

A FAVORITE TRIP

By Vera Blaine

My notes about my trip to Washington D.C. ten years ago refreshed my memory of a favorite. Arrangements for the tours, seminars, and transportation during the week were made by an organization called Close-up. I arrived at our hotel in downtown D.C. on a Sunday, a day early, and met a new friend Daphne from Seattle. Neither of us had ever been to the Capitol before, and armed with a map we had an adventurous day. We rode the Metro to the Mall, had lunch at the National Gallery of Art. We did not get lost.

The following days were well planned. One day we had lunch at the National Press Club, and the speaker that day was a retired Admiral who was not in favor of then President Bush's missile defense system. The place was crowded and not very big, but I was impressed. We toured the J. F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and had lunch there at a spacious cafeteria on the top floor with huge windows that provided extensive views of the city. At the time the theatre was being renovated. It was officially opened in 1971 as a "living memorial" to Kennedy.

We spent time on Capitol Hill. Some of the group went on their own and others divided between the two guides. I went to the Senate Gallery and saw Senator Ted Kennedy, Senators Domenici (NM) and Charles Schumer (NY) who spoke to an empty Senate. We also went to the Supreme Court and the Library of Congress. We did not tour the White House or the Capitol building because the waiting lines were too long. When we visited the Smithsonian, I chose the Air and Space Museum.

A humorous note, that first day when we were on our own, my friend and I walked great distances around our hotel looking for a place to eat. We found no restaurant or McDonald's anywhere so went back to the hotel where the cheapest meal was \$25 without the extras. Daphne ordered salmon and I ordered black sea bass. When the orders arrived, my plate startled me. Before me was a whole fish not flat on the plate but upright on its side, complete with head and tail overlapping the plate. It had a slight covering of deep-fried batter that made the scales stand up prickly. As I wondered how to eat this fish, the waiter offered to cut off the fish's head.

My trip was meaningful with a well planned program. When I was there, I often had the feeling that Washington was like an island, all to itself, and the rest of the United States and the world was way beyond.