

# Niagara Falls - Canada - New York

by Irma Kackert

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**JULY 10, 2001**

My daughter Mary Lynn and I are in the American Airlines terminal at LAX airport in Los Angeles, ready to fly to Buffalo, New York, and see Niagara Falls. It is 11:15 p.m., we will soon board the "red eye" flight to Chicago, will arrive about 6:15 a.m. and change planes there. Mary has the month of July off from her position with Conejo School District, and suggested we take a trip together, for a week or so. I have flown all over the world, almost always alone: it will be nice to have my daughter with me.

First problem: We did not leave until 1:00 a.m., one hour and 30 minutes late!!!!. There must be two pilots to fly the plane. One man was taken off the flight schedule because his wife was terminally ill with cancer, but the computer still had him scheduled for this flight. He did not come to work, so there was only one pilot at time of takeoff. Finally, after all this waiting, the error was noted, the scheduling office tried frantically, and finally a pilot was located. He was in bed, but said as soon as he could get dressed and get to the airport, he would fly, hence the long delay for us. I slept some on the way to Chicago, flight wasn't too bad, but of course, we missed our connecting flight in O'Hare airport. After getting re-booked on the next flight, which was at 10:00 a.m., we were given a \$10 voucher for breakfast, which we used. We are now waiting in the airport for the flight to Buffalo. It seems good to be in O'Hare airport again, I was here many, many times while living in Illinois, the first 56 years of my life.

We flew out of O'Hare on the 10:10 a.m. flight to Buffalo, N.Y. Our luggage arrived there o.k. and we took a taxi to Niagara Falls, N.Y., the city close to the falls. I had inquired previously about a van service there, from Buffalo, and as we checked outside for it, found a taxi which we could take for almost the same price as the van, and we could go immediately, the next van would not come for two more hours. We took a room at the Great Western hotel, right on the Niagara River, but it was about four miles away from the downtown district. We plan to take tours, from here, to both the New York and the Canadian sides of the falls. I am feeling well, and am not too tired from the long trip, and left foot is not giving me too much trouble. I have not walked very much yet. On checking the amenities of the hotel, found it had a very large pool, in an area with tables and chairs, large enclosed room, with view of the river, also had a sauna and spa. After settling in, we went down to the pool area and had a nice swim, and rested in the spa.

Tours could be arranged from the lobby, and we took a four hour trip, being picked up at the hotel. We found that Niagara Falls, N. Y. was a very small town, didn't look at all prosperous, streets not all paved, it had kind of a "run down" look. Our van and guide took us all over, across the "Rainbow Bridge" that crosses the Niagara River, between the two cities Niagara Falls, N.Y. and Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada. One can walk across it, or drive. There was immigration inspection, checking our I.D. we passed easily because we were American citizens. Our first view of the falls was from here, then we drove along the Niagara Parkway, a boulevard in Niagara Falls, Ontario, that runs for miles along the river. The mist from the falls rises very, very high into the air, can be seen long before one really views the falls. The Canadian, or Horseshoe falls, is on this side. There are beautiful

gardens, manicured so well, flower plantings all over, lovely buildings for tourists, restaurants, and walks all along the river here, for viewing the majestic sight of the falls. Next we were driven out of the town and along the huge gorge that the Niagara river has carved, through millions of years. We were driven many miles, to the area of the birth of the Niagara river. This was a high area, and at one spot we could see the sky outline of Toronto, Canada in the distance. The weather was mild, few clouds in the sky, temperature in the low 70's. We stopped often, to take photos, and our guide, a female named Dayna, was excellent, gave us much information of all the area, and was full of fun also. We next stopped at a spot where a cable car goes across the turbulent Niagara river. It was very scary, the whirlpools below were so strong, if anyone ever fell in at that point, there was no chance of recovery. There were 5 cables supporting the tram, our guide said if 4 of them broke, the tram would still be suspended, so it was very safe. I did get a couple of slides there, but no time to ride the cable car.

