

## **Chicago – once a stopover, now an exciting Midwest destination**

By Patricia Arrigoni

CHICAGO – The “Chicago Anthem,” played in all the blues clubs, goes something like, “Come on baby, don’t you want to go, to go... want to go... back to that same old place, sweet home... sweet home, CHI-CAAAA-Go!”

Everyone cheers, and the blues singer belts it out again. Members of the audience are brought up on stage to sing the chorus and dance. Some volunteers are as good as the performers. The music is loud. The saxophone wails, the bass, keyboard and drum players give it all they’ve got, and the audience goes crazy clapping, dancing in the aisles and singing along.

I felt like I was coming home when I visited Chicago in September. My birthplace was the city of Danville, Illinois, some 140 miles straight south, but we used to drive to Chicago for shopping, to visit the museums, attend the theater or catch a plane to go somewhere else.

I found a lot had changed. The major shopping had moved from the Loop to the “Magnificent Mile” on Michigan Avenue. A new Marshall Fields store had been opened, and the museums had been enlarged and the food improved. Several new hotels had been opened and some fine old ones renovated.

People used to go to Chicago on their way somewhere else or for business. Now the city has become a destination place all in itself. Some of the highlights I enjoyed included the venerable old Museum of Science and Industry (where I programmed a machine to find out that my risk for a heart attack was average to low) and the Art Institute, which contained a really nice section of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings.

I also took a couple of cruises. One was an “Architectural Cruise” on the “Fort Dearborn” down the Chicago River which had excellent viewing of the heart of the city. The other was a dinner and dancing cruise on the “Spirit of Chicago” which sailed out on Lake Michigan. This was a magic evening with warm breezes and the lights of Chicago which twinkled like a million diamonds creating a stunning sight.

Chicago is the major crossroads city for the United States and supports a population of three and a half million, or seven million including the suburbs. At the heart of the financial activities is the famous Chicago Board of Trade which opened in 1848 and is still going strong. Visitors can view what seems like mass hysteria in the octagonal trading pits from viewing galleries. I was assured that this was really an orderly process, but just in case, a team of paramedics is kept on constant alert.

In the outlying areas, I visited the fascinating Frank Lloyd Wright home in Oak Park, the Wright-designed Unity Temple a few blocks away, and an Ernest Hemingway exhibit in the Oak Park Art Center. Hemingway, born and raised in this exclusive suburb, remarked that the people of Oak Park had narrow minds and broad lawns. Fortunately, local residents have forgiven him are working towards purchasing his family home to house a permanent exhibit about his life and writings.

The Chicago botanical Gardens were another enjoyable stop. They were located in Glencoe and consisted of 300 acres of prairie, trees and flowers. The state of Illinois was once two-thirds prairie. There was also a children's vegetable garden, Japanese Islands, a nature trail, a 45-foot waterfall and an English Wall Garden.

While I enjoyed visiting the many attractions in Chicago, the hours spent in the terrific blues clubs were the most fun. I joined a group on a Friday night at a club called Blue Chicago, 937 North State Street. Being featured was the Gloria Hardiman Blues Band with Willie White on the keyboard (he was also vocal), singer Lawrence Fields, Giddie Turner (drums) Al Brown (bass, and Larry Scoller on the electric guitar.

Gloria weighed a few hundred pounds, and when she sang and shimmered her body, which was in a tight fitting dress with colorful fringes, she really brought the house down.

The second club I really liked was the Kingston Mines at the Chicago Blues Center, 2548 North Halsted. This place was unique in that it offered continuous entertainment by moving the audience. When one band finished, everyone got up and moved to an adjoining room where another band was all ready to go. We hear the Charlie Love Band with Chick Rogers and Valerie Wellington singing, and the Casey Jones Band with hot blues singer, Casey Jones himself. Shirley King, daughter of the famous jazz singer, B.B. King, also gave a great performance with her songs and audience participation act.

One other evening was spent at a comedy play titled "Sheer Madness," a whodunit performed in the Mayfair Theater at the Blackstone Hotel, 636 South Michigan. These live performances have been running for many years to the delight of audiences who participate in the action by providing clues and voting on who is the guilty party.

"Sweet home Chicago" is a friendly city, a fun city and a city that works. Those avid Bears fans hope you will visit soon.