



## Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



### Visiting the Capital

by Amaru & Suzanne, July 21th 2006

As most of you know (at least you should know if you've been following the blog) we almost made it to Washington DC when we arrived into the states but ended up with just a really bad experience at Dulles Airport. This time we just took the train, Amtrak....not only is it faster than flying (takes 3 hours from Newark to Union Station in Washington) but there are no complications either.

Well....we almost had a small one just when we got on the train in Newark. My brother Denis, Suz and I stepped on the train, we didn't have reserved seats, and saw that there weren't any empty seats. All of them had 1 or 2 people sitting in them. We kept walking through the carriages and thought that we were going to have to sit by ourselves all the way to DC. The last carriage appeared and it turns out to be a "Quiet Zone", we were told to switch off the phones before entering. Sure, no problem.....we entered and the whole carriage was empty. So people would rather sit by themselves than switch off their phone. Come on....give me a break!!! Whatever, it was good for us.

Closing in on our destination we passed the less charming areas of Baltimore by train and thought to ourselves that a train breakdown right now would be really, really unpleasant. We usually say that we can see a bit of charm in most places..... well, not here!



Enroute to DC  
Aboard an Amtrak train.....very nice!



Union Station  
The grand ceremonial train station in DC

We eventually arrived in Washington DC, purchased a fold out map of the city and set out to explore. Our first piece of sightseeing was actually the station we arrived in, Union Station. An impressive building with a high decorative ceiling. From here we sought out and found the Metro.

After catching a Metro to the Foggy Bottom station, we walked a few blocks to our hotel and checked in, and then started our sightseeing of the city.

From our hotel we quickly found our way to Pennsylvania Avenue, also called "President Avenue". This is where Dubya in 2001 on his Inauguration Day parade broke a twenty year old tradition when he was rushed by in his limo to the compound of the White House. Why?! Well,

because the people on the side of the road sure weren't cheering for him. It was more like "Hail to the Thief" than anything else.....

Well, well....we walked down the Avenue all the way to the White House, and it was a very warm day, strong sun and quite high humidity so we decided to have a quick stop for some drinks and food at a place called Cosi. It looked like your normal franchise place, but after ordering we were pleasantly surprised to find out that the food was really good. We all ordered sandwiches and the bread was great....one of those unexpected surprises that you get sometimes!

After our meal we went to have a look at Concepcion Picciotto, this is a woman that has been living in front of the White House for around 25 years now. She sits there in protest of nuclear arm. If you have seen Michael Moore's movie "Fahrenheit 9/11". She has an enormous amount of information to hand out to anyone and when we were there lots and lots of people were in front of her taking photos, shooting videos (we saw at least one professional crew) and just talking to her.



**The interior of Union Station**  
which contains lots of shops!



**Concepcion Picciotto**  
The president's closest neighbor!

The time had now come to get our photo taken in front of one of the most famous buildings in the world. Once that was done we continued around the building to see it from behind, and here we go, the famous view that can be seen in the news, countless movies and tv shows.....we were looking to the sky to see if we could spot any huge alien crafts, but unfortunately, not today!!

The Washington Monument was next on our list....you've all seen it, it's pretty much just a tall obelisk. If you want to get to the top, be prepared to be there at 8am to get tickets. We didn't think that 900 something steps to the top was worth getting up that early for, so we only enjoyed it from down below. From here we had quite a nice view, looking north we could see the White House, to our right was the Capitol building and looking to our left was our next destination, the

Lincoln Memorial.

To get there though we had to pass through the National World War II Memorial. This is a memorial for the Americans who fought and died during the 2nd World War, it's been open to the public ever since April 2004. It never surprises me to see the things that you can see in the states.....sure, a memorial is a nice gesture to all the men who died.....but do you have to have a "Freedom Wall" where they state such a hypocritical line such as "Here we mark the price of Freedom".....the wall contains 4048 gold stars, one for approximately 100 American deaths during the war, so now we are putting a price on freedom....who's freedom though?

