

Monday February 12th 2018

We were very disappointed the hear rain hitting the roof when we woke up. We are going to have to phone Noah and reserve two seats on his ark. Louise heard NOAA.

We were slow getting up making sure to do back stretching exercises to loosen up the lower spine. They appear to have an effect as David was in little pain early on – usually it takes while to get the back loosened up.

We had a late breakfast about 08:30, which included some very crisp cantaloupe that needed some help from pecan butter ice cream.

We were slow on the NYTX – Louise 3 minutes 22 secs and David 4 minutes 11 seconds. We both got tripped up by Pi Day shown as 3/14 We simply had never heard of it. Pi Day is celebrated on March 14th (3/14) around the world. Who knew of this celebration? Pi (Greek letter “ π ”) is the symbol used in mathematics to represent a constant — the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter — which is approximately 3.14159. For both of us the 3/14 brought Pi to mind, but not PiDay. Something new to us!

For some whimsical reason the incessant rain reminded David of his joining his tank regiment in North Germany in September, 1964. He remembered sharing a tent with another RMC grad one year later in the Soltau Training Area south of Hamburg (it had been acquired from the Wehrmacht). The German Army surrendered to General Montgomery on the Lueneburg Heide just east of Soltau on May 4th, 1945.

Weather: Toronto: 23F to 25F freezing rain ; Louisville: 28F to 43F sun; Gray: 65F to 68F rain – flooding.

We continued to wait for the sun – we read.

The Sunday NYT is usually covered on Monday, especially the Arts section. Lots of good stuff there today to interest Louise. And a good thing, too: we are housebound by the weather again today.

In the late morning Louise made two sketches of seabirds using her colored pencils. David finally shaved and showered. We were now in very low gear and were finding it hard to get motivated to do anything. David was suffering from his pseudo Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) – it used to get him down during the Ruhr and Rhine winter months when the sun disappeared for weeks at a time.

We had tomato soup and avocado salad, with half a beer each, for lunch.

David has been trying valiantly to understand US politics. He simply does not understand what the CBC reported as :

U.S. President Donald Trump has unveiled a \$4.4-trillion US budget for next year that heralds an era of \$1 trillion-plus federal deficits and — unlike the plan he released last year — never comes close to promising a balanced ledger even after 10 years.

"A lot of presidents' budgets are ignored. But I would expect this one to be completely irrelevant and totally ignored," said Jason Furman, a top economic adviser to President Barack Obama. "In fact, Congress passed a law last week that basically undid the budget before it was even submitted."

Fortunately, far more important news from the CBC offered a glimmer of hope. *"Prince Harry and fiancée Meghan Markle have released more details about their May 19 wedding, revealing that the event will include a carriage ride through Windsor so they can share the big day with the public."*

Oh, spare me!

We decided to go grocery shopping at Publix and dropped by the Sand Dollar Rental office. En route we dropped into a small neighborhood where Louise squealed in delight when she saw a kumquat tree laden with fruit. Louise used to have her own tree when she lived in Florida.

Sand Dollar was closed.

Back at the cottage we saw two men on the street trying to unblock a drain. The side street was completely flooded. From them we discerned that Street Table might mean a bridged drainage ditch.

Louise continued to try her hand at watercolor. The sandpipers again, and so it goes . . .

We read until supper. For that meal we prepared very tasty hamburgers, laced with chopped onion and garlic.

After dinner we read a bit and then dived into Boston Legal. The series is very good about showcasing social issues.

Tuesday February 13th 2018

Mardi Gras

David had a rough start taking 6 minutes and 10 seconds for the NYTX.

Toronto: 16F to 25F cloud ; Louisville: 30F to 50F sun-cloud ; Grayt: 60F to 75F sun-cloud. The weather radar showed a lot of flooding in our area. We can see that there is standing water in the streets and driveways, and roadside ditches. The area smells like a swamp now . . . wonder why?

