

2007 Spitsbergen

Monday, July 16, 2007. For weeks I have been telling people I was going to Spitsbergen only to be asked if I meant Pittsburgh or perhaps was it in Germany. Svalbard, as the Norse call the archipelago, is an island group off the northwest coast of Norway inside the Arctic Circle. The largest island is Spitsbergen.

This expedition is all about polar bears and glaciers. With global warming I fear they may soon become extinct.

Mary and Tom came from Houston and were waiting for me in Delta's Business Elite Lounge. We soon boarded our plane to Amsterdam. I watched part of the movie "Premonition" but even though it starred Sandra Bullock, one of my favorite actresses, it was not my sort of movie. I was soon asleep.

Tuesday July 17. We had an hour to make our connection. It was from one end of huge Schiphol airport to the other. If they had not sent a motorized cart for me I would never have made it. We even had to go through security to reach KLM's commuter gates.

The flight to Oslo is a bit over one hour. We were offered sandwiches and beverages on the plane.

We wondered if our bags would make the connection. Baggage handler Tom was sure they wouldn't. Miraculously only one of the Sesniak's did not make it and it turned up about midnight.

A Lindblad/National Geographic agent was at the airport to greet us but to get the free transfer we had to wait for the group coming in from Iceland. After a rather long wait, a group of nine appeared from an Air Icelandic flight. We were bused into Oslo and the Continental Hotel. I declined the city tour and had a bath and a three-hour nap. I have been to Oslo twice before.

Later Tom and I met in the bar for a drink. Mary was taking a nap. We met two of the ladies from the expedition; Jo Walker was from Texas and Frances Smith from Salem, NJ, who said she was Amish. Both were already dressed for the Arctic, which seemed a little strange in a hotel bar.

Tom then invited me to see their room on the eighth floor. It is really a two-room suite with balcony overlooking the city. I have a single on the fifth floor overlooking the wall of the office building next door. Such is life for a single in Europe.

Mary still didn't feel like doing anything so Tom and I went in search of food. The surrounding neighborhood was a sea of bars none of which served food! At last we found the only one that had a menu and I had a Scampi and Tom a hamburger before getting a Quiche to take home to Mary.

Then I packed for bags had to be out by ten. We leave at 7:30 tomorrow for our chartered flight.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Svalbard>

<http://www.sandrabullock.20m.com/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amsterdam_Schiphol_Airport

<http://www.lhw.com/property.aspx?propertyid=105&Ext=Gcntntl&gclid=CKqogf6jzY0CFsQsFQod1yayMA>

Wednesday, July 18. My wakeup call at 6:30 was not really needed. I had been up and down all night. I paid my small bill and had breakfast. When I went out to the bus there was only one there and I was hustled aboard. There was no sign of the Sesniaks. We drove the 45 minutes back to the airport and here our bags were all lined up. I checked in and then headed for security. Dumb me, I thought since it was a charter flight, I could leave my cosmetics in my carryon. Wrong! They wanted to take them away from me. I ran back to the check in and luckily found Tom and Mary. We hastily repacked my carryon and checked it. Then we went back to security and got through with no trouble.

It's a two-hour flight to Longyearbyen. Frances was my seatmate. She is interested in textiles and has taken weaving lessons from the Peruvians in Peru. She also does beadwork.

We landed on a desolate landscape for we are at 78 degrees north latitude, inside the Arctic Circle. All around are low mountains with snow or glaciers decorating the tops. Amazingly it is not all that cold. It is perhaps 40 degrees, but even that is a shock after Atlanta's steamy summer.

They loaded us into buses and we set out to sightsee the town. About 1800 people call Longyearbyen home although there are some more in the summer for the tourist season. Two or three hundred people live elsewhere in Svalbard.

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Svalbard is mentioned in a Viking legend in 1194 although it is doubtful they meant this place. The word Svalbard means "cold coast" so it is possible they were referring to Greenland. The Russians also may have come to Svalbard as early as the 12th century. However the Dutch navigator, William Barents, is credited with discovering Svalbard in 1596. By the 17th century there was much whaling in the area as well as trapping of animals for fur.

The settlement was founded in 1906 by John Munroe Longyear, main owner of the Arctic Coal Company of Boston. There are seven mines around Longyearbyen. They are no longer being used.

