

CHRISTMAS 2011



Well it's that time of year again when I have the pleasure of writing my annual Christmas Letter to all my family and friends! The lights are up, the tree is decorated, the shopping has begun, and I am looking forward to hearing about what's been happening around your house. This year I had many opportunities to travel around the country and at least a couple of trips beyond. As always, there are many stories to tell and I am looking forward to sharing them with you.

As has been our Christmas tradition for many years, Leslie and I spent the holiday with Lynn at her home in Illinois near where our family lived for a great many years. Before we left southern California we were beset by torrential downpours that unleashed a deluge of more than 10 inches of rain in just 3 days! That's close to the total amount of rainfall we get for the entire year. But as we arrived at LAX on the morning of the 23rd, the sun finally broke through the heavy clouds.

Our flight to Atlanta was on board a new A330-300 aircraft that had been recently fitted with new Business Elite class



seats that made our 5 hour journey very comfortable. Then a short one hour flight took us to the Central Illinois Regional Airport in Bloomington, which made it possible for us to avoid a long drive from Chicago, as we had to do in the past. As we arrived we were greeted by 4 inches of new snow from a recent storm, so another White Christmas was assured. Lynn met us at the airport and drove us to her house where we shared a hot cup of tea before retiring for the night. On the morning of Christmas Eve I fixed breakfast for all of us and then headed out to do the remainder of my Christmas shopping. But just as I got to the shopping mall a light snow

began to fall, and by the time I got back to the car the snowfall was getting much heavier. At that point I decided to have a bite of lunch at *Desthil*, a nearby brewpub where I had a pint of their IPA and a plate of fried asparagus served with a delicious orange-maple sauce. By the time I finished the grocery shopping and headed back to Lynn's place, the snow had piled up to more than 8 inches and was still falling at a steady rate. I spent the afternoon wrapping gifts and then we all sat down to a big bowl of homemade vegetable soup. Later that evening we discovered that flights from Atlanta had been cancelled, so we were lucky to have travelled yesterday and not today. Christmas Day dawned with the snow tapering off, but it was very cold and cloudy. After breakfast we all sat around the Christmas tree and opened our gifts as the cats delighted themselves in the mountains of wrapping paper and ribbons. The road report was not good, with all of the highways in central Illinois snow covered and icy. So unfortunately we had to abandon our plans to travel to Pana to share dinner with our cousins. Instead I cooked a chicken in rosemary and thyme as our Christmas dinner. Later in the afternoon as the sun was trying it's best to break through the clouds, I bundled up and took a long walk around the Grove Street Historic District to take photos of the grand old homes beautifully decorated for the season. But with the wind chill factor near zero I finally had to head back to the house for a hot bowl of soup. The next day Lynn had made reservations for



brunch at *Desthiil* and we discovered it was much more than just a brewpub. The brunch menu was quite unique with a number of interesting variations on familiar dishes. Leslie ordered the Mediterranean frittata, covered with mounds of fresh Feta cheese, along with a bowl of beer cheese soup. Lynn went for the more traditional French toast that came with cinnamon-orange whipped cream and Vermont Maple syrup. I chose the Cajun chicken and Andouille sausage frittata that was delicious and spicy. Later in the day I went about fixing a Persimmon pie from the fruit that I had picked from the tree in my garden just before leaving for the airport. But as we turned on Lynn's oven it became clear within a few minutes that there was a problem since we could see no flame at all. So we were forced to "borrow" the oven of Lynn's neighbors who were away for the holidays. (the pie turned out great!) The following day I fixed breakfast again and then spent time walking around downtown Bloomington following the trail designated as "Looking for Lincoln", which highlighted important moments in



his life when he was a young attorney. Upon returning to the house I found an interesting recipe in the local newspaper for Danish Rice Pudding, so I gave it a try, which I also baked in the oven across the street. The pudding was delicious, but strangely enough the recipe called for four sticks of butter but there were no directions in the recipe for adding the butter – however, I went ahead on my own and added the butter anyway. Later I tried another recipe from the newspaper for slow cooking pork tenderloin in a crock pot. The "secret ingredient" was a bottle of Dr Pepper, and after cooking for five hours the meat was literally falling apart – really delicious. The next morning, Lynn treated us to breakfast at a local truck stop restaurant called *Shannon's*, alongside old Route 66. It was most definitely home cooking for a local crowd, with huge portions of hot biscuits and gravy, eggs, bacon, sausage, ham, and potatoes! There were plenty of 18 wheelers parked outside to

testify to its reputation for hearty portions. That evening Lynn had made dinner reservations at *Lancaster's*, one of our favorite restaurants downtown. We began with crispy duck rolls wrapped in bacon and served with a balsamic sauce.

Leslie had the three cheese grilled sandwich with a bowl of tomato gorgonzola soup and a Greek salad. Lynn ordered a fantastic lobster mac and cheese, and I went for the gourmet hash made with three unique spicy sausages. The chilled bottle of New Harbor Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand was a perfect compliment for dinner. The 29th of December began with a warming trend that melted the snow from the highways and gave us an opportunity to visit the newly renovated *Lincoln Presidential Library* in Springfield. We spent a few hours exploring the large exhibition that detailed all of the aspects of Lincoln's life and death. There was an especially impressive display describing how Lincoln chose the members of his cabinet during the troubled time just before the outbreak of the Civil War. In another exhibit was an emotional display showing the devastating impact of the Civil War, the bold declaration of the Emancipation Proclamation, and the deep sadness of the nation following Lincoln's assassination. Truly a world class museum where one could spend an entire day and just touch the surface of such a great man as Lincoln. Back in Bloomington that evening I walked over to *Rosie's Pub* downtown for a beer and to watch the Texas Bowl game between my old alma mater, the University of Illinois and Baylor University. Illinois won the game, to the delight of everyone in the bar. The following morning we bid farewell to Lynn and boarded the short flight to Atlanta and then on to LAX. Lunch on the Atlanta to Los Angeles segment was a delicious pizza of grilled chicken breast with roasted red peppers and goat cheese, along with a salad and slice of pumpkin cheesecake, in keeping with the



holiday season. Aboard our flight to Los Angeles was a large contingent of Wisconsin fans travelling to Pasadena for the Rose Bowl where the University of Wisconsin would play TCU. About an hour into the flight one of the flight attendants announced that a couple of First Class passengers, Gary and Mike, would buy drinks for anyone on the plane wearing Wisconsin colors! I took a quick look back in the economy class and saw a great many green and yellow shirts, so Gary and Mike were going to be spending some serious money!

In early January I headed to Las Vegas for the PCMA Annual Meeting. Being that it was in Las Vegas meant that I could drive rather than fly, and given the necessity to be at the airport an hour before the flight, an hour or more in flight, and then waiting for bags and taxi at the end, the time to drive was virtually the same. So I filled up my gas tank, picked up a breakfast sandwich, and headed north on Interstate 15 toward Barstow. There were heavy clouds that obscured any view of the mountains, but once I was over the 4200 ft summit of Cajon Pass the skies cleared and I had a beautiful view of the snow capped San Bernardino mountains behind and the vast expanse of the Mojave Desert ahead. I was able to maintain a pretty constant speed of 75 – 80 mph virtually all the way to Las Vegas. As I crossed the Nevada state line near the small town of Searchlight, I came upon a large lake where there should not be a lake. It was the result of the heavy rains at the beginning of the new year, and the reflection of the mountains in the water were beautiful. Unfortunately, at 80 mph I wasn't able to stop and take pictures. Once I arrived in Las Vegas I parked at the *MGM Grand Hotel*, the venue for the PCMA conference, and checked into my room on the 10th floor overlooking the mountains to the north and west of the city. I was just in time to join the PCMA Board of Directors for a great lunch buffet that included a delicious meat loaf in burgundy mushroom sauce, honey roasted pork loin, and herb crusted halibut. Among the desserts was a fabulous apple, pear, and cranberry cobbler topped with a white cheddar crumble! Following an afternoon workshop I joined Robert in the lobby bar for a drink while we watched the end of the NFL playoff game between Indianapolis and New York, with Indianapolis leading. But with only 5 seconds left on the clock, New York kicked a field goal and won the game by one point! It was a devastating loss to the Indianapolis fans, and especially so for Robert's mother back home in Indiana as he was on the phone with her at the time. After the game, Robert and I enjoyed a great dinner of Alpine Grilled Chinook Salmon that was roasted with garlic fried potatoes and served with a spicy red pepper and pineapple salsa at *Emeril's New Orleans Fish House*, one of many restaurants in the MGM



Grand Hotel. Robert ended the evening at the poker table playing Texas Hold-em, while I found a nice quiet bar in the West Wing away from the noise of the casino. I started the next day with a small tour group going out to the Las Vegas Motor Speedway north of the city, for the "Richard Petty Driving Experience". I had originally signed up for a tour of Hoover Dam, but it was canceled at the last minute. Upon arrival at the huge racing complex, we had to sign liability waivers before donning fireproof jumpsuits and crash helmets. There were several stock cars sitting in the pit area ready with professional NASCAR drivers who would take us around the 2 mile oval track as we rode "shotgun" beside them. It took two guys to assist each of us as we climbed into the car through the open window and then to strap us into the seat. Once we were securely in place, our drivers gunned their 600 hp engines, letting out a terrific roar, as the engines have no mufflers, and we soon found ourselves pulling onto the track. Within a few seconds we were barreling down the long straightaway at 200 mph! What a rush as the G-forces from the acceleration pushed me hard back into the seat as if I was riding a rocket

into space. And if that sensation wasn't enough, when we came into the first corner the car drifted up the 30 degree banked track to within a few inches of the wall, throwing me hard against the door. Never in my life have I experienced the effects of such high speed and so close to the ground. To add to the thrill of riding in a stock car, we were only a few feet behind the car in front, speeding down the track at 200 mph! After several laps around the track we pulled into the pit area and as my driver shut down the engine, I asked him "how long does it take to learn to drive one of these cars?" to which he replied with a sly smile, "I started this morning" – we both had a good laugh! What an absolutely amazing experience, and



one that gives me a whole new appreciation for NASCAR. Back at the hotel I grabbed my camera and proceeded to walk down Las Vegas Boulevard, aka "The Strip". Among the highlights were lots of Elvis impersonators including a 3 foot high Japanese Elvis and a 7 1/2 foot black Elvis, both wearing identical white sequined outfits and posing for photos. There were many other characters on the street in costume, among them Darth Vader, Superman, Spiderman, and the Green Hornet. Then there were people with various exotic birds and animals, including one young lady with a huge boa constrictor wrapped around her. All

of this created a bizarre but entertaining scene so typical of Las Vegas. Besides all of these characters there were loads of people trying desperately to hand out free show tickets and coupons to passersby, most of whom ignored the offers. Other people were trying to sell bottled water and cold beer, but with the temperature at 50 degrees outside it was a hard sell. However, give it six months when it's 115 degrees, and they should do a land office business. The first few blocks along the Strip were filled with old, tired looking shops and bars leftover from the early days of Vegas. But when I reached the Venetian Hotel everything changed into a much more elegant environment and none of the "characters" trying to grab one's attention. This part of the Strip is dominated by huge new resorts, each designed around a theme, such as the Venetian with its replica of St Mark's Square and canals of Venice, the Paris Hotel with its scale model of the Eiffel Tower and an elegant French Chateau, Caesar's Palace has the Trevi Fountain and the Coliseum, and finally the Bellagio with an incredible, beautiful lighted water show choreographed to music. This part of the Strip is almost like an adult version of Disneyland. I returned to the hotel in time for our PCMA Chapter Reception at the *Fiamma Restaurant* in the MGM Grand. Over 120 people showed up and it was deemed a great success. Following the



Chapter reception we headed for the PCMA Opening Reception in the Grand Marquee Ballroom which was decorated in the typical Las Vegas casino décor, with a large main stage where Elvis was performing – he was the best Elvis impersonator I've seen anywhere. And of course there were loads of showgirls mixing with the crowd for photos. In addition, there were copious amounts of delicious food and drinks at bars and food stations throughout the huge ballroom. One thing is for sure, PCMA knows how to throw a great party. After the Opening Reception we were invited to the PSAV reception in the Chandelier Lounge at the newly opened Cosmopolitan Hotel. As we walked up

the circular staircase to the lounge it was like going up into a beautiful crystal chandelier. Delicious desserts were being passed out as well as made to order martinis. I had been given \$50 in casino chips as I entered the lounge and Lora insisted that I should play them in the casino downstairs, but I was reluctant to do so. However, I agreed to join her at the Blackjack table to "advise" her as she played, under the condition that any money she won would be donated to the Red Cross. As it turned out she ended up almost doubling the \$50, so it was a good night for a donation. Monday dawned clear and cold with freezing temperatures in the early morning. The speaker in the Opening Plenary session talked about the differences



in the way men and women communicate, and how she rose from two divorces and being a single mother of three children to become the general manager of the Mandalay Bay Resort. Following the plenary session we had a very nice lunch sponsored by the city of Montreal, where our event manager at the San Diego Convention Center was awarded Event Manager of the Year – congratulations to Jeff! Later in the day, I joined folks from LA Inc for a drink in the Race and Sports Book Bar at the MGM Grand where a large crowd had gathered to watch the BCS championship game between Auburn University, ranked number 1 nationally, and number 2 ranked University of Oregon. (Auburn won the game with a last second field goal – much like New York in an earlier game) Monday evening is always dedicated to parties sponsored by many of the leading hotel companies and service providers, and as usual, we all had numerous invitations. Maryann, Angela, and I shared a glass of wine at the Nob Hill Tavern in the MGM Grand before heading out to the parties. They were going to Hilton and American Airlines dinner in the 15,000 square foot Verona Suite at the Las Vegas Hilton Hotel. On the other hand, I had accepted the invitation from the newly renovated Tropicana Hotel for dinner and a behind the scenes preview of "The Mob Experience". (I had no idea what to expect) Dinner was in the *Biscayne Restaurant* at the hotel



where I joined a group of 20 people to sit down to a fantastic meal. It started with a shrimp cocktail dominated by four of the largest shrimp I've seen anywhere, followed by a "baby iceberg lettuce wedge" topped with applewood smoked bacon, crumbled bleu cheese and creamy buttermilk dressing – very classic. For the main course I chose the oven roasted halibut with wild rice and passion fruit Coquito – a delicious combination. Dinner finished with a dessert of cocoanut chocolate bar topped with Marcona almonds and bittersweet chocolate sauce, another great combination. Then the manager of *The Mob Experience*, Charlie, lead us on a tour of the new exhibit that details the history of how the

east coast mobs developed the casino business in Las Vegas, beginning in the late 1940's. Charlie described how it all took place through the years to create many of the fabulous hotel and casino properties that we see today in Las Vegas, including the Tropicana. Of particular interest were the many photos, home movies, and family heirlooms that were donated from the surviving members of the mob families, including the never before seen personal journal of Meyer Lansky, the founding father of gambling in Las Vegas. As it so happened, his grandson was on the tour with us. Another fascinating piece of history was the restored 1937 limousine owned by Bugsy Segal, and now on display. As Charlie described the exhibit, it will be very interactive so that each person will have a different "experience" as they move through it, a very unique concept. At the end of the tour, Charlie gave each of us a one year complimentary pass to the exhibit. From the Tropicana I joined Lora for an invite to *La Cave Restaurant* at the Wynn Encore Hotel where I arrived in time for dessert and after dinner drinks. Then we all made our way to *La Tryst Nightclub* next door for the PCMA Party with a Purpose where all the proceeds for the evening go to a local charity. Music for dancing was provided by the band "Skyrocket" from Austin, Texas which is well known for keeping people dancing until the wee hours. I started the next day with an early morning focus group on the topic of tourism and meetings in Mexico, followed by a couple of educational sessions before enjoying a delicious lunch sponsored by the Tourism Board of Mexico. The menu included a Romaine wedge salad with slices of jicama, baby carrots, and radishes all topped with a tomato cilantro champagne vinaigrette dressing, followed by the main course of Ancho rubbed chicken breast in Posole broth, along with creamy white masa infused with cilantro oil. The finishing touch was a plate of "chocolate tres leches" and a white chocolate flan – simply delicious. Then it was off to more education sessions before being invited to the International Reception in the Fontana Bar and Lounge at the Bellagio Hotel, with a terrace overlooking the lighted water show for which the Bellagio is most famous. As the water fountains





outside danced to the music of Beethoven, we enjoyed delicious selections of Irish food and whiskey, the best of which was an Irish whiskey soaked bread pudding topped with a warm Irish whiskey butter cream sauce – it was literally to die for! Later I joined Maryann and the folks from LA Inc at the Coliseum in Caesar's palace to watch the concert performance by Cher. On stage Cher looked beautiful, even at 60 years old, as she performed many of her old hits while constantly changing gorgeous costumes. Her voice was as strong and great as ever, and she did a very touching tribute to Sonny Bono as she described her life through the early years. What a great performer, and to see her live was a very special experience. After the concert we were invited to a private reception in Wolfgang Puck's *Spago Restaurant* in Caesar's Palace where we savored spicy Asian noodles, shrimp and scallop skewers, and a selection of his signature mini wood fired pizzas. As we left the restaurant we were each given an autographed cookbook from Wolfgang which made it a very special evening indeed. Back at the MGM Grand I shared a nightcap with my friends from the San Diego Convention Center before retiring to my room. On the next day I attended the opening session of the Virtual Edge Summit which focuses on virtual meeting technology. The closing lunch was sponsored by San Diego, as the host city for next year's PCMA annual meeting, and began with an amazing motivational presentation by Daniel Pink. The lunch menu was designed by three executive chefs from the national catering firm CenterPlate and the executive chef from the MGM Grand Hotel. I was invited to join the San Diego table to enjoy our first course, a very fresh, crisp salad of citrus, fig, and pear, followed by the main course of mole-spiced braised short ribs which were absolutely amazing. A dessert of chevre ricotta tart in an almond crust topped with citrus marmalade completed the meal in a memorable way. After the closing lunch I checked out of the MGM Grand Hotel and drove to the Red Rock Resort and Spa where I had a complimentary "signature suite" for two nights, having won the prize almost a year earlier. The resort is located on the very western edge of the city near Red Rock Canyon and about 20 minutes from the Strip. It's built from the natural red stone found in this area and highlights the native flora and fauna of Red Rock Canyon. My suite overlooked the Spring Mountains and Red Rock Canyon so I had a beautiful view of the sunset that evening before going down to the *Yard House Restaurant* located on the edge of the casino next door for dinner. There was a fabulous menu and a huge selection of beers on draft from all over the world, 135 of them in total. I chose a cold liter of Wienstephen Hefeweizen and a dish of "lobster garlic noodles" that came with huge amounts of lobster, shrimp, crab, and porcini mushrooms! I stayed on in the bar to watch the basketball game between San Diego State and UNLV. After a while I couldn't help but notice that the guy sitting next to me had ordered three root beer floats! Next morning I drove up to Red Rock Canyon where the BLM has constructed a beautiful visitor center overlooking the Calico Hills, a spectacular ridge of gorgeous red sandstone shining brilliantly in the sunshine. I found out that the ridge is actually the remnants of an ancient sand dune that has fossilized

and weathered over millions of years. The visitor center provided some fascinating displays of everything from geology, water, and wildlife of the area to the history of the Southern Paiute tribe that has called this place home for hundreds of years. Beginning at the visitor center is a lovely scenic drive into the heart of the canyon with many overlooks and hiking trails. At Willow Springs, the highest elevation on the route, one can sometimes see Desert Bighorn Sheep on the cliffs above. On this day the steep snow covered slopes where without signs of the sheep, but I did spot a young Coyote roaming around the picnic area.



