

FINDING MY SOUL
AT SEA

Pip Coleman

PART ONE



CHAPTER ONE

How Did I Get This Job?

Introduction

My friend Sarah Ann says that the time I spent on the cruise ships was the ‘most happy and confident’ that she has ever seen me. Well I admit that may have been all the sex I was having, but it was also liberating in so many other ways. I was reinventing myself every six months. I discovered how to let go and move on healthily from a relationship within a week. I learnt to deal with many different types of managers. I created my own personal development classes on board. I met awesome people (crew and guests) who became some of my best friends. And I travelled to places I would never have considered and discovered the world.

If you asked me; “are you a good girl?” ... I would say; “yes ... except for a segment of my life when I worked on cruise ships.” I wouldn’t say I was “bad” necessarily. I checked in with my moral compass. I just sometimes decided not to follow it. My sister would probably say that I was playing on “the fringe” of acceptable behaviour. Having said that on land – it was on the fringe. At sea, I was probably a prude in comparison

to some of my fellow crew members. I was pretty “vanilla.” No hard drugs and no S&M (well I had a whip, but I didn’t use it.) And, I would never sleep with a married man. It doesn’t matter whether you are on land or at sea, that rule applies. Of course, if the man doesn’t share his marital status with you, that is another story.

What was wonderful about this life at sea was that you could be anyone and do anything ... complete freedom to explore your possibilities. This was something that I’d never experienced before. Even travelling overseas to many other countries, I’d never felt that excitement of exploring whatever version of myself that I wanted to be. This really was the ultimate social experiment.

I decided to apply for a job on cruise ships because I was told that I was “too short” to work as Cabin Crew in the airlines. There was a phone interview with a lovely American guy. I told him that I was “very experienced” with using a microphone and working with groups. Truth is ... I’d been an assistant for a personal development workshop, once. I held the microphone for sound check and then handed it to the workshop leader to speak to the group.

I also said I was “comfortable on stage” in front of an audience. I had been in a low-budget stage production in Grade Seven. I was in the chorus, at the back, but there was a relatively large audience of family and friends.

It is a testament to my interview skills or blind luck and destiny, that a few hours later, I received an email offering me the job as a Social host on a cruise ship. Holy crap! What the hell is a Social host? All I knew was I had to host cocktail parties and play games with the guests. For all I knew I was just about to pay for my own ticket to the US and find I’m to be employed as an escort. I didn’t share that concern with my Mum of course. I was going on a new adventure.

I had a strong feeling that this was going to change my life. I’d originally applied for the job because it would get me out of Tasmania and allow me to travel around the world for free. Little did I know that was going to be a small thing compared to the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual lessons that I would learn.

The Interview

I closed the email and sat at my computer in stunned silence.

I couldn't believe it; one of the cruise ship companies had responded to my application, asking for a phone interview. I was amazed. I'd only sent off the resumes a week before.

I'd followed the cruise ship jobs guide instructions to the letter (www.cruiseshipjobs.com):

- select the cruise lines you would like to work for (check their websites)
- select 3-4 jobs you'd be interested in doing (noted in guide) and are qualified/experienced to do.
- note the specific managers for the departments that you want to work in (noted in guide)
- write your application letter specifically addressing the job you want and highlighting your skills and experience
- attach a good photograph of yourself (head shot)
- send your application in the mail and follow up with an email application too.
- call the company to follow up your application - if you have not heard back within three to four weeks.

I'd picked three jobs and five cruise lines – a total of fifteen applications.

This was the opportunity of a lifetime. If I could get this job I would be able to work and travel the world at the same time. It was the perfect job.

'Mum! You will never guess what ...'

Mum came to the study door with her tea towel in her hands.

'What?' Her brow wrinkled in concern.

'They want to do a phone interview! ... tomorrow! ... I might be working on a cruise ship in the USA ... oh my God! ... This is massive!'

'Wow, that's great ... what's the job?' Mum's face changed into a huge smile.

'A Social hostess ... not sure of all the details yet ... I think it is running the activities for the guests on board. I guess I'll find out more tomorrow.'

‘That’s great ... I hope they don’t expect you to call America?’ Mum was always thinking of the practical.

‘No Mum, they will call me at 7 am, I gave them the home number.’

When the phone rang at 7 am on Tuesday the 15th of August 2000, I’d been up for an hour. I was too excited to sleep. Then I’d paced back and forth in the kitchen waiting for the call.

I heard my voice shake as I said, ‘Hello, Pip speaking.’

‘Hello Pip, this is Bob. Thanks for waking up so early to speak to me.’ His American accent was soft and lilting, with a hint of a smile.

I nodded and then realised I needed to speak.

‘Oh yes, thank you for calling. I’m really excited to speak to you about this position.’

‘Okay, well the position I would like to talk to you about is called a Social host and. you would run activities like trivia, Bingo, pool games and such. And, there will be some cocktail parties to attend too, and assist the Captain. There will also be some administration – helping the Cruise Director with the daily newsletter, and paperwork for the Entertainment Department. The majority of the role involves using a microphone on stage. Tell me about your background and experience with speaking in front of groups?’

‘Well, I’ve been in a few plays at High School and I worked for a motivational speaker in 1998, assisting at workshops. I’m a strong communicator and I really enjoy meeting new people. I’ve also travelled around the world twice and feel I have the confidence to speak to large groups.’

I had never really spoken in front of a large group of people or used a microphone, but I was a good communicator and I really wanted this role. The most people I’d worked with were forty people at a motivational workshop as an assistant. And I was a large singing bat, in the chorus, in the play at High School.

‘Mm hmm ... great ... great ... so are you comfortable using a microphone?’

‘Yes, I am.’ I lied, crossing my fingers behind my back.

‘Good ... can you tell me about your administrative skills?’

‘Sure, I’ve worked in advertising sales, a car dealership, a recruitment firm, and in retail, so I have solid administrative skills. I’m comfortable with using a computer and all the Microsoft Office programs. I’ve also completed a degree at University.’

‘Okay great. So why do you want to work on a cruise ship?’

‘Honestly, I’m looking for a job that will allow me to travel and this is the perfect match. I really enjoyed my two trips overseas and I want to see more of the world. I also like the idea of running the activities and meeting new people every cruise.’

‘Well, you sound like the perfect candidate and your photo looks great. Do you have any questions for me?’

‘Thank you. I do have a couple of questions.’

‘Shoot.’

‘If I got the job, would I have to pay for myself to get to the USA?’

‘Yes, you’d need to fund your first flight to the States, but once you have done your first contract, the company would pay for your flights from then on.’

‘Okay, and what about the accommodation on board? Would I be sharing a room?’

‘Yes, social hosts are staff members and so you would share your cabin with another female staff member, usually from your own department.’

‘Okay and do I have to pay for my food and accommodation?’

‘No, that’s all included in the package. You’d be paid in cash every two weeks and that is \$300 US dollars per fortnight.’

‘Okay and what do social hosts wear as a uniform?’

‘The hosts have a day uniform of a polo shirt and shorts; a formal uniform of a blazer, blouse and skirt (or pants); and you would have to supply your own white court shoes and sandals. Plus, you need to bring your own formal dresses for cocktail parties.’

‘Great! Thank you ... that’s all my questions.’

‘Well, I appreciate your time and I’ll be in touch real soon.’

‘Thank you too, Bob. I look forward to speaking to you again.’

I was pleased with the interview. Bob seemed lovely and I hoped my white lie about using a microphone would not be my downfall. When

the email came two days later, I was so nervous I couldn't open it. I ran around the house screaming, 'I got it! I got it! I got it!'

Mum ran inside from the garden, flushed and out of breath.

'What's happened?!

'He emailed to offer me the position on the cruise ship and he wants me to come to a four-day training school in Miami, Florida on the 10th of September!' I was hopping from my left foot to my right with excitement.

'Congratulations! How exciting! What do you have to do now?'

'Oh my God! There is so much to do. I have to get my flights, my white shoes and sand shoes, my US visa and some formal dresses ... and I have less than a month!'

Training In Miami

There were six of us in my training group. There was me (27 years old), Luke (19), Helen (23), Shelly (25), Vince (22), and Carol (45). The Entertainment Coordinator (Bob) met us at the front doors of the head office. He was a tall, happy man with dark brown hair and a potbelly.

'Welcome! Welcome!' He said as he hustled us into the building.