Our first stop was the wonderful Svalbard Museum. Here they have collected all sorts of artifacts of Svalbard's past, from stuffed exhibits of the wildlife, to actual sections of some of the huts where the original settlers lived. The museum is delightful in that you look up for some of the exhibits and down into the floor for others. The stuffed animals are in an ocean of green sea glass.

Our next stop was at the Gallery Svalbard featuring the works of Klare Tveter. One gallery is filled with Olaf Stone's works. We were supposed to see a film but since the electricity was not working this could not be done.

We drove around while they pointed out the school, church and so forth. There is even a college here specializing in polar studies. I liked the earthen colors used on the buildings and found out that an art committee selected them. You cannot paint your house any color that is not approved.

We stopped at the coal station on a hill overlooking the town and enjoyed the panoramic view of the town as well as of our ship waiting below. Coal was the reason Longyearbyen was founded but there is no market for the coal today.

At last they drove us out of town to see the sign warning of the polar bears. Bears can appear anywhere and one of the naturalists said he goes hiking with a rifle, not to kill the bears but to scare them off. We were never to go anywhere without an armed escort.

We were more than ready to finally get to the National Geographic Endeavor at 4:00 pm. I felt right at home. The first thing I did was sign up for some of Sheila's massages. Then I unpacked. My room is across the corridor from where I lived last summer on the Cook Islands cruise. Mary and Tom are next door.

We sailed after 5:00 pm and soon were having the safety drill in the lounge. This concluded on deck where we could inspect the lifeboats. Then it was down two flights to put the life vest away only to climb once again to the lounge for our briefing.

I recognized Sheila as well as Steve McLean and Dennis Conejo, the underwater expert from my last cruise. Dennis' recaps were the hit of the Cook Islands trip and he has a robot to take pictures underwater on this one.

We had dinner with an attractive mother and daughter, Deri and Ashley Gray. The trip is Ashley's graduation present before she goes to Kenyon College.

I retired early still trying to catch up with the jet lag.

<http://www.allthingsarctic.com/exploration/barents.aspx>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longyearbyen>

<http://www.svalbardmuseum.no/eframside.php>

<http://www.svalbard-images.com/>

Thursday, July 19. A gray fog hangs over everything so we can't see much. The sea is calm as we head toward the Woodfjord on the northern end of Spitsbergen.

After breakfast our first bear is spotted. Everyone raced out on deck and we stood for a long time watching the big white animal walk along the shore. One of the naturalists told me it was a female but I didn't quite understand how he could tell.

Then Steve gave his first lecture on the miniature flora of the Arctic. In a darkened room I found it hard to keep my eyes open and snuck away to my cabin.

After a short rest we had another Polar Bear call and climbed back up. This time there were two bears although they weren't doing much. Then someone spotted two more on another island.

During lunch we could see from the window the great blue ice of the Monacobreen Glacier approaching. This is a huge tidal glacier extending about eight miles into the interior. It is also one of the most active glaciers in Svalbard.

The captains brought the ship in so close we were in the drifting ice. We saw the glacier calve once, dropping its ice into the bay with a loud splash.

At two the first group went off for a Zodiac cruise. Our group must wait until 3:30 for ours. I took a short nap.

Then we got ready. Long silk underwear under my clothes with a parka and Gortex pants covering the outside. Rubber boots, a muffler and wool cap completed the ensemble. But we were still not through as our life preserver went over the whole. I felt like a big stuffed rubber ball!

Richard White, our bird expert, skippered the last zodiac carrying Tom, Mary and me with two other ladies. It was like a private tour and we learned a lot about why the glacier moves and even stopped to listen the pop as the ice released the air bubbles in it. Glaciers have pressures from the sea below as well as from the air above.

We saw many birds. Brännick's Guillemots swam near the zodiac. The Ivory Gull was among the birds overhead. It is only found in the arctic. There were small flocks of Dovekies skimming just above the water. Dovekies are members of the Auk family. Skuas chased smaller terns trying to steal the fish they were carrying. It would all have been perfect if it were not for the drizzling rain that kept low clouds over the mountains.

Richard told us that the glacier has retreated noticeably since two years ago and there is even a small island visible that was not here before.

We looked for whales without success and returned to the ship after about an hour and a half. I had pulled my muffler up over my mouth and nose and so only my hands got cold. I wish I had mittens instead of gloves and will look in the shop for some.

