

September 29, 2007  
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## Features

# Sibling reunion in Baltimore

DIARY OF A FULBRIGHTER

By Zul-Fakhri Maily



WWII Flagraising Memorial at Arlington.



Writer with his younger sister Dr Farha Hanina at Baltimore Inner Harbor.



Capitol Hill.

"This is a special announcement for passengers flying to Baltimore-Washington International," airline staff blared out in the PA system at St Louis International in Missouri. "The flight is overbooked. We are therefore looking for two people who would volunteer to take the flight to Washington DC instead."

Strangely enough, the announcement came as a welcome window of opportunity for

me. The e-ticket I was holding stated that my Baltimore flight was confirmed, but my seat was not.

Instinctively, I knew there was no guarantee I would get a seat with the intended flight, and I certainly wasn't prepared to reenact Tom Hanks' part in "The Terminal". The decider was that the airline staff also offered to hand a US\$250 transferrable airline voucher to each 'volunteer'.

So, DC it was.

Labour Day Monday, September 3 made all the difference, and by Friday, August 31, Columbia Missouri the "college town" was practically deserted as the majority of the students headed out to their respective destinations to take advantage of the well-deserved break.

I myself had reason to be excited. I was about to visit my sister Dr Farha Hanina, who is undergoing specialist training in Prosthodontics at the University of Maryland Baltimore. While we both reached US soil on our own separate accords and through entirely different administrative channels, I was grateful for having the chance as an older brother to help ensure that the living environment is ideal for my sister.

An hour-long taxi ride was all it took for me to reach Baltimore from Reagan National Airport, and I reached my sister's apartment just before midnight on Friday. We were both thrilled that we could meet so far away from home, and that I finally found my way despite the slight detour. At least I managed to get a glimpse of the American capital by night.

So there I was, in Baltimore with my sister on a Friday night, with a whole weekend of sightseeing to look forward to. Effectively we only had two days at our disposal, as Friday was considered spent and I was to head back to Missouri on Monday. We decided to optimise whatever time I had on the east coast.

The following day marked my second ever visit to Washington DC in as many days. After enjoying a heavy breakfast (which is considered a luxury during term-time), my sister and I boarded the train from Baltimore Penn Station that would take us right to Union Station at the heart of the American capital.

We had planned to cover as much ground as we could throughout the daylong sightseeing trip, and I suggested that we visit the site that was the furthest out from Union Station before slowly making our way back past the other monuments.

Our first stop was the world-famous WWII memorial statue in Arlington, which was to become the main focus of my photojournalism project.

As the day progressed, we decided it would be a good idea to take a break from the simmering heat and cool off at the Pentagon Mall. Farha, being an ardent shopper, saw this as a welcome respite. I too had my own shopping agenda - I wanted to find a birthday gift for my wife, and what better place to acquire it than in the capital.

After a healthy helping of salmon sandwich and crabcake at the mall, we ventured back out on our sightseeing excursion, as there was still so much left to see. We soon reached a stretch of field in front of Capitol Hill known as the National Mall, where we were spoilt for choice in terms of photo opportunities and possible camera angles.

Upon noticing that the sun was about to set, my sister and I began to walk westwards away from the Capitol building, as we had yet to cover several more must-see sites without which our trip would have been a half-hearted affair. By the time we reached the historic reflecting pool, the sun had already set. From the edge of the pool we could see that the steps leading up to the Lincoln Memorial in the far end were festooned with tourists. Content with taking just mental pictures of the memorial, we decided it was time to head home.

Given the relative locations of the places of interest, we initially assumed the White House was too far out of the way to be sighted. But while walking back towards the Metro station at the National Mall, I spotted an opening in the trees through which the White House was in perfect view from where we stood, even though it was some two kilometres away.

My compact camera was virtually stretched to its limits as I tried to get a decent snapshot. Satisfied with our 'coverage' of significant monuments and sites in Washington DC, we returned to Union Station at 9.30pm and boarded the last train home.

The city of Baltimore itself has its own pull on tourists, and much of this attraction owes itself to the Inner Harbor, a bustling body of water surrounded by luxury apartments, swanky hotels and upmarket shops, or "stores" as they are called in the States. Further shopping side-trips aside, my sister suggested that we go to a café called Bonaparte. As the name would suggest, the immensely popular café sold all things French, and is particularly known for its pastries and gourmet coffee.

It was certainly a rewarding experience, considering the fact that we walked some three kilometres along the edge of the harbor to reach the hang-out spot.

Intent on soaking up the cool breeze that blanketed the whole perimeter of the harbour, we headed back to our starting point by water taxi. Not unlike the riverboats that normally seen carrying tourists around Kg Ayer, the Inner Harbor water taxi service opened up even more eye-catching views.

My sister and I were simply relieved with the fact that we didn't need to walk back. We wrapped up the day with a trip to my sister's favourite "grocery store" or supermarket. Because I was around, Farha was able to purchase a lot more items than she normally could.

Looking back, I feel that we had spent the weekend as well as we possibly could. After all, the trip to Washington on Saturday and the Inner Harbor walkabout on Sunday were both really day-trips, and as we all know there's only so much that can be experienced in a day.

I do have plans however to spend the upcoming Hari Raya celebrations with other members of the Brunei community in Washington DC and in the state of Virginia. The things we do to feel closer to home.

