

# GUILTY PLEASURES 23

by Eve Ackerman

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**Cruisin'...on a Sunday  
afternoon...**Last December I got a  
call from my brother in Minneapolis.

"We've got to get away for a  
while to someplace warm where I don't  
have to think about anything. Want to  
come with?"

Him being a Minnesotan and all I  
forgave him for ending the sentence on a  
preposition and said if we could work it  
out we'd love to "come with".

Steven has MS and it limits his  
mobility somewhat, so I thought a cruise  
might be the best option for the four of  
us--Howard and I and Steven and his wife  
Helen. We were not planning on taking  
any kids. His are grown and either in  
college or working, mine, I  
felt, were old enough at 14  
& 18 to spend a week on  
their own.

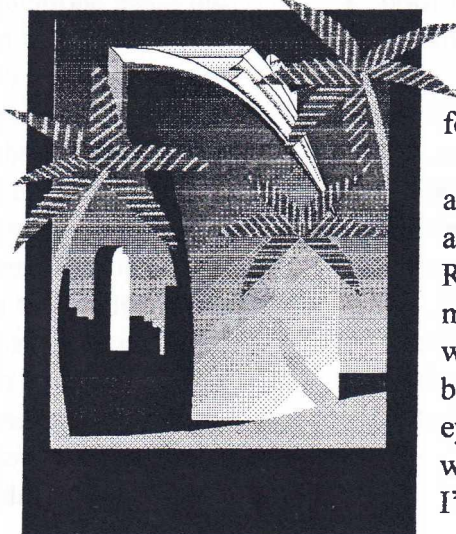
I began to check  
out dates and costs with  
my travel agent. Despite  
what you may have heard  
post-September 11, there  
weren't huge savings being  
offered by cruise lines, but  
they were offering some  
discounts. I suppose if we  
had been willing to take an

inside cabin on an older ship there might  
have been huge savings, but it's not what  
we wanted. Also, Howard and I needed a  
cruise with a Sunday departure/return so  
we wouldn't be coming or going on the  
Sabbath, and that too limited our options.  
Finally we narrowed it down to one ship  
and itinerary. The Celebrity Cruise ship  
Millennium, launched in 2000 and  
cruising the Eastern Caribbean. The  
literature looked wonderful, but then it's  
supposed to--they pay for it to look good

To get another version of reality, I  
got the Berlitz 2002 Cruise Ship guide,  
Fodor's and Frommer's guides to the  
Caribbean, and began checking things out.  
Berlitz rated the Millennium in the top  
three "premium" ships, and by

comparison one of the  
other three ships in that  
ranking was the QE2, so I  
felt good about our selection.

I was concerned  
about leaving the boys home  
alone--did I ever mention  
RISKY BUSINESS was the  
movie I watched the night I  
went into labor with Raphi?--  
but I figured they'd keep an  
eye on each other, the dog  
would watch both of them,  
I'd notified numerous adults



in the neighborhood, and left elaborate and detailed notes on everything from how to turn off the main water supply to the house to which tree service to call if a big limb falls off during a storm. I'm that kind of a mom. The only mistake I made was fixing food for them to eat while we were away. It sat untouched in the fridge while the pizza boxes piled up in the trash.

Anyway, we left the boys (and dog) and drove down to Orlando early Sunday morning to pick up Steven and Helen, who'd flown in the night before. After cramming all the luggage into my sedan we headed downstate to Port Everglades.

Our travel agent did well. Even though we didn't have the verandah rooms, we had matching rooms at the port and starboard bow, humongous, oversized rooms. They weren't just large by cruise ship standards, they were large by hotel standards, and had king size beds and handicapped accessible bathrooms which gave us additional room there.

The ship itself is quite lovely and being new had amenities like an Internet lounge. The Celebrity line is noted for offering fine art aboard its ships, and Berlitz rated it as having the best food. I can't argue with the latter. I'm not crazy about cruise ship food as a rule. Generally there are tons of it and it's presented in an interesting fashion, but it tastes like banquet food. The food aboard our ship however was consistently fresh and outstanding. I'm paying for it now every time I step on the scale. We had the option of getting kosher meals but opted instead to go with fish and veggie and there were always plenty of tasty choices for us.