I went up for the briefing and hooked up with three delightful ladies: Irene Lavorini from Darensburg, MD and Mary Ann Lisner and Mary Neubecker from Downers Grove, IL. We went in to dinner together and were joined by Mary and Tom and Loreen Wilson and Jerry Jacobs.

The recap was very interesting but the highlight was when we welcomed "shy" Dennis Cornejo, the underwater specialist. He has a robot, which took pictures, and Dennis descriptions had us in stitches. I was intrigued with the brittle fish, a relative of the starfish.

After dinner I went and bought some wool gloves to wear under my waterproofs. They cost \$36 and were made in Peru but I had no viable alternative except for a pair Mary offered which were too long.

At 8:30 pm we crossed the 80th parallel and are only about 300 miles from the North Pole. We are looking for the pack ice.

At 10:00 pm they announced two fin whales off the bow of the ship but I was not prepared to put on clothes and go back on deck. We had been told to sleep with our binoculars and be prepared so I am not following instructions. Since the sun never sets in July we could get calls all night.

<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-2900>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivory_Gull

<http://nature.ca/notebooks/english/dovekies.htm>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skua>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fin_Whale

<http://www.wetwebmedia.com/brittlestars.htm>

Friday, July 20, 2007. I woke up with a cold. This is no surprise after all the running back and forth yesterday between cold and warm. The fog continues and the so-called mountains are all draped in mist. We are still headed north looking for the pack ice. I never believed I would get this far north. Our northernmost point was 80 degrees 27 minutes. Our destination is the seven islands in the north of Svalbard.

Our ship tests the ice, which is beginning to become thick. Meanwhile we have a photographic lecture from Sisse Brimberg who has recently done an article on the Vikings for a 2000 National Geographic. I listened in my room but had vivid memories when she spoke of Thingvellir and other places I had visited in 1995 when I took the grandchildren to Iceland.

The ship has thoughtfully placed in my cabin the May 2000 issue with Sisse's article as well as a March 1997 issue that deals with seals. The current June 2007 issue is also there and its main article deals with global warming,

After the lecture we were told we were going ashore at Phippsia (Phipps Island). In 1773 Constantine Phipps made an attempt to reach the North Pole but the ice was too thick above the

80th parallel and he had to turn back. One member of his crew was a young lad named Horatio Nelson.

I dressed myself and then went ashore planning to take the short walk. However I found that just to get from the Zodiac to where they were collecting the life vests was a struggle. I couldn't imagine what the walk would be through more gravel moraine. Snow was falling and it was very cold.

I announced I'd rather not do the walk and wanted to go back to the ship. There was great consternation for someone with a gun had to accompany me. Polar bears can swim. A man with a gun was finally found and I had a private launch ride back to the ship. At least I can say I had the thrill of setting foot on ground north of the 80th parallel. I should have made this trip when I was younger!

After a pleasant lunch where I met a Charles Hunter, a lawyer from Smyrna, GA, I went back to my cabin for it is the only warm place on the ship. There was a lecture on ice but I could listen from my room radio. After a nap I got ready for my massage. I remembered Sheila from my last trip. She was even more wonderful than I remembered. Her room however has been moved to the fifth deck, which is not as convenient, and she admits that if the ship starts to roll she may have to cancel appointments.

I did miss a polar bear on the ice during the massage but Mary reported it was not very close.

I went back to the lounge and joined Mary, Mary Ann and Irene for cocktails and the wrap-up. As usual Dennis had us in stitches.

In the middle of the wrap up the sun came out and we all cheered. Perhaps better weather is on the way. Svalbard is an arctic desert and only gets about 200-300 millimeters of precipitation all year. I don't know why it has to all fall this week!

After a pleasant dinner with Jerry Jacobs, Lureen Wilson, Mary and Tom I repaired to my warm cabin and went to bed.

<http://www.shutterstock.com/cat.mhtml?searchterm=Phipps+Island&forward=1>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine_John_Phipps,_2nd_Baron_Mulgrave

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horatio_Nelson

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polar_bear

Saturday, July 21. There was a call about 6:00 am announcing some walrus on the pack ice and a polar bear in the water. My mind was willing but my body weak and I rolled over and went back to sleep. Consequently I almost missed breakfast since I didn't wake up again until 8:00. It is overcast but at least not raining.

