

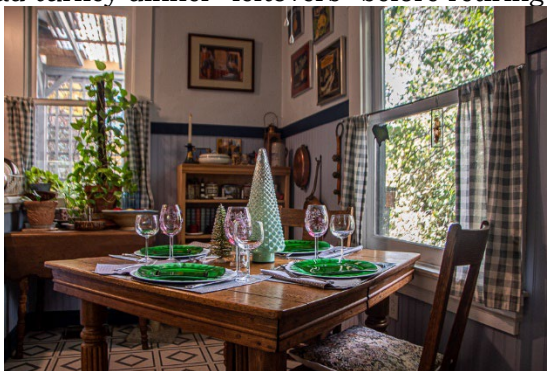
CHRISTMAS LETTER 2022

Last year, my sister Lynn was finally able to join us for Christmas after the COVID pandemic released its grip on us. Lynn had been looking forward to escaping the cold and snow of the Midwest to enjoy some southern California sunshine and warm weather, but it was not to be so. During the week she stayed with us, we had over 3 inches of rain and temperatures 15 – 20 degrees below normal! Although southern California really needed the rain, having had zero rain in November, it was not the most pleasant time for doing anything outdoors. So, we spent a lot of time at home enjoying the conversations about family.

Just 10 days before she was to arrive, I received a weird email from Orbitz Travel informing me that my “flight credits” would expire in March 2022! I had no idea what it was all about, so I called Orbitz to ask why I had received the message. That’s when I was informed Lynn’s airline ticket that I had “rebooked” back in April was no longer a confirmed booking! WHAT? Needless to say, I was really “pissed off”! Apparently, Orbitz had failed to process my credit card for the additional fare of rebooking, which resulted in American Airlines cancelling the reservation, but with no notification to me! All of a sudden, I was facing a real problem – how to book a new ticket for Lynn. After more than an hour on the phone with Orbitz, they were able to book the same dates and flights, but at a much higher fare! I wasn’t happy with the additional cost, but the only important thing on my mind at that point was to make sure she would be able to join us for Christmas.

So, on Thursday before Christmas Day, I picked Lynn up at Ontario airport and that evening we all shared ham and bean soup with fresh baked cornbread for dinner around the kitchen table. (A long family tradition at Christmas) The next day, Lynn went shopping in downtown Redlands while I baked a couple of pies for Christmas dinner, pecan and mincemeat. That evening, Christmas Eve, I prepared chicken stroganoff for dinner. Then we all called it an early night as Leslie headed to her pet sitting job in Beaumont.

Christmas Day began with a Christmas breakfast casserole I had prepared the day before. After breakfast we made our way to the living room to open gifts under the Christmas tree as we listened to traditional Christmas carols. As has been the tradition, Leslie volunteered to be “Santa” again, and we all had a wonderful time exchanging gifts while the cats played with the wrapping paper and ribbons. Later, I retired to the kitchen to put the turkey in the oven, basted with fresh rosemary and thyme. Then I turned my attention to preparing the traditional side dishes – garlic mashed potatoes, herb stuffing, gravy, and sautéed brussels sprouts drizzled with maple syrup, along with hot rolls and butter. Early in the afternoon, our longtime friend Mary Duke arrived and carried on a lively conversation with Lynn and Leslie while I continued preparing Christmas dinner. Then Leslie set the kitchen table in a beautiful holiday layout before we all sat down to enjoy a delicious dinner and a wonderful time together. That evening, Leslie, Lynn and I had turkey dinner “leftovers” before retiring for the night.



Christmas dinner table

(Unfortunately, Mary Duke passed away in May of this year at the age of 92. She led a fascinating, full, and eventful life, and we will miss her at Christmas dinner this year!)

The next morning, Lynn invited us for breakfast. Our original plan was the “Breakfast Shack”, a neighborhood favorite a few blocks away. But there was a long line out the door and an hour wait for a table! So, we headed down the street to another local favorite called “Nick’s Burgers”. However, we found the dining room closed because not enough staff had shown up for work! But I had another place in mind not far away called “Bravo Burgers”. Here we had some delicious “comfort” food that included a mushroom and swiss cheese omelet for Lynn, while Leslie and I had country fried steak and eggs with lots of white sausage gravy! As we left the restaurant, we all agreed the breakfast would keep us satisfied for the entire day. Then we got ready for an overnight trip to South Coast Winery Resort in the Temecula Wine Country. Along the way we encountered a “road closed” sign where water had flooded across the road, but I was able to maneuver my Jeep around it and we continued on to Temecula. I took the back roads through the vineyards to avoid the freeway traffic near downtown Temecula, and the scenery was beautiful under partly cloudy skies. Later on, as we checked into the resort, heavy clouds were on the western horizon, foretelling of some stormy weather on the way.

Lynn and Leslie had a lovely deluxe villa overlooking the vineyards, while I had another deluxe king villa nearby.



Deluxe King Villa – South Coast Winery Resort

After checking in, we went to the tasting room to sample some of the wines, but we found the place to be terribly overcrowded and very loud, so, after finally getting the attention of a wine server we had a nice glass of white wine. However, the crowd and the loud rap music got the better of me and I suggested we go to the bar for another glass of wine. As we sat in the bar, we enjoyed the wine and a delicious “Margarita flatbread” appetizer. As 6:00pm rolled around, we were shown to our table in the Vineyard Rose dining room, which was beautifully decorated for Christmas. Leslie ordered braised short ribs, Lynn had scallops and shrimp served over garlic mashed potatoes, while I had the rack of lamb. We all enjoyed the delicious dishes while Christmas music played softly in the background before retiring to our villas for the night.



Vineyard Rose Restaurant

Heavy rain continued to fall throughout the night, but when we awoke in the morning, the skies were clearing, and the sun was shining. We had breakfast in the Vineyard Rose dining room where Leslie ordered a unique Mexican dish of scrambled eggs, chorizo sausage and salsa served over a mountain of chips – sort of a breakfast version of chips and salsa. Lynn chose a classic spinach and mushroom omelet and requested one pancake instead of the hash brown potatoes. But when her order arrived, it was a huge 4 egg omelet and three large pancakes, which she was obviously not able to finish. After a delicious breakfast, we checked out and began the drive back home, just as rain showers started. So, we abandoned any plans of visiting San Diego Zoo Safari Park or the Orange Empire Railroad Museum. Once again, we ran into some flooded roads and had to take a long detour to get home. That evening we went to the Escape Craft Brewery downtown where we shared a delicious New York style thin crust pizza from a traditional Italian brick oven.

The next day I took Lynn to Ontario airport for her flights back to Illinois, and this time both American Airlines flights were on time. However, there were many other flights that had either been cancelled or delayed, so Lynn was lucky. As I said goodbye, I wished her a safe trip and looked forward to her visit next Christmas!

In mid-January I had a photo shoot in Perris, so I decided to go to the Perris airport to watch the skydivers. As I sat on the patio of the “Bombshelter Bar” watching the skydivers descending out of the clear blue sky, a member of the British Royal Air Force parachute squadron walked by. I asked him what his team was doing in Perris and he said they were conducting training exercises before heading to Blythe, California for another two weeks of training. They were doing at least a half dozen jumps a day, and it was fascinating to see them preparing to jump and then their landings as I sat with my glass of beer on the patio. As they sat down to lunch at a table next to me it was fascinating to hear several different dialects from around Britain.



SkyDive Perris Airport

From Perris I drove the back roads to Corona for an overnight stay at the new “Hilton Home2Suites” hotel at Dos Lagos Center, courtesy of a Hotels.com reward. I checked into a very nice corner suite on the top floor overlooking the Santa Ana Mountains. Then I walked over to the Stone Church Brewery for a cold pint of Santa Maria Pale Ale. Suddenly, just as I was finishing writing up my travel notes for the day, a man stopped at my table and complimented me on the quality of my “handwriting”! Actually, my handwriting is architectural lettering rather than cursive, which I take for granted after so many years, but it seems a lot of people are unfamiliar with it and see it as something special. (By the way, I never saw him “notice” me from across the room) Leaving Stone Church Brewery, I walked across the shopping center to the “TAPS Brewery and Fish House” for dinner. My order of lobster dumplings in lobster bisque and sour cream with chives was absolutely amazing! After that, I walked back to the hotel and retired for the night.

The next day I visited the “Mottes Vintage Car Museum”, a small museum of old vintage cars dating from the early 1900’s to the late 1950’s, all very classic and in mint condition. Every one of the old cars were spotless and in running order. It was a real hidden gem in the Perris Valley, and I had passed it so many times driving to and from San Diego.



Mottes Vintage Car Museum – Hemet



1947 Cadillac DeVille



“Rumble Seat”

In mid-February I drove to Scottsdale, Arizona to meet up with my best friend from high school who was visiting one of his grandchildren. Along the way, I stopped for a beer at the “Mecca Bar” in Wickenburg, the “Team Roping Capitol of the World”! Then it was on to Scottsdale where I checked into a nice room at the Marriott Residence Inn next to the Mayo Clinic. I called John and left a message that we should meet up at “The Keg Steakhouse” nearby for dinner. We have been in touch with each other for over 55 years since we graduated from high school in 1963. But it was only last year that we actually met up in person for the first time since I left Illinois in 1967, so this year was our second reunion. Both John and I ordered the special of the day, “Pistachio Crusted King Salmon” served with grilled Brussels Sprouts and garlic mashed potatoes, and the dish was superb! Over dinner we talked a lot about what had happened in our lives since the days in high school, and it felt as if we had always been best friends! Of special note, John still manages the family farm and continues to wear his classic “bib overalls”, which he calls his “bibs”. So, when I arrived at the restaurant early, I advised the hostess to be on the lookout for a guy wearing “bibs” since he would be joining me for dinner. Of course, she had no idea what “bibs” looked like until John arrived!

