

2006 KEY WEST, NASSAU A Celebration Cruise

Friday, April 26, 2006. Its time to celebrate! The last of my eight grandchildren is graduating from college. Brian Sesniak is to graduate from the University of North Florida. I'm very proud of all my grandchildren. Not only did they graduate from the college they started at, they also all have jobs they like! This is quite an accomplishment.

Despite a broken ankle, I made the plane to Jacksonville without too much trouble. Mary and Tom were at the airport in Jacksonville to meet me and we drove the rental car to Brian's house, which he shares with three other roommates.

What a party house! Across the back of the four bedroom house there was a large screen porch and secluded yard. Empty beer canisters attested to parties in the past. Brian explained they did this so people wouldn't bring beer bottles and cans that cause a mess. The beer can be served in paper cups.

Two of Brian's roommates were present, along with Jen McCaffrey, Brian's girl. Brenda, Brian's twin, had flown in from Houston for her brother's graduation. Six of us went to Carrabas for an early dinner. We were on time for happy hour when the drinks are two for the price of one.

A crowd was already waiting when we reached the gymnasium. The door didn't open for quite some time, but I managed to find a seat with some of the other senior citizens and when the door opened I made a beeline for the front and managed to find seats with a good view. All those previous graduations have taught me a lot! Brian looked so happy in his flowing blue robe. We cheered when his name was read out as he walked across the stage. After the ceremony we went out to Buffalo Wings for celebration drinks and chicken wings. It was a noisy place with huge television screens everywhere showing various sports. Not my sort of place.

We are staying at AmeriSuites. I had been impressed with an earlier stay in Plantation, FL, but this hotel was not the same. A somewhat cramped room, with the biggest disadvantage being that the bathroom was as far from the bed alcove as possible. However it is not so bad that we shall move.

<http://www.coj.net/default.htm>

<http://www.unf.edu/>

<http://www.carabas.com/>

<http://www.kitchenproject.com/history/AmericanHeritageRecipes/BuffaloWings.htm>

<http://amerisuites.com/>

Saturday, April 29. We had lunch on the run at Wendy's and then went to Tinseltown Theaters to see Robin Williams in "RV". I love Robin Williams but the movie was grade B in my estimation.

We went to Brian's house and picked up the girls and went to Roy's Restaurant on Jacksonville Beach for dinner. Brian's roommate, Jesse, was one of the busboys so we got hovering service from him and our waiter. A quarterback from the Jacksonville team sat at the next table but we were too shy to introduce ourselves. The cuisine is called Hawaiian fusion and it was wonderful food. We finished it off with their signature chocolate soufflé.

<http://movies.about.com/od/rv/a/rvtrailer010906.htm>

<http://www.roysrestaurant.com/index.asp>

Sunday, April 30. I woke at 5 AM with a feeling of dread. A search of my luggage proved my fear was justified. I am in Jacksonville without my passport! I will not be able to go on the cruise without it. For some reason I had not thought of this trip as going to a foreign country. I tend to think of the Bahamas as part of the United States, which of course it isn't.

At 7:30 we left for the airport for Tom has to get back to Ft Lauderdale and Brenda to Houston. I went up to Delta to see what it would cost to fly back to Atlanta and get my passport and found it would be over \$600! So I pondered over which of my wonderful friends to impose on. Martha Spalding was the obvious choice since she lives across the hall from me. I got her on the phone and she and Russ retrieved my passport from my bureau drawer and drove to the airport to Delta Dash it to me.

Meanwhile Tom found he was carrying Mary's ticket instead of his own luckily she had the other ticket in her purse. When he called her on his cell phone she was able to circle back to the terminal to trade with him.

Then Brenda realized she had left her cell phone in the car and had to race back to the parking lot to get it. Trouble always comes in threes so hopefully that is the end of it! I stopped to have a

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10-minute back massage in the airport. Then Mary, Brenda and I killed time in the food court waiting for Brenda's plane. Mary and I drove north to Amelia Island and Fernandina Beach. We had lunch at a non-descript restaurant on the ocean side where we could see wonderful pounding surf. We then drove into the historic part of town with lovely hundred-year-old houses with ample porches and live oak trees dripping with Spanish moss.

After which we returned to the airport to collect my passport. Amazingly, it was in my hands in Jacksonville at 2:00PM. Was it worth the \$75 cost? I think so, and I will forever be in the Spalding's debt for saving my cruise.

We went to a nearby Steak and Ale for dinner. Brian is enjoying a steak every night!

<http://www.bahamas.com/bahamas/index.aspx>

http://www.delta.com/business_programs_services/delta_cargo/cargo_flight_availability/cargo_products_services/delta_dash/index.jsp

<http://www.discoverourtown.com/FL/Fernandina%20Beach/Organizations-1454.html>

<http://www.co.beaufort.sc.us/bftlib/spanish.htm>

Monday, May 1. Brian and Mary are on one ticket. Jen and I are on the other. Thus we had to arrive at the dock paired off. Brian came to the motel and he and Mary returned the rental car to the airport. Then they took a shuttle to the dock. I had decided I needed a new digital camera. The Kodak Easy Share has been a good learning camera but it has some shortcomings. Also I am having trouble keeping a charge in the battery. We went to Circuit City and for less than \$200 I bought a Sony Cyber Shot Camera that has more mega pixels and more features than my old camera. After loading the battery and setting the time and date I took my first picture of, what else, Circuit City.

