

Greetings, dear Friends and Family,

December 9, 2007

We trust you have all had a good year. To those of you who have had a hard year, we hope strength, wisdom and peace will soon be yours.

We've traveled a lot this year. Whether near or far, Julia and I have seen many interesting things. In April, we traveled by car not very far to Phoenix. We took in the *Body Worlds* exhibit at the *Science Center*, and the *Heard Museum*, which features native art. Julia happened to wear a perfect dress with American Indian pottery for that visit:



A couple of months later, Julia and I traveled far, to Washington D.C. We had a wonderful time there, and I found out how many pictures my camera's memory card can hold, around 800! I also took a moleskine journal, and filled it with written and hand drawn observations. I like these thoughts written on the first night of our arrival:

"Thoughts while trying to sleep... I lay there, observing the pattern of light and shadow caused by the nightlights outside coming through the wooden slats of the blinds. The intensity of awareness! This is what I love so much about going somewhere I've never been before. As the *Supershuttle* took us to our hotel, I strained through the dimming light to see everything. There are all kinds of statues in the classical tradition everywhere I look. Julia noted a familiar sight, **"That's the Kennedy center for the Performing Arts! I saw *Swan Lake* there many years ago."** She used to live only sixty miles away from the nation's capital.

She sleeps while I write this sitting cross legged on the bathroom floor, real marble tiles! Can you imagine it?" (*Yes, the hotel was nice!*)

We had a rigorous first day of exploration, as we covered the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial and the Freer Gallery in the Smithsonian. I was especially impressed with the Jefferson Memorial:



This memorial is an awesome sight and I've learned new respect for a man who valued and fought to preserve "*life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.*" Jefferson also defended religious liberty, saying that it was according to "every man and his God" to determine. Just this phrasing shows he's honoring that we will each have individual interpretations of who that primordial God is. I was greatly moved by the movie shown in the lower level of the memorial. I like to imagine in millennia to come, these edifices will be visited as we today visit Egyptian edifices.

The *Natural History Museum* was very enriching. We saw critter skeletons, 3D movies, history dioramas and rocks that fell from the sky. We also saw rocks that were made when some of those meteorites hit the ground. The 'Desert Impact Glass' discovered in the Libyan desert in western Egypt had been found and formed by the ancient Egyptians into a necklace for King Tutankhamun. At first scholars were puzzled by the nature of the "*yellow-green glass -- carved into the shape of a scarab beetle*", until they realized in 1999 that it had been created by the heat and impact of a meteorite upon the Egyptian desert sands. Both Julia and I enjoyed all the rocks, but the fancy sparkly ones such as the Hope diamond, with its blue 45 karats attracted the most viewers.

One of my favorite places is the *Smithsonian American Art Museum*. Half the building is devoted to American art and half to the National Portrait Gallery. Through that portrait gallery, I feel that I've really met the face of America, as many of the people essential to its history are featured there.



I like that picture of me, for I like to imagine if my artwork ever is seen there, this photo can accompany it! (*I do like to dream!*) The sculpture in front of Julia is "*Nenuphar*" by Alexander Calder (1898 - 1976), who created it at his workshop in France for the 1968 opening of the *Smithsonian American Art Museum*. I took two photos of it, one with Julia and one without her. Perhaps the forms were clearer solo, but the photo with Julia is much more pleasing. One reason for this is Calder's art is meant to be enjoyed by people. Through it, he expresses the spirit of whimsical play. You cannot look at it and feel 'old'. I enjoyed his artwork at the National Art Gallery and the Hirshhorn Museum, as well. While there, I captured Julia with the big Lichtenstein brushstroke:

