

# Guess When I'll Puke



John McCabe



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## Introduction

Family vacations are supposed to be the time when families spend quality time together, exploring the world and making wonderful memories of times spent together. Given the number of movies that mock this naive scenario, we know this is not how most family vacations play out. And if your family is anything like mine, you've spent a fair amount of time trying to remove the stench of puke from rental cars before returning them.

A while ago we started writing down our trips so we wouldn't forget them as we got older, as we seniors tend to forget things, like which rental car is yours in the massive hotel parking lot. A family member read one of our vacation stories and said it was funny. Have you ever noticed that people think it funny when someone else is barfed on?

Traveling has been our family hobby since the time our son JJ could first throw up, which was immediately (and profusely) after he was born. There was a time when he considered it the ultimate in humor. Being a teenager now, it's not quite as funny as it once was, but then again neither are we. But we still have the memories - so many that we didn't have the space for all of them here. Memories of spectacular places, ordinary but beloved places, challenging places, all with one thing in common - a piece of us left behind.

My wife Helene, son JJ and I have collected a handful of stories that document some our family's adventures for this book. Collecting the stories and editing them was a fun activity for our family and it cost very little to get this out the door, so if anyone other than our parents buy this book, we will donate all the money we receive from book sales to a humanitarian charity. So please read on. Maybe you'll laugh, maybe it'll bring back memories of your own vacations, maybe you'll read about a new vacation destination and maybe you'll help feed a child somewhere. Best would be if all of these things happened. Happy reading,



## Capitol Crimes in Washington, DC



Even though I was born, lived and worked in the DC/Maryland area for the first 35 years of my life, I rarely visited any of the museums, monuments or other tourist sites of Washington DC. After all, they don't serve crabs and beer at the Lincoln memorial, so why bother? But once JJ was born, a recessive parental gene kicked in and we were convinced he needed to learn about our country's rich history by experiencing tours where guides explain what type of pantaloons James Madison was wearing when he hightailed it out of DC, leaving his wife at the White House to fend off the British. Wuss.

For years we had been taking JJ downtown to enjoy all DC has to offer and teach him the many skills one must know when living or working downtown. We showed him how to feed money to the parking meters and panhandlers, how to take pictures of yourself next to the Washington Monument so it looks like it's a large appendage of your body and how to

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accidentally step on the \$300 leather shoes of the person trying to butt in front of you on a crowded subway platform. And before every trip we reviewed a map of the city and noted how all the streets are laid out in a grid to make it easy for someone to get around the city on roads that no one actually uses. The roads that people actually use to get around have no logical organization whatsoever and are (this is the truth) in reality a luciferian design by Freemason Pierre L'Enfant in a malicious attempt to avenge jokes about the French.

Once we navigate through the ninety-nine traffic circles on roads named after states I don't think exist anymore, we visit many of the sites around the mall. Of the many services available at the museums, we find the docent tours the most helpful. These are free guided tours of the museums that focus on a specific topic. They make any visit much more informative. Otherwise, you might spend two hours at the National Gallery of Art, looking at paintings of bulls-eye targets with rulers glued to them, wondering what hallucinogens people were taking that caused them to hold this up as great art. All the docent tours we've been on were led by very friendly and knowledgeable people, eager to help, which is interesting given that most of them are volunteers. It seems that in DC, there is an inverse relationship between how much money and power people have to how friendly and helpful they will be to others. I've seen this firsthand in Washington as politicians with lots of power and money act selfishly without a concern for their constituents, and on the other hand I've seen poor women on New York Avenue ask complete strangers to join them in a party. And by how skimpily those women were dressed in the middle of winter, I knew they were very poor.

One memorable trip to DC I planned was for Helene's birthday. I booked a room and laid out an itinerary that included a tour of the Library of Congress, a tour of the U.S. Capital, and



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a free concert at the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage, all followed up by dinner at a Middle Eastern restaurant complete with a belly dancer. So early Saturday morning, we set off and drove through all ninety-nine traffic circles and around countless one way roads until we ran into our hotel. While we were heading over to the Library of Congress, JJ complained of not feeling well. Getting information out of a thirteen year old boy is like getting a splinter out from under your fingernail. It's painful and you don't get everything out you want. So, we had no clue if he had typhoid or a hangnail. We decided the best course of action would be to stop off for some Krispy Kreme donuts and some sort of neon orange colored drink. Nothing like donuts to cure a case of typhoid.

When we got to the Library of Congress, we were early for the next tour, so we walked around, checking out the interesting architecture and art work. I think it's one of the most beautiful buildings we've seen downtown so far. In the middle of the grand foyer, surrounded by precious historical artifacts, I hear the distinctive sound of projectile vomiting from behind me. Fortunately, we had many years of training for just such a scenario and had given JJ a Krispy Kreme bag to carry with him. He has a history of puking in magnificent places. He threw up on a volcano in Hawaii, atop the peaks of the Sierra Nevadas in Yosemite National Park, amid the rugged hills of Appalachia and, most notably, all over me in a waterfront villa in the Virgin Islands. So, it's no surprise that when JJ says he's feeling sick, we reflexively hand him a bag.

He found a bathroom and cleaned up. Our past experience has been that his motion sickness results in a single puke session and then he's as good as gold. He said he was okay so we headed out in time to catch the beginning of the tour. During the tour, JJ started to slow down and emanate moans. I didn't pay much attention at first since he's been known to moan

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during some tours. But while the tour guide was proudly showing off the Gutenberg Bible that is the first ‘great book printed in Western Europe’ and is prominently displayed, JJ bent over and grabbed his stomach. I had mental images of him throwing up a caustic concoction of orange donut vomit all over this treasure of humanity, which certainly would result in an army of librarians hunting us down for the rest of our natural lives. And while I found the notion of librarians chasing after me with rulers strangely intriguing, I decided to save humanity the loss of a great relic and ushered JJ off to the bathroom.

