

2011 Christmas News from the Browns

Email Marilyn - marylebones@shaw.ca

Email Gord - gord.brow@shaw.ca

Home Phone - 604-538-1943

www.browfamily.ca

CUBA TOUR —2011

For us, this year began in Cuba, escorting a fairly large group of 28 people for Royal Heights Tours. Two years prior, we visited Cuba in order to map out a new cultural tour that would give the guests a chance to explore the rich heritage of the local people. During this discovery trip, we travelled all the way to Baracoa, which is at the eastern tip of the Island. Since the last part of the trip from Santiago de Cuba to Baracoa proved to be a long and arduous journey over mountains and rough terrain with no interesting places to stop, we recommended that it be cut from the program. So, our tour with this group began in Havana and then South to the Bay of Pigs, where we continued more or less along the coast through Cienfuegos, Camaguey, Bayamo and eventually ending up in Santiago de Cuba. After touring

the Historical sites of the City, we flew back to Havana. Our guide was a young Cuban who was very informative about how the Cubans of today dealt with some of the restrictions that had been imposed by Castro. We took some time after the RHT tour to visit some of the areas of Havana that we had not



visited before. The most notable was the cemetery, covering 140 acres with more than 500 major mausoleums, chapels, and family vaults. Apparently, more than two million people are buried there – about the same population as the City of Havana.



PORT HARDY—OCTOBER

As mentioned last year, Ben, our oldest grandson, was certified for SCUBA. In October, his Dad and I took him to Port Hardy, on Vancouver Island where the “real diving” is. He was rewarded by seeing all the big critters like Octopus, Wolf Eel and Puget Sound Crab. It was the first time he had ever used a drysuit and he did extremely well. He’s 6 feet tall now but still growing so his Dad rented the suit for him just for this trip. Captain Dan of the Mamro – our dive boat – took



us first to Husser Point which is a pretty dive with great visibility and lots of Hooded Nudibranchs. This site has a 60 foot bottom so it was good for testing Ben’s weight. Later in the trip, we declared him competent enough to dive with us on Browning wall which goes straight down for over 200 feet. The crew were all excited about three generations of divers being on the boat at the same time.



NOT A GREAT YEAR MEDICALLY



This has not been a great year for us health wise. Both of us were diagnosed with early signs of cancer so have spent much of the year dealing with subsequent treatment. Actually, Gord was diagnosed with prostate cancer last year after a biopsy which followed the concerns of his doctor that there may be a problem with his prostate. After exploring all of the options, Gord opted for “Active Surveillance” as most prostate cancers grow slowly – the problem being that they can never tell which ones will kill you and which ones won’t. As the (last) year wore on, there were concerns that something might have been missed so a second biopsy was ordered and the results were more serious than the first. After visits to the Cancer Center and meetings with a Radiology Oncologist to explore all of the

options, it was decided to have the prostate removed which was done June 13th. Gord was back at the gym after only 5 weeks and now reports that everything is working perfectly – a great relief since incontinence was reported to be a problem in more than 10% of cases.

Marilyn was recalled after her yearly Mammogram and had to undergo a more thorough Diagnostic mammogram in the hospital where the machine was a little more accurate. It was determined that further investigation would be necessary so she had to go for a fine needle biopsy, the results of which were contradicted by a follow-up report. At this point, there was some confusion but, to be on the safe side, they sent her for an MRI. The MRI confirmed the results of the biopsy so she went in for a core biopsy and lumpectomy, removing a very small

tumor of 1.5mm. The margins were clear but, to be on the safe side, they did a CT Scan and Sentinel lymph node biopsy followed by 16 (every week day) radiation treatments. All these procedures have played havoc with her back and at the time of writing, she has tried the chiropractor, physio, acupuncture, laser treatment, traction, massage therapy and drugs. Nothing seems to work so, faced with having to wait for over a year for an MRI, we moved to the private sector and paid for it. We took the MRI results to a private clinic where, once again, there was no

waiting – in fact, the doctor was waiting for US and spent two hours doing a physical exam, then sitting down to discuss the options in detail. Their first attempt at a diagnosis was to block the nerve close to where they thought the problem was. This didn’t work so she is now scheduled for another type of block and some sort of a nerve test at JF Strong in Vancouver in an attempt to determine just where all the pain is coming from. Once that has been determined, they can figure out a course of treatment. Let’s hope next year is a less painful one.

