

CHAPTER XXXIII - OUR EUROPEAN ADVENTURE



Anita and me with Big Ben in London

On Thursday, September 6, 2001, Megan Woodford, Anita's granddaughter, drove Anita and me to Houston's Hobby Airport to catch the 4:30 pm flight to London. We flew all night, arriving at London airport at 9:40 am, the next morning. We spent our first 3 ½ hours clearing customs, retrieving our luggage and waiting on transportation to our hotel. Arriving at the Thistle Tower Hotel, it took us another hour to get a room. Our room was satisfactory. It had a beautiful view of the Thames River and Tower Bridge, but we had to settle for twin beds. Not long after we settled in, the Norwegian Cruse Line notified us that they had goofed and needed to move us to the Thistle Marble Arch Hotel. We had to check out of the Thistle Tower Hotel by 10 am the next morning but we couldn't check into the Thistle Marble Arch Hotel until 3 pm. The cruise line offered to make up for the inconvenience by treating us to a free bus tour of London. The tour was designed to keep us busy until we could check into our new hotel. That evening we walked over the Tower Bridge where we found a little Italian restaurant and enjoyed a nice salmon dinner.

That morning, we had to place our bags out in hall at 7 am for transfer to new hotel. We were a little early so we spent some time by walking around the London Tower taking pictures. Then we hurried back to the hotel to catch our free tour. We rode the tour bus around London till lunchtime. For lunch the tour split into random groups and we all went our separate ways. Anita and I stopped at the Texas Embassy Cantina, where we enjoyed a surprisingly good Tex-Mex meal. We were told that the restaurant was owned by a native Dallas Texan. While there we met a couple from the States. The wife told us that she was also from Dallas. They had been living in London for about 4 years. Before leaving, Anita bought a souvenir shot glass for her son Ervin and a t-shirt for herself. We found our way back to the bus and toured another hour before arriving at new hotel. While riding around the city the tour guide told us that the City of London is actually only one square mile. Surrounding this square mile there are boroughs and towns but no other cities. Our tour guide, Carol, seemed very knowledgeable with facts and dates. She said that when crossing a street, look down for painted words on the street. There you will see the words "look left (or right)" with an arrow pointing the way you should look for oncoming traffic. That bit of advice was a life saver for those of us who are not used to driving on the left side of the road. As we toured the city we were treated to stops at Buckingham Palace and Trafalgar Square.

In our travels I noticed that English newspapers did not have comics and London streets are narrow and windy. I also noticed a large variety of different people on the streets. I saw nose rings, gaily colored hair, There were Middle Eastern men and women in their muslim dress.

London is a very diverse city. Its streets are small and the buildings close together. Some of the “flats” appear to be about 20’ wide and 4 stories tall. I couldn’t tell how deep. I became very tired during the final hour of our tour. I was dead on my feet. When we finally checked into the hotel, our room seemed like a mile walk from where we checked in. It probably wasn’t more than ¼ mile. Our new room also had twin beds. They were hard but not quite as bad as the ones we had at the other hotel. After a short rest Anita and I decided to go shopping for a meal. We found a store named “Marks and Spenser” department store. It was noticeably different from American department stores. Its basement was a huge deli like store with packaged foodstuff plus fresh fruit, meat, etc. We bought sandwiches, yogurt cups and canned pop to take back to our hotel room. It was only 9 pm but we were so tired we turned in for the night. We found ourselves wide awake around midnight however. Jet lag was still extracting its toll. We lay in our beds, wide awake until 5 a.m. At about 5 a.m. we watched something stupid on T.V. until about 6 a.m. TV wasn’t working for us and we were both starving. We decided to go out and see if we could find a café and have breakfast. We walked around the block looking for some place open, where we could find something to eat. We noticed activity in the hotel café but they were only getting things ready to open. The café wasn’t scheduled to open until 7 a.m. One of the waiters took pity on us and let us in early. He seated us in an inconspicuous table in the back and asked us avoid attracting the attention of the head waiter. Unfortunately the maitre-d discovered us about 6:30 and had a fit. We basically ignored him and he went away. We quieted our hunger pains with about 3 cups of coffee & Danish before 7. After the café opened we enjoyed an “English” breakfast as opposed to the continental breakfast. An English breakfast includes hot food and a continental breakfast does not. Our English breakfast cost us L30 or about \$45 in American money.

We waited around for about two and a half hours before we finally boarded the bus for Dover. The bus ride took an hour and fifteen minutes. We finally arrived at the ship terminal & checked aboard. We were like zombies for the rest of the day. We busied ourselves as long as we could still suffering from our jet lag. We went to bed about 8 pm that evening and slept fitfully till about 9 am the next morning.