CBC: U.S. President Donald Trump is complaining about Canadian trade practices while threatening some as-yet-undefined international tax that has revived fears he might be contemplating new American import penalties. "Canada does not treat us right in terms of the farming and the crossing the borders," Trump said.

BBC: The Commonwealth has secretly begun considering who might succeed the Queen (age 92) as its head. The issue is hugely sensitive because the role is not hereditary and will not pass automatically to the Prince of Wales on the Queen's death. It was founded in 1931: There are 53 member countries: About 2.4bn people live in Commonwealth countries .

NYT: Fertility rates in the United States are dropping quite dramatically, so says the NYT. But we see little evidence of that. It seems everywhere we go we encounter young women and couples with three or four children. We often notice and wonder how they can afford these families in this day and age. Louise's ob/gyn recently commented to her that his business is booming. He averred that big families are back. . . .Oh well, enough for anecdotal evidence.

The NYT has also had a couple of articles about the Obama's official portraits. Very interesting. Barack Obama's, though very far from the norm, is quite wonderful and expressive in a way few portraits can be because of the way the artist has set the background. Michelle Obama's has an unusual, arresting setting, too. Her gown dominates the portrait and her face is barely distinguishable. It is, Louise believes, not fully representative of the strong, forceful woman she is. Though it is true that she excelled at using her clothes to send messages.

The sun seems to be trying to peek through the clouds this morning. We will try to find some waders so that we can make our way to the car. Then we'll try for a ride to explore Panama city. We hope the brakes don't go growling today as they did yesterday. A bit scary! Did they rust during the more than 48 hours of downpour we had over the weekend?

It warmed up quite nicely once the sun burned through the clouds. We departed for Panama City Beach about 11:00 hrs. We took the slow route along 30A and slowly wended our way through a succession of "Beaches". We spotted a number of small groups on bicycles. Florida is a great place for bike riding as it is mostly flat.

Basically the whole shoreline is built up, but there are obviously some developments that are more upscale, one being a seaside gated community. A unique one was what we dubbed the "Arabian Beach" - actually it was "Seacrest". The road was marked with tall white towers ziggurat-like, on either side at the entry and exit and the road was lined on both sides with tall date palms. A Bedouin leading a camel, or one of those Moroccan cavalry on a white horse, would not have been a surprise. All the buildings were white and squarish, reminiscent of the desert and definitely a cut above.

We ran out of 30A and had to join Hwy 98. As we entered Panama Beach we spotted the Visitors Bureau and stopped in to grab a map. We took the coast road and followed the franchises lined up one after the other. The area was "industrial beach" - tall hotel blocks cast formidable shadows.

We were all too happy when we spotted a "Shrimp Basket". We had enjoyed our lunch in this franchise at Pensacola Beach and decided not to take a chance. Louise ordered up two appetizers, coconut breaded shrimp and "boom boom" shrimp. David ordered two Yuengling lager beers.

After lunch we walked next door to a beach apparel emporium. Neither of us found anything of interest. We drove further east and finally saw the "Ripley's Believe It Or Not" - the sinking Titanic. Nothing so epitomized what we had seen quite like this monstrosity, so we parked the van and took a photo. It was all kind of sad.

We had seen enough of the "Redneck Riviera" and turned for home. On the way we spotted a Michael's store and stopped in so that Louise could buy some blue pencils and a pad of sketching paper.

We got home about 15:00 and walked down to the beach in short sleeves and shorts. This was the first

day that had been warm enough. We soon noticed that there were more people than usual. We wondered if we were seeing the advance guard of Spring Break. The fresh water lagoon at the top of the beach had broken through to the sea. The normally clear water was the color of weak tea – we surmised the swamp water picks up a lot of acid pine droppings.

We walked for about an hour and, upon returning to the Little Pearl cottage, we gratefully indulged in Happy Hour.

