

ALL ABOARD THE MARY DAY SCHOONER!

CAMDEN, MAINE

AUGUST 28-September 3, 2005

Dear family and friends!

Our cruise week on the “Mary Day” Schooner was an experience we are still talking about. It exceeded all our expectations. We took this cruise along with our good friends Bob and Earlene Chasse of Bucksport, Maine and John and Claire Streeter from Portland, Maine. We were all celebrating our 40th wedding anniversaries together.

Now come on aboard and meet some fantastic people.

The boat sits along a dock in Camden Harbor. We approach the dock lugging our gear and what’s this? A rope ladder going straight up the side of the boat? You have to be kidding. How am I going to climb this ladder with all my gear? I look up and there is...

”Hello, my name is Erik. Welcome to the Mary Day. Hand me your stuff.”

Gratefully I hand up my gear and use my two hands to grip the rope ladder. My ascent is slow and hesitant, but Erik awaits with outstretched hand. Phew! Now I am on the boat.

My fears melt at Erik’s kind words of welcome as he checks our names off of the passenger list. He is one of the able bodied crew members.

He shows us to our cabin. I was told our party had the choicest and largest of cabins since we signed on the trip first. Largest cabin? What is large about this cabin? This is a bunk bed in a small cabin. Where is the bunk ladder? You mean I have to climb up and down like a kid in camp?! I see that the upper bunk is a double bunk and I “call” the outside position. I explain to Al I need the outside position so I won’t have to crawl over him when I get up at night to use the “head”. You know what I mean.

Al and I put our gear on the lower single bunk which no one will be using.

There is a small sink in the cabin. Cold water is stored in a small tank over the sink when I turn the valve the water comes slowly out of the pipe.

I do not remember that the holding water tank is small and I have to conserve the water. I am not used to this.

Wait a minute...what is this? A bottle of wine? What’s inside this note card?

“Captain Barry and I are delighted that you are celebrating your 40th wedding anniversary with us on on board the Mary Day! May you have many more years of happiness. Captain Barry and Jen.”

That is very kind of them. I think I will like it here. Who cares if the cabin is small and cramped. I feel welcomed and wanted.

We are given a tour of the 90 foot boat. It holds a maximum of 30 passengers and we have 27 passengers on board. No one is wearing a nametag. Hmm.... I am going to have to work on remembering names.

We are shown the galley which will prove to be the most popular room on the boat. We will be eating our meals here and relaxing around the table between meals in rainy weather. Rain? It won't rain, will it?

Well, if it does, I see lots of games and puzzles to make use of and a small organ...a guitar...this isn't going to be bad.

We are shown the two "heads." Bathrooms. What?! Only two for all these people? Oh geez...how will this work? You mean I have to pull open this heavy door and walk down these few steps pulling the door shut behind me and closing myself into this tiny space? How will I survive?! What if I can't get out? How do I flush? Just step on the pedal...that's not bad. Our toilet on the Sea Cup is harder than this!

We are told this is also the shower room. How can this be? Where is the shower head? What hose? Behind this little door? Well, there it is. I just have to pull it all the way out, and adjust for water temp. Hot water! Wow. Won't that feel great. Where will all the water go? Through the floor? Fine. No problem.

What do you mean there is only one shower? One shower for all these people? How will this work? I will not think about that now.

After dinner on shore with our friends I am now back in my cabin. I will change into my night clothes and climb into bed. Al has to wait for me to clamber up on our bed before he can enter the cabin. The floor space is not enough for the 2 of us together.

During that first night I wake up needing to roll over. What am I going to grab on to help me? Wait a minute. What's this? A pipe running horizontally over our bed? Is it hot? No. Good. I will grab onto that. That was easy.

Our cabin is in a forward section of the boat and it contains 6 cabins. During the night I have to "go". I carefully slide down the side of my bunk and make my way quietly up the ladder to the deck. How many people will be waiting in line for the head? No one is here. I am alone? I like these oil lamps glowing on deck. I can see where I am going.

Now I just pull up this heavy door and go down the steps carefully. The light works. I can see in here. I can do this.

I creep back to bed with a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment. I did it. I survived.

The next morning Al and I take turns getting dressed and we meet up on deck by 8 a.m. along with the other sleepy passengers. 8 a.m. is our breakfast time.

A young woman rings the large brass bell which sits forward on the main deck.

