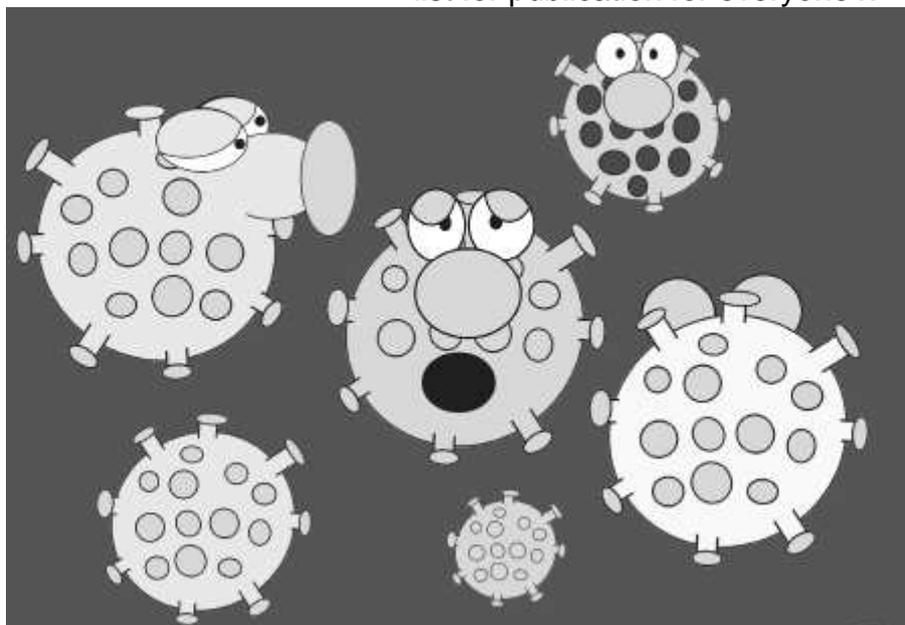


Welcome to Our November 2013 Newsletter



A Note from Maxine: Sorry I've been a bit preoccupied this month. I am writing this in Blackburn Hospital as my grandson has been here since the 4th November and there's no sign of him going home yet. This just lead to think how many of us that have medication written down that a paramedic could find not just in our home but if we were out and about. I would love to hear your thoughts on that and what you have found to be the best way of informing people. Next edition I will try to sort out a deadline date list for publication for everyone x



Hey guys, as long as those medics believe that CFS/ME is a psychiatric disease we can carry on partying!

With thanks to Invest in ME (www.investinme.org) for their kind permission to reprint this cartoon from the calendar available to download from their website.

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DISCLAIMER: Anything expressed within this newsletter may not necessarily represent the views of the editor, the Committee, nor the Bury/Bolton ME/CFS Support Group. Any products, treatments, or therapies featured are for information only and their inclusion should not be considered an endorsement.

Dates For Your Diary

Longsight Meetings Our main meetings, often with guest speakers, are held at Longsight Methodist Church, Longsight Lane. Harwood, Bolton, BL2 3HX, on the third Thursday of each month from 7.30pm until 9pm (except in April, August and December). There is a car park and blue badge parking on the street and the building is wheelchair accessible. Entrance is £1. Tea, decaf coffee, water, biscuits, etc provided. Gluten/dairy free also catered for. Any questions, please call Caroline on 01204 525955, or email caroline@mesupportgroup.co.uk.

Thursday November 21st 7:30pm: Pre-Xmas Supper where we all bring food to share. Gluten and dairy free always well catered for and we always come away stuffed and with doggy bags. Alex will be selling her cards along with gift bags & gift boxes. So please go and support her and don't forget it also helping the group. Zara Irani, one of our members has kindly donated a "free from" Christmas cake again, for us to raffle off at the social evening. It will be free from wheat, dairy and no added sugar. If you have any more allergies/intolerances, she will do her best to cater for you! Raffle tickets available on the night for £1 each, or in advance. Please email alex@mesupportgroup.co.uk or phone 0161 761 5493 for details. Thank you for your support and to Zara for the kind donation of the cake!

There is no meeting in December.

Radcliffe Socials: We meet informally on the first Wednesday of each month, our next will be on **Wednesday 4th December** at **2pm**, at **The Sparking Clog, Radcliffe Moor Road, Radcliffe, M26 3WY**. It has plenty of parking, good accessibility, comfortable seating and is relatively quiet. They serve very tempting chips that we just can't resist! For anyone who does fancy a snack, these start at just £1.50, with main courses from £3.50. We usually meet at the oval table next to the bar.

