

USA Trip 2009

Mum came with me to the airport. I checked in and then we had a light dinner before I went through Customs & Security. The flight started boarding at 7.15pm. We were taking off by 7.55pm. (8 pm scheduled flight) And we arrived at LAX, 30 minutes earlier than anticipated. BUT it took 2 and a half hours to get through immigration, baggage claim & security! There were people everywhere! And more arriving every second it seemed.

The airline I flew with was V Australia. They were FANTASTIC. I will definitely fly with them again. I had a centre set of 3 seats to myself! I did lie down for a few hours but then my neck got abit sore. The personal video screens are GREAT. I watched 3 movies (Hannah Montanah, Wall-E and Ghosts of Girlfriends Past). I spent a few hours on my cross stitch but ended up putting it away as there was a little bit of turbulence & it was hard to find the holes on the fabric! I was able to play some games on the personal video screens as well as listen to some cds that are included in their library. After what seemed like all night, I arrived at my LAX airport hotel, the LAX Travelodge. It was very nice & had free Wi-fi. I had dinner at the nearby Denny's & then went back to my room for some much needed sleep. My next journey would be back to the airport via the hotel's airport shuttle.

I arrived safely in Oklahoma in a small plane that held 66 passengers and it was a full flight. While waiting, I spoke to a lovely Californian couple who shared some fruit with me. They were very nice. Fran (my pen-pal) was at Oklahoma airport to pick me up. I was able to recognize her straight away. We went to the Oklahoma City Bombing site & saw the Outdoor Symbolic Memorial for the bombing. It was very moving. By this time we were both hungry and Fran took me to a Mexican place to eat. I spent 5 days with Fran and her family. Fran kindly let me stay in her 'guest wing' so I had a bedroom and bathroom to myself! Fran took me to see the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum (again commemorating the bombing). The Memorial Museum is very detailed & very tasteful. It was also very sad. We also went to the Stafford Air and Space Centre (Apollo Astronaut from Oklahoma) & had lunch at the Cherokee Trading Post. Another day we had lunch at Toby Keith's (Country singer from Yukon where Fran resides) & went to the "Turner to Cezanne" exhibit at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art. At the museum there was also a Chihuly Glass exhibit which was beautiful. Fran took me to the Oklahoma Science Museum. I also visited "Bricktown" (downtown Oklahoma). On my second last night there, we had dinner at the Outback Steakhouse, Just as good as here in Sydney! It was packed too and we had to wait for a table. Fran and I also saw a movie "Julie and Julia", which we both enjoyed. I finally met all of Fran's family after reading about them in letters for so many years. They were all nice & made me feel very welcome. Fran's daughter, Susan was everything I imagined her to be. The rest of the family - grand children Nicholas & Matthew, sister Jeannette, Jennifer (Fran's Niece) & Andrew and Alex (Fran's Great-nephews) were all very nice too. The weather was very HOT but that was good! I was away from Winter in Sydney! While we were out and about, I was able to do some shopping. I bought some games for Mike (he had given me a list!). I was also able to get some cross stitch kits at Hobby Lobby and Jo-Ann's. They were way cheaper here than in Australia. I also had my first visit to Ross, Wal-Mart, Koles. After 5 days of great company, I had to leave for the airport for my next stop. Fran drove me to the airport & after a hug & a kiss waved me goodbye. I was very sad to leave Fran. Meeting Fran in person was everything I knew it would be & much more. What a fantastic way to start my trip!



Fran and Me!



Outdoor Symbolic Memorial

I arrived at Chicago O'Hare airport after an uneventful flight which was almost full. I actually had 2 seats to myself. Debbie & her husband Jon picked me up. Debbie & I talked all the way to my hotel where I checked in & dumped my bags. We then headed out for dinner & then back to my hotel. Debbie & Jon would be pick me

