

Rex Jaeschke's Blog Postings from
Tales from the Man who would be King
Volume 10 – Dec 2018 through Nov 2019

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Introduction

When I decided to start a blog, I wrote the first three installments and let them “bake” awhile before I posted them and announced the creation of the blog. I wanted to get past the romantic aspect of dreaming something up, jumping in and doing it, and then, later, finding out it wasn't sustainable. Now, more than 11 years later, looking back, not only was I able to deliver a substantive posting each month for 132 months, I have 16 of the 24 postings for the next two years already written, and ideas for the remaining eight mapped out!

On a semi-regular basis, over a home-made [café-au-lait](#), I read an old posting, and I'm very happy to say that *I'm not embarrassed by any of them!* It surely has become a labor of love!

Over the years, a number of regular readers have suggested that I publish the postings in some sort of printed book form. Having written numerous technical books, many articles for technical journals, and a newspaper column, I am well aware of the formal publishing process, and the work involved in getting what I might consider to be a perfectly good manuscript into a shape that a publisher would accept. Regarding writing books, my financial return was probably far less than the minimum wage! Of course, I could self-publish, and, in fact, I have access to a facility to do just that at a very reasonable cost. After serious consideration and putting my ego aside, I decided that I would indeed re-publish the first 11-years-worth of installments, but in an electronic book form, [PDF](#). And I would do so, 12 installments (that is, one year's-worth) per Volume.

To make it worth having these Volumes available for downloading instead of readers simply going to the website for installments one at a time, I've added some small value to the Volumes. Here are the enhancement and/or changes I've made:

- Did some light editing: corrected spelling mistakes, improved punctuation, and tweaked some grammatical constructs
- Corrected factual errors
- Updated outdated information
- Added an occasional bit of extra relevant information as an aside
- Added *many* more links, primarily to [Wikipedia](#) and [Wiktionary](#)
- Added a few photos. [I write installments using MS Word, which easily allows me to arrange embedded photos. However, when I export the result to my blog (which is hosted by the freely available BlogEngine.NET), the result is far from pleasing. As such, after some early experimentation, I have included very few photos.]
- Added forward pointers to relevant installments that came later

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- Regarding links to other installments, links to destinations that are in the same Volume resolve to the corresponding chapter in that Volume; otherwise, they resolve to the blog web site.

Lastly, a very big “Thank You!” to my reviewers, good friends John Tew and Tom Plum, who have been with me from the beginning. Now I say “good” friends. There is a saying, “Friends help you move, but good friends help you move bodies!” I have not yet asked either to help in such a manner, but for now, I’ll give them the benefit of the doubt.

Happy reading,

Rex Jaeschke, April 2021.

1. December 2018, “Travel: Memories of Prague, Salzburg, and München”

Join me as I spend a week in Prague working from my hotel and attending business meetings. Then it's playtime in and around Salzburg, and more fun in Munich.

1.1 Prague, Czech Republic

[Diary] By the time we landed at PRG, I was running on empty. I coaxed 3,000 CZK (Czech Korunas/crowns) from a cash machine and waited five minutes for my luggage. (It still amazes me each time it comes out when one considers the amount of baggage processed at large airports.) I bought a ticket for the bus to downtown and boarded that soon after. The passengers were like me, very subdued, probably because they too had flown overnight. Forty minutes later, I found my hotel right where I'd left it two+ years ago. This was my fourth trip to Prague, and my third time at this hotel. The reception staff was ever so happy to have me back for six nights. Although I was there more than three hours before the official check-in time started, they called housekeeping to get a room ready as soon as possible, and that took an hour. In the meantime, I walked to the supermarket nearby and bought a liter of cold, whole milk and a small block of Milka chocolate with hazelnuts, as comfort food. I sat on the edge of a fountain in a plaza and watched the locals at play.

[Diary] At 06:30 am, I was at the front desk buying postcard stamps, after which I headed for the breakfast area, which is a glass-enclosed platform that seems to be hanging from the ceiling, with walkways leading to it from several sides. (In fact, it's built on top of a glass-walled conference room on the level below.) The buffet was included in my room rate, and it was open from 06:30 until 11:00, which was very civilized. I took my time eating and drinking a variety of things while working on a Sudoku puzzle and perusing some brochures for musical concerts. I packed a small snack for Ron (as in “later on”). The whole experience was very pleasant and took 90 minutes.

I was hard at work on my laptop by 08:30, and hardly stopped until just before 14:00 when I went downstairs to the fitness room. There, I met Luci, a tall, thin, and very strong, young Czech woman who asked me to get naked and to lie on a bench. As she looked like she wasn't about to take NO for an answer, I complied, and my 60-minute Swedish, full-body massage began. She rubbed so vigorously that I feared she might ignite the oil! It had been a long while since I'd had a massage, and it felt good. Despite the physical nature of it, I almost went to sleep.

Earlier in the day, a tag-team from housekeeping appeared, to give my room the once-over. I'd asked at the desk for a light blanket to replace the super-efficient, one-piece, oven-like quilt on my bed. (I'd woken up several times during the previous night covered in perspiration.) Unfortunately, they brought me a blanket that was Leprechaun-sized, so it wasn't clear just which of my ends would be exposed to the elements.

As the day had looked nice out my window, I decided to venture out into the Old Town. Everything was just where I'd left it from my previous visit, which was very convenient. My first stop was a theater box office to buy tickets for some concerts later in the week. Then I wound through the cobblestone-paved alleys in the general direction of the river that divides the city. There, I crossed the famous Charles

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Bridge, which was filled with stalls selling paintings, jewelry, and various crafts. The tourists were out in force and I chatted with a woman from Bavaria. I came across a jazz quintet that included trumpet, double bass, clarinet, and banjo. The percussion section consisted of a metal washboard with two small cymbals attached, which the man played using metal thimbles on his fingers or with a pair of egg whisks. I stood there for 15 minutes tapping my toes as the lead singer, a white Czech guy, did a pretty good imitation of Louis Armstrong singing "What a Wonderful World" and "When the Saints go Marching In." Soon after, the band packed up for the day and I made a small donation.

A light breeze blew down the river and there were some tour boats and a group of kayakers moving up and down. I walked all the way across the long bridge and a little way on the other side before turning around. On the way home, next to the famous astronomical clock that performs several times each day, I spied a gelato stand where I had a small cone of hazelnut ice cream. It was altogether satisfactory.

I was back in my room at 19:00, where I treated myself to a glass of ice-cold milk. Then it was time to bring this diary up to date, and to write postcards to twin boys in California.

At 20:15, I looked at the time, and thought, "After all that exercise and fresh air, I'm no longer tired. So, what's next?" The answer was easy. I headed back to the fitness room, got naked, again, had a hot shower, and assumed the position on a bench, again. However, this time there would be none of that massaging business; no, this would involve some serious ~~hanky-panky~~ sauna time. I poured several ladles of cold water over the hot coals and lay flat on a bench with my head on a wooden support. The roof was a high dome that was floodlit from recessed lights, which seemed to be changing between white, yellow, lime green, and pink. Either that or I was hallucinating from dehydration! After 10 minutes, a middle-aged Polack man from Gdansk joined me and we chatted a bit. Then when we went outside to cool off, we shared a newspaper, and he had many questions; I got a good reminder of Polish history, and how things were going there these days. Then we went back into the steam for another session, after which I had a not-too-cold shower. It was all quite enjoyable.

[Diary] *At noon, I was back in the fitness room with Luci. Even though we were old friends by now, she didn't ask me to strip naked; I only had to take off my shirt. For 30 minutes, she worked on my hands and arms, and then she spent another 30 minutes on my neck, head, and face. We chatted a bit and I found that this was her second job; her main job was being a pre-school teacher.*

Back in my room, I packed up my computer bag and put on some casual-business clothes. I stepped out into sunshine with a cool breeze and walked the 10 minutes to my meeting place. There, I met eight other colleagues from six countries: Japan, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, UK, and US. We had a meeting for 2½ hours, which really didn't achieve anything other than to let some delegates restate their old positions and to dig in their heels further. Afterwards, the Chinese delegation made a presentation on a new idea they had. I left at 17:00 and walked back to my hotel. Fifteen minutes later, I was having a conference via Skype with a colleague who was attending meetings in Switzerland.

[Diary] *At 18:30, my Czech friend of 18 years, Robin, arrived at my hotel, and we walked to my favorite restaurant nearby for three hours of eating and conversation. My pork ribs in gravy were divine as was the large mug of grapefruit lemonade. We topped it off with apple strudel and whipped cream. Afterwards, I walked Robin back to the subway station, and then went and had several sessions in the sauna.*

[Diary] I headed out in warm sunshine and walked 15 minutes to St. Michael monastery, where I joined 25 other patrons for a musical concert. I sat in the front row several arms'-length from the performers. Promptly at 18:30, the concert began, alternating with a female singer and male clarinet/saxophone player. Both were accompanied by a pianist. The theme was "Broadway musicals," and without a doubt, the highlight was the sax and piano rendition of Rhapsody in Blue. It was 60 minutes of non-stop professional music.

After a 30-minute break, another 1-hour concert started, but this time it was classical with a good dose of Baroque. The singer from the first performance sang quite a few numbers and she did a great job, especially with "Ave Maria" and "Amazing Grace." Three musicians played violins while the fourth played cello.

It was a glorious night out, so I walked to the river and out on the Charles Bridge. There a couple was playing well-known Baroque pieces on violin and accordion. They were so good, I stayed and listened for at least 15 minutes after which I gave them a generous donation. Back in my room, I ended my last day in Prague with a glass of cold, whole milk.

[Diary] The breakfast area was completely empty, just my five personal attendants and me. Really! Fortunately, they didn't hover too close to my table. I had a light meal and packed a sandwich for my trip. Afterwards, I dropped by the supermarket to rescue a liter of pear juice. Back in my room, I got my last email fix and closed my luggage and computer bag. Friendly Michaela was working the front desk, and as she'd remembered my name the whole week, I gave her a block of my finest Milka chocolate with hazelnuts. I settled my bill and walked out into a quite cool morning. It was 08:00, but busy for a Saturday morning, especially as I got closer to the main train station. Many people were going on the train with their hiking or bike-riding gear.

My train, Regional 1543, was listed on the main board, but no platform had been assigned, so I waited there for 10 minutes. Up flashed 7J, so I headed off in search of that. Signage was decidedly lacking, and I recalled the difficulty I'd had the last time there. I found my platform, but was at the wrong end, way away from the train. Don't you hate that when that happens! The good news was that the First-Class carriage was at the very end of the train, nearest to me. There were nine 6-person compartments, and even though it was a Saturday, I'd paid to reserve a seat. However, I'd forgotten to ask for a forward-looking seat, and got one looking backward, against the window. By the time we pulled out the station at 09:36, three whole minutes late, two other people had seen fit to sit in MY compartment.

We went due south through an industrial area with numerous high-rise apartment buildings. Then the countryside opened up and it was all rolling hills of green cereal crops, some bales of hay, and green fields topped with white flowers. In the distance, I saw a couple of yellow flowering fields of rapeseed. Mid-morning, I had an unnecessary snack, and as I was eating my Lay's potato chips (a very popular brand in the US) I started reading the back of the packet. The bag was packed in Poland, and the labelling on the back came in a multitude of languages: Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Czech, Slovakian, Hungarian, Polish, and English.

1.2 Salzburg, Austria

[Diary] I'd known about the accommodation website www.airBnB.com for some years, but didn't use it

until August 2013 when I stayed three nights in Amsterdam. That first experience was so good I thought I'd try it again. Anyone with a room to rent short-term, and who can comply with the rules, can join. I went online and found this place in Salzburg within minutes and paid about US\$60/night. The host was at a wedding reception, but had arranged for his father to meet me. He got me oriented and then we sat and talked for 30 minutes, which was just an excuse for me to pat his dog, who was so smart he understood German! The apartment was quite large, had large windows over a small park, and a fresh breeze wafted through. After I unpacked a few things, I set up my computer, was connected to the outside world, and started working on this diary.

[Diary] Around 13:30, I ventured out to meet the day. It was quite warm with a gentle breeze. I walked to the bus stop and several minutes later a Number 6 arrived. I rode it three stops and then walked to the river to cross on a large pedestrian bridge. Both railings were chain-wire mesh, and they were covered with padlocks with lovers' names attached, something I'd seen in a number of countries. On the other side of the river, there was a very long row of stalls along a river walk. They were selling all sorts of crafts, clothing, and food. I soon heard a distinctive noise, an Australian Aboriginal didgeridoo. A man was playing it along with a percussion instrument. Further down, there was a booth selling jewelry made from Australian opals.

From there I wandered the back streets and alleys of the Old Town, sticking my head in churches, courtyards, and shops as the mood took me. In an attempt to improve my Kulcha-quotient, I paid €7 to go into the Salzburg Museum. It contained a mixture of art, ceramics, photos, and film, and covered history, architecture, and World War I when this area was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

I stopped to take the occasional photo and to people-watch. It was a gorgeous day to be out, and every hundred meters there was another outdoor eating-place. I crossed back over the river and headed home through a park containing some abstract sculptures. I'd only been out three hours, but that was enough. Besides, I had to leave something for the next visit!

[Diary] At 18:00, I headed out to a restaurant across the street whose menu I'd perused the night before. A pleasant young waitress seated me in the sunshine in the biergarten, and after my attempts at German, she asked if I'd like an English menu. I took both, and switched to the English one whenever I needed something translated. I ordered the chicken cordons blue, which came with parsley-covered boiled potatoes and some berry sauce along with a mixed salad. I washed that down with a glass of apricot juice. It was a lot of food, so I took my time. A big-screen TV was showing a World Cup soccer game. Once again, I had no room for apple strudel, bugger! I read some chapters of my novel and worked on this diary. Diners came and went, and a small boy at the next table worked on filling his pockets with gravel.

[Diary] After a small breakfast complete with a custom mug of milch-café, I headed out to play tourist. It was quite hot out, so I kept in the shade as much as possible, which included a walk through a nice park. In 15 minutes, I was across the river in the old town and winding my way through back alleys in search of the funicular railway that went up to the famous castle of the Salzburg Prince-Bishops.

I paid €11:50 for a return ticket, admission to the castle, an audio tour, and several museum admissions. Although I saved some energy and perspiration by riding the tram up, once inside the castle and its grounds, I still had many stairs some of which were quite steep for an old man. I—and most

tourists with whom I spoke—gave the organizers a failing grade for the lack of signs, especially for the tours included in our ticket. The view from the top was very nice. You could see so far it took two people to look! Two hours there was more than enough, and as I rode the tram back down, I chatted with a Canadian couple. They were travelling with a group down the river. More than 100 Aussies were on their boat, and as I walked around the castle and town, I heard their accents.

I walked along the river a good way in the shade before crossing over and entering the grounds of the summer castle and its Mirabell Gardens. Flowers of all shapes and sizes abounded along with manicured lawns and large fountains with statues. From there it was quite a hike back home.

Once I got my shoes off and splashed some cold water on my face, I was ready for a large glass of ice-cold milk. It sure tasted good and represented one of life's simple pleasures. Then I settled down to business email, which led to a 30-minute phone call with a colleague in Hawaii, 10 hours behind me. Afterwards, I posted the June essay to my blog.

[Diary] *I packed my gear and got my final email fix just as my host got back from grocery shopping. We chatted a while and then I departed soon after 11:30. It had rained heavily that morning, but was clearing up as I walked to the bus stop. After only a few minutes, my bus arrived, and I managed to convince the driver to sell me a ticket to the main train station. All of the city buses ran on electricity, so there were many overhead wires. It took 20 minutes to get to the station, and then I had to find out where the 120 bus to Mattsee departed from. I finally asked a bus-company employee who pointed me in the right direction. However, my bus had just left, and I had a 30-minute wait for the next one.*

1.3 Mattsee, Austria

[Diary] *The bus trip was comfortable and pleasant with quite a few passengers. We had many stops and passed through a number of large towns and small villages on the 25-km drive. The end of the line was near my destination, Mattsee, the town in which my friend, Renate, lived. She had given me directions to her house, and as I got off at the town shop, I asked another passenger to confirm, and she sent me in the wrong direction. However, a young woman at a restaurant came to my rescue and gave me a map of the town. Soon after, I was knocking on Renate's front door.*

We had met in the summer of 1989 when she was our second guest through the American Host Program. European teachers and librarians who were fluent in English came to the US for 30 days where they stayed with host families for 10 or 15 days to experience American culture first-hand. My family and I visited her and her mother in Mattsee in 1992, and my brother-in-law, Colin, and I visited again in 1996. However, although we'd kept in phone and email contact over the years, we hadn't seen each other in 18 years. When I saw her, she looked the same to me, and she was enjoying her retirement from teaching.

The weather improved as the day wore on, and she proposed we head up into the surrounding mountains for a nice walk through the fields and forests. It certainly was a little piece of Paradise. At the top, we climbed a wooden tower and looked out over the valley. We came home by a different path that brought us along the lake and yacht club where Renate keeps her boat and teaches children how to sail. We caught up with a lot of each other's news along the way, and so we didn't notice we were exercising. We walked at least six kilometers.

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We had some pastries and drinks for a late afternoon tea after which Renate had an engagement for 90 minutes. I pulled up a chair in the sun in the garden, and finished my novel. Having less than my sleep quota the night before, that caught up with me and I fell asleep sitting up in the chair. We sat down to a late supper around 20:15 when we had hausgemacht (homemade) soup with semolina dumpling-like thingies. By then it was 22:00 and I was thinking about sleep. Lights out soon after.

[Diary] *At 09:00, we sat down to breakfast outdoors. The sun was streaming down, and all was right in this little corner of the world. I savored fresh bread rolls with ham and hausgemacht orange marmalade.*

By 10:00, we were packed and on the road to our next adventure, hiking at the top of a mountain. After a short drive, we reached the parking lot of the cable car that would take us to the top of Der Untersberg. We had 30 minutes to wait for the next car, so we sat outdoors in the sunshine drinking milk coffee, which was served with a piece of chocolate; very civilized! As the car ascending the steep slope, the clouds came in and visibility was quite limited when we got off. We walked over the rocks and some loose gravel, and the wind came up a bit. Occasionally, the clouds cleared, and we could see way down to the valley below. We went all the way to the top of the mountain, but couldn't see through the fog. On the walk back at the cable car station, it rained lightly, but got heavier as we went inside. We looked at the restaurant menu to see if they had any hausgemacht soup, which they did. Renate had the goulashsuppe and I had the wüstsuppe with noodles. Mine was "just like Grandma used to make," and, with some bread, it was just the right amount of food. By the time we got back to our car, the sun was out; however, light rain continued to fall. The locals call this "liquid sun."

By the time we got back home it was 16:30, time for afternoon tea. We consumed some pastries whose use-by date was 15 minutes later, and Renate made me her style of milch-café. Afterwards, we walked a short way to a new car museum created by the grandson of the creator of the Porsche car brand. All the old cars are registered and are driven on a regular basis. Some are available to rent. Back home, I set up my laptop in Renate's office and started working on this diary while listening to an album by Andrea Bocelli.

We had a late supper of wurst with salad and talked until late. Lights out by 22:30.

[Diary] *We headed out of town for a 75-minute drive to the south. We spent a long day in the National Park along the Großglockner Hochalpenstrasse some 7,000 feet up. We drove the 45 kms of the winding mountain road. There was quite a bit of traffic especially motor cycles. Entrance to the park for the day cost €43! The views were spectacular. The deep glacial valleys were braced on each side by green pastures and mountainsides right up to the snow line. There was quite a bit of snow left from the winter, and it's possible to have snowfall in the summer as well. We parked at the end of the road where we met Renate's friend, Johanna. The remnants of a glacier were below us. We visited some exhibitions and then had a nice lunch. We'd planned a hike there, but that route would not open until July 1, so we drove a short way back to a small restaurant set down a steep slope from a parking area. We hiked a kilometer or so down and across a lush, green field among some grazing cows, where we jumped across a raging stream that came down from a waterfall further up the mountain. A marmot (US: groundhog) was guarding his burrow nearby and watched as we passed. Back at the restaurant, I had another bowl of soup while the ladies had apple strudel and coffee. It was all very civilized.*

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[Diary] It was another glorious day outside, so we put on our walking shoes and headed out through the neighborhood and to the lake where we toured the very nice swimming club and playground. (Rumor has it that Big Kid Rex was seen riding one of the kiddie rocking horses.) From there, we dropped by the boat-rental place, and then at the sailing club, of which Renate is a member. It's a very nice facility, and Renate proudly showed off her refurbished sailboat, which is made of brightly varnished mahogany. We walked into town and sat in the sun while sipping coffee and chatting. It was all hard work, but someone has to do it, right?

At noon, after we took photos of each other in the garden by Renate's house, we said our "Goodbyes." Now friends help you move, good friends help you move bodies, and great friends pick up with you where they left off, even if that was 18 years ago. Renate is a great friend!

It was another Travel Day, another city in another country. I walked the few hundred yards to the bus stop. Three young women were already waiting. Compared to them, I looked boringly normal. The first was dressed as a Goth and was busy with her music player. The second was wearing a top that she had thrown on as she left the house, and she nearly missed! Inside one upper arm, she had a large amount of tattooed text. The third was also dressed completely in black, and she had a large tattoo on her shoulder. Half her head was shaved, and the other half had long hair that was dyed bright red. She had a small ring through her bottom lip. I couldn't decide which of the three I should take home to meet Mother!

The bus arrived at least 10 minutes late, and quite a few students boarded, and by the time I got on, it was quite full. I sat down next to a girl, who immediately decided I fit the profile of suspicious-old-mother-had-warned-her-about, and she escaped to safety on the other side of the aisle. Several stops later, a large group of students boarded with lots of luggage; apparently, they were headed out on a trip.

When I walked into the Salzburg Hauptbahnhof, the train to München was just leaving. Don't you just hate that when that happens! I went to buy a ticket, but found it a bit confusing. There was a long line at the ticket for the Austrian train company and a very short one for Germany's Deutsche Bahn. After I asked for help, I was directed to the DB line where I chatted with two American women. I bought a First-Class ticket with a reserved seat, and was directed to the First-Class Lounge next door. There I had a drink and some nuts, and chatted with a family from Oregon.

At 12:50, I headed for Gleis (Track) 1 where my train awaited, and a conductor pointed me towards Wagen 262, Sitzplatz 76. Well don't you know there was a couple in MY compartment and the man was sitting in MY seat! We greeted each other in German and after a few sentences, I knew they weren't native speakers, so I asked where they were from. Melbourne, bloody Australia. Fair suck of the sauce bottle, Cyril! Which roughly translated from Orstralyan means, Strewth! or Stone the Flamin' Crows, Bruce! (Is that clear? Probably not.)

As we bounced along in the glorious sunshine through lush, green pastures, it was boringly beautiful. I cleaned out my collection of papers, used tickets, and the other flotsam and jetsam of travel, and worked on my diary while eating delicious, fresh cherries from Renate's neighbors' garden. I chatted with the Aussies off and on. They were on their annual 6-week tour of Europe, and he was a professional musician who was performing along the way.

1.4 Munich, Germany

We arrived in München on time, at 15:40, and I went in search of a bank to change my leftover Czech money. The helpful cashier directed me the Tourist Office a couple blocks away. There I got a city map and information about getting to my hotel and the airport on Sunday morning.

[Diary] At 11:00, it was time to head out on my cultural tour. It was hot, so I kept to the shady side of the street. Soon, I was at the famous square, Marienplatz, with its Town Hall complete with performing figures and bells. I arrived a few minutes after the production began, and watched along with a few thousand of my close friends. I seemed to recall that it looked a lot like it did when I last saw it, 22 years earlier.

From there, I took a fortuitous wrong turn and found myself at the Viktualienmarkt, a large plaza with many stalls selling food, beer, fruit, vegetables, and crafts. A maypole stood there and some sort of ceremony regarding beer and brewing was taking place. Hundreds of men milled around in traditional Bavarian costumes. Four large beer wagons each pulled by a team of four beautiful horses stood nearby.

Next stop was the Hofbräuhaus, the famous beer-drinking hall. As it was early in the day, only a few tourists were inside drinking. I took some photos of the ceiling and the metal stands where regular patrons keep their beer steins locked up. Out front, a mime was performing.

For my Kulcha fix, I dropped into the former royal palace complex, the Residenz Museum. Knowing that it would be “over the top,” I bought just the basic ticket, forgoing all the extra rooms and smaller museums one could visit. It was room after room of huge wall tapestries, ornate furniture, elaborate ceilings, and gold-covered everything! Although all the contents were moved out during WWII, almost all the buildings were destroyed, so much of it had been reconstructed.

I walked back to my hotel through the market. By the time I got my shoes off in my room, my legs were complaining about all the work they'd done in recent days. I tried napping, but that didn't work; I was simply too tired to sleep! So, what to do, but sip on a bottle of cold Coke while working on this diary while off in the distance some church bells pealed out a tune for quite a long time.

