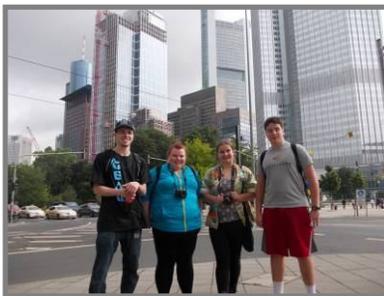




Journey for a Lifetime

Germany & Poland, June - July 2013

Journey for a Lifetime Photo Snapshot & Diary of Grace, Mel, Erich & Geoff



Arriving in Germany



West vs East at Brandenburg Gate



The Incredible Berliner Dom



The Remains of the Berlin Wall



Arriving in Poland



The Beautiful Old Town of Warsaw



One of the Many Monuments



Wrapping the Children's Presents



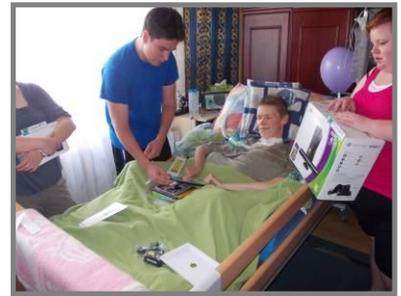
Meeting the Canadian Ambassador



With Paulina (Heart Defect & DS)



Hugs with Paulina



Robert (Muscular Dystrophy)



Off to Meet Magda



Magda (Hodgkin's Lymphoma)



Celebrating a Great Day of Wishes



Karol (Acute Myeloid Leukemia)



Natalia (Cerebral Palsy & Hepatitis)



Emilia (Bone Cancer)



Emilia - So Beautiful



The End of Another Great Wish



Visiting the Children in Hospital



Jakub (Acute Myeloid Leukemia)



Seeing the Children Smile



Marta (Spina Bifida)



BBQ with Marta



DELICIOUS



Going for a Walk with Marta



Getting Ready for the Next Wish



Szymon (Leukemia)



Bartek (Muscular Dystrophy)



Another Wonderful Feast



Marcela (Heart Defect)



Ice Cream All Round



The Unbelievable Ciecocinek



Wiktoria (Leukemia)



Soccer Fun with the Family



Julia (Cerebral Palsy)



Justyna (Cystic Fibrosis)



A Respectful Visit To Chelmno

"Tell Me and I'll Forget : Show Me and I May Remember : Involve Me and I'll Understand"
Chinese Proverb

Days 1, 2 & 3 - We arrived in Frankfurt and spent the morning enjoying this beautiful city before taking the 7 hour bus ride to Berlin and catching up with our sleep. A breakfast feast in our hotel was followed by a short subway ride into the city where we went straight to see the Chancellor's residence, the Reichstag and Brandenburg Gate. Then we went to the Holocaust Memorial (incredible) and the Holocaust Museum (emotional) - and much more. We all learned so much and shed a few tears. After a reflective break we walked through the city and into the amazing Berliner Dom and then climbed what seemed a thousand stairs to get to the top for a bird's eye view of this very powerful city. Our morning took us into the Reichstag where we were able to go inside the headquarters of the German government and take a tour up its spectacular glass dome. It is so impressive. Then we went to see the remains of the Berlin Wall and visited the Museum of Terror which is built on the site of the SS headquarters building. After lunch overlooking Check Point Charlie we spent the afternoon at a huge outdoor street festival which was a perfect way to end our understanding of Berlin, its people and culture. It seems like we have been here, and together, for a week - we've seen and discovered so much!