On Monday, September 10, the ship was going through a weather front and seas were very rough. The Captain announced that the rough seas have cost us about 7 hours off our schedule. He is reporting 10 meter waves (30+ feet). I believe him! Since I am prone to seasickness I took some seasick pills last night, as a precaution. So far, I’ve been ok. I’m taking another now just to be sure. Anita ordered coffee & Danish from room service this morning. It really hit the spot. I am thankful for Anita. She is very thoughtful. It is now about 10 a.m. and we still haven’t left our room. That’s ok, though. We are really enjoying the rest.

On Tuesday, September 11 our ship pulled into Warnemunde, Germany. We left the ship for a “walking tour of Rostock”. Rostock is the parent city of Warnemunde. Ages ago Rostock and Warnemunde were separate towns but Rostock bought Warnemunde so that it would have safe access to the sea. The two towns have been a single city ever since. We loved the old city. We were especially taken by the wall, the old church and the old clock. After the tour we returned to the ship. Almost immediately we became aware of the shocking Attack on America by Muslim extremist. After watching breaking news on the ship’s T.V. for awhile we went back to town, just to get away from the ship. We needed to get away for awhile because the news was too depressing. Later we returned to ship and went to Sports Bar for coffee. They had two separate channels covering the disaster. The awful carnage seeped into our psyches bringing Anita and me both to tears. We had to leave and go back to our cabin to stop crying. In our cabin we finally found an old documentary on T.V. It didn’t help much but it was better than wallowing in the grief of 9-11. Later that evening, we looked out of our cabin window and saw a

large number of people standing on the dock with umbrellas. Our cruise ship was Norwegian but most of her passengers were American. Anita and I discussed this with some of our fellow passengers the next day. We all agreed these people were standing in the rain to show respect for our loss. It was a very touching act and we were all grateful to the people of this little German town.

On Wednesday, September 12 we spent the day at sea. All entertainment was cancelled to show respect for the victim's of 9-11. The Captain also offered free telephone calls and email to the states for anyone needing reassurance from home or satisfy other concerns. We called Jerri, Anita's oldest daughter and Patti, my oldest daughter and asked them to call everyone else for us. Anita sent an email to several friends asking how they were and letting them know that we were alright. Being in a down mood, we also decided to cancel our cruise as soon as we pulled into Copenhagen. We decided to spend that time in Copenhagen until we could re-scheduled our flight from there to home. We figured that we would get a cruise rebate because we had insurance that would pay for the extra expense of a hotel, food and incidentals.

After checking into it, we found our cancellation insurance was basically no good. It would pay less than 75% only if there was a covered cause of cancellation. For us to be covered at all, one of us would have to feign illness. We decided to continue with the cruise as originally planned. We also felt we would probably be safer staying on the ship rather than flying home at this time.

On Thursday, September 13, we visited Tallinn, Estonia. Anita and I signed up for a walking tour. We found the Estonians a proud people and they were happy to be out from under the yoke of Communist Russia. They seemed to be very excited about becoming a member of the European Union. Old Tallinn, their capital, is made up of wonderfully old brightly painted buildings. Each building is painted in a pastel color trimmed in white.

On Friday, Sept 14, we visited St Petersburg, Russia. We signed up for another walking tour. Actually the tour consisted of a long bus ride followed by a little walking then another bus ride. The tour bus part of the tour consisted of a lot of "on your left is" and "on your right is" stuff. We saw a lot of wonderful statues and historic buildings. We also saw a lot of run down buildings that would make our slums look upper class. Our tour guide said that studio apartments cost about \$100 US if rented from private sector or about 1/8th of that from government. The New Russians or the Russians with wealth, after the fall of the USSR, lived much better. Our tour guide said the New Russians drove American Jeeps costing about \$200,000. The police are more likely to stop them because only criminals can afford American cars. On the tour we visited the Saint Peter and Paul Cathedral. All of the Tsars are buried there.

