

Hi Samantha

(My October letter) Oct 28, 2013

A trip to England! Wow! I hope you get to go. If not, you can always arrange your own trip. We would be easily able to find friends there – especially in Aberystwyth or Belfast. I'll leave it up to you to figure out where Aberystwyth is.

I can tell you plenty of stories about travelling in England – or Europe – so here is one about the time that your mother went to Wales and we met her in London. I even have some photos from that trip.

This was the year that Daegan turned 16 (1985). She had gone to a choir festival in Llangollen (she left with the choir on July 2nd). You will have to ask her to pronounce it for you since so many of the Welsh words don't sound like they are spelled. Her school choir was competing in the International Eisteddfod music festival in Llangollen – a week-long event with choirs from all over the world. Daegan can tell you about that. I remember her being particularly impressed with the Snodonian mountain range in Wales.

When the festival was finished, Daegan came to London. We met her there after spending a few days in Paris with JP. We met her at Gladsmith College, then stayed in an old house named “the Nevern” (in the “brownstone” district). It was a family dwelling that had been converted to a bed and breakfast. It wasn't great, but it was close to many of the places we wanted to visit. London is easy to get around since they have a good ‘underground’ and bus system.

There are many places in London which I know about from books I read or the stories told by my teachers and family members. It was amazing to pass by places like Covent Garden, Trafalgar Square, or Piccadilly Circus on our way to the London Zoo, for example.

We went to Hyde Park on July 21st and were hanging around “Speaker's Corner” when we met friends from Vancouver (the Lythgoes) – completely by accident. Speaker's corner is a part of the park where anyone can bring in a soap box and stand up on it to talk about some subject. Some of them talked about politics, some religion, and some guy ranted on about taxes and democracy while we were there. Even Fran stood up to say something – as did JP! I don't remember what they spoke about, though. There always seemed to be people around who were willing to listen (in my photo – you can see JP in the front of the crowd – sitting down with a yellow and blue striped shirt).



That same day, we went for a visit to the British Museum of Natural History. This was where Daegan found that each square of the toilet paper was stamped with the phrase “Property of the British Museum”. We all found that very funny. She was interested in it since she had agreed to do a research project on some topic in place of going to school. Our trip meant that the kids would get to school late in September – so we made this deal about research as compensation. Daegan chose to do research on the bathrooms of Europe and JP decided to do his research on Napoleon. Napoleon had an influence in all of the places we travelled.

The next day we had lunch with the Lythgoes at Leichester Square. On our way walking home, Daegan noticed that “The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ ” was playing at the theatre we were passing (Wyndam Theatre). She convinced us to buy tickets for the show.

While we were waiting for the play we spent some time at the Tower of London (see photo). There are a number of ravens on the grounds of the Tower since legend has it that England will be strong so long as the ravens remain. These ones have their wings clipped so they can't fly away (seems like cheating on the legend to me). The Tower of London is almost 1,000 years old – built by William the Conqueror – to control the Londoners after he invaded from France.



Many of the stories about the Tower are from the time of Henry VIII – the king who had many wives. Do you know about him? Some of them he divorced and a couple he even had beheaded at the Tower. The Beefeater tour is rather gruesome with all the stories of torture and killing that are part of its history.



We also had a walk by London Bridge (another photo) – and it didn't fall down.

On one of the days in London, JP & I went to the Imperial War Museum while Daegan and Fran went to the London Zoo (the home of the original Winnie). Fran was impressed by the wide variety of animals in the zoo – as well as the space they had provided for the animals, especially the big cats.

That was the day we had to pack our bags and head off to catch a train on our way to Holland. We went to Harwick for the boat (the Princess Beatrix) after an overnight ride. It wasn't that much fun because a whole group of drunk guys (scouts in kilts) were travelling with us – making noise and barfing too close to where we were trying to sleep. I was glad when our ship arrived in Hoek van Holland and we boarded the train for Amsterdam about 6:00 AM in the morning.

I hope you get to go with your girl guides group – but if it doesn't happen, you can put such an adventure on your own agenda by starting the planning now. I have a number of students who do a lot of travelling on a shoestring budget by learning from others who have identified the best places to stay, tips about cheap travel, and strategies for saving in preparation for a trip. One of them (also named Samantha) says that there are internet networks where “international backpackers” exchange stories and tips for such travel.

Another way to travel is by participating in one of the many groups that volunteer overseas. Often the participant has to pay for travel but in some cases they don't have to pay for living expenses. The problem is to find the volunteer organization that is dependable. The nice thing is that you have plenty of time to do the research if this sounds interesting.

Love,