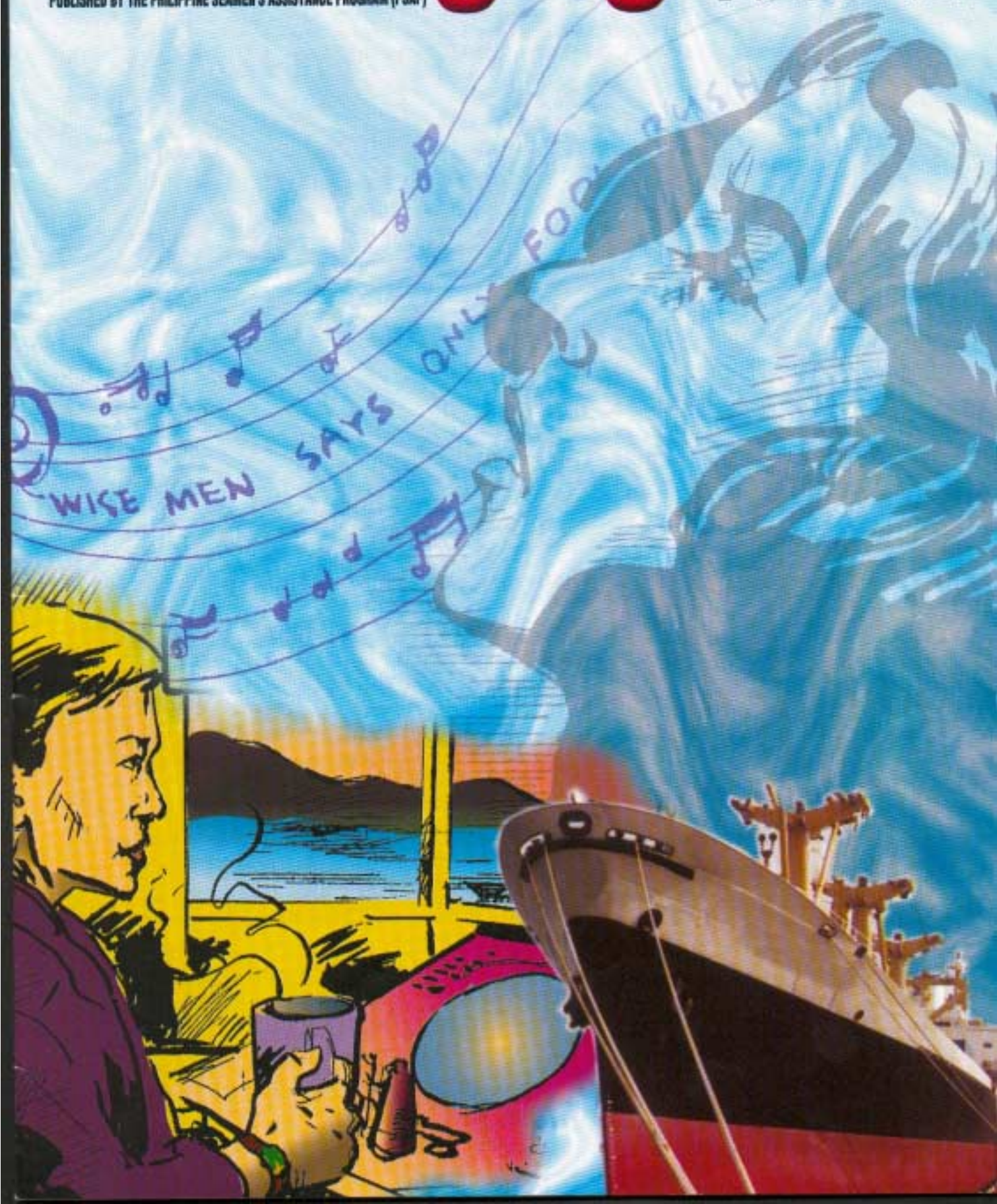


The Singing Mate

PUBLISHED BY THE PHILIPPINE SEAMEN'S ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (PSAP)

ENGLISH





Philippine Seamen's Assistance Program (PSAP)

is a non-stock, non-profit foundation registered in the Chamber of Commerce No. S127664, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

PSAP was founded in 1981 in Rotterdam with the aim to support Filipino seafarers in their struggle for better working and living conditions.

PSAP's objectives

To contribute to seafarers' awareness about their workers and human rights.

To provide support and services to the seafarers.

To promote seafarers awareness on HIV/AIDS and other health related issues.

To enhance better cooperation among seafarers of various nationalities through better understanding of each others culture.

PSAP publishes the bi-monthly newsletter *Parola*.



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To All Seafarers

When I first went away to sea in 1964, the world seemed free of cares and most social diseases could be easily cured. Thirty years later the life at sea had changed completely. The sexual freedom and easy travel between many countries have allowed sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) to proliferate. Of all these diseases there is none so terrible as HIV which usually leads to AIDS. Suddenly there is no such thing as casual safe sex.

The Singing Mate is a moving story of an ordinary seafarer, just like most of us! It tells the effect that one moment of carelessness has on his life and the life of his family.

My organisation, the Merchant Navy Welfare Board, in the United Kingdom has been concerned for some years about the need of good sexual health advice to crew members. This booklet is one of the best we have seen and I commend you to read it.

Captain David Parsons
General Secretary
Merchant Navy Welfare Board

The Singing Mate looks like the usual comics we like to read to find some relaxation after. But there is an important difference.

