

NEW ZEALAND TRIP

FEBRUARY 23 TO MARCH 18, 2010

And so the great adventure begins - my first trip south of the Equator and across the International Date Line. Lee has crossed one of both of these imaginary divides on trips to Australia and Japan, but this will be new for me. So ... while much of the U.S. is still slogging through the last gasps of winter's rain, snow, sleet, and slush, we're heading to a country that is enjoying the final days of summer and the start of fall.

As a typical geography-challenged American, I had thought that New Zealand was near Australia and to the northeast of it. Luckily, the captain and navigator of our trans-Pacific flight were not similarly misinformed. In fact, Auckland (our initial destination and also as far north as we'll be) is at latitude 36°52'S, which makes it equivalent to such metropolises as Clarksville, TN; Dalhart, TX; and Visalia, CA; and Milton (our southernmost destination on the way from Queenstown to Dunedin) is at latitude 46°07'S, which makes it equivalent to garden spots like Miles City, MT; Fergus Falls, MN; and Rumford, ME. As for its alleged proximity to Australia, Auckland is 1338 miles southeast (not northeast) of Sydney, across the Tasman Sea. (The northernmost city in New Zealand is Cape Reinga at 34°25'S; the southernmost is Port Pegasus at 47°12'S.) Furthermore, as we will be reminded several times over the next three weeks, not only do New Zealanders not like being compared to Australians but there is open resentment toward the people from the larger country. Indeed, one sensed a bit of an inferiority complex that prompted many New Zealanders to boast about the many many ways in which their citizens are smarter, wiser, and better-looking than those in that *other* place.

In the course of this document, I will occasionally use the acronyms TMOU and TWOU to refer, respectively, to Prof. Dr. Mr. Ron Magid and Prof. Dr. Mrs. Lee Magid. My loyal readers, whose numbers can be counted on the finger (no, not *that* finger) of one hand, will know the meaning of these abbreviations. For the rest of you, here's what I wrote on p. 2 of my Wales-Ireland travelog (<http://web.utk.edu/~rmagid/Wales-Ireland09.pdf>):

These two expressions were used extensively in my Scotland travelog from 2001 (<http://web.utk.edu/~rmagid/europe01.pdf>) and are "explained" in the index to that travelog (<http://web.utk.edu/~rmagid/eur01index.pdf>) as follows: "At several points in the document, I found myself using the expressions 'the man of us' and 'the woman of us' ... It's not plagiarism if I admit that I lifted these expressions, albeit quite subconsciously, from a favorite book. A prize of *inestimable* value will go to the first person who can identify the source." Although thousands (and, perhaps, even millions) of readers have enjoyed or hated or fallen asleep reading the Scotland travelog, not one has come forth to claim the prize. So the offer still stands.

Alas, nobody who has delved into the 2009 travelog has claimed the prize. Is it possible that I have no readers? Or are they just too lazy to do the necessary research? Or is the question too damned hard? Or pointless? Well, the offer stands: a prize of *inestimable* value awaits the first person who can identify the source of these expressions.

Before leaving Gig Harbor, I bought a 1 GB memory stick for our digital camera so that I could snap pictures with abandon. Indeed, that's what I did: 340 images on the North Island and 575 more on the South Island. I considered loading *all* of them to my Picasa account but finally decided against it: some pictures were awful, others were poorly lit, some were very very very very repetitious, and some showed the two intrepid travelers in a less than flattering light. (Also, one of us - and I ain't naming names, but SHE knows who SHE is - partially obscured the shot with an ill-placed finger over the lens.) At this point, I don't know how many I'll upload, but by the time this account is "published" you'll be able to view them at <http://picasaweb.google.com/ronmagid>.

Tuesday, February 23

As we did last summer, we arranged for Harbor Taxi to take us to the airport and to bring us back to Gig Harbor upon our return. Our confidence in the service is challenged by: (1) an early morning phone call wondering if we wanted to be picked up at 10:00 a.m. or p.m. (it's the former!) and (2) another phone call when the driver was circling our neighborhood, unable to find our home. But eventually we and he connect and we set out for the airport at 10:15 ... in the morning. There is very little traffic and we are amazed (and delighted) that we get our boarding passes, check our luggage, and we pass through TSA security very quickly. Because our Alaska Airlines flight to Los Angeles is not scheduled to leave until 2:15, we get to enjoy a couple of hours in the Alaska Board Room.

How did we get into this private club? Well, very much against the wishes of TMOU, we "agreed" to purchase business class passage on Air New Zealand and first class on Alaska Airlines. It "only" doubled the cost of the tickets, but what the hell - it's only money, eh? And why did we choose Business Premier (as they call it) for our cross-Pacific flight? Well, Air New Zealand, which has no first class cabin on its 747s, does have a unique seating arrangement in the expensive cabin: the seats are angled inward (I think we were in row 12) with an aisle separating them; the seats are really pods in which one is insulated and isolated from other passengers; and with the expert help of the flight attendants, the seats fold to flat beds, complete with pad, pillow, and cover. (See the seating diagram at <http://www.airnewzealand.co.nz/seat-map-boeing-747-400> and the photographs at <http://www.flatseats.com/Gallery/NZ-1.htm>.) This should make the 12-hour flight more comfortable ... assuming, that is, that one can actually sleep for a few hours (see later). So, equipped with the expensive tickets for Alaska Airlines and Air New Zealand, we are permitted to use the fancy lounge at the airport.

The flight to Los Angeles begins boarding at 1:25 and, with everyone quickly on board, the doors close and the plane leaves the gate 10 minutes early. Because the flight is not full, there is an announcement over the P.A. that passengers can change seats, if they wish, but that this should be done only in a side-to-side direction, not front-to-back or vice versa. Apparently this has to do with proper balance of the plane, but I would have thought that having people crowd to one side or the other might be more deleterious than having them all in the front or back. Shows how much I know about flying! (A friend, who is a retired United Airlines pilot, discredits the notion that a Boeing 737 would be much affected by passenger placement. Maybe the Alaska captain was jes messin' with our minds?) Nearly the entire flight is above the clouds (why did I bother getting a window seat?) but there is a very pretty view of Los Angeles and its environs as we begin our descent. The Pacific is very blue, the hills are surprisingly green, and the city is not very smoggy as we fly from west to east before making a U-turn and landing in a westerly direction.

We make the long walk from Terminal 3 to International Terminal 2, get our Air New Zealand boarding passes, and pass through security very quickly. That's twice today! Lee had read at Air New Zealand's web site that they restrict carry-ons to one item weighing no more than 15 lbs; signs at the ticket counter confirm this. Because we are prepared, I stuff my briefcase inside my carry-on suitcase and Lee puts her laptop and purse inside hers before approaching the counter. Lee is also concerned about the posted weight limit, so I am given the awesome responsibility of hiding a fairly heavy travel guide in the pocket of my raincoat. In fact, the airline personnel never weigh the bags nor do they seem to pay special scrutiny as to the number of items one is carrying.

We get to take advantage of the beautiful Koru Club, Air New Zealand's lounge in Terminal 2, where the assortment of free foods (hot, cold, liquid, and even alcoholic) is extraordinary. There are even waiters coming around offering hot hors d'oeuvres. It would have been tempting to eat and eat and eat, but we know that we will be fed very well shortly after take-off, so restraint is the order of the day. The only thing missing was "regular" coffee (they have only espresso in various strengths); this proves to be a harbinger of what we will find in New Zealand where drip coffee or filter coffee or French press coffee or whatever they'll call it is a rarity.

Those of us in the lounge are "led" by an Air New Zealand employee to the departure gate (are they afraid that we'll get lost?) for a brief final security check before boarding the plane. All of the flight attendants in Business Premier are men, many of them middle-aged (I don't know if this is true throughout the plane) and they spend much of the time before takeoff teaching technophobes (like me) how to operate the entertainment system that is available at each seat. There are, on demand, a wide variety of movies (many of them first-run), games, music of many different genres, TV shows, etc. Even the classical selections are full pieces and not little snippets: there are symphonies, concertos, sonatas, even complete operas. (Of course some of the descriptions are incorrect: e.g., conductor René Jacobs is listed as a singer in *Don Giovanni*.) But the selections are really quite excellent: e.g., a recent recording of Debussy piano music played by Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, Brahms symphonies conducted by Simon Rattle, and the Bach Brandenburg Concerti (all six of them) by John Eliot Gardiner.

Best of all, I'm delighted to find that I can follow the flight (once the damned plane takes off) through a changing series of screen shots, one of which purports to be the instrument panel in the cockpit: there are gauges for air speed and wind speed (in km/hr), heading (degrees), vertical speed (m/min), and altitude (m); another screen shot shows a map with the proposed route in yellow; another shows distances of the current position from various locations; another shows a localized map, which gradually expands to pick up other locations; and so on. In fact, I choose to ignore the movie selections and, while reading, listen to classical music and look in on the flight information screen shots. Even before the plane's engines are turned on, I have a hard time communicating with Lee across the aisle. For some married couples, this could be a blessing; not for us. The doors close and the plane pushes back at 7:26, a few minutes ahead of schedule. One of the screen shots gives our ETA into Auckland at 4:25 a.m. (a full hour ahead of schedule) but as the plane maneuvers around the airport heading to the runway, the ETA gradually changes and reads 4:51 a.m. when we lift off. (This will be adjusted constantly during the flight.)

Of course our arrival is not tomorrow but Thursday, February 25, because we will be crossing the International Date Line. This is all a mystery to me, but TWOU says that the best way to think about it is to imagine that we are traveling from west to east, going across the Atlantic, Europe, Asia, Australia, and finally New Zealand - this is a good way of understanding why New Zealand is 21 hours ahead of PST; this differential will drop to 20 hours upon our return when both New Zealand and the U.S. are on daylight savings time. As the plane leaves U.S. air space, the screen shots show only black expanses of ocean - very disconcerting, but made tolerable by the large Glenfiddich that the flight attendant pours for me. (Single malt scotch notwithstanding, I still would like for someone to explain to me where February 24 disappeared to.)

Dinner is quite elaborate, as are the descriptions. I start with "Trio of 42Below vodka and honey cured salmon with coriander, poached prawn, sesame, wasabi, seared tuna, and karenga potato salad" (whew!) and choose as my main course "Slow cooked short rib of beef, white sweet potato puree and warm salad of roast mushrooms, garlic, red onion, and red chard" Lee, having eaten much much too much at Koru Club, selects "Light choice of gruyere, pecorino, and romano cheese tart with thyme, asparagus spears and marinated tomatoes." This is "light"? For dessert, my preference is "Gourmet ice cream dessert of macadamia nut ice cream and chocolate-chip ice cream" followed by "Fine New Zealand cheese and fresh season fruit" and coffee. Burp! (No, I didn't memorize the menu, nor did I copy these descriptions into my journal. Instead, I took the "liberty" of "liberating" a menu from the plane.) As you may have noticed in the photos of the airplane's interior (see the URL on p.2), there is an ottoman on which one can not only rest one's feet but also on which a person of one's choosing can sit and eat dinner at the rather commodious table. Alas, the comely blond in picture #4 was not available, so I invite TWOU to join me.

A different set of photos is available at: <http://erequest.airnz.co.nz/cabininfo/businesspremier.html> You can view still-pictures of the cabin, the seat, the entertainment system, and the food/beverage by clicking NEXT, but you can also see a video of how the seat magically converts into a bed by double

clicking on Lie Flat Bed. Cool!

I invest my time in reading the magazines that I had brought (*TIME*, *The New Yorker*, *Yale Alumni Magazine*) while Lee watches a couple of movies ("The Informant" and "The Invention of Lying"). At about 11:30 (PST), we ask to have our seats converted into the lie-flat beds. Although the lights are dimmed, I doubt that I sleep for more than two hours (typical of me on planes even without lie-flat beds), so I continue to read and also take a walk around the cabin. What an eerie sight! On both sides of the aisle are these motionless bodies, each wrapped in a light-colored blanket, with feet protruding into the aisle. The seats are called "pods" and it's obvious why. If one wanted to re-make that *brilliant* genre film "Invasion of the Pod People," this would be a perfect start. Incidentally, one of the writers credited (or blamed) for this flick is *Ron Magid*. Really. As Casey Stengel said, "Yez kin check it out." Go to IMDB.com if you need proof.

Upon awakening after my brief nap, I return to my magazines and also work a few NYT crossword puzzles that I had packed. One of these (Feb 21, 2010) is the dumbest Sunday puzzle I've ever encountered. The theme is WORDS FROM THE WHITE HOUSE and the answers consist of garbled names of various presidents. For example, for the clue "Least smart/Kitchen worker/Towel word/___Fein" the answer is DUMBEST CHEF HERS SINN (our third president, in case you don't recognize it). Another: the clue is "Trash/Victories/"Get it?"/Do some math/Runs smoothly" which leads to JUNK WINS SEE ADD HUMS (or president #6). I won't bother repeating the others. Oh, OK, one more because it was done efficiently with only three clue words: "Most shaggy/Hotel offering/Actress Goldie" which yields HAIRIEST ROOM HAWN (# 33).

While still on the lie-flat bed, I begin reading *Alphabet Juice* by Roy Blount Jr. It's a spirited romp, witty and often snarky, through grammatical, spelling, and stylistic topics concerning written English. Most of Blount's prejudices match mine, so I really enjoy the book. Because the book can be set aside and picked up at any time, I read portions of it throughout the trip and don't finish it until the very end. The astute reader may have noticed that I did not separate Blount and Jr. by a comma. Ordinarily I would do so, but that's how the name appears on the cover and on the first page. Blount justifies it on p. 158-9 as follows:

Why don't I use a comma before the *Jr.* in my name? It's one stroke of fuss that I can spare the world – as when Disney stopped drawing a tail on Mickey to save ink during the Depression, or the war effort, or whatever it was. But people *will* put the comma in. And when you use a comma before it, in a sentence, you've got to use another one after it (unless you end the sentence with *Jr.*, in which case it's hard to tell whether the period marks the end of the sentence or just of the *Jr.* To take an arbitrary example, here's Adam Gopnick in *The New Yorker*: ... the best of all books about pro football, Roy Blount, Jr.,'s "About Three Bricks Shy of a Load" ... That's five punctuation marks – a comma, a period, another comma, an apostrophe, and a double quotation mark – in the space of three letters.

It is now 5:04 a.m. PST on Wednesday which is equivalent to 2:04 a.m. *tomorrow* (Thursday) in New Zealand. I'm still confused! According to the flight information details on the computer screen, we are well south of the Equator but won't actually cross the International Date Line until we're closer to New Zealand. I'll finally re-set my watch's time, date, and day just before landing. By the way, at precisely 5:15 a.m. PST the screen informs me that we are 1042 km from Eua Island (population 5,165) and 716 km from Rarotonga (population 14,153). In other words, in the middle of nowhere! But the captain still believes that we are on a direct line toward New Zealand ... and who am I to argue with him? Our air speed right now is 913 km/hr and our altitude is 11,582 m. Just thought you'd like to know.

Breakfast is served. I choose fruit salad followed by cinnamon apple and papaya crepes with creme fraiche and manuka honey and apple syrup. (That's how it appears on the menu, but I think that two accent marks have been omitted: *crème* and *fraîche*; maybe New Zealanders, taking their cue from

Roy Blount [no comma] Jr., have decided to omit extraneous markings.) As she did last night, Lee joins me for the morning meal.

We don't quite make the ETA of 4:51 but we do land at 5:04 am New Zealand time, a good 20 minutes ahead of the published time. As we prepare to disembark, Lee recognizes, two rows back, one of the stars of HBO's *Flight of the Conchords*: Jemaine Clement. Of him, I know nothing! Nada. Riens. Nichts. But Lee is most impressed. This is almost as exciting as our seeing Ty Pennington (of the *Extreme Home Makeover* shows) on our return flight from Heathrow last summer. (Confession - I had no idea what his name was, although I did recognize him from the incessant promos; I had to look it up when we got home.)

Before I tell about our time in New Zealand, here's some background information. Last fall, Lee made contact with a Gig Harbor travel agency called Specialty Cruise & Villas, which belongs to Virtuoso, a world-wide network of luxury travel agencies. She had read some positive things about them in the local press. We wanted to get advice concerning a Baltic cruise that we hoped to take in August, 2010. At a Starbucks (where else??), we had a very pleasant and productive meeting with Stefan Bisciglia, the youngest member of the family that owns the agency. He came armed with brochures and ideas about the kind of cruise, destinations that we wanted, timing, dress code, etc. In the course of our conversation, we mentioned that we were planning to visit New Zealand in early 2010. Although Stefan's agency deals only with cruises and European villas, he did mention that he often works with Southern Crossings, a high-end travel agency with offices in Auckland and Sydney.

Dear Reader, If the adjectives "luxury" and "high-end" are off-putting to you, they were to me as well. Nevertheless, working through emails and phone calls to Stefan, who acted as middleman with Southern Crossings, we eventually put together an itinerary. We never saw a breakdown on how much each item cost, but we did receive a single dollar amount for the overall trip, a figure that I'm too embarrassed to quote. Nevertheless, it did provide the convenience of paying in advance for nearly everything that we'd be doing: hotels in nine cities; car rentals on the North Island and on the South Island; the ferry between the islands; the train from the ferry terminal on the South Island to Christchurch; pickup at the airport in Auckland and at the train depot in Christchurch; five dinners at various hotels; guided tours of the albatross colony and of the yellow-eyed penguin colony on the Otago peninsula; and bus transportation from Queenstown to Milford Sound followed by a cruise on the Fjord to the Tasman Sea followed by sight-seeing airplane back to Queenstown. Not included in the cost was the airfare, trip insurance, and incidental expenses (transportation, meals, gifts, etc.) in New Zealand.

I *refuse* to admit how large the bill was, but I will say that I got a rough idea of the price of each hotel from their individual web sites. What I will say is that one hotel, whose tariff admittedly did include breakfast and dinner, was the most expensive place I've ever stayed ... or ever hope to stay. The only saving feature is that all of the prices at the web sites were in NZD, so multiplying them by about 0.70 to convert to USD somewhat lessened the shock. If you are curious about the rates for these hotels, all of which (with one notable exception) did qualify as "luxury" or "high-end," you are welcome to consult the web sites.

Thursday, February 25

We disembark and get through passport control and customs very quickly. We even get reunited with our luggage - all of it. We are met, at the ungodly local hour of about 5:45 a.m., by Catherine, an employee of Southern Crossings. She drives us to Mollies Boutique Hotel, our Auckland residence, while filling our brains with information about New Zealand, its population, people, customs, etc. and

with warnings about eager police who monitor speeds assiduously. She even insists on putting our luggage into the trunk by herself (I never did find out if, like the English, they call it "the boot") and taking it out by herself. Mollies is in a pleasant neighborhood (aside from some major road work nearby), a few miles from downtown. We are met by the night clerk who carries our luggage up the stairs to the hotel lobby. Catherine departs, but not before giving us maps of New Zealand, a copy of our itinerary (which we already had), and vouchers for each of the pre-paid items. The clerk then checks to see if our room is ready (it is!), so he shows us to it and, of course, lugs our bags upstairs by himself. (Frustrated statistician that I am, I count the steps: 20 to the second floor - or as they quaintly call it the first floor - and another 10 steps up to our room.)

The lobby area is quite beautiful as are the communal rooms (breakfast, dining, living room with piano, offices, etc.). You can see pictures of the common areas, of our room, of the exterior of the hotel, and of its gardens - each *sight* is at the Picasa *site* that I *cite* on p. 1. (Too bad that "cyte" is not recognized as a valid word by my spell check program.) Our room is quite lovely, with excellent views of the city and with a very modern bathroom. (There are two space-age-appearing levers above the toilet. The unwitting traveler assumes that the larger one is for a larger flush, the smaller for a smaller whoosh. There is no instruction manual to guide us.) There are two kinds of coffee available in the room: ground coffee for use in a French Press and packets of instant for use with hot water; the latter seems simpler and is the mode that we choose. Even the air conditioner works very well. (I had had my doubts.) From our room we can see the Harbour Bridge and the Sky Tower, a rather ugly structure but much beloved by the local Chamber of Commerce who tout it as the tallest structure (aside from mountains, of course) in the Southern Hemisphere.

We don't feel jet-lagged (amazing for me, considering my extremely brief sleep on the plane), so after sitting for a while we head downstairs for some coffee. The man in charge of the breakfast room wants desperately to feed us but we decline his offer, having had a sumptuous meal on the plane just a couple of hours earlier. One of the owners of the hotel sits and chats with us about Auckland and its attractions. His wife, it turns out, is a former opera singer (and current voice coach) who gives recitals in the dining room after dinner. Because we ate our dinners elsewhere and then repaired to our room, we didn't attend any of her recitals although we could hear through the door. The owners had lived in the U.S. (Bloomington, IN for four years, New York City for 12) during her career.

Armed with information about buses, we walk a few blocks (past the noisy and dusty road construction) to the nearest bus stop (keeping in our heads the key fact that the bus will arrive on the left side of the road, not the right) and head to the Ferry Building, a classic old structure at the harbor (or harbour, if you insist). We walk about a bit and stop in at the information bureau to get maps and bus schedules. Throughout New Zealand, each of the official information bureaus is called an i-SITE. Cute, eh? Except ... don't let Steve Jobs find out about it. He'll use his i-PHONE to call up his i-LAWYER and sue the tourist bureaus for invasion of i-COPYRIGHT.