We are now in Palanderbukta Fjord on the island of Nordaustlandet (Northeast) that lies east of Spitsbergen.

They offered a long hike, a short hike, or a zodiac ride. I took the zodiac cruise. After talking with people who took the hikes I believe we saw more interesting things. We saw both a bearded and a ringed seal. The bearded seals are very shy. We also spotted an arctic fox. The only other time I ever saw one was in Churchill, Manitoba, and that one was white. This one had his summer brown color and he was well camouflaged against the cliff where he was stalking a bird.

We also had a good view of the glaciers face. This one is not as blue as Monacobreen. The ice is not as dense and it looks like it is about to break up at any moment. However we did not see any calving.

Then we came to the high point of the day. How can one describe Cape Fanshawe? Steep cliffs rise out of the water looking like organ pipes and there are many irregularities or ledges for the birds to roost. It is estimated 100 thousand pairs of birds are here. Most of them are Brünnick's Guillemots but there are also Kittiwake gulls and Glaucous gulls. The ship pulled in very close to the cliff for a spectacular view.

We stayed for some time watching the adult birds come and go. Each adult had laid one egg close to her neighbor. Thus the chicks are elbow to elbow. In a few weeks they will be pushed off the cliff into the water. Then the father birds will take them out to sea and teach them how to survive.

Later there was an opportunity to hike across the gravel moraine to another glacier. Also kayaking was offered. I decided enough was enough and stayed aboard.

<http://www.pinnipeds.org/species/bearded.htm>

<http://www.pinnipeds.org/species/ringed.htm>

<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/arctic-fox.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glaucous_Gull

Sunday, July 22, 2007. There were calls for polar bears at midnight and 2PM. I got out of bed on the first one and even had my pants on before I decided against going up on deck. It is just too difficult to get into all the clothes necessary to go on deck. However the 5:30 am call lured me up and it was wonderful despite the rain. Ahead of the ship was a big polar bear. We watched through the scope while she would poke her head up.

I watched the crew put a notch in the bridge. There is one notch for every bear they have spotted since coming to Svalbard three years ago. They are almost out of space.

I then went to the nearby library for hot chocolate and warming up. I read for a while and at 6:30 there was another bear sighted. It was a mother bear with two cubs. While we were looking at it, another bear appeared astern so we had two to look at at one time. The big male walked on his patch of ice and then dived in. It was as if he was trying to follow the ship. Some felt it was the first bear. We worried that he might be stalking the female and cubs since the ship was pointing right at them.

Magnus Forsberg, Our Swedish naturalist, told me that here the bears have not been hunted since 1970 so they are forgetting their fear of people. In the Canadian arctic, where they have tagged about 40% of the bears, those bears run at the sound of the helicopter. I must say our Captain is very slow on approaching the bears and it takes him some time to come in close.

Mary apparently got up for every call. I will look forward to her pictures. She has even been carrying my point and shoot and taking pictures on it.

All of this was before breakfast! After which I went down to the cabin and was able to get on the Internet for the first time in two days. The satellite apparently does not reach up into the high arctic. It may also be that high mountains hamper the signal. Svalbard is supposed to have some beautiful mountains but we have seen nothing of them because of the rain.

Then I climbed back in bed and listened to the lecture on polar bears on my cabin radio before sleeping until lunchtime. I decided not to do the shore excursion. They promise mud and rain.

After lunch, I napped again, getting up for another lovely massage.

During the wrap-up there was a lecture on ice. We are in a sea of pack ice. Here we will find the bears that fish off the ice. Our ship crushes its way through and sometimes it sounds as if we someone is operating on the hull with a can opener.

During dinner yet another bear was sighted and we all went up on deck where they were serving hot chocolate with schnapps or whiskey. I had mine plain.

I visited with Mary and Tom in the lounge but soon headed for bed. We will probably have bear sightings during the night. I have lost track of how many we have seen.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_ice

Monday, July 23. The bear wakeup call didn't come until 5:30 am. I guess we weren't in the pack ice during the night. However we now are.

This was a big bear and he walked off when he spied us. After a warm-up hot chocolate in the library, we went down to breakfast.

