

CHRISTMAS 2012



Once again 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 a trip overseas. As always, there are many stories to tell and I am looking forward to sharing them with you.



Last year I invited my sister Lynn to spend Christmas with us here in southern California, rather than fight the ice and snow back in Illinois. While Lynn was here we took a couple of overnight trips around southern California, first to Palm Springs to visit Palm Canyon at the foot of the Santa Rosa Mountains where we walked among the tallest Fan Palm trees in the world. Then in the afternoon we took the world's longest tramway up to San Jacinto State Park to play in the snow among the giant Ponderosa Pines, and gaze down at the desert 7,000 feet below as the sun set over the San Bernardino Mountains to the west. On Christmas Day we opened

gifts and shared a lovely traditional turkey dinner at home. Before Lynn returned home to Illinois we spent a day taking in the amazing sights of the San Diego Wild Animal Park. The Lions and Cheetahs were especially popular with everyone and it was so nice to walk around the grounds under warm sunny skies. Again this Christmas, Lynn will be joining Leslie and me here in California and I have planned a couple of trips to the beach and the mountains.



During the first week of January I attended the annual meeting of the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) which was held in San Diego. Our local chapter organized a dinner at the Hilton Bayfront Hotel to honor one of the industry's leading advocates



and it was a smashing success. I was asked to take photos of the event and later even had one published in one of the convention management trade magazines. During the award ceremony, our chapter President handed a large donation to Father Joe for his Catholic charity, and as he accepted the check he raised himself from his wheelchair and shouted *"God be praised, I can walk again"*, which brought down the house with laughter! The next morning I took a long walk in the thick fog along the waterfront and browsed through the shops in Seaport Village. That afternoon, under sunny skies and 70 degree weather, I joined a small group for a harbor cruise hosted by the San Antonio Convention and Visitors Bureau. We had many spectacular views of San Diego Bay, the city skyline, and the mountains beyond, all while enjoying

cocktails and appetizers aboard the ship. There were also plenty of seals and sea lions enjoying the beautiful weather as well. Once back on shore I made my way to the "Anthology Bar" for *Game Day* being hosted by the Starwood corporation. Two huge high definition TV screens were showing the game between Pittsburg and Denver while we all enjoyed loads of food and drink. After a couple of hours I headed back downtown to the Manchester Grand Hyatt Hotel to help setup for our PCMA Southwest and Pacific Chapter Reception. As we all enjoyed cocktails and hors d'oeuvres in the America's Cup ballroom, we had a stunning view of the sunset over San Diego Bay from the pool terrace. Later that evening was the PCMA Opening Reception in the Grand Ballroom upstairs where I discovered some very talented musicians playing some incredibly unique stringed instruments. The sounds were almost ethereal and could have been from another world. The ballroom was beautifully decorated with lots



of flowers, ceramics, and lights of many colors. As always at PCMA receptions, there were massive amounts of great food and drink. Following the Opening Reception I was invited to the very elegant "Side Bar" downtown to join the New York City reception where they were serving some delicious mushroom and bacon risotto on crusted parmesan cheese, along with mini chicken pot pies. To round out the night I went to a reception at the San Diego Wine and Culinary Center being hosted by PSAV where wine tastings were being offered, as well as more hors d'oeuvres. At the end of the evening, my friend Lora insisted upon giving me an expensive bottle of Pinot Noir from Oregon – thanks Lora! The next morning was the opening general session with two very interesting presentations, the first being titled "Reality is Broken", in which the speaker talked about gaming and how to harness its positive effects in managing a large event. He presented a fascinating case study about 500 people, who in one night, collaborated to write a book about changing history as they all explored the New York Public Library. The second presentation was on the topic of "fascination" and how one can leverage its power in managing a team. Throughout the general session there were servers walking around dispensing coffee from huge thermos bottles strapped to their back – pretty unique and certainly convenient for the attendees. Following the luncheon was the presentation of the PCMA annual awards, which were presented this year by Joan Rivers, Elton John, Liza Minnelli, Charlie Sheen, and Ellen Degeneres, or so it seemed. The two celebrity impersonators were terrific! Later on in the afternoon I joined Jeff and Michael at McCormick and Schmick's for a beer at the very crowded bar before heading over to the Andaz Hotel for dinner with my friend Ed Smith. The dinner being hosted by Hyatt Hotels was on the rooftop terrace overlooking the lights of downtown and San Diego Bay, making it a beautiful setting for the evening. Before dinner a few of us took a short tour of the hotel which had been the Ivy Hotel and was recently renovated by Hyatt corporation. One of the many suites had a huge walk-in shower with glass on three sides – definitely no illusion of privacy. As we were about to exit the room, Brian discovered the "luxury items" on top of the mini-bar, which consisted of some



fancy condoms and a small vibrator, batteries included! The menu for dinner was outstanding with the main course of fresh sea bass grilled over mesquite charcoal and served with a tasty chipotle sauce. After dinner we all boarded a bus that took us to the Midway aircraft carrier where the PCMA Party with a Purpose had just started. The main event was in the massive hanger deck with several bars and food stations placed among the many historic aircraft that once called the Midway home. I also joined a tour of the ship being conducted by a sailor who had served aboard the Midway and his personal stories were absolutely fascinating. Once I was topside on the huge flight deck there were incredible views of the downtown lights and the reflection of a full moon over San Diego Bay. I found a nice seat and sat back to enjoy the evening – really a very unique venue for a party! Luncheon the next day was

hosted by the Mexico Tourism Board and featured several food stations preparing and serving food typical of four different regions of the country. The fish tacos were excellent and one of the most popular dishes as a Mariachi band serenaded us. Following the afternoon sessions I joined the San Antonio folks for a margarita in their booth before meeting up with Tom Blaine for a beer at Redfields bar to catch up on his shows since our user conference last summer. Then it was time to head to the International Reception being held in the San Diego Wine and Culinary Center, hosted by the Tourism Board of Scotland. They had chosen the theme of "Drams and Clans" to spotlight their famous whiskies and ancient family history, complete with whiskey from many premier Scottish distilleries and food typical of the highlands. Outside in front of the center was a piper in full dress uniform playing old Scottish tunes on the bagpipe, which really gave the evening a true feeling of being transported to Scotland. I had the chance to meet up with the folks from the Glasgow Conference Centre that I had met at a tradeshow in Las Vegas a couple of months earlier. It was their first time to visit southern California and they were in love with the beautiful weather. Leaving the International Reception I made my way up 5th avenue to the PCMA Networking Reception which had taken over several blocks of the Gaslamp District where all of the restaurants and bars were serving food and drink outside on the street amidst several musical stages. Ed Smith and I stopped at the Masala Indian Restaurant where he knows the owners to sample their delicious north Indian dishes of Chicken Tikka and spicy Samosas, washed down with an ice cold Kingfisher beer. Just up the street from the restaurant was a beautiful young woman with a large Boa Constrictor draped around her neck, posing for photos with people. Further along the street, "Kool and the Gang" were starting their performance to a large crowd. At that point I bid farewell to Ed and walked back down the street to "Lou and Mickey's" for dinner with Lora and some of her colleagues from PSAV. Dinner





started with a fabulous dish of crab cakes, followed by delicious steaks that the restaurant is well known for, all while sitting outside on the patio. Jess and Augie chose some excellent wines to accompany the dinner and we all finished the meal with a round of Courvoisier cognac and espresso, just as a mile long BNSF freight train slowly rolled by a few yards away. The PSAV folks insisted upon going to a new nightclub on 4th avenue called "Fluxx". It was very trendy, very techno, very loud, and very crowded! I stayed for one beer and then moved on to one of my favorite night spots in San Diego, a small bar named Patrick's where a band was playing tributes to the Yardbirds, and performing quite well at that. During the final general session one of the speakers told a very funny story about the teacher of a 2nd grade class. It went something like this. She asked each student

to think about what they wanted to be when they grew up and then write it down on a piece of paper. The first little boy wrote "fireman" and the teacher said "that's a noble profession". Next a little girl wrote "doctor", to which the teacher asked her why. The little girl responded "because my mother is a doctor". Finally the teacher read what another little girl had written and it was simply the word "happy". The teacher said "I think you must have misunderstood the assignment", to which the girl replied "I think you misunderstand life"!! (simply brilliant) As the conference came to a close, another show was setting up in the Convention Center, the "DQ Expo – Where Good is not Good Enough". I decided to stay over one more night and had a fabulous dinner back at Masala Indian Restaurant where I ordered the "Bombay Sampler" that was a combination of Chicken Tikka, spicy lamb rolls, Samosa, and fried green beans in a green pepper sauce. The cold glass of Kingfisher beer made the meal a memorable one. Next year the PCMA annual meeting will be in Orlando and I'm sure it will be another fantastic event.

A week later, Leslie and I were invited to the "Winterfest" in Temecula, hosted by the Temecula Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau, to tour the wine country and sample some local restaurants. We checked into a beautiful room overlooking the golf course at the rustic Temecula Creek Inn. As I stepped out on the balcony I saw hundreds of ducks and geese grazing on the course, which I'm sure doesn't help one's golf game. As the sun began to set I walked around the property taking photos before we joined the group for a visit to the Monte de Oro winery which sits on the crest of a hill overlooking the Temecula Valley. As we entered the large tasting room I noticed a section of glass floor looking down into the barrel room



below. A singer/songwriter from Canada played mellow music on his acoustic guitar as we savored some delicious appetizers and a fabulous dish of roasted salmon served on a bed of risotto and roasted asparagus, accompanied by a reduction of Chardonnay wine, butter, and cream. Later on, in the barrel room downstairs, we sampled some great wines from the vineyard as the winemaker described them to us. Dessert was also served in the barrel room by a local pastry shop that specializes in baking miniature bundt cakes in exotic flavors such as red velvet, lemon curd, and praline, all of which were super delicious. As we left the winery we were given a large wine glass with our name etched on it, a lovely souvenir of a memorable evening. Back at the Temecula Creek Inn I sat outside on the balcony in the



chill night air with a glass of wine, compliments of the hotel, while I watched a couple of owls flying by. The next morning began with a huge breakfast buffet, followed by a tour of the hotel property, which is set among the mountains and surrounded by the golf course – really beautiful. One of the unique aspects of the hotel is an old stone house that dates back to the late 1880's when it was used as a bunkhouse for cowboys working on the local ranches. Now the historic building is a favorite location for weddings and birthday parties. Our next stop was the nearby Pechanga Hotel and Casino that hosted us for a wonderful lunch in their private dining room atop the hotel, known as the "Eagle's Nest" for its spectacular view of the valley. Once again we were treated to a huge buffet of great food

paired with some wonderful local wines. We also learned the origin of the name Temecula, which in the local native language means "place where the rising sun meets the morning mist". In reality, there are many mornings in this region of southern California where the clouds roll in from the Pacific Ocean and rise over the mountains to the west creating a mist. After lunch at Pechanga we toured three more of the more than 30 wineries in the valley. It was our luck to have clear skies and warm weather all day as we travelled around the valley on our wine tour. The first stop of the afternoon was at the Ponte vineyards, a family owned winery built as a beautiful Tuscan style estate with a gorgeous backdrop of the mountains. We started with a sampling of two wines in the early stage of fermentation in order to get an appreciation for how the wines mature over time. There were many lovely settings for tasting wine, both indoor and outdoor. Once

again we were served lots of delicious food to accompany the tasting of the wines in the estate board room, including a very unique Port wine produced from Zinfandel grapes, which went very well with blue cheese. From the Ponte estate we went to South Coast winery, a large Spanish style estate with a hotel, restaurant, and villas among the vineyards. Here we were treated to an incredible wine tasting in the "Carter Reserve Room" with sommelier Nathan who paired 4 wines with food to show us both food that complemented each wine as well as food that gave a contrast to the taste of the wine. It was a great learning experience for all of us, and of special note was the pairing of Cabernet Sauvignon with a touch of fresh honeycomb! Our last stop of the day was at the Briar Rose winery, a small family



owned vineyard where the tasting room was an exact replica of Snow White's house in Disneyland. It seems the owner of the winery was once an Imagineer for Walt Disney. One of the most unique and interesting wines of the day was one called "Talking Frog" which is a white wine "lagered" with barley and malt, giving it a taste more like a Hefeweizen beer. That evening, on the shuttle bus back to our hotels, the group staying at the Pechanga Hotel and Casino began singing along to an old disco tune that was playing on the radio titled "Put on my, my, my Boogie Shoes". So they were all primed for a night at the casino. Later on we all joined back together for a farewell dinner at the Temecula Creek Inn that began with a cocktail reception outside on the patio beside a roaring fireplace and a large carved ice sculpture serving green vodka martinis. Our call to dinner came by way of a Samoan fire dancer whose energetic performance fit right in with the theme of the dinner, "Fire and Ice". We all enjoyed a lovely dinner of steak and seafood, finished off with a baked Alaska dessert prepared for us in the center of the ballroom by the executive chef. The next morning we had a leisurely breakfast in the clubhouse restaurant overlooking the golf course before our return home, as a steady rain began to fall.

Near the end of January I attended a University of Illinois alumni dinner at the Desert Falls Country Club in Palm Desert where the president of the Alumni Association presented the fundraising plans for the new year. A few days later I was invited to an evening reception at the Casa del Mar Hotel in Santa Monica hosted by the Leading Hotels of the World. The Casa del Mar is a classic old beachfront hotel dating back to the early 1920's and has hosted famous Hollywood celebrities and royalty from around the world. Once I arrived in Santa Monica I checked into my room at the hotel next door, "Shutters on the Beach" with beautiful views of the beach and the Pacific Ocean from my balcony. The hotel is designed to resemble a classic Cape Cod resort with all its doors and windows having bright whitewashed shutters. As the sun was setting I grabbed my camera and took some photos of the Santa Monica Pier and the Hollywood hills beyond as I walked on the beach – very relaxing. By that time the reception was beginning at the Casa del Mar and as I entered the old ballroom I was handed my name tag and a chilled glass of Champagne. Within the large ballroom were representatives from at least 40 of the Leading Hotels of the World presenting information about their properties, some from as far away as China and South Africa. In amongst all of the tables were several food stations and bars, all serving up delicious dishes. Outside on the patio I discovered that it had been set up with seating Arabic style around several small fire pits where coffee and desserts were being served. It was very peaceful and relaxing to sit around the fire and hear the sound of the ocean in the distance. All in all it was a wonderful evening and a special thanks to the Leading Hotels of the World for sponsoring it. The following morning I walked along the beach again before heading back home. As I stopped for gas at the nearby Shell station the pump would not accept my credit card. After a couple of attempts I was ready to try another station when I suddenly noticed there was no hose attached to the pump. Apparently someone had stolen it! As I pumped gas from the pump next to it, one of the guys sweeping the area came by and I told him about the missing hose. Boy was he surprised!



