

Toronto 2018

Now, when Keeb and I had agreed to celebrate our 27th anniversary in Toronto, I decided to reserve our dinner for the special night in advance as it was on a Friday. I googled best restaurants in the city and discovered that the top 4 were completely booked up that night. But the fifth restaurant on the list could accommodate us so I made an online reservation, and I noted my reservation number. Now I digress here to say I always make a "one pager" with a summary of all travel details and confirmation codes for hotel, restaurants, plays etc. which I print and carry with me. I promise there is a reason I mention it here. I just wanted it understood that I am not big on advanced features on my phone, therefore my paper one pager is my go-to document for everything.

We headed over to Canada on Thursday and had a lovely smooth Caribbean Airlines flight with a meal of callaloo, ground provisions and stewed tofu and having been entertained by the movies *Black Panther* and *Paddington 2*, we were off to a good start to our mini break. Then we got to the hotel and discovered we were not booked into it. It turns out that hotel chain has three separate hotels at the Toronto airport, and I had booked a different one to the one we had in mind, but they were able to sort it out. By the time we got into our room we were content to stay put that night, watch the thunderstorm raging outside and eat our salad bowls. The electricity then went, and as we are Trinis, there was no panicking and I merely edged nearer the window to continue eating in the waning light. Keeb wondered aloud how long it would take to have power back in this first world country and just then the lights came on. We were impressed.

Next day was our anniversary and we started out early to explore the city. It turns out on mornings, most places were closed but we were in search of a bookstore that Keeb had patronised the year before which was run by an elderly Jewish man. When Keeb found the location, it was now a Russian tea shop. This was disappointing but we found other bookstores and bought 13 books between us that day.

That night we set off for our anniversary dinner. When we came out of the metro stop near the restaurant, we were cutting it close, so we stopped a rickshaw and asked the driver to take us to the restaurant and his response was "Sure you want to go there? Someone was shot there a couple years ago." We were taken aback but said we still wanted to go and when he told us the charge per block, his partner advised us to sing Irish songs on the ride to get the price to go down! At CAN\$3.00/block I figured we did not need to belt out *Molly Malone*. Instead, I got it into my head that an anniversary photo of us in the rickshaw would be romantic and pulled out my mobile phone and I was trying to change the camera setting to selfie mode when Keeb said very loudly, "JO, WHY ARE YOU TAKING A PICTURE OF THAT GUY'S ASS?" I was certain the driver could hear him. So, I decided to just stuff my phone back into my bag and in shifting the contents, my precious one-page summary got caught in the wind and I watched helplessly as it blew into the street behind us. That piece of paper contained our restaurant reservation number.

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Soon after that, we alighted from the rickshaw at the restaurant. Keeb gallantly walked back down the street to find my one pager while I stood in front the restaurant. The hostess for the restaurant, who had been watching us from inside, came out on the street to ask what was going on so I explained about dropping something and that Keeb was retrieving it. I've never had anyone come out of their business to check if I was okay and I took her concern as a good sign. Our dinner and service were excellent, and I mentioned to Keeb that although the restaurant has been around for several years, the décor was very up to date to which Keeb said, "Well they'd have to redecorate after shootings..."

The next day my Canadian cousin and her daughter, arrived to spend the rest of the weekend with us so we met them at the train station, and we all walked over to the Waterfront where we toured the Power Plant art exhibition. One installation by artist Grada Kilomba was a pile of dirt with hollows with chocolate, sugar and coffee – it represented what African slaves were not allowed to eat (cocoa, coffee and sugar cane crops) and indicated that they were also stopped from eating dirt which was a way to commit suicide. It was a grim reminder of the dark history of the Caribbean.

On a happier note, we then walked along the lake and saw a Barbados festival on the water being advertised and Spice and Co were carded to perform. So Helen and I reminisced about a Barbados trip we made together more than 30 years ago when we saw Spice perform live at Plantation House.

That night we went to dinner at a restaurant called Blu and when I asked for them to leave the cheese out of my salad, the waiter told me he did not recommend doing that! Aside from that snooty remark the service was good and we were fascinated that one of the waiters went to place settings of people who went to the bathroom and rerolled the napkins for them. Anyway, the food was good but we were a bit rushed as we were also attending a play, "Potted Potter" which I had chosen based on the reviews. However, it turned out to be pretty lame. It was a one act play with two actors who summarized the seven Harry Potter books with really cheap props and lots of wigs. Now I have enjoyed the Reduced Shakespeare Company do a similar treatment of Shakespeare plays but this show was not up to their standard. In fact, when Helen and I went to bathroom afterwards and Jade asked Keeb where we went, he said "They're in the bathroom... crying". But we did have fun bad talking the show afterwards over dessert and hot chocolate. Honestly, there was one good joke in it – they had an upright coffin on stage and the door opened and a skeleton hand came out to give them something to which one actor said "Thanks, Cedric" and then looked at the audience and said, "Too soon?"

The next day we all went to the Ripleys Aquarium at the same stadium that a Blue Jays baseball match was being played so the crowds surging around us were a sea of blue shirts. But because everyone was going to the match, the aquarium was much less crowded than it could have been.

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Keeb teased me about hogging the seahorses. My plan is to try to quill a seahorse so I needed to look at live ones for inspiration. So what if the kids behind me were tapping their feet!

We really enjoyed our mini break and were thrilled that the plane was $\frac{1}{2}$ empty on the return flight and they left Toronto 20 minutes early ensuring we got home earlier than expected.

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