

Dear Family:

Happy New Year!! Hope this letter finds everyone doing well. Karen and I are doing well.

2015 was rather uneventful – actually, I'm not sure where all the time went. We travelled to the family reunion in June and to the Toastmasters International Convention in Las Vegas. One day after arriving in Vegas, I came down with Bell's palsy and spent 4 days in my room trying to recover. The Palsy is now gone and things are back to normal.

In September we did our annual trek to Europe: from Baltimore to Iceland (on WOW Airlines!) then to Copenhagen, Denmark. We stayed in Denmark for 2 days then caught a Holland American cruise to Rotterdam, Netherlands and the rest of the cruise was around the British Isles.

I lived in Holland from 1978-1983. In 1979, I was attempting to park between two cars (in very icy conditions) and ran into the car next to me. The owner turned out to be a Dutch Air Force Officer named Jan Stouten. We became instant friends and on this trip we were able to get together with his wife and son in Rotterdam.

The cruise around Great Britain was great – with stops in England; Dublin and Cork, Ireland; Belfast, Northern, Ireland, and Edinburgh, Scotland. Our last stop was Dover (famous for its White Cliffs). We stayed there one night and then took a ferry to Calais, France, and then a high speed train (200+ miles to Paris).



White Cliffs



Dover Castle

We were in Paris four nights visiting many of the famous sights: Eiffel Tower, Louvre (seeing the Mona Lisa), Notre Dame, and Napoleon's Tomb, Arc de Triumph, River Seine, Luxembourg Garden and many other beautiful. Paris truly is the city of lights and one of the most beautiful cities in the world.



Eiffel Tower ▲

Notre Dame ▼



Arc de Triomphe



Louvre Museum

Napoleon's Burial Place

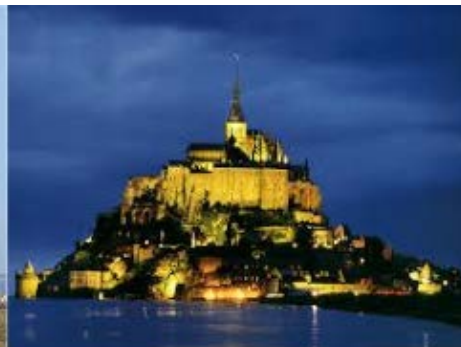


Napoleon's Tomb



St. of Liberty near the Eiffel Tower

Palace of Versailles ▶



After our stay in Paris, we rented a car and drove for 12 days over a good portion of France. First stop

was Mount St. Michele. We stayed in a farmhouse with awesome views.

Le Mont-Saint-Michel is an island commune in Normandy, France. It is located about a half-mile off the country's northwestern coast. Only 247 acres in size and a population of only 44.

The island has held strategic fortifications since ancient times and since the 8th century AD has been the seat of the monastery from which it draws its name. The structural composition of the town exemplifies the feudal society that constructed it: on top, God, the abbey and monastery; below, the great halls; then stores and housing; and at the bottom, outside the walls, houses for fishermen and farmers.

Its unique position — on an island just 600 meters from land — made it accessible at low tide to the many pilgrims to its abbey, but defensible as an incoming tide stranded, drove off, or drowned, would-be assailants. The Mont remained unconquered during the Hundred Years' War; a small garrison fended off a full attack by the English in 1433. One of France's most recognizable landmarks, Mont Saint-Michel and more than 3 million people visit it each year.

Our next stop was the Loire Valley, located in the middle stretch of the Loire River in central France, and is referred to as the *Cradle of the French* and the *Garden of France* due to the abundance of vineyards, fruit orchards (such as cherries), and artichoke, and asparagus fields, which line the banks of the river.

Most tourists go there for the beautiful chateau's that line the river. We visited several chateaux's, but the two below were our favorites.



Then it was off to Avignon in south-eastern France situated on the Rhône River. Of the 90,194 inhabitants of the city about 12,000 live in the ancient town center enclosed by its medieval ramparts.

Between 1309 and 1377 during the Avignon Papacy, seven successive popes resided in Avignon and in 1348 Pope Clement VI bought the town from Joanna I of Naples. Papal control persisted until 1791 when, during the French Revolution, it became part of France. The town is one of the few French cities to have preserved its ramparts.

The historic center, which includes the Palais des Papes (palace of the popes), the cathedral, and the Pont d'Avignon (a private bridge, built just for the pope).



City of Avignon



Palace of the Popes

From here we just drove through many small towns, like

de Puy



Colmar



And while driving around Colmar, we came across this St. of Liberty, a 36-foot high replica of the Statue of Liberty. It was sculpted to commemorate the 100th death anniversary of the sculptor Auguste Bartholdi, who was born in Colmar and created the "Liberty lightening the world".



