

Vancouver, British Columbia (with asides to Seattle and Victoria)
June 2000

Thursday, June 22 — Seattle

I arrived in Seattle late (my time) but here it's only about 11 p.m. The flight in over the city lights and the water was spectacular. I wish I could do it all again. I hope Seattle is as lovely as it appeared tonight. But not all is well.

Joey didn't make the flight. He's I don't know where right now, hopefully being rerouted to get here tonight. We'll see. In the meantime I got stuck handling both bags alone. No easy task when you consider we've each packed for a week. And the carousel at Sea-Tac broke with one of my bags just out of reach. Doh! I finally reached Joey on the cell from the airport.

"You're home," I say.

"Yes," he sighs.

"What does that mean?"

"It means I'll try to fly in tomorrow morning."

I know the flight is booked solid, that's why we decided to come tonight. "I'll meet you at the gate at 11 a.m. if I don't hear from you."

"Okay." He sighs again.

"I love you."

"I love you, too."

Needless to say I didn't sleep well for worrying, and by the time I got to the hotel it was 2:30 a.m. my time. The Holiday Inn isn't so swell, but the Marriott was booked. We'll still be staying there tomorrow night, at least I hope it's "we."

Friday, June 23 — Seattle

Got up and went to the station to meet my contacts. Sea-Tac is an old airport and it looks it. I don't like the feel of it. But the people are friendly enough. Portland's still my favorite I think.

Joey did indeed arrive on the 11 a.m. flight. Looking tired and contrite he gave me a big hug. We both lucked out on window seats coming over. Makes it easier to sleep if you're capable, which I am. He's not, but what can you do? Enjoy the view. I leave him to transfer the luggage from the hotel while I finish up my meetings. He gets the shuttle driver to wait for him while he runs in and grabs the bags (remember, no small task). Then we meet back at the station and pick up our rental car. It's time for lunch!

Cruising into the city center in our brand new Camry, we discuss "The Hurricane," the film we both saw on the way out on the plane. We decide to visit Pike Place Public Market since I'd heard so much about it. Joey navigates using our half-assed rental car map. But we get there. And boy is it packed! But it looks like fun.

However, who knew that early on a Friday afternoon it would be so difficult to find a parking spot? Dozens of lots and n'ere a space in sight. After 45 minutes we find a tight one atop a four-story garage. Pity the fools that got to the top behind us. The lot was only two blocks away from the water, so we headed down to the market.

Reaching the market, we decided to support the Special Olympics and eat at Pike Place Bar & Grill. Not the best food ever, but their clam chowder was pretty tasty. Joey

had fish & chips that were decent but meager in portion. We were so hungry, but it didn't matter much. There were soon to be found many delights at the market. Plus, Joey had decided he hated the place by now. He was grossed out by the bum in fecally-stained shorts that adorned the stairway leading up to the front door.

Cruising around the market was another adventure entirely. We found everything from a four-foot-tall Santa Jack Skellington (which I am since in the process of purchasing from another toy dealer for half the price) to a maple frosted doughnut that was literally the size of my head. They call them "Texas style." Well, maple frosted being my absolute favorite since childhood (thanks to mom and Dunkin' Donuts) I had to have one. Joey soon found a new taste treat of his own: black forest cherries. The dealer was a Washington-based cherry grower that coated their cherries in different things. In this case it was dark chocolate, Joey's favorite. He ate the whole bag within a day or two --- except for the last few that baked in the sun.

We stayed at the market for a few hours and then decided to go to our next event: a Mariners game at Safeco Field. Joey's idea, of course. We arrive back at the Camry and pay our inflated parking fees before once again using our map of mediocrity to get down to the field. Once we arrive, we have a few hours before the game starts. After picking up our tickets we attempt to visit F.X. McCrory's for a bite per my dad's suggestion.

Walking down the street to Pioneer Park, the pre-game festivities have taken on a carnival feel. For about five blocks the industrial shops, storage buildings and apartment enclaves have pulled out grills and kettles to sell food to gamegoers. We soon discover that you can take in all the food you want — just no drinks. Upon arriving at McCrory's, we find that the place is packed with a private event so we walk around the square for a while. It's a lovely evening and Joey is really digging the park. I find a little shop and buy a present for my mom. I consider the McCrory's shirts for my dad but they're all golf style shirts. My father doesn't belong to that cult. So back we go to the game with a few stops along the way to try grape kettle popcorn and a big dog. Joey said the kettle corn tasted like Boo Berry cereal.

