperature again. I decided to get up for the day, and go check everything out. In the engine room, there was no inverter fault, nor was anything else obviously amiss. I noticed that the inlet temp on the A/C panel was 11 degrees, which is as good as it gets.

As I took the opportunity to cycle the EVAC, I was seriously wondering why my cabin air handler was reading so high. I went back topside, and checked in the sky lounge and wheelhouse. Everything seemed normal there, temperature-wise. I did decide to check the Transas, and noticed that according to it, we hadn't moved from the anchorage in Martinique. So, I looked over at the GPS, and as I had suspected, it was the reason.

After all the power shut-downs the previous day, I had forgotten to re-energize the GPS, which is integral in the Transas system, among other things. I switched it on, and checked various other breakers, when the GPS didn't seem to be finding our position.

After switching on several additional breakers, the GPS had a position, but I don't think it was due to another breaker being off.

In any case, I could now see our position, and we were just even with the most northern tip of Martinique, but quite a few miles to leeward, or downwind. In this particular area, this normally means to the west. The heading was NNW, which indicated to me that the Captain had chosen to not follow the inside of the Windward island chain, but had instead plotted for a straight rhumb line, most likely to the Mona Passage, which was between Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. I decided to zoom out and check. Bingo; our heading marker was pointed right at it.

I went back down to my cabin, where the temp was still sitting stubbornly at 77, and checked the loop water. It read 94 degrees, which doesn't make much sense, as my temperature in the cabin would be much higher if that was accurate. My bathroom loop water was 54 degrees. I still couldn't figure out why I was having problems, so I decided to call Andreas on the SATCOM. There was no dial tone however, so I went back up to the wheelhouse expecting, and finding, that the Mini-M was not on.

I reset the Mini-M, and went back to the crew quarters. I finally tried the SATCOM again, and the call went through immediately. Andreas answered, and sounded good. He hadn't found my phone chargers yet, but would be looking again today for them. He had found plenty of resumes, and some were American, which sounded better to me. He planned to interview some on Monday. I asked him if Tony had talked to him, and he said yes, but only mentioned something about Buddy knowing someone, which I want nothing to do with. I don't want a spy on board. I also didn't want any South Africans, and Andreas laughed and said that he remembers why.

I finally asked him about my cabin's air handler, and he suggested that I just manually open the gear motor by hand, forcing it to stay completely open. I agreed, and he said that he has spare parts for this that he will install when I arrive, if necessary. I told him not to worry, as I always like my air "full-on" anyway, so this was the perfect answer. We concluded my call after I confirmed the off-loading schedule with him.

After I hung up, I immediately went and opened my gear valve, and at first had difficulty making it stay in the full-on position. I eventually got it to stay with a little more patience, and I was elated. I decided that the filter needed cleaning, and took it out to the aft deck for a thorough washing with the hose there. The day was getting better quickly.

I decided to clean out all of the engineering spares from Giovanna's shower storage cabinet. I had put them all there 18 months ago, and they never moved after that. We had a lot of spare filters that would have been long gone by now, had we done any amount of cruising at all since June of last year.

I got everything out first, and then gave it a good wiping out, before putting her suitcase inside. I had discovered her suitcase very early on in the trip, as I was going around the boat to make sure I didn't have something that didn't belong on board. When I found it, in Nicolas' shower storage cabinet, I sent an e-mail to Giovanna asking if it was indeed

hers. She replied affirmatively. After I had all the engineering spares out, and her stuff in, I put all the spares in the port crew shower storage cabinet, and closed it up. That made much more sense now. I hoped that Giovanna would agree, and appreciate it.

The bridge on the ship called Lady Sheila on 17, asking about their tender. Apparently, while the ship was off-loading, and re-floating, their tender shifted, and was now hard alongside the wall. I guess Allan was confident that it was going to be OK that way, as he indicated as such. I couldn't remember them having a tender, however.

The radio call was the first of the day, and startled me. There had been so many people on board prior to yesterday, that the silence was something that I had unknowingly become accustomed to quickly. After the radio fell silent again, I felt strangely alone. I went up to the wheelhouse of the boat, and looked out over the ship, as I checked our course again. The empty expanse of open cargo deck was a vivid reminder that there were far fewer people here now.

I was reminded of a favorite movie, "Omega Man", starring Charlton Heston. There was no one else in the world like him, the survivors all living underground, blinded by some man-made catastrophe. He lived by himself, and played chess against a mannequin head with a wig. He also talked to it.

The earlier discussion about boats shifting made the growing movements of the ship even more noticeable. As the afternoon wore on, the ship seemed to be taking more and more waves to the bow, and it was shaking the Mirage around quite abit.

I took some trash out, and up to the barrels. The deck crew were sitting around talking, obviously on break. They were not going to be picking up any yachts when we arrived in Florida. The ship was going to be going directly into a shipyard in Tampa, Florida, for Azimuth drive thruster repairs, and general maintenance. It would remain there until the first yachts wanted to go to the Med, next spring. You could almost feel the sense of everything ending on board. There was no anticipation, no urgency, of what was waiting for them to do once reaching port. Some, if not most, of the ship's crew would likely rotate back home for leave, being assigned to a different ship at a later date.

I decided to do some long overdue accounting for the Mirage. I worked on Andreas' October credit card receipts, and had the normal amount of questions for him, by the time I had finished up.

At 1700 I decided to get cleaned up for dinner and e-mails. I got showered, shaved, and put some clean clothes on, and headed out at about 1720. I walked all the way up to the office, and logged on. There was only one e-mail for me; from Giovanna. It was short, just letting me know that she was OK, and that she knew she would have a lot of work waiting for her when she arrived. The only other thing she mentioned was that she had not had internet very much.

I half-hoped that Liz had sent me something, but she hadn't. I decided to send out a few e-mails, including my mother, both sisters, Andreas, and Peter Spooner. There really wasn't any point in sending anyone else one. I was a little hungry for correspondence, but realized that I was being very selfish, and that people had their lives to tend to.

I was technically early for dinner, after I finished my last e-mail, but decided to at least go have a look. It was only about 1810. As I left the office and entered the stairwell, I could hear someone climbing the stairs rapidly, approaching my deck. I didn't have to wait long for the mystery person. It was Janine, whom if she wasn't smiling, I would have surmised that something might have been urgently wrong, judging from the pace of her ascent.

We greeted each other, and she then asked me, a little short on breath, if I knew if the clocks had been changed. I had just come from the office, where I had checked my watch against the ship's clocks, so I immediately informed her that they had not changed, but since I had learned that we were still one hour ahead of Florida, we were due to have a time change eventually. Janine explained why she was asking, which was that she had just come from the mess hall, where they were so obviously not even close to being ready to serve food, that she figured that there must have been a clock change.

Then, she asked me what our course was, and I described to her what I had seen on my own Transas, earlier in the day. I told her that we were apparently on a straight course for the Mona Passage, and where that was. She looked satisfied with the answer, and asked if we would be able to see Antigua as we passed it. I told her that unfortunately, we would be passing all of the Windward Islands, as well as all of the Leeward Islands, with such a great distance, that I would not think that we would be able to see any of them.

With a smile, she then informed me that I had answered all of the questions that she was planning to ask on the bridge, and explained that the boys were down on the lower deck, playing ping-pong, while she figured out what was going on. I decided to follow her back down stairs. When it was evident to Janine that I planned to part ways there, and head for the mess hall, she stopped me, and asked if I heard the good news about Ben's I-thingy. She didn't call it that, but I can never remember what I-*thing* he has.

Apparently, Janine discovered the missing item the other day, sitting out in the open, on their main salon bar top, in easy view of anyone passing through the boat. No one denied that Ben had "misplaced" it the night we were all on Lady Sheila, but none of us thought that it had gone anywhere, except possibly with Will, who had a small collection of the devices. In the back of my head was the possibility that Ben believed that I had stolen his device. He might have considered his unusually crass behavior towards me that night, as the reason, or motive behind such an action. The fact that he had left Lady Sheila before me that evening was probably also a factor in Ben's mind.

Janine went on to describe in detail how the machine had been incredibly unchanged from the very moment it had been seen last. The same song was selected that we had

been listening to, and the battery was fully charged. There was obviously no damage, or even any indication that the device might have been either tampered with, or the personal information inside accessed. The whole thing seemed to really be creepy to Janine, and I laughed, proposing that the device had been “abducted by an alien space ship”. She was laughing, and seemed to be visibly relieved to have disclosed all of this to me, but also seemed to still want to tell me something.

We stood and talked idly about the whole thing for a few more moments, until she finally admitted that at one point, they, meaning Allan, Ben, and she, had discussed the possibility that I might have had Ben’s device. I looked her straight in the eyes, and asked her “Why would I have done something like that, Janine?” She started to laugh nervously, and wring her hands together, in obvious discomfort. She replied that she wouldn’t have had a clue, and wasn’t even sure why they had thought of it as a possibility. I smiled and offered my original theory, which was that Will took it by mistake, when he collected all of his almost identical-looking devices, and then lost it in the rat’s nest (imagined) of his cabin, aboard Kai.

Janine quickly agreed, but added that someone had returned it to Lady Sheila, and had to have entered the boat without them knowing it, which she said “creeped her out”. I suggested that Will had been embarrassed to admit that he had found it, after having denied that he had it, and was trying to be discreet, as opposed to returning it directly to Ben, who Will might be a little intimidated by. She looked at me with a look that seemed like she wanted to believe me, and was trying to wrap her head around it. I could tell that there was some doubt, and it troubled me that the three of them had seriously considered me as the culprit.

I reminded Janine of the circumstances in the days following that evening, where I had continuously offered to download an extensive collection of music and video onto Will’s hard drive, but that over those same days, Will repeatedly apologized to me, as he could not even locate his hard drive. I had brought this fact up in front of them all previously, as support to Allan’s vocalized theory that Will had it the whole time. My thought had been, and still was, that if Will couldn’t even locate his hard drive, why couldn’t we all imagine that he had, in a state of drunkenness that night, collected all of the devices, including Ben’s, stumbled back to Kai, threw them all into some abyss (imagined), and passed out, forgetting much of what transpired by the next morning

Janine really seemed to be satisfied by my theory, and was looking more comfortable about the idea of Will “sneaking” aboard, but not being 100% sure, was undoubtedly still reluctant to be completely at ease with the whole thing. To me, however, there was no other reasonable explanation for the sudden appearance. Unfortunately, in spite of all of this conversation between Janine and me, I still remained the only person in the world that knew that I didn’t “do it”.