He showed us around the Entertainment department of the Head Office, and then we went into a meeting room to start the training. We spent the first day going through all the activities that Social hosts conduct: trivia, Bingo, Karaoke, game shows, hosting cocktail parties etc.

'Well this sounds pretty easy and a lot of fun!' I whispered to Helen. 'Jackpot!'

Bob also told us about our uniforms, the code of conduct, the hierarchy of officers/staff/crew and basics of living on board. On the first night, we all went out for dinner and drinks. On the way back from the restaurant, Luke saw a pool in the area next to our hotel. He then convinced Vince, Helen and me to go for a swim in our underwear. We were all drunk and uninhibited, so it didn't take a lot of convincing.

Anyway, Helen took off her bra and feeling a lot braver than normal, I decided I should do it too and waved it around my head. Everyone whooped approvingly. There was a moment's hesitation ... of course. I

heard that voice say *Really? ... Skinny dipping?* Usually that voice sounded like my Mum. Go figure.

When I started my adventures on cruise ships, I was 27 years old. I had travelled around the world twice. I'd been drunk, broke, eaten dodgy food, lived on rice and Coca Cola, hitch-hiked in Africa, worked in London, got sun stroke in Greece, walked the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu, slept with strangers ... I mean I wasn't a complete novice. But I was a 'small town girl' at heart. I was not someone who just took off their clothes and went skinny dipping. But I thought ... *What the hell! ... This could be fun!* And just at that moment a security guard came down the stairs to the pool and said, 'Get out of the pool; it is not safe to swim at night!'

We had to get out of the pool topless ... in front of him. Giggling and apologising, we all ran back to our hotel. The next day at training I had a huge hangover and was borrowing Bob's keycard to run out every hour to vomit.

'You're such a lightweight Pip!' Luke would tease. He never let me forget that day.

I never got to work with any of that training group on board, but we all kept in touch via social media and we did meet sometimes in port, when our ships' itineraries coincided.

Signing On My First Ship

When you get up close to a cruise ship it is much more imposing than you'd imagine.

The thirteen storeys, the rumble of the engines, the corridors of white walls, the smell of cleaning fluid and fuel, the beeping of the fork lifts loading all the supplies for the cruise, the security ... and the thousands of people moving inside like ants in an anthill. My cabin had two bunks, a double door wardrobe, bathroom (shower, sink and toilet) and a desk. All this in a three by five metre space. Cozy.

There was safety training for everyone signing on to the ship in home port. It was filled with lots of information to remember, and it was presented by an Italian officer who was sometimes hard to understand. Then there was a test to complete. One of the funniest pieces of safety information that we got was about the water tight doors.

The Italian officer would say, 'Do not EVER open a water tight door. They are closed from the bridge during an emergency. If there is flooding of the ship they are essential to keep closed. So, do NOT EVER open a watertight door. But ... if you have to open a water tight door ... this is how you do it.'

And he proceeded to show us a projector screen image of how to manually open the door.

'Um ... excuse me Sir.' I was confused. I think we all were.

'Yes?' The officer looked surprised. I guess he wasn't expecting questions.

'So, you are saying that we CAN open a water tight door?' I pointed at the projector screen.

'NO! Never open a water tight door.' He was firm.

'But you just showed us how to do it ... if we needed to.' Everyone was nodding in agreement.

'Yes. But don't EVER do it.' He thought he was being clear.

'Okay, so when would we NEED to do it?' I wanted to make sure that I understood fully.

'In an emergency.' He sounded less confident now.

'But you just said that we should NEVER open the door in an emergency.' I reminded him.

'Yes ...' And then I realised that he really didn't know when to open the door either.

A Canadian gift shop guy piped up from the back of the room 'I think he means, if a water tight door is closing, don't try to stop it or get through it before it shuts. But if someone's hand gets stuck in the door, you can open the door manually. Otherwise, you should NEVER open a water tight door. Is that right, Sir?'

'Ah ... yes ... yes ... no ... never open it ... unless ... you have to open it.' I felt sorry for the officer, poor guy.

I think the main issue was the lack of communication skills of the officer, not so much that it is a ridiculous rule. My friend Gemma and I loved to joke about how we should NEVER open a water tight door, except if we HAVE too, every time we signed onto a ship.

Before we sailed away there was a full ship boat drill. It was organised chaos for sure! It usually only took 30 minutes but there were thousands of passengers, not all wearing lifejackets. They were hot and sweaty and some of them were still eating and drinking while we did it. It was hard to take seriously. It sometimes hit me that we had a huge responsibility if there was ever an emergency. But mostly it was best not to think about it.

Then I met the Entertainment team – sixty-five people in total. There was a Cruise Director (the CD) and an Assistant Cruise Director (ACD) and three Social hosts. Then there were all the dancers, singers, musicians and fly-on entertainers. They were very welcoming. I felt like I was part of a family. Entertainers are positive people but they also love drama. There was never a dull moment.

The ship had a huge atrium with staircases and elevators, bright garish decorations and carpet, giant chandeliers, bars and lounges, a coffee shop, pools, a running track, spa and gym, whirlpools, stage and showroom, dining rooms and a large outdoor food area and a disco. It was a giant floating city. The passengers were mostly American, as the ships were based out of USA. My experiences with Americans were limited to the news and sitcoms (like *Friends*) – not many came to Tasmania. I thought, *This will be interesting.*

The crew bar was at the front of the ship. It was small and always crowded (understandable with up to a thousand to fifteen hundred crew members – although they were never all in bar at once). There was a crew gym and an outdoor deck for crew-only that was usually connected to the bar. There were three places to eat. The crew, staff and officers mess were mainly buffet-style, with a salad bar, toast-making station, cold and hot drinks. Staff and officers also had menu items they could order. We also had trainee waiters practise on us before they went up to the guest areas.

Of course, when you arrive as a new crew member you are the ‘fresh meat.’ It was exciting for the rest of the crew. New stories. New energy.

Sometimes you'd get told early who to watch out for ... and sometimes not. If you didn't get told who to avoid you could 'fall prey' to the smooth talkers. One of the things that intrigued people (guests and crew) was the fact that I came from Tasmania. The only thing they knew about the place was the Tasmanian devil – because of the cartoon.

On the first night of every cruise, the Entertainment staff would introduce themselves. We would be the people that the guests would see every day, hosting their activities and events. I realised that I could use this information about my home as my 'unique selling point.' As part of my first night banter I would step forward and say 'Hi everyone, welcome aboard. I'm Pip ... like in *Great Expectations* ... and I come all the way from Tasmania, in Australia ... (pause) ... yes ... like the cartoon devil ... but I am not as crazy as him.'

And with perfect timing my fellow Hosts would nod along behind me ... making faces and swirling their finger near their head, like I was a bit crazy ... And I would look behind me ... and say, 'Hey ... don't listen to them' and then I'd wink.

The crowd LOVED it. I was then known as 'that blonde girl from Tasmania' for the rest of the cruise. And so began my cruise ship career.

How To Speak To 3000 People On Stage

When I joined the very first cruise ship as a social host I wasn't expecting to stay very long. Honestly, I thought it might be a fun thing to do for a few months or maybe a year. I never expected to stay on board for six years. I did have fun, but I also learned a whole lot of very important on-the-job skills. Public speaking is one of the things that most people HATE to do. It turned out, once I worked out how to do it with integrity, I loved it!

No one can prepare you for the first time that you step on stage to host an activity and there are three thousand people expecting you to entertain them. Even though most were friendly, smiling faces. Oh boy! That was super intimidating. I felt like I was a bumbling mess at the beginning, although my fellow entertainers were very encouraging.

‘I think I said that I was from Tanzania this time. I did ... didn’t I? ... I get SO nervous.’

‘Pip ... are you crazy ... you know where you come from. Why would you say Tanzania? ... just relax ... you were great!’ Holly hugged me.

‘Yeah! ... And you killed it with the joke about being a Tasmanian devil. I wish I was from a cool place like that. Pennsylvania is very boring.’ The CD patted me on the shoulder.

I held onto my stomach as it was still fluttering.

‘How do you all get over the jitters?’

‘Well, I pretend they are all naked. Ha!’ The CD said from across the room.

‘Ew ... not sure that will help me.’ I wrinkled my nose.

‘I give myself a pep-talk before I go on stage. I say, “You are awesome and fun and everyone loves you.” That gives me confidence.’ Holly winked.

‘Oh right ... like a positive mantra. Cool – thanks.’

