

Around the World in 380 Days

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Week 1: Berkeley Bound

Fixing the date for the start of a sabbatical is more an art than a science. Officially, sabbatical leave at the University of Maryland runs from August 22 to May 21, which corresponds roughly to the start and end dates of the and Spring semesters, respectively. But that ignores the summers, which is when sabbaticals really start and end. So for the purpose of this diary, I've decided to tell the story by week (with weeks starting on Mondays), and to start with the first week in which I did something that I would not have done had it not been for my sabbatical. So the story starts on Monday, July 15.

It was a bit of an anticlimactic start, since nothing of note actually happened that day. Unless you count housecleaning, which for me is rare enough to be noteworthy! I spent part of the day at the University (of Maryland), meeting with a couple of faculty and a student, and then stopped in for the opening talk at the 2009 Digital Humanities conference (which happened to be on campus). Tuesday and Wednesday were more packed with meetings, preparations for my departure, and less time than I would have liked at the Digital Humanities conference.

Then on Thursday, at 5:50 AM, I was on the road. Some might say that the early departure was needed to beat the rush hour, but the truth is that it was really needed to arrive at the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio a couple of hours before closing time. In Washington, people rave about the new Udvar Hazy branch of the National Air and Space Museum, but that's because they haven't been to Dayton.

After the museum closed, it was on to Urbana-Champaign. Any good sabbatical should include visits to several universities, so the home of the University of Illinois seemed like as good a place as any to spend the first night. The next day found me passing through Iowa City, home of the University of Iowa, but I was unable to reach a colleague there by phone or email so I pressed on to North Platte, Nebraska. At the previous town, Lexington, it had been pretty clear that there was a line of thunderstorms ahead. As a pilot, I never get to fly through a line of thunderstorms (too dangerous), so I passed up the opportunity to stay in Lexington and pressed on to North Platte. On arrival in North Platte it turned out that most of the hotels were full – apparently because of the “dangerous” storm that I had just come through. I suppose everything is relative.

The next day included a stop to go jogging near Cheyenne (from which it turns out to be possible to run all the way to the Colorado border – it was about half a mile!), lunch in Laramie (across the street from the University of Wyoming – at a restaurant called the Library – where the staff wore t-shirts that say “tell your mother the truth – you were at the Library”) and then on to Salt Lake City. The last day of the trip was by far the most scenic – they don't call it the Great Salt Lake for nothing. Just across the Nevada border at the edge of the lake (in West Wendover) the casinos begin. And they don't stop until

you get to just north of Reno (home of the annual Reno Air Races, which I hope to make it to this year). Then on to Berkeley.

Renting a room sight unseen is a tad adventurous, but the last couple of months have been busy enough that flying to California just to check out a place to live simply wasn't in the cards. It turns out that the place is just as advertized. Clean, nicely furnished, with a bit of a view of San Francisco. And, most importantly, wireless Internet. The neighborhood's not the greatest – the nice shops Berkeley is famous for are quite a ways away. But the apartment is the entire second floor of an old house with quite a lot of character, and being on the second floor seems safe enough. Time will tell. Maybe if the street were not called Alcatraz Avenue it would be less ominous ...

Which brings me to the end of week 1. This week has truly been an accomplishment of modern technology. Wake up one morning near Washington DC with an intent to drive to California. Less than four days later, arrive in California, and do so with a vehicle that can quite easily move me around the state. And do it for no more than half a week's wages at the average salary of a worker in the U.S. (which is darn close to what faculty get paid!). Simply amazing.

Week 2: Settling In

Never one to plan ahead, I sent Ray Larson (my host here at Berkeley) a note the night I arrived, letting him know that I was here. The next morning, my email contained a note from Ray letting me know that he would be in on Monday morning. So, still being on east coast time, I headed over to the University of California at Berkeley to see Ray on Monday morning. And found out just how far that was! Now I normally run three miles at least three times a week, so my working definition of "far" is "more than three miles." But, of course, you need to come back. It turns out that UC Berkeley is about a 50 minute walk – good exercise. And a 50 minute walk back – such good exercise that I would not be likely to do it voluntarily! But, of course, a one way trip would be a tad suboptimal ...

