

CRUISE ALONG THE COAST OF NORWAY

JULY 8 TO JULY 26, 2014

Having cruised from Iceland to the Faroe and Shetland Islands and then down the coast of Norway in 2012, what could possibly have inspired the Magids to do another cruise in the same part of the world? Very simply this: the 2014 cruise (dubbed, by Regent Seven Seas, *Realm of the Vikings*) will begin in Oslo, sail south for a short distance to Kristiansand, then turn to the north (with a stop at Bergen), and continue northward, past the Arctic Circle, making a few stops at the "top" of Norway (Honningsvåg and Hammerfest), venturing into Russia (Murmansk), and then heading further north to Longyearbyen (latitude 78.2° N) and even further north to the Magdalena Fjord (latitude 79.5° N), as close to the North Pole (90° N) as we're ever likely to get, a mere 700 miles; these are in a cluster of islands called Svalbard, some 530 mi north of the mainland (not shown on this map). We will then head south, stopping at Harstad, Helligsøylt, and Geiranger, finally terminating in Copenhagen. The only ports that are repeats from the 2012 cruise are Bergen and Geiranger, but we will choose different excursions and, we hope, better tour guides - the curious among you might want to consult my earlier travelog for commentaries on the Bergen tour guide Bjørn (who was more interested in his cigarettes and cell phone) and the Geiranger guide Emilie (who was young and poorly informed ... but blond!): <http://web.utk.edu/~rmagid/NorthernEurope2012.pdf>



In my many earlier travelogs, I've paid tribute to my wife for her brilliant planning of our journey. This time, however, most of the work was done by our intrepid travel agent (Stefan Bisciglia of *Specialty Cruise and Villas*, a family-run travel agency in Gig Harbor) and by Regent Seven Seas Cruise Lines. Nevertheless, we (i.e., Lee) did yeoman (yeowoman? yo, woman?) work in choosing our stateroom, deciding on the excursions, and finding points of interest that might not have been part of any of the ship's excursion.

In the course of the trip, I took some 750 pictures!! Only a relatively small number* have been uploaded in

*By this I mean a mere 580 or so. Well, I did say *relatively* small.

three albums to my Picasa account: some of the rejected pictures were poorly focused; others were poorly lit; some were very very very very repetitive; and some showed the two intrepid travelers in a less than flattering light. On the other hand, one can never have too many pictures of fjords, glaciers, reindeer, and charming Norwegian towns, right? I've posted them at <http://picasaweb.google.com/ronmagid>.

TUESDAY, JULY 8 TO WEDNESDAY, JULY 9

On our last two overseas trips, we used the new Gig Harbor Taxi service run by Gloria and her daughter Cynthia; their charge (with tip) is \$100 each way. Because this new trip is for fewer days, we decided to drive to the airport, having forgotten that although the cruise is barely two weeks long, we'll be parked at the airport for a total 19 days; the cost, when we retrieve the car on July 26, was \$390. Oh, well. At least we weren't subjected to Gloria's son and his Rush Limbaugh inspired discussions (see the Australia travelogue for details).

So we leave home at 9:45 in the morning on a beautiful, sunny day. The weather has been glorious all week. It seems a shame to leave, but the tickets are purchased so we have no choice. Traffic is surprisingly light and we manage to find a decent parking space on Level 6 of the garage. We check in at

Delta's (short) priority line and are informed that we are eligible to go through the priority security line, considerably shorter than the other. That's nice, but it would have been even nicer had my boarding pass sported a red X, as Lee's did, indicating that she's been "pre-checked" and did not have to remove liquids, shoes, underwear, whatever. I, on the other hand, have to go through all of the TSA indignities, except that as a septuagenarian-plus-five, I'm allowed to leave my shoes on.

By 11:00, we're in the Delta Sky Club lounge, where we have some coffee and cookies as we wait for our 1:28 flight to board. The lounge is rather empty when we arrive but it fills up rapidly shortly after. At 12:30 we head to the departure gate and board the plane at 12:45. It is an Airbus A330 with a seating arrangement like the one we experienced on the Atlanta to Manchester flight last fall. The seating in business class is 1-2-1; we have seats 4G and 4J, window and aisle, respectively. Although we're not exactly sitting together, we are as close as we would be had we chosen two interior seats (say 4C and 4G), as the upper photo reveals. Besides, I'm a real infant when we fly and I like to look out the window, not that it's so very easy on this plane because even the window seats are some distance from the windows (as the lower photo indicates). The seats are configured such that one can lie flat (for sleeping) if one wishes. Also each seat has its own entertainment system consisting of a monitor that permits one to access games, movies, TV shows, or (as I like to do) the details of the flight.



Menus are distributed: we begin with "Shrimp with avocado" followed by a mixed green salad and "soup du jour" whose nature I forget. (And if one is going to use the French "du jour" shouldn't one put an e on the end of "soupe"?) For the main course, there are four choices; I pick "Seared chicken breast with tarragon lemon sauce, roasted brussels sprouts, and brown rice paella" (which sounds better in the Dutch version: "Gebakken kipfilet met dragoncitoensaus, geroosterde spruitjes, en paella met zilvervriesrijst"! Hmm, "dragon citroen"? Surely they jest.) I also enjoy a Glenlivet neat. And for dessert, from three choices I order vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce and coffee.

Seated in front of us is a couple who are giving the flight attendant fits. I hear only part of the conversation, but apparently the man is confused between the full menu (described above) which is served in courses beginning around 2:30 and what is described as "Dine and Rest" - an appetizer, salad, fruit, cheese, and dessert, served all at once shortly after take-off for those who want to get to sleep as soon as possible. From what I can hear, it seems that he is interested in having the full menu but having it served "all at once" shortly after take-off. The flight attendant patiently (and repeatedly) explains to him and his wife that this is not an option. In consultation with his wife, he tries to decide which courses might be too spicy and which not spicy enough. (I probably wouldn't have bothered to include this interaction in my travelogue, except that we will encounter this couple on the cruise ship and, again, on our return flight to Seattle on July 26; there will be other "weird" events involving them which I'll describe as they occur. The woman's name is Glee; we never do learn the man's name.)

The captain announces that the estimated flying time to Amsterdam is 9 hours, 22 minutes. As we push back at 1:30, right on schedule, we are treated to a new Delta safety film, humorous (as on past flights) but changed a little from what we'd seen earlier. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZm4ggagnVs> We are air-borne at 1:55 and are flying northward over downtown Seattle; from my window on the starboard side, I see Mercer Island, the I-90 and Hwy 528 floating bridges, and the snow-covered Cascades. Although nobody requested it, Delta is treating us to a series of ads (Coke, other products) with sound that cannot be quenched. Beginning at 2:30, the meal that I ordered is served; I have no idea what Glee and her husband received.

At 5:30, I close my eyes and try to sleep, but at 6:15 I'm still wide awake. I re-set my watch to 3:15 am on Wednesday, July 9 (the current time in Amsterdam and Norway). Having nearly finished reading the first

of several issues of *The New Yorker* that I had let accumulate following our return from Australia, I begin reading one of the six books that I had downloaded (via the Pierce County Library) to my Kindle: *The Kill Artist* by Daniel Silva, the first of 14 books in his Gabriel Allon series. Lee has read several of these spy/espionage books and highly recommends them. An hour later (just as we approach the west coast of Greenland), I again try to get some sleep, but manage only 30 minutes of nap time, waking just as we are leaving the coast of Greenland on the east. I work a couple of *New York Times* crossword puzzles that I had accumulated; and then try the crossword game on the entertainment system: very kludgy but doable.

At 6:30, the flight information announces that it's 1 hr 43 min to touchdown, which is right on time. We are now crossing the northern part of Scotland. At 7:10, breakfast is served: fruit cup (melon, grapefruit, orange), orange juice, bagel and cream cheese, and coffee. I choose the Portobello Mushroom Omelet (even though it comes with asparagus) instead of Granola Cereal. We are *not* going to starve at Delta's hands. At 7:30 we are crossing the coast of (I assume) Netherlands, not that I can see land from my window, but this is what the flight tracker tells me; it also informs me that the temperature in Amsterdam is a chilly 15°C. We are wheels down at 8:15 and are at the terminal at 8:24, quite remarkable considering the size of this airport.

Over the intercom, there are instructions about passport control and security, if one already has boarding passes for a connecting flight (we do). It seems that our strange "friends" do not have boarding passes, so my concerns that they will fly to Oslo with us and board the same cruise ship are apparently unfounded. (The former supposition is correct - they must be taking a later flight to Oslo; but the latter supposition is dead wrong. Not only will they be on our ship but they will also be on our July 26 flights from Copenhagen to Amsterdam and from there to Seattle. Stay tuned for further vignettes.)

We clear passport control rapidly; the security lines also move quickly, but I have to pass through the magnetometer twice because nobody told me that I had to remove my belt. It's a long walk, aided by several moving sidewalks, to Gate C6 from which the Oslo flight is scheduled to depart; there is a 10-minute delay because the plane arrived late from wherever, but we board the Boeing 737 at 9:45. Delta or KLM had screwed up our seats: we were supposed to have seats 3A and 3C (with an empty seat 3B between us, a poor-man's business class), but we are separated across the aisle. Somehow, we cope!

The doors are closed at 9:40 and we are pushed back. All announcements are made in English and Dutch, a language that involves lots of gargling and spewing of saliva if one is not careful. But we are held on the tarmac by flight control in Oslo. Finally, we are air-borne at 10:00, anticipating a flight of 1 hr 25 min. We do not have individual entertainment systems; instead, TV monitors swing down from the ceiling so that there is one about every third row. The one closest to me, however, comes down, then goes up, comes down, goes up, comes down, and finally goes up for good. But I can see on a different monitor our flight path from Amsterdam to Zurich. Where?? Have we been hi-jacked? I show this to a flight attendant who re-boots the computer several times, but to no avail. Finally, when we're but 20 minutes from landing, the view gratifyingly changes to Oslo as our destination. Whew!

It is sunny in Oslo as the plane lands at 11:16, just 10 minutes later than scheduled. What a contrast in temperatures: we "froze" walking the jetway from Amsterdam's terminal to this plane, but we are sweltering as we disembark in Oslo. Did someone turn on the heat in the jetway? The luggage is delivered very slowly (so much for the priority tags that were attached) and we, plus fellow cruisers, gather in the lobby near the Regent Seven Seas agents who direct us to a bus. Regent is using two hotels in Oslo: the Grand and the Scandic KNA; we are assigned to the latter.

Because we are too early for hotel check-in, the on-board guide delays our arrival at our hotels by having the bus meander about the city for two hours and giving a mini-tourism experience. The on-board guide is named Gerd (it's probably no coincidence that GERD is the accepted acronym for Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease) whose sour comments about taxes, immigrants, the welfare system, and the cost of living don't put us into the most benign frame of mind. The bus makes one stop to allow passengers to gawk at the spectacular ski jump that was erected from the 1952 Olympics. (The *winter* Olympics, if that needs

saying.) She points out city hall (where the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize is announced), the spectacular Vigeland sculpture park, and the ultra-modern opera house among other attractions. (We had visited all of these sites in 2012, but other passengers may have been more eager than we were to see them). Gerd is certainly no intellectual, but the low point of her presentation is when discussing Norway's most famous writer, Henrik Ibsen, she says, "He wrote many famous plays, for example *A Doll's House*, which is beloved by all little girls." Oh?

According to TripAdvisor, the Grand is rated #26 of 88 hotels in Oslo. We "lucky" ones are in the Scandic, rated #45 of 88. The location is excellent, near all sorts of attractions, but one's heart sinks upon seeing the Soviet-like stark exterior and entrance which do not bode well for what's inside. And, in fact, the hotel is a severe disappointment. In its literature, Regent promises a "FREE Pre-Cruise Luxury Hotel Package" which gives new meaning to the word "luxury." Among the problems are these: there is but one clerk to check in a bus-load of arrivals (and he is also charged with answering the telephone); our room is tiny, barely large enough for its two single beds and not large enough for furniture such as dressers and cupboards (which is probably why there were none); there is no place to stow luggage; there are no facial tissue, washcloths, or extra rolls of toilet paper; and the lighting is poor. But worst of all, there is no air-conditioning, despite there being a wall-mounted dial which hinted that cooling might be available. When I inquire at the desk, we are offered a small rotating fan - at least it does provide some relief, although the room would have been more comfortable had the windows been able to be opened more than a crack. (Granted, Oslo does not usually have hot summers, but we have arrived on a very warm day with temps around 30°C* and tomorrow does not promise to be much better.) One of the persons commenting at

*OK, let us stipulate that the Magids are weather-wusses, having been acclimated to the relatively cool and dry summers of the northwestern U.S. (This travelogue is being written, however, while Gig Harbor is experiencing an unexpected hot wave in late July/early August with baking sun and temperatures in the high 80s/low 90s.)

TripAdvisor wrote "The air conditioner and the ice machines did not work. There was no toilet paper in the room or bath mat. I would not stay here again if you gave the room for free, not even for the great breakfast. This hotel was arranged by our cruise line: Regent. I will make sure they know about it." In fact, Lee does send a sharp email to Regent, which gets us an apology and a \$300 shipboard credit, which we put to good use (see p. 35).

There are two representatives (not actual Regent employees) of the cruise line in the to whom we express our dismay about the room. Through them, we select an 12:15 bus tomorrow morning for transfer to the ship. These two women, residents of Oslo though they may be, are woefully uninformed about where we can find an ATM, how best to get to the Munch Museum, where the subway and taxis are located, etc. Because the museum closes early*, we decide to take a taxi rather than trying to learn the train system.

*Lee had thought that it closed at 6:00, but in fact we will discover that we have to exit at 5:00. Nevertheless, we do get to see most the collection.

The present exhibit is entitled "Through Nature" featuring "the artist's connection with the natural sciences" (according to the museum's brochure). Munch's paintings and pen-and-ink sketches are wonderful, but truth be told I think that we saw a more extensive collection of them at the museum in Bergen and at the National Museum here in Oslo when we were here in 2012, as well as at the Louisiana Museum outside of Copenhagen. Oh, well.

We take a taxi* back to the city center and to the Solsiden restaurant a highly-regarded seafood

*Like everything else in Norway, taxis are expensive: we paid 240 Kr going to the museum and 220 Kr for the return (about \$75 for the two).

restaurant near the Akershus Fortress and the pier where our ship, the Regent Seven Seas *Voyager*, is

docked. Walking past the ship, it is tempting to ask if we could get to our cabin a day ahead of schedule. Of course the answer would have been no. The restaurant is not air-conditioned: there is an outside pavilion and an inside area (which we choose so as to escape the direct sun), but at least there's a decent cross breeze. Even though it's only about 5:00, the restaurant is very full. Lee "explains" that many Norwegians eat their large meal at noon and a much lighter meal in the evening. Well, that's her explanation, but I can't tell if she read it somewhere or just dreamed it up out of whole cloth. Neither of us is very hungry: we share a scallops appetizer; I have a green salad and Lee has mussels (which she shares with me). We also have local beers. With two coffees, the bill is 916 Kr (about \$150); we leave a 90 Kr tip.

It's about a 1.5-km walk back to the hotel, but *only* if one follows the shortest path. One of us (and I ain't sayin' which one, but *she* ...) is convinced that she can find the way without consulting the maps that each of us hold. Well, she can't, but she does get us more or less in the correct direction. By the time we enter the hotel lobby, we are drenched with perspiration. The lobby does seem to have (minimal) air-conditioning, so we sit there before returning to our personal sauna. Even stripping to our tidy whites and sitting directly in front of the fan offers but a little relief. (I give myself a virtual - if not virtuous - pat on the back for having decided to wear old pants for the long flight. I knew that the confined space of a plane and the overheated airports could cause wrinkles in a fresh pair of pants; little did I know that our time in hot and steamy Oslo would have accomplished even more of a mess.)

I can, however, say one nice thing about the Scandic hotel - the internet is free and fast. On the other hand, to nobody's surprise, my Verizon cell phone fails to connect to a server, despite the assurances of at least four employees at Verizon's Live Chat service over the past few months. At 8:15, having slept barely two hours on the plane, I go to bed. Damn! I'm out of bed at 10:15, hardly having slept at all. I read my Gabriel Allon novel for a while, then return to bed. Sleep comes, *Gott sei dank*, but only for an hour. At midnight I'm reading again. The combination of the heat and jet lag and my usual inability to sleep on planes and hotels at the start of a trip conspire to rob me of my much needed beauty sleep. And the fact that it stays light for a good part of the night doesn't help either - just think how extreme this will be when we cruise well north of the Arctic Circle later this week. So I read some more Gabriel Allon.

At 12:30, I try the bed again and this time I manage to stay asleep for about three hours. So I get up for an hour to read, then return to bed at 4:30. By this time, Lee is beginning to stir. Neither of us can get to sleep again, so we get showered and dressed.

The room, of course, is still very hot but a second nice thing that I can say about this hotel is that the breakfast spread is excellent: cold meats, cheese, cereal, bread and rolls, herring, salmon and, if one wants hot items, sausage, bacon, eggs, and ham. And the room is air-conditioned!

On the elevator back to our room, I talk with a fellow Regent passenger who complains about the exorbitant cost of a dinner that he and his wife had last night - the beer, for example, was \$15 a pint! The man is named David, his wife Mary. They are from Minnesota. And they are as unhappy with the quality of this hotel as I am. As it turns out, we'll not run into them on the cruise ship. Well, there *are* 700 passengers, but still one would expect to meet nearly everyone, whether on the pool deck, in the auditorium, on an excursion, in one of the dining rooms, whatever.

From 9:00 to 11:00, I sit in the somewhat climate-controlled lobby and continue reading the Gabriel Allon book. Lee is more adventurous and heads into the outdoor heat and humidity to walk to the cathedral, the palace grounds, and Stortorget Square (a small outdoor market). She returns at about 11:00. We check out of our room at 12:00 and board the 12:15 bus to the ship.

At about 1:00, our passports are scanned by Norwegian security and we are allowed onboard the ship. the Regent Seven Seas *Voyager*. It's a magnificent vessel, one that we've sailed on twice earlier. With 700 passengers, it's less imposing than those monstrosities that carry rich widows and hedge fund managers to



the Caribbean. On our earlier trips, we chose staterooms that Regent calls Deluxe level and Concierge level, both of ample size (306 ft² plus a 50 ft² veranda), comfort, and storage space. This time we (i.e., Lee, with the reluctant acquiescence of her faithful partner) chose a Penthouse suite. It's a bit larger (320 ft²) and quite a bit costlier, but it does provide business class airfare (the others only paid for coach), extra reservations at the specialty restaurants, and a personal *butler!*



"What in the hell are we going to do with a butler?" I ask my beloved. I have nightmare-like visions of Matthews Crawley's revulsion (in *Downton Abbey*) at permitting a butler to choose his clothes, help him get dressed, button his buttons, and, for all I know, zip up his fly. "If he lays one hand on my sacred body, I'll scream," scream I. Lee cautions restraint, as she always does. And, in fact, it all works out pretty well, as I'll relate from time to time.

After boarding the ship, we proceed to the Constellation Theater where, in exchange for our passports (which the staff promises will be returned to us before the trip is ended), we fill out a health form ("Yes, we are free of communicable diseases"), have our pictures taken (just in case we get lost on shore), and are issued electronic key cards. But we are not permitted to go to our stateroom, yet, because the crew is still cleaning after the departure of the previous guests. The ship had just returned from a Baltic cruise (much like the one that we took in 2010) and a few of the passengers are staying onboard for this second leg. So we go to the Pool Deck, where Lee orders a light lunch (I'm not hungry) and we wait for the announcement that passengers may proceed to their staterooms. On the way, we stop at Club.com on Deck 5 to set up our free (because we are Silver level) internet accounts on the laptop and iPad.

