

CHRISTMAS

2015



January

(Chicago)

Soon after the beginning of the year I boarded a Delta Airlines flight to Salt Lake City and on to Chicago to attend the annual meeting for PCMA (Professional Convention Management Association). It was a smooth flight but upon arriving in Chicago that evening the temperature outside the terminal stood at a very cold 3 degrees above zero! As I waited in the baggage claim area I noticed a guy standing at the end of the conveyer belt wearing a Green Bay Packers jacket (not popular in Chicago), shorts and flip flops. (what an idiot!) When someone finally asked him why he was dressed that way, he casually remarked that he was from Hawaii and had no winter clothes. It was a pretty sure bet that after a few minutes outside he would be looking for the nearest clothing store. After collecting my luggage I walked through a long tunnel under the terminal to the Airport Hilton Hotel to check in for the night. The queue was very long due to a large number of cancelled flights, but luckily my Hilton Honors status allowed me to bypass it. Before retiring for the night I watched a bit of TV and caught a very humorous advertisement about "Luck Insurance" that showed some very funny people talking about their various injuries. It ended with the statement "luck is not an insurance plan"! The next morning I took a taxi into the city and checked into the Hilton Chicago on Michigan Avenue across the street from Grant Park, where the view of Lake Michigan was spectacular in the crisp, clear air. Later I walked up Michigan Avenue to the Sheraton Hotel to register for the convention. Even though it was only a 20 minute walk, the -15 degree wind chill was brutal and made it seem much longer. As I crossed



over the Chicago River I could see it was totally frozen over, and the lovely ice carvings in front of the Sheraton Hotel were definitely in no danger of melting! After registration I went to the lobby bar to watch the football game. Even though the bar had a half dozen big screens, only the one at the far end of the bar was showing the game, so I asked the bartender if the channel of the TV screen closest to me could be changed to the game. His reply went like this, "it's the policy of the hotel not to change channels", so I pointed out that the game was on the TV screen at the other end of the bar. Then he said, "that's because a guy paid \$75 to have the channel changed and it would cost me \$100!".

At that point he burst out laughing and changed the channel for me. (very funny!) Later I joined some of my fellow PCMA Chapter Board members for dinner at the "Howell's and Hood" restaurant near the hotel. My order of roasted Irish salmon served with wild mushrooms and chopped steamed broccoli with smoked pork belly was fantastic. After dinner I took a taxi back to my hotel and had a fascinating conversation with the driver, a recently arrived Ukrainian, as I told him about my travels in the Ukraine many years ago.

The next day the temperature "warmed up" to a balmy 28 degrees and only a light wind prevailed. As I walked up Michigan Avenue to the Sheraton Hotel, there was a large black man standing in the middle of the street as I waited with



others to cross, when suddenly he yelled out. "Under no circumstances do I want you to cross the street unless you have a smile on your face. If you cross the street without a smile I am authorized to tickle you"!! It was so funny that no one could help but smile. In the afternoon I was invited by Starwood Hotels to a "game day" reception at the new W Hotel on



Lakeshore drive overlooking Lake Michigan. There were big screens everywhere in the bar as the Green Bay Packers beat the Dallas Cowboys to secure a spot in the playoffs. Then it was back to the Sheraton Hotel for our Chapter Reception that turned out to be a big success. Soon it was time for all of us to board the buses that would take us to the Opening Reception in the world renowned "Museum of Science and Industry". Snow was falling steadily as we arrived at the museum, but once inside we discovered the museum had been beautifully decorated and set with bars and food stations everywhere, so we were free to roam among all of the amazing displays and exhibits.

Among them were antique automobiles, a full size Boeing 727 aircraft hung from the ceiling, a working farm, a full scale replica of a coal mine under the museum, and a fascinating interactive exhibit on the

"Science of Storms". Also, in a huge room was the largest model railroad display in the world where all types of model trains were running through a huge landscape of farmland, small towns and the city of Chicago, all in very realistic scale model.

Following the Opening Reception I was invited by Omni Hotels to another reception where they had a large buffet of ethnic dishes from the many Chicago neighborhoods, as well as a Bourbon tasting which was a lot of fun. It was still snowing when I left the reception and took a taxi back to my hotel. The next day was the first day of regular sessions, beginning with a fascinating general session presented by Andrew Zolli, a futurist who told us some very interesting and humorous stories. Among the best stories was the fact that in 1977 the

"Association of Elvis Impersonators" (yes, you read it right) was formed with 4 members, all of whom lived on the same street in Las Vegas. Then in 2013 it became the "Union of Elvis Impersonators" with over 35,000 members! But his point

of the story was that if one were now to use traditional trend analysis techniques to predict the future of the organization by the year 2050, then one in every three people in the world would be an Elvis Impersonator. So clearly,

different techniques need to be used in predicting the future. Later in the afternoon I met up with a couple of my



colleagues in the Hyatt Hotel "Big Bar" to discuss our chapter education program for 2015 as we sampled the local "Anti-hero IPA". As evening approached I walked over to the Dallas CVB reception being held at "The Kitchen", a new restaurant overlooking the frozen Chicago River. Although it was only 4 blocks away the temperature had dropped to 15 degrees, and with the steady wind and heavy snowfall it was brutal. When I arrived at the restaurant I looked like a snowman! The reception had delicious appetizers and local drinks, but by this time I had to pace myself since I still had

another reception to attend at the nearby ABC-TV studios being hosted by Disney Meetings, where celebrity chef Art Smith prepared delicious traditional southern foods. Among his dishes were grits with wild mushrooms, buttermilk biscuits with southern fried chicken, shrimp gumbo, and fried catfish filets. Besides being really tasty, it was particularly nice to be able to watch him preparing and cooking the dishes while explaining his techniques. Then we were treated to a tour of the "Windy City Live" set and the ABC News studio where

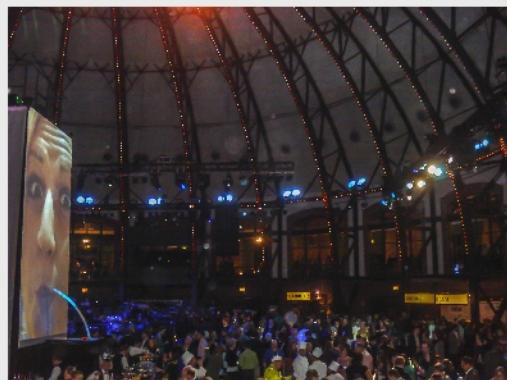


we were given an opportunity to sit in the seats of the news anchors and "report" the news in front of the TV cameras. (luckily it was not being broadcast) Meanwhile a couple of transients stood outside on the street in the falling snow, watching us through the wall of windows.

The next day there was another fascinating general session on innovation in which the presenter, Terry Jones, told us the story of how he started his career working for American Airlines and then left to start his own business, what is now the giant online travel website "Travelocity". And if that wasn't enough, he left Travelocity to start another travel website called "Kayak". He also gave us a fascinating example of innovation from Amazon.com called the "two pizza policy", based on the premise that if it requires more than two pizzas to feed a lunch meeting of the Research and Development Team, then there are too many people on the team! Later in the day the skies began to clear and we had gorgeous views of Lake Michigan. That evening was the Closing Party at Navy Pier where huge buffets and lots of bars were set up within the historic old structure, along with a couple of bands that provided



great music for dancing. During the party a photographer roamed through the crowd taking photos of people which he immediately uploaded to a huge screen in the center of the main hall where their face was projected on the image of a stream of water that appeared to be coming out of their mouth. (it was very popular) From the Closing Party I boarded a shuttle bus that took me to the "Little Goat Kitchen" for a dinner hosted by Caesar's Entertainment. We were lead upstairs to a small private dining room where we were treated to several Korean inspired dishes prepared in front of us by the executive chef. The dishes included roasted leg of goat with kimchee sauce, sautéed Brussel sprouts with spiced almonds and grilled shrimp, and pickled kale salad with shaved parmesan cheese. Everything was fabulous and as we left we were presented with a gift of the chef's signature Kimchee dressing and a signed copy of her cookbook.

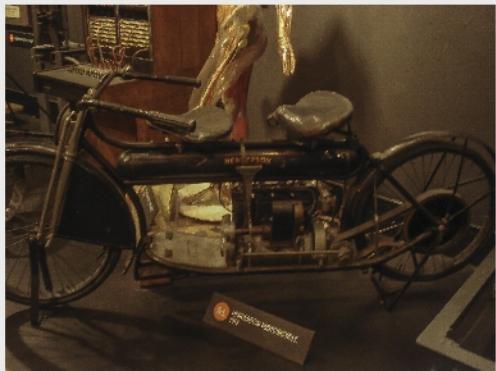


The next day, following another great general session, our lunch was sponsored by Vancouver, BC which is the site of next year's annual meeting. At every one of the tables there was at least one Canadian seated as our host and gave us instructions for mixing our own Bloody Mary with the ingredients placed before us. Then a fascinating presentation by the man who started the "AIDS Ride" and the "Avon Walk for Breast Cancer", in which he spoke convincingly about how non-profit organizations are at an unfair disadvantage compared to profit organizations and companies when one considers governmental regulations and financial policies. It was clear that he knew his subject and was passionate about his life's work, but I think everyone was a bit surprised at the end when he showed a short video of his cute 7 year old triplets and then told us he was a gay father. After the close of the conference I took the CTA bus #6 to the Museum of Science and Industry to further explore the amazing displays and exhibits, and as my luck would have it, it was a free admission day. I really enjoyed visiting the original Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad's famous



"California Zephyr", where one can walk through the entire train now parked inside the museum. As you walk through each car you can feel the motion of the train as if it were rolling along the rails! On the way back to my hotel I walked through Grant Park to take photos of the downtown skyline as the sun was setting. I went to the hotel restaurant for dinner and started with a delicious tomato bisque with fresh basil and a toasted slice of crusty Italian bread that was topped with melted cheese. For a main dish I ordered a filet of fresh Lake Michigan Walleye that was roasted and served over

black beans and rice with hot sourdough bread that made a perfect ending to my evening. The following morning I checked out of the hotel, and since my flight wasn't departing until late in the afternoon I had time to take the bus back to the Museum of Science and Industry for further exploration. (the bus fare was \$2.00 compared to \$18 - \$20 for a taxi) Once again I lucked out and found it was another free day, but there were also a lot of noisy school children as well. I discovered a fascinating exhibit titled "80 from the 80's" which showcased 80 of the most significant museum displays over the past 80 years, including a rare "Henderson" motorcycle from 1918. There was also a fabulous display of beautifully detailed model ships from the 1800's and original vintage racing cars from the 1930's and 40's, along with a 1940 film of auto racing. Watching the film it looked like many of the drivers never survived the horrible crashes since they had no helmets, seat belts or crash bars! Then back at the hotel I went to



the Bell Desk to pick up my bags, only to find out the Bellman could locate only one of them, to which I said "I hope you haven't given my bag to someone else?" After half an hour of searching it was determined that one of the Bellmen had given my bag to another hotel guest. So her bag was located and I was assured that the hotel would retrieve my bag and deliver it to my house the next day. (I was shown the other guest's bag which was a leopard skin design and nothing at all like my black roll on, which confounded the situation even more!) Meanwhile I took a taxi to the airport and spent the time waiting for my flight in the Delta Airlines Skyclub, but with the self-service bar I had trouble pouring a glass of beer from the tap. Surprisingly, one of the cleaning staff, noticing my problem, came up and proceeded to pour a perfect glass. After I settled into a comfortable chair, he brought me another glass of beer without me even having to ask. (that's great service) Later I boarded the flight and as I settled into my First Class seat, I found a "maple, oatmeal cookie" that had been left in my seatback pocket, so I asked one of the flight attendants to give it to the only young boy on the flight. Later, during the flight, she came by to tell me that he really appreciated the cookie and wanted to thank me. Dinner on the flight to Salt Lake was a delicious southwestern salad topped with grilled chicken, corn, lettuce, black beans, avocado, goat cheese, creamy cilantro dressing, and crisp tortilla chips. It was a delicious ending to a great trip, and despite the brutal winter weather I loved being in Chicago.