In addition to meeting with Ray, Monday was a good day to get started on the administrative details of a sabbatical here. The usual forms for things like a library card and building access turned out to be very well streamlined, so that didn't take much time. Michael Buckland happened by late that morning, so we had lunch together with one of his students, Ryan. Tuesday was spent catching up on some reviewing (foolishly, I had agreed to serve on the program committee of three different SIGIR workshops!). Wednesday, I had lunch with Judd, another doctoral student who I had met for the first time on Monday. And I went by the public library to check out my first book there (by Owen Garriott, about Skylab). Thursday, Fred Gey, a colleague from TREC, CLEF, and NTCIR, introduced me to one of his friends from Lawrence Berkeley Labs – I may give a talk there some time this fall.

Friday was a holiday (Independence Day, although a day early), so I headed out on a cross country trip to Treasure Island, Point Reyes, Muir Woods, and Tiburon. Point

Reyes turned out to be the high point of the trip. Nearly thirty years ago, I used to “coast out” over a navigation aid at Point Reyes, traveling at half the speed of sound, to scour the ocean for Russian submarines. On Friday, I walked the beach at Point Reyes at less than one percent of that speed, thinking about how much the world had changed. Tiberon was a close second, with the best steak I have had all year – maybe the best steak of the decade. Which, since it is the only decade so far this century, makes it the steak of the century!

Saturday, today, is the real Fourth of July. Which I celebrated by working on a proposal, jogging to the Amtrak station (which turns out to be a mile and a half from here) and watching the fireworks from my patio (it turns out the neighborhood is long on enthusiasm, and there must be an excellent fireworks purveyor nearby!). Not a bad way to wrap up my first week here. Actually, there’s one day left to go, but that’s predictably dedicated to that same proposal and to some reviewing. And then we’re on to week 3!

Week 3: Out and About

My second week here provided my first opportunity to get around to see some of the folks off campus who I plan to work with while I am here. The week started with a trip to H5, a legal e-discovery services firm in San Francisco. BART proved to be the best way to get there, and it also provided my first culture shock of the week. People I didn’t know struck up conversations with me. Nothing substantial – just “how’s the weather” sorts of things. The first time it happened, I thought it a bit odd. The second time, was a “no Toto, we’re not in Kansas anymore” moment (strangers don’t speak on the metro in Washington, nor on the subway in New York where I grew up). By the third time, I started wondering if they thought it was I who was odd with my clipped responses.

Tuesday was the first International Computer Science Institute (ICSI) speech lunch that I had a chance to attend. It’s a very dynamic and engaged group; I’ll speak there in September, and it was good to get an advance look at their style. John Canny from CS was speaking, and listening to him recount his interests, coupled with what Judd had told me about strengths of the iSchool faculty here, left me thinking that this might be a great place to deepen my understanding of what they call here “information for development” (e.g., finding ways to leverage information access to help jump start less developed economies).

Wednesday I headed down to Monterey to visit the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) and the Defense Language Institute. The purpose of bringing my car out had been to make trips like this possible. You can get to Monterey and back in a day (it’s about 2 hours each way), but for this first trip I elected to spend the night so as to have plenty of time to get to know the folks there. I’ll be working with Craig Martell from NPS and Pranav Anand from the University of California at Santa Cruz on a new project that should start in August; Pranav came down on Thursday and we spent some time scoping out what we plan to work on. Strangely, the next time we meet we’ll all be in Washington for the kickoff meeting. Few things make less sense than paying Berkeley rent while attending Washington meetings, but that’s the way the world works sometimes.

Friday was my first opportunity to join Michael, Ray, Fred and their students for one of their regular Friday research group meetings. I expect that this will be my principal research group while I am here, so it was good to have this chance to start getting to know some of the students and what they're working on. Then on Saturday I was off with the dawn patrol, with a 6 AM flight out of Oakland to get back to the east coast to pick up my plane. With a small detour to Florida to drive my mom to Washington. Yes, you read that right. Two weeks after driving coast to coast in four days, I set out to do a mini-version – driving only about half as far. Sort of like the cool-down lap that sprinters run. Except it didn't work out that way ...

Week 4: Cars, Planes, and Newspapers

Anyone who has visited my house over the past 20 years can tell you about the newspapers. There are typically newspapers everywhere, and on the rare occasions when there aren't, then there are enormous stacks of newspapers that used to be everywhere. I subscribe to the Washington Post, and I just can't bear to throw out a newspaper before I've read it. Which isn't always possible. So it should be no surprise that when the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) created a new grant program for helping scholars search through old newspapers, I felt compelled to put together a team and send in a proposal. There was just one catch – the proposal was due on the second day of my drive from Florida to Washington. As it turned out, there was no second day.