Prestwich Socials: We meet informally on the second Wednesday of each month, our next will be on **Wednesday 11th December** at **2pm**, at **The Orange Tree, Fairfax Road, Prestwich, M25 1AS**. Everyone and their carers are welcome and we'll put a newsletter on the table so you can find us.

Yoga Classes: Are **3:00pm-4:15pm on Tuesdays** at the **Jubilee Centre, Darley Street (off Eskrick St), Bolton, BL1 3DX**. Designed to cater for the average ME sufferer, classes are free and yoga mats are provided. Please wear loose, comfortable clothing. Contact Olivia on 07746 197511, or olivia@oliviayoga.co.uk for more information. **Our yoga classes are currently being funded by Comic Relief and The Co-operative Membership Community Fund.**

Neuro Support Groups: These groups, run by Greater Manchester Neurological Alliance, provide information, advice and support for people with any type of neurological condition and/or their carers. Call 0161 743 3701 or visit www.gmneuro.org.uk for information about meeting times and locations.

If you are thinking of attending any of our socials, whether you are a new member or a member who hasn't been able to attend for a while, please remember that you can bring along your carer or a friend. We don't bite, but we understand that meeting new people or if you have been house bound for a while, it can be quite daunting going out by yourself and we look forward to seeing you.

PLEASE DO NOT WEAR STRONGLY SCENTED TOILETRIES WHEN YOU ATTEND OUR MEETINGS, AS SOME MEMBERS ARE VERY SENSITIVE TO THESE PRODUCTS, THANK-YOU.



Supported by

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Reminders

Social Media. Please follow us on twitter on: @BBMECFS. Also our Facebook page just for members is www.facebook.com/groups/buryboltonmecfs/ Don't forget our own web page <http://www.mesupportgroup.co.uk/>

Volunteers needed for: Writing up an overview of what speakers said at the meetings, there is a tape recorder to help. A short summary is fine with highlights of important bits. Someone still needs to write this please and we really struggle on the night to do this.

Newsletter Articles: Please carry on sending us anything you would like to share with the rest of the group, whether it is a whole page, or just a few lines, it all counts! It could be recipes, tips, experiences, book reviews, etc. Please send your contributions to: maxine@mesupportgroup.co.uk or if you are unable to email, post to Maxine Fairhurst, 33 Heath Avenue, Sumarseat, Bury, BL0 9NU

Equipment to Borrow: We have a wheelchair and two electric mobility scooters (small enough to fit in car boot for days out or holidays). If you wish to borrow any of these, please phone Pam on 01204 793 846.

Amazon: The group gets 5% commission when you shop at www.amazon.co.uk, but only if you follow the link from our own website www.mesupportgroup.co.uk Please remember this for your Xmas shopping!!

Radar keys: We have Radar disabled toilet keys available at cost (£2.35, plus 50p if posted, or you can pick up at our Harwood meetings). Small headed or large headed (for those with dexterity problems). Contact Caroline on 01204 525 955 or email caroline@mesupportgroup.co.uk

Helpful GP's. Don't forget, we have a list of helpful GP's! There are only 13 on it at the moment, but if you have a sympathetic or helpful GP, please let us know, as people ask us for one in their area all the time. 01204 525 955, caroline@mesupportgroup.co.uk

Bury/Bolton ME/CFS Support Group Meeting **October 2013**

Thanks to all who came to our October meeting. Unfortunately, Bolton Healthwatch had to cancel, so in their place, we had a social evening, with Alex selling her cards and Karen signing copies of her book as well. Many thanks to those who came out, it was nice to meet some new members. We look forward to hopefully seeing some of you at the November meeting for our always enjoyable pre-Xmas bring and share supper!

Problems with energy production in ME sufferers. **By Pam Turner**

A simple explanation of why ME sufferers are not just tired but exhausted. The human body is made up of millions of cells and within each cell is a " power pack" i.e. the mitochondria. This unit takes the nutrients and oxygen from the blood stream and transforms them into energy.

In patients with ME this power pack does not function properly and so, much less energy is produced.

The body needs energy for autonomic functions such as heart beat, digestion, respiration, and the brain needs masses of energy for its complex functioning; therefore there is less energy available for physical activity, which becomes more and more difficult if pushed beyond the available energy levels produced. Because there is no energy the muscles then start to produce lactic acid, which is painful.

Motability Support if you lose DLA:

Motability Scheme to provide one-off transitional support to customers who, following their initial reassessment by Government for the new PIP benefit, lose their eligibility to remain on the Motability Scheme. Lord Sterling has released a statement detailing the support on offer if this happens.