At the beginning of February I attended our PCMA chapter Board of Directors meeting at the JW Marriott Hotel in Los Angeles. Rather than fight the freeway traffic I took the Metrolink train into the city and transferred at Union Station to the MetroRail Blue Line subway for the short trip to Staples Center. As I exited the station I could see workers setting up for the Grammy Awards to be held at LA Live a couple of days away. I met up with Jeff from LA Inc to have lunch at Rosa's Mexican Café where we had a superb fresh Guacamole dip prepared tableside in the traditional manner, followed by a huge Mexican club sandwich and sweet potato fries, along with a large glass of chilled

watermelon juice. During lunch my cell phone rang three times and each time I answered there was no one on the other end. Later on I googled the phone number and found out it was from a fax machine at the Desert Springs Urgent Care Center, so I called them to report the problem. I received no more calls from their fax machine! That evening I had dinner at the Yard House which is famous for having over 130 beers from around the world on tap. As I savored my black pepper encrusted gorgonzola burger and a cold pint of Weinstephan beer



from Germany, I watched the final minutes of two basketball games, in the first of which Duke beat North Carolina with a last second shot to win by one point, a real heartbreaker game for North Carolina fans. In the second game, the LA Clippers lost to Cleveland by just 2 points in the final two seconds of the game! The next morning I joined the rest of the board members for a delicious breakfast buffet provided by the JW Marriott. Following our board meeting we had a luncheon program featuring a panel discussing the state of the meetings and convention industry. For the lunch menu the JW served a fantastic grilled chicken breast served over risotto and topped with a spicy curry sauce. After the meeting I walked around LA Live and took photos of the setup for the Grammy Awards and then headed to Wolfgang Puck's restaurant

and bar on the 24th floor of the Ritz Carlton Hotel for a beer and the spectacular view of downtown LA at sunset. When I ordered a bottle of Tsing Tao beer I had to correct the bartender's pronunciation of the name, and later on he corrected the other bartenders as well. In late March I travelled back east to Washington, DC for the PhotoShop World Conference being held at the Washington Convention Center. My flight from Ontario airport to Salt Lake City went directly over the gigantic expanse of the Bingham open pit copper mine, which has to be over 2000 feet deep. I could see huge 300 ton ore trucks slowly making their way up the winding roads to the top of the mine and they looked more like a trail of ants than a line of trucks. My next flight to Dulles airport had a lead flight attendant named Scott who gave us some very funny pre-flight announcements that were guaranteed to get our attention. He started with *"The current weather in Washington is 74 degrees and broken clouds. We'll try to get them fixed before we land"*. Next came the announcement *"...pull up the seat cushion, and after you stand up, hug it to your chest or hug someone you love"*. Continuing on with his announcements *"...pull the oxygen mask down, place it on your face, and stop screaming like a little girl"*. And another one was *"...turn off all electronic devices. Off means not On and All means everything"*. His final pre-flight announcement concerning cell phones included this bit *"...that includes blackberries, blueberries, strawberries and any other berries"*. By this time our plane was on the runway and we were taking off into the night. Later on Scott served us a delicious dinner of gnocchi stuffed with Portobello mushrooms and topped with a superb marinara sauce. My glass of St Jean Merlot wine went very well with dinner. Seated next to me was a retired Army Sargent Major who now has a company that designs



live fire ranges, especially the urban environment close fire range, for all branches of the military. When I mentioned I had spent my time in the Army stationed at a remote post in Germany called Wildflecken, he knew exactly where it was located and had been there a few times himself during training exercises, so we had a lot to talk about during the 4 hour flight. I spent that night at the Dulles Airport Marriott Hotel and got up early the next morning to go downtown for the start of the conference. The city was looking beautiful with the thousands of Cherry trees in full blossom and the start of the annual Cherry Blossom Festival about to begin. The opening session of the conference was filled with lots of new techniques and demos, as well as a couple of hilarious presentations by celebrity impersonators posing as Sarah Palin and Abraham Lincoln. Over the next couple of days I attended many excellent workshops and training classes that really helped me understand the software a lot better. After the first day of sessions I walked back to my hotel and on the way I stopped at the Capitol City Brewery which was packed with people having just left their offices, but I was lucky to find one seat open at the bar. I ordered a

cold glass of their local IPA and a dish called Maryland Blue Crab Pie that had large lumps of succulent crab meat, Yukon gold potatoes, and sweet corn, all topped with a cheddar cheese cracker crust. The combination of tastes was simply to die for, so I asked the barmaid if the chef would share the recipe with me. She said she didn't think he would, but she would ask for me. A few minutes later the bar manager came out with the chef and he gave me a copy of his recipe, and even took time to explain it to me. The next day of the conference was even better than the first day and I had access to talk with a





few of the famous photographers that work for National Geographic magazine. For lunch I discovered a small food court on the second level of the convention center where I had an outstanding pulled pork BBQ sandwich from "The Bone Doctor". Later in the afternoon was the opening ceremony for 100th anniversary of the Cherry Blossom Festival and almost everything in sight was some shade of pink. Young girls dressed in costumes of flowers, Japanese dancers, playing cards, and even little pink pigs performed dances on the stairs leading up to the large hall where there were two ladies on stilts dressed as Cherry trees in bloom and posing for photos. Nearby were two guys dressed as butterflies, their wings being extended above them on long poles. For dinner

that evening I found an old historic place called Harrington's, not far from the White House. Before leaving Washington the next day I took a long walk around Chinatown and then on the Mall to take photos. At the National Building Museum there was a long frieze surrounding the old red stone structure that depicted various scenes from the Civil War. By now it was time to return to the hotel, pack my bags and catch the shuttle bus to Dulles airport. The driver took the George Washington Parkway that winds its way along the beautiful shore of the Potomac River and then through Langley, Virginia past CIA headquarters. After checking in for my flight to Atlanta I spent some time in Max and Erma's Bar with a pint of Yuengling beer from the oldest brewery in the country.



Around the middle of April I was invited to attend a meeting of the Delta Airlines Flyers Forum at Soho House, a private club in West Hollywood. Since it was a breakfast meeting starting at 7:00am, I drove to LA the night before and stayed at the Best Western Sunset Plaza Hotel nearby. From the hotel there were some beautiful views of the lights of downtown LA, as well as the Hollywood sign on the hills above the hotel. The front desk suggested I have dinner at the "Saddle Ranch" across the street, so I headed that way and found a restaurant and bar that was decorated in the style of places one would expect to find in San Antonio or Amarillo. The menu was heavy on steaks and BBQ, but I ordered the sweet and spicy orange chicken, which was served with fresh snow peas, julienne carrots, and jasmine rice – a very tasty dish with just the right amount of heat. As one might expect, the place was crowded and catered mainly to a younger, hip generation. As I was seated at the bar, the barmaid suddenly showed up with a giant margarita glass piled high with bright blue cotton candy for the three guys next to me. Looked like a pretty weird order to me but they dug into it as they downed their Bud Lights! All of the waitresses were wearing black T-shirts that read "Shut Up and Ride" on the front and "I Got Bucked at Saddle Ranch" on the back, which seemed to fit real well with the décor and patrons of the place. The noise and chaos of the Saddle Ranch finally got to me so I walked next door to the bar in the Andaz Hotel and found a totally different environment, one that was very ultra-modern, sleek, and elegant. At one end of the bar was a huge big screen TV showing an old B&W Hollywood movie starring Cary Grant and Audrey Hepburn - definitely not for the crowd at the Saddle Ranch. Early the next morning I joined about 40 people to enjoy a wonderful breakfast on the top floor of Soho House and listen to a presentation from some of the top executives of Delta Airlines where they discussed the plans to renovate terminal 5



at LAX, as well as important changes to the SkyMiles program that would reward the highest frequent flyers with more perks. As each of us introduced ourselves there were at least 10 people who had already racked up more than 100,000 miles since the beginning of the year, and on top of that, one lady had flown 400,000 miles on Delta last year alone! While I am close to having flown almost 4 million miles on Delta, there were several people in the meeting who have flown far more than me. But regardless of the number of miles each of us have flown with Delta Airlines, I was very impressed with the sincerity of the Delta executives in conveying important confidential information about the future plans of the airline and especially listening to our concerns.

At the end of April I attended a meeting of the Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Advisory Board at the InterContinental Century City Hotel in Beverly Hills. My room on the 11th floor gave me a spectacular view of the city from my balcony. The evening started with a cocktail reception hosted by the hotel in their lovely "Glass Lounge" that flows out to a beautiful private garden, which was a perfect venue for enjoying the setting sun. About an hour later we all boarded a bus that took us to along Sunset Boulevard to Universal Studios for a very interesting tour of the backstage lots where so many famous movies and TV shows have been produced, one of the more infamous being "Wysteria Lane", the home of the TV series Desperate Housewives. Along the way we had some gorgeous views of the San Fernando Valley, and then suddenly we entered the realm of King Kong in 3D, which has to be one of the most amazing 3D experiences I've ever

encountered. And if the King Kong adventure wasn't enough, our Universal Studio hosts brought us to the newest attraction in the park, "Transformers – The Ride" which was just about to open to the public, so we were treated to an exclusive preview. I can honestly say the ride was one of the most intense I've ever



experienced, with lots of motion and incredible 3D visuals, and all in such a small space. After the ride we were treated to photo ops with a couple of real life Transformers who stood over 12 feet tall in outfits that were exact replicas of those in the movie. By this time the sun had set and we were invited to the Old Globe Theater for a special dinner hosted by Universal Studios. As we entered the theater there was a long table set among lovely blossoms of Cherry trees and tropical ferns, with the soft sound of crickets chirping in the background. The seven course menu had each course paired with a different wine, which both the executive chef and sommelier described to us before each course was served. Of particular note was the tuna sashimi and Japanese salsa accompanied by a Pear sake – absolutely unique and incredible! Dinner was finished with a decadent chocolate dessert and a plate of Belgian truffles, making it a most memorable evening. Returning to my hotel room I found a bottle of wine, a plate of cheese, a bowl of fruit, and a gift box, all compliments



of the hotel and LA Tourism and Convention Bureau. Our next day started with a very nice southwestern breakfast buffet in the Glass Lounge where we dined on Huevos Rancheros served with black bean sauce and spicy Mexican sausage while seated in the private garden. Following the meeting, we all gathered in the hotel lobby to board the bus for a trip downtown to LA Live and the Grammy Museum. There we were hosted to a cocktail reception on the Toyota Terrace at Nokia Theater and invited to tour the museum below. Some of my favorite highlights of the museum were the countless memorabilia from world famous musical artists dating back to the early 1920's, as well as a fascinating interactive display of the history of recording technology from the earliest Edison cylinders to wax vinyl records, cassette tape, and finally to digital media. What made this display so fascinating was the JBL sound studio where I



could hear a song as it would sound on each of the different recording media throughout history. There were also many other opportunities to listen to the music of your favorite artist, so I chose two classic songs from my era, "Trouble Every Day" by Frank Zappa, a very early form of Rap music, and "For What It's Worth" by Buffalo Springfield, a classic anti-war song from the Vietnam era. By this time in the evening we were all heading back upstairs for an elegant dinner on the Toyota Terrace with spectacular views of the lights of downtown LA. The five course dinner started with a butter lettuce salad and pears poached in red wine, topped with toasted pistachios and brie cheese. The next course was Korean braised short ribs served with horseradish crushed potatoes, followed by sautéed wild striped bass accompanied by chanterelle mushrooms, spring onions, and fava beans. The dessert course included a selection of chocolate truffle cakes with spun sugar, New York cheese cake pops, and assorted "whoopie pies"! Coffee and liquors made an elegant finish to the dinner as we listened to the 2nd Street Band playing classic hits from Bob Dylan, Credence Clearwater Revival, and Santana. I was fortunate to be seated next to Michael Krouse, listening to his stories of raising three adopted children with his companion, including a 12 year old girl just beginning her entry into puberty and ready for a training bra. It was very clear to me as he spoke so dearly of his children that he loves being their father now. It was indeed a wonderful evening to be sure, and a perfect ending to our advisory board meeting.



On the return trip from the LA Advisory Board Meeting I made a stop at the Santa Ana River Regional Park in Riverside. Here I found a lovely natural area of huge Cottonwood trees and tall Palms scattered in groves throughout the floodplain of the river, with several small streams flowing through the sandy wash. As I hiked along the floodplain I spotted many different species of birds, as well as a large expanse of wild flowers in bloom. Besides the small streams and tributaries of the river, there were also many small ponds of water that supported a wetland ecosystem of cattails, frogs, and small fish which few people see from the freeway. Not far from the park I discovered the "Jensen-Alvarado Historic Ranch" which is an old ranch property established in 1854 by a Danish sea captain named Cornelius Jensen. He later married a young lady from a local Mexican family named Mercedes Alvarado and they had a large family of 10 children. I was lucky enough to run into one of the caretakers who gave me a tour of the old ranch house which is currently in



restoration, but still has most of the original furnishings in place, including the bed that was once used by General Sherman. Captain Jensen developed a large orchard, as well as a vineyard where he produced raisins and wine, being one of the first wineries in California. Needless to say, I was quite surprised to find such a beautiful historic place, now in the midst of a modern urban area.



In the middle of May I decided to make an overnight trip to the small town of Tehachapi to see the famous railroad engineering marvel known as the “Tehachapi Loop”, a stretch of the Union Pacific mainline track from Bakersfield to Los Angeles that makes a 360 degree loop in order to climb over the Tehachapi Mountains. As I drove north over Cajon Pass I stopped at a place near the summit known as “Mormon Rocks” which are some beautiful and unusual sandstone formations. After taking some photos of the BNSF freight trains passing by, I drove on to the small town of Wrightwood located in a grove of large Ponderosa Pines at the base of a popular ski resort. Also near the town was the historic “Big Pines Inn” which was built of native granite stone in the 1920’s and now serves as a visitor center for the Angeles National

Forest. From Wrightwood the highway headed west along the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains where there was still some of the winter snow on the highest peaks. Eventually the road descended into the high desert around Palmdale and Mojave before joining highway 58 west to Tehachapi. Driving west the landscape quickly changed from desert to pine forest as I approached Tehachapi Pass at 5000 feet elevation, which is the dividing line between the southern end of the Sierra Nevada range and the northern extent of the San Gabriel Mountains. Just on the other side of the pass is the Tehachapi Loop where I was fortunate to arrive in time to watch a mile long Union Pacific freight train with four locomotives on the front and two on the rear negotiate the 360 degree loop, crossing over itself as it traveled west to Bakersfield. Not only is the sight of the trains amazing, but the beauty of the mountains is spectacular as well. Back in town I checked into the hotel and then went in search of a place for dinner, ending up at Jake’s Steakhouse for a delicious filet mignon served with coconut shrimp in orange pepper sauce. More than 54 trains a day pass through Tehachapi so the town is a popular destination for train enthusiasts. The following day I took highway 58 east through Mojave to the small town of Boron and toured the visitor center at the huge Borax mine nearby, which has some very interesting displays of how borates are mined and processed to produce literally hundreds of household products. The visitor center also had a fascinating exhibit about “Death Valley Days”, the old radio and TV show where several famous actors got their start in the entertainment business, including three of the original Star Trek crew, as well as Ronald Reagan. From the visitor center one has a 360 degree view of the huge open pit mine that supplies 40% of the world’s borax.