As I came to Ice Box Canyon, the sun was beginning to set so I got some beautiful photos of a spectacular sunset behind the dark silhouette of the rugged peaks in the Spring Mountains. For dinner this evening I chose *T-Bones Restaurant* in the Red Rock Resort for a delicious dish of lobster risotto that had loads of lobster, shrimp, and crab in a white wine cream sauce over a bed of tender rice. The chilled glass of crisp New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc went especially well with the dish. The



following morning I drove through Red Rock Canyon to the Spring Mountains Ranch State Park in a beautiful setting nestled along a small stream at the base of the rugged mountains. The ranch was one of the first in the area, having been homesteaded in the 1840's. Former owners included the wealthy Krup family, famous jewelers and keepers of the Hope Diamond that eventually became an extravagant gift from Richard Burton to Elizabeth Taylor. Eventually the Krup family left the jewelry trade and founded a company that today manufactures small appliances, which is quite an unexpected change. Another former owner of notoriety was Howard Hughes

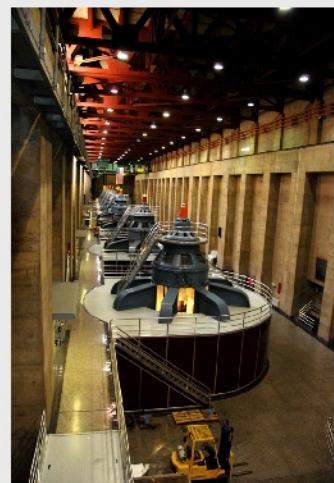
who used the ranch for private parties, although he never actually lived there. The State Park rangers gave us a fascinating tour of the main house that included a lot of family heirlooms and stories of famous people. After the tour of the house I walked around the ranch to visit some of the historic old stone buildings that date from the early 1840's and the ranch reservoir that is fed from several springs at the base of the mountains.

There's even a small hydroelectric plant that supplied electricity long before the construction of Hoover Dam. From almost any spot on the ranch are beautiful views of Red Rock Canyon and the rugged Spring Mountains. Leaving the state park I drove east on Highway 93 through the city of Henderson and on to Boulder city where I took an amazing tour of



the massive power generators and giant penstocks at Hoover Dam which sit over 30 stories below the top of the dam. It was a long ride down the elevator to the base of the dam, but our tour guide, Charlie, entertained us. As we slowly descended Charlie asked us the question "did they tell you about the policy on taking flash photography?" – we all looked at each other with surprise and collectively answered "no". Then Charlie said "no? well, that's because there is none". We all laughed in relief and by this time we had arrived at the bottom of the dam. Charlie lead us through a long tunnel to a place where we could stand on top of one of the giant penstocks that are 30 feet in diameter and feed water from Lake Mead behind the dam down to the massive turbines that generate electricity. From there we went down into one of the huge power generating rooms where eight massive turbines sit in a long

line rotating 24 hours a day to generate more than 4.2 billion kilowatts of power each year. The view of the power station was most impressive and well worth taking a tour. And the views from the top of Hoover Dam are very impressive as well, especially looking down at the Colorado River below the dam. As late afternoon approached I left the dam and drove south on highway 93 through the small town of Searchlight where I encountered strong winds and blowing sand, which didn't add anything to making a positive image of the desert town. As I reached the junction with old Route 66 I had an incredible view of the sunset just as a mile long Union Pacific freight train rolled by on its way to Barstow, which was my destination as well. There I joined Interstate 15 for the journey over Cajon Pass and down to

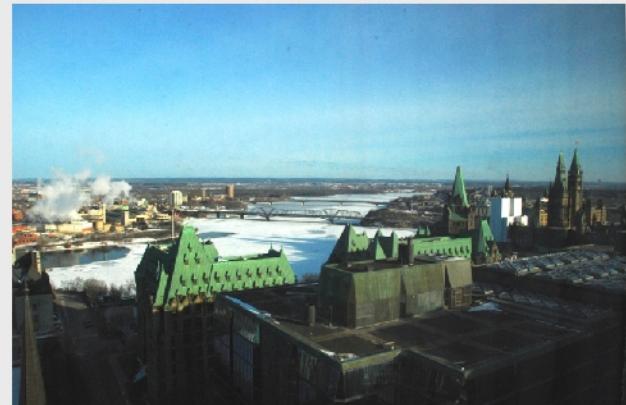


Redlands.

In mid-February I was invited by Tourism Canada to visit Ottawa for the *Winterlude* festival (*Bal de Neige* in French) which celebrates the winter season. I boarded a flight to Detroit and then on to Ottawa where I arrived just before midnight. Despite the late hour, there was a limo driver to meet me and take me to the Marriott Hotel downtown where I had a beautiful view of the city lights on Parliament Hill from my room on the 23rd floor. The next morning I woke up to sunny, warm weather with temperatures reaching 55 degrees during the day, quite unexpected for Ottawa this time of year, but there was also a foot of snow still on the ground. However, that didn't stop the locals from walking around in shorts and t-shirts! I joined a group of 20 people for a breakfast meeting on the 24th floor of the Westin Hotel with an incredible view of Parliament Hill and the Rideau Canal below. During the meeting, the head of the Ottawa Tourism Bureau told us the story of hosting several heads of state for a tour of the city by public



transport that included a stop at the waste processing facility (aka trash dump) to show them how the city processed the waste to produce bio-fuel that powers the public transit system. He said this was one example of why Ottawa calls itself the Innovation Capital of Canada. Following the meeting we all went across the street to the Fairmont Chateau Laurier Hotel for lunch. The historic old hotel was built in the classic style of the Canadian Pacific Railroad hotels in Quebec City, Banff, and Victoria and it stands across the street from the old CP Railway station. The hotel has hosted many heads of state, royalty and Hollywood film stars since it opened in 1912. We sat down to lunch in a very elegant setting where famous people had dined for many years. Our meal began with a starter of warm goat cheese soufflé on yellow beet Carpaccio, followed by the main course of blackened beef tenderloin served with roasted Roma tomato and Elephant garlic jam, three potato Pave with leeks and Trappist Monk Oka cheese, and Baco Noir Jus with caramelized baby onions! And if that weren't enough, for dessert we were served Maple Crème Brûlée, homemade vanilla bean ice cream, Maple Tuile, raspberry Coulis and Crème Anglaise. To say we were stuffed at this point would have been a gross understatement, but the food was absolutely delicious and all locally sourced. After lunch we were given a guided tour of the hotel and learned all about its historic past. Of particular interest was the "Karst Suite" with a large autograph book in which a great many famous people had signed their names as guests in the hotel. In the afternoon we had a hard hat tour of the new state of the art convention center nearby which was scheduled to open in 41 days. Looking at all of the unfinished work I had to wish them luck. As the evening approached we boarded our bus for a trip to the Brook Street Hotel located in a new high tech center west of downtown. The hotel provided a lovely reception in the penthouse suite that featured a short lesson from their Sushi chef before we toured the hotel. One of the most unusual features of the Brook Street Hotel is their unique three room adjoining suites which they call "Menage-a-Trois". Also of unique interest is a special weekend package that combines a day at the spa for the ladies and a round of golf for the men. This package is called "Beauty and Balls". From the hotel our bus took the back road through the woods to "Scotiabank Place" for the Boston Bruins – Ottawa Senators hockey game where we were treated to a VIP Suite overlooking the Boston goal. There were lots of good food and drinks and an exciting game for the sell out crowd of 18,000 fans, but unfortunately Ottawa lost 3 to 1. I woke up the next morning to see blowing snow outside





my hotel room window and temperatures of -10 degrees Celsius, a far cry from the warm sunshine of yesterday – no shorts or t-shirts today! After breakfast we boarded our bus for a fascinating city tour guided by a longtime resident named Barry. Our first stop was the National War Museum that was built to look as if was emerging from a battlefield, with a massive wall in the shape of an airplane wing. From a distance the small windows in rows across the top of the wall appeared to be a random pattern, but on closer inspection it turned out to be a message of peace in Morse code! Next stop was the new Civilization Museum located across the Ottawa River in Gatineau, Quebec. The building incorporates a

beautiful Native American design with huge pillars in the shape of giant canoe paddles and a main entrance with essential elements of a West Coast Indian ceremonial mask. Inside the large structure are beautiful displays of Native art and culture from all across Canada. Outside is a spectacular view of Parliament Hill, but with a wind chill factor well below zero, no one wanted to stay outside very long. Just upriver from the museum is a series of waterfalls where old lumber mills once stood to process the logs that were floated down from the forests of northern Ontario and Quebec in the early 1900's. Following the city tour we were hosted for lunch at the *Metropolitaine Restaurant* below the Chateau Laurier and across from the old Byward Market housed in late 19th century stone buildings. The lunch menu started with a bowl of hot soup de jour and warm crusty French bread, followed by a traditional "Croque Monsieur", a sandwich of country smoked ham with melted Gruyere cheese and Morney sauce. It was delicious on a cold day and the local wines from the Niagara region were a great compliment. After lunch we had the option of shopping in the Byward Market or visiting the Winterlude ice carving



competition in Confederation Park. Only two of us braved the icy winds to watch ice carvers from 14 countries compete, but we saw some incredible pieces of art work in the form of large ice sculptures. Within the park were many local entertainers and demonstrations of traditional winter activities such as the making of maple sugar and syrup. Young



children were fascinated and delighted to watch the warm Maple syrup being drizzled on to the snow to form Maple taffy. One of the most impressive entertainments was a group of dancers from the local Algonquin and Huron tribes dressed in spectacular ceremonial dress. From Confederation Park I walked back to the Chateau Laurier and headed for the classic old gentleman's bar for a glass of wine before going back to my hotel to get ready for dinner. Our "farewell dinner" was hosted by a trendy new restaurant named "E18teen" in an historic old stone building within the Byward Market. Once again it was a delicious meal featuring ingredients of Canadian origin, including West Coast shellfish chowder, and fresh black cod from British Columbia "lacquered" with a spicy maple syrup and served with a puree of baby carrots and sugar snap peas. The dinner was a fitting end to a lovely tour of a great city. The following morning I boarded a flight back to Detroit and on to Los Angeles, with a notebook full of stories and photos to share.

Early in March Leslie and I were joined by Lisa and Nick for a Greek Dinner at a local Redlands restaurant called Farm Artisan Foods. The menu from Greek chef Nephelie Andonyadis included many traditional dishes such as Dolma (seasoned rice and herbs rolled in grape leaves), Spanakopita with feta cheese and Greek olives, Youvarlakia with Avgolemono (egg/lemon soup with Greek meatballs), and roasted lamb. We all really enjoyed the meal, especially since, being from a

Greek family, Nick could tell us all about the food we were savoring.

A week later I drove down to San Diego in the evening to attend a meeting the following morning. I was looking forward to having dinner at *Top of the Market* on the harbor, one of my favorite restaurants, and I was not disappointed. I started with a fabulous Cream of Broccoli soup topped with warm crusty sourdough bread, followed by a small bowl of spicy red



Thai coconut curry that my server insisted I try. Then came the main course of beautifully seared Atlantic sea scallops and Tiger prawns served with an Oregon Chanterelle mushroom and white Truffle oil risotto – absolutely to die for taste! The chilled glass of Cloudy Bay New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc went perfectly with dinner. The next morning I joined my friends DeeAnne and Kay to attend a hospitality and tourism program for high school students that was hosted in the hanger deck aboard the USS Midway aircraft carrier. The program was a great success and it was fun to talk with the kids about their plans to become part of the hospitality industry.

Shortly after returning from San Diego I was invited to a meeting of the University of Washington Alumni Association in Indian Wells to hear a presentation by the new president of the university. The meeting was being held at the Esmeralda Renaissance Resort where my friend Esmo was now working, so we arranged to meet for a glass of wine before the alumni event. Meanwhile I walked around the hotel property taking photos of the beautiful grounds, the golf course, and the snow capped peaks of the Santa Rosa Mountains behind – truly a stunning setting indeed. During the cocktail reception that evening I noticed an elderly man in the corner weeping, having just learned that an old classmate had recently passed away. It was a poignant moment of sadness amid the joy of meeting old friends. At the dinner I was seated with two couples who spend the winter here in the desert and summers in Seattle, which makes them classic “snow birds”, and we had a great conversation about living in Seattle. When I retired to my room that night I found a bucket of cold beers and a bowl of chips waiting for me on the balcony – thanks Esmo!



At the end of March I decided to enroll in a Photoshop training seminar being held at the LA Convention Center. Not wanting to drive in the early morning freeway traffic, I headed down to the city the evening before and checked into the Figueroa Hotel, an old historic property across the street from LA Live. The hotel is very non-descript and without much character on the outside, but as soon as one steps into the lobby it becomes a trip to Morocco, with colors and décor straight out of the Casbah in Marrakech. It really is a hidden gem downtown, beautifully decorated and having an air of old



world charm, surrounded by the very latest trendy new places at LA Live and the JW Marriott. My room on the 10th floor did not have much of a view, but the furnishings were right out of an old Hollywood movie, just like a classic Humphrey Bogart film. There was a four poster canopied bed, a tall leather covered heavy wooden chair in the corner, and a large ceramic vase by the window. An old TV sat on a wooden desk and a bamboo ceiling fan slowly rotated above me. Everything in the room smelled of a foreign and exotic place – nothing like the sterile atmosphere of most modern hotels. The next

morning, as a heavy rain was falling, I made my way to the Convention Center to register for the seminar, along with at least 500 other people! Everyone was accommodated in the large room and we all enjoyed a great program of tips and tricks for using Adobe Photoshop.

At the middle of May I took a couple of days to drive down to Anza Borrego Desert State Park and the Imperial Valley before the summer heat transforms the region into a large oven. Having seen a small town named "Mecca" on my map, I was intrigued to find out about it, so I turned south off Interstate 10 onto a narrow road that wound its way down through Box Canyon and came out near the north shore of the Salton Sea. Here stood the village of Mecca, surrounded by huge fields of vegetables, fruit trees and vineyards, in stark contrast to the barren desert hills above. In the distance, shimmering in the bright sun, was the Salton Sea and beyond were the 10,000 foot high Santa Rosa Mountains. I continued south on Highway 111 following the eastern shore of the Salton Sea, with the rocky barren Chocolate Mountains on my left, where the Navy has a large bombing range. I made a short stop at the Salton Sea State Park and walked down to the shoreline to take some photos with the dramatic backdrop of the



Santa Rosa Mountains. At this point I was standing 235 feet below sea level, the skies were clear with temperatures in the mid 90's, but the wind was blowing like a Banshee. As I drove further south, approaching the town of Brawley, I started seeing massive green fields of hay, vegetables, and sweet corn being irrigated from a vast network of canals that spread across the entire expanse of the Imperial Valley. Just south of Brawley was a huge grain elevator complex where a continuous string of large railroad grain cars moved slowly in a giant circle through the elevators. Suddenly 111 became a

4 lane divided highway all the way to Calexico on the border with Mexico, with traffic moving along at 70 mph, but every mile or so the highway was interrupted by cross traffic that required one to come to a screeching halt. Just this side of Calexico was a huge cattle feeding operation that must have had several thousand head spread over several hundred acres, something one wouldn't expect to see in the desert. Not wanting to cross the border to Mexicali, I turned north on Highway 86, crossing the enormous "All American Canal" that brings water from the Colorado River to irrigate all of the Imperial Valley. For the next hour I passed field after field of vegetables and hay where massive farm equipment stood silent, awaiting the return of farm workers on Monday. From highway 86 I turned west on to highway 78, after passing through a second Border Patrol checkpoint, and headed to the Borrego Springs Resort, my destination for the night. As the sun was beginning to set I headed to the bar overlooking the golf course and a beautiful view of the Santa Rosa Mountains in the distance. After a couple of cold beers I ordered the house special prime rib dinner that was served with the best hot rolls I've had in a long time. I found out that the chef bakes them fresh every evening for dinner. Back in my room I sat outside on the patio under a moonlit sky as a soft breeze rustled the palm trees nearby – very relaxing. I was up early the next morning and had a beautiful view of the mountains bathed in the warm orange glow of sunrise. Huge clouds were drifting over the crest of the San Ysidro Mountains, which was an indication that a strong flow of moisture was moving rapidly inland from the Pacific Ocean. I had a delicious breakfast of



apple wood smoked bacon and eggs, along with several tables of golfers getting ready to take to the course and tee off. On the other hand, I was headed to the Anza Borrego Desert Visitor Center where I watched a fascinating film entitled "A Year in the Desert". It showed the State Park in all four seasons, and included stunning encounters with California Bighorn Sheep and a litter of five Mountain Lion kittens. Afterwards I was given a copy of the film on DVD as a gift for joining the

Anza Borrego Foundation, otherwise the film was not for sale.



