

IF IT'S NOT ONE THING, IT'S ANOTHER CANADA 2019

[UPDATE: February, 2025—As I gradually go back over my old travelogues, I'll be leaving the original text intact but adding additional comments in boldfaced enclosed in brackets to expand on what was originally said. I may also add some additional photos to enhance the original travelogues.]

I made the initial plans for this trip last April, deciding against visiting more adventurous locales (notably New Zealand) in favor of a two-week getaway in eastern Canada. I'd be flying to Toronto, taking the train to the East Coast, and then flying back to the States. **[Shortly after this, I'd book a trip to New Zealand that was supposed to happen in 2020. That trip would get delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and would not actually happen until 2023.]**

As the title might imply, things did not always go swimmingly with this trip. Throughout the summer I'd had problems with stiffness and soreness in my knees and legs, likely just a sign that I'm not as young as I used to be. The worst came about two weeks before I was scheduled to leave for the trip, when I had a minor slip at an away baseball field and could barely get back in my car to drive home. I was expecting the knee might be an issue on the trip. As it turned out, I had only minor problems there, but it seemed as if one issue after another threatened to make this the vacation from hell. **[In retrospect, I suspect most of these issues were the start of what would become a diabetic crisis that would land me in the hospital in the fall of 2019. At that time the doctor said I had the highest glucose level he'd seen on a conscious person (nearly 1,000 mg/dL, when the "normal" range is closer to 150). Fortunately things were controlled, and while I will be taking insulin for the rest of my life, today my life is otherwise relatively normal.]** I did manage to get through everything, thank God, and it actually turned out to be a fairly nice trip—in spite of everything.



David Burrow – on the rocky beach at Point Pleasant Park
Halifax, Nova Scotia

SUNDAY, JULY 21 **ALGONA, IOWA TO CHICAGO, ILLINOIS**

I went to church this morning. As usual I served as lector, leading a couple of prayers and reading one of the scriptures. It was not a particularly enjoyable service (with a sermon based on Amos, it's hard to find much positive), and I didn't care much that the reading I did was from Psalms (which I find difficult to read and minimal in content). The music was also pretty uninspiring, but we made it through the service all right. **[Our minister will be retiring this summer, and it looks as if that may bring an end to our church's regular services. I actually have mixed feelings on that, since far too often in recent years we've suffered through detailed examinations of obscure parts of the lectionary.]**

I'd already packed up my car, so right after church I headed off to start this trip. I left home promptly at 11:30 and drove southward on highway 169. My new stop was at the new Kwik Star truck stop in Fort Dodge. I bought gas there (\$2.51⁹) and picked up a berry smoothie, the first of many frozen beverages I'd get from a variety of vendors on this trip. **[I mentioned diabetes earlier, and frozen drinks (which are basically just sugar and ice) are just about the worst thing there is for glucose levels.]** Then I followed US-20 and I-35 down to the north edge of Des Moines.

I had gone a bit out of the way so that I could have lunch at a restaurant I'd repeatedly heard of, Smokey D's BBQ. The place had been featured on Food Network just last night, and I'd seen it in both national and regional media on several other occasions. I thought it might be interesting to check the place out.

While others have reviewed the place as "life-changing", honestly I didn't care a lot for Smokey D's. It's located in an enormous pre-fab building next to a Harley—Davidson dealer just off I-80. The only décor inside is awards they've won from barbecue competitions, and the place comes across as very dark inside. You order at a counter and then choose your seat in one of the many dining rooms. Most of the seating is at large tables, which made it a bit awkward as a party of one.

I ordered their dinner basket, which featured two meats and two side dishes. I got smoked ham together with chopped pork (they're really concerned that you know it's chopped rather than pulled), as well as creamed corn with jalapenos and potato casserole. I

also had an apple dumpling for dessert, since that was the item they were featuring on Food Network. The ham was okay, though honestly I'd have preferred it to be either grilled or roasted rather than just smoked in the pit. **[I've been disappointed at other barbecue places, too, and I think it's the smoke that I don't find appealing.]** The chopped pork seemed to have a rather off taste and was best drowned in sauce. The creamed corn was probably the best thing I ate for lunch, but the potato casserole (which many people raved about in reviews) was just flavorless scalloped potatoes. I'd really been looking forward to the apple dumpling, but both the dough and the fruit were weirdly mushy, and the caramel sauce was way too sweet. It would have been much better with some cinnamon and ginger mixed in, and perhaps a bit of lemon. Normally I clean my plate when I'm at a restaurant, but at Smokey D's I only had about half of what was offered. **[I recall this being a very expensive meal as well, and it really didn't seem to be worth it.]**

One interesting thing at my lunch was a guy at the next table over. He was wearing a T-shirt written in Icelandic and featuring the north Atlantic country. I'm actually wearing a T-shirt I got in Reykjavik as I write this, but I don't think I've ever worn it on the outside where everyone could see it. **[I pretty much always wear collared shirts in public. About the only exception is when I'm going to sports events, and the shirts I wear then tend to support the Garrigan Bears.]** You certainly don't expect to see an Iceland T-shirt at a barbecue joint in Des Moines.

I headed eastward from Des Moines on I-80. At first traffic flowed smoothly, but then things slowed to a crawl. Before long the reason for the back-up became clear. A car was on the shoulder on fire. It didn't seem to be a crash, though I have no idea how a fire would have started otherwise. There was no other vehicle involved, nor any damage I could see to that wasn't associated with the fire. Police, fire, and ambulance units were all on the scene, and I do hope whoever was in the car made it out safely.

I continued east to the rest area near Oxford. I'd used the opposite rest area just a week ago, on my way back from a 90th birthday celebration for my Uncle Harvey and Aunt Max. I'd thought then that the last time I'd used the Oxford rest area before that was probably around thirty-five years ago. My brother Steve used to live in Oxford, and I stayed at his place while taking a class in Iowa City. These days I rarely take I-80 between Des Moines and Iowa City, though I'd done it twice in just a short time. It's actually a rather pretty drive, and I think there's less traffic than on Avenue of the Saints. **[I actually took I-80 between Des Moines and eastern Iowa at both Thanksgiving and Christmas this past year, and I think those were the only times since this trip that I'd been on that stretch.]**



Ryan White

(from his memorial foundation website)

While I drove today I mostly listened to the autobiography of Ryan White, the hemophiliac teenager who was literally the poster boy for AIDS back in the '80s. Though I suspect a ghostwriter was responsible for much of this book (and, of course, it was read by an actor), it was still quite interesting. I remember Ryan fighting to be able to attend school, and it was interesting to hear a first person perspective on that and on his medical battles. **[I'd later read Elton John's autobiography. The musician was an important figure in the AIDS movement, and he both wrote to and visited with Ryan White. It was interesting to get the different perspectives of the two of them describing each other.]**

It's amazing to think just how long ago Ryan White's battle was. He contracted AIDS in 1984 (the year after I started teaching), and he died in 1990. There are references throughout the book that show how much the world has changed in the intervening years. It's weird to think that if he were alive today, White would be 48 years old. Since his death, more than 36 million other people have died of AIDS, including almost 700,000 in the United States. A variety of treatments allow those who contract the disease today to live for much longer than they did in the '80s (often twenty or more years after diagnosis), but there's still no cure. There are so many needs in medicine. It would be interesting to see what another thirty years will bring.

I continued over to the Quad Cities, where I stopped for dinner. I ended up at a Steak 'n' Shake at the south end of Moline. **[I actually stopped at that same Steak 'n' Shake on my trip last Christmas.]** I had a bacon cheeseburger with coleslaw instead of fries (something the waitress had to ask a supervisor about), a cup of chili, and an orange cream shake. While it was overly filling, I really liked my dinner better than the barbecue lunch. **[Steak 'n' Shake has changed a lot since COVID, probably more than any other restaurant chain. I mentioned a waitress in this paragraph, but today Steak 'n' Shake doesn't have waitresses at all. Instead all orders are placed at a kiosk. They've also done away with most of the stoneware they used to serve food on, essentially packing things "to go" even when customers eat in.]**

From Moline it was an easy drive over to Princeton Illinois, a place I've been to numerous times now. I stopped briefly at a Casey's to buy gas, so my tank would be full when I returned at the end of the trip. I really should have bought gas in Iowa, since in Illinois the price was \$2.81⁹. I certainly didn't worry about getting every last drop in the tank.

Next I stopped at the Princeton Culver's, where I picked up a cherry smoothie. (I said earlier I'd have a lot of frozen beverages on this trip.) I really love the cherry smoothies at Culver's. They're made with fresh sour cherries, and the tart taste is most refreshing.

After I got the smoothie, I drove about a mile south to Bicentennial Drive, where the Princeton Amtrak station is located. There's always free parking available in Princeton, though it's unpredictable whether you can park close to the actual station. This time I lucked out. While the lot was mostly full, there was a space available in the very first row. I snagged it, grabbed my stuff, and made my way into the station.

There appeared to be a family working together to man the station. These aren't Amtrak employees, but rather either volunteers or employees provided by the city of Princeton. While one of the three people might be classified as "special needs", all of them did a good job of answering questions and directing customers. Both eastbound and westbound trains leave at roughly the same time, and there was also some confusion because the eastbound California Zephyr was running 10½ hours late and wouldn't be in until after both of the regional trains had left. I'm certainly glad it wasn't that late when I went out west last summer.

The biggest entertainment while I was waiting was watching a very long freight train pass by. It had three engines and 127 graffiti-covered cars. I just googled the length of freight cars (which is typically 50 – 60 feet, plus the couplings between cars), and I made the rough calculation that this train would have to be about a mile and a half long. It's no wonder I sometimes get impatient at railroad crossings! **[It's also no wonder Amtrak trains lose so much time waiting for freight trains to pass.]**

The Princeton station has no air conditioning, but fortunately that wasn't a big problem today. While there had been heat warnings all over the Midwest the past few days (temperatures in the 90s, which combined with humidity to make it feel well over 100), a front had passed last night. While there was still a lot of humidity, temperatures in the 70s made it much more bearable.

Train 382, the eastbound Carl Sandburg, is scheduled to leave Princeton at 7:48pm. It was running about ten minutes late, and there was another delay while we waited for the westbound train to leave. It was right at 8pm when we pulled out for Chicago. My ticket was in business class, and I was pleased to nab one of the singleton seats in the 2—1 set-up they had in the business car. Business class on Amtrak includes a complimentary soft drink. Normally I get cranberry juice, but today I decided to get some Sierra Mist. The bubbles helped settle my stomach a bit from all the over-eating I'd done. I was very glad the pop was complimentary, since if I'd been a coach passenger, I'd have paid \$2.75 for a half-liter bottle. **[It appears that "shrinkflation" has hit the Amtrak café. In 2025 they charge just \$2.50 for pop, but it's served in a can rather than a bottle.]**

The ride to Chicago was completely uneventful. It was weird to see corn towering beside the tracks. We had a very wet spring, and all the crops were late this year. They've definitely recovered, though. In both Iowa and Illinois the corn and beans were both looking good.

We got into Chicago just slightly early, about 9:45pm. As I was leaving Union Station, a woman wearing a medical boot on her foot asked me where the subway station was. Since that's where I was heading myself (though no one in Chicago would call it the "subway"), it was easy to answer her question. Both of us walked pretty slowly to the station, though I did get there before she did. I slowly made my way down the steps to the mezzanine, while she searched around for an elevator. There is no elevator at the Clinton 'L' station, nor do I think there are any plans to install one. I really wish they would. Clinton is a busy station, and it's quite close to both the train and long-distance bus stations. I've seen lots of people struggling with luggage on the steps, and of course fully handicapped people can't use the station at all. **[There have been studies on making Clinton station accessible, but nothing concrete seems to have come of them. That said, I should note that Chicago is WAY ahead of other "legacy" transit systems (e.g.: New York, Boston, and London) in accessibility.]**

I just missed a train, and it turned out that the woman I'd seen earlier ended up joining me on the platform. She was from New York City and had flown to Illinois to help plan her son's wedding. The son actually lived in a small town near Peoria. He'd dropped her off at the train station in Kewanee, and she was making her way to O'Hare. Her flight actually wasn't until tomorrow morning, but she planned to go through security tonight and spend the night at the airport. (She'd spent the night at LaGuardia when she flew out to Illinois.) I spent more than enough time at O'Hare last Christmas, but if that's what works for her, so be it.

I think it was fortunate for the woman that I boarded the 'L' with her. I'd checked ahead of time and knew that they had the same weekend "bus bridge" in place that they did when I'd been here with the quiz bowl team in June. Knowing what to expect, this wasn't all that difficult to deal with. The woman was unfamiliar with it, though, and she definitely seemed to appreciate being escorted through the transfer process.

The bus bridge makes the trip take quite a bit longer than it normally does. It was around 11:15 when I exited the train at Cumberland (two stops before O'Hare), and I'd bet it was close to 11:30 when the woman got to the airport. Security apparently closes at midnight, so her plan still should have worked.

Cumberland station is in the middle of an office park, with several hotels thrown in for good measure. My destination, the Holiday Inn—O'Hare (the latest of numerous brands the location has had) is directly across Cumberland Avenue from the 'L' station. They have things blocked off, though, so that you have to walk south to a major intersection, cross the street, and then walk back north. It's annoying and honestly kind of creepy to do that walk at night. I did make it to the hotel without incident, though. **[I stayed at the same hotel and made the same annoying detour when I flew to Charlotte last Christmas.]**

The Holiday Inn is a cement slab building from the '70s that reminds me of a college dorm. I was assigned a room on the ninth floor that had a lovely view of the office park. It had been several years since I'd been to this hotel, and they'd done a number of renovations in the interim. **[Interestingly, the room I was given last Christmas (which was on a higher floor) didn't seem to have been renovated.]** That didn't really matter much, since I basically just collapsed in the bed. It was a rather restless night with the anticipation of travel, but I did manage to get some sleep. **[The Holiday Inn—O'Hare is far from the best of the airport hotels in Chicago. It's reasonably well located, though, and it's also usually one of the cheapest options—precisely because it is old and a bit rough around the edges.]**

MONDAY, JULY 22

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS TO MISSISSAUGA, ONTARIO

I was up right at 6am and made coffee in the little pot in the room while I showered. I realized soon after that I hadn't brought along a toothbrush, nor the Q-Tips I typically use to dry my ears after showering. I knew I had tossed them in, but unfortunately they'd ended up in a bag I left in my car for use at the end of the trip. That wouldn't do me much good through the bulk of my travels. I improvised this morning, but obviously I needed to get replacements pretty soon.

I checked out at 6:30. My plan had been to take the 'L' to the airport, but as I neared the door, the shuttle driver asked if I needed a ride. I ended up being the only passenger aboard the Holiday Inn shuttle. I think taking the 'L' actually would have been faster, because there was **a lot** of traffic by O'Hare this morning. It's only about three miles to the terminal, but it took a full half hour to get there.

The shuttle is officially "complimentary", but of course a tip was necessary for the driver. I've read articles that suggest giving everywhere from 50¢ to \$5 for hotel shuttles. I opted for \$1, and the driver didn't seem upset with me. I hate tipping in general, and I especially hate it when the amount is open-ended.

There was a long line at security, but fortunately it moved right along. It took about twenty minutes before I was at the front. The security process was pretty straight forward, though I did go through one of those booths that shoots air at you for the first time ever. I have no idea what they're looking for with those (presumably explosives), but I passed.

I bought a can of Sprite (\$2.50, I think) and nursed it while waiting to board. O'Hare is far too crowded. The gates are set up so that there's not enough seats for even the passengers on a small plane. No one of importance seems to care, though, and if you're flying on United you have little choice but to go there. **[I really don't know why the gate areas at O'Hare are so small. When the airport was built, the planes that flew in there were if anything larger than they are today. Of course it doesn't help that the majority of flyers are traveling solo, and people generally leave empty seats between them and the next party.]**

They began boarding at 8:35am. I had a window seat in the very back row of the plane (24-D). For a short flight, I liked being by the window, and since I didn't have to transfer, it really didn't matter that I was in the rear. It was an entirely full flight, but the seats seemed to be better designed than they are on many planes. I really didn't feel all that crowded.

There were signs all over the airport noting that United provided free wi-fi (though with numerous asterisks attached to that). I located the wi-fi on my phone, but I couldn't for the life of me get it to connect. **[I've since had the same experience on other flights with both United and other airlines.]** That's probably just as well. The "free" part of the wi-fi only allows you to access United's website and app—which is how they provide in-flight entertainment. If you want to visit any other site, check e-mails, or so forth, you have to cough up \$8.95. This was a short flight (1 hour and 1 minute of actual travel time, though it's more than an hour and a half on the schedule), so there really wasn't much need for wi-fi.

My itinerary for this trip was kind of weird, since it involved one-way flights on two different airlines. Today I'd be flying from Chicago to Toronto on United, and at the end I'd fly from Halifax to Chicago on Porter Airlines. Like most short-distance flights, the United segment was actually operated by another airline—Republic Airlines, doing business as United Express. The plane was an Embraer 170, a small commuter jet made in Brazil. It was a perfectly pleasant flight, though, and while it seemed like we taxied forever (they closed the doors at 8:57, but we didn't actually take off until 9:20), that's the airport's fault, not the airline's. We ended up getting to the gate in Toronto early, since they have **lots** of padding in their schedule.

We arrived at Terminal 1 of Pearson Airport (YYZ) in Toronto. Though not quite as big as O'Hare, Pearson is still one of the world's largest airports. It's busy and confusing, and my advice to anyone flying to Canada is to use any other airport if possible. **[A year ago I flew into Winnipeg, which is a much more pleasant airport.]**



UA3544 about to fly over Lake Michigan

The first thing I needed to take care of was clearing customs. It was nearly a twenty-minute walk just to get to the customs hall. As is true at many airports, they led us up, down, up again, and then down again. The signage was not clear at all, since Terminal 1 seems to mostly be used for transit passengers who aren't actually entering Canada.

Once I found the customs hall, I discovered that we should have been given landing cards to fill out on the plane. We were not given any documents. Indeed, the flight attendant told us that customs would be handled electronically, as it had been when I flew to Ottawa last Christmas. It turns out that the other international terminal at Pearson does do electronic clearance, but they haven't updated

the facilities in Terminal 1 yet. They do have kiosks in Terminal 1, but they're designed to scan the arrival card rather than asking the questions directly. So I, together with everyone else from flight 3544, had to step out of line and fill out the forms we needed to have.

Once I was back in line I was able to scan my card, though the machine then repeated many of the questions on it. It then spit out a "receipt" that was really just a photocopy of the landing card. I then had to stand in another line and present that to an immigration officer. While I was in that line, I realized I had misunderstood one of the questions, which resulted in my not including my address on the card. I figured that might cause some issue, though fortunately it's apparently not a cardinal sin. The woman who took the receipt simply asked my address and filled it in herself. She was much more concerned with what I was planning to do for nine days in Canada. Once I explained I was taking the train out to Halifax she stamped the receipt and sent me on my way.

Beyond immigration people with luggage had to re-claim their bags. I was just traveling with a carry-on, so I made my way to the final line at customs. Here the agent just took the card and ushered me to the exit. A number of people were pulled aside to have their bags searched. It would be interesting to know how they go about deciding who does and who doesn't get detained.

By the time I'd finished with the formalities I desperately needed to use a restroom. Unfortunately the first one I found was closed for cleaning. After searching a bit I did manage to find another. Restrooms seem surprisingly limited at Pearson Airport, though. They could definitely use many more.

Next on the agenda was getting some Canadian currency. I went to DC Bank ATM (the same brand I'd used in the Ottawa airport at Christmas) and inserted my card. Before I could even enter the PIN number, the screen flashed "CARD INVALID". I did a bit of searching and eventually found an ATM operated by CIBC, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. Fortunately this one did recognize my card, and I was able to get thirteen Canadian twenty-dollar bills with no problem. That works out to a little less than \$200 US. While Trump's tariffs and trade restrictions have made the Canadian dollar rise in value, it's still not a bad rate of exchange. The "loonie" was worth about 75¢ US when I arrived, and it was up to about 77¢ when I left. **[In 2025 a Canadian dollar is right at 70¢ US.]** Of course there's foreign exchange fees and ATM fees that make the real rate slightly worse

I'd find on this trip that urban Canadians make most of their purchases with debit cards. A lot of people literally never handle cash, and lots of stores have very little change in their tills. People will even use a debit card to buy a pack of gum or a cup of coffee. **[When I was in Winnipeg in 2024 it seemed as if proportionally fewer people were paying for things electronically, so this may be a regional preference.]** I'd love to know what the associated charges are, because if there's any supplement at all on small purchases, I wouldn't think it would be worth it.

I spent about fifteen minutes bumbling around and trying to follow unclear signage. I saw several signs for "TRAINS TO CITY", which is what I wanted, but after heading in the directions they indicated, I got to completely wrong locations with no further indication for where I should go. Eventually I approached a woman at an information desk and asked where the TerminaLink train was. She said she really couldn't explain how to get there, but she'd walk me to it. We ended up going to a completely different part of the terminal from where I was, then going up a level and crossing a skywalk to a parking ramp. From there we went up two more levels to the train station. I'm quite sure I'd have never found it on my own, and I'd strongly encourage Pearson Airport to improve their signage.



Presto card

While I wouldn't need it immediately, next on my list was buying a fare card to use on Toronto's public transit. It's not at all cheap to get around Toronto (I'd spend more than \$80 over three days). One good thing, though, is that pretty much all the populated part of Ontario uses the same fare card. A single Presto card will pay for fares on dozens of systems in greater Toronto and also in places like London, Windsor, Ottawa, and Niagara Falls. **[I should be headed to Japan this coming summer. There are numerous fare cards in use there, but they're all compatible with each other. All the transit companies accept each other's fare cards. It would be wonderful if we could do something similar in America.]** Presto's logo looks a lot like an EKG readout that's gone into flat line, and a lot of comments I'd read made it appear the logo was appropriate. If you look online, you'll find complaint after complaint about Presto. There are apparently problems with the cards mysteriously losing value, problems with the turnstiles accepting the cards, and problems when switching from one system to another.

Fortunately the card worked fine for me. It was easy to buy, and it worked as it should each time I used it. For the most part it works the same as every other chip-based smart card (like Ventra in Chicago or TAP in Los Angeles). The only real issue I had is that they won't let you buy a day pass for the local subway and buses with Presto. That's true in a surprising number of cities, though, so it wasn't unexpected.

Something interesting about Presto cards is that they are embossed with three raised dots in the top right corner. (Technically this would be the Braille letter "D", though why they'd choose that I don't know.) I must say that even as a sighted person, the dots are useful in locating the Presto card among the many that accumulate in a pocket or wallet. Canadian currency also has raised dots on it, which I'm sure is very useful to the visually impaired. **[On the money the dots vary to indicate the value.]**

Instead of actually taking a train into the city, I instead boarded a TerminaLink train in the opposite direction. TerminaLink is a little shuttle train with just three stops: Terminal 1, Terminal 3, and Viscount. The first two stations are located in the parking garages for the terminals the serve (and, by the way, there is no Terminal 2). Viscount (pronounced VIGH-count) is elevated over a street of that name, technically not on airport property. It primarily serves the economy parking area (long term lots and a ramp for airport employees). It's also right next to a hotel and near the airport office parks.

I had scoped things out online and knew that it was about three blocks from Viscount station to the hotel where I was staying. Those turned out to be three very long blocks, and the walk took between ten and fifteen minutes. **[I've learned that distances are often longer than they seem on Google Maps.]** It was not inconvenient, though, and the hotel I'd chosen was far cheaper than anything else remotely near Toronto.