The next morning, I joined John for breakfast at the “Times Square Café” which he had recommended. I was surprised to find it was an Italian restaurant, but it served traditional American breakfast as well. John ordered his usual bowl of oatmeal with raisins and a side of raisin toast while I had eggs, bacon, and sourdough toast. Our conversation revolved around the subject of high school friends who had passed away recently, and both of us knew there would be more “passings” in the future – it’s the way life works. After breakfast I bid John farewell and wished him a safe journey back to Illinois. I believe we’ll meet up again in Scottsdale this coming February, which I very much look forward to.



John and me at the "Keg Steakhouse"

On my way back home through Wickenburg, I spotted a sign for "Vulture City Ghost Town", so I decided to check it out. It was located 12 miles south of Wickenburg by way of a very narrow, slow, winding road. When I reached the ghost town, I "checked in" at the information booth and was given a map of the abandoned town and a short summary of its history as a gold mining town that began in 1863. From 1863 until 1942 the Vulture mine produced 340,000 ounces of gold and 260,000 ounces of silver. At one time in the late 1800's it had a population of over 5,000 people. Over the course of the next hour, I walked around the old town taking dozens of photos of the restored buildings, the oldest and most interesting of which was the "assay office". Virtually all the buildings were constructed of local "stacked" stone and quite unique. Another old building of special interest was one that housed the Doctor's Office next door to the "Brothel", which was next door to the "Boarding House"! My initial thought was just how "conveniently" they had been located. In addition to all the stone buildings, there were the remains of the old wooden "headrig" that had a lone ore car sitting at the top, still connected by a thick iron cable to a large old steam driven engine. Meanwhile, an open pit gold mining operation continued on the north edge of the town. (no idea of how successful they were in recovering gold now) From Vulture City I drove back to US 60 and continued on my journey home.



Doctor's Office / Brothel / Boarding House



Boarding House



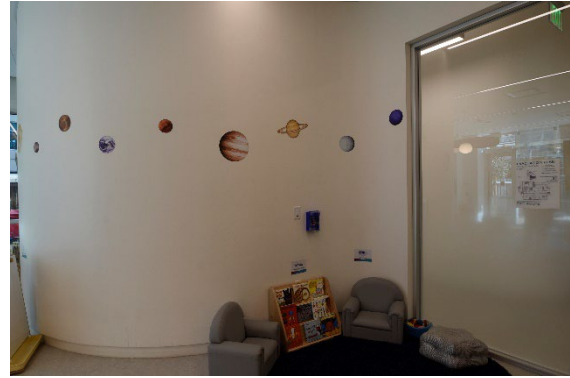
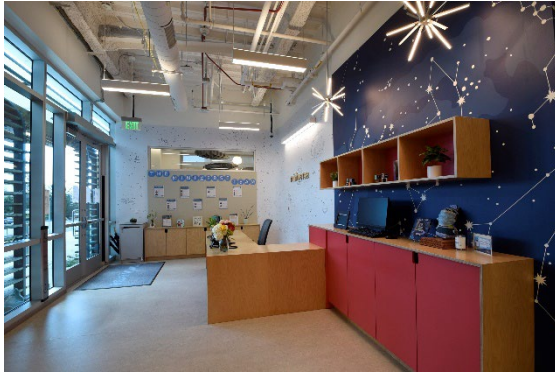
Brothel



Headrig & Steam Engine

Then in early March I was asked to do photo shoots at three daycare centers in San Francisco and Palo Alto as part of a nationwide contract with the real estate marketing company that I'm employed by. I boarded a United Airlines (SkyWest) flight from Ontario airport to San Francisco International on a Friday afternoon and it was completely full. Luckily, I was able to get a seat in the first row of the small CanadaAir regional jet which afforded me a bit more space. Our flight attendant was an older man named Tom and he was a very friendly and funny guy, especially when he recited the flight safety instructions. One of his more humorous lines was – "possession of personal alcoholic beverages is strictly prohibited, unless of course you share with your flight attendant"! Another of his safety instructions was – "whining, screaming, nasty behavior or complaining will not be permitted at any time"! During the flight, Tom gave me the one and only beer he had remaining on board the flight at no charge. As we approached San Francisco airport in strong gusty winds, Tom made an announcement – "if you enjoyed the on-board service today, please send a letter to the CEO of SkyWest Airlines. And if you didn't like the service, then don't say anything and just get off the plane"! When I got to the rental car center, there was an incredibly long line of people at the Budget counter waiting to pick up a car, and it wasn't moving at all. After 20 minutes and no progress toward the counter, I looked over to the Avis counter next door and it was virtually empty, so I decided to check to see if they had a rental car available. And most certainly they did, at \$348.00 per day!! So, I went back to the Budget line and eventually picked up the car I had reserved, a new Hyundai "Kona". But when I got to the car, I couldn't find the keys. Finally, one of the employees helped me locate the keys in the "cup holder"! It was a short drive to the Best Western Grosvenor Hotel just north of the airport where I checked into a nice room on the top floor. Before retiring for the night, I decided to grab a bar of chocolate from the vending machine in the lobby. Although it was capable of accepting credit cards, it wasn't working that night and would only accept cash, of which I had none. So, it cost me \$3.50 to withdraw \$20 from the ATM down the hall, only to find the vending machine would not accept a \$20 bill! I had to ask the front desk to give me change for the \$20 bill. (the joys of travel)

The next morning, I was up early for the drive into the city, and even though it was Saturday, the traffic downtown was horrendous. And on top of that, a parking space was virtually non-existent. However, I was able to park in a handicapped zone long enough to photograph the daycare center and not get a ticket! Then it was a long drive south to Palo Alto to photograph the second daycare facility. The drive through the lovely green forested hills was beautiful. I did a quick tour of the Stanford University campus before heading to the daycare center located in a beautiful park on the campus. My last assignment was located just north of the San Francisco airport and I stopped briefly at a Wendy's to grab a "Dave's single" hamburger. It was delicious but far more than I could eat, which lead me to ask the question – how can people eat a Dave's double or a Dave's triple for that matter? When I arrived at the daycare facility it was located on a street named "DNA Way" and adjacent to a large medical facility known as "Genetech". The daycare was decorated on the theme of the "universe" and had wonderful displays of the planets, the sun, and the Milky Way throughout the classrooms.



Bright Horizons Daycare Center – South San Francisco

After the shoot, I drove a short distance to “Point San Bruno Park” on the shore of San Francisco Bay. There were lovely flower gardens and beautiful views of the bay, and downtown San Francisco in the distance, however, the gusty winds were ferocious. After a few photos, I headed to the ‘Aloft Hotel” just south of the airport and checked into a nice room overlooking the “Bayshore Park” and flights landing at the airport.



Point San Bruno Park



Bayshore Park

Dinner at the “Grill and Vine Restaurant” in the hotel was a delicious order of BBQ chicken and Cole slaw, along with a cold pint of Sculpin IPA. The next morning, I was up early at 5:30am to catch a 7:00am flight back to Ontario airport. It was extremely busy at the airport as I checked in for my flight. At the TSA security checkpoint there were digital signs that displayed the “wait” time. It started being 4 minutes and then rapidly increased to 6 minutes, then 10 minutes, 20 minutes and so on. Thankfully I had signed up for TSA Precheck last year, so I avoided the long wait times and cleared security in a matter of minutes. As I approached Gate F-7 the line at Starbucks was ridiculously long, but I was able to get a cup of coffee at

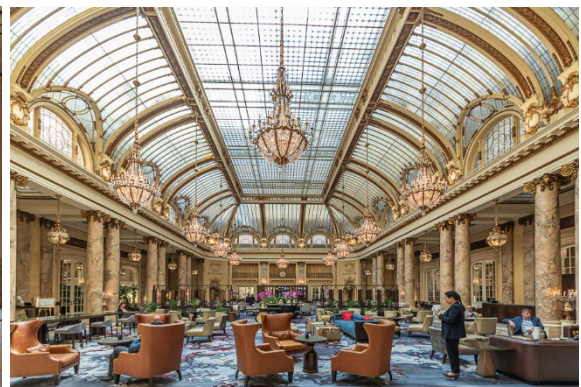
“Five Pie Pizza” nearby. The flight was on time and once again I was able to sit in the first row where I had beautiful views of Half Moon Bay, the Central Valley, and the snow-covered San Gabriel Mountains before landing in Ontario.

In early April I joined my good friend Robert Green for a special event at the Orange Empire Railway Museum in Perris called “BBQ, Boots, and Brew”. There were several teams competing for the best BBQ and Robert was one of the judges. A lot of people were dressed in western attire and a number of local craft breweries were serving samples of their beers. It was a warm sunny afternoon and perfect for the event. Definitely a fun time!

At the end of April, I once again boarded a United Express flight to San Francisco to photograph another daycare facility as part of the contract. At the San Francisco airport, I picked up a rental car from a company called “NU Rental Car” in Burlingame south of the airport. It was a brand-new Nissan Versa with a “keyless” ignition system that took me a few minutes to figure out how to start the car. None of the staff were able to give me driving directions to Utah Avenue where the Best Western Grosvenor Hotel was located, so my guess was that none of them lived anywhere close to the airport! (ironically, the rental car had Utah license plates!) After checking into the hotel, I boarded the SamTrans Bus #292 across the street from the hotel and bound for downtown San Francisco. It was a long 1-hour journey through old residential neighborhoods along old streets that often ran parallel to the 101 freeway, but it only cost me \$2.25! It also saved me from having to drive in the heavy Friday afternoon rush hour traffic, as well as the problem of finding a parking spot in downtown San Francisco at 5pm! When I arrived downtown I had about a half hour before I was due at the daycare center, so I walked up Market Street to the gorgeous Palace Hotel where I took some photos of the lovely Garden Court with its incredible stained glass ceiling beautifully illuminated by the late afternoon sunshine. Then I had just enough time for a cold beer in the hotel’s classic “Pied Piper Bar”. At the table next to me was a gorgeous bouquet of white lilies and their fragrance was phenomenal.