Leaving the Visitor Center I drove south following the historic route of Juan Bautista Anza who explored the interior of southern California in 1775. As it turns out, the State Park is named in honor of Anza and the Spanish word for lamb, Borrego, an obvious reference to the Bighorn Sheep that inhabit the region. South of Box Canyon I took a turnoff on an unpaved road to Blair Valley and followed the old Butterfield Overland Stage Route. Here I found the site of an old Kumayee Indian village and a steep, rocky trail to the top of Ghost Mountain where a family, seeking to escape the stress

of modern day life, had built an adobe house in the 1930's. Having trucked in materials and supplies by Model-T from the mining town of Julian, and packed them up the steep slope on their backs, they intended to live off the land as much as possible. After 14 years of almost total isolation, the family finally abandoned the homestead, and now it slowly weathers away on top of the mountain, from which there are spectacular views of the rugged desert landscape. As I descended the mountain, the wind was howling at 40 mph with a cold drizzle falling, and I was still in a T-shirt, foolishly leaving my jacket at home, thinking it would be warm all weekend. Later on I was to truly regret it even more so. Further on I came to the Vallecito Stage Coach Station, one of the many stops on the Butterfield Overland Stage Route. The old adobe station was built in 1888 and restored in 1971 by California State Parks. Inside the station was an old advertisement for the "San Antonio – San Diego Stage Line" that promoted the route as the only "all stage coach route to San Diego", with the exception of the 180 miles by mule from Yuma, Arizona to San Diego. That part didn't sound all that great to me! When I reached the small town of Ocotillo I turned on to Highway 78 heading north to the "Sunrise Highway", a route that climbs up to the 6000 foot high crest of the Laguna Mountains in



the Cleveland National Forest east of San Diego. Soon I was traveling through a lush forest of tall Ponderosa Pine enveloped in thick clouds and a cold drizzle being blown in from the Pacific Ocean on a 40 – 50 mph wind. I stopped at spot on the edge of a very steep slope that overlooks Anza Borrego Desert State Park several thousand feet below. Here the clouds were whistling past me over the cliff and seeming to disappear into thin air. During occasional breaks in the clouds there were absolutely stunning views of the desert in bright

sunshine 5000 feet below me. But after several minutes at the overlook I had to return to my car, because as you recall I'm only wearing a T-shirt! Finally I pulled into the old mining town of Julian under partly sunny skies and proceeded to check into the historic Julian Hotel where I had reserved the Patio Cottage once again. It's a beautiful private cabin decorated in Victorian style, with its own patio in the corner of the garden. I battled a strong cold wind as I walked around the small town taking photos of the old buildings that date from the late 1800's, including the Santa Ysabel Schoolhouse from 1888. Luckily I came across a small





shop that had a nice grey fleece jacket for sale, which made the rest of my stay in Julian much more comfortable. I came upon a small Italian restaurant named Romano's where I stopped for a couple of Peroni beers while I caught up on my journal. The clientele at the bar were very local, with the exception of an aging biker named John from Palm Desert who downed several rum and cokes while wooing a couple of ladies at the end of the bar who were not giving him much of a response. After awhile I overheard John tell the

bartender he had to ride home tonight, while he ordered another drink. Now the route from Julian to Palm Desert takes at least 3 – 4 hours over very narrow, winding mountain roads, and with the cold fog and 40 mph winds tonight – well, good luck John! Leaving John and the ladies in the bar I headed down Main Street to the Julian Grille for dinner. It's a gourmet restaurant located in a beautiful, cozy old cottage from the 1920's. I was seated at a small table in the living room and my server recommended I try the chef's special soup of the day, Romaine lettuce and smoked bacon in chicken broth.

Sounded a bit weird but I decided to try it and found it was delicious, with a taste of wild celery. For a main dish I ordered "Chicken Spinoza" in which the chicken is slow roasted with capers, onions, and Rosemary cream sauce – really outstanding. I finished dinner with a slice of fresh, homemade apple and boysenberry pie, made from the local fruit. The chilled glass of local Meneghin Vineyards Sauvignon Blanc was excellent as well. I walked back through the cold night air to my hotel room and enjoyed the warm glow of the fireplace as I listened to music. The next morning I was up early and headed back home to Redlands, following highway 87 through Santa Ysabel, Warner Springs, past Lake Henshaw below Mt Palomar, and on through the Pauma Valley with its fertile agricultural fields and beautiful views of lush grasslands, mountains and forests. It had been a wonderful weekend trip to be sure.



At the end of May I was invited by my old friends Jorg and Michael to the Esri German Users Conference being held in Munich to give a presentation on our new Certification Program. Esri Germany graciously booked my flights on Swiss International Airlines in Business Class, which made my 12 hour journey from Los Angeles very comfortable. After checking in for my flight at LAX I had just over an hour to wait so I went to the Star Alliance Lounge where there was a wide array of snacks available, as well as two kinds of soup and a large pot of Japanese rice with chicken and shrimp. I took a small bowl of the rice dish and a cold glass of Kirin beer before sitting down to check my email. The flight to Zurich boarded about 7:00pm and I found my new Business Class seat was very spacious and reclined to a fully flat bed, so I was assured of getting some sleep tonight. Flight attendants came around with chilled glasses of Champagne and handed out dinner menus before takeoff. Shortly afterwards the dinner service began with cocktails accompanied by a small bag of fantastic Dijon mustard and black pepper potato chips. Then came a very nice appetizer of smoked salmon with a small green salad topped with a balsamic vinaigrette dressing, along with a large selection of fresh baked breads. For my main course I chose the herb roasted chicken breast served with garlic mashed potatoes and roasted red bell peppers, which was



complimented very well by a glass of the Swiss white wine. Following the main course we were offered a selection of cheeses from France and Germany, along with a glass of Port. The vanilla bean mousse topped with fresh strawberries and rhubarb dessert dish finished the dinner service perfectly, and I finished the evening watching the next installment of the film "The Tron Legacy". I was amazed by the state of the art computer graphics seamlessly integrated into the film. I awoke as we neared Zurich for a delicious breakfast of scrambled eggs, sausage, and potatoes, along with coffee and orange juice. As I walked through the airport, I passed

countless shops selling chocolates, watches, and silk ties before going to the Business Class Lounge to wait for the connecting flight to Munich. Although it was just a short 35 minute flight, the Lufthansa cabin crew managed to serve a snack and drinks before we landed at the Munich airport under sunny skies and warm temperatures. It was a short taxi ride at 160 KPH on the autobahn to the Hotel Dulce in the small town of Unterschleissheim, a suburb north of the city. After checking into the hotel I met up with Jorg and Michael in the hotel restaurant as they were just finishing a meeting with their regional office managers. Later in the evening I had a plate of Wienerschnitzel and a glass of local Weihenstephan lager for dinner in the hotel bar before heading to my room for the night. The next morning I picked up my conference badge and materials and then explored the conference center facilities before joining everyone in the large hall for the plenary session. I sat with my colleague Aart from the Rotterdam office, and he helped translate some of the presentations since all were being given in German, of course. The keynote speaker was the chief technology officer from the Munich IBM office and he was very funny as he talked about how technology changes our lives, both in the office and at home. Later that evening I joined my friends on the hotel patio for a BBQ dinner and several rounds of beer before going back to my room. I watched the news on CNN as they discussed the details of President Obama's trip to Ireland as he traced the ancestry of his great, great, great grandfather in a small village in Donegal, and drank a pint of Guinness with the locals in the pub. The following day he was scheduled to attend a state dinner with the Queen at Buckingham Palace – such a stark contrast of cultures and venues! The next morning I reviewed



my presentation for later in the day and then headed outside to take some photos of the area. I found a lovely path to a small lake where families were enjoying the warm sunshine along the shore. On the far side of the lake was a small Biergarten doing a good business serving bratwurst and beer. I returned to the hotel by way of another path through the village of Unterschleissheim where almost every house had roses blooming in their garden. That evening was the gala dinner at the hotel and it seemed as though there were large pans of all types of meat at every turn, countless dishes of salads and vegetables of every

variety, and endless trays of desserts – enough food and drink to serve several thousand people, perhaps even the village of Unterschleissheim! I caught up with Jorg and Gabi near the end of the dinner and we all sat outside on the patio in the cool night air before going back inside to join the dance party where the beer and wine were constantly flowing. I finally got dragged on to the dance floor as the band played one of many "last songs", which apparently ended about 3:00am. There was no lack of fun that night! The next day I made my presentation near the last session of the conference and then headed to the hotel bar to have a glass of wine with Jorg before going for dinner in the restaurant next door. The menu was a bit limited, but the quality was first rate. I started with a fabulous bowl of cream of asparagus soup made with the fresh, tender young white asparagus that was now in season, and crisp herbed croutons, accompanied by thick slices of dark bread topped with butter and slices of fresh radish. For the main course I ordered the grilled lamb chops topped with a dollop of garlic mashed potatoes and served with a reduction of red wine and berries, together with sautéed slices of artichoke and a combination of mashed green vegetables – really an outstanding dish. The glass of South African Merlot went very well with dinner. The following morning, with the conference having ended, I decided to walk to the next town, Oberschleissheim, to visit the historic Schleissheim Palace and the Deutsches Air Museum. The fine weather of the past few days had



suddenly overnight turned to light rain, but I was determined not to let it keep me indoors all day. The 5 km walk took me past fields of grain and potatoes before I reached the town center and the S-Bahn Station where I found a map showing the route to the palace. The grounds surrounding Schleissheim Palace are extensive and provide a beautiful setting for the large estate that was built as the summer residence for Emperor Maxmillian in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. After walking around the huge estate for a couple of hours in the rain I decided to head for a small restaurant located on the corner of one of the many palace buildings. I entered a beautiful, warm room that was paneled in white Birch wood, white-washed ceiling, and blue checkered curtains on the window – very much in the typical Bavarian style. I sat at a small table in the corner, covered with a crisp white linen tablecloth, and removed my wet jacket and hat. I started with a large glass of beer and ordered a dish of pork schnitzel, which is a specialty in Bavaria. Little did I know that the huge filet of pork



came with a large green salad and full plate of French fries! But the breaded filet was fried perfectly to a light crisp and really hit the spot. Leaving the warmth of the restaurant, I walked on in the steady rain to the Deutsches Air Museum nearby at one of the oldest airfields in Germany. The museum has an extensive collection of all types of aircraft from the earliest hand powered craft to the latest jets and rockets. One of the most interesting craft was a very early attempt at human powered flight dating from 1894 that was displayed as it would have been placed for takeoff. There were both civilian and military aircraft on display throughout several hangars that once formed an important airport (aerodrome) for the region until the end

of World War II when it was occupied by the US Army. It remained an American base where helicopter pilots were trained for the war in Vietnam until 1978, when it was turned back to the German Air Force for their use as a training base before becoming a museum in 2004. I spent a couple of hours touring the large museum as the steady rain continued outside. As I was leaving, a large group of young school children arrived on a field trip. Each one was dressed in a bright red raincoat and a yellow or blue hat – quite cute. On my return to the Palace I passed a small ornate stone structure that was identified as the "Schloss Lustheim", which can be translated as the "Love Castle". Rather than slog my way through the rain back to Unterschleissheim, I headed for the S-Bahn Station and caught a train, which later became a wise decision indeed. Upon returning to the hotel I met up with my good friend Tina who had flown in from Saudi Arabia where she works now. We drove to the town of Freising and happened to find the same pub where we had first met many years ago, to share a drink and conversation before meeting up with Jorg and Gabi for dinner. Tina and I talked about her life in Saudi Arabia and how it is so different from anything we know in Europe or America, yet people are people no matter where one goes in the world. As night fell we joined our friends at the

Weiheanst Stephan Brewery, among a very lively crowd that was celebrating a birthday. Our waiter was a very witty chap from Bremen and he kept us laughing every time he came to our table. He highly recommended that I order the Goulash with potato dumplings, a very hearty and traditional Bavarian dish. It was really outstanding, especially the thick dark beer sauce that covered everything, and a large stein of the local beer completed an excellent meal. On my last day in Germany I awoke to find clearing skies and the prospect of better weather as I was planning to join

Jorg and Gabi for a drive into the city, while Tina went to visit her father in Augsburg. Jorg picked me up at the hotel after lunch and we drove to the new BMW headquarters building and museum where new cars were on display, as well as several very interesting exhibits detailing the technology used in the design of the cars, one of which was a new V12 diesel engine that was rated at 400 HP. We shared a quick cup of coffee at the café overlooking the displays before continuing





our journey to a portion of the Isar River that is being restored to its natural condition. It's a huge challenge to return the river to a natural state while controlling the spring floods that were the reason for channeling it in the first place. Nearby was an old hydro-electric power generating station dating to the late 1800's and still in operation today. Our final stop was at the famous Englisher Garten for some fresh fish being smoked on a stick, a couple of large pretzels, and plenty of beer. Meanwhile the ducks and geese paddled around hoping for a handout, while two large swans were being very protective of their two

youngsters. Sitting at the picnic table in the warm sun beside the lake shore was wonderful and a very typical way to spend a Saturday afternoon in Munich – thanks to my good friends Jorg and Gabil! Upon returning to the hotel I decided to walk into the town center of Unterschleissheim and check out a place called "Big Ben's Pils Pub" that had been recommended by one of the hotel bartenders as the spot to be on a Saturday night. It was a very small bar decorated in the style of an English pub and filled with local patrons who knew the bartender. I found a seat at the corner of the bar and ordered a beer as we all watched the European Football Championship match being played at Wembley Stadium in London between Barcelona and Manchester United. Barcelona ended up winning the game and apparently the bartender lost a good sized bet that night. The next morning I was up early to pack my bags and head to the airport for my flight to Zurich and on to LA. Once again, even though the flying time to Zurich was only 35 minutes, the cabin crew managed to serve a delicious snack of prosciutto and white asparagus sandwich and a luscious strawberry crème dessert. On board the Swiss International A-340 300 aircraft I had another great seat in Business Class and I looked forward to spending the next 12 hours being entertained. After takeoff the lunch service began with a veal and tuna terrine served on thin sliced tomatoes, along with succulent fresh white asparagus. The chilled glass of Swiss white wine from the Muller-Thurgau region went very well with the appetizer dish. The main course was a plate of pan fried Pike-Perch fillets served with wild garlic sauce, Basmati rice with lentils, Mange-Tout peas (both shelled and unshelled peas), and baby carrots with Daikon radish. This was one of the best fish dishes that I've ever had! Next came a cheese plate and fresh baked breads, along with a glass of Port. As the finishing touch, dessert was a small glass of Tiramisu with rhubarb Mascarpone strawberry coulis – outstanding! I ended up watching the newly released film, "The Green Hornet" as the cabin crew served Haagen Daz ice cream cones. After a few hours sleep, 6000 miles, 12 hours, and a delicious snack of grilled chicken and Asian rice noodles, we landed at LAX. Home at last, with a bag full of fond memories.



The first weekend in June saw Leslie and me on our way to Lexington, Kentucky to celebrate the wedding of her niece Anna and fiancée Jeff. To make the 7:55 am flight from LAX meant that we had to be up at 4:00am for the limo service, and even then we arrived at the airport with just 20 minutes to spare before the departure. Such is the nature of the LA traffic. We



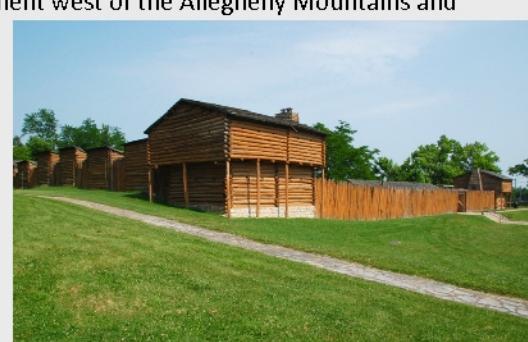
enjoyed a pleasant flight to Atlanta and then on to Lexington, arriving in the late afternoon to find sunny skies and warm temperatures. We met up with Kent and Joyce at their beautiful new home in a subdivision not far from the famous Keeneland Horse Farms. The subdivision was originally designed to allow each house private access to a horse trail that surrounded the estate. As we entered the house, Joyce's two Border Collies, Tucker and Griffin, were barking their heads off, something that would continue until the next day when they finally accepted us into their

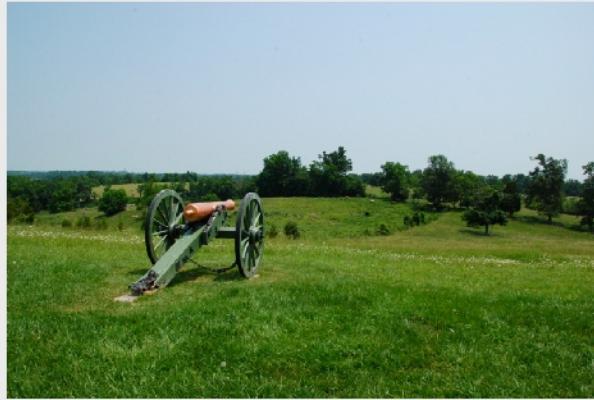
domain. That evening we sat down to a lovely dinner that Joyce had somehow managed to put together despite a full day of wedding preparations. Later that night, we stayed up with Kyle and Grant to watch the NBA playoff game between the Dallas Mavericks and the Miami Heat. The Mavericks won by just two points in the final 30 seconds for an exciting finish. The next morning I was up early and helped Joyce prepare some food for the brunch later in the day, then I sat outside on the deck with my coffee as the dogs romped in the backyard. Later I grabbed my camera and went for a long walk on the horse trail where there were lots of spring flowers still in bloom. That evening I joined Leslie and her mother for the wedding rehearsal dinner downtown at Dudley's Restaurant, one of Lexington's finest, at their new location in an historic bank building. The restaurant has preserved the turn of the century elegance of the old building, while keeping the menu fresh and unique. The wedding party took up the entire upper floor of the restaurant where everyone was introducing each other to those who were meeting the bride or groom's family for the first time. Jeff's father had arranged a slide show of family photos dating back to Jeff's earliest years and everyone was enjoying pointing out who was who in the earliest photos. Leslie and I were seated with two young couples, including Jeff's sister and her boyfriend, as well as a young guy named Max who, surprisingly enough, was from Freising, Germany. So when Max found out I had just returned from Munich, we had a lot to talk about. He was studying filmmaking at New York University and had just finished his thesis project, the filming of the death of a lonely homeless man in lower Manhattan. He chose to film the final three months of the man's life in a nursing home because he wanted to confront the reality of death. When we asked him what he had learned from the experience he said he found the experience both disturbing and comforting – something he still has to resolve for himself. Dinner began with a special prayer by Kent, as father of the bride, in which he paid tribute to Anna's mother Barbara who had passed away four years ago. Jeff and his family then sang an old hymn in perfect four part harmony, a tradition they have held since the children were born. Following a wonderful dinner, there were several toasts to the bride and groom to be by both sides of the family, some of which were very emotional, especially the toast from Jeff's brother who will be celebrating his own wedding next month. We all looked forward to the wedding tomorrow which is to be held at an old wine estate north of Lexington. The next morning I got up early, grabbed my camera, and headed



was the "Old Fort Harrod State Park", the first permanent European settlement west of the Allegheny Mountains and established by Captain James Harrod in 1774. Captain Harrod and his men, guided by frontiersman Daniel Boone, crossed into Kentucky territory through the Cumberland Gap and set up camp on the site which was to become Fort Harrod. The old fort has been re-established as an exact replica, being built from the original plans by the State Parks department. Local artisans and craftsmen are on hand to demonstrate the trades that were active during the late 1700's and early 1800's, including wood working, blacksmithing, and weaving. They also tell the history of the old

south on Harrodsburg Road to visit the historic old Town of Harrodsburg. As the highway approached the Kentucky River, it quickly turned into a narrow two lane road that wound its way down the side of the rocky escarpment to the bank of the river through the dense hardwood forest. After crossing the river the road made its way up the steep rocky hill on the other side and returned to lush green pastures and fields so typical of the Bluegrass region. The historic old town has many fine stone buildings dating from the late 1800's, including a beautiful, unique blue turreted Victorian that had been a hotel originally. On the western edge of town





fort in the manner of the people that lived there 200 years ago – really fascinating. As I left Harrodsburg and continued southwest on highway 68, I passed yard sale after yard sale, which I later discovered was an annual event known as the “400 Mile Yard Sale” that follows highway 68 and 127 all the way through the state. Soon I came to the small town of Perryville, located on the banks of the Chaplin River and the site of the bloodiest Civil War battle fought in Kentucky. On the edge of the town was the Perryville Battlefield State Historical Site where the most intense fighting took place in early October of 1862. At one point I walked through a thin

line of trees from which the Confederates advanced up a steep hill toward the Union forces on the top of the ridge, and as I climbed the hill it was clear why the Confederate soldiers sustained such an incredible number of casualties from the Union cannons firing at point blank range down on them. I can’t imagine how terrifying it would have been to face the danger of such overwhelming odds. Had the South won this battle it would have put Kentucky firmly in the Confederacy. But as it turned out that day, Kentucky would remain in the Union throughout the rest of the Civil War. By this time I was covered with sweat as the temperature was around 95 degrees and the humidity wasn’t far behind. Back in Perryville I discovered it to be a lovely old town with a street fair in progress along what is called “Merchant’s Row”, a collection of historic old stone

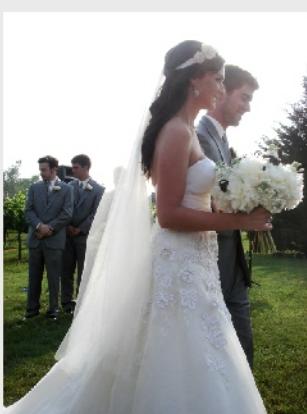
buildings dating from the mid-1800’s that housed shops and stores.