I found another thing not far from here that ticked me off even worse. Here we have a large engraving on the ground stating World War II and it contains the years 1941-1945. So the first 2 years didn't really matter did they?!? There are actually other nations in the world that were involved in the war, open a geography book once in a while and you might find them (and while you're at it, also look up Iraq, it could be nice if at least 50% of the population could find the country they are invading on a map)!!



**Suz and I**  
In front of the White House!



**The White House**  
as seen from the Lafayette Square

Either way, eventually we made it up to the Lincoln Memorial where we climbed the steps and were finally in front of the statue of Abe Lincoln. We walked around the memorial, reading of the walls and when we had enough we moved on.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall is another memorial for more fallen soldiers (they seem to have quite a few.....wonder why). This is a V shaped wall with the names of the fallen and missing in action during the Vietnam War and all the names have been arranged in chronological order. This means that the first name on the wall was the first casualty. We were talking among ourselves and saying that being first on the list isn't very flattering.....so you died first! Then we realized something else.....being last on the wall would be even worse, it's like this, you sit in your tent realising the war is over and you are going

home when a grenade hits your tent.....bummer!!

Our day was now coming to an end, we walked back to our hotel, showered and got ready to go for dinner. We ended up at Levantes, a Mediteranian restaurant near Dupont Circle. Here we met up with Vanessa, an old friend of mine who is in DC over summer doing her internship. The food was really good. We ordered a few different dishes and then just shared them all, family style. We sat for a long time just chatting, we even had to tell the waitress to come back later when she came to collect the bill since we hadn't had the time yet to put any money in there....

After dinner we walked across the street to Ben & Jerry's and had some good ice-cream. Here we ended our day, after talking for another good while we said our goodbyes and headed back to the hotel.



**The White House**  
seen from the back...

The next day we started our day by going over to Georgetown for breakfast, all four of us; Suz, Denis, Vanessa and I. After strolling around in Georgetown for a while, having breakfast and visiting Urban Outfitters we made our way across the river, and were now in Virginia (I know, it's confusing, DC not being a state but still not part of any other state).



**The Washington Monument**  
Lots of American flags at it's base

Iwo Jima was our next destination and we were all surprised to learn that it was lots bigger than any of us had anticipated. We also discovered that we were here in a straight line with the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument and the Capitol Building.....a pretty impressive sight!!

Now it was time to visit Arlington Cemetery....we entered from the north and made our way through to the Visitors Center. Along the way we were reading the gravestones and saw that most of them just said "His Wife" or similar. Who's wife?!? After a little while we got the genius idea of checking the other side of the gravestone and voila....there were the names of the fallen soldiers, when they had fallen and which wars they had taken place in. We found graves that mentioned soldiers taking place in WW2 (the one between '41 to '45 remember), Korea and

Vietnam....talk about dedication!

We eventually made our way to the visitor center, or so we thought.... we had entered the building that honours Women in Battle (or similar). Here they had a big exhibition of the fallen in Iraq though....lots of drawings and paintings of the men that had died so far in the Iraq conflict.

We walked further into the cemetery and found the graves for John and Robert Kennedy. From here we walked a bit further and arrived at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier just in time to view the change of guards. I don't know what it is , but do the guards have to walk as if they have a stick stuck up into their.....well, you know what I mean. And what's with the boot clicking when they stop?!? Silly, silly.....

From here it got interesting, we sort of, kind of made a wrong turn (the exit sign pointed to the left, we made a right) and ended up doing a lot of unnecessary walking around the cemetery. But hey....this way we managed to find the freshest graves and they were not older than a few weeks, had the name of the soldier and then they had the nerve to call the war he had participated in "Operation Iraqi Freedom".....why not just call it "Invading Iraq while violating international laws". That would be a lot closer to the truth!! The scary part of the cemetery was right here as well.....there's loads of empty space and when you look at the map it's marked as "future development", which in english means.....future space for more soldiers killed in meaningless wars!



**Denis at the monument**  
is it straight or not!



**We could use another hand here...**  
or this won't move

After this we managed to make our way to the exit where we took the Metro to Pentagon. We wanted to see the side of the wall that was allegedly hit by an airplane....we found the side but couldn't really get close enough to it to examine it. And we weren't allowed to take photos either.....which is weird because it wasn't a problem snapping away from the cemetery..... well, well.