In early June I made an overnight trip to Kernville in the southern Sierra Nevada Mountains to visit an area of California I’ve never seen before. The route of Highway 178 goes from the hot and dry landscape of the Mojave Desert up into the cool Ponderosa Pine forest of the Sequoia National Forest in a relatively short distance. Just south of Kernville the highway enters a lovely valley near Lake Isabella and then crosses the south fork of the Kern River before entering the small town which is located on the banks of the river. I spent most of the afternoon walking around the town taking photos of the river and the mountains surrounding it. In searching for a place to stay the night I saw the beautiful, rustic Kernville Inn amongst a large grove of tall Ponderosa Pines overlooking

the river, and luckily they had a nice one bedroom cabin available. The owner of the inn recommended that I try the Kern River Brewing Company for dinner so I headed that way and found a great place for some fine beer as well. The bar was very popular with the locals and the fish tacos were outstanding. After dinner, as the sun was setting I walked back to my cabin, and on the way I spotted a sports bar called “The Hut” where everyone was watching the final NBA championship game between Miami and Oklahoma City. While I joined in to watch the game, I couldn’t help notice that despite *No Smoking* signs posted everywhere, the guys sitting at the bar were smoking, along with the bartender. Obviously the signs must be for someone else! Another odd thing about this place, besides being a raunchy bar, was the way my glass of beer was served. It came in a regular 12 oz glass, along with another smaller glass of beer. When I questioned the bartender he said the smaller glass was to make up for the foam on top of the larger glass, which didn’t quite make sense but who was I to object to the extra beer.



As the game went on a young guy came up to the bar and during the conversation he said he was a cyclist from Switzerland and he was riding his bicycle from Calgary, Alberta to Los Angeles, though I'm not sure why he chose to come through Kernville when there's a much more direct route. And all through the evening at The Hut, the bartender was drinking right along with everyone at the bar! This dive bar was definitely a local hangout for sure. I finished the evening sitting on the patio outside my cabin beneath a tall Ponderosa Pine, listening to the chirping of the crickets. I left Kernville early the next morning to drive up the Kern River and into the Sequoia National Forest. The further upriver I went, the rapids became much steeper and more spectacular, until at one point I encountered a beautiful 50 foot high waterfall cascading down from the steep mountainside. It was clear now why the upper reaches of the Kern River are known for lots of great white water rafting. Beyond the waterfall the road became very narrow and winding as the canyon became steeper until I reached a large meadow below the top of the high ridge. The meadow was surrounded by a large stand of Ponderosa Pine, mixed with some young Giant Sequoia at the very southern extent of their range. On the edge of the meadow were the remnants of an old logging camp which is now occupied by a Sequoia National Forest Ranger Station. At this point I decided to head back down the mountain to Kernville and on south toward Bakersfield which took me past Lake Isabella and down the Kern River Canyon. The highway beyond Lake Isabella was a nice new 4 lane freeway, but after a few miles it suddenly became a very narrow 2 lane winding road through the canyon, with lots of 15 mph curves. Within less than a minute my speed had gone from 70mph to 15mph! But the views of the white water and the massive rapids were truly spectacular, and at 15mph one could certainly do some sightseeing. Eventually the road leveled out and came into the San Joaquin Valley where there were fields upon fields of produce, orchards, and vineyards before entering the old town of Bakersfield. Here I turned on to Interstate 5 for the remainder of the trip home.



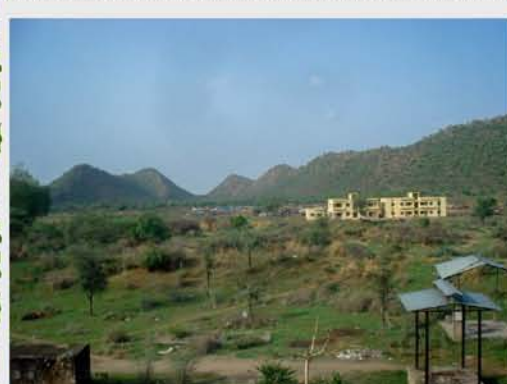
A couple of weeks later I had another PCMA Board meeting at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Long Beach, which is located downtown on the harbor near the Aquarium of the Pacific. I arrived a bit early so I took the opportunity to walk around the waterfront and browse through the shops in Shoreline Village, which is designed to be a replica of an old New England seaport. Walking along the boardwalk I had beautiful views of the harbor and the magnificent luxury ocean liner, the Queen Mary, which is moored on the far side of the harbor. Along the boardwalk leading to the aquarium I discovered a series of signs and displays depicting the details of the famous sailboat race from Long Beach to Hawaii that takes place every year. Thanks to Nancy I was upgraded to a room on the Regency Club level of the hotel where I had a beautiful view of downtown Long Beach and the harbor.

According to Nancy, who is VP of Sales for the hotel, "If you're not in Long Beach you're at the wrong beach"! The following morning I took a tour of the Queen Mary, a grand old ship on which my Uncle Wally worked for many years as a steward, and I discovered an amazing exhibit dedicated to the life of Princess Diana. It was absolutely fascinating to see the history of the Royal Family dating back to the 1800's when the House of Windsor first ascended to the throne. Besides the wealth of history that the exhibit provided, I came away with a strong feeling of Diana being a beautiful and sensitive woman who had a deep passion for humanitarian causes. She really became her own person after the divorce from Prince Charles. It was also nice to see that her sons, William and Harry are following in her footsteps. I spent the next couple of hours exploring the old ship, from the Captain's quarters and the Bridge,



down to the engine room with some of the first steam driven turbines used in such a large vessel. In one area they have built an enclosure around one of the four giant propellers so that it can be viewed from under water. As I toured the great ship it was fascinating to imagine what it must have been like to be on a 7 day trans-Atlantic voyage. I bought a book about the history of the ship and when I mentioned to the store owner that my uncle had worked on the Queen Mary for many years, she gave me a discount. I ended my visit to the Queen Mary by having a glass of wine in the classic art deco style First Class Lounge at the bow of the ship, overlooking Long Beach and the harbor.

In early July I made a long journey to India as part of a project for the University of Redlands to assess a Master's Degree program in GIS being established at a new university in the state of Rajasthan. I was fortunate to be able to travel in Business Class on Swiss International Airlines to New Delhi by way of Zurich. After checking in at LAX I spent some time in the Star Alliance Lounge to check my email before boarding the flight. As I got seated I was offered a chilled glass of champagne and a newspaper. Once we were airborne the dinner service started with cocktails and appetizers, followed by a Nicoise salad with peppered yellow fin tuna. For the main course I chose chicken Dijon in wild mushroom sauce, shallot pudding, and grilled zucchini, accompanied by some fine Swiss wines. Then it was time for dessert, a delicious vanilla mousse with Bourbon butter peaches, topped with crumbled almond biscotti. The finishing touch to dinner was a selection of Swiss chocolates and espresso. After dinner there was plenty of time on the 12 hour flight to watch a movie and get some sleep before we arrived in Zurich the following afternoon. We were served a continental breakfast shortly before landing under cloudy skies and light rain. Since the flight from Los Angeles arrived 3 hours after the flight to New Delhi departed, Swiss International provided me with a hotel room near the airport and dinner that evening. Once I arrived at the hotel I took a long walk around the small village of Kloten where I got some nice photos of the traditional Swiss village architecture. For dinner that evening I went to the Restaurant – Bar Kanzlei, downstairs in the hotel, and started with a cold glass of the local beer called "Halden Gut". As I drank my beer and wrote notes in my journal, I noticed several people ordering the Cordon Bleu for dinner, so I decided to follow their lead. It was a fabulous breaded pork Schnitzel stuffed with Parma ham and Gruyere cheese, served with pommes frites (French fries) and a side dish of ratatouille – really delicious! Later on during the night there were some heavy rain showers, but by morning the skies were beginning to clear, so I headed up a footpath near the hotel to the top of the hill overlooking the airport and the mountains to the south. There were beautiful views of the countryside with small farms and villages scattered on the hillside as the sun was just breaking through the clouds, making for some very nice photos. Eventually the footpath brought me to a large nature reserve and several trails through the forest. After a couple of hours exploring the reserve the trails lead me back to the town square in Kloten and an old church next to one of the original farmsteads along a small stream that flows through the village in a beautiful setting. By the time I returned to the hotel it was time to take the shuttle bus to the airport and check in for my flight to New Delhi. Once we were airborne the lunch service began with smoked salmon tartare topped with saffron and peppercorn sauce. For the main course I chose a typical Swiss dish of roasted veal in wild mushroom cream sauce, served with butter potato rosti and steamed broccoli with flaked almonds. The

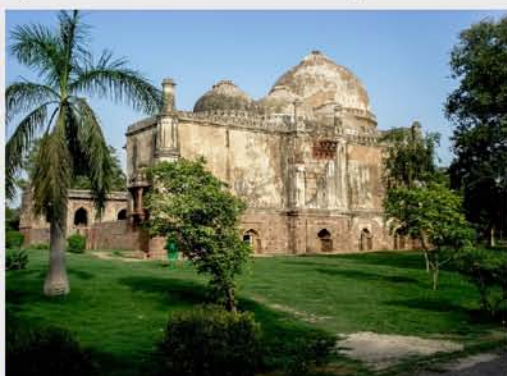


raspberry crème with biscotti and almonds for dessert was a great finish to a delicious meal. After lunch I watched the movie "The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel" which was filmed in Jaipur and the state of Rajasthan, so it was a perfect way to get myself oriented to India. It is a lovely film with some fascinating characters, and one thing I remembered most about the film was the response of the young Indian hotel owner when a guest asked why the phones weren't working. He said to the elderly English lady, *"Madam, everything will be alright in the end, and if it is not alright, then it is not the end"* – so characteristic of the Indian philosophy. The 8 hour flight was very smooth and we landed in New Delhi on time. As I entered the terminal I was astounded at how new it was and so efficient, a far cry from the dingy atmosphere and chaos of the old days. The new Indira Gandhi International

Airport is very modern, well designed and beautifully decorated with traditional art from all over India. I think it's now one of the best airports in the world! I had no trouble going through immigration and customs in just under 20 minutes, but when I exited the arrivals hall, my name was not among the countless number of signs greeting people. After waiting almost 30 minutes for the taxi driver who was supposed to meet me, I finally had to arrange a taxi on my own to take me to the Indian International Centre in the heart of New Delhi. By the time I checked in for my room it was almost 2:00am, but still pretty warm and humid. While the accommodations at the centre were more like a university dorm, the setting was beautiful, being surrounded by the lush tropical vegetation of a large park known as "Lodi Gardens". The next day Rajesh and his driver picked me up for the journey to the new NIIT University in the town of Neemrana, which is located about halfway between New Delhi and Jaipur along the National Highway to Mumbai. The distance is less than 70 miles but the time it takes to drive that distance can be more than 3 hours since the highway is under construction and passes through many small villages on the way. On top of that, the bulk of the traffic are heavy trucks and transports which make for some very slow driving. Shortly after leaving the outskirts of New Delhi, we saw a lot of men dressed in yellow and orange saffron robes walking alongside the road, each man carrying two large ceramic flasks of water on a long pole, which



were not allowed to touch the ground. Rajesh explained that these men were returning from a pilgrimage to the Ganges River and carrying the water from the sacred river back to their villages, some as far away 300 miles! About every 10 miles we would see a rest stop that had been set up for these men to eat and sleep on their long journey. There must have been several hundred men just along the portion of the route we took to Neemrana, so who knows how many thousands of other men were also making the pilgrimage throughout India. Our driver was very skilled at dodging in and out of the massive trucks to make up some time, but we encountered several huge traffic jams as the new 6 lane portion of the highway suddenly became a narrow 2 lane road through every small village. And to add to the frustration of the long drive were countless numbers of large trucks broken down alongside the road, and in some cases, disabled in the middle of the road. Ironically, I saw many signs posted at various points along the highway with the warning "Accident Prone Zone – Go Slow". Not only were these warnings constantly ignored by the truck drivers, the entire length of the highway qualified as an "accident prone zone" in my opinion! But the most bizarre sight was a stretch of the new highway with 3 lanes of traffic going in both directions in all 3 lanes at the



same time – an insane design! Finally we reached Neemrana and after a short visit to the university, I was taken to the Cambay Sapphire Hotel, a brand new 8 story building in the middle of the old village – what a contrast, but so is everything in India. The hotel web site advertised a full service facility with two restaurants, bar, pool, and spa, but when I arrived, it was clear that construction of the hotel was not quite finished. While there was one restaurant, the pool and spa were nowhere close to completion, and the bar did not yet have a license to serve alcohol. So my university hosts graciously went shopping in the village to buy some beer for me since my hotel room did have a small refrigerator, which was very welcome in the 100 degree heat and humidity. That evening I went to the hotel restaurant for dinner, having no high expectations, but I was pleasantly surprised by the