There was also a beautiful footpath along the bank of the Chaplin River just behind Merchant’s Row. By this time I was getting hungry so I had a delicious BBQ pulled pork tenderloin sandwich and a cold iced tea being served up from an outdoor grill by the “Hillbilly Grillers”. They also had a “Hillbilly Burrito” on their menu board, but I wasn’t quite sure of its origins. Leaving Perryville I drove north on highway 150 to the Lincoln

Homestead State Park where there were both original and reproductions of the log cabins in which Abraham Lincoln’s grandparents and parents lived. The log cabin of Lincoln’s parents, Thomas and Nancy, was the original home and furnished with simple pieces of that period. Amazingly, it was possible to walk around inside the structures unhindered by



ropes or glass partitions, which gave me the feeling of visiting a real home rather than just an exhibit. Oddly enough there is a golf course adjacent to the site which makes for quite a contrast in history. I returned to Lexington on the Bluegrass Parkway that traverses the heart of the state from west to east. Back at the house I sat on the deck with a cold beer and the dogs romping in the backyard. Then I changed clothes and joined Leslie and her mother for the drive to the Equus Winery and Vineyard to meet up with the rest of the wedding party. The wedding ceremony was held outdoors, surrounded by the vines, under clear skies and warm temperatures – a perfect day and beautiful setting. Anna looked gorgeous in her white satin gown and Jeff was quite handsome in his light grey suit as they exchanged their vows. Grant and Kendall’s 2 year old daughter “Cally” proudly walked down the aisle (aka the grass), with Grant kneeling at the front to encourage her. It was a priceless moment for everyone, since she had failed to walk all the way during the rehearsals. We all sang a couple of old hymns before heading to an old tobacco barn which had been decorated for the dinner and party. Here we were treated to several excellent wines from the 15 year old winery and learned from the owners that wine was produced in this region as far back as the early 1800’s, making it one of the oldest in the



country. After dinner a country band led everyone in square dancing in the old barn to round out the evening, before Anna and Jeff were escorted to their car under a shower of sparklers. As they departed for their honeymoon in the Caribbean, the rest of us helped tidy up the barn. I rode home with Kyle and we had a great conversation – he's got a good head on his shoulders. Sunday morning I awoke early to pack my bags and head to Cincinnati to catch my flight back to California. Best wishes to Anna and Jeff as they begin a new life as husband and wife!

Soon after returning from Kentucky I received an invitation from the San Diego Zoological Society to attend their "Member Appreciation Night" at the Wild Animal Park. As long time members of the Zoo we were treated to an after-hours dinner party where we had full access to various activities in the park, along with many food stations and entertainment venues. Before sunset I was able to visit Condor Ridge where the huge birds are kept, along with an exhibit that displays a lot of facts about their behavior and habitat. Nearby is a large enclosure with a dozen or more California Desert Bighorn Sheep that are rarely seen in the wild. It was a very enjoyable evening and a nice recognition of the members.



Then it was the first week of July and I headed down to San Diego for our annual international user conference that would occupy my time for the next 10 days. Although most of my time was taken up with the task of overseeing the setup and operation of the conference where we were expecting 15,000 people to attend, I had moments in which I could take a short break to see what was happening beyond the routine stuff. One day before the conference opened, I spotted a truck on the street in front of the Convention Center loaded with a huge billboard advertising a service in conjunction with the Scripp's Medical Center meeting being held at the Hilton Bayfront Hotel. The sign was advertising the services of a "Mobile Cadaver Lab", something I suspect that few people have even heard about. On another occasion I was sitting outside on the patio of the Fox Sports Bar in the Hilton Bayfront Hotel enjoying an incredible sunset over San Diego Bay, savoring the best BLT I've ever come across, and watching the unloading of bananas from the Dole ship nearby. For dinner another night I ordered a big bucket of boiled shrimp at Joe's Crab shack and proceeded to "peel & eat" my way through mounds of delicious shrimp. One of the highlights of my time at the conference is always attending the orientation dinner for our 60 student assistants who come from all over the country to help with the logistics of the event. It's fun to hear the students introduce themselves to the group, including their favorite movie, many titles of which I'm not familiar. By the end of the conference the students have established a strong bond that continues long after the memories of the event fade, even resulting in a few marriages years later. A couple of evenings during the week I joined my friends from the Marriott Hotel for a drink at their new poolside bar that was part of the recent multi-million dollar renovation of the whole pool area. The bar is now a very popular place to hang out in the evening and our Marriott hosts made sure that we enjoyed it – thanks Michael, Paul, and Jarrod! On Thursday evening our Gala party took place in Balboa Park, but a few of us opted for the Padres – Giants baseball instead. Rick, Tosca, Michael, and I had great seats on the Toyota Terrace, thanks to Joe, where we took full advantage of the service at our seats. Michael ordered the "Big Dawg", garlic fries, and an MGD to start the game. It was tied up at 1 – 1 in the bottom of





the 9th inning, send the game into extra innings. San Francisco came away with the win when San Diego's relief pitcher gave up 5 runs in the 12th inning, one of which a walk home! Needless to say, the San Diego fans were not happy with his performance that night. On a side note, one day I spotted a note tacked on our conference message board that read, "Gala Party ticket available, call xxx-xxx-xxxx – Ladies Only please!" It doesn't take much to figure out what the intentions were! Following the Closing Session we made a final "sweep" of the Convention Center and then headed for the poolside bar at the Marriott for a round of cold beers and to celebrate another successful event. That evening Leslie, Kathleen, and Jack joined me for dinner at Mickey and Lou's Restaurant in the Gaslamp District that has become a traditional way to end the week in San Diego. I had one of the best combinations of filet mignon and Alaska King Crab legs I think I've ever had, and the Key Lime Pie with vanilla Crème Brûlée finished the evening perfectly. Great food, nice wine, and good friends to share it with!

As has become my tradition after the conference, I took some time to visit a part of the country where I hadn't been before, so I headed for southern Arizona. Yes folks, in the middle of July! I filled my Jeep with gas, grabbed a large iced tea at McDonald's and pulled on to I-10 headed east toward Indio and the Mojave Desert. As I approached Blythe I turned south on to highway 78 to El Centro and the heart of the Imperial Valley. Just beyond the tiny town of Ripley I had a gorgeous view of the Chocolate Mountains silhouetted by the late afternoon sun. Here I also encountered an interesting sign marking a turnoff for the Midway Well Road, so I decided to investigate. After a few miles on the gravel road I spotted a small windmill and below it was a long abandoned homestead that looked like it had been the site of an old ranch, along with a small orchard. I took a few photos of the old place and then headed back to the highway to continue my journey south. Just east of Glamis, as I came over a low rise in the road, I was amazed to see an incredible landscape of huge sand dunes that stretched as far as the eye could see! The strong southerly winds were blowing sand across the highway, creating drifts on the edge of the road that resembled snow drifts, except they were yellow and temperatures were well above 100 degrees. Near the crest of the highway I pulled into an overlook and got some fantastic photos of the massive dunes. This area of southeastern



California is part of the *Imperial Sand Dunes National Recreation Area*, and a place I was totally unfamiliar with. I can only compare it to parts of the Sahara in Africa – truly an astounding site. A short distance to the west is the beginning of a vast agricultural region in the Imperial Valley where huge farms of vegetables, fruits, dates, hay and corn lie in stark contrast to the dunes. All of the water for irrigation of the fields comes from the Colorado River by way of the gigantic "All American Canal", which branches into hundreds of small canals in a web that covers most of the valley. The irrigation system was originally conceived and built by

William Holt in the late 1800's and the small town of Holtville honors his legacy. As a side note, my house in Redlands is next door to the Moorish style mansion that Mr. Holt built for his wife in 1887. By this time my Jeep was running on empty so I stopped at a Texaco station in Brawley. The restroom had a sign outside that read "see attendant for key", but the restroom door was unlocked, and in fact, once inside it wasn't possible to lock the door! From Brawley I drove east on Interstate 8 toward Yuma, Arizona which was my destination for the night. About 15 miles from Yuma I started seeing the "wall" separating the US and Mexico. It marched in a long dark brown line straight along the border, and several Border



Patrol vehicles were parked just off the road to observe any activity along the wall. Early in the evening I crossed over the Colorado River and into the old town of Yuma where I checked into the new Radisson Hotel overlooking the river. I headed for the bar to get a cold beer and write in my journal. At the other end of the bar was a group of British Royal Air Force pilots who were just completing a training program at the Yuma Proving Grounds north of the city. For dinner that evening I decided to try the hotel's Market Bistro restaurant and found it had a great menu. I

started with a delicious roasted heirloom tomato soup served with small toasted cheese sandwiches – such a great combination. For the main course my server recommended the beef tenderloin topped with caramelized onions and bleu cheese, served with a red wine reduction and boiled new potatoes. Together with a glass of 2008 Flock Zinfandel, it was truly an outstanding meal! Following a hot breakfast at the hotel the next morning, I headed downtown to the historic district and the Yuma Quartermaster's Depot State Historic Park situated along what remains of the Colorado River. The old depot was built in the 1870's to provide logistical support for the US Army operations throughout the Southwest. Most all of the buildings have been restored within the past 10 years, and as I toured through them I learned the fascinating history of the depot and the region in general. In the Quartermaster's Office was a display of very colorful Army uniforms from 1880 and I couldn't help wondering how the soldiers managed to survive the intense summer heat in these heavy wool garments! Located in the large warehouse was another interesting display of old vehicles, such as the US Army mule drawn wagon, that were used to haul supplies to remote posts. Of special interest was an old 1929 Model T loaded with all manner of personal belongings and sporting an Oklahoma license plate from the Dust Bowl days when thousands of people migrated west, crossing the Colorado River at Yuma. In fact, this crossing point was at the shallowest part of the river and had been used by Native Americans for



hundreds of years. The old Model T was displayed on top of a section of the original wooden plank road built in the late 1800's to cross over the sand dunes to reach the Imperial Valley and beyond to San Diego. Another fascinating piece of amazing engineering from 1912 is the unique "inverted siphon" that moves water from the Gila River Canal under the Colorado River to irrigate the agricultural fields east and south of Yuma. But one of the most amazing historical aspects of the Yuma Quartermaster Depot was the fact that it was supplied by large stern wheel river boats that transported tons of

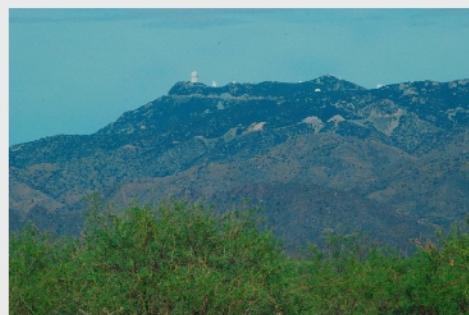
freight from ocean going ships that docked in Port Isabel on the Gulf of Mexico. At the height of the operations, the river boats made the journey upriver all the way to the Grand Canyon, until the construction of the huge dams designed to tame the devastating floods that often ravaged Yuma. My next stop was a visit to the Yuma Territorial Prison State Historical Park which has preserved a portion of the 1876 prison as a museum. Much of the original prison was demolished in the early 1900's in order to construct a new railroad bridge across the Colorado River, but some of the oldest cell blocks and the guard tower remain today. For its day, the prison had all of the modern conveniences of electricity, hospital, library, and shops, which the locals jokingly called the "country club on the hill". However, prisoners often referred to it as the "hell hole", primarily because at night they were locked up in very confined spaces no bigger than 8 ft by 6 ft, with 6 men to a cell. It must have truly been



hell in the intense heat of the summer. When a prisoner misbehaved, the punishment was up to 12 days in the "dark cell", which was a small pit with no light of day, no sanitary facilities, and only bread and water. One prisoner spent 104 days continuously in the dark cell and apparently emerged a model prisoner! As I climbed the guard tower I was rewarded with beautiful views looking north across the Gila River with the rugged and spectacular Castle Dome Mountains shimmering in the distance. From the prison I drove to the Main Street Historic District and walked around among the old buildings that date from the late 1800's and early 1900's. Of particular interest on a small side street was "Jimmie Dees' The Coolest Bar Downtown", or at least that's what the sign said. Nearby at the foot of Main Street is the "Pivot Point Interpretative Plaza" where the original railroad swing bridge was constructed to allow the Union Pacific trains to cross the Colorado River while also enabling the river boats to pass as well. All that remains today are the huge concrete pillars on which the bridge pivoted, since the bridge was destroyed by a massive flood many years ago. Surrounding the plaza were many signs and displays detailing the history of the "Yuma Crossing", a history that was unknown to me before. Just then the clouds overhead let loose with a light sprinkle of rain amid the 105 degree heat, more of a teaser than cooling off. The



that the monument preserves the northernmost habitat of the Organ Pipe Cactus in the US. After viewing a short film at the Visitor Center I took a 21 mile driving tour into the Ajo Mountains on a very rough dirt road, and despite the 100+ degree weather, the views were absolutely incredible. The hike up the 2 mile trail to Arch Canyon in the mid-day heat also gave me a real appreciation for life in the desert. Leaving the national monument I encountered another Border Patrol checkpoint as I



approached the small town of "Why" at the junction with highway 86 east to Tucson. On the way to Tucson I had some great views of the huge telescopes of the National Observatory atop 7,000 ft Kitt Peak, before arriving at the Embassy Suites Hotel on the east side of the city. Following a couple of cold beers at the Manager's Reception, I walked down the street to Chili's for a dinner of delicious and spicy "honey chipotle crispy chicken" served with fries and corn on the cob. The next day I headed south to visit the historic San Xavier Mission located on the San Xavier Indian Reservation which was founded in 1697 by Father Kino, an early Spanish Missionary who traveled extensively in the Southwest. The design of the mission is a beautiful combination of Christian and Islamic elements and has undergone a 10 year restoration by Italian artisan's in the 1990's. Continuing south to Green Valley I came across a very unusual museum that is the only remaining Titan II Missile Site in the world, the other sites having been

the following day I was back on Interstate 8 in route to Gila Bend where I turned on to highway 85 which runs parallel to the Union Pacific main line where I saw several mile long freight trains making their way across the desert. Beyond were huge agricultural fields irrigated by the Central Arizona Project that diverts water from the Gila River. Driving south on highway 85 I encountered two Border Patrol checkpoints before reaching the Visitor Center at *Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument*. The rugged Ajo Mountain Range framed by huge Saguaro and Organ Pipe cactus provided a spectacular backdrop for the Visitor Center where I learned



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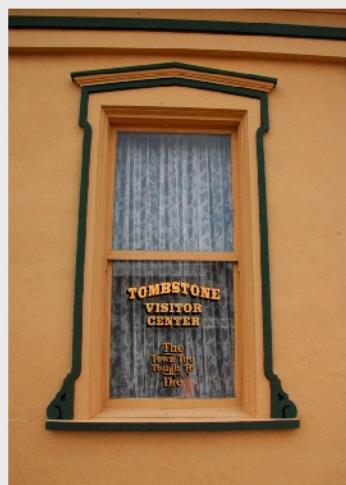


destroyed according to the terms of the Nuclear Arms Treaty with the Soviet Union. The facility is exactly in the same shape now as it was in 1985 when it served as an active base. I joined a guided tour of the silo and control room lead by Marge, who was a Titan Silo Commander in the early 1980's. She gave us all the incredible details of daily life underground for the 4 person crew, as well as how the control room functioned during a simulated launch sequence. Every detail of operation was covered by Marge, just as if she were still in command of the base today. She gave us a host of amazing facts about the base and the missile, but the most astounding fact was the enormous power of the single nuclear warhead that would have been deployed in war. It was rated at 9.6 megatons, which is equivalent to 90,000 railcars carrying TNT – that makes a train 1,571 miles long, and stretching from Tucson, Arizona to Lexington, Kentucky! That fact alone put everything in a different and scary perspective. As Marge said at the end of the tour, the very fear of an attack kept anyone from initiating an attack – thank goodness. As I left the museum gift shop I spotted a most unusual book titled "How to Photograph an Atomic Bomb". It was filled with photos taken during countless above ground tests in Nevada in the 1950's, and to be honest, there were a few of the photos that actually looked beautiful, in a bizarre sort of way. As I continued east on highway 83 the landscape began to change from desert to rolling hills of high grass around the small town of Sonoita, with thunderstorms approaching on the horizon. The area was home to a number of large ranches, as well some wineries, making for a scene that was not what I had expected to see in southeastern Arizona. Further east I discovered the San Pedro Riparian National Recreation Area, which is a long stretch of the San Pedro River flowing north to join the Gila River, and it remains the last wild, free flowing river in southern Arizona. The banks of the river were lined with huge cottonwood trees and willows that stood high above the grass and shrubs. This is an area of several old silver mining ghost towns, abandoned railroads, and the site of what once was a huge stamp mill for processing the ore. BLM had done some restoration of Fairbank, the last of the old towns that was abandoned back in the early 1950's. A few light rain showers fell as I walked the trails through the old town to the site of the stamp mill and on to the old cemetery on the ridge above town. I never saw another person the entire



time. My next destination was the historic town of Tombstone, not far from the San Pedro River. Allen Street is the heart of the old town and it's lined with beautiful old buildings from the late 1800's, most of which have now been converted to shops, restaurants, and bars to serve the legions of tourists that flock here every day. Among the most prominent of the old places are the Birdcage Theatre, which was a saloon frequented by Wyatt Earp, the vacant lot on Fremont Street where the infamous "gunfight at the OK corral" took place, the Cochise County Courthouse whose jails were almost always full, and Boothill, the graveyard where many locals who died violent and unexpected deaths were buried with their boots on. It's a town that retains a wealth of fascinating history in spite of the usual tourist trappings, and one that certainly deserves its slogan "The Town Too Tough to Die". I drove back north to Tucson for the night before going on the next day to Phoenix by way of scenic route 77 through the gold and silver mining country around Globe and Winkelman. It was a slow, steep climb to the top of El Capitan Pass in the Pinal Mountains as I followed the historic route of General Kearney's expedition to California during the

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Mexican – American War. Below the pass were the massive mining operations outside the town of Globe where I discovered the “Bullion Museum” located in the old Federal Building. It happened to be closed this day, but just outside the museum stood a huge ore truck sitting inside the bed of an even larger ore truck, making for a surrealistic scene indeed. Just east of Phoenix I made a short detour off highway 60 at Apache junction to visit the “Lost Dutchman State Park” located at the foot of the rugged Superstition Mountains. Nearby was the old



gold mining ghost town of Goldfield which had an amazing array of old mining equipment on display, as well as restorations of several historic buildings, including a former bordello that now serves ice cream. The museum was small but filled with unique historical treasures, including the dress coat that was worn by Doc Halliday, as well as a more recent buffalo robe worn by Robert Redford in the film “Jeremiah Johnson”. By the time I reached Phoenix it was near the height of the rush hour and traffic was very heavy as I slowly made my way west toward Wickenburg. From that point on the drive was very pleasant as I headed to my destination for the evening, Parker City, on the banks of the Colorado River. Signs pointed to the Blue Water Resort and Casino, owned and operated by the Tribes of the Colorado River, as the best place to stay for the



night. The hotel was quite full, being Saturday, but I was able to get a 2 room suite on the top floor with a beautiful view overlooking the river. The suite was huge and had two balconies, as well as rooftop deck that afforded sweeping views of the river and the desert – too bad I’m only here for one night. As the sun set over the river I had a light dinner at the “Cantina” outside on the water, then back to my room to relax on the deck under the warm night sky as the bats were flying by catching insects. It was a wonderful way to end my trip in southern Arizona.