In Room 820, we are reunited with our luggage, miraculously conveyed from the hotel without untoward events, and we meet our stewardess Myleen and her assistant Agung. Over the course of the cruise, they will clean the room efficiently and thoroughly; only once did we conflict with their cleaning schedule when we returned from dinner unusually early. We also meet Melwyn, our butler. He explains what he's able to do for us, including getting us extra reservations at *Prime 7* (a steak house) and *Signatures* (a French restaurant)* beyond the two that we were able to make when we booked the voyage. He also can provide

*Described this way in Regent's publications: "Preparing authentic, decadent French cuisine is an art form and is the raison d'être of our French restaurant, *Signatures*. Capturing the diversity of French fare, our seasoned chefs offer an exquisite dining experience with tantalizing tastes and enticing presentation. Consequently, each and every dish served in *Signatures* is absolutely sublime and purely French." Pretentious, eh? But, bien sûr, it *is* French.

canapé trays (with varying food choices, in which we indulge on a couple of occasions), laundry, wine and spirits, etc. No, he never touches my body! Whew! We note that a bottle of Dewar's scotch has been left in the room; we had ordered Lagavulin, for which, according to a phone call a couple of weeks earlier, we would have an extra fee of \$74 - I considered this exorbitant but Lee urged that we do it. Melwyn says that he'll look into the problem. A short while later, he calls and says that he *can* get the Lagavulin but that the cost is \$174!! Do we still want it? I say NO, but Lee (louder) says YES! And so it comes to pass, although to soften the blow somewhat there is a courtesy 10% discount on the booze.

At about 4:00 there is a mandatory life vest demonstration. Every passenger (including those who had already gone through this drill on the Baltic leg) is required to don a life vest, proceed to an assigned muster station, be instructed in how to don the vest, and finally led to an outside deck to be near the life boats that we'll be assigned to if a *Costa Concordia* type of accident should occur. When the ship leaves the pier in Oslo, I go to Deck 12 to take pictures of the harbor, the skyline, and some of the islands as we travel south on the Oslo Fjord and to open waters.

Tonight, we have dinner at *Compass Rose*, one of the restaurants for which one does not need a reservation. This evening, we choose to eat by ourselves, but on most of the succeeding evenings we'll ask to be seated with others. As it will turn out, many of the passengers that we will meet are convivial and

interesting, with only a couple of glaring exceptions. For dinner, I have a shrimp cocktail, salad, scallops, and sugarless ice cream; I'm sure that Lee has a much more detailed description in her journal. What I appreciate (and it was also true on earlier cruises) is that the food portions are of moderate size. There is always a choice of appetizer, soup, salad (I usually choose just two of the three), an "intermezzo" (a minute scoop of some sort of iced sherbet), the main course, a tray of cakes/candies* (which I leave

*Lee says that these delicacies are called *gourmandise*, but the definition that I find for that word is that it's an adjective meaning "A taste and relish for good food" - nevertheless, who am I to criticize my family's acknowledged expert on all things comestible? However, let the record show that I think that these little confections should be called *petits fours*

untouched), and dessert (most of the time I choose a fresh fruit plate; how virtuous!). There is a basket of bread on the table and generous portions of wine that are replenished throughout the meal. In addition, the service is prompt and impeccable; only once on the trip was an incorrect order delivered (see p. 35).

In addition to two mints on our pillows at turn-down, Myleen or Akung also leave a copy of *Passages*, which lists all of the day's activities (e.g., dancing, bingo, spa treatments, trivia contests, mah jongg, shuffleboard, and other childish fantasies); there is also an information sheet about the next port, in this case, Kristiansand which we will reach tomorrow morning. Scheduled for 9:30 this evening is an "Enrichment Lecture"* by Terry Bishop. His subject tonight: "NORWAY. The complete history of Norway in 45

*Regent always has onboard lecturers. On the 2012 Iceland to Norway cruise, it was Hugh Neighbour, a retired diplomat from the U.S. State Department, who gave excellent, informative, and well-research talks on Iceland, the Faroe and Shetland Islands, Norway's history, etc. On our Alaska cruise, it was a naturalist named Terry Breen who talked about the flora, fauna, and geography of Alaska. The only rather disappointing lecturer was on our 2010 Baltic cruise: Richard Tallboys, a British diplomat who had served in various posts in the Far East including a stint as ambassador to Viet Nam; he was as dry as one would expect a British diplomat to be, but he was intent on selling autographed copies of his autobiography.

minutes!" Hmmm. So who the hell is Terry Bishop? Well, he does not sport a long list of academic credentials. Instead he is described in Regent's literature as someone who has traveled widely, has led tour groups to various countries (some of them exotic), and "aiming always to inform and entertain, using pictures of their ultimate advantage and incorporating humour (sic - well, he is a Brit), music, and song in the presentations whenever possible." So, although we are exhausted this evening, we decide to give the talk a try. If it's any good, then we can attend his other seven lectures during the cruise.

In fact, it is excellent. He has a wry sense of humor (*my* spelling) and provides just enough factual material to keep the audience's interest. His slides include graphs, maps, and cartoon figures that are meant to inform and entertain. He introduces several topics that he will expand on in later talks. Unlike the Hugh Neighbour's lectures at which I took extensive notes, I just sit back and enjoy the performance. My wife, nerd through and through, takes extensive notes in all eight presentations.

One of the slides that he shows is of a T-shirt (of which he still has several for anyone who would want one) bearing the legend: ADVENTURE BEFORE DEMENTIA. Stupidly, we never thought to ask for one for ourselves.

We get back to our room at 10:30 and to bed shortly after. It has been a long, very long, two days. We awaken, briefly, at 4:00 am (brilliant sunlight is streaming through gaps in the curtains) and return to sleep.

Friday, July 11

Disaster! I either forgot to set the alarm clock or we slept through it, but we awaken at 7:45(!!!) and need to be in the Constellation Theater at 8:30 to turn in our excursion vouchers for bus tickets. So it's a quick

shower, rapid ablutions, fast shave (goodness knows I need it, as it's been two full days), jump into clothes, and (without any breakfast, even coffee) head to the theater. As I have noted, we did need the sleep. And then a strange coincidence occurs to me. In 1998, we flew to Oslo (having to change planes three times: in Atlanta, in Chicago, and in Brussels), rented a car and drove south to Sandefjord, then on the next day headed further south to Kristiansand. And it was in that lovely city that we slept through the alarm and got downstairs almost too late to get breakfast in the hotel. What is it about Kristiansand that encourages oversleeping? It seems to me that this would be an excellent topic for a budding academic to pursue for his or her dissertation.

The excursion that we've chosen is called "Hollen, Sogen, and The Vest Agder Open Air Museum." The day promises to be hot and sunny, but at least the humidity is low. However, it is very hot inside the bus. Mercifully, the driver starts the engine and turns on the air conditioning. Our guide is Maria, who is very proud of her city. As we drive through the old town, she informs us that the population is 85,000. We drive past the brand-new (2012) Kilden Performing Arts Center (with its stark architecture, see to the right), with its four halls for simultaneous performances of plays and concerts; according to Maria, there is something going on in the building every day. (Maria says that the facade is supposed to conjure up a tutu - well, perhaps.) We pass by a fortress and barracks (from 1674), through the narrow streets of the old residential area (very characteristic and unique are the many houses that are painted pure white). Human remains, 6,000 years old, have been found, but the modern city dates from its founding by King Christian IV in 1641. According to *Passages*, "The center of Kristiansand has a grid layout essentially unchanged since the 17th century." Because of its location, it became an important port and center of boat-building. For more on the city's history, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kristiansand>.



At 9:00 we are at the open air museum, a recreation of an old village (with many of the buildings having been brought to this site from their original locations). Several of the old homes and businesses are open for tourists to wander through and snap pictures. We walk a bit further to the part of the museum that is dedicated to agriculture. Maria turns the tour over to a young woman in traditional dress who takes us from building to building, explaining the function and how people lived. This new guide tells us that a man of this village undoubtedly would choose as his wife the woman with the strongest, stoutest legs. (Sounds about right.) Although no web site does justice to the museum (my Picasa pictures are actually pretty good), you can consult that font of all knowledge, Wikipedia:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vest-Agder_Museum_Kristiansand

While walking through the open air museum, I talk to a man who resembles the despicable New York Yankees fan (yes, I know that "despicable" is redundant) whom I encountered on our Rhein cruise last year (see p. 52 of my travelogue, <http://web.utk.edu/~rmaqid/England-Rhine2013.pdf>). Turns out, it's not the same person, but we do have a nice chat. It seems that I encounter Yankee fans (or, at least, people sporting New York Yankees caps, shirts, and jackets) wherever we go in Europe. Am I the only person with such a visceral hatred for the "evil empire"? Surely not. Right now, I'm reading a novel, *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour*, by Joshua Ferris in which the narrator, a long-suffering Boston Red Sox fan, writes this about his nemesis "... the Yankees of all teams – probably objectively the most crass and reviled team in the history of sports, with that obnoxious logo so well known, the interlocking N and Y you can find on swag in every part of the world, a symbol so offensive that only the Nazi swastika compares with it, and yet still regarded by so many as benign, something to admire, even worship, revealing the true extent of the human capacity for mass delusion ... " Couldn't have said it better myself.



The Norwegian flag, elegant in its simplicity, looks very much like the flags of the other Scandinavian countries but for the particular colors. Maria tells us that there are very strict rules for flying the flag. It is displayed on major holidays, but rarely otherwise. It's surprising not to see the flag on most government buildings, for example. Many private homes sport a long triangular pennant in the colors of the Norwegian flag, presumably because there are no rules for what time of day it is raised/lowered, what songs/music should accompany it, etc.



We then drive to Søgne, Norway's oldest half-timber church, built in 1640. The interior is a marvel of understated architecture and half-faded frescoes. And then it's on to Høllen, a lovely small town and fishing village with a picturesque harbor. At noon, the bus delivers us to the pier where our ship is docked.

UNCHARITABLE OBSERVATIONS ABOUT FELLOW CRUISERS (but that doesn't make them any less true): Yes, both Magids qualify as geezers/seniors/elderly/... but compared to many of the passengers on this ship, we are spry and youthful. A large number, some of whom might well be younger than we, are feeble in various ways: their balance is poor, they shuffle when they walk, they seem constantly out of breath, they speak too loudly, and they serve as unmovable (nearly stationary) objects when Lee and I are trying to do a fast walk on Deck 12 (more about this later). And, yes, granted that the man of our family does have a tummy that protrudes, it is merely a pimple as compared to some of the mountainous eruptions of my male cohort. Do you recall Al Camp's cartoon character, the shmoo? It was shaped like a pregnant bowling pin and sported sea-lion-like whiskers above its smiling mouth. If you tipped one over, it would bounce right back. That's what many of us look like. Alas, we don't also have other shmoo-like characteristics, at least I think that we don't. According to Wikipedia, these include:

- They reproduce asexually and are incredibly prolific, multiplying exponentially faster than rabbits. They require no sustenance other than air.
- Shmoos are delicious to eat, and are eager to be eaten. If a human looks at one hungrily, it will happily immolate itself — either by jumping into a frying pan, after which they taste like chicken, or into a broiling pan, after which they taste like steak. When roasted they taste like pork, and when baked they taste like catfish. (Raw, they taste like oysters on the half-shell.)
- They also produce eggs (neatly packaged), milk (bottled, grade-A), and butter—no churning required. Their pelts make perfect boot leather or house timber, depending on how thick you slice it. ● They have no bones, so there's absolutely no waste. Their eyes make the best suspender buttons, and their whiskers make perfect toothpicks. In short, they are simply the perfect ideal of a subsistence agricultural herd animal.

MORE UNCHARITABLE OBSERVATIONS ABOUT FELLOW CRUISERS: Of course, not every passenger is decrepit. Some who are quite advanced in years are also alert, active, and involved. And, of course, on the ship there are many "youngsters" (by which I mean people in their 50s and 60s) and a very few Gen Xers; there are a few teenagers on board, but very few younger kids, a contrast to what we'd encountered on other Regent cruises. Oh, yes, one additional annoying behavior of the senescent set: as the days onboard go by, these folk become increasingly more aggressive in getting to the food when it is offered buffet-style (on the Pool Deck or for breakfast and lunch in *La Veranda*). Woe unto the unsuspecting polite person (moi) who finds himself jostled, punched, folded, and mutilated by some octogenarian who is intent on getting to that last shrimp on the counter.

FINALLY (AT LEAST FOR NOW): There are some "strange" folk on this cruise. I already mentioned (p. 2) Glee and her husband. Here are some others: an elfin man and woman (who show up from time to time in my Picasa photos), who look like the ultimate computer geeks; perhaps they're Microsoft or Google VPs because they've taken one of the very large (723 ft²) Grand Suites. They often sit with another pair of geeks, he very tall and she very short. There's a rotund pair who sport matching T-Shirts: "This Guy Loves Norway" and "This Gal Loves Norway." And there are two men who always sit together on the bus or eat together at dinner: whether they are just friends or family members or a same-sex couple is unclear (and irrelevant) but they are gnome-like in their appearance and behavior. They will pop up, from time to time, in the last photos from Geiranger that I post on Picasa.

Enough! (At least for now.)

Nearly on the brink of starvation, having eaten nothing since 8:00 last night, I (along with Lee) help ourselves to goodies from the "BBQ GRILL EXTRAVAGANZA" (as it's described in *Passages*) served outside *La Veranda* on Deck 11. I do temper my acquisitiveness by taking only two types of sausage, some potato chips, a half-sandwich of smoked salmon, and a little salad. Lee heaps more than that on her plate (and even has some ice cream afterwards), but I shouldn't comment on that, right? We take an

outside table in the shade (the weather is pleasant) and order some coffees which, sad to say, taste quite chlorinated. This will persist with coffee from *La Veranda*, but nowhere else, for several days. Eventually (on July 20, p. 29), I will mention this to the restaurant manager. He will deny that any chlorinated cleansers have been used to wash the coffee pots or coffee cups, nor has any been mixed in with the coffee beans to make them go farther. Nevertheless, the day after I speak with him the taste is gone. So there must have been something ...

We get some good coffee at *The Coffee Connection*, an automatic machine* on Deck 5 that works 24/7,

*Depending on which button is pushed, the machine will cheerfully deliver Americano coffee (close enough to what we prefer) or hot chocolate or cappuccino or hot water for tea or decaf coffee or coffee with milk and/or sugar. This is the caffeinated version of the Shmoo?

but we find the room too noisy to read (people jabbering away, a TV set to CNN or BBC news, a real (noisy) espresso machine operated by one of the attendants) so we take our drinks back to our cabin. We sit on the veranda* (not to be confused with *La Veranda*) to read and watch the activity in the container

*Here is a totally irrelevant story, but one that I enjoy telling. Richard Marius (1933-1999) was a professor of history at UT. I knew him only slightly, but knew a lot about him. He was a political activist (from the left, of course) and a prolific writer. His biographies of Thomas More and Martin Luther are well-regarded; he also wrote four novels, among which is *After the War* which received Lee's enthusiastic approval. In 1978, he was recruited by Harvard to run their first-year writing program, but he often returned to Tennessee. And, although I always groaned when my turn came to attend commencement, I consider myself lucky to have heard the commencement speech that he delivered in December, 1992. He told several vignettes about growing up in Tennessee (in the bustling metropolis of Dixie Lee Junction, if you please) and about his days on the UT faculty. Most of the talk was a plea for greater acceptance of people who are "different" and for greater diversity in our public institutions. He had some harsh words for the two Pats (Robertson and Buchanan), and when he told the audience "This is not a Christian country," the collective gasp from the relatives of the graduates was audible. (The students, of course, most of whom were asleep did not respond.) Now what, I hear you ask, is this doing in a travelogue about Norway? Well, the word *veranda* brought to mind the following tale, which I'll relate in the first person as if I were Marius: "As a new instructor at UT, I was given many student papers to grade. One day, I took a stack home with me and I sat on my *veranda* (which is what we called a porch in those days) and sipped an iced tea (or perhaps a beer) and began grading ... when from out of nowhere, a bird flew overhead and deposited a load on one of the papers. I tried to wipe it off, but this only caused the ink to smear, rendering the rest of the writing illegible. When I returned the paper to the student, I informed him that 'God has judged your work.'"

shipyard across the harbor. Lee goes in for a nap and misses the "excitement" - suddenly there is loud music (singing and band instruments) coming from ... where? We're about to leave port at 4:00, so I go to Deck 12 to see if the music might be coming from some group on the pier. No. So I return to our outside deck. As the ship moves away from the dock and toward open water, the music seems to be coming from the much larger cruise ship, the *P&O Azura* (with its 3100 passengers) parked at another dock. But it's too far away. The next day, I'll discover that the culprit was our own ship: there was live music (singers and instruments) on Deck 11, serenading (if that's the proper word) the passengers.

At 5:00, we pour some Lagavulin. To be more precise, we pour some \$174 Lagavulin. Lee had asked Melwyn to bring some canapés (raw prawns and crab claws, warm vegetable and beef fritters, appropriate sauces) to the room, as if we really "need" more to eat than we had at noon and that we'll get at dinner. We decide to skip the "Captain's Welcome and Reception" at 6:00; instead we read some more (I finish the Gabriel Allon book) before going to dinner at 6:30.

Because this is one of two evenings in which formal wear is encouraged (but not required) for the fancier restaurants, we choose to have dinner at *La Veranda*, which specializes in Italian fare. Unlike the free-for-all that occurs when the old geezers (and the young ones as well) scramble for the "best" table at breakfast

and lunch, in the evening guests are seated by the restaurant manager. Food is ordered from a menu, although one can go to the buffet table for salad and antipasto; and can return there for an assortment of desserts. Our waiter is Mauro, who announces to us that he is the *only* Italian on-board and, therefore, the best of all of the servers. He has a wry sense of humor; for example, after we've finished eating, he puts a plate of biscotti on the table and says "More calories, why not?"

Back in our room after dinner, I waste lots of time trying to open web sites on the molasses-slow internet provided by the ship. In the process of looking ahead to our next port, Bergen, I check my 2012 travelogue for what I had written about the city - and I remind myself that although my miserable excuse for a "world" phone failed to find a network when using GSM, I was able to get a signal with the CDMA provided by the ship itself. And so it also works in 2014! ... but on this night only. So I phone our home voice mail in Gig Harbor and find one saved message, from Verizon of all things: someone named Jackie was responding to the angry letter about my lack of phone connectivity that I had written on May 19. The number that she left, 1-800-735-6724, did, in fact, connect to Verizon, but when I tried to enter extension 4165, I heard "incorrect number."

We head to bed at 10:30 and I fall asleep easily. But I am wide awake at 1:30 (perhaps the sunlight entering the room is at fault) so I get up and start reading *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, a novel by Ben Fountain and one of two library books* that I brought with me. I had learned about it in an article in *The*

*The Pierce County Library online system allows patrons to request books and put them on hold; sometimes the waiting lists are very long, sometimes not. When the book arrives in the local library, the borrower then has seven days to check it out. In addition, there's a service through which one can suspend requests until a date chosen by the patron. Alas, I didn't know about this in time to stop the arrival of three books: the Ben Fountain, one by Alan Lightman (see p. 32) and one by Bob Mankoff. (My other hold requests I did manage to suspend.) So I checked out all three books on July 7, the day before we left Gig Harbor, noting that all they would be due three weeks later, on July 28. The Mankoff book was too big to take with me, but I did pack the Fountain and Lightman. Upon our return, I manage to read about half of the Mankoff (an autobiography, of sorts, as told in words and cartoons) before I need to return it. So I put it on my hold list again.

New York Times by A. O. Scott, normally a movie critic for the newspaper. The book is about a group of Iraq war "heroes" who are being honored at Texas Stadium before being shipped back overseas. It is sarcastic, perceptive, and humorous, but I disagree with Scott's characterization of it as the Iraq War's counterpart to *Catch-22*. I return to bed at 2:45 and sleep until 5:30, an hour before the alarm is set to go off. No oversleeping for the Magids, this day!

