

October 29, 2001

Each year for Cheryll's birthday, I take her on the Magical Mystery Tour. I secretly arrange a weekend trip, and she doesn't know the destination until we get there. In August I booked a trip to New York City. We had made a similar trip a few years ago. We saw some Broadway shows and visited Ellis Island. We had fun and decided to come back again some day.

Then came September 11th.

A few days after the tragedy, I told Cheryll of the destination. I didn't think it would be fair to bring her to Manhattan and then say, "Surprise!" We thought about it for a few days and decided that if nothing further happened, we would go anyway. Lots of tourists were cancelling, and the rate of our room was lowered from \$200/night to \$150/night. At Detroit Metro airport there was no problem, although we had our ID checked four different times; at check-in, security, the gate and again upon boarding. Security was more thorough, but only took a few minutes. I left my penknife at home, and Cheryll took the manicure scissors out of her toilet kit. The National Guard was armed and present, but looked bored. One man was required to take off his work boots and have them x-rayed. We checked no bags, and just brought carry-ons. Our flight out was uneventful, and we arrived a little early. The pilot said that Laganrdia Airport is much less congested and the old schedules allowed for more delays. It was a short cab ride into Manhattan. There was armed security at the midtown tunnel, but things were otherwise normal. We checked into our hotel which is eight blocks from Times Square, but otherwise unremarkable, and headed to the TKTS booth for Broadway Theater tickets. We were able to buy half-price front row mezzanine tickets for that evening's performance of Les Miserables. I think we lucked out as the theater was full. Near the theater was a trailer holding the new and as yet uninstalled bronze fireman statue we'd seen on the news. Lots of tourists were snapping pictures and leaving flowers. The street vendors had no shortage of American flag merchandise for sale. There were pins, t-shirts, scarves, sweaters, hats and paintings. We could see no signs that the theater business was hurting, although we paid only half price for all of our show tickets that weekend.

On Saturday, we went to some more shows and visited the top of the Empire State Building. We had to pass through metal detectors to get into the building and a security guard checked our ID. I can't for the life of me figure out what checking my ID proved or could prevent. It was a clear, cold windy day and the visibility was good from the top. There was a small cloud of dust and smoke coming from the spot three miles distant where the World Trade Center had until recently stood. We also went on a Disney type tourist attraction called "Skyride". They put you in cars mounted on hydraulic shakers and simulate flying you around the city. They have not edited out the part where they fly straight at the World Trade Center and then bank and turn away at the last second.

On Sunday, the work stopped for a day at ground zero to have a memorial service for the immediate families of the victims. We decided to walk the four miles downtown to have

a first-hand look at the devastation. We walked the perimeter of the area which has about a one-mile diameter. We got within about a block of the damage in most sections. The police were stationed at various locations along the recently constructed fence. There was a little smoke and they were pouring water on that. Otherwise, the recovery work had halted for the day. The center section was rubble, and enough had been removed so that it was basically level with the ground. They'll still be excavating the basement levels for a while I suppose. Standing next to the hole in the skyline was a surreal experience. Several nearby buildings were damaged beyond repair and will also have to be brought down. It was eerie to see the metal beams sticking out the sides looking more like tree branches than building structure. Beyond that, several buildings had minor damage, blown out windows, damaged facades, and such. There was some dust and smoke blowing around and the windows on the nearby buildings were filthy. The street sweepers seemed to come by every hour or so. The fence that now surrounds the site is home to countless memorials, banners, flowers, teddy bears, letters to the victims, and many missing persons ads. It was very somber, and the normally boisterous New Yorkers were hushed.

The flight home was similarly uneventful and we arrived home early. As good patriots, it was our obligation to help the economy. You too should go and spend money, lots of money.

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