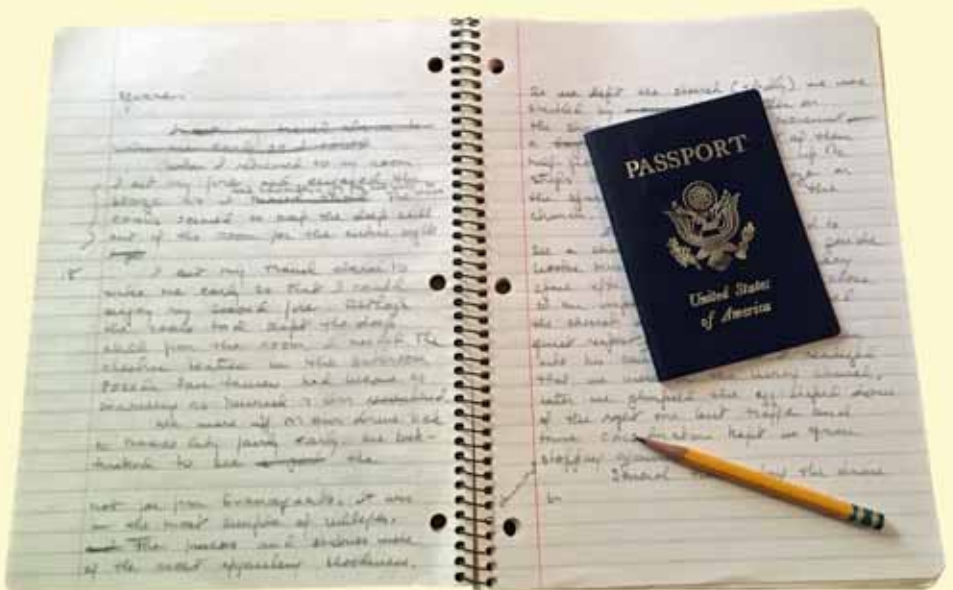




Travels, 1995 – 2007

Kate V. Scott

Edited by Carli Scott



Book 4

Travels, 1995 – 2007



Kate V. Scott in Kamakura, Japan, 1998

Cover photo: One of the travel journals from which Kate wrote her trip reports

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<www.tcracs.org/kvswp>

The four books in this series are dedicated to the people of Belize, who received the Scotts with a warm welcome and lasting friendships, and who accepted our family as an integral part of the community in which we made our new home.

Contents

Forward	ix
Agents' Meeting in Mexico	1
France – Morocco – Spain with Muriel & Don	9
Puerto Rico with Carli & Tom	83
Air France and Japan Airlines	129
Winter in Europe with Muriel & Don	137
Agents' Meeting in Miami	173
<i>Niagara Prince</i>	177
Japan with Muriel & Don	187
Quick Trip to Mexico	257
Western Tour with the Robinsons	261
Northwest Coast with Carli & Tom	277
<i>Grande Caribe</i>	303
Air France 50-Year Celebration	313
<i>Grand Caribe</i> Again	317
Pátzcuaro, Mexico, with Muriel & Don	327
Chan Chich with Fran & Louis	337
Danube River Cruise with Muriel & Don	341
Editor's Notes	381

Forward

Back when people relied on letters sent through the world's postal systems to keep each other informed, my mother, Kate V. Scott, was a prolific correspondent. For decades, her delightfully written, newsy letters and reports enchanted and entertained family and friends. Following her death, and with the help of family and friends, I collected as much of Kate's writing as I could find. This is the last in a series of four books that I assembled from the collection:

1. *Life & Times, 1922 – 1979*
2. *Life & Times, 1980 – 2014*
3. *Travels, 1961 – 1994*
4. *Travels, 1995 – 2007*

Books 1 and 2 consist of letters of general interest and other descriptions of incidents in Kate's life; Book 1 also includes a draft memoir and essays describing her first few years living in Belize, British Honduras. I've organized this material into chapters that I present in roughly chronological order to tell Kate's life story in her own words. Books 3 and 4 consist of Kate's reports of her various trips, mostly vacations but some including business as well; again, the reports are ordered chronologically.

For additional information about the source material that I worked with, see page 373 in Book 1: *Life & Times, 1922 – 1979*.

When a trip report in this book refers to material in a different book, a footnote gives a reference to the relevant chapter in that book.

I have maintained Kate's usage and spelling; I have modified her original text only where necessary for clarity or to remove redundancy when combining related material from different sources. On the first occurrence of any acronym or foreign word that may not be familiar to all readers, any word whose use in Belize is different from its use in standard U.S. English, or any word or name whose pronunciation may differ from what some readers expect, I have added a footnote to "translate" Kate's

meaning or to indicate how the spoken word or name sounds. My occasional comments on her narrative or her wording can be found in separate editor's notes (page 381).

— *Carli Scott*

Agents' Meeting in Mexico

May 1995

The problems with my trip to Mexico for the Air France Agents' Meeting were fore and aft. The middle was delightful.

We may be next door to Mexico, but you can't get there from here.

- TACA flies Belize / Salvador / Mexico and back daily. However, the schedule necessitates overnighing in Salvador both ways, a waste of time and money.
- It is possible to fly to Miami and back to Mexico, but it is prohibitively expensive.
- One of the local airlines flies a 5-passenger Cessna from Belize to the Mexican town of Chetumal, just across the border. However, they reach Chetumal at 8:30 AM and the only flight to Mexico City leaves at 4:30 PM. That's a complete waste of a day. I thought I had a good return connection until after I had bought the ticket; the little airline announced that I was the only passenger, so they were canceling the flight.
- Result: Three-hour taxi ride between Belize and Chetumal to make connections with Aviacsa to and from Mexico City. Cost, nearly what I would have paid going via Miami. The one good thing is that the driver, Mr. Arnold, is an old friend who works for our company regularly. We had a pleasant visit each way.



I went to Mexico a day early so I could do some shopping. This time, I stayed at the Hotel Aristos on El Paseo de la Reforma. The Stauffers and I liked it very much when we stayed there several years ago. I had to ask my associate at Air France, Mexico City, to help me make reservations. I could tell by the tone of her subsequent faxes, suggesting other hotels, that she did not think I would be pleased by my choice, no matter how happily I remembered the hotel.

I wasn't. I remembered the lobby as unostentatious and the reception clerk as exceptionally friendly. This time, the lobby was grander and the staff equally starchy. Last time, our rooms were large and brightly welcoming in spring greens. This time, the room was divided into bedroom and well furnished sitting area—convenient, but more crowded. For once, I found beiges and dark browns depressing.

The bed-light hood jutted out from the wall the entire width of the king-size bed. It was set so low that it was impossible to prop up with pillows to read or watch TV without one's head being thrown forward so sharply that nothing but one's lap was in view. Miserable. For this I paid almost double what I had paid the first visit, despite the current peso devaluation.

On the plus side, room service orders were delivered quickly by gracious waiters. The food was good. On the minus side, there were no plugs for either basin or tub in my expensive room. I washed stockings in a wastebasket and had showers instead of the luxurious bubble baths I had anticipated.

[Editor's Note 1 on page 381]



The hotel's location was conveniently in the Zona Rosa. I set out early my first morning for my favorite jewelry shop. I walked at least an hour, up and down almost-deserted streets, before I found it. It was closed. The shopkeeper next door assured me that the store opened late—11 or 12 o'clock. I spent the intervening time walking many more blocks before locating a beauty salon and then having my hair done.

When I returned to the jewelry shop, it was open. The talented elderly man who owned it was at the counter. He had sold me a smoky topaz ring some years ago that was in the suitcase stolen in France.* I found a similar stone in a setting I did not like. However, there was an amethyst of identical size in a handsome setting, typical of his best work. The jeweler agreed to exchange the stones. I now have a new smoky topaz ring in a

* "Five In France" on page 249 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

lovely gold setting. It is round instead of rectangular and, to me, not quite as handsome as the lost ring. Still, it is attractive and I am delighted to have it.

I took with me to Mexico another ring I had bought there, a turquoise set in gold. The stone was dull and stained. Jewelers in Colorado told me that it probably could not be cleaned. Mr. Willender confirmed it. He had a charming malachite exactly the same size and shape. I asked him to put it into my setting. Next time I am in Colorado, I will buy a turquoise set in silver. I prefer that anyway.

That should have been the end of the story. However, I couldn't resist looking at his entire collection of this type ring. The amethysts were gorgeous, but I never wear lavender or purple. Most of the topazes were too bright a yellow. Unfortunately, I found one that wasn't. It was a large, beautifully cut, soft-yellow stone. The jeweler explained that it also was a smoky topaz, but a light one. It was in a lovely setting, too large for every-day wear, but an ideal compliment to most of the clothes in my wardrobe.

It is not safe to wear my diamond rings much in Belize now. These Mexican rings are handsome, I think, and moderate in cost. It is not wildly extravagant to have several.

The jeweler promised to have all the rings set and sized by three that afternoon. Then came the business of paying. He had assured me in the beginning that he accepted Visa. However, he asked for a down-payment. I suggested his making an impression of my card. No way. I offered him a US\$50 bill. Not nearly enough. I retreated to a far corner of the store and extracted a \$100 bill from my Bosom Buddy stash. He was grudgingly satisfied. Then he announced that he would prefer cash for the balance, too, because he lost money on credit-card sales and, after all, he had given me large discounts. True. He probably cut the cost down to somewhat more than he would have charged a Mexican. I told him that I had not brought much cash, but I would check how much I had.

Back in the hotel I found I had about \$150 left. I was not about to give him that. I determined to go back and tell him that I couldn't pay more cash, so would not take the large topaz. By the time I returned, he was all smiles and quite happy to charge the balance. I am sure he clipped me on exchange, though I got him to lower the rate some. There's only so much one can do in a foreign country. Furthermore, I knew that the rings were slightly better than good value for the money. I emerged an extremely happy woman with my new wardrobe of stones.



The handcraft market was only about a block away, so I headed there. It is a warren of small cubicles crowded with silver jewelry and larger pieces glowing under bright lights. Every foot of the way, another vendor calls for one's attention. It is overpowering. It was latish in the afternoon. I had walked miles that day. I was too tired to cope with the harassment or single out one piece from the thousands. I fled back my cave in the hotel.

Next morning, I returned to the market as it was opening. Very few people were around. I found a charming young woman in one of the first cubicles. With her help, I found several small gifts to take home with me.



The Air France group gathered at the airport and set off for Acapulco by bus. It was a beautiful bus, two sections separated by a small galley and lavatory. People were free to wander back and forth, visiting with friends. An open bar was set up in the little galley. The lunch was food from Air France Première Classe, served on regulation trays. Superb wines. The highway was excellent. A splendid promotional film from Panama was shown on the video screen. Passengers took over the microphone to tell jokes, in Spanish, of course. It was a five-hour trip, but a relatively pleasant one.



You may *have* Acapulco. I consider it a disaster. Too many high-rise hotels. Too many neon-lighted shops lining the streets.

Our hotel was charming. The ground floor was mostly open-air, including bars and restaurants. My room was large and lovely. One entire wall was glass, with sliding doors onto a balcony overlooking the bay. Directly in front of me, waves washed onto the beach. To the left, the ocean swept in a long curve, washing in behind an uneven series of large rocks. The bay was tightly circled by high hills that became a wall of lights after dark. I never closed my draperies against the view. If anyone from the nearest window, a football field's length or more away, happened to see me in my slip, they were welcome to the sight.



What to say about a business conference? It was interesting, stimulating, helpful. It also was a strain, being conducted fully in Spanish. Food in the hotel was good, but not special. The final dinner in a restaurant on the top floor, looking out over the bay, was lovely.



Air France flew us all back to Mexico City. We laughed about the 40-minute flight compared to our 5-hour arrival. I could not make a connection with my flight back to Chetumal, so Air France booked me into the airport hotel. The charming young marketing manager from the Panama agency also stayed over. When I mentioned that I intended to go to the zoo, Giovanna asked if she could go with me. Naturally, I was delighted. When we met for lunch after checking in, Giovi said she had telephoned her fiancé in Panama. He was absolutely delighted that she was going to the zoo and told her it was one of the finest ones in the world. She said he is an animal nut (like my daughter, Carli, and me). I took Giovi to lunch in the hotel. We arrived barely in time to heap plates with goodies from the Mexican-type buffet before it closed.

The taxi left us at the wrong gate at Chapultepec, so we walked for at least 30 minutes before reaching the zoo entrance. The zoo is free to the public,

but there was a two-block-long waiting line. We were horrified. However, it moved swiftly. The reason for it was that Security Guards ran people through a field of narrow lanes, shunting aside people carrying things to eat or drink and probably weeding out undesirables. We found incredible security throughout the zoo. I don't think we ever were out of sight of at least three guards. We both clutched our hand bags throughout the afternoon, but never saw anything but a happy, orderly crowd of families.

It was a searingly hot afternoon, so many of the animals had retreated to their air-conditioned houses or to convenient caves in their enclosures. We never saw the lions or elephants. However, we saw a wide range of other animals, including two grown giant pandas. Giovi could not believe that I recognized every animal except for a couple of ungulates from Asia.

We stopped at the glass fronting one of the primate enclosures. I saw a flash of rust-colored arm with a fringe of long hair circling its elbow. "I think it is a very young orangutan," I told Giovi. Moments later the little animal inched its way back into view. I was in front of the glass at the left corner. The orangutan appeared to be looking directly at me with a happy smile. Suddenly he leaped down onto the ledge inside the glass and held out his arms to me. I held mine out to him. He touched the glass. Apparently realizing he could not come into my arms, he put one slim, elongated black palm against the glass. I put my hand against the glass on



Kate at Chapultepec Zoo, 1995

the other side. He held out his arms. I held out mine, then twisted my palms upward in a gesture of helplessness. The little orang's smile faded. He wrapped both arms around himself and rocked back and forth, dropped his head and looked up under his bangs with the saddest eyes I ever have seen. All I could do was crouch down to his level and show compassion by expression and gesture. There was a large crowd murmuring as they watched the performance, boosting children up to their shoulders to see. The sad little pantomime must have lasted for three to five minutes. Abruptly, the little animal rose, planted an enormous kiss on the glass in front of my face, and vanished into his tree.

It was all I could do to keep from smashing the glass and following. It seemed obvious he had been hand-raised and probably had been put into his enclosure only recently. It broke my heart to leave him...

...until we saw his probable father in another enclosure. He was a terrifying giant, splayed out against a high rock wall, inching his way along it. He must have been six feet tall with an arm-spread even greater. His magnificent rust-colored coat fell in tresses fully a foot and a half long from arms and back. The face that turned toward us occasionally was not angry, but had a self-contained sternness far more forbidding than the gentle expressions of the gorillas.

After three-and-a-half happy hours, Giovi and I limped to the nearest exit and taxied back to our hotel. En route, she looked at me admiringly and commented in her somewhat limited English, "You're really *strong!*" It suddenly occurred to me that, considering I had arrived at an altitude of almost 7,500 feet an hour or so earlier, our afternoon-long jaunt through the zoo had been a creditable performance for an "Elderly."



Giovi had walked a blister onto her heel. I took her back to my room and supplied her with enough band-aids to hold her until she could buy more in Miami. She was on her way to meet her mother and pick out her wedding dress. Giovi wanted to return to the government handcraft center to buy something she had seen earlier for her mother. I declined her

invitation to join her and said I would stay in my room, bathe, and have a room-service dinner. Giovi had been with the young Air France group who followed the final dinner with a round of discos and returned to the hotel after 6:00 AM. She was about ready to collapse herself.

My room-service dinner arrived with commendable promptness. I opened the door for the waiter and was amazed to see on the tray a delicate bud vase with a single red carnation amid greenery. Before I could recover, the waiter had extracted the flower, bowed low, and handed it to me. I was so taken aback that I barely realized that instead of simply putting down my tray and leaving, he had whipped out a table cloth, set my place, positioned plates, and taken the tray with him. P.S. The food was almost as good as the service.



My return would have been routine if I could have found my boarding gate. I spent a frantic half hour running in and out, up and down, back and forth, following bad directions, until I finally located B4 by going outdoors down one long ramp, indoors up another into A concourse, and running past all the A gates to the end where, quite improbably, a sign *B4* and a familiar clerk assured me that I could board my flight.

France – Morocco – Spain

with Muriel & Don

September 1995

The trip was planned by Muriel and Don Stauffer and me the last night of our 1994 trip to the south of France. * The intervening year brought an increasingly happy flurry of faxes back and forth as we settled on details.

I bought Arabic language tapes long before the trip, with happy plans to learn basic conversation. The unaccustomed sounds of the language and the complete impossibility of relating words to anything I already knew quickly lowered my sights to just learning basic polite phrases.

In July, my leisurely daily study time evaporated with the arrival of the new puppy, Missy. ** My Spanish had not improved noticeably. My Arabic was stuck at “good morning” (statement and reply), “yes,” and “no.”



From file written August 13, 1995

I received a mid-week fax from Don and Muriel and guffawed heartily so that my son, Alex, asked what was wrong with me. I handed him the message and asked him to read the first paragraph.

It has just been brought to our attention rather forcefully and irrevocably that we are over the hill! Today Debby (secretary) has been reconfirming automobile reservations and tidying up the itinerary. She was informed by Hertz for the first time that Morocco does not permit rental of autos to anyone over 65. It's hell to grow old; we just knew it!

* “Five In France” on page 249 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

** “Missy Joins the Family” on page 161 in Book 2: *Life & Times, 1980 – 2014*

Don's first alternative suggestion (desperation) for our trip from Casablanca to Fez via Rabat was a non-starter as far as I am concerned. It involved hauling our luggage onto a train from Casablanca to Rabat, coping with it during sightseeing, then hauling it onto another train to Fez. We are looking into the possibility of a car and driver. Otherwise, we can get either plane or train from Casablanca to Fez and will miss exploring Rabat. Tant pis.*

The real problem is getting from Fez to Tangier to catch the ferry to Gibraltar. I am hoping we can get a car and driver. The alternatives are so complicated and time-consuming that we might have to leave Fez a day early. I hope we don't.

Travel is so *simple* with a car.



Both Muriel and I have been in a frenzy trying to work out wardrobes for the trip. I talked to her yesterday, re our Morocco revisions. Her packing is complicated by their attending a wedding just before they catch the plane to Paris, plus a couple of receptions at the Madrid conference. I told her to wear one of her reception gowns at the wedding and she said she probably would have to.

We both are concerned about weight because we will have to carry luggage on the train portions of our travel. We agreed that no one is trying to impress anyone else. We can wear the same things every day, if necessary. However, you know that regardless of my best intentions, my suitcase becomes a magnet for everything that will fit into it. Fortunately, my replacement weekender has wheels, and the garment bag has a shoulder strap. All I need now is a Guardian Angel to remove a third of the things I try to pack.

* *Tant pis* is French for *too bad*.

Tuesday, 29 August

I went ahead of the Stauffers so I could visit CGM, the shipping line we have represented for years. Air France schedules “forced” on me an extra day in Paris. A last-minute boggle in my reservations resulted in my connecting with Air France in Houston rather than in Miami.

It was a normal TACA flight to Houston. That was unfortunate. In the first place, although my ticket said *Le Club*, the computer did not. The distressed young counter agent enlisted the help of his supervisor, telephoned Mexico City, and straightened out the problem quickly.

I decided to take advantage of my new membership in Priority Pass to wait in their lounge. It involved a brisk, lengthy hike to another terminal, but the luxury was worth it. I made myself a glass of iced coffee, sank into a deep, comfortable chair, read, and felt pampered until time to go to the boarding gate. It was then I noticed the polite note printed on the bottom of my boarding pass inviting me to use the Air France lounge. My inattention cost the \$20 Priority Pass fee, but I enjoyed seeing their elegant lounge.

To my disappointment, Air France was flying one of the old 707's, far less comfortable than the Airbus I had enjoyed on my 1994 trip. However, traveling on a free ticket (as the Air France agent in Belize), I could not let myself complain, even mentally.

The flight was pleasant; the food, as usual, superb. My seat companion was a pleasant young man with some experience in airlines. Thanks to the ridiculous-looking neck collar Carli gave me, I actually had a certain amount of real sleep on the flight.

I awoke at one point, miserable to find it impossible to go back to sleep. Gradually the presence of light intruded on my concentration. Wondering where it came from, I raised the shade on my window to discover dawn. On the other aisle, the stewardess was beginning to serve breakfast. Infinite relief that the flight was near its end.

Wednesday, 30 August

Formalities were brief at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris. A comfortable taxi ride took me to the Hôtel Saint Ferdinand. I had decided to try one of the hotels Air France uses for their complimentary nights for excursion passengers. It was pleasantly located just off Place Saint-Ferdinand, a block from Place Maillot. A variety of restaurants and shops were within close distance. The hotel itself was bright and gracious. My room was larger than the ones in the Tilsitt Étoile (where we had stayed last year), but not nearly as charming.

I unpacked, walked around the neighborhood briefly, made a hair appointment for the next morning, then took a nap. I had supper at the brasserie on the corner. The decor was ordinary, but the service was attentive, and the food, quite good.

Thursday, 31 August

After an early hair appointment, I took a taxi to the Marais Quarter. When I mentioned in a pre-trip fax that I had not decided what to do with my free day in Paris, Don suggested the Marais as one of Muriel's favorite areas of Paris. In the 17th Century, the nobility and courtiers began building mansions around the Place Royale, now the Place des Vosges. Their *hôtels*, described by Michelin as "discreet, classical buildings," became centers for artistic and intellectual salons.

I first visited the Hôtel Carnavelet, now a museum and art gallery. From there, I walked through the Marais, admiring the handsome old tree-shaded buildings. My next stop was the Picasso Museum in the Hôtel Salé. Leaving there, I found a charming bistro for lunch, then took a taxi to the Rodin Museum on the other side of the Seine.

Rodin's famous statue of *The Thinker* is the focus of a small square garden. Diagonal paths lead to the clearing where the statue looms on its pedestal. Other large pieces are displayed throughout a handsome long garden. The museum itself houses a generous collection of Rodin pieces, large and small. Somehow, even across the room, certain sculptures

caught my eye. It was only on closer inspection I recognized them as some of Rodin's most famous. They telegraphed their distinction across space.

Friday, 1 September

I spent a pleasant, productive day at the CGM offices in Suresnes. I enjoyed seeing my old friends in the main office. Christiane Spitals took me to lunch at a new Thai restaurant. It was a pleasant day both businesswise and personally.

I returned to the Saint Ferdinand to pack for the next day's trip to Morocco.

Saturday, 2 September


My Air Inter flight was an hour late. The person with whom I had been corresponding about car-and-driver plans had promised to meet me at the Casablanca airport. As I stood in what was less a line than a mob, waiting for Immigration clearance, I saw a man hold up a sign. I was too far away to read the name of the person he was looking for.

When I finally reached the desk, the Immigration official appeared baffled by my Belize address. His English was fragmented. I tried to convince him that Belize was an actual country and that it was in Central America just south of Mexico. He would not buy either contention. His eyes hardened. It was obvious that he considered me a danger to Morocco.

To my relief, an older man leaned forward over my shoulder and asked if he might be allowed to help. I thanked him, then listened as he repeated my explanation of Belize in patient English. When the Immigration official appeared unmoved, my champion hissed at him in rapid Arabic. Moments later my passport was stamped, and I was waved ahead into the next room, where I joined another line.


The man with the sign reappeared. At this distance I could read my name, elaborately printed. I signaled him, to his obvious relief. A few moments later, he helped me retrieve my luggage.

As we emerged from the baggage area, a charming young woman rushed forward to introduce herself as my Morocco correspondent, Fatima Zohra Khaled. I was presented to Abdulwahed, who Fatima said would be my driver. Within moments, I had bid goodbye to the man who met me, and then Fatima, Abdulwahed, and I were en route to the Hyatt Regency Casablanca.



The hotel was grand. It was large. Several attendants in Moorish costumes of billowing black and red eased our entrance across acres of black marble floor to the registration desk. I was greeted like a visiting potentate and not allowed to do anything as mundane as fill out my own hotel registration form. Meanwhile, Fatima disappeared briefly then reappeared with the hotel manager. He greeted me with more respect than I thought I deserved, assured me that I would be on their club floor, and showed me the special key that would allow the elevator “to stop at 8.” Fatima left after arranging to meet me an hour later.

A black-and-red-satin-clad valet used my key to whisk us to the private floor. We walked past a large salon to a nearby door, which he threw open with a flourish. The dazzle of glass and mirrors immobilized me momentarily. It was a relief when the valet carefully deposited my luggage and left with the tip paid with Dirhams* Fatima graciously had loaned me.



My room was a semi-suite. A large entry gave access to the separate toilet room on one side and a huge mirrored wardrobe on the other. To the right,

* *Dirham* is the unit of Moroccan currency.

one walked past a dog-leg bar, backed by mirrors. On the end of a curving bar was a plate filled with the most elegant small cookies.

To the right one entered a mirrored “island” room with a marble vanity and wash basin and a huge tub with a Jacuzzi. It was the next morning before I discovered that the bath could be closed off from the adjacent areas by sliding doors. Beyond the “island” was a sitting area with comfortable couch, chairs, and coffee table.

A beautiful basket of fruit awaited me on the coffee table. Beyond the lounge were twin beds with handsome damask covers. And beyond them was a wall of windows overlooking Casablanca. In memory, I see heavy brocades, rich colors, mirrors on every possible vertical surface. The entire time I enjoyed my luxurious surroundings, I was vaguely confused about how to get from Point A to Point B.



An hour later, I went down to meet Fatima so she could get to my private floor. We returned to the salon to discuss possibilities for Air France tours to Morocco. A pretty young attendant immediately brought us a graceful silver pot of traditional mint tea. I do not particularly like tea, but I had five cups of the fragrant, light beverage over the course of a couple of hours. We were plied with plates of sweetmeats, cookies, fruits. Meanwhile, Fatima and I had a productive meeting. I don't know whether I can sell this tour, but what we designed looks very good.

When we finished, Fatima suggested that we drive around Casablanca. Abdulwahed and the car were waiting for us. Casablanca is a large, commercial city, Morocco's business center. The main attraction from a tourist's point of view is the enormous mosque, completed within recent years. It is a magnificent building set in an extensive plaza. Steps down to the mosque actually are long broad spaces where the thousands of worshipers who cannot get into the mosque can bring their prayer rugs and follow the amplified service. The pale green mosque itself is a superb example of modern Moorish architecture.

Fatima made it plain she considered it monstrous that the country had spent millions on a building when the poor of the city desperately needed housing, clinics, social services.



We talked about having dinner together, but the late dining hour discouraged me. I invited Fatima back to my room for a drink instead. Morocco, for the most part, does not ban alcohol as many Arab countries do.

There was a knock on my door. Outside was a smiling waiter who presented me with a plate containing a small cup in which was perched an upright eggshell topped with a dark swirl of something. Baffled, I thanked him politely in Arabic and accepted the strange offering. Later I discovered the egg was filled with delectable chocolate mousse.

Fatima and I had a delightful visit. She is a bright, dedicated, intelligent young woman. Her mother, though uneducated, was a respected figure in local politics in Rabat most of her life. She insisted on Fatima's going to college. Fatima started law school, but changed her mind for a reason I don't think she mentioned. Fatima now is managing director of a car service and travel agency. It is obvious she has fought to get where she is. We liked each other immediately and I hope to continue the friendship.

After Fatima left, I realized I did not need to call down for a room-service dinner. I dined quite nicely on the fruit, cookies, and mousse so kindly supplied by the hotel.

I indulged in the first Jacuzzi in my experience, then retired in my Moorish palace.

Sunday, 3 September

I set my alarm for an early morning, fixed coffee with my new 220 immersion heater, and breakfasted on fruit. Somehow, no cookies were left.

Abdulwahed (*Abdul* for short) met me at 6:30 AM for our drive to Marrakech. He was startled and delighted when I addressed him in Arabic (briefly). Some of the Arabic phrases I had learned worked their way into our conversation on the trip to Marrakech, usually greeted with friendly mutual laughter. Abdul ended half his comments with *Inshallah* (God willing). I found regular use for *Mish mu him* (it doesn't matter).

Abdul thought he spoke English. He did, a little. He just didn't understand much of it. Once he knew that I spoke a little Spanish and French, he abandoned English.

Abdul wanted me to understand and appreciate Morocco. He was a fine tour guide. However, each sentence was a mish-mash of French, Spanish, and Italian (which I do not know, but rapidly learned to recognize). I found myself mixing French and Spanish comfortably in my own conversation. Our three-hour drive was a fascinating, though somewhat surrealistic, experience.



The countryside was relatively flat, golden agricultural land with mini-mountains in the distance. Villages had strips of shops with tiled walls, stacks of tires, stacks of Coke cases. Some, I was amused to see, could have been transported bodily from back roads in Mexico.

Marrakech is called “The Pink City.” As we approached, the entire horizon appeared as a rosy glow of low cubes jumbled one against the other. Abdul explained that the King decreed all buildings must be painted a light red to protect the eyes of the inhabitants from the dangerous glare of traditional white buildings.

In Marrakech, I met the first of what was to be the unifying element of our entire trip: Walls. Everywhere. City walls, fortress walls, palace walls. High, forbidding, unscaleable, thick walls pierced by irregular punctures. Abdul explained that they were holes from scaffolds and were left for ventilation. Given the thickness of the walls, the last explanation seemed dubious.

Abdul found a bright young student to act as a guide. One of the first places we went was the Ibn Youssef Medersa (Koranic school), the largest in Morocco. It was built in the 14th Century. At one time, it housed over 800 students in tiny rooms overlooking a great rectangular court with a large pool set into the white marble floor. The surrounding walls were elaborately decorated with classic Moorish muted flamboyance. Many of the minute bedrooms opening from a floor high above the court had ladders leading to holes in the ceiling. Whether the space above housed other students or was used for storage, the guide didn't know.

We crossed the enormous square of Djemaa El Fna, crowded with people and kiosks. I saw my first snake charmer. A cobra and a viper were twisting on a large square of cloth. I would have preferred to see the cobra in a basket, but he coiled obediently at the snake charmer's piping. Somewhat to the disgust of my young guide, I put a small coin in the hat held out by the charmer's small son.

We walked through the *souks* (literally, *shops*). It was an orderly area with shop after shop of *djellabas* (the long, straight garments worn by both men and women), brass-ware, leather goods, pointed-toe slippers, jewelry, etc. It looked to me like a native market cleaned up for the tourists.

We passed the walls of the Royal Palace. His Majesty, King Hassan, has a palace in each of the Imperial Cities (Marrakech, Rabat, Meknes, Fez) and heaven knows how many elsewhere. We drove down a new road, the Circuit Palmiers, past mansions of the vastly rich, some of them owned by familiar names from the world of entertainment. We stopped briefly at the Golf Club, a huge establishment of hotel and condominiums.



After about three hours, I paid my personable young guide and Abdul, and I headed for a restaurant Abdul had suggested on our way into Marrakech, once he had determined that I wanted Moroccan food. The name, as I understood him, was *Wasis*. He hoped I could see a *fantasia*, a mock battle of Berber horsemen, but in the non-tourist season there was

only an evening performance. When I saw the sign, “L’Oasis,” I realized the name meant *oasis*. And that is what it looked like.

We entered through a typical old mansion with punctured walls and tiled floors, and emerged into a restaurant whose top and sides were a billowing silk tent held up by rock posts and brocade-wrapped columns. The dining area overlooked a large irregular pond surrounded by rough rock buildings, palm trees behind heaps of sand to represent dunes, and small tents of multi-stripped fabric displaying piles of jars or carpets. My banquette seat was as soft as the multitude of cushions surrounding me.

The meal was strange and delicious. Midway through, the rains began. I felt snug enough until the weight of water poured over the edge of the tent onto the steps beside me. Undampened but startled, I gasped. Other diners laughed. Waiters arrived from all directions and hustled me to a safer table.

Glancing aimlessly at a nearby table, I saw a terrifying slim black shape rise, writhing, upright alongside one of the guests. Conditioned by my recent encounter with a cobra, I was frantically flipping mentally through rescue options when the “snake” moved and became the upright tail of a piebald cat wandering among the tables.

When we had arrived, Abdul asked me for one of my Air France business cards. To my embarrassment, I discovered when I asked for my bill that my meal was compliments-of-the-house. The tip I gave the assistant manager responsible for the largess probably was close to what I would have paid.



Before planning the day trip to Marrakech, I was afraid I would be overly tired when the Stauffers arrived that night. Fortunately, we finished sooner than I expected. Abdul drove home like a horse headed for the barn. I was back in my room by 6:00 PM with three hours before he would arrive to take me out to the airport to meet my friends.

In my absence, a plate of sweetmeats had been placed on my bar. A couple of those and some fruit made a pleasant supper. To finish my program of relaxation, I emptied a packet of bubble bath into my enormous pink tub with its Jacuzzi. For the first time ever, I had Hollywood-type bubbles threatening to suffocate me. It was a delicious experience.



Mid-evening Abdul returned to drive me out to the airport. The Stauffers were the very last people to emerge from Immigration. Meanwhile, I was paralyzed with guilt thinking Air France might have failed them in some way. Ultimately they emerged, bright, happy, rested from their day-room in Paris, and we had an enthusiastic reunion.

Abdul drove us back to the hotel. The Stauffers were duly impressed by their room, identical to mine, once I assured them that the quoted price applied. We had a joyful Scotch to celebrate the beginning of our travels.

Monday, 4 September

Fatima joined us in the salon for breakfast. To my astonishment, she insisted that she was providing our car free—airport runs, Marrakech, trip to Fez. We would pay only gas and Abdul's salary.

Our departure was too early for Don to get to a bank to change money, and after the weekend, the hotel could not accommodate him. Don was frantic. I had anticipated this and had changed extra on my arrival, so had plenty of Dirhams to take us to Fez. This was little solace to my good friend.

Don sat in the front seat with Abdul. I had told him about our conversational adventure of the day before. I noticed a bemused Don in the same mix of languages during the drive.

We paused in Rabat and spent a couple of hours of sightseeing with Abdul as guide. We saw the magnificent brass doors of the Palace, enjoyed the mounted guards, and toured the incredible mausoleum that King Hassan



Kate and Don Stauffer in Rabat, Morocco, 1995

built in honor of his father, the adored Mohammed V. The white onyx tomb rested on a lake-like floor of gleaming black marble. We watched a subdued parade of respectful Moroccans come in veneration for the late king who did so much to develop their country.

On to Meknes, another of the Imperial Cities. For the record, I have always mispronounced both names. Correctly it is *RA-bat* and *Mek-NES*. I had thought that Meknes was on the main road, so when Abdul turned off the main road, I quietly cursed myself for promoting a side-trip. However, we followed a fascinating series of great old walls and were delivered to a charming restaurant for lunch. It was traditional Moorish style—carved cedarwood ceiling, pierced plasterwork below that, then mosaics to the floor. We lounged against soft cushions and were pleased to succeed in having a light lunch by ordering one “Menu Marocain” with three plates.

On to Fez and farewell to our friend Abdulwahed.



We checked into the Palais Jamais and were received as visiting dignitaries. I do not know how much of this was due to my requesting reservations as an Air France General Sales Agent or how much represented the sparsity of guests at the end of their tourist season.

Our rooms were gracious in size, Moorish in decoration, and had balconies overlooking the Medina, the old city of Fez. The Stauffers adjourned for a late afternoon rest, while I went to look up the young lady Fatima had called about getting a guide for us.

An attractive young businesswoman greeted me warmly and asked if I would like to see something of the hotel. I was delighted. She took me to what must have been their presidential suite (assuming The Royals do not stay in hotels when they have their own digs in a nearby palace). The entrance hall passed a small kitchen, adequate for the modest ministrations of a staff chef and well separated from the living quarters. The first room was a music-room-cum-office with elegant, large carved desk and small grand piano. Down three steps was a gracious lounge furnished with brocade-covered furniture and elegant antiques. Windows framed by heavy draperies and swags overlooked the gardens below. A door on the left led to a huge master bedroom and bath, gleaming with gold satin. A door on the right led to a slightly smaller second bedroom, furnished with its own sitting area, television, and bath, like the larger bedroom. The decor, with its variety of materials and patterns and colors, should have been distressingly busy, but somehow it wasn't.

We returned to the lobby and I was introduced to our guide Mohammed (“Just call me *Mo-Mo*”). He was a tall Berber, somewhat Americanized in manner. I reported to Muriel and Don later that he was awfully full of himself. I was not sure we hadn't made a mistake. However, with two helpful Moroccans involved in securing Mo-Mo's services for us, I felt we had no other option.



We celebrated our arrival in Fez with Happy Hour on the Stauffer's balcony, watching daylight dim over the Medina and the lights come on through the old city and up on the hills beyond the walls. The competing calls to prayer of muezzins in the Medina's dozens of minarets were an exotic serenade.

We decided to have dinner in the hotel, since we knew nothing about the area around us. It was a fortunate choice. The dining rooms were delightfully Moorish in style. Musicians in a small band nodded and smiled as we entered past them. It was down three steps to the main dining room, then up three more into an alcove with four tables.

We were seated among the cushions and attended instantly by a hovering Maître d' and costumed waiter. The food was elegant; the service, impeccable.

The band changed tempo. Don leaned out, looking into the main room, and announced with satisfaction, "We have a belly-dancer."

Before long, the dancer swung into our area in a billow of veiling and frenzy of fringe. She was an attractive, well padded young woman who gyrated enthusiastically and sensually without ever crossing the line into seaminess. Her fixed professional smile broke regularly in openly friendly glances. We all were completely charmed. The dancer invited Don to join her, but smiled in acceptance of his refusal as she whirled away.

Tuesday, 5 September

Mo-Mo met us at 9 o'clock in the morning. He led us across the stone-paved area in front of the hotel and into a passage between buildings. A quick turn to the right and another to the left deposited us in what felt like the heart of the Medina.

Donkeys pushed past us in both directions, laden with twin bulging panniers of wool. Almost immediately we reached the Wool Souk. Great heaps of pungent raw wool—white, cream, rust, or brown in color—surrounded the small plaza. Next to them in the shade of an arcade, buyers and sellers in djellabas negotiated prices in often-excited Arabic.

Streets wound past the souks in careless curves upward and downward with no visible pattern. Uneven cobbles, the shallow troughs of drains, and unexpected steps made walking hazardous. People were everywhere, pushing through the narrow passageways on their daily errands.

Jeans and T-shirts have found their way into the centuries-old Medina, but the djellaba is the usual dress. It is a long, straight garment with long, straight sleeves and a front zipper. Many have hoods thrown back. The Fez women brighten the dim streets with their rainbow colors of orange, yellow, red, green, aqua. Many of the men's more neutral djellabas have a faint pin-stripe of a darker shade of beige or gray, or of white. Often, soft cotton pants of the same material show for a few inches below the hem.

I felt someone shove me firmly, but not rudely, and turned back to see who it was. Behind me was a tiny little old woman in the usual djellaba. She could not have come up to my shoulder blade and looked at least 110 years old. I was able to remember "Excuse me" from my Arabic tapes. Her eyes showed surprise, possibly pleasure, but the determination in her face never changed as she pushed past me and disappeared into the crowd.

I expected the area of the souks to smell as rank as some Mexican mercados.* Instead, there was a heady aroma of spices. Crowded as the streets were, they were relatively clean. The scent was just what Araby should be, and undefinable.



The major and constant hazard in the Medina was the donkeys. Placid, patient beasts, each carried a pair of heavily loaded panniers, or balanced a top-heavy load lashed into place. They moved at a brisk clip along the tricky passageways. Behind them, their drivers kept up a steady cry, "Balak, balak," warning people to get out of the way. The refrain was not something to be ignored. By the time it registered, we were seconds away from forming part of the pavement. We pressed our backs against dingy walls, praying that there was room for the donkey to pass.

Sometimes even that didn't work. Muriel and I heard the usual cry when we were in an especially narrow passage. As the donkey clopped steadily upward toward us, we stepped quickly into a shop doorway to huddle on

* *Mercados* is Spanish for *markets*.

the threshold as it passed. A little farther up the passageway, Don was not as lucky. The donkey lurched as it passed him. Its basket mashed Don's wrist against the stone wall. Don momentarily thought his wrist had been broken. Fortunately it was not, but he had a painful bruise.



Before starting out that morning, Don asked Mo-Mo about photographing. We all knew that many Arabs think a photograph steals part of their souls. Mo-Mo assured him that there were no restrictions whatever. Morocco has tried to educate people to the economic value of the tourist industry.

Don used his camcorder constantly. During the morning, he looked up the curving passageway behind him and saw a donkey approaching, its baskets overflowing with garbage. Roped to it was a second donkey, then a third. Don focused on the colorful progression. As the last donkey came into view, the wizened little driver noticed Don and exploded in fury. He screamed. He waved his arms and his stick threateningly. Mo-Mo rushed back past Don to intercept the irate Arab. He herded him on down the street, past Don and his two paralyzed female companions.

A crowd gathered. I thought, "Here goes! We meet our end in a riot in the souks of Fez." Muriel gasped in horror that Mo-Mo and the garbage man were about to trade blows. Before a real fight could begin, two men in Western dress stepped out of a nearby doorway and spoke quickly to Mo-Mo. The plainclothes policemen grabbed the still-raging garbage man, one by each arm, and hustled him off.

We huddled, wide-eyed, until Mo-Mo hurried back to us, apologizing elaborately for the "insult to tourists." It was an Alphonse-and-Gaston situation: Mo-Mo apologized to us and Don apologized to him for photographing the donkeys and incensing the poor garbage man. In the confusion of the moment, we never saw what happened to his three innocent donkeys.



We visited mosques, a medersa, and a bakery where people from the neighborhood brought their home-kneaded loaves to be baked in ancient open ovens. We saw water fountains and a *hamman* (“Turkish” bath).

The Bou Inania Medersa is considered the finest of all the Moroccan Koranic schools. It was built in 1355 as a lodging house for students. The court is breathtakingly lovely. The traditional ceiling of finely carved cedarwood tops a gallery of delicate stucco. Lacy plasterwork frames the entrances to the tiny cell-like students’ rooms. Below, delicate mosaic in muted colors covers the columns that support the elegant wooden grills leading to lecture rooms. In the center of the court is a small ablutions fountain fed by water from the River Fez.

Mo-Mo explained to me that he intended to show us the famous old buildings in the Medina during the morning and to take us to the souks in the afternoon. I rather regretted the decision as we passed stall after stall with rainbows of djellabas, stalls with leather or brass or gold or embroidered slippers with pointed toes.



I had told Mo-Mo when I first met him, and reminded him again that morning, that we liked to stop around 11 o’clock for a drink. Eleven came and went. Don got itchy. 11:15 came and 11:30 approached before he spoke to Mo-Mo himself about our traditional “*cerveza** stop.”

“Right now,” Mo-Mo replied as he led us down a curving passage. Don and Muriel dug their heels in like cartoon characters, and gasped in unison, “That’s a rug shop!”

“That’s where you’ll have your drink,” Mo-Mo said soothingly. Don, who was not to be soothed and who had been shanghai’d into a rug shop in China, protested unavailingly. Within moments we were in the rug shop, being greeted effusively by the owner. We were ushered into a large room hung ceiling to floor with Oriental rugs, and were settled among soft cushions in an alcove overlooking a great bare floor.

* *Cerveza* is Spanish for *beer*.

The Rug Man offered mint tea or lemonade. I would have been happy with mint tea, but Don was adamant. He turned to the hovering Mo-Mo and said, “We told you in advance we wanted to stop for a beer at 11 o’clock.”

“It is illegal to sell alcohol in the Medina.”

“We don’t want to see rugs. We want a beer. Please take us somewhere where we can get one.”

There was a whispered conference between Mo-Mo and two of the rug men. Mo-Mo turned around and said that they were sending out for beer.

I entered the picture. “Please don’t. We don’t want a beer here if it is illegal. We just want to leave.”

They didn’t handcuff us and they didn’t immobilize us in a roll of carpets, but there was no way we could escape. Two young Arabs began flinging rug after rug out onto the floor in front of us.

After only a few moments, a young boy scurried back with a damp brown paper bag. Three tins of beer were ceremoniously presented to us. I wanted to sink through the floor. On the other hand, the Stauffers weren’t speaking to me or anyone else, so I decided the best I could do was paper over the gaping hole in cultural rapport.

I got up and began looking at the rugs as if I cared. Two Berber rugs took my eye. They were not fine in quality, but were handsome designs in colors that would go in my house. Each time I demurred, the price came down by 200 DH (Dirhams).

Muriel noticed a rug hanging on the wall and decided that the colors would do perfectly for her kitchen if they had the right size and shape. Another pile of rugs materialized in front of us, none of them correct, and most wildly unlike what Muriel wanted.

We finished our beer with little pleasure. I explained that I could not make an immediate decision on the Berber rugs, partly because of the problem of shipping and duty.

“Oh,” exclaimed the rug man, “You don’t pay duty on Moroccan rugs.”

I tried to explain that the U.S. duty-free treatment of goods from an underdeveloped country did not apply to Belize, which was itself underdeveloped. He either could not understand or, more likely, did not believe me. No matter. I announced firmly that I had to think about the rug overnight, collected the Stauffers, signaled to Mo-Mo and glided out of the clutches of the affable Rug Man. Mo-Mo guided three seething tourists back into the twisting streets of the Medina.



As 1:30 approached, Don told Mo-Mo that we wanted to stop for lunch and reminded him pointedly that we would like wine with lunch. Perfectly clear. We were escorted to a building at the edge of the Medina. An unprepossessing door led to a Moorish nightmare of a restaurant. There were no other guests. We were attended ceremoniously. Don asked Mo-Mo about his own lunch and was told that the restaurant would provide it.

“They’ll add it to our bill, of course,” Don remarked. It didn’t matter, Don would have given Mo-Mo money for lunch.

Don’s order for a bottle of wine was accepted without question. The waiter returned with a pitcher. Don said he wanted the wine in a bottle. The waiter replied that it was illegal to have a bottle of wine on the table. Don gave up and the wine was poured.

We were able to share a Moroccan salad—an attractive plate with geometrically isolated sections of two types of olives, a nicely seasoned eggplant “mess,” and a mixture of chopped tomatoes, onions, and cucumber in a savory olive oil dressing. As for our entrées, they were inedible. Literally. We could not get a knife, let alone a tooth, through either the Stauffers’ shish-kebabs or my chicken. We hoped that Mo-Mo enjoyed the commission we knew he collected on delivering us to the restaurant.



The day continued to deteriorate. Through no fault of our own or of Fatima's, we had ended up with one of the guides the books caution you against. Mo-Mo rushed us past souks where we wanted to stop. He promised a far better gold shop as we passed the gold section where I wanted to look, whether or not I bought anything. We never saw another one. Don wanted good leather products. Mo-Mo kept showing us stiff, cheap things. We never did find a good leather souk with the lovely soft Moroccan leather, tooled in gold or plain. We ended up buying what we wanted in the gift shop of the Palais Jamais later that afternoon.

I hoped to get one or more inexpensive djellabas to wear at home at night. We never were permitted to stop at one of the stalls where I could have found one at a moderate price. In desperation I finally paid far more than I wanted for a caftan that I suspected (correctly) was the wrong length.

However, that shop was where I found an exotic birthday present for my daughter-in-law, María. While I was looking at caftans, Muriel picked up a softly draped garment of Royal Purple with elaborate gold embroidery. She said she had a similar "Sindibad," aqua in color, that she had worn successfully several times. It was a weird contraption. One end of a great length of silky jersey had an embroidered band that tied over the bust, just under the arms. The material then was passed down between the legs and up the back until arms could be slipped into the gold-embroidered bolero top at its other end. The material draped down to below-calf length, its fullness and the draping concealing the openings along both sides. An embroidered cummerbund held all together.

I knew the color would be striking on María, but was a little dubious about the Sindibad's being too exotic for Belize. As I pondered, a group of young people from England entered the shop. I approached one of the girls, carrying the Sindibad. I explained that I was thinking of buying it for my daughter-in-law and asked if she would mind modeling it. Her face made it plain that she considered me a mildly addled but harmless elderly American. She grinned and let the faintly embarrassed Muriel and me

help her into the complicated garment. Business in the shop came to a standstill as everyone, including the bemused proprietor, stopped to watch the performance. I stood back, took a good look at my smiling model, jewel-toned jersey draped over T-shirt and shorts, gave a firmly affirmative nod, and said, “I’ll take it.”

María was delighted with her Arabian-Nights dress and said it was insurance that Alex would take her to at least one glamorous holiday party this Christmas.

Mo-Mo was somewhat mollified by our actually purchasing things in one of his commission shops, so he let us stop a couple of places we picked out.

We returned to the hotel, where we met our driver, Haji. He drove us to the pottery factory. Fez is famous for its blue pottery. We watched the entire process from shaping to glazing to kiln drying. Then, naturally, we were led to a large display room. The pottery was very soft, not good quality, but I wanted a small piece to send Carli because of its traditional “Fez Blue” color. I had priced a piece at one of Mo-Mo’s shops in the Medina. They asked an unrealistic 250 DH. I got a far prettier piece at the factory for 60 DH.



On our return, Don asked Mo-Mo about a restaurant that had been suggested to us for dinner. Mo-Mo said it was excellent, but that we needed reservations. He whisked us back up the passageway toward the Medina to it.

The restaurant was large and pleasantly Moorish in decor. We booked reservations for 8:30 with the manager. Muriel asked to see a menu. The manager huffed and puffed, then said all the menus were locked up and the secretary had left. Muriel considered that highly suspect.

She was right. We returned that evening, entered a room empty except for a band and ourselves, were seated ceremoniously, and were presented with menus. Each offering had a pristine new little label pasted over the

printed price showing an amount far inflated above what we knew was usual.

“They changed the prices just for us,” Muriel gasped.

“Let’s go,” we chimed together.

To the horror of the manager, we said cool goodbyes and walked out.

We returned to the restaurant at the Palais Jamais and were greeted as old friends by the Maître d’, the waiters, the band, and even the belly dancer. We had another excellent Moroccan dinner. in elegant surroundings, at a third less than the other restaurant thought they could get away with charging us. The next day when Mo-Mo asked how we had enjoyed our dinner, he was visibly furious at learning that we had walked out, taking his expected commission with us.

Wednesday, 6 September

Mo-Mo set our sightseeing departure hour at 9:00. We waited a fuming thirty minutes outside the hotel with our driver Haji. Fortunately, Haji was an affable soul who was just as distressed as we at Mo-Mo’s delinquency. Our guide finally showed up at 9:30, explaining that he had misunderstood the time. Given that he himself had set it, we were not overly impressed. We assumed he finally had figured out we were not the Last of the Big Spenders.

We set out by car to drive around the impressive walls of the Medina. The incredibly large, triple brass doors of the Royal Palace were spectacular. Outside the courtyard, the mounted guard in billowing garb were equally so.

Leather-work is a major Moroccan industry. The tannery exists as it must have been centuries ago. We were led through a cobbled street running with a liquid that might have had something to do with the donkeys, but equally might have been dye. We climbed steep, irregular stone steps to a large, flat rooftop. The smell was pungent, acidic. We looked down into a couple of acres of stone vats. Men dipped skins up and down in the colors

and finally draped them over the sides of the vats to drain. Rooftops of surrounding buildings were spread with dozens of skins drying in the sun. I felt that I had slipped backward to a time when the years had only three digits.

We left the tannery through the usual shop. I stopped to look at the display of hassocks. I wanted one for Alex and María. They were not the quality I expected, but I had no faith that Mo-Mo would let me see any others. I bought one. It was only when I was stuffing it before wrapping for Christmas that I opened it up and found the stains, poor stitching, and scars in the leather I had failed to discover earlier.

Mo-Mo asked me if I had decided to buy one of the rugs I had seen the day before. I explained carefully that I could not buy one because of shipping and duty problems. I was firm and he accepted my decision (regretfully).

Haji deposited us at a *Bab* (entrance) on the opposite side of the Medina. We stopped at one of the brass shops and watched designs being incised into the gleaming pieces. A man squatted on the dirt showing, a young boy how to mark designs on flat pieces of brass using a compass. The boy misjudged his guide points, and the man corrected him gently. As we left, walking past the brass souks, Muriel spotted a charming brass camel. She bargained with the owner until she reached the price they both expected. At that point I announced that I would buy one, too.




Just before they had left for Morocco, Don and Muriel completed a week assisting at their Church Bible Camp. Don was the story teller. He thought a djellaba would be a perfect costume for next year's camp. The shop Mo-Mo selected quoted US\$100 for a white djellaba for Don. He laughed. The man pointed out the fine material. Don said he wanted it to wear once. The price came down slightly.


Meanwhile, in a back room, I had found something small that I wanted as a gift. The price was far too high, so I told the young man that I could only

pay X-Dirhams for that particular gift. He dashed back to confer with Don's man and returned with a new price, still too high. I thanked him politely and returned to watch Don's negotiations. My young man whispered again to Don's man. The owner left Don and led me back to my would-be purchase, extolling its quality. I agreed with him and said it was too bad that it was more expensive than I could pay. He scowled almost threateningly and growled, "Give money!" as he flounced from the room. I quickly paid the young man my chosen price and received my package.

Don, meanwhile, had given up. He told the owner that he was sorry he could not buy such a fine garment, but he needed something inexpensive. He said goodbye, collected Muriel and me, and started out the door. I don't know exactly what happened, perhaps a passing whirlwind, but instants later we all were back in the shop and the man was growling, "Give money!" to Don. Don looked at him blankly. I grabbed Don's arm and hissed, "He has accepted your price. Pay him, and let's get out of here." With a happy smile, Don completed the purchase and left with a fine set of djellaba and matching pants to wear as storyteller next year.



As we walked up a passageway between blank walls, yesterday's Rug Man materialized among us, hopping up and down with excitement and asking me if I remembered him. I did not consider it diplomatic to tell him how well. In answer to his question about my decision, I explained plainly that I could not buy a rug. By this time the price had been reduced from the initial US\$1,750 to US\$700. If he had offered that the day before, I might have bought one of the Berber rugs. The Rug Man begged us to return to his shop for a beer. Horrifying thought. I demurred. He asked me to reconsider the rug. Mo-Mo barked at him in Arabic and the Rug Man vanished so quickly it was hard to realize he ever had been there.



It was about 11 o'clock as Mo-Mo led us back to the hotel. It was the moment of parting, with relief on both sides. Don had inquired about standard guide rates, as I had, so he had an idea what to pay Mo-Mo. When Don asked, Mo-Mo gave the standard Moroccan reply: "Just make me happy." I never asked what Don gave him, but assume he did not make Mo-Mo quite as happy as he expected.

In the beginning, Mo-Mo was told by someone in the Palais Jamais that I was the Air France agent for Belize. He extolled his brother's New Jersey travel agency to me constantly. Mo-Mo explained that he guided his brother's groups plus select other tourists. (I regretted that we were among the select.) Mo-Mo wanted me to work through them on a Moroccan tour. He obviously had no idea how he had alienated all of us. I had to wait while he went to his car to get a package of brochures for me. They were impressive, but I was so annoyed with our guide that I tossed them in the waste basket after a cursory reading. I wished later I had kept them for reference.



Haji drove us to a beautiful modern hotel beyond the city walls on a mountainside overlooking the Medina. We had the-pause-that-refreshes. I used my Air France card as an introduction and we were able to see a couple of sample rooms. The public rooms and restaurant had a spectacular view. However, I thought the bedrooms were fairly ordinary, not nearly as attractive as the ones in the Palais Jamais.

After lunch, Haji drove us to the nearby town of Bahlil, a community of troglodytes (my first opportunity to use that wonderful appellation for cave dwellers). It was settled centuries ago by Christians fleeing persecution. Over the years, the persecution stopped and the inhabitants gradually became Moslem. However, they continued to live in their caves. Gradually rooms were built at most of the cave entrances, making the town look like the usual cluster of blocky white houses clinging to the mountainside. Most of the doors and window frames were painted blue in a show of political preference.

Our Bahlil guide was a dear little grasshopper of a man named Mohammed Chraibi, who spoke rudimentary but enthusiastic English. He led us along the mountainside pathway and up stone stairs. We passed a group of half a dozen women in colorful Berber dress, seated on the steps making buttons. They had contracts for hundreds of the tiny embroidered buttons used to secure “frog” closings on garments.

Mohammed led us up steep stone steps to his home. We ducked through a low doorway into a tiny kitchen. Down two steps was the main area of the house, a cave lined with six beds. A small bookcase was the only other furniture.

The beds were solid wooden ones with good mattresses. Neatly boxed dark blue covers and cushions made them into divans. We all sat on the first bed while Mohammed proudly showed us albums of pictures of tourist groups he had led. Obviously many people wrote back to him, sent presents, and helped him in various ways.

Mohammed said he would take us to his office, though he did not usually show it to people. (Good line.) Disconcertingly, he insisted on holding my hand as we skipped up and down the many steps from one mountain ridge to the nearby one. He chanted, “One, two, three, four,” over and over, but was quite disinterested in proceeding to “five.” Finally, we were faced with a wall, an opening above head height, and a ladder-like series of steps. I half-climbed, half-crawled upward, grateful for Mohammed’s steadying hand. I think I remember his boosting me with a final strong shove in a convenient but delicate location.

We entered a small cave. The floor was almost completely covered with books. The only furniture was a tiny bookcase. A small, bright oriental rug was near the end of the cave. Mohammed called us forward. I kicked off my shoes quickly. He protested that it was not necessary, but I was not about to step on his rug while shod. We crowded into the tiny cave as Mohammed proudly displayed his books and magazines in French, Spanish, and English. We were touched at his fever to educate himself. He was especially pleased at a Koran with a German translation.

As we walked back to the car, Mohammed picked long stems of fragrant mint and gallantly handed one to each of us. We drove off sniffing happily at the pungent herb.



After leaving Bahlil, Haji drove us to a picturesque waterfall. Muriel took out her pad and began sketching, to Haji's obvious amazement.

We could not explore nearby Salol because all the streets were blocked by police due to the imminent arrival of a Minister of Government. We were stalled for at least thirty minutes waiting for his cavalcade to scream past. Haji said this was a routine occurrence.

We returned to the Palais Jamais to freshen up. We gathered for our last Happy Hour on the balcony overlooking the Medina, listening to the familiar cacophony from multitudinous minarets.

We had no interest in exploring Fez restaurants after our previous experiences. We returned to our familiar hotel restaurant for a final Moorish meal, served by attentive waiters who greeted us as old friends, and entertained by our favorite belly dancer. She invited Muriel to dance with her and Muriel joined her briefly on the tiny floor. Muriel moved gracefully in what might be described as a New England translation of the Oriental dance.

Thursday, 7 September

We left early with Haji for the drive to Tangier. We passed undulating fields of wheat stubble on dune-like hills, gold and pale-olive shades under the sun. Drought had devastated crops throughout much of Morocco. Farms were tiny oases of square white buildings. Alongside the highway, tree trunks were painted white as a guide to night drivers. We reached an area of low mountains with vistas across broad valleys.

Halfway along our journey, the soil turned brassy. Large woods of cork trees showed scars from the harvesting of their bark. The cork itself was piled in long, neat rectangular stacks. Concrete canals carried water from

rivers to irrigate farmlands. The effort's success showed in the increasing green of the fields. Haji said the area produced sugar and citrus. We passed a tea factory.

Larache was a beautiful small city of lovely homes. There was much new construction. Homes were white with blue doors and window frames, indicating owners' political preferences.

At 11:00 we stopped at a neat-appearing roadside building. Haji immediately disappeared to the "facilities." In my best Arabic I asked if they served beer. I was able to understand the negative reply, to thank the young man, and to add my favorite phrase, "Mish mu him."

I decided to use the facilities myself while I had the chance. They were the usual central room with wash basin and separate doors off it marked for men and women. I emerged from my cubicle to find I was locked in the washroom. Faced with being stranded in the hinterland of Morocco, I called out and pounded on the door. The door was opened by an amused Haji. Another man had used the men's cubicle after him and, not realizing that I was sequestered nearby, locked the common washroom behind himself.



When we were on our way again, Don proudly produced the single beer he had removed from his mini-bar before leaving the hotel. He passed it around as a loving cup. Muriel and I returned it to him after two revivifying sips.

We passed a salt operation with settling tanks, drying platforms, and great piles of salt.

At one of the regular Moroccan road blocks, the police waved most cars through, but pulled out of line drivers who seemed too tired for safety. These they sent to a rehabilitation post about 100 yards away, where there were facilities for the overworked drivers to sleep for a few hours.

Watching life along the highway, Muriel remarked, "This could be Mexico—donkeys everywhere."

One clean little city succeeded the other, each with well painted walls and cubist homes in pastel colors. Along the roadside sat colorful piles of fruit or pottery. Vendors sheltered from the sun in flimsy tents nearby.

As we paralleled the coast, we could see the Riff mountains rising high beyond green valleys and low hills. Haji stopped the car alongside the vast beach so we could photograph the saddled camels patiently waiting for tourists. My best chance to ride a camel vanished in the greater need to reach Tangier in time for our ferry.

To our right, on a plain not far from the highway, was the slim silver forest of the antennae of the Voice of America station. To the left, the water in lagoons along the beach was a rich aqua. Outside them, the azure sea rolled ashore in long waves topped by foaming crests.

We arrived at Tangier in good time, in light rain. Haji delivered us to the port. We said our adieus to our convivial driver. Our baggage was moved inside and piled near a table in the café. We just had settled near the mountain of suitcases when Haji reappeared. He had found a missing part for Don's camera on the floor of his car and dashed back through the rain to return it.



Muriel and I already had turned our few remaining Dirhams over to Don. To our horror, we discovered that our Moroccan money would cover only three beers and one sandwich. At that point the slight, bright-eyed Moroccan waiter assured Don that he could use U.S. dollars. With relief, we all ordered steak sandwiches. They arrived in unfamiliar guise: meat, a salad of tomato-lettuce-olives, and French fries, all tucked together into a chewy piece of baguette-type bread.

When it came time to board the ferry, we could not find the porter who had promised to return to help us. We manhandled our luggage through Immigration, then down an endless covered walkway to wait in line. The ferry took 35 minutes to back-and-fill into position alongside the walkway. I was ready to leap overboard and help it.

Miraculously, a porter arrived to take our five bags onto the ship. He suggested our going downstairs, but we did not have sense enough to agree. We were happy just to be aboard and to find plastic chairs around a table in the long, rapidly filling restaurant. We were surrounded by a scruffy crowd of backpackers and screaming toddlers.

Don needed to find a money changer, so he went exploring. He returned to suggest that Muriel go back downstairs to investigate first-class facilities. Reluctantly, Muriel agreed. I accompanied her. We walked down a flight of stairs into air-conditioned comfort and Muriel came to life. The long room, similar to the one we had come from, was completely full. However, across the passageway was a luxurious area of tables and upholstered chairs.

I explained to the nearby officer that we had not been able to buy first-class tickets. He explained, more in French than in English, that they do not sell first class tickets after the end of the main tourist season. However, there was plenty of room, and he urged us to take advantage of it. He called a sailor to get our luggage as we ran topside to tell Don. Our bags were stowed close to the lounge, near the officer's post. We sank gratefully into the peace and plush of our table near a large window.

Muriel went off to change some money, but returned to say that they did not take travelers' checks. She thought she was short-changed 20 cents after cashing a \$50 bill. I, too, needed money since I owed the pot after the surrender of Dirhams. I produced one of my few "real" bills and counted my Spanish pesetas carefully. In my case, the money changer overpaid me the equivalent of 20 cents because he did not have change. It made up for Muriel's loss.

The trip across the Straits of Gibraltar was lovely, with a view of North Africa from one side and Spain from the other. We passed through the Pillars of Hercules. Gibraltar loomed to starboard.



We docked at Algeciras. A valet motioned to us that he would handle our luggage. Topside, we waited while others debarked. When everyone was off, a short, muscular Spaniard in strange little overalls collected our bags and carried them to a luggage cart on the wharf. Don asked me to negotiate a price. The porter demanded the equivalent of US\$16 to move us the short distance. He refused to lower his price. We grabbed our bags and struggled on. Fortunately, three of our suitcases had wheels. Don insisted on taking my garment bag. It was heavier than usual. I had put my liter of Scotch into my suitcase, which meant that my fairly heavy toiletries hanger had to go in the garment bag. I fretted about Don.

We dealt with the formalities of entering Spain, then struggled with our loads down a long, wide flight of stairs. At the bottom, an obnoxiously insistent man offered to take us to Málaga, Seville, Córdoba, or anywhere else. Negative replies just excited him. At the outer door, another man made the error of accosting an overburdened and besieged Don. The luckless shill was blasted by a bellow that sent him scurrying.

Our initial impression of Spain changed for the better when an obliging taxi driver not only took us and our luggage the short distance to our hotel, but even carried the bags inside when no porter appeared.

The receptionist at our commercial hotel at the foot of the pier greeted me by name before I said a word and handed me a fax for Don from his secretary. We were shown to simple, comfortable rooms, a vast change from our recent luxury in Casablanca and Fez. However, no room ever looked better to me. It had been a tiring day of travel.

We met in the Stauffer's room for a fortifying Scotch. We had lost two hours sailing from Tangier to Algeciras. It was 9:30 at night. I gave my regrets, leaving Muriel and Don to have dinner without me. I could not find the strength to bathe or wash stockings, but fell into bed gratefully.

Friday, 8 September

I awoke at what I thought was 4:30 AM. Miraculously, my travel alarm said 5:15, though I had not set it ahead. I set the alarm for 6:10 and went

back to bed to think about it. At what appeared to be 6:00, Muriel knocked frantically at the door to say that they had overslept. Mystery solved. My watch had paused and my travel alarm was correct—by Morocco time.

After breakfast, we walked down to the nearby Hertz office. The pleasant man in the office knew nothing about Don's reservation for a car. His call to the main office in Málaga reassured him that a car would be delivered to Algeciras by 12:30.

We wandered back down the main street bordering the water, stopping at a bank to change money. Don proudly asked me if I would like to visit a mercado, having located one by accident. Muriel and I loped off in the direction he indicated, an amused Don following behind. The fish, fruit, and vegetable stalls were radiant with colors. Muriel spotted a stand with scissors and knives. She bought a handsome switchblade, which I did not hesitate to tell her was a poor choice as a gift.

At a nearby stall, we found Muriel some clip-on dark glasses she needed because she had forgotten to bring her proper pair. Through the rest of the trip, they delighted children everywhere as Muriel flipped them up against her forehead, then back down over her glasses.

Don had his pocket knife sharpened by a diligent man whose circular stone was spun by the engine of his motorcycle.

We found a rickety table at a market-side café for our morning cerveza.



We returned to Hertz at 12:30. Our car arrived at 1:00, just before the poor rental man collapsed with anguish at the delay. Our plan was that all three of us should be registered as drivers. The day before I left Belize, Don faxed me word that while Hertz would accept my regular driver's license, in case of an accident it was vital that we all held International Driver's Permits. Alex said there was no way I could get one in a hurry. A quick trip to the Licensing Authority proved him wrong. Within thirty minutes I was back in the office, orange-covered document in hand. Apparently it

was a useless accomplishment. The Hertz man said only two drivers were permitted. Don and Muriel have operated smoothly as a driving team all over the world. They signed the contract together as usual.

Once we had wheels, a quick conference resulted in our decision to have lunch in La Linea, then go on to Gibraltar, regardless of the late hour. The Stauffers had missed it on their last trip. I didn't really care one way or the other, but since we were in the neighborhood...

We drove up and down the main road looking for a likely restaurant and finally found Pedro's, a charming place. Don and Muriel coped with enormous Salades Nicoise while I had divine scrambled eggs with asparagus and salty slices of ham.

Gibraltar traffic was directed into a huge parking lot with eight lanes. Immigration officials moved from lane to lane, clearing five cars in each before moving to the next. It took us a full 25 minutes to be waved into a faster lane, where passports were stamped after the most brief of examinations.

The road to Gibraltar crosses the middle of its impressive landing strip. I noticed that both of our ex-pilot drivers speeded up unconsciously as they crossed the expanse of concrete.

"The Rock" rises with sober disdain from acres of tightly packed buildings encroaching on its base. We took the cable car to the top. Facilities for overlooks and food were elaborate for the hordes of tourists who visit Gibraltar. We took pictures of the Pillars of Hercules and the outstretched arms of Spain and Morocco reaching to each other across the Mediterranean.

We did not see Gibraltar's famed Barbary Apes. Later in Madrid, one of Don's young British business associates mentioned that his mother had been bitten by one of the apes on her honeymoon and had not considered it remotely amusing.

A map at the summit showed a fine road around the island. We started off on it and reached a dead end. About face. We did not have time enough to

find the circuitous route. We were off to Granada, with my being sure it would be 10:00 PM before we could arrive.



Our drive to Granada took us along the Costa del Sol. It was a sequence of sailboat-studded bays backed by rugged mountains in breathtaking shades of muted purple and cerise.


To our left were hills set with neat, square houses. Alongside the water to the right were acres of white highrises with tile roofs, lining the seafront and flowing back as if thousands of bars of Ivory soap had been dumped from a low-flying plane. Whole mountainsides were hidden by housing, hinting at terrifying numbers of sun worshipers.

We drove past strange, gilded mountains, lucky to host one tree amid bushy bits of brush that would barely sustain a goat. As we turned away from the coast, the mountains became a softer green, though still parched, with golden sand showing through their olive shades. Here and there a patch of white indicated a home.

Farther still, the countryside became as barren as a desert, though the gold probably was the stubble of harvested wheat fields. Small islands of trees, ringed by stones cleared from the fields, dotted the landscape. There was a strange juxtaposition of shapes and shades. A great jagged mauve pyramid of mountain loomed behind geometric ochre faces of excavations with deep brown and olive soil on their undisturbed tops. A town spilled white through the shallow valley between two mountains. The drive was a wonderful show of elementary geology. Great slabs and ridges of dense, striated rock stood uneroded above rolling hills.