Saturday, July 12

With a population of 275,000, Bergen is Norway's second largest city. We arrive in the city as the fog rolls in. Thus, I'm relieved (for more reasons than the fog) that we'll not be going to Mount Fløyen to "enjoy" the view of the city down below. The other reason is that we'll not have the interminable wait (along with thousands of visitors to the city) for the funicular. And maybe we won't have to deal with Bjørn the tour guide from hell (see my 2012 travelogue, p. 23: <http://web.utk.edu/~rmagid/NorthernEurope2012.pdf>)

In *La Veranda* for breakfast, we sit at a table set for four. After a while, I beckon to two women, who are looking for a place to sit, and ask if they'd like to sit with us. They are very interesting. Named Margarite and something else (I can't catch it), they are sisters in their late 70s, Dutch, with a good, but not perfect, command of English. They live in different towns, but get together to travel and, in fact, did a world cruise last year. As we talk, they reveal that they (and their parents and two other siblings) were captured by the Japanese in Indonesia during World War II and suffered all sorts of privations for five years in a prison camp. The older one seems not to have lingering animosity, but the younger one (who is much taller, perhaps because she wasn't deprived of nourishment at key moments in her development) has a visceral hatred of the Japanese. To this day, she can't cry because (she says) her mother ordered her not to cry,

lest they be beaten by the guards. She will not buy anything made in Japan, which may take some doing in this day and age. As there seem to be a significant number of Japanese passengers on the ship, she'll need to be careful not to find herself seated with them at some meal. Oh, yes, we do have breakfast. For me, bagel with cream cheese and smoked salmon, fruit, juice, and coffee.

We board the bus at 9:00 and head to our first stop, the Gamle Bergen Museum, an open-air museum featuring some forty 18th and 19th century wooden structures, moved to this site intact. Our guide is an energetic (and well-informed) young man named Radak (I think). Some of the buildings are residences, others are businesses (hardware, dentist, druggist, barber, baker). Most of them are open for inspection, albeit from hallways behind roped-off rooms. Many are on a strongly inclined cobble-stone road whose surface ensures that wagons would not slide down in bad winter weather. There is even a small octagonal summer pavilion where Edvard Grieg composed some of his beautiful lyric pieces for piano. Radak gives us some of the history of the city, from its founding in 1070 through its rise as an important import-export trading station for Hanseatic merchants in the 14th century, to the great fire of 1702 that nearly destroyed everything. We re-board the bus and some 15 minutes later we stop at a working dock where we see the supply ships and tugs that are used to service the North Sea oil platforms. (Our cruise ship is visible in the distance.) The bus then wanders through the city, past the National Theatre (with its surrealistic statue of a bug-eyed Henrik Ibsen), past the Greighallen, Bergen's concert hall, and past the buildings of the Bergen art museum, which we visited in 2012. The bus lets us off on Bryggen, the old waterfront street with its numerous wooden buildings and for entry to the Hanseatic Museum. It is housed in a historic three-story wooden building, right near the famous fish market (which we do not visit). There are numerous displays detailing the importance of the city for the fishing industry.



The guided tour with Radak ends at 11:45. Lee (bless her heart) takes advantage of the free time to do some shopping (for gifts and for herself) in a couple of shops along the busy street. We then walk back to the ship at about 12:30. It's a warm day, so we sit in our room for a while to allow the perspiration to dry, then head to the Pool Grill on Deck 11 where we sit outdoors; I have a hamburger and Lee a Cuban sandwich. We then grab a couple of deck chairs in the shade and cooled by a breeze where I read a few more chapters of the Ben Fountain book. I also read the first chapter of Matt Taibbi's *The Divide: American Injustice in the Age of the Wealth Gap*. (Taibbi first came to my attention with his 2009 article in *Rolling Stone* in which he described Goldman Sachs as "a great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity, relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money." Cool!) Lee, who does not mince words, writes in her journal "The acres of flesh on display around the pool tend to the obese or über-wrinkly, with the exception of one really hunky German gay guy." Let the record show that I noticed neither the hunky guy and, even if I did, would not demean myself by pegging him as gay. Lee has no such qualms.

We return to our room at 4:00 and sit on the veranda to watch the ship's departure from Bergen. We are heading north, some 880 nautical miles,* past the Arctic Circle, and will not arrive in Honningsvåg until 7:00

*As "everybody" knows (and if you don't, then Wikipedia will tell you), "The nautical mile ... is a unit of distance that is approximately one minute of arc measured along any meridian. By international agreement it has been set at 1,852 metres exactly (about 6,076 feet)." Or, in other words, it is equal to 1.15 miles

pm, the day after tomorrow, a full 51 hours of cruising the open sea. We need to be in our room for the delivery of some canapés (Melwyn, the butler, always makes it sound as if he's lost his best friend if we don't place an order) at 5:00 and our regular glass of Lagavulin. So is this how the 1% lives? Nah.

According to *Passages*, at 6:15 "IT'S THE VOYAGER'S FAMOUS BLOCK PARTY!" Oh? Famous? To continue, "At the sound of the ship's 'cocktail bell,' we invite you to bring a glass from your suite and join fellow guests in the corridor ... Take the chance to meet your friends and neighbors as Captain Daniel Green, General Manager Andreas,* and Cruise Director JR* dash around every deck to meet you in this

*So why is the captain the only one with a last name? Huh? I think it's unfair, so I'll set the record straight by saying that the GM is Andreas Piccinin and the Cruise Director is J. R. Lustig.

fun get-together ..." Oh, joy! But we go along with it. Our immediate next-door neighbors (in another penthouse suite) are a somewhat dissolute couple named Howie and Ellie from Miami. Further down the hall is Chuck (from DOD) and Peg (who works for NASA). Most interesting are two women from Austin, TX, one of whom is named Sondra (Lee and I both forget the name of the other): the latter is a widow (her husband was a professor of metallurgy at UT-Austin); Sondra is doubly unlucky: her first husband died and her second husband is institutionalized with Alzheimer's. What is most notable is that Sondra is probably the only Texan who not only detests Gov. Rick Perry but who contends that he could never get elected again. I'm dubious and I tell her that she shouldn't be surprised if he captures the GOP presidential nomination in 2016. We also meet another couple (names forgotten) from Nebraska. And Lee meets a woman with spiky red hair who, with her husband (an adjunct professor of metallurgy at UT), lived in Knoxville for many years before retiring to Nevada. We'll run into them again.

We go to *Compass Rose* for dinner and ask to share a table for six. (Lee's strategy in specifying six is that if we ask for a table for four, we could be stuck with someone ghastly - and they with us. I reply that at a table for six, we could be seated with two couples who are hard to bear.) As it turns out, we are joined by Wally and Lynn from Michigan: she doesn't say much and he is difficult to take, especially when he espouses his hatred of Obamacare and his devotion to Dr. Ben Carson.* The other couple are Les and

*If you don't recognize the name, you may soon be seeing a great deal of him. He's a retired neurosurgeon and the darling of the Republican right-wing, perhaps because of his views, perhaps because he's probably the only African-American who appears on FOX News and at GOP Prayer Breakfasts. That he is an opponent of marriage equality, evolution, the Affordable Care Act, most forms of welfare, etc. goes without saying. He may well make a bid for the 2016 nomination. For more information, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Carson

Betty from Lawrence, Kansas. Ordinarily I don't give last names in my travelogues (for reasons of privacy) but I do need to tell you that Lester Mitscher is a fellow organic chemist, an emeritus professor in the Department of Medicinal Chemistry at University of Kansas. Although his field is far from mine, his vita reveals a very distinguished career that included receiving the ACS Award in Medicinal Chemistry. Although ostensibly retired, he is still funded by NIH and has two post-doctoral researchers in his group. He doesn't "look" it but he is in his 80s; he and Betty have been married for 63(!) years. We enjoy comparing some chemistry anecdotes: he was one of Carl Djerassi's grad students at Wayne State in the late 1950s, whereas I encountered Djerassi a few years later when I was a post-doc at Stanford in 1963. The coincidence of being seated with a fellow organic chemistry professor is almost "too much," but pales in comparison to his revelation that he and Betty may be the only liberals in the state of Kansas! As we leave the table, Les says (about Wally), "Someone's been listening to too much FOX news."

In the course of conversation, Wally mentions that he and Lynn are in stateroom 666. And he has taken full advantage of it by decorating the door appropriately. We wander by, a few days later, but (alas) without a camera; nevertheless, we recall seeing pictures of the devil, the fire and brimstone of hell, and a photo of Wally, superimposed on a map of Michigan, sporting a pair of devil's horns.

For dinner, I have gumbo, salad, scallops, and strudel. Lee will undoubtedly have a much more elegant description of our meals in her journal. The sea is a bit choppy as we make our way to bed at 10:30. In daylight! And I'm awakened at 4:30. In daylight!! I get up to read, then return to bed at 5:30 and actually snooze for another hour.

Sunday, July 13

The water is still a bit choppy, but not too bad. We have breakfast at *La Veranda* (bagel with cream

cheese and salmon, some fresh shrimp, juice, coffee). We explore Deck 11 to see if the weather is suitable for a walk around the track on Deck 12. It most decidedly is not. The winds are strong nor are the temps conducive. We'll try later in the day.

At 10:00 there is another lecture by Terry Bishop: "The Real Cold War - The Arctic Convoys 1941-45." Like his first talk, it is entertaining and informative, a nice blend of each, with just enough dry British humour*

*Joke: He asks, "Who is the greatest military strategist in history?" People shout out names like Sun Tzu, Napoleon, etc. but all are rejected. The official answer: "General Hindsight."

(sic!) introduced to keep things moving along. He does excellent impersonations of Churchill and Chamberlain. Lee, true nerd that she is, takes extensive notes on the presentation; if there's an exam at the end of these presentations, I know who's going to get the highest grade.

At noon, we venture to *La Veranda* for lunch; we sit with an Australian couple from Brisbane, Nick and Gail. (It's nice to discover that not every passenger is American. Of course, there were the Texans ... and there will be Floridians ... but, I suppose, that they can be counted as Americans.) We exchange impressions: from their travels in the U.S. to ours in Australia. Even such potentially third-rail topics like health care, politics, and religion are introduced without any throwing of punches or dishes. How nice.

Not having been dissuaded by venturing outside this morning, we again explore Deck 12 for the possibility of a walk. Not a chance! And just for kicks, I try my cell phone to see if the CDMA connection is intact. It is not! (And I thought that this CDMA came from the ship. So what do I know? Not much, as it turns out.) So we spend the afternoon in our room. I continue reading the Matt Taibbi and Ben Fountain books. We eschew (I love that word) shipboard activities, such as mah jongg, crazy golf tournament, teatime trivia contest, and (are you ready?) SNOWBALL BINGO BONANZA!! (as it's written in *Passages*). Also, Cruise Director J. R. (whom we met yesterday and whose up-beat, high-decibel announcements over the P.A. are the highlight of each day) is also a singer who will appear at 2:00, accompanied by the Regent Signature Orchestra, for "An Afternoon on Broadway." I shouldn't be so snarky. Many people enjoy such things. So I'm a snob. BFD!

Oh, yes, we are expecting to cross the Arctic Circle* at about 3:30 this afternoon. This allows Regent to

*Fun Facts (learned from today's edition of *Passages*): ●The area north of the Arctic Circle is about 20,000,000 square kilometers and covers 4% of the Earth. (I'll bet that you didn't know that!) ●The Arctic Circle is the parallel of latitude that runs 66° 33' 44" north of the Equator. ●The position of the Arctic Circle is not fixed. It directly depends on the Earth's axial tilt, which fluctuates within a margin of 2° over a 40,000-year period ... The Arctic Circle is currently drifting northwards at a speed of about 15 meters per year. ●The three largest communities north of the Arctic Circle are in Russia (Murmansk and Norilsk, populations 307K and 175K, respectively) and Norway (Tromsø, 72K). In later issues of *Passages* we'll learn that some small towns in Norway vie for the title of most northern (it all depends on how "town" is defined, much as when Bill Clinton proclaimed that "It all depends on what the meaning of the word is.")

announce (again in all caps) "THE ORDER OF THE BLUE NOSE: ARCTIC CROSSING RITE. Join Captain Daniel Green and your fellow passengers for a brief ceremony during which you will be initiated into The Order of the Blue Nose, the elite corps of brave travelers who have crossed the Arctic Circle by sea." Ho-hum. We crossed the Arctic Circle (briefly) during our 2012 cruise when we sailed from the north shore of Iceland. We eschewed (gesundheit!) initiation into the blue nosers then, and we intend to do so again today.

PUN ALERT: There's a cooking aroma coming into our stateroom. It's not unpleasant, but what is the source? I step outside onto the veranda - no aroma. I step into the hallway - no aroma. It must be coming through the vents. But from where? This makes no scents.

At 5:30, we attend a reception in the Constellation Theater for Virtuoso customers. The hosts are the Broadhursts (Virtuoso agents from Calgary) and they are much more low-key than the Texans who hosted the reception in 2012. He says that he has sold 12 places for one of the sub-orbital rocket flights on schedule for next year. On offer are some snacks, wine, and champagne. This gives us another chance to talk with Betty and Les, whom we met at dinner last night.

And speaking of dinner, we have a reservation at 6:30 for a shared table at the French restaurant, *Signatures*. At our table are fellow Washingtonians from Bellevue. Laura is a (retired) computer programmer for Boeing and John is a (retired) computer security expert for Control Data. Their airline managed to lose their luggage, so they are making do for the past few days; it is promised that their suitcases will be delivered when we make port at Honningsvåg tomorrow. We find their company most agreeable, probably because they (like all the "best" people) adhere to liberal politics. (In my notes I called them "flaming liberals.") All four of us agree that, aside from the enlightened folk on the Left Coast, the rest of our country is beyond hope of redemption. What is not especially agreeable is the pretentious presentation of the main courses (we recall this from earlier cruises) in which plates (four of them) are delivered at once, each covered with a metal dome, and on a signal from the head waiter, all four domes are lifted AT ONCE! I recall that they had shouted *Voilà!* when they did this, and maybe they did in the past, but this time the "performance" was accompanied by a mere *Bon Appétit!*

Back in our room, we read some more before going to bed at 10:45. But just before putting on my nightshirt and nightcap (figuratively, of course), I realize what the answer to the latest Will Shortz puzzle is. The challenge: "Think of a popular TV show about cooking. I guarantee it's a show everyone has heard of. Remove the second and third letters of the first word and insert them after the first letter of the second word. You'll get a phrase for a different kind of cooking. What is it?" The answer, BREAKING BAD ==> BAKING BREAD

And with that clear conscience, I manage to sleep all the way until the alarm at 6:30 in the morning, even though we are now (officially) in the land of the midnight sun.

Monday, July 14

The skies are overcast this morning. What's with all of the talk about perpetual sunlight? After breakfast*

*Because I have only cold cereal and a bagel, I miss a scene on the hot-food line that Lee writes about in her journal: "... some of the natives are a bit restless: a grumpy old man ahead of me in the special order line informs the order-taker and the omelet-man that his poached egg *must* be put on top of hash from the buffet line and that the hash *must* be warm. He then states that he 'ordered a long time ago and they'd better get on it.' " So there!

at *La Veranda*, we attend the third Terry Bishop lecture at 10:00: "The Northeast Passage Explorers - Gateway to the Indies Through Russia's Ice and Snow." I sit and listen, while the ever studious Lee takes copious notes on the lecture. Following the talk, we check the outside weather conditions: with a temperature of 14°C and a brisk wind, we again bag the idea of a walk on Deck 12. Eventually, we'll get to do it - several times, in fact.

We eat lunch at *La Veranda* with Leon and Sylvia from London. After comparing travel tales, we get to the important question of how in the hell one manages the task of downsizing, something that we'll face in a couple of years ... assuming, that is, that the Heron's Key retirement community ever gets built. They are facing the same challenge at their home. In the afternoon, I do a load of laundry (for free) and Lee goes off to a brief presentation about upcoming 2014-2015 Regent cruises.

In the early evening, we arrive in Honningsvåg, the northernmost town on the Norwegian mainland (see the map of Norway on p. 1); it has an area of 107 km² and a population of about 2400. Lee looks out across the water and proclaims, "I can see Russia from my ship!" Funny girl! Maybe it was the Lagavulin talking.

We also consume a bowl of potato chips that had been left for us, lest we perish of starvation.

PUN ALERT: Ah, that jokester, my wife. Most assuredly, she doesn't *palin* comparison with you-know-who! (Or should I say you-know-whom?) In any case, *alaska* about it.

For dinner, we sit alone at *Compass Rose*. I have pasta with clams, consommé, roast chicken, and chocolate cake. It is of course still bright sunlight, so at 8:30 we leave the ship for a stroll (with picture-taking) around Honningsvåg. We pass (but do not enter) such highlights as the Arctico Ice Bar* and the

*Described in *Passages* this way: "... the magic of winter, complete with ice and snow, has been simulated in this indoor environment, including the temperature, a cool 23 degrees Fahrenheit ... Enjoy a drink in an environment where you never have to worry about having your ice melt! But be sure to dress appropriately ... or your drink won't be the only thing frozen."

"Once Upon a Dream" Gallery and Gift Shop whose proprietor, the American wife of a local pastor, sells her artwork and shows off the unusual collection of shoes that she finds. The front window of the shop is replete with boots into which flowers and plants are stuffed; a side window is filled with hundreds of tightly packed shoes; and on the outside wall is an interesting display of flip-flops. Artists!

Outside the North Cape Museum, which we plan to visit on our own tomorrow, is a statue of Bamse (1937-1944), a Saint Bernard who was owned by the town's harbor master during World War II. Wearing a Norwegian sailor's hat, his picture was distributed to the country's sailors as they waged battles against the axis countries. Strangely, it's difficult to find English descriptions of his alleged heroism, but I did find web sites in Norwegian and French, which you are welcome to peruse: <http://tinyurl.com/os3wuyk> and <http://tinyurl.com/pr5gx5s>, respectively. There is, however, a nice wall display inside the museum, which we will not see until tomorrow, but from which I'll steal some material today. Quoting, "The large and mild-tempered St. Bernard dog was the sea dog on the Norwegian minesweeper Thorodd from 1939 until his death in the Scottish town Montrose in 1944 ... Thorodd was one of 13 navy vessels to follow King Haakon as he fled to England in 1940." Books have been written about Bamse (we *could* have bought one, but resisted the temptation) and many of his alleged exploits have the whiff of myth about them. For example, it is claimed that in Montrose he had his own bus pass and would use it to visit pubs where the Norwegian and Scottish navy people were having a wee nip. If one was so far gone that he was about to get into a fight, Bamse would rear up and place his paws on the man's shoulders, thus calming him down. Noted. (You can read the rest of the museum sign in the Picasa pictures from July 15.)

Not far from the statue of Bamse are statues of two trolls; Lee refused to have her picture taken with either of them but gleefully snapped one of me (see Picasa). We return to the ship at about 9:30, still in bright sunlight (but cold and windy). I try twice more to call Jennifer at Verizon, once with Lee's cell phone and once with the phone in the room. Neither time can I connect, so I call Verizon Global Support and talk to Beatrice and then Thomas, neither of whom can figure out why I can't connect to a network. To hell with them. I'm not going to keep trying.

TUESDAY, JULY 15

The morning begins cloudy and windy; the sun is largely hidden from view. We decide to have breakfast at the Deck 5 Coffee Connection; I have cold cereal, a bagel, juice and coffee. A quick trip to Deck 12 informs us that it's going to be chilly during our excursion.

Passages informs us that there is some controversy in Honningsvåg's claim to be "the northernmost city on the mainland of Norway." Legislation enacted in 1997 required a Norwegian community to have at least 5,000 inhabitants to qualify as a "city." As noted early, only some 2,400 (ice-cold) souls reside here. So there goes the claim! But it's not all so clear, because Honningsvåg declared itself a city in 1996, one year *before* the law was passed. So it's exempt from the 1997 law. Or so it would seem. In the U.S., teams of lawyers would have assembled by now to argue the merits of the case. The Norwegians seem much less

hung up over it. (There will be more about this, later, when we get to Hammerfest.) To give a sense of its location in the world, Wikipedia tells us that the town/city/whatever "is located in Nordkapp Municipality in Finnmark county ... Honningsvåg is situated at a bay on the southeastern side of the large island of Magerøya, while the famous North Cape and its visitors center is on the northern side of the island. Honningsvåg is a port of call for cruise ships, especially in the summer months. The ice-free ocean (southwestern part of the Barents Sea) provides rich fisheries and tourism is also important to the town. Even at 71°N, many private gardens in Honningsvåg have trees, although rarely more than 3 to 4 metres tall." And now you know.