‘I just talk to them like they are all my friends. It helps me anyway.’ Niall said shrugging.

‘Hmm I like that ... if they were my friends already, I wouldn’t be nervous. Okay. I’ll try that.’

‘Drinking also calms the nerves,’ said the CD. ‘Let me buy you a \$1 shot at the crew bar.’

It took me a while to get my style, banter and flow. I was copying everyone else for a while. But of course, that felt fake and awkward. My style ended up being just like Niall had suggested, me talking to a whole group of my friends. I would chat and tell jokes and make mistakes. And the guests responded positively (for the most part) to that authenticity. Some were not so enthused, but you’re never going to like everyone you meet, right? I once got a comment card that said: *Pip reminds me of Bridget Jones with the continuous nervous laughter throughout the game show trivia mess. JH.*

Oh yes, I remember that game show ... it really WAS a mess. I know it has been fifteen years, but a truly disastrous activity lives on in your memory. Firstly, I was late to start the activity, so the guests were already upset with me. What can I say – I think my afternoon nap ran

longer than expected. Then, of course, the game show consoles that the contestants stood behind didn't work. No buzzers. No lights. The music was skipping, and the questions were out of order. That guest was right; I really was like Bridget Jones that day – a mess.

Of course, they should probably take a chill-pill ... it was just a silly game ... hardly reason to write on your comment card as the only thing that you can remember from the cruise – but point taken. What an amazing skill to have for my future life though. Being comfortable on stage, no matter what I am talking about is a magical thing. Since then, I've been able to stand in front of large crowds at festivals and workshops with confidence. And it is all thanks to the skills I learned as a social host. I am forever grateful.



CHAPTER TWO

Firsts

This chapter is a collection of my first-time stories. I believe they represent the development of a courageous and fearless self. I had started to see these parts of myself when I travelled to Africa in 1998, but that time it was literally fighting for my life ... well in truth; I was fighting off a hoard of local hawkers who wanted my money. These stories are about breaking the rules – not things that a ‘good girl’ from Tassie was supposed to do.

First Written Warning

So, I’ve titled this my ‘first’ written warning ... when in actual fact it is my only official written warning from a Staff Captain. I was transferred off a ship, with twenty-four hours’ notice, later in my career – but that was not done by the normal means. That’s a long story. I’ll tell you later.

Anyway, I’d been on the ship for seven days – two cruises (a three-night and a four-night cruise) – when I met Nick in the disco. He was tall, blonde and well-educated. We really hit it off. Talking and drinking.

It felt good to be flirting with a hot guy, who by the way was a pilot. He was also a guest.

My fellow social hosts were teasing me and reminding me to be careful. I just waved their comments away. I mean, I was not completely stupid. I did know that crew members were not supposed to 'fraternise' with the guests. But I figured that security had better things to do than follow me around all night.

So, after a while we went out onto the deck to be alone.

When Nick leaned in for a kiss, I was taken by surprise. But I didn't stop him right away.

'Hey! Nick ... come on, I'm not allowed to be seen doing that with a guest.'

'Sorry. I got caught up in the moment.'

I looked around to see if anyone was watching us and didn't see any security.

He asked me to meet him later in his cabin. I said I would think about it. We talked some more and then I said I had to go. He gave me his cabin number and we left in separate directions.

I was not sure I would go to his cabin until I was standing outside the door.

When I knocked, he opened the door straight away and quickly pulled me inside.

'I'm not sure why I came. This is a really bad idea. I could get fired if I'm caught.' I was saying all this as we were undressing. And he was nodding and saying; 'Mm hmm' as he kicked his jeans across the floor.

By the time, we were stripped down to underwear; I'd forgotten all the reasons why I shouldn't be there. He was hot and besides it was exciting to do something 'forbidden.'

I rarely did anything outside of the rules. This was very liberating.

The sex was average ... but I felt an awesome feeling of confidence building in me.

When I snuck out at about 3 am, I felt amazing!

The next day I got a message from the Cruise Director to go to the Staff Captain's office. I knew immediately that it was about Nick. What I did not know was how much they knew of my activities. I was freaking out!

The Staff Captain was a very cool guy. He sat me down in his office and asked me if I knew why I was there. I said I was not sure. He said he had a report from security about my behaviour last night. I said okay. He said to look at the report and tell me if it's true. As he pushed the piece of paper over to me, my heart was in my throat. *Oh shit! Shit! Shit!*

I read the report and it said that I was seen in the disco and on the deck with a guest and that I kissed him. There was nothing noted about my being in his cabin. I tried to keep my relief hidden, as I pushed the report back to him. He asked me if I knew the rule about fraternising with guests. I said I did.

He said, 'Okay, so you deliberately disobeyed the rule?'

I said, 'Yes, I did.'

He paused and looked me straight in the eyes. I just breathed and looked back at him.

'How long have you been on ships?'

'Seven days, Sir.'

He tried to hold it back, but he gave a little chuckle.

'Well, that's not a good start to your career.'

'No, Sir.'

'Well, I have to give you a written warning about this. It's important that you understand that this is not good.'

'Yes, I understand.'

He signed the report and I signed the report and then he said,

'And so, now you can go. And Pip ...'

'Yes, Sir?'

'In future, ... don't get caught.'

I tried not to smile, but it was not possible.

'Yes, Sir. Thank you.'

My friends could not believe that he said that. He was a very cool Staff Captain and an even cooler Captain (in later contracts).

First Time Introducing A Comedian

When I went on stage to introduce my first Midnight Comedy Show I was terrified.

I had managed to avoid being the only one on stage for most of the first week. We all hosted the Bingo together and there was always someone with me for the other activities, in case I needed help.

‘Relax Pip; you don’t need me to help you introduce Warren,’ Maddy patted my arm reassuringly.

‘Are you sure? What do I say?’ I was sweating with fear.

‘You just basically say – “Welcome to the back lounge for the Midnight Comedy Show. Our special guest Comedian has been on Showtime and Comedy Central and tonight he is performing just for you. Ladies and gentlemen, please put your hands together for Warren Davidson” ... see it’s easy.’

‘Oh right ... okay ... sure ... easy.’

As the sound technician handed me the microphone, I realised that I had no choice but to wing it. I was talking myself into it as I walked up to the stage.

This is it Pip. Show them what you can do. It’s okay. No big deal. Just introduce the comedian.

Lights down. Music off. Spotlight.

‘Welcome to the back lounge for the Midnight Comedy Show. ... I ...’ I was interrupted by applause from the guests ... they knew what to do better than I did.

I swallowed and glanced at Maddy in the sound booth. She gave me a thumbs-up.

‘Our special guest comedian tonight has been on Showtime and Comedy Central ... I’ve never seen those shows ... I’m from Tasmania ... we don’t get a lot of the American shows there ... I guess he’s pretty good though ...’ The guests laughed.

‘I mean ... I don’t know him very well yet ... but I’m sure you will love him. Please welcome to the stage Warren Davidson.’ The guests applauded.

As Warren walked out on stage, he was chuckling.

‘Well, I’ve never had an intro like that before. Thanks Pip ... welcome to America.’

He came off stage and still thought it was hilarious.

‘I loved it Pip! ... it was so naturally funny,’ Warren affectionately patted my back.

Thank God, I got better at introducing comedians, but every time Warren came onto the ship, he would remind me of my very first Midnight Comedy.

First Time Doing Push Ups In A Formal Dress

Everyone was dressed up for formal night on New Year’s Eve. We all had duties to do prior to midnight ... countdown with the guests and then meet friends on Lido Deck for ‘after happy new year cheers’ ... then go to crew bar to drink until morning (it was cheaper).

Dani, Seth and I went to the crew cabins to get ‘a little something’ to spice up the night. Honestly, I wasn’t sure why I was going with them. I’d never taken anything stronger than a painkiller. I guess I figured Dani would let me know if I should take it.

Seth pulled out a small, unlabelled jar from the cabinet. Dani and Seth decided to give me a quarter of a tablet. I was glad because I’m not sure that Seth knew exactly what was in the tablet.

‘Better to be safe,’ Dani said.

‘Totally,’ I nodded.

Dani had the remaining three quarters of the tablet and Seth had one full one. Leaving the cabin, I felt more alert and energised.

‘What is it?’ I bubbled as we wandered back to the crew bar.

‘X ... I think,’ Seth said casually.

‘I don’t feel any different!’ I was speaking in a loud whisper. My eyes were wide, and my breath was shallow.

