



**When Is
A Circle
Not A
Circle???**



by Ralph J. Ferrusi

Offhand I can think of two classic New York State “cruise” boat trips of the caliber that should be in Patricia Shultz’s 1,000 PLACES TO SEE BEFORE YOU DIE: the Maid of the Mist trip up to Niagara Falls in the farthest western corner of the state, and, just about in the farthest southeastern corner of the state, the Circle Line cruise around Manhattan.

One, the Maid of the Mist, is mentioned on Page 764 of my 2003 version of the book, under “Niagara Falls”. I’d been to Niagara Falls a couple of times, probably first with my parents, ‘way back when, but had never opted for the Maid of the Mist. Somehow Kath and I ended up in Niagara Falls a few years ago—I think we had decided to do a Finger Lakes wine tour (we did end up at Bully Hill Vineyards)—and also walked up through Watkins Glen, then scootched over to Letchworth State Park, and then, what the heck, over to Niagara Falls. In mid-Summer the place was crawling with photo-snapping tourists from all over the world. We had



to park about a mile from the falls, and when we could finally see it, I was awestruck by the thundering drama of it. And there was this little boat down there heading upriver right to it: for once, after all those years, I thought: "Let's Do That!!!"

My single biggest impression of the trip, from our vantage point standing right up in the bow, was, "Is this guy going to keep going right into the rocks at the base of the falls???" Is he ever going to turn around???" I consider myself pretty brave, but the skipper scared the hell out of me: I could never have imagined the boat ever getting that close to the thundering falls!!!

Alas, Number Two, the Circle Line cruise, is not in 1,000 PLACES...: at least I couldn't find it, even under "New York City." In late July Kath's sister's husband's sister (got that???) was visiting from the Left Coast—Washington State—and Sue suggested they do a Circle Line tour as part of Caroline's New Yawk sightseeing. She invited Kath and I, and we instantly agreed, "Let's Do It!!!!"

Growing up in the Buchanan, as a teenager swimming at "White Beach" in Verplanck, then as an adult chasing the Day Liners with my fiberglass runabout, I don't really recall when I first heard of the the Circle Line. But, my (enduring) mental picture is of a single medium-sized white boat



with CIRCLE LINE in big red letters on its sides, the back upper three-quarters of the boat open to the sky, slowly chugging around Manhattan, allowing plenty of time for tourists, from near and far, to take in the famous sights—the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, Grant's Tomb—and a whole plethora of semi- and not-so-famous Manhattan-esque sights. In all these years it never once occurred to me to head down to The City and actually take the tour, until Sue's phone call. Let's go:

Miracle of miracles, we actually parked right inside Pier 83 (for a mere \$30.00) with the CIRCLE LINE BRONX about 30 feet from our front bumper. Ultimately, we shuffled along—with about 300-400 other people—many "from afar": Finland, Hungary, Sweden, Germany, France—and boarded one of the Circle Line boats. There isn't a single boat: there's currently a fleet of about six: BRONX,





MANHATTAN, STATEN ISLAND, etc. We made a bee-line for the open upper deck: after all these years it wouldn't have made any sense at all to me to be confined inside. At twelve noon we were out on the river, heading south: eeks, a map I had seen showed our tour going clockwise: that meant we should have been heading north at first.

Oops, we were informed by the on-board Tour Guide—the guy was really good, keeping up a running dialogue for most of the 2 1/2- hour trip, but from my seat against the stern railing (and from most of the rest of the boat) I could barely hear most of what he was saying: the sound system was lousy—that the current was nasty in Hell Gate, so we'd first go down the Hudson into the harbor and around the Statue of Liberty, then part way up the East River, then turn around and retrace our route around the Battery and up past Pier 83 part way to the George Washington Bridge, then back: no circle. This turned out to be, in retrospect, quite unfulfilling and unsatisfying: we'd miss Fort Tryon Park and the Cloisters, Spuyten Duyvil, and the narrow Harlem River through the whole more woody northern end of Manhattan.

On the plus side, it was indeed quite thrilling to be cruising down the majestic—but quite murky—Hudson, past the Empire State Building, the World Trade Center, Battery Park, Ellis Island, and right up alongside La Liberte eclairant le monde (aka



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The Statue of Liberty). And then up the East River, under the Brooklyn and Williamsburg Bridges, then several a-bit-less-famous East River bridges. Our tour guide had pointed out there was only one bridge connecting Manhattan to the rest of the world on the Hudson side, but there were 15 (!) bridges on the eastern side. We cruised past Roosevelt and Ward islands before finally, and anticlimactically, scooting back up the Hudson a ways then back down to Pier 83. Interesting note: I did not spot Gracie Mansion while heading up the East River: it's pretty much obscured by trees and foliage; a more-savvy fellow tourist pointed it out to me on our return trip.

We'd set out to circle the island. We didn't. Later some Internet poking revealed we weren't the only ones: other passengers commented that they were told the boat wouldn't fit under one of the Harlem River bridges. A neighbor, an ardent power-boater, said "I know the bridge; they can't ever get under it". Hmmm....

So, is it really a circle tour anymore??? I don't know, and I'm really not going to expend any more energy to find out, but I really wish to hell it had been.

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The George Washington Bridge.

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