

My Watershed Summer

By Marilyn Reeves

The summer of 1986 was a watershed summer for me. Printing Unlimited, the little shop where I had worked for seven years and learned to become a typographer, shut its doors for the last time. But before starting my new job with another local printer, I planned to take a much needed vacation. For the first, last, and only time in my life, I was going on a cruise!

My sister Rosie worked as a Travel Agent for over forty years, and back in those days enjoyed the amazing perk of free travel to such places as Hawaii, Europe, and the Caribbean. This particular excursion was sponsored by the Royal Caribbean Cruise Line, who paid for the five-day cruise to the Bahamas, as well as the airline tickets to Miami, for the award-winning agent and a companion. And that particular agent chose me to be her companion!

Over the Fourth of July weekend Rosie and I boarded the plane at Stapleton Airport in Denver and flew to Miami. The following morning we took a cab to dockside and caught our first view of the Song of America, the beautiful white ship that was to be our floating castle for the next five days. The beauty of the ship and the excitement of our anticipation was accompanied by the alluring sound of a steel band playing Reggae. (That silvery sound would continue to be the background music of our entire excursion.)

Once aboard ship, the first thing I recall was being led down a long hallway to our tiny room with its tiny cots and its teeny-tiny bathroom. A vase of flowers and a bowl of fruit were sitting on a tiny table to bid us welcome.

As soon as we unpacked and settled in, we went back out to explore the ship. I remember the woozy feeling I felt when it began swaying back and forth as it started to set sail. Thank heaven for Dramamine!

I wish I could recall more details of our journey, but it took place 33 years ago. I do remember the gourmet meals, the ports of call at Nassau, St. Thomas, and St. James. Taking a bus ride through the tropical rainforest of Puerto Rico. Evenings sitting in lounges enjoying live entertainment. Mornings sitting in lounge chairs out on the deck, gazing out at the endless sea.

I remember how broken-hearted I felt on our very last day when the ship pulled back into port. I wanted to stay in that luxurious Neverland and be treated like a queen for the rest of my life! But no, it was time to go home. Back to the reality of my 8-to-5, work-a-day world and my pathetic, humdrum existence. So I cried.

But then, less than a month later, I started dating Jim, and that was the beginning of an entirely new chapter in my life that lasted for nineteen years.

As I said, the summer of 1986 was a watershed summer for me. And I found something even better than a five-day cruise.