

The Trip to Italy

By Gary

Day I

Well, it's been 2 weeks, but I am finally getting around to writing my recap of the trip. We got to the Airport on Thursday morning and when we got to the gate we met another Make A Wish family who were flying out on the same flight we were to Philadelphia. They had a daughter a couple of years older than Spencer who had been diagnosed with MS and were flying out of Philadelphia to Venice and taking a cruise through the Mediterranean on the Eastern side of Italy through Greece and Turkey. We got email addresses and hope to get together with them now that we are all home and compare pictures of our trips. We got on the Plane here in Dallas about 11:00 and changed planes in Philly for our flight to Barcelona.

Day II

We arrived in Barcelona around 8:00 AM their time which was about 1:00 AM Texas time, but had to stay up the rest of the day to try to avoid the effects of jet lag. When we went to get our luggage we noticed that 2 of our bags were missing, one was the garment bag we had packed our suits provided by Brooks Brothers for our formal dinners, and the other was the miscellaneous bag with all of our toiletries and sandals and my dress shoes. They told us the bags would likely show up the next day and they would either forward them to our hotel before we left or to the boat if we had already checked out of the hotel. After the baggage issue we finally met our Royal Caribbean greeter and he got us off to our motel. We arrived at our hotel, the Silken Gran Havana, and it was beautiful. It was of course too early to check in so we left our bags there and decided to head over to the Sagrada Familia. It was about 10 blocks away and we decided to walk. We discovered that walking, if it was feasible was our best way to get around, as it allowed us to see much more of the city up close. The Sagrada was amazing, it is a cathedral that construction began on in 1880 and is still about 50 years from completion. We would have liked to have explored the cathedral more, but by the time we got there it was about lunch time and we were all very hungry and tired and still needed to get back to the hotel and check in. We ate across the street at a little café from the Sagrada then headed back to our hotel. We checked in and they had provided us with 2 rooms, which were very nice. We were on the top floor and doorway to the rooftop pool was right beside our doors. We spent a little time on the roof looking out over the city before heading back down to go to the Picasso Museum. Barcelona was for me probably the most beautiful city we saw. The buildings, although old, were very clean looking and decorated with sculptures and carvings. We headed for the Picasso museum in a cab. It was in the old section of town that was built in the 15th and 16th century. The museum had paintings from every period of his life. Then we walked through old town going through a few shops and over to the gothic section of town. There we saw a couple of cathedrals built in the 12th and 13th century and eventually ended up on Las Ramblas, the main street in Barcelona. You walked down this street on the large median in the middle of the road. It was lined with mimes, street performers, and chairs and table for the little cafes that lined

the road. We decided to have dinner here. I had some more Paella and we ate while watching the street performers and the thousands of people walking by. At this point we were all very tired after our long day and headed back to the hotel to get some rest.

Day III

The next morning decided to walk down the street and look for a place to have breakfast. About 3 blocks away we found a little place and didn't recognize much of what they were offering except for donuts for the boys. A lady and her husband that were having a beer and suggested we have cured ham with cheese on a baguette. Rhonda got that and I got a potato omelet. It was a great breakfast, as untraditional as it was for us, and then we headed back to the hotel to catch the bus to the boat. After driving around to pick up a few more people we finally arrived at the port and saw the huge boat we were about to board. At this point we still haven't seen our two lost bags, but are hoping that they may arrive sometime later that day. We got a few toiletries in the duty free store before heading to the gangway to get on the boat. Once we got on the boat we found our rooms on the 7th deck and were amazed by how large the rooms were. When we walked in we found a letter from Daniella Mares, our Ocean Adventure Manager, and two Royal Caribbean back packs loaded with gifts for the each of the boys. She had provided them with caps, shirts, free arcade cards for the ship arcade, tickets for the ice show on the boat, free movies on their TV, vouchers for free internet minutes in the ships library, and many other things. Daniella and the rest of the folks with Royal Caribbean really went out of their way to make this a special trip for Spencer and Zachary. After going through all of this we went to have our first meal on the boat at the windjammer café on the 11th deck. It was a large buffet with much more than just your average food. After lunch we went to explore some of the ship and then went to the welcome party on the promenade deck. This was in the middle of the ship and was like a little shopping mall and gathering place for everyone on the boat. We did a little scavenger hunt they had set up to teach us about all the things the ship had to offer and then I found the little tattoo parlor. I have always told the boys if they got a tattoo they would be kicked out of the house, so I decided to get one (temporary tattoo) just to see their reaction from Dad getting a tattoo. I think Zachary got the biggest kick out of this and he had one soon after. The boys weren't with us at this point; they had found the arcade and were already using their arcade card to play some games. We went back to our room to get ready for dinner and headed to the dining room. This was a beautiful dining room, three stories, beautiful chandeliers, with an incredible staircase in the back of the room leading to the two upper floors. In the dining room everything was first class. It was true fine dining. We had multiple choices on the menu every night and tonight I chose the tenderloin. This was the beginning of a very bad trend of eating way too much throughout the entire trip. The boat set sail while we were at dinner so we missed the bon voyage party, but it was outside on the 11th deck and it was windy and chilly so we didn't miss it that much. After dinner I went to guest services to find out what we would do about the next nights formal dinner having no formal clothes to wear due to the lost luggage, and they immediately sent us over to the ship tailor to be measured for tuxes that they would provide in the event our luggage didn't arrive. Sure enough, the next day, tuxes were delivered to our room although they proved to be unnecessary. The folks at guest services also spent the rest of the week