Most comics are about a 'hero' with whom one can identify. Most of the time the hero is doing things we can only dream of. He stays alive and healthy under the most dangerous circumstances. He enjoys love and tenderness of incredible nice women, he is a match for the most dangerous and vicious criminals and in the end he gains the final victory and lives long and happily.

This comics is a bit different...

Our hero Carlos, is quite an ordinary person and his adventures are very common. What happens to him can happen to each and everyone. Our story of Carlos is not a creation of our imagination. Though it's not based on one real-life story, we put together life sketches of our seafarer-friends that are infected.

The message of Carlos story is not comic at all and reading the booklet will make you think for some time after.

This is why PSAP is offering you this booklet.

We think that it's our and your concern to be aware of what threatens our lives and how we can help each other to reflect seriously and then take the necessary steps to avoid the misery our 'hero' has fallen into.

Please read it and pass it on to your mates and have a discussion. That is a way to stick together and build a common force of us seafarers.

Rev. Bob ter Haar
Chairperson
PSAP

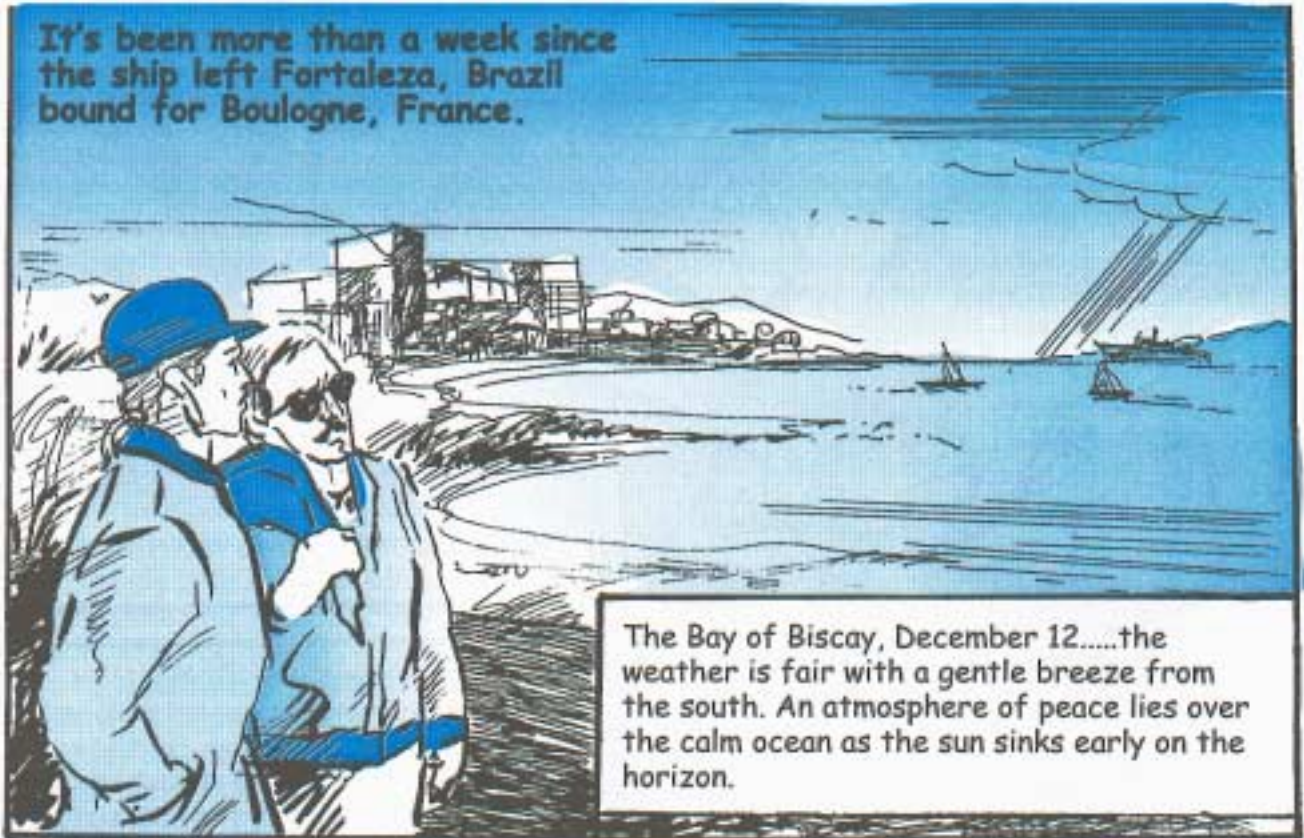
The Singing Mate

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Written by Brando Lodriga

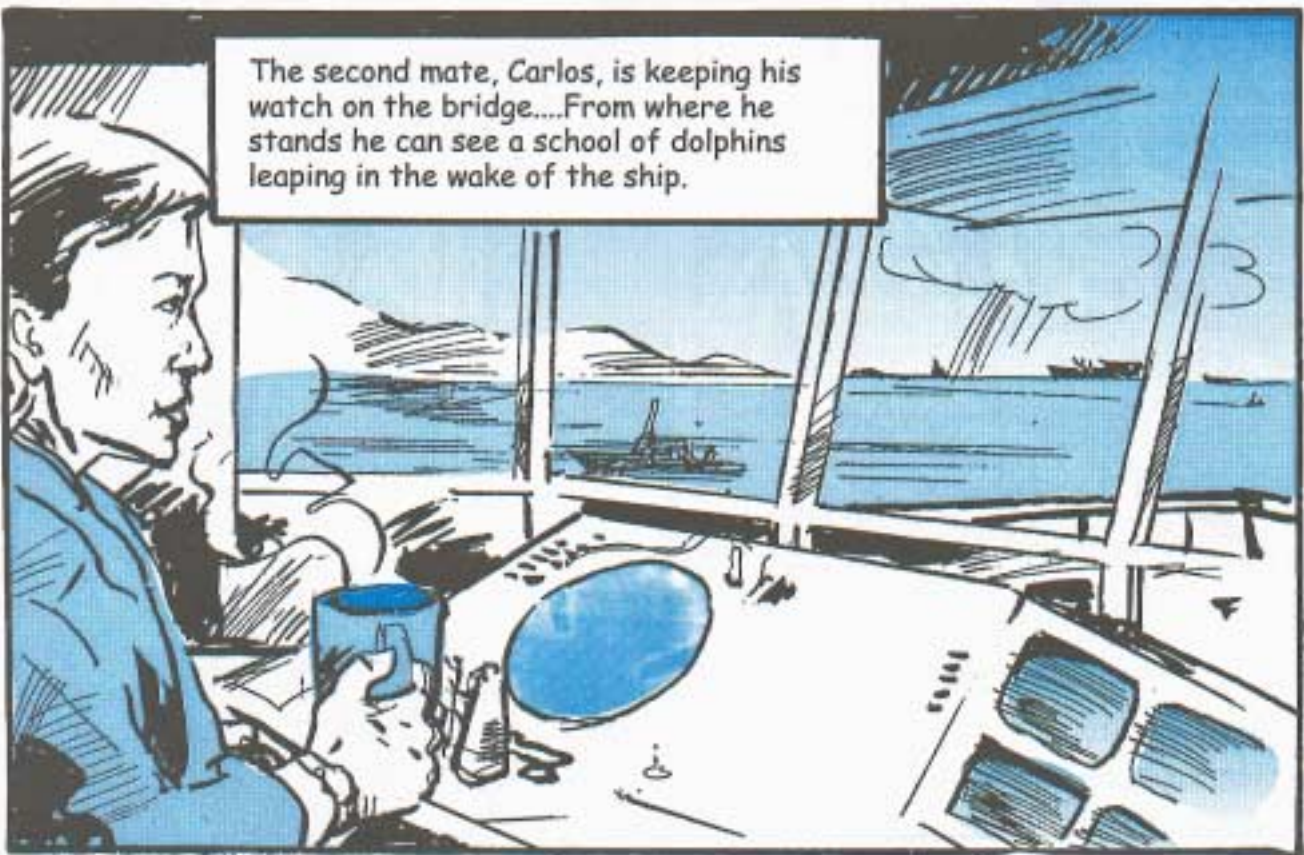
Illustrations Paeng Cruzada and Joel Geolamen

It's been more than a week since the ship left Fortaleza, Brazil bound for Boulogne, France.



The Bay of Biscay, December 12.....the weather is fair with a gentle breeze from the south. An atmosphere of peace lies over the calm ocean as the sun sinks early on the horizon.

The second mate, Carlos, is keeping his watch on the bridge....From where he stands he can see a school of dolphins leaping in the wake of the ship.



The beauty of nature never fails to move Carlos. Such a sight always lifts his spirits in the long hours of the watch as he is struck by the wonder of God's creation.



Sometimes it makes him sing with joy. Once, he was unaware that his British Captain was listening, and before he knew it he was nicknamed the "Singing Mate".



Carlos does not feel well. He has a slight fever and a troublesome cough. He had many sleepless nights with his mind running wild. Memories of his sexual adventures in ports all over the world crowd his brain.

This time, though, something is bothering him and he cannot respond to the beauty around him. He tries to put aside his disturbing thoughts, but however hard he tries they persist, nagging away in his head and making him feel sick.





No! No! No! This illness can't be happening to me.

While Carlos is absorbed in his own thoughts, the Chief Mate comes on the bridge without being noticed. Carlos isn't aware his relief has arrived.