up at 9 or 10am from my hotel, then we would head out of the day. After the day's activities, we would spend time at Debbie's house. Around 9 or 9.30pm, Jon would drive me back to my hotel. We have been on a lunch cruise on the 'Spirit of Chicago' on Lake Michigan, where it was a beautiful 29 degrees! I got a bit pink as I didn't re-apply the sunscreen when I should have. We also went to Navy Pier, went on the Ferris Wheel at Navy Pier & the old craft town of Frankfort. We had lunch at a place called 'Jimmy Johns'. I had the most amazing lunch at Jimmy Johns – I had a sandwich but with out bread and with lettuce. I can't remember what it was called but it was deliciously cool and refreshing. We went up to Sears Tower (for 20 years it was the tallest building in the world) and went on the 'skywalk' (enclosed glass platform on the 103rd floor). We also went to the Adler Planetarium for the "Cosmic Collisions" show narrated by Robert Redford. I had planned to see this in New York but when I went to book it, it had moved on! And lucky for me, it went to a city I planned on visiting! I have had a 'real Chicago' hotdog - nothing like the ones I eat in Sydney! We also went to the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry. We also visited Grant Park and the Buckingham Fountain. This was an awesome fountain. It would light up and flash to music. I got some good photos as well as Video! On my last night, we sat in Millennium Park and listened to an Orchestra playing Beethoven. It was a wonderful night. The hotel had free Wi-fi which was fantastic, so I could check my email as well as Skype with Michael. Of course I had to make sure that the Shuttle's launch date hadn't changed. The weather here was also very hot but again that was great as in Sydney it was winter!. Debbie drove me back to the airport for my next flight (to New York). It was so sad leaving Debbie! We hugged and I didn't want to let her go!



Debbie



Me in Sears Towers Glass platform 'Skywalk'

I arrived in New York after a flight that arrived on time. The flight was full. I took a shuttle that I had pre booked to my hotel. After I checked in, I looked at my maps and headed to the wharf for my New York 7pm evening cruise. I saw the Statue of Liberty all light up in the late afternoon as well as night. The next day, I did a 3 hour cruise of New York & the Hudson river. After the cruise, I visited the "Intrepid Air and Space Museum" that was right next door to the Wharf. The Intrepid is an actual aircraft carrier! It was excellent (Michael would have loved it). After all this, I saw the movie 'GI Joe'. I've had some dramas here in New York! After spending the day at the American Museum of Natural History, I saw 4 fire trucks race past me. And Guess what? They were at my hotel. All the guests had been evacuated (Over 1700 rooms here). I never got the full story but rumor had it that there was smoke coming from the 7th & 14th floors (I was on the 11th). The fire men kept coming & going in between just standing around. There must have been 20 or 25 of them! We had to wait for over 3 hours before we were allowed up to our rooms. And can you imagine how many people that were waiting at the lifts to go back to their rooms? I thought that walking up 11 flights of stairs would be faster than waiting for the lift! So I did! I think I have lost a few kilos on this day alone! I was so puffed out! I have never walked more than 3 flights of stairs and I doubt I will again! Another day was spent going to the Twin Towers site. Not much to see here as there is so much construction going on. There is a small museum dedicated to September 11th and it is quite good (not as good or detailed as the Oklahoma City one). I went on a walking tour of the twin towers site with 2 volunteers who were somehow involved that day (either family there or they helped in the recovery efforts), walked us around and told us their story. I saw a second movie in New York – 'District 9'. I was starting to feel lonely here. I almost came home. I was fed up with the quality of the Wi-fi and the fact I had to pay for it. I did nothing that particular day except nap and cry a little. I did go out that night and saw a Broadway show – "Burn the Floor". It was excellent! I was back to my normal self after that! I visited the New York M&M's World. Wow! It was amazing! I had seen photos of M&M's world but it was so different in person! I highly recommend anyone visiting New York to check M&M's world out. It's HUGE. I also went on a NBC studio tour. I really enjoyed it but we weren't allowed to take photos. We saw the studios of Jimmy Fallon (Studio 6b), Saturday Night Live (Studio 9h) and Brian Williams from the nightly news (studio 3c). I also visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I also went to Central Park. I didn't really explore it like I should have. I didn't

have enough time and it was very hot! So I sat in the shade and read for about an hour instead! And every now and then, I would look up and people watch! I didn't miss the Empire State Building nor the Top of The Rock Observation deck at Rockefeller Center. Views from both building were excellent. I did the Empire State Building in the morning. My visit to the Top of the Rock Observation Deck was at night after my Broadway show. This visit had it's own drama! The lightening storm was spectacular from this height! I did get some video of it. After 20 minutes of thunder and lightening, it started pouring and we had to go in as they closed the outdoor areas. New York was also very humid and in mid 90s. My time in New York had come to an end. It wasn't till I got home and thought – did the Chrysler Building have an observation deck? (Actually as I write this!) I never even thought about it! Maybe next time? 😊



Statue of Liberty all light up



The Concorde @ the Intrepid Air & Space Museum



M&Ms World NY

My next stop was supposed to be Washington DC but when I was in Chicago, they changed Discovery's launch date from the 25th to the 24th August. So I thought, I would only have one full day in Washington DC. Then I thought "what if they bring it forward another day?" So I said to myself "I'll just skip DC at this time & cross my fingers that the launch doesn't get delayed & I can still get to DC!" So I cancelled the train from NY to DC (Fully refundable luckily) and my accommodation (minus a \$30 cancellation fee), as well as the shuttle I had booked from DC accommodation to the airport. And made a booking from La Guardia (NY) to Orlando.

