

Canada 2006

July 10, Day 1 Berlin - Vancouver

The long-awaited trip had a very strange beginning – I wasn't nervous at all! Everything seemed so normal to me. We had spent the day before with packing and some cleaning, I knew I didn't forget anything, so there was nothing to worry about. Our friend from across drove us to the airport, which was nice, since we didn't have to park the car for 4 weeks!

It was the day after the Fifa World Cup final, and the airport was so crowded! Seemed like everyone was heading home. When we checked in, the clerk said, it was the highest number of passengers on one day since the airport opened! Anyway, the flight to Frankfurt was uneventful. We didn't have much time for changing planes, so we went straight to the departure gate. The aircraft was fully booked, and believe me, the next time I check in for a long flight, I ask for seats *outside* the family rows. We had a Dutch family with 3 or 4 kids in the row behind us, and they were steadily talking, rattling on the seats, whining, whatever! It was a very exhausting flight. But we finally arrived after 10 hours in Vancouver. Immigration and customs was quick and easy, the luggage was unloaded very quickly, so that we left the building exactly 30 minutes after landing. We took a hotel shuttle, had dinner at IHOP, which was connected to the hotel and went to bed pretty early, due to the time difference of 9 hours. Unfortunately, even though our heads seemed to have adjusted, our bodies hadn't. I was wide awake between 11 pm and 2.30 am!

July 11, Day 2 Vancouver - Hope

Breakfast at IHOP ☺. I was hungry and ate way too much! My stomach was irritated all day long. Our papers said that we had to call the motorhome rental to arrange a pick up time. I always thought that we could pick up the motorhome in the morning, but it turned out that we didn't book the "Early Bird" special, so we were told to pick it up in the afternoon. I was a little annoyed, but we decided to make the best of it – we took the bus to downtown Vancouver. We walked around, took the elevator to the observation deck of the Harbour Centre building, but I couldn't enjoy it too much because of my stomach. We took the bus back to the hotel, and waited for the taxi to take us to the rental station. It took another while before we finally had the keys to the RV, it was way too late to drive far. We were told that Hope has a nice RV park, about 2 ½ hours away from Vancouver, so we went there. We went grocery shopping on our way, it is nice to put the groceries from the carriage right into the fridge! What we learned really quickly is "don't leave things lying around in a motorhome!" – they distribute all over the floor during a turn. The lot we had in the RV park was really nice, a little secluded with plants around, cows in the back and birds in the morning!

July 12, Day 3 Hope - Vernon

We woke up early, but at least we slept through the night – like babies ☺. Had some breakfast and went back on the road. Traveling with a motorhome is a lot different from what I thought it would be. It's louder and slower, and the distances don't look as long as they really are on the map! The first stop we made was driving up the road to Cascade Lookout in Manning Provincial Park. We were all alone, and the view is spectacular! Well, not all alone, we saw a couple of squirrels and birds, Clark's Nutcrackers. We drove all day long, with a break at Wal*Mart and McDonalds, but we soon discovered that the itinerary we made, which way we are going is too far. We reached Vernon, found a lot in a small RV park (the owner is Swiss) and changed our plans. We won't drive that far tomorrow (at least that's what we think from the map), spend a night near Glacier NP and then go to Banff, where we will try to find a lot for 3 or 4 nights. That motorhome uses about three times more gas than our car at home – whew! A camping trip is NOT inexpensive! Now we are relaxing, thinking of going to bed already. The RV park here (close to Vernon) is really nice, the lots not secluded, but it faces a beautiful lake.

July 13, Day 4 Vernon – Golden

We drove through fruit farming and wine regions today. Not far after we left we crashed our plates... The roads are quite rough sometimes and one bump made the cabinet door open, and all plates crashed into the sink. So, we have to secure that door and buy plastic tableware! ☺ We had a first break at the Crazy River Falls. A bridge is crossing the falls with a nice view. Then we continued to drive through Revelstoke National Park and Glacier NP, where we had a break in Rogers Pass at the visitor center. It was raining and cool, but Nicole didn't mind and played with the ground squirrels. We continued to Golden and found a nice spot at the municipal campground right around the corner from downtown. The registration desk wasn't occupied, but the sign told us to pick a spot and return later. That's what we did. Later we found a store, which sells plastic tableware, and then we had dinner at the Kicking Horse Saloon. It looked very simple from the outside, but very nice from the inside – with white linens on the tables. The food was delicious! I chose buffalo ribs and Christian had fish. Really good.

