

Sun., July 30: Seattle Sojourn

My other friends in the area remain in the working world. Seeing them thus was infinitely easier on a Sunday. Denise Trabona and husband Robbie Morris offered to make brunch in southern Seattle. Thus I had to recross the sound.

The passenger-only ferry from Kingston only runs weekdays, so the Snowdens suggested I walk onto the vehicle ferry from Bainbridge Island, south of them. I was prepared to drive the Sage and park it in Bainbridge, but Jack kindly insisted on taking me to the 7:55 a.m. sailing. On entering the open-sided terminal, I was confused by the lack of humanity 10 minutes before departure. Finally I noticed a taped-up 8½-by-11 sign explaining there was no 7:55 sailing on Sundays. Sigh.

This is why I took an unexpected stroll through the town of Bainbridge Island early on a Sunday morning. The main commercial district is only a few blocks long, past a bridge over the tidal creek¹ in a ravine, seen at right. A couple of coffee shops were open, but I wasn't in the mood. Everything else was



closed. One store's window display explained why the island's name might be sounding a tad familiar to you. Several items proclaimed the island, "The Home of Pickleball." This virulent "sport," a term I use loosely, was invented here. At the end of the commercial strip, I was disappointed it was too early to take advantage of Emmy's Veggie House. An entirely outdoor restaurant, it serves world food through a window within a large menu board picturing such items as ginger "chicken" using vegan "meats."

1 A "tidal" creek fills and empties as the tide raises and lowers the body of water into which the creek empties. As the photo shows and noted in the next paragraph, the tide was out.

Northwest Passage



A left from there took me to the town's waterfront trail. Bainbridge has a quintessential Pacific Northwest coastal harbor, surrounded by low hills and dotted with watercraft. I walked out on the city pier to be on the water and get a closer look at some pretty boats. The trail hugs the tidal flats, which were on full display since the tide was out. Along the way I passed several examples of a species of fantastical trees, twisting, gnarled and red, stretching out toward the light.

I had dawdled too long to spend much time inspecting them, and rushed to ensure I made it to the ferry on time. I followed a guy who seemed to know where he was going, and indeed he did. Fortunately, I did not need a ticket—not because I'd already bought it, but because passengers don't buy them on Bainbridge. All tickets are sold in Seattle, round-trip. I guess the ferry system figures the few one-wayers from Bainbridge will be paid for by the few one-wayers from Seattle. I moved topside and took a position above the bow for the 45-minute

journey. Shortly Seattle peaked around a forested point, nearly stopping my heart with longing for days past.



I watched her approach like a long-lost love:



Once we pulled in, I went down to the foredeck with the other walkers. Our debarking was delayed, however by one persistent seagull. He was quite comfortable on the railing of the passenger ramp, and the mere fact it was being lowered and two dozen people were ready to cross had little bearing on his plans for the morning. He simply rode it down as a bemused deck officer tried valiantly to shoo him off, only succeeding after several tries.

I walked straight out of the terminal and directly up, and I do mean *up*, to Third Street. If you don't wish to climb hills, do not live in Seattle.

There was no clear signage, yet again, toward the Seattle Light Rail, which did not exist when I lived here. However, I thought I recalled it was intended to go through the bus tunnel that runs under Third Street. So I headed toward the street-level block where I used to catch a bus to work in the suburbs, when I lived four blocks uphill.

I'd seen on the news that the number of homeless people downtown, already worrisome when I lived here, had exploded. What I saw on that block, with people now living on the sidewalk, was my first direct experience of this sad truth. I stepped past trash of a worrisome nature to take the escalator down.

In the upper level of the tunnel, I figured out how to buy a ticket from the kiosk and within 15 minutes was in a clean rail car heading south. What I could not figure out was

how to prove I had a ticket. There was no place to scan it, and of course no conductor. The Web explains that the line runs on the honor system, a very Seattle-like approach.

Before boarding, while responding to Denise regarding my progress, another text arrived I had been expecting, and hoping for. Lori wrote, “Lovie and I were hoping to see you one more time before you leave, do you know when you’re coming back through Spokane?” The answer was of course “yes” to seeing them again, if I could possibly arrange it. I’d been disappointed I didn’t get to know Lovie, and had left the enjoyable conversation with Lori wanting more. A complication arose in the form of their planned trip to San Diego for a long weekend, which meant I had to leave Seattle by Tuesday, at least a day sooner than I’d planned to leave Jack and Ann Marie. Jack, ever cool, would accept it with calm, but I had to grant him the courtesy of asking. I told her I’d see what I could do.