On Saturday, Sept 15 we take the tour to Pushkin, just outside St. Petersburg. Our tour guide pointed out that St. Petersburg was named after Saint Peter and not Peter the Great, who founded it. At Pushkin we enjoyed visiting Catherine the Great's palace. Our tour guide told us out that most people confuse Catherine the First and Catherine the Great. Catherine the Great was Catherine the First's daughter. The palace was marvelous. The Russians are doing an excellent job of restoring it. The palace was occupied by Nazi troops during WW II. The Germans rode motorcycles up and down the halls over the beautiful inlaid wood floors. For me the most memorable part of the tour was the Russian toilet. They are much rarer and much harder to find than American toilets. It is especially hard to find a free one. Most of the ladies toilets, that we came across, had an attendant who charged the ladies for a little square of toilet paper. There was also no sitting down for the ladies. The toilets had places marked for the user's feet and the lady had to squat hanging over an open trough. The men could stand, of

course, if they only need to urinate but the ladies are not as lucky. Anita decided to tough it out and hope that luck would lead her to a regular toilet before she suffered kidney failure. After touring the palace, we went outside and walked through the beautiful formal gardens. Lucky for Anita, in the back of the palace, next to the garden, we spotted a modern rest room complete with a sit down type American toilet,

On Sunday, September 16, I woke as refreshed as I've felt this entire cruise. I woke up to a tap tap tap at the door. This signaled the delivery of a breakfast tray from room service. Poor Anita only slept about a half hour during the night. It's a problem that has plagued her since our sailing. The all-night flight to London was still taking its toll. Anita was also suffering from back pain from a slipped disk. I've been praying for it to get better but so far there's been no answer. We're now tied up at the dock at Helsinki, Finland, awaiting our tour call.

We went on a walking tour of an old island fortress. Not much can be said for it except it was big, on four islands and it was definitely a fortress. It seems Finland was under foreign rule alternating between Russia and Sweden until 1917. Finland declared its independence from Russia at that time, taking advantage of the turmoil of the Russian Revolution. Finland has been independent ever since, and they love it. Nationalism appears to be very strong in Finland. The economy is mostly timber, paper and ship building. Finland was the builder of the Carnival Spirit cruise ship in Helsinki. We went on a "cousin's cruise" to Alaska on the Carnival Spirit. The Swedes were building The Carnival Pride and one other when we toured the area. These ships are built in modules and then put together like a giant three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle.

On Monday, September 17 we visit Stockholm, Sweden. We took the shuttle bus into town. We got off at the first stop and did some souvenir shopping and hung around the palace to see changing of the guard. We didn't find it very exciting. Our most exciting event was our trying to find a badly needed bathroom. We only found two, and they were pay toilets. Unfortunately for us, we didn't have any Swedish coins, and all of the shops, cafes, hotels etc turned us away. I finally managed to exchange \$2 for some Swedish coins and we went back to one of the pay toilets. After that we rode around on a shuttle bus for awhile and finally got off at the stop was suppose to be the closest to the Hard Rock Café. We changed our minds about going there however, when someone told us that it was a lot further than we had thought. Instead we caught the next shuttle back to the ship.

Stockholm is a lovely city. We voted it the prettiest city we had seen so far. Stockholm is neat and clean but it is scattered out over a wide area. It is sectioned off with a lot of waterways. It appears as if living conditions are far better here than other Baltic ports. My only criticism here was the limited availability of public toilets. We were also shocked and a little surprised when we noticed that the Swedish flags were not flying at half-mast as the flags were in other ports.

Back on board the ship, we couldn't help but notice our dirty laundry was beginning to pile up. This sent me scouting for the ship's washateria. It didn't take long to find out that our ship didn't have one. I decided to seek out the Hotel Services Manager and point out to him that competitive cruise lines offered washateria services to lessen laundry price impact on their guest. Told him that Anita and I have made five cruises on Norwegian and one on Carnival this year and we hated the feeling of being gouged by high laundry service prices. He agreed and since we had booked back to back cruises on his ship, he offered Anita and me free laundry for the remainder of this cruise and the next one sailing south to the Mediterranean. I accepted his generous offer and thanked him. I then went back to our room and bundled up \$63.25 worth of wash to go to laundry the following morning. The normal charge was \$1.25 for underwear.

Laundering a pair of socks cost \$1, T-shirts \$2.50, blouses \$3.50, slacks \$3.50, and pants \$3.50. Some of these cleaning prices were more than the item cost new.