July 14, Day 5 Golden – Banff

On to our first main destination – Banff. The drive is not far. We decided to stay for a longer time to relax a little and not rush that much. The campground (Tunnel Mountain) is huge! We got a nice spot with a view of Mt. Rundle. Banff has public transportation, three bus lines, which we used. I was glad not to drive with the RV all the time. We took a walk first though as the Hoodoos are not far from the campground. Hoodoos are columns of weathered and eccentrically shaped rock. We had the most gorgeous weather and walking was a pleasure. From the Hoodoos we took the bus downtown. Well, my first impression was "are we in Disneyland?"

Everything looks neat and pretty – almost too pretty! We hit the shops that afternoon and mingled with all the other tourists. What I think is quite astonishing is that many, many Asian tourists are here. Japanese, Chinese and Korean (at least I think they're Korean...). Many shops have welcome signs in three different languages that consist of signs. Hm. Banff is a touristy spot, that's for sure. But it's nice! We have dinner at "Maggie and Stump", tex mex food, which is really good! The drinks are served in pint size jars, which look like jam jars. It's a nice twist.

July 15, Day 6 Banff

Blue skies and some white clouds ☺. It's cool though. We took public transit downtown and changed lines to the Banff Gondola, which took us to the summit of Sulphur Mountain. The panorama over Banff and the Bow Valley was breathtaking! We took a short walk to the actual summit. It was a station for measuring cosmic radiance. We enjoyed the view from the cafeteria having lunch, then went down again. We had packed swim wear to visit the Upper Hot Springs, located right beside the gondola. The water is 40°C warm! We managed to stay half an hour, it was like taking a hot bath – exhausting. We had dinner downtown at Elk & Oarsmen, then took the bus back to the campground.

July 16, Day 7 Banff

Today we took the motorhome and drove to Lake Louise. We stayed a couple of hours at Moraine Lake, which is absolutely gorgeous! That's why we came here – having views like this one. Nicole said it's like walking around in a panorama postcard. And she's right! We hiked along the lake to a waterfall, then hiked back. We even rented a canoe for an hour and paddled down Moraine Lake. I'm glad Nicole insisted on paddling, it's a wonderful break. After lunch we drove to the lake Lake Louise. What a difference! The lake itself is beautiful also, but this is a definite tourist trap. The hotel has some very expensive shops. I had the feeling one sales clerk didn't like us watching the artefacts. I bet she was afraid Nicole would break something. Again, many, many Asian people were there. They come in buses, stay for a few minutes, then leave in buses. Some Asian women (I guess Japanese) protect themselves from the sun, the wind, the cold, everything! They're wrapped in hats, gloves, long-sleeved shirts. They also carry umbrellas. Why not enjoy the lovely weather? It looks strange. We didn't stay that long at the lake, we had a short stop at Lake Louise Village, but soon returned to the campground. We were approached by an elderly couple (why don't we get approached by younger ones???) , who made plans to ask everyone where they are from – and we were the first ones sitting outside! She was born German, and her family relocated to Canada when she was a little girl. He was born Swedish ☺. We talked for quite a while!

July 17, Day 8 Banff

Today we visited Cave and Basin, the birthplace of Banff National Park. It's a really small cave, with sulphur smelling water in it – yuk! The basin is water outside and it smells even more from sulphur! Ewww... in this water there lives a special snail species, I think it was called small Banff snail or something. It lives only there and the population varies between 5,000 and 15,000. We used the afternoon for laundry. I cared for the laundry and Nicole and Christian went to a hotel nearby with a huge ground squirrel population ☺.

