
A Month Travelling With Mrs Hunt

Chapter 1: Utah

We left home on Saturday 14th February 2009 bound for Salt Lake City via Los Angeles. Richard generously came with us so he could bring the Golf home, the incentive being his free use of it for a month. Doubtless, he would have obliged without the incentive. Doubtless.

They checked us in at Qantas First kerbside courtesy of James Strong's long ago generosity in enrolling me in the Chairman's Club. Normal people pay such premium for First Class passage that the airlines really lay on the service with a trowel. In this case, a liveried guide who took matters, and us, into his own hands, disappeared our luggage in the direction of Salt Lake City, produced Immigration Forms from his sleeves with Qantas biros attached, and once we had completed them, swept everything up including forms, passports, boarding passes and us in his wake. Queues were jumped at Immigration. He simply unclipped barrier ropes and guided us through with a flick of the head. A hundred people waiting in the Business Class line, and three hundred in the you-only-paid-shit-for-your-ticket line scowled at us or alternatively, tried to work out whether we were someone important enough for them to recognise. We ducked our heads and tried to pretend that we were being kidnapped and simply could not avoid the hurry-along.

Soon we were deposited in the Qantas First Class lounge in which everything is supplied. In leather. And modern cuisine.

We were way early for the flight out of deference to Mrs Hunt's anxiety about missing the plane. This means we usually arrive at the airport well before the plane itself. One has to admit it is a safe strategy which served us well on the trip, except in Salt Lake City when nothing would have served us well. More later.

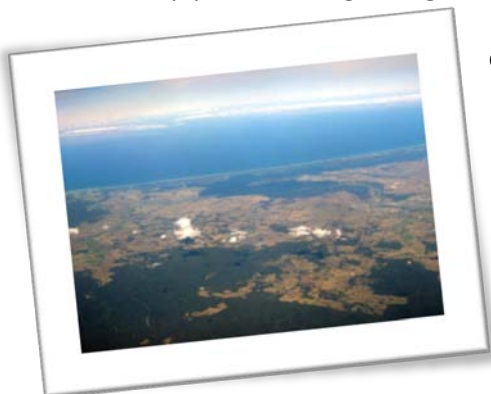
Soon we were settled in the Qantas upstairs Business Class cabin. Mrs Hunt wasn't expecting to fly business class.

"I thought I'd surprise you," I semi-lied.

"Or was it so I wouldn't talk you out of it?" Mrs Hunt seems to have got to know me after 41 years of married life.

"True."

No argument came forth about the waste of precious retirement funds, although I was ready with the *unbelievably good deal and only four times economy*. In the end, it was an investment in good health. The trip proved taxing enough without crushed kneecaps and deep vein thrombosis.



14th February 2009 we thought it worth getting up for.

And so we watched the sunrise. Down below us, as we approached California, I was pleased to see Santa Catalina was

We passed over Lakes Entrance and noted the occasional wisps of smoke from remnant bushfires while eating canapés and steak dinners, although I eschewed the wine in deference to the state of my head, and soon we were asleep on seats that folded out, almost flat.

We managed only a few hours sleep and were both well awake before the sun rose. Given that this was the second time we would see the sun rise on Saturday the



waiting for me. Still. It would have to wait again. No chance to take the ferry on this trip.

Los Angeles loomed underneath us, wide and suburban as ever. Once upon a time I landed here four or more times a year. For about twenty years. It all seemed very familiar. It occurred to me that son-in-law David was probably building up the same mixed feelings towards Seattle. In my case, the mixture consisted of familiarity and contempt.

The plane tracked well out to the east, turning somewhere over Claremont and offering us a view of the snow on top of the San Gabriel mountains. They rise more than 3000 metres above LA's sea level. Somehow I knew it would not be cold down in Los Angeles itself.

They take a picture of you in US immigration now. And your fingerprints. Homeland security is big business. Efficacy may be another matter, of course.

Business Class was behind us now, but the Delta flight to Salt Lake City was just over an hour, and two terminals around the LA airport rectangle. The self check-in computers recognised our passports and even found us on their flights. Just as well, one might say, since our bags were already on board.