By happy coincidence, mom and I were able to arrange to start off a day earlier than we had planned, on Monday morning. Up at 6 AM, out at 7, her place at 8, on the road at 8:30, and we rolled into Washington at 12:30 AM Tuesday morning. A few minutes with Google Maps might leave you wondering if that's actually possible. Ask any college student going to Spring Break and they will tell you it is. Of course, we were driving in the other direction (and hence with less incentive), and between us we averaged about four times the age of your typical college student. Just to keep the trip from getting monotonous, I spent half the time on the phone with England while colleagues there worked on the proposal that we planned to submit together. And since we made the trip in one day, we had all day Tuesday and half of Wednesday for me to do my part. It didn't really all happen in 3 days – we had been working on this for more than a month – but it sure felt like it did!

The rest of the week was spent gathering up all those newspapers and the like, moving furniture, and generally getting my house in shape for mom. By the time I left on Saturday afternoon, things were in comparatively good shape. Note the qualifier, however; if my mom blogs about her year in my house, you'll get the straight story ...

In the early days of aviation there was a flyer named "Wrong Way" Corrigan. Not really the callsign you want to earn as a pilot. But, sure enough, I started out for San Francisco in my plane by flying to Boston. Which any map will confirm is the wrong way. Why go to Boston first? Quite simply, because it was the place to be.

Week 5: SIGIR

An academic conference is really three very different things that happen in the same place at the same time: papers, planning, and partying. The papers are the part that everyone talks about. What we call SIGIR (pronounced sig-eye-are) was more formally the 32nd Annual International ACM SIGIR Conference on Research and Development in Information Retrieval. If you're a search engine developer, it is indeed the place to be. The papers are the best and most current in the business – over 500 people send their best work there each year for consideration; fewer than 100 are selected to give talks. Which is still more talks than any one person could attend – there are three sessions going on simultaneously. So we had four people from our research group there to soak up as much as we could. But in the midst of all this, editorial boards for the main journals in the field meet, advisory boards convene for some of the major projects, and a host of other meetings and side events are scheduled for planning. And the evenings are devoted to partying. I helped to organize a day of professional development activities for Ph.D. students from around the world, worked with a recently graduated Ph.D. student (Scott Olsson) on the presentation of his paper and with a visiting scholar from China on a poster presentation, and spoke briefly at workshop on searching social media. Enough in one week to wear me out – SIGIR is always that way!

Some people spend a long time traveling to get to SIGIR – for SIGIR 2010 I should be able to win the prize for that. On Friday morning, I left Boston by small plane, heading for SIGIR 2010, which will be in Geneva, Switzerland. Again, I went the wrong way; this time flying to California, where I plan to rest up and adjust to the time change for 6 months or so. Then on to Australia, where I'll take another 6 months or so to adjust to the time change. And then finally on to Geneva. I expect that few others will be able to report having taking a full year to get from Boston to Geneva without spending much time at home in between. Truth be told, I'll be back to Washington at least twice in the fall, so it's not quite as straight a trip as I make it out to be. But it's still a good story.

Flying a small plane is essentially a form of communion with the weather. The two fundamental factors in flying are when and where. If you decide where you want to go, the weather tells you when you can go there. The harder one for many people to get their head around is the reverse; if you decide when you want to go, the weather tells you where you can go. For my cross-country trip, the when was (mostly) decided; I would leave from Boston on Friday to go somewhere. That somewhere turned out to be Port Clinton, Ohio. Perhaps you didn't know there was such a place – before that Friday, I didn't either. But it has a nice airport, a nearby hotel, and some fine scenery. And there was flyable weather between Boston and Port Clinton. Saturday then was a short jaunt over to Waukegan, just north of Chicago, to wait there for Monday morning. Why wait in Waukegan for Monday? Read on ...

Week 6: Celebrating Aviation

The busiest airport in the world is, depending in when you ask, in either Paris or Atlanta. Except for one week each year, when it is in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Ten thousand

airplanes converge on Oshkosh each year, for no better reason than that 9,999 others would be there. As it happened, Monday, July 27, was opening day at Oshkosh. And at 7:30 AM, half an hour after the field opened, I rolled to a stop on Runway 27. 8,000 planes were already there (most having arrived the weekend before). Oshkosh is part airshow, part campground, and part high-tech bazaar. But mostly it is simply a celebration of flight. Nice of the SIGIR folks to have scheduled their conference so as to make stopping at Oshkosh on the way home possible!