“Good morning, people! “ she greets us with a big smile and flair. “ I am Sabrina, the assistant to Mary the cook. I will be announcing our meals at 8 a.m. 12 noon and 6 p.m. each day. Today we are having sensational scrambled eggs with bountiful bacon, super sausages, terrific toast, best-ever rolls and pastry. We also have fantastic fresh fruit and juice.”

She is right. She is absolutely right. We all file in and take our seats. The food is delicious and all home cooked by Mary who smiles shyly at us in the tiny galley.

We eat everything in sight and then go back on deck.

Now what? Who are all these people? Where do they come from? This is going to take some time.

During the week I slowly but surely meet everyone and chat with them. That couple over there, the couple that never separates...they are Lisa and Gary from Galveston, Texas. They have only been married for 10 months. They adore each other. Very capable too. Lisa is a plastic surgeon and Gary is the director of a marine museum. They own a sailboat and are restoring it. They answer every call to haul the lines and hoist the sails on the Mary Day!

Cindy and Mike, over there are from St. Augustine, Florida. They have a sailboat and have sailed up here in their own boat! Now they are getting a schooner experience.

Here are Bertie and Marilyn. They are celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary on Sept. 4th! We share the same anniversary date!

Ron and Karen flew all the way in from Eugene, Oregon! Ron is a doctor and Karen is a retired teacher. Wonderful folks. Karen likes to sleep late and sometimes does not make it to breakfast.

Anne and Mike are from Bridgewater, New Jersey. They also have been married 40 years!

Paul is here by himself in a single cabin. When I see the single cabin, I agree that Al and I have a large cabin. The single cabin has no space to stand and to dress privately. I wonder where they dress themselves? I think that is too personal a question to ask.

Paul has been on schooner boats out of Camden time and time again. He does not even know how many times. He has been on the Mary Day the past 4 years and keeps coming back. Al and I think he is addicted to Mary's cooking which is very understandable. Paul is from Hyannis, Cape Cod.

There are a group of single older ladies who have come together in pairs. They are all very friendly and hang out in the stern of the boat taking turns on the comfortable green rocking chair.

It is a pleasure talking and relaxing with these folks all week.

The crew consists of Capt. Barry and Jen, First mate Emily, Erik, Nate, Mary the cook and Sabrina her assistant.

Little red headed Sawyer and Courtney are on board with us too! These are the darling children of Barry and Jen and their ages are 6 and 4.

They are very used to their home away from home and love to climb in the rigging together and stay entertained by the passengers and by their mother Jen. They are delightful and photogenic children and we are so glad they are on board.

Emily has just received her captains license and she is strong and agile. She tells everyone what to do but she is not overbearing. We have watched her do every task there is to do on the boat with great competence. Heights are no problem with her. Up the long rope ladder she climbs with her tools around her waist....up to the top of the highest sails! It is like watching a circus high wire performer. While we all hold our breaths below, she climbs around the topmost lines with the agility of a monkey who knows its way around the treetops of the jungle! Amazing. That's Emily.

Mary our cook was born and grew up in Maine. She learned to love cooking from visting her Norwegian grandparents in Minnesota when she was a child. After years of baking at the Yew Trails Inn on Monhegan Island in Maine, she came to the Mary Day where she happily bakes and cooks from early morning to night. Tirelessly. Seeming effortlessly. But what do we know? We are above deck enjoying fresh air and beauty all around while Mary bakes down below. She does all of her cooking on the woodstove in the galley. 3:30 each morning she is up and stoking the wood stove, folks, so she can have a hot breakfast ready for us by 8 a.m.!

The crew loads chopped wood in through a trap door on the floor of the galley. Under the rug. You would never know the trap door is there unless you see the crew restocking the wood supply in the galley.

Mary. How we love her! We stand in awe of her. It comes close to worship. No one messes with Mary. We treat her with kid gloves. We just want her to stay happy and making those delicious meals. She uses all fresh ingredients right down to the herbs. This is home cooking at its best. We appreciate it. We thank her over and over. We only have one week of this and we love every bite. We are her spoiled children.

It isn't easy being the cook on a schooner in a small space. Cold foods are kept up on deck over the side door leading into the galley. To get to the freezer Mary crawls up to the freezer and opens the door. She flattens herself out full length on the deck on her stomach and reaches way down into the freezer to get what she wants.

