

Helsinki, Finland - St. Petersburg, Russia - Stockholm, Sweden

by Irma Kackert

MAY 3, 2002

This is Irma Kackert writing, while waiting in the air terminal LAX at Los Angeles for the American Airlines plane, to start the trip to Helsinki, Finland. I came from my home in Thousand Oaks, California by van, the pickup time was 3:30 a.m. so I could catch the 7:00 a.m. flight to New York, JFK airport, where I will change planes. The line was short to check baggage, that's the advantage of being here in the early morning. Passing through security was easy, my shoulder bag went right on through the xray, my shoes were not checked, though I saw several people being made to remove their shoes. Since September 11, 2001, and the tragedy happening then, air travel requires much more strict security measures on passengers. On my last flight in February of this year, my suitcase was opened, everything was taken out. I was told the computer does a random check on luggage, and mine was selected. Everything was o.k., I was then passed through. In the JFK airport, in New York city, I will meet granddaughter Jessica Reedy Gandhi, she is flying from San Francisco, we will be together on flights from then on. We are both flying on American Airlines and will meet in that terminal, then will change to Finnair, which also uses the same terminal. I have traveled around the world two different times, almost always by myself, but have never been to the Scandinavian area. I do know two people in Helsinki, Sirpa Piironen and Anja, they are nurses who lived in the same apartment, C3-1, with me for a year or more, while I was working at Al Hada hospital, in Taif, Saudi Arabia. I will contact Sirpa by phone, in Helsinki, I do hear from her each Christmas. She is still working at a Helsinki hospital.

Jessica and I hope to take a ferry from Helsinki to Stockholm, and return from there to the U.S. If we can obtain a visa to St. Petersburg, in Russia, while in Helsinki, will go there for a few days, did not have time to get a visa before this trip, but will seek one, I know this is often possible, for a few days visit. If not available, will spend more time in Stockholm.

The flight to New York was good, I landed at gate 43 American Airlines terminal. This is so huge, and is in two parts, I had to go to the other building to look for Jessica, she landed at gate 3A, this was a very long way! I was there, at her gate, as passengers got off, and she didn't appear!!! I was worried, so checked at American Airline desk, they verified that she was on flight No. 182 from San Francisco, had not missed her plane. I then had her paged – found out from an attendant that she had to stay in a transit area at gate 3A, since she was transferring to a Finnair plane, and did not come out with other passengers. I could not enter the transit area, due to security measures. A big snafu, that I didn't see her with other exiting passengers. The man who paged her told me she was in the transit area, with other passengers from flight No. 182, I should go to the Finnair desk, which was very close to gate 3A, and get my boarding pass, I was then taken to the security area, and there she was, with her boarding pass for Finnair. I was so glad to see her – new security practices have changed some things, travel is not like it used to be. I've been traveling the world for 20 years. We were early, for our next flight over the Atlantic, so all worked out well. Since I am 86 years "young" and have some trouble with left foot and ankle, walking is not easy for me, I did take advantage of the airline cart service on the long distance between the two terminals, and also was able to stop at a Money Exchange booth. There I obtained \$100

worth of “Euros”, the money used in Finland and many other European countries now. This is the name of money used since the recent change, though Sweden and Russia have not adopted them yet. I won't have to use so many different kinds of money now, in traveling Europe – this will be my first experience with Euros. We are now both checked in at Finnair desk, and awaiting our flight to Helsinki at 5:50 p.m.

SATURDAY MAY 4

Arrival in Helsinki was 8:30 a.m.. The plane was crowded, seats were very close together, there was not much leg room. I had only my shoulder bag to carry, and in flight could push it back under my knees and stretch my legs out under the seat ahead of me. I could not sleep at all, it was a L O N G 7 hour flight. Jessica had the seat next to me, in the center section of the plane, she had a big backpack, and a heavy jacket with her, stowed them under seat ahead and had no place to stretch her legs, was uncomfortable. One redeeming feature was the excellent meal served, chicken, herb rice, vegetables, roll and wine. The Helsinki airport is modern, and very nice. Hardwood floors (there are many forests here, furnishing the wood,) were shiny and bright. My bag arrived o.k., Jessica had her backpack with her. We made our way to the hotel desk, clerk spoke English, we obtained a nice hotel, right in center of town, for \$100 a night, a cab took us there, fare was 17 Euros. It was raining when we landed, and on driving to the hotel, the city looked kind of deserted, heard the stores don't open until 10 a.m., we had kind of a dismal outlook for the day. But by noon the rain stopped, sun came out and it was pleasant. Our room was very nice, in a beautiful old hotel, kept in excellent condition. It is right across the street from the huge train station, which is an architectural gem. Large streetcars serve the city for transportation, and they all pass in front of the train station. Our room faces the street, has very tall windows that open out, letting in nice fresh air.

We were both very tired, so took a nap right away, and slept for a few hours. About 2:00 p.m. we went out, walked around, looked for tourist information inside the big train station, but the “ I ” office was closed today. In walking around we noted there are many, many sidewalk cafes, also places with tables and chairs where people could purchase beer, sit and visit. We sat at one of these and “people watched”. Most all are fair haired, with blue eyes, Caucasian race, did not see any oriental or people of black race. We enjoyed walking through the delicatessen and grocery departments of a very large department store, saw such a huge variety of different breads, sausages, cheeses, etc. It was fun to see their way of shaping breads, they all looked so good! All signs were in Finnish language, heard no English spoken, saw no tourists. It is early in the year, visitors will come in summer months. Early spring is evident, buds on trees, some new leaves on trees. We selected some meat, cheese, 2 tomato's, rolls and little cakes, we will eat in our room, there is a mini fridge to store it, we just want to relax together.

This hotel was built in 1914, a very elaborate building with elegant décor, the original one of the hotel chain was erected in 1833, they are proud of this building, keep it in excellent condition. We went to the lounge/bar area at 6:00 p.m., had a drink there. Up in the domed ceiling of this room was a huge stained glass circle, really a work of art, showing what an elegant hotel this is. Returning to our room, we took hot baths, then enjoyed the open faced sandwiches we made, with the meat, cheese, pickle slices and tomato

segments. I always carry plastic picnic fork, knife and spoon when I travel. I called Sirpa, reached her at her home, she will come to the hotel tomorrow at noon and meet with us. I haven't seen her since she and Anja finished their contracts in Saudi, but we have kept in touch.