Entrance to the Garden Court – Palace Hotel



Stained Glass Ceiling – Garden Court

After photographing the daycare facility, I walked along Mission Street looking for a place to have dinner. I spotted a new restaurant called “Mendocino Farms” and the menu looked very interesting. I ordered the “Sweet Thai fried chicken sandwich” and a cold pint of Anchor Steam beer. The food was superb with just the right amount of heat that didn’t overwhelm the taste of the chicken. Before leaving the restaurant, I went looking for the restroom. There were two choices – “Gender Neutral” or “Women/Handicapped”! When I asked the manager about the naming, he just shook his head and said it was to be “politically correct”. As I walked back down Mission Street to the bus stop, I passed the new “Salesforce” Tower, now the tallest building in San Francisco, taller than the iconic “TransAmerica Tower”. I waited at the bus stop for several minutes for the SamTrans bus #292 to arrive, when all of a sudden it passed me by, despite my hand being held up. There was no way I was going to be able to run up the street to the next bus stop in time to catch it, so I decided to check out the schedule of BART trains to the airport. A very helpful station attendant sold me a ticket and directed me to platform 1. She told me that my train would arrive in 11 minutes, but less than 5 minutes later a train arrived

heading south, so I got on board. The train was clean, uncrowded and much faster than the bus. In no time we were in South San Francisco when the train driver announced that the train was not going to San Francisco airport, but rather to Millbrae, and we would have to exit to catch the next train following 5 minutes behind us! (apparently I had boarded a “CalTrain” service and not BART, no wonder she had told me “my” train would arrive in 11 minutes!



SalesForce Tower

Once I got to the airport, I took a shuttle bus to the hotel and sat down in the bar for a beer. Meanwhile, a drunk truck driver at the bar kept trying to hustle the young Latino barmaid. When she gave him his check, he said he would charge it to his room, as long as she would join him! What an incredible A—hole, and the rest of the bar agreed.

The next morning, on my way to return the rental car, I stopped to take some photos of the old historic Millbrae train station. Nearby was the “Bayshore Trail” and I spent some time walking along the path on the shore of San Francisco Bay taking photos. There was a beautiful old estate which had been turned into an Embassy Suites Hotel.



Bayshore Trail – San Francisco Airport beyond

I turned in the rental car and boarded the shuttle to the airport for the flight to Ontario. Once again, my TSA Precheck had me through security in no time and I boarded the plane shortly thereafter. As we reached the cruising altitude, I ordered a cold beer and when the flight attendant handed me the beer, she verified my name and seat number. Later I received an email from United Airlines confirming the charge on my credit card that I had registered with the airline earlier online – very convenient and “contactless”!

At the beginning of May I was asked to do a photo shoot in Scottsdale, Arizona for the real estate marketing company with which I have a contract. I drove to Scottsdale and checked into a new Hyatt Place Hotel about 10 minutes from the location of the daycare center I was to photograph later that afternoon. Before the shoot, I stopped at the “Cold Beer and

Cheeseburgers Bar and Grill” for a beer and an appetizer. The barmaid highly recommended the “Buffalo Chicken Rolls” but advised me they were very spicy. I really enjoyed them, and they were definitely hot. However, the ice-cold glass of local Four Peaks IPA mellowed the heat very well.

The photo shoot at the Bright Horizons Daycare Center went very well and I was soon on my way back to the hotel where I had another beer while I uploaded the photos to the company. Afterwards, as the dinner hour approached, the hotel front desk clerk highly recommended “Lou Malnati’s Pizzeria” across the street, so I walked over to the restaurant as the sun was slowly setting behind Camelback Mountain. I sat outside on the patio and ordered the “Personal Special” and a Lagunitas IPA. When the pizza arrived, it was a Chicago style deep dish pizza with a crisp crust and filled with very fresh tomato sauce, lots of sweet Italian sausage, mushrooms, olives, and fresh bell peppers – absolutely superb! After dinner, I walked back to the hotel and called it an early night. The next morning, I had a very nice complimentary breakfast in the hotel before checking out. Rather than take the freeway back home, I chose the back roads through the desert to Vidal Junction, 29 Palms, and Joshua Tree – a much more scenic route with hardly any traffic. I stopped at the Joshua Tree Saloon for a beer and an order of fish and chips before continuing towards Redlands.



Joshua Tree Saloon

As I joined I-10 west of Palm Springs for the final 25 miles, I encountered a lot of road construction which included a “lane split” of several miles where the 3 left lanes were separated from the one right lane. Just after entering the “split”, the 3 left lanes came to a virtual halt with heavy traffic. Meanwhile, as I sat in the stalled traffic, vehicles in the one right lane, mostly semi-trucks, passed me going 70 mph! (very frustrating!) Eventually the traffic resumed the normal speed and I was able to return home in short order.

A few days later after returning from Scottsdale, I had a photo shoot of a large house in San Clemente. So, rather than drive, I decided to take the train from Riverside. My friend Tina now lives in San Clemente, having moved from Germany earlier this year, so she volunteered to pick me up at the Amtrak station in San Clemente and take me to the photo shoot. Then after the shoot, we shared lunch at “Fisherman’s Bar and Grill” on San Clemente Pier, one of my favorite places. While we dined on delicious crab cakes and sipped pints of cold Stone IPA, we had gorgeous views of the ocean and beach. All too soon it was time for my return to Riverside on the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train.



Fisherman's Bar & Grill



San Clemente Amtrak Station

In the second week of June, I attended the West Coast School of Photography on the campus of the University of San Diego, as I have done for several years. Once again, rather than driving, I took the train to San Diego, and checked into the Westin Hotel downtown just 2 blocks from the Santa Fe train depot. My room was complimentary since I had enough Marriott points for 5 free nights. The first activity of the school was an orientation session followed by a “Meet and Greet” reception on campus. The school administration had messed up by saying the university cafeteria would be open that evening for dinner before the reception, which we found out was not the case. So, I walked down the hill to a small restaurant called “Asian Fusion” and ordered the “Orange Chicken” and a Sapporo beer. As I was finishing my meal, a large group of students from the school showed up! After that, we all hiked back up the hill to attend the reception, where all the beer and wine was complimentary because of the mess up with the dinner plans. As the sun was setting, we all enjoyed meeting with friends and colleagues who were returning to West Coast School. At the end of the evening I took the city bus to the Old Town trolley station where I boarded a trolley to downtown San Diego and the Westin Hotel.

The next day I joined 10 other people who had signed up for a class on “food photography”, something I was totally unfamiliar with, which was the reason I chose the class. Our instructor was Joe Glyda, one of the most successful and well-known food photographers in America. He spent most of the day telling us about his work and what makes a successful commercial photography business. Some of his work that he showed us was not only very familiar as most of us had seen magazine ads or TV commercials featuring his photographs – they were stunning and unique! He had photographed everything from fresh fruit and vegetable displays to bowls of cereal and elegant desserts. At the end of the day, I was looking forward to a very interesting week of photographing food!



University of San Diego

That evening I went to “Lou and Mickey’s”, one of my favorite restaurants in the historic Gaslamp District downtown. Their Maryland lump crab cake was fabulous, along with fresh hot baked sourdough rolls and a glass of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. After dinner, I walked over to “Kansas City BBQ” to check out the old dive bar which had recently been repaired after a fire in the kitchen. As usual, the clientele was a fascinating mix of locals and tourists, which always makes for interesting conversations. A large convention group was seated outside on the patio and kept ordering pitchers of beer and bottles of wine the whole time I sat in the bar. One of the most interesting features of the old bar has to be the posters and signs on the walls throughout the place, most of which are truly hilarious. (I’ve included a section near the end of this letter devoted to some of the best ones I’ve seen in the bar)

The following day, we began doing some prep work in the class to photograph items later in the week. I was amazed at how much prep time was needed to photograph just one thing. Of course, it takes a lot more than just one photograph to satisfy the client who is usually an art director. At the end of the day I happened to see a poster on campus advertising a special event in the university campus restaurant called “La Gran Terraza”. The event was a special dinner titled “Booze Brothers Beer Dinner” that was about pairing food and beer. It was being sponsored by Booze Brothers Brewing Company from Vista, a small town north of San Diego. There were four courses served that evening, each paired with a different beer. The first course

was a watermelon salad with honey ricotta, followed by the second course of grilled shrimp and mango coconut curry sauce on top of jasmine rice. The third course was a BBQ pulled pork sandwich with pepper jack cheese, bleu cheese, and Cole slaw. The last course was a dessert of Nutella stuffed Beignets, fresh berry compote, and vanilla ice cream! All the dishes were prepared by the executive chef at the university and the food was absolutely awesome! It was a dinner that I won't forget.



Dessert course

On Wednesday we began prepping some common foods for photographing as if we were tasked to present photos of a product to the art director of a famous food company, like Kellogg's or Kraft. The process of picking out individual corn flakes to get the very best ones for photographing a bowl of the cereal was not only amazing, but also quite time consuming and tedious! When it came time to complete the setting by adding the milk to the bowl, Joe gave us a huge surprise – he didn't use milk because it always went to the bottom of the bowl which made it useless for a photograph. Instead, he grabbed a bottle of "Wildroot Hair Crème" and poured it over the corn flakes. So, instead of going to the bottom of the bowl it lay across the top of the cereal, giving the impression it was milk that had just been poured a minute ago! (a very clever "trick") That was just one of the many tricks that Joe had up his sleeve as we were to find out during the class.



Picking out the best corn flakes for the shoot

That evening I went to another of my favorite restaurants for dinner, the "Top of the Market" on the shore of San Diego Bay downtown. It's both a seafood restaurant and fish market – which makes it a unique combination. My server recommended the fresh oven roasted Alaskan Halibut, with gold Yukon potatoes, topped with crispy Applewood smoked bacon, shaved zucchini, mustard beurre blanc, basil and dill. It was incredible, especially with a glass of Italian Pinot Grigio. After dinner, I walked over to the Manchester Grand Hyatt Hotel for a gin tonic in the "Top of the Hyatt" bar overlooking all of downtown San Diego and San Diego Bay. As I sat with my gin tonic, I watched people in the bar through their "reflections" in the windows – they never knew I was watching them. It was fascinating.

