**Visiting Aunt Ethel in Toronto**

Every year or two for the last 10 years, I have visited my Aunt Ethel in Toronto. She is now 100 years old and a delight to talk with and be around. She remembers all the family from long ago and even remembers me when I was two years old from the time she stayed with my parents in Venice, California. Twelve years ago she walked into a doctor’s office and the doctor said that she had no pulse. At that time she immediately got a pacemaker installed. I have heard since then that a pacemaker can extend life since it keeps the heart beating. She has had a few falls, but her mental acuity and dry sense of humor are still wonderful. We have a good time discussing family matters and the current state of affairs. She reminds me of my parents, along with their interests and attitudes on life. Every trip when I go visit, we get together for dinner with her daughters, Rosalie and Angie. They are always fun to be around and have their own interests. Rosalie seems to know everyone in town and Angie is very busy with her four children. Both are quite fashionable and have interesting and different viewpoints. On some visits, I get to see the some of the other relatives in the area.

Aunt Ethel is my mother’s sister. Life for her seems to have had three phases of about equal time: for the first third, she was growing up on the farm and general store in Beaconia, Manitoba. For the second third, she was married to Saul, living in Winnipeg, and having three children: two now live nearby in Toronto and one still lives in Winnipeg. I remember them all growing up and helping their parents at their grocery store in Winnipeg. For the third phase, she moved to Toronto, lived in a high rise apartment building by herself and hangs out with her two daughters there and her four grandchildren, who are all now between 21 and 30 years old. The oldest grand-daughter got married in 2015 with a “beautiful wedding”. It is a good thing that I missed the wedding due to a previous commitment since the custom in Toronto is to get very dressed up for such occasions. I have not even owned a suit since the one my parents bought me for my college graduation in 1966. I do not think my pink-orange sports jacket, orange pants, and bolo tie that I use for work holiday parties would have been viewed as acceptable attire for such an event in Toronto. I certainly have never worn a tuxedo (horrors!) or even black pants. Dressy shoes (the shiny kind) have been impossible my entire life.

 Back in 1978, I went to Chris’ sister Marilyn’s wedding reception at a country club near Milwaukee. Since the country club had a mandatory suit rule, I borrowed an old brown suit from the groom, Ron, who is a little shorter than I am. At the time, he had a very large collection of suits since that was the work attire then. The pants did not quite get near the floor. Afterwards, Marilyn looked at the wedding pictures and found that everyone in the pictures was correctly dressed with neutral colors, but then there was me with my bright orange socks clearly displayed. Her complaint was that my socks attracted more attention then she did in the formal picture. She has reminded me about that picture on several occasions. At least now there are digital pictures and PhotoShop repair to fix any such problems.

During the 1980’s and 1990’s, Aunt Ethel and her friend Frances (who lived in Winnipeg) would always take two to three months off during the Canadian winter and go to someplace warm. Frequently, that was someplace in Southern California or the Southwest. We would take some time off to go visit them wherever they were. There were trips (sometimes with my parents) to Lake Havasu City, Las Vegas, Palm Springs, and San Diego. Once, they even stayed in Woodland Hills, but it was viewed as too cold. They seemed to have the ability to have a good time wherever they were. We generally toured around the vicinity taking in the sights and the culture of the area.

On my last trip to Toronto, I spent some time visiting the sights with a Citipass. For this trip, I was wearing my usual all-orange outfit that I use so I can be easily seen. Aunt Ethel felt that orange was too bright and I would look better in the light blue that my mother would always dress me in. I was looking for a downtown board game store along Yonge Street; I felt pretty normal dropping in there and looking at the collection. The back room was full of old games; I have played most of them.

Afterwards, I was trying to find the subway that traveled north to a stop directly in her building at the corner of Yonge and Sheppard. I asked a group of people on the street: “How do I get down there?” while pointing at the ground beneath me. They all immediately fled without saying a word. The same question was asked to another group with the same result. Afterwards, I realized that maybe it was the all-orange outfit? Most people in Toronto do not know where the subway is located and did not recognize the reference to down there as a subway. I suppose that maybe hell is viewed as an orange place. Perhaps orange attire makes people think I am some sort of radical person. As it turned out, the subway stations in downtown Toronto are about half-block East of Yonge Street with the entrance hidden in large office buildings. In California, the orange attire is viewed as a CalTrans or Home Depot worker. Sometimes, I am a viewed as a fan of the San Francisco Giants or Houston Astros professional baseball teams. Elsewhere in the USA, I am a fan of Texas, Tennessee, Syracuse, or Clemson. Actually, the school colors at Caltech are orange and white and I am proud to dress like an alumnus when I am traveling or attending a Caltech event. I receive the occasional question from strangers: “Why!?” My usual explanation: “My children said I should dress in all orange so they could find me.” I did promise Aunt Ethel that I would show up in dark blue pants and a light blue shirt on the next visit. Aha, I did not mention that the socks and shoes will continue to be hopelessly orange.

I also went to the downtown railroad Union Station and took the first commuter train that I saw. It traveled to the Northwest on some right-of-way under construction and I wound up in the middle of the countryside near Georgetown after a one hour ride. There was nothing there except for a rail storage yard and the station. When I inquired about the train back to Toronto, I found that commuter trains only operate weekdays inbound in the morning and outbound in the afternoon. It was Friday afternoon and the next train back was not until Monday morning. Fortunately, in another hour, there was a bus that would get me somewhere near a Toronto Metro stop. It took three hours to get back to Toronto. I later found out that the construction was the new rail service that went from Union Station to the Pearson Airport. The new line was using the old railroad right-of-way for most of the distance.

Toronto has many excellent museums and places to visit. My personal favorite is the Toronto Zoo. There was also an extensive exhibit of Dale Chihuly glass sculpture at the Royal Ontario Museum. I noticed that the squirrels throughout the city are black in color. There is also a major traffic problem. During rush hours, it appears impossible to go anywhere on any East-West city street without a hour-long traffic jam. I tried Finch, Sheppard, Lawrence, Eglinton, and Queen Elizabeth Way. All seemed under construction and had lane closures at various locations. Why do people from other places complain about Los Angeles traffic? Well, at least the subways operated quickly and efficiently. Some of the trains are unusual as there are no doors between the cars; a passenger can see all the way through the train to the other end (on straight track if there are no people in the way). Of course, I have been on every Metro line in the city from end-to-end.