

Washington, DC Journal

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Monday, 4/27/98 - Day 1

I had trouble getting up this morning (as usual) until I remembered what day it was.

It wasn't as difficult to say goodbye to my parents as it has been on past departures, but once I managed to call them from the hostel, it was nice to hear their voices.

I got a little bit of a nap on the plane this morning, but I was kind of crunched and didn't sleep very well. Transferring planes at Minneapolis didn't go well either - due to a sort-of U-shaped airport, and the fact that we had to go from one end nearly to the other, grandpa says it took us 15 minutes. He guesses that we were walking about four miles per hour, and so it was about a one mile walk. This, *and* our first flight had been late.

But we did make it to Baltimore Airport, at which point we had to figure out how to get into Washington itself. We were planning on a shuttle, but then we realized taxis were available, and faster. But grandpa wanted more information on the shuttles, so he went back into the airport and was standing in line at the shuttle information desk when someone who we'd later describe as "probably a congressman" approached grandpa about something like a taxi, slightly cheaper, and leaving immediately. So we went with them, and learned several things about Washington. Between the fancy car and the interesting people, it was an interesting ride.

Tuesday, 4/28/98 - Day 2

We woke up at 7am after grandpa hadn't slept well. (Fortunately for me, I didn't notice at the time.)

After breakfast, we found our way to Metro Center, the closest Metro (subway) station to our hostel **and** the transfer point for three of the four Metro lines. Two things impressed me about Metro. One was the stored-value farecards. They use a magnetic strip to store the amount left in the card. One inserts the card at the point of entry to the Metro system, then inserts it again in a similar system at the end. The fare is calculated (based on distance travelled), deducted from the card, and the new balance is printed on the card. The other thing I liked was the row of lights beside each track. They blinked whenever a train was close by.

Anyway, we took the Metro to Union Station. It's been modernized, and a mall was added, but at the entrance it looks great. That area is huge, with numerous statues and plants. (There's a sign about the statues. The artist originally built them as male nudes, but added shields "for public decency" later.)

From there we went to the Senate office buildings. It took us three tries to find the building where Senator Wyden's office was, but on the way we encountered a presentation of new technologies in computer displays from various companies. (Of course I **had** to go in.) They were designed with military uses in mind, but I managed to avoid showing my disapproval of **that** and just tried to learn about what I was seeing. For the most part I was ignored (it's not like I have a vote on military issues in Congress) but two vendors were willing to talk to me. One had a very low power display, which didn't need a backlight, or *any* power when it wasn't refreshing, though it had a slow refresh rate. (They consider it best used in map displays, etc.)

Eventually we got to Wyden's office. There we found that the receptionist had been replaced. Then we found that the previous receptionist had gotten our ticket request all wrong - wrong contact phone number, wrong days and times (no, we don't want to visit the White House one and a half hours before we pick up our tickets for it), and wrong list of desired tickets.

Argh.

A little while later we got on a subway running from the senate office buildings to the Capitol. It appeared to be completely automatic - we never saw a driver. It brought us in to the basement of the capitol.

In the capitol, we wandered around until we got oriented, then found our way to the rotunda. It's big enough that I couldn't get much of it at all in any one picture. It's also big enough that I lost my lens cap in it... I think. (I know when I have things, I'm not always sure when I don't.)

Next we went to the old Supreme Court room. It was a relatively dark room that had been recreated from a painting of a person who had been standing there.

After the Supreme Court room we went upstairs to sit in the Senate gallery. At the top of several flights

of stairs, we were asked to check our bags and go through metal detectors. Grandpa said that once someone entered the Senate gallery and killed several senators, after which the security of the area was considerably improved.

The topic being discussed while we were there was NATO expansion. The discussion was somewhat interesting but not worth repeating here. The only Republican on the floor was Gordon Smith, one of our senators. He was only there to present the point of view of the Republican caucus, and then he went to lunch.

Grandpa and I thought we'd try to catch up with him, which was a good idea, but if we'd thought about it we would have realized it probably wouldn't work. Politicians have a tendency to eat in places that aren't publicly accessible. But as long as we were there, we decided to eat in the senate dining area.

After lunch, we left the Capitol and went to the current Supreme Court building. The first thing we did there was go to the basement where there was a World War II exhibit. That was cut a bit short, though, because we wanted to go on one of the tours of the Supreme Court room itself.