I finished off a travel essay for my blog, and worked on some other personal projects. Around 17:45, I was thinking about going out for my last supper and a walk, but the Heavens opened, and the rain came down quite heavily. It cooled things down and left a fresh smell in the air. I had my large window wide open throughout to get the full effect. After 30 minutes, the rain stopped, so I went out in search of just the right place for just the right meal. After 10 minutes of walking around, I found the end of the rainbow, a small snack bar near my hotel. All the young staff were friendly. I had a large bowl of creamy potato soup with large bits of sausage in it along with a liberal dose of fresh parsley. “Was it good?” you ask. Well let's just say that it was the kind of soup that your Grandma wished she could make! Even before getting the soup, I was dreaming about dessert, but, once again, I had no room, so I settled on a very nice, large mug of hot chocolate. As I finished up, the kitchen crew was shutting down for the day.

I walked a number of blocks down a pedestrian shopping area, and as I passed a bakery, the aromas coming out the door lured me in. However, I was very disciplined and only looked. I figured that with

each sniff I took in 50 calories! Back in my room, I worked on this diary while listening to an album by Elton John. Lights out at 22:30; asleep much later!

[Diary] *I was awake at 07:00, before my 07:30 alarm. I'd had the window open all night, and it had been pleasant. Light rain was falling. After a quick shower, I packed my gear. As the front desk was not yet open, I dropped my key in the night-box and stepped out into a light drizzle. The city was quiet at that hour, and it took me 15 minutes to walk to the central train station, where I rescued breakfast from a bakery, and bought a ticket for the S-Bahn to the airport. I walked up to Track 26, and less than a minute after I boarded, the doors closed, and we were off. Apparently, the train had been waiting just for me! It took 40 minutes, and the passengers were all very subdued. The young American couple opposite me was reading a very thick Lonely Planet guide to Western Europe. They were on their last leg of a 6-week trip around the continent. As I ate my ham and cheese croissant, and drank the last of my rhubarb juice, I was pretty sure I was the only person in the greater München area (maybe even the world!) to be having that for breakfast that morning.*

At MUC, I found my way to the United Airlines Business-Class counter where a young woman from New Mexico politely ran me through the security checks. I said goodbye to my luggage, and went through security and passport control. The Lufthansa Business Lounge was ever so happy to have me as a guest. I gathered up some English-language newspapers and a banana for the flight, and found a worktable in a secluded corner where I sipped my hot chocolate while sorting through photos and bringing this diary up to date.

Soon after 10:30, I ambled through the terminal arriving at Gate H8 just before boarding started. UA133 departed, on time, at 11:40. As the Boeing 767 rose up through the clouds, we had quite a bit of turbulence. The flight was more than eight hours, and I was tired, but attempts to sleep were futile. I had a very nice Thai chicken curry on rice for lunch. Then it was Movie Time! First up was Saving Mr. Banks, the story of how Walt Disney (Tom Hanks) convinced P.L. Travers (Emma Thompson) to let him make a movie version of her books on Mary Poppins. Colin Farrell played Travers' father. Next, was Winter's Tale, also starring Colin Ferrell, with Russell Crowe as the bad guy. Finally, it was Sandra Bullock and George Clooney in Gravity. All were excellent, and I found the space catastrophe scenes in Gravity to be so convincing, I was gripping my seat. Then after all that sedentary time, a nice snack was served. Touchdown at IAD was quite rough.

Back home, my house was right where I'd left it, and neighbor Mary had kept my indoor plants alive. My grass was freshly cut that morning. I spent a couple of hours unwinding from the 2-week trip, unpacking my luggage, and making some lists for the week. At 6 pm, it was lights out (despite the bright sun outside). And while I woke a few times during the night, I managed to get more than nine hours of sleep. It was good to be home and in my own bed!

1.5 Conclusion

I've had more than a few trips to Prague, and have enjoyed each one. I always take in a couple of concerts, and I have a favorite hotel and restaurant. Salzburg is always a great place to visit, although less so in winter. Munich has plenty to offer as well.

2. January 2019, “My Time in Maine”

Over a 15-year period (1983–1998), I serviced a business client in central Maine. Several times, I took my family along for a vacation. [Interestingly, when I went into business as an independent computer consultant in mid-1984, despite all the Federal, State, and local government, and defense-related work going on in the Washington DC area where I lived, for the first 20 years of my business, my projects were based in other states! C'est la vie!]

2.1 Where and What is Maine?

Maine is the northeastern-most US state. At its western border is the US state of New Hampshire; to its north and east are the Canadian provinces of Quebec (French-speaking) and New Brunswick (bilingual), respectively. To the southeast is the Atlantic Ocean. With all its inlets and islands, Maine has more than 3,000 miles of tidal coastline, quite a bit of which is rugged.

There are numerous peaks over 4,000 feet (1,230 meters), and one local saying goes something like, “You can see so far from the top that it takes two of you to look!” [Mainers love their very dry humor.] Two well-known sets of peaks are in Acadia National Park and Baxter State Park.

Commercial fishing is big along the coast with Maine lobster being an important industry. Inland, there is plenty of agriculture, especially potatoes. And there are huge forests, many of which are harvested and replanted. There is a lot of surface water, which leads to a huge insect population in the summer. (Can you say *mosquitos*!) There is an abundance of wildlife: bear, moose, deer, and water fowl, with plenty of fishing and boating opportunities. Many locals have non-winterized “camps,” which really are small, second houses used except in winter.

After going 2,200 miles (3,500 km) from Springer Mountain in Georgia, the Appalachian Trail ends at the top of Mt. Katahdin at Baxter Peak in Baxter State Park. [You can argue that the trail also runs in the reverse direction, but through-hikers start in the south where the weather is warmer, and get to the northern terminus after the snow has melted but before the biting insects get too hungry.] A number of times while in the area, I picked up hitchhikers who'd just completed the whole trail in one shot. They typically took three months and wore out several pairs of boots!

Now if you spend any length of time in the state, you'll learn about the term “Down East.” Its meaning differs. As best I could tell, it was a derogatory term in the northern (rural) parts when referring to that very-populated southern tip. But for those living down east, they thought something else. It seemed to me that to the northerners, pretty much anywhere in the world was “down east!”

2.2 Great Northern Paper Company

Great Northern Paper Company (GNP) produced softwood pulp from which it made paper of various grades, especially that used for newspapers and catalogs. It had facilities in several US states, but my work only involved the Maine paper mills in Millinocket and East Millinocket. (Both towns were created around those mills when they were constructed more than 100 years ago.) When I started work there, GNP was a subsidiary of Great Northern Nekoosa, which had a number of subsidiaries, including one that harvested and sold lumber cut from various hardwoods. At the time, GNP owned or

controlled some two million acres of forest in Maine. Much of the border with Canada was GNP forest, and there were a number of border crossings on company land, run by company employees.

The Maine mills were built right next to a branch of the [Penobscot River](#). The reason for this was the company operated six hydroelectric dams. It also operated two steam plants, one at each mill, which generated power by burning wood chips. While the hydro dams were unmanned, the steam plants were manned, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They and the mills typically only closed once a year, around Christmas, for maintenance. (It took a lot of effort and time to get two large paper mills operational from a cold start!)

Both mills had a grinder room in which 4-foot-long, debarked logs floated down a sluice and into one of a number of hoppers where they were physically ground into pulp by rotating stones. An alternate approach to extracting fiber from wood was to use a chemical [digester](#). And as the natural chemicals that came out of the wood during this process were flammable, they were used as fuel for the steam plants. It truly was amazing to watch logs going in at one end of the mill, and not far away, very wide sheets of strong paper coming off at the other onto huge rolls, all in a very short time.

My involvement was with the power-generation operation. As such, while GNP was a paper company, I always thought GNP stood for “Great Northern Power” company!

2.3 Getting There and Back

The way I got to central Maine was to fly from Washington DC to Boston, Massachusetts (BOS), where I changed planes, and then flew on to Bangor, Maine (BGR). For most of my time on the project, I was living in Reston, Virginia, and I flew from Washington's National Airport (DCA). However, for the time I lived in Rockville, Maryland, I used Baltimore-Washington International (BWI).

For the first year or so, I flew out early on a Monday morning, and flew back on the following Friday afternoon, for three weeks each month. So, I was away from home a lot! I also racked up a lot of Frequent-Flyer miles, which I used to take the family on vacations (including Alaska and Bermuda). So, on each trip, I had the drive to the airport, a wait, a flight, a wait, another flight, and then a 75-minute drive to Millinocket. Then I'd do the reverse coming home. It took about six hours one-way.

GNP had a fleet of cars, and as more than a few employees, contractors, and clients flew in/out of BGR, most times I arrived there, I took a company car from a reserved spot in the parking lot, and drove it “home” to Millinocket. If no company car was there, I rented a car.

Throughout my time on that project, I did this roundtrip 75–100 times. In fact, during the first year, I spent much more time in Maine than in the state in which I supposedly lived!

Over time, the need for me to be on-site diminished, and I went once every two or three months, often staying for 7–10 days at a time.

GNP had several of its own propeller-powered aircraft and several pilots. The larger one had a cockpit for two pilots, and could carry at least three passengers. Sometimes, it flew directly to/from BOS, but the highest priority passengers were company executives and senior staff, and representatives from potential or current customers. Only once did I manage to hitch a ride. There was only one pilot, and

he invited me to sit in the co-pilot's seat from where the view was great. As we didn't fly particularly high, I got a good look at the countryside below, and the highlight was landing among the "big boys" at BOS, a major international airport.

Despite the harsh winters one can experience in Maine, I recall only one really bad day for making the drive from Bangor to Millinocket. The fog was so thick, visibility was down to about 100 feet, which made driving on a major interstate highway a challenge.

2.4 The Work

So, why was I in the woods of Maine? GNP wanted to be able to accurately monitor—and where possible, control—its hydro- and steam-power systems from a central location. To that end, more than a year before I came on the scene, it contracted with a group to develop a custom-computer application, which was called EOS (Energy Optimization System).

As I mentioned earlier, the six hydro dams were unmanned. At each of those, every three seconds, a large set of analog and digital measurements (such as water flow, volts, and vars) was made at each dam, and these were relayed to the power dispatcher's office in Millinocket, where those numbers—or numbers computed from them—were displayed on a set of seven, large, colored screens. Summary information was recorded permanently on disk every minute and every hour, and reports were printed on a regular basis, or on demand. Even the remote fire and intrusion alarms were tied to the system. A dispatcher was on duty 24x7. (When I started, they worked three 8-hour shifts a day. However, some years later, they moved to two 12-hour shifts.) The dispatcher could also control the remote facility, for example, to start and stop a turbine, or to increase or decrease the flow through one or more turbines.

Now each water turbine had a series of unique physical characters that determined how much power was produced for a given flow (measured in cubic feet per second [cfs]). As a result, one could draw a graph that showed this. Basically, the steeper the curve on the graph, the more power one got from a given amount of water. The on-site computer calculated this every three seconds, and unless told otherwise by the dispatcher, it made adjustments itself. For example, to pass 3,000 cfs through one station, would it be more efficient to do that at a lower flow through three turbines or using a higher flow through only two? [This calculation involved differential calculus of a polynomial function, which I had first studied in Year 12 high school in 1969. It is the only time in my life that I have used that subject for real work, so never say "Never" regarding all the things you learn in theory, but never think that you'll use!]

The two steam plants were manned. Once again, every three seconds, a large set of measurements was made and relayed to the central computer. However, the dispatcher had no control over those plants. Instead, he communicated with their operators to have changes made as his needs dictated or as operations in the steam plants allowed.

To make the engineering challenging, when the hydro and steam systems were initially installed, most (if not all) of the power consumed in the mills was 40Hz. However, later, it changed to 60Hz. As a result, the power network had two separate parts, which were connected. Over time, many 40Hz motors were converted to 60Hz, so some of the hydro and/or steam units had to be changed. An interesting twist on all this is that the whole internal power system was linked to the public utility,

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Bangor Hydro, via a *tie-line*. If GNP was generating more power than it needed in-house, and it didn't want to cut back on generation, it sold it to the utility. [For example, this might happen in spring when there is excess snowmelt, and the water had to be passed through a dam. Better to use it to make power to sell than to waste the water over the spillway!] And when GNP needed more than it could produce, it bought it, all in real-time. Yes, you could see the tie-line gauge switch from buy-to-sell or from sell-to-buy in front of your eyes! Importantly, many of the utility's big customers only needed power from 8 am to 6 pm, at which time, GNP sold its excess power at a premium, and then bought back power at a discount during the night when the utility was generating power its customers didn't need. After all, the utility couldn't switch off its facilities every night!

While there were many hundreds (if not thousands) of electric motors to be powered in the mills and support facilities, one of the biggest power users were the grinding wheels used to make pulp. As grinder lines were started up and shut down, the system load would change significantly, and these actions were coordinated with the dispatcher in advance, so he could prepare to generate more or less power, as appropriate.

When I arrived on-scene late in 1983, the system was operational and doing quite well. However, GNP had parted company with the original contractors, there were numerous rough edges to be fixed, and new features to be added. Within a few days of arriving, I made a significant contribution. On a system in which everything changes every three seconds, one cannot stop and open the hood when something goes wrong, and one can't recreate a problem to trace its origins. By the time one knows about it, it's ancient history! What I did, was to write a small program that, on demand, took a snapshot of all the transient data from a hydro or steam facility at some instant, and saved it for analysis off-line. As this program ran at a higher priority than anything else on the remote computer, we knew that all the data was related to the same instant, not some from the previous 3-seconds and some from the next.

There were nine identical minicomputers: one each at the six hydro plants, one each at the two steam plants, and a so-called Hot Spare (although it really didn't replace anything) in the central computer room in Millinocket. I could make that computer simulate any of the hydro facilities, the idea being that I could test out new code before downloading it to the real site. However, one time, I didn't go that route, and did some live testing on a hydro station, causing one of the turbines to be shut down, and we were unable to restart it remotely. Of course, this had to happen during the night when no electricians were working. So, the electrician-on-call had to be called in, paid time-and-a-half for a minimum of four hours, and for safety, he had to have a buddy go with him. So, my little stunt cost the company eight hours of time at penalty rates! [After that, I only did such testing during daytime hours when electricians were on duty.] Oh, and this all happened at the most remote site, some 20+ miles out in the wilds!

For all but one remote site, the data sent every three seconds was transmitted on a dedicated phone line from that site. However, the most remote site had no phone line. Instead, the data was magically encoded in the high-voltage power line running from that site, and then decoded back at the central facility. If a communications link went down, the isolated remote system kept running using the most-recent commands it had been given.

For all you (older) computer nerds, here's the computing environment: The central facility was a Digital Equipment Corp. (DEC) [PDP-11/45](#) with 1MB of memory, a printer/console, some hard disks, a line printer, a 9-track magnetic tape drive, numerous video terminals, and a bank of color displays in the dispatcher's office. There was also a paper tape reader and punch. The operating system was RSX-11M-Plus, and all the application code was written in Fortran with a bit of MACRO-11 assembler. The remote computers were PDP-11/23s running the memory-resident operating systems RSX-11S. The only peripherals they had were analog and digital I/O devices and a communication link; they had no disk drives or terminals, not even a console. The systems were connected using DECnet communications software. A remote system image was created on the central host, with an operating system and the applications suite combined. This was downloaded, and booted remotely.

2.5 Air Quality and Managing the River

Most of the stuff that the mills put into the air was water vapor from the steam plants. But, of course, other particulate matter made it out as well. In general, air quality was regulated, and the company also had its own operating rules in that regard. As such, certain steam-plant and mill operations could be reduced, and these affected the power needs.

It should be no surprise that while GNP had the right to generate power from dams along the river, the public and wildlife could not be denied reasonable access to that same river. Let's start with the fish. During spawning, fish lay their eggs at a certain water depth, not so deep that they get too little sunlight/heat, and not too shallow that they overheat. As such, at those times, the power dispatcher had to maintain an even level in the lakes and river behind each dam. After all, recreational fishing was an important activity, as was rafting. Drop the water too much, and the rapids were exposed and impassable. Raise the water too much, and there would be no rapids to challenge the canoeists and kayakers.

So, as is often the case, numerous things were interconnected, with one affecting one or more of the other. In order to be legal and to not upset the tourist and recreation industry, a balance had to be maintained.

As you may have seen in old photos of logging operations, logs used to be floated down rivers, and this approach was used by GNP to deliver wood to the two mills. However, due to environmental concerns, that stopped in 1971, after which all wood came in on trucks.

2.6 Outdoor Adventures

Although I worked long hours while onsite, I also took time out to enjoy some local activities. Probably the most memorable was a hike and climb with power dispatcher Wally. We climbed up [Mount Katahdin](#) via the [knife-edge](#), and that's as adventurous as I ever want to get climbing. As mentioned earlier, the Appalachian Trail ends at the summit, and to our surprise, when we got to the top, it was so crowded, we had to walk a bit to find a quiet patch for our picnic lunch. As well as the usual day-trippers, some people had climbed up to welcome friends who were arriving on the trail. One welcoming person even played bagpipes (despite the fact there is an ordinance prohibiting the playing of loud music in the park). The mountain is 13 feet short of a mile high, so over the years, at the

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summit climbers have built a cairn 13 feet high. As you might imagine, going down afterwards was harder and no less dangerous than going up.

Once when my family visited with me, we hiked and climbed up South Turner Mountain. I carried my small son on my back in a frame. As I was near to having a heart attack a thousand or so feet up, he informed me that he really liked hiking! Once I got my breath back, I explained to him that I was hiking; he was riding!

Maine typically gets a lot of snow each winter, and from GNP's perspective, "snow lying frozen on the ground is money in the bank." After all, when that snow melts, it will eventually become water in the river and then power at the hydro stations. So, how to tell how much money one has in one's snow bank? One makes a snow survey, and I had the great pleasure of being asked to go along on one.

The chief power dispatcher, Gene, and I drove to the town airport where a 4-seat propeller plane was waiting. The pilot welcomed us, and Gene sat in the co-pilot's seat. (Gene also had a private pilot's license.) We took off in the usual way, on wheels, but the undercarriage had a set of large, metal skis that could be lowered and raised to allow the plane to land on snow. So off we went, landing on frozen lakes and measuring the depth of snow in various places. Now, the surface of frozen lakes in Maine isn't necessarily smooth. In fact, far from it, as winds can be howling when the water freezes, causing frozen waves. So, landing on what looks like smooth snow can result in finding very rough ice underneath! And unlike landing on wheels, skis have no brakes. The only way to slow down is to turn the rudder, and have the plane turn a bit sideways to slow things down.

While in flight, Gene noticed out the window that a critical metal pin holding one ski in place was vibrating loose, and would eventually cause us a serious problem. So, we put down on a lake and studied the situation. Despite the fact that the pilot was an aircraft mechanic, he had brought no tools, and the plane had almost none either. We lowered the wheels, so we could work on the ski assembly. Then we fashioned a tie (using Band-aids and stuff from the first-aid kit, if I recall correctly), that would hopefully be enough to hold the pin for the rest of the trip. The final problem was, how to get the plane back up onto the skis? Ordinarily, one did that while in the air, using gravity! Well, after much manual huffing-and-puffing, with two of us lifting under the wings, and the pilot hand-pumping the hydraulics, we managed it.

Now you might think that was enough of an adventure for one flight, but no, there was more. The question was raised as to whether we had sufficient fuel to get back home. Apparently, the pilot thought this plane was a different model than it really was, and had overestimated the size of the fuel tank. So, in fact, we did *not* have enough! Can you say, "Flying by the seat of one's pants?" So, the two of them discussed the possibilities of where one might be able to get some aviation gas out here in the remote woods. "That should be easy," thought I, facetiously. Then Gene said, "There's a summer fishing camp on one of the lakes nearby, and that has a fuel tank to resupply the floatplanes that bring in fishermen. During the winter, a caretaker lives there to keep an eye on the place. Let's try that." So, we buzzed the camp, the caretaker came outside, we landed, and he said, "Sure, help yourself!" Of course, being young and enthusiastic, I got the job of filling the wing tank using a handpump out in the cold! All's well that ends well, right? It was quite an adventure, and I can remember it quite clearly 25+ years later.

One very nice, calm, sunny, winter's day, Wally and I went snow shoeing. It was quite an interesting adventure. It was very quiet with only the sound of a few, small birds flitting about in the trees, the sound of our snow shoes on the snow, and my heavy breathing. In general, an inexperienced snow-shoer will walk in circles when they think they are going in a straight line. On a separate occasion, I tried cross-country skiing. Now while that very likely is great exercise, I never quite got the proper rhythm of it, and my hips were very sore for days afterwards.

On numerous occasions, I hiked with one or more locals along trails through the woods, in the open, and around the lakes. Once, not too far away, I saw a huge "thing" in a lake. After some minutes, it lifted its head from under the water. It was a bull moose. It had been feeding off the bottom, and it had all kinds of plant material hanging in its big antlers.

I was invited to go snowmobiling, and was given my own sled. While it seemed like a fine idea at the start, as soon as we headed out, the others were racing at 50–60 mph (80–96 kph). When one is very close to the ground, which has rocks, ice, and debris under a possibly thin coating of snow, and one is racing between tree trunks at highspeed, after the adrenaline rush, one might start to think, "This could be *very dangerous!*" One local told me with great authority that a person on a snowmobile could go across open water for at least 50 feet! (While this might seem a strange thing to do, imagine someone snowmobiling in limited light, through falling snow, or in thick fog, and coming across ice-covered water where the ice turns out to be not strong enough to support much weight. Add in alcohol consumption, and you get the idea.)

Once I hired a floatplane and pilot, and took my family around the area and up over Mount Katahdin. Taking off and landing on water is a whole new experience (which I had first experienced on the Amazon River in Peru). And, like a plane on snow skis, a floatplane had no brakes.

2.7 The Town of Millinocket

The town had a population much like that of my home town in South Australia. However, while mine is at the heart of a large, irrigated citrus, grape, stone-fruit, and dry-land farming area, Millinocket is a small town whose main purpose was to serve the paper mill and supporting businesses and services. [The mill has since closed.]

When I was first offered the work at GNP, I pulled out a detailed map and located the place. I'd never been to Maine before. Given the French influence in the general neighborhood in past times, I thought the ending of the town name might be French, and pronounced as in *beret*; that is, with the t silent, and the e as an a. But no, it was Anglicized with et as in *let*. So, it was no surprise that when I saw a coastal Maine town called Calais, I found it was pronounced like callous, not like the French coastal town Calais. Yes, really!

When the mill was constructed 100+ years ago, many stonemasons came from Italy, and they lived in a part of town still known today as *Little Italy*.

During my many trips, I stayed at the same hotel, and ate often at my favorite family diner. I also was invited to meals on a regular basis to the homes of colleagues who became friends. My friend and colleague Wally eventually became Chairman of the town council.

2.8 Some Miscellaneous Bits

After I stopped work at GNP, the power-generation group was sold to another company, which moved the dispatching center several miles away across town. Eventually, that center was moved to Boston, Massachusetts, a long way away, yet it still controlled and monitored the hydro and steam plants remotely. By then, the entire computer hardware and software systems had been completely replaced, sadly, leaving no trace of the previous effort in which I was involved.

One time I took my father-in-law, John, to Maine with me. A \$20-million conversion effort of some turbines was nearing completion, and the winning bidder was told that they could hire anyone called Rex Jaeschke living at my address, to do the work to connect the equipment to the EOS. I had carefully planned and made all the software changes necessary in advance, and went back for a week of engineering testing. However, the prime contractor had problems and we didn't start testing for several days. Meanwhile, John and I played tourist. When the new turbine finally came online, there were more issues, and the contractor staff pointed their finger at me; after all, how could an international engineering megacorporation be wrong? It must be this incompetent foreign guy they were forced to use! In their eyes I was guilty until I proved myself innocent, which to their embarrassment, I eventually did.

Some years before I first arrived in Millinocket, a couple of kids scaled the security fence around the base of a pylon that carried high-voltage power lines. They had been drinking beer, which probably made them braver. One of them climbed up the pole and sat on a ledge with his legs dangling either side of some live wires. Eventually, he touched one and got electrocuted. In fact, he was blown out of the tower and suffered major burns to large parts of his body. The interesting thing is that his shoes were still sitting up on the ledge with the laces tied!

The Bangor International Airport (BGR) was a former US Air Force base, and it has a very long runway, of 11,440 feet (3,487 meters). Today, it shares that with the Maine Air National Guard. That guard unit has refueling tankers, and the group's nickname is "Maineiacs". Given the length (and width) of the runway, it was an emergency landing site for the Space Shuttle. The airport was heavily used for charter flights taking military personnel to/from peace-keeping missions in Yugoslavia and wars in the Middle East. As I was waiting for my flight home one time, standing right near me was a rather short man who looked very familiar. It was Casper Weinberger, President Reagan's Secretary of Defense. He maintained a house in Maine.

Finally, I once thought that "The rain in Maine stays mainly in the plain.", but apparently that's not the case.

3. February 2019, "Signs of Life: Part 15"

From time to time during my travels, I come across signs that I find interesting for one reason or another. Sometimes, they contain clever writing, are humorous, or remind me of some place or event. Here are some, mostly from [Lillehammer](#) and [Oslo](#), Norway.