A bad omen - the skies open and we get drenched as we board the bus that will take us to the War Memorial Museum in the southeastern part of the city. The driver lets us off one stop too early, but after asking directions at an accountant's office (Motto posted at the entrance: "Accountancy beyond the numbers" - isn't this what led to the worldwide financial crisis?) we find the museum. And, despite its militaristic name, it turns out to house an excellent collection devoted to the history, peoples, and cultures of New Zealand. What is remarkable to contemplate is that New Zealand was the last significant land mass on Earth to be visited by humans. The first settlers, probably from Polynesia, arrived only about 700 years ago and are the ancestors of today's Maoris; the first wave of immigrants from Europe began around 1800. New Zealanders, who call themselves Kiwis (after their national bird - much more about this animal later), are proud that their country was *not* settled by prisoners, unlike you-know-who. (Recall, I did mention a considerable animosity toward that large island nation to the northwest.) The population of New Zealand is only a little over 4 million, some 1.5 million of whom live in Auckland. There are, however, 39 million sheep (down from a high of 70 million in 1980) and some 70 million possum, although to hear people's complaints you'd think that there are 70 billion ... or

more. There will be much more information about sheep, possum, and other animals later ... much more ... much, much more. The museum has excellent exhibits about Maori culture, about the treaty signed between the Maori and the Europeans, and about the tension between the populations that persists to this day. Among the spectacular Maori carvings are a meeting house and a massive war canoe. There are also wonderful exhibits about the earthquakes and volcanoes whose activity formed (and continue to form) the geography of the islands.

After a light lunch in the museum's café, we take the bus back to the hotel, but before walking the remaining few blocks to Mollies we make two brief detours: (1) to check out a restaurant that had been recommended by the hotel staff and (2) to pick up a copy of Stieg Larsson's *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest*, the third book in the popular trilogy, at a local bookstore. This novel will not be sold in the U.S. until this coming May, but the enterprising Lee had learned that it was already available in New Zealand, so she ordered a copy before leaving home. She has probably violated all sorts of copyright laws by bringing the book back to the America.

(I am reminded of the time when all sorts of books, many of them classics, were banned from the U.S. because of alleged obscenity. A friend in college had been to France and had surreptitiously stowed a copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in his suitcase. As he passed it around to the sex-starved Yale undergraduates, he became an extremely popular person. His exalted status lasted only a short time, however, because the very next year the U.S. Supreme Court lifted the ban on "dirty books" like *Fanny Hill*, *Tropic of Cancer*, and the aforementioned D. H. Lawrence classic; thus, one could now not only purchase such books in this country but also walk around with them openly. And in this regard, who can forget Tom Lehrer's song, *Smut*, which opens with "Smut!/ Give me smut and nothing but!/ A dirty novel I can't shut,/ If it's uncut,/ and unsubt--le" and which has this stanza "Who needs a hobby like tennis or philately?/ I've got a hobby: rereading Lady Chatterley./ But now they're trying to take it all away from us unless/ We take a stand, and hand in hand we fight for freedom of the press./ In other words, Smut!/ Like the adventures of a slut./ Oh, I'm a market they can't glut,/ I don't know what/ Compares with smut." But I digress.)

We spend part of the afternoon relaxing in our room and working off the jet lag. I begin reading *Disobedience* by Jane Hamilton. We also enjoy *The New Zealand Herald*, a classic broad sheet unlike the shrunken, desiccated newspapers that we now encounter in the U.S. Today's most intriguing story involves an incident that occurred in the same part of Auckland where we were earlier in the day. It is so delicious that I'll quote it in its entirety:

An Auckland man, accused of threatening Queen St. pedestrians by swinging a rabbit at them, has been named. Graham Paul Brown, 53, was remanded on bail until March 17 when he appeared in the Auckland District Court yesterday.

He faces charges of assaulting a police officer, behaving in a disorderly manner on Queen St., and ill-treating an animal. Named Larry by the SPCA, the rabbit is described in court documents as a "lop rabbit, male, adult, fawn in colour."

Police say Brown stole the rabbit and swung it by its ears at pedestrians, while verbally abusing them. When officers arrived, he allegedly tried to hide the rabbit under his shirt and police had to wrestle the animal away from him. It was now in a hutch at the SPCA awaiting its owners.

At the recommendation of the hotel staff, we then head out (by bus, again) to the harbour(sic) to have dinner at Harbourside Restaurant, upstairs in the Ferry Building; we sit outdoors, with an excellent view of the ships, ferries, and excursion boats, and have a wonderful dinner: seafood chowder for each of us followed by seafood linguine for Lee, chicken for Ron. We pick up some examples of NewZealandSpeak (New Zealandish?)* (1) As in the U.K., servers in restaurants often say "Brilliant!" not

*To save typing time, from here on I'll refer to "New Zealand Speak" and "New Zealandish" as **NZish**,

which is pronounced En-zish or, using the local accent, perhaps as En-zeesh. OK? OK.

just after one's choice of a main course from the menu but as part of the following dialog: "How was your dinner?" "Excellent." "Brilliant!" (Would they have said "Brilliant!" if I had replied "Terrible"?) 'Tis most disconcerting. (2) They also use "to" in place of "from" in the following sort of construction: "This meal is different to that one." 'Tis even more disconcerting. (3) And tomorrow (but I'll include it here), one of the hotel staff tells us that there are no *peests* in New Zealand. After asking him to repeat what he had said - and recalling the context in which he said it - we realize that he's inserted a long-e into *peests*. This is a universal pronunciation quirk, as I'll document with many other examples on the following pages. After dinner, the bus returns us to the neighborhood where the hotel is.

Friday, February 26

The rains of yesterday are gone. Today it is sunny, with only a few dark clouds which dissipate after a while. It is, however, windy and surprisingly warm - a shock to those of us acclimated to the February weather in the Seattle area. We actually wake up 15 minutes earlier than we had set the alarm, and feel very refreshed.

Breakfast at Mollies is very nice. There is a choice of four hot meals from the kitchen (Lee has Eggs Florentine) and cold cereals, breads, sweet rolls, fruit, etc. from the buffet. I opt for the latter, as I am still feeling pleasantly stuffed after the food served on the flight. We are surprised that there are no cheeses or cold meats on the buffet table, a situation that will be repeated throughout the country - New Zealanders may consider themselves as loose partners in the Commonwealth, but they certainly don't have the food preferences that one encounters throughout the British Isles. So, there's little chance that we'll encounter such "delicacies" as haggis and blood pudding. Sigh.

In the breakfast room is a couple from Canada (well, we are eavesdropping if you must know) who are joined a little later by another couple - and the four greet one another and kiss and hug like long-lost friends. Perhaps they are, but they are also very loud. There is also an elderly couple (perhaps even older than the Magids), *echt* British in appearance and dress; he looks like someone out of central casting who is playing the rôle of a retired officer from the British Army who, having completed the subjugation of India during the Raj, is now at his London men's club, enjoying a glass of port while nursing his gout. (Probably this is entirely wrong and the two are from the U.S. But not being able to hear their conversation - on account of the noise from the foursome nearer to us - we cannot confirm their nationality.)

At 10:00, right on schedule, a representative from Hertz delivers our car to the parking lot (oops, I mean *carpark* - classic BritSpeak and, I guess, also **NZish** - behind the hotel). It is a Ford *Mondeo* with conventional controls, conventional dashboard, conventional everything except for the steering wheel that is on the right. Oh, well, we got used to this in Wales-Ireland (2009) and in Scotland (2001), so this should prove no hassle. I hope.

We leave the car at the hotel and travel by bus to the harbour. By this time, we've discovered that there are two city-operated lines that go where we want; of these, the LINK line is the better deal because we can buy multiple-ride tickets that will be cheaper than the series of single tickets. At the harbour, we buy ferry tickets on Fullers' Seaflyte to Devonport, a rather nice (tourist-oriented) seaside community with pretty shops, walks, trees, etc. (It is on a peninsula that can also be accessed by land, but the ferry ride is more attractive.) At a café, Lee buys an iced coffee that we take with us as we sit in a lovely park, not far from the ferry terminal. Lee notes the absence of squirrels in the park - interesting, eh? (This will be confirmed by Graeme Fairey, the sommelier at Solitaire Lodge, and by various web sites that I visit in the U.S. The absence of other mammals are part of the New Zealand mystique and will be commented upon in due course.) The return ferry ride gives us a good view of

the Sky Tower which I finally decide consists of these pieces: a syringe needle on the top of a NASA Gemini capsule on top of an inverted candlestick. (I'm sure that locals would not appreciate this and that they find it very beautiful.) We return to the hotel at about 2:15, relax a little, then venture forth in the car to see if we can really get accustomed to it and to the traffic patterns.

We drive east of the city to Mission Bay and Ladies Bay, a round-trip of about 25 km in which we (and the car) survive unscathed. It surprises me that I'm actually comfortable with the right-hand drive on the left side of the road. There is a nude beach at Ladies Bay on which a naked man is reclining on a blanket, a subject of fascination for TWOU but not for me. She stares at the prone figure on the beach below the observation deck as if she's never seen a naked man before and she declares him well-endowed. It takes all of my persuasive powers (both verbal and physical) to extricate her from her vantage point and convince her to return to the car. Do I exaggerate? Certainly not! In fact, TWOU has written the following in her journal: "Male apparatus at its loveliest is on display!" You can't make up things like that.

PUN ALERT: On returning to the hotel and passing the road construction where huge pipes are being laid, Lee comments that "the caisson is still there" to which Ron says, "That's funny. I thought it was in Viet Nam."

CULTURAL OBSERVATIONS: (1) there is very little smoking by people on the streets; (2) there are very few graffiti on the walls and buses; (3) tattoos, wild hair colors, and body piercing are at a minimum, although, as we will soon observe, the Maori, for cultural reasons, are heavily tattooed; (4) perhaps it's against the law, but whatever the reason nobody behind the wheel of a car is using a cell phone; (5) upon exiting a bus, Aucklanders of all ages thank the driver - a nice gesture; (6) in the U.S., restaurant servers often ask, "How does everything taste?" but in New Zealand the analogous question is, "How are you going?" or "How are we going?"

One of the hotel staff recommends Prego, an Italian restaurant within walking distance of the hotel. It proves to be an extremely popular neighborhood establishment, enjoyed by families with children as well as by teenage couples and the occasional elderly pair (e.g., the Magids). We have green salads, excellent warm bread (which, in contrast to the custom at all other restaurants, is not swept away before the main course arrives), then spaghetti puttanesca for Lee, spaghetti bolognese for Ron. Excellent. We are seated outdoors, but under a large banyan tree that shields us from the setting sun. Alas, there are some smokers at a nearby table.

SOME MORE NZish: (1) Newspaper accounts of the Vancouver Winter Olympics describe one of the events as the Bob Sleigh. (2) The waitress at Prego brings us "freesh breed" and, when we are ready to leave, gives us our "cheek." (3) Another food item is "cheeder" cheese and the person doing the cooking is, of course, the "cheef." (4) At the hotel when we tell a desk clerk where we will be driving tomorrow, she asks "Are you going to see the "geezer"? Initially, I take great offense until I realize that she is asking us about a "geyser." Her name, by the way, is pronounced "Steephanie." (4) It's just a coincidence, but on p. 37 of the Roy Blount [no comma] Jr. book (see p. 4), under the heading *bestiality*, he writes "Come on y'all. Let's look at the letters. It's not *beast-i-ality* ... If you want it to be pronounced *bestiality*, then spell it that way. And then spell *festive* and *festival* that way – *feastive* and *feastival* – and pronounce them that way. And turn *incessant* into *incease-ant*, and pronounce *pleasant* as *pleezunt*." Obviously Mr. Blount had never met a New Zealander, who would have had no idea of what in the hell he was talking about.

In the evening, we do some reading and web surfing in the hotel room. The online *New York Times* has an account of Obama's health care summit with the Congressional Republicans. It's beginning to look hopeless - all of those in attendance appear to have taken a blood oath to oppose everything and anything that the Administration proposes. As Jim DeMint, senator from the great state that fired the first shot in the Civil War, elected and kept re-electing Strom Thurmond, and has as its current governor none other than Mark ("Appalachian Trail") Sanford, so prophetically proclaimed last

summer, health care reform will be Obama's Waterloo: "If we're able to stop Obama on this ... it will break him." Even GOP Congressmen who, in the past, had favored aspects of health care reform now label it as socialism. I'm sure that the 111th Congress will be viewed as the most dysfunctional in the history of the U.S.

Saturday, February 27

The morning is sunny again. I have a hot breakfast (French toast) as does Lee. Today's *New Zealand Herald* sports section offers the following shocking headline: "Butt confident of qualifying Mr. Feelgood for Final"!! Noted.

We check out of the hotel at about 10:45 and drive to Rotorua (about 235 km from Auckland). I drive the first 120 km on a four-lane motorway that gives way to a two-lane highway, but the traffic does move smoothly. The scenery consists of rolling farm land with lots of cows (belted, black-and-white, tan) but very few sheep, despite the best efforts of TWOU to spot some.

PUN ALERT: Near one field, Lee points to some lumps in the distance and asks, "Are those sheep or rocks?" to which her companion, punning weakly, replies "I thought that sheep rock was used in home construction." Yes, definitely weak. Embarrassingly so.

At the suggestion of one of the staff at Mollies, we stop at Kaimai Cheese Café in Waharoa. The place is part cheese factory and retail store, part restaurant ... and it is very very popular. In the parking lot are about 15 classic roadsters, some of which we had passed on the highway. We have a light lunch (brie and bacon quiche for Lee, ham and emmental cheese sandwich for Ron) and get on our way again, this time with Lee behind the wheel. Catherine had told us that New Zealanders obey the speed limits religiously and that there are police lurking everywhere. This does *not* accord with our observations: cars do speed, some to great excess (e.g., 130 km/hr in a 100 zone), and there seems to be little evidence of the constabulary. While I'm in the passenger seat in the *Mondeo*, the sciatica pain in my leg kicks in; on later days, I will try to adjust the angle of the seat to eliminate such problems. We drive through Rotorua and stop at the i-Site for information. Then it's off the main road and through the countryside to find Solitaire Lodge.

On the way, we pass Blue Lake (aptly named) where kayak races (one-person, two-person, and four-person at distances of 500 and 1000 m) are in progress. We stop to observe. This is a big event, the New Zealand Sprint Championships - spectators are there in great numbers, refreshments are served, there is a P.A. system with an announcer describing the races, and there are lanes marked off for the kayaks. After this, we drive a bit further past Green Lake (not as atmospheric) and on to our destination. After a while, the road narrows considerably. We are shocked to see a speed limit of 100 km/hr posted on a pole, but relieved to see a First Aid sign beneath it. And finally we find the lodge.

This is the place that I referred to, on p. 5, as "the most expensive place I've ever stayed ... or ever hope to stay." If you care to check out their web site, you'll get an idea of how beautiful the grounds, the common areas, and the residences are. You'll also be subjected to bird calls, the sound of a helicopter, and various Chopin piano pieces. <http://www.solitairelodge.com/>

We are met in the parking lot by Graeme Fairey, mentioned on p. 8, who serves not only as a very knowledgeable sommelier but also as assistant manager. Before we are allowed to remove our luggage from the trunk, he takes us in an electric golf cart around the grounds, past the herb garden and helicopter pad, and down to the beach and boat dock at the shore of Lake Tarawera. (Lying face down on a blanket is a nicely shaped female humanoid, wearing a bikini with the bra strap untied; TWOU, who claims that she notices everything, does not recall seeing this display of muliebrity - a word I've not used often enough, but is most apt here.) The cart's "name" is Agnes which, of course, he pronounces as Aigniss in his native **NZish** tongue. On the lake are black swans and various kinds

of duck. Graeme introduces us to Wayne Tomlinson, the owner of the lodge, and then helps us carry the luggage to our lagoon view room.

New Zealand is prone to earthquakes and volcanic activity. One of the most devastating occurred in 1886 when a series of earthquakes was followed by the eruption of the three peaks that make up Mount Tarawera. According to www.newzealand.com, "Newspapers of the day recorded that sounds of the blast, volcanic lightning flashes and a glow in the night sky were registered as far south as Christchurch, 800 km away. In Auckland (230 km away), the flashing lights and what sounded like artillery fire sparked fears that a marauding battleship was attacking the city as part of a feared Russian invasion force." (Auckland, itself, is built on top of a series of volcanoes that last erupted some 250,000 years ago and are now, it is hoped, dormant.) Several Maori villages were destroyed by the 1886 eruption, with considerable loss of life. Blue Lake, Green Lake, and Lake Tarawera were all created during the eruption. All looks peaceful now, but New Zealanders know that earthquakes and volcanic eruptions can (and certainly will) occur when least expected, anywhere on the two islands.

Our room is gorgeous with lots of windows and excellent views of the lake. The only downside is that the air conditioner does not work as well as it might. The common rooms in the main lodge are very hot (the A/C seems not to be on and the afternoon sun is doing a nifty job on the enclosed space); maybe it will be cooler at dinner time. (Dinner, by the way, is included in the price of the hotel. I suppose that the rationale is that the nearest restaurants are a substantial drive away.) We are advised to return to the common area for drinks at 7:00 and then dinner at 7:30.

The bathroom is much smaller than at Mollies and the toilet's flush control is slightly different. There is a button on top of the tank that is divided into two unequal areas, the larger one (I assume) for a big flush and the smaller ... well you can figure it out.

During our tour of the grounds, Lee asks Graeme why we had not seen any squirrels in the park at Devonport. We get the "lecture" that we will hear repeated many more times during our journey. There are essentially no native mammals on the islands. Before humans arrived, there were just two varieties of bat. Indigenous reptiles included frogs but no snakes. Birds, of course, were plentiful. Because they had no natural predators, many lost the ability of fly and came to the ground. Alas, the introduction of various mammals by the settlers led to the decimation of the kiwi population. Rabbits and possums, both imported, are multiplying like mad and are a huge nuisance. There are only a few deer, but no foxes or wolves. The European settlers introduced farm animals (sheep, cattle, chickens, goats); the rats (called kiore) were brought in from Polynesia.

Tomorrow we'll visit the Kiwi Encounter in Rotorua. Graeme explains that male kiwis, in the wild, are tagged with radio beacons so that when they stop moving about the scientists will know that they are hatching the eggs. (The female, having laid an egg that is nearly as large as she is, is mercifully excused from further parental activity.) Fifteen days short of the 75-day incubation period, the eggs are removed from the wild and brought to an indoor facility (we'll see this tomorrow). After they hatch (which can take up to five days of hard work), the chicks are checked for diseases and fed by hand. When they are large enough, they are released back into the wild. The survival rate for a chick that has lives exclusively in the wild is only 5% because of the many predators; those that are raised in the facility have a survival rate of over 50% because they are larger and better able to defend themselves.

Dinner in the restaurant is elegantly prepared and beautifully served. I bring home the menus from the two days that we eat there, each of them individually printed with "Ron and Lee" on the cover. Although the price of dinner is included in the hotel's tariff, this "generosity" does not extend to any wine that's consumed with the meal; those recommended on the menu are a pricey 20-25 NZD *per glass*. The first night, we start with a pumpkin and ginger soup followed by an Entrée of king prawns on crayfish risotto, then a coconut sorbet refresher. For the main course there is a choice of "Te Aroha Organic Duck Breast, roasted on Kumara Gnocchi, with Braised Red Cabbage" or "Waipukurau

Lamb Rump, grilled Pink, on Potato Dauphinoise, with Garlic Aioli and Port Jus" - both sound very elegant and are. Dessert is "Belgium White Chocolate Bavarois with Bruce's Strawberry and White Chocolate Ice Cream." (Bruce Thomason is the executive chef.) To speed things along, I'll summarize the second night's main course choices as pork tenderloin or Angus beef fillet - again excellent.

Sunday, February 28

We had left the curtains open so that we could see the "guaranteed spectacular sunrise," but are defeated in our quest because the day starts off as partly cloudy. Heading to breakfast in the dining room, Wayne informs us that there's been an 8.8 Richter Scale earthquake in Chile and that there are tsunami warnings (and some evacuations) on both of New Zealand's coasts. (We are far enough inland not to be concerned ... unless the tsunami proves to be very very very large.) We have a nice conversation with Christine McDonald who had served dinner last night and is now serving breakfast; when I comment on how little sleep she must have had, she tells us that sometimes she stays overnight at the lodge, her home's being about an hour's drive from here. Lee writes, in her journal, "The free-range eggs used for Ron's omelet and Lee's Eggs Benedict (with spinach and salmon) have amazingly deep yellow-orange yolks. They are also much tastier than supermarket eggs." Food connoisseur that he isn't, Ron does notice the color of the yolks but does not discern a better taste. Boor!

We return to Rotorua, past the Blue and Green Lakes, and head for the Maori village of Whakarewarewa, considered to be more "authentic" than the better known Te Puia because the Maori actually live there; at Te Puia, it is alleged, they perform for the tourists and then go home. The thermal village announces its presence from a distance because the escaping hydrogen sulfide assaults the nose (but not as badly as the tourist guides suggested - perhaps our nasal passages have been deadened by our years as chemists) and the billows of steam that fill the sky. An online promotional brochure informs us: "Set amidst a landscape of erupting geysers, hot thermal springs and bubbling mud pools, is the living village of Whakarewarewa." Ah, yes, the "geezers" and hot springs and mud pools, a paradise here on earth.

A Maori woman serves as the guide for a group of about 15 tourists. She refers to us as "my family" or "my friends" because that is in the culture of her people. As we walk around the thermal springs, we are cautioned not to leave the path lest we find ourselves on unstable ground that can give way under our weight. Thus forewarned, we do not stray. We see food being cooked by immersing the container into one of the springs for several hours - *hangi* is the name of the process for cooking meats and vegetables of all sorts. (Maori children, who are citizens of the 21st century as well as of their village, call these containers "Maori microwaves.") Alternatively, bags of corn-on-the-cob are lowered into the steam pools. It is very hot, partly because of the escaping steam but also because the clouds have parted and the sun is out in force. Like an idiot, I've left my hat in the car - thus, I'll get a nice sunburn on my bald spot by the time our tour has ended. Our guide demonstrates the technique for making a skirt out of flax fibers. The highlight, to my mind, is a performance of song and dance by a group of Maori women and men. Some of the dances bring to mind those from Hawaii, but there is nothing to compare with the Haka, traditionally danced by hundreds of warriors before going into battle. It involves chanting and stomping and fist pumping, accompanied by bulging eyes and tongues stuck out. (The resemblance to a fraternity party at a U.S. university is not accidental.) Several male members of the audience are invited onto the stage to learn the moves of the Haka; mercifully, I am not so chosen (perhaps because I am hiding under my chair). If you've seen the movie *Invictus*, then you've seen the Haka performed by New Zealand's most famous rugby team, The All Blacks. If not, do a YouTube search for Haka, then sit back and be amazed.