The following day I was headed down to Del Mar for a PCMA meeting at the Hilton Hotel, across the street from the Del Mar Racetrack. The meeting would be a combination of an education program and a social activity, namely a “day at the races”. As I sat outside on the patio by the hotel pool, the weather had changed dramatically, being a cool 65 degrees in Del Mar, compared with the blistering 105 degrees of southern Arizona. Our educational program began with a very nice lunch of southwest chicken Caesar salad, followed by a very interesting speaker who told a funny naval story that had great relevance to the current national debt ceiling debate. The story went like this. A signal mate stationed on the USS Missouri returning from the Japanese Surrender in Tokyo at the end of WWII with Admiral Nimitz aboard suddenly sees a light ahead and signals the oncoming ship to steer 15 degrees to starboard. The reply is “steer 15 degrees to port”, to which the signalman answers, this is the USS Missouri, steer 15 degrees to starboard. Once again the reply is steer 15 degrees to port. Finally, very frustrated, the signalman sends the message, “this is the USS Missouri with Admiral Nimitz aboard – steer 15 degrees to starboard”. Quickly the reply comes back, “this is the lighthouse Edward – steer 15 degrees to port”! After our laughter died down, the question arose, who is the lighthouse in the debate – the Democrats or the Republicans? Leaving the Hilton we boarded a bus for the short ride to the racetrack where we had our own section of the infield to enjoy drinks and watch the races. Later I was invited to join my Marriott friends for their race day party in a private VIP Skybox high above the racetrack which afforded us some beautiful views of the track. In between





race 4 and 5, there was a special race for the kids on large inflatable balls, which was a lot of fun for everyone, though there was no betting on that race. At the end of the races I moved to the Hilton Bayfront Hotel downtown and had my favorite plate of Halibut and chips at the Tin Fish restaurant while I watched the Padres baseball game on TV as it was going on next door. It's always nice to be in San Diego.

Shortly after returning from the races in Del Mar, I took another week of vacation to see parts of California I hadn't visited yet. So early Monday morning I headed north on I-15 through Barstow to the small town of Baker where I turned on to Highway 127, bound for Pahrump, Nevada. As I drove through Baker I made a mental note of the price of gas, being \$4.37 a gallon. A couple of hours later I pulled into Pahrump as dark storm clouds began to fill the sky to the south and east. Here I noticed the price of gas was \$3.67 a gallon – a full 60 cents less than California. That's the price we pay for living in California! As I drove north on highway 95, I was following the base of the 13,000 foot peaks of the White Mountains to the west, which still had large patches of snow at the highest elevations. To the east were the barren flats of Nellis Air Force bombing range and the



infamous Area 51. At Stonewall Flats I turned on to highway 266 which took me up a steep winding route through the beautiful Silver Peak Range and over 8,000 foot Gold Pass to the junction with US Highway 6. From there I headed west, back into California and on to highway 120 through tall stands of Jeffrey Pine in the Inyo National Forest. The route followed the southern edge of Mono Lake to the site of Mono Mills, which supplied lumber to the gold mining district of Bodie by way of a narrow gauge railroad until 1912. The US Forest Service had constructed a small



visitor center at the site which gave a fascinating history of the area, as well as stunning views of Mono Lake below. It was nearing sunset as I reached the western shore of Mono Lake near the small town of Lee Vining. The views across the lake were incredible as the long rays of the sun reflected off the strange crystalline formations known as "tufa towers" that rise from the surface of the lake like giant candles. I took several photos before continuing north on US 395 to Bridgeport where I found a delightful place to stay at the Silver Maple Inn. At first glance it looked like any ordinary motel from the 1950's, but when I checked in with the registration desk I found out that next door



to the motel was the historic "Cain House" which is now a bed and breakfast. To my surprise, a standard room at the motel was the same price as a room in the Cain House, so it was an easy choice to stay at the Cain House. As I entered the house it was as if the family who resided there before had never left and I was now their guest. The furnishings were from the late 1800's and early 1900's, with family photos and artwork everywhere. The large fireplace in the parlor added to the warmth of the feeling as well. As it turned out, I was the



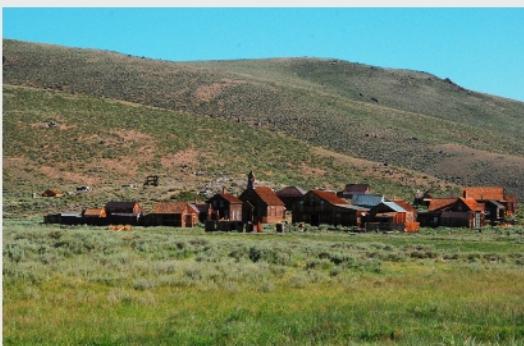


only guest in the house that night, which made for a very quiet and relaxing evening. Later that evening I sat on the front porch and watched the traffic slowly pass by on highway 395. Meanwhile I headed down the street to the Sportsman Bar & Grill for dinner as the locals watched the Dodgers vs Padres baseball game on TV - definitely a local crowd and very friendly. I was up early the next morning and greeted by the sun reflecting off the snow capped peaks of the high Sierra Nevada Mountains to the west as I enjoyed a bowl of granola for breakfast. Then I was off to see the old ghost town of Bodie in the

hills east of Bridgeport. In the past, to reach Bodie State Historic Park one had to travel 12 miles up a steep, winding rough unpaved road, but as luck would have it, CalTrans had just completed paving the first 9 miles of the road only the day before. However, the last 3 miles of the route to Bodie remained very rough, especially up the steep grade. Finally arriving in Bodie I was greeted by clear blue skies and stunning views of the snow covered Sierra Nevada Range. The old mining town sits in a large bowl at 8500 feet elevation without a tree in sight, being well above timberline at this point. At the height of the mining boom in the 1870's, the town had a population of more than 10,000, making it the 15th largest in California. Today only 150 of the more than 2000 original buildings remain and many have been restored by the State Parks Department to tell the history of the town. I spent a lot of time just walking the old streets and photographing the historic structures which included old hotels, department stores, the Oddfellows Hall, and even a funeral home that was labeled on the map as the morgue. Peering through the windows of many of the buildings I could see furnishings and merchandise still in its original place, as if the residents had left only yesterday,



including an empty casket in the morgue. Of course the dust that has accumulated over the years made the evidence of the passage of time pretty clear. A lot of the old homes were also well preserved and were filled with many personal belongings of the former residents, giving one the impression that somehow they left with the expectation of returning someday, but it was well over 60 years ago when the last residents



departed Bodie. One of the Park Rangers gave a fascinating talk on the history of the town and the mines surrounding it, especially the aspects of daily life in Bodie. One of her stories was about a young girl in the late 1800's, that when told her family would be moving to Bodie declared, "Goodbye God, I'm bound for Bodie". But when the newspaper in Bodie heard this they turned it into a promotion for the town by moving a single comma as they printed her story. What ended up in print read, "Good, by God I'm bound for Bodie". As the sun approached noon I headed back down the road and continued north on highway 395 through the beautiful Walker River Valley with its green pastures and agricultural



fields irrigated from the river. Soon I was back in Nevada just south of Carson City where I discovered the small town of Genoa, which happens to be the oldest town in the state and the site of "Mormon Station" that provided immigrants along the old Mormon Trail a place to rest and restock their supplies before the long trek over the Sierra Nevada. It took awhile to navigate the route of 395 through Carson City and Reno, but eventually I reached the border with California and on toward Susanville.

The route through the rolling hills and valleys of the Plumas National Forest was lovely and serene, with the weather being clear and pleasantly cool. I found a nice place to stay in Susanville at the High Country Inn and dinner at the R-House Bar & Grill where I had a fantastic rack of BBQ pork ribs, broasted potatoes, and steamed fresh vegetables. The next day I drove up through tall stands of beautiful Ponderosa Pine in the Lassen National Forest, past Lake Almanor, to visit Lassen Volcanic National Park where the National Park Service has developed a new Visitor Center that tells the amazing geologic history of the region, which is still an active volcanic area today. There were incredible views of the rugged snow covered peaks from the deck behind the Visitor Center as I sat down to each lunch. Over the next few hours I travelled the narrow



twisting park highway that leads one through the heart of the ancient caldera, the snow covered peaks being the only remnants of its violent past thousands of years ago. The cloudless skies provided a dramatic backdrop for the stunning views of the mountains, valleys, vast snowfields, and ice covered glacial lakes. The road crested just below the summit of 10,500 foot Lassen Peak and in many places the edge of the pavement was only 2 – 3 feet from a sheer drop off of more than 2000 feet, enough to put the fear of heights into most anyone. As I descended the park on the north side through the Lassen

National Forest, mighty Mt Shasta suddenly appeared in the distance, soaring to more than 14,000 feet elevation and capped in a permanent blanket of snow and ice. As I continued north through the rolling countryside of northeastern California and the Modoc National Forest, I passed countless valleys with large irrigated fields and only a few very small towns. Finally, after almost a hundred miles of nothing but forests



and meadows I came to the tiny town of Tulelake on the border with Oregon. Looking at the road map earlier in the day, I had considered the possibility of staying overnight there, but as I entered the town, it was clear there were no accommodations here. The only two places had been closed for some time and by the looks of them even if they had been open, I wouldn't have been inclined to take a room. The only point of interest in the town was the fact that it was home to the Modoc Northern Railroad which is now part of the Union Pacific

system. A few of the old locomotives and railcars were sitting on a siding near the highway, which made for a nice photo op. So I continued north to Klamath Falls, Oregon to spend the night at the Comfort Inn and had a nice steak and lobster dinner at the Sizzler restaurant next door. The following morning, as I stopped at the nearby Shell station to get gas, a grizzled old man in a worn out cowboy outfit came over to pump the gas since the laws in Oregon prohibit any "self serve" stations. I drove south on highway 97 to the California border and then east on route 161 to the Lower Klamath – Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge that encompasses a huge area of wetlands which are a major stop for millions of waterfowl on the Pacific Flyway. After a stop at the new US Fish & Wildlife Service Visitor Center on the shore of Tule Lake I took the auto tour around the edge of the lake with stops at several photo blinds to observe the birds, which included hundreds of large white Pelicans, as well as numerous species of ducks. On the southern





boundary of the refuge is the entrance to Lava Beds National Monument, a vast expanse of lava fields from volcanic eruptions within the past 500 years, which is quite young in geologic time. Just beyond the park entrance is a formation known as "Captain Jack's Stronghold", a large rugged lava field where a group of 60 Modoc warriors held off more than 600 US Army soldiers for 5 months during the Modoc War of 1872-73. The Modoc chief had been given the name Captain Jack by the Army commander who was ordered to move the Modoc people from their native homeland to a reservation in Oklahoma. Further south into the heart of the park is the "Devil's Homestead", an area of very large lava flows from a 1912 – 1917 eruption. The entire park is riddled with hundreds of caves and lava tubes which make for some excellent caving opportunities as well as perfect habitat for a wide variety of bats. After a brief stop at the Visitor Center to check on road conditions, I continued south on US Forest Service road

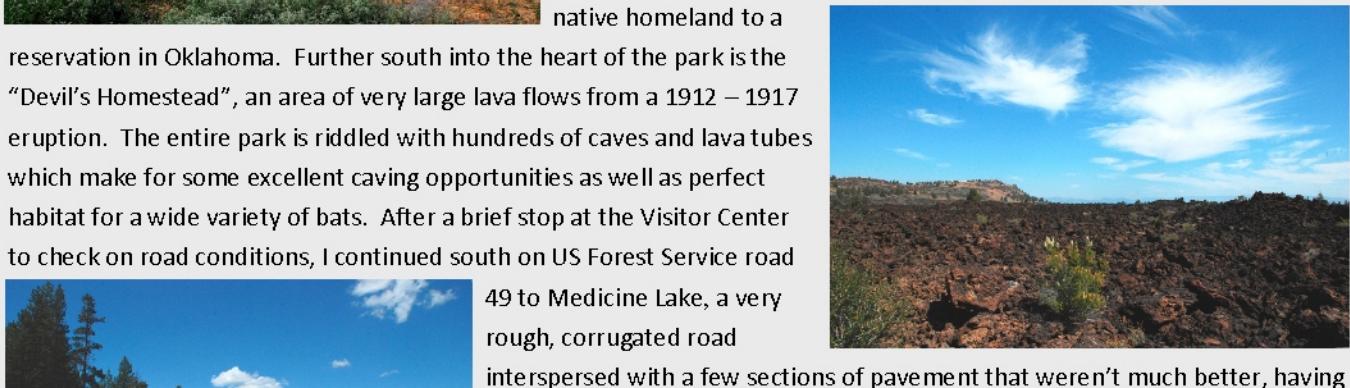


49 to Medicine Lake, a very rough, corrugated road interspersed with a few sections of pavement that weren't much better, having some huge potholes every few yards. Eventually I came to a lovely campground on the shore of the lake with beautiful views of the forested slopes surrounding it. Further south it became a well maintained road that linked up with highway 89 and the route to the small town of McCloud. Here I found some historic old hotels and Inns dating from the early 1900's when the town was a resort destination for many people from Sacramento. It was also home to the McCloud Railway Company that once transported lumber from the surrounding mills to wharves on the Sacramento River for shipment to San Francisco. A few old passenger cars remain on a siding alongside the old depot in the center of town and may be used for an occasional excursion train.

Continuing north on highway 89 around the foot of mighty Mt Shasta I came to the little town named for the mountain. The view of Mt Shasta's snow covered summit has dominated the landscape ever since I left Klamath Falls this morning. At Yreka I turned on to highway 3 heading south and west through the small lumber mill towns of Fort Jones and Callahan, passing Lewiston Lake, formed by a huge dam spanning the Trinity River, now part of the Whiskeytown



Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area. The road up and over the 4000 foot summit above the headwaters of the Trinity River was incredibly steep, narrow, and twisting, with countless 10 – 15 mph curves in a long string of switchbacks. It was if the highway engineers had decided just to pave an old logging road. After the long slow descent to the Trinity River the road leveled out and I arrived in Weaverville in time to find a place to stay for the night. As I drove up Main Street, lined with many historic old buildings from the days when lumber was king, I spotted a faded sign for the "Red Hill Motel and Cabins", the part about the cabins was what intrigued me. The place had a nice large courtyard surrounded by several small cabins, all of which were painted red. I checked into a nice, quiet one bedroom cabin sitting under some tall Ponderosa Pine trees. The little old lady running the place recommended that I have dinner at the "La Grange" restaurant a couple of blocks down Main Street, so I took her



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advice and found it to be in a beautifully restored historic building that once was a general store. The menu was very eclectic and designed around nothing but fresh, local ingredients. I started with the spinach, artichoke, and three cheese dip served with hot crispy sourdough rolls, followed by a main course of fresh trout grilled over a wood fire and topped with a dill cream sauce and capers – really delicious! I walked back to the cabin as the sun was setting and sat outside to enjoy the cool night air beneath the tall Ponderosa Pines – very relaxing after a long day on the road. I spent a quiet night with a soft cool

breeze blowing through the open window, interrupted only once by the sound of leaves rustling and the banging of some tin cans, which could have been a bear foraging. The next morning I continued my journey west on highway 299 following the twisting course of the Trinity River on its way to the ocean. At the Cedar Point Picnic Area alongside the river in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest I hiked down over a field of boulders to the river's edge for a great view of a series of rapids downstream. The cold clear water in the river was spectacular as the sun's rays played with the ripples. Further west the highway passed over several huge bridges as it continued to follow the course of the river. When I saw a sign for the Gray's Falls Picnic Area in the Six Rivers National Forest I decided to stop and hike to the falls, only to discover it was a very steep one and half mile trail down to the river. At this



point the river plunges through a deep narrow canyon, which is why the highway is located high on the steep slope above. But the view of the falls was worth the time and effort, at least that's what I felt once I reached the top of the trail again. As I approached the small town of Willow Creek, the highway turned southwest while the river continued to the northwest, eventually joining up with the Klamath River on its journey to the Pacific Ocean. The road began to climb the slopes of the Coast Mountains on its way to Arcata, and as I neared to the crest, I suddenly found myself enveloped in the clouds being swept in from the ocean. When I reached the

coast the weather had quickly turned from bright warm sunshine to cold fog and mist. I took a short drive north on highway 101 to the small fishing village of Trinidad overlooking a beautiful bay and an old lighthouse on the headlands. Within the bay are many small "sea stacks" shrouded in the mist, making the scene one from a painting rather than reality. I walked along the edge of the cliff above the bay taking photos as the cold ocean breeze surrounded me.



