Up a Lazy River

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en we woke this morning (Monday, August 20) we found that we were docked in St. Francisville, La. There is a tour of Rosedown Plantation today, but since we have both been to St. Francisville on many occasions, this is one tour we did not schedule. We decided, instead, to remain on the boat.

It is Huckleberry Finn Day and at noon there will be a Huck Finn Seafood Buffet and Picnic in the Grand Saloon.

Never have we seen so much food. At almost any given moment of the day, there is a spread laid out somewhere. Besides the three main meals in the Dining Saloon, there are the breakfast and luncheon buffets and tea served in the Grand Saloon and Happy Hour hors d'oeuvres and a late night buffet served in the Paddle Wheel Lounge. If you get really hard up for something to eat you can always grab a hot dog and ice cream cone, served all day in the Caloopen Bar, near the swimming pool on the Promenade Deck.

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n addition there are Victorian arts and crafts classes and even a Shakespeare seminar one afternoon if you are so inclined. If none of these interests you can swim, relax in any of four lounges, attend a movie, visit the library or just rock away the hours on one of the many decks.

There is no television on the boat, but each cabin is equipped with a radio with two stations, each of which plays a different type of music, 24 hours a day. Different strokes for different folks as the saying goes. One station brings intership announcements of ongoing activities and there is an intership telephone in each room.

The highlights of the trip however are the evenings. Every night we have Show Time and there are some of the most talented, no, multi-talented, young people on this boat that we have ever seen. The staff puts in 14-15 hour working days, but they all seem to love what they do. Never do you see a worn or only smiles, which we're sure aren't always easy to maintain, people being people. The crew is always closely screened before being hired.

We have finally gotten our last two, permanent table mates. They are two delightful ladies from Grenada, Mississippi, named Helen and Sarah. They had been involved in a seating mix-up, but now, by Monday, we are all happily seated with our eating companions for the voyage.

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hen we dock, in addition to the busses for the tours, there is usually a shuttle provided for those who just want to go into town and ship. The shuttle is not available in St. Francisville, but there is a privately owned limousine and driver, and for a fee, he will drive passengers to and from town.

We decide to go into town to pick up a six pack ofokes, since the ship, like many hotels, is serviced only by Pepsi Cola machines. Teetotalers must forgive me, but for those of you who imbibe an occasional “high-ball” before dinner, you have not lived until you have fixed one with a flat, diet Pepsi. It's enough to make you swear off forever. Sorry Pepsi fans!

St. Francisville is one of the oldest towns in Louisiana. It was named for St. Francis of Assisi because it was established near the site of a Capuchine monastery, built in 1785.

It is situated on a high bluff, relatively safe from Spring floods along the Mississippi. Most towns along the river are similarly situated, for the same reason, so whenever you leave the boat you face an uphill climb.

Rosedown Plantation and Gardens is a 16-room, antebellum home, built in 1835, by a wealthy cotton planter, Daniel Thornhill, who designed the gardens in the French manner. Its 28 acres are laid out with avenues of trees, garden ornaments and imported flowering shrubs.

The woodwork inside the house was crafted of that period and furnishings, including chandeliers, wall coverings, silver and marble were imported from Italy and France and brought to the area by river packet. It is said that the Palace of Versailles was the inspiration for this most opulent of plantations. Restored in 1966, the home is now a historical museum.

Today, during a trivia game, I won a lovely map of the riverboat's course. It is reproduced in color on an antiqued background. I'm going to frame it and get home as a permanent memento of this cruise. My companion won a more substantial $40 at Bingo.

We are settling in more and more, and as we do, more new characters catch our eye. During the Bingo game this afternoon I heard a familiar noise, turned around and poked my partner.

"Look," I said, "just like home.

On a chair behind me, gently snoring away, sat a man about our age. For a moment I had a twinge of homesickness because he reminded me so much of the Better Half.

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here are two ladies on board whom we refer to a Greta Caribo and theMovie Star. Both are obviously well, I won't say elderly, we know how we feel about that term, but let's say we doubt they'll see 70 again.

Greta is absolutely beautiful! She wears a lot of make-up, the right way, and she has wonderful eyes. It's not hard to tell she must have been a knockout in her youth. She wears little caps, almost like a captain's hat, to match every outfit and they look just darling on her. The only times that we see Greta without a cap at breakfast and dinner. She has a lovely head of silver hair, so it's for style, not to hide a hair problem that she wears them.

The Movie Star is a tiny, flambouyant blonde. She has obviously had many face lifts because her mouth is formed in a permanent smile. We might quote an old saying that the dimple in her chin is her belly button but we won't will we?

She wears absolutely gorgeous clothes, suited to the most exotic cruise on the QEII. She is traveling with a very handsome gentleman, at least 20 years her junior, and we figure they must occupy one of the more luxurious cabins on the Promenade Deck.

We don't know whether they are married or just traveling together, but he wears some of the most fabulous jewelry we have ever seen on a man. Dig that diamond encrusted Rolex!

She seems to be a really nice person with a delightful laugh. They mix well and seem to have a wonderful time wherever they go. They dance a lot and he is obviously very fond of her. Some girls have all the luck!

There is another lady on the boat who is traveling alone, and no one can understand why her family turned her loose by herself. She is a sweet, dotty, little lady, who reminds us of someone we know.

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he talks to herself a lot and walks around in a perpetual fog. She gets lost on all the tours so most of the passengers have taken to watching out for her and making sure she gets back to the bus and the boat. Clara is the perfect name for her.

Among the crew staff are two men whose job it is to help with the tours, and recreational activities, make sure everyone is having a good time and even occasionally dance with a few of the unescorted women.

One is a lovely man named Arthur, a retired colonel and dentist. This is his first cruise and he is not sure whether or not it is his cup of tea. His sister suggested he apply for the job, feeling it might help him to meet new people. He seems ill at ease.

The other is a dapper, little man we have all nicknamed Don Juan. Actually Helen and Sarah have dubbed him that. He is a terrific dancer and takes his duties on the boat seriously. Don Juan is particularly smitten with a very young-looking, blonde grandmother who is traveling with her daughter and granddaughter.

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At first we thought she was a member of the staff, because she danced so well with Don Juan, but we soon learned differently. He wears “knock 'em dead” clothes, mostly good looking blazers and white pants. Unfortunately he is rather short and stocky, and even in his youth we tend to doubt that he was an Adonis. He does have a good time, however, and the two of them are fun to watch.

There are quite a number of excellent dancers on this ship. You can always tell the couples who have taken dance lessons together. Their style is more formalized, as opposed to the just naturally spontaneous dancers.

Tomorrow we will dock at Natchez Under the Hill to take on water, always a necessity on a river boat. We will have a more extensive tour of Natchez itself on our way back.

Natchez Under the Hill, in its heyday, was a rather notorious area, inhabited by river men and some of the seamier elements of Natchez society. It consisted mostly of brothels, gambling houses and saloons, and it was once said that;

“Such an unholy spot 'tis this, Satan looks on with glee.”

Today it is simply a small stretch of mostly deserted buildings, preserved for their historical value. Along the levee, craftsmen hawk their homemade wares. A far cry indeed from yesteryear!

Continued next Sunday