

Sam's US Experience: March to June 2003

Explanation

People have suggested that I should keep a journal of what happens during my time in the USA and in LA in particular. I always thought that would be a good idea, but the main problem I have is writer's cramp after about five lines of scrawl. I took to recording an electronic diary, but that did not really work either. "Thursday: went to work, went out for lunch, had dinner at home" became a very dull read. So I decided to try and collate the nuggets of interesting bits and wrap them with my excuse for prose (the sound you hear is the Bard spinning in his grave). It is debatable whether this will be a more interesting read or not, but it is worth a try. Feel free to comment, but please let me know before passing on to others.

Moving to the USA

People told me that moving to another country is hard work, but nothing prepared me for what was to come. My trip started by flying to Los Angeles before flying on to Washington for an Embassy briefing: fantastic!



There is nothing quite like flying Business Class, although I left with a good deal of trepidation and sadness. The flight was easy and I had an over-night stay in Santa Monica to get a lay of the land. That also allowed me to drop into RAND before I was due to turn up on the 10th of March: it was great to get introduced to a number of people who I never saw again.

My next job was to fly to Washington. Easy. Well, it should have been. The Admirals Club in LAX — frequented by us Business Class passengers — does not announce when flights are leaving, probably due to the sheer volume of them. So I was carefully watching the electronic boards after determining my flight was listed in two places, and as soon as the boarding light on one of those places came up I left the lounge and headed for my plane. Or what was my plane, as the airline had already closed the flight and demanded to know why I was not on it. After some pointed discussion, I found myself on a flight to Washington routed through Dallas. It would get in several hours after I was due to originally arrive, but that was survivable. Of course the plane subsequently broke down and we spent three hours in our seats on the ground while they determined whether they could fly with a broken part, instilling confidence in us all. Eventually we took off as the weather conditions altered enough to not require the part. We landed in Dallas to be put up in a hotel because of missing the connecting flight. Unfortunately my luggage had already gone to Washington. An early start meant I got on a flight to Washington at long last. I found my luggage, found a taxi and, as nobody had mentioned what I should do at this point, decided the best course of action was to find the Embassy. Arriving there I was told various things of importance which I immediately forgot. I did get a lovely stack of paper¹, though.

¹ I always liked the fact that you can fold an A4 sheet of paper in half and get A5, as the width to the height of each sheet of paper is in the Golden Ratio. US Letter, of course, has no such benefits, much like most of the US "imperial" system. Ask me if 1 millimetre of rain falls on 1 square metre of roof, how much water is collected? It's an easy 1-litre. If 1 point of rain falls on 1 square foot of roof, how much water is collected? 7.97922 fl oz. See what I mean? (Apologies to the Oracle.)

Washington is worth a visit, but I recommend it in summer. Actually I don't: it supposedly built on a swamp. The snow, though, was not something I wanted to see having left a very warm Melbourne summer. Nevertheless I managed to see some of the attractions over the next few days in-between attending a workshop and falling asleep. The central Mall, the Whitehouse, Congress, Library of Congress, National Gallery of Art (I like Rodin's Thinker I must say), and the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum. What a yawn-fest the Air and Space Museum was! Not that the aero-engineers I work with would agree with that, but who cares about some capsule from the moon anyway.

Eventually I flew back to LA and yet again was met by no one at the airport: not pleasant though not surprising as I did not know anyone in LA. I found the car hire place, then the location of the keys to my apartment — after taking a quick detour through the porn capital of LA — and then my little smelly but new abode². Then the car fun started. I was given an apartment for a month and a hire car for two weeks. In that time I was to find a car and then find an apartment. To buy a car I need a Californian license, well at least that was what I was told by the infamous Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Oh, what a joyous place that is! You can wait for hours in an old building with as much charm as a Mexican emergency room. To get a license I needed to pass a written test and a driving test, as all legal aliens need to do. You cannot book a driving test until you pass the written test, and you cannot book the written test until you have a social security number. It took a week and a bit to get the SSN, then week and a half to get in for a written test, and then another week or so for the driving test. Then I could look for a car, which is made more difficult having given back the hire car. I have a car finally, but I am still trying to get it registered.