On Tuesday, September 18 we woke up at 7 and went to restaurant for breakfast. We spent the day enjoying a relaxing day at sea. We felt fresh and vigorous when we finally docked about 6 pm at Copenhagen, Denmark. Anita & I rode the tour bus to Tivoli, a famous Old Danish amusement park. Tivoli is probably the oldest theme park in the world. It is said that Walt Disney was inspired to build Disneyland after visiting Tivoli. A cold light rain fell on us for most of the first hour we were there. It warmed up a bit and cleared after that, however. Considering our dress, it warmed up just a little too much. After walking about 3 blocks into the park, we spotted a little tram that was meandering about the park. We decided it would be a fun thing to ride and tried to catch up with it. We weren't lucky enough to catch the tram, but in our attempt we did make it all the way back to the entrance gate. Determined to ride that little tram, we asked the gate attendant for instructions. The young man we asked spoke English, with a California accent. He was very friendly and very helpful. After receiving instructions on how to buy tickets from an automated ticket machine and directions to the tram boarding station, we finally got our ride. It was great fun. Next we spotted a carousel, Anita's favorite ride. Upon inquiry we found that it was over a hundred years old and had been at Tivoli for over 60 years. It was an attraction at Hamburg, Germany for 40 or so years before it was relocated to Tivoli. Anita and I took turns riding on it. One of us would ride while the other took pictures. After riding the carousel, I went up in this very high contraption that lifted its riders several stories into the sky. It then dropped suddenly, plunging all the way to the ground. It was breathtaking! I rode on it with three Danish teen-age boys. They advised me to first look around and enjoy the wonderful view. Then they advised, "Don't look down!" Our platform dropped suddenly and it was breathtaking. It was very exciting, but once was enough for me. I had accepted the dare, that I had made to myself and it left me feeling very macho. After my daredevil stunt, Anita and I ran into a couple from the cruise ship. They recommended that we go on the Hans Christian Andersen exhibit ride. This ride took us through fairy tale-story book scenes from Hans Christian Andersen's stories. It was most charming. It took us through scene after scene illustrating his best known works. After our charming ride we stopped for an ice cream cone. We then strolled leisurely back to the main entrance. We finished a very enjoyable evening with a bus ride back to the ship.

The next morning we got up about 7 a.m. and after a tasty breakfast of Danish and coffee, we strike out and find the famous statue of Hans Christian Andersen's "Little Mermaid." Our "little" walk covered several miles in all. We took several pictures as we went. Because we were totally disoriented we even strolled through a military garrison. This was after we asked the guard for permission, of course. Thanks to a lot of determination and a little luck we finally found The Little Mermaid. Little is an apt description. She was a lot smaller than I had imagined she would be. After visiting and photographing the mermaid, we casually made our way back to the ship. We arriving about a half an hour before the ship was scheduled to sail.

Being on Danish soil was a real thrill for Anita. She is very proud of her Danish blood. She often boasts that she is half Danish and half Texan. Visiting Denmark had been a dream of hers all her adult life. It's a good feeling knowing that you're walking on the same ground that your ancestors walked on.

We had to set our clocks forward almost every day that we headed east on this Baltic cruise. Now we had to do the opposite almost every day, as we headed backing the other direction. This cruise of 12 days covered a total of 2,450 nautical miles.

On Friday, September 21, we were back in Dover, England. We had finished the Baltic Capitals portion of our back to back cruises. Unfortunately for me, I was suffering with the worse cold that I can ever remember. Anita and I walked into town hoping the fresh air might make me feel better but it didn't. We managed to find a drug store and bought some cold relief drugs. The drug store was also kind enough to change \$30 into English Pounds for us. Anita and I had shopped quiet a bit on our trip so far and rather than be charged for overweight luggage by the airlines later, we decided to mail some of our stuff back home. Our package of Baltic souvenirs was getting heavier with each step and we were nowhere near a post office. We finally hailed a taxicab cab and asked the driver to find a post office for us. We mailed the package to ourselves back home. I paid the freight with a \$100 bill and got change back in Pounds. This worked out pretty well because we now had enough English money to pay for a tour to Dover Castle and 5 pounds left for a taxi. The taxi driver told us that 5 pounds was enough to get us within walking distance of the ship. Since we didn't have any other choice, we walked it. Our little walk turned out to be quite a trek. It was at least 2 miles.

Once we got back to the ship, I decided the English over the counter drugs weren't helping much. The next morning I slept too late for the ships morning medical call so counted the hours until the afternoon call. The Doctor looked me over and gave me 4 packets of pills plus some cough medicine. From that moment, I improved steadily.

On Sunday, September 23, when I woke up we were docked in LaCoruna, Spain. The ship had pulled in a lot earlier than we expected. There was some kind of medical emergency on board, so the ship steamed hard all night and arrived in port ahead of schedule. Anita and I went for a little stroll around town. Nearly all the shops were closed because it was Sunday. We had a coke at a sidewalk restaurant and managed to find a quaint trolley that took us on a sightseeing trip down the peninsula and back. We were satisfied that we had seen just about everything worth seeing so we went back to the ship, took a nap and watched a little TV.