In April 2013, the Government introduced a new benefit - Personal Independence Payment (PIP) - which will gradually replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for disabled people aged between 16 and 64. Motability acknowledges that there are positive aspects of PIP compared to DLA in the longer term. However, over the last two years, the Governors of Motability have considered how PIP will affect Motability Scheme customers and, in particular, the degree to which we can assist those customers who lose their eligibility to remain on the scheme when they are first reassessed for the new benefit.

Between October 2013 and 2018, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will reassess some two million disabled people aged between 16 and 64, who currently receive DLA, for the new PIP benefit. This reassessment process will include approximately 360,000 of the 620,000 disabled people who currently lease a vehicle through the Motability Scheme. Because PIP is a new benefit with different criteria to DLA, some disabled people may not qualify for mobility support under PIP or may do so at a lower level than they had under DLA. As a consequence, they will no longer be eligible to use the Motability Scheme.

Since its inception over 35 years ago, the standard of service and support provided by the Scheme has always reflected the very special needs of our customers. Some two years ago when the Government initially proposed the adoption of PIP, we decided that we wanted to help those customers who can no longer use the scheme to retain their mobility outside of it. Therefore, over the next five years as PIP is introduced, the Motability Scheme plans to provide a one-off transitional package of support and advice regarding alternative mobility arrangements to these former customers.

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is a Government benefit to help with the extra costs arising from disability. Once in receipt of the Higher Rate Mobility Component of DLA, a disabled person is eligible to join the Motability Scheme. It is entirely up to the recipient whether they wish to spend their allowance joining the Motability scheme or in some other way. Once an eligible disabled person decides to join the Motability Scheme, they ask the DWP to pay the Higher Rate Mobility Component of their DLA directly to Motability Operations (who operate the scheme under contract to Motability) irrevocably for the duration of their lease agreement. At the end of the lease, which is usually three years, the customer returns the car for resale by Motability Operations.

However, we cannot extend the Scheme to disabled people not in receipt of the Higher Rate Mobility Component of DLA. For more than 35 years, the availability of the mobility allowance from Government (most recently, the Higher Rate Mobility Component of DLA) has provided a sound financial basis for the Scheme and this linkage remains fundamental to the Scheme's viability.

Introduction of Personal Independence Payment (PIP):

The Motability Scheme will work with PIP in exactly the same way as it does with DLA; disabled people who receive the Enhanced Rate of the Mobility Component of PIP will be eligible to use the Motability scheme, if they choose to do so, in the same way as people who receive the Higher Rate Mobility Component of DLA.

Today, the Motability scheme supports over 620,000 disabled people and their families across the United Kingdom, for whom an affordable and suitable vehicle provides levels of freedom and independence that would otherwise be beyond their reach. However, PIP is a new benefit with different eligibility criteria to DLA. As the DWP reassesses current DLA recipients aged between 16 and 64 for PIP, those who are Motability Scheme customers may qualify for the Enhanced Rate of the Mobility Component of PIP, in which case they should enjoy a seamless service as they move from DLA to PIP. Some customers, however, may not qualify for mobility support under PIP or may do so at a lower level than they had under DLA and, as a consequence, they cannot continue to lease a vehicle from the Scheme. Although they had properly claimed and received DLA, these changes are the result of a new benefit being introduced by the Government with different eligibility criteria.

As a consequence, some disabled people may have enjoyed the benefits of the Motability scheme for many years but find that they can no longer use it as they are no longer in receipt of the relevant mobility component of DLA or PIP. While we cannot replicate the benefits of the Motability scheme for them on an on-going basis, because we have a long history of offering a unique service to disabled people, we aim to provide a one-off package of support and advice to help such customers through this difficult transition.

One-off transitional support for customers who lose eligibility to remain on the Motability Scheme:

Since 2010, Motability has maintained a close dialogue with DWP as they developed their plans for the introduction of PIP through a number of public consultations. Over the last two years, Motability has also consulted disability organisations including Disability Rights UK, Disabled Motoring UK and groups representing customers with specific impairments, as well as undertaking considerable research with our own customers, to discuss what help would be most useful for those customers who are no longer eligible to use the Scheme. We are very grateful to all of the organisations and individuals who have helped us in developing and prioritising proposals for how we support these customers.

In order to ensure that the Motability Scheme is sustainable for the long term to continue to help the disabled community for at least another 35 years, we have the responsibility to identify risks, long term as well as short term, especially in these uncertain times. Taking account of these considerations as well as of our customers' needs, Motability and Motability Operations have concluded that the following support can be provided to customers leaving the Car Scheme as a result of a PIP reassessment:

- DWP has already announced that they will allow DLA payments to continue for four weeks after they make their decision regarding PIP. In addition to this, the scheme will allow customers to retain their vehicle for up to a further 3 weeks from the date the DLA payments end. The customer will therefore be able to retain their vehicle for close to two months after the DWP decision is made.