Napboxes

From Brussels Air's Business Lounge in Brussels, Belgium. I've seen a lot of different "rest rooms" in airline lounges, but this one had a clever name.

BE USED AS:

- a little bin so you can help keep this airplane clean
- a piece of paper to doodle on or to practice your origami skills
- wrapping paper should you have forgotten to wrap the presents for your loved ones
- a sick bag when you're not feeling 100%

101 Uses for an Air-Sick Bag!

From the seat pocket on a Brussels Air plane. The missing text from the top read, "This paper bag can ..."

I can hear you say, "I'm glad you brought that up, Rex!"

Kjære gjest
Vennligst lukk vinduet når du forlater
rommet. Dette for å unngå besøk av
fugler på rommet.

Takk for hjelpen.

Dear guest,
Please close the window when you
leave your room. This is to prevent
birds flying into the room.

Thank you.

On the back of the door in my hotel
room in Lillehammer.

I guess this happens when the window
has no screen cover.

BTW, the Norwegian text shows all
three of the letters that language has
over and above the 26 English ones:
Æ/æ, Ø/ø, and Å/å, shown here in
uppercase/lowercase. When looking in
a dictionary, they come after a–z, in
the order shown above.



This
literally is
“a shop for
adult girls”.



OK, *vaskeri* is Norwegian for *laundry*, but what is the significance of the ladybug? Actually, *Marihøna* is the name of the business, and that is Norwegian for *ladybug*.

Those Norwegians seem to have words for everything!



“Seat pads for Sale! Only NOK279 (US\$36) each! Get them while they last!

Oh, and did I mention that the skins were “donated” by local reindeer?



I love gyros—especially with copious quantities of tzatziki sauce—which originated in Greece. What caught my eye was the clever use of the uppercase Greek letter delta (Δ) as the letter A.



An up-scale women's clothing store.



Now in the good old days in the British Commonwealth, *pharmacies* were called *chemist shops*. If you have traveled around England or been exposed to English culture, you'll know about the chain of *Boots the Chemist* shops (now known simply as *Boots*) with its distinctive logo. Well, the company is alive and well, and present in Norway, where *apotek* means *drugstore*, from the word apothecary, from the Greek.

And, yes, that is snow and ice on the ground!



So, you're hungry, and you're at the Lillehammer railway station. But what to buy? Apparently the soup of the day (*dagens suppe*) is sold out, but the stir-fried chicken (*kyllingwok*) sounds good. And, for the little ones, the kid's burger (*barneburger*), pasta, and pancakes are still available.

Did I mention that the Norwegians have words for (almost) everything!



There I was in Oslo visiting the grave of my dear backgammon-playing friend, Gunnar, when I came across this map of the cemetery. While I understood all the signs at the bottom, I was quite surprised to learn that people might think that riding a horse around a cemetery was OK.



I came across this sign while walking around the fjord in Oslo. What caught my eye was the presence of pigtails/braids/plaits, suggesting a girl. Perhaps Norwegian boys don't need/want to be seen in public holding their father's hand!



OK, at a first glance, you read, "THE SPA." But if you look again, you'll notice the extra space between the H and the E. And if you look even closer, you see who stole the two letters!

Click [here](#) to learn more.



OK, it seems reasonable to prohibit the kicking of soccer balls in certain places, but this sign was on the glass wall inside a very large revolving door! My guess is that it really applied to the large indoor shopping area beyond.



If you've ever wondered what those dog kennels do with all that doggie drool they collect, now you know. They bottle and sell it!

According to the label, "It's SODAsgusting".

This from a shop window in Seattle, Washington, USA.



Of course, after a while, one can tire of dog drool. So, why not have some toxic slime instead?

Now Avery's Soda has other enticing flavors in their "Totally Gross Soda" line. For example: *Fungal Fruit*, *Bug Barf*, *Kitty Piddle*, *Monster Mucus*, *Zombie Brain-Juice*, and *Swamp Juice*. Isn't that, like, totally awesome?

4. March 2019, “Travel: Memories of Abu Dhabi, UAE”

It was November, and I hadn't flown in 10 whole days! Having nothing better to do, I thought I'd hop on over to the Middle East where the temperature was a bit warmer. Now this wasn't an impulsive decision; in fact, it had been planned for more than 12 months. As chair of an international committee, each November, I'm required to attend the annual plenary of the parent committee, and this year our host was Abu Dhabi, one of the two best-known of the seven United Arab Emirates (simply UAE or, to the locals, دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة), the other being neighboring Dubai. After 35 years and 1.8 million air miles of international travel, it would be a new country for me as well as a new airline. The weather forecast for my visit was at least high 70's F during the day and mid-50's during the night, something I was sure I could live with now that back home was headed towards some serious cold.

Before I get into the details of my trip, here's some basic information about the UAE. Abu Dhabi is the capital. The time is GMT+4 (nine hours ahead of my home), and the currency is the UAE dirham (AED), one of which is made up of 100 fils. (Interestingly, before independence, they used the Indian rupee.) Although it's a former British territory, they drive on the right (while tailgating at high-speed, I found). The vast majority of the population is made up of guest workers, mostly from a variety of Asian countries.

4.1 Getting There

[Diary] Ordinarily when I have an “International Travel Day”, most of the day is given over to that; however, this flight didn't depart until 10 pm, so I had the whole day to fill. Knowing the trip would be grueling, I took it easy working on household chores and business administration before settling down to work on an essay for a future blog. It's always a challenge to finish off all the perishable food before leaving for an extended stay. As I've written before, on the last day before departure, not everything in the fridge looks good in an omelet!

I left home around 2 pm in cool sunshine, and drove to my old area, Reston, where I had a number of meetings around various volunteer and business activities. One task was to make sure the new bank cash-machine card I'd received in the mail that day worked properly, as I'd need it the next day. At 7:30 pm, my trusty Nepalese taxi driver arrived to take me to Washington Dulles Airport (IAD). It was cool, but pleasant out, and we chatted along the way.

Most domestic and international flights had departed, so the airport was quiet. Although there was a line at the Etihad Airlines desk, that moved steadily and soon I was checked in by a very friendly young woman. Next to me, the crew was also checking in. The cockpit crew of four were all white males, while the cabin crew were all females, but from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. (The one who eventually sat in the jump seat opposite me in flight was from Mumbai, India.) The women were very neatly dressed in uniforms, and most wore a white scarf around their necks, one end of which was tucked up under their mini-pillbox hats. It was my first time flying that airline, which is based in Abu Dhabi. [Dubai is home to Emirates Airlines, and the two compete quite actively.] The line at security was non-existent.

My flight was departing from Terminal A, a place I'd rarely visited except to take short-haul commuter flights. As that terminal was reachable by an underground walkway, and I had plenty of time, I decided

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to walk rather than take the train. Besides, I'd be sitting on a plane for 13 hours, so some exercise in advance would be a good idea. It turns out that the terminal also handles some long-haul carriers, and when I arrived and looked at the flights departing during the next two hours, I saw the following destinations listed: Abu Dhabi; Doha, Qatar; Dubai; Istanbul, Turkey; Kuwait; London, England; Munich, Germany; Sao Paulo, Brazil; and Toronto, Canada.

Flight EY130 boarded on time and I took up residence in Seat 24A. The bad news was I was flying Economy Class. (Ordinarily, Business Class costs about four times that, but for this trip, the cost was about seven times, which is why I declined to upgrade.) The good news was I'd paid \$120 extra each way for an exit seat with loads of legroom and the ability to get in/out of my seat without disturbing my neighbor. I'd also brought my own pillow.

The Airbus A340-500 took off to the north and we headed up to the Atlantic provinces of Canada. We were at least 30 minutes late departing. As you might expect, all announcements were in Arabic and English, as was the text in the in-flight magazine and the audio/video system. Arabic is written right-to-left, top-to-bottom, and the characters on each line seem to run together. (If I understand correctly, there are characters for consonants only, with vowels expressed via some special marks. Also, they write numbers left-to-right, in the middle of right-to-left text!) In the hour leading up to takeoff, I'd been yawning with increased frequency, a good sign, so as soon as possible, I lay back my seat, wrapped two blankets around my feet and long legs, and tried to sleep. Having had a substantial snack at 5:30 pm, I had no problem missing the inflight dinner service.

As I'm sure everyone who's flown Economy Class knows, the seats simply do not tilt back far enough for a comfortable sleep, and this trip was no exception. I slept fitfully for the next six hours. On waking, I had a sandwich and drink, and read some magazines. So, how does one get from Washington DC to Abu Dhabi? I fired up my personal video system and played around with the options to look at the route map. Here's the path of our flight: From Newfoundland, Canada, we crossed the Atlantic to Spain. Then we followed the Mediterranean Sea to a point just south of the island of Sicily. South of the Greek island of Crete, we veered right into Egyptian airspace, passing south of Cairo, and out over the Red Sea south of the Sinai Peninsula. From there, it was a straight run due east across Saudi Arabia to the Emirates.

Afterwards, I took several more not-so-restful naps. I surfed the movie and audio selection, none of which inspired me, not even the readings from the Koran in Arabic! I couldn't even get interested in a novel I'd brought. Finally, I started work on this diary.

Now on long flights, it is common to be served several meals. What was unusual on this flight is that both meals were called "dinner." The first was served at 11:15 pm, DC time, less than an hour after departure. The second came at 6 pm, Emirates time, an hour before landing. Anyway, I had a nice meal of chicken with vegetables and mashed potato, served with real cutlery, and a cup of mango juice. On long-haul flights, the crew encourages travelers to keep the window shades closed, so people can sleep, and although I like to look out the window, there isn't much to see from 40,000 feet up when you are over water or desert. I finally looked out as the sun set behind us over the Arabian Desert when we were not too far south of the Iraqi border. There was a haze below and all I could see was desert with occasional rocky outcrops. In one area, the desert contained many circles and semicircles of irrigation booms.

After a 13-hour flight with no serious turbulence, we had a smooth touch down at 8:30 pm with the local temperature at 75 degrees F. Apparently, someone had lost the front-door key, and we all stood waiting for at least 10 minutes before we could deplane. It was pleasant out, and the long walk to passport control got my blood circulating again. Along the way, I saw a few men in traditional white robes and headgear. All passport agents were dressed in that manner. There was no paperwork and no questions other than, "Is this your first visit to Abu Dhabi?" And then, "Welcome!" My luggage took a while to appear and as I waited, I chatted with a young Aussie woman who was on her way back home from a visit to Nairobi, Kenya. After some detective work, I found a cash machine and coaxed from it 800 dirhams, successfully using my new cash card. I have a checking and a savings account, but almost no cash machines I've used around the world give me a choice; they simply take the money from my checking account. However, this time, the machine took it from my savings account without asking. Bloody computers! Next up was a stop at the tourist desk where a friendly young man gave me a map, some brochures, and other useful information.

4.2 My Arrival, Hotel, and Surrounds

I went outside to the long line of black minivan taxis, and was soon on my way to the hotel. My driver was from [Sri Lanka](#) (or Ceylon, as we old-timers know it). The ride took about 30 minutes, and I think we spent most of that one car length behind whatever vehicle was in front of us, while traveling at speed. Several times, I had to look away, think of pleasant things, and not dwell on whether or not I'd die on my first day in country.

Everywhere we went, signs were written in Arabic and English. The fare was about US\$30, which included a small tip. At the entrance of my hotel, Al Maha Arjaan, two bellmen met me, one to escort me inside to the front desk, the other to take my luggage and computer bag. As I was the only customer at that time, both of the front-desk staff gave me their undivided attention. I broke my 500-dirham bill into something usable, and got some smaller bills to use as tips after asking the staff as to what the tipping practice was. When I enquired as to the size of my bed, they asked, "What size bed would you like?" Of course, it was obvious I was tall, so they upgraded me to a king-size bed, and as we were getting along so well, they threw in free wifi and breakfast.

By the time I got up to my room on the 15th floor, it was 10:30 pm. The bellman gave me a thorough orientation for which I tipped him the princely sum of 5 dirhams (about \$1.50). One whole wall was glass, and outside I could see signs of civilization: A Southern Fried Chicken restaurant, a KFC, and a McDonalds! My room was quite large with a work desk, a lounge area, a wet area with sink and mini-kitchen, complete with refrigerator and tea/coffee-making facilities. The large bathroom had a walk-in shower stall that I figured could comfortably accommodate six people at a time. (Time would tell if that number was accurate.)

Back at the front desk, I got directions to a local supermarket and I headed out. Pedestrian and vehicle traffic was heavy, and everyone waited respectfully for the green light before crossing, primarily I think because of the crazy drivers. I found all my basics. By chance, I went down an aisle that had soap, and there right in front of me were packs of [Pear's transparent soap](#), something I'd used for years, but have been unable to get back home for a long time. I rescued several of them. Back in my room, I settled down to several glasses of nice, cold, whole milk, some slices of cheese, and some potato chips. That took care of three of my four food groups!

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I took my time unpacking and setting up my computer gear before connecting to the world to see if anyone was missing me yet. Afterwards, I had a long, hot shower (with five imaginary friends). Then I turned off the air conditioning and climbed into my wonderful, flat bed. Lights out at 12:20 am. The saying goes, "It's the journey, not the destination." However, in this case, the opposite was definitely true!

[Diary] *I woke at 4 am, and after trying to get back to sleep, I decided that wasn't going to happen, so I put on the monogrammed bathrobe provided by the hotel and sat at my desk working on this diary. When I pulled back the blinds, the city was still quite alive, although only a few eating-places remained open. Around 5:15, I heard a public-address system sound the first call for prayers, which brought back memories from my first experience in a Moslem area (in Malaysia in 1979). Speaking of prayers, inscribed on the top of one of the bedside tables in my room was a green circle with a green arrow inside that pointed in the direction of Holy Mecca. This allows one to face the proper direction while praying.*

At 6:15, dawn was just beginning to break. Having brought this diary up to date, I dressed and went down for breakfast. Hmm, a bowl of cornflakes or a camel steak, medium rare? Decisions, decisions!

The restaurant was understated, but pleasant and with friendly staff. I started with a senior's breakfast of cereal with fresh fruit. I went through some tourist brochures to see how I might spend my free time. I snacked on some nice bread, jam, and cheese while sipping juice. Afterwards, I sat in the lounge area and read a regional newspaper. Interestingly, it contained a full-page ad for a sale of Christmas decorations from a Japanese company. Now I don't seem to recall Japan or the Middle East being particularly Christian, but I guess that when it comes to marketing and selling, anything is fair game. On the way back to my room, I took a detour to the 21st floor to inspect the exercise facilities, steam room, massage rooms, and the open-air rooftop pool.

Back in my room, I closed the heavy curtains and lay on the bed in search of the other half of my night's sleep. It took a while, but the good news was that it did come. More than five hours later, I woke feeling reasonably rested. And after a cup of coffee and a snack, I was almost ready for the world. Back home, it was 5 am, so with the magic of internet radio, I tuned into my home radio station and got a news update.

At 3:15 pm, I stepped outside into a very nice, warm, and bright day. I had a 4-o'clock meeting at a hotel nearby, so I set out to locate that. The hotel was the one in which my conference was to be held and when I went to the meeting room to have a look, the stage area at the front was under construction, literally! There, I met the director of national standards for UAE. He was Irish and, along with British Standards, had hosted us in Belfast some years ago when he headed the Irish national standards organization.

My meeting ran for more than two hours after which I had a private meeting with a colleague. I walked home via a different route. After looking at the menus at a number of restaurants, I settled on a Turkish-style Kebab place where I shared a table with a young Moroccan from Casablanca. He'd been working in the Emirates for a year and managed a Middle-Eastern restaurant. Almost all his employees were Philipinos. We chatted while we ate. I had garlic lamb in local bread with a side salad and drink.

It was cheap and filling, and I enjoyed my conversation. Apparently, there are numerous differences in reading, writing, and speaking Arabic from different countries just as there are in dialects in English.

Back in my room, I prepared for the next day.

4.3 My Conference

[Diary] *I slept about four hours only and was down at the restaurant when it opened just before 6 am. At 7:45, I stepped out into another nice day. As I had extra time, I walked through a park. At the meeting hotel, I registered, received my badge, and chatted with a number of delegates. We meet once each year, usually in November. (Last year, it was Brittany, France, and next year it's Beijing, China.)*

We met from 9 am to 5 pm with morning and afternoon coffee and snack breaks, and lunch for an hour from 1 pm. I renewed my acquaintance with a number of delegates. After lunch, jetlag took hold, and I closed my eyes for much of the afternoon. On the way home, I stopped off at a post office to get some postcard stamps.

As I'd eaten more than enough during the day, I decided to skip the evening meal, and as I lay on the bed reading, I fell asleep. At 7:30, I woke and got into bed where I managed to sleep deeply about three hours. I got some more hours later on. In-between times, I read, snacked, and watched an interesting program on the BBC World channel about Western Australia.

4.4 Some Social Events

[Diary] *Once again, it was quite nice outside at daybreak, and I had a leisurely breakfast. Back in my room, I set my alarm for 90 minutes and lay on the bed. Alas, no further sleep came, but I did rest my eyes. At the conference hotel, I kept one ear on the meeting while working on my laptop; however, I faded as the afternoon wore on. As such, at the end of the day, I went back to my hotel and had a 1-hour nap. That certainly recharged my batteries for the evening event, a very nice buffet dinner outdoors at a large resort hotel. I spent a delightful evening with an Irish delegate and his wife.*

[Diary] *I had my first all-night sleep, but knew from experience that I might relapse the following night. The day had the same format as the previous ones. The highlight came after the meeting ended. Our host provided buses and we drove to the [Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque](#). It was an impressive piece of architecture. Our tour guide was a young woman, dressed in a black abaya, but with her face showing. After the women guests were given abayas or donned head coverings, we walked around the outdoor cloisters before entering the main prayer hall.*

Back in my room, I had a quiet evening reading.

4.5 More Meetings

[Diary] *I slept soundly, but came up several hours short; bummer! After a custom omelet for breakfast, I walked out into a pleasant morning. The meeting was pretty much a repeat of the previous days, with lots of unnecessary eating and drinking. When the official proceedings ended for the day, there was a 2-hour meeting of subcommittee chairs, which I attended. I had trouble staying awake. I took supper in my room after which I went up to the rooftop pool to swim and sit in the hot tub.*

4.6 Playing Tourist

[Diary] After a decent sleep, I had a leisurely breakfast. No work today! Having studied the list of things to see and do around Abu Dhabi, I decided that I'd already covered the things I really cared about, so I called the airline to see about going home early. It took a while to complete the transaction, but they had room on the next day's flight, three days earlier than my ticketed date.

At 10 o'clock, I walked over to the conference hotel where I met colleagues from Germany and Finland. We took a taxi to see the Heritage Village, a recreation of life in a desert oasis town. It was hot out, so we kept in the shade. We watched a few tradesmen at work and looked around at some stalls where I bought some postcards. Most of the visitors were small children, dressed in western uniforms or traditional clothing. They were all quite disciplined. From there, we went to the Marina Mall, a huge shopping complex nearby that contained mostly expensive fashion and accessory places. We chatted over lunch in air-conditioned comfort, with our efficient and friendly waiter, Ismael, taking good care of us. Mid-afternoon, we rode a taxi back to the hotel; our driver was from Ethiopia. He told us the biggest guest-worker minority was Indian, with Philipinos second.

Back in my room, I packed up my gear and used most of my emergency rations before starting a new novel. Lights out at 7:30 pm.

4.7 The Return Journey

[Diary] As usual, I slept in stages, finally getting up at 4 am, two hours before my wake-up call was due. Don't you just hate that when that happens! I snacked, watched TV, and went online to check the weather back home. (Apparently, it was well below freezing the previous night!) Once the breakfast room opened, I went down for some cereal and fruit. Back in my room, I packed my gear and went down to the front desk to check out.

It was 7:45 and peak-hour traffic was in effect, and supposedly, taxis were in short supply, so I rode in one of the hotel's cars. The driver was from India, and with his very thick accent, I had trouble deciphering more than a few of his sentences. Anyway, he was quite talkative and informed me about all sorts of local things. The sun was very bright, and it was going to be another hot day. I arrived at my terminal three hours before departure, which was exactly when my flight opened for check-in. A very perky young woman, born in the UK, but raised in the Emirates, with a distinct British accent, took good care of me. From there I went through my first lot of security. Then it was on through the long line of duty-free shops where I stopped to be shocked by the ridiculously high prices for my favorite chocolate. Perhaps it was time to cut back! I found a currency exchange place and unloaded my surplus dirhams.

Given the number of flights each day from Abu Dhabi to US airports, the US customs and immigration service does pre-clearing, so flights arrive in the US as if they had a domestic origin. That went smoothly, and I went through another security checkpoint. Near my gate, I fired up my laptop and worked on this diary then read until my flight was called.

Flight EY131 boarded for an on-time departure of 11:30 am. (By that time, my feet were freezing from the air conditioning in the taxi and terminal, and I was starting to sniffle.) I was in the same spacious seat I'd had on the way over. Ordinarily, a return flight follows the same general path as the out-bound one; however, that was not the case this time. From AUH, we flew north across the narrow Strait of

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Hormuz and into Iranian airspace. From there it was up over the Iranian capital, Tehran, then up the west side of the Caspian Sea over Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, and over Russia to a point just southwest of Moscow. From there it was onto Estonia, the Baltic Sea, across Sweden and Norway, just south of Iceland, across the southern tip of Greenland, across the northern tip of Labrador, down across Quebec, down the east coast of Lake Ontario, and on into Dulles Airport.

Most people kept the window shades closed the whole trip, and except for the occasional crying baby, it was a smooth ride. Although it was not very comfortable for sleeping, I drifted in and out for 10+ hours. The multi-national cabin crew (headed by an Aussie) took great care of us and were very friendly.

Not long after takeoff, we were served lunch. The following were on offer: lamb meatballs in spicy tomato sauce with roast courgettes (Zucchini) and mashed potatoes; chicken biryani with aromatic rice, friend onions and cashew nuts; and dal tadka and cauliflower bhaji, red lentils tempered with aromatic sauces, served with spinach rice. All were followed by semolina pudding. I chose the lamb, which was wonderful! I skipped the mid-flight snack offerings. Just like we'd had two dinners on the way over, on the way back, we had two lunches. The second came a couple of hours before landing, and there was only one choice, a vegetarian dish called kadal paneer with haryali mutter and turmeric rice. So, what is that you may well ask? Well, there was a lot of yellow rice, some mushy peas sprinkled with mint, and some spicy sauce with some non-descript "thingies" in it. Actually, it was pretty darned tasty.

We touched down on time at 5:45 pm, local time. We pulled into Terminal A and soon I was on the train to the main terminal where the luggage came out after a short wait. The plane would be turned around for a 10-pm departure back to Abu Dhabi. It occurred to me that such a schedule, 15+ hours over and then 13+ hours back after a few hours on the ground required some very reliable equipment. Even with four engines, there isn't a whole lot of room for error when you are out over the wide Atlantic, or anywhere, for that matter, when you are at 35,000 feet!

Although the cold weather was a shock, it was still above freezing. I jumped in a taxi, picked up my car, and started the drive back home on the expressway. I cranked up the car's heater and was wondering why I hadn't stayed in some warmer place a bit longer, say, for the whole darn winter! My house was just where I'd left it, and soon I was inside raising the temperature. As I was home three days early, I called my neighbors to let them know I wasn't a burglar. I unpacked my gear and then watched some recorded episodes of a news program while sipping a mug of hot chocolate. Lights out by 8:30 pm, 25½ hours after I'd gotten up in Abu Dhabi.

This was an unusual trip in that it was a new country, but with minimal free time added. In fact, I went home three days early! I had toyed with the idea of making a day trip to Dubai, but not being interested in shopping or visiting the world's largest indoor downhill skiing facility, it didn't seem worth the 6-hour round-trip by bus. Of more interest to me was the idea of an overnight trip out into the desert, sleeping in traditional tents. Well, that didn't seem at all easy to organize either.

By far the biggest—and very pleasant—surprise was that with all the guest workers, the common language of the masses is English! Yes, even the chamber maids at my hotel, the servers at KFC, and the checkout operator in the supermarket spoke my language. This in contrast to my having to deal with mostly Arabic speakers during my previous foray to the region, to Jordan.

5. April 2019, “Law Enforcement in the US”

I arrived in the US in August 1979. Like many other immigrants, I'd seen a lot of American movies and TV shows showing various law enforcement officers. Everyone seemed to have guns (with a spare in an ankle holster), there was a high body count each episode, and for detective shows, the whole story was completed in 45 minutes. And very rarely was it that the good guys didn't win! Oh, and most importantly, the cops ate doughnuts, lots of them! However, once I settled into life in that great—crime-free NOT—city of Chicago, and followed the local, state, and national news, not surprisingly, I found that things were much more complicated than that.

In this essay, I'll outline some of the layers of law enforcement I've discovered in my nearly 40 years in the US, and I'll talk a bit about court systems.

