



Houston Marathon and Tourist Trip Notes **January 26-February 2, 2011**

From the beginning, I'd say this was the trip that nearly didn't happen. It was Wednesday morning and the snowfall wasn't due until afternoon but we were in a major white-out already. The drive to the airport was slow and tedious but went without incident. The wait at the airport was enhanced with canceled flights being announced in plentiful succession. Our gate was changed three times and two hours later during a continuing and major white-out we boarded and sat and sat and sat. The crew said we might not GO at all but GO we did and I was grateful to be gone but sorry that Tom was stuck in another major storm. Had it been Thursday, I wouldn't have made it.

New Jersey found itself digging out from another major snowstorm Thursday and dealing with canceled flights, closed schools - some for the second day in a row - and slippery roads. Much of the state received a foot or more of heavy, wet snow in a storm that hovered from Wednesday morning through early Thursday. There were 19 inches in Clifton and 18.9 at Newark Liberty International Airport. Flights were expected to resume at 10 a.m. at Newark Liberty International, which had 405 flights were canceled. Central Park picked up the highest totals of anywhere in the entire Northeast. In fact, the 19 inches of snow deposited in Central Park fell just a single inch short of matching the Boxing Day Blizzard for snow depth. That's officially good enough for the eighth largest snowstorm in city history. The snowstorm broke a 140-year-old daily snowfall record and also made January 2011 the city's snowiest such month on record crushing the previous record set in 1925. To top it all off, we've now cracked the top ten list of snowiest winters — with a full two months of snow yet to come. This storm had it all — sleet, freezing rain, high winds and even thunder-snow — including the heaviest snowfall rates this meteorologist has witnessed in quite some time.

Likewise the marathon was the run that nearly didn't happen. The weather warnings to include a possible delayed start due to wind and rain plus hail resulted in multiple alarming emails. Even after it started, I was so close to quitting at mile 7 being wet and cold. Yet like the almost aborted flight, it did happen and it happened well. I finished reasonably comfortable at 5:39:01. My headline is that I kept with the 5:30 pacer (and the 5:15 pacer for awhile until I needed a break) through mile 20. Overall, the race organizers gained much respect. Houston remains a top marathon.

What went well?

- Registration is a lottery system. (New for 2011.) I got in. That's good!
- Newspaper press before and after was excellent.
- We received a comprehensive book of instructions, maps, etc. in the mail with our bib number.
- On Saturday they hold the half-marathon Olympic trials making for more excitement. ***Here's Ryan Hall out for a Friday run as we passed. Well, we passed in our car. He had a lot of facial hair that was removed by his Saturday race.***
- Bib pick up, even on Saturday mid-morning, was seamless with absolutely NO line and run by especially friendly volunteers.
- A cotton nicely-designed shirt is given to each registrant. Finish line shirt comes later, that is, if you finish before the absolute 6 hour cut off.





- One of the best Expos around and maybe even better than NYC in part because they allocated more space and even at the busiest time it was possible to get around. There were plenty of samples and give-away stuff.
- A full-sized magazine program was given at the Expo along with a sheet of hard-paper instructions. Couldn't have been clearer! Nor more professional.
- Had there been a weather emergency, I'm convinced the organizers were totally prepared. See charts below. (I'm told they had these systems in place even before the Chicago 2008 Disaster.)
- Opening the convention center on race morning plus afterwards is excellent. The open floor was lined with port-a-potties with no line (at least to those in the back.)
- The course is plenty interesting from semi-rough areas (with a sewer smell) to lovely estates.
- Spectators are excellent and while not a NYC or a Chicago, they were out in abundance despite the rain. Even the hash house harriers. *I think these spectators were part of Houston's USA Fit booth.*



- Food on the course is reasonably good though in some areas had been exhausted before I came through. Other than the orange and banana peels on the ground.
- They call it Hoopla but I called it music, bands, singers, orchestras and costumed spectators that rivaled a Rock 'n Roll. Local running clubs added to the Hoopla.
- At the finish line the food is bountiful (if you are a fast runner) and includes snacks, eggs, sausage, yogurt, ice cream, coffee, sodas and chocolate milk. (They ran out of most everything by the time I got there.)
- The medal is designed with a zillion runners embossed with the same design as the t-shirt.
- The finisher shirt is always excellent and runners seem to keep them. They unfortunately ran out of size small. *See picture of finisher shirt, medal and mug above.*
- A glass mug that's etched with the logo and runners is given out.

What's not to like or might be improved upon?

- There's not much to do downtown during the weekend but if you pop in and pop out, the Four Seasons and the Hilton Downtown are conveniently close to the start/finish. Otherwise, staying at The Galleria or the Museum District makes sense but requires driving to the start and finding parking.
- The official merchandise by Sports Authority was lacking in creativity or choices.
- Traffic to the start could have been disastrous had I not been with a savvy and smart Houstonian who knew the roads well. Thank you David!
- The first half and in particular the first 4-5 miles are extremely crowded in part due to narrow roads but also since half marathoners start with the marathoners. (They have two waves and maybe

need the third which by the way how did those walkers get up at the front?) Only when half marathoners turned around at mile 9 was it possible to run without weaving and bumping into other runners. It might have been the most crowded I've experienced other than the Verrazano Narrows Bridge during NYC's marathon.

- Pace groups could be expanded and/or divided. Our 5:30 group was so large as to cause a bottleneck and at one time I got to the 5:15 pace group and they also were huge too, taking up the entire roadway. There could have been a 5:45 or two separate 5:30s. There was a 6 hour pacer.
- They probably can't help it but it's primarily concrete with very little opportunity to move to the dirt or grass. When I did move to the grass, it was fun because the spectators made a point of kindly getting out of my way. I hope they weren't just honoring my age.
- Despite my coming in 21 minutes before cut off time, there was little to no food left. (I later learned that they encouraged half-marathoners to take extras.)
- They ran out of size small finisher shirts.
- They are hell bent on sticking to the 6-hour cut off time and despite repeated arguments with local running clubs, they will not relent. See some notes by David below for the history.



My results

With no one more surprised than me, I hung with the 5:30 pacer through the 20 mile mark and then lost sight of them at 21 when I went off the course for a stop for both a potty and to get a stone out of my shoe and also to move over to the dirt and grass to save the hips. I'd even been with the 5:15 pacer early in the game, again until a stop. Wow, this is pretty much all a concrete course. Thus my finish line crossing at 5:39:01 made me very pleased to think that I still have a chance of finishing some of the 6-hour cut off marathons I've signed up for. I'd had a heart-to-heart talk with myself, after a suggestion by Tom, and kept reminding myself that I was in this for the journey, not the medal or for getting my ticket punched so I'd been convinced that coming in after 6 hours was okay.

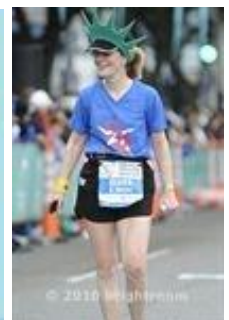
A video of the 10K mark – and you'd think that I could at least run for the cameras!