She then asked me if I had noticed more vibrations, and told me that Lady Sheila was being shaken up quite a bit today. I told her that Mirage was also being shaken around quite a bit as well. That reminded me of the radio call earlier. I asked if their tender was

OK. She replied that it was a fender. I then asked, "A tender fender?", which made her burst into laughter. She said "no", the fender from the Lady Sheila. I told her that I had apparently misunderstood the radio conversation, admitting that I never had seen a separate tender for Lady Sheila. She said that it was the lady Sheila which was now hard against the catwalk. I explained that that was a preferable location, as it would give the Lady Sheila additional support, as we experienced rougher sea conditions. that seemed to make her feel better.

I finally parted ways with her, and went to take a look in the mess hall. The cook's assistant was busy mopping the deck, and the chairs were all on the tables. Just then, Pasha, the 3rd Officer poked his head out from the door to the galley, and tried to politely explain that they weren't open. I tried to equally politely ask if they had any plans to be open soon, and whether or not they were on a different time zone than the rest of us. He assured me that everything would be ready by 1830, and smiled. I thanked him, and decided to join the other riders in the gym.

Ben and Allan were in the middle of some furious playing as I walked in. I was greeted by smiles and "hello"s, and went to sit and watch. Janine was also sitting, and we spoke briefly about my holiday woes. She made a suggestion that maybe us four should think about going out that night. I told her that it was certainly an idea with merit.

At 1825, the door opened, and Pasha stepped in, looked at all of us silently, and then kind of shook his head in a 'positive' motion, and walked out. I was certain that he was trying to indicate that the mess hall was open, but forgot that I was the only one who spoke with him. I watched, and saw no indication of anyone leaving, so I turned to Janine, and said, "I think he was trying to tell us that we could go eat". She looked at me like I was crazy, and then realized that it was about the right time.

Ben and Allan were too competitive to stop their playing in mid-game, so without saying much, Janine and I left them to it, and walked out. After we exited the gym, I heard Janine say something akin to "Well I'm hungry. I don't know about anyone else". We walked down the hallway, and right past the crew locker room, where about seven crew were huddled, obviously waiting for the news that Janine and I already knew.

The crew followed us in, and the steward rushed around like a crazy person, trying to get everything set up again. As there wasn't anything up at the soup and salad bar yet, I grabbed a chair, my usual one, on the opposite side of the table, on the end, which faces the entry door to the mess hall. Janine took the seat on the opposite side, but in the center.

The boys were close behind, as it turns out, and Allan sat down quickly next to me, directly opposite Janine. Ben walked around the far end of the table, choosing the seat next to Allan. In all fairness, Ben was almost as inclined to want a seat facing the interior of the room as much as the next person, but the stage was set, and Allan remarked that Janine would now officially be the center of attention. I smiled as I heard that, while I was getting back up to chase the steward over to the salad bar.

The conversation was fairly quiet. I mentioned a few things about having watched “The Good Shepherd”, and also “Touching the Void”. Ben looked over with what seemed like genuine interest, and we all had an amicable, if not comparatively subdued dinner. We hadn’t really been dragging our feet sitting there after eating, but Ben suddenly, and surprisingly (to me anyway), got up, and excused himself for the evening, wishing us all a good night, and to see us tomorrow.

We didn’t stay much longer, but in the short time we remained, I asked about Allan’s parting remark to Ben. Apparently, Ben is studying for his Y-3 Engineer license oral exam. The conversation that followed however, didn’t add up much, because Ben was also apparently a year shy of the actual sea time required for being eligible to even have an approved appointment to take the test. ‘What was the urgency then?’, I decided to wonder only to myself.

Janine and I grabbed some fruit on the way out the door, and we all walked up to the Forecastle deck, and out the water tight door. We were greeted by nearly a full moon, which shining down on the wind-tossed ocean waters, looked magnificent. We all “oohed and ahned” at it, speaking a little between the three of us, until we all simultaneously decided to part ways, with “goodnight”s all around.

I was feeling a mixture of feelings as I climbed back down the starboard stairs. I was now the only person using these stairs to access their yacht, and it was a somewhat lonely feeling. I was looking out over the long, empty cargo deck in the starboard bay, as the moonlight illuminated it for me. While I was getting my salad earlier, I overheard Janine asking the boys about Thanksgiving dinner, and I could not hear any responses from the boys, but she went on to tell them my situation, and was suggesting that we all go out together. When I returned to the table, it was silent.

I settled back in on the boat, ready to write, and relax. I was doing a mental inventory of the alcohol I knew I had on board, and decided to verify my beer quantity, and tidy up some empty bottles in the same go. I headed down to my secret beer storage, which was in the port aft guestroom closet. I had exactly four beers left. I debated saving them, and wasn’t too worried about it. I brought them all up to the galley in the cardboard box, and took them out, placing them in a neat row, on the counter. I looked at them for a few moments, and then thought about what I still had in the sky lounge fridge. I knew I had Champagne, but wasn’t that interested in drinking it. I then started to think if there was any other possible location that Saija might have hidden some wine.

I ended up with nothing, and found myself staring once again at my four last beers. I thought for a moment, and then glanced directly above the beers, to the cabinet used by the Chef, for cooking ingredients. I opened it. There was the expected selection of soy sauces, cooking oil, olive oils, sea salt, etc. I thought to myself, “I wonder if anyone left a bottle of white wine in here”. As soon as I thought that, I looked towards the back of the cabinet, and spotted what looked like a bottle of white wine. I immediately cleared some of the clutter out of the way for a better look.

BINGO! A nice big bottle of some great, (or hopefully great), Italian white wine. I don't care what anyone says, cooking wine should be good enough to drink, or why cook with it; right? I pulled the unopened, large bottle out triumphantly. I was smiling to myself, saying "haha", as I yanked it carefully out to look at it in the light.

However, as I cleared this bottle from its former hiding place, I was able to see inside the cabinet better, and spotted what appeared to be another bottle. Could this be more wine, or probably just some sherry or fancy olive oil? Neither! I was delighted to pull out a very nice looking bottle of Merlot, of all things. JACKPOT! "Now we're talking!", I said aloud, and excitedly started looking for a better corkscrew than the one I blamed for breaking the neck of that last bottle I opened.

I finally located one, and opened a very tasty Merlot indeed! I settled in for some writing and relaxation. I considered what I might do in celebration of my discovery. Perhaps a movie. I would have plenty of time to think about it, and was in no hurry.

At 2115, I suddenly heard a clunking sound from out on the foredeck. Fearing that the wind had broken something, I rushed up, opened the side door, and walked out to investigate. There was nothing obvious, so I looked around for a bit. I could see that Janine and Allan were watching a movie in their main salon. I stood out there for a little bit, and in spite of the rolling, bumping and wind, nothing was out of the ordinary, so I finally went back inside, giving one last glance skywards to the nearly full moon.

I took another look at my four last Peroni's, and then decided to take a photo. I wanted the picture to be clutter-free, and moved a couple of casserole dishes out of the way. When I did that, I noticed what initially looked like water, along the outside edge of the new ceramic cook-top. I was surprised, because I knew that I had dried these dishes days ago. I stuck a finger into the liquid, and it felt oily. I reached for a paper towel, and took a swipe of this oil. It was dark brown, which was indiscernible on the black cook-top.

I finished wiping it all up, but was disturbed by the fact that it seemed to have just 'appeared'. It is sort of creepy to see things like this when you are alone in a structure for weeks, knowing that no one has been in there except you. I suppose that the oil could have been there, blending in with the cook-top all this time, but it was unsettling to me, nevertheless.

The boat was shaken violently several times over the next few hours. Finally, at almost midnight, I walked up to the wheelhouse, and checked on our course, and position. The Captain had altered course to go safely clear, to the north of something called Aves islands, which I understood to mean "Birds". The wind off our starboard side must have set us down on the island more than had been originally anticipated. We were now on a slightly more northerly course. The slight benefit seemed to be a nicer ride. I checked the wind speed, and it was down to 20 knots from its previous 25. Hopefully we wouldn't be in for a violent surprise when we reached the Mona Passage.

November 21, 2010

I awoke at about 0500, to the feeling of vibrations caused by the ship shuddering from the impact of waves hitting the starboard bow. I used my head, and knew I had better cycle the EVAC. So, I climbed upstairs in the dark, not wanting to wake up any more than I had to, and made my way to the engine room.

When I opened the aft salon sliding door and walked out onto the aft deck, the wind was whipping around more than usual. Everything else looked OK, so I headed down to the engine room. The temperatures of the chilled water loop were 12 and 11, which means that the compressor should have just cycled off before my arrival there. That means I can cycle the EVAC without concern.

Once I was finished, I headed back to my cabin, noticing the strong winds again, as I passed the aft deck. I locked up behind me and headed straight back to bed, hoping that I could go back to a deep sleep. It didn't work. I tried for about an hour, but finally got back up, feeling very sleepy, and very frustrated. I was thinking of Thanksgiving dinner, and also a shopping list of cleaning products for Andreas to go buy, prior to my arrival. We were going to need a case of Soft Scrub, and a couple of gallons of Wink rust remover to make the boat white again.

I kept thinking of the dinner idea that Janine was thinking of. Even though the rest of them were not from America, maybe they would appreciate the idea of the holiday.

I decided to go up to the ship, and visit Andrey, and check and write some e-mails. Andrey was there, and smiling, as he greeted me warmly. I asked about the forecast, and he said that it would be good for the remainder of today. He pointed out where we were heading, and I let him know that I was familiar with the Mona Passage. He smiled and knew that we were on the same page. All bets were off when we arrived there. He showed the intended course following that, which was to traverse the "Old Bahama Cannel". This is the body of water that separates the southernmost islands of the Bahama chain from the island of Cuba.

We spoke casually for a minute, and then he told me that we would turn the clocks back again, one last time, tomorrow night. I told him that he just answered the question that was on my mind. We laughed, and I excused myself.

The computer had two e-mails for me; one from my mother, and another from John Breaz. My mother was consoling me about Thanksgiving dinner plans gone awry, and John had a possible crew person in mind for me. He already knew what my concerns were about South Africans, and said he had an American in mind for me. I wrote him back immediately, giving him a very detailed outline of the ideal candidate, and what the reasons we needed someone for were.