Day 4 - It was a day full of mixed emotions. We were up at 4.45am and waiting on platform 11 at 6am for the Berlin to Warsaw Express. We arrived in Warsaw just after noon and were met by Ania, our wonderful second chaperone from the Foundation. For the next 6 days we have 14 wishes to make but just before we left on our trip the Foundation received notice from a mom about her son, Artur, who was very sick with bone cancer and about the wish he would like to be granted. The Foundation has over 700 terminally-ill children now on its waiting list but they wanted to try to quickly make Artur's wish happen and so it was arranged that we were going to go to meet him in hospital this afternoon. Ania had spoken with Artur's mom at 10am to make the final arrangements for our visit but within minutes of our arrival in Warsaw Ania received a call from the mom to say that Artur had suddenly passed away. It then hit us - this was real and Garry and Ania talked about Artur and his situation at length to us and how very sick he was. His mom was so grateful to have had contact with the Foundation over the last week after she had contacted them and this was the most important thing for her - she had someone to talk to. So we checked into the hotel and then went to the Foundation's office where we changed mood and wrapped all the presents for the 14 children who we can't wait to meet and make happy. It was like being in Santa's grotto! Warsaw is such an incredibly busy city - Berlin feels very quiet by comparison!

Day 5 - Today was our last day before making wishes come true. In the morning we went to see the Invisible Exhibition - only one of three such museums in Europe. We were taken into a completely dark space by a blind person and the area was split into many other rooms - kitchen, bathroom, the street, the forest, the lounge, the gallery and we were totally "blind" and had to find our way around and find various objects. It was quite a terrifying experience at the beginning but it became a combination of fun, understanding and an unbelievable appreciation of what it's like to be blind. We were all very relieved to find the final door! Then we went to the Canadian Embassy and had a wonderful meeting with the Canadian Ambassador who was so appreciative of the work we are doing and the work of the Foundation and Coalition. We spent about 45 minutes with the Ambassador in the board room and then her chief assistant took us on a tour through the Embassy - we were very impressed and proud to be Canadian. We ended the day in the beautiful Old Town square where we had another fantastic meal and afterwards we were treated to some great live shows outside the Royal Castle.

Day 6 - Three beautiful children changed everything today... in a way we never thought possible. First it was Paulina who has a heart defect and Down Syndrome. Paulina was being tested for a new heart drug which has destroyed her kidneys and liver and her mom has just been diagnosed with cancer! But we walked into the happiest home ever. It was literally love at first sight and Paulina loved her wish gifts - a laptop and case. Her mom fed us with cake upon cake upon cake - which was so delicious we couldn't stop. What a way to start our wish giving trip. Next it all changed... Robert has Muscular Dystrophy and he can only move his fingers. He hasn't been out of his home for over 1 year - he just lies in a bed by the window. He got the Xbox he dreamed for and games and we set it up and he amazed us with his skills playing FIFA 2012 which he had never played before. We also brought him a tablet and when we arrived at our hotel tonight he had already sent us a lovely message on facebook saying how great it was to meet us and to thank us. We thank YOU Robert. Then we met the girl who stole our hearts. Magda has Hodgkin's Lymphoma and cerebral palsy. Three months ago she learned to walk at the age of 5. They were living in an apartment so bad and with no running water but they have just been moved to an apartment of 120sq ft (120 sq ft!). The Foundation will be delivering the furniture to them in August but we brought Magda everything with "horses". Magda was the most adorable girl in the world.

Day 7 - Today we were up at 5am to drive 160km to meet Karol. We had to be at Karol's by 8am as he was going to hospital at 9.30am and we wanted to make sure he got his wish before he left. Karol is 12 and he has acute myeloid leukemia. He nearly died three weeks ago after his bone marrow transplant but to see him you would never believe it. He was so handsome and happy. He is one of 7 children and we were welcomed by a house-full of happy smiling faces. Karol got his computer and a Ronaldo Real Madrid soccer shirt that he wore to the hospital!

Then we drove for another hour to meet Natalia who is 14 with hepatitis and cerebral palsy. Natalia has also lost the ability to speak following a botched operation and she has no friends and her father left her when he knew she was sick - nobody wants to know her! Natalia has the biggest happiest smile in the world and when she opened the box with her laptop - WOW. Our last wish child today was Emilia - a stunningly beautiful 16 year old who has bone cancer. Emilia has been feeling very poorly lately but she was so happy with her gifts (a 42" TV, movies and make up). Her mom and dad (this was only the second family where there was still a father) were wonderful and we felt love, and more, in their small apartment.