July 18, Day 9 Banff – Jasper

Time to leave Banff. We headed for the Icefield Parkway to Jasper. The scenery is absolutely gorgeous! Behind each turn there's a new great panoramic view. In one of the brochures the highway was called the backbone of the continent. As it is a water divide, it's true! We stopped at the Columbia Icefield, a glacier. They have a huge visitor center and we took a guided tour to the glacier itself. There's a bus driving to the glacier and some huge snowmobile on the glacier. That was nice! The guides were all young men making fun of us, telling us, they'd gotten their driver's license just the day before and stuff like that. ☺ Touristy, but funny. Between the icefield and Jasper we made two more stops, at the Sunwapta Falls and the Athabasca Falls. We saw the back of a wolf trotting along the street a few cars ahead of us but when we passed the spot he was already gone. With the many stops and the long break it was already 6 pm when we arrived at the campground, leaving us waiting in line and ending up with a lot without services. No microwave and no coffee maker without the 30 Amp plug-in! I can do without the microwave (we have a gas operated stove), but a morning without coffee?? Ok, so we decided to go out for breakfast tomorrow.

July 19, Day 10 Jasper

We chose a family restaurant for breakfast. The portions were huge and the coffee was thin like water. But the taste alone worked. We went to Maligne Lake today. On our way lied Maligne Canyon, with a hiking trail of about 2 km one way. Impressive! The canyon is deeper than I thought. We hiked down, and the way up again was quite challenging! Remember, I hadn't been running for a long time, plus the smoking – I quit (again!) on the day we left, and actually I don't miss it at all. Another stop was Medicine Lake, a lake that disappears in wintertime. Since Maligne Lake itself is the best known tourist spot in the Jasper area, we thought it would be crowded like Lake Louise. We were proven wrong fortunately, not too many people were there and it was really quiet! There were a cafeteria and a gift shop, a boat marina, that's it. Maligne Lake is a beautiful spot. The most photographed point in the area is Spirit Island, in Maligne Lake, but only accessible by boat. So, we bought tickets for the boat tour. We could've also rented a canoe, but with the prospect of paddling 6 hours one way... we opted for the boat. The boat ride itself lasts about 1 ½ hours, with beautiful views on the way. Spirit Island looks so unspectacular during approach, but it is an awesome view from the lakeshore. I can imagine why this is the most photographed spot here! Unfortunately we only had about 15 minutes time, I would've

enjoyed sitting and watching for half an hour or even longer, but the boat doesn't wait. Back at the docks, we had lunch and went back to Jasper, did some gift shop hopping and went back to the campground. We shared the campground with a herd of elk! They were everywhere, grazing between the tents and motorhomes – what a great experience!

July 20, Day 11 Jasper – Kamloops

Driving, driving, driving... (sing to the tune of "Rolling, rolling, rolling..." ☺) Too bad we are leaving the Rockies today. I loved the area! But we still need some time at the coast and on Vancouver Island. Nothing much happened today. We drove more than 400 km. We arrived in Kamloops early afternoon, found a campground not far from downtown. It's not the best, but not too far away. We did some grocery shopping, but when I wanted to hit Wal*Mart, my queen of shopping (aka Nicole) refused. We all were pooped from the day on the road, so we returned to the campground. We were not even in the mood to visit downtown. It was a hot day! I bet it was over 30°C. Our campground neighbors, an elderly couple, told us it is supposed to warm up to 37°C (about 100°F) in the Vancouver-Hope area tomorrow. Unh. We almost froze up in Jasper, now we'll probably fry. We had a quiet afternoon, played some cards, had dinner (hot dogs and cole slaw), and Christian wrote in his travel diary. I'm reading a lot, I have finished book 11 and 12 from the Stephanie Plum series by Janet Evanovich, and started Cross Bones by Kathy Reichs. I have another one of Evanovich left, then I got to buy more!

July 21, Day 12 Kamloops – Hope

Another day with clear blue skies. The Kamloops area looks quite different to what we saw until today. The mountains that surround the city are brown and red, there's not much green. It almost resembles Southern California. Shrubs everywhere, but not many trees. We left Kamloops west to Cache Creek, then went on Hwy 1 south to Hope. The scenery slowly changed from being brown to being green again, as we entered the valley of Thompson River. The road is narrow and winding and the trucks don't seem to care for speed limits! Yikes! But we have some great views when we entered Fraser Canyon.