Today's excursion uses a double-decker tour bus. At 8:50, Lee and I secure seats on the upper level. Our guide is Marial:* female, young, blond - but totally unlike 2012's Emilie (see p. 1), Marial is well-informed,

*Marial was the local representative onboard, last night, and Lee asked her for a local map and some touristic advice. She is a university student, majoring in pharmacy; her father is chief of police in this city ... so you'd better behave.

witty, intelligent, and well-spoken. We are heading toward the North Cape, about 35 km north of here. Marial informs us that there are some 5,000 reindeer on the island, about 2,500 of whom (of which?) are within the Nordkapp Municipality. She calls them suicidal reindeer because of their tendency to cross busy highways ("busy" is a relative term) when traffic (also a relative term) is passing. She tells us that the climate is relatively mild, with an average winter temperature of 4°C; the summer average is 16°C. On account of the Gulf Stream, the water of the harbor does not freeze; the water temperature is (a scalding) 8°C in the summer.

The main industries of this island are fishing and tourism, but the latter only in the summer when there is perpetual daylight. In the four months of winter, the sun never rises above the horizon. The reindeer graze here during the summer, but are herded onto boats that deliver them to the mainland during the winter months where there is less snow and easier-to-find food.

The island was occupied by German soldiers during World War II. When they left in 1944, they burned nearly every building in Honningsvåg. Only the town's church survived. The Norwegian government provided pre-fab buildings to replace those that were destroyed, thus explaining the "sameness" of the architecture that we noted in town last night.

After about a half-hour, we arrive at a small camp, inhabited by Sami* villagers. The Sami own

*Wikipedia tells us "The Sami people (also Sámi or Saami), traditionally known in English as Lapps or Laplanders, are the indigenous Finno-Ugric people inhabiting the Arctic area of Sápmi, which today encompasses parts of far northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, the Kola Peninsula of Russia, and the border area between south and middle Sweden and Norway. The Sami are the only indigenous people of Scandinavia recognized and protected under the international conventions of indigenous peoples, and are hence the northernmost indigenous people of Europe."

thousands of reindeer and breed them for their pelts and meat. Samis wear very colorful (red/blue/ gold) traditional clothing, as can be seen in my Picasa pictures. The traditional Sami hat worn by women has ribbons hanging down: if they are on the right, this says that the woman is married, if on the left she's is "looking." (And if in the middle? Hmm.) Norway has some 40,000 Sami living in the country; about 3,500 of them own reindeer herds. They live near the water and do a great deal of fishing. The Sami have their own local government, radio station, and schools. Marial also says that the Sami have 50 words for reindeer (sounds apocryphal, like saying that Inuit have 50 words for snow), 40 for the sun, and zero for tax office. (This is probably part of a typical tourism spiel, but she does deliver it with conviction).

Marial tells us that a local Sami, Nils, and one of his reindeer will be available for picture-taking, but she cautions us that Nils does not want people touching the reindeer because its horns are very sensitive. Marial also tells us that Nils's wife, Anna, is inside at the gift shop and she requests that nobody touch Nils.

After touching neither Nils nor his reindeer, we resume our northward drive and arrive at North Cape at 9:45. Accompanied by Maria, a few of us (intrepid souls, each and every one) make our way to the edge of the Earth (i.e., a 1000-foot cliff) to see a metal sculpture of the globe. It is cold, very cold. And it is windy beyond any wind that I can recall, whether in Scotland or New Zealand or Australia. I take one picture of two people who are buffeted by the gale-force wind and then Lee and I beat a hasty retreat to an indoor visitor's center that has a small museum, a 15-minute film* about life at North Cape, and a restaurant. Shown to the right is the globe and two tourists in weather a great deal more clement than what we encounter



*The highlight is a sequence showing the arrival of the "reindeer ferry" - its large rear bay is opened and the animals come running out. It would be more amusing to see how the herders get the damned beasts onto the ferry in the first place.

today. Various web sites claim that there are brilliant views of water and cliffs, but not today - nope, certainly not today. Even if we could have kept our eyes open in the wind and precipitation, the fog and mist obscure absolutely everything. In fact, my glasses have fog condensed on them. (This same tour was offered last night, shortly after docking. Passengers who took advantage of it will report to us that the weather was glorious, the views spectacular, the winds non-existent. Damn!)

PUN ALERT: The museum has several displays of trolls. I wonder how people feel about them - is the population pro-troll or control?

At 10:45, we eagerly board a different bus with a male guide who relates many of the same outlandish stories that Marial related. He tells us that 150 cruise ships (of varying capacity) come to Honningsvåg each summer, bringing 250 K tourists. Today, the only other large ship in port is one of the Hurtigruten Line.* Our one disappointment: we don't see any puffins, there are supposedly a million on the island during

*This is a Norwegian company that organizes boat tours around Norway, and also serves as an overgrown taxi/ferry service for locals who need to travel from one inaccessible place to another. We will see their ships in nearly every port. This particular ship has traveled from Bergen to Honningsvåg and will head next to Kirkenes, a Norwegian town that is near the border with Russia, about halfway between Honningsvåg and Murmansk, our next destination. Kirkenes is the end of the Hurtigruten's route from south to north along the Norwegian coast. Residents, apparently, do not need a passport to go into Russia.

the summer; they go to sea in the winter, then return the next summer.

We are back on board *Voyager* at about 11:45 and have lunch at *La Veranda*. Following that, we again check out Deck 12 for the possibility of a walk. No way! Even with the ship stationary, the winds are just too brisk (although merely pale imitations of what we encountered at North Cape). So we walk to the nearby Nordkappmuseet (North Cape Museum) and view its excellent displays of life on the island. In a room off the main gallery, there is an exhibit the work of Sami artist John Savio: woodcuts, oil paintings, striking pastels and watercolors. I take lots of pictures (see Picasa).

And then an unexpected adventure, at least for two fellow passengers. But first, some background. The ship's crew keeps track of the passengers in a very efficient way. When everyone boarded the ship in Oslo, our pictures were taken and we were issued magnetic cards that serve two purposes: (1) to be electronically "swiped" by a crew person as each passenger exits the ship and, again, upon the return; and (2) as keys to our staterooms. So now the story. Our ship is scheduled to leave port at 2:00 and sail to Murmansk (where the temperature is a brisk 8°C, or so the captain reports), so all passengers are to be on board no later than 1:30. At about 1:35, there is an announcement on the P.A. (that is heard in every stateroom, in the public spaces, and on the outside deck) asking (demanding!) Tatiana [something or other] and Igor [something or other else] to report to the Reception Desk, either in person or by phone. Five minutes later, the request is repeated. And five minutes after that, it is repeated first in English and then in Russian.

Since I don't know their last names, let's refer to the missing couple as Boris and Natasha (*pace* Jay Ward and Bill Scott, the creators of the cartoon show *Rocky and His Friends*). If they are in their stateroom, then they must be either sound asleep (very very sound asleep) or engaged *in flagrante delicto* and, thus, oblivious to external stimuli. More likely, they are not on board. At about 1:50, one of the crew members who swipe the magnetic cards races down the gang plank (I have an excellent view from my veranda, four levels above the pier) and runs into town. There not being much of a town, it's easy for him to look this way, that way, and the other way. He also stops and talks to some people who are sitting near the gnomes (see my Picasa pictures of the dock area). He goes into the museum that Lee and I had visited earlier; through a large window in the front of the museum, we can see him running up the steps to the third level, but he comes down again, empty-handed.

In a shameful display of ethnic profiling, Lee says "I'll bet that they're in the Ice Bar, dead drunk."

Several minutes later, the same crew member runs down the gang plank again, followed by one of the ship's senior staff in dress whites. They separate when they get to the town's main road, one going to the left and one to the right. Nada. After a bit, a police car arrives and discussions ensue with the ship's crew members. Cell phones are deployed (although it's not clear who is being called.) Lee still insists that the Ice Bar should be checked. (I'm guessing that they're spies who are afraid to go to Murmansk, lest they be arrested by the KGB.) Then a grey van arrives and the driver gets out - she confers with a female member of the crew who has now joined the two men on the pier. My guess is that she's from port security and that plans are being made for what to do with B and N if (and when) they make an appearance. Finally, the three crew return to the ship, the gang plank is withdrawn, and we set sail at 2:10, Boris-and-Natasha-less. (We won't learn about the final act of this drama until tomorrow - see p. 22.)

We have dinner at *Compass Rose* with two couples: Edie and David, who make their homes in Sarasota and Connecticut, presumably in the winter and summer, respectively; but I spend most of my time talking to the other couple, Joan and Clem (who also spend their year partly in West Palm Beach, partly in Philadelphia). There are two reasons why my attention is focused on the second couple: (1) they are seated closer* to me and (more important) (2) Joan, who is about 12 years older and suffered the misfortune of

*Lee is seated closer to Edie and David; she learns that he is involved in a Sarasota opera company that is producing all 34 Verdi operas. (He wrote 34? Really? I can name only about six or seven.) I'll finally get a chance to talk to him when we visit Geiranger on the final excursion of the trip; *vida infra*, as we say in the science-biz.

growing up in the Bronx, is (was?) as passionate a Brooklyn Dodgers fan as I. We exchange our favorite anecdotes and we both confess to having cried on October 3, 1951 when the bestial Bobby Thomson hit the homerun that won the pennant for the hated New York Giants. I was not yet 13 and had got home from school in time to watch the last few innings on TV; she was working as an editorial assistant at *Esquire* and was sent home because she couldn't compose herself. Aside from this saddest of all tales, we regaled one another with stories of our favorite players; and she was almost as good (not quite as good, but almost) at recalling the uniform numbers of the sainted Dodgers of the 1940s and '50s. Joan, it turns out, was a 1948 graduate of Quinnipiac College (in New Haven) during the days before it became co-ed. I can't resist reminding her that in April, 2013, Quinnipiac and Yale met in the championship game of the Frozen Four (the NCAA men's hockey tournament) and that the underdog (15th seeded in a 16-team tournament) men of blue soundly defeated the No. 1 ranked team, 4-0.

Before going to bed, we are reminded to set our watches and clocks two hours ahead to Russian time. (We are traveling essentially due east, but up here at the top of the world the distance between lines of longitude is much shorter than in most of the world.) We'll sail for the rest of today and overnight, expecting to reach Murmansk at 8:00 am tomorrow morning.

Wednesday, July 16

Overnight, we cruise the Norwegian Sea and into the Barents Sea, as we sail first to the east and then southeast to Murmansk (Мурманск in the local vernacular). The distance by sea is 287 nautical miles, whereas an all-land journey, on questionable roads that pass through Finland, would be 425 miles. The final 35 miles are through Kola Bay, a long finger of water from the Barents Sea to Murmansk and beyond. The city is experiencing a decrease in population, from about 468,000 in 1989 to 307,000 in the 2010 census. Nevertheless, it is the world's largest city north of the Arctic Circle. It is a port city and, like many of the Norwegian ports, its harbor remains ice-free during the winter. It is an important commercial port, but also is home to the Russian navy's northern fleet and to Atomflot (a fleet of nuclear-powered ice breakers). The average temperatures are: -10°C in winter, 14°C in summer. "Polar night," as the months of darkness are called, are difficult; children, especially, have trouble staying awake during this time.

The morning is cloudy and cool. The view of the port is truly ugly (although, to be frank, most commercial ports don't look much better); from our veranda, we see a rusted tanker and broken pavement where trucks move back and forth with deliveries. Lee comments that "there are lots of dodgy looking men and feral dogs on the pier." We have breakfast at *La Veranda*.

There is a complicated procedure involved in setting foot onto the soil of Mother Russia. When we boarded the ship in Oslo, among other things we were required to surrender our passports and to fill out an immigration form, written in Russian. Then, today, Regent ship personnel return our passports to us; tucked inside is a Russian *visa* that has two paper strips (one green, one red). There are Russian security personnel on board. As we head toward the exit, we hand them a passport and *visa*; they remove the green strip, and return the documents. Then we go through the electronic card swipe that is routine procedure. Upon our return to the ship, we'll swipe our electronic cards, and turn over the passport and *visa* to the smiling Russian official. A day or two later, our passports will be returned to us ... for good this time. The procedure seems clumsy, but it's a lot smoother than what we went through on each of the three days that we left the ship in St. Petersburg in 2010 .

We to a 9:25 rendezvous with the tour bus and our guide, Tatiana. (Hmmm ... Isn't this is the name of the missing female passenger in Honningsvåg? Surely only a coincidence, да?) As we enter the bus, the sun comes out, but (sad to say) the drive to our first stop reveals a city of immense ugliness (at least the sections that we traverse). The Picasa pictures don't lie (I think). We do pass one attractive building, the mint-green central railway station. We drive a short distance to the Palace of Culture where we view a statue of S. M. Kirov and hear a brief lecture about him. Tatiana says that he was assassinated by Stalin to prevent his becoming head of government. Here's how Wikipedia tells the story:

Sergei Mironovich Kirov (1886 – 1934), born Sergei Mironovich Kostrikov, was a prominent early Bolshevik leader in the Soviet Union. Kirov rose through the Communist Party ranks to become head of the party organization in Leningrad. On 1 December 1934, Kirov was shot and killed by a gunman at his offices in the Smolny Institute. Some historians place the blame for his assassination at the hands of Stalin and believe the NKVD organised his execution, but any evidence for this claim remains elusive. Kirov's death served as one of the pretexts for Stalin's escalation of repression against dissident elements of the Party, culminating in the Great Purge of the late 1930s in which many of the Old Bolsheviks were arrested, expelled from the party, and executed. Complicity in Kirov's assassination was a common charge to which the accused confessed in the show trials of the era.

Tatiana comments on the loss of population and attributes it to three factors: a decreased birth rate (yep, that would do it); the decline of the military with the end of the Cold War (which may well be heating up, as I write this); and the collapse of some industries, post the breakup of the Soviet Union. We drive past a 20-story hotel that seems to be in a state of decay and past several Krushchev-era apartment buildings that are ugly beyond words.

From the Palace of Culture, it's a short ride to "Monument to the Defenders of the Soviet Arctic during the Great Patriotic War," more commonly (and more succinctly) called Alyosha. Its dominant feature is a massive sculpture (that was delivered by helicopter in three pieces, then assembled on site) to the memory

of fighters from all countries who lost their lives defending Russia. The monstrous sculpture is 115 ft high and, although hollow, still weighs 5,000 tons. (To this disrespectful visitor, it greatly resembles Gort, the massive robot who accompanied Klaatu in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Just to be safe, I utter the words *Klaatu barada nikto* to keep Gort from destroying the planet.) Near the statue is an eternal flame and a wall with the seals of the "Hero Cities" of World War II: Murmansk on the left, then Leningrad, and then the rest.

We next drive to a typical Russian Orthodox Church. A wedding is in progress. Tatiana informs us that picture-taking is not permitted, but issues this warning after I've already snapped a photo of the loving couple and the robed and bearded priest. Nearby is a memorial to the submarine Kursk which suffered a devastating explosion (caused by leakage of peroxide and kerosene from a torpedo) in 2000 and sank, killing all 115 sailors on board.

Tatiana tells us that the people of Russia had been pagan, but were converted to Christianity in the 8th century. Here is Wikipedia's account:

Constantinople's greatest mission outreach was to areas known as Kievan Rus that later became the states of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. Christianity was introduced into Kievan Rus by Greek missionaries from Byzantium in the 9th century. In 863–869, Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius translated parts of the Bible into Old Church Slavonic language for the first time, paving the way for the Christianization of the Slavs ... By the mid-10th century, there was already a Christian community among Kievan nobility, under the leadership of Greek and Byzantine priests, although paganism remained the dominant religion. Princess Olga of Kiev was the first ruler of Kievan Rus to convert to Christianity, either in 945 or 957. Undoubtedly influenced by his Christian grandmother and by a proposed marriage alliance with the Byzantine imperial family, Olga's grandson Vladimir I (c. 956-1015), prince of Kiev, from among several options, chose the Byzantine rite. Baptized in 988, he led the Kievans to Christianity. This date is often considered the official birthday of the Russian Orthodox Church.

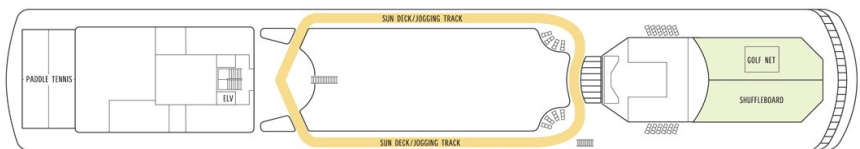
In 1985, under Gorbachev's regime, the first churches were erected in Murmansk. Now, in addition to Russian Orthodox, there are Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. There are no mosques. (And, I assume, no synagogues, although this is not mentioned by Tatiana). Tatiana alleges that "There are no ethnic or religious clashes in the city; everyone respects everyone else." Unlikely, but the sentiment is nice.

Our final stop is The Museum of Regional Studies (alas not air-conditioned), described in its online brochure: "There are geological, botanical, zoological, ethnographical, numismatical collections in the Museum, as well as manuscripts and old printed books, old Russian painting, rare photographs and documents." The two chemists especially enjoy a wall-hanging of Mendeleev's periodic table that highlights the metals (all of the rare earths, as well as others) that are found on the Kola Peninsula. (I am in awe of the six pages of notes that Lee has written about the museum's collection. I refuse to partake in such a display of erudition.)

ANOTHER UNCHARITABLE COMMENT ABOUT OUR FELLOW PASSENGERS: It is striking that most of the men (at least those of a certain age) have either grey hair or no hair, whereas most of the women are blond or brunette or, gasp, red-headed. Better living through chemistry, eh?

We have lunch outdoors on Deck 11. For me, a hot dog, potato chips, and salad. I return to our stateroom and change into shorts, white socks and sneakers, and my "official" walking shirt, then go to Deck 12 where I do eight laps (I think, but I forget to count).

According to the posted information, seven laps (in a clockwise direction, if you please) is one mile. This refers to the area highlighted in yellow, looking down on the pool and



deck chairs on Deck 11. But Lee (when she's with me) and I prefer to circumnavigate the entirety of Deck

12, going around the paddle tennis area at the stern of the ship and the golf net at the bow. From the diagram, I estimate that the full circuit is about 2.3 times greater than the yellow oval, so seven laps would equal 2.3 miles. There is a small impediment, however. To discourage joggers from using the full circuit, there is a sign near the turn at the bow-end saying "No jogging beyond this point"; and to reinforce this dictum there are strategically placed plexiglass panels that cause a walker or jogger to zig-zag lest he or she collide head-on. There is another impediment, which I mentioned earlier (p. 9) and will mention again later: the very slow-moving elderly folk who seem to congregate right where the plexiglass panels are located.

Lee has appropriated two deck chairs for us on Deck 11, so I go there to dry off, then return to our cabin to put on "adult" clothes, and finally return to the chair that Lee is holding for me on Deck 11. There's a ship's officer (whom I will later learn is the manager of all of the restaurants) who is passing by, so I stop him to ask if he knows what happened with Boris and Natasha (see p. 19). He seems hesitant to reply (maybe on purpose or maybe because he's been told not to say too much) but he's pretty sure that they are on board the ship, courtesy of a pilot boat that raced after us. He also says that Boris and Natasha were furious that the ship had left without them. (Maybe they should have been given cheap watches so that they could keep track of the time when the ship next leaves a port?) So it's not true, apparently, that they were drowned by order of the KGB. But it's still possible that Lee's theory is correct, that they were holed up in the Ice Bar and lost track, not only of time but of reality.

ANOTHER UNCHARITABLE OBSERVATION: A man walks past us, talking loudly on his cell phone. Well, one is used to this sort of behavior in restaurants, stores, airport lounges, etc. But what makes this instance especially egregious is that he's speaking loudly by holding the phone in front of his mouth - and one can hear the voice of the person he's speaking with because he has the damned thing set on speaker phone. He makes several laps around the pool, each time disturbing the peace (at least our peace) when he gets within about 50 feet. What's truly bizarre is that he seems to be talking to another passenger on this ship, making some sort of arrangement to meet. Why doesn't he just go to the person's stateroom to ask?

Last night, I finished reading the Ben Fountain book, so on the pool deck I continue reading Matt Taibbi's indictment of modern American society and begin another Kindle book, *Deadlock*, the first volume in Sarah Paretsky's series involving the detective V. I. Warshawski.