It was not part of our original plans, but at Graeme's urging we visit the Kiwi Encounter, just north of Rotorua: <http://www.kiwiencounter.co.nz/> Much of what our guide tells us (in a group of about 15) is

a repeat of Graeme's lecture, but it's worth hearing the story again. There having been no predators on the island, the kiwis (and other birds) came down to the ground and, over time, lost their ability to fly. (They do have a vestigial wing, but it's useless for getting airborne.) As Europeans came to New Zealand, they brought farm animals to serve as sources of food, but because cows, pigs, and sheep multiply and mature rather slowly, they also brought in rabbits to serve as their source of protein. After a few years, the cows and pigs and sheep were ready for "harvesting," so the rabbits were set loose. And since no people were eating them, their numbers grew alarmingly. So, stoats were imported to thin the bunny population. The stoat (or ermine or weasel) is a small, very fast moving lethal animal (a "killing machine" according to the guide). But the stoats were smart - instead of going after the fast-moving rabbits, they began attacking and decimating the kiwi population. Possums were brought in from Australia because of their fur, which is still valued when mixed with Merino wool (about which more, later). The possums, however, did not realize that they were destined to be in clothing, and so when they were released into the wild, they, too, began eating the kiwis. Possums have no natural predator, except for man - and our guide encouraged us that if we see a possum on the road, we should deliberately swerve to hit it. They number in the tens of millions and are out of control. An Australian in our group said that possums are a "protected species" in her country, which led to a retort from the guide of the sort that established, once again, the enmity between the peoples of the two island nations.

Over the course of the next two weeks, we will indeed see many possum carcasses on the roads. The reader may recall that TWOU and TMOU lived in Tennessee for 34 years before moving to Gig Harbor in 2006. While we were there, the Tennessee legislature, in one of its more inspired actions, passed a law making it legal to eat road kill found on Tennessee's roads. From that day on, we always traveled with a spoon, just in case a delectable faun or rabbit ... or possum was in our direct pathway. Alas, we have no spoon in New Zealand, but then again we are not sure that consuming road kill is legal in this part of the world.

As Graeme had explained, the eggs are removed from the wild and brought to the Kiwi Encounter to be hatched in an incubator. The chicks are fed by hand, a "delicious" mixture of ox heart, vegetables, and bananas that has been run through a huge electric blender. As the birds get larger, they are put in an outdoor run where they can hunt for mealy worms while also getting a supplement from the prepared goop. When they are large enough (about three months after hatching), they are released into the wild. The program is called "Operation Nest Egg" (or "Neest Eegg" in the local patois of **NZish**). Because kiwi are nocturnal animals, our group is brought into a darkened room to watch them (to the extent possible) scurry about. Three kiwis are on display, all having lived there for several years. (Nobody knows the life span of the bird, but there is one at the village who is 27 years old.) Fun fact about kiwis: if you've looked at a picture of one, you'll find it hard to believe our guide's assertion that it has a very short beak. But in fact the "beak" is defined as the distance from the nostrils to the tip - and the kiwi has its nostrils very near the end of the beak. The Kiwi Encounter is the only rescue facility of its type and it survives without government support; its sole source of income is private grants and the admissions fees from visitors. (There are five species of kiwi on the South Island; these birds are captured and brought to a number of offshore islands that are kept free of predators.)

We return to Solitaire Lodge to read and relax a bit on the deck off the common area. As the sun goes down, the warm day becomes quite cold, so (as we did last night) we have drinks before dinner (there is a decent assortment of single malts available) followed by an excellent dinner (see the brief description of the main courses, given on p. 11). During dinner and afterwards, Graeme talks to us at some length about vineyards in the region about Napier that we'll be visiting tomorrow. He provides names of favored vineyards and the names of the proprietors; he is very opinionated about the quality of different types of wines that can be found in various regions of the North and South Islands. He is also very knowledgeable, but still his opinions are filtered through the pretty good knowledge that TWOU has about types of wines.

Monday, March 1

Another sunny day and an excellent hot breakfast. We meet Wayne's partner, Ingrid, who helps out in serving meals. As we load the car, I notice that it is wet even though we've had no rain. Explanation: the staff washed it for us! (Still, does this justify the huge tariff?) Because we are about to check out, Wayne urges us to take a brief tour of the lake in his boat, which we eagerly accept. It is a beautiful body of water and we get very close to the many families of swans and ducks who live there.

We drive to Napier, some 220 km away, past rolling hills, pastures with cows and sheep, mountains in the distance, winding roads. We stop at Huka Falls in Wairakei Park and marvel at the brave souls (a.k.a. idiots) who screech toward the falls in jet boats, only to turn back at the last moment. From Taupo, the 140 km road through the mountains follows the old coach road to Napier, a journey that once took two days. About 46 km from Napier is Te Pohue, the place where travelers from Napier would stop for lunch on their journey; in the early morning, a passenger pigeon would be sent to Te Pohue with information about the number of visitors to expect for the noon meal.

Napier is on the Pacific Ocean (although it takes some getting accustomed to having the Pacific to the east of us, rather than to the west). I had hoped that it was named after John Napier, the Scottish mathematician, but alas not so. The honor goes to Sir Charles Napier, hero of the Battle of Meeanee in the Indian province of Sindh. But you probably knew that. Nevertheless, I did take the opportunity to do a bit of reading about John Napier. According to Wikipedia:

John Napier of Merchiston (1550 – 1617) – also signed as Neper, Nepair – named Marvellous Merchiston, was a Scottish mathematician, physicist, astronomer & astrologer, and also the 8th Laird of Merchistoun. He was the son of Sir Archibald Napier of Merchiston. John Napier is most renowned as the inventor of the logarithm, and of an invention called "Napier's bones". Napier also made common the use of the decimal point in arithmetic and mathematics. Napier's birthplace, the Merchiston Tower in Edinburgh, Scotland, is now part of facilities of Edinburgh Napier University. After he died primarily of the disease of gout, Napier's remains were buried in St Cuthbert's Church, Edinburgh.

Ah, yes, the decimal point. Where or where would we be without the decimal point? Wikipedia also gives us some useful information about Napier, the city, and its recent history:

On 3 February 1931, Napier was leveled by an earthquake. The collapses and ensuing fires killed 256 people. The figure would later rise to 258 as two people were missing, presumed dead following the quake. The town centre was destroyed and rebuilt in the popular Art Deco style of the time. Some 40 km² of today's Napier was undersea before the earthquake raised it.

Although a few Art Deco buildings were replaced with contemporary structures during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, most of the centre remained intact for long enough to become recognized as architecturally unique, and from the 1990s onwards had been protected and restored. Napier and South Beach in the US city Miami are considered the two best preserved Art Deco towns, Miami Beach being mainly in the later Streamline Moderne Art Deco style. As of 2007, Napier has been nominated for UNESCO World Heritage Site status, the first cultural site in New Zealand to be nominated.

Most people, *normal* people, are thrilled to see Art Deco buildings, but I confess that I am not among them (neither the people who like Art Deco nor the ones designated as "normal"). Truth be told, I despise Art Deco architecture. For example, I become ill whenever I see the tower of New York City's Chrysler Building. And here we are in a city that prides itself on its Art Decadent (my version) style. We will wander through the city and take lots of pictures (at the direction of TWOU) of the restored buildings and storefronts, but TMOU was not/is not pleased by it. Some of my photos are posted at the Picasa site. Other pictures can be seen at <http://www.artdeconapier.com/default.aspx>.

Our destination in Napier is The Masters Lodge, a luxury hotel with only two guest rooms. It was the home of Gerhard Husheer, a wealthy tobacco merchant of the early 20th century. The house was remodeled and enlarged in the 1930s under the direction of Louis Hay, New Zealand's most famous architect and a protegee of Frank Lloyd Wright. At the hotel's web site http://www.masterslodge.co.nz/about/history_of_the_lodge/index.htm one can read:

With a lavish budget, architect Louis Hay set about decorating the house with expensive leadlight windows in elaborate Louis Comfort Tiffany designs of fruit and flowers. He added Art Deco doors, Art Nouveau brass door handles and plates, Arts & Crafts fireplaces, and Charles Rennie Mackintosh stylised rose motif leadlights, carvings & appliques, and made the principal residence "a stunner".

Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear - seeing the name Charles Rennie Mackintosh dredges up horrible memories of our having visited his home (now a museum) outside of Glasgow and having had to view the über-ornate furnishings that he so loved. Again, most people, *normal* people, think the work is beautiful. I am proudly in the minority that disagrees. Nevertheless, we do take many pictures of the interior and exterior of the hotel to post at the Picasa site. Other pictures can be seen at the hotel's web site (see above).

The building remained in the Husheer family until 1997 when it was purchased by a Swiss couple, who converted it into a small hotel. Since 2003, it has been owned by an interesting American couple, Joan and Larry Blume. He was a lawyer in NYC, specializing in international transfer technology, she a successful dentist with an office just a few blocks from their apartment. They gave up their former lives and livelihoods (the firm that Larry sold had employed 1600 lawyers) to move here and run this beautiful place. And they are, indeed, gracious hosts, greeting us at our arrival, showing us around the house, giving us information about the city, etc.

The afternoon is quite warm. Even with the windows of our room wide open, there is not much cooling. The good news is that the air conditioning works quite well. Our suite (a huge bedroom and sitting room and a very large bathroom in (yecch) Art Deco style) is on the second level, adjacent to a common room, a solarium that, quite frankly, is hot as hell. Maybe hotter. Through the solarium is a door that leads directly to the small car park. (The other exit is through the downstairs rooms, but to get to one's car then requires an uphill trek.) The bathroom, according to Lee's florid description in her journal, "... is in stunning green/yellow tile. The mirror above the sink looks just like an Art Deco element from a Hay building. Of course! The giant soaking tub is separate from the shower, and also is located under a picture window to the Pacific." (Impartial observers have often noticed how easily TWOU is impressed by bathroom decor.)

After settling in, we drive into the city to stroll along its streets and "enjoy" the architecture. There is an "official" Art Deco Walk, described in a brochure that guides us up and down the streets so that we don't miss a single building. After a while, even TWOU begins to suffer from sensory overload, so we return to our hotel room to relax before dinner. The Blumes had made a reservation for us at the restaurant associated Mission Estates, a winery outside of town, founded in 1838 and still operated by the Marist Brothers, although all of the seminary students are now in residence in Auckland. The driving instructions seemed clear enough, but we manage to get lost a couple of times; with the aid of a couple of pedestrians and their dogs, whom we stop and ask (the pedestrians, not the dogs) for directions, we finally find our way there. The dinner is truly excellent and beautifully served; Lee begins with a cold soup based on apricot and thyme, while Ron plays it safe with a salad. She then has Akaroa salmon with a Thai accent while Ron again plays it safe with a beef fillet. (A resident cat wanders among the tables, begging for food; we choose to ignore him/her/it.) A man who serves as sommelier/majordomo/boss-of-bosses is a flamboyant and dogmatic source of information about wine, wineries, and all things grape. He has some very definite opinions about "cab sev" which we interpret to mean Cabernet Sauvignon. We manage to find our way back to the hotel and discover two cookies that some nice person had left for us when turning down our bed.

Tuesday, March 2

It is a beautiful, sunny day, and breakfast is served on an outdoor porch. On offer are fresh cut pineapple, juice, croissants, cheeses, toast, and an omelet stuffed with spinach, tomatoes, and mushrooms. Seated with us are the other guests at Masters Lodge, an interesting couple from Wageningen, Netherlands. They are on the last leg of their several-week trip to New Zealand. For the South Island, they strongly recommend the airplane flight to one of the glaciers, followed by a hike (crampons, boots, and outerware provided) across said hunk of ice. Sounds a bit too adventurous for the trek-challenged Magids. The porch overlooks a variety of greenery, among which is the curious fern tree, which we had also seen at Solitaire Lodge. Close examination of several of these reveals the fact that the "trunk" is not solid but rather a bundle of branches that each, at one time, had ended in a frond.

The Hawke's Bay region (or, if you prefer the Maori name, Heretaunga) is known for its wineries. Over the course of a few hours, we visit five such emporia and make some purchases which will be shipped to our Gig Harbor address. (A contrast in styles and interests: TWOU devotes five pages of her journal to a description of each winery, the wines we tasted, and so on. TMOU covered these details in one sentence.) But I would be remiss if I didn't comment on the last place we visited, Brookfields Winery, which distinguished itself from the others in several regards. Quoting from TWOU's journal, "We really click with John, who drinks along with us. And he brings out wine not on the standard list - including the Hillside Syrah - 15% alcohol and yummy to the max!" There's more, but I think that that's enough. Now for some additions and clarifications: (1) John certainly was more personable than the people at the other wineries, some of whom gave the appearance of wishing that they - and we - were elsewhere; (2) John did consume a fair amount of the various wines that he poured but he did not "drink along with us" - TMOU, mindful of his responsibility to drive the car, was not involved in the consumption of spirits; (3) it was from John that we ordered a case of various types of wine - quoting again "... will be air freighted to us. This is expensive, but hey ..." One has to applaud such a plucky attitude. If only more people felt the same way, the world would pull out of the Great Recession in short order. As I was not imbibing I took the opportunity to wander about the tasting room and adjacent storage room where I spotted several magnificent paintings, *huge* paintings, by a local artist named Piera McArthur, born in England in 1929 and a resident of Chile, Paris, and Moscow during her career, living in Hawke's Bay since 1990. For a sample of her work, check out <http://tinyurl.com/244asmq> and <http://tinyurl.com/27fdz72>.

More NewZealish or NZish: From the radio and from the employees at several wine-tasting rooms, we learn these unique pronunciations: *Deceembre*, *neext*, *U. Ees. A.*, *seeven*, *profeesion*, *deefinitely*, and *beest*. But we are surprised that several words that should be left intact because they already have long-e sounds are changed as follows: "brayfly" for briefly, New "Zelland" for New Zealand, and "bayten" track for beaten track. And we hear the first variation on a short-a word with "apairt." What is also confusing is that the abbreviation for the country, NZ, is pronounced En-Zed (and not En-Zeed). Why? (Besides, *Enzed*, to my untrained ears, sounds like a headache remedy. One can just imagine the TV ad: "*Enzed* is not tolerated by all people. Side effects include rash; hives; itching; difficulty breathing; tightness in the chest; swelling of the mouth, face, lips, or tongue; bloody stools; confusion; dark urine; fever, chills, or persistent sore throat; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin; seizures; severe diarrhea; stomach pain or cramps; unusual bruising or bleeding; vaginal discharge or irritation; yellowing of the skin or eyes.") [Ed. note: This litany of side effects is lifted, without any change, from a web listing for the antibiotic amoxicillin. Why this medication? Well, the dedicated reader of this journal will discover my own encounter with said medication in a few days. I apologize, in advance, for the graphic description that I will provide.] Oh, yes, in **NZish**, "No worries" means "You're welcome" and the # sign on a telephone pad is called the "hash" mark. Noted.

We stop at the Starbucks in downtown Napier for coffee, then return to the Masters Lodge and enjoy an afternoon single malt, provided by our hosts. We also discover that the Dutch couple, from this

morning, have been replaced by Vanessa and Kelly Range from Alabama, both retired employees of TVA. What is most startling is that the man not only grew up in Oak Ridge (for the uninitiated, Oak Ridge is but 20 miles from Knoxville where Lee and I served penance for 36 years) but his great-great-grandfather is the person after whom Hall's Crossroads (a suburb of K-ville) is named. He also says that he lived in the big white house on Kingston Pike at Dixie Lee Junction (again, names that are familiar to all Knoxvilleans) that is featured in the song from the movie "Thunder Road."

We have an interesting and most informative discussion with Joan and Larry about New Zealand's educational system. Joan is displeased that physicians and dentists have as little schooling as they do. And Larry comments that although several universities are first-class, the lower grades ascribe to the "Tall Poppies Syndrome" - i.e., when students achieve too much and get "too tall" for their classmates, they are "cut down to size." If this is an accurate description, it's a disgrace - and a recipe for mediocrity in the 21st century. (But see p. 27 in the section on Christchurch.)

The Blumes have made a dinner reservation for us at Pacifica, an Asian-French fusion restaurant near downtown. 'Twas very elegant, it is true, but also too precious for our tastes and too self-smitten by its perceived excellence. But what do we know? The Blumes and several tour books raved about it. This is our first (but not our last) encounter on this trip with "molecular gastronomy" which should appeal to us as chemists but somehow doesn't. In her journal, Lee writes about Pacifica "This was fussy (foams, weird combinations) and too little food! Lee had Bluff oysters for a starter - delicious, but the tapioca and tasteless sabayon of something covering them was a joke. Ron's veal tenderloin was vanishingly small." Over the weeks since this encounter, her description has flowered to "an emulsified semi-liquid gunk with tapioca and oysters." And she recalls her second course as "venison sausage with parmesan foam"; this will not be our last encounter with such foam.

After dinner, we return to our room to read.

Wednesday, March 3

Another sumptuous breakfast on the sun-drenched porch. Lee writes, "starting with blueberries and raspberries in hazlenut yogurt, delicious cheese, and a squash frittata, these folks can cook!" Fearful that said frittata might have been filled with peppers and other evil things that he does not like and/or cannot eat, Ron opts for something simpler. (A curiosity - Google searches for "frittata" and "fritatta" give the same results. So which spelling is correct? Surely not both of them!) Vanessa and Kelly are at breakfast with us. I mention casually to Joan that it's too bad that she doesn't have her dental tools with her, as I began having a toothache about three days ago and it's still with me. (This thread will continue, with an unpleasant outcome - not exactly related to the tooth - very soon.) The one downside of our stay at The Masters Lodge: I was surprised that the two scotches that we were offered yesterday afternoon were charged to our bill - after all, the pre-dinner drinks at Solitaire were "free" although the very high tariff charged for the room probably more than compensated. Larry insists on helping me carry our luggage to the car. He also makes it his mission to locate on our car radio the classical music station that had been playing on the radio in our room.

We have a long drive today, about 320 km to Wellington (population about 350,000), New Zealand's capital city, located at the southwestern tip of the North Island on Cook Strait which separates the two islands. In Woodville (150 km from Napier) there is a choice of roads: one goes inland through Masterton, the other eventually along the Tasman Sea. The Blumes seemed to favor the latter route because the mountain driving is less challenging, the scenery when one finally reaches the coast is better, and one passes through Otaki where there is an outlet store for *Icebreaker*. (Foolish moi, I thought that "we" had agreed to take this route but I find out, *eight* days from now, that Lee is really angry that we missed the sheep-shearing contest at "Golden Shears" in Masterton. Sigh. Just one of the many bumps that make the road of married life interesting.) *Icebreaker*, whose name I had not known, is a high-end manufacturer of Merino wool garments, mainly outerwear, that is favored by

runners, hikers, kayakers, and others who want clothing that will wick up perspiration. Upon our return to the U.S., I discover a long article about *Icebreaker* and its imaginative owner in *TIME* magazine: <http://tinyurl.com/yafynyx> As it turns out, the route that we take does have its challenging sections: we drive through the spectacular Manawatu Gorge, made more difficult by the sudden change in the weather from sun to wind, rain, fog, and mist. (Also on this long day's drive, my sciatica acts up when I'm in the passenger seat; one raincoat under my butt does not soothe the savage beast but two do the job. Yes, yes, I do know that the correct expression is "soothe the savage *breast*, but it seems incongruous to use "breast" when describing one's rump, eh?) About halfway to Wellington, we stop for coffee and a sweet at the Horseman's Café in Shannon - rustic but nice, nonetheless.

Along the road, we see several signs urging STOP DIDYMO. At first, we think that this is an acronym (perhaps Drowsy Insomnia Does Yo' Momma Oversexed?) but Lee discovers that it is "an invasive alga; the idea is to be vigilant if you step on it, lest you transmit it." We also pass by fields with lots of black-faced sheep, the type that were so prevalent in Scotland.

More NZish encountered en route: one uses Google to do a "weeb" search; and the year 2010 is "twenty teen" (which sounds like it should be a nighty for pre-pubescent girls).

Although having only 20% the population of Auckland, Wellington gives the impression of being a larger city. As we approach it, there are some significant highways, overpasses, interchanges, and traffic, but we still manage to find our way to our destination, Ohtel. (No, Mr. Spell-Checker, that is not a typo. The deliberately misspelled name was chosen to distinguish this facility from other hotels - or, perhaps, to take advantage of the poor typing ability of whoever first applied for a license.) It is ten years old and rather narrow, squashed between two buildings on either side; it has only ten guest rooms on its three upper floors. It is well situated on Oriental Bay, near downtown, several museums, and many restaurants. We learn very quickly that the city deserves its nickname Windy Wellington when the car door flies out of my hand as I open it to step outside. (This is the only hotel of those that we will use that charges for parking; the woman at the desk, after showing us to our room, parks the car ... wherever.) Our bedroom is very large and the bathroom is very modern. On the downside, Lee writes "... but the room itself is graceless - spotted carpet, horrible fake leather and corduroy upholstery, water stains on the round table, a glass pendant broken from an overhead fixture leaving a bare bulb. The color scheme runs to bilious clashing greens, plus oranges that aren't harmonious either. Wall decoration is almost absent, and the bathroom amenities are two-star at best." I, of course, notice none of this - which is why I have copped the description from her journal.