So my next stop was Orlando! The event I had been waiting for! An event I kept changing all my plans for. An event that was important to me. I arrived in Orlando on the 23rd August. I spent 17 days in Orlando. I also had to miss out on visiting my penpal Dawn as her husband was diagnosed with the swine flu! I also never made it to Washington. I was too lazy to go and then after thinking about it, I thought a few days is not enough time to do it justice anyway! I also wanted to visit the Whitehouse and was on a standby list for the first full day I was there, as I hadn't booked it earlier enough. (you're supposed to book months in advance and I couldn't do that!)

I arrived in Orlando safely and after 2 flights. The flight was via Charlotte North Carolina. The first flight was on time and full. The second flight was full but delayed. When we got to Orlando there were storms and lightening. We had to wait for over an hour for our luggage as our bags weren't allowed to be unloaded during lightening. Finally I was able to retrieve my bags and head to my shuttle for transport to my hotel. I think I arrived there at about 9pm.



'Believe' Show at Seaworld



Vehicle Assembly Building KSC



NASA

Discovery had 3 launch attempts. The first one was on Tuesday, 25th August (after being moved back again!) at 1.36 in the morning. I was picked up by Florida Dolphin Tours at 6pm on Monday the 24th where we headed to Kennedy Space Center (KSC) along with 3 other buses. We got to KSC about an hour later. We were told that we had free time to do whatever we wanted but we had to be back at the bus area at 10.30pm to get the bus to

NASA's Causeway (the closest public viewing area other than the VIP area). So I went to the Apollo/Saturn 5 exhibit and then checked out the Rocket Garden. I also of course bought souvenirs including a shuttle charm for my gold charm bracelet! I made sure that I was back at the bus area at 10 and just as well as the lines were huge! I finally got on my bus and we left to go to the Causeway. I met a nice English family and they invited me to sit with them. There must have been 20 other buses heading to the Causeway too! And thousands of people! Once at the Causeway, we picked out our spot.. It was a clear night but then it clouded over. And there was even lightening near the shuttle. It was 38 minutes to go (12.57am) when the weather cleared a bit. Dark clouds were still near the shuttle! And then with 9 or 10 minutes to go, the launch was scrubbed! Because of the weather. Can you believe that? You could hear everyone's disappointment. And then we packed up and headed back to the bus. It took us 1 hour to get to KSC but getting back to the hotel took us 2 and half hours! The traffic was terrible even at 1.30 in the morning!

Discovery's 2nd Launch attempt would be Wednesday (the 26th August) morning at 1.10am! The bus was going to pick us up at 5.55pm on the Tuesday. Just as we were getting on the bus, news came through that the launch was scrubbed due to a "Fill and Drain Valve" failure. The problem with the valve, was found when fueling the liquid hydrogen. After it's finished, the valve is supposed to close and there was no indication that it closed. They think it may be still open or be partially open. So we all got off the bus and were told to call the office the next day as there would normally be a 24-48 hour turn around for a third launch attempt. So the next day, I called them and they didn't know anything at that stage. Local Orlando TV was full of the news, so I was able to follow Discovery's progress on tv. It was finally announced that the 3rd launch attempt would be a 48 hour turn around and they were able to fix the problem.

