

1999 BALTIC AND POLAND

Thursday, June 3, 1999. Met Mary in the Delta Business Class lounge and at 10:00PM we took off for London Gatwick. Delta's new enhanced business class isn't all bad. The seats recline almost as far as the old first class, but if you aren't in sleeping position the footrests don't come up as far as I would like. They seemed to have a nice selection for dinner but I barely made it off the ground before I put on my blinders and went to bed. It's all too short a flight across the puddle to London.

Friday June 4. Arrived London and got in contact with Princess cruises, but Princess really dropped the ball. We were told to wait a short while for another couple supposed to be on our flight. Meanwhile they were loading people for all sorts of destinations. After an hour and a half they decided the other couple wasn't going to show. THEN they called for a minibus to take us into London. That took another ten minutes. As a result we were completely wiped out when we finally got to the Britannia Hotel about 2:00PM and were told our room would not be ready for another hour. So we went out on the street and about two blocks away found an Italian trattoria, which smelled of cigars inside but had a nice outside dining area. The food was delicious. When we got back we were shown to a rather small room and, since we were on the first floor overlooking Grosvenor Square, we got all the traffic noise from the street. I would have liked to change, but since it took an hour for them to bring the bags, by the time they arrived I only wanted to crawl into bed and sleep it off! So much for prepackaged cruise extensions, it would have been much better to have booked our own and done it the way we liked. I had only taken Princess' package because of the transfers and baggage handling!

After a 3-hour snooze we felt sufficiently revived to walk to Regent Street to L'Odeon Restaurant where we had a delightful dinner and then walked back to the hotel. Rather a long walk for Mary who has foot problems but it felt good to me after so much sitting.

Saturday, June 5. After breakfast we took a cab to Paddington Station and caught the train to Windsor. We got to the castle just before it opened at 10:00 and as a result were able to tour the state rooms and St George's Chapel before they got too crowded. I had never seen the state rooms before; the queen had always commandeered them before I got there. The rooms are magnificent. A fire in 1992 destroyed a number of them, but most of the art treasures were saved and in the reconstruction they were able to improve on some of the original design and even to restore to "gothic" some of the later "modernizations". We had plans for the afternoon but after we got back to London and had a sandwich in the bar of the Britannia, a nap took precedence. I wish I coped with the jet lag better than I do.

Around six we caught cab to the Aldwych Theater and asked the driver to drop us at some place close by to eat. We ended up in the Old Orleans Grill, which prided itself on New Orleans cuisine. But they didn't have iced tea! We then went to see Lloyd Weber's latest musical, Whistle down the Wind, which is a delightful story set in Louisiana that deals with a group of children who think Jesus has come to them, although he was in reality an escaped convict. I really enjoyed it, particularly the scenery changes which were done on a two level stage. It was impossible to catch a cab after the performance so we took a bus to the New Bond Street underground station and then walked back to the hotel.

Sunday, June 6. Bags out at eight, we had to board the bus at 9:15. It took us less than 2 hours to drive to Dover and just a few minutes to complete boarding procedure for the Royal Princess. Then we proceeded to the ship and as we were boarding heard the announcement from the waiting lounge that they were ready to start boarding! So we were practically the first on board. We found our staterooms but no sign of the rest of Mary's family. We went up to the 24-hour Lido Restaurant for a buffet lunch. The ship is lovely with all outside rooms and our staterooms on Plaza deck are well located just a floor below the floor where most things happen. We are also on the deck with the dining room, reception and beauty parlor. I also like being on the deck where you board and disembark the ship. At last Tom, Brian and Brenda appeared. Poor souls, they got to Gatwick around 8:00 and were taken to a hotel at the airport to cool their heels until ready to board the ship. Brian was starved. They just didn't have a football player's diet on the airplane! We got them fed and at last the luggage arrived so we could unpack.

Lifeboat drill was different. We got our life preservers and went to our muster station in the big lounge on the deck above us, where it was demonstrated how to wear the vest. But we never saw the lifeboat and we never had a roll call. They told us they "had a way to know if we were all there without a roll call". I am dubious. We went up to the after-deck lounge on the top deck to watch our sailing and then went to the dining room to meet Alexander, our waiter and Max our headwaiter.

Afterwards I decided not to do the show in favor of bed. I'm catching up on the jet lag but it is slow.

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Monday, June 7. A day at sea. I started out in the beauty salon for a much needed manicure and pedicure. It took forever and so I missed the morning walking, but it was so cold on deck I really don't think I'd have enjoyed it. Watched the line dancing for a while and then came to the cabin to do some laundry. I had lunch in the dining room with four ladies, 2 from El Paso and 2 from Norfolk. They had all been on more than a few Princess cruises. Played bridge in the afternoon with Dee Ashwood, who is a friend from Atlanta. It was typical of shipboard bridge. 7 tables, 21 boards (except we only got to play 15 of them). Half the field probably hasn't played duplicate before. A bit like playing in a novice game. We did end up second, but I won't waste my time on it again. Dee and I can play in Atlanta next time. Had my hair fixed and then in my best gown went out to the Captains welcome aboard gala.

Everyone looked so nice and we had a group picture taken. I was even wearing heeled shoes for the first time in 8 months! At dinner we all exchanged notes on our days activities. Brenda "treated" us to wine with the complimentary bottle she was given by Princess cruises. (We have five complimentary bottles from Princess and one from Susan so we shall drink well). Tom won a putting contest and has a medal to wear around his neck! The big disappointment with the cruise is that there is no sign of Mariner's Club on board. I booked with Golden Bear just to be part of their group. It is so much more fun to be part of a group and to have the leader looking out for you

Tuesday June 8. Oslo. I was awake at 6:00 and went up to the Lido café for breakfast and to watch us enter Oslo Fjord. The scenery looks like New England and it is 60 miles up the fjord to Oslo, the capital of

Norway. A little after 9:00, we set out on foot to explore the city.

