

April 2004

April started in Cincinnati checking out a vehicle in the garage of the local Regional Service Manager. I spent a good 6 hours changing modules and keys and trying to get it to fail and basically getting vast amounts of data but not positive conclusions. Flew back in and managed to get myself sorted out enough for the beginning of my visitors. Scot was on his way down from New Jersey and I was expecting him to arrive on Saturday afternoon so I went out Saturday morning to get a lawnmower, which I desperately needed since I finally killed the other one, and I needed a new vacuum as mine had given up the ghost. Well, the problem with having sold the Golf (which I did on the Thursday – to one of the training instructors who teaches the Technician apprentices that we have rotating through), is that buying stuff like that could be a lot awkward – in fact it was more than a little awkward since the vac didn't fit into the back of the car properly and propping the lawnmower in the passengers seat meant that I couldn't see out of the passengers side at all. Oh well – the guys that shoehorned it in there were in hysterics and had no idea who I was going to get it out again – neither did I but I did it anyway.

So – I got them home and out of the car (no mean feat I can assure you) and then cleaned the house and whizzed around trying to get it sorted. Then I got the new photo albums that I have bought out and spent the next 3 hours putting my several packets of pictures into these books – I filed around 1000 pictures and I still have all the ones from 2003 to go at the moment. I am SO behind. I also got some frames for my larger prints so that I can hang them on the somewhat bare walls of my bedroom. Scot finally arrived around 6pm and I cooked dinner and we sat around catching up. Sunday was first spent walking to the Dogwood Festival in Piedmont Park – we walked out there as it was only a couple of miles and we wandered about looking at all the art and watching the Southern Dog-Frisbee championships (exactly!) then we walked home and spent the rest of the day at Home Depot buying plants for the garden and hanging out back planting sweet corn, tomatoes, sunflowers and all sorts of other mad things. Deb came over for dinner and Scot directed us in the making of a fabulous Thai meal (which I had for lunch for almost the next 2 weeks at work as I froze it and ate portions most days!) Monday I was at work and we went out for dinner with Stacey, Ben, Marilyn and SuperDave (who all used to live in New Jersey and have known Scot for years). We went to South City Kitchen which I have wanted to go to for ages and it was great. Tuesday I went to work and then on to my Yoga class and Sheena came over for dinner – more great food and we sat out on the deck and drank wine and had a fine time of it. Scot left on Wednesday having helped transform the back garden and mowing my front lawn (bless him).

Wednesday evening I chilled out and did my washing getting ready for Rach to arrive. She arrived a little early on Thursday meaning that I bombed out of work around 5.30pm (took a little longer to get out as I was trying to program the keys that I had brought back from Cincinnati to the Cayenne we had for testing and it wouldn't work . . .how frustrating) – we had some dinner, a few glasses of wine on the deck and then she proceeded to go up to my cupboard and throw out all my horrible clothes – it was a very sad very large pile of stuff that I hadn't worn in forever or was just plain nasty that I was left with sitting forlornly on my bedroom floor. Friday I did a half-day and bailed early to go shopping with Rach – we did Bloomingdales and then the outlet malls – Rach chose me a whole bunch of summer clothes to make up for all the ones she made me get rid of. Just as well as I really didn't have much left to wear. That evening we went out for steak and staggered home.

Saturday morning we went to Savannah – tried to check in to the hotel and then went out to the cemetery – which was the worst signposted 'place of interest', I have ever tried to get to in the US. Eventually we found it and wandered around looking for the famous gravestones and finding how pretty it was with all the azaleas all around – not particularly sombre or sad, which I felt was nice. The only problem was that it was amazingly buggy and I got bitten quite a few times. We found (songwriter) grave and then meandered back. I was looking for the grave that was on the cover of "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil" but found out that it was actually placed there for the book and the original was in the museum. We babbled about in the afternoon walking all

over the place checking out the odd shop and café on our way around and even went to the restored house that is famous for its original plumbing (no great shakes as it turned out – just a bunch of iron pipes - but like everything over here that's a tiny-bit different – they raved about it). The rest of the day was spent wandering about deciding where we would want to live if we had to move to Savannah. Went to a relatively famous place for dinner – which was quite good on the whole – it was lots of tiny little rooms all stacked together (quite a lot like an Old English pub actually) and the food was pretty good – Rach wanted to go to Jazz but the place was closed so we came back and chilled out in our room and talked about next Crimble's trip.

