

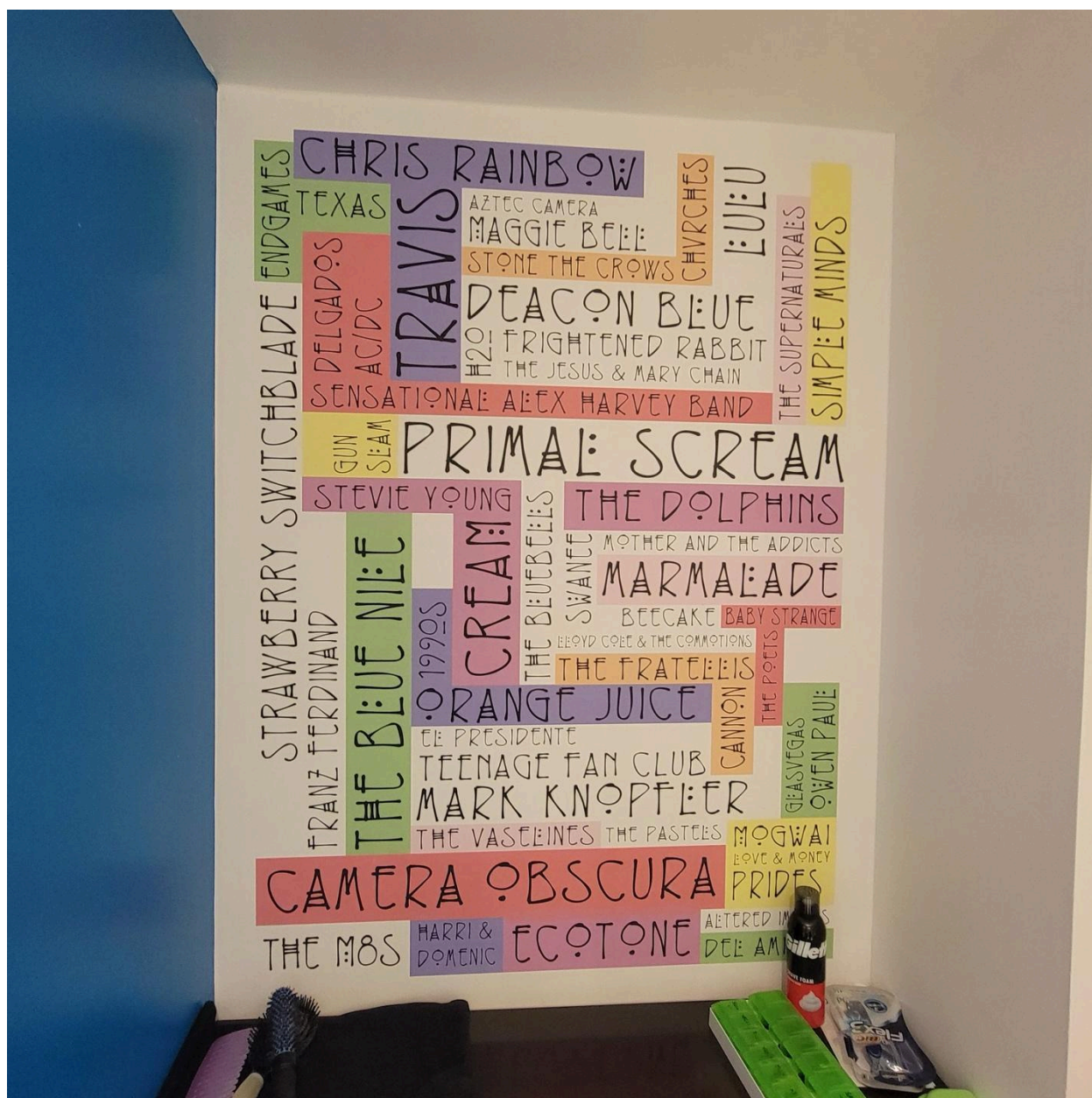
December 1, 2024:

After 36 hours of impersonating Steve Martin and John Candy, we (finally) arrived in Glasgow on Friday afternoon. Here's how it went:

Dallas – Thanksgiving morning. No worries. Pippa was safely deposited with Auntie Lori and we even finished packing and readying ourselves to go a half hour early. Great. So we get to DFW which was absolutely deserted. Checked in and through security faster than Bob's your Uncle. Then we sat. 4 hours later, our plane departed.

