

From the Bridge Room – A Cruise Diary – #4

A Little Magic

by John Arblaster



As I write, we are heading home on our last 'at sea' day, with the charms of St. Thomas far away astern, and the sand and surf of Holland America's private island, Half Moon Cay, ahead of us tomorrow, before we finish this fabulous week with Audrey and Better Bridge team on Saturday.

Oh...did I forget to mention St. Thomas and the town of Charlotte Amalie in a little detail? Well!!! First of all picture six—yes, six—very large cruise ships parking for a day in two harbours. By anybody's reckoning, that releases ten to twelve thousand, shopping-starved, holiday-goers onto the fairly small island of Charlotte Amalie for a day of retail therapy. The local denizens can count. They know just what to do and are good at it. Indeed, they welcome this daily invasion as manna from heaven, which of course it is. Tanzanite is everywhere.

It's a well-earned morning off for our Better Bridge cruisers, with the program re-starting only in the afternoon. Soooo...as some of us in our happy little team are a little jewelry-averse, we are so pleased when Audrey is off to the gangway to the waiting transportation folk, and commandeers the smiling Howard and his comfy mini-van for the morning. And Howard turns out to be a gem, driving us out of the hustle and bustle of the port about a mile to a quiet small hotel/beach place where we sit on the wooden veranda and drink delicious coffee, have a wade in the crystal-clear water, and think that bridge with all its challenges must have a lot going for it if it can get us out here on the last day of February.

After coffee, we head out along the coast road around the island, with stunning views and a continuous monologue from Howard—identifying many local plants and fruits, and including his personal view that, for aging men, a liberal daily dosage of bay leaf will keep you strong in many ways. You heard it here first.

This afternoon the lesson is on defense, and everyone receives a copy of Audrey's latest book, *The Impact of Opening Leads Against Notrump Contracts*, now published by Baron Barclay. The reception from the group is ecstatic. The book's learning-based design carries you through maxims and examples of defense that will definitely keep that half of your bridge game in shape...and improve it.

Later in the afternoon, I happened to wander into the Crow's Nest Lounge just as Team Trivia was starting. For those of you that cruise regularly, you probably know that, while shipboard life is totally designed to smooth you out and lay you back, the one sure-fire possibility for major strife is the daily Team Trivia, where teams of up to 10 persons collectively try to answer 20-odd questions such as, "What river does the Hoover Dam dam?" and "Where is the Beagle Passage?" to score points and, at the end of the cruise, win maybe a bookmark. This group seemed reasonable civilized, and I saw only a bit of pointed yelling about iPad use and the like. So, the beleaguered Cruise Director, who was emceeing this, got through fairly unscathed.

Eighteen tables of duplicate bridge tonight, and we finished in time for a very good magician in the show lounge, complete with dogs, birds and all manner of disappearing things.

More to come...