I then sent an e-mail to Andreas, suggesting (instructing?) that he go buy enough Soft Scrub and stain remover to get the boat back in shape as quickly as possible. I told him that I was not interested in polishes or compounds, which would take two men a week to make progress with. We needed instant results, which would make the most dramatic change as rapidly as possible. I told him where to start looking, which should be the only place he needs to go; Boat Owner's Warehouse.

I started climbing back down the stairs, and outside to the forecastle deck. Before descending the exterior stairs, I decided to stop on the far starboard side of the deck, and look out over the Caribbean for a bit. The seas didn't look as rough as they felt. The flat bottom of the ship seems to be a factor. I stared out over the waves for a while, contemplating things.

Suddenly, I noticed a sea bird. I don't know exactly what it was, but it was white with black wing tips. Then there were more, and finally I counted about a half dozen. These birds were gliding very gracefully on the wind, and very likely using the starboard side of the ship, which was creating an updraft, to remain effortlessly aloft, as they looked down on the water for food. I waited for a bit, and then one bird glided up gently near me, within a few feet, and looked at me. It then shifted back over the water, where all of a sudden, from about 25 feet up, it pulled its wings in tight, and dove head first into the ocean, like a dart into a dart board.

I could see the air bubbles caused by the bird's rapid entrance into the sea, as they formed a bright white trail in the deep blue color of the water. I couldn't tell whether the dive was successful at that point, but I did watch the bird, and thought I saw it spit something out. The same bird then swooped down and repeated this action, except this time plunging almost horizontally through a wave crest. I watched them all for a little while longer, and finally descended the remainder of the stairs to the cargo deck.

Back on board, I did a little writing, and started thinking about what projects I thought I would like to tackle today. An hour later, at 0910, I suddenly felt overwhelmingly exhausted and sleepy, and couldn't concentrate or keep my eyes open. So, without any more hesitation, I grabbed my radio, and crawled into my bunk. I think that I fell fast asleep immediately.

At 1400 my eyes opened, and I checked my watch. Unfortunately, I had missed lunch again. I was a little upset, but I wasn't really going to starve to death, and I think that it was more psychological than anything else. I finally got out of my bunk, as I needed to use the head. I had a slight backlog, so I decided also to go cycle the EVAC. There were a couple of ship's crew on the level above me, dressed slightly warmer than they had been for the last week or so.

I headed down into the engine room, checked the A/C temps quickly, and cycled the EVAC. Once done, I headed back upstairs, and decided to grab a Coke before going back to the crew mess. While I was on the upper level, I checked the Transas. I immediately noticed that we had changed course, and I plotted the distance to see

approximately when we had. It was almost exactly 50 miles ago. At 10 knots SOG, or speed over ground, that meant the course change was 5 hours ago. That was right when I went to sleep.

I started wondering about my conversation with Andrey. We were no longer headed for the Mona Passage. We were also no longer headed for the relative safety or smoother sea conditions, sure to be found in the remaining hours of today, had we continued to steer the straight path to the leeward, or southern, side of Puerto Rico. I wondered if the forecast was severe enough that our course might take us south of Hispaniola, meaning that eventually, we would have to go through the Windward Passage.

Knowing that I was socially unacceptable in appearance at the moment, led me to decide and get cleaned up for dinner early enough to look presentable. So, at 1600 I headed into the shower.

At about 1700, I heard Allan call Ben, asking Ben if he had heard the time change announcement. Ben replied that he hadn't, and Allan went on to inform Ben that the clocks had just been changed, meaning moved back one hour. Ben thanked Allan for the info, and then Allan mentioned something about a game of ping-pong before dinner.

I thought that I had understood Andrey, when he had told me that there would be a time change tomorrow morning at 0500. Maybe they changed their minds? I would find out eventually. I was glad that I showered early, just in case I was right.

At 1815, according to my as yet unchanged watch and clock, I headed up to the office. On the way up the exterior stairs, I was amazed at how bright the now full Moon was, shining from behind several clouds above the eastern horizon. As soon as I arrived at the office, I looked at the ship's clock there, which is changed remotely. The time was 1820. I knew then that e-mails would have to wait, as dinner was most certainly being served at that moment. I headed down to the mess deck, and sure enough, the crew were already eating.

I sat down, after grabbing a salad redux, and ate by myself for 5 minutes. At 1825, I heard the radio again, and it was Allan calling Ben once again; this time to see if he was still up for the ping-pong. I decided that I had better inform them of their mistake. I called Allan, and told him that dinner was being served at this moment. Allan answered me, sounding startled, and then thanked me.

About 5 minutes later, Allan walked in, and gave me a little wave before heading for the soup. He sat next to me, and explained how he had heard the announcement earlier today. I explained my story of Western Union in Italy, and he laughed. I also said that I had thought Andrey told me the change would be tomorrow morning at 0500, and therein could lay the confusion. He decided that it made sense.

When Ben joined us a few minutes later, Allan asked him as well about the announcement, and I interjected that I must have walked away from my radio

momentarily. Allan quickly pointed out that the announcement he had heard was not on the radio, but over the public address system. That made it even more suspicious to me, and I told him so.

In spite of the Mess Steward's ability to pick up on the slightest change in our habits, and had arranged our table permanently now in the formation we "chose" the first day we left Martinique, where Janine had the center seat opposite all of us guys, Ben decided to change things up, and grabbed what would have been Janine's utensils, and moved them to the far opposite corner from where I was sitting. Strange indeed.

Ben then asked Allan if Janine was going to join us, and Allan mumbled something about her saying she would be in 30 minutes. Janine was there in about 5 minutes, however. We talked about the course change, and that it was likely due to rough conditions in the Mona Passage. I was going to confirm all of this after dinner, with a visit to Andrey.

Somehow, the conversation got around to the fact that I had witnessed the cook and cook's assistant making the "Kool-aid" one day, when I had arrived too early. Allan and Janine laughed and knew what I meant right away. The liquid we drink at every meal is some kind of watered-down fruit juice, as I had suspected. I told them I had seen them taking two large orange buckets, one full of pure water, and mixing them together.

Allan and Janine had apparently also witnessed it one day, adding that they saw them putting quite a bit of white sugar, which made us all cringe. Allan added that it was no surprise that the drink left one's thirst unquenched.

I remarked about how good the fish tasted, adding that I am particularly fond of white fish. Ben engaged me on this, in what appeared to be genuine interest, and seemed to be coming around a little, following the whole I-gate incident. We all helped ourselves to some very ripe cantaloupe melon after dinner.

Finally, I excused myself, and went up to check my e-mails. I had several. One from each of my sisters, one from Lynne Tracy, and one from John Breaz. I was hoping that John passed along some details on his mystery person, but he had decided to say very little, for some unknown reason. I then read Lynne's, where she described a mixed bag of possibilities for Thanksgiving, none of which included me. I replied that she might consider it.

I opened Holly's e-mail, and she gave me the details I would need to get my phone re-activated upon arrival. She also said some very sweet things, including looking forward to seeing me at Christmas. Sue sent me an odd e-mail, telling me that she had thought that I was going to be getting off the Mirage in Martinique, leaving the boat behind. I have no idea where she came up with this, and told her so, in my reply.

I finished up, and went up to see Andrey. The 2nd Officer greeted me at the bottom of the stairs, having just come down from the bridge, with his customary Italian greeting, in

spite of him being Ukrainian. I corrected his greeting to reflect the time of day, which got a smile and an acknowledgement from him. When I arrived at the top of the stairs, the Captain was there, as well as the 3rd Officer. Andrey saw me, and was giving me body language that I took to mean that speaking freely might not be possible. I always assume that when the Captain is present, so I wasn't worried.

I asked Andrey about the course change, and he ushered me over to the master plotter screen, and nav table. He explained that the forecast was too rough in the Mona Passage, and I said that I presumed that we were then headed for the Windward Passage. He confirmed that, and added that we would be now delayed arriving in Florida until the 26th. I was now happy that Liz accepted her other invitation.

I headed back to the boat, noting that I would call Andreas and advise him of the arrival delay. I would also let him know that John Breaz had someone in mind for us, in case Andreas hadn't yet read my last e-mail. Andreas said that he had had no internet, for some odd reason, and so I filled him in. I made sure that he knew I was going to plan on the possibility that Mr. Hubner might pay us a visit after Thanksgiving, and that because of that, I wanted him to go to BOW and buy enough Soft Scrub and rust remover to get the boat all white again, instantly. I made sure I told him that we would not have the luxury of taking the time required to polish and buff the stains out.

I asked about my phone chargers, and he hadn't found them yet. I made sure that I emphasized the importance of him finding them, and he seemed to treat my remarks casually, which made me angry. I got the feeling that he had not put an awful lot of effort into it at this point, which was irritating.

I then called John Breaz, and asked him directly about this mystery person, as Andreas asked if we could set something up communications wise for tomorrow. John explained that it was the former mate from last summer on Sea Gull, whom John had a high opinion of. I was reluctant to go any further, as we would not be paying "mate's" wages, but John took Andreas' number, and said that he would ask Rich, and let Rich decide.

I concluded our conversation by mentioning that my remaining problem might be timing the retrieval of Giovanna from the airport in Miami on Saturday. If we did indeed delay off-loading for one day after arrival, it would then conflict. Now, I was hoping to get off-loaded immediately after arrival, on the same day. That way, I could still drive to Miami the next day, and get Giovanna. John offered to do the same, if I needed him to.

I decided to call Liz, and make sure that she knew we were going to be delayed, and thank her for the article she e-mailed to me. Liz was so pleased that I called, and told me that she had felt bad, but I asked her if she ever got tired of being called smart. We talked for a little while until I reminded her that I was no longer using my cell phone, but instead the SATCOM, which got her attention in a way that I hadn't really intended.

I went up to the ice maker and grabbed the bottle of white wine that I had out there the night before. I opened it up, and was prepared for a nice relaxing evening of good Italian

white wine. It tasted like gasoline. I tried to like it, as I had a large bottle of it, but I finally realized that I had to dump it. Maybe it was 'corked'. I don't know, but whatever it was, it was horrible. I finally grabbed one of my "final four" Peroni beers from the galley fridge.

I watched "The Life of David Gale", which was disappointingly melodramatic, and went to bed.