In the meantime I was trying to find an apartment. This was easier and I could be a kid in a candy store, given the reasonably generous allowance I was granted. After getting a real estate contact, and telling them the sort of range of prices I was interested in, I got a grand tour of five different places, mostly in apartment complexes. The one I settled on was slightly out of the way by my reckoning — my reckoning being completely off the mark — a harsh four blocks from Venice Beach. It turned out to be 200 square feet above my limit, but I did not know that at the time, was given an under-estimate by the real estate agent ("My limit for floor space is 1400 square feet. How big is this place?" ... "It's not listed in the details I have. I think it's, oh, around 1400 square feet"). It was cheaper than the other places. So how can I describe it? Well, it is a brand new two-bedroom place with two bathrooms, kitchen, dining room and lounge, the latter three being fairly open and conjoined. Ceilings in the lounge and dining room are about 12-foot high. The kitchen has granite bench tops, a central island cook-top (that doubles a dance podium), double oven, dishwasher, and a huge fridge with ice and filtered water dispenser. The main bathroom has a spa, separate shower and bidet, the latter I have not been game to use. The main bedroom has it's own balcony — there is also one off the lounge — and the bedroom itself is large enough for four queen-sized beds, if required for those extra big slumber parties. Did I mention the air-conditioning? Basically the place is a slum. I am going to suffer when I get back home, and no one will be sympathetic.

The next kid-in-a-candy-shop event was the ordering of furniture. That was preceded by me going to a furniture rental place. I enquired about some furniture including a home wears package: linen, cooking equipment, "flatware" and so on. I was told by the embassy that that was unacceptable I was supposed to bring such items from Australia. Now they tell me! My

² I do not understand how they cannot provide a knife for cutting or a chopping board, but can provide an electric can opener and 200 cable channels.

stuff was in storage in Australia. I had been misinformed that you could hire home wears. Lovely.

After feeling annoyed for a couple of days I rang the Embassy's preferred furniture supplier. This is where the fun started. So I got to talk to Louis — as in Louis Lane — and she told me how excited she was. Numerous times. This was going to be "loads of fun". They sent me a computer: a new laptop so that I could select what furniture I wanted. That took three days. I can understand why, though, in that they had pictures of every item in their inventory on the computer, and they had a very big inventory. After getting on the phone with Louis — yes, I was excited and this was going to be fun — we went through various options. After an hour I had selected two beds, the dining setting, couches including "love seat", coffee tables, and a tall boy. Louis was having loads of fun. I was too, kind of. Actually I had had enough: so I left it with Louis to have fun with the rest of the furniture. And she did: I got extra lamps, rugs that do not stop shedding fluff, lamps, more couch-end tables, lamps, and stools for the kitchen. Did I mention I got some lamps? I think my first trip to the supermarket involved simply purchasing light bulbs. But before the aforementioned conversation ended we got to talk shop about appliances. Excitement! The exchange went something like this:

Louis: Would you like some electrical goods?

Sam: Sure.

L.: What do you need?

S.: I don't know. What do you recommend?

L.: Would you like a clock radio?

S.: Yes.

L.: Would you like an iron?

S.: Okay.

L.: Would you like a skillet?

S.: Sure.

L.: How about a kettle?

S.: Sure.

L.: Would you like a coffee machine?

S.: Why not.

L.: Would you like a microwave?

S.: Okay.

L.: Would you like a toaster?

S.: Yes.

L.: How about a bread maker?

S.: I have never used a bread maker.

L.: Would like to use a bread maker?

S.: Okay.



It was exciting. Louis was excited and seeming to be bouncing around the room. This stuff all arrived in about a week and the place sure looked spiffy. Then I could get my own items delivered and stop living out of a suitcase. All those had been bubble wrapped for protection, including the towels. I am not making this up. The arrival of my bike also removed my dependence on a car. I was to become something rare in LA: someone who did not drive a car to work.

All up the apartment with rental furniture costs around \$3300 a month, US dollars of course. My contribution is a whopping \$150 a fortnight, Australian dollars of course. Now why was I here again?³ Well, I have learnt how to make bread.

A Report to vic-ultimate: “Howdy from the USA”

The following is an email sent to the Victorian Ultimate mailing list. Yes, I hang shit on LA, but that is for effect. Yes, I hang shit on LA Ultimate, but that is because it is different and I wanted to make people at home appreciate the efforts of those who spend so much time organizing events for them to attend. Yes, I talk about Ultimate a lot, but what do you expect from a report to an Ultimate mailing list? I choose to start the story ... now.

