

A TRIP

TO HALIFAX

BY SAUL WILSON



INTRODUCTION

From 25 June to 1 July 2005, my father and I traveled by train from Baltimore to Halifax. The first leg of our trip took us from Baltimore to New York, where we attended a “commitment ceremony” at Islip, Long Island, before taking the Adirondack on to Montreal. From there, we took the Ocean to Halifax, at which point we turned around and returned along the same routes.

3

BALTIMORE

to

NEW YORK



4

On the day our trip was to begin, I awoke to find that my write-up of the last train trip my dad and I had taken was not yet complete. Thus, the vast majority of my morning was consumed by a feverish, yet unsuccessful, attempt to complete researching for that paper. I eventually admitted defeat and proceeded to make a few quick attempts to learn about the Ocean and Adirondack trains on which we would be riding. What little I gathered I managed to leave at home, rendering it rather useless during the trip.

Regardless, my dad and I rushed downstairs with our luggage after a quick, online phone call with my mom, who was in South Africa. We soon flagged a taxi to Baltimore Penn Station, where my dad found a seat and I took advantage of the busyness of the station to view the Amtrak trains that were traveling through. First came Metroliner number 2203, a normal Northeast Corridor consist of a mere six Amfleet cars led by a single AEM-7. (Evidently the temporary elimination of Acela service due to cracks on their brakes had created a serious lack of Amfleet cars; normal trains would have had eight cars.)

Returning to the main concourse, I said hello to the employees at the help desk and looked over the National Association of Railroad Passengers' bulletin board. I then barreled back down to the platform to view the five-minute late Regional number 153 (another AEM-7 and Amfleet train). The train lingered while a worker quickly procured a wheelchair, which I later saw on the main concourse.

Since no more trains were due to arrive until our own, I scribbled some notes about the boring details of the trip up until that point (my memory was bound to need a great deal of assistance). When our train was announced, we squeezed ourselves into an elevator with two other people, then dragged our two oversized suitcases to the end of the platform.

We listened to the exceedingly bad music that the loudspeakers were loudly emitting until an announcement that our train was 10 minutes late broke in. We kept waiting under slightly

improved music until 11:09, when Regional number 82's arrival was eventually announced. After taking some pictures from the far end of the platform, we boarded the last car, a Quiet Car, so I could see through the puny rear window.

We could hardly find space for our luggage and were completely unable to find two seats side-by-side, but we settled in. After organizing myself, I marched back to the car's rear so I could look out the filthy window. At the Bayview rail yard, we passed a moving Acela Express train with its rear couple uncovered. This confirmed the many reports I had heard of Amtrak testing its Acelas at slow speeds.

I decided that I ought to take some more notes, so I sat back down just in time to see the Gunpowder River and miss a southbound train that we passed. Soon after, we crossed over the Bush River as I got up to beg my dad for money to spend in the Cafe Car.

After our departure from Aberdeen, I proceeded on to the café car, where the line went all the way to the end of the car. I joined the queue and had a short discussion about the excessive length of the line with the person behind me. Having made it into the actual food-selling part of the car, I was able to review the large picture of Detroit that had been placed on the wall. Sadly, the photographer had not remembered he was taking a picture for Amtrak (or perhaps Amtrak had forgot that it was a railroad?), and so no trains were visible in the whole-wall photo.

After purchasing my meal, I walked back to the rear of the

train for our stop in Wilmington, where there were unfortunately no SEPTA trains parked. I then rushed back to my seat, where I ate a semi-decent “Sierra Chicken Sandwich,” that had been warmed in the Cafe Car, and the two Minibel cheeses and the circular crackers from a Cheese & Crackers packet—a foodstuff which I seek out on all Amtrak trains. My dad had the cheddar cheeses and Wheatsworth Crackers from the Cheese & Crackers along with a packet of Doritos.

Lunch finished, I proceeded to write out a few more notes about the trip before I made a quick dash back to the rear vestibule to watch Amtrak’s Wilmington Shops fly past. At Philadelphia, the Conductor gave me a polite reprimand for riding in the vestibule.

As usual, there was a large passenger turnover at Philadelphia, where at least 5 people tried to sit in the seat across the aisle from me. I did my best to prevent people from sitting there because the seats still had seat checks from the last passengers. Since the supposed occupants never actually returned, I managed to use those seats’ window for taking pictures of the Philadelphia yards, where two Acela Expresses were parked. Of course, my camera died just as I aimed it at the trains...

Upon my return to the rear of the car, we passed a two-car SEPTA train. Standing at the rear of the car meant that I was sandwiched between the car’s only two bathrooms, a rather uncomfortable place to be. Furthermore, it forced me into the (full-time) job of explaining to people how to enter the bathrooms (the doors are extremely heavy), explaining which bathroom was occupied, and, even worse, explaining that one was labeled “men” and the other “women.”

Soon we had progressed northward to Newark, where the northbound PATH tracks were being maintained, giving me a view of both south and northbound trains on the southbound track. After traveling through the new Frank R. Lautenberg Secaucus Junction Station, opened in 2003, at speed, we entered the North River Tunnels, opened in 1910.

After our arrival in New York Penn Station, we disembarked and walked around on the platform in search of a way to the main concourse. We passed a broken escalator, discovered that there probably was no elevator, and thus settled for the only working escalator. At the top, we nearly collided with a large crowd of passengers eagerly awaiting permission from the “gate attendant” to pounce on our train.

TRACK
18

3:26^{PM}

OFF
PEAK

BABYLON

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NEW YORK



We meandered out of the station toward our hotel, walking straight up 34th St. to 5th Ave. We eventually acknowledged that we had not the slightest idea where our hotel was, so my dad called the Red Roof Inn to ask where they were. It turned out the hotel was just a block away...

We checked in and were changed to a no smoking room, but we were still shoehorned into a single bed. After asking about breakfast (the hotel had a 7:00 a.m. complimentary breakfast, but I was concerned we'd miss our train if we ate that late) we rode the elevator to our eighth floor room, which was hidden in a maze of hallways.

We laid out all of our luggage and noticed that my dad had forgotten three of his numerous medicines. So, a frantic search for replacements commenced. We made a quick trip to a nearby CVS pharmacy on the suggestion of a street worker, but they didn't have the necessary supplements. However, the pharmacist directed us to 5th Ave. and 33rd St., a sprawling intersection at which we could see only one pharmacy which was on the wrong side of Greeley Square. Nonetheless, we went in and were directed to go back across the street to the "Manhattan Mall."

On the second floor of the Mall was a GNC store where my dad managed to find replacements before we hurried off to Penn Station. I quickly collected a large stack of Long Island Rail Road timetables and we purchased our exorbitantly expensive ticket for the ride to Islip. A check of the timetable confirmed that the next Babylon Branch train was at 3:26. The train would go out of service at Babylon where we would transfer to a Montauk Branch train to Islip. When the train was announced we scrambled down to platform 18 and boarded near the middle of the train.

As we departed, we learned that we were riding an Express, making stops at only Jamaica, Freeport, and Babylon. After exiting the East River Tunnels, we passed by Sunnyside Yard, of which I took a good number of pictures. Jamaica Station was undergoing significant reconstruction, but over the din created by that were the very shrill track announcements. These stood in stark contrast to the announcements at Penn Station, where the announcer sounded as though he was actually enjoying himself.

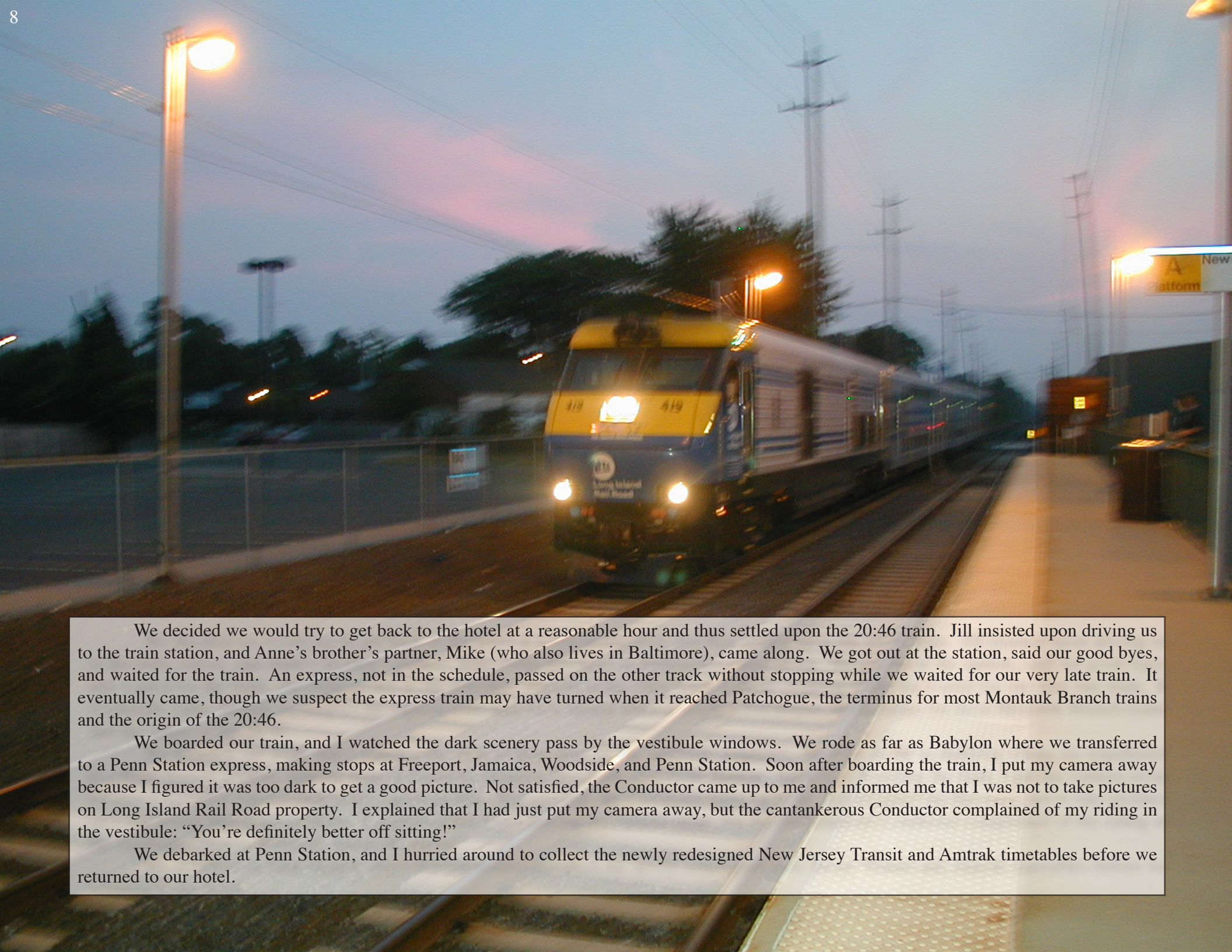
I stood in the train's vestibule as we zoomed on toward Baby-

