MY CAPITAL TIME 2006
By Dorothy M. Kurtz

Friday, April 7: After arriving by Amtrak train from Philadelphia to Washington, DC, I spent the night at the Red Roof Inn, 5th & H St., NW (202-289-5959). This moderate-priced hotel, located in Chinatown, had clean, renovated rooms. (Metro stop: Gallery Place/Chinatown)

Saturday, April 8: I took the Metro to the Capital South Station and walked over to the Thomas Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress (LOC), 10 1st St., SE (202-707-8000). About six months ago, I visited here, and like six months ago, when I entered this building again, I didn't know whether I should have been looking up, down, or sideways first. This Italian-Renaissance-styled building outdid itself in magnificence, especially the Great Hall! Again, I observed colorful murals on the ceilings and walls; polished mosaic floors; and stained-glass skylight ceilings; as well as marble columns, staircases, and arches; and bronze statues. Two of my favorite murals were in the East Corridor. The first mural showed monks in a monastery hand writing a book; the second mural was of Johann Gutenberg at his printing press. This same corridor exhibited two of the LOC's most valuable books: the Giant Bible of Maintz, written by hand; and the Gutenberg Bible, the first book printed with movable metal type. Both books dated from the mid-1400s. On the second floor, I admired a large mosaic portrait of *Minerva of Peace* before I entered the permanent exhibit gallery, American Treasures. Here, the LOC divided this exhibit area into three sections: Memory (history), Reason (philosophy), and Imagination (arts)--the same way Thomas Jefferson divided his own personal library. Many of those exhibits included books, pictures, and maps as well as manuscripts, videos, and other items. The exhibits dated from the books that Thomas Jefferson donated to the LOC to books and other items from the late-20th century. Another permanent exhibit gallery, on the ground floor, was the Bob Hope Gallery of American Entertainment. In this gallery via pictures, texts, and items as well as personal mementos, audio presentations, and videos, the LOC paid tribute to the early vaudeville performers, especially Bob Hope. The LOC also presented temporary exhibits, and when I was there, I saw an exhibit on violins from the 17th century through the 20th century. Overall, the Jefferson Building of the LOC was truly a palace of literature, both inside and out.

Sunday, April 9: In my quest to look at fine art, I entered the West Building of the National Gallery of Art

(NGA), Constitution Ave., between 4th and 7th Sts., NW (202-737-4215). (Metro stop: Archives/Navy Memorial) Some people mistake this place for a Smithsonian museum because of its location on the Mall, but the NGA has not been part of the Smithsonian Institute (SI). Nevertheless, like the SI museums on the Mall, admission to the NGA has been free. This museum was so large, that repeat visits would be necessary to see most of the permanent collection, not counting the temporary exhibits. When I was there, the NGA showed a special presentation of paintings by Paul Cezanne (1839-1906), especially about how his life in the Provence section of France affected his art. After seeing this special section, I headed toward my favorite sections of the permanent collections of art. Starting with American art, I viewed paintings dating from the 18th century through the 20th century. Later, I took time to see other areas displaying art from the 18th and 19th centuries: British, French, and Spanish. Even the 1941 Neoclassical West Building was handsome. Inside the marble interior at the Rotunda, East Garden Court, and West Garden Court, I looked at fountains surrounded by seasonal floral displays. Therefore, I enjoyed being here and seeing the artworks, despite my developing the dreaded "museum feet."

Unfortunately, that was all the time I had before catching the train back to Philly.

Friday, October 6: Again, I rode the Amtrak train from Philadelphia to Washington, DC. During this time, however, I stayed for two nights in a different hotel: Hotel Harrington, 11th St. and E St., NW (202-628-8140). (Metro stop: Metro Center or Federal Triangle) This older hotel had clean, basic rooms for less than $150 per night, including tax, and its downtown location put me close (or a few Metro stops away) to many of the places that I wanted to see.

Saturday, October 7: Deciding to pick up where I left off from last April, I revisited the NGA. (Metro stop: Archives/Navy Memorial) This time, I visited the East Building of the NGA, 4th St. between Madison Drive and Constitution Ave., NW (202-737-4215). On my way to this museum, I glanced at the Mellon Fountain, Constitution Ave. and Pennsylvania Ave. Named after the American statesman Andrew Mellon, his fortune and art collection helped start the NGA in 1936. This fountain, dedicated in 1952, showed three bronze basins with water cascading over them. Carved around the bottom basin, I saw the signs of the Zodiac. Then, before I entered the NGA's East Building, I noticed

that the triangle-shaped exterior of this 1978 building was severe looking in contrast to the NGA's West Building with its Neoclassical exterior. Inside, the East Building exhibited mostly modern and contemporary art in paintings, drawings, and sculptures as well as mobiles and other forms of art on five different levels. In addition to the above, this branch also included a room displaying small French paintings from the 18th and 19th centuries. When I was at the East Building, I observed two temporary exhibit areas. One area covered the avant-garde, jungle-styled paintings of Henri Matisse (1869-1954). The other temporary-exhibit area showed the English-landscape paintings of John Constable (1776-1837). Afterward, I walked over to the NGA's West Building to look at the sections that I didn't have time to see back in April. Here, I saw paintings dating from the 13th to the 17th centuries from Italy, Spain, and France as well as the Netherlands, Germany, and Belgium. On the lower level, I glimpsed at sculptures, prints, and drawings as well as photos and decorative arts, especially vases. Meanwhile, once again, I developed the dreaded "museum feet."

Sunday, October 8: Because of September 11, 2001, it has been very difficult to tour the White House. (Your best bet is to check with your local congressman/congresswoman or senator, and if you are from outside the USA, check with your country's embassy.) Nevertheless, if you arrived in DC and made no advanced-tour arrangements, the next best thing has been the White House Visitor Center, 1450 Pennsylvania Ave., NW (202-208-1631). (Metro stop: Federal Triangle) Once I got through the airport-styled security, I watched a 30-minute video showing the different rooms in the White House, the changes in those rooms through the years, and the behind-the-scenes work to maintain that historic building. Next, I looked at exhibit areas via texts, pictures, and objects covering the history of the White House structure, the changes in its interiors, and about the occupants who've lived there: presidents, first ladies, and other first-family members. Different exhibit areas displayed the White House's role in governing the nation, diplomatic functions, in times of crises, etc. In another section, I looked at pictures of the White House domestic staff, and finally, by pictures and texts, one exhibit area explained why congress in the late-18th century decided to locate the USA capital at its present location. The center of this large room also included a gift shop and a hands-on area for children. I felt that I learned more about the

White House at the White House Visitor Center and at a much more leisurely pace than I would on the official tour.

If you would like more information about visiting Washington, DC, contact Washington, DC, Convention & Tourism Corporation, 901 7th St., NW, 4th Floor, Washington, DC, 20001. (202-789-7000).