

Atlanta March 2003

So March comes around and you'd have thought that by now I should spend some time in Atlanta (after all this is titled Atlanta March 2003) – sadly not to be – three days after I wave my parents off and I am back on a plane again on my way to Chicago to see a dealer. It was cold and snowy in Chicago but the trip went well and I ended up visiting two dealers – which was good. The weekend was spent very quietly at a friend's in Mass – we chilled mostly and saw my first ever ice-hockey game (only a local team so it wasn't one I would even begin to remember !) and Adaptation which is a very odd film and made me realize just how ugly Nicholas Cage really is (and I am not worried as I really don't think he'll ever read this or be that bothered about my opinions !).

Monday I was up at the crack of dawn to catch my 6.30 am connector to Cincinnati and then on to San Diego to go to the port where it was the opposite weather – warm – very warm. I was there doing a battery investigation so it meant that I was standing around the dock opening bonnets of cars and leaving them for a couple of hours – going back and measuring them – all pretty mundane really. I had been on-and-off again with this trip as I had to get there just after the boat arrived and before the vehicles were distributed as well as schedule to do it around all my other commitments.... So it was a bit of a pain. I was also trying to catch up with the daughter of some friends of mine (Bob and Debra – they're on the who's who chart) – now the thing was that I had Jennifer's mobile and work numbers but not her home number.

So there I am – in a rental car on the road her place is on, but I can't find it – which would have been fine if she had answered her mobile – but she didn't Debra's line was engaged so I called one of the people who works with Bob at home (in Jacksonville, Florida) and asked him for Bob's mobile (he was working in Jacksonville) to call him – but it was switched off . . . eventually Debra gets off the phone and I get Jen's home number from her. When I found her place it was really nice – ontop of a hill in La Jolla (which is pronounced la Hoya – and the Americans have trouble with places like Leicester - I have genuinely heard it pronounced lie-cest-er) with a view of the valley – we had a lot of fun – went into La Jolla proper and walked about – ended up in an Indian restaurant which was actually not too bad (no sauces with the popadums though – now THAT I miss !) and then a guided tour of the town before scadding off back to the hotel. I was amazed at the house prices over there though – it's insane a house is minimum \$600,000 !!!

So finished off at the port – including seeing another ship come in and watching it being unloaded – went up onto the top deck – it's pretty high up there ! Then back home at some ungodly hour and the office the following day was really hard. The rest of the week was slow but that was fine by me ! The weekend was great – I had a visit from my girlfriend in New Jersey – Carla – she was my little bit of home up there as she went to primary school in the UK so still has a British accent and understands my references ! Friday night she came in quite late so we went out with Billy for Thai food and Margheritas at the Gecko Bar then home and chatted until about 3am – lots of catching up to do ! She liked my little car and we had a riot driving around in it – we had great weather so it was top-down the whole time !

Saturday we meandered about in the Highlands and then we went to a bowling thing (for charity) in the afternoon. It was a lot of fun – I haven't bowled since I was about 23 (and that was the second time in my life !) and Carla has never bowled so we were predictably useless – she even ended up on her arse at one point (and I didn't have the camera ready – bother !) I did manage a couple of strikes – strangely enough they were consecutive - how odd is that ? Anyway we had a riot and laughed way too much to concentrate properly on the game. We left and ended up at a steak place for dinner – yummy ! and back at home we shared some wine and more stories til not quite as late !



Our 'Team' (John and Maxine behind us)



Carla covets my car !

Sunday morning was a leisurely lunch and then we went to Stone Mountain – we took the cable-car up it and were lucky enough to have a reasonable day of it ! The view was a view – it's so far from most things I don't really think you see much, but it was fun – then we drove out to Johnston and took a look at the Plantation House that allegedly "Gone with the Wind" was based on – it was closed but the ride was fun and then on the way back I ended up lost but found this amazing abbey and huge cemetery – we got out and walked around inside – it had one small chapel and the rest of was walls lined with tombs – quite creepy. Then back into the car – a quick trip to Sweet Auburn and Martin Luther King Site and then I had to get Carla to the airport – it was great having her and the time just flew !

The next week was all office based and I got through a ton of work – it was pretty quiet on the social front which was no bad thing – the following Friday I went to the Jazz at the High Museum of Art – they do this evening every third Friday of the month and it's where the beautiful people go ! I went with Stacey and Ben (her dad owns a Morgan) – we had fun – wandering around the exhibits with music in the background was pretty cool – then we went out for dinner and it was a lot of fun. Saturday I painted – I sponged the sloping walls and the ceiling of my bedroom – and my arm REALLY hurt at the end of it. Sunday I finally bit the bullet and attacked my garden. Now this probably doesn't sound like that big a deal to most of you until you hear this....

1. My mower is a hand-me down and the return on the pull for the starter doesn't work (you have to wind it in by hand)
2. My mower had not been fired up since September
3. It was hot
4. I hate gardening

So – after 30 attempts to start it I was already exhausted bearing #2. in mind can you imagine the state of my garden ?and to cap it all you might remember the lawn at the front of the house has a 45 ° slope on it so by the time I had finished I realized that I didn't really need to have gone to the gym that morning ! I was very glad when I was done.