lon at remarkable speed. We detrained there and crossed the platform to a diesel train, which we took the two stops to Islip. Remarkably, the diesel train to Islip, which traveled on wooden ties, provided a far better ride than the electric train from New York had produced on concrete ties. So much for progress...

We at long last arrived at Islip, to which we had traveled for a "commitment ceremony" between my mom's friend, Jill Blauvelt, and her partner, Anne Beyrer. We walked down Islip Avenue, made a left on Montauk Highway, and proceeded down Dana Lane to Dana House. It turned out we had forgotten our wedding present, which we gave Jill and Anne when we next met them in Baltimore.

Jackie, Anne's sister, had prepared a scrumptious meal. After minimal socializing, we gathered to view the Buddhist ceremony led by their Unitarian minister. A great emphasis was placed on fire and water. Afterwards, we downed a cake covered in marzipan followed by a terrific cherry cobbler.





We decided we would try to get back to the hotel at a reasonable hour and thus settled upon the 20:46 train. Jill insisted upon driving us to the train station, and Anne's brother's partner, Mike (who also lives in Baltimore), came along. We got out at the station, said our good byes, and waited for the train. An express, not in the schedule, passed on the other track without stopping while we waited for our very late train. It eventually came, though we suspect the express train may have turned when it reached Patchogue, the terminus for most Montauk Branch trains and the origin of the 20:46.

We boarded our train, and I watched the dark scenery pass by the vestibule windows. We rode as far as Babylon where we transferred to a Penn Station express, making stops at Freeport, Jamaica, Woodside, and Penn Station. Soon after boarding the train, I put my camera away because I figured it was too dark to get a good picture. Not satisfied, the Conductor came up to me and informed me that I was not to take pictures on Long Island Rail Road property. I explained that I had just put my camera away, but the cantankerous Conductor complained of my riding in the vestibule: "You're definitely better off sitting!"

We debarked at Penn Station, and I hurried around to collect the newly redesigned New Jersey Transit and Amtrak timetables before we returned to our hotel.

NEW YORK

to

MONTREAL



I woke up around 6:30 and hurriedly prepared to go down to the 2nd floor for the free breakfast (our train was leaving at 7:45, later than I had expected). Along with one other early riser, we discovered that the breakfast area had not opened yet, so we checked out first. By then we could eat: my dad and I each consumed a doughnut; he also had coffee. I tried a bagel, but found that its quality was so low that it wasn't worth my time.

That done, we proceeded down the street with our screeching bags. We picked up some water at a bagel store, but their bagels didn't look appetizing enough to buy any. We passed the silent Manhattan Mall before entering Penn Station, where I supplemented my collection with more New Jersey Transit timetables. We soon heard the announcement demanding that all "Canada travelers" get in line under gate 9/10 East. One of the workers informed me that I couldn't take pictures; in response I inquired if photography was permitted on the train. "No, sir!" was the answer. Later he retracted the second prohibition.

We boarded the last of the train's four cars and chose our seats amongst what we later learned was a tour group heading for a week in Montreal and Quebec City. After we exited the Empire Connection West Side Line Tunnel and crossed over the Harlem River, I moved to the rear to take photographs of southbound Metro-North Railroad trains. It appeared that the Conductor had gotten wind of my arrival and already locked the door to the rear vestibule. Right when I aligned a great picture, luck struck and the batteries, deciding to die in style, literally flew out of the camera.

Of course, I had to help people understand the bathroom system again. They ought to put signs up saying, "PUSH AS HARD AS YOU CAN!" Partly because I was tired of helping with the bathrooms and partly because the Metro-North train service ended at Poughkeepsie, I deserted my position at the rear for the Cafe Car. On the way, my dad called me over to see Bannerman Castle, an old, worn-down, building used by the Bannerman family for their military surplus business.

At the cafe I consumed a bagel with cream cheese, satisfying my search for a bagel. But, in keeping with Amtrak policy, it was clearly a couple days old.

At the new Albany-Rensselaer station (it now has high level platforms and a modern main concourse), I got off and took pictures of our train and the one sitting at the neighboring platform. Then I quickly went up to the main concourse to get some pamphlets and take pictures of it, but the help desk staffer said he had no route guides for the Adirondack. As I was headed back to the train I said goodbye to the helpful conductor who had worked our train up to Albany. He had earlier mentioned to me that he liked looking out the rear window, too—a massive improvement upon the normal censure I receive.

After sitting a while, I meandered up to the Cafe Car to sight-see through the window. At Saratoga Springs I got off and took pictures of the station and a Canadian Pacific engine that was stationed right next to a tent. Then my dad came back up to the cafe for lunch: I had a pizza and half a chocolate chip cookie, my dad ingested Nachos and a hot dog, along with the other half of the cookie, which he ruled "tasteless."

My dad soon went back to his seat to work, and I went back to dealing with bad batteries in my camera: just when I was taking a picture of a locomotive in the old Delaware & Hudson paint scheme, the batteries demanded to be recharged. After replacing them, I walked back to our car for some readings I'd taken along about the Adirondack.

The Conductor then announced that the train would be waiting until our late southbound counterpart had passed us. After waiting for well over the promised 30 minutes, the conductor informed me that the train was six miles and about five minutes away, so I rushed back to the rear to get pictures (and help people get into the bathrooms!). By then we were an hour late.

I typed up some more notes in the cafe, where I was joined by my dad. He went back to our car, but I stayed to watch Lake Champlain with a man who had taken the train from Montreal to Florida and was on his way back. He refused to sit on the grounds that he had been sitting for over 1500 miles and his back was now sore.

Just before Plattsburgh, we passed some brand new MTA New York M-7 commuter rail cars. Remembering that this was the location of the Bombardier construction plant, I headed back to the



rear of the train, but I still missed the factory.

The Conductor announced that Canadian customs doesn't like people meandering about while the train is searched, causing a stampede toward the bathrooms and prompting me to retreat to my seat. Three Immigration Canada employees quickly filed into the car at Cantic, Quebec along with their stamps, questions, accents, bullet proof vests, and everything else. (But they did not have guns!) We apparently passed the inspection, as did the man sitting behind us, even though he did not have a passport or birth certificate with him. All they said was "try and bring those next time."

Next came the grilling for the woman in front of us, who was part of the aforementioned tour group. Apparently the large number of elderly black women in the car did not suggest anything to the immigration officers, who were amazed that the woman in front of us didn't know the hotels she would be staying in. Eventually, one of the women called up the group leader to explain. Meanwhile, I was typing up yet more notes and looking at the hundreds of pictures I'd already taken, while others discussed food. After sitting for about one hour and watching motorcycles race across the fields surrounding the train we eventually started to move again.

The Canadian man who had taken the uncomfortable trip to Florida and was continually complaining about Amtrak had noticed that the door to the rear vestibule had become unlocked. We both happily stepped into the vestibule along with a Washingtonian who was traveling to Montreal to practice his French, but they both quickly tired of the extreme heat and lack of seats in the vestibule.

