

## ARTICLES

# A Most Unusual Voyage – P & O Aurora October/November 2003 ‘Jewels of the Mediterranean’

Celia Short – Medical Secretary

Yes, I was actually aboard the cruise liner Aurora which hit the headlines last autumn. It was only our second cruise, the first having been the previous year to the Norwegian Fjords; it was with a much smaller organisation than P & O and was very successful and uneventful. My husband and I had been looking forward to this P & O cruise for many months and all went very well at first. We assembled in the very comfortable departure lounge and had lunch at Southampton on the day of embarkation. Aurora then glided safely out of Southampton Harbour to the strains of a military band.

We were not aware that anything was untoward until after we had docked in Palma, Majorca. Then suddenly in the open eating area containers of antiseptic wipes appeared, which had obviously been purchased in Majorca as they had Spanish writing on them. All passengers were urged to wipe their hands before touching anything. All this time life went on as usual onboard ship with bridge lessons, dancing lessons, line dancing, table tennis, deck quoits and even a simulated golf range. The next stop was Sicily which was fairly uneventful.

Next we arrived at Venice, and then things started to go noticeably awry. Large groups of people were absent for evening dinner, cabins had trays of uneaten food left outside them for collection and the rumour went round the ship that there was a virus onboard and that a family of four, parents and two children, had brought the virus onto the ship at Southampton.

Then a message went out on the tannoy to all passengers that there was a virus aboard but that it was nothing to do with the ship's food. More and more precautions came into force and we had notices sent round to our cabins advising us to use only our own cabin toilet facilities, to be extra vigilant about washing hands, not to touch anything on the ship including hand rails on the stairs, lift buttons etc. etc. as this virus was spread

by touch; we were not to shake hands, progressive dancing was stopped and there was no self-service anywhere – even the salt and pepper had to be put on your food by waiters. Unfortunately, all these precautions came into force *far too late* for them to be effective and consequently 500 out of 1,800 passengers were affected with the virus (my husband and I included!).

The medical centre was full to overflowing. By one means or another, the virus was being spread. The affected were advised to stay in their cabins for 24 hours after their last episode of illness. All this time the rest of the activities of the ship went on. The bridge lessons went on but the cards had to be destroyed at the end of each session and new cards, pencils and score cards supplied and hands wiped at every opportunity.

The next big hiccup was in Athens when the Greek authorities refused us permission to dock and so we went on to Gibraltar where a 5-hour meeting was held by the ‘powers that be’ to decide whether we would be allowed to dock there. We were allowed to dock, but the Spaniards closed the Spanish border and our passports were confiscated so no one could go any further than Gibraltar itself.

Incidentally, onboard our ship was a passenger who had been on the TV programme ‘Wife Swap’ and she made sure that our plight hit the headlines.

You are probably wondering whether we will be cruising again. Well, the answer is that at the moment all this is very fresh in our minds, but as time passes we do hope we will forget this nightmare of a cruise and be able to put it all behind us. The Aurora is a wonderful ship and it is very exciting waking up in a different place every day. We hope that P & O will learn from this experience – that in the event of a similar disease outbreak they will stamp on it straight away to limit its spread amongst passengers.

# Chinese Medicine

Merilyn Fraser

*Middlesex Hospital, London*

In October I visited Beijing and booked myself onto a tour of the Great Wall. That was amazing enough but to my surprise the tour also took us to a Chinese hospital.

I shared a delicious Chinese meal at the hospital with my friendly Chinese companions who treated me as their principal guest, making sure that I sampled all the different dishes (they only spoke Chinese so it was a bit of a mystery). We were then taken along corridors covered in posters of acupuncture sites and Chinese herbs and medicines, past curtained cubicles where patients were being seen (outpatients I presume) and into a small room. We sat there in silence wondering what was next!

An English translator explained to me that we were about to meet three experienced professors of Chinese medicine who could tell from one's pulse and hands areas of poor health in the rest of the body. I was fascinated and a little nervous as it came to my turn for a diagnosis by my professor. I sat on a chair opposite him. He took hold of

my hands which were cold and he felt along my fingers and palms. Then he took a pulse reading from my wrist. I waited with bated breath for his verdict. 'You have problems with your shoulders' he said. I couldn't believe it. A minute and he makes a correct diagnosis. I'm just recovering from two frozen shoulders. How on earth did he work that out I thought. I was then totally captivated when he declared I had problems with the lower back and circulation problems. Well that was news to me but I presume the circulation bit came from my cold hands.

We then looked at a complicated medicine list – I was Medicine B – for people with circulation problems and bad shoulders I guess. £50 for medicine once a day for a month and my problems would be cured. I thanked my professor most kindly – maybe another time – and returned to my seat. Clever, I thought, I didn't have enough confidence to buy his medicine but there was definitely something in those pulse readings and pathways.

## Some Thoughts On Getting Old

The secret of staying young is to live honestly, eat slowly and lie about your age (*Lucille Ball*)

One of the good things about getting older is that you find you're more interesting than most of the people you meet (*Lee Marvin*)

Birthdays only come once a year, unless you are Joan Collins, in which case they only come once every FOUR years (*Anon*)

Old age is always 15 years older than what I am (*Bernard Baruch*)

It's not how old you are — it's how hard you work at it (*Jonah Barrington*)

With a little practice every woman can remain 30 years old at every birthday (*Anon*)

I believe in loyalty. I think when a woman reaches an age she likes she should stick to it (*Eva Gabor*)

Ladies, don't worry about losing your youth. Strap him to the bedpost instead! (*Anon*)

From birth to 18 a girl needs parents. From 18 to 35 she needs good looks. From 35 to 55 she needs a good personality. From 55 on, she needs good cash (*Sophie Tucker*)

If you survive long enough you're revered — rather like an old building (*Katharine Hepburn*)

AND FINALLY

Growing old is something you do if you're lucky (*Groucho Marx*)