extent of the menu and the quality of the food. I ordered the Chicken Tikka Masala, steamed rice, and fresh baked Naan, all of which were really delicious. There were only two other people dining in the restaurant, both from Japan who were here to work on the construction of some large industrial estates which would become assembly plants and distribution facilities for several Japanese companies. After dinner I returned to my room and turned on the TV, only to find out that of the more than 60 channels available, just 2 of them were in English, and one of which, oddly enough, was NHK from Japan! The next morning I had a very nice breakfast at the hotel before joining the faculty at the university to discuss their GIS degree program. For lunch we had traditional Indian food in the student cafeteria, served on metal trays like I remember from my days in the army, but the food tasted great. After a long day in discussions I was driven back to the hotel where I had a couple of cold beers before going down to the restaurant for another delicious Indian dinner. The next morning Ms. Ranjani, one of the university faculty members, accompanied me to Jaipur for a day of sightseeing, which turned out to be my only day off during my time in India. Once again the 2 hour trip was a nightmare of traffic problems and some hair-raising near misses as our driver weaved in and out between the heavy trucks at 80 – 100kph. Then to add to the chaos, we began encountering all manner of vehicles and beasts on the road, including bicycles, farm tractors, elephants, camel carts, and people madly dashing across the road – really insane at times, or so it appeared to me. In addition to the heavy traffic was the constant road construction, most of which was centered around building huge "flyovers" that will eventually bypass all of the small villages and towns, making the highway an expressway. Throughout this scary experience on the highway, I only saw one minor accident, which I thought must be a miracle. There were more interesting signs amid the highway construction that simply read "*Inconveniency Regretted*", which failed to alleviate any of the feelings of frustration or terror while in the midst of the driving experience. Also of interest were the signs painted on the rear end of virtually every large truck – including "*Blow Horn Please*", "*Keep Distance*", "*Use Dipper at Night*", and "*Great India*". Of all of these signs only one of them seemed to be heeded by everyone all the time – Blow Horn Please! After all of the precarious driving we reached the edge of Jaipur, often called the "Pink City" for all of the old buildings that are painted that color. Our first stop was the Amber Fort, an ancient citadel dating back to 1592 when it was established on the site of an even older 11th century fort, and served as the capital of Rajasthan. It is a massive stone structure with hundreds of rooms built on the side of a steep hill overlooking the old town of Amber. Surrounding the whole fort is a high stone wall that resembles a small scale version of the Great Wall in China as it meanders along the top of the surrounding ridges. The royal palace within the walls of the fort was occupied by several generations of the Rajput Maharajas and their families who ruled most of Rajasthan until the independence of India following WWII. The palace is arranged around three massive courtyards with many rooms surrounding





them, some of which were dedicated only for the women, who were not allowed to be seen by anyone outside the family. Most of the rooms in the palace are richly decorated with beautiful examples of Indian art, including many large murals made from precious gems and stones. And throughout the huge complex are lovely gardens with exotic plants from around the world. We spent more than half the day wandering through the labyrinth of rooms and saw only a small portion of this magnificent heritage site. For the rest of the afternoon we drove through the heart of the old city, with its historic pink buildings dating from the 18th century, before making a stop at the Albert Hall Museum which was built in 1876 to honor the visit of King Edward VII. The classic old English style

building now houses the main art collection for the state of Rajasthan, with a large number of paintings dating from the 16th century. By now it was time to begin the journey back to Neemrana, and as we left Jaipur we saw a beautiful, intricate pink façade known as the “Palace of the Winds”. On the outskirts of the city we stopped for dinner at a local restaurant where we sampled some of the delicious spicy dishes of Rajasthan. At one point during the long drive, our driver pulled off to the side of the road to buy some bananas, and as he brought them back to the car, a troop of monkeys came scrambling out of the bushes.

It was fun to watch them eating the bananas beside our car, and I suspect the roadside banana stands are located there for that reason. On my last day in Neemrana I continued meeting with the university faculty and that evening we all went to a nearby restaurant to share a farewell dinner. Back at my hotel I decided to watch a movie titled “The Alamo”, which was a pretty decent production, but there was something very weird about the film. All of the English language dialogue had English subtitles, while the Spanish dialogue had no subtitles, and it was being shown on a local Hindi language channel! As I left the university the next morning, the

university president and the groundskeeper, a retired Commodore from the Indian Air Force, insisted that I follow the customary tradition of planting a tree on campus. So we hiked a short distance up the hill and I planted a small tree among a number of other trees recently planted by visitors to the university. I was told that I should give the tree a name, so I chose to name it “Magellan”, in honor of the first person to circumnavigate the world, and also the name of my beloved Siamese cat. The drive back to New Delhi was reasonably short since the truck traffic was pretty light that day, but there were a couple of places where traffic on the 6 lane highway came to a screeching halt as herds of cattle, sheep, and goats crossed the road. As we approached New Delhi my Indian hosts decided to stop at a McDonalds for



lunch and suggested I try the “McSpicy Chicken Burger”. It was delicious and I believe it would make a great hit in America if it were offered. Of course the French fries were identical to those back home, and at every McDonald’s in the world for that matter. After a meeting with the CEO of NIIT, Rajesh took me to the Indian International Centre where I checked into my hotel room and then headed to the bar that overlooks the beautiful Lodi Gardens Park. It was a hot and humid evening as I sat on the patio with a cold Carlsberg beer and listened to the lovely sound of the birds in the trees. On my last day in India I met with the local Esri staff in the morning and then spent the afternoon visiting the National Railway Museum. Most of the museum’s exhibits were outdoors and included some very unique and historic pieces, such as the world’s oldest operational steam locomotive, and the only operating



steam “monorail”, which runs on one steel rail with another conventional wheel on the other side to balance the locomotive. In addition were at least 20 other steam and electric locomotives on display, as well as several elegant private coaches that were used on many of the Indian railways by various Maharajas during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. All in all I had a very enjoyable time at the museum, despite the 100 degree heat and high humidity. Back at the Indian International Centre I took a long walk through Lodi Gardens as the sun was setting, taking photos of the beautiful flowers and trees, as well as some of the historic 15th and 16th century mosques and tombs located throughout the large park. Later that night my driver took me to the airport and I checked in for my return flight to Los Angeles via Zurich. The new Lufthansa Business Class lounge was very comfortable, especially since my flight did not depart New Delhi until





1:15am. After takeoff we were served a light meal of smoked Perch and tandoori vegetables with a mint and mango chutney. Eight hours later we landed in Zurich on time at 6:30am, and since my onward flight to LA wasn't scheduled to depart until 1:00pm, I had several hours to spend in Switzerland. So I headed for the Swiss International Arrivals Lounge, took a shower, had breakfast, and then boarded a train to the small alpine town of Zug, about 45 minutes west of Zurich. I found it to be a quaint old town situated on a beautiful lake and with a spectacular view of the Alps beyond. It was very relaxing to walk around the old town with so many great places to take a photo. Then it was back to Zurich airport to board my flight to Los Angeles. The 12 and a half hour flight was smooth and the

lunch service was excellent. We started with a chicken terrine wrapped in cured ham and topped with blueberry chutney. For the main

course I chose the roasted chicken breast with lemon oil, parsley polenta, and steamed artichoke. The raspberry crème with biscotti and almonds for dessert was fabulous as well. After lunch I watched a very interesting film titled "Salmon Fishing in the Yemen" which is based on a true story about a wealthy Yemeni who transforms a desert wadi into a free flowing stream for the spawning of salmon. In a strange twist, the British Prime Minister becomes involved as his press secretary sees an opportunity to gain positive public support in his failing re-election campaign. In all it was a thoroughly enjoyable film and a most unusual story. But my return to LAX was not so enjoyable as I encountered very long lines going through Immigration and Customs. And the late afternoon freeway traffic was horrendous, taking me over 3 hours to get home!



In late July it was time for our annual International User Conference in San Diego, and this year was my first time not managing it. In fact, I was not really involved in the running of the event, which gave me time to enjoy various aspects of it that I had not been able to do when I managed it. I spent a couple of days at the conference to meet with some of the Esri India staff, attend the opening plenary session, and to visit with some of my colleagues. One evening I had dinner at "Casa Del Reyes" in Old Town with my San Diego friends, DeeAnne and Maureen, as well as her Iranian friend that I had met at the PCMA annual convention in Toronto several years ago. We had a great time catching up on all that has been happening lately, along with enjoying some delicious authentic Mexican food. The next morning I checked out of the Marriott hotel and headed north along the coast toward Los Angeles where I had been invited to a presentation by the Preferred Hotel Group about the newly renovated Broadmoor Hotel and Resort in Colorado Springs. But along the way I stopped at San Juan Capistrano to visit the historic mission that was established by Father Junipero Serra in 1776. The old mission is a beautiful structure of brick and adobe construction that has been very well preserved over the centuries, with many lovely courtyards and chapels. The old town of San Juan Capistrano also has a wealth of beautiful historic adobe structures dating back to the 18th century. All in all, it's a lovely area to visit. I encountered some heavy traffic approaching downtown LA, but I was still able to arrive in time for the event being hosted on the 50th floor of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in one of their "residences". The view of downtown LA and the Hollywood Hills from the floor to ceiling windows at sunset was nothing short of spectacular. The Executive Chef and two of his sous chefs from the Broadmoor were preparing and cooking various dishes of bison and lamb according to his personal recipes, all of which were amazing. We were told that he is only the 5th executive chef at the Broadmoor in the past 95 years, which is quite unusual and a compliment to the hotel. It was truly a wonderful evening and the hotel was gracious enough to provide a room for me that night at the JW Marriott next door.

Near the end of July I attended a PCMA meeting in Del Mar that included an afternoon of social networking at the Del Mar Racetrack. I arrived the day before the meeting and took some time to walk around the coastal town of Solana Beach where there were some beautiful views of the ocean and beaches. Later in the afternoon I checked into the Hilton Hotel and joined a group in the bar for dinner while



watching horse races on the big screen TV. The next morning we had a short board meeting before the main luncheon program on the topic of how to keep meetings fresh. Following the program we all boarded a bus for the short trip to the racetrack where we had reserved a section of the Clubhouse Grandstand for our group to watch the races. As it happened, I also had an invitation from the Preferred Hotel Group to join their party in one of the Skyboxes at the top of the Grandstand. Besides the gorgeous views of the track, the ocean, and the mountains from the Skybox, we were treated to all manner of great food and drinks. My business card went into the drawing for prizes before the start of the races, and I was lucky enough to win a complimentary dinner and

night at the "Inn at Rancho Santa Fe", which I'm looking forward to using after the holidays. Several people in our group won money on the races, but even though I didn't bet on the horses, it was a really fun time watching them race. At the end of the races I walked back to the Hilton Hotel and passed by the Fish Market restaurant, where I had a fantastic dinner of Pasta Promodore, which is a dish of angel hair pasta with diced tomatoes, parsley, olive oil and sautéed tiger prawns, served with fresh hot crusty sourdough bread! Sitting at the bar I joined many other people in watching the opening ceremony of the Summer Olympics from London, and it was a spectacular event, especially at the end with a live performance of "Hey Jude" by Paul McCartney.



In mid-August I made a return trip to San Juan Capistrano to take more photos of the lovely old town that I had seen only briefly on my previous visit. I decided to take the train this time and boarded MetroLink in Riverside for the journey to Union Station in LA. Our first stop was in San Bernardino near the huge BNSF railroad container and trailer facility. Here were massive mobile gantry cranes lifting heavy shipping containers and semi-trailers off the rail cars onto waiting trucks for distribution around southern California. It was fascinating to watch the complex choreography of the cranes, and trucks as they went about loading and unloading several of the mile long freight trains. I had about an hour layover at Union Station which was enough time to have a beer in the Traxx Bar, with its beautiful art deco design still



intact from the early 20th century when it served many a Hollywood movie star as they travelled to and from New York. I boarded the southbound Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train and took a seat in the upper level of the Pacific Business Class car. As we left Union Station, the car attendant came around with a complimentary half bottle of wine and some snacks which made the journey a pleasant one. The route passed through southern Orange County with lovely views of the Santa Margarita Mountains and the Cleveland National Forest to the east, before reaching San Juan Capistrano. I walked up the hill to the Best Western Capistrano Inn where I had a nice room with a balcony overlooking the mountains. Later I walked back down to the center of the old

town and had dinner at "Sarducci's Restaurant" which is located in the historic old Santa Fe Railroad Depot. I sat outside under the pergola with a chilled glass of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc to go along with a bowl of spicy black bean soup to start. For the main dish I ordered the fresh chargrilled filet of salmon that was topped with a fantastic orange marmalade glaze and served wild mushroom risotto, along with fresh green beans sautéed with onion and garlic – really a spectacular meal. After dinner I stumbled on to the "Swallows Inn", a local dive bar with a bunch of old bras hanging from the ceiling and a country band playing in one corner of the dimly lit room. The place only accepts cash, but there are at least three or four ATMs placed strategically around the room for the convenience of credit card customers. I had a beer, listened to the music, and watched all of the local action before walking back up the hill to my hotel.



The next morning I headed back downtown to walk around the Los Rios Historic District which is where the town was first established in the late 1700's. Here there were many small old adobe houses that are still occupied today, including a few that have been turned into cafes and restaurants. I stopped for a latte at the "Hidden Door Coffee House" that was once the historic Olivares House and still has a lot of its original character, as well as a large sign reading "Stressed spelled backwards is Desserts". As lunchtime approached I found "L'Hirondelle", a delightful restaurant across the street from the Mission, where I had a great shrimp cocktail as I sat outside on the patio. Soon it was time to head for the station to board the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train on the return journey to LA, and the end to another short but wonderful trip.



The end of August was a very sad time for me as my beloved Siamese cat "Magellan" passed away. He had been with me for close to 18 years and we had a very strong bond with each other. Even though I knew for some time before that his days were numbered, his passing left a deep hole in my heart, which still makes it a bit difficult to talk about. But I was very fortunate to have had the help of my dear neighbor Mike in providing Magellan with care to make his final days more comfortable. I was also fortunate to have made arrangements with a very sensitive local vet to come to my house, which made it more comfortable for both me and Magellan when the end came. Knowing that Magellan is no longer suffering and is in a better place does ease my emotional pain a bit. But he is sorely missed! After saying my farewell to Magellan, I felt the need to get away for a couple of days, so I drove to Palm Springs and



spent the evening at the local Street Fair. The crowds of families having fun amongst the vendors selling everything from food to artwork helped to calm my mind. I ended the evening at the Las Casuelas bar listening to a local band playing pretty good renditions of familiar songs from the 60's and 70's. The next morning I took the first tram at 10:00am up to San Jacinto State Park and at the valley station it was already 92 degrees, but by the time we reached the mountain station at an elevation of 8,335 feet the temperature had dropped to 61 degrees. I decided to hike the trail through the wilderness area to the summit of Mt. San Jacinto, which at an elevation of 10,836 feet is the second highest peak in southern California. The 12 mile roundtrip hike took me through beautiful Ponderosa Pine forest and as the trail climbed higher the vegetation changed to alpine spruce and fir before reaching the rocky summit. From there I had magnificent views of the Mojave Desert to the east and the San Gabriel Mountains and the Los Angeles basin to the west. Along the trail I met a local guy who showed me a small herd of Mule deer grazing no more than 20 yards away. There were two young bucks, several does, and three fawns together. When I reached Wellman's Divide there were awesome views of the Santa Rosa Mountains and the Anza Borrego Desert to the south, with the mountains in Mexico beyond. Upon returning to the mountain station as the sun was setting, I had a fantastic dinner at the Peaks restaurant where I dined on grilled pork chop served with a delicious fig chutney, while I looked out at the lights of Palm Springs more than 5000 feet below. What a great setting for dinner. On Saturday I drove into Joshua Tree National Park to see a part of the park I had not visited before. As I was about to enter the southern gate of the park I spotted an historic marker designating the former site of "Camp Young", one of several US Army training camps located throughout the deserts of California and Arizona during World war II. At their peak, more than 100,000 troops were housed and trained in these camps, but today all that remains are a few historical markers. Once inside the park I made my way to Cottonwood Springs, which is an



ancient site of a Cahuilla Indian encampment where they collected Mesquite seeds and ground them into flour using stone mortars, some of which still exist today. The area is a beautiful oasis with huge palm trees surrounding it, giving the place a very quiet and cool feeling, especially with the water flowing from the springs. During the late 1800's there was a lot of mining activity throughout this region that continued even into the early 1960's before the whole area was given protected status as a National Monument and more recently as a National Park. One of the best preserved of the old mines is the "Desert Queen Mine" where the National Park Service has collected some of the old mining equipment for display, but the mine shafts have been boarded up. Not far from the mine is the "Wall Street Mill" where ore from several mines was brought in for processing. The site

has the remains of an old two stamp mill in great condition, having operated up until 1961. Nearby the mill were several old trucks dating back to the 1930's that were used to haul ore from the mines to the mill. By this time I must have hiked at least 10 miles in the 100+ degree heat, which certainly gave me an appreciation for the desert climate. That evening I went to the "Spa Casino Steakhouse" where I had an incredible dinner of filet mignon with black peppercorn sauce, lobster and garlic mashed potatoes, and almond glazed pound cake with lemon curd for dessert. Of special note was the presentation of the menu, which came in a leather bound folder that when opened up displayed the menu on a backlit screen. It was a very unique touch, especially when the bill came in the same manner. Returning home on Sunday I decided to take the scenic route up and over the San Bernardino Mountains by way of Big Bear Lake. State Highway 78 from Lucerne Valley climbs up the steep north face of the mountains in a series of tight switchbacks before reaching Big Bear Lake at nearly 8,000 feet elevation. The lake sits in a broad valley surrounded by huge Ponderosa Pines, making it a very popular place to escape the heat of the summer. From here the highway descends several thousand feet through thick pine forest and scrub oaks of the San Bernardino National Forest, finally reaching Redlands.