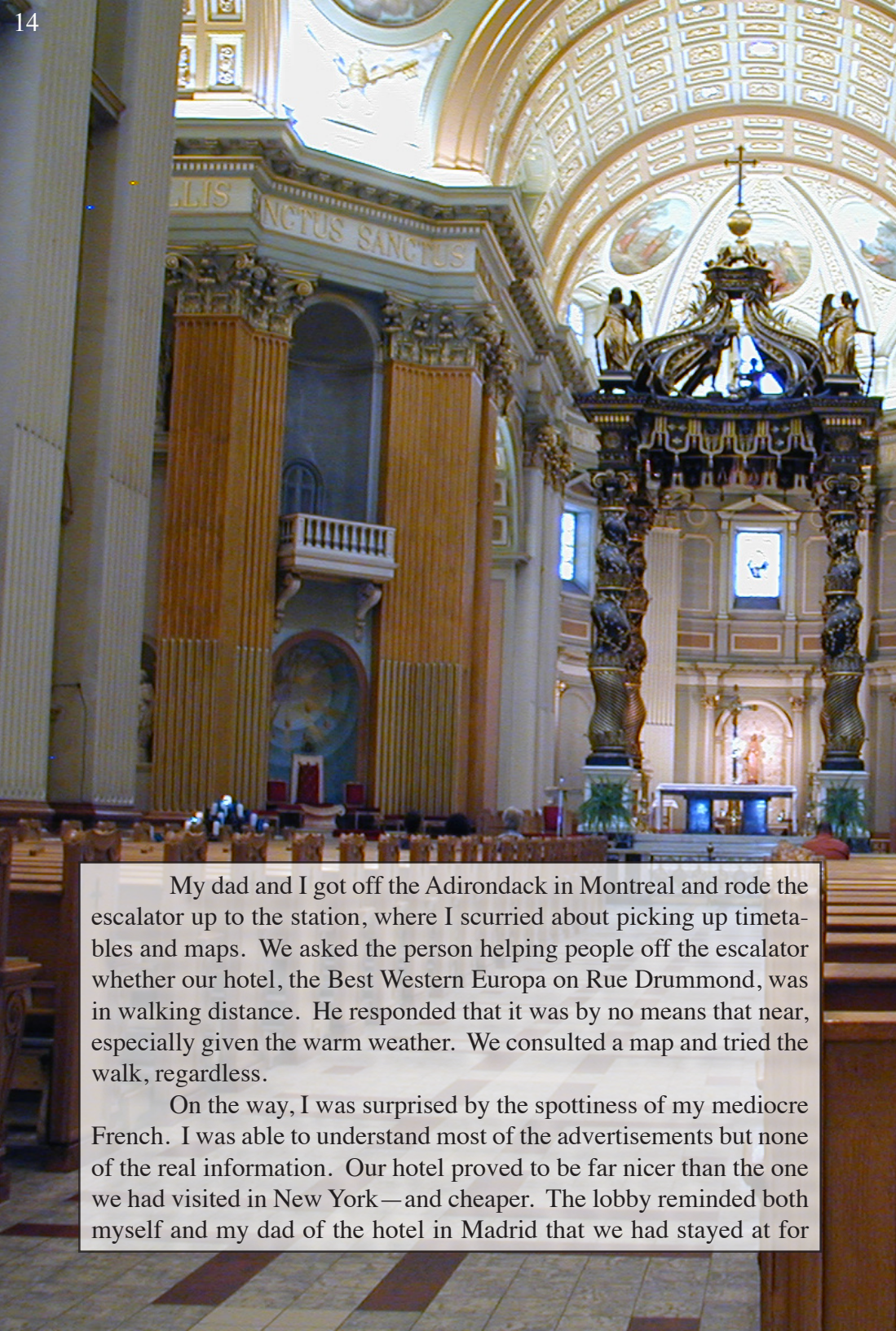
We slowly traveled through rural Quebec. Sometimes we were fenced in while running down a boulevard and other times we were meandered through the middle of three-building towns with drunkards stumbling across the tracks. We eventually joined the mainline at Saint-Lambert after crossing under an enormous pedestrian/bicycle structure that crossed the entire rail yard.

As we traveled toward Montreal, a Canadian National freight train was visible in the distance, but it never caught up with us. We crossed over the St. Lawrence River on the Queen Victoria Jubilee Bridge before we backed into Gare Centrale. I was effectively evicted from the rear by the Conductor, who had to "guide" the train back into the station. I later learned why we had backed in: When the diesel engines are underground in the built-over Gare Centrale, they must be plugged in so as to minimize fumes. Amtrak apparently does not like to pay the locomotive plug-in costs and therefore backs the train into the station and leaves the locomotive outside the station.



MONTREAL





My dad and I got off the Adirondack in Montreal and rode the escalator up to the station, where I scurried about picking up timetables and maps. We asked the person helping people off the escalator whether our hotel, the Best Western Europa on Rue Drummond, was in walking distance. He responded that it was by no means that near, especially given the warm weather. We consulted a map and tried the walk, regardless.

On the way, I was surprised by the spottiness of my mediocre French. I was able to understand most of the advertisements but none of the real information. Our hotel proved to be far nicer than the one we had visited in New York—and cheaper. The lobby reminded both myself and my dad of the hotel in Madrid that we had stayed at for

my seventh birthday.

We checked in, rode the elevator up to our second floor room, and called Lisa, a colleague of my dad's. She, along with her son Tomas, came and picked us up, although I'd vehemently advocated our taking the metro instead.

When we arrived at her condominium unit in Outremont, we immediately started a load of laundry and sat down to tomatoes, basil, and mozzarella with bread. In addition to those scrumptious foods, Lisa, her husband, and my dad ate pate. Discussion ranged from mathematics, Lisa's old profession, to public health, her new field. Of course, trains and politics got their normal (and appropriate) attention.

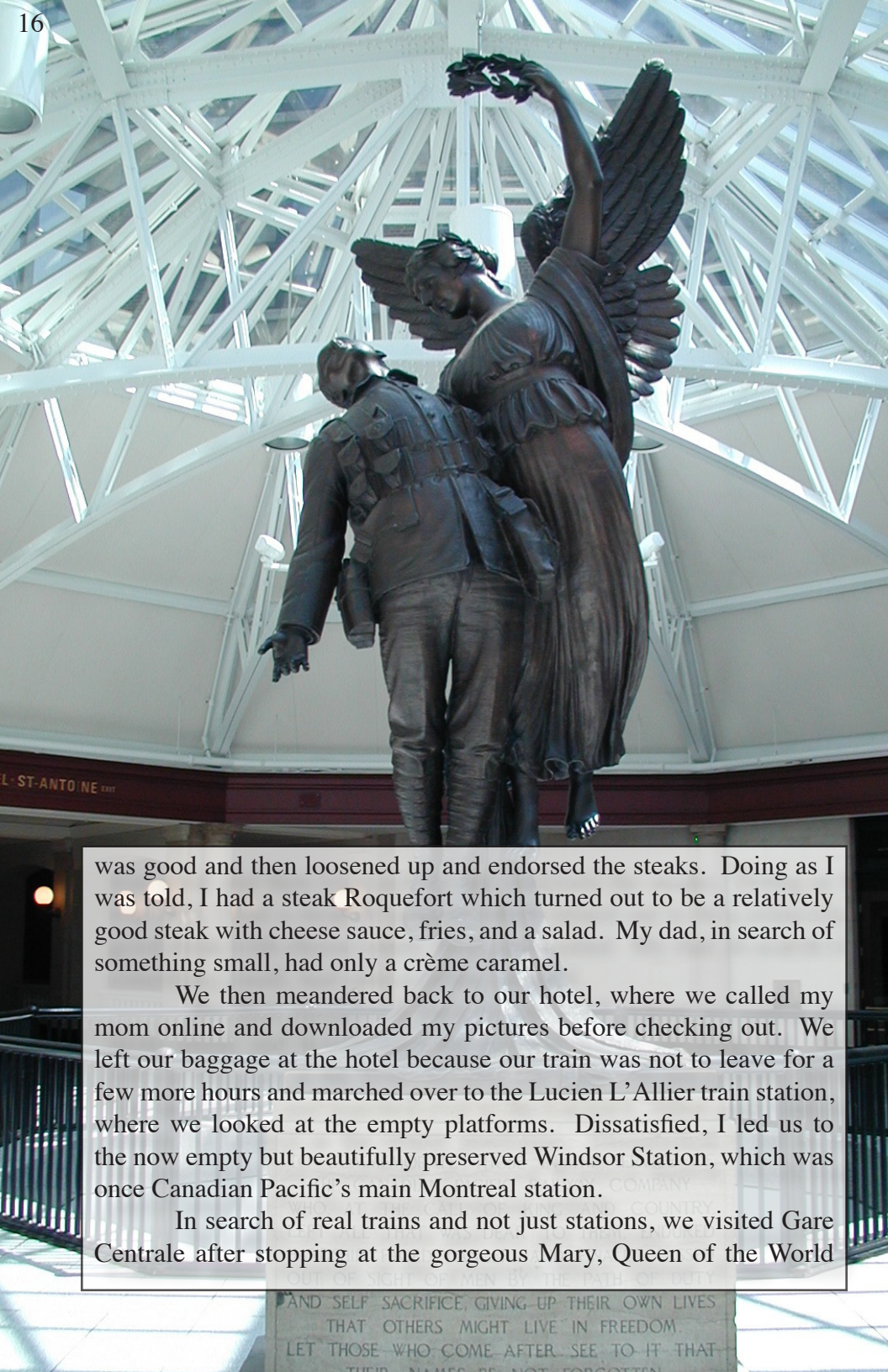
The meal then progressed to four different cheeses, all of which were delicious. One was from Quebec while the other three were from Europe. The best was a soft cheese (with quite a stench) that we ate by using a spoon to place it on bread. Last came a caffeine-laden chocolate coffee cake. Lisa then took us back to our hotel, where our hotel card wouldn't work. We technically needed a card to use the elevators, but thankfully somebody else let us up. Our card wouldn't open our room's door, so we had to go downstairs to get it reformatted. We then went to bed after checking the news.

Upon waking up I naturally returned to checking the news: oil had hit \$60.36, Rehnquist had not resigned yet (we still thought he would), and the Supreme Court had just outlawed the Ten Commandments in some places, but not others.