On Monday, September 24, we spent the day at sea. My cold was much better but it was still bothersome. I was no longer wheezing and my cough was much better. My nose had cleared enough that I could almost breathe through it. I took enough time out from feeling sorry for myself to play off my "free money" at the casino. I won \$30. Later Anita and I went shopping at the ship's stores. Anita found a 3-karat gemstone she liked for \$30. Oh, well, easy come, easy go.

On Tuesday, September 25, we pulled into Cadiz, Spain. Anita & I went into town and walked and walked. We tried to catch a tour bus but I didn't have enough Spanish money, and they wouldn't take American dollars. I thought about changing some more American money into Spanish pesetas at the bank, but we decided not to because the tour cost seemed a bit pricey. Instead we walked some more. All that walking made us thirsty so we stopped for a coke at a little sidewalk bar and then went back to the ship. The ship departed Cadiz fairly early and headed for Barcelona. Anita and I stayed up past midnight that night because we wanted to watch our ship steam past Gibraltar. A lot of the passengers stayed up to view the passing. We were in the south traffic lane and could see the coastal lights of Morocco, Africa much better than we could see the Rock. Even so, the Rock of Gibraltar was the star attraction that night. Even though it was dimly lit, it was still very exciting. We went to bed around 2 a.m. and slept late the next morning,

On Wednesday, September 26, we spent the day at sea. It's a good day to relax. There wasn't anything of interest happening except for a genealogy lecture at 4 pm. Anita and I attended the lecture and found it very interesting.

On Thursday, September 27, we docked at Barcelona, Spain sometime before noon. Anita and I found Barcelona to be a delightful city with a personality all its own. Barcelona is a very large city with over a million people plus another million in suburbs. Barcelona is in Catalonia, a large independent region of Spain. I was surprised to learn that Catalonia has its own language and culture. I was told that Spanish was rarely spoken here. Most of the buildings in Barcelona are dressed up like some fantasy kingdom. For decoration, they even outdo Disneyland. All over the city, there is ancient mixed with modern. That applies to sculpture, art and architecture. It's a fascinating city. Most fascinating was an old church still under construction that was started in 1882. The guide told us that this marvel won't be finished for another 40 years. This wondrous structure is dominated by 12 towers each of which is at least 40 stories tall. Each of these towers represents one of the 12 apostles. Each tower has the apostle's name and a sculpture of the apostle on it. The sculptures are modern renditions. Other scenes and decorative sculptures are all around each tower. Try as I may, this marvelous structure, defies description. Even the photos I've seen of it do not do it justice. I can't imagine what prompted the undertaking and continuation of such a project without funding from the government or church. It's all done with privately donated money, all for the love and glory of God.

Barcelona also has a world class cactus garden that takes up a lot of acreage. This wondrous garden has hundreds of varieties of cactus and succulents. It is said that it is a favorite place for young lovers to "study the cacti" After returning to the ship, it was take it easy time again except for a folkloric dance show right before sailing. The dancers treated us to charming rendition of the Flamenco. Their show was very exciting and colorful.

On Friday, September 28, we steamed to Cannes, France where we anchored out and tendered in. Cannes is a small city fronting the sea. The "main" street is littered with upscale shops and hotels. The rest of the streets look narrow, a la Europe. Because we had signed up for a tour to Monaco, I didn't see the need of exchanging any U.S. money for French francs. That was a huge mistake. While waiting on the waterfront for our Monaco tour, the urge to go to the bathroom overtook me. There were several toilets in the area but they were all for hire and admission required French coinage. While I'm dancing the "I've gotta' pee real bad" jig, Anita spotted a McDonald's restaurant just a little over two blocks away. I danced my way down the street and lucky for me, I made it before my bladder gave way. Also, lucky for me, McDonald's still have free toilets.

Monaco was a nice experience. It is about one square mile in area but it looks larger. It is located on the side of a steep mountain that goes into the sea. The bay is crowded with large sailboats and yachts, too numerous for me to count. Going inland from the waterfront, you go UP. Can't overemphasize UP! Buildings range from about 4 stories on up to skyscrapers that are 20 to 30 stories high. Monaco has an abundance of parks and gardens. I am a passionate gardener and I found theirs to be magnetically beautiful. We were able to see the casino from the hilltop overlooking the principality but we could only view it from afar. When we asked about the casino we were told that ordinary people, such as ourselves, were not allowed to come near the casino, much less enter it.

