

## SEVENTEEN DAYS IN AUTUMN

### *Berlin, Rome, Venice, Lake Garda, Florence, Pisa*

**September 16, 2004 (Thursday):** 10:55 AM PST (GMT-8) found me setting in the South satellite of Seattle-Tacoma's *SEATAC* airport. E-ticket check-in had been fast, our bags checked through Amsterdam, and onward to Berlin's *Tegel flughafen*. It was the first time that Laveta or had been in the new concourse, a real improvement over the older ones. Security was thorough, including a shoe check, but lines moved quickly. I was fortunate to discover an unused power plug in the gate waiting area- so I'd managed to steal public power to run my laptop yet again.

While reviewing some useful phrases with which to introduce myself at my PATRAM\* conference presentation, I ran across this jewel:

“Ich bin kein Mitglied dieser Konferenz, dennoch möchte ich einen penguin.”

Which translates something like:

“I am not a conference delegate; nevertheless I would like a penguin.”

Isn't the internet wonderful!

Glenn and Gisela- who would also be attending the conference, arrived at the gate just in time. Every seat full, our Northwest/KLM flight 34, lumbered off the runway at 1:10 PM.

4:30 PM. (PST) Wow, I was over Hudson's bay for the second time this year! Scotland last May was the first. Lunch trays had been removed and I was on my second free glass of *Casa Mayer* a red Cabernet from Chile. Airlines rightly serve free wine on these long masochistic flights. Anyhow- the symbol on the label purportedly belonged to the *Los Onas* people, who over 400 years ago built fires to frighten off Ferdinand Magellan and his little fleet of ships as they neared Patagonia- an area still referred to as *Tierra del Fuego*- the Land of Fire.

\* *Packaging and Transportation of Radioactive Materials*

Time passes slowly at thirty thousand feet. I emptied the second glass, placed it in the seat pouch in front of me and settled back. It was a very long flight and I felt like a prisoner being forced to endure “stress positions” hour after painful hour.

**September 17 (Friday):** We landed in Amsterdam's *Schiphol* Airport about 07:20 (7:20 AM) European Standard Time. *Schiphol* is a large airport and required lots of walking. While Gisela was ticketed on KLM to Düsseldorf and then Lufthansa to Berlin, we flew KLM straight into *Tegel*. As a Consequence, Gisela would be about 3 hours behind. We considered waiting for her at Tegel, but with her on a different airline- in a strange airport- we decided to meet her at the hotel. I'd planned to take the Bus and then the *S-bahn* (surface train) to the hotel, but we were all tired and he taxi turned out to be a reasonable thirty euros for the three of us. Our driver though was strange indeed. Unshaven and unspoken, he raced our Mercedes down the autobahn like a highly competent madman- while we sat silently in frightened admiration.

We arrived at our hotel exhausted.



*The Estrel Hotel*

The ‘Estrel’ turned out to be a little different than I had expected, not quite like the Los Vegas it purports to be, but still a very nice place.

Worrying about Gisela traveling alone (even though she's a German national) made waiting hard. Hoped she'd take a taxi. (As it turned out she took the S-bahn). At about 17:00 she called my cell phone to say that the front desk had told her that neither Glenn nor I had checked in yet and she wanted to know where we were! Oh well- we had a great dinner in the hotel.

Since there was no broadband in the hotel rooms, I used my cellphone as a modem- slow, but good enough for email. I'd look into hotel wireless connectivity the next day.



*Waiting for the S-Bahn*

**September 18 (Saturday):** It was hot in our room and I didn't sleep well, though I still woke up at 07:00. We had a really great buffet breakfast in the hotel before leaving at about 9:20 to explore Berlin. We began a block from the Estrel by taking S-Bahn #41, then changed trains for the *Tiergarten*.

Walking down *Straße de 17 Juni*, we came upon the *Seigesstaiite 'Goldelse'*, the golden angel of victory that watches over the Tiergarten from the top of her 194 foot high pedestal.