She loves what she does and she loves pleasing us. This is selfless giving like you have never seen before. She is an excellent example to us of serving others with a loving heart.

Sabrina, the assistant cook, came to us straight from the circus. She loves to dance and is very agile.

"Did you see Sabrina at 4:30 this morning?" Anne whispers to me. When I came up on deck to "go" I saw her walking on her hands! I have seen her dancing in the early morning too!"

I never saw her in action. I had to "go" way before 4:30 in the morning. But Al swears he looked up and out the galley window one time

and saw her feet going by outside the window. She had to be walking on her hands, Al said!

Just as we are relaxing on deck each morning we are interrupted with Emily's " Okay, everyone. It's time to haul these lines. We have to get this boat moving. I need six people on this throat side and 6 or 7 people on the peak side.

We line up obediently.

"Are you ready on the throat?"

"Ready on the throat!"

"Are you ready on the peak?"

"Ready on the peak!"

She laughs and is enjoying this.

"Okay, now heave those lines!"

You think this is easy? No way. This takes lots of strength and stamina. Hand over hand, grunt after grunt, up go the sails.

That was the fore sail. This is a schooner, remember? This boat has multiple sails.

Now we have to do it all over on the main sail. It is sweat, yes, but it is fun doing it all together in a group. It is team work at its best. Another good lesson learned.

After these big sails, the staysail, jib and jib topsail seem easy. The crew handle the main topsail and fore topsail as these require climbing the mast.

Each day the Captain sails us to a different island. The first 3 days of the trip, no one cares where we were going. We just want to stay dry and out of the rain, so we hang out in our cabins reading. It rains for 3 days taking turns with the fog and sometime both going on at the same time.

Monday night we set anchor at Pretty Marsh, the quiet side of Mt. Dessert Island. Those who want to are taken ashore in the dinghy to stretch and see what we could see. We have an hour on shore walking in the rain. No one cares about the rain. It is an adventure to be in a new place and it feels wonderful to walk and stretch.

Tuesday night we are in Brooklin, Maine and we tramp up the hill Wednesday morning in the drizzle to see the Wooden Boat Building where they build...wooden boats! Anyone who reads Wooden Boat Magazine and admires wooden boats loves to visit the workshop and see these boats being made. It is a wonderful education.

It is Wednesday afternoon and I am sitting on deck under the large tarp that keeps us dry. I am reading and minding my own business.

Along comes Marilyn and she backs down the ladder leading to her cabin. Nothing unusual there.

A few minutes later Bertie, her husband comes along. Bertie backs down a different ladder leading into a different cabin area.

"That's strange," I think to myself. " I thought Marilyn was married to Bertie. "Why would Bertie be going to a different cabin?"

A couple of minutes later Bertie comes back up the ladder and looks at me sheepishly.

“I got lost. I went down the wrong ladder.”

“That’s all right ,” I answered, “ I was keeping it all to myself.”

Wednesday night we anchor in a sheltered harbor at Fort Point. We need a safe place in the driving wind and rain which was a spin off from Hurricane Katrina. The rain stops late afternoon and I take a walk on shore up hill to the lighthouse. It’s not easy walking around with the wind gusting...pushing and pulling at you. But it is another achievement. The view from the lighthouse is awesome even in the wind and under darkening skies.

Thursday morning we passengers come up on deck and sit down absolutely dumbfounded. What is this strange sight? Where am I? Did I die and go to heaven? No one says anything. We have never seen anything so beautiful and we are speechless. We silently gaze before us at....the sun! What is that dancing on the water? It looks like diamonds. The sea is sparkling blue and the sky above is....blue. This is a new color.

We love the new look and for the first time we are reluctant to go below deck to eat. But we hesitate only an instant. We can smell the cinnamon buns up here on deck!

All day we sit mesmerized gazing out on the sparkling sea as we sail along in a good breeze. This time we sail to Caldywood Island where we are all taken ashore for a lobster bake picnic on the beach!

This island has several hiking trails and most of us disperse to explore on our own in small groups. We climb up hills to the highest most point and stop. We are now gazing at the water on the far side of the island. Such beauty takes our breath away. We walk silently in awe. We are in a magical place under a spell.