There were no rooms available when I arrived at the Comfort Inn—Pearson Airport. I was able to leave my bag, though, and then walk back to Viscount station. I had a short wait for a TerminalLink train (which typically runs every five minutes), but when I got back to Terminal 1, I was almost immediately able to transfer to a train bound for the city. I boarded, and after just a couple minutes, we set off towards downtown.

While there have been proposals for decades to extend the Toronto subway to the airport, to date it stops well short of there. Instead they spent a huge sum of money to build a train called the UP Express. "UP" is said as a word (the opposite of down), rather than as the initials U.P. That's probably because it has nothing to do with the Union Pacific but instead stands for Union—Pearson Express. It runs on freight tracks owned by Canadian National, and it connects the airport with the downtown train station in 25 minutes. En route it makes two stops at commuter train stations on the west side of the city. While you can buy individual tickets, it's **much** cheaper to use a Presto card. It costs \$6.35 for a one-way trip between the airport and downtown on Presto, and nearly twice that if you buy a physical ticket. It's slightly cheaper to go to the intermediate stations, which is what I mostly did. From them you can catch TTC buses or subways and get all over the city for an additional \$3.50 per ride.

Today I rode the UP Express to Bloor, the last stop before downtown. From there it's a fairly easy transfer to the Dundas West subway station. Toronto's subways are mostly quite crowded, even though service is quite frequent. I managed to find a seat, but there were people standing all the way across the city.

My destination was Kennedy station, the eastern terminus of the crosstown line. Something I don't care for with the Toronto subway is that it's almost entirely underground. There are only occasional surface stretches in a couple of park areas. I like to look out at a city's neighborhoods when I pass through them, but that's definitely not an option in Toronto.

My destination was Kennedy station, the eastern terminus of the #2 subway train. Kennedy (which is named after a local developer rather than the U.S. President) is the gateway to Scarborough, the eastern-most of six formerly independent cities that amalgamated a generation ago to form modern Toronto. While they like to think of themselves as Canada's Brooklyn, Scarborough is really more like Queens. It's a combination of single family homes and residential towers where people from all over the world live peacefully together. It's also the poor stepsister that lives in the shadow of the glitzy city. I'd been to Scarborough once before on a trip with Margaret, and I was looking forward to re-discovering it.

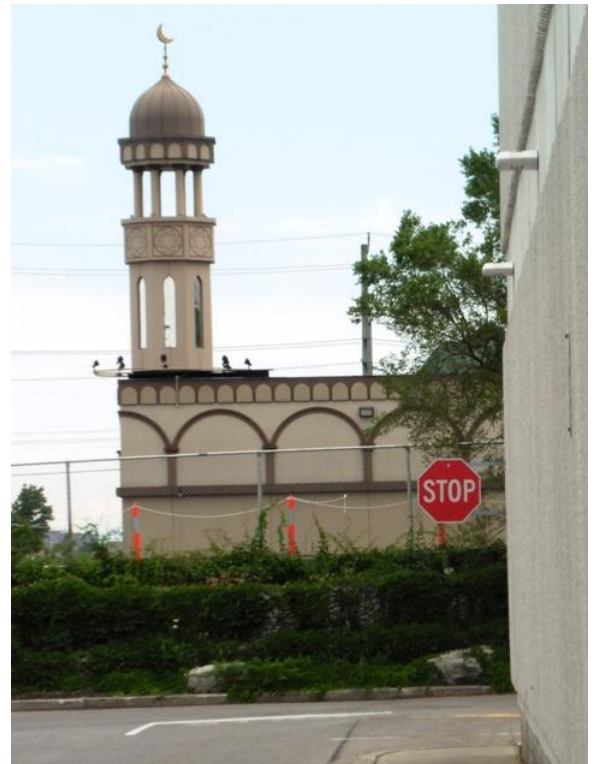
Kennedy, like many of Toronto's transit stations, offers free interchange between subways and buses. The buses stop within the paid area of the station, two levels above the train tracks. **[Something Toronto does extremely well are the seamless transfers between trains and buses. Other cities could definitely take lessons from them.]** At Kennedy you can either take a very long flight of stairs or an elevator up to the bus level. Since my knee was feeling sore, I first waited behind a man in an electric wheelchair for the elevator. It seemed to never be coming, though, so I walked over and very gradually made my way up the stairs. As it turned out both the disabled man and I reached the bus platforms at precisely the same time.



ABOVE: Nando's and Jollibee at Kennedy Commons
RIGHT: Mosque next to Metro supermarket at Kennedy Commons

I caught TTC bus 43, which runs straight north from the subway along Kennedy Road. I rode about half the length of the route, until I came to the Kennedy Commons Shopping Centre, which is just south of the massive highway 401 near the north end of the city.

My first stop was for a very late lunch—and the only thing I'd have to eat all day besides a maple cookie on the airplane. I ended up at Nando's, the global chicken chain that I'd first visited years ago in London. I ordered two chicken kabobs with spicy rice. I also went through an entire liter carafe



of water—which gives you a clue of how hot and dehydrated I was. **[I'd find out later that being overly thirsty is a symptom of diabetic issues.]** I love the flavor of Nando's spicy chicken, and this probably ended up being my favorite meal of the trip.

For dessert I went right next door. Scarborough has Toronto's location of Jollibee, the Filipino fast food giant. I had a peach mango pie and a glass of pineapple juice, and they were delicious. Jollibee is busy at all hours. Fortunately I had to wait just a short time to order, but there was a line out the door by the time I left.

I then made my way across the parking lot. I passed a Chinese grocery, a restaurant supply store, and then a mosque before coming to Metro, a major supermarket chain. I picked up a replacement for my missing toothbrush at Metro, and I also got some juice I'd be drinking over the next few days. **[Juice is another thing that's horrible for diabetics. While we think of it as "healthy", aside from a few vitamins, it's basically just sugar water. I used to drink a ton of juice, but today I almost never touch it.]** I did a bit of browsing at prices around the store as well. While there was certainly a range of prices, on the whole things seemed cheap on this trip. Many things were priced about the same as they would be in the States, which after conversion means there's a 25% discount. For other things the cost seemed like a direct conversion from U.S. dollars. One issue when comparing prices is that almost every Canadian product is taxed at a rate of 12 – 18%, double what the tax typically is at home. There are actually taxes at both the national and provincial level on everything bought in Canada. GST refers to the national Goods and Services Tax, while PST means Provincial Sales Tax. Sometimes these are combined into HST, or Harmonized Sales Tax, and some places (though fewer than in America) also add local taxes—either on everything or on particular bad things like sugary foods or carbonated beverages. It's hard to predict what the tax will be, but it's a safe bet the final price will be way higher than what's shown. **[One of the nicest things about my trip to New Zealand was that while tax is quite high there, it's required that prices reflect the final amount with tax included.]**

After buying groceries I made my way a couple blocks east of Kennedy, to Ellesmere station. On transit maps they show Ellesmere as serving line 3 of the subway. Line 3 isn't really a subway, though. Ellesmere serves the SRT or Scarborough Rapid Transit, a sort of glorified light rail system that has been using tiny people mover cars to shuttle people around the eastern part of the city for the past 35 years. I purposely chose to go to Ellesmere station because I'd read online that it is the least used transit station in the city. Only about 1,700 people pass through Ellesmere station each day, compared to half a million at the Bloor—Yonge subway interchange downtown. While it's located in the middle of an industrial park, Ellesmere does have a quiet and almost pastoral feel to it. **[The Scarborough transit line closed in 2023. They are in the process of extending the subway east beneath the route line 3 originally took. The extension won't be finished until 2030, though, and it also won't stop at intermediate stations like Ellesmere.]**

I took an SRT train back to Kennedy and then rode the subway back to Dundas West. I found the UP Express station with no problem, but I ended up waiting on the wrong platform for my train. The station was actually signed correctly, but I hadn't expected that the northbound and southbound trains would use the same platform. (The other platforms here are mostly used by GO commuter trains.) Eventually I did catch a northbound train, which I rode back out to the airport.

When I got back to Pearson Airport I needed to use the restroom again. There are signs all over the train station indicating that the nearest "washrooms" (the common Canadian euphemism) are in the domestic departures area. Unfortunately, when I got there, I found the men's room was closed for cleaning. I ended up heading to U.S.-bound departures (an entirely different part of the terminal) before I could relieve myself. It does strike me that for a major airport YYZ has surprisingly few toilets.

Eventually I made my way back to the parking ramp, where I caught a TerminaLink train to Viscount. I'm pretty sure the Terminal 3 train station is actually closer to my hotel, but exiting there would require crossing an extremely busy highway. The walk from Viscount was annoying, but at least it was perfectly safe.

I made my way back to the Comfort Inn, retrieved my luggage, and spent a long time checking in. Earlier in the day I'd successfully communicated with Canadian immigrants who had come from various parts of Asia as well as Eastern Europe. The employees at the Comfort Inn were immigrants from the Caribbean. While English was theoretically their native language, there were some major problems in them and me understanding each other. Eventually I got the formalities done, and I was able to make my way back to my room.

While eventually I'd become familiar with more of its quirks, my initial reaction to the Comfort Inn—Pearson Airport was that it was old and tired. The place features long cavernous hallways with grimy red carpet that reminded me of what they had at the Iris Restaurant where I worked in high school. The Iris also came to mind when I looked at the beverage station in the lobby. They served Sanka, those little orange envelopes of decaffeinated coffee. The Iris served those same little coffee packets, though the American version wasn't bilingually labeled. I don't think I'd even thought of Sanka since I graduated from high school, and I was surprised to find that they still even make the stuff.

[This Comfort Inn has since rebranded as a Quality Inn, a fairly common step down in the Choice Hotels ladder. Its recent reviews are generally good, though, so I suspect it has seen renovations since I stayed there.]

They had the same snack and pop machines you'd expect at any hotel, but those were also a blast from the past. While there were bill acceptors on the machines, there were also signs noting they would not accept "plastic money". Canada first introduced polymer bills in 2011, and while paper money is still technically legal tender, absolutely no one uses it today. Why the bill acceptors on those machines weren't updated years ago, I have no clue.

When I reached my room (#131) it was no surprise that it was dark and gloomy. There were actually four lights in the room, one overhead and three table lamps. The bulbs in all of them seemed to be of the minimum possible wattage, though. There was just one tiny window, which looked out at a rental car lot. There was also a brown stain on the ceiling of the bathroom, and the toilet had to be stopped from running by hand.



Website photo of the exterior of the hotel, following its rebranding as a Quality Inn

Clearly the Comfort Inn was not a nice hotel. On the other hand, it was pretty much what I was expecting, and it was by far the cheapest place I could book. They charged just over \$100 Canadian, which worked out to under \$100 U.S. even with taxes added on. **[I checked an equivalent date in 2025, and the best price they offered was Can\$147, which would be about \$102—before tax.]** The other airport hotels were in the \$150 - \$200 range, and downtown the sky was the limit, with standard rooms going for over \$500.

Pearson Airport, by the way, isn't actually in Toronto. Both the airport and this hotel were located in Mississauga (pronounced miss-uh-SAH-guh), which for most people is probably the largest place in Canada they've never heard of. While the place was only founded in 1968, today almost a million people live in Mississauga, and the headquarters to dozens of companies are located there as well. Located just west of the Toronto city limits, you really can't tell where one city ends and the other begins. Mississauga today is the sixth largest city in Canada. It's bigger than places like Winnipeg and Quebec City, and it recently overtook Ottawa for the honor of second largest city in Ontario. **[Winnipeg actually passed Mississauga again on Canada's 2021 census, but Mississauga remains an enormous place nobody's heard of.]**

I settled into my room and just sort of vegetated for the evening. Mostly I watched the CTV News Channel. I'd watched that cable network at Christmas, and it was good to see it again. There really isn't any true news network in America these days; it's all politics that you can agree or disagree with. In Canada, though, you can watch CTV for an hour and pretty much know everything that's happening around the world. Why that model can't work in the States is beyond me. I'd far rather see actual journalism than talking heads. **[In the intervening years American TV has only gotten more political and less of a source of actual news.]**

It began raining while I watched the news, but I barely noticed it. Eventually I turned out the lights and went to bed.

TUESDAY, JULY 23

TORONTO AREA, ONTARIO

The bed at the Comfort Inn was comfortable, and I actually slept well for the first time in a while. While I got ready for the day I turned on CTV News again. The big story this morning was that Boris Johnson had become the new British Prime Minister. I remember when Margaret and I visited London. Johnson was the mayor at that time, and his picture was posted everywhere—much like the benevolent dictator pictures you used to see in Communist countries. Johnson is honestly not very photogenic. He's been compared to Donald Trump in that regard, and he also looks like he belongs on the Soviet politburo. It will be interesting to see how he works as a national leader.

Today also brought updates in what would become **THE** Canadian news story during this trip—the murders of tourists from Canada, the U.S., and Australia in far northern British Columbia. This story caught my interest for a variety of reasons. The tourists were killed along the Alaska and Cassiar Highways, both of which my family had taken on our trip up north back when I was in high school. The primary suspects were from Port Alberni, a town on Vancouver Island that my brother Steve and I had visited back in the '80s. While they'd been searching all over western Canada, the focus ended up being the town of Gillam, Manitoba. Margaret and I went through there on the way back from Churchill a few years back. As I write this, there's still no resolution in the case. The police had given up on Gillam and were turning their sight to northern Ontario when an abandoned rowboat was found beside a river near Gillam. Now many people believe that the suspects drowned in the river, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have sent divers to try to look for their bodies. **[Eventually the bodies of the two suspects were found in the scrub forest near Gillam. Simultaneously with committing suicide they posted a confession video on social media, though they didn't offer any motive for the crimes.]**



Suspects in the B.C. murders

Another of this morning's news stories involved heat warnings all over Canada. It's not really surprising to find temperatures in the 90s and even triple digits in the Prairie Provinces, but those temperatures are unexpected in the Maritimes and especially in the Northwest Territories. They were expecting highs near 35 Celsius (95 Fahrenheit) in Yellowknife today, which would eclipse that city's all-time high temperature.

The best aspect of the Comfort Inn was probably their breakfast. They set up a buffet in their restaurant, which serves pizza and Greek food for lunch and dinner. I had scrambled eggs, Danish pastry, blueberry yogurt, decent coffee and juice, and half of a do-it-yourself waffle. The main thing I passed on was weird sausage links that resembled bratwurst more than breakfast sausage.

The mix of people in the breakfast room was very ethnically diverse. About a third were Caucasian tourists, most of whom appeared to be from Canada or Europe rather than from the U.S. There's lots of Asian people anywhere you go in Canada, but here there were also a lot of Latino guests, plus tourists who appeared to have come from Africa. It was close to the most diverse clientele I've ever seen at a hotel.

Paul had e-mailed me with the Garrigan softball team's results from state (not good, but making it to state is the real honor), and I spent a while updating the school website with that information. Then, shortly after 8am, I set off for the day. The walk to Viscount station went quicker this morning, and I was pleased to catch a TerminalLink train almost instantly. Unfortunately the UP Express departed just as I arrived at Terminal 1, so I had a fifteen-minute wait for the next one.

The train downtown was very crowded. In addition to tourists and airport workers, it was clear there were also lots of people who lived in the northwest suburbs and were using UP Express to commute downtown. I managed to get a seat, but it was so crowded that the ticket inspectors couldn't make it around to verify that people had paid. I had properly tapped my Presto card, but I could have ridden for free on this train if I'd wanted to—and I suspect some people did. **[Indeed that may be precisely the reason some commuters take it.]**

This time I rode all the way downtown. When I got to Union Station, I scoped out the place to see where I'd need to go when I left Toronto. Then I made my way a couple blocks east to one of downtown Toronto's biggest attractions, the Hockey Hall of Fame.



The Stanley Cup – Hockey Hall of Fame

It was interesting that the whole time I was at the Hockey Hall of Fame I kept crossing paths with a kid who could have been a dead ringer for one of our athletes at Garrigan. Both this kid and Marcus Plathe are extremely tall, and both have scraggly blond hair in the same style. Marcus is best known for basketball and baseball, but if hockey were a thing in small-town Iowa, he'd probably be donning skates. It was weird to keep seeing a kid who could have been his double. **[I inserted a picture of Marcus above that appears in an archive saluting the Class of 2020 on our school website. It's a screenshot that was taken during the COVID-19 pandemic. Marcus' mother is an elementary teacher, and her son was one of many people she organized to do "virtual read-alouds" for the little kids on Facebook in the time when everything was online.]**

While hockey is far from my favorite sport, I've enjoyed the few games I've been to. **[I went to another hockey game in Winnipeg last year, and I enjoyed it as well.]** I also very much enjoyed the hall of fame. Located in the basement of a downtown shopping mall, it occupies an enormous space. They begin with several galleries that trace the history of hockey—from the origins of the game to the ups and downs of the NHL. There was also a huge exhibit on international hockey competition, including the Olympics and several contests I'd never heard of. There were displays on minor hockey (from the "Timbits" teams that are the equivalent of Little League (the teams are named after the doughnut holes sold at Tim Hortons) to the farm system of professional teams that feed the NHL. There were features on many of the sport's greatest players, including an interesting contrast between Gordie Howe and Wayne Gretzky,

who were the stand-outs of two very different eras in the sport. There's also a large interactive area, where you can test your hockey skills. It shouldn't come as a surprise that I completely skipped that.

The actual Hall of Fame is a temple-like room upstairs from the main museum. It includes a book inscribed with the names of all the athletes who have officially been inducted, surrounded by the trophies for various hockey awards. By far the most famous of these is the Stanley Cup, the traveling trophy that is awarded to the top team in hockey each year since 1892. The Stanley Cup is a living trophy that changes every year, since the names of the players on every team that has won the cup are engraved on it. Originally the Stanley Cup was a relatively small silver bowl, but it has grown several times as new tiers have been added to the bottom. Today the cup itself is about four feet tall, and they have it placed on a pedestal that towers over the visitors who gawk at it. It really is quite impressive.

I finished at the hall of fame by browsing through their extremely overpriced gift shop. Even the postcards there were dear, though I did pick up a few of them. Then I exited into the main shopping mall. I shopped at a Shopper's Drug Mart (Canada's answer to Walgreen's), where I searched for Q-Tips. I was hoping to find a travel-sized package, but the smallest they had was 400 swabs. I bought it, and it certainly makes a curious souvenir. I also picked up a bottle of Orangina, a citrus soda made in France. The name implies that it's orange, but it actually contains lemon and grapefruit juice as well (not to mention carbonated water and corn syrup). It was rapidly becoming quite hot outside, and the tart beverage was most refreshing.

I got lost leaving the mall and ended up going about three blocks out of my way before finally returning to Union Station. I caught the subway north to St. Clair station and then transferred to a westbound streetcar. I got off at Spadina Avenue and walked south through an extremely posh neighborhood to my next destination, Casa Loma.



LEFT: Exterior of Casa Loma

RIGHT: Gilded bed and zebra skin rug at Casa Loma

Casa Loma is a mansion built at the turn of the last century by a banker and former military commander, Sir Henry Pellatt. It is modeled on various British castles and is pretentious beyond belief. Pellatt only lived there a few years before the place was seized for unpaid taxes. Today it is operated as a joint venture between the city of Toronto and a private historical trust. Admission is pricey (\$25 Canadian), but it is an interesting place to see.

Something I didn't care for was that the preferred method of visiting Casa Loma was with an audio tour. I'm not a fan of those; I'd much rather read from either signs or a brochure. **[I also didn't want to pay an additional fee to listen to recordings on headphones.]** Unfortunately just about the only printed explanation they had was the names and purposes of the various rooms. I learned much more about the place by reading its Wikipedia article later, but it would have been nice to have more information available to read while I was there.

A couple of food vendors had set up in the parking lot outside Casa Loma, and I stopped to get some lemon gelato before I left. **[If you note all the sugary treats I got on this trip, it's no doubt I'd be facing a diabetic crisis soon afterwards.]** At five bucks it was no bargain, but it really was quite tasty.



Top of the Baldwin Steps – Davenport Park, Toronto

Apaches ever made it into Canada. The place combines the sort of futuristic décor you might expect from the '60s with "retro" tributes like a mosaic of Marilyn Monroe.



Apache Burger – Toronto

saying that there was a water pipe problem and that the water would be off until 10pm. That didn't really bother me, because I was planning to be gone **[until about that time]** anyway. It meant I'd have to use the toilet at the airport rather than in my hotel room. I relaxed in the air conditioning for a bit and then set off for the evening.

My destination tonight was Rogers Centre, the stadium formerly known as SkyDome where Canada's last remaining Major League Baseball team plays. On a map Rogers Centre (named after Canada's main cell phone provider) appears to be right next to Union Station, but it's actually a long, complicated walk to get from one to the other. It was about twenty minutes after getting off the train that I finally made it to the entrance gate. I was glad that I'd allowed some extra time.

At first I thought there'd be almost no one at this game. People trickled in until the fifth inning, though, and eventually the place was about two-thirds full. I was intrigued to see that Toronto fans don't feel compelled to wear the team's registered merchandise. Maybe a fourth of the fans had Blue Jays caps, but pretty much no one had jerseys or

Casa Loma is located on a cliff that is much higher than the land below. There's a break in Spadina Avenue there, with the two parts connected by the Baldwin Steps. One hundred ten steps wind down through Davenport Park from Casa Loma to a trendy neighborhood at the foot. Casa Loma's website suggests that visitors coming by transit go to DuPont subway station and then walk up the steps to the mansion. I can assure you it's much easier to take the streetcar to the top and then leave by walking **down** the steps. I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have wanted to ascend them, but going down the Baldwin Steps at a leisurely pace was no problem.

I caught a westbound train at DuPont station and rode clear to the end of the line at Kipling. They were building condos around Kipling station, and they'd blocked off the area so that it was not at all pedestrian friendly. I did manage to make my way through, though, and eventually I found my next destination, Apache Burger. This is a local ma 'n' pa burger joint that has been at this location since 1969. What the origin of its name is, I have no clue, since this is Iroquois country and I don't think the

I ordered a bacon cheeseburger, onion rings, and a chocolate malt. I ended up with far more food than I wanted and more than I could finish. If I'd ordered their namesake burger, I don't think I could have fit the thing in my mouth. **[I like burgers, but I do find that far too many are bigger than they need to be. My go-to at Burger King is the Whopper Junior, and I wish specialty burger joints would offer similar things.]** The food was decent, but I don't know that I'd bother going there again. I've had better burgers for less money elsewhere.

Kipling is right on the Toronto—Mississauga border, and an advantage of having come here was that I could take a bus straight back to the airport. Bus 900 runs from Kipling right up to the terminals, with a fare about half that of the UP Express. The bus wouldn't have been practical for most of my trips, but it did save me some money on this trip.

When I got back to the Comfort Inn there were drop clothes scattered all over the hallways. When I went to my room, I found they'd slipped a notice under my door



Rogers Centre – Toronto

even T-shirts supporting the team. There were easily more shirts supporting the Toronto Raptors (who recently won the NBA championship) than the Blue Jays. There were also a fair number of Montreal Expos caps, and that team became the Washington Nationals fourteen years ago.

While it caught me a bit off guard, it shouldn't have been a surprise that they did a double National Anthem. The same woman (apparently someone known in the country world) first sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" and then followed up with "O Canada". Since all the possible opponents are American (including the Cleveland Indians tonight), I assume that's what they do at the start of every home game.