We kept walking (and walking and walking) until we came to *Den Brandenburger Tor* (the famed Brandenburg Gate). Continuing on, we arrived at the beautifully rebuilt *Reichstag*, where it was open house. We explored the Reichstag (seat of the German parliament) for a couple of very enjoyable hours. We were lucky, as the open house was rather special lasting only two days. It was difficult to believe that the Reichstag had been burned by the Nazis in 1933, bombed by the Americans and British all

throughout the war and finally assaulted by the Soviets in 1945.



*At the Brandenburg Gate*

The weather was perfect with just a little high cloudiness. Laveta and I bought some *Bratwurst and Brochen* from a street vendor, remembering that last time we had done so in Germany was back in 1968.



*On the roof of the Reichstag*

We strolled along *Unter den Liden*, filled with shoppers and folks enjoying lunch at the many outdoor eateries and 'beer gardens' that flourish on Berlin's autumn sidewalks. Turning South onto *Friedrichstraße*, we kept on walking until we came to *Checkpoint Charlie*- seemingly rather small and quaint now in modern Berlin. There was a time though, when it was a symbol of western resolve- a small hut with sandbags

that loomed large in the history of the 20th century.



*Checkpoint Charley*

Heading underground we picked up the U-Bahn (#6) to the Tempelhof station where we transferred back to S-Bahn (#41) for the Sonnenallee station, only a block from the Estrel. On the way, we came across a small Turkish grocery where I bought some cookies, Cokes, Mars-bars and a bottle of burgundy. Lastly, the four of us had an Italian dinner (with German beer) before ending our day.

We'd set up our PATRAM booth tomorrow and see what kind of condition Floyd and Zelda are in when they arrive.

**September 19 Sunday:** Floyd and Zelda dragged in a little before noon- looking like long lost refugees. We met Trevor, the Executive Vice President of one of our customers and his wife Tabitha, "Tabby" who flew in from Ohio. Glenn and Gisela got the booth ready and we all stopped by the registration desk to pick up our programs and badges. The GP crew had a light Italian dinner before heading off to bed.

**September 20<sup>th</sup> (Monday):** Busy day today. We saw Richard (Sandia National Laboratories) after breakfast. Laveta gave him a big hug- she hadn't seen him for about 16 years. Wouldn't you know- right off, he wanted to know about foam and blast mitigation!

Laveta and Tabby departed on their "Accompanying Persons" bus tour of Berlin. The rest of us attended the PATRAM Opening Plenaries

beginning with the German "Minister for Transport, Building and Housing" (escorted out of the building immediately after his speech) followed by the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) Radioactive Materials Transportation Unit. Also speaking, the Director of the Maritime Safety Division of the International Maritime Organization, followed by the Director of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards.

We spent the rest of the day in our booth drumming up business, which went well- tiring though. Some of our visitors, represented serious potential business, others, like the two guys from the "National Atomic Company" Republic of Kazakhstan were just interesting.

I made a final dry run of my presentation to Floyd. The following morning I'd do it for real. Laveta and Tabby returned around 14:00. They seemed to have had a good time. Tonight's the opening reception- half social, half business.

*PATRAM reception*



Wow, the reception was really something! There were more than 600 people- scientists, engineers, business types, regulators, tons of food and endless (really endless- never seen anything like it) wine and beer. Cute little waitresses kept bringing out trays of the stuff... making it difficult to say no.

It was still going strong at 20:30 when Laveta and I pulled out and left for our room. Amazing how much English fluency improved after just 3 or 4 drinks.

By the time we left the party... I mean the reception; I could even understand the Kazakhstan engineers! One particular Japanese engineer kept dropping by the booth next door to squeeze the foam rubber stress balls being given away. A German gentleman even said a few encouraging words about our current administration (like Vice President Cheney probably wouldn't make it through another four year term). The French seemed politically resigned but polite- like whatever disease we had wasn't completely our fault. We all had had a great time.

**September 21<sup>st</sup> (Tuesday):** Got up at 06:30 and went to the speaker's breakfast. Richard was there as chairman for the security session. Others presenting papers in my session, "Package response to Fire", were from the US (Norman from Westinghouse, whom I knew) and others from the UK and France. Breakfast finished- we set off for the "Paris" room. The session chair was Carlos Lopez (of Sandia) co-chair was Wenzel Brucher, of GRS, Germany.