Following the requisite glasses of Lagavulin, accompanied by potato chips and assorted nuts, we choose to sit alone at dinner in *La Veranda*. From the appetizers delivered to the table, I indulge in one veal meat ball and one bruschetta, then have for my entree a dish with a chicken roll, wrapped with spinach (and also red peppers, which I carefully set aside); I have no dessert from the buffet line, although once again Mauro delivers biscotti to our table.

The ship departs Murmansk at 5:00 (no hold-ups caused by AWOL Russians this time) and is in open waters very soon. In the evening, there is a fair amount of rocking and rolling, but we're tough and we can take it. Best of all, we get to set our clocks and watches two hours back, thus recovering the sleep time that we lost on the way to Murmansk.

Thursday, July 17

Having set sail last evening, we expect to arrive in Hammerfest at about 1:00 this afternoon. The extra two hours of sleep are nice, although I almost fail to take full advantage: I awoke last night at 11:15 and was concerned that I'd not be able to sleep again; I was wrong.

At a latitude of 70.66° N, this town is almost as far north as Honnigsvåg (70.98° N). According to today's issue of *Passages*, "Hammerfest claims to be the northernmost city in the world, although the title is disputed by Honnigsvåg. The validity of the claim depends on one's definition of a city: although Hammerfest is further south than Honnigsvåg, it has a population of over 5,000, which is required by Norwegian law to achieve town status ... Some foreigners may find it strange that Hammerfest and Honnigsvåg claim to be cities, given the small size of both places; and it may help to know that the Norwegian language does not

distinguish between city and town. If both Hammerfest and Honningsvåg were to be defined according to old British tradition, neither of them would be considered cities, as neither has a cathedral." So there!

At 9:45, we attend a question-and-answer session involving Captain Daniel Green and General Manager Andreas Piccinin. Green is Swedish born and has been at sea since age 16 when he began work on cargo ships; he became a ship's captain at a very young age of 29. Piccinin is Swiss; he has worked in the cruise industry for 20 years; at age 41, he is also relatively young. The questions from the audience were quite good, but my favorite was when Green was asked to tell what is the dumbest question he'd every been asked. He told of a woman who complained that she had deliberately chosen a port-side cabin so that she'd always be on the side of the ship that docked at every port.

Lee has a light lunch at The Coffee Connection. I'm not hungry, so I stick to coffee alone. We arrive in Hammerfest ahead of schedule at 12:15. I'm pleased to note that the Hurtigruten has arrived ahead of us. The day is warm enough, partly cloudy as we sail in but changing to mostly sunny by the time we leave the ship and climb onto our tour* bus at 1:20. Our guide is a woman named Gerd. If that sounds familiar,

*It is something of a miracle that we even have a scheduled excursion. For months leading up to the ship's departure, the entry at Regent's web site for Hammerfest indicated that no excursions had been arranged. Hmm. Well, Lee is an avid reader of the Cruise Forum and learned that other passengers had managed to book excursions through their travel agent, so she called Stefan Bisciglia who, in turn, called Regent Seven Seas and got us booked onto the tour we would wanted, a visit to the Polar Bear Club. And why was this so desirable? Well, dear reader, please read on.

Gerd was also the name of the guide on the bus that took us from the Oslo airport to our hotel. And, I'm sorry to say, today's Gerd is as poor a guide as was the Gerd of yesterweek. Among her faults: she fails to hold high her Regents lollipop, thus causing some of the slower tourists to lose contact with her (which might not have been such a bad thing); she is unable (or unwilling) to answer questions that passengers on the bus; she fails to inform us of the time when we need to return to the bus (fortunately nobody was left stranded - I think); and she reads her spiel rather than deliver it from memory. I was able to "forgive" Emilie (in 2012) for all of her missteps, but (as I might have mentioned once or twice), she was young ... and blond. (I'll refrain from making jokes about "girding my loins" but I do wonder if Gerd is, perhaps, the Norwegian word for "incompetent"?) The two female Gerds and the male gerd (I mean guide) whom we'll have in Harstad are the only poor ones on this trip.

Like Honningsvåg, this city was burned to the ground by the defeated German forces at the end of World War II. All of it. There is a fence surrounding the city to keep reindeer out. According to Wikipedia, "For years many of the 2,500 to 3,000 reindeer in the area have been coming into the town itself, wandering in the streets and among the houses. Although very popular with tourists, this has been less favourably received by the town's population, with people complaining of traffic disturbances and the dung and urine left by the animals." Our first stop is at 1:45, but Gerd doesn't explain the reason. I thought it is to allow incontinent passengers to find a bathroom, but it seems that it is to view the drying of cod on a wooden structure. Woo-hoo! And my displeasure with Gerd only increases by the piece of dried cod that she offers to me; like an intrepid traveler, I'll try anything - and while it isn't as vile as the fermented shark that I sampled in Iceland in 2012, I'm eager to find a place to spit out the piece that I just cannot bring myself to swallow.

We head back toward town and step out of the bus to view, from this lofty height, the city, its harbor, and (yes) our cruise ship. We next visit a small protestant church, the one structure left standing by the Germans when they burned the down. And then, finally, we arrive at "The Royal and Ancient Polar Bear Society" headquarters. It is a museum devoted to the ecology of the Arctic regions. There are numerous (dead) polar bears, seals, otters, reindeer, and other creatures.

Once again, we turn to Wikipedia: "Founded in 1963 by two local businessmen, the Polar Bear Club is not particularly ancient. Primarily, it is a somewhat jokey amenity* for tourists. Although entrance to the actual

*And not cheap! It costs 180 NOK (about \$30) to join. Lee, who is determined to divest ourselves of all

of our money, eagerly pays for a membership.

museum is for a nominal charge, visitors are encouraged to join the Society, which is rewarded with a membership pack, the contents of which include a certificate, a sticker, a hat, a membership card and a lapel pin. Since the only way to join is in person at the museum, this pin signifies as proof of visiting this remote place." Membership in the Society aside, the museum does have its assets: many stuffed animals from the region (polar bears, walrus, foxes, seals, birds, etc.).

So why are we so eager (see above) to visit the Polar Bear Club? Because Lee had read in the *Lonely Planet Guide to Norway* this exciting tidbit about joining the Polar Bear Club: "For a little more, you also receive a schnapps glass and, as the demure young receptionist will explain without blanching, get dubbed with the bone from a walrus's penis. It's well worth the extra for the conversation this unique honour will generate down the pub, once you're home." Lee, without blanching, asks the demure young receptionist about this, and she replies (without blanching) that one needs to make an appointment for this "treat" ahead of time; it can't just be ordered on the spot. Damn!

We return to the ship at 3:00. Because the weather is sunny and not too windy, Lee and I walk Deck 12 for about 30 minutes. We return to our room and await the arrival of Melwyn with his tray of canapés: crab claws (for Lee) and chicken tenders (of which I eat but a few). Despite having had no lunch, I'm just not hungry. But I do join Lee in our daily fix of Lagavulin, even if we have no schnapps glass into which it can be poured. The captain's announcement, as we depart Hammerfest at 6:00, is that the weather is turning colder; we shouldn't expect a high of more than 10°C tomorrow. This next leg of the journey, 488 nautical miles, will take us north, far north, to Longyearbyen, which we'll not reach until 8:00 am the day after tomorrow (i.e., after 38 hours of cruising).

We have dinner at *Compass Rose* with Lisa and Tom (from Reno, he's an electrical engineer) and Betty and Les, our new July 12-13 BFFs from Lawrence, Kansas. (I write BFF because we'll find ourselves seated with them at several more dinners over the next few days.) We mention that strange case of Boris and Natasha, which prompts Lisa to relate an equally strange incident. (How she knows this, I can't figure out, but she does seem to know lots about many of our fellow passengers. Maybe she's with the NSA?) She says that a British couple boarded the ship in Oslo, but did not have their passports. Well that works fine with traveling in the countries that belong to the European Union, but it is most assuredly not acceptable when going into Russia. So, they were required to leave the ship in Honningsvåg and make their own way to Hammerfest where they'd be allowed to board. Of course, they had to pay the airfare as well as the cost of hotels on July 15 and 16. (Lisa also insists that on a Seabourn cruise off the eastern coast of Africa - think Somalian pirates - she was with a group that were shown the room with the vessel's rocket launchers. I think that this is apocryphal, but ...)

We return to the room, read our books and Kindles and iPads, and try to use the painfully slow internet connection.

Friday, July 18

It is a foggy, rainy, cold morning as we cruise all day long to Longyearbyen, 800 miles north of the Arctic Circle. Following breakfast, we attend the fourth of Terry Bishop's lectures: "The Vikings are Coming (Part One)" which is, like the others, entertaining and informative. The leading figures are those whom we've all learned about in school: Erik Thorvaldsson, better known as "Erik the Red" (950 - 1003) and his son, Leif Erikson (970 - 1020). They and their crew sailed to Greenland, Iceland, and North America, setting up colonies in all of them.

PUN ALERT: In school, we learned that Leif's name was pronounced "leaf" but Terry Bishop made it clear that he deserved to get a "life."

Following the lecture, we return to our room and try, once again, to use the slow slow slow internet

connection. A little later, we go to the 5th floor atrium where our passports are returned to us. Following lunch,* we use the ship's "on demand" TV library to watch *Dallas Buyers' Club* in our stateroom.

*With this long day of cruising and no excursions, Regent is desperate to find things to entertain the masses. In addition to a bean-bag tossing competition, golf chipping (indoors!), how to make a nautical-themed greeting card, a black jack tournament, a backstage tour of the theater, and dozens of other "fun" things, today's *Passages* informs us that the Pool Grill will feature a "CHILI SHOWDOWN! Taste three different varieties of chili, made by three different chefs on board." Lee, bless her iron stomach, takes advantage of this, but brings her plate into *La Veranda* where I'm having a more sensible meal of salad, cold cuts, and a slice of pizza.

I contend that *fun* is a noun, not an adjective.* Yes, I did use it, above, as an adjective, because I want to be snarky ... and sarcastic ... and holier-than-thou. Yes, I realize that 95% (or more) of the public accepts the adjectival use of the word, but they are probably the same people who contend that "verbs" can also be made from such nouns as *access* and *input* and *dialog* and *workshop* and *message* and so on. No, I say, NO! Worst of all are the compound verbs that one hears from time to time: "to laser-surgery an eye" or to "remote access a TV program" or to "cheddar cheese a hamburger" or to "marathon watch" a full season of some TV show.

***Having made my position as clear as I can, let me now share with you a "fun" fact from Terry Bishop's lecture. He contends (and who can criticize him) that despite the paintings and movies and TV shows that show horns on Viking helmets, in fact they had none. As Terry points out, horns would be antithetical to climbing the ship's rigging; he says that the idea of them were "invented" by Victorians and Richard Wagner (who was not a Victorian, but ...)

Daily menus for *Compass Rose* and *La Veranda* are posted on a dedicated TV channel. One needs a lot of patience, as each screen image lasts about three times as long as is needed; and for *Compass Rose*, this involves the opening image, then a picture of the dining room, then the appetizers, then the soups, then the salads, then the main courses (sometimes on two screens), and finally the desserts. This evening, we're interested in comparing the fare at the two restaurants, so we wait patiently for the *Compass Rose* to end and for *La Veranda* to begin. The latter is always Italian-themed, and two of tonight's main course offerings are *Veal Scallopine Al Marseille* and *Veal Scallopine Al Limone*.

PUN ALERT: What's with this "Al Limone"? Isn't that what I have to pay my ex-wife?

PUN ALERT: According to the itinerary, after Longyearbyen, we'll proceed even farther north to the Magdalene Fjord. So, there'll be a fjord in our future after all.

At 4:30 in the afternoon, there's a kitchen galley tour for Virtuoso customers. Chef Jonathan Smid, from Toronto, talks to us in the enormous room where the meals for *Compass Rose* and for room service are prepared. It is an impressive operation, involving many chefs and cooks, some doing appetizers, others main courses, and still others desserts, cookies, and *petits fours*. He says that the *only* on-board item not cooked or baked in this kitchen is the cronut, a croissant-doughnut pastiche. He also reports that all recipes are now on iPads.

At 6:00, there's a reception in the Constellation Theater for members of the Seven Seas Society, an extremely "select" group consisting of people who have sailed at least once on a Regent cruise ship. Thus, nearly everyone on board is present (560 out of 700, to be precise). There are speeches (oh joy!) in which we learn that there are people on board who have sailed more than a thousand* nights! There are some

*This would challenge even the endurance of the Persian king for whom Scheherazade told her stories (Aladdin, Ali Baba, Sinbad, and other cool dudes) over a thousand nights, all to avoid the fate of the thousand women (virgins, of course) who preceded her and lasted only one day.

drinks and hors d'oeuvres, some very loud music, and some singing (with great emoting and sighing) by the versatile J. R. Lustig. Over the din, we try to talk to Laura and John (the couple from Bellevue) but without much success. We ask if they'd like to accompany us to *Compass Rose*, but they have a reservation at *Signatures*.

At dinner, we are seated with Mary and Ann, 70-something friends from Texas who travel together a lot; and with Stan and Joyce from San Diego, who must have made no impression because I have no notes on them. (Lee, who is never restrained in her judgments, calls them duds.) Ann is very interesting: she has a masters degree in mathematics and worked for many years as a defense contractor while having an adjunct position at University of Dallas. Her husband is not on the cruise, but in his career he was an inventor of semiconductor parts. Anne says that both of their names are in a famous case of patent law where the Supreme Court ruled, in their favor, on the time interval from invention to filing for a patent. From her appearance, I would have pegged her as a wealthy gun-loving Republican one-percenter, but she surprises me by being the second Texan on this cruise to express a visceral dislike for Rick Perry. She also (gasp!) has views on a variety of issues that can only be labeled as ... liberal. For example, she's a big fan of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. And as for her senator, Ted Cruz, she has only the vilest words. Who woulda thunked it?

Saturday, July 19

At 7:30, the ship arrives at Longyearbyen. The morning begins cold (46°C), cloudy, breezy, and foggy. Oh joy! The captain informs us that we are at latitude 78° 14' N, and that we have traveled 2100 nautical miles from Oslo, with 2400 yet to go. At dinner, last night, the Chicken Kiev that I ordered committed an unprovoked and violent act upon my person - that is, as I cut into the breading with a knife, a stream of melted butter shot out and onto my jacket. This is a job for Super-Butler! So I call Melwyn, ask him if he can take the jacket to the onboard dry cleaner and get it back to me before tonight's dinner. Yes, he can!

We have breakfast at *La Veranda*. The day has become sunny, so the relatively low temperature does not feel too cold; nevertheless, a jacket is in order for today's excursion. But first some words about geography. Svalbard is an archipelago in the Arctic Ocean. It lies about halfway between the Norwegian mainland and the North Pole. The largest island in this cluster is Spitsbergen whose largest city is Longyearbyen (population about 2,000). Without any of the sort of dispute between the competing claims between Honningsvåg and Hammerfest, Longyearbyen is indisputably the world's northernmost community having 1,000 residents or more. Wikipedia tells us the following: "Svalbard's climate is a combination of an Arctic climate tempered by the North Atlantic Current ... Average summer temperatures are typically 4 to 6 °C (39 to 43 °F) while average winter temperatures are -12 to -16 °C (10 to 3 °F). Longyearbyen experiences midnight sun from 19 April through 23 August, polar night* from 27 October through 14 February, and civil polar night*



*From Wikipedia: "The polar night occurs when the night lasts for more than 24 hours ... The civil polar night period produces only a faint glow of light visible at midday."

from 14 November through 29 January. However, due to shading from mountains, the sun is not visible in Longyearbyen until around 8 March. Snow covers the town from late September through May."

The governance is a bit strange. Svalbard is not part of any Norwegian county, but the Svalbard Treaty of 1920 recognizes Norwegian sovereignty; and the Svalbard Act, five years later, made Svalbard part of the Kingdom of Norway. Longyearbyen is named after John Munro Longyear, an American industrialist, who

founded a coal-mining company in 1906.

Here is some more information from Wikipedia:

The Svalbard Treaty of 1920 established full Norwegian sovereignty over the archipelago. The treaty came into effect in 1925, following the Svalbard Act which established the institution of the Governor of Svalbard. He holds the responsibility as both county governor and chief of police, as well as holding other authority granted from the executive branch. Duties include environmental policy, family law, law enforcement, search and rescue, tourism management, information services, contact with foreign settlements, and judge in some areas of maritime inquiries and judicial examinations—albeit never in the same cases as acting as police. Odd Olsen Ingerø has been governor since 2009; he is assisted by a staff of 26 professionals. The institution is subordinate to the Ministry of Justice and the Police, but reports to other ministries in matters within their portfolio.

Because of the special treaty status of Svalbard, Longyearbyen is subject to Norwegian legislation, but citizens of any signatory country may conduct commercial activities and live in town. However, people without a source of income can be rejected by the governor. The treaty limits Norway's right to collect taxes to that of financing services on Svalbard. Therefore, Longyearbyen has a lower income tax than mainland Norway, and there is no value added tax.

Our guide on the tour bus is Josephina, a Swedish student who is taking courses in marine biology at the local university. She is impressively tall (maybe 6'2") but, alas, not blond. In talking about the tax status (see above), she says that Norwegians cannot receive their government pensions, unless they move to the mainland; as a result, the population of 18-year olds and younger is 40%.

At 9:15, we are at the Svalbard Museum which is connected to the Svalbard Science Center, part of the UNIS (University Centre in Svalbard) where we stay for about an hour. On display are numerous wild animals (all dead, all stuffed) and human artifacts, among which is a most ingenious wolf trap: it is a wooden contraption with food to lure a wolf and a gun whose trigger is tripped by the wolf's actions. Really suicide, when you come right down to it. (Lee, bless her nerdiness, has no fewer than four pages of detailed notes about the museum's collection.)

I ask her how gloomy it is during Arctic Night. She says that it's really not as bad as you'd expect: there is the glow from artificial lighting (homes, offices, street lamps) and from the moon which, if full, makes it easy to walk everywhere. Lee writes "Josephine says that on March 8, the first place that the sun hits is on the hospital steps. There is then a week-long festival with much drinking." She takes us to see the two Polar Bear Signs at the town's city limits: if one dares to proceed beyond these signs, it is required that you carry a rifle, that you know how to use it, and that you have a trip wire in case you decide to set up a camp. Nobody, however, can explain to my satisfaction how the bears know not to cross into town and past the signs. Surely they can't read Norwegian! There is a confusing warning posted: "As everywhere in Svalbard, it is critical to understand that all year round there is a significant threat from polar bears. However, polar bears are legally protected, and shooting a polar bear will be regarded very seriously by the police and investigated thoroughly."

The bus takes us past the university and student housing and a coal-fired power plant that supplies hot water to the community. There's not enough wood on the island for burning in a home furnace; and coal, which is plentiful, would melt individual furnaces. If the one power plant fails, there is an emergency evacuation plan for everyone, as there is no other way to get heat.

We drive to the Svalbard Villmarkssenter, a home for well-trained huskies and dog sleds, open all year round for dog-sledding trips. According to their web site, one can rent a dog: "We provide tenant introduction to securing dogs to prevent escape. We provide the housing chain, dog food and pack saddle. It is the tenant's responsibility to ensure that the dog is responsible secured during the entire trip so it will not come loose and hunt deer. Any action for tracking and capture of escaped dog will be paid by the tenant ... Dogs must only be used as an additional safety with regard to alert in case of polar bears and can never

replace guns and guards." Consider us warned (if in imperfect English).

Well, despite this warning, the dogs are wonderful. One of the keepers, in a very warm looking sealskin parka gives a brief talk about his animals. We are on site for 45 minutes, first taking pictures of all of the dogs that are presently in cages (and a few that are available for petting) and then of the return of two dog sleds (each pulled by 13 animals), although because there is no snow the sled is replaced by a four-wheel wagon. The dogs are amazingly friendly and even those that have just returned from work seem eager to get going again. They make quite a racket, not only with their barking but with their crying if people walk away from them. They are beautiful animals. They are quite different from the huskies that we're accustomed to seeing; and they come in a wide range of colors from pure white to dark grey and all sorts of shading in between. The sledding teams consist of 13 dogs (I never get to ask if this is standard everywhere) with a pair in front, then a single dog, and then five more pairs (again, I suppose that there's a reason for this arrangement, but I don't know what it is). Before the two sled teams return, we are invited into the small house for some hot toddy and waffle.

