

Toronto and our US cross-country trip 2024

This short-form document contains just the text portions of our Toronto & USA Cross Country facebook posts.

To see the original Facebook posts in their entirety, with all photos and comments included, click on the link you will find just below the **bold title** in each individual post. The link will say:

<To Facebook Post>

Using these links will only work if you are a Facebook friend of mine.

If not, then you can open the long-form version of this same document which you will find at:

www.samadhisoft.com/travel-logs

2024 May 3 - Toronto Day 2 Friday

<To Facebook Post>

Well, it's been a long trip to get here. But, we knew that when we left.

We're 29 floors up now looking out across the Toronto skyline. And there are still buildings around me which are taller than the one I am in. This city spreads out as far as you can see with tall towers rising in the distance in every direction. We've had many big and small adventures getting here and a good deal of sitting and waiting on plane seats and in airports.

Let's flip the switch now on the way-back machine....

2024 May 1st - Travel Day Wednesday

Christchurch to Auckland was our first flight and it was easy - just a bit over an hour to make the flight. Then after a few hours another Air New Zealand flight took us from Auckland to Los Angeles. That was a 12 to 13 hour sit. I used the time to good advantage. I watched Skyfall and Spectre; two excellent James Bond movies. I also found a little gem of a **Chinese film called, "Hidden Letters"**. It was about a written script called 'Nushu' which was invented by Chinese women to secretly communicate among themselves at a time when women there were deeply oppressed by their servitude to men.

When we arrived at Los Angeles, after our long flight, it was still May 1st - due to the quirks of traveling west to east.

Los Angeles border customs. Have I ever mentioned this subject to you without cussing? I must have been in a good mood. I've been into a number of countries over the past decades and I've yet to see one with border customs worse than those in Los Angeles.

Huge lines which snake back and forth interminably until you finally reach one of the apparently very few border agents who chats with you for 30 seconds and then you are through. Most countries accomplish in minutes what the LAX folk take hours to accomplish. One could suspect that the richest country in the world is not spending much of its money on its border customs.

But, a nicer experience awaited us once out of the airport. We'd booked a room for an overnigher at the **Airport Hilton Hotel**. A Hilton shuttle took us to the hotel from the airport where a nice room awaited us. A nice restaurant meal also awaited us along with a Corona Beer.

Afterwards, walking around the hotel lobby, it was obvious that an 'event' was in progress. Ballroom Dancing was having their annual gathering there; which they've apparently been doing for the last 35 years. The entire place was a-buzz with the event. Some pretty spectacularly dressed women were about and there were a lot of pop-up shops setup selling everything one might want for Ballroom dancing.

At one point, while Colette sat in the lobby enjoying the scenery, I wandered off into some of the shops. They were friendly and I talked with several folks - after explaining that I was not a ballroom dancer but that I was just curious. I thought it was strange how easily they believed I was not a ballroom dancer (smirk). The dresses they were selling were pretty amazing; we're talking thousands of dollars. But then, this is LA. This is Hollywood. You'd expect that if they were going to do Ballroom dancing right anywhere - they'd do it here. The event was called, "Emerald Ball Dancesport Championships".

See: <https://emeraldball.com/2024-highlights/>

2024 May 2nd - Toronto Day 1 Thursday

Off to our comfy beds and then up early for our last flight from Los Angeles to Toronto. This was about a five hour flight on Air Canada.

The entire Airlines industry, world-wide, seems to be having the screws tightened on their business models. Or at least that's the impression I'm getting. In North America now, it is becoming the norm to charge you for your first checked bag. Most of the world, previously, I believe, included your first checked bag as part of the basic ticket price. But Air Canada charged us each \$30 USD for our 1st checked bag. And then, on the flight, snacks and meals were also extra now.

But, on the flight I slept some (jet lag was catching up to me) and I also got most of the new Dune movie watched. At Toronto's Pearson airport, we got an Uber to take us to our destination.

Our Uber driver was from India (five years ago) and he was a pleasure to talk to.

So, after many hours of flying and sitting, we arrived at our new apartment for the next five weeks and check-in was easy.

We got in to the apartment about 4 pm. We took our usual round of photographs before we spread our stuff around and then we wandered out to a local food market we could see below from our balcony; "Fresh Co". We bought just what we needed for an evening meal and then came back. Jet-lag was hard on our heels. And our brains were deeply confused as to when we should sleep. So, about 10:00 pm Toronto Local time, we went to bed.

2024 May 3rd - Toronto Day 2 Friday

Got up again at 4 AM. Wandered about dazed. Went back to bed again at dawn and got up again about 9 am. This morning, we're more coherent (smile).

We noodled out where the local Starbucks is on Church Street and went there for a revival ceremony. Then we walked over to the Shopper Drug Mart on Sherborne investigating city bus tickets. I'll continue with May 3rd on my next post. Going to get this posted now with our various photos taken getting here....

2024 May 3rd - Toronto Day 2 - Friday - The Afternoon

<To Facebook Post>

We went out in the afternoon, bound for The Eaton Centre and lunch. The Eaton Centre is the biggest, or one of the biggest, shopping centers here in Toronto. I'd read about it in the months before we came. See:

<https://shops.cadillacfairview.com/.../cf-toronto-eaton...>

It was about a 20 minute walk from our place. But all these walks are a pleasure. Everything we see along the way is new.

We're in now for the day but we've got about 13,000 steps on the meter for the day. Old man that I am, I can feel it.

The Eaton Centre was huge! At least three levels (and maybe more?). We had to ask twice before we found the

main food court. I can see this place will be a regular. Just about anything you might want can probably be found here.

We found lunch.

After that, we chanced upon a Shopper's Drug Mart and splashed out for two, month-long '**ride-the-transport system-as-much-as-you-want**', with a discount for being an old-fart tickets. Price? \$132 CDN each. Let me tell you, we have plans to wear their little busses out.

Of course, at the moment we have no idea where any of the little buses go.

So, after our ticket purchases, we went to the Dundas Transport Station (located conveniently in the same Eaton Centre) and begged some maps. Whoop, now we are a serious threat.

Did I mention it is raining this afternoon? It was. But that was OK because it wasn't too hard a rain, it was warm and we'd brought our umbrellas.

So, out of the Eaton we went in quest for our new (and only 2nd) supermarket here in Toronto. This time we were in search of Loblaws Market.

See: <https://www.loblaws.ca/store-locator/details/1007>

Loblaws was definitely a step up from "Fresh Co' just down the street from our place. It was much more like the fine market we found last year in Stockholm.

So, supplies were gathered, avocados were squeezed and rejected, and, among our other treasures, a nice can of Asahi Beer (500ml don't cha know) was obtained for the male traveler (smile). And off we walked home. Day done.

Photos? we took none this afternoon. Mostly because of the rain. But we will get some good ones later of the Eaton Centre and the downtown area.

2024 May 4th - Toronto Day 3 Saturday

<To Facebook Post>

Most times, when we're in our houses on the ground, we conceive of going out as moving out into a bigger, wider world and exiting from a smaller enclosed space.

But from up on the 29th floor and looking out, it feels like I'm far above the world's small details. And that if I go down and to step out onto the street, I'll be immersing myself into a smaller more detailed and closed in world. I see why people like these high places.

Jet lag is still biting me today. I got up at 4 am; after being awake since 3. I did some stuff on the computer, got sleepy again and went back to bed. And got up the 2nd time before 8 am.

We had one specific goal to accomplish today in among beginning our explorations of the city and its transport systems. And that was to get a Canadian SIM card for my iPhone so I'll have Internet access when we're away from WiFi.

We were up and both wanting to go out and use our new **Presto Transport Cards**. But, it was still only 8 am

and the Eaton Centre didn't open until 10 am, so we needed to go do something else for a while. First, I called my friend, Gerry, in Paris. Some years ago, he'd come to New Zealand to visit us and he brought with him presents for us from The City of Light. These included four antique silver napkin rings. Now, a number of years later, Colette has taken up hyper-realistic pencil art as a challenge and she's just done a rendering of one of Gerry's silver napkin rings and it turned out really well. So I'd e-mailed an image of this newest art project to him and I called him to thank him again for his gift and to see if he liked the image. This image is attached among the photos accompanying this story.

Then we decided we'd walk to the **Wellesley Station** and catch Subway Line 1 down to Union Station; which is the Toronto's central transportation hub. And then later, after the Eaton Centre was open, we could ride the same Subway back to the Dundas Station, where the Eaton center is, and look for a SIM card. And it went smoothly. We walked to the station, placed our Presto Cards on the entry gate sensors, we enjoyed a gratifying 'beep' ... and we were in.

The subways seem to run every four minutes so we did not have long to wait.

Half a dozen stations later, we got off at Union Station.

See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_Station_\(Toronto\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_Station_(Toronto))

It was big! Several forms of transport use it. So negotiating one's way around to even get out onto the street was not trivial.

Now were we out on Front Street in downtown Toronto for the first time. It is even denser here, with high-rise buildings, than it is out in our area in Cabbage Town. Don't laugh! That what the area of Toronto we are staying

As we were wandering about on the street wondering where to go, Colette recalled that we'd investigated Saturday Farmer's Markets and that one of them was called the **St. Lawrence Market** and that it wasn't far from where we were.

So, a quick look at the map, to be sure of our directions, and we were off for about a five block walk to the east. And there it was. A huge old building that used to be the Toronto City Hall. Inside, was virtually every kind of thing you could want.

See: <https://www.stlawrencemarket.com/>

A refrigerator magnet and a fine cookie followed us out of there. One will hopefully get home to our refrigerator

It was late enough now that we could move onto the Eaton Centre; so we began our walk back to Union Station.

Along the way on Front Street we found a really cute park seemingly dedicated to dogs. It was called Berczy Park. Given that I am a big dog fan, I really liked it. I think Colette was perhaps a bit more, shall we say, 'meh' about it.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berczy_Park

We should have looked around a bit more as we tried to find our way out of **Union Station**. Because, when we got back, we had an even bigger problem determining which part of this vast station gave us access to Subway Line 1. But, eventually, Colette spotted where to go.

A few stations going north and we got off at Dundas Station where the Eaton Centre is. Second impression - same as the first - huge, fun and beautiful.

We were there looking for a **SIM card** for my iPhone.

For any non-tech types, a SIM card is what you need to put into your mobile phone to allow it to access to the cellular system in the country you are in. Buying one will typically give you a local phone number and a certain amount of Internet data access for a set amount of time - like a month.

I was looking for a SIM card that I could use for a month here in Canada.

I won't bore you with all the details. But we went into the Telus Shop and talked to nice lady named Sameera who sold me on a plan that sounded good. So I said yes, money was spent and then ... then things got technically messy. She tried to install the option I'd chosen using a special promotional code ... and it didn't work. Or, perhaps it is better to say it partially did.

30 Minutes later, we walked out with the same \$45.20 CDN, that I'd spent from my credit card on the plan, now in my hand as cash. They'd told me that once the plan was bought, it was non-refundable. But we could all see that the plan wasn't right - so they simply gave me the cash rather than a refund back to my credit card. I stopped at another store and talked to them for a bit but, in the end, I decided I'd get over the idea for the moment and do some research at home about what was best to do.

SIMs and mobile plans are complex and changing things. Regardless of what the ad in the window says, there's always a few things needed that will make the final price tick up.

We backtracked to the Dundas Station and caught Subway Line 1 north to our Wellesley Station and then walked home. By the time we got there, I was really beat. I lay on the couch and was out for nearly three hours.

We have been walking a lot. yesterday 13,000 steps and today, before it was all done, another 17,000. At 4 in the afternoon, we rallied and walked to Loblaws market again and did a bit of shopping. Then home for a nice meal Colette made. After that I contacted Ancestry.com and they most kindly confirmed that Bob was indeed, my uncle.

It is now 8:40 pm and the city around and below us is growing dark and I fancy that out there above the urban wilderness I can hear the sound of an Asahi Beer calling my name softly from our fridge.

2024 May 5th - Toronto Day 4 Sunday

<To Facebook Post>

Not much special today. We went out for morning coffee at Starbucks on Church street, This place is becoming our 'regular'.

I'm feeling relatively normal with respect to jet lag now. Though sometimes, I just get an overwhelming urge to shut down and rest my eyes for about ten minutes.

We are feeling more confident about the transportation system here now. So today, we went out in search of a particular artist's solvent that Colette wants.

This involved taking Subway Line 1 north one stop, getting off and transferring to the Subway Line 2 going west and then getting off three stops later at Spadina in the China town section of Toronto. We did all this easily and then we located the **art shop which is called Gwartzman's**.

In the end, Colette said that Gwartzman's advertising PR bark was considerably more impressive than their bite;

in terms of what they actually had in their shop. Dang!

Not all was lost, however. We found a great Chinese Dumplings place just across the street and had a nice lunch there.

Then we got on **our first tram** here, the erstwhile 510. And we rode it down to Union Station where we switched back onto Subway Line 1 heading north.

At Dundas Station/Eaton Centre, we jumped off to see if Eaton Centre might have any art supplies. Answer – nope!

We consoled ourselves with a Starbucks coffee and then we got back on Subway Line 1 and rode it up to the Wellesley Station where we go off and walked home.

Damages? Nearly 11,000 steps today.

Accomplishments? Nada.

But we're becoming whizzes at the metro system. And our little Presto Cards have begun emitting little squeaks. The dense fog from this morning cleared about midday and all the tall buildings reasserted themselves.

2024 May 6th - Toronto Day 5 – Monday

<To Facebook Post>

It's solvent, it's solvent,
its's solvent we need!
So we ran to the metro
to pursue a great deed.
Having allowed this verse, my partner, to see,
she said, 'Solvitur Ambulando' could be what we need.
For unlike the emitter of doggrel, I be,
she's five years of Latin for setting her thoughts free.

Well, that is sort of how our morning began. It's really a lot harder than one might imagine to try to work 'Solvitur Ambulando' into one's opening remarks, don't you know?

Yesterday's hunt for the solvent Colette needs for her art work had come to nothing.

So today, with another art store's address in hand, we went out again. And we're feeling pretty flash now about knowing how to ride the metro system. We took Subway Line 1 down to Union Station and switched into the 510 street car and soon we were at **DeSerres Art Store**.

This was a good visit. Colette saw the very product she wanted as she walked in the door. Then we reversed our course and returned home. Job done!

I'd seen a coffee shop I wanted to investigate previously and Colette felt like staying home so I walked over to Isabella and Church by myself to have a cup of coffee and to check it out.

Fortuitously, along the way, I came across an '**Chatr Mobile store**' and I stopped in to see what they'd charge to pop a SIM into my iPhone so I'll have Canadian Internet and phone access while we're here. \$40 Canadian for a

phone number and 75GB of data access for the month. I thought that was a OK deal and so it was done in under 10 minutes and I walked on the coffee shop.

The coffee shop was nice. Small but nice. And it was a local's shop - rather than a chain store. I sat outside under the awning with people around me and had a cup of coffee and a cookie and quite liked it all. I think I'll see if Colette wants to come see it on our outing tomorrow.

The afternoon here in the apartment was good. I sorted out a problem I've been having with Dropbox and then Colette and I walked over to the Loblaws Grocery Store and bought some stuff for the evening. This evening, my cousin, Noreen, and I finally talked on the phone. We'd exchanged a few e-mails and texts but tonight we talked. And that was fun.

I didn't even know that Noreen existed until about January of this year. My father's side of my family has always been a deep mystery to me. My parents divorced when I was five and my mother and I moved then from Alabama to Southern California. After that, I only ever saw my father again twice and I was still fairly young. I, literally, knew nothing about the paternal side of my family until I got involved with **Ancestry.com**. Then I discovered that my Father had had two brothers and two sisters and he was the youngest of the five. Noreen is the daughter of Justin who was two years older than my father. And she has two brothers; Daniel and Michael. I haven't met them yet.

Anyway, talking to her was a big part of my evening. We'll probably swing by Boise, Idaho, later on in this trip to meet them.

2024 May 7th - Toronto Day 6 – Tuesday

<To Facebook Post>

We're 29 floors up this evening and looking out over the city and Lake Ontario in the distance. And all around us, in this part of the city of Toronto, is **a war going on** in slow motion; which we're watching. Today, we went walking the streets near our apartment and we saw the many signs of it. The most amazing sight we saw so surprised me, I forgot to take out my phone to take a photo. A woman of medium build, perhaps in her 50's, was standing on a busy street corner with her five or six suitcases and bags of personal things scattered around her.

As we approached, I was looking at all her stuff on the ground and wondering how she could manage to carry it all. And then she pulled her top up over her head and stood holding it for several moments in her bra as the traffic passed by. Then she bent over and dug into one of her bags and got another top out and put it on. And she did all of this as if she might be standing in her bedroom.

We came to the corner then and stood beside her, avoiding looking at her, and then we crossed. It took me a minute or two before I fully processed what I'd just seen.

Now her situation may or may not be directly related to the war I'm referring to but I think it probably is. The war here is over money; as so many are. And how it is playing out here is that developers are buying up older buildings in this area until they've gathered enough land upon which to build a giant condo tower of 40 to 60 floors.

The driving math is simple. Two or three older buildings, each of two of three stories tall, and each with six to 12 lower-rent apartments in them simply can't compete with the kind of money a developer can make from building a condo tower of, say, 50 floors with 10 condos per floor. At best, that's the income from 36 low-rent apartments vs. 500 condo each selling for \$400,000+ each.

And the city likes it because it means higher density and less sprawl.

But the folks who lived in the lower-rent apartments simply can't afford to buy the new condos or to pay to rent them with their \$3000+ per month rents.