<http://www2.brightroom.com/browser.aspx?eid=74333&bib=10004>

Lots of picture proofs at <http://www2.brightroom.com/browser.aspx?eid=74333&bib=10004#>

From David the computer geek giving me my 5k times and noting that they were amazingly consistent until the inevitable slowdown: 36:37, 39:20, 39:48, 38:58, 39:15, 39:14, 43:06, 43:58
First half 2:43:26 and 2nd half 2:55:35

Bib	Name	City	State	Cntry	Div	Age	M/F	Event		
10004	Burton, Diana	Middletown	NJ	USA	F65-69	65	F	Marathon		
	Checkpoints	5k	10k	15k	20k	Half	25k	30k	35k	40k
		0:36:37	1:15:57	1:55:45	2:34:43	2:43:26	3:13:58	3:53:12	4:36:18	5:20:16
				Start Offset	Pace	Proj Time	Official Time	Overall	Gender	Div
				-	0:12:56		5:39:01	6358	2305	7



But along with the theory 'speed kills' -- the next day I was already looking forward to my next marathon because it's at Surfside Beach without a cut off time. Even as good, it is on hard packed sand and with a lot of friends who couldn't care about the finish time. I was also very creaky; surely that's not from age? Fortunately a couple days later I felt back to new.

Fellow Liberty Lady Maricar's kind note: *Wow D! This is a huge PR! When was the last time you ran a 5:39? Damn! Good job.* She's right – I'd been stuck on 5:45s, then 6:15s, and only just did another 5:45 so I had reason to be surprised and pleased. The weather was actually favorable.

Weather

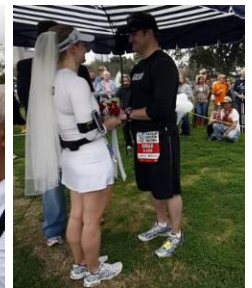
A note from David the day after about how it could have been: *I'm glad you made it out of Houston OK. You got to experience how unpredictable our weather can be. Marathon day was better than the final forecast with no thunderstorms or hail during the race, but there was hail just north of town later in the day. On Monday I was sweating in a short sleeve t-shirt as we walked through Sam Houston Park looking at the old houses. Tuesday morning it was 67 when I left my house, 48 by the time I got to work 15 minutes later and 22 that night. Two days after the marathon it was 45 degrees colder than during the race. Diana was saying on Monday that she was glad the race wasn't on Monday because of the heat. I was thinking on Wednesday I was glad it wasn't then because as a spectator being out in the 20's would have been tough. Yesterday we had rolling blackouts in Texas due to power shortages. I was about to get in the shower yesterday morning at about 6am when the lights went out. It quickly started getting cold in the house so I decided after a while to take my shower by flashlight. Then the power came back on after about 40 minutes and stayed on a while. Then it went off again for 45 more minutes. Some power plants were down for maintenance during a normally low demand time, than some suffered frozen pipes that shut them down. When power use went up with temps in the 20's, the grid suffered and they shut areas down on purpose. Schools lost power off and on, people got stuck in elevators around town, traffic lights went out, etc. We have never had that before. Not from lines being down from ice or a hurricane – power down because they couldn't make enough. Today they are predicting sleet and snow starting after lunch. Many schools are already letting out early and Shell has said we can go home at noon if we need to. The largest Houston school district has already canceled classes for tomorrow because we are supposed to get 1" of snow. You definitely don't want to drive around here when there is ice or snow. We don't have plows and most people have no clue what to do when driving on it.*

On Friday from David with a really awful weather report: *We got freezing rain, starting around 11pm. Everything is iced over, including all bridges. All the freeways are either closed or have wrecks that have things pretty much blocked. The sun started to sorta shine through the clouds a little while ago. It is still 28 but should get above freezing for a little while before going back to 24 tonight. Four nights in a row below 30. I know ya'll have gotten tons of snow but we very seldom get weather like this – this is the worst ice I've seen here even if it is minor compared to a real ice storm. On the other hand, our cold weather seldom last long. 24 tomorrow morning but should get up to 60 during the day.*

On departure from Houston airport returning to NJ – half of all Houston flights were canceled. Over 6,000 nationwide flights were canceled. All the morning flights to Newark had been canceled. Yet mine went without delay. I must be saving up for a doozie!

The wedding

USA Fit was started in Houston and this happy couple trains with David (he's been a coach for many years.) See the professional photographer? See Daddy taking her by the arm and walking her down the aisle/course?



Friends at the event

Paula Boone was there with Steve. Paula was doing her 300th marathon and then rushing off to a packed car for a cruise with Steve. Her mascot monkey was with her at the finish so I can only presume she ran with him. Monkey has a new 50-state shirt. Paula has been injured and thus didn't make the cut off but I saw where she got her medal and that with the bib should be enough to give her credit for the



marathon. You're laughing? Yes, she's the one we give proof to in order to get credit!

Mary Lenari was of course without Greg who had to get his kind heart rebuilt after Zoom Yah Yah indoor marathon a week or two ago. She says: *You will be passing me in no time :-)* *Houston will be #81 for me - having DNF'd at ZYY. I'll have no problem reaching 100 while I'm 65--choosing which one and the timing? Shooting for Marine Corps 2012.* Mary is the cutest little runner and there's no way anybody would guess her to be over 50. She's also a personal trainer and coach.



Dianna Sultzer and Judy Hayes from Fort Worth were there and I felt terrible missing them. But I did see **Joyce and Tracey Hightower** also of Fort Worth. Joyce asks if we could run together and she sounded serious! Ha ha ha. She's a 4-something marathoner despite being of similar age.

David Williams was wise enough to let his stress fracture keep him from running. He hosted me and walked so much that he got open wounds from his 'boot' which was maybe worse than marathon injuries. He couldn't be stopped from putting on miles as a spectator for those he coaches through USA Fit Houston. His group so kindly adopted me, let me wear one of their shirts, and loaned David to me for touring. I joined their dinner as well as their breakfast. Here we are at the start line where David is to be found every year supporting his running group.



David "Parker" Parker who didn't get into the marathon lottery but will be with us at Surfside Beach Texas on February 26 and has publicly declared that in honor of his quitting smoking he's going to run the 50K at Surfside and work towards a 100-miler. He's new to the Houston area and has a new career so we were limited in our time to dine but we did manage one dinner and one other time for a drink. Remember that I claim to be fairy godmother to little Marie? He is her uncle.

Drats – I missed one of my favorite race directors. **Joyce of Calico Racing** was there but I missed her. Another one is **Nancy Goodnight** whose **"Toughest Little Marathon in Texas"** held in Waco was held on the same day. Both are big time favorite marathons I part because I am fans of their race directing.

Laura of Marathon Charms was at the Expo, with her husband helping at the booth which is a 'charm' since he's newly a long distance commuter and they don't get to see each other very often. That's one way to stay together – work together.