At this time we were so tired and hungry that we went straight to our destination for food. We were looking for African cuisine but couldn't find the place we were looking for and ended up in a Nepalese Indian restaurant instead. Well, no harm done, the food was excellent and the price was quite reasonable as well.....and of course we ordered our food family style again and shared it all. The food arrived and about 5min later it was all devoured.....we were that hungry =)

Our last day in Washington DC we started out by heading over to Vanessa's place for Brunch (she lives close to Van Ness Metro station.....Vanessa in Van Ness, we liked that). After a very nice brunch we walked back to the Metro, said goodbye and moved on.

Since we only had a few hours before the train left we didn't do too much on this last day.....we had a look at the Thomas Jefferson Memorial from a distance, walked up to The Smithsonian Castle and had a quick look before heading along "the Mall" towards the Capitol Building. We obviously didn't have tickets to enter or so, we just watched it from the outside and when comparing all the sights we've seen, this one is the most impressive and the most famous landmark in DC.....not even the White House can compare (funny enough, a lot of people actually thinks the Capitol is the White House).

We then walked the few blocks back to Union Station where we had a bite to eat before catching the train back to New Jersey...

Our view of Washington DC.....well, it's quite small and easy to get around. It has some amazing sights and landmarks and supposedly also some really good Museums (We saw them all from the outside but just didn't have enough time to explore them). On the negative side, it doesn't feel all that safe, it's not like New York where you can walk around at night and still feel safe.....dunno what it is but that's the general opinion we got from some people living there as well. Another thing that was odd was the fact that New York has lots and lots of police in heavy riot gear everywhere and here we didn't see a single one.....sure the White House has it's snipers but what about the rest of the monuments and sights??

Well, at least we've done it now, it was interesting and we were glad we finally made it there.



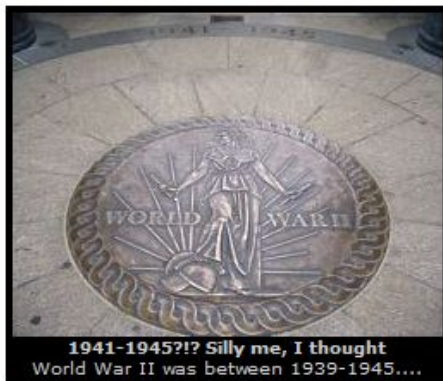
**World War II Memorial**  
Denis throwing in a coin into the fountain



**"Here we mark the price of Freedom"**  
Every star represents 100 deaths



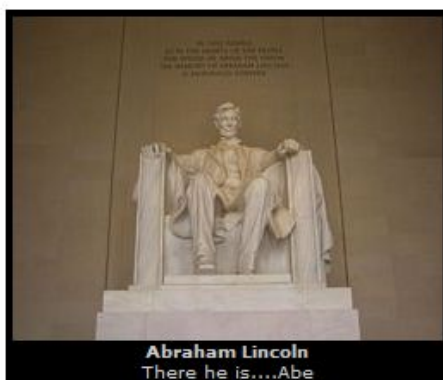
**One hot day....**  
and the birds are cooling off



**1941-1945!?!? Silly me, I thought**  
World War II was between 1939-1945....



**Suz and Denis**  
Walking up to the Lincoln Memorial!



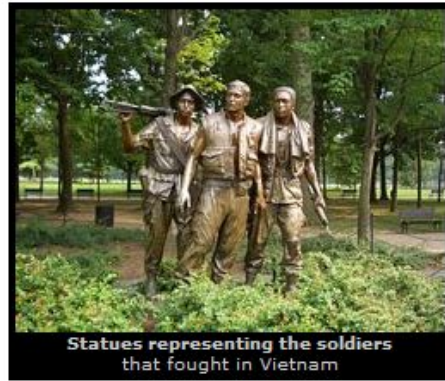
**Abraham Lincoln**  
There he is....Abe



