

## New York 2022

### Wed Nov 30

After many delays to our flight into New York, due to weather initially and then a crew change, we finally arrived 5 hours later than scheduled. Since we had missed the inaugural lighting of the Rockefeller tree, we decided to get some dinner and stopped at a restaurant near our hotel called Skirt Steak. Neither of us had ever heard of this restaurant and Helen voiced concerns for me which I blithely brushed aside as most steak houses offer a seafood option. We settled in but no one brought menus. We asked for one and the waiter pointed to a corner of the brown paper covering the table on which was printed:

skirt steak  
field greens  
fries  
\$35.00

They literally only served those three items. When the waiter heard me say I was hoping for seafood, he recommended another restaurant by the same owner with more choice. L'Amico was just around the corner, and we found the food there was very good.

### Thu Dec 1

#### Tavern on Green

Helen checked that it was going to be a fine day, so we decided to walk through Central Park. Our hotel staff advised us to take the metro to Columbus Circle stop and we listened out for Columbus which was not announced and realized too late that the 59<sup>th</sup> street stop announcement was in fact also Columbus Circle, so we went on to the next stop and got out. We headed over to a street map to get oriented and discovered we were just 2 blocks from the Tavern on Green, a restaurant that Mum, my sisters and our friend Sabina had eaten in years ago. And Patti had reminded me to check it out as she knew we were planning to visit Central Park. The restaurant was decked out in vintage Christmas decorations, and we had an excellent meal. Helen ordered a hamburger which turned out to be one of the best she has ever had, and I enjoyed the thickest, juiciest salmon burger I have ever eaten.

#### Central Park

The agony of de feet - so not having worn closed shoes for the previous two pandemic years, my winter boots had already started to hurt my big toes. But it was such a beautiful day and we wanted to see Central Park so a horse drawn carriage ride seemed the perfect solution. We really enjoyed clip clopping along with the blanket over our knees. A carriage with the name "Bada Bing" passed us so I sent Keeb a photo as he is a big "Sopranos" fan. We stopped at the fountain featured in the opening of "Friends", saw the path from "You Got Mail" and the Bethesda fountain from the big dance scene in "Enchanted". Keeb had taken me to this last fountain years ago and the day we were there we heard live saxophone music and hymns being sung as it was a Sunday. On this day there was only the sound of the carriage. On our ride we saw that a Christmas market was being set up in a corner of Central Park so when we were dropped off, we walked back to it and had a browse.

## **New York 2022 (continued)**

### **The Nutcracker Ballet**

That night we met Sabina for a catch up at Rosa Mexicano and then we took in the New York City Ballet's performance of The Nutcracker. This was a superb show that put us in a festive mood. Helen recalled it was A. Dawne's favourite. And for the rest of the holiday, I kept hearing the overture in my head. A case of a welcome ear worm.

### **Fri Dec 2**

#### **Staten Island ferry**

Since we were expecting fair weather, we decided to head downtown and took the Staten Island ferry. At first, it appeared we could not sit outside but that turned out to be just a result of where we were chivvied on entering the boat. On the ferry back we made our way outside and had a fine view of the harbour and the Statue of Liberty. We then went to China Town where we had dim sum for lunch and afterwards went to the 9/11 Memorial Pools.

#### **Saks Fifth Avenue & Rockefeller Tree**

That evening we took in the Saks 5th avenue store light show and the Rockefeller tree. The streets in that area were just thronged with people and Helen and I were in the minority wearing our masks. But we felt more comfortable in them in such populated spots.

#### **Leopoldstadt**

We then made our way to our theatre early enough to sit across the road munching on left over dim sum for dinner and tiramisu bought at the bakery to ensure we could occupy the outdoor seating. We then took in "Leopoldstadt", a play I was very keen to see as it was written by Tom Stoppard who is one of my favourite playwrights. This story did not disappoint, and although it ran without a break, we were so immersed in it, we did not even notice. This was despite the man next to me who fell asleep twice and snored loudly enough for Helen to hear on the other side of me. I turned to her with raised eyebrows, and she averted her eyes to keep from giggling! Fun fact: I had seen the 2015 movie "Woman in Gold" on Netflix recently and it is a good companion piece to this play.

### **Sat Dec 3**

This was the one day of our holiday forecasted to be rainy, so we planned indoor activities.

#### **Strand bookstore**

This is my favourite bookstore in the United States, and I am so happy it has survived the pandemic. Keeb and I have spent many a happy hour there in the past. There was that memorable time we bought a backpack load of books there, went to the hotel, emptied it on the bed and went right back to the Strand... this was in the days before Amazon. Helen was fine with going, even though she is an audiobook fan, and they did not carry those. I picked up several books by Connie Willis and I am looking forward to getting lost in them.