Customers will need to return the car to the dealership in good condition and within the agreed timeframe in order to qualify for the following transitional support:

- For customers who entered into their first lease agreement with the Scheme before January 2013 and therefore could not have been aware of PIP and the associated risks when they joined (the vast majority of customers), we will provide transitional support of £2,000. For many customers, this will enable them to continue to have mobility by purchasing a used car.
- For customers who entered into their first lease agreement with the Scheme with an awareness of PIP being introduced and of the risk that they could lose eligibility following a future PIP reassessment i.e. after January 2013 and up to December 2013, we will nonetheless provide transitional support of £1,000.

We will review these levels of transitional support during 2015 to take account of economic conditions and of any possible changes the Government may be making to PIP at that time.

- For customers who have made an Advance Payment (an additional upfront payment to lease a larger or more complex vehicle on the Scheme), the Scheme will continue to refund any Advance Payment on a pro-rata basis. No further costs will be applied to customers whose leases end early as a result of a PIP reassessment.
- We will work with our scheme suppliers, including RSA and RAC, to provide general information on motoring, insurance and other motoring services outside of the scheme. This will include information, for example, on buying a new or used car, and arranging insurance and other services such as breakdown cover. In particular, we are working with a leading UK insurance broker who will offer insurance quotes to former scheme customers that will recognise their no-claims history on the scheme. We are also working with manufacturers and dealers to ensure that they are aware of the issues faced by these customers and are able to discuss possible alternatives to maintain their mobility once they have left the scheme.
- The scheme will offer customers an opportunity to purchase their vehicle following the end of the lease. The payments that they would otherwise have received upon returning the vehicle can be directed towards the purchase price.
- We will work with customers who have wheelchair accessible vehicles on the scheme on a case by case basis to understand and assist with their future mobility arrangements including, where appropriate, enabling them to retain their current vehicle.
- For customers with adaptations, we will help them with the costs of fitting the same adaptations to a non-scheme vehicle.

The Motability scheme will also provide a package of support and advice to customers currently leasing a scooter or powered wheelchair, with the objective of allowing them to retain their current product wherever possible.

As the DWP plans to begin reassessments of existing DLA recipients in October 2013 and each reassessment will take several months to complete, we do not expect any scheme customers to become eligible for this support until early 2014. We will monitor customers' feedback on the support and advice we provide and we may make changes to it based on experience. We will also formally review all aspects of our support package in Autumn 2015, to take account of economic circumstances and any possible changes the Government may be making to PIP at that time.

In the years to come, the Motability scheme will receive applications from recipients of PIP as well as from recipients of DLA and we will continue to meet the needs of disabled people, as we have done since 1977. Lord Sterling. Chairman, Motability Board of Governors. September 2013

Nom de Plume.

Recently, there have been a number of significant events to celebrate. Firstly, my second wedding anniversary, followed by my birthday and now, my column.

This is my 12th offering and like any other anniversary it too serves as an opportunity to reflect upon and consider how best to plot the pathway ahead.

With every deadline met, I have learnt to expect my feelings about each column's topic, to be as varied as its content!

It was around August that I considered giving up. Like you, I too suffer at the hand of an incapacitating condition. Over many years, my illness(es) have eroded so much of me away.

The pursuit to retain what remains of me, more often than not seems futile. Chronic illness does that, within its very nature it is the power to undermine in the most pervasive of ways. A heavy blow indeed and one continually struck upon both the individual and their supporting circle!

Looking back to August, perhaps I am, even now, too close to appreciate why I felt as unconfident as I did. I doubt I was any less physically or emotionally afflicted than I am now. At any rate, the column happened to be under discussion and quite by chance, I received some unexpected feedback from a subscriber. I hadn't been looking for it, so was surprised to receive it. Apart from the kind words afforded, the event helped to qualify some thoughts I had been quietly mulling over for a number of months.

Issues relating to, who I am writing for and what kind of writer I hope to develop into began to concern me. These fundamental questions are ones I don't intend to answer here, essentially because I don't have the answers yet. But the feedback helped me to engage with these notions in clearer way!

These comments were not necessarily meant for me to hear first hand, but the positive words enveloped within me, and this enabled me to feel the full force of what sharing can really do. At a very basic level, sharing informs us, it creates connections, be they positive, negative or indifferent!