Friends elsewhere

Kathy Kass was in Miami and maybe she got to see the beached baby grand piano in Key Biscayne. Well, if she got out of NYC's snowstorm which I heard was a challenge

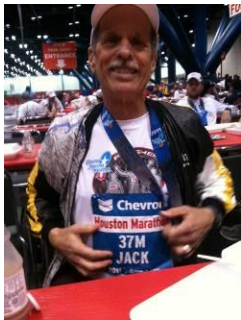


People we met

Mark Bailey is a police officer who has been in charge of the police effort for the marathon. I ran into Mark and his friend at about mile 21 and mostly kept with them to the end. There he was surrounded by a group of professional photographers so I asked who this celeb was. Here's from an article about him. **Not a spectator this time AROUND** – *This year, HPD officer's marathon preparation is two-fold HPD Sergeant Mark Bailey will hand off command to fellow Special Operations officer Bernard Simien and run in the Houston Marathon. Want some proof that Mark Bailey is serious when he says he's going to run a marathon? In his first five years of coordinating the police work*

for the Houston Marathon, the sergeant's favorite place to watch the runners go by — and the place where he got the idea that he could do this himself — was always about three-quarters of the way through. Not the second mile when the field has found its collective form and is still breezing along and mugging for spectators. Not the final "point-two" when the gravitational pull of the finish line outweighs the forces of exhaustion and trauma. No, Bailey got all the evidence that he really could do this when the runners reached the most brutal stretch of all: Memorial Park. The contorted faces, parched mouths and unseen but understood trauma elsewhere on the body were seemingly his invitation. "Whenever I get to mile 20 or 21 over in Memorial Park," said Bailey, who will forgo his usual position in charge of the Sunday safety detail for the relative calm of running 26.2 miles. "When you see these people run by, you say 'I know I can do that. I know I got that.'"

... the first doubts came at around six miles. "There's no way," Bailey recalls thinking. "Six miles? I've got 20 more to go?" Fast forward about 13 months, several Monday night runs in Memorial Park with Warren, one Texas Independence Relay and multiple half-marathons, and it's exactly the reverse. Twenty down, six to go. "The first time I ran 20, I blazed 20; it was nothing," Bailey said. "The last time, from about 13 in, I was miserable. What happens race day, who knows? But I'll be there at the end." Like he always is, just a little more out of breath this time. Or maybe, given the challenges of his day job, a little bit less out of breath



Jack the 37th – This was the 39th Houston Marathon and Jack holds the record for having run it the most times -- 37. The program honored him and his bib honored him. I just happened to sit near to him at the finish and when he realized the food was gone, he readily shared.

Chris and Jesse – Chris was co-founder of USA Fit but he and Denis parted and apparently not to happily according to Chris. Chris, shown as Mr. Muscle on his bib, is a character and runs across the country and other feats despite his new hips that have recently been repaired. He also was the 6-hour pacer which is super important since 6:01 gives one no credit for having been there at all. His friend Jesse seemed to be famous but he wouldn't tell me why. Folks kept coming up and shaking his hand.

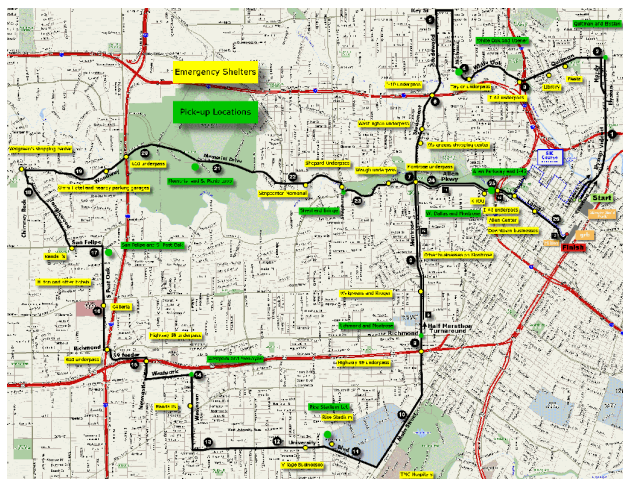


Paula and Monkey at the finish line – Paula hadn't made the cut off which suggests that her 50-states mascot Mr. Monkey didn't either. Yes, Monkey seems to be everywhere the 50-states are. Paula seemed to be taking it well that she was over the cut off and maybe because she found a way to get her medal and with the bib that's enough to convince the 50-states president (her husband!) that she ran it. This was her 300th marathon. I was with her in Wilmington for her 200th about the time I thought it was a big deal to do 7 and 7 in '07 – until I met Paula!

It's hard to stop. So many friends made through Houston Fit. David took me to the Thursday night pasta dinner, then the Saturday morning runners' breakfast, and all through the Expo we met up with a great number of his friends, all of whom made me feel welcome. He knows everybody. At race morning, the Houston Fit group had their own area. At the expo they were volunteering in different capacities.



Denis, the USA Fit Co-Founder, one of the groups cheerleaders, rodeo clowns at the kids races and Diana with the January 1st Texas Marathon medal.



Excellent organization – from one of many emails received from the race committee.

Based on this projected forecast, the Event alert remains **GREEN**, which suggests ideal temperature range; but the forecast is for a high probability of rain. This will make the roads slippery and also increase the possibility of hypothermia (cold exposure) in the early morning. It is likely that conditions will move to **YELLOW** by mid morning and possibly even **RED** by mid day.

(Diana's note: Alert moved to Yellow for Race Day. The map showed shelter locations as well as transport pick up points.)

There is also a threat of thunder showers. If lightning is in the area, the start may be delayed. Once the race has started, if lightning is in a 10 mile area of the course the race will be stopped and a black flag will be displayed. All runners must move to shelter and will be directed to the nearest overhead shelter by course officials and the Houston Police Department. The race may be restarted under an altered race plan or it may be cancelled and the course cleared. This decision will be made based on the Houston Marathon Committee Cancellation policy and with consideration to the likely conditions for the remainder of the day, including the availability and feasibility of continued road closures for the course.

EVENT ALERT SYSTEM TABLE

CURRENT RISK LEVEL DUE TO WEATHER OR OTHER CONDITIONS

ALERT LEVEL	EVENT CONDITIONS	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS	POTENTIAL RISKS
EXTREME	EVENT CANCELLED/ EXTREME OR DANGEROUS CONDITIONS	STOP PARTICIPATION/ FOLLOW EVENT OFFICIAL INSTRUCTIONS	HEAT ILLNESS
HIGH	DANGEROUS CONDITIONS	SLOW DOWN/ OBSERVE COURSE CHANGES/ FOLLOW EVENT OFFICIAL INSTRUCTIONS/ CONSIDER STOPPING	HEAT ILLNESS IN ALL INDIVIDUALS
MODERATE	POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS CONDITIONS	SLOW DOWN/ BE PREPARED FOR WORSENING CONDITIONS	HEAT ILLNESS PARTICULARLY IN HEAT SENSITIVE INDIVIDUALS
LOW	GOOD CONDITIONS	ENJOY THE EVENT/ BE ALERT	HEAT ILLNESS RISK WITH INTENSE EFFORTS
< 50 F COLD WEATHER ALERT	COLD WEATHER CONDITIONS	COVER HANDS, FEET AND TOP OF HEAD	HYPOTHERMIA INCREASES AS TEMPERATURE DROPS AND WINDS AND DAMPNESS INCREASE

Top Ten Ways to Be Photographed – from a personalized email a couple days prior to the marathon:

- 1.) Please Take a Number - Wear your race number high in the center of your chest. We use the numbers to identify your photos. Also, remember to wear your number on a layer of clothes that we can see.
- 2.) [Check out the Course Map](#) - Review our course shot locations on the aforementioned link and be sure to look for our photography teams wearing blue vests.
- 3.) Rub the Curb - When you approach our photography locations, move to one side of the road (don't run right down the middle).
- 4.) Smile - Smile, yell or wave at our photographers - they love it!
- 5.) Do a Shot Before You Race - Be sure to get your pre-race commemorative photo by visiting our various corral locations (photographers in the blue vests) at the start staging areas between 6.00am-6.30am.
- 6.) Do a Shot After You Race - After you finish, grab your medal and get your commemorative medal photo by visiting our candid stations. Commemorate your accomplishment!
- 7.) Celebrate - Don't Watch Your Watch - As you finish, put your hands in the air, or give a high-five to your running mate - DO NOT block your number by looking down at your watch. Let you chip record your accurate time.
- 8.) Don't Tailgate - At our photo locations and at the finish, don't run right behind someone else. Run in your own space (if you can). That way, you'll get a cleaner shot and really showcase your finish.
- 9.) Run a 5 minute mile pace like Ryan Hall.
- 10.) Have Fun!

