

Christmas in California



December 2014

Molly and Bob Hillery

This was the first time that we had spent Christmas in California in a number of years so it was a special treat to spend several days—including Christmas day—with Christopher, Cyndi and Samantha.

We traveled to San Francisco where all five of us spent the weekend before driving to Sacramento to celebrate the Holiday itself. Things didn't go exactly as planned (read on) but we had a wonderful time with our family .

This few days in California immediately preceded our New Year visit to “our” flat in Ilkley so we flew directly from San Francisco to England on December 26.

California , December 2014

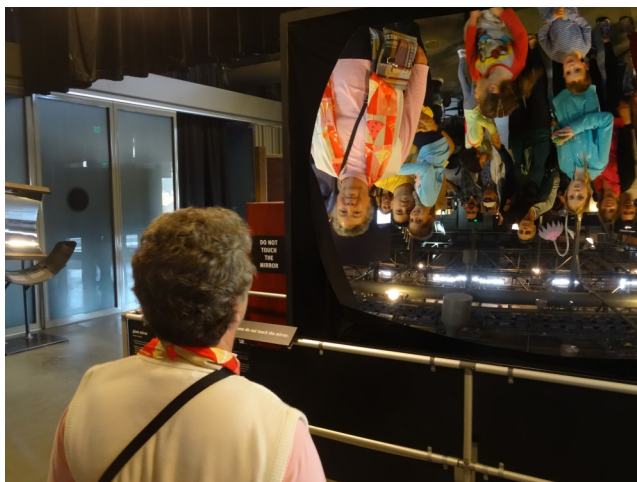
Saturday December 20

Elizabeth drove us to the airport for our 4:15 flight to Los Angeles and then on the San Francisco, where we arrived about an hour late at 9:30pm. We were met by Christopher, Cyndi and Samantha and taken straight to a local Mexican restaurant for dinner. This was quite close to the hotel where we were all staying the night, so it was a short ride after we had eaten. It was almost midnight by the time we had checked in and got to our room.

Sunday December 21

Molly and I were up before 8am despite our late night so we had coffee and a pastry in the hotel lobby before packing and waiting for our hosts to get up and packed. We left the hotel, had breakfast in a local restaurant and then drove into the city where we were to spend the afternoon at the Exploratorium on the waterfront at Pier 15.

We parked in a nearby lot and then spent a very interesting five hours in this superb hands-on facility where there were many interactive exhibits covering, it seemed, everything from electricity to biology to marine life. Although it was a little tiring it was a great way to spend an afternoon with the family - and, of course, Sammy was in her element.



The Exploratorium

About 5:30 we finished there and walked back to Christopher's rented SUV. That's when things suddenly took a turn for the worse! It was Christopher who first noticed that the rear window of the SUV had been smashed and shortly afterwards we realized that, while only one bag had been stolen, it was the one carrying my laptop and, equally importantly, our passports. For a while we stood in shocked disbelief and I mentally went through the rest of the contents of the bag - nine weeks' worth of my medication, my kindle, various electronic items, paperwork, etc - but none worried us as much as the passports and laptop (which I feared contained information that could be hacked and initiate theft of my identity).

We then started to re-group and try to figure out what we could do, both immediately and in the few days before we were due to fly to England. We were fortunate that we were in one of only two cities in the country where passports could be replaced quickly so I tried to contact them and find out what to do and when. I succeeded only in finding out where the local office was and what time we could start the process on Monday. Cyndi meanwhile had arranged for a replacement car and got us back in the hotel for another night and Christopher had filed a police report.

After about an hour on what by now was a cool evening (it had been a beautiful warm day), we drove back to the airport, got the replacement vehicle, had dinner and checked back into our hotel with plans for an early start on Monday.

Monday December 22

At 7:30 (after a short and mostly sleepless night) Christopher drove us back into San Francisco and dropped us off at the Passport Office. As soon as Molly and I got out of the car we saw that there was a line of perhaps a hundred people waiting for the doors to open at 8:30. Most, it seemed, had appointments (we didn't, of course) so our hopes of a quick replacement were immediately dashed. Indeed, the possibility of getting a replacement that day or even in the next two seemed remote and we started discussing alternatives that included going back to Cincinnati (after spending Christmas here) and delaying our England visit until we could get new passports by mail.

