

August 2012

Dear Friends and Family,

In May and June I visited twelve cities in the U.S. for family special occasions and to visit friends. Some places were new to me – Charleston, WV, Lafayette, LA, Seward, AK – while the rest were old friends, but of course changing, evolving. As I always do when I travel I took a lot of photos. I also ate all the foods that I don't find elsewhere in the world – reuben sandwiches, Cajun gumbo, oyster po-boy, Dungeness crab. The highlight is always quality time spent with friends and family. For that I thank each of you for flexing your schedules to accommodate mine!

My first stop was Washington, D.C. When I saw a Dixieland jazz band playing in MacPherson Square (with an Indian fast food truck parked at the curb) and children dancing to the music my thought was "never in Paris". But, then, just this week on the Pont Saint Louis connecting Ile de la Cite with Ile St Louis, there was a Dixieland jazz band playing. So, as they say, never say never! I had not been back to D.C. since moving to Moldova in September, 2007 and the city is looking beautiful. It was great fun visiting friends and walking neighborhoods, both new and



familiar.

I took Amtrak from DC to Charleston, W.V. (and, later on, onwards to Chicago and then Ann Arbor). It is fun on the long distance trains talking with people who regularly travel all over North America by train. The Amtrak staff were fun and friendly and definitely train buffs and although the snack bar was expensive, the sit down dinner in the dining car was reasonably priced and good. Charleston is a very pretty capital city with many handsome old houses (my friend there is restoring a Craftsman house) and there are new entertainment venues along the



Elk and Kanawha Rivers' waterfront.

I realized the impact that Peace Corps (2000-2002 and onwards) has had on my life in that over half the people I visited on the trip (apart from family) are friendships that originated during that era. However, I do still cherish my "old" friendships as well and am a great believer in the refrain: "Make new friends, but keep the old. One is silver and the other is gold".

I arrived in Chicago on the eve of the NATO summit with sparkling blue skies, warm weather and the city impeccably clean and ready to show off. I will always love this high rise



city with its mix of beautiful new and old: high rise buildings as well as the preserved 19th century architecture. Chicagoans always seem animated and with the beautiful weather the parks and streets were hopping. They have added new street furniture which I am told was inspired by Paris (bus shelters, newspaper vending machines) and the first solar compacting trash cans I have ever



seen!

I enjoyed an architecture cruise on the river with many buildings now having new lives and uses, such as the Merchandise Mart. Many famous buildings have new names (Sears/Willis Tower) and my old neighborhood adjacent to Grant/Millennium Park has added townhouses and the beautiful new 86-storey mixed use residential Aqua Tower by architect Jeanne Gang.



But the biggest surprise is the high rise development south in the Hyde Park area!



Wonderful reunions with friends from my years living there (1985 – 2000) as well as with more recent friends from Peace Corps years. Food choices: Greek, Mexican, plus American beef.

After a great family visit in the Ann Arbor area, taking in all the grand kids' end of school year events including plays, concerts, sports matches, eagle scout honor awards ceremonies and

graduations, (plus some rpcv visits!) I started the air travel portion of my itinerary. I spent five fabulous days in Louisiana between Lafayette and its surrounding Parishes and New Orleans. I have to admit to not really having known/remembered the history of Acadians, and the French connection is very strong from street names written in French to Acadian French being taught in the schools. Great food, constant music and dancing, lovely old plantations, beautiful parks and fascinating Acadian/Cajun/African American history. A highlight here was Breaux Bridge “crawfish capital of the world”



where on Saturday morning the Zydeco music, dancing, and breakfast with bloody Mary's starts at Café des Amis at



7:30 am. I love the live oak trees with Spanish moss, throughout the Parishes and in the swamps, definitely a symbol of

this region, much like baobab trees in Africa and coconut palms on atolls.



And a 12th Century Buddha from China that made its way in 1886 to the McIlhenny family (as in Tabasco sauce) property on Avery Island.



And cheese grits, and duck and Andouille sausage gumbo, and boudin, and...and... I gained 7 kg on this 2 month trip and I think half of it in Louisiana! Voluntarily, and happily, of course.

Dallas, TX, which now has a very good inexpensive public transportation system including an antique trolley in Old Town, was next.



Luckily for me there is currently an amazing installation of Dale Chihuly (a long time favorite artist of mine) blown glass pieces throughout the Dallas Arboretum. I spent a whole day savoring each setting with



my friend as well as touring the DeGolyer Estate, and enjoying a good lunch.



Another highlight was the night time colored light show on the facades of surrounding buildings – I was staying downtown near Union Station. Not as spectacular as I saw on the casino facades in Macau, but very



entertaining. I also enjoyed Dickey's barbecue for old times' sake (when working for DSC at greater Dallas facilities) and a large private gallery sale/exhibition of Peter Max's work, the American Pop Artist who is



still active and has been documenting every decade since the 1960's. The cattle drive sculpture of 40 larger-than-life bronze longhorn cattle chased by several cowboys in Pioneer Plaza is also very impressive.