Or take your own photograph with your iPhone while on your way to the Houston Fit dinner.

Houston offers a free video of the finish line. Mine will disappoint some of you as it shows me stopping to take pictures all along the finish line and then walking in.

<http://finishcam.com/TX/Houston-Marathon-2011/Default.aspx>



Tourist – an overview



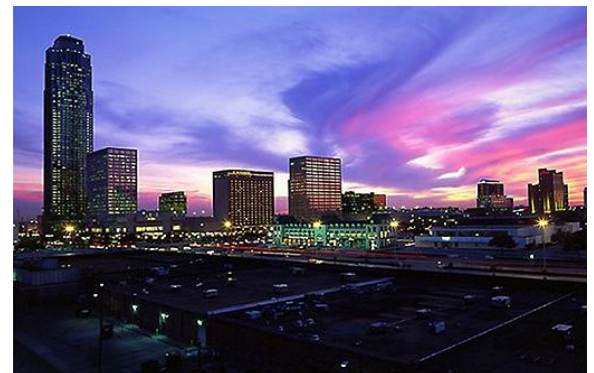
The Fred Hartman Bridge or Baytown Bridge is a cable-stayed bridge spanning the Houston Ship Channel. I had this on my list but missed it so will try again. But since I have the research and I love bridges and generally have a bridge or two in my reports: *It carries 2.6 miles of State Highway 146, between the cities of Baytown and La Porte just east of Houston. The bridge, named for Fred Hartman (1908–1991), the editor and publisher of the Baytown Sun from 1950 to 1974, is the longest cable-stayed bridge in Texas, and one of only two such bridges in the state, the other being the Veterans Memorial Bridge in Orange County. It was the seventy-sixth largest bridge from 1995 to 2003. Now it is the 77th largest bridge in the world. The construction cost of the bridge was \$117.5 million. It replaced the Baytown Tunnel which had to be removed when the Houston Ship Channel was deepened to accommodate larger ships. The bridge has had trouble in the past, when water streaming down the cables in light rain, changed the wind profile of the cables, causing unexpected vibrations.*

The Galleria Area – where my hotel was located was a second high rise district. That tall tower is the Williams Tower with the Waterwall on its grounds. David, is this any relationship to you?

Williams Waterwall

Imagine a multi-story sculptural fountain and it was in my neighborhood. It's been around since the early 80s and seems to flow tons of water 24/7. The plaque shows that it sits on 3 acres and 11,000 gallons of water per minute flow over the walls of the 64-foot high fountain. It is built to remind us of an ancient roman theatre stage and it sits among 118 Texas live oak trees.

To protest that they don't waste water, the total supply is 78,500 gallons which is recycled every 3 hours. The movie "The Way She Moves" contains scenes filmed here. I had a great time taking videos of the Waterwall both at day and at night. Yes, that's a person standing in the last two pictures – for dimension.



Hermann Park



Right in the middle of Houston, near to the medical centers (which are much in abundance) is their own Central Park complete with jogging paths, a small train for transport, and a Japanese Garden.

My short video is at

www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcZboJ4f_DE

Here's David traipsing around in his 'boot' and an effort to get healed. You couldn't hold him back – he walked every inch of the park.

We found this little cutie with zero English but with a professional photographer working with her. She was about the size to fit in one of David's hands.



And the next picture just because I love ducks.



The Rothko Chapel is a non-denominational chapel founded by de Menil, home of a nearby museum. The interior serves not only as a chapel, but also as a major work of modern art. On its walls are fourteen black but color hued paintings by Mark Rothko. The shape and design of the chapel was largely influenced by the artist. Built in 1964 Rothko was commissioned by de Menil to create a meditative space filled with his paintings. The works are site-specific, one of the requirements of the program. As Rothko was given creative license on the design of the structure, he clashed with the project's original architect, Philip Johnson over the plans for the chapel. The plans went through several revisions and architects. Rothko continued to work first with Howard Barnstone and then with Eugene Aubry, but ultimately he did not live to see the chapel's completion in 1971. After a long struggle with depression, Rothko committed suicide in his New York studio in 1970.

A distinctive sculpture by Barnett Newman, *Broken Obelisk*, 1963–1967, stands in front of the chapel. The sculpture sits in a reflecting pool designed by Philip Johnson and it is dedicated to the late Martin Luther King, Jr. The Chapel is on the National Register of Historic Places. One of Morton Feldman's best known pieces of music was inspired by and written to be performed in the chapel — it too is called *Rothko Chapel* (1971). The musician Peter Gabriel named the song *Fourteen Black Paintings* after his experience in the chapel. Independent singer-songwriter David Dondero also has an ode to the site titled *Rothko Chapel* (2007).



I can't say what I felt about it, as it was with mixed emotions, so

here's a review off Yelp: *I feel odd giving place 4-stars for making me feel such a sense of despair. But simultaneous somberness and delight pretty much characterize my experience at the Rothko Chapel. Walking towards the rather drab building and through the entryway flanked by worn copies of the Bhagavad Gita, Quran, and the like, I really had no idea what to expect. Nor am I a serious Rothko fan. But as soon as I entered the chapel itself I felt as if a blue-black veil was pushing down on me. The atmosphere, perceived as tranquil by some, was definitely grave and heavy to me. The benches and cushions inside are equally austere. I felt oddly delighted that Rothko's design, the 14 black,*

color-hued paintings hanging in the chapel, evoked such a strong, surprising emotion in me. Feeling those shades of black and blue envelope you under the dome of a chapel is an other-worldly experience.

If I needed a meditation place, this would be it. For an in-depth explanation of this chapel, see www.examiner.com/humanist-in-houston/how-houston-s-rothko-chapel-paintings-illuminate-part-1-3

Bishop's Palace in Galveston

Said to be Galveston's and maybe even Houston's grandest and best-known building, it's an ornately colored stone building with intricately carved ornaments, rare woods, stained-glass windows, bronze dragons and other sculptures, luxury materials and furnishings, and impressive fireplaces from around the world (including one lined with pure silver.) It was a rare treasure that wasn't ruined by Galveston's devastating hurricanes. Built by lawyer Colonel Walter Gresham and designed by Nicholas Clayton, Galveston's premier architect, this Victorian castle was cited by the American Institute of Architects as one of the 100 most important buildings in America. The home was built from 1886 to 1892. Disappointingly they didn't allow photographs nor did they have any to sell.

