

## Travelin' the world ....lookin' for somethin

Written by Irma McClaurin  
Monday, 20 August 2012 22:25

---



*Sweet Dreams are made of this  
Who am I to disagree?  
I travel the world and the seven seas.  
Everybody's lookin' for somethin'.  
Eurythmics, Sweet Dreams are Made of This*

Pictured: Malik of African & Caribbean Culture Centre, McClaurin, Centre visitor

People often ask me why I travel. And it's only after I return home that I can truthfully answer that question. Perhaps, like the Eurythmics' lyrics suggest, I am looking for something. And that is true, then what?

Travel, for me, is an adventure. It is like tumbling down Lewis Carroll's famous rabbit hole in *Alice in Wonderland*

*In another moment down went Alice after it [the White Rabbit], never once considering how in the world she was to get out again.*

## Travelin' the world ....lookin' for somethin

Written by Irma McClaurin  
Monday, 20 August 2012 22:25

---

*The rabbit-hole went straight on like a tunnel for some way, and then dipped suddenly down, so suddenly that Alice had not a moment to think about stopping herself before she found herself falling down a very deep well.*



Travel is a trip into the unknown—a "rabbit hole" experience. You can pack your suitcase, plan an itinerary, but in the end, you never know what's going to happen, who you will meet, if the weather will cooperate—in other words, travel is a space over which you have little control. And, if you throw in language barriers, such journeys can be very unsettling and disconcerting, or you can view them as adventures of unexpected consequences and unknown outcomes.

Pictured: Rev. Dr. Iain Whyte and Dr. McClaurin

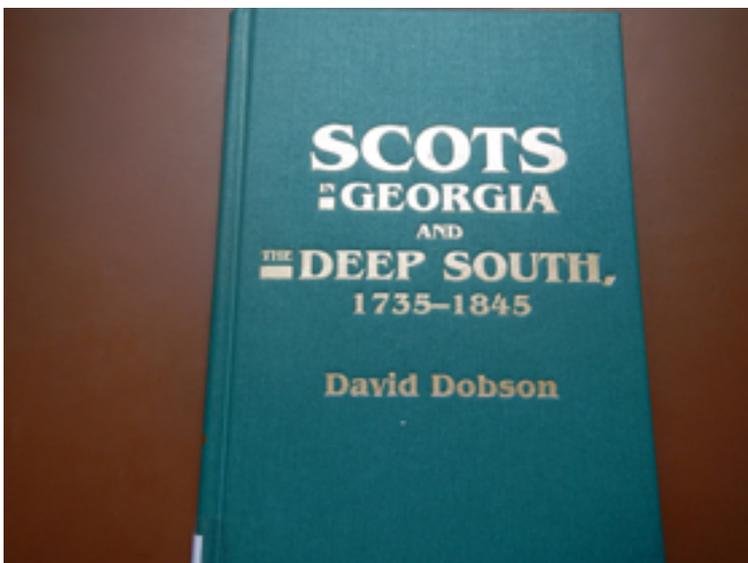
## Travelin' the world ....lookin' for somethin

Written by Irma McClaurin  
Monday, 20 August 2012 22:25

---

My most recent travels took me to Europe this time. I attended an African Studies Conference in Edinburg (pronounced Edinborro) Scotland. Hosted by the Centre for African Studies at the University of Edinburg, two topics at the conference caught my attention and stood out—studies of the Chinese in Africa and the implications of their presence on African cultures and their economic landscape, and memory studies by scholars using the recollections of aging Africans who recall the slave trade and their personal experience with it. Attendees were from Scotland, of course, but also from Paris, Ghana, South Africa, Japan—yes, there are African Studies programs in Japan, Korea, and China—Denmark, Ireland, and a small number, including us, from the United States.

My time was spent observing the dynamics of professional conferences where clearly I was the outsider. I am always amazed at how "endogamous" academics are—that is generally sticking to their own kind, and not really very friendly. I did happen upon a few exceptions—the Secretariat from Malawi and the Scottish couple (Rev. Dr. Iain Whyte and wife; he had conducted his own research on slavery and Scotland.) After the conference I relocated from the University to one of the numerous B&Bs in Edinburg, and visited historic buildings, including the Queen's palace.