November 22, 2010

I awoke in bad pain in my lower back; this time on both sides. My watch said 0900, but with the time change, I knew that it was only really 0800. I couldn't rearrange myself comfortably, so I finally got out of my bunk. I used the head, and went immediately afterwards to cycle the EVAC.

I could see off the starboard side of the ship that the sea conditions were fairly rough, although we weren't being bounced around too badly, in my opinion. Maybe it was the direction we were headed. In any case, it felt better than it looked, which was a combination I would take any day of the week. There were seriously large chunks of exhaust soot on the aft deck, which did not please me.

When I arrived in the engine room, I checked the A/C temps quickly, and they were near perfect, at 12 and 11. For some reason, after I cycled the EVAC, I decided to put my hand on the top of the upper condenser, and I thought that it was a little too hot, so I took the flashlight, and checked the raw water lines for bubbles. Not finding any, I couldn't come up with any other reason for unusually high condenser temps, but since the temps were 12 and 11, I decided that I would let it go for now.

I returned to the inside of the main salon, and decided to go to the wheel house to check our position, course, and speed. We were on an almost due westerly course, directly under the Dominican Republic, still headed for Haiti.

I decided to get some of my Gatorade out of the walk-in cooler, and pour it over a glass of ice. I was seriously hoping that I wasn't experiencing some sort of kidney failure, as I was not anxious to be medevaced off the ship to Haiti. If my back pain was solely the result of sleeping, I was going to demand a new mattress upon our return to Florida. The pain was still strong, even two hours later.

At 1000, we were still headed west, now only about 80 miles due south of Santo Domingo, and about 90 miles ESE of Cabo Falso, which was the last major point of land to go around before crossing the border to Haiti. So, in about 10 hours, we should feel some relief from the wind and rough seas, which were shaking us up quite a bit at the moment.

I tried to write, and did, for a while, and the back pain was so distracting that I tried to imagine what I could do to relieve it. Finally, at 1030, I decided that I was also very

sleepy, for some reason, and tried to lie in my bunk, on my stomach. It didn't feel very good, but I was so sleepy, that I did fall asleep.

I slept until 1230, and got back up, still in some pain, but not as severe. I noticed that the A/C seemed warm, so I went to the engine room to investigate. #1 had an inverter fault. I switched #1 off, reset the inverter, and then switched #1 back on. #1 came on, and then, within seconds, #2 joined in. Both ran for about 30 seconds, before quitting simultaneously. I took the opportunity to cycle the EVAC, and before long, #1 re-started, and this time it ran properly.

I did some writing, but felt too uncomfortable to do anything else. I still didn't feel very well today, and decided to try lying down again at about 1400. I awoke again at 1500, this time feeling a little better. I cycled the EVAC, and checked the Transas. We were still in rough seas, but now, they were more or less coming with us. We weren't rolling as much, but the flat bottom of the ship would continuously get lifted by the starboard aft corner, and slammed, sending vibrations throughout the ship, and the yachts.

We still had a few hours, before we might be able to feel the beneficial effects of Cabo Falso.

I got cleaned up starting at 1600, and after I was showered, shaved, etc, I decided to dispose of some beer bottles that I had neatly stowed in their original cardboard containers in the walk-in freezer. I neatly bagged all three boxes, and walked them to the aft end of the main salon. I decided to take two up to the barrel for now, and deal with the remainder in the next few days.

I considered doing some laundry, but I decided against it for now.

By 1700, the ocean waters looked downright angry, as they chased us to the hopefully more protective area west of Cabo Beata, which was now about 30 miles NNW of us.

At 1720, I headed up to the office, to check e-mails. Before I walked through the water tight door on the forecastle deck, I saw a very spectacular sunset occurring, and decided to walk around the bow, to get a better look. The red and pink clouds were very nice to look at, but they also gave me an uneasy feeling. I enjoyed it for a few moments, and walked the rest of the way around, and inside.

I had half a dozen e-mails! That might be a record. Both my sisters, Lynne, Andreas, Giovanna, and even Peter, all wrote. Andreas didn't have an awful lot to say. Giovanna was just staying in touch. Sue mentioned maps and places from my previous e-mail. Holly mentioned my phone plan, and some options. Lynne said she would be playing Thanksgiving by ear, and Peter left his US cell number for me. What a haul!

I answered most of them, and left my answer to Holly for another day, as I needed to hear more from Andreas on chargers, before I did. I informed Lynne that since we changed course, we were no longer going to make it for Thursday, but that I looked

forward to when I did get to see her. I sent Giovanna the “new” ETA, which was to arrive on the 26th, but no further news yet.

After I finished, I went to the bridge. The bridge was bustling with activity and personnel. I stood off to the side of the top of the stairwell, so I would neither be in the way, or too noticeable. I then noticed the chief cook standing there as well, in the shadows. We waved to each other, in spite of being only about 10 feet apart. The bridge is normally quiet, but under the circumstances, it was better to be quite. Anything could be happening for all I knew. As an experienced Captain, I knew that I personally would have appreciated my behavior as a “guest”.

I didn't see Andrey immediately, but there was a lot of activity. Suddenly, Andrey called “Good evening, Russell”, from over by the port side, and when I waved back, he asked me to give him just a second, and I told him to please take his time. He scurried around for a little while longer, and I could also now see the Captain as well. I decided to have a seat on the sofa, so it didn't look as though I needed emergency assistance.

After only another minute, Andrey appeared only a few feet away, and with a typical “Andrey” big smile, said that I now had his full attention. I knew that it wasn't the time to be casual, like we were when it was just the two of us, so I cut it short and told him that I was just looking for a weather forecast. that wasn't entirely true, and everyone knew it, but no one minded.

Andrey walked me over to the nav table, where he briefed me on the latest weather updates. It would apparently continue to be very similar conditions, through tomorrow, and then we would pass through the Windward Passage, where apparently, all bets were off. The Captain had by now strolled over to where Andrey and I were talking. When Andrey was finished, and I thanked him, the Captain picked up where Andrey left off, and answered my real question.

The Captain told me that we were now looking at an ETA in Port Everglades of 0700, on Friday, the 26th. Then he went on to tell me that if that ends up accurate, we will clear customs and immigration in the morning, and begin to submerge by lunch time. Then, we will off-load by the end of the day. I thanked the Captain, and turned and thanked Andrey as well, telling them both that I liked the sound of their news, as I had a crew member to pick up in Miami on Saturday, the 27th. Andrey smiled, and said “Yes, Giovanna, correct?” I said yes, and thanked them again, before leaving.

I decided to let Giovanna and Andreas both know the new ETA. I sent Giovanna an e-mail, and told her that I could still very likely come to retrieve her personally, which is what I had wanted to do. I also told her to keep her cell phone handy, in case I needed to call her at the last minute, before she boarded her plane in Rome. I also updated Andreas, so that he would be ready with crew.

As I finished, it was 1815, and I decided that the mess hall should be serving by now, so I headed down. I passed the chief cook, as I walked by the crew locker room, and he

was having a cigarette. He saw me and jumped up, I asked him if it was too early, and he said no, and I told him to relax, and that I didn't need him now anyway. The soup wasn't out yet, and the salad bar was getting pretty skinny, so I took a few things that I was not as anxious to eat, just to get started.

Allan walked in a few minutes after I sat down. We greeted each other, and eventually the soup was out. I finished my mystery food, and followed Allan's lead, by getting some soup. We talked about a few things, starting with my updated ETA news. I brought up that I hadn't felt all that well today, and Allan mentioned that Janine hadn't either, which was why she wasn't here now. We discussed some bad movies that we had each watched, and had a few laughs. Finally, he said he was grabbing a couple of pears for Janine, and cheerfully and politely excused himself. Ben never showed.

I followed shortly after he left, but passing on the pears. I had enough problems without hurrying things up any more than they were now. When I exited the water tight door, I was staring right at a very spectacular full Moon. The scene was so dramatic, that I decided to stay on the pool deck for a bit to look at everything. The sky had a very wintery look to it, in my mind. It reminded me of cold, snowy winter nights as a child growing up in the northeast. I watched as the bright moonlight played off the water, as the waves seem to be literally boiling alongside the ship.

As thoughts of Haiti, and the Dominican Republic filled my head, I stared out to the horizon, wondering what was happening, on this "full moon" evening, where voodoo was notoriously popular. As I let myself wander in thought, the sound of the ship, lightly rolling side to side, produced an effect, by a combination of the main engine beating, and something banging at a slower pace. Suddenly, I imagined I was hearing conga drums, beating a rhythm to the movement of the ship and the sea. It was beautiful, and a little creepy, all at once. I decided to climb the stairs the rest of the way down, and get back aboard the Mirage.

At a landing, halfway down, I decided to stop and watch the seas, from a closer vantage point. I was looking out, scanning the waves, from right next to the side of the ship, and up to the horizon. There was a ship! It wasn't very far away either. I watched, as it silently passed, headed in the opposite direction. The moonlit night, with the general lack of color that comes with it, along with the lights of the passing ship, reminded me of the many black and white films I had seen, produced during World War-II. "Victory at Sea" was a favorite, and the scene before me was straight out of an episode. I could have been Humphrey Bogart at that moment, unless of course I turned my head slightly to the right, and looked at the Mirage.

I settled in, and realized that the air was slightly warm. So, I headed down to the engine room for a look. Sure enough, #1 had an inverter fault. This was becoming a concern, as it was getting more frequent recently. I checked the raw water, but there was nothing unusual, and no air bubbles. I reset the inverter, and let the system start itself again. #2 was the first to come online, and when it did, it only cooled for a short while, before

shutting down again. I wasn't too alarmed, but I was much happier when #1 then kicked in shortly thereafter, and I waited while it completed its cycle, before cycling the EVAC.

I went back up, and decided to do some writing. I pondered my last Peroni, and decided to drink it. What the hell.

I had been debating what movie to watch, and finally decided on, an old favorite of mine; "Judgment at Nuremberg", with Spencer Tracy. I hadn't seen it in a long time, and it fell in line with the article I have been reading on Libertarianism. The movie finished unexpectedly, when the DVD player fucked up, and advanced the final scene to the finish for no apparent reason.

The ride of the ship had been comparatively comfortable during the past three hours, and I hoped that it continued throughout the night, so that I could sleep. The sound of the alarm for the water tight door between me and the main engine room was going off more than usual tonight, I thought. I hoped that they would knock it off soon. I went down and checked everything in the engine room, cycling the EVAC as I did. Temps were 13 and 11, which was notable. I went back up, and checked our details on the Transas.