Whether it be through words, flavours, gestures or images, the means of how we adhere to one another has power. And so in the spirit of sharing, I offer an adjunct to this monthly offering, in the form of a blog. The website address is:

[www.sketchesforanassumedname.tumblr.com!](http://www.sketchesforanassumedname.tumblr.com)

In its very early formation, I already see it as a way of you potentially igniting me just as much as I hope to do for you! From Christmas past to Christmas present. Now just weeks away the inevitable concern with what I shall be offering on our dining table is fully upon me. Traditionalists will have had their fruit steeped in liquor from August onwards, and although that's when I began to prepare mine this time round, there have been occasions when I have been far too weak to contemplate such an endeavour.

Times when one is fatigued can provide an impetus to experiment- the aim being to find a means of playing a kind of culinary catch up. So for those in need, here is my tip on how to trick time so you too may bake the most moist Christmas Cake you care to share!

Ingredients:

- 400g of Organic unsweetened Jumbo Sultanas
- 400g of Organic Unsweetened Jumbo Raisins
- 200g of Organic Unsweetened Dried cherries
- 25g of zest from an unwaxed organic Orange
- 25g of zest from an unwaxed organic Lemon
- 2 Tablespoons of Organic (preferably Homemade) marmalade
- 2 Tablespoons of freshly ground Cinnamon
- 2 Tablespoons of Green Cardamom powder
- 1 teaspoon of (preferably) smoked salt
- Enough Dark rum to cover all the ingredients or if preferred organic Orange juice!

Method:

While heating the rum or orange juice until almost at boiling point, combine and decant all the dried fruit and marmalade into a large lidded Tupperware container. Add to this the zest of each citrus fruit and the freshly ground spices and smoked salt.

Once the rum's aroma has begun to permeate the kitchen and is showing signs of reaching boiling point, remove the liquor from the heat.

Pour it immediately over all of the prepared ingredients. Stir until all the ingredients have been evenly distributed and the fruit sits completely submerged in fluid. Once all has returned to room temperature, fix the lid onto the Tupperware box, and store your mix somewhere it will remain undisturbed.

From time to time, when passing, remove the lid, stir. Should you find the rum completely absorbed within the flesh of the fruit, add a little more.

Now replacing the lid and return the mix back to its sedentary state. This can be done as late as days before Christmas.

Next month, we bake!

The Road is Long, With Many a Winding Turn.

This is a personal story and is not a recommendation to take up any of the treatments listed below. It's been written so you can read about one person's experience. If you want to pen a reply, or write your own article for another edition, please get in touch with Andrew on 07933 922 375 or andmk1@gmail.com

I've had CFS/ME for 10 years and I've tried so many treatments but without any lasting success. I'm very fortunate to be employed, and I also have a supportive family. At the end of last year, with the ominous 10 year anniversary looming, I decided to really try harder to make a recovery. I didn't want to live just managing the symptoms, and wanted to make more effort at recovering.

So I started to see someone who started me off with a hair mineral analysis test. The day I received the results was excellent as it showed I was very low on lots of essential minerals. It seemed all I had to do was take the supplements, sit back and get better. Unfortunately about 6 months later, I was feeling very rough and in a worse position than before. I was told I could feel worse before I felt better, but this "low" period was far too long for me to take, and I had to stop the diet and the supplements.

In July I went on holiday to Turkey and had already heard about the good quality of their dentistry, but at lower prices than the UK. As I had 7 amalgam fillings, the suggestion was that I could be poisoned by Mercury leaking from the fillings into my system. So before I flew, I asked some locals and expats living in the area (on Facebook) to recommend a dentist, and I went to see him on day 1. Immediately he said I'd need 4 visits to do the work and he could start immediately. So whilst my wife went to the market, I had my first 2 fillings out. By the end of the week I was amalgam free and was feeling better already. However, by the end of the second week of the holiday I was already relapsing and knew I had more to do to expel the Mercury that was already in my system.

The person who organised the hair mineral analysis then referred me to a specialist nutritionist and person who specialises in psychological treatments for CFS/ME patients. The cost is high in £s, but if it works it will be worth every penny. I've just started seeing both of them and I feel both are having a positive impact. I'm also off work at the moment so I have more time to do what they recommend.

On the psychological side, I've been retraining my brain to stop the negative and destructive thoughts. For example, when I think my symptoms have returned, and I'll never get better, I have to consciously stop the thought and rethink a more positive alternative. I've also been using Emotional Freedom Technique which helps to separate my emotions from events in the past. I saw a demo at our support group a few years ago, and was a little cynical it could really work. However, now I'm practicing it properly, and I absolutely believe it works. Just for good measure I'm also doing mindfulness meditation and yoga.