Day 8 - Today our emotions went from low to high and even higher... We started by visiting the children's cancer ward at the Bydgoszcz Hospital. There were so many children in isolation - the heat and lack of air were unbearable, the lighting and rooms were depressing and the children were so sad. We delivered toys and games to the children - going into their rooms and trying to bring a smile to their faces. One girl in particular was in so much pain but each time she took a gift from us she smiled and forgot about it for at least few moments. The nurses were angels. We didn't take many photos as it was not appropriate. We met with Jakub and gave him his wish - a laptop and a cell phone. He was very happy and can't wait to go home to be alone with his wishes. After we left the hospital sent us a text to say how important our visit was and that as the children's situation is very sad our kindness and good heart makes the world a better place. But it's the children who give us strength and they show us the way! Then our world changed and we went to the home of Marta. We spent 5 hours there! Not only is Marta sick but her 5 year old brother has cerebral palsy - but this was the happiest and warmest family we have ever met. We were treated to a BBQ feast for lunch and then we all went for a walk to the lake for a swim together and ice cream. When we got back it was time for more food and then they showered us with gifts - and we were the ones meant to be bringing the happiness! We ended with Grace and Geoff singing for them - we didn't want to leave.

Day 9 - Today was a long day and it's very late and time to get some sleep, so it's a short diary note tonight... We made 3 wonderful wishes come true - Szymon who has myeloid leukemia - a mountain bike, a cellphone and clothes; Bartek who has muscular dystrophy - a TV, a Playstation 3 and games; Marcela who has a heart defect - a tablet, board games and lots of Barbies! Szymon, Bartek and Marcela really loved their wishes but they were all living in very poor conditions - in one home the family of 5 had one room to live, eat and sleep! We brought some happiness into their lives today.

Day 10 - This morning we visited Ciechocinek an incredible SPA town famous for its immense saline towers. All we can say is that you have to see it to believe it - and we all felt really healthy after breathing in the air. In the afternoon we went to see Wiktoria who has acute lymphoblastic leukemia. Wiktoria was very shy and so after she opened her wish gifts - a computer, printer, keyboard and a toy barking dog - the boys went outside to play an hour of soccer with her brother and the girls "did their stuff" and made her smile and laugh. It was great and very fulfilling. Tomorrow is our last day of granting wishes which we are so sad about - we want to do more and more...

Day 11 - Today was our last day of granting wishes and we were honoured to meet 2 wonderful children... 7 year old Julia suffers from cerebral palsy and last week a tumor was found in her stomach. Julia was in a lot of pain and couldn't get comfortable but when she opened her wishes, especially the soft toys and blankets, she really calmed down and when we sang songs from the Lion King it was great. At the end she was smiling. Her mom was the most amazing person in the world - the love and happiness she showed to her daughter was unbelievable. It was mom's birthday today so we shared a birthday cake and sang Happy Birthday. Then we drove to meet 13 year old Justyna who has cystic fibrosis. Justyna was beautiful but she lived in the worst conditions possible for someone with her illness. Justyna wanted a professional camera and she was thrilled. She must have taken 200 photos while we were there. We hope that her new hobby will take her to a new world away from the treatments, hospitals and dark days. Then we switched moods and paid a respectful visit to the concentration and extermination camp at Chelmno. This was where 300,000 people were murdered between 1941 - 1943. We drove on death road - the same road that they took when they were driven to the forest, being gassed on the way, and then buried in the woods - later to be exhumed and burned when the numbers became too large to bury. We then made our way back to Warsaw, checked into our hotel and had a fantastic Polish meal and celebrated our Journey for a Lifetime with the Coalition and Foundation.

Days 12 & 13 - We spent a great day in Warsaw, enjoying the city and its people and then early the next morning we began our long journey home - we were so happy to see our families but will never forget the wonderful families we were blessed to meet in Poland.

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