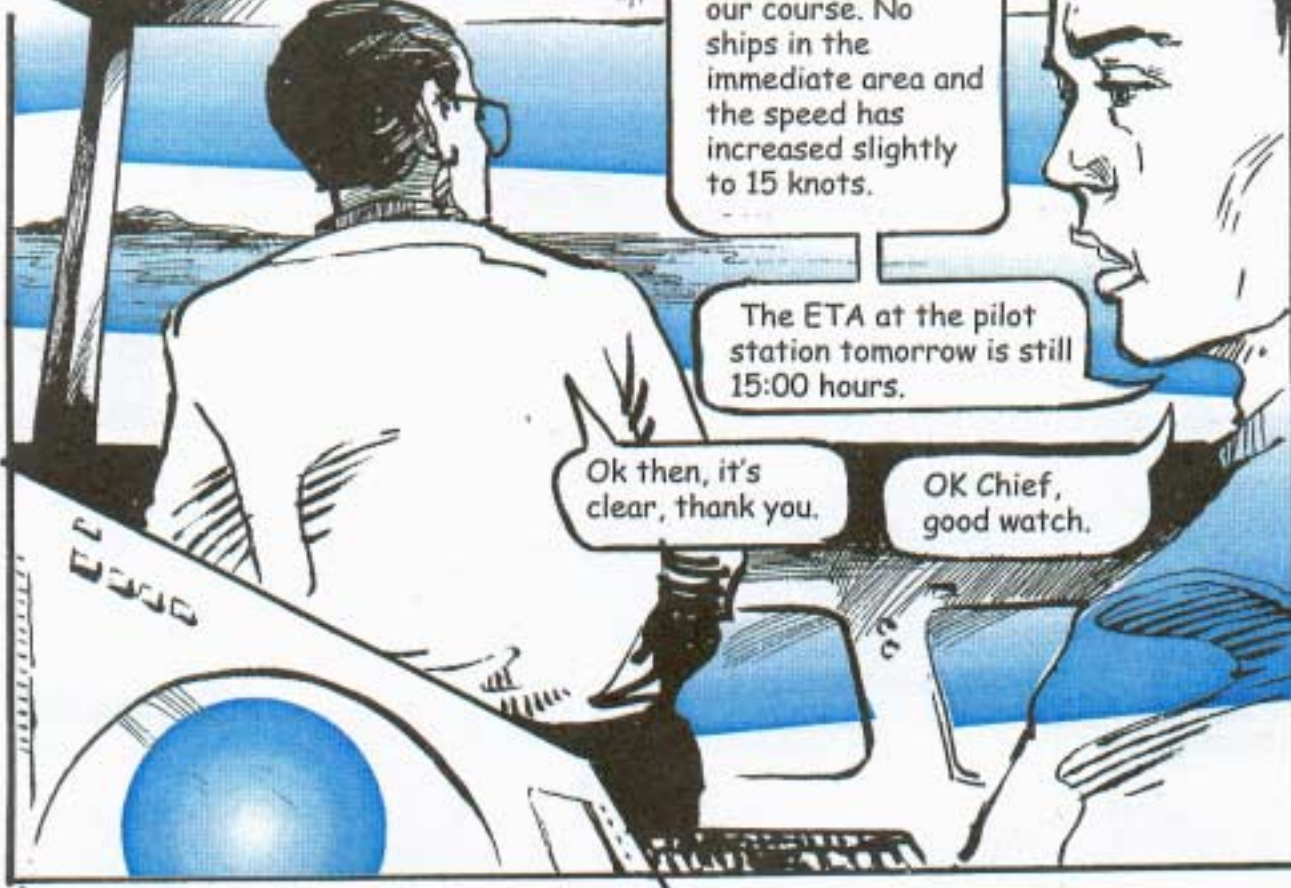


Good afternoon, Carlos!



Huh, Good afternoon, too, Chief....oh, I'm sorry, I was miles away.

Pretending that everything is OK Carlos goes to the side of the bridge and checks the instruments. Then he opens the logbook and quickly writes down the readings. Finally he checks the GPS receiver and plots the position on the chart.



OK Chief, zero, four, nine is still our course. No ships in the immediate area and the speed has increased slightly to 15 knots.

The ETA at the pilot station tomorrow is still 15:00 hours.

Ok then, it's clear, thank you.

OK Chief, good watch.

Having given a short briefing to the relief watch, he is just about to leave the bridge when the Chief Mate stops him.



You don't look too good. Are you feeling OK?



You know you can tell me if there's anything wrong...I've noticed lately how tired and drawn you've been looking.

The Chief Mate recalls that when they joined the ship ten months ago in Bangkok, Carlos had been happy and carefree.

I do feel sick, Chief. I think I must've got malaria when we were in Fortaleza.

But Carlos, Fortaleza is not malaria infected area...You'd better ask the Captain for permission to see the doctor when we're in Boulogne.



Good idea, I'll do that.

After giving a reluctant answer, he asks permission to leave and walks hastily down the small stairs.



Carlos goes straight along the narrow passage to his cabin.



In his small cabin he sits at his desk and puts his favorite CD of Simon and Garfunkel.



He picks up a can of beer and begins to drink.



Every now and then he glances at the photo of his family, his wife and children. The picture seems to be talking to him, reaching out. He finishes his beer and then feeling tired lies down.

Carlos is very restless. He cannot sleep and finds himself looking again at the photo of his loved ones...Once more he starts to feel afraid and insecure.



What have I done? This will not only ruin me but my family as well. How could I have been so selfish? I can never forgive myself.



What if am infected with HIV? Will I die soon? Will people hate me? What about my family? What will they say? What will happen to them, who will support them?

All the time Carlos lies blaming and cursing himself he can't take his eyes off that photo. Without realizing tears are running down his cheeks.