We left the hotel and walked down Rue Saint-Catherine, visiting a store, Souvenirs Super, that looked as though it might have Canadian flags. It did, and I bought two for my Canadophile classmates. We then started on an unsuccessful search for a USB cable. Finally, we reached the Jazz festival. We had seen banners for it and my dad claimed that Lisa had mentioned that she would bring us to it, and then remembered that it would not have started yet. Curious, we searched endlessly for dates, and eventually learned that it began on June 29, in time for us to watch it upon our return to Montreal.

Deciding that it was time for lunch, we walked back to a bistro we had seen earlier, the Bistro Francais Grand Comptoir. In a somewhat surly manner, the waiter suggested, first, that everything





Cathedral. We used the electronic “VIA EXPRESS Ticket” machines (the first one did not work) to print the tickets we would need for the next two legs of our trip. I next rushed over to the entrance to the platform from which the next train would depart, expecting to take pictures. But I was told that I couldn’t go down. My solution was to take the unguarded escalator, which was set on down, to see the VIA LRC train that was sitting on the platform. I took a few photographs and then rushed back upstairs.

We then bought our tickets for the AMT Deux-Montagnes electric commuter train and boarded the 14:30 run. We rode through the Mont Royal tunnel to the Canora Station, which was the first outside the tunnel. I quickly snapped some pictures before we started our walk to the Acadie Metro stop.

On the way, we passed through a large number of residential neighborhoods. A hired lawnmower was carefully mowing an already well-trimmed lawn, although there was a meadow of two-foot tall grass next door! We then passed a group of three locals riding their bikes. They were clearly so surprised by seeing camera-toting foreigners in their neighborhood that they completely stopped talking for a few moments.

We rode the Metro’s Blue Line to Snowden, where we transferred to the Orange Line to go back to Lucien L’Allier. We were puzzled by the appearance that there were six rails/guideways for each track set: two guides on the sides of the tracks, two rubber tire guideways, and two steel rails.

When we got off at Lucien L’Allier I started taking pictures of the train. A woman walked up to me and started asking, in French, if I had taken her picture. I tried to explain I was taking pictures of the train, not her, but I eventually gave up and left. To get out, we had to go up a flight of stairs, three escalators, and two more flights of stairs, before crossing over a street to get into the train station.

By then, there were four commuter trains sitting in the station, so I set to work taking photographs. Each of the trains seemed to have different locomotives and cars, one even had a boxcar. We then visited a cafe we had seen earlier, Paris, to buy Lime and Strawberry frozen drinks.

was good and then loosened up and endorsed the steaks. Doing as I was told, I had a steak Roquefort which turned out to be a relatively good steak with cheese sauce, fries, and a salad. My dad, in search of something small, had only a crème caramel.

We then meandered back to our hotel, where we called my mom online and downloaded my pictures before checking out. We left our baggage at the hotel because our train was not to leave for a few more hours and marched over to the Lucien L’Allier train station, where we looked at the empty platforms. Dissatisfied, I led us to the now empty but beautifully preserved Windsor Station, which was once Canadian Pacific’s main Montreal station.

In search of real trains and not just stations, we visited Gare Centrale after stopping at the gorgeous Mary, Queen of the World

AND SELF SACRIFICE, GIVING UP THEIR OWN LIVES THAT OTHERS MIGHT LIVE IN FREEDOM. LET THOSE WHO COME AFTER SEE TO IT THAT THEIR NAMES BE NOT FORGOTTEN.

MONTREAL

to

HALIFAX





After picking up our luggage, we dragged it all back to Gare Centrale. The departure board declared that our train, the Ocean, would start boarding at 17:50 for its 18:30 departure. Oddly, the boarding time later changed to 18:15, making it impossible for the train to leave on time. We next went to the Panorama Lounge, where we sat and watched the news for a while before I walked over to the check-in booth. There I waited in line, provided our tickets for collection, and made dinner reservations for the 20:30 sitting.

I scrambled down to a platform to see a Mont-Saint-Hilaire commuter train before rushing back upstairs to the lounge. My dad then asked me to figure out whether we should check our bag. The help desk workers said that we should do so immediately, so I dragged one of our two bags across the station to the baggage check just seconds before they took the last load down to the train. My dad got in line for our train while I walked down to watch a Deux-Montanges Line train leave. It left late, after the flood of late-arriving commuters eventually ceased. While waiting for its departure, I learned that there was a second stairwell down to the commuter platforms that was not blocked when the train wasn't yet ready for passengers. Security is a hopeless cause...

Back upstairs, the line eventually started to move. But it turned out that we were in the Pre-Boarding Line (infants, the elderly, etc.). This was particularly annoying to the people in front of us, who turned out to be Baltimoreans. They were then absolutely furious when we decided to use the

Pre-Boarding Line's escalator because we didn't want to drag our luggage down the stairs.

We got onto our train, made up of VIA's new Renaissance cars. Our bedroom in car 14 (of 19), to which we immediately walked, was #8. I promptly went to Evangeline Park, the observation car at the rear of the train. I went up to the dome, where the attendant gave out free Champaign to most patrons and sprite to me. Soon, my dad joined me and partook of the champagne. He reported that he had gotten our room changed to number 2 because we had been promised a shower and number 8 did not have one. He then proceeded to download the pictures I had taken thus far.

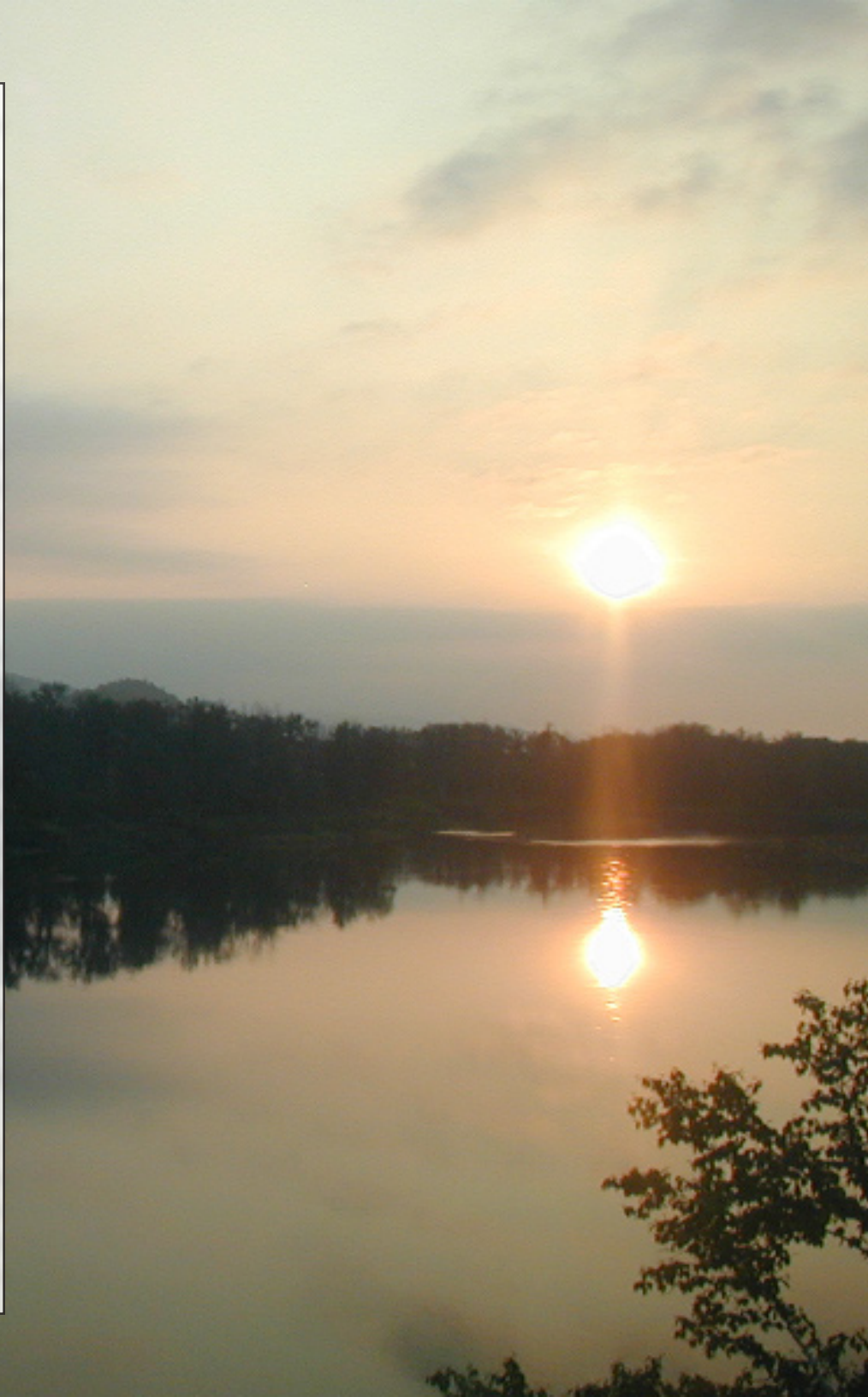
We eventually headed for the diner to have dinner. Along the way we ran into a large number of people returning from the last seating. A traffic jam resulted, but thankfully one rider took control and organized the passengers so we could all get to our destinations.

