

A SURPRISE TRIP

By Judy Fritschen

Our niece, Renee Fritschen, was engaged to be married and the wedding was all planned. It was to be held in Boston, Massachusetts. Bill and I were invited and were excited to make the trip to Boston from Kansas. Our airline tickets had been purchased. Just about a week before the wedding something went terribly wrong. The couple decided not to get married after all and the wedding was called off. It was too late to cancel the airline tickets. Bill and I decided we would just take a vacation trip to the east coast. I had always wanted to see New York City. We made a slight adjustment to the flight plan and off we went to New York City.

We took a shuttle bus from the airport to a hotel that was located near Time Square. We rode the subway, which was a new experience for both of us. We walked around Time Square. Late in the evening I was amazed to see mounds of trash bags along the sidewalks. I wondered, "Where did all this trash come from?" Then I looked up. "Oh, that's where!" The storefronts on the lower level of the buildings were a mix of retail, restaurants, and businesses. But when I looked up I saw many, many stories. These buildings were huge, and the upper stories were apartments. Obviously, the trash bags came from the thousands of people who lived in those apartments. The really amazing thing about those trash bags was the fact they were all gone by morning. The trash pick-up system had hauled it all away over-night.

We were able to sign up for guided bus tours at our hotel. We signed up for a tour that included The Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. Our hotel was located within walking distance of the bus terminal where the tour buses were parked. We walked over the morning of our tour

and there was a whole row of buses each with a sign on the front indicating the name of the tour that bus would be taking. We found our bus and got on board. Our tour guide was very interesting and informative. I asked where people park their cars. There didn't seem to be any parking lots or garages for the many, many people living in all those apartments. He said very few of those people had cars. They depend on public transportation. That made sense because we had already discovered the subway is very efficient and relatively easy to learn how to get to just about anywhere you want to go. Our tour guide himself, probably about 30 years old, said he did not have a car and did not have a driver's license.

We drove by some interesting sites as explained by our tour guide, then got on a boat and headed toward the Statue of Liberty. We did not tour the statue but as we sailed by I remembered my father's comments about the excitement he and other immigrants on the ship from Europe felt as they first sighted the Statue of Liberty. This was their first sight of America which was to be their new home!

Ellis Island is not far from the Statue of Liberty. Our boat headed there next, and we did tour Ellis Island. I was particularly interested in this part of the trip because my father came through Ellis Island in 1924. The tour on Ellis Island was so interesting! This location has not been used for processing immigrants for many years, but the walls were lined with photographs that were taken during those times. I remembered my father describing a long staircase where immigrants had to climb the stairs. Anyone who had difficulty was marked with an "X" on his back. That meant that immigrant might need medical attention. There was concern of diseases being spread in the United States. There it was! There was the wide and long staircase my father talked about.

There was a stone wall outside the building with immigrants names carved in it. The names were arranged by date they came through Ellis Island. I searched and searched for my father's name but never found it. Several years later I had an opportunity to come to Ellis Island again and that time I found his name. I spotted his friend's name, who was traveling with my father, first and there was my father's name right under it. The reason I didn't recognize it the first time I came was because it was spelled wrong. My father's name was Gerhard Hahn, but his last name was spelled Hon, like it sounded.

I would also like to mention that on that second trip to New York, we went to the top of the World Trade Center. I gasped in disbelief as we looked out the window, down at the city we were so high up! Approximately one year later was 9-11-2001. I still have trouble coming to grips with the fact that those buildings are gone and a memorial stands in their place.

In spite of the fact that this trip was not planned in advance, it was one of my most memorable.