[What follows is a diatribe of varying amounts of pap. Your mileage may vary depending on your frame of mind and care factor. I'd highly recommend listening to "Santa Monica" by Everclear whilst reading. Enjoy.]

Hi ya'll! (nope, that's not right)... Yo! (not quite right either) ... Aloha! (now I'm sinking... ah!)

IF I DON'T GET MY HAZELNUT VANILLA MEDIUM BLEND COFFEE TO GO RIGHT NOW I'M GOING TO SUE! Dude.

Greetings from the land of plenty and excess! Given that it is nearly three months since I departed the beloved shores of Oz, I thought I'd share with you some of the struggles of life in LA, and the local Ultimate scene.

Let me say, that I've been doing it tough. I'm working in Santa Monica, a good 50 metres from the Pier with its fun park and carousel of "The Sting" fame. However, I'm slumming it in Venice near the canals, about a stone's throw from Julia Roberts. I'm still waiting for the invite... People have rather unfairly nicknamed my place "The Palace", which is complete rubbish. I mean the second bathroom doesn't even have a hot-tub, and one needs two ovens when one is preparing souffles... The daily commute is a grind too. After grabbing a bagel and a 15 gallon coffee (quantity not quality), I ride 20 minutes to work. A tough ask. Four blocks down Washington Blvd to Venice Pier, passed my local: some place where Jim Morrison carved his name and which hasn't changed since then, with the possible exception of the sawdust on the floor. The ride takes me up Venice Beach, passed Muscle Beach and the Venice Boardwalk, to Santa Monica. You hardly ever see a handgun. Can't say the same for body augmentation. The weather here is starting to warm up, though June Gloom means fog two out of every three days. At least that covers up the pollution. It's been an ugly spring: it's rained three times. LA drivers can't handle the rain, but at least they stop shooting each other and concentrate on driving home fast to avoid the accidents.

In commenting about the local Ultimate scene, I'd first like to point out that you guys in Victoria are SPOILT! Here there are two leagues — one summer and one winter — both lasting about ten weeks. No different divisions, you get one game per week on any of Monday to Thursday nights, on a team with around 20 people. The location is in the Valley which means travelling on the 405, possibly the world's largest car park from what I can tell. The rest of Ultimate is pick-up games: you turn up and hope there are not too many people; if your team wins you stay on field. There are no provisions ensuring spots for women, hence the numbers of female players are small. I've

³ Actually I do know why I am here. My bosses told I was to get an address guitars could be sent to, go to Muscle Beach and come back looking huge, and get a car large enough to land a helicopter on fore and aft.

found a couple of games that I tend to play: Wednesday nights, Saturday afternoon in Venice, and Sunday afternoon beach Ultimate. Ah! Just think of that the next time you arrive at work on Monday morning... which is when I'm heading for the beach.

Basically most of the people in LA are not from LA. Most seem to be from the east coast, or at least the ones who are friendly enough to meet are from there. That seems to translate into no one having enough ownership of what happens with the Ultimate locally to really push the development, plus there are difficulties in finding reasonable fields to play on. In fact there are no really strong LA mens or women's teams. Any outstanding players prefer to do the commute to Santa Barbara to play on the Condors or Lady Condors. In fact Beth Thomas' sister Margaret was telling me the majority of the Lady Condors team were from LA. Go figure.

There do seem to be a few tournaments that happen. I played on a team that won the St Pats Hat tournament here in LA. Think 12 teams, have to register fast, no music, no food, limited party and everyone gets a cacky green shirt. Our Hat — though slightly more expensive — absolutely canes it. It was still fun, and a great way to meet some people. The team I was playing on won the tournament with the short game. We had no chump players, but tended to lose points when we hucked the disc. In the final there were three or four points that involved us throwing 20+ throws within 10 metres of our endzone before scoring. We ended up winning 16-14 (original cap at 15, after coming back from 14-11 down).