You might think that the better off folks moving into these new condos would tend to bring the neighborhood's finances up? But I think it's not so.

These condo towers have vast garages under them. I suspect that most of these new residents get up in the morning, go down to the garage and drive off to work or where ever they like to shop in the more affluent parts of town. They're not going to come out into the local area to shop until the ground-level neighborhoods improve.

We noticed a lot of this warfare here in these last days. Gleaming condo towers all around us. But when you go out on the streets, it doesn't feel affluent. In the first several days, we only saw one man in a business suit in the entire area. But there's a lot of semi-marginal folks. It isn't exactly dangerous but it is decidedly not well-off. Just below us, looking down out our kitchen window, is a small park. And there's been a small homeless encampment there; until yesterday. On Sunday, we saw the authorities come and talk to the one of two folks who appeared to be living there. And on Monday, city employees were there packing the rubbish, tents, debris and whatever else up into truck beds and hauling it all away.

On the streets we see the occasional person, in the throes of some drug or mental health crisis, screaming on the side walk. We see people talking and singing to themselves and beggars on many corners. We also, in all fairness, see a lot of ordinary people out and about on the streets.

When we went out for an extended walk today, we saw several large signs announcing that developers had applied to the city to build something on the site. And each of these sign was well graffitied over by people who were complaining that these developments are destroying local lives and neighborhoods. Many of the older houses, which have thus far escaped the wrecking ball, are actually quite beautiful old buildings which were undoubtedly significant in their day.

It's a complex neighborhood here. Many shops for vaping, marijuana (apparently legal here) and stag movies. Also a lot of shops for the more normal things that people need to live. But there are no shops that anyone would call high-end.

The street-level neighborhood is notably gay and counter-culture. And it's also got a strong mix of races and cultures. Lots of middle eastern folks and gentle gay men; all sharing the space. Many people with little and medium sized dogs. People by and large are friendly. But where there's a lot of need in an area, you do have to be aware of what's going on around you.

This is a place in transition and a significant part of the transition's push, I think, is being driven by the logic of money and profits.

Change is inevitable and in 10 or 20 years, all these changes will just be a memory. The streets will all have a nicer, more affluent mix of shops and everyone will think it a beautiful upscale neighborhood. And the poorer folks will have moved on; as they always do.

'Gentrification' - it is such a nice sounding word, isn't it?

Colette and I walked over to my new coffee shop, "**Church Street Espresso**", at Isabella and Church street and it was nice. She liked it. Then we took the extended walk that inspired the comments, above. In the afternoon, we jumped on the Subway and rode it out quite a ways out to the massive **Yorkdale Mall**. Did I say massive? I'm not sure even that word does it justice. It was big! All the big names were there like Gucci. We had a good

look around, patronized a Starbucks Coffee and then headed home again. And that's a wrap.

2024 May 8th - Toronto day 7 – Wednesday

<To Facebook Post>

Today was just a romp around town on busses and street cars; after the obligatory morning coffee at Church Street Espresso.

See: https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant_Review-g155019...

We had a scare, however.

We both carry Wise cards because they are so convenient with multiple currencies. So, there we were in our new morning coffee shop and we went to pay.

See: <https://wise.com/nz/card/>

And both of our Wise cards were declined - several times!

We have other ways to pay, and we did, but they are not as economical and useful.

After sitting and sipping our coffee and thinking about it for a few minutes, we reasoned that it must be an issue with the local shop's credit card machine. After all, we're used these same cards in this same shop on previous days. And what are the chances that two independent card holders would both have a problem with their Wise cards at the same place on the same day? It seemed much more likely that the problem centered on the coffee shop rather than back in Britain at Wise.

And, indeed, later out and about, we used our card to pay for things without incident. Whew! One thing we saw today was the Distillery area; which is located down near the lake shore. Quite an amazing expanse of breweries, bars and restaurants there.

See: <https://www.thedistillerydistrict.com/>

It was also where one can catch the 506 streetcar. And we were intent on riding some streetcars today. They seem the best way to sit and see the city pass by.

As it happened, our travel day began with a bus which was packed to the gunnels with people going down Parliament Street and we basically couldn't see a thing. That bus finally dropped us off in an industrial construction zone (my error! I ignored getting off when I saw the Distillery sign) down near the lakefront. We had quite the harrowing walk back under a giant bridge with huge construction trucks roaring around us in all directions.

Not much else to say. It was mostly fun, it involved a bit of anxiety over our Wise Cards, exposed us to the worst of busses and the best of streetcars and showed us a bit more of this huge city.

Ah, and we 'discovered' a store, Rabba, which is just a block from our apartment which seems to have most of what we might need for everyday items like milk, cereal and etc.

See: <https://rabba.com/>

Nuff said.

2024 May 9th - Toronto Day 8 Thursday

<To Facebook Post>

We walked out and got our morning coffee at Church Street Espresso and then we came home and puttered until mid-day.

Then, having picked out a specific goal for the day, which was the Kensington Market, we went out again.

Transport is easy-peasy now for us. We look at the transport map, then at our destination and then lights start blinking and the quantum bus/streetcar/subway calculator whirs and, bingo, a plan emerges. And we're off like the legendary robbers' dogs; Presto cards in hand.

I'm not sure what we expected from the **Kensington Market**. I suppose we might have been influenced by seeing the St. Lawrence Market the other day. Well, little buddy, any such projection was proved to be deeply flawed; it was different.

It was fun, chaotic, hippy and quite counter culture. An entire street of, perhaps, six blocks. The closest thing we've ever seen to it may have been the Christiania area in Copenhagen.

See: <https://kensingtonmarket.to/>

So, we wandered, we gawked, and we scanned for places where we might get a small lunch and not worry if we that we'd be poisoned (joke!).

There was quite a mix of people there.

On one end of the spectrum, we saw what looked like 10 or 12 people in a group who looked like they were being led by a guide.

At another point, a young group of school kids (maybe 13-15 years old) came walking through in a tight group; with teachers on either end.

And then there were people, like us, in twos and threes who'd just come to look.

Then there were the local workers (who are looking ever more hippy-like as we progress on through our spectrum of denizens).

Then there were the actual street people of various shades.

And note now, as you are walking through all this, that the shops are offering most everything from dentistry to earrings and including, in several instances, marijuana and magic mushrooms; because, apparently, it is all legal here.

And then, near the other extreme end of the denizen picture I'm painting, we saw an elderly homeless woman sitting in the midst of her possessions on the sidewalk who was laughing uproariously. For some reason, I suspected she may have had some of the aforesaid magic mushrooms - but that is, of course, just an unfounded suspicion.

After strolling both sides of the street, up and down, we settled on "Wood Fired Bagels" as an enticing and

nutritious choice.

See: <https://www.nubugel.com/>

It was OK. A good bagel was served up with a copious amount of creme cheese on it. And we had a place to sit up front where we could observe the street. And thus, while so observing, we saw the school tour group walk by and many of them staring, with unabated curiosity, at the laughing homeless woman, who was positioned on the side walk just outside and to the right of us from where we were bageling-down. After that, we emerged from the market area and went in a general search for:

- (1) a Starbucks
- (2) non-slip socks for dancers
- (3) a Michaels Art Store

Though, in truth, we didn't know we were looking for a Michaels' Art Store - until we saw it - and then we knew.

Six shoe stores later, and still no non-slip socks, we staggered into a Starbucks, refreshed ourselves, and then, thus fortified, we marched over to the Michaels Art Store to give them the thorough checking-out that only a serious-to-the-bone artist can give a place. Note, being an art novice, I sat outside and watched the street traffic.

See: <https://canada.michaels.com/>

After that, it was home where we managed to connect my laptop, via an HDMI cable, to the apartment's TV and we watched an episode of season 12 of Vera the British detective lady. And we were well satisfied with ourselves and our day.

See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vera_\(TV_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vera_(TV_series))

And that's our story for the day.

Did someone ask about the non-slips socks? Well, I like to go to **Ecstatic Dance** events and at the age of 76 I can hardly afford to fall down while I'm shaking my booty, thus the need for these socks.

2024 May 10th - Toronto Day 9 Friday

<To Facebook Post>

Today's adventure was to go to the beach here in Toronto.

Colette had worked out our routing and we were off about mid-day.

It is nice being in a place like this for an extended period. You can afford to easily take a day or half a day off from sight-seeing and just 'be' there.

So, a subway downtown and then off on the 501 street car going east. We rode it to the very end of the line just to see what was there.

Answer?

A giant water treatment plant that looks like some of the forts we've seen in Europe. And also, it was beside a scenic beach that we walked along going west.

After the beach walk, we returned back up to Queen Street E. which is the one that the streetcar runs along and we got on it again as it was heading west back towards the city's center.

But our nearer goal was to jump off at one of the Starbucks we'd passed on the way out. And we did and then we sat outside and enjoyed the beach city scenery going by.

Then, refreshed, we got back on the streetcar. As we rode towards the city, a fellow sitting next to me across the aisle asked me if I could look up 106 Jarvis on my iPhone because he and his wife were getting off at Jarvis and they wanted to know if the 106 address would be to the left or the right; after they got off. That task done, we began to talk and he was interesting. They were originally from Mexico near Oaxaca but they had left there some years ago and had lived in quite a few countries around the world. That made for an interesting conversation. It turned out that he'd seen the same hippy-cultural connections as we had between Kensington Market here and Christiania in Copenhagen.

We bid them goodbye at the Jarvis stop and a few minutes later we arrived back downtown ourselves. We walked two blocks to the King Station and took the subway home to Wellesley Station - and that was our day. In the evening, we watched another excellent Vera episode (season 12 episode 3) and looked in vain for evidence of the northern and southern lights mania that is sweeping the world just now. But we looked in vain - Toronto was clouded over.

2024 May 11 - Toronto Days 10 – Saturday

<To Facebook Post>

Well, we've become social people this weekend. And what a great weekend it has been. On Saturday, we decided to follow up on a recommendation made by our AirBnB host here, Cyrus. He had suggested, among other things, that we might like to dine at '**House on Parliament**'. Apparently, it is quite popular and they do not take reservations so you just need to show up - hopefully, early.

See: <https://houseonparliament.com/>

We walked over for lunch and were there by 11:40 am. It is, indeed, popular but luckily we found a good table. And we had a great waiter - quite friendly and attentive.

But the best thing was their French Onion Soup - a favorite of both of ours. Colette proclaimed it the best she'd had. And I think I would agree.

So that was a fun adventure.

That evening, friends back in Australia, Kathryn & Don, whom Colette has known for a very long time, had arranged for us to meet Paul; a Toronto resident and a fellow that Don had gone to university with here in Toronto long ago.

Paul had arranged for the three of us to meet at 8pm at Noonan's Pub in Danforth which wasn't too far from our AirBnB. The Subways got us there easily.

See: <https://noonanspub.ca/>

Again, it was a great venue. A classic Irish bar with live Irish music and an enthusiastic Irish crowd. But it was loud.

We arrived a bit early and ordered a glass of wine for Colette and Guinness for me and we listened to the Irish

music group while we waited. Paul came along quite soon and he suggested that we retire into one of the snugs.

So, what is a **snug**, you say?

The dictionary definition of a snug: "a small private room or compartment in a pub" Snugs were first built in Irish pubs in the early to middle 19th Century. It was a place where the wealthy went for the privacy. But, it was not only the well off visitors who would use these rooms.

There were several snugs towards the front of the bar and we joined some people in the front-most one. Pleasantly, once the door into the snug was closed, you could actually hear your self talk (smile). Paul turned out to be great company. A lifetime resident of Toronto and even of the very neighborhood we were in. He could recall walking the sidewalk with his parents on the other side of the street from the bar as a child of 4 or 5.

Paul and Colette compared notes about how long they'd each known Katheryn and Don in Australia and the three of us covered any number of other topics as the evening went along. We learned a lot about Toronto. Amazingly, it never occurred to me once to shoot a photo of Paul, the bar or the neighborhood. Must have been the Guinness !

After two beers and a lot of chat, we finally departed and made our way home on the subway and got in about midnight.

2024 May 12 - Toronto Days 11 – Sunday

On Sunday morning, we decided to go out on our normal morning coffee run but we wanted to try something different. So we walked down to Carlton and Church street to where the map on my iPhone showed us there was a Starbucks we hadn't tried before.

Imagine our surprise as we stood there looking at our Loblaws Market on that very corner. The same large Loblaws Market we've been shopping at this past week and a half!

See; <https://www.loblaws.ca/store-locator/details/1007>

Then the light turned on and we both remembered that this Loblaws Market did, indeed, have a small Starbucks inside. Ha!

But this particular Starbucks didn't have much in the way of seating or ambiance so we decided to press on.

So, we gazed at my trusty iPhone again, beseechingly, asking that it might offer up yet another Starbucks for our morning pleasures. And after a small search (and perhaps a plaintiff little 'ding'), it offer one up over on Yonge Street, a major north-south thoroughfare not too far from where we were.

So we walked over.

Well, when we got to Yonge Street and wanted to cross over the west side, where the Starbucks was shown in the map, we found that nearly everyone in Toronto who could walk, or even shuffle, was in the midsts of holding a major marathon event down that very street. It was packed with runners and police and people! How to cross? We watched a bit and noted that people could carefully cross if they just walked slowly into the stream of runners and trusted that the runners would see them and go around. A quick calculation ensued: our lives or our coffee? Coffee won and so we walked into and through the melee.

Now we were over and the iPhone was saying 'Here is Starbucks!' But, we couldn't see it. Finally Colette

noticed what looked like an entrance into a mid-block set of doors that seemed to promise some sort of a mall inside. OK, so we pushed our way in.

Inside, was indeed a mall-like setup. But it was quiet. I suspect that during the business week is it quite a big and popular place. But on a Sunday morning? 'Minimal' was the operative word.

A large lobby with one lonely security guard led out into a large central courtyard. Then, off on the right, a small Starbucks appeared with one young lady attendant. No tables, no chairs. Small as.

But, we'd traveled far and coffee was in order. So, we ordered and then looked for where to sit. Nothing. The Starbucks was, itself, part of a supermarket (quite similar to the Loblaws setup) and beyond the supermarket I could see a food court. But, when we walked over, it was closed and screened off.

So, we continued through the large and quiet complex until we came to a few tables that belonged to a Farm Boy Market.

See: <https://www.farmboy.ca/stores/college-and-bay/>

The tables said "For Farm Boy customers only!" But seeing no one around and everything quiet as death in the area, ... we sat.

No bells went off and no security folks rushed out. So, we'd found a place. And in that cavernous hall to weekday commerce, we proceed to enjoy the spoils of our long morning Starbucks search. And yes, we picked up our papers and left it all just as we'd found it.

We walked home after that adventure.

And, once home, we invested some time into thinking about how we're getting to **Buffalo, New York**, when we've finished here in Toronto. And then that led us to think about the **rental car** we're going to get in Buffalo. And that, again, in turn, made us think about **car insurance**. And soon papers filled with notes began to proliferate about the room.

Turns out, for the unwary, that car rental agencies just love to sell you high-priced insurance of various types if you just rock up to their counter to acquire a car for a trip and you haven't thought about insurance ahead of time. We did some research and tomorrow, Monday, when businesses are open, we'll make some calls about insurance.

On Sunday afternoon, I went to meet a friend of mine from Vancouver; back when we were there in 2015.

Nawar is actually the person who inspired me to start my own Meetup Group in Christchurch. A group which ran for seven years until last year when I suspended it prior to our trip to Sweden.

Since then, he's moved to Toronto, which I knew, so I'd suggested we get together to renew our friendship. And today was the day.

We met at The Impact Cafe down near Union Station.

See: <https://www.impactkitchen.ca/>

We had a great talk over coffee. But getting there to meet him was a bit harrowing.

I left an hour early just to be sure. And my plan was to take the 94 bus to Wellesley Station, transfer onto

Subway Line 1 south, get off at King Station and then catch the 503 or 504 Streetcar east to where the restaurant was. Yep, that was the plan.

First thing off, the 94 bus took 30 minutes to arrive and I saw no less than three 94's go by heading west before my eastbound bus arrived. The transfer to Subway Line 1 was smooth and soon I was at King Station and onto the eastbound 503 Streetcar.

Then I thought to double check things. When I'd first looked for the Impact Kitchen on-line, just one had presented itself. And thus I'd assumed there was, indeed, just one. But now that I was re-checking, I saw that there were at least two of them.

So, a quick check back to Nawar's original invitation e-mail revealed that I was heading towards the wrong one!!! Zowie, Batman! Off the Streetcar, cross the street, get on the next one heading back to King Station, then into the station, back onto the subway south and off at Union Station; which was quite near the correct Impact Kitchen.

Sounds easy. But once you are dumped inside of Union Station, it is a huge maze; given that every sort of transport uses it as their hub. It took me nearly ten minutes to figure out how to get out of the complex and onto the street.

Then, once on the street and out of the concrete maze, I could see where the Impact Kitchen was from where I was and I started walking. While walking, I E-Mailed Nawar that I was going to be about 10 minutes late. In fact, I was 20 minutes late because the fun was not yet over.

Once I got to where the Impact Kitchen was located, according to my iPhone's map, I saw nothing. Again, just as in our morning's adventures, there was a large building that appeared to have a mall embedded in it. So, I went in and walked through most of it and saw no Impact Kitchen. Finally, I returned to the huge entrance lobby and there on the side, was a sign that advised that entrance to the Impact Kitchen could only be had from the western end of the building outside.