Then Jen and I went to the Cheesecake Factory where I had a delicious chicken salad sandwich and Jen had a piece of cheesecake. Wish I were as thin as she is! By cell phone we found out that Mary and Brian were already aboard Carnival's Celebration.

We headed for the port. The boarding process was easy since I was on a walker and we cleared security and soon were in our cabin.

We went to a presentation by the spa personnel and I signed Mary and myself up for massages. I also am going to have my teeth whitened! After the spa presentation we were then given a talk on the shopping in Key West and Nassau. Jen caught one of the hair ties that were thrown out at the audience. We were all told to ooh and aah and make noise. This is after all one of the "fun" ships and the crew really was working to make us have fun.

There were Planters Punch drinks for sale. When I rode down in the elevator one lady was so tipsy she didn't know where she was going. As soon as I got to the cabin they announced the lifeboat drill. Since we are on deck 4 and our muster station is on deck 9, there were a lot of people trying to catch an elevator. The elevators are small and two of them are being used to shuffle the baggage so it was quite a rush to get on one. This is the biggest disadvantage to our cabin. Everything is several decks above. I will be riding a lot of elevators!

Our ship, the Carnival Celebration is one of the modern ships that look like a box on a barge. However this means that our cabin is quite spacious with lots of closet space for a five-day cruise. The hangers are a bit strange but soon I was soon unpacked with everything stowed.

Then it was time for dinner in the dining room on deck 8. Our waiter, Augusto, is from the Philippines. I had smoked salmon followed by a filet mignon. We had a bottle of Shiraz wine to wash it down.

After dinner I returned to the cabin to get my feet up. It has been a tiring day. Mary went to the entertainment, which I believe was a comedian. Jen and Brian also went off to find the fun.

<http://www.circuitcity.com/ssm/Sony-Cyber-shot-DSC-S600-Digital-Camera/sem/rpsm/oid/142192/catOid/-13062/rpem/ccd/productDetail.do>

<http://www.thecheesecakefactory.com/>

<http://www.cruiseweb.com/CARNIVALCELEBRATION.HTM>

Tuesday, May 2. At Sea. Mary slept in but I got up early and had breakfast at the cafeteria on top of the ship. I had signed up to have my teeth whitened. I never thought I would go on a cruise to have it done although I have thought of having it done at home. I was stretched out on

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my back with a clamp holding my lips apart. The technician would apply the solution. Then I was put under a lamp for five minutes. She rinsed it all off and repeated the process three or four times.

I must say my teeth looked nice and white when she was done. Then she wanted to sell me more solution at \$45 a bottle to use for the next 3 months. I bought one bottle and will try some of the less expensive solutions available in Atlanta.

I returned to the cabin to find Mary gone. When we finally connected I found we were on different schedules for she had had a late breakfast and wasn't hungry. I went up to the cafeteria for lunch but the line was long so I ended up in the dining room at a table with 8 others. My left hand neighbor was from Jacksonville and lives where they can see the ship come and go. They saw their daughter get off her school bus as we passed their house.

After lunch I had a massage. The girl rubbed me with a cactus bristle brush to improve circulation. She also gave me a deep tissue massage, which got the kinks out of me. Best of all she wrapped my foot. I have been wrapping it every morning but sometimes the wrapping doesn't stay.

Tonight we had the Captain's party. But he didn't shake our hands. Of course, he did introduce his officers. Everyone was in his or her best bib and tucker. Since we have 14 honeymoon couples on board, one bride appeared in her lovely white dress. The dinner that followed featured lobster tails but they seemed overcooked and not all that great. Carnival promises lobster on every cruise.

We returned to the cabin to kill time before the show. I never made it. First I tucked my feet into the bed because my feet were cold and then the rest of me followed. I woke up about 9:30 to find the cabin dark and Mary in bed!

http://www.animatedteeth.com/teeth_whitening/t1_teeth_bleaching.htm

Wednesday, May 3. Woke to find we were in Key West. Mary and I signed up for the trolley bus tour.

We began with a tour of the aquarium. This isn't nearly as large as some I have seen but there were some interesting displays of fish and coral.

We got on the trolley and went to the Hemingway House. When the doorkeeper saw my stroller he suggested we might like to see a video and we sat in the kitchen for an interesting presentation of Hemingway's life. Afterward we went out into the garden and looked for cats. The Hemingway cats are known for having 6 toes, but the ones we saw only seemed to have the usual five. However, there were cats everywhere. There was even a special cat drinking fountain made from an antique urinal. Hemingway's studio was up a flight of stairs in an old attic and it was much as it had been when he lived here with his second wife. (He had five wives).

There is a large salt-water swimming pool on the property and a small cemetery with headstones for the deceased cats, many of who are named for movie stars, painters and authors.

