

1998 ALOHA HAWAII

Saturday, July 11, 1998. I am taking this trip with five grandchildren: Exton Howard aged 16; Brenda and Brian Sesniak, almost 16; Connie Harrell 15 and Alta Howard 14. The kid's air has been booked through American Hawaii Cruises, but since I wanted to use a frequent flyer upgrade, I had to take what Delta would give me. Thus we are on different planes! My flight leaves at 8:15 and goes to Honolulu with a stop in Dallas. The kids are meeting in Atlanta, where Evans will see the five of them get on the 12:55 nonstop. I get to Honolulu several hours ahead of them. A representative from American Hawaii Cruise is waiting for us as we disembark the plane to direct us to the bus. I am exhausted and have big time jet lag since Delta doesn't treat Honolulu like an overseas flight, even though it is a nine-hour flight. First class is "business" seats that don't recline very far and have no footrests to elevate your feet. Hawaii is not as hot as I expected, temperature in the low 80s and breezy from the trade winds.

The SS Independence was built some 40 odd years ago as an ocean liner. After the jet airplanes ran the ocean liners out of business, she was converted into a cruise ship. Delta Steamship Company bought the line a few years ago and completely refinished the ship. She is in keeping with Delta Steamships historic ships, with wooden decks and rails and gracious unplasticised public rooms. My stateroom is a mini suite, with sitting room, refrigerator, TV with VCR and so forth. The teenagers are nearby in two inside triple rooms. These are also fairly good sized and the bunks fold up against the wall to clear a floor space.

The teens are unbothered by the flight and set out to explore the ship. There are about 40 teens on board, many accompanied by grandparents so we shall fit right in.

Dinner is an open buffet and it is obvious we shall not starve to death! The food is delicious and the deserts are popular with the kids. After dinner we are introduced to the staff and finally at 8:15 (its 4:15AM in Atlanta) they have the mandatory lifeboat drill. With Titanic such a popular film, everyone takes it seriously. We sail at 9:00 but I have long since gone to bed. The kids throw the streamers and plan to go to the late buffet and dance! It's wonderful to be young!

Sunday, July 12. At Sea. Predictably I am awake at 3:30AM and decide to start this journal. After an hour it was back to bed for a fitful sleeping until 7:00, when I decide to get up. Breakfast is a huge buffet in the Ohana Lounge. I ran into Exton and Brian who were so surprised to be wide-awake at 7:00 and decided to get up. They were planning to join the scavenger hunt in the morning teen program and Brian's team won. They seem to enjoy meeting the other teens.

Meanwhile I went to a lecture on Kauai, whose Na Pali Coast is on our port side, with its shear green cliffs dropping into the ocean. The Hawaiian Islands sit over a hot spot in the Pacific where the Pacific Tectonic plates are moving everything north at the rate of 4 inches a year. Geographically, Kauai is the northernmost and oldest of the islands, Hawaii, the big island, is the southernmost and still has active volcanoes. There is another island forming on the ocean floor south of that, but it is not expected to emerge for about 1000 years. Kauai was settled about 200 AD by Polynesians from the Marquesa Islands. More came from Tahiti about 200 years later. Captain Cook came in 1778 bringing the outer world to the islands. The early settlers brought plants and animals and today Kauai is known as the garden island. Mount Waialeale, a volcano, is known as the wettest spot on earth, always having a cloud over its summit and producing 300 inches of rain per year. The island is known for its beautiful Waimea Canyon, the Grand Canyon of the Pacific. There is also a fern grotto recovering from the effects of the hurricane four years ago, which heavily damaged the island. Many myths abound on the island. One is of the Menehune or little people who supposedly built the huge tidal fishpond near the river.

Then I walked a mile (9 times around the sun deck) before attending a culinary demonstration by the head chef. A Szechwan shrimp stir-fry and a gingered black bean scallop and shrimp salad were delicious. He told us the cuisine on board is largely international with Polynesian and Pacific Rim influences.

The port lecture was involved since every port has a lot of choices. My plan is to try many of the soft adventures, rather than bottle the teens up on the bus tours.

The singles luncheon turned out to be just four of us. Our host the "Kumu" (Hawaiian historian) cousin Kahea, whose ancestry is a little of everything. (We're all cousins since we all have an Uncle Sam). The other two were two ladies who were pioneering Waves and made a career of the navy before retiring. They are both in their 80s and had many tales to tell. It's apparent there are few singles on board, this is a family cruise!