We went down to Hell. And it only was \$15 per person! *lol* We made a stop at Hell's Gate Tramway, which is about 10 km behind Boston Bar. We had seen a brochure and were always looking for a tram or gondola going up the mountains – wrong! The tramway went down! It's a nice spot overlooking the canyon. But we were melting down there. One guy at the tram going up again told us that it can heat up to more than 50°C in the Canyon! Only a rough 30 minutes later we arrived in Hope. We actually wanted to stay at the same campground as before for the first night, but the one campground next to it has a pool, so we registered there. Again we had a quiet afternoon, it was way too hot to do anything. We downloaded all the photos from the cameras. We also went into the pool, which was a really nice refreshment. Later we'll have pizza, in case I can figure out the pizza program in the microwave!

July 22, Day 13 Hope – Qualicum Beach

What a day! We left Hope quite early and headed for Tsawwassen, south of Vancouver, where the ferries leave for Vancouver Island. I'm not sure if we drove the way I wanted through Vancouver, we probably missed one sign and drove on a very, very long street with a lot of construction sites for houses. But we found our way. Sometimes I have a feeling that direction signs are scarce here ☺. We arrived at the harbour at close to noon, bought a ferry ticket and caught the ferry at 1 pm! Guess we were lucky. We were not so lucky in finding a campground in Victoria, our first destination. All campgrounds were full, even though we were told at the visitor information center that they weren't. So we decided to change our plans and drive on. If we had known how difficult it would be to find a place to stay, I'd opted for a campground closer to Victoria, but we drove past Nanaimo until Qualicum Beach. At the information center we were given two campgrounds, we drove to one and unfortunately there weren't any hook-up sites left. And the girl at the office didn't have a clue what to do. It usually takes a while to make Christian mad, but that girl was able to infuriate him. Being furious in English isn't easy... So, we finally drove to the other one, which thankfully had a lot left. We decided to give it a break and booked two nights. We were so exhausted that we just had dinner and went to bed.

July 23, Day 14 Qualicum Beach

We spent a wonderfully relaxing day at the beach. We went swimming, collected sand dollars, went swimming, and went for a walk... It was really nice. But I got sunburned! I've tried to call the campgrounds in Tofino and Ucluelet a couple of times to make a reservation, but either the line was busy or a voice told me the office hours would be Monday to Friday. But we made a reservation for a whale watching tour at Jamie's Whaling Station in Tofino.

July 24, Day 15 Qualicum Beach – Tofino

We left early, hoping we would find a place to stay in Tofino. We didn't call again, but as check out time is 11 am on campgrounds, we gave it a try. Asking at the visitor center, the lady told us that the campground in the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve was fully booked, but we could check at the MacKenzie Beach Campground, even though it only has a few RV sites. We were lucky! Even though we only got a parking space for the first night, we were able to change to a full hook-up for the following two nights. As the name suggests, the MacKenzie beach is only a couple of steps away. We went there to catch a first impression of the Pacific Ocean. Beautiful! In the afternoon we drove into Tofino, which we had imagined different – we thought there would be two or three parallel roads with lots of seafood restaurants, shops etc, but there is only one main road, very

steep small streets descending from the main, Campbell Road, only two – in our eyes quite expensive – restaurants, so we ended up at Big Daddy's Fish Fry, which surprisingly had some good fast seafood. One of the restaurants is the Schooner, and it is mentioned in a book, which I have read, The Swarm by Frank Schätzing – I think I have recommended to everyone I know! The story takes place in Tofino too ☺. That was nice to imagine being in a spot in a book. In the evening we watched the sunset at the beach. No real vacation without a proper sunset! But the wind was strong and cold, so we soon went back to the car.

July 25, Day 16 Tofino

We slept in. Nicole slept until after 10 am! ☺ We drove to Tofino (the campground is approximately 3 km south) and checked in at the Whaling Station. We got stuffed in thick red suits and walk down to the boat, which is a zodiac – a big dinghy with room for about 12 passengers. We felt like astronauts in these suits and soon began to sweat, but later it turned out that we really needed them! The zodiac ride is great! We managed to enter first, so we sat in the front row. As soon as our guide - Matt - sped up, the ride turned into a rollercoaster ride! It was really heavy but a lot of fun. We drove to some place in Clayoquot Sound and waited for whales to show up. And there they were! We saw two humpback whales, though only from a distance and not in whole, just their backs. Then we sped up again, going out to sea, and at one of the outer islands we saw a grey whale – well, just the back of it only, but it was a great experience. It almost showed its fluke! ☺ We're actually thinking of doing another whale watching trip to see Orcas in Victoria, but we don't know yet. Back at the station, we all looked really happy and windblown. We got some coffee and hot chocolate, then we dropped in at Big Daddy's Fish Fry again for a snack. We had a relaxing afternoon with a campfire and after dinner I went with Nicole to the beach again, catching another sunset.