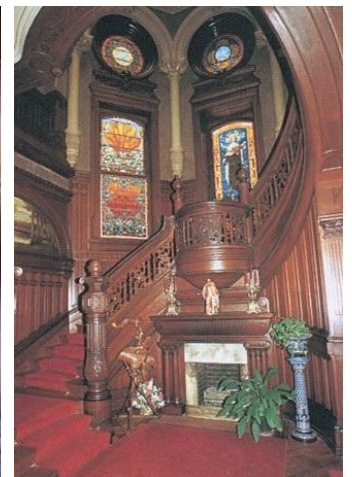
The Library of Congress has classified it as one of the fourteen most representative Victorian structures in the nation. In 1923 the Roman Catholic Diocese of Galveston purchased the house, and, situated across the street from the Sacred Heart Church, it served as a bishop's residence. After the diocesan offices were moved to Houston, the diocese opened the mansion to the public in 1963. The home is estimated to have cost \$250,000 at the time. It was sold to the Diocese for something like \$40,000 and today its value is estimated at over \$5.5 million.



The small lot and oversized house make it an anomaly among similar houses of its period and architectural style. It is Victorian; however, it is more specifically described as Chateausque given the intricate combination of materials, cast iron galleries and complex roof system. Chateausque is a derivative of the French Revival popularized in the latter part of the 19th century by Richard Morris Hunt. Nicholas Clayton, however, expanded on the style by using varicolored and irregularly shaped stone, round Romanesque and depressed Tudor arches with heavily articulated carvings of vegetation, animals, people, and imaginary creatures. Constructed of steel and stone (it survived the Great Storm of 1900 virtually unscathed), the Bishop's Palace soars three stories over a raised basement level, with steep roofs and long sculptural chimneys. Typical of Clayton, he used a combination of simple geometric forms in bold massing to create an additional dramatic effect. In Galveston's great period of mansion building – the 1870s, 80s and 90s – Gresham's commission of Nicholas Clayton, Galveston's premier architect, resulted in Clayton's most spectacular residential design and arguably the finest of the "Broadway beauties."

The interior spaces are grand with exotic materials such as a pair of Sienna marble columns flanking the entrance hall. The first floor rooms have fourteen foot ceilings that are coved and coffered. An octagonal mahogany stairwell is forty feet tall with stained glass on five sides. The stair is lit by a large octagonal skylight. A massive fireplace in the front parlor is made of Santo Domingo mahogany. The house includes abundant stained glass, wood carvings, and decorative plaster ceilings and walls.

Interior pictures were next to impossible to find as they were restricted during the tour and then nothing was available to purchase.



The interior pictures came from:

www.humanitiestexas.org/newsroom/spotlights/May10/preservation/index.php

Ghosts! The mansion withstood the Great Storm of 1900 (the Galveston Hurricane) virtually unscathed. *It is said that the ghost of Walter Gresham is seen, sometimes appearing to be inspecting the exterior of the building, whenever the island of Galveston is threatened by a storm from the gulf. (The house also suffered some flooding and roof damage from Hurricane Ike in September 2008, but it has since*



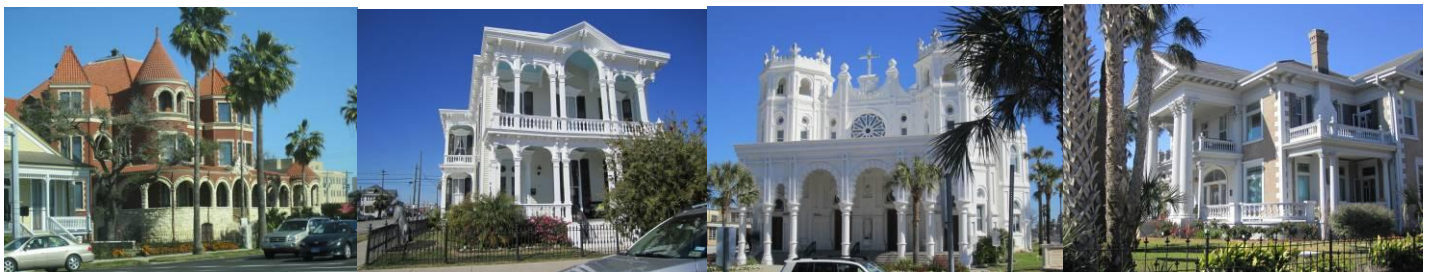
dried out and been reopened.) Other ghosts are said to haunt the home and publications and websites insist the mansion is quite haunted, one website even saying that the ghosts move about there willy nilly.

This weird little lamp is amazing. Ugly at first sight, perched upon a vase, but logical. Each globe can hold a candle and like a torch can be picked up and carried. Ghostly?

Historical pictures from a book I purchased including one after the 1900 Hurricane.



More from Galveston



We took a ferry across to a no-man's land where houses needed to be built on very high stilts. Galveston proper was hugely more interesting but a little bit sad to see all the damage from Hurricane Ike that happened in 2008. They lost most of their huge live oaks and have now taken to having the trunks sculpted. You can see a large dog hanging over the fence in the second house? It's a tree trunk. There is a self-guided tour of sculptures from the 2008 live oaks.

Downtown Houston



Intermixed with an area preserving some old historical homes setting along the bayou



George W. Bush Presidential Library

Presidential Libraries have long been on my list as interesting and the George W. Bush library is in College Station about 2 hours northwest of Houston. I spent a day there and found it to be one of the less impressive buildings and sites (on the Texas A&M grounds). Yet it's very much as we think of George Bush – understated and effective. I had respect for him before and do so even more now, and gained new insight into both his and his son's terms.



Featuring his armored car, CIA days, ambassadorship to China, and a replica of the oval office.



The Kuwait door – This was maybe the most significant item in the Library for me.

Having been invaded and tyrannized by Iraq, Kuwait knew to what extent it owed its reclaimed freedom to George Bush. The small Arab country went to great lengths to show him its gratitude during his first visit there on April 14, 1993 - two years after the end of the Gulf War. Feted as guests of the Emir, the presidential party stayed in his Bayan palace. In addition, the former U.S. President was awarded the nation's highest civilian honor - the Mubarak, the great medal, never before bestowed on an American. "Mere words cannot express how proud I feel to be with you on the hallowed ground of Kuwait," President Bush told the Kuwait Parliament. "Thank you for honoring me and my country." Also presented to President Bush was "The Gate of Kuwait." Made of teak, studded with domed nails, and sometimes elaborately carved, such doors were once the primary access to the walled homes of Kuwait's leading citizens. Over one hundred years old, the door is framed with plates bearing the names of American servicemen who died in the Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. The inscription below the door cites the old Kuwaiti proverb: "When a man gives you the key to his home, it means you are the best and most valuable friend to him; when a man gives you the door of his home it means that you are one of his family." A gift of great significance, this door symbolizes George Bush's place in Kuwait history as well as his place in Kuwaiti hearts.

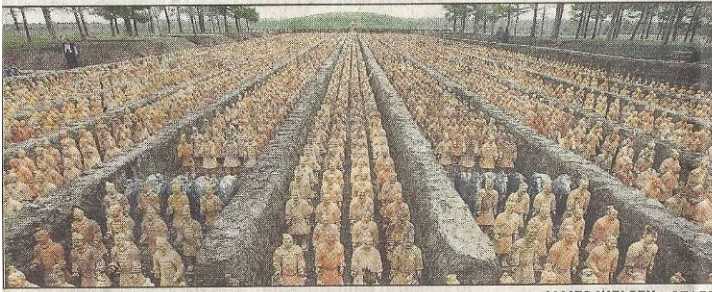


Also of significance was the ceremony at the library just the week prior. With a number of visiting dignitaries from Kuwait honoring and again thanking President Bush there were three protestors at the day's events. What do you think the newspaper featured?