Next we went back to Niagara Falls, Ontario, and took the "Behind The Falls Tour". We descended below ground in a building, were issued yellow raincoats, which we donned, and then walked through huge tubes, or tunnels, to a large opening where we could view the tremendous fall of water, from the Horseshoe Falls. We were sprayed completely, with mist. The tubes were part of a previous happening when water was diverted from the falls, through these tubes. Water is now taken out at different locations, there are power plants on both the American and Canadian sides, that provide energy for the areas. There were plaques, or signs down in the tunnels, that gave information. Following this trip, we were driven to an area further away, to the beautiful gardens kept by the Canadian horticultural school. This is an elite school, only 12 students are accepted each year, by the Canadian government, the training is meticulous, we were told that graduates from the school will always get choice jobs, such as gardeners at the White House, the British government buildings, etc. They have made the floral clock, the dial, numbers, etc. are all of trimmed plantings, and the hands are made in the shape of crutches, it is dedicated to Crippled Children's society, and money tossed into the moat, with lily pads, that surround the clock, is given to that organization. We were there as it struck 9 p.m., heard the beautiful chimes. It was not quite dark yet.

Next we were driven to the Skylon Tower, in the city, near the downtown area, which is very large, and full of all kind of attractions, so much more activity here, than on the American side. The Tower is hundreds of feet high, with restaurants and shops at the top levels. Elevators are on the outside of the tower, and as you ascend, a beautiful view is seen, overlooking the falls, and also on opposite sides, views of the city below. It was dark as we went up, and very, very windy if stepping out on the outer sides of the observation platform. The falls are lighted at night, alternate colors appeared and changed all the time: rose, green, purple, blue, tan, lavender, it was a wonderful sight. Due to the wind, my red jacket and travel hat felt good, as I observed the beauty below. We returned to the hotel at 11 p.m., I was a very tired lady, but glad I was able to experience everything. What a fantastic tour this has been, and our enthusiastic guide Dayna, was responsible for part of the learning, and the fun.

## THURSDAY JULY 12

I slept soundly all night, awoke at 7 a.m., did some exercises on the bed and the floor. My body was a bit stiff, but loosened up o.k. Mary and I went down into the beautiful pool in the huge entertainment area and had a swim. It felt good. We dressed and had breakfast in the dining room, included in room rate, then took photos of the beautiful view from outside the hotel, the Peace bridge was not very far upstream. This was built with the effort of both Canada and the United States and links both countries. It was a lovely view. Next, wanting to leave this hotel and find one on the Canadian side, where there is much more activity, and beauty, I did some phoning and secured a room at a Howard Johnson hotel, in Niagara Falls, Ontario. I was disappointed that New York has not done much to make the American side in this area, as lovely as the Canadian side. We packed our bags, and waited for the tour company to pick us up for an afternoon tour. We had arranged this yesterday. The driver, Jeff, put our suitcases in the back of the van, and kept them there as we did our tour, this time it was mainly on the American side. There is a park near the American falls, and he stopped there to let people walk down to a spot just above the falls, also to the Bridal Veil section. This is a narrow area of falls, we were told that a breaking away of part of the American Falls, years ago, has left this narrow strip of land, and the river diverts a bit, hence creating a separate area. This is called the Bridal Veil falls. There were viewing spots all along this area. I chose to wait at the top, for have been walking a lot, and my foot is telling me so! The strip of land is called Goat island, and also Luna island.

Then, the most awesome event, the Maid of The Mist boat ride, out to the Canadian Horseshoe Falls, on the churning, turbid water, and right up to the huge spray from the forceful, falling water. Everyone was given a blue slicker to wear, to keep from getting soaked. Mary and I stood right up in the bow of the boat, my face and hands were very wet, but clothes were kept dry by the slicker, and I pulled the hood up tight around my face. We really enjoyed this event. Next we went back to the Table Rock area on the Canadian side, enjoyed viewing the falls again, also got slides of the rainbows that appeared. It was fascinating, standing there and watching the rushing water, and the spray shooting far up into the air. As the sun caught the mist, rainbows appeared, then disappeared, like magic. Returning to the van, the driver Jeff, let us off at the Skylon tower; we could have gone up in it again, but instead chose to go to our hotel on the Canadian side, and get settled there. Jeff got a taxi for us, took our luggage out of the van, and the driver delivered us to the Howard Johnson hotel, in Niagara Falls, Ontario, the Canadian side of Niagara Falls. It was on busy Victoria Street, our room faced the street and had a little balcony, where we could sit and watch the activity below. There was a steady stream of automobile traffic, also pedestrians filled the sidewalks, looking at the tourist attractions. Directly below us, across the street, were a couple of "Horror Houses", strange music from there floated up to us, and in front of each one a ghoul would hide behind a pillar. He was dressed in long black robe, with red "bloody" hands, and a skull mask on his face. When a young person would walk by, he would jump out and scare them, which brought many shrill screams wafting up to us. That brought business to the scary houses.

