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10/15/2023

Diary of a Clearance Fiend



Arrived Sun July 30

I watched three movies in business class and got about 4 hours of sleep. We made the bed when we first arrived so now when we are both ready to collapse, we have someplace to lay our weary heads. Darwin immediately set up the computers so we can be in touch with family.

Reclaiming the flat is nice, especially as I get to just toss so much in the rubbish knowing we will never be back here. But I have already found a few treasures.

Mon July 31

Everything is a challenge but it is so sweet when you succeed. It took me 45 minutes to figure out how to set the clock on the oven!

Our priority today is to get some fresh food. We had to put in light bulbs and fine extension cords. No phones yet but emailing is just fine!



It stays light until 9 here and gets light at about 5:30. I have a wonderful full leafy tree outside the bedroom window which gives us privacy and a nice view. It is supposed to rain for a week which is fine by me...we have found the umbrellas!

I have huge piles of things to get rid of already...lots and lots of rubbish. But it is making me feel lighter.

I found a mystery novel in the book shelves so I am going to read for a while and try to relax as it is 6 am and we have been awake since 3:30 am

The first food delivery cancelled earlier today but I rescheduled and we now have fresh food including duck breast and turkey sausage. But it was so late, we ordered from Pizza Hut. My first time ever...that food will kill you it is so fatty and the salad was miniature. But it gave us some strength. I have another order coming on Wed...ostrich steaks and

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white anchovies. We have not been out of the flat yet as we are both quite exhausted. Everywhere I turn there is something to sort out. I am limiting myself to sentimental stuff so far, but I have not started on the art or art supplies or the china. So far one small box to come home and everything else is rubbish or charity.

Jet lag and bad food has kicked up my indigestion. I need to get back on schedule.

Yeah, and thanks to Darwin, I am now able to WhatsApp's with the American phone and make calls with the UK phone.

Our bed is amazing. The mattress is so much better than the one in the USA. I have to check and see what kind it is. I left one here 25 years ago from Harrods. Could it possibly be the same one??? Nope it is new, but I don't remember paying for a new mattress. I am just thankful.

Tues Aug 1

I had no idea I was such a pack rat! The biggest pile is rubbish, so far. The second biggest is electrical stuff which probably has to go to a separate pick-up service. Pretty soon I will need to do something as the flat is full of bags of trash and it is getting fuller.



Good news is that I have set up a fan and light right by my bed now so I can cool off and take breaks and I can read at night. We put the dining room table back together last night so I have a staging area for what I want to bring back. 12 screws and some planning on our part...I had to google how to put together a Regency two pedestal wood antique dining table and it helped me figure it out. Those regency people were clever.

I slept 12 hours last night so I am in proper jet lag instead of the sleep deprived first phase. Darwin and I both were so sore this morning, but hoping to loosen up during the day. We actually have a touch of sunshine now. Opps, now it is gone, but we might try and leave the flat in the next few days. The tenants pretty much stripped the flat even took the mirror that was screwed to the wall, but I could care less as I am probably not a pretty site right now. However, I have found some glamour shots from the past.



It has been easy to throw thing out but pretty soon I will get to the personal things. Like birthday cards and all sorts of papers like a note back from UK Gov telling me that my request to have the head master of the school I taught at considered for the Queen's honors list. I have no memory of writing that at all.

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Thurs Aug 3

I found a whole box of mystery stories today and have chosen 6 to read since I can't get my books on phone right now. I can usually read a book every other day, but I am so busy, I have been reading the same one since I arrived. The current book was published in 1997 and the pages are yellow but it is about a murder in a retirement home and quite fun to read.... lots of crazy characters. 15 book boxes arrived...onward ever onward.

Found the antique mirror on top of a built-in closet, with chairs and pots in front of it. Now what do I do with it? Maybe my dear friend Alison will want it.

Just finished boxing 8 carton of books: cook books, classical novels, modern novels, maps and travel and 4 boxes of art books... all my inspiration and all available online now! Progress is being made.

I am making piles of stuff, but the pile of things to keep will need a second and third pass as I get more ruthless! I see now the advantage of getting rid of things bit by bit instead of all at once.

Finally found glass candle stick holder, I think from my sister Dion. Very tall and thin. I have about 50 green candles. I was told burning green candles brings you money luck and it seems to have worked for me!



We had duck breast for lunch with leftover potatoes and some roasted broccoli with a 1988 red. Yum. A little bit vinegar but I like vinegar. Darwin is opening old wine and we are finding some drinkable ones and he is enjoying the wine as an adventure!

