

## harriet report #14 - BIG SCREW UP IN ITALY

Pompeii, Amalfi, and Rome with Peter and Arthur, February 24 to March 3, 2001

"Looking forward to hearing about the trip to the mezzogiorno" writes Susan.

I SCREWED IT UP! I got horribly sick and couldn't walk and spent days and days wasted between laying in bed and waiting around the hospital and trying to figure a way to come home early. We did see the most important sites finally before leaving at our usual time. In a way it was a "kid paradise", all the gameboy, tv, and junk-food and soda you could imagine.

Peter was an angel when I was hallucinating with fever and did exactly every breathy word I begged him to, cold drinks from the mini bar on my face, more blankets on my shivering middle, taking my socks off, putting them on, getting their own room service, paying the tips. Telling me the time left until the Doctor would come. Dialing Alex and Marti and talking to them for me. Later when I was on crutches, carrying all the suitcases and keeping Arthur nearby and the rest of it. What a helper!

It was beautiful down south. And weird weather, tee shirt sun and then hail and snow the next day. The Mountains around Naples and Amalfi were so steep and high, incredible, and wild!

And Naples, what a scene. The streets were tunnels of teeming life. People even threw trash out the windows above. More than one couple were getting intimate using a moped for a bed. I can't believe I took the boys there. I can't believe I took myself there. What was I thinking? Somebody get me a doctor? But the boys just went along. After the second or third time Arthur almost got run over he stayed close to Peter and I.

They played happily at Pompeii, which was where I started getting sick, had the chills and nausea. We traveled anyway to that night's new hotel in Amalfi. The bus WAS incredible along the cliffs. Much more extreme than Big Sur. We all took dramamine and the boys sat in the front seat on the water view side with my seat just behind and higher.

Our driver was a pro and cursed like one when he smashed into the back corner of the bus in front of us while PASSING on a blind turn. But we stopped for nothing, the bus's broken mirror swung against the window by Arthur's face for a little while before it fell completely off. That was enough excitement for me, to clonk another bus.

Course it wasn't the only thing we almost clonked.

And I got a completely serious marriage proposal from the Italian doctor who attended me in my fever in Amalfi. THAT freaked me out.

He gave me a shot in the butt the night before! He listened to my heart, he saw me in the worst fever of my life, and he came the next day and said I want to marry you. Please call me anytime. I'll come to you in Holland or the US. "You are so beautiful and white". What a freak! (Not bad looking though.)

It was SO LUCKY that I was sick in Amalfi. Our hotel was so nice and our room had a balcony over the main road promenading along the harbor and a big view of the sea.

It was Carnevale and kids went parading by with confetti and costumes and floats in the sun on the middle day of my laying sick. There was room service from the restaurant or the bar, a minibar, decent cable tv with lots of american shows, all dubbed into Italian. The hotel found me an english speaking doctor, who wanted to get married. The doctor found me a babysitter, but she turned out to not speak english and she looked really slutty and sullen, so we didn't really use her. Arthur went to the beach with her for an hour and a half but Peter wouldn't go with her and I was glad Peter had stayed as soon as Dr. Mike proposed to me. I wondered why he kept trying to get Peter out of the room. It was scary. I was glad to have Peter there. We had to pay the sitter for the whole day (\$50) even though we used an hour and a half. Oh well.

At the end in Rome, by the time I had crutches, I arranged a taxi tour and we got to see all the major sights from the outside. All the fountains, the big monuments, the coliseum, St. Peter's and Castle Nuovo and lots more. Our driver spoke some english and was trying hard.

The next day I could walk some and we went in the beautiful morning sun to the coliseum to walk around. The boys were glad. We didn't get any good junk shopping though ever since I got sick and that was a problem with the boys. they both had promised money left to spend and were upset to not find the kind of junk we saw everywhere in Naples and Amalfi, specifically DragonBallZ toys, cards, and kitsch. Things they can't get in Holland. That was disappointing.

Our hotel in Rome was safe and clean and the owners were very kind. It wasn't particularly attractive though and no room service, which is probably best. When we first arrived we left my backpack in the taxi and the hotel reception woman helped by calling taxi companies until it was found and returned! We paid a big tip for that one. There was a bar/pizzeria/ristorante combo place on the corner across and they were good for me. We ate lunch and dinner there for five meals straight. And the hotel had cornflakes! and yogurt! Although when we first arrived I couldn't eat still. I didn't eat for four days. I was glad to have my first food.

We spent lots of money on doctors and taxis, both of which were very worth it. We left Amalfi after the second night because by then I couldn't walk and knew I either had to go home or go to the hospital and both were in Rome where our next hotel was so we might as well struggle up there. We got there fine and I let the boys have McDonalds's before taxi-ing to the hotel to collapse onto my bed.

The next morning we taxied out to the American Rome Hospital. Dr. Are was like the son in law in "All In The Family" but kind. He arranged some tests for the afternoon and sold me some crutches at my request (Thank YOU!). We left, We came back, we didn't conquer, but we did get definitive diagnosis and competence from Dr. L something who did ultrasounds to rule out blood clots.