So, back out on to the sidewalk and I walked to the western end of the building and looked around the corner and there it was!

And the good news was that Nawar had waited for me and was just inside the door. Whew!

He and I had a great talk - far too much to try to recount here. But it was good to see him again. He's started a new business here in Toronto and I think he's quite successful.

See: <https://www.kanataadvisors.co/about>

After that, it was towards home again. But, in a new wrinkle, Colette and I had decided to meet at Loblaws (yes the very one we visited this morning) to do some shopping. So, as I got onto Subway Line 1 heading north, I called her and then she departed for Loblaws then and we were both at the destination within just a few minutes of each other. Sweet as.

Shopping done, we retired to our Aerie Abode up in the sky and that is the story of our very social mouse-in-a maze weekend.

2024 May 13th - Toronto Day 12 Monday

<To Facebook Post>

Nothing.. That's what we have to say about Monday. Nothing happened. Nada. Zip.

In truth, it was our day in to think about how we're going to get from Toronto to Buffalo on June 8th and then how we're going to rent a car for our long drive across the USA to Irvine, California. And then, mixed into all that, were issues concerning rental car insurance and liability as well.

So, before it was done, it took up much of the day. We did go out for our morning coffee to our favorite coffee shop (and we took photos today) and we also shot pictures of a few murals we saw on the walk back. But ... that's it. Please try not to ask us anything else about May 13th. Our lips are sealed!

2024 May 14th - Toronto Day 13 Tuesday

Now, this was a much better day. A sumptuous, full of it self - ran all over the city sort of a day. It even ended with a Multi-cultural show (free) put on just around the corner from us.

We caught the Subway Line 1 north, transferred to Subway Line 2 east and jumped off at Broadview - much as we did when we met with Paul at Noonan's Bar on Saturday.

But today our mission was to track down a giant Carrot. **The Big Carrot Market** in Danforth.

See: <https://thebigcarrot.ca/>

Our friend, Eva, in Vancouver (who used to live here) recommended it to us. And we had liked what we'd seen of the Danforth area on Saturday, so we went off for another look and to visit to the giant Carrot. It was fun and we had a good time looking around a very cool market.

As we walked away, we ventured off the main road into the adjacent neighborhoods and they were nice. Big old Craftsman styled homes that all looked inviting and well kept. It was a nice find.

Also, as we walked the main street, I shot photos of several public poster poles; places where people put up offers for yard work, yoga lessons or whatever. I love looking at these, slowly, later. They reveal a bit of what the place was like on a particular day.

But ... that was just the beginning of our epic journey for the day. We had deep intents to ride the Toronto streetcars and wave around our Presto Cards with aplomb until the entire Toronto Metro system squirmed. And thus, we go onto the 505 Streetcar at Broadview and went west. West, west and west. We were thinking we might 'ride-to-the-end of the line. A habit we sometime engage in.

The first part, heading south towards the lake was good. Then we turned west and went through the center of the city and that was OK but grittier. Lots of street people and marginal business to be seen. Then we got out onto the western parts of the city that were new to us. And there was a lot of it. See:

<https://www.ttc.ca/routes-and-schedules/505/0>

But as the kilometers passed by, slowly, and neighborhood after neighborhood full of sameness passed us ... the thought of a Starbucks began to creep into our neighborhood viewing satiated brains. A quick look at the Find-A-~~whatever~~ map thingy on my iPhone revealed a Starbucks lurking on the distant horizon before us - in a neighborhood so remote that they have taken to quietly calling it: Roncesvalles.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roncesvalles,_Toronto

Surely a place so named must be very close to some foreign border of Canada, yes? We decided to get off, consume coffee and consider the matter.

Interesting side note for people who like to collect trivia that they may never use. To use the toilet in the Starbucks in Roncesvalles, the door code is '5566'. Just thought you might like to note that down? When we were sitting outside the Roncesvalles Starbucks, supping our coffees, we noted that the 504 streetcar was just by us going the other way back towards downtown and it was returning on a different street than Dundas; which we'd come out on. It was returning via Queen Street. Yay! New neighborhood to peruse. Sign us up!

So, like the legendary Robber's Dogs, we were on it faster than one could sniff a bush or raise one's leg. And new scenery unfolded before our now brightly engaged coffee refreshed minds.

We eventually got back to the Subway station at Queen and exited the streetcar and Subway'd it home for a rest.

But the day wasn't done.

I'd see a sign the other day for a free multi cultural event just one block from us at the **Jarvis Collegiate Institute** that looked interesting. So, at 6 pm, I walked over to see what it was like. Colette opted to stay home for the evening.

See: <https://schoolweb.tdsb.on.ca/jarvisci>

I enjoyed it. It was an amateur event to be sure. They had no 'sound-man' on a mixer to balance the voices and the music. But even so, it was sweet to see. People from 10 to 12 different cultures sang, danced, and played instruments for a crowd of perhaps 100 people. I was quite glad that I went.

And that, my friends, was the 14th of May in Toronto.

2024 May 15th - Toronto Day 14 Wednesday

<To Facebook Post>

Of course, we began with a coffee at our favorite place. Then, we returned home and sat about for most of the morning. I was writing and Colette was doing her art. It was a fairly gray day outside.

Around mid-day, I suggested that we go out for lunch. But not just any 'off-the-cuff - go-out-for-lunch' adventure. Let's add some spice to it!

So, I suggested that we go to **Vaughan**. We've been looking at Vaughan, way out at the north-eastern end of Subway Line 1 for a while wondering what could be out there. I'd also looked up rents in our area vs. the Vaughan area and clearly it was cheaper to live out there.

So, we decided to go and investigate.

See: <https://www.vaughan.ca/>

It took a solid hour on what seems like a fairly fast mostly underground subway to actually get there. It is a ways. AI says, '26 km or 16 mi'.

See: <https://www.urbanrail.net/am/toro/toronto.htm>

I think we both had various ideas of what we would see when we got there - but none of our ideas were even close.

You arrive into a brand new Subway station and once you are above ground, there is a lot of open space with various hi-rise towers scattered around. It immediately assaults you that this is 'car territory'. Everything is a fair distance from everything else. That was our immediate impression - and it was going to get worse. We'd come out for a look around and for lunch. So, we started walking. Most of the hi-rises seem to be residential and some were completed and some were still under construction. There was also one large tower that happily proclaimed KPMG at the top so it was probably a business-oriented tower. See:

<https://kpmg.com/xx/en/home/about/offices/vaughan-1.html>

Well, we walked a fair amount and all we saw in the base of one of the apparently newly created towers was a Balzac's Coffee Shop.

See: <https://balzacs.com/pages/vaughan-metropolitan-centre>

We thought surely there must be more so we kept walking. And walking. And more walking.

We began to work out that **all of this was new**. Apparently, the subway had come here (maybe with some money chipped in by developers to encourage it?) and what had probably been open farmland had been acquired and was now becoming the site of a new southern extension of the city of Vaughan to the south of the main part of the city.

So, there were huge construction projects around. Residential towers that were set at some distance from each other, a great variety of stores for woodwork, drapery, plumbing and everything else a person might want to fix a new place up and make it home.

But, in among all of that were large car-centric spaces, giant car parking lots (with lots of cars in them) and no markets or restaurants that we could see.

I finally resorted to the maps on my iPhone. And using that, we located the **St. Louis Bar and Grill** and **Gordo's Diner** a few long blocks away.

Well, Gordo's Diner didn't sound like what we wanted (if you've no Spanish, note that 'Gordo' means 'Fat') so we went and looked at the Grill. But we could imagine giant sides of beef hanging on hooks so we weren't too thrilled with that either.

A bit more strolling brought us to a small strip mall with several offerings and we settled on one that made burritos and such. It seemed to be used primarily by the local construction workers on their lunch breaks. But, it worked. So we made our orders and, once they arrived, we wished that we'd have ordered one lunch and split it rather than getting one each.

Now, back on the street and plump as ticks, we waddled back over to the Balzac Coffee shop where we simply should have gone in the first place as they had nice little sandwiches in the cabinet, and I had a coffee as we girded our loins for the long subway ride back to Cabbagetown and our aerie abode.

Later, we read that Vaughn has 323,000 people and is therefore not a small place but the subway only brings you to the new flash south end Vaughan Metropolitan Centre area mostly still under construction. So, we never did see Vaughan proper.

Such is life for two small wandering mice tourists who are long on sailing out into the wild blue yonder and perhaps a bit remiss on any serious pre-trip research.

But hey! That's how we like it. <smile>

2024 May 16th - Toronto Day 15 Thursday

<To Facebook Post>

Today was about going to see the **Queen's Park Gardens** which is adjacent to the University of Toronto.

See: <https://www.utoronto.ca/>

We walked around the park and part of the campus and noted a sign that advertised **free tours of the Parliament** (which sits next to the University).

See: <https://www.ola.org/en>

That sounded interesting but we wanted some lunch first so we walked back over to a Starbucks within one of the bigger University buildings and we got a small lunch and ate in the building's central area. Then we walked back over to Parliament to investigate the free tour. When we got inside, we were surprised to see the amount of pre-tour security they have. It was like being in a mini-version of what you pass through in most international airports.

ID's, in the form of NZ drivers Licenses, were presented. My shoulder bag was passed through an Xray machine. And then I was asked to dump everything out of my pockets into a plastic tray. That's when things for the tour came to a stop. In the tray was **my Leatherman Tool**, which I carry pretty much everywhere, and the guard informed me that it was a 'no go'.

See: <https://www.leatherman.com/wave-832531.html>

Mmmmm. That was too bad. So, we took our stuff and departed.

We return home after that and then, in the late afternoon, I went out again to buy a book at the **University's book store** and then to meet my friend, Nawar, at Mado at 144 Yonge Street. Colette elected to stay in while I did all this.

See: <https://madocanada.com/>

I allowed nearly two hours to accomplish my travels and it almost took all that time. I arrived at Mado perhaps ten minutes early.

The transit system is good here but the streets downtown can be packed. There's construction, there's rush hour and there are just a lot of people going places. So, I rode busses and street cars for some of my trip and I walked fair distances for other parts.

The book I bought is called "**How Life Works**" by **Phillip Ball** and it is part of what called the New Biology. Thus far I've read the prologue and it looks quite interesting.

Nawar and I had a long talk about Global Climate Change and about his special interest which is to advise

companies about how to profitably incorporate environmental considerations into their long term plans.

See: <https://www.ecorth.com/team/nawar>

After that, I returned home and it had been a long day. I racked up over 17,000 steps.

2024 May 17th - Toronto Day 16 Friday - Impressions

<To Facebook Post>

This isn't going to be about our travels and explorations. It is going to be about impressions I've been getting living, as we are, 29 stories up in the Toronto central city.

The first thing is that each time you even glance out the windows, a hundred other buildings and hi-rises present themselves. Some thirty stories tall, some 50 and even 60. The tallest residential building here is 76 stories. And, below you, are streets, houses and smaller buildings, cars, busses, trucks and people; in endless detail. And it is all 'just out there'. It is not difficult to see it. With just a glance, a very large part of the city, with its many, many thousands of people, just presents itself, effortlessly to your eyes.

And in each of the many thousands of windows you see, are other lives; lives which are, to them, just as absorbing as we find our own lives to be.

And the city hums constantly; night and day. Street noises, cars, busses, trucks, streetcars, dogs barking and people shouting.

I've been astounded at how well sound carries up here. Having lived most of my life on the flat, it seems normal to me that sounds die quickly when they travel horizontally through houses and trees and etc. But up here, in this vertical space, if a dog barks below - **29 stories below** - you hear it; just as clear as if it was 50 or 100 feet from you; on the flat.

And I'd always imagined that as birds fly high over us that all of our ground level world of sounds would be largely muted by the time it rose up to them. Oh, not so! All of the racket carries straight up; with very little attenuation. That is a fact that has become very clear to me up here.

Given that we see so very far and wide from up here, much more of the city's drama also presents itself to us than you might imagine.

When you are up here and look down on an ambulance or a fire truck moving, they look so small and far away.

And they seem to move so slowly and carefully. But the sound they make is huge; just as it is down on the street when they pass.

Last night, just as I got home, an enormous racket of sirens erupted on the streets below us.

Several emergency units arrived, sirens blaring. And we heard a woman screaming at the absolute top of her lungs, over and over, "*Make it stop!*", "*Make it stop!*". That went on for several minutes until you began to wonder how anyone could scream so much and so loud for so long.

We, of course looked out to see what was happening. And one street over from us, far down below; where we could easily see, no less than eight fire engines and several other auxiliary vehicles had arrived. All with their red lights flashing.

What the original problem with the woman was, we never found out. But traffic down below was scrambled for an hour and a half before the last of the units pulled away and the problem was apparently resolved.

This evening, just as we arrived home from walking over to Fresh Co. to shop, we found several people gathered around a very large woman who was in a motorized wheel chair and had apparently tipped over off the the curb and she and the chair had fallen hard on their side. She looked unconscious. As we approached, two police had just arrived on the scene.

We went up to our apartment and the site of the accident was directly below our balcony on the street. I watched with my small telescope looking straight down as more police and firemen arrived and then, finally, an ambulance. It took them a long time to decide how to stabilize her, move her, and etc. And, as you can imagine, on a large street like Wellesley, traffic was badly impacted.

On any given day, we are likely to hear a large collection of sirens numerous times a day; night or day.

Sometimes, we hear shouting, sometimes loud engines - it all drifts up here. Luckily, our windows are doubled-paned; so much of the noise is cancelled.

It is an experience being up here so high over a major city. It is not one I would choose to have not had. I'm quite enjoying it; even with all the noise and drama.

And, off on the horizon, at quite a distance; perhaps 5 kilometers away, are other pop-up collections of tall buildings - almost like other cities far off in the distance. But I don't think they are other cities. I think they are still part this one enormous city; which seems to be gathered into clusters of high-rises with larger flatter areas and lower buildings, filling in the inter-spaces.

2024 May 17 - Toronto Day 16 Friday – part 2

<To Facebook Post>

Today's adventure was to take the Subway Line 1 out to **Eglinton**. We'd heard that it was a nice neighborhood, maybe 5 km north of where we are, and we wanted to see a bit of Toronto which had, perhaps, a few less street people.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eglinton,_Ontario

And it was nice. But, just like here in the more central part of town, it was characterized by tall condo towers in

several directions. But, if you walked a block or so off the main streets, you found areas full of nice, well kept houses. We enjoyed those.

I was feeling particularly tired after yesterday's 17,000 steps so I wasn't into a lot of walking. So, I suggested that we go to the Eglinton Mall at the intersection of Yonge Street and Eglinton Avenue East and have a coffee and a sit-down. We'd seen the mall when we'd first come up from the Subway.

See: <https://yongeeglintoncentre.com/>

Well, the mall, once we were inside, seemed to be a bit of a work in progress and I didn't find it all that attractive. Then I suggested we walk a block south to a Starbucks I'd noted. And we did. And it was a disappointment as well - it had virtually no inside seating.

So then we turned around towards the mall and went to the Aroma Espresso Bar which had a lot of business and nice outside seating.

This morning, as I was writing this piece, I looked for a website for the Aroma Espresso Bar and found that there's a lot of chat on-line about the chain being Israeli owned. I really liked the place and its vibe. But it is strange, isn't it, how geo-political issues half way around the world can affect how people feel about a business here in distant Canada.

See: <https://www.aromacafe.ca/>

I enjoyed our ride out to Eglinton and our walk but I was really not into much exercise today so I suggested, and Colette concurred, that we return home and have a mostly inside day. And we did. And it was nice to take a bit of a rest.

The only other thing of significance that we did in the afternoon was to go shopping for supplies over at Fresh Co.; just a block and half away. That was my kind of a journey (smile).

Oh, and Colette cooked us a really fine meal this evening, as well.

2024 May 18th - Toronto Day 17 Saturday

<To Facebook Post>

Today's adventure was another neighborhood deep-dive into an area called Seaton Village. It is regarded as one of the last well-preserved inner city pockets of Old Toronto.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seaton_Village

After sharpening the edges of our Toronto Metro Presto Cards into razors, we ventured forth to the Wellesley Station, caught the Line 1 subway north one stop, transferred on the Line 2 subway west for several stops and got off at **Spadina Station**. From there we began to walk west on Bloor Street. Which was quite an interesting street in its own right.

Ah, surprise! Just as we arrived on the edge of the Seaton Village neighborhood, we discovered the **Bathurst Metro Station**; which we could have ridden line 2 further west for by one more stop and have gotten off right at our intended destination!

See: <https://www.ttc.ca/subway-stations/bathurst-station>

Not the sharpest pencils in the box; we two. But hey, we get there.

The Seaton Village neighborhood is fairly compact and with Colette leading, we began to wander through it. We walked up Bathurst Street as far as Olive and then cut left, or west, into the neighborhood proper. Immediately, nice houses were around us. And soon, we came to Vermont Square Park; where we sat on a bench and watched for a bit.

See: <https://www.toronto.ca/.../facilities/complex/250/index.html>

There was a playground, park benches and people throwing balls for their dogs. I could see a park building of some sort north of us across an expanse of grass. And I decided to walk over to see if it had a toilet. It did! But when I got inside, I discovered it was a neighborhood ice-hockey rink with a ton of kids practicing. That is a very Canadian thing, eh?