The Mariners field is lovely and Joey and I pay a brief visit to the team store. He picks up a few things for his dad. Then we go to check out our seats. They're fabulous. We're sitting just a few rows up from the field, behind the right fielder. They're playing the Orioles tonight but unfortunately Cal is off. I was so disappointed. The game went off without a hitch for six innings, until the innings began to drag and my jet lag kicked in. Boy I never wanted to be home so badly as I did those last three eternal innings. What you have to understand is that Joey will never leave a game early, even if you're killing the other team. Just in his code of ethics somewhere. So we stay.

After the game's over we head to our new hotel, the Marriott. It's lovely. It has a lodge feel --- like Fort Wilderness --- and there's a lot going on. I'm tired but happy to be there, and Joey's happy the Mariners won the game. But once we check in we're both asleep within minutes. The next day, to Victoria!

Saturday, June 24 — Seattle/Vancouver

We wake up at 8 a.m. Seattle time. I thought we'd have been up much earlier. We take a little time to get going. I eat my big doughnut until I can't eat any more. We finally check out and begin our journey to Victoria. We are planning to see some whales today. My friend Pete warned me not to try to take the ferry out of Seattle though (it gets very crowded, especially on the weekends) so Joey and I attempt to drive most of it. This goes along just fine until we finally reach the Tsawassen ferry, which is also booked. We aren't going to make any of our preferred whale watching cruises, so we decided to drive on to Vancouver and try again tomorrow. The only hitch is that I had planned for us to take a bus tour tomorrow and the times conflicted with a Victoria journey. Guess I'll have to miss it. Whales will be better, but I'm a little disappointed.

We decide to head straight for the hotel and go from there. Driving through Vancouver was amazing; very big-city. We were staying in the posh West End district. Some call it a second Rodeo Drive. It is a very exclusive metropolitan section of the city, and our hotel rose as a French chateau right in the middle. Strange. But lovely. We check in to the historic Hotel Vancouver, built by the Canadian Pacific Railroad back in the late 1800s, late in the afternoon. If you ski you may have also heard of their Banff Resort. In America their sister hotels are the Fairmonts. This gives you an idea of just how fabulous this place is. You know, designer shops in the lobby, 24-hour room service, the whole shebang. We raided the "honour" bar.

Once we checked in and visited our lovely little corner room, we decided to explore the city on foot for a while. No need to trouble the valet to bring up our car. ☺ After walking about ½ a block to the Vancouver Art Museum, we literally walked into a double-decker bus that was just leaving for a two-hour city tour. Behold the luck! And so, from our sumptuous back seat (the bumpiest I've ever experienced) Joey and I got a whirlwind tour of Vancouver courtesy of Gray Line and 50 Canadian dollars. Well worth getting to know the different areas of the city though.

Upon the tour's conclusion we had a good feel for what we wanted to do. First on the list: some of that incredible Asian cuisine. So we headed to the Shanghai Bistro and got some take out. I ordered ginger sesame beef and Joey got General Tso's chicken. Mine was wonderful and Joey even helped me polish it off he liked it so much. The beef was thinly sliced into medallions and the ginger sauce was dark and flavorful. The General Tso's was truly spicy, so I only took a small bite. But Joey loved the cashews with the chicken.

After a brief respite, we decided to explore the shops for a while. A cool Saturday night, we ventured forth into the city. But alas, everything was closed! And only 7 p.m.! What the heck ... It ain't New York I guess. So we looked around and walked over to an ice cream shop where we were cheerily serviced by a local fellow who served up some serious chocolate and bubble gum scoops. Meanwhile, an unruly Wall Street looking guy swiped a soda and acted like an ass when the guy didn't move fast enough for him (he arrived well after we did and behind one other customer). What a choad. He walked out without paying for the soda and we made fun of his complete idiocy. Certainly not typical of Canadian behavior from what we saw; like the way the guy working there never lost his temper. Anyway, Joey and I tipped the guy well and took our humongous cones down to the waterfront to watch the sunset. It was so nice.

At the water we encountered a funny group of Australians and a young Asian couple that were engaged in a dead-still liplock for like 13 straight minutes. It was hilarious. By this time it was getting dark so Joey and I decided to call it an evening so we could get an early start for Victoria in the morning. We'd agreed to be out of the hotel before 6 a.m. so we could be assured a spot on the ferry. I made reservations for a 10 a.m. tour and we hit the sack. So far, so good.