SUNDAY MAY 5

I slept well, for about 3 ½ hours, then woke and could not sleep again. I watched the sky lighten, about 2:30 a.m. (daylight starts early here, at this time of year) I lay awake, prayed on my rosary, thought of my many past trips, counted sheep, and finally about 4:30 a.m. slept again. I didn't awaken until 9:00 a.m. Jet lag, I guess. Jessica was already dressed, and waiting to go down to breakfast. It was served, buffet style, in the large dining room, and was really sumptuous – so much food!!! I sampled porridge, bits of sliced meat and cheeses, a piece of pickled herring (yummy), eggs and coffee. A bit of “cloudberry jam” sampled on my roll, was probably gooseberry jam. Had not had that since childhood. Everything was delicious. After eating, we went to the train station across the street, and there changed more money. For \$360, I received 373.75 Euros, the rate today is 1.066 E for \$1. There was a \$10 fee for the money transfer.

Sirpa came to the hotel at noon, we were so happy to see each other, after 20 years, she is now about age 60, is still working here in a hospital. When we lived together in Saudi Arabia she worked as a surgical nurse in the hospital, I did hydrotherapy there. As we visited in the lobby area of the hotel, a man dressed unusually, in red pants, navy blue /green striped shirt, and tan vest over that, approached us, offered to sing for us at no charge. We accepted his offer, he sang a song in the Finnish language, had a beautiful voice. He also spoke English, said he had ambitions at one time, to attend Julliard School of Music in New York city. We learned later he had been a teacher, had developed a brain tumor, it was surgically removed and he recovered, but his brain functions were not the same, he could not teach again. Sirpa spoke with him in their language. He then went into the restaurant area, and brought us 3 beautiful yellow roses, presented one to each, Sirpa, Jessica and myself. What an unusual happening!! I taped him singing, on my recorder, and then had Sirpa talk on the audio tape. Jessica took the roses up to our room, then we left the hotel, walked to a nearby restaurant that Sirpa knew about. It was raining lightly now, Sirpa had an umbrella, it was only a short walk. We had a delicious lunch, whitefish (cooked local style), boiled new potatoes, creamy white sauce, carrots, and for dessert I chose a rhubarb tart with thick, yummy sauce, and blueberry ice cream with raspberry sauce -- all so good! White wine was served with the meal. The area where we ate was two stories high, with window walls on two sides, plants and palm trees at one side, and vines over the solid wall. It was lovely, like being outdoors (where it was raining) but dry and comfy inside.

After that we walked to the nearby train station and boarded a trolley car, or tram, Sirpa knew which one to take, we had about a 45 minute ride through the central area of town, and down to the waterfront. We saw the ship building area, a Carnival cruise ship was anchored there, for repairs. Many of the large cruise ships are built here. Finland is surrounded by water, also there are numerous lakes and rivers in the country and few large cities. After the tram ride, we went to her apartment, where she got her car, and drove us

to other areas. The large buildings in the city are well built, in good repair even if they are old. Everything was neat and clean, not a scrap of paper seen on the streets, it was now sunny, air was clear, temperature was about 58 F, snapped pictures, at the old Russian Orthodox church, on a hill in the city. Before the Russian revolution (and when Finland was a part of Russia) this religion was practiced, many churches were built in the ornate style. This one remains, now the prevailing religion in Finland is Lutheran, there are many churches of this faith here, and one Roman Catholic church. We went to several parks, to waterfront areas with marinas for many kinds of boats, to the old port area where ships traded merchandise from other countries, and then back to her apartment. Almost everyone lives in apartments here, I saw no single houses. The population of Helsinki is about 1,000,000, winters are long and very cold, there are only about 4 months of spring and summer. In late June, there are almost 24 hours of daylight. In her apartment she has many things from Saudi, Oman, (where she worked also, and bought her car, had it shipped here) and other countries she has traveled. She made coffee, offered little treats, we had a sip of cognac, looked at picture albums from Saudi, and I am in many of them. It was a nice remembrance time, we enjoyed being together again. Following this she drove us back to our hotel, we really got to see the city of Helsinki, with a personal guide. I treated all of us at lunch, felt it was my appreciation for escorting us through the city. If we are still in town on Thursday, which is her day off, she wants us to come to her apartment again. That depends on whether we get a visa to go to Russia. In the evening Jess and I went to the lounge, had a glass of wine, talked a long time together, we are great travel partners. It was amazing that it was twilight outside, the time was 10:00 p.m.!!

MONDAY MAY 6

Slept so well until 1:30 a.m., then “counted sheep” for a while, fell asleep again and awoke at 6:00 a.m. to a clear blue sky, no clouds, no rain! The yellow, long stem roses looked so pretty, made a cheery greeting against the large mirrored wall as one stepped into the bathroom. Again we had a plentiful breakfast in the dining room, with conversation about our various travels, and Helsinki. It was quite cool outside, and windy as we set out from the hotel, to find a travel agent, to help us get to St. Petersburg from here. I want to see the Hermitage, once the palace of the Czar of Russia, now a museum. The city was founded by Peter the Great, laid out to be a most beautiful city. The first place we went could not help us, but directed us to another – Jessica was great, finding her way there. I couldn’t read the very small map well, got mixed up easily. That agent was very good, will try to get a visa for us, and set up the trip to St. Petersburg. We had to get passport photos made, found the photo shop to do that, the cost was 9.90 Euros. Mine looked terrible!!!!Then we had to go to another agency, fill out visa application papers, for Russia, submit them and passport pictures, pay the fee. There is a May 9 holiday in Russia, celebrating a war victory over Nazi Germany, the city will be full of people that weekend. The first agent will find us a hotel, if rooms are available, will let us know tomorrow.

We walked about, in the area of our hotel, I saw an advertisement at a McDonald’s for a “Mc Curry” sandwich, wanted to try it. We purchased one, was a hamburger with curry flavoring, it tasted very good, I like curry seasoning. Also had a “shake” with it. We sat outside on a bench, eating, and watching people. There was a large paved area here, with benches, people sat out enjoying the sunshine. I noted a group sitting quite a way from us,

two men and one woman. She stood up, started to take the man's shirt off, then suddenly took her shirt and the scoop necked T-top underneath, off, she was bare to the waist! Evidently she wanted the sun on her body too. One never knows what to expect, when out amongst people. She didn't keep it off long, put the garments back on, but the man seemed to enjoy sitting in the sun, bare to the waist.

Next we went to a cyber café, Jessica sent e-mails to a person in Stockholm, saying we would be there, hopefully on Friday. That address had been given her, by the acquaintance she worked with in U.S. She read all her e-mails, on her computer at home, then read those on my computer. Amazing!!!! I am not that proficient on computer, have a lot more to learn. We then walked to the train station, sat outside in the sun at the tables and chairs there, and drank the local drink, a LONGERO, a tall, white, cold drink with a little alcohol in it. That, and beer, are the common drinks here, we were told. It was refreshing. We returned to our hotel, across the street, and I left a message on Sirpa's phone, that we would probably be going to Russia, on Wednesday. The Finnish people seem very busy and ambitious, most all live in large apartment buildings in the city, and use the trams, or streetcars, for transportation. The autos we see are all small, and parking is a problem.