We had been told in Algeciras that our drive to Granada would take about four-and-a-half hours. Heavy initial traffic made us lengthen the estimate. Suddenly we were on an *autovía*^{*} and traffic evaporated. We reached Granada at 8:15 PM.

* An *autovía* is a divided highway similar to a U.S. freeway.



In Granada, we followed the small lavender signs for the Alhambra until they gave out. Muriel, the driver, retraced our path and turned at a street division we apparently had missed. Within a short time, she had covered a series of increasingly narrow streets, progress blocked by more *No Entry* signs than *One Way*. Muriel took a promising two-way street uphill. At a corner Don was sure led to our hotel, we were stopped by another *No Entry*. Tour bus drivers parked nearby told us to go back down the hill, take the first right, then the second right, and go back uphill to our Hotel Alixares.

Muriel turned us around with her usual ease and followed directions. The second right was blocked by a diagonally-parked van. Looking up the incredibly narrow street, I was sure I saw a dead end. Don and I persuaded Muriel to drive on to the next right. That initiated another half hour of exploring the cramped streets of Granada. Muriel spent half her time backing-and-filling to reverse direction when progress was blocked or prohibited. Tempers were tested. Ultimately, Muriel found an actual street leading in the right direction. Stops for inquiries by Tour Translator Scott elicited information that let to our checking into the Hotel Alixares at 9:15 that night.



The valet apologized for the size of my room as he opened the door, but added that it had the best view in the hotel. The room was minute. Just space for a narrow single bed, a desk with small TV, and a suitcase rack. The adjacent balcony had a greater area and overlooked Granada below and the Sierra Nevada mountains above. My only complaint was that in the large wardrobe, the shelf built to accommodate a safe was so close to the hanging bar that even skirts and jackets doubled up at their hems.

Warned that the dining room closed at 10 o'clock, we had a quick celebratory Scotch on the Stauffer's (smaller) balcony, then hurried to the dining room. We had an unexceptional meal, served by a disgruntled staff.

I returned to my little room and examined the edges of the balcony. I decided that no cat burglar would select the smallest room in an hotel, and left my sliding doors wide open to the cool Spanish night.

Saturday, 9 September

By agreement, we slept late. I counted on the morning light to wake me, not realizing that the sun did not rise until nearly 8 o'clock. We had a leisurely breakfast, then set off on foot for the nearby Alhambra.

We climbed ancient towers for an incomparable view of the palaces, Granada, and the mountains ringing the city.

We wandered slowly through the magnificent rooms, courtyards, and gardens of the Nasrid Palace. It is the finest example in the world of Moorish architecture. Plasterwork drips from the usual lacy designs to form small stalactites. The carved cedar ceilings with plasterwork below, the incised inscription from the Koran, and the delicate zellige, mosaic of intricate ceramic shapes, finishing each wall to the floor, should have been disturbingly busy. Instead they were graceful, muted artistic successes. Each room was lovelier than the last; each garden, more serene. There are books to describe the Alhambra. I shall only say that walking through it was an experience to enrich the soul.

As we emerged from the final gardens of the Alhambra, we found a small refreshments kiosk. Nearby was a tiny wisteria-draped gazebo, where we retired gratefully to enjoy both sitting down and a cooling liquid. We were alone in a long park area except for half a dozen cats, most of them a sinister black.



After a pleasant lunch in a nearby restaurant, we visited the Museum of Arabic Arts in the Palace of Carlos V. From there, we took the little Alhambra train up to the Generalife, the summer palace of the Kings of Granada. Built on the side of a mountain overlooking the Alhambra, it allowed their Majesties to retire from burdensome official audiences and

enjoy its spectacular gardens and simpler palace. It was a short walk from the Alhambra for officials who had to take important matters to Royal attention.

The area was surrounded by tall, elongated cypress trees, their dense foliage and pointed tops forming a living fence. Huge hedges of yew or cedar lined walkways. Arched openings through the hedges led to a succession of smaller gardens at each side of a central garden of varied flowers, pools of water, and bisecting paths.

A series of steps to a level higher on the mountainside led to a private amphitheater. Beyond that was the famous water garden, a long rectangular pool with jets of water arching from each side. Walks past beds of flowers led to the palace itself.



We decided to drive into Granada for dinner. Don communed with the front desk about routes to and from the hotel. He learned that the best way from the hotel to el centro^{*} was the route Muriel had tried up from the other direction unsuccessfully.

Again we explored more of Granada than we had any desire to see. An almost total lack of street names, ubiquitous *No Entry* signs, and a plethora of narrow one-way streets going the wrong direction acted with centrifugal force on Don each time he approached the restaurant we had selected. After nearly an hour, the gods relented. We found a congenial route, a parking garage, and the restaurant in short order.

It was a simple, attractive place with a waiter dedicated to making us happy. We had an excellent meal with house-offered bocas^{**} and a delicious final house liqueur.

We retired to the hotel. I delayed bedtime in a frantic search for the train ticket I would need next day. I had mislaid it exactly where it should have

* *El centro* is Spanish for *downtown*.

** In Belize, the word *bocas* (literally, *mouths* in Spanish) is used to mean *appetizers*.

been, among my plane tickets. It had *not* been there when I searched in a panic that afternoon.

Sunday, 10 September

We were off by car for Córdoba at our scheduled hour of 9:30 AM. The drive was faster and easier than anticipated because of a good highway and Sunday sparsity of traffic.

We passed dozens of miles of olive groves marching up and down the folds of sage-green and golden hills. Don remarked, “If the nutritionists ever decide olive oil is not good for you, the economy of Spain will crash.”

Suddenly, olive groves were replaced by undulating empty fields, ploughed for their crop of winter wheat. Towns along the way were the usual collections of white cubes with tile roofs, nestled in valleys or frosting the tops of low, broad mountains.

We reached the train station in Córdoba early. It was new, spacious, immaculate. We found our two necessities: the Hertz return and carts for our luggage.

We settled in the little lunchroom for a light snack before train time. Don and I decided on ham-and-cheese sandwiches as simple and reliable. Muriel noticed something interesting in the display case and ordered it for herself. As she was paying the bill, a woman standing next to her remarked, “I assume you realize you have just bought a potato sandwich.” Muriel was dumbfounded—and helpless.

Back at the table with us she found that indeed, her “tortilla” sandwich, which she had assumed was a sort of scrambled egg with sausage, was a thick patty of potato. Fortunately, her new friend offered her a little packet of catsup. Muriel smeared her potato liberally and said that the sandwich was strange, but quite good.

Although we had bought first-class tickets, only tourist accommodations were available on the train. They were lovely, comfortable airplane-type

seats. The car offered a movie and earphones. It was a new line with high-speed trains similar to the French TGV. Spain has built new tracks of standard European gauge that eventually will connect at the French border. The ride felt like velvet, with no jolting and no noise.

Again, our major landscape was olive groves, up hill and down dale. Tunnels through the surrounding mountains alternated with great, flat green-gold plains.

We reached Madrid in good time and checked into the Hotel Intercontinental Castellano. Our rooms were exceptionally large, but little things gave us the feeling that the hotel was sliding down from its original glory. Taps didn't work, and there was no wash cloth on arrival, though one appeared next day. It annoyed us that the hotel was the most expensive of our tour.



Don and Muriel attended the opening reception of the Naval Stores Conference. In the early evening, I joined them for dinner as guests of Mitsui, a major international Japanese corporation. We were a congenial group of ten, including Mitsui representatives from several countries (England, Germany, Red China, as well as Japan).

I was included as Don's Central American agent, rather than as the Stauffer's traveling companion. Don had warned me that the Japanese are big on business cards and suggested that I carry a good supply. Sure enough, as we were seated and introductions began, the cards started flying back and forth like confetti.

Don explained later that cards are indispensable to Japanese businessmen in determining who is in the superior position. This governs such niceties as how low one bows, how long the bow is held, and who straightens up first. I was pleased that my cards identified me as Executive Director of our company in Belize, Marine & Services.

Conversation was brisk, the food was delicious, service was attentive. A memorable evening.

Monday, 11 September

Madrid is a magnificent city, masculine in feeling, where Paris is feminine. Squared grilled balconies, many glassed-in against the cold, are prominent features of long buildings. Towering old trees border great avenues. Gardens bright with blooms are tucked into every available space. Ornate public buildings glow with dramatic lighting at night.

Muriel learned that because the King was not in residence, the palace was open to the public. We decided to take advantage of the opportunity to see a working palace. We entered though the quaint ancient pharmacy, its walls lined ceiling-high with shelves of great jars holding powders, crumbled leaves, and other fascinating nostrums. We proceeded through a smoky room with a great brick fireplace, the original laboratory where potions were concocted.

We were led through elegant audience rooms with almost as elegant waiting rooms leading to them. The banquet hall, with its table set for sixty, was breathtaking. Finally, we reached the throne room. I was so overcome at seeing the real throne of a real, living king, that I broke my own rule and snapped a quick photograph. Instantly I was intercepted by a gracious but firm official who let me know that I had done something unforgivable. Muriel hissed at the same time that flashbulbs were not allowed. I apologized abjectly, zipped my camera into my handbag, and promised to go forth and sin no more. As we moved into the next room, I realized that the guard in there was eyeing me suspiciously. I am not used to being an Ugly American and was embarrassed at my fall from grace.



That evening, I was included in the Arakawa Chemical Company cocktail party. It was pleasant to find that all my new acquaintances of the evening before were there. As we left, each of the women was given a brightly wrapped small box. Muriel said that it was customary in Japan to offer a gift to departing guests. She predicted coasters, correctly. It was a lovely set in charming Japanese designs of a characteristic but, to me, strange number: five.

After the party, Don took us out to dinner, along with some delightful Austrian friends of theirs. When we first talked about this trip a year ago, Don said I had to have suckling pig in Madrid. This was the evening.

We went to the Plaza Mayor looking for a restaurant Don remembered. The Plaza is a large brick-paved square surrounded by a long, formal building. We finally were directed past the plaza, down some dark, steep steps and into a restaurant that bills itself as a cave because it actually is one.

We were led into a lower, narrow, informal room literally gouged out of the rock on which Madrid stands. The suckling pig was as delicate and delicious as Don promised. The problem was the skin, cooked so crisp that it made a formidable barrier. Seeing my frustration, Klaus, sitting on my right, without saying a word, leaned over, cut sharply through the middle of the skin, severed it, and deftly lifted one half aside. I thanked him and enjoyed the rest of the meat I had feared I would have to forego.

During dinner, a gaily dressed group of musicians moved through the rooms, entertaining with sprightly pieces.

Tuesday, 12 September

Muriel awoke with a recurrence of her periodic vertigo. She had to spend the day quietly in her room.

I was disappointed for her and for me. We had planned to tour the Prado together. I learn a great deal and appreciate paintings more fully with Muriel's knowledgeable, often amusing, commentary. I went on to the Prado alone and spent a thrilling day surrounded by some of the world's greatest paintings.

Bill Breen, a long-time friend of the Stauffers, invited us all for dinner. Muriel was recovering, but did not feel well enough to go. We walked a few blocks to what we understood was Madrid's finest restaurant. We did not eat; we dined. Few sommeliers could match the costume or manner of ours. With us was a British couple, the wife a well known gourmet and both of them members of the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin, the

ancient and exclusive Burgundy wine-experts' society. They were quiet, pleasant people who knew why the food was exceptional, where I only knew that it was.

Wednesday, 13 September

Muriel awoke feeling alive again. The Stauffers had the final half-day of their conference, then were scheduled to join a planned trip to Toledo that afternoon. I had booked a day-long tour to Escorial and Toledo.

The massive El Escorial Monastery is on a mountainside a short distance from Madrid. The royal Bourbon apartments are sumptuous with Pompeian ceilings and fine tapestries. The apartments of Phillip II are far more simple.

Our tour group was led down what seemed like miles of marble and jasper steps to a baroque circular room that houses the remains of centuries of kings and queens. The black-and-brass ends of elaborate caskets show from openings that rise five high. Only three unused spaces remain. We were told they are waiting for the mother and father of the current king and for King Carlos himself. Their Majesties are not brought to the impressive mausoleum immediately after death. They rest elsewhere for about 25 years before being moved to the magnificent chamber.

We proceeded down a long marble corridor, past room after room of marble catafalques, some elaborate with effigies atop them, others simple. These were the resting places of royal relatives. The corridor debouched in a second round room, this one light marble compared to the heavy black-and-brass ornamentation of the major room. In the middle was a large, elaborately carved marble creation, a circular housing for the remains of tiny Royal children.



From the Escorial, we went to the Valle de los Caídos, Franco's magnificent monument to the dead of the Spanish Civil War, deep in the

Guadarrama Mountains. Rising from the mountain above the Basilica and great cypress-bordered plaza is a gigantic cross.

I did not go into the basilica like most of the tour group, because a service was in progress. I started to walk out onto the great plaza to look down into the valley battlefield beyond. However, sudden wild blasts of wind swirled out of the mountains, the most vicious, icy wind I ever have felt slicing down like a knife. I fled to the nearby cafeteria for a cup of coffee. I returned to stand in the sun in the shelter of the bus, but the wind whipped past me from the opposite direction. It was a miserable wait for the tour group to reassemble and the driver to open the bus doors.

Our drive back to Madrid took us past wooded mountains with jagged expanses of exposed granite. Pine woods carpeted with needles reminded me of childhood summers in Michigan.



In Madrid we left some passengers who had paid for only the morning tour, took on some new ones for the afternoon, and departed for Toledo. We stopped first for lunch at a hillside restaurant overlooking the town. The meal was quite decent, but what I remember most is the incredibly efficient way waiters attended a vast room full of tour groups.

Toledo rises golden against the bright blue Castillian sky, on its pedestal of granite, ringed by the green waters of a river, deep in the ravine. The bus left us at a handsome ancient bridge, which we crossed on foot to portals of the ancient city.

We wandered cobblestoned, winding little streets in the walled city. We visited many of Toledo's magnificent old buildings, mixtures of Spanish Gothic and Mudéjar architecture. The cathedral was huge and elaborate. The centerpiece of its Treasury was a 3-meter-high monstrance of gold and silver.

The Synagogue was refreshingly simple after the ornate Cathedral. Interestingly, its handsome decoration was Moorish mosaics.

The Monastery is a virtual art gallery with paintings of El Greco, Rubens, Velázquez, and Titian. I was close to tears in one long gallery when I realized I was completely surrounded by paintings of El Greco. Later in a small church we saw El Greco's magnificent *Burial of Count Orgaz*. It is the art of Toledo more than its charm and glorious buildings that burns in memory.



Muriel and Don's tour ended sooner than originally planned. We got together for a farewell drink to Madrid. I was too tired for anything but bed. Alternating waves of hot and cold washed over me. I was exhausted, not sick.

Thursday, 14 September

After a straight eleven hours' sleep, I awoke feeling marvelous and ready to move on to the north coast of Spain.

We caught our train for Santiago de Compostela at 2:00 PM. The train station was at the edge of Madrid. We were out in the countryside in moments without the usual long, dismal run through the ugliest area of town. As soon as we pulled out of the station, we went to the dining car next door for a light lunch. The Serrano ham sandwiches on long, crisp rolls were good at the time, but by the middle of the night, Muriel and I realized we could have done without them. Nevertheless, at the time, we enjoyed watching the mountains roll past as we ate. In the far distance, we could see the great cross rising above the Valle de los Caídos.

We returned to our car and the movie of Bill Cosby as a ghost speaking Spanish. The trip was long, but our seats were comfortable in our first-class no-smoking car, and the countryside, fascinating: Mountains, plains, great fields of corn and wheat stretching pale green and gold across the gentle hills, and enough olive groves to supply the world's demand for years to come.

As the fields gave way to low mountains, layers of rock thrust through the grass like great gray teeth. The train slowed. Alongside, I could see discarded rust-stained ties. A cut through solid rock showed towering stone faces where rock had been blasted free for the track. Piles of shale threatened to bury the line in retribution.

Tunnels became more frequent. Amid the short, tight vegetation on the folded land were large patches of purplish growth, reminiscent of the lavender of Provence. Rocky outcrops broke the smooth silhouettes of increasingly high mountaintops.

Tunnel – valley – tunnel – valley – tunnel – cloud –

Occasionally we passed boxlike little houses with brown-framed windows and tile roofs. More often, small planted plots broke the scruffiness of valley floors with no signs of human habitation in sight.

As we approached Orense, we entered an area of friendlier hills, with valleys scattered with farmsteads and villages. It was announced that the train would split into two sections. I panicked, of course. Don assured me that he knew all about it and that our car was destined for Santiago de Compostela. “If it weren’t, I would have told you.”

On our trips, I made a great to-do about wanting to reach each new hotel in daylight. Despite the long trip, but thanks to even longer days, we just barely succeeded at Santiago de Compostela. We were in the city around 9:00 PM and ensconced in the Hotel Peregrine soon thereafter.

Friday, 15 September

Our first morning project was picking up our car from Hertz. It was a lengthy and frustrating procedure. First, Don had to wait at least thirty minutes before the Hertz man attended to him. We were on the wrong side of his kiosk with no way of getting around to the other, where new people kept arriving and taking the clerk’s attention. Eventually the man moved around to our side. Yes, he had the reservation, yes, it was shown as prepaid.

HERTZ MAN: Where is your bowcher?

DON: What bowcher?

HERTZ MAN: The bowcher from the travel agent.

DON (*recognizing that bowcher = voucher*): I didn't use a travel agent. I booked directly through Hertz, as I always do.

HERTZ MAN: I can't give you a car without a bowcher.

DON: You know I booked the car. You know it was prepaid. I need the car right now.

HERTZ MAN (*eyes rolling, hysteria imminent*): Bowcher...bowcher...

DON (*soothingly*): Why don't you give us the car and then fax the Hertz office for a copy of the voucher you need.

With resolution in sight, Don began filling out the contract. He asked to put both Muriel and me on as alternate drivers.

HERTZ MAN: Only one driver. You pay extra for others.

MURIEL (*aggravated*): Leave us both off!

DON: If you think I'm going to do all the driving myself, you're crazy.


In the end both, Don and Muriel signed onto the contract. I stood aside, my brand new International Drivers' License in its bright orange cover unwanted and unused. Later, I realized how relieved I was. I never have driven in mountains and the idea of learning how with a stick-shift car was daunting.



By the time we were settled with wheels, it was almost time for lunch. Muriel ordered the Caldo Gallego.* It arrived, a thin liquid with unrecognizable greens floating in the bottom.

* *Caldo Gallego* is Spanish for *Galician Broth*.

MURIEL (*sampling soup*): It has a slight *hint* of rubber tires. (*another tentative sip*) It gets better. You get used to it.




In the Middle Ages, Santiago de Compostela was the third most important pilgrimage destination, after Jerusalem and Rome. It is the alleged final resting place of the Apostle St. James the Greater, called “The Thunderer.” The tale of his association with the city is long, convoluted, and involves several miracles. Nevertheless, when we descended to the little vault under the main altar of the cathedral to view the Reliquary, we found a pious middle-aged woman kneeling on the little prie-dieu in front of the ornate casket, rosary in hands and tears on cheeks.

We drove outside the city to an old Monastery, still in use. Square upper windows were encased by iron grills. Inside them for privacy were green-painted lattices. But on some windows, monks had inserted planters with pink flowers between grill and lattice. The imprisoned blooms brightened stark walls.

Saturday, 16 September

Muriel, emerging from her room for breakfast, casually remarked, “Sorry to be late. I was attacked by a snake.”

It took a count of five for me to translate that to an unfortunate encounter with the hand-held shower in her bathtub. These are common throughout France and Spain. I love them; the Stauffers don’t. Muriel had failed to hold her shower-head firmly when she turned on the water. The metal line coiled and recoiled like a vicious serpent spraying walls, floor, and ceiling of her bathroom, as well as drenching dried laundry and her hair. Muriel’s screams brought Don to the rescue.



We drove south along the coast of Galicia. As we neared the coast, we saw increasing numbers of beige stone houses and walls. The area was wooded, with deciduous trees a fall russet among the more numerous

evergreens. We continued down cloud-shrouded roads amid slow-moving small-truck traffic. Layers of clouds billowed above us, reaching ridges where the gray was shot with silver as the sun tried to break through.

At the town of Noia, the highway was lined with square modern houses with touches of bright colors. We followed a mountain-bordered river leading to the ocean. Homes covered the mountainside below us on one side of the road and above it on the other. A rocky promontory jutted into the Atlantic.

We passed town after town crouched around inlets. Where the highway moved away from the water, we passed small fields of corn. Grapes for *Vino Verde* grew on trellises in every yard, no matter how tiny.

Strange rectangular crypt-like structures along the road caught our attention. They had peaked roofs with a cross at each end. Because of their slatted sides, apparently for ventilation, we decided they must be corn cribs. Not long after we made our determination, I glanced at the bottom of the page of my open Michelin guide and saw the picture of “An *hórreo* drying shed.” We passed dozens of them on our drives along the coast. I was reminded of my husband Bucher’s* comment: “When in doubt, read the Book of Words.”



We turned off the coast road toward the Mirador de la Curota, an overlook high on a mountainside above a jagged inlet. We climbed an increasingly poor road, past spectacular views of the bay. As we drove higher, the clouds dropped lower. By the time we reached the Mirador,** we had one brief glimpse of the four inlets of the Rías Baixas before the clouds closed in again. We paused at the top, hoping the strong winds would dispel the clouds. They didn’t.

* *Bucher* is pronounced *BOOK-er*.

** *Mirador* is Spanish for *overlook* or *vista point*.

As we left the summit, creeping through the fog on a winding road, we passed a speed sign, *40 KM*. “Are they out of their minds!” Don exclaimed.

We came out just below the level of the clouds at a lower overlook. It was faintly hazy, but the view across the inlets was a spectacular panorama until the clouds drifted down over us again.

I am not completely comfortable in clouds. My life has been spent at sea level. I love mountains, but expect clouds to keep their place in the heavens, not on earth.

It was beer time. Muriel dug in her heels. She wanted a view with her beer. Frustrated by the shrouded Mirador, we turned at the next roundabout to go back through the streets of Padrón. In desperation, we settled for a nondescript café on the main street. Muriel’s view consisted of an aqua car being loaded onto a trailer across the street.



Houses in this area often were two-story buildings, the second story overhanging the first by the width of a balcony. As we neared Ataxa and O Grove, we began passing serious vineyards, though homes still had their little grape arbors tucked into tiny spare places in yards, alongside front doors, or at the sides of houses. The local wine is *Albariño*, a young (green) white wine.

We became aware of the famous “Spanish Windows,” many small panes to each opening. In Spain, flowers in window boxes are predominantly pink, whereas in France they usually are scarlet geraniums.

We stopped for lunch in O Grove. We entered a small, crowded fish restaurant and ordered what we saw on a nearby table. It was the finest meal of our entire trip. We were served a giant platter heaped with crabs, lobster, shrimp, and oysters. We had worked our way through barely half of it when a second platter arrived, with an equal abundance of clams, mussels, and something in a long, pipe-like shell that I did not recognize, but learned to love.



We continued on down the coast, out to promontories, and back to the base of inlets, where picturesque fishing villages rose onto the embracing mountainsides. Fleets of fishing boats were moored alongside piles of nets on piers. The nets were rolled, not spread out to dry. Moored beyond the shore in inlet after inlet were fleets of small barges, some with houses. Don speculated that they might be crabbing platforms.

Long, slow waves broke against wide golden beaches in the bights of inlets and, as we drove along, gave way to piles of rocks, coves, and tide islands. As we drove south, we found quick alternation of sandy coves and rocky cliffs jutting out into the ocean. We stopped at a little park with flagstone walks, overlooking a long stretch of wide beach. Far below us, two horsemen cantered slowly back and forth in opposite directions, while an enthusiastic German Shepherd tried to decide which of them to follow.

We passed gray-green humps of hilly islands. Along the shore was a series of summer resort towns with small apartment buildings. Muriel remarked, "I didn't like the Costa del Sol, but I could see living here. It has charm."

Miradores along the highway gave us a succession of views, each lovelier than the last. At Cangas, our driver took the wrong road trying to reach Vigo. We wound up the mountainside, away from the sea, past handsome private homes, to a magnificent view at the end of the inlet. We retraced our road and followed the coast to a suspension bridge, on which we crossed to Vigo. We stopped at the railroad station. We were not able to get a Herald Tribune for Don, but I was able to get postcards of the little towns along the coast.

We returned to Santiago de Compostela on the autovía and were back at the hotel in a surprisingly short time.

Sunday, 17 September

We made our usual confused exit from our hotel and city. Fog made it difficult to find the autovía to La Coruña. It was under construction. Arrows pointing in opposite directions shared the same sign. Muriel, who was driving, remarked, “This is more interesting than I care to see.”

As the fog lifted, it became a lovely drive. Rolling country was lightly wooded, broken by the occasional agricultural valley. The weather was alternating fog, clearing, rain.

We stopped in La Coruña in the rain and dashed into a charming little ice cream shop. Upstairs was a tiny room with only three tables, where we had a view of our car. Last year’s trauma of shattered van window and stolen suitcase left us uneasy on the road when our luggage was in the car.

Muriel and I sat down gratefully, putting our umbrellas and handbags aside. Don appeared most uneasy.

“What’s wrong?” Muriel asked him solicitously.

“I’m sitting on the wet side of my raincoat.”

We stopped to see The Tower of Hercules. Built in the Second Century AD, it is the oldest working lighthouse. Nearby along the coast, a sad small ship lay wrecked on the rocks of a cove. Don remarked that the Spanish Armada had sailed from La Coruña.



As we continued, we drove through gorgeous countryside of mountains, woods, and individualized homes instead of white boxes with red tile roofs. The succession of inlets had little towns pasted against the mountainsides that dipped down to the water. Pretty homes with lawns perched high on hills. Gradually, the mountains became heavily forested with pine and eucalyptus. Don called it “wild, lush country.”

As we reached Asturias, each inlet became a little port. Small freighters rode peacefully at anchor in the middle of inlets. The mountains dropped down to the sea in ridges frosted with the little white homes of the

townspeople. In places, several tongues of mountain, their sides sheared off in giant slabs of gray rock, emerged from the bright blue water.

By the time we reached Viveiro, we found heavy new construction of apartment buildings, presumably for tourists to the developing Costa Verde. New homes demanded admiration with their exceptionally bright orange brick.



We had left three nights open on our trip so that we could proceed as we decided after reaching the coast. Don communed with his Michelin Guide and found two possible hostelries. Surprisingly, the Parador de Ribadeo was only \$8 per night more than the recommended small country inn. The Paradores are special—historic buildings, carefully remodeled into hotels by the Spanish Government. Most of them were more expensive than we prefer.

We were delighted with our choice. We had large, attractively appointed rooms and baths. French doors opened onto balconies overlooking the estuary. The picturesque little village on a hilly promontory opposite us was crowned by a tiny church. Muriel immediately got out her sketch pad and paints.

We had a good dinner in the Parador's dining room. I wisely chose the veal entrecôte while Muriel and Don selected "boiled pork," which turned out to be thick slices of ham, served with a type of greens they had learned to love in Portugal. We ended our evening with liqueurs on the glassed-in veranda overlooking the estuary.

Monday, 18 September

At the breakfast buffet, Muriel and Don made the mistake of trying the interesting curls that one put onto the revolving tray of a small toaster oven. To their horror they discovered that they were made of potato, not pastry. Spain, we decided, is very big on using potatoes in unexpected ways.

We made our customary stop at a bank to change money. It took an agonizing forty-five minutes to cash our travelers' checks. First, there was the laborious typing of a "bowcher" by a gentleman who, we suspected, had started work that day. Next, there was a lengthy conference with the supervisor. Don decided that our day's sightseeing was the interior of the bank. *Mish mu him*. In recompense, we got the best rate of exchange and lowest bank charges of our trip.



We continued east on the coastal road, a plateau dropping down to the ocean with mountains on the inland side of the highway. Forests of pine and eucalyptus marched down to the water's edge on the other side. A green checkerboard of fields, outlined by low hedges, rose from the plateau to the lower slopes of the mountains. The blocky white houses had slate roofs decorated by single rows of tile caps filing down roof peaks and intersections.

We turned toward Luarca. Don remarked, "There's a cozy little town down in this valley."

The road followed a deep cleft with a high wall of blasted rock on one side and a wide creek on the other. We wound among tall trees, passing several bridges that looked like Roman aqueducts spanning gorges for the old narrow-gauge railroads.

The town of Luarca was built in a series of deep gorges leading to the sea. Narrow streets wound upward between buildings. White homes outlined the tops of ridges, while more clustered at the bottoms of each slash, or clung to the sides of ravines. The view of our drive into Luarca will always be one of my choice memories. No postcard captured the panorama.

We stopped at a waterfront café in intermittent rain. Don walked through a passageway between buildings to the next street, where he photographed school children at recess with his camcorder. The children laughed, waved, and posed for their pictures. Later Muriel and I walked

with our umbrellas through the same passageway to find a store for Muriel's film and a kiosk for my postcards.



We continued past Luarca, through an area of steep mountains, narrow ravines, and villages nestled in narrow valleys at little bays. Drying cribs with stubby legs, similar in size to the ones in Galicia but of different material, were mounted high on concrete platforms.

Muriel was at the wheel through the mountains, in driving rain.

She fumbled with controls futilely, trying to get the rear window wiper to work. Finally she succeeded. Don asked her how.

Muriel replied, "I just banged it *there* and it went."

Problem was, it wouldn't stop.

Muriel commented in frustration, "It may rain for the next two days, and it still will be working."

We had no idea whether we would have had glimpses of sea along our route, because everything was obscured by either fog or cloud. A sign warned *Slippery Road*. Moments later, we passed a four-car collision, including a police car.

We left the highway for lunch in Cudillero, on the enormously rocky coast. The town lay in a ravine and extended a short way up the mountainsides. Streets were narrow and cobbled. It was an enchanting place.

We investigated several restaurants before Don suggested that we try a tiny one with only eight or nine tables, because it was full of locals. It was an inspired choice. Muriel and Don had a delicious *Caldo de Mariscos*, a rich soup served in an enormous tureen, full of shrimp, lobster, crab, and fish. I tried the *Calamares Fritos* (tiny fried squid) and loved them.



As we continued on our way, I noticed an enormous black bull silhouetted at the top of a nearby hill. My amazement grew as the bull increased in size as we neared it. I thought in terms of Paul Bunyan. Finally the bull became a huge cutout billboard, no printing, just the shape itself. We saw them several times more before we left Spain.

We followed a twisting road in rain after our late lunch. It was another free night, so we needed to find an hotel. We hit the *autovía* to reach Llanes as quickly as possible. The landscape opened up to increasingly high mountains, many with sides that appeared as triangular planes in the late afternoon sun. Wooded areas separated small fields where small herds of black- or brown-and-white cattle grazed peacefully. The scenes were so set, so traditional, that they looked unreal.

The mountains of Asturias were higher than those in Galicia. We passed great gray tors and tumbled piles of naked granite. Mountainsides were rusty with drying autumn growth sprinkled among the olive greens of mosses and trees. Whole mountainsides stretched 8,000 feet high, devoid of topsoil, the gray granite softened by a vast lacy pattern of moss.



We reached Llanes and cruised through the town, investigating the hotels recommended by Michelin. Muriel and I went into a new hotel on the waterfront. We glanced around the barren lobby and assessed the few guests. Muriel commented that it was the sort of place where you expected to find slot machines. We drove to the next hotel. Don, with unabated patience and not even a sigh of strained tolerance, sent Muriel and me in to evaluate it.

Muriel's evaluation was, "Not bad for a YMCA."

We returned to the Hotel Paraíso, which we had passed on our drive through town. The charming young brunette at the reception desk briskly erased notes on her room chart to make two rooms available for us. While Don put the car in the hotel garage, Muriel was led to their room. I tagged along. At our first glance into the room, Muriel and I both privately

thought they were going to enjoy the night on a pull-out sofa-bed. A second glance at the adjoining bedroom reassured us that they had been given a simple suite, with ample storage space everywhere but in the bathroom, where they needed it.

Our smiling hoteliere then led me down the hall to the emergency entrance at the end, opened it, and ushered me up a flight of marble stairs with a bright yellow metal banister to a single door at the top. This opened into my aerie. It was a charming room with twin beds and a third bed tucked into a far alcove. French doors led to a large balcony overlooking the jumble of tiled roofs of nearby homes. Doors and windows under the eaves were curtained in traditional lace. I was entranced.


After happy hour in the Stauffer's living room, we followed directions to a restaurant in the neighborhood. We checked several menus posted outside in the traditional manner and elected a restaurant with cloth napkins, in contrast to the places with paper tablecloths and napkins. The chicken cooked in its own juices was delicious.

Tuesday, 19 September

I awoke in the dark to hear heavy rain. We breakfasted early so Muriel and I could have our hair done. We got directions to "Carmen and Emilio" from the pretty receptionist and walked through the deluge, huddling under our umbrellas.

We arrived just as the shop was opening. Muriel's coiffure by Carmen was attractive, but a bit more elaborate than she liked. She was sprayed almost to the point of asphyxiation. Later, a few judicious pats back in the hotel tamed it into more becoming dimensions.

Emilio attacked me with rapid, jerky movements. Just when he appeared to have blow-dried, curled, and teased adequately, he ran his fingers up through the coiffure and started the entire process again. He finished another round, then began a third. I was spellbound. He finally achieved something both of us liked. With what I considered three layers of the same coiffure, the set held its shape for an unbelievable number of days.



I left my aerie and its view of the rooftops reluctantly. We drove along the ocean highway through the high mountains and rocky inlets of Asturias to the simpler sandy waterfront of Cantabria. In Santillana del Mar, we parked near an hotel and dashed through heavy rain to the bar. As we enjoyed our morning beer, the rain abated. We wandered on wet cobblestone streets up the hill into the charming old village. The streets were lined with quaint balconied houses with ticky-tacky tourist shops on the ground level.

As we returned to the car, so did the rains. It belted down on us as we proceeded to the hotel Don had expected us to stay in, had we reached Santillana del Mar the night before. The waiter had to turn the lights on as we entered the empty dining room. I selected a table tucked into a tiny alcove. We all ordered what we hoped were shrimp omelets.

Remembering that last time Muriel ordered a “tortilla”, she received potatoes, I inquired firmly, “That *is* a tortilla de huevos, isn’t it?”

We ordered a bottle of the local Albariño “green” young wine we had learned to enjoy.

We had hoped to see the prehistoric drawings in the Altamira caves, but arrived too late. We had not realized that the caves were closed for the day at 2:30 PM. Only 40 people per day are allowed to enter the caves.

We continued to Santander, a huge city rebuilt since a 1941 tornado. We stopped to walk down to the wide, golden beach through a lovely park. The wind was biting, though the rain had stopped temporarily.

We left and headed for Burgos on a route recommended by our friends at the hotel. On the map, it appeared longer, but they assured us that the direct route was a terrible road. Our fine Spanish highway helped make up for the sodden scenery on the drive to Burgos. We wound down three steep mountains, alternately forested and wind-scoured. Don remarked that perhaps the weather would improve when we got through the mountains.

It was hardly a fine afternoon, but there were layers of bright silver where the sun reflected on clouds at the horizon. We entered an area of low mountains, almost bare of vegetation, and of rolling valleys, the less-lush ocher of ploughed fields. Round bales of hay were scattered across expanses of greenish-yellow stubble. Buildings were stone instead of the white we had seen for days. The countryside was treeless and unattractive. We drove miles without sight of human habitation.

A tiny castle appeared perched on a high rocky outcrop. There was a sense of desolation in its treeless, peopleless, stockless surroundings.



This was the first day that the rain never stopped. Our hotel in Burgos that night was large and modern, with mirrored bathrooms that multiplied our images endlessly, unnervingly. It was too cold and wet to venture out, so we enjoyed perfectly cooked lamb chops in the hotel's welcoming little dining room.

Wednesday, 20 September

Burgos' 13th-Century cathedral is fascinating architecturally, melding French and German Gothic into the final traditional Spanish form. Elaborate tombs just in front of the main altar are the final resting places of the parents of Isabel la Católica (patroness of Christopher Columbus). A wooden casket secured by brackets high on a corridor wall had a plaque, *El Cid*.

The treasury held a spectacular silver cart unlike anything I had seen in any other cathedral. Obviously designed for religious processions, it was a great, heavy wheeled piece with platform upon elaborate silver platform, ending in what appeared to be a small reliquary.



After our explorations in Burgos, we headed north toward the coast. We stopped at the café of a modern roadside hotel for lunch. We had our usual "safe" choice of ham-and-cheese sandwiches. We took our first bites

simultaneously. I wish Don had been using his camera to capture our expressions of outrage and repulsion. Our innocent sandwiches had been grilled in fish-tainted oil. Muriel ate only her ham and cheese. Don and I chomped dutifully through ours, pretending they had a strange and special Spanish seasoning. When we finished, Muriel suggested ice cream as an antidote. We ended up with quite good packaged cones and bars.

Storm clouds closed in as we headed to Hondarribia at the corner of the Spanish coast adjacent to France. The landscape was barren low mountains, made more dreary by rain. The area toward Vitoria was a vast cereal-covered plain, reminiscent of Southern Spain. We wound back through ridges of tall, jagged mountains, bare rock with tiny plants in crevices. On the other side we saw a herd of deer peacefully grazing in a pasture amid softer ridges.

Muriel's demand to see "real Basques" became a running joke. We drove into Vitoria.

DON: See all those people, Muriel? They're Basques.

MURIEL: How do you know?

DON: They have to be. Vitoria is the head of the Basque government.

We suddenly noticed that street signs carried both Spanish and Basque names. Don was determined to find the old city, though his companions were less driven. After endless circles of the city center, he found a parking place and we walked in. Stone steps led to heavy old stone buildings with glimpses of charming old homes up curving little side streets.

Two red-uniformed police officers strolled side by side through the plaza. Muriel asked Don to photograph them.

Don quickly aimed his camera at their departing backs, then himself departed after them, camera at the ready. Muriel and I wondered whether they would slap Don in jail or just confiscate camera and film. Don returned, chastened. The police had turned on him. One of them jumped

behind a tree to get away and the other threatened him with a string of things Don fortunately could not understand. He fled.

Muriel scolded, “After worrying about belligerent Indians in Chiapas,^{*} why would you take a chance with touchy Basques!”

Don protested that he was just following Muriel’s instructions.

Muriel replied, “I said photograph their backs. I didn’t say anything about spring up under their noses with your camera.”



We drove through another mountain range where entire sides were sheared off, leaving immense rock slabs. The high forests gradually gave way to lower mountains and broad valleys. Farm houses were made of stone with tile roofs or were half stone with whitewashed upper stories. The highway toll booth carried instructions in Basque with a Spanish translation below.

We turned east, paralleling the coast through high, wooded mountains. Clouds sifted down over their tops, softening contours and dulling the deep greens.

We never completely reconciled the two names of *Fuenterrabia* and *Hondarribia*, which appeared to be two names for the same town. Probably one was Basque and the other Spanish. The old walled city where we stayed used *Hondarribia*.

We went through our usual performance trying to find our way to the top of the hill, into the old walled city, and through narrow streets to our hotel. After several tries, Don suggested that I ask directions. I got out of the car and accosted a surprised young boy who was walking his dog. He proudly pointed to the next corner, instructed us to turn left and said we would find the Parador at the top of the hill.

* “Mexico with Muriel & Don” on page 201 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

When I returned to the car, Don remarked to all of us, “Aren’t you glad I thought of it?”

Muriel replied, “Aren’t you glad Katy can say it?”

Moments later we parked at the edge of the large, unadorned plaza in front of the stark, bare beige walls of a 10th-Century castle used by King Carlos V. We entered a great stone lobby, where arched doorways led to unexpected stone stairways and courtyards.

The desk man grabbed my luggage and set off through a stone lounge decorated with heavy tapestry, lances, shields, and a small cannon. We climbed a flight of stairs, went down a corridor to an elevator, went up one floor, emerged and climbed four steps, walked down another corridor, down six steps, and turned right to my room.

Our rooms were charming, with dark wood furniture, paneled wardrobes, and a deep alcove where French windows opened above a dining patio and looked across the harbor to the French coast. The alcove was separated from the room by heavy draperies. Later I remarked on the strange construction and Don explained that the alcove was cut into the two-yard-thick original wall to permit placement of normal windows.

Windows on the opposite side of my hall corridor looked down into the courtyard, with its broken original wall, iron gateway, and moss-covered stone steps leading nowhere.

That evening we crossed the plaza to a small restaurant. We were ushered down steep, narrow stairs to a dining room just two tables wide. The narrow room had rough stone walls and a low beamed ceiling. Service was friendly and the food, excellent.

Thursday, 21 September

Heavy rain. Our planned walk through the old city of Hondarribia was impossible. As we left the hotel for our car, a party of four (two of them old enough to know better) was waiting for a break in the weather to cycle to Pamplona. Not long afterwards, we passed them as they were turning

back through the torrents to return to Hondarribia. We drove up to the lighthouse via a narrow, winding road past lovely private homes. Fortunately, it was one way. The rain worsened. We could see nothing. We gave up and drove to the nearby city of San Sebastian.

We passed a depressing series of highrise apartment buildings. Streets were flooded. Police in red-hooded rain jackets and black rain trousers with red stripes down each side directed traffic and unplugged drains.

We did not know where we were or how to get where we wanted to be.

Muriel, who was driving, complained, “Every time I finally see a sign, it points to France. It may take all day to find San Sebastian.”

Don, thinking ahead, mused, “When we try to get back, it may be better to go on into France to get back to that place we’re staying that no one can pronounce.”

Muriel corrected him: “No one but Kate.”

We passed an ambulance towing a boat boldly marked *RESCUE*.

I commented, “I find that colorful.”

Muriel disagreed. “I find it distressing with all these street with so much water on them.”

Don cautioned, “We’re approaching Centro Ciudad.”*

I commented, “Fine, but what ciudad?”

Muriel broke in with, “If this is San Sebastian, we’re looking for a laundromat with a beer parlor next door.”

Those needs were put in abeyance as sunshine replaced rain. We strolled along the handsome corniche, enjoying the view of the horseshoe bay with small mountains at each end and a hilly island in the center. We took advantage of the city to visit a bank, an art store, and an electronics store.

* *Ciudad* is Spanish for *city*; *Centro Ciudad* means *City Center*.

We drove up to the restaurant at the top of the mountain at one end of the bay for lunch. Afterwards, we actually located a laundromat past a smelly market up a dark alley. The alley debouched in a large plaza overlooked by thousands of Spanish windows and lined with sidewalk cafés. Hot coffee while the laundry was swishing supplied a pleasant antidote to the cold wind whistling about the plaza.

Back in Hondarribia that night, we returned to the same restaurant for dinner. We were seated at the same table and found the same Austrian couple at the table across from us. We greeted each other like old friends, chatted across the narrow aisle separating us, and agreed to have dinner together the next night.

Friday, 23 September

Muriel settled herself in the half-ruined courtyard to paint the arched doorway with its grated door. Don and I set out to explore Hondarribia on foot.

Each little stone plaza was surrounded by houses very different from those we saw elsewhere in Spain. They were narrow and tall, stucco or half-timbered, with tiled roofs. Brightly painted balconies overflowing with flowers stretched the width of most houses on every floor. One house had scarlet balconies; the next, aqua; the next, green; the next, yellow; the next, a surprising sober brown. The effect was warm and friendly. Tiny shops selling bread, meat, fish, etc., opened off the steep little cobblestone streets.

When Muriel joined us later that morning, we walked down into the newer town below. Careful as I was at watching my step on the uneven streets, I succeeded in tripping and going down like a felled tree. I lay on the stones evaluating possible damage while Muriel and Don gasped in horror above me. I had made a three point landing, two knees and my chin. None was damaged.

When Don helped me to my feet, I realized that my right thumb was bent back at a right angle. Don gently pulled it back into position. The thumb

moved normally, so I refused his offer to find the nearest hospital. I had only moderate pain, swelling, and discoloration for the next few days, though when I got back to Belize, I found that the thumb was broken. My priorities on a fall are somewhat askew. I worry about breaking my glasses or tearing my surgical stockings before I contemplate the possibility of breaking a vital extremity.

We continued our walk, passing through the handsome old gateway in the town walls. As we started down the steep street, Muriel reminded us that what goes down must come back up. We stopped for beer at a sidewalk café with long, highly polished tables with backless benches at each side and small square stools at each end, ideal for long Basque conversations over coffee. By this time, Muriel had decided that the elderly men wearing berets definitely were Basques. She was not sure about the other dozens of people in view on the streets at any one time.

We explored several outdoor dining areas for lunch before settling on one. Don finally had the tiny snails he had been looking for. I joined Muriel in ordering octopus salad, admittedly, with some trepidation. It was delicious.



We drove into France, past former Immigration kiosks, now empty and useless under terms of the European Union. Saint-Jean-de-Luz was a lovely vacation area of handsome homes, hotels and apartment buildings. I found it unappealingly over-developed.

The French Basque coast is a plateau that drops in sheer rock cliffs into the ocean. Huge limestone rocks near shore are scoured into strange shapes by wind and water. Many have small crosses mounted atop them, attesting to lost ships and sailors. Wide beaches stretch along the long, open coastline.

Biarritz is equally heavily built. We stopped for coffee on a terrace overlooking the beach, then walked out a long bridge to a massive rock formation. We agreed that our favorites were the Galicia and Asturias

coasts. They were simple, not glitzy, not tacky. The French Basque coast was too-much-too-much for our taste.

Don had been told to return our Hertz car to the San Sebastian airport. We stopped there, but found no Hertz office. Back at the hotel Don enlisted the help of one of the men at the reception desk. After a long period and several calls he got the necessary information:

“Take the car to the airport (5 minutes from the Parador). Lock it. Give the keys and contract to the bartender in the airport.”

We tried another restaurant for dinner with our Austrian friends. It was a pleasant evening, but I preferred our first, intimate little cave dining spot.

Saturday, 23 September

Muriel and Don left early to pick up our French Avis car just across the border, then drop off the Spanish Hertz at the San Sebastian airport. I was left in situ to guard the luggage.

Muriel appeared at my bedroom door sooner than I expected. She reported that the car given them was a tiny Renault that just barely could accommodate our luggage and us. We were to exchange it for a larger car at the Biarritz airport before noon. We exited in haste to meet our deadline. I was slightly less perturbed by the luggage stacked almost on my lap in the tiny back seat than I was by the car’s disgusting purple color.

We reached Biarritz in time. The Avis agent told Muriel that she was *désolée*,* but they only had a vehicle with automatic transmission. Muriel graciously accepted the “inconvenience.” It was a large, gorgeous car. We knew the car probably would cost a young fortune, but after seeing its capacious trunk, none of us complained.



* *Désolée* is French for *terribly sorry*.

We drove toward Bayonne, searching for a suitable beer stop. Found a Novotel, where we were able to get our favorite brand, “1664.” When we returned to the car, Muriel could not start it. She thought the engine was flooded. Fortunately a gracious young man asked if he might help. He demonstrated how to disarm the security sensor above the rear view mirror with the ignition key. Without his help we might be sitting in Bayonne still.

We continued through a countryside of poor soil, fit only for raising pine trees. We pulled up at a small hotel just off the highway for lunch. There was only one other table of diners in the slightly depressing room, but we were entertained by an affectionate little Dachshund. We had a pleasant quick meal of omelets and salad.

We set off for Dax through a double lane of Sycamores, with their mottled gray-and-white straight trunks. Leaves meeting overhead formed a green tunnel for miles. We paused briefly to see the Roman Baths, then continued through flat country. Our Driver considered it a restful change from mountain driving. Muriel noted that the architecture in villages was all the same, as if everything had been built the same year. She suspected it might have had something to do with the War.

Through Armagnac, the land became prosperous-looking, with vast fields of grapes and corn. Our road wound through rolling hills. Curved patches of woods separated bright green fields.

We stopped beside an enormous weeping willow to change drivers. Muriel emerged from behind the wheel with her head bent forward almost at right angles. She and Don wrestled with the resisting head rests of our fancy car until they finally found the trick to adjusting them for comfort.



We reached Auch and circled downtown, searching for an hotel. We found the Relais de Gascogne, liked its looks, and checked in. Our rooms were spartan but immaculate. The pamphlet and map of Auch given us by the receptionist informed us that we were in an area of exceptional

interest. Auch was a stop on the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela in the Middle Ages.

Over Don's unvoiced protest that hotel food usually is inferior, Muriel and I made the fortunate decision to enjoy the hotel's charming dining room. We had an exceptionally good meal—superb soup, Mousse de Foie, and a savory Daube of Beef with noodles, which arrived in great pottery serving bowls, far more than we could eat. We finished our meal with Crème Caramel and Armagnac.

An after-dinner walk took us across one bridge and back another. Don unerringly directed us through a series of unfamiliar passageways that led back to our hotel.

Sunday, 24 September

We breakfasted early and drove up the hill to the Cathedral in Old Auch. It was a beautiful Renaissance building with Gothic arches, unpainted statues, and spectacular stained-glass windows overlooking the ambulatory. The cathedral was simple compared to the ornate Spanish cathedrals we visited, with a handsomely carved wooden reredos instead of the massive gold structures we had seen.

After completing our leisurely examination of the cathedral, we wandered through nearby shops, waiting for the mid-morning service to begin. We returned for the first part of the Mass. We were charmed by the enthusiastic nun standing in front, vigorously directing the tone-deaf congregation through hymns.



Between Auch and Toulouse, widely separated traditional farms dotted lush countryside. Homes were substantial beige stone with tiled roofs. People seemed to live on their farms, unlike the areas we had passed earlier, where families lived in villages and went outside to work their fields. A minute, flimsy plane passed low overhead. The pilot appeared to be pedaling it.

We stopped to explore a Sunday market in Légevin. Stalls held fruits, cheeses, fresh meats and sausages, mushrooms, and wine in kegs, to be sold in small measures. Chickens roasting on a spit reminded us that it was near lunchtime.

We continued down a Sycamore-lined road to Toulouse. We followed a tree-lined river into Centre Ville.* We found a small brasserie with tiny round outdoor tables. A pert waitress moved two tables together. Our orders of steamed mussels in their great bowls, more bowls for shells, and three glasses for our bottle of white wine, completely covered their surfaces. It was a memorable meal.



We took the autoroute on to Carcassone. In both Spain and France, the superhighways were worth traveling, despite their successions of toll booths, when we were through sightseeing and wanted to get from one place to another quickly.

As we approached, we could see Carcassone rising above the plain on its low hill. It was a picture-book Medieval fortress, a circle of towers and battlements, typically French, with massive crenelated walls set with watch towers with conical peaked roofs. A light rain arrived at Carcassone along with us.

We were directed to the car park, where a bright young Scotsman in a small van collected luggage and us and whipped through a small arched entrance in the massive walls. He wound rapidly through curving cobbled streets too narrow to hold both the vehicle and the hordes of strolling Sunday sightseers. To our surprise, we arrived without incident at the Hôtel Dame Carcas.

The hotel was one (or several) of the original stone buildings. Muriel and Don were shown to a gracious room. Then our driver led me across a charming tiled walkway with glass sides and ceiling, brightened by a row

* *Centre Ville* is French for *Town Center*.



Muriel & Don Stauffer with Kate in Hôtel Dame Caracs, 1995

of plants in tall wrought-iron stands. He apologized for the distance, but assured me it was a lovely room.

It was. The room with its beamed ceiling was very large, dwarfing the enormous heavily carved four-poster bed with its brocaded spread and canopy. Mullioned windows, with window boxes overflowing with red geraniums, overlooked the plaza in front of the cathedral. Three ornate arm chairs and a heavy table made a pleasant locus for Happy Hours during our stay. Walls were decorated with gold-framed paintings and a tall gold-framed mirror above the mantle. Walking down the hall next day, I glanced into a nearby single room with a gleaming brass bedstead and realized the Air France agent had been honored with special accommodations.

The bathroom itself was huge, with an old-fashioned claw-foot tub fitted out with the standard new faucets and hand-held shower spray. The only small thing in my new home was the separate toilet room opening off the entry hall. It was triangular in shape with a door that opened inward

making it difficult to squeeze in between door and commode. It must have tried the agility of large former occupants.



The Stauffers and I met in the lobby and strolled through winding streets, studying menus posted in front of restaurants. Streets still were jammed with people. Half the offerings of shops were displayed on racks in the street outside. The effect was to bury the ancient stone dignity of the town in tourist tacky-tacky. We remembered Eze above the Riviera, where shops hid discretely beyond deep doorways and the passageways were bright with planters, not T-shirts.

Cassoulet was the regional specialty. It was on every menu. We decided we had to have it, with Crème Brûlée for dessert. The restaurant directly across from the hotel filled our requirements. We feasted happily and regretted the richness of our meal during the wee hours of the night.

Monday, 25 September

We spent the day exploring Carcassone. The sparseness of Monday tourists was a relief. The Château Comtal, within the walls, held a wonderful museum of Medieval artistry. The cathedral was simple but handsome, with lovely stained-glass windows.

We walked out through the massive main gate to the area between the inner and outer walls. We were alone to admire the towering walls and turrets. Skies were clear, but a sudden, fierce, icy wind reminded us of the Mistral we had experienced the year before in Provence. Muriel and I wondered why the linings of our rain coats were hanging in closets back home.

In the afternoon, we took the little train ride around the outside of the walls. We learned a lot from the English commentary. Allegedly, the name of the city came from an event early in the life of the fortress. It had been under siege for over a year. Cleverly, the starving inhabitants fed much of their meager store of remaining food to fatten their remaining

pig. Then they threw the pig from the battlements. Leaders of the army below saw how fat the animal was and decided the town had supplies to withstand a further lengthy siege. They withdrew. The lifting of the siege was celebrated by joyous ringing of the bell of the Cathedral Dame Carcas. The people shouted “Dame Carcas sonne” (Dame Carcas rings). From that, according to legend, came the name *Carcassone*.

We all enjoyed our stay, trying to separate the truly impressive medieval fortress from the current sleaziness of its streets. We were pleased to have seen Carcassone, but had no desire to return.

Tuesday, 26 September

We made an early departure to Toulouse to turn in our luxurious car and catch our Air France flight to Paris. As we turned onto the highway above Carcassone, the snow-capped peaks of the Pyrenees ran like a sunlit line of jagged clouds above the far horizon. It was a pleasant, quick drive with little traffic.

Don dropped Muriel and me at a door to the airport and vanished to turn in the car. We stood amidst our pile of luggage and, to our horror, saw no baggage carts in sight. I mounted guard while Muriel went scavenging. She returned with a single cart she had whisked away from a passenger checking in for a flight. We put the large bags on the cart while I pulled our two suitcases on wheels. We proceeded to the opposite end of the terminal and the Air Inter check-in. There, just outside the door, was a long line of luggage carts. Don joined us with one of them.

We spent the hour before Check In having a last 1664 beer in the pleasant little bar.

Gabriela Anaya at Air France Mexico had assured me lunch would be served on our flight. It wasn't. Receiving a complimentary tiny 1664 helped. As soon as we reached the welcoming arms of the Tilsitt Étoile in Paris, we walked down to a nearby crêperie and corrected the oversight. Our strength restored, we walked briskly from one store to another,

looking with sporadic success for things we knew we could not live without for the next twenty-four hours.

Long before our trip, the Stauffers had faxed me details of some twenty-odd bistros in Paris. We whittled the list down to three favorites. Together we decided on a single one. The hotel receptionist telephoned La Poule au Pot for reservations for us.

Don led us masterfully through the maze of the Metro to the vicinity of Les Invalides. We walked three or four blocks and found our simple, turn-of-the-century bistro exactly where it was supposed to be. We all ordered the specialty from which it took its name. We enjoyed a quarter chicken stuffed with pâté and stewed with vegetables. Muriel and I finished with the best Crème Brûlée of the trip. Don forewent it for a classic Pêche Melba.

We returned to the Tilsitt Étoile for a farewell Liqueur, courtesy of the Stauffers rather than of our depleted “pot.”

Wednesday, 27 September

After a final petit déjeuner* together, I collected my luggage, gave Muriel and Don a last hug, and took off for Charles de Gaulle Airport.

I spent my pre-boarding time in the pleasant Air France lounge. A young Air France employee came by to ask if I were on the Washington flight. In alarm for Muriel and Don, I asked if the flight were cancelled. CNN had reported that morning that Air France flight attendants had called a 2-day strike. The young woman assured me that the Washington flight was delayed, not cancelled. I asked her to call the Tilsitt Étoile and try to get a message to the Stauffers. She returned shortly to say that they already had left the hotel.

Soon I boarded my flight and explored the electronic wonders of the new “Espace” configuration of the former Le Club class. A private TV screen emerged from one arm rest, while my tray was hidden in the other. I had

* *Petit déjeuner* is French for *breakfast*.

enough leg room to stage a small dance in the area if I were not using the built-in leg rest. The seat reclined so far that I felt almost horizontal.

My seat companion was a huge, gracious Palestinian returning from a construction site on an island off Portugal to his home in New York. Our snippets of conversation through the long day were pleasant. I was less pleased at being given the awful cold he was fighting.

The trip to Miami was uneventful. I checked into the Hotel MIA in the airport.

Thursday, 28 September

A pleasantly routine TACA flight delivered me to Belize mid-afternoon. Alex and María were waiting. At home, our Golden Lay, Amber, greeted me enthusiastically, as did my new puppy, Missy, who I feared might have forgotten me.

Epilogue, 12 November

As I wrote you, I returned from my gorgeous trip with a broken thumb. I stumbled on the uneven street in Hondarribia, Spain. It seemed to be just a major dislocation. Don gently eased in back into position. It worked fine. I saw no reason to consult a doctor.

When, ten days later, it had not improved, I finally had an X-ray here in Belize and found it was fractured. I saw a nice young orthopedic surgeon. He said they didn't do anything about a fracture in the final joint of a thumb, but that I should have physical therapy for the torn ligaments to avoid permanent damage to the hand.

Can you think of anything more ignominious than physical therapy on a *thumb*?

Fortunately, the delightful young woman I was sent to took it seriously. I enjoyed my sessions with Michelle. She used sonic massage to encourage torn ligaments to mesh smoothly instead of forming scar tissue. Michelle gave me guidelines for use of my hand and decreed “homework” with a large ball of something that looked and felt like Silly Putty.

Puerto Rico with Carli & Tom

March 1996

The idea of a trip to Puerto Rico blossomed a few years ago when CGM, The French Line, moved their regional office there. I told cousin Hank de Geus, whom I last saw when we both visited his daughter, Katy, in Colorado a few years back,* that I was planning a business trip there in early 1996 and suggested that he meet me for a week of sightseeing. He promised to consider the idea. When I mentioned the possibility to Carli some time in 1995, she instantly asked if she and her husband, Tom, could join me. They had been in a Spanish conversational group for a couple of years and were eager to visit a Spanish-speaking country. I was delighted. Carli took over planning for the trip, with help from their office manager, Mirla Reyes, a Puerto Rican. To our disappointment, Hank decided later he could not make the trip.

Sunday, 10 March

I had a pleasant, uneventful trip, leaving Belize early in the morning and reaching San Juan at 6:30 PM.

The airport gleamed with newness. However, there were no luggage carts. Fortunately, I had packed so conservatively that when I closed and lifted my garment bag before departure, I was tempted to open it and add a few of the clothes I so carefully had excluded. I had no problem carrying my garment bag through the airport and pulling my wheeled suitcase by its strap.

At the curbside, the taxi dispatcher asked where I was going, extracted two overlarge suitcases from the open trunk of the taxi in front of him to the dismay of their owners, and tossed my luggage in upside down.

* “Family Visits in Colorado” on page 193 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

I was lucky in getting a bright, voluble young taxi driver who was interested in talking about his country. The drive into the city, with its myriad lights from highrise buildings, was daunting. Bridges ablaze with lights spanned the contrasting black of rivers and bays. It was a relief to reach Old San Juan's simpler, more sedate dim streets. We passed what seemed in the dark to be stately homes, then walls of buildings reminiscent of many I saw in Spain.

It was amazing to me that my driver even could find The Galería Inn. It is on an unmarked driveway that angles off the main street along the Atlantic coast between the massive forts of San Cristóbal and El Morro. He pulled up the steep, short drive and halted in front of an iron grill. There was no sign, nothing to indicate that it was not the discreet entrance to a private home.

I reluctantly accepted his word that I was in the right place.

A grill blocked entrance to a short old brick walkway. As I approached, an elegantly dressed woman in spike heels tripped on the uneven steps inside and fell in a heap. My taxi-man was barred by the grill from rescue. A charming young woman appeared from the patio behind, helped the Fallen Angel to her feet, and opened the grill to let me in. I spoke solicitously to the woman who was ruefully inspecting herself after her fall. Damage was limited to her sheer black stockings and her dignity.

The Galería hostess greeted me by name—Katharine—to my amusement, introduced herself as Chista, and said she would show me to my room. When I suggested that she might want me to register, she waved a cheerful hand and said I could do that later. Chista led me through what, at the time, seemed a brief maze of small ancient rooms, lush with greenery and glowing with paintings and bas reliefs. She threw open a tall, narrow wooden-grilled door and led me up a steep flight of stairs of checkerboard tiles. The great slab door of ancient wood at the top of the stairs opened onto a short downward flight of stairs into my bedroom, "Secret B."

Dark-painted lattice screened the steps. The room was higher than it was wide. A dark-beamed ceiling looked down on roughly plastered walls. A

large arched window opened onto two patios on the floor below. Later I realized that the nearest one was the quaint cistern patio, while the larger, far one was the open-air studio of the Galería's artist-owner, Jan d'Esopo. The walls surrounding the great window were painted in trompe l'oeil as if old bricks showed through a broken wall. A profusion of paintings and bas reliefs decorated the walls.

A huge, high four-poster double bed took up half the room. Pillows were heaped invitingly. The dark, swirly print of the coverlet was duplicated in the curtains outlining the arched opening into the tiny bathroom. Privacy was minimally assured by a sheer old-gold net curtain.

I asked Chista for my room key.

"Oh, none of our rooms has a key," she replied brightly. "In twenty-some years we never have had a problem. There is a good bolt on the inside, though, that you should use when you are in the room." Chista did not realize that she was speaking to the world's Number One Paranoiac when it comes to assuming hordes are lurking outside her room at all times, intending to invade as soon as she leaves.

My consternation was compounded when I discovered that the lock on my suitcase was dangling uselessly from one zipper tab, the other tab broken in transit. I was in a strange country in strange surroundings with no security whatever. I had two options: collapse in hysterics or shrug. I took the easier one.

As long as I was "In Residence" in Secret B, both security and privacy were assured by the heavy, bolted door at the top of my private stairs and by barred shutters at the great window. So was claustrophobia. The only air was supplied by machine. Three lamps gave total illumination better suited to a tryst than to the business of unpacking and settling, let alone reading. Nevertheless, it was a charming room.



The Galería is literally that: an art studio and gallery for the owner, with a few suites and rooms for guests. The three buildings that now comprise

the Galería date back to the mid Fifteen Hundred's. Some twenty years ago—neglected, derelict, inhabited by squatters—they were bought, joined, and restored by a noted artist and her husband. It is a wonderful warren of old brick, lush patios, unexpected stairs, with charming and oddly shaped rooms.

The Galería was hosting a large dinner party the night I arrived. The Damsel of the Torn Stockings obviously was one of the guests. Happy voices wafted up through my barred shutters from the patio below as I unpacked slowly in the dimness of my room and the dark of my walk-in closet.

When I had undressed and was ready to wash my stockings, I found a gaping drain in the basin. Smugly I went to my suitcase and reached into the far corner of a pocket where I carry three sizes of basin plugs for such emergencies. They were not there. I decided I must have removed them for my December trip to California.

My best alternative was the plastic wastebasket in the bathroom. It leaked. Still, I was able to do a relatively satisfactory washing. When I finished, I retrieved my package of clothesline and pins from my suitcase. Inside it were the missing basin stoppers. They were the new ones purchased to replace the three from the corner of the suitcase stolen in France two years earlier.*

Monday, 11 March

I walked down the hill that was to become something of a trial during my days in San Juan, and did a few errands.

Old San Juan is hilly. Streets are paved with small, iridescent blue bricks. Tom later explained they were made from the tailings of iron factories especially for use as ballast in sailing ships. The Galería sits at the top of a fairly steep hill; restaurants and shops are strung out some five blocks below. It was a pleasant walk down to them. It was daily drudgery to

* “Five In France” on page 249 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

return to our lodgings. What with our endless perambulations, we did the climb several times a day.

Near noon, Sylvia Álvarez, along with the delightful young CGM SUD* finance manager, Jean-Yves, picked me up. We went to an elegant restaurant, where we were joined by Jean-Paul Gustin, regional manager. Soon after we were seated, all exclaimed in hushed voices that a new group nearby included San Juan's mayor.

The conversation was both delightful and, in business regards, useful. The food was superb. Jean-Paul insisted I share his appetizer and challenged me to say what it was. To his surprise, I was able to identify sweetbreads grilled in butter with slices of garlic. I ordered a lovely salmon in rosemary sauce. Sylvia and I had a dessert tart of blackberries in white chocolate.

Jean-Paul drove me back to the CGM SUD office, with a side trip to the docks when I admitted I would like to see them. After our meeting, Jean-Paul drove me back to The Galería. I had told him how utterly charming I found it, but the expression on his face when he saw the grilled doorway with its ancient brick walls and pathway behind it indicated that he was appalled.



It was about 4:00 PM; I did not expect Carli and Tom for another five hours. I killed the time writing, reading, napping, and fretting. By about 8:45, I settled myself with my book at a table in the patio nearest to the entrance. At 9:00, I overheard someone at the desk in the adjacent room apparently giving instructions for finding the Galería. I went in to ask if by any chance it had been Carli on the phone. I did not realize I was talking to Jan d'Esopo, the owner.

When Carli and Tom had not arrived thirty minutes later, I walked outside hoping they would see me. I was sure they were driving back and forth, unable to identify the small driveway that led to the Galería. Jan and her

* *Sud* is French for *South*.

nondescript dog, Copa, joined me. She said she had told Carli to look for the gargoyles. I had not noticed them from the back seat of the taxi the night before. On the roof's edge, brightly spotlighted, were two delightfully grotesque figures, examples of the artist's humorous skill.

About 9:45, a red Ford Taurus slowly turned into the drive and my beloved Carli and Tom appeared smiling happily. Jan insisted on giving us all an immediate tour of the Galería. She made it plain that she considered it a home, not an hotel. Upstairs, a beautifully decorated music room held an enormous grand piano. Jan explained that a music student used it regularly to practice and that guests were allowed to listen unobtrusively. Jan said that she sometimes took groups of guests in for informal concerts, saying it was good practice for the student. Jan led us through patios and passageways, up stairways, through one of her own rooms, onto her own, statuary-crowded balcony, and up to a large rooftop overlooking the city, the forts, the ocean.

Carli and Tom's suite was off the same stairway as mine, about three-quarters of the way up to my entrance. Their large entry and comfortable living room opened onto a long balcony overlooking the entrance patio. Huge trees shaded it, allowing glimpses, through the shiny leaves, of the Atlantic beyond. With our private stairway and close proximity, we felt a million miles from the world.



If anyone was in charge of running the Galería, it didn't show. Jan made it clear that it was not her job. The several young ladies we saw at the computers were invariably friendly and delightful. None of them appeared to manage.

The Galería was the most lackadaisical place I ever have been. We both were taken directly to rooms and returned to the desk at our convenience, that day or the next, to register.

Rooms were immaculate. Sheets appear to be changed every other day. Bathroom supplies were haphazard. I had no soap when I arrived, but

fortunately, carry a special bath soap. Next day I went out (down the hill, that is, which I then had to climb back up) and bought hand soap for Carli & Tom and myself. When they arrived, their bathroom had four bars; mine still had none. Next day, the maid left three for me. The towel situation was equally strange: some days no wash cloth, one day, three; some days no hand towel but three bath towels; some days one of each. When I called about shortages, a smiling maid appeared instantly with supplies. Most of the time I was too amused at the variation to bother.

Tuesday, 12 March

I rose and dressed early. I pulled my comfortable upholstered chair from its place in front of the mirror at the foot of my stairs and established myself in front of my huge open window to read until Carli and Tom were ready for breakfast.

We went down for a simple Continental breakfast set out on a small bar. One went into the cupboards for coffee cups, if necessary. Slices of homemade bread were ready to go into the toaster oven. One raided the refrigerator for more juice or milk. Later in the day, one helped oneself to the soft drinks, wine, or beer in the refrigerator and kept a list of what was taken so it could be paid for on departure.

Carli, Tom, and I found an unoccupied little area up a couple of steps from the breakfast-bar level, nestled under a set of stairs leading to an even higher level. We settled around the large, low coffee table for our breakfasts. To our delight, it was available for us every day of our stay. Most people preferred the tables and chairs in the patio where I had waited for Carli and Tom the night of their arrival. From our semi-private dais, we looked onto a long, open patio with old brick walls, planters along one side, and doors on the other. Busts emerged improbably from among the giant plants. A full-size statue graced the raised area at the far end.



Tom looked at his watch, which reported a decent mid-morning hour, and said worriedly that it was only such-and-such time in Palo Alto. I reminded him that he was in Puerto Rico and that he had enjoyed a full nights' sleep by current time. For days, Tom kept referring to California time, and I continued to tease him about it.

We set out on our walking tour of Old San Juan. We enjoyed the restored rooms and small museum of the Casa Blanca, home of the Ponce de León family. The explorer himself never lived there. The exhibit was charming and the gardens outside, even more so.

We proceeded through gracious streets to the bottom of the hill that is Old San Juan. We stopped at a sidewalk café for delicious fruit frappés. They were cool and filling. We skipped lunch, as we did most days of the trip. It made us feel righteous about enjoying dessert every night.

