

December, 1998

Check out the world wide web address <http://stat.tamu.edu/~carroll>
There are new pictures, plus pictures of our summer trips.

Marcia and I hope that you and yours are doing well, and wish you a happy and prosperous new year. We're sort of at the same jobs, and sort of doing the same thing (although my golf handicap has risen from 9 to 15), so we thought a few stories would be fun.

BAGS FLY IF YOU LET THEM

A big trip we took this year was to Germany with our niece Brett, nephew Jeb and sister-in-law Carol. We visited our friends Winfried and Eva Effelsberg, and stayed in a Ferien Wohnung (vacation apartment) just outside Freiburg im Breisgau. We had two great apartments, with only one minor deficit: they were right on top of the cow barn! So, if the wind backed in from the west, we got let's just say an interesting smell.

The trip was fun, with visits to Switzerland (Interlaken) and France to see Cheese Master Anthony. The Cheese Master has a small restaurant which sells only cheese, bread and wine, and that was our dinner. Fabulous cheese, fabulous wine: who could ask for more.

We also visited Heidelberg, where I had done a sabbatical in 1980. After we arrived, we went looking for a vacation apartment in the hills outside town, but we could never find the place. Everyone we stopped to ask just kept saying "I don't know exactly, but I think you have to just keep going up the hill". Finally, we had given up, and I went to change my shirt because I was going to give a talk at the university. To do this, I opened the hatch-back in our Opel, and then spontaneously decided to try one more time to find the place. So, up the hill we go, and as I looked out of my rear view mirror, there was a suitcase flying in the air, and another rolling down the road. It seems that I had forgotten to close the hatch! A couple of German men were observing this, and laughing away, and one of them asked (even before we had said anything) "where in the US are you from?" I guess in Heidelberg, lost tourists in the hills with suitcases flying from their cars are typically Americans.

THE BEST COUNTRIES ARE THOSE WITH THE BEST HOTELS

In August, we went to Taiwan to a statistical conference. Taipei in August is extremely hot, but we stayed in the best hotel of our lives, the Grand Hyatt. Given as many hotels as I've stayed in, calling one the best is a serious compliment. I decided in the first five minutes that I was not going to leave the hotel except to go to the conference, and that's exactly what I did. So, if you ask me what Taiwan's like, I can only tell you two things: (a) it's hot in August; and (b) what a great hotel.

Oh yes, and (c) I have no idea what was in the banquet food; and (d) I needed to take a break for my liver after the banquets. As it turns out, at statistics conferences in Taiwan they put on these really fancy banquets, but something simple like rice is too plebian. Thus, they rolled out course after course of fancy food which to this day remains unidentifiable. My solution to the dilemma was to steal the food from the breakfast at the hotel (what a great hotel) and eat it just before we went to yet another banquet. I needed to eat because as an honored guest I was expected to participate in toasts, and this meant toast after toast, and it was impressed on me that it would be tacky not to drink as much as my hosts. Unfortunately, the main host must have had some Irish in his background, because there was no stopping him.

Marcia is a better tourist than me. She went all over the city shopping, and even flew to another city on the island to visit a national park. She could tell you what Taiwan was like, but I'm a typist and not a reporter.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO TO AN IMPEACHMENT HEARING TO HAVE HECKLERS IN THE AUDIENCE

We did our usual trip to Montana in July. One of the highlights was that we stayed at our usual B&B in White Sulphur Springs, and Marcia was invited to give a talk about aging to the local community. It was even advertised in the local newspaper. The talk took place in the local nursing home's guest center, and what was wild was that the residents also attended. It was hilarious. There was Marcia giving her talk, complete with transparencies, and there was one of the nursing home residents stopping her every couple of minutes to tell her what he thought, which was a lot. It ended up working out very nicely, because Marcia started prompting him, and he thought she was the cat's meow.

We also did a horse-back ride into the far country with our friends Marc and Debbi Steinberg. As usual in these sorts of things, I just tell any and all concerned that I have never even seen a horse before, much less ridden one, and I always gets the slow dumb one. This didn't quite work out this time, because my horse was slow and dumb OK, but insisted on being in front all the time. If you think about it: this is a problem, rather like being on an interstate where you pass a slow driver, he wakes up, zooms by you, falls asleep, gets passed, wakes up, etc. So, every time another horse passed us, which was every couple of minutes, my horse would gallop off into the front (although sometimes he stopped to try to bite the guy who passed him, which is kind of like the slow guy on the interstate giving you the finger as he passes). Marcia's horse was just dumb. and fairly clumsy into the bargain, and we all thought that he would simply fall and she'd fall too. Very scary but we had magnificent views of the mountains.

WHICH WAY DOES THE WATER DRAIN IN THE ANTIPODES?

In September we went to a statistics conference in Argentina. Great country, fabulous food, friendly people, dinner starts after 8:00PM, and you can't possibly be late.

Marcia went to Tierra del Fuego (I always remember that this means land of fire, because Dan Patrick on Sportcenter is always saying that someone is "en fuego"). What's cool about this is that it means that she has been to the southern-most city in the Americas (Ushuiah, Argentina) and the northern-most city (Barrow, Alaska). She saw sea lions among other things, of course, but more important she got to say that she was there.

On the way back, she had a Buffalo story (so-called because everyone is *from* Buffalo, if you get the drift). Before she went on her trip, we were at a restaurant in a small country town and having terrible trouble ordering because neither of us speaks a word of Spanish (except "en fuego", which doesn't much help at a restaurant). So four days later she is walking through the Buenos Aires airport, and a guy stops her and says, in perfect English, "oh, I sat next to you at the restaurant". Now, if you think about it, here we are struggling to order, and this guy at the next table speaks English, but he was too polite to embarrass us. Crazy world.

AND FINALLY, GOODBYE

We hope to hear from you, and please come visit if you have a chance. If you are a golfer, my golf courses are just a mile from both houses, and they are great fun.

Marcia and Ray

P.S.: As my grandfather Charles Carroll said every night as he was having scotch and I was having bourbon: "Ray, never let the facts get in the way of a good story". He also said "never drink rye whiskey", which is pretty good advice if you ask me.