*Speaker's podium*

Standing at the podium and scanning the audience I could see Laveta and the rest of the GP crew. The damn lapel mike popped off early during the presentation, but once retrieved and reattached, the presentation went smoothly. It even elicited interest and some good questions from the session chair (the only presentation that did). Was glad it was over.

In the afternoon Laveta, Zelda, Giesela and Tabby went shopping together in Berlin and Floyd took a few hours to go sightseeing. Glenn

and I attend to the booth- which was slow that afternoon because of the 200 metric-ton drop test (at the new German test facility) being conducted for a large group of attendees. All the busses were full- else some of us would have attended.

The girls got back about 16:30 after getting lost in S-Bahn and U-Bahn land, and having other small adventures. They finally took a taxi (with a very accommodating driver) back to the hotel.

Five Busses picked up those going to dinner at the *Deutsches Technikmuseum* hosted by *Areva-Cogema-Transnucléaire*. What a great venue for a dinner! Laveta had guessed right- nearly all the women wore evening dresses.



*Deutsches Technikmuseum*

At the museum entrance, very old bicycles and steam engines were on display. Moving farther along the first locomotives appeared, followed by more modern ones as we neared the dining area. Most interesting of all was Hitler's locomotive, the *Reichbahn*. And in a glass display case alongside the *Reichbahn* was an unopened bottle of wine... vintage 1940.

Tables and chairs, all covered in white linen were set in a large area bounded by two locomotives. For live entertainment, a stage with a grand piano was set up on one end of the room (really a very large roundhouse). There was a short welcoming address by *Jean-Baptiste des Escotias*, the chairman of *Transnucléaire*, after which many of us I'm sure, ate and drank more than we should have.

We left early, at about 22:30. Don't know what time it finally ended.



*Laveta at the Technikmuseum dinner*

**September 22<sup>st</sup> (Wednesday):** Worked at the booth and went to some presentations. I also had some good talks with customers and potential customers. All in all, it was a long day. At 17:30 we all headed out for a dinner boat ride through Berlin put on by NCS. Dinner was to be at 19:30 with the boat returning to the hotel around midnight!



*Dinner boat on the "Spree" river*

At 17:30 we were picked up at the hotel in ultramodern double deck busses (with steerable rear wheels no less). Arriving at the river *Spree*, we were greeted at the dock with food tidbits and "Red & Green" Berlin beer! The boats were long, around 150 feet or so, and low-needed to clear the many low bridges.

We found a table with Trevor and Tabby. Floyd joined us as we proceeded upriver towards central Berlin. Though it was getting late and somewhat cold we all went topside to take in the sights, including a long graffiti covered section of the Berlin Wall. After about an hour and a half, the food, wine and beer began arriving in the now to be expected overwhelming quantity.

Our boat ride was very smooth- indeed; it was difficult to feel any motion at all. Berlin certainly looked beautiful at dusk and in the later darkness. The best sights were well lit and close to the river.

Passing under the many bridges was definitely exciting as we cleared by only a foot or two. The boat loudspeakers would blare out "sit or go down!" Even when sitting, we instinctively ducked... then reaching up, we would touch their dark undersides as they glided overhead.

On the return trip, our boat left the river proper, taking various canals, including a lock that dropped us eight inches. We docked at our hotel at 30 minutes past midnight.



*Ready for the Banquet*

**September 23<sup>rd</sup> (Thursday):** I worked while Laveta and Tabitha "Tabby" went on their bus tour, which turned out to be quite an adventure. Their bus broke down and they elected to tour the exterior of the *New Palace* in Potsdam and *Sanssouci*, the summer residence of Frederick the Great. It was raining and they both got wet, but Laveta's photos show two goofy girls seemingly having a good time.

Today the Director of Research and Development of one of the large multinationals dropped by our booth and talked with me about the presentation. He seemed most interested in data useful to designers.