On the diet side, I've gone gluten free and have also made changes to the food I'm having. For example, no processed foods, no tuna, sea salt instead of table salt and organic fruit and veg. I'm also taking a whole range of supplements, but this time it's to get my cells to produce more energy again. This means I'm wearing a Vitamin B12 patch, spraying magnesium oil morning and night and taking supplements like Co-Enzyme Q10, D-Ribose etc.

I'm also "earthing" every day which is recommended for stopping Electro Magnetic Frequencies from mobile phones, electricity and Wi-Fi. These waves are seen by some as harmful and earthing yourself each day is seen as helpful. Ideally you should walk barefoot on the earth for 40 minutes per day, but as the UK is cold a conductive mat plugged into a socket will do. Earthing also means turning off mobiles and WiFi at night and disconnecting cordless phones.

This all seems a lot to do in one go. In fact I was astonished at the amount I had to take on. However, I've taken it on gradually and it's been OK. I'm also keeping a diary to note all my foods, thoughts, symptoms and treatments so the therapists can see what's been

happening. I used to do one treatment at a time to see if it would work, but now I'm throwing everything but the kitchen sink at it. These therapists believe this is the best way to combat CFS/ME and I'm coming round to that idea. I'm not better yet, but I still have hope.

Antarctic cruise 13th January - 1 February 2013

My husband and I had one item on our bucket list we really wanted to do and that was to go to Antarctica. As I have ME we felt we would never be able to do this, but in 2011 our favorite cruise ship Azamara Quest had an itinerary for 2012 which we felt would offer the right balance between rest and activity as it included a lot of sea days where you were observing the scenery. It is not an expedition ship therefore there would be no Antarctic landings and I would not have to try to get in an inflatable zodiac to reach shore or walk on slippery rocks.

We booked the cruise 12 months in advance in order to get a mid ships stateroom, crucial if you are to encounter bad seas.

I also did some research and booked us a walking tour in Buenos Aires followed by a Tango/Dinner show on the day we arrived to optimize our one night there.

We booked the cruise flight and precruise hotel in Buenos Aires through Azamara as a package. Once I had our flight details I paid BA an additional fee to pre-book our seats on the long haul flights to and from Buenos Aires. The flights from Heathrow were 13.5 hours.

After reaching our hotel and settling into our room, Oliver our walking tour guide was waiting for us in the foyer, so we set off on our 4 hour walk. It was very hot, 30°C. We walked through San Telmo, Monserrat, saw the key sites and had coffee and cake at Tortoni Cafe, opened in 1858 and now owned by the staff. We saw the tomb of General Jose de San Martin, the independence hero, which is guarded by soldiers. We visited the Plaza Mayo where women, the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, congregate each Thursday to remember the disappeared; the ground is marked with footprints and white scarves. Our final visit was to Casa Rosada, where Eva & Juan Peron made a lot of their balcony speeches. We passed the camp of Malvinas veterans who are trying to get active service pensions as this group guarded the mainland and the government does not consider they served in the Falklands War.

The tango/dinner show comprised of dancing by about 8 dancers, both pair and group dances and also 2 men dancing some sort of historical theme. There were 2 male singers and a female singer. The songs were impassioned and sad, but we didn't understand a word. But it was very enjoyable. I hadn't realized the tango was so beautiful to watch.

We were both running on adrenaline by the end of the night but we felt that we had experienced a little of Buenos Aires.

The next day we joined the ship, we had a balcony stateroom on deck 7. Our journey that night took us along the River Plate to our first port of call, Montevideo. The following morning we joined our pre-booked a ships tour. We were not sure what to expect in Montevideo but we felt it to be a really nice little city. Principal places of interest we visited included the Jewish Holocaust memorial, the bronze sculptures depicting a settlers wagon train and stagecoach and a memorial to sailors lost at sea. Additionally we passed the stadium venue of the first ever Football World Cup held in 1930.

We now had 2 sea days to relax and we went to lectures by Charles Richardson on Antarctic wildlife, overview of what we might see and the Falklands. Nigel Marvin, a UK wildlife presenter talked about his career to date and Falklands wildlife. We had our first wildlife sighting at breakfast, whales from the window.