The lobsters are brought in live from our boat and cooked in a big tub over a wood fire along with the ears of corn and potatoes. We sit on the sand and eat and eat. Between us Al and I finish off 6 small lobsters!

We look out over the water to where our schooner layes and see someone swimming off the boat!

“Look!” Al says to the Captain. “Over there! Someone’s in the water!”

Captain Barry looks up and says, “Oh, that’s just Mary.”

He is right. Mary swims all the way from the schooner to the beach and comes up out of the water perfectly calm and at ease. She is doing what she has always done...swimming and loving it. We have seen her more than once after dinner swimming around our boat for exercise and relaxation.

Back on the boat later we are all relaxing when we hear Ann call from down below...

“Mike is stuck in our cabin and he can’t get out! I’m going to tell the Captain!”

Captain Barry sends the capable First Mate Emily over with her tool belt. She tries and tries but can not get the door open.

“Can you use the escape hatch?” she shouts?

“I don’t know,” answers Mike in a weak and tired voice.

“I will try.”

Mike climbs up the step escape ladder in his cabin as Emily prys off the wire hatch cover. Up pokes Mike’s head. With abated breath we gaze as Mike squeezes his way out of the hatch opening onto the deck. We all let up a big cheer to his embarrassment! It was a close squeeze!

Ann is happy to have her husband back!

Later on in private Al confides to me, “ I did not know he couldn’t get the door of his cabin open. I thought he had eaten so much he had gotten too big to get through his cabin door!”

Friday we sail back to Camden Harbor for the Schooner Festival. It is schooner festival week-end which means ALL the schooners are coming into port at the same time. What a wonderful sight and we are the lead boat in the schooner parade!

On shore that night there is a talent show involving all the schooners. A platform is set up and various boat crews are singing away.

We had been told about the talent show earlier in the week, but we thought the Captain meant it was just for our boat.

In anticipation I borrowed the Captain’s guitar and practiced the song I had written about life on the Mary Day Schooner.

We are too shy to sing the song in front of a large crowd on shore, so a group of us sings the song after breakfast Saturday morning as the crew gathers on the deck for farewell speeches and last goodbyes.

We are a group of 7 passengers and I introduce ourselves as the Mary Day Choir.

Lustily we sing to the tune of “I’ve Been Workin On The Railroad”:

“ We’ve been living on this schooner
All the live long day.

We’ve been living on this schooner
Just to pass the time away
Can’t ya hear the first mate call’in
Rise up and haul those lines!
Can’t ya hear the shap mates baw’lin
Catch me another time!

Sabrina won’t cha ring
Sabrina won’t cha ring
Sabrina won’t cha ring that dinner bell!
Nothing else do we live for
Sabrina won’t cha ring that bell!

Someone’s in the kitchen with Mary

Someone's in the kitchen we know ooo
Someone's in the kitchen with Mary eeee
Please leave her alone!

We're thinking, Oh, no 3 more days!
Will it ever stop rain aa ning.
If we go to bed, we'll bump out heads
And maybe stop complaining.

Song starts over...

Captain Barry and Jen
Emily and Erik
Nate Mary Sawyer and Courtney
Sabrina we love you!
So many many happy mem'ries
We do not mean to fuss
Thank you, thank you for your patience
In putting up with us!

It is the end of the week. Time to say good-bye, collect E-mails and promise to keep in touch. There are tears. There is sadness and there is joy. All of us have done things we have never done before. We have experienced new things and learned a lot about the boat and about ourselves. I have had an absolutely wonderful time. I would do it again. I WILL do it again. I heartily recommend a schooner week on the "Mary Day"!

One big thing I have learned is that what looks impossible at first is made easy as time goes on. I can scramble up and down a bunk without a ladder. I can wash with cold water. I can use too much water in my cabin and drain the water tank dry. I can share the bathroom with 26 other people and take a shower in a small closed place. I can climb easily up and down rope ladders and get in and out of a dinghy safely and calmly. I can have fun in the rain and have fun in the sun. It's all good.

And....I can forget who I am and where I came from!

On the last day I am asked by a new friend, "What will you do when you get home?"

I think about that.

"I don't know," I answer honestly and surprised. "I can't remember!! I will have to check my calendar to remind myself what I used to do!"

And that's the truth. Now

THAT'SSSSSSS THE SIGN OF A REAL GREAT VACATION!

With love and thankfulness,

Maren Schober