On Saturday morning, September 29, I woke up to find our ship already docked at Livorno, Italy. We had breakfast in our cabin then went on a tour to Pisa. The road going to Pisa was built by the Romans centuries ago. It is a very straight. Along this road, I was impressed with the pine nut trees. When I think of pine, I can't help but think of the American Christmas tree. These trees look nothing like their American cousins. Some of the trunks of these trees were 20 to 30 feet before reaching branches. Most of them appeared pruned but some of them

are not. From where the branches start, they tended to take on a ball shape as opposed to being pointed like our Christmas tree.

I expected the famous leaning tower of Pisa to be in the center of town. This was not the case. The tower is located at the edge of town along with several other ancient structures. We took a few pictures of the famous tower and then wandered around to take in the other sites. Near the tower we found a cathedral and a baptismal inside a centuries old wall. We toured the cathedral admiring the beautiful artwork inside. We only peeked inside the Baptismal because there was a baptism of an infant in progress.

On our way back to Livorno, we encountered hundreds of motor scooters with young people on them. They were all going the same way and they all seemed to be in a hurry. Our guide pointed out that Pisa was a university town and many students commuted. They all come into town on Monday and they all leave on Saturday. What we were witnessing was the Saturday student stampede.

On Sunday, September 30, we were well rested and ready for our tour to Rome. Our tour consisted of a long bus ride followed by lots of walking- and then another long bus ride. The trip from our ship to Rome took about 1-½ hours. Our tour bus was part of a convoy of eight busses. Our tour guide was loud, mouthy, and spoke with a very strong Italian accent. Her English was so terrible. I could hardly understand anything she was saying. She caught me asking Anita about something she said and gave me a good dressing down for it. She said if I had questions I should address them to her and only to her. Our tour of Rome was mainly driving up one street and down the other. There was an awful lot of, “On your left, you have” and” on your right, you have.” Between my hearing impediment and her poor English, I could understand none of it.

Rome was a lot of old buildings and monuments, with lots of statues and paintings. None of it excited me as it should. For starters, we had to stand in a crowded line that was over 3 blocks long and six people wide waiting to get into the Vatican. We found out that 5th Sundays was always free admission at the Vatican and today was a 5th Sunday. This went a long way in explaining the huge crowd that we were a part of. Once inside, it took forever to inch our way to the Sistine Chapel with people shoulder-to-shoulder. The tour guide kept stopping and trying to tell us something. We couldn't understand a word she was saying because of the low hum coming from the crowd. After a very long and difficult struggle, we finally arrived at the famous Chapel. It is much smaller than I had imagined it would be. It was beautiful, but it was so crowded, it took a lot away from the appreciation of it. About this time we found ourselves hopelessly separated from the tour group. We walked what seemed like forever and finally arrived at the main entrance. Anita and I were about to panic, thinking we were lost completely, when we found another tour guide from the ship. A few of the others, who had become lost, were gathering around this other guide. Our small band of lost souls followed the other guide to St. Peter's Square, where we finally connected up with our guide and the rest of our tour group. Because of our being last we missed seeing the Pope at 2 p.m. Also because of all the confusion, we were afraid to leave our group, for even a minute, to buy souvenirs. Our group then walked from the Square to a restaurant where we had reservations for lunch. It was 3 p.m. by the time we arrived. It seemed as if we had walked miles! I'm pretty sure our guide was lost. I'm certain we went around the same block at least twice before we stumbled on to our restaurant. The food was good. It was a “typical” Italian lunch. After lunch we had to walk the long walk again to get to the bus. I never did figure out why the bus wouldn't pick us up at the restaurant door. The rest of the afternoon was another drive through Rome. This bus touring was disappointing because we couldn't see out the windows that well. We left Rome with only photos, mostly taken out our bus window.

Another big disappointment was the Coliseum. Our bus pulled up across the street from the Coliseum and stopped. The tour guide told us all to wait at the bus while she checked something out. About a half hour later, she returned and told us to get back on the bus. We left without ever seeing the interior of the Coliseum. We found out later that our guide had walked part of our group through the interior of the Coliseum while the rest of us stood outside waiting for her to return. It doesn't figure unless she was punishing us for being bad little tourists. A large group of us complained to the ship management about the tour. It was certainly not worth the money. We were notified the next day that our money would be refunded.