Flight to Heathrow was uneventful. Heathrow was a madhouse. It was like being in the middle of Koyannisqatsi. Commuter flight to Edinburgh. Check. Bus to Glasgow. Check. Taxi to our hotel. Check. And presto – 36 hours after we left Dallas, we're here in Glasgae. Where it's warmer than in Dallas. Go figure.

Our hotel is great. It's a rock n roll themed place, run by young women (more on that later). Our room is bedecked with wallpaper commemorating all of the bands that have come out of Scotland. And the muzak in the public areas are punk and 80s. My Shazam has been on overdrive. The Ibis Styles is the name of our hotel. Highly recommended.



Initial impressions of Glasgow: It gets dark really early and stays dark for a really long time. The sky darkens about 2:30 p.m. and doesn't get light again until about 8 a.m. "Light" being a relative term. While we haven't seen any sun, we seem to have missed all the rain. So far. There was a bit of blue sky yesterday as we strolled on Buchanan Street – which seems to be the main drag in the area we're staying in. Buchanan street is all tricked out for Christmas – as is everywhere we've been so far – and its annual Christmas market is in full swing. I don't know why, but I didn't expect that. It's really festive here.



Normally, I'm not a day drinker. Normally, I don't drink beer. Normally, I don't drink Scotch. Fuhgeddabout it. We went into a pub at 11 a.m. innocently thinking we'd have a light libation before continuing our perambulations. We left at 3 p.m. After 2 pints of Tennents and some Scotch provided by our new friend, Robert. Robert is a sales rep for Aberfeldie. Robert bought all of us Scotch. Robert assured us we'd see him in another pub before we leave. Robert is our friend.



And speaking of friends, we had a GREAT day yesterday. We met up with our cousin David Bate. David's a doctor who normally lives in Asheville (or what's left of it). He just "happened" to be in Scotland. There are no coincidences.



We also met up with Jr. Ranger Balazs "the Hungarian Bear Killer" Csafordas and his fiancée, Alika. You may remember Balazs from my Camino and Cockeyed Caravan blogs. I think he may be one of my guardian angels. It was our first time to meet Alika – who is great. Not surprising. She and Balazs make a great couple, and we are looking forward to seeing more of her in the future.



We capped off the day by having drinks (a common theme yesterday) with my pal Deborah Steed and her husband David. I haven't seen Deborah in 40 years and, as the cliché goes, it was as if no time had passed at all.

Tonight, Deborah, David, Balazs (sans Alik, just started a new job and has to go back to Vienna today), and my LAMDA friend Jane Campion Hoye (who we're meeting up with later today) are off to the awards ceremony for the European Film and Screenplay Festival. Gee. I wonder if alcohol will be served.

Adriana and I really like Glasgow. The people are incredibly friendly and down to earth. It seems to be a young city where young people predominate. What most impresses me is that there seems to be a lot of gender equality. I don't notice patriarchal behavior here. The women

take no shit from men and the men don't seem to give women a problem. Young and old mix freely. I like that. There are a lot of tattoos here and more people smoke than I'm used to seeing.

So now we're off to Boots (the U.K. drug store chain) to get a razor as I should probably shave before tonight's proceedings. If I win, I can celebrate with a drink. If I don't win, I can drown my sorrows. Oy. In truth, I've already won as I'll be with old friends and new who made the effort to come and support me. I am touched beyond words.

