

April 2003

So – no sharks this month – but not a quiet one (what a surprise !) either – the rest of the shark week was spent quietly slaving away at work and coming home relatively on time..... except when it came to Friday when I get an e-mail and three phone messages to call my friend Sherry – apparently she had been given a couple of tickets (FREE!) to the Cirque De Soleil. Now I had been keen to go but had not gotten around to booking tickets so I was thrilled – however the problem was that it was the other end of Atlanta on Friday night at 5pm so I got into the car and made my way up there – the parking was exorbitant so we met in a shopping mall and dumped her car and then went to park. It was raining on and off so we dodged the raindrops on our way into the circus tent And it was very much like a circus inside – now the last time I went to the circus was in France with my parents when I was definitely sub-ten so my memories are very shaky – but one thing I can remember was that they introduced all the acts – well this was a little more seamless with singing and so forth in-between the tumblers/jugglers/exotic people who can bend their bodies backwards in half and still stand on one tippy-toe on top of a pole 4ft high and 1 inch in diameter (interesting thing to put on your cv I guess !) Still, it was a lot of fun and very spectacular although I did wince during the tumblers. The bigger guys laid down on a saddle-thing and the smaller ones stood on their feet and between one pushing up and the other jumping the little ones span and span and span – until one missed and got a crotch full of foot – OW !

So – tons and tons of rain on the way out and we de-camped to a wings joint and munched on a ½ ton of hot wings – yummy !

Saturday after going to the gym was spent doing chores around the house – mostly going back and forth to the hardware shop trying to get the correct screw to hold the door handle to the upstairs (where I reside) to its spline rather than just spin and therefore NOT open from the inside (I had to shoulder-barge my way out of my bedroom one morning – oops !) – now going to the local hardware store you'd have thought they would have all that old stuff for all the local (old) houses – no such luck ! Eventually I gave up and stole one from a door that never gets closed. Saturday afternoon I fought with the lawn again (and why did I go to the gym ?) and in the evening I went out for dinner with Deb. Deb had bought a painting in Arizona – called waterfall, which was odd as it is all reds and browns and black. Very interesting but almost 6ft square – we had some fun trying to work out where it should eventually hang, until she relented and agreed that it worked really well with her burgundy sofas and her grandmothers drawings would just have to move into the hallway.

The next week was the usual stuff- work, more work and a bit of not work Wednesday I went to the dermatologist and finally got the white lump on my face taken off – he sent it off and found out that it was just a white lump – no surprise there but once he said he was sending it off a relief to hear nonetheless ! I walked about with a silly plaster on my face for a few days to stop it getting infected and now I have a small scar I had Stacey and Ben over for dinner one evening – Ben had just lost his job – but the news is good – he got another one before the end of the month, which is great as he was expecting to have to look for at least 3 months in the present climate.....

Friday night a whole bunch of us went to the Phillips arena to go to my first-ever Basketball match (we got free tickets !) – I have NO idea who we were playing but we won (which I believe is a miracle as the Atlanta Hawks suck I hear. It was the most odd sports experience that I have had here – firstly the players are absurdly tall – except the occasional 6ft runt (!) and it's the most unsports-man like game I have ever seen – they give all the spectators behind the oppositions 'hoop' these 3' long inflatable white thunder sticks which you wave around and bang together (making a 'thunder-type' racket) every time the opposition tries to shoot at the hoop . . . it's really irritating – especially as we had the misfortune to sit behind the hoop in the second half and everybody around me was banging thunder sticks – now I made the huge mistake of saying how

un sportsman-like I thought it was so Sherry and John (who I was unfortunate to sit next to) banged their thunder sticks in my ears – boy did I have a headache by the end of it.

An idiotic ride back on Marta (like the underground but not nearly as extensive) where we had the Marta-Nazi make sure that not even one person's tippy-toe was over the little grey area (some 3 foot from the station platform edge) before he would allow the train to come in to the station – this was no mean feat with some 300 people on the platform but he yelled and beeped his whistle until we were all standing to attention one inch behind the grey area – and half an hour later by the time we got to the pizza place for dinner it was 11pm and I was bushed – it lightened up as the Junior High School Graduates came in in their tuxs and ballgowns after the graduation dance (odd- like a ball but with 13-year old participants who all had braces !) – I was glad to go home !