(Los Angeles)

A short time after I returned home I was invited by Jeff to the "Lakers All Access" event at Staples Center in downtown Los Angeles where several of the Lakers players and their new head coach were there to talk about the season and what we could expect in the coming year. Besides a great buffet dinner and open bar, we were all invited onto the court to shoot baskets. The kids in the crowd were absolutely thrilled by the experience, and even Jeff made a basket on his first try. Later on, as we left Staples Center, we could see the red carpet being set up for the "People's Choice Awards" at LA Live the next evening. Thanks for a very fun evening Jeff!



(Anaheim – Cabrillo National Monument – Borrego Springs)

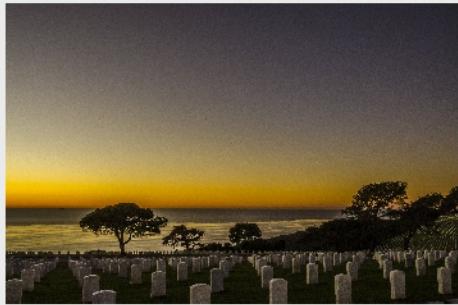
At the end of January I had to go to Angel's Stadium in Anaheim to meet with the staff and discuss a PCMA Chapter event we were planning for May. Jessica lead me on a tour of the stadium and the Diamond Club, where our event would take

place, with its fantastic view of the field,. As we discussed the details of our event I watched huge construction equipment on the field moving massive mounds of earth to prepare the "Monster Truck" course for the contest that would take place in a few days. Then I drove south to San Diego and up to Cabrillo National Monument at the tip of Point Loma for the opening reception of a new exhibit



about the history of Portuguese whaling in America.

The exhibit, sponsored by the New Bedford Whaling



Museum in Connecticut, was absolutely fascinating and told the story of how the Portuguese brought their traditional foods, wine, and culture to the west coast. Even the Portuguese Consulate General from San Francisco was there to welcome everyone. Afterwards I took

some photos of the historic Point Loma lighthouse and the spectacular sunset from Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery.

The next day I drove west over the San Diego mountains, battling ferocious gusty winds and over the summit of Laguna Mountain to the small desert community of Borrego Springs. It's an historic old town that was once a stop on the Butterfield Overland Stage Route from St Louis to San Francisco, but it's now completely surrounded by the expanse of Anza Borrego Desert State Park, the largest state park in the lower 48, being the size of Rhode Island. One of the most fascinating features of Borrego Springs are the beautiful and unusual metal sculptures by the Mexican artist Ricardo Breceda. As one drives around the area, huge steel dinosaurs, woolly mammoths, and giant serpents seem to appear out of the vastness of the desert as if they were slowly returning from eons of sleep. I checked into the Borrego Springs Resort and had a cold beer in the bar as I watched the golfers finish their rounds on the course. Then I drove over to the University of Irvine Desert Research Center for the 25th anniversary celebration of the Anza Borrego



Foundation where there was a dinner of grilled chicken and steak tacos, along with plenty of cold beer from the Nickel Brewing Company of Julian. There was also a silent auction and live entertainment to complete the celebration. Later on that evening I stopped by "Charlee's Bar" to listen to a local musician who called himself the "human jukebox" because he could play virtually any song from the 60's and 70's and sounded amazingly like the original artist! (the range of his voice from soprano to bass was incredible) Back at the resort I sat on my patio under a lovely crescent moon with a soft wind blowing through the palm trees.



February

(Idyllwild)

At the beginning of February I decided to take a day trip up to the little town of Idyllwild in the San Jacinto Mountains. The town is located at 6,000 feet elevation so there were a few patches of snow around the town but the weather was clear and comfortable. Idyllwild is known for its old world charm and the many artists who have their studios there, so it's a very pleasant place to just park your car and stroll around the town. It's also surrounded by 10,000 foot peaks and large Ponderosa Pine forests, so it's an idyllic setting. After perusing some of the small shops and studios I went to "JoAnn's Beer Garden" for a cold beer and an order of grilled bratwurst as a young man on acoustic guitar played some classic rock from the 60's and 70's, including an exceptional rendition of "Nights in White Satin". Across the street was the "Idle-a-While" bar that had an extraordinary selection of fine wines and local craft beers. As the sun was setting it was time to head home after a very pleasant and relaxing day.



(Long Beach)

In mid-February I headed to Long Beach to attend the Scottish Highland Games at the site of the Queen Mary where I was also staying for the weekend. I checked in to my First Class Stateroom overlooking the harbor and then made my way down to the dock where lots of booths were set up to sell all sorts of Celtic clothing, art, books and more. In addition there were several food stands and a large beer garden where we had a great



view of the games on the field that included the caber toss, hammer throw, putting the shot, and pitching the hay. The event started with the Grand Parade lead by the Royal Scots Brigade mounted on beautiful grey dappled horses, followed by a number of pipe and drum bands whose music really made it feel like we were in Scotland. Interestingly, several of our modern day track and field events have their origin in the

Highland Games, such as the hammer throw and the shot put. Not only were all of the competitors dressed in traditional kilts, but many of the people attending the event were as well, including a few guys in kilts and flip flops!

Throughout the day the games continued and at the same time there were



competitions for the pipe and drum bands, including a competition among the drum majors, some of whom wore beautiful and elaborate dress uniforms. The weather was clear and warm which made it particularly pleasant to sit outside with a cold beer watching the competitions. Later I went back to the ship and discovered several more activities going on, such as the bagpiping competition, Celtic dancing, and a whole room dedicated to Scottish Clan Societies where I met the leader of the Henderson Clan for southern California. Here I found a lot of information about my heritage, including the fact that the clan established the "Pulteney Whiskey" distillery in Caithness on the northwestern coast of Scotland in the 1600's and it's still operating today. In another part of the ship they had setup a short archery range and a darts competition, so there was something for just about everyone. All in all it was a really fun weekend.



(Coronado Island)

At the end of February I was invited to the Cadence Group Advisory Board Meeting being held at the beautiful Loews Coronado Bay Resort south of San Diego. The meeting began with a fabulous buffet lunch featuring seared Ahi with North African spices, curried potatoes, and sautéed parsnips, all of which were described to us by the chef. Then we all went into a session about "Design Thinking" that was a very interesting and unique approach to event planning. Following the session we were transported to the home of the owners of the Cadence Group in La Jolla located on the top of the hills overlooking the Pacific Ocean. It was a delicious dinner of classic Mediterranean dishes that we enjoyed outdoors on the patio where we also had a gorgeous view of the sunset. Then back at the resort we finished the evening with a nightcap in the hospitality suite, playing a game of Charades.



March

(San Diego)

In early March I made a trip to San Diego to attend a presentation on Egyptology at the Natural History Museum, and on the way I paid a visit to the San Diego Zoo Safari Park to see the new Tiger exhibit. It is designed as if it were in the middle of the Indonesian jungle in the traditional Indonesian style architecture and beautiful artwork. As luck would have it three of the big cats were out and almost posing for our cameras, which I never saw in the old exhibit. As I watched one of the large males stretched out on his back next to the glass wall, he suddenly stretched out his enormous paw and put it up against the window right next to a young boy as if he wanted to touch him. One of the caretakers told me that the tiger's name was "Teddy" and he was on loan from the Indianapolis Zoo to breed



with two young females, which they hope will lead to at least one litter of kittens. Just before I left the park, I watched one of the handlers showing a group of kids a beautiful and very friendly African Porcupine who was in the stage of shedding some of her 15 inch long quills. Upon reaching San Diego I joined my dear friend Maureen for a glass of wine at the Prado before heading to the Natural History Museum for the lecture titled "Adventures in



Egyptian Archeology" presented by Dr. Zahi Hawass, the world's most famous Egyptologist. I had seen him on many TV shows, but seeing him in person was amazing, and having him autograph his book for me afterwards was really a special experience. His passion for Egypt and archeology was clearly evident throughout his lecture and there were many moments where he related some personal stories. The next day I returned to the museum to visit the new "King Tut Experience" exhibit which was in San Diego for a limited time. At the beginning of the exhibit we were given audio sets and started our "experience" with displays of the Rosetta Stone, photos of the Valley of the Kings, and a huge graphic depicting the timeline of Egyptian Dynasties going back to 4500 BC. (Tutankhamen ruled Egypt around 3000 BC) At the same time our audio sets gave us a narrative explaining what was displayed before us. Then we were ushered into a small theater for a video presentation, and interestingly the sound was broadcast through our audio sets, so there was no outside sound to disturb other people making their way through the exhibit. The video detailed the life of Howard Carter who was the first

person to discover the "tomb of the lost king" Tutankhamen.



At the conclusion of the video the narrator invited us to proceed to the next room where we saw a display of what Carter had first seen in the tomb. Step by step we were lead by the narrator through several more rooms that revealed what Carter continued to find over the course of several months until he finally discovered the burial chamber, which was not one but four chambers, one inside the other and each made of solid gold. At last he found the massive granite sarcophagus and as he opened it he discovered three burial caskets, one inside the other and each made of gold and precious jewels before he was able to access the mummy of the king. This is when he found the spectacular gold death mask, which is probably the one artifact that we all remember the most. The



whole exhibit was one of the most innovative I've ever encountered and amazingly, all of the objects displayed from the tomb were incredible life size "replicas", crafted in amazing detail and authenticity by staff at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. (the replica of King Tut's mummy is right down to the most minute detail as Carter first saw it) Leaving the museum I really felt like I had just come from the Valley of the Kings! On the way back home I took the scenic route through the San



Diego Mountains and had a beautiful view of snow-capped Palomar Mountain. Then just south of Warner Springs I passed a sign along the side of the road for the "Oasis Camel Dairy", and further down the road were a herd of camels grazing in a large pasture. I had to wonder how many people drive this route and never see the sign or the camels.

(Palm Springs – Anza Borrego Desert State Park)

The second week of March I was in Palm Springs to attend the Esri Business Partner Conference and meet up with old friends from Esri and some of the international offices, which usually takes place in the lobby bar of the Renaissance Hotel. It's always fun to catch up with friends and colleagues over a



few beers. The next day, not having to attend any sessions I decided to drive down to Anza Borrego Desert State Park to photograph the wildflowers that had just come into bloom, and I was not disappointed by the acres and acres of colorful white, yellow, blue, orange, and purple blossoms. The bare slopes of the Santa Rosa Mountains formed a dramatic background for my photos. Before leaving the State Park I photographed a few of the unique and spectacular Ricardo Breceda metal sculptures that I had not seen before. (he continues to add more of them in the desert every year)



(Lancaster)

Around the middle of March I made a trip to the California State Poppy Reserve near Lancaster to photograph the flowers before they withered away as the heat of summer approached. (the night before an unexpected severe thunderstorm hit the Redlands area with strong winds, hail, heavy rain and lightning that lasted for almost an hour and we received over an inch of badly needed rain) I drove the back roads on the north side of the San Gabriel



Mountains to Lancaster and checked into the Hampton Inn before heading out to the reserve. Here I found large fields of gorgeous yellow and orange flowers beneath clear blue skies, with the Tehachapi Mountains in the background. The north facing slopes in the Antelope Valley were especially alive with masses of poppies in full bloom. The intense orange color of the flowers contrasted dramatically with the snow-capped San Gabriel Mountains behind, making for some gorgeous photos that I later put into a photo book. Returning to the hotel that evening the front desk recommended the nearby "Bull's Eye Bar" for dinner and the delicious wild mushroom and bleu cheese Filet mignon steak was fabulous. Added to that was the fact that it was March Madness College Basketball and whenever there was a game on the big screen TV it was "March Madness Happy Hour".