The dock had a number of interesting old ships, including the square-rigged Christian Radich, which I had seen some years ago at a tall ships celebration in Charleston. There were many wooden ships, including one replica of a Viking ship. There were interesting sculptures on the dock

We walked up to the 19th century palace, which you can't enter, but the palace garden is lovely with enormous fragrant lilacs in bloom. We got to the Historical Museum only to find it didn't open until 11:00.

Went on to the Art Museum but found it was closed on Tuesday. And at last reached the Stortorvet Cathedral and, guess what, it too was closed, for a rehearsal. Mary, Tom and Brian went back to the Historical Museum and reported later that it was quite interesting. Brenda and I headed back to the ship.

Oslo was founded about 1000 years ago and when the capitol was moved here in 1300 it became a city of importance. The Akerhus Castle is inside a huge 13th century fortress overlooking the harbor.

We climbed on the rampart for the lovely view of the city and then paid to enter the castle itself, and were lucky enough to find a costumed hostess giving a tour of the castle. We saw everything from the banquet halls and chapel to the dungeons. It was all very interesting. Then it was back on board for lunch.

We had signed on for the afternoon bus tour to the three ship museums. First the Viking Ship Museum. The Vikings buried their dead in ships.

Three ships have been found. One is almost destroyed but the other two are beautifully restored. One was the site of burial in the 9th century of two ladies, the other of a man. In the ladies ship they found clothing, including shoes, carts, beds and so forth. The man's ship was a seagoing ship and not as highly decorated. Next we went to the Kon Tiki museum where Thor Heyerdahl's ships are displayed. The papyrus Ra 2 which he sailed from Africa to Barbados (and discovered we were polluting our oceans) and the Kon Tiki, reed boat, which he sailed from South America to Easter Island, proving that the Polynesians might have come from the east instead of the north to Easter Island. Next door was the Fram museum. Nansen and Amundsen used the Fram in polar expeditions over a hundred years ago. You can board the ship that contains many original furnishings. Her thick shell was designed so the polar ice could not crush it.

Wednesday, June 9. Copenhagen. The kids and I are signed on for a walking tour. Mary and Tom are doing it by bus. We are taken to see the Little Mermaid, a Hans Christian Andersen character that has become the symbol of Copenhagen. When I saw her first over 30 years ago, she was on a small rock just offshore. Now an esplanade has been built connecting her with the shore and to accommodate the huge crowds of people who come to see her. From here we walked through the Kastellet, a military base almost 300 years old. The guide tells us that this is the first time barracks were built. The king's palace was also supposed to be within the fortified enclosure but the people, who had just given him absolute monarchy power, rebelled at this and he had to build his palace elsewhere.

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Then it was on to the graceful Amalienborg palace, four rococo buildings around a central square. One is where Queen Margaretha 11 lives.

Across from her is where the 31-year-old heir to the throne lives. Next to her is a palace for the 87-year-old dowager queen and the last of the buildings is for housing state visitors and giving small dinner parties (those with less than 100 people). We went through the medieval part of the city with its narrow streets. We passed the old fish market quay and went on to one of the canals that form the artificial harbor. Picturesque boats were tied up on either side. The area once was a red light district but is now a stylish place to live. We stopped briefly at the Carlsberg complex, with a courtyard that reminded me of where Charity and Evans are living in Toulouse, a four-story building around a courtyard. Originally the brewery was housed on the top floor and they also kept cows in the building. At last we stopped at an old palace, now a museum of fine art, where we had refreshments. Coffee and a delicious Danish cake, an apple filled torte. After lunch it was on to the Kings New Square, where executions and floggings once occurred, passed the Christiansborg Palace and Old Stock Exchange and finally to the City Hall Square. We walked the shopping streets for a while but aside from a couple of amber shops found little of interest. I want to get some amber, which comes from the Baltic, but most of it is yellow, a color I do not wear. The red amber is better but seems much rarer. Rarer still (and more expensive) is amber with a distinct bug inside! We caught the shuttle bus back to the ship where Mary and Tom were anxiously awaiting Brenda and Brian so they could go to Tivoli Gardens.

I opted out and had lunch and then explored the small shop district near the ship.

After dinner I finally made it to the show. A Russian xylophonist named Misha and a British comedian, both enjoyable.

Thursday, June 10. Up at seven and after breakfast walked the treadmill for a mile or so. I must do something to compensate for all the eating I've been doing! Went to the port lecture, checked into the bridge lecture to give the director my ACBL number. Found a book in the library to read since I am almost out of reading material and went to the Scandinavian buffet and had an orgy of herring dishes.

In the afternoon heard an interesting talk on amber and Russian boxes and dolls, which was very well done and made me want to rush, out and buy some. Then the guest lecturer spoke, supposedly on the relations between Finland and Russia but turned out to be a talk on Peter the Great building St Petersburg and introducing western culture and architecture to Russia (which until then had oriental leanings).

After dinner made it to the entertainment of "American Music", but it wasn't that great and seemed inappropriate in the middle of the Baltic with so many nationalities represented on board. I am so pleased that Brenda and Brian are finally getting acquainted with the other teens on board. There are 10 of them and they were shy at first about getting together.