The 3rd launch attempt would be at 12.17 on Friday morning. I called the office and put myself down for the trip to NASA. We were picked up at about 6pm on Thursday night. This time at KSC, I saw an IMAX film about the ISS and saw one of the other museums on early spaceflight. I almost went on the Shuttle Launch Experience ride, but piked out at the last minute, when the person in charge started telling the crowd what to expect. I really wanted to attempt this but... I really hate rides though! I picked out a spot to watch the launch. This time we would be seeing the launch from the Rocket Garden at Kennedy. The Causeway would be closed. I don't know why. I did email the tour company when I got back asking why and they informed me that it was standard operating procedure. Where we were, we could not see the shuttle on the launch pad but we were told by commentators that we would see the shuttle between 2 trees on the left (facing the big video screen). We were able to see Discovery on the big video screen and as the countdown neared, the excitement around me increased. At long last, it was 10, 9, 8, 7, 6 etc. The crowd was counting back wards too and all of a sudden the crowd cheered and clapped. I was looking at the screen taking photos when I remembered to change the setting on my camera and point it in the direction of trees. Before I knew it, the entire sky light up brighter than daylight. Discovery was rising into the night sky! It was totally amazing! I will always remember seeing the Shuttle rise into the sky. The weather for the launch was perfect too. It was incredible. It was bloody AWESOME. The atmosphere was... I don't have the words to describe it. It was AWESOME, FANTASTIC, INCREDIBLE, EXCELLENT and much, much more.

I did have a small stuff up with my camera. I missed recording the first 2/3 or so minutes of the launch. I was taking photos of the huge video screen when I thought I better change to video mode and I didn't check the setting correctly. It was like 3 minutes later when I realized it wasn't recording and I quickly changed it and so I got the 'end' part of the launch! I did see the launch - everyone was standing and looking at the sky and I had my hands held out with the camera but I wasn't looking at the shuttle via my camera! The sky was SO lit up I was looking directly at the sky. I can still see the night sky COMPLETELY lit up from her and the 'fire' and smoke trail in my mind. It was truly incredible.



Discovery



Here is some trivia - It would be Discovery's 25th birthday, the next day. Her first flight was August 30th, 1984. They also made an announcement prior to the launch, that if anything happened (like a shuttle exploding), to make your way asap into a building (if at KSC) or a bus/vehicle (if at the Causeway).

While I was in Orlando, Ted Kennedy passed away. The tv was full of the news.

The rest of my time in Orlando was spent at Orlando's theme parks - Orlando SeaWorld, Universal Studios, Universal's Islands of Adventure as well as DisneyWorld's 4 theme parks - Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Animal Kingdom and Disney's Hollywood Studios. I enjoyed SeaWorld - lots of shows which I enjoy. I was going from one show to the next. I think the best show was Shamu's 'Believe' show. Video screens moved and everything. They also had a show called 'Pets Ahoy!'. It was fantastic! I loved how all the cats seemed to perform as they should. Who says you can't train cats? These cats were perfect actors. I ended up leaving SeaWorld early at 6pm. I had planned to stay for the night show and fireworks but at about 5.30pm it poured down rain. I waited for a half hour to see if it would stop but it didn't, so I went back to my hotel. Universal Studios was ok. I didn't stay the whole day as there were more rides etc than shows for me. (I dislike rides). The shows I did see were excellent (Terminator 3D and Shrek 4D just to name a few). Universal's Islands of Adventure I could have missed. It was mostly rides. Hardly any shows. DisneyWorld was excellent! The first 2 were EXCELLENT. I really enjoyed both Magic Kingdom and Epcot. I would revisit these 2 for sure. Hollywood Studios was very much like Movieworld (except WITH a studio tour). Animal Kingdom had some good shows. The American Idol Experience at Hollywood Studios was excellent - I watched the finale. The 7 'finalists' were quite good and could audition for the real thing. We voted for the winner. Magic Kingdom was all decorated for Halloween - it looked excellent. I could go on to describe the shows at the theme parks! I enjoyed all of them including Dream Along With Mickey, the Magic Kingdom Night Parade, Disney's Carousel of Progress, Ellen's Energy Adventure (twice!), The American Adventure (twice) and Lights Motors Action stunt show. I think next time, I should stay at the Disney resort. It would be easier to get to and from Disney than where I stayed on I-Drive. Next time I will go to the other theme parks at Disney too - Typhoon Lagoon, Blizzard Beach, DisneyQuest Indoor Interactive and Downtown Disney.



Universal Orlando



Magic Kingdom



Magic Kingdom decorated for Halloween

I also went to the Titanic Exhibit, the 2 major 'fashion' outlets in Orlando and the Florida Mall (where the Orlando M&M world is), Universal's City Walk, Fun Spot Amusement Park, the I-Drive Flea Markets and Ripley's Believe it or not. I also saw a couple of movies "The Time Traveller's Wife" and "The Hangover". It would not be a holiday if I didn't see movies! I also had a couple of days where I did nothing but stay in my room. Orlando weather was very humid almost 24 hours a day it seemed and was in the 85s to mid 90s range.