We were at a window table on the starboard side when the call came of "Walrus" and there they were; two of them huddled on the ice right next to where we were having breakfast! One male had the customary two long tusks. The other only had one tusk and that was broken. Stefan Lundgren, one of our naturalists, tells us they do not need the tusks for fishing since they live on clams but they might need it if they got into a fight over a female. Walrus molt each summer and these two were huddled together to build up body heat and speed up the molt.

Pack ice is interesting. It comes in many shapes and undulates with the ocean movements. It also moves around. The ship was not expecting it here since last week there was none. Our ship is ice strengthened so can move through the ice and let us see the animals.

I had a short rest and then went up to the lounge to hear Steve MacLean talk on global warming. He didn't say much I didn't already know but I was having trouble keeping awake so I may have

missed part of it. The gist of it was that we should spread the word that collectively we might be able to slow it down by curbing our carbon footprint.

After lunch they took us ashore on the western shore of Edgeoya, the second largest island in the archipelago. This time the walking wasn't too bad. Shingle for a time and then spongy moss on top of the tundra. Tundra is the coldest of all the biomes. The word comes from the Finnish word tunturi, meaning a treeless plain. Below the tundra is the permafrost. Where the top of the permafrost has melted the ground is soggy. We saw reindeer scat but no deer.

Steve pointed out the various flowers. There were some bones from a whale and some wood that had been a trap. It was a short walk but I didn't get to the end. When he asked if anyone was ready to go back to the ship three of us volunteered. It is just too strenuous for me to walk very far burdened by all the heavy clothing and boots. I feel like I am stuffed into my clothes and find myself short of breath almost immediately. Sure wish I could have made this trip five years ago. I was booked along with Charity and Evans but had to cancel.

Tonight there was a cocktail party in honor of Gary Raizes 60th birthday. That meant free drinks for all. I sat with Irene, Mary Ann and Mary. However, I had dinner with Mary and Tom. There was a preview of the National Geographic DVD of our trip after dinner but I am going to buy it sight unseen and enjoy at home. The nice part about the DVD is that it will have close-ups of the wildlife that our lenses can't capture.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walrus>

<http://www.blueplanetbiomes.org/tundra.htm>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Permafrost>

Tuesday, July 24. The last day. We came into Hornsund Fjord and entered historic Gashamna Bay. It wasn't raining and we even saw some blue sky making this the best touring day of the cruise.

I went ashore with the short walkers and Magnus showed us around. He is very knowledgeable about the history of the area and told us about the early whalers who came here. The Basque people were some of the best whalers since along the Brittany coast the whales would come in close to land. Good Catholics ate fish on Friday and the whale was considered a fish at that time. Thus the French Catholics could eat the whales!

Other countries mounted expeditions to explore the area. Here we found the remains of a Polish research station now in ruins. The only standing structure was an old trapper's hut and it doesn't look like it will be standing much longer. I can't imagine living in this small box like structure.

Magnus also gave his opinion of global warming. He believes it is a cyclical thing and that ten years from now we may be talking about global cooling. Let us hope so.

We walked around the site and looked at the old whalebones. We also spotted a reindeer. Then it was time to return to the ship for lunch.

After lunch we went further into the fjord and some people went kayaking. They also offered zodiac cruises near the glacier but I decided to relax and enjoy the view from the ship before my last massage of the voyage.

Sheila did a facial as well as a massage. I wish I could figure out another time to travel with her. However, this trip has been very strenuous and I wonder if I am up to another.

The Captain greeted us in the lounge. He reported there are 22 notches in the bridge for the bears we have spotted on the voyage! He also pointed out we had done a lot of things they hadn't done before. We circled Spitsbergen, the first voyage this year that has accomplished this.

We had dinner with Charles Hunter and Jana Kicklighter. Then we went back to the lounge where various passengers had slide shows of their pictures. Wow! There must have been a lot of professionals on board. Mary got some good ones, even some on my point-and-shoot, but nothing like this.

I came back to the cabin to find the bathroom flooded. They cleaned it up but now my carpet is wet. I hope that gets some attention before I have to go to bed.

The situation got no better. My carpet felt like the tundra. I went up to the bar for help and finally they arrived with towels and a fan to try and dry it out. I told them I did not see how I could sleep in the room, but there was not another empty bed on the ship. Finally they moved me into a staff

room. I have no idea where one man slept. His roommate, who was Lisa Lagerstrom's father, ended up sleeping in my swampy room. Lisa is the expedition leader. I felt badly about it all.