See: <https://www.billboltonarena.ca/>

We walked on. Zig-zagging through the neighborhood streets and admiring the house and the gardens. On one point, we came to an utterly amazing house. Someone had apparently spent quite a number of years and a lot of effort to make it 'special'. Hard to describe it so I'll let you discover it in the photos. Finally, we'd 'done' the Seaton Village neighborhood and it was time to think about what was next. I suggested that we return to the Bathurst Station because I'd noted that the **511 Streetcar** departed from there and went all the way down to the waterfront. I thought that it would be nice to go eat lunch at the Impact Restaurant on Queens Quay where I'd met Nawar for lunch a week or so ago.

See: <https://www.impactkitchen.ca/locations>

And so it was. The 511 ride south was excellent. Good seats and lots to see along the way. Once we got down to the harbor, we made a couple of quick streetcar changes and soon we were at Impact (which I'd had quite a hard time finding the first time a week or so ago).

It was good and just outside was a nice park with a big circular pond in it. And, of course, the always present hi rise condo and business towers gathered all about.

But, we were now tired so we caught a passing streetcar that took us into Union Station, we stepped out of it onto a line 1 subway heading our way and we were home in good order. Another excellent day of exploring.

2024 May 19th - Toronto Day 18 Sunday

I'm writing this day in advance because we already know what's going to happen (smile). We'll get up, walk for coffee and then come home and then I lay about. Then, at about 1115, we'll walk over, or bus over, to the House on Parliament for lunch; just like we did last Sunday.

Surely, some French Onion soup will be ordered and then we'll walk home and I'll do some more laying about. We've decided that Sunday will be a day off. And that even includes this report <smile>. So, that's all you are going to get as regards our Sunday here. Cheers from deepest, darkest (and oh so far away) Toronto!

2024 May 20th - Toronto Day 19 Monday - Victoria Day

<To Facebook Post>

Today is a holiday here in Canada. Victoria Day. It promises fireworks and many businesses shut down. And

streets full of people happy to be off-work. That all sounded fun!

But, to be sure we checked out that none of this would disrupt our treasured rituals. And yes, the Church Street Espresso House would be open! Glory-be ... I knew at that point that everything was going to be OK. So, a coffee and an Apple Strudel later (for me), we began to plan what we were going to do for the day. I suggested that we had not yet used the transit system to explore the western lake-side limits of where it could take us. Why? Just because. If you opt in for 'end-of-the-line' adventures, some of them can be really good. And then, there are a few others we won't mention....

So, I did some research to see how to get to the western end of the Toronto transit system. A place famously known as the "**Long Branch Loop**"; to the five or so people who actually live that far out and have heard of it.

The Metro maps are a bit obscure about getting there. One can see, clearly, that the 501 Streetcar goes there. But, the question was, where does the 501 start from in order TO go there?

I won't bore you, as I have in the past, with a blow-by-blow of how it all went wrong and we were shanghi'd to odd places and then ended up having to walk a lot farther than I'd imagined. Well, maybe I will .. just a little. But rest assured that it did not all go as well as it might have.

I mean I even consulted with an AI twice to confirm that the 501 Streetcar did, for sure, start from Union Station. Brrring! Wrong.

Well, we did eventually, locate a 501 streetcar after a few unplanned transfers and rode it westwards happily for ten minutes, until it made an unexpected turn and dumped us at the **Dufferin Gate Loop**. Yes, readers - that's exactly what we said: "Where?"

We never found out why we were dumped there - but there we were; quite near the **Toronto Exhibition Grounds**. So, making the best of it and seeing some interesting looking buildings on said grounds, we wandered off into the exhibition grounds to see what we could see.

Great idea - except everything was closed for the holiday. Oh, you could walk through it all - but it was closed. So, we wandered through the immense grounds taking photos here and there and wondering if we'd ever see civilization again.

It finally occurred to me to look on my iPhone's map for any bus stops in the area. And we could see one across the exhibition grounds where, apparently, people who came to the grounds from the city arrived and departed. Yippy!

And there, waiting like a promise, was a lovely **511 streetcar**. We got on it and decided to ride it towards Union Station and jump off and have lunch, again, at the Impact Restaurant.

Another good plan, we smirked to ourselves ... until the 511 suddenly turned north and Union Station and Impact were no longer among our possible futures. Ah, if only I'd checked the map to see where the 511 actually went!

But, just as we were deciding to engage in a small bout of despair, I looked out the streetcar window and noted that we'd just stopped in front of an **Aroma Coffee shop** - much like the one we'd visited in Eglinton. Yay! We were up and off the streetcar in mere seconds.

A nice lunch was had, sitting outside and watching the crowds of folks walk by.

Now, for a small side adventure, which I'm not quite sure how or where to present.

As we were about to depart, I decided to visit the Aroma's toilet facilities. Seems like a common enough thing to do.

Well, I walked down a short hall and found two doors; neither marked with "Men" or "Women", both made of island-style bamboo surfaces, both with no doorknobs and each having beside it, a large silver button with a wheelchair symbol on it. Mmmmm.

I finally chose the left door and pressed the button. And the door electronically swung open. And there was no shutting it from the inside until 'it' decided to shut. Ah, and the inside door lock, you say? I looked and none was evident. None at all.

So, I completed my minimal business; wondering all the while if the electronic door was about to swing open behind me. And all was well. Hands rinsed, I departed.

I got back out to our table outside and related all this to Colette. She was amazed. But she opted to go have a look-see at the situation (I suspect she was thinking that I'd missed something really obvious). Sure enough, we arrived and she inspected the situation and then pressed the button associated with the right door. A **woman squeaked** and looked around the door at us. "Oh, sorry!"

Then Colette turned to the left door and pressed that button, And the door swung up and soon a man was looking at us from inside, in surprise.

Ha! We decided it was best to depart that area.

I then walked the rest of the restaurant to make sure there were no other restroom facilities and, no, there were not.

Explanation? I have none. Canada does have it surprises.

After that, we planned our route home and it all actually happened just as it was supposed to - much to our surprise.

And that is our story about another day's explorations, well planned that went, at least partially, to hell (smile). In the evening, we could see dark clouds building to the northwest of our place and soon we got a **severe thunderstorm warning** on my iPhone's weather program. Dark clouds rolled over and a few lightening flashes were seen but it didn't, in the end amount to much - in spite of our hopes.

Cheers, from Toronto Canada

2024 May 21 - Toronto Day 20 Tuesday

<To Facebook Post>

Well, today was pretty short and sweet. No transport system misfires or disasters.

Our goal was to go to the northeastern end of Subway Line 1 to **a town named 'Finch'**. We were curious if it was going to be as strange as when we went to the end of the northwestern end of Subway Line 1 to Vaughan.

See: <https://www.northstormont.ca/living.../our-communities/finch>

A nice thing that happened as we walked down to catch the subway at Wellesley Station was that I noted a

sidewalk coffee/bar called the Fox and Fiddle just by the Wellesley Station. And it was advertising **French Onion Soup**.

See: <https://foxandfiddlewellesley.com/>

So, we spontaneously changed our plans, on the spot, and went in and had our lunch there. We'd intended to find lunch out in Finch but this seemed like a better and surer option.

And then we rode out to Finch. Nope, it wasn't as strange an adventure as Vaughan had been. It did, however, reinforce our notion of just how very big Toronto is; and how spread out it is.

So, we rode out to Finch, looked around, saw the same tall buildings everywhere, located a Starbucks, had a snack and then rode the 97 bus back into the central city so that we'd be above ground and could see the neighborhoods we were passing through.

That worked OK and we saw that the city runs pretty continuously the entire way.

One wrinkle was that the 97 bus only goes as far as St. Clair. So, we had to jump off there and take the subway from there back to our Wellesley Station.

All in all it was a simple day that met our simple expectations. And being simple people, like we are, we went home and basked in the notion that even simple people can get it right ... sometimes.

2024 May 22 - Toronto Day 21 Wednesday

Well, this day had a bit more transport mis-fires, if that's your thing.

Our plan was to take the 97 bus north to **Rosedale Station**, look around and then catch another bus from the Rosedale Station, the 82, which promised to show us **one of Toronto's nicer neighborhoods**. Clever readers might recall that yesterday (yes, just yesterday) we'd taken the same 97 bus south from Finch and we had to switch in St. Clair to ride the rest of the way home on the Subway.

Well, yours truly was not clever enough to remember that little detail. Too many busses and too many bus numbers is my excuse.

And it did not help my confusion about this when I asked the Perplexity AI if the 97 ran on a regular schedule going north from Wellesley Station. And some nameless computer, somewhere on the other side of the world, answered that most assuredly it did. And that it ran every 30 minutes.

So, Colette and I walked up to Yonge Street, just by Wellesley Station, and found the north-going bus stop that said that the 97 bus does indeed stop there.

And we waited and waited. After 40 long minutes had passed with no bus, we decided to bail on that idea and go inside the Wellesley Station and just take the Subway north to Rosedale.

The weirdness was not over. As we waited inside the Wellesley Station for the northbound Line 1 subway, the southbound was sitting across from us; stopped and **waiting. And waiting.**

Soon an announcement came over the speakers that someone on the southbound had triggered a medical alarm and thus the train was going to sit there waiting until paramedics came to see if someone was, indeed, in trouble.

But, in a few minutes our northbound came and we were off to Rosedale. Whoop! Only 45 minutes later that we'd intended.

See: <https://www.ttc.ca/subway-stations/rosedale-station>

Rosedale Station was so-so. It was under reconstruction so there were a lot of plywood panels, jury-rigged walkways and it was definitely low on ambiance.

But, we found our way out on the street and began to have a look around. South of us seemed to be where all the buildings were - so we took off walking that way.

There was not much that was exciting. Buildings, streets, people and cars. Yup, we've seen all that before. We wanted **at least a small Disneyland or a moderately sized spaceport or something**.

Soon our thoughts turned to food. It seemed like a good idea to eat before we returned to the Rosedale Station and caught the 82 bus that starts from there and tours through the upscale residential neighborhoods of Rosedale.

Food? Not much was obvious out on the street. So, as per our habit, we looked up the nearest Starbucks to us. Yay! there it was two blocks ahead in the right side of the street.

We arrived and it was one of those newer Starbucks that we seem to be finding a lot of. No inside or outside seating. Just get your order and - go away.

But the people there were nice. We ordered some stuff and carried it back north towards the Rosedale Station and found a small park like area and ate.

Then back to the Rosedale Station. **The station master lady** there was really nice and she told us just where to sit and wait for the bus; which was maybe 12 minutes away from arriving. She came over and talked with us and that was nice.

The ride on the 82 was fabulous. I shot quite a number of pictures of really nice houses. Seeing that neighborhood was basically our goal for the day.

See: <https://wahi.com/.../neighbo.../ontario/gta/toronto/rosedale>

Upon our return to the Rosedale Station (the 82 bus just runs in a loop that starts and stops at Rosedale), we waved 'hello' to the subway station lady and then we went over to the Subway line side and sat down to await the southbound subway train.

Well, the speaker system came on and announced that just north of us, one or two stations away, someone had again pressed an emergency medic call button and the southbound train was halted awaiting paramedics. And then, just a few minutes later, the same speakers announced that things were badly snarled down by Union Station because some Yahoo had gotten out onto the tracks and so things were shutdown there; while order was restored.

See: <https://torontolife.com/.../who-broke-the-ttc-inside.../>

That provoked a discussion between Colette and I as to whether there might be a concerted effort under way to shut down the subway system today? Perhaps a political demonstration about something or other. She didn't think so but I was suspicious.

I have to say that for the most part Toronto's transit system has worked well for us.

In any case, our southbound came not too long later and off we went, headed south toward home. Colette cooked us another nice meal and we had a quiet evening in. I watched a NOVA PBS show on science that I really liked.

2024 May 23rd - Toronto Day 22 Thursday

<To Facebook Post>

It was an easy day and we did not set ourselves any specific goals to go and see or do anything. But, as lunch time rolled around, I suggested that we go to a flash place I'd seen a week or so ago downtown. It is called **Earl's**. They had one in Vancouver that we quite liked.

See: <https://earls.ca/locations/financial--district/>

It was an easy trip to get down there. We just walked to the Wellesley Station, got on Line One southbound and then jumped off at the **St. Andrew Station**; just by King Street. We walked out of the station, walked half a block east and we arrived.

And it was fun and flash. This is in the midst of Toronto's business district, on a weekday, and the place was packed; and obviously popular. But they found us a seat and that was sweet.

We each ordered a bowl of Clam Chowder and enjoyed the ambiance as we looked around. I even got up and photographed some of their wall art.

Done with lunch, the question was, "What was next - if anything?"

I suggested that we board the **505 streetcar** which passes right by Earl's on King Street and ride it all the way up to the **Broadview Station** (which is the entry into the Danforth neighborhood; which we've liked and visited at least twice before (remember the Giant Carrot?).

So, we did. We were lucky and got two forward facing seats with a good view. The route took us east right through the midst of downtown and then, when it had gone as far east as Broadview, Avenue, it turned north. Neighborhoods of all sorts of quality passed us by. Business suits and flash cars to run-down churches with street people asleep on their steps.

About halfway through the trip, two school teachers and perhaps 20 kids of around 10 to 12 years old got onboard. Whew, it got noisy after that (smile).

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We finally arrived at Broadview Station and then decided to go for another Danforth walk-about. And to perhaps look for a Starbucks.

So, we headed east down Danforth. We passed Noonan's where we had a nice beer or two with Paul a week or so back. And we continued on until we were just opposite of the Giant Carrot Co-op. And we found there a **2nd Cup Coffee shop**. Starbucks was still another five blocks away so we decided to give it a try.

See: <https://secondcup.com/en/location/355-danforth-avenue/>

A cup of coffee and a chocolate chip cookie were nice finishers for our lunch. And our seating out on the

sidewalk was excellent for watching the denizens of Danforth pass by.

And then we headed home and called it an easy day - and fun.

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2024 May 25th - Toronto Day 24 Saturday

<To Facebook Post>

We're opening this story on the 25th because Colette and I just got chased back to our apartment by a sudden rain. We were on our way towards our favorite coffee shop when we both saw a lightening flash and then heard a big, rolling boom. And within about two minutes - it was pouring.

A big dig into the bag I carry ensued and it turned out that my umbrella was in there but Colette's was not. What to do? We scooted it back our apartment - significantly wetter than when we left it not ten minutes ago.

We're back upstairs now, having dried off and we're wondering if that cloud burst is over and if we might try a coffee shop run again. I cannot speak for others in the advanced western nations, but I do feel quite a bit of idealistic motivation towards my morning Apple Strudel - all in the cause of world peace, you know.

We were also planning to go out to an area called The Brickworks for their Saturday Farmer's Market and other events. We are questioning the wisdom of that now.

See: <https://www.evergreen.ca/evergreen-brick-works/>

A bit later, after the rain slowed, we went back out again and an Apple Strudel was indeed, consumed. (just thought you'd like to know).

Well, then. Let's turn the **way-back machine** back to ... **yesterday**.

Yesterday, when we went to a lovely dinner party in Port Credit; which is southwest down the coast from Toronto. (more about this fine event, below)

2024 May 24th - Toronto Day 23 Friday

Friends of friends are wonderful things. It was through such a connection that we received a dinner party invitation for the evening of May 24th.

Katherine is a friend of Colette's sister, **Brigette**. Brigette and Katherine have known each other for sometime through working within the same international organization; **InteRAI**

See: <https://interrai.org/>

Hearing from Brigitte that we were in town, Katherine and her sister, **Doris**, sent us an invitation to come to their place for dinner. In her invitation, she also told us that several other friends and relations would be there. It sounded wonderful.

One of the best pleasures, when traveling, is getting an opportunity to meet locals. You can obtain more 'real' insights and information in five minutes with them than you could glean from reading 10 books.

An interesting mix of people greeted us there.

Sandy, a long-time friend of Katherine's was there. She also was, at the end of the evening, the one who gave us a ride back, into Toronto proper, to a subway location very near to where she lived. And that was a sweet thing to do for us.

And **Bruce** and his daughter, **Danielle**, were also there. Bruce is related to Katherine's sister, Doris. And Danielle, 30, is a law student who has been studying in Ottawa and will be moving onto further studies in the U.S., after this summer break.

What a great mix. The conversation never flagged and many, many subjects were covered. Everyone was educated and informed and quite willing to engage. Just the sort of thing that Colette and I love. All-in-all, there were seven of us.

But, let me back up a bit.

Katherine and Doris live in Port Credit; which is a pretty town of about 10,000 souls southwest down the Lake Ontario coast from Toronto proper. Think it is considered to be a sub-part of the larger city of **Mississauga**.

See: <https://www.portcredit.com/>

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port_Credit

From Toronto, we had to take the subway south to Union Station and then switch onto the Lakeshore West Go Train.

See: <https://www.gotransit.com/en>

We hadn't been on a **Go Train** before and we were also interested to see what Port Credit was like before we joined our hosts, so we took off just after 1 pm for the dinner party; which was scheduled for 5pm.

The transfer at Union Station wasn't too difficult and soon we found ourselves on an efficient looking train heading down the coast. We noted passing the Exhibition area where we'd found ourselves a bit lost last Monday.

I'd used Google Earth to map out where the train station was in Port Credit vs. where we were going for the dinner party; so the arrival and a walk-about was no mystery.

And, because we had extra time - having come early for just that purpose, we went walking and looking about. Lakeshore Road was the main street and we walked over to it and began to stroll.

As per our usual (perhaps unimaginative) plan, we took a look for a Starbucks. You always know what you are going to get there and how much. But, a quick look assured us that the nearest Starbucks was a further walk away that we wanted to do. It was about 24 C and hot when the sun was on you.

So, we finally noted a place, **The Shore Grill & Grotto**, which had outside tables with shade.