Dani laughed, ‘Yep, you’re totally normal.’ She rolled her eyes.

Seth looked irritated. ‘Shh! It is supposed to be a secret. You have to be quiet Pip.’

‘Sorry!’ I said whispering just as loudly as before.

When we got back into the crew bar the atmosphere was charged. Dani and I joined our friends on the comfy couches and Seth disappeared to get a drink. Dani started talking about how funny it would be to run on the treadmill in her formal dress. Sebastian and Joe (who had not taken any drugs) agreed and dared her to. Everyone knew that Dani would ALWAYS take a dare. So, Sebastian, Joe, Dani and I went to the crew gym (next door) and proceeded to run on the treadmills in our formal tuxedos and dresses. Laughing hysterically, I challenged Sebastian to a push-up competition. As I started to do push-ups on the floor of the crew bar in my pink flowing gown, people stopped drinking and stared for a minute, then laughed and went back to their drinks. Guess it wasn’t that unusual.

Dani stopped me after about two minutes saying, ‘You will ruin your dress. Get up! You crack me up girl!’

I said (again) that I didn’t feel any different to normal, even though I was now hopping from one foot to the other. Dani hugged me, laughing. Seth was watching from across the bar with a scowl on his face. Dani waved a hand at him to chill out. He just shook his head and turned away.

Sebastian, Joe, Dani and I decided to go to the disco in the guest area at around 2 am. As we passed the guest cabins near the crew bar, Dani had to put her hand over my mouth because I was talking so loudly. Sebastian had no clue that we had taken anything, so just assumed I’d been drinking too much. At the disco, we danced, laughed and played around until about 3.30 am ... then we went for pizza up on Lido Deck as was the tradition. I was still ‘hyper’ and for some reason thought that Joe was chasing me. I bolted out of the elevator into the crew corridor and ran away from the group laughing.

‘He’s chasing me! He’s chasing me!’ I chanted.

Joe was not actually chasing me but trying to stop me from running around. Sebastian finally caught me and steered me into my cabin. He hugged me tight and sat me on the bed.

I whispered, 'Is he still chasing me?'

'No, no ... he's gone to bed now,' he soothed.

'I'm still awake; can we go dancing again?' I said.

Sebastian's eyes squinted as it dawned on him that my behaviour was probably not alcohol induced.

He held my shoulders and said, 'Did you take something tonight?'

'Yeah ...' I nodded emphatically ... then realising my error ... 'I mean, No'

'What did you take?'

I looked around the room vaguely. 'Umm, I'm not sure. Seth gave it to us.'

'Us!'

'Dani and me.'

'No wonder you were so hyped up tonight. Was it "Speed" or "X"?''

I nodded for both but then said, 'Oh umm, "X" he said. I think.'

'I'm going to stay with you until you fall asleep. We don't want you running around the ship all night, do we?' He grinned.

'Okay.' I nodded.

'Lie down here next to me.'

I lay down and turned to look at him with a smile. I fell asleep eventually. Sebastian stayed all night and when we awoke the next morning, I was surprised to find him still there ... fully clothed ... beside me (also fully clothed). There had never been anything but friendship between us – although some people thought Sebastian liked me more than friends, I thought that he was crushing on Dani.

'Morning, crazy-head,' he said grinning.

'Oh' I groaned, 'my feet hurt. Was I running around last night?'

'Yeah ... A LOT,' he laughed.

'Why?' I rubbed my head.

'You thought Joe was chasing you.'

'Oh yeah, hah ... right.' I put my hand on my forehead. 'Thanks for staying with me.'

'No worries.' He smirked. 'And besides I got a bonus because you touched my penis in the night.'

I sat up in the bed, 'NO, I DID NOT!'

Sebastian sat up too, 'YOU DID! You rolled over and touched me in the night and then rolled back over.'

'What!? You are making that up!' I hit him.

'Haha ... why? ... Would it be so bad if you did? Just admit it ...'

I wasn't sure if I had or not ... and I wasn't sure if Sebastian was pulling my leg or not ...

Sebastian chuckled as he got up to leave the cabin.

'Okay, okay ... even though you won't admit it. I know the truth.'

I waved him out the door, laughing. 'Go away! I will NEVER admit that!'

Sebastian raised his eyebrow. 'Me thinks thou protest-eth too much.'

I laughed and said, 'That is not how you say it!'

First Time Eating Fire

Beth and I used to go to watch Stan and Lenny do their juggling act every time they came on the ship. We'd get all dressed up and sit in the first row. Stan and Lenny would always send us a wink during the show. It was great fun!

We were encouraged, as part of our jobs as social hosts, to be supportive of the fly-on acts but honestly, I always loved going to the shows because we knew the entertainers and it was just a little more special when they acknowledged that we came.

One of the segments of the show was Stan eating fire. He would do his banter about how the fire was dangerous. He would wave the flaming baton around and make sure everyone knew it was real fire. He would go to eat the fire and then stop, saying that he had to make sure he didn't laugh because it would make the flames bigger.

'NO laughing! You have to help me out. If you laugh, I laugh,' he would scold the audience.

Of course, they laughed as he got the baton close to his mouth. And he would stop and chastise them. This would go on for a while. Anyway, eventually he would get everyone to do a drum roll on their tables and

then he would eat the fire to a rousing round of applause. It was very cool. One day before the show, Beth and I were hanging out backstage with Stan as he set up for the evening. When he got the batons out of his case, I asked him how actually he got the flame to go out.

‘Don’t you burn your mouth all the time?’ I asked him.

‘I mean, I did in the beginning, but not anymore. Actually, there is a trick to it,’ he grinned.

‘Of course, so how do you do it?’ I pointed at the batons.

‘Well, I could show you how to do it ...’ He wiggled the baton at us.

‘How?’ Beth seemed interested.

‘What? I’m not putting that huge baton in my mouth!’

‘No! I’d start you on a smaller baton.’ And he reached into his case and pulled out some cotton tips.

‘Cool!’ Beth clapped.

‘Oh ... well that might be worth a try,’ I laughed.

‘Okay, so here’s how it works ...’

And Stan proceeded to show us how to eat fire with the cotton tips.

WARNING: DO NOT TRY THIS WITHOUT EXPERT SUPERVISION.

Basically, you have to breathe out all the air in your mouth and when you close your mouth over the flame you need to make sure you don’t breathe out. Air and oxygen fan the flames, of course. So, now I understood why he always told the audience not to make him laugh. You breathe out when you laugh ... that means a bigger flame. I was surprised that we managed to do it. It was exciting, daring and fun!

First Time Kissing A Girl

Dani and I oversaw organising the surprise games for Bea’s birthday.

‘Okay, Party Headquarters is done! ... I hope she likes it.’ Dani was standing on a slightly wobbly table as she put up the last streamer.

‘Be careful up there Dani ...’ I grabbed the table to steady it.

‘Copy that!’ She jumped off like a cat.

‘Okay nice landing! ... Let’s go wrap for pass-the-parcel.’ We high fived and ran out of the bar.

When we arrived back in the bar after Bingo and Game Show, it was pumping. Not normal for a sea day at 10:30 pm. I guessed that Bea had invited them all to celebrate.

‘Happy BIRTHDAY Bee!’ We yelled as we ran over to Party Headquarters.

‘Aw ... girlies ... now we can start properly celebrating.’ Bea hugged us both tightly.

‘Great! ... let’s get some drinks first.’ Dani headed to the bar.

‘We’ve got a special game of pass-the-parcel for you to play. You’re gonna like it.’ I sat next to Bea.

‘Oh sounds fun!’ She clapped her hands excitedly.

We decided to play pass-the-parcel without the music stopping and starting, because that would’ve annoyed the other crew members in the bar. Instead, we had stuck on heaps of funny dares for Bea to do before she could open the next layer of the wrapping paper. She decided to read each instruction out loud and then once the dare was completed would come back to the couch to read the next one.

‘Okay, instruction #1 ... drink three shots of *Woo Woo* with accompanying “Woo Woo!” ... Too easy girls.’ Bea could handle her drink better than most.

‘Instruction #2 ... stand on one leg, sing the Canadian National anthem and do the rub your belly, pat your head thing.’ She nailed it.

‘Not drunk enough!’ Dani said with a laugh.

‘Instruction #3 ... drink a Jaeger Bomb ... ew blah ... that tastes awful.’ Bea stuck out her tongue. ‘NEXT!’

