

**August 18, 2009**

Dear Mum,

Our house still seems rather empty without Samantha around to liven things up. I thought it would be a good time, therefore, to give you an update on the lovely time we had with her – and send you a few photos as well. There are so many great memories there.

She is a very competent and engaged person! It was great to see her smiling face when we met her at the airport – even though it was after midnight (at least our time). Since she was still aged 11 for the trip out here, she was accompanied by an Air Canada worker and Daegan had to drop her off at the Vancouver airport. She looked like an accomplished traveller – with her well stocked backpack and efficiently sized travel bag.

Needless to say, she didn't get up until after noon on the 17<sup>th</sup>. We thought at that time that it was jet lag, but soon discovered that she is a night owl – loves to stay up late and sleep in 'til about 10:00 am or 11:00. She fit in well with Fran's schedule.

When she did get up, she was on to various projects, however. She's like her mother and grandmother in that respect as well. She always had a plan and a project on the go. For the 17<sup>th</sup>, it was a bike trip to check out the island and then water play – with some water balloons (actually coloured condoms that Fran had accumulated from her research!).



Saturday was a nice recovery day with reading, planning, and chatting on the agenda but on Sunday she woke up and went straight to the list of projects that I had put up on the fridge. Today was for gutters and chimney fix, she announced.

The kids are so wonderful to have around at this age – partly because they don't seem to know the difference between work and play. Cleaning the gutters and replacing the

chimney cap on the chimney are definitely play – especially since she got to climb up on the ladder and roof. As you can see from the photos we both enjoyed it.



Later on Fran and Sam made some of the delicious “pull-apart” buns that Thomas had pioneered while he was here. We took them down to the Yates since we were invited there for dinner. It was a lovely dinner - Rachel was there with her two children (Eva and Marcus). It was great to see how Samantha was starting to join in the ‘adult’ conversation. Simon remarked how surprised he was to find a 12-year old with coherent opinions and the wherewithal to express and discuss them in adult company.

On Monday, our house filled up even more since Samantha invited her friend Alex over. Alexandra was a young girl that she met in Victoria a year or so ago. Alex’s family moved from Victoria to St. Hubert here in Quebec and Sam had kept in touch with her since the relocation (Alex’s father works for the Canadian Forces). They arranged for Alex to visit us here on Bigras for a few days, then for Sam to visit Alex in St. Hubert in August.

One of the first things the girls did was to get on their bikes and head off to the swimming pool. The closest one was ‘full’ according to them, so they continued on to the pool in Laval-sur-le-lac – not too much farther on. I was pleased to see how quickly Sam had become re-integrated with the island – feeling at home with getting around and making use of all the amenities nearby.





Tuesday included a visit to Carrefour Laval – a major shopping mall here in Laval. The girls were insistent on going shopping (much to my apprehension) but in the end it turned out very well. They were primarily window shoppers so my concerns over Samantha's spending habits were alleviated. From her discussions it seems that her impulse buying past has been significantly mitigated by her critical eye.

After returning home they insisted we join them for a swim in the pool. I was able to avoid getting wet since Fran was keen about joining them in the water. Somehow she always ended up being the 'pig in the middle'. They had so much fun in the water that when Fran suggested they eat their dinner in the bathtub they jumped at the chance.



On Wednesday Reg and Denise arrived from Sherbrooke to pick up the two girls for a visit with Samantha. They dropped off Alex on their way to Sherbrooke where she will stay for a few days to visit her other grandparents. In the interim, Fran and I frantically tried to do some catchup on our school work in anticipation of Sam's return.

We drove out to Sherbrooke on Saturday (25<sup>th</sup>) and enjoyed a lovely meal and visit with the three of them. It seems that the highlight of the visit for Samantha was a half-day adventure in an aerial park. There are a number of these in the province – where platforms are built high up in the trees with cables connecting them in a series of walkways, rope bridges, and ziplines.

Reg and Denise said that Sam found a friend in the waiting line and the two of them headed off well ahead of the others. From Samantha's stories it sounds like they had a wonderful time challenging each other along the way. She tried to make us promise to take Sarah and Kathryn to such a park when they arrive.

The 26<sup>th</sup> was another relaxing day at home. We had a couple of computer related projects on the go so we used the time to move them ahead a bit. One project was to document the travels of "Mellow Yellow" a small plastic figure Samantha found in the geocache here on Ile Bigras. Mellow had travelled to our island from Ohio and wanted to get to Texas. We decided that he/she should do some exploration of Québec before continuing on his/her journey so we set up a series of photos to record the events. The first was to build him/her a prosthesis since he/she had lost a leg in the travels. We figured that this would be a good demonstration of the value of our Canadian health care system. The next was to teach him/her some French so we took a picture of him/her reading up on French grammar. These (along with other photos of his/her adventure) can be seen on the geocaching page. If Jennifer can set up her computer you can see them by going to: [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com), clicking on "trackable items", enter the tracking number TB5E54, and click on "Track". Then click on the "View the Gallery" link to see the photos and stories.

