

February 26, 2017
(February Letter)

Dear Samantha,

My last letter reminded me of a memorable trip that Fran, Daegan, and I took to St. John's Newfoundland in the summer of 1971. This was one of the many trips we took to Canadian locations, courtesy of various associations in which we were involved. This time, it was as graduate students at UBC when we decided to submit paper proposals for the annual meeting of the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association.

We were very excited to learn that both our proposals had been accepted for presentation – and that we had been granted the funding to fly out to St. John's for the event. Daegan would be about 19 months old when June rolled around, so we began to make plans for travelling with a toddler.

Our excitement was picked up by John as we passed on the news to the family – and he quickly seized on an opportunity when we asked him if he would take care of Samwise (our dog) when we were away. This was the summer that his girlfriend Allison was planning to visit her relatives somewhere near London, Ontario for a few weeks – so John proposed that he would drive our VW van (with Samwise) to pick us up in Montréal, before picking up Allison, then driving with us back to Vancouver.

This sounded like a wonderful trip from our point of view – it would be much more exciting to return to Vancouver *à terre* than to miss all the vistas and excitement by flying home.

Our planning, therefore, took a sharp turn as we considered travelling with a toddler over a week or so rather than a 5 or 6-hr flight. As we considered the modes of transport available, it became even more complicated since we would be doing so via bus, ferry, train, and van in order to return. We even expected we would have to include hitchhiking on our list of options if we were to visit PEI.

As expected, the trip turned out to be a super adventure from beginning to end.

Daegan was a wonderful traveler. She adapted to air travel with no problem. In those days the rules about such travel were much more lenient, so she soon discovered that by walking up and down the aisle and chatting to the other travelers she could end up with all sorts of goodies – including shots from the creamers that were handed to the coffee drinkers and even the occasional candy or dessert. By the time we got to our residence room at Memorial University she was well fed and nicely tired.

We had arranged for a baby-sitter to look after her when we were off at the various conference sessions, but there were opportunities for us to enjoy several events with her over the 3 or 4 days of the conference.

One of our favorite was the Olympic-sized swimming pool that Memorial University had just built near our residence. They were very excited about this facility since it was not only unusual to have a pool, but it was the only Olympic-sized one in the province. When we asked about it, we were told that although most Newfoundlanders lived near water, almost none of them knew how to swim since the water was so cold, that if they fell in from a fishing boat or other craft, swimming would simply prolong the agony and not provide much hope for rescue.

Daegan was a good swimmer, since Fran had taken her to Crystal Pool in Vancouver since she was a baby. It turns out that infants are rather natural swimmers. They will stop breathing when under water and seem to enjoy the feel of the water so long as they are not splashed in the face.

Thus it was a familiar scene for us, when I emerged from the change room, jumped into the water at the shallow end and waited for Fran and Daegan to emerge from the women's entrance to the pool. As usual, Fran walked over to the pool with Daegan in her arms, and casually tossed her into the water where I was waiting.

The poor life-guard went berserk! He came running over to Fran and began reprimanding her about mistreating her child and risking her drowning. Of course, all the activity in the pool stopped as everyone turned to watch this drama unfold.

Mind you, the activity in the pool consisted mostly of the many people hanging on to the edge of the pool stopping their chatter and kicking to pay attention to the exchange. There were only one or two people in the deeper water of the pool since there were few swimmers in the province.

By the time the lifeguard calmed down he turned to see Daegan and I playing happily in the pool. I expect it was when he noticed how Daegan would come up giggling after being under water that he eventually realized there was little danger.

The incident left us somewhat amused as we considered the shock it must have created for the poor lifeguard, but we did not realize its impact on the rest of the swimmers until we dropped into the cafeteria later that evening.

While standing in line we overheard a conversation between the woman serving us and one of the students in line. "Did you hear about the crazy woman who tossed her baby into the pool this afternoon?" the student asked. "Yes, another person told me about it. What was she thinking?" the server replied.

Of course, this was a perfect opportunity for Fran to introduce herself as the "crazy woman" and offer to answer the server's question. We all enjoyed the buzz this created!

I see I have already taken two pages and have not even got to the return trip from NL – so I guess I will continue the rest of the travel story next month. I remember how you complained(?) about my letters being too long!

I've included a couple of photos of Daegan in St. John's. In one of them you can see Signal Hill in the background. She looks rather tough in the other one!

Love,
Bill

