

**Blogging
Maritime Museum
of San Diego
2007**

The Unbroken Chain

Last weekend we sailed the *Star of India*. I have been lucky enough to sail aboard her a dozen times. My job, along with trying to make sure we can afford to do it, is to spread the word about the sail. I spend a great deal of time leading up to the sail explaining to anyone that will listen, the reasons we sail the *Star of India* and why we think it is important. The pitch, like many things you do over and over again, has become somewhat canned. It's not that I lack passion or conviction for our mission. It's just anything that's done hundreds of times loses some of its freshness.

The first time I sailed aboard the *Star of India* I was like any passenger. I was impressed with the exclusivity of the opportunity to sail and was anxious to share my experience with others. As the news helicopters circled overhead I called my mother on my cell phone. "Hey Mom-turn on channel 9, can you see me? I'm right at the back of the ship, I'm waving, can you see me?" Dumb-I know but I see people do the same thing every year. Now I have to admit I have become a bit jaded. Don't get me wrong-I appreciate and enjoy the privilege and responsibility of sailing aboard the *Star of India*-but the excitement of the first sail has long since worn off. As one of my colleagues describes it, "Without the rare and special nature of the event, sailing on board the *Star of India* is really just like riding a big bus on the water."

This year was different because of four young sailors and one very old sailor. Let me explain...

The *USS Constitution* is a frigate launched in 1797. She is still part of the US Navy and is manned by an active duty Navy crew. Her last extended voyage came in 1931-34 when she visited over 90 ports from Bar Harbor, Maine to Bellingham, Washington. The last surviving crewmember from that historic voyage, Bob Evans, is one of our most treasured volunteers and friends. Bob, along with four sailors from the current crew of the *Constitution* and their CO, sailed with us on Sunday.

Blogging Maritime Museum of San Diego 2007

The young sailors from the *Constitution* were a joy to watch. They were invited to join in and help out the *Star* crew, a rare and not-to-be-taken-lightly invitation. They earnestly threw themselves into the work. The three young men and one young woman effortlessly scrambled up to the top of *Star of India's* mainmast 11 stories above the weather deck. The chance to put their training to use on a ship actually sailing in the ocean clearly inspired them. These young sailors, none of them past their early twenties, shunned duty on one of the Navy's high tech warships to crew a ship that last saw combat in the War of 1812. Their skill and enthusiasm was remarkable. The *Star of India* crew, a notoriously tight knit bunch, welcomed them warmly.

At one point we all gathered around for a presentation made to Bob Evans from the crew of the *Constitution*. During the presentation the youngest member of her current crew, an 18 year old seaman first class, presented Bob with a framed photograph signed by the entire crew. Precisely at that moment a link in a 210 year old chain was closed. You see, when Bob was aboard for the *Constitution's* national voyage in the early 1930s, she was visited by several retired naval officers who trained aboard her 60 years before. They, in turn, were trained by men that served aboard *Constitution* during her last combat action during the War of 1812. Those sailors crewed alongside men that served aboard *Constitution* during her battles with Barbary Coast pirates shortly after her launch in 1797. Hopefully 60 or 70 years from now, that seaman first class, no longer young, will have the opportunity to close another link in this remarkable chain of history.

So next year, when I am explaining to some local television news reporter whose idea of a historic event is her stunning victory at the 1997 Miss Iowa Star Fair contest, that it's important for us to keep alive the skills necessary to sail an old square rigger. That without the commitment and dedication of our staff and volunteers, these skills and perhaps even the *Star of India* herself would disappear.

Blogging Maritime Museum of San Diego 2007

I will also point out that 200 years before her triumph at the Iowa State Fair, some sailors climbed aboard the deck of the United States Navy's newest warship. Those men were the beginning of an extraordinary chain that remains unbroken thanks to the efforts of those people that are the caretakers of the legacy embodied in ships like the *Star of India* and the *USS Constitution*. I will do so with a renewed sense of purpose, having been reminded that I am privileged enough to play a small part in keeping that chain unbroken. Of course, she won't get it anyway, but I bet those fried Twinkies are great at the Iowa State Fair!

That Brain Dead Tourist May Be You

For those of you that work in the visitor industry, at an attraction, museum, hotel, etc. you know how annoying it can be to answer the same questions over and over-particularly when the answer is obvious or in plain sight somewhere on a sign or handout. Don't you just want to slap the next person that tells the same dumb joke you have heard before a thousand times from other oh-so-clever tourists? Or how about when someone asks you where (fill in the blank) is when they are standing right in front of it? I have a theory about that...

I believe that all of us lose about 30% - 50% of our intellectual ability when we go on vacation. The combination of being in a new environment and being freed from our day to day routines renders us temporarily loopy. So if you're not that smart to begin with...well you figure it out. Let me give you an example. I'm a pretty smart guy, I have a college degree, a fairly responsible job, but last time I went on vacation it took me 3 - 4 attempts to figure out the toll system on the New York Thruway. It's really not that complicated folks.

Blogging Maritime Museum of San Diego 2007

So try to keep this in mind the next time someone asks you how much the soda in the souvenir cup is when they are standing in front of a giant sign that says "soda in souvenir cup \$4.50." Remember-the next time you go on vacation, it may be you asking the dumb questions.

Waving on the Water

So here's one thing I have discovered...

If you wave to someone-anyone-from a boat, the person you are waving to will almost always wave back. I would say that the wave back percentage from boat to boat or boat to shore waving is about 98%. It drops considerably for most any other form of transportation.

People in trains will wave back to you about 50% of the time if you are standing by the tracks and the train is going slow enough so that you can see each other. If you wave to a stranger from a car, either car to car or car to pedestrian you only have about a 10% chance of getting a wave back. (That percentage goes up quite a bit if you are waving to a child.) I have never tried waving to anyone from an airplane-those little windows make it practically impossible. But I suspect that percentage may be about the same as it is from a train. If you wave to a person you don't know while you are both walking down the street they will probably pretend they didn't see you and if you persist they may call the police.

Now my research is not scientific and it really has only taken place in big cities. Perhaps in small towns, people wave back and forth to each other all the time regardless of their transportation arrangements. And why it is that people will almost always wave back to you if you wave to them from a boat? Well that is going to require some more research. I guess I better head out on the bay...