

## Leg 5 – Chicago

### Day 24 – Wednesday 12 January 2000.

The first part of this journal for today is coming to you at 32,000 feet between Birmingham and Chicago eating peanuts and sipping coke. Today's temperature in Orlando when we left was cooler than the previous day but we have been told that the forecast temperature in Chicago will be a minimum of 35 to a maximum of 47 degrees Fahrenheit with light snow showers.

Our last day in Orlando started out by dropping our car back to the car rental place we were commenting on how well we had been doing driving from Fort Lauderdale to Orlando and navigating the streets and car parks etc. when all of a sudden a lady came screaming from the right lane across in front of us to the left lane and did a sharp turn into a shopping centre, a close call and didn't want to take the car back with a ding and having to explain how the damage occurred.

Orlando international airport is a huge modern complex with its own monorail shuttle service to take you from the check in area to the boarding gates which are some distance from the terminal. Today they were hardly any passengers on our flight so it wasn't such a crush to choose your own seat and we were able to sit back, relax and enjoy the antics of the comic flight steward who explained all the normal regulations in a very funny way. At Birmingham I had to put my watch back 1 hour as we waited for the last internal flight to Chicago.

As our flight got closer to Chicago the weather clouds rolled in and on our arrival at Midway Airport we really felt the temperature difference from the 75 Fahrenheit in Orlando just a couple of hours earlier to the 31 Fahrenheit in Chicago. Our bags were the first off the baggage conveyor so we were out of the airport and on the Express Bus to our hotel in no time. It was interesting to hear from the driver that they never ask Asians for a tip, guess they just don't understand that there are countries outside the USA where tipping or begging is not the norm.

On our arrival at the 'Best Western' we were given a letter from Aunty Thora and a message from Jon which really made us feel welcome and at home. As the night got darker you could see the people outside all rugged up against the cold and the wind coming off the lake which is just across the road from the hotel which is situated at 100 S Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois opposite Grant Park.

Our hotel room on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor is good and comfortable and the lights of the city look magnificent from the windows. After dinner in the restaurant downstairs (it looks too cold to go wandering the streets) we received a telephone call from Aunty Thora welcoming us to Chicago and apologising for not meeting us at the airport. I explained we didn't expect to be picked up from the airport and how we were looking forward to catching up with the family soon. After a while Jon rang to see what arrangements we had made and how we could all get together, so tomorrow night Jon will pick us up from the hotel and take us out to Aunty Thora's place where we will have dinner and a chin wag.

The rest of the evening Robyn and I went through the tourist guides to see what we will be doing and wanting to see over the next 5 days. Places to visit include the Navy Pier, museums, sky deck, Hancock building, the river and lost more. Tomorrow I will have to find out how to get to Oshkosh to

visit the aircraft factories, that is if we have time as there is so much to pack into the 5 days and spend as much time as we can with Aunty Thora, Uncle Ted, Colinette and Jon.

With the forecast of snow flurries overnight and tomorrow our hotel location on Grant Park will allow us to walk to most attractions, the perfect place to stay downtown Chicago.

### **Day 25 – Thursday 13 January 2000.**

The snow flurries have arrived and from our hotel window look so beautiful across the park and with an outside temperature of 26 degrees Fahrenheit, we are certainly back in wintry conditions and looking forward to brisk walks exploring the city to keep warm.

Rugged up against the winter chill we set out on Michigan Avenue heading downtown (up from the hotel) with our trusty city map as our guide. First place was a little café for breakfast and we were both filled in by the manager and waitress on things to do and places to explore.

Just down the street is the Studebaker Fine Arts Building (1898) used for the assembly and display of their carriages and now used for artists and craftsmen. Inside the building you can hear music lessons and every type of instrument, singing lessons and a centre where you can purchase music and instruments. I immediately thought of Mum and Dad and their love of music and how they would love to be here sorting through the shelf after shelf of sheet music. Across the hall is a display of historical violins, cellos and other musical instruments. On one floor there is a school of interior design and students were working on their CAD (computer aided design) computers doing their practical work and assignments.