Merry Christmas
and happy New Year

SECOND TOUR OF THE YEAR

In May, we headed, once again, to the Greek Islands with a very small group of only 10 people. Of the original 14, two couples became ill before the trip and had to cancel at the last minute. It's the smallest group we have ever taken to the Greek Islands and maybe an indication of how people feel about visiting a country that seems to be bent on solving their problems with Molotov Cocktails. Since we spend only one night in Athens at the beginning of the tour, we see very little of Syntagma Square, where all the protests are staged. Nevertheless, people seem to be so nervous about it that they are not booking for Greece. For the first time in 9 years, Royal Heights has cancelled the 2012 tour because of a lack of interest and we will miss seeing the many Greek friends made over the years. Normally, we escort a group to Egypt before visiting the Greek Islands but, because of the "revolution" in Egypt, the Canadian Government issued a no-travel advisory against visiting that Country. This rendered everyone's travel insurance void so, although there were people booked for this tour, Royal Heights had to cancel the scheduled tour because of liability concerns. By this time, we were aware of our impending cancer

treatments so decided to spend the extra two weeks on the Island of Rhodes. We had hoped to stretch out our two weeks by mixing visits to various historical sites with time just to relax. We had planned to



rent a car but decided on a bus tour that took us around the entire island. We soon discovered that, other than the Old City, which was right beside the cruise ship centre and full of tourists, there was not much else of historical value on the island of Rhodes. We had been there in 1981 and, since then, the Old City had not changed - but there are now miles of

high rise hotels lining the beaches which are covered with umbrellas and beach chairs. Beach-side walking paths provided for miles of walking or jogging so we were able to get some exercise and view some of the fat and much burnt bodies that present themselves to the Mediterranean sun. We were surprised to see that most of the tourists were from the Scandinavian countries and Europe - very few from North America. Rhodes has truly become a beach-side resort destination like Hawaii or Cancun with visitors scrambling to the beach to grab a quick tan then, a week later, returning to their home country to resume their work. Unfortunately, just after arriving, Marilyn got Pneumonia so, for the first time in our travelling days, we were able to put our medical insurance program to the test. Initially, we called the doctor to the hotel and, as it turned out, the doctor-on-call happened to be a pulmonary specialist. So, after, several visits to the clinic for x-rays and blood tests, a time of rest was prescribed and much of the first week was spent relaxing on our hotel balcony which overlooked the ocean. We did manage to make the short ferry ride over to Turkey to visit the town of Marmaris which has been transformed to accommo-

date hundreds of tourists who make the journey for a day of shopping. The harbour has been renovated from old stone and brick to shining marble seaside walks lined with hundreds of Turkish cafes. The town also sported a Turkish "bazaar", a miniature version of the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul in an unsuccessful attempt to provide the tourists with a taste of "Old Turkey".

We had a funny experience when leaving Greece for the short ferry ride to the Turkish coast. We are used to using our EU passports while travelling around Europe but, when going into non-EU countries, we use our Canadian passports. We presented our Canadian passports to Greek immigration before boarding the ferry and were delayed which the agent thumbed through the pages trying to find a stamp indicating that we had entered the country. We had forgotten that we had used our EU passports to enter the country and should have used them to exit. The Greek immigration officers had a laugh about it and stamped our Canadian passports before allowing us to proceed. If this had happened at the US border, we would probably have been labeled a terrorist and sent to jail.



RESTORATION PROJECT

As if life wasn't busy enough for us this year, our drain in the basement suite backed up and flooded part of the hallway and bedroom. The plumbing guys can't figure it out because, after the initial back-up, everything cleared and went back to normal. We think it was a "perfect storm" or should we say, "perfect flush" of cat hair, toilette paper, kitty litter particles etc. that all hit a branch of the drain at the same time and backed up. At first, we didn't think it was serious so rented a "Rug Doctor" to suck up all the water. After the first day, things began to smell badly so we called the insurance company who brought restoration guys with them. They declared the spill contaminated because the toilet was on the same branch and proceeded to remove the floor moldings, carpet and drywall in the area that was affected. Because the carpet was continuous, they said that they would replace it all, including the living/dining room area - in all, a

\$13,000.00 bill. The good news is that they waved the deductible because it was over \$5,000.00 and, because it was our first claim, they announced that our premiums would not go up. We were very impressed with BCAA Insurance who paid immediately for the cost of the Rug Doctor equipment and supplies and for the extra power their equipment used to dry out the walls. We had three 7.5 ft. barrister book cases full of books and travel photo albums which had to be unpacked and boxed so that they could be moved. BCAA asked us to keep track of our time which they would pay for once the job had been completed. After several weeks of restoration and finally getting new carpet in, we are able to lay claim to the suite which we are used to using every night for watching a movie or TV with the projector. Little finishing jobs have yet to be done but it should all be finished by the first week in December.



SPAIN TRIP POSTPONED

Earlier in the year, we had booked flights and made reservations for a trip to Spain with some friends that have travelled with us before on several RH tours. Although Gord was over his operation and back to the gym, we had no idea how long Marilyn's follow-up procedures would take so decided to cancel our trip to Spain. We met with our friends and they agreed that it was better to postpone until next year. As it turned out, John developed some chest pain while at work and ended up in the hospital having open heart surgery, an issue that would have presented itself at the same time we were supposed to be in Europe. Health issues have at least been timely this year.