After further exploration of the shopping area, we climbed back up the several blocks of steep hill to The Galería. Tom had been given a key to the back door. The door, with plants on each side, had only a number to identify it. We entered through a long hall hung with paintings, climbed a wide, tiled staircase, and walked through Jan's studio, where she was at work on one of the three busts that were her current project. A narrow passageway took us past the private kitchen and past a display of bas reliefs to the main room. It was more lounge than lobby, despite the small desk and three busy computers in the far corner. From there, we went out into another patio and through our private door with its wooden-spool grill at the foot of our tiled stairway.

We adjourned to Carli and Tom's veranda for refreshments before separating for a rest before dinner.



We walked back down the hill and, after a bit of wandering, located the restaurant where we had made unnecessary reservations. It reminded us of an old New Orleans restaurant, with tiled floors, enormous mirrors

framed in dark wood, and the most extraordinary ornate ceramic columnar pieces in corners, exquisite samples of the worst of Victoriana.

We had typical Puerto Rican food and were disappointed. It was interesting but relatively tasteless. We agreed later that the well recommended restaurant was one of the worst choices of our trip. Carli remarked hopefully that the food might be better once we got “out on the island” (the phrase indicating anywhere away from San Juan). She was right, wonderfully right.

We trudged back up the hill to The Galería. Jan was in the kitchen as we passed, so we stopped to visit with her. She suggested enthusiastically that we go back out to the bar across the street because it was a Tuesday, its traditional Opera night. The music, she said, was lovely and guests sang when they felt like joining. We went back, but the bar looked very quiet and was far too smoky to attract us. We returned to Carli and Tom’s balcony and sat in the darkness where the treetops half-hid the Atlantic, not far away.

Wednesday, 13 March

After breakfast, we settled ourselves in the bright red Taurus parked half on / half off the sidewalk per instructions to Tom when they arrived. Almost immediately after departing, Tom ran into a no-entry street, turned and proceeded down a no-exit street. Shades of Spain. He reversed back the long, narrow street, manipulated a turn, and we were on our way to see the national rain forest reserve of El Yunque.

The city of San Juan was less overwhelming to me by day. However, as I learned my first day with Jean-Paul and reconfirmed almost immediately, driving could be hazardous to one’s health. Each San Juan driver appeared to believe that he had constant and immediate access to all available traffic lanes. Twice I saw drivers happily turn left across two lanes of cars properly paused at red lights. Tom stopped at a signal and a car sped past him on the right through the red light. After many blocks of defensive driving, Tom commented, “These people pull all sorts of stunts to gain one little car length.” There was an incredible dichotomy about

San Juan drivers. They were unfailing polite to pedestrians, unbelievably rude in traffic.

Tom drove and Carli navigated, despite her wretched sense of direction. I asked whether she attributed it to her long-ago concussion.

CARLI: I have been Directionally Challenged since I was a child.

KATE (*to Tom*): It's all right to let Carli read directions from a book, but *don't* let her point.

In practice, Carli gives directions as “turn your way” or “turn my way” rather than risk confusion between left and right.

We drove eastward along the azure Atlantic, with its long crested rollers. The highway was lined with low, sprawling resorts and tiny refreshment shacks. The road was excellent, with regular parking areas and rest stops. Finally we turned south, twisting through mountainous high bush to the rain forest.

KATE: This looks like home.

CARLI: Except for the road.

TOM: This is what happens when you have a Corps of Engineers with nothing to do.

We stopped at an observation tower. It was a design to end all designs. Steps were comfortable and wide. A pipe rail down the center separated up-going and down-going traffic. Each short flight ended with a large landing for catching one's breath and an observation window for enjoying the view over the forest while doing it. The open viewing area at the top came almost as an anti-climax.

We drove a bit farther into El Yunque, but realized that for all of us, there was no need to fly thousands of miles to see a rain forest. We continued driving northeast. The botanical gardens were closed, so we continued on out to the tip of the island. Signs were an interesting mix of English and Spanish, such as “La Casa de Mattress & Dry Cleaning.”

We passed questionable-looking open-air restaurants. Finally we found a neat building across from the shore, which we thought might be cleaner and safer. We took a table by large windows overlooking the little harbor. It was one of our inspired choices. We had delicious seafood lunches, nicely prepared and attractively served.

Carli excused herself after we finished. She returned to reassure me about the facilities. “They are clean, roomy, have paper—and a jukebox.”



The trip back to San Juan should have been a simple, relatively brief drive along the northeastern coastal road. Tom drove and Carli continued to navigate. I did not have a map. Carli kept up a steady stream of instructions. I became uncomfortably aware that the sun was shining brightly on my right shoulder. Considering that it was mid-afternoon and that the sun would be in the western sky, it indicated to me that we were driving south. The coastal road ran east to west. I said nothing. We passed a sign.

KATE (*tentatively*): Do you realize that we are back in El Yunque?

CARLI: Yes.

This did nothing to reassure me that Tom had a clue about where he was going.

KATE (*in a determined, motherly attempt to save the party from the wilds of Puerto Rico*): The sun is shining on my right shoulder. I believe that means that we are going south.

CARLI: Yes.

TOM (*after miles through El Yunque in what I was sure was the wrong direction*): We certainly got away from the traffic.

KATE (*to herself—Did we want to?*)

CARLI: Ignore 946, or maybe its 9946...turn your way on 953, then quickly your way onto something that I think is my way on 185...

TOM: You'd better make your mind up before we get there.

CARLI: (*mumbles*)

TOM (*glancing at Carli*): How can you read the map without your reading glasses?

CARLI: Well, I don't need them now except on rare occasions.

TOM: If you can't read three-digit road numbers, how are you going to read the four-digit ones?

CARLI: I thought this morning I should put them in my pocket. (*pause*) I think I brought them on the trip.

KATE (*to herself—This is meant to reassure me?*)

We continued through forested mountains. Gradually the sun moved behind my back. We finally had curved to the east, Carli dictated turns onto one back road after another, each with its own set of hair-pin curves. Tom remarked facetiously, "We're out of the woods," as we emerged into open country and wound through a valley, passing occasional homes or villages surrounded by undisciplined tropical growth.

Carli pointed in surprise to a pair of shoes, laces tied together, dangling over a telephone wire. We saw the same thing many times in the back country, often several pairs close together, and wondered who, under what circumstances, considered it a good joke.

One of my companions remarked that we would be following a large lake formed by a dammed-up river. I must have muttered something about someone's apparently knowing where we were.

TOM: Oh, I thought you knew we were taking a scenic route back. No wonder you kept complaining about having the sun on your right shoulder. I thought you were uncomfortable from the heat and turned up the air conditioning.

Letting me know exact travel plans became a standing joke for the rest of the trip.

We finally reached a divided highway. Carli, with satisfaction, read a road sign: “San Juan.”

TOM (*with rising, surprised, inflection*): San Juan?

CARLI: Don’t you want to go home?

Tom wound his way faultlessly through the unfamiliar city from extreme south to extreme north. As he pulled up in his same parking space on the sidewalk in front of the Galería, he remarked, “It’s fun driving with a blind navigator.”

We retired to Carli and Tom’s balcony to talk about our trip. The subject of Puerto Rican cuisine came up. Carli and I admitted that we knew it would be bland, but were disappointed to have been proved right by the traditional *asopao** the night before.

CARLI (*to Tom*): When we go out west, the food probably will be spicier.

KATE (*interested in hearing about their next trip*): When are you going where, and who’s going with you?

CARLI (*astonished*): The west coast of Puerto Rico, and we thought you were!

KATE (*giggling*): You don’t say “out west” here, you say “out on the island.”

Thursday, 14 March

I had an early hair appointment. Tom and Carli insisted on walking me down the hill to it. A tall Dominican girl, whose Spanish I could understand easily, did an excellent job.

Carli and Tom met me as she finished. We walked from shop to shop looking for a light nylon jacket for me to wear on the water at Phosphorescent Bay, for the noted local handmade lace, and for sun screen for Alex. We had limited success. The only jacket I could find was a rather attractive one, white with single bars of blue and red and a small

* *Asopao* is a Puerto Rican stew.

crest saying Puerto Rico. Unfortunately, it was a man's size medium, and was enormous on me. The next day, in desperation, I returned and bought it, thinking I could donate it to either María or Alex for their coming *Caribbean Prince* cruise. Alex never had a chance; María claimed it delightedly.

We walked a short distance west of the Galería to the famous fortress, El Morro. It held off English and Dutch invaders through the centuries. Heavy waves broke against barriers of black rocks at the base of the fort. Tide pools behind the first line of rocks showed how closely the sea encroached on the massive walls. We climbed every stone stairway, walked up or down every ramp, explored every watch tower. El Morro is an immense, impressive fort.

We continued our explorations of Old San Juan, returning to The Casa Blanca so Tom could take pictures, and ending at the foot of Cruz for a repeat of our frappés.



We made dinner reservations at a noted French restaurant, dressed in our finest, and set out in pouring rain. By a miracle, Tom found a nearby parking place.

La Chaumiere was small, simple, charming, with superb food. We all started with their special Portobello mushrooms sautéed with butter, garlic, and herbs. Tom's poached salmon in a sea of green-tinted basil sauce, garnished with a small island of shredded vegetables, was picture-book elegant. Carli succumbed to the exotic and chose ostrich steak, tender in a delicious sauce. I had a rack of lamb that arrived with such a multitude of tiny, perfectly cooked chops that I could share with Carli and Tom. Tom's dessert was an enormous floating island with caramel sauce in a huge goblet. Carli had a lovely chocolate and almond tart that I should have ordered. I had the worst Crème Brûlée ever. It contained unwelcome apples and a cloying coating of sugar that was melted but not crisp.

Friday, 15 March

After breakfast, Carli left to take accumulated laundry to the nearby laundromat. When she returned, we set out for the Castillo de San Cristóbal, just east of the Galería. We expected to be let down after seeing El Morro, but found San Cristóbal equally impressive. No ramp or stairway was left unclimbed.

We had lunch at Butterfly People, a charming restaurant. That is where we learned that *Flan de Queso* was cheesecake.

We returned to the hotel, dancing up the long hill amid scattered raindrops. The receptionist at the Galería ran to meet us, telling me that friends had “faxed you a bottle of wine.”

It seemed a physically improbably feat. However, investigation showed that Muriel and Don Stauffer had sent an order to give me a bottle of wine as a gift. Since the Galería did not serve dinner and since it hardly would be acceptable to arrive at a restaurant with our own bottle of wine under one arm, we decided to have a picnic-à-la-Provence* that night. With Tom’s help, I selected the Galería’s house Cabernet Sauvignon, the wine they served at banquets. The receptionist shrugged at my insistence on being sure that it was not more expensive than intended. She laughed as she said, “Not much,” and added that she already had charged the Stauffers the specified amount.



We settled on Carli and Tom’s balcony and watched through gaps in the foliage as a squall swept in over the ocean. When the rain stopped, we walked back down the hill and along Fortaleza to a delicatessen Carli had seen earlier. The delightful young man behind the counter apparently never had anyone request meat and cheese sliced to go in any shape but a sandwich. He spoke no English. He was enthusiastically obliging, once Carli convinced him what we wanted. Carli took over most of the

* “Five In France” on page 249 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*



Carli and Kate with picnic dinner in San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1996

subsequent conversation, though Tom and I got in the act with varying degrees of success.

We were disappointed not to find pâté available, but happy with the substitute prosciutto. The young man insisted that we try a paper-thin slice. It was delicious. We ordered that and some sliced salami. I suggested the Spanish cheese and asked him to slice it, assuming squares. Before I could stop him, he had cut each square into three long pieces. No matter. When he sliced the long loaf of bread we ordered, his left hand, holding it down on the bread board, mashed it into an oval as the right hand sliced. The bread ended up exactly the right shape for our Spanish cheese.

At 7:00 PM, feeling elegant in my flame-colored silk robe. I returned to Carli and Tom's suite: Seven steps up to the door of my hideaway and seven more down to their landing. We arranged our picnic on their large, square coffee table. Tom poured our wine. We toasted Muriel and Don, with a thank-you for their delightful gift. Our picnic was as delicious and as much fun as we expected. We said our farewell to San Juan with a nightcap of Bailey's.

Saturday, 16 March

I was up so early to complete my packing that I had an hour in my easy chair in front of my great window to bring my Journal up to date and to write post cards.

We breakfasted, paid our bills, stowed luggage in the capacious trunk of the Taurus, and drove westward through low green mountains. Then and for the rest of our trip, the lush foliage was set off by tall trees bursting with large scarlet blooms. On the right were occasional distant views of the Atlantic. Peajes* were even more frequent than in Spain. Fortunately, Carli had brought a roll of quarters. Equally luckily, I had accumulated nickels and dimes to make up the usual 35-cent tolls.

We reached the karstic country, an area where water has dripped through limestone for eons. *Karst* remains, low bumpy hills rising from an eroded, level limestone floor. The remaining hillocks are strikingly similar in size and shape. The area is studded with caves and, where tops have caved in, with sinkholes. Allegedly, Puerto Rico is one of only two places in the world with this particular formation in comparable size. Geologists are said to go wild over it.

We reached Quebradillas and easily found the Parador El Guajataca. It was a lovely, low, modern resort with a Mesón Gastronómico rating.** We registered, but could not take our rooms until 3:00 PM. A nuisance. Far more aggravating, especially to me, was the mandatory signing of a page-long pledge that, among other forbidden sins, one would not commit the sin to taking food or beverages to one's room. In half-hearted expiation for the rudeness of the rule, we were given vouchers for free drinks, with or without rum. The only problem was that neither the main bar nor the poolside bar was open.



* *Peajes* is Spanish for *toll roads*.

** The Puerto Rico Tourism Company rates a restaurant, or an inn with a restaurant, as a *Mesón Gastronómico* if its service, food, and facilities are all excellent.

With nothing to do at the Parador, we returned to our still-laden car and drove to the northwest tip of the island. Well paved roads wound through pretty, wooded country with fields full of cattle, and neat houses glowing with fresh paint, no matter how modest the size of the abode. One after the other, they formed a pastel rainbow.

We drove out the hilly peninsula to the western Atlantic shore, then had a beautiful drive along the coast to Aguadilla. It is resort country, but we went through two long, lovely public parks on the shore, one with a boardwalk and children's playground. We continued south along the coast, passing one of two places that claims to be the spot where Columbus landed on his second trip. The water was somewhat greener and rougher than the water on the northern coast.

We wound higher and higher into the mountains. Elaborate homes looked past the valley to the ocean on both sides of the ridge. Gradually, we reached the coast of one of the best surfing beaches in the world. The manicured park nearby had a lighthouse and a small museum with relics from a Spanish shipwreck accidentally discovered in recent years by a scuba diver.

We followed the road southward toward Mayagüez, through wooded valleys with glimpses of pastures and plantings. Carli said she noticed fields of half-grown sugar cane. Her mother did not comment that she had assumed they were untidy cornfields. We drove through green tunnels of trees whose upper branches intertwined above the road below.

Tom took a back road on our return to the Parador Guajataca, through gently rolling country of small towns. Carli remarked that houses were painted colors you couldn't imagine in Palo Alto.

At the Parador, we settled into our rooms, then went to the bar to claim our complimentary drinks. The bowls of popcorn, generously refilled, held us until the dining room opened.

The Parador's food was as good as its status as a Mesón Gastronómico promised. Carli and I had traditional Puerto Rican Mofongos. They were beautifully seasoned shrimp in a creole-like sauce with a crust of grated

plantain. The Mofongos were served in tall, decorated wooden goblets like those used to mash plantain.

Sunday, 17 March


We made a leisurely departure for the Cavernas de Camuy. After we had checked in, an open trolley took us through dense woods, not jungle, to the mouth of the cave. We followed a wide walk, surfaced in an unfamiliar slip-resistant material, past massive stalactites and stalagmites to an enormous cavern. The cave was lighted discretely and just sufficiently that its spectacular accretions could be enjoyed. I had a pang of disappointment. This was my first cave. From pictures seen all my life, I expected glowing crystalline growths. Instead they were impressive, correct in size and even larger than expected—but mud colored.

Our guide led us along excellent walkways through three caves. A bridge crossed an underground river. One chamber was open to the sky where the roof had collapsed decades earlier. Across from where we stood, another cave opened black against the far wall. For the first time, I learned of and saw sheet formations, formed when water seeps through a long crack and crystalizes in a sheet rather than in a more usual icicle-like stalactite.

We emerged from the caverns, climbed the hill back up to our trolley, and were driven through the forest to a large, deep sinkhole. Carli and Tom suggested that I might prefer to wait at the top, but I was the first man down the 205 easy wooden steps that wound into the invisible bottom of the collapsed cave.


At the bottom we found a beautiful half-dome cave decorated with a fringe of sheet formations. The bottom of the sink hole was a verdant basin of trees and bushes.

The 205 steps back up to the road were not nearly as attractive as the same ones had been skipping downward. Eventually, I was forced to stop at one of the large, comfortable landings, gasping for oxygen. Had I realized I was almost at the top, pride would have precluded the pause.



From Camuy we drove to the nearby Arecibo Observatory. Visitors are allowed only on the observation platform overlooking the huge sinkhole lined with aluminum mesh reflectors for exploratory radio waves. High above it hangs a massive radio telescope, guyed to three tall concrete posts. A couple of men, probably on routine inspection, could be seen, tiny as ants, climbing from one level of the futuristic-looking “thing” to a lower level.

An excellent commentary in Spanish and English explained the telescope, its purpose, and its achievements in simple terms.



We returned to the Guajataca by back roads so we could pass Lago Guajataca, the largest man-made lake in Puerto Rico. We caught only rare glimpses of the lake winding narrow, then wide, among the hills.

We decided that the prohibition against taking drinks to one’s room had dubious application, since there were an ice machine and drinks’ vending machine down the corridor. Tom discretely brought our stock from the car, where we had left it the first night. We sat on Carli and Tom’s ground-level veranda enjoying a refreshing drink as we watched the brilliant Atlantic crest white and crash against the shore.

Suddenly an appealing small dog thrust his head over the edge of our veranda at my feet. Naturally, I petted it. Naturally, the dog immediately jumped up and stood patiently at my elbow begging for more attention. He was a nice little dog of no determinable ancestry. A short star-shaped white collar peaked near the back of his head over a short, soft light brindle coat. He was slightly damp from a recent dash into the ocean. When my fingers stopped caressing his ears, my new companion gently reminded me of my duties with a tentative tongue.

TOM: How long do you think he will stay?

KATE: Until we go inside and leave him.

TOM: What if he stays?

KATE: Then he'll howl under your window all night and I won't hear him.

TOM: That's exactly what I'm afraid of.

The dog finally lay down near me. We all gasped in dismay as we saw that his exposed haunch was bare and pink with mange. My children eyed me with something less than deep affection.

My dubious pet deserted us, to our relief, when another dog appeared on the lawn.

I kept my petting hand isolated until I could go inside and wash. After two good latherings with regular soap, I remembered that I traveled with surgical scrub. My final wash in it did not last fifteen minutes, but was sufficient to guard against my acquiring the mange, I was sure.

We had another delicious dinner in the Parador's dining room, then convened on Carli and Tom's veranda for a final Bailey's.

Monday, 18 March

We took the main highway to Mayagüez, having already done our sightseeing in the area. We continued to find amusing incongruities. The sign on the side of a building said *Asociación de Leche*^{*}—with the silhouette of a horse.

Tom turned off the “dual carriageway” at a stop light.

TOM: I guess we can turn right on red.

CARLI: In San Jun, they turned left or went straight ahead on red, so I think you are legal.

As we approached Mayagüez, Carli, who had read all the Puerto Rico guide books several times, exclaimed in happy recognition, “Smell that! It's tuna. See, there's Starkist.” We decided that the smell from processing is not as pleasant as the scent of tuna-out-of-the-tin.

* *Asociación de Leche* is Spanish for *Milk Association*.

We paused at a turn-out for a photo-op view of the Mayagüez coast.

TOM: Look at the little area of rain over the city from that one little cloud.

CARLI: That's smoke. Take off your dark glasses so you can tell the difference.

KATE: Note that it goes up instead of down.

The Mayagüez bay was gently rippled, murky water with a band of beautiful blue far out, underlining the horizon. Tom explained that the bay had the effluent from three rivers opening into it.

The Mona Passage, off the western coast of Puerto Rico, is noted for its dangerous currents and even more dangerous sharks. They do not deter the pitiful craft of Dominicans and Haitians from trying to reach Puerto Rico's U.S. haven.




Tom remarked that we ought to stop in Mayagüez at the Tourist Office for information. I just had noticed in one of the guide books that Mayagüez did not have one. Several miles south of the city, Tom suddenly turned off the highway onto a side road and coasted to a stop alongside a handsome building on a small hill. He and Carli had noticed the sign indicating a tourist information center. It was the wisest detour of a trip full of them.


The enthusiastic woman in charge gave Carli and Tom all sorts of instructions and advice. Her most valuable contribution was to urge us to find a guide known as "Charlie-the-Frenchman" to take us to Phosphorescent Bay. The center had a large display of fascinating and humorous sculptures by Charlie, done with nuts and bolts and pieces of metal.

As we reached the southwestern edge of Puerto Rico, the vegetation became noticeably dryer. Colors were gray-green and tarnished-gold instead of the rich, deep greens of the rainier north. Gentle, rolling hills were often denuded of trees or had only a narrow rooster's crest of green above the topmost ridge. The roads were narrow and sometimes patched,

but always passable. By the southwest end of the island, the large layovers on each side of the road were surprisingly reddish in color. We understood its name: El Faro de Cabo Rojo.*



As we drove southward, the coast was lined with inexpensive resorts, simple restaurants, and homes. Gradually the water became blue and clear again. The farther south we went, the more impressive became the homes and resorts. We passed a country cemetery. Tom noted that every grave had vases with bouquets of artificial flowers. He drove in. We saw that the vases were cast into the concrete slabs covering graves. Most of the flowers in them looked unweathered. No grave was undecorated.



The pavement ended. We continued toward the southwestern point on a packed-sand road. We passed the evaporation tanks and granular piles of a salt industry. We entered a mangrove forest. We had a slight problem of which path to follow. A car slowly easing its way over the uneven road ahead of us turned off. We continued straight to a dead end, turned around, and took the Y fork taken by the other car. We found the car parked at a gorgeous overlook of ocean with mountains on the far side of a bay. As I remarked that perhaps the two occupants of the other car were seeking privacy, the driver started his engine and retreated. We passed the car later parked in a shady, hidden spot on the other side of the peninsula. We were in a national reserve. Unfortunately, the lighthouse and adjacent center for scientific study were off limits. The only available road took us around the base of their hill to a picturesque little rock-studded beach near the mouth of the bay. The water was Carli-blue.

After finding our way out, we drove to a little compound Carli had spotted earlier. A sign on the fence advertised refrescos.** We drove in and parked in solitude and safety. Large up-ended reels formed tables. We

* *El Faro de Cabo Rojo* is Spanish for *The Lighthouse of Red Cape*.

** *Refrescos* is Spanish for *soft drinks*.

sat around one in the welcome shade of a palapa.* A friendly woman greeted us in Spanish from a serving window in the small adjacent building. Of the soft drinks she offered, we all selected “Coco India,” produced by the company that brews the worst beer in the world. Their lightly carbonated coconut drink was far more acceptable. Tom handed the patronne \$2.00 for our \$1.50 order. Instead of change, she presented him with three purple lollipops. It was only later in the car that we found, to our mutual horror, that their centers were bubble gum.

The woman offered us one of her “Tostones Grandes” and we agreed enthusiastically. *Tostones* are slices of green plantain, pounded flat and quickly sautéed. They accompanied many of our Puerto Rican dinners. The Tostón Grande was an immense oval of diagonally sliced plantain, which we divided among ourselves delightedly. We sat in the shade of the thatch enjoying a brisk breeze off the water a few feet away.

[Editor’s Note 2 on page 381]



We continued along the south coast to Parguera and our new Parador. It was wooden Colonial style, the walk to our rooms lined with giant hanging baskets of luxuriant bougainvillea. This time our balconies overlooked a quiet Caribbean harbor. Small boats were moored along a pristine white pier.

Following instructions from the receptionist, we walked past the next resort to where a houseboat was moored. Charlie-the-Frenchman was not at home. We were considering leaving when he appeared in his outboard. Tom arranged for him to take us to Phosphorescent Bay that night. Charlie counter-suggested leaving early so we could have a tour of the mangrove islands, see the sunset over the bay, and visit the island where the frigate birds roost. We accepted delightedly and arranged for Charlie to pick us up at the Parador Parguera’s pier.

* A *palapa* is an open-sided shelter with a thatched roof.

We walked back toward the shops, browsed, then bought ice cream to hold us until a late dinner after our sea trip.



Minutes before 5:00 PM we were seated at the end of the pier. Exactly on the hour, Charlie's boat eased up in front of us. Carli and I were seated amidships on stiff life preservers. It was not easy to arrange a comfortable position, considering the neck opening and front slit of the unyielding garments. As we crossed an open bay, a man in a small boat hailed Charlie. His engine had conked out. Charlie promised to send help.

The cruise through the mangrove was a homecoming for Carli and me. Still, Charlie showed and told us things we never had known about the useful seaside shrubbery. His own interest in, and enthusiasm for, every facet of marine life was a delight to us all. Charlie paused to show us sponges clinging to mangrove roots, along with moss, oysters, anemones. He said that the latter were being tested for an AIDS cure. He showed us mangrove seeds and described their floating, often for very long times, before taking root. Charlie picked a mangrove flower and passed it around so we could enjoy the lovely, light scent. He pointed out huge nests of termites and described their symbiotic relationship with the mangrove. The termites, Charlie explained, clean up dead mangrove without damaging the live trees. Some of the passageways among mangrove islands were wide. Some were green tunnels where we all sat hunched over as we eased through.

In an open bay, we passed a fisherman friend of Charlie's pulling in a catch of fish from an enormous net that still drifted over acres of water. He pulled the net into his boat, untangling the gills of a fish every foot or so. Charlie nimbly jumped into his boat, after some unintelligible conversation between the two, and returned with three fish his friend had offered him. A few moments later he reached over and took another large fish, which he explained was being given to a mutual friend. The fisherman promised to help the incapacitated boat on his way back to town.

Charlie remarked that it was a long day for him. He had been up since 12:30 AM, “And when I get home, I’ll have to clean these fish!”

Carli or Tom spotted the pink-and-lavender oval balloon sail of a Portuguese Man-O-War. Charlie instantly turned his boat around to go along side it so Tom could photograph the sea creature. Charlie soon stopped again so Tom could photograph swarms of tiny insects on the water’s surface in a quiet bight.

We continued through the mangrove into a bay where we could see the beam from the lighthouse at Cabo Rojo, which we had passed earlier in the day. From there, we turned back eastward, slapping through the choppy waves. We watched the sun set. Tom missed by a millisecond capturing the evanescent flare of green just as the sun dips below the horizon.

Our next stop, in deep twilight, was an island where dozens and dozens of frigate birds swirled overhead and alighted in the branches to rest for the night. Charlie explained that this was not where they nested, just where they roosted. We were used to seeing frigate birds in twos or threes. This great soaring mass was thrilling, despite the growing dark.

Within moments, we were in a branch of Phosphorescent Bay, an area noted for its dense population of dinoflagellates. Carli and I had seen phosphorescence. We expected something-a-bit-more-so. Instead when, at Charlie’s command, we dipped our hands into the water, they created a great milky, pale-green glow. The bow and stern wakes, when Charlie moved the boat, threw light so far it was as if he had floodlights inset in the chine. When the boat drifted, we could see large fish dart past, feeding, as pale-green amorphous glows far below. Tinier sea creatures dining on the dinoflagellates were minute emerald sparks deep in the darkness of the water.



We learned that Charlie had been born in Martinique. His father was from Brittany in France. Charlie worked for USIS* as an electrical engineer during the 1950's. Suddenly, he was transferred to Puerto Rico because of his language skills. Just as suddenly, the USIS station was cancelled. Charlie was given \$500 and a permanent U.S. visa. He asked what the \$500 was for and was told it was to cover his deportation in case he "did something bad."

We asked how he became an artist. Charlie said that he began painting and studied in a London art school. Back in Puerto Rico, one day he saw some machine parts he had saved in case of future need and without prior intent, combined them with other parts to make his first small statue.

For no particular reason, he constructed a 13-foot-tall skeleton and hung it from a tree near his houseboat. One day, an American woman came by and insisted on buying it. He did not know what to charge her. After discussions over lunch, it was decided that Charlie would pack and send the sculpture to her, she would have it appraised and would send him a check. The would-be purchaser represented the Philadelphia Museum of Modern Art.

Charlie made what he referred to a sarcophagus for the skeleton and inscribed the top, "Rust In Peace." After some time, he received a large envelope with two smaller envelopes inside. One had a check for \$6,000, the appraised value of his sculpture. His friend had written that if he was not satisfied with the amount, he should let her know. Charlie said he couldn't get it in the bank fast enough. The second envelope contained \$200 with a note saying that it was in recognition of his sense of humor.



Charlie asked if we would like to return to his dock so he could show us his latest statues. We agreed with alacrity. We clambered out of the boat, stiff from the ride, and balanced our way from his dock across a plank to shore. Charlie opened the trunk of his car and lovingly lifted the strange

* *USIS is the United States Information Service.*

creations to a lighted platform. One was a wonderfully large and ferocious Chupacabra (literally, “goat sucker”), a representation of a possibly mythical creature alleged to be preying on Puerto Rican livestock. Charlie had given the poor goat in his statue a suitably terrified eye, using only machine pieces.

Charlie gallantly took me by the arm to lead me across his open parking lot, to assure that I bypassed the shallow pools and streams left by recent rains. I jumped lightly across the major barrier, silently pleased that I did not fall on my face and even displayed a small degree of grace.

Charlie exclaimed with delight, “She leaped like a rabbit!”

Tuesday, 19 March

We set out to explore the area. Our first destination was the lovely little town of San Germán, north of Parguera. We drove all the way through it before we knew we had made a slight navigating error. We wound back and parked nose-down on a steep hill not far from the Cathedral.

Carli described San Germán as a town in the process of change. The beautiful old buildings we wanted to see were closed for reconstruction. We wandered up and down the streets, enjoying elaborate large old Victorian-style houses. Many were freshly painted to set off their elegant plaster friezes. Carli explained that in a Spanish country, the era was referred to as “de Isabel,” referring to the Spanish queen, rather than the English one.

From San Germán we drove along to Guánica on the coast. We saw far more flowering shrubs, bougainvillea, ixora, hibiscus, etc., in the south than we had in the north. The Bay of Guánica was edged by high hills. The Caribbean coast was rocky, alternating with sandy stretches of beach.

Returning toward Parguera, we passed through dry tropical forest with cactus, tall palms, and an overgrowth of vines. We continued through an arid valley paralleling the sea.

KATE (*after referring to her map*): I think that's the Bahia-Something-Beginning-With-An-M.

CARLI: Hah. And you thought the other day that you could see better than I do without my glasses.



Back at Parguera we strolled down to get an ice cream, then went back to sit on Carli and Tom's balcony.

TOM (*to Kate*): Please let me move your chair so I can close the door. We have the air conditioner on.

KATE: Throw the bolt open first to keep the door from locking accidentally.

TOM: No, I have set the lock so that it won't lock.

KATE: I tried that with my door and it didn't stay. I suggest you leave the bolt out for safety.

TOM (*closing door*): Not necessary...oh, oh, it's locked!

Conscious of my status as mother-in-law, I diligently refrained from comment.

Tom shrugged and nonchalantly pulled his Swiss Army knife from his pocket. He extracted the pick, inserted it into the tiny hole in the doorknob and tried futilely to disengage the lock. Carli offered him a slightly longer large safety pin. He tried using that with equal lack of success.

CARLI: That's all right. We can climb over to your balcony and go through that way.

KATE: No you can't. My balcony door is bolted...(*pondering*)...but my louvers are open. Maybe you can reach through and open the door.

CARLI: No, there are screens.

KATE: Then we'd better call for help.

Just then, the housekeeper appeared on the walkway below at the corner of the building. Carli called down to her, explaining the status in flawless Spanish. The housekeeper laughed happily and promised to help. A few moments later three smiling faces peered at us over the railing of my balcony, next door.

TOM (*to the housekeeper*): You can come in through our door.

KATE (*unhappily remembering*): No they can't. I bolted your door when I came in.

TOM: You *bolted* it!

Kate nods embarrassedly.

HOUSEKEEPER: That's all right. We'll get help.

The three of us waited, chortling at our contretemps. The maids clucked with concern and assured us that this never had happened before. I had assumed it was a regular occurrence.

The housekeeper returned with a hefty young woman from the front desk. She Was Not Amused. Without pause, the receptionist threw a leg over my balcony railing and eased herself across my railing, over Carli and Tom's railing a few inches away, and down onto Carli and Tom's balcony as if she had done it repeatedly. She thrust a long pick into the hole in the center of the door knob, turned the knob, and opened the door. Tom escorted the still unsmiling young woman through their room. He unbolted the door I so inconveniently had secured, and let her out onto our private stairway. She was joined by a flurry of maids retreating from my room after final giggles of sympathy and relief across the railings for Carli and me.

Tom returned with refreshments. We settled securely on the balcony, bolt extending on the door to prevent another accidental closing. A gentle wind rattled palm trees as light dimmed across the quiet harbor.

Wednesday, 20 March

We left Parguera. As the road stretched straight on the low coastal plain, I silently hoped that at least part of our drive to our next parador at Jayuya would take us into the mountains. That was before I found that the drive designed by our indefatigable driver would take us miles inland from the coast winding through steep, forested mountains for the next five hours.

We joined the Ruta Panorámica, passing one tiny country village after another, some neat, some shabby. The government wisely had resisted posting “S-Curve” signs. The road consisted of nothing else.

Steep hillsides, so straight up and down that they appeared impossible to climb, were planted with coffee shaded by taller banana trees.

TOM: (*musings*) I wonder how they harvest the coffee?

CARLI: That’s easy—they call Juan Valdez and his donkey.

Carli remarked that, considering the abundance of plantain in Puerto Rican cuisine, the trees we identified as banana easily might be their hardier cousin. Tall stands of feathery bamboo reminded Carli and Tom of their former graceful growing screen across the back of their yard. They destroyed it reluctantly under threat of suit by the neighbor whose adjacent yard was beset by the unwanted invasion of one sprouting clump of bamboo after another.

We entered one of the many national forests. Rock outcroppings, rare in Puerto Rico’s heavily wooded mountains, gave contrast to the rich greens. A bright yellow fire hydrant appeared improbably at the side of the road in the middle of the forest.

We stopped at an isolated stone observation tower, the morning’s obligatory climb. One side presented a vista of ridge after mountain ridge disappearing into the far mist, while the other side showed an extensive valley stretching to the Caribbean sea.

We reached a blockade and turned onto the almost impassable detour. Tom inched along as the rutted road narrowed and almost disappeared.

TOM: This is getting more scenic every mile.

Fortunately, the diversion was short. We rejoined the Ruta Panorámica.

Most of the drive was in deep shadow. Mountains were steep and sudden, separated by deep-V valleys. Frequent tall trees with large scarlet blooms were welcome spots of color against the varied greens. Blooming mango trees looked like rust stains in the distance. Tiny white flowers blossomed on coffee bushes. An unfamiliar tree aflame with orange flowers stood in occasional isolation against a hill. Impatiens in rich shades of pink grew in profusion along roadsides and climbed up steep verges to disappear among the rocks and trees.

On the map, the line of the Ruta Panorámica so far was a narrow snake with easy curves. It became, instead, a squiggle. After the twisted road we had followed, we could not believe the map was telling the truth.

It was. The car was into a new curve before our innards could recenter themselves from the last one. Even the infrequent open stretches that should have been straight had two or three curves in quick succession. We reached the end of the squiggly line on the map. Tom asked Carli what we could expect ahead. Just as she finished replying that it looked straight on the map, we turned onto a new section of the Ruta with its own series of sharp curves.



Outside Jayuya we took the wrong fork in the road. A normal part of travel. Tom reversed and turned into the entrance of the Parador Hacienda Gripiñas, before 5:00 o'clock, as Carli had predicted.

The parador was near the top of a mountain, surrounded by tall trees. It was a pleasant old hacienda on a former coffee finca,^{*} wooden, Colonial style, surrounded by beautiful informal gardens. Bentwood rockers invited guests to linger in the lounge, while newer wooden rockers formed seating areas on the long, wide veranda.

* *Finca* is Spanish for *plantation*.

The first sound we heard was the clear “co-QUI” of the famous Puerto Rican frogs. We later learned the truth of their reputation for making an almost-deafening chorus at night in the mountains.

We were led down wide stone steps, through a patio with a planter whose properly named enormous *Monstera* climbed through a hole in the ceiling to leaf luxuriantly in a side area of the dining room above.

Doors in our bedrooms opened onto what eventually will be a veranda, with gardens beyond them. My room had the most space because of a double, instead of queen-size, bed, so we gathered there for Happy Hour. Again the parador was a *Mesón Gastronómico*. Again our dinner was superb.

Thursday, 21 March

We were off early on twisting mountain roads through a peopled area of pastel houses to the Taino ceremonial center. Taino Indians were an Arawak people who inhabited the area about 1,000 years ago.

Traffic was rapid, despite the curving roads. We drove with a sense that danger lay dead ahead. Cars and vans pushed to get advantage, though large trucks honked politely in warning on curves. Carli remarked, “Now I see the advantage of having a crucifix or religious statue hanging from the rear view mirror.”

Like all the parks in Puerto Rico, this one was spacious, handsomely planted, manicured, with attractive, clean public buildings. We followed a neat walkway to a large grassy park set with widely spaced enormous trees. The Taino ball courts, of which there were several of varying size, were large sandy rectangles outlined with rocks—some low, some upright slabs with faint traces of Taino drawings that had withstood centuries of weather.

We wandered from ball court to ball court, enjoying the pleasant surroundings. On the ground beneath an unfamiliar tree Carli found a strange seed pod, split open to show a line of discs inside like a roll of Life Savers.

We left the Taino Center and continued our explorations of the area. Midday we pulled off the road at a little repair shop / car wash / bar for a *Coco Rico*. The genial owner insisted that we sit at his domino table under an awning. The man who was there hoping for players to join him cheerfully moved to the bar while we enjoyed our drinks. Our simple hill-top retreat refreshed us with a brisk breeze and view across a valley to the mountains beyond.



We returned to Jayuya by a route along a lake. The wide, easy highway was a welcome antidote to the sharply twisting road we had ventured out on, uncomfortably soon after our large breakfasts.

Suddenly our lovely road ended, with a view of the other side of the karst country we had driven through a few days earlier. We turned back onto the old road lower in the valley. Three rivers merged at a dam. We followed a line of rivers and lakes. Polite truck drivers pulled over to let us pass on narrow, frustrating roads.

Mountains in Puerto Rico were nearly vertical, sharp angles softened by dense foliage. To me, they were almost cozy in contrast to the massive, forbidding mountains of Spain. In places, they resembled the Appalachians.

From a combination of conversation and road signs, I could see the looping route we were taking back to Jayuya. I thought of remarking that the only way we ever could get from Point A to Point B by the most direct route would be to confiscate the highlighter Carli used so happily each evening to trace the day's travels. I refrained from comment because I was afraid Carli and Tom would misunderstand and think I was tired of driving. Actually, I gloried in every winding mile through the mountains.



Throughout our travels, the homes we passed were an unending pleasure because of the immense variety in their decoration. Homes in the interior tended to be less eclectically painted than those near the coast.

The basic Puerto Rican house was low and boxy with a flat roof and an open-walled or railed veranda across the front. Most were painted a basic white, off-white, or cream. Fascia boards around the roof, often the inner wall of the veranda, and almost always trim on the veranda were a contrasting color. There was imaginative variety in the application of trim color. Most of the homes were charming combinations; some were questionable choices, but amusing; some were unbelievable.

The most popular and attractive combinations were cream with tile-red, soft-pumpkin, or tangerine trim.

Almost as frequent were homes of pink with blue trim, blue with pink trim, combinations of pink and aqua, pink and green, or pink and purple.

One house had twisted columns on the veranda. A line of pink paint curling up the groove echoed the pink around the roof. It was a delightful candy cane of a home.

Another charming combination was white trimmed with my mother's 1930's favorite, "Ashes Of Roses."

A few white houses were trimmed with a mauve that looked surprisingly suitable under the hot Puerto Rican sun.

Two tones of the same color often—but definitely not always—were handsome, depending on the colors and shades selected.

Some homes were more eccentric: two shades of lavender trimmed with green and peach; diagonal blocks of lime-green and purple.

Not far from the turnoff onto the private road up to the Hacienda Gripiñas was a large building with huge squares of alternating pink and lavender, topped by a broad band of tile-red.



At Happy Hour in my room, Tom glanced out the window, stared for a moment, then announced, "There's a rooster in that tree!"

We all rushed to the open door. Tom was right. High in a clump of bamboo, strutted a black rooster with majestic red comb. It couldn't happen. He was some twenty feet from the ground. Tom pointed out that the bamboo grew down the side of the hill so that the rooster was not quite that far from adjacent perches. Still, it was a strange sight.

Almost immediately, Carli pointed out a hen on a branch of a tree slightly lower. A second rooster made his careful way out the same branch, to the obvious disapproval of the hen. There was a cacophony of clucking. The top rooster scolded the others for invading his kingdom. The hen told the second rooster, "*No*," in shrill detail. And the second rooster defied them both. The foliage fluttered in the great storm of clucking, crowing, and carrying on, verbal and physical.



As we left the dining room that night after another excellent dinner, we hear a loud "Co-QUI" from the area of a small grassy patio off the wide covered walkway outside the dining room. Carli moved forward cautiously in a Groucho Marx crouch, trying to locate the frog. As she reached the patio path, the croaking ceased. Carli retreated. The clear call of "coquí" resumed. All three of us tried to pinpoint its location. We decided the little frog either was in one of the planters on the wall alongside the stairway, or was near the base of the wall in the grass of the patio.

Two young men, newly-arrived guests, emerged from the dining room. They eyed our activities warily. The croaking stopped as they approached our target area. I explained that we were looking for a frog. This did not appear to reassure them. Carli described the famous Puerto Rican coquí and they joined us with bridled enthusiasm, but broad grins.

A young Puerto Rican appeared and joined our conversation. I asked him what size the coquí was. He measured out something between five- and seven-eighths of an inch and added, discouragingly, that there were some 200 varieties of coquí in the island. The young man said he was supervising installation of fiber-optic telephone lines to a large area,

principally to provide areas never served by telephones before or to upgrade service to area businesses.

We finally agreed that our coquí was in one of the planters, left him still unseen, and retired to our bedrooms to listen to the repetitious calls of his friends-and-family as we fell asleep.

Friday, 22 March

We checked out of the Hacienda Gripiñas and made our circuitous, scenic way to the old city of Ponce, on the southern coast. This solved one of my problems. I was familiar with Ponce from our shipping schedules. However, I had a difficult time pronouncing the name of the town we just had left: Jayuya. After frustrating early attempts, I learned that if I could manage to get the first vowel right, the rest was easy. In the meantime, what should have been *Ha-YOO-ya* more often came out as *Hoo-YA-you* or *Hoo-YOO-yoo*.

Our drive took us past a steep waterfall with blankets of pink impatiens stretching far up on either side. Only occasionally did we catch glimpses of rock as we drove through the mountains. One such exception was a waterfall where the stream emerged from between two huge rock outcrops to plunge vertically for perhaps fifty feet.

We returned to the Ruta Panorámica and quickly were in another national forest. We followed comfortable curves along a ridge overlooking a broad valley to the Caribbean. Rarely did we see pine trees amid the dense tropical forest. The broad cuts where the road intruded into mountains were stabilized by heavy growths of shrubbery. We had alternating glimpses of the range of the Cordillera, stretching higher and higher into the distance endlessly away, and on the other side, of the sea beyond broad valleys.

Tom remarked that we should tell the government that the tourist bureau does a fantastic job, but that they need to produce a decent beer. Our experience was the watery light beer the Galería stocked and the famous “India” on the west coast, which we found virtually undrinkable.

Dogs in Puerto Rico tended to be small and nondescript. Roosters, on the other hand, were magnificent and omnipresent. You couldn't avoid them. We found them strutting in places almost as strange as the trees outside our bedrooms in Jayuya.



Ponce is a major seaport, with mountains just behind it. We stayed in the downtown Hotel Meliá, just across from the ornate old black-and-red fire station.

I embarrassed Carli. She and I went in to register while Tom circled the block. That done, we went outside to signal him to stop to unload baggage. I saw a parking place close to the hotel door. I planted myself in the middle of it and waved off cars whose drivers had the temerity to attempt to utilize the space. Carli's face assumed the what-will-that-woman-do-next look that I remembered from her early years. With surprising tact she extracted me from my self-designated task, indicated that the bell man was moving stanchions to open a parking area directly in front of the door, and nodded in satisfaction as Tom slid the car smoothly into position. I gathered the remnants of my dignity around me as a cloak and withdrew, head high, into the hotel.

A sign at the reception desk stated, "For additional information, befriend our desk executives who will enlighten you of our many attractions."

Carli's comment: "Mom's the one to befriend the desk executives."



After settling in, we walked over to the fire station. One of the two gleaming old fire trucks appeared to date from the 1920's. Paint and brass fittings gleamed. Seats were highly polished wood, upholstered with cracked leather. Wooden ladders bracketed on each side of the engine were no longer than my aluminum extension ladder at home. We climbed up to the balcony and visited the neat little museum with its display of fire memorabilia and touching tributes to the men of the service.

By the greatest of good fortune, the Feria de Artesanías* opened that day in the plaza across from the hotel. The grounds were decorated. Row after row of kiosks displayed handmade jewelry, leather goods, small statues of the Three Wise Men, decorated gourds, T-shirts with Taino designs, small ceramic ticky-tacky. We spent two hours seeing everything. We paused for a glass of fresh orange juice and shared a large square of coconut candy of minor quality. Carli and I agreed that Belizean cutubrute** was far superior. We bought a few little things for gifts, our dismay over the dearth of native crafts in Puerto Rico assuaged.

We walked to a nearby German restaurant recommended by the guide books. Service was slow because each meal was cooked as a special order. It was not our finest dinner of the trip, but the owner's wife had charm enough to offset our disappointment.

On our way back to the hotel, we stopped at the parking area of the "trolleys" that carried sightseeing passengers up the mountainside behind the city. Drivers were talking together after parking for the night. Tom asked one of the drivers the schedule for the next day. He misunderstood Tom's question, corralled a second driver, and was ready to take the three of us up to the castle at a time when all we wanted to do was go to bed. We thanked him warmly and returned to the Meliá.

Saturday, 23 March

We had breakfast in the charming rooftop terrace of the Hotel Meliá, with a view over all of Ponce.

By 9:00 o'clock, we were the sole passengers in the "trolley" going up past lovely old homes to the great Cross and Castle on the mountain above the city. The appealing vehicles used for the trip are a fleet of buses designed inside and out to resemble turn-of-the-century street cars—red and black-green paint with gold trim, traditional seats of highly polished wooden slats in black iron frames, arched windows with frosted glass

* *Feria de Artesanías* is Spanish for *Craft Fair*.

** *Cutubrute* is a coconut candy made in Belize.

designs, and a curving wooden overhead inset with small oblong windows.

We arrived at the cross at 9:30 only to find that it opened to visitors at 10:00 on weekends. We descended the long stairway to the castle below. It, too, still was closed. We wandered up and down its lovely terraces, steps, and gardens. At 10:00, we were allowed into the gift shop. There we were told that the first tour would be at 10:30. We had waited long enough. We climbed the seventy-some steps back up to the cross and took the brief tour up into the cross-arms. Our enthusiastic young guide gave us a brief history of Ponce and of the monument itself as we looked out over the city. As we left, our friendly trolley man drove past the cross to park near the castle. We had lost all interest in visiting the mansion built in the 30's. We raced down to meet him and returned to town.



On our return, we walked to the other side of the plaza to wait under a sign saying “Chu-Chu Tren de Ponce – Parada.”* The delightful bright red two-car open train is pulled by what appears to be an old-fashioned steam engine. We leaned against El Alcaldía,** watching the resuming artisans’ fair across the street in the plaza.

Finally the Chu-Chu arrived and we climbed aboard. It was a pleasant 30-minute trip out to the beach. The handsome boardwalk along the harbor was shaded by trees set in planters along its center, and lined by identical refreshment stands. We climbed the observation tower (76 steps), but found nothing much else to do. We were relieved when it was time to return to the Chu-Chu.

A detour on the trip home took us to a beautiful public recreation park. We stopped for about fifteen minutes. Cages held peacocks, which were utterly disinterested in demonstrating their feathered glory. A hen and rooster wandered free. A delightful little boy, probably around three years

* *Parada* is Spanish for *stop*.

** *El Alcaldía* is Spanish for *City Hall*.

old, ran up to Carli begging her to come see the ducklings in one of the cages.



Back in Ponce, we could not resist the magnet's pull of the now-bustling Feria. Both Tom and I "needed" things we had seen but not bought the day before. Carli led the way to an ice cream stand conveniently close to our hotel. We sat on hard benches and enjoyed the deliciously flavored, inferior-quality frozen sweet.

Tom worried that the way the car was blocked in at the parking lot near the hotel, he would not be able to extract it when we wanted to leave the next morning. The garrulous, but almost unintelligible, attendant reassured him that he had keys and could move any blocking vehicle. He helped Tom extract the red Ford, now dull with dirt rather than gleaming as it had been at the start of our travels.

We drove to the beautiful modern Museum of Art, designed by Edwin Durell Stone. In the entry, double staircases swept in wide curves to the second floor, where a simple railing outlined a broad circular balcony above the entrance hall. Below were a pool and statues.

The museum had fine representations of most of the major schools of art, a few respectable paintings by masters, and a striking selection of works by Puerto Rican and Caribbean artists. We were highly impressed by the design of the building, which eased the flow of traffic from room to room.

We returned to the Meliá to change for dinner, unnecessarily as it turned out. We drove to a recommended fish house a couple of miles outside Ponce. The restaurant was a charmingly informal building, where we sat on a covered veranda with the light waves of the Caribbean sea breaking on the coral just below us. We watched the sunset turn swirls of cirrus bright pink against a still-blue sky. Our dinners were more delicious than we had any reason to expect.

Sunday, 24 March

After leaving the Hotel Meliá, we drove to the Tibes Indian Ceremonial Center by way of an uncharted cul-de-sac in a cluttered little neighborhood. Tom was not happy at the navigational error, but I was charmed at seeing an unexpected part of Ponce.

The Center, on the edge of the city, had an excellent small museum. We began our tour there, studying the three groups of early inhabitants of Puerto Rico. A short film described the accidental discovery of the ruins following a flood some years ago.

A personable young guide led us through beautifully groomed grounds. He described the various trees and their medicinal uses. We inspected a reconstruction of a Taino village, the circular houses made of elephant grass with peaked thatched roofs. The oldest of the Taino ball courts was edged by rocks that had been carbon-dated as 1,400 years old.

The Ceremonial court was almost square, rather than rectangular like the ball courts (120' x 130'). It was outlined by large rocks, three deep and about six wide at the top. Larger rocks formed seats for chiefs. Our guide told us that during the area-wide celebration of discovery of The New World (Columbus Day in the U.S.), Puerto Rico invited Indian chiefs from all over North, South, and Central America to meet to discuss matters of common interest and, perhaps, to form an organization that could make the voice of Indians heard in international affairs.



In view of the time and our desire to reach The Galería by mid-afternoon, we took the main highway back to San Juan. The most picturesque place we could find for a refresco was a Burger King. I never had been in one of these chain fast-food establishments.

Carli gave our order, but I paid for it. Having seen no human communication among employees subsequently, I quietly asked Carli if anyone knew what we had ordered. Carli and Tom pointed out that the cashier's machine, which I took for an ordinary cash register, was a

computer with a key for each item on the menu. The order was displayed on a nearby monitor. I felt like Rip Van Winkle.

We indulged ourselves with milk shakes. Carli seemed quite happy with hers. I found mine icy instead of smooth and rich, as I remembered milk shakes' being in the distant past when I last had one.

Entertainment was provided by employees' quickly decorating the table next to us for a birthday party. They installed a great, two-tier cake inscribed in orange frosting "Feliz Cumpleaños, Roberto."^{*} We never saw Roberto or his little friends, but enjoyed the increasingly elaborate preparations for his party.

About half-way back to San Juan, we turned off the highway to make a small loop, our last brief fling on the Ruta Panorámica. We twisted up into the mountains, looked hundreds of feet down into narrow valleys, and again appreciated the dense vegetation broken by spots of color on either side.

Near the end of our loop, we found ourselves immobilized in the traffic of a Feria at a town so small it was not even shown on the map. It was virtually impassable. With incredible patience, calm, and skill, Tom threaded the car among the mass of vehicles and made his escape.



Back in Old San Juan, we parked at The Galería. Chista greeted us like old friends. In line with its casual manner, the new electric machine to impress credit cards did not work. We were told we could worry about checking in next morning when we checked out.

I was booked back into my original room, Secret B. Carli and Tom's balcony suite was occupied, so they were put in the Caracol Suite,^{**} which they had expected to be in on their first stay.

* *Feliz Cumpleaños* is Spanish for *Happy Birthday*.

** *Caracol* is Spanish for *snail* and *escalera de caracol* means *spiral staircase*.

We were led down a hall, up a flight of tiled stairs, around a corner, up a flight of wooden stairs with dark, turned, wooden balustrade, and into a small room. There an iron spiral stairway, the longest and tightest spiral I ever had seen, led to a pleasantly decorated entry on the floor above.

I *hate* spiral stairways. Fortunately, my abundant fear of them results in such careful placement of feet and tight grip of railings that I negotiate them in utter safety.

Chista opened the door to Carli and Tom's suite. We went up an unexpected step on the threshold and were in a small room occupied by an immense bed with a large low table placed at its foot. The bedroom opened on a charming living room. Glass doors along one side led to a small dry pool with stone wall behind it. On the other side of the living room, a wide doorway gave access to a covered rooftop terrace with patio furniture and beyond it, an open deck with lounge chairs.

Carli immediately walked out alongside a half-height wall and surprised the neighbors from the next room as they were sunbathing. She retreated apologetically.

Chista suddenly suggested that, if we liked, I could have the third room opening off the entry at the same price as Secret B. I hesitated momentarily, thinking of the spiral staircase and of the charm of my first room. However, the pleasure and convenience of being across the entry from Carli and Tom outweighed other considerations—assuming I could avoid taking a header down the chute walking from my room to theirs.

Moving luggage from the car to our aerie was a major project. Tom absolutely forbade me to carry even one of the lightest pieces.

TOM: We've had a good trip so far and we're not taking a chance of spoiling it now.

I heard a particular note in his voice I never had heard before, so ceased my protests abruptly.

How Tom manhandled our heavy luggage up the narrow spiral stairs, I'll never know, but bag after bag, he managed.



Kate, Carli, and Tom, in the Galería's Caracol Suite, 1996

We did a minimum of settling, then gathered on their open terrace for a last-chance photo session.



We had planned to drive into Condado to a highly recommended restaurant. However, Chista suggested a restaurant in Old San Juan that seemed to fit our desire for someplace special for the last night of our trip.

We changed and walked down the hill with much laughter about forcing me to climb the endless hill back to The Galería one last time.

La Marisol was perfect. The restaurant opened onto a small court off Cristo Street. The Maître d' seemed surprised to see us arrive 15 minutes before our reservation and suggested that we wait at one of the wrought-iron tables outside with an aperitif.

After a short time he returned to say, "Please follow me," as he deftly picked up our drinks and led us into the restaurant. We were attended by

more polished waiters for that one meal than we had seen on the entire trip. (Literary license)

The restaurant was modest in size, traditional / elegant in style. Food was delicious and elegantly presented. Two waiters stood by to lift the silver domes of our entrées at the same moment, displaying, as if to a roll of drums, Tom's halibut, Carli's rack of lamb, and my venison.

Desserts were hard to choose. Everything sounded luscious. Tom had chewy brownie-like cake with ice cream. Carli selected almond cheese cake. I could not resist Crème Brûlée. Carli's and my plates were decorated with swirls of custard and raspberry sauce, berries, and fruit.

We struggled back up the hill to The Galería and up all the steps, straight and curving, to our bedrooms. We said goodnight in the pretty little entry and retired to our own chambers.

Monday, 25 March

I was up early for my private cup of coffee and final packing. By the time Carli and Tom knocked on my door, they already had taken some of their luggage down to the car. Both were smiling broadly. As soon as we reached privacy on the floor below, Tom insisted on Carli's confessing all.

When Carli returned to their floor after taking a bag down to the car, she opened the door and, to her surprise, found herself in a dark room. A woman's voice called out sleepily, "Who's there?"

Carli had intruded on our neighbors *again*. She apologized quickly as she made an embarrassed withdrawal.

After that, it was a final breakfast in our favorite patio and a short drive to the airport. Goodbyes were fervent but quick, as I left to check in and Carli and Tom drove off to turn in our trusty red Taurus.

Air France and Japan Airlines

May 1996

I had a delightful four days in Guatemala for the annual Air France Agents' Meeting. At the end of that conference, I flew on to Mexico City to spend a day at the regional offices of Japan Airlines to investigate becoming their agent for Belize.

Air France Agent's Meeting

My departure was precipitous. Two days before my flight to Guatemala, I was told that I must leave the next day and spend the night in Guatemala because my TACA flight arrived too late for the bus taking the conferees to Lago Atitlán.

The Immigration officer in Guatemala City was delighted to be the first to stamp my new passport. Still, he sent me back to another office to get a tourist card for US\$5 before he would enter me into the country.

According to my official airlines manual, U.S. Citizens need only a valid passport, not a visa or tourist card. So much for that. It's a good source of painless revenue for Guatemala.

Javier from the Guatemala office of Air France met me and delivered me to the Princess Hotel. It is a delightful small hotel just off La Reforma on the edge of the Zona Rosa tourist district.

I looked forward to most of the next day by myself, either to shop for gifts or to lounge in my room. At 9:30 AM, Rosario from the Honduras Air France office called to say that she was in the lobby and to ask if she might bring her luggage to my room for safety. Rosario has been a special friend since we bunked together, under unspoken protest, the first night of the Costa Rico conference a couple of years ago when the hotel was short

a room.* Our only problem is that Rosario speaks no English and my Spanish is not fluent.

Rosario arrived exhausted, so we stretched out on my two beds and caught up with each other in reasonably comfortable conversation. An hour later, another call. The mother-daughter managers of the Nicaraguan Air France arrived to take advantage of the security of my hotel room. They, too, spoke no English.

We had a pleasant lunch together, then all retired to my small room to wait for time to go back to the airport to meet the Air France bus to Lago Atitlán. I knew Rosario was tired so suggested she stretch out on one of the beds and take a nap. We ended with four females stretched out on two double beds. The three slept; I continued with the excellent book I had planned to spend the entire day reading.



The contingent from Mexico arrived on flights thirty minutes apart. We waited. Finally boarding the bus, I took the vacant front seat on the left with its broad view straight ahead over the bus driver's shoulder as well as from the window alongside me. Gabriela Anaya, the delightful young woman from the Mexico City office, with whom I have constant fax contact about reservations and fares, joined me.

The drive up into the mountains to Lago Atitlán was more thrilling than scenic. As we set out, guard vehicles fell into place, one behind, one in front of the bus. They were small pick-ups with two men inside and two guards with automatic weapons perched in the back. I was, by no means, the only one slightly unnerved by this verification of danger on Guatemalan highways. For some reason I never understood, the driver pulled off the road periodically and let the guard trucks swap stations.

The first part of the trip was beautiful. As dusk came, so did the clouds. We wound our way up into the mountains, and the clouds came down to

* "Agents' Meeting in Costa Rica" on page 241 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

meet us. Soon nothing was visible but the white lines scoring the center and outer limits of the highway. The bus slowed to a speed of about one kilometer per hour. When thicker cloud obscured all but fleeting glimpses of the life-saving white lines on center and outer limits of the highway, the driver slowed to one inch per hour. Fortunately, these moments were few. Dips into valleys brought brief relief.

I considered moving to the back of the bus, where I would be free of my self-assumed obligation to drive the bus from behind the driver's back. Meanwhile, my colleagues were enjoying the drinks and sandwiches thoughtfully provided for the trip. Before I could make a decision, we were in Sololá and turned toward the lake. Our driver received enthusiastic applause as we emerged from the fog and he maneuvered his long vehicle through turns that threatened to take corner buildings with us.

We twisted our way down through the little village of Panajachel to our pleasant hotel. My balcony overlooked a broad terrace and the swimming pool. I was disappointed not to see the lake. Next morning when I opened the curtains, I gasped at the glorious view beyond the hotel grounds that I had been unable to see in the dark. Across Lago Atitlán stood a picture-perfect volcano, its cone touched by clouds golden in the early light. To each side were mountains and more volcanoes. I hastily made my coffee and returned to my balcony, drinking in the panorama as I sipped the hot beverage.



What do you say about a sales meeting? First, these always are conducted in Spanish. I follow fairly easily because I know the subject matter. By tradition I am seated next to the agent from Panama, Tom Kenna, one of my favorite young friends. He explains anything I miss.

Again, there was spontaneous applause when the bar graph of Belize sales went up on the screen. For the second year in a row, we doubled our sales.

The first day's meeting ended in time for a 2 o'clock lunch buffet. We dashed to our rooms to change into casual clothes and regathered to board a large two-deck boat for a tour of Lago Atitlán. Several of us were worried about getting back to the hotel in time to change for the cocktail party scheduled at the home of the Guatemalan agent. No one had bothered to explain that the boat ride would end at Pepe's house for the party, so slacks and sweaters were the order of the day.

Afternoons at Atitlán always were dark and threatening, though it did not rain. The clouds were settling down over the mountains as we passed them in the boat, but the view still was gorgeous. Two guitarists played and sang as we cruised. Suddenly, a splendid tenor voice burst forth accompanying them. Our finance manager, Raúl Soto, is a serious voice student. Judging by the arias he sang, he could have a second career if he wanted one.



The boat pulled up at Pepe's dock. A sheer, jagged rock wall rose some fifty feet above us on a point of land jutting into the lake. Gray stone steps carved irregularly into the rock led us in an unsteady, winding way up and up and up to the broad terrace of a spectacular weekend home. I was reminded of the handsome lodge on the rim of Ngorongoro.*

The house is built around and amid the rocks. A massive outcrop forms the fireplace and centerpiece of the large living room. To one side, stone steps lead upstairs alongside a rough rock wall with plants growing from crevices. At the head of the stairs, a huge tree twists out of the rock, leaves out into the passageway, and disappears through the roof.

One of Pepe's three delightful almost-grown children led me to a bedroom to leave my coat. To my surprise, the long room with its rock wall at one end held five beds. Later when Irena, Pepe's beautiful wife, led me on a tour of the house, I found a similar room above it on the second floor. When I questioned her about the dormitories, she laughed

* "Africa with Carli & Tom" on page 107 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

that their children liked to invite friends to spend weekends with them. The “cottage” was approximately three times the size of my house.

Every hallway ended in large glass doors leading out to a small rock garden or to stone steps to another level. The promontory itself, seen from the wide veranda across the front of the house, was a two-level lawn contained by hedges and set here and there with rocks from under which wild flowers sprouted.

The party was lavish but relaxed. Near the end, a sing-along developed with the guitarists playing well known Spanish songs and Raúl leading the group with his magnificent voice.

The moment I dreaded arrived. We had to go back down those tricky, steep rock steps in the dark. The lights along the way were too few and incapable of lighting the stairs adequately. Fortunately, “My Protector” Tom took me in hand. He stood on the step below me, put one hand behind his back and commanded that I grasp it while my other hand rested on his shoulder. Step by slow step, we made our way down. Pepe said next morning that he had told Irena that he was sure Tom was going to kill me because he had enjoyed the flow of drinks with notable gusto. The thought crossed my mind, too, but Tom was perfectly steady throughout the scary descent.



Things ran very late the second day of the conference. Half of the meetings with the individual agents had to be postponed until after lunch. I had time to dash out for some brief shopping before my own session, the last of the day.

I returned to my room, tired from two days of Spanish, and brewed a cup of coffee. Without thinking, I took off my suit and hung it in the closet. I considered putting on my robe, but realized that my balcony was very exposed. Instead, I pulled a soft multicolor skirt on over my blouse, added a dollop of revivifying Scotch to my steaming coffee, and settled myself on my balcony looking out over the mountains and lake.

Moments later, I heard my name called. Looking upward, I found several of my young friends grinning down at me from the rooftop terrace above me. Tom commented on how glamorous I looked. We chatted for a few moments, while I thanked my stars at having dressed appropriately.

As I sat there, the mountains receded, one behind the other, in increasingly grayed deep greens. It was impossible to tell whether the faint shapes on the far side of the lake were low clouds or remembered volcanoes.



At the end of our 2-1/2 day conference, everyone agreed it was the best meeting ever. We enjoyed having the Mexican agents invited along with the Central American agents for the first time. The hotel was lovely; food and service, exceptional. We all were sorry to hear that our regional director of the past four years is being transferred to Spain.



The final morning about half of the delegates returned to their countries, and the rest of us went on to Antigua for a last night. The bus ride out of the mountains was glorious in bright sunshine. We had at least thirty minutes of one spectacular view of the lake after another as we wound up the mountains surrounding it.

We drove through typical small mountain towns where dirt roads descended sharply from brick-paved main streets. Low buildings had stained tile or rusting galvanized roofs. In the higher elevations, each little adobe house had its small neat plot of corn alongside it. A village church even had a corn field for its front yard. In a cemetery on a hill across a valley, the white of the crypts was relieved by surprising large splashes of blue and green and aqua.

Terraces as narrow as steps rose steeply up mountainsides. New-growth woods were small or large patches through the hills where lumbering or milpa* farming had destroyed forests through the centuries.

We passed a steady succession of women with babies on their backs and toddlers in tow, all dressed in traditional multicolor fabrics that the women probably had woven themselves at home. Indians walked on the narrow paths alongside the highway, bowed down with heavy loads, or rested, displaying handcrafts in the futile hope that a passing car of tourists would stop to buy.

In Guatemala, unlike Puerto Rico, the varied greens were unbroken by flowering trees. The only color was the sudden lavish magenta of bougainvillea in an occasional tiny walled yard.

The Hotel Santo Domingo in Antigua is a converted former monastery. The well traveled Guatemalan Air France agent, Pepe, told me he considered it one of the most attractive hotels in the world. It is a great, sprawling maze of courts, passageways, patios, grottoes. At 5:00 PM, small courtesy offerings of coffee and cookies appeared in nooks at the ends of corridors. At night, long lines of candles outlined stone passageways.

Our group sought out what were said to be the finest restaurants for lunch and dinner. I am willing to believe we were successful.

Discussions with Japan Airlines

Next morning, I had to leave for Mexico City, while the rest of the group took a tour to Chichicastenango to see the market and the pagan / Christian church services. I was sorry to miss the tour, but ready to be alone and to shift gears from French to Japanese.

On the Monday morning, I was at Japan Airlines just before my designated hour of 9:00 AM. Manuel Hernández, who had been in Belize for two days the week before, met me. The general manager, Mr. Shimizu,

* A *milpa* is a cultivated field, usually growing a variety of vegetables.

was gracious and easy to talk with. We had perhaps fifteen minutes together so that he could look me over. From then on, it was a succession of delightful people who were warmly welcoming as they explained the Japan Airlines system for accounts, reservations, ticketing, etc.

Manuel took me to a charming nearby Japanese restaurant for lunch. When I asked him to order for me, he suggested four different things for us to share. I don't know what they were, but hope I can find them again. Although I asked for a fork in case I needed to revert to Occidental type, I found I could manage quite adequately with my chopsticks. Manuel was delighted.

Manuel insisted on walking me back to my hotel at the end of a long, stimulating day. He invited me to have dinner with him, but accepted my regretful explanation that I had a long week and a strenuous day and thought it was time to retire to my hotel room.

The wheels are turning in their methodical Japanese way to have us appointed as General Sales Agent for Japan Airlines. I can tell that working with the Japanese will be far different from working with the French. Still, this is a fine step forward for our little business, and I am excited about it.

What's that silly word "retire" that friends keep tossing at me?

Winter in Europe with Muriel & Don

February 1997

The trip developed out of an idle complaint, sometime in 1996, that I felt cheated at not getting to Paris that year. A fax came back from Muriel and Don Stauffer, suggesting that I join them in February 1997 on a business swing through north-continental Europe. Muriel and Don lived in Amsterdam and Brussels many years ago. They have visited that entire area many times and never will take a tour of the area as we have done in France and Spain. As this might be my only chance to see those countries, it took very little time for me to weigh the disadvantage of dismal winter weather against the pleasure of traveling with my friends. I accepted.

The intervening months were spent equipping me for cold weather. I built my wardrobe around a new red wool suit. When I could not find a navy wool skirt to wear with the blazer-style jacket, I let Becky (Bucher's youngest sister) talk me into making one. She helped me select suitable material. My recent acquisition of María's quite new "old" sewing machine made the project practical. My endless troubles adapting a pattern to suit me were forgotten when the resulting skirt met even María's high standards.

My sister, Mary, mailed red-and-navy scarves. Carli sent one padded envelope after the other of silk undergarments, heavy gloves, socks, even one of her own sweaters. At the last minute, spurred by reports of blizzards in Europe, I ordered the hat and boots Emilie and Jill had insisted I must have. I fancied a halo-of-fur, but realized that it needed to surround a 20-year-old face; I could not offer one. I settled for a classic brimmed hat "hand-crocheted in traditional design by Nepalese countrywomen." Selecting boots involved much faxing back and forth. The final choice was perfect: short brown "fur"-lined boots, surprisingly trim in style and divinely comfortable.



From fax sent January 9, 1997

I leave for Europe a month from today!

I find myself in a slight panic. If I don't have enough crucial things to do in a rush before I leave, I probably will invent some.