July 26, Day 17 Tofino

We went to Ucluelet today, hiked the Wild Pacific Trail, walked around town, visited the gift shops (I think we saw all of them! There aren't many ☺), and had lunch at a bar restaurant overlooking the harbor. We bought pasta sauce for dinner tonight, walked a little more and headed for some viewpoints in the Pacific Rim National Park. It was already late afternoon (where did the time go?), so we stopped at Long Beach and Wickaninnish Information Center only. The beach is really nice, there are whitish logs everywhere, looks somehow weird, but the wind was so cool, that we didn't stay too long. Back at the campground, Nicole went into the pool for an hour, then we had dinner.

July 27, Day 18 Tofino – Victoria

Our campground neighbors are Dutch. Many people we meet during our trip are Dutch! Anyway, when Christian and I had breakfast, one of the neighbor men excitedly woke the family and all of them hurried outside. Christian went to take a look as well and what he saw, was the huge backside of a black bear vanishing in the bushes! He came back to get the camera and us, but when we arrived the bear was already gone. Darn! But we were lucky, on our way to Victoria, not long after we left Tofino, we saw another one crossing the street! Not as big as the one in the morning, and we also couldn't get out the camera in time (so no picture proof), but we have really seen a live, wild bear! The street between Tofino and Port Alberni, which is the next biggest city between the west- and the east coast of Vancouver Island, is narrow and winding, even more than the street through Fraser Canyon! We had a break in Port Alberni, browsing Wal*Mart. We had another break in Nanaimo, where I finally visited a Staples store! Of course I had to buy some stationery and I was happy to find three designs I really like! I also bought a couple of pens, envelopes and Nicole got a huge package of colored pencils and a bag she can put them in.

As we had reserved the campground in Victoria, we took our time. But as we arrived, they couldn't find our reservation! The campground wasn't full so thankfully it was not a problem. We still had most of the afternoon left, so we took public transit to go downtown. Hurray for public transit! Even though it is great to drive with all your stuff in the back, it's not fun to drive with a motorhome in a city. I'm not even talking about finding a place to park! Buses and trains are convenient and not that expensive, so we took the bus. We walked around the streets, went down to the Inner Harbour, where the famous huge hotel The Empress and the Parliament building are. The inner Harbour is a place for artists of all kinds and it's fun to watch them. We booked another whale watching tour at Prince of Whales for noon tomorrow. We had dinner at the Garlic Rose and went back to the campground.

July 28, Day 19 Victoria

In the morning I called my penpal Kate, who lives in Victoria. Although she had a dentist appointment ahead we decided to meet in the afternoon, after our whale watching tour. We took the bus downtown again. We still had some time left, so we enjoyed the atmosphere at the Inner Harbour. Two big sailboats were about to leave, they offer courses to learn to sail for 5 days, for people between 13 and 25. We saw all the people waiting, but we didn't see the ships leave.

Again we had to wear these red suits for the zodiac trip! As we claimed to have some experience already, we didn't mind ☺. Our group was quite big, so we got divided in two groups. When we boarded the boat (we again sit in the front!) our guide James told us that no tour on this day got to see any orcas yet. My heart sank and I thought what if *we* don't see any? He also told us, they had reports of whales in the Vancouver direction, so we would go there, even though that meant the tour would be extended from 3 to 4 hours. I didn't mind of course! So, we went, and if we thought the zodiac ride in Tofino was bumpy – this one was really bumpy! Geez! After half an hour we stopped and James said, we're in a dilemma. Whales close to Vancouver and another