Pictured: Book on Scottish in the American South

The moment of epiphany for me was finding out information about the name I carry "McClaurin/MacLaren/MacLaurin/McLaren/"—my "slave" name, yes, but still a part of my personal history. I secured some help from the receptionist at the National Archives of Scotland

## Travelin' the world ....lookin' for somethin

Written by Irma McClaurin  
Monday, 20 August 2012 22:25

---

located in Edinburg ( <http://www.nas.gov.uk/about/default.asp> ) . After two hours of chit-chatting in the lobby and looking up information in the book of Scottish names, he introduced me to one of the librarians who showed me to a very small section of books on Scottish people who had emigrated to the U.S. South. Most went to North Carolina, and then spread out from there. Some obviously settled in Mississippi, where my father was born, but I could not find a direct link, so I will have to try and find more from the Mississippi side.

The next stop was Glasgow— a bit further north, it was colder and more rain, and eerily, the sun did not begin to set until around 9pm. The long days played havoc with sleeping when it was still light outside. While in Scotland, I experienced summer solstice, some of the longest days of the year, and the longest I've ever known in my life. Despite the rain, people in Glasgow were friendlier. As I stopped to look at a map and figure out directions, people would stop and ask "can I help you find something?" One man walking his dog actually walked me back to our hotel as I navigated streets that twisted and curved. And the B&B served the best smoked salmon and scrambled eggs that I had tasted. I also found time to connect with the large African immigrant and refugee population in Glasgow. They are trying to build community through the African and Caribbean Centre [http://www.glasgowcityofmusic.com/find\\_a/5199\\_afro\\_caribbean\\_network\\_centre](http://www.glasgowcityofmusic.com/find_a/5199_afro_caribbean_network_centre)



Pictured: Glasgow at Night

After a few days of cool weather and lots of rain, rain, and more rain, I headed for London.

## Travelin' the world ....lookin' for somethin

Written by Irma McClaurin  
Monday, 20 August 2012 22:25

---

There I found more rain, but the excitement of the upcoming Olympics gave the city a festive air. I connected with friends I had not seen in over a decade, and enjoyed visiting the train stations.

But it was by bus that I made my way through the English Channel and onward to France. What can I say about Paris, except I love it. There is a quality about the people. They are enthusiastic, passionate, and seem to enjoy each other's company. I first noted on the subway that couples laughed with each other, held hands (old and young), and talked. Unlike American couples who always seem to be angry at each other, the French seemed to take delight in their companion—gay or straight.

My most wondrous observation came while sitting at sidewalk cafés, of which there are many. People were not plugged into phones and computers. They actually still engaged in the art of conversation, a dying tradition in America. Walk into any Starbucks in the U.S. and you will see people talking on their cell phones even as they sit at the table with another person, or typing away at a laptop. The days of coffee and chit-chat have disappeared. Not so in Paris!. Having arrived during Fashion week, my favorite French term was "soldes" or sales. Cross-cultural communication was not a problem when buying items. Somehow I got what I wanted, and the store clerks got a sale. And when translation was an issue, they often enlisted the aid of a nearby customer. In one store, the information was communicated in French and translated into Spanish, which I and the customer both spoke. Yes, I travel the world, looking for something, and in Paris, I found it. I just enjoyed the musical energy of the jazz clubs—especially Jazz Acts ([www.jazz-act.com](http://www.jazz-act.com)) in the Montparnasse area, a newly-opened club by a Senegalese engineer who was born in Paris, and retains a love of music nurtured from when he was a child. On my visit, I was treated to live music by a Cuban flutist visiting from Habana, accompanied by musicians from the Cuban diaspora in Paris. And my good friend, John Betsch—a great drummer, tipped me off on this one, and other places to go and hear jazz, including himself ( <http://7lezards.com/musiciens/betsch.htm> ). He has a new album coming out ( <http://tribaldisorder.com/2.0/john-betsch> ).

Staying in the Latin Quarters at Résidence les Gobelins ( <http://www.hotelgobelins.com/en/component/content/article/406-hotel-residence-les-gobelins-paris-13-eme-arrondissement.html> ), located on rue de Gobelins, off of Ave des Gobelins—yes, lots of Gobelins, I wandered around amidst a diversity of immigrants and French people. In fact, the owners of Hotel des Gobelins are a Jamaican woman married to a Frenchman. I learned about the hotel through a colleague.

