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Across

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I've just come back from across.

“Across” is over the water, off the island, to the mainland. It doesn't matter if it's no farther than the town of Charlevoix – as my trip was this time – or downstate, or to another state, or to another country, we say, “I'm going across.” Everyone understands. It is treated with the reverence it deserves. People respond with appropriate comments and concern.

“How exciting!”

“I hope everything is okay?”

“What fun!”

“Be careful!”

“Stay safe...”

They don't necessarily know what the trip is about, and they don't have to know to have any of these comments feel right. I may counter with facts like, "It's just for one overnight...a regularly scheduled health screening...just Charlevoix and maybe Petoskey for a little shopping..." I'll probably even say, "No big deal," but we all know that's not true.

A trip across *is* a Big Deal! Even this one, which was just turning an appointment at the hospital for a mammogram into an opportunity to do a little shopping, go to a bookstore, eat in a restaurant and maybe take in a movie. It is an adventure!

A trip across also entails quite a bit of planning. I had to arrange for time off work. I had to make arrangements for the dogs to spend the night in the kennel, schedule my flights, arrange to use Aunt Katie's car that she keeps at the Charlevoix airport, reserve a motel room for the night, put together a shopping list for myself and – it's the only considerate thing to do – offer to shop for Aunt Katie and anyone else I happen to mention the trip to.

Everything would have been easier if this weren't Labor Day weekend. When I scheduled the mammogram – several weeks ago – it never dawned on me that it was the Friday before the *last big weekend* up north. It is also the weekend of the Mackinac Bridge walk and many other special events. It is the weekend when it would be hard to get a room at all, and absolutely impossible to get a good deal on a room. When all of the roads would be choked with cars, the sidewalks teeming with pedestrians and all of the shops and restaurants busy.

It's okay. I'm easy. Any trip across offers new experiences. I'd bring my old computer and take the opportunity to access all of my photographs and upload them onto other sites (WordPress! Facebook!) where I could then access them from my other computer. I'd watch TV! I don't have television at home. I haven't seen *Jeopardy* in years! *The Food Channel!* *HGTV!* *The Weather Channel* in hurricane season! Whatever else is on! I'd read! How luxurious to have time – without distractions – to just read! Add to that my shopping list, and all the bookstores I wanted to browse through, and it would be a fine trip.

I ended up at the Villa Moderne Motel, which was quite the place when it was new...fifty years ago. It is now used mainly by workers. The rooms are clean, but dated and a little worn. The television offered a few stations, but many of them – including the *Food Channel* that I had been looking forward to – came in as a pixelated mess. There was internet access, but not an outlet for the three pronged plug my computer needs. The lights were barely bright enough to read by.

The traffic was so heavy, I decided to walk to the hospital for my screening. A nice day for a walk...a good, healthy thing to do. I didn't realize the hospital was two and a half miles away. Though the day had started off cool – which accounted for my long sleeves topped with a light blazer – but had gotten very warm. I was sweaty, tired and a frazzled mess by the time I arrived at the (wrong door of the) hospital.

The technician was cranky; I felt far too bedraggled to assert myself, and was close to tears by the time I got out of there. And proceeded to walk two and a half miles back to my shoddy motel room. I stopped at Pizza Hut for an order of bread sticks and a lemonade, and took it back to my

room. Ate while watching a program I didn't understand. Read a little. Went to bed early. The mattress was not quite as bad as I expected it would be.

Today was better. My room came equipped with a full sized coffee pot. I brewed four cups and drank them all while watching the *Today* show. I went to K-Mart and the Family Fare grocery store. Took care of most of my list and all of Aunt Katie's. I drove to Petoskey for my favorite bookstore (McLean & Eakin) and lunch at the Roast & Toast (Chicken Cordon Bleu on toasted sourdough, Cafe Mocha with two shots of espresso). I visited the other bookstore, and then the Grain Train for bulk beans and grains, plus one loaf of 7 grain bread from Stone House Bakery.

I made it back to Charlevoix with plenty of time to fill the car with gas before going to the airport. Back on the island, I loaded my purchases into the car, dropped groceries and keys off to Aunt Katie, went to pick up my dogs, then home.

"I just got back from across," we say, with a bit of breathlessness, as if reporting a trip to Paris, the South Pole or even the moon. We say it to explain feelings of exhaustion, jet-lag and culture shock. "Aaah," others reply, understanding perfectly.