All the fresh air had made us quite hungry so we started work on a taco supper at 17:30 hrs. Then of course we went on a Boston Legal splurge.

Wednesday February 14th 2018

Valentine's Day

Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day coincided this year.

As is our custom, we spent a ton of money on gifts for each other. Actually we are splurging a bit on rib eye steaks following a NYT recipe that is new to us. A NYT teriyaki steak marinade has been very good for the filets we often buy at Costco, makes a delicious steak and easy to do. So tonight we'll give the rib eye a go.

David's quiver was not full of arrows so he took one second less than five minutes to do the NYTX Valentine's crossword. Louise was much faster at 2 minutes and 47 seconds.

Weather: Toronto 32F to 37F sun Louisville: 48F to 58F rain Gray: 62F to 68F cloud.

BBC: A former Canadian prime minister tweeted that female television newscasters who show bare arms "undermine credibility and gravitas". Kim Campbell, who served briefly as prime minister in 1993, came under fire shortly after her tweet on Tuesday. This is just one more example of why politicians should not tweet.

David finished his book "Memoirs of Hadrian" by Marguerite Yourcenar. It was a hard read in that Marguerite uses arcane language in a slightly stilted sentence structure – it is narrated in the first person as if Hadrian were speaking to the reader. Hadrian seems to have visited every province of the Roman Empire. There are so many references to Hadrian's preference to adolescent boys, that it is no wonder that Hadrian and his wife Vibia Sabina had no children.

Louise read this book some years ago and enjoyed the leisurely writing style, as well as the imagined memoir of Hadrian. M. Yourcenar's deft touch and scholarship are admirable in themselves. Her "Reflections on the Composition" at the end of the book are an essential part of the story. The notes and the main text show a fine understanding of the transience of life and its pleasures. There is a snippet of Hadrian's poetry at the frontispiece that is incredibly beautiful:

Louise once had occasion to visit the Mayo clinic in Jacksonville, Florida. Believe it or not, the young physician quoted verbatim the poem below.

Animula, Vagula, Blandula Hospes comesque corporis Quae nunc abibis in loca Pallidula, rigida, nudula, Nec, ut soles, dabis iocos . . .	Little soul, gentle and drifting, Guest and companion of my body, Now you will dwell below in pallid places, Stark and Bare; There you will abandon your play of yore
---	---

And the last lines show the realist Roman ruler:

“But one moment still, let us gaze together on these familiar shores, on these objects which doubtless we shall not see again Let us try, if we can, to enter into death with open eyes.”

You can tell Louise admires Yourcenar's scholarship and her sensitive treatment of a man, the most powerful man of his day, who was as deeply human as he was powerful. Yourcenar spent years in one way or another on this writing, and she leaves it with the same sense of regret as noted in the 'little soul' lines.

We had a slow morning waiting for the outdoor temperature to rise. We started thinking about going to a travel agent in Louisville to find a long-stay package for 2019. We had searched the Web and came up dry. The travel market seems to have taken a hit from the VRBO and AirBnB sector.

CBC: The federal government is taking a somewhat noxious approach to studying just how much pot Canadians are consuming: researching our sewage. Statistics Canada will spend up to \$600,000 a year for a contractor to regularly test waste water from 15 to 20 municipalities across the country for traces of THC, the active ingredient in marijuana, and other drugs.

About 11:15 we went for a long walk, mostly to clear our heads. We strolled over the brackish fresh water lagoon. There was a heavy flow of dirty brown water and the gap had widened such that we were confined to the western side. At the surf line, that which had been a pristine white when we arrived, was now brown with lumps of froth from decaying swamp vegetation. There was also the whiff of decay in the air.

But just to note that some things never change, we spotted a woman (Metal Momma) strolling the sands with her metal detector and a little plastic shovel. Hope springs eternal, as the poet has written.

We heard the sound of a giant Mixmaster as an Osprey aircraft flew over going straight west. It is an ungainly, ugly bird.