Then in early September I attended the PhotoShop World Conference in Las Vegas, and decided to take the scenic route by way of northern Arizona and southern Utah. On my way through Barstow, following historic Route 66, I saw a sign that read "What happens in Vegas starts in Barstow". Beyond Barstow old route 66 follows Interstate 40 for a few miles and then heads out across the Mojave Desert



on its own, parallel alongside the main line of the BNSF railroad. For the rest of the way to the Colorado River, the old highway becomes a lonely road through the heart of the desert, passing long abandoned cafes, gas stations, and motels in a few small towns that have definitely seen better days. There are really only two places from the original route 66 days that remain open – the “Baghdad Café” and “Roy’s Café”, but both are just a hint of their former glory. Just before crossing the Colorado River into Arizona, old route 66 joined up with I-40 once again as I drove east toward Kingman. Later in the evening I arrived in Williams and checked into the Grand Canyon Railroad Hotel, after which I walked to the center of town to have dinner at the famous route 66 landmark, “Cruiser’s 66 Café”. The huge homemade bacon

cheeseburger went well with the cold pint of local India Pale Ale from the Grand Canyon Brewery. Later in the evening I sat on the patio at the hotel and listened to the sound of the crickets in the cool air of the quiet night. The next morning I headed north toward the south rim of the Grand Canyon following the route of the Grand Canyon Railway for the first few miles. Once in the park I stopped at Mather Point for one of the most spectacular views of the canyon, especially with thunderstorms in the distance. As I was returning to my car, I noticed several tour buses had arrived and there was a long line of young Japanese couples, each waiting to have their photo taken next to the large Grand Canyon National Park Sign, so I took a photo of them. I had no idea if they had even seen the canyon yet, but obviously their

photo with the sign would prove to their friends and family, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that they had indeed been to the Grand Canyon. From Mather Point I drove east along the rim of the canyon with more spectacular views from several other overlooks before heading north to Cameron Trading Post, a collection of gorgeous old yellow sandstone buildings from the early 1900’s at the site of the first bridge crossing the Little Colorado River. It has served as a lodge and general store while also being a favorite meeting place for local members of the Navajo and Hopi tribes. North of Cameron Trading Post, Highway 89 follows the river, with spectacular views of the bright red Vermillion Cliffs. Further north as the highway climbed 3,000 feet up to the top of the Kaibab Plateau, two massive thunderstorms loomed on the western horizon. At this point I turned south on to



the highway leading to the north rim of the Grand Canyon, passing through several lovely meadows and rolling mountains, part of the Kaibab National Forest. At the end of the road was the magnificent Grand Canyon Lodge on the edge of the north rim at over 9,000 feet elevation. The main lobby and outdoor terrace overlooked the canyon with sweeping vistas to the south and west. I hiked the short but steep trail to Bright Angel Point where one has almost a full 360 degree view of the canyon that is absolutely overwhelming. Many of the



log cabins surrounding the main lodge are also located on the edge of the canyon, so one can only imagine what views come with the rising and setting of the sun. Unfortunately for me, the lodge was fully booked that night so I was unable to stay. Instead I was lucky enough to find a great little cabin at the Kaibab Lodge, just outside the park, overlooking a beautiful meadow surrounded by a forest of Ponderosa pine, Spruce, and Aspen. By now it was late afternoon and after taking a hike around the meadow, I sat on the porch of my cabin, had a couple of cold beers, and watched a small herd of Mule deer grazing near the edge of the forest. I made my way to the main lodge and had a wonderful homemade dinner of “Kaibab Chicken” that is cooked in beer with rosemary, making it so tender that the meat practically fell off

the bone. The cold mason jar of local Oak Creek Pale Ale was perfect with dinner. A sign in the lodge read *“If we see you smoking we will assume you are on fire and take appropriate measures”*, by no means your typical No Smoking sign. Since there was no TV or Internet at the lodge, I spent the rest of the evening sitting outside on the porch listening to music as a full moon rose slowly over the meadow. I was up early the next morning, had a great breakfast of bacon and eggs, and then headed north toward Utah. As I approached the state border, the highway began a slow descent from the Ponderosa Pine forest of the Kaibab Plateau into the Pinion Pine and Juniper forest 3,000 feet below before coming to an



overlook that afforded spectacular views of the brilliant red and yellow cliffs of Bryce Canyon and Zion national parks in the distance. From here the highway proceeded west through Hurricane Valley, entering the Paiute Indian Reservation and Pipe Springs National Monument. Here I found a fascinating historical site where an old ranch had been built in the 1850's by the Mormon Church to supply food and water for the men building the temple in St George. The spring had been used by Native Americans for hundreds of years before that, and the flow of water continues today. West of Pipe Springs I ran into a brief but intense thunderstorm before I came into St George, the main city in southern Utah. At this point I turned south on to Interstate 15 for the last leg of my journey to Las Vegas, which took me through the spectacular canyon of the Virgin River and then on past Lake Mead. Arriving in Las Vegas I checked into the Mandalay Bay Resort and then had "smoked short rib tamale" at the Border Grille before attending the first



evening Photoshop seminar. Initially my room was a corner suite on the 5th floor that the front desk assured me would be a very quiet location. But the next morning I was rudely awakened at 5:30am by the sound of a jackhammer! I couldn't believe it – was I dreaming? I called down to the front desk and asked what the hell was going on, but they knew nothing about a jackhammer. However, when the front desk clerk heard it in the background noise from my phone, he said he would check with his manager. In a couple of minutes he came back on the line to say that the renovation of the ground floor nightclub had just started with the demolition of the old club. Obviously I couldn't stay in the room with all of the demolition going on so he moved me to a suite on the

32nd floor where the sound of the jackhammer couldn't possibly reach me. When I went downstairs to the front desk to get the key to my new room I had to join a long line of other guests doing the same thing. It was clear to all of us that the front desk staff had never been notified of the impending demolition work. But my new room was quiet and had an amazing view of the Strip. Over the next couple of days I attended some great training sessions and met professional photographers from around the country. One session was particularly amazing, in which the instructor showed us the process by which he built a very realistic scene in Photoshop of the middle of Manhattan with several thousand layers of photos that ended up being an image over 75 feet wide and 15 feet high. The project took him more than 4 years and even included such small details as paintings on the walls of apartments that one would see through the apartment window if you zoomed into the image 1000% - like looking with a telescope! He referred to his technique as "painting with photos". For dinner that evening I went to the Four Seasons Hotel next door and their outdoor patio for an excellent northern Italian dish called "Capesante". It consisted of lovely seared scallops, together with cannelloni stuffed with a puree of cauliflower, almonds, and mascarpone cheese, served with a fresh green pea and mint coulis – really superb, especially on such a warm evening. The following day, being the 6th of September, it was my birthday, and as luck would have it, I won a prize in one of the sessions for being the only person in the room with a birthday on that day. Later in the afternoon, as I checked my email, I received several birthday greetings from friends and family, but the most incredible birthday greeting came from the general manager of the "Barr Al Jissah Shangri-La Resort" in Muscat, Oman, where I had been a hotel guest more than 5 years ago. It is amazing that they would have kept the date of my birthday in their records! In the final session of the day, an inspiring photographer talked about his long road to achieving success as a professional. One of his quotes was about the importance of promoting your business by knocking on a lot of doors, in which he said "If you don't get a response, you're knocking on the wrong door". Before going to dinner I grabbed my camera and went up to the rooftop bar on the 72nd floor of the Mandalay Bay Hotel. Here the views of the glittering lights of the Strip were phenomenal and the drink prices were commensurate with the height above the city. Back down to earth I chose to have a Lamb burger and a pint of Guinness at the very authentic Irish Pub called "Ra Ra" as I watched a football game between the University of Cincinnati and the University of Pittsburgh. During the half-time show a really funny thing happened as the University of Cincinnati band came marching on to the field. One of the trumpet players fell down the steps and lost his mouthpiece, but he got right back up and continued marching, "pretending" to be playing his trumpet. What made it so funny was the fact that the TV camera was zeroed in on him at the same time and virtually everyone in the stadium could watch him on the big screen! The guy should have been awarded as the most valuable player of the game for his





performance. The last day of the conference was as good as the first, especially the session with “Dr. Brown”, the Director of Creativity at Adobe Systems. He is very funny, engaging, and yet a real expert in the nuances of using Photoshop. At the beginning of the session, he gave all of us a thumb drive with some of his best Photoshop tips and tricks, and each time someone asked a question, his first response was always “Everything is on the thumb drive”, which after a while was being repeated by most people in the audience as well. The last session of the day was a great one on the technique of restoring old photos using Photoshop, and I can’t wait to try it on some my old family photos. In the closing session there were several prizes given away, including a \$2500 photo printer from Epson, which I

could surely have used. I didn’t win anything, but then neither did 4,000 other people in the room! That evening I walked over to the “House of Blues” and had a wonderful plate of “Voodoo Shrimp”, which is a specialty of executive chef Aaron Sanchez. The jumbo gulf shrimp were sautéed in a wild mushroom and black pepper sauce, and then served on a thick slice of fresh Jalapeno cornbread – fantastic, together with a cold pint of Stone IPA. I finished the evening at Rick Moonen’s seafood restaurant with seared scallops in a pork confit sauce, followed by steamed clams in garlic and white wine. For dessert, my server said that I had to try the trio of orange almond strudel, roasted fennel tuile, and buttermilk orange sherbet – absolutely delicious together! The next morning I checked out of the hotel and headed north to the Spring Mountains National Scenic Area that encompasses the summit of Mt Charleston (elevation 11,997 feet) and a beautiful pine and spruce forest that is part of the Toiyabe – Humboldt National Forest. The highway climbs to well over 9,000 feet at the foot of the summit before descending down the steep slopes on the southern side of the mountains. During the winter months there is skiing on the slopes of Mt Charleston, less than half an hour’s drive from Las Vegas – what a stark contrast in both landscape and culture. From here I headed south on I-15 to the California state line and then on to the back roads of the Mojave desert that would take me to the



abandoned railroad town of Kelso where I had visited the previous year to see the historic Union Pacific steam locomotive UP 844 as it made the journey from Barstow to Las Vegas, part of a celebration of the 100th anniversary of Arizona and New Mexico Statehood. After a few photos of the classic railroad station, I continued on south and west on old route 66 through the towns of 29 Palms and Joshua Tree, where I made a stop at the Joshua Tree Saloon for a cold beer and their signature Joshua burger. The cold beer was especially welcome in the 100 degree heat. Back on the road home, I had spectacular views of the San Bernardino Mountains and Mt San Jacinto as the sun was setting.

In mid-September I was invited to a fundraising dinner in northern Illinois organized by the College of Natural Resources Alumni Committee from my old alma mater, the University of Illinois. I flew to Chicago and spent the night at the airport hotel before picking up the rental car the next morning. In the small town of Union, just west of Chicago, is the Illinois Railway Museum, the largest of its kind in the country, and of course I had to stop and visit. The museum is spread out over 40 acres with more than 500 pieces of railroad equipment, most of it sitting on tracks in the huge rail yard. The collection includes some rare locomotives, such as the only surviving turbine powered diesel that was built for the Union Pacific railroad. Also in the rail yard were at least 50 old steam locomotives, one of which was the largest ever built, a giant Southern Pacific 4-8-8-4 locomotive. Perhaps the most beautifully restored of the rolling stock was a classic stainless steel Chicago, Burlington, & Quincy railroad streamliner named the “Nebraska Zephyr”, that once traveled the famous route from Chicago to Los Angeles. Leaving the museum I drove west to Rockford and then south along the scenic Rock River where the trees were beginning to show some of their fall colors. I stopped at Castle Rock State Park and climbed to the top of the rocky bluff overlooking the river and the surrounding forest. South of the state park I came to the small town of Dixon, the boyhood





home of Ronald Reagan. From here I took old highway 31, part of the historic Lincoln National Highway, to the town of Rochelle, the site of the dinner that evening. Rochelle is also known as a major hub for railroads today, where both the BNSF and Union Pacific mainlines meet each other on their way to and from Chicago. At this junction of the two railroads, the city has developed one of the first parks dedicated to viewing trains, since every day over 90 trains pass through the town. In the 15 minutes that I spent at the park before heading to the dinner, three 100 car freight trains passed by. The dinner was held on the estate of a committee member who hosted not only the venue but also everything needed for the dinner, including a huge tent, tables, chairs, decorations, food and beverage.