Falkland Islands - A highlight for Colin was our visit to the Falkland Islands. I had pre-booked a private tour for us to Volunteer Point to see penguins. The seas were calm so we could tender in to Stanley. In the weeks before cruise ships had not been able to visit

due to bad weather. Our 4 wheel vehicle driver was Tara Wilson. On the route to Volunteer Point she pointed out all the key areas of the 1982 war, Mount Harriet, Longden, Two Sisters and Tumbledown, we saw in the distance Port San Carlos and Fitzroy,(the attack on the Sir Galahad) she explained where Goose Green was. Her parents had a farm called Estancia and the paras had been camped on the farm for 11 days prior to setting off to fight. Local farmers had helped by ferrying ammunition, supplies. Her grandparents had been taken prisoner on the first night by the Argentinian as they were known activists. She said they had managed to jury rig a radio so that they could communicate even though prisoners. On the way to Johnsons Farm where the off road began we saw a burnt out Argentinian Chinook. The scenery is barren but beautiful, bog, deep pools, minefields! The minefields are being cleared for the land to be used again because the land is boggy the mines could have moved from their original position. Johnsons Farm was set in a cove, the shearers were there shearing. Tara told us about the economy of the islands, education, social life etc. children are educated on island until 16 then their government will pay for them to go o UK to college, academic or vocational and if they wish university. Most young people come back to the islands. The cost of housing is high, rent is about £750 pm excluding bills. Her husband bought land and built their house. They have a hospital which can cope with all but most serious cases.

A wealthy elder lady had bought Johnsons Farm last year to ensure that no off island company bought it and that access to the penguins would remain. A tenant farmer was installed. The off road element was very bumpy and although only 7 miles took over an hour. Lovely pools, views of the scene, bog fern and a smaller plant called Diddle Dee which has red berries used to make jam. We saw Falklands Geese, Brent Geese and flightless steamer ducks. At Volunteer Point there were 3 types of penguin, Magellenic, Gentoo and King. All let you get really close, the Magellenic had burrows with babies in, the King babies were hard to see as they were protected by parents feet. Some larger babies were molting they were last years chicks. After a while we walked down to the beach, pristine white sand, beautiful. Penguins were in and out of the water and we were lucky enough to see them skimming the waves. The journey back was over a different route and even rougher. Tara took us on a drive around Port Stanley, we saw the Governors residence, all the official buildings, the hospital, the British War Memorial, a cenotaph and bronze plaque, beautifully kept, the Anglican Cathedral.

The next day was at sea through Drakes Passage. It was very blowy, with albatross flying around the ship. There was a lecture on Shackleton, Captain Stig the ship's captain and Captain Ole, the ice captain gave an update on the ice position and weather for the next day. Fog and poor visibility expected which may affect Elephant Island views.

Drake Passage lot calmer than expected, 10 ft swells.

Elephant Island Captain Stig announced about 8.00am that visibility was poor and the big iceberg in front of us would not be visible. Elephant Island viewing might also be difficult. We had breakfast and were on deck for 9.00am. Elephant Island loomed through the fog then magically it gradually cleared and we had wonderful views. Chin strap penguins on an ice floe, a Blue Whale pod just swimming around the ship, a very rare sighting, penguins swimming in the water, fulmars, cape petrels, albatross. We saw the point on Elephant Island where Shackleton landed and also in the distance the point where his memorial is. The mist lifted and we could see the glaciers and peaks. Captain Stig turned the ship around so views were available from port and starboard. Charles Richardson and Captain Stig gave commentary from the bridge. We stayed in the area for over 2 hours. Staff came round with hot chocolate and rum or gluewein, asparagus soup was also available. It was very cold and windy initially but warmed up slightly out of the wind by lunch time it was very foggy again and cold.

Charles Richardson gave lecture on Antarctica - the surprising desert. During dinner Captain Stig slowed the ship so we could photograph icebergs with penguins on also little floes went past with penguins on, they were also swimming in the water.

The next 3 days were at sea in Antarctica, on the first day Captain Stig woke us up early to say whale pods off the ship, they were Orca, Finn and Blue. We got dressed quickly and went on deck. Trinity Peninsula and Trinity Island. Very cold but good views of whales and icebergs. After breakfast Captain Stig announced as the mist was so bad it was too dangerous to enter close to Deception Island so he sailed on and we had some brilliant sightings of icebergs, whales and penguins, plus hot chocolate with rum to keep warm. Penguins swimming in water again but they go so quick you cannot photograph them.

Two lectures, the Quest for the South Pole and Our blubbery friends- Seals and fur seals. Lectures have been good. Lots of whales around ship you could see the blow then their fins/bodies cutting through the water. Captain Stig announced that lots of whales, humpbacks, around the bow of the ship. We were stationary for an hour + whilst the pod at least 5 strong circled and dived, ate krill and created bubble circles to trap the krill. Absolutely marvelous and a rare thing to see. The area was absolutely beautiful, snow/ice covered islands, icebergs, ice floes in weird and wonderful shapes and still tranquil seas.