We were going to get a lot closer to Jamaica than I had thought, before turning NNE, to get past Cuba. This seems to be a significant detour, at first glance, but the Captain and Andrey have done it many times, and I trust that if they say what they say, they not only mean it, but can also back it up. The average speed of 10 knots helps a great deal, but only to make the math easier and quicker. These days, electronics can take a lot of the guess work out of ETA's.

As I passed through the galley, I noticed the mystery brown oil on the cook top again. This time, after I cleaned it up, I placed a clean paper towel in a random spot in the area where the oil appeared.

I finally did a little writing, and felt sleepy enough to go to my bunk. I was hoping to get a good night's sleep.

November 23, 2010

I awoke at about 0820, and realized two things right away. The first was that it was relatively calm. There was at least comparatively less vibration. The second thing was that I had slept reasonably well. This was in spite of the fact that I could feel pain in my back. However, as I rolled over a little, in an attempt to decrease the pain, I knew that I had rested. I decided to lie there a little longer.

At some point, while I was lying there, I started thinking that I had left my portable radio in the crew mess, but that if anyone called, I would hear it. I drifted in and out of consciousness for a while. I dreamt of strawberry smoothies, to which rum was added. In real life, these would have been frozen rum-runners. It was a pleasant dream.

At 0910, the radio crackled to life, and it was Pasha, the 3rd Officer from the ship, calling Mirage. I answered immediately, suddenly realizing that my radio was right next to me on the porthole sill along my bunk. Pasha informed me that the Chief Officer would like to come aboard the Mirage. I answered, asking them to give me a minute, as I was in the bathroom. I wondered to myself if Andrey was doing some sort of “pre-inspection” of the yachts, prior to arrival, and US Customs boarding in Florida.

I walked up to the main salon, and when I opened the curtains at the sliding glass doors, Andrey was standing there in his orange cover-alls. I unlocked, and then opened the door. I greeted Andrey, who smiled politely, and then asked if he could come inside. I agreed of course, and let him in, after he removed his work shoes. After I closed the door, he didn't seem to want to go anywhere, but said that he had a question for me. Well, I was certainly curious at this point. He asked if he has awakened me, and I said that honestly, I had been lying there, but not a problem.

Andrey finally got to the point, and said that he was “sorry to disturb, but Captain and I would like more knowledge of American holiday; Thanksgiving”.

I was dumfounded. That was the last thing I expected to hear. So, I tried to give him a brief, almost one-sentence explanation, and he responded. “We would like to know should we call American office to congratulate”. OK, this was going to take a little more explanation. So, I went into the history, which I described as the first American settlers, who escaped British tyranny under the current king, and were so thankful, that when they arrived there, they celebrated by having a feast of food, with the local natives.

I continued that over the years, it has become a day when most people are spending with their families, and that the tradition is to always have a lot of food, and over-eat. The thing that a lot of people try to do, in my opinion, is not be alone on this day. The way that I feel about it, I told him, is that I would rather be stuck on the ship, than be in Florida and not have any friends or family to spend it with. I even mentioned that, before we knew we would be delayed, the other riders were considering all joining me for dinner on shore that night.

Andrey seemed to understand now, and with a big “Andrey” smile, informed me that this was all he needed, and would be going now. I showed him out, and commented on the smooth sea conditions. He said that it would be like this for a little while at least. We said goodbye, and I headed down to the engine room to cycle the EVAC, which needed doing badly.

Afterwards, I went up and checked the Transas, and we were about 30 miles off the far southwest peninsula of Haiti. I could see why we would have smooth conditions, but the truth was that there was little wind as well, so the lee of the land wasn't as responsible as the lack of wind. Maybe the Windward Passage won't be a bad as I was imagining it.

As I passed through the galley, I saw my formerly clean paper towel had a brown spot on it. I looked directly above the spot, and the only thing there was one of the light and fan control switches for the exhaust hood. That was not good. If there was that much oil up there, we had a big problem. I knew we had a leak, since late last summer, but this was an even more critical hazard.

I decided to get cleaned up for lunch, and do some laundry. After my shower, I grabbed all of my white clothes and bath linens, and headed up to the crew laundry. It was actually quite hot out now, and as I climbed the stairs, I noticed that the lack of wind had not diminished the size of the swell on the sea. I continued upwards, I was greeted by one of the senior deck crew, who replied to my greeting very formally, saying "Good Morning, Sir". When I reached the top of the stairs on the forecandle deck, I was met by Andrey, who was already dressed in his swimming trunks for the sun and the pool.

We spoke briefly about the swell, which he estimated at 2 meters. It is easy to lose perspective from the upper deck of a large ship. I always try to keep mine in spite of this, and was fooled today until I was up close to it on the exterior stairs. I excused myself to get to the laundry. After luckily getting the machine I wanted, I headed up to the office to check e-mails.

I was disappointed that there were none from Andreas. Either he still has issues with internet, or we are having our own communications problems between the two of us. After taking some pictures of the cargo deck from the stairwell balcony on "C" deck, I headed back down.

Back on board, I tried calling Andreas, but got his voice-mail instead. I was upset that I had not received any e-mails from him at all, and also that he now wasn't answering his phone when I called. I left a message that I hadn't heard anything about crew, and he should call me back, either right away, or later this afternoon, when I could be sure to have finished with lunch and laundry. I would probably call him back first, as under the current sea conditions, I was planning an "outdoor" day this afternoon.

I waited for Andreas until 1150 before heading up. I went into the mess hall at 1155, and saw crew already there. I looked over the slim pickings on the salad bar. There were no greens anymore, but I helped myself to some cut tomatoes, green bell peppers, and cucumbers. I added my usual Italian dressing, which is actually American. I never saw Italians in Italy use anything remotely similar. Maybe they do further south. I sat down and ate.

It was already 1210, and I was now eating a very nice Borsht soup, with a dollop of cream. It was delicious. I was finished with my soup, and waiting for the steward, when Ben sauntered in. He helped himself to something on the counter, and sat at the far end of the same side of the table. We conversed sparingly at first, and things warmed up slowly, until Janine and Allan strolled in. Janine took the seat between Ben and me, and Allan directly across from her.

We talked about plans in Florida. Ben was not going to go with Como the rest of the way, but rather fly home, stopping in Las Vegas and Utah before leaving the US. While Allan spoke with Ben, Janine turned to me and asked how I was “getting on”. I told her about how I hadn’t felt 100% the day before, and she said the same, explaining her absence from meals.

I mentioned that I had never seen Haiti before today, in spite of all my years going past it, back and forth to the Caribbean. We discussed Haiti at length, and covered many topics, including the politics involved with relief work following the earthquake. Everyone was very attentive to my diatribe on the subject, and after I while, I felt that I had said enough.

We all excused ourselves, Ben being the first, and headed out. I checked on my laundry, but had apparently just missed an opportunity to get a dryer by mere seconds. The good thing about these machines is the rapid rate of turnover, however. I would come back in a short while to check again.

Back on board Mirage, I tried Andreas again, and this time he answered. He sounded like he had everything under control now. He had my chargers. He had the wash-down chemicals I asked for. He had two crew to get us off the ship. He spoken to John Breaz’s former mate, and wanted to hire him for the refit. lastly, Andreas said that he was renting a PT Cruiser, which I had to have him repeat, as I thought that I was hearing things. I asked why, and he seemed to be chuckling for some reason. I explained that it was exactly what I would have wanted. He was the man!

Then, as we were still speaking, the line went dead. I tried him back, but had to leave a voice-mail.

Andreas called me within minutes, and I told him that we were still expecting to be in at 0700 on Friday, and planned to off-load that afternoon. That was a plan I really hoped that we could stick to, as I wanted to be in Miami for Giovanna’s arrival on Saturday. Andreas described his plan to have the boat scrubbed thoroughly by Saturday afternoon, and it was music to my ears.

We concluded our call after I told Andreas that we were rounding the western end of Haiti as we spoke. I hung up, and immediately forgot to tell him something. I called back, and he answered right away, thankfully. I told him that I had forgotten to tell him to add the names of the two crew to the DYT port security list, otherwise they wouldn’t be allowed into the port. He said that he would personally go down to DYT’s FLL office to take care of it, after getting the necessary info from the two.

I went down to the engine room to check the fresh water tank level. It was down considerably, and with my plans to wash down, I decided that I had better replenish it. I climbed down the ladder to the cargo deck, and walked over to the water supply valve, and opened it all the way. The sudden splashing from a wave caught me by surprise.

I decided to check my laundry again. This time, I could no longer see Haiti, which sort of surprised me. I then went up and found my laundry had been removed from the washer, and was sitting on top of it, still wet. The dryer was at least free, and I plopped it all in, and set it for 30 minutes. The Captain greeted me as I exited the water tight door, pointing towards the pool, and grunting "Is good", to which I agreed, but tried to explain, with sign language that I had to scrub my decks.

On my way back down the exterior stairs, I now saw Haiti, and realized what had happened. It was now much further forward, off our starboard bow. We had changed course at 1330, and were now headed almost due north, around Cap Tiburon, and directly towards the Windward Passage.

I was out on the foredeck, rinsing off the boat, and yelled over to Allan and Janine, who were also washing down, that the wind came out of nowhere. I apologized for spray, but they didn't seem too concerned. The seas were building quickly, and in spite of the sunny and clear sky, the conditions were going downhill quickly. If this was a taste of what was to come, I wasn't looking forward to it.

Washing down was a great idea, which came and went quickly, as things deteriorated weather wise. I would have to be extremely careful with even the most basic tasks out on deck, or risk serious injury, and even death. It certainly wasn't worth it. The distance off the port side of the Mirage main deck to the ship's cargo deck, was at least 20 feet straight down, to a hard steel surface, with little steel fittings sticking out everywhere. There are plenty of fools, and plenty of old people, but very few old fools.

At 1500, I checked the water level, and it read 100%, so I went back down and turned off the water supply. I decided to get back up on the bow and try to wash down some more. I couldn't locate the pressure washer, but would give it a go with a regular hose.

By 1545, I had to quit. The winds were so bad, that every time I sprayed the hose, it blew everywhere except where I wanted it to go. This was getting ridiculous. I would have to postpone more cleaning until tomorrow, when hopefully, we are out of the Windward Passage.