On Monday, October 1, Anita and I enjoyed a lazy morning. We pulled into Messina, Sicily about noon and departed about 5. We went into town, but all shops were closed because of siesta. The entire town had shut down for their afternoon nap. Messina was like a ghost town. We were told that all the shops in town were closed from 1 to 4 each day. We did manage to do a little window-peeking but we found that rather boring. We amused ourselves for awhile watching the clock in an old tower. Every fifteen minutes a mechanical figure came out, twirled about and then went back in. It was a show, hardly worth waiting for. Finally after a couple of hours, we stumbled across a small souvenir shop that was also disappointing. We returned to the ship without having spent any money at all.

For dinner, that evening, I presented the maitre'd with a card I thought was for free a bottle of wine. Apparently our travel agent, Sharon, had told the cruise line that we had a "special occasion" to celebrate. The maitre'd asked me if it was my 29th birthday. I replied jokingly that it was the 40th anniversary of my 28th birthday. I thought she was kidding so I was kidding her back. She is a cute young lady from Romania and seemed to enjoy a subtle joke. We had talked jokingly to each other many times before so I didn't give it another thought until we found out that the card was not for a bottle of wine but for a special dessert. The waiters gathered round our table and started singing "Happy Birthday" to me. Our tablemates, Debi and Billy Fong, and Anita told me to go along with the ruse and enjoy the moment. The special occasion that Sharon had in mind was Anita's and my honeymoon. As it turned out we celebrated my "birthday" instead of our honeymoon! We all got a good laugh out of it.

On Tuesday, October 2, we spent the day leisurely packing. The cruise was all but over. We arrived at Pireaus, Greece early the next morning. We had traveled 3,257 total nautical miles on this 12-day cruise from Dover, England to Pireaus, Greece.

We taxied to and checked in at the Hotel Divan Palace Acropolis. From there we walked to the Acropolis, which was about a mile from our hotel. We enjoyed walking about this ancient landmark, trying to visualize how it will look when the Olympics are here in 2004. We observed lots of restoration work going on. The Greeks were doing a good job of restoring this ancient structure. After that we took a taxi to a large shopping area nearby and stopped at an outdoor café for lunch. We then walked a few streets up and down the shopping area, stopping in most of the souvenir shops along the way.

On Thursday, October 4, we spent most of the day just sitting around until it was time to go to the airport. We finally took a taxi to the airport and caught our flight to Copenhagen.

We arrived in Copenhagen around 7 p.m. This was about an hour behind scheduled arrival. It was about 8 p.m. when we finally got to the Hotel Mercur. We checked in and were told someone had called but did not leave a message. We were expecting to hear from a family that we were supposed to have dinner with through an organization called, "Dine with the

Danes.” About an hour later, they called again. We were unpacking and were too tired to go for out for dinner that late. Considering the circumstances, all we could do was apologize to them.

On Friday, October 5, we went to the State Archives so that Anita could do some research on her family history. The employees and patrons were all very nice and helpful. They also spoke very good English. Thanks to their help, Anita found her grandfather’s birth record.

We found Annette, our contact with “Dine with the Danes,” at the Wonderful Copenhagen Tourist office. Annette was very pleasant and empathetic. We paid her for the dinner we missed the night before. We had received Annette’s fax with specific information but it was delivered to us too late to act upon. We complained to the hotel manager that we had not received the fax when we first arrived. It was there when we checked in but the check in clerk didn’t think to give it to us. The hotel manager insisted on refunding our money for the dinner. After that we went to the restaurant at the planetarium and had our first real good meal in Denmark. We both ordered salmon. It was very good. The Planetarium Restaurant was very elegant. Our table overlooked a large pond and as we ate we were entertained by the antics of the resident ducks. It was almost midnight when we finally got back to the hotel and retired for the night. At exactly midnight, loud booms and bright sparkling lights, out our hotel window, awoke us. We were really shaken up, at first, because of the memory of the recent terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center. It didn’t take us long to realize that it was only fireworks, however. Once we realized this, Anita and I both relaxed and enjoyed the free show. We made inquiries the next day but we never did learn what the celebration was about. We figured it was something to do with either the nearby Tivoli amusement park or the celebration of a triumph of the National Soccer Club.

On Saturday, October 6, Ole and Else Frederiksen met us at the hotel. We had found them through the Friends Overseas organization. They were nice enough to take us on a guided walking tour of Copenhagen. The first place we went to was the new library building nicknamed the “Black Diamond.” It is a beautiful building with a dark glass exterior giving it the appearance of a huge black diamond.