Glenn Laveta, Tabby, Trevor

The formal banquet was at 19:00, and what a banquet it was. It took place in one of the largest halls I've ever seen. About 700 people were seated, ten to a table. There were short speeches. Our friend Richard from Sandia received an award for his work in front of all the delegates and guests.



Our table

Laveta and Tabby wore black. The food was excellent, the presentation outstanding. A moment's inattention and one's wineglass was re-filled! Not a few left their tables both sated and sodden.



The PATRAM banquet hall

**September 24<sup>th</sup> (Friday):** Last day! Traffic was slow at the booth and PATRAM was over at 13:00. Our friends were last to get their crates. Laveta and I waited with Trevor and Tabby until they arrived then helped them getting their stuff crated and ready to ship back to the states.

We left the hotel about 15:30 and took the S-bahn and U-Bahn to *Friedrichstraße*, where we set off on foot for the *Dom zu Berlin* (the 14th century Berlin cathedral) the most beautiful thing we've seen on the trip to date. It has been lovingly restored. We spent quite a bit of time in the cathedral- Tabby leading us ever upward into the dome.

Walking West on *Unter den Linden* we met Nick (a customer-friend, who was waiting for us) then finally with the rest of the GP crew. We ate together at the *Dressler* restaurant, at Unter den Linden 39. Another great meal- other than I paid this time. Trevor, Tabby, Laveta & I took a taxi back to the hotel- arriving around 21:30.

**September 25<sup>th</sup> Saturday:** Exciting day! Phone woke us up this morning at 06:00. Gisela called to say Zelda had been vomiting and missed her flight. Laveta and I went to their room to check her out. "Z" was in bed, but alert- was sure that it was food poisoning from last night. I gave her a Dramamine and a couple of *Hyoscyamine* tablets to help control cramping

and then went down with Gisela to get some breakfast.

Reading my email at breakfast didn't help things. From Carol I learned that Mom was released from the hospital today to Fountain Court- where she lives, (though my sister was concerned she wasn't yet ready) and that during the transfer my sister-in-law, Pat had chest pains and was taken to the hospital!

When I called Zelda again about 9:00, I found out that Giesla had called a doctor- who was already there treating her. We came over again and watched the doc. He made her vomit some more then hooked her up to a drip that was strapped high up on a floor lamp! Zelda was in good spirits- considering. She wanted a photo of her and her with her drip- so I took it with Gisela's camera. We were lucky to have Gisela there, as the doc didn't speak English. Gisela translated that the doctor diagnosed it as common food poisoning, and that she could probably fly home the next day. Gisela would take care of her, then take the train to Nuremburg to see her family the following day. As things seemed to be well handled (Gisela deserves some kind of special award for this one) and with a good prognosis from the doctor, Laveta and I left for *Schoenefeld Flughafen* to catch our flight to Rome. I had so many things going on that I put the hotel bill on my credit card (rather than the company's)!! Still felt guilty leaving.

I called Zelda's cellphone from the airport. She said that the doctor explained that she should wait until Monday the 27th to fly home. Actually, I kind 'a felt queasy myself...

Called "Z" again when we arrived in Rome. She seemed ok and resigned to leave on the 27th. Called Floyd- no answer. Called Sharon and told her the situation. Told her to have Floyd call Zelda at a convenient time (for Zelda) so she feels company support. Also told Gisela (again) that days spent helping "Z" are not vacation.

Got to our hotel in *Roma* (Rome) and had our first meeting with our tour director *Marisa Anderton*, who proved to be a wonderful (and quite pretty) mother hen who took care of all of us in her flock. She was downright imperious

with hotel managers (as a *Trafalgar* tour director she had clout) but she cared for us like we were family.



*The Pantheon*

We were out on the tour an hour after we arrived in Rome. Driving over the *Fiume Tevere* (Tiber River) Claudio our driver, parked our bus and we walked a few blocks to the *Pantheon* (awesome) particularly so since we'd just walked around a corner, then with no warning- there it was, looking magnificently out of place. Its dome was made of concrete- two thousand year old concrete, a material that I believe that the Romans invented.