There are a number of universities and colleges along this section of Michigan Avenue all dedicated to the arts and architecture and occupying historical buildings.

As we walked past the theatres and concert halls we see that we will miss the performances as they are not due to start until the end of January but it would have been good to attend at least one of the concerts.

Our walk downtown past the buildings dating in the 1800's also brought Robyn's attention to the sales in the many stores as they clear out their winter stock. One thing we noticed on our walk is the lack of public toilets so a word of warning, go before you set out since the signs say 'tenants only'.

After buying another carry on suitcase we headed toward 'Navy Pier' crossing the Chicago River with their many draw bridges, the one on State Street was built in 1949, what a grand and historical year that was, the year I was born.

By now the wind chill factor (wind coming off Chicago Harbour) was making us both cold as we strolled along Navy Pier first constructed in 1916 and called the Municipal Pier #2. In World War 1 it was used to house draft resisters, however in 1941 it was converted to a US Naval Training School for aviation mechanics. The pier housed 2 ships chosen as training carriers - the SS Seeandbee (1913) and the Greater Buffalo (1924) and had flight decks of similar length to the Independence class light carriers, so these two makeshift carriers could be used to train naval pilots to land without tying up seafaring combat units. The U.S.S Sable and U.S.S. Wolverine, as the new carriers were renamed, worked seven days a week throughout the year. In the winter, they were escorted by Coast Guard

icebreakers. The U.S.S. Wolverine and U.S.S. Sable, both former Great Lakes passenger steamers, were a unique part of World II history in many ways. The ships were powered by two side paddlewheels which turn in the same direction. The U.S. Navy had not used paddlewheel vessels in the active fleet for many years but many of the navy pilots learned to land on aircraft carriers on these ships. In all 250 planes were lost in Lake Michigan due to carrier training and weather related incidents. In 1948 both carriers were scrapped and the pier returned for public use.

During winter most of the attractions on the pier are closed and the river cruises shut for the season., however you can get the feeling of the outdoor events, craft stalls, concerts in Festival Hall, the dancing and fun in the historic ball room, the adventure on the huge ferris wheel and the excitement of the children's playground building which also houses and IMAX theatre currently showing Fantasia 2000.

It gets dark rather early with sunrise at 7:44am and sunset at 4:45pm so as the lights of the city start to show up the magnificent architecture, the temperature drops further and further and we decide to head back to the hotel. On every intersection police assist in directing traffic since peak hour traffic seems to go on forever and endless streams of cars and people make their way home for a few hours rest before it all starts up again the next day.

When we got back to the hotel there was a message from Ann (an Internet chat friend), so after a return phone call we have made arrangements to meet up on Saturday night. Meanwhile Jon and Susan will pick us up outside the hotel and take us out to visit Aunty Thora and Uncle Ted. Meeting Jon after all these years was a little emotional and during the 40 minute drive the catching up began. As we drove in the drive way on Northlake Drive I recognised the house from the photos and after the hugs, kisses and tears it was like old times again. Aunty Thora reminded me that it was 10 years ago in May when they were in our house in Nambour. The talk soon turned to old times with Jon recalling the games we played on the farm when we were kids and the things we got up to 'come on men' and we stormed the paw paw rows with Jon and his favourite toy rifle.

Boy was Mum surprised when Aunty Thora passed me the phone while she was talking, it was good to hear both Mum and Dad and the Australian accent. Another surprise was when aunty Thora dialled Colinette and handed me the phone, did she sound surprised when I said 'G'day' in my Australian accent.

The rest of the evening was taken up with coffee, cookies and much talking about yesterday, today and the future interrupted with the regular hugs and comments like 'just can't believe this is happening'.

Jon and Susan dropped us back at the hotel around 11:00pm as Jon is up around 4:30am for work and the rest of his family soon after. What a long day and having to drive through all the traffic as well, must be a better way to make a living. Robyn and I cannot really understand how people survive like this and while Chicago is architecturally magnificent and full of history, the temperature extremes, overcrowded population and everyone in a hurray is all too much for us.