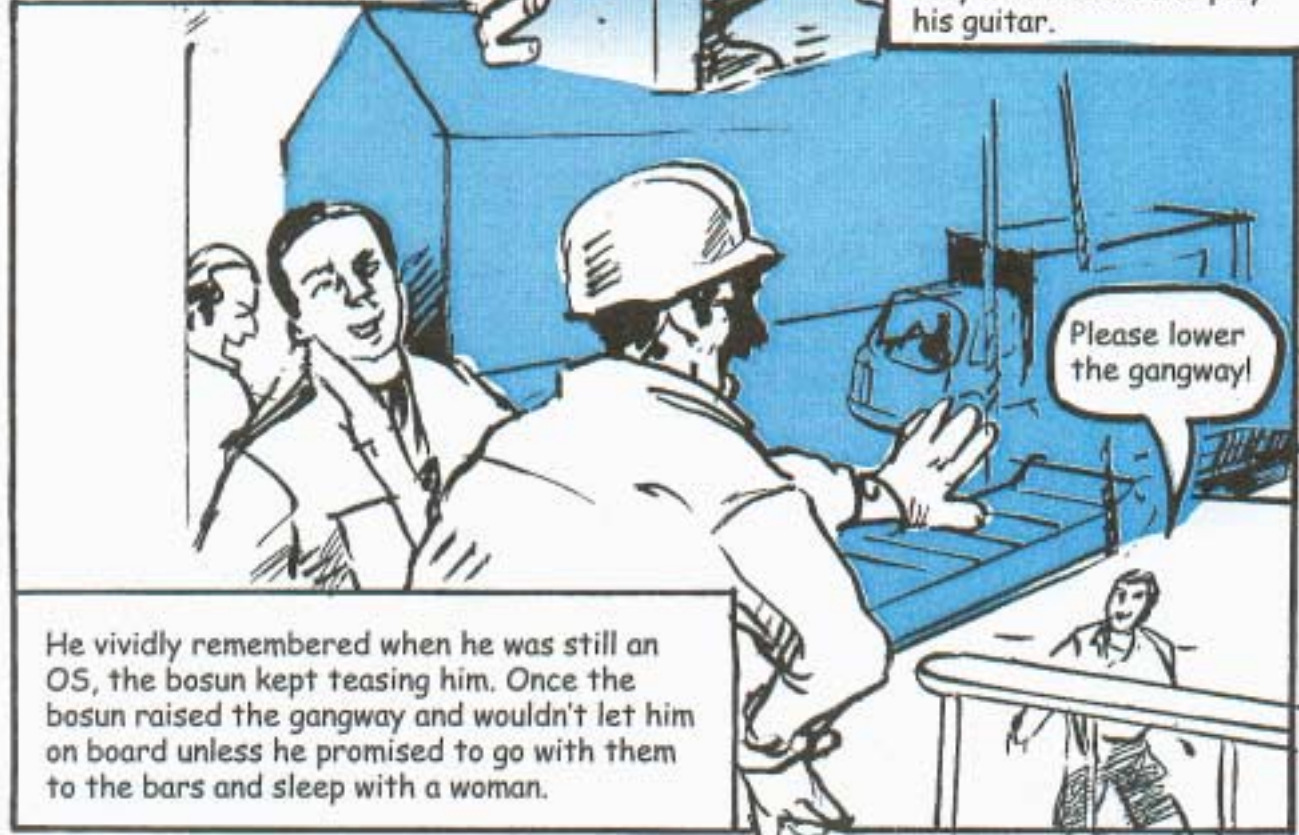


During his early years as a sailor he was often ridiculed by the rest of the crew for being a killjoy, because he didn't want to go out with them on shore.

Why not join us? Are you gay?

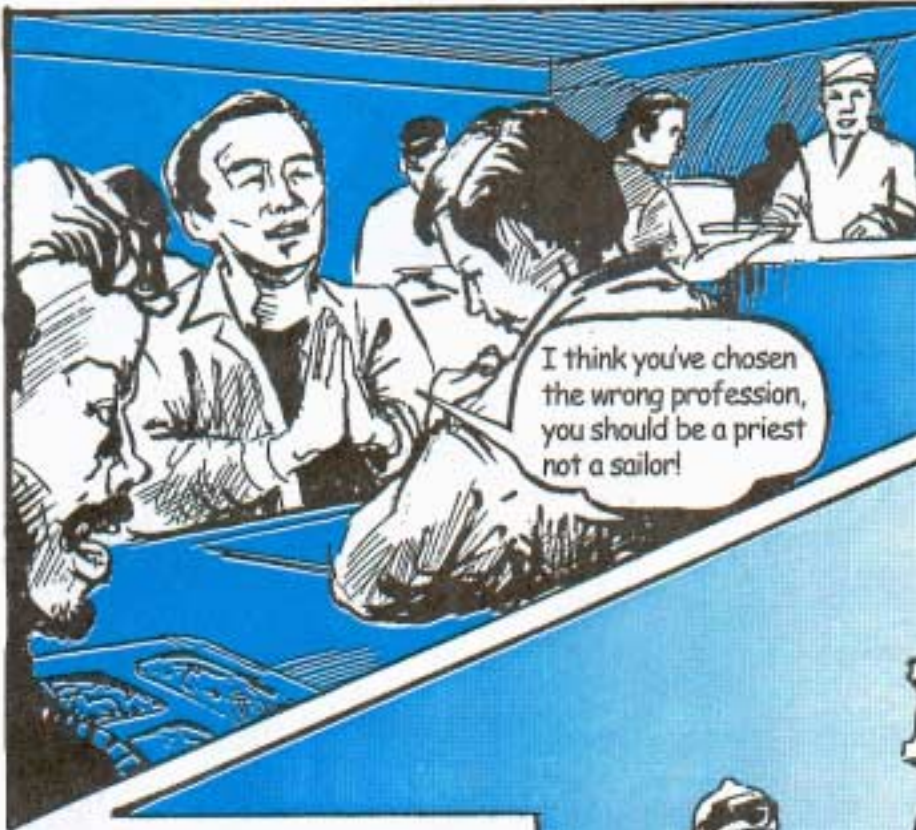


His shipmates were surprised that even when there were women guests on board, he preferred to stay in his cabin and play his guitar.



Please lower the gangway!

He vividly remembered when he was still an OS, the bosun kept teasing him. Once the bosun raised the gangway and wouldn't let him on board unless he promised to go with them to the bars and sleep with a woman.



On one ship he was also teased when he started distributing Bibles.

I think you've chosen the wrong profession, you should be a priest not a sailor!

After many years in the job, however Carlos' attitude changed; not as a result of the crew's teasing, but because of the boredom and intense loneliness on board ship. The money he earned did not compensate for the absence of his family.