While supposedly there are some interesting concessions at Rogers Center, the choices in the upper deck are pretty sparse. I bought a bag of peanuts (\$7.50 Canadian or \$5.65 U.S.—pretty standard ballpark prices). These were "lightly" salted—too lightly for my taste. I nursed them through the game, but I didn't feel bad about throwing the leftovers out afterwards. The peanuts were it for my purchases. I didn't even get the souvenir cup of pop I usually do at ballgames, since the only soft drinks they had for sale were in plastic bottles.

I'd never heard of a single player on the field, though some of them (like Cavan Biggio, Bo Bichette, and Vladimir Guerrero, Jr.) were the sons of guys who were big in the majors twenty or thirty years ago. It was honestly a rather dull game, and the Blue Jays were down 1 – 0 when I left at the stretch. I'd find out later that they'd come back to win 2 – 1 in extra innings.

As I walked back to Union Station I saw an electronic billboard advertising Toys Я Us. I checked later and found that while the U.S. company is completely out of business, its Canadian subsidiary lives on and is still found in malls all over the true north.

While the automated announcements on the UP Express didn't work, the ride back to the airport was mostly uneventful. The walk from Viscount station to the hotel was badly lit and honestly kind of creepy, but I made it back without incident. Unfortunately when I got back to the Comfort Inn, I found that the construction had done more than just shutting off the water for a few hours. A large amount of water had leaked into the bathroom and closet area of my room. Among other things it had gotten into a bag of clothes I'd set on the floor, making them all totally wet. The carpet was also soaked, and I used all of the towels in the bathroom to mop up what I could there.

I went to the front desk to let them know about the problem. The clerk there was sympathetic, but not really very helpful. All she really did to help out was give me some replacement towels. I almost instantly got those wet as well trying to create a dry path from the bed to the bathroom. I then settled in to bed and managed to get a couple hours of sleep.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 24 **TORONTO AREA, ONTARIO**

It was only a couple of hours of rest, though. When I woke up I heard water dripping. Turning on the lights I saw there was a big pocket of water in the ceiling that was continuously leaking down to the floor. A similar pocket in the bathroom had caused the flooding I found when I returned from the ballgame. It really didn't feel safe mixing water and electricity, so I gathered up all my stuff and headed to the front desk once again. A different employee was working, and she was much more helpful than the first one had been. She first took my wet bag of clothes and agreed to have it done with the hotel laundry for free. Then she assigned me to a different room. She gave me the key

to Room 226. Getting there was odd, because the whole second floor is set up weirdly. Instead of one continuous floor, I went up a long flight of stairs and then went down about half a level to the hallway where my room was. I've never seen anything quite like that.

Technically this property is listed as a Comfort Inn **and Suites**, and Room 226 is why they get to tag "suites" on to their name. It was obviously once two separate rooms, and today I'd bet they market to families or perhaps two couples traveling together. There's only one standard bathroom, but there's sleeping for up to six. The main room includes a king bed and a sofa sleeper. Then there's a sort of room within the room that has an additional queen-sized bed. It was honestly kind of an awkward room, and it was certainly more than I needed. At least it was dry, though.

I got a few hours of decent sleep, though honestly nowhere near a full night's worth. When I got up I realized that somehow in the process of moving I'd lost the key to the new room. So I made yet another trip to the desk to get that replaced. That also allowed me to confirm that they had indeed put my clothes in with the laundry and that they'd be delivered to the room once they were done. The day staff seemed quite a bit more helpful than those who worked at night, and it did seem things were working out.

[This was one of the strangest experiences I've ever had at a hotel, and hopefully it's not one I'll repeat anywhere else. My bet is that it was new to the staff as well, so it wasn't really surprising that they didn't know how they should respond.]

The items on the breakfast bar were the same as yesterday. There was a different host today, though, and he was definitely not as concerned with keeping things filled or clean. Several items were exhausted, and there were spills all around the counter that made the meal less than appetizing.



Water pocket in the ceiling of my room

I sort of plodded walking to the station today. I was very tired, and things just sort of moved in slow motion. It was kind of annoying to find when I got to Viscount that they were running only one TerminalLink train because of maintenance, so service was much less frequent than usual. I did eventually get to Terminal 1, and I transferred to the same UP Express train I was on last night, complete with no announcements. Today I got off at Weston station, which is about halfway between the airport and downtown. There I caught TTC bus 52, which I rode eastward to Lawrence West station. Across the aisle from me on the bus was a family of plus-sized people who were headed to the Canada's Wonderland amusement park. While they were Canadian, they could have been Central Casting's version of loud, crude Americans. It certainly made for a colorful ride.

Like most of Toronto's subway stations, Lawrence West has a convenience store inside it. The fat family stopped there, and each of the kids (plus mom and dad) picked up something to drink and something to snack on. They inspired me to also stop and pick up a can of grape Crush. It's difficult to find grape pop in the States these days, but it remains a popular flavor in Canada. **[Since my diabetic diagnosis, I've come to appreciate that Kwik Trip sells sugar-free grape pop in their own brand. It can be hard to find diet pop that isn't cola, so that's become something I frequently buy while traveling.]**



"Selfie" in Toronto's Graffiti Alley

I took the subway down to Spadina station And then caught a streetcar down to Queen Street. I stopped briefly for a McDonalds smoothie. (At \$2 each—\$1.50 U.S., they're one of the best values around). Then I made my way to my first destination of the day, Graffiti Alley. While there's graffiti all over Toronto, the city has set aside a three-block area on the near west side of the city as an outdoor art gallery for what otherwise would be vandalism. Some of the displays here are very well done, while others just look like graffiti. It is quite interesting, though.

I caught another streetcar and rode east along Queen Street through a rapidly gentrifying area of the city. My next stop was in the heart of downtown, at Nathan Phillips Square. This enormous public space is located in front of the Toronto City Hall and a little ways south of the provincial legislature. The surrounding area is rather sterile concrete skyscrapers from the '70s, and this could be a rather ugly square. What rescues it are fountains that soften all the bare



Three more artworks from Graffiti Alley



concrete. Those fountains apparently convert to skating rinks in winter. It's actually quite a nice park. **[You'll notice the enormous letters spelling out "TORONTO" in the picture of Nathan Phillips Square at right, a larger version of which is shown on the previous page. Toronto was one of the first places to install such a sign. Today they're absolutely everywhere. Indeed you can see letters spelling out "ALGONA" less than a mile from my home.]**



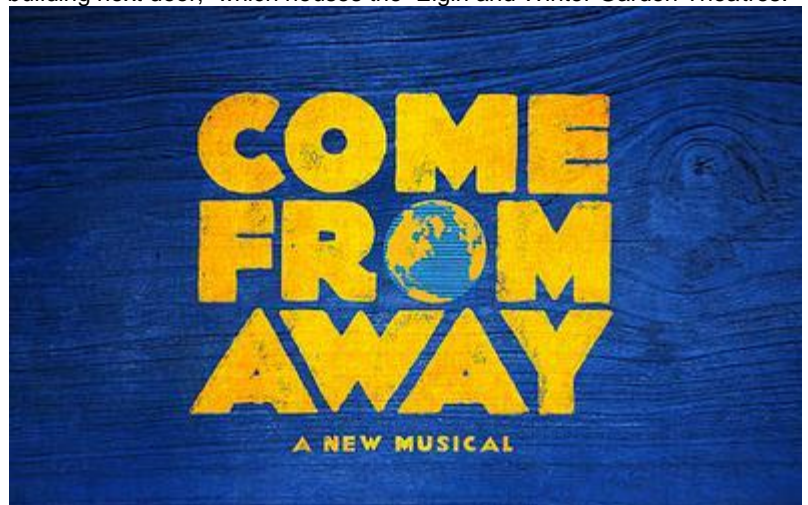
Nathan Phillips Square – Downtown Toronto

About a dozen food trucks had set up shop at Nathan Phillips Square. I scoped them out, but nothing any of them was serving looked all that appetizing. **[In addition to offering odd menus, these—like pretty much all food trucks I've encountered—seemed seriously overpriced.]** In the end my "lunch" ended up being another frozen beverage, this one sold by the concessionaire for an area that serves the skaters. I ordered a strawberry banana smoothie. It turned out to be more of a slush than a smoothie, but it was tasty nonetheless.

I spent half an hour or so relaxing at Nathan Phillips Square. One interesting feature there is a collection of pianos that people who are passing by can play. I banged out a verse of "Ode to Joy" **[about the only song I can play from memory]** and listened to much more talented people playing far more complicated selections. I also enjoyed watching kids scaring the pigeons who flocked around the square. It was really quite enjoyable.

Eventually I caught another streetcar and rode over to the corner of Queen and Yonge. I went into the subway station there and added fare to my Presto card. Then I made my way to the building next door, which houses the Elgin and Winter Garden Theatres. I had bought a ticket to a matinee at the Elgin, and I was pleased to be able to enter right away, though it would be a long wait before curtain time.

When I searched to see what was on in Toronto while I was here, one of the main things that came up was the musical *Come from Away*. This show was written and first performed in Toronto. It's since become one of the hottest tickets on Broadway, and now it's back in Toronto to start a tour around North America. **[Not long ago I was looking for events in Chicago and the Twin Cities, and a second touring company is making the rounds of those cities this year.]** *Come from Away* follows the aftermath of 9/11. You may recall that after the terrorist attacks, American airspace was closed. No planes were allowed to fly or land in the U.S.A. There were more than 200 international flights headed to America that day, and almost all of them ended up landing in Canada.



Come from Away tells of how the town of Gander, Newfoundland welcomed 7,000 unexpected guests when 38 planes were diverted to the airport there. (The title, by the way, is Newfoundland slang for someone from outside the island.) Reviewers have described *Come from Away* as "a cathartic reminder of the capacity for human kindness in even the darkest of times", "the triumph of humanity over hate", and "the perfect antidote for Trump's xenophobia".

I had read the book on which *Come from Away* was based (or, more accurately, I'd listened to the audiobook) earlier this summer, and I'm glad I did. The show is presented as a series of vignettes, and of course most of the story is told through music. I think I would have found it difficult to follow if I didn't know what to look for. Having prepared in advance, I found it a thoroughly enjoyable show.

The music from *Come from Away* is interesting. It mixes the traditional show tunes you could find in any show with traditional Newfoundland music that has its base in sea shanties and Irish folk songs. The orchestra used a number of unique instruments, most of which I'm not familiar with. The overall sound was really lovely.



Today's performance was a sellout, and everyone seemed to enjoy it immensely. My seat was in a formal box, clear at the side of the floor level. At \$37 (\$28 U.S., including taxes and fees) it was extremely good value. **[Unlike the U.S., the Canadian government subsidizes the fine arts, which makes going to the theatre quite a bit cheaper there.]** I was close enough to the stage to see expressions on the actors' faces, and while there was an overhang from the balcony (which made the seat cheaper), it really didn't get in the way at all.

Following the performance I went next door to the subway station. I paused briefly at the convenience store there to buy a bottle of orange juice. This cost \$4 (\$3 U.S.), which made it one of the most expensive drinks I bought on the trip. It was tasty, though.

I took the subway back to Lawrence West station. From there I caught a bus to Dufferin Street and walked north a couple blocks. Inspired by the show, my destination was a fast food chain based in Newfoundland, Mary Brown's Chicken 'n' Taters. Margaret and I had seen Mary Brown's when we'd visited Newfoundland back in the '90s, but we never actually stopped there. In the intervening years the chain has expanded across Canada, so I figured I'd check out what they offered. It was interesting that there were signs all over Mary Brown's proclaiming that they were celebrating their fiftieth anniversary.

Mary Brown's mostly sells whole pieces of fried chicken, but they also serve a chicken breast sandwich called the Big Mary. That's what I had. It was tasty, though honestly quite a bit too big. I wish they had a selection called the Little Mary, since that's what I really wanted. I also ordered a portion of their famous "taters". These are skin-on potatoes that are cut vertically through the center into six or eight wedges each. The potatoes are dredged in spicy breadcrumbs and then deep fried. They were honestly quite a bit tastier than the chicken sandwich, which gets most of its flavor from "special sauce". I don't know that I'll seek out Mary Brown's in the future, but it was interesting to see what they served. **[I ate at another Mary Brown's in Winnipeg a year ago, and I my reaction wasn't a lot different from this one.]**

It was very hot out this afternoon, and I was sweating profusely after just the short walk back to the bus stop. I waited nearly twenty minutes before a bus finally showed up, with no immediate explanation for the tardiness. I was pleased when it finally did show, so I could settle into the air conditioning. Once we were on our way, we saw the reason for the delay. Another bus had crashed a few blocks ahead of where I was. Both emergency vehicles and TTC bureaucrats were on hand investigating things.

I rode back to Weston station, where I saw the UP Express pass overhead as I got off the bus. That meant I had a fifteen-minute wait on the hot platform for the next train. The UP Express ride was uneventful until we got to the airport station. That station has platform edge doors, a separate set of doors that block the platform from the tracks until the train is in the station. They normally open together with the train doors, sort of like what happens when an elevator reaches its destination floor. Well, for some reason the platform edge doors didn't open at Terminal 1, and we were stuck on the train for about five minutes while they figured out how to get around the automatic system. I was very glad when I could get off and make my way back to the hotel.

When I returned to my room I was glad to see my clothes neatly folded and laid out on the couch. There was actually a bit of a silver lining in the flood. I'd brought along a minimal amount of clothes, with the intention of doing laundry in hotel sinks at least twice. The first of those clothes washes was essentially done for me, and it was nice not to have to hang wet clothes all over the room.

I bought some pop from the hotel vending machine. In a way it was good that they didn't accept plastic money, because this gave me a chance to get rid of some of the change I'd accumulated. It's amazing how much value a pocketful of coins has in a place where \$1 and \$2 coins are common. I had nearly twenty dollars worth of coins at this point, and even after buying two cans of pop, there was still a lot to go. **[I'll be getting even more coins on my upcoming trip to Japan. The lowest value banknote there is 1000 yen (\$6.50), and there are coins valued up to 500 yen (\$3.25).]**



"Illegal" picture of the orchestra during the curtain call of *Come from Away*



Cancer quarter

but then hit the hay fairly early.

One coin I didn't spend was a special commemorative quarter for breast cancer awareness. This coin features a plastic inlay in the center with a pink ribbon logo. Canada has issued many similar coins with these plastic inlays in recent years, but this was the first commemorative coin I'd come across. Even the normal "loonies" have plastic on them now, with images of a maple leaf embedded in the brass body of the coin.

I'd be leaving tomorrow, and I'd originally planned to just walk back to Viscount station as I'd done so many times. I noticed a sign-up for the airport shuttle, though, and I figured I might try that instead. So I added my name to the 6:30 shuttle departure before making my way back to the room. I watched some TV for a while,

THURSDAY, JULY 25

MISSISSAUGA, ONTARIO TO MONTREAL, QUEBEC

I was up around 5:30 this morning. I showered and packed fairly quickly and was down in the lobby shortly after 6am. There was some complication at check-out, since they had to merge the two rooms into one account. I was charged the original rate I'd booked for the suite, though, and there were no extra charges of any sort.

Breakfast at the Comfort Inn doesn't begin until 7:00, so I'd had to skip my freebie this morning. About twenty after six they confirmed who was taking the shuttle, and I was scolded for not crossing my name off the list to show I'd arrived. The shuttle actually left about five minutes early. The driver was a middle-aged Latino man, and he drove like an utter lunatic. We made a U-turn on a busy street and cut across places that weren't really roads. We did make it to Terminal 1 of the airport very quickly, though—much faster than if I'd walked and taken the TerminaLink train.

I had an uneventful ride on the UP Express and then found my way to the Via Rail business lounge ("salon d'affaires" in French) at Union Station. My ticket today was in business class, and this was one of many perks that came with that. As I arrived someone was attempting to change a ticket to a later train. The lounge attendant regretted to tell him that every train today was sold out, something that rarely happens. I checked the board, and indeed the French word "complet" appeared next to every departure today.

Via's business lounges are nice, though they're a step down from what Amtrak offers and are nothing at all in comparison to an airline lounge. The Toronto lounge was spotlessly clean and brightly lit, and they offered a wide range of leather furniture. There was also free wi-fi, but that is provided throughout Union Station. They also play classical music in the background, which adds an elegant touch. They have coffee, tea, and bottles of pop, juice, and water available for free, though there's a fairly limited selection of the beverages. There's no food at all. Amtrak at least offers simple snacks appropriate to the time of day. It would have been nice if Via had at least something to munch on.

I spent about an hour in the business lounge. In addition to enjoying a liquid breakfast, I read through a few magazines. *Toronto Life* had an interesting article on the lack of affordable housing in the city. There are new condos everywhere in Toronto, but the lowest prices for them are around half a million dollars. There's almost no affordable rental property, so the vast majority of newcomers end up in rooming houses. The going rate for a single room in a rooming house is apparently \$750 a month (\$1000 is typical when two roommates share a room), and many of them are not well maintained. The landlords note that this is cheaper than equivalent lodging in Hong Kong or London, but it seems absurdly high to me. **[Affordable housing is an increasing problem in cities around the world as governments cater to real estate moguls instead of to the bulk of people they're supposed to be serving.]**

They announced our train was ready for boarding at 8:15. The boarding process was awkward, though I'm pretty sure it would have been worse if I'd have been in coach. One thing that is very nice on Via is that they have assigned seats for all passengers. That means people aren't rushing to claim a seat, and there's not the awkward situation where lots of individual passengers have positioned themselves on the aisle with their luggage by the window. **[That happens all the time on Amtrak, and it's one of my least favorite things about taking the train in the States.]**

My ticket was for seat 7-S in Car #1. The good thing about this was that it was a singleton seat in a 2-1 configuration. The bad part was that the seat faced backwards. Via seems to set up most of its cars with both forward and rear-facing seats. **[Newer Amtrak train cars (which are made by a Canadian company) have the same configuration.]** I suppose that makes it easy to turn the train around when it reaches its destination. It's hard for me to believe that very many passengers actually like sitting backwards, though.

Something very nice about Via's business class cars is that there's lots of luggage storage in them. Luggage space is at a premium in business class on Amtrak, but on Via there are lots of choices for bags. There's a closed storage area above all the seats, much like the overhead bins on a large aircraft. They also have luggage racks at each end of the car. I put my main bag above the seat and kept the little book bag that supplemented it with me. **[I think the new Amtrak cars also have improved luggage storage, though the overhead area is open.]**

We left right on time at 8:35 and made our way eastward. For most of its length Via's *Corridor* train runs right along Lake Ontario. Much of the landscape is industrial, but there are some beautiful views as well. The route mostly parallels highway 401 (the expressway that is essentially Interstate 100). The train tracks are closer to the water, though, so we had the better view.



View of Lake Ontario from Via train #52

While the station lounge was not as nice as Amtrak, the on-train service in business class was much nicer. Almost immediately after leaving we had a beverage service, where I enjoyed cranberry juice and some rather nasty coffee. After that the steward came around with hot towelettes.

As we approached Oshawa, the first stop east of Toronto, they served breakfast. I had raisin wheat French toast, scrambled eggs, bacon (which was fatty and undercooked), a lovely fruit salad, and a bagel—plus orange juice and more bad coffee. A few minutes after we'd finished the breakfast service, the steward came around again with very formally presented tic-tacs. Later still they served complimentary wine, beer, and mixed drinks. My stomach wasn't feeling the best, though, so I just had ginger ale.

I had my cell phone with me, and it amused me that as we neared Oshawa the clock on the phone finally switched to Eastern Time. I'd been in the Eastern Time Zone since just minutes after leaving O'Hare, but the phone hadn't changed the whole time I was in Toronto. Normally cell phones get a time reading when they lock onto different towers. American phones (particularly prepaid phones like my Tracfone) don't normally use Canadian cell phone towers, though. I'm not sure how the phone finally realized it was in the wrong time zone.

It's honestly kind of annoying that the Tracfone won't access Canadian cell towers. That means that I can't send or receive texts at all in Canada, I can't use cellular data (which is the main thing I do with my phone), and the only phone calls I can make are to 911 **[which fortunately I didn't have to do on this trip]**. Basically the phone is useless unless I have a wi-fi connection. That's fine at a hotel or a fast food place, but it would be nice to access Google maps while I'm walking down the street—and that's impossible in Canada. It surprises me they don't make a deal with Rogers or Bell Canada to re-sell phone minutes and data at a higher rate. If they'd sell minutes or megabytes used in Canada at a 3–1, I'm sure they'd make money, and they'd keep customers like me happy. That's more or less how pay-as-you-go cell providers do things, and there's no reason prepaids couldn't use that model as well. **[Some prepaid companies (Mint Mobile, for instance) do exactly that, but Tracfone still offers no service originating from foreign countries. In preparing for the trip to New Zealand I bought a travel phone in which I can install foreign SIM cards, and I used that on my trip to Winnipeg a year ago. It also worked well in New Zealand, and I'm planning to use it in Japan as well. It can be a bit of a chore to install a foreign SIM card, but once it's there, using cell service abroad is easy enough.]**

I used the restroom after breakfast, and it was enormous. It was clearly designed for handicap access, and I think you could get a motorized wheelchair in there, in addition to its user. The bathroom was also immaculate, though I'd expect that to be the case in business class.

The announcements on this train were bilingual, though it was clear the crew's native language was English rather than French. The English announcements were rapid and chatty, while the French ones were said slowly, clearly, and by the book. Speakers of both languages should have understood them clearly, though.

Technically the train I was on was two trains in one. When we left Toronto trains 52 and 62 were part of the same consist. Train 52 (which I was on) was headed for Ottawa, while train 62 went to Montreal. The two trains split at Kingston (where Lake Ontario ends and the St. Lawrence River begins) to continue to their separate destinations. I was actually going to Montreal, but it was cheaper to book a routing via Ottawa. Since the train was sold out, I couldn't really switch at the last minute.

I was curious about news from home, so I connected with the wi-fi and went to algonaradio.com. Instead of getting the website for radio station KLGA, I instead got an announcement that the site had been blocked by Via Rail. The pop-up said, "Our network works

best with basic internet or e-mail.” I assume they thought I was intending to stream the radio broadcast, which isn’t the case. KLGA has written articles of their news and sports stories, and I was just planning to scan through them. I’d have to do that some other time, though. **[Honestly, the bandwidth used for streaming audio isn’t much, and it’s kind of surprising they’d block it.]**

When we turned away from the lake, the rest of the trip was honestly pretty dull. From Kingston to Ottawa it’s mostly farmland, with occasional stands of forest. It might as well be Indiana or Illinois. The tracks follow the Rideau Canal, which I’d seen last Christmas. Even the water isn’t all that pretty, though.

The excellent service we’d had kind of disappeared after Kingston. I think the galley they use to serve business class must be in the Montreal section of the train, because we didn’t get lunch or even a snack or another drink service after we turned north. I’d planned on having all my meals on the train today, though there really wouldn’t be much problem in eating during the layover in Ottawa. **[Given the length of the journey, it is a bit surprising that they didn’t even offer a boxed lunch or snacks on the section from Kingston to Ottawa.]**

Like Amtrak, Via Rail’s schedule is at the mercy of freight rails (mostly CN). We had been told several times that there were delays due to “congestion”, which of course means we were waiting for freight trains to pass. These kept compounding until we were just over an hour late by the time we reached Ottawa. When I’d booked my ticket, Via’s computer had actually recommended a connection that would have ended up being just five minutes with the delay. I’m glad I opted for the later train so I didn’t have to worry about that.