Later in the afternoon Sirpa called me to say Anja was sorry to have missed me, as she was working on Sunday, and would like to come to the hotel tonight for a visit, also Sirpa and her niece Minna, who had worked in Dubai too, would come along. Of course that was fine, I would like to meet with them. They came at 7:30 p.m., we met in the lobby downstairs. Anja looked the same as she did years ago, I never did correspond with her, just Sirpa. Anja brought me a small bouquet of roses, baby breath and fern, procured a vase from the hotel restaurant, and presented them. How nice of her! We took pictures and visited a bit, then they wanted to take me to their favorite place for an evening drink. We walked to a park-like area, about 6 blocks away, in an area of beautiful old buildings. The center parkway has flower gardens (too early to be in bloom) a fountain, statues, wide paths, and green grass. Some of the embassies for foreign countries are on each side of this long area. At the far end was a charming small building which was a coffee, dessert house, also wine or beer served.. We went in, sat at a large table, they bought us each a drink, I chose white wine. Here we spent a couple of hours, just reminiscing and re-living those times when we lived together. Anja and Sirpa both worked as nurses in Al Hada hospital. The niece, who was about Jessica's age, had worked in Dubai, a country close to Saudi Arabia, was familiar with far east customs. It was a pleasant evening, we had lots of laughs about episodes in our apartment, C-3-1. Minna talked of her experiences working in Oman, in the Arab Emirates. There is freedom for ladies there, in opposition to Saudi Arabia, ladies may drive a car, wear western clothing, etc. Sirpa showed me her driving license, from Oman. What a pleasant evening we had together. Jessica enjoyed the evening too, she likes to socialize and was glad to meet my friends. It stays light very late here, at this time of year, was just getting dark as we walked slowly back to the hotel, enjoying the cool evening air, and the bright lights along the boulevard/park. I only had on my red nylon jacket, but had a short sleeved sweater, and long sleeved blue one over that, so was not cold. It was 11:00 p.m., and Minna snapped a picture of us, as we walked along, was not completely dark. We parted at the hotel, don't know if we will ever see each other again, but were grateful we had this meeting. It was 11:30 p.m. when we went to bed, end of a nice day.

TUESDAY MAY 7

I slept so well, didn't even turn over once, awoke at 6:15 a.m. to a bright blue sky, and sun was shining. The air was still cool, but a bit warmer than yesterday. The bouquet of roses and baby's breath next to my bed, was so nice to see and the yellow roses in the bathroom were still bright. After a long, relaxed conversation, while lying in our beds (talking about days when Jessica was a little girl) we rose, had breakfast in the hotel, and planned our day. We wanted to go to the market place, down by the waterfront, and explore by ourselves. Jessica located the small shop (there are many of these around, Sirpa had pointed them out) where you buy tickets for the tram, cost was 4 Euros each.

We boarded tram No.4 in front of the hotel, and rode toward the waterfront. The main streets here are very wide, trams travel in the middle area, and are well used by the locals. Lanes for cars and trucks are on each side, traffic moved very well, it seems most people use public transportation, even if they have an auto. Helsinki is very old, but kept up very well, is clean, no beggars or homeless seen walking around. I have noted that young people are very "hep" to modern styles, even have colored hair, some males have ear or brow piercings. I noted two girls passing by, as we sat in a plaza area, with "punk" hair styles: pink, blonde and green colored hair, stiffened to stand up straight in long spikes on her head – the other one had a "mowhawk", the hair was shaved off in a two inch wide band, from forehead all the way back to nape of neck! I guess they wanted to be noticed. Overall, though I have seen most dressed well, and neat looking, better than in some other large cities in the world where I've traveled.

The tram operator told us where to get off, near the market place and the huge, beautiful Lutheran cathedral with large plaza in front of it. The architecture of the church is beautiful, white, with dome tower above and a bright, shiny ball and cross atop it, all very striking. The church, plaza, and statues in front were objects of my camera, I hope the slides will be good. We walked through the market place, admiring the handcrafted objects for sale, made by local people. Small dolls were dressed in real fur, such as people wear here in winter, many fur hats for ladies, and men, were beautiful. Jessica tried on a black cloth headcover, scarf type and with light fox fur that outlined the face, she looked so lovely in it and wanted to buy it, but living in California, would have no place to wear it. I bought a doll, also some amulets made of reindeer horn, and necklaces with stones of local hematite and also lapis lazuli. The little boxes that hold them are made of round juniper branches, shaved smooth, and with a place for the chain and stone piece inside, a cover slides over this. Quite unique, someone had a good idea and made them. There were many hand crocheted hats and children's capes displayed. At the water's edge a couple of boats were docked, men were selling fresh fish right from the boats. We came upon several large booths where 2 men were preparing and selling local food. We ate here, I bought a herring (not smoked) dinner, with a delicious garlic sauce, and a salad. It was a large plateful, but so tasty that I ate it all. Jessica selected the local pea soup. Round kegs were the tables; we sat on small stools and enjoyed the meal outdoors. We noted that at the far end of the market was the park, and building, where we were last night with Sirpa and Anja; also at edge of market was the large fountain, with the naked lady statue, and water spouting seals.

Having seen most everything in the market area, we walked back toward the tram tracks and on a small side street we took, heard a lady call out to us - it was Minna, Sirpa's niece whom we had met last night. What a coincidence! She recognized us, from the other side of the street where she was walking; we spoke a few minutes together, then went on. Crossing the large plaza in front of the church I took a few pictures, then we waited for it to come, and boarded tram No.4, rode back to the hotel. What a nice way to spend a beautiful day in Helsinki. It gets very cold here in winter, to 30 F below zero, with little daylight for many months. Lapland is north of this area, the reindeer are raised there for export, it is within the arctic circle. On arriving at the hotel, I needed to rest my foot after all the walking around, and I stayed in our room while Jessica went to the tour office to see if our trip to Russia will occur, pick up passports, etc.