Wednesday, July 25. At five a chime went off on my night table. Someone's cell phone had been set as an alarm. I didn't know how to turn it off. I waited about an hour before I got up and they roused Lisa's "Poppa" so I could get back into the room. It was still soggy but I have to pack and get the bags out by eight.

They off loaded us and took us to the SAS Radisson Polar Hotel. We found a nice quiet corner and Tom even found a copy of the book he had been reading on the boat about Cook and Perry.

Mary and I went off to explore. Downtown Longyearbyen is quite modern with a large central square decorated with a sculpture of a miner. There are all sorts of shops, mostly for clothing, but some tourist type places as well. In the huge grocery store we found some decorative glass and found a sculpture of two polar bears, which I bought for a souvenir for Mary.

Back at the hotel they had a buffet although I wasn't terribly hungry since it was only 10:30 am, I did try some of the salmon.

Finally we went to the airport where our bags were all lined up. I grabbed mine and jumped into a short line. Then I went through security into a tiny waiting room, which obviously would not hold us all. I managed to grab three seats and then we killed time for an hour or more until the plane came in from Oslo and got recharged to go back. They are building a new air terminal that should have adequate seating.

I sat on the plane with Laurada Byers and Michael Sanyour who I had not seen on the ship. They are from Philadelphia. He is in financial services for wealthy investors. His wife and I talked about travel. They served us lunch during the three-hour flight but it wasn't very good.

We got to the domestic terminal in Oslo at 5:30 pm. However we had to go to the international terminal for passport control. Even though we have been in Norway the whole time, Svalbard is treated like another country! They bused us around and then we had to climb two flights of stairs. I struggled up one flight before I found a lift for the other. However, after I stopped to visit the ladies room, I found myself at the end of a long slow line. It seemed to take forever. Finally I was through and then I found we had to walk all the way back to the domestic terminal for our bags! It must have been a mile, even though there were a couple of moving sidewalks. I was exhausted by the time we got to baggage claim.

We got our bags but still had to get to the SAS Radisson Hotel, which had been billed as just a few steps away. It was nice that we were allowed to take our luggage carts to the hotel. It was more like four blocks. Tom was a wonderful escort standing by me to give me encouragement the whole way. When I finally got to my room I collapsed.

Everything is very modern with a sort of jungle motif. I have a plasma TV and a large squashy bed with a duvet.

Mary and Tom called after a bit and I went down to join them in the coffee shop. I had a delicious Club sandwich. Then it was off to bed to wait for the 4:15 am wakeup call.

<http://www.longyearbyen.radissonsas.com/>

Thursday, July 26. 4:00 am came all too soon and we headed back to the airport to check in for our plane to Paris. The check in clerk said she couldn't check us in without the ticket numbers! Air France Customer Service was not open for business and we were told to cool our heels until it was. Tom went and stood at the Customer Service Counter to wait. At last they came. I had my computer turned to my reservation page but Delta doesn't put ticket numbers on the reservation so that was no help. We palavered for a time and at last the reservations were found. Why don't Air France and Delta coordinate their computers since they are both Sky Team?

I had requested a wheelchair for Charles de Gaulle although my past experience told me it was hopeless. Mary and Tom disembarked taking my roll-on and purse to help me. Then the stewardess told me the wheelchair was waiting at the rear of the plane. They would not let Mary and Tom back on the plane and it was only after some arguing that they allowed my purse back on. It was not really a wheelchair, but one of the cabs they use to service the plane. It ran me to a terminal where I was switched to a real wheelchair that took me to security. Then I was loaded

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back into a cab to be taken to my departure terminal. It was quite a procedure and I could never have done it myself.

At the gate there was no sign of Mary and Tom, and also no apparent way to get to the Business Class Lounge. I did find a necessary rest room and when I got back to the gate, there were Mary and Tom. They had had a harrowing time getting there with long lines.

We were so glad to finally get on the bus for the plane. I hope when they finish rebuilding Charles de Gaulle that Delta will finally be able to use jet ways.

Home in Atlanta I parted company with Tom and Mary and went to baggage claim. Charles de Gaulle was not finished with me! They had damaged both my bags! One had a wheel ripped off and the other had a handle ripped off. Delta told me they would not repair anything external on the bags. They did give me 1900 Sky Miles as recompense but that isn't worth a lot.

It had been a difficult trip!