Friday, June 11. Stockholm. We are so lucky with the weather. Sunny and warm, a pleasant change from London. Was up early enough to see the beautiful approach through hundreds of islands with granite rocks that remind me of Maine. Ninna and Leif Tollen came to meet us and it was so good to see them after 12 years. Ninna was a foreign exchange student who lived for a year with us so many years ago. The whole family came. Martin, aged 24 with his girl friend Helena; Eric, aged 14 and Charlotta aged 10. All but Charlotta spoke excellent English. Using their van and a taxi, the 11 of us went to the Vasa Museum, which is very impressive. 300 years ago Sweden built a huge battleship called the Vasa after the Swedish royal family. She was elaborately decorated with carvings and bristled with two gun decks of cannon. However she had such a narrow hull she could not carry a lot of ballast, and with her top-heavy superstructure it is no surprise she capsized and sank on her maiden voyage! 300 years later she has been salvaged from the harbor and meticulously restored. She is in a great museum with all sorts of exhibits on how she was lifted and fixed. Then we walked up to Skansen, a park where they have collected historical buildings from all over Sweden and arranged them in a rural landscape. We walked around for a while and particularly enjoyed the lovely 200-year-old church and the schoolhouse. Then it was lunch before catching a ferry back across to the old town. Our goal was the Royal Palace and we toured the elaborate state rooms. One thing that makes Sweden so unique is that because of her neutrality all of the buildings are original because they weren't damaged or destroyed during the 2nd World War. Nearby the palace was a square where many Swedish leaders were massacred during a dispute with Denmark several hundred years ago. We enjoyed some ice cream and then

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Leif took us back to the ship. We were foot weary but had such a good time that we hardly noticed. Sat in the Horizon room as we sailed and then went to dinner. It had been a wonderful day but I was tired.

Saturday, June 12. Helsinki. We took the city tour (there really wasn't much choice) and "lucked" into a tour guide who spoke in a monotone and gave us more information than we cared to know. We went to the Senate Square with the impressive marble Lutheran cathedral of St Nicholas, and then it was on the Temppeleauko Rock Church, which was carved out of the granite rock and is basically underground with a louvered copper roof that lets in the light. It was also impressive. At last we went to the Sibelius Monument, a massive stainless steel sculpture that resembles organ pipes dedicated to Sibelius' vision. They all teased me for nodding off in the bus. We were dropped off at the Open Air market, a very crowded area of stalls on the dock with fish and vegetables and some stands selling tourist goods. Tom and Mary spent some time buying Brian one of the Finnish knives while Brenda and I found some earrings at another vendor. Then we decided to break into two groups with Brenda and I walking all the way down the crowded esplanade. It is a festival day, the 145th anniversary of Helsinki's birth. We didn't find much shopping, it was all high fashion type stuff, so we decided to look for a place for lunch but everything seemed to be beer halls or coffee bars where the only food was cakes. We ended up walking back to the ship for lunch. Then Brenda and I took our laundry to the ship Laundromat, which I expected to find uninhabited but it, was quite crowded as a lot of other people had the same idea. With our clothes clean (Brenda even did some of Brian's laundry) we felt so noble! Met Tom and Mary up in the Horizon Lounge to enjoy our sailing away from Helsinki. They had managed to catch the parade of samba dancers, and apparently the men couldn't take their eyes off the scantily clad dancers!

Sunday, June 13. St Petersburg. Peter the Great spent three years as a young man in Europe and became impressed with western ways. He decided to create a port on the Baltic and waged war with Sweden to claim the land where St Petersburg now stands. In 1703 he started to build his new capitol city. Architects and artists were imported from Europe and were commissioned to build the palaces for the nobility. The land was swampy but with canals and rivers tamed he was able to lay out a town with grid shaped streets. St Petersburg today still has many of the buildings from Peter the Great's time. After the revolution in 1917, many of these buildings fell into decay, but now that they have gotten rid of the communists a restoration process is going on. Thus, while some of the buildings have a shabby look, reminiscent of the decaying buildings in Vladavolstok, many others are covered with scaffolding for restoration and some have already been restored to their former glory.

Along the Neva River there are many Italianate buildings, and L'Hermitage, the winter palace of the Tsars. We took the city tour and were driven by St Isaac's Cathedral, with its gold dome that dominates the skyline. Since this weekend is the anniversary of the birth of St

Petersburg, the citizens are celebrating with a giant beer fest and some of our route has to be modified to avoid the crowds. We were taken to see the Aurora, a naval cruiser, which fired the first shot in the Russian Revolution. The naval cadets now maintain it as a monument. Every place we stop we are surrounded by vendors selling not only the dolls and boxes so typically Russian, but also watches, hats with pseudo Olympic pins and so forth. Some of these vendors are quite aggressive and dollars are the unit of currency. We stopped to see the Church of the Savior of the Spilled Blood with its elaborate mosaic domes and turrets, reminiscent of St Basils in Moscow. (This seems to be about the only building in St Petersburg which reflects Russia's historical link to the east, almost everything else being western in design). The church is so-called since it is built on the site where Alexander 11 was assassinated. Across the street from the church was a bazaar and it was hard to resist the bargains. I bought an amber ring and an enameled set of earrings and pin. The Sesniaks are loading up on dolls and boxes and having a great time doing so. Brian bought two Russian hats, and later an "army watch", which ran for about 2 days.

You dicker for everything. We stopped to view the lovely Smolny Cathedral which once housed a convent.

After lunch we took another tour to see the L'Hermitage Museum. The first part is housed in the original palace with an imposing white marble staircase. Unfortunately a fire destroyed much of the rest of the palace that dated from Catherine the Great's time but many rooms have been restored. The art collection is incredible. We started in the impressionist collection then proceeded to the Rembrandt collection. Catherine the Great was quite an art collector and bought huge collections of art. They don't have just a few Rembrandts but a whole gallery of them. They have the only two Da Vinci paintings in all of Russia.

