

"Amazing Grace. . .

How sweet the sound . . . that saved a wretch like me,
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see."

As the ship pulled up at the dock at St. Petersburg, Russia, near Leningrad, my lifelong dream of setting foot on Russian soil was about to be realized. A rainy, overcast grey line of buildings, but a welcoming band of 6 musicians in (was it military) navy blue uniforms similar to the Salvation Army bands in America greeted us blasting out THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER, AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL, and AMAZING GRACE!!!

Imagine! Imagine that!

Tears sprang to my eyes that the load of fear and burden of nuclear holocaust has ameliorated. Dear Saint Gorbachev saw the futility of the Cold War with America. And here we are, tourists on a cruise ship in August, 1994, waving and clapping.

"Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come,"

Yes. Most of the passengers on the ship are senior citizens. We remember the second World War; our husbands were in it. We had fifty years of Red-baiting hysteria and of both countries pouring their precious resources into ever more hideous engines of destruction.

And now the tiny band at the landing is tootling DIXIE!

I'm glad I lived to experience this with my grandchildren. Humanity, ugly and mean and fractious, still has moments of Grace, and Good-ness.

Perhaps I am touched because my sweet mother May gave me the middle name of Grace. I didn't know until I was grown what the word connotes.

I wonder who arranged for this cheerful ceremony of reconciliation at the arrival of our cruise ship RENAISSANCE. (nice symbolism) Public Relations? the Tour Director? Is it a custom? Kathryn ran to put a dollar bill in the cardboard box at their feet in appreciation. No one else seemed to notice it. Merci, Kathryn.

I looked up the word grace in our venerable Webster's Unabridged dictionary, circa 1934, carefully excised the page to duplicate it, then scotch-taped it back into the huge tome.