Didn't sleep almost at all last night so maybe an early night. I am on an organizing high, it seems.

Sat Aug 5

I spent the last hours going through Darwin's and my x's James' love letters to me. I threw out all the greeting cards and just kept the letters. I now see that as a writer, it was easy for James to write of undying love and how happy he was with me. Darwin's letters are more fraught (second marriages, can we trust each other) but he also was driven to write me poems.... a way for a man who uses few words to express himself. I had two boxes, a rather flimsy white box for Darwin and a Saks Fifth Avenue box for James. I put James in an orange folder and now Darwin has the elegant and sturdy black shiny Saks box!

Three more days I have given myself of sorting and then I will start calling more friends and lining up help to take some of this rubbish away.

We are still having trouble with the phones especially trying to use uber eventually when we do go out. Plus, the loo seat has been slipping and Darwin has tried three different fixes. I think he finally got it. That man never gives up on a challenge. We did our first wash today and it was ok, but the clothes have been in the dryer for hours. I only brought one nightie, so I was waiting to put it on. Finally gave up and wore my t-shirt to bed. We will dry the clothes over chairs and radiators like the old days and just put them in the dryer to fluff them at the very end.

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Sun Aug 6 – yesterday the neighbors were playing croquet in the backyard and today they gave a party for their little fairy princess daughter GiGi. So adorable to watch and actually very well behaved. So terrible English!



Mon Aug 7

A red-letter day. Darwin fixed the loo seat, put a new handle on the dishwasher (a ball!) so we can now open it and a new handle on the fridge. Both are make-do solution but very clever. We walked to the post box and back...a big outing.

Aug 8 Tuesday

We went to lunch today...hurrah. A couple of blocks in the rain there and back and I was pooped. But I found a good cheese shop and a bakery. Lunch was foie gras and chicken pate, smoked salmon and confit of duck. Too full for dessert.



(mine is not signed!)

I discover a hoard of art posters that I got in the 70's and 80's and they might be worth a penny or two. I found a small gallery on Abbeville Road next to the cheese shop and they might be interested in seeing them. Keeping my fingers crossed that this might help pay for the shipping. We have pretty much decided to bring home the dining room table and all the wedding china and some very pretty champagne glasses, a Waterford bowl and vase.

You see, life has been quite uneventful for the first day. It has been heads down and sorting....old memories and hard decisions about what to keep and what to throw. Quick tip, if you have documents that you are unsure about, take a photo on your phone and store on your computer. Makes throwing away much easier.

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Aug 9 Wed

This is supposed to be my last day of sorting. Art supplies and tools today which I managed to do and it feels great. I even have a space now to make art. But I still have not been ruthless about the photo albums or even looked at the slides. However, company starts to come the end of this week: we have seven dates and we still have a few more dates to set. With the work and the fun, will I survive this trip? I just have to in order to go back to Cardiff and sort out all those paper files at home!

Aug 10 Thurs

Back in the day, documentation of art work was always by slides. That is what you needed for press and to submit to exhibitions. And slides can't be duplicated so you took 2-3 of every image, sometimes more. Now I only need one image of each art work to archive. So, it is like a game to sort like images and throw out extras. Right now, that is a stretch too much for me, so they are all being shipped home. If and when I get them sorted out, I can have them digitized.



Aug 11 Fri

Art is now packed up and I am bringing home lots of pictures no one in the US has seen!

Sun, Aug 13th

COVID finally arrived at our household. Poor Darwin is suffering. He is from Minnesota so he often answers with yup and nope and so it is hard to tell, but he is miserable and uncomfortable, but is still eating and drinking, has no trouble breathing and no fever. It is frustrating when someone you love is sick, you worry, but sometimes there is nothing you can do but be there. I am still testing negative today, but I have been everywhere he has been and sharing our bed, so the best I can do is think positive to stay negative.



Clarice Cliff Ornament for our xmas tree 2023 – Made from broken napkin rings and my trusty glue gun.

I can't believe I went through all my supplies and found no glue gun. With 17 more days here, this is an essential so Darwin ordered it and I have already put it to good use. Now that we are officially isolating, I have time to use some of my art materials.

Sat Aug14

I may not get to see much art, but I am still researching what I might want to see.