It turned out that we weren't going to reach ours for a while, anyway. Once we reached the lounge car, we were told to wait until further notice. Apparently the air conditioning had broken and there were rumors going about that they might only serve sandwiches. To add to our misery, a train worker kindly turned on an extremely annoying promotional video about Prince Edward Island.

We eventually were let into the diner, where they actually served real food (no sandwiches). I ordered the Poole's Corner—pork tenderloin with apples, a blueberry sauce, a potato, mushrooms (which I promptly gave to my dad), and some vegetables—while my dad ordered the Aspy Bay, halibut with lobster ravioli. The waiter quickly returned to report that there was no Halibut left, so my dad changed his order to the only other item available, the Poole's Corner.

Appetizers came and went, most of them into my dad's mouth. He commented on my refusal to eat mussels and shrimp: "The day will come when you regret having passed it up." We ate our relatively good food and proceeded to the desert tart.

After dinner, I walked up to one of the coaches to detrain at Charny, where I noticed that the train was very late. Once we had stopped and the Renaissance car's steps had moved themselves to a useful position (they are pushed out from under the train), I snapped a few pictures and ran down the platform to photograph the Park car before reboarding at the last possible moment.



We backed out of Charny—otherwise we would have gone to Quebec City—and then pulled forward onto the route to Halifax. I then meandered back up to our car to straighten some things out and borrow my dad’s computer, but on the way I ran into the coach attendant whose car I had detrained from at Charny. She complained that I belonged in coach since I had gotten off there, but I eventually persuaded her that I’d only been visiting.

I went back to the Park car’s dome and typed up some notes while looking at pitch-black scenery. While heading there, I asked one of the stewardesses what the second to last car was. It was completely empty, save for a large amount of extremely hot air and a few machines covered by temporary walls. She said that it ran the air-conditioning and that it helped connect the Renaissance sleeping cars with the stainless-steel Budd Park car.

At midnight, I figured it was probably time for bed, and therefore headed back to our room, where I had earlier claimed the lower bunk. I awoke at 5:00, 6:00 Atlantic Standard Time, and headed back to the dome for a while. But before I left our car, our attendant pounced on me to offer a breakfast ticket. I said we already had one, though I neglected to say why: the evening before my dad had lost confidence in our dozing attendant and had asked the next car’s attendant for a ticket.

I sat in the dome for a while, then went back to our car to check that breakfast at 7:00 punctual was alright with my dad. He consented, and I returned to the dome to detrain at Campbellton. It turned out we were running very early, so we stayed for 30 minutes. I had wanted to buy a newspaper from a nearby gas station, but I miscalculated the length of the stop and therefore dismissed the trip as too risky.

At seven we marched off to breakfast, where Elaine and Mary Anne, both members of a large tour group, joined us. They sat in almost complete silence, while the food took its time. The waiter complained that there was only one toaster, though we later noticed that the toaster happened to have four toast slots. But this did not explain the speed of the service for other foods. Mary Anne’s continental breakfast was first to arrive, followed by my crepes, which were trailed, at length, by my dad’s omelet.



We walked back to the dome and lounged about. Feeling sleep deprived, I went back to our room and napped, missing Bathurst. I awoke relatively invigorated and walked back to the dome to read the Moncton newspaper cover to cover. A stewardess came by, and I made lunch reservations for the 13:45 sitting. Meanwhile, I had the dome mostly to myself, since everybody else was downstairs to listen to a discussion on lobster trapping.

Once we actually reached Moncton, my dad and I got off one of the coaches and bought that day's Globe & Mail, which I sat down to read. Some of my newspaper-reading desires already taken out of me by the Moncton Times & Transcript, my curiosity grew as to why we were not moving. Our now-useful car steward commented: "That [freight train]'s probably what we're waiting for, 'cause they said the fuel [was the reason], but we can't be taking on that much fuel!" A comment over the train's walkie-talkie system presented a better image of the situation: "I don't know what's going on there now."

We started to walk to the dining car for lunch, but then heard an announcement informing us that lunch was delayed until 14:15. Like all the other announcements, it was made both French and English. Considering lunch a temporarily lost cause, I made my way back to the dome while my dad returned to our room.

Around the announced time I made my way back to the diner, where I joined my dad. I ordered the BBQ Pulled Pork Sandwich while my dad had the Crab Cakes. The dessert was an aged version of the diner tart, rather than the "Triple Berry Crumble Square" that the menu had promised.

During lunch, we overheard one of the waiters telling another passenger that the stainless-steel cars (upon which we would be returning) were "much more like the old train travel," giving us something to look forward to. Once we had finished, we were presented with a bill, which we ignored, thinking that our sleeping car status covered us.

We meandered back to the dome where the wine tasting was going on and remained there until our arrival at Halifax. On the way, the dome car attendant told us about a small house that was next to the right of way. As we pulled into Halifax, my dad went back to deal with our luggage and we both detrained.



HALIFAX



Trapped behind a large number of elderly people, we slowly walked down the platform to the huge station. The station was connected to the Westin hotel, formerly run by Canadian Nation Railroad, in which we would be staying. My dad went up to the hotel to check us in while I waited by the baggage carousel. Our baggage eventually came and I went up to the hotel lobby, where my dad leant me his computer while he went up to our room. Once I had finished checking my growing backlog of e-mails, I looked around our room, and we then went looking for a restaurant for dinner.

After walking along the waterfront for a few moments, we quickly settled upon Bish, an upscale looking (and costing) restaurant. It was across the way from a partly Japanese restaurant, but rejecting that turned out not to be a big mistake: I was still able to have pork tenderloin with surprisingly well done yakisoba and teriyaki sauce. My dad had arctic char with delicious potatoes and a chardonnay sauce. But the best part of the meal were the tempura apples that my dish came with.

While eating, my dad had looked at the map our hotel had given us. It listed all the good restaurants in town, and our short walk had already exposed us to most of them. Discussion then turned to the two towers we could see from our waterfront table. We couldn't figure out what they were, so we asked the waitress, who said they were sometimes there and sometimes not. We also noticed that the chief Chef's name was Mark Giffin, the name of my 4th grade teacher.

I then ordered, on the waitress's suggestion, the "Bish Cook-

ies and Cream Sundae," which had ice cream along with little bits of cookies. After donating an exorbitant amount to the restaurant's coffers, we walked over to a cafe to buy a bottle of water. We later went to another store, where we bought the same bottle of water for much less money.

Just as we were walking up to the hotel, my dad fell and sustained minor bruises, but a great deal of surprise. We then rushed upstairs, put ice on his wounds, and watched Bush's "major Iraq war speech," in which he said nothing. Even the reporters, who normally prefer to glorify, acknowledged this. We then listened to Senators Biden, McCain, and Kerry each provide their two cents.

I woke up around 9:00 and watched the news. When we eventually got out of the hotel, we walked up the hill, got some money out of an ATM, and visited a small cafe, the DECO coffee shop. My dad had a coffee with what appeared to be the cafe's specialty, coffee ice cubes, and I had a dry, but good, smoked bacon and cheese scone.

We visited Citadel Hill, which we walked around but didn't actually go to the top of. We asked the guide who was guarding the gate what the towers we had seen from the restaurant the previous night were; he said that they were part of an oil rig. This delighted me because it was similar to one of my dozens of guesses and explained why they weren't always there.

We walked by the old town clock to City Hall and a church. We visited the church and managed to escape a tour of the place only by explaining that we had a train to catch. Then came the provincial legislature; after going through security, we were given a very quick tour. We were shown the old upper house chambers (they had abolished the entire upper house), the library (which used to be the Supreme Court's chambers), and the chambers of the sole remaining house. The lower house apparently had 25 Conservatives, constituting a minority government, with the New Democratic Party as the Official Opposition.

We then walked down to the water and meandered back to the cafe we had bought water at the previous evening. There I had a cold chocolate milk, which was relatively good. Then we went back to the hotel to check out and use the internet again before I checked our baggage and attained boarding passes for the return trip.



HALIFAX

to

MONTREAL



We boarded our train and checked out our room before rushing back to Revelstoke Park, our train's observation-dome. There, the attendant, who was far more informative than the one we had on the outbound trip, discussed the Halifax explosion of 1917 over the din generated by a child playing a noisy video game.

I went up to the other dome on the train, the "Skyliner," before going to lunch. I had the Jester, while my dad ate the Maritime Seafood Salad. We were sitting with Joe, a woman who teaches at an education school. Discussion started with trains; apparently she enjoyed riding them and had recently traveled aboard the Rocky Mountaineer. She gave raving reviews of that train before the conversation moved on to Bush-bashing and education. My dad and I complained about math and history, respectively, and she calmly listened, claiming agreement.

After desert, which was, contrary to the menu's promises, an apple cheesecake, we settled down to pay the bill, having discovered that sleeping car passengers have to pay for their meals on VIA.

I then marched back to the Park Car's parlor section. I had hardly sat down before being pelted with the loquaciousness of an old man and younger woman who called their quiz the Andy and Andy show. It was certainly difficult to keep up. I found it much easier to converse with Shawn, a man who was helping with the wine tasting because he happened to be on the train and worked for a wine company.

After loafing about a bit, I discussed VIA Rail Canada, Amtrak, and other railroad topics with the head of VIA's Eastern Division, who had the misfortune of being on the same train as me. He was surprised by the bad shape that Amtrak was in, but seemed to like his new Renaissance cars more than I did.

The passengers on this train were turning out to be far more sociable than the outbound one: I soon fell into a short conversation with a Montréal resident who was riding the train because his car had broken. He was clearly delighted with his state of affairs, because parking in Montreal was "impossible."