Checking out Old Montreal was always on Samantha's list of things to do while here, so Monday (27<sup>th</sup>) was the date. We hopped on board the train and headed down to check out the sights. Fran had previously proposed that we try out the Segway machines that were for rent in one of the hangars, so this became a primary objective for the visit. We signed Samantha up for the training and trial and watched in envy as she demonstrated her quick learning skills on the strange machine. The assistants were charmed by her along the way so they agreed to let Fran and I try one out without paying – but only for a short time. They were very clever, however, since it was enough to get us eager to plan another trip down to give them a real spin.

On our way back home we paused for a photo in front of the Marché Bonsecours.

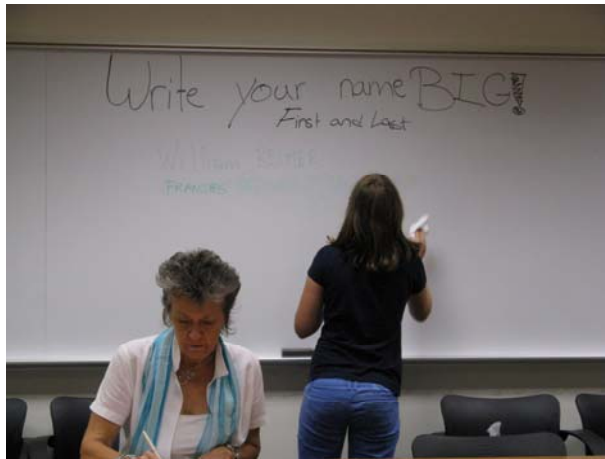


Tuesday (28<sup>th</sup>) was a working day for Fran and I so Samantha joined us at the university. Not to be outdone, she decided that she would teach us a lesson, so she set up the seminar room in our department and announced that we should be in class on time. Fran was late, however, so she received a detention as soon as she walked in the door!

Our first assignment was to write our names on the board but Fran ran into trouble with that one as well – insisting the “Queen” was her middle name. She only succeeded in extending her detention time.

Our second assignment was to do some special math and the third was to write a short story. Both Fran and I failed miserably on the math but were generously treated. I was pleased to receive an A+ on my story, but poor Fran only received A-. I think it was mostly due to the fact that her story was about how she was mistreated by Ms Jones, our teacher.

The teacher and student were quickly reconciled in the end when they went off to the pedicurist for a foot massage and nail painting. Samantha didn't want bright colours on her toenails so the pedicurist painted on some nice little flower petals instead.



By the time we arrived home we got the news that Peter, Penny, and their gang had arrived in Ottawa. They had quite the adventure getting there since the rail strike meant they had to get off the train at Winnipeg to be flown to Toronto. They then stayed overnight in Toronto before getting to Niagara Falls in a limousine. By the time they were due to take the trip to Ottawa, the trains were running again so they arrived on schedule in our nation's capital.

The plan was for us to meet them in Ottawa to join them at the Children's Museum at the Museum of Civilization. We drove up to Ottawa on the 29<sup>th</sup> to make this possible. We spent the full day in the museum – watching the kids have a wonderful time exploring all the games, dressups, and exhibits in that part of the museum.

It is a fantastic place for kids (and adults) with examples of clothing, games, architecture, and activities from around the world. Upon entering, the children are given passports that they can stamp at each country's exhibit, then spend the rest of the time playing with all the things they have to offer. The photos might give you an idea of the range of activities: from selling cheese in Holland, to loading a ship in Canada, and riding a camel in Egypt. Most of the places also have dressup clothes representing their local attire.





We finished off the day with a picnic by the Rideau canal before heading home. It was great to watch the kids have such a lovely time together (no fights either!) and for a bonus, visit with Mike and Julia in their Ottawa digs.

Thursday was only a bit less strenuous since we went in to town to see the latest Harry Potter film, then drop in once again to Old Montreal for dinner and a look around. We were surprised by a lovely acrobatic display on one of the sailboats in the harbour. A couple of acrobats performed an act to music using long fabric strands hanging from the mast and sail arms.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> we hired a rental van and headed into town to pick up Peter, Penny and the others as they arrived by train from Ottawa. Dorothy and I drove back to Ile Bigras with all the baggage and the others followed on the train.