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We saw examples of most of the great painters of the 15th 16th and 17th centuries. The collection long ago outgrew the original palace and Catherine the Great built another palace, the Little Hermitage next door to hold her expanding collection. You could spend days here and not see everything, but Nadja our guide was very good in threading us through the huge crowds to see the highlights. I had always heard of this great museum and it certainly lived up to its reputation. The Sesniaks headed out into the palace square to try some of the beer, but I was happy just to make it back to the bus. After dinner we took our third tour of the day. This time to see the ballet put on by the Marinsky ballet company. They did excerpts from a number of ballets including Rimsky-Korsakov's Sheherezada, Chaikowsky's (Russian spelling) Sleeping Beauty and Stravinsky's Apollon. It was beautifully done. The most enjoyable evening of ballet I have ever seen. The show was held in the Hermitage Theater, a wonderful baroque theater, which was crowded to the rafters with people and they served complimentary champagne and soft drinks during the entr'acte.

Monday, June 14, 1999. Tom picked today's tour and he picked a good one. We went to Oranienbaum, which is some distance out in the country.

One of the nicest parts was that there were only 21 of us, compared to the cast of thousands we have had on other tours. We drove west along the Gulf of Finland through rural countryside about an hour. Most of the nobility had dashas or summer palaces away from the heat of St Petersburg. Many are gone, but Oranienbaum remains in its original state. Peter the Great's friend and confidant, Menshikov built this dasha. He had made his money by siphoning off some state money that he was in charge of (later he was found guilty by Peter 11 and exiled to Siberia). But meanwhile, in a lovely park he built a complex of palaces. The grand palace is imposing but only a few rooms, unrestored, are open to the public. Much better was the Chinese palace, where Catherine the Great spent her summers. A charming place, it is one palace I feel I could live in. A small lake with classical sculpture lies in front of it. The floors are beautiful parquet and there were painted ceilings and porcelains that added to the effect. The palace takes its name from two rooms decorated in Chinoiserie style, one with an enormous British pool table, added by a later owner of the palace. We walked through the park and the next building was sort of a playhouse. A popular recreation in the summer was taking wheeled-toboggan rides down a track from the roof of the building to the grounds below, a sort of roller coaster. Another building was where balls were held.

I suppose we could have had another tour in the afternoon but I decided to catch up with this journal and rest.

Sailed out the narrow channel to the Gulf of Finland coming close to the naval yards, where a number of submarines were in evidence. Ate in the Bistro at the Lido with a window table looking out over the sparkling but calm water. It was a pleasant change from the dining room. (We heard later that Brenda and Brian ate at our table in the dining room with three other teenagers so a good time was had by all).

Tuesday. June 15, 1999. Tallinn, Estonia. The Estonians came from central Asia about the 3rd millennium BC. They are not related to any of their neighbors, although the Finnish language has similarities to

Estonian. Their history has been of being overrun by many of their neighbors, Danes, Germans, Swedes and Russians. The native Estonians built a stronghold on Toompea Hill and it has ever since been the dominant feature of the city. Much of the wall is still extant with interesting towers all around. After years of occupation, Estonia got its independence at the end of World War 1, but in 1939 Hitler and Stalin made a pact and Estonia came under Russian control. So many Russians moved in that today they are 35% of the population. In 1991 Estonia again became independent, and they are very proud of their republic. I took the walking tour with Brenda and Brian, while Mary and

Tom signed on for the bus tour. We had a young guide called Triin (pronounced Treen) who had just finished high school. She knew her facts but did not know how to treat her tour. We started out on Toompea Hill where she pointed out the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, with its onion domes, and told us we could in and look at it while she waited outside for us for 5 minutes. The icons were lovely and there was an ornate gold door through which only the priest was allowed to come, symbolizing that he came from heaven to earth. Then we walked the cobblestone streets to a lookout spot on the old wall where we could see the whole medieval below us. Tallinn is a very picturesque town. We walked back to the "Dome" church, the Cathedral of St Mary. This Lutheran church is quite a contrast to the Russian Orthodox Church. The nave of the church was filled with enclosed pews, which each family could rent. I

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have seen these pews before, which individual families rented. Old St David's Church, where I grew up, had them but not with such high sides. On the walls were wooden coats of arms and family crests commemorating the families that had buried their dead in the church. In the floor were well-worn signs of early tombs. However, burials were stopped in the church many years ago. We continued down through the old wall into the lower town and its Town Hall Square with its gothic Town hall dating from 1371. Down another medieval street we came to the ruins of the

Dominican Monastery. Here Triin told us the toilets were inside to the right, the museum to the left and she would wait in the courtyard for us. The washrooms were the first problem since they were in a locked restaurant, but fortunately the proprietor heard us and let us in.

Going to the left we came to a small courtyard where costumed musicians with medieval instruments gave us a concert. Other Princess groups with their guides were also there and some got taken into the monastery itself, but we were afraid of being left behind and went back to the outer square where Triin was waiting but no others of the tour. Brenda and Brian were thirsty so we went into the restaurant for cokes. They wouldn't take dollars so I put them on a credit card. At last our group reassembled and we walked back to near the Town Hall Square where Triin told us we had an hour and a quarter to shop! The only problem was that the shops were few and far between and wouldn't take dollars. We found a souvenir shop that let me buy a souvenir pin for Brenda with a credit card, but we weren't so lucky when we tried to buy some ice cream from a street vendor. We wandered around aimlessly for some time and then went back to the monastery and went into the museum area. It was interesting but would have been better with a guide! At last we found a cafe and bought cokes and a piece of pastry on a credit card. Thoroughly bored we at last found Triin and after another long wait were led down the hill to where the buses were waiting. Down at the foot of the hill were all the tourist shops that would take dollars, even a McDonalds! Triin had not told us about this. I was really annoyed at how bad a guide she had been, for Tallinn would have been really enjoyable with a good guide. I did not tip her when we got off the bus.

