

THE SILVER AND BLUE PREMIER SERVICE ON THE CANADIAN RAILWAY TO BALDWIN COUNTRY, MINNESOTA

Ed and I flew from Los Angeles to Vancouver, British Columbia on June 7th. Later the same day, we set out on Via Rail Canada's The Canadian train to Winnipeg, with first class "Silver & Blue" accommodations. Our goal was to experience the train, see the Canadian Rockies, and visit our Baldwin family in Minnesota.

Since The Canadian times its departures so the passengers can see the Canadian Rockies by daylight, we had about seven hours to spend in Vancouver before our 8:00PM departure. We took a taxi from the airport to the train station, where the Silver& Blue Service took our bags and said we would find our carry-on bags in our room, and they would check our suitcases to Winnipeg. No worries!! They told us some options for lunch, so we took the SkyTrain light rail to downtown Vancouver and had a very fine pub lunch. The waitresses at the pub happened to be wearing hats, and they looked perfect. They were little English style caps with a small bill—perfect for rain. So, after lunch we walked to the shopping area, and visited the Hudson Bay Company (established in 1670, I think) to buy hats for ourselves. That was a lot of fun. Then we spent some time in the Art Museum, and finally walked to the Blue Water Café for a very tasty gourmet dinner, since dinner was not to be served the that night on the train because of the late departure. From there we took a taxi back to the train station to await the departure of our train from the Silver Blue lounge. Soft drinks and coffee were provided, as well as live music, while waiting to board.

We had a very comfortable suite, as Ed has shown in the photos on our web page: <http://www.efsowell.us> (click on Recent Photos). Ed's pictures and descriptions really tell the story. I will try to put in some of the details I noticed.

I was impressed both by the impeccable service on the train, and the wonderful measures they took for safety. First, the engineer had at least fifteen years of experience before they were allowed to drive The Canadian (or La Canadian as the French speaking Canadians call it). There was always another engineer with him in the engine. The two trains #1 (westbound) and #2 (eastbound) run only 3 days per week, allowing plenty of time between for outfitting and repairs. This also

gave the crew time off, so they were rested when they returned to the train. The crew on the train going East seemed to be mostly English speaking (French as a second language), and the train going West had a crew with a heavy French accent, but were quite competent in English.

For more safety, they had electrical sensors in the tracks to alert the engineer ahead of time if there was a break in the track. They also had a similar system for avalanche-prone areas in the Rockies. Interestingly, they added a third engine during the first night to get us over the Rockies, and then removed one on the other side of the mountain (back to two engines).

The food in the dining car was excellent, and we were usually seated with very interesting people. We sat with the person in charge of Tax Recovery in the province of Ontario. He suggested that we might want to try a cruise, and told us the Royal Caribbean was the safest, he thought. He didn't want to visit Alaska because Ontario was cold enough. He liked the Caribbean for its beauty and warmth.

Another interesting couple we sat with was from Germany, but had seen much of the world. They lived in Cologne, but also had a home in the South of France. He was unhappy that the EU used French, English and Spanish, but not German in most of their transactions.

The trip to Winnipeg was 44 hours, so we slept two nights on the train. The beds were comfortable and we slept well.

Since we arrived in Winnipeg at 8:30 PM we spent the night in a hotel. The next morning we rented a PT Cruiser and crossed the border to meet Mike and Lee Baldwin in Hallock, Minnesota. They were ready to head for the cottage on The Lake of the Woods, so since we were still packed and ready to go, we left almost immediately.

The cottage, called Leaside, and its setting are beautiful. The cottage is comfortable and beautifully decorated in the English manner, which is Lee's heritage. The Lake begins where the lawn ends. It was idyllic. The Lake of the Woods reminds me of a fresh water inland sea. You can't see across it, and it is at least seventy miles long. The weather was sunny and warm (perfect for being outside). I spent a day resting, reading and visiting with Lee while Ed and Mike were fishing. They

caught enough for an abundant fresh fish dinner that evening. Mike deep fried the fish and Lee baked a rhubarb cake that I decided not to resist.

The next day Mike, Ed and neighbor Orrin Lee, went fishing. Lee and I and Orrin's wife met up with the fishermen for lunch at Rock Harbor, on the shore about 10 miles north. Afterwards, I decided to go along with the guys for the ride on Mike's powerful and beautiful fishing boat. I loved it, and we stayed out until storm clouds appeared across the lake towards Canada. It would have taken half a day for such a storm to reach us in Southern California, but Mike and his neighbor, Orrin, said it would be 45 minutes at most before it would be on top of us. There was rain and lightning coming up very fast. Ed and Orrin got their lines out of the water and Mike drove the boat at fifty miles per hour to the shore and boat ramp. We were the first boat in, and Mike and Orrin got it out of the water and onto the trailer in record time. We made it to the cottage to watch a really powerful storm with heavy rain, thunder and lightning **outside**, thank goodness. It was over in about an hour. We have never seen anything like it. Mike explained that it was the water in the lake that caused the storm to come in so fast. He is a certified weather-watcher as well as radio operator. Both are wonderful assets as cell phones don't work at the Lake, and one is much safer if somebody knows what the weather can do. (Lee listens for Mike on the radio in the house, and often we could see his boat on the water. She saw us booking for the boat ramp, and of course knew why).

The next day we left the Lake, and headed back to Hallock. Mike and Lee had a wedding to attend, so we met Uncle Mark for dinner in a restaurant in Hallock. After dinner, Uncle Mark took us to the farm in Humboldt, near the Canadian Border. Since its light until about 10:00 pm, we had lots of time for a tour. (The sun rises a little before 5:00 am, and they sometimes see red, green and blue aurora borealis). Uncle Mark showed us some of the land they farm, about 5 ½ square miles now. They grow sugar beets, mainly, then some wheat, soybeans, and other things. The farm equipment is huge and spectacular. Mike and Lee, as well as Uncle Mark are retired, but chip in with labor or expertise when needed. Cousin Ronnie Baldwin is in charge of running the farm now.

Sunday, Chris and her husband Danny Ohman brought dinner to the farm. Chris is Uncle Mark and Aunt Joyce's youngest child, just slightly older than our Jan and Liz. The meal was beautiful. I was impressed with her summer cornbread dish that we would normally use for Thanksgiving. It was light, and had some of the celery and onions, but also fruit. She had made a jelled applesauce dish, salad, pork, and bread. It was a summer feast I wish I could recreate. This was the first time I had met Chris, and I found her to be delightful. She told of some of her travels, like taking a boat down the Amazon from Peru to Brazil once. Danny is a Border Patrol Agent on the border between the U.S. and Canada. We played a game of cards in remembrance of Aunt Joyce. It was great fun, and we were able to visit at the same time.

As many of you know, the Baldwin family is getting ready for Aunt Joyce's funeral on June 27th (Saturday). There will be a Mass in the local church. Unfortunately, we won't be able to attend.

Uncle Mark will winter in Yuma again this year. He said he would be going down sometime in October, and asked us to visit him there. We will, and I am sure he wants anyone who can to visit him.

We had a wonderful visit with Uncle Mark, Mike and Lee, as well as Chris and Danny. Ronnie was very busy, but poked his head in a couple of times. He is married with three sons; at least one is a teenager. I would have liked to visit with him more, and meet his family, but there was little time left. It was time to retrace our steps back to the train, plane, and home in Placentia, California.

Judy and Ed Sowell

June 21, 2009