

Carson Valley couple joyful to be off doomed cruise ship

By Kathryn Reed

This may have been the first cruise where passengers lost weight instead of gained a few pounds.

That's what happens while living off salads and odd sandwiches (think beet, cucumber and tomato – but just one of those with bread) for three meals a day.

Karen and Bob Smith who live in Gardnerville and work at Lake Tahoe were two of the 3,299 passengers aboard the Splendor – the Carnival cruise ship that was pulled to shore by two tug boats Thursday after a Nov. 8 engine fire crippled the vessel.



Bob and Karen
Smith

“We never want to eat another sandwich or salad for a long time,” Karen Smith told *Lake Tahoe News* from Disneyland.

The couple decided to salvage their vacation by staying in Southern California to enjoy a few days at the Magic Kingdom before returning home today and having to go back to work. Karen works at Heavenly and Bob at MontBleu.

Everything started well Nov. 7 as the 952-foot ship departed Long Beach for the Mexican Riviera. The couple had gone to one of the shows, which was highly entertaining.

Then came the announcement across the public address system at 6am Monday, "Alpha team to the engine room."

Smith said, "They said they would never come over the PA in the room unless it was an emergency."

The next announcement was for all passengers to report to the ninth floor, which is outside, because there was a fire below. Despite being told there was no reason to bring lifejackets from the room, some passengers did.

"We could see all this smoke as soon as we opened the door," Smith said.

But before any announcement was made to the masses, the Smiths knew something was wrong.

Their outside cabin near the stern of the boat was on level one.

"It happened right underneath us. We had just woken up. We were sitting there and it almost felt like an earthquake with the rumbling and shaking," Smith said. "I looked at my husband and said we better get dressed."

For hours the passengers sat on the deck not knowing what was going on. Finally, that afternoon they were told the cruise was terminated. The "fun ship" cruise line was becoming just the opposite.



Carnival
Splendor

"It was a little scary at first. Out of the smokestack pitch black smoke was coming out all day. It was still coming out very lightly the day we got off the ship," Smith said.

She praised the cruise director for his calm, reassuring voice. About 80 percent of the people went with the flow, while some thought it a good idea to yell at crewmembers for things beyond their control.

Smith said the 1,167 crewmembers were phenomenal. One criticism, though, was the delay in trying to salvage any sort of fun. Activities didn't return until Tuesday afternoon. Passing out free beers helped ease tensions.

Without electricity and everything computerized, not much could happen. Camp Carnival for the kids was started Tuesday, plus games in one of the show rooms.

Having a window in their room allowed them the convenience of being able to be in their room during the day.

The Smiths through their son heard what was supposedly in the food packages airlifted in by the military.

"We didn't see any Pop Tarts. That would have been nice. We didn't see Spam either," Smith said.

She said some people complained of smelling rotting food, but they never smelled it. Their big stink issue was the bathrooms. Their toilet wasn't usable until Wednesday. It was cold showers every day.

As cruise veterans, this little adventure is not going to deter them from going back on the water. In fact, with their free voucher from Carnival they are planning a spring cruise to the Caribbean.

By the time they hit terra firma their credit card for the ill-fated cruise had been refunded as had all charges made on the ship until the power went out.