I have not spent as much time with my German language tapes as I intended. However, all of a sudden, essentials are falling into place. I am becoming comfortable with the odds and ends of phrases I will need. No possibility of my going further than that, because I don't have time and strength to learn a new language properly.

Saturday, 8 February

Alex and María drove me to the airport for what was an uneventful trip to Houston. My only worry was whether or not I would get a seat to Paris in Air France's new Club Class, *Espace 127*.

I arrived early for check-in. The Air France clerk was a tiny, smiling African-French young woman who not only instantly okayed my upgrade, but gave me the best seat in Club Class. The three hours until boarding were spent reading in comfortable semi-privacy in the Air France lounge. The middle-aged attendant, a charming woman from France's Atlantic coast, joined me periodically to visit about our two countries.

I boarded the plane and walked into the Espace 127 compartment, looking in vain for my seat. Laughing young men motioned me back toward a small area through which I had passed, exclaiming at my luck in being assigned to 1A.

I found myself in a separate compartment holding only a single set of seats. I was alone throughout the trip, except for the devoted ministrations of a handsome young steward who seemed dedicated to ensuring that I was comfortable and well fed.

It was the perfect time for me to be hidden from my co-passengers. My commotion of settling was an unintended comedy, which fortunately

amused only me. For a relatively well organized person and an experienced traveler, I managed to drop everything portable and mislay everything hideable. When I finally found myself pleasantly organized, I could not cope with my magic modern seat.

My guardian angel of a steward graciously showed me the button to turn on my light. It was the one with a little light bulb on it, too tiny for me to distinguish. He delicately extracted my ear-phones from their stowage shelf alongside my right hip and magically produced my private TV screen from its hidey-hole in the armrest.

I fought the language button through half of a delightful movie, thinking some fault in the mechanism caused it to switch back to French after I successfully adjusted it to English. Finally it registered with the dim-witted traveler that the lapses into French (with subtitles) coincided with events in the movie that made such lapses superb artistic touches. To my great relief, I had not reported the “malfunctioning” to my shepherd.

Dinner was the usual elegant Air France production, beautifully presented and delicious, with wines to match. My mistake was accepting portions from the cheese tray my favorite steward pressed on me, despite my demurrals. Just as I finished sampling the exceptional cheeses, which I appreciated without wanting, he returned with a magnificent concoction of a desert I would have adored, but no longer could manage.

I slept surprisingly well in my seat with its footrest. It adjusted to 127 degrees, allegedly the angle a weightless body assumes, giving the feeling of almost the horizontal. Certainly the sense of privacy of my isolated seat contributed to my relaxation. I awoke in time to walk back to the bar to get a glass of water. I read for a while. As usual, I failed to reset my watch upon enplaning. I thought the long night was only half over when breakfast appeared. Although the skies still were dark, it was morning in Paris.

Sunday, 9 February

French Immigration formalities are minimal for U.S. Citizens. My baggage arrived quickly. I made the questionable decision to take the Air France bus to Montparnasse to save taxi fare.

Paris was wearing its loveliest winter face. The sky was cloudless; the sun, bright; the temperature, 45 degrees. I stood in relative comfort for about twenty minutes before settling on the comfortable bus. We traveled along the (to me) unfamiliar north and east sides of the airport, then south past country less developed than I was used to on trips to and from Charles de Gaulle Airport. I enjoyed the bare-bones look of leafless Lombardy poplars during the moments between dozes when my tired eyes were able to focus on them.

We crossed the Seine and soon were enmeshed in double lines of traffic, stalled to allow the jogging passage of a straggling column of marathoners. Fifteen minutes later, the cacophony of horns from impatient drivers quieted as we all moved forward—for two blocks. At that point, we inexplicably were halted again. The runners, who simply had circled, emerged from the opposite direction. After another fifteen minutes of involuntarily watching their erratic progress, we moved smartly on to our destination.

I collected my two bags and looked about for one of the many taxis I was told would be waiting for me. None. I fastened the leash onto my wheeled weekender, picked up my garment bag, and lurched in a promising direction. Both bags obviously had gained weight during the transatlantic journey.

A half-block walk and a relatively short period of frantic signaling found me seated with relief in a taxi. It was a short drive to the Hôtel France Eiffel. From plane to hotel may have been inexpensive, but it took an unbelievable three hours.



I had selected the hotel from my Bonjour catalogue because of its location near the magnificent tower. The hotel was adequate, but the neighborhood was nondescript. My room was spartan, certainly not what I expected from a 3-star hotel. However, its amenities were pleasant—a minute, but recently remodeled, bathroom; cable TV with CNN (which I could get), BBC, and TNT (which I could not).

I unpacked and lay down to catch up on lost sleep. I remember 2:30 PM and thinking I should get up and go out exploring. I remember 3:30. Somehow the next time I looked at my travel clock it was 4:30, and I finally was ready to emerge from my cocoon.

I walked toward the Eiffel Tower, turned down to the avenue bordering the Seine, bought a couple of postcards, and decided I was tired. Air France had fed me so enthusiastically that one of the long sandwiches in a baguette displayed at one of the street kiosks looked better than dinner at one of the bistros I had passed. I returned to my room and enjoyed chicken, tomato, and lettuce on a long chewy roll as I watched CNN. I then showered and slept for ten hours.

Monday, 10 February

I had planned my trip to allow a day of business in Paris before rendezvousing with the Stauffers in Frankfurt.

My travel alarm failed to go off. Nevertheless, I had ample time to make coffee, dress, and go down to the continental breakfast buffet that was included with my room fee before leaving for my morning appointment at the office of Visit France, the travel agency of the Air France Groupe.

Just before the appointed hour of 10:00, I arrived by taxi at the Visit France office in Ivry-Sur-Seine, feeling chic in my new red wool suit. It always is fun to meet in person people one has known only by fax. Amusingly, it was only moments before they led me to a large wall map and apologetically asked me please to point out Belize. No one had a clue whence this foreign creature had come.

After relatively brief discussions the reservations manager, M. Ruffie (pronounced *Roof-ee-yea*), whisked me off into his metallic turquoise Mazda for a tour of selected hotels. Visit France has an extensive list of hotels of all categories, but I am reluctant to recommend one without having seen it. At each hotel, we were met by one or more enthusiastic managers eager to show me a selection of their rooms. We visited a wide range of hotels in several areas of Paris.

M. Ruffie was an energetic man in his 40's, Algerian by birth, but raised in Paris. He was touchingly in love with the city and made many detours to show me special sights. First was a pretty, private harbor on a branch of river that disappears underground for several miles, making a long covered waterway for small-boat traffic. He showed me the enormous new Pompadour Library; the new Les Halles, which used to house the famed Paris market; the Bourse, center of financial activity.



When M. Ruffie dropped me off at my hotel late in the afternoon, I pranced out to the bistro next door for an early dinner. A sign told me it opened at 7 PM. I walked on to the nicer brasserie at the far corner of the block. The young barman and I played games with language. He seated me before either of us realized it was the Dinner-at-Seven-and-Not-A-Moment-Earlier syndrome again. However, the young man seemed so utterly bereft at the misunderstanding that I decided to return at the indicated hour.

An hour and a half later, I walked around the corner and down the block in pouring rain. My young friend greeted me like visiting royalty and seated me in solitary splendor. No Parisian would consider eating at so uncivilized an hour. Dinner was a crisply roasted leg of duck with golden slices of new potato. I returned to the hotel for a welcome shower and ten hours of sound sleep.

Tuesday, 11 February

I was up at 4:30 and enplaned by 7:30. The flight to Frankfurt remained on the ground for another hour in the congestion caused by early-morning ground fog. It was 9:30 before I checked into the Scandic Crown Hotel, where I was to meet Muriel and Don.

The gentleman at the reception desk was frantic. It erroneously had been assumed from my fax requesting reservations that all three of us were Air France personnel. On that basis, they had offered the Stauffers a room at one-third the usual rate. I was visibly upset at the misunderstanding. I explained that none of the other hotels had misunderstood my requests and that they all had offered us discounts. The desk clerk seemed more shattered by my distress than he was by the error. He assured me that he believed it was an innocent mistake. He said he would be on the desk when we checked out and would honor the rate.

No porter was available. I struggled into the elevator with my luggage, tiptoed past the door behind which the Stauffers were sleeping, and continued down the third-floor hall. The housekeeper met me, exclaiming in German that I could not have room 315, to which I had the key. She ushered me across the hall to 316. I assumed I was to leave my luggage there until 315 was made up. This room seemed unfinished, too.

Gradually it registered that 316 was mine and that the lack of a bedspread was the German way. A puffy down comforter (called, I believe, a *duvet*) encased in a fresh sheeting cover was folded on the bed ready to shelter me through the night.



I returned to the lobby, traded room keys, and accepted directions from My Friend The Receptionist for a short walking tour of Frankfurt, along with a map to guide me. I walked about three blocks to the river, turned left, and strode briskly along it. Below the street level, a long park bordered the river for several blocks. Stark, lifeless trees, their upper limbs pruned to strange knobs, marched in military precision. Despite the

cold weather, an occasional black-overcoated man was seen huddled on one of the concrete bench looking out over the water.

The objective of my walk was a church. I watched my time carefully, wanting to be back in my hotel room when Muriel and Don called me for lunch. I barely reached the cathedral at the half-way point of my time allowance. I turned up away from the water and unexpectedly found myself in a Platz* surrounded by elaborate old houses and filled with the stalls and rides of a fair. It was the pre-Lenten holiday of Faschtung (probably misspelled).**

I wound through the area, enjoying the old and the new, the families and the excited children, until I reached a major street. My map showed that I could follow it back to our hotel. That was fine until the street divided and one branch curved, disappearing into the bowels of the earth. I retraced my steps to a point where I safely could cross the wide street.

A little uncertain now of my route, I stopped a pleasant-looking woman as she emerged from an arcade. I apologized in the best of my newly-acquired German and asked her where I was. She acknowledged my request, adding, “You might prefer that we speak English.” It was a surprise, disappointment, relief.

A block later, I spotted a taxi and cheated my way back to the Scandic.



I just had time to freshen up from my walk when Muriel knocked on the door. We went back to their room, where Don and I had another reunion. Don had to catch a 2:00 PM train to the suburbs for a business appointment, so we walked across the way to the *Hauptbahnhof* (main railway station) and went upstairs to its attractive restaurant.

We all ordered a light lunch of eggplant with egg and cheese in tomato sauce. We all expected something rich and bubbly. We all received slices

* *Platz* is German for *town square*.

** The correct spelling for the holiday is *Fasching*.

of eggplant coated in a sort of plaster that must have been the egg and cheese. The tomato sauce, shrinking in embarrassment, peeped out from underneath. I do not like eggplant. I ordered it on the basis of a glowing memory of its being prepared with the same ingredients at Carli's vegetarian restaurant in Palo Alto. To me, the only redeeming feature of this Germanic presentation was that the normally mushy eggplant was the consistence of a tough piece of fried round steak. Muriel and Don, on the other hand, considered this feature the final insult.



After lunch Don caught his train, while Muriel and I took the *U*nterbahn or "U" (subway) to Römer. Don recommended it as one of Frankfurt's few tourist features, an area of a few old buildings spared by World War II, and some Roman ruins. We emerged from the U to find ourselves in the same place I had discovered on my morning walk.

After wandering about and finding all museums and most shops closed for the holiday, Muriel suggested that we explore further by tram. We caught the next streetcar and proceeded through undistinguished streets. We were too busy talking to care. When we looked up and realized we were approaching an industrial park, we got off to take the next tram back. I fumbled with unfamiliar coins and did not get my ticket from the dispensing machine in time, so the tram departed without us. No matter. Another pulled up directly behind it. We boarded and settled back for the return ride.

The trolley swung around a corner. A winter-bare park appeared on our right. Substantial homes lined the left. We agreed that we unwittingly had switched to another line. Our surroundings were far more interesting this trip. Every time I exclaimed that the line finally had turned in the right direction, it swung away at the next corner. We had no idea where we were and could not reconcile any street names with our map.

I remarked, "We could always get off and take a taxi home."

“That’s the coward’s way,” replied Muriel, who regularly entertains herself in strange cities by riding trams or buses.

My increasing fear was that the line might take us so far that we couldn’t find our way back. I leaned across the aisle to speak politely in carefully enunciated German to a drab little woman, showing her the map. She waved it and me away, indicating that she wanted nothing to do with either of us.

Muriel was more successful in speaking to a brisk woman in jeans and a hooded jacket trimmed with ratty fur. She told us to get off at the next stop and take the U back to the hotel. Not only did Muriel’s new friend rush us off the tram, she strode along with us to the nearby Unterbahn entrance. As we passed the front of the tram, we realized it was nosed against a block, the end of the line.

Our new friend took us to a glass elevator. Down we went to the track level. Muriel announced that we didn’t have tickets. Our self-appointed guardian shooed us back to the elevator and up to the lobby floor, where Muriel bought tickets for us both. We returned to wait a very few minutes for our train, our friend still doggedly with us.

We three boarded the train together. The German woman’s English was broken but comprehensibly. Muriel finally understood that she was a nurse and had visited a sister in Florida many times. Our ride was short. We had boarded only one stop past our original one at Römer.

Muriel and I left the U at the exit close to our hotel. Since it was around 4 o’clock and we were half-frozen, we stopped in the bright little bar for a cup of tea. Remembering how impressed our friend had seemed at our staying at the Scandic, we wondered if perhaps she hoped we would ask her to join us for tea. We wished we had thought of it earlier, but wondered how on earth we ever would have gotten away from her if we had.



Don returned to the hotel soon after we did. We celebrated our reunion with Happy Hour in their room, then left to find a restaurant for dinner. It had begun raining, but the nearby restaurant did not look sufficiently appealing to lure us out of the weather. We crossed the street to the Hauptbahnhof and took the U to find a restaurant Muriel and Don remembered from an earlier trip.

They couldn't find it. Restaurants we passed were closed because of the holiday. Don finally led us into an elegant hotel. The "Pub" was closed, but we were directed to an invitingly informal restaurant. Muriel and Don looked around, then exclaimed that it was the one for which they were searching. We had elegantly prepared and presented light suppers, just as we all wanted.

Wednesday, 12 February

We were up early and off to the Hauptbahnhof. Our plan was to check our luggage through to Hamburg, take the train to Heidelberg, then after



Kate on train in Germany, 1997

sightseeing and lunch, ourselves take the train to Hamburg. Our luggage would be waiting for us there. It was a good plan. However, to everyone's dismay, German trains no longer accept unaccompanied luggage for security reasons.

Fortunately, luggage carts were easily available, if one were lucky enough to have a 1-Mark coin. Muriel and Don each had an easily handled medium-size suitcase with large wheels and a retractable handle. I still was traveling with a weekender on four tiny wheels and a garment bag. Both were manageable, but together they made a difficult load for me. My traveling had been almost exclusively by plane, surrounded by skycaps.

We had comfortable seats in a First Class car on our Eurail Passes, with storage space for our luggage. In Heidelberg, we stashed our bags in lockers and headed to the Schloss* by taxi through a light mist.



The Schloss is the remains of a huge and magnificent red-stone palace, built over a period of some 200 years in the 15th and 16th centuries. It was damaged by invading French and later made uninhabitable by fire.

We tramped from place to place through intermittent rain. A frigid wind made me wonder why my boots and hat were in my suitcase instead of protecting toes and head as they were meant to do. I think I was waiting for snow to christen them.

We wandered about the Schloss by ourselves, then took the guided tour. A few rooms had been restored with handsome carved dark wood doors and great multicolored ceramic stoves.

When we finished, the rain had increased and the cold, intensified. Don was frustrated in his attempt to call a taxi, because the only public phone was in use by a Fräulein talking to her boyfriend. We set out downhill on foot, stepping cautiously on the rain-slick brick surface of the slanted street.

* *Schloss* is German for *castle*.

By great good luck, we met a taxi before we had gone far. We settled gratefully into its warm interior and continued down into Heidelberg. We passed the University, with its milling students, and saw acres of bicycles parked in the Platz. We got out near a restaurant recommended by friends and walked to it in happy anticipation, only to find it was closed at lunchtime. We retraced our steps to an attractive *Stube* (lounge) we had passed moments earlier. A stern Fräulein served us an excellent lunch in charmingly traditional surroundings.

After lunch we reclaimed our luggage at the railway station and caught our train to Hamburg. We emerged from the underground world of the Hauptbahnhof to see our hotel's sign blazing at us from directly across the street. In Europe, unlike the U.S., some fine hotels are located close to railway stations for the convenience of travelers.



It still was raining hard, so we dashed next door to a wonderful seafood restaurant. It was jammed, but people were beginning to leave, so we waited for a table. The room was long, with dark wood booths and tables brightened by candles. Chandeliers of curlicued old brass hung from a low, beamed ceiling. Busy, red-vested waiters rushed back and forth with great trays of beer and plates heaped with delicious-looking food.

Finally we were seated in a semi-private nook at the back of the room. We enjoyed our aperitifs as the overpowering din of happy voices gradually diminished with the departure of some of the crowd. We decided that half the people had been there to drink beer and visit with friends, rather than to eat. Our dinners, when they arrived, were worth the wait.

Thursday, 13 February

All of us were off schedule. My balky travel alarm again failed to sound. Muriel and Don slept through theirs. It was not an uncommon occurrence. Both of them slept with radio earphones on, listening to news and music as they went to sleep and blocking out street noises during the night. Don dashed off breakfastless for his first business appointment. Muriel and I

enjoyed a leisurely breakfast at the hotel's extensive buffet. Most of our hotel rooms included either a continental breakfast or a continental breakfast buffet. The Europäischer Hof offered eggs, bacon, and sausage as well. Furthermore, a card given us when we checked in entitled us to three days' free use of Hamburg's extensive transit system, plus a free harbor cruise.

Muriel and I took full advantage. Mid-morning we stepped from the revolving door of our hotel, huddled against the chill wind for a very short time, then boarded the red double-decker tour bus that pulled up at the curb in front of us. We settled on the top deck amid a large group of teenage French students, some of whom were more interested in catching a little more sleep than they were in observing Hamburg. To our disappointment, the commentary was in German and French only.

We drove along lakes that must have been lovely in summer. We saw handsome private homes and historical buildings. Suddenly in the middle of the tour, we heard laughing from the two guides in the rear seats and commentary in English was added to their descriptions of Hamburg.

When we entered the Red-Light District, a French boy of about fourteen made a great show of trying to climb over the back of his seat to get a better look. His classmates hooted and cheered.

We stopped for twenty minutes at St. Michael's Church, a handsome Protestant place of worship, elegant and airy. After a tour of the interior, Muriel and I walked around the outside to see the large statue of Martin Luther. A biting wind literally blasted us the rest of the way around the building, and we made a hasty retreat to our red bus.

Our next stop was at the magnificent Hamburg harbor. There, we were told, we could leave the tour to take a harbor cruise if we chose, catching the 2:00 PM bus back to our hotel. It was one of the things Muriel and I intended to do anyway, so we set out to find the next harbor tour.



Like everything else we did, it took a bit of too-ing and fro-ing. Soon, however, we were seated at a table on the *Concord*, with a 180-degree view through large windows in the aft of the vessel. Muriel ordered a hot spiced wine and I had a beer.

The first large ship we passed belonged to one of the lines our shipping agency represents, Safemarine. It is a South African line that hopes to promote traffic in the Caribbean area in the future. We have been their agents in name only for about three years.

The Hamburg harbor is modern and extensive. Many berths were empty, though wharves were stacked high with containers. We passed a large ship in dry-dock. Chances were slim that a New Container Service vessel that serviced Belize would be at dock; still, I was disappointed not to find one.



When the cruise ended, Muriel and I ducked down a nearby U entrance for the rapid return to our hotel. It was 1:30 PM, time for lunch, and raining again. We ran next door to the restaurant we had enjoyed so much the night before. This time we were seated in one of the cozy carved-wood nooks near the front. The prawn soup we both ordered was so thick we decided it must be three-quarters rich cream.

Plenty of afternoon was left, so Muriel suggested that we return to the nearby lake, where cruises around the lake and through Hamburg's canals originated. She found the right U route easily enough, but the boats all were closely moored; the *Kasse* (ticket office), shuttered; and the wharf, abandoned by humans except for our wind-and-rain-besieged selves.

Muriel announced that we were near a major shopping area and suggested that we window shop. I had my ailing travel alarm with me, so went into the first jewelry store we passed to ask if they sold batteries. They did not, but directed us to another jeweler who did. We continued across the bridge to the second jewelry store. The repair man's quick evaluation showed a good battery and a defective clock. Regretfully, he said they did

not carry travel alarms, but directed us to a nearby department store that sold them.

The repair man came out from his station and gallantly ushered us to the door as he gave directions. He grabbed a large red-and-white umbrella, apparently intending to escort us to the store himself. I showed him my own folded umbrella and declined his courtesy, thanking him warmly as we left.

We found the department store easily. It displayed a wide array of travel alarms, so I bought a replacement for the one I had owned—unused—for a brief five months. Attracted by a nearby costume jewelry display, I found a gold pin I needed for a particular blouse. After those successes, we explored the entire store, leaving no escalator unriden.



Don met us back at the hotel. After some Happy Hour discussion, we settled on dinner in a restaurant they had enjoyed on earlier visits. Considering that the rain was even heavier and that the restaurant was at some distance from our hotel, taking a taxi instead of the U appealed to all of us.

The restaurant had old, traditional charm. Walls were decorated with aged photographs. We sat in a dark wood nook. The waiter was surprised, but ecstatic at my choice of the house specialty. The dish can best be described as a sort of corned-beef hash made with mashed potatoes and topped by two poached eggs. Delicious. Following our meal, I was presented with an elaborately inscribed “diploma” attesting to my having enjoyed the special. According to the menu, the recipe was included in the intricate printing. Since it all was in elaborate German, I may never know.

After dinner, we walked through the rain a short block to the corner of a main street, where we assumed we could flag down a cab quickly. We couldn't. About the time Muriel and I were insisting as diplomatically as we could that perhaps we should return to the restaurant and ask them to call us a cab, one swung across the street and picked us up. Don has his

own travel pattern and we usually try not to disrupt it, even when it seems relatively idiotic to me.

Friday, 14 February

We packed before breakfast. Don took off for a business appointment, while Muriel and I went to Hamburg Historical Museum.

When we left the U, Muriel was not quite sure exactly where to find the museum. We walked down one side of a major street until she spotted what she thought was it, set back in overgrown grounds on the other side. We made our way across and entered a curving driveway. When we could not find an entrance, I approached a yard man, begged his pardon for interrupting, and asked him if he please could direct us to the entrance to the museum. I was confused when he gestured toward the street we just had left. I repeated that we wanted the entrance and he finally understood. His arm swept out in a broad circle indicating that we were to continue walking around the building. I returned to Muriel to report proudly my successful conversation in German. She broke up in laughter as she explained that I had asked the yard man for the exit instead of the entrance. So much for the quick language course.

It was cold and windy. We walked what seemed like miles around the building until eventually we found the gracious entry. It was a short half-block from the point at which we had crossed the street.



The museum had an elaborate display of artifacts and models describing Hamburg from its earliest settlers, through the glory days of the Hanseatic League, to the present. Beautiful scale models illustrated homes and town activities at various stages.

Because Hamburg's history was so closely linked with the sea, it had an extensive marine museum. Large- and small-scale models of ships illustrated the development of shipping. One was a large cross-section showing the many-level interior of a passenger ship of the kind that

carried immigrants to the U.S. at the turn of the century. It was a fascinating museum, beautifully mounted.

Early in our explorations, we ran into a crowd of German school children, perhaps about ten years old. A pretty little girl approached me, held out a notebook, and unleashed a stream of German.

I smiled and explained in carefully enunciated German that I did not speak the language. The little girl quite literally fell back a couple of steps, looked at me in astonishment, and gasped in what sounded more like horror than astonishment, “Englische!”

“Nein, Amerikanische,” I replied, with what I hoped was a reassuring smile.

The children muttered to each other rapidly in apparent disbelief, queried Muriel, and ended up fleeing. We saw the children periodically through the morning. I was able to pass a few comfortable words later with one of the little boys over a ship model we both were admiring. In general, however, we were met with wary smiles of recognition, but treated as potentially dangerous aliens.



We returned to the hotel, checked out, and carried our luggage across the street to the Hauptbahnhof, where we met Don. I found my room key in my coat pocket and dashed back through the rain, across the streetcar tracks and wide highway, to return it. We caught the first of three successive trains taking us to The Hague for the weekend.

European trains are excellent. Accommodations are comfortable; schedules are precise. The only problem is baggage. Trains linger in stations only a few moments. It is a frantic hassle to fling luggage aboard and scramble after it before the beast begins its slow departure. It is the same hurried affair on arrival. Changing trains often involves going up, over, and down to another track. Usually luggage carts are available.

We learned to keep specific coins available in each country to release the carts. When the cart is placed back in a rack, the coin is returned. Luggage

carts ride up or down escalators easily. However, often escalators are not working. Equally often there are only stairways. Baggage must be carried up or down the steps. Don and Muriel managed easily with their single pieces of luggage. However, they were very heavy and unwieldy to toss onto or off trains. My two were more trouble, but each was lighter weight to manage. The Stauffers were inured to the baggage problem in train travel. It was a new, endlessly-repeated horror to me.



We checked into the Park Hotel in The Hague. My room was small, with a narrow single bed. The bathroom was enormous. Muriel and Don had a large room with a minute bath, which was a constant source of inconvenience to the two of them. The weather was cold, our rooms were warm.

We walked to a restaurant Muriel and Don remembered as a pleasantly informal place. It had grown more elegant in the years since they lived in The Hague. We had excellent meals, beautifully served. When we left, the Maître d' bowed as he presented ribbon-wrapped Valentine gift boxes to both Muriel and me. They held some of the finest candy I ever remember tasting.

Saturday, February 15

We picked up a rental car from Avis in the morning and drove toward Amsterdam. I was fascinated at the lowlands, vast stretches of level fields intersected by narrow drainage ditches and bordered by canals. We passed many traditional windmills, but most of them were without their sails. The only working windmills were slim, modern ones of steel.

We knew it was too late for the flower market, but Don wanted to show it to me anyway. The vast stretch of greenhouses and huge warehouses covers some seventy to eighty acres. Saturday mornings, Don said, flowers arrive by the hundreds of carloads to be auctioned off in the Dutch manner. A top price is set by the auctioneer. This is reduced by stages until a merchant signals a bid. He wins the consignment.

We continued into Amsterdam to the Rijksmuseum, with its excellent collection of Dutch artists and Old Masters. As I remember, we were able to visit every room, unlike the Louvre, where rooms appear to divide and multiply as one moves along. The Rembrandts were the cream of the collection. Muriel pointed out the artist's increasingly effective use of light. The gem of the collection was *The Night Watch*. I don't know how long we all stood in front of it or how often we returned to look at the painting from a different angle.



After lunch in the museum restaurant, we walked a couple of blocks to the Van Gogh Museum, in its fine modern building. Muriel was visibly disappointed. She said that in the old museum, studies made by Van Gogh before his final painting were mounted near it, so one could see the changes and improvements he had made before being satisfied. In this museum, there were only a couple of examples of that kind of mounting. The old museum was exclusively Van Gogh. This one hung fewer Van Goghs along with what Muriel termed poor paintings by Masters and second-class paintings by lesser-knowns.

I found it fascinating to see Van Gogh's progression from the dark early paintings through the light ones of the Arles years and, ultimately, the increasingly wild scenes of the final St. Remy period. It was exciting to see the originals of familiar Van Goghs. I was interested to learn that Van Gogh suffered from epilepsy rather than dementia and that he cut off his ear lobe, not his left ear as we were told in school many decades ago.



It was getting late, 4:00 PM, but Don insisted we must try to take a canal cruise. We were able to get seats on the next-to-the-last cruise of the afternoon. Small birds called "Water Hens," jet black with a slash of white "painted" down their faces and bills, swam around the boats at their moorings.

We moved off down the waterway, under arched stone bridges, past tall, handsome houses. The fronts of rooftops were decorated with elaborate “crowns” of varying styles. Homes in Amsterdam are taxed on the property on which they stand so they are narrow and many-floors tall. We passed what was termed the smallest warehouse in the world, barely wider than its own door frame and only two floors high.

A short pole with a hook affixed to the end was secured near the top of almost every Amsterdam home. Stairs inside are too steep and narrow to permit the moving of furniture, so large objects are hoisted to the proper floor by ropes attached to the poles and are hauled inside through a window.

The guide said that, at any one time, Amsterdam has some 500,000 bicycles. Annually 10,000 bikes are dredged out of the canals. Locks cost double the price of a bicycle.

No bridges connect the northern and southern parts of the city. Traffic travels through a tunnel under the harbor. There is free ferry service for pedestrians and bicyclists.

In the harbor, the guide pointed out a tower on a jutting point. Bungee jumpers leap from its top platform and end with their heads in the water.

We passed the new Technology Museum. It was designed like a ship rising out of the water, by an Italian architect who took his inspiration from an 18th-Century trading ship.

Near shore was an elaborate Chinese floating restaurant. Its three floors could accommodate 900 diners. The higher the floor, the more expensive the meal.



I found driving through Netherlands cities somewhat dazing. Lamp posts and traffic signals were set on heavy pedestals painted with wide black-and-white stripes. At a busy corner, the effect was practical but dizzying.

We returned to The Hague for dinner. Don wanted to introduce me to Indonesian Rijsttafel at Bali, their favorite restaurant. It was not a success. I enjoyed both the elaborate service and the dinner, but the Stauffers were disappointed at the restaurant's deterioration since their last visit. As a final blow, long after they returned to Pennsylvania, Don received a parking ticket. Somehow the police tracked Don through Avis and across the ocean. I remember vividly where we parked that night, in line with other cars. No sign of posting.

Sunday, 16 February

Close friends of Muriel and Don's, Yope and Wim Westland, invited the three of us for brunch in Kijkduin, on the Atlantic coast about twenty miles from The Hague. They were utterly charming people. The hotel dining room overlooked the beach. The buffet was superb, each platter a work of art both visually and gustatorily.

Following lunch we drove back across the lowlands, up along one canal and down the next, looking for an old Pumping Station. Don finally found it, minutes after the doors closed to visitors. We walked around the outside, looking down into the stream below as Don explained its simple and historically effective operation.

Monday, 17 February

Don left early by train for an appointment in Paris. It was ridiculous to travel from Holland to Paris when he would be there two days later, but it was the only day he could meet that particular man.

Muriel and I set out by car for Delft. We stopped at one of the two factories that still hand paints pottery in the traditional way. It was fascinating to see the process and shocking to see the prices. My gifts were fewer and smaller than I intended to purchase.

Muriel gave me a short driving tour of Delft, with its charming old homes. It was more human size than Amsterdam.

I took over the driving as we continued on an excellent highway toward Bruges in Belgium. In a convenient town, we waltzed into an attractive-looking restaurant, heads high, along with other somewhat dressier guests. We found ourselves in the middle of what obviously was a private luncheon party of elegant ladies and gentlemen. We exited rapidly and found a door leading into the adjacent, handsome pub. Laughing at our faux pas, we recovered with a beer (Kate), wine (Muriel), and tostis* (both).

Bruges was farther than either of us expected. The road was good and the traffic moderate, but it was 4:00 PM before we entered the wonderful, winding streets of one of Europe's loveliest medieval cities. It had canals, wonderfully "lacy" homes, and a vast sense of calm. I hope to return for a longer visit.

Muriel drove us to the coast to catch the ferry back to the Netherlands while I, wordlessly (I hope) fretted beside her about directions and the increasing dark. No need. We ended up in the right place at the right time and, in a very short while, were looking for our hotel in Middleburg.



We parked behind the hotel, registered, and were shown to small but charming rooms across the hall from each other. Soft moss-green walls set off white wicker furniture effectively.

We had been told that there was no valet, so we set off to get our luggage from the car. Muriel stopped me as I started down the hall toward the front door. She motioned in the other direction to a door just past our rooms at the end of the hall. "We can use this door instead. It is much closer to the car," she said.

I opened the door and found myself lurching down a two-foot high step. Muriel followed. We each retrieved one suitcase and returned to the door we had propped open. We had shoved the luggage up onto the hall floor when the attractive receptionist came running toward us warning, "It is

* *Tostis* are grilled ham-and-cheese sandwiches.

forbidden to use this door,” adding that an alarm siren was about to go off. We scrambled back inside as the receptionist closed the door firmly. Chastened, we walked the long corridor to the front door and got the rest of the luggage the legal, though lengthy, way.

Don returned briefly, then left for dinner with business associates. Muriel and I adjourned to the hotel dining room. We returned to the coldest night any of us ever had spent. The radiators in our rooms felt warm to the touch. However, heat never moved beyond the surface. Controls did nothing to procure higher temperatures. The bathrooms had no source of heat whatever. Thank goodness the beds had the familiar great puffy down covers. Even so, I would not have survived without a flannel gown, my velour robe, and wool socks.

Tuesday, 18 February

Don left early for a tour of the Hercules plant he helped install years earlier when they lived in The Hague. Muriel and I had a driving tour of Middleburg (pleasant, but not special), then picked up Don to take him to an appointment at Bergen-op-Zoom. We both had good books and found our waits pleasantly restful.

Somewhere along the line, we had what we hoped would be a quick lunch, which wasn't. We continued on to Roosendaal, where we were to return the car to Avis and catch the train to Brussels. The only noteworthy thing we passed was a small pasture where llamas unexpectedly mingled with sheep. Don drove around the city a few times, looking for either Avis or the train station. He finally located the latter.

Don deposited Muriel, me, and the luggage at the train station and went off to nearby Avis. We struggled to the proper train track. We stood on the cold and windy platform as our train arrived and Don didn't. We were uncomfortable, but not unduly concerned, as there was a train every hour.

Don finally arrived to report that when he reached Avis, it was locked. A note advised customers to check at the gas station next door. The attendant there reported cheerfully that both Avis clerks had gone off to

deliver a car. Fortunately, they returned before Don exploded, the car duly was returned, and Our Leader joined his waiting troops.

The train arrived. Muriel jumped aboard to catch suitcases as Don heaved them aboard one-handedly. We found seats, stored suitcases, and settled down to our late but pleasant trip to Brussels.

At Antwerp, I noticed fascinating little towers outlining the train tracks. Notes from conversation: In the Netherlands, one can tell what religion a person is by looking at the wedding ring. Catholics wear it on the left hand while Protestants use the right. European train stations all were built with vast, vaulted ceilings to vent the steam from early engines.




Business associates were waiting for Don in the lobby of our Brussels hotel. We freshened quickly, then joined them for the dinner we had been anticipating: Mussels in Brussels. We walked down a busy street lined with seafood restaurants to the one our friends had chosen. We were ushered upstairs to a long wooden table in a happily noisy room. Great bowls of mussels steamed in white wine kept us busy for a long time.

After dinner, we strolled down to the famous Grand Place. I knew it was something I was supposed to see, but had no idea how gorgeous it is at night. Golden flood lights illuminate the intricate facades of ancient buildings surrounding the great square. It is a breathtaking sight.

Wednesday, 19 February

I unexpectedly slept late, enjoying the luxury. Friends of Muriel and Don's, Jacqueline and Robert, joined us for lunch. Earlier that morning, when Muriel tried to make reservations in our hotel dining room, she was told we could not be accommodated because of a small luncheon beginning at 3:00 PM. The clerk whispered that there were twenty other restaurants just around the corner. Muriel booked us at the dining room of an hotel across the street, where we enjoyed an elegant cold buffet and warm conversation.




First class was sold out on our train to Paris. For the first time, we were forced to travel Second Class. Compared to the trains I remembered from the Forties, it was luxurious. Still, it was more crowded and less comfortable than the other train rides of our trip.

In Paris, Don announced that his choice would be to take the RER, an underground line, to a station near our hotel and walk the rest of the way. Kate announced that she was taking a taxi and Muriel and Don were welcome to accompany her. We ended up in the taxi for the vast fare of about \$20.

The driver was an enthusiastic young man who spoke reasonable English. He warned us that he might have to take a roundabout route to our hotel because the Sorbonne students had announced plans for a demonstration in the neighborhood.

The car radio was on. Suddenly the first notes of the French National Anthem filled the car. The driver began to sing. I joined him. I learned the Marseillaise in high school French class and, for some strange reason, never forgot the words. I kept my voice low to limit the impact of my poor voice, but pronounced the words distinctly. At the end, the taxi driver was unbelievably effusive in his praise of the elderly American who cherished his National Anthem.

Fortunately, the driver found no obstruction and was able to deliver us directly to the Hôtel Trianon Rive Gauche. In pre-trip faxes, Don suggested that we stay on the Left Bank for a change; I had booked our hotel through Visit France. The hotel I chose was a few steps from the Boulevard Saint-Michel, across from the Luxembourg Gardens. The streets were full of Sorbonne students. Shops, bistros, brasseries lined the streets, and Metros were nearby.



We checked in and were directed through a long lounge to a tiny elevator at the top of an abbreviated stairway. A heavy grillwork door guarded the entrance. Another heavy inner grill led to a triangular lift platform just large enough for one person with one suitcase or two people who were very close friends. We found our way up to our third-floor accommodations in a series of slow, clanking moves.

The receptionist had assured me that our rooms were beautiful. Certainly they had been redecorated recently. I suspected a decorator seriously in need of a cataract operation. The rooms were pleasantly large for a Paris hotel. Embossed gold fabric covered the walls. Wildly floral swagged draperies in shades of greens, reds, and pinks looped over lace-trimmed sheer curtains to decorate windows overlooking the street. The coverlet on the bed was a plaid of light greens and red. The traditional patterned rug was dark red with green flowers. The modernized bathrooms were tiny, but newly tiled in dark brown and metallic bronze.

When I joined the Stauffers in their room for our traditional Happy Hour, Don motioned me over to the window and pointed down to where a dozen police officers were spread out at the intersection below. Noise of a large gathering could be heard from the “Boule Miche”^{*} half a block away. We wondered whether we safely could leave the hotel for dinner.

Fortunately by the time we left, most of the police were gone, and the demonstration appeared to have ended.

Thursday, 20 February

Don left early for a day of business appointments. Muriel and I walked down to the Metro and, under her meticulous guidance, emerged at the Louvre. We were surprised at the numbers of visitors on a cold February morning. We headed for galleries we had not explored on earlier visits. Again, I felt privileged to have Muriel’s professional comments to help me see aspects of paintings I otherwise would have missed.

^{*} *Boule Miche* is a common short-hand for *Boulevard Saint-Michel*.

Our aching feet more than our stomachs told us when it was time to break for lunch. We adjourned to the museum cafeteria, then went back to the galleries. It was a fortunate accident that our eventual exit took us past the magnificent *Victoire de Samothrace*. We detoured to reexamine the *Winged Victory*,* each of us quietly cherishing the beauty of the statue in her own way.



Traveling had taken its usual toll on both of us. We hurried to our late-afternoon hair appointments at a salon near the hotel. We returned, refreshed and re-glamorized, to meet Don. Again, we saw police in the streets below our windows; again, we heard strident student voices; again, all was quiet by the time we left for dinner.

The danger was inside the hotel. When we emerged from the tiny elevator, the lounge area was wall-to-wall young travelers and their luggage. Since I was first in line, I asked a seated young man how we were supposed to get through the room, “Bull our way through?”

“I guess so,” he replied with very little conviction as he reluctantly stood to let me pass. He was the only one in the room with the vaguest sense of manners. I picked my precarious way among unmoved legs and torsos, over duffles, and past expressionless faces. Muriel and Don followed. My foot caught in the loop of a bag and I fell flat, knocking over several startled young people to my descending delight.

Did anyone except Muriel and Don rush to my rescue or ask if I were all right? Of course not. My friends helped me to my feet and we finished our tortuous progression through the room. I was relatively undamaged, but seething at the (to me) incredible lack of manners of the young American travelers. One ankle was mildly sprained and painful for a few days, but the damage to my faith in the younger generation was far worse.

* *Winged Victory* is the English name for the statue whose French name is *Victoire de Samothrace*.



We took the Metro to a stop near the Arc de Triomphe. I suspect that the air around me still was corrupted by the negative vibrations of my recent trauma. Muriel and Don nearly were forced to leave me in the maze of underground Paris. For some reason, my ticket was refused by the exit machine. I could not get out. A tall brunette, seeing my problem, told me to follow her through. I did not understand her directions, so was left back beyond the clanking door when she slipped through. She gave me a ruefully apologetic smile and went on her way. A short, efficient Frenchwoman then took me in hand and dragged the befuddled American through the briefly-open exit gate with her.


After a gratifying dinner at our beloved Brasserie des Ternes, the Metro again trapped me. This time, a tall young man rushed me through on his ticket. I obviously was a klutz. However, just as obviously, this is a common problem, and Parisians are united in their willingness to aid the misbegotten and defeat the machines.

Friday, 21 February

Don left early for a four-hour train ride to Dax for an appointment. Muriel and I rushed first to buy gifts at a shop we had seen the day before.


We were enchanted by some Lucite eggs containing an artistic variety of gears, nuts, and other bits and pieces caught within the clear plastic. Muriel is a connoisseur of decorative eggs. They appealed to me as the daughter-wife-and-mother of engineers. It took two visits and a generous half hour for each of us to select two apiece out of the basket of eggs retrieved from its place in the window of the small shop by the patient proprietress.

We continued on to the Pantheon, nearby. Don had insisted we go, though neither of us particularly wanted to. It was impressive building and display, and we both were glad we had followed his advice.



After a light lunch, we crossed the city to see the exhibit in the Petit Palais. Muriel was delighted to find that, as seniors, we were admitted *gratuit* (free). It was the only time on the trip that our status as seniors did us any good. There was a special exhibit of Cambodian art, but it was so crowded that we decided just to enjoy the regular art galleries of the Palais.

We returned by Metro to a stop on the Boulevard Saint-Michel instead of to the Odéon, as on other excursions. When we emerged from the underground, we did not know which way to turn. I assessed the area, then set out with confidence too firm for argument. Muriel followed. Within a block we were in a strange, deteriorating area of increasingly shabby stores with racks of clothing outside each door. We looked at each other, laughed, and wheeled around. The tone of the “Boule Miche” changed dramatically on the other side of the Metro entrance to one of dignified stores and businesses. A block later, we saw the entrance to the Trianon Rive Gauche, a few steps up a side street.



We were exhausted by the time we returned to the hotel. Muriel’s leg and back hurt severely. My ankles were sore and swollen. We freshened up and decided we were justified in taking a taxi to the restaurant where we were to meet Don.

The cab driver was surly and obviously had no idea how to find our destination. Muriel, quoting from a map, directed him as best she could. He growled and occasionally complied. We drove around blocks, sometimes the same block, tempers on each side getting testier with each pass. Finally the driver let us out at the end of a closed street and assured us that the restaurant was at the other end. We did not believe him, but were so annoyed by then that being stranded on the Left Bank was preferable to more frustrating moments of hearing his meter click.

There we were at night, two aching, aging females alone in the dark on an unfamiliar street in Paris. We walked to the end of the arcade, past blank walls, and debouched into a narrow street. Two pleasant young women walked toward us. I accosted them in my best French, showed them our map, and asked if they could help. They were eagerly kind, though they did not recognize the name of the restaurant for which we were looking. We were in the middle of a four-way, two-language conference when a deep voice from behind me asked, “Are you ladies in trouble?”

I spun around in something between hope and terror to find Don grinning at us.

We all said grateful adieus to the helpful young Frenchwomen and walked around the corner to the brasserie our taxi driver failed to find.

Saturday, 22 February

This was Don’s Day, one of the few fragments of holiday breaking his hectic succession of business appointments. He admitted that never before had he had time in Paris for one of the sights he always wanted to see. Muriel looked a little apprehensive at his suggestion, but it happened to be one of the things on my long list of “some day” plans. We headed for the Sewers of Paris.

A faint ripe aroma met us as we descended steep, narrow stairs. Once underground, the air appeared fresh and odorless as we emerged in a large open tunnel lined with pipes carrying telephone and electric lines and potable water. Guides embarked on endless lectures in French with much waving of arms. We moved ahead of our group to join an earlier one. Engineering of the tunnels was superb. Great channels carried water at varying speeds, sometimes steady, sometimes bubbling and leaping. We were shown the boats and machines used for cleaning the channels to keep water flowing freely.

The group we had joined was led from the main tunnel into one of the original “Jean Valjean” tunnels. We had a slightly unnerving short walk through a low, narrow, rough shaft, scary in its uneven darkness. We

emerged gratefully into another major area where waste water rushed past, echoing thunder as it erupted over a paddle-wheel into a lower channel.

Finally, we passed through a long gallery with handsomely mounted diagrams and photographs of the sewer's history, construction, and operation. The tour was beautifully designed and interesting. I do not need to go again.



Following a good lunch, we headed to Les Invalides. Don wanted to visit the museum of plans and bas reliefs of the old fortified cities. We wandered around the arcade at the back of the building before locating our museum on the top floor.

Don is absorbed by history and fascinated by maps. The displays were intriguing hints at a time and life we could only imagine. When we finished our survey, we decided to walk back down, rather than take the elevator. Somewhat to our surprise, we realized that our museum was the top display of the Musée de l'Armée, adjacent to Les Invalides, where Napoleon is buried.

We walked down through three floors of military displays—World War I, World War II, and finally Medieval. I was not as disturbed by the World War II exhibits as I had been at the Peace Museum in Caen, thank goodness. Don felt it was incomplete until he realized that a French museum would reflect the French war, not the American one in which he had taken part.

One room on the ground floor was dedicated to ancient Oriental uniforms. It was vaguely possible to tell through the gloom how magnificent they were, but the dim light maintained to protect delicate pieces prevented our appreciating materials and workmanship as much as we wanted.

Sunday, 23 February

We said goodbye to Paris reluctantly and took the train—the first of two trains, that is—to Zürich. It was a traumatic trip for Muriel and Don. As the trip originally was planned, they should have been approaching the high point of their year, their annual skiing vacation in Wengen. However, they had cancelled their reservations because of Don's broken arm. At each train stop, we saw more and more ski-laden vacationers on the platform. Snowcapped mountains broke the horizon. Don pointed out the peak nearest to their beloved Wengen. It was a bittersweet view for them.

Monday, 24 February

Don left early for his final appointment in Basel. Muriel and I set out to enjoy Zürich. It is a lovely old city of handsome buildings. A river near our hotel led to a large lake. We spent the morning walking around the old city. I found a small shop that had an enticing array of attractive offerings. We spent a gratifying half hour or longer while Muriel bought one thing and I went mad accumulating gifts for Christmas giving.

As lunchtime approached, Muriel searched without success for a restaurant offering fondue. She said she was sure there used to be one on every corner. Finally, in desperation, we went into a ordinary-looking delicatessen crowded with tiny tables and wire chairs. We found a place and settled ourselves. When the waiter came, Muriel ordered a glass of white wine before lunch and I asked for a beer. No! They did not serve drinks. We had not liked the place from the moment we first looked into it, and that was too much for both of us. It was not a restful midday oasis, but a crowded, noisy place of the kind we preferred to avoid. We agreed instantly that a dignified exit was in order.

I got up, struggled into my coat, and prepared to leave. Muriel stood, swung her coat off the back of her chair, and knocked over a coca cola on the next table. It splashed its astounded owner before exploding on the tile floor. Muriel apologized profusely. Our already disgruntled waiter arrived with broom, dustpan, mop, and scowl. Muriel insisted over protests on paying for a replacement drink, though the girl by now was laughing at

the incident, conciliatory about Muriel's obvious dismay. We bundled our coats around us and left with somewhat less than the degree of composure we had planned.

We found a quiet pub nearby and escaped into its old-world comfort to recover with the aperitifs that had caused our problems, followed by an excellent light lunch.



On the way back to the hotel, Muriel stopped in a supermarket to pick up some bread “for the ducks.” I pointed out the smallest available bun, but she insisted on taking a large loaf. We deposited our other purchases in our rooms, then took the tram in front of our hotel for a ride alongside the river to the lakeside park.

We strolled past the few people braving the brisk winds and stopped at an overlook. Below us were a few of the white-faced black water birds we had seen in Holland, with some gulls circling overhead. Muriel opened the sack and broke off a small piece of bread. She tossed it into the lake. Hundreds of birds of a dozen varieties materialized instantly. Ducks paddled up from the left. Water hens swarmed from the right. Swans appeared directly below us. Gulls swooped dizzyingly. We fed the birds for the good part of an hour, the bits of bread decreasing in size as we tried to extend our fun.

We aimed our offerings toward the ducks or water birds to avoid greedy gull beaks. The swans were irritatingly stupid. Unless the bits of bread literally hit their beaks, they missed them, while other birds dashed in to snatch the food from under their graceful necks.

Eventually, the entire loaf had been tossed to the birds. We turned to walk the end of the lakeside park and catch a trolley back to our hotel.





Don & Muriel and Kate in Europe, 1997

Don returned at about the same time. We had a final, sad Happy Hour, then walked to one of their favorite restaurants for a superb dinner of fresh asparagus Hollandaise and Fondue Chinoise.

On our way back to the hotel, we passed the Bierhaus that had been crowded with people engaged in passionate polkas the night before. This time, the band was playing to a small, quiet audience. On an impulse we went in. We enjoyed the music as we had the last liqueur of our trip.

Tuesday, 25 February

We breakfasted together, then made our separate ways to the airport for our flights home. My Air France flight was pleasant and uneventful. I spent the night at the hotel in the Miami airport.

Wednesday, 26 February

Slept late to overcome the long trip, then checked in with TACA for my flight back to Belize. For the first time in history, the flight was early. Alex was not there to meet me, but I thought there was a container ship and did not expect him. I was through formalities quickly and took a taxi home. Alex apparently passed me en route. He reached the airport on time, only to be told that I already had left. Fortunately, he met a neighbor

who needed a ride, so he brought him back to town. I had made a good start on unpacking by the time Alex returned to greet me.

After work, María and Alex joined me for our traditional post-trip visit and reunion drinks.

Agents' Meeting in Miami

May 1997

This was the worst agents' meeting Air France ever has held. I'm quoting the Marketing Manager, a very self-contained Frenchman. It began with the hotel, which was in unbelievable contrast to the gorgeous places we have stayed at other meetings throughout Central America. It was perfectly comfortable, but vaguely shabby. Service was excellent, but the food! I marvel at a "chef" who is able to serve eggs, melon, and even salmon that are completely tasteless.

I arrived on Saturday, before the others. When I took a look around at the other hotel guests, I had trouble restraining my giggles until I was locked discretely in my room. I wished I could be in the lobby when the contingent from Air France Mexico and the other agents arrived.

Later I was pleased to see how gracious everyone was about the situation. No overt grumbling. The new Air France Regional Director was wild, however. And the poor young man in charge of arrangements was distraught and said he never would book a meeting again without a personal visit to the hotel ahead of time. Apparently he had accepted the accommodations through the travel agent Air France uses for their passengers. (She usually is so good that I can't understand how this one got by her.)



The meeting was scheduled for Monday and Tuesday. Therefore, I went up on Saturday so I could do a bit of shopping. The hotel van took me back and forth to a nearby mall late Saturday afternoon. It was the day before Mothers' Day. The mall was wall-to-wall people, at least two-thirds of them were children, playing alone or in groups, half-under clothes racks, where you couldn't see them until you were about to trip over them. I don't know whether the stores—Burdine's, J.C. Penny's, and Sears—were smaller with less walking space than in newer stores or

whether I had a mild case of claustrophobia because of the crowds. I bought a couple of things and fled.

I had booked a car for the next day, planning to return to the nearby mall and a discount one across the street for a more leisurely shopping expedition. No way. I headed north to my own stomping grounds. Even so, it took two-and-a-half hours to locate the suitcase I needed to compliment one Carli brought me at Easter. I would not let myself stop for other errands or food until I succeeded.

I lunched, finally, at 2:30, then shopped with modest success until 4:30. I actually guessed the right direction back to the expressway, but managed to swing onto the northward leg and the toll road accidentally. The young man in the toll booth was pleasantly concerned and helpful—then demanded 75 cents. I followed his excellent directions, got off the toll road and back onto Sunrise, from which I had departed so recently. This time, I found the proper ramp and headed back to Miami and the hotel. Most of the other convention attendees had arrived by the time I walked in with my shopping bags.



Usually our meetings are held in Spanish. I understand about two-thirds of what is said. This time we had the new Sales Manager for North and South America with us. He is American and speaks no Spanish. The morning session was in English. I loved it, but it put an awful burden on some of the other agents. All the others had to ad lib translations of their reports. Even though most of them are fluent in English, it was obvious that they skipped a lot they had intended to say. I felt sorry for them.

After a stressful morning, we adjourned to the worst lunch buffet any hotel ever has provided. The food—what there was of it—was displayed attractively, but was ordinary in content.

Normally there is a gorgeous dinner in a private room to end a meeting. This time, many of the people had to leave at the end of the afternoon session, so we had a convivial, informal, tasteless dinner in a wing of the

regular dining room. The best thing about it was watching through floor-to-ceiling windows the incredible wind and lightening of the storm that earlier had spawned the tornado that raked Miami.



Tuesday morning we checked out of the hotel, took the van to the airport, and deposited luggage in the Air France office. We had a tour of Air France facilities and the new, spectacular American terminal (well worth walking to the end of the main terminal to see). We were a fairly small group. Some had flown out early and others, who had brought wives and children, felt they could give the somewhat useless morning a pass.



Three of us were flying TACA home. We checked in early and joined four others who were on later flights. I was jolted to find myself being rushed out to a taxi and told we all were going shopping. Not the sort of thing I do before departure time. We went to a lovely mall, separated for an hour, then regrouped for a quick, happy lunch.

By the time I reached my boarding gate, the only human beings in sight were the staff; doors were closed; and I nearly had a heart attack before they ushered me through to the waiting plane.

Niagara Prince

January – February 1998

For ten years, we have been agents for American Canadian Caribbean Line (ACCL). They send a cruise ship in for a 4-month season every winter. This year, for the second time, the owner, Captain Luther Blount, invited me for the MV *Niagara Prince* * cruise he would be on.

I took my computer on the cruise. My intention was to have emails ready to send the night I got home. The only problem was that I left the mouse in my bedside table when I carefully packed the computer, cord, extension cord, and miscellaneous correspondence.

Friday, 30 January

This morning there was some question about whether I would take the cruise at all. The ACCL office faxed that Luther was recovering from the flu and might not come, but that I was welcome to take the cruise; I decided it would not be the thing to do, since I was his guest. I called the office in Rhode Island and was told that Luther would join the ship in Punta Gorda. Also, he had another friend aboard, a recently widowed woman, and I could sort of fill in for him, giving her extra attention. So I shifted mental gears once more.

To Alex's and my delight, our old friend Bob Gifford is captain of the *Niagara Prince* for the Belize season.

Alex carried my not-so-featherweight bags aboard after lunch. I hung things up, then went to the office. I went home, bathed, dressed, and came aboard with my familiar S.A.S. handbag in one hand and my Africa hat in the other. The slip I had forgotten that I would need for my single dress was rolled neatly atop my umbrella at the bottom of my purse.

* *MV* before the ship's name means *Motor Vessel*.

Most of the cabins are on the deck below the lounge, dining salon, and galley, instead of on a deck above. I like it. There is no walkway outside the windows, so there is more privacy.

My cabin is slightly smaller than the one Emilie and I had on the *Caribbean Prince*,* but it is almost lavish for me alone. The bunks are built slightly higher, leaving more easily accessible stowage space beneath them than I needed to accommodate my wardrobe, even though I had packed generously rather than bothering to make decisions on what to take.

With the two pillows plus a thick throw pillow on each bunk, and folded heavy extra blankets, I have all I need to make myself a comfortable nest with my legs elevated. There is a small square desk and chair alongside my bunk that would be ideal for working, but I think it is wiser to use the case for my laptop, resting on my knees, as a desk for my computer.



The ship carries only about 78 passengers. It is bring-your-own-bottle. A little before 5:00 PM I took my bottle of White Label up to the bar, fixed myself a Scotch and soda, and joined a couple of seated passengers. We were having a pleasant get-acquainted session when my horrid little plastic glass simply slipped out of my hand scattering a small amount of liquid and a lot of tiny ice cubes over the rug. There are better ways to make a good first impression. Of course, everyone laughed, probably delighted that I, not they, had done it.

I circulated a bit, meeting delightful and friendly people, joined them for dinner, and went back to my cabin early. I was settled in bed to read by about 8:30 and managed exactly two pages of what promises to be a good book before realizing that I needed open eyes, not closed ones, to continue.

* “Caribbean Prince with Emily” on page 223 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

Saturday, 31 January

First light coming in my generous-size window woke me. I watched a spectacular sunrise as I dressed.

I fixed a cup of coffee in the salon and went topside to the Sun Deck to join the other early risers.

The passengers were fascinated to find someone from Belize aboard and asked endless questions. This morning after breakfast when I was back in my room, I lectured myself about taking care not to become the verbal Old Man of the Sea of the voyage.

I went back topside and found a wonderful V-shaped lookout forward, where the outer rail meets the railing of the ladder. I stood there alone, reminiscing, as we slowly made our way through Port-o-Stuck.

I ran into Luther's friend, Thelma, as I came down the ladder from the Sun Deck, introduced myself, and had a little visit. She is a delightful woman, a littler older than I. Her daughter, Martha, is a bright charmer, a veterinarian, who looks about twenty, but has a teen-age daughter.



We moored at San Pedro this afternoon. After the boat with snorkelers and the glass-bottom boat took off with passengers, the Captain began shuttle service ashore. María had told me about a nice gift shop she found when she and Alex were at San Pedro last weekend. She was much taken by some glazed pottery, assumed it was expensive, couldn't manage to take it home anyway, and left it there. I mentioned it to one of my new friends. She and her husband had spent three days in San Pedro before the cruise. She said the shop had lovely stock at New York prices and a pushy owner to match.

I found my way up the beach to Belize Arts. Lots of lovely things I don't need or want. However, if you are looking for a pink pot with a green iguana peering over the top, I can tell you where to find it.



We all dressed up this evening for the Captain's dinner. Four of the people at our table are interestingly related. The younger couple has been married for several years. A few months ago after they all took a trip to Hawaii together, her father and his mother, friends for years and both long widowed, decide "that they enjoyed being together" and married.

Her daughter is her husband's stepdaughter and daughter-in-law.

His son is his wife's stepson and son-in-law

The girl is married to her stepbrother.

The man is married to his stepsister.

Sunday, 1 February

We sailed from San Pedro just after daylight. After lunch, we anchored at Goff's Caye* for snorkeling.

This cruise is a real holiday for me. I circulate enough to be a part of the group, to enjoy the sailing and scenery, and then escape to my little cave and luxuriate in being utterly alone doing exactly what I want to do.

Much of the cruise involves island-hopping, stopping regularly for snorkeling or bird-watching trips to special cayes. Been there, done that, thank you, loved every moment of it, and would rather be holed up with my computer or book. There is plenty of time to socialize at meals.

This morning, I set out tromping around the deck—17 revolutions to the mile. At about the third lap, the woman I was following thought of a question she needed to ask me. That led to a 20-minute conversation that we both enjoyed far better than exercising.



After the first couple of days, I almost gave up on finding any passengers with unusual backgrounds. Everyone was delightful and fun to visit with, but we seemed not to have anyone as especially interesting as two or three I had met on my earlier cruise.

* Caye is pronounced *key*

Then I found myself talking to Bill Allen at early morning coffee. Our casual comments about sea conditions led him to mention his time with Scripps Institute of Oceanography. I fed him the odd question to keep him talking about it.

One project kept their ship in the Pacific mapping currents for seven months. In all that time, he said, they saw only one ship. The Scripps ship was describing circles around a certain point when they saw a Norwegian tanker bearing down on them. In that empty ocean it did not deviate a degree. The Scripps ship was fully lighted, although it was daylight, but the Norwegian continued on its course and passed with perhaps 500 feet to spare. The Scripps captain turned his search light on the freighter. The bridge was empty. The ship was proceeding on autopilot without even a man on watch and no one aware that it nearly had run down the only ship within thousands of miles.

Bill's wife, Pam, is British and a retired doctor. At dinner, the woman sitting next to her started to choke, so Pam did a Heimlich Maneuver quickly. She said it was the first she ever had done.

Monday, 2 February

Late in the afternoon, the Captain announced that a Norther was on its way. Already snorkeling was poor because of the roiling of seas from the westerly wind. The Captain said he would reverse his itinerary, head directly to Guatemala, and hope that the weather would be normal again and the sea pleasant for snorkeling by the time we returned to the cayes of Belize.

Swimmers returned to the ship, chilled by the cooling water. Several passengers were literally blasted through the door into the lounge by torrents of rain. The ship rocked and rolled as she made for the protected harbor of Placencia to anchor for the night.

Tuesday, 3 February

Morning, the air was cold, but the clouds cleared gradually. By the time we had finished ship formalities in Punta Gorda and headed for Guatemala, the sky was solid blue. The crossing was rough enough to be interesting. Foam-capped waves tossed the shallow-draft ship. The ship entered Guatemala in Livingston and stayed long enough for passengers to climb the hill to the few shops that comprised the town's shopping area. The typical Latin American stores were full of plastic and limited canned goods. However, passengers found a few *cosas típicas**—Guatemalan belts, hand bags, and for one couple, an *hamaca matrimonial***.

Late in the afternoon, we made the long-awaited run up the Río Dulce. The ship cruised slowly up the winding river of the gorge. The birders aboard made a greater noise with their exclamations of delight than did the dozens of birds perched on trees and bushes clinging to the green vertical walls of the forested mountains rising from the water on each side. The Captain anchored in a cove in lake from which the Río Dulce flows.

Wednesday, 4 February

Our anchorage was at the mouth of a small river flowing into the lake. The Captain himself took the skiff to sound that river and found 30 to 60 feet of water, even under the bushes along its banks. He returned to the ship, eased her around a right-angle turn into the river, and tried the side trip for the first time. The passengers were spellbound at the slow journey between high walls of jungle, not quite close enough to touch.

There was no place wide enough to turn the ship, so the Captain reversed all the way back to the lake and then proceeded toward Lago Izabal.

* *Cosas típicas* (literally, *typical things* in Spanish) means traditional local handicrafts.

** An *hamaca matrimonial* (literally, *matrimonial hammock* in Spanish) is a hammock large enough to sleep two.

My reputation as Resident Authority took a beating in Guatemala. Most of the passengers looked forward to shopping for native crafts. I assured everyone that there was a fine gift shop at the orphanage where the ship always stops. It was closed because it had attracted guerrillas, who came down from the mountains to rob them.

I calmed disappointment by telling everyone that there would be an informal market near where we docked at the Fortaleza de San Felipe, at the entrance to Lago Izabal. The fort was built in the mid Sixteen Hundreds to protect against intrusion of pirates. Allegedly, the Spanish stretched a large chain across the narrow entrance to the lake, from their strategically located fort to the opposite bank, to ensnare would-be intruders. Repeated attacks ultimately almost destroyed the Fortaleza.

In 1955 reconstruction began. Today, the fort is a small stone gem. It is a little maze of unexpected narrow passageways, none straight for more than a few feet; of steep narrow stairways to the battlements and tower; of small, windowless rooms and unexpected open courtyards. One of the passengers wished he could have it for a house, not an impossible idea considering its compactness. I commented on the dark, airless rooms. He fended off the question: “Guest rooms!”


The Indian women were not there with their colorful woven goods and other typical crafts because we arrived unexpectedly, off schedule. Passengers who had heard me tell of the fine shopping possibilities at the orphanage and again at the fort railed at me in mock irritation.

The Cruise Director announced that the vendors would be at the Hotel Miramonte when we docked for the night. They weren't.

Thursday, 5 February

More than half the passengers took off early to visit the Mayan site of Quiriguá. Emilie and I went there last cruise, so I did not go again. It is unlike most ruins—a great park set with some of the most handsome stela found anywhere.


Mid-morning, the Captain announced over the P.A. system that the Indian vendors had arrived. The passengers who had remained aboard flew down the bow ramp and fluttered excitedly around the blankets, tables, and one kiosk where displays of Guatemalan fabrics, clothing, linens, and trinkets still were in the process of being laid out on display. We rapidly made it worthwhile for the Indians to have made the 400-mile round trip from Antigua for the *Niagara Prince*.



One of the shipboard activities was the raffling of some handsome Belizean carvings to raise money for the orphanage. Our cruise doubled the amount raised on the earlier one.


When these raffles first began, the guerrillas learned that the ships left U.S. dollars with the orphanage and came down from the mountains to rob them. These days, they do not dare give the orphanage the cash raised. Instead, the ship's pilot finds out what food the orphanage needs and buys it for them with proceeds.

This afternoon, the First Mate made three trips with the ship's skiff to the nearby community store to buy sacks of rice, beans, flour, fruit, and vegetables, which they delivered to a wharf aswarm with eager children when we passed the orphanage as we left Lago Izabal.



Every passenger was on deck for the return trip through the Río Dulce, enraptured again by the river twisting between the mountains. The Captain's plan was to clear quickly and sail on to Livingston before dark in case Luther were there. No need. We barely had anchored when Luther appeared in a speed boat he had taken from Punta Gorda to meet us.

Both Thelma and I were concerned about Luther's drawn look. However, he was elated with his success in surprising everyone. Luther and Thelma had an old-home-week reunion, then he agreed with her brusque instructions to eat with us rather than with the crew, as he had suggested he might do.




After dinner, a troop of Guatemalan Garifuna dancers came aboard to entertain the passengers. The intricate but monotonous drumbeat, unintelligible chants, and shuffling dances surprised and delighted the audience. At the end, the Garifuna urged passengers to join them, and a surprising number did, gyrating in interesting variations of basic uninhibited dance.

Friday – Sunday, 6 – 8 February

We sailed early for Punta Gorda. We stayed there long enough for passengers to invade the local gift shops to buy the local little Mayan baskets or pick up Guatemalan items they had overlooked at the Hotel Miramonte display the day before.

To the delight of the passengers, the rest of the cruise involved anchoring morning and afternoon at small islands perched on the reef and surrounded by bleached sand and clear aqua water. They resumed their interrupted snorkeling and explorations in Luther's specially designed glass-bottom boat. The picture-book settings were nostalgically familiar to me and, to others, spectacular in their perfection.



I was available whenever Luther (my host) was around. However, I rapidly realized that he was not interested in talking business. Suited me; we had spent hours together on things I considered very close to nonsense on the previous cruise.

Luther spent hours taking photographs with a new camera (or getting in his captain's hair). He did the same thing on an earlier cruise this season, then had his camera and all the film stolen in the airport. I doubt that he missed a square inch of the ship. I nearly fainted when I saw him crawl under a protective railing and disappear down a ladder into the supplies stowage hatch. This is an 82-year-old man who ran a fever of 104 two weeks earlier.

Luther and Thelma spent a lot of time reminiscing. It was good for them both, and I made a point never to intrude.

Luther dreads mealtimes and always hangs back until everyone is seated before finding an empty seat. He was delighted to have Thelma, Martha, and me available to ease the situation. We did not always all sit together, but we made sure he never was alone.

At meals, Luther always ended up talking about his new ships or new patents. The passengers were as fascinated as I was. One passenger, who had not been at our table, asked me, “What was Luther lecturing about this noon?”

Meals during the cruise were generous in quantity and superb in quality. Fish caught by the crew ended up on the table grilled or in wonderful chowders. The desserts of our delightful sous-chef, who doubled as snorkeling leader, were to die for. “Diet” was not a word in any passenger’s vocabulary.

Monday, 9 February

We returned to Goff’s Caye for morning snorkeling, over the complaints of some of the passengers at going the same place twice. Everyone returned aboard delighted at the water, the reef, and the numbers of colorful fish.

I packed in the morning.

Alex took my luggage and me home after meeting the ship in the early afternoon. He, María, and I returned to the ship for the final Captain’s dinner that night.

It was hard to say goodbye to the friends with whom I had shared the delightful cruise.

Japan with Muriel & Don

September 1998

When Muriel and Don Stauffer wrote suggesting I join them in a trip to Japan in the fall while Don had to attend a conference, I laughed at the idea as charming but impossible. Twenty minutes later I was mentally listing all the reasons I should and could accept their offer. Prime among them was the opportunity to see the country with close friends who had lived there (after they left Belize in the Sixties) and who still had business in the country.

I planned to fly to Palo Alto four days early for a visit with Carli and Tom, which would give me a chance to see them after more than a year and to share excitement about the coming trip.

Wednesday, 9 September

Departure from Belize. I went to Annie Wongsam at 7:30 to have my hair done, then took a taxi to the airport. All was routine until I reached Houston.

My Continental flight to San Francisco was running late. For perhaps an hour and a half, I sat at the departure gate while agents reported regularly that the flight would be delayed and to advise us to check back in 30 minutes. Finally, I talked to one of the agents and learned that thunderstorms had delayed the plane at its previous stop, so it had lost its slot to depart SFO.*

I left the boarding gate for the nearby private lounge, to which I had access through my Priority Pass membership. The woman at the desk assured me that they would announce boarding of my flight. I found a telephone and called Carli to tell her about the delay. Thanks to the time differential, she had not left for the airport.

* *SFO* is the airport identifier code for San Francisco International Airport.

I fixed a cup of coffee, found a couch where I could sit with my leg up, opened my book, and settled down in comfort. I was on my second cup of coffee when the final call for my flight blared out over the loudspeaker.

Throughout the several rooms in the lounge, people leaped to their feet, grabbed coats and hand baggage, dashed out the door and around the corner to our departure gate. I was last in line. When I got to the gate, I could not find my boarding pass. I fumbled, fretted, finally emptied the document pocket of my bag and retrieved it. It was only when I was seated on the plane, gasping for breath, that I realized I must have dropped my book at the gate in my frantic search. It was a good Dick Francis and I just was getting into the good part. I did not dare return to the boarding gate to retrieve it, so reluctantly took a new book from my hand luggage.