After getting settled, and resting a bit, we walked away from the hotel to observe shops, restaurants and tourist attractions. We learned that to purchase a bottle of wine, one must

go to the nearby LCBO store, this is licensed by the Canadian government, and is the only way to purchase liquor, it is not sold in drug, or grocery stores, as it is in U.S. We found a chain restaurant, T G I F nearby, and ate a meal there. My feet and legs were EXTREMELY tired, I had done so much since Tuesday night, so retired soon after returning to our room. Returning in the cab

## FRIDAY JULY 13

I slept well all night, but awoke feeling bad ---feet and bones in shoulder areas ached, leg muscles were very tight, it was hard to do my exercises on the bed, I was so stiff, but I did them! We relaxed all morning in our room, for I needed the rest. There was a coffee maker, and coffee, we had some rolls also. About 11 a.m. we went down to the pool, which was inside, but one could swim under an arch, to the outside pool. Mary sat outthere in the sun, I swam for awhile. This made me feel much better. I also got into the spa and let the strong jets massage lower left leg and heel, that brought a much better feeling to my foot. I also sat in the sun awhile, read, relaxed, then returned to our room. It had been sunny all morning, but cool air was prevalent, a very nice temperature. Later on, it clouded up but the air was still comfortable. Mary rested, I relaxed in our room for awhile, then we decided to take a taxi to the "No Frills" grocery store we had heard about. There were no neighborhood stores in this business\ tourist area. This was interesting to us, to shop where all the products were labeled in French, some also in English. People spoke French, though English was heard also. We noted the names on the boxes of cookies that we selected, French for "cookie", "Croque-Pop" for the English, "Crunch and Munch". We also bought apples, bananas and cheese, these would keep without refrigeration, and we could snack in our room at times.

Returning to our room with the cab, we rested awhile, then decided to take the shuttle bus from the hotel, to the huge Casino, 4 or 5 stories high, one of the attractions that brings many people here. Patrons at the hotel can buy a \$3 ticket, good for as long as one stays at the hotel, to go back and forth from the Casino. There were long lines outside, awaiting entrance, because each person is checked for age, no one under age 21 is allowed to enter. This is quite different than the gambling casinos in Las Vegas, anyone may enter there. The Casino is quite lavish, slot machines all over, on all the floors, plus gaming tables for other types of gambling. There were fountains of dripping water, 3 or 4 stories high, right next to the escalators, with green plants alongside, it gave a refreshing feeling inside. At Las Vegas, mixed drinks are served free to patrons, but not here; hostesses went around taking orders, but the drinks cost \$5. I played the 25 cent machines for awhile, won and lost, but it did not take very long to lose \$10. I am not much of a gambler, but we enjoyed walking around and observing the players. Mary won 40 quarters, but then eventually put it all back.