doing everything they could to track down our luggage and calling us everyday to give us an update on what they had found out. Now for a good nights rest as we sail to Villefranche to anchor the next morning.

Day IV

We awoke the next morning to views of the coast of the French Riviera the next morning. We didn't have a tour set up for this day and were going to explore the city of Nice on our own. As the dock here was too small to accommodate our ship we had to anchor about a mile out and little boats took us back and forth to the dock. After breakfast in the Windjammer, we headed down to the first deck to get on one of the little boats and headed to the dock in Villefranche. This was a very small little town with hotels and villas built form the coast all the way up the hillside. We walked up a steep hill and many steps to get to the bus stop to catch the bus that would take us to Nice. It was about a 20 minute drive along the mountainside coastal road and dropped us off at the Nice bus terminal right near the entrance to the Vieille Ville, Nice's old town. This area was built in the 1400's and had something amazing to see around every corner. We got some Gelato here, our second time having the real stuff, and probably a little better than what we had in Barcelona. We went through a few more shops and then stopped to have lunch at a very old little café. I had gnocchi with beef stew, the boys of course had pizza, and Rhonda had some of the best lasagna that I have ever tasted. The waitress asked where we were from and upon discovering that we were from Dallas began to talk throughout our lunch about JR Ewing and Sue Ellen and how much she thought she was like Sue Ellen. Her and the other folks that were eating here were very nice, not at all like what you hear the French are like to tourists. She did seem to get a little offended that I didn't finish my Gnocchi. We discovered that leaving food on your plate anywhere over here was a bit of a no no. They seemed to take great pride in the food they have prepared and it was like a slap in the face if you didn't finish it. We also started to realize that meals are a long process and are not meant to be rushed. After your meal it seems you are expected to relax a while before they bring your check. We are so used to rushing everything here, it is a bit uncomfortable with all the waiting at first, but then you learn to enjoy what a relaxed meal can be like. After lunch we left Old Town and headed towards the beach. As we walked by the opera house and got our first glimpse of the beach, it was breathtaking. The water truly is different color of blue here. We needed to find a place to change into our swimsuits and saw long areas of open beach and one closed off area with lounge chairs. It had a changing area (very old and dirty, but we had to change somewhere) and a little bar but would cost us 12 euros each to rent the lounge chairs, no matter how long we were there. Seemed very expensive but after discovering that the beach was all rocks, we decided it was worth it. It looked like any other white beach until you got close enough to see that it was actually white rocks all about 2 inches across and mostly flat. We got changed and went and found some lounge chairs and went to dip our feet in the Mediterranean. The wind had picked up and the waves were about 4 to 5 feet. Didn't spend much time in the water as the rocks were very painful on your feet and Zachary, who spent the most time in the water, had some pretty good scratches on his legs from the waves battering him against the rocks. The other unusual thing about the beach was that tops weren't required for men or women, and about 80% of the women

