

# **Impressions of New York**

**Four days in October 2011**

We flew into New York at 11.30 pm (local time) on 12th October 2011 after more than 30 hours and four flights travelling from Brisbane via Sydney, Dallas and Washington. We were tired but exhilarated and the following are memories of this amazing city, the bastion of capitalism and American culture.

- the bus drive from Days Inn who rescued us as we waited in vain for the shuttle to take us to our accommodation and delivered us to Howard Johnson motel gratis because the Howard Johnson shuttle stopped running at 11.00 pm.
- Sleeping until 11.15 and missing our breakfast to wear off jet lag
- Catching the bus in Jamaica on Long Island into catch the E train and all of the characters we observed on it and from it like
- the school ground we passed where everyone in the busy playground, teachers and students were black;
- most of the people boarding the bus were black including the alcoholic who didn't stop talking between his swigs on his whisky although nobody was paying any attention to his rantings;
- Finding our way through Jamaica station to the underground to catch the E train;
- The woman on the train preparing for her tie-dying, and the woman who sat next to her who didn't stop mutely mouthing her anger and upset;
- The fundamentalist Jewish man who stood reading a book "Jerusalem" until he moved and sat next to me and then pulled out a scroll with only an image of some angelic looking old rabbi and he just studied it for several stations;
- Getting off at Penn Station and finding our way to street level was an adventure that may never have been accomplished without the aid of two women. An old white woman was pushing a shopping trolley because someone had stolen her walking stick from her hands some time ago and a black woman on crutches. We went down then up then down and up again changing elevators each time until we found our way out on to 34<sup>th</sup> Street;
- The walk three blocks along 34<sup>th</sup> Street to 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue was itself a rich experience which we subsequently repeated as we returned trying in vain to secure an internet connection that we could use;
- Our Hotel Lotus on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue just 300 metres from the Empire State Building proved to be much more amenable than anticipated and very roomy and comfortable even with the shared amenities with another couple we never saw;
- Shopping for the dongle proved fruitless and we were misguided with advice; (In the end we decided that there would be only six days when we would use such a device and there seemed to be no affordable way of getting short term internet access when there were many places where we could log on to wifi);
- After exploring the underground mall at Penn Station where we checked how to make our train connection on Saturday, we emerged to the adventure of catching the M4 bus up to Central Park;
- How motor vehicles can move through this city seething with humanity and seemingly the most undisciplined pedestrians ever observed is amazing but the bus drivers always seemed courteous and patient;
- Central Park was another experience never to be forgotten — the dogs, children young women joggers with almost all swinging their long pony tails, the other joggers, walkers and everything as we walked beside the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Lake and through the park, the squirrels and robins, the ice-cream vendors

and the Turtle pond as it became progressively darker until at 7.00 pm it was too dark to photograph anything other than city lights;

- Eating in New York was surprisingly inexpensive. Two of us ate brunch and dinner for less than \$25 each time, fruit from street vendors was great quality and surprisingly cheap.

That was just our first 24 hours in New York. The next day was full of sightseeing starting with a bus-ride down to the lower end of Manhattan Island to catch a ferry to get close-up to the Statue of Liberty. It was a glorious golden Autumn day and the eve of the Columbus Day long weekend and obviously there were countless thousands stretching the weekend further because from the time we got to Fort Clinton to acquire tickets for the ferry until we got on to the ferry it took at least an hour shuffling along a huge conga line to get aboard the ferry.

After half an hour we were advised that we would have to undergo rigorous airport type security check and that we would be stripped of all metal. I was worried about my Swiss army knife in my pocket which I didn't want to forfeit because of its utility that I feel bereft without and for sentimentality. So I shoved it in with my camera and into my backpack and hoped. I had more trouble getting myself through the security having to even remove my boots that hadn't been necessary at Brisbane Sydney or Dallas airports but I finally got through to be reunited with my beloved Swiss army knife that has no intention to harm anyone. It made me wonder what it must be like to live in the land of the free when you feel like a prisoner in your own country paranoid about a threat from an unseen and unknown enemy that could be lurking in any crowd.

We didn't disembark at either the Statue of Liberty or Ellis Island because we had more to see and were deterred by the prospect of further queueing to get on board the crowded ferries that must have held about 1,000 people or more, all of whom crowded towards to same side to get a better view of this symbol of America. If the Statue of Liberty is a World Heritage site, which I believe it is, then it carried no indication of this status and I looked for it.

Back ashore we walked down Broadway to a park crowded with demonstrators against capitalism. It was a really anarchistic and disorganized demonstration by disparate interest groups from environmentalists, Marxists, homeless, and people resenting the system. The park was encircled by police who were taking no chances of a repetition of last week's event when they had to arrest 700 for disrupting traffic on the Brooklyn Bridge. We could only get glimpses of the destroyed World Trade Centre site as construction work was going on all round it but we were constantly reminded of it as we went. Then we strolled down Wall Street, mostly barricaded against a possible breakout from the protesters in the park whose mutual object of detestation is the centre of this bastion of capitalism. Then after passing the Stock Exchange and Tiffanys and other symbols of wealth and extravagance we caught the bus up First Avenue to the United Nations HQ. It was much larger than I had envisaged and also heavily locked down. On the fence outside was a banner pronouncing that on 31 October (Halloween) the global human population would reach 7 billion. It didn't say whether this was a landmark to celebrate or deplore. Such a statement seems to symbolize a degree of impotence of the United Nations.

We then went up 49<sup>th</sup> Street to the Rockefeller Centre where we experienced the most amazing coincidence. Standing in Rockefeller Plaza admiring the environs, gardens, sculptures and the array of people and activity, Su spied in the crowd my brother Chris and Dee Sinclair. We knew that he would be in New York for one day while we were there but we knew not where and we didn't anticipate seeing him until we caught up in

Dallas on 17<sup>th</sup> (10 days hence) but to meet in crowded New York when we hadn't run into each other in Brisbane for months was incredible. We left them to go shopping while we joined the throng ascending the Top of the Rock to overlook the jagged skyline of New York with its myriads of skyscrapers. After all this is where the word "skyscraper" was invented. It was an awesome and daunting sight.

Back down to earth and below it for much of the time we wandered around as the daylight faded and electricity glowed in every hue and colour from as many spaces as could be conveniently illuminated. We found our way into brilliantly lit and very crowded Times Square and soon found our way out of it again following Broadway back to 32<sup>nd</sup> Street dubbed "Korea Way" where we found a Korean Restaurant for a pleasant and again inexpensive meal before retreating to the nearby and very comfortable Lotus Hotel.