Later - Jessica came back with the passports, visas, train tickets, vouchers for a hotel in St. Petersburg, air tickets to Stockholm, and a voucher for admission to the Hermitage. I have dreamed so long, of being able to visit it, now at age 86 it is going to happen! We both were very happy, and pleased with arrangements the agent had made for us. We then went across to the train station, I changed travel checks to Euros, and we paid our hotel bill, so we can just leave in the early a.m. Our train leaves at 6:55 a.m., we ride through Finland, cross into Russia, and arrive at our destination at 1:30 p.m. A driver will meet us, and take us to the hotel in St. Petersburg, so we will have no problem with the language, seeking a taxi, etc. We explored a bit, looking at shops of all kinds on the several levels under the train station, a subway also runs from there, to parts of the city. It seems like the area just "spread", went on and on. I had eaten a fish lunch at noon, and was not hungry, but Jess ate in a small "fast food" place where the meat was cooked on an upright bar-b-q, as they cook it in Saudi and other eastern countries, and make schwarma sandwiches. I ate a lot of those while I lived in Saudi, they were good! We returned to our room, organized suitcase and back pack, and retired. The sky was still light at 10:30 p.m..

WEDNESDAY MAY 8

I didn't sleep well, awoke often as I usually do when leaving on a trip, in early a.m. Turning toward the windows I could see something white, appearing and disappearing from the roof edge of the 10 story building across the street. It was puzzling at first, then realized it was a huge white emblem flag waving, and then dropping, in the wind. It must have been put up today, was not evident last evening. We rose at 5:30 a.m., left the hotel at 6:15 a.m., the desk clerk took a picture of us on my camera, as we left. I had no problem pulling my suitcase across to the station, Jessica carried her large backpack and shoulder bag. We found our train on track 9, the proper coach, and reserved seats. Jessica put my suitcase up on the overhead rack for me, there was no rack at the end of the car, as I have often found in Europe. We left on time, rode north through Finland countryside. An officer just checked our passports and gave us customs declaration sheet to fill out, and show on entering Russia. The land is covered with pine trees, is very beautiful, some places have been cleared for planting crops and small frame houses are nearby. Often they are painted red, with white trim, everything is very neat and orderly. On passing through a few towns I noted there are some single houses, but more apartment buildings than houses. It is a nice time of year here, the new, small leaves are out on deciduous trees, making them look

feathery. It is bright, sunny and pleasant, about 60 F, I think. I feel good, and it is good to be traveling again!

The passport inspection was done as done as the train moved along; two officials checked it and put in the stamp, the visa permit. Later on, before we passed into Russia, two ladies came through the cars with a rolling machine, they were money changers and computed changing Euros into rubles, the money used in Russia. I tried to use two travel checks, they refused them so I used \$40 into 1130 rubles, paper bills. That was a nice service, we won't have to stand in line at a money changer, in the station. The train stopped at Vainikkala, a rural area. At this time the lunch coach was closed, also the rest rooms, I suppose for security. Announcements for these happenings were made in 3 languages, Finn, Russian and English. All passports were taken from passengers, officials entered the train here. We started again, several sets of two officers came through the coaches, for immigration and for customs. One of them asked me about my suitcase, "what did I have in it"? I said it held personal clothes, the other one looked so stern, talked in Russian, I thought he was going to make me open it, but he wrote something on the customs declaration and finally said O.K., stamped the paper and went on. Then 2 female officers came through, did not speak English, went away. Now we passed the Russian border, and stopped at Viborg. We stayed quite a while there, a building was next to the tracks, I presumed for official business. Then our passports were returned to us, and I felt much better for I never like to give up my passport when traveling in foreign countries. It is really more valuable than your money! Finally we started moving again and were told we are now on Moscow time, one hour ahead of Finland.

Observations from the train as we moved along -- no more neat red painted, white trim, little houses as we saw in the Finland forests. Here, the rural areas are messy looking, small wooden houses are not painted, some very old looking, tractor-like machines are seen loading cut timber onto trucks, many things seen gave the impression of poor economy. In some places tractors were seen dragging the plowed fields, getting them ready for planting. I took a couple of pictures out of the train window, wonder if I got anything? I noted as we left Viborg it was 11:56 a.m.

We reached St. Petersburg at 1:30 p.m., all passports had been returned before we left the train, and exiting was easy as Jessie carried my suitcase for me, I took her backpack. We followed the crowd out of the train, and on the platform a man was standing, holding a sign up with the name GANDHI on it. This is Jessica's married name, we used her name as she did all the transactions with the travel agent, for me. That saved me walking a lot in Helsinki. He was our driver, and how convenient for us, to have him waiting for our arrival. He had a car, took us to it, through the big crowd around. He spoke just a little English, had us wait in the car while he phoned his agency that he had made contact with us. In that time we had a chance to watch the steady flow of people going by, such a busy place. Many were poorly dressed, in contrast some had very smart, stylish clothing. I noted what I called "poor taste", women mixed garment style of a large plaid skirt, with a striped jacket, or wearing a velvet top and non-conforming color of slacks. Many women wore dresses, had hair tinted with the shiny, magenta color that seems to be the fashion color of the year. We saw a lot of this in Finland too. The driver took us through the heavy street traffic with

trams, trucks, autos and bicycles, all trying to get through first, I thought we would surely have an accident before arriving at our hotel, quite a distance from the R.R. station.

The name of the hotel was Okhtinskaya, fronted on the wide river "Neva", and quite a way from the part of town where Peter the Great started the city in the 1700's. It is quite large, several stories high, our room had twin beds, a balcony and full bath. It was not as large as our last one, but adequate. There was a TV and small refrigerator, but we found one could not use both at the same time. Another evidence of property not in "top" shape in Russia, the economy is not as good as our last country. There were many services though, we soon found out, a gift and snack shop, a money changer service, a travel person, a book and news shop, and 2 restaurants. Soon after getting settled in our room (on the 5th floor) we asked about a tour of the city, an evening dance show with refreshments, and a possible boat tour on the canals. The travel lady in the hotel arranged a ½ day tour of the city tomorrow at 10:00 a.m., and a reservation for the evening Russian dance show on Thursday. We will have to get our own taxi to go there, and return, they did not provide a driver for that. The tour agency in Finland called us in our room, to make sure we arrived safely and were met by the car and driver. They also reconfirmed that we are taken care of, in our tour pact with them, a car and driver will pick us up, and a guide will give us the tour through the Hermitage on Friday. He will then escort us to the airport, for flight to Stockholm. They really put together a wonderful tour package for us, everything included in one price, and service was excellent.

Jessica went to the cyber café in the hotel, made contact with the e-mail address given to her by her co-worker (who had been born in St. Petersburg), two people would contact her at the hotel, and take her out in the evening, for a glimpse of Russian clubs and cafes. What an opportunity, to have locals escort her. I will prefer to rest in the room at night, my foot and ankle is always painful after being on it all day. I washed my hair and showered, got ready for dinner in the hotel. Our hotel faces a busy 4 lane highway, along the river, traffic moves fast there; right across from our balcony is a large grassy area, we learned it is a dog park. People live in apartments, have no yard, so this is provided, where they can exercise their animals. I see people walking with pets, on a leash. At apartment buildings on the opposite side of the hotel, I see fenced areas with a parking booth, and automatic gate, evidently people must pay to park their cars. We appear to be in the much better part of town, than the area near the train station.