whale spotting in the complete other direction, in the Juan de Fuca street, between Vancouver Island and the US. Either way would be the same distance, but the way in the other direction would be smoother, without the 3 or 4 ft waves we would have to expect if we went on. Ok, so we turned and headed the other way. And he called that smooth! I felt like in a wild rollercoaster for 1 ½ hours. With a hairdryer from the front with salty, cold wind. I wondered what the 3 or 4 ft waves would have been like. Probably it would've felt like hell. We went really fast and sometimes I thought if this was worth it. It was really exhausting to hold on to the handrails in front, we hopped up and down and this only because we wanted to see orcas! Besides, with going so far, we would have to go the same way back! My heart sank even more, as the only things we saw were waves and skies. I really feared we wouldn't see any wildlife today. I lost my feeling for time (and my butt) but eventually we stopped at the place where whales were sighted. We were told to lookout for the fins and the blows. And finally – yes, we saw one! And one more, and one more! In the end we saw maybe 12 orcas, one passing our boat only about 10 meters away. It was definitely worth it!!! We were so happy! Nicole was glowing! I bet we all were ☺. The way back to the station wasn't as long as we thought thankfully, and it was smoother. We were gone for a little more than 4 hours.

We relaxed a little and then I called Kate again. Poor thing, she had to spend most of her day at the dentist, but she was willing to meet for coffee even though she wasn't feeling too well. Which we did half an hour later, at a small café called Mirage. It was great to put a face to her name and we talked and talked. We finally let her go to get some well deserved sleep, and we headed for the Inner Harbour again to have dinner. Kate recommended Milestone's with a harbour view and we settled for that! It was good!

July 29, Day 20, Victoria – Vancouver

We were sore, when we got up early. Every muscle ached from the zodiac ride. But we wanted to have some time to visit another Victoria attraction before we left the island – Butchart Gardens, a really nice botanical garden. It was recommended by a man we talked to in the bus from downtown to the campground. We arrived early and already we met several travel groups, probably Japanese. I don't mean judging the Japanese (or Asian in general) people, but the ones we saw on our vacations were loud and rude. Unfortunately Nicole wasn't feeling too well, and at one point she even threw up. It must've been the chocolate milk she had this morning, even though it tasted well, it must've gone bad already. So we didn't stay as long as we wanted to and went to Swartz Bay to catch the ferry over to Tsawwassen (I never really figured out how this is pronounced!). Luckily we didn't have to wait long and caught the boat leaving at noon. I thought, Nicole could maybe stretch out and sleep, but the seats didn't allow that. She threw up a couple times more ☹. So we didn't really get to enjoy the trip over. She finally fell asleep on the way to Burnaby, where had reserved the campground, and thankfully felt fine and refreshed when she woke up! The campground in Burnaby is closely located to the Skytrain, another public transportation system. It's also a very well maintained campground with quite a few amenities and conveniences, like a fully equipped laundry, an indoor pool with a hot tub, a well equipped store and even a hotspot for wireless high speed internet! Our laptop found the hotspot quickly, but got stuck at retrieving an IP address, so no chance to check emails ☹. I didn't mind too much, I can wait a couple of days more.

We had some time left, so we visited Canada's second largest mall, Metrotown. We weren't in the mood for anything else. This mall was overwhelming! We needed two hours for just one level (ok, with having dinner at the food court), but there was no way to see it all. Our feet ached, so we returned soon after. We didn't even buy anything! ☹ On the way to the campground, from the Skytrain station, there was the Burnaby fire department. Curious as Christian is, he stopped, because the doors stood open. He was able to talk to two of the firemen, which he really enjoyed! Nicole and I went into the pool then, which was really refreshing.

July 30, Day 21 Vancouver

We woke up to heavy rain. Our plan was to visit Stanley Park, but we waited. I did some laundry first, and when it seemed to clear up, we went. On our way to the Skytrain station it poured again ☹. But it stopped as soon as we exited and it became better minute by minute! We dismissed our plan to rent bikes in Stanley Park, although we could've done it, as it didn't rain again. Instead we took a 1 hour narrated horse-drawn carriage tour, which we enjoyed very much. The narrator, Clare, had a way with telling stories! We walked a little, and then visited the Vancouver Aquarium. This place was packed! Probably because firstly, it was Sunday afternoon (I totally lost track of dates and weekdays!), secondly, because many people thought, it's going to be a dull day. But we managed to get around and also see a short demonstration about white-sided dolphins and one about Beluga whales. We spent quite a bit of time there. Back to the city by bus, we walked through Chinatown, which was kind of disappointing. Not like we remembered Chinatown in New York City, with open booths and shops – everything was closed. We only saw street signs in Chinese. And I have to admit, it felt weird. It just didn't feel safe. Just around the corner is Gastown, a small district where Vancouver began. That was such a difference to Chinatown! As we were hungry, we looked for a restaurant and went to the Old Spaghetti Factory – just another chain restaurant, but we were positively surprised! It was huge, you couldn't see that from the entrance, the food is good and inexpensive. It turned out that our waiter was German ☺. We were stuffed! We went back to the campground by Skytrain again – our last night in the motorhome! It feels like home in a way. It also feels like we've been here for a very long time already. These three weeks went by in a wheeze.