The next day, Joe led the class on a shopping trip to a nearby Ralph's grocery store with a mission to buy a cart full of fresh fruits and vegetables that we could use for food display

photos. As we entered the store, Joe gave us our first assignment – take 15 minutes to walk through the store and determine what is the dominant “color” of the product packaging and advertisements. When we got back together, he asked what color was dominant, and most all of us answered “purple”! Then Joe said color often changes as consumer’s choices change – something that art directors and advertising executives try to anticipate when designing product packaging and ad campaigns. (fascinating) At that point, we followed Joe to the produce department to select items for our photo shoot in the afternoon. As Joe navigated the aisles of fresh fruits and vegetables, he explained why he chose certain ones from the displays. (from then on, I would not see grocery shopping the same way again!) Having completed our shopping trip, we headed back to the classroom to prep a large display of the fruits and vegetables, with expert instructions from Joe. It was a fascinating and fun experience!



Fruit and vegetable display



Class Photo in Ralph's grocery store

Normally Thursday evening is reserved for each class to go together for dinner somewhere in San Diego. But Joe suggested we order Mexican food for delivery to the classroom so he could show us how to photograph beverages, specifically beer, wine, and spirits. We all agreed! (I ordered a chicken quesadilla, thinking it would be small enough – but while it was very tasty, it was huge!) We spent the rest of the evening setting up bottles and glasses of beer, wine and whiskey to photograph, which was not as simple as one might think. For instance, when Joe was preparing to photograph a mug of beer, he asked me to click the shutter of the camera at exactly the moment after he poured the beer into the mug and the foam just began to flow over the top of the mug. Timing was critical and the shot was perfect! The evening was both a fun time and a great learning experience thanks to Joe.



Setting up the shot of a slice of cheesecake



Shot of the cheesecake

As the last day of the class came, Joe shared some lessons about commercial photography that he learned along the way. He invited us to contact him anytime with questions or ideas – he was a great instructor and a warm human being – it was an amazing class!

When the month of July rolled around, I made my way to San Diego again for the annual ESRI International User Conference – in person for the first time since the pandemic. I took the train from Riverside to San Diego, with a short stopover to change trains in Fullerton. While I waited for the next southbound train to arrive, I enjoyed a delicious “Santa Fe Scramble” for breakfast at the “Santa Fe Café”. It was simple and delicious as I sat outside on the patio next to the station platform. The warm morning sun was delightful. Just before my train arrived on platform 1, I walked to the spot where business class passengers would board the train. All of a sudden, a large Hispanic man walked up and punched an old transient man, claiming the man had stolen his ring! As I boarded the train, a heated argument ensued! I managed to find a seat on the right side with wonderful views of the Pacific Ocean and beaches as I enjoyed a bottle of local “Islandia IPA”.

Upon arriving in downtown San Diego, I walked up Broadway to the new Marriott Courtyard Hotel. It was a beautiful restoration of the classic old “San Diego Bank and Trust Co.” building. My room was on the top floor where there were only 4 rooms and to reach my room, I had to take two elevators. From the room there was a very nice view of downtown and San Diego Bay beyond.



Private railcar at Santa Fe Depot



Marriott Courtyard Hotel

Then I walked down to the Convention Center to pick up my badge, which required me to show my COVID vaccination certificate. As I was leaving the Convention Center, I suddenly realized my cell phone was missing! Thinking back, I must have left it on my seat in the train. So, I quickly hopped on the trolley and went to the Santa Fe Depot where a friendly Amtrak agent had my phone waiting for me!

From the depot, I boarded a Green Line trolley to Fashion Valley Mall where I had arranged to meet up with my good friends Denise, Dawn, and DeeAnne for dinner at the “North Italian Restaurant”. Having arrived a bit early, I stopped for a beer at the “True Kitchen Restaurant” in the mall. The barmaid was quite attractive with her bright red hair, but I was curious why she had only her left arm heavily tattooed? She said it gave her “two sides to life”! Later, I joined the ladies for dinner, and we all shared a huge dish of “Chicken Parmegiano” and glasses of Italian Pinot Grigio while we caught up on what had happened in our lives since the pandemic. It was a wonderful evening with great friends!

The next day I attended the user conference where the plenary session was excellent – one of the best I can remember. There were over 13,000 people in the huge hall, and everyone was very glad to be meeting in person again. Later in the afternoon I went to the Map Gallery which is always a very popular event. There I ran into several old friends and colleagues I hadn’t seen for more than 3 years, including several of the International Distributors. It was fun catching up on all that had happened in the meantime. At the conclusion of the Map Gallery, I walked up to “Patrick’s Irish Bar” where a band by the name of “The Johnny Deadly Trio” was playing some classic 1960’s Rock-n-Roll music, after which I walked back to the hotel. I spent a couple of hours visiting the exhibit hall the next morning before boarding the train back to Riverside. I was glad to have had the opportunity again to attend the user conference, my 36th conference! Looking forward to next year’s conference as well.



Esri User Conference – Exhibit Hall

Once again, when my birthday arrived, I made my way down to the Temecula Valley and a beautiful Deluxe King Villa at the South Coast Winery and Resort, one of my very favorite places to stay in southern California. My villa overlooked the vineyards and had a lovely private patio where I enjoyed a complimentary bottle of the vineyard's Wild Horse Peak Chardonnay before going to dinner in the Vineyard Rose restaurant.



View of the vineyards from my villa – South Coast Winery Resort

My server recommended the braised Korean short ribs and they were amazing, so tender and flavorful – absolutely superb. He also recommended a glass of South Coast Winery Merlot that had won several awards last year in competition with lots of wineries in the Napa and Sonoma region. For dessert he insisted that I try the Cajun Bread Pudding topped with heavy cream and it was fantastic! After dinner I retired to my villa and ended the evening with another glass of the Wild Horse Peak Chardonnay. The next morning, I checked out of the villa and drove to the Perris airport to watch the skydivers before returning home. All in all, a wonderful way to celebrate my birthday.

At the end of September and beginning of October I was once again able to make my journey up to Alaska to visit with Marion and her family. I boarded an Alaska Airlines flight at Ontario airport bound for Seattle and on to Juneau, Alaska. The snack in first class was a delicious fresh fruit and cheese plate that I had pre-ordered online when I booked my ticket. The plate had crisp fresh apple slices, red and green grapes, cheddar cheese, brie cheese, and whole wheat crackers – delicious! We arrived at the SeaTac North terminal which has become exclusively for Alaska Airlines. Since I had a couple of hours to wait for the flight on to Juneau, I spent the time in the new Alaska Lounge which was complimentary for first class passengers. It was a large facility beautifully appointed and with a fantastic buffet of soups, salads, and sandwiches, as well as a full bar. I enjoyed a local Seattle brewed IPA as I sat at the bar watching the airport traffic. Later, as I boarded the flight to Juneau, I noticed it was virtually full. After takeoff we were served a luscious “Peruvian spiced chicken sandwich” and salad,

along with a huge chocolate chip cookie for lunch, which I had also pre-ordered online when I booked the ticket. When I ordered a gin tonic with a lime, it came as a glass of ice, along with a can of tonic water, two bottles of “Aviation Gin”, and two small packets of lime powder – basically a “mix your own drink”. Shortly after passing over Vancouver Island the sky became a heavy overcast all the way to Juneau. Landing in Juneau was a very long approach through very dense clouds until just before we touched down a few hundred feet from the ground. It was 45 degrees and raining heavily upon arrival – a very dramatic contrast to the sunny 102-degree weather in southern California! I took the shuttle van to the Juneau Hotel downtown and checked into a very nice “Queen Suite” which had a full kitchen, as well as a washing machine and dryer. (As I checked in, I couldn’t help noticing that the entire hotel staff were Latinos!)

Since there were still several hours of daylight, I decided to walk downtown to the center of Juneau, a matter of only a few blocks. But the heavy rain was being blown sideways by the strong, gusty winds off the waterfront. It became difficult to handle my umbrella and I ended up getting soaked from the waist down by the time I reached the center of town. Along the way I saw many tour buses crowded with tourists from the two cruise ships docked in the port. I could only imagine how they would describe their one and only day in Juneau to their friends and family when they returned home! Then I spotted the “Hanger Bar” on the dock overlooking the waterfront, and as the heavy rain continued to fall outside, I sat at the bar with a cold pint of Alaska Brewing Company “Icy Bay IPA”. The bar was very crowded with mostly local people watching Thursday Night Football and celebrating a birthday. I ordered a bowl of Halibut chowder and watched as passengers made their way to the two large cruise ships that were preparing to depart that evening. Then I walked back to the hotel, again in the heavy rain and gusty wind.



Cruise ship in Juneau, Alaska

The next morning, I awoke to another day of heavy rain and wind, but I was determined not to let the miserable weather keep me from exploring Juneau. I had a fantastic breakfast of “Crab Benedict”, home fried potatoes, sourdough toast, and coffee at the Sandpiper Restaurant before heading to the Alaska State Museum where I spent a couple of hours exploring the wonderful exhibits. The museum had amazing displays on the history of Alaska, all the way from the earliest native people who migrated across the land bridge from Siberia thousands of years ago up to more recent times of Russian exploration and development of resources by the United States. The exhibits and displays were extremely well designed and quite informative – easily worth spending a whole day or two.



Alaska State Museum - Juneau

From the museum I walked over to the “Sealaska Heritage Center”, dedicated to preserving the cultural history of the native people of Southeast Alaska – Haida, Tglinket, and Timshimian. Sealaska is one of the native corporations established in 1980 when Congress passed the “Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act” that distributed ownership of Federal lands to the Alaska natives, State of Alaska, local municipalities, and several Federal agencies, including the US Fish & Wildlife Service where I worked for 7 years. A young Timshimian man gave me a guided tour of a full-size replica of a traditional “Long House” like the ones built by the native people. Inside he gave me a very detailed history of the Long House and the cultural traditions of the tribes. The front of the structure was beautifully adorned with intricate wood carvings representing the animal spirits held sacred by the tribes. They were divided into two “families” – Raven and Wolf, and I could easily see the resemblance of the animal spirits in the carvings and paintings. And at the center of the design was a figure representing the one who was responsible for holding up the world! The interior of the Long House was constructed of tall cedar walls carved by hand in a traditional method using an ancient tool called an “adze”, which created a beautiful pattern of small marks on the surface of the wood.