Life on board a ship can be like a prison sentence. Time at sea is much longer than the few precious moments in port.



Each day is occupied with carrying out one's own particular duties and life ashore is very distant and remote.

Between the ages of 20 and 40 Carlos was at the peak of his virility. He and his friends on board often talked about their sex lives.



During these conversations Carlos realized he was no different from other men. He was just an ordinary human being with physical urges that needed to be met.

After he had slept with one woman, it was easy to do the same in every port...Bangkok, Hong Kong, Durban, Rotterdam, Hamburg and many Latin American ports.



He enjoyed listening to music in different parts of the world and if he was accompanied by a woman it was even better. Music and girls made him feel free and human once again.





These encounters did give him intense, though only temporary, satisfaction. The memories kept surging through his mind.

How could he forget those exhilarating moments with Wendy of Rio Haina? Just eighteen years old with tempting light brown eyes. She was really gorgeous. She would whisper softly in his ear, he could still feel the brush of her lips.



And how about the unforgettable scent of Jacinta of Havana? Her reddish hair, fair complexion and luscious lips?



Just recently he had met Rosa in Fortaleza. Her friendly face and just like Jacinta she had reddish hair and a fair complexion. She was so voluptuous. Memories of his last adventure with Rosa brought back all the feelings.

Those adventures could only provide short moments of joy, but the fleeting love and affection gave much-needed relief from the loneliness and hardships of life on board ship. Carlos fully understood that for the woman it was just a job and he was only one of many men.

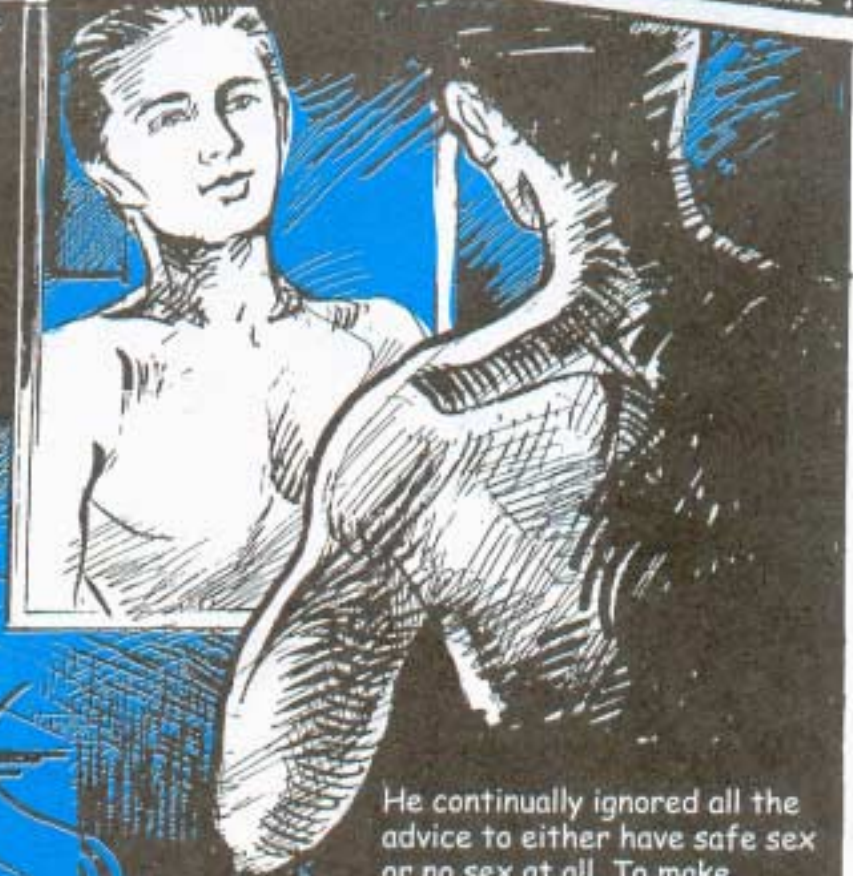


He knew that there was a potential risk every time he had sex with them, but again and again he had refused to use condom thinking it was a sin. He also believed that using condom would lessen the sensation.

You know the HIV virus can't infect us. We're already immune. All these years we've been sailing, breathing in the sea air, have made our blood salty already!



That was the response of one of the engineers when they got hold of a leaflet about AIDS. All these myths and wrong beliefs became Carlos' ideas too. He had always engaged in unprotected sex and not been infected, why should it happen now?



He continually ignored all the advice to either have safe sex or no sex at all. To make matters worse, he had had some things implanted in the foreskin of his penis, believing it would give greater pleasure to the girls.



The CD had already finished, but his mind continues to wander.

Second mate,
dinner time.

