

## **Lima couple wins cruise to Bahamas**

Merri Hanjora - Feb. 24th, 2008

LIMA - The last time Elmer Collins was on a plane was 30 years ago, and a rough landing in Chicago made him vow he wouldn't do that again.

Earlier this month, he broke that vow.

Elmer and Erma Collins, of Lima, won a four-day cruise to the Bahamas, thanks to OSU fan newsletter Buckeye Sports Bulletin. When they renewed their subscription, their name was entered into a drawing for the cruise, and they won.

The cruise, the Buckeye Cruise for Cancer, featured football coaches and players signing autographs and auctioning memorabilia - with proceeds helping the Stefanie Spielman Breast Cancer Fund for Research at OSU Med Center in Columbus. Spielman's husband Chris is a former Buckeye.

Elmer and Erma Collins have been married for 58 years and have never been on a cruise. The Royal Caribbean ship, Majesty of the Seas, sailed Feb. 8 to 11 to and from Miami with stops scheduled in Coco Cay and Nassau in the Bahamas.

Elmer Collins, who is a big Buckeye fan, could barely contain his enthusiasm about the trip. His fear of air travel subsided when he noticed former Ohio State quarterback Craig Krenzel and former Ohio State coach John Cooper on the plane. When they got to the Atlanta airport, they had to change planes.

"We were getting our luggage and Craig Krenzel was getting his," Elmer Collins said.

Elmer Collins told him that he and his wife had won the cruise and asked when the autograph session was. Krenzel obliged with an autograph right there.

Once the plane landed in Miami, the airport shuttle was delayed.

"John Cooper, Craig Krenzel and Kirk Herbstreit took us under their wing and said you are in our group," Elmer Collins said.

Erma Collins was quick to point out that she really liked Cooper's wife.

"I thought she wasn't talking a lot of football," she said, laughing.

They boarded the ship and found their cabin, which was in their opinion one of the nicest on the boat.

"We had our own balcony," Elmer Collins said. Their room was on deck 10. Cooper was on the ninth deck, but his cabin wasn't as big as theirs, they were quick to point out.

There was champagne on ice, wine and French bottled water. The vanities were marble. Workers would stock their cabin with fruit and candy while they were away. There were white terrycloth bathrobes with matching slippers. They were able to keep the slippers, but the robes would have had to be purchased for \$50.

Purchasing the robes was the only time they could have spent money onboard.

"They wouldn't let us pay for anything," Erma Collins said.

The day the ship sailed, the autograph session was held. Elmer Collins said the lines were long, and he waited in line for more than an hour. He obtained autographs from Galen Cisco, Kirk Herbstreit, Bobby Carpenter and Nick Mangold. A.J. Hawk was on the seventh deck, and he is Elmer Collins' favorite player. By the time they got down to the seventh deck, the session was over.

Chris and Stefanie Spielman were in charge of activities onboard, and they never stopped. Erma Collins was invited to a breakfast with Stefanie Spielman, who is a survivor of breast cancer.

Erma Collins said she wanted to go, "but they had us out until 1 a.m. the night before and the breakfast was scheduled for 8 a.m. I didn't want to get up at 7 a.m. to make it to the breakfast," she said, laughing.

They had Elmer Collins, 78, playing musical chairs and hula hooping.

"I sat back and watched," said Erma, who turns 75 this year.

Coco Cay brought white beaches, palm trees and clear water. Erma Collins photographed an iguana and chickens that run around the property and enjoyed the local music.

The Nassau stop was on a Sunday, which meant the majority of shops were closed.

Elmer Collins got near his favorite player, A.J. Hawk, several times on the ship, saying that he and his wife, Laura Quinn, pretty much stayed out of the limelight. He never had a chance to get his autograph, though.

"I'm still satisfied. This is one of the best things that's ever happened to us. I would do it again, only this time I would see A.J. Hawk first," Elmer Collins said.

Erma Collins agreed: "It was great. We couldn't have had it any nicer."

They both enjoyed themselves so much that Erma Collins is now learning how to use the computer so she can book trips online.

The next Buckeyes Cruise for Cancer is scheduled for Feb. 12 to 16, 2009. Travel arrangements are through Lisa Cisco at Travel Partners, of Dublin. Call 800-628-1727 for details