## Travelin' the world ....lookin' for somethin

Written by Irma McClaurin  
Monday, 20 August 2012 22:25

---

Her friend, Ms. Melinda Herron, is working on a "Black Paris" guidebook ( [http://www.escapeartist.com/Travel/eBooks/Guide\\_To\\_Black\\_Paris/](http://www.escapeartist.com/Travel/eBooks/Guide_To_Black_Paris/) ), and saved me by speaking to the owners of the hotel on my behalf, even though we had never met.

While the monuments like the Eiffel Tower are wonderful, a visit to the Museum National D'Histoire Naturelle, with its historic Jardin des Plantes (botanical gardens) will give you proper exposure as well as a stroll along the Rue Monge. The last time I stayed near the Sobornne. This time, it was the Latin Quarters. Each area has its own charm. Thanks to a new friend Kristi of C.T. Weekends ( <http://www.ctweekendsforwomen.com/> ) from Raleigh who was in Paris for Fashion Week, I got to experience a delightful restaurant called SPRING at 6 rue Bailleul with noted chef Daniel Rose—Iron Chef and Food Network, move over ( <http://www.springparis.fr/> )

. I kept waiting for the hidden camera to appear—it was that good. With seating for just 29 people, it was an intimate experience as we watched our food prepared in close proximity. Eating is a wonderful pass time in Paris, and it's true that "French women don't get fat" because they walk--- a lot! Let me say that my perspective on Paris was from the point of view of a "tourista." Others who have spent more time there have a more critical viewpoint on the problems of immigration and race, which are important issues there, and perhaps on my next visit, I will have the "Black Paris" guidebook that will give me another perspective.

The train from Paris to Luxembourg was uneventful and cheap. Upon arrival, I discovered the train station was just two blocks from my hotel. My European style quarters consisted of a double bed, a built-in desk, tiny shower/toilet and flat screen TV. Once I settled in, I asked how to get to the town center. The desk clerk informed me Luxembourg was very small, and I could walk just about anywhere. He was right. I strolled along the streets with many others and found myself in a town square where beer is served in a real glass for which you pay one Euro refunded upon return. I watched Disney's Nemo in French and German on an outside screen set up in the square where I was able to take wonderful photos of children playing; I became intrigued by the number of men out along with their children, and just began photographing them.

I was fortunate to get a brief visit with the American Ambassador to Luxembourg, the Honorable Ambassador Robert A. Mandell. To him, diplomacy is an "art," and he knows what that means better than anyone, since Mandell is also an accomplished painter in addition to being a savvy businessman, and strong Obama supporter.

## Travelin' the world ....lookin' for somethin

Written by Irma McClaurin  
Monday, 20 August 2012 22:25

---

My final stop was Konz, Germany. It is about 45 minutes outside of Luxembourg. My Raleigh neighbors, Rosie, Frederick, and their son Oliver, who are originally from Germany, graciously hosted me. They also assisted me in my search for a lost Afro-German cousin—but to no avail.

All in all, it was a wonderful adventure— Scotland, London, Paris, Luxembourg, and Germany. And, more fun than tumbling down a rabbit hole, I must say:

Yes indeed, "...sweet dreams are made of this—travelin' the world, lookin/ for something."

(Rev. 8/25/2012; the author notes that this article was revised in response to some feedback and to make clear that the opinions expressed are completely my own and are not intended as a response to the blog cited below.

Read More:

<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~rgs/alice-l.html>

<http://www.racismreview.com/blog/2012/06/11/racial-profiling-france-us-pt-1/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/travel/01bites-spring.html>

©2012 McClaurin Solutions

*Irma McClaurin, PhD is the Culture and Education Editor for Insight News of Minneapolis. She is a bio-cultural anthropologist and writer living in Raleigh, NC, the Principal of McClaurin Solutions (a consulting business), and a former university president. ( [www.irmamcclaurin.com](http://www.irmamcclaurin.com) ) (@mcclaurintweets)*