Sunday, June 25 — Vancouver/Victoria

We arose at 4:45 (yes, a.m.!) in order to make the first ferry. We didn't want any trouble getting over to Victoria today. Did I make it clear that you can't drive to Victoria even if you want to? We dress quickly and head out to make the Tsawassen boat. We do, and then I realize that I've forgotten the sunscreen. Oh well, we'll get some there.

The ferry ride is nearly two hours long. During the trip, I spot some orcas riding the wake next to the boat.

"Look!" I yell.

"What? The dolphins?" Joey says.

"Those weren't dolphins! They were whales! Did you see them?"

"I think they were dolphins," he asserts.

"No way! Didn't you see the white mark over the eye? And they were black. When was the last time you saw a black dolphin?" I say, with a touch of sarcasm.

"They were awfully small to be whales, Amanda."

"I guess they were babies."

We would come to learn from Luke, our naturalist, that these were in fact dolphins. There are two types of dolphins that live in the area, and one --- the harbor dolphins --- do in fact remarkably resemble killer whales and are mistaken all the time. So Joey got a big I-told-you-so on that one.

In the meantime, we enjoyed the ferry ride for other reasons. I had a very good breakfast — yes, I ate Canadian bacon — and we got to see the rising sun and the lovely water and the islands. We had a good time.

Getting off the ferry was a challenge as we emptied out last. But we got right in to Victoria and found the marina where our whale-watching tour was to depart from. We went inside the building to check in and paid for our tickets. We also bought some hats and some sunglasses for the trip. We were to depart at 10 a.m. and be back by 1 p.m.

This was where we met Luke. While Joey was making a final stop at the car, I was putting on the huge flotation suit you have to wear while out in the boat. Luke was our naturalist/tour guide and he was explaining that we were going out on a Kodiak boat, which --- for those of you who don't know --- is like a little speedboat with two inflatable pontoons on either side. And make no mistake, this thing will fly! Joey arrives just in time to get his suit and pick a seat. He opts for the front, which we've been warned is the bounciest. Since a small kid and his mom are already up there (it's three to a row), I decided to sit right behind Joey so he could enjoy the view. I sit next to a foreign couple. They were really sweet.

And off we go!

A few miles into the trip we stop to see bald eagles and cormorants. Lots of native birds up here. And this is also where we learn about the dolphins as we happened upon a few pods. They like to ride the wakes of boats. Ours was not only creating a wake, but every time we had to cross one it got really violent. It was like a non-stop rollercoaster, or a ride at Universal Studios where you get the crap beat out of you due to all the jolts and swerves. It was fun though. I was wearing my cool new hat by holding it down on my head. The only trouble was, Luke still didn't have any confirmation on whale sightings even though he'd been on the radio constantly.

He finally decided to ride out near the ferry because he heard that that was where the pod was most likely hanging about. To ride out there would take another 45 minutes or so, so we chose to skip the sea lions and he floored the Kodiak.

When we finally saw the ferry we also spotted a few other Kodiak boats out there. We knew this was a good sign. Luke powered down the motor and we watched. Then, we saw him. Ruffles! I know, not a very dignified name for a creature weighing upwards of a ton or two, but he was spectacular. He was the male in the pod and we watched him swimming and jumping for some time. They don't avoid boats like ours --- we're small compared to them. Then we spent a little time watching the females. They tend to swim in groups so we got to see gaggles of them all together. It was so incredible. I never thought I'd be seeing killer whales out in the wild. Joey was excited too and we shot pictures every time they'd jump, just trying to get a good shot. Unfortunately, my camera with the zoom lens had a dead battery so I had kind of a crappy camera. But we hoped for the best and the photos did turn out fairly decent in the end.

Anyway, we watched the whales for about 45 minutes. Then Luke said we had to go because he had a 2 p.m. tour. Mind you, most of the tours didn't see any whales that day, but Luke burned three times his usual amount of fuel and was making himself late in order to make sure we did. He was a good guide. The only thing he didn't do was turn on the quadraphonics so we could hear the whales (our boat had one of these). But that's OK. It was still neat.