Monday evening's forecast called for thunderstorms, so an early departure from Oshkosh was in order. That made it possible to get all the way to Minot, North Dakota that evening, after a gas stop in Fargo. Then on Tuesday on to Glacier National Park in Montana, with some spectacular scenery, and some spectacular weather after arriving that I was glad to be observing from the ground rather than the air! Wednesday saw a fuel stop in Eugene, Oregon (where it was 110 degrees) and finally arrival at the airport in Concord, California, just over the hill from Berkeley (where it was 65 degrees). A quick trip home on BART completed the trip. Surprisingly, nobody struck up a conversation.

From Maryland to Berkeley had been about 30 hours of flying over 6 days. Driving and flying the same trip in such a short time invites comparison. Driving had been work, with a little sightseeing, and one occasion to think about the weather. Flying was living with the weather; planning around it, rescheduling around it, and, quite often, flying around it (circumnavigating thunderstorms, which was necessary on four of the six days). But flying was as relaxing as driving had been stressful; it's hard to explain to those who haven't done it. When you drive, you are seconds from death constantly. When you fly, you are seconds from death twice each flight. The rest of the time, you are mostly looking at the scenery, and waiting for where you want to be to appear under you. And checking the weather.

Week 7: Berkeley Again

This was the week in which I got started on what I expect to be my principal research topic here: oral history. Berkeley is home to the world's second-oldest oral history program, the Regional Oral History Office (ROHO). On Monday, I met with the ROHO director, Richard Candida Smith. One idea that we agreed seems promising is to draw together my interest in linking newspaper stories with my interest in oral history, essentially using news stories to embellish the content of the oral histories. I spent a part of the week trying that out on a NASA oral history, since as a space geek I know the issues people talk about in that collection fairly well. I picked Rusty Schweickart's first interview because Rusty is one of the more colorful characters among the Apollo astronauts, and one of the least studied. This turned out to be both interesting and enjoyable, so I would not be surprised to see this blossom into a full-fledged research program during my time here.

Saturday was my first chance to visit Napa Valley. I lived near here for about four years back in the early 1980's, but never managed to find the time to visit Napa's wineries. What better time for a little wine tasting than during a sabbatical? It turned out that

Sutter Home winery's tasting room was the first stop on the cheapskate's tour of Napa (which involves finding all the tasting rooms that have no tasting charge). And, by happy coincidence, that's where I found a five dollar bottle of wine I really liked: Sutter Home Chardonnay. So I decided to splurge and buy a bottle to bring home.

Week 8: What Happens in Vegas, Stays in Vegas

Week 8 started a contradiction, and with a view. Every border of Berkeley has a sign, posted by the city, that declares Berkeley to be a "Nuclear Free Zone." This is a tad strange, but I am guessing that most cities don't need such signs. Berkeley does. Perched high up the hill that defines the east side of the campus is the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, one of the Department of Energy's network of national research labs. All the research there is focused on fundamental science, but without those signs who knows what they might work on! I gave a talk there on Monday. And yes, the view from halfway up the hill is pretty spectacular.

Berkeley's Fall semester wasn't scheduled to start until the middle of the next week, so what's a boy with a plane to do? Fly to Las Vegas, of course. So Wednesday saw me out dodging mountains again in search of the luck and family. My aunt lives in Lake Havasu, and the real purpose of the trip was to visit her. And, by happy coincidence I learned from her that my cousin (her daughter) is living in Las Vegas. So it was family reunion time. We'll skip the part about what (might have) happened in Vegas, but in Lake Havasu I did get to not only see the London Bridge, which has indeed moved to Arizona, but also to see the complete historical account of how it got there.

Week 9: Starting the Semester, Sort Of ...

On the way back from Lake Havasu, I stopped in San Diego to see the Air and Space Museum there. As it happens, that's where Rusty Schweickart's Apollo 9 capsule is. Then a quick stop at Santa Barbara for lunch, followed by a gorgeous flight up the coast at low altitude. And then back to "work" here at Berkeley. On Wednesday I visited Clearwell, another e-discovery firm. Then, according to the schedule on Berkeley's Web site, Thursday was the start of the semester. On Thursday, nothing happened. It turns out that the first day of classes here is a very different thing from the start of the semester (which is some sort of administrative milestone), and that everyone knows that. Except me.