On the way back to Arcata I stopped at Clam Beach County Park to walk along the vast



expanse of sand as the heavy surf pounded the beach. At the far end of the beach a group of riders and their horses were trotting along, playing tag with the surf, and in the heavy mist they looked almost as if from a dream. South of Arcata I drove along the edge of Humboldt Bay to the city of Eureka whose historic district includes some of the finest Victorian

mansions outside of San Francisco. Among the most famous and elaborate is the Carson Mansion which was built by lumber baron William Carson in 1884 and is considered to be the most spectacular of its kind in the country. Also of special



note is the smaller Milton Carson home across the street, a Queen Anne style Victorian home built in 1889 and often called the "Pink Lady" because of its vibrant pink color. The old downtown shopping district has also been faithfully restored and has many fine examples of the Victorian period of architecture. Not far from Eureka is the small town of

Ferndale which is also home to many beautiful examples of classic Victorian architecture lovingly restored. As I continued south on highway 101 I passed several abandoned logging



railroads as the road slowly wound its way through the Coast Mountains. At the town of Pepperwood I turned on to highway 254 that slowly makes its way through Humboldt Redwoods State Park along a route known as the "Avenue of the Giants". The narrow route follows the Eel River and winds past massive 1000 year old Coastal Redwood trees 6 – 8 feet in diameter and over 300 feet tall, making this one of the most spectacular scenic drives in the world. Several times I stopped, got out my

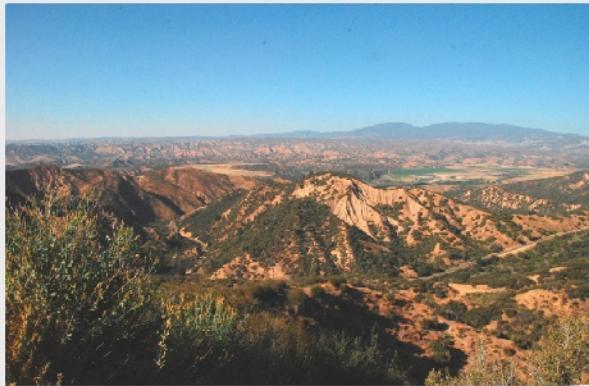
Jeep, and just stood there beside the giants, suddenly feeling so small and insignificant. It's a humbling experience and also one of sheer wonder to be among these ancient trees. Back on highway 101 the route climbed several high ridges before descending into the headwaters of the Russian River and the vineyards of northern Sonoma County. The landscape became one of beautiful rolling grass and forested hills above a valley covered with deep green vineyards, the classic view for which Sonoma is so famous. One of the



most picturesque small towns has to be Geyserville which has many restored Victorian homes surrounded by vineyards and famous wineries. As evening approached I pulled in to the Best Western Wine Country Inn located just off the highway in Santa Rosa and next door to Applebees where I had their signature dish of Fiesta lime chicken served on a bed of wild rice and toasted tortilla chips. Along with a couple of cold Sierra Nevada Pale Ales it made for a delicious dinner. The following morning I took highway 12 east over the hills and into the Napa Valley for a very scenic drive past countless vineyards covering the gentle slopes of the mountains shrouded in clouds. Among the many famous places, I decided to make a stop at the Kenwood Winery where the road was lined with a canopy of beautiful Pepperwood trees, making it an idyllic scene. Further on as I approached Sonoma I encountered heavy traffic bound for the "Gravenstein Apple Festival" going on in the center of town. South of Napa, in order to avoid the Bay Area traffic, I took a route starting with I-80, then to I-780, on to I-680, and finally back on to highway 101 near San Jose, which took me high above the Sacramento River Delta on a monstrous bridge several hundred feet above the water – very impressive with 4 lanes in each direction. On the way to San Jose the route went



through the beautiful grassy hills above Berkeley and below the summit of Mt Diablo, overlooking San Francisco and all of the Bay Area. As I drove south on 101 again, the traffic got rather heavy, until at one point we all came to a screeching halt and then crawled along at 15 mph for several miles. Just about the time I was considering trying to find an alternative route, the bulk of the traffic lined up to take the exit for highway 46, bound for Monterey Bay, after which the traffic on 101 resumed a normal speed. I was sure glad I wasn't going to Monterey Bay today! Soon I was cruising along through the Salinas Valley surrounded by huge expanses of agricultural fields, and smelling the strong odor of garlic as I approached the small town of Gilroy – garlic capitol of the world! Later on I made a short stop in the lovely city of San Luis Obispo and then on past countless vineyards to Paso Robles and the junction with highway 166 toward Maricopa and Bakersfield. In contrast to the expanse of vineyards along 101, highway 166 passed through a landscape of mostly yellow grassy hills dotted with scrub oak trees,



home to remote ranches and farms. The sign at the turnoff from highway 101 warned motorists "No Services for the Next 75 Miles", and that was also the distance to the next town, New Cuyama. It was at this small, lonely town where I turned south on to highway 33 toward Ojai, which was another 60 miles to the next services. So one better plan on filling up the gas tank before driving on either of these routes! Route 33 went due south, up through the steep slopes of the Los Padres Mountains and quickly became a very narrow, twisting, steep road winding its way slowly up to the summit at 5100 feet before plunging headlong down the other side in a series of hairpin curves that could barely be negotiated at any more than 15 – 20 mph. Eventually I reached the old town of Ojai,

having descended more than 4000 feet through the wild and rugged Los Padres National Forest. Coming into Ojai was a delightful scene of beautiful Spanish and California Mission architecture everywhere, but as I drove down the main street, all the places I could see for overnight accommodations were the usual run of the mill tourist motels, none with any character. I took a few photos in the center of the old town and then headed toward Ventura where I was



assured of a decent place to stay. Just on the edge of town I spotted a sign for the "Ojai Valley Inn and Spa", so I made a quick decision to see if they had a room available, knowing that it being a Friday night and after 7:00pm, the answer could very likely be no. But it never hurts to ask. To my surprise and delight, they did have a room available in the original section of the resort, so I grabbed the opportunity to stay for the night. (Later I found out they had been sold out the past two weekends several days in advance, so I was incredibly lucky this night!) I found my room in the original structure of the historic inn that was built in 1923, set on gently rolling hills among huge Oak trees and with beautiful views of the Los Padres Mountains. All of the buildings in the resort complex are designed in the classic Spanish and California Mission style with bright white washed walls and red tile roofs – really a stunning scene. My room was decorated in the style of the 1920's, with beautiful dark hardwood floors and a

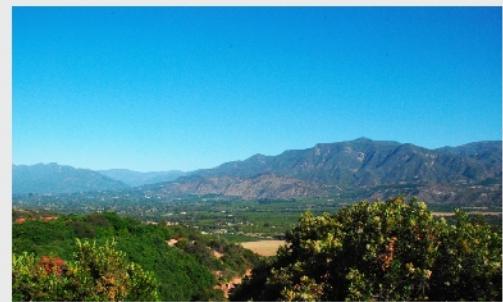




fireplace that made it feel warm and very inviting. The resort complex is extensive, having several restaurants, bars, pools, two golf courses, and a large spa. It was absolutely one of the best places I have ever stayed in the world! For dinner that evening I sat outside on the balcony of the English pub and enjoyed a delicious traditional dish of fish and chips as I watched the sun setting behind the mountains.

Early the next morning I walked around the grounds of the

resort taking beautiful photos before heading east to Santa Paula, on through the Simi Valley with the rugged San Gabriel Mountains in the distance, and back home to Redlands, with a carload of stories and photos of parts of California I had only seen on a map before. This truly is an amazing state and one I have come to enjoy more and more each year.



At the end of August I attended the annual meeting of the Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau Advisory Board, being held in the historic Biltmore Hotel downtown. I decided that rather than driving in the horrendous LA traffic, I would take the train instead. My journey started with boarding the MetroLink train in San Bernardino that took me to Union



Station in Los Angeles where I hopped on the Red Line subway train (yes – LA has a subway system) that took me two stops to the station at Pershing Square. A walk of one block and I was at the Biltmore Hotel, so I can definitely recommend this way of getting downtown. As I entered the historic old hotel, I suddenly found myself in the middle of a Jewish wedding photo shoot in the beautiful Gallery Lobby. Once I had checked in and dropped off my stuff in the room, I headed downstairs to join Jeff in the classic old Gallery Bar for a drink and to catch up on what's been happening in LA. At 4:00pm we joined the rest of the advisory board members in

the hotel lobby to register and pick up our badges before boarding a bus that would take us to the new Rolling Stone Restaurant and Bar, one of many restaurants and shops surrounding the Kodak Theater. At the restaurant we were invited to dine on Maryland crab cakes, Kobe beef sliders, Asian shrimp, and Lobster mac and cheese, not to mention copious quantities of cocktails and wine. I met up with my good friend Debbie and we had a great conversation as we enjoyed the delicious food. After dinner our group made its way to the Kodak Theater where we had great seats for the newest Cirque de Soleil performance titled "Iris". As we were seated we all had the same thought – who had been seated here during the past Academy Awards Ceremony? The performance of Iris was nothing short of spectacular in every respect, with many flying acts that really challenged the ingenuity of the engineers. On one occasion twin brothers were suspended from the ceiling by bungee ropes and as they swung back and forth they seemed to "float" above us, performing very intricate acrobatics together – the audience was literally spellbound! The entire show was a brilliant combination of stunning computer generated visual film effects and amazing live performances. The title of the show, IRIS, refers to the lens of the eye and the lens of the camera, and it tells the story of the history and culture of the film industry in Los Angeles. This was without question the best Cirque de Soleil performance I've ever seen. At the end of the show we were invited to a private session with the show's manager, the artistic director, camera director, and one of the



trapeze performers. It was fascinating to hear about how they all put the show together, as well as the fact that the Kodak Theater will now be home to the show for the next 10 years. Then we all went to the "George Eastman Room" for drinks and sumptuous desserts, catered by Wolfgang Puck. The room was like a small museum for the Academy Awards, with old photos and memorabilia decorating the walls. The room is also serves as the VIP lounge during the evening of the Academy Awards, so I could only imagine who I would be meeting if this evening was during the ceremony. The next morning, our group gathered for a delicious breakfast buffet in the legendary Tiffany Room before beginning our meeting next door in the historic Crystal Ballroom. Soon it was time for lunch and the Biltmore Hotel hosted us for a fantastic meal in the Gold Ballroom, where we dined on herb crusted grilled chicken breast with an heirloom tomato salad and buffalo mozzarella, corn chowder gazpacho, and a very unusual heirloom tomato sorbet for dessert. I sat with Jeff and Javier, the general manager of the JW Marriott Hotel at LA Live, and we had a fascinating conversation about Javier's experiences with famous Hollywood celebrities that frequent his hotel. Following the close of the meeting I met Jeff in the Gallery Bar before we all boarded a bus for the trip to Paramount Studios and a VIP tour of the sound stages and back lots. Hundreds of famous films have



been produced at the studios since the early 1920's, including many classic silent films, as well as all of the Star Trek movies and many of the TV episodes. As our tour guide drove us around the huge complex, we encountered a film in progress on the old New York back lot. Then we entered the theater where films are reviewed for editing by the director, and our guide



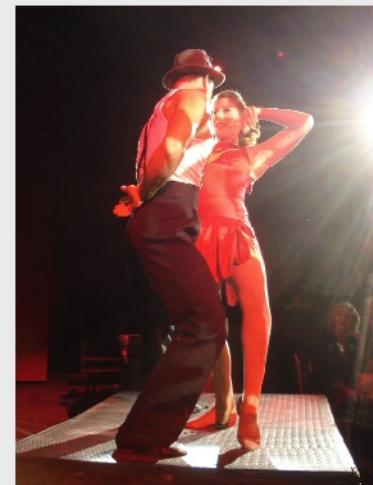
pointed out the seat that is used by Steven Spielberg as he edits his films. We were given the opportunity to sit in his seat! From the theater we walked to Stage 23, and as we entered the large building through the huge steel door, the lights suddenly went out. We were told not to move until they could get the lights back on. Strangely enough, there was a janitor sweeping the floor as we had entered, but none of us gave him a second thought, at least until after the lights went out. A few moments later a spotlight suddenly illuminated a small stage in front of us and a character dressed as a circus ringmaster cracked a large bullwhip to get our attention – and that he did! He proceeded to welcome us to tonight's show, and it was at that point that we all realized we were now in the middle of what would become the stage! People on stilts brought drinks around to us as we watched various clowns and performers entertain us throughout the evening, sometimes only 2 or 3 feet away, which gave us the feeling of being part of their performance. One of the performers was a contortionist who ended her act by squeezing herself into a box no more than two feet square – unbelievable. At one point during the evening all of the performers brought out our tables and chairs and setup everything for dinner, as if the whole process was another performance. As we dined on delicious curried lamb, spicy shrimp balls, and wild mushroom cakes, our ringmaster introduced more unique acts, including one guy who had been walking around among us with only a towel wrapped around his waist. But soon it was his turn on stage and he picked up a can of shaving cream, then he proceeded to put a huge dollop of the stuff on his head and face. Suddenly he started to "sculpt" the shaving cream into the face of the Devil, and a few



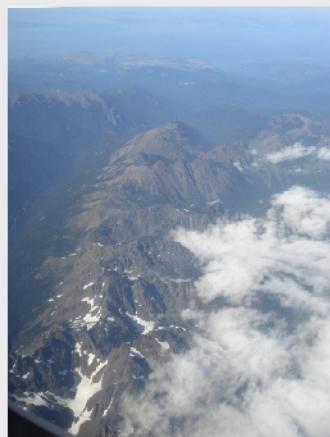


seconds later he became the face of James Cagney, followed by faces of other famous people. A very unique act for sure. As we sat down to a delicious dinner of filet mignon and lobster, a clown came from behind the curtain dragging a wooden tower with a ladder leading up to a small diving board. Then he brought out a small wooden barrel filled with water. We had been cautioned earlier to move our chairs back, so we all expected to see something jump from the diving board into the barrel. The clown returned again pulling a heavy rope with a massive collar attached, but the collar was empty, so we were obviously supposed to imagine a large beast would be climbing the tower to jump into the small barrel. Suddenly the imaginary beast splashed into the barrel and it broke apart, sending a shower of water into the air, immediately after which a small white dog dressed as a miniature elephant jumped out of the barrel and ran behind the curtain as the clown chased after it. We all had a great laugh at that point. But a few seconds later the clown reappeared from behind the curtain with a "real" elephant, and a large one at that!

He proceeded to have the elephant do some tricks for us, like balancing on one foot and standing on its hind legs, all within a few feet of our table. What an amazing surprise! Later on, as we were served dessert, a young couple approached the stage and began dancing a beautiful Tango to the music of Ravel's Bolero. As the music became more complex, they began performing intricate balancing moves that required a great deal of strength and coordination with each other in a beautiful performance. At the end of the evening each of us received a Tarot card that had a photo of our face superimposed on a particular character that was to represent something of our personality. It was a nice souvenir to remember a wonderful and surprising evening. Back at the hotel I decided to have a beer in the Gallery Bar while I wrote in my journal. I ordered a glass of Weinstephaner Hefeweizen, the name of which I had to help the bartender to pronounce correctly. Hopefully he'll remember it the next time someone orders this wonderful beer. Following the close of our meeting the next day, the hotel had prepared a delicious box lunch for us to take on our journey home, which in my case was via the subway and MetroLink train. And thanks to all the LA Inc staff who made this meeting an exceptional one.



At the beginning of September I made my annual journey north to Alaska to visit Marion, Michael, and the boys, both of whom had graduated from high school already! I felt like it was only yesterday when I was buying children's toys for them and now they were becoming young adults – where does time go these days? I had a very pleasant Alaska Airlines flight to Seattle, with beautiful views of Puget Sound, the San Juan Islands, and the Coast Mountains of British Columbia. On the



flight from Seattle we encountered heavy clouds south of Prince Rupert that would extend the rest of the way to Anchorage. Lunch on board the flight from Seattle was a fantastic bowl of tomato bisque along with a delicious Italian salad. We arrived in Anchorage on time, however, the landing was pretty rough in the strong winds, but at least we had partly sunny skies and no rain. I picked up a rental car, which turned out to be a new Jeep Cherokee, and couldn't figure out how to start it with the new key that "plugs in" to the dash. Finally the attendant had to show me how to start the vehicle, and even admitted that it wasn't obvious to anyone else either. As I exited the parking garage on a tight circular drive, I almost ran head on into another car coming up the wrong way on the one way exit! After checking into the Captain Cook Hotel downtown, I headed to Simon and Seaford's Restaurant for one of my favorite dishes, delicious crab and artichoke dip served

with warm, crusty sourdough bread, which went very well a cold glass of Alaskan White Lager. Meanwhile, the cook behind the bar continued to shuck oysters, constantly on the lookout for a pearl, several of which he claimed to have found in the past. My next stop was at the busy F-Street Station, which has the absolute best halibut and chips anywhere on earth, however, even the pretty waitress who served me couldn't coax the recipe from Carlos the cook. I finished the evening at Humpy's Bar listening to a great band and enjoying a cold glass of Alaskan Amber. The bar was very crowded and throughout the evening, guys seated next to me started various conversations, each of which, on reflection, were a bit weird.