We discuss restaurants with the clerk who urges us to make reservations for today and the next two days, as restaurants do tend to fill up. For this evening, we choose Shed 5; and we give her some preferences for tomorrow and Friday; none of the places we select for Thursday have available seating but we do get a reservation for the following day. Shed 5 is located on the wharf, a pleasant 20-minute walk from the hotel. And the food is superb, among the best restaurant meals we can remember. We order a loaf of ciabatta and know, immediately, that this is a place worth getting to know. I begin with an outstanding seafood chowder (fresh fish, clams, prawns, and mussels), served in a hollowed out loaf of bread; and follow it with "Seared Diver scallops w fettuccine in a light mushroom sauce." Lee begins with (in her own words) "grilled giant prawns followed by steamed hapuku grouper* (a bit like sea

*No, not a pervert but rather **NZish** for grouper

bass and supremely delicious) on a risotto with smoked paprika and an amazing crayfish essence. The plate is decorated with balsamic vinegar, herbs, and fish eggs." In her journal, she sketches the arrangement of items on the plate, but to my eyes her drawing looks a great deal like a giant worm having sex. To show solidarity with Brookfields Winery, we each have a glass of their unoaked chardonnay. I eschew dessert but Lee has something called "vanilla honey bubbles with rhubarb & apple custard tart & mango ice cream." The only downside? It took an inordinate amount of time to get

our check.

A nice touch at the restaurant was the lemon that was served with Lee's prawns. It had been cut in the shape of "La Coupe du Roi" (see the photo posted at Picasa). This shape is of special interest to chemists because it has unusual stereochemical properties that were described in a classic 1983 paper by chemists at UCLA and Princeton; the first page of the article, but not the accompanying drawing, can be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/y4antee>. (Those unafraid of a little science may also gain understanding by looking at a 2005 article: <http://tinyurl.com/y4lk4tg>.) For the non-scientist, perhaps the best description (along with pictures) can be found on p. 34 in a book by Magdolna and István Hargittai about symmetry in art and nature: <http://tinyurl.com/y7mz6ct>. If you have no desire to look at any of these cited sources, here's a brief description of what is so interesting. An apple is an *achiral* object - i.e., it and its mirror image are identical. (This assumes a perfectly symmetrical apple, something that is not found in nature.) A *chiral* object is one whose mirror image is not identical to it. (A useful analogy would be a pair of gloves - they are non-identical mirror images of each other. If you're not convinced, try pulling a right glove onto your *chiral* left hand.) According to the discussion in the Hargittai book, cutting an (idealized *achiral*) apple in the conventional way gives two identical halves that are also *achiral*; this is not surprising. But cutting the apple according to La Coupe du Roi produces two *chiral* pieces that are, furthermore, *homochiral* - i.e., they are identical to one another and not mirror images. On its face, it would seem that an *achiral* object ought not to be able to be bisected into two *homochiral* pieces nor should two *homochiral* pieces be able to be reassembled into an *achiral* apple. It may so seem, but in fact it can be done.

This ends our chemistry lecture for the day. We now return you to your regularly scheduled travelog.

OK, I lied. Here is another chemistry-related curiosity. As a "recovering" colloid chemist (which is what Lee is) the "vanilla honey bubbles" dessert is her second encounter with bubbles or foam (see the meal at Pacifica, p. 17. She also notes that Ohtel, our hotel, has bubbles in its logo, bubbles embossed on the glass divider between our bedroom and bath, and a cartoon "bubble man" to designate which door is for the men's room in the lobby. Rather than my describing it, the curious reader should consult the Picasa pictures - there's a photo of "bubble man" that graphically defines the men's room, but the accompanying cartoon on the women's room remains a mystery.

The return from Shed 5 to Ohtel is, again, along the water. A Force Five wind is blowing into our faces, but we persevere. Near the hotel is an arts festival with a circus troupe doing acrobats and other dangerous things. I cringe ... but we also continue watching from our hotel room when we reach it.

Thursday, March 4

Breakfast at Ohtel is available in the rather small lobby. There is a small selection of uninteresting cereals (cold), breads (also cold!), waffles (that can be warmed), and coffee (but only if one asks for it) - pretty minimal for a place that describes itself as a "boutique luxury hotel." Seated at the far end of our long table is a delightful couple who had come by train from Auckland. He is a teacher (I forget if it's at the college or high school level) who is here to interview outstanding high school seniors, from across the country, for a very prestigious university scholarship. It is in the most positive sense that I would describe the man and woman as sophisticated (yet down to earth), intellectual, well-spoken, and charming. (I wonder how they view the American tourists who are eating with them.)

Now I know that this is a travelog about our adventures in New Zealand, but I must digress to talk about an adventure of an unpleasant sort, one that could have occurred anywhere but (our bad luck) happened here. I mentioned in the account of March 3 that I had been experiencing a toothache. When it first began, I couldn't tell if it was from the upper or lower teeth at the right side of my mouth, but by today it has become clear that it is from a bottom tooth, the next-to-last molar (#30 in dentist lingo). It is sensitive to pressure, but not to heat or cold - thus, it's quite different from earlier

experiences I had with teeth that required root canals. I decide that I can't ignore it any longer, so I ask the desk clerk to recommend a dentist. She does so and gets an appointment for me at 9:30 this morning with Dr. Philip Chin whose office is about a 10-minute walk from here. The morning is beautiful and sunny, by the way.

The dentist examines me, x-Rays the tooth, and concludes that the nerve is dying. He offers three choices: extraction, root canal, or treatment with antibiotics. I reject the first, and he and I both reject the second as it's not clear when, or even if, I'd be able to complete the root-canal treatment before returning to the U.S. (and there's significant concern about how the partly treated tooth would respond to the low pressure on the long flight). He was willing to start the root canal (he had an open slot in the afternoon) but we choose the third option. He prescribes a mixture of amoxicillin and clavulanic acid which I have filled at a pharmacy across the street (15 NZD). I also get the name of a dentist in Christchurch, our next destination, in case the tooth continues to cause trouble. Cost of visit: 70 NZD.

From the dentist's office, we visit two nearby galleries of Maori art and we then walk to Te Papa, New Zealand's National Museum. As excellent as we thought the War Memorial Museum in Auckland was, Te Papa is far better. The museum is on six levels, but we don't have time to visit everything. The exhibit rooms are huge and very well laid out. We begin at the sixth level with contemporary sculpture, then "art of the nation" (on five), New Zealand history (on four), natural history before and after the arrival of humans (on three), earthquakes and volcanoes (on two), and the café on the first level where we have coffee and a light lunch at the end of our visit. Highlights of the collection are the Maori houses with their elaborate carvings, the exhibit devoted to the different kinds of jade and the jewelry that the Maori carve from the stone, and (most curious of all) an interactive video "game" that we could play to discover whether or not we would be desirable immigrants in New Zealand's eye; by putting in our age, net worth, and current job status, we discover that we are rejected! The museum has many visitors but one never feels crowded. There are even hordes of students in a variety of different uniforms, most of them acting in a civilized manner. Amazing! Because I finish on level two before Lee does, I go down to the café to wait for her - the labyrinth of rooms is a bit disorienting, but a helpful guide tells me to walk straight ahead and take a right turn at the elephant. Good directions!

Probably the most interesting exhibit, certainly the most unique (yes, yes, I know that "unique" cannot be modified, but here is a time that the rule *must* be broken) is the Colossal Squid. This beast, captured (alive) two years ago by intrepid seamen, weighs 500 kg, has eight arms, two tentacles, and eyes as big as soccer balls, the largest eyes ever found in the animal kingdom. Standing in awe alongside it, one is reminded of Matt Taibbi's characterization (*Rolling Stone*, July 2009) of Goldman Sachs as "a great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity, relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money."

After the museum, we walk to the i-Site (very crowded and hard to get to talk to one of the staff) across a public square that has groups of people, mostly young, adorning a message post with small message-pieces each consisting of a single word. Some are arranging the words into sentences but others are constructing portraits with the word-pieces. Again, pictures can be seen at the Picasa site. The afternoon has turned quite warm, about 25°C.

It's a bit difficult to find (because there is no good signage) but we finally locate City Gallery for its display of art by contemporary New Zealanders. As with Te Papa, there is no admission fee, but we do make a donation of 5 NZD. Big spenders! Most impressive is the work of Séraphine Pick who depicts scenes of family life that are anything but blissful and congenial; for some examples of her art, see <http://tinyurl.com/y6fe9c6>, <http://tinyurl.com/yyfl6lu>, and <http://tinyurl.com/y5ye99o>. Lee writes, "Séraphine Pick, a young NZ artist with a dark imagination and eclectic style, is the big feature ... Her 'burning the furniture.' showing resentful wife's images of her clueless husband's baggage is striking, as is the huntress with wall flowers (= wallpaper), knife, and dead rabbit." (Methinks my bride of more than 40 years has a side that I'd best be wary of.) As we are leaving the gallery, we run into the distinguished gentleman from breakfast who has just arrived - I wonder how he will react to the modern

art of Pick and others.

Wellington is a much more attractive city than Auckland: its architecture, shops, streets, flora, waterfront, etc. are appealing to the eye. Where it loses out is that there are perilously few electric walk/don't-walk signals of the type that are seen (and heard!!) at nearly every intersection in Auckland; and there are very few crosswalks marked out on the street. Dodging traffic, then, is an adventure.

After City Gallery, Lee does a bit of shopping before we return to Ohtel at about 4:45. Because we could not get a reservation at one of the more expensive restaurants recommended by the hotel staff, we walk to China Delight, an unassuming Chinese restaurant not far from the dentist's office - there are some language problems, but we have a most enjoyable meal.

When we return to the hotel I send an email to Joan (the retired dentist at Masters Lodge) asking her advice. She replies very promptly and says that it was wise not to begin the root canal, not only because the second stage might be difficult to schedule but also because she's a strong believer in having a specialist do such a procedure. She provides the name of an endodontist in Wellington whom she is scheduled to see for a root canal of her own. (This is not the end of the saga "The Tooth and I" - there will be many more installments over the next few days.)

Friday, March 5

Following breakfast (as dull as yesterday's) I call Michael Flatley, my Gig Harbor dentist, and speak to Barbara, his receptionist and wife, just to inform them of what has transpired with my tooth. I also call the endodontist recommended by Joan Blume, but there is no way to get an appointment. I ask that office for the name of an endodontist in Christchurch, but when I call him I learn that their office is closed on Fridays. Business must be good! I did not anticipate any further contact with Flatley's office, but I am pleased to receive a very long email from him, saying that taking the antibiotic was the correct course; I hadn't told Barbara what medication I was taking, but Michael made me feel better by writing that he usually prescribes amoxicillin. In the meanwhile, Lee contacts Jane Turner (of Southern Crossings) and asks for her help in finding an endodontist in Christchurch. Jane calls back with the name of a full-service dental clinic, near our hotel, that is open on Sundays! I call and get an appointment for 9:00 Sunday morning. (In fact, Jane will call a few more times during our journey to see how I'm doing. This is much appreciated.) I send an email to Michael Flatley, telling him about this and saying that the antibiotic that Dr. Chin prescribed is a mixture of amoxicillin + clavulanic acid; in a follow-up, Flatley replies that this combination is a powerful drug called Augmentin ("antibiotics on steroids" he calls it).

Although cool in the morning, the day gradually gets warmer and the sun is strong in a cloudless sky as we walk to the center of the city to take the cable car to the Botanical Garden, a huge place with a wide variety of trees, plants, flowers, and other stuff that grows in the ground. Within the park, there are steep hills to ascend (none of the hills goes downward!) and many steps to climb. The reader might sense that TMOU is not an enthusiast. The reader is right. (A brochure informs us "The Wellington Botanic Garden features 25 hectares of unique landscape, protected native forest, conifers, specialised plant collections, colourful floral displays, and views over Wellington city" but says not a word about the poor signage or the steep hills.) Lee notes the absence of squirrels (as we expected) and insects (the plants pollinate themselves?), but we do see some butterflies and birds. Although not an enthusiastic fan of things botanical, I am intrigued by the "Sundial of Human Involvement"! It consists of what looks like an infinity sign (∞) with months and dates written on the outside of the curve. According to the instructions, one stands on today's date, holds one's hands over head, and notes the shadow which falls (with an accuracy of ± 10 minutes) on the time of day. Several pictures are at the Picasa site, with Lee acting as the dutiful hour and minute hands. (Upon our return to Gig Harbor, we see a picture in the *Seattle Times* of an "analemmatic sundial" at a city park; it, too, uses the shadow of a human body to tell the time.)

More to my liking is a duck pond near which we stop for a pastry and a drink for me to take my medication, before finding our way back to the cable car. We never do locate the Lady Norwood Rose Garden, an omission that breaks my heart. When the cable car descends to ground-level, Lee does a bit of shopping and we return to the hotel. (A passenger in the cable car is wearing a T-shirt that reads "Bedford-Stuyvesant Fire Department in Brooklyn" - cool!) We get back to Ohtel at 1:15 and are happy to let our feet relax and cool off.

We ask to have our car delivered (from wherever they've hidden it) and we drive to the ferry terminal (just to be sure about where we'll need to go early tomorrow morning), then on Marine Drive which runs along the water and offers beautiful views of the sea, of the hills, and of the airplanes landing at the airport. The road seems to peter out - our map had suggested that it would make a full loop, but when we reach the gate of Wellington's prison discretion suggests that we turn around, so we stop for ice cream before returning to the hotel at 4:15.

In the late afternoon, I'm feeling a little punk - perhaps too much intense sun at the Botanical Garden? We have a 7:00 reservation at The White House, a 10-15 minute walk from the hotel. The food is excellent, but I'm not very hungry - I eschew an appetizer and eat only a small amount of my "21 day aged Angus pure sirloin steak served with cippoline onions, croquette potato and café de Paris butter." Lee starts with crab ravioli and then has snapper with clams and chorizo, covered with "parmesan air"; once again, a photo (at Picasa) is more helpful than any words I can write, although Lee does characterize it as "absolutely tasteless." By the end of dinner, I'm really feeling ill; and I have diarrhea on the return walk to the hotel. One thought comes to mind: the time lapse between last night's Chinese meal and now is the same as it was when two friends, Lee, and I all got sick after eating at a Chinese restaurant in Seattle.

We arrange with today's desk clerk (who is also the owner of Ohtel) to leave our car in the "illegal parking space" at the front door of the hotel for our early departure tomorrow morning.

Saturday, March 6

We get up really early so as to leave the hotel by 6:45. Now, listen, I understand that nobody wants to read about icky things, but sometimes it's better to tell the ugly parts along with the beautiful. So - last night's diarrhea is repeated early this morning. Because we have a long ferry ride followed by an even longer train ride today, I take a loperamide (the generic form of imodium) in the morning and another later in the day.

The drive to the Interislander Ferry Terminal should have taken about 10 minutes, but we are surprised to run into a police road block for drunk drivers. A local gendarme asks me a couple of questions and requests that I exhale into his breathalyzer. Satisfied, he allows us to proceed to the terminal. We check in, using the vouchers provided by Southern Crossings, and are issued not only boarding passes but also blue wrist bands, the meaning of which we know not. When it's announced that the gates are open for boarding, the experienced travelers (nearly a thousand in number) make a bee-line for the door, knowing that it will be difficult to find good seats on board the ferry. Indeed, we are a bit frustrated when we discover that most seats are taken, until I wise up and ask one of the crew what the function of the wrist band is. Turns out, it gives us entry to the first-class lounge (thank you, Jane Turner!) where there is ample seating, comfortable couches, free food and drinks, much less noise, and a total prohibition on children. Lee has a nice breakfast *and* lunch, all within three hours, but I'm still feeling the effects of my two close encounters with the bathroom. After about an hour, however, I'm feeling much better and so I eagerly down some food without any apparent ill effect. Just to be "safe," I decide to visit the bathroom on board and am delighted that this occurs without event, a subtle way of saying that the loperamide is working. While waiting for the single-person bathroom to become available, I chat with a woman who is an American. She describes herself as the U.S. Defense Attaché for New Zealand (who knew that we had one?) and has lived in this country for four years. She

was quite familiar with Gig Harbor, having been based in this region for several years. She says that we'll find that the South Island is a lot like Western Washington. She has made this crossing many times, and tells me that sometimes (when the seas are rough) the ferry company cancels the sailing.

The ferry, having left Wellington at 8:25, arrives at Picton on the South Island at 11:35, right on schedule. Most of the trip is on open seas (Cook Strait) but the final segment requires some tricky maneuvering (some 30 km) among the many islands in Queen Charlotte Sound. There is an announcement, made in **NZish**, for those passengers who have driven cars onto the ship: "Don't start your *engine* until directed to drive to the *exit deck*." Our luggage has been checked through to Christchurch, so we need only walk a fairly short distance to the train depot to await the 1:00 departure of the Tranz Coastal. (Why the deliberate misspelling? Well, ya see, we *are* in New Zealand which is abbreviated NZ and ...)

The distinguished couple at Ohtel had told us that railroads in New Zealand use a narrow gauge track. Indeed, this is evident, even to these uninitiated eyes, when we see the tracks; furthermore, there are no wooden ties between the rails. According to Wikipedia, "Sixty percent of the world's railways use a standard gauge of 1,435 mm (4 ft 8.5 in) ... but New Zealand, Australia, and several countries in Asia use 1,067 mm (3 ft 6 in)." Again, according to Wikipedia, "Narrow gauge railways generally cannot handle as much tonnage as standard gauge, but they are generally less costly to construct, particularly in mountainous regions because the turning radius of curves can be less ... Many narrow gauge railways were built in the Rocky Mountains of the United States and Canada for these reasons, although most have since been abandoned or converted to standard gauge."

A woman in the train's ticket office assigns seats (by what protocol, I have no idea). She is a real character, a rotund lady "of a certain age" with a broad English accent and a gregarious attitude - to her, everyone is Darling or Honey or Dear, even those who argue about whether or not they can keep their luggage with them. She greets one person with "How're you doin', Lovey, there's a dear." and one of her conversation went like this: "Hello, Love, are you taking the train?" "Yes." "Well done!!" A public address announcer at the Picton train station tells "*pedeestrians*" to put their luggage behind their "sates" (another instance in which **NZish** takes a word that already has a long-e and changes it).

On the train, I'm feeling very tired and I sleep for much of the journey, waking up from time to time to see fields that are populated by horses, cows, hogs, or turkeys. The sheep scatter when the noisy train approaches, but the stoic cattle are unperturbed. The sheep come in various hues: most have white wool, but some are dark grey. In some fields, there are sheep and horses and cows, all co-existing peacefully. There is a public address announcer who describes features of the terrain, interesting sites, and so on. When awake, I learn about "braided rivers" and see many of them. These are very shallow and quite wide gravel-bed channels that form in flood plains. For much of the year they are dry (or nearly so) but during the rainy season or the snow melt, they fill up and become significant waterways. Part of the train trip is along the Pacific Ocean shore (some passengers claim that they can see whales), whereas other segments climb through narrow mountain passages (no whales here!).

Because the train does not go very fast and because there are six stops, the 350-km trip is scheduled to last 5 hrs 20 min - and I almost make it to the end without "incident" but, alas, about 4 hours into the journey I barely make it to the bathroom where I throw up. At least there's no diarrhea, a small blessing. (An aside: it is amazing that now, several weeks after our return to the U.S., I'm able to decipher the notes that I wrote on the train trip because my notoriously challenging handwriting was made even more illegible by our bouncing and swaying on the narrow tracks.) Because I am dozing so much, I don't get as much reading done on the ferry and train as I had hoped, but I do manage to finish *Disobedience* while in the Picton train station.

We arrive about 10 minutes behind schedule because our train is forced to stop while waiting for another train to leave the station. We are met by a driver, courtesy of Custom Tours, who helps us to retrieve our luggage and drives us in his town car to The George Hotel, here in Christchurch. On the

way, he shows us some significant sights, things that we will certainly want to visit over the next couple of days. First impressions are that the city center is quite beautiful, with a huge park across the street from the hotel.

The George is the only moderately large hotel (53 rooms) that we'll be in for the trip, although it boasts that it is the only Christchurch facility to be included in "Small Luxury Hotels of the World" (whatever that may signify). The lobby is large and modern, as is our room. The lobby walls are decorated with some excellent modern lithographs by some of New Zealand's leading artists. An interesting feature of our room is that a stuffed bear (named George, of course) is on the bed, accompanied by a note requesting that one take said bear home, have him/her/it photographed in various places, and send the digital pictures for posting at the George Bear Blog: <http://www.thegeorge.com/existing.htm> Lee not only appropriates the bear today but will stuff another into her suitcase when we return to the hotel on March 17. The modern decor includes several wall-mounted touch pads for controlling the lights and the heated towel rack; these are activated by barely touching the word for the desired light.

A curiosity: in newspaper articles, on billboards, on road signs, etc. Christchurch is often abbreviated ChCh. (Cha-Cha, anyone?) Also, I sense that I would feel more comfortable here if only the city were named Mosestemple. But I digress.

Because I'm still feeling the effects of my stomach ailment, I lie down to rest for a while. I have no desire to find a restaurant, so we place an order from room service. Lee has a very tasty vegetable cream soup with grilled scallops followed by a panini (cheese, tomato, onion) and fries, but Ron is thwarted in his plaintive request for a clear soup or bouillon and plain toast; what is sent, instead, are several large bread slices, at least two of which are heavily seasoned. Although not at all hungry, I nibble at the bread and wash it down with water (prison food, I love it!) but even this does not settle well and I have another throw-up session in the bathroom. This is getting tedious! At least I do manage to get a good night's sleep.

Sunday, March 7

Last night's nausea is gone, but the diarrhea is still with me. Well, what do you expect? I've had essentially no solid food since Friday morning.