## **Day 26 – Friday 14 January 2000.**

No new snow over night but the temperatures are still in the low 20's with the wind chill factor sending into single figures. Today we will explore the north side of Chicago, the opposite side of the

river about 1 mile from the hotel. Walking along the footpaths the air is brisk, perfect for walking and along the way we passed an outdoors ice skating rink, coffee shops and more stores with sale signs in the windows before we reached the John Hancock Centre known as “Big John” on the magnificent mile.

Robyn does not like heights so while I took the lift to the observatory she went shopping. From the observation deck some 1000 feet high you look out over Lake Michigan which is 321 miles long, 22,400 square miles and a maximum depth of 923 feet.

Some of the history written on sections of the wall makes for interesting reading including:

1. After the great fire of 1871, Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett set about a civil development for a comprehensive plan integrating a series of projects to make it easier ‘to live, work and play in the city [for] without rest and recreation all work becomes drudgery’;
2. The development plan centred around:
  - River walks, parks and greenbelts;
  - Rail and road transportation;
  - Public access and
  - Civil architecture.
3. The great fire cost \$200 million (about 2 billion in today’s economy) and 300 lives were lost;
4. Chicago was first established in 1795 and the name is derived from the word ‘*Checagou*’ local native American called the wild onions that abounded in the swamps, or whether it meant ‘swamp gas’ or just plain ‘strong’ are all a matter for debate;
5. Chicago firsts include:
  - The world’s first sky scraper in 1885;
  - Tubular steel construction for the Hancock Tower instead of solid steel making it lighter and stronger;
  - Nuclear reactor;
  - Zipper;
  - Twinkies, cracker jacks, dove bars and Ovaltine;
  - Roller skates;
  - Ice cream sundae;
  - Blood bank/Trauma Centre (Cook County Hospital)
  - Successful heart surgery;
  - Lie detector and
  - Juvenile court system in 1989 (Julia Lathorp).

Opposite “Big John” are two historical buildings, the pumping station in the Water Works pumping water from Lake Michigan through the filtration system to the houses in Chicago and there is a monument to the designer. Some 118 outlying suburbs as well as the city get water from the 720 million gallon capacity system.

On our way back to the hotel we stopped in and saw the ‘Nike’ building with all their range of footwear and clothing for men, women and children. Other places we visited along the way include the symphony orchestra hall, stores with electronic equipment and I was able to purchase LINUX Version 6 for \$30USD, normally around \$100AUD.

Tonight I had a chat with Jon and worked out sightseeing places for tomorrow and Sunday as he is having a day off. We ordered a pizza as our tired feet told us we needed to stay in room 403 in the warm and relax ready for the next 2 days of exploring.

### **Day 27 – Saturday 15 January 2000.**

Happy 50<sup>th</sup> birthday Robbie Bakks, hope you had a wonderful celebration for such a milestone.

Jon and Susan came and picked us up at around 9:30am and we headed along the lake to the Baha'i House of Worship, a very impressive temple with its architecture and dome structure with 2 levels, seating 1200 people up stairs and around 500 downstairs. They started construction the temple in 1902 and is built from the money raised from within their own members as they do not accept donations or seek loans from a bank. Their philosophy is to build in stages because 'if we as believers cannot raise the money ourselves, then maybe we are doing the wrong thing'. Good words of advice.

From there we headed back to the south side along the lake past the city itself to the Museum of Science and Industry. This huge building has 4 levels housing static and working models on just about everything dating from the oldest exhibits to futuristic creations. We didn't have enough time to visit every display or spend sufficient time to take it all in, however some of the attractions we worked our way through included the development of the carriage from hoarse to formula one racing cars; agricultural and nutritional foods; chickens actually hatching in their heated enclosure; flight observation deck inside a 727; all forms of science displays from the human body to electronics and telecommunications. After lunch we passed through the spaceport and navy workshops of warships, submarines and space craft.