took advantage of this. Women of all ages, shapes, and sizes. Thought the boys might be uncomfortable with this, but it didn't seem as though they even noticed. Either that or they hid it real well. This was not the best beach experience I have ever had, but hey, we hung out on a beach with the rich and famous in the French Riviera. After leaving the beach we wanted to head over to Avenue Jean Medecin which is the main street in Nice loaded with shops and other touristy things, but we were somewhat lost, had a mediocre map, and street signs were very difficult to find if they existed at all. It was the opposite direction of the bus terminal and we didn't want to miss the last little boat back to the ship, so we headed back to the bus and went back to Villefranche. We found our way back down the steep hill, bought some fresh fruit at a little fruit stand and headed over to the dock to catch our little boat. When we arrived at the dock we saw about 20 suitcases and to our amazement, our garment bag with our suits in it was there. Still missing the other bag with our shoes and bathroom stuff in it, but at least we would be able to dress for dinner. We grabbed our bag and got on the little boat and this is where the fun began. As we pulled out from the little dock area into the open water we noticed that the waves had grown to about 8 to 10 feet. There were about a dozen people sitting in the front of the boat, which was open, and the waves crashing over the front of the boat were battering them. We managed to stay dry, but it was a pretty frightening trip back to our ship. When we got off of the boat onto the little temporary floating docks tied to the ship, they were bouncing all over the place, and there were a dozen steps that we needed to walk up to get into the doorway to the boat. Spencer was having trouble navigating these steps on his crutches and was slipping, and the crew there shut everything down and made sure he got on the boat safely. This became another trend everywhere we visited. We didn't see anyone during our visits to the cities on crutches or in wheel chairs. When folks saw Spencer on his crutches they almost always stopped to look. Everywhere entrance to whatever site we were at each day though, whoever was working the gate would immediately take Spencer as soon as they saw him and either take him to an elevator or other entrance to make sure it was as easy for him as possible. One security guard at the Vatican yelled a one lady because she got too close to Spencer as he was going through the metal detector. Spencer has no trouble getting around on his crutches, but everyone seemed to want to help him once they noticed his crutches. We were lucky we got back to the boat when we did, as the folks that came back an hour or two later were in even rougher seas. These rough seas, high wind, and off and on rain would stay with us for the next couple of days. We took our suits up to our rooms and dressed for dinner after trying to hand press the wrinkles out, and went to the dining room for our first formal dinner. Tonight was escargot and lamb roast. As the boat sailed out of the harbor and into the open sea we got our first taste of the ship rocking heavily out on the water. Had our first feeling of queasiness and put on the anti nausea bracelets that Rhonda had got before we left and they worked better than we even expected. We went to bed that night thinking that I would roll out of the bed as the ship was rocking, but managed to get pretty good nights sleep.

Day V

We awoke the next morning and were surprised to see the coast of Livorno a good ways away at about the time we were supposed to be docking. A few minutes later, Captain

Frank's voice came through the speaker in our room informing us that due to high winds and high seas we would be unable to dock in Livorno. I went down to guest services to call our tour company who would be waiting to take us to Pisa and let him know that we would not make it but hoped to dock the next day for our tour of Rome. The Captain told us that we would spend the day at sea and head for Civitavecchia, the next days port. The seas and the winds only increased that day, the seas up to 15 feet and the wind up to 70 MPH, so we had a day to kill and it was way to windy and cold to go out to the pool. It may have been a blessing in disguise though as it gave us a day to rest and continue to recover from the jet lag we were still feeling a little bit of. There seemed to be many folks feeling the effects of the boats movement that day the mood on the ship was getting a little tense. I spent most of the morning exploring the ship and saw several folks down in the medical center looking for some relief from the seasickness. Lots of folks were stumbling and falling into the walls as they tried to walk around the ship, but as the bracelets were doing their jobs we got through the day pretty well. We hardly saw the boys that whole day, as we told them after we got on the boat that they could be on their own. The boat seemed to be a very safe environment and thought they would enjoy the trip more by letting them come and go as they pleased rather than having to always check in with us. They took full advantage of this and spent most of their time up on the 12th and 13th decks in the children's area. It was separated off with different sections for different age groups and had a nightclub that only people under 18 were allowed into. They made many new friends there and stayed there till after midnight every night we were on the boat. We got to spend plenty of time with them while we were on our tours in the cities we visited, and they got to enjoy the trip on their own terms while we were all on the boat. After dinner we did our best to get a good nights rest in hopes of seeing Rome the next day.