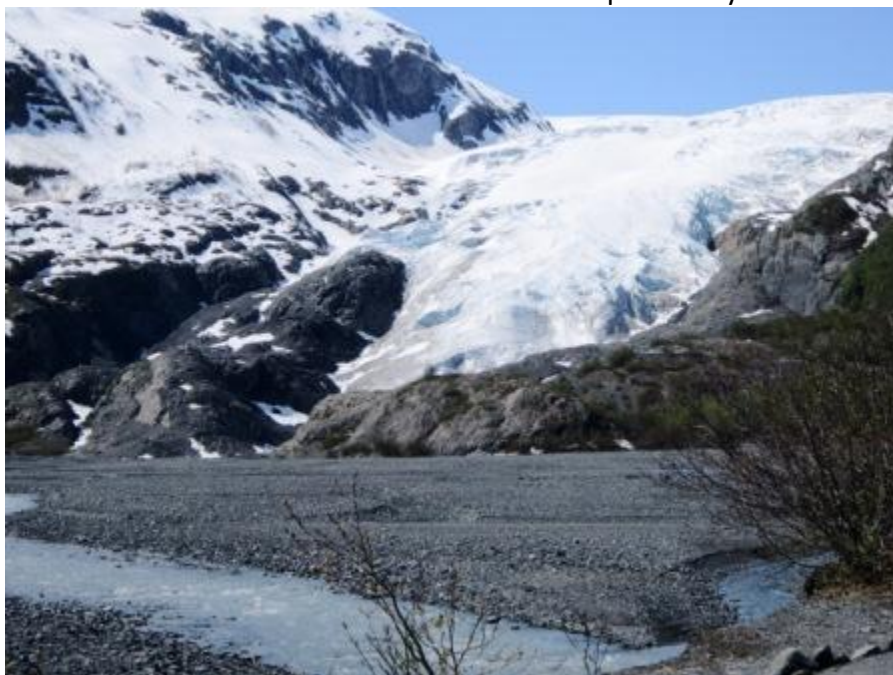


Next stop was supposed to be Anchorage, but due to mechanical delays leaving Dallas I had a night and a day in Denver in the former Stapleton Airport area, now redeveloped into typical U.S. suburban shopping and housing. But, the unexpected chance also to visit with old PC friends from Micronesia. In Anchorage the surrounding mountains were still snow covered and many streams running with glacial melt. We drove down to Seward where we kayaked for an afternoon in Thumb Cove. We were accompanied by a school of porpoises playfully leaping and racing the boat that was transporting us and the kayaks. And then in the quiet bay a sea otter rested on his (her) back and watched us.



We also visited Exit

Glacier which has receded several miles in the past 100 years.



And, of course, we saw

moose on the roadside in Anchorage.



Portland, OR was next where spring was everywhere except of course for beautiful Mt. Hood guarding over the city and the valleys.



A day spent visiting Willamette Valley wineries was a must, plus sampling many of the city's creative chefs' output



emphasizing use of fresh local ingredients and, of course, local wines. The view from the View House looking down the Columbia River is dramatic.



And visits again with both



old and new friends.

From Portland I took Amtrak to Seattle and then went onwards by ferry and car to the Olympic Peninsula. On the ferry ride one sees Mt. Rainier guarding the city and Puget Sound. An exciting event on the peninsula is the removal of the dam on the Elwha River. Planting of the former lake bottom is underway and soon it will be known if salmon will return to spawn. While out on the Peninsula we also took advantage of the Soleduc hot springs near Lake Crescent where I hadn't been for over 20 years. It was a treat to eat so much fresh fish and shellfish in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest. It was also wonderful to see how thriving the local farmers' markets and "Community Supported Agriculture – CSA" are everywhere I visited.

It was very interesting that at The Evergreen State College commencement Travel Writer/Guide Rick Steves was the commencement speaker. I had no idea that he was from Edmonds, WA and has done a great deal of philanthropic work in that community. His theme was that these graduates, who have experienced the autonomy of an alternative self-directed curriculum, need to experience the world outside the U.S. and understand that Americans are not the only smart people in the world or the source of all new technology/ideas. He urged that for America to retain (or regain?) a leadership position in the world Americans need to be more worldly. YES!

Back on the Seattle side I went to the Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art from the Kaplan & Levi Collection show at the Seattle Art Museum which is really outstanding, and another Dale Chihuly installation at the Seattle Center. There I particularly liked the interior displays and the retrospective of his distinguished career.



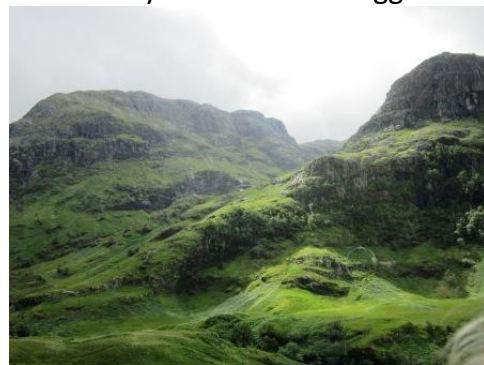
And, finally, to my last visits, in the San Francisco Bay area. Two art exhibits that were so good I may have to see them again when they come to Europe – “Central Nigeria Unmasked” at the Cantor Museum at Stanford University and the Jean Paul Gauthier retrospective at the de Young. And of course more great food from fresh ingredients, both home-cooked and out. A

highlight in SFO was the dim sum at Yank Sing plus just walking the streets of several SFO



neighborhoods.

I have made one short foray since returning home to Paris – a long weekend in Edinburgh, Scotland. Took a full day bus tour into the “highlands” which is very wild and unpopulated and used for training British ground troops and air force pilots. A very beautiful and rugged



landscape that I am happy my ancestors left behind.

Edinburgh architecture is monumental, heavy, and, unfortunately, the local stone is of a dark hue, not blond and golden like Paris. So it leaves a rather somber feeling.



A retired urban planner from Edinburgh gave us a wonderful tour around the area, including the Forth Railway Bridge, a single span cantilever



built in 1890.

We found some very good restaurants on Rose Street and celebrated the end of my first two weeks on Atkins diet. As I write this I have managed to take off the 7 kg I gained in the U.S. and have three more to go to regain my ideal weight.

I hope this finds each and every one of you happy and healthy and enjoying summer if you are in the northern hemisphere.

Love,
Marilee