So, to mask my disappointment, I had lunch at Fisherman's Warf and walked across the Golden Gate Bridge. Well, okay, halfway across the Golden Gate Bridge. But I walked back too ... so I walked far enough to have completely crossed the Golden Gate Bridge.

Week 10: Why 2,419 Miles is Not Nearly Far Enough

Monday was one of those days that reminds you how small this world really is. I had lunch with a friend in Berkeley, and then slept that night at home in Maryland. In between I did what I usually do – sat in front of my computer for several hours. Except

this time the computer and I were moving at 500 miles an hour towards Maryland. The reason for the trip was to attend a principal investigator's meeting for a new research project, but it also provided an opportunity for me to catch up with what's happening back at Maryland. So I spent Tuesday afternoon at the University, Wednesday through mid-day Friday at the meeting (in nearby Virginia), and then hot back to Berkeley in time for dinner Friday evening. The moral of the story is that if you really want to get away, 2,419 miles (the distance between the San Francisco International Airport and Washington's Dulles International Airport) is simply not far enough.

It turned out that I made it back just in time for the 50th anniversary of the Berkeley Space Sciences Lab. For that anniversary, folks came back from around the world (one fellow I chatted with over coffee normally sits on top of a volcano in Hawaii. Looking up, when most of us would be looking down ...). The most interesting part of the event (for we computer folks, anyhow) was learning about the SETI@Home project, which the Space Science Lab runs. The key idea is that they get an enormous number of people to donate spare cycles on their personal computers to the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) by downloading a screen saver that grabs a piece of the problem off the Berkeley servers, computes on it for a while, and sends back the results. What's interesting is not that this is possible, but that it works. Their 3 million users together contribute more computing power each day than the world's largest supercomputer. It's not the world's greenest computer – it takes a lot of power to run all those separate machines – but it is the world's most powerful number crunching machine. SETI@Home is open source, so if you want to set up StringTheory@Home you can. But there seems to be something special about E.T. – nobody else has been able to capture the public imagination as well as the original SETI@Home project has. Which just goes to show that it's not your technology that makes the most difference – it's what you do with it.

Week 11: The Real Beginning

Finally, eleven weeks into my sabbatical, Berkeley and I got in sync ... they were actually having a semester here at the same time that I was having a sabbatical here! On Monday, I had the opportunity to sit in on my first class, and on Tuesday, I gave a talk at ICSI that generated some good discussion. Wednesday saw me off at one of the local E-Discovery companies, Cataphora, learning more about how that industry is evolving. I am particularly intrigued by how the relationship between the e-discovery industry and academia has evolved – there seems to be a remarkably strong connection with research on computational linguistics, and (as best I can tell), a surprisingly weak connection with research on information seeking behavior. I still have a lot to learn, though.

Week 12: What Goes Down Must Go Up

One fact about Berkeley that is hard to miss is that it is built on a hill. Which means that bike rides from campus to home are easy, which is more than can be said for bike rides from home to campus! At Maryland, I try to go running run three times each week. Here, it's enough to just go to work three times each week!

The most interesting thing that happened this week was that I had my first opportunity to participate in the weekly seminar here on Information and Communications Technology for Development (ICTD). That's "development" as in "international development," a real strength here at Berkeley. Before I left Maryland, I had worked with a team on a proposal to foster the development of academic libraries in Africa, so this is a topic of particular interest to me. Much of the time in this meeting was devoted to a report by Josh, a grad student who had spent the summer in Rwanda researching the ways in which people use their cell phones. He has data that I would never have even dreamed of trying to collect. This sabbatical is turning out to be an exceptional opportunity to expand my perspective.

Week 13: Not Quite as Fast as a Speeding Bullet

If I told you a story about eight guys who went out and bought old military jets, flew them to an abandoned Air Force Base in Nevada, laid out a race course, and staged a race, you might think I was at least stretching the truth a bit. But that's not even half the story. This is the Reno Air Races, held every year at the former Stead Air Force Base, which of course is in Stead (Nevada), a suburb of Reno. They have all kinds of planes racing, including biplanes, World War 2 training planes, and custom-built "formula one" racing planes. But nothing else comes close to the audacity of racing jets. If you've seen the movie *Top Gun*, you have some idea what I am talking about. Except that that kind of flying isn't really done – real dogfight training takes place way up high, not down among the mountains. Yes, the military does fly down low too, but when they do, they are just going from point A to point B and trying to avoid being seen on radar. But at Reno, the jets fly at 100 feet, at 500 miles an hour, in a constant turn, in a valley with mountains several hundred feet above where they are flying. And they do this for nearly 10 minutes, jockeying for position the entire time. If I hadn't seen it, I wouldn't have believed that it really happens this way.

