

Tuesday, April 24th – Day 3rd

Even though there was „We'll get up at our leisure" written in Susie's itinerary for that day, we weren't any morning lazy people and got up early and already at 7:30 a.m. we were walking down toward Mallory Square with a giant cruise ship by the quay and many hens and roosters ☺. And of course with a tropical greenery all around. It was like a fairy tale again. The sun, the blue sky, the marvelous white ship ... And much, much water of Gulf of Mexico with some islands in them. Unbelievable for us Middle Europeans. After a while we reached our morning destination that we headed for, the restaurant of „Two Friends Patio".

(<http://www.twofriendskeywest.com>)

And coffee and eggs in all manner. It was ‚Crab Benedict' for me and ‚One or Two Eggs Any Style' for Hana.

During breakfast we were talking about our that day's program. Susie and Dan prepared for us a sail by kayaks around a shallow ocean nearby Overseas Highway, in the north end of Key West. Even before we left the restaurant, Susie's cellphone rang. Dan's sister Vera called Dan and told him a very sad message that her husband Jack died. Really the sad event. Well. Life has both ups and downs ...

On our way to the kayaks Dan told us that Vera and Jack Whitaker meant a lot for him.

„As I said before, my sister's name is Vera. Vera Laverne Whitaker. Jack and Vera are for me like my second parents. Especially Vera is like my Mom. When I was ‚teen' I started having troubles. I got in a bad bunch. My mates were quite rogue and wild and we were making monkeyshine. And my parents were too old to tame me. So I was sent to live in Omaha to my sister and her family. They have two sons, Mike and Mark. Mike is slightly younger than me and Mark a little younger still. When I moved up here from Mississippi, when I was in high school, I stayed with Jack and Vera and was in the same class in school as Mike. (I lost a year in school when I was hit by the car). I was really lucky to have possibility to stay with them, faraway from Pascagoula troubles. Now Vera lives in Mesa, Arizona. "

09:30 a.m. – a stop for a short walk around a beach, paddling and frolicking.

09:45 a.m. – our arrival to the place of a meeting with an kayaking guide. She came on a motor scooter, had some words with Susie, we jumped in Toyota and started chasing the nimble scooter down the streets of Key West to a bay of a shallow ocean where there was a headquarters of a tourist agency ‚Blue Planet Kayak'. (<http://www.blue-planet-kayak.com/refugetour.html>).



We bought ‚Wildlife Refuge Tour' and shortly after 10 a.m. : „Let's go for it !", the four of us sat down into kayaks, me with Hana and Dan with Susie, and were paddling from a dock together with other about five kayaks and our guide under the deep blue sky, on the shallow, clearly blue water toward wonderful adventure.

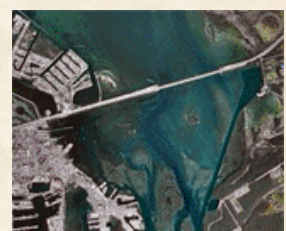
First we took a direction around the first small mangrove island. Left-hand we could see slender pillars of the Overseas Highway, ahead of us a beautiful white catamaran and in the distance a stretch of the mangrove islands, our destination.

Our voyage was great and went without any troubles by a permanent English talking of our guide girl. Here she pointed at a small Lemon Shark, there she explained us about mangrove trees that are very important for a formation of the mangrove islands. They are able to live in a salt shallow water and catch a sand among their high roots and this way to form new islands. They are also home for a lot of birds and other creatures.



No Greater Love
than the Enduring,
Tender Love...
of One Drunken
Friend for Another

**TWO FRIENDS
BAR**
KEY WEST



And in a half an hour we could see that natural phenomenon with our own eyes from near. We were there at time between high and low tide, which meant that a tangle of mangrove roots was semi-bare and we could marvel at its solidity. And above the roots there was an line network of trunks with a juicy greenery of leathern leaves, that all twisting together with other blooming plants and bushes. The luxuriant life ! „It's amazing, Zuzanka ! We love this cruise !”, we were smiling at our friends.

And our guide continued her talks about those islands and an animal kingdom there. Here she fished out Sea Cucumber, there Shellfish, here Starfish and there she pointed at a shoal of Jellyfish close to the seabed.