*The Spanish Steps*

Walking to the beautiful and crowded *Piazza Navona*, we took in the sights, had dinner in a little restaurant few blocks from the piazza, then walked and bused our way through night-time Rome

Wake up was set for 6:00 AM



*St. Peter's Basilica*

**September 26<sup>th</sup> (Sunday):** Man, did I sleep. The alarm woke us up at 06:00. We had breakfast in the hotel- then left for the *Vatican*. The lines were long but we were reasonably close to the front- having to wait a only little over an hour. We proceeded through security and then straight into the Vatican museum which was absolutely incredible- better than I had expected. Proceeding down more hallways we entered the *Sistine Chapel*, which was just breathtaking! Genius is too weak a word to describe Michelangelo's accomplishment. Walking down new and old hallways with many twists and turns; we found ourselves outside in front of St Peter's, looking out into the great colonnade. St Peter's appears big on the outside, but that hardly prepared me for how big it was on the inside! It's certainly the most beautiful enclosed space I'd ever entered. Michelangelo's *Pietà* was in one corner behind glass. It was his first major work, accomplished when he was in his early twenties and the only major work that he ever signed. After the *Pietà*, his work hardly needed a signature.

While inside St Peter's, my cellphone vibrated and I walked over to a corner to answer. It was Zelda on a plane home! Our Zelda was ascending into the heavens in a DC-10. I imag-

ine that they'll talk about this one at work for a long time... as "The Miracle of St Peter's".

Laveta and I had lunch just a block off the colonnade in a little place called *Il Collonato*. We had soup and tortellini, which I topped of with a bottle of *Birra Peroni* beer.



*The Coliseum*

Returning to our bus we headed off to the Forum and Coliseum. Lots of tourists, vendors, and beggars about, but these incredible structures and ruins seemed to notice them not at all... and after awhile neither did we.

Returning to the hotel for a couple of hours, we left for the *Spanish steps* and *Trevi fountain*, where we tossed the obligatory coin over our shoulders. From the fountain, we walked through crowds of well dressed young people (actually, in Italy everyone dresses well all the time) to our restaurant *Il Giardino*. This meal might be called the meal from hell- not because it was bad, but because it was so damn good. I lost track of all the dishes served, most of which were new to me- waters just kept bringing them out. When we emptied a wine bottle, it was re-filled. We were serenaded. At meals end we toasted our hosts with *Lemon Cello* liquor. Our bus picked us up (thankfully) only a couple of blocks away. Got back to the hotel about 22:30.

**September 27<sup>th</sup> (Monday):** Were on the road at 08:30; more precisely, Motorway-A1 North from the Roma Ring Road, through *Firenze* (Florence) Bologna, Ferrara, *Padova* (Padua) to our destination for today *Venezia* (Venice).



Traveling literally “under the Tuscan Sun”, we kept on our northern path. Tuscany was indeed beautiful with picturesque mountain towns perched on hilltops. The *Apennines*, distant at first, approached slowly from the West. Crossing over, we dropped into the flat plains that begin just South of Bologna. After an hour the country reminded me of California’s San Joaquin valley, only greener. We crossed the river *Po*, the longest river in Italy at 14:55. We arrived in Venice in late that afternoon, whereupon things got very busy for the next few days.



*Venice at night*

An hour after arriving at our hotel in *Mestre*, located on the mainland opposite Venice, we headed off in our bus and water taxi to *Venezia* proper, where we took the requisite (serenaded) gondola ride. Returning to the hotel, we had the only indifferent dinner of the trip, followed by an evening trip back to *Veneczia*. Disembarking, we walked the waterfront, crossed four bridges and past the hall were *Vivaldi* first performed his “Four Seasons”.

Turning right, we entered *Piazzetta San Marco*, seated ourselves at an outdoor table and were soon drinking Venetian style hot chocolate as the full moon rose slowly above the 900 year old *Basilica de San Marco*. A musical quintet played a medley from “The Sound of Music” then topped things off with a New Orleans rendition of “When the Saints Go Marching In”- to the applause of a couple hundred or so people in the square. That’s when Laveta called Carol

back in Tacoma. Where were our best friends, when we needed them?