There was the young guy from Sandpoint, Idaho who said that Sarah Palin was born there and later attended North Idaho College, something that I couldn't independently verify. A guy from Ireland insisted on buying me a beer and proceeded to comment on a wide variety of topics, none of which interested me - he was pretty cynical about everything. Then there was the young guy who felt that the girl he was planning to marry was

really in love with his brother - Dude, you have some issues to discuss with her before you buy that diamond ring! So went my evening in Anchorage. Saturday morning I started with a wonderful crab omelet before going to the Barnes and Noble bookstore where I found three great books on photography. As I went to pay for them I discovered my driver's license was missing! I spent a couple of hours searching for it, checking with the rental car company and the places I had been the night before, but with no luck. Knowing that I would need some form of photo ID to check in for my return flight in a few days, I called Leslie to have her Fedex my passport to me at the hotel. Later on that day I found out that the earliest it could be delivered would be Tuesday morning, due to no Sunday deliveries and the Labor Day Holiday on Monday. Since I was leaving Alaska on Wednesday morning, I figured that would be OK and headed for the Brown Jug liquor store to buy a bottle of wine for Marion and Michael who I would be seeing for dinner that evening. As I perused the vast selection of wines, I saw an amazing bargain, a Cabernet Sauvignon marked down from \$180 to \$40! How could I pass up such a deal, so I headed for the checkout counter. Standing in the line I suddenly spotted a sign notifying the public that there was a new law in the Municipality of Anchorage which required everyone to present a photo ID when purchasing alcoholic beverages. Needless to say, I had to return the bottle to the shelf and left the store empty handed. Back at the hotel I went down to Fletcher's Bar to have a beer and write up my notes – thankfully the new law did not apply to bars and restaurants. I noticed the guy sitting next to me received a text message and announced to everyone that it was his daughter wishing him a Happy Birthday. Suddenly another guy further down the bar shouted out that it was his birthday tomorrow, and no sooner had he spoken up when the guy on the other side of me said "I can't believe this, it's my birthday on Monday." Well, at that point I stood up and said "this is going to be really weird, but my birthday is on Tuesday!" It turned



out that the four of us had birthdays on September 3, 4, 5, and 6 – now how weird is that? Apparently strange enough for the bartender to buy all of us a round of drinks. Later that evening I joined Marion and Michael for dinner at the Spenard Roadhouse, the new restaurant where Marion now works. Something about the place looked very familiar though the name of the place was new. I found out it was the old "Hog Brothers Café" that had been well known for its huge breakfast dishes. The menu of the Spenard Roadhouse had retained a few of the traditional comfort foods, such as stuffed "Tator Tots" and homemade potato chips, but also added

some more upscale items like hummus and seared Ahi tuna with ginger red pepper sauce, which was an excellent dish. Both Marion and Michael looked great and were more relaxed than the last time I visited. I wasn't able to see the boys this time, as they were working at the Alaska State Fair in Palmer. Michael was looking forward to participating in a relay race

next week that would begin in Whitehorse and end in Skagway, a distance of well over 100 miles through some pretty wild and rugged terrain. He also told me about his new iPad app that has the wine list at the Orso Restaurant and not only with descriptions and ratings of each wine, but also recommendations for pairings with food in the restaurant. I stopped at Orso later that evening and gave the app a test run – really very nice and easy to use. Michael also explained to me the reason for the new law in Anchorage and I was astounded. It seems that if you have more than a certain number of convictions for



DUI, like 5 or 6 of them (believe it or not!), you can still get an Alaskan driver's license but your license will have a big red stripe on it. So now that every store selling alcohol must check IDs, anyone with a big red stripe on their license will not be allowed to purchase any alcohol. That makes sense, but now here is the kicker, there are only about 300 of these red stripe driver's licenses in the entire state of Alaska! Michael also was among those who lobbied to prevent the law from being extended to bars and restaurants, thank goodness! On Sunday morning I had a delicious Crab Benedict for breakfast before heading down to

Alyeska to spend a couple of days enjoying the great outdoors. On the way to Girdwood I stopped at Potter's Marsh for a short hike on the boardwalk to spot some of the many species of waterfowl that are often here on their way south this time of year. The weather had turned cloudy and cold, but the views of the mountains were still spectacular. As I drove south along the shore of Turnagain Arm, a light rain began to fall and by the time I got to Girdwood the rain was falling at a steady rate. I checked into my room at the Alyeska Resort and then headed south on the Seward Highway, bound for the little town of Hope, which is more than 80 miles by road from Anchorage, but less than 10 miles as the crow flies! There were some incredibly beautiful views of the tundra all decked out in brilliant colors of autumn as I drove over Turnagain Pass, in spite of the heavy overcast and rain. Soon I arrived in the tiny town where the views across Turnagain Arm were beautiful as the clouds hung over the rugged peaks of the Chugach Range. I walked around the few streets in town, that are lined with really neat old buildings, some of which are original log structures from the early 1900's when the town was established to support the mines located

in the Kenai Mountains beyond. After taking a lot of photos around town I stopped at the old Seaview Bar for a glass of



Moose's Tooth IPA, as all the locals had fun ribbing each other about having gotten drunk last night on Bud Light! Soon it was time to hit the road back to Girdwood where the rain had gotten heavier now and that did not bode well for spending time in the great outdoors! I started the evening in the bar with a cold glass of Alyeska Ale and a bowl of steamed clams that were perfectly prepared in a delicious broth of garlic and onion. For dinner I chose the Sakura Japanese restaurant where I had a superb order of Hamachi (tuna sushi) followed by an "Alaskan Waters" bento box that included miso soup, small salad, salmon teriyaki, shrimp tempura, King Crab tempura, and vegetable tempura, all accompanied by a large bowl of rice and a cold glass of Sapporo! The young sushi chef was a native of Portland, Oregon who was trained in Salt Lake City, of all places. But he had great skill and perfect presentation, and even though he had no Japanese heritage, he was passionate about sushi. After dinner I managed to catch the last tram up the mountain to the Seven Glaciers Restaurant and Bar to have a glass of 2008 Cloudy Bay Chardonnay and enjoy the view of the lights of Girdwood some



4000 feet below. The bartender said that he was expecting there would be some snow falling here at the upper station later tonight. The next morning I awoke to see heavy rain falling, a bit of fresh snow on the surrounding peaks, and a temperature of 40 degrees – a stark contrast to the 100 degree weather I left in southern California a couple of days ago!

The steady rain continued to fall as I enjoyed a fantastic King Crab Benedict and roasted potatoes for breakfast in the Pond Café.

Following a leisurely breakfast, I grabbed my camera and headed south toward the small coastal town of Seward, but with the heavy rain the normally scenic drive was less than pleasant. Despite the heavy clouds and rain though, the fall colors of the tundra and marshes were still brilliant and spectacular. During the entire trip I made certain not to exceed the posted speed limits, being that I was driving without a valid license. It wasn't hard to stay below the speed limit in such weather conditions however, and I was sure glad I had

been given a 4 WD vehicle from the rental car company. When I arrived in Seward I parked down by the waterfront at the site of the old Alaska Railroad wharf that had been destroyed during the massive 9.2 magnitude earthquake in 1963. Now



all that remains is the old passenger depot that was located well above the wharf and now houses the administrative offices for the Alaska Sea Life Center next door. I spent most of the afternoon in the center with its fascinating and informative displays that include a live display of the life cycle of the five species of salmon found in Alaskan waters.

Strangely enough, scientist's still don't know how the salmon spend their time in the deep ocean environment before they return to spawn in the exact spot where they were born. It's an excellent aquarium and a real treasure in Seward. As I left the Sea Life Center I saw a sign for Cairn's

Head State Park, so I decided to follow it. The road quickly turned into 3 miles of rough gravel that resembled a minefield of deep potholes, before ending at the tiny community of Lowell

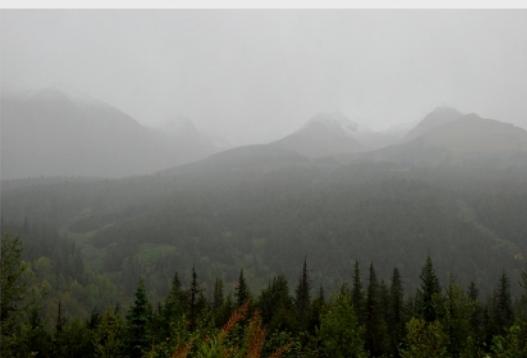
Point, where an old Alaska Railroad passenger coach was sitting on a set of tracks that went nowhere! The State Park was the beginning of an historic gold rush era trail along the rugged coastline of the Kenai Fjords. The drive back to Girdwood was long and arduous with heavy rain and wind, but eventually I arrived back at Alyeska Resort none the worse for wear. That evening I walked through Moose Meadows, all decked out in beautiful shades of orange and red, to have dinner at a local restaurant by the name of "Jack Sprat's". It's rather a funky alpine style house with fabulous food

that is locally sourced and very fresh. I started with a delicious soup of roasted cauliflower and white truffle cream sauce,



followed by a main course of broiled King Salmon filet served with roasted red potatoes and Brussels sprout leaves sautéed with pancetta, accompanied by a glass of "Twisted Creek IPA" from the Denali Brewery in Talkeetna. Really a great place with exceptional food and friendly staff.

Tuesday morning I awoke to the sound of heavy rain pounding on my hotel room window and strong winds blowing the rain near horizontal at times. What a miserable beginning to my birthday! But the smoked salmon, wild mushroom, and cheddar cheese omelet for breakfast made up for it. As I watched the cold heavy rain falling outside, I felt sorry for





the people seated around me who were most likely here for their first time and probably wouldn't be able to see the spectacular scenery that surrounds them before they have to leave. On a clear day one can see seven glaciers from the hotel, as well as the rugged 10,000 foot high peaks of the Chugach Mountains in every direction. But this morning one can barely see more than a few hundred feet. However, by the early afternoon the rain had tapered off and there were even a few small patches of blue sky above, so I decided to hike up the Winner Creek Trail behind the hotel. It was a beautiful trail through dense

temperate rain forest of spruce and fir, with the forest floor covered in a thick, lush deep green carpet of moss and ferns.

The trail climbed up several hundred feet to the Winner Creek Gorge where a tremendous volume of water from the heavy rains rushed through a narrow channel, creating a spectacular roar that could be heard for miles around. A quarter of a mile further on was a hand operated tramway that enabled hikers to cross Crow Creek on their way up to the historic Crow Pass on the route that followed the original Iditarod Trail from Seward to Nome. Showers continued to fall as I made the 5 mile trek back to the hotel, so by this time I was pretty much soaked to the bone, but it felt really good to be out hiking and not sitting around the hotel lobby as most everyone was doing. I drove back to Anchorage, picked up the Fedex shipment with my passport, and then checked into the Millennium Alaska Hotel on the shore of Lake Hood. I still had a few hours in the afternoon to visit the



Alaska Museum downtown where there was a special exhibit sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution, on the culture and history of Alaska Natives. It was an incredible collection of rare native artifacts, tools, and intricate artwork representing each of the seven major tribes, as well as stories and films depicting their daily life – really an amazing and fascinating experience. The majority of the museum is dedicated to an extensive exhibit of Alaska history from the earliest inhabitants that crossed the Bering land bridge 20,000 years ago, through the Russian and European

exploration, and up to the time of the American settlement of the territory. It was well documented and very interesting – something not to be missed in a visit to Anchorage. Back at the hotel I took a walk along the shore of Lake Hood, past the many float planes moored in front of private residences, something unique to Alaska. As the sun was setting over the lake I headed for the Fancy Moose Bar in the hotel where I had toasted sourdough bread topped with loads of King Crab, picante sauce, and melted cheddar cheese – delicious with a cold glass of Alaskan Amber. I was up early the next morning for my 7:00am flight to Seattle and on to California. The flights were very pleasant and I arrived home to find lovely late summer weather. A few days later I got a letter from a company named EasyPark which handles the management of parking meters for the Municipality of Anchorage, stating that I had received a parking ticket on the day I visited the museum. To my great surprise, the company allows visitors to dismiss one ticket by taking a parking quiz on the company's web site. The weird thing is they tell you what are the correct answers before you take the quiz, so there's no way to fail! Now all I needed to do was replace my California driver's license.



At the end of September I took a quick trip to Phoenix, Arizona to attend a PCMA Chapter meeting at the beautiful



Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort and Spa in Chandler. The short one hour flight from Ontario to Phoenix was pleasant, after one of the flight attendants calmed down a frightened two year girl by giving her a special "surprise" gift – worked like a charm. It was clear skies and 100 degrees as we landed, and unfortunately, I soon found myself in the thick of the rush hour traffic as I drove south to Chandler. I checked into the hotel and had a great view of the gorgeous sunset over the Sierra Estrella Mountains from my room on the top floor. The resort is located on the Gila River Indian Reservation and is designed to show the beautiful artwork and

culture of the local Pima and Maricopa tribes. I joined my friend Maryann downstairs in the lobby bar that is built into the rock cliff on which the hotel stands, with tall floor to ceiling windows offering spectacular views of the mountains and Wild Horse Pass to the west. We joined a couple of her local friends that work for the resort and we all enjoyed an excellent dinner in the hotel's "Ko-Sin Restaurant". The meal began with traditional Native American crisp bread for dipping in a spicy guacamole, along with a chilled glass of Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand. For a main course I ordered the Diver scallops seared in Teriyaki sauce and served on a bed of sautéed spinach, smoked bacon, and roasted corn salsa – incredible! We finished dinner by sharing a couple of delicious desserts, a lemon sage pound cake served with vanilla bean ice cream and a New York cheesecake topped with fresh raspberry sauce. After dinner I went up to my room and sat on the balcony to enjoy the warm air and quiet desert night. I awoke early the next morning to a beautiful view of the mountains and Wild Horse Pass reflecting the rays of the rising sun. Then I joined Maryann for coffee before taking a long walk around the resort, following an old channel of the Gila River that had been recently restored to a natural state so that it blends with the rest of the resort landscaping. Since

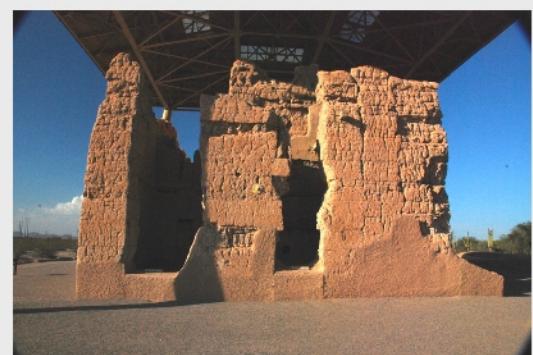


there were still a couple of hours before the start of our meeting, I took a hike along a two mile interpretive trail through the Sonoran desert surrounding the resort, taking photos of the lovely wild flowers in bloom, thanks to the recent storms. The hotel's conference center is filled with many extraordinary works of art and displays of history representing the local Pima and Maricopa native people, beautifully incorporated into the design and décor of the building. Following the meeting I changed clothes, grabbed my camera, and headed south to Casa Grande Ruins National Monument located on the edge of Coolidge. Casa



Grande was the site of the largest ancient civilization in America west of the Mississippi River, with over 30,000 people inhabiting the area from 700AD – 1100AD! They were known as the Hohokam people and are believed to be the direct ancestors of the present day Pima and Maricopa tribes. The Hohokam developed a very sophisticated system of canals to channel water from the Gila River to their extensive agricultural fields. While most of the structures have long disappeared, a few massive adobe buildings still remain, protected by the National Park Service.

Archaeological excavations are still underway and continuing to discover new aspects of the Hohokam civilization, including a solar calendar they built over 1200 years ago to mark the exact dates of the Vernal and Autumnal Equinoxes. Although the site is not large by national monument standards, it is very interesting and a surprise to find so close to a major metropolitan area like Phoenix. Back at the hotel I ran into Sylvia and we shared a



drink at the pool bar as the sun was setting behind the mountains. Later I took the shuttle bus to the Wild Horse Pass Casino and found an excellent Asian restaurant by the name of "Ling and Louie's", which was very crowded with over an hour wait for a table. But there was a single seat open at the bar so I grabbed it right away. I started dinner with a cold glass of Kirin and a tasty order of crab wontons. Then for a main dish I had the Firecracker Chicken which was quite spicy, but superb, especially along with another cold glass of Kirin. After dinner I "donated" \$10.00 to one of the slot machines before catching the shuttle back to the hotel, where I sat on my balcony enjoying the cool desert night. The following morning, Sylvia and I headed to the airport for our return flights home. As I checked in for my US Airways flight to Ontario I was given an upgrade to First Class, always a nice way to travel.



The second week of October saw me on the road again to attend the IMEX America conference in Las Vegas. Rather than taking the plane I decided to drive, which would give me an opportunity to explore some new country on my own. As a guest of PCMA I was given a beautiful suite in the Palazzo Hotel, overlooking the mountains to the north of the city. As I entered the Sands Expo Center I was overwhelmed by the sight of several hundred large tradeshow booths representing destinations from all over the world, as well as companies offering conference services. During the course of the next two days I had appointments with representatives from Dubai,

Argentina, Scotland, and New Zealand, all places where our company would be holding events next year. I picked up a lot of useful information to take back to the office. While I was sipping a dram of whiskey with the folks from Scotland talking about their new convention center in Glasgow, I mentioned my old friend from travels in Africa, John Porter, and the fact that he has lived at the same address in Glasgow since 1975. Lo and behold, both of the folks from Glasgow knew exactly where he lived and the names of the pubs in his neighborhood. After the tradeshow closed for the evening I was invited to a reception in the Aquanox Bar, sponsored by the Sands Expo Group. As we enjoyed the drinks and appetizers, a very strange stilt walker wound her way through the bar, dressed in blue chiffon and covered in tiny blue lights. She had three face masks and moved very slowly like a giant spider, which was a bit eerie, while at the same time totally fascinating. I was invited to join the rest of the PCMA group at Wolfgang Puck's restaurant for a dinner sponsored by Singapore Tourism Authority. The combination of the filet mignon and fresh giant Asian prawns was wonderful. After dinner I sat on the patio of the



Lavo Bar and watched the Pirates of the Caribbean show going on at the Treasure Island Resort across the street. The next day the conference began with a fantastic keynote speaker from Australia who had many words of wisdom for balancing life at home and work. During the afternoon I strolled through the shopping area of the Palazzo and Venetian Hotels alongside canals with gondoliers singing Italian opera. Together with the beautiful facades and famous shops I could have easily been walking the streets of Venice, except that all of this was under a roof painted to look like a





summer sky – very impressive indeed. As evening came, our PCMA group enjoyed a wonderful reception with delicious gorgonzola penne pasta, roasted pork sliders, and spicy shrimp skewers, along with chilled glasses of champagne. Then we boarded a small bus that took us to the Coliseum at Caesar's Palace where we had seats for the Elton John concert. The staging for his performance was beautiful and the acoustics were superb as he thrilled us with many of his greatest hits over the past 40 years. His percussionist was one of the most incredible musicians I've seen, as he brought the drums, cymbals, and bells to life before our eyes. Elton was very engaging throughout the evening, approaching the edge of the stage many times to be close to the audience and acknowledge their applause, never once taking a break during the 3 hour concert. At one point he made a very emotional tribute to the late Elizabeth Taylor and her unending support for AIDS victims, especially when such support was not considered politically correct. It was

a fantastic performance and one I shall remember for a long time. As the concert ended I spent some time walking along Las Vegas Boulevard taking photos of the spectacular lights of the casinos and resorts. Following the closing session of the conference I drove east to Boulder City where I hiked a few miles on the historic Hoover Dam Railroad Trail that marks the route of the railroad built in 1931 to transport the construction materials for the dam. What make this trail particularly unique are the four huge tunnels

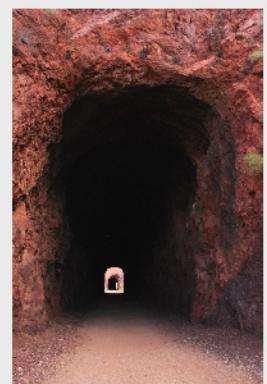


that were blasted through the mountains to reach the top of the dam. The tunnels had to be very high and wide in order to move the huge penstocks and giant turbines that would produce the electricity. The railroad was dismantled in 1962 and became part of the Lake Mead National Recreation Area shortly after. Today there are beautiful views of the lake and surrounding mountains from almost any point on the trail – very scenic. I drove across the new steel arch bridge that now spans the

deep canyon of the Colorado River just below the dam, and continued south on highway 93 to Kingman, then southwest over the mountains and down 12 miles of a steep 6% grade to Bullhead City, across the river from Laughlin, Nevada. From the Arizona shore is an incredible view of the bright lights of many tall high rise hotels and casinos, in stark contrast to the small town of Bullhead City where the tallest building is no more than two stories. As I drove through the small town I spotted the "Lodge on the River", a small family owned motel on the edge of the river, where I had a two room suite with a large patio that overlooked the river – very quiet and peaceful. By now the sun had set, though the temperature was still 98 degrees, and I was looking for a place to eat. Not far from the motel was "Mad Dog's Bar and



Grill", a very local establishment that had the appearance of a typical biker bar, but once inside it was a lively and friendly atmosphere and I was made to feel at home. The bar had at least 10 flat screens with several sporting events playing, only one of which had sound, so as not to confuse people watching the other games. In the corner sat an old B&W TV that had seen much better days. I had a great hamburger and 3 glasses of Fat Tyre Pale Ale as I joined the locals in watching the game between the University of Arizona and UCLA. As I prepared to call it a night, I looked at the bill and saw it was a total of \$15.24. Thinking the



waitress must have made a mistake I called it to her attention, but she assured me it was correct, since the beers were only \$2.00 a glass. That's a lot less expensive than the \$9.00 beers at the Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas! I spent the rest of the evening sitting on my Patio and gazing upon the river, illuminated under a full moon – very peaceful and relaxing. The following day I drove back home by way of Needles, and as I crossed over the Colorado River again I passed huge fields of cotton being harvested and bundled into monster bales stacked beside the highway. Rather than taking Interstate 40 I decided to follow old Route 66 across the Mojave Desert through the small, mostly abandoned towns that once were the lifeline of the old road. In the town of Amboy, on the mainline of the BNSF Railroad, was Joe's Café, once a major stop for Route 66 travelers. But today, with the faded sign out front and dusty interior that no longer serves food, it's a sad shadow of its former glory. Once it closes there will no longer be any reason for stopping in Amboy. However, the railroad continues run through the town on a regular basis, never needing to stop.