For explanation ... if I talk about the shallow ocean, it means something between one foot to seven feet in depth and somewhere there are sandy tongues where ocean currents unload their sandy load in front of the mangrove islands.

And then we continued our cruise, around the green island and then through it about in the middle. We sailed in and squirmed our way through a labyrinth of canals in the shade of a canopy of the mangroves. We noticed a small snake slithering above our heads as well as a beautiful white heron sitting on top of the trees. We sailed through the island and pulled out on ,our' side under the beating down sun. We headed back toward a dockland, our two kayaks side by side : „Zuzanka and Dan, it was the great trip ! We thank you for that idea, our friends !”.

We pull up a pier, our three hour wonderful sail ended. We thanked the girl and left ,Blue Planet Kayak'. We returned along a crab company with many wooden crab traps to our Toyota and went out. On the way back we stopped at a supermarket to replenish our supply and came back to our base. There we had a short break with coffee and beer and some munchies in the porch and take our time easy but it lasted just an hour and then : „Let's go !”, we set out for sightseeing that lazy Caribbean town and headed toward the docks, for looking at boats of various size and for feeling of scent of the ocean and fish and for sitting in an old sailor bar with the unmistakable laid-back atmosphere. We had friendly talks, there was also a phone from Stacie and Dan's joking with Cassidy. Drinking Corona I remembered Susie's problems with FEMA. „FEMA ? No problem. Everything came out well. O.K.” When we enjoyed our break enough we continued our exploring. Yes, we visited a shop with souvenirs of course ... Then we took a walk around Hemingway's house to the Zero Mile point and then to the southernmost point of Key West, of the States too, just about 90 miles far from Cuba. And another walking back to ,our' house, that time down the streets with mostly wooden houses in the colonial tradition with large gardens full of a luxuriant vegetations. And full of the greenery and colors. There were also many colorful cars and motorbikes in the streets and we also could see one for us strange, mighty tree. It was the Kapok tree with almost horizontal, thick arms. The real stunner among other trees for us ...

And our dinner ? For that evening Susie put a gas grill into operation and fixed a perfect barbecue for us. Steak Kebabs were her masterwork, delicious ! Yum, yum !!!

And red wine and Coronas and joking and talking. We also looked through a program of Wednesday, the program a bit misterious for us since Susie had written in her itinerary for that day that :

„6:30 a.m. – A quick cup of coffee and then we're off. Today we've rented an entire island and a boat to take us to that island of Dry Tortugas for both of your 50th birthdays. Mirek's past and Hana's future. Today, if anyone asks about your birthday we will tell them you are both celebrating 50th birthdays, Mirek's was yeasterday and Hana's is tomorrow. This day is our 50th birthday present to both of you.

There will be lots of other people on the boat and island, because what would a party be without people, but they've been instructed to act like they don't know us. It will be more private that way. So when you go home, you can say you had a party on an island and there were 150 people there. What popular people the two of you are !



We will have breakfast on the boat, fruit and pastries. There is also a bar where we can buy drinks on the way back and snacks if we choose.

On the island we'll take a tour of the fort. After the tour, we'll have lunch of sandwiches and salads.

After lunch, we can snorkel with the provided equipment (they will give instructions) or we can swim, sit on the beach or explore the island.

In the afternoon, the boat will bring us back. We'll arrive in Key West about 5:30 p.m. The rest of the evening is ours to do as we please."

Reading that we started looking forward to Wednesday. It sounded to be a wonderful trip by a boat to a Caribbean island ...

There was also an dramatic event during that evening. Susie's ,homesitter' Marcia phoned that there was a cloudburst in Omaha and the pump suddenly stopped working and she worried about downstairs to be flooded. Zuzanka didn't lose her head, put her the right questions and according to Marcia's answers she determined the cause. A circuit breaker ! And Zuzanka by phone gave instructions to Marcia and led her to a fuse box. Marcia put the circuit breaker up and a breakdown was repaired. What a pleasure ! We had another glass of wine to toast to that happy end. And I added a Czech folk song too ... And we had a good time again.

About 10 p.m. we went to bed. „*We already look forward to morning !*”.