NOAA Teacher at Sea
Christopher Harvey
Onboard NOAA Ship OSCAR ELTON SETTE
June 5 – July 4, 2006

Date: June 19, 2006
Time: 5:00 PM Hawaii
Location: Within eyesight of Necker Island

Entry
We are back within eyesight of Necker Island, after spending the last few days fairly far off to the southeast. I have issues with backtracking when traveling. I remember returning to Dublin eleven days after I left it several years back. I hitchhiked around the entire country of Ireland, filling the time with wonderful tales of adventure and company I met along the way. And when I revisited Dublin in order to catch a flight to Brussels, the city remained the same- but I had changed.

Necker Island feels the same to me now as Dublin had then. Both were spectacular in their own respect. And both were markers in the timeline of Christopher Harvey's life, in a sense that they both stirred his heart to the point that traveling has become as essential as breathing. Yet this time the waters around Necker Island are rough, clouds surround us here, and we are constantly plagued with the chance that we might get rain at any moment. This is just the physical change I have noticed.

Emotionally, I have been run through the ringer- having performed each job on the line, having conversation with many crew members that have allowed me to know them and myself better, having read many more words from books that have taken seed within my heart, and having survived a two-day cold (Thus the reason for no entry yesterday. I was sick in bed for 16 hours!) . I shouldn't try to be any more poetic than any other person who has ever noted the effect of time on a soul, but I will because I cannot help myself:

"Time is the only factor that moves us, even when we don't want to move. It brings us into hard times, and out of them all the same. It gives us the room to look back and laugh or cry at the things that we have done, and the hope to look forward to the good things ahead. It prods us. It changes us. It befriends us, even when we push It away. It is, and so we must be- with It or without It, Time moves on."

I have made Time my friend on this cruise. Even though routine is wearing me thin- especially now that the sleep is not as good as it used to be- I find myself grateful for the time aboard the ship. I know that as soon as I step foot off of the Oscar Sette and venture into the world of Honolulu, I will look back on the sunsets I have seen here and be grateful for each of them. I will be sad to leave my new friends behind, though like always, they will remain with me in memories and email (for as long as distant friends can remain friends). I will be forced into a new world- exciting nonetheless- in which the only thing that remains constant in my life will be Time as my friend.

Hopefully we have all found some way to befriend Time. How many of us know how long she will be here with us? How many things have you thought of doing, “if only I had more time”? For me there are too many.

I have had conversations with Huntley, perhaps my closest crewmember friend on the ship, and his story has moved me to embrace the time I have. I hope to write about him so you too can know him better. But he is hard to write about. A friend once told me that the reason she never took a picture with me was because I was too dynamic for a still picture. I have carried those words in my heart, because some of us slow down to the point that a picture might capture our essence. Some of us become predictable. We become easily captured in a photograph. Huntley is one of those people who is too full of life to describe in words, though I will try sometime. He has given me great thoughts of the world out there- of the people that he and I are supposed to meet someday- and I cannot help but wonder if I am becoming inactive in my life. Am I settled down already? Will I read about Huntley’s adventures one day and tell everyone that I could have done the same, if only I had more time?

Amee received some of the best news a marine biologist/traveler could receive at 7 am today. She has been accepted into a program in which she will be working on a German research vessel in the waters surrounding Antarctica. While this may sound boring to some, I find it to be extremely fascinating. You may not know how hard it is to visit Antarctica, but it is not like traveling to Europe or South America. And as one of the seven continents that I have made it a goal to visit in my lifetime, Antarctica holds a special place in my heart. In Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world, I had a dream of the mysterious continent. It was one of the most peaceful scenes I can recall- the stillness at the end of the world. I’ve asked Amee to take as many pictures as she can while she is there in hopes that one of her pictures might recapture this dream for me.

Will I make it to Antarctica someday? Should Time continue to be my friend, I imagine so. Will I take to the wind and wisp myself around the world? I cannot decide right now. What I do know is that we are midway through our cruise and Time is both an ally and an enemy to many of us. Many of the crewmembers have family back at port that they are anxious to see. Many have already been at sea for some 250 out of the past 365 days and just want a break from life at sea. Still others have plans of traveling the mainland and visiting friends and familiar places. Time seems an enemy to some- it keeps them from the things they have come to love the most. But I imagine they all have hearts for the sea- for what else could bring them out here but a love of the ocean, joy in the sunsets, and some sense of satisfaction that what they are doing here is what they are supposed to be doing with their lives.