5.1 My Background with Law Enforcement

I was born in, and for 25 years lived in, the state of [South Australia](#). Australia has two kinds of police: State and Federal. However, as I never went through a federal point of entry until I left in 1979, I never had any contact with Federal police. The [South Australian Police](#) force was (and still is) an agency of the state government, headed by a Commissioner (a non-political, permanent department head) who reports to an elected Cabinet Minister.

To be a policeman in my state, one had to attend the [Fort Largs Police Academy](#) **fulltime for three years**. During that period, cadets were trained in all aspects of policing and some law, and they rode around with officers to get on-the-job training. On graduation, they could be posted to *any* police station in the state (which is about the size of France and Germany combined), and throughout their careers, they could be moved anywhere in that state.

Until about 20 years ago, SA police did *not* carry guns. [If you watch movies or TV shows from the British Commonwealth countries, the only police that typically are armed are [SWAT](#)-like teams. But then again, way fewer citizens can own—indeed, want to own—guns.]

When I got my driving license at 16, the theory and practical tests were administered at a state police station by a policeman. (That process has since been taken over by the state's Motor Vehicle Department.)

My home-town police station had four or five officers headed by a sergeant, a few administrative staff, and some holding cells. Police patrolled in cars or a “dog box,” a pickup truck (AU: ute) with a camper-van-like unit on the back, which was lockable.

During my teen years, I did have a couple of encounters with police, one of which I'll mention here. I was walking home from my girlfriend's house around 1 am, along a major road, and I was in the gutter with my thumb out trying to hitch a ride. Unbeknown to me, a patrol car quietly came up behind me, and two officers “wanted a word with me.” As you might expect, they didn't much care for any lip from a young lad, so they gave me a ticket for “walking on a roadway where there was a footpath provided.” And so began my career in crime! [When it came time for me to apply for US citizenship, I had to document my criminal past; however, on inquiry, I was told that they were only interested in [felonies](#),

not misdemeanors; phew! And just in case you think I'm descended from convicts, I tell people, "No, I'm descended from the Prussian immigrants who were brought out to guard said offenders!"]

5.2 Chicago, Here I come!

This city was where I had my "baptism of fire" in the US, for 12 months in 1979–1980. Despite all the crime that went on during that time, only once did I see serious police activity. One day, I was looking out the window of my high-rise Federal Government building downtown when I saw several patrol cars pull up 10 floors below, officers drew weapons, and they went down into a subway station. I never did find out what was going on.

A couple of things I remember were the three-wheel motorcycles some police rode, and how overweight some of the officers were. A sketch from a local comedy club show had an overweight-and-out-of-shape policeman trying to chase a crook, shooting him, and then yelling, "Freeze!"

During that year, a big scandal broke. Apparently, some officers would park their cruisers, leave them unlocked, and then walk off. By prearrangement, a gang of thieves came along and ripped out all the communications equipment, which they subsequently **sold back to the Police Department** through some front organization! Now is that entrepreneurial, or what!

Not having a car, I rented one for a weekend getaway with a friend. In suburban Chicago, the Police stopped us. We didn't ask them why, but we figured there were two likely reasons: We were driving a rental car that happened to have out-of-state plates (which raised the chances it might be stolen), and we were a black guy and a white guy traveling together, so we were probably up to no-good!

According to Wikipedia, "The Chicago Police Department is ... the second-largest municipal police department in the United States, behind only the New York City Police Department." It also says, "The United States Department of Justice has criticized the Chicago Police Department for its poor training, lack of oversight, and routine use of excessive force."

5.3 A Bit of US History

The move by Europeans to what is now the US started out as a few and then many separate groups of people seeking a better life, often with respect to religious freedom, the ability to own land, and to succeed on one's own merits. They formed small then large communities, and created their own systems of government. Eventually, large governmental areas were created, but the local communities wanted to keep control of law enforcement, education, and such, rather than give that up to a county, state, or federal government. To that end, the US Constitution is quite short, and any rights it doesn't claim for the Federal government, belong to the states, whose own state constitutions often have similar wording, leaving many rights to local government. As a result, there are separate law enforcement agencies at *all* levels of government.

As one might expect, a local law cannot override a state law, which in turn cannot override a federal law, but each level of law enforcement can enforce laws as created by their corresponding governments. So, if a state has numerous counties (as they do) there are the federal laws, the laws of the 50 states and several federal territories, and at least 5,000 sets of county and town laws and their separate enforcers!

5.4 Local Law Enforcement

I live in the rural half of Loudoun County, Virginia, one of the most affluent counties in the US. Many residents in that county are serviced by county law enforcement, but one very large and a few quite small towns have their own police forces. One of the small ones is Purcellville, a town of about 9,000 residents, an hour west of the national capital, Washington DC. It has around 15 officers, and I live just outside the town limits. Although the town has uniformed officers, it doesn't have detectives, and major crimes are handled with support from county and state services. In fact, if town residents dial the emergency number, 911, that is handled by a county law-enforcement dispatcher.

But, of course, not all neighboring law enforcement jurisdictions get along! What happens if a town policeman is pursuing a suspect, who leaves the town limits and goes into a neighboring town, county, or state?

The Purcellville police chief is appointed by, and supervised by, the town council, which is headed by a mayor. [After a major investigation that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and during which the police chief was on paid-suspension for about a year, she was exonerated of all charges and has resumed her job.]

Contrast this with my previous place of residence, the unincorporated town of Reston in neighboring Fairfax County, Virginia. Reston has a population of around 65,000, but it does *not* have its own police force; instead, it uses that from the parent county.

So, when I say "local" law enforcement, I mean, "the lowest unit of local government," be it a 1,000-person town, a 65,000-person city, or a mega-city like Chicago or New York.

Interestingly, the borders of a number of towns around America include a small section (perhaps as little as a half mile/kilometer) of a major road or even an interstate highway. As such, a major source of revenue for such a town's coffers could come from tickets given to motorists speeding by, possibly without their knowing the town even exists!

5.5 Regional Law Enforcement

I lived for 30-odd years in Fairfax County where the "regular" law enforcement agency is the Fairfax County Police Department. However, this does not do all the policing for that county. Specifically, law enforcement within the county's court system is handled by the Fairfax County Sheriff's Office. Here in Loudoun County, the law enforcement agency is the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office, which handles public *and* court policing. All officers are called *deputies*, not *policemen/women*. The sheriffs in both counties are elected, while the Fairfax County Chief-of-Police is not.

Sadly, pretty much all middle schools (grades 6–8) and high schools (grades 9–12) in these counties have a full- or half-time county law-enforcement officer on-site. Some of them have drug-sniffing dogs. Gangs and drugs are big problems in parts of both counties. Some schools even require students and their bags to go through metal detectors/screening devices!

5.6 State Police/Troopers

As best as I can tell, these all seem to wear what are called campaign hats! They definitely look smart in their uniforms.

So, if a state is made up entirely of counties, cities, and incorporated towns, which are policing their territories, what's left for the state police to do? Here's an example: Roads in Virginia designated as "state highways" are patrolled by state police. Route 7 is a major highway that runs through my county and right alongside my town. One state trooper I spoke to spends his whole shift driving back and forth along the western half of that highway, dealing with motorist-related problems such as breaking the law, accidents, and broken-down vehicles.

And just as county police help police in towns in their county, state police can help county and town police. Each such relationship has its own protocol as to when it's okay to call in a "higher" authority.

State police are typically used in protection details for the state's top elected official, the governor, and sometimes other civic leaders and ranking politicians or visiting dignitaries.

Several of the better-known state police groups are the Texas Rangers (think Chuck Norris and the TV show, Walker: Texas Ranger) and the California Highway Patrol (think the TV show ChiPs). [When Arnold Schwarzenegger was Governor of California, I toured the State Capitol in Sacramento. And there right outside the door to the Governor's office suite was a CHP officer, standing guard. I smiled at him before entering, and inside the receptionist gave me one of the Governor's business cards.]

For more details than you could possibly want about state police, click [here](#).

5.7 Federal Police

5.7.1 FBI

According to Wikipedia, "the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is the domestic intelligence and security service of the United States, and its principal federal law enforcement agency." Historically, it has been part of the Department of Justice. It, "has jurisdiction over violations of more than 200 categories of federal crimes."

The FBI gets involved with crimes that cross state borders, which cannot otherwise be handled by state or local authorities. The FBI is also involved in some crimes within a state, such as kidnapping and bank robbery.

The FBI has agents in various US embassies and gets involved in certain US-related crimes. Examples include the bombing of the USS Cole and attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. [Security at US embassies and consulates is provided by the US Marines.]

Almost certainly the best-known FBI leader was J. Edgar Hoover.

5.7.2 Immigration and Borders

According to Wikipedia, "The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is a law enforcement agency of the federal government of the United States tasked to enforce the immigration laws of the

United States and to investigate criminal and terrorist activity of foreign nationals residing in the United States." ICE is part of the (massive) [Department of Homeland Security](#).

"[U.S. Customs and Border Protection](#) (CBP) is the largest federal law enforcement agency of the United States Department of Homeland Security, and is the country's primary border control organization. It is charged with regulating and facilitating international trade, collecting import duties, and enforcing U.S. regulations, including trade, customs, and immigration."

5.7.3 DEA

According to Wikipedia, "The [Drug Enforcement Administration](#) (DEA) is a United States federal law enforcement agency under the United States Department of Justice, tasked with combating drug smuggling and distribution within the United States."

5.7.4 ATF

According to Wikipedia, "The [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives](#) (ATF) is a federal law enforcement organization within the United States Department of Justice. Its responsibilities include the investigation and prevention of federal offenses involving the unlawful use, manufacture, and possession of firearms and explosives; acts of arson and bombings; and illegal trafficking of alcohol and tobacco products."

Unfortunately, ATF might best be known for the disastrous outcome of the [Waco Siege](#) of the Branch Davidian sect in 1993.

5.7.5 Secret Service

Think "Secret Service" and you probably think "protection of the US President." However, that is just one of their jobs, and it wasn't their first. In fact, it wasn't until 1902 (after three Presidents has been assassinated) that the protection aspect was added.

According to Wikipedia, "The United States [Secret Service](#) is a federal law enforcement agency under the United States Department of Homeland Security, charged with conducting criminal investigations and protecting the nation's leaders. Until 2003, the Service was part of the U.S. Department of the Treasury, as the agency was originally founded to combat the then-widespread counterfeiting of U.S. currency."

5.7.6 US Post Office

According to Wikipedia, "The [United States Postal Inspection Service](#) (USPIS) is the law enforcement arm of the United States Postal Service. Its jurisdiction is defined as "crimes that may adversely affect or fraudulently use the U.S. Mail, the postal system or postal employees." The mission of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service is to support and protect the U.S. Postal Service, its employees, infrastructure, and customers by enforcing the laws that defend the nation's mail system from illegal or dangerous use."

5.7.7 IRS

You've probably heard the old adage, "The only things certain in life are death and taxes!" Well, if you don't pay Federal taxes to the [Internal Revenue Service](#) (IRS), they will hunt you down!

5.7.8 US Park Service

According to Wikipedia, "The [United States Park Police](#) (USPP) is one of the oldest uniformed federal law enforcement agencies in the United States. It functions as a full-service law enforcement agency with responsibilities and jurisdiction in those National Park Service areas primarily located in the Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and New York City areas and certain other government lands. The United States Park Police is one of the few full-service police departments in the federal government that possess both state and federal authority. In addition to performing the normal crime prevention, investigation, and apprehension functions of an urban police force, the Park Police are responsible for policing many of the famous monuments in the United States."

So, when a depressed veteran commits suicide at or near the Vietnam Memorial in the heart of Washington DC, that's handled by the Park Police. In some parks, Park Police are mounted on horses and/or armed. Not only might they have to deal with aggressive, large animals (think bears and mountain lions), but they might also encounter armed people tending and defending their marijuana gardens grown on Federal government land!

5.7.9 Capitol Police

The [US Capitol](#) is the area enclosing the Capitol building housing the Senate and House of Representatives, and their nearby office buildings. According to Wikipedia, "The [United States Capitol Police](#) (USCP) is a federal law enforcement agency charged with protecting the United States Congress within the District of Columbia and throughout the United States and its territories. The USCP is the only full-service federal law enforcement agency responsible to the legislative branch of the U.S. government."

A number of states also have separate police departments for their state capitols.

5.8 Military Police

Now if you are in the military and fall foul of the law, some sort of military law-enforcement group will be involved. (Think the TV shows [JAG](#) and [NCIS](#), and the well-known military prison [Leavenworth](#).)

5.9 The National Guard

According to Wikipedia, "The [United States National Guard](#), part of the reserve components of the United States Armed Forces, is a reserve military force, composed of National Guard military members or units of each state and the territories of Guam, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia ..." Basically, each State or Territorial Governor has this militia that can be used in an emergency. The US President can also activate the National Guard of a state. This is typically done after a large hurricane or tornado devastates an area, or there is extensive flooding or fires. Unfortunately, such situations lead to looting and other illegal activities, and the Guard is used in police roles as well as for rescue.

An infamous event involving the Ohio National Guard was the [Kent State shootings](#), in which four unarmed university students were killed by guardsmen.

5.10 University Campus Police

Many universities have their own police forces, and their officers are often armed. During the third and fourth years of his bachelor's degree, my son was a resident advisor, and in exchange for free room and meals, he was responsible for the well-being of some 25 students who lived in his building. At times, he had to report incidents (such as underage drinking and bringing a handgun on campus) to the campus police. While serious offences might lead to charges with the local police, lesser offences are usually dealt with in-house, often by student councils.

5.11 Miscellaneous Topics

Hunting is big in the US, but you'd better carry a license with you along with appropriate permits to hunt certain animals, such as deer, moose, or bear. Such things are typically enforced by a *game warden* who is part of the local government or state Parks and Recreation Department.

From 1919–1933, there was a nationwide ban on the production, importation, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages. This was known as [Prohibition](#), which was enforced by the U.S. Treasury Department's Bureau of Prohibition, whose most famous agent was [Elliot Ness](#).

As you've no doubt seen in movies, a mayor might personally control the local police chief. At the local level there certainly is plenty of opportunity for corruption. And oftentimes, local force officers might get little formal training. Law enforcement can be used as a political tool!

The [Central Intelligence Agency](#) (CIA) is *not* a law enforcement authority, but rather is focused on intelligence collection abroad.

With the myriad of law enforcement groups and the sometimes-loose laws regarding firearm ownership, there is an on-going debate about gun sales at gun shows with respect to background checks.

When the Summer Olympics were held in Los Angeles in 1984, the events spanned a large area and covered the jurisdictions of more than a few local law-enforcement groups. Because those groups had different and incompatible communications equipment, an officer in one area had to radio a dispatcher who patched them through to a dispatcher in another area, who then radioed an agent there, so the two agents could speak!

There are many "private armies" in the US, from banks, to casinos, to shopping malls, to personal security.

Some Native American reservations are recognized as sovereign nations. As such, they may well have their own legal system and Tribal Police to enforce it. "The [Bureau of Indian Affairs Police](#), usually known as the BIA Police, is the law enforcement arm of the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs which polices Indian tribes and reservations that do not have their own police force, and oversees other tribal police organizations."

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According to Wikipedia, "The United States Coast Guard (USCG) is a branch of the United States Armed Forces and one of the country's seven uniformed services. The Coast Guard is a maritime, military, multi-mission service unique among the U.S. military branches for having a maritime law enforcement mission (with jurisdiction in both domestic and international waters) and a federal regulatory agency mission as part of its mission set. It operates under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security during peacetime, and can be transferred to the U.S. Department of the Navy by the U.S. President at any time, or by the U.S. Congress during times of war." So, break the law when you are out cruising in your yacht, and you might get a visit!

For even more information on law enforcement in the United States, click [here](#).

6. May 2019, "Signs of Life: Part 16"

From time to time during my travels, I come across signs that I find interesting for one reason or another. Sometimes, they contain clever writing, are humorous, or remind me of some place or event. Here are some, from the US Virgin Island of St. Croix.



I had never seen the term *well drink*. However, Wikipedia was able to enlighten me, by saying, "A **well drink** or **rail drink** is an alcoholic beverage served using the lower-cost liquors stored within easy reach of the bartender in the counter 'speed rail' or well."



A chalkboard outside a restaurant on the waterfront of Christiansted.

The first wish is "Eat blueberry ice cream". The second is, "Meet [an] angel in a white bikini".



I never did learn just what Nate was angry about. Hopefully, not his customers.



It's not everyday one sees an airport for seaplanes. This one in Christiansted had regular flights to and from neighboring islands. I stopped by to watch some planes land and takeoff. (I have experienced it myself, from both a river and a lake.)

And, just in case you were wondering, Captain Ovesen was a local pilot, who died when his twin-engine propeller aircraft

crashed into a car dealership in Puerto Rico while he was flying a chartered medical evacuation.



A sticker on a vehicle at the seaplane terminal. I never did quite figure out just what the driver's point was. Perhaps people had way too much luggage!



A clothing shop for *small wonders*; children, that is!

Amen to that!



An Italian restaurant in Christiansted.





And she should know!



The best-decorated tractor on the whole island.

A vacant block in Christiansted. I say *vacant*, but I couldn't really be sure what was under there!

And this was only a week after they'd cut the grass! Things sure do grow quickly down there in the tropics.



While the word *savant* has various meanings, the one that I thought of was (from [Wikipedia](#)), "**Savant syndrome** is a condition in which someone with significant mental disabilities demonstrates certain abilities far in excess of average." That begged the question as to where the non-savants parked.

Actually, it's the name of a [restaurant](#).



Let me see if I understand this. You buy a ticket in the lottery in the hopes of winning, so you can afford to go to a Caribbean Island Paradise. But aren't you already there? Perhaps even the losers feel like winners!



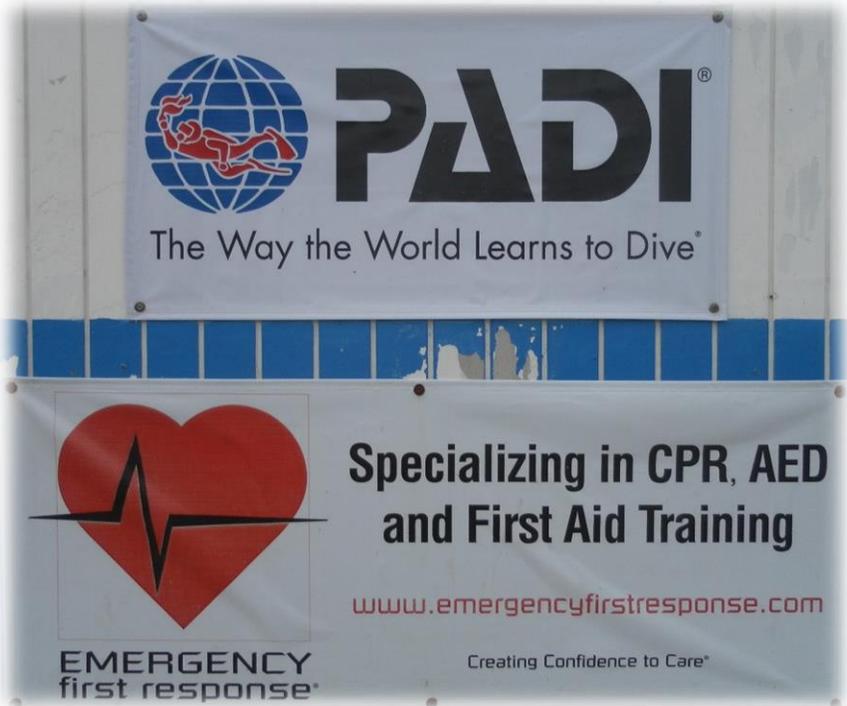
I'm all for some seclusion by the sea.



Well I waited outside the entrance to this gated community, and I waited some more, but I never did get an invitation. Perhaps prosperity isn't available to everyone!



A sign outside a nice house. It looked like Willie had gotten what he wished for in a place to retire, except perhaps for the occasional hurricane.



OK, folks; step up and learn how to dive in the beautiful blue Caribbean Sea. And don't worry about the sharks, jelly fish, jagged coral, and the hundred of other things that can hurt or kill you, we **know** CPR!

I couldn't help but feel that the bottom sign took some of the attraction out of the top one.

7. June 2019, “Travel – From Adelaide to Washington DC”

In June of 1979, my wife, Jenny, and I departed Adelaide, Australia, to live and work in the US for a year. Five and a half weeks later, after touring around Asia and Europe, we landed in Washington DC. This month marks the 40th anniversary of our arrival in the US.

7.1 The Urge to Travel

Early in 1976, I moved from the field of chemistry to that of computer programming. I also got married. Over time, Jenny and I started talking about traveling abroad. I was living in [Adelaide](#) and working for a state government department. It was a classic public-service environment; sort of like waiting for someone to retire or die to be promoted. I was way too entrepreneurial, and knew it was just a matter of time before I went into business for myself.

The obvious places to move were Melbourne and Sydney where many multinational companies had offices. However, it occurred to us that if we relocated interstate, we'd have to start from scratch with respect to finding our way around, making friends, and so forth. In that case, we'd likely want to stay put there for some years before heading off to travel. An alternative was to travel overseas first for an extended period and then when we returned to Australia, our ties to Adelaide would be much weaker, and we could live in Melbourne or Sydney instead.

Sometime during 1978, I noticed an advertisement in the *Pacific Computer Weekly*, which, oddly enough, was published every two weeks. It invited people in Australia and New Zealand with solid computer programming skills to consider taking a job in another country. [At that time, there were many high-paying jobs for people with experience on IBM mainframe computers, in places like Iran and Saudi Arabia. However, I had no such experience. My specialty was with Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) PDP-11 minicomputers and, fortunately, that skill was in high demand in other places.] By then, I had been in the field more than two years and had obtained a wide range of experiences, and I was interested. So, I wrote a letter to Harvey, the recruiter who'd placed the ad, outlining my skills and requesting information.

Harvey responded enthusiastically. However, at the time, I was in the middle of a major renovation of the house we'd bought when we were married, and I still had a lot of work to do. As such, I indicated my interest, but said it would take considerable time before I would be ready. Over the next year, the house was completed, and we put it on the market. After we sold the house and our cars, we put some things in storage, and got rid of the rest. Then we lived with friends for some weeks. Jenny took a year's leave of absence from the South Australian Department of Education, and I gave a month's notice to quit my job at the State Highways Department.

7.2 Plan A

After a lot of planning, we had our airline tickets. It would take us two weeks to get from Adelaide, Australia, to Washington DC, USA, and along the way, we'd have stopovers in New Zealand, Fiji, Hawaii, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas. However, that did not happen. On 1979-05-25, [American Airlines Flight 191](#) crashed moments after takeoff from Chicago, killing all passengers and crew. What made this significant for us was that the plane was a [McDonnell Douglas DC-10](#), the type we'd be flying

across the Pacific with Air New Zealand. As a result, all DC-10s around the world were grounded, indefinitely. It took us some time to realize the impact on us, and by the time we did, the alternate flights across the Pacific were taken. We were back almost to Square 1!

7.3 Plan B

On a subsequent visit to our travel agency, I was looking at a large globe when it occurred to me that we could get to Washington DC by going in the opposite direction, via Asia and Europe. Yes, it was further, but we could take our time and stop off in a lot more places along the way. Very quickly, we put together a whole new—and far more exotic—itinerary, as follows: Adelaide to Sydney, Australia; Hong Kong; Singapore; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Bangkok, Thailand; Bombay, India; Athens, Greece; Rome, Italy; Geneva, Switzerland; Paris, France; London, United Kingdom; New York and Washington DC, United States.

We bought one-way, Sydney-to-London, unlimited stopover tickets valid for a year. So long as we kept going in the general direction of London we could add side trips, whose cost would simply be added to the base fare (about AU\$1,000 at that time). If you look on a globe at the cities I listed above, they are pretty much in a straight line. The only place out of the way that we added was Hong Kong, for a 15% surcharge. To give us maximum flexibility, each leg of the ticket was issued to the most frequent carrier for that leg. When we were close to being ready to leave one country, we could go to the carrier for our next leg to see when they could accommodate us. If they couldn't, we'd asked them to sign-over that leg's voucher to another carrier who could.

Putting our lives into two suitcases was quite a challenge and required ruthlessness. So, when the travel plans changed drastically only weeks before departure, and the change in route limited us to only one case, halving our "treasures" turned out to be quite easy. Who needs *two* sets of socks and underwear anyway!

7.4 Leaving Home

We departed Adelaide (ADL) for Sydney (SYD) where we had a layover before boarding a 7.5-hour Cathay Pacific flight. [At that time, one could visit the cockpit in-flight, and we both did that and chatted with the pilots as we flew over parts of the vast [Outback of Australia](#).]

We had open tickets, no specific plan with respect to the number of days in each country, and only the first two nights of accommodation booked. Hey, we were 25 and invincible; what could possibly go wrong!