## **New York 2022 (continued)**

### **New York Public Library**

We saw so many treasures in this library including Charles Dickens's desk, the Harrods bears owned by the original Christopher Robin whose father penned "Winnie the Pooh", an original paper cut illustration from Matisse's book "Jazz" and Frances Hodgson Burnett's handwritten manuscript draft of "The Secret Garden". We also checked out an installation commemorating Virginia Woolf. We saw handwritten notebooks and photographs and on seeing a copy of Mrs. Dalloway I was seized with the urge to rewatch the film "The Hours". I have not read any of Virginia Woolf's books but from the display it seems she was experimenting with stream of consciousness writing before the name was ever coined.

The coat check lady at the library complimented me on my coat. This was a last-minute purchase on the way to the airport when we discovered I had left my winter coat at home! Keeb remembered this one clothing chain that sold coats at a shopping mall that was on our way. I am still amazed that I was able to get one since I live in a tropical country that barely sees temperatures below 18 degrees C. But there must be enough Trinidadians who are happy to buy their winter clothes in country. And I got it half price in a Black Friday sale to boot.

We staved off the chilly weather with a hot Thai lunch, dutifully packing half for dinner later that evening.

### **The Play That Goes Wrong**

Looking back on that night it feels as if the name of the play foreshadowed that evening. We decided to treat ourselves to a taxi for that play as we had walked miles that day with heavy day packs – I blame The Strand in my case. I called the front desk and asked for a taxi to pick us up at 7 pm as the play started at 8 pm and I mentioned the name of the theatre. The guy at the front desk responded that there was no need to get a taxi that early and we could come down at 7:30 pm and just call one off the street. We knew it was just a couple of subway stops away but thought we would be safe regarding the time to get there so we came down at 7:15 pm and it took another several minutes to get a taxi. And so began the ride from hell with the seat belts not working and the driver darting in and out of traffic then grinding to a halt in stand still traffic. When we finally got to the theatre, the play had already started. We were not sure if we would see that first half, but the beauty of off Broadway is the more casual seating policies, and we were seated immediately. The play itself was a riot and we laughed so hard,, Helen was hoarse the next day. And a reminder of that night is etched in our memories as the selfie I took is laterally inverted so the program name looks like a mirror image. A fitting memento of that evening.

## **New York 2022 (continued)**

**Sun Dec 4**

### **Central Park**

Our last day was beautiful and sunny and when we got up, we considered going out for breakfast as we had been having breakfast in our room so far. I thought of my favourite New York breakfast joint Pershing Square, but I did not look it up to see how far it was Grand Central Station where we were going to meet Helen's cousin Joy. We decided to finish off our snacks for breakfast and make a quick stop at Central Park Children's Gate so I could get a photo of the Alice in Wonderland statue as I already had a photo of the Peter Pan statue in Kensington Gardens. Walking alongside Central Park, we spied a Nathans hotdog cart, so Helen sampled this New York classic.

### **Grand Central Station**

After I got my Alice photo, we met Joy at Grand Central Station and walked outside to get lunch. We had only been walking a few minutes when there was Pershing Square in front of us - so I got to have eggs royale after all at the place I had hoped was still in business. After catching up at lunch we went back to Grand Central Station and checked out the holiday market together.

### **Russian Tea Room**

Then Joy left and we headed uptown to the Russian Tea Room where we had a reservation for afternoon tea. It was such an opulent and indulgent experience. Where else can a Canadian and Trinidadian have an English afternoon tea featuring African Rooibos in a Russian Tea Room in the United States? Only New York. I was quite impressed that each of us was served a three-tiered stand of savouries followed by a second three-tiered stand of sweets. And as someone who no longer eats meat, I must say I was able to eat the majority of the fare that was served.

### **Dyker Heights Lights Tour**

Our last experience in New York was inspired by a dare in the Netflix series "Dash and Lily" in which Lily dares Dash to go to Dyker Heights when the lights on the houses came on. I was fascinated that he passed a house with a multitude of nutcrackers. So, we booked a Dyker Heights coach tour to see those houses lit up for Christmas. The tour started by taking us through Bay Ridge and the houses there were typically tastefully decorated. But for sheer audaciousness, we were charmed by the overly elaborate decorations in Dyker Heights, including the Nutcracker House owned by Lucy Spada, the person who started the over-the-top decorating tradition in her neighbourhood. Seeing the Nutcracker house provided a fitting bookend to the holiday as the first performance we saw was The Nutcracker ballet. Helen and I found our vacation to be the perfect combination of planned and impromptu events.