Sunday we got up early-ish and had breakfast and then took a horse-drawn carriage ride of the town – it was interesting and although it's terribly touristy it does give you more information about the city that you don't get any other way. After that a little more wandering and then we decided to come back home. The weather was pretty gruesome on the way back – lots of rain and it didn't bode well for my deck party – but it cleared up as we came back in to Atlanta and was fine by 6.30 when everybody arrived. A good turn-out and we all talked and ate and passed the time of the evening until around 9pm when everybody left and we got the atlas out to see where we wanted to go to. We had a hit-list of 3 places – Argentina, Ethiopia and Iran – so Monday after work I picked Rach up and we went to Barnes and Noble and sat around in the travel section working out where seemed the least infeasible and wouldn't require a visa – Argentina it was then...

Tuesday was Rach's last day so I picked her up from home and we went to the Carter Museum on the way to the airport – it was quite interesting although I agreed with her comment that he wasn't really a world leader – more of a headmaster-type. So – that was Easter. The evening that she left I finally got in touch with Ben, who I haven't seen in nearly 18 months – he came over and we got take-out and a bottle of wine and just sat around and talked and caught up on life – it was great fun. The rest of the week was very quiet and I took the time to catch up and get back into my yoga and other classes – Saturday I did a trade with Deb – I went to her co-worker's party in Decatur (all doctors and not my type) if she came to the Mog party with me (all car types and not her type) – we drove all over in the Morgan which was fun for me but probably not Deb's vehicle of choice. Now I know not to do that again – our interests are so dissimilar it's amazing that we are friends but the polarity of our friends is too great.

Sunday morning was a dash to the airport to get my flight to LAX – I was due in San Diego Monday to meet a boat but the flights were insanely expensive so I flew in to LAX and out of John Wayne airport. Picked up the rental car and meandered down the coast road to San Diego for the next 3 hours just chilling out. Copped a nap at my two-level apartment-thingy just outside the City and then got picked up by my friend who has recently moved there from Mass. It was nice to hang out with a pseudo-local and eat tacos in a dive I'd never have gone to on my own – a couple of beers and then he dropped me back. The following day was spent hoping the boat would unload in time for me to get to the 15 vehicles that I had to test – well I finally got my hands on the vehicles at around 5pm only to find that half of them were not identified with the 1"round yellow sticker on the windscreen (not too obvious anyway) – so I would have to check the VIN (vehicle identification number which about 1 inches long and visible in the front windscreen) of each of the 144 vehicles to find my 15, and then had to do it 3 more times as I couldn't locate **one**. Eventually I gave up and decided that it just wasn't there – did my checks and was finally free and clear by 7pm. Grabbed some beer and got food delivered and took advantage of cable tv to watch a Harry Potter movie without too many adverts! Up early the following and followed my mapquest directions to the airport – except it took me into the middle of nowhere – it would appear that I'd gone for some two-bit airport and not the one I should have – thankfully I'd kept all the rental-car maps in the car – found out that I was 20 miles off and dashed over there. Went to fill the tank only to find that the fuel cap broke off in my hand with half in the tank and half out – so I couldn't fill it – and I was now running late. Had a rant at the rental-car people (second car in a month I'd had problems with) and ran for my flight, which despite everything I made. Back in Atlanta in time for my yoga class and then to bed. Wednesday was bookclub and Thursday I went out for dinner with the training instructor from Reno again – we went to College Park proper (my office is in

College Park gnarly) – a lovely little traditional small-town USA High street and the food was very good too. During this time I was trying to get the certification for the Mog (we have to be emission certified before we can pay our annual car tax which so delightfully falls due on our birthdays over here – gotta love Georgia!) – I went back and forth to the test center three times – first the machine was down then they couldn't test my car as it didn't have the OBD connector and finally I had to get dispensation from the Environmental Protection Agency to get a tailpipe test. They were really nice and "grandfathered" my car which means that it has to pass the least stringent tests – which it did with flying colours of course since it's a 1999 car and has catalytic converters and all that good stuff on it – anyway – it's now grandfathered in perpetuity so I shouldn't have the same problem next time . . . but I did worry for awhile.