I went to Reno the way you're supposed to – by flying. Unlike Oshkosh, only participants are welcome at Stead, so I flew into the main Reno airport. Which is a quick hour and a half from Concord, where I keep my plane. I flew over on Tuesday afternoon, and back Thursday morning. Wednesday is the first day of the Air Races, so the crowd was thinner than it will be over the weekend, and the sense of competition was not yet as strong – these are the early heats that establish the starting order for later days. But it was enough to get a sense for what this was all about, and it was surely worth the trip.

All play and no work makes Doug unemployed, so the Air Races weren't the only thing that happened this week, of course. I have a slew of half-done journal articles to work on, and one of my goals for this sabbatical is to finally get all of them submitted for review. This Friday, the first one went in. And, this Monday, I had the opportunity to see a very interesting panel discussion with three game designers. This was a part of a course on narrative that I am sitting in on while I am here. I hadn't previously thought of game design as narrative, but of course that's exactly what it is. It is an interactive form of narrative ... a narrative with the "reader" as participant. As a result, like other forms of

narrative, it has its own “rules.” If a sabbatical is best thought of as a chance to be exposed to new things, than this has been a great sabbatical week!

Week 14: More Than I Really Wanted to Know About Health Care

This week, I had the opportunity to contemplate the health care debate that’s going on back in Washington with a tad more immediacy than I otherwise might when a tooth of mine informed me that it was time for a trip to the dentist. Of course, my dentist was, at the time, about 2,500 miles away back in College Park. So it was time to determine whether out here on the west coast I was one of the uninsured that everyone is talking about. Thankfully no, since this year my dental plan became national. Which led to the second question – how does a stranger in a strange land find a dentist? The obvious answer (look up the participating dentists in the plan’s listing) wasn’t too helpful – there were several hundred listed near Berkeley. Ah, a search problem! Good thing I am a search expert. So I set out to integrate other information sources (the Berkeley Parents Network is a great source of advice) with my dental insurance company list (result: Berkeley parents like dentists that my insurance company won’t pay). So I began to understand better all the things we’re debating – choice isn’t all that it’s cracked up to be. In the end, I threw a dart at the list (after printing it – bad for the computer otherwise!) and called the dentist that it hit. Who was good enough to see me the next day, and a few days later to fix that troublesome tooth. But in the process I learned more than I really wanted to know about health care.

The other major event of the week was a protest. This was no small protest – this was a full-blown chanting, marching, picket-lining, sign-toting Berkeley-style protest, complete with news helicopters circling overhead. What interested me the most was who was protesting (the students) and what they were protesting (underpaid teachers). At the University of Maryland, the State had reduced faculty salaries (temporarily) last year, and they are doing it again this year. In response to concerns and suggestions from our faculty, this year the process is much better organized – for example, they put up a Web site to tell each faculty member exactly how much money they will lose. At Berkeley, this is the first year of temporary salary reductions. And efficient implementation was the furthest thing from anyone’s mind. Protest is a tradition here at Berkeley, and I am seeing a new generation of protestors learning the ropes. They were well organized, well led, with well made arguments, and for the most part very well behaved. All of which was impressive to see. But I’m still trying to figure out why the students were protesting on behalf of the faculty! There is an argument to be made (they risk losing good faculty, which would adversely affect the educational experience here, California has long embraced a shared value of accessible excellence through public funding of higher education, so this is a matter that should be of interest to all citizens of the State). But there were no burning buildings, no students living in a tree for six months (as happened here last year when they tried to cut down a few trees for some new construction) and no sit-ins inside the administration building. Perhaps those are being saved for the next protest, about raising student fees? Still, it was an experience that would be hard to imagine having back at Maryland. And, after all, isn’t that what sabbaticals are for?