We had dinner in the hotel, went to the dining room on the second floor, it was not quite as fancy as the one on main floor, where we had a cappuccino, right after we arrived from the train station. That was very formal. Our tables here had white linen tablecloths, the napkins were set up, fan style, were so stiffly starched, in order to stand upright, appeared a bit different. Male waiters, in black and white garb, formal looking, spoke just a bit of English. I wanted to order a Russian dinner: had fish chowder first (delicious), dinner of petite crepes called "blinis", salmon slice, and caviar, all with fresh dill topping. The caviar was not black, but light peach-pink color. It was too salty for my taste, but I was glad to have some while in Russia. It is served so much here. A vegetable accompanied the dinner. Returning to our room after dinner, Jessica received a phone call from the local couple, they met her in the lobby downstairs, and escorted her for a taste of "evening out". I preferred to stay in, and rest. On the TV I heard news on CNN channel, in English –

another bombing in Israel, 16 people killed. How terrible, when will it stop? At 11:00 p.m. when I was ready to retire, the sky was still light, had a rosy tinge!

THURSDAY MAY 9

On waking at 6:30 a.m. I looked out at a cloudless sky, the sun was shining, I could see the skyline of city center in the distance. I had slept well, heard Jessica come in at 2:30 a.m., but went back to sleep. She told me later they were a married young couple, both university educated, who took her to a few private clubs, and a café, young people stay out late nights, they call these the “white nights”, because daylight remains for such long hours, and they celebrate these times. She had different Russian foods and drink, they were happy to escort a visitor to their city. In each city we will visit, a person located through the e-mail address given by her fellow employee in U.S, will contact Jessica and offer to show her around. What a nice treat!

We had breakfast, which was included with room rate, following this our guide and driver for the city tour arrived. In a small van we were taken to the town center, where the palaces are located, quite a distance from the hotel. The female guide, named Irina, spoke excellent English, also Spanish and Russian, was very knowledgeable. Czar Peter the Great designed and built this city in the 1700's, which was named St. Petersburg, after him. He wanted it to be the most beautiful city known in the world at that time, superior to Athens, Rome, Venice, Alexandria, and incorporated architecture used in those places, also 70 canals going inland from the Neva River. These are still in use. After the revolution in Russia, about 1917, the city was called Leningrad, but after the fall of Communism in 1991, the name went back to St. Petersburg. Russia is now C I S, the Commonwealth of Independent States, called the New Russian Federation. The Neva River, flowing through the city, empties into the Bay of Finland. The river freezes solid in winter months, but beginning in June, bridges over it will open at certain hours, so ships can go through, again celebrating the “white nights”. Peter the Great, Catherine I, Catherine II, Paul, Alexander, Elizabeth, all Czars or Empresses in 1700's and 1800's, built huge palaces when they ruled, these are in that town center, are kept up well, are so beautiful. During Communism in Russia, they were not cared for as well, but have now been restored to original beauty. Different types of architecture were selected by Peter: Baroque, Grecian, Roman, Orthodox, and colors of yellow and white, dark green with lighter trim, blue and white were most used. One was dark red and white.

There are many large government buildings, from the early days, also universities, and museums in this area. They are mainly 4 and 5 stories high, none much higher, giving a rather level skyline. The fronts of buildings are decorated with sculpture, or pillars, or baroque style embellishment, none exactly alike but all beautiful. The streets were very clean, some with boulevards where trees grew, new young leaves sprouting out gave a feathery look to them. The huge churches built at that time were of Russian Orthodox design, some had huge domes covered in gold, which glistened above the skyline. One was particularly elegant, the Cathedral of the Resurrection: it reminded me of churches I've seen in Turkey, with rounded minarets of bright colored stones, arranged in swirling patterns. Above the entrance was a huge mural of Christ ascending to heaven. The stone used to construct the body of the church was dark red. We made a stop at St. Nicholas

church enclave, several buildings painted blue with white trim, the church had 3 gold domes glistening atop it, was in Greek Orthodox style. We stepped inside the church, a service was just ending (they were celebrating Easter now) and people were kissing a cross that a priest held, many were singing. People stood in line, waiting to approach the priest. Candles were burning in front of several icons, participants prayed there, were happy to have freedom of religion again.

The driver and guide took us back to the hotel at 1:00 p.m. A little later Jessie's friends, the married couple who live here, called to say they would like to guide us to town center, and have a boat ride on the river and canals near the Hermitage, also called the Winter Palace. They came to the hotel, we walked to the busy street next to the river, and she obtained transportation, in the local custom, which was a surprise to me. She stood at curb edge, with arm extended fully, a car soon stopped, she spoke in Russian, made a price with him for a ride to town center, he agreed, we all got in the car and were driven down to the canal area. Serge, the man's name, told us to wait at canal edge, where there were many local boats, while he walked ahead, found a boatman waiting for more passengers. There were already 6 locals waiting in the boat. It was an open deck cabin cruiser, the driver showed a map of canals and the wide river where we would ride. The weather was mild, pleasant in the city center, but quite windy and cold when out in the river, the driver had large woolen blankets for each person, to cover when the air was cold. We had an hour long ride along many canals, seeing the beautiful palaces, museums, the summer palace area, a walled island with gardens and statues along the paths. The buildings we saw this morning, from street side, were now approached from the river, or a canal, we had a different perspective of them. The majority of colors on buildings were yellow and white. Serge explained to us, in English, history of the different buildings, his wife Anja, only spoke Russian, both were very pleasant, I felt so lucky to have this personal guided boat tour. Apartment buildings, most 4 or 5 stories high, were along canals in some areas, no single houses were seen except out in suburban areas, when we were driven to the hotel. This is a very unique city, planned so well, many, many years ago. We returned to the hotel, after the boat ride, in the same way we had come to the water area: walked to the busy thoroughfare, Anja stood at the curb with arm extended, a car stopped, she spoke with the driver, he took us to the hotel. Local drivers with a car, make extra money this way, taking people to and from town center. They charge less than a regular taxi, local residents use their service. Serge and Anja took Jessica out again in the evening, to show her a bit of night life, in the time of the "white nights". I retired at 11:30 p.m., the sky was still kind of light, with a rosy tint.