Driving back Luke opened her up. He was gonna be late. Then, about 20 minutes into our journey he stops and turns around. Seems a friend of his from a competing tour service had had a little mishap with his boat. Oh yes, there they are. A small group in a Kodiak boat and flotation suits just like ours are sitting still off to the side of the strait. Luke goes over to investigate. Seems they've clogged their fuel lines. So we throw 'em a line and tow them over to a dock so the guides can flush the lines. Everyone took a rope or lended a hand in some way. What a tour! It was a lot of fun. I took the opportunity to explore the microcosm that was the Kodiak's "washroom." This boat is open air and the facilities consist of a 2x3 foot box with a pump handle. Between the accommodations and the task of getting in and out of that floatation suit, you know that pee had to be worth it. Joey took a picture of my emerging from the tiny box.

After that there was some apprehension about Luke losing his job for being late and for using so much fuel. We were going so fast I left my hat off because I could hardly hold on to it. Joey had never bothered to really wear his. It felt so cold out there, plus the wind. We weren't all that worried. But we should have been.

On the dock Luke's next tour was waiting. But it was OK. His boss didn't seem too mad. I handed him a big tip for all he did, and Joey thanked him for everything. We were one of only a handful of people that got to see whales that day.

Walking into Victoria, Joey and I were hungry to say the least. But we couldn't agree on a restaurant so we decided to split up. Unfortunately, the Hercules Greek place wasn't open, so Joey came down to the Mexican place I had chosen. It sucked. Victoria was really touristy and didn't invest a lot in food. Although Joey suspected the Chinese food would be good. The nicer places didn't open up 'til dinnertime so we had settled. After our mediocre meal, we walked through an arts festival and browsed through Victoria's Chinatown. That was neat. We even stopped into a tobacco shop where a very silly English gentleman helped me pick out a Cuban cigar (I was determined to try one this time in Canada). He was telling us stories about getting drunk and smoking expensive, hand-rolled cigars from the wrong end so that they unraveled on him as he puffed. He even kindly sucked all the air out of the bag he'd put my cigar in. This grossed Joey out but I thought it was too funny. Then we went back to the car and drove around town and past the Parliament building.

It was really pretty there in Victoria, but crowded by now since there were beaches and it was a gorgeous Sunday afternoon. By this time it was around 3:30 so Joey and I decided to try to catch the next ferry. We made it on with no waiting and headed back to Vancouver.

The closer we got to town, the more Joey and I began to feel our skin beginning to heat up. Our hands and arms were alright since they'd been in the floatation suits, but our faces weren't faring nearly as well.

Once we made it into town at about 6:30 p.m., we decided to go to dinner before heading to the hotel. We went to a place Joey found on the Internet called the Yaletown Grill and Pub. It was so cool. Yaletown is this old warehouse district that has now been turned into upscale shopping and dining. Some of the streets between the old buildings you can't even drive on. The only drawback is that it's like going to dinner in Buckhead. It's crowded and everyone's young and trying to be cool. But that's OK because we'd made a reservation on the way in so we got a table amongst Vancouver's Buckhead equivalents almost immediately and had a delicious meal.

We began with beer-battered artichoke hearts, which were incredible. Joey convinced me to try these. Ironic, isn't it? I then ordered a chicken penne pasta in a rose cream sauce. It was very good. Joey had ordered one kind of shrimp dish, but they brought him the shrimp curry. He also tried a few of their house-brewed beers, a wheat ale and their signature Jupiter brew. (Which you should do if in a brew pub.)

Dinner took about two hours, all told, and while we were sitting there our faces got redder and redder and redder. Joey's especially since he'd been sitting right up front and hadn't worn a hat at all. When we got back to the hotel room he was looking pretty crispy. I wasn't too worried then. He's usually pretty resilient, and I always thought I was the fairer of we two (in complexion, that is).

So we went to bed as we'd been up since 4:45 and I had the conference beginning tomorrow. Joey hadn't quite decided what he was going to do, but he thought he'd try to visit the suspension bridge.

Monday, June 26 — Vancouver

Today I went to the conference. I won't bore you with those details, but Joey had an exciting adventure in Lynn Valley.

While I was sitting through lecture after boring lecture, Joey discovered a park that was only about 15 minutes from down, up in the hills, that featured a suspension bridge that was 10 feet higher than the famous (and not so free) Capilano Suspension Bridge.