This room was much bigger than the old Supreme Court room. Above it was a basketball court, the tour guide told us - he said it's the "highest court in the land". He also told us about the architecture, various legal aspects of the Supreme Court, and John Marshall, who was the first Chief Justice.

Next we went to the Library of Congress. That building is very big, with a large part of it being public exhibits. We weren't allowed in the library itself, but the guy who accompanied us on the trip from Baltimore to Washington had said that the ceiling had been redone and so we paid quite a bit of attention to it.

I had to buy more film at this point, but then we went to the National Archives. There wasn't a lot to see there, though I assume if we were more important than tourists we would have been able to find quite a bit more. However, we did get to see original documents like the Declaration of Independence. I didn't get much value out of these though. Sure it's somewhat interesting to see such old writings and the handwriting they were originally written in, but other than that I might as well read a printed version out of a book.

After that, we headed "home" on Metro. (It feels a bit strange to be thinking of it as home.)

Wednesday, 4/29/98 - Day 3

We started our morning visiting that place famous for war, the Pentagon. It felt strange after having been going to a Mennonite (peace) church for several years.

Arlington felt nearly as strange as the Pentagon, but the majority of what I got out of it was sore legs and a feeling that there were way too many grave stones there. Probably the most interesting part of it was watching a small group of young students performing a ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown with help from a fully uniformed soldier.

When we were done meandering around Arlington, we caught a trolley to the National Air and Space Museum. Since we were only travelling two stops, though, we never ended up being charged for the ride (though we would have been perfectly happy to pay if they'd asked us).

At the National Air and Space Museum we had lunch, then spent about three hours exploring, during which time we got through about one fifth of the upper floor of the building. It's not an excessively big building, but there's a lot of stuff in it and most of it is very interesting. I learned a lot while we were there. I can't say that I had any one favorite thing there, but I would say that it was my favorite place of all the places we visited.

Once we got back to the hostel, we visited with some of the other residents there. The people we talked to for most of that evening were a couple from England and knew quite a bit about England but not a lot about America's history, which made sense to me. We had some interesting discussions.

Thursday, 4/30/98 - Day 4

We started the day with a walk to the National Geographic Society after breakfast. There we saw a couple of movies (which had some pretty interesting stuff in them), and quite a few exhibits. What I found most interesting, though - and frustrating - was a moving holographic display. Interesting because I had never seen anything like it before, except for a small (two-dimensional) picture in a magazine once. Frustrating

because I couldn't figure out how it worked. (Sigh.)

Next we went to the National Cathedral. To quote a past visitor from Oregon, it was "very big", and to quote myself, "that's an understatement". There were some pretty windows and interesting architectures, and we did quite a bit of exploring.

We took a taxi back into Washington, to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. We had tickets for a show on Sunday evening there, but thought we'd take a look around beforehand. Unfortunately, we arrived at a time when the building was mostly deserted, so there wasn't really anything to do. I couldn't even find any good pictures.

From there we headed around and about to the Lincoln Memorial. On the walls to either side of the giant statue of Lincoln were his Gettysburg Address and his second inaugural address. After I read his inaugural address I decided that the southerner who shot Lincoln was really stupid since Lincoln was trying to help the southerners.

When we were done looking around at the Lincoln Memorial we headed towards the Vietnam Memorial Wall. I think that wall had too many names on it. Next we went to the Korean Memorial. I liked that memorial because of the way they engraved shadowy faces into the wall. The Nurses Memorial, which we saw next, was a relatively small statue of several nurses tending to wounded soldiers. I think that one should have been bigger.

From those three memorials we began walking around the tidal basin. Our first target was the FDR Memorial. On the way we were beginning to notice our feet hurting.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt wanted his memorial to be no bigger than his desk. To get around that, his memorial is very small and has a very big entrance. Not to mention the memorial to his wife...

By the time we got to the Jefferson Memorial, we really needed to sit down and rest our feet. It's a long way around the tidal basin. This memorial had a large statue of Jefferson, which I suppose is to be expected, and several quotes from him. Other than that it wasn't very interesting.

We finally made it all the way around the tidal basin and wandered by the Washington Monument on our way to the Metro station. The Washington Monument was closed for repairs, though, so we didn't get to go up it.

Friday, 5/1/98 - Day 5

The day started out as a mixture of overcast and sunny. Note that, there'll be a test on it later. (Or something.)

We started our touring by setting out for the Holocaust Museum, in order to get our tickets for it. Twice while waiting in line before they started distributing tickets my legs fell asleep. I suppose it was kind of appropriate, given the location. At one point, grandpa left to get tickets for the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) tickets.