Forbidden Gardens

I've been to some the real thing but who would expect a perfect replica of the Forbidden City in Houston? Paula Boone told me about it and David took me there. The newspaper article tells the weird story better than I could, and then you can see <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/life/main/7408093.html> for how you can buy one of these soldiers for your own garden.

Ancient Chinese secrets: The strange last days of Forbidden Gardens



JAMES NIELSEN: STAFF

FINAL DAYS: The thousands of miniature terra-cotta warriors at the Forbidden Gardens in Katy won't stand guard much longer. The park will close soon.

WHAT will happen to the 6,000 little terra-cotta Chinese soldiers? The loyal, thigh-high warriors who for almost 15 years have maintained their strange vigil over both the Katy Prairie and the Emperor Qin? You wouldn't just throw them away, would you?

At Forbidden Gardens last week, that's what all the tourists wanted to know. But the guides, usually so knowledgeable, just shrugged.

Word had leaked out that the place was about to close its gates forever, and the weekend crowd was the biggest the theme park

had seen in ages — dozens of people hoping to take one last look at its strange replica treasures of ancient China: the architecture room with the marvelous, obsessive wooden model that reveals the inner workings of the Hall of Supreme Harmony; the weapons

Please see **GRAY**, Page G8



LISA GRAY

GRAY: Owner nowhere to be found

CONTINUED FROM PAGE G1

room, with its chariot, leather armor and a bogging array of swords; the outdoor model of the Forbidden City, which even at dollhouse scale covers more than an acre, and which is sheltered by what appears to be the world's biggest carport.

Most wondrous of all, of course, was that replica Emperor Qin's tomb, with its legion of $\frac{1}{3}$ -scale soldiers. What would happen to them?

Elusive Mr. Poon

The staff was friendly and chatty, delighted to talk about ancient China's concubines and foot-binding and royal dishes made of bear paws. They even passed on imperial gossip: In his last days, one guide cheerfully informed us, Emperor Qin "had that whole crazy paranoid thing going on." Worried that someone might sneak up on his army while it was on the march, he made soldiers at the edges march backward and sideways.

But the guides knew more about China's past than they did about the park's present or its future.

When will Forbidden Gardens close? tourists asked. Soon — probably the end of February — but the date isn't firm.

Why is it closing? Something to do with the Grand Parkway expansion.

What will happen to the soldiers? We don't know. Nobody knows.

In a way, that mystery seemed fitting. Ever since Forbidden Gardens was announced in 1995, there's been something elusive about it.

The park's official handout describes the founder as "Mr. Ira Poon, a businessman and Hong Kong native who made the U.S. his adoptive home." Oddly, that's about as much as anyone seems to know about him.

Over the years, various intermediaries have told reporters that Poon most definitely does not want to be interviewed, and efforts to track him down have failed. He's said to be a real-estate mogul, who got his start as an English teacher in Hong Kong. Obviously, he's very wealthy — reportedly, he paid between \$14 million and \$20 million to develop Forbidden Gardens — but in the mid-'90s, Seattle business reporters said they'd never heard of him. One reporter connected him to Maria College, a Hong Kong school that Poon may have owned — but there the trail went cold. Calls to a number that may or may not have been Poon's were not returned.

Since then, Poon hasn't surfaced. Nexis searches of business publications and other media reveal no mention of his name. Land records connect both Poon and Green Ever to modest addresses in Renton, Wash., a suburb of Seattle. One address appears to be a pleasant middle-class house. The other is a little brick office building whose other occupants include a massage therapist. But there's no phone listing in Renton for either Poon or Green Ever.

Over the years, intermediaries have said that Poon wanted to introduce Chinese history to Americans, and most especially to young Chinese-Americans. They said that he chose Texas instead of Seattle because the weather was better for a theme park, because the land was flatter and cheaper, and because Katy's former rice fields reminded him of China.

They said, too, that Poon visited Forbidden Gardens when it was first under development, that he considered it a 20-year project, one that would include a hotel, a 60-foot pagoda, a system of colored ponds, a waterway with boat rides, maybe even a Chinese-themed water park. The goal seemed to be an Asian AstroWorld.

But theme parks don't

usually pay so much attention to detail. At first, every piece on display — the tiny palaces, the ceramic eunuchs and royalty, the replica feast — was handcrafted by Chinese artisans, who took great pains to make their replicas as authentic as possible. The clay used to make the terra-cotta soldiers was said to come from the Chinese province that produced the originals; the tiny palaces were built of Chinese wood.

New additions were still arriving 2002; then-director Nancy Johnson told reporter Bryan Woolley that about once a year, crews of Chinese workers would suddenly appear, unannounced, and begin setting up some new attraction: a Dragon Throne, or an emperor's dining table. "I never know when they're coming or what they're doing," she said. "They just do their work and go away." She'd heard that a miniature Great Wall might be next.

It never came. And neither did throngs of tourists, in large part because Forbidden Gardens didn't employ theme parks' usual noisy methods of attracting them. There were no billboards, no radio ads, no coupons. The place was as reticent as its owner.

At some point, a genteel downhill slide began. The Forbidden City's little palaces cracked in the Texas heat, and the china figures' paint faded. Hail damaged the terra-cotta soldiers. The American staff did what they could, repainting the cracked palace walls and reinforcing the sagging roofs. They glued arms back on the terra-cotta soldiers. They brightened up the Forbidden City with their own, improvised miniature cherry trees. "We went down to Hobby Lobby and got a lot of cheap stuff, like fake flowers, and put it all together," maintenance worker Tommy Cassidy



JAMES NIELSEN : STAFF

MINIATURES: A 1/20-scale replica of the Forbidden City.

told an Los Angeles Times reporter. "It was like being in home ec in high school."

For years, the staff heard that the land was up for sale — and obviously, with the Grand Parkway slated to cut right through it, the 80 acres was about to become very valuable freeway frontage. In 2007, the real estate broker McDade, Smith, Gould, Johnston Mason + Company was hired to list Forbidden Gardens. No buyer materialized.

Forbidden Gardens stayed open, its tiny soldiers quietly on alert.

Fate of the soldiers?

The theme park plans to close as quietly as it has run. In January, a note simply appeared on Forbidden Gardens' website, informing its few visitors that the museum would close soon to make way for a new section of the Grand Parkway — an enormous, controversial ring road.

Reached by phone, Ben

Cornblath, Forbidden Gardens' current museum director, confirmed that yes, it was true: The place was closing soon — most likely at the end of February. He seemed glad it would last that long: He and the tiny staff love the place and its tiny soldiers, and they want Houston to have a chance to say goodbye.

Other than that, he didn't know much — "I'm glad they keep me out of the loop" — and referred me to the Vinson & Elkins lawyer handling a lawsuit related to the property.

Dixon Montague, the lawyer, could add only a little more. He represented Green Ever Corp., the Forbidden Gardens-related entity that owns the land that Harris County condemned to make room for the road. On Green Ever's behalf, he's arguing that his client hasn't been offered enough for the land.