*Laveta- Burano Island*

It was close to 22:00 when we took our leave of the moonlit *Piazzetta*. Enchanted but tired, our water taxi whisked us to our bus- and then onward to our hotel.



*Me- Burano Island*

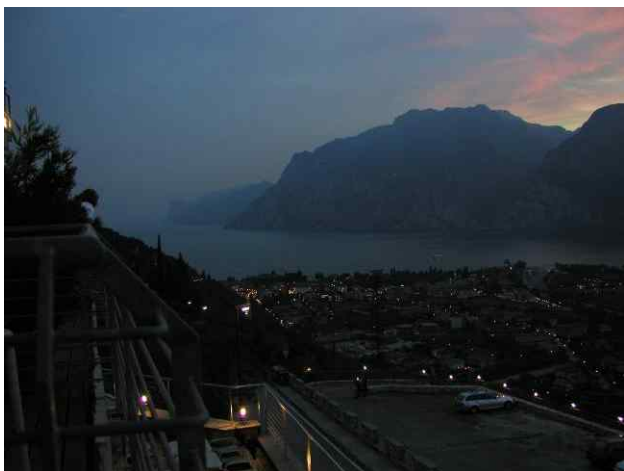
**September 28<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday):** Up at 06:30, we had breakfast in the hotel then headed out early for Venice. Once there, we went to a glass factory before heading out on our own. Making our way to the *Rialto Bridge* we came upon a farmer’s market. Wow! I’d never seen anything like it- even in Seattle. Weirdest part was that we ran across the beans we grow in our garden. We call them “Kinsky Beans” and had never seen them in a store. Venice had lots- called *Borlotti Beans*. They sold them in the pods.

Also ran across a Disney film crew in San Marcos square filming “Casanova” starring Jeremy Irons. There were tons of cameras and equipment and what seemed like at least a hundred costumed extras. You could take photos though were asked not to use a flash.

Venice proper is a really neat place to wander around in, but we had things to do elsewhere.

At 11:00 AM our party left Venezia by water taxi and proceeded to another island called *Burano*. There is on Burano, a most beautiful town complete with its own leaning tower. The island is neat, clean and mercifully lacking the crowds plaguing Venice. A most enchanting place!

We had a great lunch there, with so many courses that they replaced our plates four times, and served (white) wine in wide mouth pitchers! Called *Osteria Ri Pescrator*, It was, without a doubt the best white wine I ever drank. The meal ended with coffee and a red wine-like drink that tasted of raspberries. Wonderful! Our meal over, we boarded our water taxi, then our buss and headed off to *Lake Gardia*.



*Lake Garda*

From *Venezia*, we proceeded west on motorway A4. Just past *Verona* we turned off the motorway and journeyed northward along the shores of *Largo di Garda* (Lake Garda). The lake is very large (much larger than Lake Chelan in Washington State) and a fine example of a subalpine lake- deep and surrounded by mountains. Actually we were probably only about a couple hundred kilometers or so from Innbruck.

The lake is ringed in vineyards, beautiful little towns, old churches, and most of all by high mountains. Our hotel was located about 500 ft up an eastern slope at the north end of the lake. We arrived at 18:30 and had dinner at 19:15. I backed up the day’s photos, sent some email and then took a shower. Bedtime!

**September 29<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday):** Morning call was 06:30, suitcases in the hallway at 07:00 then downstairs for breakfast at 07:30. Laveta and I ate lightly in a glassed in dining room with beautiful views of the mountains and lake before heading off to *Firenze* (Florence). Driving down motorway 22 to *Verona*, we continued on 35/35 to *Modena* and *Bologna*, then finally along motorway 35 bringing us into *Firenze* from the north.

The North of Italy is certainly prosperous with its mountains and rolling farmlands. There were grapes growing everywhere.



*Hercules and the Centaur- Florence*

The bus dropped us off downtown near the *Plaza St. Croce*, where tour-guide (the lovely) Marisa allowed us an hour to look around. Laveta found some *Lemon-Cello* to share with our absent friends in Tacoma. Going in to the cathedral of *St. Croce*- which was huge, I discovered that there are some famous Florentines buried there. On the left side of the church is the grave of “Galileo” and on the right that of “Michelangelo”! The grave of Dante was there also, as was Machiavelli. How absolutely marvelous!