After lunch we sailed for Poland. Dinner was formal and we said goodbye to our waiter and had a delicious French meal. Then watched the show, which was pretty good featuring destinations around the world. Came to my stateroom and packed.

Wednesday, June 16. Poland. The whole focus of this trip has been to come to Poland, ancestral home of Tom Sesniak whose family came to the US in 1912. We were at the dock in Gdynia, Poland at 10:00 but it was some time before the ship was cleared, for everyone's passport had to be examined and stamped. Because of the time involved we had signed on for the morning tour of Gdansk (formerly Danzig), which left at 12:35. Our guide, Adam, was guiding his first tour and on the hour drive from Gdynia to Gdansk read to us from a prepared talk. However there really wasn't much to talk about. Gdynia is a modern port city, the largest in Poland, and the whole area from there to Gdansk is developed with shopping centers and apartments. However, the area looks prosperous and not at all shabby, as St Petersburg had been. Gdansk was wonderful. During World War II 85% of the city was destroyed. It has all been meticulously restored to its 17th century appearance. Originally a prosperous port city, the buildings were elaborately decorated with sculptures and paintings. They have a Flemish look to them. Inside the gate was the huge town square lined with patrician houses, now mostly converted into shops. In the center was the Neptune fountain which symbolizes Gdansk's ties to the sea, and Adam pointed out that three

Neptune statues could be seen from one spot since two sculptures were on nearby buildings. Just off the square was St Mary's Church, built of brick and said to be the sixth largest in the world. Its somewhat stark gothic appearance was impressive and in one side aisle was a unique astrological clock. We walked down a narrow alley and soon were back on the wharf where Adam told us we had an hour for shopping! Brenda and I walked down to the huge antique wooden crane which was used to lift masts to place them on the old sailing ships. Then we shopped the numerous amber shops. These are the best we have seen with a great variety of designs. I bought a small amber turtle and an unset piece with an ant in it. When the resin ran down the pre-glacial age trees it entrapped whatever was in its path. Most amber has bits of wood or leaves in it. The insects are more rare. Amber is called the "gold of the Baltic". Back on the ship we had a last meal in the Lido Cafe and at six were met by Gate 1 and loaded into our 8-passenger van (with lots of room for our huge amount of luggage). Our driver is Tomasz. It is a five-hour drive to Warsaw but we took almost six hours since there was a bad traffic accident near Gdansk. Once clear of that we enjoyed the lush green farmland and small towns until it got dark. When we stopped for gas I treated Brenda to a McChicken at the nearby McDonalds and she said it tasted just like

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the one at home. And we learned our first Polish word... "frytki" for french fries. Just about everyone slept a bit and by midnight we were at the Forum Hotel in Warsaw. This is a large rather unattractive tourist type hotel, probably built by the Russians. It is primarily used by large bus groups who crowd the lobby and make noise in the early morning getting their bags out and so forth. If I had known this I would never have agreed to stay here. However my room is adequate and I went immediately to sleep.

Thursday, June 17. Warsaw. Our hotel overlooks a huge square, dominated by the Palace of Culture and Science. Stalin as a gesture of friendship gave this to Warsaw. The architecture is supposed to reflect both Russian and Polish tradition, but the Poles don't see anything Polish about it. The building was once the tallest in Europe.

Aside from that we are not near much of interest. Tomasz came at 9:30 with Piotr, "Peter", our guide. It is raining but not too hard. We have had such spectacular weather on this trip we cannot complain. We set out into the suburbs along the Royal Way to Wilanow (Villa Nova) Palace, a handsome Italian baroque building with lovely formal gardens reminding us of Versailles, the first part of which was built by King Jan 111 Sobieski, in 1679. He was the king that defeated the Turks in 1683 at the battle of Vienna. After his death the palace passed through other hands, each person adding another wing until the palace as it stands today is huge. Part of it houses a museum. The second floor is basically a portrait gallery of Polish nobles. The first floor is more interesting with a number of original rooms of furniture. The palace was relatively untouched during the destruction of Warsaw since it was in the suburbs. After that we went to Belweder palace near the statue to President Pilsudski. Behind all this was a lovely park called Lazienki for the "bath" that used to be there. An impressive statue to Chopin is near the entrance depicting the composer and a willow tree.

Chopin died and is buried in Paris but his heart was taken to Warsaw and is buried in Holy Cross Church. Ujazowski Palace is in the park, the former summer palace of the Vasa Kings (The same Vasa family who ruled in Sweden) but it had been burned and the reconstructed structure did not seem worthy of our weary feet. We continued through the park, passed the "white house" where the king used to entertain his mistresses (another White House is used the same way) and at last were back in the van. Piotr took us to the old city and we had a Polish lunch in Kawiarnia Restaurant. The borsch left a bit to be desired. The Lithuanian Perogis were delicious. Then we walked through the old town. In the Second World War, just before the Germans gave up the city to the Russians, they destroyed everything except the embassy part of town where they had been living. Nothing else was left. Using paintings by Canaletto, old pictures, even postcards, the Poles were able to recreate the 16th Century town. The result is amazing for everything is new but it looks ancient. Piotr made a little joke about how the restoration wasn't very good since after 50 years it is already looking ancient. I liked the restoration in Gdansk better but Gdansk was only 85% destroyed, and probably was a more picturesque town in the first place. About the only thing original in Warsaw were parts of the city walls. In the 17th century a "new" city had sprung up next to the old one, but of course it also was destroyed by the Germans and had to be rebuilt. Piotr pointed out the house where Madame Curie lived as a young girl. We drove through the area where the Warsaw Ghetto had been and Piotr recounted the terrible way the Jews were treated by the Germans and how they were packed into rail cars and sent off to concentration camps. Nearby was an interesting monument to the Poles who tried to liberate the city from the Germans in 1944. They managed to hold off the Russian takeover of Warsaw for 30 days, but did not have the military strength to hold them off longer. We crossed the Vistula River to Prague, which is a commercial section, but contains a park and monument to George Washington. Back to the hotel for some R & R and then we set out on foot to find a restaurant. The first one we found had \$32 steak entrees so we went further and found a pub. After small difficulties with the language we managed to have an enjoyable dinner washed down by good Polish beer. I had marinated pork that was very tender and delicious. Tom and Brian went for a walk after dinner to try and find a disco while the three ladies went back to the hotel.