December 2, 2024: Glasgow Rocks

Seriously, when was the last time you heard "Daddy Cool"? I had breakfast to its melodious strains this morning after a full day yesterday. It was quickly followed up with a disco version of Stumblin' In. I really like my hotel and its celebration of Scottish bands.

Quick recap: Our hotel is located on the edge of the central business district. That means a lot of the restaurants around our hotel are closed on Sundays. In addition, it was St. Andrew's Day weekend – which is kind of like the 4th of July in the U.S. minus children blowing their fingers off with errant Roman Candles. Finding lunch was a challenge, shall we say.

First, we considered going back to the Grant Arms – scene of our previous day's alcohol-fueled triumph where Adriana and Alika befriended one of the mourners who had just returned from the memorial service for former First Minister Alexander Salmon. However, considering the events of the previous day, we didn't want to risk being found face down on a table singing By the Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond, so we continued our search.

We finally found a pub that was open. They advertised lunch service. Good enough. We go in, take a set, and tune into the Watling/Queen's Park Rangers match. No waitress. No worries. We go to the bar and ask about ordering, only to be told their cooker was "off" and there was no food service. Okay. Fair enough. So, we head down the Argyle Street and find another restaurant. Looks nice. We go in. The Matre'd is very nice, but it was Sunday. Sunday means roast in Glasgow, and everyone was having roast, so there was no room for us. Off we go. Again.

The next place we get to that's open is Wetherspoon's. Wetherspoon's is kind of like a step down from Denny's. After we sanitized the menu, we tried to order by scanning the QR code. It didn't work.

By now, the Hungarian Bear Killer was growling. So, we headed out Davy Crockett style to find us a 'bar to kill. No luck. Balazs then headed back to his hotel and we headed back to ours, where we found a 7-11 style sandwich to munch on before dressing for the big soiree.

After we suited up, we met at the Radisson for a libation with my LAMDA bud Jane Campion Hoye, her husband Mike, the human encyclopedia Deborah Steed and her husband David, and the HBK before heading over to the Glasgow Trades Hall for the Main Event. We were all hungry, but we knew there would be food soon.....Uh....

We get to the Glasgow Trades Hall (ca. 1767). Very nice and posh in a Hogwarts kind of way.



Champagne, hors d'oeuvres, etc. Then we take our seats. No food. Eek. We are all famished and somewhat annoyed that there was no food for an event starting at 6:30 and for which we weren't told there wouldn't be dinner.



Fortunately, my event came up in the first segment. 8 nominees for Best Feature Screenplay. Guess who won? Not me. So, we collectively decided to cut out at the first intermission and find some place to eat. And for our perseverance, we found Margo's. All I can say is, Margo's was fabulous. Great food, great service – no – extraordinary service, reasonably priced. We closed the joint, but what a night! It was one of the best nights of my life with such good and dear friends. I didn't get a little trophy, but I got something a lot better. I will remember last night for the rest of my life.

Unfortunately, all good things come to an end. We saw Jane and Mike off this morning, and we were suddenly on our own. On the recommendation of my LAMDA bud Sally, we hopped a

Scottish rail for Pollok Country Park. Our conductor (Alan) was covered from jawline to wrists in tats. He was also wearing a golf shirt and shorts. It was 41 degrees and he's in shorts. The Scots are hardy people.

When we got to Pollok Country Park, we saw the hairy coos (I know what you're thinking, you nasty people). No, a hairy coo is the Scottish national cow. I am going to ask you question about hairy coos tomorrow, when you'll have a chance to win a Broyhill Living Room Suite, an Amana Radar Range (from the Spiegel Catalog – that's Spiegel, Chicago 60609) or a wee giftie of my choosing from Edinburgh. We also saw a monument to the animals who sacrificed their lives in the first war to end all wars, and the Burrell Collection – which was astonishing. Must be fun to be rich. 8000 items from all over the world. It's the largest private collection ever donated to a city. So, suck on that William Randolph Hearst.