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I have bitten off more than I can chew. The ukulele lessons looked interesting and I have a borrowed ukulele in my cabin. Never having touched a fretted instrument before I am all thumbs, and the teacher, Butch, wants us to sing as well (all without crib sheets). The Hawaiian words are long and strung out with every letter pronounced. I must practice before tomorrow's lesson.

A small wine and cheese party for the suite renters was pleasant. And then at dinner we ran into a glitch. Our table for six at the early sitting had been assigned to someone else. We ended up eating at two serving tables in a corner and it is obvious we shall have to switch to the late 8:00PM sitting. The Maitre D', Tim, offers free wine as a pacifier. Dinner was delicious and afterwards, the kids set out on a teen beach party, while I went to the entertainment, a peppy dance review.

Monday, July 13, Kauai. We signed up for the bike, hike and snorkel tour. They loaded us into a van and took out past the interesting Menehuna fishpond, built in ancient times to trap fish. Then we went on to our outfitter who issued helmets and bikes. The first part of the trip was lovely. We went through a small town, and then paused to see if we could spot sea turtles in a small bay that used to be Kauai's port. Then we biked along the coastal road. While it was smooth, there were small hills, which were strenuous. Finally we reached our destination, a lovely blowhole in the lava on the beach. As I came to a stop, I forgot to use the handbrakes (when I learned to bike you backpedaled for brakes) and wiped out, bike and all. It was all rather embarrassing and I have a big scrape on my left leg and was a bit shaky and out of breath for some time. Dan, our leader, cleaned the wound and treated it with Neosporin. After a while we started back, but I didn't have the strength to do the small hills and was grateful when Dan called for a van to take me back to the starting point.

The second part of our triathlon was to snorkel inside a reef and this I do very well. There were many fish I had not seen before. There was surf outside the reef and an undertow. A picnic lunch on the beach followed and they kindly got our vegetarian, Connie, a veggie sandwich.

Our third adventure was to walk along the cliff near the Hyatt, where we saw the remains of two ancient temples near the golf course. Then we went out on the dunes to the shore where there were tidal pools, and funny little fish that jumped from pool to pool much as salmon go upstream. Exton turned over a rock and found a sea cucumber. The girls had opted to stay behind on the beach. Alta is determined to get a tan, and I believe she also spotted some boys on the beach.

It was a fun day but tiring and it was hard to make it up for my ukulele lesson. Then a short rest and we got dressed for the Captain's welcome party. Everyone looked so nice in their finery. Early to bed for me but the kids stayed up until 1:00.

Tuesday, July 14. Maui. Walked my mile, and then went to the mall with Connie and Alta. Alta wanted acrylic nails. While this was going on, Connie and I window-shopped and found a good luck gold frog ring. When the frog has his mouth open it is good luck. After lunch in the mall we went back to the ship. It may be Maui's largest mall, but it pales before the ones we have at home.

It's time for some comments from the kids:

EXTON---I ate an orchid. It was red and had three pedals. It was small, but it was an orchid none-the-less. Anyway, it was rather bitter and I highly recommend not doing this at home.

I have had a great time on this cruise. The teen program is very good and I have met a lot of interesting people. I have gone biking, hiking, swimming, snorkeling, played scavenger hunts and even jumped into the pool with all my clothes on as part of the contest to find someone wet. It's a great cruise and I have to go.

BRIAN---So far the cruise has been great. I have met a lot of people that are also teens in the teen program. There is so much good food on board so I never go hungry. I have already been snorkeling, swimming and dancing. I have also entered the lip-syncing contest, and they have me as Tom Cruise. This happens later on in the cruise. Well gotta go now, I'm going to the mall with some friends. I will write more later.

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CONNIE---This cruise has been the most wonderful thing. Snorkeling was beautiful, and I bet tomorrow will be even better. I feel so free and relaxed, more than I have in a long time. France (the intensive course I took last month) was great but I definitely need this break and rest. I have already met so many great people and it will be sad to leave. Thank you so much, Grannie!

ALTA--Well I just got my nails done, and they are really pretty. So far on the cruise, I've met the 40 teenagers and some other people too. I loved snorkeling and have gotten a really good tan, and time. I've adopted a cousin, Ross, and he lives near me. I'm having the best time...thank you Grannie!!