Tremblay Station in Ottawa was crowded and chaotic. Eventually I did manage to find the business lounge there, though. The lounge was also very crowded, but I was able to leave my bags with the attendant so I could set out exploring.

There’s a light rail station right next door to the Via Rail station in Ottawa. However, the light rail line that was a year behind schedule when I was here last Christmas still isn’t open in July. Supposedly they are done building everything now, but they need four weeks of continuous testing before they can actually open for business. Right now they’re hoping things will be ready by Labour Day. **[The Confederation line of the light rail did open in the fall of 2019, but it was plagued by problems the following winter. In the past six years they have managed to get things running normally, and today things seem to be working well. They recently expanded the system so the O-Train directly serves the Ottawa airport.]**

Since light rail was not an option, I walked up to a bus stop on the nearest street. I’d find out later that the bus actually stopped right next to the train station as well, but it was no big deal to walk to the street. While I was waiting, a Chinese girl with limited English skills asked me whether she should wait at this stop or the one across the street for a bus to go to the University of Ottawa. Having stayed at a hotel right next to UOttawa at Christmas, my instincts told me that the stop across the street was the correct choice. I was glad there was a map in the bus shelter to confirm that, though.

I took bus 62 a couple miles east on a route that mostly followed the access road for a freeway. I transferred at St. Laurent station and rode bus 19 two stops north to a ratty old shopping center. My destination was the third location I’d been to of the Canadian discount chain Giant Tiger. **[I’d go to another in Winnipeg last summer.]**

Giant Tiger’s prices are cheap compared to pretty much anything else, and it’s easily the cheapest place to shop in Canada. I bought a polo shirt for \$8 (\$6 U.S.), and everything else was similarly inexpensive. I purchased some Pepsi, a package of pita bread, and tons of sweet and salty snacks, and I ended up with almost \$30 in change from a \$50 bill.

I had planned to get another smoothie from a 24-hour McDonalds in the same little shopping center. Unfortunately, while they’re open around the clock, the only access to the restaurant is via a drive-through. Since they didn’t want walk-in business, they didn’t get mine.

I crossed the street, and almost immediately a bus stopped. This, like all Ottawa’s buses, used the same Presto card I’d gotten in Toronto for fare payment. I’ve wondered for years why different cities can’t use a unified system for paying transit fares. Ontario has proven it’s possible, and it’s high time other places adapt it. I actually paid just one single fare for all the buses I took in Ottawa. You get automatic transfers to unlimited other vehicles in Ottawa within a two-hour time frame, so most of my Presto taps were charged nothing. (Toronto, on the other hand, charges you a new fare each time unless you make your transfer within the paid area of a station.)

St. Laurent station (which right now mostly serves the busway, but will soon serve light rail as well) is located next to a mall of the same name. I spent a while browsing around there. The only store I actually bought anything at was Dollarama, where I picked up a few more snacks. As it would turn out I didn’t eat many of the snacks I bought in Canada, but I am enjoying them now that I’m back home.

I had a mid-afternoon lunch at the St. Laurent mall as well. I ended up at a place called Michel’s bakery, which is part of a chain based across the river in Gatineau, Quebec. I had a pasta and vegetable salad and a blueberry and cream cheese danish. Both were excellent. The salad included a number of vegetables I rarely eat (like broccoli), but I enjoyed it immensely. **[It was good that salads were already one of my favorite foods when I was diagnosed with diabetes. I can essentially eat unlimited amounts of green salads, and they help rather than hinder the blood sugar.]**

I took the bus back to the train station. The business lounge was unattended when I got there, so I just grabbed my bags from behind the counter. When the attendant returned, I let her know that I had them.

They had the CBC news channel (CTV’s competition) running silently but with closed captions in the business lounge. Again it amazed me just how good news coverage is in Canada. In addition to updates on the B.C. murders and a financial scandal involving

Prime Minister Trudeau, there was coverage of Robert Mueller's testimony before the House, the resignation of the Governor of Puerto Rico, protests over China's restrictions on Hong Kong residents, and North Korea's test-firing of missiles. There was also extensive coverage of the heatwave in Europe, where several countries were recording all-time record highs. They even noted the death of the President of Tunisia and looked into possible instability that might follow that death. I wondered if the President of Tunisia was even mentioned in passing on U.S. television; my bet is that he wasn't.

They called our train for boarding at 6:35pm. The boarding process involves a sort of intricate dance between the coach and business passengers. Everyone else knew what to do, but I got scolded a couple of times for not going in the right direction. Eventually I did make it on board, though.

Virtually everyone in the car this time was Francophone. It was kind of weird to see an Asian guy speaking French while wearing a White Sox cap. One of the most interesting passengers didn't really speak either French or English. She was Chinese, and it was clear she wanted to change seats so she could be next to her boyfriend. I think the conductor understood that, but there was really no place to move her. Fortunately it's not a long trip from Ottawa to Montreal.

When I boarded I'd plugged in the charger on my cell phone, but I noticed the outlet wasn't working. I pointed that out to the conductor when he took my ticket, and he said to press the re-set button. I hadn't even known there was a re-set button (similar to what you often see on bathroom plugs), and when I found it, it was basically impossible to press with my finger. I managed to jab it with a pen, though, and that did get it working again.

We left Ottawa two minutes early and were pretty much on schedule through this whole trip. Again there was lots of service. We started with crackers and drinks. Most of the group chose various wines, but again I was a teetotaler. The Chinese girl asked for lemonade, but what she actually got was sweet tea with lemon. She took a couple sips, but never finished it.

They brought warm towelettes again, and then it was time for our meal. Dinner was served in little rectangular china dishes like they used to use on airplanes. There was a choice of pasta with spinach and tomato sauce (which is what I had), chicken tikka masala, or beef tips in wine sauce. The pasta was accompanied by a tasty salad of potatoes and celery topped with a vinaigrette and three slices of fatty pancetta (which I passed on), and raspberry sauce with whipped cream. I just had water with my meal, but they refilled wine for other passengers endlessly. After dinner they served coffee together with little dark chocolate bars with pepper flakes in them. It really was quite a nice meal.

Western Quebec is far from the world's most interesting landscape. It actually looks a lot like Iowa—mostly flat and agricultural, with occasional trees. We paralleled a major "autoroute" most of the way. Trucks were speeding along the freeway, but we went at almost exactly the same speed.

There are a handful of minor stops between Ottawa and Montreal. The only major intermediate stop, though, is Dorval, the suburban station that serves Pierre Trudeau International Airport. This airport uses the code YUL, which has always amused me. I've often thought it would be fun to fly to Montreal at Christmas.

The staff on our train this time primarily spoke French. Everyone was bilingual, but it was clear French was their first language. Of course the signs we passed were also in French, which is legally required in Quebec. I was amused at one sign that advertised "Doggy Daycare®". They had trademarked that phrase, which is the only way they can get away with using it on a sign in Quebec. The remainder of the Doggy Daycare sign was bilingual, but (as mandated by law) the French was in a larger font.

We arrived at Montreal's Gare Centrale at 8:50, about five minutes ahead of schedule. I'd sent an e-mail to my brother Paul, and he had to look up that "gare" meant "station" in French. Interestingly, an airport terminal is an "aerogare".

I knew I had to find my way from the train station to the Bonaventure metro station. I actually found it with no problem, but it was rather a chore to get there. My leg was hurting again, and the underground city in Montreal is definitely **NOT** handicap-friendly. I went up and down and down and up, all on stairs—no escalators or elevators. **[Montreal's underground is fairly new, but I think it was built just before advocates for the disabled pushed for accessibility.]**

It amused me when I reached the metro station that a local college kid had trouble buying a ticket, but I managed to get a day pass in about 20 seconds. The vending machines look intimidating (which is true in almost every city), but they're actually pretty user-friendly. They first ask you to choose a language (nice, and kind of surprising, given that all the signage in the Montreal Metro is in French only), and then a card type. Unlike Toronto, Montreal offers a "carte occasionnelle" that is intended for visitors to the city. It's a cardboard card with a chip embedded in it, and it comes loaded with any of various short-term fares. They then asked for the fare type (in my case an adult day pass), the number of fares, the method of payment (cash for me), and whether a receipt was needed. In addition to the machines, you can also buy fares from clerks who work in cages by the turnstiles. That's where the college kid went when he couldn't figure out how to buy his ticket. **[In fairness, there's a good chance the kid was looking for a reduced fare option that was either not available from the machine or was buried in a list of menus.]**



Occasional fare card from Montreal's transit system

I'd actually scoped out how to buy a ticket ahead of time, which made the process simpler. What I hadn't bothered to do was to check which platform I needed to reach my destination. Fortunately my instinct (the side marked "Côte-Vertu") was correct.

I only rode one stop west on the metro. I actually could have walked this distance fairly easily, but when arriving in an unfamiliar city **[particularly at night]**, I wanted to keep my walk as short as possible. I got off at Lucien-L'Allier station. This is named after the engineer who designed the metro, but its name could vaguely translate as "Go, Satan". That would not be an inappropriate name, either, since this is an extremely deep station. I first went up a long flight of stairs, and then escalator after escalator (I think seven in all) to ascend from the depths of hell.

The entrance to Lucien-L'Allier station is at the rear of Centre Bell, the hockey arena where the Montreal Canadiens play. The exit lets out onto a very steep sidewalk that can't possibly meet accessibility standards. It took all the energy I could muster to drag my bag up to the main street at the top of the hill. I crossed the street, and the next block (where my hotel was located) was almost entirely blocked off for construction. The sidewalk was completely closed, but I was able to walk in the traffic lane to get to the entrance.



View from the balcony of Room 1406 – Comfort Suites – Montreal

A young man of African heritage greeted me with the "Bonjour—Hello" that is typical in Montreal. I responded with "Hello", and the check-in process went easily in English. I was assigned to Room 1406 (which, in traditional hotel fashion, was actually on the 13th floor). The room had two queen beds and a sofa bed and was one of the largest urban hotel rooms I've ever been in. Technically billed as a "suite" it also had a refrigerator and microwave. Its nicest feature was probably the balcony, which provided a beautiful view of the downtown skyline. I booked this as a point redemption, but its cash price would have been about \$175 (a little over \$130 U.S.), which is pretty good value for a downtown hotel. **[The place currently goes for around 200 Canadian dollars a night.]**

I left the room to get ice, but then kicked off my shoes and settled in to the room. While I really hadn't done much of anything, this seemed like a very long day. It was nice to finally turn out the lights.

FRIDAY, JULY 26

MONTREAL QUEBEC TO EASTERN QUEBEC

I slept fairly well, but I was awakened by the air conditioning funneling through the curtains. The sound was much like a choir changing between "ah" and "oh" sounds. I guess it's a good thing I wasn't actually headed for the Pearly Gates.

The Comfort Suites—Montreal City Centre is a tall narrow building. The breakfast room is in the basement, and it's a very weird place. The room is enormous, but there's only six tables in the place. They also have the food segregated against three different walls. All the other guests appeared to be Asian, and they and all ate their breakfast in silence. It was basically the same spread they had at the Comfort Inn in Toronto, with a couple of small differences. The attendant's main function seemed to be to stir milk into the scrambled eggs at regular intervals, keeping them overly moist. (She did this twice while I was eating.) They'd also replaced those strange bratwurst-like sausages with standard breakfast logs that were dry to the point of desiccation—as if they'd been sitting there a week. This was a place where I mostly focused on the do-it-yourself waffles.

I checked out and left my bags in the hotel's storage room. Then I set out down the steep hill to Lucien-L'Allier station. As I made my way down all those escalators, I kept seeing yellow stickers affixed to the stainless steel that said "risque de blessure". I googled this later and found out I'd guessed its meaning more or less correctly. It means "risk of injury", though it's apparently most often used in the plural. The stickers invariably showed a silhouette of a hand as well, which I assume meant "please hold the handrail". I found the stickers amusing, because it seemed as if we were getting risqué blessings all over the metro.

This morning I caught a train with the destination Montmorency. I rode almost all the way to that terminal, though I can't say it was a terribly interesting ride. The Montreal metro is entirely underground, even in remote neighborhoods and in the suburbs. That's mostly because the system runs on rubber tires, and it's much easier to maintain the route when it's fully enclosed **[particularly in a place with severe winter weather]**. At track level, though, pretty much every station looks alike, which makes for a rather boring ride.

I got off at Mont-Royal station, which is located in a rather quaint residential neighborhood northeast of downtown Montreal. The neighborhood is located at the base of one of two large peaks that overlook Montreal. Guide books encourage visitors to hike to the top of the mountain, but I didn't have that much ambition. I'd done some research ahead of time, though, and I knew there were a couple of buses that ran through Parc Mont-Royal. My plan was to take the bus to an overlook and just do some short walks around there.

Thar proved to be harder than I'd imagined, though. There was construction underway all around the station, and the bus stops had been relocated. There were signs vaguely indicating where the stops should be, but until a bus actually stopped, I wasn't entirely sure I was waiting in the right place. Eventually I did catch bus 711, which I rode to Belvédère Camillien-Houde. ("Belvédère", by the way just means "viewpoint" in French.) I'd encourage others to take this particular bus, but honestly I don't know that it's worth getting out at the overlook. The views are very distant, and they're of the eastern side of the city (mainly old Olympic Stadium) rather than of downtown.

I basically spent the time between one bus and the next at the overlook. Then I traveled west to one of the most famous sites in Montreal, Oratoire Saint-Joseph. Margaret and I had walked past St. Joseph's Oratory when we were in Montreal a few Christmases ago, but we had no desire to walk up 207 icy steps to get to the entrance at that point.



**Oratoire Saint-Joseph
Montreal, Quebec**

had guides to the basilica available on a little stand in many languages for \$2 each, with the principal method of payment being tapping a credit card. After a long look, I did find a slot where I could drop a "toonie" instead. They also had a credit card tap system in place to pay for lighting votive candles. I don't think I've ever seen that at any church before **[nor have I seen it since]**.



Main sanctuary -- Oratoire Saint-Joseph
to the street. I did so slowly and carefully, but walking down the stairs really wasn't that big a deal.

Back at street level I caught bus 51, which I rode to Snowdon station. It surprised me to see metal doors there that said "TOILETTES" and had the wheelchair symbol. It's very rare for metro stations anywhere to have restrooms, but they do indeed exist



**Don't touch the animals sign
("I am a carrier of illness")
Belvédère Camillien-Houde – Montreal**

Today there was construction all around the exterior of the oratory. While they did have a path cleared to allow pilgrims access, I was glad to see that they also had a shuttle that led up the hill. The shuttle let off at a back entrance that led down to an employee lunchroom. I attempted to buy a bottle of pop, but the machine would only accept debit or credit cards. The whole place seems to favor electronic payments. They

After getting my English guide book, I took a rather grand escalator up to the main sanctuary. I took tons of pictures at Oratoire Saint-Joseph, and of course none of them really did the place justice. It really is a lovely church. It's interesting that while the exterior is very classical, the inside comes across as very modern. It reminds me of churches I've seen in Latin America.

The oratory was largely the work of Brother André Bessette, who was canonized a saint in 2010. Construction began in 1904 and was largely completed by 1967, which conveniently marked Canada's centennial and Montreal's hosting a world's fair. Brother André had an extraordinary devotion to St. Joseph, and the basilica is the manifestation of that.

"Oratory", by the way, basically means "prayer center". Some of the decommissioned Catholic churches in our area that no longer have priests are now called oratories. St. Joseph is technically not a parish, though Holy Cross brothers do say mass there each day.

I said a few prayers at the oratory, and of course I snapped lots of pictures. I only spent about half an hour there, though. I could have re-traced my steps and taken the shuttle downhill. The main exit was at the front of the church, though, and it was quite a bit easier to just descend the 207 steps

near the top of the escalators in Snowdon station in Montreal. I used one of them and found it spotlessly clean, which is certainly more than can be said for most of the metro.

I caught an orange line train and rode just a couple stops to Côte-Sainte-Catherine station. I exited there and walked a few blocks south. When I reached the entrance to an underground autoroute, I knew I'd gone too far. So I turned around, looked more closely, and eventually found my destination.

That destination was recommended to me by my brother John and his wife Janet. When they were in Montreal they visited the city's holocaust museum and found it very moving. I figured I'd check the place out.

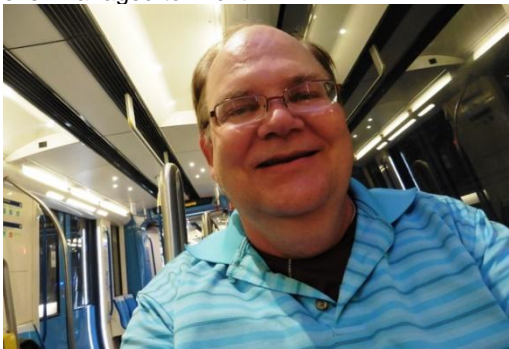
The holocaust museum is well hidden. It's inside an academic building for a Jewish college, and it's not well signed from the street. Even inside the building there's not a good indication of exactly where the museum is. Once I did locate it, I paid my admission (\$8 - \$6 U.S.) and made my way inside.

This is another place that prefers that you visit with an audio tour (this time by downloading a cell phone app). Fortunately they also have very detailed signs that explain all the different exhibits in both French and English. They explore the roots of racism and antisemitism, and then they trace the timeline of the holocaust through the eyes of people who lived through it. Most of the artifacts on display were the meager possessions holocaust survivors had with them when they came to Canada. It's hard to do justice to the place in words (which was also the case when John tried to explain it to me), but I'm glad I stopped there. It was well worth seeing.

After seeing the museum I re-traced my steps to the metro and then took a train back to Snowdon station. A variety of restaurants of all types surround the station, but none of them sounded very good to me. I ended up at McDonalds. Like most McD's these days, this one had installed automatic ordering kiosks. A big difference from most, though, was that virtually everybody here used that ordering method. **[Since COVID, kiosk ordering has become standard in the States as well, but at the time pretty much nobody used the kiosks.]** The machines actually make sense as a solution to language issues in Montreal. You can order in the language of your choice, and for those with limited skills in either French or English (which there are a lot of in Montreal) there are pictures of all the items on the menu. **[Apparently many Japanese restaurants—not just fast food—have similar kiosks, which should my visit there go somewhat more smoothly.]** You can also spend as long as you want browsing at the kiosks, with no pressure to make a fast decision.

I ordered a side salad and a blueberry smoothie. While I was waiting for the food, I actually remembered a friend of mine who had gotten food poisoning from a McDonalds salad a year ago. As it would happen, I'd become quite sick a couple days later in this trip (though, as you can tell, I wasn't 100% for any of it). I don't really think it was this salad that caused that, but it does make me wonder.

After lunch I spent a couple hours riding around on the metro. Since I couldn't really see anything from the trains themselves, I rode to a couple of the terminals and went outside to see what was there. I chose to go to Montmorency, which is actually outside Montreal in a city called Laval (basically the Mississauga of Quebec). Montmorency is named after what is basically a community college, and aside from the buildings for that institution and a big park-and-ride, there's not much there. Supposedly there's a mall nearby, but I never managed to find it.



LEFT: David Burrow on the Montreal Metro

RIGHT: Entrance to Angrignon station, from the same-named park

More interesting was Angrignon, which I mostly went to because its name looks and sounds like "angry nun" and reminded me of the stories my colleagues tell of sisters whipping around large wooden rosaries. Angrignon is in the southwest corner of Montreal, adjacent to a park of the same name **[which was the surname of a real estate developer who subdivided the neighborhood]**. The park is full of flowers and features a tree-lined lake. I spent quite a while just enjoying that little bit of nature.

I rode the metro back to Guy—Concordia station, which on a map appears to be about equidistant from the Comfort Suites as Lucien-L'Allier. It appeared to be just a straight shot a block and a half south to the hotel, but I never did figure out how to get from there. **[This is another place where access to cellular data would have been useful.]** After getting thoroughly confused, I went back downstairs and took a roundabout way back to the station I knew.

I went back to the hotel and claimed my bags. It was a bit weird that there was a different guy at the desk, but he just gave me my bags without asking for any identification at all. I used the restroom at the hotel and re-packed to get things better balanced. In the process I managed to turn on my electric shaver. It was buried deep in one of the bags, so I let it buzz away while I walked outside.

Since I wasn't sure about controlling my bag on the steep downhill stretch to at Lucien-L'Allier station, I decided instead to follow the main drag of downtown Montreal (Boulevard René Lévesque, formerly named Dorchester and renamed after one of the main leaders

of the Quebec separatist movement). While it was more walking (probably three-fourths of a mile), I think that was a wise choice. The route was mostly level, and the corners all had curb cuts that made handling luggage easy.

I was amused to add a word to my French vocabulary while walking past a construction project. There was a sign there directing pedestrians around the construction, and from it I learned that the word for “sidewalk” in Quebec French is “trottoir”. I laughed at the idea of going out for a “trot” at the side of the street.

I made my way back to Gare Centrale with no problem. When I got there, though, the station was chaotic at best. Both long-distance and commuter trains leave from Gare Centrale. It was rush hour on a Friday now, so people were flocking to the “EXO” tracks to make their way home for the weekend. People seemed to be moving in every direction at once. The station is basically a big shopping mall in the basement of a ritzy hotel, and because of all the shops and cafes, there’s not really many places to wait. It really is a madhouse.

I could have saved myself from this hubbub if I’d booked a sleeper for the next leg of my trip. Montreal has a lounge similar to the one in Toronto, and with a sleeper ticket I could have waited there. I’d actually considered doing that, but the price was just slightly too high. My coach ticket cost \$150 (just over \$110 U.S.), while a sleeper would have gone for \$600 (about \$450 U.S.). On the western trains Via offers the option of a cabin for one (which is much cheaper than a full-size room), but two-bunk rooms are the only option when traveling east. Since I didn’t want to quadruple my expenses, I lost the perk of the lounge, so I’d have to make do in the main part of the station. **[In retrospect it seems particularly strange that I’d booked business class from Toronto to Ottawa and on to Montreal, but I hadn’t booked a sleeper. Business class on Canadian trains is more than double the cost of coach, and the sleeper would have been more worth it than the business car was.]**

I confirmed with a Via employee that I didn’t have to check in anywhere. Then I went to a McDonalds in the station and got another blueberry smoothie. (They’ve discontinued that flavor in the States, but it’s easily my favorite.) I also stopped briefly at a Couche Tard convenience store (the company that tried to buy out Casey’s a few years back), where I mostly picked up some postcards. Then I found a seat in a small section that was mostly occupied by people waiting for one of the corridor trains.

My ticket said the boarding time for my train was 6:30pm. A line started forming at 5:40, though, and I quickly joined it. I’m glad I did. I stood around for a full hour, but it would have been a real chore to board if I hadn’t already been in line.



They began boarding sleeping car passengers at 6:30, but it wasn’t until 6:45 that they let coach passengers head down the steps. When I reached the platform, I saw this was a VERY long train. It was easily the longest passenger train I’ve ever been on. My ticket was for car #5, but the stairs let out by a sleeping car numbered in the 30s, and there were at least a dozen cars further back. I turned left and kept walking and walking and walking, eventually reaching my car.

One of the reasons I’d decided not to splurge for a sleeper is that the ticket I’d supposedly been confirmed with was for a single seat (12-S, I believe), which would mean I’d be by myself all the way to Halifax. Shortly before leaving on vacation, though, I got an e-mail from Via that said there would be a “change of equipment”, and that my new seat assignment was 12-D. That was a window seat in a 2—2 configuration. The re-assigned car (which was also much older than the model I was supposed to be in) was entirely full when we left Montreal. My personal bet is that when they sold out the regular car they switched to the new configuration so they could sell more tickets and take in more money. A lot of other passengers hadn’t gotten notification that their seats had been switched, and that added to the chaos in boarding.