We headed back to Glasgow as the sun was setting, the strains of 2000 Miles by the Pretenders dancing sugarplums in my head. I will always associate the Pretenders with my time at LAMDA as Brass in Pocket came out then and I used it in a play I directed at that time. Curiously, Brass in Pocket is playing in my rock 'n roll hotel as I write this. There are no coincidences. Have a bonny night, my wee ones and I'll check in tomorrow.

December 3, 2024: It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas

What do you know about the Duke of Wellington and umbrellas? Unless you're Deborah Steed, not a lot I bet. In the first Peninsular War at the siege of Bayonne, the British officers raised their brollies to keep their uniforms dry. Duke Artie nixed the whole idea, and the French ultimately signed an armistice, not knowing that Emperor Nap had trotted off to Elba the previous week.

Fast forward a year to a little place in Belgium called Waterloo. The French, in true Monty Python style, waved their private parts in Artie's auntie's general direction, taunting the British about their unmanly umbrellas. Artie ordered his officers to lower their brollies and the rest, as they say, is history (BTW, Artie's umbrella concealed a hidden sword).

Last night, Adriana and I celebrated the memory of Artie and his crew with a wonderful dinner at The Duke's Umbrella, where we had attempted to eat on Sunday but were turned away because Sunday is "roast day" in Glasgow. Sorry, Balazs. I had a Christmas dinner replete with Turkey, dressing, and roasted cranberries. It was "tasty good", as my friend Dave Graham would say. I'm currently stocking up on Christmas ("stocking." Get it?) as I'm having sinus surgery on the 19th and expect to be laid up on the big day.

And speaking of hairy coos (no, not that you dirty minded buggers), without looking at yesterday's post, who can tell me about the HC's horns. First correct answer wins a trinket of my choosing from Oul' Reeky, where we are headed in an hour or so.

Our cab driver to the train station was a hoot. He asked us about Trump. We were noncommittal for fear of Kash Patel monitoring our conversation. Our cabbie said the Scots generally think Trump is great for comic relief. My British friends can't understand how our country could possibly vote for him. Great. One more thing to be embarrassed about for being American.

The train ride to Edinburgh, or “Edinburger” in the words of our cab driver, was simple enough. 1 hour and 10 minutes. The sun was even out as we glided through the countryside.

Edinburgh is all decked out for the holidays. Very pretty in a tasteful sort of way. Not a single deflated sagging mutant Grinch or Santa. The Christmas Market was in full swing. Even the Manson Family got into the act.

After a lovely stroll on Prince’s Street and a stop at Boots, which after all is made for walkin’, we hit the Grass Market for a return to the scene of the crime. Jason, Shawn, Bryan, remember? We had the mussels in tribute to you.

On our stroll back to our digs, we passed a Spanish tapas place. I had to go in and ask for the owner. His name is Ignacio. No relation. However, I still maintain there are no coincidences.

Time now for a snooze as the silver rain is falling down. One more day (wah!), then back to . . . whatever it is we’re going back to.











December 4, 2024: South of 40 degrees there is no Law. South of 50 degrees there is no God.

Before we get into today's post, I want to congratulate alert readers Mary Lou Alter and Ruth Landry Jones who (sort of) correctly identified the significance of the horniness of the Hairy Coos (What? Again? You filthy bastards!). The horns of female hairy coos point upwards. The horns of male hairy coos point sideways or downwards.

Today was our last day in Scotland. Adriana has come down with a cold and feels rotten, so today I was mostly on my own.

I started off with a visit to St. Giles. St. Giles is located on the Royal Mile, which runs from Holyrood Palace to Edinburgh Castle. If you look down the Royal Mile, you can see the Firth of Forth.