We talked about the kind of vacations that might work and really ran out of ideas. We did conclude that two weeks was probably the optimum length.

We had a light lunch of chicken and salad.

We had waited for quite some time for fresh sheets from the rental agency. After the agent finally made

the delivery, we went for another walk.

We both wore shorts and short sleeves and found out that it was a bit cool for such attire. Instead of clearing as forecast, the sky was totally overcast.

Back at the cottage we read.

David started a book in the Penguin Classics “Tacitus - The Agricola and The Germania”. First came the story of Agricola, the famous governor of Roman Britain. The second part examined the life and customs of the warlike German tribes. It was a tough slog.

Louise found a January, 2019 Road Scholar trip that involved Zimbabwe, Swaziland, South Africa and Mozambique. It was train-based on the Shonogolo Express operated by Rovos Rail out of Pretoria, South Africa, and had 4 by 4 safaris to search out the Big Five. David had travelled with Rovos Rail from Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe to Johannesburg, South Africa in 2010.

About 17:00 we started our Valentine's Day meal preparation. We thinly sliced garlic cloves and placed the slices on top of the seasoned boneless rib-eye steaks. Then we pulled the leaves off rosemary sprigs and added them to the meat. We then used a plate to invert the meat so that the rib-eyes would press down under gravity against the garlic and rosemary. We let them marinate for an hour.

Then came the small potatoes that we had purchased specially, cooked with lemon zest, parsley and butter. We added some lima beans and green peas for color. After five minutes the steaks went into the oven for nine minutes.

We dined in splendor sipping on “Il Carnevale di Venezia” Cabernet Sauvignon 2015.

Boston Legal had a couple of really heavy episodes, just when we wanted something light.

Thursday February 15th 2018

Weather: Toronto 40F to 44F cloud ; Louisville: 64F to 69F rain ;Gray: 66F to 71F cloud & sun.

David did the NYTX in 2 minutes 12 seconds. Louise took a mere 84 seconds.

BBC: Teachers were warned in advance about the teenager who allegedly carried out a mass shooting at his former school in Florida, US media are reporting. Nikolas Cruz has been charged with 17 counts of premeditated murder following the deadliest shooting at a US school since 2012. Cruz was not allowed on campus with a backpack.

Over breakfast we decided that we wanted to visit Southern Africa in January, 2019 so Louise phoned Road Scholar and by 09:00 Ann-Marie had enrolled us. Louise had noted that several books were recommended as advanced reading, so Louise got onto Amazon and ordered three for starters. One of which was obvious given Louise's love of painting birds. Specifically, “Newman's Birds of Souther Africa” is being mailed to Louisville.

David started doing a mental check list of safari wear and concluded he had enough gear. But, Louise could immediately see the fashion possibilities. However, David remembered getting soaked at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe and recalled how miserably our ponchos had failed us at Iguazu Falls. So, we needed to get better ponchos.

On the camera front, David thought that his mega-zoom Pentax, the one he bought three years ago and has rarely used, would be the best for long shots. He has rarely taken video, due to the editing difficulty and problems posting large files. However, the image processing technology has advanced and David should start experimenting.

Louise asked about visas and the one for Zimbabwe can be obtained, through the Tour Director, at the border. However, we need to get a visa before departure for Mozambique and Road Scholar will offer assistance.

Late morning, in full sun, we went for a long walk on the beach. We took photos of a wading bird that we think might have been a Willet. The breach in the fresh water lake was still open and a vast amount of brown tea was flowing into the sea. The churning surf has created brown froth and the whole despoiling mess has yet to be diluted. For some reason the sea birds are attracted in large flocks to this brown mess. The wind was blowing from Mexico so at least the stench was not apparent. It was quite a good workout. When we got back onto the paved roads, it was quite hot.

For lunch we repeated the leftovers from our Valentine's Day dinner.

