

2014

Christmas News from the Browns

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Take time during the rush of the holidays to enjoy the things in life that really matter. Take time to take in the quiet moments spent with friends and loved ones. And may the wonder of Christmas surround you throughout the season.

Cozumel - March



SAN GERVASIO RUINS

In March, we joined the Clancy clan for a spring break holiday at Cozumel. Paige managed to secure a three bedroom condo right on the beach so we each had a bedroom and bathroom to ourselves. The condo was about 15 minutes from town which suited us just fine as some days there were four or five cruise ships at the dock near down town and the resulting crowds made it pretty busy. By 4:00PM, however, the cruise ships all left so the evenings in town were quiet and relaxing. A visit to the local "super mercado" got us stocked up on food and drink for breakfast and some dinners, others we ate in rather than go to town for a meal. Paige celebrated her birthday while we were there so we hired a chef to cook for us that day. We ordered the meals and the chefs brought all the food and cooked breakfast and dinner.

Rather than rent a car, we hired a driver to take us around the island for a day. All went well until his van broke down on the opposite side of the island. While our driver called for service, we managed to get ourselves to a nearby beach resort where we spent a few hours snorkelling and just relaxing on the beach. Our driver eventual-

ly showed up to finish up our tour back at the condo.

Ben ignored his parents warnings to cover up or use sun-screen so he paid the price with a beautiful red "tan". (parents don't know anything)



The only incident we had at the condo was with our dish washer. The detergents below the sink were labeled in Spanish "Dish Washing Detergent" and "Dish Washer Detergent" - big difference of course. Anyway, Gord loaded the dish washer and off we went to the pool which was right in front of the condo. About 20 minutes later, Gord returned to get his sun glasses and when he opened the door he was greeted by a foot of soap suds. The floor was all marble tile so, when he dashed in, he skidded across the room and was only saved from a bad fall by crashing into the dining room table.



scuba Diving in the Gulf Islands

In February Gord & his buddy, Mark, boarded the *Nautilus Swell* once again for some diving in the Gulf Islands. The *Nautilus Swell* is a great live-aboard dive boat with small cabins but a full bathroom with shower in each cabin. Usually, these live-aboard dive boats have a dorm style bunk system with a communal bathroom. This was our second dive trip on the *Swell* and little did we know that it would be our last. The boat was sold this summer and they are winding down live-aboard boat tours in favour of a land based

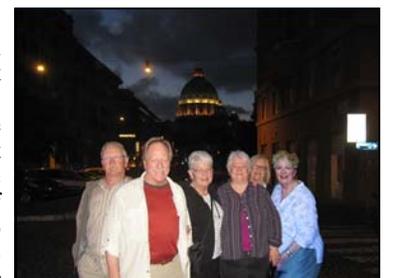
dive destination. This was the last of the live aboard dive boats in our area - there are no more. It was always fun to be out diving without having to make the long trek back to shore. We will miss the convenience of having our rooms right there when we get out of our dive suits.



Trip to Northern Italy- May/June

In May, we travelled to Northern Italy with Royal Heights Tours. They offered the trip to us as a thank you for spending the last 10 years escorting tours for them. Four friends joined us on the tour and we had a great time just sitting back letting someone else do the work. Starting in Rome, we had some free time before joining the tour. We had been to Rome before and were staying right down town so decided to walk to the various points of interest like the Vatican, Trevi Fountain and the Forum. Because we have EU passports and are seniors, our touring that day was very affordable. What we weren't prepared for were the crowds. We arrived at Trevi Fountain and were joined by about a thousand other tourists. We took photos which we compared to our 1990 visit when there were a scant 25 - 30 people standing around taking photos. After joining the tour, we headed north to Florence, Bologna, Verona and finally Venice. We spent a few more days in Venice before flying home but the proliferation of cruise ships created a crowded atmosphere that we found uncomfortable at times. The tour was led by Julie Bruce, one of the owners of RHT, and she did a great job but set a mean pace. We certainly fit everything into our days quite often sliding into our

destination at 6PM and doing a city walking tour before dinner at 7:30. Some WAG in the group remarked on one of these walks that it was more like a forced march. In any event, the food was great, the wine was (mostly) good and the weather was hot. Our favourite place during this tour was a stay in the Tuscan Valley. Nestled in the hills of the valley and flanked by vineyards on one side and rolling pastures on the other, this hotel was more like an old Italian farm house. The grounds are beautifully appointed with gardens of roses and lavender everywhere. A small lane behind the main house led to a large paddock where four mares were grazing with their young colts. The place is something you would see on a post card. The farm is over 300 acres with 60 acres in olives and 40 acres in vineyard. They make their own wine but the olives are taken elsewhere to be pro-



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cessed into olive oil. This was a working farm and the guests were invited to create our evening meal for the group. We had a quiet drink with the other abstainers while the rest of them sweated it out in the kitchen below. All four courses were prepared from scratch in about two hours and, to their credit, it was absolutely delicious. Apparently there were some testy moments among the sous chefs during the process but, what goes on in the kitchen, stays in the kitchen and there was so much wine con-

sumed during dinner that any minor scraps appeared to have been forgotten. It was beautiful and rural enough not to be too crowded with tourists.