See: <https://www.shoregrillandgrotto.ca/#shorething>

It was hours yet until our dinner party and we were at leisure, so we each ordered a beer and a small lunch. I got Mussels, which I haven't had in a long time, and that provoked various memories of where I've had them before in various countries. It was fun spot and we spent a pleasant hour there watching the life of Port Credit pass by.

Then we wandered further until we found a coffee shop and sat at their outside tables.

See: https://www.tripadvisor.ca/Restaurant_Review-g154996...

Finally, we walked on and headed down to the water. Katherine had told us, in her e-mail, that there were some pleasant spots down by the water that we might want to check out if we came early. And she was right. We found some pleasant shaded benches which were on a small projection out from the shore that had a nice pergola structure over them.

See: <https://www.tripadvisor.ca/ShowUserReviews-g154996...>

I did my best imitation of sleeping sitting up on the bench there while Colette watched me carefully, in case I fell over.

There was a lady with a small baby in a carriage under the pergola with us. The lady was smoking a small hookah pipe continuously (the smoke wasn't coming towards us) and talking intermittently on a video call and to the baby in what sounded to me like an eastern European or middle-eastern language. I thought she might be an au pair.

It was interesting, as I dozed, and I tried to imagine what she might be saying to the baby. "*Please go to sleep, little one, so you don't grow up all irritable like Joseph Stalin or Bashar al-Assad*", was the best I could do.

After a while, it was time to present ourselves at Katherine and Doris', so we walked to their place; which was relatively close to the pergola.

Lovely people, Kathrine and Doris, greeted us at the door and Katherine took us on a lovely tour of their place. And it was pretty amazing.

Far bigger inside than it looked from outside. Four levels; including basement rooms and a garage. A second story with their two large bedrooms each with an en suite. And then a fourth level with offices and a spare bedroom for guests. And all nicely furnished!

This link is about Katherine and Doris' neighborhood in Port Credit.

See: <https://condos.ca/.../st-lawrence-drive-townhouses-95-159...>

Then we began with hor d'oeuvres and chatting while we waited for other guests to arrive. Sandy arrived and then, not long afterwards, Bruce and Danielle.

And all the while the conversation and a bit of wine flowed freely.

I couldn't possibly recall all that was discussed. Politics, law, history, climate change, homeless people, our impressions of Toronto, personal histories and on and on.

We moved to the big table after a while and a nice meal, courtesy of Katherine and Doris, arrived and more conversations flowed.

I was especially taken with Bruce's daughter, Danielle. She was relaxed, intelligent, thoughtful and communicative. I'm not sure what she'll do with all her law studies - but I'm sure she'll do well.

As you might imagine, we learned a lot about Canada and Toronto from these folks. The sort of real-life things you just can't get from books.

Finally, about 10 pm, we broke up and Sandy gave us a ride back to the High Park subway station; which is just by her place. Her lift gave us an easy and short ride home.

All in all, it was a notable evening. Our gratitude to all who helped make it happen and to all who participated.

2024 May 25th - Toronto Day 24 Saturday - Part II

<To Facebook Post>

As you may remember, I had a few notes about getting chased home by rain on Saturday morning. And that later we went out again and managed to get our morning coffees?

Well, not much else happened that day except that when lunch time came around, we thought about French Onion Soup again. So, I looked up "The Best French Onion Soup in Toronto" on Google. And, the top recommendation was not too far from us. So ... yes, you **CAN** imagine what followed.

See: <https://www.maisonsselby.com/>

The place was up Sherborne and it is called "**Maison Selby**". We've actually walked by it before without noticing it. It is in a large classic mansion on the corner but it doesn't announce itself in a splashy way. The soup was pricey, at \$19 Canadian Dollars per bowl, but it was good. We quite enjoyed it. I think the staff may

have wondered if we were some new form of strange that they hadn't seen before. I've mentioned that Colette is deep into teaching herself **Hyper Realistic Pencil Drawing**? Well, as part of that effort, we took my cup of espresso and did an entire photo session on it. Turning it this way and that way and changing its relationship to the light. Photographing it half empty then fully empty. And etc. I think we left them wondering.

In the afternoon, I decided to go over and try something that I've thought of, on and off, since we arrived here.

You see, we live near a Catholic church which is staffed by Jesuits. The church is Our Lady of Lourdes. I'd noted that behind the church there's a residence for the Jesuits.

See:<https://lourdes.to/>

My thought was to go over and see if any of the Jesuits were up for a conversation. I've read about Jesuits for years; but I'd never met or talked with any.

So, I walked over in the late afternoon and rang the bell. I could hear, far away, the sound of a phone ringing.

Maybe ten rings and then it quit. I waited a few seconds and then pressed the button again. Same thing. Ten rings and then a clicking-off noise. The Jesuit residence also serves as an office and I was clearly outside of its posted hours.

In any case, I decided that my adventure was a 'no go' and turned to walk home. But, standing in my path to the parking lot (which is between the church and the residence) was a man in civilian clothes looking at me. I smiled and walked towards him and said, 'Hello'. And he, in turn, asked if he could help me. I realized then that he'd come out in response to my after-hours buzzes. He must of seen me on their camera and then walked out the back door to see what I was about.

He was cautious but open and curious and we began a conversation. And, before long, he knew why I'd come over and he'd asked me a few questions.

I told him that I like to talk new people and that I'd wondered if the Jesuits living here might be interested in conversations with someone outside of their own group. And also free of always being cast into the Worshiper Priest role all the time.

He confirmed to me that he was a Jesuit and he seemed to the idea of talking but he told me he was busy just then. But he invited me to come back to the residence on Monday at 2 pm and we could visit. Sweet!

The rest of Saturday then? Nope, that was it.

2024 May 26th - Toronto Day 25 Sunday

<To Facebook Post>

We had fully intended to go out to the **Brickworks** on Saturday. But the rain made us decide to wait a day. So today, Sunday, was the day.

When we awoke this morning, there was nothing outside. Just gray.

A powerful fog had rolled in and you couldn't see the street or the surrounding buildings. But, by the time we were ready to go out, it had partially cleared.

After our usual morning coffee adventure (they know us now and what we're going to order), we strolled down to Wellesley Station via Yonge Street and rode north from there on subway line 1 to the **Davisville Station**. From that Station you can catch the 28 bus which takes you right to the Brickwork's front entrance.

See: <https://www.evergreen.ca/evergreen-brick-works/>

The Brickworks was fun. It is in the Don Valley which is a wide river bed and nature area that bisects a lot of Toronto and provides folks in this town a large nature area to go walking and bicycling in; not far from their homes. A former brick-making industrial area has now been turned into entertainment venues, weekend markets, meeting areas and school activities. There is also a lake (the filled-in former clay pit) and trails that go around it.

We walked around the various areas and around a bit of the lake. We poked into the market stalls and I bought a toy for one of the kids at home.

Once we'd seen what there was to see, we discussed what else to do. We sat and got out our maps. We knew that the Brickworks wasn't going to be an all-day adventure so we'd come expecting to dream up a second activity for the day.

After some discussion, we decided that now that we'd experienced the Go Train system, maybe we should go off on **another Go Train adventure**. After all, our trip out to Port Credit, Friday, had been spectacular. We opted to take the eastbound lakeshore Go Train and go see what **Scarborough** looked like. It wasn't too far away. We could go and have a look and get some lunch there.

So, we got back to the transit system, this time using the free shuttle from the Brickworks to Broadview Station on Line 2. And from there down to Union Station; to where you can catch all the Go Trains. Bim-Boom-Bam and we were onto the Eastbound Lakeshore Go Train and headed out of town. And all courtesy of our all-you-can-ride month-long Presto passes.

Well - that was exciting! All the way out, in my mind's ear, I was listening to Paul Simon singing about Scarborough Fair and his 'true love'.

Exciting, **until we arrived**.

So, imagine our disappointment when we stepped off the train. First, Paul wasn't there. And second, there was basically nothing there. A big car lot stared at us, a housing tract was on the other side of the lot and miles and miles of nothing else filled the picture in. At least until some hi-rise condo towers rose up perhaps a mile or so distant.

See: <https://www.gotransit.com/.../find-a.../sc/station-details>

Mmmmm, Batman, I don't think we're going to find lunch 'ere, mate.

A short walk around and through the station assured us that we were not hallucinating. We were in 'car-only' territory in the back of beyond. Two little traveling mice on foot. Whoop!

Back onto the Westbound Lakeshore Go Train which arrived after about ten minutes and we were heading back to the big city.

Colette asked if I could recall how to get from Union Station to the Impact Kitchen which Nawar had showed me and I said, 'Yes'. And, so that's what we did. And we had a nice meal, indeed, sitting there beside the large park that's just beside the restaurant.

See: <https://www.impactkitchen.ca/>

Today was a foggy day on and off and big clouds of it were still drifting into the city from off the lake. In made for some interesting visuals sitting there as a large banks of mist would roll into our area passing between and through the towers around us.

Departing the Impact Kitchen, I pointed out that we could catch the 510 streetcar, just a block from where we were, and ride it all the way up Spadina to Spadina Station and then, at that point, we could jump into subway line 2 going east and get off at Sherborne Station.

I'd noticed the other day that this station was just by the 'No Frills' supermarket and it was no more distant from our apartment that the Wellesley Station was. So, we could get off the subway, shop there and have a relatively easy walk home.

See: <https://www.ttc.ca/subway-stations/sherbourne-station>

See: <https://www.nofrills.ca/store-locator/details/7911>

And that was basically our 25th day here in Toronto. Our departure is not far away now. Ten or eleven days until we vacate and take the bus across the U.S. border and into Buffalo, New York, where we'll rent a car (it is already all setup) and begin our long driving trip across the U.S.

And Colette cooked us another fine meal to complete our day.

2024 May 29th – Toronto Day 26 Monday

Postscript on my planned meeting with the Jesuits on Monday. It never happened. I went over, at 2 pm, as agreed and talked to a fellow in the office and mentioned who I was to meet. He went in the back and said that fellow wasn't available but that another would be able to meet me at 3. And could I come back? Yes, I could. So, I killed an hour and then went in again. The same fellow said that the one due at three was late and could I wait five or 10 minutes? Yes, I could. At quarter after the hour, I left my business card on the desk and left. And no one has contacted me since.

So, it was all a big dud.

2024 May 28th - Toronto Day 27 Tuesday

<To Facebook Post>

Well, after our morning coffee this morning we went off and we had a wild ride. The Presto transport card was much in evidence today as we moved from bus to subway to streetcar back and forth right across the city.

Confession time: Today would have all be a lot easier if I hadn't have made an assumption and took us to the wrong place in the first place. (hangs his head).

You see, a Canadian friend, Eva, had told us about an area here on Toronto called "**Ossington Avenue**". Apparently, it had made it onto a prestigious list as one of the coolest streets on the planet. So we, of course, wanted to see it. Eva had even included a link to the story.

Nice!

But rather than reading and studying the article, I recalled having seen the Ossington Subway Station, which I then looked up on my iPhone's map function. And, sure enough, there it was! And just beside it, was Ossington Avenue itself. What could be easier?

So, we walked up to Sherborne Station after coffee and caught the westbound subway 2 line and got off at **Ossington Station**.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ossington_station

And we looked around. Yes, there were stores gathered around the corner but they didn't see especially flash or different. We wondered where the 'special' part was.

So, we shrugged our shoulders and started to walk. I could see on the iPhone's map where the nearest Starbucks was. And it was a ways from our current location at Ossington and Bloor. It was north east of us up at Dupont and Christie. Well, OK. We like to see new neighborhoods and we were out exploring anyway. So we walked and enjoyed it. Along the way, I noted a business that was called the '**Christie Pits Pub**' and that triggered a memory of something I'd read about riots a long time ago here in Toronto.

See: <https://christiepitspub.com/>

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christie_Pits_riot

So, I reasoned that we must be in the area where the riots had occurred.

We eventually got to Dupont and Christie and found the Starbucks inside a big Loblaws Market. Yum. We enter and had a sandwich and a coffee each.

See: <https://www.loblaws.ca/store-locator/details/1029>

Now, while we were sitting there, it occurred to me to take another look at the data Eve had sent us. Ah ha! The light turned on.

The portion of Ossington Avenue that the article was talking about was **several kilometers south** from where we'd gone looking. It, in fact, had nothing to do with Ossington Station at all. That was a 'red herring'. It was on Ossington Avenue between Dundas and Queen.

That started me on a long look at the TTC transit maps we had to work out how to get from where we were now to where we should have gone.

Yep. Onto the 126 bus south from Dupont and Christie to the Christie Station. Then onto an eastbound subway line 2. Then transfer at Spadina Station onto a southbound subway line 1. Then off at St. Patrick Station and then onto a 505 streetcar heading west. And then off it at Ossington and Dundas.

And we did all that. And we finally arrived on the section of Ossington we'd started out to find before I guided us into the bushes.

Ossington Avenue was interesting. Lots of fun shops along it and we decided that we might return on another day to have lunch at one of the places we saw there.

We walked all the way down to Queen and then decided to return back up the other side of the street. But, first, we had to buy ice cremes at Ossington and Queen. Yum.

Then we started north. But, suddenly, the sky got quite dark and within a minute or so, it was raining hard.

Whoop!

We ducked into a **restaurant/bar called the Paris Paris** and asked if we might just sit and have a cup of coffee.

Well, apparently, this place felt that it was 'quite' snooty and people didn't just come in for a mere coffee! Ha!

The receptionist had to go and ask someone more senior what the protocol might be for such a situation wherein two wet mice came in for just a cup of coffee. After a conference, they said that they didn't 'do' just coffee ... but that we could stay in until the rain slowed.

See: <https://www.parisparis.ca/>

Yeah, right! We walked on and sat in the overhang of a door entry to a closed restaurant until the downpour slowed.

Yep, that was fun. When it slowed a bit, we walked back up to Dundas and found a covered bus shelter to wait under until an eastbound 505 streetcar came along.

It did and we took it to **St. Patrick Station** and then caught subway line 1 towards Finch and rode it until our own Wellesley Station appeared. Then the 94 bus to our front door and long adventure and a wet adventure was over.

2024 May 29th - Toronto Day 28 Wednesday

<To Facebook Post>

Yesterday, we walked over to the Ontario Parliament and took the free tour. It was fascinating. Then we took the subway down to Union Station and walked over to the Impact Kitchen on Queens' Quay; which Nawar had shown me, and we had lunch.

Then we returned home and had nice afternoon and evening in.

Sweet and simple.

2024 May 30th - Toronto Day 29 Thursday

<To Facebook Post>

Yesterday, **David Reid** came over to Toronto from **Mississauga** (24 km/15 mi) from where he lives and met me for a walk, a talk and a lunch.

See: <https://www.mississauga.ca/>

As I've said several times before, it is really nice to meet and talk with folks who actually live in a city you are visiting. And David was certainly no exception. We had a great time together sharing life histories and various stories.

I'd met David, perhaps, a year ago on-line. When I was wrestling with how to convert an article I written in a magazine back in the 1980's into a form suitable for today's Internet. David was part of the Pick Operating System Internet group I was posting questions in and he stepped up and gave me a lot of help. Actually, in truth, he essentially did the conversion for me. Very generous.

So, when I knew we were coming to Toronto, I planned to hopefully meet him.

He met me in front our building at 159 Wellesley and drove the two of us over to **Riverdale Farm**; which wasn't very far away. It was a great place to walk and talk. I will be taking Colette over there in a few days to see it before we depart (about a week away now).

See: <https://riverdalefarmtoronto.ca/>

Then, later, we walked over to Parliament Street and went to House of Parliament where I bought him lunch (Colette and I have been there twice before).

See: <https://houseonparliament.com/>

That was basically my day - and it was a good one. Thanks, David!

Dear Readers:

One of my readers shared with me that they feel that sometimes I write too much and/or post too many photos. Yes, I can see how folks might feel that way.

If you do feel like this, then please realize that from my POV, I'm not writing this primarily for you, my readers. I am writing it primarily for Colette and myself. It is, for us, literally, a diary for us of our travels. I share all of this via Facebook because I know some folks do love following along. And I'm very happy that they do. And I enjoy readings their comments, observations and reactions. Thank you to all of you who do follow along.

When we get home, all of the posts from this trip will be copied off and made into a notebook which will then join other such notebooks which we will preserve both digitally and physically.

As always, friends, your comments are welcome.

2024 May 31st - Toronto Day 30 Friday

<To Facebook Post>

Well, yesterday, David Reid came over from Mississauga to visit and, today, by coincidence, was the day we decided to go see Mississauga. Our plan was to ride a Go Bus over to the big **Square One shopping center** and have a look around.

See: <https://shopsquareone.com/>

Did I say the shopping center was big? We got as lost in it as we regularly do in Toronto's Union Station. So, yes, it was big.

Therefore today was a particularly tough day for the two little semi-lost traveling mice with Union Center on one end of our journey and the massive Square One Centre on the other.

But, the very fact that we have gotten back home this afternoon does bode well for our tenacity - if not, particularly, for our sense of direction.

Bus 21 at Union Station Bus Center was our magic carpet. And, on the way out, we were treated to upstairs seats on a two-decker bus right in the front. Sweet as.

See: <https://www.gotransit.com/.../route-21-service-updates>

So, we got to see a lot of city and countryside from up there. **Mississauga** is directly inland north and west from **Port Credit** so it was not too far from where we've been before.

Mississauga seems to be under construction basically everywhere; from what it looked like to us. They appear to be installing train or street car tracks right up the middle of one of the main roads we used to get to the Square One Center. It all should be pretty flash; when they are done.