Walking further deeper into old Florence we came upon the intricate façade of the *Duomo*, the great renaissance basilica whose dome was designed by, and erected without scaffolding under the direction of *Filippo Brunelleschi*.



*The Duomo in Florence*

We proceeded next to the *Galleria dell Accademia* where we saw works of the great Italian renaissance artists. The central piece is Michelangelo's 17 foot tall, 5 ton masterpiece in Italian marble: "David". But as impressive as "David" was- more Impressive still (to me) were the six or so unfinished statues recovered from his workshop after his death. Michelangelo famously said that he didn't create his figures; rather he "removed the superfluous stone". These larger than life figures are only partially released from the stone. Most of their forms are well defined, but only 20 to 60% complete. On one, the body was, though unfinished, distinct- but the head remained just a rough block of marble. Some have ghostlike incomplete bodies or faces- prisoners trapped forever in stone by the death of their creator- condemned to live in a stone purgatory for all eternity. Contemplating them kind'a gave me the creeps.

Dinner tonight with our group in our hotel, the *Grand Hotel Mediterranean*.

**September 30<sup>th</sup> (Thursday):** The majority of our group elected to go to *Pisa* rather than spend

more time in Florence- as did we. It was only about an hour and a half by bus and gave us a chance to see the famous leaning tower. The weather, which started out cool and cloudy, began breaking up about the time we arrived. Another warm and sunny autumn day!



*The leaning tower of Pisa*

Our young and pretty local guide, *Madeline*, wearing a white blouse, pink belt, green slacks, and silver shoes- not quite as beautiful as our exceptionally lovely tour guide Marisa but... Now, where was I, oh yes- Madeline bought tickets for all of those wishing to climb the *Leaning Tower*- which turned out to be just seven of us.

Climbing the tower was a strange experience indeed. The stone staircase, with smooth stone walls on both sides, ascended upward in a long anti-clockwise spiral, broken only by small level look-outs on each floor. Due to considerable lean, the well worn steps ascend at varying angles, both up and down and side to side. There are no handrails! But the climb is well worth it, as the view from the top is spectacular. Leaning over the railing, I wondered if this was the spot where Galileo stood dropping various objects to the ground below, all the while thinking mightily about constant acceleration. Going down was a little trickier than going up as the marble steps have been worn smooth by hundreds of years of use.

We (our tour group is somewhat of a team now) rode back to Florence to pick up those who had stayed behind, then set off for Rome.



*On top of the Leaning Tower*

I'm going to have to keep a closer watch on Laveta. While pulling out from a rest stop, she smiled at some *young* Italian (she said he was cute) who proceeded to blow her a kiss! We arrived at the *Sheraton Golf Parco de' Medici* in Rome, where we'd stay two nights.

We had a final group dinner with our tour-mates at a restaurant 15 minutes from the hotel- a very nice place. Not only did we have food- we had entertainment, a quartet of three singers one piano player sang opera! Again the food and wine flowed and flowed. We sat next to some Ausies, and man, can they put away the wine- fine folks though. Lots of good cheer and good-byes, then miraculously, all of us manage to find our bus for the drive back which took us by a very recent, car-pedestrian fatal accident. A young man was lying face down on the roadway, his head ringed in a pool of blood, one shoe about five meters away, windshield on the stopped car completely shattered. The scene rather muted our ride back to the hotel.

**October 1<sup>st</sup> (Friday):** We slept late this morning and had a buffet breakfast in the hotel, then took the hotel shuttle to the *Piazza Venezia* near the *Victor Emanuel* monument. Going first to the monument meant crossing *V. Teatro Marcello* near *Piazza Ara Coeli*. Crossing any major arterial on foot is indeed taking one's life in hand (I was thinking about previous night).