One other option we took

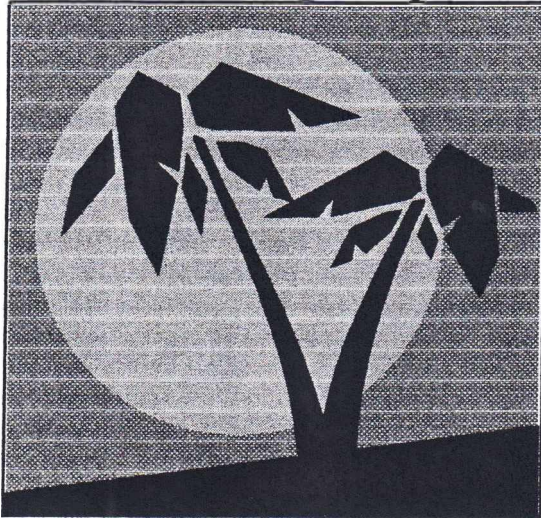
advantage of was making reservations at the alternative restaurant, the upscale Olympic restaurant within the ship. You pay an additional per person surcharge but you get an evening of fine dining in a smaller, intimate setting. So since we would be celebrating our 26<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary aboard ship, we thought this was the way to go.

I've learned through past experience that ports of call on a cruise are not a big deal unless it's the reason for the trip. In other words, if you're cruising for relaxation (as we were) then you may opt not to run around the islands where the ship docks. But there were a couple things we wanted to see.

In San Juan we took advantage of Fodor's recommendation of the free trolley that runs all 'round the old city. It was great getting on and off when we wanted and this way Steven didn't have to walk so much. Turned out to be a shopping day more than a sightseeing day, but we had a good time. Helen wanted to visit a butterfly art gallery she'd heard about. It was interesting, but I wasn't excited about art consisting of butterflies under plexiglass. Helen was less than thrilled too, but it was worth a stop. She did some shopping in the upscale discount stores and I saw some Dunhill cufflinks I wanted to get for Howard, but he wasn't crazy about the setting so we passed. I think he regretted it later when we didn't see any other red amber cufflinks quite as nice, but so it goes.

In the evenings we had the second seating at supper and our table companions were a family from New York. They had two kids, a 16 year old boy and an 11 year old girl and while initially I wasn't excited at the idea of children at our table, we lucked out.

They were pleasant and well mannered and apparently the family cruises a lot so they were used to being seated with strangers for a week. We had a lot of fun with them. Our favorite spot for breakfast and lunch became an outdoor site on the stern deck where we could sit in the sun and feel the wind on our faces. The Yankees couldn't get enough of it.



We also stopped at St. Thomas where we visited the second oldest synagogue in the Western Hemisphere. Like the one in Curacao, it has a sand floor and the current building dates from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was once a Sephardic congregation, but is now affiliated with the Reform movement. I spent some money in their gift shop on tropical motif *kippot* (skullcaps) for the boys. I was a little disappointed they didn't have the folk art t-shirts depicting the synagogue in my size, but there was other shopping in St. Thomas to make up for it.

This was the port where we pillaged the Carribean. I could tell as soon as we stepped into the shops that some of the bargains weren't all they were cut up to be. While there was talk

of fine jewelry at 50% off what you'd pay in the States, that was only true if your Stateside retail was, say, in NYC on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue with all the taxes added in. Then it's a savings. I priced an Ebel watch I'd admired in Gainesville and I only would have saved a couple hundred dollars off the list price of \$8,000. So I passed.

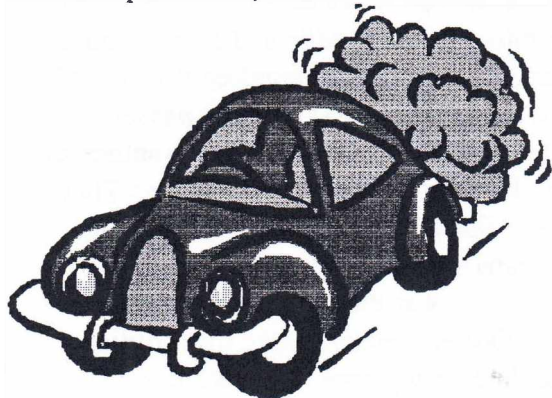
However, I did take advantage of the H. Stern Jewelry Outlet store. They carry fine jewelry in contemporary designs and I'd been admiring some of their pieces at their shop aboard ship. The Outlet store was, like most outlets, stocked with pieces that were from previous years' styles, but I've found that gold and precious gems don't have a shelf expiration date. Howard got me a couple bangle bracelets, one in rose gold with a scattering of inset diamonds, the other in yellow gold with sapphires and diamonds. I got him a pair of gold and ruby cufflinks which helped make up for the ones he passed on in San Juan.