Next we visited a gigantic landscaped block containing four identical buildings. These structures were the Royal Residences and government buildings featuring a statue of Frederick V accenting the center of the royal complex. We learned that the Danish people love and revere their royalty. We then walked and rode a water taxi to cross the canal to Nyhavn. Nyhavn is an area filled with sailboats and sidewalk cafes. The Denmark-Sweden soccer game, an event not unlike like our world series, was scheduled for that evening. The Nyhavn area was packed with soccer fans, all wearing their team hats and painted faces, carrying banners and drinking beer. I enjoyed watching them. It would have been very easy to get wrapped up in their festivities. Next we visited the Royal Danish Naval Museum and then walked some more. Anita and I then took our leave of Ole and Else and caught the bus back to the hotel. It was a delightful day; the weather was absolutely perfect. About 10 p.m. we experienced more fireworks outside our hotel window. It didn’t frighten us this time. My guess was that Denmark had won its soccer match.

On Sunday, October 7, we rode the train to Vasevej and then took a taxi to Anita’s cousin, Eva’s, house. Lucky for Anita, Eva was listed in the telephone book under her maiden name. Anita had all but given up finding her but turned to the telephone listings in one last desperate try. We had a wonderful visit with Eva. Eva’s husband, Jens, couldn’t stay long because he had a Boy Scout meeting to attend, and we didn’t see much of her son because he was playing computer games with a friend. Eva, Anita and I went for a walk through a wooded area next to her house as part of our visit. The weather was cool, but it felt good. Eva pointed

out the many mushrooms available to them as we walked along. Eva told us that she has been picking them for years and knows which kinds are good and when they are ready for her table. We returned to her house for coffee and Danish. She told me that they call sweet pastry “Danish” there, too! She told us that she hadn’t made our treat. She had bought it at a local bakery. It was raining by the time we left. We had to run from Eva’s house to the taxi when it pulled up at the end of the walk way. The taxi took us to the train station and we rode the train back into town. Not surprisingly we failed to recognize our stop and had to ride on to the next one. At the next stop we got off, went across the tracks to the other platform, and we caught the next train back to our station.

At about 5 Sunday afternoon, we took a taxi to Ole and Else’s flat. It was a few miles away but still in the city. We had a wonderful dinner with them. Our hostess had cooked a delicious pork roast that was cooked with little red potatoes. As a side dish we were served a sampling of veal meatballs. We finished this home cooked meal with a special treat for our dessert. After dinner, we had coffee and chatted. Ole told us that he was a retired sales manager, and Else was working as a physical therapist. She is due to retire in about 6 months. We also learned that they had been married for only a couple of years.

On Monday, October 8, we went back to the Archives for more research. We rode a taxi to another part of town where the police archives were kept. Anita found both her grandparents on the emigration rolls that were kept by the Copenhagen Police. We celebrated her find with a pizza across the street at a Mex-Italy restaurant. We were surprised to find a Mex-Italy restaurant in Denmark.

On Tuesday, October 9, we spent most of the day strolling along the Strøget, a pedestrian shopping street that is closed to vehicular traffic. We went to Illums, a department store, where Anita’s grandmother had worked before she immigrated to the United States in 1909. Because they had sold to another company, they did not have any record of her employment almost 100 years ago. It was a long shot but we had to try. From there we went to the Royal Copenhagen store. They have beautiful dishes, serving pieces and figurines that are collected and treasured worldwide.

Anita’s cousin, Aase, Eva’s sister, and her husband, Ip called us and arranged to meet us at the hotel. We discussed genealogy for awhile, and then went to dinner. Eva, Jens, their son and a friend, parked in front of the restaurant just as we arrived. They were on their way to see a play. What a coincidence. We had a great visit with Aase and Ip. Aase had lots of information on Anita’s grandmother’s family. Aase had three photos of Anita’s Grandmother, Marie that no one from the American side of the Atlantic had ever seen. She gave those photographs to Anita. What a priceless treasure!

On Wednesday, October 10, we left Copenhagen for Paris where we changed planes. We had to rush through the airport to catch an Air France flight to Dallas. Security was very tight. We had to show our passports and tickets at every turn. Thank goodness, we had an uneventful flight home. We did see armed soldiers in both Paris and Dallas airports. We were delayed at Dallas for a couple of hours for no apparent reason. We finally arrived home after being up for over 26 hours. We discovered that our luggage would be delayed for another 24 hours, for security reasons. We had to file a missing report on our luggage after we arrived in Houston. Anita’s daughter, Jerri and granddaughter Megan met us at the airport to take us home. Our luggage was delivered to us, 2 pieces the next day, then the other 2 pieces the day following that. It was good to be home.