I cleaned my head, in celebration of the nice clean laundry I had to put back in it. It gave me a real sense of satisfaction, after the debacle on the exterior. I cleaned up myself afterwards, and was done by 1630.

I went to the wheelhouse to check the Transas. While I was up there, I spotted two ships far off of the starboard beam, towards Haiti. They were both headed southeast. The seas weren't getting too much worse, which was good news, at least "for now", as Andrey loves to say to me.

As I was still up on the upper level, I heard what sounded like something had crashed on top of the sky lounge cabin top, outside. I decided to go back down to the main level, where I would exit the main salon doors, and go back up the exterior stairwell, to

investigate the noise. I never made it past the bottom of the stairs. There, sitting partially propped up against the dish cabinets, was a ceiling panel. I knew what the noise was now, and rather than invite a repeat performance, I stowed the panel off to the side.

At 1730, I decided to head up for e-mails and dinner. I had no e-mails, but sent a couple out, including one to Andreas about internet at Derecktor's, and also about the ideal way that we should be tied up in a slip there. It was still early for dinner, so I went up to see Andrey. There were several people there again, but the mood was noticeably light, and I waited by the top of the stairs until Andrey walked out of the shadows, and greeted me, with his usual "Good evening Russ".

We started talking about the weather, the ETA to FLL, and even the ETA to exit the Windward Passage. Suddenly, the door at the bottom of the stairs opened, and I could see Allan and Janine coming up. They had a question about their immigration forms, which Allan said could be possibly answered by either Andrey or myself. All it was about was their intended address while in the US, which Andrey immediately and correctly told them was their boat name.

They didn't stay long, but while Allan spoke with Andrey, Janine came over to where I was standing and asked if the big flat screen was what showed where we were. I confirmed that for her, and pointed out where we had been, were now, and were going, on the screen. The intended course was indicated with a dashed line, and the exact track of our former path was a solid line. I pointed out where we would exit the passage.

Allan and Janine left shortly afterwards, with Janine smiling at me, asking if they would see me for dinner, which I answered affirmatively. As soon as they closed the door at the bottom of the stairs, Andrey told me that he had one last question for me, about Thanksgiving. He asked what the main food item was. Before I answered, he asked, "IS it Turkey?". I said that it was. He then said, "OK; that's all I wanted to know. Thank you".

I felt that it was a good time to head down for dinner, and excused myself politely. I am not sure where Allan and Janine went since I saw them on the bridge, but they were not in the mess hall when I arrived. I decided to start with some soup, and as I started walking over to it, I noticed that each crew table setting had a very nice looking piece of cake waiting for the occupant. I quickly glanced to our table, and saw the same. Wow!

I saw the thin choosing at what used to be the salad bar, and opted for the great soup again. Before I had eaten that, Allan and Janine walked in. We all talked, with Janine recovering from her lack of appetite from the day before very nicely. Allan commented that all the hard work helped.

I mentioned Andrey's question, and this morning's as well. Allan also wanted a quick history lesson. I qualified my description of the traditional version of Thanksgiving, with a lot of humor, and disclaimers. They both enjoyed it, and we all laughed, but Allan agreed that it did indeed sound like Andrey was up to something. Where he might get a turkey would remain a mystery, but Allan told me that during a conversation a few days

ago, when Allan commented that he hadn't seen Andrey for a few days, Andrey's response was that he had gone home for a few days. Maybe there was a helicopter that came and went in the middle of the night that none of us knew about.

Ben joined us, and the discussion turned to exterior maintenance. Allan remarked at how little the wash down seemed to effect the staining, and I threw my 2 cents in. Ben simply said that he was not even going to bother. We all tried the cake, with Allan being the guinea pig, as we watched. He said it was OK. It looked better than OK to me.

When I was finally finished with my dinner, the Steward had come around with clean forks, and I dug in. It was delightful. I am partial to less sweet of a taste, but I really liked it. We all finished ours. Afterwards, while we sat and talked, the young cook's assistant came around and asked us how we liked the cake. After we told him that it was good, he informed us that he made it. We all complimented him.

Shortly after Ben left, the three of us also left, stopping briefly at the pool to look at a ship, which was overtaking us, on our starboard side. Allan commented that "all the action" was on that side, which I readily agreed with. We said goodnight.

After settling in back on board Mirage, I picked two John Wayne war movies to watch; "The Flying Tigers", and "The Sands of Iwo Jima". I finished Flying Tigers, but went to bed before Iwo Jima was finished. The sea conditions were better than I thought they would be at this point, but according to the Transas, we were going a little bit slower than our normal 10 knots. I went to sleep hoping that our ETA would not be affected.

November 24, 2010

I awoke several times, starting at 0500, but was woken much later at 0900 by the sound of Andrey's voice, calling all the riders. He wanted us to know that there would be a rider's off-loading briefing today, at 1800, in the wheelhouse. He asked for confirmation and acknowledgement, so I answered him immediately. Allan answered right after me, and Ben never acknowledged.

I slept a little while longer, as I felt very tired. Perhaps my exertion from the day before had taken its toll on me. By 1000, I was awake, and decided to get up. I was very sore around my rib cage.

I needed to cycle the EVAC, so I went to do that, and as I exited the main salon, I heard electronic music, which at first I thought might be coming from the ship's crew, but it was from Como. Ben had apparently changed his mind about doing a little last minute cleaning on the exterior.

After visiting the engine room, I headed up to my wheelhouse to check the Transas. We had started to follow the northeast coastline of Cuba at approximately 0530, according to our track line. It was still a little windy and bumpy outside, but I figured that I could get

something accomplished later today on the exterior. The conditions should gradually improve, I think.

At about 1100, I decided to go throw some laundry in the officer's machines. I had some colors to do, and was in no particular hurry for them to be done. That is the main criteria for using the officer's laundry. After I grabbed the bag, and the detergent, I headed up.

After starting the machine, I went to check on e-mails. I had six! One surprise e-mail from Carolina, which was short but sweet, one from Giovanna, stating that she really would be very happy if I was the one that picked her up at the airport, one from my sister Sue, about a ferry accident, and what did I think, One from John Springer, about Thanksgiving plans and the Korean War, and one from Andreas, which looks delayed, about having gotten my chargers.

I answered John Springer's, and Sue's. The remainder were rhetorical. Afterwards, I headed for the mess hall. The cook had his Borscht soup, which I liked, and a concoction made from frozen vegetables with mashed potatoes baked over the top, which looked so good, that I actually took too much.

I ate for so long, that I was sure at one point that the other riders had no intention of joining me today. I glanced over at the sign-in sheet, but without being able to read the actual dates from where I sat, I saw everything evened up, making me think that no one else had signed in yet today.

When I had basically reached a stopping point with my main course of noodles and chicken fried steak, the Steward took my plate. I told him that I ate too much, and he mimicked me, repeating "too much", and smiled. I decided to leave, and got up to sign in; just as the other three came walking in. I heard Janine mention something off to my side. I was just realizing what she was trying to tell me, as I saw her initials in my little box for today. She explained that it was done erroneously, and laughed. I was hardly upset; I mean who would be?

I decided to sit, and enjoy their company. We all talked, with me doing the most, and Ben the least, as they all ate. I talked about the job market, and the crew agencies, relating my horror story about Luxury Yacht Group, but without mentioning their name. Interestingly, Janine guessed who it was. We continued talking about things until I suddenly remembered John's e-mail, and mentioned the Korean conflict.

Ben excused himself quietly, if not politely. The remaining three of us stayed and continued chatting. Janine mentioned something about getting up-to-date with the agencies upon arrival, and I mentioned the 40-meter new build I was going to try and get on. I mentioned something about being anxious to get my hair cut, and Janine mentioned that she thought that it "suited me". I was really trying to take her comment as some sort of compliment, but I protested, saying that I normally have it shorter than Allan had his at the moment. We laughed about my hair for another few minutes, before deciding to go.

Allan mentioned something about the balance of work remaining, and Janine pleaded for a “siesta”, with a big smile on her face. We all filed out, and returned to our boats.

At 1330, I decided to check on my laundry. It was finished, and I put it all in a dryer, and set the timer for 100 minutes. As I made my way back down, I took a minute to walk over to the port side of the forecastle deck, to see if I could see Cuba. As I got to a good vantage point, I immediately saw a large tanker steaming in the opposite direction, and there, behind it, I saw Cuba, for the first time in my life.

The topography was almost featureless at this location of Cuba, with only a slight rise of say a couple of hundred feet above sea level. I stared out at the ship as it passed, and continued looking at Cuba, and imagining what life might be like in this remote area of the communist island. Eventually, I was starting to get very hot, standing there, and decided to go back to the boat.

I walked back across to the starboard side, where I saw Andrey, standing at the top of the exterior stairs, in his bathing trunks. We spoke for a minute, with me mentioning that it was my first visual sighting of Cuba. Finally, we said that we would see each other at 1800, and I went back to the boat.

I went to retrieve my laundry at almost 1500, and was a little surprised to see that it was still running. It was already dry, however, so I folded it, bagged it, and headed back to the boat. On the way out of the laundry, Pasha saw me, and asked if I would remind the other riders to bring their surveys with them to the briefing tonight. I agreed.

When I reached the boat, I called Lady Sheila and Como. Only Ben answered, and I relayed the message. He said “No worries”, and that he had already completed his survey, (for whatever extra credit that deserved).

I looked for Spray-9, and more Soft Scrub, but could not find any. I decided to do the best I could with what I had; Orpine. I started on the sun deck, and eventually worked my way down to the swim platform. The results were downright depressing. I was reminded of the previous trip, when I was also horrified at what the soot does to the painted surfaces. At least I tried. I would give it another shot tomorrow as well.

At 1700, I quit, and put everything “away” for the day. I went and got cleaned up for the evening, and ready to go up early to the briefing, as I could not find my survey. As a matter of fact, I had never laid eyes on it from the very beginning of the voyage. The other crew talked about where it was in their paperwork handouts, but mine was not in that location. I hardly concerned myself with it at the time.

At 1720, I headed up to the bridge. It was still dusk, so Andrey and I saw each other easily. I asked if he had an extra survey form, and he had to get Pasha involved. I finally had it, and filled it out right away. Having accomplished what I intended, I decided to go check e-mails. I got another nice one from Sue, and in addition to some other things I

said, I thanked her for all of her e-mails during my trip, and stated that I think she was the only one who fully understood the value to me of the frequency of them, and had done something about it. I also mentioned that she was the only one who followed the proper protocol of putting my name and/or the Mirage in the subject line.