7.5 Hong Kong (4 nights)

After my only ever flight in a [Boeing 707](#), we landed at the old [Kai Tak Airport](#), which involved flying "close" to high-rise buildings, an interesting experience. Our deal with the airline included two nights at an up-scale, Western hotel, complete with Colonial-style uniformed staff. Interestingly, our room was on the top floor, but the elevator (AU: lift) only went up to the floor below, so we had to walk up a flight of stairs! For the other two nights, we were on our own, and we located a cheap, Chinese-run place. Although there might have been a front desk, each floor had an attendant who sat on a rickety chair at an old wooden desk, and it was his job to "watch" that floor. Each time we came back to our

room, he'd welcome us and then open the adjacent fire-hose cabinet in which there was a row of hooks with keys for each room. And we'd hand him our key each time we went out. [After I bought a new leather briefcase, I gave my old one to that man, who was very grateful.] The contrast between the two places was huge, and I remember the doorman at the first hotel looking strangely at us when he put us in a taxi to go to the second place and asked us where he should direct the driver.

As that was our first experience outside Australia, and we'd never even been to a Chinatown before, it was all quite a novelty. We had a good look around Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and a bit of the New Territories, where we got quite close to the Chinese border. Near that border, we asked a couple of women in peasant outfits if we could take a picture of them. After we gave them several \$HK, they allowed us to "take away their souls" by taking their picture. [Back then, Hong Kong was still British territory.]

One day, we walked through the afternoon-tea room of the fabled Peninsula Hotel (which had a fleet of Rolls Royces to ferry around its VIP customers). Let's just say that it was "over the top," but in a veddy dignified British way! In our travels around the island, we met a diplomat from Malta who was having a vacation after business meetings in Asia. He'd bought quite a few used books and wanted to send them home without paying too much. So, he went to the concierge desk at the Peninsula and asked if they could arrange to send his books home for him. They replied, "Of course, Sir, and it will be at no charge to you. What is your room number?" He told them, and they took care of it. However, what he didn't tell them was that his room was *not* at that hotel! He also told us that rather than pay his hotel to do his laundry, he found it much cheaper to throw away his underwear and socks and buy new ones at the Chinese People's Republic store nearby.

When I departed Australia, I had longish hair and a beard. However, Singapore had a reputation about refusing to let in men who had long hair and beards, as such people were linked to hippies, and hippies meant drugs, which were a major "No No" there. As such, I shaved off my beard before leaving Hong Kong. However, I don't recall if I got my hair cut shorter. I do remember the challenge of shaving because I had to buy a hand razor. Up until that time, I'd only ever used an electric one.

7.6 Singapore (4 nights)

We flew Singapore Airlines, and landed at the then new airport, which had been built on reclaimed land. We stayed downtown in a non-descript hotel on Beach Road. Interestingly, the road was no longer on the beach, as more land had been reclaimed around it!

It was early evening, and we planned to go out late to the famous "Boogie Street" where cross-dressers, transsexuals, and others paraded around in their finery. As we were a little tired, we decided to sleep for a few hours and to set the alarm for some time after midnight. We slept, our alarm went off, we dressed, but once we got downstairs, we found a huge metal grate across the entrance of the hotel, and it was locked! And although we could hear someone snoring back in the office area, we couldn't get anyone to come and let us out. Fortunately, we also had no need to make an emergency evacuation that night.

We took several bus tours around parts of the island and over into southern Malaysia. One highlight was a delightful ride in a trishaw, a cart pulled by a wiry man on a bicycle. As he pointed out interesting

places and things, he added emphasis by appending “No bullshit!” to each of his statements. He asked if we were on our honeymoon, and we replied that we’d been married three years. Then he asked how many children we had. When my wife replied, “None”, he looked me up and down several times and then said to my wife, “He no good!” We told him we’d heard that a good place to eat was the [Satay Club](#), and could he drop us there. Now the name had conjured up in our minds a fancy place possibly with a dress code, but when he dropped us at a public park, we learned it was an open-air place filled with grandfather-and-grandson pairs running BBQs. For a small amount of money, we feasted on [satays](#) with hot peanut sauce, salad, and drinks. It was quite a fancy picnic. We rode the cable car across to [Sentosa Island](#), site of the British surrender during WWII. However, halfway across, the cable stopped moving, and we hung suspended over the sea for quite some time until it started up again! We also took a bus tour around the island during which we saw many orchids. We visited [Tiger Balm Gardens](#).

7.7 [Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur and Beyond \(7 nights\)](#)

We flew Malaysian Airlines, and started in the capital, then visited [Malacca](#) to the south, and [Penang Island](#) to the north. Movies were very cheap, and in Penang we saw one each day. For the premier of [Superman](#), the shows were all sold out, so we bought tickets from a scalper. Even then the cost, at least by our standards, was very cheap. One interesting thing was that most people in attendance did not speak English; instead, they were reading one of the three sets of subtitles that covered the bottom half of the screen, while talking to each other. That made it hard for those few of us native-English speakers to hear the audio.

It was our first experience being in a Muslim culture. So, when the public-address system at the local [mosque](#) fired up at 5 am with the first call to prayers, we had no idea what was waking us up in the “middle of the night.”

One night, we ate at an open-air restaurant, and enjoyed the food. When we left and walked around the side, we saw an old woman squatting on the curb washing dishes in some greasy, cold water with a rag. She was working for our restaurant, so as to what was on the plates we’d eaten from, we could only imagine!

I recall a tour outside the capital that took us to a huge cave. We also walked around various markets trying to figure out what all the things were.

7.8 [Thailand: Bangkok and Beyond \(7 nights\)](#)

The flight north from Kuala Lumpur to Bangkok followed along a mountain range, and we’d just been served a meal with hot drinks when we hit some sort of air pocket. Well, we lost some altitude in double-quick time, and the food and drinks went up in the air, but no one was hurt. I don’t even recall the oxygen masks dropping down. [Each time I watch the animated safety video on a plane, it shows how calm everyone is when the masks drop down. I’m thinking that is highly unlikely for most people in a real emergency.] When we landed, as martial law was in force, the airport was full of very short soldiers with very large automatic weapons. It was a little unnerving for a young lad from the bush, but I didn’t feel at all unsafe. Outside the airport, there was no evidence of any security concerns.

A highlight of our visit was a boat tour around Bangkok's extensive canal system. At one market, a baby elephant put its trunk into everyone's pockets and bags looking for snacks! With all those canals, there are many bridges, and under many of them were shanties. The "owners" paid no rent, they stole their electricity from the public wires nearby, and they threw their trash out the windows into the canal. Kids jumped from the houses and swam in the canals. When we came across an ice works, I wondered how pure the ice was that was made from that water!

At Pattaya Beach (a popular place for R&R for Allied soldiers during the Vietnam War), I tried my hand at parasailing. I was much taller than the average tourist, so when the power boat took off to pull me in the air in the parachute, my long legs dragged across the beach and through the water until I got airborne. I'd not received any real instruction how to use the equipment, so when it came time to land, I really was "winging" it! It turned out that the parachute had controls on one side only, and as the boat pulled me closer to the beach, I had to pull on a handle to direct the chute in that direction. Now James Bond would have taken off on the beach dressed in a tuxedo, and landed back on the beach, without effort. However, I landed in about three feet of water, and had to pull the chute out onto the beach, which is probably why there was no Bond-girl waiting for me!

We spent an interesting day visiting Kanchanaburi, site of the infamous WWII prison camps and the Bridge over the River Kwai. We rode a public bus there and then hired a man with a pickup truck to drive us around to the tourist spots. He spoke no English and had a young son with him in the cab, as we rode on the back. At several roadside stalls, he stopped to buy us fresh fruit and sticks of sugar cane on which to chew. When we got back to the city it was dark and we had no idea how to get back to our hotel, and all the information posted nearby was only in Thai! After quite some time, we met a student who spoke some English, and he gave us directions.

The tourist literature said not to drink water from taps, but rather from the bottles in the hotel room. We dutifully followed this advice, but one day when we came back to the hotel, we saw a staff member filling those bottles from a tap! C'est la vie!

7.9 India: Bombay (now Mumbai) (1 night)

Due to its location with respect to the world's time zones, long-distance flights arrived and departed here in the very early hours of the morning. I well remember having to go through numerous "layers" of staff, each of which seemed to have no purpose but to pass me along to the next person. (Perhaps it was a way to keep people employed!) A large and rather imposing security guard eyed a nice ballpoint pen I had in my possession, and he seemed to suggest it would be good if I made a gift of it to him. I hesitated, and after a very long pause, he offered to swap it with a third-rate pen he had. In the interests of getting into the country, I agreed.

We had the romantic idea of getting a rail pass and spending some weeks traveling the countryside. However, when we went to the train station, we waited ages for attention and then were told that a ticket as complicated as that might take a week to organize! Then there were beggars and overcrowding everywhere and it was all rather off-putting. As such, we gave up and spent the rest of the day trying to find a flight out. We were ticketed next for Athens, Greece, but as we couldn't get a flight there with any carrier for a week or so, we opted to bypass that city and go to Rome, Italy, instead. [Forty years later, we still haven't been to Greece!]

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Jenny remembers there being huge cockroaches in the sink in our hotel room, and the extensive slums built from cardboard and corrugated iron. Going to and from the airport, our taxi drivers drove with parking lights only and flashed on their main lights from time to time. The airport was very busy at 1 am, and we got the impression everyone was in a hurry to leave the country; we certainly were!

7.10 Greece, NOT!

The stopover that wasn't, as mentioned above!

7.11 Italy: Rome (3 nights)

We landed at Leonardo da Vinci International, and by the time we reached the end of our runway on landing, we were "way out in the vineyards," and took some 20 minutes to taxi to the terminal. It was our first time in Europe, and we had a most arrogant customs inspector. I had purchased a new briefcase in Hong Kong, and it had straps that allowed it to be expanded several inches, and the inspector figured it had some sort of false bottom. So rather roughly, he tipped out the contents on a table and searched the case for a secret compartment. When he found none, he threw up his hands in disgust and walked away. We didn't know where he was going, but after waiting a while and his not returning, we simply packed up and left.

We quickly realized that we no longer had the protection against tourists being ripped-off like we'd had in Asia, where we'd been welcomed/respected visitors. In Italy, we were on our own.

We found a hotel, and breakfast was included in the rate, but when we checked out, there was a different price for food each day, despite there being a buffet. We were told that a waiter was watching what we took and recording that; what a system! (It was a good thing that we'd been sneaking extra food out of the dining room when the staff wasn't looking.)

We visited the obligatory places, and at the Vatican City museums, on the floor were painted lines in different colors that one should follow for a 1-, 2-, 3-hour, etc., walking tour, as one wanted. Well, to get our money's-worth, we followed the 8-hour path, and we were out in an hour or so! You know, once you've seen Pope Pius I, II, and III's robes, do you really need to see those of Pope Pius IV and V? We also paid a visit to the Colosseum (where many stray cats were living) and the Fountain of Trevi.

To get to the airport, we rode a taxi to a bus station, and the taxi driver kept telling me we'd never make it to the airport on time and that he should drive us there instead, which, of course, would be an expensive trip. I repeatedly declined. To make sure he wasn't ripping us off, I tried to follow our route on a map, but wasn't able to. So, when the driver said he'd take a short cut, I feared the worst. In fact, he did take us straight to the bus station.

7.12 Switzerland: Geneva (3 nights)

The main thing I remember was that it was (and still is) an expensive city. As we walked around, we stumbled on a museum of armory. I especially remember it having a big collection of crossbows and pikes. We saw the very tall water jet, Jet d'Eau, and the impressive flower clock. We also visited the Reformation Wall, which commemorates John Calvin and his colleagues' efforts in getting going the Protestant Reformation going in that part of the world.

Jenny remembers that one night we ate a very expensive steak dinner.

7.13 France: Paris (3 nights)

I remember well the quaint hotel at which we stayed—l'Opéra Comique—next to the famous theater of the same name. The elevator was so small, that we each had to go up to our room separately. [In old cities, modern conveniences were retrofitted centuries after the buildings were constructed.] The hotel had two kinds of rooms: those with a bathroom, and those without, and we had the latter. Strangely, for those without, there were no shared bathrooms down the hall! Instead, each morning one wanted to take a shower, one went to the front desk to get a key to a room with bathroom that had been vacated, to use that. This worked well the first time, but the next one found me with a chambermaid who spoke no English. After a game of charades, she finally understood I wanted “la douche!”

We went up the Eiffel Tower, got a kulcha-fix at the Louvre, and strolled around the Pompidou Center. Quite coincidentally, we were there on July 14, Bastille Day, so we got to see the city and the French in party-mode, complete with very loud car horns and fireworks.

As we had no schedule, it wasn't until we got to Paris that we had a reasonable idea of when we'd be able to pick up our visas in London, so we contacted Harvey to let him know we would be arriving in the US “any week now.”

7.14 England: London (5 nights)

When we landed at Heathrow Airport, we visited the tourist office and asked for cheap accommodation. The woman at the counter looked down her nose and said, “Then it will have to be in South Kensington.” It was quite a nice place, actually. At least it wasn't Earls Bloody Court!

The next day, I fronted up at the US Embassy to get my 1-year work visa with the very naïve attitude that I would be “in and out” in double-quick time. And, measured in geologic time, I was! After a considerable wait in line, we got to the end of a corridor, which opened out into a huge room populated by many hundreds of people waiting in lines that snaked back and forth across. We discovered that our little line was now at the very end of another very long line. Hours later, our paperwork was accepted, and we were told to come back in four days, which was about three days longer than we'd expected. [That was my very first time getting a visa in person; 40 years, 60-odd countries, and two million air miles later, I'm much wiser.]

To fill in time, we did the usual touristy stuff: Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace, Trafalgar Square, Number 10 Downing Street (back when that street was open to the public), Parliament House, and the Big Ben clock tower.

As our airline ticket only got us as far as London, we had to buy a one-way ticket from there to the US. The cheapest alternative by far was with Sir Freddy Laker's Skytrain, a daily service between London's Gatwick and New York's JFK airports. Interestingly, the planes used were DC-10s, but by the time we reached London, the model his airline flew was allowed back in service. Passengers were encouraged to bring along their own food. [To this day, that's the only time I've used Gatwick.]

7.15 US: New York City

We landed at JFK International, and once we got through immigration and picked up our luggage, we took a taxi to La Guardia Airport, not too far away. There, we caught the Eastern Shuttle down to DC.

7.16 US: Washington DC

Strictly speaking, we landed in the state of Virginia, at Washington National Airport, which is across the river from DC. Harvey was there to meet us, and he drove us to the (quite new) Marriott Hotel in Bethesda, in the neighboring state of Maryland.

The main thing I remember about the hotel was the next evening, when we went to the dining room for supper. We ordered a salad and a main course, and the salad was soon served. Like all sophisticated people we “knew” that one eats one’s salad with the main meal, so we waited, and we waited, and then we waited some more. Finally, we asked the waiter when our main course would be served. To which he replied, “As soon as you finish your salad, Sir.” And so, a lesson was learned!

7.17 Conclusion

After a week in the Washington DC area having job interviews and getting back into work mode, I accepted a 1-year contract in Chicago, and we took the train there. [Interestingly, at the start of my discussions with Harvey about coming to the US, I said, “East or West coast; definitely not the Midwest!”, yet there I was agreeing to go to the Midwest. C’est la vie.] And that’s where I started my conquest of the United States. But that’s a whole other story! [See my October 2018 essay, “Living in Chicago.”]

As you might imagine, at age 25, going abroad for the first time and with the intention of traveling and working for up to five years, really was a big deal, but required a certain amount of naïveté. All I can say in my defense is that “it seemed like a good idea at the time.”

In summary, in 38 days, we flew 22,000 miles (39,600 kms), on 10 airlines, and saw bits of nine countries. And after 40 years, we’re still here in the US!

8. July 2019, “My Experience with Airbnb”

According to [Wikipedia](#), “Airbnb, Inc. is a privately held global company headquartered in San Francisco that operates an online marketplace and hospitality service which is accessible via its websites and mobile apps. Members can use the service to arrange or offer lodging, primarily homestays, or tourism experiences. The company does not own any of the real estate listings, nor does it host events; as a broker, it receives commissions from every booking.”

I first starting using Airbnb for accommodation in August of 2013, and so far, I've stayed in 43 properties in 11 countries, for a total of 157 nights. Of those 43, nine involved renting the whole property; the rest were a private room. In three places, I travelled with a friend, and we had separate bedrooms; on another trip, three of us shared two bedrooms; and on three other occasions, two of us shared a single room.

Although I have never been an Airbnb host, I have hosted many people over the past 25+ years through various programs, so I have an appreciation of what it takes to host. [See my essay from January 2010, “[Travel: Home Stays.](#)”]

When I asked my good friends Kathy and John, who are based in Australia, to proof this essay and to add some of their own comments about their Airbnb experiences, they very generously shared them. I have added their comments (with very light editing) at the end of the corresponding sections. Thanks very much, Kathy and John!

8.1 Setting Reasonable Expectations

[See my essay from May 2011, “[Planning for Success.](#)”]

Here are some things to keep in mind as you look over candidate properties:

1. While the name is “Air**bnb**”, many properties are not what anyone would call “Bed-and-Breakfast” places. (See the opening paragraph to this essay about what Airbnb is in the business of doing.) At least 13 of the places I've used were partly or wholly commercial ventures (small hotels, guesthouses, or B&Bs), and some of the others rented out every bedroom in their home, including their own. That said, some were very pleasurable hosting experiences like one might get at a cozy B&B or country inn. Perhaps a quarter of my hosts provided meals, most of which involved a Continental breakfast and coffee/tea and maybe cookies (AU: biscuits) at all hours. Several provided a full English breakfast.
2. A host and traveler might have different ideas about what is normal, even if they are living in the same country. Read the property description carefully and understand the cancellation policy. Ask questions before you book. Don't make any assumptions about things you can't verify! For example, while you will have access to a toilet and bathroom, they might *not* be *in* your room, or even anywhere near it, and they may well be shared with other guests or host family members!
3. Read the reviews and look out for a pattern of the host cancelling at short notice!
4. If you have certain allergies, take particular notice of whether the host has pets (or had them recently, or allows people with pets inside the house, or ...). Check the rules regarding smoking.

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5. You will not find out the actual address before booking, just the general neighborhood. However, this is sufficient for you to “look around” in advance using Google Maps, for example.
6. Do your homework! Who has the most to gain by having a good experience? You! Who has the most to lose by having a bad experience? You!

So, what are my preferences and selection criteria?

1. Most importantly, I'm a traveler, not a tourist! For example, I am happy to try and communicate in the local language, to buy bread and cheese, and have lunch sitting on a seat in the local cemetery where I try to chat with the locals. A tourist, on the other hand, might be in a group with a leader, and be quite insulated from the locals, and eating in (expensive) mainstream restaurants, or maybe eating at a well-known international fast-food place, “because that's the only food they recognize/trust!” I have no interest in package deals, cruises, timeshares, or the like, and I want nothing to do with anything that suggests “luxury.” To me, accommodation is a major part of travel and gives me the opportunity to see how the locals live.
2. Being a gregarious person, I very much like interacting with the host and any other guests. After all, that's part of the travel experience!
3. I have no problem using a shared bathroom/toilet.
4. I can be very flexible provided the situation is rational.
5. I almost always chose a place that gives me kitchen privileges, and I'm happy to live by restricted hours for those. And I really want a fridge. Only one place I've stayed in provided neither.
6. I almost always want a reliable wifi connection, so I can continue to run my business remotely, and so I can go online to get maps and to make plans for that or future locations on the trip. That said, I have been known to “go off the grid” for (typically no more than) three days at a time.
7. I always rent a private room, unless, that is, I rent the whole place.
8. I very much prefer quiet, residential neighborhoods, and if I have a rental car or easy access to public transportation, I'll stay outside major cities if I can. In only one place was my room overlooking a very busy pedestrian tourist area that was noisy until well after midnight!

[K&J: We have stayed in about a dozen Airbnb places in the USA, France, Spain, Australia, and Scandinavia. This year we will stay in another four in Scotland and one in Italy. We tend to stay longer than does Rex, most often 5–7 days and we generally like to be close to public transport unless we have a hire car and then we tend to avoid large cities, as we don't wish to negotiate and pay for parking. Whilst travelling together, we also have shared two thirds of our Airbnb places with friends. This means that we stay in places that are not hosted; in fact, we have never stayed in one of these. We seek out places that have an appropriate number of bedrooms, a living space and our own kitchen and bathroom facilities. Airbnb provides us with much more than a couple of hotel rooms (in terms of cost, privacy, space and comfort) when we are travelling with friends.

If we are in a city, we tend to like being a part of the action; able to walk to most places, use public transport and sit in restaurants, bars, and cafes where life abounds. All this can of course be done in the suburbs, but we quite like the vibe of the city. Two of our Airbnb places that were outstanding and were in the suburbs, were San Francisco and Bordeaux. Public transport was easy and only about 10–

15 minutes from the city Center. On each of these occasions we met the owners, and they were both terrific at letting us know what was available in our local area and the easiest transport to get into the town center.]

8.2 My 3-Night Model

In recent years, I've developed what I call, "the 3-night, 4-day model" of travel accommodation. The idea is that I'll have three nights and two full days at a location, plus any free time after I arrive the first day, and before I depart on the fourth day. I've found this to be just the right amount to get an overview of a new location. It's not so short that I'm hardly there, and it's not too long if I find it less interesting or otherwise difficult. [In my 40-odd years of international travel, I've rarely been so enthralled with a place that I've gone back again to spend more time there.]

My most successful implementation of this model was a vacation involving 12 nights in Croatia followed by three in neighboring Slovenia. I stayed in five places for three nights each, and crisscrossed northern Croatia by bus to get around, and then rode a bus to Slovenia. However, this involved one really long travel day, and another of medium length.

I also use this model for mini-vacations to places within 1–2-hour's drive of my home. In these cases, I "stop to smell the flowers" in towns through which I've passed, perhaps many times, yet never stopped to look around. As a result, I've found some very nice surprises and enjoyed various encounters by visiting places "right under my nose!" One doesn't have to go abroad or even out of one's area to have positive travel experiences.

However, I am not rigid about following this model; it's just a guideline. For example, I stayed only one night in a place in London, as I arrived late from the countryside and took in a night of theater before flying home the next day. I stayed put for 10 days in an apartment in Hawaii, and when touring Yorkshire, England, I stayed in three places for three, four, and then five nights, respectively.

8.3 Property Description and Photos

For the most part, I've found the written descriptions of properties adequate; however, it is clear that some people are more experienced at promoting their properties than others, and if they have also been travelers, they see it from both perspectives.

As they say, "A picture is worth 1,000 words," and by posting more than a few, representative photos of their place, a host has an easy way to show a prospective traveler around. Unfortunately, too many hosts don't seem to realize this. Some have only two or three photos, some have photos of really crappy quality, and quite a few have a whole set of photos, but few of which actually show the bedroom and bathroom where one will spend at least a third of the stay. In my case, I'm 6-foot 4-inches (195 cms) tall, so unless the bed is a queen or king, I need to see a photo of it, including the end. If the bed has no footer, I can hang my legs over, but otherwise, not.

If I find the set of photos less than helpful, I don't even bother contacting the host. Basically, "If they can't get their act together on such a basic thing, I'm not interested in staying with them!"

[K&J: We completely agree with you that the photos and descriptions can be one of the first indicators as to whether you will continue to pursue a property. We believe the wide-angle lens has often been used for photographs and when you only see very limited and bad photographs it does raise doubts. Another indicator is whether you get a timely and helpful response from the owner. Sometimes in the written description it is about 'what is not mentioned' and you do have to make sure that you read carefully what the place has to offer to reduce the number of 'surprises.' Some things to look out for are:

- Is there an elevator (AU: lift), if you are on the fifth floor of an apartment building?
- Is there a washing machine and how does it work? (In other parts of the world the front-loading type seems to prevail, not in Australia, so we are at a disadvantage to begin with!) We generally travel for extended times, so a washing machine is an essential requirement for us.
- Is there a place to park a car?
- The ability to contact someone if needed while you are staying in their accommodation
- Some people are very good at supplying information about supermarkets, restaurants, appliances, etc.; this is difficult if there is a language barrier.]

8.4 Fees, Costs, and Discounts

One of the filters available to narrow property selection in a particular area is price, and the "base price" of a property is shown on a flag on the map. However, by the time you go to make a booking, you might find some unexpected surprises. For example, I wanted a basic room for one night not too far from the San Francisco airport (SFO). I located a very nice place for only US\$59. However, the final bill came to \$95, because there was a \$25 cleaning fee, and an \$11 Airbnb service fee. Of course, a stay of multiple days would have the same one-time \$25 cleaning fee.

Note that more than a few local governments in the US (and perhaps other countries) have occupancy taxes on rooms rented to the public. And while these will apply to all properties in the same jurisdiction, you should make sure you understand if such taxes will be added to the base price.

Some properties provide a substantial discount for long stays (typically lasting seven days or more).

As the Airbnb site reminds you, you should never have to pay the host money directly for accommodation!