(Hollywood)

During the third week of March our PCMA chapter put on an event at the Paramount Studios in Hollywood, featuring a presentation by Mr. Vin DiBona, the executive producer of America's Funniest Videos, Entertainment Tonight, and MacGyver. His presentation was both humorous and heart-warming as he described his experiences with the programs and the people who performed. The setup for lunch outside under the shade of trees in front of the famous Paramount Theater was both gorgeous and relaxing as we savored Cajun shrimp, chicken and waffles, and spicy pulled pork. Following lunch we all joined a private tour of the studio



backlots where a couple of films were in production. Then it was time to return to Union Station and catch the train back to San Bernardino.

(Pasadena)

At the end of the month I headed for Pasadena to attend the Professional Photographers of California Conference being held at the Convention Center near old town. Before the conference began I took a walk around old town Pasadena taking photos of the historic old buildings, including the famous Green Hotel which was the height of opulence at the turn of the century. But since then it had fallen on hard times and just recently the city has begun a multi-million



dollar restoration project. Back at the Convention Center I sat in on some interesting sessions and explored the expo area where I ran into my friend Wendy who was managing it. Later in the day I drove over to the Langham-Huntington Hotel to take some photos of the historic and exclusive property that has played host to all of the rich and famous for the past hundred years or so. The hotel is located on a hill overlooking Pasadena and has extensive gardens that have been featured in many Hollywood films. So it was easy to take some gorgeous photos as I strolled around the hotel and through the gardens under sunny skies. Then I returned to the Sheraton Hotel for the gala banquet and awards ceremony where I had some interesting conversations



with other photographers, many of whom specialized in weddings. The next morning I attended a fascinating class on macro photography in which the presenter showed us some absolutely amazing images of familiar objects that looked anything like familiar. Later in the afternoon I walked around old Pasadena once more before heading home.



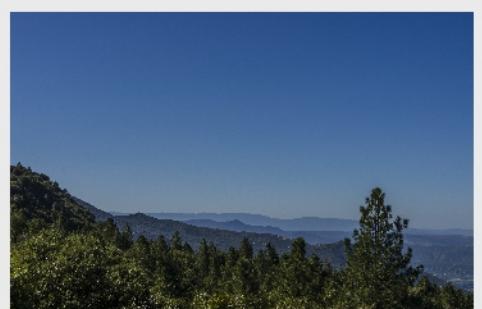
April

(Idyllwild – Borrego Springs)



At the beginning of April I planned to attend a meeting of the Anza Borrego Foundation in Borrego Springs, but along the way I stopped over in Idyllwild to do some hiking in the San Bernardino National Forest. I drove up a steep, narrow unpaved logging road to the base of Black Mountain where I started hiking up the trail toward Black Mountain lookout tower through beautiful tall Ponderosa Pine, Douglas Fir and Sequoia trees. The trail was easy to follow though quite steep in places, but the views of 10,085 foot high San Jacinto Peak with snow on the summit were beautiful. When I finally arrived at the end of the

trail there was a 40 foot high steel lookout tower that had replaced the original old wooden tower in 1962. The 360 degree views of the San Bernardino Mountains, San Jacinto Mountains, San Gabriel Mountains, the Hemet Valley and parts of Orange County were breathtaking. I stood there taking in the enormous view of the landscape of southern California for quite some time, as I was the only one for miles around. The descent down the rough road was slow as I had to put my jeep into 1st gear and 4-wheel drive. Once I was back on highway 243 I headed for the Idyllwild RV Resort where I had rented a small cabin located in a large grove of trees just north of town. For dinner I went downtown to the Idle-a-Wile Bar and Café for a delicious but huge bacon burger that I couldn't finish so I took the rest back to the cabin. Meanwhile, seated in a booth nearby were a couple guys with their 4



young sons who were drinking hot chocolate while eating chips and salsa. (a weird combination) That evening, back at the cabin I sat outside on the deck with a pint of Ballast Point Pale Ale in the chilly mountain air looking up at the sky filled with stars – very peaceful and relaxing. The following day I woke up to a cold, crisp morning and headed south to Borrego Springs through beautiful Garner Valley and historic Anza Valley where the Spanish explorer Juan Bautista de Anza made his way into California in 1774 to claim the territory for the King of Spain. As I descended the steep, winding road over the Laguna Mountains toward Borrego Springs I suddenly spotted two Desert Bighorn Sheep just 100 yards above the road. I pulled over and took several photos of the young rams framed against the sky and the desert below. It was my first encounter with Bighorn Sheep in the wild, despite having visited the state park many times in the past. Normally they are very elusive creatures and difficult to spot, so I felt especially lucky this day. After a short stop in Borrego Springs I returned home by way of the small mining town of Julian in the mountains west of the park, and here I stopped at the Nickle Beer Company for a cold pint of "IPA 372" before continuing on to Warner Springs. Just north of the small town stands a beautiful old adobe chapel that dates back to the late 1800's when the area was first settled.



(Los Angeles)

Soon after returning home from Borrego Springs I was invited by Caesar's Entertainment Group to the Dodger's opening game. I took the train to Union Station and then the free "Dodger's Express" bus to the stadium, along with what must have been thousands of Dodger fans! (so there was a very long line for the buses) Upon arriving at the stadium I joined David and some of his clients in a section just 12 rows from first base behind the Dodger's dugout. It was a warm and sunny day as the Dodgers took to the field to play the San Diego Padres, and our seats gave us an amazing view of all the action. (ironically, the only baseball cap I had was a Padres cap) David was very generous in offering us plenty of food and drink, but I couldn't help noticing the price of beer, at \$14.50 for a pint of Heineken it seemed just a "bit" overpriced! The



stadium seats over 65,000 people and today it was sold out! The Dodgers scored 6 runs in the 8th inning to win the game, so all the Dodger fans left the stadium very happy, but there must have been 10,000 people waiting for buses and taxis – it was insane! When I was finally able to board a bus I found myself standing next to a couple of young, overweight women trying to hit on a couple of handsome guys from San Diego. (who knows what the outcome was) With the horrendous traffic downtown I think I could have walked back to Union Station in less time. From Union Station I took the Metro to the

Westin Bonaventure and checked into a lovely room on the 29th floor with a great view of the Hollywood hills. Then it was to the lobby bar to join many other people gathered to watch the 2nd half of the final NCAA championship game between Duke University (ranked #1) and the University of Wisconsin (ranked #2), and as I had thought it would end so it did with Duke winning in the final 3 minutes after trailing for most of the game! It was definitely a thrill to watch. The next morning I took the Metro back to Union Station and the train to Riverside.

(Seattle – Vancouver, BC)

Around the middle of April I decided to use a certificate for two complimentary nights at the 5 star Four Seasons Hotel in Vancouver, BC that I had won at a PCMA event last year. My trip started aboard a United Airlines flight to Seattle where I planned to stop overnight before taking the train to Vancouver the next morning. We landed in a light rain and as we were about to disembark, one of the flight attendants invited a young boy to say hi to the pilots, so he walked into the cockpit and shouted "Hi Pilots"! (everyone laughed) I rode the new light rail system from the airport to downtown

Seattle and walked over to the Marriott Courtyard Hotel in historic Pioneer Square. The hotel is located in the old Alaska building that dates from the late 1800's and Marriott has done a beautiful job in renovating it, especially the lovely white marble lobby. I had a very nice corner room on the top floor with a stunning view of the historic Smith Tower, once the tallest building west of the Mississippi. At one time in the late 1970's I worked for a consulting firm whose offices were in the tower, and I clearly remember that the one and only elevator had an operator who sat on a stool in the corner and manually operated it. That evening I enjoyed a delicious dinner of clam chowder, fresh Pacific Cod and chips, and a cold pint of local Snoqualmie IPA at "FX McRory's in Pioneer Square.



Early the next morning the skies had cleared as I walked down to King Street Station to board the Amtrak Cascades train bound for Vancouver. As part of my Business Class ticket I was given a \$5.00 voucher for the Bistro Car, which quickly became my breakfast as the train pulled out of the station and headed into the long tunnel under downtown. The train exited the tunnel along the waterfront near historic "Pike Place Public Market". From there we followed the scenic shore of Puget Sound past Everett and through the Skagit Valley to Bellingham. As we passed through the small town of Custer, Washington the conductor told us it was the hometown of legendary country singer Loretta Lynn! North of Bellingham the train continued to follow the shoreline, weaving in and out of small bays and inlets, through thick stands of Douglas

Fir and Western Red Cedar. We had stunning views of Puget Sound and the San Juan Islands before eventually arriving in Blaine and the border crossing into Canada. As we waited for Canadian Customs officials to board the train, we had a beautiful view of the "Peace Arch" that marks the international boundary and bears the inscription "Children of a Common Mother". Once cleared by Customs the train proceeded north, crossing the mighty Frazier River at New Westminster before arriving at the Pacific Central Railroad Station in downtown Vancouver. After checking into the hotel I walked down

to the waterfront and through Canada Place where the historic Canadian Pacific Railroad Station has been restored and turned into a main station for the new light rail system called "SkyTrain". As I walked through the old station I recalled the time as a student at the University of British Columbia in the early 1980's when I boarded the Trans-Continental train from Vancouver to Halifax, Nova Scotia and visited every Province along the way. Leaving the old station I walked along



the harbor and through the virgin forests in Stanley Park, and then along the seawall, under the Lion's Gate Bridge, to the "Tea House" on the bluff overlooking English Bay and beyond to the Strait of Georgia beyond. Here I sat on the terrace in the warm afternoon sun with a cold pint of local Stanley Park Pilsner. As the sun began its

slow descent toward the west coast of British Columbia I walked down to the beach in English Bay and stopped at the new Cactus Club Café where I enjoyed a fabulous Szechuan chicken lettuce wrap and chilled glass of Pemberton Pilsner from the small town of the same name in the Coast Mountains north of Vancouver. (until a few years ago the town could only be reached by railroad) After dinner



I walked back to Canada Place and visited the new Convention Center where I discovered a fascinating exhibit about some of Canadian history, including the odd fact that Bactrian Camels were imported in 1864 to carry supplies to miners in the Okanogan Valley, and a few of the beasts roamed wild for many years. At the end of the evening I headed to old town Vancouver, a historic district known as "Gastown", where the world's first steam clock still operates, and home to one of Vancouver's first micro-breweries. So I stopped at the "Steamworks Brewery" for



a pint of their IPA and joined several other hockey fans to watch the 3rd period of the game between the Vancouver Canucks and the Calgary Flames. Vancouver was leading 1 - 0 but eventually Calgary won 2 - 1, a great disappointment for the local fans. The following morning I savored a delicious eggs benedict with wild salmon before walking up Granville Street and over the bridge to the Granville Island Market where a wonderful and exciting public market coexists with a huge cement plant. (it's amazing to watch the monster cement trucks negotiating the narrow streets on the island and still avoiding collisions with cars and pedestrians) Old railroad tracks are still in place



from the days when the island was a hub of industrial activity, and some of the old buildings and warehouses have been repurposed as restaurants, shops, and art galleries. The public market is a lively, colorful kaleidoscope of stalls and counters selling

everything from meat and fresh seafood, fresh fruits and vegetables to wine, native arts and crafts. I picked up a cup of coffee at the "Two Parrot Coffee Co." and sat

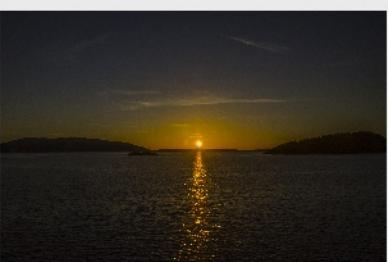
outside in the sun on the dock watching a magician/juggler entertaining the children.