When I was finished, it was almost time to go back up for the briefing, so I headed back up. Andrey and I talked casually for a little while, until the other Allan and Janine joined us. Allan accepted Andrey's offer of a coffee, and Janine and I talked for a moment. Ben showed up on time, and the meeting came to order.

Andrey had a schedule for Friday printed out for each of us, in addition to a "ladder safety" card, which was apparently printed up recently, (and not a minute too soon), in light of the accident that happened to James Woods on Touch. I asked about Customs and the Department of Agriculture. Andrey said that Customs would search the yachts, or pick just one to search, and that we were not allowed to be aboard during the search.

That sounded odd, and incorrect to me, and rather than challenge poor Andrey, I let it slide. It was not "custom"ary for Customs to do searches without a crew member, or the Captain, present during the search. This is for the benefit of both parties. It prevents Customs from planting evidence, and allows the Captain to see where they found something, if they do.

In any case, I wasn't going to sweat it. My biggest issue was agriculture, because I was refusing to throw away some very nice Italian sauces, and was willing to take the risk of getting caught with them. If they really wanted to jail me for that, I would be surprised. I did have the belongings on board of several people, but didn't expect any difficulties there. I didn't like the whole idea of us being sequestered during the "search" however.

When the briefing was over, Janine, Allan, and I all proceeded to the mess deck, leaving Ben at the water tight door, where he stated that he was still working. It wasn't 100% clear to me at that moment, but Ben would not be joining us for dinner. Once inside the mess hall, and sitting down, Allan mentioned "What's up with Ben", and they discussed it openly, knowing I could easily hear them.

We ate, and discussed the various scenarios that might be awaiting Allan and Janine, and talked about the Bahamas, and Ft. Lauderdale. I asked how long they had been together, and they both took turns explaining their history to me. They had only worked together for the past 6 months, but knew each other for a year now. They worked on sister Feadships for the same owner, who named each one after a race horse.

I finally told them that their last names sounded like a law firm, and Janine laughed loudly, while Allan agreed, repeating it out loud, saying "Briner & Raynor" several times. We all laughed, as it truly did have a good ring to it. I showed Allan my cell phone, and we talked for quite a while longer about many things, including my plans.

When it was time to go, we had been sitting there for almost an hour. Janine asked if I wanted to have a little red wine with them tonight or tomorrow on Thanksgiving. I thanked her for considering me, and asked if it could be tomorrow. Allan was only a little concerned that Friday would be a “big day”, starting early, but I countered that I had no plans to get “shit-faced”, so it shouldn’t be a problem. Everyone agreed finally, with Allan tattling on Janine’s wish to drink it tomorrow as well.

We all left, and said goodnight by the pool, before going down separate stairs to our boats. It was funny, because the stairs emptied out at nearly the same exact spot on the cargo deck. If we matched each other’s descent speeds, we would surely practically walk right into each other at the bottom.

It was a little breezy as I climbed down the stairs. I hoped that the weather and seas didn’t make a giant mess of all my earlier efforts. I watched the movie “Heaven and Earth”, with Tommy Lee Jones. I tried to take some lessons from it, in spite of my general distaste for Oliver Stone.

The boat was shaking violently for what seemed to be fairly calm weather. I couldn’t see exactly how the seas were out in the blackness of night, but we weren’t really rolling. We would be heading into the narrow part of the “Old Bahama Channel” tonight. Our speed was 11.1 knots, which was higher than usual. I went to bed at around midnight.

November 25, 2010; Thanksgiving Day

I awoke a few times during the night, and went back to sleep. I wasn’t experiencing as much pain in my back as usual, for which I was thankful. Finally, at 0900, I heard Allan call Ben on the radio. They switched to 68, and I decided to get up. I went to cycle the EVAC, and could see that outside, it was a gloomy-looking, windy, rainy, and overcast day. Not exactly what I had envisioned for working outdoors.

After visiting the engine room, I headed up to check our position, course and speed. We had just exited the Old Bahama Channel, and were on a new, more northerly course, towards the Santaren Channel. This would be the last channel before entering the Gulf Stream. We were getting very close now.

The ship was still getting hit just right to produce a vibration, which shook the Mirage like an airplane going through turbulence. I would replace the ceiling panel after it stopped; otherwise it would probably come back down.

At 1000, we were almost exactly 200 miles from Port Everglades, which means that at our normal speed of 10 knots, we would arrive in 20 hours, or 0600 tomorrow morning. The Gulf Stream would be an additional boost, so unless we purposely slowed the ship, we might arrive even earlier. It looks like our ETA at the dock of 0700 would be easily achieved.

At 1100, I decided to go up and check e-mails, and eat lunch. I had one e-mail, and it was from Sue. She had a lot to say, and it was fun to read. I replied to almost everything she mentioned in hers. By that time, it was 1150, and I stared out of the office window at the ocean for 5 minutes, before heading down to the mess hall.

As I entered the mess hall, I immediately noticed a sign, which had been placed on the end of our table, where I usually sit. I went over to read it. It said "From the Master and the Crew of the Yacht Express, we would like to wish everyone a Happy Thanksgiving. Enjoy your meal". I thought that it was a very thoughtful gesture, and I already knew who was behind it; Andrey. Janine and Allan walked in at the stroke of 1200, and went into the galley to give them a bottle of red wine, before stinging down.

Janine was the first to notice the sign, and came right over to read it. She also agreed that it was very thoughtful. Allan sat down, and Ben walked in a few minutes later. I told Janine that the weather had not motivated me to work, and she agreed, saying that they had been inside all day.

We all chatted about our imminent arrival, and who had crew coming tomorrow, and who weren't sure. No one had kept Allan or Janine informed of their fate, which was something that occupied their thoughts on an increasing basis these days. There had been talk before they loaded the Lady Sheila, that the boat would be possibly driven to the Bahamas straight away, and then based there for the winter. That bothered the two of them, and with good reason. The Bahamas were hardly a good place to sit for extended periods of inactivity, and were very poor for networking, should they decide that this boat was not the right choice.

Ben was going to start his holiday the moment the Como was off-loaded. He planned to go snow-boarding in Utah. His Captain was already waiting for him in Florida, and the interior staff had all apparently been let go for the season, when the boat was to be shipped all the way to New Zealand. It makes sense, as the boat will be out of commission for the next 2 months, as it makes its way slowly across the Pacific Ocean.

At the end of our meal, the cook's assistant walked over to us, and asked that we all come to dinner together, as they had a special dinner prepared for all of us. We all agreed, and thanked everyone on our way out.

The wind was still blowing strongly as I climbed down the starboard side exterior stairs. The ship was still shaking the Mirage, and Allan said that Lady Sheila was also shaking.

It was Thanksgiving, and I wasn't too motivated to do any work, so I watched "The Quiet Man, with John Wayne, and started cleaning up for dinner at 1600. I decided to dress nicely, as the crew were going out of their way to do something nice for me. The wind was still brisk from the east, and the ship was still shaking. We are 137 miles from Port Everglades, which puts us at the entrance at approximately 0600 tomorrow; right on time.

At 1720, I decided to head up. It was very windy outside. I got into the office to check e-mails, and discovered the cook was already there, so I went to see Andrey. The crew were mopping the deck of the bridge when I reached the top of the stairs, so I decided to just stand on the top step. Andrey saw me, and we talked briefly about the Thanksgiving Day sign, which he credited to the cook.

After getting a quick update on the ETA, and the plan for early morning, I excused myself and headed back down. The cook was gone, so I checked my e-mails. There were none, so I decided to walk around a little bit, and take some pictures of things I have mentioned in this journal. The 2nd Officer caught me taking one of the water tight door, and laughed.

I had a good 45 minutes to kill, and I didn't want to climb all the way back down and then turn right around and climb back up, so I stayed on the forecastle deck, and looked out over the ocean, and the cargo deck, and did some reflecting. Finally, at about 1800, I saw Allan and Janine walking on the cargo deck, headed for my direction. They were each carrying a bottle of some sort. When they got much closer, near the top of the stairs, I could see that one of the bottles was bottled water, and the other, although partially hidden inside a paper bag, looked like a bottle of wine.

They saw me as soon as they reached the pool deck, and we talked briefly before heading inside, and down to the mess hall. The sign was still on the table, and I snapped a photo of it. Ben walked in, and sat himself as I was focusing on the sign. After we were seated, we each had a glass of red wine sitting in front of us. We had a "devil may care" attitude on our last night.

After we toasted the evening, the cook's assistant brought out a lovely roast duck, on a platter, with roasted potatoes around it. Janine, who is also a cook, did the honors, and carved. It was delicious, with an apple stuffing inside. We all enjoyed our meal, and our wine. After the dishes were cleared by the Steward, we all sat and talked for a while longer.

Janine mentioned that it would be nice to play a game, and Ben stated that he had some on Como, and we were invited over. It was agreed, and we all got up and left, thanking the cooks for the very thoughtful gesture and great food.

Ben needed to shower, so we all headed off to our respective boats. I was going to pick something out of the owner's liquor cabinet to take over, and finally settled on a partially full bottle of Grand Marnier. I went back outside, and only saw one pair of flip-flops on Como's swim platform, which I reckoned were Ben's. I was wrong.

So, for the next 15-20 minutes, I walked around the cargo deck, waiting for some sign of life from Lady Sheila. After about 30 minutes passed, I finally called Allan on the radio. He answered, and told me that they were already aboard Como. I had missed them going aboard, just before I went outside Mirage, and the flip-flops were Allan's. So, I asked if I could come aboard, and Allan spoke for Ben and invited me up.

When I went in the open port side door, I could hear voices coming from the crew mess. I yelled "hello", and they all beckoned me in. I passed through the very nice galley, and found them all sitting at the crew mess table. I sat next to Janine, and put my bottle of liqueur on the table. Everyone approved of my choice.

We quickly started a game of gin rummy, which evolved into regular gin, and the night was on. One thing led to another, and what started out as a night where we were all going to be "good", and get some sleep before the big day tomorrow, turned into a wild party, with everyone having a great time. The only casualty was the crew mess itself. It was a disaster, and I offered to help clean up, but Ben wouldn't have that.