Last weekend coincided with Memorial Day — not that anyone has been able to tell me what it is a memorial too — and there was a reasonable tournament in Santa Barbara. I was playing on a team called Penultimate in the second division along with other teams such as Crows (Isla Vista), Spinal Daisy (LA), UC San Diego Air Squids, UCSB Black Tide and Smoke (San Diego). The first division contains such notable teams as KAOS (Santa Cruz), Valhalla (Bay Area), LA Traffic (West Hollywood), and Condors. One notable thing about US Ultimate at a higher level is how intense the players get and that translates into some ordinary spirit. One guy on the UCSD team has the nickname of "snot rocket", having blown his nose on an opponent on the ground. Lovely. Their spirit was so low at times that I heard another team give them a cheer that basically pointed out they did not make it to college Nationals. And they weren't the worst. Having said all that I'd be remiss to not point out that a lot of the teams do play with decent spirit, and part of the revulsion at poor spirit probably stems from the general high standards that Ultimate players expect. For the record I believe it was going to be a Condors X vs Condors Y final, with the two Condors teams having commanding leads over KAOS and Valhalla. This was the final try out for Condors before selecting their team for the Nationals campaign. The B division had a final between UCSD and UCSB in what promised to be an interesting blood letting. I had a lift, which seemed more important at the time.

I hope things are going well in Vic. I'd come home for the Hat and the associated wedding frenzy, but I'm saving up for some calf implants and the botox injections. When in Rome...

Regards,

Sam

Invasion

Derek and Julie were coming to LA as Derek had a Gaming conference to attend. Simon also indicated that he was going to traveling through LA on his way to a Buck's Night in London, as

you do. The two events collided and I was told to get my drinking shoes on. My response: "oh shit".

Derek and Julie arrived on the afternoon of the 8th of May, to enjoy some oh-ing and ah-ing over the apartment. I took the next day off and we went to the Getty Center, after breaking fast a French café down the road. The Getty Center is an imposing building on the LA skyline, built to house the J. Paul Getty Collection, or at least part of it. I had been told that you have to see this building: it is more impressive than the art contained within it. I must admit the whole place was very impressive. An open design with four interlinked buildings looking south over Santa Monica, Venice, Culver City, Century City and across to Downtown LA. Much of the art was gaudy, but nonetheless there are pieces in the collection to suit anyone's taste.

Simon arrived from Australia on Saturday morning. We had breakfast in Venice and then drove to Santa Barbara via the Pacific Coast Highway. Simon, for some reason, crashed out on arrival, left the rest of us to throw a disc on the beach. It's a hard life. We went out for dinner that night to a restaurant that had been recommended. We had to queue outside for a while, but were able to survive with some "travelers", which is undoubtedly illegal in this country (actually it's probably illegal in ours...). Our waiter on getting to our table proved to be highly entertaining. Everyone was sure he was on speed. He spoke so quickly and was generally jumpy. The rest of the evening involved going to a few bars. Julie and Derek bailed and I followed soon afterwards. Simon spent the rest of the evening chasing a nun.

On the Sunday we went viewing the local scenery: mainly the Court House and the Mission. The Court House was a stunning building of Mexican influence. The Mission also looked beautiful, but us clever people turned up on a Sunday. What, people go to church on Sunday? We then went to Santa Ynez for some wine tasting. I would highly recommend this: it was a cloudless day, just pleasantly warm, and strolling through the township tasting wine is a great way of killing time.

Before Julie and Derek went to their hotel on the Monday night, we had dinner at my home. Simon did the honors with a roast. A friend of mine Amy also came along, and provided the highlight of the evening, apart from Simon's cooking of course: the gravy was an extraordinary shade of purple. Being a former gymnast, she demonstrated her ability to do handstands. That was impressive enough, without the running commentary on training over the years, whilst remaining in said handstand.

On Wednesday night we decided to hit the town, considering I was having a day off the next day. We had a few beers at home waiting for Derek to get back from his conference. We had a beer at Julie and Derek's room once he had appeared. We had two bottles of wine between four at the restaurant on the Promenade in Santa Monica. I had a couple of pints at the Gotham City playing pool. Simon and I then kicked on the Circle Bar. Of course Simon started it off with a round of tequila shots, and we had a couple of fizzy drinks with alcohol in them. I lost track at this point. They closed at 1am and we left. Apparently: welcome Sam to your first alcohol black out. We got a taxi home, apparently, and stumbled down the road to find a bar. We found several but all were shut. No amount of waggling our arses would convince the bar staff to let us in to their after party. Simon entertained himself by molesting ducks. The next morning I had to rely on Simon filling in the details. Not a good plan. But that did not stop us going out the next night. On the way home Simon and I managed to find another bar and a shopping trolley. That was a good idea. I was in the trolley and Simon was sprinting down the road when it flipped. Luck of the

drunks made me tuck my head in. Simon could not work out whether I was laughing or crying. I was definitely laughing: more than Simon, as he ended up with very bruised shins.