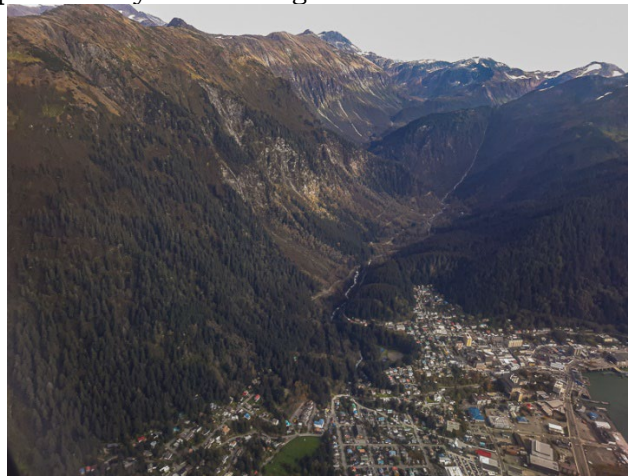


Inside the Long House – Glass Screen and Statues of Warriors

A well-known Timshimian artist spent over 18 months building the structure. My young guide explained that a large fire pit was constructed in the center of the building and surrounded by floors on two levels. The first level was for eating meals and socializing whereas the second level was for sleeping and divided into individual family units, the most honored being located closest to the family of the tribal chief. Inside the Long House were two large statues representing warriors from two family groups, Raven and Eagle. At the far end of the Long House was an immense glass screen covered with delicate and intricate native art, and apparently, it’s the largest of its kind in the world. Before I left the center, the young

Timshimian guide told me that the Haida were the strongest warriors of the three tribes and were reputed to have raided other tribes as far away as the Blackfeet in Montana and the Iroquois in the Great Lakes region! The warriors were said to have stood over 6 ft tall with very broad shoulders, much like Polynesians. Visiting the Alaska State Museum and Sealaska Heritage Center were highlights of my short time in Juneau.

On my way back to the hotel, I looked for a place to have some coffee when I saw the “Alaskan Coffee Pot”, so, I went in to order a cup of coffee. But when I was asked to show my driver’s license, I was more than a bit surprised! They certainly had coffee, but their main business was selling marijuana, which explained the requirement to show proof of age, as well as the name of the place! After finishing my coffee amid the smell of “pot”, I walked back to the hotel, picked up my bags and rode the shuttle van to the airport for my onward flight to Anchorage. There was over an hour delay in the arrival of the flight coming from Ketchikan, so I sat down with a cold pint of Icy Bay IPA in the one and only bar in the airport. Despite being the capitol of Alaska, the Juneau airport is very small, having just two major airlines, Alaska and Delta, as well as a local commuter airline called Alaska Seaplanes. Eventually we were called to board the flight and it was a pleasant one after about a half hour of moderate turbulence leaving Juneau as we flew through a very heavy overcast that followed us all the way to Anchorage – not a particularly “scenic” flight.



View of Juneau

Upon landing in Anchorage, I picked up a rental car from Alamo and drove to the Captain Cook Hotel where I checked into a very nice corner room on the 16th floor in Tower 3. Rather than spend \$35 per day for Valet parking, I found a parking space on the street across from the hotel, which just happened to be free parking on the weekend! Later that evening, I walked over to “F-Street Station” for a beer and an order of the best halibut and chips in the world. The bar was very crowded, being that it was a Friday night, but I was lucky to find one open seat at the bar overlooking the kitchen. As usual, the halibut was perfect, and the pint jar of Alaskan Amber went very well with it. Seated next to me was a couple from Denver having their first experience of Alaska. They struck up a conversation with me and I gave them my recommendations for things to do and places to go for their two remaining days in Alaska, the first being a visit to the Matanuska Glacier north of Anchorage. We had a great time talking about what they had seen so far and their impressions of Alaska. Then I walked back to the hotel and called it an early night.

The next morning the weather was cloudy and quite chilly (42 degrees), but there was a nice view from my room of the snow-covered peaks of the Alaska Range to the west beyond Cook Inlet. After a crab omelet for breakfast in the hotel, I headed to Barnes and Noble to peruse the books. There I found a small book of Native American sayings and quotations from the late 1700’s to the present day – fascinating book! Then I met up with Marion and Michael for lunch at the “Bear Tooth Grill”. We had a wonderful time catching up on all that had happened in our lives during the pandemic since my last visit over 2 years ago. After enjoying some delicious food and 3 hours of conversation, we said farewell. I decided to go to Potter’s

Marsh to see the migratory birds while Marion and Michael returned home to oversee the installation of their new “induction” kitchen stove. From Potters Marsh I hiked along part of the coastal trail as heavy clouds began to move in from the west. Then I stopped at Simon and Seafort’s Restaurant for an order of their famous crab and artichoke dip with toasted sourdough bread – absolutely delicious! As I sat down at the bar, the bartender handed me the “Happy Hour” menu that was supposed to be Monday through Friday, but this was Saturday! When I pointed out the fact it was Saturday, he responded that it was his choice of when to offer “Happy Hour”. It meant the crab dip and my pint of beer were half price, and I left him a good tip! From Simon’s I walked over to Humpty’s as a light rain began to fall. As I sat at the bar with a pint of Alaskan Amber, the band began to play their next set, which they said would be nothing but Dolly Parton songs. However, when it came to “Hey Jude” I knew something was wrong! Nevertheless, they were a good band and the music was great, so all was well.



Potter's Marsh

The next morning, I went to the Snow City Café intent upon having their fabulous crab benedict, but the small restaurant was packed with people, without even an open seat at the counter. So, I decided to head to another one of Anchorage’s most historic, classic, popular diners called “Peggy’s Café” across the highway from Merrill Airfield. Here I sat down to a huge plate of country fried steak, eggs, home fried potatoes, sourdough toast and huckleberry jam! It was more than enough to last me for the entire day. (Peggy’s is also famous for their pies) After the enormous “trucker’s breakfast”, I drove north on the Glenn Highway to the small town of Palmer in the heart of the Matanuska Valley, famous for growing some of the largest vegetables in the world. I parked at the abandoned Alaska Railroad station where trains used to pass through the town hauling coal from mines in the upper Matanuska Valley to Seward to supply Navy vessels. I discovered some very interesting history of the town as I walked around taking photos. It seems the town was originally established as part of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration to create the town of Palmer and relocate 203 families from the hard hit Iron Range region of Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin. Families traveled by train and ship to Palmer, arriving in May 1935. Upon their arrival they were housed in a city tent during their first Alaskan summer. Each family drew lots for 40-acre tracts of land and their farming adventure began in earnest. The failure rate was high, but many of their descendants still live in the area and there are still many operating farms in the Matanuska Valley.



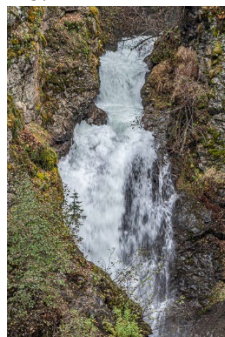
Palmer Visitor Center exhibits

From Palmer I drove a short distance north to the “Musk Ox Farm” for a guided tour of the facility dedicated to raising the animals for their superb wool which is very lightweight but incredibly warm. Our guide was a young woman who fell in love with them when she spent a summer working on the farm. The tour was fascinating and gave us a much better understanding of the unique creatures, and we were able to get quite close to some of them. It was quite an extraordinary experience.



Musk Ox Farm – Palmer

On my way back to Anchorage I stopped at the Matanuska Brewery in Palmer to sample some local brew. As I entered the brewery, a woman with “pigtails” behind the bar greeted me with “Hello handsome, what can I do for you?” When I asked her if she had a West Coast IPA on tap, she said “we only have beers that we brew here”. So, I had to explain that West Coast IPA was a “style” of beer, not a brand! She told me they had an IPA called “Long Track IPA”, so I ordered a pint and sat down to watch the brewery in action. (the beer was acceptable but nothing exceptional) Leaving Palmer I drove south on the Glenn Highway and saw a sign for “Thunderbird Falls” in Chugach State Park. The first ¼ mile of the trail to the falls was very steep and I saw several people taking breaks along the side of the trail. But once beyond the steep slope, the trail became an easy hike through the Birch and Aspen forest with some nice views of the Eklutna River below. At the 2-mile mark was a viewpoint overlooking the falls, and the views were beautiful, well worth the hike.



Once I got back to the hotel, I decided to check out the “Crow’s Nest Restaurant” at the top of Tower 2 for a glass of wine and a quiet location to write my travel notes. As I exited the elevator, I ran into the couple from Denver who were having dinner in the restaurant. We chatted about their trip to the Matanuska Glacier, which they loved and thanked me for suggesting the trip. So ended my trip to Alaska which I always enjoy, regardless of the weather!



Southeast Alaska from the air

Then in mid-October I travelled to Ventura, California for the “Seaside Highland Games”, my third time to attend the event. It was a lovely trip on the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train along the Pacific coast before stopping at the station next to the Ventura County Fairgrounds, the site of the games. Along the way were gorgeous views of the Pacific Ocean and beaches, as well as the Channel Islands off the coast. From the train station I walked a couple of blocks to the Renaissance Hotel on the beach next to the Ventura Pier to check in for the next couple of days. Then it was back to the fairgrounds to watch the Highland Games and enjoy some authentic Scottish food and drink. I picked up a small “Shepard’s Pie” along with a pint of Guinness and sat outside under a warm sun while the sound of bagpipes floated through the air. Soon after I finished my lunch, the “Parade of Clans” began along the main pathway through the fairgrounds. There must have been over 40 clans represented at the games, including the Hendersons! Among the parade of clans were several drum and bagpipe bands from all over California, and it was wonderful to watch them marching and listen to their traditional Celtic music. Later, I went to the soundstage to hear the music of a band called “Celtic Storm” as they played traditional Celtic music combined with contemporary Irish songs – a nice mix that was a pleasure to listen to as I enjoyed another Guinness in the warm sunshine. As the sun was setting, I walked along the beach to the “Fish House” on the pier for a local beer and a beautiful view of the sunset on the beach. For dinner that evening, I went to “Tony’s Pizzeria”, a classic local dive bar with great pizza and cold Budweiser.