We scientists are but transient visitors. We invade the space and privacy of those who make the Sette their home for two-thirds of the year. We often get in the way, or ask stupid questions, and sometimes even make faulty inferences based on our limited knowledge of life at sea. But we are doing our best to become family out here. And even if it seems that there might be conflict or drama evolving, we all recognize the need to

remedy the problem immediately. My friends out here are *good* friends. We have to be. On July 4th we might become strangers again. That is the reality of life on shore. But life on the ship is different, and friends are either the easiest or the most difficult to come by.

I know that I said I would be observing the dynamics of individuals more than I have been. But it seems sometimes this task is a bit too much at times. And on the other end, the science of the ship is becoming routine. We rotate jobs each day, and the catch rate is remaining just about on par of what it has been in the past. We have not had any extraordinary days in terms of how our catch went. But as I have already mentioned, Time is doing some peculiar things to us out here- rather, Time is giving us the opportunity to do some peculiar things. Some fuses are growing shorter. Some fuses are remaining the same. No fuses seem to be growing longer. I sometimes feel unwelcome for I am a bit too honest about some things I have noticed. I have learned in life to be wary of passing judgment and I avoid doing this as much as possible. Still I haven't figured out how to walk on water yet, unless I'm pulled behind a ski boat, and I know that I am probably contributing equally to the shortening of fuses as anyone else out here. We have fifteen more days at sea- as many left as we have put in already- and I wonder how they will go. Will we grow into better friends? Or will we tear away from each other and come in contact only when we have to? As the proverbial "They" say, "only Time will tell."

Back to the classroom for a minute (I just gave myself the shivers in mentioning the word "classroom" while still early into my summer vacation!). The Hawaiian Islands are the result of what geologists call a "hot spot," Essentially this is a pool of magma under the earth's crust that is waiting to rise up wherever it can due to density differences between materials. Every now and then a crack will form in the crust, and this pool of magma is able to seep out.

To complicate matters, the Earth's tectonic plates are geologically active, meaning that they are continuously moving in one direction or another. For instance, the Pacific plate, cradling the Pacific Ocean, is moving generally in the Northwest direction. Once upon a time, some millions of years ago, a hole opened up in the Pacific plate. As a result, this hot spot magma flowed through the crust and formed a series of undersea volcanoes. Over time the volcanoes built up and up and up until they broke the surface of the ocean. At this point we would call the volcano, and the exposed land around the volcano, an island.

Because the Pacific Plate is moving northwest and the hot spot remains stationary underneath the crust, as the Pacific Plate moves, a series of volcanoes form over the hot spot. Over time these volcanoes form what geologists call "island arcs." In the case of the Hawaiian Islands, those islands farthest from the hot spot are the ones farthest northwest. The newer islands are closer to the hot spot, which is currently located near the Big Island, or Hawaii. I say "near" because there is a new island in the making that is slightly southeast from Hawaii. However, the island of Hawaii is still very active.

Necker Island is one of the older volcanic islands, believed to at one point been made up of two cone volcanoes. What has happened to Necker Island over time is that its weight has actually pushed the island further and further below sea level. When I first arrived I was very surprised to find that Necker Island was more of a “rock” than an “island.” But looking at nautical charts of the depths around Necker Island, where we have been doing all of our lobster trapping, it is very easy to see the borders of what used to be a rather large island. We are dropping traps in about 15 fathoms of water (15 times 6 feet), and almost immediately to the other side of the ship where we drop traps the water drops down in some cases to about 1,365 fathoms (1,365 times 6 feet)! I wish that I could attach a topographic map of the island and the waters around the island, but without Internet on the ship it is hard to find.

Eventually Necker Island will do what the islands to the northwest are doing, and it will completely sink down into the sea. When this happens it will be called a “seamount” and will be subject to erosion by the oceans currents. Literally, mountains are tumbling to the sea. Kind of cool huh!