Penny and Sarah had found a special program at the eco-museum on the west island of Montréal, so on Sunday (1<sup>st</sup>) we piled into the van (except for Dorothy and Fran) and headed off to see the animals. It is a centre for injured and orphaned animals that is established in a lovely outdoor setting not too far from where we live. We spent part of our time there, then headed off to St. Anne-de-Bellevue to take a look at the locks, wander along the boardwalk, and of course have some ice cream.

I was very pleased to see the way in which the girls became interested in the operation of the lock. They wanted to stay long enough to see boats go both ways on the lock and asked some interesting question about its operation. It helped, of course, that the day was sunny and warm and there were plenty of strange looking boats and people enjoying the sights.

We all got back together on Ile Bigras and enjoyed a lovely meal on our deck.





August 2<sup>nd</sup> was the day we had designated to explore Old Montreal with the Shaver gang. It was raining buckets when we were about to leave but we headed off anyway since we planned to visit the Fur Museum at the Lachine canal. It was a good choice because the rain stopped by the time we finished our visit there.

This is a lovely small museum right on the canal showing the history of the fur trade in Canada – the various pelts that they trapped, the struggles between the Hudson Bay Company and the North West Company, and the relations with the native peoples along the way. It is a hands-on type of museum so the kids had a great time trying on the fur hats, checking out the demands on the voyageurs, and pushing buttons on the displays.



Since the rain had stopped, we hopped back into the van and Echo and headed once again to Old Montreal. This time the kids insisted on trying out the pedal cars. They had a great time pedalling back and forth along the walkway – fortunately avoiding both pedestrians and other obstacles.



We also had some time to check out the street entertainers and enjoyed watching one of the fellows we had seen before when we were down here for dinner. We had to extract them from all of the action, but we had planned to have a party for Samantha so it didn't take too much effort.

Samantha seems to cleverly arrange for multiple birthday parties each year. Her real birthday is on Aug 10<sup>th</sup> but Daegan has one for her before her schoolmates leave for



the summer. This year she argued that she should have another one when Sarah and Kathryn were here – then of course there was the actual date! Since she was not in Victoria for the date, I expect she will arrange to have another one when she gets back.

There is no denying that it's fun, however. This time we invited the Yates to join us since they also have a special history with her. I remember how Samantha packed up wood in her backpack and rode off on her bicycle to deliver it to them the last time she was here. It was the wood from the tree branch that fell on our deck during a wind storm.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> was forecast to be good weather so we got our picnic together and climbed onto our 2 cars for a trip to Upper Canada Village. The Village is a standard stopoff for any Shaver events in the neighbourhood – because of the family connection with the woollen mill. It's always fun to check it out – especially with each new generation. This time it was our chance to introduce Peter and Penny's kids to the history. It was great to have Dorothy along – for her and us.



The kids, as usual had a great time. They fed the pigs, milked a cow, explored multiple houses, dressed up, played skittles, and generally used the place as their playground. I was particularly pleased to hear all the wonderful questions that Samantha asked and her interest in the answers – as best we could provide them.







Tuesday was the day that Peter, Penny, and family were off to Quebec City. We took them down to central station and returned the van before heading home. It was also the day that Samantha turned up in the kitchen wearing her mother's wedding dress. You can see a photo of how nice it looked on her.

Since we wanted to visit Quebec City with Samantha, we arranged to join Peter and Penny in the city when they were there. On Wednesday we drove up to Levis to stay in the hotel where they were settled. The kids (and Fran and Peter) had a great swim in the hotel pool to top off the day. I simply enjoyed the full moon shining through the clouds, the glow of the underwater lights in the pool, and the sounds of everyone having so much fun.

On Thursday we took the ferry across the river from Levis. It is a lovely ride – with a fantastic view of the cliffs of Quebec and the Chateau Frontenac. The ferry stops right in the middle of the lower town – just perfect for us since there was a summer festival taking place in all the streets down there.

This was a celebration of Quebec history so there were people everywhere who were dressed up in early Quebec costumes – some of them formally in displays and demonstration booths about cooking, blacksmithing, or boot making; some of them in roving groups of actors – as washer women, les Filles des Roy, or soldiers; and some of

them just local people who have a flair (and sewing skills) for various costumes, so they come out to join the crowds and add to the ambiance. I have included a few photos to give you an idea of the range of things taking place.



The kids spent a lot of time exploring all the activities in the lower town. It was a nice follow up to our time in Upper Canada Village since they were full of questions about the relationships between activities during the two periods and places – and they were able to compare some of the ways in which things were done. Of course all the games, climbing apparatus, and (as you can see) the stocks were all part of the fun.