Meanwhile, seagulls and ravens circled overhead eagerly searching for any food leftovers. Before leaving the island I stopped at the "Granville Island Brewing Co." for a couple of their local brews, the "English Bay Pale Ale" and the "Infamous IPA", both of which were excellent. Then I boarded one of the small taxi boats (part of the fleet called the "Aquabus") for the short 15 minute trip up False Creek



and back to downtown. Later on in the afternoon I checked out of the hotel and took a taxi back to Pacific Central station to board the Amtrak Cascades train to Seattle. On the return trip we had spectacular views up the Frazier River and the snow-capped peaks of the Coast Range. As the sun was setting there were gorgeous views of Mt Baker, the North Cascades, and the Olympic Mountains before we arrived back in downtown Seattle. Once again I checked into the Marriott Courtyard Hotel and then walked down to the "Central Tavern", a historic old bar in the heart of Pioneer Square for a pint of

Deschutes IPA. (on the wall above the 100 year old bar was a sign that read "Hot Beer - Lousy Food – Bad Service, Welcome and have a nice day") Thankfully it was all a joke! The next morning I rode the light rail train to SeaTac airport, and boarded the United Airlines flight to LAX. As the plane climbed into the clear sky and made a wide turn to the east, we had an absolutely spectacular view of the entire Cascade Range, all the way from Mt Baker on the Canadian border to Mt Rainier and beyond to Mt Hood in Oregon. Our pilot flew over the very top of Rainier and as I looked down I don't think we could have gotten any closer, as we could see the cracks and crevasses in the glaciers! It was a great ending for a trip to a couple of my favorite cities in the world.



(Lexington, KY)

At the end of the month Leslie and I once again made the pilgrimage to Lexington to visit her family and enjoy the unique experience of the Rolex Kentucky 3-Day Event, the only 5 star equestrian event outside of Europe. Rather than take a limo to LAX we took the train instead, which at a cost of \$18 for each of us was considerably less expensive than the \$175 charge for a limo! As we stood on the platform at the Riverside station, three enormous freight trains passed through and I had the feeling our train to San Bernardino would be late, which it was, but that turned out to be just the first delay of many. As our luck would have it, the 11:00 am train from San Bernardino to LA Union Station developed a mechanical problem and had to be cancelled, so we had to take the 12:00 noon train instead. This meant that by the time we arrived

at Union Station we had just missed the Express bus to the airport, forcing us to take a taxi. But we arrived at LAX with enough time to be able to relax in the Delta Airlines Skyclub for half an hour before boarding our flight to Cincinnati. The non-stop flight was very smooth and the First Class dinner featured a delicious Italian sausage calzone with salad, fresh fruit, cheese and Tiramisu for desert, which was superb. After dinner I watched a new film "The Theory of Everything" – the very inspiring and emotional story of the life of Stephen Hawking. (tears filled my eyes several times during the film) There was a point in his life when he wanted to die, but his wife was the rock in his life and their family of 3 children. It has to be one of the best films I've ever seen! We arrived in Cincinnati (though the airport is actually across the Ohio River in northern Kentucky), picked up the rental car, and drove to the Hampton Inn Riverfront on the shore of the Ohio River north of the airport.

The next morning we drove south on I-75 to Lexington and met up with Leslie's brother Kent and his wife Joyce for lunch at their house. While Leslie spent the afternoon visiting with her mother in the nursing home, I drove to "Shaker Village" in the small town of Pleasant Hill just south of historic Harrodsburg, the site of the first permanent European settlement west of the Appalachians. The route along state highway 152 was gorgeous as it wound its way through the lovely Bluegrass countryside and between traditional field stone fences on either side. I spent a couple of hours walking the old streets in the village and visiting the many daily activities being performed by people dressed as they would be in the late 1800's. It was a beautiful glimpse into the past. As the



sun began to set I headed back to Lexington to join the family for dinner, including all of the young grandchildren. We all had a great time catching up on family news and talking about the upcoming Rolex event. The following morning dawned very chilly and overcast, and by noon strong thunderstorms hit Lexington. But that wasn't as bad as the tornadoes and 3 inch hail in Louisville. In spite of the inclement weather we gathered our rain gear and headed for the Kentucky



Horse Park to watch the cross country competition. I always take some time to walk the 7 mile course and this year it was a very wet tromp through the rain. But an hour later the heavy rain had tapered off, so by the time the last horse and rider had completed the course the skies began to clear. Returning to the house we all changed out of our wet clothes and sat out on the deck with glasses of wine before savoring a fantastic dinner of pork tenderloin roasted over the grill.



Overnight there were more thunderstorms, but by the morning the skies had cleared and we had a beautiful sunny day for the stadium jumping competition. At the lunchtime break I made my way to the tradeshow area where dozens of vendors were setup in large tents, selling all manner of goods and services for both horse and rider – everything from art work, clothing, and jewelry to feed, saddles, and horse trailers, some of which included luxury accommodations for both the horses and their owners. Within the tradeshow were many food trucks offering a wide variety of typical southern

dishes, from fried chicken, sausages, and gumbo to funnel cakes and kettle corn. I chose a fried pork tenderloin sandwich that was delicious but almost more than I could eat. Back at the stadium jumping, a rider from Germany won both 1st and 3rd places with his two horses, taking home \$130,000! Second place went to a rider from New Zealand who claimed a very respectable \$50,000. (to say that the sport is an expensive hobby would be an



understatement) That evening we continued a tradition of the whole family going out to dinner, and this year it was hosted by Kent's son Erick who insisted that we go to his friend's restaurant in Lexington called "The Village Idiot". While most of us were a bit dubious, given the name, it turned out to be a great culinary experience. In addition to an impressive list of craft beers and fine wines, we enjoyed such dishes as pimento cheese fritters, lamb sliders, mussels steamed in ale, and duck confit served over a cornmeal and cheddar waffle. The chilled pint of local Dark Horse ESB beer was especially tasty. (later we found out that the entire dinner was "half off" to celebrate the anniversary of the 1000th day since the restaurant opened – thanks Erick!)

The next day I drove to the site of historic Boonesborough, originally established as Boone's Station by legendary frontiersman Daniel Boone, and although Fort Boonesborough State Park was closed, the park alongside the Kentucky River was beautiful with spring flowers blooming everywhere in the surrounding forest. High above the historic fort I discovered an old Civil War fortification built near a steep old wagon road that was once used by the early settlers of the Kentucky territory. The site had a lot of very interesting interpretative signs detailing the history of the old fort that was built to halt the advance of Confederate troops on their way to the Ohio River. (Kentucky remained in the Union throughout the war by the narrowest of margins) Later



on that afternoon I met up with my best friend and old army buddy Pat for lunch at Joseph Beth's bookstore and café where we caught up on our latest news and reminisced about our days in the army where we were stationed at a remote post on the East German border. Then I joined Erick for a visit to his new nightclub named "The Trust", located in a historic, late 1800's bank building downtown. As we entered the building I was struck by the gorgeous turn of the century architectural details. Just then Erick turned on the new state of the art "Digital DJ Sound Station" with unique "simulated" vinyl record turntables, like the old DJ's once used. Suddenly we were surrounded and immersed in an incredible volume of sound that literally shook the entire building. At that point I asked about his neighbors, to which he replied "they've all gone home before we open" – thank goodness! Leslie and I had to make it an early night since we had to be up the next morning at 5:00 am in order to drive back to Cincinnati for our return flight to LA. Our flight went by way of Atlanta where we spent a couple of hours relaxing in the Delta Airlines Skyclub. Aboard our flight to LA we were served a delicious chicken enchilada and southwestern salad for lunch, after which I watched the movie "Imitation Game" about the man who broke the German enigma code during WWII, almost by sheer luck! In the process he built the first mechanical automated computing device that was almost dismissed by his superiors as an expensive failure. The film was very fascinating but unfortunately ended with his suicide after the war. We arrived in LA ahead of schedule with plenty of time to take the express bus to Union Station where we enjoyed a drink in the classic Art Deco "Traxx Bar" prior to boarding the Metrolink train to Riverside. And so ended a wonderful trip to a reunion with family and friends, as well as another exciting Rolex Kentucky 3-Day Event.



May

(San Diego)

At the beginning of May I headed to San Diego to attend a 2 day Nikon class about shooting video with a DSLR camera. The evening before the class I went to a Padres baseball game and enjoyed a great seat in the Premier Club section hosted by the Omni Hotel. The game honored First Responders and the Padres beat the Colorado Rockies 13 – 2, to make

it a very enjoyable evening. The next morning I made my way to the Museum of Natural History where a room had been set up for the class, and Nikon was generous enough to loan us any of the gear that we needed. Our two instructors were very knowledgeable and gave us a mountain of information about how to use our DSLR camera for shooting video, which was a lot different than shooting still photos. Besides the lectures and demonstrations, we had two assignments to shoot short videos in the museum or around Balboa Park, and the instructors were always not far away, always ready to offer advice and answer questions. At the end of the first day I headed to the Prado Restaurant in Balboa Park for a drink and appetizer of spicy hummus served with black pepper crackers, which was fantastic. Then I went to the Gordon Biersch Brewery in Mission Valley for a delicious dinner of panko crusted, deep fried chicken filet stuffed with gorgonzola cheese, along with a cold pint of Mission IPA. The next day our assignment was to choose a subject for our second video



project and do a "storyboard". So I chose to make a short video of the new "Coast to Cactus" exhibit in the museum and the reaction of kids as they experienced it. I got my camera ready and set up near one of the displays about the coast, but after 15 minutes there still were no kids anywhere around. (it seems that there was a birthday party for them downstairs) I thought I might have to come up with a new story when, just then, one of the senior volunteers came by and said he was very proud of the exhibit and was there anything I wanted to know about it. As he started to explain what the displays

represented I suddenly realized that he was now my story, so I quietly turned on the camera and let him talk to me. It turned out to be a great little video that was not staged, just natural. When the instructors critiqued our work at the end of the class, the only real criticism I received was that I should have had a microphone on him so as to eliminate the background noise. Otherwise it was a great first start. After the class concluded most of us joined our instructors for a drink at the Prado Bar and shared delicious skewers of Korean beef, mustard crusted chicken, and blackened shrimp. It made for an enjoyable end of the class and I'm looking forward to trying my hand at more video.

(Pomona)

The following weekend I went to the "LA on Tap" event at the fairgrounds in Pomona that featured craft beer from over 60 breweries around the country as part of the "LA International Beer Competition and Festival". It began the evening before with a "Brewers VIP Reception" where there were 25 beers available to sample, as well as several food stalls serving smoked chicken, pulled pork sliders, Portuguese sausage with grilled onions and green peppers, garlic puffs with smoked bacon, California bacon wrapped hot dogs, and Dr. Bob's handcrafted vanilla bean ice cream, among others. It was just the beginning of a great time sampling different beers and foods throughout the festival, which was very well attended by several hundred people. Besides the great beer and delicious foods, there was entertainment from a band of young high school guys who played some pretty mean blues and rock music. Later on in the afternoon,



after enjoying a wide variety of beers and delicious food, I walked around the fairgrounds and discovered another event called the "Militaria Collection" which was essentially a tradeshow for people who collect old military memorabilia. There was a huge exhibit of old uniforms, weapons of all kinds, books and maps from the Civil War, WWI, WWII, Korean War and the Vietnam war. Everything was original and authentic, including several display cases of military insignia, badges, and medals from not only conflicts that involved the US, but also from historic events



like the “Hundred Years War” and even the French Revolution. It was an amazing exhibition and tradeshow, but the thing that struck me the most were the many people dressed up in military uniforms, some of whom were acting out their roles in a very dedicated manner. At one point I saw a group of 3 older guys talking with each other, as they sat around a simulated campfire, one dressed in a Nazi SS uniform, another dressed as a Japanese officer, and the third man was in the uniform of an American army colonel. (if only that could have been the reality of war, settling differences over a campfire)

Leaving the military tradeshow I could hear music in the distance and I just stumbled across another unique event going on nearby. Inside a large hall were young girls and a few boys dressed in traditional Irish costumes dancing to the music of an Irish folk band. I had arrived just in time for the finals of the Irish Dance Competition, where each contestant stepped forward, one by one, to do their best dance for 2 minutes. It was fun to watch and the traditional Celtic music was beautiful to listen to as they danced. I noticed around the perimeter of the room were several vendors selling the essentials of dance competition, such as costumes, hairpieces, shoes, and other apparel. Meanwhile the families were all seated patiently watching their young daughter or son perform for the panel of judges, and anxiously awaiting the results. Returning to the Sheraton Hotel I sat in the lobby bar and joined others watching the Stanley Cup Playoff game between Montreal and Tampa Bay. As it happened, the guy sitting next to me was from Montreal, so when they won he bought a round for the bar.