So we spent most of our trip resting, reading, relaxing, eating and generally vegging out. A good time was had by all, and I knew the trip was a success when the second to last day Helen said we needed to plan to do it again in two years.



Sometimes the bread lands jelly side up. I had to take my car into the shop because some trim under the front bumper had come off. Raphi brought it to my attention, 'cause he called while he was driving the car to a USY meeting in Tampa, and said it made a godawful racket roaring down the road.

Knowing what makes the world go 'round, I told him to get out his Swiss Army Knife, grab some duct tape and tape that sucker up until I can get it to the dealership. He did, and it worked.



So the next week I dithered around 'cause I really didn't want to tie up my car at the dealership all day for a piece of trim, but I finally took it in. They told me they could fix it, it would cost about \$30 bucks and they didn't think it would take very long. Then the mechanic goes to drive my car 'round back and he says "is there a trick to getting this out of park?"

"You have to really jam it with your thumb," I said, "It sticks, especially in the mornings when the car is cold."

"It shouldn't do that," he maintained, and called over their transmission guy. Transmission guy looks at it and says "the frammerjammit isn't releasing the brake out of park so you can get the car in gear. You need a new thingamabobber and that's going to require taking the transmission shift box apart," or words to that effect.

I knew the warranty was close to expiring, 'cause I'd made the last payment on the car that month, so I said "if the car's still under warranty, this is covered, right?" and they agreed it was.

"Look up the warranty expiration date," I said. They did, and lo and behold, the warranty expires February 7.

I looked down at my watch. February 7 was winking up at me from its little box.

"Holy cow," the mechanic says, "your warranty expires today!"

I grinned a big ol' grin. I was 'bout as happy as a dog rolling in three day old dead squirrel.

"In that case, gents, I think I'd like to leave this car here and let you work on that transmission."

When I went to pick it up the next day I said to the clerk "How much would it have cost to fix the transmission if it wasn't covered?"

She looked up the codes and said "with labor, figure about \$286."

It sounds cruel to say I was a little disappointed. I wanted it to cost *thousands* but at least I got the \$286 covered completely.

And I don't have to jam my thumb into the gear release anymore.///



## Reviews!

Rather than mention one book, allow me to make a pitch for the collected works of Robert Crais. I'd heard people rave about his writing for years, and finally read *THE MONKEY'S RAINCOAT* while I was cruising. I liked it so much I almost turned around and swam back to shore for the others I'd

bought and left in town in case I didn't like him.

Most of Crais books are about a PI name Elvis Cole, who takes Pinocchio and Jiminy Cricket as his personal heroes and role models. He's got a mysterious sidekick named Joe Pike and the dialogue is witty even as the body count rises. I highly recommend all the Elvis books and the other stand alone novels by Crais.

### I DARE--Lee and Miller--

The "Liaden" series comes to a rousing conclusion in the latest from Meisha Merlin, I DARE. It's space opera at its finest, with lots of daring, swashbuckling, engaging heroes and heroines, big plots and interesting aliens. I highly recommend this series by a small press which is doing big things.