At our Moncton stop, I walked up to the front of the train and took pictures. Walking back through the coaches, I was forced to dodge around the hundreds of students who were riding the train.

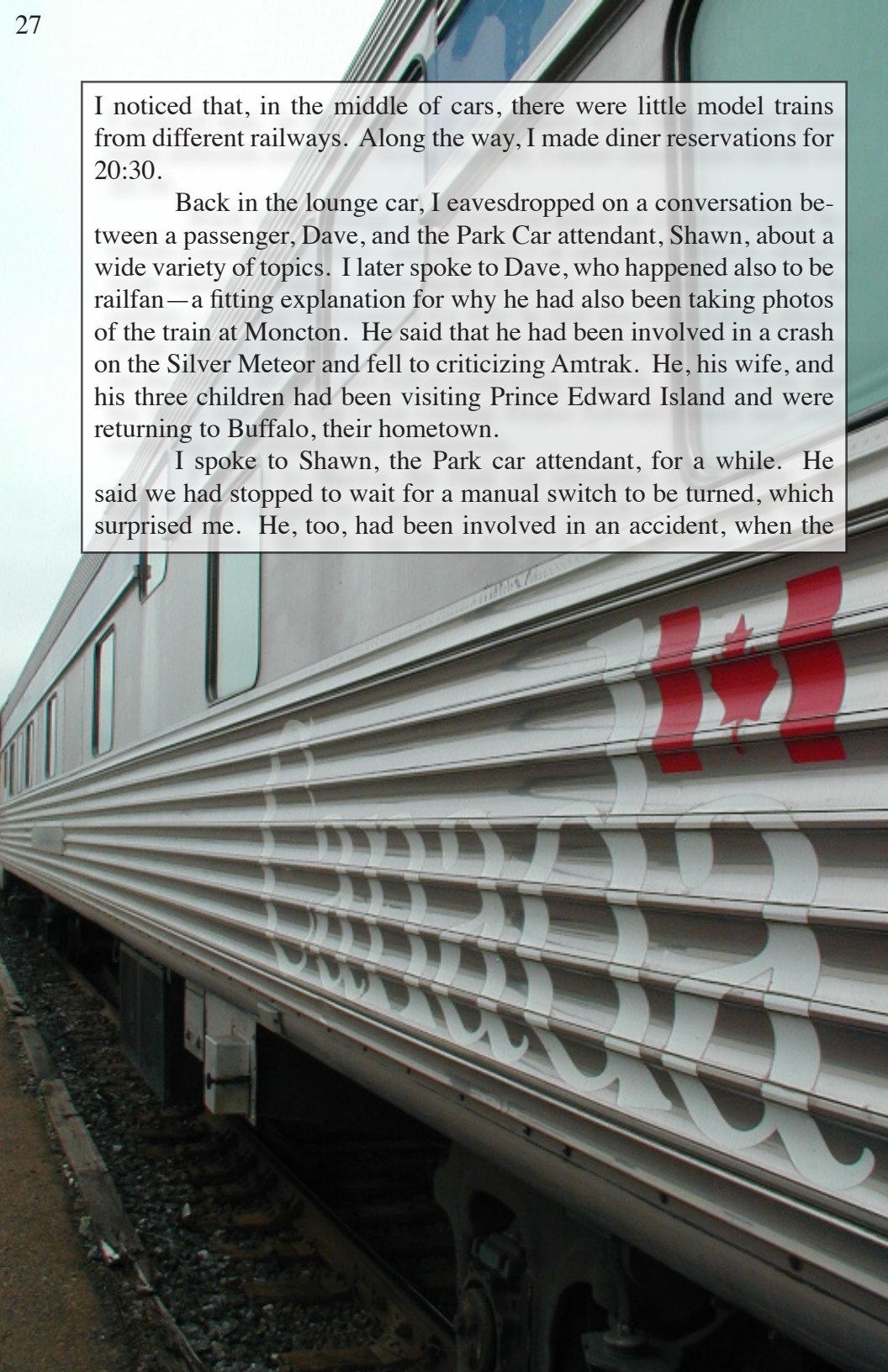




I noticed that, in the middle of cars, there were little model trains from different railways. Along the way, I made diner reservations for 20:30.

Back in the lounge car, I eavesdropped on a conversation between a passenger, Dave, and the Park Car attendant, Shawn, about a wide variety of topics. I later spoke to Dave, who happened also to be railfan—a fitting explanation for why he had also been taking photos of the train at Moncton. He said that he had been involved in a crash on the Silver Meteor and fell to criticizing Amtrak. He, his wife, and his three children had been visiting Prince Edward Island and were returning to Buffalo, their hometown.

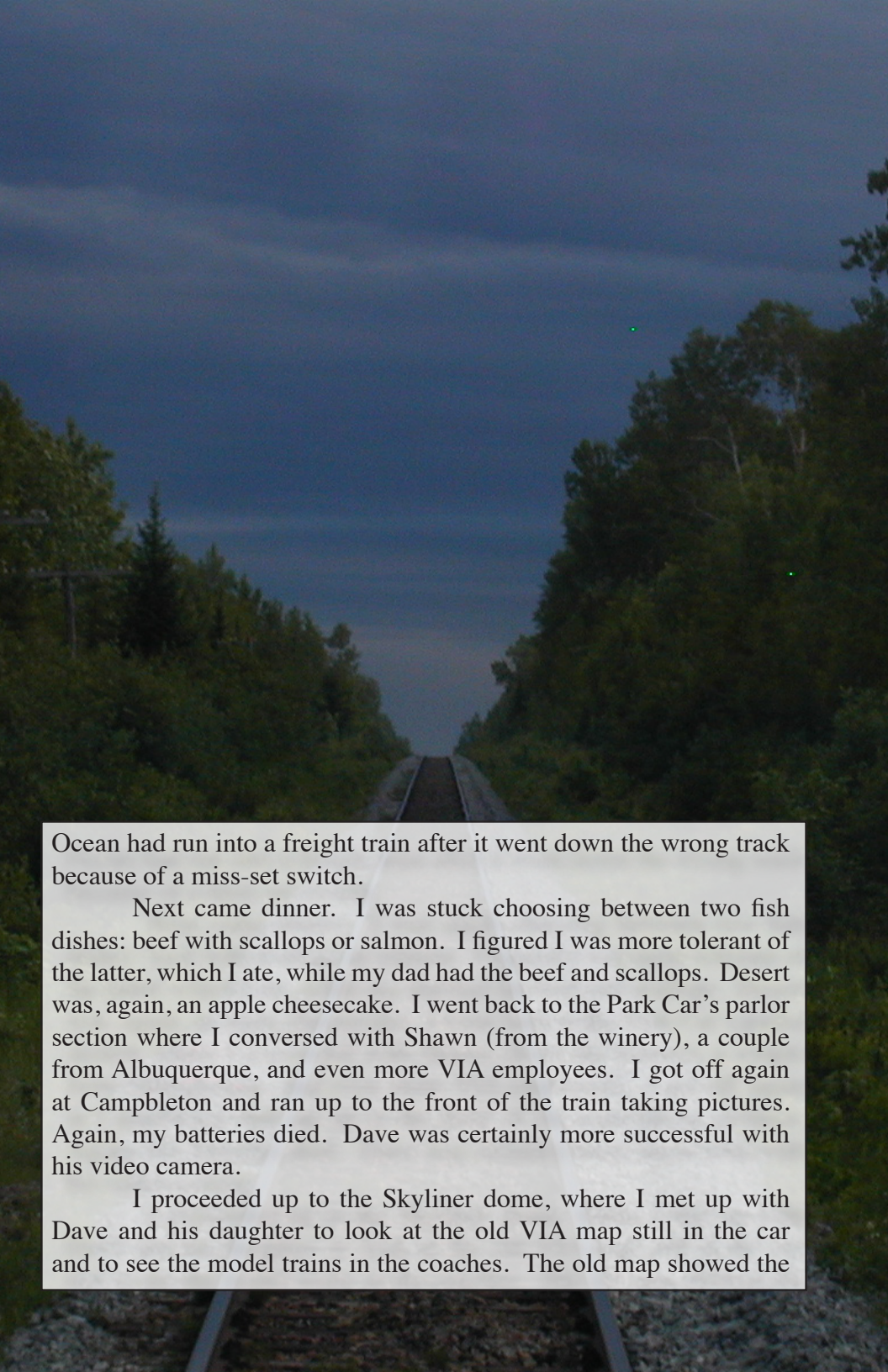
I spoke to Shawn, the Park car attendant, for a while. He said we had stopped to wait for a manual switch to be turned, which surprised me. He, too, had been involved in an accident, when the