The freeway, he says, will cut far too close to the developed part of Forbid-

den Gardens, swiping too close for comfort on its east side. The freeway, he says without irony, would mean that the theme park is no longer a quiet place for meditation and contemplation.

And what will happen to the tiny soldiers? to the doll-size palaces? to all the funny bits and pieces of Forbidden Gardens? Might you auction them off?

Could thousands of Houstonians display bits of Imperial China in their yards? Terra-cotta soldiers instead

of garden gnomes?

"That's a good question," Montague said. "I don't think we'll be able to move the soldiers. They're permanently affixed to their bases. And I'm not sure if it's even feasible to save the Forbidden City."

"I hate to see it all destroyed," he said. "But we can't just leave it there. The liability is too great."

And no, he said. Mr. Poon wouldn't want to talk with me.

lisa.gray@chron.com

Moving on

And to all things come an end and after eight days it was time to come home. But as McArthur said, "I shall return" -- and soon. I missed telling you so much (because I have to pack for my next trip!) and I missed seeing so much and so many in Houston but this will not be my last trip. Following a hiking trip to Maui, I'm back to Houston on February 25th for the Surfside Beach Marathon then quickly off to Midland/Odessa for the start of a hike through Big Bend National Park, Guadalupe and then Carlsbad Caverns in NM, returning home March 8th.

Just for fun - "What behaviors of fellow runners bug you the most?" - A tidbit from one of our local running newsletters.

- Runners who change lanes and step in front of people, clip heels and toes and cut them off
- Runners who drink (alcohol) after a race to an abusive level, really need to get a grip on life. Especially masters runners. Come on! What kind of example of fitness is that, especially for younger runners?
- Slow runners and young children starting at the front or standing with the wrong pace group
- Groups that train young runners but don't teach them proper race etiquette
- The runner who constantly complains about being injured then proceeds to run 5 miles at a 5 minute per mile pace.
- A person who feels that their way of running or training is the only right way
- Wearing headphones in races!
- On training runs in the neighborhood: runners coming from the other direction that don't acknowledge your existence. During races: runners who, after finishing a race, return to the course running backwards against runners completing the race. Grrrrr!
- Passing people in the finishing chute
- And the most frequently mentioned behavior which "bugs" us is:
- Piggish and selfish people grabbing armfuls of after-race foods (for their entire family) often leaving nothing for "back of the pack" participants (who paid for the same refreshments!)

Riverdance: For your laugh of the day – or maybe of the year – click here to see Lord of the Dance - which will strike a bell with all runners:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0rrLdWLu_0&feature=player_embedded+

Olympic Trails vs World Marathon Majors – Correction and of course it's at the bottom but at least not small print. Thank you David for clarifying my confusion. These have nothing to do with the Olympic trials. (But Houston did.) The World Majors is a championship-style competition that started in 2006. It comprises five annual races for the cities of *Berlin, Boston, Chicago, London, and New York City*. Two other races are also included in the series: the IAAF World Championships Marathon (in odd-numbered years) and the Olympic Games Marathon (in years evenly divisible by four). Each WMM series spans two calendar years; the second year of a series overlaps with the first year of the next. Athletes who compete in the marathons receive points for finishing in any of the top five places. I still want to do all FIVE!

Itinerary

Wed 1/26

10:45am Depart Newark EWR via CO#303
1:47pm Arrive Houston

Rental Car Directions: Exit Airport onto West beltway 8, merge on to I-45 South, merge onto I-610 WEST, Exit 8B - Hidalgo St/Richmond Ave; Turn Right Hidalgo Street.. Hotel is .5 mile on right side. Turn right just before hotel sign.

Hotel Hotel Indigo in Galleria
5160 Hidalgo Street, Houston, TX 77056 Tele: 713 621 8988

Thu 1/27

6:30pm Doors open for 7:00pm for Houston Fit Pasta Dinner with David and group
St. Martin's Episcopal Church at 717 Sage.

Fri 1/28

To Galveston for day - David off work for day; Maggie interested in Galveston
11:00am Expo at Geo R. Brown Convention Center, First Floor, Hall E until 6pm

Sat 1/29

8:00am Breakfast with Marilyn and David's group at IHOP
9:00am Expo at Geo R. Brown Convention Center, First Floor, Hall E until 6pm

Sun 1/30

7:00am Marathon start for red wave at Crawford at Prairie— 6 hour firm cut off
7:10am Marathon start for blue wave at Crawford at Texas

Mon 1/31

Touring? Or to College Station president library for day? Pending what David wants or what Parker needs.

Tue 2/01

Touring? Or to College Station

Wed 2/02

10:45am Depart Houston IAH via CO#106
3:15pm Arrive Newark

Tourist

AAA Gems: Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens; Menil Collection; NASA Space Center; San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site, Monument and Museum of History in La Porte; Moody Gardens in Galveston
Geo Bush Presidential Library and Museum in College Station
See NY Times "36 Hours in Houston"

From David re Houston attractions:

Galveston is only moderately interesting. You have a better ocean drive than in Galveston. I haven't been down there but once since Hurricane Ike, and that was just for a Thanksgiving dinner with one of Maggie's friends. We drove down, socialized, ate, threw a football around on the beach, and drove home. If you like to tour old houses, there are a couple from before the 1900 Hurricane. But a lot of Galveston is still in recovery from Ike, when the entire island was covered in water. The sea water

then killed most of the old oak trees because they had a long drought after the storm and no rain to wash away the salt.

The San Jacinto Monument is cool - similar to Washington monument but maybe taller? (this is Texas after all). The Battleship Texas is there but I doubt you are interested in that. I haven't been to either in 30 years. Not a lot to see, except the drive is interesting if you like refineries. It is only 30 minutes from my house.

I haven't been to the terra cotta warrior display in Katy. I did see some of the real stuff in the Houston Natural Science Museum last year. Very interesting. I'd be interested in going out to see this.

Other museum ideas - The Menil Collection and Rothko Chapel. Won't take too long and can be quite interesting. They are next door to each other and between the Galleria and downtown.

I plan to take a couple of days off while you are here so I can take you most of these places. I'm off that Friday anyway.

From Paula: <http://www.forbidden-gardens.com/>

From David: The Hilton Americas is right at the start finish line at the Houston Convention Center. The Marriott Residence Inn and Courtyard are about 8 blocks away from the convention center (actually a little less to the starting line) so not really a big difference. There are some other choices downtown, too, but since you get the Marriott discount and you mentioned the Hilton those are your best bets. The other choice would be to stay near the Galleria. That is the shopping hub of town and only about a 10-15min drive to downtown. There is a JW Marriott there, as well as other the Marriott West Loop, Residence Inn and Courtyard. Plus Hilton choices. The advantage there is you are very close to my house and I can take you to/from the race.

Houston does have a light rail line (only one) that goes from Downtown south next to a couple of museums but not much else. Everything else is pretty spread out and taxis would be expensive. Of course, it depends on what you would want to see. NASA is one frequent tourist attraction and I haven't been there in a long time, so we could do that. It is a long way from downtown.

Figure out what you want to do and then we can talk about where you should stay. As far as the race goes, I can get you to the start and back. The best thing about the Houston marathon is that the convention center has room inside for 20,000 people before the race so you don't have to worry about standing around in the cold. After the race everything is also inside, including food, medical, bag drop/pickup, bathrooms, family meeting area.