Armed with instructions and prescription, we finally left. It took an hour to get a taxi at that time of day, but by 6:30 we were at the farmacia and finally had the drugs. Then next door to our pizza cafe for dinner to get the required full stomach, a tasty lemon linquine, it being only my second meal since monday, the first being the tasty cheese ravioli I'd had at the same place for lunch, then medicine, then to bed across the street in our nice safe hotel, I wish! Instead, off to Termini, the huge central train station, to figure a way to get home.

Having been advised by the doctors to not fly, we spent time waiting in line to get Eurostar train tickets to Amsterdam only to find out the computers didn't work, no fare information, no schedule information, no availability information, and no tickets to buy. Went back the next morning (by now Friday and our regular flight was for Saturday afternoon) determined to give it only one last try. Again, no computer. Seemed clear to me, we were meant to fly home, hang the doctors advice.

They wanted to admit me to the hospital and give me IV drugs too, but I couldn't do that and leave Arthur and Peter to sleep in the hospital hall? And nothing horrible had happened being loose in Rome with only my antibiotics and crutches.

So we went off on a taxi tour instead after at least a few hours of foot up, doctor's orders. I had bought some postcards at the Termini and pointed to the things we wanted to see to our driver and he complied. He even asked the police to let him drive next to Trevi Fountain where it's only pedestrians. I kept telling him I could walk!

We did stop and go inside the Pantheon and I'd forgotten all about it's round hole in the roof. What an absolutely incredible thing. Why the hell doesn't it fall down? No wonder Italians are blase' about ruins, they have so many ruins that are still monuments and NOT ruins. The whole country is old.

I was really impressed that the Italians are doing the world such a service by keeping these monuments in decent shape. It's really kind of them to use their

tax dollars like that. I could see spending them all on social programs and letting the Pantheon fall down, or Trevi Fountain get dirty.

I can't believe all the humongous sculptures! There's this one huge building on a hill with sculptures all over it, most of the them about four times life size, and it's a war memorial. It was near our hotel and we went past it about eight times. And St. Peter's. Peter said, "It doesn't look so big" and the driver said "Look at the top of the dome, see the people?" He couldn't see for a while, because the people were just little tiny specks!! I'm not sure Arthur ever did get it.

By Saturday morning I felt able to walk without crutches and asked the hotel to donate them to a worthy person. We had fun frolicking, sort of, not really for me, at the Coliseum. The boys liked the dressed in costume gladiators and emperors, but their costumes were so cheesy. It was fun though.

Then we went looking for kitschy shopping for Peter at Spanish Steps. Didn't see any, so had McDonalds's again, fourth day in a row for boys, first time for me. At least Arthur was eating more than Ritz crackers and plain noodles. Then it was off to the hotel to get the luggage and taxi to the airport. Surely we could shop at the airport. Nope. Nothing there for Peter and believe me, he looked, while I sat down mostly.

We flew home uneventfully and Alex kindly met us at the airport. The boys were overjoyed! I think Arthur especially was upset about seeing Mom so sick and then disabled and it made him really lonely for Dad. I am so glad to be home!

You're probably wondering what I had. I got "lymphangitis" (also called cellulitis) which is an infection in a cut on my leg or foot, unknown, and caused extreme fever and some nausea on Monday and by Tuesday afternoon had created deep redness, double sized and more swelling, and extreme tenderness in my entire foot, especially the bottom, and up my calf to a few inches below my knee. Nothing dangerous about it really. Treated with antibiotics and with caution taken to avoid the common secondary illness of ?? (little blood clots). There were five instructions from Dr. Are and Dr. L. in Rome. I did two of them correctly, the drugs and the cleansing with whatdoyoucallit. I didn't do the not flying, the tight stocking (couldn't find one anywhere) and the laying down all the time with it elevated. (Actually it's "blood poisoning", and pretty damn serious!)

And about that first Amalfi Doctor. It really might be funny to have him proposing to me, but it's also sick because he had a professional role he played in treating me and his shot did break my fever (although it didn't go away for days completely). It was totally unfair for him to make advances when all I did was be sick. I didn't say anything to him at all. And I'm a nice fat woman totally sick, what's he making advances to me anyway. What a weirdo.

So that's our story. We got to see incredible internal Naples and we survived with vivid new impressions, we got to romp at Pompeii and see Vesuvius in the distance, we got to drive the tortured Amalfi coast and stay perched over the ocean, we got to Rome and tested the American Rome Hospital, way out in the middle of some weird industrial wasteland part of Rome, not even on an interstate, and we got to see many monuments of Rome which are so impressive and amazing, and the boys finally had a chance to play at the Coliseum, which wasn't exactly what they expected, but they might remember it anyway. And we're all home safe.

And Peter said to me a number of times "This is a great trip Mom" and I said "not really with me being sick" and he said "well, it's still really cool". And Arthur said "This is the best trip ever Mom, much less fighting!"

AND, now we know that my kids don't like "real" pizza (and I did NOT tell them it had buffalo mozzarella on it made with REAL buffalo milk because that's the napolitan way), but they will eat pasta solo with nothing on it, pretty much anywhere. So that's a good thing.

And they didn't get one taste of gelatto (ice cream) because not one place we went by served gelatto, but they had prepackaged frozen treats in Rome at our pizza/cafe and they loved them, and they loved the cute little dishes they come in and played with the lids and the dishes and brought them to the hotel and made a puzzle out of them. Maybe they were finally tired of Gameboy!