The shopping center itself was huge. And, like any big center, it had electronic boards where you could look up a store that you wanted to find and then receive directions on how to proceed.

Yep, they had all that and we approached their electronic directional signs with reverence twice for help. And we poked buttons and looked stores up and, in the end, we could not make heads nor tails of their 'help'. Might as well have been in Swahili; as much use as we could make of it.

I worried today if we might have crossed over some 'age' line wherein we are no longer capable of understanding the direction finding boards in use by younger people? Hopefully, it is just a localized effect that is only manifesting itself in Mississauga?

Eventually, doing the mouse-stumble-and-fake-it dance that we do know how to do, we did find one of the two alleged Starbucks in the center.

The center, itself, was quite nice. And we both had Salmon Poke bowls (actually, in square cardboard boxes) at the food court and they were good. Yum.

See: <https://kohakitchen.com/menu/>

Colette went into a shop with an unpronounceable name and bought a three-pack of socks which she assured me are very likely unavailable in any of the other 168 countries of the world. And I think that made her happy. And if she's happy, then I'm happy.

See: <https://www.uniqlo.com/ca/en/>

Well, we looked, we puzzled, we shopped and we ate.

And it finally seemed like about 'enough' and thus we decided to go home.

Mmmm. Which way does one go to get out of this huge shopping center? With all our logic proven faulty, we finally just stumbled out any door that led to the outside. And THEN we deduced where the gathering place of the buses might be. And, eventually, we were right and we manifested some buses; including our beloved bus 21.

And home we went, full of Poke bowls and happy as two traveling little mice can be.

I had heard today that another effect of age creeping up on people is a tendency for them to become more child like and whimsical?

I just want to say, **here and now**, that I do not think there is a even a shred of credibility to such ideas.

2024 May 31st - Toronto Day 30 Friday - Evening

<To Facebook Post>

Forgot to share what we did on Friday evening here in Toronto. We splurged, just for the fun of it, and we went to **Maison Selby** and had **French Onion Soup** and **two nice, big glasses of wine**. And it was fun. And that's the story of our evening. (smile).

2024 June 1st - Toronto Day 31 Saturday

<To Facebook Post>

A nice day. Not too complicated. We walked over for our morning coffees and then we elected to walk back and continue right on by to **Riverdale Farm**. **David Reid** had shown Riverdale to me on Thursday, when he came to visit, and I wanted to take Colette to see it.

See: <https://riverdalefarmtoronto.ca/>

Once you get beyond Parliament Street going east, the neighborhoods you walk through to get to Riverdale Farm are pretty spectacular. Big, old-style, well kept houses all under mature trees. Truly, a lovely neighborhood. We shot a lot of pictures of them.

Once to the farm, there were many things I wanted to show Colette but the one I talked to her about the most, the **Chipmunks**, refused to put in an appearance for us. They were certainly in evidence for David and myself when we were there. And Colette and I even went and sat on the same bench David and I had sat on and waited. But, after 20 minutes, none of the little critters showed up.

See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chipmunk>

One bit of fun I liked (Colette's mileage may have varied?) was when I went into a big barn to see the animals in there. She stayed out because of the smells. She was standing with her back to a fence with a pasture just behind it and she was staring at the barn door I'd gone in waiting for my reappearance. Well, the barn had two doors and I came out the other door and I was able to walk along the fence line she was by and come up right behind her. And then **I made a big 'snort'**, as if an animal had come up behind her. I am **BAD boy!** My, my. She gave a great squeak and quite a good jump! Ha!

Well, after the chipmunks had given us the cold shoulder, we walked back towards the apartment and discovered a place along the way called **l'Avenue on Parliament**. It had an inviting outside patio bistro table and chairs setup with shade. So I suggested that we go in.

See: <https://lavenueonparliament.ca/>

And it was very nice. It is a **high-class French Restaurant by night** and they do brunches on Saturday and Sundays. And they were quite happy for us to have a croissant and a coffee and to enjoy one of their tables. I have to say that the staff were very friendly and very professional. I'll give the place a **big recommendation**, if I get the chance.

Then home and we had a quiet mid-day and afternoon in.

We'd decided later that we'd go back to Earl's downtown for more of their Clam Chowder Soup about 3:30 to 4

pm and that this would be our evening meal.

So, when the time came, we created a simple plan to get on Sherborne's 75 bus south to King Street and then change to the 504 streetcar west and it would drop us right in front of Earl's.

What a great plan!

But it didn't work out as planned. We took the 75 south but when we jumped off to transfer west, the street was **closed off with emergency vehicles**. We could see a streetcar down the street and things looked to be a mess. So, we went a block south and then turned west and came around to the far side of it all and sure enough, **the 504 streetcar had derailed after a collision with a vehicle** and it had, in turn, run up on on the side walk and taken a power pole out. Three people were hurt.

See; [https://www.cbc\(dot\)ca/news/canada/toronto/ttc-collision-streetcar-1.7221920](https://www.cbc(dot)ca/news/canada/toronto/ttc-collision-streetcar-1.7221920)

- Try replacing where it says (dot), in the link above, with an actual dot and remove the spaces on either side of the dot. This may have to do with some data feud going on between Canada and Facebook over rights to Canadian news.

In any case, we decided to just walk on to **Earl's**. It wasn't that far away. And so we did - and the soup was great.

See: <https://earls.ca/locations/financial--district/>

Then we walked to the **King Subway Station** and caught line one north towards Finch where we jumped off at out old regular; Wellesley Station. And, by luck, a 94 bus east was waiting there for us when we arrived so we were into it and seconds and home just a few minutes later.

We're into our **last week here** and beginning to feel like we've seen most of what we wanted to see so the pace is slowing a bit for us and that's fun.

Cheers, from Toronto on a nice 24C day. And this was another 13,000 steps day.

2024 Jun 2nd - Toronto Day 32 Sunday

<To Facebook Post>

A quiet day today. I think our romping about Toronto is slowing down as we approach the end of our time here. We're doing things in a more leisurely pace as we enjoy these few days before we depart. Today, it was coffee, as usual, at Church Street Espresso and then not too much else until I took off to meet Nawar at Impact Kitchen downtown for a visit.

I've seen Nawar now three times since we arrived in Toronto. And each time has been a pleasure. He's a very intelligent and thoughtful man and an endless pleasure to talk with.

I couldn't begin to cover even a small part of all the things that we discussed; but it was all good.

He works now as an ESG Evangelist to corporations and investors who want and need to integrate ESG thinking into their investment strategies and corporate planning.

Here's an explanation of ESG:

See: <https://www.imd.org/.../esg-environmental-social-and.../>

I think you can see how he would be deeply interesting to talk with. Here's a link to his business:

See: <https://www.kanataadvisors.co/about>

I may be repeating myself, but I encountered Nawar back in 2015, when Colette and I spent two months in Vancouver, Canada. He was living there then as an investor and as an author. And he was leading meetup discussion groups focused on Existentialism.

It was in this latter context that I met him.

I attended several of his meetings and I got quite hooked on the process and the topic. We also met additionally, one-on-one, and established an enduring friendship.

Later, when I returned to New Zealand, I tried to find a meetup group similar to his, but with no luck. So, I began my own and it ran there from 2015 until 2023. It was a great pleasure for me and I made many good friends through it. And I owe the genesis of all of that to Nawar.

2024 June 3rd – Toronto Day 33 - Monday

No idea what happened today. Perhaps it was the day that the Aliens beamed us up. But, if it was, they've cleared our brains. I can see from looking at my Wise credit card records, that we went to the Church Street Espresso place. And that, later, we shopped a bit at Fresh Co. ???

2024 June 4th – Toronto Day 34 – Tuesday

<To Facebook Post>

Usually, once during any major trip we've taken to a foreign city, I take off for a day by myself. It is a way of soaking up a place by just sitting and watching the life of the place pass by. Some hours, some coffee, some writing, some lunch and probably some more coffee.

Tuesday was that day for this visit to Toronto. After we went out for morning coffee, I took off (with my laptop in my bag) headed for an area we'd seen two weeks ago over on Bloor Street. I recalled seeing an intersection there with coffee shops and outside seating on three of the four corners. It looked just like my sort of place. The plan was loose. That's part of the fun of it. I didn't recall the exact intersection where I'd seen the coffee shops but given that I could ride along Bloor on a bus I should soon find it again.

But I'd have to say that there is such a thing as a plan being 'too loose'.

The today began with me going up to Sherborne Station. Riding Subway 2 west to Yonge, getting off and locating an electronics store named **The Source** there and buying a small computer gadget I wanted. That part went really well. The store was actually in the subway station building complex. How convenient is that?

Then I walked out onto the intersection of Bloor and Yonge.

The part of Bloor that I was interested in was quite a ways west of Yonge. I thought I could simply catch a

westbound bus on Bloor and jump off when I saw the area I wanted. It seemed reasonable because I'd seen bus stop symbols all along Bloor on the map.

But it wasn't actually so. When I found the first westbound bus stop on Bloor, I saw then that the busses that used it were all night time busses.

Ah, the little light turned on. Toronto's Line 2 Subway runs underground east to west across the city just underneath Bloor. So, given that fact, why would the city need to provide a bus to cover the same route? Things got worse for me after that little insight. I decided to go south, then west and then north again to get over to the part of Bloor that I thought I wanted to be in.

That series of transfers was really slow. And the day was getting hot. At one point, I had to walk a long ways to get to the next streetcar stop on Bathurst (heading north now) because I'd foolishly decided it wouldn't be too far to walk to the next stop north. But it was!

And when I arrived, finally, I watched the streetcar pull away just as I approached. So, another 15 minute wait ensued as I waited for the next one.

Eventually, I got to Bathurst and Bloor and began to walk west hoping to see the intersection I'd noted. And I walked and I walked. Did I mention it was hot?

I walked a long ways and I was realizing more and more that I might walk a **very long** ways before I found the intersection I remembered. And I was getting quite uncomfortable with the heat.

Then I thought about the Danforth area which Colette and I had discovered very early on when we went to meet Paul over there at Noonan's Bar. There was a coffee shop there, just across from the Big Carrot organic store, that I recalled which would be perfect. Yay!

The next subway station was a few blocks ahead at Christie and Bloor and I went there and caught the eastbound line 2 subway and rode it to Broadview (which is the Danforth Stop).

Now things were looking up after a lot of wasted time and a poor plan.

I arrived and all was as expected. Coffee shop, tables out front, nice street scene and shade on my side of the street. Yes!

I got a coffee and a small sandwich and went out front. But now both tables had folks sitting at them. I asked the fellow at the first table if I might share the table with him and he said that would be fine. We sat for maybe 5 or ten minutes just sipping coffee and then we began conversing. Well, that turned out to be fun. He was a local in the neighborhood, 75, named **Marcel**. And he was friendly and had an interesting story to share.

So, we spent a good hour or more talking about quite a lot of things. And all the while, the interesting neighborhood street scene passed by.

Among other things, he'd been a drummer in a band for most of his life. He'd travelled with the band as far as Reno, Nevada, He had no kids. He'd been living for 15 years now with a Chinese lady immigrant 16 years younger than him and they were getting on well. They'd travelled to Europe together to France, Spain, Portugal and Italy.

We also wandered through some of my stories, through world politics and the world's various conflicts. We talked about why Colette and I were here in Toronto.

It was, after all the fuss to get there, an afternoon well spent.

I headed home. Colette had had a quiet day.

We ended up going back to **L'Avenue on Parliament** for French Onion Soup and a glass of wine and then we came home and indulged ourselves in watching an episode of Vera (the detective lady) via VPN from ITV in Britain.

2024 June 6th – Toronto Day 36 Thursday

<this is part of the June 7th post>

Today we spent a fair amount of time on packing and some on worrying.

It turns out that Toronto was on the brink of its **first major city-wide transit strike since 2011** and it was due to begin this morning, Friday. That would have been all buses, streetcars, subways and trains - all stopped for 6.5million people.

We heard about the strike possibility a day to two ago and quickly considered our options. As a result, we reserved an Uber to take us to the Toronto Central Bus Station at 6 am Saturday morning. Our Flix Bus (which is not a part of the Toronto Transit System) leaves for Buffalo Airport at 9 am. The three hour gap would hopefully give us time to adapt, if for some reason Uber failed us.

But when we got up today, on Friday morning, and looked out the windows, we could see buses running. And a quick look at the Toronto news showed that the strike had ben averted overnight. Whew! Yesterday, Thursday, in addition to packing and worrying, we did managed to get out for coffee, lunch and an evening snack. (smile)

See, we were not too crippled by worries.

Morning coffee was our regular at Church Street Espresso.

See: <https://www.yelp.ca/biz/church-street-espresso-toronto>

At noon, Colette suggested that we walk down to Loblaws on Carlton and have a slice of their ready-to-go pizza in the deli. That sounded fun, so we did

See: <https://www.loblaws.ca/store-locator/details/1007>

I felt like another coffee afterwards and I suggested that we walk over and catch the 75 bus going north on Sherborne and ride it to Sherborne Station and then transfer onto the line 2 subway to Broadview Station and walk down Danforth Avenue to the **Second Cup coffee shop**; where I'd hung out with Marcel on Tuesday. And all of it just for fun and because our packing was mostly done.

See: <https://secondcup.com/en/location/355-danforth-avenue/>

Back in the afternoon. Some news reading, some couch napping and then I, as the light from a beautiful late afternoon was filling the world outside, suggested we go out again for a beer.

A last hurrah sort of thing. We discussed a few places and Colette thought **Gabby's** might be fun. We've walked by it any number of times but we had never stopped in. So, we walked up Sherborne and paid them a visit and it was every bit as good as we'd hoped.

See: <https://www.gabbys.ca/>

I had a Labatt Blue beer which I quite liked and Colette had a glass of wine. AND she ordered a plate of Poutine. We last had Poutine in Montreal 9 years go and we'd been wanting to try it again. Well, we finally did ... one day And they were good. Gabby's was a great place to sit and enjoy the late afternoon warmth. This morning we're up. We've discovered that the Toronto Transit System strike is, luckily for us, a non-event. We're are mostly packed and all our plans seem to be lined up and quacking - like little ducks. Outside, at this very moment, the skies are quite threatening and rain is promised. We've heard some thunder. But we're thinking that it will be hard to keep the two little mice in on their last day.

2024 June 7th - Toronto Day 37 Friday (Last Day)

<To Facebook Post>

We'll be moving on to our next adventures tomorrow morning.

We'll **Uber** down to the **Toronto Bus Station** and catch a **Flix bus** across the US border to the **Buffalo International Airport** where we'll pick up a **rental car** and begin our USA-crossing adventure.

See: <https://www.buffaloairport.com/>

But first a bit about the last few days.

On **Wednesday evening**, we met our friend, **Eva, from Vancouver** for a nice meal. Eva's work takes her back and forth across Canada and we were quite fortunate that she had a week's work here in Toronto while we were also in town.

We met Eva in 2015 while we were in Vancouver for two months. Catching up with someone after 9 years is fun. A lot generally happens to all of us in such a time span. She caught us up on her career and travels and we shared our adventures with her as well.

We met at the **Parquet Restaurant** and it was a lovely place. Good food and great conversation. Quite nice. However, I was quite lame and forgot to take any pictures of our reunion.

See: <https://restaurantparquet.com/>

===== TRAVELS BEGIN =====

2024 June 8th – Saturday - Travel Day 1 – Toronto -> Ashtabula, OH

<To Facebook Post>

Long day getting here. Up to get an Uber at 6 am to the bus station for a 9 am departure. Then a long bus ride.

A nice free perk was that the bus dropped off and picked up people at **Niagara Falls on the Canadian side**.

Yay, so we got to see Niagara Falls!

Customs, as usual, crossing into the US was slow and a bit of a pain.

The bus finally dropped us at the **Buffalo Airport** about 1:30 pm where we picked up our car. The car we picked up was a 'no extra charge' upgrade from what we ordered. So, now we are driving a big **Chevy Blazer**. It's a nice car but I suspect it's going to cost us more money for gas than what we'd expected or hoped for.

Before we got on the road, we popped into a Starbucks and had a light lunch and a coffee. Then it was out on the highway - **driving on the other side of the road**. I was a little worried about it but my brain has seemed to settle right into it.

We drove SW down the southern shore of Lake Erie to a town called **Dunkirk** where we visited a **T-Mobile Store** and I got a month's worth of Data and a phone number for my iPhone.

And for all who might be interested, our number in the US for this next month is: 1-716-281-9921. Another fairly long drive SW took us to a motel where I'd reserved us a room in advance. We got in here about 6:30 pm; after quite a long day.

Tomorrow, it is on to **Sydney, OH**, to spend two days with friends there.

Night!

There are pictures I could have put up of our travels but I am just too tired tonight.

2024 Jun 9th - Sunday - Travel Day 2 - Ashtabula -> Sidney, Ohio

<To Facebook Post>

Well, on the 8th, we arrived in **Ashtabula** and stayed at a **Red Roof Inn**. Have to say, it was not my best motel experience or choice. So, if you find your self in Ashtabula, please keep driving (smile). We didn't. But then we'd had a very long day getting there and we'd reserved ahead - sight unseen.

See: <https://www.redroof.com/property/oh/ashtabula/rri1080>

The next morning, on the 9th, we were up and out of there and heading south and west towards Sidney, Ohio. Sidney is where two friends of ours, **Bill and Marina Shaw** live on a farm outside of town. They had offered us two nights at their place.. They are wonderful and interesting people and I was sure that it was going to be a great visit - and it was. But, let's not jump ahead!

