



My shoes in Santa Monica



Shoeless in Seattle



## Barefoot through America

America is a large and populous country whose people are known for their outgoing and welcoming disposition. Nevertheless on a book tour you tend to spend most of your time alone and so, because I've never been expert at taking those arm-length camera-phone self-portraits, I've decided instead to document my progress around the land of the free and the home of the brave by photographing my shoes. Los Angeles is the first stop, home of the renowned radio host Michael Silverblatt whose Bookworm show has hosted just about anyone who's anyone over the years and whose deceptively casual style of questioning circles in on its target, landing gently and unerringly time after time. The interview is good, and the post-interview chat is just as good, jumping from John Barth to David Mitchell to Martin Amis, who is on the show next week. 'I don't care what other people think about "Lionel Asbo"' Michael says. 'If they like it or not. That's not criticism. It's just opinion.' The next morning I'm back on the plane, this time to San Francisco where I drop in on Paul Yamazaki, Kurosawa expert and City Lights Bookstore luminary then walk down to the waterfront and take off my shoes. The next day finds me up at 5.00am and confronting the longest security line I have ever seen. A rushed breakfast and I'm on the plane to Seattle where the skies are grey and drizzly as they should be – none of that bright blue Californian nonsense – and the hills are steep. I check in then head for the Pike Place market. At the event that night I meet long-time fans and college students who have been assigned 'a reading' as part of their creative writing course. It's not enough to write a book anymore; you have to be able to present it too. Then it's on to Chicago where I lived between 1993 and 1996. I'm staying with Doug Seibold, founder and owner of the Agate publishing house, my friend and ex-pool partner. He's organised a meeting with members of the Chicago press at the city's first winery, a friendly group who range from a senior journalist at the Chicago Tribune to a couple of post-grad students putting out a monthly journal of ideas. We talk food, and talk the writing of food. And this being Chicago we eat food too. The reading that night is in Winnetka but it feels like a reunion as old friends (and some new ones) pile in. Tomorrow I'm on the plane to Jackson, Mississippi....

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