

Comments at Mom's memorial

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I want to talk about just one aspect of Mom's rich, full life: her openness to the world and her love of travel. She was always game to go. But it wasn't till after she had established the pattern of her life--her family, her career, her summers at the cottage--that she started to explore beyond the country's borders. It was my fault--having spent a wonderful year exploring Europe in the middle of graduate school, I wanted to share it with them. So in the summer of 1969, they and Ellen joined me in the white Buick Opel that I purchased for them and we toured the continent--and they loved it. It whet their appetite for more.

In her biographical essay for University House, Mom mentions the travel they did, starting with the student groups they led to England, Germany and even Taiwan. And then after retirement they continued to travel for their own enjoyment--without a bunch of students to look after! I gained a special appreciation for the travel they did when I recently went through the scrapbooks and photo albums that Mom put together of their trips. Her documentation was impressive.

But my jaw dropped when I read about their 3-week tour of South America in March of 1988, followed by a 3-week trip to Turkey and Yugoslavia in May of that same year! It was on trying to digest these dates that I also realized that I am the same age now that Mom was when she went to Turkey. Having just taken a trip in May to Turkey and Greece with Donn--many of the photos in that album looked familiar--I was impressed with my parents' stamina in doing two such huge trips just a month apart. But Mom was only getting started, as you can see from the list of places they eventually went.

After Dad died in 2003, Mom wanted to travel some more, but her travel companion was gone--so she asked if I would be interested in accompanying her on a trip. She decided she wanted to visit the country where her granddaughter Clare was spending a year between high school and college: Costa Rica. I agreed, but somewhat reluctantly--I wasn't sure about taking a tour on a bus or how wearing it might be on her. But I also really didn't want to say No to her. So I took the time off work and went. I need not have worried on either count: I soon realized that a tour can be a true vacation. But I could also see that Mom's zest for new experiences made the travel invigorating, not wearing. She went zip lining in the forest, she went up crocodile-infested rivers to see tropical birds--and we managed somehow to find Clare in her little village where the streets had no names. Mom loved it all.

Then, a couple years after that, Mom said to me, "I have one more trip in me. I really enjoyed Australia when your Dad and I went there, but I've always wanted to go to New Zealand. Would you go with me?" I was retired now and readily accepted. So we went on a tour to Australia, but mostly New Zealand in early 2006. True to her style, she--at 86--was not content to just go with the program. She wanted to do the options, too--and even make up a few of her own. She swam in the beautiful waters at the Great Barrier Reef, she walked the Sydney Bridge, she insisted on climbing the cathedral tower in Christchurch.

What a gift she gave me in inviting me to accompany her on those trips. It was one of many for which I will be eternally grateful, starting with my very life.