

Kids "Cruise" Around the World with * Lisa & Friends *

"Today we're going to go on a cruise." With that announcement it was "bon voyage" for the kids gathered at Bellingham Library for one of the summer-reading programs as Lisa Manning of * Lisa & Friends * prepared to embark.

The audience was in experienced hands since Lisa once spent a year and a half performing on a cruise ship without returning home during that time; she in fact worked on cruise ships, including the QE2, and in hotel chains for 12 years.

Donning her captain's hat and with the recorded sound of a ship's horn and then music, she sang "Won't You Let Me Take You on a Sea Cruise?" and "Somewhere Beyond the Sea."

At the first port of call she supplied all of the kids with maracas; then with their accompaniment and her recorded music—and holding the appropriate puppet—she sang the Chiquita Banana song, a commercial from half a century or so ago that some of you may still remember and may even be able to sing. After singing "Yellow Bird" she announced the next port of call—Jamaica.

"Have you ever heard of that island?" she asked. She spoke of the lovely beaches and flowers there and then sang "Jamaica Farewell"; to give the kids some activity to keep them involved and alert, she had them line up to do the limbo, which they seemed more than eager to do (photo below).

The next stop on the imaginary cruise was Puerto Rico. Using a monkey puppet, Lisa sang "Day-o, Day-o." As she sang "La Paloma Blanca" ("White Bird"), she danced among the audience flapping the wings of a white gull-like puppet.



Lisa Manning with Puff the Magic Dragon

Then it was through the Panama Canal and on to Mexico, where she now distributed sombreros to the kids and had them dance as she sang "South of the Border" and "La Bamba."

At Acapulco she told the kids about the excellent swimmers who dive off the cliffs there and then sang "Under the Sea" from *The Little Mermaid*.

Throwing several large plastic balls and soft-sculpture fish and other sea creatures out to the kids, she encouraged them to toss these around—and expend some pent-up energy at the same time.

Then, holding Gus, a puppet dressed like a Mexican, she danced and took him among the kids while singing "Spanish Eyes."

A "special" port of call was a place that does not exist except in the imagination of a generation of people who remember hearing Peter, Paul, and Mary sing about the Land of Honalee in "Puff, the Magic Dragon." Lisa sang the song with help from a dragon puppet.

Since the last stop on the cruise was Hawaii, she had four girls don hula skirts. Turning on a bubble machine that pumped out a steady stream of hundreds of small bubbles, she asked all of the kids to dance and play in the bubbles; they needed no encouragement, since kids and bubbles go together like fish and water.

celebrated by a march around the room with the kids wearing caps with a flag décor or carrying small flags and singing "God Bless America," after which it was lollipops for all.

Music has been an important part of Lisa Manning's life since she was a child. "I was a shy child," she says, "and I guess I had more confidence singing than talking. I used to think people should have a choice between speaking or singing a conversation." Singing a conversation? Isn't that exactly what they do in opera? So it isn't so far-fetched.

Lisa has an illustrious background. A graduate of Professional Children's School and American Musical and Dramatic Academy, she also studied acting with none other than Richard Burton's stepfather, Philip Burton. And that's just the beginning of her many associations with celebrities, people like Victor Borge, Florence Henderson, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Rosemary Clooney, and Richard Rogers, among others.

With her "Friends," her 35 puppets, she performs at many kinds of venues, for both children and adults—places such as corporation parties, libraries, nursing homes, retirement communities, churches, schools, civic organizations, and concerts in the park. Her versatility and energy are such that a program director in Framingham said of her, "She's a party in a box ready to explode." That her performances contain educational nuggets only adds to their value and desirability, especially for schools and libraries.

Manning has a website at www.lisamanning.com.

story & photos by Florence Ames, Bulletin Editor