(Anaheim)

In mid-May I took the train to Anaheim to prepare for our PCMA Chapter event at Angel's stadium the following day. Along the way I had to change trains in the city of Orange and had enough time to enjoy a pint of beer in the “Streamliner Bar” at Ruby's Diner located in the classic old Santa Fe Depot, built in 1931. Also at the bar was a weird old guy dressed in a red plaid shirt and blue overalls with bright green suspenders, drinking a large vanilla milkshake and making loud comments, to no one in particular, about the CNN broadcast on the TV. Later the bartender told me the guy comes in once a month, orders a vanilla milkshake, and carries on a conversation with himself. So the bartender believes the guy is a mental patient they let out once a month! (just my lucky day I suppose) After arriving in Anaheim I checked into the Marriott Courtyard Hotel and then headed to “The Catch” restaurant for lunch before going to the stadium to



meet with the Director of Catering to discuss the schedule for our event the next day. Just as I started walking over to the stadium a heavy thunderstorm suddenly hit Anaheim and I had to wade through large puddles of water. So by the time I reached the stadium I was totally soaked from my knees down to my feet! With the heavy rain, strong wind, and cold temperatures it felt more like January rather than May. Later that evening I found a nice restaurant and bar called “Zov's” for a pint of local Hopnosh IPA as I watched the World Hockey Championships with the USA facing Russia in the semi-finals. (seemed strange that it should be going on at the same time as the Stanley Cup Playoffs)

The next morning I walked over to the stadium, and again I had to slog through huge puddles and driving rain, so once more I was totally soaked by the time I met up with the catering staff. (but being that southern California is in a severe drought I can't really complain) Our event began with a delicious buffet lunch in the exclusive Diamond Club overlooking

home plate as the sun slowly made its way through the dark clouds. Then we had a very interesting presentation on the latest mobile technology by a leader in the field where we were shown an amazing video from South Korea demonstrating a very innovative, high tech "bracelet" that can project a display of a keyboard and video screen on your arm! Now that's definitely "portable" technology! After the presentation we all went on a private tour of the stadium and finished with a lovely reception in the Diamond Club as the skies were clearing for a beautiful view of the field. That evening I walked over to Downtown Disney for a fantastic dinner at "Brennan's New Orleans Restaurant", and while I was seated at the bar two guys both ordered vodka and diet Coke, but after 10 minutes they called the bartender over and questioned their drinks. Apparently they had been enjoying their drinks without any vodka!

(San Simeon)

At the end of the month I made plans to go to San Simeon, on the central coast, to visit the world famous Hearst Castle for the first time. Driving up I-15 to Cajon Pass was a nightmare with the extensive road construction that snarled traffic for miles. But once I reached the exit for highway 138 and the route along the north side of the San Gabriel Mountains, it was a much better experience. I travelled through Tehachapi and Bakersfield into the heart of the Central Valley and through an area known as the "Missouri Triangle" where there were massive oil and gas fields studded with hundreds of wells and pumps from Exxon-Mobil, Chevron, and Shell. Then I drove west on highway 46 over the Santa Lucia Mountains to the wine country of Paso Robles, with vast acreages of vineyards covering the gently rolling hills. West of Paso Robles the highway threaded its way through hills of oak forest with the coastal fog drifting over them. Arriving in the small town of Cambria the air became very chilly from the steady breeze coming off the ocean. I drove a short distance north along the coast to San Simeon and checked into the Best Western Cavalier Oceanfront Resort where I had a very nice room overlooking the ocean. I took some time to walk along the bluff taking photos as the waves crashed on the beach and rocks below. For dinner I walked across the street to the "Big Sur California Café", and although being rather worn and dated on the inside, the beer battered shrimp and chips were very good. After dinner I sat on the balcony of my room under the stars and listened to the pounding of the surf, as small groups of people gathered around the fire pits on the edge of the bluff. The next morning dawned very foggy and cold, with a damp mist as I walked along the beach with heavy waves crashing around me from the high tide. Then I returned to the hotel for a delicious breakfast of eggs benedict that had two poached eggs, each topped with a whole slice of ham! After enjoying breakfast I headed up to Hearst Castle and viewed a



fascinating IMAX film about the life of William Randolph Hearst and the construction of his "San Simeon Castle". Following the film at the visitor center I joined a tour of the "Grand Rooms" that were designed to resemble those of several famous European Castles. Hearst had imported many original artifacts from Europe to furnish the rooms, including a huge 15th century stone fireplace from France, several 16th century wooden ceilings from Italy and Spain, 14th century tapestries from Belgium, and even 6th century Roman ceramic mosaics! (the list was a staggering amount of countless and priceless art treasures) After viewing the rooms I walked around the extensive gardens atop the hill overlooking the ocean and San Simeon Bay. Also on the property was an enormous outdoor pool known as the "Neptune Pool" for its statue of the God Neptune standing watch over it. The pool held 475,000 gallons of water, but since it was undergoing an extensive restoration it was empty. In addition, there was a gorgeous indoor Roman Bath with tennis courts above it. Hearst entertained top Hollywood celebrities at larger than life parties, and our guide told us that one never turned





down an invitation from Hearst. No matter where I walked around the estate there were beautiful views of the Santa Lucia Mountains with large stands coastal live oak scattered among the golden grass covered slopes and fog drifting in and out of the valleys. Returning to the visitor center below the castle, I had an excellent BBQ beef sandwich for lunch, prepared from local Hearst Ranch beef. Later on in the afternoon I

drove down to the W.R. Hearst State Beach where an old wooden pier remained from the days when supply ships docked to deliver building materials for construction of the castle. Not far away was the old village of San Simeon with the historic "Sebastian's General Store and Post Office", which now also houses the Hearst Winery tasting room. After a glass of wine at the general store I drove a few miles north along the coast to the Elephant Seal rookery where hundreds of seals were hauled out on the beach, just a few yards from the viewing area above. It's one of the largest concentrations of Elephant seals in the country and a very noisy one at that. Back at the hotel that evening I sat outside in the cold night air beside



one of the fire pits with a glass of wine, watching the flames from the wood fire and listening to the waves crashing on the beach below – very relaxing and peaceful! The following day I headed back home by way of spectacular Morro Bay and then over the Santa Lucia Mountains on a narrow winding road to the small historic town of Santa Margherita, and from there to the Central Valley once more. Here I took a short detour to visit the "Carizzo Plain National Monument", an enormous dry soda lake with a fascinating history of dry land farming dating back to the late 1800's.

There were some very interesting displays of old farming equipment, including 3 huge combines that were pulled by massive tractors powered by steam engines. Just west of Bakersfield I saw an interesting sign at a small gas station that had the prices of gas listed as "Arm \$3.99 / Leg \$4.29 / OMG \$4.99), but, thankfully I wasn't in need of any gas at that point.

(San Juan Capistrano – San Diego)

Near the end of May I took the MetroLink train to San Juan Capistrano on my way to San Diego. I arrived in San Juan Capistrano around lunchtime so I headed for Sarducci's Restaurant in the historic Santa Fe Depot. Sitting outside under the shade of the grapevine arbor, I enjoyed a fantastic grilled chicken and wild mushroom flatbread topped with a delicious, slightly spicy ginger – sesame sauce and melted Monterrey Jack cheese. The chilled glass of Red Hook IPA went really well with it. Then I spent a



couple of hours walking around the historic "Los Rios" neighborhood, the original site of San Juan Capistrano village, taking photos of the lovely old wooden and adobe buildings. (in spite of a few rude signs put up by some residents that read "Photographers, you are standing in front of a private residence and you are disturbing us. Please ply your trade elsewhere!") As if even a family with an iPhone was a problem? Really, give me a break here – so I had no choice but to take a photo of the sign itself – so there! Later in the afternoon I boarded the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train bound for San Diego, and along the route were gorgeous views of the ocean and beaches. (this route is one of the most beautiful train trips in America) Upon arriving in San Diego at the historic Santa Fe Depot, there was a very unusual sight – a beautifully restored Santa Fe passenger train from the golden days of rail travel, parked





on the adjacent track. Several gleaming stainless steel cars were headed by two brand new BNSF locomotives. The Amtrak staff were fascinated by the sight of the classic train and the speculation was that it had to be the private train for high level BNSF executives, perhaps even Warren Buffet himself.

(owner of BNSF) There were lots of Amtrak and BNSF railroad police around, so I asked them if I could take a

photo of the train and they said of course, since they all had their phones out taking photos as well. Later that evening I took the trolley to Petco Stadium to watch the game between the Padres and the Pittsburgh Pirates, and once again I was seated in the Premier Club section, row 3, courtesy of the Omni Hotel. For some strange reason I was surrounded by Pirates fans, and lucky for them their team won the game. Despite the Padres loss, it was a very enjoyable time at the stadium. After the game I walked down to "Kansas City BBQ", where scenes from "Top Gun" were filmed, and had a delicious pulled pork sandwich, along with a cold glass of West Coast IPA. About 20 minutes later a monster BNSF freight train rumbled by outside just a few feet away, and as has been the long standing tradition of the bar, the bartender poured shots of "Night Train" wine all around!



The next day I visited the Maritime Museum to see if our PCMA chapter might be able to host an event there in September, and I found the space aboard the historic ferry boat "Berkeley" to be very nice, especially with the beautiful view of San Diego Bay. Then for lunch I went next door to Anthony's Fish Grotto where I sat outside enjoying a plate of fried clams and chips as I looked out on the bay. Just then a historic old 3 masted schooner sailed by. Afterwards I took the trolley to Old Town to visit the historic old Cosmopolitan Hotel as another possible venue for our September event. The old hotel had such history and charm that it seemed

a clear choice after touring the property with the general manager. Then he invited me for a drink at the nearby Barra Barra Saloon, another historic property in Old Town. By this time I had to catch the train back to LA and on to Riverside. As the train arrived in Fullerton I noticed the guy across the aisle, whose destination was Fullerton, still remained in his seat working on his computer. So I gently tapped him on the shoulder and pointed toward the door. When I arrived at Union Station I had enough time to enjoy a fantastic crab cake with mango and papaya salad, along with a glass of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc in the Traxx Bar before boarding the Metrolink train.



June

(Julian)

At the end of June I was invited to another event hosted by the Anza Borrego Foundation (ABF) that was held at the Nickle Beer Company in the historic mining town of Julian located in the San Diego Mountains. We had been experiencing several days of temperatures over 100 degrees, so going up to the mountains provided some welcome relief. Along the way I made a short detour to visit the observatory on top of Palomar Mountain and see the enormous "Hale" 200 inch mirror telescope that remains as one of the world's largest optical telescopes. It was built in 1948 and its



massive mirror was cast in Corning, New York, where it took one year to cool down before being transported on a specially built railroad car to Pasadena. Then it had to be hauled 5000 feet up the mountain on a very steep, winding road by a team of two trucks, where it was assembled over the next 6 months in a special enclosure. There is a fascinating exhibit area beneath the huge telescope describing its design and operation, and it is still in regular use to view some of the most distant objects in the universe. Later in the afternoon I pulled into Julian and found the "Butterfield B&B" where the

owners, Ed and Jean, greeted me with some iced tea and then showed me to my room overlooking Julian. That evening I had a delicious shrimp scampi with linguini at a small family owned place named "Romano's Italian and Sicilian Restaurant", which has no relationship with the national restaurant chain of a similar name. Later on that night I sat outside on my private patio with a glass of wine, listening to the sound of crickets.