The day begins very cloudy, but in short order the sun breaks through, the clouds dissipate, and the temperature reaches a pleasant 23° by afternoon. Breakfast is served in the casual restaurant of the hotel. Lee orders hot food off the menu, but I decide to play it safe by having a little dry cereal with only a touch of milk, some un-buttered toast, juice, and coffee. Different countries, different customs: instead of skim milk or non-fat milk there is a pitcher of "trim" milk. And Lee recalls having ordered a "trim latte" at Starbucks.

The hotel clerk assures us that it is just a 10-minute walk to Garden City Dental, but even though we are fast walkers it takes closer to 25 minutes, so we arrive a little late. And even though the web site advertised full dental services (including root canal), there is only one clerk on duty and one "regular" dentist, an interesting guy named Sam Umara. He examines the x-Ray made on Friday and pokes at my tooth. He thinks that there's nothing seriously wrong with it, especially since the pain has subsided entirely with the antibiotic. (He compliments whoever it was who did the gold crowns - I've had so many that I don't recall, but it's undoubtedly one or another of my Knoxville dentists: Jim Lockett and his successors, Mike Powell and Jim Polles.) When I tell him about my gastrointestinal problems, he suggests that I try eating natural yogurt. He says that my upset has lasted too long for it to be food poisoning from Thursday's dinner. He recommends that I finish taking the antibiotic (two more days); and he writes me a prescription for amoxicillin (alone) to begin three days before our return flight, just in case the tooth decides to act up on the plane. As he has no other patients, we sit and chat for a while. He has practiced dentistry as a member of the armed services throughout Southeast Asia (in fact, he

knows what food poisoning is like after a really bad experience in Hanoi) and he tells us that dentistry is but a sideline for him. One day a week he works at the clinic; the remaining six days he is a sculptor. He shows us pictures of several of his pieces on a computer screen, and tells us his idea of what several of them really mean. Later in the day, when we have access to our own computer, we check out his web site: <http://www.samumaria.com/Home> Indeed, he has some magnificent pieces (sans prices) in bronze and other media, some of them of quite impressive size. We ask where his gallery is located, but are unable to find time to visit it. Too bad. Cost of the office visit: 100 NZD; cost of the new prescription: 15 NZD.

We walk through Cathedral Square and down Colombo Street (surprisingly busy for a Sunday morning), taking pictures of several buildings, of the cathedral, of a modern sculpture that resembles the basket in which my bread arrived last night, and (of course) of such "local" businesses as a Starbucks, a Burger King, and a McDonald's. We continue walking to the Hertz office to pick up our car. 'Tis a Toyota! We have flashbacks to last summer when our Citroën Picasso acted up in Wales and Ireland in precisely the manner as described for some Toyotas: sudden, uncontrolled acceleration caused by a malfunctioning throttle. This Toyota, *Gott sei Dank*, does not misbehave in any such manner. Indeed, the only thing difficult about driving it is that, unlike the Ford that we had on the North Island and unlike our cars in the U.S., this vehicle has the windshield wiper control on the left of the steering column, the directional signal control on the right. For virtually the entirety of our time on the South Island, one or the other of us is flipping on the wipers when we want to make a turn, and signaling for a turn when needing the wipers.

We return to the hotel where we park the car. I'm feeling well, but still we rest some 30-45 minutes before setting out again. We first walk to the nearby Arts Centre which is housed in the beautiful Gothic buildings that had constituted Canterbury College before its relocation to the outskirts of the city in 1974. There are shops and galleries in the buildings as well as a large outdoor performance space where singers and instrumentalists entertain the crowds; there are also booths set up, offering goods designed to separate you from your money; and there is a very adept (and acid-tongued) juggler, much like the one on the boardwalk in Victoria, BC. There is a very effective "living statue" - a young woman, painted head-to-toe in white, standing absolutely still for an extended time (she outlasts us). Also of great amusement to us is a long stretch of grass, attached to the side of a building across the street, with a lawnmower halfway up; something that we read tells us that this is an homage to the typical New Zealand male's attitude to cutting the grass: "Whenever I get around to it, mate." On behalf of all males, I nod in solidarity.

TWO stops at several shops and walks away (after paying, that is) with a scarf (at an outdoors stall) and sweater (indoors). We wander into, but don't buy anything at, a jewelry store and a store that specializes in beads. The name of the latter is Beadz. Now I understand, at least I think I understand, the spelling Tranz for the railroad, but Beadz seems gratuitous; maybe they just misspelled it?

I'm getting along pretty well, still feeling a bit punk and tired, but not at all hungry. (I do not, however, recommend this as a way to lose weight.) Tucked away in a corner of one of the buildings is Rutherford's Den, named after Ernest Rutherford who won the 1908 Nobel Prize in physics. He had been an undergraduate at Canterbury College. While there, he convinced the administration to set aside a small cloakroom in the basement so that he could perform experiments with minimal vibrations because of the concrete floor. This small museum consists of the rooms he used, displays of his accomplishments (including holographic avatars of Rutherford and various colleagues), a model that demonstrates the famous gold foil experiment, and the actual lecture hall (with its creaky stairs and with the signatures of countless numbers of students carved into the wooden desks) where he studied English literature. Alas, no pictures were permitted inside the den, but I do have a nice brochure of the exhibit.

After completing his degree at Canterbury, Rutherford did his Ph.D. work at Cambridge University. He then took a faculty appointment at McGill where he did the work that would earn him the Nobel Prize,

the study of radioactivity, the identification and naming of alpha and beta rays, and the splitting of the atom. Following this, he returned to England, first to Manchester and then to Cambridge. In England, he discovered a third type of radiation, which he called gamma rays. He proved that alpha particles were ionized helium atoms; and when he fired a beam of alpha particles at a gold sheet and found that most went right through but some were deflected over large angles, he concluded that the atom was mostly empty space but that its nucleus, positively charged, was small and at the center. It's difficult to imagine another scientist whose contributions were as far-ranging and influential as his. New Zealand is right to be proud of him.

We return to the hotel, where I rest and nurse my stomach ache, while Lee sets out on an excursion of her own, does some shopping, visits Cathedral Square, tours the cathedral, finds the i-Site, crosses the Bridge of Remembrance (from World War I), visits Victoria Square, sees the lanterns and other displays associated with the Chinese New Year (which occurred four weeks ago!), walks through Hagley Park, encounters the statue of Robert Falcon Scott (who lost his life exploring Antarctica), and sees punters on the River Avon. She also visits several stores and makes three significant purchases, all the while her poor hubby is suffering in his hotel room. One of the purchases, a lambskin reversible coat, is so costly that it's sold without GST but will need to be picked up at the store in the duty free area at Auckland airport next week. It's amazing what the energetic tourist can accomplish without the sickly ball-and-chain spouse to impede her. When I express doubt that she visited all of these places, she says that she can prove it with the pictures that she took and that are now loaded on Picasa. And, of course, she has (in her own words) "the Merino/possum cardigan with nice Maori-ish trim," a more expensive "funky sheep pyramid sweater" and, of course, the really expensive coat for which she has only a receipt.

Food holds no appeal for me, so we find a grocery store where we can purchase some natural yogurt with good bacteria (at the suggestion of Sam Umaria), a box of plain crackers, and the New Zealand version of bouillon cubes. Lee buys an Italian BMT sandwich at a nearby Subway. And we take our goodies back to the room. The soup and crackers taste good, but my stomach doesn't think so and so I throw everything up. Undaunted, I have more soup, crackers, and yogurt - this time it all stays down, but I retire early (about 9:00) in the hope that a good night's sleep will make me well.

Monday, March 8

I'm feeling much better this morning, but, then again, I also felt well yesterday. And, as were the past several days, the day is beautifully sunny with mild temperatures. How long can this last? Lee orders a hot breakfast from the menu, but I stick again to a light continental breakfast with "trim" milk on my cereal. I'm feeling really good right now. Maybe I'm cured? Nah! On the other hand, Lee has a "yummy, yummy breakfast - best omelette ever" Well, I'm glad that *someone* is enjoying the food.

We walk to a nearby pharmacy to have the prescription for amoxicillin filled. And then ... in the hotel parking lot, who should shout out to us from a large chauffeured Chrysler but Vanessa and Kelly, our Tennessee connections from six days, 730 km, and one island ago.

Our destination this morning is Akaroa, about 100 km away, a scenic drive through a long valley and then via a twisting road that cuts through the hills. At one point, we stop to take pictures of nearby mountains and are passed by the big Chrysler, but I doubt that we were spotted. Further on, their car is stopped to let them take pictures and I beep my horn as we go past them. Finally we reach Akaroa which is on the Banks Peninsula to the southeast of ChCh. (I think that I like that abbreviation. It saves having to type out the full name which, under my clumsy fingers, often comes out as Crjrstccjhruch ... or worse.) I try to convince Lee that Akaroa is celebrated in song: "♪ How are things in Akaroa? Is that little brook still leaping there? ♪" but she's not convinced.

It's a lovely town, situated on an inlet off the Pacific Ocean, and shows evidence (through the flags,

street names, and shops) of its having been settled by the French in 1830. It is, in fact, the oldest town in Canterbury. We are enjoying an ice cream when what drives past us but the big Chrysler bearing only the driver but no passengers. Maybe they were murdered or sold to pirates? (Oh, by the way, I think that I'm not cured - I was able to finish only about half of my ice cream.) Returning to our car and walking past the outside eating area of a restaurant, there they are again - Vanessa and Kelly. They weren't murdered after all!

We drive back to ChCh and return to the hotel at about 2:00. I'm definitely having a relapse, so Lee goes to the nearby Canterbury Museum (New Zealand Natural and Human Heritage) with excellent displays devoted to the Mōa (now extinct) and the many varieties of penguin. I stay behind, attend to my email, do some web surfing, and take advantage of the free washers and dryers that are available one floor up to do my laundry. In her journal, Lee writes "Don't know how we missed this on Sunday, but Park Terrace features the Cathedral Grammar School, whose motto is 'growing tall poppies.' This is a signal that they want children to excel." You might recall that Larry Blume at The Masters Lodge had told us (p. 17) that many NZ schools cut down the tall poppies so that nobody stands above anyone else. Maybe there's hope after all. (We take a picture with Lee standing under the tall poppies sign.)

When Lee returns, I'm feeling considerably worse, but (brave soldier that I am) I walk with her to a relatively close restaurant, the Belgian Beer Café. It's a funky building with bare rafters and posters on the wall. Much of the menu has old favorites that we remember from our visits to Brussels, many of them with their Flemish names. Lee has a puff pastry pie with chicken and mushrooms, accompanied by a small salad and fries. Not wanting to risk my well-being, I order a delicious clear chicken broth and a piece of bread. I feel stronger almost immediately. We return to the hotel at about 8:00. The skies are beginning to cloud over ... and so am I. Yep, I throw up everything about an hour later.

Dear Repulsed Reader, you've been very valiant to have stuck with me this long. I promise on all that's sacred to me (the New York Mets, the New York Giants, the New York Knicks, and the memory of the sainted Brooklyn Dodgers) that I will not (repeat NOT) describe any more bouts of diarrhea or nausea for the remainder of this travelog. During the evening, I read some more of the language book by Roy Blount [no comma] Jr. and I begin reading *What is the What* by Dave Eggers. This is a "novel" based on autobiographical material of Valentino Achak Deng, one of the "Lost Boys" made homeless by the civil war in Sudan. His struggles to survive are nearly beyond belief as he and the other boys are attacked by Arabs on horseback, government troops in tanks and helicopters, disgruntled farmers along the way, and lions as they move through the jungles and deserts. As I did last night, I go to sleep early and sleep well.

Tuesday, March 9

Another beautiful, sunny day. This is so unlike any other vacation we've taken - and is surprising in light of the reputation of New Zealand for rain during this time of year. (It's not a violation of my solemn promise, made just two paragraphs ago, to inform you that the loperamide has finally worn off and I actually produce a bit of solid stool. Hooray for me.) In spite of my feeling better, I again have a light breakfast (cereal, toast, fruit, yogurt). We check out of the hotel, but leave our car in the parking lot as we walk to the Christchurch Art Gallery. (As I had written, our hotel is wonderfully situated within easy walking distance of many desirable venues.) It is in a strikingly handsome building with excellent exhibition spaces, well-lit, and housing a wide variety of modern art. Alas, only one Séraphine Pick painting is on display.

We return to get the car and drive to the Urgent Care (recommended by the desk clerk at our hotel) where I hope to see a physician. It's located only about a block from Sam Umari's dental practice, but we know well that the "10-minute walk" will take considerably longer and so we drive. Also, our goal is to get going as soon as possible because we have a three-hour drive ahead of us to Arthur's Pass. We

arrive at 12:05 and I get to give a brief account of my "illness" to a gruff nurse or nurse's aid at 12:15. Then we sit and wait ... and wait ... and wait. Finally, at 1:15, we are ushered into an examining room where we meet Dr. Belinda van Gruting (South African by birth). She discredits any possibility that my problems are the result of tainted food at the Chinese restaurant and points her accusing finger at the antibiotic that I had been taking since last Friday, probably to the clavulanic acid additive. The attentive reader (if he, she, or it exists) will recall (p. 16) that even amoxicillin by itself can have nasty side effects, some of which are very similar to what I have experienced. After examining me, she *gives* me (an early Christmas present she called it) a few E-mycin pills (in case my symptoms return) and four prescriptions: one for something to ease the stomach pain, one for the nausea, one to help restore my electrolyte balance, and one for yet another antibiotic (Cefalcor) that I can begin taking a few days before my return flight. The cost: 160 NZD plus another 110.60 NZD for the four prescriptions.

Although the physical discomfort is not something that I can dismiss, I'm pleased to report that our having purchased trip insurance allowed me to recover, from AccessAmerica, the total cost of the doctor and dentist visits (330 NZD which converts to \$239.08 as charged by MasterCard); in fact, a check in this amount arrived in Gig Harbor on April 20. The total cost of the three pharmacies (140 NZD) cannot be claimed. What I can't yet come to grips with is the strange sequence of events that befell me: a toothache brought me to Dr. Chin in Wellington who concluded that tooth #30 needed treatment and prescribed an antibiotic that made the pain go away but also made me sick; and that led me to Dr. Umaria in Christchurch who decided that the nerve in #30 was not dying; and then to Dr. van Gruting who prescribed medications to relieve the symptoms of my reaction to the antibiotic ... and finally to my own dentist in Gig Harbor who thought that simply grinding down a bit of the gold crown would improve my bite and ease any pain from chewing. But a week later, the pain flared up again and this time it was clear that the culprit was the *back* molar, #31, which (after examination by an endodontist in Tacoma) was deemed to be much in need of root canal treatment. So added to the costs in New Zealand (much of which was recovered by the insurance), we now have \$94 for Michael Flatley and about \$1600 for Ronald Kuratani. Whew!

Oh, yes, one other point of confusion: Sam Umaria referred to these back molars as #46 and #47. Being quite sure that I don't have that many teeth, I asked Michael Flatley for clarification. He replied "The #4 means the lower right quadrant and the 6 and 7 mean 6 or 7 teeth back from the midline. It is the British/Canadian method of counting teeth." Ah, that explains it. A final comment: both Michael Flatley and Joan Blume were a huge source of comfort during those miserable days. I had kept them informed about my progress (or lack thereof) and they were ready with immediate email responses, some of them very long and detailed. Also, Jane Turner of Southern Crossings showed deep concern for my well-being. But I can't help thinking: if only the toothache had waited until I was at home ...

And so we're finally on our way. According to an online site called NZine (well, ya see, the abbreviation for New Zealand is NZ and ... oh, you figured that out), "The journey from Christchurch to Arthur's Pass is only 154 km (95 miles) but to appreciate what lies along this road much more time is needed than that distance would suggest." Unfortunately, the time spent at the doctor's office did not allow us to make a leisurely drive because we needed to get to Wilderness Lodge in time for a sheep-herding and -shearing demonstration. [An aside (which could have been mentioned on several earlier occasions): whereas a weather forecaster in the U.S. would describe good weather as "nice," the New Zealanders say "fine" - it doesn't seem weird when written, but I am taken aback every time I hear an **NZish** announcer say that such and such a city is "fine."] We do stop to take a few pictures of the snow-capped mountains in the Southern Alps, but we basically drive straight to the lodge, where we arrive at 4:30, a mere 30 minutes before the sheep demo. We are shown to our room (hot!) where we dump our bags and then return to the main lodge to meet Neale Wood who is the manager of the sheep farm that occupies a major fraction of the 2400-hectare (about 6000 acres) property. In the various field are some 4,000 sheep.

Neale leads a group of about eight guests down to the sheep station and introduces us to the two dogs who will be working today: Ty, a border collie, and Scamp, a New Zealand breed called a "hunt-away"

whose purpose is to find isolated sheep who are hiding out in the hills. Both dogs perform on demand (Neale issues his orders with a whistle) and a small herd of sheep are brought toward us. Neale grabs one with his crook and sits the ewe down on her rump, holding her up by her front legs - he insists that all animals love this position and, I have to admit, that the ewe seems none too bothered by it. We are invited to take pictures, pet the animals, and even kiss them (please, it's a first date!). In this pasture, the sheep are either ewes or neutered males (ouch!); the rams are kept at a distance until it becomes their time to shine. We walk past another field of sheep where we are invited to toss pellets of food from a bucket, guaranteed to bring the animals to our side; in fact, it works. Then it's on to the shearing room where we are educated in the virtues of Merino wool and why is it so highly valued by clothing manufacturers like *Icebreaker* (see p. 17). Through successive breeding cycles, the ranch is trying to get as fine a fleece as possible; the finer the fiber, the higher a price it commands. There is no shearing going on, but we see both the manual and the powered shears.

In our room, I begin taking the medications prescribed by Dr. van Gruting, including Enerlyte, an orange-flavored powder that dissolves in water and is surprisingly pleasant to consume. The instructions are to make up 200-mL batches and to drink 1500 mL each day. This requires filling small plastic bottles with the electrolyte solution whenever we are walking or driving any distance.

I have a single malt Scotch in the lounge before dinner and Lee has a glass of wine. It is quite crowded because there are about 20 people on a National Geographic tour. (The capacity of the lodge is only about 28.) I chat with some of the tour group and with unaffiliated guests who were at the sheep demonstration with us. The managers of the lodge are a married couple, Anne Saunders and Dr Gerry McSweeney. They also manage the other Wilderness Lodge at Lake Moeraki. The latter was built first (1989) followed by the one we're staying at (1996), which Gerry describes as a nature reserve and high-country sheep station specializing in Merino wool. Both locations are family businesses, but the way things are set up the Arthur's Pass location is owned by younger members of the family who have "hired" Anne and Gerry to run it. Their son, Michael, is also involved and will lead a nature tour for us tomorrow.

I'm not sure that it was necessary, but Gerry performs a shtick that seems to be a tradition before dinner: while we are all enjoying our drinks in the lounge, he introduces the new arrivals, tells where they're from, describes some of the tours, treks, and activities that guests had done that day, tells us who's on honeymoon and who is celebrating an anniversary, and finally releases us to the dining room.

Because I couldn't be sure that my distress was over, I asked for Lee and me to be seated alone; tomorrow we will join others for dinner. I actually enjoy the dinner, even though it's not very elegant: Gravlax as an appetizer and roast lamb slices (too well-done) for the main. After dinner, I rest a bit in our room, then return with Lee to the lodge for a 9:45 guided tour of the Southern Sky. We drive in two vans to an open area (a paddock mercifully free of animal deposits) and when the headlights are turned off we are plunged into complete darkness. But the skies are spectacular! We see the Southern Cross, the Milky Way, Andromeda, Betelgeuse, Alpha and Beta Centauri, Sirius, the small and large Magellanic Clouds, and even the space station which streaks across the sky. Gerry is a university-trained botanist but also an excellent amateur astronomer - and with the aid of a laser pointer he directs our attention to various features. One reason for the spectacular light show is that there is no light pollution from nearby cities; a second reason is that the Southern Sky has about three times more stars visible than in the north. It's a 100% wonderful success ... *except* that when we get back into the vans in the pitch dark, a woman manages to slam a door onto two of Lee's fingers. There is a great deal of pain and some bleeding, but probably no broken bones. (If I didn't see how black and blue her fingers were, I might have suspected that Lee did this deliberately because she was tired - as I'm sure most of you are - of hearing about my own medical problems.) During the evening, our room has cooled a bit, but not enough for my own tastes. Of course, there's no air conditioning here.

Wednesday, March 10

Now I'm sure of it. I'm cured, I'm cured, I'm cured. Say, Hallelujah, Brother.

Another beautiful sunny day, but the Wilderness Lodge staff are getting a bit antsy because there has been no rain for several days - not good for the local flora. Breakfast is entirely buffet style: cold cereals, rolls, fruit; juice, then hot offerings of eggs (scrambled or fried), mushrooms, bacon (two kinds), coffee, tea. I am actually hungry, for the first time in days. One of the servers, who dutifully refills the coffee cups, is a young man from Berlin, 31 years old. After he finished his education (M.S. in sociology and statistics), he decided that he didn't want to enter the work force so he's been tramping around in India, Myanmar, Vietnam, Australia, the U.S., and now New Zealand. He came first to Auckland and worked in a restaurant to earn some money, then left for the South Island and worked in an office in ChCh; he saw an ad for this job at Wilderness Lodge and applied because he likes to hike and back-pack. After this, who knows? Last night, Gerry told us about another employee, now gone, who also worked in the kitchen and dining room. He was a business major at The University of Tennessee (we just can't get away from these people!) and was not only the most gregarious and outgoing person he'd ever met but also the laziest. Sounds about right for a typical "good ol' boy."

At about 10:30, Lee and I set out on the 3-km Rainbow Valley nature trail because it is described in the lodge's information as "a wonderfully easy walk - and it is really flat." Ha! I say, Ha! Granted, it's not mountainous, but it is certainly not "really flat." At about 11:45, we're near enough to the lodge for me to take a short detour to return (I've tripped over enough tree roots and fallen branches for me to realize that I've tested my luck to the limit), but the intrepid explorer TWOU goes on for another 45 minutes.

