

My first day in Fort Lauderdale after 35 hours of travelling and a few hours sleep.

Not having a clue where I was, I fumbled around searching for the origin of some discordant melody and vibration – and found in my hand my phone with the words “7.00 am Alarm, Snooze” displayed on the front. Where on earth was I??? It took me a few breaths to work out I was actually in a motel in Fort Lauderdale....and was determined to get my body clock adjusted to local time. I stumbled to the toilet and sitting there I had this wave of disappointment overcome me. You know how much I love my morning cuppa and my dandy tea well... I did have a room booked with a coffee maker and fridge... but the one they had allocated me – because I was last to check in at 11.30pm at night.... was a room adjoining the lift. Not good for a farm girl who is only used to tweetie birds in the morning. No-one had remembered or taken the time to read the request notes which had been written by the person with whom I had made the booking and clearly written at the bottom of my booking confirmation form. “Quiet room please – not beside an elevator” The grinding, groaning, squeaking, clunking lift was just not going to happen in my dreams so down I went to relinquish my coffee maker and fridge to have a quiet room down the hall. Back at the lift going to the second floor, I drank the polystyrene cup of milk I had conned out of the reception lady to sneak from the adjoining breakfast room, and had carefully tried to not spill with 2 suitcases in tow (artwork in one) up the 3 floors in the lift the first time ..So... with no coffee maker which Max and I had expertly worked out on our previous trip how to use Dandy bags in..... the likelihood of a morning cuppa in my room looked definitely out of the programme. The joy and anticipation of my morning cuppa sank out with my pee. Yep...no morning cuppa in my room....it didn't happen at all. Even in the breakfast room... I just could not come at warm water from a thermos in a white polystyrene cup and zero fat milk. I just couldn't do it..regardless of how much I was craving a cuppa! ☺

Glad I took some GF muesli down the threadbare carpeted stairs to the breakfast room, because there were tubs of these sugary circle things and some chocolate poppy things... and some sticky muffin donut things. I poured my own muesli into a small brown polystyrene bowl and ate with a plastic teaspoon, while the other members at adjoining tables discussed their bunions, arthritis and memory loss. I was 'out of there' - still crunching my last spoonful of pepitas and pecans! Determined to get some sun....although it was pouring outside... I packed my goretex in my backpack, tore a map off the counter at the front desk and asked which road took me to the Art Centre. I was shown on the map which road I was to take...and was explained that it wasn't a really detailed map and the star where the hotel was marked..was a little way off where it should be marked. LOL... so off I went in my boots and free Spirit. First hiccup. Which way was north?? Hmmm/ Northern hemisphere... East... no..that's not East.. yes it is..hmmmm no it isn't... that's west that way..... Hmmmm think I had better go back in and ask them which way North is so at least I can start off in the right direction. LoL

I passed a large expanse of grass , dotted with flowers and small rectangular headstones. Fig trees with wild and furrowed roots encapsulated corner blocks. The hems on my pants were starting to fold under my boots as I walked, as they became heavy with water from the storms and rain from during the night. The puddles were clear, but filled whole sections of footpath, and just lay waiting for the heat of the day to steam them away.

Fripped scallop shells adorned garden edges. Spiky cactus hedged with their salmon flowers were the only life on this run-down holiday home. White and lavender flowers traipsed across the footpath on weedy tendrils. Green paw-paw fruit hung like middle aged women's breasts on leaning trunks as if they were trying to escape domestic suburban life. A black concrete owl hung heavily from the branch of a radically pruned mango tree, and a man with a long pair of secateurs in his gnarled hands was tangled in prunings from a tree and the rope with shreds of a symbol which had been long ago hoisted up this flaky, grey pole. I stopped and helped him escape this branchy jail, and he invited me to see his orchids in his gazebo in his back garden. He shuffled down the strip of concrete which once was a path for his car which is obvious by its absence; and I followed his excitement. A friend of his redid his gazebo with new shade cloth and timber, and in it hung the most amazing orchids. "Jack's my name." "Hello, my name is Julie." "I am just so amazed that this one I was given for Christmas is still flowering. Just beautiful !!" and it was. They were exquisite. I tasted his Cilantro, arugula, rosemary..... "And there are so many mango flowers...and bananas....."and there is so much parsley" ... "isn't that Basil" ... "I have heaps of parsley" "isn't this one basil?..... "ah- yes.... it's my mind you know- it plays tricks and gets scrambled. I know it is parsley...I mean basil.... now which one is it..I'm confused." We then spoke about his heliconias... and I asked whether he grew ginger... he said NO??? Can I?? How do I do that??? I told him...and I think he was so excited he wanted to go to the shop there and then.... but I suspect he would have to wait until someone would take him. He said whenever he tended or ate his ginger – he would think of me. I don't need anyone to make a toast for me at my birthday lunch; or put a sparkler on a dessert; or remember my birthday – when I hear those words which have just come from such a place of loving openness.