Now I am wondering whether anyone in LA does plastic surgery on livers. Mine could probably use a lift and tuck.

So, what is LA like?

One thing that people are often interested in is what I think of LA⁴. Fairly obvious question but there are some interesting answers to it. Firstly, one thing you notice about LA the lack of public transport options and that everyone uses a car. The car became dominant when a number of car companies bought the public transport system and removed it sometime early last century. I have never been through anything more monstrous than the crossing of two freeways: the 105 and the 101 from memory. We are talking about seven lanes with fly-overs in every direction. Not only that they double it by having extra fly-overs for the car pooling lanes exiting from the left hand side of the roads, so that you do not have to fight across traffic to change direction. That is certainly a spaghetti junction, and you can be ten stories up on a banked road.

So what, you might ask. Interestingly this means that, because everyone drives, everyone can get “everywhere”. Hence there is no need for strip shopping like you get in Melbourne. For example, Brunswick Street does not have an equivalent in LA. Shops are spread out, restaurants⁵ are spread out, and bars are spread out: everything is spread out. This in turn leads to two effects. Firstly, there is no single area for people to congregate in. Hence there is nothing of the social scene that you get in Melbourne: people just do not go out in that sense. Secondly, everyone has to drive so no one gets rollickingly drunk. Bugger.

This has a further flow-on effect, he says knowing full well that there are people downstairs from where I type this who would scoff at my social research. As no one really goes out, then there are really no ways of meeting other people. In fact when you do meet other people they are friendly and finally say something like “hey, call me sometime” which translates as “nice meeting you, but don’t call me”. A large number of people that I have met here — Australians, Canadians, British and even Americans from other parts of the country — have indicated how unfriendly LA is. Part is the lack of social interaction and hence the moving in tight circles. Part is also the entertainment industry, which dominates LA. Everyone is an aspiring actor, writer or something, and they are all coming at you from an angle. What can you provide for me? How should I treat you in the scheme of things? Are you likely to be the sort of person that I would not want to have pissed off later on? “Great to see you! You’re looking divine. Are those new breasts? Give me a call sometime.” No wonder the locals are cagey.

⁴ The other thing that is immediately noticeable more generally about the USA is the throw away society. Bagels are served with little plastic knives, sushi is always eaten with wooden chopsticks, and at the supermarket I have seen numerous people have their groceries double-bagged in paper and plastic. Most frightening to me was the use of Styrofoam for drinks and take-away: apparently the largest consumer society in the world has no pressure to look after the environment. That might get the way of profit.

⁵ Americans love the chain food outlet and sameness, although it is apparently a recent occurrence. All coffees are huge and brewed: the espresso is not worth having. Spaghetti Marinara does not contain seafood and a Caesar salad contains no bacon or egg: I learnt those things the hard way. When I get back I am looking forward to decent coffee and decent bacon.

It must also be said that very few people in LA are from LA: most are on their way through and probably trying to become someone. This and the lack of available meeting space have led to a huge industry in dating schemes. My personal favorite is the speed dating: one hour, ten people of the opposite sex, six minutes with each and you can decide who you might want to see later.

The other reason why there may be no meeting places is that the councils in LA — with the possible exception of the Communist Republic of Santa Monica, dude — have had no hand in preserving old buildings. Either the earthquakes got them or the developers did. Likewise, no one thought it worthwhile to invest in some green space. So you end up with a city that is always on the move, always developing, but seems to lack that element of soul.

Sounds like a terrible place, but it is not that bad. Just different, shall we say. My opinions will probably change given time.

Flying Visit to Toronto

On Thursday the 5th of June a delightful young lady by the name of Julie Ducharme invited a number of people to a birthday party for Derek Elliot, her partner. In her infinite wisdom she cc'ed this message to myself a bundle of people in Australia, saying that would start around 5pm followed by "some craziness later on", and it would be great if you could make it. Bugger it, thought I, and within a few hours and a few rapid emails between Julie and myself, I was booked to fly to Toronto for the following weekend. Yippee! Julie and I then got to renew our collusion of the previous year in organizing a surprise for Derek. We arranged that after arriving in Toronto I would catch the airport bus to the CBD and meet them at the Bier Markt: fancy beer drinking place that drops vowels from its name.