Whilst we were having dinner going through the Gerlache Strait whales were going passed the window, penguins were jumping on ice floes and an ice berg tipped over, calved and tipped back again. Absolutely breathtaking scenery.

The next sea day was in Paradise Bay. We were up at 6.30 am and on deck by 7.00am, only 4 of us there it was cold and snowing. Icebergs all around. We saw whales, penguins, a seal. The MV Ushuaia was moored in the bay near the abandoned Argentinian Research Station Emarilla Brown and zodiacs were going from that ship to land. The ocean was 12000 feet deep here and was scattered with ice bergs, floes and shards. We saw whales, including one below the surface, by the side of the ship, this was a Minke whale, penguins swimming in the sea and on the ice, they were also doing their little jumping thing in the water. A seal on a floe. There was another research station in the distance. We were actually at the Antarctic continent not the archipelago. People from the MVP Ushuaia were taking inflatable's and landing near the burnt out research station. One craft came to investigate us. The weather was beautiful for taking in the majestic scenery.

On our next sea day Charles Richardson gave a talk on Wandering Antarctica which was very interesting. By now we were now in the open sea again as Captain Stig hoped to make an earlier arrival in Drake Passage to avoid the worst of the expected bad weather. It is a little rougher now after 2 days of flat tranquil seas. Sea was by now much rougher waves about 3 meters and the ship is moving fast to avoid the bad weather. Lots of Cape Petrels around the ship this morning. Two lectures Why Ushuaia and Penguins.

The show that night was Kate Dowden, a classical/modern soprano she was excellent and very professional considering she could hardly stand due to rough seas. Lots of things went crashing at the bar plus some tables & stools. The late show was cancelled due to weather. Captain informed us the next morning that waves had been 8 metres and winds hurricane force. Very rough til about 3.00am.

Ushuaia -Captain announced that coastguard had closed port so we moored just off land. The ship needs to restock fuel, food, water etc. tours would be cancelled. Very windy on deck but not too cold. Scenery in Beagle Channel was lovely and the peaks behind Ushuaia were snow covered. We think it is Royal Albatross flying around the ship, there are a lot of them. We remained moored off Ushuaia until 2.00am the following morning. The entertainers the fly in for specific activities had all missed flights they needed to get to other appointments in UK or Caribbean. Captain Stig had already said we would not be going to Cape Horn the following day as weather forecast for winds too bad. Ship still

needed to restock urgent things like fuel, food, water. The promised abatement in wind not happened it was still 40 knots.

The next day I awoke early and saw pilot boat leaving we had not managed to dock and refuel, restock. It's 800 miles to Puerto Madryn so Captain Stig explained we could not stay in Ushuaia today. Another talk on the Atlantic today, some really interesting facts. Nigel's talk was on Untamed China, this was about a series of programmes he had made on giant pandas.

Captain Stig's had called everyone together to explain what had happened in Ushuaia. We thought he gave a fair and frank response and explained the facts in detail including the ships capabilities. Ushuaia has no tugs, the port authority had closed the port and the coastguard would not even let the local pilot off the ship. Winds were up to 40 knots and the ship can only safely cope with 20. The actual pressure increases exponentially to 43 tonnes on the side of the ship. At 2.00am he tried to dock but was hit by a 35 knot gust and aborted the attempt. All the prepaid food and fuel was left in Ushuaia. We have enough fuel to reach Buenos Aires, with 1.5 days supply to spare. Some guests were not happy but the majority understood that safety was paramount. Someone asked how bad the winds were when we went to Cape Horn on Thursday night, they were 102 knots high and 60 + miles per hour, hurricanes force. These winds may occur once each month in the Antarctic summer.

The next day was at sea and Charles gave a talk on Who discovered America.

Puerto Madryn- This is a town founded by the Welsh who settled in a lot of Patagonia. Captain Stig announced high winds but they were hoping to tender ashore. In the end the wind dropped and we docked and were cleared to go ashore. We walked down the very long pier to the town, not much shade, lots of people on the beach. Some very old cars. We lasted 2 hours but it was very hot and. After lunch we saw a brown sea lion swimming just under the veranda it was quite fat but very graceful, it came up for air just in front of us.

The last 2 days were peaceful sea days, very relaxing.

We flew straight home from Buenos Aires via Heathrow. The experience was tiring, the initial flights and long day in Buenos Aires were exhausting and I did feel the effects but we both felt a sense of achievement and also of gratitude that in the end in the main the weather, the scenery and wildlife had all come together to give us such a magical once in a lifetime experience and lovely memories.