Day VI

The next morning we awoke again with the shore a good ways away, but shortly the Captain came on the PA system to let us know that we would be docking, just a little late due to weather and heavy traffic in the port. We went to breakfast and waited for the ship to dock in the heavy rain and ended up getting off the boat only about an hour later than what was originally scheduled. Everyone gathered on the dock in a big tent to look for their tours that they had set up and finally fought our way through the crowd and found our tour guides who called our van over and loaded us up and headed for Rome. Our tour guides were Caroleena and Mary. Caroleena to guide us through ancient Rome, and Mary to take us through the Vatican. They were great tour guides and the day would not have been the same without them. As we got to the outskirts of Rome which was about a 40 minute drive, we stopped at a convenience store for a restroom break, and as we were about to get back on the Van, Giulio, the owner of the Tour company who had arranged the tours drove up to meet us. He apologized for us not getting to see Pisa and said he had a gift for us. He owns a winery in southern Italy and had two bottles of wine for us, one for our lunch that day and one for us to take home with us. He sent us on our way but showed up several more times that day to make sure everything was going well. During our drive into Rome Caroleena was telling us the history of Rome and a little about what we would be seeing that day. Our first stop was the Circus Maximus in front of Palatine

hill. This she told us was the very beginning of Rome. Although it is mainly used as a park now, the size of it was impressive. It was said to hold 250,000 spectators. Much of the ruins of the original buildings of Rome still stood behind it. After leaving Circus Maximus, they took us to a little park up on top of a little hill to get a good look over the city of Rome. We could see most of the main part of the city from here and several domes towering above the other buildings. From there they told us they had a surprise for us and we drove a few blocks over to a little parking area where a very old large stone wall covered with statues and other carvings stood. It had two large iron doors, which were the entrance to the gardens of the scion of the priory. In one of the iron doors was a keyhole about a ½ inch across. Caroleena told us to look through the keyhole and we could see bushes and hedges bordering and growing into an arch over a long walkway, and at the end of the walkway framed by the hedges was the dome of St. Peter's Basilica. As small a thing as this was, it was very nearly the highlight of the trip. This was something that we hadn't anticipated seeing and was an amazing view that we know most folks who go to Rome don't get to see. Our next stop was the Coliseum. On the way we passed the monument to Vittorio-Emmanuelle II, a gigantic stone building that is called the wedding cake by the locals. Then by the Roman Forum which was barely visible because of the temporary bleachers that were being put up for the upcoming Republic Day (their independence day). Because of all of this we were unable to stop at the Forums or the Pantheon, but a few blocks later we were at the Coliseum. Caroleena gave us the history of the Coliseum on the drive, and then negotiated a deal for some umbrellas from a street vendor as it was still raining some when we arrived. Then she sent us through a tunnel that led over to the coliseum. What an amazing structure to have been built over 2000 years ago. For a while we just stood in awe, then Rhonda made Spencer actually go over and touch it. He, of course was happy just to be standing there at the base of it, but she eventually coaxed him over to the base of it to actually touch one of the large columns. As we were walking around a part of it and taking way too many pictures, three guys dressed in full gladiator outfits told Spencer to come up there so we could take his picture with them. Then one of them said he would take a picture of our whole group with them. After we had finished the photo session one of them held open a cloth pouch and said "5 euros for each person". I guess we should have asked if there would be a charge before taking all the pictures, but as they had swords we gave them the money and headed back to the tunnel to the van. So, we got conned by some filthy mouthed gladiators in Rome, but it was almost worth it for the story we now have to tell. After leaving the Coliseum we drove towards the Vatican to the restaurant they had us set up to have lunch at. We drove by the balcony where Mussolini gave his speeches from during WWII and into a newer section of Rome. By new I mean built in the 1800's. When we arrived at the restaurant they took us to a table in a small dining room and immediately delivered the wine that Giulio had delivered to be chilled before our arrival. Then wine glasses for everyone, including the boys. Then they started bringing plates of antipasto. As these were large plates and there were many of them we thought this was lunch. So after we had gotten pretty full from that they came and asked if we wanted pizza or pasta. Not wanting to offend by turning down food, even though we had already had about enough food, we asked for a mix of both pizza and pasta. The pasta dish was truly the best I have ever eaten and the pizza was probably the best we had the entire trip. Now, being completely stuffed they brought desert. We did our best to finish that and waddled