Once we had our tickets, we went to the Smithsonian Museum of Arts and Industry. They had a bunch of tools from the Smithsonian 1876 centennial exposition. These included woodworking equipment, an elevator (from Otis!), power sources for the above (steam, wind, coal, gas), telegraph equipment, printing tools, and a bit more. They also had artwork from a black woman - specifically, interesting and unusual sculptures.

Next stop: the US Bureau of Engraving and Printing. They say "The Buck Starts Here" - and they're right! I enjoyed seeing the equipment with which they print, group, check, cut, and package bills. Unfortunately, they didn't provide any samples for us to take home.

After BEP we went to the Holocaust Museum. Upon entering the permanent exhibit entrance, we were given ID cards and told to go through the double steel doors ahead of us. Once inside, we found ourselves surrounded by steel walls with a TV above us. The TV showed a short movie and the doors on the other side opened onto the fourth floor. The first thing we noticed about this area was that it was almost completely silent. Everyone, no matter what age, seemed to understand that this was not a place to make noise. The fourth floor covered Hitler's rise to power, and at that point in time nothing particularly bad had happened.

I noticed as we went to lower floors, though, that as the events described got worse, the viewers got

noisier. That didn't make much sense to me, but neither did most of what happened. I find it difficult to believe that anyone could claim that the holocaust didn't happen.

As we wound our way through that exhibit, the few times that we could see the sky, we kept noticing that it was raining harder and harder, but we thought it would let up before we left. This was not the case, and we hadn't brought our umbrellas or coats with us; we were wearing T-shirts. All we had was a newspaper and so that's what we ended up using to keep from getting too wet until we got back to the hostel. So here's that test I promised: What was the weather like this morning?

Saturday, 5/2/98 - Day 6

When we left the hostel this morning, we started by heading towards Ford's Theater. But we saw a sign saying "MCI Center", and we were curious about what this thing was that had signs pointing to it all over the city. So we followed the signs and found the building, and it appeared to be similar to Portland's Coliseum, with several shops and a large stadium inside.

If Grandpa hadn't been with me, I wouldn't have chosen to go to the National Gallery of Art, but that's where we headed next. It turned out that I enjoyed it though, particularly the sculptures and certain paintings. It turned out that some of the paintings that I liked, my Mom had decided that she liked when she visited Washington DC with Grandpa in 1976.

Once we found our way out of the National Gallery of Art, we went to the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. This museum had a collection of a bunch of dead stuff, such as animals (there's a **big** elephant at the entrance), plants, and minerals (this is where the Hope Diamond is stored).

After finishing a very incomplete tour of the Natural History Museum, we moved on to the Smithsonian Museum of American History. I found it much more interesting, but we started out with lunch there. Once we had finished lunch (which involved struggling to find a free table) we began exploring the exhibits. My favorite exhibit was on the digital age. It ranged from very early computers to modern computers and various things that could be done with information gathered about you.

Sunday, 5/3/98 - Day 7

What are you supposed to do when it's Sunday morning so nothing's open? Well, we decided to go walking. Since we hadn't been to the White House (thanks to Senator Wyden's office) we decided to wander around it first. We noticed quite a few boxes on metal poles scattered all over the White House lawn. Our best guess is that they're cameras, lights, and motion detectors. We also took a look at the Old Executive Office Building. Aside from being interesting examples of architecture, there wasn't much to look at around either the White House or the Old Executive Office Building, though I didn't mind hanging around the White House for a while. Then we began walking in the general direction of the National Air and Space Museum.

The museum was pleasantly familiar after the three hours we'd spent on our previous visit. We managed to get through the whole place with a bit of time to spare, so we reviewed a few exhibits which I hadn't gotten as much out of as I would have liked. One of the exhibits that I enjoyed was a temporary exhibit about Star Wars (the movie). The gift shop for the exhibit had a bunch of *very* expensive items in it.

Once we were done there (which took most of that day), it was time to go to the JFK Center for the Performing Arts to see the show Shear Madness. Shear Madness was an "interactive mystery" in which... Never mind. You may want to see it for yourself. However, I will say that it was very funny and very good almost all the way through. The room in which we saw Shear Madness was pretty big, but it was one of the smallest theaters at the JFK Center.

