

2005 ENGLAND

Wednesday, March 9, 2005. Elizabeth Cerulli and I had a practice session of bridge. The way I was playing, we probably needed two. Then we went home for last minute packing.

At 4:15 Lou came and gave us a lift to the rail station. It's about an hour to the airport. The train was really full, the beginning of commuting hour.

When you take the train you have to walk the entire length of the terminal to get down to international check-in. I made it about 3/4 of the way then engaged a wheelchair for the duration. Check-in took an eternity! I asked to be switched to the direct flight coming home, instead of through New York. The agent had to poke a number of buttons to get it for me for there were no coach seats available on the flight that could be upgraded. At last it was done. People wonder why I go to such lengths to become a silver Medallion flier each year. Those 25,000 miles gets me things like this! By the time it was done, Elizabeth had gone on for she wants to be in the waiting room when they start calling the pass riders.

My patient wheelchair pusher took me to the Elite Waiting Lounge where I had some water and watched TV news for a while. Then I walked to the gate. Halfway there a cruising cart driver picked me up. I just can't handle long walks anymore.

The flight to London was on time but the service was very slow. It took about two hours before they started the meal service. My seatmate was a Mrs. Hughes from Alabama. This was her first trip in three years but now her 19-year old cat has died. She hadn't feel she could leave her for all that time since she was so ill. That is a real cat lover!

Dinner was pleasant. I had a really good lamb dish. Before it was over, I pulled my blanket over me and went off to sleep.

Thursday, March 10. We got to Gatwick about 9:30. I had asked for a wheelchair and that took a very long time. I finally walked up the ramp alone. At the top I was told there was a cart waiting for me. The cart then waited for four other people to come! By the time we got to baggage claim, everyone had gone and only our bags were left. I don't know what they had planned to do with us next but I grabbed a trolley for my bags and cleared customs alone. Elizabeth had long since gone through.

Not finding her, I went to an ATM to get some sterling. At 1.9/1 everything is going to be very expensive. I heard my name being paged and found Elizabeth. To our surprise Joan and Ed Pengilley had driven all the way to Gatwick to pick us up! What hospitality! After a stop for tea, we drove about an hour to their home, which is near Slough, near Heathrow airport. He is a retired flight engineer from British Airways.

Their house has been lovingly remodeled and decorated. My room is huge with a queen bed covered with a white duvet. It was just as comfortable as it looked and I had no problem taking a three-hour nap.

Joan cooked a delicious stewed chicken dinner, with Ed hand-mashing the potatoes. Desert was a raspberry comfit and a little later we were treated to some apricot and chocolate candies.

The four of us warmed up for tomorrow playing bridge on a lovely 19th century gaming table that unfolded as if it was a napkin. I made a valiant attempt to learn ACOL, which involves 4-card majors and weak no trumps. It was all much fun.

Friday, March 11. Cold and windy. Ed gave us a driving tour that included nearby Eton, Windsor Palace and the countryside around. We then went to the Red Lion Pub for lunch. We had planned to treat but Ed beat us to the check. I had fish and chips, a "whale" of a piece of fish that took an extra large plate to hold. It came with English peas as well as the fries and was delicious.

Back at the house, Ed showed us his pride and joy. A 1959 ford in almost perfect condition. He has won prizes with it. He also has three vintage motorcycles. They had been living across the street but when this house came on the market they bought it because it had two garages! Then they remodeled it to its present state.

After a nap, we had high tea with sandwiches and lemon cake. The Pengilley's daughter

2005 ENGLAND

Sue, with husband Kevin and children Thomas and Megan joined us. The tournament was held in British Airways Concorde Club. This facility includes all sorts of activities from a bar to a bowls court. The bridge room was light and had ample room for the seven tables. This was Mixed Nation day. I played bridge with Ed and Elizabeth played with Joan. I played ACOL the whole way and didn't really mess up at all. To my delight we came in second with a 58% game!

Saturday, March 12. Today was the main event where British Air played Delta for the trophy "No Trump", a cute little doll in tie and tails! We were Delta's number one team with Elizabeth, Sallye Koehl, Jeanette Keener and me. Since there were only three Delta teams and six British Air teams, Peter Blondell, the director, had worked out an interesting movement, somewhat akin to Board-A-Match. East-West moved up two tables leaving the boards on the intervening table. Of course this meant we also played some of the Delta teams.

After eight rounds of three they presented us with huge trays of sandwiches and gave us an hour break. For the second session, the Delta team members switched: North-South becoming East-West. The British Air teams remained the same. This allowed us to play almost everyone. Our team blew away the field by a large margin!

We adjourned to Peter's house for a lengthy cocktail party and delicious covered dish supper. At last they presented No Trump to Mike McGowan. He was instructed how to get a passport and visa for No Trump!