However, we waited in line and, although the process was slow and convoluted, by 4pm we had new passports in hand! We even had enjoyed a very nice lunch in the middle of the day with Christopher and family at a beautiful restaurant on the Bay in Sausalito. Thank goodness for cell phones which allowed us to keep each other apprised of estimated timings, location and arrangements for pickup, etc, etc. So, by late afternoon, one very important problem had been solved (we could now leave for England from San Francisco as planned) and we were on our way to Sacramento for the next few days, including Christmas Day. We still had a number of issues, particularly the possibility of identity theft, but - on the plus side - Elizabeth had arranged for overnight shipping of my medications from home and I was hopeful that this would carry me through the visit to England.

Once in Sacramento, we went straight to Christopher and Cyndi's home where they had planned a Hanukkah Dinner for us, the Schreibers and some friends. None of us are Jewish but Samantha even last year had expressed an interest in Hanukkah, so her parents are encouraging her to "explore" religions via celebrations such as this. Cyndi did her usual yeoman job of preparing a special meal in double-quick time and at 8pm, thirteen of us sat down to a wonderful meal and some very pleasant conversation. It was almost 11pm by the time that festivities were concluded and Christopher had driven us to our hotel. He had insisted before we came that there was no need for us to rent a car.

Tuesday December 23

My medications had a "guaranteed" delivery time of 10:30 Tuesday morning so Molly and I stayed in the hotel (after a short walk to a local Starbucks for breakfast) awaiting a call from Cyndi who was staying at home to be on hand for the delivery. Again, things didn't go quite as planned and, to cut a long (what seemed a VERY long) story short, it was almost 3pm before the medication arrived. I was beginning to feel the effects of not taking pills for two days and, together with the stress of the overall situation, was feeling very low and had not received much in the way of encouragement from my supplier of the medication nor the local drug store.

However, the pills were now here, a dose of which I swallowed immediately, and we could turn our attention to the next order of business - a replacement computer. I had spent much of the morning making phone calls to various credit re-

porting agencies, my bank and credit card companies and had received some reassurances as a result, but I still wanted (needed?) a laptop to retrieve much of my data and to take to England. Molly, Christopher and I spent the next two hours or so completing that task (with invaluable advice and counsel from Christopher) so the whole family was able to enjoy the evening, including a meal at Applebee's, and I was feeling MUCH better.

Wednesday December 24 (Christmas Eve)

Molly and I were up again soon after eight and strolled to Starbucks for coffee only, as we had plans for a noon lunch with the family. I then spent another couple of hours getting to know my new computer and making further phone calls to help in the security issues. Also, it turned out that one of my medications was a few pills shy for the whole trip into February so I made plans to deal with that issue once I could contact my doctor whose office was now closed until December 29.

At noon we all went for brunch at iHop and then were taken back to Christopher's house. Molly stayed there for the afternoon to wrap Christmas gifts and I returned to the hotel (borrowing a car from Christopher) to download items to my new computer and try to get things a little clearer in my mind. This proved to be a very useful and therapeutic time and by 6pm I was ready for pickup for the evening's itinerary.

We drove to a local Sacramento neighborhood where the entire three block series of streets have extensive Christmas lighting on the homes. (This was a substitute for a planned visit to a Lights Festival at the Exhibition Center in Sacramento) but turned out to be very pleasant - and perhaps involved not as much walking. We then had dinner at an Italian restaurant before being returned to the hotel for the night. I kept the car and planned to return it when we went to Christopher and Cyndi's home for our family Christmas Day.

Thursday December 25 (Christmas Day)

Molly and I packed and checked out of the hotel about 10am and drove to Christopher's for the day. Festivities started with a very nice breakfast (for which Cyndi must have been up early after very little sleep) and then started our gift exchange. Bill and Shirl were there but since they and Cyndi et al generally make their gift exchange on New Year's Eve, it was basically a Hillery to Hillery day. This went very well, everyone seemed very pleased with their gifts and the exchange was complete by mid-afternoon - including time out for a substantial lunch.



By now it was time for Cyndi to don her pinafore once more and repair to the kitchen. Here she prepared a delicious chick-



Christmas Day

meal took us till almost 10pm, by which time it was necessary to say our farewells and for Christopher to drive us back to San Francisco for the night where we were to stay in readiness for our early morning departure for England. Again, he had insisted that he was happy to do this - and then drive himself back to Sacramento.

The "Goodbyes" were even more emotional than usual after a very unusual, unplanned and, at times, very stressful few days but at least we had done all we could for now on security issues, we had passports, I had my medications and tomorrow we would leave for England as planned way back in August.

en dinner accompanied by vegetables
and corn on the cob (prepared on the
grill by Christopher). This excellent

