



It Felt Like Flying!

Where there's a will there's always a way as Scott Rains has shown by not letting his disability get in the way of seeing the world. He tells of his recent experience travelling, this time to Alaska.

Photographs in this articles provided by Scotts Rains & Sherri Backstrom.





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Scott Rains

EACH morning I made the leap overboard. “It looks like flying,” piped a voice from the deck of the Sea Wolf somewhere behind me. It was like flying as I looked out at the glacier-studded mountains ahead and the glass-smooth Alaskan water of Glacier Bay around the kayak floating below me. It was a kind of freedom I never expected as I signed on to spend a week cruising on a wheelchair-adapted yacht with Waypoint Yacht Charter Services.

Strapped into a device that held me securely I was lowered – “flying” – into a tandem sea kayak. Some days, like the first one at Reed Glacier, immersed me in a passionately delivered

course on biology, botany, geology, glaciology and the history of the Tlingit people. I bobbed in front of a glacier towering 10 stories above me as the articulate young naturalist, Sarah Betcher, paddled us expertly. Intimate and ego-erasing was the combined effect. Comfortable and safe far beyond what I imagined could be possible for me as an aging ever-more-obviously-quadruplegic.

Other days, like when we anchored in Tidal Inlet, I earned my 15 minutes of outdoorsman’s fame by spotting a pack of wolves – black, tawny, silver – five in all.

With seven passengers and four crew members the Sea Wolf was the perfect size for experiencing small-ship cruising. Built to hold 12 passengers in

three wheelchair-adapted and three non-adapted cabins there was room to spare onboard and I enjoyed my solitary accommodations to the hilt. Simply opening the cabin door put me 32 inches from the sea on this retrofitted World War II minesweeper with decks widened and lifts installed for wheelchair-users.



Scott Rains’ recent adventures to Alaska were no less heavenly.





Sherri Backstrom, Waypoint Yacht Charter Services

Experiencing Alaska

To experience Alaska is to experience the earth revealing a majestic that only truly impacts you when you encounter it at the human scale of a small boat, kayak, or you own body.

Once, at Marjorie and Grand Pacific Glaciers, our flea-sized flotilla of kayaks glided past nesting puffins, cormorants, Bald Eagles, and endangered species of gull. We weaved through the ice floe shortly after sunrise to listen to what the Tlingit called “white thunder.” Those explosive cracks of gas release and the body-resonating reverberation of calving glaciers are a wake-up call.

The same call was evident on the faces of the small knot of passengers standing at least 15 stories above us on the promenade of a mega cruise ship that obliterated our view of the 5,000 year old river of ice succumbing to gravity and dragging mountaintops to the sea. Those passengers, turned away from the glacier, chose to vicariously enjoy our vulnerable rapture. They alone of the thousands of their shipmates spent that half hour with us their

floating city-substitute left its carbon footprint over the fastest-receding glaciers in the world.

My morning meditation was for them – handicapped by their mode of transportation. It is one that has made neither the transition to socially-inclusive Universal Design in order to sustain them on a human scale or to Green Design in order to preserve the sacredness of place for seven generations and beyond.

I can think of only two words for the Tlingit grandparents who preserved this place intact; for the park rangers, residents and responsible tour operators who continue to do so; for my shipmates on the Sea Wolf who gave generously to allow me to experience it and for the cruise ship-bound congregation whose longing for wilderness intimacy freed them to engage in our morning meditation.

Those words are the only two I have learned in Tlingit. They are sufficient and all the more poignant for having been taught to me by a man I met on Seattle’s Skid Row caught up in that same longing when he saw

me wearing the artwork of his people:

“Gunalchéesh.”- “Thank you.”

To take this trip or others on accessible sailboats and small boats around the world contact: Sherri Backstrom, Waypoint Yacht Charter Services (contact@waypointcharter.com) or visit its website at www.waypointcharter.com/accessible_travel.htm tel 888-491-2949 or 360-656-5934

** (Scott Rains is wheelchair user and sees no reason for the disabled to shy away from travelling. He can be reached at srains@oco.net or through his website http://www.RollingRains.com)*

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Fun time: strapped into a device that held securing, Scott was lowered -"flying- into tandem sea kayak.



An adventure indeed: Scott enjoyed his Alaska trip tremendously



Making it possible: Scott Rains' disability is no issue in his wanting to travel the world.