About 150 people attended the dinner and everyone agreed that it was a huge success. The following day I drove down to Champaign and toured the campus, which I had not seen for at least 20 years. In the afternoon I presented a seminar to a group of graduate students on the topic of GIS applications in management of natural resources. That evening I joined some of the committee members for dinner at a local restaurant, and as I entered the place I noticed an old grey haired man sitting at the bar. He looked at me and then walked over to shake my hand, but I had no idea who he was. Then he said "Jim, don't you recognize me?", and honestly I did not. "I'm Stan – now do you know who I am", and then it suddenly became clear to me. Here was someone from my 1967 Forestry class with whom I had shared the experience of sophomore summer camp in northern Minnesota. We had not been in touch with each other ever since that time, almost 45 years ago. Later on that evening Stan and I shared a few beers



and caught up on a lot of the time between us, and it felt good to do so. The next day I drove through the rolling cornfields of central Illinois to the town of Lincoln to visit the historic courthouse where Abraham Lincoln practiced law before running for election to the US Senate. Just west of Lincoln I came to a region of small hills (drumlins deposited by the great ice sheets of the glacial period thousands of years ago) and an historic cemetery situated in a beautiful hardwood forest on the edge of Elkhart. A beautiful stone chapel stands among a grove of large trees on the grounds of the cemetery where several famous people are buried, among them Governor Richard Oglesby, the only man to serve as the

governor of the state three separate times. Not far from Elkhart lies the town of Havana on the shore of the Illinois River. Within the old town stands a beautiful and historic red brick water tower dating from 1889, still in operation today. From Havana I traveled north along the river through the Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge which is home to millions of migratory birds in the spring and fall seasons. The narrow county road passed through the tiny village of "Goofey Ridge" before ending up at Spring Lake State Park where I was fortunate to see several pairs of beautiful, white Trumpeter Swans on the lake. Further north I came to the outskirts of Peoria and an area of many tall grain elevators on the banks of the river where huge barges and long freight trains were being



loaded. Then it was on to Interstate 74 and a short drive to Bloomington to visit with my sister Lynn. That evening we had a delicious dinner at the Desthil Brewery where we shared an order of beer battered deep fried asparagus served with Maple syrup Chipotle sauce. Lynn told me all about her recent trip to the Oregon coast and a reunion with the Baker City side of the family. The following morning we had breakfast at the "Times Past Inn", a local restaurant where Lynn has become a regular, so our server knew exactly what she wanted to order. I had a plate of corned beef hash with eggs, potatoes, and toast that was sure to keep me going all day. After breakfast I headed north to Chicago and my flight back to California.

At the end of September I signed up for a landscape photography seminar being presented by two well-known National Geographic Society photographers. It was held on the campus of the University of San Diego located on a high bluff above Mission Valley and the San Diego River. I took the train to Old Town San Diego where I had booked a room at the Best Western Hacienda Inn, a couple of blocks from

Old Town State Historic Park. After checking in to my room I headed to the Barra Barra Saloon, an authentic replica of the original bar that was established on this site over 200 years ago. I enjoyed a cold glass of Tecate, served with homemade chips and salsa while I sat outside on the patio, watching people as they roamed through Old Town. Later on I walked over to El Fandango Restaurant to have dinner, and the grilled shrimp stuffed with crab and wrapped in applewood smoked bacon were outstanding. The next morning I took the city bus up to the University of San Diego campus and found a spectacular collection of buildings all in the Spanish Mission design, similar to the lovely buildings in Balboa Park. I had no idea such a beautiful place existed so close to Old Town. The seminar began with a marvelous slide show of the instructors work for National Geographic Magazine over the past two decades. Just before the first morning coffee break the fire alarm suddenly sounded and we were all told to leave the building until campus security could investigate. About 20 minutes later we were allowed back into the building and to our amazement, we were told that the smoke detector in the room had apparently been set off by the instructor's laser pointer! Needless to say, both instructors used their laser pointers with great care after that. After the seminar I was really inspired to take some photos of the campus and the spectacular views of Mission Valley before walking back down the hill to my hotel in Old Town.



At the beginning of October, Leslie and I travelled up to Alaska to visit Marion and Michael. This would be the first time Leslie had been back to Anchorage in over 15 years, so she was bound to see a lot of changes in the city. Our flight on Alaska Airlines via Seattle was very nice, and included a tasty hot roast beef sandwich and potato salad for lunch. When we left southern California it was sunny and 95 degrees, but upon our arrival in Anchorage 6 hours later it was light rain and 42 degrees – quite a change indeed. After checking into the Captain Cook Hotel downtown we headed for the bar at Simon and Seafort's, a great restaurant which Leslie had managed when she lived in Anchorage many years ago. The bar was quite crowded but we found seats at the bar and ordered some food and drinks. My favorite dish is their crab and artichoke dip with fresh baked sourdough bread, and it never fails to be the best I've found anywhere in all my travels. The next morning we had breakfast in the hotel and then I gave the rental car keys to Leslie so that she could spend the day seeing the city, both those familiar places that haven't changed, as well as all the new places, of which there are many. I spent the morning at the Anchorage Museum with all of its really outstanding exhibits and displays about the history of Alaska, all the way from the earliest native inhabitants to the most recent development projects, including the oil pipeline. Of special interest is the fascinating Smithsonian Institution exhibit on the Native peoples of Alaska, with displays of their culture, art, history, and daily life, as told in their own words. From the museum I walked over to the Pioneer Cemetery where there were beautiful views of the Chugach Mountains, the highest peaks being covered with a fresh blanket of snow. From the cemetery I went over to Chester Creek and walked down the trail that follows the creek through the woods as it meanders its way through the city to Cook Inlet. Most of the trees were a bit past their prime fall colors, but still very pretty under the mostly cloudy skies. When I reached Westchester Lagoon, the sun was beginning to peek out of the thick clouds, giving us gorgeous views of the snow covered mountains and Cook Inlet. Across Cook Inlet the sun highlighted Mt Susitna (The Sleeping Lady) with her beautiful white coat. Then I walked along the coastal trail that follows the Alaska Railroad into downtown Anchorage, where I stopped at the Snow Goose Brewery for a beer and to watch the activity at the port of Anchorage down below the bluff. Later that evening I joined Leslie at the hotel and we walked to the Glacier Brewhouse in search of dinner, but as we went inside, the place was absolutely packed with people and no sign of an open table or even a seat at the bar. When we were told it would be at least an hour to wait for a table, we talked about finding another restaurant. But just as we were walking out, a young couple was leaving and graciously gave us their table. It was fortunate for us because we had a fabulous dinner of herb crusted pan fried halibut filet stuffed with crab, topped with grilled shrimp and served with a spicy tomato cream sauce. After a huge breakfast the next morning we headed south on the Seward Highway bound for Alyeska Resort. On the south edge of Anchorage we made a brief stop at Potters Marsh where there were several Trumpeter Swans resting. As the highway meandered along the shore of Turnagain





Arm a light rain began to fall, and further south it became heavier, so that by the time we reached Girdwood it was a steady rain and strong wind, making it no fun to drive. We continued on to Portage Glacier but found the visitor center was closed, and besides, with the heavy rain and fog, one couldn't see the glacier anyway. However, on the way back to Girdwood we had a lovely view of Byron Glacier, with its deep blue ice clearly visible. A little later, after we checked into the Alyeska Resort Hotel, I decided to brave the elements and hike the Winner Creek trail through the thick spruce and fir forest of the Crow Creek Valley. As I expected, parts of the trail were quite muddy and the whole forest was dripping with rain, but when I reached the falls at Winner Creek Gorge, it was worth it for the spectacular sights and sounds. The creek was running very high from the recent rains and a huge volume of water suddenly went from being a 30 ft wide stream into a narrow 4 ft wide rocky gorge. The sound of the rushing water cascading down more than 25 feet

into the canyon below was almost deafening. By the time I got back to the hotel after the 7 mile hike in the rain, I was totally soaked to the bone, so I took a hot shower and changed clothes to be ready for dinner that evening with Marion and Michael. The four of us met in the hotel lobby and then rode the cable car up to the top of the mountain for dinner in the Seven Glaciers Restaurant. It got that name from the fact that on a clear day one can see seven glaciers surrounding the valley below. However, on this night with the rain and fog, we did not see any of the glaciers, but we did share a wonderful meal together, including king crab, wagyu beef, and mustard crusted Ahi tuna, as well as a couple of fantastic wines chosen by Michael. We spent the better part of the evening catching up on all that has happened over the year, and it felt good to do so. The rain had ended overnight and the following morning we saw some patches of blue sky above the



valley. After a hearty breakfast of eggs, potatoes, toast, and reindeer sausage we took the tram up the mountain and had some magnificent views of snow covered peaks, glaciers, and the mountains surrounding Turnagain Arm, with their lower slopes covered in brilliant yellow and gold foliage. On the drive back to Anchorage there were lovely views of high peaks in the mighty Alaska Range shining in the distance on the far side of Cook Inlet. By now it was time to check in for our flight to California and after a cup of coffee in the Alaska Airlines Board Room, we boarded the plane. As we took off over Cook Inlet, we could see glimpses of Mt McKinley sitting majestically above the clouds more than 100 miles to the north.



A few days after returning from Alaska I headed to Las Vegas once again, but this time to attend a tradeshow for the meetings and convention industry. I drove the back roads to Las Vegas through the Mojave Desert and over the Spring Mountains to the Red Rock Hotel and Casino where I was part of a group being hosted by the resort. That evening the resort put on a dinner for our group where we were served a delicious offering of poached Sea Bass in tarragon cream sauce, filet mignon in cabernet sauce, and grilled asparagus with flaked almonds, followed by a large dessert buffet. After dinner we were all invited to a concert by Jason Mraz at the Red Rock Amphitheater outside under the stars. When I returned to my room later that night I found a chilled bottle of wine and a box of chocolate truffles waiting for me, as if I needed any more to eat. The next morning we all boarded a bus that took us to the Green Valley Ranch Resort and Spa located just a few miles east of the Las Vegas strip, but in a totally different environment. As we toured the property we saw beautiful gardens, fabulous rooms, lovely pools and patios, all designed in the architectural style of a rustic Tuscan village. Some of the suites have grand pianos, billiard tables, and private pools, but the most opulent of the suites is one called the "Villa". It's a self-contained, three bedroom house with, full kitchen, dining room, huge living room that opens on to a private pool and spa. There's also a grand piano, billiard table, and a large marble bar, fully stocked with the best wines and spirits, and all of this is "complimentary" for only \$10,000 a night! Our tour ended at the Spa where we were treated to a brunch buffet in the private courtyard, from which one could see the Las Vegas Strip in the distance. Following brunch we were invited to sign up for a spa treatment so I chose to go with a Swedish massage that was incredibly relaxing and made me wonder why I hadn't done this more often. Before leaving the resort I took a walk around the place to





take some photos, especially of the lovely Tuscan architecture and the gardens, which included a small vineyard as well. Then we all boarded a small bus for the trip back to the Red Rock Resort, but as we proceeded down the highway I had a premonition that the bus would have a breakdown along the way. And sure enough, just a few minutes later the driver suddenly pulled off to the side of the road and announced that the engine had died. He called his company on the cell phone to request they send another bus, but the dispatcher told him it could be overheated fuel injectors, so let the engine cool off for 5 minutes and start it again. Well, that worked and soon we were on our way again, but as the highway climbed a small hill, I could hear the engine laboring under the load and I could sense the anxiety of the driver as well. I knew what was coming, another breakdown, and just as we turned on to the exit for Red Rock, a lady in the back of the bus shouted out "We made it!" Sure enough, that was the moment the engine died again, on the exit ramp less than 100 yards from the Hotel. At that point I decided to get out and walk the rest of the way, and it wasn't long before the rest of the people followed. I felt bad for the driver, but why sit in the bus waiting for a rescue? Later that evening I joined our group for another

dinner hosted by the resort, this time in their fine dining restaurant called "T-Bones Steakhouse". After cocktails and hors d'oeuvres we sat down to a fabulous dinner that started with a unique chopped salad and a huge tray of fresh seafood on ice, including lobster, crab, shrimp, and oysters. For the main course we had filet mignon and lobster tail, accompanied by side dishes of creamed spinach, steamed broccoli, and garlic mashed potatoes. It was truly an excellent meal that was finished with cr me br lee and a cup of espresso. During dinner I was seated next to a guy named Bill from New York, and in the conversation I found out that Bill had won two gold medals and a silver medal at the 1956 Summer Olympics in Melbourne. The years since his victories have not been very kind to him as he is now suffering from severe arthritis, but amazingly enough, he still holds two world records in the Pentathlon and shooting. I found Bill to be a very nice and humble man, as well as fascinating to talk with. The next day I checked out of the Red Rock Resort and checked into the Wynn Encore Hotel on the Strip, where I was booked for the next three days while attending the IMEX America tradeshow being held at the Sands Expo. Walking from the Wynn Encore to the Sands Expo involved following a circuitous route through the casinos of the Wynn Hotel, Palazzo Hotel, and the Venetian Hotel, so anyone addicted to gambling probably would not have completed the entire journey. Over the next three days I had a full schedule of meetings with various hotel properties, convention management consultants, and destination management companies representing countries from all over the world. In the evenings I was often invited to their receptions and parties, some of which I did attend. Among them was a reception hosted by Cvent that was held in a private room of the Dal Toro Restaurant where there were at least two dozen vintage and antique "celebrity" cars and motorcycles on display. I found the cars to be fascinating, but I noticed that surprisingly few of the people at the reception took time to look at them and to read about the history of ownership, some of which had been the prized possessions of famous Hollywood movie stars. Later in the evening I joined the group again for a dinner on the pool terrace at the Trump Hotel, also hosted by the Preferred Hotels Group. From the terrace there were great views of the lights of the Las Vegas Strip shining brightly against the dark night sky. Dinner consisted of a delicious buffet of roast turkey, oyster stuffing, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes and gravy, and by coincidence, it was Canadian Thanksgiving Day! I ended the day sitting outside in the warm evening on the Lakeside Terrace at the Wynn Hotel, watching a beautiful and very colorful light show on the huge wall of water facing the restaurant. At one point two large lighted glass globes that seemed to float on the surface of the water did a "dance" to some beautiful classical music. The following day was another full schedule of meetings, one of which was with Kuala Lumpur Shangri-La Hotel, where the sales staff was giving everyone \$40 in fake Malaysian dollars to spend in their marketplace that featured traditional Malaysian gifts. I overheard one of the staff commenting that less than half of the people were "bargaining" for the items in the marketplace, and since every item was priced at \$40, it was quite funny. In the afternoon I ran into a couple of my colleagues from ESRI and we shared stories of our meetings while we sampled a glass of Dunkel beer from the German pavilion. That evening I joined my group again for dinner at the top of the Palms Hotel in the "Alize Restaurant", and being 56 stories high we had a spectacular 360 degree view of the bright lights of Las Vegas. Once again, the food and wine was amazing, starting with a roasted lobster and tomato bisque, followed by a main course of almond crusted rack of lamb, and finished with chocolate mocha tart for dessert. On my last day in Las Vegas I attended the PCMA Global Professional Conference where we heard some fascinating presentations by meeting planners who shared their experiences in organizing



and managing meetings and conventions around the world. In the evening, following the afternoon sessions, we gathered for a heavy reception hosted by PCMA, where we enjoyed some dishes from all over the globe, including Malaysian fried rice with chicken and shrimp served with spicy mango chutney. The cold Tsing Tao beer from China went very well with the spicy Asian dishes. I ended the evening in the Sports Bar at the Wynn Hotel as the Detroit Tigers beat the Oakland A's to win the divisional title. Unfortunately for Detroit fans, the team eventually went on to lose in the final game of the playoffs. During the night severe thunderstorms hit Las Vegas with torrential rain, which is unusual for this time of year, but by morning the skies were clearing. I checked out of the hotel and headed west to Red Rock