Saturday I flew to Dallas as a friend of mine from MB days was getting married – actually he features in the Mog trip of 2 years ago – Mark. I hired a car at the airport – all of \$25 total and piled in to town – this time I actually managed to get to the museum – I walked over there in the glorious sunshine (and now I am glad that I did as you will see later ...) it was amazing – it had some of the real greats – which was really fun to see (although everybody else was walking about filling in some questionnaire or taking a class – I felt very left-out) but really oddly set out.

Somebody (rich) who was a great art collector was also a (distant) friend of Churchill – so she had bequeathed all her stuff and a ton of money to the museum – fine and dandy.... However – every letter from Churchill was displayed in a case – the beautiful Monets, Manets, Van Goghs, Gauguins, Pissarros and and and were oddly put into a “room” setting – you could only walk 1ft into the room – so every painting was at least 20 ft away – not a problem if they weren't all 1ft square canvases it was immensely frustrating and I wanted to ask somebody why we could get to within 6 inches of a dull letter from Churchill about his dog but not see these beautiful canvases. Something to do with the bequestee wanting to show how 'important' she was – I only wished she had been a good friend of the painters instead ! Anyway- lots of modern art well-presented prevented me from boiling over !

The wedding was a riot – I had a vague idea where it was – but realized nearer the place that I had no clue – and I was running late – it was (of course) a black-tie affair – so I was in ankle-length black shi-shi frock stopped at traffic lights on the highway and I ran to the car behind begging for directions... thankfully they were very sweet (**and** stuck behind me !) and said “follow us” – I did until I found a church and tons of people – I stopped (they went on) and shouted out the window “are you going to Mark and Andreas wedding ?” – got a “WHO ?” and decided to follow nice-people after all – MY wedding was ¼ mile further down the road ! I dashed in (after thanking them of course) to have the doors closed behind me. What an interesting wedding – first we watched while they sat the grannies, then we watched while the dads sat, then we watched the sitting of the mums the actual service (with 8 bridesmaids and 8 groomsmen) took approx 15 minutes – the 'sitting' took longer !

After the service I took my car back to my hotel (at the point of leaving the chapel I found that they had a coach to and from the reception hotel – bit late) and hot-foot it to the reception hotel Drinks and and – found myself at a table of people from Mark's company that I used to work with so we all got drunk and made merry together.) Sunday I got to the airport early – couldn't get a flight so read until I got on my plane to go home. That evening was pretty quiet – went out with the usual suspects for dinner.

The following week I spent madly trying to get everything done to get my cars registered – boy what an experience that indeed was The Golf and the Boxster were fine as they were in the Georgia Department of Motor Vehicles records – but the Mog wasn't – firstly I had to persuade them that I indeed had insurance and that involved calling the insurance agency yet again to get them to send through the confirmation – now that was OK – the next bit was more complicated as they tax you based on the value of the car – all I had was the original receipt from the purchase of the vehicle in 1999.... So we got into negotiation-mode – the woman behind the counter ended up getting her supervisor to come out and help – now SHE was something else. With one front

tooth protruding directly out at right angles to the rest of her teeth, and the other one going away from it towards the floor at an angle of 45 degrees...I was trying not to stare..... anyway – here we go – firstly we decide that the exchange rate is 1.2 (yeah – right – I could have said 0.5 and they would have believed me – bother !) – then we discussed the price – firstly they wanted to charge me \$300 – I just said “that’s too much” – so we negotiated a little – looked at the receipt and took off all the extras (like paint and leather interior) got down to about \$230 – then I asked about depreciation as it was nearly 4 years old – they said they couldn’t do anything about it but eventually she agreed to put the Sterling price in as the dollar value of the vehicle – down to under \$200. A veritable deal when the Golf is \$91 and it is 11 years old and wasn’t worth much in the first place – I was a happy girlie – and nobody that I work with believed that I had the nerve to go in and haggle over my car taxes !

At the end of all that and me getting my shots for Kili I scoot off on Friday to Chicago to meet up with Rach for Easter – we were very lucky and were offered a place to stay by the in-laws of my distant cousin Amy (bless Amy and Donna for being such a sport and having us to stay !) – they are a great family and live in Oak Park – the Frank Lloyd-Wright part of town with all the great houses – so we were totally made – and it was on the EI so we got into town on public transport. Rach arrived a day or so before me so was settled and I was even picked up from the airport.

Our first day was utterly freezing and we wandered into town to pick up with Scott (Amy’s husbands brother) who works in FLW building – the Rookery in the centre of town – it’s great but closed to the public so we got our own special tour – hoorah !