Nest we walked to the nearby "Secret Garden" restaurant, right down on the Parkway, and facing the American Falls, across the Niagara River. We sat at a table outside, and ate. I ordered a large bowl of clam chowder, was not very hungry, for we had enjoyed "Happy Hour" in our room before coming down to the Casino. Our cheese, snacks and a glass of wine, plus apple slices, were very good. After the clam chowder, we shared a calorie-laden dessert, peanut butter \ chocolate cake, which was sumptuous, and delicious. We

stayed at the table, which was out on the veranda, and watched the fireworks which were set off on the Canadian side, and aimed toward the Horseshoe Falls. They were wonderful, lit up the sky with brilliant colors and formations. This is done on Friday and Sunday nights here, during the month of July, as an attraction for tourism, and I felt we were fortunate to have such a wonderful seat, to watch them. After they were finished we took the Casino shuttle bus back to our hotel. Our street was so BUSY, even at this time of night. Autos loaded up the street, had to drive along at a very slow pace, and the sidewalks were full of people, there were many families with small children, some in carriages and another two or three walking alongside. Mary and I walked up and down a couple of blocks, looking at attractions and entering shops. It was now about 11 p.m. and everything was open for business, it was nice to be a part of this "touristy" side of Niagara Falls. I had not done a whole lot of walking today, and my foot was o.k. We noted many varieties of different nationalities as we walked along, there were many from India, ladies wore their saris and some men had turbans on their heads. We also noted many Japanese. Returning to the hotel after midnight, we soon retired.

## **SATURDAY JULY 14**

I slept so soundly all night! When I did my exercises, I was not stiff and sore, as I was yesterday morning. After dressing and having coffee, banana, and a roll in our room, we walked a little way up the street, to a hotel nearby where we had seen a tour advertised that sounded interesting, and we booked it for today. It was \$50 for the whole day, and left in ½ hour. It was very good, took us out of the city and to several areas in nearby Canada. First we were driven to the Wellington Locks, which are on the canal between Lakes Erie and Ontario. This canal has been used for many years and allows cargo ships to carry on trade to different areas. There is a difference of 300 feet in elevation between the lakes, and locks are necessary to permit raising and lowering the ships so they can navigate. It was very interesting, and I did get some slides.

Next we were driven to a candle factory, where they demonstrated the hand dipping, blending colors, etc. Each person was given a white candle, and then shown how to dip it in different colors of hot wax, thus making individual designs, Each one was allowed to keep his or her candle. I bought a couple of other candles there also. Then, on to the chocolate factory, where chocolate dipped nuts, fruits, marshmallows and strawberries were made. It was a small place, not a huge business. Everyone was allowed to sample each variety, bowls of every kind were set out, no limit on how much you ate, it was like a kid's visit to the candy store! I tasted most every kind, then bought a bag of chocolate covered raisins, also some white chocolate covered pineapple pieces, to take home. Every kind was delicious, and it was interesting to see how they rolled the ingredients in large round bins, to get them coated.

Now we were driven further, to the small city of Lake Niagara, situated on the shore of Lake Ontario. This is a very old, historic city, the houses are old, but kept in beautiful condition, some were built as long ago as 1792. There were gardens and flowers all over, hanging baskets from street lights, flowers in the center area of a boulevard, manicured yards and parkways, everything bursting with blooms. We were shown the "Prince of Wales Inn", a very old, beautiful and elaborately maintained hotel. We walked through it, the furnishings

were authentic, from the 1700's and 1800's, all very elegant, and there were paintings and statuary everywhere to admire. One could be served English tea and biscuits, at tables on a long veranda, if you wished, but we did not have the time to do that, for there was much more to explore. We next walked down to the shore of Lake Ontario to admire the view. There was a gazebo in the park-like area there, and a wedding couple were standing in it, along with two attendants and a man playing a guitar softly. Maybe the wedding was about to take place? Looking out over the lake, an excursion boat was plying by, there were many small sailboats further out, and up a way was the old Fort George. This was a historic fort, many wars in early history of this area were fought there. As we stood there, we could faintly see the skyline of the city of Toronto, Canada. We walked back to the town center, but stopped first in a lovely park, and ate the apples, pudding and cookies we had brought along, also rested awhile. There were horse-drawn carriages in the streets, all beautifully white, where one could take a ride through the city. My foot was getting tired, but Mary held my arm firmly as we walked back to the bus, and I made it all right, really felt happy we could see this lovely, historic city. The first newspaper was published here, in 1792.