I guess if you are coming to run it I would have to decide if I will do it again. I usually just drive around to 3-4 places and support my friends and take pictures for them. I've not bothered to run it while going for the 50 states and instead just doing new states (something you might consider?). Last time I did it was 2004. Probably time to do it again. But I need to lose some weight and train harder to be sure to be under the strict 6hr limit.

From David re Further religious studies for you (after visiting the Mormons in SLC and Billy Graham's in Charlotte): When you come to Houston you might want to try out this church. It is very close to my house and uses the building that previously housed the Houston Rockets basketball games, concerts, etc. It seats 16,800. Not as big as the Mormon conference facility in SLC but it is used for the actual church services. Joel Osteen and his wife are icky sweet.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lakewood_Church

From David

Well, the half has gotten a lot of attention. Ryan Hall ran it 3 years ago and set the American record with the first sub-1 hour half by an American. This year Meb Kefezghi won it for the men and one of the top US women also won. It has been the US Half Marathon Championship. But the marathon is still good, with the men's and women's winners setting course records this year (2:07 and 2:23). There were a lot of comments in the Houston Chronicle website following the article, mostly negative about "get rid of the half", "you are forgetting about the Full", "you are going for the money from the half". But nationally the halves are growing rapidly. Mainly they need to quit allowing a switch from the Full to the Half. If you can't do the Full, they should give a partial refund and sell it again to someone else from the lottery.

As you recall, the US Olympic Marathon Trials for both Men and Women will be here in 2012, the day before the marathon. Also all the comments on marathonguide.com are very positive. Great Expo, great course, great spectators (usually including me), great aid stations, great organization.

I feel a lot of pride for my hometown marathon because it has always done a lot of things well that people complain about at other races. But as the half has gotten bigger, the logistics (parking, hotels, finding your friends) has gotten harder. And they have always done some things to slight the slower runners. When I started, there was a 5:00 cutoff! After 5 hours, no medal for you. In '97 they increased it to 5:30 (good thing because that was the ice storm year I have told you about). Then they increased it to 6. But some years they have strictly enforced the limit with no medal, shirt, mug, name in finisher list if you were past the limit + the time it took the last runner to get past the start. My good friend Nagindra got shut out in 2009 because he was over the limit by a few minutes. He is in his early 70's and got a little over heated and slowed down at the end too much. It would have been his 18th Houston. They have an active Veteran group.

http://www.chevronhoustonmarathon.com/Upload/documents/2009%20Vet_List_FINAL%2007-14-09.pdf The retired doctor that was head of the Shell medical office in Houston is at 31 Houston's and still going at 69. We have pushed for a longer cutoff, but they always say things like "we can't keep the streets open" (so what, the handful of people over 6 can go on the sidewalk and from 22 to 25 there is a bike path off the road that we use every week in our training and the last mile is downtown, not a busy place at 1pm on Sunday but good sidewalks, stoplights with walk signs, etc). Or "slow people get in the way of fast people". Maybe in the first mile you have a few slow people who got further up the starting chute but not as big a deal as the 14,000 half marathoners who often have no clue about race etiquette. They could shut down support but still have the clock on and one person handing out medals for a little while longer.

They did unofficially allow walkers to start early if they didn't use their chip. They would get course support (after the start) and get a medal, etc at the finish if they were before the race close. We would have groups of walkers starting 1 or 2 hours early but not a lot. Then in the summer of 2008, after the race had filled up in a couple of weeks, they realized they didn't want walkers taking bibs from runners so they announced no early starters and police would enforce it. For Houston Fit and our other suburban programs that was a slap in the face since it was after people had registered. What harm was it that maybe a hundred walkers started 2 hours early on the empty streets of Houston at 5am on a Sunday morning? They are used to walking on the streets early in the morning so they know to stay out of traffic if the roads aren't closed yet and to not get in the way of runners as they pass. Plus if they start early, they are very spread out by the time the runners catch them at 3 hours into the race (after the Half has turned around at mile 8 so smaller crowds anyway). Anyway, USAFit created a marathon the weekend before in Sugar Land, a Houston suburb for walkers and anyone who didn't get in the Houston Marathon. That is the one where I got my horrible blisters in January. Very nice, friendly, well organized race. Like your buddy at NJ calling your name at the start and finish, my buddy was the announcer at this race and made a big deal, at my request, about Marilyn finishing her 50th marathon.

From David: I'm at your disposal for 4 days. Since I'm not running with you at least I can spend some non-running time with you. Maggie may want to do some of the stuff too. Weather looks good for your visit - lows 38-45, highs 58-64. Very low chance of snow shoveling. It was 31 this morning and very pretty day. Still too far away to predict race weather but at least for now it looks promising.

The Thursday dinner is with the Houston Fit group. It is optional for you but I will be there. Last year we had Larry Macon speak - a client is one of my fellow coaches. Not sure who it will be this year. It is at a church near your hotel. Definitely different than the Greek dinner, except our catering is from, now get this - pasta from a barbeque place run by a Greek guy. It is a good group and can be fun. I get motivated by the nervous energy of all the first timers.

Saturday morning is a totally different group. Almost all are former Houston Fit members but I'm the only one that has kept it up. Two of my coaches when I started in 1994 were at breakfast this morning. Everyone wants to meet one of Dale's flat bellied women. One common approach is to go to breakfast on Saturday and leave there for the expo downtown. We can be done with both by noon, do a museum, forbidden gardens or whatever. Or continue from downtown further east to San Jacinto Monument.

I'm not sure I need to go to College Station but if it is a nice day it is a nice drive up there. I can get around pretty well with my boot, but not quite at a Diana pace. But if you want to go there on Thursday without me, that would be ok. If you can be back by dinner then you can join me. It is about 90 miles. Good highway if not rush hour. You would be going against traffic each way so it shouldn't be too bad.

In Houston, Maggie suggested you would like the Menil Collection. It is a unique art museum that has an eclectic base collection and often has unusual visiting exhibits. It is between our house and downtown. I see now that was already on the itinerary. Maggie and I haven't been there for a while so that would be fun. It isn't huge so it doesn't take a lot of time. <http://www.menil.org/>

In the itinerary I mentioned the terra cotta warrior exhibit. Last week on the news there was a story it is closing soon because there is a highway planned to go through their land. Sounded odd because the highway isn't that far along in planning, but it is a good thing to go see it while we can. <http://www.forbidden-gardens.com/>

Bishop's Palace in Galveston is worth seeing. Maggie and I went a long time ago so we would like to go again. <http://www.galveston.com/bishopspalace/>

Bayou Bend is good. It is near downtown and actually on the marathon route. Ima Hogg's house. Yes, her parents named her that. <http://www.mfah.org/visit/bayou-bend-visitor-info>. Call 713-639-7750 for information, reservations, and to arrange special tours. Bayou Bend is closed on Mondays. Guided House Tours (Reservations Recommended). Tuesday – Thursday: 10:00 – 11:30 am; 1:00 – 2:45 pm; Friday – Saturday: 10:00 -11:15 am; Tours are 60 minutes and occur every 15 minutes. Self-Guided Tours (No Reservations Needed); Friday – Sunday, 1:00 – 5:00 pm. (last admission 4:00 pm)

Two lucky folks from Houston win a trip to Athens Marathon each year. Isn't this a coincidence since I was just there and they are partners?

