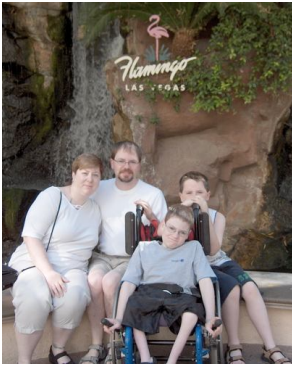


TRAVEL

OUR TRIP TO LAS VEGAS

By Roger Maschke



A month before the Canada Day long weekend, Colleen and I decided to go on a vacation. We had been working very hard at the Camrose Morning News, 6 days a week for over a year and decided that we needed a change of scenery. We decided to take the entire family to Las Vegas because I had already been there twice about five years ago and the rest of the family had never been there. We also decided at that time, not to tell the kids and make it a surprise. The main reason for doing this is that Matthew has been diagnosed with Cyclical Vomiting Syndrome, which basically kicks in whenever he gets over stimulated. Once it starts, he can't keep anything down (even water) for about 3-4 days. First trip in a plane, first trip outside of Canada, first trip to Vegas...that's a little bit of stimulation!

The trip did involve a lot of planning because we were not sure if Matthew's shunt would be fine during the plane trip (which wasn't even an issue, it was fine), we didn't know how wheelchair accessible the planes were and we wanted to see a couple of shows while we were there and had to make sure of wheelchair accessibility. Once we had all that figured out, we were ready to go.

The plane trip was pretty uneventful once we got on. WestJet airplanes are not wheelchair accessible. We had to carry Matthew from the door to his seat and then they stowed the wheelchair in the cargo compartment. It was specially tagged so that it would be last item loaded and the first item unloaded once we reached Vegas. The airplane staff was very helpful, but it would be nice if there was a better level of independence for the disabled. There was another man in a wheelchair on the flight (travelling alone) and the staff had to carry him to his seat as well. Matthew is accustomed to being carried if we need to get somewhere, but I'm hoping that won't be an issue as he gets older and uses his crutches more.

So we land in Vegas, get unloaded from the plane and step outside. BAM, a wall of heat is our invitation to this strange land called Vegas. The temperature while we were down there was +40 during the day. We could have waited for a wheelchair accessible bus to take us to our hotel, but we just carried Matthew to the first seat and stowed the wheelchair in the cargo area.

Our stay in Vegas was a whirlwind of activity. Everywhere we went was wheelchair accessible. Our first night was spent attending the new "Ka" performance by the Cirque du Soleil. We lined up to get into the show (our seats were already pre-determined) and one of the ushers motioned to us to move to the front of line so that Matthew could be assisted to his seat. We are lucky in some respects that Matthew has mobility because we always ask where the disability seating is at events, but we are not forced to sit there. I find that the disability seating is not the best seats in the house, so we typically buy best seats we can afford and figure out how to get Matthew to them. Once we were inside the auditorium, the staff stowed Matthew's wheelchair for us while we enjoyed the show and it was waiting for us, once the show had ended. This happened again with perfection when we attended the Tournament of Kings dinner show the next night. The service was very attentive and always with Matthew's enjoyment in mind.

The other event that sticks out in my mind was when we lined up to have lunch at the buffet in the Luxor hotel. We waited approximately 45 minutes to get in (it was well worth the wait), only to find that there was another entrance to the buffet for hotel VIP's and people in wheelchairs where there was no line. I have to say that Colleen did see this entrance and pointed it out to me, but I felt that it was unfair to move ahead of all the other people waiting just because Matthew was in a wheelchair. However, the lady who sat us down, apologized repeatedly and made sure that we knew to come to that entrance the next time we came.



All in all, it was an incredible trip filled with visits to the Star Trek Experience (I got to eat in Quark's bar and the kids got to talk to a Ferengi, sorry that was a geek moment), the M&M museum & 3D theatre and playing games of chance & arcade games at the Circus Circus (Connor won a Game Boy Advance). It was an amazing trip and I highly recommend it to anyone wanting a change of scenery. There were lots of things for the kids to do, easy wheelchair accessibility and lots of memories for us to talk about afterwards.