It lofted over a waterfall and led to many miles of steep trails and hidden pools. He especially dug the Thirty Foot Pool, where lots of daring kids and playful dogs would frolic in the afternoon. The boys would jump into the pool from the jagged rocks above. Joey saw one kid nearly hit the rocks on the way down. Joey climbed up to where the kids had jumped from and peered over the edge. Not safe at all, glad I missed it.

He had quite an adventure exploring though. See, in Canada they don't believe in fencing everything in just to protect the idiots. Their philosophy seems to be, if you walk too close to the edge of a cliff, fall off and die, then it's your own stupid fault. I like Canada on so many levels. ☺ But it was good for Joey and it was ever better that I wasn't there. My aversion to heights would surely have cramped his style that day. And he would have given me a heart attack for sure.

After that, he followed a trail through the forest to Rice Lake, a manmade lake created by the lumberjacks for their use. There was a memorial rock placed there marking where a plane had crashed in the 1940s, but wasn't found until 1994. He took a photo of a squirrel for Cathy and Steve. They're different here, dark grey on top with red bellies.

Meanwhile, back at the Hotel Vancouver, I was ordering room service and trying to check my e-mail. I also watched my soap. It was a nice break, but I was looking forward to tonight because I had managed to get a ticket for the evening's Nite Out event. A woman had posted her ticket for sale on the message board. I had a ticket that came with my conference purchase, but I wasn't planning to go. But once I got there and saw that the Nite Out was going to be at the Vancouver Aquarium and Marine Science Center, a place that Joey and I had since decided we really wanted to see, I was eager to attend the event.

That night, we took the shuttle bus over to the aquarium, which is located in Stanley Park. Yes, the park is named for Lord Stanley, of Stanley Cup fame if you're a hockey fan. The aquarium was packed with conference goers. There were seven stations of gourmet foods, everything from spicy lo mein to crab legs. And as we traveled between stations filling up our plates, we observed sharks and jellyfish and an octopus. It was really cool. We then saw a killer whale and dolphin show (Whitewings was a "faux" killer whale dolphin like we'd seen on the ferry). After the show Joey and I made our way to where the seals and sea lion lived. The sea lion was in quite a temper after being harassed by drunken corporate types all evening. The sea lion was barking at the crowds and banging on the glass (even pretending to bite) at the underwater observation area. Joey and I were embarrassed at some of the behavior of these now-drunk people. We

didn't blame the sea lion one bit, especially since it was probably past his bedtime and what were all these people doing here anyway?

The seals in were cute, and one was even the color of Tak our chocolate kitten. I thought he was sick or sad, but Joey thought he was just trying to sleep seeing as how we were there after hours.

The highlight of the evening for Joey was seeing the beluga whales. These are the white whales from Russia and they are ugly as anything, but really cool to watch. Once Joey got up close to them he thought they were beautiful. We hung around their habitat for quite a while. Before departing, we purchased a few gifts in the gift shop and make one more round of the tables in order to enjoy dessert. It was a fun evening.

Back at the hotel we were both pretty zonked so we decided to call it a night. Joey's sunburn and turned out to be second degree and his face was covered with blisters that had popped throughout the day and into the night, oozing some nasty yellow fluid which caked up and oozed around his eyebrows. He had considered going to the hospital, but had settled on finding some aloe vera and wearing a hat and sunscreen for the rest of the week. In fact, he said he'd considered skipping the aquarium altogether because he didn't want to gross anyone out, especially if they were trying to eat.

He stayed out of the sun as much as possible after that. I was burnt but not nearly to the degree of Joey's face, particularly his forehead. It ended up taking about two full weeks for all the blisters and scabs to heal. He was terrified he would scar, but he is just fine, though still a little discolored.

Tuesday, June 27 — Vancouver

Well, it's back to the conference for me. But before I do Joey and I decide to grab a McDonald's breakfast together. He's still uptight about his head oozing in front of eating customers, so he brings a lot of tissues.

Once I head over to my session, Joey goes up to Grouse Mountain for the day. At Grouse, he got to take the Sky Car up to the lodge area just below the peak. There were some beautiful First Nations carvings and he got to see a lumberjack contest. He has to pay to get in, but he felt that was really worth it. He tried to find Crystal Lake, but the lake trail was under a few feet of snow. Once he did find it, he discovered to his chagrin that "Crystal Lake" was really just a murky old pond.