The rest of the week was quiet-ish, Thursday 14 of us got together for dinner to celebrate Nancy's birthday which was a great showing and the first time in a LONG time since I had seen some people – it was a fun night.

Then came Friday and my adventure began – off to the airport and my trip out to see Suzy (ski crowd) who has packed up her job in the UK and ended up as a dive instructor (via all sorts of other stuff) in the Bahamas – Dick and Polly were coming out too so I was really looking forward to it ! She picked me up at the airport – bless her and we went back to her place to get settled and meet her upstairs neighbors (and friends) Hugo and Mark. Now Hugo is from south American and I found him hard to understand – Mark is an Essex boy and I could at least understand him !

We picked up Dick and Polly and headed into town to a place called Johnny Canoes – it's a restaurant that does good food, but the highlight was every hour there is a calypso-type band that snakes through the restaurant – big men making a lot of noise on steel drums wearing a vast amount of sparkly bits and feather things on their heads that reached the ceiling. Sadly I didn't have my camera.....

Saturday we went to the dock to take our first dive (my first in 3 years actually !) and unfortunately Suzy couldn't dive as she had an ear infection – but she came along for the ride. Now I had been getting terrible reports from Suzy about the awful weather conditions and how they had had 10 ft waves and incessant storms and rain and and and – we had a perfect calm day – beautifully sunny and we could see the bottom of the ocean from the boat ! Dick and I buddied up and we had a lot of fun ...



the second dive made me laugh –we have to sign back in when we come out of the water (so they don't leave anybody behind) and Suzy **kept** saying “OK who's Richard ? – Richard please sign in” – until I pointed out to her that Dick is Richard derrrr ! She got her revenge on me by signing us up for the shark dive that afternoon. Now when they say a shark dive I thought – it can't be that bad – well the orientation was fine – we went down and to the feeding site to check our buoyancy (we didn't want to go shooting around when the feeding was going on) and came back up.

After our half hour top time we got ready to go down again – complete with camera girl and video man – I began to take it a little more seriously when Mark suited up (he was the feeder) and put on a shoulder-length chain mail glove and a hard hat..... (where were mine ??) – he also had a huge metal cage full of hacked yellow tails – we went down and got settled in a ring and then he came with the food – at first there were a couple of sharks about – but when he brought the food there were a LOT – and they battled to get to the food – I had gotten an extra 4lbs onto my belt and boy was I glad – I got battered by shark fins, tails and everything else in their rush to get to the foodit was pretty scary when one swam under my leg (I was kneeling with one leg up to

steady myself) – this picture is NOT fake – they WERE that close (and you can tell by the expression on my face !!!



So after that we were exhausted and had a very chilled evening – Suzy and I went to her ‘local’ – the Sand Bar – a small gazebo on the edge of the beach – we sat on the beach with a beer in hand watching the ocean – how peaceful – until I realized that a million mozzies were sharing it with us and I was their dinner. We had chicken burgers and went back to the house to crash.

Sunday was more diving – fabulous, fabulous ! Suzy had to work at the dreaded Lyford Cay – in the middle of the “rich” part of town (she had to drive as they wouldn’t let me through the gate as I wasn’t an employee and we were in a ropey old car !) – Sean Connery , amongst others has a pad there. I helped her fix the electrics on the boat and then drove past all the posh houses before driving around and about around the island – it’s an interesting place but not exactly huge ! I picked Suzy up from the dock and then we came back and got changed to go out for dinner with Dick and Polly – we were due to meet at “Pirates” - but it was closed when we got there Dick had left his business card with instructions to meet them at a place over the road, stuck in the door jamb – so off we trotted only to be accosted by two policemen – now this isn’t Dick’s fault as he didn’t know – but Suzy had had a rough week previously as a couple of her workmates were arrested drunk – both spent two days in jail as they were there working illegally – their boss had to bail them out and then pay for their fines and and and ... one actually got deported. Suzy hasn’t even got her work permit papers in yet so she’s very jumpy around the police – when one said to her “are you Suzy ?” she nearly had a heart attack – Dick had asked them to look out for us and direct us to meet them !!!! We had a fab meal and pleasant evening – walked to the Key where the fishing boats come in and they do cookouts – about half of Nassau was hanging out there – obviously THE place to be – lots of mad bars loud music and drunk people but not unpleasantly - we then had a “scenic” (read she got lost !) drive back to drop off Dick and Polly and home. Phenomenal storm in the night – lots and lots of noises !!!

The following day we took Dick and Polly to the airport and then meandered into town – mooched all day really – not doing very much of anything – went looking for shorts for Suzy and had lunch at a weird place called “groovy monkey” – had a nice walk along the very windswept beach and then got my stuff and I headed out to the airport and to drop off the rental car it was very sad to leave – we’d had a lot of fun but it’s only two hours by plane and they regularly do cheapies there so I guess I’ll be back before she moves to her next place ! I flew home via Orlando and got in very late – Tuesday was hard to get up for. That was my March !