We got back on the trolley and decided to stay until the end since it was so full. Many people had to wait for the next bus and we didn't want to join them. Mary figured out where we could get off near Margaritaville and we went to Jimmy Buffett's establishment for strawberry margaritas and lunch.

Then it was about five or six blocks back to the ship. A great day but I was worn out. I took a nap rather than watch us sail.

After dinner we went to see a magician and a comedian followed his show. It was somewhat bathroom humor in my opinion although he did some very good impersonations of people like Don Knotts.

<http://www.historictours.com/>

http://www.hemingwayhome.com/HTML/main_menu.html

Thursday, May 4. Had breakfast in the dining room with Mary. At 11 we came into Nassau. There were three other cruise ships in port and we were at the dock furthest from the port.

We assembled on the dock for our Stingray Encounter. The woman in charge told us that we had missed the shuttle bus and would have to walk all the way in. About a third of the way in, we met the shuttle coming back and I climbed aboard, stroller and all. We returned to the ship and picked up some others who could not walk with ease and then went into the terminal, getting

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there long before the stingray group got there!

We were then led to the Coral 11, a large pontoon boat for the ride to Blackbeard's Cay. This small island belongs to Carnival. There was a beach as well as refreshment stands. Even a massage was offered but I didn't have time for one. The main attraction was the stingrays. They were in a fenced area and are really quite friendly and tame. We donned our masks and snorkels and waded in to swim with them. They would come right up to you and swim under you. There were even some young ones. The mature ones are kite shaped, over two feet across, and they have a long tail. Someone told me that their "stingers" have been removed, but we still had to sign all sorts of waivers in case we got hurt.

After a bit they brought out with a cooler full of squid for us to feed them. We lined up, the men on the deeper side, the women and children on the shallow side.

The stingrays swam between us and would come and suck the squid right out of our hands. Then we were given the chance to touch them and feel their leathery skins. It was lots of fun. Mary and I got out of the water and showered. Then we had a drink and it was time to get back on the boat.

Back in Nassau we walked down to the straw market where all sorts of tourist goods were for sale. Some of the ladies were weaving the straw baskets and hats for which the market is named. I found some place mats to buy and Mary bought some hats and a bag.

We found an Internet cafe for much less money than the ship offered (\$5 for an hour). I couldn't get on Earthlink but I did access my Gmail account. Mary managed to get to her mail program.

We got back to the ship with only a few minutes to spare before dinner. There was no sign of Jen and Brian who had gone to Pearl Island on a "Treasure Hunt". I had grouper but it was not like the usual grouper. I think it had been frozen or something. It was "Baked Alaska" night as well, but the waiters didn't parade the flaming desert. It was just presented to us "unflamed".

After dinner we finally caught up with Brian and Jen. Their trip had been a disappointment with poor snorkeling and they were told they could not have the conch shell treasures they found. Also Brian said everyone had his hand out for a tip. I'm glad that at least their fishing excursion in Key West was fun.

<http://www.mote.org/index.php?src=gendocs&link=Stingrays&category=Shark%20Research&sub-menu=INFOhttp://>

www.carnival.com/ShoreExcursionDetails.aspx?portcode=NAS&excursionname=Stingray+Adventure+%26+Beach+Break&excursioncode=42402

Friday, May 6. A Day at sea. We went to the debarkation lecture and found that the only way to get off the ship early was to tote our own luggage. I packed and had my hair done. At lunch I ordered the trout. I have not really liked any of the fish products on the ship, but the meats are good.

At the last night's dinner, desert was individual Grand Mariner soufflés. Afterward, as he has every night, the Maitre d' announced "Showtime". This was the clue that everyone should get up and dance with the waiters. After all, we are having "fun".

We stopped at the jewelry sale outside the dining room and I bought everyone a souvenir gold chain for \$2 and \$3 dollars a foot. The last night's entertainment was a "western revue" by the resident ensemble.

So our cruise has come to an end. I will say that I have had a good time. The Carnival ship is kept clean as a whistle and there is something going on every minute. Many of the people are on their first cruise and one man told me that Nassau was the first time he had been out of the United States! However they are all pleasant enough.

My main criticism is that Carnival is continually offering you ways to spend money. Even the Bingo is held several times a day at \$10 a card. There are continuous sales of jewelry and so forth all at "50% off". I wonder how far up they mark it before they discount it. Like all cruises, the fare is just a down payment. By the time you buy the shore excursions, drinks and so forth, it is very easy to spend as much as the fare all over again.

Saturday, May 6. We were up early and with Brian and Jen's help got up to the reception deck for the debarkation. Half the 1400 passengers seemed to have the same idea. One woman barged the line and I thought Mary was going to get into a fight with her. Finally Mary pleaded my

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crippled state and we were allowed to enter the Reception where there were seats. Passengers that had been on ten or more cruises were allowed off first and we were close behind them. I was quite breathless by the time we raced down the ramp to immigration and customs. I got through with no problems but Mary was questioned at length if she had recently been to the Middle East!

We caught the shuttle to the airport and I made my ten o'clock flight back to Atlanta with no more difficulty.