I don't know what time it was when we all left, and I have a slightly foggy memory of going home, but we all had quite a time.

November 26, 2010; Arrival in Ft. Lauderdale

I awoke suddenly at 0815, startled and concerned that I had slept through the period that Andrey had asked us to be available on the radio, which started at 0700. I could feel the ship still moving, and it felt like we were still at sea. I quickly got up, realizing that I was stark naked, and got dressed in a hurry. I popped my contact lenses in as quickly as I could, and started to realize that I wasn't feeling all that great.

I ran upstairs to the galley, and when passing the window on the way, I could see that we were still out at sea, but close to Ft. Lauderdale. I ran up to the wheel house, and checked the Transas. We were turning to line up for the entry into Port Everglades. I hurried back downstairs and grabbed the camera, before heading outside, and climbing up the exterior stairs to the forecastle deck.

At some point, I went to the mess hall. I don't remember exactly when, but I remember eating several hard boiled eggs, before the cook finally cooked me some scrambled eggs. The other riders were there, but I have vague memories of them. I think that I might have been still a little bit under the influence of the previous evening's activities.

On the pool deck, I saw Anatoly, the cook's assistant, and we struck up a conversation. I watched as we entered the harbor, and approached the dock, with a tug assisting us. The crew were very busy, making all of the preparations for docking, and I stayed out of their way. When we finally tied up, I could see many law enforcement vehicles pulling up on the dock, including Customs & Border Patrol.

We were finally stopped, and it was a very strange feeling. I had a mixture of thoughts, but mostly a kind of mild euphoria that we were finally here. The gangway was lowered to the dock with the crane, and the ship's agents came aboard immediately, followed shortly thereafter by CBP personnel, in uniform. I knew that we were going to be called to the Officer's office for immigration, so I headed there to wait for them.

I found a chair off to the side in the office, and very quickly after that, the room began to fill with all kinds of officials. Everyone who was anyone crammed into the office within 10 minutes. The Captain came in, and glanced over at me briefly, before greeting the uniformed officials. There was a lot of paperwork, and the order of events was to sign off the out-going ship crew members before clearing the yacht crew, or the yachts.

I waited patiently, while just about everyone in the ship's crew filed in and out, to be inspected by the immigration officer. Finally, I saw Andrey, and after noticing that I was there, he called Ben, Allan and Janine on the radio, instructing them to report to the office. When I heard Janine's voice, I knew that they were waiting outside in the hallway, and within minutes from then, one of the agents came over to me, and asked me to fill out a customs declaration.

I was given my passport, after the official checked to make sure that the picture matched the face.

When I did that, the other riders finally came inside the office, and we all greeted each other. After the forms were filled out, one of the customs agents informed me that two officers were going to accompany me to the Mirage for an inspection. I was relieved that the inspection would be carried out in typical and proper protocol, allowing me to be present for the entire time. This flew in the face of what Andrey had told us the night before, and I was happy that I was correct.

The three of us walked all the way back down the stairs to the cargo deck, and then up the ladder to the Mirage's swim platform. Once I unlocked the main salon doors, we all went inside. The officers were extremely courteous, especially the one who appeared to be of Hispanic ethnicity. When they had penetrated the boat as far as the crew area, they seemed to be satisfied that there wasn't anything extraordinary, and seemed very relaxed, and at ease. They did question me about money, liquor, and food. I told the truth about the money, lied about the liquor, and got caught with an apple, but told them it was from the ship's mess hall, which was the truth, and satisfied them.

After the officer's left, I was basically free to do whatever I wanted. At that moment, Andrey called me on the radio and asked me to remove my sea water supply and discharge hoses. I answered him on the radio, and acknowledged his request, letting him know that I would do it immediately. Andrey does things in a very timely and orderly fashion, and I knew that he was being extremely polite. After I shut off the A/C and started disconnecting the hoses, I realized that Andrey had only just turned the sea water pump off. Had I tried to disconnect a moment sooner, I would have had salt water spraying everywhere.

I lowered the hoses out through the port hole, and then grabbed a screwdriver and climbed down to the cargo deck to remove our fittings from the ends of the hoses. While I was finishing that task, A person I have known about for 20 years, but never met, walked up and said "Hello Capitano". I looked up at the stranger, and saw that he was offering his hand. I removed my work glove, and as I shook his hand, he said "Steve

Kidd". I said, "Russ Keys", but only out of politeness, as at that point, I knew that he already knew my name very well.

Steve Kidd owned the small boat that had been placed next to Mirage; the "Outback Kidd". I had suspected that it was his boat, as I knew his name, and that he was from Australia. What were the odds? In my favor, I think. Steve's name was first brought to my attention in 1991 by Don Deihl, the former Captain of the "Time", whom had purchased a very inappropriate tender for the Time through Steve. Don later lamented his decision, implying that Steve had hoodwinked him on the deal. I have long since decided that Don was responsible alone for that bad transaction.

I was now faced with the enigma, the rumor, the legend, the man himself, in person, for the first time since first learning of him, almost 20 years earlier. He was polite, and didn't seem to be the image of him I had in my mind all of these years at all. He was not at all what I pictured him to look like. The most ironic part of the whole thing is that Steve is now the sales broker for the Mirage. We spoke for a few minutes, and I excused myself to finish getting things prepared for shutting down.

Andreas showed up shortly after that, and we had a nice reunion. He explained that he had the two day workers earlier in the morning, but that we were not there yet, so he took them back, and dropped them off. I told him that I needed to go to the bank, and cash a check for some spending money, and he described the car he had, and how to start it, which was trickier than I thought it would be.

I went to the bank, and had a very, very attractive teller, named Betsy Bolle wait on me. Everything seemed surreal to me at this point. I was back in the United States, in Florida, in Ft. Lauderdale. I got my cash, and left for the pick-up point to retrieve the day workers. While I waited a few minutes for them, I called Tony. He asked me to get a hold of Cape Ann Towing, and got the number for them by calling into the office.

The contact person was Courtney. I have known Courtney for years, and I was looking forward to working with him again. Courtney used to be Ellis' protégé. I then called Courtney, and we talked about the revised schedule for off-loading. I told him that I had learned this directly from the Load Master. Courtney asked if it was Jon. I said no, that it was Frank, and Courtney remarked that he was surprised, as Frank was "the boss", and he was working on this Thanksgiving weekend. I hadn't realized that Frank was the senior member of the DYT team.

It was good talking to him again. I quickly remembered how at ease he was driving his tow boat, and it was there in his voice. He was relaxed, confident, and reassuring.

The day workers showed up; Chris from Poland, and Aaron from New Zealand. We talked briefly as we passed through the many security check points on the way back to the ship, and. When we arrived at the parking lot, we all walked over to the ship, with the two young lads bringing up the rear, as I easily outpaced them, much to my chagrin.

Once on board, we were waiting for the ship to submerge, and during this time, my radio crackled to life with Frank calling me. I needed to go up to the atrium to sign off for the delivery of the Mirage. I went up, and after signing the triplicate documents, we had a good conversation. I finally left the atrium, and before heading back to the Mirage, I decided to see if the mess hall was still serving. They were.

Ben was there, as well as Mark, his Captain, although at that point I didn't realize that yet. Ben finished first and left us. The Steward brought me everything I needed, even though I was officially late for lunch. I had made good friends. I started talking with Mark, and he asked me if I knew the vertical clearance under the 17th Street Bridge. I admitted that I didn't, but that I felt very sure that he would clear it. That was when I realized that Mark was probably the Captain, even though he seemed young, and was very quiet. I then asked him directly, and he confirmed it. They were going to Bahia Mar, and yes, he was the Captain.

I finished my lunch, and excused myself, going into the galley, and shaking the hands of the Chief Cook, and the Steward, thanking them again for everything. I made my way back to the Mirage, and there was now evidence that divers were on board. It was 1330, and the ship started to submerge.

Courtney called me back, and I confirmed that we should be ready by 1500. He said that was fine, and he gave me the working frequency for the tow boats; channel 67. After I finished speaking with Courtney, I went back outside, and Frank asked me if I had heard back from Cape Ann. I told him that I had, and that we were all set. He was glad to hear it.

By 1500, the Yacht Express was fully submerged, and we were waiting on the divers to finish their inspections. Two Cape Ann tow boats were idling off the stern of the ship, waiting for the signal from me to proceed. I heard Courtney and his partner conversing on 67, and when I heard a question, I jumped in and answered it. Courtney asked, "Is that you, Russ?", and I confirmed that. We talked briefly, and professionally, for a few moments; just the way I like it on the radio. If you ever want to learn how to talk properly on the radio, listen to aircraft pilots; they know how to use a radio. They are my teachers. Courtney knew how.

I was informed that I would be number 4 for departure. That was number 4 in a field of four boats. That meant I was to go last. I wasn't thrilled, but with only four of us, I didn't get upset. I called Courtney, and told him. He was cool. The "Outback Kidd" backed out, and it was "Lady Sheila"'s turn. But Lady Sheila had a new Captain, and he didn't have things sorted yet. They couldn't figure out how to start their engines. All of a sudden, we were up.

I called Courtney, and they started heading into the starboard bay right away. It was time to go. The two Captains were the picture of confidence, and showed off in front of their captive audience, with some very impressive boat handling, as they came into the tight confines of the ship, and spun their small tow boats in tight circles, demonstrating

their ability. Frank finally yelled at Courtney's partner that he should at least pretend that it's more difficult than he was making it seem. I was enjoying the "show". There is not much more enjoyable for me, than to watch people handle a boat like it is an extension of their own bodies.

The second boat slid in behind the Mirage as the ships' crew hand-lined us forward enough for him to move into position. Courtney backed up to the bow so fast I was startled, but he had it all under control. I hadn't seen him in a while, and he looked older, but don't we all. We quickly greeted each other, and I hooked us up.

We were ready on the stern, so as I listened, the boat was hand-lined forward some more, until the crew on the center catwalk, ran out of catwalk. The boat was now in Courtney's control. I was at ease. Our passage was not without incident, however. As we were being both hand-lined and tugged, the aft end got too far sideways, and a large inflatable fender got caught, and nearly popped. Andreas was watching the aft end, and saw the entire event unfold, with the tail tug Captain talking on his cell phone. He yelled at the man, telling him to get off his ass, and pay attention to what he was doing.