

Editor's Note

When my parents turned 60 years old (they are six weeks apart in age), my brothers and I decided to throw them a big surprise party in a banquet hall.

It was a great party. Everyone had an awesome time. My parents never forgave us.

They didn't like the idea of us going to such lengths to give them a big party when we all had bills to pay and children to support. They felt badly about us spending so much money on them. We did it to say "thank you" for being such great parents.

So, when their 50th anniversary came around, they told us well in advance that there would be dire consequences if we did not immediately scrap whatever plans were in the works. True to form, they knew. It was only a week or two after the initial round of emails was exchanged that they called me on the carpet. Instead of a party, they insisted on a family vacation to the Outer Banks, for which they paid the full freight. It was a lovely time for all of us.

For many of us, 50 years of marriage sounds like the impossible dream. I'm about to turn 60 next year... which means that Mom and Dad have been married for 60 years now. Few of us will ever be able to make that claim.

As I write this, I am looking out over the balcony of my stateroom on one of the largest cruise ships in the world. Mom and Dad decided to do the 60th Anniversary in grand style, and once again, we benefit. We are enjoying 7 days in the Eastern Caribbean aboard Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines' Oasis of the Seas. If you scan the Discovery channel listings, you may eventually catch a documentary on how she was built.

If you have never been on a cruise ship, no doubt you have friends and/or relatives who rave about the experience. First, let me say that the stories that you've heard about the food on board are all unequivocally true. I'd come back for the mashed potatoes alone, to say nothing of the rest of the cuisine. These folks know how to put on a spread, and it's all there for the asking at virtually any time, including room service, all included in the price of your sailing pass.

The first time I saw the ocean down this way, I marveled at how

brilliantly deep blue the Deep Blue Sea actually is. It slips silently past the ship, which remains remarkably stable. For my part, I don't really care where we are going or when we get there; I love being on board this ship. Did I mention that there's no cell phone service here? Oh, dear... that means that nobody can call me... or even find me. Blather on all you wish about shore excursions; I'm happy to stay on the ship.

This attitude had served me well on our previous cruise, 5 years ago, on board the Oasis's sister vessel, Allure of the Seas. Mom and Dad had taken us on that cruise as well, on the recommendation of their friends, who had done similarly with their children and grandchildren. Mom's one regret was that we had not been able to attend a Catholic Mass while on that previous cruise, and she was determined not to repeat the mistake.

She insisted on finding a way to attend Mass this week, and as God would surely have it, we learned of a Catholic Church that was just a few minutes away from our first port of call, in Nassau, where we made port at 7 AM on Sunday.

We received assurances that the church, St. Francis Xavier Cathedral, was a mere ten minutes from the ship, and that taxi cabs would be available. Dad explained that there would be an 11:00 AM Mass, and that we had plenty of time to attend and be back to the pier before the 1:30 PM last call to board.

It sounded reasonable enough: get off the ship around 10AM, get to the Cathedral by 11:00, and get back to the ship a little after Noon.

So at around 10:00, we headed to the lower gangway to disembark on the pier. We were cautioned to have our sailing passes handy, along with a photo ID or a passport. As they checked us out, ship's personnel verified IDs, and we ran into a problem: Dad's sailing pass was invalid. This was only mildly surprising, since he had not been able to use it to access his stateroom only minutes prior.

After holding up the line for several minutes, and insisting that they re-check and double check the validity of the sailing pass, a sharp eyed security officer pointed out that Dad's sailing pass was from Allure of the Seas. He had been trying to use his sailing pass from five years earlier. In the midst of all this, Mom had already gone through, and was waiting on the pier... without her

passport. As they whisked Dad away to resolve his problem, he handed me Mom's passport, and having had the good sense not to bring my 5 year old sailing pass with me on this trip, I made it through and gave it to her.

Dad eventually located his current sailing pass, and joined us a few minutes later. It took more than ten minutes just to get clear of the pier and out onto the street, but we still had plenty of time. We engaged the services of a taxi, and Michael, our driver, made good on his promise to deliver us right to the front door of the church. As we needed a return ride, we asked him to come back after Mass. He approached one of the congregation to ask how long the Mass would be, and was told that it would be about 90 minutes.

That would mean that we'd be getting out at around 12:30, and we needed to be back on board by 1:30... certainly do-able, but with little margin for error. Dad offered to pay him, but he told us we could pay after we got back to the pier.

"This way," Michael exclaimed with a grin, "you know I'm coming back for you!"

We got out of church at about 12:15, and noticed that there were a number of taxi cabs milling about, hoping for a fare. Time being as tight as it was, we might have taken any one of them, but we still hadn't paid Michael for getting us there. Fortunately, Michael showed up early, and whisked us promptly back to the pier.

The walk back from the cab to the pier was slow going for Dad, who was getting tired. When we arrived, we had to go through security screening prior to boarding. We all knew the drill: empty your pockets, take off watches and belt buckles, etc.

Dad didn't care; he marched right through the metal detector, which he immediately set off. Out came the wands, and we extracted a cell phone, a pair of metal rimmed glasses, a watch, a camera, and several other items from his pockets. We made it back on the ship with about a half hour to spare.

Next time I am bringing a priest.



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