out onto the street to get some air. They did let me go into the kitchen to get some pictures while Giulio was making sure the guides had everything set up for our visit to the Vatican which was just a few blocks away. We headed over on foot and saw a huge line wrapping down and around the block to enter the Vatican Museum. We had been told that with private guides they could bypass some of the lines and we thought that meant that there was a different entrance for them. Our guide's method was to just merge into the line a short ways from the entrance and surprisingly no one said anything. I was waiting for the yelling to begin, as I know that these folks had been in line for a while, but no one seemed to bat an eye. As we entered the Museum it was like entering a different era. It was a huge place with tons of artwork lining every inch of each room. It was filled with statues, monuments, paintings, and relics and was just too much to see. We were somewhat rushed as we wanted to see the Sistine chapel and St. Peters Basilica before we headed back, but as you are going through there is so much to look at you then realize you need to haven't seen the ceiling and the beautiful design that was built into it, then about half way through we noticed that the floor was covered with giant mosaics and intricate tile work. There were many rooms that we didn't even have time to go through. As we exited the museum into a small courtyard, Mary took us over to some posters depicting the murals in the Sistine chapel. She explained what all the paintings represented with the help of the posters, as there was absolutely no talking in the chapel and she wouldn't be able to explain any of it in there. Walking into the Chapel was absolutely overwhelming and seemed to bring tears to everyone's eyes. The color and depth of the paintings made you feel as though you could literally walk right into them. The feeling I had while in there is something I will never forget. From the Sistine chapel we headed over to St. Peters Basilica. The size of this building is difficult to convey. It was loaded from corner to corner with giant monuments to many of the previous popes. Even with the amount of people that were in there, we had a feeling that we were intruding. It seemed much more of a place to worship than a place for tourists, but we were happy to have had the chance to experience it. We left the basilica and walked out onto St. Peters Square and then over to a little store just off the square to get some mementos of our visit. Then a little Gelato and into the van to head back to the boat. The skies had cleared by this time and we would have better weather for the rest of the trip. When we arrived back at the port we thanked Caroleena and Mary for giving us such a remarkable day and headed for our stateroom to get ready for dinner then back to the room for a much needed nights rest. This was a very exhausting day for us. Not because it had been very busy or tiring, but after seeing some of the remains of the Roman Empire and then touring the Vatican we were in a bit of a daze that was left from experiencing the history and beauty of Rome and then the overwhelming feelings we experienced standing in the Sistine chapel and St. Peters Basilica. This seemed to be the day that would symbolize what our trip was all about. Now, onto Naples.

Day VII

The view of Naples from the boat this morning made this the prettiest port we sailed into. The day started with very nice weather and after breakfast we walked off the boat onto the dock to meet Marinella, our guide who would take us to Pompeii. It was only about a 20-minute drive through a more rundown section of Naples. Pompeii was for me

probably the highlight of the trip. I think because it was so much more than we expected. I had thought we would walk up on a little pile of rocks and then it would be explained what used to be here. It actually is a large city, mostly still intact, covering about 200 acres. The second stories of the buildings and the roofs are about all that is missing. As we walked through the town we could see paintings that were still on the walls from over 2000 years ago. All in all though, it resembled nearly any random city you see today. There were residential areas, business sections, the theaters, a red light district with brothel, and of course the Roman baths and Roman style forums. The Marble bar tops in the bars and food marts looked as they probably did many years ago, and the bakery we went through looked like with a little work could be up and running in short order. A few of the many bodies that were found there were on display in the bathhouse. We spent about 5 hours touring just a small section of the city and was in awe with the fact that houses built in America today begin to crumble within 50 to 100 years, these houses that were built between 600 and 100 BC have most of their original rock walls and even some of the stucco that covered the rocks still in place. Excluding the obvious differences, it felt much like walking down the streets of any small town here in America, only without the inhabitants. Marinella did a great job of telling us the stories of Pompeii and left us with a true sense of what living there must have been like. We left Pompeii to head back to the dock early in the afternoon, dropped our bags of souvenirs of at the boat and hopped in a cab to head into Naples to have lunch. I quickly realized that there was no meter in the cab and after traveling about 8 blocks to Brandy's, a pizza place that had been recommended, we got out of the cab and the driver told us we owed him 20 euros. We had been warned the night before to watch for pickpockets in Naples and were now getting a sense that many things here were a racket designed to take as much money as possible from the tourists, but seeing all we saw here made it all worthwhile. The cab driver was playing an Italian music CD on the way over and Rhonda was talking to the driver about how much she liked it and after a brief conversation she was able to con him out of his own CD for just 2 euros, or maybe he just felt guilty for charging us so much for the cab ride. Either way, Rhonda was very happy with her purchase and has listened to the CD many times. This afternoon at the restaurant was one of the most important for Spencer. One of his main goals for the trip was to eat Pizza in Naples, which he had told us many times prior to the trip, was the birthplace of Pizza. I don't know that he enjoyed the actual pizza as much as he thought he would, as it was completely different than any pizza he had eaten before, I know that the fact that he ate pizza in Naples was a very big deal and something he will always remember. We decided to walk back to the boat rather than be extorted by another cab driver and saw some of the most beautiful buildings we saw in any of the places we visited. As we got back to the dock we spent a little time in a large 12th century castle that at one time sat right on the edge of the water. Then the deadly dash across the street through the never ending line of speeding cars to the dock and back on the boat for another great dinner and a relaxing evening.