Carli and Tom met me at the San Francisco airport. As we drove back to their home in Palo Alto, Carli gave me a full description of her cousin Peggy Robinson's wedding the previous weekend.

Sunday, 13 September

We drove back to the San Francisco airport and met Muriel and Don. We had brunch together at the Grosvenor Hotel, where they had spent the night. I was overjoyed that we were able to get together. Carli and the Stauffers had not seen each other since the Sixties, and I wanted the Stauffers and Tom to meet.

Tom drove the Stauffers to the airport and I insisted on their leaving me, too, though my boarding was a couple of hours later. Muriel and Don checked in for their United flight, but I discovered that Japan Airlines would not even open their counters for another hour-plus. Fortunately, I was equipped for the trip with my new roll-aboard and a small wardrobe bag that hooked onto it. I could pull it with little trouble. I went to the Exchange booth and bought enough Yen to carry me through my arrival and the next day's holiday. Later, I realized that they gave me one of the best rates of exchange of the first part of the trip.

I continued to the bond store and ordered Scotch for our traditional travel Happy Hours. I found Muriel and Don, already checked in, doing the same thing. They accompanied me back to Japan Airlines, where I finally was first in line to check in. My upgrade to Executive Class was honored, to my great relief.

I accompanied the Stauffers to the Red Carpet Lounge to enjoy the time until they had to go to the boarding gate. Don said I could stay, but I was not comfortable, so moved on to my own lounge.

I went to the boarding gate early, thank goodness. Bond purchases were being distributed, and it was discovered that mine had not been sent to the gate. A man dashed off to get it and returned with my package as passengers were boarding the flight.

Japan Airlines is no Air France. The club class seats were roomy and comfortable, and there was a private TV. However, seats did not recline as far and were closer together. When the man in front of me pushed his seat back, he was virtually in my lap. I felt pinned in my seat like a captive butterfly.

The service was attentive and meals, very good. My flight seemed shorter and less arduous than I expected, similar to the flight from Houston to Paris. I found the time change confusing in the extreme.

Monday, 14 September

We reached Tokyo an hour later than scheduled, due to our late departure. I took the bus into town, a long drive. It was after 5:00 PM as I was shown to my room in the Shiba Park Hotel.

The Shiba Park is the training grounds for staff for Tokyo's magnificent Imperial Hotel, so service is impeccable. Before the attentive bellman left the room, Muriel was on the telephone calling to invite me to their room, next door, for Happy Hour.



Muriel wanted yakitori for supper, a sort of Japanese shish kebab, Japanese finger food. The little yakitori restaurant that Muriel remembered near the hotel had been replaced by a giant building. Don knew of another. We followed him through an intricate pattern of turns, alley to street to alley, which brought us to a main thoroughfare. In one passageway, a group of five or six black-suited young businessmen emerged, laughing and talking. Don explained that they had stopped at a Geisha house on their way home from work.

When we found the yakitori-ya,* it was surrounded on two sides by a line of tiny stand-up tables, each with several men eating, talking, and laughing. Inside, long wooden tables were completely occupied by diners. To my enormous relief, the Stauffers were no more interested than I in waiting for a chance to eat. We backtracked and found a charming sushi bar closer to the hotel.

This was no time for me to experiment with chopsticks. I have used them from time to time and managed not to starve to death. However, the sushi are huge mouthfuls. Don asked the chef to cut mine into three pieces. He did so with cheerful understanding. I managed them adequately. Don ordered a different kind of fish for each plate. Some I liked better than others. I suspect my tastes were fairly plebeian, with tuna at the top of the list.

The Japanese woman seated next to me took great interest in my progress. As my chopsticks approached each morsel, she leaned forward slightly, obviously urging me on, hoping I would do it right. She nodded in approval at each success. When we finished dinner, we smiled and bowed to each other with the wordless graciousness I was to learn well in days to come.

Tuesday, 15 September

National holiday, Respect for the Aged Day, which we thought we deserved.

* A *Yakitori-ya* is a restaurant specializing in yakitori.

As we enjoyed a Continental Breakfast at the hotel, Don and Muriel warned me about the danger of ordering an American Breakfast in Japan. It always includes salad, often potato salad plus a little slaw or green salad, and usually a sandwich of some sort of fish, as well as eggs, bacon, and sausage.

Don said that some years earlier when he was on a business trip to Japan with a group of Americans, he ordered breakfast for the group the evening before. They all wanted American breakfasts, so he carefully described to the Maître d' plates with only fried eggs, bacon, and toast.

Next morning his group was served their American breakfasts. The eggs had been fried the night before and carefully preserved in the refrigerator.



Guide books warned me that in Japan, cars drive on the left. Don and Muriel quickly taught me that pedestrians walk on the left of sidewalks and (try to) stay on the left going up and down stairways. It was easy—and upsetting—to forget. Don explained that when the British went into Japan, there were no modern roads. British engineers built roads in Japan to British specifications, including left-hand driving.

The books did not warn me that bicycles travel on sidewalks, often at a spanking good pace. As I leaped out of the way of one, Muriel laughed, warning that the delivery bicyclists were far more threatening than the ordinary rider I just had evaded.

Don, having no business appointments on the holiday, took command of our sightseeing. We walked to the nearby subway entrance, and I had my first experience of Japan's well designed, immaculate underground world.

In one of the corridors leading to our train, we all were entranced by an enormous sign advertising "Pocari Sweat." Delightful line drawings of animals surrounded a center panel with a line drawing of a naked man and the caption "Human Water." We assumed it was advertising a soft drink and determined to avoid it at all costs.

Train attendants patrolled the platform dressed in dark trousers, short-sleeved white shirts, white gloves, and black-visored caps with a wide red band and varied gold stripes designating rank. Throughout our visit, we found them (usually) helpful when we became confused. That day, we were lucky enough to see three of the guards together as a train pulled out of the station. All three bowed deeply, then saluted the departing train in unison.



My introduction to Japanese temples was probably the most spectacularly colorful one we saw anywhere. Asakusa Kannon, the Sensoji Temple, is huge, ornate, and vibrant with gold and the traditional red-orange color. It is approached through the “Thunder Gate,” an open building guarded by giant statues of the Gods of Thunder and Storm, one on each side of the entrance. Overhead is a gigantic red lantern decorated with huge letters in Japanese script. The gate dwarfs passers-through.

Beyond the gate I saw, to my amazement, that the walkway leading to the temple was lined on both sides by a noisy arcade of gaudy kiosks selling souvenirs, food, clothing, toys, and fortune telling. It was a colorful chaos of pilgrims, shopkeepers, and visitors. The Japanese stopped and shopped, climbed the steps to the temple, bowed heads, prayed for a moment, then returned to browse among the mundane offerings.

We arrived fairly early. The crowd was light. Don warned me that there would be more people later—and there were. Dozens upon dozens of couples and families. However, despite the throngs, no one ever jostled or pushed. The Japanese seem encased in thin, invisible, head-to-foot shields that protect themselves and each others. Muriel said that was true, with two exceptions: 1) boarding subways at rush hour, and 2) little old ladies who were all elbows and jabbed their way past at will.

At the foot of the stone steps leading to the temple itself was a large, smoking brazier under graceful little roof. Its smoke is believed to heal. The brazier was surrounded by people thrusting arms or faces into the smoke or waving it toward themselves. Don insisted that I join them. I

could not think of a ladylike way of thrusting my leg into the smoke, so satisfied myself with wafting it toward me with large gestures. I did not notice any healing, instantaneous or delayed.

Inside the temple, the statue of Kannon, to which the temple is dedicated, is hidden within a vast, elaborate, gold-plated shrine. A service was in progress. Visitors to the temple were separated from the shrine and monk by a glass wall. The monk bowed before the shrine. A few worshipers were seated behind him, their backs to the glass divider. Off to the right, the deep throb of a drum sounded solemnly.

Donations at shrines and temples are tossed into large rectangular wooden containers covered by wood or copper strips between which coins drop into the bottom and slide from sight.



We saw the first of several wedding parties we were to pass on the holiday. The bride was a beautiful young girl in the most elaborate of white wedding kimonos. Muriel said that most brides rent their wedding dresses because the kimonos are so fabulously expensive. This bride was not wearing the usual high, squared white headdress that is designed both to protect her hairdo and to hide the horns women were said to have. The bridegroom wore the traditional short black kimono top with small gold medallions, reminiscent of a black cutaway coat, over a long striped gray skirt with a deep pleat in the front. Muriel explained that the woman fussing with the drape of folds in the skirts of the two was the Marriage Arranger, not one of the mothers.

Most Japanese marriages still are arranged. The Marriage Arranger plays a major role throughout. The parents of the bridegroom pay wedding expenses. Parents of the bride give the couple a substantial gift, appliances for their kitchen or even a house itself. The bridal couple does

not need furniture. Japanese rooms normally have only tatami,* cushions, and futons.

The ceremony is brief. Then comes a lengthy session with the photographer. Finally, everyone adjourns to the reception. The bride changes into a red kimono for it. She sits quietly with eyes downcast, eating nothing. She leaves periodically to change her kimono. She may make as many as three or four more changes into beautiful kimonos of various colors and decoration, representing an investment of many thousands of dollars by her parents. She will use her wedding kimonos for the rest of her life. Muriel pointed out that the friends bustling around the wedding couple we were watching were wearing kimonos from their own ceremonies, saved especially to wear at weddings. (They all also have a kimono with a special emblem on the back that they save for funerals. This probably is acquired later.) Finally, the bride will dress for departure on the honeymoon in a little dark suit, round hat with upturned round brim, and white gloves, clutching a small handbag in front of her.



As we left the temple, I remarked that I wanted to get something electronic as a gift for Alex. Muriel said that Don would be delighted for an excuse to go to what I assumed was an electronics store. Don decided that for this particular trip, a taxi was the best mode of transport. Unfortunately, the driver left us on the wrong side of the station Don had directed him to because the electronics store was adjacent to it.

We walked down and around for what felt a mile, and debouched in not just the electronics store I expected, but an entire district—a brightly lit wilderness of open-front electronic stores on both sides of the street and down intervening alleys for several blocks. The screaming array of hundreds of tiny radios and telephones with their (to me) undecipherable price signs across the front of every store made my head reel. We found

* *Tatami* are woven straw mats used as floor coverings. One always removes ones shoes before stepping on a tatami.

what I eventually bought in one of the first stores we tried, but we continued prowling through at least two dozen more stores just-in-case.

Running out of steam half-way through our explorations, we decided it was time for a beer and lunch. Could we find a restaurant in this country where there normally are three on every block? Nothing but electronics stores in the district. We walked endlessly before finding a small Chinese restaurant down a steep set of stairs off a side street.

We had our beer then Muriel declared that, as it was lunch time, we might as well eat. I was introduced to the noodle soup Don had warned me would be our standard lunchtime fare. It came Chinese-style in an enormous bowl with chopsticks and a stubby spoon made of some unfamiliar material. One grasped some noodles with the chopsticks—not necessarily at the first attempt—twirled them in the spoon, and lifted them to the mouth, slurping as necessary. Slurping is not only acceptable, but expected. The gentleman at the next table assured us that it is permissible to drink from the spoon. I think I consumed about half of my lunch.



We returned to the first store, where I completed my shopping, then took a train from the nearby station to the Meiji Shrine. Don asked whether we wanted to take the subway, which was faster, or the train, which ran on the surface and would allow sightseeing. We opted for the train. Don explained that although the subway system is owned by the government, the train systems are privately owned. Many of them belong to department stores and end right in the stores themselves.

We stopped close to the shrine. One enters through one of the largest wooden *torii* (gateway to a Shinto shrine) in the country. A wide, wide path of fine dark-gray pebbles leads through dense, peaceful woods over an arched bridge to the shrine. An extensive park like this is highly unusual in Tokyo, with its dense population and limited room to accommodate its people. As we walked down the long, gentle slope, I

reminded myself that what goes down, must come up—tired from a generous period of walking about the shrine.

The Meiji Shrine is a collection of low, graceful wooden buildings. All Shinto shrines have a large rectangular stone or cement trough for ritual hand-washing. Small cups at the ends of poles are used to dip water and pour it over one's hands before entering the shrine. Properly, one's mouth also should be rinsed. While all the guide books explain this, many tourists ignore the practice.



We saw another bridal party parading slowly past the front of the shrine, then entering the far end. It was a solemn, colorful procession. Muriel remarked that it must be a highly influential family to be permitted to have a wedding in the Meiji Shrine.

This bride wore the traditional white headdress and walked sedately with eyes lowered. Muriel explained that the women in the procession wearing dark kimonos were wedding attendees, while the ones in white were vestal virgins from the shrine.

We headed toward another building in an adjacent compound, Muriel going on ahead of Don and me. She turned and gestured frantically to us. We smiled and continued at our own pace. She gestured even more imperiously. We hurried toward her. Another bridal group was emerging from the building and settling down for the obligatory session with the photographer. The Marriage Arranger fussed over the folds of the bridal couple's kimonos. Friends flitted about at the sides in their bright kimonos, taking tiny steps on their wooden clogs. We spent some time watching and photographing them ourselves. The couple, noticing us, seemed pleased that we wanted to take their pictures.

Muriel and, later, Japanese friends laughingly commented that Japanese are born Shinto but die Buddhist.



We headed back up the long hill to the exit. As I suspected, uphill after substantial walking was not as pleasant as downhill beforehand. Partway up, we all decided we needed a break. We adjourned to an elaborate restaurant off the pathway for a bit of cold refreshment.

Instead of taking the train or a subway back to the hotel, we walked blocks—and blocks—and blocks to a store Muriel especially wanted to visit. It actually was right where the Stauffers expected it to be. I, of course, had trudged along with them certain that we would prowl Tokyo afoot unsuccessfully for the rest of my lifetime.

The Oriental Bazaar was four floors of exactly that—a wondrous selection of things large and small, choice and simple, expensive and bargains. It had everything Japanese, from the most exquisite of antiques to dear little ticky-tackies. We wandered from floor to floor, admiring here and buying there.



When we emerged from the Oriental Store, it was raining. We all were exhausted. We opted for a taxi back to the hotel. We separated to dress for dinner, regrouped in the Stauffer's room for Happy Hour, and were Don's guests at the American Club for an excellent meal.

From the dining room, Muriel pointed out the windows of the apartment in which they had lived. It overlooked not only the American Club, but the adjacent Soviet Embassy. Since the Stauffers lived there during the Cold War, they were able to observe an endless succession of tantalizing activities from their apartment.

It was raining when we finished dinner, and we returned to the hotel by taxi. Muriel gave me careful instructions about Japanese taxis. One does not open or close a door. The driver controls the passenger doors from his seat and takes great umbrage at passengers who preempt his responsibilities. Seat backs, in front and back, are covered with immaculate half-slipcovers, always white, usually eyelet embroidery,

often edged with a pleated ruffle. Many drivers wear white gloves. One does not tip. Taxis are easily available almost everywhere in large cities.

Wednesday, 16 September

In the middle of the night, a typhoon hit Tokyo. We had been warned of its approach. It blew in with heavy winds and rains.

Morning arrived with the horrible news that Muriel could not find her camera. She and Don had searched everywhere. The best she could think was that she had left it in the taxi when we returned from the American Club the night before.

Muriel went to the front desk. She explained the problem. The helpful young man took down all the information, then asked for the taxi receipt. Don had receipts for every move we had made in Japan, but not that taxi receipt. Don and Muriel returned to their room. They searched the waste baskets for the missing receipt. They searched pockets. They tore their suitcases apart. Don finally decided that because it was raining, he might not have waited for the taxi receipt after paying the driver. The desk man promised to call the taxi company and see if the camera had been turned in. Muriel was optimistic about favorable reply because the honorable Japanese automatically turn found items in to their offices or to the nearest police kiosk.

With heavy hearts, we adjourned for breakfast. We tried to reconstruct where else Muriel might possibly have left her camera. The last place we had shopped was the Oriental Bazaar. We knew Muriel had the camera when we went in there. Mentally we backtracked our progression through the store. Muriel did not remember whether or not she had it at her final stop. We all thought back to her next-to-last stop. Muriel's face lit up like the angels in the TV show. She remembered putting her packages and camera on the counter while she searched for Yen to pay for her purchases. Back in her room, Muriel called the Oriental Bazaar. Yes, they had found her camera and were holding it for her.



In view of the weather, Muriel and I decided we would spend the day safely in department stores, rather than continue sightseeing. Our first stop was the hotel gift shop, where Muriel and Don each selected an umbrella from the large selection. Don chose a conventional black while Muriel found a pretty collapsible umbrella in a soft bluey-greeny-lavender print. Muriel later commented that had she known she would use it almost every day of the trip, she would have bought a more expensive one.

Don left for his business appointment. Muriel and I headed for the Oriental Bazaar. By the time we settled into the taxi, the rain had stopped and the skies were brilliant blue. That day, Muriel never opened the new umbrella that she was carrying.

We retrieved Muriel's camera from the Oriental Bazaar, then took a long subway ride to the Ginza, Tokyo's famous shopping district. Magically, the subway ended within the store to which we were headed.

The store was enormous. The floor we entered held food, more food, still more food—canned, dried, packaged, and raw. The preponderance was fish. It smelled of fish, but pleasantly. We strolled up one aisle and down the next. I found most items unfamiliar, but interesting.

The charming uniformed clerks almost without exception were young, tiny, slim, with their shiny black hair swinging in a short bob, and with delicate hands on wrists with no apparent bones. They were embarrassingly attentive, so polite that it was hard to walk past without buying something. Kind as were their attentions, we resisted the unobtrusive persuasions. Just seeing the dozens and dozens of attentive clerks was a shock after the frustrations of U.S. stores where it is impossible to find a human being with access to the cash register.

We wandered through all seven floors of the store. They carried elegant designer clothes, shoes that were works of art, jewelry to dream over. Price tags were high beyond belief.



We paused longest on the floor where kimonos were sold. As we lingered over each magnificent creation, Muriel suddenly whispered and pointed to where a little girl was being fitted for a kimono. She explained that The Day of the Children was approaching, a day when children are feted and parents give thanks that their young ones have survived infancy.

I quietly moved closer to watch the fitting. Just as a man dashed toward me, his face a mask of horror, I realized that I had inadvertently stepped onto a large tatami in my shoes. I backed off instantly, bowing and apologizing, turned and fled to hide my barbarian presence behind a tall showcase. Muriel thought it was funny. I was humiliated, but annoyed that a large tatami had been put on the floor where unsuspecting people might walk on it accidentally. Not that this particular idiot had any business moving in on a private Japanese moment.



The store had an art show as, according to Muriel, they often did. Stores, she said, felt obligated to entertain and instruct their clients as well as to provide goods for them to buy. The show had elaborate figures intricately woven of straw or reeds, some mounted on frames in a sort of 3-D, others free-standing on small mats. All were interesting and exquisitely done.

I tried to compliment the artist, but she spoke no English and my Japanese didn't stretch to a complimentary critique. I wanted to tell her that her work was very imaginative. Muriel did not know the word and could not find it quickly in her handy dictionary. We both smiled, bowed, and thanked the artist, using in the most elaborate wording for the phrase, then headed to the escalator. As we rose, the woman in charge of the show ran toward us, gesticulating frantically. We realized that she wanted us to sign the guest book. We would have done so gladly, had we not been rising out of sight on a one-way moving staircase.

Muriel found the word I wanted. We intended to return later, compliment the artist, and sign the book. However, we returned on another bank of escalators and missed the show.



We reached the top floor, where Muriel said the restaurant should be. We walked through another food shop, a far less elaborate one. This was a place where ordinary Tokyo residents could shop for their family meals.

Muriel—in Japanese—asked a clerk where the tea room was located. She was told it was on the bottom floor. Muriel protested that tea shops always were on the top floor. The woman admitted that there was a restaurant on this floor, but added that it was Japanese. Muriel said that was fine. Off we went, following directions.

We found a small, simple restaurant off in a corner. We looked at the plastic representations of menu offerings on display. These are a welcome aid to *gaijin**—though not intended for them. One studies them, then points to one's selection wordlessly.

At this little restaurant we pointed, then realized that we had to pay for our meal in advance. There was a bit of back-and-forth before we figured out what we were supposed to do. I thought it would be easier if I paid for my own, but Muriel took over. Ultimately, we ducked under the printed pennants hanging in the doorway and were shown to one of about six plain wooden tables covered with plastic.

The bowing waitress promptly served us hot green tea in the usual handle-less cups. The waitress brought us our drinks and one plate of food. Somehow Muriel had ended up with only three tickets. We laughed at the mix-up. I got up, returned to the cashier, and paid for a second plate of food. Our choice was excellent. Raw fish was piled high with lettuce shredded as fine as silk thread, decorated with fine shreds of carrots and radish.

Our food was good, but Muriel was less than happy about the restaurant itself. It was fine for a little street place, but not what she expected in a major department store. As we left, with Muriel grumbling, we found

* *Gaijin* is Japanese for *foreigner* or *foreigners*.

ourselves in front of an elegant restaurant. “That’s where I wanted to go!” she exclaimed.

We browsed along the display of their offerings. All were elaborate, with five or more items on each tray. I felt what we had eaten was exactly right, especially since we were to be taken out for dinner that night. Muriel was not pacified.



We left the store to take care of a specific errand of mine. As we emerged from the arcade, we ran into Don. He was walking off a huge lunch and killing time until his next appointment. The three of us ambled across to the Imperial Hotel for a cup of tea.

We then explored nearby arcades. The Stauffers were disappointed to find that many of the shops they expected to find no longer were there. Don gave Muriel instructions for getting back to our hotel, then left for his appointment.

We walked through a beautiful, modern arcade, then miles through the underground, miles. We walked down three long flights of stone stairs to get our train. Thank goodness, when we got to our station we found escalators to take us up the first two flights. We then were faced with what looked like a Mayan temple’s worth of stairs leading up to the outdoors. Don said he had counted them. There were 63. I had a system for this sort of situation. They say when you are up high, “don’t look down.” This was “don’t look up.” We trudged our way up the stairs, then back to our hotel.



We had just enough time to dress for dinner as guests of business associates of Don’s. We met our hosts at a Chinese restaurant in the Ginza. It gave me a chance to see the Ginza at night, a fantasy of vertical, multicolored lights shining down on throngs of people moving slowly or quickly along the sidewalks below.

We greeted our host, Nishibesan, and his associate, and were shown into the restaurant and through to a private room. (As you probably know, the *san* tacked onto the end of a surname is an honorific, like our *Mr.*)

Don had known Nishibesan for many years. His English was labored, but understandable. The younger man was gracious, but did not say as much. The Stauffers and Nishibesan caught up with news about each other as an exquisite, many-course dinner was served to us impeccably.

It began with a plate of almost transparent thin slices of raw fish topped with a red cube of something Muriel insisted was tomato, but I said was another kind of raw fish.

Later conversation:

DON (*to Kate*): Did you know what kind of fish that was?

KATE: Of course not.

DON: You've heard of the poisonous fish?

KATE: It couldn't have been. That is fantastically expensive.

DON: I am sure that is what it was.

MURIEL: And I'm sure it wasn't!

DON: As long as you're not dead yet, you don't have to worry about it.

The second course was the loveliest fish this non-fish-lover ever has had. A delicate variety of fish had been cooked, fashioned into a cake, quickly deep fried, and was served with the creamiest of sauces.

Next, we had small filets with a mushroom sauce. Accompanying it was a tiny potato baked, mashed with almost an equal amount of finely chopped crisp bacon, and restuffed into the shell.

After the elegant meal, the dessert was a disaster—a goblet of instantly-melting, tasteless, icy, watery, sherbet containing bits of canned fruit. I found the contrast with the superb dishes that preceded it wonderfully amusing and fought hard to keep my face from reflecting it.

It was early when we thanked Nishibesan for the sumptuous dinner and bade our hosts *sayonara** (pronounced closer to *sigh-OWN-a-rah* than to the *sigh-ugh-NAH-rah* of Wartime American movies). The two men left for their hour-plus train rides to their homes on the outskirts of Tokyo.

Don suggested we stroll through the Ginza a bit. We moved among the masses of happy people, enjoying the brilliantly lighted shops lining the street. Perhaps the Ginza is not unlike any other major city's center at night, but it seemed busier, louder, and more garish.

It still was early when we returned to the hotel. Don proposed a nightcap in their room, so we had a pleasant hour reliving the day and evening before parting for the night.

Thursday, 17 September

Muriel and I set out for the ancient city of Kamakura, outside Tokyo.

Don had carefully shown Muriel which train to take. Don, who is unfailing about directions, routinely underestimates distances. By the time Muriel, with me in tow, found the right platform, there was not a ticket-vending machine in sight that offered tickets to Kamakura.

Muriel spoke to the train manager on the platform. He was either unable or unwilling to help. A passerby saw her bafflement and stopped to offer assistance. His English and Muriel's Japanese could not find common ground. A lovely Italian girl with perfect English took us over. She explained that we could pay for our tickets at the other end of the trip. It was wiser, she said, because if we went back down three flights of stairs to buy the Kamakura tickets, we would lose our tickets for the subway line we had to take first. Even then, we might not find the correct machine for the Kamakura tickets. She added that there was a "Ticket Adjustment" window at every exit.

It was early-morning rush hour. Young business men and women on their way to work seemed to travel in flocks of discrete dark suits and white

* *Sayonara* is Japanese for *goodbye*.

shirts, unsmiling. We got into line with the Dark Suits and soon were propelled by them onto the train.

Muriel noticed me observing elderly Japanese women. Guessing at what was puzzling me, she confirmed that older Japanese women tend to have bowed legs, the result of a lifetime of sitting on their heels. Muriel said she learned to sit that way in art class when she lived in Tokyo. She eventually could maintain the position for thirty minutes at a time. Fortunately, they left Japan before her leg bones were affected.

The Tokyo area now is about 40 miles by 40 miles, or 1,600 square miles within the city limits. The Greater Tokyo area could include as much as 4,800 square miles.

Tokyo is so crowded and expensive that “most” people try to live on the outskirts. Our hosts of the previous evening said that it would take them an hour and forty minutes to get home. They were executives. People lower on the scale probably have two-hour or longer commutes morning and evening.

Trains in Japan run on perfect schedules. Muriel said that when she lived in Tokyo, there were no signs in English, as there now are. She would see what time a train was due at her station, check her watch, get off at the right time, and invariably find herself in the right place.



The train to Kamakura was like a subway car with seats along the sides, and straps and poles for standees. The trip took about an hour. We had time to visit on the long ride. Muriel explained that after they left Japan, while Don still was working for Hercules, the company had a guest apartment not far from their home in Wilmington. She and Don acted as “house parents” for a succession of young Japanese executives sent to the U.S. for one or two years of training before returning to Hercules in Japan.

Early in their chaperonage, they were startled to learn that the ceiling had fallen through in the Hercules guest house. Investigation showed that the

Japanese tenants were bathing in their accustomed Japanese manner in their U.S. bathroom. They soaped outside the tub, poured pans of water over themselves to rinse, and finally, immaculately clean, stepped into the waiting tub of hot water. A U.S. bathroom is not made for constant deluges. The floor of the bathroom dissolved.

From then on, arriving guests were lectured firmly about American bathrooms and mores. I suspect Muriel, in full professorial mode, scared them into adopting unfamiliar and, to them, unsanitary customs while in Wilmington.



We approached our station. The public-address system proclaimed a delightful caution in Japanese and then in English: “Please do not forget your forgetables.”

Kamakura is the site of The Great Buddha, a giant seated figure that keeps watch over the city. It was cast in bronze in 1252. The temple that housed the statue was washed away by a tidal wave in 1495 and never was rebuilt. An opening in the back of the statue permits entry into the vast base. One can see the great metal plates that form it. The statue sits impressively huge against the view of the peaceful city below.

We left the Great Buddha and walked down to a street lined with shops, looking for a restaurant for lunch. We passed two that we considered unacceptable, then saw no more until we reached the end of the street. There was a small one. No tables were available. Muriel gave a firm negative in Japanese at the bustling middle-aged waitress’s offer of a seat at a low Japanese table in a side room. At that the waitress rushed up to a single man eating alone at a small table. To our horror she whisked away his food, signaled him to follow, and seated the docile gentleman with his half-eaten meal in the tatami room. She then ushered us with elaborate courtesy to the vacated table. Slightly embarrassed at our privilege, we had our usual acceptable lunch of beer and noodle soup with bits of tofu swimming in it.

We traveled first class in the train back to Tokyo, thanks to a gift from one of Don's business friends. We were tired and enjoyed the comfort. We reached our hotel in time to rest before dressing for dinner with more friends of the Stauffers.



Arakisan —*Hiro*—our host, was one of the Hercules-guest-house friends from earlier years. He attended university in the U.S. He is an ebullient, delightful person. Muriel explained that Hiro was one of the few people they ever had heard of who divorced a wife of an arranged marriage. Later he remarried and they had a son. The wife and child, now early teens, live in the U.S. because Wife No. 2 refused to return to Japan. Hiro and the boy correspond almost daily by email, and he visits his wife and son two or three times a year.

Don had mentioned before hand that we were being taken to Tokyo's finest Chinese restaurant. I considered it an appropriate occasion to wear my new-for-Japan dress, emerald silk two-piece with a Chinese-style jacket. Hiro was delighted and insisted that I tell the proprietor, an old friend of his, that I had selected the dress in his honor. I refused, but Hiro told him anyway. The tall young restaurateur appeared delighted, and acted as if he believed it.

As before, we were ushered into a private dining room. There I sat in my "best" dress while Muriel wore a pant suit and the men took off their coats to enjoy a relaxed, informal dinner.

Again, the food was exquisite in looks, delicious, and multi-course. This time, however, we had entertainment with the service. Our waiter fancied himself as a singer and, after serving each course, leaned against the door and serenaded us in English with a series of inappropriate, thoroughly American songs.

Friday, 18 September

The rain that had dogged us almost since our arrival was so heavy that Muriel and I decided not to go out. She had hoped to show me the gardens of the Imperial Palace.

We packed for a weekend on the Ise Peninsula as guests of Hasegawasan and Hiro, of the company Fujikura Kasei. We each put just what we would need for the weekend in a small bag and delivered the rest to the Bell Captain to be sent on ahead by train to await our arrival in Osaka Sunday evening.

The rain slackened by mid-morning. Muriel suggested that we walk to a nearby shrine, one of her favorites. It was a small, weathered shrine that appeared to have no special significance, until I glanced to the right. There, stretching as far as one could see, were row after row of identical stone figures standing side by side on long stone bases. Each small statue had a little red knitted collar and cap, some faded to pink. Most had a colorful pinwheel on a stick placed in a holder in front of it. Each represented a child who had died. Muriel said that on good days, one usually saw mothers with children, come to visit the one—or ones—they had lost.

A nearby standing frame displayed rows of inlaid Japanese characters, apparently names of the dead children. Muriel explained that you could not find a child's name in the list because names are changed as soon as a person dies.

We returned to the hotel and decided to go to the American Club for lunch. Don, of course, had a business appointment and was to meet us at the station. We took our weekend suitcases with us. We had a pleasant change of food, delicious hamburgers. We visited in delightful surroundings until it was time to leave for the train station.



Of course, the moment we walked into the terminal, Don materialized at our sides. This always happens. We found the track for the *Shinkansen*

(“Bullet Train”) for Nagoya. While we were waiting, the train-cleaning crew arrived. It was a large group of slim women of various ages in matching suits of light coral slacks with striped coral tops and matching tennis-style visored caps. They moved with a delightful sense of pride in their positions in the subway hierarchy. We watched as they fanned out through the standing train and busied themselves cleaning it.


Our host, the president of Fujikura Kasei, Hasegawasan, joined us along with Hiro, his vice-president and our host of the previous evening. Hasegawasan was an athletic-appearing man of medium build, who appeared to be in his forties, but was closer to sixty. His manner was formal; his English, better than he apparently thought it was.

The Shinkansen is blissfully comfortable. The cars are luxurious. The ride is like floating on clouds, utterly unlike any train I ever had ridden. The only problem was that it moved so swiftly that I got dizzy looking out the windows. Most of the trip took us through industrial areas or past warren-like apartment complexes built close to the tracks. Buildings flashed past too quickly for the eye to catch.

We changed to a standard train in Nagoya. I found myself in the same luggage situation I had been in Europe 18 months earlier*—heavy suitcase and endless stairs. After fighting awkward luggage on that trip, I had invested in a weekender-size roll-aboard suitcase and a small wardrobe bag that clipped onto it. I considered myself well equipped to handle luggage easily on this trip. I had packed all nonessentials in the wardrobe suitcase and sent it on to Osaka by train. Still, roll-abouts have a lot of steel in them. They are heavy before one adds the first pair of pantyhose. I really am a disgrace to the Stauffers, as far as luggage goes.

I started easing my roll-aboard down a long flight of stairs in the Nagoya station, finding it both awkward and heavier than I had imagined. Suddenly our host, Hasegawasan, snatched it from my hands and sped down the stairs with it. I was both relieved and mortified. From then on, he automatically took control of my bag during transit.

* “Winter in Europe with Muriel & Don” on page 137



We reached Toba after dark. We took the hotel limousine to a magnificent hotel, high on a mountain overlooking the bay. We were told that Queen Elizabeth had stayed there. To our amazement, both the Stauffers and I were ushered into separate, identical, spacious suites.


One entered into a paneled entry. Opening off that on one side was a large wash room with a basin set into a long vanity. A separate room beyond held the toilet. Special slippers to be worn only in the toilet room stood ready on the floor matting.

A door on the other side of the entry led to a small room with a wash basin set in an even wider marble counter. Beyond that was a Japanese-style bath.

A large door set with frosted glass led to a comfortable living room. Just to the right of the doorway was a small bar with china cabinet above it holding an assortment of fine-quality glasses of every sort one might need. The omnipresent large Japanese electric pot held water at tea-brewing temperature. Tea service was set neatly ready at one side.

An archway opened on a large bedroom with two double beds covered with thick down coverlets in a handsome print that matched the heavy draperies on the wall-to-wall windows. A carved wooden armoire adjoined a long dressing table along the far wall opposite the windows.

I hung up clothes, freshened quickly, and changed for dinner. Hasegawasan had impressed upon us that he had made a 7:00 PM reservation for us.



We gathered in the Sea Horse Room on the first floor, which was the floor below the lobby. We were ushered to a long, elegantly appointed table next to windows overlooking the bay. The lights twinkling on the water like stars came from little boats seeking shelter against a coming storm.

Somewhat to our dismay, we were served another several-course meal, each plate artistically arranged and superb. By this time I was becoming more comfortable with chopsticks, though I approached each bite cautiously, fearing sudden disaster.

We parted immediately after dinner and went to our separate rooms for a long, restful night.

Saturday, 19 September

I awoke early and fixed coffee for myself. All Japanese hotel rooms, I found, had electric pots for brewing tea. They worked equally well for coffee. In Tokyo, I made the mistake of unplugging my hot water pot. This obviously distressed the maid. From then on, I left the pots steaming whether I was in the room or out, awake or asleep.

It was time to take my Japanese bath.

I ran water into the deep, almost square tub, then dipped water out into the large basin that was provided. I soaped thoroughly, then rinsed with a hand-held shower. Water drained off through the traditional slatted floor. Finally, scrupulously clean and well rinsed, I permitted myself to climb into the tub for the final soak. The effect was spoiled by my inability to loll in bathtubs. I probably stayed all of three seconds.



We met for breakfast at 9:00 in the Sea Horse room. As we were seated at the same long table, we all assured Hasegawasan that we would like the Japanese breakfast. The service was superb. Each of us was given a lacquered tray with a multitude of dainty covered bowls, small trays, and tiny plates. It was a beautiful picture. But everything tasted of fish.

The waiter asked if I wanted rice or porridge. That was an easy one; I'll take oatmeal over rice any morning of the week. However, when my porridge arrived, the waiter removed the top from the little bowl and I realized that it was soupy rice. He raised an eyebrow, asking permission as he paused before pouring a dark liquid onto the mess. Thinking nothing

could be worse than soupy rice, I nodded permission. I was wrong. It was fish oil.

Muriel pointed to a row of tiny bowls in the center of the table. I was supposed to sprinkle things on top of the porridge. However, they all looked like dried guppies, so I resisted the invitation. I tried to eat my porridge with chopsticks as Hasegawasan was doing. He got great lumps, which he ate happily. All I could manage was a bit of something that looked like a slight smear of library paste at the end of my chopsticks.

I found it easy to ignore the dried fish staring at me with a desiccated eye from its little rectangular dish at the back of my tray. One little dish had beans, and another a small crab cake. Both were eminently edible. I investigated the covered bowl on the right. Soup. Not my usual breakfast, but acceptable. Guess what! In Japan the basic broth for soup is not chicken or beef; it is bonito.

Muriel began picking at her dried fish with chopsticks and without success. Hasegawasan urged her to pick it up in her fingers. He said that the flesh on the underside was free of bones. I followed her example and found he was right. It was just a few mouthfuls. and it was fish, but it was delicious.



At 10:00 we set out in a luxurious van Hasegawasan had rented for the weekend. It was raining, and the hotel supplied umbrellas for our party and for others leaving at the same time. Muriel, Don, and I had our own, of course, but Hasegawasan and Hiro made good use of the loaners during a damp day.

We were headed for Jingu, the most honored of all Shinto sanctuaries. Hasegawasan wanted us to see the view from the mountain top, so he directed Hiro to take the drive through the national forest instead of the more direct highway. It was a gorgeous drive, winding through the loveliest of woods and overlooking lush valleys far below.

We had awakened to sun and broken clouds. We left the hotel in light rain. We knew there was a typhoon in the area. As we wound our way up the mountain, we moved deeper and deeper into the gathering clouds. The higher we went, the thicker the clouds and the less we could see. I wondered how Hiro could see anything on the curving trail. The only thing that saved him was the white line down the center. I prayed that someone wasn't following it coming toward us from the opposite direction.

We reached the top of the mountain. Hiro parked at the observation point. Hiro hustled us all out of the van and into the clouds. We could see each other, but that was about it. We walked to the observation platform and took pictures because that was what we were supposed to do. We have some delightful laughing group pictures, slightly fuzzy as if stroked by an air brush. We all thought it marvelously funny to be taking photographs in deep cloud.

We wound down the other side of the mountain and eventually came to the first shrine. Jingu, which is a series of shrines, is considered the spiritual home of the Japanese people. Most Japanese want to make at least one pilgrimage to Jingu during their lifetime.

The original shrine dates back 2,000 years. However, every twenty years all buildings are taken down and rebuilt completely, exact to the last wormhole. While the buildings themselves are not old, the spirit of the Shinto shrine is.

We walked along the usual wide, wide gray gravel path through an ancient forest. Here and there great old trees had been left standing in the path. They and large trees at the edge of the pathway are protected from passers-by by 5-foot-wide bands of bamboo laced tightly around their trunks as shields. This seems wise in view of the fact that some six million pilgrims and tourists visit Jingu annually.

Both Hasegawasan and Hiro are devout Shintoists. We followed them closely. When they dipped water over their hands before approaching the shrine, we did the same. We climbed the steps to the shrine, but could not

go inside because of a barrier. We understood that the Emperor and Empress come to Jingu on occasion. At those times, others are barred from the area.

We visited several of the buildings in the extensive complex. As we were returning to the car, Hiro commented that the street we just had walked down to the car park used to be lined with pleasure houses. Men were so overcome at cleansing their souls through a visit to Jingu that they set out instantly to collect new sins. Hiro then added that while they were busy on their pilgrimages, their wives were at home entertaining themselves with handsome young men.



No one told us where we were going. We drove this way and that, up and down a series of narrow streets, Hiro and Hasegawasan laughing and arguing and consulting a map. Finally we stopped in front of a charming Japanese house.

Muriel asked where we were going. Hasegawasan answered, “To lunch.”

The Stauffers and I glanced at each other in horror. Our big breakfast had been about three hours earlier. To complicate matters, as we approached the house we realized that this was a tatami restaurant, the height of traditional Japanese dining.

A beautiful young woman in a sea-green kimono, bowing low, greeted us. We left our shoes at the door and went onto the tatami in stocking feet. We followed our hostess down a hall with sliding screen walls and into a private room. The table was long and low. I was faced with sitting on the floor. With relief I saw that we were to sit on a sort of stadium seat with a thick cushion and a padded back rest. Instead of being seated directly across from one another, guests were staggered so that legs could be stretched out without danger of inadvertently playing footsie with the person across the way. It was remarkably comfortable.

The gracefulness of our hostess is hard to describe. She moved with typical tiny steps. She sank to her knees to serve as smoothly as a willow

branch bowing to the wind. She rose as effortlessly. She shuffled along the matting from guest to guest on her knees.

Our hostess was very talkative. She wanted to know all about each of us. There was much Japanese conversation. Of course, I had no way of knowing what Hiro and Hasegawasan told her, and I doubt that either Don or Muriel could follow completely.

I cannot describe our lunch. I think there were fifteen courses. Each was tiny, but a gem of color and shape. Our hostess spoke no English. Don and Muriel could say a few things to her in Japanese, to her delight. Still, she was so attentive and so responsive that there was a wonderful feeling of friendliness throughout.

The most interestingly presented course was two small rectangular dishes stacked one above the other and covered by a little bamboo cricket cage. We lifted the dishes out to enjoy the food—bits of raw fish, seaweed, other bits-and-pieces, all delicious. When we put the dishes back together



Hasegawasan, Hiro, Don & Muriel, and Kate, Japan 1998

to return them to the cage and set them aside, we discovered that the faint design was crickets and wide blades of grass, the pattern of one dish blending perfectly with the pattern on the other.

Muriel explained that it is not unusual to keep a cricket as a pet in a tiny bamboo cage. Japanese homes are so tiny that they do not have room for larger pets. Muriel added, “Crickets are cheerful creatures.”

One course came on an individual brazier. Lumps of grilled eel, possibly one of tofu, and some of the most tender beef imaginable were enclosed in a leaf. The stem of the leaf was poked through its point to make an envelope for the meat.

Muriel bogged down at about Course 11. She knows from embarrassing experience that a moment sometimes comes when she cannot take another bite without risking public disaster.

Across the table from her, our hostess remarked to Hasegawasan, “She drank so much beer that she can’t eat her meal.”

“Careful,” Hasegawasan cautioned her, “She understands Japanese.”

And Muriel did! Fortunately, she was amused. Since we all had only one beer, and Muriel drank only half of hers, she wasn’t offended. I did not see the by-play so don’t know if Muriel made sure our charming waitress knew that she overheard.

Muriel set her unfinished plate aside. The hostess left it there. Muriel moved it to the side. The hostess left it there and brought another. Muriel did not touch it. Another plate was presented and the untouched one moved aside. Hiro finally spoke to the young woman in Japanese and she reluctantly removed everything and did not include Muriel in new offerings. Muriel explained later that she had met that problem before in Japan. They will not remove a plate until you have finished what was on it.

I found that if you replace a cover on a dish they can’t tell whether you have eaten it or not, but assume you are through. This was helpful frequently.

When Don commented at the size of the meal, Hiro said we were not to worry, that we would walk it off visiting other shrines.

The lunch went on and on and on. It was one of the most fascinating experiences of my life. Everything about the room, the young hostess, the service, the food, was exquisite.

To avoid disturbing the picture of gracious oriental living, I shall not discuss the process by which ultimately I regained upright position.

We bowed and arigato-ed* our way out, reclaimed our shoes, and returned to see the rest of Jingu.



We took the gray gravel path again and looked at the shrine from behind a barricade. All of this was in the rain, with our umbrellas. The rain itself stopped, and started, stopped, and restarted. However, it dripped from the trees continually, so the umbrellas remained unfurled.

We continued to another shrine on a side path. It was dedicated to the Fox and is one of my favorite memories. It was small, colorful, charming. We washed our hands ritually before entering the shrine. We tossed coins into the rectangular fare box. I happened to be standing next to Hasegawasan. He bowed deeply twice, clapped his hands loudly twice, bowed again, then grasped the thick bell cord at his left and tugged, making the brass soccer-ball-shaped bell chime loudly. I followed his performance and he insisted I also ring the bell. I did. I hated leaving the shrine, it was such a joyous place. In mood, it reminded me of the lower chapel at Sainte Chapelle in Paris.

Hasegawasan suggested we stroll through the nearby shopping area. It was a pleasant series of almost-empty streets and small shops. Unfortunately, it had a large number of restaurants emitting more food odors than appealed to us after our large lunch. We turned this way and that and finally reached the end of one of the streets. Hasegawasan stood

* *Arigato* is Japanese for *Thank you*.

legs spread, hands on hips, scowling like a menacing shogun. He thought he was taking Muriel to a *washi** shop where she could buy the beautifully decorated Japanese gift paper she had mentioned looking for. The shop was gone. He led us up one street, around this corner, down another street—it was fascinating. We finally stopped at a shop that sold wood-block prints. Muriel found some of her paper, and we bought some wood-block post cards.

We returned to the car, and Hiro announced that the weather seemed to be clearing. We would return by the mountain road so we could stop again at the observation point. As we started climbing we had a gorgeous view of the town of Ise below. And then we were in the clouds again. Obviously they had been waiting for us. We could barely see the observation spot as we drove past, laughing uncontrollably at our luck, or lack of it.



Back at the hotel, we took thirty minutes to freshen up, then gathered in Don and Muriel's room for Happy Hour. I thought I would expire when Hasegawasan announced that we were going to the sushi bar in the hotel for supper. I had not planned to eat again until next weekend.

In the sushi bar, I happened to sit next to Hasegawasan, which may have been a mistake. He ordered twice as often as did anyone else, and he did everything possible to see that I ate at his pace. I couldn't.

I suggested that my pieces be cut in two so I could manage them better, as we had done our first night in Tokyo. Hiro remarked that was what was done for children. I was doing fairly well at picking up with my chopsticks the little packages of raw fish wrapped around tightly compacted sticky rice and dipping it into a tiny dish of sauce. Muriel made the disastrous mistake of telling me that I was managing my chopsticks quite well. My world exploded.

My chopsticks suddenly crossed. The sushi slipped and dropped out of sight, missing my plate, missing my lap, and failing to miss the attention

* *Washi* is traditional Japanese paper.

of all my friends. I was mortified, but tried to carry it off with a laugh at my ineptness. We continued our meal, but I was somewhat undone. Everyone offered me advice, which did not help. I was shattered. At one point Don reached over and somewhat impatiently, showed how I was using my chopsticks at the wrong angle to pick the portions of sushi up safely. I thanked him, but silently wished he had demonstrated it earlier.

Soon after that, we left the sushi bar. I picked up my pocket book from the little shelf under my stool, slipped the strap over my left shoulder, and out of habit grasped the corner of the bag. My hand closed on something smooth and cold that only could be a piece of raw fish. I realized with horror that the sushi had stuck to my handbag. I unobtrusively peeled the piece of fish off my handbag, clutched in it my hand—fortunately, the left one—and put my hand down at my side, hoping no one would notice.

It was time to say farewell to our attentive host. Hasegawasan intended to leave for his nearby home early Sunday morning. I consider my performance as we shook hands and I thanked him for his expansive generosity, a lesson in poise-under-pressure.

When we left Hiro and Hasegawasan, Don suggested I join them for a nightcap. I agreed. As I entered their suite, I excused myself, closed the bathroom door behind me, flushed my fishy burden, washed my hand and the corner of my bag, and quickly rejoined my companions. I honestly don't know whether I told them what had happened or not. I may still have been too embarrassed at disgracing them in front of their friends.

Sunday, 20 September

We packed to leave for Osaka later in the day. Hasegawasan departed, though not as early as he had planned. I had a chance to say a second, unencumbered goodbye.

We returned to the van, and Hiro drove us to the Mikimoto pearl museum. We parked in the most beautiful garage I ever have seen. The entrance and elevator were worthy of a business building. We walked a short way, then over an enclosed bridge from the mainland to the Mikimoto Pearl Island.

We watched the show of women diving as they used to dive for pearls before the business of cultivating pearls was expanded and modernized. They arrived in an enclosed launch, wearing white uniforms of jumpsuits and a head covering. They entered the water with their large baskets, dove down, and stayed a frightening length of time before returning to drop one or more oysters into their floating baskets.

Nowadays after the nucleus has been implanted in each oyster, it is placed carefully in a netted rack and suspended under great rafts holding dozens of racks. We could see a large fleet of rafts anchored in the sheltered bays nearby. The procedure of caring for the oysters is far more complicated and painstaking than I intend to describe here.

We studied the process in pictures and models in the nearby museum. Young women demonstrated the key task of selecting an oyster and seeding the nucleus around which it would create a pearl. Other young women showed how pearls are sorted, matched, and strung. On display were some of the enormous and elaborate creations Mikimoto has made of pearls for exhibitions or anniversaries—a Liberty bell and a temple, for example.

Then, naturally, there was an elegant jewelry store. The most exquisite of pearls were available for sale, as well as less expensive pearl jewelry.



When we finished with the Pearl Island, it was noontime; we had to catch a train just before 4 o'clock; we had to have lunch; and our destination, Kashikojima, was two hours away. It was all very complicated, but somehow we found ourselves back in the car flying along one of the most beautiful drives I ever have seen.

We wound up and around mountains with overlooks of the bay, fishing boats and rafts, and green islands. We reached an overlook with a restaurant and grounds full of topiary of all sorts. Far below, the Pacific beat against huge rocks and spume leaped high in lacy contrast to the dark water.

To everyone's relief, it was decided that we did not have time to continue to Kashikojima. Don explained that he was less interested in our reaching there than in my seeing the glorious drive.

Don obviously expected Hiro to suggest that we have lunch. The restaurant looked like the kind of place I prefer to avoid, but no comment. Moments later we were in the car hurtling back down the mountain. Don, who takes mealtimes seriously, appeared to be in shock. I managed to stifle my giggles at the situation. To Don's relief, Hiro turned into a narrow road that led to a charming restaurant. However, it turned out to be a tatami place that offered only the full-course meals.

Onward we went. Hiro suggested that we stop at the Maritime Museum, which we had passed on our drive up. Muriel said later that she was sure he intended to go there all along. I was delighted. Don was about to die because he had not had any food and it was now past one o'clock.

Fortunately, there was a tiny café attached to the museum. It was decided we would stop there. We had welcome beers and bowls of soup with a special kind of fat noodles, famous in the area. They were quite good, though they looked distressingly like long, white worms.

The museum was fascinating, an extensive collection, handsomely displayed. We lingered happily.

We returned to the hotel, picked up our luggage. En route to the railway station, Hiro stopped to fill the gas tank of his rented van. He drove into a small area that did not look like any gas station I ever had seen. I watched with amazement as the attendant pulled a hose down from the ceiling and inserted it into the car's tank. Land is so choice in Japan that they do not dare waste space on the kind of pumps that are common in the United States.

Hiro delivered us to the terminal. We said goodbye reluctantly.



We had a pleasant ride to Osaka.

The Hotel Granvia in Osaka was an experience in itself. Our train arrived on the ground level. This was fortunate, since I no longer had the attentive Hasegawasan to manage my heavy bag. We rolled our suitcases effortlessly a short distance through the expansive marble lobby and directly into the lobby of the hotel. Furthermore, I learned later, through the doors opposite, one was immediately in a major department store. And up one of the towers, using a separate bank of elevators to three high floors, were literally dozens of small restaurants of every sort imaginable. I never ceased marveling at the gloriously convenient conjunction of facilities.

We checked in, deposited luggage in our rooms, reconvened for Happy Hour, and decided to take advantage of the convenient restaurants for dinner.

Don led us to the special bank of elevators, and we ascended to what seemed to be an indoor arcade of restaurant after restaurant after restaurant, each displaying the plastic replicas of its menu offerings. We walked the limit of the floor without making a choice. We saw a sign saying there were more restaurants on another floor. We went up to that level and again “cased” each of the restaurants. They were a cut above the ones on the lower level, but none appealed to us.

We returned to the lower floor and entered a tempura restaurant we had seen earlier. It was simple and unimpressive. We had to wait to be seated and were directed to a tiny bench crammed into a corner. The three of us perched precariously, but fortunately, did not have to balance uneasily for very long.

We were seated cheek-by-jowl next to Japanese diners. No matter; the tempura was delicious—shrimp, chicken, and various kinds of fish, fried in delicate batter. We also were served an egg concoction in a small bowl, a little like an unsweetened flan with some ginkgo nuts and other goodies in it. It was tasteless until Muriel talked me into putting *Shoyu* (soy) sauce on it. Directly after dinner, we adjourned to our separate rooms for an early night after a long and interesting day.

Monday, 21 September

Rain. We had planned to go to Nara, but a look at the dismal weather convinced us we should do local things in Osaka instead.

I went down to the Beauty Salon to make an appointment to have my hair done. Muriel suggested going with me, but I assured her I could manage quite nicely on my own. I did, but it was a lengthy process.

The charming young girl at the desk hadn't a clue what I was talking about. We talked brokenly at cross-purposes until I finally realized that the time I proposed arriving appeared to her to be the time I expected my session to be finished. In desperation I went to the 24-hour clock, but that threw her even farther.

A second young woman joined us and seemed just as confused as the first. I happened to glance over the high desk and saw the appointment chart. I saw an ideal vacancy and pointed to it. The girl said she couldn't finish me in thirty minutes. I didn't care, and finally convinced her of it. My name was entered on the sheet proudly. I was escorted to the door amid bows and smiles and chirps of pleasure.



Muriel and I set off for the famous Osaka castle. Don had given Muriel subway instructions. We walked out of the hotel, into the adjacent terminal, down long, wide corridors lined with shops. Muriel paused slightly in front of the ticket dispensers. A gentleman stopped to ask if he could help. They held a brief conversation in Japanese. He assured her the 200-Yen ticket was correct. Muriel, studying the diagram on the wall had thought we needed tickets for 230 Yen.

Muriel was right. When we tried to exit at our station, the gates snapped shut. Muriel forced hers open and pushed past. I was blocked. A boy in his early teens saw my dilemma and led me to the Ticket Adjustment window next to the exits. Muriel joined me and we paid the rest of our fares.

We emerged from the subway. Every time we paused and looked lost, someone stopped to help us with English of one caliber or another. Muriel told me that all Japanese are required to take several years of English language in school. However, most of them are comfortable writing English, but not speaking it.

We found our way to the castle, a magnificent, gaudy, great structure, glowing with gold, high on a hill. We walked in the wrong gate, of course. We were in the expansive area surrounding the castle, but needed to find our way through the high inner stone guard wall. We backtracked out through the great outer wall, and walked about a block and a half to a gate that led through both. A wide stone ramp led over the moat and into the castle area proper.

Muriel and I both were dismayed to find the entire castle has been rebuilt with the exterior exactly as it was originally—breathtaking—and the inside a modern museum.

The elevator took us to the fifth floor. From there, we had to walk up to the eighth floor. We visited the exhibits on each floor as we went. The most fascinating were a kind of living diorama I never had seen. Behind flat plates in the wall, lights came on to show a three-dimensional scene. Tiny figures appeared. They obviously were actors, filmed, reduced, and somehow projected into the setting where they moved and spoke. A dozen or more of these small dioramas told the life story of Hideyoshi, who built the castle many centuries earlier.

An observation deck surrounds the eighth floor, under the soaring roof of the castle. It was fascinating seeing up-close the heavy, gold-plated decorations of the building. From the deck, one can see the expanse of Osaka, a beautiful city that Don termed the Chicago of Japan.

When we decided to leave, we found that our elevator went up, but not down. One walks down all eight flights. It is a clever way of assuring that most guests take advantage of the many displays. We stopped to see the exhibits on each floor—fascinating artifacts, costumes, art. It was a

lengthy process, it was interesting, and we were dead by the time we got to the bottom.

We found a small restaurant in one of the buildings in the compound. I ordered what became one of my favorite Japanese lunches, a breaded pork chop with some wisps of scrambled egg served on a bed of rice.



With the help of a series of kind passers-by we found our way back to the subway. We took a train to another station where, again thanks to occasional help from bowing strangers, we reached the temple to which Muriel was headed.


Our walk took us past a school just as very young, uniformed children were leaving. It was amusing seeing the doll-like little girls in their round-brimmed hats and little boys with bikes slightly too large for them doing all the same just-out-of-school things American youngsters do.

We strolled slowly through the shop area, enjoying the bewildering array of offerings, and finally reached the grounds of the temple and nearby elaborate five-story pagoda.

It must have been a special day. For a distance of perhaps three blocks, the area in front of the temple was a network of small awninged kiosks selling everything imaginable, from used clothes and china to fresh fruit.

When we entered the temple, a service was in progress. The monk was chanting, beating a drum, and clanging a brass bell. He appeared to be praying over some thin pieces of bamboo with writing on them. Muriel remarked that she would love to have one to give her skiing friend who was a Buddhist.

When we left the temple, I told Muriel that I thought a young woman in a nearby stall was selling the bamboo strips. Muriel went over to speak to her. As I watched, the young woman's face took on a strange expression. She and Muriel both began laughing. Muriel returned to report that the strips were prayers for the dead, and her friend was still very much alive.




Magically, we easily found our way back to the subway. Muriel asked directions of one of the guards. He motioned on, on, on, so we followed his gestures and walked on, on, on, down some stairs, and on, on, on. Muriel was studying the subway map when another of the fine subway attendants came to her assistance. He led us to another stairway and we finally reached the right track.

When we emerged from the train at the other end, a young man asked if he could help and showed Muriel which way to go. Next time she hesitated, a young woman showed us which of the maze of corridors to take to get back to the hotel.

Before reaching our destination, we reached the department store that joins the hotel. Unfortunately, the store opened off both sides of the corridor. We gambled on one side. Muriel ambled ahead, but I decided we had wandered enough. I spoke to a helpful clerk who led us out of the store and directed us to the door of the hotel, just out of sight behind the jutting opposite entrance to the department store.

We shared a quick beer in Muriel's room, then I went up to my hair appointment.



The two young women with whom I had conferred earlier in the day were amazed, but delighted, to see me both there and there at the exact time.

I was seated in a chair. A lap robe was thrown over my legs, probably for modesty rather than warmth. I was festooned with towels, then draped with plastic. A small table was rolled up alongside me. It held a small cup in which the operator indicated I was to deposit my glasses. She presented another dear little cup with a tiny doily in the bottom in which I was to put my earrings. With gestures, I was instructed to deposit my handbag alongside them on the top of the table. Throughout my stay, every time I was moved, the table was moved so that it remained right at my elbow.

The girl who had been at the reception desk began brushing my hair, long and deliciously. Then she lowered the back of my chair, firmly holding my neck as we went, because the counter moved to expose the basin beneath it. She began my shampoo. She had the tiny hands of a twelve-year old, but they were capable. In soaping my hair, her two little hands moved back and forth faster than I could believe human hands ever could move. When my hair was properly clean, she finished with a massage of my head, my neck, and finally of my shoulders. I decided that I did not care what I looked like at the end, the experience was so blissful.

She whipped off my coverings, replaced them with a new set, and whirled the chair around to face the mirror. An older woman replaced her to set my hair. With gestures I explained that I wanted it blow-dried and she apparently understood. However, somehow she applied the mousse after drying, instead of beforehand in the usual way.

She “finished” the coiffure by running her fingers through my dried hair. It looked quite all right on the sides and in the back, but the front was a disaster. I indicated to her that it was exactly what I wanted, got up, and walked toward the counter, intending to pay.

Instead, I was motioned over to a settee where a cup of hot tea and crisp cookies were laid out on a coffee table for me. I partook as expected and indicated my pleasure. Finally, I was allowed to pay and was ushered out amid bows and exclamations of pleasure on both sides.

As soon as I reached my room, I used my traveling curling iron to reorganize the front and top of my hairdo.



I rejoined Muriel and Don for Happy Hour, then we left the hotel to go to a small family sushi bar Muriel and Don enjoyed when they lived in Tokyo. Don had looked for it earlier that day to make sure it was still there. With his usual serendipity, he ran into the owner not far away. They rejoiced at seeing each other again.

It was a simple place, tiny, tacky, and sweet. The owners, a couple probably in their sixties, were wonderfully welcoming. No other customers were there. We had a delicious sushi meal. Then, at Muriel's urging, they put on their karaoke. The man had a beautiful voice and his wife had a very good soprano. They sang some Japanese songs. Don described one of the songs, a plaintive geisha favorite, as the "second Japanese national anthem." We all joined in singing the final song in English before saying sayonara.

Tuesday, 22 September

The weather still was unsettled, but over breakfast, it was decided we had to go to Nara anyway.

Don walked us the whole way to our train because he did not trust us to find it. It was rush hour. As we passed an entrance to our corridor, its 20-foot-wide stairway was solid with young Japanese business people, step after step with people a dozen or more abreast, all dressed in dark suits with white shirts and all with inscrutable faces that probably had more to do with the early hour than with their culture.

When Muriel and I reached Nara, the skies were doing something more than sprinkling. We hoisted our umbrellas and proceeded on the long walk to the Todaiji temple. We passed the beginnings of the noted "Deer Park," large grassy fields with animals happily grazing in the rain. Muriel, who remembered the deer at large, was disappointed. Soon we met a herd of deer huddled under a tree on our sidewalk. Others were walking about ignoring the rain. The shop where Muriel intended to buy food for the deer was closed.

We turned off the main road onto the long road down toward the temple. Two rickshaw men tried to talk us into rides, but we waved them away. Despite the rain, several large groups of uniformed school children, most of them young teenagers, were headed for the temple. We paused where a huge group was arranging themselves on steps to have their photograph taken, oblivious to the rain. We finally made our way past them and on up

the long stone walkway leading to Todaiji. Deer wandered wetly around us.

Todaiji houses the Great (indoor) Buddha, said to be the largest bronze statue in the world. It is dark and magnificent. To each side, and somewhat behind the Great Buddha, are two enormous gold statues.

School children were everywhere, milling but polite. Every one of them intended to have his / her picture taken in front of the Great Buddha. An older boy, perhaps 17, was posed in front of the statue when a much younger girl came up, snuggled along side him, and just as the picture was snapped, raised her hand in imitation of the Great Buddha's gesture. From then, everyone had a hand raised when a shutter clicked.

We walked around the side and behind the statues. At the corners of the room were great, ferocious statues Muriel described as temple guards. The temple and its statues were intriguing and impressive. I found the Great Buddha almost hypnotic. One begins to lose oneself in its ineffable serenity.

When we reached the first gate outside the temple, we found a young woman and her husband feeding a couple of deer. They gave them the last of their food. The deer waited expectantly, then, when no more was forthcoming, one nipped accusingly at the girl's skirt. She looked terrified. Her husband rushed to her defense and shooed the deer away. Muriel said the same thing happened to her in the Deer Park except that the deer she offended waited until she turned her back, then nipped her in the behind.



It was raining as we left the temple, but not hard. As we walked up the little stile through the final gate out of the compound, the skies opened up.

We already were soaked, so we decided to stop for lunch, then continue to a nearby shrine that Muriel particularly loved. The street had been lined with open shops and little restaurants as we went to the temple. Now all

were shuttered. Luckily, the little restaurant at the corner of the main street still was open.

After our respite, we continued through rain-lashed woods up a slight hill toward Muriel's shrine. The rain was heavier and the wind gusted wildly. We both found we were climbing the hill walking bent almost double with our umbrellas held as shields in front of us as we fought the increasing wind and driving rain. After struggling for about half a block, Muriel turned and asked, "What do you think about just going back." I had been pondering that possibility. We wheeled about and let ourselves be shoved along, like a couple of heavy leaves, to the big intersection.

Muriel went into our little restaurant and asked the pleasant woman who had served us earlier where we could catch a bus. I interrupted to say, "Muriel, there are lots of taxis on this street." The station was a long walk, but short ride dead ahead on the same street.

When we returned to the intersection, the rickshaw men pounced. Muriel ignored them as she looked for a taxi, so I was left to fend them off. I finally succeeded when they insisted on knowing where we were going. I raised my eyes as if looking far beyond the horizon and dreamily replied, "Far, far away." The rickshaw men retreated, either unwilling to have a long run, or reluctant to become involved with a slightly crazy elderly foreigner.

A taxi appeared almost as soon as we reached the other side of the street. It was pouring and we clambered in gratefully. I was wearing my new brown wool skirt for the first time. Muriel made me feel better about its sodden state by commenting, "I hope it doesn't shrink."

Taxi and train returned us to Osaka and the shelter of the Hotel Granvia. It was only when we turned the TV on to CNN that we learned a typhoon had raged inland through the Kobe, Osaka, and Nara area and continued through the north of Japan. Bad as the storm had seemed while we were in it, we had no idea it was that dangerous. It was scary to realize how easily our trip to Japan could have been ended, and our trip to the Unknown been hastened, by typhoon-tossed tree limbs.

Muriel commented, “I must say we’re inveterate sight seers to keep going through thunderstorms and typhoons.”

Wednesday, 23 September

Japan was kind enough to give us another public holiday for the Autumn Equinox. Don had worked out a very special program for the day.

Through a Japanese friend, Don bought tickets for all of us to a famous dance review in the town of Takarazuka. Don studied maps and time tables and determined that we could take a train to the cable car at Mt. Rokko in the Inland Sea National Park. We would ride to the top, then take the longest rope-way in Japan from Rokko to Arima Onsen far below. The trip allowed us a leisurely lunch before curtain time.

The view from the cable car going up was matchless—deep green forests, the jagged coastline of the inland sea, and a panorama of the great harbor at Kobe. We reached the restaurant recommended by Don’s friend midway up the mountain. However, as it was only 10:30, it was too soon after breakfast to stop for lunch.

The suspended rope-way car was even more exciting than the cable car. When we started down, Old Kate was not happy. It looked precipitous. The car swung down toward gashes between trees that looked too narrow to accommodate us. I was sure we would hit something either beneath us or at the sides. We didn’t, by what I considered fractions of an inch. I am never completely at ease swinging helplessly far above the land, but in this case, I was so busy enjoying the view that I did not have time to contemplate catastrophe.

We landed in Arima. On Don’s map, the town looked about five miles away from the rope-way terminal. Don blithely announced, “We’ll walk into town.” This is the sort of thing that throws me on our travels.

Off we set down the roadway. Almost immediately, Don turned left onto a steep, narrow, roughly paved street. I thought he had lost his mind. I was sure my knees never would be the same. The road wound down and around past one spa after another. In a relatively short time we were in

town, passing shops and restaurants on either side, looking for a place for lunch.

Nothing seemed to suit us. Muriel remarked, “You watch it; we’ll be back up here to one of these after we reach the foot of the hill.” She was right. Furthermore, the little restaurant we chose was quite good. I had an extremely good version of the pork-chop-and-egg-on-rice dish.

From Arima, we took a bus to Takarazuka. We arrived an hour and a half before show time. Don deliberately had left a lot of slippage in our schedule. We strolled to Takarazuka’s enormous amusement park and located the theater in a large building that also housed several fine shops. We wandered about the area and killed time until the audience emerged from the first performance.

We had excellent second-row balcony seats that gave us a perfect view of the entire stage and the runways on both sides and along the front. The show presented a well known troupe of all-girl dancers. They begin as little children and grow up in the dance school, ultimately graduating to the troupe.

I have never seen such staging in my life. The settings, the lighting, the costumes—everything was spectacularly beautiful. The first half was a dramatization in music and dance of a Pushkin story. We had to fight to make ourselves realize that the “men” actually were women dancers, their movements and entire body language were so masculine. Even in dance, they moved like chorus boys. Several had strong alto voices.

It was a rather confusing story, and we had not studied the program notes carefully enough. As war succeeded war, we hadn’t a clue who was fighting whom. The hero kept dying, we thought, or being dragged off to be shot. Next scene he would be resurrected and reunited with his love. We sorted it all out with the notes afterwards.

The second act was a series of dances, many to jazz or modern music. The staging of each was fabulous. There was a Rockette-style number. The finale was straight out of the Lido in Paris. Lights rose gradually on a stage-wide white staircase, narrowing at the top, risers outlined in lights,

as dancers slowly appeared tier by tier wearing white feather headdresses that threatened to carry them away.



We walked to the nearby train station and got a train directly back to our hotel. We were late returning, so decided to have dinner in one of the little restaurants in the hotel. After the usual wandering and trying to decide, we went into a Korean barbecue place.

A grill was set into the center of the table. We were served large platters of various kinds of meat to cook ourselves over the fire and dip into special sauces. We had beef, tongue, chicken, huge mushrooms, and vegetables including corn on the cob sliced like wagon wheels. The tongue was delicious; the beef not that tender. We all decided the chicken was the toughest bird we ever had tasted. Later we learned that it was not chicken, it was stomach.

Thursday, 24 September

Muriel and I took a train to Horyuji, between Osaka and Nara. The grounds of the Horyuji Temple house the world's oldest surviving wooden structures and give a glimpse of life as it existed in Japan more than 1,300 years ago.

We—Muriel—found our train without any trouble. There were only a few people in our car. We reached what we thought was our station. Muriel, speaking Japanese, asked a pleasant older woman near the door if this station were Horyuji. She said yes. I exited. Muriel lingered, asking the same question of a nearby young boy in case there had been a misunderstanding. He agreed that this was our station. Muriel still was inside the train. Doors remain open only for moments before slamming shut. Possibilities raced one after the other through my frantic mind: Should I stay on the platform and risk Muriel's disappearing down the track on the departing train? Should I jump back aboard? The problem was solved when Muriel stepped off the train moments before the doors would have sliced her neatly in two.

This was a small station, not automated. We gave our tickets to a man in the Ticket Adjustment office. He protested, waving the tickets and talking rapidly. Muriel said she didn't know whether we owed him money or he owed some to us. To settle the matter, we both smiled broadly, bowed, and left.

We walked down a nearby stairway. The view at the bottom was an acre of parked bicycles. We emerged in a walled alley, where the single human being wore a hard hat. We quickly retreated to the station. The man in the Ticket Adjustment office was holding out our unexpired tickets to hand them to us as we passed on our way back to the platform. We found that the name posted for the station was something beginning with H that was not Horyuji.