Our return trip was by far the worst flight that we have ever had to endure. In our section of the cabin on our flight from Frankfurt to Vancouver, there were two dogs which began to howl before we took off, kids running up and down the aisle and a crying baby seated behind us. We had adjoining aisle seats but they were so narrow that it proved to be almost impossible to get comfortable on this 9 hour flight. We decided during that flight that we had seen enough of the other continents and it was now time to stick to some North America travel. Not counting all the trips we did to Asia, we've crossed the pond to Europe 44 times - that's enough.



Short Notes

CATERACT SURGERY— Along with his advancing years, so goes his eye sight as Gord was forced to undergo cataract surgery this Fall. He says that he can see all the way to Langley now but can't read his cell phone. For years, he has needed glasses for distance but chose the cataract lenses that corrected that. The trouble was that it affected his near site so is now forced to wear glasses for reading and some computer work. The health issues seem to have leveled out – spending six days a week at the YMCA helps.

BOTHELL— In August, Marilyn and Paige took a few days to visit Woodinville wine country which is just a few minutes from Bothell near Seattle, Washington, just two hours' drive from our house. These internationally acclaimed wineries, which are home to Merlot, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Bordeaux and Riesling offer wine tasting which the girls took full advantage of. There was never full disclosure on who was drinking and who was driving but it sounded like they had a wonderful time.

COWICHAN VALLEY— For the last 10 years, we have been back and forth to Europe and South America escorting tours for Royal Heights Tours. Now it's time for us to explore more of our own Country and Province which we have sadly ignored for the last 30 years or so. In September, we visited the beautiful Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island. We stayed in the little town of Chemainus which is right near the water on the East coast of the Island just North of Victoria. It is famous for its murals which are painted on every building in town. We were travelling with our friends, Lesley and Harold and the main goal was to experience the scenic drive that took us to the many wineries throughout the Cowichan Valley. It was a great mini holiday made even better by not having to get on a plane to get there.

BEN— Number one Grandson, Ben, left the nest in June and is now living with his girlfriend in an apartment in Langley. He is working on his mechanic's apprenticeship with a local car dealer and she is working for Lordco an auto parts dealer. Apparently, he didn't like the rules at home and was invited to leave or conform – he chose to leave. He did, however, leave his car at home because he is in the process of rebuilding it and, much to the concern of his Dad, remains in a million pieces in the garage.

MATHEW— Mathew continues to do well in school but still has to work hard to maintain his goal which is B average. He is excelling in soccer this year and his team is on top, having not lost a single game all season. We are almost hoping for them to lose at least one game as they are pretty cocky at the moment. After the soccer season comes ball hockey which, at 16 years old, will be his last season as a junior. Next step is into a men's league which we don't think he will do.

Ottawa - June/July



This year, 2014 marks the 50th anniversary since Gord graduated from the RCMP academy in Regina. His old troop organized a reunion which took place in Ottawa and, although it was only a week since we had returned from Europe,

gave us another view of the city. The troop had a formal dinner at the police academy followed by the Sunset Parade which included the Musical Ride, pipe bands, Irish dancers and all sorts of police demonstrations. Since Gord had never been to Ottawa, we stayed in town to take in the festivities of Canada Day on the "Hill", a very busy time in the city. After the crowds we experienced in Europe, we didn't find it uncomfortable at all. We also did the tour of the parliament buildings and Library and, on another day, visited the War Museum. Being in Ottawa also afforded us an opportunity to visit with Marilyn's cousins who live just outside the city. Peter, who lives right on the canal, has a boat and took us on a cruise to an old mill not too far from where he lives. The weather cooperated but the mosquitos were brutal. A nice dinner with Anne, Marilyn's other cousin also included rummaging around some old letter files which brought back some old memories and lots of laughs.



we hopped on another plane headed to Ottawa. It was great to see all the old guys again. The troop reunion included a cruise down the Rideau Canal which



PERSONAL NOTES