Parade of the Clans – Seaside Highland Games

The next morning, I took a long walk along the seaside trail and watched the surfers enjoying an unusually high surf which made for some great photos. At one point, as I looked down to the rocks below the trail, I saw a number of little ground squirrels scurrying among the rocks looking for bits of food. And as soon as a large wave crashed on the beach, they dove head-first into the rocks. They were fun to watch, but almost everyone was unaware of them. Back at the Highland Games I walked through the “marketplace”, a large building housing lots of shops. In one corner of the building was the “Celtic Caterer” with a setup to demonstrate the art of cooking Celtic recipes. Every two hours throughout the day he would show us how to cook another traditional Celtic dish from Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, and even Galicia in northwest Spain which is part of the historic land of the Celts. It was fascinating to watch him prepare some amazingly simple but delicious dishes which we were invited to taste at the end. I ended up buying a couple of his cookbooks, as well as some of his special Celtic spices. I really enjoyed watching him cook while telling us the history of Celtic cuisine. That evening I had dinner at the “Aloha Steakhouse” next door to the hotel and the dinner was fabulous – “Parmesan crusted Sutchi baked with garlic bread-crumbs, and topped with shallot butter, mango relish, and drizzled with Teriyaki sauce – it was phenomenal! (Sutchi is an Asian freshwater fish called “Iridescent Shark Catfish” and is a light mild white fish very similar to Mississippi catfish.) So ended my evening as I retired to my room overlooking the ocean. The next morning, I had enough time to walk along the beach before boarding the train back to Los Angeles and on to Riverside. I look forward to being at the Seaside Highland Games again next year!



Surfing at Ventura Beach

Shortly after returning from Ventura, I was asked to do some commercial photography in Phoenix for the real estate marketing company again. But this time it was part of a national contract with Walgreens stores to do what was called a “site survey” of selected stores. I was assigned 15 stores in the Phoenix area over the span of 4 weeks. The schedule involved shooting 3 – 4 stores a week, with a return home on the weekends. The work involved doing a full 3D scan of each store, including every aisle, the pharmacy, office, storeroom, and even the

restrooms, as well as the cooler and freezer! To do an entire store required a 360-degree photo every 6 feet, which added up to between 300 – 350 scans that usually took about 4 hours to complete. And all of this had to be done while the store was open, which presented a lot of problems (aka challenges) trying to avoid having staff or customers walking in front of the camera as it scanned. I found the experience of scanning to be very frustrating and stressful. And once I had completed the scanning, I had to do what was called “data collection” which involved measuring the shelves in each aisle, the height of the ceiling in each area of the store and the distances between the foundation supports.



Typical Aisle in a Walgreens Store

And on top of that, I had to take photos of the electrical panels, fire alarm panel, water meter and water heaters. Finally, I had to take 360-degree photos of the outside of the store every 30 ft. Each store took at least 8 hours to complete. I always showed up at the store as soon as they opened so I could get as many scans done as possible before a lot of customers showed up. Each evening, back at my hotel I would compile the results of the data collection and upload it to the company website, along with the scans and photos. If I was lucky, I would have a few hours in the evening for dinner and a couple of beers in the bar. The compensation was very good, along with all my travel expenses paid, but honestly, the work was not fun! One of the most frustrating aspects of the work was the fact that we were never told by Walgreens corporate the reason for the assignment, so, every time I walked into a store and told the manager I would be doing a “site survey” I had no answer when they asked what was the purpose of the survey! But despite the long hours and frustrations, I tried to make the best of being in Phoenix where I discovered some great restaurants for dinner and places to visit whenever I had a “day off”. The following are some highlights of those times.

It began in mid-October when I drove to Tucson for on-the-job training in how to do a “site survey” of a typical Walgreens store. To be honest, it was almost totally different from a lot of the other photography work I’ve done, and a real challenge to remember all the steps that needed to be completed, but I managed well enough. That evening I had a nice relaxed dinner at the “19th Hole Oasis Bar and Grill” near the hotel, along with a local Tucson beer. The next day I drove up to Phoenix and checked into a Comfort Inn north of downtown. The hotel was OK, but the neighborhood was rather questionable with lots of transients and even a hooker or two on the streets at night. On top of that, there were no decent restaurants within a reasonable distance, just a couple of fast food places. There was a 24-hour IHOP restaurant a couple of blocks away, but when I went to check it out, I found a guy asleep on the bench outside the front door, so I skipped it and went to Carl’s Jr for a hamburger instead!

Early the next morning, I found the coffee maker didn’t work, nor did the hair dryer! So, I decided that afternoon to change hotels and ended up at the Hilton Garden Inn in mid-town Phoenix – a much better place to stay. Over the next couple of days, after finishing the site surveys, I had dinner at a couple of great restaurants, an excellent filet mignon steak dinner at

the “Longhorn Steakhouse” and a fabulous fresh grilled Redfish with delicious Asian risotto at the “Neighborly Public House”. One day, as I was doing the site survey of a Walgreens in north Phoenix, I couldn’t help but notice a couple of things that amazed me, (1) how much candy and junk food obese people were buying, and (2) how so many elderly people would “stare” at products on the shelf, trying to make a decision about what to buy! Then it was Friday and I drove home by way of Wickenburg and 29 Palms to avoid the heavy traffic on the I-10 freeway.

My next trip to Phoenix began on Halloween and I was fortunate to stay at the Hilton Garden Inn again. After checking into my room, I walked up Central Avenue to the “Steele Indian School Park” three blocks away. The site had been an Indian school for several decades before being transformed into a city park. There were several beautiful old red brick buildings that were built in the early 1900’s and surrounded by a large open area with a small lake in the center. I spent some time exploring the grounds and taking photos in the late afternoon sun. On my way back to the hotel I passed the “George and Dragon English Pub”, so I decided to check it out for dinner. Inside it looked very much like an old English pub and the menu featured many traditional English dishes. I started with a Union Jack IPA and then chose the “chicken curry pasty” with mashed potatoes, brown gravy, and peas – it was an authentic Cornish pasty and delicious. The rest of the week was just a lot of work and nothing special to take note about.

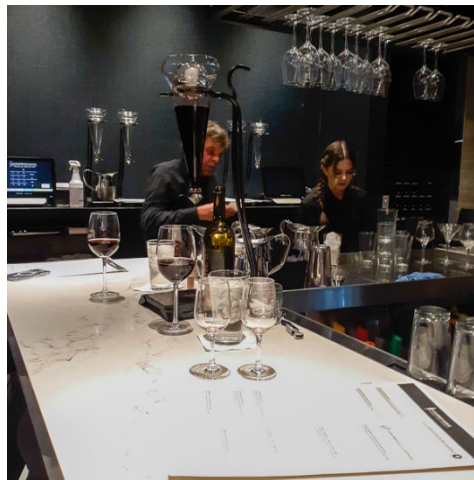
The next week I stayed at a new Hyatt Place hotel in Mesa, just east of downtown Phoenix and close to Arizona State University in Tempe. It was a very nice hotel that was located adjacent to a large shopping center, Mesa Riverview, where I found some nice restaurants. There was a small bar in the hotel that I frequented several evenings where I would finish compiling my data collections for uploading later. A young, rather “chatty” front desk clerk/bartender named David soon knew that I would order a local “Hopnotch IPA” from the Four Peaks Brewery in Tempe. We always had a great conversation as well. One day at a Walgreens store in Mesa, I saw one rather strange advertisement in the beauty section for a new product called “Mother Pucker Lip Gloss” with a closeup photo of some very large bright red lips! For dinner one evening I walked over to “Famous Dave’s BBQ” and enjoyed an exceptional “cedar planked salmon” topped with a spicy pineapple glaze, along with Cole slaw, cornbread muffin, and a dish of “Wilbur Beans” – phenomenal baked beans with applewood smoked bacon! As I was just finishing dinner, I noticed an “alert” on one of the TVs broadcasting a horse race. A stallion named “Flightline” was being offered for stud at \$200,000 per “service”! A pretty high price to pay but it was also “guaranteed”! At the end of the week, I headed back home, looking forward to a relaxing weekend before returning for another week in Phoenix.

Once again, I was back at the Hyatt Place Hotel in Mesa and David greeted me as I checked in. That evening he had a Hopnotch IPA waiting for me at the bar as soon as he saw me enter the hotel. After a couple more days of site surveys I finally had a day off, so I decided to visit an old ghost town named “Goldfield” at the foot of the Superstition Mountains east of Phoenix. The old gold mining town was well preserved as a popular tourist attraction. I walked through the town taking photos of the old buildings and mining equipment scattered around, before heading to the Saloon for a beer. The bartender was a unique character who could have been straight out of the old west with a six gun on his hip. He poured me a cold pint of Alaskan Amber beer and I sat out on the deck with a spectacular view of the Superstition Mountains. It felt wonderful just to sit quietly on the deck under the warm sunshine with a light breeze in the air. When Friday rolled around, I headed back home, looking forward to having the week of Thanksgiving to do as I wished.

I spent one day making a couple of pies, persimmon and apple, for Thanksgiving dinner. As has become a tradition, I prepared a full Thanksgiving dinner, complete with a turkey breast basted with rosemary and thyme oil, garlic mashed potatoes, gravy, herb stuffing, sautéed Brussels sprouts drizzled with maple syrup, roasted acorn squash with brown sugar, and hot rolls with melted butter! Our good friend Tina joined us for dinner, and we all had a great time that evening celebrating our friendship.