[K&J: When staying in places like Manhattan, New York, and central Chicago we expected prices to be quite high. They were, and therefore we were happy to stay in more basic accommodation. In actual fact, the cost of a couple of nights in a New York apartment was the same as a week in a whole house in a small village in the French countryside.

We have had two cancellations from owners; both were in a timely manner and we were able to book something else. Money was refunded, with no problems. At one place we stayed in France, we were told by the owner that there would be a cleaning fee at the end of our stay, (we could do the cleaning ourselves), but on all other occasions if there was a cleaning fee it was written into the conditions of occupancy.]

8.5 Writing a Review

Within hours of your stay ending, you will receive email asking you to rate the stay. The host will also be asked to rate you. However, neither can see the other's evaluation until both are posted publicly. Then, the host and traveler each get a chance to respond to each other's comments.

Frankly, if you have done your homework by reading carefully the property description and rules, and you've contacted the hosts prior to booking to resolve any issues or get answers to your questions, you really have no business complaining after the fact. Unfortunately, there are many whiners in this big world, and from time to time, they post negative comments about things that are quite petty, misunderstandings, or show that their expectations were incompatible with the property. That said, I do read traveler reviews carefully, and I have rejected more than a few properties based on what I've interpreted as constructively critical feedback.

Twice I've provided constructive feedback myself. A friend and I had a very nice 2-bedroom condominium in Idaho, and the kitchen had pretty much everything one might want to prepare meals for three days. However, I could not find any cooking pots and pans. When I communicated this to the owner, she was most apologetic, and she immediately drove to the property and took the pots and pans from their "hiding place" in a drawer at the base of the stove and put them in plain view on kitchen shelves. Now as that was a "problem" that could easily be fixed, I submitted it as a private comment. That is, it did not get posted on the permanent, public record. The host addressed the issue and there was no need for the world to know it had existed.

The second occasion involved a 2-bedroom apartment in Germany. The shower was inside a very deep bathtub, the inside bottom of which was narrow and very slippery. When any of us took a shower, we had to be extra careful not to slip and fall into the tub or against the large hot-water heater unit. From the first time I encountered this situation I just knew that "it was a serious accident just waiting to happen," and I felt obligated to make this a public comment. (If I'd have made it private, future travelers would not know about the potential disaster awaiting them if it were not rectified.) To his credit, the host—who actually lived in the apartment when it wasn't rented—posted a public reply thanking me for pointing out the problem and promising to fix it.

While ranting in a review might let an upset traveler feel good, it doesn't help the rest of us coming afterwards. In any event, such rants are visible to all future prospective hosts with whom the complainant asks to stay. So, if you rant too much, hosts might reject you; even worse, they might discover this well after you have booked, and cancel your booking at short notice!

[K&J: We have written a couple of reviews about our stays. We do however read them with some slight cynicism as it sometimes seems the whiners are people who want everything and don't wish to pay for it, or they have chosen places which are not appropriate for them. We have written personal notes or verbally thanked people; I know this doesn't help them get more customers, but it's the way we like to do it.]

8.6 My First Time

As the old saying goes, "The first impression is a lasting impression!", and that was certainly true for me. My first time using Airbnb was in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The young woman host was super

organized and had a very nice 3-bedroom apartment. She provided detailed and comprehensive written instructions on the apartment, local shops, and transportation, and my room had a king-size bed, something not found too often in Europe. Interestingly, all three bedrooms had locks, and if she had three lots of guests, she stayed somewhere else. In this case, all three rooms were occupied, she was on vacation, and arranged for a friend to let me in and get me oriented.

The place was located in a residential neighborhood, a 15-minute bus/tram ride to downtown. Being a traveler, that suited me just fine, as I like to explore such neighborhoods and to “see the locals at work and play” by walking around and riding public transportation.

Of course, every Airbnb experience can and likely will be different, sometimes significantly so, but my comfort level with Airbnb was very high after this initial stay. The host set a high bar, but not unreasonably so. Thank you very much, Daniella!

8.7 Memories of Some Properties

England and Scotland: During a 2-week vacation in Yorkshire, I stayed in three places, all completely different. The first was a commercial B&B in a small village outside York, and I was their first guest via Airbnb. They served a full English breakfast, and one afternoon I came home to find fresh baked goods coming out of the oven, and I was invited to join the hosts for afternoon tea. One evening, the hosts, a guest couple, and I all put in money and bought take-away fish-and-chips, which we ate together at home. The hosts provided coffee and dessert. It was a very pleasant experience. At the local bus stop, I met an elderly man who said that if I wasn't going to Whitby, there was no point in my being in Yorkshire! Not having booked my next place, I checked out that town, booked an Airbnb place there for three days, and once there, I added a fourth. It definitely was worth spending time in that area, and it's good to have some flexibility built into one's schedule. Finally, I wanted to be in Harrogate, but the best deal I could find was in Knaresborough, a short train ride away. A single mother made a little extra income by renting a spare room in her house, and the location was great!

I decided to spend a week in Edinburgh, but discovered I'd be there in the middle of the very busy international festival season. However, I found a cozy place in a private house owned by a woman who ran a catering business from home. Needless to say, she “forced” all kinds of baked goodies on me! I had a 10-minute walk to the bus stop and then a 20-minute ride to the city, which was all quite manageable. And when it rained heavily on the day I left, my host generously drove me and my luggage to the bus stop.

Having visited London many times, where I usually take in two or three theater performances each visit, I like to go off to neighboring counties for days at a time. My most recent sojourn involved six nights in Norwich, the seat of Norfolk County, which I explored, and took the train to the north and east coasts. The very friendly hosts welcomed me and made room on a shelf and in their fridge for all my kitchen stuff.

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Spain: After I finished business in Barcelona, I moved from my hotel to a 1-bedroom Airbnb apartment, which I had all to myself. It was walking distance to the subway and the downtown area, and the front door to the building was very non-descript, like you'd want if you were in some sort of witness-protection program. It was very cheap (as in US\$45/night), clean, and serviceable. Yes, it was dark and dated, but "So what!"

US: In California, I stayed with an 80-year-old woman in San Francisco, in a townhouse full of artworks and travel souvenirs. We enjoyed our time together, and I got along so well with her cat that I made it an honorary dog! I then moved to a place closer to Golden Gate Park, so I could explore that part of the city on foot over several days. There, I was in one of six rooms labelled A–F; clearly it was a commercial enterprise.

In Idaho and Montana, I rented three whole places so my travelling companion and I each had our own bedroom. The first place was a large 3-bedroom, 2-story log-house, and the host left us wine and snacks. The second place was a cottage, which the owner vacated during our stay. The third was a 2-bedroom condominium in a commercial storage neighborhood.

I've had several nice stays in the greater Seattle, Washington, area, one in Yakima, Central Washington, and another near the state capital, Olympia. I chose the particular Yakima property because the owner had an Australian kelpie sheepdog.

I spent three pleasant days over one Christmas in a B&B/restaurant in Berkley Springs, West Virginia.

Austria: My second Airbnb experience was in a private residence in Salzburg within walking distance of all the things to see/do. When I arrived, the host was at a wedding reception, and he'd arranged for his father to meet me. He got me oriented and then we sat, drank coffee, and talked for 30 minutes, which was just an excuse for me to pat his dog, who was so smart it understood German! The apartment was quite large, had large windows overlooking a small park, and a fresh breeze wafted through.

I had business in Vienna, and when that ended, I had six free days before more business in Seoul, Korea, and rather than going back home and then off in the other direction, I rented a room and then continued on around the world. My host admitted me to her ground-floor apartment, and I very much appreciated not having to lug two heavy bags up flights of stairs. My room came with a very large/long bed, a work desk and chair, some storage, and quite large windows overlooking the side street. When closed, they blocked out most of the noise. The kitchen and living space were nicely appointed, and there were two bathrooms, one with the usual sit-in-the-bath-with-hand-shower, the other with a proper shower stall. One afternoon, another AirBnB guest reported that the outer-door lock of the building was not working, and she couldn't get in. Fortunately, another tenant came soon after she arrived back and let her in. I checked my key and that too no longer worked, so I contacted our host about it. I had plenty of food in the apartment and had no need to go out, which was just as well, as I might not have been able to get back in until the lock was fixed.

Croatia and Slovenia: As I mentioned earlier, I spent three nights in each of five places in Croatia and Slovenia. The first place was a commercial guesthouse in the capital, Zagreb. I never saw anyone else there except the host's mother who managed the facility and was there on occasion. It was central and adequate. I very much wanted to visit the Plitvice Lakes National Park, so my second place was a (good

long) walk from there. It was a small hotel that kept several small/cheap rooms for Airbnb folks. No meals or kitchen privileges were provided. Next up was a room in a guesthouse in [Pula](#).

Then came an apartment in the heart of the quaint old town of [Rovinj](#). The town is a veritable maze of large and small alleys, all with stone paving. Now while I had a street name for my place, I had no number. Fortunately, as I entered my street, a man came out from his hotel and asked if I was Rex. The owner of my place had gone to Zagreb for the day and had arranged for this man to give me my key, so he'd been on the lookout for me around my expected arrival time. I'd rented a place which although it looked like an apartment, it was much smaller! However, if I stood in the middle of it, to use an Aussie expression, there was just about enough room to swing a dead cat! I had a decent bathroom, but as I turned around in there, I hit my head on the hot-water system mounted on the wall, and I did that more than once. Don't you just hate that when that happens! The kitchen was quite compact, but very serviceable and it had all the basics. Two large windows opened out over the alley below. The bed was made for [Leprechauns](#), but at least it did not have a footer on it, so my long legs could hang over!

While I only had three days in [Ljubljana](#), Slovenia, I very much enjoyed staying with a 30-something couple who had gone back to university as students. We shared late-night pizza, drinks, and conversation in their nicely appointed loft. I also spent time with another of their Airbnb guests, a man from Spain.

Australia: There were two of us, on a 9-day road trip, and the first half was conducted in temperatures of up to 113 degrees F (45 C). We spent three nights near [Mildura](#) in an upstairs room with a mini-kitchen and had all the facilities we needed elsewhere in the guest wing, including a saltwater swimming pool and outdoor eating area. Next up were four nights in [Broken Hill](#), a mining town way out in the desert. The hosts had three rooms to rent, but only ours was occupied during our stay. They offered a small buffet breakfast each morning and a cooked one on Sundays. We sat with them on their balcony to watch the fireworks on New Year's Eve. The third stay was in the delightful town of [Clare](#), where we spent one night in a private house owned by a young woman.

8.8 From Spartan to Nice to Special

For sure, the most [spartan](#) room I've had was for one night in the inner suburbs of London. And although it was inside a faceless storefront, it was clean and comfortable, convenient to the Tube to the city and Heathrow airport, and it cost only US\$60 (which for London, is cheap). It served its purpose precisely!

My longest stay was 10 days, in a 1-room building on the side of a mountain on the Hawaiian island of [Maui](#). It was Christmas, and the weather was very nice, especially when back at my house in Virginia 36+ inches (1 meter) of snow fell while I was away. Although it was by no means luxurious, it was very comfortable and had all I needed. It also had a friendly, generous, and experienced host.

At the "high end"—remember, I'm a traveler not a tourist—were four nights in a tall, circular, stone tower on an old sugar plantation in the rain forest of the US Virgin Island of [St. Croix](#). My suite consisted of the third floor containing a king-size, four-poster bed, a spacious living room on the second floor complete with various pieces of art and sculpture, and a toilet off the stairs between them. Double doors led to my large patio where I could sit and read in the sun under the bamboo

trees. The ground floor had a communal kitchen, and a bathroom, which appeared to be used only by me. A ladder went up to a door in the roof of the bedroom through which one could climb to look out over the area. The shared kitchen reminded me of a number of hostels I'd stayed in over the years. It was very well-equipped. The eating area was outdoors, under a roof. One evening, a group of us pooled our supplies and made a meal together.

8.9 Challenges

When travelling abroad, I don't carry a mobile phone, which can make it challenging to get access to some Airbnb properties. Sometimes, the host simply says to "phone me or one of my neighbors/friends to get a key when you get to the neighborhood." I first encountered this in Madrid, Spain, with my third Airbnb rental. So, I simply went to the address, stopped a passer-by, and in my poor Spanish, asked him if I could use his phone—after all, everyone except me carries a mobile—and because people have unlimited use, they don't charge me, although I do offer to pay. In Montana, the host didn't listen to her phone messages and I don't do text messaging, so it took a bit of dancing around for us to communicate. In Norwich, England, I also borrowed a passerby's phone. More and more places now have some sort of door lock operated via a keypad, and the host sends me the access code the day or so before. (I have heard of properties with locks that can be opened from a mobile phone, but that wouldn't help me.)

As mentioned earlier, the host and traveler's "normal" might not be anywhere near the same, especially when it comes to language. For example, imagine you are in a property and you want to use the clothes washer, and no local is around. You find the washer and the detergent, but all the words on the controls are in—Heaven forbid!—some language of which you know little or nothing. In such cases, I have been known to go on the internet searching for a user's manual for said appliance, in English. Twice I encountered a whizz-bang cooking system that I was at a loss to figure out. How hard could it possibly be to switch on an electric hotplate to boil water or to fry an egg? I can attest that it can be "bloody impossible!" Apparently, the stove is matched to pots and pans, and one can't activate a hotplate unless there is a compatible pot sitting on it. I seem to recall there is some sort of electromagnetic technology involved. Now while the hosts know how to use this, most others out there probably don't, so it would make sense for the host to anticipate this and leave instructions, but neither had.

[K&J: Our biggest challenges have been front-loading washers! I think we may have won our first battle last year in Copenhagen. One surprise, when staying in a French village was that the house we stayed in did not have an oven; we had lots of 'stove-top' meals and it was also a good excuse to buy plenty of food from our town's fabulous food market; which happened to be, once a week, on the street just outside our front door. Occasionally when we have had a car, parking has been difficult, but we have known beforehand that parking may be an issue and we have managed to deal with that.]

8.10 Conclusion

I have more than a few real and imaginary trips planned. I fully expect to continue using Airbnb properties where they make sense. However, I'll also stay in cheap motels/hotels and traditional options, like [ryokans](#) in Japan.

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Some cities (most noticeably New York City) have strict rent controls and leasing agreements. Specifically, tenants in many buildings are forbidden to sub-let (that is, to rent to someone else) their apartment. So, if you make contact with a host there and they say to not come to the main entrance, but to meet them “around the corner, out of sight” to get a key, you are probably violating some local law.

The bottom line is that I have not had a bad experience using Airbnb, just a few minor teething problems from time to time, but nothing that couldn't be solved with the application of some common sense or worked around. In any event, my main mantra in life, especially when it comes to travel, is “Always have a Plan B, even for Plan B!”

[K&J: Airbnb is part of our travel life and we are sure we will continue to use it. It's not just something we do overseas; we are now starting to do it more in Australia as we really like the flexibility it provides.]

9. August 2019, "Signs of Life: Part 17"

From time to time during my travels, I come across signs that I find interesting for one reason or another. Sometimes, they contain clever writing, are humorous, or remind me of some place or event. Here are some, from [Texas](#) and [Utah](#).



A famous [highway](#) and a famous [TV show](#).



The woman figure looks like she needs "to go" badly, but will it be safe?



Well, this public service message seems very clear!



Outside a visitor's center on a main highway.

I must say that I was in no great hurry to meet the indiginous wildlife.



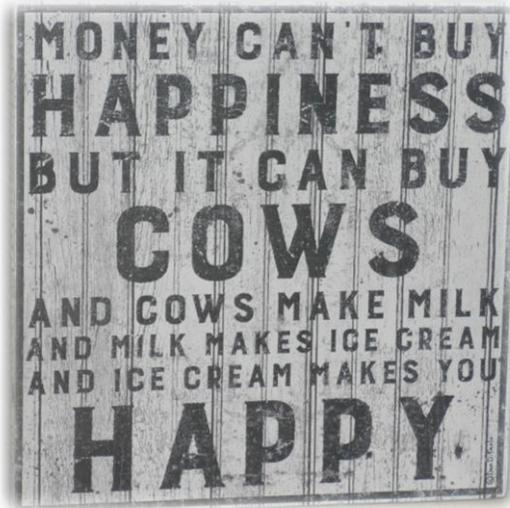
I'm guessing there's an interesting story behind the name of this company.



A restaurant in Moab, UT.



I was amused by the pairs of hot peppers used to make the Spanish letter "ll" (yes, this is a single letter). And the claim that research and development were going on inside was encouraging.



All right!



Given that *casa* is Spanish for *house*, I thought this a bit clever.



I think the driver was probably handicapped by drink!



Who knew that pagans were into mountaineering!



You mean I can't just drive forward to get out?



With a name as attractive as that, why wouldn't every tourist driving through go to see this Utah state park?

Wikipedia states, "The park is so named because of its use as a natural corral by cowboys in the 19th century, where horses often died of exposure. Dead Horse Point has frequently been noted on lists of unusual place names."



Another “must see” place in southeastern Utah.



Just the thing for a polygamist to drink with his wives after a hard day of work on the ranch in Utah!

From the back-side label, “She’s on Nitro! Meet the sister-wife of our classic brew. This nitrogenated version is as chocolatey and easy drinkin’ as the original but even softer and creamier. It’s OK to love them both.”

BTW, porter is a dark style of beer.

This from an expansive gated community in Park City, Utah, an area where dinosaurs once roamed.

I understand that running your vehicle into a Brontosaurus can ruin your day!



10. September 2019, "Travel: Memories of New Mexico"

For some time, I'd been thinking about going to the US southwest state of New Mexico. And now the opportunity to do that finally arrived.

10.1 Albuquerque

[Diary] My flight landed in Albuquerque (ABQ) at 8:15 pm, a few minutes ahead of schedule, to a temperature of 80 degrees Fahrenheit. The sun was a huge orange ball just above the mountains to the west. Altitude-wise, the city is just short of a mile high. It being May, I switched my clock back two hours, to Mountain Daylight Time.

I called my first hosts to let them know I'd landed. I rode the shuttle bus to the rental car companies, and picked up my car, a Hyundai Elantra. While I was riding on the shuttle bus, a man dressed in a cowboy hat and boots and behaving strangely ran back and forth across the highway, apparently intent on entertaining the drivers. As I left the airport, officers from two police cars were "interviewing" him.

Thirty minutes later, I was at my hosts' place meeting Tricia and Ann, their dog Happy, two cats, and several neighbors. They served me a meal, and we started to get to know each other. They had traveled extensively, including time in Australia, where they even visited Hutt River Province, Prince Leonard's breakaway "country." Lights out soon after 10:30 pm.

[Diary] I had the bedroom window open all night, and only pulled on a blanket in the early hours. I was awake way too early. Tricia and I had a light breakfast of coffee and toast outdoors in the sun. Ann had left quite early for her work.

Around 10 am, I left for the southwest regional offices of the charity "Save the Children." I spent the morning talking to the director about their current programs, especially the ones involving literacy with which I participated. These programs were for schools with students from predominately Native American and Hispanic families. Another staff member, Liz, joined us for a traditional New Mexico lunch. The official state question in New Mexico is "Red or green?", which means "Do you want red or green chili peppers with that?" The correct answer is "Both."

At 2 pm, the "business" part of my trip was completed, so I headed to the edge of the metropolitan area up to 6,500 feet, to the base of an impressive aerial tramway. It took some 15 minutes to go the mile and a half across, and 4,000 feet up, to the peak. In a deep valley below, we saw the wreckage of a plane crash.

At the top, the temperature was 51 degrees, a drop of 30 degrees from the city below. I hiked a small section of the La Luz (Spanish for "The light") trail, and parts of a few others as well, stopping to shoot video and still photographs along the way. I came across some patches of snow, which had fallen a week earlier. I caught the tram down at 5:30 and was home by 6 pm.

Tricia was a photographer and worked for AmeriCorps, a U.S.-domestic version of the Peace Corps. That evening, she was teaching a photography class to young, incarcerated women, so couldn't join us for dinner. Ann and I drove to Old Town where we walked around the shops, and I bought a silver and

turquoise necklace from a woman working at her street stall. Ann was Navajo, a Native American tribe to the northwest. She worked for the Santo Domingo tribe on land restoration projects.

[Diary] It was very windy during the night, but it wasn't at all cold. I was awake with the alarm at 8 am, and up very soon afterwards. I joined Tricia for coffee and toast, and then checked my email to see if the outside world was getting along without me; fortunately, it was. We walked Happy to post mail at a mailbox. It was sunny, but a stiff breeze was blowing.

I washed the breakfast dishes, lest I get out of practice, and then packed my luggage, which seemed to have exploded all over the room in two short days. I wrote in my hosts' guest book, said my goodbyes, and departed at 10:15 am. It had been a very good visit.

10.2 Santa Fe

Soon, I was headed north on Interstate Highway 25 (I-25) to the state capital, Santa Fe (Spanish for "Holy Faith"). (Interstate highways with odd numbers run north/south while even-numbered ones run east/west. I-25 starts in Las Cruces, New Mexico, and runs 1,059 miles through Albuquerque; Denver, Colorado; Cheyenne, Wyoming; and ends in Buffalo, Wyoming.)

The open-road speed limit was a rapid 75 mph, but I set the cruise control to a sedate 60, much to the chagrin of some other drivers behind me in the so-called "slow" lane.

The terrain was relatively flat, with gently rolling hills and brush on one side, and taller mesas on the other. The 50-mile drive was pleasurable, and I sang to tunes on an easy-listening station on my rental car's XM satellite radio. (Although the road looked rather level, in those 50 miles, I climbed 2,500 feet.)

Just south of Santa Fe, I pulled into a rest stop. They served free coffee, had free internet access, BBQ and picnic areas, and plenty of information.

I took an exit toward the downtown area, and when I saw some Golden Arches in the distance, I decided to pull into McDonald's for a light lunch. I ordered a spicy McChicken sandwich and Coke, which came for the surprisingly low price of only \$1.62. The server gave me an unsolicited senior citizen's discount! I must have looked especially wise. I shared a table with an older gentleman who had a small ranch and grew vegetables. He was well informed about national politics and world events, and we had a pleasant chat. Then I pulled out my map and guidebook and made a plan for the rest of the day.

Around 1:30 pm, I put the car into an all-day parking lot, and walked to the Capitol building. A guided tour was scheduled for 2 pm, and I was able to join that. Like some other rural states, the Capitol had no security screening, just police and many cameras. It had a very friendly atmosphere and was quite new. More than 600 pieces of art were on exhibit on the walls, in small galleries, and in the grounds. All the 550 artists at some time lived in New Mexico. And all the art was paid for by private donations.

At 2 pm, guide James lead six of us on a 1-hour tour of the House chamber, a committee meeting room, and the Governor's offices. It was most informative. In odd years, the legislature meets for 30 days, and in even years, for 60. They receive no pay, just expenses.

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The building is circular, centered on a rotunda with a skylight roof but no dome. On the floor is the state seal inside a stylized Zia Native American sun symbol of four parallel lines coming out on each of the four sides. These groups of four represent the four seasons, the four periods of the day, the four directions, and the four stages of human life. The circle represents life, no start and no end, just continuity.

At the Governor's office, I asked his receptionist if I could have a business card. She had none but gave me a large color photo of him. He was Bill Richardson, former Federal Representative in Congress, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and cabinet secretary in the Clinton administration.

I walked into the downtown area, stopping off at the oldest European church in the U.S., San Miguel Mission, and the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi and its garden next door. I chatted with a German couple and another from Canberra, Australia. Next, I visited a western wear store and drooled over the hats and belts, although I thought that \$350 was bit much for something to hold up my pants!

I sat in the sunshine in the main plaza area, and watched the world go by. Then I enjoyed all the authentic Native American art stores and drooled again at a shop having all-things sheepskin. I hesitated to try on anything for fear it would fit, and I'd have to buy it!

By 5:30 pm, I was starting to think about food, and soon came across the Plaza Café, a family-friendly restaurant that had some interesting specials. Not being too hungry, I settled on a large bowl of Yucatan chicken lime soup: chicken, rice, mild green peppers, and a good dose of green lime flavor. A fresh roll and butter came with it. I finished off with a cup of very strong café con leche.

At the table next to me sat a family with four small children, including a set of twin boys. I got chatting with the parents, and I asked if the kids were all theirs or had they just rented them for the day. They laughed and said that, unfortunately, the kids weren't rented. They were from Lubbock, Texas.

I walked in the sunshine back to my car. Using a book of discount coupons, I'd gotten at a roadside stop, I found a number of medium-priced hotels with good facilities. By 6:30 pm, I was checked into a room with a king-size bed, free wifi internet connection, pool, and Jacuzzi.

I ventured out to a supermarket to buy emergency rations: milk, juice, and dried fruit. Back in my room, I handled email, photos and diary, read the national newspaper, and tried to have an early night. Lights out at 10:30 pm.

