

*Excerpt from Chapter I: Passages Through Pakistan*

CHAPTER I  
OCEAN VOYAGES

*"She watched the gap between ship and shore grow to a huge gulf. Perhaps this was a little like dying, the departed no longer visible to the others, yet both still existed, only in different worlds"*

*Susan Wiggs, The Charm School*

I was conceived, I am told, on the Queen Mary. That once-majestic ship is now retired, forever docked in the blue-green waters of the Pacific near Los Angeles. In May of 1959 my parents were aboard the Queen Mary with their three older children – all boys. The four-week journey from Karachi to New York had its share of adventures. From my present vantage point, my conception is the most notable of them. I began in a tiny compartment, on a massive ship that rocked on the ocean waves.

Prior to World War II, the Queen Mary was known for her elegance. Originally labelled Job #534, she "captured hearts on both sides of the Atlantic." On her maiden voyage in 1936 she sailed from Southampton to Cherbourg and then across the Atlantic to the New York Harbor. She was massive, with dining halls, ballrooms, swimming pools, and even a squash court. The Queen proudly took the wealthy back and forth between countries and continents.

Then war came. During World War II the Queen Mary was put to utilitarian use as a troop transport. Stripped of the opulence that had made her so popular and painted a camouflage grey, she was fast and stealthy. A postwar rehabilitation brought the Queen back to the seas as a commercial ocean liner, and for over twenty years she continued her journeys back and forth across the seas. Along with the wealthy, she now took missionaries to their destinations far from the comfort of their homes in the Western Hemisphere.

When I was seven years old, the Queen Mary made her final voyage, docking in Long Beach. A ten-year-old photograph shows my three oldest children in Southern California with the great liner in the background. My husband sent the photo to my parents with a note. "If it hadn't been for you, these three wouldn't be here."

My family had begun the journey at Karachi Harbor, embarking on a much-needed furlough. Pakistan had become their adopted home seven years before, and during that time they had only been back to the United States once. Until the mid 1960s, my parents always traveled by ship. Air travel was expensive, reserved for the wealthy; sea travel was more economical. There was something wonderful about those six-week journeys, Mom once remarked, wistfully. They provided time and space to

acclimate oneself, to adapt while slowly moving away from one country and, equally slowly, entering another. It was a floating world between two worlds, without expectation from or connection to either. Long days and nights alternated in slow rhythm, allowing my parents to rest and rejuvenate before arriving at the bustling harbor in Ellis Island.

My parents traveled during the golden years of the Queen Mary. They offered, I imagine, a stark contrast to their fellow passengers. Mom began her first book, *Jars of Clay*, with an anecdote from their first voyage to Pakistan in 1954. Listening to their shortwave radio one evening, they heard a familiar voice: "I take missionaries out and bring monkeys back, and I don't know which is worse!" It was the captain of the ship. As missionaries with a growing family, they were worlds apart from this captain and from the luxury passengers who later traveled with them on the Queen Mary. Everyone knew it.

My passage through Pakistan began here, in an elegant boat on a vast ocean, with long days at sea, and nights spread with stars in an expansive sky. I wish I could travel in time to witness the journey. During those long days and nights at sea, life happened. I happened. And somehow that was no accident.