My armpits were satched... My back was dripping and I was getting my wish... SUN ! The clouds had gone. The puddles were drying up....and all that moisture was engulfing me. I was sooooooooooooo hot. It was cool and windy in the morning ...and I sooooo wished I had my dress or even my shorts and t-shirt and boots.... because I was sweltering. I walked the 6 miles up to the main gallery/eating type street.... and was wishing I was back in the suburb area – wandering aimlessly up and down the streets – catching glimpses of the lives of Fort-Lauderdale residents. I wasn't fussed on the white polo-shirted men with their expanded bellies and swollen fingers from an excess of food. I wasn't that fussed on all the 'resort' type clothes shops for the wannabe rich and famous. Everything seemed fake. Fake smiles. Fake wealth. Fake happiness. The Riverwalk was lined with white boats with necklaces of "For Sale" signs. I wanted to be back into the reality of the overgrown grass and discussions with young mums about how difficult it is to bring up children here. but I was hungry and needed to eat. This street was lined with those typical tourist type restaurants with the board and menu at the front and the waiter ready to pounce to give you a table should there be any indication that there is anything you are even remotely interested in on the menu. I searched for the letters GF... and of about 20 restaurants and many inquisitive looks from wait-staff... and another 2 hours later... I decided on one place that had some hand cut chips... and grilled salmon and a gourmet salad. Yum.... table service.... so I sat down... and waited about 5 minutes for someone to come over. I thought the man who saw me deciphering the menu may have come over, but no-one appeared out from between all the other tables of guests eating their lunch. I stood up and went inside to the counter near

the bar area. "Oh.... lunch service finishes at 2.30..sorry you have missed out today". ... "But it is only 2.35...surely you could make one lunch" ..."t's only 2.35.....there are other guests still eating." "How many are there of you?" ... "Just me" "sorry... come back at 5pm." Bummer.... and as I walked up the street that was the same story in all of the restaurants. ...so... where to now.

I had on my phone the address of the Wholefoods store. I could see the Federal Highwayand I needed to go to number 2000. I walked one block and I saw I was at 10..... I texted Max to confirm my suspicions... and at 3pm I had 200 blocks to walk....and I was hungry and had drunk nearly all my water. I prayed for a shop with some nutritious food.... and after walking one more block, like the crown on top of a building I read the word "Fresh Food". The car park was black and smelled of tar with stark white lines dashed in rows. The trees were supported by 3 wooden posts positioned like a tripod. A wet banner "Now Open" hung limply from the side of the front door.

This was the place I was to spend my next hour.

Schubert squeezed out the glass sliding doors as I approached them....and his melodies accompanied me until they closed behind me when I left. Puffed red hearts...on ribbons-floated in groups amongst tiers of coloured bunches of flowers. This morning on "Mornings with Ed" I heard that on average, males will spend \$186 this Valentine's day...and females will average spending \$146. These flowers were certainly going to contribute to this figure. Tight bunches of vibrant colours sat waiting in buckets half filled with water. Waiting for the trip home and to be placed in a vase ... Waiting to observe whether the expectations held in this gesture had achieved their desired outcome.

Fuji. Braeburn. Pink Lady. Jazz. Big apples. Apples on steroids. One apple would be adequate to share between 4 people. I have never seen such BIG apples in my life. Everything here seems to be BIG. Big things. Big people. Big apples.

Globe grapes bulged out of bags. Schubert 'sticcatoed' the pears. Forests of asparagus stood ankle deep in black trays in wooden bins. Green bananas waited patiently to turn yellow. Capsicums; yellow, orange, red; with swollen cheeks poked out their green tongues at the people wearing thongs... or pointy high heels...or women with white hair and gold ear-rings... or women with make-up and red lipstick which hid all traces of flesh... or men who walked 2 paces behind the women who pushed the trolley... or men who walked 2 paces in front of the women who pushed the trolley. Those green stemmy tongues did not discern. All were given the same treatment- regardless. Floral green carpet mats presented wooden bins with thick legs. Boxes of berries were stacked like children's building blocks...raspberries, blueberries, strawberries, cranberries.

Fresh cut GM green salads lined the wall like a vertical paddock... shades and green flecked with grated carrot and beetroot. Onions were like flying saucers out of a 1960's Sci-fi movie. Fat ladies in black aprons were handing out tofu squares coated in burnt sesame seeds. Organic lollipops sprouted from a mountain in the distance. Plastic ferns draped down from above the counters beyond the baskets and pillars of specials of pasta and nuts. Dried mushrooms and garlic....and chillies and peppers – fire encased in plastic – ready to ignite

on someone's tongue. I'm really thirsty so I go to find some water....'and I'll just start it now....and pay for it when I go out... that will be fine'. My back is clammy and wet...and starting to become cool. Even my arm-pits are feeling cool from the air-conditioning and wetness from perspiration on my skin. There is a round plastic bottle – pomegranate juice. "Naked" juices... 'with OTHER ingredients'.... Huh... these are about as close to being 'naked juices' as I am standing here with my saturated t-shirt and pants- saturated from both the top AND bottom.