After finding the lake, as Joey was hiking back through the woods, he saw a little girl walking perilously close to the edge of a cliff above him. Joey called out to her and made her go to her family because she was making *him* nervous. I thought that was both amusing and sweet.

He then got to ride the ski lift to the very top of the mountain, and once there, he said, there was nothing holding you back. He said it was beautiful and serene and that even though it was hot there was still snow up on the peak. Yes, he even ate some. He said it wasn't yellow, but it was dirty. I think you have to be from Georgia to appreciate his position.

Before taking the Sky Car back down, Joey indulged in a hot dog and a drink. Guess dirty snow just doesn't fill you up. And it's back to the Camry!

After leaving the mountain, he drives over to the Capilano Suspension Bridge (less than 45 minutes away) where he pays an extra 20 Canadian dollars to walk across.

He says it was cool but not worth the money. As I mentioned it isn't as high as the one at Lynn Valley, but it is significantly longer.

At Capilano, there are some really cool First Nations totem poles. Then, while walking across the bridge, Joey accidentally litters beautiful Canada when his ticket slips out of his pocket. A friendly voice from out of the sky (loudspeaker) asks that patrons should try not to litter or drop things. Joey says the view from the Lynn Valley bridge was better.

I was once again enjoying room service. This time a gourmet grilled cheese sandwich with seasoned fries and bowl of soup. Remember, we're in a five star hotel so even this kind of food is pretty darn good. But I'm glad once Joey gets back and I'm done for the day because tonight we're going to the William Tell. This is the Swiss restaurant that I've been excited about.

Once we get there I'm impressed with the service. Our severely Asian waiter is named Hank (or something comparable) and he helps us choose wine and dinner with care. I was disappointed you see, because the veal schnitzel Holstein was no longer on the menu. I settled for veal with a mushroom sauce and risotti potatoes. Joey's original choice of sea bass was no longer available, so he ordered the halibut instead. A good choice, and one that got us half of a dessert soufflé for our trouble. Now this is no small deal, for soufflés take about 35 minutes to prepare and they cost about 20 dollars Canadian.

When our meal was finished and Hank brought out the soufflé, boy was I impressed. He cut it up and served it with freshly whipped cream (unsweetened) and chocolate sauce. Though it was my first, this was the real deal in Swiss cooking. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Also, knowing how Joey feels about eggs I neglected to mention the main ingredient until he was nearly finished. He was enjoying it so much I didn't want to ruin it, but I wanted to see if he'd noticed, or would notice afterward. Once I mentioned it he was surprised and he said that he could taste it after that. But we both finished the whole thing. It's making me feel bloated just thinking about how much we ate that night. But it was a lot of fun.

After that, Joey decided he wanted to show me Lynn Valley so we hurried to the car (as fast as we were able given our full bellies) and drove up there. See, this time of year in Canada, and at that place on the globe, there are 16 hours of daylight per day. Even when we'd gotten up at 4:45 it was practically full daylight. When we arrived at the valley it was nearly nine p.m., but there was plenty of light.

Somehow, Joey talked me into crossing the bridge. I was freaking out and it took me a few tries but I did it. Once across he showed me the Thirty Foot Pool. It was a beautiful spot. There were lots of joggers and kids and dogs still about. And me in my dinner clothes and Joey in his. It was cute. Joey even coaxed me into getting up on the rocks in my flats for a closer look.

Walking back across the bridge I forced myself to stop and look at the waterfall from the middle. It was neat. But then I had to hurry across. Driving back through town to get to Vancouver again we stopped for groceries. I found a Canadian Slurpee machine that served Orange Crush Slurpees. I was in heaven!

On the ride back to the hotel we had fun playing Spot the Hooker. Vancouver is known for such things and the area we had to drive through was clearly a sketchy one. Though much more pronounced and yet less menacing than what you see in America, it was still worth locking the doors over.

Back at the hotel we decided to see Boiler Room on the pay per view and crash. It was almost ten p.m. when we started the movie. It was good though, better than either of us had anticipated. Then it was bedtime. Only one more day in Vancouver.

Wednesday, June 28 — Vancouver

The conference didn't have a first session until 11 a.m. today, so Joey and I took our time getting ready. This was a good thing since I had gotten up at 4 a.m. to host my monthly StationLinks conference call. I had another one to do at noon. Fortunately, the one this morning went by quickly.