While in Orlando, these are some of the places I ate at - "Uno Chicago Grill" (excellent Tortellacci), "Friendly's" (had dinner here twice), "Perkins Restaurant and Bakery" (3 times), "Denny's" (over 3!) and "IHOP". Overall I really enjoyed the food in Orlando. I used Orlando's I-Drive Trolley to get around I-Drive.

I have had to control myself with DVDs here. I have purchased a couple of boxsets tho. My spoon collection has increased, so has my ear-ring collection. I was able to get a gold space shuttle charm for my gold charm bracelet! They had it in silver too, so I got that as well for my silver charm bracelet. The gold charm cost \$79.95 plus taxes (everything is plus taxes... very hard to keep remembering). I would normally never pay that for a charm! And I wasn't going to. I got to the check out and then thought, "I'm going to regret not buying it when I get home", So I bought it too! I did tell myself before I left for the trip, that if I saw something I really liked, I would buy it no matter what the cost.



Epcot



Beauty & the Beast Show



American Idol

My next stop would be Las Vegas. The flight was on time but again full! I did have to repack my big suitcase otherwise I would have to pay \$50. So I repacked it! I met Katy at Circus Circus, our first Vegas hotel. I was so HAPPY to see her. We both hugged and almost cried in each others arms! Finally a familiar face! The next day I went on an Area 51 tour. It was ok - not worth the \$200 I spent (maybe \$100). There was 5 others plus me. I'm glad I went on it though. I probably would have regretted not doing it. We went to a dry lake bed were they apparently test stuff. It was so quiet. We were in the middle of no where almost! They only sounds I could hear were our foot steps. It was amazing not to hear anything at all, not even animals. I also believe that Area 51 is there! When we got to the beginning of the main fence, up a little hill, there was a dark SUV parked facing us and the main road. I felt they were watching us. There were 2 cameras also pointed down at us with what looked like sensors. We weren't allowed to take any photos. There were signs saying 'No recording devices, No Photos and No Admittance' and if you did try any of these, it was a \$100,000 fine and/or 6 months in prison for you. Maybe if the SUV weren't there, I would have tried to take a photo.

Our first Vegas show was Human Nature Sings Motown. They are in Vegas on a long term gig! They were fantastic. I told Katy that she would enjoy it and if she didn't, I would pay for the ticket. Needless to say, I was right and she did enjoy it. (I had seen Human Nature before in concert here in Sydney). Other shows we saw were "Le Reve" - no story line that we could understand what so ever but it was awesome to see. In the show there was music, dancing, synchronized swimming, acrobatics, diving and gymnastics all in water! The stage moved up and down depending on what part of the show it was. We also saw Rita Rudner (Comedian). She is very funny. Katy's choice was a "Ice - The Show from Russia"! She gave it 4 out of 10. I would give it 7 out of 10.



A Little Aleinn advert



Hoover Dam



4 of us at the Grand Canyon

Katy and I met up with Colleen and Patricia who flew to the USA to join us on my 40th birthday (and also to do shopping!). We had breakfast at the hotel Paris. We would meet up with them every day or so, depending on what we were doing. They would do their thing and so would we.

On the Saturday we switched to our second hotel - The Luxor. Our room was in the pyramid! Everything is Egyptian themed. It looks excellent.

We went to more outlet shopping centers! I also went to The Titanic Exhibition as well as The Bodies Exhibition. All 4 of us saw "Menopause". This was a great show!



a Star Trek Poker machine



The Excalibur in Vegas



The Fremont Experience

Colleen and I went on a helicopter flight of Las Vegas at night. It was excellent! Las Vegas from the air is beautiful at night all lit up. Patricia didn't go and Katy originally said that she would rather go shopping with Patricia. Instead Katy saw Santana in concert at the Hard Rock Café.

We went to the West rim of the Grand Canyon on a tour. On the way, we saw the Hoover Dam. The Grand Canyon is a fantastic natural wonder! The Skywalk there is AMAZING. I highly recommend it. The view was spectacular. I can just imagine a sunrise or sunset there.



Our Luxor Hotel Room



3 of us on the Skywalk



Luxor at night

Gambling wise I lost approx. \$70 in the casinos over the 8 nights I was there. I would have liked to play more roulette but at the Luxor, the minimum bet was \$10! Circus Circus's minimum bet was \$4. I didn't check any other hotels for their minimum bets. Next time I go to Vegas I will!

