

## WITH RELATIVES AND FRIENDS

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I was going first time to Philadelphia. But I was not worried in any way as my niece Shiji and her husband and my friend Selvan had phoned me at Los Angeles on the previous day that they would be at the airport to receive me. At Los Angeles Airport the machine of United Airlines issued me a boarding pass without a seat number. My first attempt with machine had failed as the machine was offering me a morning flight and a gift of an extra free ticket! Then, I approached a flight attendant and with her help I got a boarding pass without seat number!

I thought that being a night flight there may not be enough passengers to fill the aircraft and hence it must be free seating. But at the gate there were repeated calls for half a dozen volunteers to choose a morning flight and avail a gift of an extra free flight ticket! From a Negro flight attendant at the gate I came to know that the airline had overbooked passengers and they could not accommodate everyone who has come and hence the repeated request for volunteers. Anyway, after about 45 minutes of anxious waiting my name was called out and I was given a boarding pass with a seat number.

There was morning traffic rush of office goers and so it took two hours for Selvan and Shiji to drive me to their home at Devon in Pennsylvania State. Both of them opted to work from their houses during the week while I was with them. They had both the laptops of their company and I had the choice of their two tabletop computers to work. So while enjoying the love, warm hospitality and choice food prepared by Shiji, I was able to write an article on Inter-Religious Chaplaincy.

To my luck Fr. Lawrence Culas, a friend of Selvan came to meet him. As he was introduced to me as a visiting chaplain in Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital at Philadelphia, I told him about the article I was writing. Fr. Lawrence's ideas and experiences helped me to improve my draft copy of my article.

Though I told Selvan and Shiji that I was not interested in any sight-seeing trips they organized two outing for me. The first was to the Amish village and then to the historic places of Philadelphia.

The Amish village is the place of a Christian sect who tries to live the Christian message without the modern amenities like electricity and motor vehicles, etc. The Amish village is located on Route 896 two miles north of Strasburg. The only vehicle they use is horse drawn cart.

I was happy that Fr. Lawrence Culas joined us in the trip to Amish village. We reached the Amish village just in time to join the last guided tour in the evening of July 27. The tour guide, a lady, gave us a general outline of the history and the daily life of the people in Amish village. Then, she took us around a typical Amish house, built in 1840, room by room explaining the foot habits, dresses and dress codes religious practices and marriage customs, etc.

Then, we visited a one-room schoolhouse at the Amish village. The Amish people study only to read and write up to primary level. They have their own Amish newspaper. They harness solar

energy for light. Water pumps are operated by windmills. Water wheels are also used to pump water for animals and farm lands. Their livestock include piglets, goats, horses, donkeys, etc. An important part of Amish life is the tools of trade produced in their own blacksmith shop.

After the guided tour Selvan drove us through several small roads inside the village where we could see people at work, returning from work in horse-carts and a group of people relaxing in front of their house. All Amish houses have large chimneys as smoke outlets.

To me the visit to Amish village gave an idea of people who lived in the 18th and early 19th century. But the buffet dinner that evening in Hershey Farm Restaurant brought me back to 21st century USA. For me there were endless choice of food items and cold drinks in the Restaurant. I like the buffet because I could see the food items and select from them. The dishes were identified with nameplates Cleanliness of the Restaurant was outstanding.

On the next day after working whole day in the room in the evening Selvan drove me and Shiji to Philadelphia. We saw the historic town hall. Then, we visited the Liberty Bell at Market Street. The Bell is a symbol of freedom for all Americans. We were a bit late for the inside tour of the Bell house. But Bell was clearly visible from outside and on the outside wall close to the Bell we could press a button according to the language of our choice and we heard the recorded history of the Bell.

When the declaration of Independence was first read in public the Liberty Bell was sounded in celebration. The huge Bell weighed 2080 pounds! The Bell history recalled the biblical verse: "In this way you shall set the fiftieth year apart and proclaim freedom to all the inhabitants of the land. During this year all property that has been sold shall be restored to the original owner or his descendants, and anyone who has been sold as a slave shall return to his family" (Leviticus 25, 10).

Then, we went to the well-developed Bank of Delaware River. There were numerous activities on the river front including live telecast of music and dance programme. Philadelphia city developed on the bank of the river. The first paper mill in America was started here on the river-bank.

Close to the bell house is the first government house with right in front a life-size statue of George Washington, the first President of USA and to date the only president who was elected twice by all electoral votes!

In the morning I had told Selvan and Shiji that I have some money to buy a laptop, which I wanted to buy in India so that repairs and maintenance service would be easily available. Selvan said that there might be cheap laptop available in USA on sale. He offered to look for sale. So on the way back from Philadelphia we went to a computer shop 'CompUSA' which we found was closed for good.

So on the next day, July 28 after working whole day in the house Selvan drove me and Shiji Compusa at Wilmington, Delaware to buy a laptop for me as their gift. I choose a Toshiba laptop, which the salesman said, was the last piece in stock for a little less than 800 dollars. The

computer comes with free printer but the printer was not in stock. Selvan phoned a friend and got his address for the printer to be delivered. But when the salesman asked to fill a form for it, Selvan said to forget about the printer, as there was no time for it. We were already an hour behind to visit a couple that had invited us for dinner.

Actually, Selvan and Shiji invited the couple Mr. Philip V. M. and Mrs. Achamma Philip to come and meet me and have dinner. But the couple, very close friends of Selvan and Shiji, insisted that we all go to their house for dinner. We had the choicest wine and sumptuous meal with Keralite dishes prepared by the couple.

On July 29 Selvan and Shiji worked at home and I finalized my article on Chaplaincy in my room computer, which I sent to Prakash Mody with a copy to me by e-mail so that I could use it later. Shiji copied the article into her laptop so that she could print and give me a hard copy.

In the evening, in spite of my saying to Selvan and Shiji that I could go by a bus or a train to New Jersey, they insisted on driving me to Victor Macwan's house in Jersey City, which they did. They were taken up by the loving and warm reception which we received in the house of Victor and his family.