The next morning Jean fixed a fantastic breakfast that started with an "Orange Pinwheel" of fresh orange slices topped with fresh raspberry compote and mint leaf. This was followed by a delicious egg and cheese tart with green pepper salsa, sour cream and Italian sausage, as we all sat around the dining room table. After breakfast I decided to drive down through the San Felipe Valley following the route of the "Great Southern Overland Stage of 1849", and the only business establishment I saw in the tiny village of San Felipe was the old, ramshackle "San Felipe Saloon", which to my surprise was open for business. Further down the road as I entered Anza Borrego Desert State Park I saw a sign literally in the middle of the desert for "Palm Spring", so I decided to check it out. About 2 miles down a rough unpaved road I came to a small canyon where indeed there was a spring with several palm trees surrounding it. It seems that it had been a major stop along the route of the stage since it was one of the few permanent water sources in the desert. As afternoon approached I headed back to Julian and just outside of town I spotted a big banner advertising "Gold Rush Days" at the Julian Mining Company. There was a small crowd enjoying the historical mining exhibits and displays, as well as the chance to pan for gold and gems, which was especially fun for the kids. A short time later I joined other members of the ABF for a VIP tasting at the Nickle Beer Company which started with a beer that had been brewed especially for

 the ABF called "Dark Sky Borrego Stout". It was basically a traditional oatmeal stout with a touch of chocolate malt and vanilla bean, and it paired very well with the homemade chocolate chip cookies. Throughout the rest of the afternoon we sampled several other craft beers that included the Julian Pale Ale, Volcan Mountain IPA, and an unusual "Barrel Aged Kupernickel Barleywine" that was aged for 6 months in Bourbon barrels. We all had a great time sitting outside in the beer garden under the shade of Ponderosa Pine trees. Later that evening I went to the "Wynola Pizza Company" just north of Julian for a fabulous Thai Chicken pizza and a cold bottle of Ballast Point Amber Ale as I listened to a local band named "Way Back Then", playing classic rock-n-roll.

During one of their own compositions I heard the line "the only thing that satisfies is a chocolate Jesus", whatever that was supposed to mean!

The following morning was another fabulous breakfast that began with a delicately poached pear in honey sauce, followed by French toast stuffed with apple compote and walnuts, served with maple syrup and Applewood smoked bacon. (a couple of the most amazing breakfasts I've had at a B&B anywhere) On the way home I took a short detour off from highway 79 on the Chihuahua Valley Road heading east into the San Diego Mountains. Near the end of the road was a large Buddhist temple sitting next to an old rundown ranch house with a front yard full of junk automobiles and tractors. Just goes to show that you never know what you may find at the end of the road!



July

(Death Valley National Park)

Then in mid-July I decided to experience Death Valley in the height of the summer heat for the first time. It was a long drive through the heart of the Mojave Desert to the tiny town of Shoshone, where gas was priced at \$5.09 a gallon. But since it's the only gas available for 70 miles, one may welcome it. North of Shoshone on highway 127 is the historic old mining town of Death Valley Junction where the old mining railroad from Death Valley joined the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad that transported the ore to the Southern Pacific Railroad mainline in Daggett. Today the town has a population of less than 100, but the classic old Amargosa Hotel and Opera House dating from the late 1800's is still operating, offering a unique view into life at the turn of the century. As I walked around the small town I noticed a new historical museum for the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad, but unfortunately it was closed that day. I walked through the old hotel and came upon some beautiful, original painted backdrops from the Opera House, which during the late 1800's had theatrical productions that rivaled those of San



Francisco! As I was leaving town I began seeing large pools of standing water alongside the road, a result of the recent monsoon rains. With evening approaching I arrived at the Furnace Creek Ranch Resort, only to find a large crowd trying to check in, so I headed to the saloon for a cold beer to wait for the line to thin out. Later, as I checked in, I think I was the only person who didn't need to show a passport. (the vast majority of people staying at the resort were either European or Australian) Finally I settled into a very nice room overlooking the 10,000 foot high Panamint Mountains that

form the western edge of the valley. That evening I went to the Furnace Creek Inn, overlooking the valley below, for a delicious buffet dinner that included BBQ pulled pork and ribs, as well as homemade linguini with sun dried tomatoes, shaved parmesan cheese, pesto, and roasted chicken, all served by the chef himself. At the end of the evening I sat outside on my balcony in the 95 degree heat, staring at the incredible clear night sky and billions of bright stars!

I awoke early the next morning at 5:30am to

take photos of the spectacular sunrise, shining like a brilliant orange crown on the summit of the Panamint Mountains. Then I drove up to "Dante's View", almost 6,000 feet above the valley, for an incredible 360 degree view for a hundred miles around. On the way down I took photos of the gorgeous colors of the barren rock. Following a huge "Miner's Breakfast" at the ranch, I headed north to Rhyolite, Nevada, one of the

best preserved old mining ghost towns in the state. During the early 1900's there were over 10,000 people living in the town, but today there's only one person who maintains the "Goldwell Outdoor Museum". This is where I discovered a strange, yet fascinating and weird sculpture entitled "The Last Supper" – a group of 12 life-size statues made from pure white plaster, all of whose faces were covered by hoods. It was a very dramatic presentation against the barren desert landscape surrounding it. Not far away was the "Bullfrog – Rhyolite Cemetery"



with many graves dating back to 1889, although there were a lot of the graves unmarked. Apparently there used to be another small mining community nearby called Bullfrog, so the two towns shared the cemetery. Leaving Rhyolite I drove further north to Beatty, Nevada and discovered a



small, but very interesting local historical museum.

Among the most unusual exhibits was the one that displayed a 30 volume set of old radio repair manuals titled "The Perpetual Technicians Troubleshooter" that was published in 1940. Some of the huge volumes were 4 or 5 inches thick and filled an entire bookcase from floor to ceiling! (today the entire contents would occupy only a small portion of a flash drive!) Unfortunately, except for a few old photos, there was very little left of the old mining railroad history, save for a few places where one could see small sections of the old railway right of way etched in the hillside. From Beatty I took US 95 north through Oasis Valley, a surprisingly green landscape surrounded by barren mountains. Then I headed back into Death Valley National Park to visit "Scotty's Castle", where I barely managed to join the last tour of the day through the old estate. On our tour we saw beautiful, original furnishings from the 1920's when Scotty established the ranch on an old gold mining claim. Our tour guide, a National Park Service Ranger dressed in the style of the 1920's, gave us an amazing story of how Scotty convinced a wealthy eastern banker named Albert Johnson to finance a non-existent gold mine, while building the castle. Of particular interest was the fact that Scotty incorporated some amazing "modern" technology, such as a solar water

heater and a hydroelectric power plant in the development of the castle – far ahead of his time! The tour was absolutely fascinating and something not to be missed on a visit to Death Valley. (unfortunately, as a sideline, on October 25th of this year the northern part of the park experienced what can only be described as a 1000 year flood when 5 inches of rain fell in only 3 hours from a series of severe thunderstorms. The result ended in Scotty's Castle being covered in more than 4 feet of mud and the newly rebuilt state highway being completely washed out for several miles! It was truly a weather phenomenon of epic proportions!)

Back at the Furnace Creek Ranch saloon I had a cold pint of the local "Badwater Pale Ale" while the official thermometer outside stood at 118 degrees. As I returned to my room before dinner, I was startled to see a large hawk sitting on



my balcony as I opened the door. Later on that evening I took my camera and tripod out on the golf course to take photos of the brilliant night sky, with the Milky Way clearly visible, rising above the southern horizon.

The next morning I drove south to Badwater Basin, the lowest place in North America. There was a lovely reflection of 10,280 foot high Telescope Peak in the small pool of water still in the basin. As I headed back to my jeep I met a Dutch family and pointed out the "Sea Level" marker over 200 feet above the road. They said they would have missed seeing it otherwise. On the way home I stopped briefly at "Dumont Dunes" to explore the huge 500 foot high sand dunes that were formed 18,000 years ago when ancient Lake Manley slowly dried up as the climate





warmed. Even today the dunes constantly change shape with the winds. Soon it was time to join the traffic on I-15 over the Cajon Pass and back home. (As a side note, I saw a sign on the rear of a van that read "I don't always use air conditioning, but when I do I choose JBS Heating and Air Conditioning, Stay Cool my friends!" It was a very clever marketing piece, especially with a photo of the business owner who bore an uncanny resemblance to the "Dos Equis" man!)

(San Diego – Esri User Conference)

Soon after returning from Death Valley I boarded the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train to San Diego for the Esri User Conference, this year as an "attendee" for the first time. The route to Oceanside was beautiful, with lots of surfers enjoying the 6 – 8 foot waves. But as we approached San Diego, very dark clouds appeared ahead of us, and as we passed Torrey Pines State Beach the rain began. By the time the train arrived at the old Santa Fe depot downtown, the rain had become a torrential downpour! As I stepped off the train I slipped on the wet concrete platform and fell on my elbow. It wasn't until I was checking into the Westin Hotel that I realized my shirt was soaked with blood! So once in my room I tied my handkerchief around my elbow, washed out the shirt, and changed to a clean one. Later on I walked down to the convention center and picked up my conference badge. Then I met up with a couple of my favorite international friends, Myles and Jorg, at the Union Bar in the historic Gaslamp District for a beer. Light rain continued to fall throughout the evening, which is most unusual for San Diego in July. In fact, this was the first time in the past 16 years that the user conference has experienced any rain.

The next morning I attended the opening session, along with 16,000 other people, to see some amazing presentations on an enormous 60 foot wide screen. Among the presentations was the powerful and emotional story of the "Ebola Project" in West Africa, and another story of a National Geographic Explorer on a quest to walk the route that early humans travelled as they migrated from Ethiopia to the southern tip of South America, a journey that will take over 7 years! Also of special note was the presentation by two sisters from Molokai High School about their project to map and study the Mangrove forests on the island. When their laptop stalled in the middle of their demo, one of them said, very calmly, "the computer must be on Hawaiian time", which broke up the audience. After the conclusion of the plenary session I joined Myles for the Map Gallery Reception where more than 1500 maps were displayed, representing the work of users from all over the world. (the Map Gallery is one of the most popular events at the conference) Later I met up with my old conference team of Rick, Joe, and Robert at Petco Stadium for the game between the Padres and San Francisco Giants, which the Padres won. (the four of us worked together for many years managing the user conference)

The next day I joined many of my Esri colleagues and International distributors at the User Group Social, which was a great time to catch up on what's happened the past year. Later in the evening I ran into Alexei and Yulia, our Russian colleagues, for dinner at Lou and Mickey's Steakhouse. I hadn't seen them for two years, so we had a lot to talk about. At



the end of the evening I met up with some of my Esri friends at Patrick's in the Gaslamp District for some of the best blues and rock in the city. The following morning I boarded the train for the return trip home, and once again there were gorgeous views of the beaches and ocean. Along the way I spotted a couple of interesting signs, the "Azuri Pet Spa and Resort" in Laguna Nigel, and "Ma's Chinese Islamic Restaurant" in Fullerton. So ended another year at the user conference.