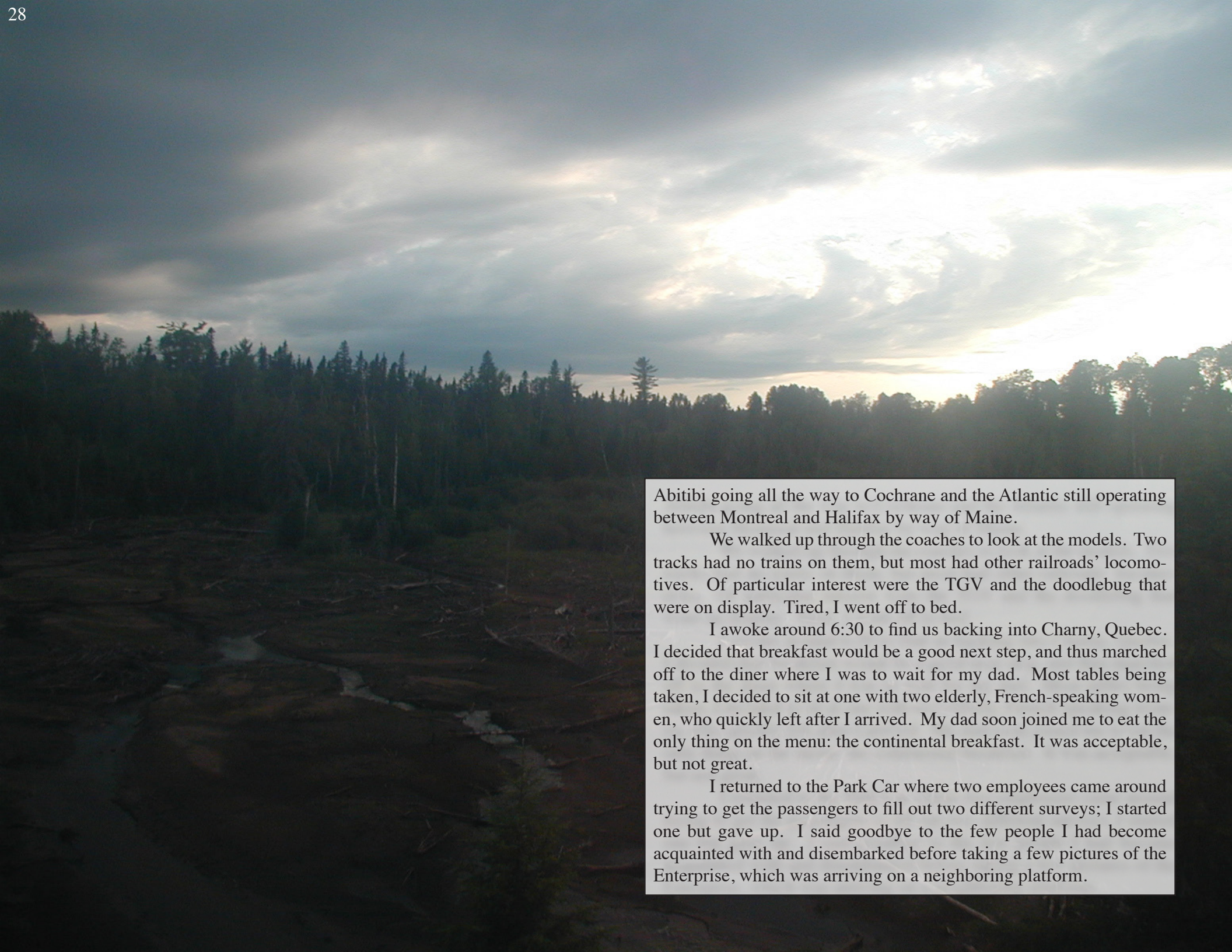


Ocean had run into a freight train after it went down the wrong track because of a miss-set switch.

Next came dinner. I was stuck choosing between two fish dishes: beef with scallops or salmon. I figured I was more tolerant of the latter, which I ate, while my dad had the beef and scallops. Desert was, again, an apple cheesecake. I went back to the Park Car's parlor section where I conversed with Shawn (from the winery), a couple from Albuquerque, and even more VIA employees. I got off again at Campbellton and ran up to the front of the train taking pictures. Again, my batteries died. Dave was certainly more successful with his video camera.

I proceeded up to the Skyliner dome, where I met up with Dave and his daughter to look at the old VIA map still in the car and to see the model trains in the coaches. The old map showed the



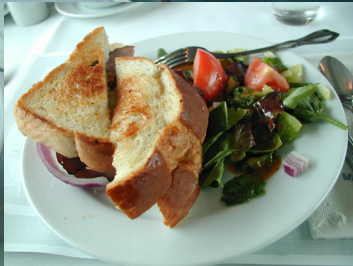


Abitibi going all the way to Cochrane and the Atlantic still operating between Montreal and Halifax by way of Maine.

We walked up through the coaches to look at the models. Two tracks had no trains on them, but most had other railroads' locomotives. Of particular interest were the TGV and the doodlebug that were on display. Tired, I went off to bed.

I awoke around 6:30 to find us backing into Charny, Quebec. I decided that breakfast would be a good next step, and thus marched off to the diner where I was to wait for my dad. Most tables being taken, I decided to sit at one with two elderly, French-speaking women, who quickly left after I arrived. My dad soon joined me to eat the only thing on the menu: the continental breakfast. It was acceptable, but not great.

I returned to the Park Car where two employees came around trying to get the passengers to fill out two different surveys; I started one but gave up. I said goodbye to the few people I had become acquainted with and disembarked before taking a few pictures of the Enterprise, which was arriving on a neighboring platform.



MONTREAL





My dad and I went upstairs to the main concourse, where, because my dad's back was feeling tired, we took a taxi to our hotel. We checked our luggage in but they told us to "come back at 15:00" for our room. I settled down to read a newspaper, and, before 9:00, they had come back and offered us a room.

Upstairs in the room, I tried the internet connection, which did not work, and moved on to taking yet more notes.

We then decided that we ought to take a walk to Old Town (Vieux-Montreal). Of course, like all bona fide walks, it began at a train station: Lucien L'Allier. There, we saw one train sitting and watched another, with a boxcar, arrive. Then we walked over to the Metro station and attempted to buy three tickets, two adult tickets for my dad and I and one children's ticket for my collection. At first, the attendant didn't understand why I wanted to buy a discounted fare ticket if I couldn't use it, but I eventually explained that I collected tickets and it turned out that he was also a collector. In addition to the ticket we purchased, he gave me a few commuter rail passes and a free ticket that is normally given out when a train breaks.

We rode the metro to Champ-de-Mars station and debarked to encounter a confusing maze of walking paths. Eventually finding an exit, we walked up to a couple of old ruins, as we were followed by an energetic, green-clad tour group. The ruins were nicely complemented by signs describing them. The only problem was that only one sentence was in English. We later learned that the old stone structures were the original town's fortification.

We visited City Hall, which was a beautiful building, and then walked down to the waterfront. The latter was excruciatingly boring, although a train track did begin to add something worthwhile. We proceeded to a market, Marche Bonsecours, but found that it was not particularly interesting. Then we walked over to a beautiful church, Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel.

Feeling that we had seen most of the Old City, we started walking back to Gare Centrale along a street that was smothered in tourist shops. After my dad bought a coffee (the cold chocolate used 2% milk, so I rejected it), we looked into a fur shop, but everything was far too expensive. We also visited a general tourist shop, which was coated in maple products. Then, just after leaving Old Montreal,

we were suddenly in a Canadian-style slum of old, uncared-for, seemingly empty buildings.

We searched for the underground city, but we found ourselves walking in a maze between exits—and no sight of the famed stores, hotels, and museums. We eventually gave up in frustration and went into Gare Centrale, where we found the entrance to a small portion of the underground city. Unable to find the rest of the underground city, we went back to our hotel. We then called Lisa to ask where we could find the cheese shop from which the cheese that we had eaten on our last stay had been purchased.

After checking the news and typing up some more notes, we rode the metro to Outremont (by way of Lucien L'Allier, where we saw a commuter train with a VIA locomotive). We took the Orange Line to Jean-Talon and the Blue to Outremont. We walked around Outremont for a while before acknowledging that my dad's desire to reach the cheese shop by way of streets with shops on them was hopeless. We eventually dropped by Lisa's house, and she walked to the cheese store with us. We bought three raw milk cheeses: one hard cheese and two soft ones. One of the soft cheeses was the same as the one we had when we had visited with Lisa. Of course, they didn't let us buy cheese without tasting it, so the process was relatively slow.

I walked back (after buying a bottle of water) and my dad took the train. The walk was very interesting: I had to walk through Outremont, where the multitude of bearded, yarmulked men proved accurate Lisa's comment that it was a neighborhood of orthodox Jews. I then walked by a number of large houses on Mont Royal; the driveway of one was being paved with tar. I walked around on a few trails across the mountain until I reached the main trail, which was not as nice as its underused neighbors. I attempted to cross the intersection of Peel and Pins, and discovered that our earlier belief that Canadian drivers were polite was quite misled. I went back to the hotel and we loafed about for a little while. After a time, we went downstairs and asked where we could get good Montreal French food. The receptionist responded that "what people here eat is fast food." But he suggested Italian food, adding that Saint-Denis was the French street. We decided to go there because it would allow us to walk past the Jazz festival.

We walked to Saint-Denis and meandered around. We could only find Italian, Indian, and Mexican restaurants. We eventually settled on Chez Pasano, a restaurant that billed itself as both French and Italian. As it turned out, the only French food they served was escargot, so we both had Italian food: my dad ate Veal Marsala, I had Veal Sorrentina. We returned by way of the Jazz festival, where we listened to the terrific Indian (they were actually playing Egyptian music) Jaipur Kawa Brass Band. We searched for the chocolate place we had earlier found in the underground city. Everything was closed, so we went over to the Paris Cafe where I had a chocolate ice cream cone and my dad had a lime drink. We then went back to the hotel, where I took notes, checked the news, and went to bed.