In the daze induced by jetlag and three hours sleep, we walked through molasses to the gate and oozed down into seats until our *zone* was called. Once squashed into place we remained supine until Salt Lake City. Literally, I suppose, not really *supine* which implies lying back because of moral weakness of indolence. Not literally. We couldn't lie back at all. The seats in Delta economy have no backrest adjustment. As for moral weakness and indolence, that pretty much describes our state of mind.

Until disgorged at Salt Lake City which had all the familiarity of an airport visited once 18 months prior, and we saw our luggage and Melanie. In that order. And, not to be too harsh on Mel, with equivalent joy.

It was cold out, but not biting. There was snow about. Mel was driving Dave's Nissan Armada, a four wheel drive device about the size of a block of flats, although less economical. It swallowed our suitcases with rather more efficiency than my Golf had en route to Melbourne airport, and with only three passengers we had the choice of seven seats. Well, not Mel. She had to drive from the designated position.

The drive up to Park City is always wonderful. Last time it had been summer. Now it was the tail end of winter. The canyon road is photographic candy but one cannot stop to take advantage. The cliffs rise vertically at the base of the canyon. Studded with pines and dripping with snow mounds. Nearer the summit, now 2000 metres above sea level (and 1000 metres above Salt Lake City's valley) the mountain tops spread into a wide plateau pimpled with modern villages that constitute the conglomerate community of Park City.

Mel and Dave Carbon and the four grandchildren occupy a huge house just off to the right a few kilometres over the summit. Well, huge only by our standards. In Park City terms it is down the lower 15th percentile in size. I mean it only has four bedrooms upstairs and two bathrooms. Upstairs. And a lounge and dining room on the main floor. Plus a kitchen. And a two car garage big enough for two vehicles each about the size of a block of flats, although faster off the line. Plus a family room. And a breakfast nook. And a patio.

And then there is downstairs. With rooms we never even found during our stay there.

But then we have seen some of the grander houses. They have garages the size of our whole home at home. And still they seem to need to park RVs and boats on the driveway. Or three or four small Audis. Or all of the above.



It being Saturday, and it being the day we were arriving, we expected Dave and the kids to all be home when we turned up. Otherwise they might have been out on the piste. Dave certainly.

But the house was empty when we arrived. We dropped our bags and then there was the thunderous pitter patter of little feet returning from shopping.

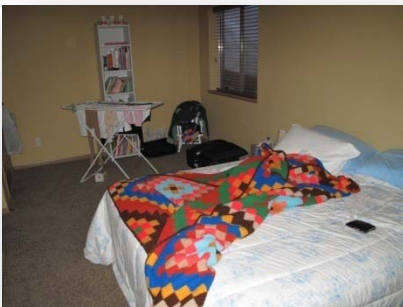
Emily and Sophie went silly. Zachary went shy. And Riley stood looking at us with that *who the hell are these people* look on his face. Within the hour we had inveigled our way into their hearts, by dint of our genetic similarity, and a large suitcase full of gifts.

The next three weeks were a jumble of noise, fun and Spongebob Squarepants. The latter seems to play on a cable TV channel on permanent rotation. Except when ICarly replaces it, a show just as frenetic as the aforementioned square panted one, but with more human looking actors, albeit a bit stretched sideways by the 16:9 format of Carbon's upstairs TV. Yes, they have a downstairs TV too. It's a huge LCD screen of 50 million inches with a sound blaster attached. Mrs Hunt and I introduced Dave and Mel to the Gospel Music Channel. Hard to believe that they didn't realise it was there among the 273 other choices. But there it was. Playing the Gaither Vocal Band on permanent rotation. They sounded even better through the sound blaster audio system.

Our bedroom had to be relocated owing to a foul smell emanating from the original downstairs bedroom. At first I was tempted to express delight at their generosity in pre-odourising the room to match the inevitable smells we would produce upon occupation, but a quick reconnoitre of the room suggested something more than flatulence was going on in there.

A day or two later Dave revealed the problem. Literally. He knocked a hole in the wall and there was the pipe that should have been the connection between the kitchen sink and the sewer. Neatly severed. The smell was the combination of kitchen sink water coming down, and sewer odours coming up. Mmm. Pleasant.