Friday I flew in to JFK to go to my good friend Dagmar's surprise 30th birthday party. Carla and I met in the City and had a really good Italian dinner around the corner from the club and then we went up to be there a little early for the party. I didn't know anybody else there so was relieved that Carla had agreed to come with – it meant we could catch up and I wasn't bored. Dagmar arrived at 9.20 – 5 minutes before her boyfriend arrived so it wasn't quite such a surprise for her – or it wasn't until she saw me – she waved and I waved back and then she thought processed and her mouth dropped and she was speechless! She was amazed that I had come all the way from Atlanta for her birthday – me? Those of you that know me well will tell her – if I can I will, of course – rent a mob – weddings birthdays – give me an invite and I'll go if I can. I was really pleased to have been there for her and she really was surprised and seemed really pleased. We stayed until around 11.30 and then bailed back to Carla's place to chat a bit and then go to bed around 2am. She had to work the following day and I slept late- first time in ages.

Mike picked me up from her place around midday and we drove in to the city – parked the car and then meandered about looking for lunch. It was weird – the last time I had been in Battery park with Mike was when we biked there from the GW bridge a week before September 11th 2001. Sent a few chills but we had a great day for it – lovely sunshine and we had lunch and walked and talked all afternoon. I was wearing new shoes and unfortunately they were not as comfortable as I had first thought as soon as we got back to the car I had to put my flip-flops on as I had huge blisters on my little toes. Mike dropped me at Nancy's and I had a beer and chilled until Joanna called and I met her at her place which is way downtown – I'm still a dab-hand at the subway despite having left the NY area over 2 years ago ! We went to an Italian for dinner – where almost everything I wanted was 'off' the menu. It was very funny. We had a great meal and walked back – went to bed around midnight- we had thought about hooking up with Dagmar but she got out of dinner too late for us to meet. Slept well again and left around 10am to get up to Nancy's for 11.30am – we had Tuna-fish melts in her local diner and then decided to go back to the apartment as it was just very cold and miserable and yucky. Fred went to go and do some shopping and we chatted and took a nap on the sofa in the middle of the afternoon – all very civilised.

As I left Atlanta I remembered that the same time last year Marla and I had been on our way to Jazzfest and I remembered the guy who Marla was chatting to and we rescued when our flight was cancelled - Dave – so I gave him a call on Friday to see if he was in town – he was on his way to Chicago but would try to get in to meet me on my way out- well he called – the party went on way too late and he'd not woken up until 1pm so we wouldn't meet – next time I'll think about it a little more in advance. Flight home was uneventful and I got to bed around 10pm. Monday was cold and grey and wet and totally miserable – just great for my birthday – not ! Oh well –I had a bunch of e-mails and a couple of really nice calls so by the evening when my friend here took me out for a Thai meal the rain had stopped I decided it wasn't so bad after all. For some strange reason everybody who forgot remembered to call me 2 days later which was odd as I literally had 4 phone calls from the UK and one from Germany - the guys in the office couldn't believe as I laughed every time and they thought that maybe I had the date wrong and not all my friends !

The rest of the week was taken up with work and sorting out the interviews for the new engineer – we had one we took for dinner on Thursday and interviewed on Friday – ok but very arrogant and

more inclined to play with “stuff” than actually do the statistics (yes – another Ken!). I ended up spending the whole day at the corporate office – not my workplace of choice since its’ too noisy and everybody there just sits about and gossips – it would drive me mad listening to people yakking all day and not working and then listening to them telling people at great length on the phone how they work 110% (yeah – riiii ght !). Friday evening one of my friends had a huge gathering as his sister and brother-in-law were in town from South Africa – there were around 20 of us – very jolly on the whole – I left early as I had to go home and get food and make beds for my impending guests . . . about whom you will hear of next time.