‘Instruction #4 ... exchange bras with someone and wear their bra on the outside.’ She was having a blast and everyone in the bar was watching the game unfold.

‘She is enjoying this way too much,’ I chuckled.

‘Instruction #5 ... kiss all the men in the bar with beards.’ She tossed the parcel at me while she jumped up to kiss the two men with beards.

There were not many because the ship rules stated that male crew members were supposed to be clean shaven. We allowed her to kiss some men with stubble and shadows too.

‘Instruction #6 ... sing a lullaby to your favourite bar tender.’ This was hilarious. I am not sure that Ranjeet from India had ever been sung a Canadian lullaby.

‘Instruction #7 ... show your boobs to someone who’s signing off the ship tomorrow,’ Bea read out loud.

Well, there were quite a few guys who volunteered for this one. I’m not sure if they were all signing off though.

‘Hey! Hey! I am signing off tomorrow ... and I’ve not seen yours or Bonnie’s or Bea’s boobs!’ I’m pretty sure Drew had tried to get us to do this on other nights.

‘So?’ I raised my eyebrows.

‘Alright, let’s do this ... Bon, Pip ... come on ... Drew can just stand in the corner and we will all flash. Quick and easy!’ Bea was dragging us over before we could protest.

‘Come on ... I need at least a twenty second viewing.’ Drew protested.

‘Oh, you are pushing your luck Drew -boy ... but OKAY!’ Bea agreed.

‘BEA! You said quick flash. Not a twenty second perv!’ I complained.

‘Ah fuck it ... let’s just do this.’ Bonnie grabbed my arm.

‘You have nice boobs Pip, come on ...’ Bea whispered in my ear.

I blushed, but I was flattered. ‘Thanks ... so do you.’

Now everyone wanted to watch the game.

‘One ... two ... are you ready Drew?’ Bonnie counted.

‘Hell yes!’ He was in a corner of the bar and we were facing him, our backs to the crowd.

Bea counted down: ‘Okay, one ... two ... three ... go!’

I think we only did ten seconds ... but Drew seemed satisfied with the fact that it happened.

‘Best last night ever!’ He was grinning from ear to ear.

I felt strangely empowered and not embarrassed, as I expected to be.

‘Alright, moving on ... instruction #7 ... kiss all the guys with blue eyes in the bar,’ Bea continued.

‘Is it just me or are there more guys than there have EVER been in this bar tonight?’ I laughed.

‘Yep ... totally,’ Dani clapped with joy.

‘Okay, instruction #8 ... kiss a girl in the bar.’ Bea looked around trying to decide who to kiss.

‘Who will be the lucky lady? Random stranger or someone you know?’ Dani chuckled.

‘I am thinking ...’ she tapped her lips as she contemplated.

‘I’ve never kissed a girl,’ I mused – I had not meant to say it out loud.

‘Really!’ Bea grinned cheekily and put her hands on either side of my face.

And before I had a chance to say or do anything, we were kissing. The crowd seemed to hold its breath for a few minutes. I’m not sure what I expected kissing a girl to be like, but I remember that it was a really good kiss.

‘Wow ... you two were so hot!’ Dani gave us both a high five.

‘Yes – we ARE! Best birthday EVA!’ Bea cheered. I blushed.

Bea was (and she still is) one of my favourite people in the world. She was always open to trying new things. She taught me how to be fearless.

PART TWO



CHAPTER ONE

There Has To Be Something More!

During my fourth contract on board, I was offered a permanent Groups Coordinator role and then it was withdrawn. I was offered an Acting Cruise Director role and that was also withdrawn. Understandably, this took the shine off the experience of being on board the ships.

I decided that I was going to take a long vacation and reset. After a few months I decided to come back as a social host but with a whole new focus. I was going to bring some relaxation classes and self-improvement activities into the ship environment. I was tired of just hosting Bingo games, trivia and cocktail parties. I wanted more out of my ship life. And I thought that the guests might appreciate what I had to offer too. It turned out that everyone loved it.

Getting Sick Of Ship Politics!

My fourth contract was a huge turning point for me. I'd been carving myself a niche within the social host role. My strengths were in organisation, communication and customer service. I'd never really been an entertainer

like my fellow social hosts. I would help the Cruise Director put together the daily newsletter. I'd offer to do cabin allocations and anything else, so I didn't have to do much onstage.

Head Office assigned the social hosts the duty of coordinating the special groups that were sailing on the ship and I jumped at the chance to do what I did best. The other social hosts loved that I was putting up my hand to do the role because they couldn't think of anything worse than organising and setting up rooms, coordinating functions and dealing with group leaders. Everyone was happy. Win-win. It was the perfect bargaining chip. We were supposed to rotate the duty each cruise.

'Hey Darren, do my midnight Karaoke and I'll do your groups duty this cruise.' I waved a \$20 note at him.

'Seriously? Hell YEAH!' He grabbed the money and ran off.

'Sweet,' I chuckled.

Then Head Office decided to move the Groups Coordinator role to the Purser Department and I was devastated. This was my saviour. I knew I would go crazy if I had to do only the mindless games every cruise. I begged the Cruise Director (CD) and Hotel Director (HD) to put in a good word in for me to be transferred.

'PLEASE can you ask the office to consider transferring me?' I pleaded with Owen and Grayson.

'Okay ... but I think they want to hire a new person for the role, even though you've been doing an amazing job,' Grayson rubbed his chin.

'That doesn't make sense though; there are people on all the ships who know the role and have been doing it well. Why hire new people?' I said confused.

'It sucks! ... But I promise I will ask ... even though I want to keep you as a host in my team. I know you love doing that role.' Owen was a lovely man.

'I'll put in a recommendation for you to be interviewed.' Grayson started typing.

'Thanks, SO MUCH you guys! I love you both!'

'Yeah, you do!' Owen let me hug him.

So, they asked, and the office sent back a message saying that I could interview for the role.

Howard from the Purser's department spoke to me on the phone and said that he had heard lots of great things about me. He especially liked that the group leaders always praised me highly in their comment cards at the end of the cruise.

He said that he wanted to offer me the role of Groups Coordinator on my current ship either starting immediately or I could finish my contract as a host and then start on my next ship as Groups Coordinator. I decided to make the change immediately. Two weeks later there was an email from the office saying that my transfer had been postponed and they had decided to give a new crew member the role. I was very disappointed and angry. It left me seriously contemplating what I wanted to do next.

'Maybe I should just quit and not come back for my next contract!' I pouted to my boyfriend, Max.

'Ahh, come on Pip ... it's not that bad, is it?' He tried to soothe me with a kiss, but I pushed his face away with a big sigh.

'YOU don't have to host the nightmare midnight Karaoke sessions or the TEN games of Bingo every cruise! I mean seriously. That is TOO MANY BINGO GAMES! ... I never want to say "sixty-nine, - dinner for two" EVER, EVER AGAIN! Blahhhhh.' I stuck out my tongue.

'Hah ... that is pretty tacky. But who knows, you could get promoted to ACD or CD. That might be cool. You'd be the boss. You could choose what activities you did or didn't do,' he soothed me.

'Hmmm ... yeah I guess so. It'd be more responsibility but more money. I could do less hosting of the trivial stuff.' I was starting to think that there was a way to make it work.

'Okay, well you can look forward to that.' Max was pretty chuffed with himself for turning me around. And as it turned out the "Gods of Ships" did bestow on me the opportunity to be promoted to Cruise Director. And that's my next story.

Rumour That I'm To Be Acting Cruise Director

Basically, the Entertainment Supervisor in the office was not my favourite person. I really felt he was the most incompetent and disorganised person in the world – to put it mildly. Darren and I heard in late March via our Cruise Director that an email had arrived listing the people who would be filling in while the CDs went to their CD conference on the 28th of April.

Owen (CD) told us that we should be a bit prepared. He gave us a videotape of the talks and information about the ships we were assigned to. He said not to say anything to the Entertainment Supervisor in the office because he usually liked to give the good news to the social hosts himself. Three weeks later the Entertainment Supervisor had not contacted us personally. No emails. No phone calls. Nada.

I wanted to send an email to him to ask, 'What is going on? I heard a rumour that I am supposed to be acting CD ... Owen said that you would email ... please advise.'