This weekend was the first high school reunion my graduating class has ever held (which was scheduled for the 35.5th anniversary of our graduation – we never were ones for traditional intervals, I guess. Had it been at another time, I would very much have liked to attend. But in my last sabbatical I felt I had traveled a bit too much, which worked out well enough because I had a full year there. But this time I'm spending just half a year in each of two places, and essential travel already has that whittled down to about four months in each place. So I have already said no to four trips from here, and I am already starting to stack up no's for trips away from Melbourne (and I'm not even there yet!). If someone told you that you could take an entire year off, go anywhere in the world, and do whatever you wanted, you probably would have a hard time imagining saying no to so many things that you would otherwise truly want to do. But there are few things in life that make less sense than paying Berkeley rents and having a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience Berkeley life as an insider and then tossing that all away to spend more time on airplanes (particularly other people's airplanes!). So here I sit in Berkeley, thinking back to those four years in high school that did so much to shape my life and that ultimately led me to be here, rather than there, this evening.

Week 15: Dining with the Stars

Traveling around the world is done the same way you do everything else in life – one step at a time. You don't need to know everything when you start – it is enough to know which direction to head and when to begin. The rest of it, you can work out along the way. In my 2007 summer trip around the world, I sorted out the airline tickets before leaving, but I was working out hotels and other arrangements a few weeks before getting to each place. In this case, with a much more extended time frame, I left Washington with literally no idea how I would actually get to Australia. This week, I finally sorted that out. The key pieces of the puzzle turned out to be two papers and the global economic crisis. The papers were accepted to the Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS), which – no surprise – is in Hawaii, in January. How the global economic crisis might need a little explaining, though.

Any good map will confirm your expectation that Hawaii happens to be in between Berkeley and Australia. So the obvious thing to do was to route my trip through Hawaii. What's less obvious is that the global economic crisis also demands that I visit Fiji. That was pure serendipity. Originally, I had expected to buy a "Round the World" ticket on Star Alliance (the airline group led by United Airlines). But prices have been going up for those tickets, and they now cost nearly \$6,000. That's more than my first car cost, and my second, and my third, and indeed every car I have ever owned (including the one I drove from Maryland to Berkeley)! So I went looking for alternatives. Which is where the global economic crisis comes in. It turns out that airlines are having trouble selling seats, so in some cases they have done away with those pesky rules that require you to fly round trip to get a really good fare. If you manage to find just the right routing, you put together a set of one-way legs that will take you around the world for about half the price of a "Round the World" ticket. But, and this is the key but, only if you go through Fiji. So this week I bought a ticket to Fiji, one that just happens to include a stopover in Hawaii.

The Dean here at Berkeley's iSchool has been writing about how silicon valley came to be the way it is, and how that example is influencing efforts to create similar dynamics elsewhere around the world. So I was particularly intrigued when an invitation arrived to the "Bay Area Natural Language and Speech Processing Barbeque." At Maryland we have research group events, department events, college events, and even university events. But I would be hard pressed to think of a National Capital Region NL(S)P barbeque. But here (at least according to what I have been reading), this is how things are done. So on Sunday I drove over to near Stanford (which is about as far from Berkeley as Dulles is from the University of Maryland) to do what one does at a barbeque, and also to see how it's done here. I can't imagine anywhere else where you could so easily bring people together from so many different environments – most notably, universities, search engine companies, and startups – and it made for a most enjoyable evening. Maybe Washington power lunches are in some sense similar for the people in that world. But for my world, this was dining with the stars.

Week 16: Halfway to Somewhere

A 380-day journey has its midpoint at 190 days, of course. But this is a journey in two parts, and the end of the first part is now closer than its beginning. So I am halfway to somewhere (which, the observant reader will note, is somewhere in Hawaii). Which provides a good opportunity to reflect on what I have experienced so far. Reflecting on that question, two surprising things come to mind. The first is that I did perhaps a bit too good a job of preparing for this visit. In my last sabbatical, I found the second semester to be more productive than the first for the simple reason that it took time to get connected to what was going on there. So here at Berkeley, with only one semester before moving on, I did my best to get started quickly. And perhaps I did just a bit too well at that – some of my days here are now just as full as my days were back at Maryland before starting this journey. Lesson learned: planning ahead is overrated.

My second surprise has been that the "great" weather in California is a marketing ploy. As I write this, I am sitting on the deck behind my apartment, overlooking San Francisco, wearing an arctic parka. This is the same parka that my father borrowed for a trip to Iceland. I feel somewhat obligated to sit out here on the deck while writing this, since I am paying Berkeley rents for the weather and the view, but I sure am glad I brought this parka!