Dave, better than your average handyman, and I ought to know because I am very average, ripped up carpet, cut away plaster board, and went off to Home Depot (pronounced dee-poe) for new bits of pipe and rubber connections. And fixed things up. Except for the smell. Slowly it faded. By the end of our visit it was but a faint olfactory memory.



Our bedroom, therefore, was relocated to the children's rumpus room. It proved quite adequate except that it was right beside the furnace, the noise of which didn't interrupt our sleep until it cut out into silence. Go figure. It did this about once every half hour. We got used to this soon enough.

A few nights in, the thing that makes the water soft decided to update its programming with loud wheezing. This new noise brought Mrs Hunt and I awake and we spent a few minutes with torches trying to locate the offending asthmatic machine in case it was in need of a good puffer. Satisfied it was doing what it was supposed to do, we retired back to bed. A few days later when it repeated its purification rituals, we just rolled over onto the other ear.

And the only other minor disadvantage of this location was that it was right under the upstairs family room. Of course, someone walking around in the family room in slippers feet may not have disturbed our sleeping in. And we did get used to Dave's 5am breakfast patter. But four grandchildren? No matter. That was why we were here. So no alarm clock was needed. If the kids were up. So were we. Ready for another day in Utah.

Sunday night we walked down the almost icy road and around the corner to Christian and Pascale's place. A whole bunch of people had been invited. Some of whom Dave and Mel didn't even know. And all of whom we didn't know. But we were soon part of the family, discussing long flight stories with rellies who had flown in from the other direction, Switzerland. And being welcomed by more children who were related to some of the people present and just assumed we must be nice because we'd been invited. Such charming innocence. They would come and actually speak to us, and invite themselves onto our laps. Why do we teach kids to be afraid of strangers?

A local couple who by the accents and general size and shape had originally hailed from Mexico, provided the food. It was, surprisingly, Mexican food. I can tell a Taco from a Tarot card, but that's about it. There was a very nice fish thing. And some spicy stuff. With green. And yellowish. And mushy long things. And jalapeño fire things – thanks for pointing them out, Mel.

One day, I think it was Monday, we went down to Salt Lake City. Emily had to have allergy tests. Riley is dangerously allergic to peanuts, *inter alia* (just like some people are allergic to italicised Latin phrases being inserted *ad hoc* into documents). So everyone is being checked out.

The plan was for Mel and Emily to leave us at the clinic. Then I would drive us to a nearby Albertsons that we had spotted on Google maps, do some shopping as slowly as possible, accompanied by the other three kids, and then return after 90 minutes. Then off to Carls Jnr for lunch since Mrs Hunt and I have this recollection that the burgers are better at Carls Jnr. And then a visit to Super Target (some of our hearts raced at the thought – others slowed towards near death).

Good plan. I took over Mel's Toyota thing. It's a people mover with all wheel drive (for the snow, folks). Typically Toyota, it's light and easy to drive (which also tends to make Toyotas a bit boring). After 30 years of swapping left and right hand drives, once I looked up into the rear view mirror, something went click-click in my brain and the road was in the right place and the car controls all fell to hand. Although I still had to think hard at the first intersection. *Now where are the cars going to come from?*

We made Albertson's. I filled up with gas. Quietly burped. And then filled the Toyota too. At first, the pump would not read my credit card. And there appears to be no way you are going to get petrol unless it does. There IS a way, but it involves passports and notarised documents. Two or three times I pushed and pulled the card. *Unreadable Card*, the pump display announced. I returned to the driver's seat and asked Mrs Hunt for her credit card and while she was rummaging in her handbag for it I thought to myself *I wonder if I put it in the wrong way?*

"Wait a minute," I said to Mrs Hunt because she was still rummaging. Perhaps I need to explain that Mrs Hunt's handbag is rather like Dr Who's Tardis. Modestly sized on the outside, but cavernous on the inside. More than most women, Mrs Hunt can hide long lost bicycle parts, souvenirs from that 1998 visit to Budapest, and an astronomical telescope souvenired from the Warrambungles Observatory during a brief visit when Melanie was 7. Of course, these items only are discovered when she is actually looking for something else. Like her credit card.