BRENDA---Well, this trip has been exciting. We've already met a ton of people our age on the ship, and there seems to always be people coming in and out of our room, just to say hi. It also happens in Brian's room, right down the hall. This is a big change from Duke. I'm so glad the food's good here, but I may be eating just a little too much desert. Mmmmm. I had a fun time yesterday snorkeling and biking, and I'm hoping to get a tan while I'm here. This is my first time on a cruise, and it's great.

Exton came into my stateroom to present me with a beautiful and fragrant lei of plumeria blossoms. Shortly afterwards Brian gave me a lovely red carnation lei. The boys had been to the lei stringing lesson. Dressed in our Hawaiian finery and leis we started out for the 45-minute ride to the Hyatt in Lahaina on the other side of the island, where a huge luau was going on. A big enclosed area held 500 people. They paraded the pig (don't look Connie) and then invited us to a huge buffet of Hawaiian specialties. None of us cared for the poi, which tastes like wallpaper paste! As we ate the show began with Polynesian songs and dances from all over the Pacific. It concluded with a dramatic fire dance. Exton bought a tiki at the bazaar on the beach. It was my bedtime when we got back to the ship, but the kids went out looking for turtles with the teen program.

Wednesday, July 15. Maui. Our tour left at 6:25. The teens came dragging along. They are learning it's hard to stay up half the night when leaving on an early morning tour! I haven't set any curfews, feeling they are old enough to take this responsibility themselves. We drove across the island and boarded a 55-foot catamaran called Four Winds 2, with about 100 other people. The crew entertained us with one-liners as we sailed toward Molokini, one of the 10 best snorkeling areas in the world. The wind was light so we soon turned on the power. Molokini is an old volcano crater with one side eroded away by the tides. The water is so clear you can see the bottom from the boat a long way out. One of the crew videotaped us as we snorkeled with fish all around us, so of course, I bought some tapes for each family. It was all quite wonderful although the water and air were cold. They cooked a barbecue for us on the stern before we started back, and on the way we stopped in an area to see the sea turtles.

Briefly back on the ship, we then set out for a helicopter ride over Mount Haleakala's crater. From the heliport it looked as if the mountain was covered with clouds, but as we went up, the top appeared and we could look down into the old crater. We continued on to Hana and flew back along the coast with a good view of the old lava fields and many waterfalls. It was the first helicopter ride for many of the kids and they seemed to get a kick out of it.

However, we were late getting back to the ship, and Brian missed his rehearsal for the lip sync show. I went to ukulele practice and told Butch I just wasn't getting it, but he told me to just fake it and no one would know the difference. I can do some of the notes and some of the words, but not together. Most of the kids ordered lobster, which was on the menu tonight.

The lip sync contest was great and our own Tom Cruise (Brian) looked great dancing around in his boxers! Most of the acts were cleverly presented.

Thursday, July 16. Hilo, on the big island of Hawaii. Sent the kids off to snorkel in tidal pools and to see an orchid garden, and a forest engulfed in lava, while I took the all-day bus trip to see Volcano National Park.

We went first to an area where the 1982 eruption sent so much lava down it pushed the sea back 300 yards, wiping out half of a small town. We walked across the lava to the sea with its black sand beach. The lava is thought to be 300 feet deep. Much of it looked like the giant black river

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it was as it came spewing forth. Nearby we could see the steam from erupting Pu-u-eo Volcano, which is dumping its hot lava into the cold sea causing the steam. The focus of our trip is Mount Kilueta. Up we climbed to about 2500 feet where, at the Volcano House, we stopped for lunch with a view of the caldera (a caldera is a crater more than two miles across). Near the center of the caldera was Halema'uma'u crater, a nearly perfect circle. A hundred years or so ago, the crater was full of boiling lava, but now it is quiet, although it could become active again at any time. After lunch we drove around the caldera. At one point lots of steam was coming out of the earth, caused by rifts in the surface collecting rainwater, which turns to steam when it meets the hot magma below the surface. We stopped at the Jagger museum with its seismographs and exhibits of previous eruptions. We stopped a number of times to view the crater from different angles and concluded with a walk through a huge lava tube. Unlike the last one I walked, this one was well lit and paved and had about 20 feet of headroom. A really nice day. Before dinner there was a comedian, and then after dinner, we had our last ukulele rehearsal. I will never be any good at this. Meanwhile the ship was slowly moving to the other side of the island, and we were treated to a great fireworks display by Mauna Loa as her lava ran into the sea with lots of fire and smoke.