Canyon to take photos as the beautiful colors of the rocky landscape were highlighted in the early morning sunshine. Then I drove west over the 5470 foot summit of the Spring Mountains to the small town of Beatty, Nevada which lays claim to be the town closest to the

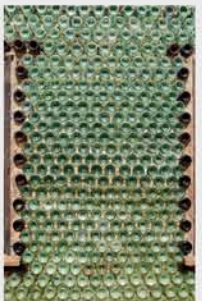


infamous Area 51, and it even has its own "Alien Museum", but unfortunately it was closed when I drove through the town. However, it was a good place to fill up with cheap Nevada gas before going on to California, but when I tried using my credit card, the pump wouldn't read it. Finally the lady running the station came out and found the same problem, so she activated the pump from inside the store and gave me a free cup of coffee for my inconvenience – nice folks in Beatty. About 4 miles further west I came to the old mining ghost town of Rhyolite where BLM has preserved the remaining concrete and stone buildings that date from the late 1800's. The best preserved building was the old Las Vegas and

Tonopah Railroad depot which is a beautiful stone structure, but unfortunately surrounded now by a chain link fence, so it's not possible to see anything inside the building. Perhaps BLM will open it up some day as a visitor center. Probably the most unique and fascinating structure was Tom Kelley's Bottle House, a lovely 3 room house whose walls are made entirely from empty glass bottles laid on their side with the bottom of the bottles facing the outside. The last resident of Rhyolite left town in 1907 and hasn't been heard from since. Continuing westward I entered Death Valley National Park and as the road



descended the steep slope leading down to the valley floor, there were stunning views of the Panamint Mountains with heavy clouds hanging over the highest peaks. Once down in the valley at 50 feet below sea level, I began seeing several places where water was standing in the road, having been flooded from the recent rains. It was very strange indeed seeing these large pools of water in such a dry place as Death Valley. The highway climbed the steep slope of the Panamint Range up to the 5000 foot summit before plunging again down the other side and into the Panamint Valley. Here I began seeing roadside warning signs to be on the lookout for wild horses and burros that have made this remote and isolated valley



their home for over 150 years. From the Panamint Valley the highway took me south through the mining community of Trona, which is well known for having the world's largest soda ash processing plant that mines minerals from the huge dry salt lake bed upon which the town sits. Being that it's located on such a large saline deposit means that it's impossible to grow anything, not even grass, so the town has the appearance of devastation as one drives through. But when you see the mile long freight trains hauling the mineral products from the plant, it's very much alive. From Trona I continued south to another old mining ghost town called Randsburg, but here a small population still remains among the very well preserved old buildings that date from the late 1800's and early 1900's. The town is named for the



nearby Rand Mine, which draws its name from the famous gold mining region of South Africa. I walked around the old town taking photos of the classic 19th century buildings before heading west to Tehachapi, where I planned to stay the night. After a long drive through the heart of the Mojave Desert I arrived in Tehachapi, located in the cool Ponderosa Pine forest of the southern Sierra



Nevada Mountains. I checked into the Fairfield Inn and then went looking for a place to have dinner, ending up at the "City Slicker's Saloon" where I had a superb plate of broiled



halibut with capers and grilled shrimp, along with a lemon butter sauce. Early the next morning I drove up to the Tehachapi Loop in the hopes of seeing one of the 80 or so trains that pass through it each day. And just as I got to the loop, a heavy 100+ car BNSF freight train being pulled by six locomotives at the front and two in the rear, slowly rolled down through the 360 degree track crossing over itself in the process. This site is a very popular place for watching trains and a busload of tourists was parked beside the road as well to see the train make its way through the loop. Soon I was driving back over the Cajon Pass and into Redlands, with a lot of photos and stories to tell.

Near the end of October I made a short overnight trip to Campo, a small town in San Diego County near the border with Mexico and home to the Pacific Southwest Railway Museum. On the way I stopped at the Mission Trails Regional Park to hike a trail along the shoreline of small lake and wetlands in the San Diego River watershed. There were some lovely views of the waterfowl on the lake and the San Diego Mountains in the background. Then I headed east on Interstate 8 through the town of Alpine in the Cleveland National Forest and over the 4000 foot summit of the Laguna Mountains to Campo. Earlier I had booked a special ticket to ride in the cab of the locomotive on the daily excursion along the tracks of the old San Diego and Eastern Railroad that used to haul passengers and freight from San Diego to Yuma. It was known as the "impossible railroad" because of the rugged mountain topography along the route, a significant portion of which ran through northern Mexico and involved blasting at least a dozen tunnels in the process. The line opened in 1907 and provided regular service until the 1970's when a series of tunnels collapsed and were abandoned. In the mid 1980's the track and rolling stock were purchased by the San Diego Railroad Museum and the depot at Campo was designated as the museum headquarters. Since then the museum has restored several locomotives and passenger cars that it uses for the excursion trains, one of which used to make a special trip from Campo to Tijuana, Mexico until 4 years ago when the tunnel at the border collapsed. Today the train travels only from Campo to the Mexican border



and back, but it's a scenic journey and gives one the sense of how rugged the route really is, especially riding in the locomotive with the engineer who explains the entire operation of the train. On this particular day the museum was running the "Pumpkin Express", which was filled to capacity with families and small children preparing for Halloween and Thanksgiving. Upon our return to the depot, I toured the locomotive shops where restored steam engines and Pullman coaches were on display, many of them decorated with ghosts and goblins to thrill the kids. That evening I stayed at the Sycuan Resort and Spa, located on the Sycuan Indian Reservation in the mountains east of San Diego, where my room and patio overlooked the beautiful golf course.

At the end of October I signed up for a week long photography workshop in Santa Fe, New Mexico, something I had been planning for some time. I decided to take a couple of extra days and go by car, rather doing it by plane and rental car. I left early on Saturday morning and drove south to Escondido in order to deliver my old printer that I had just sold on eBay, before heading east on Interstate 8 to Yuma. On the far side of the San Diego Mountains are the immense fields of produce, hay, and fruit trees in the Imperial Valley, beyond which are the Imperial Sand Dunes, a very popular area on the weekend for off-road vehicles and dune buggies. I filled up with gas in Yuma to take advantage of the significantly lower prices in Arizona and then headed north on US 95 past the Yuma Proving Grounds and Castle Dome Mountains to the small mining community of Quartzite. It doesn't have a lot to offer, but of special interest is the large welcome sign on the edge of town which had three camels carved in stone. Later on I found out the history of the town includes the establishment of the US Army Camel Corps in 1941 as an experiment to see if camels would be a viable form of military transportation in the desert areas. Well, as we all know, of course they are viable in the desert, but the Army abandoned the project at the end of WWII and the camels were turned loose. Up until the early 1950's feral camels could still be sighted around Quartzite, hence the homage to the camels on the welcome sign today. From Quartzite I headed northeast on US 60 across the



desert, passing the small town of Hope, where they had erected a sign to mark the edge of town, which read "You are beyond Hope now!" Then I was headed toward Prescott on state highway 71, which on the map had a few "wrinkles" in the route, but when the road left the desert and started climbing into the mountains the "wrinkles" became a long series of steep grades and hairpin turns at 15 – 20 mph! Although the route through the Prescott National Forest was very scenic, the drive was a bit strenuous, especially as night fell. By the time I reached Prescott, it was already dark and in navigating through the town I apparently missed the turn on to highway 89, and instead ended up on another route. Several miles later, after seeing that the moon was rising in the wrong direction, it became obvious I was not



where I had planned to be. So when I came to a junction in the road, I stopped at an old saloon nearby to ask which way I should turn to get to Interstate 40. The barmaid told me to turn right and that would take me to US 93 and I-40. Her directions put me on a narrow, winding county road, which in the dark of night seemed to go on forever before finally coming to the junction with US 93. Not long after I turned on to the 4 lane highway, I saw a sign for Kingman 45 miles ahead, and at that point I knew I had gone way off my planned route because I was now heading northwest when I should have been heading northeast. To add insult to injury, my gas gauge warning light suddenly came on and I knew it was only a matter of time before I had better see a gas station or else. And not having passed a gas station for the past two hours didn't help ease the stress. As I approached the junction with I-40 I was hoping to see that gas station I so much needed now, but unfortunately the only thing at the junction was a sign with one arrow pointing west to Kingman and the other pointing east toward Flagstaff. So I had a choice to make, either go west to Kingman that I knew would be about 20 miles, or go east without knowing how far it would be to the next gas station. So I chose to turn west and a few minutes later as I crested the hill, the shining lights of a Shell station were directly ahead – thank goodness. I filled up the tank and with a fresh cup of coffee I headed east on I-40 to Williams,



my destination for the night. Just before 10:00pm I checked into my room at the Grand Canyon Railroad Hotel and walked to "Cruiser's Route 66 Café" for a homemade bacon cheeseburger and a cold pint of IPA from the Grand Canyon Brewery next door. As I walked back to the hotel the air was becoming quite chilly and there was sure to be frost on the windows by morning. After a hearty breakfast at the Depot Café, I headed east on I-40, past Flagstaff and through the beautiful Ponderosa Pines of the Coconino National Forest, with gorgeous views of the San Francisco Peaks to the north. About 100 miles down the road I came to the Petrified Forest National Park and the Painted Desert, just south of the Navajo Indian Reservation. Scattered throughout the park were huge trunks of trees from a

tropical forest that once covered this part of the world more than 200 million years ago, and now forever preserved as stone. Besides the gorgeous colors of the petrified wood, there were spectacular sweeping vistas of the colorful landscape, especially in the area known as the Painted Desert. Further east on the way to Albuquerque were beautiful yellow, orange, and red mesas in the Cibola National Forest, which is named after the legendary city of gold that lured the Spanish explorers to this area in 1541.

Early in the evening, as the sun was setting, there were beautiful views of the Sandia Mountains outside of Albuquerque as I travelled north to Santa Fe, where I checked into the Marriott Residence Inn that would be my home for the next five days. For dinner that night I went to the Red Lobster restaurant in the Santa Fe Place Mall and enjoyed a delicious meal of Cajun spiced, blackened fresh Atlantic salmon in a spicy papaya cream sauce and topped with grilled shrimp and pico de gallo. The next morning I drove to the Santa Fe Photography School,



which is located on the eastern edge of the city, at the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, on the grounds of the Sacred Heart of Immaculate Mary Retreat. Located within the retreat is the Carmelite Monastery where a convent of nuns observes complete silence as they go about their daily routines. All of the buildings on the grounds of the retreat are designed in the classic adobe style so common in this region. The first day of the workshop involved a detailed introduction to the Adobe Lightroom software that we would be working with for the entire week, and since there were only 8 of us in the class, this was going to be intense. For dinner that evening I went downtown near the town square to the "Del Charro Saloon", which means "the cowboy" in Spanish. It's a rustic bar that is very popular with the locals, and the bartender recommended the local Santa Fe Pale Ale, along with an order of Frito Pie, also a popular local dish. It consists of a large



bowl of Frito corn chips covered with a generous helping of homemade chili, topped with cheese and then baked like a casserole. The combination is very tasty and is said to have been invented here in Santa Fe in the early 1960's and first served at the F W Woolworth's lunch counter. Later in the evening, the lady sitting next to me was showing everyone at the bar a photo of her Halloween costume that she designed herself, which she named "Devil with the Blue Dress On", after the famous rock-n-roll song first performed by Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels in 1966. Upon returning to my hotel room, I turned on the news and watched with disbelief and sadness, the extent of the damage on the East Coast from Hurricane Sandy. Over 9 million people

were without power, lower Manhattan and the New York City subway was flooded, and the New Jersey shore was all but devastated. My heart went out to the people who were suffering such tremendous hardship, so I went online and donated to the Red Cross that night. The following day was another great workshop experience, and our instructor Rick, suggested we all go to lunch at "Bumble Bee's Baja Grill", one of his favorite lunch spots. As we walked in the door we were immediately aware of the many bright yellow and black paper mache bumble bees hanging from the ceiling and, not only was the décor very colorful, the food was very fresh and delicious. After the class, I hiked part of the Atalaya Mountain trail in the Santa Fe National Forest for a couple of miles through the pinion pine and juniper forest to a point on the mountain where I had a magnificent view of the sunset over the San Juan Mountains to the west. That evening I went to the "Ristra Restaurant" downtown which was widely acclaimed as the best fusion of French and Southwest cuisine in the city, if such a fusion is really possible. The restaurant is situated in an classic Victorian house on an old residential street and looked rather inviting as I entered and sat at the bar. But right away I noticed that I was the only customer in the entire place, which made me feel a bit awkward. However, I went ahead and ordered a glass of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc to accompany an appetizer of Mediterranean Black Mussels in a sauce of chipotle, mint, and aromatics, which was delicious. The bartender told me the special that night was grilled Elk, which sounded inviting, but since I was still the only person in the restaurant, I decided to finish my wine and search out another place for dinner. As I walked back to my car, I saw the "Raaga Restaurant" next door and it was much livelier, so I walked in and found a lovely family owned Indian restaurant. I started with a cold glass of the "Maharaja Premium Indian Pilsner", followed by a plate of Chicken Makhani, which is chicken Tikka and roasted potatoes served in a spicy tomato cream sauce and served with hot freshly baked onion naan. The serving was so huge that I had to take half of it back to my hotel, but it was an excellent meal and a very friendly place. The finishing touch for dinner was a small bowl of mango and papaya sherbet to cool the taste buds. The workshop the next day was really great and now I felt that all the books and videos I have about the Lightroom software will make a lot more sense to me. For lunch today, Rick took us to a very nice Mexican seafood restaurant where I had a superb filet of Tilapia baked in a paper bag and topped with crab, scallops, shrimp, and melted cheese. On the way back to my hotel after class I stopped by the Art Museum to photograph a very large and beautiful life size bronze sculpture depicting a covered wagon being drawn by four mules, with a cowboy on horseback in the lead, and an Indian off to the side of the trail holding a basket. The title of the piece was "Journey's End" and it represents the arrival of the first pioneers on the old Santa Fe Trail. That evening I had dinner at Appleby's where one of my favorites was on the menu, crispy chicken with orange spiced sauce over almond rice and served with fresh steamed broccoli. The meal was wonderful, but I have to admit that being served by Dracula took a bit of getting used to. Since this was Halloween night, all of the staff wore costumes! The following day we took a field trip to the Plaza in center of old Santa Fe with the goal of capturing our view of the essence of Santa Fe in photographs that we would later process in the lab. I found the old town area to be a wonderful mix of old adobe architecture and late