I was so tired I went right to bed on returning to the house.

Sunday, March 13. Today, Elizabeth's former son-in-law was supposed to contact us and arrange how we were to go meet with her nephew. Something went wrong and he didn't call so we had to go to plan B.

We went to a pub for lunch (again a Red Lion Pub but no connection to the first). I had a beef and kidney pudding, which was good but so filling. Elizabeth was able to grab the check!

Then Ed and Joan drove us into London, to Kensington, and left us to call on Elizabeth's nephew, Mike Uva and his family. Mike is an international banker who works for Morgan Stanley. His wife, Yvonne, is expecting their fourth child in May. Their oldest son is at Harvard. The next daughter, Stephanie, will start college next fall and the third, Ann, is about to start high school. Their house is lovely, five stories high and two rooms deep, the back ones overlooking a lovely garden. They pointed out the back of the building behind them as the Kuwait Embassy and beyond but out of sight is Kensington Palace. Mike collects sculptures and he has a spectacular collection, from ancient to modern. After tea, Mike walked us up the street and showed us where to catch the tube. It cost 3 pounds eighty, over \$7:00! Everything in England is so expensive since the dollar is so weak against the pound. We changed trains to catch the train to Tottencross. The second train was very crowded but a nice Nigerian family made room for Elizabeth and me. As soon as we got to Tottencross, Elizabeth used Joan's mobile phone to call them and they said they would pick us up in about 15 minutes. We were told not to go to where the buses came for they could not bring the car there. Thus we turned the other way, where a three-foot high fence separated us from the road. A hundred feet away was the entrance to the car park and we walked down and waited and waited. It was cold and windy. After a half hour we started back to the station and there we found Joan looking for us. It seemed they were waiting on the street beyond the buses!

Back at the house we had tea and cake. The plan was to watch television afterwards but the choice did not inspire me so I left to go up and pack. I didn't sleep well, waking every couple of hours. I would read a bit, and then try to sleep again to no avail. All that tea has caffeine in it!

Monday, March 14. Ed drove us to Heathrow airport where we caught a British Midland

2005 ENGLAND

plane to Leeds Harrogate. The flight was impressive. In 20 minutes they fed and beveraged us! It was a small hoagie sandwich and the usual beverage cart. What a treat after all the US flights that offer peanuts if you are lucky!

Stephanie Matthews met her. She is John's granddaughter, and the mother of my only great grandchild, seven-year-old Rebecca. I had not seen them for two or three years. Jim was scheduled to pick Rebecca up at school, give her a meal and take her to her gymnastics class. So at first it was just Stephanie and us.

Stephanie drove into Harrogate where the lawns were covered with crocus. I have never seen so many. Harrogate is known as the city of flowers. It is a lovely city with many shops. There was even a juggler on the street to entertain us. We went to Betty's bakery to buy scones and then to Marks and Spencer for groceries. Stephanie can shop at the Post Exchange on the base but not every day. I found the extra strong tea that Connie Smilowitz had requested and managed to find a few other tidbits such as wine. We then drove to Knaresborough, a small town, along the River Nidd. High above the river is the ruin of a castle, which dates to the time of Edward 11 in the fourteenth century. The ruins have been preserved as a park.

At last we came to Ripon. Jim works for the US government and they have a lovely home, which looks out on the surrounding fields. Elizabeth and I are in the guest room, which is Rebecca's playroom. We meet the last member of the household, Rainbow, a black cat with yellow eyes and silky coat.

Stephanie prepared a chicken and salad meal for us. Jim and Rebecca got home some time after. Rebecca is so grown up! She reads very well for a seven-year old.

Tuesday, March 15. Our goal was York to see the famous Minster. Minster is an ancient word meaning mission and the origins of Yorkminster go back to 627 AD. It is now the largest Gothic cathedral in Northern Europe. At first the cathedral was laid out parallel to the Ouse River, but in its subsequent rebuilding this was changed so that it faced east.

Some years ago, the tower started to collapse and an excavation was made to find a way to correct it. In the excavation they found the remains of the original Roman fortress, Viking and Norman carvings and the three foundations of the church through the ages. This undercroft has been turned into a museum and your entry fee allows you to have a radio guide. It was a well-done guide and explained the origins of many things such as the use of candles. Some of the early silver pieces in the treasury date from the cathedral's catholic heritage. After the reformation, the Church of England had less ornate pieces. There were exhibits of early stained glass and models of how the earlier churches must have looked.

The cathedral itself is magnificent and we walked all around admiring the tombs covered with effigies. Law prohibited burials after 1854. The rose window commemorates the union of the royal houses of York and Lancaster. We could have spent days just admiring all the treasures, but elected to go and find some lunch.