I ended up next to a young black man who was traveling on a passport from the Republic of Chad and was headed to Bathurst, New Brunswick. He appeared to only speak French, and he basically just sat in his seat and wouldn’t move at all. That made it a major chore for me to use the restroom, get anything out of my luggage (like the snacks I’d bought in Ottawa and was planning to eat on this journey), or even stretch my legs at all. At one point I had no choice but to excuse myself and use the bathroom, which elicited a big harrumph from the man. Otherwise I didn’t leave my seat at all, since this guy wouldn’t leave his. I don’t think he was trying to be inconsiderate, but that was how he came across to me.

The train I was on was the Ocean (train #14), the oldest continuously-operating named train in the world. Its route looks like a lower-case “n” or an upside-down “u”. We left Montreal at 7pm, crossed to the south side of the St. Lawrence, and stayed relatively close to the river (though not close enough for any nice views) for several hours. Around 11pm we crossed to the north bank again to stop at Ste. Foy station. This is a suburban station that serves Quebec City, and a number of passengers both got on and off there. Then we backed out and continued going in reverse all the way across the river until we were on the main line again. The route apparently goes much closer to the St. Lawrence past Quebec City, but since it was now late at night, there was nothing to see at all.

My dinner tonight was a piece of pita bread, the one bit of food I had in my book bag as opposed to my main suitcase. It was dry and tasteless. (Indeed, I'd throw out the rest of the pita bread.) I washed down my evening medications with some Fanta soda I'd gotten at Couche Tard. I read from my Kindle for a couple of hours, mostly going through a biography of Julia Child that I'd downloaded. That had to stop at sundown, though, since the reading lights in the car didn't work. **[Had I pushed it, I probably could have gotten some reimbursement for losing the single seat and having nonfunctional equipment. It would most likely have been a VIA credit rather than an actual refund, though, and I wasn't planning any other Canadian trips at the time.]**

When I was doing some cleaning out at Margaret's place, I'd come across an amenities kit she'd gotten when flying to the Middle East several years ago. It included a sleeping mask and ear plugs, and I thought I'd try them out on this trip. The ear plugs dampened but only partially eliminated the noise. I could still make out women behind me giggling and kids in front of me playing video games with the sound on. The eye mask was more helpful, since they never turned out any lights in the car all night long. (They weren't bright enough to read by, but they were bright enough to be a distraction.) I don't think I really slept at all this night, but I could quite literally rest my eyes. **[I'll be flying business class to Japan this summer (the first time I've ever done that on an international trip), and one of the things I'm looking forward to seeing is what they give for an amenities kit.]**

SATURDAY, JULY 27

EASTERN QUEBEC TO HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

There are several industrial cities along the St. Lawrence in eastern Quebec. We stopped at Rivière-du-Loup, Trois-Pistoles, Rimouski, and Mont-Joli during the night. These were all major stops, and because of the length of the train, we actually made two or three stops at each station.

I'd set my watch to Atlantic Time shortly after boarding, but when daylight came this morning, we were still in Quebec and Eastern Time. My phone showed that it was about a quarter to five (Eastern Time) when the sun came up. I badly needed to use the restroom at this point, so I again excused myself and made my way back there. Since I was up, I also shaved and brushed my teeth, and I made my way back to the lounge (called the “canteen” on Via) to get some coffee. Getting to the food service car was interesting. The old car I had been re-assigned to doesn't naturally pair with the cars they usually use on this route, so between my car and those behind there was a “transition” car, basically a completely empty car that fit the dimensions of the old cars at the front and the new ones at the back. It had been decorated with the flags of all the Atlantic provinces and signs that gave interesting facts about them. The transition car connected to one of the newer coach cars, and to be honest I'd probably have complained if I'd been traveling in it as well. While they do indeed have singleton seats, the seats are very close together in the Renaissance cars. There's not much more legroom than in an economy seat on an airplane.

One thing I noticed while walking around was a lovely crescent moon above the mountains. My thoughts were taken back to a week ago, right before I started this trip. I spent much of that day watching replays of the Apollo 11 moon landing five decades earlier. The moon landing is easily the biggest event in my lifetime, and I distinctly remember watching it on a fuzzy rabbit-ear TV back in Mt. Pleasant. One of my students asked me in all seriousness last spring if I believed we'd actually gone to the moon. There's no question in my mind that we did. The kid should be grateful for it, too, since almost every bit of technology we take for granted today owes its existence to the space program.

There was a long line at the canteen, and it moved very slowly. It certainly didn't help that almost everything they served had to be prepared in some way. For instance, an Asian girl in front of me chose to have Cup-a-Soup noodles for breakfast. **[In preparing for the trip to Japan, I've found that noodles are apparently a fairly common breakfast there.]** The attendant had to add water to the noodles and then put them through three separate cycles on the microwave. Her till wouldn't let her move on to another customer until she'd finished with the prior one, so everyone behind the Asian girl just had to wait for the microwave to do its thing. **[It's kind of odd that they don't just keep a kettle of hot water for this purpose. That would be faster than the microwave.]**

I filled the time while waiting by checking things on my phone. The lounge is the one and only place on this train that they offer wi-fi. Given that the area we were travelling through was very remote, I was kind of surprised they had internet access at all. Since they did, though, it was good to take advantage of it.

Eastern Quebec is basically the north end of the Appalachian Mountains. **[They also go into New Brunswick.]** The landscape is very rugged, with extremely dense forest. Riding through it made me respect the early engineers who built the original highways and railroads through this wilderness.

We finally reached Matapedia, at the foot of the Gaspé Peninsula around 7am Eastern Time, close to an hour behind schedule. From there it was just a short hop through the mountains to Campbellton, New Brunswick, which we reached at about a quarter to nine Atlantic Time. The Campbellton stop was even longer than most. We were there for nearly half an hour, long enough that some passengers got off the train and got coffee and doughnuts at Tim Horton's.

A guy boarded at Campbellton who would be in my car most of the rest of the day. When the conductor came to him, he said, "My ticket says Halifax, but there's nobody there to pick me up today. So I'm going to Amherst." Amherst was the place where I ended up spending most of a week years ago when my brother-in-law Brian's truck was totaled. I can't say it would ever be a place I'd choose as a destination, but to each his own. **[Presumably the guy had friends or relatives there.]**

I was pleased to enter New Brunswick, because it meant the guy from Chad would soon be leaving. It seemed to be a huge imposition on the guy when I returned from the lounge, and it was clear I wouldn't be getting up again until he left. Fortunately, around 10:00 the conductor came around announcing "Bathurst prochaine" in French only, and not long after that my seatmate left. No one replaced him, so I sprawled out over both seats and enjoyed a real nap.



Inlet of the Atlantic near Bathurst, New Brunswick

The train is called the Ocean, and once we reached New Brunswick we mostly ran southward near the Atlantic coast. There really aren't any sweeping ocean views on this route of the sort I'd seen near Los Angeles. There are some nice views of harbors and inlets, though, and it is a pleasant journey.

I went back to the lounge for more coffee late in the morning. I'd actually intended to get a cold drink, but there was no ice to accompany pop or juice. I must say the girl running the lounge was pretty clueless. My coffee cost \$2.75, and I gave her a five-dollar bill. She had to use the calculator on her phone to figure out that she needed to give me \$2.25 in change, and then it took her forever to realize that what she needed to give me was a two-dollar coin and a quarter. **[I suppose it's the lack of skills like this that are speeding the transition to electronic transactions.]**

Two young black girls were in the lounge this time, providing entertainment for other passengers. They were singing some popular song I'd never heard of, and they clearly knew the words to every verse by heart. These girls were among many people I'd encounter singing on this trip. While I was riding the bus around Montreal, there was a couple with two small kids in front of me. The kids kept singing "The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round" (in English) over and over again. I'd also encounter at least two other groups of kids who were singing later on this trip. **[It's fascinating to read about singing as I write the revision to this travelogue. Just last night I was at a rather dull basketball game that Garrigan won handily. Our kids entertained themselves at the game by singing songs they'd been learning in choir, almost like it was a pops concert rehearsal.]**

We made good time crossing New Brunswick. We were pretty much back on schedule by the time we got to Rogersville, shortly after noon, and around 1pm we actually passed a freight train that had pulled off to a siding.

It was interesting to watch the scenery change through here. The forest in the mountains is very different than it is close to the water. The trees are shorter, and the ground is notably swampier as you near the coast. It reminded me of the landscape down in Louisiana, which made me wonder if things looked familiar to the Acadians who became the Cajuns centuries ago.

Thankfully the seat next to mine would remain empty through the rest of the trip. They resold other seats over and over, though. In particular there was a grouping of four seats, with two facing the other two, that was occupied by five different families at various times on this trip.

We reached Moncton, the biggest place between Quebec and Halifax, right on time at about 1:30pm. I have no idea how the tracks are designed here, but for some reason we backed out of Moncton just as we had earlier at Quebec City.

A fascinating family boarded at Moncton and sat in the seats in front of me. The husband wore a button-down shirt and a baseball cap without any sort of logo on it. His wife wore a gingham blouse, and their two daughters were in princess dresses. Shortly after we set off from Moncton, the mother and father read aloud from a rejection letter they'd received from an exclusive elementary school where they were apparently trying to send the girls. I'm not sure why they chose to read the letter aloud, since it certainly wasn't my business, nor that of anyone else in the car. The parents did do a good job of using the train trip as a way of teaching their children. They asked the girls about everything they saw out the window, and the father did a nice job of explaining how tides work.

There was some more entertainment provided by an Amish family that kept going back and forth to the lounge. Each time they'd come back with some other kind of treat. They must have spent close to a hundred dollars between them.

Before long we crossed into Nova Scotia and made our stop at Amherst. The station would be very close to the RCMP detachment where Brian and Margaret filled out all their paperwork following the accident. It was interesting that most of the people who boarded at Amherst were Asian. Even small-town Canada is very diverse these days.

There's honestly not much to look at around here. The stunted forest reminds me of what you see up in the Yukon, and it's twenty or thirty miles from one town to the next. Beyond Amherst we passed Springhill, which is famous for two things. It's the home of singer Anne Murray, and it was the site of a major coal mine disaster. Then we reached the last intermediate stop on the trip, Truro. Truro looks like a Norman Rockwell town from middle America. There were families picnicking in the park, little kids playing baseball and adults playing softball, and downtown businesses in substantial brick storefronts. It looks like the sort of place a Republican politician would film a commercial—except that the flags show maple leaves instead of stars and stripes.



Typical landscape in western Nova Scotia

The stop in Truro was long enough that the family in front of me was able to run to a Dairy Queen next to the station and buy ice cream bars. Except at a scheduled service stop, you'd be a fool to walk away from the immediate platform area at an Amtrak station. That seems to be quite common on Via, though.

It's about an hour and a half from Truro to Halifax. Most of this trip is through farmland, with tidy fields and neatly mown lawns next to the farmhouses. The Maritimes are supposedly the poorest region of Canada, but from the train it looked quite prosperous—not wealthy, mind you, but certainly not destitute.

I did see some poverty on the very last leg of the trip. Just north of Halifax we passed about a half dozen homeless encampments. The occupants of the camps obviously didn't care much for having a passenger train invade their space, and they made some nasty gestures at us as we passed. I just took it as an unusual welcome to the city.

Except for those homeless camps, Halifax came across as an immaculate city. There's almost no litter, and almost no graffiti—far less than I'd seen in Toronto or Montreal. It was weird to pass miles and miles of retaining walls as the railroad tracks went through an open cut and see nothing but the original gray paint. Highway overpasses were similarly clean, and the lack of litter made the place seem almost disconcertingly tidy.

We officially arrived in Halifax at 6:19pm, about half an hour late. It was actually a good thing to be a coach passenger when we arrived. The coach cars were at the front of the train, so we disembarked first. Many of the sleepers were around a bend, far south of the actual station. It probably would have taken fifteen minutes or so for those passengers to walk up to the station.

The Halifax railway station is a grand old building from the age when trains were trains. My ultimate destination today was a hotel that dates from that same era. What is now the Westin Nova Scotian was originally built in the 1920s by the Canadian National Railway as the Hotel Cornwallis. It was part of a chain of railway hotels extending throughout Canada and included such famous sites as the Château Frontenac in Quebec and the Banff Springs Hotel in Alberta. It has changed management and been added onto many times, but it remains the premier hotel in Atlantic Canada.



Halifax station

The Nova Scotian has hosted many famous guests over the years. Since it's close to both the railroad and the harbor, it's often the first or last place famous people stay when visiting Canada. Queen Elizabeth has stayed here multiple times, both before and after she became the British monarch. Many other members of the royal family have stayed here, as did Winston Churchill, Presidents from Roosevelt to Obama, and several Canadian prime ministers. A number of actors and musicians have also stopped here while traveling to and from Europe. **[I loved the sense of history the Nova Scotian had. It reminded me quite a lot of the Palmer House in Chicago.]**

Staying here was a definite splurge, though the rate was somewhat more affordable given that I was arriving on a weekend. I paid about \$200 Canadian per night, which is about 150 U.S. dollars. That actually made it one of the cheapest places in the downtown area. A Hampton Inn, for instance, was charging \$269. That rate would have included breakfast, but seventy bucks is pretty steep for breakfast. It was also nice that the hotel was just steps from the train, so I could collapse in the room right after I'd arrived. It was also close to the waterfront and a reasonable distance from the downtown attractions.

A covered walkway led directly from the train station to the lobby of the hotel. Check-in was quick and easy, and the desk clerks were probably the most polite I've ever encountered at a "nice" hotel. While the maze of hallways was covered in one of the ugliest carpets I've ever seen, my room (which was surprisingly large) was tastefully decorated in browns and golds. **[It intrigues me that "good" hotels are almost always decorated in masculine colors.]**

I dumped my stuff in the room and then headed down the street. I was intrigued to see a sign indicating that the Consulate of the Netherlands was located in the hotel. The only time I've ever really paid attention to a consulate was when Margaret's husband Brian died in Mérida, Mexico years ago. The American consulate there was a large house fenced off from its neighbors and the street. It seems kind of weird to have a glorified hotel room serving that purpose. **[Security is always important at outposts of the American government. I suspect that is less a concern for the Dutch.]**

One block south of the hotel, just the other side of the train station, was a place called the Great Atlantic Superstore. This is one of many branches of Canada's biggest retailer, which also operates Loblaw's, Dominion, and SuperValu supermarkets, No Frills warehouses, and Shoppers Drug Mart stores—among many other brands. Great Atlantic is a hypermarket, meaning they sell both groceries and dry goods. They're open 24/7, and they seem to do a booming business.

I'd somehow lost my comb on the train, so first on my list was replacing that. All I needed was a single comb, but of course they only had packages with multiples available. I ended up getting half a dozen combs for \$3.89. That's actually not bad value, but it's annoying when all I needed was one.

I bought some pop and juice, since I figured the prices were almost certainly less than what the hotel had to offer. A two-liter bottle of Fresca for \$1.50 (about \$1.15 U.S.) seemed like a particularly good deal. Finally I looked for something I could have for supper. I'd noticed my room had a refrigerator but not a microwave, so that limited me to foods that were already prepared. I ended up getting Greek salad wraps—lettuce, olives, cucumbers, feta cheese, and tzatziki sauce stuffed inside of tortillas. In retrospect, I'm pretty sure it was these wraps that made me really sick. When I got back to the hotel and started eating them the lettuce was obviously past its prime. I ate around the bad lettuce, but I wonder if there wasn't something nasty in the rest of the salad. The wraps actually tasted pretty good, but I have a feeling they were the source of an ongoing bug. **[I also likely had a weakened immune system that was part of the diabetic issues.]**



Westin Nova Scotian – Halifax



Hideous carpet at the Westin Nova Scotian



Dutch consulate sign



**“Selfie” into the multi-paned mirror
Room 356 – Westin Nova Scotian**

are generally the worst possible places to money exchanged, be it at an ATM or the desk. Not only do you pay for the convenience of the location, but both the hotel and the bank are taking a cut on the transaction.] I did get a bit of cash, though, and then I was on my way for the morning.

My walk this morning would take me up Barrington Street and along Spring Garden Road, two of the main thoroughfares in downtown Halifax. It's fascinating that while Halifax was founded in 1749, very little in the city looks very old. That's because much of the city was destroyed during World War I in what was the greatest man-made explosion before the atomic age. It wasn't an act of war, though. Two ships carrying munitions and petrochemicals collided in the harbor, and the resulting explosion killed 2,000 and injured 9,000 in a city that at the time had a population of about 60,000. Only a handful of buildings from before World War II still stand in Halifax (I'd stay in another hotel that was one of those), and most are much more recent. A lot of the city dates to the concrete tower era of the '60s and '70s, and there's also lots of very modern condos and office buildings. I read a derogatory remark that noted that Halifax had all the charm of Houston. While I can see why the reviewer would make that comment, Halifax is much tidier than Houston, and it comes across as a much more friendly place.

More than anything Halifax feels like a college town, which it is. There are at least half a dozen colleges here, by far the most important being Dalhousie University. The students and the international population give it a nice vigor.

Having mentioned how new much of the city is, the first thing I photographed today was one of the oldest places in Halifax. My walk took me past the Old Burying Ground, and it's not hard to figure out what that is. The cemetery dates to the mid 1700s, with the most recent graves dating to around 1900. Many locally prominent people are buried here, including lots of British loyalists who came to Nova Scotia during and after the American Revolution. Another interesting grave is that of the first slave freed in the United States.

The Old Burying Ground is actually not the most famous cemetery in Halifax. That honor goes to Fairview Lawn, which is best known as the eternal resting place of many of the Titanic victims. Most of those who died in the explosion also ended up at Fairview Lawn. I didn't make it there, but in pictures it looks like a fairly generic cemetery.



**Old Burying Ground
Halifax, Nova Scotia**

Beyond the Old Burying Ground, I entered downtown Halifax proper. Everything there was decked out for Pride Month. At this point I don't think I could begin to count the number of cities that were having Pride celebrations when I've visited them. I was too late for the parade or any of the other big events in Halifax, but I saw the pedestrian crossings painted in rainbow stripes and brightly colored ribbons hanging from the lampposts. It really was kind of pretty. **[It's not really surprising that I've seen so many cities decked out for pride celebrations. As a teacher, I mostly travel in summer. Pride Month is traditionally in June, the time of the Stonewall riot in New York. Even if I visit a city after the celebrations have passed, the decorations are likely to be up into July and even August.]**

My ultimate destination was Smitty's restaurant, the local branch of a chain that is basically Canada's answer to Perkins (though that chain does business here, too). I'd been to a Smitty's years ago in Manitoba, and it sounded like the sort of food I could stomach when not feeling terribly well. This particular Smitty's was located on the ground floor of a senior living building. I suppose that makes sense, though it always makes me feel kind of old when family restaurants are marketed as a “senior” thing.

I had a ham and cheese omelette and hash browns, both of which were fine. The star of my breakfast, though, was a fruit salad that featured various berries, melon chunks, and grapes. I'm pretty sure everything came out of a freezer bag, but it was very tasty indeed. I also had decent coffee and some canned grapefruit juice. This would basically be my only meal of the day, but it was a good one.

I took a long, luxurious shower when I got back to the room. Since I hadn't even changed in the twenty-two hours I'd been on the train, it was nice to feel truly clean. The hotel provided complimentary bathrobes, and of course I had to put one on and feel more sophisticated than I really am. Otherwise I just relaxed in the room, watched some TV, and eventually called it a night.

SUNDAY, JULY 28 **HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA**

I got up around 7:15 this morning, and I felt **sick**. Indeed I wanted to throw up, but I couldn't. I ended up sitting on the toilet for nearly half an hour before I finally was able to get rid of a nasty liquid mass. Then I showered again and dressed, because I really didn't want to waste the day.

I was getting a little low on cash, so I was pleased to see a machine in the lobby that advertised it was a “low fee ATM”. They weren't wrong about the low fees, but the exchange rate they offered was the worst I encountered on this trip—with the Canadian dollar valued closer to 80¢ than 75¢. **[Hotels**

Next I spent half an hour or so wandering through the Halifax Public Garden. This is an enormous and absolutely gorgeous park that is the crown jewel of downtown Halifax. There are numerous formal gardens that are lovingly maintained. It's peaceful and beautiful. While I've no green thumb at all myself, I love looking at gardens, and these are among the nicest I've seen anywhere.

Next I bumbled around downtown for a while trying to find my next destination. While Halifax mostly follows a grid, a number of streets (including Argyle, which I was looking for) come to dead ends. There are also several streets that change names when you pass an intersection, and others that keep the same names after turning a corner. I was pleased when I could finally hook up with the wi-fi from a restaurant that was closed to confirm just where I was going.



Gay pride display – Halifax Public Garden



St. Paul's Anglican Church
Halifax, Nova Scotia

The place I was headed was St. Paul's Anglican Church. Built in 1750, this is the oldest Protestant church in Canada and the oldest surviving building in Halifax. There is a curious legend about the place, too, which deals with the Halifax Explosion. The explosion knocked out all the windows at St. Paul's, but when they were replaced one supposedly bore the image of a deacon who was killed by the blast. They've apparently replaced the windows at least twice since, and each time the image of the deacon appeared again. Today this window is blocked off so casual visitors can't get to it, and from a distance there really appears to be nothing to see. It's an interesting story, though.

I'd come to St. Paul's for their regular weekly eucharist, which turned out to be one of the most confused services I've ever been to. They used three different worship books. Two of these were essentially missallettes, and I don't really know what the difference was between them. **[While I don't remember years later, most likely one was the traditional *Book of Common Prayer*, while the other was the more modern *Book of Alternative Services*.]** The third was a hymnal, but it only gave the words to the hymns, not the music. We were given a bulletin directing us where to turn for each element of the service. It was wrong in places, though, and there were other places that it appeared everyone was just supposed to know what to do. **[This was not the first Anglican or Episcopalian service I'd been to that had the problem of constantly switching from one source to another. I've been to other churches that got around that by just putting all the necessary information into a single bulletin.]** Two different priests (one male and one female) conducted the service, and apparently neither of them was actually the parish pastor. He was on vacation. We had high mass with every conceivable extra element—all for a congregation of about forty.

Toward the end of the service I started feeling very ill again, and I could tell I would be having problems with diarrhea. I made it up to communion and back without a problem, and I kept a firm clench on things through the benediction. When the priests kept going on and on with announcements, though, I zipped like a cartoon character to the exit. Fortunately there was a restroom right behind the sanctuary, and I spent a good five minutes there. I was in a bit of a daze when I came out, but I did manage to make my way to the door.



Nova Scotia license plate

I made my way back to the hotel and just rested for about three hours. I napped and watched the news on TV. I had a couple of rice crackers, and I drank some Fresca. That was pretty much it for lunch. The hotel maid arrived and wanted to make up the room, but I just asked for some more towels.

My room overlooked the harbor, and around 3:30 I headed over to the biggest attraction there, Pier 21. This is a national historic site, though the museum there is operated as a private enterprise. Pier 21 is essentially the Canadian version of Ellis Island. It was built in the 1920s

as part of the same complex that included the railroad station and my hotel. From then until the early 1970s it served as the main port of immigration to Canada.