Our next stop was at a local winery, for wine tasting. We had driven through an area of fruit orchards, and vineyards. There were occasional roadside stands where apricots, cherries and plums were for sale, they were in season now. We were told there are 31 wineries in nearby area, the climate must be good for growing grapes. We entered one of them, and people stood at a counter, listened to the story of how wine is made, and the many different varieties produced in this area. I sat on a chair near the wall, and listened, needed to rest my foot, then was given the small amounts of 4 different kinds of wine for tasting. I chose to purchase a sparkling wine, something like Aste Spumante, to take home. It was quite inexpensive, being locally produced. Then we drove back toward Niagara City, Ontario, and along the Niagara Parkway again, adjacent to the falls. We visited greenhouses, lovely gardens, a conservatory which was full of tropical plants, bushes, vines, and lovely statuary. There were colorful birds flying around amid the greenery. I was quite surprised on this trip, to see how much care Canada has taken, to make their side of the Niagara Falls area, so beautiful.

This ended our daylong tour, and the driver now took people to their hotels. I wanted to attend the 5 p.m. mass at St Ann church, which was about 3 blocks from our hotel, so I asked him to let me off there. He did. Mary took my backpack, and articles I had purchased. I kept my travel hat on in church, for having worn it all day, my hair would look messy if I removed it. It has patches from all over the world on it. Mass was attended well, there were three teenage girls sitting near me, one of them whispered "have you been to all those places, really?". I whispered "yes". After mass, as I started walking the three blocks to the hotel, Mary was walking toward me, to make sure I could make it back to the hotel o.k. What a wonderful daughter! Our weather has been ideal all during this trip, temperature in the mid seventies, and partly sunny, part cloudy. Today there was more sun than yesterday, and I wore a long sleeved shirt to protect arms from sunburn, did not need a sweater at all. They do predict rain starting on Monday, but we will be going home then.

After returning to our room, we relaxed on the balcony, had a glass of wine and snacks, our own little "happy hour". We again watched the people traffic below, sidewalks were full on

both sides of the street. The ghouls were again front of the two scary houses, dressed in their long black robes, and trying to lure people to enter the attractions, by emitting low moans, and jumping out at people, especially the teenagers passing by. It is almost like a carnival atmosphere in this area, all along Victoria street and down several blocks to "Clifton Hill" street. This is called the "Fun Street", there are banners hanging from light standards. There are different kinds of rides, a Ripley museum, a Dinosaur park, souvenir shops, a kiddy playground, and eating places. The walks are thronged with people, and cars creep slowly in the street. There were families with children all over, many with little ones in carriages, I was surprised to see them out at this late hour. The Casino was a few blocks further down the street, but did not want to go that far, so we started back, stopped in an Italian restaurant and ate. I ordered veal scallopini, it was good. The nerve damage in left foot, resulting from an attack of severe sciatica, plus some arthritis in bony area of foot, limits my walking, but I do not want to give up traveling. In years past I traveled the world, and walked all day long, but guess the years are adding up, and I can't do all that I used to do. I am 85 now.

## **SUNDAY JULY 15**

I was glad I attended mass last evening, for it allowed me to rest long in the morning, do some exercises and get my foot to feel flexible. I slept very well all night, prayed my rosary when I awoke, then thanked God for allowing me to make this fine trip. Mary and I were both very lazy this morning, read for awhile in bed, then had coffee, rolls, apricot and banana. The sky was bright, sun was out, it looked beautiful. About 10.30 a.m. we went down to the pool, had a swim, relaxed a bit, and went into spa and sauna. This really made me feel very good. Swimming has always been "medicine" for me. While in the returning to our room, we bathed and dressed. I planned to stay in the room today, and rest a lot, so I would be feeling fine to make the journey back to California tomorrow. In the afternoon Mary wanted to go to the Imax theater, about six blocks from the hotel. I did not want to walk, or go there, so she went by herself. We could see the roof of it, from our balcony. I stayed in the room and wrote in my journal. The weather was a bit warmer today, probably was about 82 degrees F., really very nice. I should mention the bathroom in our room, it had a RED tub and shower enclosure; never in all my travels over the world have I seen a red bathtub. Pictures of some of the suites in this hotel, showed heart shaped tubs, white, with a red rim all around the top. Many honeymooners come to Niagara Falls, maybe that is the reason.