The light rail tunneled through Beacon Hill and provided an exquisite view of the Rainier Brewery, now also making gin, a banner on the building informed me. Exiting at the Mount Baker station, I had to let MapQuest guide me on a *walk* for the first time: I’d always arrived at their house by bus from the other side, and I wasn’t sure where I was in the changed landscape. Further uphill I went.

Denise Trabona is featured in one of the great coincidences in my coincidence-filled life.² We met at Mizzou in a class, where she was an undergraduate. Her intelligence and sly, dry wit immediately set her apart, not to mention her earthy beauty and dramatic natural swoosh of white in her raven hair. She had a boyfriend, but we hung out as friends and stayed in touch by phone after I finished my thesis research.

She was from Connecticut, and I of course from North Carolina. More than a decade after meeting in Missouri, we ended up not only working for Microsoft at its headquarters on the West Coast, but in the same one of its 42 buildings at the time! I would wander to the other wing for a quick hello on occasion. She rose to lead the graphic design of Windows, and now does the same for SharePoint. She had met husband Robbie, a software developer who currently works for Disney, through recreational soccer. When I lived in downtown Seattle, they did me the great favor of letting me park the Sage on their street so I could avoid paying the hefty monthly fee at my apartment. (Unfortunately, at their first house this resulted in the sideswipe damage he still bears, from a hit and run.)

Robby fed us with eggs and impressive biscuits he made, reminding me that he is from Georgia. I should have recalled, since I went to visit them there after my move. I was sad

2 I assign no significance to this, as mentioned in Pullman. Mathematicians long-ago proved coincidences are inevitable, and the standard distribution (“bell”) curve means some people will have more than others—or at least, notice them more.

not to find their daughter Zola, whom I'd last seen at age 8 on mutual trips to Maine where I had another friend. Zola and friends had gone to a concert at the Gorge Amphitheater, but was due back later that day.

My disappointment at not seeing her was balanced a bit by finding out Robbie always thought I was six years younger than I am. This did not prevent my teasing him after we all moved to the front porch. His friend Eric showed up, apparently the first time they'd seen each other for a couple years after a falling out (notching another coincidence for my list, us showing up on the same day). I'm not sure how weight came up, but Robbie complained about his to Eric as Denise and I conversed separately. "Whereas I'm the same weight I was when I graduated high school," I said to Denise loudly. I glanced over and was ingratiated to spy his middle finger thrust in my direction.

Though I was prepared to leave them and re-explore Seattle if they had plans, Denise suggested the two of us hang out in case Zola returned in time for me to see her. I needed no other motivation than to spend more time with D. She and I took a walk through their neighborhood, talking life and work in a way I miss more deeply than I had realized. A text informed her Zola was en route, so I only got a few moments on a dock on Lake Washington before we had to head back. We went to pick her up north of downtown, at the house of one of the music lovers.

They were still unloading, so the place was bustling as introductions were made to the owner and friends. Zola confirmed, to her mother's query, that she remembered me. "I figured you're remember the guy who put your diaper on backwards," I quipped, which fell flat. I filled in as babysitter one time, but had never changed a diaper. (As an uncle, I told my sisters, I was happy to help out with the kids any way I could—except diapers. Poop was not in my job description.) Denise gave me a lesson prior to their outing, and I handled the duties with Zola acceptably, to the degree that she didn't die or suffer lifelong trauma. But I did make that one humiliating mistake.

We went to a coffee shop, where I got to know a burgeoning adult every bit as unique and impressive as her mother had been around her age. Zola was a theatre kid like me, providing another connection. After a gap year she was preparing to go to college, at Occidental in Los Angeles, though feeling distinctly ambivalent about that. She expressed some irritation that everyone expected her to be excited about it. I made the point she'd heard before, but said she appreciated, that she could always change schools if she didn't like it. Back in the car, as they dropped me off downtown, I wished her "a neutral time at college." No pressure, in other words.

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She clapped her hands together in namaste above her head, where I could see from the back, and said, “Yes, thank you!”

Denise inquired quizzically, “A neutral time?” Neither I nor Zola explained. After a long, heartfelt hug from my soul friend Denise, I dropped into the heart of town.

Seattle, its name a corruption of a Duwamish chief’s, made its money the way the smart people in Deadwood did: by servicing miners rather than running off to the mines themselves. The Duwamish and other nations had villages throughout the area for centuries. Whites first barged in in 1851, and eventually settled at what now is called Pioneer Square on a deep-water bay of the Sound. A mill on the bay fed wood into the building of San Francisco and other towns. Seattle was doing very well selling its natural resources, spreading up the terraformed hills between the sound and the lake, when a fire wiped out the commercial zone in 1889.