At the end of October, Leslie and I had tickets to a concert of Celtic music by Orla Fallon on the campus of Pepperdine University in Malibu. Not wanting to be caught in rush hour traffic late in the afternoon, we left home just after lunchtime and were in Malibu by 3:30pm. The route from Santa Monica took us north on the Pacific Coast Highway with beautiful views of the ocean, beaches, and mountains as the highway weaved its way along the shore. I had reserved a couple of rooms at the Malibu Country Inn overlooking Zuma Beach and about 10 minute drive from the university. The inn had recently undergone an extensive renovation and our garden

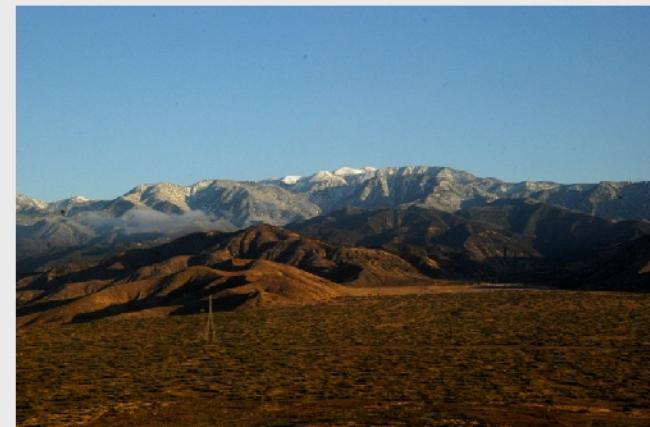
view rooms were small, but well appointed, along with a private patio overlooking the rose garden. As we had several hours before the start of the concert, and it was a gorgeous sunny day, I grabbed my camera and walked down to Zuma Beach. As I walked along the beach, large 6 – 8 foot waves crashed with a roar of thunder and a few surfers were taking advantage of them. Behind the beach, cliffs rose up more than 200 feet, crowned with expensive mansions. I walked along the edge of the surf for quite some distance and only passed 3 or 4 people, so it was very relaxing to sort of have the whole area to myself. Later I joined Leslie on the deck of Kristy's Restaurant, overlooking the Santa Monica Mountains and the Pacific Ocean, for a glass of wine and a delicious appetizer of wild mushrooms and risotto, served with a fantastic aioli. Then we went inside for dinner as the sun slowly set behind us. I ordered the chef's special, a perfectly sautéed Red Snapper served over a bed of risotto, a port wine sauce with Porchini mushrooms, sweet baby onions, and steamed Brussels sprout leaves. It was an exceptional dish by any standard. Leslie had a delicious wood fired pizza with prosciutto and herbs, which was complimented very well by the crisp glass of Flora Springs Chardonnay from St Helena vineyards. Chef recommended we try the homemade coconut cake, which was luscious and yet light, an excellent finish to a great dinner. Soon it was time to leave for the concert being held in the Smothers Theater on the Pepperdine University campus. A small band called "Tin Cup Gypsy" accompanied Orla on a great many old Celtic songs, which was quite unusual since all the band members are from Nashville and have strong southern accents. We enjoyed the beautiful performance from our seats in the center of row 4,



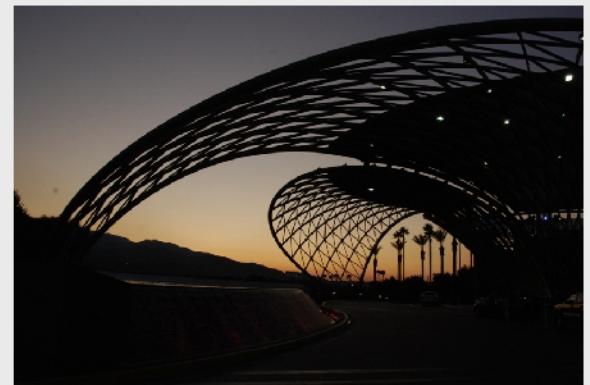
courtesy of KCET Public Television. After the concert we joined the rest of the KCET group to meet Orla in the nearby art museum. She's a very gracious woman who greeted every one of us individually and made us feel as if we were old friends. When I spoke with her I told her that she sounded just Loretta Lynn when she sang "The Tennessee Waltz", and she was most appreciative of my compliment because she felt that so much of American country music had its root in Ireland and Scotland. Back at the Malibu Country Inn I sat in front of the small fireplace in my room and listened to some music before retiring for the night. The next day Leslie and I enjoyed a sumptuous breakfast at the legendary Paradise Cove Beach Café where we sat outside on the beach, warmed by the sun. I ordered a crab Benedict served on a Portobello mushroom that was an outstanding variation on the traditional dish. Soon it was time to head home, as many folks began arriving in Malibu for the weekend.



At the beginning of November I attended the Board of Directors Retreat for our Southwest and Pacific Chapter of PCMA. The meeting was hosted by the Morongo Casino and Resort located not far from Redlands on the route to Palm Springs. I had passed the casino many times, but never actually stopped, so this would be an opportunity to experience the new hotel property. The Casino and Resort provided us with complimentary hotel rooms and meals, as well as the use of their spa. My suite on the 23rd floor overlooking the 11,000 foot San Bernardino Mountains was beautiful and very comfortable. The resort provided a very nice afternoon break for our board meeting by bringing in a table of delicious Haagen Daz ice cream with all the toppings, thanks to our host Carlos. Following the meeting we all met for cocktails in the Vista Bar on top of the hotel with a spectacular view of the San Bernardino Mountains on one side and the San Jacinto Mountains on the other as the hotel is situated atop the San Gorgonio Pass. Then we sat down to dinner in the Ceilo Restaurant next door, and no sooner were we seated than a bright flash of lightning and strong bolt of thunder shook the building, much to our great surprise. Over the next couple of hours, several more strong thunderstorms rolled through San Gorgonio Pass. The Executive Chef had created a special menu for our dinner that started with a warm bowl of smoked tomato soup with black olive tapenade and curry oil, followed by a choice of roasted Pacific Salmon, Filet Mignon, or Carbonara for a main course. The fresh mixed berry tart and flourless chocolate cake for dessert rounded out an excellent dinner, accompanied by a couple of very nice wines from Montalena Vineyards. If there were any complaint with the hotel it's the fact that one must walk through the casino, with its crowd of smokers, to access the elevators. But overall, the hotel and resort are excellent. The next morning I awoke to a beautiful view of the San Bernardino Mountains covered in a fresh blanket of snow from the storms last night. The hotel provided us with a delicious breakfast that included eggs Benedict, omelets made to order, and waffles with maple syrup before we began our second day of the Board Retreat. Following a short break we closed our meeting and headed to the 26th floor where we were guests of the hotel for a private lunch in a room surrounded by panoramic views of the snow capped mountains. Lunch began with a fresh green salad over a polenta cake, then a beautiful plate of petite filet mignon on a Portobello mushroom accompanied by grilled shrimp, followed by



New York cheesecake topped with fresh raspberries, blackberries and strawberries – a superb meal. After lunch I grabbed my camera and walked around the hotel property taking photos, now with a spectacular background of snow capped mountains. As a treat from the hotel we were each given an appointment at the spa, so I chose a facial treatment, and for the next hour I was pampered by one of the spa therapists, also a licensed masseuse, so she gave me a neck and shoulder massage as well. All this was taking place in a room with soft music and low lights, so by the end of the facial I was a bowl of jelly. I spent another night at the hotel before returning home, and I can highly recommend the Morongo Resort and Spa.



In mid-November I was invited to an event at the historic Hotel del Coronado in San Diego. I arrived at the hotel, in time to join the welcome reception in the rose garden courtyard where two hairy guys in drag and a lovely Marilyn Monroe look-a-like welcomed us. Later I discovered they were representing the characters from the 1959 film "Some Like It Hot" that was shot on location at the hotel. The two guys in drag were supposed to be Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon, while the lovely Marilyn Monroe was of course herself. One area of the hotel lobby was dedicated to a fascinating display of photos from the making of the film. The hotel opened in 1888 as the largest resort hotel in the world and remains today as one of the largest wooden structures in the country. It is one of the few surviving examples of an American architectural genre, the wooden Victorian beach resort, and is designated a National Historic Landmark. On top of that, it is four diamond property that continues to host presidents, royalty, and of course, Hollywood celebrities. Following the reception we strolled into the ballroom where we found ourselves seated with a drum at each chair, and for the next hour, three young people from South Africa lead us in a team building exercise focused on drumming to various Zulu tribal rhythms. It turned out to be a really fun time for everyone. After a short coffee break we listened to a very inspirational presentation by an anthropologist who has spent his life exploring most of the world's native cultures through living among the people. His experiences in Tibet among the Buddhist monks were incredible and inspiring, as were his failed attempts to climb Mt Fitzroy, a spectacular 11,000 foot peak in the southern Andes Mountains of Patagonia. The peak remains one of the most



technically challenging climbs in the world, with the first ascent being in 1952, and only a handful of successful attempts since then. The speaker was an amazing man with a very positive message and a strong belief in humanity. In addition, his photographs were stunning and beautiful, especially those from Mongolia and the Himalayas. That evening we all headed for the beach where the hotel had set up a number of food stations, bars, tables, and chairs on the sand for dinner under a full moon and waves crashing behind us. In the background a small band played all of the old Beach Boys hits, which added to the feeling of a





beach party. The view from the beach of the old hotel lighted for the holidays was gorgeous, as we dined on delicious BBQ short rib served over creamy polenta, grilled Asian shrimp, and seared scallops served with a fresh, spicy guacamole salsa. After dinner I retired to one of the deck chairs that had been placed around the fire pits, which provided a perfect place to relax in the chill night air as the sound of the waves a few yards away soothed the stress of the day. Soon I was joined by folks who began toasting marshmallows and making smores. The scene was like one from summer camp and we all enjoyed each other's company around the fire. Following a very nice breakfast buffet the next morning, I made my way home, having enjoyed a short but wonderful time at "The Del", as the old hotel is affectionately known by the locals.

The next week I heard a report that the Union Pacific Railroad had a steam locomotive excursion train making a tour of the Southwest, and the schedule included an overnight stop in Barstow on Saturday. But this was no ordinary locomotive, it was one of the two largest steam locomotives in the world still in operating condition. It was the UP 844, a 4-8-4 engine built in 1942 by the Baldwin Locomotive Works. It didn't take much for me to make the decision to drive to Barstow and photograph the enormous piece of history, so I booked a room at the Comfort Suites Hotel. I arrived in Barstow late in the afternoon and followed the signs for the historic Harvey House located on the edge of the vast BNSF Railroad yard where 30 – 40 freight trains roll through every day headed east to Chicago or west to Los Angeles. One of the huge freight trains pulling out of the yard had 110 tank cars, with five locomotives in front and two in the rear. The Harvey House was a large depot with a hotel and restaurant that once served as a major stop for passenger trains between Chicago and Los Angeles. Today it is a National Historic Landmark and houses the Western Railroad Museum, but the museum was closed for a private wedding party. I took photos of the historic old building that was designed in the California Mission Style and watched some of the mile long freight trains passing through the yard, before heading back to the hotel. For dinner that night I joined the locals at a nearby bar for a huge burger with applewood smoked bacon and a cold glass of Budweiser, while watching Saturday night football. The next morning began with scrambled eggs and bacon at the hotel before venturing out into the cold wind and heading to the railroad siding at Yermo where the UP 844 was being coaled and watered for the trip to Las Vegas. There was a small crowd of train buffs taking photos and videos as the huge locomotive sat on the siding, hissing and puffing, before backing out of the yard on to the main line of the Union Pacific. I got some nice photos and a video of the 844 as she steamed past me on her way out of the yard.



Along with a lot of other folks, I drove north on Interstate 15 catching glimpses of the steam train in the distance, white smoke and clouds of steam billowing high above. There was no way anyone could mistake her for an ordinary train. Eventually the train disappeared over the ridge and out of sight from the highway, but I continued on to the small town of Baker where I turned on to the road going south toward Kelso, an old railroad town where Union Pacific steam locomotives used to be serviced as they crossed the barren landscape of the Mojave Desert. The population of Kelso declined quickly after the introduction of the diesel locomotives,

but the historic depot remained and has become the headquarters for the Mojave National Preserve, as well as their new Visitor Center. The old depot was once a Harvey House that provided hotel accommodations and a restaurant for passengers travelling on the Union Pacific passenger trains between Chicago and Los Angeles, the most famous of which was the luxury train named the Overland Limited. The National Park Service has faithfully preserved the old depot and added wonderful displays and exhibits of the natural and cultural history of the region. I arrived in Kelso just as the 844 pulled into the depot where a large crowd was on hand to photograph and record the event. The locomotive was scheduled for a 30 minute service stop, but due to a heavy freight that stalled on the Cima Summit several miles north of Kelso, the service stop turned out to be several hours, during which time, the "Beanery" café in the old depot did a land office business in hot dogs, hamburgers, and coffee. It looked like the old days of the Harvey House had returned, if only for a few hours. The extended stop gave me time to see the National Park Service



displays and take photos of the depot. Finally the steam locomotive blew her whistle three times and slowly rolled out of Kelso on her way to Las Vegas. Shortly afterwards the mile long freight train that had been stalled up the line made its way past the old depot. Leaving Kelso I drove south through the heart of the preserve, stopping briefly at the huge Kelso Dunes that were formed over 25,000 years ago and reach heights over 700 feet. The drive through the Mojave Desert was beautiful in the late afternoon, but going over Cajon Pass that evening in heavy rain and fog, together with the heavy traffic returning from a weekend in Las Vegas, was not fun. I was glad to get home that night.

December began with a PCMA Chapter meeting in Anaheim, being hosted by the Disney Institute. Robert was a most gracious host in providing complimentary rooms at the Grand Californian Hotel for the Board of Directors. The hotel is a magnificent example of what might be called National Park lodge design, especially when one sits in front of the massive stone fireplace that dominates the large lobby with its huge wooden beams reaching four stories high. Another beautiful architectural feature of the hotel is the gorgeous inlaid marble floors that are intricate patterns of flowers in brilliant spring and fall colors. Being surrounded by the massive wood and stone one can easily forget the hotel is located in the largest metropolitan area



of the country. In addition, the entire hotel property is beautifully decorated for Christmas. That evening I joined a couple of fellow board members for dinner in the hotel's Napa Rose Restaurant for an exceptional dish of seared Diver scallops served with a Port wine reduction and accompanied by a chilled glass of 2010 Schweiger Vineyards Sauvignon Blanc. It's definitely five stars in every respect. Walking around the hotel, it was very apparent that I was among a very small minority of guests who did not have at least one or more small children in strollers. Perhaps Disney should consider renting children



for a day. The following morning we enjoyed a lovely breakfast buffet that featured breakfast burritos, waffles, and hot cinnamon rolls, before sitting down to our board meeting. Our chapter lunch program featured a behind the scenes tour of DisneyLand and California Adventure Park, lead by staff of the Disney Institute. It was really a very interesting look at some aspects of the parks that most people would never think about, even if they had been to the park on many occasions.

During the hour long tour we learned about the incredible attention to detail in literally everything that Disney does, including even making the trash containers attractive, easy to use, and unique to each area of the park. Another unique detail that our tour guide pointed out to us was the names of some important Disney staff that appear in the second story windows along Main Street USA, such as "McQueen's Bait Shop".

At the conclusion of our tour we had lunch at the Wine Country Trattoria in the California Adventure Park. The fresh grilled Halibut was absolutely some of the best I've had, and I've eaten a lot of Halibut in my time. After lunch I stayed in the park, courtesy of Robert, to take photographs of the amazing holiday decorations and some of the new attractions. Later that evening as I walked through the hotel toward Downtown Disney, I passed a small group of carolers singing old Christmas carols that made one feel much more in the mood for the upcoming holidays.



And speaking of the holidays, my sister Lynn will be making the trek to the west coast this year to spend Christmas at our house. Unfortunately it's highly unlikely it will be a white Christmas in Redlands, but all we'll need to do is drive up into the mountains and within 30 minutes it will be a white Christmas – such is the uniqueness of southern California in winter. So once again, I want to wish everyone the very best for the holidays and a peaceful, prosperous New Year!