There are three main exhibits at the Pier 21 museum. The first, which was a traveling exhibit apparently prepared by the University of British Columbia, explored the question "What is family?" That really is a fascinating question, particularly in modern times. More and more often, I teach kids who don't live with their natural parents, and it's fascinating to see the relationships that develop these days. This exhibit was really quite well done. It didn't come across as politically correct or preachy; it just acknowledged the merit in all different kinds of families. **[Sadly, this exhibit would likely be considered controversial in the United States these days. We have far too many so-called "Christians" in our country who seem to think that their interpretation of "family" is the only one that could possibly be correct. To them the tolerance Christ had would be intolerable.]**

The second exhibit traced the history of Pier 21. Its heyday was during the Great Depression. Many of the immigrants were British subjects who had been reasonably wealthy but were now down on their luck. When such people went through Pier 21, they would step off the ship and make their way up to the second floor (where the museum is located today). They were processed fairly quickly by immigration personnel, given quick medical and dental checks, and then fed in a cafeteria run by the Red Cross. The wealthiest would head to the hotel, while others might head to rooming houses near the docks. Eventually most would make their way to the railway station to catch trains headed west. Perhaps needless to say, things were more complicated for immigrants who weren't British and for those who were poverty-stricken. Still almost a million people, rich and poor, passed through Pier 21, coming to Canada from more than a hundred different nations.

One thing that struck me at Pier 21 was that everything about it was a quarter century newer than Ellis Island. While both Canada and the United States were built on immigration, Canada is just a newer nation overall. It was kind of weird to think that Pier 21 was still welcoming immigrants in 1971, when Ellis Island had already been closed for almost two decades.

The final exhibit, and the largest at the museum, is on the Canadian Immigrant Experience. They trace what life was like for the people who passed through Pier 21 once they made it to the big cities or to farms on the prairies. It's actually pretty similar to the American immigrant experience, except that most Canadian immigrants had electricity and proper plumbing—again mostly because it was just that many years later.

They also note that Canada's biggest period of immigration is in the present day. In the years since Pier 21 closed, about eight million people have entered Canada, mostly through the international airports in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. About twenty percent of Canadian citizens today were born in another country, and another ten percent are the children of immigrants. Canada has become one of the most diverse places on the planet—a place where a Sikh man who was born in India is the leader of one of the biggest political parties in the country.

Finally there's a large discussion of how the ebb and flow of immigration follows the prejudices of the general public. They note that Canada (like the U.S.) largely refused to welcome Jewish refugees from Germany and Nazi-occupied countries, and until quite recently there were major restrictions on immigrants who were "visible minorities" (a very common Canadian term that includes people from pretty much everywhere but Europe). This section did come across as a bit too politically correct. It's unfortunate that these rules were in place, but people today shouldn't be blamed for the sins of their ancestors.

[It's kind of sad to read my description of Pier 21 as an American living in the era of Trump 2.0. Both Canada and the U.S. were built on immigration, and it just seems wrong for one of those nations to suddenly decide to pull away the welcome mat. While politicians want to make them scapegoats, in fact immigrants are almost always hard-working people who just want to improve their lives.]

I stopped briefly at the gift shop. My main purchase was a children's book about immigration, which I found fascinating. They also had a bunch of First Nations (I.e.: Indian) handicrafts (interesting in an immigration museum), and I picked up a coffee mug. Only after I got back to the hotel did I realize the First Nations who designed that mug came from nowhere near Nova Scotia. The local natives are the Mic-Mac (which is transliterated numerous ways, often including apostrophes). Their name is enshrined in the Mic-Mac Mall, the largest shopping emporium in the Maritimes. The mug, on the other hand, was made by the Skagit people from British Columbia. At least it's pretty.



Cruise ship docked by Pier 21 – Halifax

enjoyed them, it's not a form of travel that's seemed even remotely appealing to me.]

Today the docks that once welcomed immigrants serve cruise ships. Occasionally there is a trans-Atlantic crossing (invariably on Cunard, which was founded in Halifax), but most of the ships cruise around the Maritimes or up the St. Lawrence. There was a cruise ship in port today, which I could see from my hotel room. It completely dwarfed the Pier 21 buildings. **[While my sister and two of my brothers have taken cruises and thoroughly**

After just the short walk from Pier 21 to my hotel room, I was sweating heavily. I got some ice and downed some more Fresca. Then I just rested up for about an hour and a half.

I was hoping I'd be healthy enough to go ahead with plans for the evening I'd made before the trip started. I'd bought another play ticket, and this one would be the single most expensive thing I was doing on this trip. At \$59 (about \$45 U.S.) it wasn't a huge loss if I didn't go, but I hate to let anything go to waste. I purposely didn't eat anything at all, and I stuffed myself full of Pepto-Bismol tablets. Fortunately that seemed to do the trick.

I was feeling very tired now, so I hoped to take the bus to the theatre. I left the hotel at 6:45 and got to the bus stop about five minutes later, which was about five minutes before the bus was due to get there. I waited there for half an hour, which should have been sufficient time for two buses to pass. I didn't want to risk waiting much longer, lest I miss the start of the show. So I gave up and retraced the route I'd walked in the morning. Perhaps needless to say a bus passed me about halfway to the theatre.

I was headed to the Neptune Theatre, a professional company (and a union house recognized by Actors Equity) that boasts it is the largest theatre in Atlantic Canada. They were founded in 1963, and they perform both in Halifax and on traveling runs throughout the Maritimes. The building itself is nothing noteworthy at all (it screams 1963), but the company is very talented indeed.

The show was scheduled to start at 7:30. However, when I entered the theatre, they announced that there would be a delay; curtain time would be 7:45. I suspect that this was explained by another announcement they made right before the curtain. The lead role was going to be played by an understudy. Had they not made that announcement, I wouldn't even have known, since the actress who took on the role did an excellent job.

The show I was here to see was *Cinderella*. This was not the Rogers and Hammerstein musical of that name, nor the Disney version. This particular show was introduced at the Neptune itself (though in its second run) and was in the British pantomime tradition. If you, like me, didn't really know what British pantomime was, the first thing to know is that it has nothing to do with silent clowns. "Panto" has been popular in Britain since Victorian times. It's a theatre genre that is normally found during the holiday season. It typically takes a classical story (in this case "Cinderella") and gives it an over-the-top farcical treatment, plus singing and dancing. Andrew Lloyd-Webber's first piece, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, was originally performed as a pantomime, though it's a more serious show than is typically found in the genre. The music for pantos always includes a wide range of styles, and in the case of *Cinderella* the songs were mostly taken from hits of the past decade or so.



The show was weird, but honestly delightful. It featured a young black woman as Cinderella and overweight "white trash" women as the stepsisters. Instead of Prince Charming, there was Prince Charmin, like the toilet paper. The fairy godmother's wings kept getting bigger and bigger as she did more good deeds. The play was set in modern-day Halifax, so people used cell phones and drove cars. There were lots of local references I didn't get, but there were enough that I understood. The choices of music were unexpected, and the lighting, costumes, staging, and the melodramatic plot all worked well. The weak point was probably the set. They did almost everything with projection, which just came across as cheap and tacky. Perhaps that's the feeling they wanted to convey, but I'd have far preferred they built a real set. **[Rear projection is very much in vogue these days in professional theatre. I assume that's because it's cheap and easy to do with modern technology. It still seems tacky to me, though.]**

It was pushing 10:30 when the show got out. The buses had stopped running, so I knew I had no choice but to walk back to the hotel. I was amazed when I left the theatre at just how lively Halifax was on a Sunday night. The bars were still open, and there were people everywhere. If I'd magically been beamed down, I'd have imagined it was Friday rather than Sunday. The walk back was actually pretty enjoyable.

I was absolutely exhausted when I returned to my room. I sat on the toilet a while, and then I just went to bed.

MONDAY, JULY 29

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

I was up around 6:00 this morning and began the day feeling much better than yesterday. Unfortunately it would be up and down from there.

Again today my main meal would be breakfast. This time I decided to dine at the hotel restaurant, a place called “elements” in all lower-case letters. **[They’ve apparently since renamed the restaurant to “Seaport Social”.]** Most of the people there were part of package tours that included breakfast in their rate, and the host seemed a bit surprised to see a lone diner who wasn’t on a tour. He asked if I wanted their buffet. I looked briefly at the spread, but the very loose scrambled eggs put me off. I decided to order off the menu instead. I had eggs over hard, grilled ham (in weirdly small slices), rye toast, and another fruit salad. Elements advertises that they use only fresh, local ingredients, and that made their salad somewhat more limited than the one I’d had yesterday. It was basically strawberries and cantaloupe, which honestly don’t go that well together. It was obviously fresher than the salad I’d had at Smitty’s, but honestly I think I liked yesterday’s better.

All over the menu elements stressed that all their food was fresh and local. I’ve always wondered what such restaurants do in winter. The whole reason why food preservation methods developed was that our ancestors knew their gardens would go barren in the cold months. You might be able to get fresh meat in winter, and you might have root vegetables and hard fruits in the cellar. You certainly couldn’t sustain a restaurant menu with fresh, local ingredients in winter, though. **[When writing this revision, I was just about to write almost this same thing, when I realized that I’d put it as part of the original text of the travelogue. A northern restaurant that brags that its food is always “fresh and local” strikes me as a pretentious lie.]**

I packed up my stuff, and about 8:30 I headed down to the desk. The room rate at the Westin Nova Scotian shot up on business days, so I’d be moving elsewhere today. I left my bags with a bellman and got a receipt to reclaim them later in the day.

Buses are frequent in Halifax at commuting hours, and I quickly caught a bus that shuttled me downtown. The fare in Halifax is \$2.50 (a buck ninety U.S.), though it appeared I was just about the only person who threw a toonie and two quarters in the farebox. Virtually everyone flashed a monthly or annual pass to the driver. They’re apparently looking at introducing electronic fare payment, but that hasn’t begun yet. There’s no day pass, but they do have a generous transfer system, which I’d mostly take advantage of tomorrow. **[Apparently in 2025 Halifax Transit does most of their fare collection through a cell phone app. The standard fare has increased to \$3 Canadian, but they do now offer a day pass for \$7.50 and a two-day pass that’s just \$13.50.]**

I got off the bus in the heart of downtown. In the notes I made for writing this, I put that I walked up and up and **UP** from there. I’d find that today my biggest problem was stamina. My knee did fine, and I didn’t have to constantly go to the bathroom. I just had no energy at all. To reach my first destination of the day I needed to walk up two blocks of a hill and then up a long, winding ramp carved into a hill. I rested several times, but even so, when I reached the top I was completely winded. Family and friends know I walk a lot, and I could tell from this walk that something just wasn’t right. **[My knee has been an on-again, off-again problem in the years since this was originally written. Knock on wood, though, I generally have had decent stamina.]**

At the base of the hill with the ramp is the most photographed landmark in Halifax, the Town Clock. The tower dates to 1803. The tower survived the explosion, though the clockwork inside was destroyed. For decades they left the hands on the clock faces showing 9:04 as a memorial showing when the explosion happened. Today the clock is under renovation (as it seems everything in Canada is), and each of the four clock faces shows a different time. Regardless of what the faces say, though, the clock does still correctly play the Westminster chimes every quarter hour. It’s also a lovely little tower overlooking the city.

At the top of the hill is the city’s most famous attraction, the Halifax Citadel. Officially called Ft. George, the Citadel was erected to protect settlers from the French, the Acadians, and the Mic-Mac. It was rebuilt four times, with the present structure reinforced in the 1800s to provide protection against possible attack from U.S. forces. While it has never seen actual battle, it served as a barracks for the Canadian Forces as late as World War II. Today Parks Canada operates a living history portrayal of what life was like here in the early 19th Century. It’s interesting that they cast young Canadians of both sexes and all races, so I was greeted by a Middle Eastern woman in a kilt wearing a hijab under her feathered military headpiece.



Halifax Town Clock

I took a guided tour of the citadel. Another costumed young woman took us through the different barracks that various levels of the military would use and then up to the major canon battery. We then saw the enormous mast used for signal flags. While we were there they were going through a very formal ceremony of raising flags for the morning, which was fascinating to see. We then saw the jail (technically spelled g – a – o – l) and the munitions magazine. The tour worked well to see everything, and it was quite interesting. **[While it’s perfectly possible to just wander around the grounds on your own at Signal Hill, taking a more formal tour did allow me to learn about things in more detail and be sure I hadn’t missed any of the highlights.]**



Entrance to the Citadel – Halifax, Nova Scotia



Raising signal flags at the Citadel



**Deck chair from the Titanic
Maritime Museum of the Atlantic**

After seeing the Citadel I slowly made my way down the ramp and then spent a while walking around downtown. I was sweating again, so I popped into a Tim Horton's and got a smoothie. They had tables on the sidewalk in front, and I sipped it as I watched people pass by. Across the street was a site I wouldn't expect in Atlantic Canada. I looked across at the main Halifax Branch of the Bank of Montreal, which had bilingual signage. The first language was English, but the second language wasn't French, but rather Chinese. There are quite a few East Asians in Halifax, though it seems less than in most Canadian cities. I'm not sure why the bank felt a need for Chinese signs.

Next I made my way down to the waterfront and the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic. In preparing for this trip, this was one of the things I was most looking forward to seeing, but it turned out to be one of the most disappointing attractions. I was expecting something like the maritime museum I'd seen in Reykjavik, but this was much smaller and not as well presented. It mostly comes across as a dusty old museum, and most of the artifacts really aren't very well explained. There is a substantial collection of artifacts from the Titanic and also many from the Halifax Explosion. All in all, though, I just didn't care much for this museum.

I left the museum and spent an hour or so gradually making my way along the Halifax harbour walk. Pretty much every city on earth has done a similar waterfront restoration, and Halifax's is far from the most successful. Halifax harbour is still active, so most of the views are of an industrial landscape. It's not an unpleasant walk, though.

The Harbour Walk is very much geared to tourists **[the biggest reason I didn't care a lot for it]**, and it features tons of opportunities to part with your money. There are musicians playing traditional instruments who all but assault you if you don't pause to listen to them. There's also endless gift shops, art galleries, and stands selling homemade jewelry. My sister Margaret stopped in Halifax on a cruise a few years back, and I'm sure she loved this. I can't say it did a lot for me, though.

Of course there's also lots of food available along the harbourfront. I'd enjoyed beaver tails (basically Indian fry bread with sweet toppings) in Ottawa at Christmas, but today the smell of fried dough made me nauseous.

I also passed on fish and chips, lobster cakes, and elegant German pastries.



Theodore Tugboat in Halifax harbour

Indeed the only thing I bought as I walked along the waterfront was a snowcone. At four bucks it was horribly overpriced, but it was cold and refreshing.

As I walked, I happened to pass another “must see” thing, which is in the picture at left. *Theodore Tugboat* is a children’s cartoon series that originally aired on CBC in the ‘90s. The TV show inspired some Halifax residents to decorate an actual tugboat to look like the cartoon character.

Eventually I got to the south end of the waterfront, near the Westin Nova Scotian. Besides Pier 21, the main attraction there is the Seaport Farmers Market. This is also largely geared to tourists, with the offerings tending more toward maple products than fresh vegetables. One vendor

had fresh apple cider for sale, and I thought I’d pick up a liter of it. Unfortunately the vendor was busy chatting with someone else. I waited for over five minutes, but he never did come to the till to take my money. So I put the juice back in the cooler and went on my way.

I stopped briefly at a Mobil station that was part of the Great Atlantic Superstore complex. I picked up a couple bottles of ginger ale there that I’d drink later in the day. The price wasn’t indicated, but I from what I’d bought before, I figured it would be somewhere around six dollars. It ended up costing \$8.50 (\$6.40 U.S.). Not only did they have convenience store prices and the standard sales tax, but there’s also both bottle deposit and a separate “carbonation tax” in Halifax. That all added up fast.

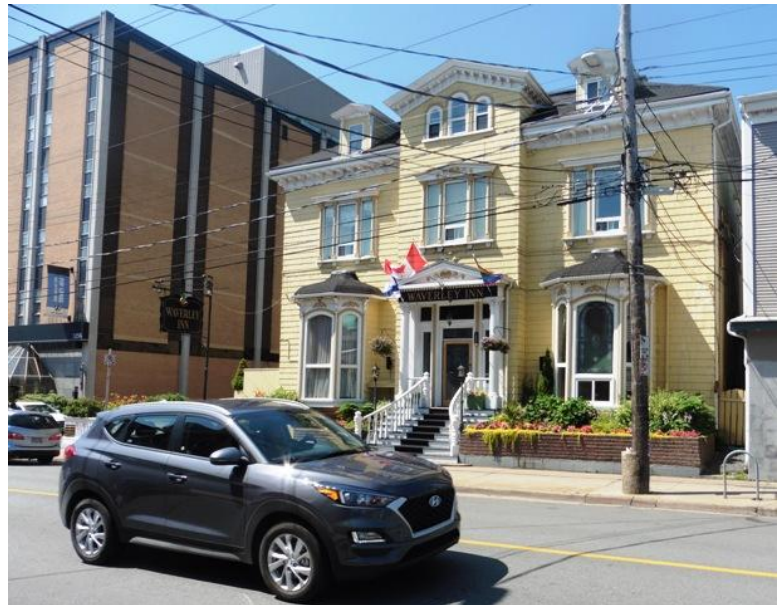
I made my way down to another Tim Horton’s, just south of the superstore. My stomach felt rather queasy, so my lunch today was another frozen beverage—this time a frozen raspberry lemonade. I accompanied that with some more Pepto-Bismol tablets, which did help to settle things down a bit. The frozen beverages, by the way, were all pretty cheap. Tim Horton’s had small frozen lemonades for \$1.59 (\$1.20 U.S.), and even the largest sizes were only about three bucks. It intrigued me that they tax carbonated beverages, but there’s no extra tax on things like smoothies and frozen lemonade. While there is some real fruit these drinks, there’s a whole lot more sugar. No one will ever pretend they’re a health food.

I reclaimed my bags, though I must say it seemed weird to give the bellman coins as a tip. I’m not a huge fan of high-value coins, but it is what most countries are using these days.

I walked a couple blocks west, right across from the bus stop I’d used earlier, to my new home at the Waverley Inn. The Waverley is located in an enormous Victorian home with the Canadian, Scottish, and gay pride flags on display out front. Originally built as a private residence, for nearly a century and a half the Waverley has been a lodging establishment.

Many prominent people have stayed here. Perhaps the best known is poet and playwright Oscar Wilde, who stayed in the room next to the one I was given. They have a little exhibit in front of that room that includes his typewriter and several photographs. There’s also an engraved sign that notes Wilde’s responding to a customs officer’s question of “Do you have anything to declare?” with “Nothing but my genius.”

P.T. Barnum also stayed at the Waverley, in a much fancier room than Wilde or me. It also hosted Anna Leonowens (as in *The King and I*) and her son-in-law, who founded the Bank of Nova Scotia. Today the Waverley functions as an oversized bed and breakfast, but it really was a fun place to stay.



Waverley Inn – Halifax

The check-in process was oddly long and complicated. I had to initial my life away and listen to a long spiel on what my key would and wouldn’t open. They lock the outside doors at night, and the room keys (traditional metal keys) won’t open them.

I made my way up to my room, which was small but quite well appointed. It had a double bed with more pillows than anyone could possibly use, a dresser, two chairs, and an end table with drawers. There was a sink in the main part of the room, and a toilet and tub in the bathroom. All the amenities, including the extra toilet paper roll, had been elegantly arranged and decorated with dry flowers. On the wall were old photographs in gilded frames. For \$135 a night (right at \$100 U.S.) it was actually quite a pleasant room. The Waverley is cheaper during the week and more expensive on weekends, so moving here on Monday made sense.

I was absolutely exhausted when I got to the Waverley, so I just relaxed and rested for about three hours. I ran the air conditioning full blast and sipped on the ginger ale I'd bought. I never really slept, but I did lay in bed with the TV on. I watched Game Channel, which during the day in Canada shows re-runs of old American game shows. I thought of our mother ironing laundry as I watched *Match Game* and *The \$10,000 Pyramid*.

Around 6pm I had enough energy to go out again. I walked back to that Bank of Montreal I'd seen earlier and got my last stash of Canadian cash from their ATM. Just down the street from there was a place called Sugar Fix, where I got a cone with blueberry ice cream and white chocolate chunks. It was delicious.

For dinner tonight I had the classic "sick folks" food—chicken soup. I went back to the Tim Horton's by the superstore and got a bowl of chicken noodle soup and another berry smoothie. I got them to go (which always means a lower tax rate in Canada) and ate them in my room at the Waverley. The soup came with a roll, and they included nine different pats of butter that I could use for it. There were also half a dozen packets each of salt and pepper. I used about one and a half of the butters and one little envelope of pepper. It certainly seemed wasteful to throw out the rest. **[I remember that my room at the Waverley had only a single tiny wastebasket, the sort of thing where a woman might dispose of sanitary products. Just the trash from Tim Horton's filled it, and with a few other things it was quickly overwhelmed.]**

One of the choices on Halifax's cable system is NBC 10 from Boston, which oddly almost never mentions their actual call sign WBTS. I watched the local news from Boston and then *Jeopardy*. It's really weird that in the Atlantic Time Zone the pre-prime time game shows don't come on until 8:30 at night. I'm used to having the news at six, with prime time starting at 7pm. We all know Eastern Time is later, but it's weird to think of a time zone that's an hour later still.

After *Jeopardy* I tuned back to CTV News. I can't tell you a lot about what was happening today, though, because I fell asleep with the TV on.

TUESDAY, JULY 30

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

I was up around 7:00 this morning and spent quite a while getting ready in slow motion. Eventually I made my way down to the basement, where the Waverley serves their breakfast. It was an impressive spread. I enjoyed blueberry pancakes with maple syrup, slices of various cheeses, hash browns, juice, and coffee, and a banana. They also had hot and cold cereal, other fruit, and a wide range of pastries available. The only thing I took and didn't enjoy was bacon. It was sliced thick but undercooked, basically a big sloppy mess of fat. I don't know why people bother serving bacon if it's not crispy. **[Apparently that's how it's commonly served in Britain, which is probably where Nova Scotia got the custom.]**

Around 9:00 I checked out and left my bags at the desk. I took bus 7 downtown, making sure to request a transfer. Bus transfers in Halifax are strips of flimsy paper, with the color varying day to day. (Today was an avocado hue.) Various times of day are listed along the strips, and the driver is supposed to rip them so that the expiration time is at the bottom of the transfer. You can make unlimited transfers to different vehicles within that window. While in theory that expiration time should be an hour and a half after boarding, they're usually very generous in how they rip the slips. This morning my transfer expired at 11:00, about half an hour later than it should have. In the afternoon I'd get one that would be valid for four hours.

I got off near the Maritime Museum where I'd been yesterday. I knew the Halifax ferry terminal was supposed to be near there, but I spent about fifteen minutes trying to find it. Eventually I realized that it was in the back of a building that mostly houses the local courthouse and—what else—Tim Horton's.

My bus transfer also worked on the local ferries, and I soon caught a boat across the harbour. The destination for this route is listed as Alderney, which is the gentrifying waterfront area of Dartmouth, a formerly separate city across the harbour from Halifax proper. **[Like Toronto and most of Canada's other big cities, Halifax merged with its suburbs back in the '70s. There were a few U.S. cities (like Nashville and Miami) that did the same thing. It helps avoid the problem of having a dying city center with a wealthy tax base on the fringes.]**

Technically there is no actual city named Halifax these days. The lowest level of government is the Halifax Regional Municipality, which is essentially a county and includes the core city, Dartmouth (which is basically a twin city), a number of suburbs, and lots and lots of rural area. That area has about half a million people, which is what is normally the population given for Halifax. Only about 200,000 live in the core city itself, though. Dartmouth has about 100,000 more, and the rest are scattered throughout



David Burrow on board the Viola Desmond in Halifax harbour

the area. It appears there are a lot of political issues between the various parts of the region, and people almost invariably refer to where they live by neighborhood rather than saying they're from Halifax.