PUN ALERT: On the path leading to the house, there is a small enclosure with an female eider duck sitting on her eggs. How did she get there, I wonder. Who put the eider down?

PUN ALERT (CONTINUED): Well, it's eider dis one or dat one.

ANOTHER PUN ALERT: Wherever we are on the open sea, unless very far from the coast, there are birds following us, hoping for scraps of food, I imagine. Well, one good tern deserves another, eh?

On our return to the ship, we stop to examine the conveyor belts that were used to bring coal from the mines to the port. From the side of the hill, we look down on the town, the port, and our ship. We pass an enormous red mail box - surely it's not real, or is it? Finally, we visit the Svalbard Church which bills itself, of course, as the world's most northern church. It is also the only church in town. Like two of the other towns that we've visited, Longyearbyen was largely destroyed by German forces at the end of World War II; nearly every building that we see (including this little red church) has been built since the end of the war. (Lee says, "Where we're going to travel tomorrow, it will be 79.5°," but Ron says "I dunno - it feels a lot colder than that.")

We're back on board at 12:15 and have lunch at *La Veranda*. It's very crowded, so we intrude on a younger couple named Jeff and Teresa from Oregon. They are in business together as home-builders. (Well, at least they're not home wreckers!) At first, the conversation is a big strained (e.g., when Lee mentions the TV show *Portlandia*, the pair express their dislike) but after a while both couples warm to the occasion as they discover that they have lots of things to talk about despite the vast age differential. Following lunch, Lee takes the shuttle into town to take advantage of shopping without a VAT; I remain in our room, using the very slow internet and reading.

At 4:45, the sun comes out, but it's too late to contemplate a walk on Deck 12. Half an hour later, Melwyn returns with my *clean* jacket - hooray! Again, he expresses his deep disappointment that we've not ordered any snacks for this afternoon. The captain's announcement at 5:30 says that he plans to set sail at 6:00 (assuming that a Natasha-Boris type of incident doesn't occur), to be at the entrance to Magdalena Fjord at 7:15 tomorrow morning, and to reach the glacier at about 8:00.

Dinner, tonight, is at *Prime 7*. This is the "extra" reservation that Melwyn managed to secure for us; our other reservation, made long before sailing, is two nights from now. Seated with us are Sayla (sp?) and Frank, both Orientals from Boston. I'm seated next to Sayla, but she speaks so quietly and with such a strong accent that I have trouble understanding much of what she says. (It doesn't help that there are some very loud Americans at the next table). Frank is a retired nuclear engineer (or something like that); Sayla is a homemaker, not retired. Listening to Frank's discussions of their travels suggests that we are mere juveniles compared to the more adventurous of our fellow passengers. They seem to have been nearly everywhere in the world, often (but not always) on cruises.

I've been avoiding rhapsodizing over the meals, but Lee has infinitely detailed descriptions of everything we've eaten. Quoting from her journal about tonight's meal, "Ron has a jumbo* shrimp cocktail; an

*English is a devilishly difficult language. For example, does "jumbo" refer to the shrimp or to the size of the portion? Similarly, is a small businessman one who has a small business or one who is tiny?

enormous lettuce wedge salad; roast chicken with twice-baked potato and corn; apple tart for dessert. Ron drinks Sauvignon blanc; Lee has La Terre Cabernet (after being offered zinfandel). The *amuse bouche* was (as always) a Wagyu beef hamburger slider. Lee has a crab cake - fantastic, almost no filler; Harvest salad (pumpkin, beets, cranberries, pecans, and corn with lettuce and a raspberry dressing); 6 oz filet (dry and cooked beyond medium)* with port wine/cranberry sauce (awful, like Thanksgiving)* and twice-baked potato

*So! It's no longer true that never is heard a discouraging word about the meals.

and corn. The corn, alas, is dull, not like the wonderful corn pudding of earlier days. For dessert, *tres leches* cake, which is completely fantastic!

Back in the room, we read. There's no point in getting frustrated by the slow internet because, as we learn from the TI guy on board, there'll be no connectivity today and tomorrow. Presumably (this is a guess, but it seems reasonable) we are so far north that the ship's antenna cannot "see" over the horizon to the satellite that is positioned above the Equator.

Sunday, July 20

We have breakfast at *La Veranda*. By this time, I've fallen into the routine of cold cereal with skim milk, an English muffin, juice, and coffee. Gotta worry about this youthful svelte figure, eh? As mentioned on p. 10, this is the time that I speak to the restaurant manager, a large affable Italian, to complain that the coffee has (and has had for several days) a strong chlorinated taste. He's incredulous and contends that no halogenated cleansers are ever used on the cups or coffee pot. Nevertheless, the offensive taste is gone the next time we eat here. Coincidence? I doubt it.

The sun has come out, but it's still very cold. I take pictures from the restaurant as the ship enters the Magdalene fjord. The clouds are low, the mountains are stark and covered with some snow; the color photos look as if they were done in black-and-white (see Picasa). Lee gets her coat and goes to Deck 12 to continue taking pictures, while I do a load of laundry* before joining her. Soon, we see chunks of ice from

*Much of these few paragraphs are based on what Lee tells me and what the Picasa pictures reveal. I miss seeing much of it because the washer, which was supposed to run for only 45 minutes, is still going strong for 30 minutes longer. And then the dryer, which I had set for 60 minutes, continue to spin and heat and spin and heat for 20 minutes extra. Well, at least every item is dry.

the fjord floating past the ship. The glacier comes into view at 8:45. (The icy weather notwithstanding, I take a picture of the deck crew down below, putting out blankets for the deck chairs, assuming that someone ... anyone ... will want to use them.)

The captain announces that we are at latitude 79°31' North, just 630 nautical miles from the North Pole. He also reports that the local pilot, who had come on board, has advised against getting any closer to the glacier. Instead the captain sends one of the ship's tenders (and its frozen crew) to approach the glacier and try to get a piece to bring back to the ship. Why? Who knows? After about a half-hour, they return to the mother ship with two huge chunks of glacier. (They had tried, first, to grapple some larger chunks onto the tender, but failed.)

At 9:30, the chunks of glacier are safely on board and are delivered to Deck 11 where people gather around, taking pictures, oohing and aahing, almost giving obeisance to these pieces frozen water as if they were

gods. Even Captain Green and General Manager Piccinin come for a closer look. (The Picasa pictures reveal everything.) Perhaps the most amazing sight of all is that in the midst of all of the warmly dressed passengers, a nearly naked man has emerged from the hot tub and has come to take pictures. Why, it's Wally, the right-wing zealot from p. 13.

As we exit the fjord and head into open waters, Lee and I grab comfortable chairs on Deck 6 near the library* (yes, indoors if you please) to read. I, alas, am interrupted by needing to attend to the dryer in the

*It is a very well stocked library, filled with reference books, current fiction, older literary works, sociology and politics, etc. Lee, in fact, borrows one of four copies of *The Luminaries*, an unnecessarily long novel that I had already read in Gig Harbor.

laundry room. We do some more reading in our room before going to *La Veranda* for lunch. Following that, at 2:00 it's Terry Bishop's 5th lecture, "The Vikings are Coming (Part 2)." (You'll have to ask Lee to share her handwritten journal with you if you want to read about the exploits of Kings Alfred and Ethelred - not to be confused with Ethelred the Unready - Guthrum, Canute,* Harold Godwinson, Harald Hardrada, William of

*Terry says that his name in Danish is *CNUT*. He adds, "One has to be careful in spelling this correctly."

Normandy, and other dead white dudes.) We retreat to our room to read, awaiting Melwyn's delivery of canapés at 5:00. At 6:00, as we are sailing southward, Lee discovers that the internet is back. I feel renewed and restored, but there's no time to take advantage of it now.

Dinner is at *Compass Rose*. Our dinner partners are Jim and Linda (from Napa Valley) along with (of course) Les and Betty. This is the 3rd time that we and they have been seated together. I'm beginning to suspect that only a small number of diners ask to share a table; that and the fact that the Kansans tend to arrive at about the same time as we do makes the odds of being seated together considerably higher than random. As the dinner conversation continues, we discover that Jim's last name is Dunlop and that he's very famous. In 1965, this Scottish immigrant was working as a chemical engineer and making devices to attach to guitars when someone tells him that what the world needs is a capo that will fit securely on a 12-string guitar. (This is all new to me - I have to go online to discover what a capo is and why it might be useful.) Well, the young chemical engineer succeeded and started a business, Dunlop Manufacturing, which through its own inventions and the acquisition of smaller companies is now one of the world's biggest manufacturers of guitar accessories. When he tells us that a section of the EMP (Experience Music Project Museum in Seattle, founded by Paul Allen) is devoted to him, we know that we're in the presence of "royalty." His web site is worth a look, particularly for the rock musicians who use his products exclusively. Jimi Hendrix was one of his early adopters; for others, see: <http://www.jimdunlop.com/> OK, I confess that I've heard of practically none of them - but there are a few names that are familiar to me: Alice Cooper, Dave Matthews, Ricky Skaggs, and Yo-Yo Ma (OK, I made that last one up). Dunlop is 78, now, and shows some signs of confusion (e.g., continually confusing Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon) but that's certainly understandable considering his age and a lifetime of being around ear-shattering sounds and rabid drug use (even if he didn't partake himself). Oh, yes, dinner: I have a vegetable tart, iceberg lettuce, chicken breast, and fruit plate.

PUN ALERT: At dinner, I mention that Regent's 2015 version of the cruise that we're on is four nights longer and, after visiting Murmansk on Day 12, it then goes to Russia's Solovetsky Islands before doubling back to Murmansk two days later. Everyone is amazed (and surprised and somewhat horrified) that Murmansk is featured so prominently, but as the song classic goes, ♪ "I'll take Murmansk" ♪

Following dinner, we retire to our room where I use the restored internet connection; Lee decides to go to tonight's entertainment, J. R. Lustig (and band) performing the music of Cole Porter and George Gershwin. She agrees with me that he has a wonderful voice but his mannerisms are just too over the top. She also comments on the passengers who took to the dance floor during Lustig's final song, *The Way We Were*. She writes, "My favorite: the slender woman in a lace minidress with her obese hubby in a bowling shirt!"

Monday, July 21

Today is a cruise day. The last time we were on land was when we left Longyearbyen at 6:00 pm on July 19 and we'll not set foot on land again until we dock at Harstad at 10:00 am on July 22. That's 64 hours at sea for a distance of 815 nautical miles. The weather is cloudy, foggy, rainy, yecchy. We order breakfast for our room because Lee wants to have waffles ... and Melwyn is giddy with excitement about doing something else for us. (I stick with corn flakes, English muffin, juice, and coffee.)

We sit in our room to read. I finish the Matt Taibbi Kindle book and continue reading another Kindle download from the Gig Harbor Library, Sarah Paretsky's *Deadlock*. At a little after 9:00, Lee goes to a lecture by Destination Manager Katja (still, no last names - weird, eh?) on the excursions in Hellesylt and Geiranger, two days from today. Because our room has not yet been made up, I get a coffee on Deck 5 and head to the comfy chairs on Deck 6 to continue reading (and to work some crossword puzzles). A little after 10:00, Lee returns from the relatively useless lecture, carrying coffees for both of us. Half an hour later, we return to our room, now ready for occupancy again.

[I'm going to insert a vignette here but I don't know if this is the correct date. Lee made no mention of it in her journal nor did I in mine. But it did occur. So, here is the story. Lee goes down to Deck 5 to get coffees to bring back to our room. At the elevator, she runs into Glee. You do remember Glee, yes? We met her on pp. 2 and 9. While waiting for the elevator to arrive at Deck 5, Glee engages Lee in conversation. Maybe she's NSA or FBI or CIA but in short order she learns that we live in Gig Harbor; and she then reveals that she lives in Toutle (a "metropolis" of about 1,000, quite near Mt. St. Helens) but formerly in Tacoma. As the elevator ascends, she reveals her background and her name (we didn't know that she was Glee before this); and she asks Lee to step off the elevator at Deck 7 to continue the conversation. Because Lee makes no notes, she doesn't recall exactly what's discussed, but it is rambling and pointless and inane - and, beyond this, the hot coffee cups are becoming difficult to hold. So she finally frees herself and continues on to our deck and our room. Glee does not follow her]

[Another vignette that Lee and I recall but didn't think to record in our journals - so we don't know on what date it occurred. Around 9:30 or 10:00 in the evening, we want to have some coffee, so we go to the Coffee Connection on Deck 5. Several people are milling around, trying to decide which cookies or pieces of fruit to grab for a late-night snack. Two of them are aghast (*aghast*, I tell you) that we are daring to ingest a caffeinated drink so late at night. So be it.]

We have lunch at *La Veranda*. We read for a while, then go to Terry Bishops's 6th lecture, "The Fjords at War: Norway at the Sharp End (from the Tudors to the Tirpitz)." Lee has been taking extensive notes on these lectures, as if she were expecting an exam at the conclusion; I've been behaving like a disinterested auditor, enjoying the endeavor without committing myself intellectually. Nevertheless, the Tirpitz (which sounds like a disease of the esophagus) story is interesting enough that it deserves re-telling here. As I didn't take any notes, I'll ~~steal~~ borrow the following from Wikipedia:

Tirpitz was the second of two Bismarck-class battleships built for Nazi Germany's Kriegsmarine ... Like her sister ship Bismarck, Tirpitz was armed with a main battery of eight 38-centimeter (15 in) guns in four twin turrets. After a series of wartime modifications she was 2,000 metric tons (2,000 long tons; 2,200 short tons) heavier than Bismarck, making her the heaviest battleship ever built by a European Navy. After completing sea trials in early 1941, Tirpitz briefly served as the centrepiece of the Baltic Fleet, which was intended to prevent a possible break-out attempt by the Soviet Baltic Fleet. In early 1942, the ship sailed to Norway to act as a deterrent against an Allied invasion. While stationed in Norway, Tirpitz was also intended to be used to intercept Allied convoys to the Soviet Union, and two such missions were attempted in 1942. Tirpitz acted as a fleet in being, forcing the British Royal Navy to retain significant naval forces in the area to contain the battleship.

In September 1943, Tirpitz, along with the battleship Scharnhorst, bombarded Allied positions on the island of Spitzbergen, the only time the ship used her main battery in combat. Shortly thereafter, the ship was damaged in an attack by British mini-submarines and subsequently subjected to a series of

large-scale air raids. On 12 November 1944, British Lancaster bombers equipped with 12,000-pound (5,400 kg) "Tallboy" bombs destroyed the ship; two direct hits and a near miss caused the ship to capsize rapidly. A deck fire spread to the ammunition magazine for one of the main battery turrets, which caused a large explosion. Figures for the number of men killed in the attack range from 950 to 1,204. Between 1948 and 1957 the wreck was broken up by a joint Norwegian and German salvage operation.

As on all of the other days at sea, the ship's cruise director offers many exciting events for "thems what cain't" amuse themselves. Among these are: Crazy Golf Tournament, Daily Trivia, Snowball Bingo Bonanza, Baggio Bonanza ("Join the Entertainment Team for the fun* bean bag tossing competition"),

*Just a short while ago, I pontificated on never using *fun* as an adjective (p. 25) and yet here I'm violating that rule. Well, I have no choice - I'm simply quoting what I read in *Passages*.

Indoor Bocce Tournament, Needlepoint, *und so weiter*. I might say a word about Bingo. According to fellow passengers, who have indulged over the past few days, one "invests" \$20 to receive three Bingo cards; then if nobody succeeds in completing this "game of skill" the dollars are added to the next day's pot and so on. By the last day of the journey (when a winner is guaranteed, or so they say), the prize will rise to over \$2,000. So, the Magids sneer and sniff and hold their noses at these many activities, but we do indulge, nearly every day, in trying to add at least one piece to the jigsaw puzzles that are laid out on Deck 5. A confession - we're not very good at this, as compared with some of the pros who see things that we miss (shape, color, etc.) Maybe my 75-year-old eyes should retire from such games.

Having finished Matt Taibbi's excellent indictment of the crooks on Wall Street who caused the 2008 financial crisis, but have never gone to jail, I want to begin another non-fiction work, so I turn to another of the Gig Harbor Library books (a real book, not one for the Kindle) that I had carried along (see p. 11): Alan Lightman's *The Accidental Universe: The World You Thought You Knew*. It is excellent - and well written for both the scientist and the neophyte. Lightman is an interesting person: a physicist *and* a novelist - in fact, his biography says that he's the first person to receive a joint appointment at MIT in the sciences *and* the humanities. I also finish the last of the four or five issues of *The New Yorker* that had accompanied me on this trip.

Dinner, tonight, is at *Prime 7*; this is the reservation that we had booked before boarding and we have a table to ourselves. I enjoy the clam chowder, filet mignon, vegetables, and cheese cake. There's a bit of a kerfuffle (as Lee describes it) over the wine. Initially, the wine steward ignores us. When we finally get his attention, Lee asks for a glass of the La Terre Cabernet Sauvignon that she had drunk here just two days ago. The steward tries to force a Zinfandel on her, but she stands her ground, so he goes off in search of the Cabernet - and locates a bottle, but takes his sweet time returning to our table by serving several other tables first. This is uncharacteristic of the serving staff; it's rare-enough behavior that it does stand out.

Do you remember Glee (pp. 2, 9, and 31)? Of course you do. Lee writes, "[she] shows up *sans* husband and engages in a constant stream of drivel directed at the waiter. When her husband arrives, 15-20 minutes later, she proceeds to read the menu to him." (This is reminiscent of their behavior on the Seattle to Amsterdam flight. It's quite possible that the man has extremely poor eyesight or is suffering from dementia. We really shouldn't make fun of the situation, but Glee's behavior seems to demand such attention.) We also hear her ask where Malaysia Airlines MH17 crashed, as if it went down unaided by a ground-to-air missile.

Back in the room, I finish reading Paretsky, continue reading Lightman, and begin reading another Gig Harbor Library Kindle book, Jo Newsboy's *The Leopard*. This will be the fourth book of his that I've read, the third in the Harry Hole series; all that I can say is that if Oslo is as dangerous a place, filled with intrigue and murders, as he says, I suppose that we're lucky that we're still alive.

Tuesday, July 22

For the first time in several days, I awake before the alarm. After failing to fall asleep again, I get up at 5:00 to read (Jo Nesbø). Perhaps the bright sun (in the middle of the night!) is the culprit, but on the other hand it's nice to see a bright sun again after so many days of clouds and gloomy skies. At 6:00 I return to bed, hoping to catch a little bit of sleep, but no. And so I get up for good just before the alarm at 6:20.

We have breakfast at *La Veranda*. For me, cereal, bagel, juice, and coffee. I head to Deck 12 to take pictures of the little towns and villages that we pass as we make our way past many small islands toward our destination, Harstad. At about 8:45, Harstad comes into view; the closer we get, the less attractive it becomes. A quaint village, it ain't. In fact, it's a moderate sized city with a population of about 24,000. According to Wikipedia, it is "the most populous town in Central Hålogaland, and the third-largest in all of Northern Norway ... Harstad is bordered by the municipality Kvæfjord to the west and Tjeldsund (in Nordland county) to the south. To the southeast, the Tjeldsund Bridge connects Hinnøya with Skånland municipality and the mainland across Tjeldsundet, and to the northeast is the Vågsfjorden, where Harstad shares a water border with Ibestad municipality. The city itself is located on the northeastern part of on Hinnøya; it is the only city on the island, and is popularly known as Vågsfjordens perle (The pearl of Vågsfjorden)." So there! (Take that, spell checker!)

It's interesting to watch how carefully the ship approaches the dock. From outside Deck 12, I look down on the platform jutting out on Deck 11 where the captain and the local pilot use controls to slowly guide the huge vessel to the pier. By 9:30, we are securely tied off.

PUN ALERT: Lee: "I think that the ship's restaurant manager is the tall man that I saw on the deck, looking rather stern." Ron: "Are you sure that he wasn't looking rather aft?"