In addition to the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, we visited several other great cathedrals, including Chartres (in Chartres, France, built in 1209...left in photo below. And the great cathedral in Reims, France, begun in 1211. Twenty-nine French kings were crowned in this cathedral. (photo on the right)



While driving around, we came across two unusual structures: a Roman aqueduct, built in 19 BC (left) and a WWI Memorial for American soldiers killed in the Battle of the Marne. See next page.



After our trip through France, we took to high speed train from Paris to Barcelona.

We spent 4 nights in Barcelona – one of our favorite cities, and one of the most beautiful.



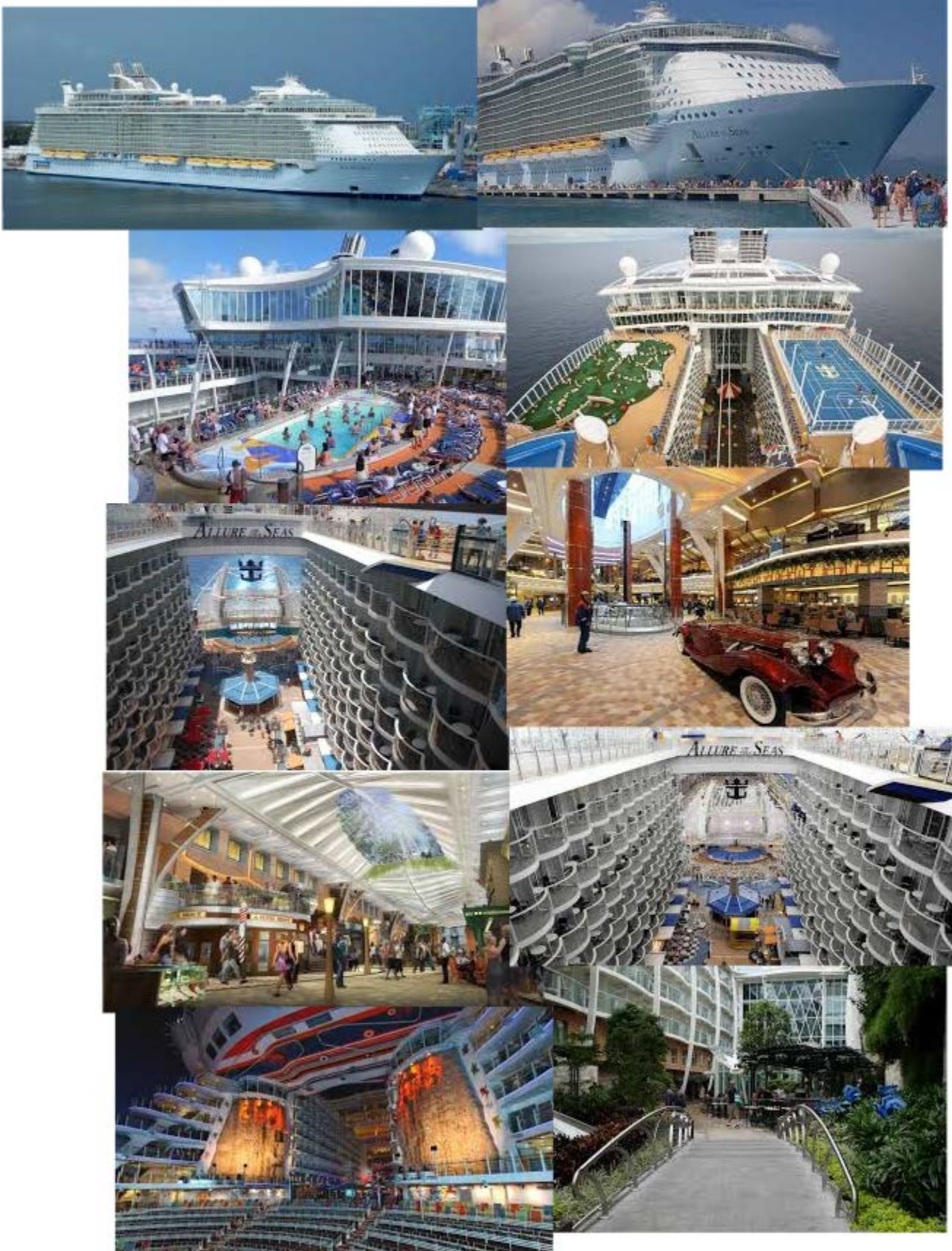
city hall



Sagrada Familia cathedral

From Barcelona, we boarded the world’s largest cruise ship...with 7500 people on board...and sailed back to Florida.

Ship Statistics	
Year Built	2010
Tonnage	220,000 tons
Registry	Bahamas
Length	1,181 feet
Beam	184 feet
Passenger Capacity	5,400
Crew Size	2,150
Total Inside Cabins	496
Total Outside Cabins	2,210
Cabins & Suites w/ verandas	1,956
Suites	166



We made it back to Baltimore Nov 6 and went to Don and Gloria's for Thanksgiving.

Frank & Karen