



The journey of a lifetime

Alumna retraces Capt. Cook's 1771-1768 journey

Melissa Smisko ('95) took the journey of a lifetime last summer. And the History Channel documented it all.

Smisko, who works at Marriot International's corporate headquarters, was selected to appear in the History Channel documentary *The Ship*, which aired in October. She applied for the documentary in April 2001, after her friend saw an Internet advertisement and shared it with her.

To land the dream job, Smisko had to write an essay, give a phone interview and fly to New York for an in-person interview. In June, she found out she was accepted and flew to Australia in August to start filming.

The documentary, a six-hour, three-part miniseries, re-enacts the historic 18th-century, maiden voyage of Capt. James Cook aboard his ship, the *Endeavour*. Cook's voyage lasted from 1768-1771, and his goal was to observe the Transit of Venus and find the "southern continent." Cook and his crew successfully observed transit at Tahiti and mapped New Zealand, discovered its Southern Island and discovered and mapped the eastern coast of Australia.

The *Ship* crew set sail from Cairnes, Australia, on Aug. 25, 2001, and docked six weeks later, Oct. 6, 2001, in Bali, Indonesia. Taking almost exactly the same course as Cook, the crew retraced one of the most ambitious and dangerous journeys of history. The miniseries chronicles two adventures - one from the 18th century that was recorded with quill and ink, the other from the 21st century recorded on digital video.

The *Ship*'s participants, who ranged in age from 20 to 50, are from different backgrounds and a wide range of occupations, including historians, medics, navigators, scientists and sailors. In addition to the United States, the seafarers hailed from England, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. The group also included a 15-man crew of experienced sailors.

"The majority of what made the trip great was the people," says Smisko. "But it was also amazing to be at sea in such a beautiful part of the world."

In the first part of the miniseries, *Secret Orders/Grief on the Reef*, viewers meet the sailor-actors as they prepare to board the ship. However, problems arise when the ship crashes in the uncharted, unexplored waters of the Barrier Reef. The seafarers spend months exploring and repairing the ship while trapped inside the reef.

While filming *Escape to Nowhere/News from Home*, the second part of the series, one of the crew comes down with a mysterious illness. He is sent to the hospital after a dramatic sea rescue, and the crew sails to Possession Island. All is well until news of the Sept. 11 attacks reach the crew. Crew members did not see any news footage of the September attacks until a month later when they landed in Bali.

"It was nerve wracking to not fully understand what was going on at home," says Smisko. "Thankfully, of the five Americans onboard, we didn't have any close family members or friends who were lost."

During the last part of the miniseries, *Still Waters/Plague of the Sea*, the crew lands on the exotic island of Savu for some island festivities. As a result of anti-American riots in Jakarta, the crew decided to change plans and make their final destination Bali.

Smisko says she loved the experience and now really appreciates the luxuries she has at home. "I learned a lot about sailing, got to meet many amazing people and learned a lot about myself as well," she says. "But it wasn't easy to go without showers, decent food and lack of sleep."

The Ship miniseries aired in October. Learn more at www.HistoryChannel.com.

Story by Janelle DiOrio ('03)