The skinny on St. Giles is that it was a Catholic cathedral for 400 years (ca. 1100 to 1500). Then, 'Enry the Eighth decided he wanted a divorce from Catherine of Aragon (who, by all accounts, seems to have been very nice), so he invented the C. of E. Only problem was that, by this time, there was John Knox, who invented Presbyterianism because he thought the C. of E. was too much like Catholicism. Ole Johnny Boy, like Sick Boy in Trainspotting (an Edinburgh favorite), decided to shake things up by having a bunch of Presbyterians sign a Covenant which

basically said “Heck no, we won’t go” . . . to mass. The “Covenanters” took over St. Giles, Johnny was installed as the Big Boss, and presto, changeo, St. Giles was no longer a cathedral. The Covenanters were eventually kicked out of Scotland, going first to the Ulster Plantation (Belfast), then on to America. If you’re of Scotch-Irish descent, this may well be how your antecedents arrived in America.



I like St. Giles. Those of you who have been following my recent screenplay endeavors probably know that I like WWI stuff. St. Giles has my favorite Great War memorial.



After paying respects to Captain Primrose and lighting a candle for the Departed, I took off for Dundee. It's a one-hour ride from Edinburgh to Dundee Station. The cool thing is that the train travels on one of the three bridges that span the Firth of Forth. Those three bridges are, collectively, historically significant to Edinburgh history. The first person who can tell me what the significance is will win a Scottish trinket of my choosing.

So, why exactly did I go to Dundee? Those of you who know me well, or who followed my Antarctic blog, know that I'm interested in the heroic age of Antarctic exploration. "What has that to do with Dundee?" you may well ask. Well, the ship *Discovery* was built in Dundee. As was the *Terra Nova* – the ship that re-supplied the *Discovery* after its first Antarctic winter 1901-1902 and the ship that ferried Captain Scott and his ill-fated companions on their quest to be the first to reach the South Pole ten years later.

The Discovery was the first ship Scott commanded to take a little trip down south. Scott and a host of other players who show up throughout the next 20 years of Antarctic exploration cut their teeth on the Discovery expedition – Scott, Bill Wilson, Edgar Evans, Tom Crean, Shackleton, Apsley Cherry-Gerard. Wilson had only been married 3 weeks before he took off on the Discovery, whose mission was scientific discovery, not to achieve the Pole. And yet. . . You just know that as soon as they returned to England that crew was chomping at the bit to go back. Sledges and dogs, you morons!

The exhibits were visually interesting, but plain vanilla in their explanations. They left out all of the political intrigue – Markham's snobbish predilections, Scott's insecurities and his jealousy of Shackleton, the backbiting of the crew, etc. No matter. It was cool to see the ship (which is undergoing renovation). Especially a peek at Scott's quarters, which were lavish compared to the other officers.

As the fates decreed, there is a presentation tomorrow night about Shackleton's time in Scotland (he lived in Edinburgh for a time) and the recent discovery of the Endurance, his boat that got smushed in the ice which resulted in his desperate journey across 800 miles of some of the most turbulent waters on earth in an open boat in order to rescue his stranded men. Dang. Missed it by one day.



DISCOVERY'S LIFE RING

Canvas life ring used on board *Discovery* during the National Antarctic Expedition 1901-1904. Below is an image of Edward Wilson, the expedition's zoologist and artist, looking through the ring on the deck.



When I got back to Edinburgh, I took a stroll through the Christmas market, bought a giftie, and hopped the bus for Bruntsfield High Street just as it began to rain. I met Adriana for a farewell dinner at Montpelier's (our new favorite place in Edinburgh) and got back to our guest house to pack up and turn in early as we're up at 5 am tomorrow. Amazing. As I write this, I'm sitting in Edinburgh, Scotland where it's windy and rainy. In 27 hours, I'll be in Dallas, where . . . All things considered, I'd rather be in Scotland.

Thanks to you all for joining me for a most wonderful and memorable week. It's good to have friends. That means you.