Me in Rookery



Arty shot in Rookery

So – we hung out in town looking at all of the funky buildings and chilling out shopping mostly and thinking about holidays for Crimble – the normal stuff. That evening we had decided steak was to be the order of the day so spent ages trying to find a place that wouldn’t charge us \$35 – we found a great place in the end and had a slap-up meal before staggering back and going to bed almost immediately – I was very tired. The next day we got up and I took Rach to the bread shop that I had had recommended to me – then Scot had very kindly lent us his car so we went shopping at the outlet mall up north out of town. It was miles out and to be honest not nearly as good as the one in Atlanta – no Tod shoes and the only ones Rach fell in love with were the Prada ones at \$200 – no sale there then ! back via the lake-side route where we squealed and screamed all the way back at the truly hideous houses that we could see either side - they fell into one of four categories:

1. Pub (half-timbered and would look perfect with a pub sign swinging outside)
2. Old people’s home
3. Municipal Building – Library or Town Hall
4. What were they thinking ? (usually something with castellations)

We had a riot and although we missed the Unity Hall Church that I wanted to see it was way too much fun to be missed... took family Anderson out for dinner and then Scot took Rach and I to an ice-cream place to drop us off for desert. Rach had a field day playing with the 15 year old behind

the counter who couldn't work out the change from a \$50 bill... we walked home looking at all the stained glass and admiring the houses.

The next morning we went to church ! Well – I still wanted to see the inside of the Unity Temple so we went in to the back during the service – it's a typical FLW with all sorts of levels and no real doors – just walls and walkways all over – it was a little dilapidated but cute and I am glad that I made it in ! We bumbled into town and did the full circuit of the sculptures:



Rach props up the Miro looking very bored

Then we did a full circuit of the EI before taking the train to the airport – very civilized – getting the train from where we were staying to where we needed to leave – wish more US cities were like this ! – Rach waved me off (just making sure that I had actually left I think !) and I had an un-eventful flight home via Cincinnati (airmiles with Continental so it was a little circuitous) Bit of messing about to actually GET home as I had let somebody take my car from the carpark when I left town and he didn't pick me up from midtown as promised – but a nice taxi-man took me home and I was right and ready for Monday !

The rest of that week was pretty quiet on the whole – not much going on and nothing really eventful until the Saturday (which was also my birthday !) where Stacey was racing at the Walter Mitty races – I picked up Ben and we dashed up to Road Atlanta to catch up with them there – basically we hung about all day – Stacy's dad was racing his Morgan in the Enduro which was an hour and I wandered around the track with a couple of people that Stacey knew who were nice enough but never going to set the world on fire – the best bit (apart from Stacey and Super-Dave's race) was the lunchtime drive. As part of her pit crew I got a free ticket to drive laps at lunchtime – so I had brought the Boxster so Ben and I could do laps



View from car



Girl in picture in white racing suit is Stacey – guy sitting down is Ben

Which I duly did behind a man in an SUV – thankfully he pulled off relatively quickly so I was moving behind a couple of cool new Minis – it was a lot of fun !

Stacey and Super-Dave's race came up and I got to do umbrella duty again this year – hold it over Dave to ensure that he didn't boil in the sun as the race was waiting to take off... somehow

things went really wrong and Dave spun on the first corner – which was scary to watch as he was at the front of the race so was narrowly missed by some 30 cars ! He started again and buzzed around passing some people but not really recovering – Stacy whizzed like a mad thing and came first in class (!) – even beating some Porsches which made her ea very happy girlie ! I drove Ben home after the race (Stacey was staying at her parents who live near the track) and I went home for a really quiet dinner and glass of wine – sunburnt but had had a great day !

Sunday I went to the Inman Park festival with Marla – we lucked out and got a great parking space and maendered about met a friend fo hers and watched her sone play on the slide and then just bibbled – caught up with Jay, Sherry, Zach and Laurie who were doing th e tour of homes- we decided that we hadn't missed anything as the others weren';t really raving about it. Came back home and talked about paints for the downstairs bedrooms then chilled until it was time to go out for dinner – 11 of us went out to a great Thai restaurant and had an awesome meal and I had a gift and cards and Deb gave me a FLW book – how appropriate ! For the first time in forever it really felt like my birthday. It was a really nice day and I was really glad to be able to spend it in really good company – it made me realize what a nice bunch of friends I have down here. I left the food choices to everybody else and had a bit of everything – it was wonderful ! Came home and staggered in to work on the Monday.

So – that was my April ...