July 31, Day 22 Vancouver – Toronto

We had to get up early to return the motorhome to the rental agency. We saw a coyote standing at the highway watching the traffic! Returning the RV was quicker than I thought it would be. We gave the last food and firewood to a German family, who had just arrived. Then we shared a van-taxi with a Dutch family (who we

had seen in Tofino already!) to the airport, our flight to Toronto left at 1.30 pm. The flight took 4 ½ hours and due to the time difference we arrived at 9 pm. I couldn't believe my ears, when the pilot announced the temperature – over 30°C! It was like hitting a wall when we stepped out, it was so humid! And the forecast didn't sound too nice as well, 36°C. Whew! We retrieved our rental car, a Toyota Corolla. The hotel we had reserved, the Delta Chelsea, is downtown, and bigger than I imagined! We got a room at the 20th floor, and this wasn't even the last! At least it was air-conditioned. The restaurant in the hotel was already closed, so we just walked down the street to get some dinner. We stopped at a pizza place just a few steps away. It took awhile until we finally fall asleep.

August 1, Day 22 Toronto

It was hot! At breakfast time, we caught the weather channel in the restaurant. It was already 30°C at 9 am, forecast was 36°C. Still, as we only have one day, we walked downtown, sweat running down our backs even though we walked on the shady side of the street! At least we wanted to go up the CN tower. We did that and didn't have that much waiting time to go up. What a view! The visibility wasn't too great, it was too hazy due to the heat, but it was amazing! On clear days, you can see Niagara Falls ☺. We did the lookout at 346 m and the glass floor a story below at 342 m and the Sky Pod, another lookout at 447 m! It was great!

We melted when we got out and decided to skip the rest of the city and drive to Niagara Falls instead. We had 40°C on the highway! We didn't think we would really go, but having the Falls so near and not go, we would've regretted it, I'm sure. As we had been there 15 years ago, it was like a revival trip. In 1991, it rained the whole time and here we had the chance to see them in bright sunlight. Also, Nicole wanted to see them. It only takes almost 2 hours from downtown Toronto. As it was back in 1991, despite the rain, the Falls are a breathtaking view. We stroll down to the American Falls, and decide to do the Maid of the Mist – which we didn't do back then. We had taken the Journey behind the Falls tour. The Maid of the Mist is fun and we got so wet! I'm not sure if we just hadn't gone that far during our first visit, or if the place just changed so much, but we didn't remember the place so extremely touristy. Not directly at the water, but at the "town" itself. We had dinner at the Rainforest Café, Nicole insisted on going there when she saw it! We went there in Florida twice and she remembered that well! It's not a cheap experience, but a real experience. After dinner, we watched the Falls being light-colored for a while and went back to Toronto.

August 2, Day 23 Toronto – Fenelon Falls – Bancroft

In the morning I called my penpal Carol that we would be on the way soon. We had agreed to spend our last days with her, when we planned our vacation. Fenelon Falls is almost 2 hours north of Toronto. Due to the heat, Carol said that we would not stay in their house, which isn't air-conditioned, but drive up to Bancroft, where she and her family (husband Harold and children Zach and Alannis) have a cottage at Carfrae Lake, it would be cooler up there. That sounded like a wonderful idea! Arriving in Fenelon Falls, it was great to finally meet her and her family. We have been writing for about 7 years now. First we just sat and chatted – Zach was surprised to hear us talk fluently in English! I was a little hesitant for Nicole – even though she's had English in school, I was sure it wouldn't be enough to carry a conversation with children who are native speakers! But I needn't have to be worried, Zach and Alannis own a GameCube as a common link ☺. As soon as we had arrived, the kids were together. Carol told me that her neighbor Louis, whom she became good friends with since they moved there, would probably be glued to the window to watch us arrive. And lo and behold, only half an hour later, Louis and his friend Keith came over to talk to us. We had some good laughs! Her neighborhood must be similar to ours, with neighbors being friends and being able to rely on each other.