The discovery of gold on the Klondike River of Canada changed everything seven years later. As the closest city, Seattle became the transit point for most of the gold-seekers. Merchants sold them supplies, booze, and of course, sex. More than one madame became rich. Big business has remained a theme: UPS, Amazon, and Boeing started here; Microsoft and T-Mobile became behemoths nearby.

Tourism played a major role from early on. The city hosted its first international exposition in 1909, and two of the city’s icons, the Space Needle and the Monorail, are remnants of the 1964 World’s Fair. One of the first sights on my downtown tour was this building I took to be a new hotel at first glance, until the lifeboats clued me in it was an Alaska cruise ship. I know people who have ridden one of these and enjoyed it. As a sailor and self-guided traveler, I find it an abomination.



Northwest Passage

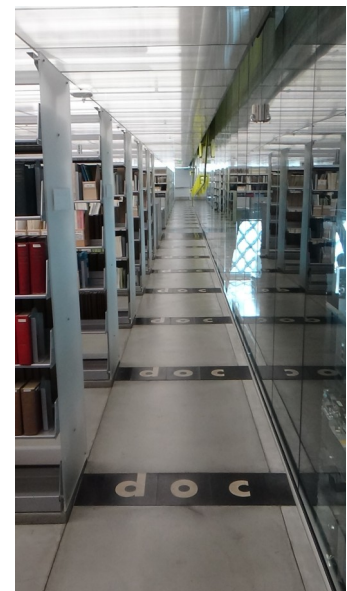
I made my way to Pike Place Market. The city council approved a farmer's market here in 1907. The first wagons pulled in a couple weeks later, and the first building went up by the end of the year. The current set, including at least one of the restaurants, was in place more than a hundred years ago. Along with many unique eateries and stores, there are food and flower and craft stalls. Chances are good you've seen video of workers at a



fish stall tossing the goods. You can read a million descriptions online, so I will end this stop with a personal tie. I lived about 20 minutes away on foot, so my produce usually came from a stand here owned by a Filipino family. Several members came to recognize me, and Mama, who was almost always there regardless of who else was, always asked multiple questions

about my life. When I had to inform them in Spring 2008 that this would be my last visit, because I was moving to N.C., she refused to take my money for my final big bag of produce. She was there today, but I decided not to say hi. I didn't think she would recall me, and feared she would feel embarrassed if she couldn't.

I made my way toward my former home, stopping by my favorite library anywhere, the main branch of the Seattle Public Library. The architecture is cool, worth your looking up online, but what I love is the stacks. They swirl up, the walkway ramp marked with the section of the adjacent bookshelf.



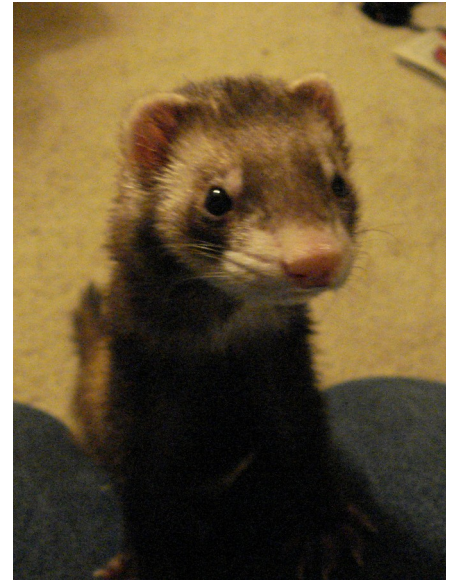
Finally I got to where I could see the Zindorf Apartments, the first concrete apartment building in Seattle, built in 1911. My post-marital home inside was a studio of less than 400 square feet, a third-floor walk-up with a bay window view of the brick office building a few feet away. I refer to the room as "my monk's cell." At least if I looked out the right side of the window I could see the spires of a cathedral a couple blocks uphill. But that view now is blocked by a sky-scraping glass-box building that replaced the parking lot where I loaded the U-Haul for my move.