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Andy Warhol: The Textiles at the Fashion and Textile Museum. Read the Guardian Review: [‘They could have ended up cut to bits and used for cushions’: the lost textiles of Andy Warhol](#)

Hilma Af Klint & Piet Mondrian Forms Of Life at The Tate Modern. Read the Guardian Review: [Hilma af Klint & Piet Mondrian: Forms of Life](#) review – a thrillingly odd couple



Tuesday, Aug 15

I bought this in London at least 30 years. It is a Mexican box and when you open the doors, it is a little hat maker displaying his wares. This is so perfect for our 20th Anniversary Celebration, Hats On happening Sept 16 from 6-10 at ICA North. If you want to see it in person, purchase tickets [HERE](#) or [VOLUNTEER](#) for free admittance and food.



Weds. Aug 16

It just dawned on me that I probably never have to buy perfume again. I saved perfume of my mother's when she passed, I have a collection at home in Cardiff and now I have five more bottled of half used scent here that I will bring home. I shall waft through the rest of my life on a cloud of aromas.

Sat. Aug 19

COVID sucks but in the UK you can go around the NHS and go private. That is what we did and we found out we are doing pretty well and should be negative by the time we are ready to board the plane home. But moving house, COVID, and now Hurricane Hilary....is this a cosmic joke? I am writing this before the storm is due to strike southern California and keeping my fingers crossed that I don't have to pack up the entire flat and send it to Cardiff by the Sea to refurbish a new home!

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Epilogue: August 30th, 2023



We have now both tested negative for COVID. Such a relief! Shippers for our items going home, British Heart Foundation for all the donations to charity and a few special friends have been by to collect our good furniture and prized possessions. The flat is naked as the day it was born. We are currently in a luxury hotel near the airport and I am eating chocolate and much relieved to have a mission accomplished.

So, not at all the trip we had expected. My great joy was to make 4 small sculptures and one small painting while I was here. I am bringing home a load of art that no one in the USA has seen. Visiting with a few friends and talking to many on the phone made me feel more connected to them. We all vowed to stay in touch.



The last full day in the flat was to sort all the alcohol and hard liquor. Good friends arrived in the morning and we plowed through some small bottles of sweet wine (served with a strong munster cheese and runny honey). We then moved on to port comparison. We had a tot of whiskey but the star of the show was the bottle of 1989 Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin La Grande Dame Brut which was so good that instead of sipping and spitting, I did guzzle a bit. I looked it up and it retails for \$340...but it was not going to get any better and it made a wonderful last impression.



Our biggest regret was not getting to socialize more and especially not to see our cherished friends [Boyd & Evans: High Time](#), at their retrospective at the Milton Keynes Museum. We missed our lunch with them and the glory of this show for which I had pre-read the catalog from cover to cover. Sadly, their dealer since they began their careers,

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Angels Flowers died in August at age 90. Not to see any art exhibitions at all while in London has never happened to me. COVID only gave me the strength to take care of my dear husband and pack up the house.



We have promised ourselves to go to The Broad when we return to see the Keith Haring exhibition and I am bringing home four posters, two of his, one of Kim MacConnell, which I hope to get signed and one of Niki de St. Phalle, which is signed and which will go into the silent auction on Sept 16th at the [SDVAN/Synergy 20th Anniversary celebration HATS ON](#). The poster is valued at about \$750, but the starting bid is only \$200. If you have not bought your [tickets](#) yet, please do so. It is not too late to sign up to [volunteer](#) and get a complimentary ticket. By the way, while in LA, we plan to go to Sparrow Italia as we had to cancel that reservation in London.

I have learned so many things on this trip:

1. I loved my time in London, but it is time to say goodbye. Having COVID actually makes that easier. I always find it charming especially Abbeville Rd, but the high street is dirty and I am just getting too old for public transportation. I need my car!
2. Giving away things when your friends choose what they want is as satisfying as selling a work of art. Old friends are sweet to take some of your possessions especially as they are all down-sizing themselves. If you want to spread the wealth, you need children or young friends. I am so happy we are digital now and only have to deal with papers and photos pre-1998. But holding those old letters in your hands and reading them is very special indeed.
3. I always thought extra money was for indulgencies. I was not much good at luxury except for champagne. But now I realize that throwing money at a problem is a very big stress reliever when it works and I am very happy I have a bit extra now from selling the flat to lessen life's anxieties.
4. My art continues to sustain me and center me. I feel very privileged to still be able to gather items and make them into art objects and paint when the muse inspires me.

My clearance fiend days are not over as I have to make room for our shipment, but our travel in the near future might be a bit closer to home. We are looking forward to seeing family and friends in the USA. Thank you for your patience with my writing and support through a challenging time.

My love as always,
Patricia