(Borrego Springs)

At the end of the month I had planned a trip to Borrego Springs for another ABF event. But the day before the water pump in my Jeep broke and the replacement parts were hard to find, so I ended up driving a rental car. I decided to take the scenic route up through Idyllwild in the San Jacinto Mountains, and I stopped for a delicious grilled burger and beer at Joanne's Beer garden in the center of town. I was joined by a large group of bikers,



mostly with long grey hair and big black Harleys. The weather was perfect, with clear blue skies and temperatures in the 70's. Then I headed south through the Anza Valley to Warner Springs, and to my surprise I found the historic old Warner Ranch House and Museum open. As I entered the old adobe house I was the only visitor for the elderly lady who gave me a fascinating tour of the 150 year old structure, which once served as an important station stop along the historic "Butterfield Overland Stage of 1887". Then I drove southeast down through

the San Felipe Valley and over Yaqui Pass to Borrego Springs. After checking in to the Borrego Springs Resort (my favorite place to stay) I went to "Carlee's Restaurant and Bar" for dinner and enjoyed a delicious grilled chicken fettucine with a creamy Parmesan cheese and basil sauce. There was also live music from a couple of local musicians who played some great folk songs on guitar and fiddle.

The next day I drove into the southern portion of Anza Borrego Desert State Park and discovered an old railroad from the US Gypsum mine that ran down to Westmoreland in the Imperial Valley where it connected with the mainline of the Union Pacific. In the small town of Westmoreland is the giant "Spreckel's Sugar Plant" that sits 50 feet below sea level, as marked on one of the huge silos. Nearby was an old San Diego and Eastern Arizona Railroad spur with several old boxcars on the tracks that had definitely seen better days. As I headed home I knew I had spent another enjoyable time in the desert.



August

(Las Vegas)

The second week of August I headed for Las Vegas to attend the annual "Photoshop World Conference". Having plenty of time and wanting to avoid the I-15 freeway, I took the scenic route through the Mojave Desert. Just east of Twentynine Palms on highway 62 was a sign that read "next services 100 miles", so it was imperative to fill up before going any further. Several miles down the road was a large empty field surrounded by barbed wire with thousands of old "sneakers" tied on it! (perhaps it was meant to be a piece of modern roadside art?) For several more miles there were hundreds of abandoned homesteads consisting of little more than a broken down shack and a utility pole. Along the way I spotted a clever name for one of the dirt roads intersecting the highway – "Sandy Claws Lane"! Once I reached Needles, an old railroad town on the banks of the Colorado River, I headed north on US 95 to Las Vegas. As I arrived at the MGM Grand Hotel in the 105 degree heat, there was a long line of cars waiting for valet parking, which was complimentary. Then came the even longer line in the lobby to check in. Finally, as I made my way to the guest elevators through the casino



(and a thick cloud of cigarette smoke) there were hundreds of slot machines with jackpots from \$12,000 to \$100,000. I couldn't help wondering how many years have gone by since each of them paid out their jackpot? (not that the casino would ever reveal that kind of information, but it's a sure bet that they know!) That evening I had a superb "black and bleu" burger and cold pint of Mirror Pond Ale at "Michael Mina's 1842 Pub" in the hotel.



The next morning I walked over to the Mandalay Bay Hotel to register for the conference, and as a 5 year alumni I was invited to join other alumni for a complimentary breakfast in the private lounge before we were escorted upstairs to front row seats for the opening session. The presentation by Julianne Kost from Adobe was most impressive as she demonstrated cutting edge technology with the greatest of ease. Later on I attended several excellent technical sessions lead by outstanding instructors, many of whom are world renowned professional photographers. During the lunch break I returned to the MGM Grand to take advantage of the complimentary lunch buffet. The roasted turkey with cranberry salad and the roasted potatoes with spicy ground beef were delicious, as were the chorizo and pork empanadas. Since the casinos charge a ridiculous fee of \$5.99 to use their ATMs I took the Monorail downtown and found a Wells Fargo ATM that was free. Following the afternoon sessions I walked back to the MGM Grand and enjoyed a delicious dinner of Kung Pao chicken and noodles, along with a cold bottle of Sapporo at "Pan Asia" in the food court. After dinner I stopped at the bar in Fammia Italian Restaurant for a beer. When the check came for the one glass of

"imported" Italian IPA I was shocked. Surely the figure of \$17.50 must have been in error, but the bartender insisted it was correct! (frankly, the beer was OK, but I've had much better at less than a third of the price) As a matter of fact, everything in the hotels is outrageously priced. (\$8.00 beer, \$8.50 package of cookies, and \$8.50 for two disposable razors)

The following day there were more excellent technical sessions and I was able to get some tough questions answered by the Adobe staff in the Expo area. For lunch I stopped in the outdoor bar at the Border Grill Restaurant for a fantastic plate of Yucatan pork tacos with guacamole, caramelized onions and habanero chili sauce. After the last session of the day I went to the "Ri Ra Irish Pub" for some delicious Irish potato cakes served with white cheddar cheese and green onion sauce, along with a pint of Guinness. The live music of the Irish band made it feel very much like being in Dublin, hardly like Las Vegas. Later that evening I sat outside on the terrace of the MGM Signature Towers in the warm desert air.

The next morning, on the last day of the conference, I attended a couple of great "hands on" labs about editing landscape photos and using Adobe Illustrator. Following the closing session, where the grand prize was \$12,000 worth of camera gear, which of course I didn't win, I drove east toward Green Valley Ranch Resort where I had booked a room for the night. A light rain had begun to fall and quickly it turned into a serious thunderstorm with heavy rain and lots of lightning. The I-215 freeway suddenly became a flooded parking lot and I was barely able to exit on a side road to escape the stalled traffic. That's when I spotted a local Applebee's restaurant and decided to have a beer and wait out the storm.

As the storm increased and the lightning struck all around us, the lights flickered and the Direct TV signal went out. After about 45 minutes the rain had stopped and I asked the manager of the restaurant what would be the best route to Green valley Ranch Resort, since I could see that the traffic on the freeway was barely moving. Driving to the resort was still not the best as many streets were flooded and traffic signals were out, but eventually I made it. The resort is a





gorgeous property in the style of a luxurious Italian Villa, and my room was beautiful. I went to the Grand Café and Bar for a beer and to write notes in my journal, as more rain and thunder passed over the area. The bartender's recommendation of prime rib, classic baked potato and fresh steamed green beans was excellent. Later that night I watched the local news and saw pictures of the flooding and damage in the wake of the storm's wrath.

The next day I headed for home and two jobs I had scheduled to photograph real estate sales in Corona and Temecula. Owing to the time constraints I had no choice but to take the freeway, and traffic moved fairly well until we got to the summit of Cajon Pass where it came to a standstill due to the road construction. The normal 4 lanes of traffic suddenly became two lanes and traffic barely moved more than 5 miles an hour for the next 6 miles! Luckily I was able to make it to the properties on time, though I was sweating it all the way down from the pass. The property in Temecula was a large estate on the top of the mountain overlooking the valley, and with the spectacular sunset that evening, the photos turned out to be especially beautiful.

(Highland Springs)

Near the end of August I headed to Highland Springs for the 6th annual "Sausage and Beer Festival" at the historic Highland Springs Resort. There were 22 breweries serving over 60 different beers on tap, along with several food trucks dishing out a variety of traditional sausages to pair with the beer. It was a very pleasant day with temperatures in the mid



80's under clear skies, so a lot of families had come out for the festival. Sitting under the shade of tall Ponderosa Pines, savoring German bratwurst and cold beer while listening to a local folk band was very relaxing. In addition to the food, beer, and entertainment, there were several games throughout the day for both children and adults. Among the games were the "ice cream eating contest" for kids under 12, the potato sack race, the chicken dance, and the beer tasting contest. But by far, the most popular event was the "stein holding contest", a very traditional Bavarian event where one must hold a full liter of beer in a heavy glass stein, while holding it at a full arm's length for as long as possible. The last person holding their stein is declared the winner and gets to drink another stein of beer. It was indeed a very festive and fun time for all!



September

(Paso Robles)

The day after my birthday I had planned a short trip on the train to Paso Robles, but when I got to the MetroLink station in Riverside there was a big notice posted, there would be NO SERVICE since it was Labor Day! So I was forced to drive to LA Union Station and luckily, being a holiday, the traffic was minimal, so I arrived in plenty of time to board the Amtrak Coast Starlight train. Once on board I went to the dining car for lunch where the special was panko crusted chicken breast, served with ancho chili sauce over garlic mashed potatoes – delicious, and a bit of a nice surprise aboard Amtrak. The route along the coast from Ventura



and Santa Barbara to San Luis Obispo was absolutely stunning. North of San Luis Obispo the train ascended the coastal mountains through a 360 degree curve and over a long steel bridge that gave us spectacular views of the beautiful landscape with groves of coastal oak scattered among the golden grassland. Late in the afternoon we arrived in Paso Robles (meaning the “Pass of the Oaks”), a lovely small town surrounded by extensive vineyards and wineries among the hills. I had been through the



town several times on the train, but this would be my first time to actually spend some time walking around it. I checked into the lovely Paso Robles Inn, once the historic “El Paso de Robles Hotel” that entertained many notable Hollywood stars in the 1920’s and 30’s. My room overlooked the beautiful courtyard with several small gardens and fish ponds. Across the street from the inn is the City Park, the heart of the restaurant and shopping district where many of the local wineries have tasting rooms. Besides the numerous fine restaurants there



are several art galleries and craft shops that make the park a great place stroll around almost any time of the day. I discovered a small boutique hotel called “Hotel Cheval” which had a delightful outdoor wine garden where I sampled a local beer by the name of “Drakes 1500 Lager”. Later in the evening I choose to have dinner at “Basil Thai”, and the cocoanut crusted crab cakes were outstanding, as was the main dish of Spicy noodles with chicken and bell pepper. Along with the ice cold bottle of Singha beer it felt like I was in Bangkok – very authentic Thai food.



The next morning I visited the Carnegie Historical Museum in the center of the park and discovered a rare display of original glass photographic negatives of Paso Robles and its people from the late 1800’s, which a local photographer had painstakingly scanned, restored, and printed. The museum building had originally been built as a public library, a gift from the famous financier Andrew Carnegie. There was also an exhibit about the history of the “El Paso de Robles Hotel and Spa”, built in the late 1800’s to incorporate the natural hot springs and mud baths on the property. It became very popular with wealthy eastern families, as well as

famous Hollywood personalities during its heyday in the 1920’s. Standing outside in front of the museum was a statue of Ignace Paderewski, the famous Polish statesman and concert pianist who visited Paso Robles many times in the early 1920’s and established a vineyard of Petite Syrah grapes on his ranch. (grapes were first introduced to the region in 1797 by Spanish conquistadors and Franciscan missionaries) Since the late 1960’s, Paso Robles’ reputation as a premier wine region has become firmly established with many well-known winemakers resident in the area. For lunch I went to the “Red scooter Deli” for a wonderful BLT made with Applewood smoked bacon and avocado. (the name derives from the fact that the deli delivers orders using a red scooter) As I sat outside on the patio, I watched as two elderly disabled people shared their lunch, each one with their own “tricked” out power chairs that even included stereo systems and chromed horns. After lunch I rented a car and drove into the wine country to do some tastings. My first stop was the J Lohr Winery which had been highly recommended by the staff at the Paso Robles Inn. I tasted two wines made from



their local grapes, the "Gesture Syrah" and the "Hilltop Cabernet", both of which were excellent. In fact I could see the grapes growing on the hill to the north of the tasting room. Next I visited the Eberle Vineyard with its spectacular view of the Santa Lucia coastal mountains. Here I found a fabulous Zinfandel that made a perfect pairing with the smoked gouda cheese and fresh figs. I spent some time driving some of the back roads through the hills, passing many small vineyards and wineries. As I approached the town again I spotted the Firestone-Walker Brewery, so I had

to stop to sample the "Hammersmith IPA" that is only available at the brewery. In the bar the US Open Tennis Championship was being shown on all of the big screen TV's since the match was between Venus Williams and her sister Serena. That evening I had a fine Irish dinner at McGregor's Irish Pub, along with a couple of pints of Guinness as I listened to a young guitarist playing old folk tunes. The following day I boarded an Amtrak bus to Santa Barbara to connect with the train to LA and once again, enjoyed the beauty of the California coast.