Moments later, another train arrived, and moments after that, we exited properly in Horyuji.

The temple complex is a symphony of graceful, weathered buildings. We visited most of them, fascinated by what the pamphlet describes as “a unique storehouse of Buddhist culture.”



We returned to Osaka early to rest and dress for dinner with old friends of the Stauffers. Japanese rarely entertain in their homes, usually because homes are too small to permit it. It was a special honor for all of us that Matsuosan and his wife had asked us to dinner.

Matsuosan picked us up at the hotel at 4:30, which we thought an unholy hour. However, even having avoided rush-hour traffic, it took us over an hour to reach his home in the suburbs. The home was perfectly lovely and far larger than any of us expected. He said they had lived there for thirty years. Don said later that either Mr. Matsuo or his wife, Kazi, must have private money, because the house was far larger than his salary level would have made possible.

A garden, elegant with groomed shrubbery, stepping stones, and artistically placed rocks, surrounded the house. A gravel walk led to the

front entry, where we deposited our shoes. Muriel politely refused the slippers offered by our attractive hostess, saying she preferred her stocking feet. I followed her example.

We passed through a small room with bookcase and into what, to us, would be a modest-size living room, but was luxuriously large in Japan. The room was attractively furnished with comfortable upholstered pieces, a large coffee table, and a handsome wall of bookcases, cupboards, and shelves for “pretties.” Double sliding-glass doors opened onto the garden.

We enjoyed a beer and conversation before adjourning to the dining room. Don had asked Matsuosan ahead of time whether we should expect to eat sitting on a tatami. He laughed and said that they had only one tatami room, and it was not used for either eating or sitting. It was their bedroom.

They had a fine dining table and chairs at one end of a long room, with the kitchen at the far end. The table was elegantly set with damask, silver, crystal, and fine china-service plates. We three Barbarians were delighted to see knives and forks instead of chopsticks, a gracious concession by the Matsuos to their guests. Each of the several courses was as lovely to look at as it was delicious to eat. The appetizer included a tiny bowl of cut avocado in a creamy sauce, grilled swordfish under a garnish of angel-hair pasta and fine shreds of carrot, and three thick slices of something that looked like uncooked bacon, which I hoped wasn't.

Following that, Kazi brought out an entrée of a nice piece of very tender beef in a delicate gravy, set off by the bright green and orange of perfectly cooked broccoli and carrots.

We had begun with beer. Wine accompanied dinner. Somewhere along the line, we had sake. Matsuosan mentioned that he had begun making beer out of a kit from Australia. He left the table and returned with a bottle. Given some of my past exposure to home brew, I was most reluctant to repeat the experience. However, as a guest in a strange land, I accepted a little enthusiastically. It was delicious. I would not have guessed it had been made at home.

Dinner finished, we adjourned to the living room and continued a far-ranging conversation. The talk turned to plum wine, which I had read about. Muriel complained that her attempts to make it when they lived in Tokyo were unsuccessful because the wine always was too sweet. She cut down the amount of sugar, but never got the wine the way she wanted.

Kazi said that her plum wine was not sweet. She jumped up to get a bottle and insisted that I try it. She poured some over ice and gave it to me. It was lovely. It had a delicate plum flavor. It was not too sweet. It was a light, refreshing drink. When both of the Matsuos left the room, I offered sips to both Muriel and Don. They agreed that it was delicious and exactly what plum wine should be.

Our hosts reappeared with a great platter containing a huge banana cream pie topped with mountains of whipped cream. Matsuosan explained that Kazi works for a bakery and has access to elegant pastries. Kazi cut gratifyingly small slices, and we all enjoyed the pie.

While we were waiting for Matsuosan to pick us up at the hotel, Muriel told me that, in the past, they had sent bags of shelled pecans to the Matsuos for Christmas. However, the pecans returned to them quickly in the form of pecan cakes. After learning that Kazi worked for a bakery, she understood better. However, Muriel and Don long ago had stopped sending pecans out of frustration. In Japan, one gift requires another.

Conversation continued. Kazi disappeared and reappeared with a plate of fruit. Matsuosan asked me if I ever had eaten a Japanese pear. I admitted that I had not, though Muriel had mentioned them. Kazi returned to the kitchen and returned with both the entire fruit and one cut into wedges. The pears look almost like apples, shading in color from pale cream to pale yellow. I took one of the wedges. To my surprise, it had almost the consistency of an apple. It was firm, very juicy, and absolutely delicious. It had the flavor of a pear without being insipid (as I consider the pears I have known).

During the evening, I excused myself. Don directed me to a hall off the living room. I passed the tatami-floored bedroom and found the bathroom

door. I was startled to see only a urinal. Don laughed and directed me toward a door on the far side. It led to a normal western lavatory. A farther door led to the Japanese bath.

At about nine o'clock, Don said that we must leave. He had to get back to the hotel for a call from his secretary in Pennsylvania. We made our adieus—sayonaras—and put our shoes back on. We all insisted that Matsuosan leave us at the railway station to get a train back to our hotel, but once he had us captive in his car, he took off for the highway and drove us back to Osaka, over our protests. It was a beautiful evening with lovely people.

Friday, 25 September

The weather was as unpromising as ever. Muriel suggested that we take the train to Kyoto to see a couple of temples. She said that once we moved to Kyoto for the conference, we would not have enough free time to do everything we wanted to do. I never got used to the casual way in Japan one took a train from one city to another with no more thought than running down to the nearest Kroger's.

We all took time to repack so that we could send one suitcase on ahead to Kyoto to await our arrival on Saturday. As I was reorganizing the roll-aboard I had kept for overnight, I realized that my passport was in the wardrobe suitcase I had delivered to the Bell Captain. I dashed down to the lobby and, close to tears, asked if the bag had been sent. The delightful young woman told me not to worry and retrieved it. She hoisted my over-full bag onto the counter. Together we tore off the plastic wrapping, and I found my passport in the small pocketbook where I had put it for the trip to the Matsuo's the night before.

I joined Muriel and we walked out of the hotel and into the station, bought our tickets, and boarded our train. Kyoto was a short train ride from Osaka.

By the time we reached Kyoto, it was raining. Muriel stopped at the Information Office to ask directions. When Muriel told the attractive

young hostess that we wanted to walk to the shrines, she laughed at her, saying that the closest was a 25-minute walk. That didn't appeal to us in the rain.

We emerged from the wrong side of the railway station. We had to retrace our steps, walk up, over, and back down the other side to reach our bus stop. We joined a long, long line to wait for our bus. After some delay, a bus arrived, took on a few people, and took off half-empty for some reason we did not understand. After another delay, a second bus pulled up. Most of the people in line in front of us climbed aboard and the bus departed. Not long after that, our bus arrived. We got on and were lucky enough to get seats opposite the rear door. The bus filled up, with standees packed in the length of the aisle. The bus made a couple of stops. No one got off, but more people crammed their way on.

On Japanese buses, one drops the right change into the fare box as one exits past the driver. Muriel and I had no idea how we would pay our fees since the aisle was completely blocked. We decided we would leave through the nearby rear door and run around to the front of the bus to pay our fees.

We reached our stop. Those Japanese passengers smilingly and deliberately blocked our exit. They handed us, one after the other, up to the front of the bus. The word I learned for “excuse me” (*sumimasen*) was used over and over and over. The two of us, muttering, made our way to the front of the bus, paid, and exited into the rain.



Sanjusangendo is known as the Temple of a Thousand Buddhas. This was the first time we had to remove our shoes before entering a shrine or temple. We left umbrellas and shoes in places provided and followed the matting in our stocking feet.

The building had three sections. All held about a dozen tiers, each tier lined with row after row of tall, delicately carved statues standing close together from one end of each vast room to the other. They rose in even,

diagonal rows, each statue slightly different from the others in the drape of a skirt, embroidery at the neck, or other detail. All were of gold leaf, some black with age where the gold had worn away. The hands of each figure were pressed together, and emerging from the shoulder blades were dozens of tiny hands like a low halo.

We walked slowly past row after row after row of the elegant figures, marveling at the workmanship and overwhelmed by their multitude. In the center of the central hall was the principal image with eleven faces and (allegedly) a thousand arms, the smaller statues ranging out on the tiers to each side. It was a breathtaking display, and one of my favorites of all I saw in Japan.

We retrieved our shoes, walked a short distance to the main street, and found a small restaurant for lunch. It was the first time I had been able to try *soba*, the buckwheat noodles. I found them far superior to the usual white ones, as Muriel and Don had predicted.



By the time we left the restaurant, it was pouring. We had directions for taking a bus to the next temple, but even the woman in the Information Office had not recommended our doing it. We found a taxi just outside. We waved, the driver opened the door, and I got in, carefully collapsing my dripping umbrella.

The driver talked rapidly, rolling his head about on a chicken neck, and gesturing wildly. I watched in amazement. Muriel told him in Japanese where we wanted to go. The driver yelled something at her and literally evicted us from the cab.

All right; back out into the rain. A second cab came by and stopped, This time when the driver opened the door, Muriel remained outside, crouching under her umbrella as she explained where we wanted to go. He also refused to take us, slammed the door in Muriel's face, and sped away.

We huddled in the rain, pondering our next move. Muriel said that either the taxi drivers did not want to go to that shrine, or they did not understand her. She decided that when another taxi came, she would say we were going to the terminal.

One came and she did. Once we were in the car and underway, she asked the driver if he knew the shrine and could take us there. He agreed happily and delivered us to our chosen destination.

We left shoes and umbrellas at the entrance and proceeded into one of the loveliest shrines we had seen. Rooms were enormous, with massive columns, heavy beams, tatami-covered floors. In an outer corridor, a showcase displayed a great coil of heavy rope. The description explained that it was made of women's long hair, the only thing strong enough to lift the giant beams into place.



We took the train back to Osaka. At Happy Hour, Muriel announced that she wanted yakitori for dinner. Don said that there was a yakitori restaurant in the maze of underground corridors and that we would not have to go outdoors. He stopped at the front desk to ask directions. The receptionist could not find one listed underground, but gave Don directions to one about three blocks from an opening. I said I would go back for my umbrella, but Don looked like such a thundercloud that I abstained.

We took off, walking rapidly through one corridor after another. I never could figure out how Don knew where he was going. We emerged into the night to find that it was raining. I said I was not going out in the rain without my umbrella. Next morning I was going to Kobe to meet my friend Marjorie Gerstle and had no intention of looking like a drowned rat for our reunion. Don said it was only three blocks. I urged them to go ahead while I returned to the hotel. More thunderclouds. Don stormed back into the underground maze and we followed meekly.

I cannot describe how many corridors we traveled, how many restaurants did not serve yakitori. Tempers frayed. We looked at the mock-ups of menu offerings in each window. Nothing suited us. We went up and down, back and forth, here and there. Suddenly, out of nowhere appeared a yakitori-ya.

We went in, got a table, and settled happily into the noisiest room I ever have experienced. Four young men were seated at a table on the other side of a low partition. Four empty bottles of sake stood forsaken on their table. Such joy and vivaciousness. Eventually, they staggered off happily.

Don went outside with the waiter and pointed to the things he wanted to order. From looking at the models, I thought I would get one little skewer with four small pieces of beef. To my amazement, we received plate after plate of skewers with meat freshly fried—breast of chicken, chicken liver, chicken gizzard, crisply fried pieces of chicken skin. The very best were little, well seasoned balls of ground chicken. I think there were some vegetables somewhere along the line, but they are not what I remember.

We had beer. We picked and chose among the skewers. Don went out and ordered more. We ended up with a delicious, happy, typically man-on-the-street Japanese meal that was exactly what we all wanted.

Saturday, 26 September

Incredible happenstance put the luxury cruise ship *Crystal Harmony* in port in Kobe the day we were to leave Osaka for Kyoto. My friend Marjorie Gerstle was aboard as arts-and-craft instructor. We met a few years earlier when she was hospitalized in Belize after having a heart attack aboard the *Caribbean Prince*.^{*} I visited her two or three times daily and we became friends. We continued to correspond after she returned to the States.

We could not believe that the reunion we both hoped to have some day actually would take place on the other side of the world. We made plans

* “Emergency at Sea” on page 157 in Book 2: *Life & Times, 1980 – 2014*

by fax. Marj invited Muriel and Don to join me in a visit to her, but they preferred to continue to Kyoto early.

After the typhoon in Tokyo, I checked with Marj to make sure the ship's schedule had not changed. At my request, Marj faxed me directions to the pier where they would dock in Kobe. The helpful hotel receptionist wrote out the instructions for me in Japanese.

I went down to breakfast early and alone. I checked out of the hotel and checked my suitcase with the Bell Captain to be reclaimed when I came back through Kobe that afternoon.

I don't think Muriel and Don worried about my taking off for a day by myself, but I myself had no concern. I considered myself their apt pupil in Japan.

On my own, I made my way through the mysteries of the underground. Having been coached ahead of time by Don, I got the express train to Kobe. The trip took about twenty minutes. It was raining when I arrived, of course. The taxi driver was delighted to be given directions in Japanese. We found the proper pier with no problem. Umbrella raised, I alighted alongside the looming ship.



The Japanese security guard explained that to board over the covered gangway one story above the wharf, I had to go up some nearby stairs. I climbed the stairs and found myself in a large room covered with blue painters' drop cloths. I exited through the door on the other side. A pleasant middle-aged workman at the top of a flight of stairs told me that the way to get to the ship was to go down the stairs. I did, and found myself face to face with the same startled security guard. With gestures I explained my futile jaunt.

From the guard's reaction, one would have thought that the future of Japanese–American relations hinged on his getting me aboard the *Crystal Harmony*. The flustered guard ran on ahead, signaling me to follow. He found another flight of stairs and ushered me up them, arms thrown wide



Kate and Marge Gerstle aboard *Crystal Harmony*, 1998

like St. Peter welcoming a new resident of heaven. I emerged in the proper reception room, and proceeded across the gangway, umbrella sheathed in plastic in the bottom of my hand bag.

As Marj had warned me, security aboard ship was tight but polite. My bag went through a scanner. My passport was studied, my name matched on a list, and the document confiscated, much to my dismay. Despite years of travel, I never have come to terms with confiscation of my passport, regardless of how routine and temporary.

I explained that I was meeting Marj in the lounge. The officer remarked that it must be the lounge on the fifth deck. I hadn't a clue. He tried without success to reach Marj on the phone, then asked the young man operating the scanner to escort me to the lounge.

It was large. It was opulent. Colors were muted. Crystal sparkled, brass shone. It looked like the lobby of a fine hotel, with an impressive mahogany reception desk. Marj arrived quickly, having wasted time trying to meet me at the foot of the gangway.

The visit was a thorough delight. Marj-Healthy was a Technicolor version of Marj-III. She is exactly my age, enthusiastic, capable, endlessly interesting. We had coffee in the café to get reacquainted. She led me through the major public areas of the ship. We went to her stateroom and, at my request, she showed me her craft projects.

We continued our visit over an elegant lunch in the almost-empty main dining room. Marj had suggested various cafés, but decided that with most of the passengers ashore, the dining room “needed bodies.” We sat at a large window overlooking the harbor, attended by more friendly stewards than three tables would need, plus the *Maître d’* himself. We enjoyed Vietnamese salad and deliciously tender steak with green pepper sauce. It was far more food than I happened to need at lunchtime, especially after a diet of noodle soup.



We said our adieus in the early afternoon. Marj walked me down to the taxi stand. When I told the driver I wanted to go to the terminal, he replied that the shuttle bus was right there and I could take that. The shuttle attendant confirmed that they were going to the station. I got on and off we went.

We stopped on a street with shops and hotels, but no terminal. The bus driver assured me I was at the JR* terminal. The shuttle attendant got out a map and showed me. I was distraught to find that I was at the stop before Kobe. The young attendant assured me that if I walked down that way and then down that other way, I would get to the station.

All I could think was that I was adrift in a foreign land where I did not speak the language, headed for the wrong train. However, walking off lunch was not a bad idea. It was only about three blocks to the station—in the rain—but I found it more than a little confusing to be in the wrong city. Don told me later that there are three stations in Kobe and any of them would have done.

* *JR* is Japan Railway.

I bought my ticket with no trouble, having watched Muriel carefully for many days. The next train happened to be the one I wanted and I was back in Osaka in a very few minutes. Blessing the fact that the terminal flowed into the hotel, I collected my suitcase.

I rolled my roll-aboard merrily along the wide corridor to the flight of about eight steps leading to the JR tracks. I was easing it down, one step at a time, when a husky young girl ran down behind me, grabbed the suitcase out of my hands, whisked it to the bottom of the stairs, smiled and was gone almost before I could say *arigato gozaimasu*.*

I went to the wall of ticket machines. I got out the proper change and dropped the coins into the machine. It ate my money without producing a ticket. I did not know what to do. A woman stepped out of a nearby line to help me. Without language compatibility, I managed to show her what had happened and she showed me that 1) punching a red button would result in the return of my coins, and 2) I was 100 Yen short of the correct amount.

Luckily, my train was not full. I pulled my suitcase aboard and pushed it upright close to the window. The young man who sat next to me got off at the first station. For the rest of the trip, I had a full seat for my suitcase and myself.



In Kyoto, there was no problem getting to the hotel by taxi. The Miyako is a huge, elaborate hotel up in the hills that surround the city. To avoid rush-hour traffic, the taxi driver turned off the main street and cut alongside a canal for several blocks. The picturesque waterway was lined with bowing willows and arched by narrow foot bridges between the pretty homes on either side.

Kyoto is a fascinating mix of old and new. During World War II, the allies were told that it was an historic city with no military importance whatever, so it survived untouched. Kyoto has shrines and temples

* *Arigato gozaimasu* is Japanese for *Thank you*.

numbered in the many dozens, some tiny, beautiful little old buildings nestled in the middle of an otherwise ordinary block.

We finally reached the enormous entrance to the Miyako. I have never seen so much staff in all my life. Three bowing bellman assisted me into the hotel. Without my even asking, the bellman ran and got the wardrobe bag that I had sent on ahead. When I reached my “economy” room, I found it far nicer than the ones we had in Tokyo and Osaka.

An inveterate reader of signs, I studied instructions on the back of my door. Below the floor plan of the hotel was the following message: “In case of fire, body posture lower and cover mouth with handkerchief when escape.”

I settled in for our four-day stay, then called the desk to get the Stauffers’ room number. The operator connected me with their room. Muriel answered. When I asked where they were, she said that they were right next door. I was invited over for Happy Hour, then we went down to one of the hotel restaurants for dinner.

Sunday, 27 September

Don could spend the day sightseeing with us. We went first to a beautiful old temple Muriel and I had skipped on our day in Kyoto because it was raining so hard and its main attraction was the view. On Sunday morning, the weather was better and we joined the large crowd of people, almost entirely Japanese, visiting the historic site.

The Kiyomizu Temple was established in 780, but was burned down several times. The present buildings date from 1633. The vast temple buildings stand on a scaffolding of immense wooden pillars. Its wide wooden veranda projects over a steep cliff giving a panoramic view over the trees, across a valley to the expanse of Kyoto.

Steps lead down from the main hall to a sacred waterfall, said to have healing powers. Japanese visitors, mostly young people laughing and joking, formed a line, possibly fifty people long, on the steps and walkway leading to the tiny temple below the water fall. They waited in

happy patience for their turn to catch a bit of the cascade in a long-handled cup.

A man, perhaps in his forties, took his turn to drink. The young people laughed and clapped, and he smiled across at them, obviously their teacher. There was much commotion while he went through the ritual drinking and rinsing of the cup.



We next went to a Buddhist Temple, a huge one that, like many, had a Shinto shrine incorporated in its compound. A service was in progress before a few worshipers. There was much clanging of gongs and beating of drums with one deep, heavy beat after the other.

We stopped for lunch just inside the temple grounds at a funny little open-front stand with room for perhaps five guests. It was painted red and festooned with banners proclaiming things in Japanese that we could not read. The stand had one long table with a bench and individual cushions for seats. We were the only guests and received the delighted bows and



Muriel and Kate at Kiyomizu Temple, Japan, 1998

moans of pleasure from the elderly woman who seemed to own the stand. I finally had the cold *soba* (buckwheat noodles) I should have ordered with Muriel another lunchtime. One wound a few strands onto one's chopsticks, then dipped the lump into a tiny cup of sauce. It was delicious.



After lunch, we visited the starkly austere Ryoanji, most famous of all Zen gardens. Its perfectly raked expanse of white sand displays fifteen rocks in five units in a scene of the most exquisite artistic balance. Visitors speak low, if at all, as they seat themselves on the long row of steps to contemplate the garden and lose themselves in meditation.

The gravel path leading to the Zen garden wound through woods and a garden where the ground cover was a rich green moss, rather than grass. Women knelt on the moss, gently sweeping up the typhoon debris of leaves and twigs with long, soft whisk brooms.



We had to return to the hotel to register for the conference and dress for the opening reception. Muriel was furious at registration to find that my name tag read “Industrial” instead of “International” Development. The obliging hostess went to her computer and made me a new tag—with the same error. The third effort was correct.

We dressed for the evening. Muriel wore a new midnight-blue dress with gold buttons, slim cut, most becoming. I wore my rose (almost red) “good” shirtwaist with Barbara-Bush-style pearls.

The reception was a beautiful party. The buffet was elaborate. Liquor flowed like water. I returned to my room a little before the Stauffers. Don had been working the room and said he wanted to “graze.” They knocked on my door about thirty minutes later and invited me over for a night cap.

Monday, 28 September

The conference started in earnest. Don left early for a men's breakfast. Muriel and I left a little later for the women's continental breakfast in a room several floors and even more corridors away from our rooms. Fortunately, the hotel had stationed a bowing employee to direct us at each turn along the route.

After breakfast, we were the first people on the tour bus. We had not seen any familiar faces waiting in the lobby, so proceeded to find seats. Gradually, the other wives and guests arrived, except for one woman who joined the tour on a street corner several miles later.

Our tour guide was a delightful, tall, rather austere woman with a surprising sense of humor. She told us to call her Sue because we couldn't pronounce her name. Sue's talks on the bus were fascinating anecdotes of history or culture, rather than a stale recitation of dates and statistics.

One of her tales, appropriate in view of the weather, was that in Japan the man normally walks three steps ahead of his wife. The only time they walk side by side is under an umbrella. Japanese young people wish for rain as an excuse for closeness. The graffiti in school bathrooms, Sue said, is a drawing of an umbrella with the names of a girl and boy.

Sue remarked, "Japanese universities hard to get into and very easy to get out."

One of the guests asked Sue about Zen. She replied, "May I explain why I cannot explain about Zen. It is not in the mind, but in the spirit. If you go to Zen garden and feel something, that might be Zen."

When we drove past the Imperial Palace, Sue commented, "The Emperor not so rich as other royal families. Several years ago, royal couple—I won't say who—came and stayed in the Kyoto palace. They were supposed to stay three nights. After first night, they moved to Miyako Hotel."



We stopped first at the Nijo Castle, the castle described in the novel “Shogun.” It is enormous, wooden, with exceptionally large rooms. Screens and walls were exquisitely decorated with paintings by famous Japanese artists. Floors were covered by tatami.

This particular shogun had far more gold than the emperor. Many of the walls were covered with gold leaf, applied in four-inch squares. Artists then painted over the gold with a powder mixed with a sort of glue.

One spectacular room is called the Tiger Room, because of its magnificent mural. Tigers were considered emblems of strength. There were no tigers in Japan. The Japanese heard about the great striped animals from the Chinese, so their artists drew pictures of an animal that was fairly close to a tiger. However, the Japanese thought all tigers were males, and that leopards were female tigers. The mural demonstrates this confusion.

The tatami-covered wooden floors creaked as we walked from one sumptuous gold-leaf-encrusted room to the next. The “nightingale floors” were designed to warn of the faintest approaching footstep. A shogun won his position by killing the previous shogun. Thus they all lived in constant fear. Every room had a built-in compartment where loyal samurai hid, ready to protect their master in case he were attacked.

Few saw the shogun’s face. During audiences, he was seated behind a screen. The shogun received more privileged guests in an enormous room. For them, he was seated on a dais, itself the size of a small room, without a screen.

We followed a corridor, lined with windows with wooden bars, into the women’s quarters. There life-size, costumed figures showed the shogun and his maid servants. The maid servants were virgins who never married. If a maid became involved with a man, her throat was cut. The maids all were guards and wore knives in their obis* to protect the shogun if necessary.

* An *obi* is the sash worn around the waist of a kimono.

The shogun had a wife and several mistresses because it was necessary for him to have a son to whom to leave his holdings. When women were brought to the shogun for his approval, his asking "What is her name?" indicated that he was going to take her as a concubine.

The shogun's bedroom, where he slept with his wife, opened off the room we could see. If he took one of his concubines to his bed, two of his maid servants went into the room with them to protect the shogun in case the woman were a spy and attacked him, and to make sure that nothing untoward was said.

The Nijo Castle gave a vivid education in life in the shogun era.



We went next to a textile house. On the first floor was a demonstration of the ancient art of weaving the material for kimonos and obis and another demonstration of modern looms.

On the floor above was an enormous showroom with a vast array of textiles and fabric items for sale. The kimonos and obis on display were breathtaking. Muriel and I saw no one buy them. The kimonos cost about 1,000,500 Yen.

Finally, we were taken to the small, comfortable theater on the third floor. Muriel and I were lucky enough to have front-row seats as we watched a style show of kimonos. The models were beautiful, stylized little dolls of Japanese girls. Each kimono was a work of art, gracefully displayed. The finale with all the girls together was a kaleidoscope of colors.



We returned to the hotel, and Muriel and I went to the Danish restaurant on the ground floor for lunch. We found it early in our stay. Few people seemed to know how pleasant it was. As usual, we found a table by the large windows easily.

After lunch, we visited a shrine recommended by Matsuosan. He said it had ghosts. We didn't see them. Originally it was the home of a

nobleman, and the emperor had stayed in it, which made it very special. The rooms were surprisingly spacious, with beautiful paintings on the walls. At some point, the owner had given his home to the monks.

The gardens surrounding the house were exquisite. Whenever one looked out a window, one saw a garden, no matter how small. The grounds also had a “dry lake,” a large area of coarse sand, carefully raked, with artistically placed rocks, or a rock with a bit of greenery, or a small bush. As we left this house, the rain turned into torrents. We grabbed the nearest taxi and returned to the hotel. I felt I had seen as many shrines as I needed to see.



After a restful late afternoon, we went to a “light reception.” We did not know what that meant, but assumed it meant limited food. It did not. It meant beer and wine only; no hard liquor. The vast buffets offered as many superb edibles as had been available the night before.

After the reception, Don and Muriel continued to a conference dinner. I returned to my room.

Tuesday, 29 September

There were glimpses of the sun as Muriel and I walked the endless corridors to breakfast. The sun was hidden by the time we went to the lobby to join our tour group. To our delight, the vast room was full of kimono-clad women. They all wore simple every-day kimonos, most in shades of brown or gray, but one a gorgeous not-quite-emerald green.

In the bus, Sue told us that when railways first were built in Japan, the people were unfamiliar with them. Daytimes a man with a flag walked ahead of each train to warn the inhabitants. At night he carried a lantern and the train had a net to scoop up anyone who fell in front of it.

Our first stop was the Golden Pavilion. Muriel had been unhappy to see it listed on the conference tours because she said it was in such dismal repair that it was not worth seeing. Muriel was the most amazed of all of

us to see the gleaming pagoda, newly re-sheathed in gold leaf, sitting on its tiny island, brilliantly reflected in the lake that surrounds it.

The many-storied Pavilion is surprisingly small and delicate, with a golden phoenix perched on the pinnacle of the roof. It was built in the late Thirteen Hundreds as a pleasure palace for the shogun. On his death, it was given to the monks and turned into a Zen temple. In 1950, it was burned down by a young monk. The present Pavilion is a faithful reconstruction. The lake itself is a picture of beauty, with the perfect tree here and the perfect rock there around its edge. One of the pine trees is 600 years old.

Visitors may not enter the Pavilion, but we walked through the magnificent gardens. At the foot of a flight of steps, Sue told us, “When you return, remember to turn left, or goodbye.”

At the end of our tour, Sue passed out long narrow strips of paper with Japanese writing on them. She said, “Take this paper home and put it up on the wall and you don’t have to lock the door.” The top character is for luck. When I unpacked after my trip, I found the little strip and secured it in a back hall next to a beautiful calendar of Japanese gardens. I continued to lock doors. However, when Hurricane Mitch veered southward after threatening Belize with complete destruction,* I looked speculatively at my little Japanese good-luck strip.



After lunch, we packed to leave the next day. Both men and women reconvened at 3:00 PM. Sue had told us to reassemble in the “oval lobby.” Someone asked her where it was. Sue replied, “Not up, not down.” Somehow we all found the right place.

We were to have a tour, then dinner in the garden of a palace. I wore the teal jersey I had been saving for the semi-informal occasion, but wore low-heeled shoes. When I reached the lobby, I found that mine was the only dress. All the other women were in slacks. The pants to my sage suit

* “Hurricane Mitch” on page 217 in Book 2: *Life & Times, 1980 – 2014*

had remained behind in Palo Alto because I was sure I would not need them in Japan. I was mortified at being overdressed, but felt slightly better once I belted my trench coat around me.

As we were waiting, a sumo wrestler, identifiable by his bulk and top knot, walked heavily through the lobby, followed by his retinue.

We arranged ourselves on two large buses and were driven a considerable distance to the charming Buddhist temple of Byodo-in. Again, it was a private home that had been given to the monks many centuries ago. It was built at the edge of a lake.

The temple is relatively small with a beatific Buddha. Behind him is a canopy of inlaid mother-of-pearl in graceful arabesques. Figures of musicians and dancers form a famous frieze along the walls, just beneath the ceiling.

Our delightful guide, Sue, led us around the lake to the far side, where we could see the elaborate facade of the temple. Long extensions on each side of the main building, all with gracefully up-swept roofs, gave the impression of a bird taking flight.

At each end of the peak of the main roof was one of the strange figures of a phoenix. They were identical and looked more like roosters than like the fabled birds. Sue explained, “One phoenix is a male and one is a female. The one that is not a male is the female.”



We returned to the buses and were taken to a magnificent, five-story castle up on a hill. We gathered in front of a giant pair of closed wooden doors. On each side were flaming lights in what looked like a metal basket on a pole. The doors opened, and out came the president of the host organization, a rather portly gentleman with glasses, dressed as a samurai. There was a roar of delight from the conference delegates. The president made a charming short speech of welcome, then invited the gathering into the gardens.

We walked through gates, up a long, easy flight of shallow steps. Stationed at each side periodically were maikos, geishas-in-training, in full regalia. Maiko is the first stage of learning the social skills of a geisha. The girls go into training when they are about sixteen. The first year, the girls wear the heavy white facial paint, but are allowed to paint only the lower lip red. By the second year of training, they are allowed to paint both lips. The five girls at the reception wore full lip makeup. Sue pointed out that despite their elegant kimonos, all of them had simple bows at the back of their obis. She said that when and if they completed the strenuous course and became geishas, they would be allowed to wear the traditional butterfly bows. The girls learn singing, dancing, playing the samisen,* and entertaining in both Japanese and English. They are gracious hostesses, nothing more.

The walkway turned toward the garden itself. Two young men in samurai dress were stationed at the corner. Some of the delegates stopped to have pictures taken with them.

The garden was lighted with Japanese lanterns. Low tables covered with red cloths filled the extensive area. A wide gravel path curved around the border with one food kiosk after another lining the far side. People stood by the dozens waiting to be served. A large percentage of the crowd made a dead set for the yakitori booth. It ran out of food before we got there, much to Don's dismay.

Muriel, Don, and I settled on one of the tables close to the path. I had been a little nonplussed at the in-between height of the tables—too low for sitting in non-existent chairs and too high to sit on the grass beneath. Apparently they were for perching while one enjoyed one plate after another from the buffets.

One of the Maikos came over to speak to me. She was a delightful young girl determined to practice her English. She insisted on getting a plate of food for me. She succeeded in selecting too much of everything I did not want to try. She fluttered about me, settled me back on our table, and

* A *samisen* is a traditional Japanese three-stringed musical instrument.

watched as I gallantly ate. She was prepared to do a second run when someone came up to ask if she would pose for a picture with them. My Maiko bid a gracious goodbye and I fled the moment her back was turned.

Muriel, Don, and I went into the castle when we finished eating. It was far lovelier outside than in. Like the others we had seen, this one had been gutted and made into a modern museum.

We managed to get the first bus back to the hotel. The ride was not as long as we expected.

Wednesday, 30 September

We had an early farewell breakfast. I took a train alone to Osaka, where I caught a flight to Narita* to connect with my Japan Airlines flight back to San Francisco.

I arrived in the States the same day we left Japan, thanks to the magic of time zones. Carli and Tom met me and, to my amazement, so did the Stauffers. Tom had recognized them on a TV display of arriving passengers. Carli and Tom met them at the bottom of the escalator and they all waited for me.

I had a final goodbye with the Stauffers before they left to catch their flight east. I talked all the way as Tom drove back to Palo Alto.

I spent another three days with Carli and Tom before returning to Belize—recovering from the long flight, sharing tales of my trip, just enjoying being with them. I was out of Shopping Mode and into Packing Mode.

* *Narita* is the Tokyo International Airport.

Quick Trip to Mexico

August 1999

You may remember that I mentioned that I was going to Mexico City for a reception for the chairman of the Air France Groupe, who was making his first visit to this region. Let me tell you about it.

For the first time in years, it is possible to fly from Belize to Mexico City at reasonable cost. Aerocaribe (a subsidiary of Mexicana) flies between Belize and Cancun daily in a 20-seat prop-jet. It was a pleasant flight of just over an hour.



We were ushered into the Immigration area at Cancun to find ourselves at the back of some 200 people in three lines. Desks for another ten Immigration officers stretched emptily off to the right. New groups of passengers piled into the room behind us faster than Immigration could process people in the lines.

It was agonizing. Suddenly a large group of very large, loud young men pushed their way between our line and the next one, trying to shove into the head of that line. Naturally, the young people who had been in line for almost an hour objected at the top of their lungs. I was terrified that there would be a fight. Fortunately, security officers came fairly quickly and politely ushered the intruders to the back of the line. Unfortunately, more officers marched off with a perfectly nice young black man who had been in line longer than we had and who did nothing more than protest the pushers-and-shovers. Everyone in our line was most upset about his being “arrested.”

When I finally got through, it was past one o'clock. I retired to the restaurant for a revivifying beer and enchiladas. Later, in the boarding area, I wrote the story of the Immigration mess in my little trip notebook. I got mad all over again.

I marched myself back out through the security gate, and after three attempts, finally located the Terminal Administrator. I told him my tale. He could not have been more pleasant. I warned him that I intended to report the situation to the International Airline Passengers' Association and to the major travel magazines, but felt that I owed it to him to tell him first.

The poor dear admitted that he had only been in the job for three weeks. A new company just had taken over management of the terminal. I assured him that I knew Immigration was a law unto itself and not under his control. I took back my threats and offered to put my complaint into a fax and send it to him so that he would have something in writing to help force Immigration to use more officers. I made a point of saying that Mexico has spent millions developing Cancun, yet the reception tourists receive says "Get out; we don't want you; you are too much of a bother."

You can imagine the comments I overheard in the line: people saying that they never would come back. One man said that he was going right to a ticket counter and taking the first plane out. It really was a disgraceful reception for a country that lives on tourism.

The Terminal Administrator was pathetically grateful to me for going to him. He said most people would grumble, but not do anything about it. Of course, I felt vastly relieved and disgustingly smug with myself.

It was well after dark before I reached Mexico City. To my surprise, I found that 8:00 PM was the middle of the rush hour—on a Friday night, in the rain. It was another hour before I got to my hotel.



The next day was worth it. I spent the morning at Air France, talking over all sorts of things with the people responsible. It was fun seeing old friends and I accomplished a great deal.

As for the reception, it was a beautiful party, but something of a bust. I arrived at 6:30, as invited. No one there but the two agents from Costa Rica. They said someone had told them that planes were late, guests had

not arrived on time, and the party was delayed an hour. We went off to a nearby bar to kill time.

When we got back, the party was in full swing, but the guests of honor had not yet arrived. When they did, there were some short speeches, then the Regional Director brought M. Spinetta and his group of about six French aides around to meet people. The Central American agents happened to be more or less together near the front, so they came to our group first. Everyone said a few polite words, then the honorees moved on. And that was the end of that.

We enjoyed better-than-average wine and elegant goodies. Friends from Guatemala and Honduras collected me and we all went back to the hotel to finish the night in the piano bar.

The next day was a full day of travel returning to Belize.



And the worst of it was that we learned at the party that Air France had cancelled its plans to have their agents' meeting in Atlanta this year and that instead, it would be in Mexico City in two weeks. Everyone was furious. All the agents' wives were looking forward to a trip to Atlanta. And I had built my visit to Becky around the meeting.

By the next morning, I had made up my mind that there was no way I would go through two days of exhausting travel for one day of listening to speeches in Spanish. I accomplished more in my morning at the Air France offices than I would at the meeting anyway. When I received official details of the meeting, I sent back my regrets, "for personal reasons."



Katy Jenkins with Ellis, Nancy, and Mary Robinson, Las Vegas, 1999

Western Tour with the Robinsons

September 1999

In a recent letter to my sister, Mary, I commented that next time I visited them, I hoped to see something of the Western United States. I thought it was time for me to explore my native country. In response, Mary invited me to join her, her husband Ellis, and their daughter Nancy on a tour of Zion National Park, Bryce Canyon, and the Grand Canyon. I accepted instantly.

There were misgivings. Severe sciatica was beginning to cripple me, but I was determined to take the trip, even if it meant seeing everything only from the car window. Mary by phone and letter, and Nancy by email, assured me that I would not be a drag on their holiday.

We rendezvoused in Las Vegas, partly because Katy Jenkins (daughter of my dear cousin Helen Anne) now lives there, and partly because it is accessible by air from almost anywhere.

Thursday, 2 September

My Continental flight from Belize to Houston was superb, the most elegantly comfortable economy facilities I ever have enjoyed. We were late getting to the gate in Houston, and I had a very close connection with my onward flight to Las Vegas. By the time I was halfway up the passageway from my plane, the pain was so severe that I knew I could not make it.

I passed a row of wheelchairs and attendants, "I need one," I gasped. All four men leaped to attention. A tall man grabbed a chair, settled me in it, asked for directions, and whisked me off. He was delightful and was determined to get me to my plane on time.

Fortunately my luggage was first off the carousel. My Guardian Angel snatched it up and whisked me through Customs and to the Continental desk just outside the exit. He parked me and, bypassing the crowd in front

of the desk, carried my bags behind the counters and checked them through to Las Vegas himself. Fortunately, Continental in Belize now has electronic ticketing and issues all boarding passes for the entire trip when one checks in. The baggage tags showed the entire trip through to Las Vegas, so I had the stubs already.

We raced along corridors, into elevators, and past other passengers to reach my gate as boarding began.



The Continental flight from Houston to Las Vegas was for sardines. However, it was relatively short, and I had pleasant seat companions who were immersed in their own books until landing time.

In Las Vegas, I walked slowly up the ramp and found Mary and Ellis waiting for me, just inside the waiting area, with Katy. They all looked wonderful, and we had a noisy, happy reunion, ignoring the people around us.

It was well into the evening hours, but they had waited dinner for me. Katy drove us to our hotel, where Ellis deposited my luggage in my room. Then we went to a charming restaurant for a late supper. Marie Callender's is noted for its pastries. I amazed myself by ordering a turkey pot pie. It was unbelievably good, with great masses of meat under a melt-in-your-mouth crust.

My body time was three hours ahead of everyone else's. By the time we had eaten, I fell apart. Katy took us back to our hotel. I barely managed to undress before collapsing in my comfortable bed for overdue sleep.

Friday, 3 September

I awoke late to explore the wonders of my room. It was a large, pleasantly decorated standard hotel room, but surpassed many by providing a coffee maker, iron and ironing board, and wonder-of-wonders, a Jacuzzi.

I joined Mary and Ellis for one of the worst complimentary breakfasts I ever have been offered. The room was early food court. Beverages were

acceptable. Breads were horrid small things wrapped in plastic. It was surprising in an otherwise lovely establishment.

It had been decided in our almost daily pre-trip email correspondence that Katy would take me shopping for essentials the first morning. That suited Mary. She had lost her driver's license somewhere between Durango and Las Vegas and needed a replacement so she could share driving with Ellis on their long trip back to Colorado. She intended to spend the morning on the telephone.

Katy took me to a large drugstore, where I quickly acquired the necessities on my shorter-than-usual list. We then went to a Back Store, where I bought the lumbar-support pillow prescribed by my physical therapist.

Katy told me that she and her husband Larry planned to build a house soon and, at my urging, took me to the new development, where she showed me the model home they had selected. I was enchanted. It was charming and ideal for them. The open first-floor living area was attractively designed and perfect for a couple. The gem was the master bedroom upstairs, which had a separate small sitting room off it. Katy's back problems force her to spend a lot of time in bed. The generous size of the suite will make her quiet hours far more pleasant than they would be within four walls.

We proceeded back to Katy and Larry's condo, not far away. I was introduced to Steve, the delightful young friend who has been staying there and taking care of things while Larry was working near San Diego. And I met Tess, Katy's lovely Brittany Spaniel.



We returned to the hotel, picked up Mary and Ellis, and drove to the airport to meet Nancy. She arrived a few minutes late, hale, hearty, and happy. Katy dropped us all of back at the hotel and arranged to pick us up at four that afternoon to begin our investigation of the delights of Las Vegas.

We went first to Treasure Island and settled onto a balcony overlooking a small lake. To our right, we could see a life-size replica of a pirate ship affixed at the far end of the pool. We could see sailors climbing the rigging.

Gradually the water in the little lake became agitated with rough waves. We heard the noise of voices and rustle of rigging out of sight to our left. Slowly, the HMS *Britannia** sailed into view and came to a stop directly in front of us. The Captain stalked back and forth, issuing orders to sailors in red-and-white-striped shirts.

The pirate ship fired on the British ship. The battle was joined. The ships fired back and forth at each other with increasingly real and terrifying pyrotechnics. The pirate ship was set afire. Flames leaped high. Sailors dived from their high perches into the water to escape. The dying pirate ship sent a final volley into the *Britannia*, sinking it. The British ship slowly disappeared into the water, stern-first, until only one rail was above the waves. Thunderous applause from onlookers on the balcony and from the people lining the fence along the sidewalks on the far side of the lake.

To everyone's amazement, a few moments later the *Britannia* rose slowly, majestically from the "sea." Incredibly, there was the Captain, standing at attention, on his deck. He spit a great jet of water over the rail, doffed his great hat, and finally stepped out of his role and began raising the ship's sails. With only one man on board, the ship quietly sailed back around the corner and out of sight. The fire on the pirate ship burned out as the British ship sank. However, the flames had caught a palm tree above the top mast. It continued to blaze merrily. This must have been a regular occurrence because men appeared, sprayed it, and extinguished the errant blaze.

The entire show was a magnificent, realistic display. It was one of Las Vegas' several spectacular free shows.

* *HMS* before the ship's name means *His Majesty's Ship*.



From Treasure Island, Katy took us to a Tex-Mex restaurant well away from the Strip. It was delightfully informal, with excellent food. While we were waiting to be served, Katy produced a deck of cards and proceeded to show us the finer points of Black Jack. She dealt each of us a hand, displayed the dealer's cards, then told us how to decide whether or not to ask for another card. She gave us the basic rules for judging the dealer's hand and one's own hand.

After several rounds of Black Jack, she took out a pad and pencil, diagrammed a roulette table, and suggested the best chances to win, either a risky big win or a safer small one.

Katy has years of experience dealing Black Jack and acting as croupier for Roulette. She is not fond of the latter. She herself plays regularly at a nice casino not far from their condo. She allows herself \$50. If she loses it, she stops for the night. If she wins \$100, she stops for the night. Over time, she has a nice little bit of extra spending money from her disciplined betting.

After dinner, Katy drove us up and down the Strip so we could see the great, gaudy, gorgeous casinos. We were too late for the light-and-sound show at the Bellagio, but since it comes on every fifteen minutes, we knew we could see it another time.

Saturday, 4 September

Katy picked us up at 10:30 AM and took us to Caesar's Palace. Its Forum Shops is a magnificent mall of expensive shops done in the Roman style, radiating out in a series of corridors. A large central room has a huge fountain with nearly life-size winged horses and ancient gods.

We separated to explore on our own, then regathered in another rotunda by another fountain displaying four life-size "marble" gods. Varicolored lights around the ceiling played on the figures. A flash of lightning lit the "sky" The central god, seated above the others, slowly lifted a cup to his

lips, lowered it, and began to talk. Unfortunately, you could not understand a word. Katy was most disappointed. In the past his dialogue was a clear and interesting tale of the gods.

The base holding the three lesser gods began to revolve. Each of the statues in turn moved eerily, an arm raised and lowered, fingers strumming a harp. Jets of water showered the figures. Lights played over them. The show was an intriguing concept and we enjoyed it, though we would have appreciated it much more had we been able to understand the dialogue.



We went to the nearby Planet Hollywood for lunch. I have read about that popular chain of restaurants without particularly wanting to visit one. I was right. It may be heaven for movie buffs, but to me, it was almost grotesque with noise, movie artifacts, too many too small pictures everywhere, and numerous video monitors mounted overhead showing clips of famous scenes so briefly that it was hard to recognize one before the next one began.

We were lucky enough to be seated in a booth at the back, slightly away from the crowd. It gave us a modicum of privacy. Our lunches were excellent, but they could not compensate for the cluttered decor.

Before lunch, Katy and Nancy went upstairs to the movie museum. Mary and Ellis visited it after lunch. I did not think there was anything I needed to see, since Nancy had reported on *Planet of the Apes*, *The Terminator*, and other movies I had not seen and had no wish to see.

Katy took us back to our hotel. I could see that she was getting very tired and was worried about her. We arranged to meet at 7:30 PM to allow her several hours to rest her back.



Ellis called my room about six to say that they were going to drive to the bookstore. The day before, Katy had taken him, at his request, to two

bookstores that were at the far edge of the city. He found the book he wanted in one of them. I had no idea why he needed to return, and declined Ellis' offer to accompany them.

At about 7:25, I called the Robinson's room. No reply. I walked down the corridor and knocked at their door. No answer. I did not want Katy waiting alone at the parking-lot door, so went on out. I perched on a low concrete wall and watched the occasional comings and goings of hotel guests. The scene was unremarkable, but the cooling evening air was pleasant.

To my vast relief, the Robinsons arrived about quarter to eight, laughing and joking about the heavy traffic. It was the Labor Day weekend, and Katy said the city expected a million visitors. Katy drove up moments after the Robinsons, so the timing was perfect.



Katy said she wanted us to see downtown Las Vegas, where the gambling began. As more and larger casinos were built farther away, downtown deteriorated. The city decided to renew it. A main street and parts of adjacent side streets were cordoned off and resurfaced attractively for a pedestrian mall. At cost of \$90,000, a great curving metal framework was erected, arching over the length of the main street to provide hourly laser light show.

We all were delighted with downtown Las Vegas. It was ablaze with colored lights, but the clubs were smaller. One could stroll from one side of the street to the other without fear of becoming one of the frightening pedestrian-death statistics. There were people, but not crowds. It had a neighborhood feeling.

Katy took us to The Golden Nugget, one of the old, established casinos. It happened to be the one where she got her first job. It still is one of her favorites.



Mary obviously wanted to dive into Black Jack or Roulette after her indoctrination of the night before. Katy explained that she would be lucky to find even one seat, and certainly the tables could not accommodate us all. I suspected that Katy was protecting her elderly aunt from her own enthusiasm.

Katy found a bank of poker slot machines and settled each of us in front of one. Katy happened to be sitting next to me and gave me some guidance for the first several rounds. We played for close to an hour until the laser light show began. I never had seen one and was fascinated at the music, the lights, the moving forms, the elaborate display.

We all went outside and watched the spectacular show. I had walked farther than I could manage comfortably and was in extreme pain. However, I perched on an uncomfortable narrow cement ledge to watch the show. At the end I hobbled back to our poker machines and settled on its padded stool with a sigh of relief.

We played for another hour. As I remember it, everyone lost the \$20 they had dedicated to the evening. I started with a stake of \$2, won some, lost some, won again, and returned my original stake to my wallet. I continued to play, enjoying it, to end up even. It quickly became obvious to me that the machines were set to make the player lose for three or four spins, then allow him to win two to four quarters, lose again, win a bit more, and so on. Big wins were spaced farther apart. The machine let the player win often enough to prevent his losing interest.

We went back outdoors to watch a second laser show, then left for the night. We all were charmed with the easier, less formal, less boisterous downtown club. We bid Katy farewell until the next weekend and hoped she would get a good rest before Larry returned at end of the week. We thanked her profusely for acting as our chauffeur and guide in Las Vegas.

Sunday, 5 September

The Robinsons and I packed and, after a leisurely breakfast, were settled in the car and on our way to Zion National Park by 10:00 AM.

We drove through fairly ordinary countryside at the beginning of the drive then came to desert, which I found bleak and disturbing. We reached an area of denuded mountains, no vegetation whatever. It was ominous and intimidating. As we neared Zion, we passed magnificent vertical walls of the brilliantly red Navajo Sandstone so characteristic of the canyon. The walls were sheer, and at the base were enormous rocks that obviously had fallen from the face.

The Virgin River runs through Zion Canyon. Mary had been told that our rooms would not be available until 4 o'clock, so we enjoyed some of the spectacular views of the canyon on our way. Mary, Nancy, and Ellis took a short hike to the Hanging River. This is a reminder of the long-ago time when the Virgin River was cutting its course down through the mountains to create what today is Zion Canyon. The Hanging River is a remnant of the time when the river was at that level, half-way up what is now a wall of the canyon.

While my companions were exploring, I stayed in the car enjoying a view of The Court of the Patriarchs. Its three towering pillars of rock are named for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.



Ellis warned me that national parks are staffed by civil servants, so I was not to expect courtesy. He could not have been more mistaken. Mary and I went into the lodge to register. The woman at the desk was as warmly welcoming as any hotel clerk I ever have seen. She went out of her way to answer questions and make sure we were comfortably accommodated.

Our rooms were in a nearby building, adjacent to each other, each with a private balcony looking across a wide lawn to soaring red cliffs. We left our luggage in our rooms, then returned to the car to follow the scenic drive up to the end of the canyon. It was a gorgeous ride between high red rock walls, with the shrunken Virgin River snaking below the road.

Returning from the scenic drive, we parked and got out of the car to see the great formations of The Organ, Angels' Landing, and The Great

White Throne. Nancy and Ellis strode off on one of their hikes while Mary and I stayed near the car.

A small sedan stopped near us and an attractive young woman rolled down her window to call to us. She said she had been following a sightseeing tram. The driver pointed out to his passengers this rock and that formation then added, "...and there are two lovely elderly women enjoying the scenery." Mary and I were convulsed.



We returned to the lodge and freshened up for dinner. The dining room in the lodge was attractive; the service, excellent; and the food, exceptionally good. I was surprised and impressed. I could not pass up the Prime Ribs. It was the first of my several fine beef dinners in the lodges on our trip.

We returned to our rooms and set up for bridge. Mary had suggested it because Nancy is learning to play, and she thought a few friendly teaching hands after dinner might be fun for us all. Mary had brought cards. I suggested our using my room. I had a handsome wooden table of bridge size and two nice upholstered arm chairs. Mary and Ellis brought two of their chairs in from their room, next door.

Ellis and Nancy were partners, as were Mary and I. We play similar though not identical systems, so we had to be careful not to confuse Nancy. Both Mary and I told her that the important thing was that she and her partner play the same system. We played for a happy hour or so, then parted for the night.

This is when we began playing games with time. It was an hour later than it had been when we left Las Vegas. Our trip would take us back and forth through Utah, Arizona, and Nevada with changes in time almost daily. I never did get used to changing my watch.

Monday, 6 September

The sun wakened me, and I fixed a cup of coffee in the lovely little traveling coffee pot Air France gave me.

As I was enjoying scenery and coffee on my balcony, Nancy and Ellis walked by after an early breakfast before hiking a nearby trail. They asked if I had seen the huge porcupine on the lawn, but apparently he disappeared before I emerged from my room.

Their walk took them past the Weeping Rock. The Navajo Sandstone is so porous that water permeates it, moving downward until it reaches one of the impervious layers. Then it moves horizontally and seeps out of the rock face as a spring or sheet of water.



Mary and I went over to the lodge for breakfast by ourselves. It was our first—and best—visit alone together. Unfortunately, Mary was not feeling well and preferred to stay home for the day. When they returned, Nancy, Ellis, and I set out in the car to drive to the southern end of Zion, then up the East side of the park. The drive took us in and out of the park, sometimes over private land, sometimes national. As the road climbed, we passed fascinating rock formations. Sparse vegetation gave way to woods of pine, aspen, and oak. It was surprising to be in so lush an area after having seen mainly deserts and raw rock walls.

We were on the Horse Pasture Plateau. We drove past beautiful homes and farms with cattle grazing. Not a mountain in sight, just long, lovely flat vistas. We assumed we were atop the Temple Cap formation that forms a narrow layer above the Navajo Sandstone.

We began to see large basalt rocks on either side, remnants of an old lava extrusion. We ended at Lava Point, with a 180-degree vista across plateaus, mesas, and canyons to mountains far in the distance. We were at almost 8,000 ft. elevation, some 4,000 ft. higher than Zion Canyon.



When we returned to the lodge, Mary was well and was eager to take a nearby trail to a ledge high on the cliff on the other side of the river overlooking the lodge. The three of them took off hiking, and I retired to my room.

We had another lovely dinner, then a happy hour or so of bridge before saying good night.

Tuesday, 7 September

Mary and Nancy had an early breakfast and took a short hike, while Ellis and I had a more leisurely breakfast and visit together.

We had set 9:30 as our departure time. We checked out, loaded luggage into the car and were ready. Mary strolled down the walk to meet us. I had learned from listening to family conversation that Mary was the one least likely to make a deadline.

Mary proclaimed, “See, we are getting in the car exactly at 9:30,” then added, “but I need a cup of coffee.” She strolled back to the lodge’s snack bar, leaving the rest of us grinning to each other in the car.

Ten or fifteen minutes later Mary returned, coffee in hand, and we left Zion for Bryce Canyon. It was a short trip. We decided to make a brief stop en route at Cedar Breaks National Monument.



Geologically, the canyons we were visiting were linked. The top layer at the Grand Canyon becomes the bottom layer at Zion. The top layer at Zion becomes the bottom layer at Cedar Breaks and Bryce. Together they form The Great Staircase, with the tilted edges of strata exposed in places as the Pink Cliffs of Bryce, Gray Cliffs, the White Cliffs of Zion, Vermilion Cliffs along the north edge of the Grand Canyon, and finally the Belted Cliffs of the Grand Canyon itself.

Cedar Breaks is a relatively new national park. The Visitors Center overlooks a great amphitheater of red rock walls and “hoodoos,” precursors of the formations found at nearby Bryce Canyon. Hoodoos are



Ellis, Kate, and Mary at Cedar Breaks National Monument, 1999

bizarre freestanding or linked pinnacles, pedestals, or toadstool forms of rock that has eroded free from rock walls and been further shaped by rain, ice, and wind-blown sand.

We stopped at two or three more overlooks before leaving Cedar Breaks to continue on to Bryce.



The lodge at Bryce dates back to the thirties, old dark wood and rustic decor. We were given adjoining rooms in a separate building at the edge of the lodge area. To our amusement, the rooms looked almost identical to the ones we just had left. Again, we both had private balconies overlooking open woods. We left our luggage in our rooms, then took off for a late-afternoon drive to two of the overlooks past the lodge.

The vistas were gorgeous—an incredible jungle of brilliant red hoodoos, apparently springing up from the canyon floor alongside the great cliffs that gave birth to them. Cliff strata were not as clearly visible at Bryce as at Zion. Here the stripes were pastels, shading one into the other. Basic rock colors were rich shades of red or the palest of yellow.

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Kate's unfinished trip report ends here. The trip continued to the Grand Canyon and was followed by a reunion in Las Vegas with Katy & Larry; Tom & Carli; and Mary & Ellis' oldest daughter, Peggy, & her husband, Dick. The following excerpts from letters written after the trip give a little more information.

— *Carli Scott*

We spent two days each at Zion, Bryce, and the Grand Canyon. None of the pictures, moving or still, I ever had seen prepared me for the towering cliffs, the vivid colors, the twisted stone shapes, the varied colors, the striking striation, the glowing colors, the vastness, the shifting colors of the differing canyons. For neighbors, we had friendly mule deer.

It was a fascinating trip made richer by being with family whom I see seldom. Mary and Ellis both look marvelous and are a delight to be with. Having time to get to know Nancy on an adult basis was a major plus. She is a fine, bright, capable, charming young woman.

Throughout the trip, everyone was wonderful about letting me out of the car at the closest entrance. I am eternally grateful to Mary for suggesting



Kate, Nancy, Mary & Ellis at the Grand Canyon, 1999

the wheelchair at the Grand Canyon. It was the only way I could have enjoyed that magnificent scenery—or managed a meal, probably. Thereafter, all cheerfully accepting the effort and nuisance of pushing a creaky relative over rough walks.

We returned to Las Vegas and a ten-strong family mini-reunion, which was a blast—noisy happiness and more laughs than real conversation. It was lovely seeing Peggy and meeting Dick. They appear very happy and added a lot to our group.



Tom, Carli, and I had invited Katy out on our final evening, after others had left Las Vegas. She picked us up in her car at 4:30, as I remember, allowing time to get to the Bellagio through heavy traffic, park, and be on time for an early dinner before the show.

The dining room downstairs at the Bellagio was the height of elegance. We were shown to a table next to a large window overlooking the water, where the fountain show played for us several times while we were eating. Our dinners were delicious and the service, impeccable. When I excused myself after dinner, an attentive waiter led me to the facilities so assiduously that I feared he would continue to see me all the way to a cubicle.

We were in our seats at the nearby theater a few minutes before curtain time. The Cirque Du Soleil show *Eau* was spectacular. Incredible acrobatics and fantastic staging.



Next morning, Carli and Tom met me at my room at 5:30 AM for an early departure and flight.

My trip home was easy. I took wheelchairs all along the way. Alex almost dived off the viewing gallery in shock when he saw me in one on my arrival in Belize, but calmed down once we were in the car together and he realized I had not deteriorated unduly during my absence.



Kate in patch of snow near Crater Lake, Oregon, 2000



Carli and Kate along the Washington coast, 2000

Northwest Coast with Carli & Tom

October 2000

Superstition? Nonsense. Our trip began on Friday the Thirteenth of October.

Friday, 13 October

The luggage for three people, a multitude of black bags of assorted sizes and shapes, challenged Tom, our indefatigable driver. After a few moments of trial and error, he jig-sawed them into the trunk of his car, establishing a permanent packing pattern for the tour.

The first day, one of our longest drives, took us to Ashland, Oregon, for the Shakespeare Festival.

Carli filled the cubbyhole in the console of the car with musical tapes to play during our trip. She thought of Old Mom when she included Benny Goodman and Harry James, as well as Greatest Hits by Richard Rogers and Cole Porter. I loved them, but enjoyed equally her eclectic mix of instrumentals and vocals.



As Carli had warned, the scenery as far as Redding was fairly ordinary. I thought the Central Valley was quite lovely. It stretched for miles with small, rounded hills so softly gold that the moss-green vegetation seemed almost another tone of the same color. We climbed out of the valley through rolling, rumped hills. Carli said that the great treeless swathes on some mountainsides probably were caused by arid conditions, rather than by over-logging.

Almost immediately after leaving Redding, we were in densely wooded high hills, the chiseled points of tall pines stretching up toward a pale blue sky. We passed a winding lake, at least fifteen feet lower than usual, waiting for fall rains and next spring's snow melt to fill it to normal level. Carli pointed out two snow-capped volcanoes on the right. Mount

Shastina and taller Mount Shasta, slightly behind it, appeared to rise directly from the floor of the adjacent valley to more than 12,000 and 14,000 feet respectively.

We continued through forested mountains until we reached Ashland, a lovely small town of winding streets and old Victorian houses, lovingly restored. Ashland is considered the cultural center of Oregon. Its annual Shakespeare Festival, lasting from February to October attracts more than a quarter of a million people from all over the U.S. and beyond annually.



We were greeted warmly at the Chanticleer Inn, the delightful bed-and-breakfast where Carli and Tom stay on their regular visits. Carli had booked for me the pleasant room in which they usually stay. It opened onto a lovely terrace whose rock wall was lush with vines and autumn flowers. Both mornings of our stay, I bundled up in a heavy red coat and settled with my book in one of the white wrought-iron chairs on the terrace to enjoy the flowers as I waited for Carli and Tom to join me for breakfast. Thirty minutes of crisp Oregon air was about all I could stand before fleeing to the warmth of my room.

An autocratic cat wandered in and out perpetually. Eventually I realized that it was a matter of multiple cats, five in all by accurate count.

Breakfast in the sunny dining room was lavish but, according to Carli, somewhat more fat-free than she felt necessary. We settled on our accustomed travel program of large breakfasts, no lunch, and a fine dinner. Most days we stopped for a cappuccino (Tom), cafe latte (Kate) and tea (Carli) at a convenient middlish hour. Quite often a cookie appeared as an unintentional grace note for which no one took caloric responsibility.



Both mornings in Ashland we prowled the shops, looking for gifts among their unusual offerings. My purchases complicated Tom's car packing for the rest of the trip.

Carli had ordered tickets for two matinées. The first was Euripides' *The Trojan Women*. By the time we reached Ashland, Carli had read the play and had misgivings about her choice. She was afraid the play would be a dismal ordeal and somewhat more edifying than any of us felt was in keeping with our holiday mood. Tom remarked that he planned to sleep through it.

We settled into our comfortable seats, second row center, thanks to Carli's early purchase. At curtain time, the house lights did not dim; they suddenly were extinguished. Through the velvet blackness was heard the distant battle sounds of the Trojan War, now on this side, now on the other, increasing in ferocity, louder and louder. A woman's cry sounded faintly over here. Others joined from different directions until the clash of armor was overwhelmed by the screams of unseen women.

Stage lights gradually illuminated a stark gray, multilevel set abandoned by battle. Center front, prone in the dirt, was the ragged and disarrayed figure of Hecuba.

The play was electrifying. It was a shattering, exhausting, exhilarating performance.

In contrast, the next afternoon was a brilliant performance of the witty *The Man Who Came To Dinner*. The sharpness of its repartee has not been dulled by the six decades since it first was performed. I probably appreciated some of its nuances more than Carli and Tom, because the real-life writers and actors satirized in the play were ones I "knew" in my early years. The director even caught the acting style of the late Thirties. It was an utterly diverting performance.



Both nights in Ashland we enjoyed excellent French food at two different restaurants. When we left the Chanticleer the first evening, deer were quietly feasting on the fruit trees in the side yard. They ignored us as we walked to the car.

Carli told me that one of their favorite French restaurants improbably was named “New Sammy’s Cowboy Bistro.” It was a few miles outside Ashland.

Tom realized that he had driven past it and turned back. The undistinguished, low frame building was half-hidden by trees close to the road. As we approached from the other direction, a curving arrow of lights, several bulbs missing—the kind of sign that used to advertise disreputable motels—pointed to Sammy’s. The interior was simple, but the food was superb.

Monday, 16 October

From Ashland, we drove north to Steamboat Inn. We paused briefly at Eagle Point to visit a 150-year-old grist mill, still using its original water-powered gears. We were tempted to buy some of the fascinating variety of grains on sale, but restrained ourselves out of consideration for Tom’s trunk-packing problems.

We drove through gentle mountains where cattle grazed on valley floors. We followed the Rogue River for miles past one tiny strung-out village after another. The river alternately danced and bubbled over rocks, or deepened into a dignified flow.

I caught the well remembered highway smell of a distant skunk.

In great pine forests, the deep green of the trees was accented by sudden orange sprays of bushes snuggled at their feet. Traces of long-ago forest fires showed in large tracts where the trees all were slender and young regrowth.

As we continued through a National Wilderness area with walls of tall, dark pines hugging the highway, I felt lost in timelessness with no relationship to the outside world. I had a brief moment of claustrophobia. Reality returned when the popping of my eardrums suggested an unseen change in elevation.



The day was brilliantly sunny. Weather reports hinted at rain to come. We decided to detour to visit Crater Lake immediately rather than waiting till the next day, as we had planned to do.

Crater Lake is one of the treasures of Oregon. It is the deepest lake in the U.S., formed in a caldera. It is all that remains of Mt. Mazama, a volcano that erupted nearly eight thousand years ago. Crater Lake owes its famous brilliant blue color to the clarity of its water, which is replenished only by pure rain and spring snow melt.

Just the northern and western roads around the lake still were open this late in the season. We drove along the north side of Crater Lake, stopping at each overlook to enjoy the pristine view. As we continued, I was excited to see patches of snow, left from the previous winter. Tom stopped to take a picture of me standing in snow. Carli commented that the snow even crunched. I promptly marched down the entire five-foot length of my personal patch of snow, beaming at the resulting, long-forgotten sound of snow underfoot.

Carli's guidebook said that the annual snowfall at Crater Lake is 44 feet. No wonder some of the snow survived the summer.



As we turned away from the lake, we passed the desolate Pumice Desert, miles of land still barren from the ravages of the ancient volcanic eruption.

As we continued through deep woods, deer crossed the road ahead of us. We followed the boulder-strewn banks of the North Umpqua River, passing quietly swirling pools and surging cascades, to Steamboat Inn. We settled into adjacent stream-side cabins, charmingly rustic and cozy, with a common veranda overlooking the river, which churned and gurgled its way past us over and around the rocks. The mountain on the far side of the river appeared to rise at right angles to the stream. Tall pine trees covered it, magically growing straight up as if attached to the mountain by magnets.

Steamboat attracts numbers of fishermen. Visiting with one of them soon after our arrival, I asked, “Does this involve waders and a fly rod?” I shuddered at his affirmative reply because I was semi-chilled in the warm lodge despite several layers of clothing. Both mornings we heard fellow guests leave early, and saw some (or their equivalents) patiently standing knee- to hip-deep on the edge of quiet pools in the river, casting long loops of line in hopes of hooking a steelhead.

We stayed at Steamboat for dinner both nights. Hors d’oeuvres and complimentary wine were served in the library. Dinner was family-style, with guests seated at long tables. The food was elegant and lavish. Unfortunately for our waistlines, we found it impossible to resist either the seconds that were served or the delicious desserts.

Wednesday, 18 October

After two nights at Steamboat and a day of exploring the forested mountains, we continued to the Columbia River. The weather had changed. We departed in light rain. The rain stopped almost immediately, but left a lingering overcast that was ideal for driving.

We drove through a Corot-like landscape. The climbing highway took us into the clouds themselves. They were a fleeting fog, misting the windshield without dampening vision. Nevertheless, I am not comfortable being in a cloud unless surrounded by the fuselage of an airplane. I expect them to stay in the sky where they belong. Carli’s comment that we were invading the cloud’s territory instead of the other way around did not impress me.

We checked into Skamania Lodge, a large, rustic hotel. Room-wide windows, three stories tall, in the public rooms looked past extensive, groomed grounds and tall pines, to the Columbia River in the distance. Fire blazed in a huge stone fireplace not far from the reception desk.

Our rooms were not ready when we checked in, so we drove to the nearby Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center, a fascinating museum in a handsome, modern building of award-winning design. Exhibits

illuminated the history of life along the river and the cataclysmic formation of the Gorge itself.

We returned to the Skamania and, to our delight, saw my niece, Peggy Robinson, and her husband, Dick Mark, walking toward us, smiling in welcome. Plans for our trip had changed from a visit in Seattle to see them, to their meeting us at Skamania. It was a gratifying evening of reunion over a delicious dinner, served by a refreshingly independent and amusing waiter.

Thursday, 19 October

In the morning, we drove east along the Washington side of the Columbia. Across the river, in the distance above the mountains on the Oregon side, loomed Mt. Hood in snow-shrouded serenity.

When we stopped for our traditional midday coffee, I remarked that it was almost 1:30 PM and we still had not reached the Columbia Gorge.

“Where do you think we have been all this time?” Carli asked.

To me, a gorge is a deep Vee gouge in the earth, with a river far below high cliffs. The Columbia Gorge, however, was created by glaciers and is a broad U-shape. It winds through a 3,000-foot-deep gorge flanked by volcanic peaks and mesas whose stark horizontal bands of basalt have eroded in stair steps. In places, great basalt slabs on mesa tops are draped by wide “skirts” of pebbled detritus clinging to the side of the mesa at the angle of repose. While a few trees lined the sharp valleys of watercourses, for the most part, the land bordering each side appeared desert-like, broken only by basalt boulders and towering basalt walls, etched by the elements. One needs to drive both sides of the Gorge to understand the forces that formed it.

During the most recent Ice Age, that is, up to 15,000 years ago, 2,500-foot-high glaciers filled the valleys that drained western Montana. An enormous lake formed behind the glaciers. When water in the lake rose high enough, it broke out the ice “plug,” sending torrents of water filled with ice bergs roaring through the Columbia Basin. Forty of these

periodic, catastrophic floods over two millennia scoured out the narrow Columbia watercourse and cut away the canyon walls, leaving the broad gorge that we could see. Tributaries remained high above on the plateau, joining the Columbia in waterfalls.



We turned in at the Maryhill Museum, a magnificent French-style chateau built in the early part of last century by entrepreneur Sam Hill. He hoped it would entice his socialite wife to remain in Oregon with him. It did not. She took one look at the desolate surroundings and fled to her beloved Philadelphia. The chateau never was completed as a residence. Carli and I looked at the sparse vegetation, the gloomy dark rocks, and the solitude of the mansion on its hill, without view of human habitation, and understood Mary Hill's reluctance to incarcerate herself there.