A lot of the drive to Sidney was on **Interstates**, which I wanted to avoid. But we had quite a distance to cover and we'd given them a rough arrival time so it seemed best to drive there using the fastest options. And even with that, we'd hoped to be there by 2 pm and didn't make it until 3 pm.

I could tell you about what we saw along the way but when you drive on Interstates in the US, you don't see much. You'll see several lanes of high-speed (70 mph) traffic moving with you and nothing but trees on either side blocking any view to the actual countryside. Even the names of the adjacent towns just go by meaninglessly. I.e., if you don't get off the Interstate, you are never going to see them. But, in spite of all that, we did have a few adventures. We 'discovered' **the world of Interstate Rest Stops**. Well, they've always been there - but on this day, they became one of our central amusements. Clean toilets, vending machines, shady places to park, patriotic flags and generally a story or theme is played out at most stops.

On the 8th, one of the first rest areas had a collection of highway workers' helmets outside on waist-high posts with the names of the workers on the base of the posts. A memorial to all the highways workers in Pennsylvania who'd lost their lives doing their work. I was surprised there were so many.

In Greene, Ohio, on the 9th, we stopped for a coffee and I filmed the shopping center. It is bound to be a best seller in the short film category and I'm expecting the big movie offers to come rolling in - once people have seen it.

See: <https://www.thegreene.com/>

At another rest stop in Ohio, I used the toilet and found a case of medical supplies attached to the wall to be used in case of an Opioid Overdose. I thought that was worthy of a photo.

All in all, the rests stops proved to be a bit of a life-saver for us; places where we could get out and stretch our legs after long sessions on the Interstate.

About the time we got within about 20 to 30 km of Bill and Marina's place, we pulled over for petrol near the small town of Wepakoneta. And when we looked across the street, we became curious about the several planes sitting out on the park grass.

See: <https://www.armstrongmuseum.org/>

We walked over and discovered that it was **the Neil Armstrong Air and Space Museum**. And that the planes and spacecraft on displays were replicas from his career. Well, that took a good 20 to 30 minutes of our time looking at the outside displays. And we never even went into the museum itself as we were running late getting to Bill and Marina's as it was. But it was fun!

We called Bill from there and let him know where we were and what our revised timing was and then we set off for their farm.

He'd written very detailed directions and after we'd followed them, I could see why.

They are on a farm to the west of Sidney and just a bit north of the tiny village of Hardin. A pretty place, indeed. A big barn and two complete houses. And, of course, all the farmland around the buildings for quite a ways. Bill's family had homesteaded it at least four generations ago and their original grant had been for a square mile of land. Of course, on those days, it wasn't farmland. It was forest and most of it had to be cleared before it could become productive. The hard work of multiple generations had gone into what we saw; as we drove in. I'm going to break this here and continue it in the next piece.

2024 Jun 10th - Monday - Travel Day 3 - At Bill and Marina's in Sidney, OH

<To Facebook Post>

We arrived yesterday afternoon and Bill and Marina received us so well. A nice evening meal, plenty of good talk, a nice walk and then they put us up on their 2nd house.

I'd mentioned that they have two houses and a huge barn? They live in one of the houses and use the other for an office and a guest house. I'm sure I've never been given an entire house to stay in as a guest. And an interesting place it was. Bill shared several good stories about how it was built, turned 90 degrees (by hand) and was added onto. A huge amount of history there - and all by the hands of his ancestors. On Monday, the 10th,

more good meals, another walk, a trip to town and more good talks among us. Bill's wife, Marina, is a very intelligent Russian woman with quite an interesting and complex family history; which she shared some of with us.

Colette and I are staying in the original farm house of the farm. And Bill and Marina are living in a house that used to be a barn. Until 1994, when Amish carpenters came in and spent three years converting it into a house.

They showed us some before and after photos and they are pretty amazing. But the deeper sense of it all becomes clearer when you are in the house. There are functional wooden exposed beams where the adze marks are evident from at least 100 years ago; when the place was built as a barn well before power tools. The Amish, Bill jokes, don't care about straight lines. But everything they do is solid and sure. You can see that everywhere you look.

The internal wooden structure of the house is intentionally visible. And it is a beautiful and wondrous thing to contemplate.

To say that we appreciated our time with Bill and Marina would be a huge understatement. It was a wonderful experience on so many levels.

In addition to being a successful farmer, Bill is also a political activists of the first order. Indeed, I met him in 1987 when I joined a group of citizen diplomats that he organized and led into the (then) Soviet Union for three weeks.

The idea was for Americans to go and meet the Soviets as citizen diplomats in a direct people to people manner. Referring back to those years, he estimates he led at least 1500 Americans into the Soviet Union. He runs an organization (then and now) called **Cross Currents International** from his farm.

See: <https://crosscurrentsinstitute.org/>

He has spent much of his life working on and leading a number of other organizations and peace-focused efforts - most of which I have only the vaguest idea of.

In 2022, I finally organized my notes from our 1987 Soviet trip.

See: <https://samadhisoft.com/travel-logs/>

And that, in turn, led me to get in touch with Bill; after many years of having lost contact. That was a nice reconnection.

In 2023, he and I discovered that we were both going to be in Stockholm at the same time. He and his wife, Marina, were going to be there for him to read a paper to a peace group and to receive an award. And Colette and I were going to be in Stockholm on one of our travel jaunts. So, we all met in Stockholm after all those years and toured **the Nobel Prize Museum** and then, later, had a meal together. That's when Bill met Colette and I met Marina.

Then, this year, when I told him of our plans to visit Toronto and then to drive across the USA, he invited us to their farm in Ohio for a visit. Hence these notes, this day and the story I am relating.

Bill and Marina took such good care of us and so many things happened, it is hard to remember them all. It was intense.

**2024 June 11,12,13 – Tue/Wed/Thu - Travel Days 4,5,6 –
Sidney, OH → Danville, IN → Cedar Rapids, IA → Estherville, IA**

<To Facebook Post>

Well, that certainly sounds like we're going to pack a lot of stories in here, right?

But it isn't so. Imagine how the story would go:

We drove and we drove and we drove and we drove.

Then, sometimes, we stopped and ate. And other times we stopped and stayed over night. And then we got up and did it all over again.

Hollywood thriller, right?

But, we do have a few nibbles to share. First, a series of four photos shot by Bill in Sidney; which he shared with me.

After we got up at Bill and Marina's on the **morning of the 11th**, and they fed us another very nice meal, we took off.

Destination; **Danville, Indiana.**

See: <https://danvillein.gov/>

Why Danville? Because I'd mapped out how far we needed to get each day to stay on schedule and Danville was 'about there'. And, I liked the name (hat tip to my son Dan!).

There was a lot to driving to get to Danville and a stop along the way to get lunch. And sometimes, for a change of pace, we stopped as well. Starbucks? Well, yes, we might have seen a few....

What do I remember of the trip. Just the names of towns. **Union City, Kokomo** and then **Danville**. On the **morning of the 12th**, we departed from Danville for Cedar Rapids in Iowa. Rinse and repeat.

See: <https://cedar-rapids.org/>

What do I remember? **Bloomington. Peoria, Davenport** and **Cedar Rapids**. And some Starbucks and some rest stops.

And then **on the 13th**, today, we departed from Cedar Rapids bound for **Estherville**, Iowa. Yep, I had never heard of Estherville either.

See: <https://cityofestherville.org/>

On today's trip, I recall **Cedar Falls** for coffee and **Fort Dodge** for lunch and then a long drive north up country roads while I watched a huge thunderhead cloud wondering if it was going to rain hard on us. But, we managed to stay away from it.

See: <https://www.fortdodgeiowa.org/>

Estherville is about 5500 people and not a place I'd ever heard of before. But, while we had an evening meal at **Mother's Nature**, we read about the fact that the **largest meteorite** (the three fragments were 431, 151 and 106 pounds of Iron and Nickel) to ever fall and be observed by humans (in 1879) in North America fell just outside the town.

See: <https://www.yelp.com/biz/mother-natures-estherville>

See: <https://www.estherville.org/estherville-meteorite.html>

See: <https://starhuntermeteorites.com/.../estherville...>

So, tomorrow morning, before we depart, we're going to go to see a piece of it at the **Estherville Library**. The trip may seem boring, with all the driving, but it is not. It is what we came to see - which is the American Mid West from east to west. And we are. Lots of farms, small towns, highways and roads of all sizes. Lots of good conversations about what we're seeing as well.

We were reflecting today that we've seen thousands of farms along the road. And that for a thousand mile to the north and the south of us, there are farms we've never seen and probably never will. And many of them with folks like Bill. Folks whose lives for generations have been tied to that one particular piece of land in the vast country. And all of them with lives they love and people they love and all the details that go into making up their lives. And we will never know them. Truly, the world is unimaginably big.

Thus far, the land has been flat to lightly rolling. But soon we'll get into the mountainous west and things will change.

**2024 Jun 14,15,16 - Fri,Sat,Sun - Travel Days 7,8,9 -
Esterville, IA -> Sioux Falls, SD -> Wall, SD**

<To Facebook Post>

It is 7 am and we've just finished our free breakfast here at the Best Western in Wall, South Dakota. Was that a plug? Yes, it was. I really like this place and the family who run it. I give it a 10 for 10. But hey, this is suppose to be a travel-log not and advertising scree. So, let's get a better grip on this keyboard, eh? (as the Canadians say).

June 14th 2024

We left **Estherville** on the morning of the 14th and headed west towards **Sioux Falls, SD**. A good friend of mine, Jim, from **my military days**, lives there and he and his wife, Gloria, had invited us to visit. Sioux Falls was almost directly west of Estherville and we could have just stayed on highway 9 west to get there. But I'd noticed that if we ran north just a bit, we could get onto Interstate 90 west and also cross over into **Minnesota** for part of the day's ride. We're keen on adding the names of US states to our coup sticks and this looked like a good chance to add Minnesota.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counting_coup

We'd timed ourselves so we'd get to **Jim and Gloria's** about 1:30 pm. After lunch but with a good amount of the day still before us for visiting.

The visit was fabulous. Jim and Gloria have done many things in their lives and have, apparently, done them well as they seem quite affluent and successful. Their house was a beauty and they'd designed it themselves. They told us that this was the fifth house they've done over the years. It was pretty flash and done just to their

specifications.

I'd last seen Jim and Gloria on about 1976. So, something like 48 years had passed between now and then. An entire lifetime, as they say.

We sat and talked and then they drove us to downtown Sioux Falls and we all had a good walk-about. I'd never been there before and in short order, we learned that it is **the biggest city in South Dakota** (about 250,000 people?) and it is a university town as well.

All that meant that the downtown should be vibrant - and it was. It was busy and buzz all over the place. Lot of public art as well. Traveling is such a trip. It can expose you to a city you hardly knew existed and wow you with the loveliness of the place. We were certainly wow'd.

Jim and I talked through a lot of common memories and people from years ago and they asked us a lot of questions about New Zealand and what things are like there. We also learned about the many places they've lived over the years and about the kinds of businesses and properties and life-styles they've done. Everything from sitting on the boards of corporations to cattle ranching.

That evening, they took us to a nice restaurant and treated us to a fine dinner. "Sweet as" - as the Kiwis say. Gloria even loaned us her washing and drying machines so we could do a load of laundry that evening. That was a helpful thing.

June 15th 2024

We got up early the next morning and Jim and Gloria were still sleeping so we went out and sat on their back porch. When they bought the land, they'd also bought the piece just behind it so a house would not be built there and hem in their view. Smart move.

The back yard was beautiful and full of trees Gloria had selected. It was raining lightly but their back porch area was covered and pleasant. We just sat for about 15 minutes enjoying it. I confess, I spent part of that time meditating. Watching the trees moving in the wind and seeing it all, wordlessly, and feeling the seamlessness of it. Our words and the divisions they engender are always just overlays atop what's simply happening - with or without them.

Soon our hosts joined us, and we chatted some more. Packed up and then we followed them in our car to a place for breakfast (**The Original Pancake**) that was pretty spectacular, again. They do know the good places in town (smile). We got in but by the time we'd finished our breakfasts, I could see a long line formed up outside the front doors. Popular? Oh, yeah.

After some hugs and thank yous, we departed westward again - full of good memories. Over the breakfast table, we'd all looked at our travel maps and discussed possibilities. It looked like the hot items before us were **Mt. Rushmore**, **Wall Drug** and **Rapid City**. All, apparently, good choices. And away we went.

Today's driving was all on Interstate 90 west. I'd said earlier that I wasn't fond of Interstates but back then, the ones we were on in Pennsylvania and Ohio many had trees on the side blocking any views the larger countryside and the passing towns. But out west here, that is very much not the case. Wide open views and, best of all, fast and easy driving. Once in South Dakota the Interstate speed limit is 80 mph! It was a long slog of a drive to nearly cross all of South Dakota from east to west. We stopped at a number of rest stops to stretch our legs and shake any mental fog.

We also jumped off to look at **a small town called Kimball**. Not sure why we did that other than for curiosity. But it was insightful.

See: <https://www.cityofkimballsodak.org/>

About as small as town as you could imagine living in. Less than a 1000 people and I'm sure everyone there knew when anyone else in town sneezed (smile). Didn't see any new houses. And most of the houses we did see were a bit tired though many were well kept up. In particular, I recall two small girls riding their bikes through town. One was perhaps eight and the other five or six. We saw them twice as we toured. And my impression was that the entire town was their ride-around playground. It made me smile.

Then, back in the Interstate and put the pedal down again.

Wall Drug. Have you heard of it? I had many, many years ago. But I couldn't have even told you what state it was in. But I had had the impression that folks all over the mid-west knew about it - even if I didn't. Well, Jim and Gloria had filled us in that it was a 'place to see'. Don't miss it!

Back in 1931, in the midst of the great depression, in Wall South Dakota, a pharmacy had initiated a program of giving travelers free ice water. The idea had caught on, the news spread, signs were put up and suddenly they were famous.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wall_Drug

All across the state, as we'd been driving west, we'd been seeing signs for Wall Drug making all sorts of claims. They are a bit of a legend.

In any case, we'd seen it approaching for many miles and we were getting tired of driving so we decided to give it a look for lodging and to see what all the "Wall Drug" hoopla was about. So glad we did - on both counts; the lodgings and Wall Drug, itself.

We ended up staying at **the Best Western in Wall and I give it a 10 for 10**. Great place, family owned and they do a nice job. Very nice to see after so many corporate owned places.

See: <https://www.bestwestern.com/.../propertyCode.42022.html>

See: <https://www.travelsouthdakota.com/.../best-western-plains...>

After checking in, we, of course, wandered over to see Wall Drug. Well, it is there and so is an entire other collection of businesses which have grown up to bask in its reflected glory. And what a fun place it was to wander in and out of the shops and restaurants and things for sale of every description. We had dinner at the **Salty Steer** and that was fun. With two complimentary beers courtesy of our hotel.

See: <https://www.visitsaltysteer.com/>

Well, that's about it. What we saw at Wall Drug will be hinted at in the photos. But, beyond that, you'll just have to come and see it for yourself.

We're up this morning, the 16th, **bound for Gillette, Wyoming**, for more adventures.

2024 Jun 16th - Sunday - Travel Day 9 - Wall, SD -> Gillette, WY

<To Facebook Post>

Not a lot of text today. Mostly pictures.

We left Wall (and the famous Wall Drug) and drove to **Rapid City**. A Starbuck's visit was made. And on the way to that worthy destination, I spied a **Cabelas store**.

Whoop! I didn't know I was looking for one until I saw it. Then I remembered that most of my socks are from Cabelas and that it was getting time that I got some new ones. So, in we went!

See: <https://stores.cabelas.com/.../rapid.../3231-e-mall-dr.html>

After Cabelas, we detoured away from our final destination for today, which was Gillette, Wyoming, to go a bit south to see **Mount Rushmore**.

See: <https://www.nps.gov/moru/index.htm>

See: <https://www.gillettewy.gov/>

And then, after that sweet visit, we took a back country road over into Wyoming and saw some remote and empty landscapes before rejoining Interstate 90 west and following it on into Gillette where we are camped out for the night in a Holiday Inn Express.

See: <https://www.ihg.com/.../us/en/gillette/gccwy/hoteldetail>

2024 Jun 17th – Monday - Travel Day 10 - Gillette, WY -> Billings, MT

<To Facebook Post>

Up fairly early from a good night's sleep in Gillette, Wyoming. I'm remembering that Colette turned on the TV last night and landed us on a channel that was having a full pig-out on **Star-trek**.

When I first looked, I was busy doing something else but I saw the cast of the original Star trek. Then, later, when I had time to take a better look, I tuned back in and they were showing an episode of **Star Trek - Deep Space 9**. Whew. I watched it and I was amazed at how I really used to like it - decades ago. Now, it looks really dated to me and the plots and dialogues are almost funny, they are so lame. It was interesting to take a trip back in the 'Way-Back Machine'.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Trek:_Deep_Space_Nine

Our route today took us to Billings, Montana.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billings,_Montana

We're actually just positioning ourselves so we can see **Yellowstone** and the **Grand Tetons** tomorrow and then be in Idaho Falls on the night of the 19th. This will allow us to arrive mid-day on the 20th to meet my **cousin, Noreen, and her family in Boise, Idaho**. That's been one of my major goals on this trip. Previously, we've stopped and seen Bill and Marina in Sidney, Ohio. And then Jim and Gloria in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Our trip has been such a nice mix of driving, seeing the country and socializing with nice folks along the way. I've never met my cousin, Noreen, before. Indeed, a year ago, I didn't even know she existed. But then I dug into **Ancestry.com** and discovered a lot of things I never knew.