We head to the bus that will take us on today's tour at 10:45. Our guide, Tore Lund, gives us some of the history of the city. Although human artifacts more than 3,000 years old have been found, the modern city wasn't founded until early in the 20th century; it celebrated its centenary in 2004. Originally based on a fishing economy, the region has been over-fished to the point of exhaustion. The very lush grass, however, makes it ideal for cows to graze, hence a burgeoning dairy industry. And the city is home to Statoil and other oil companies that grew up with the discovery of oil in the northern seas.

Our first stop is a strange one - strange, that is, for tourists. Tore explains that Harstad has several facilities for what he calls "mentally handicapped" people; and, indeed, we get to walk through a now deserted facility (Trastad) that housed the mentally ill, but closed in 1991. A local guide, Kjeld, is not very useful for answering questions, nor is Tore, who seems to have disappeared. Many of us can't really understand what we are doing here. I can't say that it is inspiring to see the bathrooms, kitchens, laundry, and bedrooms, many of them showing the restraints that were used to control residents, the special walkers that some residents needed, and so on. But, there is a highlight: the Trastad Collection is of art in all sorts of media, done by the people who lived there. I take numerous pictures of the collection (see Picasa). Some of the work is quite extraordinary. There is pottery, oil and watercolor paintings, etchings, needlepoint, and sculptures, spread out over several connecting rooms.

At noon, we're back on the bus and heading to a small town, Hemmestad, which is on the water. The sun is bright and the small buildings are delightful. One of them serves as a museum, whose forward room is made to resemble a pharmacy of the early 20th century; on the shelves are boxes of food stuffs, ointments, pills, etc. that are no longer available. A large adjacent room has displays all related to the fishing and sailing industries. As described at the museum's web site, "The store, the cod liver barrel and the nordlandsboat that bathe in the sun on the pebble beach, help to create a magical feeling from days gone by." Noted.

By 1:00, we're on the bus again. The brilliantly lit water, green fields, and hills are suddenly not so brilliantly lit as a fog bank rolls in and the temperature drops. A suggestion for Regent tour guides: they should use microphones that transmit by radiowave to the headphones of the tourists, as was done so effectively at every stop in last year's Rhine cruise. Tore is extremely difficult to hear, especially on the bus.

Our final destination is Røkenes Farm. The web site says, "Røkenes Gård is an old trading post and guesthouse dating back to the 16th century. The property has been in the same family for 10 generations. In 1942 the main house was declared a national monument. Røkenes Gård was the first establishment in northern Norway to receive the 'Olavsrose' a mark of quality, by the foundation "Norwegian Cultural Heritage". The gallery in the former barn is venue for an exhibition by the Harr siblings. Sale of handicrafts from local producers on 'Låvebrua' in the old cow-shed." The grounds are quite extensive and beautifully maintained.

We are first ushered into a huge dining room with long wooden tables, where we are served coffee or tea and an enormous piece of very rich cake, Kvaefjord Cake, which is the national cake of Norway (but Tore doesn't tell us about it; we learn this from a cruiser in a different tour group). And then we're left on our own ... for much too long. Lee and I wander about, take pictures of some of the indoor displays featuring furniture and a kitchen from years ago, then outdoors to admire the view and to stand next to a weird sculpture and have our pictures taken. I have several questions that I want to ask Tore, but he is nowhere to be found. So be it. Unlike all of the preceding tours, which were free of charge, this one cost \$84 each. It was most assuredly not worth it! Even at "free" it would have been overpriced.

We are at Rokenes Farm from 2:20 until 3:00 and finally back on the ship at 3:30. Lee sits on our veranda to read, but I take advantage of the pleasant weather by changing into my walking duds and doing about seven laps on Deck 12. There are a few other dedicated walkers (some of them even faster than I, dammit) and joggers (some of them actually slower than I). Alas, there are the nearly immovable objects (called fellow passengers) who move at a glacial pace, seemingly oblivious of those of us who are intent on getting some exercise. Old people!! Worst of all is a very slow group of three women who are walking six abreast. (Sorry about that.)

The ship sets sail at 5:00. Lee and I have dinner at *Compass Rose* and ask to be seated at a table for six. To nobody's surprise, one of the couples who join us is Betty and Les (for the fourth time!). We also meet Lillian and Jim, a retired couple from Arizona. The sunny day has lost the battle to thick fog. I hope that the weather will improve during our long day of cruising tomorrow.

Several times earlier today, we tried to look at menus using the closed circuit TV network, but every time I turned on the set I saw the message "Be patient. Your program will load in a few minutes." Well, it never did, so after dinner we stop at the Reception Desk to ask about it. It turns out that there is a malfunction, requiring that every TV set in every stateroom be rebooted individually. Really? Well, in fact an engineer appears in our room a short while later, pulls the set from the wall, and manipulates the controls buried in the wall. *Et voilà*, it works. I ask him, "Do you really have to do this room by room?" In a weary voice, he replies "Yes."

Wednesday, July 23

Today is another long day at sea. Having left Harstad at 5:00 yesterday afternoon, we don't expect to dock in Hellsøylt until 7:00 tomorrow morning; that's 38 hours of sailing, 526 nautical miles. The morning is bright and sunny. According to the closed circuit TV information, we're at latitude 67°N with temperature 60°F (or vice versa). Breakfast at *La Veranda* consists of scrambled eggs, bacon, beans, an English muffin, juice and coffee.

At 10:00 is Terry Bishop's 7th lecture: "Soldier of the King, Marshal of Napoleon, Scandinavian Monarch - The Rise and Fall of Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte." This is, perhaps, the most interesting and humorous of all of Bishop's presentations, and certainly a hell of a lot more entertaining than the dry account in Wikipedia:

He was born Jean Bernadotte and subsequently had acquired the full name of Jean Baptiste Jules Bernadotte by the time Carl also was added upon his Swedish adoption in 1810 . He did not use Bernadotte in Sweden but founded the royal dynasty there by that name ... French by birth, Bernadotte

served a long career in the French Army. He was appointed as a Marshal of France by Napoleon I, though the two had a turbulent relationship. His service to France ended in 1810, when he was elected the heir-presumptive to the Swedish throne because the Swedish royal family was dying out with King Charles XIII ... Carl Johan was King of Sweden (as Charles XIV John) and King of Norway (as Charles III John) from 1818 until his death and served as de facto regent and head of state from 1810 to 1818. When he became Swedish royalty, he had also been the Sovereign Prince of Pontecorvo in Southern Italy from 1806 until 1810, but then stopped using that title.

Whew!

As is his wont, Terry has a set of slides and raucous music playing for about 30 minutes before beginning his presentation. The music, this time, sounds as if it comes from a play; I was guessing *Les Miserables* or something else historical, from the few words that I could comprehend. And then comes a slide to explain everything. The following appears, one line at a time:

The music comes from "Napoleon the Musical" / It's a play with singing/ Really/ I actually saw it/ Once!

PUN ALERT: Lee: "The gulls are flying around the ship, having a grand old time." Ron: "Well, as the song goes, gulls just wanna have fun."

At noon on the pool deck, there is a "Seafood Extravaganza Lunch" which Lee happily partakes of while I secure an inside table at *La Veranda* and get my food from the buffet line indoors. After lunch, we had hoped to sit outside on Deck 11, but with the ship's forward motion it is just too windy and cool. So we go to our room to read before attending the next *big* event at 3:00: "Liar's Club" in which Terry Bishop, J. R. Lustig, and John Charles* (an onboard comedian and musician) are asked to define obscure words; only

*Despite the coincidental spelling of his name, he is *not* one of the many personas of Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, as outlined above.

one of the three is telling the truth each time. This proves to be very entertaining. Bishop and Lustig, especially, show themselves to be excellent liars or truth-tellers, whichever was called upon for a particular word. (I hope that Lee wrote some of these weird words in her journal; I have no recollection of them, myself. I just checked. She doesn't!)

When we return to our room, there's a letter from Regent Seven Seas acknowledging Lee's complaint about the horrible Oslo hotel and the poorly-informed Regent representatives in the lobby (see p. 4). They are providing a refund of \$300, but only as a credit that must be used onboard. Charges that we've already accumulated are moved by an employee at the Reception Desk *from* the \$300 deposit given by Virtuoso *to* this non-refundable account; this is \$174 (less \$17.40) for the bottle of Lagavulin plus the money for dry-cleaning my jacket (they forgot to charge extra for one-day service). But this still leaves us with some \$130 in the non-refundable account. After deciding that there is absolutely *nothing* in the ship's boutique that we might want to buy, we decide to get a second bottle of whiskey to bring home with us. (There'll be more about this later.)

Because tonight is another of the formal dress (optional) for dinner, Lee and I go for an Italian meal at *La Veranda*. I start with minestrone soup followed by chicken with mushrooms and polenta, but the waiter brings cioppino. I tell him that I ordered chicken and he argues with me, showing that he has written cioppino on his notepad. "I don't care what you wrote. I specifically said chicken" and Lee backs me up. A short while later, the chicken arrives. This was the only foul-up and unpleasant confrontation that we had with any of the staff during the entire trip. Oh, yes, there was also the dustup over the wine on July 21.

I note that Terry Bishop and his wife are having dinner at this restaurant, so I introduce myself and say that I want to correct one thing in today's lecture. We were told by two different guides on our 2013 Rhine cruise that *La Marseillaise* was actually written in Strasbourg, but was appropriated by revolutionaries who marched from Marseille to Paris in 1792. The two guides had even sung it for us. Bishop has not heard this version;

and I can't attest to its veracity, except to quote the two tour guides. Later in the evening, I check on the story. According to Wikipedia, that font of all knowledge:

On 25 April 1792, the mayor of Strasbourg requested his guest Rouget de Lisle compose a song "that will rally our soldiers from all over to defend their homeland that is under threat." That evening, Rouget de Lisle wrote "Chant de guerre pour l'Armée du Rhin" ... The melody soon became the rallying call to the French Revolution and was adopted as "La Marseillaise" after the melody was first sung on the streets by volunteers (fédérés in French) from Marseille by the end of May.

In our stateroom, we look out our window and see an oil platform off the coast of Norway and a supply ship that is sailing away from it.

Thursday, July 24

Today we will dock at two towns: Hellesylt and Geiranger, a mere 20 km apart. "Dock" is probably not the operative word. In fact, we will anchor away from the shore (the water is just too shallow further in) and use tenders (♫ "Love me tender" ♫) to take people to/from shore. We leave open waters at Ålesund, a major fishing port (population 35,000) and one of the stops on the 2012 cruise, and head down (up?) Storfjorden and then Sunnlyvsfjorden to reach Hellesylt (population 250) at the southern end of the fjord at 7:00 am. There are two tours that begin in Hellesylt, but they are strenuous; one involves hiking to Geiranger, presumably in time to meet the ship which leaves Hellesylt at 11:00 am and arrives in Geiranger (population 300) just one hour later. Do I need to add that the last leg is down/up Geirangerfjord? I take numerous pictures in both fjords, particularly in Geirangerfjord because of its famous waterfalls, among which are "The Pretender" (which looks like a beer bottle) and "The Seven Sisters"; the local pilot says that four of the "sisters" are on vacation because of the warm weather, hence the somewhat scraggly appearance. Also, I capture an image of a rock formation that looks like a man's face. Sort of. We also pass the amazing switch-back road that climbs from Geiranger to the nearby hills. Pictures of the scenery can be seen at Picasa. But this is getting ahead of the chronology.

During the evening, we actually had a sunset! That is, the room got dark. Really. Just like a "normal" place. Well, no wonder - about halfway between Harstad and Ålesund, we crossed the Arctic Circle. By morning, when we get out of bed, there has been an actual sunrise (really!) and it is a beautiful day.

MORE UNCHARITABLE COMMENTS: Following breakfast, I put on my shorts and sneakers for a fast walk on the Deck 12 track. As before (see p. 31), the combination of the slow old folk and the plexiglass "cattle grids" impede me somewhat, but I persevere. (One of the geezers, deeply involved in conversation and paying no attention to the surroundings, actually walks into one of the plexiglass panels. There is no obvious damage - to the panel or to the person.)

At the end of my walk, I see Terry Bishop and his wife standing nearby, so I tell him that what I was unsure of yesterday (i.e., that *La Marseillaise* was actually written in Strasbourg) is confirmed. Wikipedia tells me so! He seems unconvinced, even though he promises to check out the story. I doubt that he'll change his presentation of the Napoleon era.

When we drop anchor at Geiranger, we are one of four ships arriving that day. Another is the *TUI Mein Schiff* (with 2700 passengers) and an even larger one, the *MSC Poesia* (with 3600 passengers). It's obvious that Geiranger is a tourist destination *extraordinaire*. Someone says that the town's population of 300 swells to several thousand as people arrive to serve as tour guides or bus drivers.

In the morning, I receive a troubling email from the U. S. State Department's *Smart Traveler Enrollment Program* (STEP) through its Oslo embassy warning of the following:

This morning, 24 July 2014, the Norwegian government announced that foreign fighters returned from Syria may be planning an attack in Norway over the coming days. The Norwegian police are not aware

of where, when, or in what method this attack could take place. However, public gatherings, government facilities, businesses, and public transportation systems tend to be the targets of choice for terrorists and extremist groups.

The Embassy recommends the U.S. citizen community in Norway remain extra alert during this period. Please err on the side of caution over the coming days. Especially now, if you see anything threatening, dangerous, or concerning, please call the Norwegian Police at 112.

Gulp!

We have an early lunch (at about 11:00) because our excursion begins at noon. There is an Asian buffet on the Pool Deck, from which Lee fills her plate; I, less adventurous, get food (green salad, potato salad, corn salad, and a roll) from the buffet line inside *La Veranda*.

You remember Edie and David? Of course you don't. We were seated with them at dinner on July 15; David is the one who told Lee that the Sarasota Opera Company, of which he is a director, is putting on all 34 Verdi operas. Well, it turns out that this couple are on the same tender ("Tender is the night") as we are when we head to Geiranger. I get to talk with him, both now and on the return to the ship later in the day. Yes, there are 34 operas, but one reaches that number by counting operas several two times (e.g., if there are versions in Italian and English). And he does confess that some of them are truly obscure. One that he mentions, an early work (that was actually well-received by the Florida audiences), is called *King for a Day* (which sounds as if it belongs on day-time radio in the 1950s). The company performs it both in its original version (*Un giorno di regno*) and its English; it was the second opera that Verdi composed (age 27).

David tells me that, although the company depends on generous donations, most performances do sell out. He also says that a reporter from *The Wall Street Journal* told him that the Sarasota chorus is better than the Metropolitan Opera's! (One does have to ask if someone from the *WSJ* is a reliable judge of music. Is it equivalent to a *Car and Driver* writer's passing judgment on the paintings of Rembrandt?) David also tells me that the average salary for members of the Met chorus is \$200K. I find this unbelievable, but in fact I find an article in a recent *New York Times* that reports "The Met says it must reduce labor costs, which account for two-thirds of its expenses, to stay afloat. It says the proposed changes would mean that the singers, who earned an average of \$200,000 each last season, would earn about \$170,000."

We are on the tour bus at 12:15; this is the second tour that costs extra, but unlike the one in Harstad this one is worth it. The bus driver is Magnus; he is from Iceland, the bus is from Sweden, and we are in Norway. So what happened to Denmark and Finland? The tour guide is Camilla who, contrary to what we'd heard about "imported labor," is from Geiranger. Both have excellent command of English. We are heading to the Herdal Mountain Farm. As we ascend the switch-back Eagle Road, Camilla tells us about the region. The tourist season is from May 1 to October 1. During this time, there will be over 200 cruise ships; today there are five in port. Visitors come from about 30 different countries. Even in the winter, when there are only 221 permanent residents, there are 10,000 visitors; one hotel is open all year round. In winter, there is a risk of avalanches. If/when they occur, the town is isolated, so additional ferries are brought in to take the residents to safe areas.

According to a web site, "Ørnevegen (the Eagle Road) is the name given to the steepest stretch of road up the mountain side from Geiranger towards Eidsdal ... The road turns through 11 hairpin bends up from the Geirangerfjord to the highest point 2,000 feet above sea level." Magnus is a very good driver ... we hope. The bus has a forward-facing camera that transmits to a monitor above our heads - thus, we can see the oncoming traffic, hairpin turns, goats, and other hazards. Scary! The road is one of three that are open in the summer, and the only one that remains open in the winter. At about 12:30, we reach Eagle Nest with its spectacular view down into the fjord. At present, the sun is out and it is quite warm. As the Picasa picture shows, there is a snow pole on the road that is taller than the bus.

STILL MORE UNCHARITABLE COMMENTS: On p. 9, I mentioned the couple who wore complementary T-shirts: "This Guy Loves Norway" and "This Gal Loves Norway"; a picture of the man is available at Picasa.

Also on board are the gnome-like pair of men whom I mentioned on p. 9. They will pop up in various Picasa pictures that I take this day.

We continue climbing, past rushing streams and waterfalls; I try to take pictures through the window of the fast-moving bus. After some thirty minutes, we reach Herdal Mountain Farm with its 500 goats and assorted other animals. Camilla has to get out of the bus twice to open (and then close) the gates that keep the farm animals inside. From <http://www.herdalssetra.no/engsider/engstart.html> we learn the following:

The idyllic Herdal Mountain Summer farm in Norddal has operated continuously for 300 years. With several hundred goats, it is one of the country's largest joint mountain summer farms. There are also cows, sheep and fjord horses on the farm. Thus children can find a genuine playground here. The mountain area has a unique setting, with over 30 old buildings gathered in a cluster. Old traditions are kept alive: brown and white goat cheese and authentic goat's-milk caramels are manufactured. As a guest here you can embark on " a journey in time, smell and taste", and you can visit the old farm and barn where you can taste homemade cheese, as well as the "new" joint farm from 1960. At Herdal Mountain

Camilla hands us off to Maya, a Swedish student who is spending the summer working on the farm. She says that the 350 goats belong to five families and that the remaining 150 belong to the family in charge of the farm. The animals (goats, cows, and horses) spend their winters in the family's lowland farm where the feed is grown; the animals are moved by vehicles rather than being herded.

Other students are here as well and we meet Valentin, who explains the cheese-making process,* and a

*According to the diligent note-taker who is also my wife, "The goat's milk is heated to 37°C and a small amount of rennet is added to produce coagulation; the resulting curds are removed using birch baskets and go on to be made into white soft cheese that is sold under the Snofrisk brand by the big regional dairy ... The watery suff - whey - has more goat's milk added and is cooked for nine hours with constant stirring. The lactose (milk sugar) caramelizes. A big blob of the result is worked with wooden paddles. For the goat cheese caramels, hazelnuts and sugar are added to 30 liters of goat's milk and cooked." Wow! I always thought that cheese came from the dairy department of the grocery store.

woman from Namibia, whose name I don't catch, who is in charge of the tasting room where we are invited to sample the cheeses and the caramels. (Lee's review: "the brown goat cheese is heavenly and like velvet. The caramels are too crumbly, but tasty." There are, of course, full-time employees who live and work on the site.

We stay at the farm for about an hour, wandering from building to building, admiring the grass-roofed houses, the surrounding mountains, the lush grass, and some of our strange traveling companions. From a distance, we spot a fellow passenger who looks amazingly like our Gig Harbor neighbor, Lois Manske: similar size and build, similar floppy sun hat, similar glasses, similar everything. So I stop her to talk. No, she has no relatives in Washington state nor did her family come from Norway; she is an ophthalmologist, living in San Francisco. But I do snap pictures of her to show to Lois; and she snaps several of Lee and me. (On the bus heading back to the ship, this woman recalls having had an organic chemistry course from Carl Djerassi at Stanford, so I introduce her to Les, sitting right behind us, who was one of Djerassi's first Ph.D. students at Wayne State.)

