

Day 44 – Tuesday 1 February 2000 – Going Home [Brisbane]

What do you do on your last day in America when your flight doesn't leave until 8:10pm? We discussed this at length last night and again this morning. Should we go to Beverly Hills? Go window shopping along Rodeo Drive? Spend more time in Santa Monica at the pier or the shopping centre? Take the bus up to Malibu? Decision, decision, decisions but guess what, no resolution. Finally we decided to leave the hotel at 12 noon, check in our luggage at Qantas then head up to Rodeo Drive and Beverly Hills however our plans were shot down at 1:00pm when we tried to check in only to be told that the earliest we could do this is 3:00pm Bugger.

Never mind, we spent this time checking out the duty free shops, lunch, check in our luggage and dinner ... boring but at least we didn't get lost, miss the bus and heaven forbid miss our flight as we are going home.

Having all this time to kill it now appears that LAX is not as well set out as Brisbane or Auckland International Airports, the shopping is limited, no currency exchange so we are thinking the airport authorities don't want passengers hanging around for any period of time. But it is interesting watching aircraft movements and can't wait to get back home to fly my Xair ultralight.

After 7 weeks away from home we both feel it's time to leave the USA and we aren't wishing we had just one more week. I just saw a Qantas plane called 'Longreach' touchdown and taxi to the terminal and I wonder if we will be flying back in this one. We will soon find out at 7:10pm when we have to board the aircraft.

With each Air Alaska jet that comes and goes my thoughts and prayers go out to the passengers and crew who lost their lives and to the families who will be devastated. I try to imagine the scene in the cockpit as the Captain and 1st officer try to gain control of the aircraft when the tail section failed and the aircraft turned upside down and headed into the Pacific Ocean. Lord, bless those who are affected by this tragedy and strengthen them in their hour of need. Amen.

Finally we get the call for our flight and make our way along with the other 350 passengers heading for New Zealand then on to Australia. It was good to hear good day from the cabin crew as we were welcomed aboard and listen to the aussie accents from the many Australian passengers sitting around us.

Our plane left the gate a little and as we saw the lights of Los Angeles fade away behind us I am pleased how the holiday went and we are going home fully refreshed with a life time of memorable moments on which to reflect.

I slept on and off during the flight and saw the most beautiful view the quarter moon and stars as we passed the International Dateline and is doing so, missed one day in the week. We were woken up rather early to have breakfast as we were due in Auckland around 7:00am but flying at 39,000 feet with perfect weather we were 30 minutes early. The sun was just rising as we touched down in Auckland and the airport seems so small when compared to LAX except for the abundance of duty free shops, smiling faces and friendly people and the knowledge we are just 3.5 hours from Brisbane.

Day 45 - Thursday 3 February 2000

Our original 747 headed for Melbourne and about 30 passengers boarded a Qantas 767 heading for Brisbane taking off at 7:10am on our last flight of the journey. Another breakfast, in-flight movie, immigration and customs forms to fill out and after 24 hours since leaving Santa Monica I caught my first glimpse of Australia, the top end of Morton Island and a navy ship heading into port.

Soon I could make out Bribie Island and the Glasshouse Mountains, Caboolture and the airfield and then we banked as we were on the final approach to BNE (Brisbane) slipping past Redcliffe and finally we touched down on Australian soil.

We quickly moved through immigration, picked out our luggage, walked straight through customs (no questions, no opening luggage, no x-rays) and out into the arrivals hall to be met by John Bakss holding up a cardboard sign saying STILLER. What a welcome sight to be met by our closest friends John and Robyn and after all the hugs and kisses we headed off for a cup of coffee and the start of many conversations to find out what each of us have been doing over the past 7 weeks.

Funny driving of the left hand side of the road instead of the right but there was never a silent moment during the drive home to Caryota Street in Nambour. Driving up the drive and walking into our home my immediate reaction was 'it's so big' and the 'place seems so bright' after living out of hotels, flying in tin cans and in the Amtrak carriages. David has the place spotless and everything in its place, thanks David. Walking into my study I couldn't help but notice the 30cm high pile of mail and knew it was going to take some time to work through it all, but not just now.

John had a bottle of Champaign ready to toast our return from a successful holiday and apart from taking a call from my Mum and Dad and Robyn's mother, all other calls were directed through the answering machine. Mum and Dad are fine (which is good) and Robyn's mother soon joined us for a cuppa.

After John and Robyn left and we settled down, jet lag hit us so off I went to have a snooze in my own bed with my own pillow, magic. That night Robyn's mother joined us for tea and so with David we had KFC and sat around covering the highlights of our journey knowing that it will take more than one night to tell the whole story.

Having been unable to catch up with my emails since Taos in New Mexico I was not surprised to see there were 558 emails but after a while I quickly deleted them as I am sure if anything was important they would contact me again before too long. Important emails and telephone calls from both the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) and Central Queensland University (CQU) setting out my teaching program for the semester were noted and recorded in my diary.

Mean while, I had to start thinking about my return to LAX and onto Anchorage (Alaska) to deliver a conference paper I had accepted to the international Resource Managers Association (IRMA) at the end of May. Can't think straight so time to do the next most important thing, unpack, sort out the dirty clothes that need washing, shower and back to bed after 38 hours on the go.

GOOD NIGHT.

Epilogue

The sun rose on its Friday 4 February and I am supposed to be delivering a lecture at Central Queensland University this morning but the jet lag has flattened me completely and in no shape to teach advanced maths to a group of masters students who have an exam in 2 weeks. Jennifer at CQU understood especially when she heard me trying to string words together to form a sentence and will make up this class next week.

I did head over to USC as I had paper work to do as they do not run a summer semester while Robyn headed off to Dr Keys the knee specialist to see what needed to be done to repair the damage to the knee from the skiing accident in Albuquerque.

It will take time to wind down from the 7 weeks abroad and settle back into a 'normal routine' but boy it was worth it and I recommend to everyone to get out and live, experience what God has created, learn from other cultures and then look to the future thank God for all the blessings he has given us.