PUN ALERT: With regard to the section that Lee walked alone, she tells "I passed by the lambing fields, but they were all empty." "Of course they were. All of the sheep were on the lam." (I'm embarrassed that my puns on this trip are so very weak, especially when compared with those posted in my other travelogs. Maybe I'm getting too old? Maybe my standards are too high? Or too low?)

The early afternoon sky is still a brilliant blue with no evidence of the storm that is supposed to blow in from the Tasman Sea. As a result, our room is really heating up, dammit. I guess that I'm just not "built" for this sort of environment. After consuming two more glasses of the Enerlyte mixture (yum!), we escape the warm room for the lodge's lounge which, surprisingly, is considerably cooler. I take the opportunity to read while Lee uses the free WiFi to do web work, some of it in preparation for our Baltic cruise this summer.

PUN ALERT: TWOU says, "This pamphlet describes the ferns and lichens that we saw this morning. Did you enjoy seeing them?" to which TMOU replies, "Yes, I lichen them very much." (Damn! I told you that I'm losing the ability to make puns. If it gets any worse, it will be the Happy Trails Nursing Home for me in a year or two. Groan.)

We've signed up for a nature walk in the late afternoon with Michael, a son of Anne and Gerry. It is advertised as a bird expedition, but we see precious few birds except for the occasional bellbird (a native of Australia and New Zealand) whose warning call is clear as ... well, as a bell. We also see a few tomtits, described by Lee as a junco head on a chickadee body. Much of the trail takes us past patches of red or white mistletoe whose seed is spread from tree to tree by the birds; it is a parasite that will eventually kill the mountain beeches on which it is growing. On the trail with us is an American couple, Jessica and Bill Bavinger, who were also on the sheep tour yesterday. They are from Bethesda, MD. He describes himself as a "recovering" attorney (Jessica says that that means that he's semi-retired). I discover that he is a Yale grad, class of 1965. My own undergraduate Yale degree was in 1959, but I did overlap with him in New Haven during my days in grad school (1959-63). (After first meeting him during the sheep tour, I had pegged him as a Princeton man ... but I don't dare tell him this so as not to insult him.) Also on the tour is Francis, a very voluble man from Toronto, who is a serious photographer and nature enthusiast. His wife, whom we meet in the lounge and at dinner, isn't as

energetic as he and is pleased that he goes off on nature walks, glacier hikes, mountain treks, etc. by himself. (She is also very difficult to engage in conversation. It's not clear why. She will finally "open up" a bit when we encounter the two of them in another city, tomorrow.)

In the lounge, we have a single malt (mine) and a glass of wine (Lee's) and are then ushered into the dining room. We are seated with Jessica and Bill; Francis and his wife (Caroline? but I'm not sure); a Dutch couple from Gouda; and Sue, a woman from Melbourne who is a Ph.D. candidate in public health but is taking forever to complete her degree, perhaps because she travels a lot; she is older than the typical grad student and has a grown daughter. For some reason, I find it difficult to engage her in conversation (she is seated next to me, so I have little choice) but she does seem willing to talk about herself without showing any interest in anyone else (i.e., ME). Part of my difficulty in connecting with her is that she has an intense, unblinking stare that could signify boredom or hatred. My dinner is a hunk of beef, not very well-prepared. After dinner, I tell Bill about the film "Harvard Beats Yale 29-29" and urge him to see it. We have coffee in the lounge with the Dutch couple before it's time to head off to bed.

I don't want to be too hard on the food (after all, these are my first meals in days and I'm most appreciative that I can keep them down) but here is how TWOU described tonight's dinner in her journal: "Dinner is again Americanized - a pumpkin/kumara soup very like last night's or salad to start; a chicken choice or beef (sort of prime rib, unfortunately well done), with a plain white potato and ratatouille. The hokey-pokey ice cream in lace basket for dessert is not as good (not enough caramel bits) as what you get at a cafe/tea room scoop counter!" Methinks the lady was unimpressed.

Thursday, March 11

Some clouds have rolled in, but the threatened rains have not yet arrived. Instead, we have yet another beautiful, cool, sunny day with only a few wispy clouds. Breakfast is the same as yesterday's, but there is one added "treat" - a three-generation family from the U.S. actually sing a blessing before eating. Even in the Bible Belt (i.e. Knoxville), we never heard anything like this. Anne asks Lee if she'd like to have a nurse in Hokitika (the only relatively large town that we'll be passing through) look at her bruised fingers; Lee is not enthusiastic and, as it turns out, the clinic that Anne calls does not have a nurse on duty today. Upon check-out, we are a bit surprised to be charged for the single malts and glasses of wine that we had before the two dinners. That first night, Gerry just handed me the bottle and invited me to pour as large a drink as I wanted; the second night, one of the staff carefully measured exactly 1.0000 jigger of whisky into my glass. Well, maybe I shouldn't have been surprised. After all, Masters Lodge charged for what I thought were complimentary drinks; and only the ultra-expensive Solitaire Lodge provided the whisky without charge, although they were not so magnanimous with the wine consumed with dinner.

Driving down the hillside on which the lodge is perched, we pass one of the sheep paddocks through which Neale is driving some animals who have just been shorn. We have a nice short chat with him and learn that an **NZish** alternative to "good-bye" is "Good as gold"! Really. He said it twice. Somehow this is more pleasing than the "No worries" that we heard from several clerks.

As we drive west through the mountains and toward the shore, we run successively into clouds, drizzle, mist, fog, and heavy rain; this persists until we reach the coast. Because of the bad weather, we skip our intended stop at the Otira Gorge viaduct where guests at Wilderness Lodge had seen keas attacking the rubber around their van's windows. (A kea is a large parrot found in the South Island but it is not known to make a diet of polymerized organic molecules.) Along the way, we see two *spectacular* rainbows, very low in the sky; they seem almost touchable. Lee manages to get a couple of nice pictures through the car window (see Picasa). The rains soon cease and we are bathed in sunlight. We turn south and drive to Hokitika (about 100 km away) and stop there even if they don't have a nurse for Lee. It's an attractive small city (population 3,000) with a compact downtown (suitable

for strolling) and a plethora (maybe plethora-squared) of stores selling jade jewelry. Some of the stores carry high quality pieces carved by Maori artisans, whereas others have lower quality offerings (a.k.a. dreck in NYC). TWOU, of course, buys a pendant at one of the better stores. TMOU, having lapsed into a state of senescence, discovers that he has pocketed the key to our room at Wilderness Lodge; we call them, confess our (i.e., my) sin, and mail the key back to them.

PUN ALERT: On our way out of town, we need to buy petrol. Lee says, "Go through the roundabout and see if you can get into CalTex." I reply, "No way - I don't have high enough grades." Still weak, eh? Well, I won't disagree.

About 20 km south of Hokitika, we see a temporary road sign "Stock Crossing Ahead." And then we see the reason. "OMFG!!" shouts TMOU, followed by "WTF???" There is a herd of cattle, thousands (maybe millions) of them, being driven across the road from one pasture to another. We take pictures, of course. The attendants take pity on the line of cars that is forming and halt the "stampede" partway through so as to allow traffic to proceed. Energized by this scene, we stop in Whataroa to visit a small art gallery (the "official" excuse for stopping) but really to have an ice cream.

More NZish: On the radio, we hear "People are piling up *deet* because of their excessive *spending*." (Of course, you recognize that the words are debt and spending.)

We continue driving in a southwesterly direction along the Tasman Sea, but eventually need to turn inland, still heading southwest, to the small town (population 300) of Franz Josef (135 km away). The town derives its name from Franz Josef Glacier which was "discovered" and mapped (and named) by Sir Johann Franz "Julius" von Haast, a Prussian geologist who explored the region in the mid 1800s. He remained in New Zealand and taught geology at Canterbury College. He was elected to The Royal Society then knighted.

Westwood Lodge gives the appearance of an old-timey motel, but our room and bathroom are large (although much too warm because of little cross-ventilation); the common areas (fireplace, library, and snooker table) are very nice. Along the road leading into the hotel grounds, the rocks are covered in a deep red, probably iron oxide from deposits of iron sulfide found in ground water. (Another theory is that it's a lichen. I am agnostic on this subject.) After check-in, we drive a short distance through and out of town to see the glacier. The signs direct us off the main road and over a series of nine (count 'em, nine) *double* speed bumps, each made up of compressed large rocks, whose purpose is to slow us down to 10 km/h. I would have thought that two or three single speed bumps would have sufficed, but what do I know? We cross a very narrow bridge; our direction has priority going toward the glacier, a good thing because we are part of a long line of vehicles. Finally we reach the parking lot. From there, it's about a 10-minute hike up a dirt/gravel road with an incline of at least 75°, probably more. And it has started to rain. Hard. Finally we reach the observation platform for viewing the geyser. Had we been adventurous (e.g., like the Dutch couple at Masters Lodge), we would have taken one of the tours in which a helicopter or small plane deposits hikers on the glacier for a half-day or full day of exploring. We are not so adventurous. And so, after viewing the glacier from a safe distance, we proceed downhill, still in the rain, and return to the hotel.

I rest at the hotel while Lee returns to town and visits the i-Site where she watches a film about glaciers. At the recommendation of the manager of Westwood Lodge, we have dinner in town at Blue Ice Café, an unassuming-looking place, which is fairly pricey but has very good food (Lee has rack of lamb and I have lamb shanks). This is no aberration; most of the reviews on TripAdvisor are similarly glowing, if also sometimes bordering on the illiterate. While we're eating, who should enter the restaurant but the Toronto couple, Francis and Caroline(?), whom we had met at Wilderness Lodge. They're staying at Westwood, but we are not likely to run into them again as they are heading in the opposite direction from us. But who knows? Maybe we'll run into Vanessa and Kelly again? (Doesn't happen - but coulda.)

This is all reminiscent of the German tourist whom we met in Glencolmcille (Ireland), last summer, and whom we encountered again in a CD store in Donegal a day later. Were I the sort who worries that the government (ours or, perhaps, another) is tailing me, I would have good reason to be more careful about covering my tracks. But I am not the worrying sort, no sirree, and so I consider the incidents with Vanessa and Kelly, with Francis and Caroline(?), and with the German tourist to be nothing more than amusing coincidences. I hope.

Westwood Lodge charges for internet connectivity (as did The George) but it's on an hourly basis, so we are very frugal on how we invest our 120 minutes for 10 NZD. I send an email to Michael Flatley to ask his advice on which of the two antibiotics, amoxicillin or cefalcor, to take before flying home. I also use Lee's cell phone (mine doesn't work overseas), even with its excessive roaming charges, to call our home phone number to see if there are messages. There are six: one is from Chico's to tell Lee about a sale, one is blank, and four are from Judy who wants to talk to Norris and leaves a 360 area code phone number. You'd think after hearing my voice mail message once or twice that she'd realize that Norris cannot be reached at that phone number. Despite the lack of a cool breeze or a decent amount of indoor light, we spend much of the evening reading.

Friday, March 12

In the morning, we use our remaining minutes of internet connectivity access. But then, when we are unable to get an outside line for Lee to make a phone call, she calls the front desk and discovers that she has awakened (at 7:15!!) a very angry hotel manager. Tough!

Westwood offers a nice breakfast: cold cereal, bread, cheeses and ham (the first time we've seen these typical European and United Kingdom treats at a New Zealand breakfast buffet) followed by hot choices of eggs, mushrooms, and bacon. There is even a nice drip coffee like the kind we drink at home. (Most of the time - nearly all of the time. in fact - coffee at breakfast, lunch, or dinner is some form of espresso. Even when diluted to make an "Americano" it's still too strong for my taste.) We are joined by Francis and Caroline(?). We say our good-byes and get an early start on a long day's drive, about 350 km to Queenstown.

The weather cooperates and we are driving in bright sunlight. The first 30 km, or so, we are on a winding mountain road. After that, our drive takes us through a lovely valley, marred only by entirely too many one-lane bridges, too many road-repair crews, and too many carcasses (all playing possum?) on the road surface. The highway takes us to the shore of Tasman Sea and a beautiful view of Bruce Bay. We stop to take pictures (Picasa) of the blue-green water, the jagged rock formations, and many man-made stone piles that resemble the inukshuks built by the Inuit of Northern Canada. The road moves away from the coast and, after a few km, we come to Lake Moeraki, the site of the other Wilderness Lodge. Back to the coast, we stop to take pictures of the wild sea and coastline at Knight's Point, a historic site where the crew building a westward road through Haast Pass met up with the team building a southward road from Ross in the 1950s. We cross what is claimed to be the *longest* one-lane bridge (700 m) in New Zealand and take a picture of the sign that informs drivers that there are *two* passing bays available on the bridge. We arrive at the small town of Haast where we find the Visitor Centre. A film about the special features of this remote area is not available today, but still there are very interesting displays about how the roads and towns were built in what is called the South Westland area. (This reminds one, but only a little, of a traffic accident in Seattle that, according to the radio, occurred in the northbound lane of East Marginal Way South. Noted.)

We've already heard (p. 32) about Sir Johann Franz "Julius" von Haast (1824-1887), the geologist who explored and mapped this entire region. Part (maybe most) of the impetus for road construction was the discovery of gold. According to Wikipedia, "The West Coast was only occasionally visited by early Europeans until the discovery of gold near the Taramakau River in 1864 by two Maori, Ihaia Tainui and Haimona Taukau. By the end of the year there were an estimated 1800 prospectors on the West

Coast, many of them around the Hokitika area, which, in 1866, became briefly the most populous settlement in New Zealand."

From Haast, we turn in an easterly direction, inland, through the mountains. We stop and take pictures at the spectacular Thunder Creek Falls, then cross Haast Pass, and then turn sharply south. For a while, with snow-capped mountains in the distance, we are driving along the eastern shore of Lake Wanaka (a good 30 km long) and then along the western shore of Lake Hawea (20 km long), both very beautiful, until we reach Wanaka, a busy resort town. Our greatest disappointment? The *Rough Guide* had informed us that in the town of Cardrona there is a "bra fence, where four women celebrating the millennium ... decided a new era of women's liberation was upon them, and hung their supportive garments on an otherwise ordinary fence. The act has given rise to a surreally massive collection of bras." Well we looked and looked, but came up (you might say) empty. Perhaps the lingerie has been returned to its owners? Or perhaps the keas, having tired of eating rubber gaskets, decided to feast on brassieres? So we drive on.

More NZish: words heard on the radio are pronounced *eesence*, *anceestor*, *forebeer*, and *respect*.

It is another 120 km to Queenstown. South from Wanaka, we are climbing through the mountains again. Some 30 km south of Wanaka we are on the highest main road in New Zealand at 1121 m. The car's thermometer shows a drop from 13° to 6° at the summit. As we come down from the mountain, there is the most spectacular and sometimes frightening series of 180° switch-backs, nine of them in succession, alternately left-right-left-right ... Finally we are at Queenstown (population about 10,000), located on the shore of Lake Wakatipu. Our destination is a hotel called The Spire.

It's fortunate that we have detailed information from Southern Crossings because it turns out that the hotel is on Church Lane, a pedestrian-only street, connecting Earl and Church Streets. We are instructed to park anywhere along Earl Street, walk to the hotel, and give the car keys to the staff. They will, we are told, show us to our room, retrieve our luggage, and park the car. Can this be true?

It is true!! Because we are park in a no-parking zone on Earl Street, Lee stays with the car while I find the hotel. Two people are in the lobby: Daphne is sitting at the desk and Jan is standing next to it. He and I walk to the car to retrieve Lee. While Daphne shows us around the hotel and then to our room, Jan retrieves our luggage and carries it to the room; he then parks the car I know not where. Daphne says that she'll return with our welcome champagne and chocolates - and a few minutes later, there she is. When TMOU, notably inept, cannot uncork the champagne bottle, Jan does it for me. I ask him if he's the owner of the hotel, but he laughs and says, "No, I'm just a dogsbody*." That's an

*This is not to be confused with Dogberry, a delightful character in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Richard Sheridan may have given us Mrs. Malaprop, but Shakespeare, almost 200 years earlier, wrote several malapropisms for Dogberry to proclaim, such as "Comparisons are odorous" and "Our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two aspicious persons."

expression I've not heard recently - and although it's British slang, his accent betrays him; he is, in fact, from Denmark and is married to Mel Bohse, who is the General Manager of the hotel. (There'll be more about her later.) Daphne, it turns out, is German. She is the third young German whom we've encountered on the South Island. The others were the young man in the dining room at Wilderness Lodge (as I've already written), and a waitress-trainee at Blue Ice Café.

What can I tell you about the Spire? Just this: TWOU and I agree that it is the finest hotel we've ever stayed in. There is nothing to criticize about it. Nothing. The room is gorgeously furnished with high-end furniture and in an ultra-modern style. The staff are amiable and eager to serve. It is conveniently situated for walking to restaurants, shopping, and various Queenstown attractions. The minibar is well-stocked and although most of the items carry a charge, all soft drinks are free. When we will check out on Monday, the only complaint that I can think to tell Mel is that the bathroom could have benefitted

from a wall-mounted magnifying mirror. I've posted several pictures of our room at Picasa; others can be seen at the hotel's web site. <http://www.thespirehotels.com/content.cfm> All 10 guest rooms are the same. One view of a room is shown on the main page of the web site, but I suggest clicking the GALLERY tab followed by THE HOTEL - the first image shows the bed; the Eames recliner chair and ottoman; the sofa; the ultra-modern telephone, which could have been mistaken for a large vibrator (is it a coincidence that it was made by BANG and Olufsen?); and the floor lamp and table lamp (designed by Phillippe Starck - is this supposed to impress?) that is turned on/off merely by tilting the bulb housing. Other views, in the thumbnails, show the TV and fireplace that are built into the stone wall; iPod, CD and DVD players; the bathroom; and the terrace which looks out on a church garden. Not shown is the small hand-held touch-screen device that controls the TV, CD/DVD player, and the MP3 music selections that the hotel staff has made. (Maybe I *do* want an iPhone after all? Nah.) Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. Hell, they even offer a choice of five different pillows: "Well-being pillow, Lavender lambs' wool pillow, Sonar pillow, Tri pillow, Complete sleeprrrr, and the Pregnancy pillow." Sonar? Tri?? Pregnancy???

The Spire's web site further informs us:

When Stewart Harris of Martin Hughes Architecture Interiors was brought in on the project, he knew instantly the look he would steer clear of. "I didn't want the spaces to be over-designed," he says. "This is a downtown hotel, not a lodge." As a nod to the ubiquitous local palette, architects Archimedia have used schist in the building yet it is tastefully restrained and teamed with plenty of glass and opalite balustrades. Stewart describes the two-storeyed building as "handsome and modern" but it is beyond the entrance and the contemporary comfort of the reception area that the pleasant surprise awaits. "I wanted to team classic, collectible pieces, with quality New Zealand art and accessories," he explains. And when this designer spouts such oft-abused adjectives, it's not just lip service to impress and inspire. He really means it. As it turns out, the mirror-image rooms at the heart of the hotel should prove quite enough to lure you indoors for extended periods of time in this adventure capital renowned for snow sports and socialising. Instantly recognisable and immediately covetable, each room is furnished with its very own genuine Eames lounge – soft, supple black leather wrapped in cherrywood and just ripe for resting in. Very soon, the trained eye spies further objects of desire – a Philippe Starck Ara table lamp, a shiny Kelvin T Flos bedside light, and a Bang & Olufsen telephone that speaks volumes about the choices made here. Rich red on the walls and accent accessories infuse the rooms with the cosy factor and the artwork by some of New Zealand's leading names including John Pule and Robyn Gibson, allow visitors, both locals and international, to feel instantly at home. Originally conceptualised as a multi-media mecca, an idea that was softened by Stewart's accent on colour and texture, guests nevertheless receive an insight into the sound and vision system as part of their room orientation. Set into a wall of hand-chiselled Timaru basalt, the plasma screen TV may at first seem daunting to master, but in reality, it's simplicity in the palm of your hand. Cleverly, shutters from the en suite bathroom open up so it is possible to simultaneously bathe in bubbles or bubbly (as the whim takes) while soaking up the sound and vision from the latest DVDs.

Well! If I had only known that this much detail could have been found on the web, I could have saved a lot of time by not describing the same things (in much less flowery language, it is true, but with U.S. spellings) myself.

Perhaps they were being prudent, but one feature not shown in any of the photos at this web site is a poem or essay (or, maybe, just a statement of licentiousness) that hangs on the wall; it is adorned with whimsical drawings and its message is beyond mysterious. Hell, it doesn't even rhyme. Lee and I burst out laughing when we read it, especially the third stanza, but I can imagine the horrified reaction of other guests who might not be as fond of ribaldry as we are. Do seek it out among the Picasa photos - you won't regret it. Note that the wall hanging is unsigned, but a Google search after returning to the U.S. reveals that the author is a New Zealand poet and artist named John Puihiatau Pule and that it comes from *100 Love Poems*. So it is a poem, after all. If interested, check out these URLs on

the author: <http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/authors/pule/index.asp> and <http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/writers/pulejohn.html> And now that I know that it's a serious(?) poem, I apologize to Mr. Pule for confessing that the Magids burst out laughing. (The adventurous reader might try highlighting some of the titles listed in *100 Love Poems* at the first web site. Tender and romantic, he ain't. Tsk, tsk - such a potty mouth!)