He went into a stall to wait the revolutionary call of his stomach. I stood outside the door waiting for something to happen, not able to fit inside the stall to help and starting to feel uncomfortable from the looks people were giving me for hanging out in a men's bathroom. And it doesn't help to try and explain your situation to someone

“You know, I'm not a pervert or anything, I'm just waiting for someone. By someone, I mean my son. Really, you don't need to call the cops.”

After many awkward minutes, I left to wait outside the bathroom. While hanging out, I saw two guys go into the bathroom talking seriously to each other. Now guys don't normally go to the bathroom together; in fact, I think most would rather pee their pants than go at the same time as another guy. So, I figured I should go back in to check in on JJ. Shortly after the two guys left, a U.S. National Park Police officer came in the bathroom and knocked on JJ's stall.

“You OK in there?”

JJ mumbled back, “MFFPHHH.”

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Since the police officer wasn't bilingual and couldn't speak 'teenage boy', I interpreted for him. "He says he's feeling sick and feels like he needs to hurl."

He seemed content with this explanation and left the bathroom. In the meantime Helene walked down to the gift shop and bought a tote bag so we would have a future barf receptacle, if necessary. I wasn't in the mood to spend the night in the basement bathroom of the Library of Congress, so after thirty minutes without any stomach rebellions, I asked JJ to come out and go sit down on a nearby bench. We sat and tried to assess how sick he was. He said he wasn't feeling well, but didn't know if he'd puke again. Being the caring parents we are, we assured him he was up for a tour of the U.S. Capitol Building.

We walked through the tunnel from the Library of Congress to the Capitol tour area and as soon as we got past security, I heard that distinctive sound again. He had the bag Helene had purchased at the gift shop, so it wasn't too messy, but it was a shame that he couldn't have held it until we were in the U.S. Capitol proper, where he could have expressed his true feelings about our political system. The site of a teenage boy slumped in a chair and puking into a bag threw the Capitol security guards into a frenzied state of high alert. Just as they were about to consider taking action, the officer from the Library of Congress came by and recognized JJ from the bathroom. (On a side note, being recognized by the police as 'the boy from the bathroom' is not something you generally want your child to aspire to.)

"You again?! Do you all need an ambulance or other medical assistance?"

We replied we were okay, and just needed to get out and back to the hotel. In hindsight, I think I should have taken him up on the ambulance; it probably would have been cheaper than

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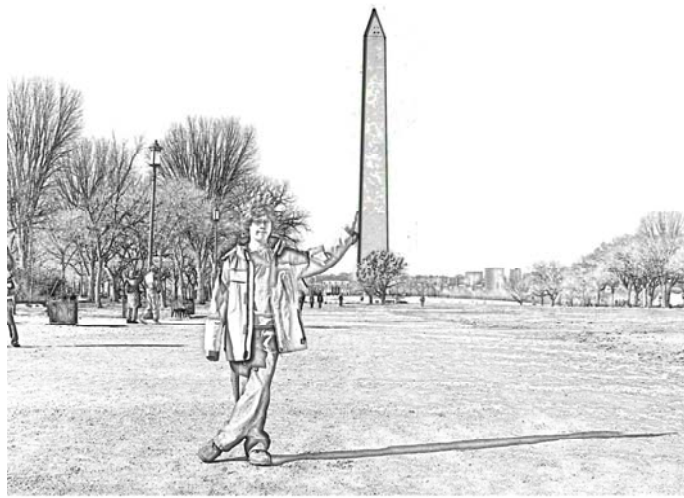
the cab ride back. As we left, I poured the contents of JJ's barf bag into a drain right in front of the building. I'm sure between the vomiting in the Library of Congress, my "I'm not a pervert" bathroom speech, JJ puking at the U.S. Capitol security station, and my pouring toxic liquids into drains around the Capitol that we are now on every government watch list out there.

We quickly hailed a cab and scooted back to the hotel before we could be incarcerated for a Hazmat violation. JJ spent the rest of the day on the hotel bed squirming around in the fetal position with a trash can near his head. We paid good money for that hotel room and, by golly, we were going to use it. We watched the Sorcerer's Apprentice, Shrek, and Mamma Mia; the latter movie making me feel queasy as well. We finished the night by watching "Wayne's World" on Saturday Night Live, which was probably more culturally appropriate for a thirteen year old boy than a performance of the Paris Opera Ballet at the Kennedy Center.

The next morning, JJ was as weak as yesterday's coffee, so we got room service for breakfast and hung out, contemplating what we would do for the day. We originally planned to ice skate at the sculpture garden and possibly visit the Holocaust Memorial Museum. We asked JJ if he was up for anything and he just grunted. I thought he might want to stop off at Gravelly Point next to Reagan National Airport to chase rats and watch the jets take off. He said he wasn't up for that either. When a boy doesn't want to chase rats and watch jumbo jets fly right over his head, you know he's sick. We decided to pack it in and head home. On the way, we stopped at Roosevelt Island. If one is going to throw up in Washington DC, I think this would be the best memorial to do just that. Given Teddy's own long term sickness in the wilderness of the Amazon basin, I think he would understand if JJ threw up on his wooded island. On the way back to the car, we witnessed a deer swim across the

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Potomac River from Georgetown and come up on the shore of the island. Obviously, this deer also had a rough night in Georgetown and was just getting back home. We schlepped back to the car and headed home on a quiet ride with one ear towards the back seat listening for 'that' sound.





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