Day VIII

On this day we are docking in Palermo, Sicily. Sicily is the most conquered island on Earth, and thus has the remnants of many different cultures that built houses, businesses, and cathedrals here. Here we took a bus tour provided by Royal Caribbean to a few of the Cathedrals in the area. As we drove through the city the influence of all the different

groups of people who lived here were evident in all the buildings we passed. The first Cathedral we visited was up the mountain behind the city in a little town of Monreal. This Cathedral was built in the 12th century and it's ceiling was covered in gold mosaic tile depicting bible stories. Like most of the cathedrals here it also had the tombs of many of the emperors of Sicily and saints who lived in the area. The other two Cathedrals we saw on the way back to town were equally amazing and what was the most amazing is the amount of time and effort that had to be put into the building of these cathedrals. It was obvious that a great deal of pride was taken in an effort to make these buildings as beautiful as can be imagined, and all nearly 1000 years ago. Sicily was a place we would have definitely liked to spend a lot of time wondering the streets, but the boat was leaving early this day to head back to Barcelona. We had time this afternoon for Rhonda and the boys to spend a little time by the pool before dinner, and for me to spend about an hour in the Casino. Tonight was our last formal dinner on the boat and we were served steak and lobster. Another great meal, and after dinner the waiters and chefs all gathered on the staircase and sang 'O Sole Mio. Tonight we told the boys they had no curfew as we didn't have to get up at any certain time the next day. Tomorrow would be a sea day and we would finally get to sleep in so we went to bed watching the full moon rise over Sicily in the distance.

Day IX

With an entire day at sea today, we had to get all of our bags packed to be picked up by 11 pm this evening. The boys slept very late and skipped breakfast because they had stayed at the nightclub until about 3 AM. Daniella, our Ocean Adventure Manager, had set up a tour of the bridge with the captain for the boys at 4:00 so Zachary got to do a little swimming and they got to spend a little more time in the Arcade. After the bridge tour we all headed down to the Ice Rink for the ice show. They had reserved us seats in the front row and a short time into the performance a couple of the performers skated a throne over to us and grabbed Spencer and put him on the Throne and skated him out onto the ice so he could be the King presiding over the Ice Show. They skated him around as they performed and then placed him at the head of what looked like a "knights of the round table" table and had him start spinning it around. Then they skated him back to his seat about half way into the show, acted like they were crying as they told him goodbye and went back and finished what turned out to be a great show, especially when you consider that it was done on a ship at sea. After the show all the performers came out to meet Spencer and visit with us for a little bit. The performers were from all over the world and were very gracious. We had our last dinner on the boat and said our goodbyes to Rugellio and Emrullah, our waiters who had taken such great care of us. The trip was beginning to take its toll on us and Rhonda and I went to bed early while the boys stayed out late again.

Day X

The boat had docked in Barcelona before we got up this morning. We had to be off the boat to catch our bus to the airport by 7:30 this morning so we skipped breakfast. We went down to the dock and searched for our bags among the thousands that were going around the many carousels and after finding all of them headed out to find our bus. We

got to the airport and finally figured out where to check in for our flight and got checked in pretty quickly which left us a little time to grab some breakfast. Although offering different types of food, the quality of Barcelona airport food is much the same as American airport food. Our flight was a couple of hours late getting off which left us with just 45 minutes to get through customs in Philadelphia and recheck our bags. We got through customs pretty quick and were fortunate that they held our flight so we could get back to Dallas that evening. We arrived in Dallas about 9:00 PM, some 22 hours after we had left the boat in Barcelona and once again were missing luggage, this time 4 bags. As great as the food was everywhere we went, we were very excited that Sonic was still open to get a burger before we got home. The airline delivered the 4 missing bags the next evening, but we are still missing the one bag with our toiletries that was lost on the way out. The airline says they are still looking for it and we filed our paperwork today for the claim, so hopefully we will see it again.

Sorry this was so long, but there is still so much more that can be told it was hard to figure out what to leave out. It was a trip of a lifetime and something that none of us will ever forget. Make a Wish and everyone else who made this possible will always hold a special place in our hearts. And a special thanks to Michael, Patricia, and Beatte who started this process and made sure it was such a special trip for Spencer.