The Zindorf is the small gray building to the right of the brick one, bottom center

The red-tiled front steps renewed one of my favorite memories of the Seattle years. I had a roommate at the Zindorf. I had moved from a three-bedroom house in Albuquerque to a two-bedroom townhouse in a Seattle suburb to the monk's cell, with a stop in the three-bedroom I shared with my wife. Even without being a materialist, and leaving appliances and the stereo for my ex because she had a kid—and because I was a lousy husband—I still had a storage space of stuff to get rid of. Among these were a two-story ferret cage and related items from my first pair of kids, who were bought in ABQ and transplanted to the region with me. There was a ferret-and-bunny rescue shelter in the area. I went to donate these, explaining I didn't have room for a fuzzy. The volunteer at the desk said, "Boy, do we have a ferret for you!" I was not there for a ferret, but I let her take me back and introduce me to the little female who, unusually, didn't like other ferrets. They could not keep her with the others, so she had been living alone for most of her two years.

She was named Minna. It's pronounced "MEE-nah"; the name, pronunciation and spelling came with her. I had no choice but to leave with my cage, gear, and her. I squeezed the cage into the tiny kitchenette, barely wide-enough to drop the cage door down. I would take her on walks around the neighborhood on a harness. When she tired out, she would come to me and stand up with her front paws on my leg. I then put her into a shoulder bag and carried her until she started crawling out, and again she walked until she was tired. Whenever we got within a half-block of the Zindorf, she would want out, and she started sprinting home. I dropped the leash and ran after her as she made her way to and up the steps. I tear up as I recall this for you now. She was the best.



Given how depressed I was about the marriage and angry at myself for my behavior, it is not a stretch to say that tiny kid saved my life. What would have happened to her if I took it?

Despite the apartment house fronting on I-5, I couldn't hear the traffic in my cell. What was already Homeless Central underneath said highway is far worse now. My guess is the parking lot there, which has now been fenced off, is supposed to be cleared every day, because a couple of tents were on the sidewalk, nearly blocking the path.

With time to kill before the next ferry home, I dropped down to First Street and swung through Pioneer Square, which is really more of a triangle surrounded by stone and brick buildings dating to the post-fire era. Some of these display odd architectural arrangements. After the 1889 fire, the city fathers couldn't decide whether to pay to raise the street level, which had a tendency to flood. They dithered, and dithered some more. Finally the building owners in the area couldn't wait anymore. They rebuilt, in fire-resistant materials, with two entrances—one at each potential street level. When the city finally made its call—to raise the streets—the bottom floors became basements, their useless entrances left intact. The boardwalks were built at the new level before the streets were; for a time, crossing a street required taking temporary steps down to the street and walking up a set on the far side. Now you can take an Underground Tour, as I did twice while living here, that is both fascinating and funny.

Once back at the ferry terminal, I still had about 20 minutes. I decided to walk 10 minutes down the waterfront, and got as far as the Ferris wheel on a pier, which was not there when I lived in town. Glancing at the time, I told myself, “You gotta boogie, dude.” Skirting around and through tourist groups New-York-style, I made myself pass without comment the guy covered head to toe in Michael Jordan UNC gear, possibly homeless. As it turned out, I could have stopped. The ferry was running 25 minutes late.

As I crossed back, my friend Mount Rainier, the permanently snow-capped dormant volcano roughly 60 miles south of Seattle, came out to see me off. The first time I saw it, on that spontaneous overnight trip Steve, his girlfriend and I made from Pullman, was from the Space Needle. I thought I was just looking at an unusual, fetching cloud formation. Slowly my brain resolved the pattern to realize I was looking at a mountain surrounded by clouds. On moving here I learned that view was unusual: Most of the time it is obscured by the typical drizzle of Western Washington. Rainier posed for me on the ferry home:





Mount Rainier, barely visible at center

Outside the ferry terminal in Bainbridge, I found my entry to Jack's Jeep blocked by another guy of my demographics. Apparently he thought Jack was his Lyft/Uber, despite the lack of stickers and likelihood the Jeep didn't match the vehicle description. The guy didn't seem to take Jack's first answer, and tried again before closing the door, which I promptly re-opened with a smirk.

On the way back we had a slight disappointment. The route passes through the small reservation of the Suquamish, who were setting up for a *potlatch* (tribal gathering) as we crawled carefully through in the morning. I had spotted a sign advertising fry bread. We may need to make a stop when we come back, I said. "*Love* fry bread," Jack responded. I had not tasted this traditional native food, a flat, airy base to which you add either honey or powdered sugar, since I left New Mexico. That remains true, sadly. The event was all over except the cleanup when we returned.

I informed him of the request from Lori, and he graciously gave me leave, despite his having made some plans for Tuesday I would have enjoyed. Ann Marie's dinner, inspired by the other kind of Indian food, more than compensated. The homemade mango ice cream by itself would have done it for me.