Upon Mary's return (she enjoyed the Imax show) we walked out, found a Sicilian restaurant on our street, and had freshly made pizza and a glass of beer. Then we walked a bit more, visited a few souvenir shops, bought a couple of t-shirts and post cards, using up some of our Canadian money. The street traffic was so much less tonight, than on Friday and Saturday nights. When back in our room, we finished packing up the suitcases, and prepared to leave here tomorrow morning. At 10 p.m. there were fireworks again, set off down at the falls area. From our balcony, we could see them plainly, except the very low ones. They had a beautiful display again, it was a nice farewell, for our last night here.

## MONDAY JULY 16

I slept fitfully, as I usually do when I have to arise early for a flight, and arose at 6 a.m. Mary was up, brought me a half bagel with cheese on it, also an apricot, then a pudding cup. Such service!!! Our tour guide Dayna, from the half day tour on Thursday, had offered to drive us to Buffalo airport this morning, and we preferred that to the airport bus. She picked us up at the hotel at 7:30 a.m., we had a pleasant ½ hour ride to our destination. She did not want money, but we paid her the bus rate, plus a tip. She was a very vibrant, pleasant lady, and we had become friends with her during our stay here. Buffalo has a new airport, very spacious and well designed. It reminded me of the bedouin type airport at Jedda, Saudi Arabia, that was built in 1981, the year after I arrived there. I watched it being built, as the hospital bus took employees right past the area, on our way to the beach north of Jedda, the Obhor Creek area. We did this every Friday that year. Male doctors and employees did not have cars yet in those early days, and the hospital provided us with that bit of entertainment, on our weekend off duty.

The flight from Buffalo to O'Hare, (Chicago) was only 1 hour and 15 minutes. At O'Hare I phoned my brother, Steve Bushman, who lives in Des Plaines, Illinois, very close to O'Hare. I had told him we were transferring there on Monday. His daughter Gail Mudra,drove over and picked up, then drove us to Steve and Fran's home. We had 1 and ½ hour layover, so had a quick "renewal" visit. Gail's daughter Cathy Morrison, was there also, and their only great grandchild Elisabeth (age 2). It was great to all get acquainted again. Mary had not seen them for many years, ssince she moved to California in 1973. There were four generations present, in Steve and Fran's family, and we took a couple of pictures. Then Steve drove us back to O'Hare, and we got our flight to Los Angeles; we had to hurry, in the airport, for our departure gate had been changed, it was now way out near the end of the H concourse. My foot and leg were "dragging", but we made it.

We arrived in Los Angeles in 3 hours and 45 minutes, our bags came promptly, and Shannon was out in front waiting in her car for us, as we emerged from baggage area. She had gone around the circular arrival area only once before, as she awaited us, so that was very good timing. She drove back along the Pacific coast highway, and that was pleasant, the scenery is so beautiful. The traffic was too packed to take the 101 freeway. We arrived home in Thousand Oaks just at 6 p.m., tired but happy. The house was all neat and clean, no dirty dishes in the sink, Sean had vacuumed, and all looked o.k. He had taken care of the pool chemicals too, the pool was fine.

My brother Steve is 88, and he and Fran both look good, they still do their normal pattern of living, have been in their own home in Des Plaines, for almost all of their married life. They had lived in Chicago for a few years, after marrying. They said they do everything, "at a slower pace". I am 85 ½ , am happy I can still travel, though I can't walk as I used to do in my travels, since 1985. I have gone around the world, alone, twice, visited over 50 countries, all done after age 65. I take slides all over the world, and present lecture tours professionally. The series is called "Whizzing Around The World With Irma" and I present at least 4 times each month at various places. The schools use me, and all the retirement homes in our area have me come once a month, have done this since 1986. I have over 25 titles that I speak on. I gave a lecture at Castle Hill on Tuesday afternoon, July 10, then



we left that night on this trip. Now my slides on Niagara Falls will be a new addition to my slide lectures. Last year I went alone to Portugal, and explored that country.