Other areas of interest include the Fairy Castle; imagining using sophisticated computer technology; the whispering gallery using parabolic domes across a distance of 30 feet; past ships from the early days of sail craft to oil fired engines. No wonder this place is popular for school field trips and families. Some of the queues were so long including the U505 World War II submarine that we gave up waiting and went on to see the F15 flight simulator instead. As we walked around the museum a bloke walked passed and said 'love your ugg boots'. Well Robyn and I had a long conversation with this Australia and his wife who comes from Chicago and as an aussie he was pleased to hear an Australian accent as he has been living in Chicago for 1 year. He plays aussie rules for the 'Chicago Swans' and they have around 37 teams playing regularly and they also have a national competition and are looking for umpires, maybe an opening for me ... lol

When we got back to the hotel it was time for a hot shower and a trip on the subway from Roosevelt downtown to meet a couple of Internet chat friends at the Rainforest café on the corner of Clarke and Ohio. A novel restaurant whose interior was filled with animals, aquarium with all types of fish, trees and lighting effects with sound that brings the interior to life.

It was very interesting to sit and chat with Ann and Gale once she found us walking around lost. I have been chatting with Ann, Gale and Jason their son for a number of months on the Internet even helping their son decide what to do with his career. It was good to learn that he has decided to become a mathematics teacher. After a lovely evening we made our way though the subway to our hotel without even getting lost, that's a miracle.

## Day 28 – Sunday 16 January 2000.

A sleep in and breakfast before Colinette arrived for a day's outing at her and Bobs house. After a hug in foyer of the hotel and shedding a few tears we headed out on a cold and windy morning. First stop was the Adler Planetarium for a south perspective view of downtown Chicago. The wind across the lake from the northerly direction whipped up waves and white caps bringing the wind chill factor down to around 15 Fahrenheit.

From there we headed north to their house and once inside out of the chill we met Bob and soon we were all exchanging jokes and aussie sayings while lunch was being prepared. It was good to go over old times with Colinette and soon found out that they were heading to Freeport in the Bahamas so we were able to talk about the weather, swimming, shopping and other points of interest even though as we pointed out we were only on the island for 1 day and they will discover so much more during their 2 weeks' vacation.

Colinette and Bob would like to come out to Australia sometime soon so we chatted about going sailing in the Great Barrier Reef as this is on Bobs to do list as he has always wanted to go sailing. We had our first visit to a 'basement' even though Colinette protested like anything that it was untidy, seemed very clean and tidy to us.

We sat and chatted all afternoon, it was good to kick back and relax for a while and not be on the go all the time. Jon rang late in the afternoon with a suggestion that we could all meet up at Bailey's restaurant for dinner. Unfortunately Susan was helping he daughter strip wall paper, Colinette and Bob had so much to do before they leave for Miami on Wednesday morning and Aunty Thora wasn't feeling to good and thinks she is coming down with the flu so in the end Jon, Robyn and I headed off to Bailey's. We sat chatting for hours, the good times, the bad times and future plans and anyone would think we were brothers as we opened up and discussed a wide range of topics, some of which I don't think he has shared with many people in the past.

Around 8:30pm however we made our way back to the hotel as Jon was off to work the next day getting up at 4:30pm as he doesn't get the day off for Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Workers discuss with their employer which of the 5 out of the 12 holidays they want to take. The car ride back to the hotel seems much shorter this time and realised our short visit to Chicago was coming to an end. Outside the hotel we stood on the footpath for sometime hugging and not wanting to let go as we realised it will be sometime again (if ever) before we have the chance to meet up again and vowed to keep in touch via email.

Time to hit the sack and prepare for the next leg of our journey via AMTRAK to Portland Oregon. I will miss Aunty Thora, Uncle Ted, Colinette, Bob and especially Jon as it felt like we were still brothers on the farm back in Kuraby (Queensland, Australia.)