1800's wooden Victorian buildings that were brilliantly white-washed. On the east side of the Plaza was the very elegant 19th century St Francis Cathedral located in a lovely park beside the Santa Fe River. I was lucky enough to be taking a photo of the cathedral as the afternoon mass procession lead by the priest and alter boys exited the front door. As I walked through the park by the river, the giant cottonwood trees were displaying their finest fall attire in brilliant yellow foliage against the deep blue sky. Around the perimeter of the Plaza were lots of small shops and galleries, as well as many native artisans selling their beautiful works in silver, turquoise, and ceramic. As I wandered through the narrow streets and alleyways, I was constantly attracted to the small details in the myriad of shops, especially the

many long strings of bright red chilies drying in the sun. That evening we all had a farewell dinner at “La Chosa” Mexican restaurant that is popular with locals, and famous for their homemade posole that comes with plenty of the red chilies. The last day of our workshop was just as great as the first day and Rick had planned for a group photo outside beneath one of the cottonwood trees where we all gathered up a handful of leaves and tossed them into the air as the camera clicked away. It turned out to be a very interesting photo that really expressed the personality of Rick. After class that evening I went to “El Farol”, the oldest bar in Santa Fe and very rustic in design, located among many small art galleries along a narrow road beside the Santa Fe River. The bar is well known for its marvelous array of tapas every night, and this night was no exception. I started with a small plate of grilled garlic shrimp in a lime and chili sauce, followed by a plate of roasted pork tenderloin slices topped with fresh figs and melted Spanish cheese, complimented by a reduction of Port and figs – truly an



outstanding dish! Parker, the bartender, introduced himself to everyone that came in, and incredibly, he remembered everyone’s name as he served them each time. Later on I went downtown to the “Staab House Bar” located in the “La Posada Hotel”, an historic old Victorian structure that was built in the late 1800’s and remains very much as it was in the past. There was a lively crowd watching the Hurricane Sandy Relief Benefit Concert being headlined by Bruce Springsteen, Bon Jovi, and Sting. The next morning I packed my bags and headed north on highway 84 following the Rio Grande with the beautiful golden yellow foliage of giant cottonwood trees along its banks. Just beyond the small Indian pueblo of Abiquiti I

discovered the home and studio of the famous artist of American Southwest landscapes, Georgia O’Keefe. Her home was a gorgeous adobe structure set among a large grove of magnificent cottonwood trees and surrounded by the spectacular red cliffs that are often seen in her paintings. From Abiquiti the road climbed west into the San Juan

Mountains and the lovely Ponderosa Pine in the Santa Fe National Forest before descending again into the high desert region of northwest New Mexico. Soon I could see the outline of a huge rock formation on the horizon and I instantly recognized it as Shiprock, a distinctive landmark for pioneers heading west to California on the old Santa Fe Trail. Beyond Shiprock I came to a sign pointing to the Four Corners Monument, a geographic location that marks the boundary of four states, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Utah. As I drove into the park surrounding the monument I could see the place where all four state flags were displayed around the survey marker in the center. The area is now managed by the Navajo Nation and one can buy native jewelry, stoneware, and best of all, fresh Indian frybread drizzled with local mesquite honey – really delicious. From the four corners region I travelled south on US 191 through the heart of the Navajo reservation and past Canyon de Chelly as the sun was



setting, before reaching the junction with I-40 and on to Flagstaff, where I spent the night. Early the next morning I headed south on highway 89A toward Sedona and for the first few miles the road meandered through the lovely Ponderosa Pine forest. Then all of a sudden, there was a large sign along the road warning vehicles over 40 feet to proceed no further. Just around the next corner the road began a steep, winding descent into the depths of Oak Creek Canyon through a long series of 15 – 20 mph turns. For the next 32 miles the road slowly twisted and turned beneath spectacular sheer 1,000 foot high cliffs reflecting the morning sun. Once the road reached the floor of the valley some 3,000 feet below the rim of the narrow canyon, I

stopped at a Coconino National Forest campground in a large grove of trees to take photos of the stunning landscape. A few miles further south down the canyon was Slide Rock State Park where the waters of Oak Creek have eroded the soft yellow sandstone of the stream bed to form large, very smooth surfaces that make for a perfect natural water slide. Also within the park is an old homestead dating back to the mid 1800’s where fruits and vegetables were farmed using a very elaborate irrigation system that even included a small water driven electrical power generator, the first in this part of the world. The State Parks Department has restored



most of the old farm buildings, as well as three old stone “tourist” cabins that were built in the 1920’s. The park really combines stunning scenery, historical interest, and a unique kind of recreation very well – definitely a place to return to someday. Just a few miles further down the road is the lovely town of Sedona, perched precariously on top of the steep ridge several hundred feet above Oak Creek. Many of its luxury hotels and resorts afford guests spectacular views of the brilliant red and yellow sandstone cliffs surrounding the town. Sedona is also very well known for the large artist community that resides here at least part of the year, and the town has an abundance of galleries and shops featuring their work. Beyond Sedona the highway crossed a broad valley before heading 5,000 feet up the mountains again into the Tonto National Forest, becoming a steep, narrow winding road to the old gold mining town of Jerome. The town clings to the steep mountainside next to many of the mines, and dates from the 1880’s when it was one



of the largest communities in Arizona. Today much of the town remains as it was back then, but now with a smaller population of permanent residents. The headquarters for the Jerome State Historical Park is located in the mansion built by the founder of the town and it features some amenities that were ahead of its time, such as hot and cold running water, electricity, an Italian marble shower, and a steam bath. Today the old house serves as a museum that displays the fascinating history of mining in the region, including a unique 3D model of thousands of tunnels that were blasted out of the mountain beneath the town. The road from Jerome climbed another 2,500 feet to the 7,800 foot summit of the Mingus Mountains where it begins a hair-raising descent down

a very steep, narrow canyon for 15 miles, before suddenly coming into the Prescott Valley. On the far side of the valley is the town of Prescott where I stopped at a beautiful city park along the river, and a large grove of old cottonwoods were decked out in their full fall splendor. Southwest of Prescott I came to another broad valley, home to the vast Maughn Ranch, with lovely meadows of golden grass and small groves of giant cottonwood trees. Once again the highway ascended another mountain range before crossing the vast expanse of the Sonoran Desert on the way west to the Colorado River and back to California. As I passed through the small town of Salome, I saw an old abandoned gas station called the “Pit Stop” that had been repurposed as a “comfort station”, now having two old wooden outhouses in place of the gas pumps!



At the beginning of November I took a short trip to the Stone Brewery in Escondido where they were holding a special “tapping of casks” to sample the special brews of 12 different beers, each produced by one of their brewmasters according to their own personal recipes. The event began with the tapping of the casks in one single operation, followed by the opportunity for us to taste samples of whichever beers interested us. There were many unique flavors from added herbs and spices, such as cinnamon, allspice, nutmeg, and lavender. My favorite was probably the pale ale flavored with lavender and nutmeg. That evening I had a fantastic “Chicken schnitzel” in the brewery’s restaurant that overlooks a lovely tropical garden.

The following week I joined the other members of the PCMA Southwest and Pacific Chapter Board of Directors for the annual two day retreat, which this year was held at the La Quinta Resort and Spa in Indian Wells. The resort was established in 1926 as an exclusive getaway for the Hollywood wealthy and famous. Originally there were two dozen Spanish style adobe haciendas surrounding a golf course at the foot of the Santa Rosa Mountains. The resort has grown over the years to become a huge property with 41 swimming pools and 6 golf courses, but it still retains the beautiful adobe architecture and spectacular views that made it a favorite spot for the stars. The resort gave us complimentary suites that had private patios and gorgeous views of the mountains, as well as providing us with a meeting room, complete with food and beverage service. In the evening of the first day we all shared dinner at Morgan’s, the resort’s fine dining restaurant, where we were treated to tempura fried eggplant with aioli sauce and grilled shrimp appetizers. For the main course I chose the fresh Maine diver scallops sautéed in garlic butter, served with





ginger pumpkin risotto and basil essence, accompanied by a side dish of ginger scented sweet corn. The wines were excellent and the finishing touch of a lovely Pear tart with ginger cream sauce, topped with French vanilla ice cream was a perfect end to a superb dinner. The next morning we began our board meeting with a wonderful breakfast of “Huevos Rancheros “ and applewood smoked bacon as we dined in the courtyard. As the time for lunch approached, the resort had a surprise by inviting us to “La Casa”, the former private residence of Greta Garbo, where they had laid out large tables in the residence courtyard to serve a delicious traditional Italian menu family style. After our board meeting closed late in the afternoon on Friday, I decided to stay over that night, and as I walked back to my

suite, I saw hundreds of young Marines in their finest dress blues, many with their girlfriends and wives, heading for the ballroom. I asked one of them what was the special occasion and he proudly said “Sir, it’s the Marine Ball – the birthday of the Corps”! Judging by the large number of Marines at La Quinta, I wondered if they had closed the base at 29 Palms for the night. Later on I ran into Kay at the outdoor bar overlooking the ballroom, and her husband Dean and I shared stories of our days in the military. The following day I walked around the resort taking photos of the original adobe haciendas that are all named for southern California geographic landmarks, such as San Jacinto, San Juan Capistrano, and San Gabriel.

At the end of November we had our final board meeting and education program of the year, which was hosted by the Disney Institute at the Disneyland Resort in Anaheim. Disney was kind enough to offer the board members a complimentary night at the magnificent Grand Californian Hotel and Spa before our board meeting the following morning. We also had a very special deal on a ticket to the park, which I took advantage of the day before the meeting, in order to see the new “Cars” attraction at Disney’s California Adventure. As I left home, the weather forecast was for showers later in the



day, but I was fortunate to have mostly sunny skies throughout. I started my day in the park by walking around the area known as Paradise Pier, which is a replica of the Santa Monica Pier with lots of shops, restaurants, a huge Ferris Wheel, and a monster roller coaster. The ride on the roller coaster starts with being hurled up a steep ramp by a steam catapult similar to the kind they use on to propel jet fighters from the deck of aircraft carriers. Then it was on to the Cars attraction where they have reproduced a full size model of Radiator Springs, the fictional small town in the Cars movie, complete with all of the Cars characters. It’s very well done and has become very popular since it opened this past summer. Among the rides is one where you sit in the middle of a giant tire floating on a cushion of air, and you must lean your body to steer it as you try to avoid being hit by another giant tire. It is a very unique version of the old bumper car ride that we all remember from carnival days. But the most popular ride is the “Racers” in which one rides in a two-seater sports car that takes you on a road trip through “Ornament Valley”, a re-creation of the fictional American

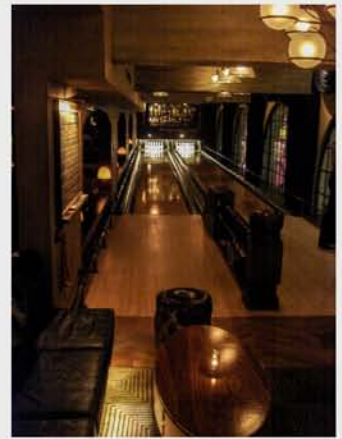


southwest landscape around Radiator Springs. The drive starts off slow as you pass some of the desert scenery and then you arrive in the town itself, where the Cars characters tell you a bit about the history of the community and its residents. The final segment of the ride, as you leave town, is a race with another of the sports cars through hairpin turns and steep hills at breakneck speed – it’s a serious thrill! By this time I was up for some lunch so I went to Pacific Wharf, a replica of San Francisco’s Fisherman’s Wharf, where I had a delicious Asian chicken rice bowl with spicy Korean sauce, along with a cold Sapporo beer that I enjoyed outside in the courtyard under warm, sunny skies. After lunch I walked around the Hollywood area which is a replica of 1930’s Los Angeles, complete with theaters and street entertainment. That evening I joined many other people for a performance of the “World of Color”, a huge water show in which hundreds of fountains and water jets create beautiful walls of color, as well as being the “screen” on which familiar scenes from various Disney films are projected, giving the feeling of being in 3D. It has to be the most spectacular and beautiful water show I’ve ever seen, and one that should not be missed. Following our board meeting in the morning, the Disney Institute presented a program at lunch on the subject of creativity, and the Disney philosophy of “Treat our cast members well and they will



treat our guests the same way" is fundamental to the entire success of the Disney Company.

Then at the beginning of December I was invited to a holiday party hosted by Delta Airlines for members of their Los Angeles Frequent Flyers Forum. The party was held in Hollywood at the classic Roosevelt Hotel, which is famous as the site for the first ever Academy Awards, as well as hosting world famous celebrities and heads of state. Delta had reserved the "Spare Room" in the hotel, an exclusive club with a private two lane bowling alley dating from the 1920's. The atmosphere of the room was very elegant and the hotel staff was all dressed in period clothes from that era. One of the most unique aspects of bowling alley were the bowling shoes, because they were not just your ordinary bowling shoes you get at the neighborhood lanes. These are designer shoes that go for upwards of \$1,000 a pair, so they don't let you wear them out of the hotel! Although no one bowled a perfect game that night, everyone had a lot of fun trying to get the ball to roll down the lane without going into the gutter.



Soon it will be time for the arrival of my sister Lynn, and I have a few more trips around southern California planned to show her some of my favorite spots. Until next year then, I want to wish all of you a very happy holiday with your family and friends, and all the best for this coming New Year!



PHOTO GALLERY



South Coast Winery - "Carter Reserve Room"



Santa Monica beach



National Law Library - Washington, DC



Washington Monument



Jensen - Alvarado Historic Ranch



Santa Ana River Regional Park



Tehachapi Depot



USS Midway - San Diego



San Diego Bay



Monte de Oro Winery - Barrel Room



Cherry Blossom Festival - Washington, DC



Del Mar Racetrack



Rios Historic District - San Juan Capistrano



Downtown Los Angeles



15th Century Tomb - Lodi Gardens, New Delhi



"LA Live"



Palm Canyon



Westchester Lagoon - Anchorage, Alaska



View of Turnagain Arm - Mt Alyeska, Alaska



Cajon Pass, California