It intrigued me that the boat I was on was called the Viola Desmond. You might recall that in my Christmas travelogue I noted that Desmond, who is often called the Rosa Parks of Canada, appears on the latest version of the Canadian \$10 bill. Desmond was from Nova Scotia, so it makes sense they'd name a local ferry after her. Oddly, on this trip I didn't see a single one of the new tens. I actually didn't see many tens at all, more often getting two fives if that was the required change. The tens I did get, though, were the old ones with Prime Minister MacDonald on the front and the Canadian Rockies on the back.

It only takes about ten minutes to cross Halifax Harbour, but it is a pleasant trip. When I reached Alderney landing, I found there was yet another Tim Horton's inside the ferry terminal. (They really are everywhere in Canada.) I picked up another frozen lemonade and spent about half an hour sipping on it in a very pleasant waterfront park. Then I used the same bus transfer to ride back across the harbour to downtown Halifax.

[I almost get a laugh reading of all the frozen drinks I had on this trip. While I might have one as a big treat now or then these days, there's no way I could have multiple slushes or smoothies in the same day. It does seem weird to me that no one seems to make a diet frozen drink. I'd think they'd be quite popular, but everything on the market seems to be packed with sugar—or more likely high fructose corn sugar.]



View of downtown Halifax from Alderney landing

It was right on the border of my transfer's expiration when I got back to the Halifax ferry terminal, so I paid another fare to catch bus #29. I actually got on that bus in the wrong place, and the driver scolded me mildly. There are separate drop-off and pick-up points at the ferry terminal, though they're only a few feet apart. I'd boarded at drop-off, and then seconds later the bus pulled up to the other stop.

I rode the bus to the end of the line, a place called Point Pleasant Park. This is at the extreme southern tip of the Halifax Peninsula, south of the train station and the hotels I'd been at. The bus stops at a parking lot at the north end of the park. Beyond there are only gravel trails.



Prince of Wales Tower – Halifax

I followed the gravel, again proceeding much more slowly than I normally would. Most of the park is an off-leash area for dogs. There were a lot of canines there, but I was pleased that none of them really bothered me. I think I'd hate to be there on a weekend, though.

The first main point of interest in the park is Prince of Wales Tower. Built in 1796, the stone tower was mostly used as a powder magazine. Its walls are eight feet thick.

A bit further down is the Cambridge Battery, which was built in the 1840s and remained active through World War I. It guarded the harbour but never actually fired a shot other than ceremonially. Today the battery is used for performances of Shakespeare by the Sea.

Eventually I made my way down to the actual point in Point Pleasant Park. I was rewarded for my efforts with an immaculately clean rocky beach here with gorgeous views of the Atlantic. There's also a war memorial and

some interpretive signs on the history of the area. While it's a bit of a chore to get there, I do recommend that anyone who visits Halifax makes their way down to the point.



**Looking out at the Atlantic
Point Pleasant Park – Halifax, Nova Scotia**

Having walked down to the shoreline, of course I had to make my way back up. That was very slow going. There's a series of benches along the trail, with probably 400 meters or so from one to the next. I walked from bench to bench, but I felt absolutely spent when I reached each one. I think I spent more time resting on those benches than I did walking up the trail.

There was a convenience store just outside the park, but its prices were even higher than the Mobil station. I bought a bottle of Orangina (\$4 even), but I passed on throwing over five bucks for an ice cream bar. I sipped my pop during my long wait for the bus. Buses are supposed to come through here every twenty minutes, in both directions of a loop. I waited nearly forty minutes, though, before the first bus in either direction passed. If my phone had worked in Canada, I could have texted for the arrival time, but unfortunately all I could do was wait.

I rode the bus back downtown, where I stopped at Scotia Square. This is a big downtown mall from the '60s that long ago saw its better days. My bet is that at some point in the past it was probably named Eaton Centre, after a now-dead department store chain. Pretty much every Canadian city has a mall that was once Eaton Centre, and most are of about the same vintage as Scotia Square. If it wasn't Eaton's that built Scotia Square, then it must have been some regional chain that also long ago went under. **[I did some searching and found that Scotia Square has in fact always had the same name. The mall was part of an urban renewal complex that mostly featured public housing. When it was opened its main anchor was Woolco. Most of Canada's Woolco stores were converted to Wal-Marts around 1990. My bet is that Wal-Mart didn't care for the downtown location in Halifax, so they just closed the store entirely. There once was an Eaton's store in downtown Halifax, but it relocated to the suburbs at about the same time Scotia Square was built.]**

I got a smoothie at the Scotia Square McDonalds and hooked up to their wi-fi. Mostly I scoped out how to get to my final hotel at Halifax Airport on the bus. I relaxed in the air conditioning a bit and then took the bus back to the Waverley Inn. I claimed my bags there and then returned downtown.

The transfer to get to the airport bus in Halifax is not particularly easy. Most buses stop on the north and east sides of Scotia Square, while the airport bus leaves from a parking ramp behind the mall to the west. I got off at the north side of the mall and had to cross two very busy streets to get to the stop I wanted. In the process I just missed my connection. The airport bus only runs hourly, so I had a long boring wait before I could leave.

The driver of bus 320 actually arrived about ten minutes before the appointed departure time. We actually departed about five minutes behind schedule, though, because he took a lengthy smoke break before we set off. There's a fare supplement for the airport bus, so I had to drop a dollar coin in addition to flashing my transfer.

The route took us through the North End of Halifax (which happens to be the area most damaged in the explosion). Then we made our way over the Angus MacDonald Suspension Bridge. This is a toll bridge, and I was amused to find as we passed through the automatic gate that the sign flashed a message saying that the electronic pass on our bus had a low balance. It does seem a bit strange for one government entity to pay toll to another. I checked online, though, and apparently the electronic fare is \$1.20 each time the bus crosses the bridge. If they didn't have a pass, the rate would be \$2.50.

We stopped at Bridge Terminal station in Dartmouth, where the driver took another smoke break. From there we went up a hill on a highway



**"Selfie" waiting for the airport bus
Scotia Square parking ramp – Halifax**

that follows two different one-way streets. There's a McDonalds in the middle of those two streets that serves traffic in both directions. It reminded me of a similar McDonalds they used to have on the west side of Ottumwa.

Soon we merged onto a massive freeway. This part of the route reminded me of when Paul and I flew into Minsk years ago and took brand new freeways that had been built for the 1980 Olympics. After a few miles we pulled out at a park-and-ride. A woman with a baby stroller boarded there. She rode out to the airport and then stayed on the bus as it went back to the city. I wonder if she wasn't just trying to quiet her kid, in the way some parents might by taking their baby for a ride in the car.

Beyond the park-and-ride two freeways came together at an enormous roundabout. Highway engineers keep trying to brag up roundabouts and tell us how they're the perfect solution to every traffic problem. This one was definitely the argument against that. Where a traditional interchange would have kept traffic on both freeways moving, here everyone in all directions came to a dead stop as they entered the circle. I was very glad I didn't have to drive through the mess.

For the last part of the trip we made a series of stops on the freeway access road that is essentially the back entrance to the airport. Halifax Airport (YHZ) is about thirty-five miles from the city proper, and it took nearly an hour to get there on the bus. There was a bit of a delay when we arrived, too, because they let a handicapped person board first before they let anyone off the bus.

While I wouldn't be flying until tomorrow, I had decided to stay right at the airport so I wouldn't have to make this trip early in the morning. There are a number of hotels vaguely near Halifax Airport, but I'd decided to stay right on the airport grounds. Just steps from the bus stop I reached my final destination, the Alt Hotel.

Alt is run by St. Germain Hotels, a company based in Quebec that runs expensive hotels all over Canada. Those that bear the St. Germain brand are apparently rather stuffy old-school hotels. Alt is a brand that mostly exists near major airports. There was one adjacent to Viscount station in Toronto, and they have about a dozen others at transportation hubs around the country.

I entered on ground level and found I had to go up to the second floor to find the lobby, which is connected to the main terminal by a skywalk. I checked in quickly and was assigned to Room 1401, which again was really on the thirteenth floor. If you see the colored panels at the top of the hotel in the picture, I was at the left end of those.

My room was absolutely enormous, and it had a cute, ultra-modern décor. My bet is that the place won't age particularly well, though. The floor was covered with a fake wood laminate, and almost every other surface in the place was plastic or cement. It looked nice brand new, but I'd imagine before long it will seem cheap and tacky. I was paying about the same as at the Westin Nova Scotian (roughly \$200 Canadian a night), and honestly that rate seemed mighty steep here. The Alt Hotel was overly pretentious, but it didn't deliver any real luxury.



**Alt Hotel – Halifax Airport
(from the hotel's website)**

There were some odd quirks at this hotel, too. I was told when checking in that I would need to tap my room key to use the elevator. A lot of hotels do that these days, but obviously some guests had forgotten the instructions. I saw several people waiting and waiting, wondering when the elevator would finally run. They also require you to insert a key in a receptacle by the door in order to turn on the electricity in the room. A lot of hotels in Europe do that, but it's very unusual in North America. I wonder how much they actually save by turning the power off between guests.

In my room there were two lights that seemed to glow the entire time I was there. I eventually figured out how to extinguish one of them, but the other (which lit nothing but the Nespresso coffee machine) never did turn off. Even when I removed the key from the receptacle, the light over the coffeemaker stayed on. It made me wonder whether Nestlé hadn't paid some premium to permanently light their product.



View from Room 1401 – Alt Hotel – Halifax

One other issue was ice. The Alt Hotel seemed to go out of its way to discourage guests from using ice. There were only two ice machines in the entire building. Fortunately those were on floors 12 and 15, so just above and below me. What was weird, though, was that they didn't have any sort of ice buckets in the rooms. I don't think I've been in a hotel anywhere in the world that didn't have ice buckets. The Westin had lovely monogrammed brushed metal buckets with thick insulation, and even Motel 6 gives you an old Cool Whip container you can use to get ice. There were no containers of any sort in the room; nor did they have anything by the ice machines. I ended up improvising with a plastic bag I'd gotten at Shopper's Drug Mart. You have to pay for plastic bags in Canada, so at least I was getting my money's worth out of this one. That easily remedied little flaw will as much as anything keep me from ever going to an Alt Hotel again.

While there is an overpriced café in the hotel, I decided to walk over to the airport for dinner. I first made a brief stop at a place called the Nova

Scotia store, where I bought a T-shirt and some maple sugar candies. Then I went to the airport Subway. I got a six-inch ham and cheese (and yes, they still size their sandwiches in inches even though everything else in Canada follows Metric measures) and some beef and barley soup. It was interesting that while almost everything about Subway was the same as it would be at home, there were subtle differences in the bread choices and the toppings available on the sandwiches.

[When I went to Subway in New Zealand, they also sold their sandwiches in “six-inch” and “footlong” sizes, though I actually got a salad there. New Zealand was honestly way more Metric than Canada is. A lot of Imperial measurements still creep in around Canada, particularly in the grocery store. While the official measures of meat and produce are given in grams, Canadian supermarkets advertise the prices by the pound. In New Zealand, on the other hand, things are sold and advertised either by the kilogram or in units of 100 grams.]

When I got back to my room I found that Microsoft was installing an update to Windows 10. That took much of the rest of the evening, and in the process it deleted the document where I'd been keeping notes for this travelogue. Fortunately I had an older version of that saved elsewhere, so I only had to re-do about a day and a half of the notes. **[These days I tend to put such notes in Google Keep, where they're stored online. I've never had an issue with any unwanted deletions there—knock on wood.]**

I laid in bed and watched a lengthy travel documentary on Finland and Estonia. Once again I fell asleep with the TV on.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 31

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA TO CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

It was very foggy when I got up this morning, enough that I wondered whether my flights would be going ahead as scheduled. There was little to do, though, than to say a little prayer and hope things would be all right. I showered, made a cup of Nespresso, dressed, and turned on my computer. I checked the status of the flight and found in the bilingual results screen that it was still “à l'heure” or on time.

At 7:30 I checked out of the hotel and made my way through the skywalk to a very empty airport terminal. Stanfield International Airport in Halifax is the eighth busiest airport in Canada. At four million passengers a year, though, it handles less than a tenth the traffic that Toronto—Pearson does. Among airports I've been to, it's a little larger than Anchorage and Albuquerque, but notably smaller than New Orleans or Kansas City. Their terminal seems overbuilt for the traffic volume. **[Mind you, that's not a bad thing.]**

Halifax Airport also featured in the 9/11 flight diversions featured in *Come from Away*. Less is made about Halifax than Gander, though, because it's not quite as big of a deal to absorb a few thousand people in a city of half a million. There were actually seventeen Canadian airports that welcomed flights bound to the U.S.A. on 9/11, from Vancouver in the west to St. John's in the east. Even Whitehorse and Yellowknife were part of what is now known as Operation Yellow Ribbon. Canadian border officers processed around 40,000 passengers who were bound to the States from four different continents. There is a plaque of from the United States thanking the people of Canada at Halifax airport that was presented by Condoleezza Rice.

There was a huge tape maze at the check-in area for Porter Airlines, but absolutely no one was waiting there. I quickly made my way to the front, checked my bag (which was small in dimensions, but well over their weight limit) and got boarding passes for the flights I'd be taking today. I also confirmed with the woman at the desk that the bag was checked through to Chicago; I wouldn't have to deal with it anywhere else. On most flights from Canada to the U.S. you have to claim your bag at the last Canadian destination and go through U.S. customs (in Canada) before re-checking it. The small airport Porter uses in Toronto doesn't have a U.S. customs facility, though, so everything was treated as it would be on a domestic flight.

Once I had my boarding pass, I made my way to security. Things started out fine there, until the officer noticed the brace on my knee. He felt that might be a security hazard and proceeded to swab it for explosives. Of course it came back negative, but it made for an amusing delay.

Porter Airlines is described as a low-cost carrier, and is most often equated with Southwest Airlines in the States. Their only alliance with another airline is with Jet Blue, and they're often compared with them as well. I've never flown either Southwest or Jet Blue, but Porter was mostly quite pleasant. They fly small planes (Canadair regional jets made in Toronto), but they seem to cram them less full than some airlines do. Their flight attendants (who dress in cute “retro” outfits) provide a high standard of service. Snacks (chips, cookies, nuts, etc.) are free on board, and they encourage people to take more than one if they want. They also provide free drinks, both with and without alcohol. **[I've since flown both Jet Blue and Southwest. I liked Jet Blue a lot, while I truly hated Southwest. I'm pretty sure I'd say Porter is my favorite in the group, though.]**

Porter used to provide free beverages and drinks on the ground as well. However, the concessionaires at the various airlines they served got them to discontinue that policy. So instead of getting free coffee from Porter this morning, I had to buy it from Tim Horton's. I got a small black coffee, yet another berry smoothie, and a pack of what they called “bacon and cheese bites”. I selected that last item on a whim after seeing a picture of them on the menu board. I shouldn't have bothered with them. They're little disks of egg, cheese, and bacon bits, and I'm sure they'd be quite tasty if made fresh in a restaurant. At Tim Horton's, though, they're obviously shipped frozen and microwaved. The result is salty hockey pucks, and I threw most of them out.



**View from Room 1401 early Wednesday morning
(Both pictures have a purple tint from the colored glass.)**

Pretty much everyone who goes through security at Halifax airport stops at this Tim Horton's. As I sat nursing my drinks, I saw passenger after passenger coming up the escalator and stopping for a coffee. There are actually two other Tim Horton's at Halifax Airport as well—one pre-security and the other in the U.S. departures area. This one appeared to serve the full menu of soups and sandwiches, as well as coffee and doughnuts.

It was interesting that Tim Horton's was playing a '70s radio station. I pondered as I listened just when the last time I even thought about the group America was. It had certainly been decades since I heard the song "A Horse with No Name".

By the way, the big thing Tim Horton's is pushing in Canada at the moment is the "beyond burger", a vegetarian sandwich whose "meat" is made of pea protein, bamboo cellulose and tons and tons of stabilizers. While I'm not vegetarian, I eat very little meat myself. It's not like I'm a health nut; it's just way cheaper that way. Better than half the entrees I eat at home are meatless. I could easily live on meat-free soups and chili, pasta with only cheese, vegetable stir fries, and a range of salads. Somehow I've never felt a need to have vegetable products masquerading as meat, though. Reviews of Tim Horton's new burger are very split; people either love it or hate it. I suspect the reaction has more to do with people's politics and state of mind than with the food itself. **[Today I probably eat slightly more meat than I did before the diabetes diagnosis. I have almost no pasta or rice these days, and I have to be careful with things like the beans in chili. High protein foods like meat don't affect blood glucose, though, and fat isn't really a problem either. I suspect plant-based meats are probably not diabetic-friendly, but I've never bothered to find out whether or not that's true.]**

Once I'd finished at Tim Horton's I made my way to the gate area. I used up as many dimes and nickels as I could buying an overpriced bottle of pop, which I sipped until the plane arrived. The flight I was booked on actually originated in St. John's, Newfoundland. It had left there on schedule and was listed as arriving in Halifax on time as well. The fog was gradually burning off, so I hoped that would be the case.

I did a bit of bumming around on the internet, and I read some more from the Julia Child biography. At about 9:25 clerks finally arrived to man the desk at the gate, and five minutes later the flight from St. John's arrived. Dozens of people departed, and just a few minutes later they called boarding for Ottawa and Toronto. The boarding process was mostly smooth, the notable exception being a gentleman seated in the row in front of me. I made my way down the long jet bridge and entered the plane, only to find him blocking the aisle while he went through items in both the overhead bin and in his seat. It turned out he had left his glasses in the terminal, and he had to go back and get them.

You can pay to get a specific seat assignment on Porter, or you can just let them assign you a seat. Unless you're with a group, there's certainly no reason to pay for a seat. It's a 2—2 configuration, so every seat is either aisle or window. For the first two of three legs on this journey, I ended up in 3—B, an aisle seat near the front of the plane. I don't know what would have made any other seat better than the one I was randomly assigned. **[Porter has since bought some larger planes, and paying to choose a seat might be worth it if the alternative was being assigned to a center seat.]**

Almost all the announcements on Porter are pre-recorded. I suppose then they don't have to worry about hiring bilingual staff. Something that stood out was that they announced twice that all passengers needed to remove headphones during the safety demo. I never wear headphones anyway, but it's an interesting rule for those who do.

We pushed back from the gate about ten minutes early and were in the air before our scheduled departure time. Something that stood out on this flight was that people were in the aisle throughout it. The restroom is at the front of the plane, so tons of people filed past my seat to get there. There were also lots of small children on the flight, and parents were keeping them occupied by walking the aisles. The kids were mostly quite well behaved, so I guess it worked.

I read through my brother Paul's write-ups of his two most recent trips on this flight, and I also thumbed through *Re-Porter*, the rather worthless in-flight magazine. I enjoyed orange juice and coffee served in glass and china. For my snack I chose a bag of chips, mostly because it was hyper-inflated like I remember seeing packs of film when we'd vacation in the mountains. I don't think I'd ever had chips on an airplane before, but of course the pressure would affect their packaging.

They turned the seat belt light on and announced that we would be experiencing "rough air". I've been through far worse turbulence that went unnoted, though.

We landed in Ottawa at 11:08am Eastern Time and were parked at the jetway just a couple minutes later. This plane was a puddle-jumper (something you don't really see in the States these days). Its route was St. John's → Halifax → Ottawa → Toronto → Thunder Bay. A little more than half the passengers (almost all of them seated at the rear of the plane) exited at Ottawa, while the rest of us just waited for the next leg. **[I mentioned Southwest Airlines earlier, and its schedule does depend on puddle-jumping. That's also true of low-cost carriers like Frontier and Spirit. All the big airlines fly between their hubs and let regional affiliates fly from the hubs to smaller cities.]**

I used the restroom while we were on the ground. It was incredibly cramped, but I made things work. Apparently the water faucet was out of service, as it had a sign taped to it that said "ROBINET HORS D'USAGE". There was a container of hand sanitizer nearby. The sign intrigued me because I didn't know that "robinet" was the French word for water faucet. The only place I'd encountered that word before was in the old drinking song "Chevaliers de la Table Ronde", where it refers to the tap on a keg. Our French teacher taught us that song in high school, which makes me wonder if she could get away with that today.

The most annoying thing about the layover in Ottawa was that for some reason the jetway kept making an annoying beeping sound, the sort of noise some trucks make when backing up. Being at the front of the plane, I could hear this quite loudly. I'm not sure what was up, since the thing didn't seem to be moving at all.

The Ottawa passengers boarded, and we pushed back from the gate at 11:55am. It was an incredibly uneventful flight. I filled most of the time reading more of the Julia Child biography. I chose shortbread cookies for my snack this time, and I had cranberry juice for my drink.

We began our descent for Toronto at half past noon. Toronto City Airport (also called Billy Bishop Airport, with code YTZ) is located on an island in Lake Ontario, just south of downtown Toronto. Landings and take-offs there provide absolutely gorgeous views of the city and the lake.

We landed at 12:48 and quickly pulled up to a gate. While we were parked right at the gate, we actually used steps rather than a jetway to deplane in Toronto. I grabbed my bookbag and made my way down the stairs. Inside the terminal they divided passengers into three groups: those whose destination was Toronto, those who were transferring to domestic flights, and those who were transferring to U.S.-bound flights. I'm not sure why they segregate the "trans-border" passengers, when there aren't U.S. Customs facilities to go through. **[I think they may have checked our passports to make sure we wouldn't have issues on landing.]** Basically the domestic and international departures are done from two different large holding lounges.

I had about two hours to kill before my other flight would depart, and it was a rather boring wait. While the waiting area was huge, it was basically just a bunch of chairs. The only businesses appeared to be a duty free shop and a Hudson News outlet. I did a bit of work on the computer and entertained myself by gawking at other passengers. One woman, who was headed to Newark, really stood out. She was probably forty years old, but she wore white platform shoes with glitter and unicorns on them.

There's only one desk in this lounge, and they use that to board people through at least eight different gates. Everybody leaves through the same door, but then they divide people off in a hallway to head to the correct gates. They began boarding my flight to Chicago at 2:55pm. This time I was assigned to 9—A, a window seat right by the engine. While perhaps a bit louder than I'd care for, it was also a perfectly acceptable seat. I ended up next to an Asian girl who spent the entire flight doing homework for a business class. The title of the chapter she was working on was "Cultivate a Customer-Centric Culture within Your Organization". I'm glad I wasn't in that class.



View while taxiing to take off from Toronto

sounds fun" as she handed back my passport. My bag was one of the first ones off the carousel, and the guy at the exit just took my declaration without a blink. It intrigued me that a black man who had been argumentative with same woman I'd spoken with had been pulled aside to have his luggage searched. It wouldn't surprise me if that man left the airport thinking he'd been singled out with racial profiling. My bet, though, is that someone just needs to remind him of the old adage that you get more flies with honey than with vinegar.

It's a long walk from the actual airport at Midway to the 'L' station of the same name. I made my way through the skywalk that crosses Cicero Avenue and then through a massive parking ramp. About fifteen minutes later I was in the busway at the station.