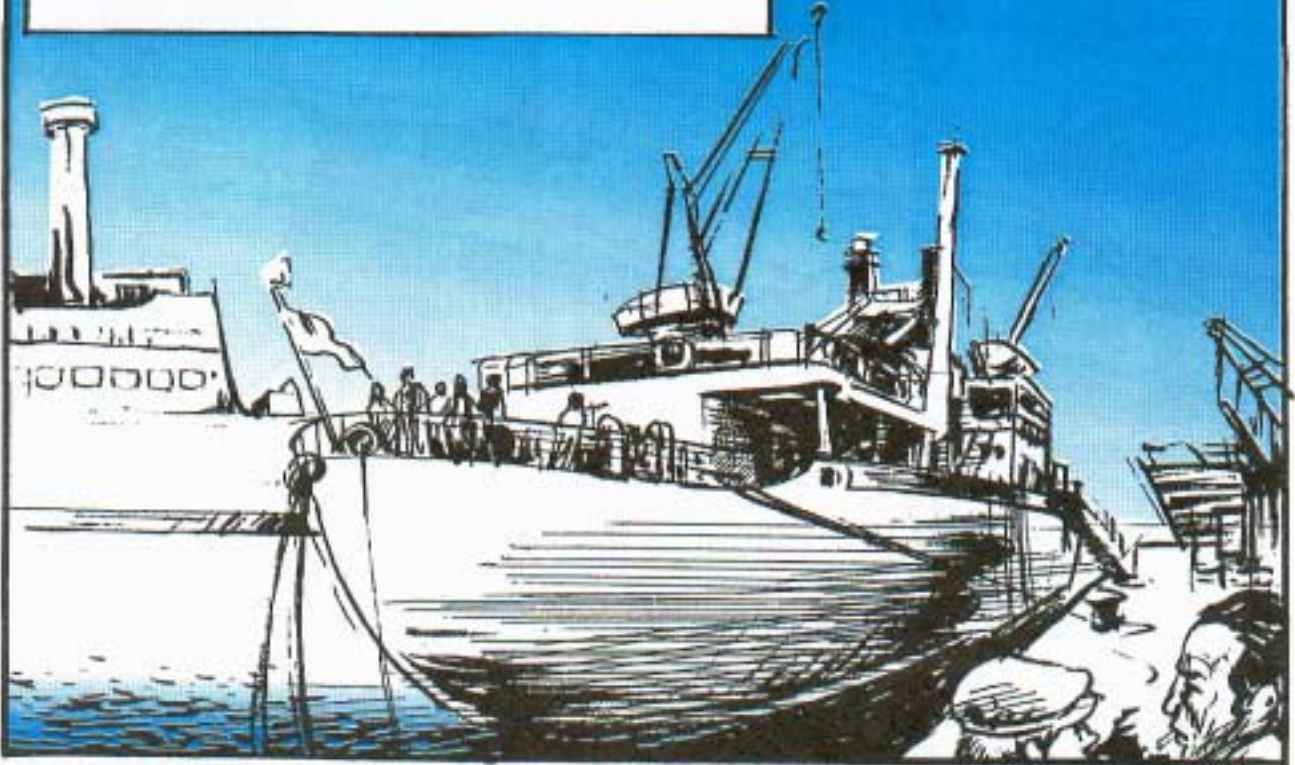
It's OK,
thanks.

I don't feel good,
maybe I'll come
later.

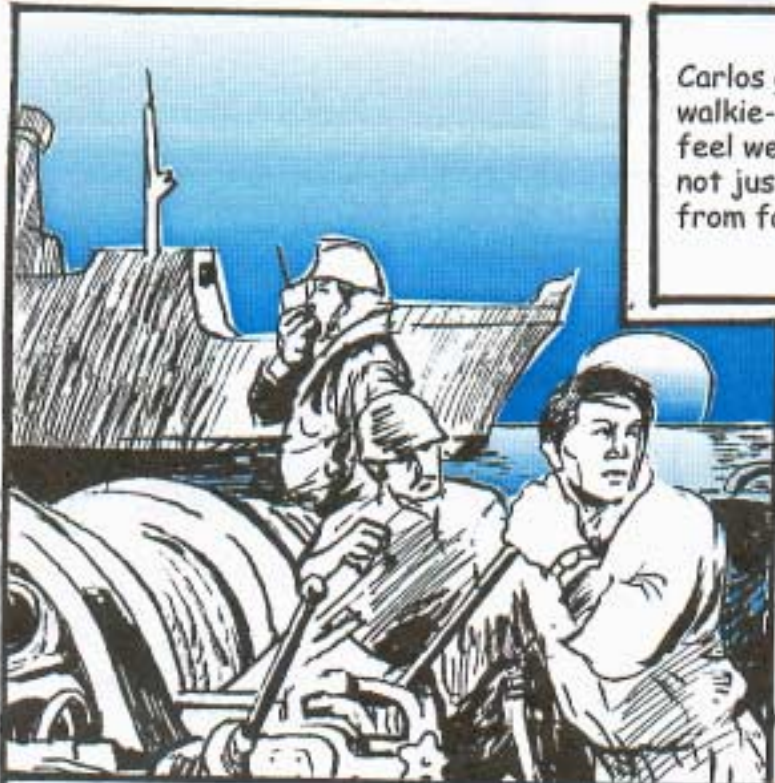


He decided not to go to the messroom, because he wants to be on his own. He has no appetite and falls asleep in his chair.

Boulogne Sur Mer, three o'clock in the afternoon. December 13... The air is cool. It's foggy. Seagulls circle the ship.