It wasn't until about 2:00 pm that we were able to extract everyone and make our way to the upper town. We had some lunch after checking out the buskers and acrobats then started our trek up to the Citadel. It wasn't that easy since we didn't have a map, but everyone seemed to be in good spirits and treated this search as part of the adventure.

The two older girls took off along the wall, so by the time we entered the gates, they were inside patiently waiting for us (exhausted from pushing the wheelchair up the steep hill). We paid for one of the tours and headed out with our (entertaining) guide to see all the sights. You can see from the photos that the girls decided to take over from the guards at the Governor General's residence.





On our way back down the hill the girls walked the ramparts, played the role of regal lions, checked out the plains for marauders, and discovered a lovely grass hill – nice and wet from the short rain we had and perfect for sliding! By the time we found a place to eat we were tired and hungry – a perfect combination. We entertained ourselves by telling tales while waiting for our dinner.

Fran, Samantha, and I parted company with the others at the ferry terminal – we to our car and the others to the ferry and back to their hotel. It was a long drive home, but well worth the effort.

Friday (7<sup>th</sup>) was a day for recuperation, but Samantha obviously felt that we should be sure to accomplish some of our obligations along the way. She appeared in the solarium, for example, waving the list of projects and announced that it was time to go out and prune the bushes back from the path through our ‘forest’ in the back. She had already changed into her full length clothes to protect her against the mosquitoes so it was clear she meant business.



She and Alex had planned to meet once again, so on Saturday we drove her out to Alex's after a trip to the mall. Once again we were on our own.

We went to pick her up on Monday (her real birthday) then drove back into town to follow up on one of the plans we made the last time we were in Old Montreal. Fran had enjoyed the taste of travelling on the Segway so we planned to go back and rent them for a real tryout.

After a diversion to pick up some books at the bookstore we headed back to Old Montreal and took three Segways out for a spin. When the attendant heard it was Samantha's birthday, he extended our time from 30 to 45 minutes for the same price. He was certainly a charming addition to the whole event. Samantha was clearly most at home on the machines of the three of us so she led the way as we travelled all along the old port on these funny contraptions.

After our little tour we hopped in the car and headed back for our own birthday party. Samantha had ordered pizza so she and I headed off to the local pizza parlour while Fran set up the rest of the meal. When the staff at the pizza place heard it was her birthday – once again – out came a cupcake with a candle in it and we all sang a round of "happy birthday"! This girl has more birthdays that I have ever heard of!

After our pizza Samantha suggested we put a sheet up on the wall and watch The Sound of Music as projected from my 'Powerpoint Projector". She climbed into bed, finished off her cake-muffin and we all sat around watching the movie on her wall. It was a wonderful end to a lovely day!

The 11<sup>th</sup> was the day before she left so we were all aware of the many things we had wanted to do but were without time to do them. We ended up doing a modified version of the "old sailor my grandfather knew". Instead of basking in the sun 'til we were saved, we spent our time in little pleasures and time together.

One of these was a trip on the train to town and back for Fran and Samantha. Sam had wanted to pick up a new wallet that she had seen in central station, so the two of them decided to take the trip into town to give Sam some practice with her train navigation skills and pick up the wallet. Luckily the new train tickets allows one to travel on them for 2 hours so it was easy for them to go and return on the same tickets.

There was still time to get an ice cream at our local ice cream store – then the car took us on a trip to the Ste-Dorothee parking



lot so that Samantha could try her hand at driving a manual shift car. She picked the basics up quickly!

Another mini-project was the home manicure kit that you can see in the photo. Fran got out a little soaking machine she had received as a gift from Daegan, so the two of them spent a nice time fussing over Samantha's nails.

It should have contributed to an early night since Samantha's plane was at 8:30 AM the next day, but true to form we were having a tough time shutting down the party. At least all the packing had been done, snacks were prepared, and Fran and Samantha had gone over the appendix to the travel book that we had produced for her way home. They read it over and talked about it on their travel to and from town so Samantha felt reasonably well prepared for the challenge of changing planes in Vancouver.

We got up about 5:30 AM on the 12<sup>th</sup> and dragged ourselves to the airport in good time for the flight. Only one of us was allowed to accompany Sam to the airplane gate so Fran got chosen and I hung out waiting for her return. Fran returned with news that all was well with Sam, she had got on the plane without any problem.



Later that evening we received a phone call from Samantha informing us that she was back in Victoria. Her plane was late in arriving at Vancouver so the time for transfer was very tight since she only had 45 minutes if the planes were on time. She asked an agent to help her at the arrival gate and he drove her down to the next gate on one of the airport carts – a little bonus for her, I'm sure.

She said that the flight to Victoria felt like it was only about 10 minutes long!

Love,  
Bill and Fran