After a while, the woman who is wearing the "This Gal Loves Norway" shirt begins to worry - we are supposed to be back on the ship by 3:30 in time for a 4:00 departure. We're a good 30 minutes away and she's sure that the ship will sail without us. Several people reassure her that this is unlikely to occur, but we do know about the (mis)adventure of the Russian couple in Honnigsvåg (pp. 19 and 22). Hopeful for a successful return, we board the bus at 2:50 and drive down from the mountain, through the scary hairpin turns, to the harbor. Just as we see the port and our ship (along with the others anchored there), we come to a complete halt at 3:55. We are stopped behind a line of cars that, initially, Magnus suggests may be waiting to enter the ferry lane. But this is not the case. There are security people everywhere. Eventually

we learn that Norway has closed every single port in the country,* even in towns of only 300 people. The tenders are

*I guess that the message I received from the U. S. Department of State was right! But Geiranger? Seriously? As a follow-up to this, there's an article in the Seattle newspaper on August 1 saying that Norway has called off its terror alert: "Benedicte Bjoernland, head of Norway's security service, said new information indicates a terror attack won't occur now ... [She] said that the original information that prompted last week's warning ... of an impending threat was unspecific about what the target might be or when or where an attack could take place." But Geiranger?

not allowed to land nor, if they are already at the pier, allowed to leave. The good news (if it can be called good) is that the cruise ships are also not allowed to leave, so we'll not be stranded here for months and months. To keep us amused, Magnus sings an Icelandic folk song. He has a nice voice. But still ...

After a while, either because he got an official go-ahead or because he decided to take the law into his own hands, Magnus pulls the bus into the on-coming traffic lane (with is empty), passes all of the stopped cars and buses, and gets us to the port. Where we get out. And stand. And wait. Because there is nothing going or coming. It is now 4:15.

PUN ALERT (part one): Well, not really a pun, but it occurs to me that the boats that convey passengers between shore and ship are not considered legal tender.

PUN ALERT (part two): Perhaps this is a real-life example of the tender trap?

Well, we stand on the pier for about a half-hour. During this time, the "shopping gene" of the estrogen-laden segment of the population can't resist leaving the line and going into the nearby souvenir shop. And then at 4:55, we're given permission to board the tenders that have now come to shore. (One of the "missing" people, thanks to the lure of the souvenir shop, is the person who was most worried about missing the ship's departure - I refer, of course, to Mrs. "This Gal Loves Norway" but you probably suspected that.)

DOUBLE PUN ALERT: Lee: "Despite this delay, I like sailing." Ron: "Our ship has no sails, although there may have been sales in the ship's boutique." Lee: "Well, at least we weren't stranded shiplless." Ron: "Yes we were, we were scared shiplless."

The ship doesn't finally get going until 6:05, two hours late. This is, of course, a bit of a concern because we'll probably be late arriving in Copenhagen on July 26; and if that's the case, we might miss our flight to Amsterdam and, more importantly, the flight from Amsterdam to Seattle. I'm hoping that Captain Green ignores some of the rules of the sea and increases the speed of the ship to make up the lost time; from the original departure time at 4:00 pm on July 24 until the scheduled arrival in Copenhagen at 7:00 am on July 26, it's a journey of 39 hours. Come on, Captain, you can cut that down to 37 or so, n'est-ce pas?

Note to self for future reference: after numerous failures to use Lee's cell phone (don't even mention mine!) to call our home voice mail, instead of starting with 011 (which fails), the IT guy onboard suggests starting the number with +1 - he's right!

Captain Green comes over the public address to explain that the port was closed because it had moved to a higher security level. He estimates that we'll be about an hour late getting to Copenhagen, even though we left two hours late. And he promises to try to cut that down even more. Will he succeed? Well, you'll have to look at my entry on July 26.

We have dinner at *Signatures*. This is the extra reservation that Melwyn "scored" for us. Seated with us are Tom and Laurie, a couple who have homes in Cape Cod and Florida (presumably the former in the summer and the latter in the winter); he is a naval architect, retired from Exxon; she, also retired, the administrative assistant to the president of Mobil Oil. Tom grew up in Brooklyn, Laurie in Boston (as is immediately evident from her accent). Also with us are two oriental women, friends from California. The one next to me, Janice,

is a program analyst for NASA at Moffett Field and is, alas, very soft-spoken; that plus her fairly heavy accent make it difficult to carry on a conversation. Her friend, whose name might be Cloni, is older and is retired from Conoco Phillips in Calgary, but now lives in Los Angeles. Tom and Laurie say that during the "meet and greet" on July 12, the residents of two suites get into a "pissing contest" about who has sailed more times with Regent. Each of them has affixed small plaques on the stateroom door, courtesy of Regent, for each cruise. So how come we didn't get plaques for our door? Huh?

Our servers at *Signatures*, this evening, are two fearsome Eastern European women: one young and rotund, the other older and virtual drill sergeant. Could they both be KGB? Perhaps. The spectacle, in which metal domes are lifted at once, is not done with the enthusiasm we witnessed on our first dinner here (July 13), but perhaps they're already worn out for having taken part in the show for several days on end.

It is foggy, tonight, but the forecast for tomorrow is sunny and warmer. As was true yesterday, I'm surprised that when I awake briefly in the middle of the night that the room is actually dark. I guess that there's no doubt that I've left the Midnight Sun behind.

Friday, July 25

It's hard to tell if the ship is going faster than normal, but I'm hoping for a not-too-late arrival in Copenhagen tomorrow. This leg, from Geiranger to Copenhagen, covers 626 nautical miles. At 7:25 am, our position is latitude 59° 52' N, longitude 4° 17' E; we've traveled 4083 nautical miles so far, with 432 left to go. And I've snapped 778 pictures, many of which will be deleted before I post to Picasa.

Enough speculation about timing! Captain Green announces on the P.A. that he is "putting the pedal to the metal" (figuratively speaking) and is averaging 18.5 knots; most of the earlier part of the trip he was going 15-16 knots. He now says that he may be able to shave some time off his originally announced ETA of one hour late. (A speed of 1.0 knot is 1.0 nautical miles per hour - see p. 12.)

Following breakfast, at 10:00 we attend the eighth (and last) of Terry Bishop's lectures: "Denmark - Friend or Foe. Vikings, Alfred the Great, King Canute, Nelson, The Battles of Copenhagen and Beyond." Well, the tedious title notwithstanding, the talk, like all of its predecessors, is entertaining and enlightening. Horatio Nelson is, perhaps, the most interesting of the characters we've encountered. Despite having won numerous important battles, he also suffered many wounds. In fact, he characterized them this way in a letter: "His Eye in Corsica, His Belly off Cape St Vincent, His arm at Teneriffe, His Head in Egypt." (For details on these, see <http://www.rmg.co.uk/explore/sea-and-ships/in-depth/nelson-a-z/wounds>) A quip from Terry: "Napoleon, disparagingly, called Britain a nation of shopkeepers. He was wrong: it's really a nation of Indian restaurants."

When we return to our cabin, we discover that Myleen and Akung have put our suitcases on the bed (on a protecting blanket), a gentle reminder that we need to get the hell out of here tomorrow. In fact, we're instructed to put our packed suitcases outside our stateroom door before 11:00 tonight; they'll be spirited away, but with the promise that they and we will be reunited on the dock tomorrow morning.

Regent has a nice system (when it works). Depending on what time one needs to leave for the airport or to a city hotel, the departures are staggered; and everyone is assigned tags with a color and number (ours is Purple-One) to put on the luggage so that it goes to the airport on our bus. (I say "when it works" because two years ago, in Oslo, the luggage was stacked on the pier when we walked down the gang plank; alas, some of it was not protected by an awning from the heavy rain. As a result, one of our bags, the soft-sided Cougaroo, was so wet that its light-tan color became a rich dark-brown; our fear, of course, was that its contents were wet as well.)

We take our lunch outdoors on the Pool Deck. I have a hamburger, fries, and beer. The day is warm, but too windy for a walk on Deck 12. Instead we sit on the deck chairs and read. At 2:15, we head to Club.Com on Deck 5. This is the bailiwick of the onboard IT expert (Russian?) and has many terminals with printers.

We want to print boarding passes for tomorrow's flights. We had entered all of the salient information about us on the Delta web site for the flight *from* the U.S., but this time we need to provide the same data for KLM's web site on the *return*. There was some confusion about one aspect of the check-in form (I forget what it was), so Lee goes to KLM's Frequently Asked Questions, one of which is "How do I import my horse?" How, indeed!

PUN ALERT: In trying to find a rationale for the equine question, Lee reasons that sheiks have horses, to which Ron replies "Are they dancing sheik to sheik or do they turn the other sheik?" (This, of course, works only if "sheik" is pronounced as "sheek"; but if it's pronounced as "shake" then my response could be about "getting a fair shake.")

Although there is no requirement or expectation that gratuities be offered, we decide to leave tips in cash: \$60 for Melwyn and 350 NOK (about \$55) for Myleen and Akung; this also allows us to get rid of the last of the Norwegian money; as we'll not be on Norwegian soil again, we shouldn't have need for any more kroner. We finish packing (yes, everything fits, including the bottle of Lagavulin) and head to dinner at *Compass Rose*. Seated with us are Laurie and Tom (from last night) and, back by popular acclaim for the 5th time, Betty and Les. The latter couple are staying onboard for the continuation of the trip to the Baltic, essentially the same ports that we visited in 2010. I have paté, consommé, wiener schnitzel, and a fresh fruit plate.

One thing is missing from this cruise (not that I mourn its absence): because there were no excursions today (and because the afternoon excursions yesterday were so confused), there was no welcoming party on the dock. It was mildly embarrassing when, in 2010, our bus returned late from the Berlin tour and every crew member (the officers, the sailors, the wait staff, the cleaning staff, the kitchen staff, and the entertainers) were lined up, clapping as we walked to the gang plank, while singing and dancing to the music. This shtick was repeated in 2012 (in the rain!) when he were is Oslo.

The final issue of *Passages* tells us that the crew come from 36 different countries. The word "good-bye" is translated into a variety of languages, such as *Aie' bohan* (Sri Lankan), *Pheribhetaunia* (Nepalese), *Nägemiseni* (Estonian), and *Arriverderci a presto, alla prosima crociera* (Italian). Take *that*, Spell Checker! One wonders: why do the Italians take six words to convey what the others do in one or two?

This issue also summarizes the distances between ports and the total distance traveled, an impressive 4,184 nautical miles. By comparison, it's only 3,459 nautical miles from London to New York and, by great coincidence, also 4,184 nautical miles from Seattle to Tokyo.

Saturday, July 26

Three cheers for Captain Green! Through our cabin window, as we awaken, we see that we are approaching Copenhagen; and, in fact, we are at the dock at 7:15, just 15 minutes after the originally scheduled time. One wonders how many laws he broke, how many speed barriers he exceeded, how many other ships he played "chicken" with as he bullied his way past them and into port.

It's a cloudy, muggy day; warm, with a hint of rain. *La Veranda* has opened early - and it is a zoo! No, it's worse than a zoo; zoo animals do not behave as aggressively as do our fellow passengers as they grab at the food on the buffet and push to get a good table.

Our "instructions" are to vacate our room and arrive in the Constellation Theater at 7:45 to await the calling of Purple-One. We wait an hour! Then, there is confusion on the dock. Our instructions are to locate our luggage (which we do at the far left-hand edge of the jumble of suitcases), identify them for the crew, and then to board the bus. Someone tells us that even though both our luggage and our bus are to the far left, we need to exit the security area at the far far far right. But when we get there, we are informed that we have been misinformed, so we traipse back to the far far far left and, finally, get on board. Despite all this, we arrive at the airport at 9:15 (two and a half hours prior to our departure time).

We check our luggage at the KLM counter, go through security, and arrive at the business class lounge by 10:00. Not bad, not bad at all. The lounge is quite empty when we arrive; nevertheless, the lack of air-conditioning results in my sweat pouring down my face and Lee's. (Clarification: the latter is Lee's sweat, not mine.) The good news is that the lounge must have just been conserving energy because the A/C is turned on as many more people make their way to the lounge. Among them are Glee and her husband? (see pp. 2, 9, 31, and 32). You do remember Glee, yes?

As we walk through the airport, we are reminded (once again!) how ridiculously tall the Dutch people are. This is particularly true of the younger generation, most of whom tower over us. I feel so ... so inferior. We board the plane (Sky Priority lane, if you please) at 11:35; it is quite warm inside this metal cylinder, but mercifully they turn on the circulating fans (if not the A/C) at about 11:50. Announcements are made in Dutch and English, but not Danish (even though we are presently in Denmark). We are reminded, once again, how strange the Dutch language sounds to our ears - lots of ccchhh sounds and gargling and choking, all of which seem quite normal to the Dutch. The doors are closed at 11:57 and we are in the air at 12:10. The flying time to Amsterdam is a little over an hour.

We are surprised to see how "cavalier" the crew is about leaving the door to the cockpit open, both before taking off and, from time to time, while we're flying. It seems that they've decided not to over-react to the events of 9-11 that have caused American airlines to keep these doors closed, locked, and guarded by a flight attendant. Lunch is served at 12:25, but I have only coffee and a cookie. (It's time to return to the "real world" after the culinary excesses of the past two weeks.) Lee, however, opts for a hoagie (bacon, tomato, cheese), a salad, and dessert. (I suppose that she'll return to the "real world" at a later date, to be determined.) The drop-down monitors show the flight information (air speed, temperature, estimated time of arrival, etc. and even the gate in Amsterdam for our connecting flight to Seattle). These monitors are better behaved than those on the July 9 flight that kept showing us going from Amsterdam to Zurich.

We land at 1:07 and are at the gate an amazing five minutes later. (At least that's what my notes say.) We clear passport control, head to the terminal from which our flight leaves, and pass through security at the gate. This proves to be quite intensive: a full-body scanner (everything needs to be removed from all pockets) along with removal of the laptop, Kindle, cell phone, and camera from the carry-on. Contrary to various recent warnings on TV and in newspapers, we are not required to turn on the computer or cell phone to prove that they are not explosive devices.

We board the Airbus A330 (the same model that was used on our July 8 flight) at 2:25 for a 2:55 departure. Music (words and instruments) is piped into the plane's intercom, thus making it difficult (at least for me) to read. Based on the published departure time of 2:55 pm and arrival in Seattle at 4:10 pm, the flight should consume 10 hr 15 min. But the captain announces that our flight time will be about 9 hr 10 min (like Captain Green on *The Voyager*, he's planning to break the speed limit?) Surely it can't be true that the hour discrepancy is taxi time at the two airports, can it? He then confuses the issue by saying that we should be landing at 4:00, which, by my admittedly fallible calculation, is 10 hr 5 min after departure. But it is encouraging, yes it is, that he says that "We will be landing on the ground at 4:00." That's good - "on the ground" is definitely the best place to land.

At 2:58, the doors are closed and the plane is pushed back, but we're not air-borne until 3:20 (a combination of the long taxi distance in the Amsterdam airport and the number of departures and arrivals at about the same time). We are above clouds almost immediately, so I close my window shade, knowing that I won't get spectacular views of snow-covered mountains in Greenland as I did on the flight from Amsterdam to Seattle last October (see Picasa). So the question: why do I want a window seat when the airlines are incapable of *guaranteeing* a cloud-free view? And why do I want a window seat when the configuration of the A330 puts passengers in Business Class much too far from the window to be able to see (even if there were no clouds)? And why do I want a window seat when, according to the Flight Tracker, our path from Amsterdam takes us northward off the east coast of Great Britain, so there is no land to see ... if there were no clouds ... and if one were not so far from the window? Life is so cruel!

The menus are distributed before take off and we make our selections. At about 4:00, the flight attendant

brings an appetizer of smoked salmon and shrimp. This is followed by Caprese* salad, although I reject the

*According to Wikipedia, "*Salad of Capri* is a simple salad, made of sliced fresh mozzarella, tomatoes and basil, seasoned with salt, and olive oil."

accompanying "Thai Coconut Soup" (just in case it has spices that don't sit well with me). I also ask for a Glenlivet single malt; *two* small bottles are emptied into my glass. (Are they hoping that this will mellow me out so that I don't cause any disruptions?) Of course I also have a glass of their German Riesling. For my main course, I order the roasted chicken breast with morel mushroom sauce, brown butter broccoli, and egg noodles, which sounds much more impressive in Dutch: "Geroosterde kipfilet met morieljesaus, broccoli met bruine boter, en eiernodels." (The Dutch word for broccoli is *broccoli*. Who knew?) For dessert, I have a vanilla ice cream sundae and coffee.

Following dinner at about 6:30 pm, I re-set my watch for PDT, 9:30 am. Fifteen minutes later I close my eyes and, much to my surprise, don't awaken until 10:30 am (a whole 45 minutes later!). We are now flying over Greenland, although the clouds look the same as the clouds from the first part of the trip. During the flight, I finish reading the Nesbø and Lightman books, both very enjoyable (in entirely different ways).

And then a truly strange event takes place. Around 12:15 pm, I make my way to the bathroom. Although the lighted green icon indicates that the lavatory is vacant, it isn't. In fact, there's even a line to get in (if one person waiting can be considered a line). And that person is Glee, whom you may remember from pp. 2, 9, 31, 32, and 42. You do remember Glee, don't you? After a while, a man exits and Glee goes in. When she comes out, she says to me "Don't go in there. Someone puked all over the toilet. And it wasn't me!" Well!

So I walk toward the rear of the plane and find a flight attendant (male) who accompanies me to the befouled lavatory. He enters, then comes out immediately and says that nothing is wrong, there is no mess of any kind. Huh? He asks me who was the person who had warned me of the problem; I point to Glee, sitting in the front row alongside her husband, already asleep. He decides not to confront her. I suggest that perhaps she was just having a bad dream; and I thank him for his trouble and proceed to use the bathroom. He says, "When I took this job, I didn't realize that a large part of it would involve waste management."

A light meal is served at 2:30; I choose a hot chicken parmesan sandwich, which turns out to be larger and more tummy-filling than I had expected. At about 3:00, while I'm reading, this same "waste management" flight attendant comes down the aisle. I (jokingly) ask if there have been any other weird incidents. I tell him that Glee and her husband had exhibited some strange behavior on the flight from Seattle on July 8 and on the cruise ship. He said, "I'm so glad that you told me that. The two of them have been a constant source of trouble ever since they boarded." To begin, they were unhappy that they were not seated together, so they appropriated seats on their own. When told that they'd have to move, the flight crew did manage to secure them side-by-side seats in the center section of the front row, Seats 1C and 1E." I don't know if there were problems (as on the earlier flight) in ordering from the menu, but I wouldn't be surprised if there were, given his comment about "constant source of trouble."

We land at 4:05, right on time. There is a new passport control routine. Instead of filling out a questionnaire onboard (which we had done on all of our previous returning flights), we are ushered into a hallway with a large number of computer terminals. An attendant tells us to choose any one of them. It asks us to insert our passports (one at a time, of course), asks a few questions, and takes our pictures. We then make our way to an immigration official who gives us a cursory (but not cursing) inspection and sends us to baggage claim. Suitcases retrieved, we go through customs and, shortly thereafter, are in the terminal and are then reunited with our car in the parking garage.

Books read:

Daniel Silva, *The Kill Artist* (Kindle)
Ben Fountain, *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*

Matt Taibbi, *The Divide: American Injustice in the Age of the Wealth Gap* (Kindle)

Sarah Paretsky, *Deadlock* (Kindle)

Alan Lightman, *The Accidental Universe: The World You Thought You Knew*

Jo Nesbø, *The Leopard* (Kindle)

Addendum (after arrival in Gig Harbor)

On Sunday, July 27, the day after we arrive, I put the accumulated dirty clothes from the trip in the washing machine. When I then remove them out of the dryer, I discover that three blue socks and one brown sock are missing. (I know that there are four missing socks, based on the number of pairs of underpants that I take out of the machine.) I look everywhere: in the suitcase (which I re-open, actually several times), in the plastic bags that served for laundry bags, in the drawers in the bedroom (just in case I put dirty clothes in there), on the floor of the closet next to the laundry basket. Nada!!

Exactly three weeks later (Sunday, August 17) Lee and I are at the breakfast table where the following conversation ensues: Lee, "What was the best part of the trip for you?" Ron, "I dunno. There were so many highlights." Lee, "I particularly enjoyed having to unpack only once." Ron, "Well, the really best part was having to *pack* the suitcases only once. At least the whisky survived ... **LIGHT BULB** .. I just realized where the missing socks are! They're inside the Lagavulin box to keep the whisky bottle from moving around on the flight!" And so they are!