But Owen asked me not to send the email because he said that Bob would be "upset" if we hassled him. And maybe it wasn't confirmed yet. Then I heard from the Crew Administration Purser that I was flying out of Barbados on Wednesday the 24th of April. Yet I had still not heard anything official from the office about the position. Then on Monday 22nd of April I got an email from Head Office:

Dear Pip, we may not need your excellent services, due to an immigration problem with the ACD. She may not be able to get off the ship. So, she will stay there for the week of the conference. Bob.

I got really mad! Not only had he not even asked me to do the job yet. He was then saying "wait and see" ... two days before I'm supposed to go ... and it was not even the ship that Owen had told me to prepare for at all! I spoke to Owen and Helen (the Hotel Director) about my concerns. They understood. I told them that I was going to refuse to go to any new ship. I would prefer to stay on the current ship and help

Darren than be on a ship I was not prepared for and embarrass myself. I was flipping out!

The Hotel Director responded to my draft email as follows:

“Pip, I totally understand your frustrations, but the email you have written is a little harsh. I would not send it in that way. Also, the Entertainment Director’s name is misspelt, not a good impression when your complaint is about preparation and organisation! I would re-word it to be more diplomatic and ask the Cruise Director to hand deliver it to the Entertainment Director OR together with the Cruise Director, call and speak to the Director if you feel strongly. The latter should happen, in my opinion, before the CD conference. Helen.”

On Wednesday morning 24th of April the day I was supposed to sign off, Bob emailed to say that I was not going to either ship mentioned in the emails to the CD. He said he would talk to me later to explain. He didn’t call. I was not expecting him to. I had not even packed anything anyway. Then as fate would have it, on Monday 29th of April, the President of the company and the Entertainment Supervisor’s boss were coming on board to do a Q&A session with the crew. I was delighted. How convenient!

I spoke to the CD and the HD, and they both agreed that this was the perfect opportunity for us all to speak to them face to face about the disorganisation of the whole Acting CD situation.

I made a list of the key points noting all my concerns in a professional way:

- We had no personal requests from the office to do the Acting CD role.
- No information pack or preparation materials for the new ship.
- No information regarding salary compensation for acting in a higher role.
- It was poor management and very poor communication.

and I stated how this would impact guest services and staff morale.

The conversation went well with the Entertainment Director, although he defended the actions of the Entertainment Supervisor saying that he didn’t have much time to organise the CD conference. He did agree that perhaps Bob had spent too much time focusing on the conference and not enough time arranging the people who were left on the ships.

I thought: *Well Der!... why would you spend more time on an event for twenty people and not properly arrange the replacement staff on the twenty ships that they left?* It was such a mess!

He also pointed out that it was a blessing that I was on the ship this week to help Darren. And that's the truth! The ship had broken down with a propeller issue and we had lots of group issues that I had to sort out, plus we missed a port. Bob did eventually email me to apologise for the whole mess. Hopefully he apologised to everyone. It was not just me that felt strongly about the disorganisation. Although I think I was the only one who spoke to his bosses.

Later I heard from a friend that Bob started as the assistant to the Entertainment Supervisor. Then that guy got fired and so Bob took over the role. But he was doing his own role and the job of the guy above. No one offered him an assistant. No one offered him a pay rise for doing the new role. And my friend said that he had been doing the best that he could in the time offered. Sometimes things slipped through the cracks.

She said, 'It's a tough life that he leads ... I get the impression that the standards are passed down to us from his supervisors anyway. Now that puts a new light on all sorts of things. Huh?' I decided to let it go after that. Later, new people were employed in Head Office as Cruise Staff Supervisor and Cruise Director Supervisor. There really were too many ships for one person to handle.

Coming Back With A Purpose

After the fourth contract drama, I took a longer break than normal and really considered whether I wanted to come back to ships again. I travelled up the east coast of Australia in a very dodgy campervan, which broke down in Byron Bay and cost \$1,000 to fix the head gasket on the radiator – it was only worth \$1,500 total. What a Lemon!

I wondered if that was a metaphysical representation of the way I was feeling at the time. My head was overwhelmed with trying to decide. Would I go back to the lifestyle of the ships? Or would I make a change back to a land-based life? Or maybe I could travel overseas again?

I spent some quality time with my sister (Marnie) and we went to the Melbourne Spiritualist Church to do some meditation and energy healing. It was fantastic to be around people who were tapped into their spiritual and authentic selves. I felt like I was meeting my new tribe. Marnie and I also talked about how, if I went back as a social host, I could bring something deeper and more spiritual to the ships. The more I thought about that idea, the more it excited me.

‘You could take your favourite meditation CDs and play a different one every day. The guests would love it!’ Marnie suggested.

‘Yeah! I think the guests would appreciate some activities that are not gambling or drinking.’ I really liked the idea.

Doing meditation classes and spiritual development was definitely something that was not currently offered on board. They did do yoga classes at the gym and there was a tiny chapel. But that was all. I came up with the idea to start my own “Mind, Body and Spirit Program” and it basically included:

- Meditation sessions – every sea day
- Destiny Drawing – life purpose exercise, fun and creative
- Relationships Reframed – new ways to enhance relationships

I had a feeling that this could be my new lease on life. Except that I just wasn’t sure if the onboard management would be supportive of the idea.

As Long As It Improves Ratings

When I signed onto my new contract, I felt inspired and confident. All I had to do was convince the management team that these new classes I wanted to teach would be great for the guests and make the company look like heroes. The bonus was that I also got to do something I was passionate about. I arranged a meeting with the Hotel Director and the Cruise Director.

‘My idea is to offer these mind, body and spirit classes as extra activities on the Entertainment program. I’ll host them in between my other duties. They will give us an edge because no other ship is doing this kind of thing.’ I showed them my plan for the cruises.

‘Hmm ... I’m not sure Pip, it’s not going to be too weird is it?’ The CD frowned as he looked over my notes.

‘No, it’s basic meditation for beginners and some personal development classes to bring a bit of soul back into the cruising experience. There is a lot of drinking, gambling and silliness but nothing for people who want to relax and work on themselves.’

The more I talked about it, the more I felt confident that I was on the right track.

‘She’s right; we do get comment cards from guests, asking for more wellness activities. At the moment there is only yoga.’ *This was great!* The HD was sounding interested.

‘I think it’s the perfect opportunity for the guests to do some personal development work. They are on holiday. They have time. I think it’ll work well. Let me give it a try.’

‘As long as it improves our ratings, I am in.’ As usual, the CD was all about ratings points.

‘I will encourage the guests to write their feedback on their comment cards at the end of each cruise, to help us gauge how it’s going,’ I assured him.

‘Okay, let’s give it a month and reassess,’ the HD said, and we all nodded in agreement.

And so, began a whole new chapter in my cruising life. I was not just another silly social host doing the same old activities. I was going to offer the guests a calming and peaceful experience. An energy balancing experience. A creative and inspirational experience. A way to look at their life differently. A soulful experience at sea. It was going to be brilliant. I was super-excited to start.

First Month Of Classes On Board

My first month of classes were a raging success! The guests loved them! I was really humbled by the feedback. It was wonderful and I was really enjoying myself again. One guest told me she was really grateful that I’d offered the classes because she had wanted to try meditation but never

had a good opportunity before. *You are obviously enthusiastic and loving towards your subjects and that matters tremendously. Keep up the good work!*

Another guest said that she had no idea what the classes were going to be about, but she was so glad that she attended. *It opened my eyes to several themes in my life that I needed to deal with. Thank you so much.*

The meditation sessions were scheduled on every sea day (four days). They all went very well. Most people said that they felt very relaxed and peaceful. They particularly liked the chakra colour meditation and the past life guided journey.

The Destiny Drawing was a fun and creative life purpose class – this was very well received. The guests enjoyed getting the crayons out and being creative. Not everyone was an artist, but that was not the point of the class. It was about connecting with your true self through colour.

In the Create Your Destiny class we'd discuss energy, values, beliefs and goal setting. This class had some mixed feedback. It did push people to look at their life and ask if they are living to their highest potential. But it was mostly positive, so I kept it in the program.

The Destiny Relationships class offered new ways to consider and enhance relationships. After a while I decided not to continue this class, although I think they were needed, they were a bit too intense ... I felt I wasn't qualified or really inclined to handle some of the issues that were coming up in the group environment.

It was such a welcome relief to teach these classes every day. I got so much joy from meeting the special guests who chose to come to them. They were a very unique group of people who I had missed meeting when I was just hosting the games and parties in the previous three years.