Monday, 5/4/98 - Day 8

Today we finally checked out of the hostel. It was nice leaving there, but I wouldn't have minded staying in Washington longer.

Grandpa called our targeted rental car company to find out if we could be picked up instead of having to find our way to the Washington airport. After dealing with a few different people, he was told that yes, we could be picked up, but not until later. So when "later" arrived Grandpa called back and was then told that

he'd have to talk to a different office. When Grandpa called that number, after the person he was talking to verified a couple of times that he had the address right, he said he'd be right over. Sure enough, in about five minutes he was, and once we'd gotten in the car he said we were in for a surprise. He went a block, turned right, went another block, turned right, went two blocks, turned right, went two more blocks, turned right, went another block, and there we were. For those of you who are paying attention, you'll realize that that means that he only went one block south, which really embarrassed us because we had had breakfast kitty corner from there that morning and we could see their sign from our window in the hostel.

We drove first to Mount Vernon, which is just south of Washington. Mount Vernon was George Washington's home, which was still true while he was president because the city of Washington only began construction during Washington's presidency. While we were at Mount Vernon, I made Grandpa accompany me to some areas that he hadn't seen before, specifically the slave burial grounds and the wharf. The slave burial grounds weren't dignified by any headstones, only a small memorial.

After stopping at Mount Vernon, we headed south toward Jamestown. On the way there, I had a pleasant reminder of home - we stopped at Taco Bell, my favorite restaurant. <grin>

After a fairly long drive, and getting lost trying to find certain roads, we arrived at Jamestown. Since we had been told that a storm was coming in, we went out to the ships first, in the hopes of getting to see them before the storm arrived. They were recreations of the Susan Constant, Discovery, and Godspeed. They were somewhat good sized ships, but reading the information on the number of people that were in them, I decided the ships must have been way too small. Still, they were interesting.

However, our visit with them was cut short by the impending storm, so we headed back to land to take a look at the recreated fort. Unfortunately, the staff was closing up the fort, too, and so mostly all we managed was to run through it, which was not terribly interesting. The most annoying part came when we discovered that the storm had passed Jamestown to the north, missing it completely.

Anyway, we got to the hotel we'd picked and asked if there was any room, and the owner sort of chuckled. Based on the number of cars parked in the parking lot later, we figured there must have only been four residents there at the time, counting ourselves. I liked our hotel room. I think it must have been the biggest hotel room I've ever been in. If it had had a slightly bigger kitchen, it would have made a respectable apartment.

After settling into our hotel room, we drove to Yorktown. It was after the museum there had closed, though, so there wasn't much to do but drive around. For the most part this was a long day of driving around.

Tuesday, 5/5/98 - Day 9

We had intended to stop at Williamsburg yesterday, but we didn't have time so we stopped there this morning. Colonial Williamsburg is a recreation of the town of Williamsburg, which I think was the capitol of the colony of Virginia. (However, I wasn't too impressed with most of the recreation. I guess I've gotten spoiled by the Civil War reenactments we have here in Oregon.)

The print shop in Williamsburg was kind of interesting, partially because they were using the same techniques for type setting as Grandpa had used when he got started in the printing business back in the 1940's. Reenactors were printing a newspaper while we were there.

At the end of a tour of the House of Burgesses, we became involved in a discussion in which the "public" was invited to ask questions about the upcoming issue of whether Virginia should adopt the Declaration of Independence. I had a question for them: "How competent has General Washington shown himself to be at leading a military force?" I've forgotten now what their answer was, but I sure liked the question.

After leaving Williamsburg, we began driving towards Charlottesville. This turned out to be an extremely uninteresting route, because it was about 120 miles o' nuthin' but forest. We arrived in Charlottesville around late afternoon.

Once we were there Grandpa wanted to take me to the University of Virginia campus to show me an example of Thomas Jefferson's architecture. I think Jefferson wrote some of the first text books that were

used there. Anyway, the external tour of the UVA campus dampened my interest somewhat, because it took us quite a while to find anything that wasn't modern buildings.

Wednesday, 5/6/98 - Day 10

Monticello was perhaps like several universities and a college or two put together, with large "labs" and libraries, and a few (unusually comfortable) dorm rooms. That's where we spent this morning. I enjoyed seeing Jefferson's various inventions, and hearing about different events in his life. I particularly liked Jefferson's large clock which included a day of the week calendar. I also found it interesting that he had run out of wall space and had to put the last day of the week in his basement. Overall I liked Monticello better than Mount Vernon.