On Friday the 13th of June I flew to Toronto. Well initially I cued to get my ticket for an hour and a half, then I cued to be searched for another three quarters of an hour, and then I waited for the plane to depart, and then for the plane to get there. Then I waited for the bus, and then waited while the bus to visit every bloody terminal building it could find by taking as many half completed loopy roadways in Toronto. Then I waited as we crawled through peak-hour traffic. Julie also deserved some flowers — is there any question of this? — so I found a florist, selected two bunches of flowers and asked her to put them together. I am completely sure that that florist was the slowest florist known to man. One branch was rearranged three times. You may guess that by this stage I was slightly sick of waiting.

Nevertheless, the big moment came when I walked into the bar and it worked a treat. Derek looked somewhat surprised: a combination of the familiar and a certain sense of wrongness. Julie was laughing like a drain: probably on account of her nervous energy if mine was anything to go by, and the added fuel of a number of drinks. Needless to say my state was not fueled by endless alcohol. The first beer tasted very, very good though. After drinking further beers in memory of fallen comrades — Leffe Blonde for Simon, and a thought of Stella for Jason — we staggered to dinner, an up-market steak house with up-market prices. It should be said at this point that Derek probably should not have had the primers and Julie, while waiting the arrival of a surprise visitor and keeping that secret from said partner, should probably have not been sitting at a bar with an empty stomach. Dinner was great, and we then headed to Julie and Derek's flat (a



wonderful place) and then amazingly out with a friend of theirs, Jordan. That included some bar somewhere and some club somewhere else. I forget the details, but at least I remember that much.

The next day was a slow start. We went shopping in town after touring the CBD: Derek taking possibly the windiest way possible in a bid, I am sure, to show me everything but also get me completely lost: I still had not seen a map of Toronto. This evil plan of his was aided by my predominant view being the upholstery of his car. I hate cars, especially sporty ones. I was not made to fit in cars. I have enough trouble with chairs without putting them in confined places.

We saw the dome where the Toronto Blue Jays give away tickets because no one wants to see them, and the CN Tower, which is so big you lose all perspective. Let me just say though that Toronto is a beautiful city, with old buildings and character. Plus sun shine. After an almost characterless LA, and a month and a half of June Gloom where we had fog every day, I was enjoying the sun, the character and the decent pubs. Pity we were hung over, and pity I had packed so lightly. It seemed like a good idea at the time, and probably saved a good ten minutes of waiting at the airport. I simply did not think that Toronto would be warmer than LA, and had prepared for slightly cooler conditions. It was fine in the end as Derek is a man who requires large shorts. I borrowed some, okay?

Next we prepared for dinner. St Lawrence Market was great: lots of nice food to buy, huge salmon steaks, and a light and airy atmosphere. I loved it, and the ham sandwich thingies and the ribs. We then headed home via the province controlled liquor outlets. Nice and glossy places but obviously designed by a government official⁶: the check out points at the wall and not the door. They were selling Australian wines at what seemed high prices, even for the ones that would score only three paper bags on the wino scale. Dinner that night consisted of the Weber-fest with some friends of Julie and Derek. The Weber got its first taste of action since leaving Australia. Derek hit the zone and his movements became sublime: never has a Weber webbed so well. A delicious meal, that even contained vegetable products cooked on said BBQ: I suppose that avoids it being a salad. Unfortunately, Friday had taken its toll and we petered out early.

Sunday saw another late start, although there was reasonable coffee involved so all was not lost. We headed to the Little Italy district and found a wonderful place for breakfast. Very Melbourne. After that we headed to the water-front and possibly the biggest number of posers I have ever seen in such a concentrated space, but then I had not seen Venice on a good day at that stage. An entertaining session of spot the false rack ensued. Kind of entertaining, but it was like shooting fish in a barrel. We returned home and went for a throw of a disc, and then I was whisked to the airport. I passed through immigration for the USA in Canada. At least saved time at the other end, where a friend Brad tried to pick me up in failed drive-by: you have got to love slow moving traffic covering four lanes. LAX is a marvel of modern engineering, and the traffic snarls are a testament to LA's reliance on the car. Nevertheless, I could not wait to tell all the people I knew at work what a great weekend I had: I knew Paul would be impressed.

⁶ Yes, like me. "We are from the government and we are here to help."