The town of York is still enclosed in its wall and the buildings are so old many of them lean. It is all very picturesque. We found a teashop and had some sandwiches. It was a local place and every other table had a baby in a buggy. There were tourist shops, and also an open-air market.

We went to Jarvik, where a Disney-like time machine took us back to Viking times with life size dioramas of the Vikings at work. It was very well done although the smell was a little too realistic. The Vikings captured York in 866. In 1972 a large archaeological dig uncovered the pavement and then the remnants of the Viking town near the Coppergate.

We stopped at Marks and Spencer to use the rest room and then walked to Castle gate. Stephanie announced that it was a long walk back to the car and I sat on a bench and waited for her, while Elizabeth shopped. A man next to me told me all about a 3-week trip he had made to the states when he was a student. He had a bus pass and saw New York, Washington, St Louis, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Salt Lake City. I was tired just listening to him. He now has bad knees and can't travel any more.

2005 ENGLAND

Near Castle gate is the tall Clifford's Tower built as part of William the Conquerors fortifications to preserve his northern border.

On the way home we stopped again at Knaresborough so I could photograph the ruins of the castle. Yesterday the camera was acting up, perhaps because it was so cold!

We told the Matthews we would take them out for dinner and we drove down a very twisty road through the Dales. It was too dark to enjoy the colors of the heather. Nothing grows here but heather.

Our goal was the Yorke Arms in Ramsgill. This is a picturesque old hunting lodge. We started with drinks in the cozy sitting room while we perused the menu. The prices were extraordinary but dinner was wonderful. Just the right amount of each course. Rebecca and I had chocolate donut balls and chocolate mousse for desert. The donuts were so light you could hardly believe them. The bill was unbelievable too but it was a once in a lifetime meal. I don't get a chance to dine so elegantly very often!

On the way back to the house we drove up around the Riponminster but did not get out of the car.

Wednesday, March 16. Stephanie took us to Castle Howard, which was built, for the 3rd Earl of Carlisle. It is a magnificent castle although some of it was destroyed by fire. It houses an amazing collection of paintings and ancient sculptures. There were some beautiful pieces of furniture. Building the castle started in 1700 and continued for a hundred years. Today the seat of the family is elsewhere, but a younger branch of the family still lives in one wing. I imagine they give some spectacular parties in this beautiful castle!

We had a light lunch in the castle cafeteria and then browsed the shops. One sold glass made in the Jarvik manner.

Back in the car we drove back to Thirsk where James Alfred Wight was born and lived until he died in 1995. He wrote the James Herriot stories based on his own experiences. His surgery still remains but we were too tired to do another museum today. We browsed some of the shops in this lovely little town before coming home for a rest.

Tonight the Matthews are taking us to an Italian restaurant and tomorrow we leave for home. It has been a quick trip!

On our way to dinner, Stephanie dropped us off at the Ripon cathedral while she went for Jim and Rebecca. The cathedral was locking up for the night but a lady let us in and took great pride in telling us all about it. She led us down to the Saxon crypt that was dedicated to St Wilfrid in 661 AD making this the first Christian church in England. We could see the marks of the stonemasons on the wall. In the nave of the church effigies of prominent people of the town have been placed in the niches where earlier effigies have long since disappeared.

Dinner was at Primo Pizzeria where Rebecca got the pizza she has wanted. I had a tortellini and lobster and prawn dish which was very good. Jim ordered calamari and a strange sort of garlic bread for appetizers.

Then we returned to the car at the main square, which has an obelisk, on top of which is a golden horn. A tradition dating back to the early days of Ripon is that the watchman each night blows his horn to tell the town all is safe for the night. Back at the house, Jim treated us to a movie of this. The man with the horn in costume went on and on about the tradition and all it meant so we learned more than we wished.

Thursday, March 17. We were up at 5:15. Jim also got up and there was time for coffee and a scone before we left for the airport. Leeds is certainly an easy airport since it is so small. In no time we were through the formalities and on our BMI flight for Brussels. No wheelchair met me there so I walked a horrible distance while we went through two security checks to reach Delta's flight to Atlanta. The flight was delayed. It ended up being about three hours late due to a computer failure. Elizabeth hoped to stay over and fly home with her son who is the pilot on tomorrow's flight, but tomorrow's plane is

2005 ENGLAND

overbooked so she will go home today. The flight took nine hours. I watched the movie "Ray" and enjoyed Ray Charles' music.

We finally got to Atlanta and cleared customs. Elizabeth wanted to take the train. It broke down and we spent several anxious moments on a cold windy platform waiting for a replacement train. At the Sandy Springs station, Yvonne met us and brought us home.

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/>

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<http://www.royal.gov.uk/output/page557.asp>

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