Friday, July 17. Hana side of Hawaii. A huge launch took us ashore in groups of several hundred at a time. Our more adventuresome members took scuba lessons on the beach while Brenda and I went shopping. Brenda spotted a spectacular \$32000 opal ring, but we said we'd have to think about it. Then we found a more reasonably priced one, which I bought her for a souvenir. Walked back to the pier stopping to visit the summer palace of the last queen of Hawaii.

Then we all got together and went parasailing! This was lots of fun and much easier than I expected. We took off, two at a time, from the deck of our speedy launch and were up about 15 or 20 minutes each. It is so peaceful and quiet up there.

The kids were very kind and came to my graduation and ukulele recital. Now they know how their parents felt watching them entertain! I was not the star pupil.

We told the Maitre d' it was Brian and Brenda's birthday. (We're only a week early). They said they had never done twins before. The table was decorated with streamers and the staff sang Happy Birthday and presented us with a delicious chocolate cake.

Saturday, July 18. Oahu. We left the ship about 7:30 and took a tour to Pearl Harbor and the impressive and poignant Arizona Memorial. It is built right over the Arizona, which was blown up and sunk on December 7, 1941, taking 1100 lives, the worst naval disaster in history. "A day that will live in infamy."

Then we had a long bus ride to Waikiki and the Sheraton Princess Kaiulani (known as the PK) Hotel. After lunch in the food court in the market next door, we shopped, finding Alta a sapphire ring, a fancy pair of designer sunglasses for Brian and a diving watch for Exton. So everyone has a souvenir to remember the trip. Walked to the beach but it was very hot and no wind, so I turned them loose to swim while I rested in my room. Waikiki was wall-to-wall people, much different than on my last trip in 1964! We ate dinner in the Chinese restaurant in the hotel.

A few last comments:

CONNIE. This trip has seemed not like one week, but several. Yet it has been several fabulous weeks of excitement and happiness and difference. I'm glad to be going home, but I already miss some of the kids, like Ross, who was a real sweetie who followed us around the 24/7. Alta may keep in touch with him since he lives 20-30 minutes from her house. But tomorrow on the plane I'm going to write the other people we have met. I think the most beautiful part of the trip was the lava flow. I'm so glad I have come. It has been the most different and exciting trip. Hawaii is absolutely gorgeous. I adore my good luck frog ring, even though he's been stuck on my finger for several days. Both Brenda and Alta have gotten rings too. Exton got a diver's watch and Brian got sunglasses. Personally I think mine is the greatest souvenir, but I'm a little prejudiced. I know my good luck frog ring is good luck because his mouth is open and on this trip I have

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become closer to my cousins, which is good. Also, my grandmother learned the ukulele well. I've never had an experience at all like this in my life and I love it. Merci beaucoup!

EXTON. I have had a great time. I went scuba diving and parasailing. Parasailing is very peaceful and it is not the rush you would expect. Scuba diving was fun. We went down about 20 feet and saw an eel. It took some getting used to breathing out of a regulator. I think I want to pick this up as a new hobby.

Honolulu is great. There is all sorts of things to do. I went to Waikiki beach, but there were not very big waves. There is a little market near the hotel that has everything you can think of. I got this really cool diver's watch, and it is water resistant up to 200 meters (600 feet). I helped this lady set up a Tiki, which fell over, and she made me a great deal on this other Tiki.

When I get home, everyone is going to think I'm weird because I'm going to be saying "Hang Loose", "Mahala" (thank you) and "Aloha" (hello, goodbye, and I love you).

Aloha.

BRIAN. The cruise was so much fun. All the people were very nice. During the last dinner everybody sang Happy Birthday in front of a lot of people. I also played Tom Cruise and had to go out in front of 500 people in my boxers! Everybody really enjoyed it as much as I did. I have made a lot of friends. At the end of the cruise I got all there address and phone numbers. I hope to keep in touch with most of them. I also enjoyed watching grandmom playing the ukulele. She was GREAT. This cruise had to have been the most fun I've had in a long time. bye.

ALTA. I've met so many different types of people on the cse ship. I've gotten about 15 different peoples addresses. I have learned a whole lot more about my and I'm having a great time...and I don't want it to be over. Thank you so much!! I also luv the ring you got me. thanx.

BRENDA. Wow, this has been sooo much fun! I'm sorry it has to end Grannie - you're the best! Well, I gotta go downstairs and dance.

MEG. What a wonderful experience to see the world through teen-age eyes. It's been tough to keep up with them but I've had a ball!

Trip home uneventful except for a "first". We taxi'd away to the end of the runway and then the pilot announced we had to go back. One lady had left her child behind!