See: <https://www.ancestry.com/>

So, I am really excited to meet her and her family. These are all folks on my paternal side. A side I knew nothing of until Ancestry.

The ride from Gillette to Billings was nice. We passed through Buffalo, Wyoming and we both wondered how many folks set out on a trip that has two Buffalos in it!

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buffalo,_Wyoming

Then we got to **Sheridan**, Wyoming and settled in for some coffee at a Starbucks and that was nice.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheridan,_Wyoming

During the next part of the drive, Colette took a movie on my iPhone to show just how empty and barren the country is.

Not long after Sheridan and a Starbucks visit (no, we never thought of "**Keeping Up Appearances!**"), we got to the Montana border and Colette got to add a new state to her quiver.

Once over on the Montana side, we found ourselves in the huge **Crow Reservation**. and that provoked a long discussion about indigenous peoples and their fates in various countries as their lands were taken over.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crow_Indian_Reservation

Most of the land we saw on the reservation was empty and barren. But when we did see communities, they looked fairly run-down.

Then we came to Hardin and from there is was a straight shot into Billings.

Once in Billings, we had a light lunch and then located a hotel we liked (and which had good recommendations).

So, tonight we are staying in the Best Western Plus in downtown Billings. And it is a nice place.

See: <https://www.bwclocktowerinn.com/en/>

We'd gotten in early so I laid down and had an hour's nap and then we went out exploring a bit. But downtown here seems to be hotels, bars and restaurants. None of the busy, buzzy main street kind of a scene that we liked so much in Sioux Falls.

But, we did decide to go up to the **restaurant at the top of the Doubletree Hotel**. It has a restaurant on the 20th floor. Fun!

See: <https://www.hilton.com/.../bildtdt-doubletree.../dining/>

Tomorrow morning, we're **away to the small town of Gardiner**; which is just north of the entrance to Yellowstone. My cousin, Noreen, had mentioned it. We've already made a reservation at the Roosevelt Hotel as things are tight in the summer months.

See: <https://www.yellowstonehotelbooking.com/>

Night!

2024 Jun 18th - Tuesday - Travel Day 11 – Billings, MT -> Gardiner, MT

<To Facebook Post>

Well today our trip was from Billings, Montana, to Gardiner, Montana, and it was one of the stranger days I can recall.

The first thing that happened was that we managed to walk out of our hotel room in Billings and **leave our map book there.**

Neither one of us noticed this due to a conjunction of things that were happening just as we were walking out the door.

The result was we had gone for nearly 30 minutes to the west before realizing it was missing. But the reason that we realized it was missing was because the GPS seemed to be taking us in an odd direction for reasons that we didn't understand.

It turned out that I'd asked the GPS originally for directions to Yellowstone. And then later, I realized that I actually wanted to go to the town of Gardiner. So, I touched the name of the town Gardiner on the GPS screen and it reacted and seemed to understand that's where I wanted to go now. And off we went, unknown to me that the GPS still taking us to Yellowstone in general and not to Gardner in specific.

Now there are several small roads that go south from interstate 90 into Yellowstone and none of them goes particularly anywhere near to Gardiner. The result of this misunderstanding was that 20 or 30 miles west of Billings, the GPS asked me to turn off on a small road near Park City and head south. Being a GPS obedient driver, I did so. And soon we were on a small road paralleling the interstate.

At about this point, I was getting an unsettled feeling that **something wasn't right.** And that, in turn, made me start thinking about looking at the map book. And that, in turn, made me start thinking about where I had packed it. And that made me realize I couldn't remember.

So I asked Colette. We could both recall looking at it as we were getting ready to go, but neither of us could remember packing it!

So we stopped on the little road and searched the car and determined that we didn't have it. I called the hotel back in Billings and told them that we thought we had left our map book in room 279 and could they make sure that the housekeeping didn't throw it away before we got back to recover it. Yes, they could. So, we turned around and drove all the way back to Billings and retrieved the map book.

And then, before we left the parking lot, I tried to puzzle out why the GPS had been taking us off in an odd direction. And it was then that I realized I must have mis-programmed the GPS.

So I cleared the GPS and then re-entered our destination as being Gardiner.

The GPS updated and showed us on Interstate 90 going all the way to Livingston, Montana, where we would turn to south to Gardiner.

See: <https://www.visitgardinermt.com/>

So, we took off again.

But the GPS weirdness was not over. In spite of the fact that I'd cleared the GPS and reprogrammed it to go

to Gardiner, it once again asked us to turn off south on the same small road as we went west! This was very weird because we could see on the GPS screen that the road displayed there headed west on Interstate 90 even though the GPS voice was asking us to turn off at the next off ramp. After an incredulous look at each other, we decided to ignore it.

It sure enough, as soon as we passed the requested turn-off, the GPS immediately changed its mind and said, "Oh yes, just keep driving 100 km west from where you are to **Livingston** and then Gardiner." I think something was left in its memory even after I reprogrammed it.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livingston,_Montana

Somewhere along here, the car's automatic systems, decided to tell me that the front left tire was getting a little low. So, I pulled into a station and, after a search, found their air hose. But it had no meter on it. So, I used it and applied air to the tire in question for just a few seconds and hoped that would be 'good enough'. Then, a few minutes later, I found another station and I looked and, yes, they had an air hose with a meter on it. But, upon closer inspection, **the hose was also attached to a credit card reader.** Meaning, you paid to use it. I made a rude noise and we drove off.

So that's **two weird things** that have happened today. **Let me tell you about the third.**

Today's the 18th. Two days ago, on the 16th, we made a reservation by phone from Gillette for Gardiner because anything near a big tourist place like Yellowstone is likely to fill up quick.

I used my Wise credit card do to this and it did not work. We tried it three times and it was declined each time. But the hotel in Gardiner said they would hold the room for us and we could straighten the credit card problem out when we got there.

So sure enough we arrived this morning and went to the hotel front desk, presented the Wise card and it worked first time. Credit card problem solved (we thought).

After this, we needed to fill the car up so we pulled into a local gas station and tried my Wise card on the gas pump and it said I had to go talk to the "Attendant".

So, I went to the office and we tried the Wise card there and it fails several times. I used another card to pay for the gas and left a bit disquieted.

Later we were in **Gardiner** playing tourist and I attempted to buy a refrigerator magnet (that said Yellowstone National Park) and again I used the Wise card and it failed again. And this time **a message appeared saying the card was suspended!** Yow!

You can imagine our consternation, being on an international trip halfway around the world, and my main credit card now says it's suspended!

So, we went out to sit in the car and think about the matter, and also to take a look at the Wise app on my iPhone to see if it could give us any insight.

And, in looking at the Wise app, **a new button, that I had never seen before, appeared that said "Press to clear the suspension".**

So I pressed the button and, apparently, the suspension was lifted.

At this point, not being sure what to believe, we went to a market to buy an ice cream - just to buy something to **see if the card was working again. And sure enough, it did.** Glory be!

That was almost too much excitement for us so after eating our ice creams and sitting a while under a tree in a parking lot waiting for our motel to give us a key to our room, because they don't pass the keys out until 4 PM, we checked in and I laid down to have a nap to recover from all the fun.

One nice thing that happened, as we pulled around the motel to go to our room, was seeing four large deer standing on the side of the alley eating tree leaves and having absolutely no concern over the fact that we were driving by in a car just 3 feet away. That seemed like a good omen.

Later, I saw that I had an **e-mail from Wise. It said they would suspend your card if they saw suspicious transactions.** And that they had suspended mine. And that I should check for unusual transactions.

So, I did and I quickly came to the conclusion that our hotel here had charged me for our stay **SIX TIMES!**

It turned out that The three times the card was declined in the 16th and twice when they retried it this morning, before we arrived, had **ALL become actionable once I came to the counter with the physical card and it worked.** I went to the office and several of us went over all this and they agreed that it had happened and it would be refunded. They confirmed all of this with their boss, Brandon. Exactly how, they were not sure, but said that I could come into the office and they would know in the morning.

Tomorrow, we're going to get up early and head on down through **Yellowstone** National Park and then through **Teton National** Park until we merge out the south end of the second park and head for **Idaho Falls**. One notable fact that came to us today is that it will cost us \$35 to enter each of the parks. But, we're happy. It's good to know that we're keeping the US Government afloat.

Now, was that a weird day - or what?

2024 Jun 19th - Wednesday - Travel Day 12 - Gardiner, MT -> Idaho Falls, ID

<To Facebook Post>

And a very long day it was. We took off not long after 8 am and only arrived here in **Idaho Falls** just after 6 pm. A good deal of the slowness was because we went through both **Yellowstone** and **Grand Teton** National Parks and folks generally drive at about 35 MPH there. Ah, and then there was the over an hour we waited to see **Old Faithful** do its thing. (smile).

When we left Gardiner, it was just above freezing. Quite a change from when we were in Wall, South Dakota, just a few days ago.

So, how to summarize and encapsulate today?

We saw:

- 2 Prairie Dogs (who ran across the road in front of us)
- 1 Wolf (also ran across the road before us)
- 1 Bison very close and many far away
- and 1 Chipmunk at very close range, indeed.

And lots of trees, lakes, mountains, snow and highways and far less Starbucks than usual. The financial weirdnesses we experienced in Gardiner are still pending. But I have faith they will sort out correctly.

That's all I'm going to write tonight. I am bushed. But I will include quite a few photos (watch for the chipmunk.

2024 Jun 20th – Thursday - Travel Day 13 - Idaho Falls, ID -> Boise, ID

<To Facebook Post>

We drove from Idaho Falls to Boise yesterday and after we checked into our hotel, we went off to meet my family.

My family?

Yes, **my family whom I've never in this lifetime seen**. People I didn't even know existed; until perhaps a year ago. People I found through ancestry dot com when I used it to learn about my father's history. It was a once in a life time experience to meet a collection of direct blood relatives that I didn't know existed not long ago.

My family has been very small for all my life. My mom and I, her half brother and his two daughters; who were my half-cousins. And that was it. Unless you include my direct progeny; my two sons; Dan and Chris. But yesterday, I met three first cousins. Michael (1941), Noreen (1943) and Daniel (1955). All the children of my uncle Justin (who has passed on).

And I met my cousin's spouses. Noreen's husband, Pat, and Michael's Wife, Robbin.

And I also met several of their children. Noreen and Pat's daughter, Katy, and Michael and Robbin's boys, Lonnie and Jeff.

These are people with my own blood - staring back at me after all these many years, shaking my hand, hugging me and sharing family stories with me!

It was an event. There was a tremendous amount of talk and sharing and questions flying in all directions. Colette was with me and there was a lot of friendliness and curiosity directed at her as well. It was almost more than a single afternoon could pack in. Luckily, folks arrived in two shifts to meet and greet us. Noreen also cooked us all a nice meal towards the end of the second shift.

All of this was an experience I've never had before and I am still, 24 hours later, a bit dazzled. Needless to say, I'm full of thoughts about how to see more of these folks.

Not much else to report. We went back to the hotel and I slept like a log after all that stimulation.

2024 Jun 21st – Friday - Travel Days14 - Boise, ID -> Reno, NV.

We drove from **Boise to Reno** - which was about six hours of steady driving. This last stretch of travel over the 21st, 22nd and 23rd has us covering a long distance all the way from Boise to SoCal. It's not trivial. But, the highways are smooth, the car is working like a dream and I am fortunate to have a lovely traveling companion who put up with me very well - even when I am grouchy at times.

Tomorrow, we strike out south and west into California.

2024 Jun 22nd – Saturday - Travel Day 15 - Reno, NV → Salinas, CA

<To Facebook Post>

Not a lot to report today. A long drive that we intended to get us to Monterrey, California but which actually got us to Salinas.

Why?

Because the traffic towards Monterrey was so heavy on a Saturday afternoon that we thought, "If even a fraction of these folks are going there for a room, there won't be anything left by the time we fight our way through". So, we turned towards Salinas and got ourselves a nice room and had a good meal at a Mexican restaurant just around the corner.

Tomorrow, we'll go from Monterrey to San Luis Obispo down the California coast via Highway 1. Always a beautiful trip. The day after, we'll make it to Irvine, California - which was always going to be our final destination. It has been a pretty epic trip.

2024 Jun 23rd - Sunday - Travel Day 16 - Salinas. CA -> Pismo Beach, CA

<To Facebook Post>

Going to be a last day of these reports ... probably.

We'll reach **Irvine, California**, tomorrow; where my son, Dan, and family live, and I will probably wrap these reports up then. No promises, however. After Colette flies back to New Zealand on the 28th, I'm intending to stay for another month and do some more visiting. And I just may take up more story telling then. But let's turn our attention to today. Today has turned out spectacularly - though it had its disappointments early on.

After our aborted run down to **Monterey** on the coast last night (when we deemed the traffic too busy and too slow and turned back to Salinas) we had planned to resume our original costal route this morning. As an aside, **Salinas** was nice and the hotel there was quite flash.

So, we got up this morning, enjoyed our free hotel breakfast, loaded the car and took off for Monterey. And all was good.

As we got closer to the coast, intermittent fog came and went and we were not sure what we'd see when we got there. But, once in Monterey, we had a good drive around and agree again (after our last visit over ten years ago) that it is one sweet town. And that we loved it.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monterey,_California

Then we turned south to take highway 1 all along the coast. That is a beautiful drive which we've done at least three times before.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California_State_Route_1

But, somewhere near **Carmel**, a sign appeared saying that **highway 1 past Big Sur was closed**.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carmel-by-the-Sea,_California

That, as you can imagine, necessitated a stop to investigate. **And it was true!**

See: https://www.bigsurcalifornia.org/highway_conditions.html

So, a revision of our plans was in order! After some map cogitations, we decided to backtrack to highway 101, which is inland, and take it south to San Luis Obispo; which is a sweet university town. So, we reversed out of Carmel and Monterey and went overland to where we could catch the 101 south and we were off bound for our chosen destination again.

Whew, the Central Valley was hot today! 30C or 86F

We had a stop in Soledad for a Starbucks and a break.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soledad,_California

The only thing that happened along on the way south of Soledad was that we stopped to have a look at the **town of Bradley**. That was about as big a non-event as you can imagine:

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bradley,_California

After that visit, we stopped at the next rest stop to recover from the intense excitement of seeing Bradley in its full flowering.

Eventually, we got to **San Luis Obispo** and it was as nice as we had recalled. We parked in a parking structure in mid-town and went for a walk.

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Luis_Obispo,_California

What a buzzy place on a Sunday afternoon. We had a nice walk up and down a few streets and finally settled on a place called **Sequoia Sandwiches** - and they were great.

See: <https://sequoiasandwichco.com/>

San Luis Obispo (SLO) is a university town and I always love the buzz of such places. Another nice thing was that as we left town, the parking structure's gates were all up and so parking was free! While we were eating lunch in Sequoia Sandwiches, we discussed what to do. SLO might be nice to stay in but it was hot. And we thought that if we went down to **Pismo Beach** (first beach town south of SLO) we might catch some sea breezes. I checked a few hotels out remotely and they seemed reasonable. And it was a short walk to the beach from them. Things looked good!

See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pismo_Beach,_California

In Pismo Beach, we vectored directly to the hotel I had scoped out. And it was just as represented so we checked in.

See: <https://www.pismobeachwalkerinn.com/>

Once checked in, it was still too early to access our room, so we walked down to the beach. Whoa - it was booming and I had a lot of fun shooting photos down there.

So, now we're back in our room #225 (2nd floor) and watching the street life and traffic flow by in the doorway as I write this looking out. Sea breezes blowing in. 21C / 70F outside.

All in all, this is shaping up to be a nice finish to our epic cross country trip. As of today, we've put 3,979 miles on our rental car (or 6404 kilometers). And so far, (knock on wood) without a mishap. That's Dennis & Colette signing off (for now) from Pismo Beach, California.

2024 - June 26th - a change of plans.

<To Facebook Post>

For those of you who have been following our travels, you will know that Colette and I just spent five weeks in an AirBnB in Toronto and then we rented a car in Buffalo, New York, and drove it through many adventures for 16 days to Southern California. It has been an epic trip.

I'd been talking about staying on for another month after Colette flies back to New Zealand on the June 28th.

But today, after quite a lot of thought, I realized that my enthusiasm for staying on and traveling some more has waned.

The travel extension (after Colette left) sounded good when I planned it. But now that we've come to ground after driving for 16 solid days, I've realizing that I am tired of travel for the moment.

It's probably an age thing. At 76, perhaps, I just cannot push it like I used to.

But it is a deep truth that if I feel that way, then I need to honor it - regardless of what I may have said and planned earlier.

So, Colette will be flying out on June 28th for New Zealand and home. And I've changed my flights and I will follow her two days later on the 30th. It'll be good, I think, to be home again with simple days and no travel plans for a while.

I'm returning to the USA next year for my 60th High School Reunion in Long Beach, California, and perhaps I may resume my traveling and visiting plans after that - we'll see (smile).

Best wishes to All!
Fondly,
Dennis Gallagher

PS. the photo below is of Colette and me at my son's bar, Mugs Away, in Laguna Niguel, CA. This was taken, as you can well imagine, soon after our arrival (smile).

See: <https://mugsawaysaloonoc.com/>

Bgn mileage in Buffalo, New York = 20,531

End mileage in Irvine, California = 25,062

Difference = 4,531 miles or 7292 km

A longer, electronic version of this notebook (with all photos) can be found
on-line at: <https://samadhisoft.com/travel-logs/>