On Monday, Jimmy Lin (one of my colleagues from Maryland) ran a workshop on cloud computing at the Computer History Museum down near Stanford. So I was up with the dawn patrol and out the door at 6:15 to participate. Fourteen hours later, I got home. An interesting experience from which I learned a lot, but also a good reminder of how nice it is to not be doing that every day!

This weekend was "Fleet Week" in San Francisco. In days gone by, this was a much bigger deal, but since the Navy closed all of their bases here back in the late 1990's the celebration has become much more muted. This year, the Navy sent one ship and the

Blue Angels. The Blue Angels flew their C-130 (quite a large plane) under the Golden Gate Bridge, which was a sight to see. But their jets just made a few passes in front of the crowd for the photographers. Too much low-level turbulence, apparently, for their usual formation flying display. Still, it was fun to see them flying here. And cold.

Week 17: Rain!

Truth be told, my reason for coming to Berkeley in the Fall was the rain. Not the rain in the Fall; the rain in the Spring. It usually doesn't rain before November in Berkeley. Of course, the economy doesn't usually collapse in a way that has people talking about the Great Depression either, so as we found out this year, "usually not" and "never" are very different concepts. So, naturally, this week it rained. Not sprinkled. Not drizzled. Not even rain showers. Rain! All day. To imagine how people here reacted, just think about the first snow of the season in Washington. It was front page news.

The other big event of the week was a two-day visit by faculty and students from Kyoto University. It was a great opportunity to learn not only about their work (which was indeed quite interesting – they are doing some quite well motivated work on Web search), but also about the work of faculty and students here (from their presentations to the visitors). Berkeley's iSchool faculty has much in common with ours at Maryland – there are a substantial number of Assistant Professors, each with rich and diverse research interests, which makes for a very dynamic and energetic place. I also had the chance to see presentations by a few of the doctoral students here whom I had not yet met, and as a group they are doing quite impressive work as well. I suppose I had expected to find more differences than similarities, but that's not how it came out. Indeed, I've been reading a bit about the history of the iSchool here (they have an oral history program that goes back to the 1920's!), and there are some interesting similarities in the way our programs evolved over time as well. So it seems that 2,419 miles is not really that far after all.

Week 18: LA Story

I spent my last sabbatical in Marina del Rey, a small city on the coast just west of Los Angeles. This week I had the opportunity to return there to see what's changed. My first stop, however, was the University of California at Irvine. Irvine is home to one of California's three "iSchools" (the other two are at Berkeley and at UCLA), so one of my goals was to understand how they construct the idea of an iSchool. What I found was different in some ways from my experience at Maryland, and more recently at Berkeley, but similar in others. We're different in that their iSchool grew out of CS (as was the case at Georgia Tech) rather than out of Library Science (as at Maryland and Berkeley), and that they are organized into quite distinct departments (as at UCLA and Rutgers, but not at Maryland or Berkeley). But we are similar in our strong attachment to human-centeredness. The birth of a new discipline is an interesting thing to watch, and to help in some small way to shape, and visits like this are an important way of coming to better understand that emerging landscape.

The next day, Tuesday, I spent at the University of Southern California. There I had a chance to visit with Shri Narayanan, who leads a remarkably productive speech processing group in the Electrical Engineering department, and with Sam Gustman, with whom I worked on a half-decade project to develop search technology for recorded speech. Sam has been working seriously on digital preservation for multimedia materials in recent years, and I was quite interested to learn where the hard spots were in that process (interestingly, the cost driver is handling the physical media). We also spent some time brainstorming search techniques for his unique collection, which connects to the oral history linking work I have been doing at Berkeley in some ways.

Finally, Wednesday was old home week at the USC Information Sciences Institute in Marina del Rey. The weather was wonderful (the prevailing winds blow the smog inland and keep the air at the coast fairly clean), many of the folks I worked with on my last sabbatical were around, the new crop of students is just as impressive as the students who I worked with there seven years ago, and there were many interesting projects going on. I gave the same “Who ‘Dat?” talk there that I have given in many other places, but it was really a special telling of the story because several of the strands in that work got their start during my last sabbatical. I got some grief from my friends there for having scheduled this sabbatical 350 miles too far to the north, and I had to admit that perhaps they had a point. Not that Berkeley hasn’t been a wonderful opportunity to meet new folks and learn new things. But LA too has much to recommend it. Who knows – maybe I’ll be back there for my next sabbatical!