

AS TIME GOES BY: RETURN TO ANOTHER ERA
AT RICK'S CAFÉ IN CASABLANCA, MOROCCO

APRIL 15, 2011

AMERICAN WAY

AMERICAN AIRLINES + AMERICAN EAGLE

WINNER
NORTH AMERICAN
TRAVEL JOURNALISTS
ASSOCIATION
Gold Medal
PORTRAIT, PEOPLE 7

(See 10.01.2010)



California, Here We Come

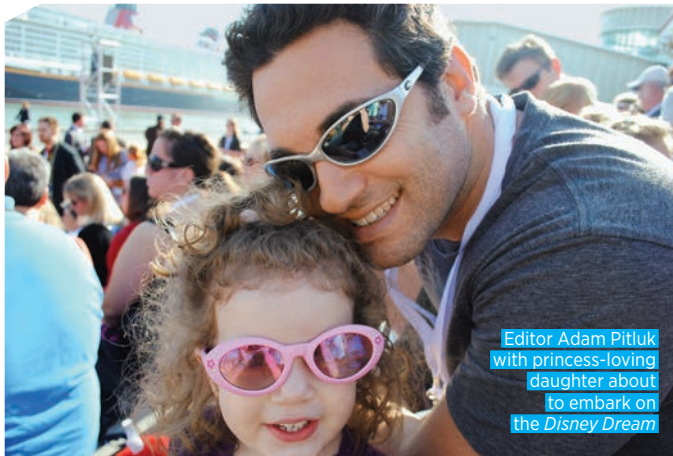
The intricate canal network
may look like Venice, but this is
NEWPORT BEACH, U.S.A.



TWICE MONTHLY



PLUS
An in-depth look @
virtual education
p. 34



Editor Adam Pitluk with princess-loving daughter about to embark on the *Disney Dream*

Living the *Dream*

I HAVE THIS BUDDY, ANDY, WHO ABSOLUTELY loves everything about the Disney brand. The guy can sing every fairy-tale song by heart (or speak them by heart, or however it is that you recite a fairy tale). He owns all the collectible merchandise — like that watch whose face has Mickey dressed up as a wizard. He has a stuffed Jiminy Cricket standing sentry while he slumbers, and he (Andy, not Jiminy Cricket) has what would amount to a country-club membership at the California park. He elects to go there whenever time permits. He spends countless hours on Space Mountain, and he has blown more cash at the Mad Hatter's store over time than I've made in my four years at American Airlines.

But Andy is no Mickey-crazed infant. He's no Cinderella-loving tween, no contest winner, no Disney focus group study subject examined by teams of Disney scientists, sociologists and social engineers to determine how adolescents respond to the introduction of a new Muppet. No, Andy is a 25-year-old man with a college degree from NYU. Yet, his reality is my children's fantasy world.

Now I don't mean to be too hard on ol' Andy: I don't mean to come across as snarky or judgmental. After all, the guy is content and, much to my surprise, is part of an army of like-minded, upon-a-star-wishing, Nemo-finding, Pixar-hardened soldiers.

This column is predicated on an out-of-the-blue e-mail I received from Andy back in January. The e-mail said simply this: "I hope you and your family have a fun time on the new *Disney Dream* cruise ship (see page 20). I'm quite jealous of you!"

An innocent enough e-mail, but it made me curious: Why on earth would anyone be jealous of being stuck out at sea with a 4-year-old and a 2-year-old?

I approached this vacation — the first time on a cruise ship for my family, let alone a Disney cruise ship, let alone the newest ship (and the Hope diamond of the fleet) — with just a tinge of hesitation. All I wanted from this trip was for my daughters

to have smiles stuck on their faces. Even though the ship is billed as having a host of activities for Mommy and Daddy, to be honest, I didn't care. I'm a 34-year-old man. I haven't watched a Disney flick by choice in over 25 years (although I wouldn't be honest if I didn't admit to having a crush on Mary Poppins when I was a boy). This trip was for the kids: This trip was Daddy making a sacrifice; Daddy wanted to take the family to Miami; Daddy loves Miami. But the kids love Ariel and the other princesses. So before embarking on a trip that had "Griswold" written all over it — complete with name-embroidered Mickey-eared hats — I decided to pick my friend's brain.

"Andy," I e-mailed back, "what is it about Walt and his empire that's kept you loyal after all these years? I mean, I remember a time when you picked me up from the airport and you had 'When You Wish upon a Star' blasting. You were 19 years old!"

"Disney has always been at the forefront of entertainment technology," he wrote. "From the first sound cartoon to Disneyland and now to the *Disney Dream* with the AquaDuck water slide, no other company but Disney is capable of continually innovating and creating something new. That is very exciting to me."

"But you used to live in NYC. Now you live in L.A. Can't you get those same feelings walking about Times Square or around Hollywood Boulevard?"

"I could, but I choose not to," he wrote. "Disney spares no expense in creating a theme and environment. From the architecture to the cast members' costumes, Disney makes you believe you are someplace else. That's why I thoroughly enjoy sitting on a bench on Main Street and soaking up the atmosphere."

The guy had a point. I packed that advice into my daughter's Crush the sea turtle backpack (which I carried through the airport) and steeled myself for some nights at sea with some Muppets.

From the moment we entered the grandest of palace entryways to the moment when my

4-year-old got pulled onstage by Snow White to play Sneezey Dwarf to the moment my 2-year-old declared herself a pirate and greeted all passersby with a hearty "Arrrrr," the Disney folks sure did nail this one. I didn't get to experience Deck 4 of the ship — the mommies and daddies deck — but I didn't have to. My family bonded on this big ol' boat. My children met all their heroes. And I hugged a duck.

This friend of mine, Andy, is one bright kid. Or one bright man, I should say. He's still young and not obligated to a wife and children, so perhaps this never-never-land Disney phase he's going through will end when he gets married, has some kids, starts his career and becomes a little bit more like his older friend. Perhaps he will, as they say in *Peter Pan*, finally grow up. Perhaps he'll lose that inner child in him when the world starts knocking him around a little bit.

But I sure hope he doesn't. I'm sure glad there are still dreamers in this world, like the folks at Disney. And like my buddy, Andy.


ADAM PITLUK
Editor

 **Want to sign up for e-mail**
notification of Adam's column or to read his past columns? Visit www.americanwaymag.com/whatsnew

 **We're blogging!**
American Way is published twice a month, but our new blog, OnTheFly, is updated regularly with exclusive content not found in the magazine. Visit the blog for our product giveaways, great videos, travel news, recommendations and much more. (You can even talk back to us.) Visit us at www.americanwaymag.com/blogs