In Italy NO ONE stops for pedestrians, unless proceeding means the certainty of hitting someone. And the scooters! There must be more scooters in Rome than cars. Furthermore, there seems to be no rules for their operation. At a major intersection stop signal- the cars stop, but perhaps a dozen or so scooters lane-split and so end up at the front of the pack. When the light turns green- the scooters (all of them) head out first. Lane-splitting is easy since there are no marked lanes- there can be just as many vehicles as will fit across the roadway. The scooters move in and around auto traffic like mosquitoes. Scary! Good riders though. I saw things done routinely that I wouldn't even try once. That said, nearly all drivers here seem to be highly skilled. Normal drivers and pedestrians are surely already dead! I've never seen such situational awareness. Everyone pays attention. Most unbelievable, was that motorway (freeway) drivers, keep right except when overtaking! In any case, we were cautious but swift in our crossings.



*Victor Emanuel monument*

The *Victor Emanuel* monument is recent, dedicated to the 19<sup>th</sup> century reunification of Italy. Laveta and I watched the changing of the guard at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, before wandering over to the Forum. The Forum is the hart of ancient Rome- its ruins, extensive. We walked it from end to end, took pictures, then sat on some 2000 year old stone blocks and ate sandwiches made with the bread, meat and cheese we took from our breakfast buffet.

Walking back to *Piazza Venezia*, we grabbed a ride on the Sheridan shuttle back to the hotel about 15:20.

Our plane leaves at 6:35 AM tomorrow!



*The Roman Forum*

Even though our tour was over, Marisa had made arrangements for us to leave for the airport on a special shuttle at 4:15 in the morning. Seemed kind of tight, but the airport's was only about 15-20 minutes away and uncrowded at that hour. We ate dinner in the hotel as soon as the dining room opened at 19:00 (the earliest anyone eats dinner in Italy).

**October 2<sup>nd</sup> (Saturday):** The van arrived at our hotel just as Marisa had promised. She'd also arranged that Laveta and I be given breakfast bags- with more sandwiches, cheese, rolls and apples than we could possibly eat.

The sky was clear as our 737 rose with the early morning sun at 06:40 local time. Wings tilting northward, we headed for Amsterdam.

It was a crowded seventeen days and Berlin already seemed ages ago.

It was a very enjoyable trip. The Germans were gracious hosts and had put together a world-class conference. We were well treated by nearly everyone. I was a little surprised at how much work remained to be accomplished in what was East Berlin, which looked rather forlorn. The amount of Graffiti in Berlin (on just about everything) was astounding. Graffiti in some parts of Rome was bad also, though nothing like Berlin.

Apart from these things, Berlin was a fun town with lots of things to see and a great public transportation system. The PATRAM symposium went well and Laveta had a grand time.

Italy in particular exceeded my expectations. It was, except for the omnipresent outdoor advertising a beautiful land populated with beautiful people. The American preoccupation with getting ahead and the craving for a life in the suburbs (a life that I must confess I do find seductive) does have its downsides. Italian's live a much more compact city life (even in smaller towns) a life that includes far more interaction with others. Perhaps because of this closeness, they tend to be more conscious and refined in their grooming and dress (they wouldn't be caught dead in public wearing sweats). Italians walk far more, eat less refined foods and in smaller proportions which surely contributes to a conspicuous lack of obesity (as may smoking- an otherwise unhealthy habit that's much more common in Europe than in the states).

These traits, to a greater or lesser degree, appear all across Western Europe. Americans (particularly those from the West Coast) seem rather grungy by comparison. At the gate in Amsterdam, returning out-of-shape Americans, with their shorts, flip-flops and sweats were immediately apparent- they hardly needed passports.

The weather in Italy reminded me of San Diego. The Italian countryside was simply marvelous, particularly in Tuscany and in the Lakes District to the North. Lastly- perhaps living with so much history imparts a perspective that America lacks.

That said, there is a vitality, work ethic, optimism and capacity for change in the American psyche that's less apparent in Europe.

We're cruising now at 11,000 meters over the Atlantic, chasing the sun westward. I'll call Jim to pick us up when we touchdown in Seattle. It's good to have friends... and it'll be good to be home.

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