Friday, June 18. Another misty day, but at 8:00 AM it is not raining and the weather must be in the high 60s. I refused to be herded into the group dining room and had a lovely breakfast in the regular dining room, with a far better selection and nicer atmosphere (even tablecloths on the tables) than the one I had yesterday. It really annoys me to have paid a premium for an FIT and be treated as if I was on a bus tour. Met Piotr at 9:00. He took us to Holy Cross Church. Here in a pillar is buried Chopin's heart as well as that of the Polish writer, Wladystow Reymont.

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When the church was destroyed in 1944 the pillar where the two hearts are entombed is about all that survived. Also in the church are commemorative plaques to other Polish heroes such as Copernicus. There are also small plaques of thanks from people who have had their prayers answered. We walked down to picturesque Rynek Square until it was time for our movie about the destruction of Warsaw (It cost an extra \$12 since we were the only five customers and had to rent the whole theater for the movie, which was made from old movie footage of Warsaw before the war, and news reel films of the bombing of the city and finally of the destruction of the city in 1944, while the Russians waited across the river waiting for the flames to die down. It was all horrifying. Over 700,000 citizens of Warsaw lost their lives in World War II. After the war the Poles themselves came from all over the country to Warsaw and cleared the rubble and started to rebuild the town so that within a very short time Warsaw was once more a functioning city with over a million residents. Our next stop was the castle, built 700 years ago as a residence for the Dukes of Mazovia and later for the parliament established in 1791, the second oldest in the world after ours. Although Krakow was the capitol of the country, the kings had to come to Warsaw to preside over the parliament. Thus the castle was enlarged and modified to create a royal residence. The Swedish took over the country in 1587 and ruled until 1668 when Warsaw was destroyed for the first time. Then the people elected the kings for life but this was not successful and about two hundred years ago the last king resigned. Poland has been occupied and reoccupied and partitioned by Prussia, Russia and Austria. It is a tribute to the Polish people that their culture and language survived, or perhaps the hardships were the motivation to keep it all alive. The various ruling bodies used the castle, lastly by the Germans after they invaded Poland in 1939.

With the war being lost, and the Russians advancing in 1944, the Germans drilled holes in the walls for dynamite and blew up the building totally destroying it. For a number of years the site was grassed but at last in 1971 the Poles decided to rebuild it. Using bits and pieces taken from the rubble they have been able to reconstruct a very interesting and impressive palace and we toured the original rooms of the parliament and the royal residence. Then it was time for lunch and we went to Fukiers, which is considered the best restaurant in Warsaw. The atmosphere in the restaurant was wonderful with flowers and fruits everywhere and we had a two-hour lunch of great food. We then went back to a shop we had spotted earlier of military replicas and Brian bought a gun and Brenda and Tom got Polish eagles. Piotr then wanted to go to the National Museum but it was closed so we returned to the Forum Hotel for some rest before our Chopin concert in the evening. Found some lovely amber bracelets in the shop in the lobby.

The Chopin Concert was given by Maria Korecka-Soszkowska who has an impressive number of credits from such places as Ethiopia, Romania, Hungary and she served on the staff of the faculty of Music and Performing Arts at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey. She was obviously deeply involved emotionally with Chopin's music and we enjoyed the recital very much. The setting was the Szuster Palace originally a small villa but remodeled into a palace in 1791. The palace was burned by the Germans but has been restored to its 19th century appearance by the Warsaw Music Society. We enjoyed champagne in the dining room, feeling like guests in a palace.

Saturday, June 19. Leaving Warsaw we drove south to Czestochowa and the monastery of Jasna Gora. This is a baroque masterpiece of a cathedral and the treasure of the complex is "The Black Madonna", an icon some attributed to St Luke that has been determined to be probably 1500 years old. She has a swarthy colored skin, probably due to her Byzantine origin and a distinctive scar on her right cheek from an early vandalism. Her first miracle was that the Poles were able to hold off the invading Swedes and save the monastery. King Jon III Sobieski prayed here before his successful battle against the Turks. Since then many other miracles have been attributed to her and pilgrims come from all over to pray to her. Today I think everyone in Poland was here!

She is the patron saint of Poland. To our delight we were given a VIP Pilgrim Tour by Father Eugene, one of the monks. He took us everywhere, cutting in front of the huge crowd waiting to get in and even getting us up close to the Madonna having us squeeze up to the rail to avoid the supplicants crawling around the altar. "Too many sinners today", he commented. Father Eugene has been several times to the US and implied he would come again if we would send him a ticket! We were there for over two hours seeing all the many chapels and the amazing treasury of gifts the monastery has received. He had a great sense of humor and we were sorry when the tour came to an end. Piotr commented that although he had taken this tour any number of times, he had never seen so much of the monastery. The Pope has just

