

A funny thing happened to me today. Let me tell you about it.

I had my last full day in London today. I leave tomorrow on an 11:something flight, which means I must be on the westbound train to Paddington by a little after 8:00. So, what to do for my last day? I came here in part to have some business meetings, and I had finally managed to nail one down for midday. In preparation I slept well, having gotten to bed early last night after the whole Sister Wendy Chow Mein disaster.

I started off the day with a prepared breakfast at DAZN, around the corner. This was a Halal take on a "Full English Breakfast", a normally repugnant affair made better here by an utter lack of sausage (English sausage is best avoided) and no pitiful fried tomato. It was rather good. I spoiled myself by requesting a croissant rather than toast (75p extra) and by getting to both read *The Independent* and watch the BBC *with sound*, the first time I have enjoyed that on this trip.

It was a good day to have all this news. Last night saw the worst storm of the season hit, with 80mph winds, huge waves fed by Spring tides, and some major upsets in both the FA Cup soccer matches and the 6 Nations rugby tourney. There was lots of news.

I have an Oyster Card, a magical RFID device which I just wave over a turnstile to let me on any train or bus in the capital, charged up for a full month of travel in zones one and two (central London and the immediate outskirts) but I opted to walk down to my meeting. The weather was very strange; sunny one moment and raining the next - or both at the same time. I kept taking out my broly and stowing it again.

I stopped in at La Frommagerie to get some mints, and generally just ambled slowly through the crowds down towards my meeting spot in Soho. A rather nice stroll, and the perfect way to spend my last day — no galleries, no ticket booths, just a nice walk.



Soon I was sitting in a Soho coffee shop, and then, when it went well, in a very nice Indian restaurant just a block off of Piccadilly Circus. What was to have been a 30 minute get acquainted session turned into 2½ hours of rollicking good discussion, which I won't go into here. But I made a good friend, let's leave it at that.

After leaving the restaurant and parting ways, I was left wondering how to complete my day, still young at only 2:40 pm or so. Soon I had my answer when in a bracing wind I realised I had left my scarf behind at the restaurant. A walk back yielded no scarf, much to the consternation of my hosts. They were beside themselves trying to find it (It is cold sir, you need scarf, no?). I waved off their concern. I was feeling pretty good about things, and that was a really cheap scarf I had bought down in Petticoat Lane. I deserve better, and since my dinner companion paid for my meal and tea, I decided I had some money to spend on a scarf. I leave tomorrow, and I have more pounds in my pocket than I need to see me through. Off to Saville Row I went.

Okay, Saville Row is intimidating. This is where "Bespoke Suits" rule. These are custom made suits which cost around £2,500 each. This is not the place to buy a scarf even if you are feeling flush. Their idea of flush has at least a couple more 0's tucked onto the right hand side of the price tag. I went a block over to Regent street where I found a lovely cashmere number for the right price. Quite posh all the same.

I could have just walked back up towards home, or a closer tube station, but I thought I would like one more turn around Piccadilly Circus. I am glad I did. As I emerged from Soho into the Circus I saw an American couple pouring over their map. "Welcome to my London" I thought, and thought to help them find what they needed. I stopped myself, though. Piccadilly Circus is one of those places that is typically filled with either tourists or hucksters. If you get directions here they are likely to be tainted in some way, and most guides will tell you as much. I realised that as well intended, any advice I gave may well be treated with suspicion. Besides, I had made this very same map inspection several times — they will figure it out, and having done so once, will be better set to do so again.

I walked on by, and then it struck me: My London. “Welcome to My London” I had thought. Suddenly I stopped in my tracks, which in the middle of the Circus is not advised, and realised that I’d had an epiphany: my unspoken comment “Welcome to *my* London” put me squarely in camp with Alexandra Styron and her sensation, reported in her essay (which preceded my trip here and which I wrote about in [my preamble](#) over a month ago). “My London;” I’ve realised that I have a London, I have my London; my view of the place, my streets I know backward and forward, my own internal map of the place, of the layout, the tube, the neighbourhoods. It is limited, my London, but it is mine. My father had his and now I have mine. Just like Ms Styron and her father, they are not the same, and now I understand the sense of disconnectedness that she expressed between *her* Brooklyn and *her father’s* Brooklyn.

In my preamble I saw a gulf between her experience and my own, I now see that was myopic. I just hadn’t gone far enough down the line to understand.

I spent the next hour or two walking *my* London. I navigated effortlessly to Covent Garden where I shopped the antique stands. I strolled The Strand and found a place that would actually make me a Martini (no small feat here, believe me). I finally ducked into Charing Cross station and caught the Bakerloo home. The last time on this trip I will take that line, that trusty train which is so much a part of My London.

Early back home, I settled in to take care of some updates to the blog, a nice cold supper to polish off my last bits of grocery, packing my bags. And a nice relaxed night with myself and my new found comfort in my original hometown. Fluent? I don’t know yet. Comfortable? Most certainly.