

Cruisin' with Mickey

Innocence. We try to hold on to it as long as we can with our children. I wish that Breanna would simply stay young and untouched by our ever-changing and at times terrifying world. On the flip side I am anxious to see her blossom into a young, vibrant adult and make a difference in this universe. Like many moms, I feel that my daughter could be the first President of the United States. Of course, her plans are to become the next female pop star.

As the years continue to pass, it is becoming an uphill battle to preserve the naïveté in her world. With the milestone of starting Junior High looming, I needed to stop the clock at Pre-teenville, if only for one weekend. A four-day trip right before the start of 7th grade would be perfect, though, I had to admit to myself, this return to innocence was almost more for me. But I would never tell!

There are very few places on earth that represent global happiness and that precious ideal of sheer innocence that is so fleeting as we parent our children. My friends have always accused me of navigating through life wearing rose-colored glasses. My response to that has always been; "I will chose my bifocals and you choose yours." I have also been told over the years that the small amount of naïveté I still hold on to is part of my charm. Keeping things simple, fun and playful is how I like to live my life. At times I feel my real role of motherhood could be mistaken as more of a sisterhood with Breanna. We were fortunate to skip the terrible two's, but the terrible tweens have hit hard at our house. These days I no longer can say or do anything right!



With age comes wisdom. My own sense of naïveté still exists, but I am well aware that Breanna is starting to slip away from that pure state as she enters the reality of young adulthood. The coming teen years will be an adventure, and I am ready for the journey with her, but not before we experienced one more Disney dream vacation together.

As a child, I spent countless summers at Disneyland in California because my grandparents lived in the area. As a new mom, I had the joy of taking her to Disney World in Florida with my parents when she was just a little bitty tike. This time around mother and daughter would be voyaging together with Mickey and friends on the Disney Wonder cruise ship - one day on land at the parks and three days on the Caribbean Sea.

All of Disney's destinations deliver a warm fuzzy feeling to adults and children alike. This was my first trip with Breanna where we were not meeting or joining a member of our family or someone else's. Our weekend was about just the two of us... hand in hand, talking about Breanna's hopes, dreams and inner thoughts with her dear old Mom. NOT! The moment you step aboard this magical ship your brain goes into sensory overload. There is so much to see and do on this enormous vessel that it was hard at first to decide which way to turn.

Our first day was spent roaming around the boat and seeing how incredibly organized the programs were for the children, as well as the adults. Fortunately my daughter is not constantly struggling with her inner Map Quest like her mom, so navigating through this 964-foot vessel was not quite as daunting for her as it was for me.

As we trailed along on the tour before setting sail, I realized Breanna was more interested in her shipmates than the darling Disney décor. It was at this time that I realized my trip would be taking a very different turn! Waves of children were clustering around the pool area bellied up to the all-you-can-eat ice cream counter and slurping down bottomless sodas. While Breanna was announcing to me that she was spotting one "cute" boy after another, I was panicking we wouldn't make it back to our cabin by lights out. My "bonding" weekend with Breanna was already slipping away into the ocean and we hadn't even pulled up the anchors!

It does not take long to figure out the secret ingredient to Disney's successful cruises. It is, in a word, their staff. Representing over 65 nationalities, this close-knit international family of crewmembers has one common goal, (and I mean goal!) to make every last guest happy and content. I have NEVER experienced such unconditional and exceptional service in all my travels. It almost felt like they were vacationing right along with us. I loved hearing the array of accents and knowing exactly where in the world they all came from because nametags including origin were pinned on their Disney attire, just like in the parks.

The handy daily newsletter, The Personal Navigator, clearly lays out all the programming available on the ship and the method of organization on The Wonder is just that, a wonder. There is a system to every aspect of this boat and it appears to be working flawlessly for Disney. From the spectacular evening shows that rival any Broadway production to the clever dining rotation that allows each guest to experience the 3 main themed restaurants, these folks know how to put on a cruise. And the cleverly designed "Adults Only" activities and areas show, clearly, that grown-ups matter on this cruise ship too. Parents, do not feel guilty enrolling your youngsters in the daily and evening activities while you take some much deserved time to yourself.

Since I was traveling alone with Breanna I felt there was no reason to split up, no reason to go our separate ways - wrong! Once she got a taste of freedom and the parent pager system, it was bye bye Mommy. What did I do? I felt a tad bit lonely and frankly a little abandoned for a very brief moment. Choosing to work off a bit of the cruise food in their clean and rather impressive gym helped. Booking myself into one of the most fabulous body massages I have ever encountered using the Hawaiian technique, Lomi Lomi, helped too. Finally, it was one of the specialty Piña Coladas that sealed the deal of peaceful, remote parenting for a window of time. When a parent is feeling healthy, relaxed and happy your child knows it and benefits from it. I have never believed in needing to take a vacation because of a vacation. This kind of magical adventure at sea makes it easy for moms and dads to indulge without guilt.

I wondered over the long weekend on the Wonder what would become of my precious daughter in this big wide world of ours. Would she embrace her new school and make new friends easily? Would she hopefully continue to confide in me when the going gets tough? Time will tell, it always does. There are no guarantees in life. I decided to make a wish on a big bright star over the Caribbean Sea that Labor Day weekend. My wish was to continue to enjoy this wonderful voyage of parenting I am on and, for the most part, cruise through calm waters in this next mother/daughter phase of our lives.