After Monticello we continued on our way, heading toward Staunton, where we had lunch. When Grandpa asked our waitress about Skyline Drive in the Blue Ridge Mountains, she said she thought the road was closed for repairs after a very stormy winter. So after lunch we went next door to the visitor information center and found out that the road had just reopened about a week earlier. So we got directions and were on our way.

Eventually we got to Harrisonburg. Trying to find Eastern Mennonite University, though, we got lost. (My mother had arranged a visit there for me because my parents would like me to go to a Mennonite college some day.) Then we found EMU, but got lost trying to find the administrative offices. When we finally found the offices, there was a sign outside the door saying, "Welcome to EMU, Jamey Sharp". One of the students, who was there even though school was out, gave us a somewhat thorough tour. Then we got lost again trying to find the highway. Eventually, we found it again, and headed for Harpers Ferry.

Next, we got lost, found highway 7, got lost again, found highway 340, got lost again, found a hotel just outside historic Harpers Ferry, and clung to it for fear of getting lost again. What a day. <grin>

We didn't actually stay chained to our hotel for long. We soon got hungry and went to a restaurant named *The Anvil* in Harpers Ferry for dinner. This was the fanciest and most expensive restaurant we ate at on our trip, and it turned out that I didn't like the food all that much.

Thursday, 5/7/98 - Day 11

We started out this morning travelling into the historic Harper's Ferry area. Unfortunately, it was a bit chilly and, like a previous day of the trip, we hadn't brought our jackets. Also, several buildings within the town were under construction and there were very few people around, so overall we didn't see much. However, what we did see was interesting. There was a short movie that covered the history of the general area. Harpers Ferry was where John Brown attempted a slave revolt which failed when he was forced to confront the US army.

Gettysburg, our next stop, was a bit overwhelming. We saw so much there, ranging from the cyclorama to the open battlefields. My primary thought was that General Lee had made a very large strategic error in sending his men unprotected across open fields when the north was so well protected behind their defenses.

When we were done exploring Gettysburg, which took more than half the day, we drove into an area which we expected to be Amish country. However, it was mostly more modern farming and businesses. We did see some Amish people and one buggy, but that was about it. Before I left, my Mom had asked for a gift from Amish country for her birthday which is going to be the day after I get back. However, we couldn't find any place that we could stop and get anything, so we didn't bother. We headed on towards Philadelphia.

When we got into Philadelphia, we found ourselves in a very familiar situation - we were *lost*. We were looking for the standard tourist attractions. We think we might have found them, but we were too busy trying to find our way out of the city to be sure. Tensions had begun to run high in the car while we were still in the city, and so it was quite a relief to get out.

Friday, 5/8/98 - Day 12

This morning we headed down from our hotel to Baltimore where we went to Fort McHenry before trying to find the airport. In the war of 1812, at one point the British ships that were in America tried to get past Fort McHenry. However, despite their overnight barrage of the fort, its occupants wouldn't surrender. It

really helped that it was raining all night which put out most of the fuses on the British bombs. Because they hadn't exploded, some of the bombs were on display within the fort when I visited. Throughout that night, Francis Scott Key was sitting on a British war ship where he'd been negotiating for the return of an American prisoner. When he saw in the morning that the American flag was still flying over Fort McHenry, he wrote the poem which was later set to music and became "The Star Spangled Banner". I was impressed that Fort McHenry was able to survive the assault and I enjoyed the information presented in the visitor's center.

When we were done looking around Fort McHenry, we returned our rental car and headed into the airport to wait for our plane. We knew we were early. We didn't realize how early we'd turn out to be. We were scheduled to fly to Detroit, and from there we were going to get a connecting flight to Portland. But our flight to Detroit was delayed and we found out that we would miss our connecting flight and there wouldn't be any more today. So the airline put us on a flight to Minneapolis instead, which you may recall we'd had not especially pleasant experiences at on our way to Washington.

After about a two hour delay, we boarded the plane to Minneapolis. Once we got to Minneapolis it turned out that our connecting flight there was also delayed. I was getting a bit tired of the delays and I was particularly tired of the delays once we arrived in Portland after midnight, four hours late.

When we went to collect our luggage, the situation turned out to be still worse. Our luggage had departed about the same time we did, only on a different plane to a different city. It made it to Detroit though we didn't.

Overall, I really enjoyed this trip even though it had a few negative points. I think I'll have to go to Washington DC again sometime, though it could be a while.