So while she was placing the astronomical telescope on the seat between Riley and Zachary who immediately began fighting over who was going to break it first, I said, "Let me try something else" and went back to the pump and inspected the little picture beside the credit card slot. I found that by reversing the logic of the picture, and putting my credit card in the slot in a direction contrary to the way the picture appeared to suggest, the pump sprang into life and a few gallons of 88 grade petrol (or gas, actually – well, actually petrol, but they call it gas you see) gurgled happily into the Toyota.



Then we went shopping with Mrs Hunt making sure that no child went unobserved for more than a nanny-second. In the World of Mothering, the nanosecond has been replaced by the nanny-second. It is defined as the measure of time between when Riley steps behind his grandfather and Mrs Hunt shrieks "Where's RILEY?!"

To which, loving husband that I am, I reply "Who's Riley?" Mind you, I don't do this too often. Or life would be shorter.

We bought things at Albertson's. It's a supermarket. A chain of them. If we lived in Utah, we would not be hearing *I am going to Coles*. We would hear *I am going to Albertson's*.

This took us about 40 minutes. So we went for a drive. Not much to see in this part of Salt Lake City. Except some ducks.

"Did you see the ducks, kids?"

“No.”

“What ducks?”

“I didn’t see any ducks. Waaaah. I wanna see the ducks.”

I did a deft U-turn and the Toyota followed me around. We saw the ducks. All of us saw the ducks as they waddled, mother duck and a bunch of cute little ducklings, waddling across the road near a sign that said *Caution: Ducks Crossing*.

Back at the Clinic, we parked and waited. And waited. We played I Spy. Which, for players under the age of 5 one needs to play in colours. That is, *I spy with my little eye, something the colour of <choose a colour>*.

This was great fun for ten minutes.

“When’s Mummy coming?”

“Soon. Let’s play I Spy again.”

“When’s Mummy coming?”

“Let’s see what’s on the radio? Oh that’s nice. Listen to the nice man talking about Jesus. And the Book of Mormon. I wonder what else is on...”

“When’s Mummy coming?”

Mummy and Emily came soon. Fresh with news of nuts that will kill. Offset somewhat, in Emily’s mind at least, by the news that the Medical Alert bracelet she will wear to school is very cute and pink.

Carl’s Jnr did not fail to live up to its reputation in our minds. The burgers were more than ample. The seven of us filled the same entire corner of Carl’s Jnr as we had two summers earlier. Next time we expect to see a plaque there.

Super Target is quite super. Like big. It has check-out aisles as far as the eye can see. But only three were open today. It must be the GFC hitting local sales. Or maybe the whole HUGE thing is really a marketing ploy. Make it big and everyone will think it’s great. After all, *great* does mean good. Doesn’t it? No? Oh.

Another day we went tubing. I think it may have been the next day, but I was already in holiday mood. Every day was Holiday.

Now tubing is like sledding except in large truck sized inner tubes. It bears no relationship to the town of Tübingen, although I can’t say for sure that there isn’t a Tübingen Tubing club which might meet in the Tübingentubingparkplatz. Probably not. But you never know.



It costs 17 cents a minute to ride the tubes. But you have to buy 2 hours. So a whole family can ride for around USD100. Because kids only cost 8 cents a minute. And for that they have seriously good fun.



This one is just around the corner from Carbon’s so we all piled into the cars (now accompanied by another Mel-friend, Erin and her daughter, Lilly). You have to be three to ride the tubes. Riley was three today. I told them so at the counter. So he must have been.

Tubing is fun for all ages. There are 8 slides graded down the mountain. Four shorter ones for the weak, nervous and those under 6 (none of whom are weak and nervous). And four longer ones for those who ride the shorter ones and say *There must be more speed in these things than this*. The answer is No, there isn’t. Just a longer ride.

There were two birthday parties while we were there. Zachary turned four and Emily turned seven. It was Zachary's turn for presents first. And he got loads. A few days later it was Emily's turn. And she got loads too.