OK, OK, I do have something to complain about. Whoever constructed the playlist for the MP3 classical selections in the room was a Philistine! There! I've said it and I'm glad. As with so many radio stations in the U.S. that claim to play fine music, we get one movement from Vivaldi's *The Seasons*, followed by an aria from Verdi, followed by one movement from a Bach *Suite for Orchestra*, followed by a snippet from *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, followed by Leoncavallo's *Vesti la giubba*, followed by another movement from *The Seasons*, ... etc. and usw. and *ad infinitum*. Even worse than this chopped-up and random music is the fact that each piece follows immediately upon the preceding one with not a heartbeat of a pause between. And, of course, there's no printed playlist. When I first turn on the MP3, I am surprised at the absence of any Beethoven, but this is "remedied" the next day with about the first five minutes of his 5th symphony. One saving grace - no Rodrigo* (so far). Lee observes

*In my Wales-Ireland travelog, I wrote the following about a radio concert that we heard in our car: "Worst of all, we are treated to the Rodrigo guitar concerto *Concierto de Aranjuez*, a melodic work whose very traditional style belies its having been written in 1939. Why do I write 'worst of all'? It's because KING-FM in Seattle seems to know the moment that I get into my car because that damned piece is on the air much too frequently than to be just a bad coincidence."

that none of the classical pieces for which I (and my classmates in elementary school) were "forced" to learn words so as to "enhance our appreciation of good music" were included. For those who were not blessed with this bizarre form of music appreciation, I am referring to such gems as "Over the water the snow-white swan, glides to the music written by Saint-Saens" and "Go to sleep my dusky baby, sleep and dream of angels maybe, while Dvorak writes his Humoresque" and "Here's to the dawning of Grieg's glorious morning which comes from the Peer Gynt Suite" and on and on and on. (If you know the melodies for which these words were written, it is quite likely that from this moment on, the words are so imprinted on your brain that you cannot hear the music without also hearing them.)

It's a shame to have to leave our room, but dinner beckons and so we walk a short distance to Wai Waterfront Restaurant. ("Wai" is Maori for water.) The food is excellent. I start with seared North Atlantic scallops and follow with "Oven roasted Fiordland grouper on top of a creamy pearl barley risotto. Served with Marsala braised chicken wings and roasted root vegetables." Yep, there were indeed chicken wings. Why do I quote the full menu description? You'll see. Lee has the tempura soft shell crab with coconut foam (there's that damned colloid science again) and then "Oven roasted fillet of monkfish, wrapped with Parma ham, served with crumbed confit pork belly, seared scallops, a crispy fennel and orange salad and salsa verde." Every item on the plate is minutely described on the printed menu; nevertheless either our server or the manager comes over to point to and name every damned thing again. One other curiosity, something that's never happened to us in a restaurant. When we arrived, we had hung our jackets on hooks near the front door, but when we were ready to leave we noticed that they were not there. "Oh, no, someone has taken them by mistake," we thought. When I informed the manager, he said that we had hung our coats on the wrong hooks and that they were safely over "here" on the hooks assigned for our table. Assigned hooks? And how were we to know our assigned table before we were even led to it? Weird, I tell you. Weird.

The boardwalk area is really jumping. There is an outdoor fair with a very loud band and even louder revelers. It's not clear whether the people outnumber the shorebirds or vice versa. When we return to the hotel, we arrange to have a light breakfast delivered to our room, tomorrow, as we need to leave for our Milford Sound adventure before the Spire's dining room opens. And because it is likely to be cool (or even cold) on the boat that takes us down the fjord (or fiord as it's spelled here), I set out a long-sleeve shirt and stick gloves in the pockets of my jacket.

Saturday, March 13

We set the alarm clock for 5:45. Following our showers, we apply scopolamine patches, supposed to ward off motion sickness from the rocking of the boat and the buffeting of the small airplane in which we'll be traveling. This morning, I take the last of the pills for nausea and stomach ache, although a great many remain; and I consume my final "cocktail" of Enerlyte. Breakfast, ordered last night, is delivered to the room at 6:30. It consists of "Honey Puffs with vanilla roasted apricot and passion fruit mascarpone" (yecch!), Americano coffee (ditto), flavored breads ("), and pear juice ("). I eat only a little of it. I'm reminded of the A. A. Milne poem, "Nobody, could call me a fussy man; I only want a little bit of butter for my bread!"

The taxi to drive us to the Real Journeys office arrives right on time (7:20), although it's barely a 10-minute walk that we could easily have managed on our own. The day is cloudy, dark, windy, and cold, but we are hoping for improvement. We board the bus that will take us to the boat at Milford Sound; a few people are already seated, and the bus will make stops at three more hotels/motels before we are all accounted for. The driver, equipped with microphone, serves as tour guide during the trip. And we are finally on our way at 7:55.

More NZish, learned from the driver: "yeesterday"; "heed" (for head); "lie" of the land; "layft" turn; "pleenty"; "veesel"; "scheest" (for schist); "feestooned" with flowers; "heevy" rains. (My poor Spell Check - it's going nuts with these variants.)

A digital display, above the driver's head, gives the time of day and also shows 13 03 (which never changes). I'm too boneheaded ("boneheaded"?) to realize that this means the "13th day of the 3rd month" but I do notice that when reflected into a window it seems to read EO EI, which could be a refrain from *Old MacDonald Has A Farm*.

We proceed south through attractive countryside, over a one-way bridge that has a traffic light, and past a deer farm. At the start we are along the eastern shore of Lake Wakatipu. We see stark mountains that have been thrust up and pushed together over time - as for the next big earthquake, it's not a question of IF but WHEN. We drive past "STU'S ORGASMIC FLY FISHING SHOP." Our driver tells us that this is excellent trout fishing territory, but that trout is a game fish and cannot be caught commercially; thus it is not seen on restaurant menus. I confess that I missed the following completely, but in her journal Lee writes "Deer velvet, from the antlers, is sold as a remedy for arthritis and menopause, notably in Korea and Taiwan. This explains the bottles we saw in a ChCh Korean health store." She also writes, "Stoats are prodigious reproductive machines: the fathers impregnate their female kittens before they leave the nest." Perverts!

At 9:00, we turn to the west, drive past "deery" (dairy) farms and toward the town of Te Anau. Although "deery" does not mean "deer-laden" we do pass woods that have hybrids of the original Scottish deer and American elk sent by Teddy Roosevelt. With no natural predators (e.g., large cats), the population of these animals has grown. Fortunately, New Zealanders have a large appetite for venison, so the herd does not grow alarmingly. On the nearby mountains (called The Southern Alps), there is snow cover. At about 9:50, we reach the town of Te Anau where we stop for 30 minutes and pick up 27 additional passengers. (You can experience the drive in the opposite direction, Te Anau to Queenstown, in a much shorter time: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrBbEdhdLq8>) It's "only" another 119 km to Milford Sound. Fun fact: Milford sound has an annual rainfall of 6,813 mm on 182 days. Glug.

We drive along the eastern shore of Lake Te Anau, the second largest in New Zealand, and we are in Fiordland National Park. The bus stops at Mirror Lake where everyone gets out to take pictures. It's nice, but really no different from any other relatively still lake. And we hear from the driver the same information about mammals that we've been accumulating since talking with Graeme at Solitaire

Lodge. The only native reptiles are lizards and tuatara (more about this at the Kiwi Birdlife Park tomorrow). There are also frogs, but no snakes. Because there were no predators, various bird species came down to the forest floor, grew large (the moa), and lost the ability to fly (kiwi). (The moa, now extinct, represent one adaptation to evolution: gigantism. This also applies to huge grasshoppers and giant mollusks that still exist.) The first humans on the islands, the Maoris, brought rats. Europeans, some 600 years later, brought rabbits as a source of food, but when they became too plentiful, ferrets and stoats (vicious animals who resisted being trapped) were brought in to control the bunny population. Alas, they soon multiplied to astounding numbers. And they began to decimate the kiwi population. We've already seen how Kiwi Encounter in Rotorua works to preserve the kiwi population; on the South Island, there exists no comparable facility, but there are several islands off the coast where kiwis are brought because the lands have been cleared of predators. And then there are the possums, brought from Tasmania for the fur trade, who now number 70 million. (Correction: the number is only 69,999,985 based on the dead animals that we've seen on the highways.) Possum are not strict herbivores, as is often alleged; they also eat small birds. Our driver urges us, as we've heard numerous times, to run over any possum that dares to dart in front of the car, along with any rats, rabbits, and hedgehogs that may accompany them.

Our guide tells us that the red stain on the rocks is lichen (see earlier, p. 32, for an alternative - and wrong? - idea). We stop, again, to view a pair of impressive glaciers, one on the right and one on the left. Claim to fame: Edmund Hillary spent time climbing these mountains, which are subject to heavy avalanches and rock slides. We reach the Homer Tunnel: construction was begun in 1935 but not completed until 1954 because of intervening "natural" events like avalanches and World War II. The tunnel is 1270 m long and descends (in the direction we're traveling) at a 10% grade. There are traffic lights at each terminus to control the direction of cars and buses in what is, effectively, a one-lane passage. (Apparently, the tunnel is barely wide enough to allow a car and bus to pass ... but only if driven very very slowly ... and very very carefully. So it is treated as a single-lane passage.) We see more evidence of avalanches, one of which was so extensive that it took three days to clear the road. Finally we reach Milford Sound, about four hours after our departure from Queenstown.

This, and the nearby Doubtful Sound, are really fiords. According to the *DK Guide*, "sounds are flooded river valleys whereas fiords are valleys carved by the tremendous pressure and power of glaciers during successive Ice Ages, then later flooded by the sea as the ice melts and sea level rises." We board the Milford Wanderer for our trip up the fiord. A decent picnic lunch, ordered in advance, is consumed on board. We pass rugged cliffs, waterfalls, and a rock populated by fur seals. It is cold and windy and wet! We are warned (more **NZish**) to take "eextra" care if we walk outside on the "deek." Because the seas are too rough, we turn back instead of going into the Tasman Sea. On the return, we come very close to a 164 m waterfall (cf., Niagara Falls is "only" 47 m). We return to shore at 3:55.

Our original plan was to return to Queenstown in a small sight-seeing plane. In fact, the driver had urged everyone to choose either the airplane or helicopter flight so as to avoid the long drive back. She says that it would be worth "eevery ceent." 'Twas not to be. Because of clouds and wind, the planes were grounded. Soooo ... another four-hour bus ride, this time without cheerful patter and scenic stops, gets up back to the city at about 8:00. If I feel exhausted, how about the poor driver! (An aside: we get a refund from Southern Crossings for the canceled flight.) At the hotel, we ask for a suggestion of where we could get an Italian dinner; the desk clerk suggests *Bella Cucina*, a short walk away and she makes a reservation for us. The weather has become much milder, in contrast to this morning and last night. When we arrive, we're initially seated at an outside table, but before the food even arrives we are brought indoors, alas too close to a very hot pizza oven. The food is good and simple.

Sunday, March 14

Today's weather is mild, with sun mixed with a few clouds. We have breakfast in the small, but very attractive dining room. I choose eggs, bacon, sausage, and potato cakes; Lee has pancakes. We

waddle away and back to our room. After we recover, we walk uphill, many many steps uphill, to the Kiwi Birdlife Park for its 11:00 performance. Two keepers lecture about and show the antics of various birds, including the yellow crowned parakeet, the New Zealand pigeon, and others, but my feeble attempts at capturing them on camera result in blurred images, each and every one. Much more sedentary (and, thus, easier to photograph) is the Ollie, a tuatara which is a reptile found only in New Zealand. According to a brochure, "They are the last of the sphenodontians, an order of reptiles from the time of the dinosaurs, and are frequently referred to as a 'living fossil.' Tuatara do everything slowly. [Hmm, sounds like a University of Tennessee student. But 'living fossil' sounds like a faculty person.] Their heartbeat can drop to 10 beats per minute and they may go for an hour or more without breathing. They live longer than most reptiles, maturing sexually at 10 years or more and living between 100 and 200 years." [Why does the image of John McCain come to mind?] During the show, a small rat races across the stage, but this is a planned activity as he/she/it has a "house" right there. When the show ends, we walk the extensive grounds and see numerous birds in cages. Alas, many of the photos that I snap are marred by the metal of the cage, but I do my best. We see the kea (an Alpine parrot, the only one in the world), the black stilt (appropriately named), the yellow-crowned parakeet, the tua, the Antipodes Island parakeet, and various variety of duck. A wonderful place, I think. As we are considerably higher than the central area of Queenstown, I take some nice pictures as we descend the steps; Bella Cucina, last night's restaurant, can be seen on the right side of the road.

We return to our room for a while, then call the desk to have our car delivered. I don't know how they do it, but the car keys are at the desk when we walk down a few minutes later and the car is already parked on the next street. Our destination is Glenorchy, at the head of Lake Wakatipu, about a 45-minute northward drive, twisting and turning through very pretty countryside. We skirt the edge of the lake and see many snow-capped mountains in the distance. The town has seen better days, but we're here and we might as well pretend that we really like it, so we walk a nature trail, become acquainted with some local sheep, and have a snack at the Glenorchy Café, before returning to Wellington. We go to the hotel room to grab the remainder of my salted crackers from last Sunday's bland diet and head for the lake's edge to feed the ravenous ducks and geese. When the food is gone, we stroll along the boardwalk and through the city, taking some pictures of the local sights. There is a giant kiwi (only a model, alas) and a giant moa (also a model, but full size I think) which we capture on film. (No, that's not right - we have no film; rather we capture it digitally.) It is a really attractive town (at least the town center is) and very pleasing for tourists on foot.

After reading for a while in our room, we return to the boardwalk to have dinner at Boardwalk (seems appropriate). The restaurant is upstairs and commands a lovely view of the harbor. The food is excellent: TWOU starts with ravioli and crayfish followed by a delicious bouillabaisse; TMOU chooses a healthful salad and then (not so healthful) fish and chips. One of us (my lips are sealed) has tarte tatin for dessert. We return to the hotel and read for the remainder of the evening.

Still more NZish: deemocrat, beeter (for better), correection, fleexibility, raison d'eetra.

Monday, March 15

"Beware the Ides of March," said the soothsayer to Caesar. Brutus (already part of the plot) repeats, "A soothsayer bids you beware the ides of March." Well, Caesar ignored the warnings and we all know how badly that day turned out for him. We trust that we will live to see tomorrow.

After breakfast, but before leaving the hotel, we have a wonderful chat with Mel Bohse, the manager. She's had an interesting and varied career, having worked in sales and marketing for a number of high tech firms including a stint as vice president at Alta Vista. In 2006, she and her husband joined The Spire Hotels Group Ltd. where she is manager of this Queenstown hotel and is scouting other sites for building similar facilities (Auckland, Wellington, maybe Sydney). We tell her how wonderful the hotel and its staff are. When she asks if anything could have been better, this is when I tell her that a wall-

mounted lighted mirror would have been nice. She agrees. She asks where else we've stayed in New Zealand. She's unfamiliar with Solitaire Lodge and Masters Lodge but has stayed (and enjoyed immensely) Mollies in Auckland. And she agrees with our lukewarm impression of Ohtel.

It is yet another mild, sunny day (our luck is bound to run out ... eventually) as we set off for Dunedin, 280 km distant. Dunedin is southeast of Queenstown, but intervening mountains require that one plot a slightly circuitous route. We drive east to Cromwell, where we snap a picture of a model of gigantic chicken with pieces of fruit, then southeast to Alexandra (a lovely, prosperous town), then almost due south through Roxburgh and Lawrence (sounds like a law firm). On the way, we pass pastures with cows, sheep, and goats; and we pass many vineyards. Some fields have large rocks and boulders strewn about, making them look much like rural Maine. Clear evidence of seismic activity over the millennia are the strata seen in the rocks, some of them at intriguing (perhaps "impossible") angles. For much of the trip, we are alongside the Clutha River, which runs from Lake Wanaka southeast to the ocean; at 338 km, it is the second longest river in New Zealand. It is alleged to have the 7th fastest flow in the world, but I'm unable to confirm that when searching key web sites. At Milton, we turn northeast to Dunedin. In towns both large and small, the influence of American fast food is on display: KFC, Burger King, McDonald's, Denny's, Starbucks, but (surprisingly) no pizza chains.

During the drive, a startling incident occurs, one that still has me shaking several weeks later. I had misplaced my U.S.-bought ballpoint pen in one of the hotel rooms and so I've been using another pen, "liberated" from Mollies, for a couple of weeks. When we were at Wilderness Lodge, that pen came apart in my pocket. . (This is very difficult to explain in words - I'm sorry that I didn't take a picture. But, *mirabile dictu** Wikipedia has a picture: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ballpoint-pen-parts.jpg>)

*One of my former colleagues at UT, a professor in the English Department, thought that he was praising one of his students when he wrote *mirabile dictu* on a paper that the student had turned in. The young lad, clearly deficient in reading ability and knowledge of Latin, ran to the department head to complain that his professor had called him a "miserable dick." True story, or so I've been told.

I'm reminded of a "lesson" recounted in Brendan Gill's wonderful book, *Here At The New Yorker*, an account of the first several decades of that magazine's life. The founder and first editor for 25 years, Harold Ross, was an eccentric, as was his successor William Shawn who ran for the magazine for the next 25 years. (The following two editors were Tina Brown, who came close in her six years to destroying the culture that made the magazine unique; and David Remnick, who has brought sanity, accompanied by appropriate amounts of insanity, back to the organization.) Gill informs us that Ross had two pieces of advice for his stable of writers: "Mingle" (which meant that they were to plunge into the crowds of people in NYC to find interesting stories) and "Everything can be described." It is with the latter admonition in mind that I shall endeavor to describe the workings of this ballpoint pen, using as my "visual aid" the already cited Wikipedia picture.

When the pen came apart, I thought that a piece had broken off or been lost, but I discovered that the pen could be restored to its original function by carefully aligning the refill cylinder (with its spring) not *directly* against the plunger at the top of the pen (as in my old pen) but with a small cylindrical piece of plastic in between. This piece of plastic may have a name (George, maybe?) but I don't know what to call it; in any event, it had the appearance of having broken off from some other piece, and, in fact, at the start I was unable to figure out how to attach the upper part of the pen to the main barrel. But after a bit of manipulation, and calling on my years of experience as a college professor(?), I discovered that everything would hold together (*with* the little plastic doohickey in its proper place) after a small, but insistent twist. All went well until today. While Lee was driving, I removed the pen from my pocket ... and the two-weeks-worth of tension on that brave little spring caused it to release its energy with such force that the top of the pen shot forward and struck the flap covering the car's ashtray with such speed that the lid sprang (sprung? gesprungst?) open. Amazingly, I was able to retrieve all of the pieces of

the pen and reassemble it, but it's clear that this writing implement has become a lethal weapon and it will be best if I discard the little demon before trying to pass through airport security.

We arrive in Dunedin (the largest city on the South Island, population 124,000) at about 1:00. Wellington may well deserve its sobriquet "Windy" but that adjective could/should apply equally well to Dunedin. We navigate to the center of the city and discover an interesting feature, the Octagon, a plaza with eight sides (duh!) and a huge amount of traffic. When we locate the i-Site, we park on the street. I put 3 NZD into the appropriate slot of a pay meter, but (alas) the ticket that is ejected is caught by a gust of hurricane-force wind and is lifted to the stratosphere ... or higher. The locals who watch this are much amused, but I am not. So I insert another 3 NZD, but this time I grab the little receipt with both hands and carefully transport it to the dashboard of the car. Whew! At the i-Site, we get some information about walking tours (the city has some fascinating old buildings that we plan to explore when we return in two days). We walk to the nearby Public Art Gallery, which has a very nice collection of mostly modern works. One of the highlights is an exhibit of photographs by a 30-something American named Taryn Simon. The collection "An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar" is spread out over many rooms. Some of the works can be seen at <http://www.tarynsimon.com/#> (click on PHOTOGRAPHS at the bottom of the page.) Not shown at the web site, but of great interest to those of us who served time in East Tennessee, are photos of a serpent handler in Newport, TN and of the "body farm" with rotting corpses at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. (No, this is *not* where they put young faculty who are denied tenure.)

At about 3:00, we begin our drive to Kaimata Retreat on the Otago Peninsula. The peninsula is about 20 km long and 9 km wide (at most places) but is connected to the mainland, east of Dunedin, by an isthmus about 1.5 km wide. Proceeding outward on the peninsula proves to be one of the most challenging drives I've attempted. At the start, we are in an area that's built up, so there are houses and *paved* roads, but these roads are very curvy and right alongside the water with no barriers or guard rails to stop one from plunging into the briny. And, because I am driving eastbound on the north arm of the peninsula and driving on the left, as is required, I am hugging the water's edge. (I look forward to the return trip when I'll be on the inside, away from the water.) After a while, the quality of the road changes (and not in a positive sense). Not only do we find ourselves driving quite a distance on gravel, but the road also twists and turns and changes elevation as we climb and descend over many hills. According to the driving instructions from Kaimata Retreat, we are to approach Papanui Inlet and drive along Cape Saunders Road (some road! - dirt and mud) until we find the address 297. This takes some doing, but we get there. We are then directed by a sign in the ground to plunge down a dirt road (whose path we can't see until we're actually on it) and then down another such dirt road to get to the building itself. Whew! We are met by Rachel, one of the owners, who shows us around.

The entire place is rustic and (how can I say it nicely?) very much down-market. The shock of going from the ultra-elegant Spire to here is enormous. We have a small room with only one chair and very poor overhead lighting. There is not even a desk chair, probably because there is no desk. Our private deck has no chair (we discover that we had been allotted one chair but it has been appropriated by another guest). We open the windows to try to cool off the room but, as there are no screens, we are forced to shut them lest every insect on the peninsula is admitted. There is no TV, no phone, and no internet connectivity. Furthermore, Lee's cell phone does not get a signal. We are isolated from civilized society and will probably die here ... and nobody will know about it for months.