[Diary] *At 8 am, I joined an international committee for its weekly 1-hour phone meeting. (The trip wasn't all vacation!) By the time I was done with that, the east coast was well and truly into its workday, and email started to arrive.*

By 10:45 am, I was downtown and parked in a high-rise parking station. My first activity for the day was a visit to the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. She was a well-known American painter who lived to be 100. She spent many years in the area around Santa Fe painting the desert landscapes. The main exhibit was of her works along with a collection of black and white photos by renowned nature photographer Ansel Adams. I paid extra for the audio tour in an attempt to understand the exhibits, but, once again, the understanding of art eluded me, Philistine that I am.

I found my way back to the Plaza café for lunch. It was very busy, and all the tables were taken, so I sat at the counter next to Kathy from Pittsburgh, a fellow Sagittarian. We spent more than an hour swapping travel and life stories, and I invited her to visit me in Reston.

From there, I walked to the park in the main plaza, where I shared a bench with a woman having a brown-bag lunch in the sun. She was a potter and was selling at a stall in a park nearby. It was another glorious day, very warm with a gentle cool breeze and a clear blue sky.

The next culture stop was the Institute of American Indian Arts Museum. The main exhibits were made by members of the Mississippi and Oklahoma branches of the Choctaw tribe. There was clothing, beadwork, jewelry, baskets, and art. Now all that artwork, I understood.

[Diary] *By 9 am, I was packed, checked-out, and heading north on Highway 285. Then it was west on 502, stopping occasionally to shoot photos and video of the spectacular rock formations. Although there was plenty of snowmelt in spring, the countryside looked harsh.*

10.3 Bandelier National Monument

At the entrance, I paid the fee, and drove the three miles to the visitor center. I took the short trail, along a creek, through the ruins of a 500-year-old Anasazi village, and up to a series of cliff dwellings via ladders. Several caves were open for inspection, and each had ceilings blackened from ancient campfires. Inside, they were very cool. Near the end of that trail loop, a sign to another attraction caught my eye, so off down the half-mile trail I went in search of the Alcove ceremonial site. The ceremonial chamber (kiva) was built on the floor of a huge cave 140 feet up from the canyon floor. It was reached by a series of large wooden ladders and was well worth the effort.

10.4 Los Alamos and Beyond

I took my time on the highway, and arrived in Los Alamos around 3 pm. This is the home of the world-famous Los Alamos National Laboratories, which was created in the 1940s to research and develop nuclear weapons for the U.S. with Britain as a partner. It is still in operation today. I spent two hours in the Bradbury Science Museum watching videos and looking at numerous displays including mock-up copies of the bombs Fat Man and Little Boy, which were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, respectively. It was a moving experience.

Although Los Alamos looked like a nice place to stay, I pushed on up into the mountains with the sun streaming down, a nice breeze blowing, and music playing. I soon discovered the best section of Highway 4, which ran through prime ranch land and pine forests. It didn't take me long to start thinking about living there.

I stopped off at Valles Caldera National Preserve to see some of its 7,000 elk. The preserve is tens of thousands of acres in size, and much of it is down in a caldera formed when the magma underneath ran out when a massive volcano on the edge erupted.

10.5 La Cueva

Next came La Cueva (Spanish for "cave"), which consisted of a general store, restaurant, and motel. It was 6 pm, and I got the last room. I paid more than I had wanted, but it was a long way to the next

town, the proprietors were very friendly, and they had free internet access. Each cabin/room was named for a bird or animal; I was in Rabbit, right down the end. The bonus came in the form of a totally unexpected queen-size bed. The room was very comfortably furnished and included novels and magazines. The back door led out to a patio and picnic area, complete with BBQs. Just down over the back rail-fence, a stream ran rapidly passed, and, yes, there was even a young beaver swimming there with his small lodge off to one side. I sat in the sun at a picnic table reading the national newspaper as the stream gurgled by. It was hard to image that at 9 am that morning, I was in the state capital.

At 8:05, I went across to the café to eat supper, only to be told they closed at 8! Don't you just hate that when that happens! So, it was on to Plan B, which I made up right then and there. At the general store, I cobbled together some snack food, and retreated to my cabin to eat and do the day's newspaper puzzles. I sat indoors but with the backdoor open. However, once the sun went down, it got cold pretty quickly. I read some brochures that described the places I'd visited. Lights out at 10 pm.

[Diary] It was a cold night up at 8,500 feet, but I had plenty of warm bedding. I was wide awake at 8 am. By 9 am, I was in the diner next door chowing down on sausage, egg, hash-brown potatoes, and toast, tapping my foot to country music. I took my time over breakfast and worked on some puzzles. Then I walked along the creek where a number of fishermen had set up their operations. However, there were no beaver out, probably because of the dogs around.

At 11 am, I checked-out and got email using the motel wifi while sitting in my car. The drive south out of the mountains was very pleasant, but slow. The lush green soon gave way to parched red. After an hour, I hit the main highway, so could increase my speed.

10.6 South and West into the Desert

I drove to the outskirts of Albuquerque, and then went west on Interstate 40 (I-40), which goes 2,547 miles right across the country, from Barstow, California, to Wilmington, North Carolina. I stopped along the way for refreshments and a stretch. I was surprised to come across an area with large dark black lava flows. That continued for many miles and was in stark contrast to the surrounding geology.

I got off the freeway at the town of Grants, and went in search of a public telephone. Being one of the (presumably) few Americans without a mobile phone occasionally puts me at a disadvantage. The first phone I found was out of order. The second one had a dial tone, but the buttons worked only intermittently. The third one ate my 50 cents and wanted more money. On my fourth try, I switched to a phone credit card, and actually got through to my next hosts, letting them know I was less than an hour away.

Highway 53 was in good condition, and 40 minutes later, I was at the main ranch gate. Then it was on to several miles of dirt track and up into the forest to my hosts George and Caroly. After 4.5 hours of driving, I was ready to rest.

They built their magnificent adobe, passive, solar house themselves, and were retired on 40 acres. The house had one level, with huge windows facing south, with a great view.

We sat on a patio in the shade sipping cold drinks and getting acquainted. For supper, we had typical southwestern fare: corn tortillas, cheese, chicken and beans. We talked some more and then we each settled down to reading, and in my case, writing this diary. Lights out at 10 pm.

[Diary] *My bed was Heavenly, and I had a very good sleep. I was up at 8 am, and not long after, we sat down to halves of grapefruit and waffles with syrup. After the dishes were done, I packed water, emergency rations, hat, and cameras, and headed out for the El Morro National Monument, just a few miles away. There, I paid my \$3, watched an orientation video, and then applied sunscreen. The 2-mile hike started at the base of some formidable cliffs, on which Native Americans, Spanish explorers, and settlers moving west had all carved their names, dates, messages, and even a poem at a place called "Inscription Rock." A 12-foot-deep, 200,000-gallon pool lay at the bottom, which is why the spot was so popular.*

The trail slowly took me 200 feet up to the top of the rock formation. Along the way, the geology changed several times. Fortunately, there were plenty of shade trees on the way up. From the top, I could see a large canyon down between the two branches of the rock formation. A Native American pueblo (Spanish for "village") ruin was partially excavated. It was occupied in the 13th or 14th century.

Back at the visitor center, I looked at the exhibits, bought a National Park DVD, and had a light lunch. On the way home, I stopped in at a Trading Post where I had a delicious peach-flavored smoothie (milk, crushed ice, and frozen fruit).

Back at the ranch, I rested up, worked on this diary, and went through all the digital photos from this trip, deleting some and naming the others. This tourist thing can be work! Around 5 pm, we had drinks in the shade on the patio. Then at 6 pm, we ate supper there. George grilled kebabs of meat, mushrooms, zucchini, and red pepper. Caroly served a salad. We talked over supper, and then did the dishes before we all worked on individual projects.

I showered and lay in bed reading a guidebook for frugal travelers that Caroly had published some years ago. As I read, I found myself agreeing with a lot of the advice she had given. One bit of information I got was that, at age 19, George had driven from Florida to Alaska to Costa Rica, and from there, to Nova Scotia, in the Atlantic Provinces of Canada. What a trip! Lights out by 9:30 pm.

[Diary] *I was up with the alarm at 7 am. We all had a light breakfast, and then packed for Albuquerque, me to head home, and them for a big shopping trip.*

I left around 8 am, driving east, into the morning sun. It was pleasant out, and I had the windows down, and the stereo blasting as I went down the highway.

10.7 Acoma

At exit 102 of Interstate 40, I went south some 15 miles, onto the Acoma Native American reservation, to an old town built high on a mesa (Spanish for "table"). At the very nicely appointed visitor center, I paid my \$12 for a guided tour, and 10 minutes later, a bus took us up to the top. A young Acoma woman, called Tahoma, welcomed us, and guided us through the Catholic church, cemetery, and village. Of the 300 dwellings up there, fewer than 20 are lived-in year-round. The rest are only used

during Catholic or Acoma festivals, when extended families come to celebrate. I lead a small group back down, via a very steep set of steps carved into the rock. It was challenging, but well worth it.

Back at the visitor center, I had lunch with a retired couple from Alabama. All the food was prepared on the reservation, and I had some rather spicy lamb stew and bread, which was baked in a traditional mud brick oven outdoors.

Back at the ramp to the interstate highway, I picked up a hitchhiker. Originally from Michigan, he'd been working in southeast Arizona, near Tombstone. He was headed to Denver, Colorado, to find work. We chatted the 50 miles to Albuquerque, where I dropped him at a northbound ramp of I-25.

10.8 Albuquerque

I was looking for a cheap hotel and soon found one with free wireless internet and a king-size bed. For the first time the whole trip I turned on the air-conditioning, and it sure felt good. As I unpacked, I watched some TV, and found that a movie was about to start. So, with my being on holiday, I didn't think that watching a movie at four o'clock in the afternoon was too decadent.

Soon after 6 pm, I walked to Milton's, the 24-hour diner nearby. I had a bowl of soup—just like Grandma used to make—and a BLT, while reading the national newspaper. After supper, I handled email, surfed the internet, and watched some TV. Lights out at 9:15 pm.

[Diary] *I was awake a little before my 5:45 am alarm. I got my final email fix, packed my bags, dropped my room key in the "after hours" slot, and was on Interstate 25 for the short drive south to the airport. Weather-wise, it was a very nice, clear morning.*

I fly a great deal, and rarely have any problems. However, as the old saying goes, "When it rains, it pours." It started right at the beginning when I returned my rental car; my rental record had been messed up, and the agent was neither polite nor helpful.

Once I got to the terminal, controlled chaos reigned. All the people from a cancelled flight were lined up in the premier check-in line, leaving us premier travelers with the exact opposite of priority check-in. Eventually, I got to the front, but much of the time I'd budgeted for breakfast had evaporated. And, No, United doesn't have a business lounge at ABQ, nor does the airport have a priority security line. So, it was one long line after the other, even to buy breakfast.

Despite having arrived at the airport two hours before my departure time, I got to Gate B9 just before boarding started. When priority boarding was announced, I stepped forward, put my boarding pass into the reader, which promptly rejected it. So, an agent came over, and after some effort trying to figure out why, he solved the problem by issuing me a new boarding pass, but this time, in First Class. Considering I was flying on a free ticket anyway, I did not object. (Of course, having had a rushed breakfast before boarding, I had to decline the nice one they served up front just after we were airborne.)

Once I was on the plane, things seemed to get back to normal. The captain and First-Class flight attendant welcomed me on board with big smiles, a pre-flight drink was served, and all was right in the

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world, or at least in Seat 2A of UA flight 782's Airbus 319, which was headed for Washington DC, non-stop.

ABQ shares runways with Kirtland Airforce Base, and as we went down the runway, I saw quite a few military aircraft, including two Ospreys, which take off vertically like a helicopter and then fly like a plane once their rotors are tilted. A large number of 4-engine prop cargo planes were present.

I worked on this diary while sipping a mixture of cranberry and apple juice. Then it was time for a short nap. The ride was very smooth, and we arrived at IAD, on-time at 1:55 pm, Eastern Daylight Time, losing two hours along the way. The baggage handlers played "hide the luggage" for a while, but, eventually, it appeared. By then, Jenny had arrived to pick me up, and we were on our way home, in humid weather.

Back home, it was time to unpack from the trip, complete my diary, upload and name photos, and upload and edit video. There was even a little bit of paid work to be done before our house guests (a German family) arrived on the following Friday. And my next flight wasn't scheduled for another four whole weeks!

One interesting fact was that New Mexico was the 47th state to be admitted to the US Union, and it was the 47th state I'd visited.

11. October 2019, “Washington D.C.”

Washington D.C. is the capital city of the United States of America. The “DC” suffix means “District of Columbia,” and the city is often referred to as “Washington” or simply “D.C.” However, note that there is also a state called Washington (think Seattle and Spokane), in the extreme northwest of the Continental US, so using the term “Washington” can cause confusion unless the context is clear.

D.C. is the home of the headquarters of the three branches of the Federal Government: The Executive, the Legislative, and the Judicial. [Almost all the Executive Departments and Agencies are within the limits of the District of Columbia, but the Department of Defense is actually across the Potomac River in the Pentagon located in the state of Virginia.]

According to Wikipedia, at the time of writing, “The city hosts 177 foreign embassies as well as the headquarters of many international organizations, trade unions, non-profit, lobbying groups, and professional associations, including the World Bank Group, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization of American States, ...”.

For a detailed overview of Washington D.C., click [here](#).

11.1 Shape and Layout

When D.C. was created in 1791, it was a 10-mile-by-10-mile square consisting of land contributed by the states of Maryland and Virginia, and the Potomac River that separated them. However, in 1847, that part contributed by Virginia was returned to that state, leaving approximately 69 square miles (69% of the original), the southwestern, jagged edge of which borders on the Potomac.

Some 19% of the city's total area is parkland, which contains a wide variety of plant and animal species, including deer and coyotes.

The streets of D.C. are organized in a grid system. Those running north-south are numbered (as in First, Second, and Third Street), those running east-west are lettered (as in D, E, and F Street), and those running diagonally, at least in the downtown area, are named for states (as in New York Avenue and Virginia Avenue). Now while such a plan keeps it simple for Members of Congress and those that lobby them, in order to confuse any invading army—not to mention people visiting from out-of-town—a twist was added. The Capitol building is at the center of a rectangular coordinate system whose four quadrants are named—TA DAH!—Northwest, Northeast, Southeast, and Southwest! And any street in a quadrant has the suffix NW, NE, SE, or SW, as appropriate. (For example, the Whitehouse is at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, and Union [railway] Station is at 50 Massachusetts Avenue NE.) As a result, there are actually four distinct intersections of 6th and C Streets, for example, one per quadrant.

11.2 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

This is probably one of the best-known addresses in the world and is the location of the White House, the residence of the US President. This building includes the West Wing, the location of the President's Oval Office.

Marine One is the Presidential helicopter, which typically transports the President to/from Air Force One (stationed at Andrews Air Force Base in suburban Maryland) and to/from the Presidential retreat, Camp David, in rural Maryland. Marine One lands in the front yard of the White House. [Once while taking a cousin on a tour of the D.C. Mall, I watched Marine One land to deliver President George W. Bush. Some years later, I watched Air Force One land at the Naval Air Station in San Diego, California, with President Obama onboard.]

Every four years, on January 20, the President takes office at the Presidential inauguration, held on the steps of the US Capitol Building. The Presidential motorcade—and its very long parade—then travels from the Capitol to the White House along Pennsylvania Avenue. [I stood out in the cold along Pennsylvania Avenue for the first inaugurations of Presidents Reagan and Clinton.]

Across the street from the White House is Blair House, where visiting dignitaries and other guests of the President sometimes stay. When a head of a foreign government is in residence there, at the corner of each street in the surrounding neighborhoods, a set of three flags fly: Washington D.C.'s flag, the US flag, and the flag of the country of the visiting leader. [When Harry Truman was President and the White House was being renovated, he lived at Blair House. During that time, two Puerto Rican nationalists attempted to assassinate him there.]

11.3 The Capitol and Surrounds

[Note the distinction between “capital” and “capitol”.]

The United States Capitol building houses the Federal Senate and House chambers, which together make up Congress, the Legislative Branch of government. This building sits atop a hill in what is known as the *Capitol Hill district*. The Capitol (and other places mentioned below) are protected by the Capitol Police. The public may tour the Capitol via the Capitol Visitor Center (which I highly recommend visitors do).

The offices of Senators and Representatives, their staff, and meeting rooms, are not located in the Capitol. Instead, they are located on the north side of Constitution Avenue NE (Senate) and the south side of Independence Avenue SW (House). However, they are part of the Capitol Complex, and are protected by the Capitol Police.

On the eastern side of First Street NE stands the U.S. Supreme Court (pinnacle of the federal Judicial Branch), and next door, on the eastern side of First Street SE, stands the main building of the Library of Congress, the research arm of the US Congress. The United States Botanic Garden is in the southwest corner of the Capitol grounds. These places are also part of the Capitol Complex and are protected by the Capitol Police.

Although the Library of Congress doesn't look too impressive from the outside, it is definitely worth a visit just to see the interior. As well as entering via its main door, a tunnel leads to it from the Capitol.

The Supreme Court building is also worth a visit even if you don't plan on attending a formal session. There is an orientation video narrated by one or more of the justices, halls of permanent exhibits, and sometimes temporary exhibitions. There is also a nice cafeteria.

11.4 The National Mall and Memorial Parks

This is the large area to the west of the Capitol and is part of the [National Park Service](#).

Much of this area used to be a mosquito-infested swamp, which is why, from time to time, people running for national office who have not served before in Washington promise that if elected, they will come to D.C. and “Drain the swamp!”

I highly recommend visiting the following:

- [Smithsonian Museums](#): These have free admission, although there is a charge for some special exhibits and movies. The [National Air and Space Museum](#) is perhaps the most-visited museum in the world. The place to start in the [National Museum of the American Indian](#) is in a small, circular theater on the top floor where a video is projected onto blankets. Although its cafeteria isn't cheap—visit even if you don't eat there—all the food is native American, as are all the things in the gift store. The administration building, [the Castle](#), is also worth a visit.
- [Washington Monument](#) (site of a major fireworks display on July 4th): Thankfully, tourists no longer need to stand out in the weather to get inside. Now, they get a (free) ticket in advance, which is stamped for a particular date/time.
- [Lincoln Memorial](#): The destination of various protests, and where one can stand on the spot from which [Martin Luther King](#) gave his “I have a dream” speech. Don't miss the basement where you can watch the video shown there. The 36 columns represent the 36 states in existence when Lincoln was President. The classic view is from the left or right edge upstairs, east across the [Reflecting Pool](#), past the Washington Monument, and to the Capitol.
- [Vietnam Veterans Memorial](#): After all the war memorials showing dead white guys on horseback, this was a big departure when it was completed in 1982. It's a wall sunken into the ground with the names of the 58,220 dead and missing-in-action engraved on a series of panels ordered by year. Nearby directories help you locate the panel for a given name. Nearby is the [Three Servicemen Statue](#) (with Agent Orange marker) and the [Vietnam Women's Memorial](#).
- [Korean War Veterans Memorial](#): After the Vietnam Memorial, it was a challenge for “what next” in war memorials, but this one really does justice to the conflict. I'm especially taken by the wall containing sandblasted images of photos carried by servicemen.
- [Thomas Jefferson Memorial](#): Situated on the [Tidal Basin](#) with a larger-than-life statue at its heart.
- [Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial](#): This set of four open-rooms shows via writing and sculpture a snapshot of each of FDR's terms in office. And you can join the throngs of people who have patted the bronze head of the statue of his well-known dog, [Fala](#).
- [Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial](#): This statue is also situated on the Tidal Basin.
- [National World War II Memorial](#): At the center of the Mall, this relatively new memorial is sunken down, so it doesn't obscure the view down the Mall at ground level.

Personally, I prefer to visit most of the monuments and memorials at night.

Each spring, the Tidal Basin is the location of the [National Cherry Blossom Festival](#) when many visitors come to see the pink and white blossoms. However, it is not uncommon to have strong winds and/or

heavy rain in the days before the festival, resulting in many of the blossoms being knocked from the trees.

11.5 Local Government

Washington D.C. is *not* a state (yet)! Instead, it is a federal territory whose government is headed by a [mayor](#) and [council](#). However, the US Congress maintains supreme authority over the city and may overturn local laws.

For more information on how this all works, click [here](#).

11.6 Federal Representation and Federal Elections

Washington D.C. is one of six US Federal Territories (the others being [American Samoa](#), [Guam](#), the [Northern Mariana Islands](#), [Puerto Rico](#), and the [U.S. Virgin Islands](#)). **None of these territories has a voting member in the US Congress, not even D.C.!** And while D.C. does have a non-voting, at-large [congressional delegate](#) to the House of Representatives, it has *no* representation at all in the Senate. In that respect, citizens residing in D.C. definitely are second-class Americans!

Leading up to the American Revolution, in 1773, the [Boston Tea Party](#) was a protest by the American colonists who objected to Britain's Tea Act because they believed that it violated their rights as Englishmen to "no taxation without representation" in British Parliament. Fast-forward 246 years, and we find that the D.C. motor vehicle license plate contains the phrase "End taxation without representation."

In 1961, the [Twenty-third Amendment to the United States Constitution](#) went into effect. For Presidential elections, this treats D.C. like the least-populous state, as though it had one Representative and two Senators, resulting in its having three [electoral votes](#). (The other 535 electors come from the 50 states.) So, since 1961, citizens in the nation's capital can *actually* vote in a Presidential election. (See [District of Columbia voting rights](#) for more information.) But they still don't have a vote in Congress!

It is interesting to see how some other countries having a "capital territory" deal with this issue:

- [Canberra, Australia](#) (as well as the [Northern Territory](#))
- [Mexico City, Mexico](#)
- [Brasilia, Brazil](#)

11.7 The Fight for Statehood

There have been, and continue to be, efforts to get D.C. full statehood. And if that were successful, given the model used for Federal representation in Congress for the 50 states, that would result in D.C. have one Representative and two Senators. Now, D.C. has long been a bastion of the Democratic Party, so it is quite likely that all three of these positions would ultimately be held by Democrats. With the Senate having only 100 members (two per state), adding two extra Democrats could easily cause control to swing Democrats' way. (As the House has 435 members, an addition of one would not have anywhere near as big an impact.) As a result, Republican opposition to statehood is high.

See [District of Columbia statehood movement](#) for more information.

11.8 The War of 1812

Although the British lost the [American Revolutionary War](#) in 1783, after licking their wounds, they decided to come back and “have another go,” from June 1812 through February 1815. In August of 1814, the blighters actually captured and occupied the US Capitol, and [set fire](#) to the White House and Capitol. Altogether, they were quite an unfriendly lot!

These days, the Brits seem to be content with a small bit of land in D.C. for an [embassy](#), and permission for its staff and other subjects to play [cricket](#) in/near The Mall.

11.9 The Greater Metropolitan Area

The Washington DC metro area includes the Maryland suburbs on the east side of the Potomac River, and the Virginia suburbs on the west side. This is especially important for prospective tourists to know when they are looking for accommodation. Although the D.C. subway system is relatively small, it does provide easy access to D.C. from numerous Maryland and Virginia areas.

The population of D.C proper is around 700,000 while the metro area has more than six million. Given the large number of people commuting to work from the suburbs, it is estimated that D.C.'s weekday population exceeds a million.

11.10 Conclusion

Washington D.C. was *not* the first national capital. The [former capitals](#) include Annapolis, Maryland; New York City, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Trenton, New Jersey.

The second President, [John Adams](#), was the first to occupy the White House, in November 1800. Interestingly, the Vice President did *not* have an official residence until 1974 when a [house](#) on the grounds of the United States Naval Observatory was made available. However, its first fulltime resident was [Walter Mondale](#) (1977–1981).

Presidential history buffs can visit [Ford's Theater](#), where Abraham Lincoln was fatally wounded.

Many of D.C. neighborhoods have names, and one of the best-known is [Georgetown](#) with its brownstone houses and up-scale shopping and eating establishments. It is also home to [Georgetown University](#), and the place where the [Chesapeake & Ohio Canal](#) joins the Potomac River.

One of the best “secrets” of D.C. is [Theodore Roosevelt Island](#), a National Park on an island in the Potomac River. Although many thousands of commuters drive over part of it on a bridge each workday, because the island is only accessible from Virginia, and then by only one entrance while driving west, it's not easy to get to, and there is very little parking. Having walked and picnicked there many times, in all four seasons, I highly recommend going there. And if you are a little adventurous and the north shore of the island isn't flooded, you can make your way off the path through the woods to stand on a beach and get the only uninterrupted view of the Kennedy Center and Watergate complex (see below).

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The [John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts](#) overlooks the Potomac River, as does the nearby [Watergate building complex](#), the location of the great [Watergate](#) break-in, in 1972, that ultimately led to President Nixon's resignation.

The [Washington Post](#) newspaper was started in 1877. It is well-known for its reporting on the Watergate scandal, which was the subject of the 1976 movie, "All the President's Men." The 2017 movie, "[The Post](#)," covers the paper's decision in 1971 to publish the [Pentagon Papers](#).