FRIDAY MAY 9

I slept very well, heard Jessie come in at 1:00 a.m., but slept again right away. Awoke to a bright blue sky and sunshine, about 6:15 a.m. I did my stretching exercises, dressed, and wrote a bit in my journal. After Jessie rose, we went to breakfast. It was not buffet style, as many of the hotels use, but served by a waiter to our table. A plate was brought to each of us, with slices of warm meat, peas, and cucumber slices. Bread, butter and a croissant accompanied it. Then a serving of a very light egg soufflé was presented, also coffee. I don't think I ever had peas and cucumber served at breakfast before, but it all tasted good.

Today we have the trip to the Hermitage, provided in our tour pack by the Helsinki agent, pickup time was 12:00 p.m. We packed our cases, as we will be leaving St. Petersburg after the tour, will be provided with a car and driver, also a guide. Following the tour of the Hermitage, we will be taken directly to the St. Petersburg airport, to catch the 6:30 p.m. flight to Stockholm, Sweden. I am sitting on our balcony now, enjoying the sun, basking in it's warmth. The temperature is probably about 59 to 62 F, air will warm up later. We do not have a hotel reservation in Stockholm, will obtain one at the airport there. I see ripples on the river below us, there must be a wind – we are protected from it here on the balcony. The wide road is full of cars, probably it is back to work day for many, following yesterday's celebration of victory over Nazi Germany.

There have been one or two saunas in each hotel we've stayed in, and we expected to use them, but so far have been too busy to do so. Maybe in the next hotel! We checked out of our hotel at noon, and in the lobby a tour guide was waiting for us, she had the sign "GANDHI", as did the driver at the rail station. This is a common practice throughout the world, meeting people signed up for a tour. Outside was the car and driver (the same man who met us at the rail station); our female guide was Natashya, a beautiful young Russian woman, who spoke English well. We were driven to the Hermitage, or Winter Palace, and entered through the front entrance, facing the Neva River. It is very broad here, and directly across the water is where Peter the Great set up the first buildings, and first church. We'll have a personally guided tour, entrance fee was already paid, but I had to pay 300 rubles, to take my camera inside, were told no flash was allowed. The place was very crowded. My first elegant sight was the very wide staircase going up about 3 levels, made of white marble, curved, and with red velvet carpeting down the center. This was held in place at each step, by shiny brass rods. The surrounding walls were of white marble, with baroque décor, figures of angelic cherubs here and there, touches of gold accenting them. This was the residence of Peter the Great, and wife Catherine I, it was amazing that he would create (ordered built) such a magnificent residence. At the beautiful staircase I saw someone take a picture, and saw the flash, so I got bold, and took one too. We ascended the stairway and went into one great hall after another, the floors were of parquet, was told 10 different kinds of wood were used in making the designs, or patterns. Such artistry!! There were crystal chandeliers, the great one in the first room entered was of gold filigree with crystal pendants. It was so big, and heavy, I wondered how they securely fastened it to the ceiling.

The next room had several floor standing, upright crystal chandeliers, also some hanging ones. There were mirrored walls here, I feel it was copied from the ballroom at the palace of Versailles in France, and was probably used as a ballroom here, for grand affairs. I could imagine the room filled with lovely gowned ladies and uniformed males, dancing to music provided by court musicians. Later on in the tour, we saw several gowns from the 18th and 19th centuries, so ornate, colorful, and I imagine, hard to wear. Of course ladies that wore gowns like these had many servants to help them dress. The gold covered royal carriage was displayed in one room, it was so elaborate, almost unbelievable. The Hermitage is now a museum, filled with pieces of carved furniture from palaces, tables with inlaid mother-of-pearl, or precious stones, objects displaying beautiful wood carving, paintings from famous artists, serving pieces made of silver, etc. Room after room displayed wonders of past regal living, gifts from other rulers at that time, displayed

beautifully. In the throne room, the parquet floor was elegant, at the head of the huge room was the red and gold chair, where the Czar sat. In another room pieces of the dinnerware designed by Peter the Great were shown – they had the design of a frog, St. Petersburg was built on marshy land, hence he chose the frog symbol. The crowds moved along slowly, many stopping to observe closely, two originals by Leonardo di Vinci. My foot was painful, and I took advantage several times, of sitting on a bench to rest it, then would proceed again. In the malachite room was a huge circular temple, with round pillars and gold accents, large, and outstandingly beautiful; the green color was vibrant. The final room, after the malachite temple, was called the gold room, walls and ceiling were resplendent with gold leaf. On beautiful wood tables were triangular shaped glass cases containing a collection of hand carved cameos, all different. These were fashionable as jewelry for ladies. We were told that different collections would be displayed under the glass cases, at various times, right now was the time for the cameos. I do have a cameo necklace, very old. There was a corridor where huge old tapestries, mainly from Belgium, hung on the walls, another corridor was copied from the Sistine chapel in Rome, it had arched ceiling and paintings by famous artists on the walls.

We did not explore every room, though did see the little Hermitage and theatre addition, added on by one of the Empresses. On leaving the Hermitage we had to walk a long way across the plaza at the rear, to where our car and driver waited. All buses and autos were made to stay at that spot. Passing a food stand in the plaza, we bought a potato filled piroshki, local food made of soft dough, filled with mashed potato, then deep fried – it was very tasty, the stand had many customers. We said our “good bye and thank you” to the guide Natashya at the car, she now left us and the driver took us to the airport. We had put our luggage in the car, when we left the hotel. We passed many churches and several monuments, on the way. The victory celebrated yesterday was for the 1941 – 1945 war with Germany. There are bronze statues of Peter the Great on his horse, and other Czars, throughout the city. The driver left us at the terminal, we were surprised to find it small, old and not well kept. There were no signs in English, no check-in counters, just a small office with two ladies inside. I went to the window, seeking someone who spoke English, one did (a little) were told to wait, and at 5:00 p.m., pass through the x-ray area for luggage, at one side of the room. We did that, found we were then taken into the new part of the St. Petersburg terminal, we had been in the old building, not kept up well. Our luggage was checked to Stockholm (Jessie had to check her backpack too), we had time to browse through some shops. I looked for a patch from St. Petersburg, for my travel hats, but didn't find one, did purchase a snack and a drink, then went through the security check and waited till time to board the Russian plane. It was all quite simple, no problems, after we got into the newer part of the terminal. Now we're leaving Russia, I have traveled for 20 years, all over the world, just put off coming here. I'm glad I could visit St. Petersburg, a wonderful city.