Later in the afternoon we decided to leave for the cottage near Bancroft. Carol and Harold stuffed us all into the van ☺. They treated us to dinner at the Fox & Hounds, a pub and restaurant close to our destination. I finally learned what pogo sticks are – hotdogs in a blanket and on a stick! *lol* All the kids had them. Arriving at the lake, I was really surprised how big the cottage is! Harold is building it himself – what a great job he does! It's not finished yet, so we have a reason to go back! It's a huge living room with space for a kitchen. Right now there's the fridge, a sink and the stove. The cottage has a bathroom and three bedrooms. Perfect for weekend getaways! You just have to follow a short path down the property and you're at the lake. A private hideous retreat. We all go into the water and relax. But there was a storm coming through and it rained heavily. Just as the children wanted to see a movie, the power goes out. The storm must have been stronger than we thought. Unfortunately no power also means no shower and no flushing the toilet, as the water pump needs power. But Carol was confident to have power back the next day.

August 3, Day 24 Bancroft

No power. No coffee! Harold went and got coffee from McDonalds and ice for the groceries. We spent a really lazy day at the lake, read magazines, talked, swam... I wasn't feeling too well though, I had caught a cold – probably from going back and forth from the heat into the air-conditioned stores. But it felt so nice to just sit and relax. The kids were busy catching frogs and toads, and the language barrier was almost non-existent ☺. We had shrimp and surimi for lunch, and a meat pie that went onto the bbq instead of the oven. For dinner Carol improvised – instead of spinach and ricotta stuffed chicken breasts, we have bbq'd chicken breasts and Cesar's salad – yummy anyway! It was a perfect ending to a great vacation.

August 4+5, Day 25+26 Bancroft – Fenelon Falls – Toronto – Frankfurt – Berlin

Time to leave. I didn't want to. But I was also looking forward to being home again. Still no power! Harold said, they said in the news that about 150000 people were without power, and some areas would be until next week.

So we packed our things early and left for Fenelon Falls. Carol prepared breakfast, we talked a while, and then we had to leave. A long weekend ahead with Civic Day, Harold said, the highway to the airport should be fine, and the other direction would be crowded. Harold was right with the highway being crowded, but in both directions! ☺ Still we had enough time, since the flight home left at 6.10 pm. We arrived at the airport at 1.30 pm. We had to wait for check-in, they didn't even open the check-in before 3 pm. Toronto Pearson International Airport has a couple of shops, but not that many to keep you occupied for hours. We had a late lunch and then just sit and read. The flight was surprisingly short, instead of 7 ½ hours as stated in our papers, the pilot announced we would only need 6 ½ hours. With settling, dinner, drinks, duty-free shopping carts, an early breakfast 1 ½ hours before landing, light was off for only about an hour. Not much time to sleep! We arrived in Frankfurt in the morning (German time), had to wait for the connecting flight and landed in Berlin at 11.20 am. It took a while until we had collected our luggage, then we took a taxi home. Home. The lawn needs mowing! I did most of the laundry, talked to the neighbors who took care of the house for the last few days, as my friend and her family left for their own vacation on Monday. I was surprised that we weren't too tired after a night too short to call it a night. But we crashed at 10 pm.

August 6, the day after

We slept until 11 am! Otherwise it's a quiet day. We didn't pick up the rodents as the line at Nicole's friend always was busy. We watched the Formula 1 race, I finished this travel diary and the rest of the laundry. Thankfully we will have another day off tomorrow before it's back to the workforce. Resuming, it was a wonderful vacation with lots of excitement, fun, experiences and impressions. Wildlife sightings were elk, goat, wolf, bear, deer, coyote, bald eagle, humpback whale, grey whale, sheep, and orca. No moose! ☺ We'll be back one day. Period.