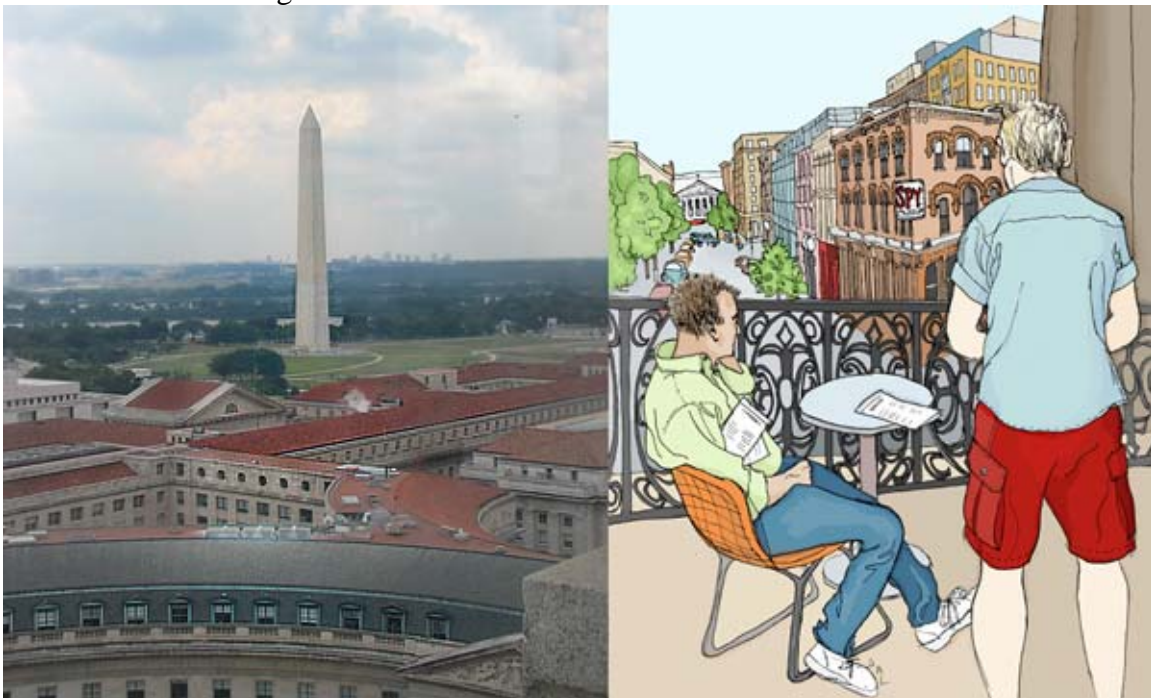


Julia pointed it out to me, for I did not see it. When this sculpture is seen from the front, rather than the back which you see here, the brushstroke is of an 'h' for the 'h' in Hirschhorn! It is all in the calligraphy, which she keeps telling me I should study. Oh, I know it could help, for my writing often lacks a good flowing line. And furthermore, I noted earlier at the Saul Steinberg exhibit, he gave much credit to the aid of his calligraphic studies.

The other picture is the Smithsonian's *Arts and Industries* gallery, which was closed for renovation. It was the original home of the National Museum. The National Gallery has really expanded since those days, needing two separate buildings, connected by an underground passageway. It needs two visits, as well, which we did.

We never did get to go up in the Washington monument. Tickets were always sold out. But we got plenty good views of it, and we did get a chance to view the city from a high vantage point. While we were at the Natural History Museum, I spied a pamphlet for the *Old Post Office* building on the floor in the restroom stall I occupied. That night, I had a dream. In it, Julia and I visited the Old Post Office and somehow we could see skeletal ghost postal workers pushing huge carts of mail around. (*Perhaps we had special red framed glasses to enable us to see this, like we did to see the 3D movies?*)

When I awoke, I told Julia the dream and she said we'd visited the *United States Ghost Office!* After that, we had to go. If there were any ghosts there, we could not see them for the huge throngs of people milling the food courts. Before eating, we took the glass walled elevator upwards. It glided slowly and smoothly so we could observe the building's many levels. That let out on the ninth floor, where we got a smaller elevator that took us to the tower. And yes, we did have good views from there. We could see all the way up Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capital building and in the opposite direction, we could see the Washington Monument:



The trip posed beneficial for art inspiration, as the picture to the right is one I did from a darkly silhouetted photo from an American Art Museum porch. I think this trip will continue to subtly enrich my artwork.

After the trip, we settled in for a long, hot summer and didn't do much then in terms of outside explorations. As it cooled, we got out more, seeing *Gateway Park* and the *Yuma Crossing State Historic Park*.

We did have minor misfortune recently, with the death of our old refrigerator. A messy cleanup inspired a small renovation of our kitchen. We got rid of a space hogging freezer we were no longer using, and upgraded our shelving unit, giving us much more room in the kitchen. This inspired quite a bit of general house renewal as we found many things we weren't using that someone else might make more use of.

It's been a good year, we've been very fortunate. I want to close with remembering a chance encounter in Washington, D.C. We discovered the Albert Einstein memorial, due to bus route changes, and a path unplanned. . A huge bronze of the old sage posed sitting on the ground delighted us. Seated so, he was more approachable than we would be sternly posed in a 'throne' or standing tall and proud. Down to earth, his statue proved a friendly place to children, which clambered happily all over it. Famous Einstein quotes were placed around its outer wall. One was about the beauties of nature and the infinite mysteries:

“JOY AND AMAZEMENT AT THE BEAUTY AND GRANDEUR OF THIS WORLD OF WHICH MAN CAN JUST FORM A FAINT NOTION.”

May such joy be yours in the year to come!

Joan and Julia