A light, packaged meal was served en route, meat and cheese slices, dark bread and butter, olives, lettuce, a little cake, coffee and wine. Air time to Stockholm was one hour and ten minutes. On arrival we collected our luggage with no problem, used the carts provided to advance through the terminal, to the tourist counter. It appears to be a new building, the shiny wood floors were attractive and showed they use the wood here, from their forests. At customs, no questions asked, we then looked for a money change booth

and found a couple of them. I asked to change Russian rubles to Swedish money, called KRONER (crowns), but was refused, they don't take Russian money. Sweden does not use Euros. I then cashed some travel checks and got Swedish money. Now we had to find our way into town, were told at the information counter, to take the Arlata, a train, and at the train station could find a hotel. We did so, my ticket was 60 crown, a pensioner price, but Jessica's was more. It was a fast, new train, a 20 minute ride to the central R.R. station in Stockholm. On arrival there we found the hotel locator office, but it closed at 6:00 p.m.! It was now 8:00 p.m. on our watches, though there is a 2 hour time difference here, from Russia. I sat down, with our luggage, Jessica purchased a phone card, she had some hotel phone numbers and wanted to stay on the island part, or the old section, of Stockholm. She phoned several, it took quite a while, for she would check with me about each one, then selected the Scandia, a Hilton hotel. We took a cab there, not far from the station, in a good location. It was very large, modern, with all amenities. Our room was very large, even had a lovely sofa and chair set, a table and chairs. The covering on the sofa was bright, stripes of red, light green, beige and yellow, very Swedish looking. After resting a bit, I took a nice hot bath, then watched TV. I should mention that in all the hotels we've used, the bathrooms have round, shiny metal towel holders, that are warmed by electricity, so the towels are pleasantly warm to touch. A nice feature! The ones in Russia were "skimpy", again a sign of poor economy. We don't have a balcony here, or a view of the street, will be here a very short time. Jessica contacted the e-mail address for Swedish "friend of a friend", they were awaiting her message, and met her down in the lobby, to escort her for a short tour of "Gamla", the very old part of town. I retired, was ready for rest, felt happy that I made the tour of the Hermitage museum, the flight to Sweden, a very full day, and was just tired, but not exhausted. We only have Saturday here in Stockholm, will leave on Sunday morning, plane departure 10:00 a.m.

SATURDAY MAY 11

Today, back in U.S. there is a party for the first birthday of my twin great-granddaughters Anna and Emma, I will miss it, but left gifts for them, sad to miss the party. I slept well, awoke very early feeling rested. At 4:30 a.m. it was already bright outside. Later, when Jessie awoke, she told me of her taste of night life here, with the Swedish young people who took her out. There was a young couple and another man, he was very large, strong looking, had a reddish beard and hair. He builds the old style "Viking" boats, told much about the history of Sweden and the old port of Stockholm. They showed her old town, went into a tiny café, sampled Swedish food, young people danced. She said the streets were full of people, who stay up late at this time of year, enjoying the very late daylight hours. We had breakfast in the large dining room, and what a spread it was!!! A huge buffet was beautifully set out: hot and cold cereals, several kinds of yogurt, fruit juices, coffee, milk, all, kinds of fruit, a variety of sliced meats and cheeses, breads, sliced tomato and cucumber, eggs served in several ways. Such a lot of food! After eating, Jessie wanted to show me GAMLA, or old town, where she was last night. Stockholm is built on islands, connected by bridges and canals.

The sun was out, sky bright blue, air was pleasant, just a light jacket needed. The streets were cobblestone, many very narrow passages between the tall, narrow buildings, shops all along, the streets were full of tourists. After ½ mile walk, my foot was weak and tingly,

and we turned around toward an area where a bus tour of the city could be had. I wanted to do this, also take a boat ride provided for tourists. As we walked toward the bus I took pictures, saw a man fishing out of a little boat (near the statue at the water's edge, of a rear view of a naked warrior, with only a helmet on) he had a tall pole in the boat, rigged so it held a rope with very large, round net on it – he dropped this into the water, brought it up on the extended rigid pole, but only had a couple of little fish. I felt sorry for him. On the bus ride, which lasted for 2 hours, we had ear phones to listen to a tape each person had, it gave history of areas and special buildings. We toured several islands, then the main part of town. All housing is in apartment buildings, many quite new and nice looking There were many large churches, mainly Lutheran: it was the rule that if born in Sweden, one was then Lutheran. This has been changed, in recent years. Other religions are tolerated here. Traffic was heavy, at one point a through street ahead of us was closed, because of a parade going by. Stockholm appeared to be a very clean, neat place.

After the tour, we were let out near the boat departures, so purchased tickets for a tour called "Under The Bridges and Through the Locks". We were on a closed excursion boat, with windows at the sides, were going to view the area from the water, a 2 hour ride. The skyline of the city was interesting, with domes of churches, and statues on top, outlined against the sky. Architecture of apartment buildings along the water, was interesting, some with older style façade, some more modern. Head sets again gave detailed descriptions of the history, buildings, of the area. We passed a very large, red brick building, where the Nobel Peace Prize is given out, in some years. Several thousand people attend this event, from all over the world. Boats, ships, yachts, every kinds of watercraft are seen along the canals – bridges lift, or swing away at certain times, so large sailing ships or yachts can go through. We went through 2 locks today, where the level of the canal was not the same as the big lake we were entering, so gates are closed, water made to rise, then front gate is opened and the boat glides onto the lake. That reminded me of my trip to Panama several years ago, when I went through the canal in a small boat, not a cruise ship. I wanted to be down at the bottom of the lock, when water was lowered! not 5 stories up on a large ship. Stockholm is called the "City On Water", I was glad to view it from bus and boat, hope I obtained some good slides.

The sun was warm, and temperature had risen, we went to a lovely park nearby, where young, new leaves were coming out on the trees, tulips were open in flower beds, and there was a small glass sided building, where soft drinks, beer or coffee were served. Tables and chairs were just outside, we sat there in the sun, I had a lime ice, covered with fresh strawberries. It was so good, had a real stingy, lime taste, was very refreshing. All over, on lawns in the parks, or in grassy places, many people were lying out sunning themselves, rolling up pant legs, removing shirts or blouses (but ladies had bras on) because they want bodies exposed to sunshine, after the long, dark winters. I think we did the town, as tourists, saw the beauty of it, enjoyed the day. Sitting on the boat those 2 hours rested my foot, and as we walked toward the hotel, Jessie often took my arm, that helped when going over curbs. I noted that at busy intersections, the stop lights also had beepers, for blind people. The sound is in different timing of the beeps, for red (stop) or green (go), we don't have this in California. Stockholm is a beautiful city, neat, clean and well kept.