While I waited, someone led an elderly blind man up to the bus stop where I was. When his assistant had left, he confirmed with me that this was the stop for the southbound 54-B, which it was. He asked if I knew when it was coming. I didn't at the time, but I was able to use the Ventra app on my phone to check that information. It was nice to have my phone working properly again.

It was about a ten-minute wait before the bus showed up. It went very slowly, though, since in the late afternoon Cicero Avenue was packed with outbound traffic. Midway is at 57th Street, and I was headed to 73rd Street. That's a little less than two miles, but it took a full fifteen minute to cover the distance. **[The original proposal for the orange line 'L' would have taken it south to roughly where my hotel was located, making for a much faster trip. The line was pared back to save money, though, and these days there don't appear to be any plans to extend it further south than the airport.]** We had especially long stops at 63rd and 65th Streets—waiting through a full cycle of traffic lights at each of those. At 65th and Cicero I happened to notice a Panda Express restaurant, and that sounded like it might be a good place to have dinner.

I'd made a point redemption reservation at the Quality Inn—Midway, and I got there about 4:45pm. I think the Quality Inn may be the only one of the Midway hotels that's actually in the city of Chicago. The rest are across Cicero Avenue in the suburb of Bedford Park, which has more favorable real estate taxes. The Quality Inn is part of the Ford City Mall complex. This is a mostly dead shopping center that was built on the site of a plant where Ford built defense vehicles during World War II. Until around the year 2000 it was a very active mall with four major department stores. Now it houses businesses like Marshall's and Ross Dress for Less, plus lots and lots of empty space. Across the street in Bedford Park there are enormous Costco, Wal-Mart, and Target stores, but the Chicago side has lots of abandoned buildings.



Quality Inn—Midway

Check-in was quick and easy. I made my way up to Room 519 where I rested up a bit. While the room was huge (with a king bed and a sofa bed), there really wasn't much to recommend the place. I'd bet the place was built in the 1980s, and it's probably been renovated once since then. It used to be a Clarion, and I'd bet it was something else before that. Even with the curtains open on a sunny day, the room seemed dimly lit. The room had been picked up and wiped down, but there was a lasting grunge that only deep cleaning could fix. I'd chosen to stay here because it was just about the only place in Chicago that had a reasonable point redemption rate—which makes sense given that the Lollapalooza music festival would be starting tomorrow. It's highly unlikely I'll ever be back, though.

[This property is no longer a Quality Inn. It's shown as a Holiday Inn both on TripAdvisor and the IHG (Holiday Inn's parent company) website. The reviews in 2024 were mostly scathing. It appears they are currently renting most of their rooms to the city to house homeless people, which does not make for a good experience for normal guests. I've encountered hotels with similar arrangements in the Twin Cities, and I'd definitely try to avoid them elsewhere.]

I rested up a bit and then decided to head into the city and try to be back before nightfall. I went down to street level and fairly quickly caught a northbound bus back to Midway. I transferred to the orange line and took the 'L' downtown.

I exited at Quincy and made my way to one of a half dozen or so Chicago locations of Amazon Go. This is a chain of convenience stores that exist in Seattle, San Francisco, Chicago, and (as of just a few weeks ago) New York. Amazon's plan is to open them in the downtown areas of tech-forward cities all over the country. I'd gone to a couple other locations of Amazon Go when I was in Chicago at Easter, and I thought it would be fun to check them out again.

The motto of Amazon Go is "Just walk out", and their most noteworthy feature is that there is no check-out. To enter the store you have to download their phone app (which I'd done at Easter). You scan a QR code at the turnstile, and it lets you in. There are literally hundreds of cameras in the ceiling, and while you're in the store, they're following your every move. They see when you pick things up and when you put them back on the shelf. You can put them in a bag or in your pocket, and they know you've taken them. Once you're done shopping, as the motto says, you just walk out. A couple minutes later you can access a receipt either through the phone app or by e-mail. Everything is billed directly to the credit card you have on file with Amazon. I've used Amazon Go three times now. I've found it quick and easy, and the billing was always right. I've read numerous reviews from people who purposely tried to screw up the system, and it appears that it works correctly 100% of the time. **[I've been to Amazon Go a few more times since this trip. While I don't know that there's really much point to the concept, it is kind of fun to shop there.]**

Just down the street from Amazon Go was an Arby's, and I decided to have dinner there instead of at Panda Express. I had a carved turkey and Swiss cheese sandwich. It was very good, but was another thing that was just too big. I only finished about half of it.

For variety I decided to take the pink line out to the Cicero stop. The pink line is probably my favorite of the 'L' lines in Chicago. It runs roughly at roof level past what look like cozy houses from the late 1800s. That's actually a generous description, since the neighborhoods it passes through (Pilsen and Little Village) are generally considered slums. I might not want to be on the streets at night there, but they do look pleasant passing by on the 'L'.

I got off at Cicero and Cermak and had a rather long wait for a southbound bus. We made our way down Cicero Avenue much faster than before, though, and I made it back to the hotel about 8:15pm.

I'd picked up a copy of *Hoy*, the free Spanish-language newspaper published by the *Chicago Tribune* [**Hoy is no longer in print**], and I was very disturbed by one of the articles in it. Apparently a number of convenience store workers in the western suburbs had recently had customers come in and yell at them that they should "Go back to your own country". Everyone involved was a U.S. citizen of either Hispanic or Middle Eastern origin. Most had been here at least two generations, and in one case the person who had been yelled at was a sixth generation Mexican—American.

It doesn't take much thought to figure out exactly where that language comes from. When our President uses those same words with black and Hispanic members of Congress, it eggs on his supporters. It's just plain wrong to treat people that way, and it really

bothers me that no one in the Republican Party ever seems to call out the President when he says things like that. No one deserves to be treated that way, and Republican leaders need to stand up to the President and let him know that. Sadly, it really does seem that what used to be the party of moderation and Christian values has become the party of outright, unapologetic racism. **[It's only gotten worse in the past six years, of course. When an Episcopal Bishop read Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount at Trump's second inauguration, Trump called her "nasty" and his allegedly Christian supporters suggested she should apologize for daring to say such things to him.]**

I turned the TV to one of my favorite shows, *Forensic Files*. I watch that almost every night at home, and it was good to be able to watch it again. Then, a little before midnight, I turned off the TV and went to sleep.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 1

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS TO BETTENDORF, IOWA



**News photo of car crashed into Panda Express
65th & Cicero – Chicago, Illinois**

[I checked online and found this Panda Express location has re-opened. I doubt I'll ever go there, though, since these days I find that few things spike my blood sugar more than Chinese food.]

I was up around 6:30 and turned on WBBM news radio in the background. While there's no TV stations that cover news stories without editorializing in America these days, at least there are a few radio stations that continue to feel news rather than opinion is important. I did a double-take when one of the big local stories ended up being about a place I'd been by on the bus just yesterday. Overnight someone had cashed an SUV into the wall of the Panda Express at 65th and Cicero, the same place I had thought about eating last night. The driver apparently fled the scene, though I think he could be easily identified from the license plate. The police found a woman stuck in the passenger seat, and she refused treatment. So both of the people are all right, but there's a huge amount of damage to both the car and the restaurant. I would go past Panda Express again when I left this morning, and it looked almost exactly like the photo. It should end up on one of those "America's Dumbest" shows.

Since this was a "free" hotel night, I can't be too picky, but the breakfast at the Quality Inn was pretty sad indeed. They served it in their restaurant, which is closed for other meals. There were no eggs or meat, and their waffle irons weren't working for some reason, so the only "hot" item on their buffet was biscuits and gravy. I took a biscuit, and it was so hard I couldn't cut into it. They also had no honey or jam to put on it. There were danishes, but they looked as if they'd been sitting around for a week. I also passed on the badly bruised fruit and on the juice that had stuff floating in it. The coffee also had no flavor at all, and that was pretty much it for breakfast.

I checked out of the hotel and made my way to the bus stop. The hotel has an airport shuttle, but it was difficult to use. I had a pass on a Ventra card left over from the kid who didn't go to national quiz bowl earlier in the summer, so it was essentially free to use the bus and 'L'.

I caught a bus and made my way up Cicero Avenue to Midway station. I stopped briefly at a Dunkin' Donuts there, where I picked up a small coffee and a Boston cr me. Then I made my way to the 'L' tracks. I'm not sure what the schedule is supposed to be for orange line trains leaving Midway, but they need to increase service at rush hour. Almost every seat on the train was full when we left the Midway terminal, and we just kept adding more and more passengers at every station. It was jam-packed by the time we got to Roosevelt, just south of downtown.

I got off at Quincy again, and I made my way west across the Chicago River to Union Station. I had a business class ticket on Amtrak later today, and that allowed me to store my bags in the Metropolitan Lounge throughout the day. The lounge attendant seemed to think it odd that someone with an evening ticket would show up in the morning. That has to happen all the time, though, as people will check out of their hotels hours before they travel. **[They've done away with lounge access for business class Amtrak passengers. These days the Metropolitan lounge is limited to sleeping car passengers and (most importantly from Amtrak's view) people who have high status with an Amtrak-branded credit card. You can theoretically buy a day pass to the lounge for \$50, but it's definitely not worth that much.]**

I had some more coffee and juice in the Metropolitan Lounge. I could have had oatmeal, but I figured I'd get enough to eat throughout the day. I connected to Amtrak's wi-fi and spent a while deciding where I might go throughout the day. I could be content just riding around on the 'L' all day in Chicago, but it's always good to have some ideas in mind. I also knew that the area south of downtown would be crazy with Lollapalooza fans, and I wanted to plan things to stay as far from there as possible.

I spent half an hour or so in the lounge. Then I set off westward on foot on Jackson Street. I made my way west to Halsted, about half a mile west. I ended up waiting for a bus there right outside the Greek restaurant I'd taken kids to earlier in the summer.

I caught bus #8 southward on Halsted and passed by the University of Illinois at Chicago and the city's traditional Little Italy as I rode down to 30th Street. My destination was a rather grungy shopping center whose tenants include Unique Thrift Store. This store used to be at a different location, and I think I liked the old place better. The new location still has some interesting stuff, though, and I spent quite a while browsing through the place. I like thrift stores, and I've picked up some very good deals at them over the years. All I

got today was a pair of denim shorts. I didn't bother trying them on, but they were the correct size and looked like they should fit. I was pleased when I got home to find out the size was perfect. In fact, I'm wearing them as I write this.

I caught a bus back north and got off at the Halsted orange line station. There was a little stand out front that among other things was selling Mexican ice cream, so I stopped and picked up an ice cream bar. The one I got was rich vanilla ice cream with a "cajeta" (goat's milk caramel) inside and a cinnamon chocolate coating. For two bucks, it was probably the single tastiest thing I bought on this trip.

I rode the orange line to Roosevelt and transferred there to the red line. I got out at the downtown Macy's, the old Marshall Field's flagship store. I intended to do a bit of shopping there, but at the moment visiting the place is honestly kind of a chore. There's major construction everywhere, I think structural stabilization. Large areas of the store are blocked off, and they've temporarily relocated a number of departments. I did do a bit of browsing, but I bought nothing at all. Since I'd be out throughout the day, though, I did make a point of using the bathroom at Macy's before heading out again.

Next I rode the red line north of downtown to Clark and Division. I caught a bus just a short distance from there and then walked a couple blocks to my next destination, the Wooden Alley. Back in the days before the Great Chicago Fire, pretty much the entire city was built of wood, including all the streets. Every street and alley in the city has since been re-paved in concrete or asphalt—with a single exception. Behind the residence of the Catholic cardinal of Chicago is a single alley that is still paved in wood blocks. It's designated as a historical landmark with interpretive signs at both ends of the block, and they periodically update the pavement with fresh blocks.

The weird thing about this alley is that it really doesn't look like wood. The wood blocks are the size and shape of bricks, and it would be easy to assume the pavement was brick. When you walk on it, though, it's spongy underfoot. This certainly isn't anything of real touristic interest, but it was kind of cool to see.



Wooden Alley – Chicago

I made my way to the corner of North and Clark. Several buses stop in this area, with the one I wanted to catch being bus 72. Here I encountered one of the reasons I prefer trains to buses when getting around cities. Just east of that corner, there's an off-street bus stop located behind the Chicago History Museum and across the street from the Latin School of Chicago. The sign says bus 72 stops there from early morning through late evening. I waited there for more than half an hour, during which time between two to three buses should have passed. None did. I found out later that I should have waited west of the intersection, where there's another stop marked for bus 72. Apparently they only stop at the place I was waiting when the Latin School is in session. Unfortunately there was nothing there to indicate that. I've e-mailed the CTA about the problem. They actually did respond and are supposedly looking into it. **[I've actually communicated with CTA four or five times over the years. They're surprisingly easy to get in touch with, and they do genuinely seem to want to make the city's transit work better for everyone—residents and tourists alike. I've seen major changes in the years I've taken trains and buses in Chicago, almost all of them improvements. It's not possible to do everything people might want on a shoestring budget, but they really do seem to do the best they can.]**

Eventually I gave up and instead caught a southbound bus on Clark Street back to Clark & Division station. I caught the red line there and then transferred at Belmont to the brown line, which for some reason ran express for most of the trip. I rode clear to the end of the line at Kimball and then crossed the street to catch a westbound bus on Lawrence. Apparently there was some traffic tie-up, because the bus was very late. By the time it arrived, fourteen people were waiting at the Kimball & Lawrence bus stop, and the bus was already standing room only. We did all manage to cram on, and I rode west about two miles to Pulaski Avenue.



Pollo Campero – Chicago, Illinois

At the corner of Lawrence and Pulaski is a surprisingly clean and vibrant shopping center. Tucked in behind Walgreen's is a restaurant I'd been to once before, the Chicago location of Pollo Campero. The restaurant's name basically means "country chicken", and it's a Guatemalan chain that's been slowly expanding in urban America in recent years. In addition to Chicago, I've eaten at Pollo Campero in New York and St. Paul. They specialize in hearty fried chicken, but they also serve a wide range of Central American dishes that you're not going to find at Taco Bell.

I had a spicy chicken empanada, a corn salad, sparkling lemonade, and flan. Everything was good, but the best part by far was the corn salad. The base was grilled sweet corn and pepitas (pumpkin seeds), and there was also tomato, bell pepper, cilantro, and a neutral white cheese. It was all covered in a tangy lime vinaigrette. It really was delicious.

After lunch I made my way to a southbound bus stop, but my issues

with CTA buses continued. I waited together with a large group of Latino people for more than half an hour. While we waited no less than five northbound busses passed on Pulaski, and three westbound buses passed on Lawrence. Eventually two southbound buses arrived at the exact same time. Those buses would end up playing leapfrog as we made our way south on Pulaski Avenue. **[Trains can get behind schedule too, but they're rarely as far off as buses.]**

Pulaski is a rather grim-looking part of the city. I've been through here before, and while it's perfectly safe, it just looks downright ugly. Much of it is industrial, and the parts that have homes and businesses are often in disrepair. There's litter and grime everywhere, and the whole area just feels bleak. On closer inspection, though, I could tell decent people lived here. Something I always do when I go through "bad" neighborhoods in any city is look at the windows. In truly bad neighborhoods there's nothing to see. The windows are either bare, barred, or shuttered tight. Along Pulaski there are curtains in the windows—sometimes torn, but hanging there nonetheless. Many of the windows also feature flowers, religious articles, and other knick-knacks. The people here may be poor, but they're working to make their lives better.

I got off at the Pulaski blue line station. This station is located in the middle of the Eisenhower freeway **[why I wrote "freeway" there, I don't know; this is Chicago, so of course it's the Eisenhower "expressway"]**, and there's a very long ramp to reach the platform from the street. Two young black men, a Hispanic woman, and I got off the bus there. We heard a train arrive, and the woman and I tried to hurry down the ramp. Unfortunately the other two guys were blocking the path as they trudged along giving each other a "bro" hug. It was like they didn't even realize anyone else was in the station. The woman loudly said "Excuse me", to which she got the response "Chill, babe". She did push her way past, though, and I followed her. Unfortunately we just barely missed the train.

I caught the next westbound train and rode out to the Harlem stop, where the city borders the suburbs of Oak Park and Forest Park. Right next to the Harlem station is the Ferrara Candy Company. While they've moved much of their manufacturing overseas, they still have an outlet store in their old factory. In my write-up of the quiz bowl trip earlier this summer, I noted the vast sums of money the kids spent at Dylan's candy store on the Magnificent Mile, and I said they could have gotten much better money here. I spent \$8.80 at Ferrara this afternoon, and I got a big bag of treats that probably would have cost fifty bucks at Dylan's. I'm enjoying Canadian treats right now, but when they're gone I'll be snacking on Ferrara candy through most of the fall semester.

There's a lovely mural on the overpass at the back side of the Harlem Avenue station (the Circle Avenue overpass). It depicts people of all races and religions with the overall message "Hate has no place here". I do wish we could all abide by those words.

I made my way back to Union Station, reclaimed my stuff, and relaxed there for about an hour. At about 5:20pm they announced that my train, together with several others, would be boarding. Something I've noticed ever since they opened the new Metropolitan Lounge in Chicago is that there seems to be some miscommunication between there and other parts of the station. As I'd experienced before, when we got to the actual boarding area, they weren't actually ready to board the train. Also as has happened in the past, the Amtrak employees acted as if the business class passengers had cut the line and were trying to board early. This afternoon a very loud woman ordered the business class customers into the room from which coach customers depart. There was no seating available there, so we stood with our bags by the door until she decided it was time to board. After about ten minutes, she decided that time had come, but she screamed, "You'd better be in business class, or y'all are in trouble!"

Amtrak could totally eliminate this issue if they'd follow Via's lead and use assigned seating. In business class in particular, most people are traveling alone. Almost no one wants to sit next to a stranger, so they rush at the start of the boarding process on to get a seat by themselves. On short-distance trains seats don't turn over, so it would be quite easy to assign them. Hopefully, one way or another, they'll get this issue ironed out.

Business class was the most forward car, but I made it up there without much problem. I did manage to get a seat by myself, and I settled in for the journey. I quickly found my fellow passengers to be a VERY chatty group. Most of them appeared to be college business professors, and they talked constantly. It was strange overhearing half a dozen different conversations at once. It brought back memories of high school and a speech piece that involved rapidly switching between different radio stations.

I'd recently downloaded a new app on my phone that's basically a speedometer. It uses the GPS to figure out how fast the phone is moving from place to place. It was interesting to watch the changes. The top speed on this route is about 80mph, and we sustained that for most of the trip. We started slowing down well before each station, getting down to about 20mph before we entered each town.

Business class on Amtrak's Midwestern trains is located in half of the car that also houses the lounge. Around the Mendota stop a couple of teenagers who had been in the lounge happened to come into the business class section to use the restroom. That's apparently a big no-no. While the conductor was quiet and polite, he was very stern with the boys.

We got to Princeton right at 8pm, about fifteen minutes late. There was a bit of a delay while they tracked down two coach passengers who were supposed to leave the train at Princeton, but for some reason hadn't. About thirty passengers got off at Princeton, which is pretty typical.

I'd made a reservation in Bettendorf, Iowa, so I had to get over there. The drive ended up being one of the least pleasant parts of the trip. Shortly before this trip I'd gotten some new glasses. I'm still not sure whether there was an issue with the glasses themselves or whether it was my sickness during the trip (likely both), but I couldn't seem to get things to focus correctly with the new glasses. I'd had some problems with this during the trip, but it was especially bad while driving at night. The lights just blinded me, and at times it seemed as if I couldn't see anything at all. Compounding this were tons of vehicles that didn't have lights on, but should have. Two were particularly annoying. One was a pick-up that was hauling a big trailer. The pick-up's lights were on, but they'd somehow connected

things wrong, so the trailer was entirely dark. There was also one small car that just didn't seem to realize it was getting dark out. Sunset in Princeton was 8:15pm, but he didn't bother turning his lights on until 8:45.

Obviously I did manage to get to the hotel safely—thank goodness. The worst part was actually at the very end when I was following city streets to get to the hotel. The area was quite poorly lit, and I ended up turning into the wrong lane. Thankfully I got corrected fairly quickly.

My reservation was at the Econolodge in Bettendorf. **[This has since been rebranded as the Clarion Pointe.]** Margaret and I stayed there several years ago on another trip. It's not a nice hotel, but it's actually pretty decent for an Econolodge. The rooms are large, and everything is kept spotlessly clean. My redemption was for 8,000 points, which these days is basically the minimum that Choice Hotels allows. I think it was good value at that rate.

I checked in fairly quickly and settled into my room. Tonight I mostly watched the Food Network on TV, but I was off to sleep before terribly long.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 2

BETTENDORF, IOWA TO ALGONA, IOWA

I was up around 6:30 this morning, and I soon found out the biggest issue at the Econolodge was their plumbing. There was almost no pressure at all in either the shower or sink. I did eventually manage to rinse the shampoo of my hair, but I still had toothpaste stuck in my brush when I got back home.

I'd packed a separate bag that I'd left in my car, and it was good to have truly clean clothes again. I made my way to the breakfast room, but it was no surprise that there was little of interest there. There's a Steak 'n' Shake across the freeway from the Econolodge, and my plan was to have breakfast there. When I got there, though, there was a paper taped to the door that said the place (which is normally open around the clock) was closed until "9:00?" because of "needed renovations".

I ended up having breakfast at IHOP. The name traditionally stood for the International House of Pancakes, and I went with that theme in choosing a combo with Swedish crepes and lingonberry sauce. I happened to be wearing a White Sox cap, and a guy at the next table noted that the White Sox are like what the Cubs were before they got good. That's an interesting comment, since both Chicago teams have around a 50% winning record this season, and over time the Sox have been much more successful than the Cubs. I didn't really comment one way or another, though. **[His comment would have been more appropriate this past year, when the Sox had an all-time low winning percentage.]**

Traffic was surprisingly light on Interstate 80, and I made my way over to Iowa City quickly. My first stop on the way back was at Aldi in Cedar Rapids, where I picked up some coffee and supplies for communion at church. I made a stop for gas at Casey's in Nashua, and my last stop was for one final smoothie at Kwik Star in Garner. I finally got home about 1pm.

It did seem like I had more than the usual challenges on this trip. It's a week later as I finish writing this, and I'm still not back to 100%. I am getting better, though, and hopefully I'll be more or less my regular self when school starts. This was a good trip, one way or another, though. I like Canada in general, and it was nice to get out to the Maritimes for the first time in decades. This ended up not being a restful vacation, but it was an enjoyable one.

[Just over a month after the vacation (during Homecoming week at school) I'd end up in the hospital with severe dehydration and a 980 glucose level. Fortunately they were able to get things under control, and today with the aid of both injected insulin and the oral drug Metformin, I'm able to keep diabetes under control. My day-to-day blood sugar fluctuates more than it should, but the long-term average (called A1c) has been excellent. That's allowed me to enjoy several other trips after this one.]

The 2019 – 2020 school year would be the strangest one of my career, particularly since shortly into the second semester the COVID-19 pandemic shut everything down. At Garrigan we moved everything online, and I mostly taught over YouTube in the spring of 2020. I don't think I've ever worked harder in my life, but I'm proud to have gotten through that semester.

I'd love to go back to Atlantic Canada again, though if I do another train trip up north, it will more likely be the more famous Canadian train across the Rockies. I do love almost everything about Canada, though, and while it won't be my next trip, I'm sure I'll be heading back up north someday.]