We have already paid for dinner here for tonight, but I announce to Lee that I do not want to try to drive to Dunedin for dinner tomorrow if it means that we have to drive the length of the peninsula after dark. So we arrange to have dinner here tomorrow as well. There is a resident peahen and her three daughters who prowl the property and appear at the most unexpected moments. (Her "husband" lives up the hill with the owners, but makes his presence known by his very loud screech.) The birds are a welcome treat, except for the "calling cards" that they leave behind on the walkway and the outdoor furniture. The common room is very nice (if also too hot) and commands a wonderful view of the Papanui Inlet. The waters of the inlet are subject to large tides; by morning, what looked to have been

a lake turns out to be many sandbars with rivulets of water separating them. The sea birds have a wonderful time. We see a man carrying a kayak as he walks across much of the inlet on land.

Rachel brews some coffee for us and offers muffins. There is no coffee maker in the room, but we are invited to come to the kitchen anytime to make coffee or to grab snacks from the cupboard or refrigerator. Because the common area is so warm, we sit on the deck to read. The Belgian-born chef, Danielle, comes out to chat with us. She is a real character and has lots of wonderful stories, along with some definite opinions about ... virtually everything. Her accent is strongly French, despite having lived in New Zealand for a very long time. She never knows, more than a day ahead, what she will be preparing for dinner, as it depends (among other things) on whether or not Kyle, Rachel's husband, has gone fishing that day. While we are in the common area, Kyle arrives to build a fire - god knows why, as the room is already broiling. He fits the stereotype of the Otago Peninsula Male that we had read: about 6'4", muscled, bare feet, unruly hair, and a "veeery theeek" **NZish** accent.

Danielle is also a devoted reader, consuming books at a prodigious rate. She and we exchange recommendations about favorite books and authors. She belongs to an online club www.shelfari.com, described as a "social network for people who love books." One can search to see what one's "friends" (who may number in the thousands) are reading; and one can use the virtual book shelf to store pictures of the books that one has read. Perhaps I'll get curious enough to join, but not now.

Two other people are staying at Kaimata, a young German couple (Martin and Sabina) whom we meet at dinner. He is a Ph.D. in engineering (from Colorado) and she is an actuary. Although Rachel had said that drinks would be served at 6:30, this does not happen. Nevertheless, at 7:30 Dani sets out an excellent meal of fish chowder, venison, vegetables, salad, and ice cream with raspberries and chocolate. (There was no choice of what we would eat, a contradiction of what had been promised at the web site. There, it was indicated that at 5:00 we'd get to choose from among four entrees.) Lee and I are the only ones interested in coffee, so we make a pot for ourselves. After a while, we return to our room but step outside to see the stars of the southern sky, at which point I get a spontaneous and totally unexpected nosebleed. And I have another in the middle of the night (something that's never happened to me before) so that I drip some blood onto the linens. Sorry about that.

Thursday, March 16

It is a cool, beautiful morning. Our weather luck is holding out. Danielle cooks a hot breakfast and chats with us about books. As well read as she is, she's unfamiliar with Philip Roth, so I recommend that she seek him out, starting with *American Pastoral*. (As was true with the dinner, the breakfast did not match what was described at the web site; nevertheless, the fresh croissants were excellent.) The German couple from last night eat breakfast with us.

At 10:45, we set out to visit the aquarium in the modest village of Portobello. It's another very challenging drive with gravel or dirt roads, very narrow, steep grades both up and down. The aquarium, run by the University of Otago, is nice but minimal (especially when compared to the huge facilities in Atlanta, Chattanooga, Seattle, and Vancouver). It has a rubber model of the real Colossal Squid that we saw, albeit in a preserved state, in Wellington. There are many "touch pools" but, also, many many small children. The aquarium invites visitors to enter a "submersible" and "go" underwater, except that the damned thing never leaves its original spot.

From there, we drive to Pukekura, The Royal Albatross Centre. We have tickets for a 1:50 tour, but we exchange them for 1:30 when we discover that lunch hasn't taken us as long as it might. Shortly before the tour is to begin, we notice that clouds are forming and that it's getting dark. TMOU is "commissioned" to run to the parking lot to fetch our raincoats, but with impeccable good timing the skies open and the winds howl just as he leaves the safety of the building. Drenched, he returns with the outer garments. This heroic act is probably unnecessary because by the time the introductory

lecture given by the very knowledgeable Julian is ended and we begin the steep walk up the hill to see the bird colony, the weather has improved enormously. At the top of the hill is an indoor observatory with an abundance of binoculars. On the side of the cliff, we see three nests, each with one chick; as they grow, they will reach 12 kg before molting, acquiring "adult" feathers, and shedding some weight. The adults, with wing spans of 3 m and weighing 9 kg, fly only when the wind is up, so we are fortunate that we've arrived on a very windy day.

To say that the birds in flight are impressive is to understate the situation. This facility is not just for tourists, but also serves as a conservatory for protecting the birds. According to their web site, "The first egg was laid on 31 October 2009 and we had 17 albatross eggs in total. A major milestone was achieved in January 2010 as 100% of the fertile eggs produced successfully hatched - a first in 16 years. Another fact that is generating a lot of media interest this year is that there are two 'mums' who have formed a pair bond and are raising a chick. [To paraphrase Captain Renault, "I'm shocked, *shocked* to find that gay marriage is going on in here!" I say, have these birds no shame? But I digress.] During the next few months, the chicks will have to cope with heat, humidity, the risk of fly strike and predators. For the next six weeks, their parents will take turns guarding and feeding their chicks. They will then be left unattended while both parents forage at sea for enough food to feed them. One of the issues albatross face living on the mainland is the constant threat of predators such as cats, stoats and ferrets. However, the trapping programme run by the Department of Conservation helps to minimise the threat (traps are wooden boxes which you may see from time-to-time on the web cam)." At the bottom of the hill, we spot some of the Stewart Island shag colony (shag are a type of cormorant) and some New Zealand fur seals.

At 2:30, we drive to the Yellow Eyed Penguin colony where we have tickets for a 4:15 tour. Alas, we have to wait until that time because the earlier tours are fully booked. So we sit in the car and read for a while. The weather has turned rotten again (rain, squalls, wind) as we board a bus that will take us around curves and up/down hills to get as close as motorized vehicles can get to the viewing places to see the penguins. We traipse some considerable distance in miserable weather, but before seeing any penguins, we encounter a number of fur seals who are relaxing on the beach (and giving off their own "sweet" odor). As we walk along, there are some viewing points that are under cover - and from them we do spot several of the penguins. The guide knows them by name and knows their habits and habitat very well. One pair (names forgotten but let's call them Kate and Jon or, if you prefer, Brangelina), spend their time driving an interloper, Donna, from their territory. In spite of the weather, this is worth the price of admission. That Donna has recently been widowed does not seem to matter to the aggressive pair.

We make the challenging return drive (gravel, dirt roads, and dirt turning to mud in the heavy rain and winds) back to Kaimata. Two new guests are staying here, a middle-aged German couple (Roswitha and ? - name forgotten) whom we meet at dinner. It's a bit difficult drawing conversation out of them, but that's not because of any language barrier, as their English is excellent. Maybe they're still angry at the U.S. for WW II. (The woman has a head of red hair in a shade that is not found anywhere in the natural world.) Dani prepares another excellent dinner, but again without any choice.

It is a violent and stormy night. We hear things crashing against the outside wall, probably the wicker basket-chair that is suspended by a rope; and we hear the frightened peahen and peachicks (is that a word?) scurrying around the deck and on top of the roof, screeching their little heads off. Well, I guess that our weather luck has run out.

Wednesday, March 17

The morning begins with wind and some heavy clouds but no rain ... yet. It is also quite cold: 7°. After a nice breakfast prepared by Danielle, we are on our way - "over the river and through the mud to Dunedin house we go ..." On this drive along the peninsula, we should be on the side of the road

away from the water ... except TWOU plots a route that goes along the south shore - i.e., with us and our car, yet again, on the brink of a seaside death. But we make it to Dunedin. Somehow. One helpful hint that we pick up from Dani: we can park for free at the Countdown Supermarket, right off downtown.

More NZish: On the radio, we learn that the *Metropolitan* Opera is performing *La Boheeme*; there is an announcement of a *wedding* after a long engagement; and what Americans might call "nice weather," the announcer uses "fine" as in "we will have fine *breeks* in the *weether*."

Dunedin is proud of its historic buildings, many of them constructed in the late 19th or early 20th century. We park our car and walk past the Law Courts (1899), still in use, and the Railway Station (1904), which we enter. Now used for various tourist trains, it also has shops and a restaurant, but the original functions are magnificently on display. From Wikipedia, "the station is constructed from dark basalt from Kokonga in the Strath-Taieri with lighter Oamaru stone facings, giving it the distinctive light and dark pattern common to many of the grander buildings of Dunedin and Christchurch. Pink granite was used for a series of supporting pillars which line a colonnade at the front of the building. The roof was tiled in terracotta shingles from Marseilles surmounted by copper-domed cupolas ... The booking hall features a mosaic floor of almost 750,000 Minton tiles. A frieze of Royal Doulton porcelain runs around the balcony above it from which the floor's design (featuring a locomotive and related symbols) can be clearly seen." Not your typical train station, eh? We wander around the city and along the Octagon, stopping to look at St. Paul's Anglican Cathedral (1915). And although *this* Dunedin is not in Scotland, there is a statue of Robert Burns that we capture in a picture.

We head north toward Christchurch, 362 km distant, but on the way we stop (after about 80 km) to see the amazing Moeraki boulders which lie isolated or clumped together along a stretch of ocean beach. Many are nearly spherical; and some are almost the height of an adult. They (the boulders, not the adults) are estimated to be over 4 million years old and were formed over a very extended period by "cementation" of marine mud in the sea above the calcite lattice - or something like that. Some are cracked open, looking like large dinosaur eggs (not that I've ever seen a dinosaur egg). Others have cracked completely so that pieces are strewn about, looking like discarded Halloween pumpkins that have been hit by passing cars. Our next stop, some 100 km distant is in the town of Waimate where our mission is to find the Knitware Factory Store. We do, but "we" (i.e., TWOU) are not impressed by the sweaters and coats, and so walk away without making a purchase. The temperature is a bracing 11° along the coast.

We stop in Timaru, 45 km away, for coffee and lunch. (I'm ashamed to report that it was at a McDonald's, something that we had avoided for the entire trip.) The temperature is now up to a blistering 14° as we complete the drive to Christchurch, another 165 km. (Those of you who can't resist juggling numbers may have noticed that the sum of distances quoted for these driving legs is 390 km. I can't account for this. The total distance, 362 km, came from the official AA web site as did all of the smaller numbers. Oh, well, let's just dismiss the discrepancy in the same offhand manner with which Goldman Sachs dismisses the loss of billions of dollars.) We check in at The George, but are deeply disappointed that nobody remembers us from just eight days ago. Dinner is at *50 on Park*, the hotel's casual restaurant. We also take advantage of the WiFi access (even though there is a charge for it) after having been "internet-less" at Kaimata.

Thursday, March 18

In contrast to the bland breakfasts that I had during our first stay at The George, this time I enjoy a full hot breakfast. We check out around 11:00 and drive to the International Antarctic Centre, located next to the ChCh airport. What a wonderful place! There are numerous exhibits, panels of information, hokey "re-enactments" of life on Antarctica, and video displays all intended to illustrate the utter strangeness of Antarctica and the hardships for scientists who explore it. We spring for an audio guide which is very informative.

We spend about three hours but could have spent three times more, if only we'd had the time. The highlight, from my perspective, are the "Little Blue Penguins," so-called because they are little ... and blue ... and, without a doubt, penguins. All of those on display have been rescued from unpleasant encounters with humans and their boats; some are crippled, others are blind in one eye, and one is totally blind but manages to get around quite well. We plan our visit so that we're there at feeding time. Two keepers are involved: one narrates and the other throws fish to those who can see - and spoon-feeds the one who has no sight at all. I take about 35 pictures of the little beasts, most of which look just about the same as most of the others. Surprised? (The cost of admission to the Antarctic Centre and the audio tour for two "seniors" is *exactly* 100 NZD which happens to be *exactly* how much New Zealand currency we have in our pockets. Smart? Or just lucky? Actually, we still have 10 NZD left, but this will be put to good use in the purchase of a snack at the airport.)

We return the rental car (no major - or even minor - scratches, in contrast to our UK experience last summer) and get to the Air New Zealand desk at about 2:30. Because our flight to Auckland is not scheduled to depart until 7:30, we are not permitted to check-in more than three hours ahead of time. Who knew? It's unfortunate that we weren't aware of the regulation - we could easily have invested another two hours at the Antarctic Centre. So we sit in the noisy entry hall where I finish *Alphabet Juice* by Roy Blount [no comma] Jr. The entire book was a delight. Perhaps I can entice you to read it if I cite one of the passages that I read at the airport. In a section titled *Transposition Game*, Blount recounts a tale involving relatively well-known author Burton Bernstein, 14 years younger than his much much better known brother, Leonard.

[The game involves] "rearranging the letters in one word of an existing title or well-known phrase. Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* becomes *The Odors of Perception*. The Continental Army becomes the continental Mary. I'm told that Burt Bernstein, then a writer at *The New Yorker*, learned of this game and found himself to be good at it. He hastened to his brother, Leonard, who had always been better at everything than Burt, but now, finally, maybe ... Burt explained the game, Leonard looked up from whatever major thing he was doing and said, "Icy fingers up and down my penis."

(Hmm, I wonder if Lenny had been thinking about the John Pule poem posted at The Spire, rather than the Harold Arlen/Johnny Mercer song.)

Finally, 4:30 arrives and we can check our luggage through all the way to Seattle, although (of course) we'll have to pick it up briefly in Los Angeles in order to clear U.S. Customs. We get through airport security in record-shattering time: in contrast to the TSA regulations in American airports, New Zealand agents do not require that one have all liquids in quantities of 3 oz or smaller in a one-quart zipped plastic bag nor do they even require that passengers remove their shoes nor do I have to remove my belt with its metal buckle before going through the magnetometer. How refreshing! Thus, we arrive at the Koru Lounge where we nosh, relax, nosh, read, nosh, have coffee, and nosh. There is a wide variety of hot and cold snacks. Even wine, beer, and liquors are on offer - for free - but we do not partake. (The ChCh to Auckland flight does not have a first-class or business-class section, but our Business Premier tickets from Auckland to Los Angeles make us eligible to stay in the lounge.)

The plane arrives late and, so, does not depart at 7:30. But the staff rushes people on board at 7:40, the doors close at 7:50, and we are air-borne at 7:57! (The ChCh airport is just a wee bit less busy than airports in the U.S.) We make up the lost time and arrive at Auckland at 8:56, just a few minutes behind schedule. Because we are seated in Row 1, we get off the plane first and hurry to the International Terminal which is described as being only a short walk away but is considerably longer than that through the chilly evening climate. There is only one agent at passport control (a second one joins him after a while), so getting through security is somewhat slow. Again, we don't remove our shoes nor show the plastic bag with the liquids nor remove my belt. Unfortunately, I am "randomly" selected for extra screening ("Racial profiling," I want to shout, but I restrain myself); however, a magnetic wand and rubber-gloved hands reveal nothing untoward upon my body and so we are on our

way. Lee picks up her red lamb coat (they have *red lambs*?) at the BONZ outlet in the Duty Free Shop.

We get to the Koru Lounge at 9:35 and wait there until the call for boarding comes. I just have some water, as we'll be fed a full dinner shortly after take-off. Although our flight is not scheduled to leave until 11:00, the call to proceed to the gate comes at 10:10. Why so early? Read on.

After a long walk to the gate, we are directed to "secondary screening" which is a requirement (mandated by the U.S.) for all passengers flying into the country. First, we hear the directive: "Men form a line on the left, women on the right." (Images of Auschwitz flash through my mind, but as long as they don't direct us to showers, we're probably OK.) I kiss Lee good-bye, fully aware that we may never see one another again. So, I'm in the stag line (so to speak), and although I've not had to remove my shoes at any check point so far, they must come off now. Also my belt. I get a very thorough pat-down - and the agent isn't even cute. It occurs to me that this extra security is the result of the failed bombing of a Detroit-bound plane, last Christmas. Curse you, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab!! Curse you, you incompetent underwear bomber!!!! May the 72 virgins you had hoped to meet in Paradise either be 72 sturgeons or 72 ugly men.

Not only am I searched, but my carry-on raincoat is thoroughly gone through. And my briefcase and carry-on suitcase are probed and studied and x-rayed and otherwise violated in the most brutal manner. Finally, I am allowed to leave the presence of the Gestapo and proceed down an escalator where I await the arrival of Lee. (Because the men's line moved faster than hers, I've lost sight of her. For all I know, she's been pulled out of line and sent to someplace dreadful ... like Knoxville.) So I wait and wait ... and get angry because if only I could board the plane I could relax with a nice single malt. I am not the only man waiting for his partner/wife/paramour/whatever. As each woman comes down the escalator, each of us is tempted to ask her if she will accompany us onto the plane, but (sigh) each such woman does seem to have a man on the platform who actually knows her. [A thought occurs to me - if one were part of a gay male couple, would one's partner be permitted to stay in the same line? Obviously yes, but it just doesn't seem fair. And now the light comes on - finally ... *finally* ... I understand what they mean when Pat Robertson and Rush Limbaugh warn us about "the gay agenda" - it's all about getting through airport security! Well, I'm glad that that's cleared up.] *Finally*, TWOU emerges and descends the spiral staircase (oops, I mean escalator) and into my waiting arms. Images of Cary Grant (and other romantic Hollywood types) flash through my tired brain, but I can't recall any of his magical lines except, "Darling, darling ... darling."

At 10:45 (but it feels like much later) we get on board and settle into our pods. It's weird: on the L.A. to Auckland flight, the flight attendants spent most of their time teaching us nincompoops how to operate the entertainment system. This time, the crew does none of that. It doesn't make sense that so many first-timers were on the New Zealand-bound leg and that essentially none are on board today. Does it? The flight information screen that I love watching has our ETA in Los Angeles at 2:07 p.m., exactly 11 hours from now. But we don't push back from the jetway until 11:14 (maybe some people are still trying to clear security?) and we're not airborne until 11:28. (Now the ETA is 2:35.) Lee expresses disappointment at not seeing any celebrities on this flight. So what am I? Chopped liver?

In the business class lounges in ChCh and Auckland, I continued reading the wonderful Eggers book; and on the plane I've begun Tim McCarver's *Baseball for Brain Surgeons and Other Fans: Understanding and Interpreting the Game So You Can Watch It Like a Pro*. We are served an excellent dinner, but (for whatever reason) Lee doesn't sit with me as she did on our initial flight. Is she angry? Tired of being with me? Or still mad about having been felt-up at security? I keep my monitor set to the flight progress panel while Lee watches "The Blind Side." Once again, I "liberate" the airline's menu, but I won't bore you (as I did earlier) with a detailed recitation of what is served. Suffice it to say, it is an excellent meal.

At about 12:30 a.m. (New Zealand time), we hit some severe air turbulence, but it eventually subsides. At about 1:30 I ask to have my chair converted into the lie-flat bed, but as was the case on the way

over I keep my eyes shut for about 2.5 hours and sleep for, perhaps, 1 hour. (TWOU, unburdened by all of the worries that torment me, manages to sleep for five hours!) So I get up, have my chair restored, go to the lavatory to brush my teeth, and spend the rest of the flight reading. Today (if it really is still today) is when we're going to recover the day that disappeared when we flew to New Zealand. Thus, we leave ChCh at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 18 and will arrive in Seattle (after changing planes in Los Angeles) at 8:14 p.m. *on the same day!* And to indicate how really incredibly long this day is/was/will be, we rose at 7:00 a.m. New Zealand time and will remain awake (except for any sleep that we get on the plane) for 35 hours by the time we reach Gig Harbor.

A nice breakfast is served at 1:00 p.m., Los Angeles time. Lee deigns to join me for this meal. We are over open waters for the longest time, but finally can see the islands (San Clemente and Santa Catalina) that are off the California coast. One of the stewards remarks, "I always feel better when I can finally see land." I reply, "Can you imagine how Columbus felt?" We reach the mainland south of L.A. at Laguna Beach, fly inland for a while before turning back toward the ocean and landing at 2:44, a little ahead of schedule.

Our luggage is *very* slow to arrive. So much for its having been given a "priority" tag! We get through immigration relatively rapidly (well, this isn't Arizona, you know) but then comes U.S. Customs! Lee knows that she'll have to pay duty because of having purchased clothing that costs more than \$3,000, but the agent seems incapable of finding specific items (e.g., "leather coat" or "wool sweater") on his list, so he "guesses" at what the duty should be and comes up with a total that's probably too low - but who are we to complain, eh? In fact, he seems to be acting as our private purchasing agent when he considers various items. For example, instead of charging the 40% duty he should have imposed for a merino wool sweater, he calls it "cashmere" and charges on 5%.

We need to go from Terminal 2 to Terminal 3, which means passing through security again. Thankfully, it is "only" the regular demeaning exercise that we're accustomed to on domestic flights. But it is still quite slow. We find the Alaska Board Room where I have a chance to make some phone calls as my cell phone is finally "alive" again. I call our home number to see if there are messages: in fact there are two more from Judy asking to speak to Norris. (I refer you to p. 32 for similar calls). I call Lois, our next door neighbor, to tell her that we *will* be home today. I call Harbor Taxi to tell them the same thing. And I call Michael Flatley's office to set up a dental appointment for next Monday. Our flight to Seattle leaves a few minutes late but we are happy to be on our way. We are served a light dinner, spoiled only by the Biblical psalm that is on the dinner tray. We are on time getting into Seattle. Steve, my Brooklyn "homey" who owns Harbor Taxi, meets us at the airport; he has to weave his way through surprisingly heavy traffic to get near the curb. And we finally arrive home, exhausted but happy that we made the trip.

Addendum:

A couple of days after our return to Gig Harbor, our new BFF Judy calls and asks to speak to Norris. Lee takes the call and bawls her out for (1) not paying attention to our voice mail message that gives no indication that anyone named Norris lives here and (2) costing us roaming charges when we called our home number from New Zealand. Bottom line - she has not called again.