In the evening we walked to a plaza area, with large, beautiful fountains, Jessica wanted me to taste the local “fast food”, which she had when out with the young people last night. It is called TUNNBRODSRULLE, made by taking 2 large, thin flour tortillas, placed flat, a large scoop of hot mashed potatoes dropped on them, a Swedish sausage stood in the potatoes, shredded lettuce, cabbage, sliced onions, catsup, mustard, shrimp in a sauce, laid on, then it is all rolled up like a cone. A little fork is provided, but Jessie said the locals just eat it, like an ice cream cone. It was delicious, though I made use of the fork, and couldn't eat all the tortilla – was nice to learn of local food. We also had a local drink that is popular here, called PUCKO, chocolate flavored. Returning to the hotel, it was cold, for the temperature had dropped a lot, but I had put on 2 sweaters under my light jacket, and was all right walking. Back at the hotel we prepared our cases for travel, got ready to leave here in the early morning.

SUNDAY MAY 12

This is Mother's Day in U.S., I'll be traveling home today. Many years ago, husband John would present a corsage to me on this day, from the children and himself, I always appreciated this nice gesture. After sleeping well, awoke about 4:45 a.m., it was very light outside: I did some stretch exercises, prayed my rosary, and got ready to travel. A Surprise!! When Jessica got up, she had a grandmother card for me, on this Mother's Day, had carried it all the way, on our trip – how sweet of her!! We went down to breakfast, it was another huge spread of food, and we ate well. I even had a small piece of pickled herring, it was so good, and I must say Jessica picked out a very good hotel, everything was excellent, and price was reasonable. Probably that was because it is not tourist season here yet. Leaving the hotel, we expected to take a cab to the train station, and the fast train out to the airport. The taxicab driver in front of the hotel said it would be almost as reasonable for us to take the cab to the airport, since there were two of us, so we did that. The ride there, on a good highway, was through some fields of agriculture, and also many uncleared areas of forest. Everything looked fresh and green, the sun was out, air pleasant. On arrival at the airport, we found the money change booth, I changed the Swedish kroner I had left, received \$161 for it. I asked about changing Russian rubles, and she took that too, gave me \$19.50: I did keep a few coins, to add to my collection of money from all over the world. We checked our bags, will fly to Helsinki and board the Finnair plane there, for flight to New York. The bags are checked through to U.S., mine to Los Angeles, Jessica's to San Francisco. This has been a great trip, we saw. and did, so many things in 3 different countries, in nine days.

The flight from Stockholm to Helsinki was only about 45 minutes, a packaged breakfast was served, including a little herring, so typical of the Scandinavian countries. The departure level of the Helsinki airport had so many shopping areas, even a food store. There were all kinds of fish, smoked, and in plastic, sealed wrapping, to take home, also caviar, mustards and sauces. I selected a tube of HOT mustard for myself – here U.S. money could be used. While waiting for boarding time, we had a “white” coffee in a café, it was served in a tall glass and was so hot, one could hardly hold it, but I liked that, for most of the coffee I've had has been just warm.

We boarded the plane to New York, on Finnair airlines, had seats next to each other toward the rear of the plane. This was much better than on our trip here, we were crammed into the center section, had no leg room. This plane has more room. The whole row of seats across from us was empty, so after the meal served, of beef stroganoff, I went to that row and put my leg up on an empty seat. Though our bags are checked through to our final destinations, we will have to collect them in New York, go through customs, then they will be re-checked by airline personnel. In international travel, bags must always be claimed at the first port of entry to a country. Two movies were shown, first one was "Shallow Hal", it was funny, second one was "Red Planet". Since we're flying in daytime, could see snow on mountains below, Finland shores were both visible, at one time, that was interesting. The mountains were probably in Norway and Sweden. Often, when flying over the Atlantic, could see solid ice at times, then water with ice floating in it, probably icebergs. Later – Now we are probably over Canada, flying lower, can see mountains with many, many snow patches and also frozen lakes, there are no clouds at all. Then the cloud cover came back, couldn't see land below. In another couple of hours we arrived at JFK airport, and landed in a deep, deep fog, with the miracle of instrument landing, couldn't see anything but fog. It was scary, but landing was fine. I was not uncomfortable on this long flight, (8 ½ hours) as I had my leg up most of the time.

Our luggage arrived on the carousel, we put it in carts, proceeded to immigration, and the lines were not too long, were passed through quickly. I now have another stamp in my passport, to join Finland, St. Petersburg and Stockholm. We had to go to the "connections" desk, where attendants took the luggage, it would be put on the proper planes for the rest of our journey. We had a couple hours layover, which was good, for it was a great distance from our arrival gate on Finnair, to the far end of the other building, for gates on American Airlines. Jessica obtained a wheelchair and attendant, we did not see any trams in operation at the time. I was glad to ride the long distance, Jessica said she was happy she had checked her big backpack, did not have to carry it. Our departure gates on American Airlines were quite close to each other. She had time to call her husband, let him know we arrived safely, he will pick her up in San Francisco airport. When it was boarding time at my gate, 48 A, she gave me big hugs, we parted; she had 30 minutes to wait for her boarding time.

My flight to LAX was 5 hours 40 minutes, was quite bumpy, and we had headwinds which slowed the plane – arrival time was 9:30 p.m.. My suitcase arrived on the carousel, I then phoned the van service, ROADRUNNER, and was picked up shortly at curbside. It is an hour or more ride, to Thousand Oaks, and I was tired, my foot ached, but I was not exhausted, as I thought I might be. It is a long trip for an older lady! On arrival at my home, found the lights on inside (daughter Mary had done this), which was so nice, it was almost midnight. I went right to bed. MONDAY 5 a.m. I slept until 2:30 a.m., then no more, so got up, showered, and am now having a good cup of coffee, then will start emptying the suitcase.

ADDENDUM; On May 3, on arrival in New York from LAX, I changed a \$100 travel check and received 100 Euros, had to pay a fee of \$6.70. STOCKHOLM – The e-mail "friend-of-a-friend-of a-friend" males and lady acquaintance, who took Jessica out at night, all spoke excellent English. She described one as very big, husky, red bearded man, the other light

hair, and blue eyes. The red bearded one was very knowledgeable about the Viking boats of old, he sailed them, worked on them, and is now building them. They ate and had a drink in a tiny, old style café, walked about the old narrow streets, showed her the sights. People stay out very late nights, at this time of year, enjoying the warm weather (in opposition to the very long, cold, winter nights), eat, drink and dance.

FINLAND WORDS	kiitos	thank you / please
	hei (hay)	hello
	ei -no - Lonkero	colorless drink, alcoholic
RUSSIAN WORDS	spasibo	thank you
	privet	hello
	poka	goodbye
SWEDISH WORDS	hei (hay)	greeting, hello
	toalett	toilet
	utgang	gate
	kroner	crown (money)
	tak	thank you
	Eur	Small coins under 1 crown

Typed on computer by Irma Kackert August 2004 Age 88