

How one sea glass collector can make a difference!

by Dick Conklin

Delray Beach, Florida is a seaside town with a wide beach made for walking, jogging and collecting sea glass. Unfortunately, during the 1990s it had also become a dumping ground for cruise lines.

I found sea glass scattered among piles of garbage on the beach every morning. Much of the litter floated ashore with gobs of sticky "beach tar" from polluting vessels. It wasn't the kind of refuse beachgoers leave behind – cocktail glasses, cigarette lighters and hundreds of shampoo bottles bearing the names of big cruise ships that used nearby ports. Most notable was the imprint of Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines.

I talked to the city's Parks and Recreation Director, who hadn't given the beach pollution much thought. Every morning his crew would cart away the garbage, just as they had for years. Once a year local volunteers would participate in Beach Cleanup Day, bagging tons of refuse, but a few days later the garbage would be back. But since nobody was complaining, the Parks & Recreation guy advised me to just forget about it.

Taking action

I called Royal Caribbean at their Miami headquarters and got a chilly reception. I was told all of their cruise ships bagged their own garbage, which was then transported to landfills. They assured me that somehow the garbage must have been finding its way from those landfills into the ocean! I started writing letters to the local media, urging the public to get involved.

One day I received a call from Royal Caribbean's law firm. I was warned to cease and desist – "You have no idea of what you are getting yourself into!"

Next I joined an Internet forum for cruise travelers and asked for their help in reporting instances of cruise ship dumping. One couple, recently back from a cruise, said they had videotaped crew members late at night dumping garbage overboard. They asked us what to do with the evidence.

After an online search, I contacted the Center for Marine Conservation.

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Shampoo bottles and other refuse from cruise ships found scattered along Delray Beach, Florida.

A few weeks later, staffers from their Florida office asked to borrow my growing collection of cruise ship garbage. They were enroute to a convention of cruise operators and wanted to graphically call attention to the problem of dumping.

A powerful impact

Later I learned that my souvenir collection had made quite an impression when it was put on display for the cruise line executives. Within a week, the daily pileup of ocean borne trash on Delray Beach was noticeably reduced.

A year later, newspaper headlines reported that my Internet friend, who had videotaped the late night dumping by Princess Cruises, had won a class action lawsuit for a half million dollars – and he got to keep half of it!

Today the efforts of a very small group of whistleblowers – a vacationing videotaper, the Center for Marine Conservation, and a lone sea glass collector – continue to make a positive impact on the appearance of Delray Beach. I can think of only one small drawback – with the daily supply of seaborne garbage cut off, the sea glass is also gone. A small price to pay for a cleaner ocean and shoreline!

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Videotape pays off in ship's dumping

By WILLIAM E. GIBSON
Washington Bureau Chief

WASHINGTON — "Al," a cruise line passenger who videotaped crew members dumping garbage into the ocean, was lionized by a subcommittee on Tuesday. The unidentified, otherwise unidentifiable witness on Tuesday testified at a hearing of the House Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Navigation. Members peered at television screens depicting Al's plastic dark videotape bags dropped one by one in 1991 from the Regal love boat. Dumping garbage overboard, said the subcommittee's Chairman Billy

\$250,000 to Al and his wife, who have asked to remain anonymous.

More citizens should be as vigilant as Al was to help curb cruise-ship pollution, panel members said.

The videotape has become a rallying point for ocean cleanup. Rear Admiral Arthur Henn told the panel on Tuesday the Coast Guard would be quicker to investigate evidence of dumping at sea.

John Estes, president of the International Council of Cruise Lines, vowed that cruise ships would clamp down on dumping at sea.

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