A close friend of Sam Hill's, Queen Marie of Romania, and other friends, took an interest in the chateau. They turned the handsome building into a museum, donating many personal items of furniture, clothing, and valuables to begin its collections.



From Maryhill, we descended to a bridge and crossed the Columbia.

“See, Mom, doesn't this look more like a gorge?” Carli asked. She admitted that it probably was even more like a traditional gorge before the dams were built.

We drove back along the Oregon side of the Gorge. Tom turned off the highway to follow the old road, originally laid out by the multitalented Sam Hill.

We wound through dark forests brightened by the reds and yellows of fall foliage. We stopped at each of the waterfalls along the way. Water plunged from original levels, some 3,000 feet above the river, in torrents and cascades to reach the river far below. One is the second highest all-season waterfall in the nation.

As the river approached the sea, a basalt monolith rose from it, not far from the Washington shore. Beacon Rock is a long-loved landmark. At one time the Army Corps of Engineers wanted to use the material from it. Outraged private citizens bought the landmark to save it from destruction. They offered Beacon Rock to the State of Washington, which refused the gift. They then offered it to Oregon. When it became apparent that Oregon was going to accept, Washington was shamed into taking the prize.

During our drive, Tom remarked, apropos of nothing at all, “The Northwest grows very large women.”

Carli replied, “They may just be at the end of a long trip like ours.”

“Oh,” Tom sighed, “is that what I have to look forward to?”

Friday, 20 October

As we expected from the weather reports, it was dark and raining heavily when we departed Skamania. Thin cloud resting on the ground blurred the landscape. Halfway back to our highway northward, we had descended below the cloud layer and could say goodbye to the Columbia.

The rain stopped. The farther north we went, the more reds and oranges joined the ubiquitous yellows in the emerald forests.

We detoured slightly to visit my close friend Callie Young, who just had moved to Panorama City, a retirement community near Olympia, Washington. We spent a little less than an hour with her. For me, it was a visit with a dear friend whom I probably never will see again. I satisfied myself that she is happy in her new life.

We left Callie and headed for our next port-of-call. Our introduction to the Olympic Peninsula, as we left the main highway, was a Megalopolis of Tawdry. Tiny espresso shacks were barely large enough to hold one person. Ungainly, bare-wood shacks with crooked hand-painted signs advertised fireworks or bait shops. Boats were drawn up on shore where

one expected to see a battered car. Low, boxy buildings housed everything from restaurants to shops to dubious motels.

Before long, we reached the lovely scenic drive along the Sound. Tall trees graced the landside hills, and woods to our right parted briefly to give glimpses of the water beyond. We spent the night in Port Angeles.

Saturday, 21 October

We caught the ferry from Port Angeles to Victoria, British Columbia. The trip was pleasant, in a large salon with great windows and comfortably upholstered seats. We approached Victoria. Our car was parked near the door of the ferry. Across the harbor our hotel, The Empress, Grande Dame of hostelrys, rose in stately splendor. As we came closer and closer with no apparent slackening of speed, Tom remarked, “Slow this puppy down before it runs into our lobby!”

The Empress is a dignified old girl of a hotel, her steeply pitched roofs topped by turrets. Lower walls are draped thickly with vines, much of it turned an autumn red that blended with the soft rose of the brick facade. The interior is a luxurious maze of wide, carpeted hallways, staircases gleaming with polished mahogany and brass, ramps, and handsome antique furniture. Most of our stay, Carli and I were hopelessly lost. Tom, on the other hand, went unerringly from Point A to Point B, followed by his trusting females.



We took off on foot to explore the neighborhood. We walked past fascinating shops and stopped to ponder the menu in a charming restaurant. Tom led us up a hill along a windowless bank of buildings. Carli protested. Tom insisted it was the right way, leaving us with the impression that glory itself would shine around the next corner.

Glory, it turned out, was a parking lot. Carli and I were hysterical with amusement. Tom was neither offended nor deterred. He marched us downhill past a series of parking garages, each of which gave rise to more

giggles from his unhinged companions. We ended within view of the great Royal British Columbia Museum. Tom indicated that it was where he was headed the whole time. We resisted mentioning that it could have been reached four blocks, one hill, and several parking lots sooner.

We wandered around the outside of the museum, marveling at the majestic totem poles standing on its grounds. We verified that it would be open on Sunday and planned to return for a leisurely visit the next day.

We continued past the museum to the handsome old parliament building. This photographer with her fine throwaway camera insisted on posing Carli and Tom where the detail of the elegant doorway would show in the background. Tom was surprisingly stubborn about moving to the step I designated. The resulting picture of my laughing companions was excellent. The background was exactly as I hoped.

We argued about the identity of a statue near the sidewalk in front of Parliament. To settle the argument, we walked down to the front of it to verify that it was a young Queen Victoria. Utterly appropriate.

We wandered down to the harbor. The slanted top of a granite wall was inset with brass plaques dedicated to sea and tug captains from the earliest days of Victoria. We read them all. Most were straightforward with names of people, ships, and dates. Others added touching bits of information about the seafarers, ships, or incidents they memorialized.



We discovered the hotel's Bengal Lounge. It became our favorite refuge. The Bengal Lounge is a high-ceilinged, dark den of a room, done with great, overstuffed leather furniture and dark woods in the English men's club manner. Tall, narrow windows overlook gardens. Splayed above a vast stone fireplace is a huge tiger skin with head attached and teeth barred, somewhat too Raj for all of us.

The mood was muted; service, swift and sure. We sank into our private sitting areas each time we visited and felt completely at home.

We all felt overfed from stays at various inns, so we decided against dinner in the Empress's elegant dining room. Instead we walked to a nearby informal seafood restaurant Carli and Tom found listed in the guidebook. It was exactly right for our first night in Victoria.

Sunday, 22 October

After breakfasting at the lavish buffet in the Kipling Room, we set off for the nearby Royal British Columbia Museum. It was one of the finest I ever have visited. Exhibits were exhaustive and imaginatively displayed. Enormous totem poles of varying styles stood near the entrance to an Indian dwelling designed to house several families.

The two final animal dioramas imperceptibly merged from the static, behind-glass exhibit to life-size plants and trees alongside us as we moved to the next area. The museum covered the full history of British Columbia, its geography, history, people, flora and fauna, on land and under the sea.

We were so happy in the Bengal Lounge that we decided on their curry buffet Sunday night. I had been introduced to real curry by British Army friends in Belize and was delighted at a chance to enjoy proper curry again.

Monday, 23 October

We thought that we might be in Victoria too late in the season for it to be worthwhile to visit the famous Butchart Gardens. On the contrary, it was a spectacular time to visit because of the fall foliage. Some beds of flowers were in brilliant bloom. Most were not, but the landscaping itself was so lovely it hardly mattered. The Japanese Garden, with its bubbling stream, red lacquered bridges and matching Japanese maples, was exquisite.

To our surprise, except for the hotel, Victoria was not noticeably British. It was settled by the same mix of trappers, merchants, and explorers who settled the rest of the Pacific Northwest a century and a half ago.

We drove through some of the loveliest residential areas of Victoria, past enormous, beautifully groomed parks. Conservative homes of varying sizes perched high overlooking the bays. Unassuming mansions in wooded grounds were the conventional architectural styles of several decades ago. Nothing was pretentious. Even more modest homes had tree-sheltered streets and immaculate yards. Victoria appeared a city comfortable with itself and with no intention of changing.



The one thing one “absolutely must do” at the Empress Hotel is take afternoon tea. It is a long and elegant tradition. Carli made reservations for us, and we appeared, properly dressed, at the exact hour.

We were seated near a window. Our smiling waiter brought tea, announcing that it was the Empress’ special blend of Indian, Ceylon, and Burma teas. He poured for us, making sure we had the milk and sugar we needed, then retired. Every time we diminished the tea in our cups by three sips, he materialized to refill them.

Our waiter ceremoniously placed on the table a silver three-tier lazy Susan, artistically displaying three kinds of tea sandwiches, scones, and three kinds of pastries. Butter for the scones, a bowl of Jersey cream, and several pots of jam completed the array.

Conversation was limited.

After our repast, none of us could consider dinner. We took a short walk to consider possibilities, then adjourned to our beloved Bengal Lounge for a glass of Port.

Tuesday, 24 October

We took the ferry back to Port Angeles, Washington. I nearly did irreparable damage to my neck craning for a succession of “last” looks at the Empress Hotel as we left her behind.

Back on land, Tom took the scenic route through forests of green and gold with mountains on either side. I marveled again at the wisdom of the government in setting aside so much glorious country as national forests.

Then we passed a wide swath of clear cutting, the ground dug up unevenly, great stumps jutting out from it. Blanched limbs and debris lay scattered like Jackstraws. It was heart wrenching.

Patches of forest separated the clear-cut areas. Gradually we saw that efforts were made to clean up and reforest the raped tracts. Neat signs posted by Weyerhaeuser appeared along the highway indicating that a particular section had been clear-cut in such-and-such-a-year and reforested in the next. It was interesting to see from the girth and height of the trees how long it takes to reestablish a forest. Other signs proclaimed, "Future Forests Start with Logging." We were skeptical.

Conversations with Washington residents later in the trip presented the other side of the clear cutting argument. The oldest, largest trees almost always are diseased. Fungus is a major problem. It quickly can affect nearby trees. Clear cutting protects adjacent tracts by removing diseased trees. Young trees have a better chance to develop. Unquote. Reforesting repairs the damage, but slowly, very slowly.

The road went through an Indian reservation. I was pleased to see that this tribe had received wonderfully wooded land, unlike the depressing desert of the Navajo.



Our next stop was at Caswell's On The Bay on Long Beach Peninsula, a narrow spit of land off the mainland just north of the mouth of the Columbia River. The large, modern house with a flavor of Victoriana stood alone in luxuriant grounds on a rise overlooking Willapa Bay. The Caswells are charming people. We happened to be their only guests, so they ignored our room reservations and put us in their two finest rooms without changing the promised prices. Both large rooms overlooked an expanse of lawn leading down to the tidal flats of the bay.

At Tom's request, Mr. Caswell suggested restaurants we might enjoy for dinner. We had elegant dinners both nights. The first was at one of the inns from the *Unique Northwest Inns* group, where we had superb food in a semi-private dining room. The second night we went to a gaudy fish house for a surprisingly elegant meal that included the famous Willapa oysters.



We explored the peninsula on Wednesday. We walked to picturesque North Head Lighthouse on the Pacific and Tom later walked even farther, uphill and down, to the lighthouse at Cape Disappointment, overlooking the mouth of the Columbia River.


We visited the small Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center at Fort Canby. In addition to giving us a fascinating view of the explorations, it provided a traumatic interval for this reporter. I excused myself to use the ladies' room. I noticed that the commode in one of the cubicles had not been flushed. It was unsightly. I decided that, being a Concerned Citizen, I must take responsibility. I flushed. The foul water rose, and rose, and rose, and...Jiggling the handle did no good. I fled in advance of the flood.

I whispered the dire news to the attendant at the counter. She nodded and continued reading. I repeated that the room was flooding and that she probably should take action before it reached her toes. Startled, she called her supervisor. The two ladies put their heads together and decided to call the maintenance man, as soon as he emerged from a meeting.

Carli headed for the Ladies. I warned her which area to avoid. She returned to say that the flooding not only had stopped, but that a drain in the floor had coped with it. She went outdoors to scrape her shoe soles on the cleansing grass.

I determined 1) never again to take it on myself to be helpful, and 2) when in strange facilities, never to flush until I was ready to exit in a sprint, if necessary.

Tom returned from his hike to the lighthouse, assuring me that it was more climbing than I would have enjoyed. We continued our explorations of the dunes and the long, wide beach beyond and of the nature reserve at the end of the peninsula.




That morning, as he served our delectable breakfast, Mr. Caswell had been absolutely giddy with anticipation of the opening of razor-clam season. Clamming is permitted publicly on only a few days each year, during specified hours, and with a limit of fifteen clams. He spent all day getting his vehicle and his gear ready for the night's expedition. Poor Mrs. Caswell, who was suffering from sciatica, went with her husband to provide a license for a second fifteen clams.

When we returned from dinner, Mr. Caswell happily was cleaning his catch of the huge clams. The two of them had a late, luxurious supper long after we had said goodnight and retired to our charming rooms.

Thursday, 26 October

Before leaving Long Beach, we stopped at a bookstore so I could buy a copy of the Washington Bed-and-Breakfast Cookbook, I was convulsed at the sign in a shop window:

FREE
RIDE IN A
POLICE CAR
IF YOU
SHOPLIFT
FROM THIS STORE
Compliments of the
Long Beach Police Department



Our departure gave us one last goodbye to the Columbia River as we drove south over the 4.1-mile-long Astoria Bridge, the world's longest continuous truss bridge.

Our road was a few hundred feet above the rocky Pacific coast, along the sides of basalt mountains. We passed great black outcrops and caught occasional glimpses of the beach through the haze.

When we settled in the car for the drive to our next stop at Depoe Bay, Oregon, Carli suggested that we pick up picnic food for that evening as an antidote to the steady, understandable overeating in which we had indulged. This tied in nicely with our planned stop at the Tillemook cheese factory.

Carli read from the guidebook that Tillemook County had 23,000 people and 22,000 cows. The guide continued that the first thing people noticed at Tillemook was the smell. Carli and I both assumed it referred to the glorious aroma of cheese. The guide continued, "It's fairly obvious that a lot of cows live in the area."

Tom parked near the cheese factory. We opened the car doors and instantly agreed that the guidebook had not exaggerated. Fortunately, I am fond of farmyard smells.

We watched the automated factory operations, then took advantage of the cheese tasting to select a cheddar for our picnic. Carli found an interesting sausage. Our purchases were presented to us in a silver bag decorated with a large orange Jack-o-Lantern. Ever since arriving in Palo Alto, I had teased about buying a pumpkin and carving it to decorate my rooms on the trip. I appropriated the Halloween bag and put it up as a decoration each time we stopped the rest of the trip.

Next we went to the French cheese shop for Brie and baguettes. We needed a bottle of wine. Again, we decided a taste test would be in order. The house brand Pinot Noir was just shy of noxious. We tried the Cabernet. Not much better. Finally we agreed that the Merlot was enough better than the other two that we might as well take it, despite its price of \$25.

Tom remarked that we could get a better wine at a supermarket for \$6. Carli and I protested that we did not know when or if we would pass a store on our drive along the coast. As it happened, once we tucked our

questionable bottle of wine away in the car and drove on, we passed endless numbers of markets and liquor stores.



Channel House at Depoe Bay was perched on the rocks at the foot of the bridge that crosses the narrow pass from the ocean into the tiny harbor. Carli had booked a two-bedroom suite. It had a spectacular view overlooking the rocky coastline, the surging Pacific, and the challenging pass. A balcony ran the length of the suite, with a Jacuzzi outside the sliding-glass doors of Carli and Tom's bedroom. The living room was a gracious size, attractively decorated, with comfortable furniture, a gas fireplace, and a full kitchen.

A hall led past Carli and Tom's bathroom to my room. They had a basin in a mirrored niche in their bedroom. The rest of their facilities were across the hall. The shower had spray heads at each end and was large enough to hold a convention of bathers.

Which brings us to my room. It had a lovely double bed with a dark flowered comforter. A TV sat on a small chest of drawers a few inches from the foot of the bed. A small armchair chair blocked the hall door and obstructed entry into the tiny bathroom. Tom immediately picked it up and moved it to the living room, easing congestion marginally. The only place large enough for a suitcase rack was in front of my main door to the outside hall. One end of my weekender touched my bed; the other was flat against the wall.

Later, I noticed the lock on the sliding door into the small bathroom. I hardly could stop laughing enough to ask C&T why anyone willing to share that tiny room with another person would find it necessary to lock the bathroom door.

Carli and Tom were a little perturbed at the size of my room. They had trouble believing that I considered it delightfully cozy, rather than claustrophobic.



As we investigated our temporary home-by-the-sea, Carli found two bottles of wine, attractively presented in a little basket on the kitchen counter. Tom remarked that the red wine was much better than the one we had purchased so reluctantly. It cost slightly less. We decided to take advantage of it instead of opening the dubious Merlot.

I asked Tom what he intended to do with the Merlot.

“We’ll give it to friends we don’t like and tell them it is a fine Oregon wine,” he replied without hesitation.

I draped the Jack-o-Lantern bag on the mantle where we all could enjoy our Halloween decoration.


We gathered for the afternoon in our living room, spending more time looking out the large windows or wandering out onto the balcony to watch the waves break on the rocks below than we did reading our books. Tom, of course, was not reading. He was happily involved with his laptop when he wasn’t out on the balcony taking pictures.

That evening Carli arranged our picnic on our coffee table. We congratulated ourselves on taking advantage of our spectacular view and comfortable surroundings as we feasted informally.

Around midnight I was wakened when a blast of wind that literally shook the bed ushered in a violent storm. I roused enough to realize that it wasn’t a hurricane, that it wasn’t my house shaking, and that I was quite safe. I was asleep again moments later and missed the full fury of the storm.

In the morning, Carli and Tom told me the roar of storm and surf were so loud that they drowned out their TV. Tom got up when the power failed. He watched the storm long enough to see the raging waves of high tide below our windows.

[Editor’s Note 3 on page 382]




It still was overcast and rainy the next morning, but after a nice buffet breakfast in an attractive room, we set out for the nearby Oregon Aquarium. On the way to the entrance, we followed a pretty little stream. Posted above it was a sign that proclaimed:

NO COINS NECESSARY TO OPERATE STREAM

The aquarium is justifiably notable. It has a beautiful display of marine life, both in tanks inside the modern building and in natural-appearing outdoor pools among the rocks. Visitors walk through a long, clear tunnel that allows them to see fish swimming past on either side, overhead, and—through heavy plates in the floor—underfoot.

In an outdoor exhibit, Carli and I were enchanted by the below-surface view of the Common Murres, penguin-like sea birds. Through a plate below the water level of their pond we saw nearly a dozen dear little round tummies propelled by webbed feet located far aft. Ducks, which we all had seen elsewhere, have flatter, less amusing underbodies when viewed from beneath.



Tom drove out to the famous Cape Sebastian overlook, high above the violence of the surf. Waves lashed by last night's storm beat onto the shore. At my questioning, Carli and Tom agreed that the waves here were probably twenty to thirty feet high, so high that the wind whipped off their tops, blowing them back out to sea. The creamy foam stretched at least 100 yards from the breakers to shore.

Tom got out to take pictures. Carli was afraid that the gusty winds would whip him off the cliff. He drove through a long, dark tunnel of trees to the other side of the overlook. The car rocked in the wind. Carli remarked that at least we would be blown back against a little hill instead of being hurled out to sea. It was exciting to see the Pacific throw a tantrum.

We continued along the coast. The road dropped lower. Not far from the highway, mountainous waves broke over towering basalt outcrops. The surf surged through arches cut in the rock by centuries of billowing ocean waters.

Before returning our refuge at Channel House, we shopped to replenish our larder for a second picnic that evening. Despite the weather, we felt obligated to take more pictures from our balcony, carefully posing each other to capture as much of the wild water below us as possible in the background. The only use Carli and Tom had from their Jacuzzi was huddling together perched on its edge while I captured the pose on film.

Saturday, 28 October

The next day we were off, driving along mountainsides overlooking the Pacific. We returned to Cape Sebastian overlook. As the storm diminished, so did the violence of the surf. Waves probably were ten to twenty feet high, but that seemed almost moderate compared to the day before. Visibility still was reduced. We were unable to see the great distances along the shore in each direction for which the overlook is famous.

We continued our drive southward. A flat, sandy shore stretched for miles. The Oregon dunes we passed probably were lovely, but we were on one side of them and the Pacific was on the other.

I remarked to Carli that I would be quite happy living in a tiny house high on a bluff overlooking the Oregon Pacific.

Carli scoffed, "You'd be cold."

I assured her that my little house would have good heat.

I was so busy watching for glimpses of the ocean on our right as we drove that I almost failed to see the great folds of mountains disappearing into the distance on our left.

The road twisted through a deep cut in the mountains, then turned back to the coast on the edge of a national forest. Below us, towers and mini-

islands of basalt stood in the surf, separated from the shore by centuries of grinding waves. Smaller outcrops were marooned on tidal flats, waiting for the ocean to surround them again. Waves broke far out. There was a line of white water, a line of green, and some fifty yards of foamy white water with the wind catching the tops of the farthest breakers before they rolled shoreward.

Watching the pounding surf, we marveled that this ocean ever could have been named “Pacific.”

Carli remarked, “Balboa must have had your eyesight, Mom.”



After turning off the highway and taking two or three smaller roads in succession (somewhat to my distrustful dismay), Tom actually reached Tu Tu’ Tun Lodge on the Rogue River. It was somewhat more elegant than the inns at which we had stayed earlier, but handsomely rustic.

We were told that hors d’oeuvres would be served before dinner in front of the fire in the lodge. We were familiar with this nicety from Steamboat Lodge earlier in our trip.

By the time we arrived, guests had begun to gather at the bar at the back of the room. Tom and I joined them, assuming that the wine was complimentary here too. I rapidly realized that we were expected to buy it, and told Tom that wine for the evening would be my gift. Tom had been speaking to the woman next to him and casually asked her opinion of a certain bottle of red wine. She replied that it was very nice, and that it was what she was drinking. Tom ordered a bottle and I asked that it be put on my room bill. The hostess poured us three glasses of wine. She put the bottle aside, obviously to be served to us at the table.

Tom and I rejoined Carli on great, comfortable couches by the fire. After a bit Carli got up to get another hors d’oeuvre. She returned, grinning, to say that she had been able to glance at the wine list at the end of the bar. Neither Tom nor I had seen a wine list. “Mom, you just bought us a \$70 bottle of wine,” she added.

It was absolutely too much, after my \$25 bottle of bad Merlot. The only consolation was that this really was a very nice red wine. It paid for itself in the laughs it gave us then and afterwards. Carli and Tom refused to let me cover the entire cost and insisted on splitting it three ways.

Next day we went sightseeing in pouring rain. We drove the twisting back roads in the vicinity and returned to the coast for another view of the Pacific. It was kicking up again in advance of another storm.

We had another lovely evening at the lodge, this one accompanied by a more modest selection of wine.

Monday, 30 October


In the morning, we left for the final inn of our trip under sunny skies. We drove through Prairie Creek State Park in Northern California and past the Elk Prairie Camp Grounds. Carli chided, “Here we are at Elk Prairie, and where are all the elk?”

“Up ahead, crossing the road,” Tom replied.

Carli gasped in surprise: “It’s a whole herd of elk!”

In the back seat I struggled against my restraining harness and peered around headrests, hoping to catch a glimpse of the animals. Usually all I see of deer ahead of the car is a white tail disappearing into the underbrush. I need not have worried this time.

Tom slowed the car until he was barely inching along, then pulled over to the side of the highway and stopped. Ahead of us, a car on the opposite side of the road was doing the same thing. We were directly across from the apparently delectable patch of grass that had lured the young buck and his harem of nine to graze. The elk ignored passing traffic and the traffic ignored the two parked cars. We decided that this must be unexceptional behavior in the area. Tom had his window down and his camera in action. We must have spent ten or fifteen minutes watching the elk graze, move around, greet each other, and graze again.




As we drove on, we saw several plumes of smoke billowing from the mountains not far from the road to our left. It occurred to me that never have I been in so much danger. Throughout the trip, signs along our route warned me of dangers never before considered:

EARTHQUAKE INSTRUCTIONS
TSUNAMI EVACUATION ROUTE
ROCK SLIDES
BEAR COUNTRY

And now forest fire.

I was ready to return to Belize, where the only danger was an infrequent, familiar hurricane.



Our final night's stop, Gingerbread Mansion Inn, was my one contribution to the planning of our trip. Carli roughed out our itinerary. She chose inns from listings of *Unique Northwest Inns* because Chanticleer Inn in Ashland, where she and Tom stayed often, was one of its group. When I saw the picture of flamboyantly Victorian Gingerbread Mansion Inn in the brochure and realized that its location made it an ideal last stop before returning to Palo Alto, I could not resist suggesting it.

Gingerbread looked exactly like its picture, but more so. It had been restored enthusiastically with windows, doors, paintings, furniture, and bibelots collected from all over the world. After walking through one fussy parlor after another, I reached down to lift the hem of my long skirt gracefully to keep from tripping as I climbed the stairs—then remembered that I was wearing slacks.

Our rooms were delightful. Mine came with a friendly painter on a ladder outside the window and a bed almost too high to climb into and a hazard to vacate.

After briefly settling in my room, I returned to Carli and Tom's room, probably to say something innocuous that simply could not wait. I left them, walked to the end of the hall, opened the unlocked door, and was faced by a startled young woman sitting up in bed. I apologized, mumbled that I was lost, and fled. With only one room besides ours occupied, I had to invade that room. On the other hand, she could have locked her door.

When we checked in, the Innkeeper urged Carli to explore. She said we were free to go into any room with an open door. Carli and Tom did a quick check. They were so fascinated with each room that they collected me to join them. The rooms all were charming, all were different. Many had claw-foot tubs in the bedrooms themselves, mounted on small platforms inside low white wooden fences. The Empire Suite on the third floor was said to be the most opulent room in Northern California. Certainly it was an extensive jumble of draped king-size bed, Ionic columns, enormous multi-head glass shower, and raised tub in front of a fireplace. A second fireplace warmed the charmingly Victorian living room. The three of us had a wonderful time exploring and exclaiming.

We strolled through the lovely, small gardens. Low, immaculately clipped hedges outlining flowerbeds gave the impression of a much larger garden. We returned to one of the parlors for tea, a lovely presentation of tiny sandwiches, pastries, and candies.

Tuesday, 31 October

After a good night's sleep (during which, to Carli's vast relief, I did not fall out of bed) and a superb breakfast, we started the final leg of our homeward trip.

One of the things I had hoped to see was California Redwoods. I did. Tom paralleled our highway to take us through The Avenue of the Giants, dark woods where the enormous boles of Redwoods stood sentinel-straight in a valiant, last-ditch stand against the loggers. We passed "The Immortal Tree," which survived multiple attacks by fire and lightening.

From the back seat, I could not see the tops of the trees. Finally I realized that by turning around as much as my harness permitted, I could see the trees' full majesty through the rear window.

Tom especially wanted me to see the Redwoods on a sunny day. I realized why when I saw how streaks of sunlight pierced the heavy foliage to gild a branch or outline a tree trunk in gold.

The Avenue wound through the mountains, overlooking rivers shrunken to small streams snaking over wide, dry riverbeds in the dry season.

Even after we left the reserve and returned to the highway, we passed dozens of Redwoods, their slender spires towering above the other pines.



Gradually, we left the heavily forested mountains. In the Sonoma Valley, the land flattened into rolling, grassy hills, tawny in the autumn. Tom remarked happily, "This is more like the California we know and love."

We approached San Francisco from the far side of the Golden Gate Bridge. Unexpectedly seeing the city across the bay, I had the impression of a double handful of square white stones tossed recklessly onto a hill with taller stones studding the top ridge.

We returned to Palo Alto on October 31st. Carli had just enough time to get into her traditional black slacks, black top with sharks' teeth necklace, and black witch's peaked hat before the Trick-or-Treaters arrived.

Halloween made a festive end to a glorious trip.

Grande Caribe

February 2002

The cruise began on Friday the 15th. I chose a cabin on the Forties* mid-deck of MV *Grande Caribe*, despite our friend and captain Mike Snyder's wish to put me in one of the best cabins on the deck above. I did not like the larger cabins because they overlooked the promenade, where a constant stream of people would pass, either diligently avoiding looking into my cabin, or peering in expecting a friendly wave in reply. The alternative would be to keep my curtains closed day and night. Further, I thought the lower deck might be slightly more stable during the crossings between Belize and the Bay Islands.

My cabin had a double bed and limited open space, but a generous hanging locker and four-drawer chest. Settling in was easy. The rectangular window was almost as wide as the bed.

As on previous trips, passengers were friendly. As usual, they were fascinated to learn that I lived in Belize. The first questions, as always, were "How long have you lived here?" and then, in amazement, "How did you happen to come?"

Among the more interesting passengers were two nonagenarians. Mary Sue Cobey, 91, headed a party of thirteen that included her six children and their spouses. They all were delightful and mixed with the other passengers rather than staying in their own exclusive company. Mary Sue's husband had been a university athletic director and she knew Pappy (Bucher's stepfather, Georgia Tech football coach William A. Alexander).

Fred Sturgis was 91, a tiny grasshopper of a man. His wife Betty was a large, smiling woman, semi-crippled by strokes and cancer. Their devotion was charming to see. In his teens, Fred sailed as a cadet on the round-the-world cruise of the square-rigger *Joseph Conrad*.

* The *Forties* here means the "40's deck," where cabins 40 through 49 are located.

Joyce and Clark were our only Canadians. He was a retired journalist. They became special friends of mine.

Virginia, probably in her 70s, raised horses and ran a riding school. In April, she plans to take a small group of her best riders to Ireland for a riding holiday, as she has done annually for years. In her earlier days, Virginia bred and showed dogs, Beagles and Dalmatians. I loved talking to her, or rather listening to her.

Marian was Virginia's friend. They met ten years ago on an American Canadian Caribbean Line (ACCL) cruise. They live in different parts of the country and do not see each other throughout the year. However, every year since their meeting, they have taken another ACCL cruise together. Marian was my partner at the only bridge game I managed on the cruise.



Saturday the ship anchored briefly in the late afternoon at Man-O'-War Caye so passengers could see the great flock of Frigate Birds returning to the little mangrove island for the night. The island is home to numbers of Brown-Footed Boobies as well. They share a symbiotic relationship with the Frigates. The male Boobies fly off in the early morning searching for food. They return late in the afternoon to feed their mates and broods. The Frigate Birds, singly or by twos and threes, attack the returning Boobies, forcing them to drop some of their food. The Frigates feast. Obviously the Boobies are able to keep enough to feed their families, because their population flourishes. Vicki Sholer, the naturalist, said that the flock of Frigate Birds used to be much larger. However, since Honduran shrimp boats now operate in our seas, many of the birds have left to follow the shrimpers.

Saturday morning after dressing, I walked around the corner to the coffee buffet in the dining room. Julia Cobey, whose cabin was next to mine, was there. I told her that I thought next day I would slip out in my robe to get an early cup of coffee. Julia said she did the same thing earlier that morning and intended to continue doing so. We were so close to the

coffee area that we were quite discrete going back and forth en déshabillé.*



By Sunday the 17th, the winds were moving into the northern quadrant. Mike altered his itinerary slightly so passengers could swim in the shelter of islands. Early Monday morning, we proceeded to Punta Gorda in light, steady rain, and moored at the pier. Passengers trudged through mud in ponchos or with umbrellas to visit the town. Some returned elated to have found roomy shorts of multicolored Guatemalan fabric, which they wore with smiles as brilliant as their bottoms later in the cruise.

As soon as the ship was cleared by the authorities, the Captain sailed from Punta Gorda to take advantage of whatever moderate weather he could before a Norther hit. Even so, heavy swells left from the previous day had us rolling.

I played bridge with Joyce, Clark, and Marian for a couple of hours. We were too busy to notice the increasing motion of the vessel. By Happy Hour, the seas were much rougher. Walking became a perilous zigzag from one grab-point to the next. Once I skittered across the lounge in an impromptu Shuffle-Off-To-Buffalo, as friends stretched out hands ready to catch me if I fell. The cocktail crowd was noticeably thinned. Movement on that deck was markedly worse than on the dining-room deck below, where we had been playing bridge. It was a relief to be called to dinner and return to the lower deck.

More than half of the places set for passengers remained empty. Two or three people sat down, thought better of it, and left abruptly. The rest of us enjoyed Chef Jeff's superb dinner of steak and stone crab claws. You may remember that I am violently allergic to stone crab. I was horrified to see one sprawling on my plate. The stewardess cheerfully returned to the galley for uncontaminated meat. My pristine steak, when it appeared, was worthy of Palo Alto's Sundance, the restaurant where I take Carli and

* *En déshabillé* is French for *partly dressed, in a casual manner*.

Tom for prime rib whenever I visit them. When a spectacular Black Forest cake appeared on the serving buffet, several passengers, including me, decided it was advisable to retire without dessert.

I returned to the safety of my cabin and did my nighttime chores resentfully, wishing I were horizontal. I did not feel sick, but I did not feel good. When finally I snuggled down in my comfortable double bed, the ship's lurching, which had been tossing me from wall to wall, became a pleasant rocking motion that lulled me to sleep quickly.

Captain Snyder anchored for the night around ten o'clock in the lee of Utila instead of proceeding to Roatán. He said the entrance through the reef there was wider and safer for the ship in heavy seas. I remember waking up to find the ship motionless in calm water and going back to sleep instantly.



I awoke Tuesday at 5:30 AM when the ship departed the calm waters inside the reef at Utila and returned to the open sea for the passage on to Roatán. While still rather rough, motion was moderate compared to that the day before. I stayed in bed enjoying the rocking and slept another hour or more.

Passengers who had vanished from sight Monday reappeared for breakfast, most of them hale and happy at the brilliant weather. The ship moored at Fantasy Island resort. Swimmers and snorkelers padded off down the beach for a morning's activity. I took a taxi into Coxen Hole to do an errand for María.

My driver, Edgar, was a Honduran from the mainland who had lived on Roatán for eleven years and learned English. He was good company and an attentive driver. He left me at the main store, where I bought some fish-print material for María's T-shirt appliqués.

Edgar was waiting when I emerged. He took my packages, then led me to a nearby gift shop. When the clerk refused to accept my 20-Lempira* notes because they were too old and crumpled, Edgar assured me he would buy them from me. As it happened, he charged me less for the trip than Alex had led me to expect. I gave him the Lempiras as a tip, about US\$6.



It was only a little after 11:00 when I returned to the ship, so I decided to go to the resort gift shop. It was a short walk, but I misunderstood the directions given me by one of the deck hands. I missed the boutique, but found the bar. My time was running short by then, so I decided to have a Salvavidas for old time's sake. The Honduran beer was as good as I remembered. I enjoyed it while watching CNN on the bar TV. Nothing much had changed in the world since I opted out.

In the afternoon, the Captain called me to talk to the skipper of a 70-foot yacht moored next to us. He was headed for Belize and wanted information. Mike and I had a pleasant half hour answering his questions about how to do this and where to get that.

I left the men talking and walked back to the boutique the right way. I found a gift for María, but the postage stamps promised for three o'clock would not arrive until five. The glitch felt rather homey.

Cruise Director Isa called for a Pirate's Party that evening. Guests appeared for the cocktail hour with bandanas, eye patches, and jagged scars made of eyebrow pencil and lipstick. I wore the over-blouse with a great red macaw that María had made for me for the trip. With it, I wore my navy striped shirt and navy slacks, a red scarf headband, and navy-red-and-gold sash. It was the best I could manage. Several people laughed that my "parrot" had fallen off my shoulder.



* *Lempira* is the unit of Honduran currency.

I signed up for the Roatán tour the next day. Four van-loads of passengers proceeded to a nearby iguana farm. Dozens of the lizards, from babies to great crested orange grandpappys, crawled over and around each other in competition for the mass of leafy greens tossed to them. Other iguanas were in the trees. Two unwary passengers were christened from above in ways they would have preferred to avoid.

The tour took us through Coxen Hole, then on to ticky-tacky-touristy West End. We stopped for the obligatory gift-store visits, then went on to see the dolphin show at Anthony's Key. Two of the mammals put on a delightful performance of leaps and dashes.



Thursday many of the passengers took Dramamine before dawn in anticipation of the roughness of our passage through the reef as we left Roatán for Utilla. The Captain advised passengers to remain in bed until we were back in open sea. I was awake and leaned on my windowsill to watch our departure. We rolled a bit for a short while, but once through the reef, the passage became fairly smooth. I felt safe whisking out to the nearby dining room in my robe to get my coffee before outfitting myself for the day.

Our Spanish cruise director, Isa, gave a short introduction to Utilla in her quaint English. She suggested that people might like to walk down to the left to the beach. "It is at the edge of the water, where beaches usually are."

I went ashore to explore. I found myself walking with the Sheriff. He was a tall Garifuna, gracious in the old-fashioned Bay Island manner. I told him I was from Belize and that I considered us cousins of the Bay Islands. He beamed in delight.

The town was quaintly old British Colonial and reminded me of early Belize...except that it was far cleaner. Everything was tidy, well painted, and immaculate. People were friendly. The Sheriff met me when I returned to the *Grande Caribe*. He was pleased by my impression of his

town and assured me that I had been perfectly safe walking about alone. The alternative had not occurred to me.



Friday I happened to be standing by the forward rail of the top deck when the Captain was talking to his weather station. I heard him told to expect another Norther with high winds and rough seas before we reached Punta Gorda that night.

Mike departed Utila three hours early to take advantage of light seas through the early part of the evening, hoping that by the time the storm hit, most of his passengers would be safely abed. Despite his forethought, the front came through just after dinner. Mike had called at my cabin to invite me aft to see the large Wahoo caught on the ship's outriggers. I noticed flashes of light above the churning foam behind the vessel, but thought nothing of it.

I returned to the dining room to join seven other passengers in a silly little card game Isa proposed. As we began, thunder rolled. Great flashes of lightning flared almost on top of the ship, and torrents of rain poured down. The storm was short-lived. To everyone's surprise, especially mine, I was the proud winner of the card game. One of the players offered to accompany me to the bank next day to deposit my fortune of \$7.

By the time I had retired, the ship was rolling more sharply than it had done on our first passage. Mike later described it as the worst seas he ever had encountered. He said waves were as confused as if they had been whipped up by a giant eggbeater.



Daylight Saturday brought clear skies and a temperature of 65 degrees. Passengers appeared topside with their steaming coffee, then retreated to their cabins to get jackets.

We were anchored just off Punta Gorda. The ship moved in to moor at the pier so that officials could enter it into the country. Colorfully dressed

Mopan Maya women crowded the pier, and children peered shyly through the windows as we finished breakfast. A brassy little local band greeted passengers when they went ashore.

After dinner, a slightly larger crowd gathered to play “Turn The Corner,” the ridiculous game at which I had won the previous night. To my relief, I was about the fourth player tossed out of the game. I did not want to win again.

Mike wandered by and showed us another mindless game, “Golf,” which involved almost the same percentage of luck versus skill —99% to 1%. We had a rousing game. I intended to sit out, but Mary Sue insisted she needed me to be her eyes because she had trouble seeing the cards. Several rum punches may have affected her already faulty vision. The cards smiled on our twosome. We won easily though, to Mary Sue’s voluble regret, no money was involved.



Sunday we awoke anchored just outside Placencia. Almost everyone went ashore. Alex warned me that Hurricane Iris had devastated the town last October. I almost decided against visiting the village. Alex had not exaggerated. Where little homes once crowded together, an occasional building remained standing. Where the beach had been lined by small resorts, only one was left. Where tall trees used to shade a picturesque fishing village, only the occasional palm remained. I fought tears.

Despite the devastation, villagers had begun rebuilding and repainting. Some works-in-progress were a jigsaw of salvaged lumber of dozens of sizes and colors. Those fisherfolk are a hearty lot.



As we left Placencia, I braved the wind to stand in my favorite post at the forward rail alongside the wheelhouse. Belize pilot Charles Westby was at the wheel as we proceeded to Laughing Bird Caye.

Despite the chilly wind, many passengers swam and snorkeled.

I was shocked at how little vegetation the hurricane had left. Vicki, our naturalist, said that already Government has planted 150 coconut palm trees, hoping to return the caye to its former picturesque state. They grow so quickly here that by next year, the new palms should be well established and a few feet high.



At the Happy Hour, Chef Jeff surprised everyone with a beautifully roasted whole small pig, bearing a beer bottle instead of an apple in his mouth. He carved it up for bocas. The meat was the most tender, the sweetest I ever tasted.

We went up to the open top deck for the crab races. A green rope formed a large circle. The hermit crabs in their shells were placed in the middle. The crab that crawled its entire body and shell over the rope first won. Bets of \$1 each were placed. I won \$9 on the first race, betting on my lucky number, four. I thought I would share in the money from the second race when my Number Two crab appeared to topple over the rope at the same time as Number Five. However, the decision went to the latter.

After dinner the “gamblers” gathered for another round of Turn The Corner. This time it was an accidental Lady’s Night because the husbands decided to return to their books instead of play. Five of the Cobey’s joined the group. Mary Sue, in her outspoken way, promptly named the other four of us the Non-Cobs. We were the first to be forced out of the game, to everyone’s amusement. The game continued among the five Cobey’s. Finally, only the mother and her daughter Mary Pat were left. Mary Sue had won three times on the crab races. She did everything possible to try to throw the card game. Her daughters, as well as a gathering gallery of her sons, shouted her down. With the final draws, Mama lost honestly to Mary Pat, to her own delight.



For the final two cruises of the season, María had Mike’s permission to come aboard to sell her decorated T-shirts when we moored back in

Belize. María gave me her cell phone so I could call to let her know what time Mike planned to moor. I actually figured out how to use it.

Unfortunately, on Monday Mike re-boarded his swimmers and departed Goff's Caye earlier than he expected, so my message to María was incorrect. By the time she and Alex arrived, most of the passengers had left to shop ashore. María waited and sold a substantial number of T-shirts to returning passengers. She made nearly US\$600 on the two cruises.

Alex took my luggage and me home. We all returned at 5 o'clock for the final Captain's Cocktail Party and Dinner.

I made a point of introducing Alex to Fred Sturgis. Fred told me later that Alex knew facts about his cruise long ago as a cadet on the square rigger *Joseph Conrad* that he himself had forgotten.

We all had a last visit with Mike at the Captain's Table. It was painful for the three of us to say goodbye. Mike sailed straight into another Norther next day, returning to Key West for supplies, then on to the Bahamas to finish out the season.

Air France 50-Year Celebration

May 2002

The Air France activities were delightful. The trip was comfortable as far as TACA was concerned—on time, planes not too full. But the timing of the flights both directions nearly finished me off.

I reached Mexico City at 11:00 PM. The new terminal is gorgeous, but TACA is at the far end of an exxxxtennnsivvve walk. In addition to perhaps fifty yards of regular perambulating, there were seven moving sidewalks that did only a little to help. When I reached the baggage area, I compounded the distance walked by not being able to find the right carousel. I went to the only one with baggage, at the far end of an enormous room. No suitcase. I began thinking in terms of facing the Air France festivities in the suit I was wearing.

A very unhelpful woman official finally waved me to the other end. No suitcase. Someone there told me that TACA baggage was at “8” and I should take the elevator. I did and went to the wrong floor. A very helpful man led me down a flight of stairs to the right location. There, all by itself, stood my dear roll-aboard waiting for me.

It was 1:00 AM before I reached the hotel, checked in, and got myself to bed.



By late morning, I pulled myself together, skipped the free breakfast, and headed for Air France. I introduced myself to the new regional director, Michel Rispal, whom I never had met, and had a pleasant ten minutes or so with him. Then I worked my way through the offices, finding old friends. I kept visits short, knowing that they would be overwhelmed with visitors. It was a gratifying visit.

After lunch back at my lovely four-star hotel, I returned to bed to make up for lost sleep.

The dinner party that evening was more informal than I expected. We were a group of about ten, Air France people and agents. It was relaxed and fun and the Mexican cuisine was superb. The visiting ex-regional directors, and the brass from Air France Mexico and Paris then gathered in M. Rispal's home for what (I learned later) was a delightfully informal evening.



Next morning, I went out looking for an *artisanías** where I might pick up little gifts. Polanco, the *colonia*** where the Air France office now is located, is a beautiful area of gorgeous old Colonial homes and encroaching businesses, expensive boutiques, and dozens of restaurants.

The taxi driver could not find the shop to which the concierge directed us, but took me to a beautiful Taxco silver store. To my surprise, I found inexpensive gifts I was looking for.

A bus collected all of the Hotel Nikko Air France guests for the Thursday evening festivities at the French pavilion. The large outdoor inner court was jammed with guests by the time we arrived. We found ourselves clinging to each other in small groups to keep from getting lost. Surprisingly, we managed to run into old friends now and then in the mob. Wine was served.

One of the first strangers to whom I was presented was a tall, handsome middle-aged man, obviously one of the Brass from Paris. He stopped several times through the evening to say a pleasant word. During the party I was introduced to another attractive Frenchman who immediately remarked, "Oh, I know who you are. Francis Richard (former regional director) talked about you for a good thirty minutes last night when we all were at Michel Rispal's." (Believe me, there's no answer to a comment like that except a light laugh.)

* *Artisanías* is Spanish for *crafts*; here, it means a *crafts shop*.

** A *colonia* in a Mexican city is a *neighborhood*.

A delightful fashion show was spotlighted on a large stage. About six models, willowy girls with long straight hair, dark lipstick, and deadpan expressions, showed some fifty or sixty outfits. Most of them were things I would not want to see my daughter wearing. Navels were much in evidence. Chiffon tops worn without under-pinnings delighted the men guests. Later, evening styles with draped-open tops barely covering nipples added to their entertainment. Some of the outfits were too outré for me, but many were gorgeous.

Eventually there were the expected speeches, fortunately brief, and visiting former directors were introduced. I was delighted to cross paths again with the three I had become fond of during my years with Air France. Everyone was gratifyingly pleased that I attended the celebrations.

The party continued with more drinks and bocas. As people left, it was easier to circulate and visit with friends.

I was ready to collapse by 11:00 PM, when our group was rounded up to meet the bus. We stood outside for thirty minutes waiting. As more time went by with the bus still not arriving, the visiting official from Paris, who had been so pleasant to me, swooped down to whisk me off to go back to the hotel with him in M. Rispal's car. I was vastly relieved and very touched at their thoughtfulness.



By the time I finished last-minute packing and was ready for bed, it was about 12:30 AM. I slept fitfully until my 2:45 AM wake-up call.

Considering my brief nighttime, I was surprisingly steady for the travel ordeal facing me. In Salvador, I walked as briskly as my battered feet permitted to the distant gate for my continuing flight to Belize. I arrived, exhausted, just as it was boarding. I was back in the house by 10:30 AM.



As guests left the big party, each of us was given a handsome book detailing Air France in Mexico. I looked at it the day after the trip. To my

astonishment, I learned from the first large picture that the tall, handsome Frenchman who had been so gracious to me was the President and Director-General of Air France. I wonder if I would have visited so comfortably with him had I known.

The trip to Mexico was exhausting, but I am very, very glad I went. Everyone made me feel that I was a valued part of the Air France family. On the other hand, I am considering giving up travel as my favorite recreation.

Grand Caribe Again

February 2003

Friday, 14 February

Alex delivered me with my luggage to MV *Grande Caribe* mid-afternoon. I settled, met a few of the other passengers, enjoyed the first of a sequence of superb meals, and retired to my comfortable cabin.

Like most cruises this year, the ship had only about half the number of passengers it is designed to carry. Pat Snyder, the Captain's wife, told me that on the previous cruise, one of the passengers explained that the stock market decline had cut incomes drastically for the ship's age-50-and-up passengers' incomes. While a few potential passengers changed plans to travel because of terrorist fear, more were deterred by reduced disposable funds.

To my delight, Captain Luther Blount was aboard. He came, trombone in hand, with a member of his band, another trombonist. They spent hours practicing, waffling about whether or not they eventually would perform for the passengers. Eventually they found a wonderfully capable semi-professional musician who could play an incredible array of tunes from memory. Len, Luther's friend, had an acceptable voice and often sang lyrics to the Golden Oldies they preferred. The three began playing during Happy Hour after about three days into the cruise. Some evenings they even ended with a song that everyone could join in singing.

Saturday, 15 February

Passengers enjoyed their first swimming and snorkeling when we anchored at nearby Goff's Caye. Pause at another one of Belize's uninhabited, picturesque islands gave them a second chance to enjoy the water in the afternoon.

Meanwhile, I began what became my usual pattern of reading, using my laptop, and visiting with Pat.

The Captain's Dinner is held the second night of cruises because most of the passengers arrive hot and tired late Friday afternoon after a day-long excursion to Xunantunich. I was invited to join Captain Mike Snyder and his wife Pat, long-time friends, at the head table.

Sunday, 16 February

Breakfast was a revelation. In the first place, there were sliced strawberries with brown sugar in a bowl next to them on the buffet. Then at our tables we were served lovely, crisp waffles to be topped with thick mashed strawberry sauce and whipped cream. This was my first exposure to this particular delicacy. Normally I do not eat waffles. Later Pat told me that years ago, a chef in one of the pancake houses who was famous for his crepes decided to try the toppings on his Belgian waffles. It was a great success and the idea flew around the country.

Fate saved me from indiscretion at that breakfast. I had finished and was eyeing a basket of muffins that had not been passed. It was in front of Luther, who was in the middle of one of his lengthy stories. I did not want to interrupt him. While I continued to ponder over whether it was a good idea or a bad one to have a muffin, the stewardess asked if I were through with my plate. Fortunately I replied that I was, and she whisked it away, resolving my problem.

That night Luz Hunter, our naturalist, alerted passengers to an unusual phenomenon. From one side of the ship could be seen the setting sun and from the other, the rising moon.

When I retired to my cabin after dinner, a full moon was shining brightly through my large window. I quickly turned off the lights so that I could enjoy the moon and the sweep of silver on the sea.

A few minutes later, the ship changed position to anchor and I lost my moon. It returned briefly as we swung around, but by then it was almost hidden in haze. On the mainland, great flashes of lightning slashed the sky, though rain had not reached the ship.

Monday, 17 February

Dawn brought heavy clouds and wind. I went topside before breakfast, but it was too blustery to stay. Mike decided to proceed directly to Placencia rather than pause for swimming, hoping that the weather would improve by afternoon.

After lunch, one of the passengers stopped me to say that he had been in Belize in the early 70's. He asked a barrage of questions, most of which I could answer. When he asked if I knew Gordon Roe, I said we should sit down and talk. Bill said he had the entire file on his Belize trip. We arranged to meet in the lounge.

A Houston friend of Bill's who had been in Belize many times in connection with cattle operations—possibly involving Bull Headley—talked Bill into coming down to investigate an offer of ten thousand acres of land bounded on one side by Beaver Dam and on the other by the Northern Highway. He had been told that it contained the last large stand of first-growth mahogany trees left in the country.

My eyebrows disappeared in my hairline.

Bill told a wonderful tale of coming down, setting off on horseback with a non-English-speaking guide, who ran them in circles for four hours before admitting that he was lost. Finally he took them to a vast stretch of savanna without a tree or bush in sight. He threw his arms wide and indicated that this was where the mahogany trees were supposed to be.

While the sale of land collapsed instantly, Prime Minister George Price had been notified of the arrival of some major investors. He and his driver chauffeured them around in the official prime minister's car, flags flying on the fenders. There was some talk about their buying a large lot in Belmopan for a small hotel with shops on the ground floor. Development concessions offered were excellent, but the time frame for completion was impossible.

Price introduced the Americans to Felo Fonseca (his finance minister), Gilly Canton (his brother-in-law and, I think, a senator at the time), Fred

Hunter (a member of the legislature and possibly minister of agriculture), Sandy Hunter (a senator and senior advisor), Gordon Roe (insurance), Ford Young (real estate), and Willy Francis (lawyer). Most of them were guests at a party Marie and Gordon Roe had for the visitors.

Bill read excerpts from his journal. I found it fascinating. Furthermore, I was impressed by how well he had evaluated the situation he had fallen into and the people he met.

All in all, it was an interesting session. Of course Bill, his wife, Nancy, and I are special friends now.



The cruise director announced that this would be “Pirate’s Night.” To my dismay, the new, untrained cruise director had changed things. The crew,



Kate and *Grande Caribe* crew in pirate regalia, 2003

not the passengers would dress up. I decided that it didn't matter if I were the only passenger pirate, I was not leaving my carefully collected pirate's regalia unused.

I tried every way possible to secure my macaw to my red vest. It drooped downward sleepily. In desperation, I fastened my precious bird to my wrist, bracing it slightly by my side, and slipped my hook onto the hand. With eye patch, two snees, and pirate hat, I was a relatively effective pirate. Fellow passengers were delighted at my costume—and relieved that they had not had to create get-ups for themselves. The crew pirates were equally pleased. I posed for pictures as requested by passengers and even one stewardess.

I was pleased at the reception I received, but felt let down that Pirate's Night was not the big party with a parade that I remembered from earlier cruises.

Tuesday, 18 February

Clouds and drizzling rain. We docked at Punta Gorda, where many of the passengers went ashore. I went up to see Pat and we sat in her cabin discussing books. Mike poked his head in to say that Luther wanted me in the dining room.

Luther was seated at a table with three Belizeans. Ludwig Palacio and Mrs. Sabal were Garifuna and the third man was a Mayan from San Antonio. Luz Hunter, our naturalist, joined us quickly. Mr. Palacio, handsome, black, with a brilliant smile, was in charge. He explained that they wanted to see how they could work with ACCL to the advantage of Punta Gorda.

Luther visited Punta Gorda several years ago hoping to develop a tour there, but the routes to the ruins were almost impassable, and he had no one to work with, so he gave up the idea.

Since Luther retired, his daughter Nancy is in charge. Luther was upset that Belize Tourist Board publications barely mention his company, whereas if he knew ahead of time, he would book ads. I blame his new

agent in part, as well as a non-operating promotion department in his Rhode Island office. According to Pat, there is a cruise website that lists ships / cruises with full information and pictures for a fee of \$350. I thought this was a good time to suggest it to Luther and urge him to follow through, as if it were my own idea.

I made a point of explaining to the Belizeans the problems all cruise lines are having: fear of traveling because of terrorists and reduced income because of the economy.

These people were bright, articulate, and full of ideas. Mr. Palacio, who is a published poet, and Mrs. Sabal had good suggestions about tours to Mayan villages and maybe the three ruins. Groups would have to be kept small. The necessary vehicles are available in Punta Gorda. They are going to work up a plan with costs, make a video tape, and present it to Luther.

Meanwhile, Luz says that the new Tourist Board officers are young, without any background. She intends to invite a woman who has something to do with the board and who knows tourism well, to bring some of the officers aboard for a tour of the ship, to meet some passengers, and generally to see who ACCL is and what they do.

I have been delegated to work with the Belize Tourist Board to see that ACCL is mentioned in government publications involving tourism. I demanded a title, to the amusement—and agreement—of the Belizeans, and will be “Personal Representative of Captain Luther Blount.” I doubt that I need documentation for the title. This will be fun.



We crossed the Bahía de Amatique and anchored off Livingston, Guatemala. Two sand bars with 6-foot depths block entrance at the mouth of the Rio Dulce. ACCL ships are the only ones of shallow enough draft to go up the river. Mike announced that they usually touch the bars entering the harbor. This time we didn't. A small cruise ship, not much

larger than the *Grande Caribe*, was anchored at the mouth of the river, unable to enter the harbor because it could not pass the bar.

The weather continued cloudy with misty rain. Despite the damp, I, like most passengers plastic-draped or umbrella-d, went ashore. Pat exclaimed at the cleanliness of the streets, a big change since her last visit. Aside from that, Livingston is a typical Central American town with half-starved dogs foraging along a succession of open-front small shops, all displaying the same mixture of plastic buckets, gaudy hammocks, and native fabrics.

To my relief, Captain Mike decided to anchor for the night off Livingston instead of proceeding up the Rio Dulce to El Golfete, as he had planned. I would have hated traversing that gorgeous green gorge in rain.

Wednesday, 19 February

The sun smiled on us next morning. The *Grande Caribe* cruised slowly up the Rio Dulce, allowing time for Luther and the travel writers to follow in the skiff so they could approach the banks, aflutter with their wealth of birds. Green mountains rose from the water, reaching vertically to the sky. We passed more and more small *cayucas* (dugout canoes) with fishermen. Pelicans, often as many as five at a time, floated expectantly near the little boats, hoping for a free meal.

Hawks soared above us. Many more were nesting on the ridges in a wall of exposed limestone. Pat was surprised at the few egrets we saw. She said that they were numerous in January, the males in their mating plumage, but now must have settled down to nesting.

Pat described her most thrilling passage up the Rio Dulce. Mist shrouded the mountains on each side, lending a sense of mystery. Suddenly dozens and dozens of egrets and pelicans took up station ahead of the ship and flew in advance of them as they proceeded up the river. Pat was lucky enough to capture the scene with her video camera.

The Rio Dulce opens to become a long lake, El Golfete, then debouches into larger Lago de Izabal. Izabal has two special features for the cruise, a

visit to the orphanage and another to the picture-book little fort at the entrance to the lake. The Castillo is a favorite of mine. It is a little gem of a fort, a perfect miniature with a moat, dark curving narrow passageways, sunny patios, and crenellated turret.



After looking in on the quiet lounge, where small groups were having quiet conversations the preceding night, Mike berated the passengers for being dull. He determined to shake us up.

Mike announced that Happy Hour would be on the top deck, where he would preside over the bocas. When we arrived, we found Mike in gaudy shirt and gaudier apron tending a grill, while palm fronds bowed over an impromptu bar, where the Chief Mate served rum drinks. Soon Mike produced great platters of marinated grilled shrimp and chunks of wonderfully tender beef. The shrimp, in particular, was the best I ever had tasted.

Meanwhile, a marimba was set up and three musicians beat out a succession of tinkling tunes. It took a while—or a couple of the delicious rum punches—for people to begin dancing. The darlings of the dance were a Canadian couple—he, a very tall, very hefty German and she, a tiny smiling woman with soft gray curls. Ernst posed as he danced, a wonderful and dramatic variety of expressions flashing across his face. Vivienne played up to him with the grace of a former ballet dancer. They were endlessly inventive and charming to watch because of the fun they obviously were sharing.

When we finally were called to dinner, we found the dining room decorated with pastel balloons. Pink napkins wound into the shape of candles set off the tables. Small colored disks sprinkled on white tablecloths were a festive note. The Celebration Cake destined for dessert was displayed on a small table, a white frosted square decorated with a large red bird in an upper corner and bits of green forest about the edges. Champagne and toasts completed the festive evening.

Thursday, 20 February

A restful day for me. Breakfast was earlier than usual so passengers could leave by bus for a tour of the ruins at Quiriguá. I did the trip on an earlier cruise, so did not repeat it. I luxuriated in a day of working on my laptop, visiting with Pat, and reading.

In the afternoon, I claimed my favorite position along the rail at the bow on the top deck. Luz Hunter, the naturalist, was with me. She pointed out birds and foliage that I might not have noticed or been able to identify. Ahead of us in the curves beyond our sight, the mountains on each side appeared to fold into each other in the distance. The slow cruise through the narrow, winding Rio Dulce was almost as exciting to me this sixth passage as it had been the first time.

The cruise director announced at dinner that she hoped the Garifuna dancers would arrive for a performance, but added sadly that last cruise they had not shown up.

I returned to my cabin after dinner and waited until 8:00 to hear if the dancers had come. I assumed by then that they wouldn't appear, so got ready for bed—just before the announcement of their arrival.

Unfortunately, only about a third of the passengers went to the top deck for the dancing. Some, like me, had given up and gone to bed. Others had begun watching the movie shown as a substitute for the Garifuna and did not want to leave. The ones who saw the dancers enjoyed the show. Some were lured into dancing by the visiting performers.

Friday, 21 February

Glorious weather. The swimmers and snorkelers had a wonderful time.

It was Caribbean Night. Passengers dressed in their most flowery garments. Drinks again were on the top deck with rum punches or Tequila Sunrises dispensed by the Chief Mate in his palm-decorated bar. The Chef produced a roasted suckling pig with the requisite apple in its mouth. The meat was incredibly tender and delicious

In the evening we had the Yankee Swap. A stuffed toucan on a swing was the favored gift, passing from hand to hand.

Saturday, 22 February

Calm and sunny. Mike decided to forgo Lime Caye, which probably would have had weekend Guatemalan holidaymakers, and proceeded to Tom Owens Caye, perched on the reef itself. He only can go there in very calm weather. This is ideal for swimming, snorkeling, and for the glass bottom boat, or “the glasser” as it is called.

Pat and I spent most of the day in conversations that wandered off in all sorts of fascinating directions. She is a delightful, well read, thoughtful person with a lovely sense of humor.

Sunday, 23 February

Luther called me for another conference about advertising. I always enjoy our visits, professional or otherwise.

I did my preliminary packing so that I could make an easy exit the next day. Through the day, I made a point of saying goodbye to my special friends, knowing that farewells would be complicated when I left the ship next evening.

Monday, 24 February

Suitcases were zipped by mid-morning, so I had time for a last visit with Pat. Alex collected me-and-mine after lunch. The dogs greeted me with all the enthusiasm I expected of them. I had a couple of hours to unpack and regroup before dressing to return to the ship for the Captain’s Dinner.

Again Mike invited me to join Pat and him at head table. To my delight, two of my favorite couples were with us, plus the old friend of Pat’s, her dentist, whom I liked very much.

The steel band arrived to play for passengers on the open top deck after dinner, so I was able to slip away unobtrusively. Much as I had enjoyed the cruise, it was pleasant to sleep in my own bed that night.

Pátzcuaro, Mexico, with Muriel & Don

January 2006

I flew to Houston a day early and spent a leisurely night at the airport Marriott in a room so familiar it might have been in my home. Muriel and Don Stauffer were to fly in from Philadelphia the next day, arriving with an hour to make their connection to our flight to Guadalajara.

I checked into the airport the required two hours early. Muriel and Don still had not arrived at the boarding gate when our flight was called. I was frantic. Finally, on one of my desperate visual scans of the area, I saw them arriving, Muriel in a walker. We made our flight, much to my surprised relief.



Guadalajara was a dizzying montage. Muriel eased herself gratefully into a waiting wheelchair. Its attendant took charge of the three of us, rushing us to the front of waiting lines at Immigration, baggage claim, and Customs. The Hertz agency took over the next thirty or forty minutes with delays in documentation, car delivery, and car exchange.

By the time we left the Hertz compound, Don was cursing at the car, which had the requested stick shift, but an unwelcome lack of power steering. We had a long drive to Pátzcuaro, so returning the car to Hertz was not an option.

The drive over excellent highways, double carriageway most of the distance, was pleasant but long. The land gradually rose to low hills, then large uplifted plateaus ringed by gentle mountains. Don commented on how dry and yellowed everything was. The higher we went, the greener fields became. The Stauffers apologized to me for once again delivering me to our hotel after dark. They know I prefer daytime arrivals. I assured them that I had realized in advance that we could not avoid being late.



Kate and Don in Pátzcuaro, Mexico, 2006

We circled unfamiliar streets in Pátzcuaro for another thirty minutes before locating our hotel. Every time Don stopped the car, I was delegated to get out and corral the nearest Pátzcuaran to ask for directions. The third lot of directions delivered us to the Hotel Posada de la Basílica at the top of a hill.

The night receptionist expected us. Don was directed to the adjacent parking area, protected by high doors. As he turned into it, the car's "out-of-gas" signal alerted him to our precarious situation. The clerk rushed us to our rooms. Without bothering to settle, we met for a brief celebratory Scotch before adjourning to the dining room for a gratifyingly good dinner.



The next morning, we staked out our usual table in the corner of the delightful dining room. Uninterrupted windows made up two sides of the room. The view from our hilltop out across the towns' red tile rooftops was charming. Not far away, a cat slid off a shed roof down onto a simple walled roof decorated with long flower boxes and the family laundry.

Our rooms were interesting. The Stauffer's room was notable for a spiral iron stairway in one corner, apparently leading to a loft they neither wanted nor intended to explore. The room had the corner chimenea* I had requested, but a king size bed instead of the two beds I had specified for them. The walls of the generous bathroom, obviously recently remodeled, displayed a dizzyingly large checkerboard pattern in red and white tiles.

In the room next door I had two beds, a chimenea, and a large bathroom with a smaller, thank goodness, red-and-white tile checkerboard. An old-fashioned claw-foot bathtub gleamed whitely in the corner of the room, parallel with my beds. As I gasped at it in wonder, I realized that it was a private spa with mirrors on the walls above the two sides of the tub and a curving wooden shelf displaying votive candles set in random holes. A floral arrangement at the end of the shelf completed the spa picture.



Don & Muriel in Pátzcuaro, Mexico, 2006

* *Chimenea* is Spanish for *fireplace*.

We all had unpacked when the young lady from the front desk appeared, obviously frantic about something. I took over with my imperfect Spanish and learned that we had been given “suites” by accident the night before. Those rooms had been promised to other people for the weekend. I calmed her down, assuring her that we would be happy to move, as long as we could have rooms with fireplaces. The relieved young lady led me down to the corner of the patio outside our rooms and showed me the two rooms that had been reserved for us.

The rooms were of gracious size with great, dark ceiling beams. They had some features we liked better than those of the fancy suites. The Stauffers had their twin beds. Both of us had chimineas. Wooden blinds in both rooms opened on French doors leading to small balconies overlooking the Basílica for which the Posada was named. We all were delighted with our new rooms.




Our first project after resettling was to get Mexican pesos. Muriel insisted she could come with Don and me—until she saw the hill we had to walk down.

“What goes down, has to come up,” she declared as she said she would wait for us in the Basílica.

Don and I walked down to the bank, exchanged money, and slowly trudged back up to our street and to the church to join Muriel. We strolled between informal mercado stalls lining each side of the wide walkway back to the street. I was bemused at the sales stands extending in both directions on the lawn of the Basílica. Daily from our balconies we saw the stands dismantled each evening and reassembled and restocked early each morning.

We returned to the hotel. It was *very* cold. We spent the morning huddled around the fire in the Stauffers’ room. The Posada staff kept us well supplied with firewood, kindling, and “lightwood” sticks, which could be lighted with a match and used to start fires.




Around noon when the sun had warmed the outside air, we made a Pemex run. Don said he knew why we had run out of gas. “The tank holds only eight gallons!” he explained. Obviously the car also had very good mileage on our four-hour trip.


Exploring mid-town Pátzcuaro was an adventure. The traffic was the most undisciplined, erratic, boisterous I remember anywhere, including Mexico City and Paris. The several plazas were fairly ordinary—not that we could find a parking place so we could explore them afoot. How Don maneuvered through the traffic without ever touching another vehicle or, more likely, being bashed by one, I’ll never know.

We drove to the restaurant in the Hotel Don Vasco, on the edge of town, for lunch. We had eaten there when we passed through Pátzcuaro on an earlier trip to Mexico. The restaurant now was in an indoor patio with a fountain that attracted all pint-sized patrons. The food was as good as we remembered.


That night we ventured across the street from our hotel to a restaurant we had noticed earlier. The outside was nondescript. I went ahead to make sure it was someplace we would like. One quick look was ample to impress me, but the American owner met me and solidified my fine impression of the Cha-Cha. Muriel stalwartly came across the street with her walker as Don checked the street for traffic. We all had excellent dinners and decided that the Cha-Cha would see us again.



Muriel and I, both dedicated mercado aficionadas, were delighted at having what we considered our own personal market across from our hotel on the front lawn of the Basílica. After returning the car to its garage, we crossed over to the market. We walked slowly past each booth. To no one’s surprise, we pleased the vendors as we bought both gifts to take home and things we could not live without.




Little needs to be said about my Friday nighttime fall that hurt without damaging me. Blame questionable balance. A multicolored bruise on my forehead, a deep, 3-Band-Aid-wide scrape on my arm, and an aching shoulder were minimum inconveniences. I learned far more than I ever wanted to know about the difficulty of tracking down Band Aids in Mexican pharmacies.



Sunday Don suggested that we visit the Mayan ruins near Uruapan. The receptionist marked a map for him. We followed roads of decreasing size until we were bumping over a rocky trail with stones too high to get over and too large to avoid. We all decided we did not need to see any more ruins. Don laboriously turned the car around. The direct steering was giving him stevedores' arm muscles. He never stopped cursing the lack of power steering in the car.

A roughly dressed elderly Mexican came up to the car. I took over my usual job of interpreter, though I had trouble understanding him. I decided he was urging us to turn back around because the ruins were just a bit farther on. We thanked him and gradually convinced him that the conversation was at an end. As we left, Muriel exclaimed with dismay that she should have taken his picture.

We returned to the last good road we had deserted for the rocky trail and drove on through several typical villages. We returned to Pátzcuaro on the *autopista* (divided highway).



On the Monday, we decided to drive around the large adjacent lake, Lago Pátzcuaro. Our immediate destination was the town of Tzintzuntzán. Muriel and I had vivid, happy memories of stopping at the market there on an earlier trip. My memory may be hazy, but when we reached it, the town appeared to have expanded from the mercado, modernizing it as it

went. We all wandered through the improved market, finding this and that to buy, of course.

We continued around the lake, through a succession of small towns and colorful villages. Travel was slow because of *topes*—“sleeping policemen”—speed bumps that seemed to be a maximum of ten feet apart the entire way.

Noon came and went. Where was a decent restaurant? Nowhere we could see, though we went up and down streets in each town. Eventually we found one, its entire side open to the street. It was bright and clean, and we had surprisingly good lunches after a stormy beginning.

When I arrived at the table, Muriel and Don were arguing with the waitress in their limited Spanish, insisting that they wanted to order a beer and then would order lunch as soon as I arrived. The waitress, who spoke no English, was equally determined that they could not have a beer until they ordered lunch. Fortunately I was able to solve the impasse. We all ordered and, almost to our surprise, our cervezas arrived before lunch, as requested. Apparently our waitress was diligently upholding an ordinance designed to keep casual drinkers from taking up space in restaurants.

It was 3:30 PM by the time we returned to Pátzcuaro. Don left me at the Posada and took Muriel to the beauty shop. The hotel receptionist had assured Muriel she did not need an afternoon appointment. The shop was closed. So were two other beauty shops in the same block.

Later when Muriel complained to the hotel receptionist, she was told that all salons closed at 3:00 PM and reopened at night.