The cakes were purchased, from Albertson's naturally, by inspecting a large catalogue of three hundred children's party cakes. All of them themed with Disney and related characters. Even a Spongebob Squarepants one. Mercifully, Zachary chose Cars. The cakes were a big hit. And tasted pretty good too.

Emily's big birthday moment had come a few days before when she went to get her ears pierced. A tear may have been shed. But she was soon proudly showing off her studs. And, for a few days at least, following a strict cleansing regime with dedication.



Of course we went skiing. Well, Mrs Hunt and I went. The others skied. Two days we went up the Canyons. This required a short trip in an open lift called *The Cabriolet* which merely passed about 20 metres in the air above cars and apartment blocks which you could look at through the grating on which you were standing. I think this quite pleasant. And Mrs Hunt scanned the heavens steadfastly without actually saying *Are we there yet?* once.



Beyond the cabriolet was a serious cable car in which you sat enclosed and it whisked you to the top of the mountain. Somewhere approaching 3000 metres high. You could tell because your head aches and every ten steps you stop to breathe. Although, thankfully the human flesh is not so weak that it does not soon adjust.

Up at the mountain top there are more chair lifts of the sit-on-with-your-skis kind. First time Dave and I went up with the three older kids and his knees. Let's just say the kids are in better shape than Dave's knees. Undaunted by disabilities that would crush a lesser man, Dave managed to get all three young ski champions onto the chairlift. And more than once.

Within minutes I saw them winding their way down the slope again. All three of them skiing like they'd been doing it since they were three. Which they had. Except Emily. She was four.

A second time, Mrs Hunt and I baby-sat young Riley while Mel and Pascale skied with Zachary. The girls were at school. Riley decided he would have a hot chocolate and then was dismayed to discover it was hot. At first we thought we had burnt our youngest grandchild, but I tasted the drink and realised Riley's pained reaction was surprise rather than pain. He soon recovered his composure and was happily using the ski racks as a gym set when Mel, Pascale and Zachary returned. We took the boys back down while Mel and Pascale skied underneath our departing lift pod. Mel looked really confident and graceful on her skis. Then we saw Pascale, who grew up in Switzerland. Another class altogether.

Towards the end of our visit we went up to Deer Valley to see the kids' end of school parade. Nothing cuter than a few score kids showing off what they've learned in school. Especially if it's on skis.

Otherwise our days were filled with fun, conversation, food, noise. Four children, from 2½ to seven can wear you out! And somehow the noise and activity level reaches a peak around 6PM. Thank God we have children when we are young and strong.

In contrast there are quiet times when they crowd into you, arguing for a place on your lap, or urging you to roll some cars across the carpet for a few minutes. Again. Again.

And then there are moments when someone else is looking after the children and you are dining at Jean Louis' Restaurant in Park City itself. I discovered a new way to do foie gras. My order did not resemble the foie gras I had had in the past. Previously it came as a kind of pate or terrine. Cold. With brioche (or toast, if you must). This one was, well, like a liver. Later, Françoise explained to me that sometimes they take the foie gras (which is basically goose liver – that bit I knew) and simply fry it lightly on both sides. So that's what I had. Warm and tasty. No complaints.

Dave took along a nice bottle of Hunter Valley Shiraz which miraculously had the Utah official sale label affixed to it. You can't import alcohol to Utah. Mormons don't drink apparently (ironic filter ON).

We finished the night with a stroll up Park City main street. There are two Park Cities. There is the whole area on top of the mountain that really contains a bunch of disconnected suburbs. All called Park City. But also with estate names. And there appears to be a couple of semi-official place names such as Snyderville. I suppose if you lived in Snyderville you might prefer to tell people you lived in Park City. As you would if you lived in Cynictown or Don'tgiveashitville.

The other Park City is the original mining town with its main street that, to Aussies anyway, looks like a Hollywood set. Except it is a reasonably faithfully maintained or restored old west mining town. Without the miners. And, of course, no alcohol.

So a stroll up the steep main street is memorable. We did it twice during our visit. Once up. Once down. Down is easier.