We (all 4 of us) also went to the Stratosphere - the view of Las Vegas was great from here – Vegas all lit up at night. Katy would not go on any of the rides even though we tried to talk her into it.

Now the final stop on my very long trip! We got the bus to LA. I wasn't too impressed that the Amtrack bus I booked turned out to be a Greyhound bus! On arrival at Union Station we grabbed a taxi to our hotel. Our hotel would be on Sunset Blvd – a great location. After traveling most of the day and after checking into our rooms, we headed out to dinner. I walked the entire length of the Hollywood Walk of Fame. We went to Disneyland – It wasn't as good as DisneyWorld, I must say and in fact I was disappointed in it. The 'It's a Small World' ride was the same as Orlando. Katy and I did a 'Grand' tour of Hollywood. We also saw 50-60 movie stars homes on a Movie Stars Homes Tour. All 4 of us visited the J. Paul Getty Museum. We also visited Griffith Observatory where lots of movies and television shows have been filmed - a Star Trek Voyager Episode was filmed here too! We saw the "First Light" show in the Samuel Oschin planetarium at the Observatory. It was excellent. Katy and I also went to San Diego SeaWorld. This was very good and very similar to Orlando's SeaWorld.



Me at Griffith Observatory



Griffith Observatory



Patrick Swayze's Star on the walk of fame after he died

We had my 40th birthday dinner at Universal Citywalk, at a nice Chinese Restaurant. We all had a cocktail and the girls gave me, my gift. On our last day in LA before heading to the airport for our 11.45pm flight, we went on a Warner Brothers Studio Tour. This was an excellent tour. We saw Merlotte's place in True Blood, as well as the sets of a new show called Eastwick.. Our last day was also spent doing some last minute shopping. I went to Best Buy (just like JB Hi Fi here in Oz) and Target. We also called by Ross again (bargains in clothing) and we had dinner at Denny's (I loved Denny's – must have dined at Denny's during the 7 weeks at least 8 times). Katy and I had a chance to see a movie – 'The Informant'. Katy hated it and I thought it was weird. This was a case that we wanted to see a movie, there wasn't much to choose from that I hadn't already seen, I had seen previews and seemed like it was ok (and that it was a comedy). It was my choice. Katy says it was worse then Star Trek that I dragged her to see in Queensland!



Merlottes in True Blood



Reba's Star on the Walk of Fame



Katy at Disneyland



Doris Day

Our flight home was good. The plane was full. Because we booked our flights independently from each other (in one case months apart), we weren't sitting together. Over the 7 weeks, my big suitcase had been handled roughly. LA to Oklahoma, the side was little bit bent. Oklahoma to Chicago, one of my locks went missing. Lots of marks on the outside of the case after every flight. After one flight (can't remember which one now), my clothes were totally removed around in the case.

Overall my 7 week holiday I had in the USA was fantastic. I loved meeting Fran and Debbie. It was a great way to start my trip too. And thanks must go to Katy, Colleen and Patricia, who joined me in Vegas and LA! If it hadn't been for these 3 Ladies, I may have come home early. There was one day in New York, I was so homesick that I would have flown home that day if I could have, but I knew I was meeting the girls. My future trips will not be as long, a maximum of 10 days including travel time. The Shuttle launch is an experience I hope to repeat in 2010. This time with no planning – just book my flights 4 or 5 days before hand, get there, stay a week and fly home! There are 5 shuttle launches left for 2010. Food and weight wise, I was very happy that I came home 800 grams lighter then when I left Sydney. I was totally amazed. I had hoped that there would be zero loss/gain. I hope to re-visit some of the places I went to, as I felt I didn't see / do enough there. LA and Vegas for sure. For both of these cities, I was not as prepared as I should have been. In LA I was a bit fearful of the public transport systems. This was totally ridiculous, as I had traveled in LA before (from Pasadena to Universal Studios), so I shouldn't have been fearful. Maybe it was due to the length of my holiday? I was exhausted by this time and couldn't wait to get home. I was in countdown mode most of my time in LA I am sorry to say.

I also have to thank Mum. She kept an eye on Mike while I was away by visiting him a few days every week that I was away. She made sure the place was reasonably tidy and the laundry done! And that B'Elanna was being looked after. I should also thank Mike for being reasonably good and not trashing my house while I was gone. It was still standing! Only his bank account was a disaster but that's another story!