**Denis and I**  
With our pal Abe in the background!



**Reflecting Pool**  
And the Washington Monument



**Statues representing the soldiers**  
that fought in Vietnam



**Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall**  
the fallen in Vietnam in chronological order!



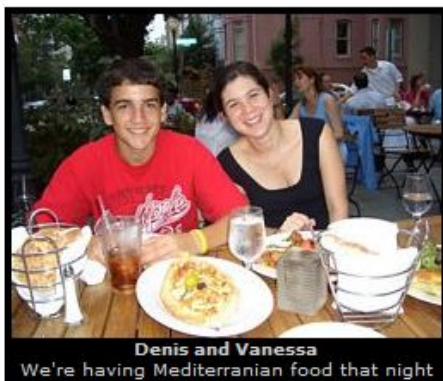
**58,249 names**  
That's how many are on the wall....



**Has to suck to be the last name on the wall**  
Jessica Alba?!? Ah, no...almost



**We met up with Vanessa**  
And had dinner together...



**Denis and Vanessa**  
We're having Mediterranean food that night



**At Levante's**  
where we ended up for dinner



**Our hotel room**  
Denis, we strapped him into a small cot!



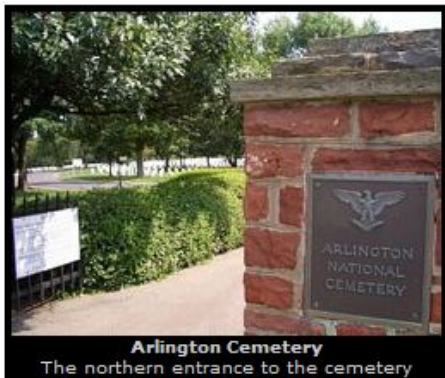
**Georgetown**  
We had a bit of a stroll through Georgetown



**Iwo Jima Memorial**  
a lot bigger than we were expecting...



**In a straight line...**  
All the way to the Capitol



**Arlington Cemetery**  
The northern entrance to the cemetery



**A bit tight ain't it....**  
the grave isn't even that old



**A quiet stroll....**  
through the cemetery



**Faces of the fallen, drawings**  
of the fallen from the Iraq invasion!!



**The grave of JFK**  
And the Arlington House in the background



**A cemetery sign on our way to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier**



**Guard Change at the Tomb**  
Very silly guard change



**Here rests in Honored Glory**  
An American Soldier...whatever!



**At the tomb...**  
notice the Amish people to the left.



**Lots and lots of grave stones**  
And they all look the same



**St Denis**  
Yup, we found him!



**Bradley Drive**  
Suz found her street!!



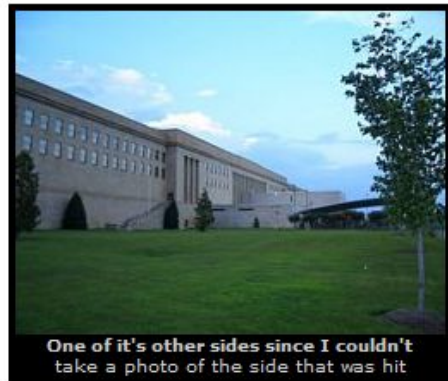
The Pentagon and the green area where more dead soldiers will be buried



"Operation Iraqi Freedom", Bullshit!!  
"Invade Iraq and violate international laws"



The Pentagon Memorial  
it was still being built!



One of it's other sides since I couldn't  
take a photo of the side that was hit



The Metro  
One of it's station, they all look the same.



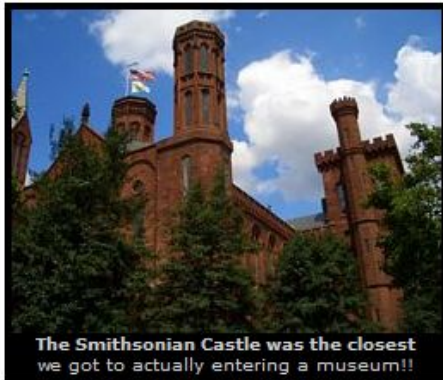
Dinner time  
We went for Nepalese-Indian that night!!



Mmmmm!!  
...getting hungry just looking at it again



The Thomas Jefferson Memorial  
and the Tidal Basin surrounding it



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