After lunch we read a bit. David tried to understand "Democracy and Populism" by John Lukacs. He gave after 50 pages as his writing style replicated a billiard ball rebounding from every bank. It was just too hard to keep focussed on where you thought the ball was going.

We decided that it was time to go for a beach walk. It was a bit cooler than before lunch when we started off. Then, as we got closer to the beach, we saw the fog rolling in. Down on the beach we could only see about 100 yards. We walked west as we had worn out the track to the east. After a while the visibility dropped even more. So, we decided to turn back before we became missing persons. As luck would have it, as we were leaving the beach the sun brought through for a couple of minutes.

David moved on to "The Virgin Suicides" by Jeffery Eugenides. The story line follows brainy Theresa, fastidious Mary, ascetic Bonnie, libertine Lux and saintly Cecilia. This was a completely different reading experience for David.

For supper we had a bowl of chili with green salad and toast.

The Boston Legal episodes were serious, hard-hitting material. They must have gotten a lot of legal advice before running the subject matter.

Friday February 16th 2018

The dishwasher ran, but the soap dispenser did not release the soap.

Weather: Toronto: 34F to 25F sun Louisville: 47F to 45F rain Grayt: 69F to 75F fog then part cloud

David did the NYTX in 4 minutes less 7 seconds. Louise 4 minutes and 15 seconds

CBC: The recent palace coup within the ruling African National Congress of South Africa replaced Jacob Zuma with Cyril Ramaphosa.. There was now a long missing sense of optimism in this country.

When we first got up we had fog. During a breakfast of cereal and coffee the fog burned off. The heat

pump started to make a whirring sound that we had not heard before. Turned out it needed to be switched to COOL.

We drove off about 08:45 headed for Navarre and Gulf Breeze to come at Pensacola from the south. The drive was about two and a half hours. Our target was the Naval Aviation Museum on Pensacola Naval Air Station – Blue Angels Parkway, the former back entrance to NAS, Sherman Field area.

We got about ten miles west down Hwy 98 and then we were stuck in a traffic tie up from a crash for half an hour. When we finally got to the accident we saw that two vehicles had tried to occupy the same space at an intersection. The police had roadblocks and a small detour set up.

Along the way the flags were at half mast due to the Florida school massacre. Later in Pensacola we saw a man on the side of the street with a home-made sign saying “Gun Control” - we acknowledged him.

We got as far as Navarre and then turned south over the bridge onto the road leading to Pensacola Beach. About half way along we pulled into a parking lot and stretched our legs on the beach, taking the mandatory photos.

We got into Pensacola and saw a sign for the Naval Air Station. We were at the front gate by noon and the sign said 100% ID. When we got to the gate the Marine told us to turn around and go all the way around the perimeter to Sherman Field. We accomplished that maneuver and had our ID ready at the second gate. The guard wanted a Canadian passport, which was back at the cottage. David gave him his ex-Canadian military ID card and we got waved through.

We made it to the Naval Aviation Museum by 12:30 and it was getting quite hot in the full sun. At the museum we once again had to show ID and the Marine guard put a red slash on David's hand and put a red wrist bracelet on Louise's purse, which she had to open for inspection.

We were very impressed with the museum, it being very similar in scope as the one we had visited in Rockcliffe, just outside Ottawa, in May 2017. The major difference being the focus on naval aviation. (The Ottawa museum, by contrast, had a great number of very early attempts to get the flying machine airborne.)

The aircraft in the NAS museum began with the US Navy's earliest attempts to fabricate flying machines specifically useful to the Navy. Therefore, the aircraft we saw ranged from the earliest flying boats, pontoon float planes to carrier-based fighters and bombers to the gemini space capsule.

After about half an hour of neck-craning, as many exhibits were suspended from the rafters, we decided to get lunch at the café. It soon became apparent that too many other people had the same idea.

There was a huge full-size replica of an airplane that the US Navy had flown across the Atlantic in 1919. To David, with its canvas-covered wings, it just looked like a model airplane. It had two outboard engines and one central pod with a tractor propeller in front and a pusher four blader in the rear.