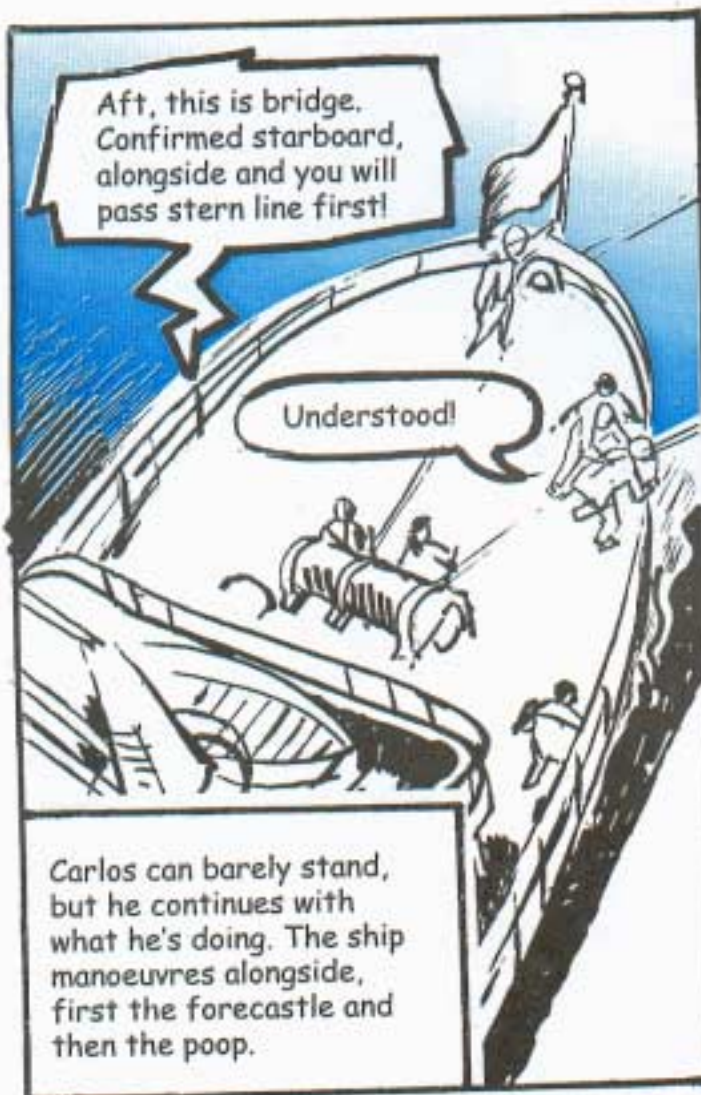


Carlos goes on deck with his walkie-talkie. He still does not feel well. He shivers all over, not just from the cold, but from fatigue.



It's time to manoeuvre. Carlos is in charge of the aft. All the crew members are warmly dressed for the cold weather. Everyone is busy with his own task getting ready to dock. Everyone moves with precision. Only the sound of the capstan is to be heard.





Everyone is now confused. An AB attempts to stir Carlos when he suddenly falls. A commotion follows. Someone approaches Carlos and he notices that he is very pale and his lips have turned white.



When the ship docks, Carlos is immediately rushed to hospital.



When he regains consciousness, the doctor tells him that his check-up does not indicate any serious illness, he just needs complete rest.



Carlos is still worried though, and asks to have an HIV test. Later the doctor carefully confirms his worst fears. He is HIV positive.

Ninoy Aquino International Airport, December 16, 1993... Christmas is very much in the air. Christmas songs happily welcoming and greeting the arriving passengers, one of whom is Carlos. Outside the airport, his children are eagerly waiting for him. They do not have an idea of his situation. His wife is there, too. She is very much aware of her husband's conditions.



Teary-eyed, Carlos tightly hugs his loved ones. Right there and then, he breaks down and regrets all the wrong doings he has committed. He sincerely asks for forgiveness.

Carlos last years were not happy at all. The only consolation is his wife when blood tested is HIV negative. Carlos was courageous enough to face his fate. He spent his time giving voluntary work, specially helping institutions in their information work about AIDS. Before he passed away, he forced himself to write this story. He would like us to consider his life as a lesson and as an example. He calls on us to be safe and responsible all the time.

*To my brothers, brave men of
boundless seas, that my story serves
as an example not to be followed,
that AIDS more than the wrath of
nature we encounter in the most
remote ocean does exist, and so we
should not commit blunders.*

The Singing Mate

BASIC FACTS ON HIV/AIDS

HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

AIDS - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

AIDS is caused by infection with a virus: HIV. Having AIDS means that the body's immune system has been damaged. Immune system is a vital part of the body as it fights off infection.

When infected, the body reacts by producing anti-bodies, but these anti-bodies are not capable of destroying AIDS virus. The AIDS virus even starts to destroy the immune system itself. A damaged immune system cannot combat anymore any illnesses entering the body.

The period before the symptoms start to appear can vary tremendously, with an average of eight to ten years. Only a HIV test can show whether someone's blood contains antibodies to the AIDS virus. In this case, then the person is HIV positive.

The body needs at least six months before the antibodies can be fully detected in the blood. Therefore, if someone would like to be tested and would like the result to be reliable, wait for six months after have had unsafe sex.

People with HIV can look healthy and feel healthy, but they can infect others.

HIV/AIDS is easy to avoid, but impossible to cure.

It is transmitted only through:

Unsafe sex

Sharing infected needles and syringes

Blood transfusion with infected blood

HIV positive mother to her baby during pregnancy

How can we prevent HIV/AIDS?

Abstention from sexual intercourse is the best way. Or be faithful to one uninfected partner.

Practice safer sex. Use condom correctly and consistently. A condom protects us not only against HIV/AIDS but also from all other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD's)

Sail Safely, Safety on board, Safety Ashore.

For further information:

AIDS Info line: For a personal call, you can call free of charge and you don't need to mention your name. Questions can be in Dutch or in English.

Tel: 0800-0222220

(open-working days between 14.00 till 22:00 hrs.)

PSAP : 010-2400930

Safety on Board
Safety Ashore!



Always Play Safe
or better don't play at all!