I awoke to type more notes before checking out of the hotel. I read over the main stories in the newspaper and then we both went, dragging our plentiful luggage, in search of an escalator or elevator into the part of the underground city that connected to the train station. All we could find were stairs, so we took an escalator down to Gare Centrale and skipped the underground city. In doing so, I had a great deal of trouble with one of our suitcases, which was starting to make a deafening squeak whenever it was moved. My dad waited while I got breakfast (Tim Horton's was the only place open, as it was Canada Day). I had a bagel with cream cheese while my dad had coffee and a doughnut.



BRAU HAUS

Restaurant KASHMIR FINE CUISINE INDIENNE Tel: 661-6640

GRAND HOTEL

MONTREAL

to

BALTIMORE



After waiting in the long line to board the Adirondack, we eventually embarked. As we boarded, the conductor was being lectured by a railroader about how he ought to be loading his passengers. (The railroader was not satisfied with there being only one door open on the entire train.) The conductor eventually gave in, but before that he yelled, “Let me run my train!”

As soon as my dad sat down, he tried to plug in his computer. Of course, the outlet refused to work, as did the one for the seats in front of us. The Conductor said that all the outlets in the entire car must not be working, but he did promise to check the circuit breaker. Over the loudspeaker, he then ordered us all to, “Please be happy with the seat you have and make friends with the person next to you.”

I next went to the rear and looked out the window; I was able to see a Park Car stationed next to a F40 once we started moving. Later, figuring that I’d probably seen all there was to see, I went back to my seat which, I noticed, had changed. My dad had switched to the other side of the aisle because—contrary to the conductor’s sug-

gestion—half of the car’s outlets were operational.

Upon reaching the border, we waited for U.S. Customs to board and question us. They were far more efficient than the Immigration Canada agents—for better or worse: We had marked “yes” on question 11B, “Are you bringing with you meats, animals, or animal/wildlife products?” Oddly, this “yes,” which answered a question covering not only our legal cheese but also various illegal products, did not cause any hesitation or remark by the customs officer. However, he did come to the conclusion that I was going to a hockey tournament. (Where on earth did he get that idea from?)

Customs completed, I went up to the cafe to buy (with Canadian dollars) a second Sierra Chicken Sandwich for myself, Nachos for my dad, and M&M’s for me. The chicken sandwich was far worse than it had been on the first train of the trip.

Sitting in the cafe car, I heard the same railroader who had been arguing with the Conductor earlier using the newspaper’s quiz to interrogate the Conductor about whom the Canadian head of state

was (answer: Queen Elizabeth II).

I then meandered back to the car's rear just as we entered Plattsburgh. There, I was given a nice view of the Saranac River, an Eagle on a pedestal, and a very short glimpse of the rear of some newly constructed Long Island Rail Road cars. A man from Lima, who hardly spoke English, joined me in the rear vestibule, and we attempted to carry on a conversation. He had been visiting Montreal and was then moving on to Washington, but he complained bitterly about North America's bad trains. He said he had lived in Paris, and the trains there were far better. But, when I asked him about Lima's trains, he said that the only passenger railroad went to Machu Pichu.

At Westport, I was entertained by a VIA standing stool that was being used in the United States. After the Peruvian had gone back to his seat, a Salvadorian came back to the rear. He talked about Canadian and European trains and how much better they were than Amtrak's. But he, too, admitted that there was only one train route in El Salvador—and it had been cut back because the bus went so much faster. Soon, the Peruvian returned and he and the Salvadorian entered into a long, Spanish conversation. Feeling slightly excluded, I went back into the car. The train got later and later, to the point where we were likely to only just make our connection in New York.

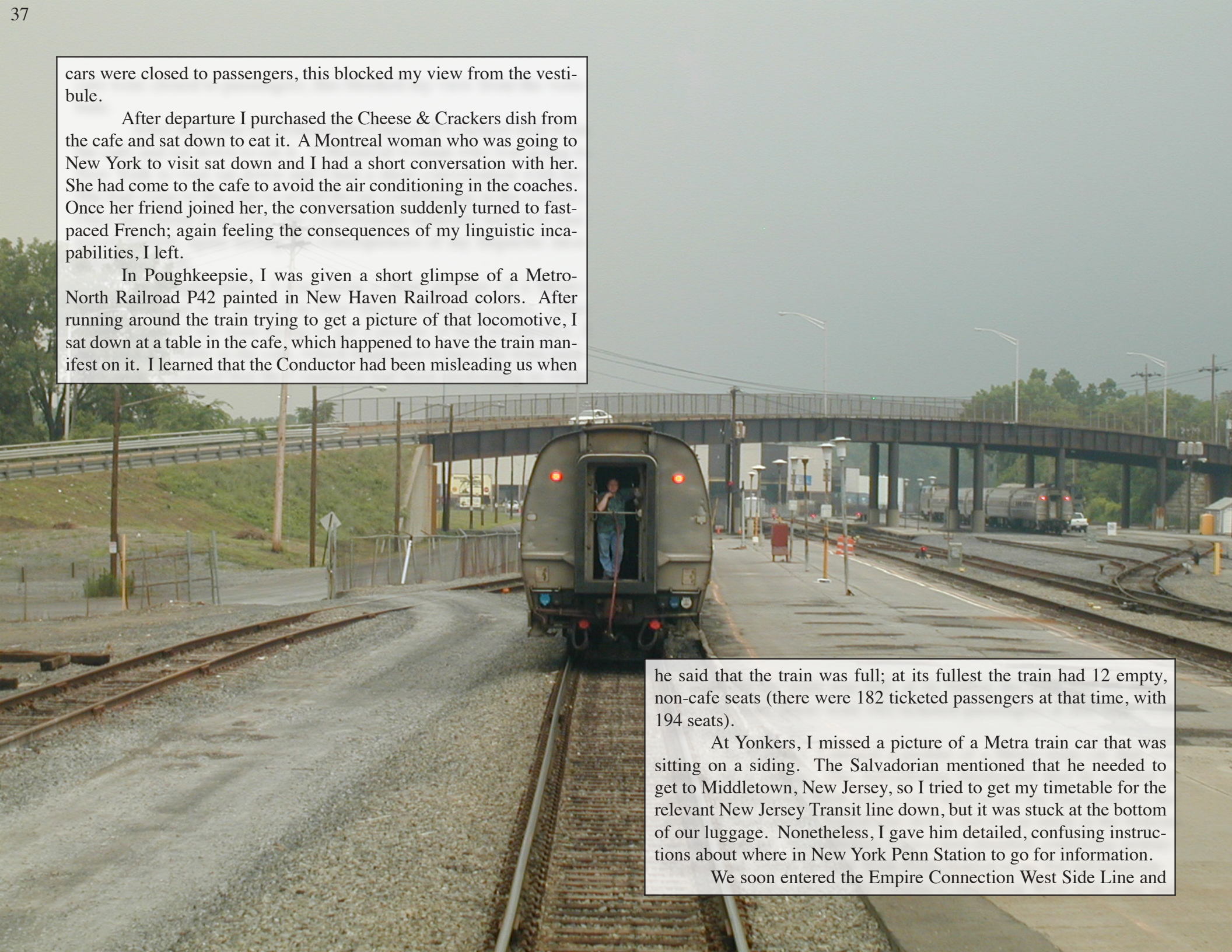
At Albany I detrained and snapped plenty of pictures. The people boarding at Albany were all shoved into the Horizon car that was at the front of the train. Before we left, we were further delayed by the addition of three refurbished club/cafe cars to the rear of the train. Because these



cars were closed to passengers, this blocked my view from the vestibule.

After departure I purchased the Cheese & Crackers dish from the cafe and sat down to eat it. A Montreal woman who was going to New York to visit sat down and I had a short conversation with her. She had come to the cafe to avoid the air conditioning in the coaches. Once her friend joined her, the conversation suddenly turned to fast-paced French; again feeling the consequences of my linguistic incapacities, I left.

In Poughkeepsie, I was given a short glimpse of a Metro-North Railroad P42 painted in New Haven Railroad colors. After running around the train trying to get a picture of that locomotive, I sat down at a table in the cafe, which happened to have the train manifest on it. I learned that the Conductor had been misleading us when



he said that the train was full; at its fullest the train had 12 empty, non-cafe seats (there were 182 ticketed passengers at that time, with 194 seats).

At Yonkers, I missed a picture of a Metra train car that was sitting on a siding. The Salvadorian mentioned that he needed to get to Middletown, New Jersey, so I tried to get my timetable for the relevant New Jersey Transit line down, but it was stuck at the bottom of our luggage. Nonetheless, I gave him detailed, confusing instructions about where in New York Penn Station to go for information.

We soon entered the Empire Connection West Side Line and

the Conductor announced that the southbound Regional train we were connecting to would be held in Penn Station. Hearing the Conductor announce that the train was leaving on track 13, we bounded off to board it, finding ourselves well ahead of the rest of the transferring passengers. The Regional, numbered 187, departed 15 minutes late, and I immediately made my way back to the rear. On the way, I spoke to a Spanish couple who were looking for somebody transferring from the Adirondack. Later, I saw them sitting with the Peruvian I had met earlier.

I stood in the rear, but not the vestibule, and watched trains travel up and down the corridor. At Metropark, Amtrak and New Jersey Transit trains both passed us going northbound within seconds (on separate tracks). After Wilmington, I went back to our seats and heard, from the people next to us, that Justice O'Connor had resigned. We talked about that and then got off in Baltimore, catching the last available taxi home.