Lots of the guests said that these types of classes should be held on all the ships in the fleet. They also suggested that the cruise line offer cruises with personal development, spiritual and wellness themes. Interestingly, in 2019, this type of cruise is now a huge part of the cruising industry. One guest said that I should definitely continue the classes because it provided a purpose for the trip in addition to the fun on the ship.

I loved that feedback because that is exactly what I wanted to bring to the cruising experience, some purpose, not just for the guests but for

me too. A lot of guests commented that they wanted classes every day and they wished they had found me earlier in the cruise.

I remember one lady got a bit upset with me for saying that her grey hair was created by her belief in “the hardship of life.” She didn’t disagree with the fact of the belief. But she didn’t like that her choice of belief may have caused her hair to go grey quicker. Luckily, I had Louise Hay’s book “*How to heal your body - the metaphysical causes of physical illness*” to show her that it wasn’t my personal opinion – it was based on correlated evidence from years of clinical sessions.

Even the guests who didn’t really agree with my principles and ideas still gave me great feedback on the meditations and the whole concept of the wellness classes. One memorable guest said on a comment card, *There was a lot of good stuff. But some conflict with the bible. Did you know that the bible is the most proven, most documented part of history EVER! All scholars agree. ... Still, you have a lot to offer. God Bless. K.*

This person came to two of my classes and rated my presentations as “Very Good.”

All in all, I was feeling very optimistic about the future.



CHAPTER TWO

Destiny Classes At Sea

The most rewarding thing about doing these classes on board was the way that it affected the guests. I knew in my heart that there needed to be more relaxing activities, more soulful activities, and more connecting with yourself activities, but I didn't fully grasp how much it would help people until they started giving me their feedback. Some comments made me cry, my heart felt so full.

Sardines On The Floor

During a normal seven-day cruise I would conduct four meditation sessions, one on each sea day. The guests were usually off the ship doing tours in the ports, so I didn't schedule them on port days. When I started doing the meditation classes I decided to use the ship's library. I needed a quiet space and what quieter space is there than the library, right? But on the bigger ships I used one of the conference rooms. I liked to set up the space with a circle of chairs and that made it more intimate. I wanted people to feel included, not like they were lined up in a lecture.

Day 1 was a body relaxation meditation – this was usually a small class (three to four people). Most of the guests didn't know how to find their way around the ship yet. I liked to do a nice and easy meditation for them. So, no matter their experience they could follow it. It gave the new meditators an opportunity to get into their bodies and out of their minds.

Day 2 was a colour chakra meditation – this class was usually a bit bigger (six to eight people). I liked to discuss the energy centres of the body and how they relate to the various areas of our lives. This was always a lively and interesting discussion as well as a fun meditation.

Day 3 was a guided journey meditation – this class usually had more people in it (eight to twelve people). This one was a walk in the garden or on the beach to give the guests an experience in using their imagination and visualisation skills for relaxation of the mind and body.

Day 4 was a past life meditation – this one was always interesting because it was commonly the busiest class (fifteen to twenty people), as guests would tell their friends and family and bring them along. One cruise I had thirty-five people turn up for the last meditation class.

'Oh wow! I'm so excited that you're all here.' I was overwhelmed and humbled.

'We only just discovered you in the daily newsletter.' Guest #1.

'My mum told me about your class every day. She thinks this is awesome! I thought I should check it out too.' Guest #2.

'We've been coming every day and this one is the meditation I've always wanted to do.' Guest #3.

'Where would you like us Pip?' Guest #4.

'Well, I think we should stack all the chairs out in the corridor and get cosy with each other. What do you think?' I'd chuckle.

I had to lie them all down on the floor, side by side, like sardines. They were a lovely, open and friendly group and the session went very well. I

became very good at adapting to whatever happened in each class and I learned to trust that everyone who turned up was there for a reason.

Creating My Own Meditations

After six months of doing meditations with lots of different people, I realised that some people were struggling with the twenty-minute meditations. It became clear that beginners to meditation needed to do shorter amounts of time to gain confidence. It made sense to me that when you learn something new, you start with easy exercises and then build up to harder ones.

I put together a selection of five-minute meditations using various sources as my reference. I applied my knowledge of Psychology and people's different ways of processing the world. They were divided into Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic and Cognitive meditations.

These are the five-minute meditations: Body Relaxation, Sacred Space guided visualisation, Feeling, Listening, Mini-Mantra, Chanting, Mini-Chakra Balance, Looking, and Walking/Moving meditations.

When I started to teach the five-minute meditations, I got some great feedback. One of the guests, David came to tell me that he had a funny experience while practising my walking meditation. He said he'd been alone up on the top deck. He was walking ten steps slowly along the deck. Stopping and breathing and looking out to sea. Then he would turn around and walk ten steps slowly back along the deck. He said he was really feeling very centred and calm. After about ten minutes he felt a tap on his shoulder and a very serious-looking crew member asked him, 'Are you okay, Sir?'

He was a bit annoyed that he'd been disturbed. He said, 'Yes, of course, I was just practising my walking meditation, why?'

The crew member looked very relieved and said, 'Oh I am SO glad; I thought you were considering jumping overboard.'

David said he laughed and thanked the crew member for his diligence. He said that he had to share the story with me to make other people aware if they are practising on the deck in future. We both had a good

laugh about it and I always tell my clients that story when I am teaching the walking meditation.

Teaching Increased My Spiritual Connection

When most people think of doing a meditation, they have an image of sitting cross-legged on the floor and chanting “Om”. I was one of those people. But my experiences of meditation have been that there are thousands of ways to do it and only one of them was like that. It made a lot of sense to me when I connected the dots. There are millions of people in the world and all those people have different ways of living, thinking, moving and relaxing, so of course, there are thousands of meditations.

It made meditation accessible to everyone. What a revelation. That was cool. I understood the physical and mental part of doing a meditation. That was easy. Take a deep breath, it calms your mind and body. I got it. But I didn’t really understand the spiritual part. I mean, I didn’t really understand how taking deep breaths, or visualising yourself in a garden, or even chanting “Om” made you feel more spiritual?

It was only when I had other people asking me those questions that I started to truly get it for myself.

‘But Pip ... I don’t believe in God ... so does that mean I can’t connect to a spiritual feeling when I meditate?’ They’d ask.

And I would reply, ‘Not at all. Religion doesn’t come into this process at all. I’ve come to believe that everything in this world is made up of energy. Energy that is unseen – but we know it is there. It makes the grass grow. It opens the flowers. It beats our heart and moves the blood around our bodies. It makes us feel connected to another human being. Some might call that God. I call it Spirit or Source or Universal Energy. When I meditate, I can slow down and begin to connect to all those unseen things that I miss when I’m rushing around in the physical world. Just taking time to stop and breathe. It’s so simple. So simple, it’s profound. That is where you find your spirituality.’

‘Oh wow. That is cool. Thanks,’ they’d smile and look relieved.

Sometimes I felt like the Universal energy was guiding my answers, because I didn’t say it the same way every time. It depended on the person or the situation or the moment. But the essence was the same. I discovered my spiritual connection by teaching others to find theirs. Isn’t that perfectly Divine?

Draw Your Destiny

Looking at it from the outside this class was very simple. I’d lay out lots of crayons, large pieces of butcher’s paper and then I’d ask the guests to open their minds and hearts by doing some automatic drawing (like automatic writing).

Before they began drawing I would encourage the guests to ask the question, “What’s my destiny?” or “What do I want in my life?” and then I’d tell them to choose the coloured crayon that felt right and just let it flow. No rules. It worked best when they were given less instruction. After they had finished drawing, we would talk about the colours, the symbols, numbers and letters they drew and what they meant, using a dream book and some other information about chakras and the energy magic of colour.

It was always very revealing, and a lot of guests were surprised by their creations. Dan was a well-dressed man with a confident manner. He spoke to me after class:

‘You seem to have a lot of insight into the very things that I am interested in. Thanks!’ he said.

‘I’m glad you enjoyed it.’

‘Yes, I found it very interesting. My drawing had lots of messages in it that helped me understand myself a lot better.’ He showed me the drawing; it was full of symbols and vibrant colours.

‘What do you do on land, Dan?’

‘I’m a lawyer. This was not like anything I have done before.’

‘Oh wow! I am really pleased you got something out of it.’

Melissa was a quiet young girl who didn't share much in the class. But she waited behind to speak to me after everyone left.