We continued and got outside to look at the B-25 of the Doolittle Raid. Actually, the B-25 was the key to General MacArthur's sweep from Australia to the Philippines. There was one very poignant piece of statuary – a bronzed family group greeting a returning airman.

In an atrium a flight of four Blue Angels were suspended in mid-air.

We went back to the café and had a chicken salad sandwich and a BLT for lunch. A beer only cost \$3.35 – wow!

We made our way up onto the balcony exhibit space. There were many tributes to the pioneers of naval aviation and the heroes of campaigns. Of note was Pappy Boyington, commander of the Black Sheep Squadron in the Solomons.

We declined the opportunity to have a docent take us through the airship display. We were getting a bit of museumitis.

There was a memorable cluster of replica shops showing the retail situation in World War Two – you could get a “Blue Plate Special” for 65 cents and a haircut was 50 cents. Men in uniform got into movies at half price.

About 14:30 we left the museum – we were very impressed. We took our final photograph of the modern jet fighter on “Gate Guard”. We had cameras full of photos for the album.

We had a bit of trouble getting out as the GPS “Sue” knew nothing about military security. The Marine guard would not let us cut across the base. Finally we worked it out from a paper map and got onto Highway 98 East.

The traffic going home was remarkably fast-moving. About 15 miles from home we pulled in to a Winn-Dixie to buy a pizza for supper.

We got home about 17:30 so it had been a long outing. The oven went on and in about half an hour we were chowing down on pizza and green salad – we decided against wine as it seems to affect us when we are tired.

Boston Legal was really good, tackling some very tough subject matter. We are happily amazed as we view this series. Big issues of American life and culture, as well as legal hocus-pocus, are brought into view in such a way as to surprise the viewer into acknowledgment of the difficulty of whether to agree one way or the other. The satire/parody of issues as well as human character and belief are well done!

Saturday February 17th 2018

Weather: Toronto: 26F to 33F cloud; Louisville: 37F to 42F cloud; Gray: 71F to 74F fog then part sun.

David slugged through the big Saturday NYTX in one second less than 7 minutes. Louise stalled out. Between the sports knowledge requirement and the pop music knowledge requirement, Louise is often at a huge disadvantage. One for which she will neither apologize nor attempt to correct.

CBC: Canadians are withdrawing more money from their retirement savings to pay for short-term expenses despite the tax consequences, according to a new bank survey. About 40 per cent of the 1,500 people polled online in December by the Bank of Montreal (BMO) said they have made a withdrawal from their Registered Retirement Savings Plan (401k).

BBC: Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, has dismissed as "blather" the charges leveled by the FBI special counsel against 13 Russians for election meddling. The charges brought by Special Counsel Robert Mueller are seen as a major development in his continuing probe into the US 2016 election.

Fox: The FBI, which has been a frequent target of criticism from the Trump administration and Republican lawmakers, now faces additional scrutiny after admitting Friday that it botched a tip that

could have averted Wednesday's school massacre in Parkland, Florida. Louise has known of the fear prevalent in Florida, especially in the schools since the time when she lived here and taught in a public school. It has only become worse over time what with the arming of the citizenry.

A NYT editorial today was a plea for rescinding the Second Amendment. One would agree that it is an issue that is far-reaching, but the possibility of such a solution is as remote as the possibility of dissolving the NRA. Sorry to admit, but the chaos of today's society caused by global warming, lack of gun control, and multitudes of inequalities among people would appear to be completely without any feasible solution. And these are only the issues we know and have given a local habitation and a name. It also seems that the 'little by little' ways of going at problems can only be too little and too late. (A personal note from Louise who is unable to tamp down cynicism.)

We are looking at our last few days here. We have no more little 'side' trips, so we'll take advantage of the sun on the beach walks and the leisure to read.