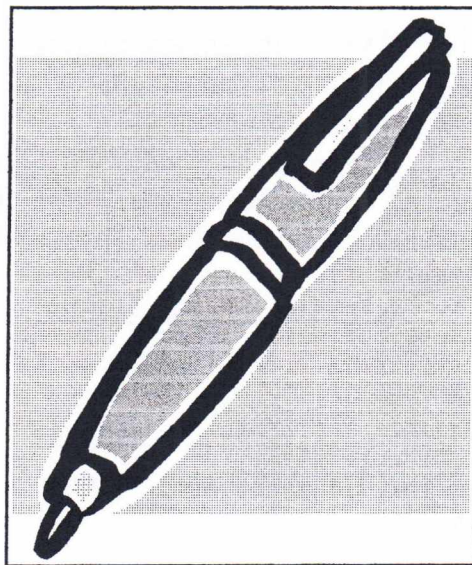
### DOING GOOD--Pamela

**Morsi--**Jane Lofton thinks she's doing good. She's not. She's not only not doing good, she's not doing well. Sure, she has a stunning home, great figure, successful job and handsome family, but it's not as perfect as it looks. She knows her husband cheats on her, often, and all her absent daughter wants to talk about is her therapist and how Jane's ruined her life.

But when Jane, momentarily distracted by a broken nail, sees an 18 wheeler bearing down on her BMW convertible, what's really important in life suddenly becomes very obvious. Staying alive in the next five minutes is what counts. And afterwards, fulfilling her vow to become a better person if she survives.

DOING GOOD is a funny, poignant novel of Jane's voyage to betterment and how sometimes, no

matter how hard you try, no good deed goes unpunished. DOING GOOD is also a very spiritual novel in the best sense of the word, and Morsi walks a fine line showing us how people can pay it forward and do the right thing, without being preachy about it.



### Mailing Comments, SFPA 225

**Lynch--**I'm very sorry to hear you might not be able to donate blood again. But why would it be permanent? It sounds like a rule that might change down the road. Anyone who does a year of foreign study in a college exchange program wouldn't be able to donate blood!

I know for Howard it was a real blow to come back from cancer able to give again after five years, and then discover after his heart attack that he was now unable to donate ever again. Of course that rule is for his protection while

yours is for the safety of the recipient, but even so it's getting harder and harder to find "clean" donors. I gave last month and I've been nagging Raphi about donating again. I think he's waiting until they do a special movie pass offer again.////###

**Hlavaty**— "the seminal cultural event of the 90's." You're right. You couldn't make that one up.//

Your quote on Windows and the work of The Other Creator is classic. It would make a great sig line. Thanks for sharing!//

As always, a very enjoyable zine.////###

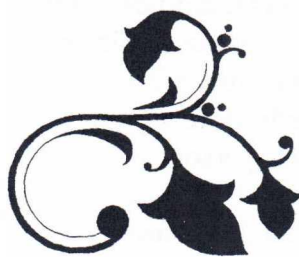
**Feller**— As awful as Anita's car crash was, I'm glad it wasn't worse. ////###

**Gelb**— Re ct. Copeland: That's extremely cool that your brother's getting all those nice freebies and sharing with you. What a good sib!// Ct. Me: Howard's become a reading fiend in the last month or so. I think it started on our cruise, but he's been racing through the Janet Evanovich "Stephanie Plum" books and started reading Robert Crais as well. I like it 'cause now we can talk about books together, but I'm worried he'll fall into bad habits like reading mysteries when he ought to be working on a lucrative legal case. Heaven knows I would never neglect my work to *read*, but I'm not sure about him!//The SMOFcon Report was very entertaining (no surprise there). I especially liked the Roman Convention idea. Now that would be a retro convention to end all retro conventions. And think of the Hugos

you'd give out! People would be scabbling over whether the Iliad really should qualify under fantasy. But maybe Aristophanes "The Frogs" could win for best media presentation?// Speaking of long flights, I bought something interesting from Magellan's, an inflatable footstool. Those of us with short legs have our own problems when we fly, 'cause the seat's too high to be comfortable. The footstool helps with that by raising up my feet so that my knees are more level and reduces stress on my back and thighs. And it folds up small after you deflate it.////###

**Strickland**— ct. Me: Friends who've studied at Oxford told Raphi that Yale's a pale imitation of the real thing, but from Raphi's POV he'll be quite happy to get into Yale, thank you very much. Now we're waiting for April and the letters to come pouring into the mailbox. It's going to be hard for me to resist opening them. And then sealing them shut again, naturally.////###

**weber**— Thanks for passing along the Amazon "review" of DEMOLITION ANGEL. It confirms everything I've always believed about those "reviews".////###



**See  
ya!  
Eve**