

Big City Time

Enid Busser Oct 18

I will not be joining you in class next week- I will be in New York City! I am going on a Theater Tour, sponsored by my alma mater, Occidental College. The first time I went was in 2005. I had heard from my friends how much fun it was- especially since it was led by Omar Paxson. Omar had led the drama department while I attended Oxy and was loved by all. He was wildly enthusiastic about his classes and theater in general. His happiness was contagious. I invited my daughter Katie to join me. She told me later that she was nervous- all these old Oxy people. (When we discussed it this week, she said it was the best trip she had ever taken- good shows and informative discussion afterwards. The Oxy people were really nice too.)

Our hotel was near Time Square. We walked to the various theaters. The New York leader was a tall woman and she had a flashlight that looked like the statue of Liberty's torch. She walked ahead of us, through the crowds holding it above her head. It was exciting just to walk through famous Time Square with the crowd, lights and famous clock.. Each day we had a morning discussion about the shows we were seeing. Sometimes someone from the cast would come to speak. It really made us feel like insiders. In the afternoons we would go to local sights-sometimes by bus- museums, costume makers, and other interesting places. When we went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art I remembered that my mother's distant cousin had some pieces of his work there. I found the right department and asked to see them. They took me "behind the scenes" and gave me some white gloves to wear. Next they brought out several etchings made by our relative, George Plowman (1869-1932). I recognised them immediately. It was quite thrilling.

One year my sister came with me. When we had some free time, we could walk up to Central Park and explore. We began to feel very comfortable in the BIG city. She was also a bit uneasy about the Oxy people- she is a graduate of Pomona College- one of Oxy's historic rivals- but she had a good time too. I think she found another Pomona alum in our group. By this time, Omar had retired and our group was led by Alan Freeman, also a former professor at Oxy as well as a playwright, actor and director. I had seen him many times in Oxy's summer theater productions. His joy in theater is catching.

A few years ago a London Theater Tour was offered and I signed up. Many of the theater tour regulars were there. The camaraderie of the "Oxy family" is wonderful. We were in London for the New Year and had our own party. We saw interesting plays- AND

it didn't rain at all. We also noticed that the seats in those fancy old theaters were quite small - all the vitamins and rich food in our current diets have made a difference in the audience.

This year we will be seeing five shows—"My Fair Lady" and "The Band's Visit" are musicals. Several actors and directors of the shows will come and discuss them with us. Jim Ryan, whose travel agency has planned the tours for us for several years, feels like he is an Oxy alum too, and we all enjoy him and feel very special. We will have our farewell dinner at the West Bank Cafe, a favorite of many famous actors.