

STILL TRAVELING AT 86? (Lowered Expectations)

First, two quotes from close friends; My friend Sol Rauch used to say, "I don't want to die wondering." This was his rationale for his travels to distant places. And my friend Martha Bernstein, when asked by a waitress what she wants, answered, "world peace."

I happen to agree with both my friends. I don't want to die wondering, and I want world peace. However, at 86, I have modified my wants regarding places to visit, and am losing faith in our ability to achieve world peace. There was a time when exploring places unknown was high on my list of things I wanted to do before I die. I bragged about the fact that in 1952, the summer after Sylvia and I married, we hitch-hiked the northern route across America. Two years later, we hitch-hiked across the southeast, from Florida to Arizona. I wanted so much to see this remarkable country.

As a child, my world was limited to the Bronx, Manhattan and Brooklyn, until I discovered I had cousins in Queens. It wasn't until college that I set foot on Staten Island, thanks to the nickel ride on the ferry. And it was during college that a few of us took the bus to Union City, New Jersey for our first burlesque show.

In my 20s, my dream was to see as much of America as I could; Europe can wait. See America first. From sea to shining sea. America the Beautiful. This land is my land. I couldn't get enough of it. And the discoveries continued. As I write this, my first impulse was to list all the places I visited: the cities, the museums, the National Parks and monuments, the lakes and forests, the historic sights. They were mind-blowing. I had missed a few states, and last year, thanks to the fact that Martha and family moved to Oregon, we got there.

Over the years, we did Eastern Canada, Mexico, Puerto Rico, the West Indies, and Costa Rica. That's it for the Western Hemisphere. I would have liked to have seen Brazil and Argentina, and Fran dreamed of Machu Pichu, but it didn't happen. In 1975, I had saved up six weeks of annual leave and did Israel, Italy, Switzerland, Denmark, Holland and France. And more recently, after a few more trips to Israel, I went to Romania and Kishinev in 1997, with my son, David. When he returned home, I checked out Budapest, Prague, and Vienna. David and I saw the sights of St. Petersburg, before he went on to Vilna to study Yiddish one summer.

Fran and I visited Israel when David was there, and we then toured Greece. We also had a couple of quick trips to London and Paris. More recently, Fran and I did Spain and Southern France, and then an Alaska cruise. Last year, we piggy-backed a trip to Charlottesville and the Shenandoah onto Lewis and Nina's wedding in Washington, and in October, we combined our first visit to Martha and her family in Portland (see above) with a trip to the Columbia River Gorge, Mt. Hood and the Oregon coast.

And you know what? It is getting much harder to get around, getting to, from and through airports, getting in and out of cars, hotels, restaurants, museums, theatres. I am

becoming more dependent on my cane. Fran uses a walker, and in airports, a wheelchair. When we get to wherever we are going, there are no more long (or even short) walks to see the sights. Those wonderful adventures where you strolled through strange cities, discovering beautiful and exotic places are over. We can no longer take organized foreign tours which require following guides holding up umbrellas, and describing the sights we are seeing, in accented English. The last few years, I rented a car, read the guide books, and did the best we could, at a much reduced pace. The only organized Road Scholar (formerly Elderhostel) tours that we now consider are the ones labeled "easy." I was amused when another friend commented that, "despite our infirmities" Fran and I are still travelling.

In the winter, we used to visit friends in Deerfield Beach, Florida, and in San Antonio, Texas, and in Palm Springs, California. Not any more. It has become too much of a shlep, and besides, our friend in Palm Springs no longer winters in Palm Springs. It became too much of a shlep for her as well. We are happy enjoying our nice, warm condo where, the nice, thoughtful maintenance staff shovels the snow, and keeps our apartment (and the garage) warm. And in the summer, we have a nice, warm outdoor pool.

But we have not given up traveling altogether. Twice a year, we get together with close friends in the Berkshires. Once or twice during the summer, we may drive down to the Cape for a week or a weekend. And we are giving serious consideration to the next "big one:" a river cruise. We trust it will be similar to the Alaska cruise where we saw spectacular sights from the ship, and went on tours by bus which we boarded when we docked. A minimum of walking, a minimum of planning, knowledgeable guides, comfortable cabins, good food, a reasonable number of congenial companions.

However, I have accepted the fact that I will die wondering what all those mysterious, exotic, strange, breathtaking countries of Asia and Africa are like. Friends have gone to China and Japan and came back with wonderful stories. From the time I first read about the Taj Mahal in junior high school, I have wanted to see India. When my friend Jacques Wilmore left the Civil Rights Commission and his home in Yonkers, and made a new life for himself in Tanzania, I thought of visiting him and exploring Africa. Too late. Travel these days, when it is not to attend a family event, will be by car to somewhere within a couple of hours of Brookline. And the driving will be in the daytime. We will try to take Rick Steves' advise: "Keep Traveling," but in moderation.

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