Next morning we waited until 10:00 AM, then set out to find Muriel a beauty shop. All the shops they had checked the preceding afternoon still were closed. Muriel was not happy. She explained that she had not brought her hair dryer this trip because hotels all have them nowadays. She forgot we were going to Mexico. Actually, our first “suites” had hair dryers. The suites now were empty. I decided mentally to ask the hotel if

we might borrow the hair dryer from one of the now-empty suites so that Muriel could do her own hair.

About the time I figured out a solution to the problem, Muriel let out a shout. We had passed an open beauty shop.

Don parked. I went in with Muriel to act as translator, if necessary. It was.


The pretty, plump beautician understood “shampoo,” but “blow dry” defeated her. I finally mimed it and she nodded understanding. However, I could not see a blow dryer anywhere in the tiny shop. I asked where she kept the “machine” (the only applicable word I could think of). She opened a drawer and displayed several. Thinking all had been settled, I asked how long Muriel’s hair would take. Twenty minutes, the beautician declared, then repeated at my obvious disbelief. I left Muriel in her hands and returned to the car.

Don drove from one plaza to the other, fixing in his mind shops Muriel said she wanted to visit. Twenty minutes later, we parked again in front of the beauty shop. I went in. Muriel was in mid-shampoo. She told me that the girl had to heat the water before she could start. That obviously did not count toward the twenty minutes.

I decided to stay. It was a good thing I did. The girl’s blow-drying was a disaster. I made her discard her big brush and showed her how to encourage shape in the hair with her fingers as she blow-dried it.

Then we got to the curling iron. Timing was vital. I stood over her, showing her how to give the hair form without burning it. Muriel had an expression somewhere between hysterical amusement and sheer terror. Finally Muriel had a clean head of hair with something approaching normal styling.

Muriel thanked the young beautician extravagantly as she paid her. As we left the shop, Don called that he wanted to take Muriel’s picture in the doorway, under the sign. He took one shot then Muriel went back in and begged the beautician to join the two of us in a group picture. The girl was embarrassed, but obviously pleased.




Wednesday we checked out of the Posada. A long-time friend of Don's insisted on driving from nearby Morelia to Pátzcuaro to take us to lunch. Fredo was an attractive young businessman. He seemed sure he had met me. We finally discovered that we had sat together on a bus to a large party in Tokyo some years earlier.

After lunch, we said goodbye to Fredo and drove to Guadalajara. We checked into the resort El Tapatío, where we had stayed on an earlier visit. There was a slight contretemps at the reception desk when Don discovered that their room had only one large bed. Instead of simply switching rooms with me so the Stauffers could have my twin beds, the frazzled clerk found another room for them far down the open passageway.

Our rooms again were enormous and beautifully appointed. I joined Muriel and Don in their room for Happy Hour. As we left the security of our building to walk a short distance to the dining room, a torrential rain squall hit. Muriel had her plastic head covering. I had my umbrella and offered to share it with Don. He refused and arrived at the dining wing soaked. We were seated in an unfamiliar, informal room. A few moments' conference with the obliging waiter established that we were in the cafeteria when what we wanted was the formal dining room.

We made our way to the room we remembered happily from our first stay. As usual, we ate earlier than most people, so we had an unnerving number of waiters hovering over us. The supercilious manner of our principal waiter warmed slightly as he tossed shrimp in tequila sauce over an open flame at our tableside. Muriel and I were sure he was overcooking the shrimp, but the finished dish was superb.



Next morning we were off to the nearby airport early to catch our flight back to Houston, where we connected with our separate flights to Philadelphia and Belize.

Chan Chich with Fran & Louis

March 2006

During the planning stage for long-time friends Fran and Louis Bondurant's visit to Belize, Fran emailed that Louis insisted on treating the three of us to one night at Chan Chich. They had fallen in love with the place after reading about it in Frommer's *Belize*.

Checking revealed that the resort's rates had more than doubled. We would need an air charter to make a one-night stay worthwhile because of the long, rough trip by car. Louis still insisted. I made the necessary reservations.



We all were excited about the Chan Chich stay. It is my favorite of favorites. We had a half-hour trip in a Cessna 182, slightly rocky due to faint haze. The van from the lodge met us at the Gallon Jun airstrip. The Bondurants were fascinated by their first drive through jungle en route to the lodge.

The driver stopped at the small suspension bridge a little way from the resort, apparently on radioed orders from the lodge. We could not hear much of the conversation and were somewhat perplexed. Finally he started the van again and eased over the bridge and on up the rest of the way to Chan Chich.

A lovely, thirtyish young woman, Anne, one of the management couple, met us. She greeted us enthusiastically. Anne ushered us to comfortable seats on the veranda outside the bar and ordered coffee for us. Fran told her excitedly how much we were looking forward to our visit. The conversation wove this way and that. I explained that I had known the owner, Barry Bowen since he was a boy and that his mother, Emilie, was one of my closest friends. I said I had visited Chan Chich three times.

Then, for no reason I can think of, I mentioned that Chan Chich was a dirty word to my son, Alex. I explained that I had given Alex and María a weekend at Chan Chich as a Christmas gift some years ago. Reservations were made and later reconfirmed. I had seen Alex and María off the morning of their trip, as excited as I ever had seen my son.

I was horrified to hear the car return late in the afternoon. An incensed Alex explained what had happened. After a rough almost four-hour-long ride, they were stopped at the security gate. Their reservation—which I had reconfirmed two days earlier—had been entered for the following day. Chan Chich had no room left and refused to let Alex and María enter the property.

I cried the rest of the evening out of disappointment for them and fury with the lodge.

As I told this tale, both Fran and I noticed that our hostess's face had grown more and more drawn. I thought it was strange because the error had occurred long before she arrived to manage Chan Chich. When I finished, she gulped and with amazing poise remarked that it was strange that I had told the story because the same thing had happened again. It took a beat of three for me to ask, "With us?"

"Yes," she admitted.

As you can imagine, Fran, Louis, and I all were struck dumb with disappointment. Anne quickly added that they were arranging for us to stay in the guest house at Gallon Jug. We could spend our two days at the lodge and the van would take us back and forth at our convenience. Ann described the guest house as being lovely with a view across owner Barry Bowen's huge agricultural operation. My heart was somewhere around my ankles.



Anne's friend and co-manager, Mark, whom we had met briefly when we arrived, appeared and spoke quietly to Anne. Her face tightened. She said they had decided to give us their own home on the lodge property for the

night so that we could have “the Chan Chich experience.” Not only would we have their large, lovely veranda overlooking the high bush, but we would have the company of their parrot, named *Parrot*. Furthermore, Anne said, the night would be complimentary, no charge.

We were overwhelmed. We made the appropriate demurrals, then thanked Anne and Mark fervently for their courtesy. We all simmered down to something approaching normalcy after our brush with disaster. Fran said later that probably my mentioning that The Dowager Queen, Emilie Bowen, had been a close friend had as much to do with our royal treatment as my inadvertently opportune tale of Alex’s mishap at Chan Chich.

We stayed in our comfortable chairs on the bar veranda for a while, recovering from our close escape. Several wild turkeys, with their iridescent feathers gleaming in the sunshine, wandered back and forth over the lawn not far from us.

A bit later we were shown along the curving walk to a charming, rustic house at the end of the line of guest cottages. Fran and Louis had a large, upstairs suite. I had a smaller bedroom and bath on the ground floor. The living room opened onto the aforementioned veranda. It overlooked a stretch of lawn leading to a wall of jungle. We settled down to the happy time we had anticipated.



Many improvements had been made at Chan Chich since my last visit, some ten years earlier. The wooden walks had been replaced by skid-resistant rock-like paving stones set in fine, white gravel. Double upholstered chaises invited two people to lounge on cottage verandas. New, handsome, comfortable furniture welcomed guests on the verandas of the main building / restaurant and the separate bar. Most of all, the food had improved. It was good but ordinary on my past visits. This was excellent in choice, preparation, and presentation. Anne said she had told Barry that a first-class resort needed a first-class chef. We agreed that they had found one.

We returned to the restaurant for a delicious lunch, had an afternoon quiet time, then returned to the bar for Happy Hour. Dinner was equally satisfactory. We made it an early night.



Next morning, we gathered on the veranda just after dawn for coffee. We watched the parrots fly back and forth and listened to their squawks of conversation. Meanwhile, Louis was determined to get our parrot to talk. He failed completely the evening before. In the morning, after diligent, but apparently futile coaxing of the bird he had named *George* (considering *Parrot* an insult to him), Louis turned away. The bird immediately began a complicated, incomprehensible conversation. Louis and George talked back and forth until it was time for us to go to the lodge for breakfast.

We had a guided tour by golf cart down the road from the lodge, through the high bush. Our guide, Honorato, was a wonderfully knowledgeable man who had been with Chan Chich since helping build it. He explained unfamiliar plants and trees, pointed out birds he identified and located by their calls, and made the little drive an exploration. We were lucky to see a bracket deer, tinier than the whitetail and relatively uncommon.



For the most part, we had a quiet time, but thoroughly enjoyed it. Fran has a hip replacement and just had recovered from a crippling sciatic-nerve problem. We walked around a little, but spent most of our time sunk in the upholstered chairs on the bar veranda. The bird watchers who called goodbye as they took off in vans, returned to tell us of their successes. We decided they thought we were part of the scenery.

In the afternoon the lodge van returned us to the airstrip just as our plane was landing. We had another pleasant, short flight back to Belize City.

Danube River Cruise with Muriel & Don

June 2007

Email sent April 30, 2007

In view of my upcoming Danube cruise through five Eastern European countries, I decided I must have a few polite words or phrases in each language. I had no trouble locating lists of basic phrases for Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania on the Internet.

I copied these lists into my word-processing program. I deleted things I knew I didn't want to try to memorize, such as *I don't speak good Croatian*. That would be abundantly clear once I opened my mouth. I also axed *Do you speak English?* In the first place, the phrase involved endless unintelligible syllables and, in the second, I could inquire in English. If they understood me, asking in the language of the country would have been unnecessary.

As you would imagine, the languages of these countries don't remotely resemble any language with which I ever have had the slightest acquaintanceship. The lists gave phonetic spelling. Most showed stressed syllables. However, I was left to guess how the words broke up into separate syllables. I did a rather eclectic, and not necessarily consistent, job of it.

Once I had a page for each country, I could see how most phrases in Croatian and Serbian were identical, or nearly so. I decided to make a separate chart, organizing all the definitions for a phrase together. It wasn't as hard to do as I expected. I find it a remarkably helpful adjunct to my studying.

When that was done, I went back to the original sheets and redid them in larger type, triple spaced, and with words separated into syllables. I also ditched a couple more things. I don't need to tell anyone *good afternoon*,

and by time to say *goodnight*, I will be on the ship and talking to Muriel and Don Stauffer, who wouldn't understand me anyway.

I am well aware that 1) memorizing these phrases will be difficult, 2) I rarely, if ever, will have opportunity to use my new language skills, and 3) there is no telling whether anyone over yonder will understand me, should I venture out with a careful phrase. I haven't even mentioned the business of remembering which phrase goes with which country. Still, if I mix them up, there is a good chance that everyone in that part of the world is familiar with the languages of their neighbors. This is a make-work project, but I am having fun.

I concentrate on one language per day, starting in the afternoon and continuing to quiz myself during evening TV commercials. Once I was reasonably comfortable with what I presumed was the approximate pronunciation, I transferred attention to the pages with all the versions of each phrase listed together. I found, to my delight, that in addition to the consistence between Croatia and Serbia, many of their phrases are similar in Bulgarian. As for Hungarian and Romanian—they are strange, wonderful, and difficult. I live for the moment when suddenly these crazy phrases become automatic. However, if I completely fall on my face with this project, I still will be fluent in *yes*. It is the same in four of the five countries—*dah*, just like Russian.

Wednesday & Thursday, 30 & 31 May

A short flight to Houston, overnight in a familiar room in the Marriott, a long flight to Frankfurt, and a short finale to Budapest delivered me to the efficient arms of Vantage Tours.

Friday, 1 June – Budapest, Hungary

A Vantage porter was waiting to snatch my two bags from the airport carousel. I was ushered up a walkway to meet the blond local guide. Another cruise passenger, Rufus Jarman, arrived on the same plane. The welcoming guide said we would wait ten minutes for the arrival of the Vienna flight and two more cruise passengers. In short order, Veronica

and Edward emerged from the baggage area, and we all were bundled into a van to be taken to the hotel.

The four of us introduced ourselves and settled into excited conversation. Veronica, it developed, grew up in Hungary and still spoke the language. She chatted with the guide and driver.



My first impression of Budapest was that it was a normal large city with unreadable signs of strange assortments of letters, often in unreadable characters, on the shops. Graffiti decorated the bases of buildings. Looking upward, however, I saw the handsome, classical architecture of the upper stories and roofs. During our many drives through the city, we passed miles of three-story buildings decorated with statues, bas reliefs, arches, and pediments.

The city actually is composed of two towns—Buda on the hill and Pest on the plain. They were united in the late Eighteen Hundreds. The city dates back to Roman times. Like the other countries we visited, Hungary has a long history of being invaded and conquered. Its more recent history is closely linked with that of neighboring Austria. Nevertheless, Hungarians are a homogeneous society ethnically, with great national pride

During Soviet domination, Hungary managed to achieve a relatively relaxed and liberalized society. One popular saying at the time was, “We are socialists in the morning and capitalists in the afternoon.” Still, we were aware of their strong sense of relief with their open society after the restrictions of Communism.



After a relatively long drive, we arrived at the beautiful Corinthia Grand Hotel Royal and settled into our large, luxurious rooms.

I had time to hang up clothes from my wardrobe suitcase and open my roll-aboard before it was time to join the other members of the pre-tour group who were gathering in the lobby for an introductory walk around

the area. For the first of many times I became lost in the endless, interwoven corridors of the hotel. Nevertheless, half of the group had not yet arrived from the airport, so the walk was delayed. I used the time to become acquainted with Sandor (pronounced *SHAN-dor*), our program director for Hungary.

I could have skipped the walk. It was designed to show group members the location of nearby restaurants and shops. I did not intend to go out that evening. The only thing of interest to me was a charming, narrow little park on the street parallel to the hotel.



Late in the afternoon a talk was scheduled by our program director on Hungary, Budapest, and our plans for the next day. I left my room and started the long, complicated walk to the elevators. I descended to the designated floor. The corridor led me to a balcony overlooking the lobby and the great staircase. I followed the hallway to a dead end of bedroom doors. I retraced my path. As I reached the balcony again, I saw Sandor waving at me from the top of the staircase. I continued around the other side of the balcony and finished at another dead end. Slightly frantic, I returned to wave helplessly to my distraught program director.

In intricate mime, Sandor directed me to take the elevator down to the lobby floor, cross the lobby, and take another elevator back up to the floor on which I was stranded. I took the elevator down, but felt far safer climbing the long stairway up to where I could see Sandor waiting.

I was not hungry after the excellent meals on my flight, so I forewent supper, put out the card ordering room service breakfast and set my new travel alarm for 5:30 AM. I dived into the inviting bed under the first of a series of cozy duvets covering beds throughout the trip.

Saturday, 2 June

At some point while the room still was deeply dark, I heard a knocking on the door. Slowly I roused myself enough to go to it. A male voice said

something I could not understand. I replied that I was not going to open my door to a stranger in the middle of the night. As I struggled back toward my bed, the telephone rang. I answered. An irate voice asked why I had refused my breakfast. I checked the time. It was 7:30 AM. My alarm had failed me—or I had slept through its ring.

I let the waiter in when he returned with my breakfast, issuing repeated apologies that he probably did not understand. My tip may have made up for his trouble. I drank two cups of strong coffee as I dressed, but reluctantly left the basket of beautiful rolls untouched.



Somewhat to my own surprise, I was among the first to gather in the lobby for the drive to the village of Hollókő. Our group boarded a large, comfortable bus.

Once on the road, we passed miles of cultivated fields. Low hills folded together irregularly. Houses were little square stucco buildings with hip roofs, a few small windows, and pale neutral colors occasionally shading to a surprising pale tangerine.

Farther on, heavy forests crowded each side of the curving road. Signs with pictures as well as the name of the village told us what community we were approaching.

Hollókő, in the Cserhát Hills, has a population of about 400. It was the first village in the world to be added to UNESCO's World Heritage list. It burned down several times through the years, but always was restored to its original charm.



We were led to a patio behind a small restaurant. Women in bright native costume served us light, crisp lemon pastries and jiggers of szilva, a clear schnapps-like brandy that was a shock to our systems early in the morning.

Sandor called and motioned me forward. The Hungarian women encircled me and herded me up onto a porch and into a dim room. I had no idea what was happening. Wordlessly, they made it clear that I was to disrobe. Shoes went, then shirt, then slacks. They motioned me to a chair and one of them knelt in front of me to roll heavy white stockings up over my knees. Clunky black shoes with straps over the instep were added and, magically, fit fairly well. A soft white blouse, with elaborate embroidery at neckline and around sleeve bands, was dropped over my head. Another of the women tied fastenings around my arms to puff the sleeves. A white, lace-bordered petticoat was whipped around my waist, its opening, surprisingly, in the front. Ties were wrapped around the back, crossed, then brought to the front, where they were tied in a bow. A second petticoat was added. A third petticoat covered the first two.

In my semi-dressed condition, I was marched out in front of my trip companions, to their great delight. A fourth petticoat came next, a white confection, heavily starched and pleated. A second starched, pleated



Kate gets red skirt on top of four petticoats, Hungary, 2007

petticoat covered it. Finally, a red skirt with a beautifully woven pattern covered all. A black embroidered apron came next. Then a thick, narrow stole was placed around my shoulders and crossed in the front. A soft blue, fringed, triangular stole was wrapped over my shoulders and fastened in front.

I thought that was the end. I felt like a stuffed sausage. Then one of the women grabbed a thick lock of hair at the front of my head, twisted it and secured it with a rubber band. The final glory, a highly inappropriate bridal headdress too elaborate to describe, was set squarely on my head and secured by a great pin through my topknot.



Kate in full regalia, Hungary, 2007

Cameras went wild. A friend took my camera and immortalized the brightly clad, plump figure I had become. About the time I thought I could escape my mute, determined Hungarian ladies, they grabbed me and whisked me into a sedate dance.



By the time I was released, undressed, and redressed, my tour group was ambling down the cobblestone street, enjoying the charming homes. Most houses had stone foundations then clay-and-stone main stories, stuccoed and fancily trimmed with wood. Scarlet geraniums bloomed in planters on every porch or along every fence. Only once did I see a lonely white flowering plant.

We stopped to see village women weaving their beautiful fabrics. We stooped at the low entrance of the doll museum, where hundreds of dolls in a colorful variety of regional costumes stared back at us from the glass cases that lined the walls.

We visited a tiny stone church. Each statue stood on a beautifully embroidered red cloth. Pews were upholstered in red. The altar cloth was discretely embroidered red hand-loomed material. It was simple and welcoming.

We were led along the entrance to one of the homes. Outbuildings could be seen behind it, indicating that the owners grew their own food. An enthusiastic, fawn-colored dog leaped against his pen in greeting.

Our group had been separated into manageable numbers of ten for lunch. We were seated at a long table in what obviously was the living room, judging by the couch pushed out of the way. We were served the traditional jigger of high-octane “schnapps.” The typical Hungarian midday meal involved soup (chicken, noodles, carrots, hot peppers) followed by a main course of spaetzle and tender chicken with paprika sauce. Wine glasses were refilled as quickly as they were emptied.

Our host warned, “If you spill any of the sauce on your clothes, the only remedy is scissors.”

Dessert was light puff-pastry tarts filled with apple or cherries.

My departing *viszontlátásra köszönöm* (goodbye, thank you in Hungarian) surprised and delighted our hosts.

I was among the first to leave the house. I joined a group of four men who were standing just below the front steps. They were discussing age. I claimed that I was older than any of them. A large gentleman named Lee told me not to brag, that he was a year older. He was delighted when I replied (truthfully) that when we met the day before I thought he was one of the younger members of the group.

The dog pen drew me like a magnet. Sandor had assured us that the Vizsla, a traditional Hungarian hunting breed, was very friendly. I petted him tentatively through the mesh. He was ecstatic. I reached over the top of the pen to stroke his head. He reached up and took my entire hand in his mouth, gently as a feather. It was a happy moment for us both.



We returned to our hotel. From the outside, I could see that it was an immense building, encompassing three full blocks, restored to turn-of-the-century elegance. It was here that I established my reputation for being late to gatherings because I repeatedly became lost in the (understandable) maze of halls when searching for the elevators.

I arrived late for the lecture about Hungary and our plans for the next day. Most of the group left to find nearby restaurants for dinner. I returned to my room. To my delight, my breakfast tray had not been removed. I feasted on leftover rolls, packed for an early departure, and went to bed early.

Sunday, 3 June

Not trusting my travel alarm, I left a wake-up call for the morning. My suitcases were outside my door at the appointed moment so Vantage could collect luggage to be taken to the MS *River Odyssey*.^{*} For the first time, I managed to make the correct turns in adjacent corridors and reached the lobby on time.

In the lobby I again met the group of men with whom I had visited in Hollókő. They greeted me like a long-lost companion. This was the beginning of pleasant friendships, characterized by brief passings and frequent few words. Muriel, Don, and I called them “Kate’s Gentlemen.”



The bus was waiting to take us to a nearby village whose name I neither understood nor wrote down. (Note: I looked it up and know why: Szentendre—translation, St. Andrews.) It was a charming town of narrow, winding streets and gated homes. A blend of cultures through the years made interesting architecture.

We started on a brisk walk over cobblestones through the shop area. Nadia had joined Sandor as guide for Hungary. She told us firmly to stay together until we reached the town square. After that, we would have free time to shop.

I had every intention of obeying orders. However, we passed something I absolutely “had to” buy, sure I never again would see its like. I peeled off from the group, quickly spoke to the saleswoman who was standing at her door, was delayed deciding whether I wanted Hungarian or English writing, and finally turned back to the street with my purchase. Sandor was waiting for me with a not-unpleasant look of tried patience. We took off up the street as quickly as I considered it safe to walk and met our group and a disapproving Nadia around a far corner in the main square.

* *MS* before the ship’s name means *Motor Ship*.

Bonnie and Russ Lambing, two of my new friends, took me in hand, suggesting we have lunch together. We bypassed the recommended sandwich shop because it had long lines and no seating.

Instead, we climbed the adjacent cobbled path and worn stone stairs to the patio above. From the low encircling walls, we had beautiful views of the city on one side and the Danube beyond red roofs on the other.

We took the requisite photographs, then descended to the square. We decided on a restaurant already being patronized by some of our group. As we looked for an outdoor table, the first raindrops fell. Russ told the hovering waiter that we would eat indoors. We were standing next to Rufus's table, so suggested that he pick up his things and join us. By the time Bonnie and I were inside the restaurant, Russ had collected several others, so the waiter pushed a few tables together to accommodate the ever-increasing crowd of a dozen, all of whom were delighted to be offered shelter. Orders were mostly rich Hungarian beer and sandwiches, plate-size, thick slices of coarse bread with sliced tomatoes or meat, covered with melted cheese.



I left Bonnie and Russ as we strolled back along the street, stopping to browse on the way back to the bus. A shop full of lovely linens attracted me. The owner, a charming Australian woman, sold me two items, noted the "Belize" on my name-tag, then initiated conversation. We exchanged tales of how we each came to live so far from home. As the bus deadline approached, I made my excuses and hurried down the street.

Nadia was frowning at the bus door when I reached it. However, both my watch and the waiting passengers assured me that I was five minutes early.

We drove to the *River Odyssey* and boarded. The process of submitting passports and receiving room keys was swift and efficient. I was led down two short, curving flights of carpeted stairs to my passageway. My cabin, 303, was near the end. Inside, my suitcases awaited me.

A model-tall-and-slim blond stewardess hurried forward to help me. She pointed out all the features of my cabin. On each side was a padded seat, the back of which opened down into a twin-size bunk. At my request, Niki left my bunk down and brought me an extra pillow and blanket.

I had just begun to unpack when Muriel knocked on my door. We had a quick hug then went to their cabin, directly across the passageway, so I could greet Don. We separated to continue settling in. At 6:00 PM, we gathered in the Stauffer's cabin for a proper Happy Hour reunion. We all were enthusiastic about the cruise and delighted to be traveling together again.

Monday, 4 June

I mis-set my travel alarm, overslept, and missed breakfast. Later examination showed that, by some unfathomable quirk, the little clock was operating on 24-hour time.

The morning began with a scenic bus tour of Budapest, finally stopping at the magnificent, neo-Gothic Parliament building. Muriel and Don began their schedule of avoiding extended walking and stairs. Throughout the trip, they found pleasant park benches and handy watering holes that offered glasses of wine, where they could wait while the rest of us exhausted ourselves.

The Parliament building was superb—elaborate design and tons of gold leaf, but in perfect taste. The wide main staircase, carpeted in rich red, rose exactly 94 steps to commemorate something I forgot instantly. Two vast wings, mirror images, stretched out from the main building, one designed for the House, one for the Senate, when the legislature was bicameral. Now the country has a unicameral legislature and the Senate wing is unused.

The local guide pointed to a strange, scalloped brass fitting on a windowsill outside the legislative chamber. One of our group correctly identified it as a cigar holder. The guide said that the legislators would

stroll into the wide corridor for a smoke, then quickly perch their cigars in one of the grooves when business called them back inside.



We returned to the ship. Muriel, Don, and I adjourned to the Latitude 52 Lounge for a pre-lunch drink. The barmaid routed us out, explaining that it was one of the seated (not buffet) lunches and that we had lost much of the half an hour allotted for passengers to reach the Compass Rose Restaurant.

At 4:00 that afternoon we returned to the lounge for the performance of the Black Danube Orchestra. The excellent chamber musicians were joined by a fine tenor from the opera company. They put on a first-class performance.

At dinner we sat with Bobbie and Jerry Soberaij and their in-law, Don Zeller, not realizing that they would become our closest companions for the cruise.



Don, Muriel, and I decided to celebrate our reunion and our first night aboard the *River Odyssey* with an after-dinner drink in the lounge. The ship was due to sail at 10:00 PM. I decided that it already was so close to that time that I would go topside and enjoy our departure. Muriel and Don preferred to return to their cabin.

Budapest at night was spectacular. Lights outlined the graceful arcs of its seven bridges. On each bank, one Baroque building after another gleamed in floodlighting. Our dinner companions were seated at a table on deck. They called for me to join them. We all were too busy sightseeing to remain sitting. Naturally it had not occurred to me to take my camera. Fortunately, Don Zeller had his and spent the entire hour snapping this side and that.

Tuesday, 5 June – Kalocsa, Hungary

Our bus took us northward to the Puszta, the remains of the Great Plain that once covered more than half of Hungary. Arriving at a horse farm, we were directed to a covered stadium. Simply clad girls offered us pastries and the inevitable jiggers of szilva as we seated ourselves for the riding show.

The slow circuit of a hundred-year-old wagon drawn by yoked oxen started the show. Next, five horsemen in voluminous blue outfits circled the vast ring, the cracking of their long whips so well synchronized that they sounded like one great gunshot. Tailing along behind them was a similarly dressed “clown” on a donkey. He aped their tricks, cutting across the vast ring to save time for his tiny beast while the horsemen galloped around it.

The riders performed a number of riding feats, including having their mounts lie flat on the ground while they stood on top of them, cracking their great whips. The horsemen raced around the ring at top speed, moved into position abreast, and pounded forward toward the stands, pulling to a halt side-by-side an inch before the fence.

In competition, each rider raced toward a small wooden piece balanced on a short column, trying to knock it off with his whip as he roared past. At the end of the tourney, the rider on his donkey plucked the piece off its stand and waved it triumphantly as if he had performed as skillfully as his companions.

Next, a carriage with three beautifully matched horses did a series of complicated passes and circles in front of us. As the carriage exited, five great dappled-gray horses galloped in, guided by a bareback rider balanced on the last two horses, one foot on the back of each. He put them through a series of difficult moves, then pulled up in front of the stands. The three lead horses danced, obviously wanting to continue. The rider balanced incredibly well on his two horses as he brought them back under control.

At the end of the show, we all were loaded into great, heavy, covered wagons and driven over a muddy, roughly rutted track out to a nearby pasture. Cattle grazed on one side of a fence. Dozens of horses grazed peacefully around us as we dismounted. Refreshments were offered in a nearby semi-enclosure. I felt that another schnapps was contraindicated. A grazing horse strayed into the enclosure. One of the blue-clad horsemen rode in and herded him out.

The wagons returned for us, and we were taken back to our buses. At a local restaurant, we were seated at long tables for a delicious, typical lunch.



During our absence, the ship moved to Mohács for Customs clearance. Passengers were told not to leave the ship in case the officials called for a face check. They didn't.

That evening, passengers dressed in their best for the Captain's welcoming cocktail party and dinner.

Wednesday, 6 June – Vukovar, Croatia

We passed through rich agricultural country with extensive fields of corn, wheat, potatoes, sugar beets, and the rape whose seeds were used to make canola oil.

Driving through the town gave us a heartbreaking understanding of the hideous damage done by the Serbs and Yugoslav Partisans in the not-so-long-ago war. Rubble, derelict, half-destroyed buildings, walls stippled with bullet holes and with great swatches of plaster stripped by shrapnel. Allegedly, Vukovar was 99% destroyed. Much of it has been rebuilt. The government coped with one of its most pressing problems by building hundreds of small concrete boxes of houses, 900 square feet, to resettle families as quickly as possible.



We drove on to Osijek for another one of our delightful home-hosted lunches. A slim young girl, not one of the family, but the translator, greeted us. The home was a substantial one, adjacent to a small farm, which, we learned, grew all sorts of vegetables, wheat, etc., and raised chickens and pigs. Two tiny dogs added to our welcome, the younger one dashing up for her share of petting when the older dog was given attention.

At table we received the traditional small measure of schnapps. No wine glasses. A glass pitcher of red liquid and one of almost colorless liquid appeared instead. The red was cherry juice—cherries abounded throughout the area—and what I suspect was pear juice, quite awfully insipid.

The soup was a rich vegetable mixture with dumplings. Next came platters of deep-fried meat (a well seasoned cross between hamburger and meatloaf) arranged on each side of a great long mound of mashed potato. Slaw with a delicious light dressing was passed and admired. To everyone's delight, wine glasses appeared along with small pitchers of homemade red wine. As the pitchers emptied, larger pitchers of wine replaced them. The hosts offered two desserts: squares of cake studded with cut-up cherries, and slices of pastry rolled around a chocolate filling.

Our hosts spoke no English—a sturdy, brunet husband and a quietly pretty wife. At the end of the meal, a chubby preteen daughter and gangly older boy arrived to say hello. They both were learning English—compulsory in school—but were too shy to speak. The baby of the family slept throughout our visit.

Despite language problems, we were impressed by the friendliness of picturesque Croatia. It was apparent that since the country's escape from the cocoon of Communism, there had been a rebirth of native independence of spirit in an atmosphere of hope.



Back aboard the *River Odyssey* that afternoon, a Croatian Tambura Band enthralled us. The five musicians wore full shirts, black vests and trousers. Their tamburas were similar instruments of varying sizes, from a tiny miniature guitar to a bass. Their music was vigorous and happy. Much of the time the men sang in harmony. In the middle of their program they urged passengers to join them singing the choruses of old favorites such as *Oh, Susannah* and *Home on the Range*.

One of the passengers asked the guide to relay word that he was from Croatia and requested a certain old folk song. The band, obviously delighted, played and sang it directly toward him.

Croatia and neighboring Serbia have complicated histories, replete with foreign invasions and a series of conquerors that ruled their countries, often for hundreds of years. Antipathy between Croatia and Serbia remains strong. We heard one version of recent history from the first then, next day, a conflicting history from the second.


Thursday, 7 June – Novi Sad, Serbia

When I opened my curtains on waking, I saw that we were moored at the official port, alongside a high, slanted stone retaining wall, at the top of which was a wide walkway set with old-fashioned wrought-iron benches. A large apartment building faced the street above. When we turned in our room keys at the reception desk and were given our boarding passes and receivers, we also were given our passports. We were told to keep them with us while in Serbia, in case we were stopped and asked for identification. We never were.

To get ashore, we crossed a deck whose railings and walkways were colorfully decorated with planters of geraniums. The walk to the bus was long, much of it uphill and all of it cobbled. Muriel and Don stopped to rest halfway along. I was afraid they might decide not to come on the tour, but they reached the bus before its departure.

It is time to discuss Eastern European cobblestones. They were unlike the rounded ones I remembered from Western Europe and Mexico. For the

most part, they were small, flat stones about three inches square, laid in straight lines or in graceful, intersecting arcs. Sometimes the cobblestones were larger. Sometimes streets or sidewalks were laid with flagstones. The crucial word is “flat.” Walking was not as treacherous as I had feared.




Centuries ago, the often-displaced Serbs asked Austrian Queen Maria Therese to let them form a country in the area they had settled after finding refuge from the Turks (Ottoman Empire). She agreed, with one proviso, that they plant trees in the swamp and build a fort to forestall future invasions. We walked around the fort, which never needed to be used for its intended purpose.

Novi Sad was destroyed in the 1800’s and rebuilt in the early 1900’s in a mixture of Austrian and Serbian styles, relatively clean and simple, with some balconies. It is a multicultural town. Signs on government buildings display four different languages.

More than once we heard disparaging comments about NATO. Serbs have not forgotten that during the war following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, NATO blew up all three of Novi Sad’s main Danube bridges.

The area is one of Serbia’s most fertile agricultural regions. The plain surrounding the town once was a sea. Two meters down, seashells still can be found. We were told that Serbia has the potential to feed a quarter of Europe

FYI: Tennis champion Monica Seles was born in Novi Sad.



The evening’s entertainment aboard ship was a version of The Liars’ Club. Our friend Bobbie was one of the panel. She performed delightfully. Passengers formed groups of five for the game. Rufus joined us, as did Chris, another single man whom we had not known earlier. To our delighted amazement, we were the winners. The prize was a bottle of wine. We agreed to meet next day for lunch and enjoy it.

Friday, 8 June – Belgrade, Serbia

During his introduction to Belgrade on the bus tour, our program director made a point of explaining to us that the Serbian government was not involved in the assassination that started World War I.

In addition to more details about Serbian history than I can or want to recount, he said that WWII Nazism and a strong Muslim influence were responsible for Croatia's problems. He added that Serbia had recovered from a very weak and impoverished condition to reemerge as a stable democracy, once its communist dictator Milošević was arrested by NATO. Even so, Bulgaria no longer qualifies for its old tongue-in-cheek description as "the forgotten corner of Europe."

Belgrade, a hilly border city, was the most important bastion for many regimes through the ages. It was virtually destroyed at the turn of the century, so most buildings are neo-Classical Modern.

I decided against the city walk and went into a park across from the bus stop with Muriel and Don. With his usual unerring guidance system, Don found a pleasant outdoor café for my morning beer and their white wine.

Our guide Marius (as usual) mis-estimated the time when the bus would return. We perched on a concrete windowsill next to the bus stop and waited. To our amazement, a small sedan made a right-angle turn off the busy main street, mounted the curb, and turned to park not far from us on the wide sidewalk.

Our group returned to the bus and we took off for an endless drive through Belgrade.



Months earlier when we signed up for our cruise, the afternoon tour was listed as a visit to a nearby village. Later we were notified that it had been cancelled in favor of a visit to Tito's tomb. While none of us was pleased, I remembered reading of some sort of disturbance in a rural part of Serbia. Nothing serious, but enough to spark caution in Vantage.

We would have been happier remaining on the *River Odyssey*. Tito's "House of Flowers" is in a park that has been allowed to deteriorate because of public mixed feelings about the former Yugoslav chief. We climbed endless steps to a semi-circular patio with a fountain surrounded by the only flowers we saw. Inside the adjacent building, Tito's tomb is a simple marble block with his name and dates inset in gold. A second long building houses a museum for some of the many gifts of costumes, arms, saddles, etc., that the dictator received from all over the world.

I photographed the patio and tomb for Muriel and Don, who were not able to negotiate the steep climb.

Tito walked a careful tightrope. After WWII, he incorporated the Partisans into his army, ending with a force of 800,000. When Stalin tried to take Yugoslavia into the Soviet Union, Tito had enough forces to say "no" and get away with it. Less well defended countries were not as lucky.

We heard an amusing story about the Serbian flag. Prince Michelov proposed adopting the Russian flag with an added Serbian crest. Strong public complaint. The Prince turned the flag upside down, added the Serbian Coat-of-Arms, and said, "There!"



That evening after dinner, the Serbian Folkloric group "Taliya" entertained us in the lounge. Native costumes were colorful; the dance, sometimes delicate, sometime vigorous. Fascinating.

When we retired that night, a note on our bunks declared:

East Europe Time Is Here. Do not forget to change your clocks
tonight, One Hour Ahead.

Saturday, 9 June

After several days of suffering more-or-less in silence, Muriel and Don complained to the receptionist that the air conditioning in their cabin did

not work. The chief engineer examined it and announced that a part was needed but could not be obtained on the weekend.

I offered to trade cabins. Moving would be a hassle for all of us, but the cabins being directly across the passageway from each other, would not have been difficult. They declined.

The Stauffers were offered a cabin on the lowest deck. Muriel balked; the water line was halfway up the window. Furthermore, it would have meant moving the ship's doctor out of his cabin and into theirs. They assumed that their air conditioning would be corrected on Monday.

When they reentered their cabin later in the day, they found a bottle of wine and note of apology from Vantage.



This was our only full day of sailing. It provided the most spectacular scenery of the Danube cruise. On waking, I opened my curtains to see that the ship was passing close to a vertical wall of mountainous forest broken by slashes of gleaming, white limestone.

After breakfast, passengers began crowding the upper deck. In recognition of the cool air and strong wind, I wrapped myself in my coat and an awkwardly tied headscarf. Outfitted with dark glasses, camera, and notebook, I settled down for the transit of the famous Danube Gorge. Sheer rock walls brilliantly reflected the morning sun. Mountains dovetailed in the river ahead of us.

We passed a quarry where rock was being blasted loose and crushed for shipment in waiting barges. To starboard a long, semi-stripped expanse of rock displayed the area's geological history to knowledgeable eyes. In one outcrop the graceful, multicolored curves of either a syncline or an anticline made me wish I remembered more from the geology class I enjoyed almost seventy years earlier. Striation taunted me. A wide band of red rock, effectively shot with two narrow bands of white, ran from one exposed surface to the next several, disappearing again and again under the intervening mantles of trees and bushes.



Kate on deck, Danube cruise, 2007

As we continued down the Danube, the dramatic mountains of the gorge were replaced by lumpy, wooded hills. An occasional narrow bridge spanned a tiny inlet. Gradually the river narrowed. A wall of granite formed the Serbian side of the river. A great face was carved into the stone above a narrow bridge. Across the river a dense, green forest clad the Romanian side.

A small, elaborately spired monastery cantilevered out over the river. The usual three domes of an Orthodox Church and the vari-sized parts of the building looked like a tidy heap of white blocks.



Above the locks, the Danube opened out lake-like. A small cluster of white buildings with red roofs hugged the shore. Here and there, expanses of cultivated fields clung to the hills.

We reached Iron Gate I. The *River Odyssey* eased into position alongside one wall of the locks, so close it was incredible that its paint survived. We watched the water level creep downward to about eighteen meters. It was still lowering as we were called to lunch. Passengers were infuriated at the poor timing. Through the dining room windows we saw the ship move and realized that we had missed the ship's moving into a second, adjacent lock to be lowered to the level of the Danube beyond.

When we returned to the upper deck, we were passing an area of low hills with dear little villages of trim white houses with the traditional red roofs, perched here and there along the banks of the river on flat hills overlooking pastures where their black and white cattle grazed.

Later that afternoon, we entered Iron Gate II. This time passengers were able to enjoy the entire process of the ship's being lowered and reemerging through great iron-and-wood gates to proceed on the cruise.

Sunday 10, June – Svishtov, Bulgaria


We moored during breakfast. Our tour buses left early for a full day's tour. From the beginning, Bulgaria appeared far less developed than the countries already visited. Roads were rough. Even the woods boarding the road seemed ragged and untamed.

We passed farmhouses with small, cultivated patches or orchards behind them. Occasionally we saw a cart, sometimes a car, pulled by a horse or donkey. Once we passed a huge nest on a telephone pole. A mother stork was feeding her three fledglings. Small pastures held a few sheep or cows.

Often fields were hidden from the road by a narrow band of untidy bushes and trees. Fields were cultivated by hoe, usually by two or three women. Sometimes a man was seen with a horse-drawn plough. Very occasionally we saw a small tractor of undetermined age standing idle in a field.


Like its neighbors, Bulgaria had centuries of history as the victim of a succession of conquerors. To the dismay of most Americans, it joined Germany in World War II. At the war's end, they spent fifty happy years as Communists. A popular saying among pro-democrats at the time was, "Everyone in the whole world knows that Communism is no good except us." Bulgaria joined NATO in 2004 and expects to join the European Union this year. Still, much of the populace is unhappy about the political change, especially in the area of health care, which no longer is free.

Bulgaria has a large gypsy population. The usually peripatetic groups settle in the friendly countryside, assume the predominant religion, and live their own way.



The Bulgarian language is Slavic. It is so close to Russian that the two peoples can understand each other. I noticed that our local guides from all of these Eastern European countries (not just Bulgaria) inserted a "k" sound after English words ending in "ing" or after "in" in the middle of a word, just as Russians tend to do. This was especially noticeable in the speech of our program director, Marius, a Romanian.

Passengers, although they did not speak the language, were warned about one Bulgarian peculiarity. Bulgarian gestures for *yes* and *no* are the reverse of ours. Shaking the head from side to side signals *yes*. Nodding up and down means *no*. I suspect that all of us forgot those instructions by the time we were interacting with Bulgarians in the shops.



Veliko Tarnovo probably was my favorite village of the trip. It nestles in the foothills of the Balkan Mountains, small houses clinging precariously to the rising cliffs. We browsed through shops along the curving, cobbled

street. Small workshops displayed ancient arts of woodcarving, pottery, and embroidery. As we drove out of the city, we saw that buildings beyond the street of shops had peeling plaster and dingy paint.

We continued toward Arbanasi. Cultivated fields stretched as far as one could see toward mesas rising flat-topped behind them. Corn was one- to two-feet high; wheat, about the same. Fields were outlined and divided by narrow bands of trees, thick and long. Farmers cultivated small vineyards in their side yards to make their own wine.

A flock of ducks grazed happily on a grassy plot alongside the road. Horses, cows, and sheep chomped busily in unfenced pastures along a major highway. A shepherd herded his flock along a railroad bridge.

High on a plateau, Arbanasi is one of Bulgaria's most picturesque villages. Houses resemble small fortresses with high brick walls, massive wooden doors, and (allegedly) secret hiding places.


We stopped at a local restaurant for a regional lunch. Huge salads, a full meal in themselves, greeted us when we sat down at long tables. A subtly seasoned chicken-and-vegetable stew was served in individual brown pottery jugs, to be ladled out onto our plates. Dessert was an unfamiliar but delicious version of baklava.



We visited a 400-year-old Orthodox Christian church, famous throughout the region. The small stone church was covered, inside and out, with frescos.

We were ushered inside. In the typical Orthodox manner, the church was empty of pews, but had high, narrow little seats, looking like tiny wooden cubicles, along the walls for the questionable comfort of the elderly.

Harmonic chanting announced the arrival of four men, whom we took to be priests. They wore black cassocks. Mandarin collars, sleeve-ends, and front openings were piped with scarlet. The rich voices captivated us as they chanted. It was only afterwards we learned that they were four retired laymen who chose to contribute their singing to the church.




It was our longest day of touring. While we were gone, the ship had moved to the town of Ruse. It was a happily frazzled group that trudged gratefully up the familiar gangway. Most headed for needed revivifying in the Latitude 52 Lounge. Muriel, Don, and I returned to the cool of my cabin for our personal Happy Hour.

That evening the crew presented a vaudeville show, clever and entertaining.

Monday, 11 June

The Stauffers' air conditioning was not repaired. We all wondered why Vantage had not couriered the missing part or thermostat immediately. It was agreed that Happy Hour was permanently relocated to my frigid cabin. From then on, both cabin doors were left open during those pleasant periods, sacrificing privacy in hopes that the cold air from my cabin would lower the temperature in theirs. Muriel said later that she thought it helped marginally. Just trying to do something about the problem may have appeared to ease it.



The morning project was a walking tour of Ruse. I had not seen anything in the town to endear it to me, so I stayed on the ship and washed my hair. Muriel and Don had remained aboard, so we had a pleasant time together later that morning.

The Captain's farewell cocktail party and dinner brought all the passengers out again in their finest. Bobbie told us at lunchtime that she and Jerry were invited to have dinner at the Captain's table. To Bobbie's obvious relief, we told Don Zeller that we expected him to eat with us.

Our table was next to a wide window ledge close to the service area. Throughout dinner, waiters deposited empty bottles on the ledge in increasing numbers. Muriel, already weakened by their warm cabin,



Farewell dinner on Danube cruise, 2007.

Seated: Muriel & Don Stauffer and Kate; standing: Don Zeller protested that they were blocking the air vent that provided her with a cooling breeze.

What to say about the evening? More champagne than any of us wanted and no more socializing than normal.

Tuesday, 12 June – Constanța, Romania

The Black Sea Riviera. I opened my cabin curtains to darkness. The ship was pressed against the wall of a lock.

Romanian is one of the Romance languages. Its similarity to French, Spanish, and Italian is apparent. Actually, it is the one of the group closest to the Latin from which they all developed.



After breakfast, we walked up a cobblestone ramp to the waiting buses. We drove to the beach through the charming old town with its

neo-Classical buildings. While the program director invited us to dip our feet into the Black Sea, I didn't see anyone do it.

Marius remarked, "The Black Sea actually is blue, while the Danube actually is black."

We had a good view of the great blocks of concrete, shaped like giant jacks, that topped seawalls as far as we could see. These "wave breakers" form a breakwater guarding the city from waves that can be thirty feet high in winter.

We walked to a nearby Orthodox church. Roman ruins had been uncovered alongside it. The outline of ancient rooms remained to prick the imagination.

A great, gold altar wall, elaborate but subtle with Oriental influence, shined through the vast, dim interior. Most of the handful of worshipers concentrated on ritual bowings, kneelings, prostrations, and kissings of icons. The few elderly women wandering about were dressed in long, soft, black or discretely printed dark skirts with loose tops. All wore head scarves. One of them silently, smilingly, produced chairs for Muriel, Don, and me.



The afternoon tour took us to the remains of a large mosaic in the ruins of the Roman market and to the newly modernized and growing Archeological Museum with, primarily, its collection of Roman jewelry, busts, pottery, coins, and glass.

We adjourned to a shopping area, and I realized that I had left my wallet locked in the safe in my cabin. Don graciously loaned me 40 Leu* and pressed me to take more. I demurred. After much browsing through a lovely assortment of items too heavy or too fragile for packing, I settled on my purchases. They came to 60 Leu. I rapidly gave back enough items

* *Leu* is the unit of Romanian currency.

to allow me to pay for the remainder. Meanwhile, impatient passengers went to other clerks or left the shop to return to the bus.

I flew out of the shop, down the street, around the block, and to my vast relief, reached my group before the bus returned. Don fussed at me for refusing to borrow more local money from him.

Wednesday, 13 June

The end of the cruise. Luggage outside cabin doors at 6:30 AM. Early departure for Bucharest by bus.

Only neat forest strips along the roadside prevented our easily seeing across cultivated fields to long, low hills that rose like levees in the far distance.

We were told that houses were built of bricks made of clay, manure, and straw. “They were cool in summer, warm in winter—unlike communist apartment buildings, which were just the reverse.”

Throughout Romania the majority of windows were a pair of French windows that opened inward, topped by a fixed pane under a rounded arch. Frequently, window frames were trimmed with two colors of paint.

Farming practices were primitive. Most fields were worked by hand. We were told that usually one or two people in the village owned a tractor, which was rented out to neighbors.

Small homes frequently had a single cow in the little pasture behind them. A wagon with blue arched covering was slowly drawn across a field by two horses. Often a single cow grazed alongside the road, carefully guarded by an elderly man or woman carrying a staff to deter the precious animal from seeking forage on the far side of the highway



Entering Bucharest, we were greeted by scrap yards with enormous piles of metal scrap. Homes were small but neat, often with one or more circular windows giving them an Art Deco look.

...and then the results of decades of Communism! Miles, literally miles, of cheek-by-jowl blocks of four- or five-story tall, ponderous, unadorned apartment buildings. Often the only decoration was inexplicable, thick semi-circles of concrete jutting out of bare walls. Narrow balconies often were glassed-in because of the cold. We could see laundry hung to dry on both the open and the closed balconies. Rarely did a planter of bright flowers alleviate the drabness.

Farther in, apartment buildings, though equally large and crowded, had brick trim, were painted in warm neutrals, and had larger rounded balconies. Marius told us that of the three million population of Bucharest, 65% lived in apartments.

Only the abundance of luxuriant, small-leafed trees lining sidewalks and boulevards prevented this view of Bucharest from being utterly depressing. Marius, our Romanian program director, explained that they could not get rid of the monstrous apartment complexes because the city's needs for housing were so great.

As we reached the center of the city, we had glimpses of Old Bucharest in the charming architecture down side streets. We passed large, wooded parks. A main plaza held a replica Arcul de Triumf (Romanian spelling) erected after WWI to celebrate the Romanian troops' beating the Turks. Older buildings in the heart of Bucharest were classic Romanian style, a mixture of Italian Renaissance and Byzantine.



Bucharest is noted for its dangerous stray dog population. At one time, these feral canines numbered an estimated 50,000. The government tried to cope through neutering, failed to dent the problem, then went to poisoning. Actress Brigitte Bardot headed a worldwide protest movement and the government caved in.

Marius warned us about Bucharest traffic. Our bus slowed, then stopped. From my seat in the bus, I was able to observe the traffic alongside and ahead of us, a carpet of cars, bumper to bumper, eight lanes wide as far as

I could see. I could have walked for miles on the cars top-to-hood-to-top-to...Normal rush-hour traffic in Bucharest.

Marius added that the city had too few traffic lights to control the volume of cars. Drivers had no hesitation in cutting across several lanes of traffic to make an illegal turn.



Despite the traffic, we eventually reached the Intercontinental Bucharest. Nadia brought our room keys to the bus and distributed them there to avoid congestion in the lobby. Fortunately, here I had no trouble finding my way to or from my room. Again, of course, my luggage arrived before I did.

Muriel, Don, and I stayed in the hotel for dinner. It was pleasant to be away from crowds. Conversation was brisk, possibly lubricated by Happy Hour Scotch.

Thursday, 14 June

To our surprise, seventy-four cruise passengers signed up for the Transylvania post-extension package. Our two buses first visited the Sinaia Monastery. We were allowed to visit its church, but not, of course, the monastery itself.

Many of our meals were our own responsibility on this final part of the trip. We found a pleasant little restaurant for lunch, climbed narrow, worn stone steps, and sat on a raised patio under a red umbrella, watching passersby. It was here that I discovered the unbelievable richness of Romanian tomatoes. From then on I ate them three times a day.



After lunch we visited Peleş Castle, former residence and summer home of the Romanian Royal Family. As we drove to the castle, I noticed that the cars passing our bus were almost exclusively small four-door sedans of various European makers. Only rarely did a small SUV appear.

The land was flat, with mountains scalloping horizons. No gentle hills softened the transition. Dry weather had turned rivers into beds of gravel with narrow rivulets of water bubbling through them in twisting streams.

We drove through dense forests, occasionally passing buildings with strange towers, flat-sided cones, and roof ornamentation. Route One, Romania's finest highway, came as welcome relief to the bumpy secondary road on which the drive began. We passed the Ploiești oil fields of WWII infamy.

Romania (then Rumania) had a habit of protecting itself through fence-sitting and flip-flopping. In WWI, the country bought arms from the Germans and ammunition from the Allies. In WWII, they supplied oil to the Germans, then switched sides and joined the Allies as the tides of war changed.

The enormous cultivated fields on either side of the highway presented interesting patterns. Long, narrow green bands of young corn alternated with the yellow of ripening wheat or barley. We were told that most homes grew enough to feed themselves. If necessary, they traded with neighbors to fulfill needs.

The hip-roofed houses had no running water. Most families had wells and outhouses. As for oil, while the country could supply itself, during the Soviet era, 33% of its oil had to be given to "Mother Russia"—"if she was in a good mood."

We reached the Carpathian Mountains, the Romanian "Alps." Ski resorts climbed above us on each side of the road. I felt that although they were steep, the mountains curving gently, not jaggedly, embraced us.

We followed a tightly twisted road up over the mountain to Peleş Castle, built in the late Eighteen Hundreds by Prince Carol of Hohenzollern. Marius warned us that we would have to walk down about 200 meters of cobblestones.

"That's two football fields!" I exclaimed.

It was a steep, loooooong walk to the castle. Don and Muriel were not deterred, but wished they had been. They did not attempt to negotiate the many staircases in the castle, but returned to the bus. Don paced out the distance as they climbed back. It was 540 meters, not the 200 Marius had mentioned. Don was not amused.



Upon entering Peleş Castle, we were ordered to select felt slippers to cover our shoes. I grabbed the smallest pair I could find, but the elastic straps at the backs were loose. Walking up the first carpeted staircase, I found a slipper someone had lost. As I stopped to pick it up, a voice behind me said, “You’ve lost both of yours.”

Russ handed me my slippers. I stopped at the top of the stairs, but could not manage to slip them back over my shoes. My friend knelt down and did it for me. Not long afterwards I lost a slipper again. Once more Russ picked it up, put it back on my foot, and cautioned me, “Don’t lose it again!”

I tried to tuck the straps down into the backs of my shoes, hoping they would hold the slippers on. It didn’t work. I shuffled, flatfooted, along with my group, but the next staircase did me in. This time Bill, one of “Kate’s Gentlemen,” retrieved my slipper and replaced it. By the time the tour was ending and I was faced with a long, downward stairway, I decided disobeying trumped tripping. I took the slippers off and carried them the rest of the way.

“Hide them behind your back,” one of the group advised me, “so the tour guide doesn’t see.”

Muriel told me later that she often ended up carrying similar slippers while sightseeing in other countries.

The castle was built in German neo-Renaissance style, with heavily carved dark wood and massive furniture. I found it depressing. I much preferred the Italian-style rooms when we reached them.

It was a panting group that reached the bus after climbing back up the hill. In recognition of our exhaustion, Marius played the gentle, soothing music of the famous Romanian musician Zamfir, with his Pipes of Pan, on the sound system as we drove to Braşov.

Marius did not realize that this gave us welcome respite from his increased telling of jokes that fell flat and his new habit of ending of every comment with “okey dokey.”



The Braşov area was settled by Germans, moved there by Hungary to provide a buffer against an invasion of the wide vulnerable valley by the Turks. Several towns in the area remained conclaves of Germans long after the threat was gone.

We checked into the Aro Hotel. It was the finest in the area, but gave me the impression that it was a three-star hotel aspiring to five-star status. It had the requisite acres of marble, but as Muriel pointed out with horror, “There’s no Kleenex in the bathroom!”

It was after 5:00 PM by the time we had checked in. We were too tired to go out for dinner. Don suggested that we eat in the hotel, preferably in its most informal café. Muriel and I were relieved at his suggestion.

We approached the hotel restaurant. In the foyer, we found several elegantly dressed young people. Glancing into one of the adjacent dining areas, we assumed from its aqua-draped seatbacks and bows that a wedding reception was in progress. We started to leave, but a formidable waiter herded us into the room.

Muriel asked to see a menu. Our escort seated us at the closest table, then handed us the cartes. We all were uncomfortable with the situation and barely glanced at the menus. Don stood and firmly announced our thanks-but-no-thanks to the startled waiter.

We exited with as much dignity as we could assume under the circumstances, pleased that the room was almost empty. We adjourned to

the bar where, we understood, food could be served. There we were told that they provided only the breakfast buffet.

Before we could resist, a helpful bar attendant took charge of our small group, ushered us through a back corridor, and with a flourish, deposited us with the waiter on whom we recently had walked out. I don't have a picture of the moment, but assume everyone had a slightly stunned expression.

Either Don or Muriel suggested that we preferred to be as far as possible from the little band that was tuning up. With elaborate courtesy the waiter led us to a table in the far left corner of the dining room. We sat down. Don decided that we would be happier at a table farther to the right. We moved.

We started to seat ourselves at a table on the right side of the room. Instead, the waiter waved us to a booth just beyond it in the far right corner of the room. The booth's table was exceptionally wide. It was so high that my chin was barely cleared it. Muriel announced that conversation would be impossible.

Don got up and tried a chair at the adjacent table from which we had been moved. He signaled that it was an improvement. Muriel got up and joined him. As I started to slide out of the booth, I was overtaken by an attack of the giggles. I was paralyzed with laughter.

"Will this be your last move?" came the dry query from the booth behind me. It was Russ, who with Bonnie was just finishing dinner. Between giggles I gasped out an apology for our peculiar performance. They thought it was hilarious.

When we all were settled at our final table, the waiter proved his merit by ignoring our previous carryings-on. He was helpful in interpreting the menu, attentive, and somehow avoided smirking. P.S. we had a delicious dinner for a very low price. Our bottle of Romanian wine helped us return to our accustomed poise.

Friday, 15 June

We slept late. None of us wanted to take the walking tour of Braşov. I felt I had seen enough of it on the circuitous drive into the city the night before.

At 11 o'clock we boarded the bus for the Transylvania full-day tour. We drove through flat agricultural country cultivated by primitive methods, hoes or an occasional horse-drawn plough. The patchwork pattern of plots of hops, wheat, corn, barley, rape, etc., formed a symphony of greens. Fields alternated with heavy woods laced by small streams. We learned that poppies were grown in small patches to supply seeds for baked goods. The government banned large acreage of poppies to forestall a drug culture.

Marius recounted the tale of the old “Red Rooms.” When a couple had irreconcilable differences, village leaders locked them into one of these rooms for a month with one cup, one spoon, one plate, one chair, and one bed.

Invariably their problems had vanished by the time they were released.



Two hours later we were in Sighisoara, another UNESCO National Heritage town. Lunch was served at an old restaurant in a large patio shaded by wooden latticework. As we filed in, we were told to sit at the tables with red napkins.

Marius had told us we would have a surprise at lunch. We did. A band was playing on a stage in the middle of the restaurant. It was joined periodically by a group of Folkloric dancers in colorful native dress. There was almost as much clicking of cameras as eating.

Following lunch we had a short walking tour of the charming town, followed by time to visit the nearby shops.

On our drive back to the Aro Hotel, the bus driver stopped suddenly for a “photo op.” A large horse-drawn cart, loaded with long sheaves of grass,

forage for their livestock, driven by a woman and led by her husband, just had turned onto a dirt road. The husband was persuaded to pause. Passengers poured out of the bus to take pictures, then to tip the man. His grin grew broader and broader. Marius said the one-Leu tips probably added up to a month's income for the couple.



Along with the Soberaij party, we decided that this would be our last convenient opportunity for a farewell dinner. Bobbie promised that we would have to walk just around the corner from the hotel and that she would stop at the first restaurant we came to. She did, we did, and luck was with us. It was an inviting little grotto of a Romanian-German place with a brick interior and low ceilings. An enthusiastic young waiter pushed tables together for us in an alcove at the rear of the room. It was a convivial, happy evening of congenial company, good food, and an ever-refilled supply of wine in small pottery pitchers.

Saturday, 16 June

Our luggage was outside hotel rooms early to be transferred to the hotel in Bucharest where we would spend our last night.

We left early by bus for our visit to Bran Castle, associated with the legendary Dracula. History indicates that Dracula actually was Vlad The Impaler. Vlad, who allegedly visited the castle only briefly, ended a blood-soaked career imprisoned in the castle.

A 100-meter-long, 30-degree flagstoned slope led up to the castle. I copied nearby companions and paused occasionally at the welcome iron railing to catch my breath before resuming my climb.

Bran was a typical medieval castle, heavily stone with low, arched entrances to small rooms and many narrow, steep, curved stairways of treacherously worn stone. Unexpected balconies looked down into flower-bedecked patios.

We learned that before Royalty was unseated, Bran Castle was Queen Maria's favorite home. She loved it so much that she asked that when she died, her heart be buried there. Her wishes were followed. Her heart was interred in a small gray stone chapel just down the hill from the castle. Later it was moved to the museum in Bucharest.

Lunchtime was disappointing. Bobbie raced ahead to claim a table for our group, but was prevented from saving places for us. We ended up at the far end of the room at a semi-empty table with strangers.



It was a long drive back to Bucharest. We passed a gypsy village and were assured that they are not persecuted in Romania, as they are in other countries. Families were celebrating the Saturday afternoon by picnicking in the middle of fields under great trees far back from the highway.

A sign in a small town read: *SPĂLĂTORIE AUTO*. I identified the establishment as a simple car wash.

Our run of perfect weather vanished mid-trip with driving rain. However, as we continued on our way, the rain remained behind us in the mountains. The skies brightened to the benign blue we had known the entire tour.

In Bucharest, we checked into the J.W. Marriott hotel, a five-star caravansary that deserved its rating. We hardly had time to enjoy the luxury as we busily completed our final packing and retired early to grab a little sleep before our wee-hours departures. I skipped dinner to buy an extra hour in bed.

Sunday, 17 June

Our luggage was out by 2:45 AM and we were en route to the airport by 3:30. Transit in Bucharest was the easiest of any airport. Security was swift and minimal. Muriel, Don, and I were together to the Frankfurt airport, where complicated arrangements unraveled us before we parted for our separate flights home.

Both Muriel and I expected wheel chairs. Instead we were ushered into a waiting room. A delightful couple from the cruise joined us. The woman was a classic German dowager. After some delay, we all were crammed aboard a small motorized car and whisked to another part of the airport. The Stauffers and I said goodbye as they went on to a lounge area where they had to wait five hours for their flight to Philadelphia.

The Germans and I were met by a beautiful, brisk blond who, after ascertaining that we could use an escalator safely, led us upward. We joined a group of sari-clad chatterers. With the competence of a Border Collie, the blond herded us onto a train. After a short ride, we were divided into groups. The Germans and I became a bit more intimate than any of us wanted as we squeezed into the only passenger seat of an even smaller car. Eventually, we actually were delivered to our Lufthansa gate.



The trip home was ten endless hours, but ultimately, I reached haven in the Hotel MIA in the Miami Airport. I unpacked overnight necessities, washed two days' worth of stockings plus myself, and lapsed into exhaustion. I forced myself to stay awake until 6:00 PM, and then gave in to the lure of a perfect mattress and comforter.

Monday, 18 June

I checked out of the hotel early without calling for a wheelchair, because I wanted to stop at the Duty Free store. A helpful hotel porter took my luggage and led me to the shortest of the lengthy American Airlines lines. He stayed with me to manage my bags. When I checked in, I was told that my flight had been cancelled, but that American had confirmed me on their afternoon flight. I moaned something about regretting the decline of a wheelchair. The helpful agent gave me my boarding pass and suggested that I call for a chair when I returned for the flight.

“My Guardian” explained that American no longer took baggage when passengers checked in. Luggage was returned to them and they were responsible for carrying it over to the enormous scanner. He assured me

that he would take care of it. He put my suitcases back on his rack and led me to the device, where he handed my luggage over to the attendant.

I told him I was going back to the hotel. Taking charge of a slightly undone Elderly, he said he would go back and tell the desk that I was returning. He advised me to stop at the Duty Free on my way back to the hotel. He strode ahead with the empty luggage rack. Unfortunately, I did not watch which way he went. I looked at the confusing array of corridors. I had no idea which one would take me back to the hotel. After trying a couple of them unsuccessfully, I asked for directions. A lengthy walk took me to the Duty Free and on to the hotel.

Purchases in hand, I asked the hotel receptionist if I could return to the room I just had vacated. She checked her computer. Some sort of problem. My Guardian came over and learned that she did not have a key for my room. He said he would take care of it and led me to the elevator. On my floor, he stopped next to a housekeeping cart and called to the maid inside an open room. She came out and they conversed in some unintelligible language that I guessed to be African. The maid accompanied us on to my door and unlocked it. My Guardian said that a wheelchair would be at my door for me at the proper time.



Back in my room, I had no luck placing an overseas call to Alex to tell him of the delay. Finally I telephoned my son-in-law, Tom, and asked him to alert Alex that I would be in on American's late flight.

The wheelchair arrived far too early, but the attendant was a miracle-worker in avoiding lines. He delivered me through Security and to my gate swiftly.

I hope I never have to fly American again. Their planes are like putting on an overcoat—too narrow seats crammed too tightly together. Still, the flight was uneventful, though late. In Belize, Alex was waiting.

Editor's Notes

These notes are by no means necessary for understanding and enjoying my Mom's accounts. Rather, they contain additional bits of information, as I might relate to a friend who had just read the relevant chapters.

— *Carli Scott*

1. Kate's Stockings

In the report of her trip to Mexico in 1995 (page 1), Mom complains of the hotel:

... On the minus side, there were no plugs for either basin or tub in my expensive room. I washed stockings in a wastebasket ...

Because of her thrombophlebitis, Mom had to wear custom-fit elastic compression stockings to assist blood circulation; she also had to keep her leg elevated whenever possible.

When she traveled, she needed a basin with stopper (or alternative container) where she could soak, wash, and rinse her stockings at the end of the day.

2. Carli-Blue

In Mom's report of our trip to Puerto Rico in 1996 (page 83), she described a bay we passed on our drive along the West coast of the island, writing:

The water was Carli-blue.

One day toward the end of my freshman year at college, my good friend Donna Fukumoto told a group of friends about something unusual she had seen, saying, "It's color was...um...Carli-blue." She meant a particular bright blue-green color that I wore frequently—so frequently that I and everyone else listening knew immediately what she meant. The following summer, Mom picked up the term from Donna when she came down to Belize with me for a short visit.

I believe Carli-blue is properly called *cerulean*, although the term can be used to refer to the entire range of shades from aqua, through turquoise, to teal.

A year or so after grad school, while shopping with my good friend Catherine Pfeil, I was attracted (as usual) by the color of a Carli-blue pullover. When I picked it up, Catherine commented tactfully that I already had lots of clothes the same color, so it might be better to get the pullover in a *different* color instead. Although I still wear Carli-blue frequently, thanks to Catherine's suggestion, I have expanded the palette of my wardrobe.

3. About That Wine

Mom's report of our trip through the Pacific Northwest tells of an unfortunate wine purchase (page 293):

The house brand Pinot Noir was just shy of noxious. We tried the Cabernet. Not much better. Finally we agreed that the Merlot was enough better than the other two that we might as well take it ...

...

As we investigated our temporary home-by-the-sea, Carli found two bottles of wine, attractively presented in a little basket on the kitchen counter. Tom remarked that the red wine was much better than the one we had purchased so reluctantly. It cost slightly less. We decided to take advantage of it instead of opening the dubious Merlot.

I asked Tom what he intended to do with the Merlot.

"We'll give it to friends we don't like and tell them it is a fine Oregon wine," he replied without hesitation.

Some months after the trip, I decided that the Merlot couldn't really be all that bad. I retrieved the bottle, opened it, and poured myself a sip. It *was* that bad. I gave Tom a sip, and we both agreed that it was not worth drinking.

I gradually used up wine by adding a quarter cup to any sauce, soup, or stew I cooked whose flavor was hearty enough to overpower whatever

taste the Merlot might contribute. It was a relief when the bottle finally was empty.

4. Vocabulary Lessons

Early in this project, when I encountered in Mom's writing a word that I considered obscure, I added an editor's note about it. If I didn't know the word, I figured other readers might not know it either.

Later, I came across a word that appeared to be a typo; by changing the initial letter, I transformed it into the word that I felt sure Mom had intended. When I reread the finished chapter, however, I discovered that my substitute word didn't make sense in context. So I looked up Mom's original "typo" and, sure enough, it was a real word that was exactly right where she had used it.

Thereafter, whenever I found an unfamiliar word, my immediate reaction was to look it up; each time, I made a new addition to my vocabulary. I came to view these discoveries as presents...here I am, in my late 60's, still learning what Mom has to teach me! And so, I left it as an exercise for the readers to look up any words whose meanings they may wonder about.

While proofreading drafts of these books, I made a list of the words I've learned as I worked on the project. I don't recall ever having seen many of these words before, though I was familiar a different usage of one of them, I correctly guessed the meanings of several, and I recognized a few others without being entirely certain of their meanings.

Here is my list of new words, in the order in which I they occur in this series of books:

- rep (fabric)
- rouche
- port cochere
- ukase
- piscine
- cerise
- contretemps

blondined
peripatetic
burgee
forepeak
sybaritic
coaming
careen (a ship)
napery
porphyry
perfidious
reredos
serried
troglodyte
zellige
nostrum
catafalque
Mudéjar
tor (rock formation)
corniche
mullion
patronne
chine (of a boat)
ineffable
bibelot
bole

I now use the term *port cochere* whenever the opportunity presents itself, always happily remembering Mom as I do so. Although I consider most of the other words too obscure to use, I am always pleased (maybe even smug) when I read and recognize one of them, or when I know that one would be appropriate. For example, I can't imagine ever using the word *reredos*, but when I look at one of Tom's photos of any of the Spanish Colonial cathedrals we visited on our trips to South America, I do think to myself, "what a stunning reredos."

Kate V. Scott was a journalist, a wife and mother, a private pilot, a bookkeeper, a shipping agent, an airline agent, a dog lover, a bridge player, a traveler, and a tireless correspondent with a uniquely engaging writing style.

This is the last of four books in a posthumous autobiography that her daughter, Carli Scott, assembled from Kate's letters, reports, and other writing. In it, Kate recounts trips that she took in her later years, some short and close to home, others extensive and to exotic destinations, some for business, but most for pleasure.



Kate with frequent travel companions
Don & Muriel Stauffer in Japan, 1998