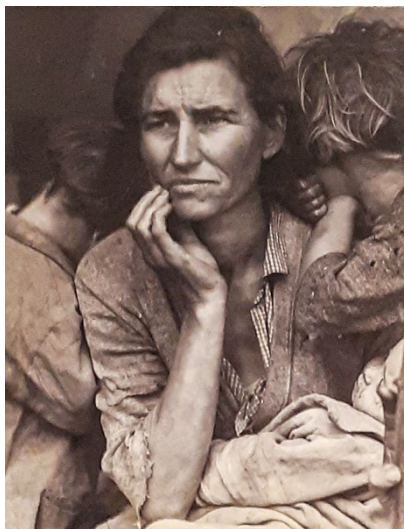
The following week I returned to Phoenix to complete the site surveys of the remaining 4 Walgreens stores. Since they were located southeast of downtown Phoenix, I stayed at another

Hyatt Place Hotel in Chandler, which was located next to the Chandler Fashion Mall. It was a huge new shopping mall with many great restaurants and shops. One evening I walked over to the “Firebirds Wood Fired Grill” for dinner, and the “lobster fondue salmon” was exceptional. It was a grilled filet of king salmon topped with fresh green onions and lobster sauce, served with a side dish of smoked kernels of sweet corn mixed with crumbled bacon! The cold pint of local “Monsoon IPA” went well with dinner. On another night, I had a fabulous dinner at “P.F. Chang’s” next to the shopping mall – a very authentic plate of “Kung Pao Chicken” and a cold glass of Tsing Tao beer. After dinner I stopped at the “Hop Social Tavern” before making my way back to the hotel. Over the course of the week, I often stopped at the tavern after my work at Walgreens for their Happy Hour, and the bar manager soon recognized me almost as a regular. He would pour a glass of “Fateful IPA” as soon as I entered the bar. On another evening I walked over to the “Coopers Hawk Winery and Restaurant” for dinner and enjoyed a dish of “shrimp and scallop risotto”, fresh steamed asparagus, parmesan cheese, and white truffle oil – fabulous! The bartender also told me a bit of the history of the winery. The grapes come from Washington State and are shipped to Illinois for processing, then the juice is shipped to Scottsdale, Arizona where the wine is produced! (seemed a bit complicated, but the wine was very good) As I sat at the bar, I noticed a unique way they served a bottle of wine. It was a tall glass cylinder that narrowed down to a spout at the bottom from which one could pour a glass of wine. The bartender said the device was designed to aid in the aeration of the wine, which seemed to make sense. Meanwhile, it drew a lot of attention from people in the bar.



Coopers Hawk Winery and Restaurant

The next day, I drove to Buckeye to meet my good friend Steve who lives in Waddell, not far from Buckeye. We met up for lunch at an old, historic dive bar called “Mother’s Bar & Grill” located on Buckeye Road, a very busy route for semi-truck traffic. Steve told me that Buckeye Road used to be the main highway (old US 80) into Phoenix before Interstate 10 was built in the 1970’s. It was great to catch up with Steve, but the food was nothing to shout about. After lunch, I drove back to Chandler and visited the Chandler Museum near the hotel. It had a marvelous new exhibit about the history of the Dust Bowl days when many people from Texas and the southern Plains drove to Arizona and California in search of work. Of the people who stayed in Chandler, most of them ended up picking cotton on the farms surrounding Chandler. There were many beautiful and touching photographs from the period taken by a couple of photographers who had been employed by the “Federal Resettlement Agency”, one of the “New Deal” programs during the Franklin Roosevelt administration. One photograph in particular is famous for depicting the hardships people faced at the time. (a mother holding her baby and with two children hanging on to her shoulder – a powerful, emotional image!) Later in the exhibit I found out that the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company had built a factory west of Phoenix, and during WWI they lost their supply of cotton from Egypt, which was an essential element in the manufacture of tires. So, the company established large farms in the area around Chandler to grow cotton, which continues still today!



Next to the museum was the “McCullough-Price House”, beautiful Pueblo Revival Style design with Art Deco accents that was built in 1938. It was later donated to the city of Chandler in 2001 for use as a small conference and learning center. That evening I had dinner at the “Keg Steakhouse”, a fantastic filet mignon crusted with bleu cheese, followed by a warm apple crumble topped with vanilla ice cream!



McCullough-Price House

After completing the last Walgreens store on my schedule, I went back to P.F. Chang's again for dinner. The barmaid highly recommended the "pork dim sum", and it arrived on a very hot plate sitting on top of a thick layer of salt. I was instructed to pour the hoisin sauce over the dumplings quickly, and when I did the whole plate "sizzled" loudly! The taste of the dim sum was fabulous, exactly as I remembered from my trips to China!

At the end of the week, I made my way back home through Wickenburg and 29 Palms again. I stopped for a beer at the Mecca Bar in Wickenburg where a young man with a guitar was doing some excellent Johnny Cash songs. I left him a tip on my way out the door. As I walked back to my Jeep, I passed the old movie theater and noticed it no longer showed movies but had been converted into some sort of "strange" attraction. (a female mannequin was seated in the ticket booth at the entrance to the theater – weird!) Later, as I drove through the small town of Bouse, Arizona I spotted an old Saloon, so I thought I would check it out. When I walked up to the front door, I noticed something odd. The "handle" of the front door was an old rifle! I walked in and sat down at the bar and ordered a Lagunitas IPA. Brent the bartender poured the beer and then said "that'll be \$3.00" – what? Only \$3? That same beer was \$7.50 in Phoenix and \$10 in Las Vegas! Looking around the bar I think I was the only non-local there, but everyone was very friendly and curious about where I had come from and where I was going, since it was obvious that I didn't live in Bouse.



Old Saloon in Bouse, Arizona

Of special note is the fact that besides being an old mining town, Bouse was the site of a "top secret" weapons training site during WWII. The secret weapon was called a "Canal Defense Light" and was mounted on a tank. In reality, the weapon had nothing to do with "defending" canals at all, rather it was a very sophisticated high-powered light that flashed 100 times a second and designed to "disorient" troops in its path, even causing severe nausea and

temporary blindness! The irony is that the weapon was never used during the war in the way it was intended. Instead, it saw limited use as a common “searchlight” late in the war. Virtually no one driving through Bouse these days has any inkling of its history during WWII.

A couple of days after I returned home, I was requested to do a photo shoot of a property in the small town of Hinkley, just west of Barstow on the Old Bakersfield Highway. It was a long drive up to Barstow, but the weather was clear and the snow-covered San Gabriel mountains were beautiful. (the next day a huge Pacific storm rolled into southern California and dumped several inches of rain and up to 4 feet of snow in the mountains!) When I finally found the property, I parked alongside the road and began getting my camera and tripod out of the Jeep. Just then a voice said, “are you the picture taker?”, to which I answered, “yes, I’m the photographer”. The owners name was Roy and he was a very friendly, elderly guy but a bit shabby looking. He proceeded to give me a tour of the one-acre property and pointed out where he had demolished some old chicken coops and a pig pen. To be perfectly honest, the place was in pretty bad shape and barely qualified as a house. Before we went into the house, Roy pointed out that when he bought it several years ago, there were only two windows in the entire house, so he spent a lot of time installing more windows to make it “livable”! I started taking photos as Roy kept saying that the house inside was a “bit of a mess” – which turned out to be a gross understatement! There were half filled moving boxes everywhere, clutter on almost every horizontal surface, half empty bottles and full ash trays everywhere! I saw a couple of old vacuum cleaners that looked like they hadn’t been used in years. Roy and I attempted to move stuff out of the view of the camera as much as possible, but there was only so much that could be done to avoid the “mess”. Despite the atrocious condition of the house, Roy was “optimistic” that a buyer would see the “potential” of the place, just as he had when he bought it! (in my opinion, a buyer would have to be overly optimistic and in possession of a lot of cash! But I never said anything to Roy.) Then Roy led me to the “addition” he had made to the house, what he called the “master bedroom and bath” which he had done without any building permits! It was just an empty space – totally unfinished, but Roy imagined it to be a “gem” for the potential buyer. Then he opened the door to the master bath, and I was stunned! Roy had built a tub/spa out of large river rocks, along with a shower that had fixtures imbedded in a tower of more river rocks! He said it wasn’t quite finished because he still had to lay the rock floor.



“Master Bathroom” – Spa and Shower

That’s when he told me he used to do rock work for the Disney company! (I had no idea if it was true, but it certainly made for a good story!) Then as we ended the photo shoot with a photo of the garage “stuffed” full of junk, Roy suddenly told me about his encounter with an internet dating scam earlier this year – he had been corresponding with a young woman whose professed love for him he trusted, only to end up being defrauded by her for \$40,000 that he could have used to finish upgrading his property. At that point I began feeling sorry for him, but he had been a very naïve and trusting person, and probably would continue to be! (I believe it was his nature) The more he told me about his internet dating experience, the more I felt sad

for him. He was 62 and had counted on the \$40,000 to enable him to retire. Now it was like he would have to begin again, but he still had a positive attitude, as if God would make it work out for him! (I most certainly hoped so) As I said goodbye, I wished him the very best, because he certainly deserved it after the disaster of the internet dating scam. At that point he said he had gotten rid of the computer and the internet!

Just before I bid farewell to Roy, he showed me a large trailer he had built to haul all of his belongings from San Bernardino. Then he told me that after hauling the trailer all the way to Hinkley, the trailer yoke broke just as he pulled it into the garage in Hinkley! His only comment was, "Thanks to the good Lord it didn't happen on the I-15 freeway! If it had, maybe some people could have been killed!" As I left, I felt it was a rare and special experience to meet Roy, despite his shabby looks, weird past, and very uncertain future. He was a character I came to respect and will not forget! As I headed back toward Barstow, I saw a local dive bar called Riley's Place on the side of the Old Bakersfield Highway. I decided to check it out, and upon entering the small bar I couldn't help but notice that everyone was drinking Bud Light. A lady at the end of the bar said, "welcome, have a seat here". That's when I ordered a Bud Light! When the barmaid placed the can of beer in front of me, she asked if I wanted to also order biscuits and sausage gravy? (I wasn't sure why she might have thought I came in to have breakfast in the bar at 1:00 pm?) Meanwhile, a couple of people were playing pool and an old western TV program was on the one and only TV in the bar. Riley's Place was probably only a 5-minute walk from Roy's house, and I suspected that if I waited long enough, he would show up and order a Bud Light, or even biscuits and sausage gravy!