'Hi Pip, I just wanted to say this class was fun, especially the drawing part. It let me get my feelings out. Thanks!'

'That's great! I really liked the feel of your drawing.' It was full of purple and blue swirls.

'Wow! I don't think I am very good at it, but I might try some more art when I get home.' She was very humble and a lot more talented than she realised.

'Sounds like a great idea to me.'

Then she hugged me quickly and rushed away.

Sarah wrote a really lovely comment card which was a wonderful compliment to me, and it really touched my heart:

The meditations were excellent. The seminars were interesting. I have not enjoyed the cruise except for this. I would consider taking a cruise that purely worked on self-growth; otherwise I wouldn't do this again. Pip was fab and the only "real" thing on here. Thanks.

These types of comment really lifted me up. It seemed that I was also satisfying some deep needs in the guests. How could I not do these classes?

Create Your Destiny

The idea of this class was to have the guests review if their beliefs and values were supporting the life that they wanted. The class was designed from an exercise I did at my very first personal development weekend retreat when I was twenty-three years old. The wonderful Mary Dwyer from *Impact Solutions International Pty Ltd* taught this process to us and it had a profound effect on me.

I asked the guests to write down their values and put them in order – making special note of their top ten. Then we would discuss how our beliefs support our values – like the legs on a table – so that we can achieve our life goals. The next step was to decide whether the beliefs and values were supporting them in achieving their life goals. If they were not supporting them, then we talked about how to change them.

Louisa left me a private note after the Create Your Destiny class. It was very sweet:

I enjoyed both sessions. Pip you did a great job! You are very well informed and have a cute personality! I lost my husband of forty years, six months ago, and this helped me to believe in God again. Thank you, Pip.

This lady was delightful. She had a big heart and warm smile. I remember her giving me the biggest hug when she left my class on the last day. She was an Earth Angel for sure.

James wrote this lovely comment card and also left me a long list of books I might be interested in reading. A lot of guests did that after this class. It was wonderful to get tips to expand my library. *The class was very enlightening for me. I love that we all have energy within ourselves and that energy affects our surroundings too. Great job! Truly, J.*

Destiny Relationships

The idea of this relationship class was to give people a new way of thinking about themselves and their partner. First, I would introduce the concept of the Law of Attraction and remind them of how powerful we all are. What we focus on we get more of. Then I had the guests write down the qualities that they would like in a partner, for example: sensitive, caring, passionate, communicative, and loving etc. then we would discuss how these qualities that they “wish for” in another, need to be focused on in themselves to bring about a magnetic attraction of that person to them.

We would discuss how to become all of who you are to align with the person who is perfect for you. I used the wonderful *Conversations with God – Book 3* by Neale Donald Walsch as my guide.

Looking back now, I thought that these relationships classes had not gone well. I had a lot of self-doubt and felt I needed more skills in relationship counselling. There were some challenging guests. Some people did not appreciate taking a closer look at their relationships – even though they had decided to come to a relationship class.

One of the concepts that pushed a lot of buttons was the “allowing your partner to be all of who they can be ... and do as they wish.” It

brought up some fear in people to consider allowing their partner to do as they wish. I understand that the concept of giving people freedom to choose worries us, because we think “what if they don’t choose to be with us anymore?” It’s a lesson in trust.

This person didn’t agree with my presentation ideas:

As you wish, NO. I love you is better because I love you means I want you to be happy. As you wish may imply that doing whatever is ok when it may not be ok. You can’t allow children to do as they wish. Life moves too quickly to do as we wish. If you don’t go to school, you’ll be stuck in poverty and you may never be able to get out! Brian

It was hard for some to consider the concept of allowing others, including children and partners, to take responsibility for themselves. They didn’t quite get that when we do that, the other feels safer, empowered and much less likely to leave. And this person got a bit personal with his feedback:

I think the class is extremely shallow. Not near enough info to provide people with tools for life. It was wrong to tell the young man maybe he should talk to the gal across from him. She is my girlfriend and he was the young lady’s new husband near me. You are not too bright. Marcus

It was interesting that my own self-doubt and lack of trust in my ability to help others was also being triggered by conducting these classes. When I did my research for this book and re-read the comments from those Destiny Relationships classes, I was humbled and surprised that there was actually some very encouraging and wonderful feedback.

Les gave me one of my favourite comment cards:

Was awesome. I learned more about my future life partner today. It was great to sit down and finally see what she wants in life. Every day I would ask her, “what do you want?” and she would reply, “I don’t know.” BUT today she answered me. Her answer was “This” and she put her hand to my face. Thank you for everything you’ve done! L.

This couple was so delightful. They dived into every exercise with an open mind and heart. I was so pleased that Leo had this revelation during the class.

Russell – *My wife talked me into attending this session. I had no idea it would be as meaningful as it turned out! This was really worth attending!!!*

I remember Russell being a calm and peaceful soul. He was one of many who were dragged along to the class by their wife and left feeling like they really found some value.

Laura – *Even though me and my friend were the only single people in the crowd you thoroughly took the time to show us how to create a list of what we should be looking for in a mate.*

These two girls were only in their early twenties and they were the odd ones out, in a room full of couples. But I made sure that they felt included and it was so nice to hear that they found it helpful.

Brigitte – *I loved this class because it was educational. It was not about selling me something but educating and helping me to improve. I loved it! Thank you.*

This was a perfect example of the type of comment cards that I got regularly. So much of my experience on board was about getting people to spend more money. I was excited to be offering them something different. It was exactly what I intended with the classes. These were activities that allowed them to do some self-reflection, self-improvement and actually find some inner peace on their vacation.

Affecting People's Lives

When I planned to do these classes on board I thought they'd be a nice change from the frivolous activities. I thought that I'd bring a little bit of soul into a very superficial world. What I didn't expect was that I would affect people's lives in a profound way, and they would change mine too. It was such a relief and a delight to be doing something that filled me up and helped people too. It's why I love what I do now too.

Alice – *I really enjoyed the last session of this because it had a lot of information that pertained to circumstances in my life. I recently went through a severe depression to the point where I had to be hospitalised. I still suffer from minor setbacks to this day, but I realise that most of it is because I have been living in the past too much, worrying about the future even more.*

The techniques you taught greatly helped me in realising a lot of things and I intend to use some of the techniques to help me in the future. Your sessions really helped me feel enlightened and positive.

I cried when I read this comment card from Alice. I was so moved by her story and that I helped her to such a degree, in just one week was amazing.

Brenda – *Very relaxing. I usually take pills for anxiety on a regular basis and after meditating I feel as though I don't need to take them today.*

I remember this lady was so sweet and genuinely wanted to regain her personal power. She had been feeling generally anxious for many years. I was delighted that she felt so much better.

Mike – *I felt cleansed and cried during the meditation. Learned about colour and body for the first time. Thank you.*

Mike and I also chatted about his desire to do training in Reiki Energy Healing. I had only done my Reiki Level One training at that time and I shared how I found it was wonderful for pain, digestive issues and it helped me to sleep.

Carrie – *Pip was knowledgeable and informative. Never having been to a meditation session I found this great – needing to solve many problems, Pip may have introduced me to a new path. I am already beginning to feel a difference, even though I can't seem to visualise the colours (of the chakras). Great job! Thanks.*

About the Author

In my 12 years of experience in Reiki Coaching, I've tried all of the techniques that I teach.

This means that you'll gain value from my trials and successes. I've been uninspired, unbalanced, and exhausted. I've also over-given to others and not taken care of myself. So, when I work with you to feel more connected, energetic and balanced, I'll be authentic and real. Nothing is hidden, as transparency and integrity are very important to me.

In my courses, therapies and books, my focus is on offering simple and practical skills to honour and fully accept yourself; using Reiki Energy Healing, Psychology, and Meditation.

When I teach my Reiki courses, coach clients, and conduct treatments, I only work with people I know that I can help; so if you're a fun, open-minded person who is willing to try new things, are prepared to take action and learn how to heal yourself – that's perfect.

Email: pipcoleman@yahoo.com.au

Phone: 0437 670 820

Website: www.pipcoleman.com

Facebook: [pip.coleman.5](https://www.facebook.com/pip.coleman.5)

Twitter: [pipcoleman1](https://twitter.com/pipcoleman1)

LinkedIn: [pip-coleman](https://www.linkedin.com/company/pip-coleman)

Instagram: [coleman_pip](https://www.instagram.com/coleman_pip)