Bunches of carrots and beetroot are corralled in purple rubber bands. Leeks are lassoed in pairs by yellow ribbon. Chunks of vegetables and fruit are skewered and are lay to rest in long plastic boxes. A bell pepper tries to escape – about 10 seconds after a lady takes its companion to her trolley. A red and white variegated eggplant longs to be in a traditional moussaka. Potatoes balance precipitously on pyramids on the cusp of crumbling and falling on to the yellow vinyl floor.

Liquorice – green apple, strawberry and mango?? What were they thinking???

OMG!!
Cowboy blend coffee. French Roast coffee. Sumatran Coffee. Justice blend. Mexican Mayan blend. What will they think up next? Noosa – Aussie culture inspired – and Colorado fresh yoghurt! LOL.

Nuts and seeds are in bins as organised as the Chinese army on a parade. Steel spoons vertically – saluting, ready to scoop into paper bags. Green dried beans. Dried okra, Dried potato. Dried sweet potato. Dried pumpkin. Dried pineapple. Dried apple. Dried papaya. Don't really know why when we can have all our fruit and veg fresh that we need to have them dried?? Perhaps it is so we can eat more..and fit more in our ever expanding bodies.

I wander over to the islands of salad where a little boy's fingers which had just fossicked in his nostrils creeps to snatch a piece of potato from one of the salads. A lady with a green apron is searing pieces of rib fillet for customers to try...sample pieces large enough to be a meal sized portion. Pies are squished into boxes. Fish are lying in coffins of ice. Bread in shiny plastic bags with green twist ties rise out of huge baskets. Stuffed roast legs of pork, and whole chickens, and stuffed beef glisten and drip fat under a hot yellow light.

Rows of bottles of sauces and oils stand to attention across the room. Glances from cherries on the top of cakes cream whipped like ocean waves and chocolate shines like the skin of a sweaty African athlete (☺) ...cakes in a glass cabinet where white and black are happy to be side by side.

Pale, anaemic meat is cut in huge portions and lay side by side, pressed against each other - identically as they were positioned in the feed lots. Pickles and olives stuffed into jars stood beside tins with cartoon type images of corn cobs with faces and peas with tendril arms.

An antipasti island swayed under the flood of olive...no wait..perhaps sunflower oiled artichokes, and stuffed peppers...and olives which were sliding out of their silver trays.

Natural remedies with preservatives in white plastic bottles lined the wall beside the European wines... Merlot.... white wineBeer...

I see green visors and caps bobbing up and down behind the counter of the deli....where tongs are snipping and scooping into clear round tubs and being sealed with sticky stickers with bar codes and numbers. Sushi is being deftly made by Japanese wearing coats with small black polka dots..and black baseball caps....and speaking with an American accent. That's a bit trippy ! I see some 'officials' wearing neck string identification..and I read a badge which says "David". He seems to know about everything and collects a large tray of pre-made antipasti and takes it over to a small island marked by red heart balloons. 3 boxes of wine are stacked and a tall lady with dark straight hair and a red top with a ruffled neckline...and spiky shoes poking out of skinny dark jeans... asks him if he would like to try some of this 'beautiful wine' ..from Chile. "It goes with absolutely 'everything'" he takes one.... perhaps he doesn't know everything after all.

The violin concerto starts ... and I wonder where Schubert has gone... perhaps for a toilet break.... I tried to go, but there only seemed to be one and a queue 6 ladies long. Not too sure whether the frenetic violin is very conducive to choosing ... but what can I do..??? absolutely nothing...and it seems to be getting louder... and the queues are getting longer...and the trolleys are multiplying..and the baskets are doing some sort of mitosis... and my backpack nearly has a clean strike on a whole arrangement of wine bottles. Fortunately disaster averted. That may have saved some poor sucker from purchasing a Chilean wine which 'went with everything' though.... but this sucker may have had to pay for them all!!! LOL..

As the piano and violin now run the scales like 'flight of the bumble bee'... I pick up a bag near the counter.... "Chocolate covered peanut butter pretzels...." I nearly vomited! Then there were the mags beside the counter... "100 ways to do macaroni cheese"... and on the cover of another mag...an image of a lady holding a bowl of macaroni and cheese as big as her torso and head!! What is it with Americans and macaroni and cheese!....

Now being 5pm.....hungry and tired... I take my spinach leaves, feta cheese and pecan nuts outside with me... accompanied by the last fading notes of Shubert, or Beethoven...or Brahms.... and sit on a wet seat in the car park by myself happily looking at the sunset...working out how I'm going to walk the 10kms back to my motel.

That's another story. ☺