As I left the bar, I bid everyone Happy Holidays and complimented the barmaid on the beauty of the Christmas tree with the toy wagon underneath filled with gifts. I'm sure the old bar must have been a favorite stop on the old highway before the new 4-lane State Route 58 was constructed parallel to it. Just as I left the bar, I got some text messages from Roy's real estate agent asking me "how it went"! Over the course of the next twenty minutes and many text messages she (1) apologized for not "warning" me about Roy, (2) told me about her experience with Roy where he had cussed her out for not being able to sell his property, and (3) her encounter with the clutter, dirt, and photos of nude women on the walls! My only response was "Roy and I had a good time today". When I got home later that afternoon, I went online and discovered that Riley's Place is famous as the location where Erin Brokovich, as a young law clerk, met with representatives from the Pacific Gas & Electric Company to successfully negotiate a \$330,000,000 settlement of a lawsuit by residents of Hinkley regarding the dumping of toxic waste into their local water supply. Many years later, a film was made of the story starring Julia Roberts as Erin Brokovich, for which she won an Academy Award as Best Actress. It turns out that the real Erin Brokovich also appeared in the film as a waitress named Julia in the bar! It never fails to amaze me how much interesting history one can find in small towns!

In mid-December, I was invited to the Inland Empire Photographers and Videographers Holiday Party at the Hampton Inn in Riverside. It was a wonderful time to meet up with many colleagues I hadn't seen for a couple of years. Besides a delicious dinner, there were lots of raffle prizes and awards. The party was a great way to start celebrating the holiday season!

And next week Lynn arrives to join us for Christmas again this year. She's hoping for some warm dry weather, which may or may not be the case as southern California has been abnormally cold and wet so far this month, but we'll have to wait and see. Besides celebrating Christmas with a traditional dinner, I have planned an overnight trip to San Diego, a favorite place for all of us. Unfortunately, we won't be taking the train to San Diego since the railroad tracks along the coast by San Clemente were damaged recently by storms. Hopefully the repairs will be completed in early January. So, we'll be driving to San Diego with possible stops at the vintage car museum in Perris and the San Diego Zoo Safari Park in Escondido.

Here's wishing you all a most Joyous Christmas and Happy New Year!

Miscellaneous Notes in 2022

Signs and posters at Kansas City BBQ

- "Life's all about Ass – covering it, kicking it, kissing it, or trying to get it"
- "Twitter – when you need to say nothing quickly"
- "I'd agree with you, but then we'd both be wrong"
- "Your body is a temple – mine's an amusement park"
- "Old age and treachery trumps youth and beauty"
- "Life goes faster near the end"
- "Carrots may improve your vision, but whiskey will double it"
- "Music is what feelings sound like"

Corona City Circle Center

- Photography workshop about Fashion Photography
- Across the street was the "Union Barber and Beer Lodge" And it was a really weird combination of a barber shop and a bar!
- During the photography workshop a "Cubing Competition" was going on in another part of the center where dozens of young people were trying to solve Rubic Cube puzzles!

San Timoteo Canyon

- One day, as I sat under a tree near San Timoteo Creek, a large rattlesnake slowly approached me, coming within 3 feet before moving off into the tall grass! (I never made a move the entire time)
- Another day, as I sat in my Jeep alongside the Union Pacific Railroad mainline tracks, a young Coyote suddenly appeared, trotting gracefully down the tracks, stepping only on the railroad ties! It was lovely to watch, like a dance.
- One afternoon, while a UP freight train rolled by on the other side of the creek, I saw something suddenly move out of the corner of my eye. As I looked to my left, there was a "Long Tailed Weasel" slowly moving through the grass!
- On another occasion, as I watched a long Union Pacific freight train roll by, a couple of young guys suddenly waved to me from one of the container freight railcars! They were riding the freight train to Los Angeles – so people still "hop" the freight trains. Since then, I've seen at least a half dozen other "freight hoppers". (I remembered back to a time when my Dad told me stories of riding the freight trains during the Great Depression and stopping over in "hobo camps" along the way)
- In early August, as I was sitting beside the creek, an exceptionally long Union Pacific freight train passed by with 9 locomotives – 5 at the head of the train, 2 in the middle, and 2 at the rear of the train. I estimated it must have been more than 3 miles long!

Escape Craft Brewery, Redlands

- As I sat down to enjoy my cold pint of Pale Ale, a man came in with a huge, beautiful German Shephard and sat down at the table next to me. I "jokingly" asked him what

was the dog's favorite beer? Right away he answered, "He likes IPA" and then promptly let the dog take a sip from his glass of IPA!

Las Vegas - from my Army buddy Mike

- "If you break even at the casino, you've beat the house"
- "If you don't like to lose, you'll never win"
- "A few nights ago, I was walking down Fremont Street, and as I approached Las Vegas Blvd, there was a crazy dude waving a bible and claiming that he was Jesus. For some reason, he singled me out and started ranting. I told him that he needed to calm down, but he insisted that he was Jesus, and could prove it if I'd just buy him one drink. Always up for an adventure, I helped him stagger across the street and into the El Cortez. As we approached the bar, the bartender yelled "Jesus Christ, are you here again?"

ESRI International User Conference – San Diego

- Plenary session presentation "We don't inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children – Lakota Sioux Chief Crazy Horse"

From my Welsh cousin as published in the London Daily Telegraph newspaper

- Notice as posted in the café at Torosay Castle on the Isle of Mull "Will the ladies please rinse out teapots and then stand upside down in the sink. On no account must the hot bottoms be placed on the worktops" How's that for a bit of a giggle!

Eureka Burger Restaurant, Redlands

- As seen on a T-Shirt of a well-endowed young woman: "Beauty is in the eye of the beerholder"

A weird man's phone recording message

- "This is Dean – if you're with the government, then I'm dead, if you're looking for money, then I'm dead, if you're giving away money, then please leave a message"

Quotations sent from my friend in Seattle

- "It's not what you look at that matters – it's what you see" (Henry David Thoreau)
- "A person may make many mistakes, but they are not a failure until they blame someone else" (John Wooden – UCLA basketball coach)
- "If you want to go fast, go alone – if you want to go far, go together" (Old African Proverb)
- "The brain can absorb only as much as the seat can endure" (Anonymous Conference Manager)
- "If you have something better to do – do it!" (Anonymous)
- "To think outside the box, leave the box behind" (Anonymous)

Other Quotations heard along the way this year

- "Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting a tomato in a fruit salad."
- "The early bird might get the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese"
- "Politicians and diapers have one thing in common. They should both be changed regularly, and for the same reason."
- "Sex is not the answer. Sex is the question. Yes, is the answer!"
- "To steal ideas from one person is plagiarism. To steal from many is research."
- "I asked God for a bike, but I know God doesn't work that way. So, I stole a bike and asked for forgiveness."
- "Light travels faster than sound. This is why some people appear bright until you hear them speak."
- "A computer once beat me at chess, but it was no match for me at kick boxing"

- “Crowded elevators smell different to midgets”
- “Women will never be equal to men until they can walk down the street with a bald head and beer gut, and still think they are sexy”
- “A diplomat is someone who can tell you to go to hell in such a way that you will look forward to the trip”
- “I don’t know what makes you so stupid, but it really works”

A couple of political Jokes from my long-time friend in Mississippi

- “President Barak Obama, George W. Bush, and Donald Trump have died and are standing in front of God. God asks Obama, “What do you believe in?” “I believe in democracy and a just America.” “Very well my son, take a seat to my left” Then God turned to Bush and asked him, “And my son, what do you believe in?” “I believe in a strong and powerful America in the world.” “Very well my son, take a seat to my right.” Then he turned to Trump. “And you dear Donald, what do you believe in?” “I believe you’re sitting in my chair.”
- “The Pope, Bill Gates, the Dali Lama, and a young homeless man were on a flight together when the pilot announced both engines had failed, the plane was going to crash, and there were only 4 parachutes on board, one of which he was about to use. As he jumped out of the plane, he shouted, it’s up to you who gets the other three parachutes. Immediately the Pope said “I am the hope for millions of people in the world so I must have one” as he jumped out of the plane. Right away Bill Gates said, “I am the smartest person in the world so I must survive” and grabbed a parachute. Then the Dali Lama looked at the young homeless man and said, “son, I am old and have lived a full life, but you are young and have a whole lifetime ahead of you, so you must take the last parachute”. Suddenly the young man said, “your Holiness there are two parachutes left – Bill grabbed my backpack when he jumped out of the plane!”

Redlands 2022

- This year finally saw train service back in Redlands after decades without it. While the service was welcome, it wasn’t without its problems. Once the tracks were laid, stations built or renovated, and crossing gates installed there were several months of “testing” the new German locomotives and railcars. This testing included the train’s horn which was very loud and was sounded 4 times at every street crossing, despite a promise by MetroLink that downtown Redlands would be designated a “quiet zone” that did not require sounding the horn except in an emergency. That “sounded” like a great idea, but the testing continued for almost 7 months! Given that the train crossed 6 streets downtown with 4 blasts of the horn at each crossing it meant 24 horn blasts per train. Given 25 roundtrips per day it came to an astounding 1056 blasts of the horn every day! This became an intolerable situation for which MetroLink received untold numbers of complaints. It wasn’t until the day after Thanksgiving that the quiet zone was finally observed by the trains – thank goodness! So, we’re looking forward to a “quiet” 2003!

Additional Photos



Steele Indian School Park – Phoenix, Arizona



Old Redwood Tree – Onyx Summit, San Bernardino Mountains



History of Rancho Cucamonga, California in Murals



Goldfield, Arizona



Rainbow in Redlands



With friends at Escape Craft Brewery in Redlands



Farewell Party for Colin Childs - Redlands