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concluded a trip to Poland and all the churches are decorated with blue and yellow flags, and posters of him look out of many windows. He came by helicopter for a brief visit to this shrine
We were taken to McDonalds for lunch since we were behind time and fast food is not a Polish tradition. Two hours south of Czestochowa we came to Auschwitz, the notorious concentration camp of World War 11 where a million and a half Jews were brutally killed. I wasn't at all sure I wanted to see it, but it is sort of required of tourists. Even though I knew about the horrors of the camp, it was still shocking to see the dreadful conditions in which they lived. We were shown collections of eyeglasses, prostheses, shoes, even hair, that were salvaged from the bodies and recycled. The hair was used to weave cloth to make German soldier's uniforms. The prison was really awful with various forms of torture such as stand up cells where the prisoners were packed in and forced to stand all night before going off to work. Many died from the torture or starvation. Those who didn't were shot or taken to the gas chambers and we were taken inside one of the early ones. (The prisoners destroyed the later ones). Then the bodies were cremated until later when the executions became more than the crematories could handle and some of the other prisoners had to dig mass graves for the bodies. When Auschwitz became overcrowded another much larger camp was built nearby at Berkenau. It was used primarily for extermination, many of the Jews being taken off the rail cars and marched immediately to the gas chambers. At the end of the war, when the German's knew they were losing they forced the prisoners into a long march toward Germany where many others died. When the camp was liberated there were only 700 prisoners left, those too ill or weak to make the enforced march. Many of these died since their condition was too bad to cure. It was a sobering tour. It is appalling to think that after the lesson of Auschwitz, that inhuman massacres are still going on in places like Rwanda and Kosovo. We finally got into Krakow about 7:30, said goodbye to Piotr and Tomasz and checked into another Forum Hotel, but this one was not at all like the one in Warsaw. We have lovely rooms overlooking the Vistula River and a sweeping view of the old city and some of the many churches in the town. Had a lovely dinner in the dining room with a pianist playing soothing music in the background.

Sunday, June 20, 1999. Krakow. Henryk, our new guide met us at 9:00 and we set out for the Wawel Heights where the castle and cathedral stand. Henryk has a Phd and is a history professor but since professors are only paid about \$350 per month he makes much more money as a guide. The first written mention of Krakow is in 965 when it was called an important trading center. A legendary dragon called Smok lived in a cave under the hill and a statue of him sits near the river sending off a flame every minute or so. By 1000 Krakow had become a cathedral town and the seat of the Polish Kings. The best part of Krakow is that the retreating Germans did not destroy it and you can feel its authenticity. The cathedral is not huge but is the Westminster Abbey of Poland. All the Polish Kings were crowned and buried here. Inside the door is a huge silver sarcophagus containing the relics of St Stanislaus, an early bishop of Krakow who was killed in 1076. Also that of Queen Jadweiga, the Polish Queen who brought christianity to Lithuania and who was a patron of the monastery at Czestochowa, before dying young in childbirth. Two years ago she was declared a Saint. It is Sunday and the mass was going on but we were able to walk around and admire the lovely baroque interior. We then walked into the cloister-like courtyard of the adjoining castle and had pointed out where the royal residence had been. Perhaps we will be able to tour the castle later but have no time today. We went down into the lower city to the town square with its 300-year-old "Cloth Hall", now a covered market. We walked through the square and watched a group of costumed children performing traditional dances. On beyond was Jagiellonian University, founded in 1364, the oldest in Poland and second oldest in Europe. We went into a small courtyard of the Collegium Maius with its arcaded courtyard to see its renaissance architecture. Back in the square we viewed St Mary's Church but it is all swathed in scaffolding being renovated for next year's celebration of the 1000-year anniversary of the establishment of Krakow. Thus we could hear, but not see, the live trumpeter who sounds the hour. The church has a masterpiece of a wooden altar. Again a mass was going on and a huge crowd was there. Henryk spotted his wife and children and excused himself to join them. We found a cafe on the square and had lunch then looked around the market until it was time to meet Henryk again.

Our goal this time was the old salt mine at Wieliczka. 900 years old, the mine is 1000 feet deep, but is inactive now since salt is not profitable. We walked down to the first couple of levels (some 400 feet) to see the unique sculptures carved by the miners out of blocks of salt. At one time the electricity failed and we sat in total darkness for about 10 minutes until they repaired it. There were exhibits through the mine showing how it operated. Most amazing was the large underground church with carvings depicting the

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life of Jesus around the walls. A large uncarved block of salt is reserved for a planned statue of the Pope. After a snack at the large underground restaurant we went back to the surface by elevator. In the evening we walked down to the citadel where the Wianki Festival was going on celebrating the first day of summer. A huge crowd was gathering and we had difficulty finding a piece of grass to have our picnic of Kielbasa. The crowd got bigger and bigger and they even ran out of beer! Everyone was waiting for the fireworks but while they waited for it to get dark there was a concert (not my kind of music) and I walked back to the hotel, and later the five of us had a wonderful view of the fireworks from our window.

Monday June 21, 1999. At this point we departed our planned itinerary. It all started before we left home when Delta stopped flying out of Warsaw and tried to put us on LOT airways. Not only did I not want to fly the Polish airline, it was going to get us to New York too late to get the Sesniaks back to Florida without spending the night en route (and Delta wouldn't pay for that). Susan got to work and changed our itinerary so we would fly home from Frankfurt and she reserved seats on an early morning flight from Warsaw to Frankfurt (It would have been much easier if we had flown from Krakow to Frankfurt). Then Gate 1 made an executive decision to send us by train back to Warsaw on Tuesday on a train that left at 11 in the morning, effectively killing the whole day. I was very annoyed when I found the train schedule was not changeable (there are hourly trains all day long). So I put Henryk to work on it. The train was rescheduled at a cost of \$15 to have us leave on a 4:00 PM train, giving us an extra half-day in Krakow. (There was nothing further we wanted to do in Warsaw). Then he drove us to Roza. Tom's, maternal grandfather Stanislaus Kieras, came from Roza to the USA in 1912. Roza is in a poor section of Poland and in 1912 was part of the Austrian-Hungarian empire. There was no economic opportunity there and his family gave him a ticket so he could come to America. We drove about two hours east of Krakow, through Tarnow, and then into lovely rolling country with forests and fields of wheat and potatoes.