According to [Wikipedia](#), "Washington was once described as the 'murder capital' of the United States during the early 1990s. The number of murders peaked in 1991 at 479, but the level of violence then began to decline significantly." Interestingly, in 1995, the owner of "The Washington Bullets" professional basketball team announced he would change the name to avoid violent overtones! Eventually, the team became the [Washington Wizards](#). For many years, there has been opposition to the name of the local-area professional football team, [Washington Redskins](#), seen by some as offensive. Click [here](#) for more details.

Finally, not one of D.C. finest moments, according to Wikipedia, The [Bonus Army](#), "were the 43,000 marchers—17,000 U.S. World War I veterans, their families, and affiliated groups—who gathered in Washington, D.C. in the summer of 1932 to demand cash-payment redemption of their service certificates. ... Many of the war veterans had been out of work since the beginning of the Great Depression. The World War Adjusted Compensation Act of 1924 had awarded them bonuses in the form of certificates they could not redeem until 1945. Each certificate, issued to a qualified veteran soldier, bore a face value equal to the soldier's promised payment [with] compound interest. The principal demand of the Bonus Army was the immediate cash payment of their certificates.

On July 28, U.S. Attorney General William D. Mitchell ordered the veterans removed from all government property. Washington police met with resistance, shots were fired, and two veterans were wounded and later died. President Herbert Hoover then ordered the Army to clear the marchers' campsite. Army Chief of Staff General Douglas MacArthur commanded the infantry and cavalry supported by six tanks. The Bonus Army marchers with their wives and children were driven out, and their shelters and belongings burned."

Major [George S. Patton](#) commanded a cavalry group, and Major [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#) served as one of MacArthur's aides.

12. November 2019, "Signs of Life: Part 18"

From time to time during my travels, I come across signs that I find interesting for one reason or another. Sometimes, they contain clever writing, are humorous, or remind me of some place or event. Here are some from Japan.



Magnetic signs in my Tokyo hotel room, which I could stick on the outside of my room's metal door.

I especially liked the pictures.



Once you've seen this sign on the sides of vans, you start to wonder what it's all about.

According to Wikipedia, "[Yamato Transport](#) is Japan's largest door-to-door delivery service companies." Supposedly, they are as careful as a momma cat is when she moves her kittens!



Well, do you?

Yakiniku refers to grilled meat cuisine.



East meets west.

BTW, this famous American brand of whiskey is now owned by the Japanese!

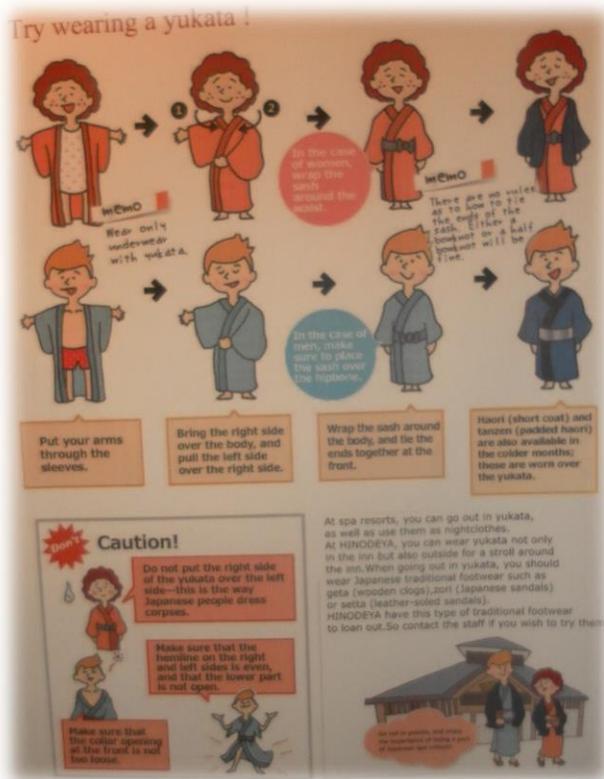


As big as the Japanese are on small animals as pets, this is a recyclable bottle made of polyethylene terephthalate (PET).



I was staying at a ryokan on Izu Peninsular, and there were two sets of indoor baths with change rooms. The larger one was usually assigned to men; however, at certain times of each day, they swapped over the signs, so the ladies could enjoy the larger communal bath. Now while I remember reading this soon after I checked in, I promptly forgot about it, until that is, I was coming out of what had been the men's room the day before, and ran

into a woman coming in. She gasped at the sight of the giant *gaijin* (foreigner) coming out of the (currently) ladies' room, and raced away!



When staying at a ryokan, one gets to wear a kimono-like gown called a yukata, for walking around the house and gardens, and for sleeping. The important thing to remember is shown in the box marked Caution! It states, “Do not put the right side of the Yukata over the left side—this is the way Japanese people dress corpses.” So, unless you want to be a “dead man walking”, pay attention!



In my many years of seeing this beverage during my trips to Japan, I cannot get inspired by drinking the sweat from anything! That said, this sports drink is very popular.

According to Wikipedia, “The reference to sweat in the name of the beverage tends to have a certain off-putting or humorous connotation for native English speakers. However, the name was chosen by the manufacturers originally for the purpose of marketing the product as a sports drink in Japan, where English words are used differently. It was largely derived from the notion of what it is intended to supply to the drinker: all of the nutrients and electrolytes lost when sweating. The first part of the name, *Pocari*, does not have any meaning; the word was coined for its light, bright sound.”

Sign on a commercial laundry, probably not run by the Chinaman, Mr. Clea Ning!



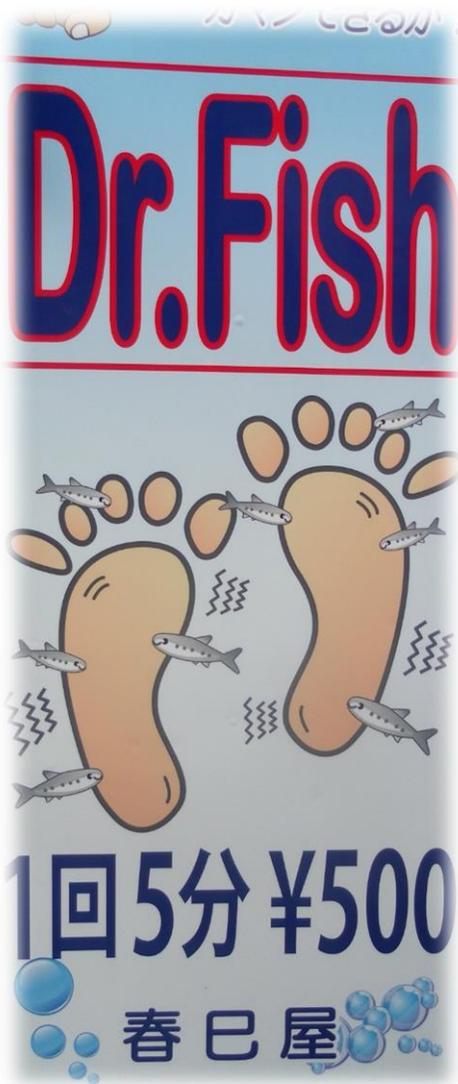
On the table of a restaurant. Once a customer has ordered, waitstaff do not come and ask, "Is everything OK?" several times throughout the meal. If you want their attention, or to get the bill, you simply press the button, and someone comes.



Just in case you were wondering what this pet store is offering, the list contains the following: dog run, dog cafe, dog products, souvenirs, porcelain, and, of course, more!



In some Japanese restaurants, one takes off one's street shoes and puts on slippers provided by the host. (However, as I can attest, one size does *not* fit all!) So, what to do with one's own shoes? Put them in a storage locker in the foyer, close the locker door, and take the wooden block "key" with you. *Wakari-mas?* (Do you understand?)



From a sign outside a store on the island of Enoshima.

For only 500 yen, you can take off your shoes and socks, roll up your pants legs, sit down with your feet in a pond, and let the fish remove all the dead skin. It's ticklish fun!



According to Wiktionary, *capricious* means “impulsive and unpredictable; determined by chance, impulse, or whim.” An interesting name for a resort.



While all the kinds of people qualified to sit in this train seat are obvious, I can't help but feel sorry for the woman who appears to be pregnant with triplets!



As Wikipedia states, 'The *maneki-neko*, literally "**beckoning cat**", is a common Japanese figurine (lucky charm, talisman) which is often believed to bring good luck to the owner.' You'll see it "all over the place."

BTW, *neko* is Japanese for *cat*.

Annex A. Cumulative Index for Volumes 1–11

A.1 Postings in Reverse Chronological Order

Here are the essays posted thus far, with the most recent listed first:

A.1.1 Volume 11

- #132 November 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 22](#) — Switzerland
- #131 October 2020: [School Days: Part 2](#)
- #130 September 2020: [Travel – Memories of Russia](#)
- #129 August 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 21](#) — the Northern Neck of Virginia, USA
- #128 July 2020: [School Days: Part 1](#)
- #127 June 2020: [Travel – Memories of Chile](#)
- #126 May 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 20](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland; London, England; Beijing, China; and more
- #125 April 2020: [The REALLY BIG Picture](#)
- #124 March 2020: [Travel – Memories of the US Desert Southwest](#)
- #123 February 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 19](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland
- #122 January 2020: [Football, Aussie Style](#)
- #121 December 2019: [Travel – Memories of Yorkshire](#)

A.1.2 Volume 10

- #120 November 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 18](#) — Japan
- #119 October 2019: [Washington D.C.](#)
- #118 September 2019: [Travel – Memories of New Mexico](#)
- #117 August 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 17](#) — Texas and Utah
- #116 July 2019: [My Experience with Airbnb](#)
- #115 June 2019: [Travel – From Adelaide to Washington DC](#)
- #114 May 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 16](#) — St. Croix
- #113 April 2019: [Law Enforcement in the US](#)
- #112 March 2019: [Travel – Memories of Abu Dhabi, UAE](#)
- #111 February 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 15](#) — Norway
- #110 January 2019: [My Time in Maine](#)
- #109 December 2018: [Travel – Memories of Prague, Salzburg, and-Munchen](#)

A.1.3 Volume 9

- #108 November 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 14](#) — Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy.
- #107 October 2018: [Living in Chicago](#)
- #106 September 2018: [Travel – Memories of Puerto Rico](#)
- #105 August 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 13](#) — Croatia.

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- #104 July 2018: [A Little Bit of Religion](#)
- #103 June 2018: [Travel – Memories of Sacramento, Tahoe, Reno, & Napa Valley](#)
- #102 May 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 12](#) — Vienna, Austria, and Seoul, Korea.
- #101 April 2018: [These United States](#)
- #100 March 2018: [Travel – Memories of The Dalmatian Coast](#)
- #99 February 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 11](#) — US states of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, and Korea and Japan
- #98 January 2018: [Having a Plan B](#)
- #97 December 2017: [Travel – Memories of The Hill Country, Texas, Y'all](#)

A.1.4 Volume 8

- #96 November 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 10](#) — Hawaii
- #95 October 2017: [English – Part 7: Adverbs](#)
- #94 September 2017: [Travel – Memories of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao](#)
- #93 August 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 9](#) — Barcelona, Spain
- #92 July 2017: [What is Normal – Part 10. Automobiles and Driving](#)
- #91 June 2017: [Travel – Memories of Jordan](#)
- #90 May 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 8](#) — France, Finland, California, Croatia, England, Korea, and Washington State
- #89 April 2017: [Oh, the Things that I have Eaten](#)
- #88 March 2017: [Travel – Memories of Southeast England](#)
- #87 February 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 7](#) — Italy, Jordan, and France
- #86 January 2017: [Travel – Airports](#)
- #85 December 2016: [Travel – Memories of Cornwall and Devon](#)

A.1.5 Volume 7

- #84 November 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 6](#) — Various countries
- #83 October 2016: [A Little Bit of Astronomy: The Moon](#)
- #82 September 2016: [Travel – Memories of Poland](#)
- #81 August 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 5](#) — Various countries
- #80 July 2016: [It's all Greek to Me](#)
- #79 June 2016: [Travel – Memories of South America](#)
- #78 May 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 4](#) — Australia
- #77 April 2016: [English – Part 6: Verbs](#)
- #76 March 2016: [Travel – Memories of Switzerland](#)
- #75 February 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 3](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #74 January 2016: [Accidents and Incidents](#)
- #73 December 2015: [Travel – Memories of Germany](#)

A.1.6 Volume 6

- #72 November 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 2](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #71 October 2015: [What is Normal – Part 9. An American in Australia](#)
- #70 September 2015: [Travel – Memories of Austria](#)
- #69 August 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 1](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #68 July 2015: [Confessions of a Canine Companion](#)
- #67 June 2015: [Travel – Memories of Mexico and Central America](#)
- #66 May 2015: [What is Normal – Part 8: Public Holidays](#)
- #65 April 2015: [Travel – Memories of Asia](#)
- #64 March 2015: [A Little Bit of Royalty](#)
- #63 February 2015: [Travel – Memories of the Eastern Bloc](#)
- #62 January 2015: [Sockets, Plugs, and Cables](#)
- #61 December 2014: [Travel – Oh the Places I have Stayed](#)

A.1.7 Volume 5

- #60 November 2014: [English – Part 5: Adjectives](#)
- #59 October 2014: [Travel – Memories of the Benelux Countries](#)
- #58 September 2014: [Abbreviations and Acronyms](#)
- #57 August 2014: [Travel – Memories of Japan](#)
- #56 July 2014: [Technology, Revisited](#)
- #55 June 2014: [Travel – Memories of Australia](#)
- #54 May 2014: [What is Normal – Part 7: What's in a Name?](#)
- #53 April 2014: [Travel – Memories of Ireland and the UK](#)
- #52 March 2014: [A Little Bit of Mathematics](#)
- #51 February 2014: [Travel – Memories of Scandinavia](#)
- #50 January 2014: [The Cost of Bad Weather and Natural Disasters](#)
- #49 December 2013: [Travel – Memories of Italy](#)

A.1.8 Volume 4

- #48 November 2013: [English – Part 4: Pronouns](#)
- #47 October 2013: [Last Writes](#) — Leaving an audit trail for your executor and/or loved ones
- #46 September 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 4](#) — Gardens, Theme Parks, Parliament Houses and Capitals, National Parks and Historic Places, and some Odds and Ends
- #45 August 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 3](#) — Museums and Art Galleries, Libraries, and Aquariums
- #44 July 2013: [English – Part 3: Nouns](#)
- #43 June 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 2](#) — Royal Hangouts and Military-Related Places and Things

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- #42 May 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 1](#) — Ancient Civilizations and Old Sites, and Religious Places and Artifacts
- #41 April 2013: [Standards – The Secret Life of a Language Lawyer](#) — A look at some everyday standards and conventions
- #40 March 2013: [What is Normal – Part 6: Weights and Measures](#)
- #39 February 2013: [The Big Move](#) — preparing and selling a house, finding another one, and moving.
- #38 January 2013: [Starting your Own Non-Profit](#)
- #37 December 2012: [Symbols and Marks](#)

A.1.9 Volume 3

- #36 November 2012: [English – Part 2: Pronunciation](#)
- #35 October 2012: [A Little Bit More American Civics](#) — The Congress, Presidential Succession, The Supreme Court, and the Flag
- #34 September 2012: [A Little Bit of American Civics](#) — The Constitution, Presidency, Vice Presidency, and Cabinet
- #33 August 2012: [What is Normal – Part 5: Numbers and Counting Systems](#)
- #32 July 2012: [Are You Getting Enough Vacation?](#)
- #31 June 2012: [English – Part 1: A Potpourri](#)
- #30 May 2012: [Shooting and Editing Home Video](#)
- #29 April 2012: [Electronic Mail Etiquette](#) — Some of my pet peeves and observations about people who use email
- #28 March 2012: [How Committees Work](#) — My take on 40 years of committee participation, and how successful committees can and should work.
- #27 February 2012: [Living in Utopia](#) — Life in a planned American city.
- #26 January 2012: [Travel – Packing and Preparing](#)
- #25 December 2011: [Making Good-Looking Documents](#) — Some tips on how to take advantage of a word processing program.

A.1.10 Volume 2

- #24 November 2011: [A Little Foreign Language Goes a Long Way](#) — The advantages of having some basic foreign language skills when traveling.
- #23 October 2011: [Starting Your Own Business](#)
- #22 September 2011: [What is Normal – Part 4: Dates and Times](#)
- #21 August 2011: [Teaching English as a Second Language](#)
- #20 July 2011: [A Walk along the River](#) — A look back at my 187-mile hike along the Thames Path in England.
- #19 June 2011: [Just Me and MiniMe: Traveling with Technology](#)
- #18 May 2011: [Planning for Success](#)

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- #17 April 2011: [Travel – FAQs](#)
- #16 March 2011: [What is Normal – Part 3: Money](#)
- #15 February 2011: [Talk is Cheap. Write it Down](#) — I explore what I perceive to be the four stages of turning a dream into reality and why many people don't have what it takes to go beyond the first one or two stages.
- #14 January 2011: [Waiting My Turn](#) — A look back at all those times I'd stood in line or taken a number and waited my turn.
- #13 December 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 2](#) — I discuss automobiles, still and video cameras, the written word, a digital data preservation strategy, and my right-hand gadget.

A.1.11 Volume 1

- #12 November 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 1](#) — I discuss the telephone, television, the internet, and recorded music.
- #11 October 2010: [Books by My Bed](#) — My love of books.
- #10 September 2010: [Making Allowances](#) — My experiences in setting up an allowance for my son.
- #9 August 2010: [Confessions of an Obama Volunteer](#) — My involvement in the 2008 US Presidential election.
- #8 July 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 2: Writing Systems](#)
- #7 June 2010: [Australia and the U.S. – A Contrast](#) — A comparison of the following: politics and government, law enforcement, taxation, education, and changing light bulbs.
- #6 May 2010: [Travel – Fly Me to the Moon](#) — My flight log after 40 years of air travel.
- #5 April 2010: [The Road to US Citizenship](#)
- #4 March 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 1: Getting Started](#)
- #3 February 2010: [Where's My Damn Gold Watch?](#) — A look back at my first 40 years in the workforce.
- #2 January 2010: [Travel – Home Stays](#)
- #1 December 2009: [Hi Ho, Hi Ho, it's Off to Blog We Go](#) — The introduction to my blog.

A.2 Series: Travel

- #130 September 2020: [Travel – Memories of Russia](#)
- #127 June 2020: [Travel – Memories of Chile](#)
- #124 March 2020: [Travel – Memories of the US Desert Southwest](#)
- #121 December 2019: [Travel – Memories of Yorkshire](#)
- #118 September 2019: [Travel – Memories of New Mexico](#)
- #115 June 2019: [Travel – From Adelaide to Washington DC](#)
- #112 March 2019: [Travel – Memories of Abu Dhabi, UAE](#)
- #109 December 2018: [Travel – Memories of Prague, Salzburg, and-Munchen](#)

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- #106 September 2018: [Travel – Memories of Puerto Rico](#)
- #103 June 2018: [Travel – Memories of Sacramento, Tahoe, Reno, & Napa Valley](#)
- #100 March 2018: [Travel – Memories of The Dalmatian Coast](#)
- #97 December 2017: [Travel – Memories of The Hill Country, Texas, Y'all](#)
- #94 September 2017: [Travel – Memories of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao](#)
- #91 June 2017: [Travel – Memories of Jordan](#)
- #88 March 2017: [Travel – Memories of Southeast England](#)
- #86 January 2017: [Travel – Airports](#)
- #85 December 2016: [Travel – Memories of Cornwall and Devon](#)
- #82 September 2016: [Travel – Memories of Poland](#)
- #79 June 2016: [Travel – Memories of South America](#)
- #76 March 2016: [Travel – Memories of Switzerland](#)
- #73 December 2015: [Travel – Memories of Germany](#)
- #70 September 2015: [Travel – Memories of Austria](#)
- #67 June 2015: [Travel – Memories of Mexico and Central America](#)
- #65 April 2015: [Travel – Memories of Asia](#)
- #63 February 2015: [Travel – Memories of the Eastern Bloc](#)
- #61 December 2014: [Travel – Oh the Places I have Stayed](#)
- #59 October 2014: [Travel – Memories of the Benelux Countries](#)
- #57 August 2014: [Travel – Memories of Japan](#)
- #55 June 2014: [Travel – Memories of Australia](#)
- #53 April 2014: [Travel – Memories of Ireland and the UK](#)
- #51 February 2014: [Travel – Memories of Scandinavia](#)
- #49 December 2013: [Travel – Memories of Italy](#)
- #26 January 2012: [Travel – Packing and Preparing](#)
- #17 April 2011: [Travel – FAQs](#)
- #6 May 2010: [Travel – Fly Me to the Moon](#) — My flight log after 40 years of air travel.
- #2 January 2010: [Travel – Home Stays](#)

A.3 Series: What is Normal

- #92 July 2017: [What is Normal – Part 10. Automobiles and Driving](#)
- #71 October 2015: [What is Normal – Part 9. An American in Australia](#)
- #66 May 2015: [What is Normal – Part 8: Public Holidays](#)
- #54 May 2014: [What is Normal – Part 7: What's in a Name?](#)
- #40 March 2013: [What is Normal – Part 6: Weights and Measures](#)
- #33 August 2012: [What is Normal – Part 5: Numbers and Counting Systems](#)
- #22 September 2011: [What is Normal – Part 4: Dates and Times](#)

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- #16 March 2011: [What is Normal – Part 3: Money](#)
- #8 July 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 2: Writing Systems](#)
- #4 March 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 1: Getting Started](#)

A.4 Series: English

- #95 October 2017: [English – Part 7: Adverbs](#)
- #77 April 2016: [English – Part 6: Verbs](#)
- #60 November 2014: [English – Part 5: Adjectives](#)
- #48 November 2013: [English – Part 4: Pronouns](#)
- #44 July 2013: [English – Part 3: Nouns](#)
- #36 November 2012: [English – Part 2: Pronunciation](#)
- #31 June 2012: [English – Part 1: A Potpourri](#)

A.5 Series: A Little Bit of ...

- #104 July 2018: [A Little Bit of Religion](#)
- #83 October 2016: [A Little Bit of Astronomy: The Moon](#)
- #64 March 2015: [A Little Bit of Royalty](#)
- #52 March 2014: [A Little Bit of Mathematics](#)
- #46 September 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 4](#) — Gardens, Theme Parks, Parliament Houses and Capitals, National Parks and Historic Places, and some Odds and Ends
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- #35 October 2012: [A Little Bit More American Civics](#) — The Congress, Presidential Succession, The Supreme Court, and the Flag
- #34 September 2012: [A Little Bit of American Civics](#) — The Constitution, Presidency, Vice Presidency, and Cabinet

A.6 Series: Autobiographic Essays

- #131 October 2020: [School Days: Part 2](#)
- #128 July 2020: [School Days: Part 1](#)
- #122 January 2020: [Football, Aussie Style](#)
- #110 January 2019: [My Time in Maine](#)
- #107 October 2018: [Living in Chicago](#)
- #89 April 2017: [Oh, the Things that I have Eaten](#)

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- #74 January 2016: [Accidents and Incidents](#)
- #68 July 2015: [Confessions of a Canine Companion](#)
- #41 April 2013: [Standards – The Secret Life of a Language Lawyer](#) — A look at some everyday standards and conventions
- #39 February 2013: [The Big Move](#) — preparing and selling a house, finding another one, and moving.
- #27 February 2012: [Living in Utopia](#) — Life in a planned American city.
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- #13 December 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 2](#) — I discuss automobiles, still and video cameras, the written word, a digital data preservation strategy, and my right-hand gadget.
- #12 November 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 1](#) — I discuss the telephone, television, the internet, and recorded music.
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- #9 August 2010: [Confessions of an Obama Volunteer](#) — My involvement in the 2008 US Presidential election.
- #5 April 2010: [The Road to US Citizenship](#)
- #3 February 2010: [Where's My Damn Gold Watch?](#) — A look back at my first 40 years in the workforce.

A.7 Series: Signs of Life

- #129 August 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 21](#) — the Northern Neck of Virginia, USA
- #126 May 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 20](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland; London, England; Beijing, China; and more
- #123 February 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 19](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland
- #120 November 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 18](#) — Japan
- #117 August 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 17](#) — Texas and Utah
- #114 May 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 16](#) — St. Croix
- #111 February 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 15](#) — Norway
- #108 November 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 14](#) — Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy.
- #105 August 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 13](#) — Croatia.
- #102 May 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 12](#) — Vienna, Austria, and Seoul, Korea.
- #99 February 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 11](#) — US states of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, and Korea and Japan
- #96 November 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 10](#) — Hawaii

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- #93 August 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 9](#) — Barcelona, Spain
- #90 May 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 8](#) — France, Finland, California, Croatia, England, Korea, and Washington State
- #87 February 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 7](#) — Italy, Jordan, and France
- #84 November 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 6](#) — Various countries
- #81 August 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 5](#) — Various countries
- #78 May 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 4](#) — Australia
- #75 February 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 3](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #72 November 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 2](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #69 August 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 1](#) — London and Yorkshire