Once we were up and showered, Joey finally decided that he was going to go to the noon baseball game. He'd been waivering — I mean, how could you top the Mariners game? — but eventually the draw was too much. He loves sports, you know. So off he goes to see the Vancouver Canadians (clever name, eh?) and I head for the conference. If you're not aware, as I wasn't, the baseball team is a "minor league single A affiliate of the Oakland As."

Lunch for me was a pumpkin muffin and a Pepsi during my noon StationLinks call. Lame! Joey had hot dogs and soda pop again. Game food! He topped it off with a cup of greasy French fries. But that's OK because Joey and I had big plans for dinner tonight.

When the conference was over, we met back at the room. We hurriedly changed clothes to make a 5:30 dinner reservation at the Kobe Japanese Steak House. Yes, there was a Kobe steak house about half a block from our hotel and yes it definitely featured Kobe beef because we checked the menu. We were so excited. Ulysses had turned us on to the notion of Kobe beef a few months back when he explained that it's reputed to be the best beef in the world. The reason for this is that the cows are fed a highly specialized diet that includes beer and daily massages. This makes the beef most tender. Essentially, they're treated as kings until the day they go to slaughter. Free range chickens never had it so good.

Our mouths water as we enter the dark, Japanese décor and prepare for this culinary experience. Even Joey can hardly stand it. They lead us upstairs to the food preparation tables and hand us our menus. We hardly glance at them because we already know what we want: the Emperor's Special featuring Kobe beef. There's even a brief explanation of the Kobe process in the corner of the menu. I read it to Joey. Our server arrives and we order.

"Oh, we do not have Kobe beef today," she tells us. "Only filet."

What? What?! No Kobe beef? Joey is agitated, the server goes to get her manager. The manager, a polite woman in her late forties, explains to us that they no longer server Kobe beef at all because it's too expensive to import. Joey is flabbergasted.

"But it's the *name* of your restaurant," he points out.

"So sorry," she offers.

On that note, we decide to leave because teriyaki chicken just wasn't going to cut it at that point. We return to the hotel to figure out what to do. I kinda had my heart set on steak at this point and I remembered the guy in Seattle (who used to work in Vancouver) telling me about Hy's Encore. Joey's up for it so I call them. They say they can seat us right away. Once again it's only about one block down the street so we hurry over. Joey seethes for the entire block. He's 0-3 for getting what he orders.

At Hy's we enter a dark, rich room fit for an estate's historical library — or a sendoff of Disney's Haunted Mansion. It was just lovely; Joey was enamored. Dark oak wainscoting and old portraits adorned the walls. The back dining room featured full paneling and a huge fireplace that lived in a round bubble. It was wonderful. We ordered a steak for me and lobster tails for Joey. "Fantastic!" he says of the lobster. I started off with a sweet carrot soup that was quite interesting.

We ate appreciatively, without speaking too much. The food there was so delicious. This turned out to be Joey's favorite meal. He had the waiter (great service) shuck his lobster because he was worried about making a mess. Rick had made us a great recommendation and I would encourage anyone who visits Vancouver to eat at Hy's.

After the meal Joey and I had the valet bring up our car so we could try to make the Omnimax double-bill. They do this every Sunday and Wednesday evening. Joey and never been to an Omnimax, only an Imax and I think a 3-D Imax. Of all of them, Omnimax was my favorite. It's the one where the images are projected onto a round screen, one that even rises over your head. It's so cool.

We get there in time to see Olympic Gold (Stacy Keach narrated), which I wasn't very interested in, but we both loved it. It was so exciting. And I even cried once or twice. Then we saw what we'd really come to see: Dolphins (narrated by Pierce Brosnan). Featuring songs and music by Sting, this documentary was simply spectacular. Though there were some sad moments, specifically the footage from the tuna nets, the insight into the dolphins' world was so inspiring.

At the show, I bought an Aero bar from Nestle. Does anyone else remember Chocolite from back in the 70s? I used to love those, but you can't get 'em in the States anymore.

When it was all over we went back to the hotel (after I discovered a parking ticket on my rental car). It was still relatively early and I still hadn't smoked my Cuban cigar. In Canada, you can't smoke indoors anywhere, much like in California and Maryland. Pain in the neck! So we got my cigar and walked down to the Georgian Grill, the outside bar attached to the Crowne Plaza. I ordered a granny smith hard apple cider and Joey got two kamikazes. I puffed on my cigar for a while. It was very good, but I'm still into Macanudos above all. Joey still doesn't get the draw of a good cigar.