We saw one farmer plowing with his horse. There were few signs to direct us on these country roads and Henryk kept asking for directions from the farmers until eventually we came to the sign announcing Roza and got out of the car to have our picture taken with it, to the astonishment of some people nearby. One woman determined why we were there and led us to the church and then apparently spread the word for we were probably the most exciting thing that had happened in Roza for a month. The town is a real rural community, with some newer cement block houses interspersed with the old wooden and log ones. We spotted one television satellite dish. Some of the houses have wells in their front yard and we saw one woman doing her laundry in a bucket. The farmers drive old-fashioned tractors that would be collector's items in the States. Cows and chickens were in the yards. In short, we were well away from the tourist track and seeing a rural community as it probably had been for 50 years. Many curious people came out to see us and Mary was given an address in West Virginia by one old woman and asked to find a friend or relative of a relative who had died. She had no English to do the job herself. The church is a modern one but Father Joseph got out the old church baptismal records and we looked for a Stanislaus Kieras, born about 1895. There was a Stanislaus Kieras born 6 August 1890, son of Jon and Sophia (Kleszcz) Kieras, but he would have been 22 in 1912 and Tom feels he was only 17. There are also records of children of Stanislaus and Catarina (Baran) Kieras, starting with twins born in 1897. This Stanislaus was the son of Adalbert and Jagwiga (Zauche) Kieras. We really didn't have enough information to do more. Father Joseph said that the old church and cemetery were in the nearby town of Zasow and we set out to see what we could find there. An old man who lived across from the cemetery led us through it and we found a lot of Kieras graves but they were all 20th century ones. The old parish church in Zasow is undergoing renovation. While we were looking at it a horse and buggy went by. In short, it was all a wonderful experience and a highlight of the trip. We drove back to Turnow and had lunch at an Italian restaurant on the old square with a view of the 17th century town hall. Turnow is not a tourist town but is known for the fact that before the War 30% of the population was Jewish. A dubious distinction is that the first transport for Auschwitz came from this town. While we ate the rains came and we had to taxi back to our van, which was parked several blocks away. On the way back to Krakow, Henryk drove us by a picturesque 400 year-old castle in Nowy Wisnicz but it was raining too hard for us to explore it. The traffic was bad due to the rain and it was after seven before we got to the forum. We ate fondue in the dining room.

Tuesday, June 22. Our last day! It was pouring rain and the river looked about ready to overflow its banks. We slogged up to the castle and had a great tour of the royal rooms. The first ones were Renaissance with elaborate ceilings some decorated with heads and others with gold medallions. A magnificent collection of tapestries is the castle's main claim to fame. Half the castle was destroyed by

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fire 200 years ago and that part was rebuilt in baroque style. Used by the Nazis as a headquarters in World War 11, it was also used to house soldiers. An extensive renovation has restored it to its present magnificence. Some of the rooms have only been open a couple of months.

We were driven by Schindler's factory. Then Henryk took us to the Russian monument at Plaszow for the victims of fascism. A smaller monument nearby put up by Krakow's Jewish Congregation points out these victims were Jewish! Plaszow was a concentration camp where 4500 Jews were shot. It was built on the site of an old Jewish cemetery, which has been completely obliterated. Nothing remains but a grass field. Spielberg filmed part of "Schindler's List" here recreating the barracks but even these are now gone. There were 10,800 slave labor and extermination camps in Europe. In 1941 the Jewish Community was forced to move from their homes in Kazimierz in Krakow to a small crowded ghetto on the other side of the river. In 1943 they were taken to Plaszow. Spielberg did not use the actual ghetto for his film since a large modern bank building overshadows the site. There is a small museum, housed in an old pharmacy on the square, with pictures of the people forced to move into the ghetto. We then drove into Kazimierz where the oldest synagogue in Poland stands (now a museum). Unfortunately it was closed but we had hot chocolates at a nearby cafe called Ariel until it was time to return to the hotel. 7000 Jews lived in Krakow before the War, only 180-200 remain.

After snacks in the coffee shop, Henryk took us to the rail station where we boarded an express train to Warsaw. A boring three-hour ride in the rain brought us in on time but, alas, no Tomasz was on the platform to greet us. We struggled up two flights of escalators with our mountain of luggage and tried to catch a taxi to the Forum Hotel, but no one would take us since the trip is only a few blocks. We finally found Tomasz' phone number and find he had been told 7:40 instead of 6:40 as our arrival time. We were SO glad to see him. The Forum gave us some trouble insisting we only had two rooms reserved but some perseverance finally brought forth the third room. Since we leave for the airport at 5:00AM it will be a short night.

Wednesday, June 23, 1999. The long long trip home. We caught the 6:30 AM Lufthansa flight to Frankfurt. Once there we found we had to transfer from Terminal 1 to Terminal 2. This is basically impossible to do. The only way to do it is to go up two flights of stairs to the sky train. Since we had three trolleys of luggage and the lift only went one flight, where we had to change lifts, it took awhile to finally get on the train (where we had to abandon the trolleys). At last we got to Terminal 2 and found Delta only to find Flight 15 had been canceled and we had been placed on a flight 3 hours later. For this we had gotten up before dawn! The only good part is that Tom and the kids got bumped up to business class to make up for the delay. The three hour wait turned out to be five hours since the incoming equipment was late and then, after a mechanical that had to be fixed, we ended up in a 20 minute delay in Atlanta's holding patterns! I was so glad to get home!