Funny that, just recently I saw an episode of The Sopranos where Tony orders Macanudos be given out to all the poker players at his executive game. Cool, huh? I have a gangster's good taste!

We sat outside for a while watching the people, then decided to hit the sack. We had to drive back to Seattle the next day for a 2:55 p.m. flight.

Thursday, June 29 — Vancouver/Seattle (and Portland, Dallas and Jacksonville)

We arose early to do all our hotel business. Between the check-out, paying my parking ticket and getting the car brought up, I think we were outta there by 10:30 or so. Driving back to Seattle we decide to stop for breakfast in White Rock, B.C. It was a charming little seaside town that was sure to be bustling in the next few days once July hit. But now it was quiet, and we stopped in to a little place called Kim's.

As it turns out, Kim was a tiny, exuberant Asian woman who ran this place like a dynamo. Whatever you ordered, "That's easy, that's easy." And off she went to make it for you. I ordered French toast and bacon, Joey opted for fish and chips. And let me tell you that was some of the best food we had. Joey said it was definitely the best fried fish he'd ever eaten. She told him it was halibut. Joey believed her. We ate like pigs. Everything she brought we devoured.

When we were through we tipped her well and hit the road. She was so funny, calling after us how nice we were and how she could tell when she first saw us. "Inner beauty!" she exclaimed. While we wished each other farewell (many times) Joey took a photo of me in front of the restaurant to remember it. I wish we could go back it was so good.

Next was a stop at the duty free. Some cheap last-minute gifts and a way to spend those last few Canadian dollars we had in our pockets. We took a little longer than we'd planned, then headed down to the airport.

Things were going along swimmingly until we suddenly hid dead stopped traffic just outside of Seattle. We sat for over an hour while the minutes ticked away until our flight was to depart.

"We're not gonna make it," Joey said.

"I know."

It was so stressful. It was only one o'clock in the afternoon. And all this traffic! We soon discovered it was all due to an accident with a semi. Either way, we were gonna be late. We still had to turn in the rental car.

We arrived at the airport less than 15 minutes before the flight departed. We decided to have me go, since Tsunami was scheduled to arrive at my house at 10:30 that night (for Dragon Con). Ulysses was flying in the next day at noon. I had not been able to reach either of them by phone during the last few hours. Nicole had tried to offer us suggestions on rerouting, but nothing looked good. Plus, it was a Catch 22 if I stayed because I had positive space, which meant I'd get boarded before Joey would. So we split up. I ran through the airport and made the flight. Then, according to plan, I called Joey on the cell phone to let him know. Well, the cell phone didn't reach him. He figured out I was gone, but I couldn't get to him that few minutes before the plane took off. So there I was, heading back to Atlanta without him.

Joey was a trooper though. His plan was to drive to Portland, a mere three hours away, and fly out from there. The only trouble was, we'd been given the wrong quote from the rental car company. Rather than \$60 it was going to be \$300 to drop it off there.

So he stayed in Seattle. He didn't get on the next flight to Atlanta, for now had officially begun Fourth of July weekend, the busiest travel day of the year so far. He ended up flying a most convoluted route to: Portland (arrive at 12:30 a.m.), Dallas (arrive at 5 a.m.), Jacksonville (arrive at 4 p.m. and spend the night) then to Atlanta the next morning at 7 a.m. In other words, it took him two days to get home. He was pretty miserable those first 24 hours with no sleep. And I felt so helpless. But even AirTran was booked so I couldn't do anything. He had my credit card to get by on but he never even used it. My mom took him in in Jacksonville and fed him. That was the best part of the ordeal. But other interesting "flightmare" tidbits include:

- Being cruelly teased by the gate agent in Seattle for the 10 p.m. flight. Joey was told to get on and try to find a seat only to have the flight attendant send him back off due to the full load. (He says everyone on board pointed and laughed as he skulked back down the jetway. A grain of salt would be handy here.)
- He found a name magnet in Dallas (he likes to buy them for me from places he goes. Guess which rack was empty?)
- Coming back he flew first class every leg of the trip except for the Portland to Dallas connection (the longest one he should point out).

When he finally arrived Saturday morning I was so happy to see him. He looked refreshed from his night at my mom's, and so Ulysses, Tsunami, Joey, Kelly and I all headed out to Dragon Con.

And that was the end of our trip!