(San Diego)

In mid-September I boarded the train once again to Old Town San Diego for our PCMA Chapter quarterly program. The forecast was for the possibility of some rain from a hurricane in the eastern Pacific Ocean off the coast of Baja California.



I checked into the Best Western Hacienda Inn and had a delicious dinner at the Barra Barra Saloon in Old Town. The next morning I walked down to the historic Cosmopolitan Hotel to check on the set up of the room for our event. Prior to the start of the program we had a short board of directors meeting in the "Casa Bandini Room", the original adobe house of the Bandini family, one of the founding families of San Diego. Lots of old photographs lined the walls and family heirlooms were carefully displayed on some of the antique furniture. Just as our board meeting got started, the rain also began, and within minutes it had become a torrential downpour that lasted almost two hours. It was so heavy that one needed an umbrella in order to cross the courtyard to the restrooms! But luckily the rain decreased in intensity before our lunch and program of the afternoon, which featured a fascinating presentation about the history of ComicCon and the incredible challenges of managing it. Following the presentation we all gathered in the old saloon for a reception before calling it a day. Later in the evening I joined some of my PCMA friends for dinner at the Tequila Factory where we enjoyed some delicious blackened Mahi Mahi tacos and cold Pacifico beers.



(Chicago – Cincinnati – Louisville – St Louis)

At the end of September I boarded a United Airlines flight to Chicago where I would join a special private train for a trip through Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, and Illinois on the way to the annual convention of the American Association of Private Railroad Car Owners (AAPRCO). The inflight dinner in First Class was a fantastic meal of tandoori chicken, rice, masala, and lemon-lime sherbet for dessert. After collecting my luggage I took a taxi downtown, and several miles later traffic on

I-90 suddenly came to an abrupt halt when all 4 lanes were reduced to 1 lane for "bridge cleaning"! The taxi driver said this had been happening every weekend for months. Luckily he knew an alternate route on the surface streets to the location of the Roosevelt Railroad Yard where I would meet up with Doug, the owner of the Pacific Sands Pullman sleeper. During our journey from the airport, I had noticed something very strange about the taxi – the speedometer didn't work. Shortly after leaving the airport it was stuck on 120 mph, but whenever we slowed down for heavy traffic it suddenly dropped to 60 mph! (weird) Eventually I met up with Doug and made the long walk through the Amtrak yard to his railcar, a classic Union Pacific Pullman sleeper built in the early 1950's. Then Doug told me that the owner of the "Salisbury Beach" on which I had travelled last year to the convention in Portland, Maine had died the day before after a long battle with cancer. It was indeed sad news, even though I had spent only a week with Tom. In addition, Doug said the "Tioga Pass" business car that was supposed to travel with the Pacific Sands had lost its AC unit in Los Angeles and



was replaced with the business car "Kansas" from the American Railway Explorer. (this was crucial since the business car provided a kitchen, dining room, and lounge for all of us in the sleeper) The next morning our train of 25 private cars, named the "Spirit of St Louis", pulled out of Union Station at 5:20am for a long, slow trip through a maze of tracks coming and going from every direction surrounding the city. We passed through the old blue collar neighborhoods on the southside of the city and the rusting, crumbling industrial areas of Gary, Indiana before finally rolling into the beautiful farmland of northern Indiana. Our route took us on the tracks of the former Nickel

Plate Road (New York, Chicago, and St Louis Railroad) to Ft Wayne. From there we headed south to Muncie on the old Pennsylvania Railroad line, and then southeast on the Indiana and Ohio Railroad to Cincinnati, our destination for the night. As we pulled into the city we followed the shore of the mighty Ohio River to an old spur in a new city park beside the river and just a short distance from downtown. It was a beautiful location to park our train for the night. But the day would not be complete without mentioning the fabulous meals that had been prepared on board by Alan, our private gourmet chef. Our first day had begun with breakfast of scrambled eggs, red and green bell peppers, applewood smoked bacon,



rye toast, and fresh fruit. For lunch, Alan served us a delicious sandwich of melted



Gruyere cheese and black forest ham, along with German potato salad. And for dinner there was a wonderful, fresh trout almondine, boiled red potatoes, and braised Brussel sprouts with crispy bacon. The next day we had an amazing tour of the historic Cincinnati Union Terminal, which has preserved some of the most beautiful Art Deco architecture in the

country. Our guide, a former TWA flight attendant, took us to some areas that were not open to the public, like the Presidential office suite and the VIP dining room. Of special note were the incredible ceramic murals on the walls surrounding the huge main waiting room that displayed the history of the city. She even invited a small group of us to walk with her to downtown, and along the way she pointed out some other historic sites and described how the German community had a profound influence on the culture of the city. Then I



walked down to the riverfront where the historic "Roebling Suspension Bridge" was built across the Ohio River in 1867 and is still in use today. At the time it was the longest suspension bridge in the world at 1,057 feet. (Roebling is most famous as the engineer who invented wire rope and as the builder of the Brooklyn Bridge, which is also still in use



today.) After taking photos along the riverfront on my way back to the train, I stopped at the "Montgomery Inn Boathouse Bar" for a cold pint of locally brewed "Riesenkost IPA". That evening, as the sun slowly set over the Ohio River, we boarded the "Cincinnati Dinner Train" for a short trip on the tracks of the former Little Miami River Railroad, Cincinnati's first railroad. As our train slowly made its way along the banks of the Ohio River, we were served a delicious dinner and enjoyed the music of a trio of ladies who sung old tunes from the 1940's. After dinner we all sat in the lounge with glasses of wine and shared stories of our day in Cincinnati.



The following morning was once again a departure at sunrise bound for Louisville by way of Lexington, Kentucky. Although the weather had changed overnight from clear skies to heavy overcast and light rain, the route on the former Southern Railway crossed over the Kentucky River on the historic "High Bridge", a cantilevered design built in 1877 for the Cincinnati Southern Railroad to connect Lexington and Danville, then the capitol of Kentucky. At 305 feet high and 1,125 feet in length it was the tallest railroad bridge in the world until the early 20th century. Even today it's still in use on the mainline of the Norfolk Southern Railroad. Despite the low clouds and fog in the deep gorge below, it was a spectacular view as our train crossed over the bridge. Later in the afternoon we pulled into the Norfolk Southern rail yard in Louisville where our train was scheduled to park for the next two days. It was



not the most scenic spot in Louisville and lucky for us Norfolk Southern management made a last minute decision to relocate us to an old railroad spur on the river next to the new "Riverwalk Park" and near the McAlpine Locks and Dam where we had great views of the river and lights of downtown Louisville. Before darkness fell I walked over to the locks to take photos of the huge towboats and massive barges negotiating the locks that allow river traffic to navigate around the "Falls of the Ohio". Some of the largest towboats had 15 barges that required all of the towboat's 12,000hp engine's power to go upriver. As a light rain

began to fall I made my way back to the train where we were once again treated to a fabulous gourmet dinner by Alan. As we watched the barges moving up and down the river less than 100 yards from our window, we enjoyed a salad of iceberg lettuce smothered in heavy Roquefort cheese dressing with a liberal sprinkling of bacon bits before the main dish of Korean short ribs in a spicy Hoisin sauce served over polenta, along with braised broccoli and bacon. And if that weren't enough, Alan served us a homemade pecan pie he had prepared in the galley of the rail car that afternoon.

The next day began with more light rain and chilly temperatures, but Alan had prepared a sumptuous Italian sausage strata for breakfast that took our minds off the dreary weather. Afterwards we boarded buses that took us to the





Hillerich & Bradsby Baseball Bat Factory where we had a fantastic tour about the making the legendary "Louisville Slugger", that remains the official bat of Major League Baseball since 1887. Where it used to take over 2 hours to make a bat by hand from the oak or maple wood core, new computer guided lathes make a bat in less than 30 seconds! However, many of the major league players still have their bats custom made by hand. Following the tour of the bat factory we drove through an old and elegant Louisville neighborhood to Churchill Downs for a sumptuous luncheon buffet of all the favorite southern foods of Kentucky, accompanied by Mint Juleps! I also tried a pint of the local "Goodwood Ale" that is aged in wooden barrels made from the Poplar tree. The tour of the race track and Kentucky Derby

museum was fascinating, especially the film about the history of the Kentucky Derby that we watched in a unique 360 degree theater. Our guide gave us some amazing facts about the Derby, but what was really surprising was the fact that last year over 175,000 people attended the Derby, which was 3 times more than attended the Super Bowl! Another amazing bit of trivia was about the scale of betting at the race track where over \$100 million is wagered every year, and all in cash only! After the tour of Churchill Downs I walked through historic old town



Louisville and took a peek inside the famous "Brown Hotel" with its extravagant original Victorian furnishings and décor. Then I came to the new "4th Street Live" development downtown where there were lots of restaurants, bars, and shops. Just beyond was the historic riverfront where the original sternwheel steamboat "Belle of Louisville" is moored. She was built in 1914 for the West Memphis Packet Company and served as a freight and passenger boat on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers before being purchased later by the City of Louisville, to serve as a boat for river cruises. It still operates almost year round in that capacity. Moored nearby was the historic "Life Saving Boat Station #10", the last surviving one of its kind from the days before the Coast Guard originated. As evening fell I walked back to the train along the "Ohio River Walk" and watched two enormous

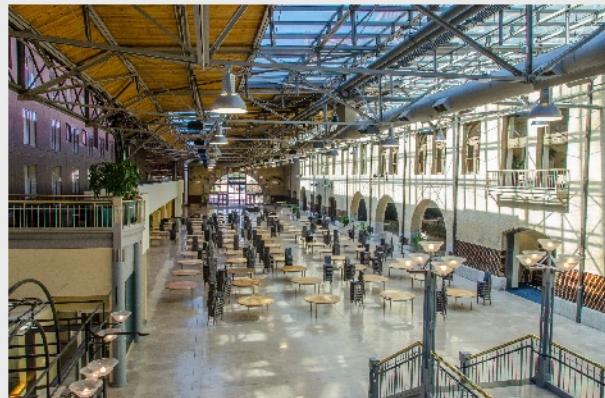
towboats pushing 16 huge chemical barges slowing up the river. They had to negotiate a tight 60 degree turn in a narrow section of the river – very impressive work! After dinner I walked along the top of the levee and took photos of the downtown lights reflected in the river.

The next morning we had an early 6:00am departure for the next leg of our journey through the scenic forests and farmlands of southern Indiana



and southern Illinois to St Louis for the annual convention of AAPRCO. Alan had prepared another fabulous breakfast with a delicious ham and cheese frittata, sautéed potatoes in BBQ sauce, and fresh fruit. Our route to St Louis followed the tracks of the former Southern Railway, as well as portions of the old Wabash Railroad through a mile long tunnel. Everywhere we passed the harvesting of corn and soybeans by monster combines, and in some places it was such a bumper crop that the grain was being stored outside in huge mountains beside the tall silos that were already full! As we approached St Louis and crossed the mighty

Mississippi River, the skyline of the city came into view with the famous "Gateway Arch" shining in the late afternoon sun. Slowly our train made its way along the riverfront, under two huge bridges, and past Busch Stadium before arriving into the historic Union Station, once the largest and busiest railroad station in the world during the 1930's and 40's. At its peak, it had 42 tracks serving 22 railroads with over 100 daily arrivals and departures, all under an enclosed train shed that was the largest in the world. During WWII hundreds of thousands of soldiers passed through the station on their way to the East Coast for deployment to Europe. Today it has only 4 tracks and 2 platforms remaining which are used for charter rail companies and special trains like ours.



Rather than spend the next couple of nights on the train I checked into the new DoubleTree Hotel located inside the old station. It's a beautiful restoration of the original Union Station Terminal Hotel and has preserved the elegant décor and atmosphere when it was the height of luxury for passengers traveling by train. Luckily the old station was not demolished after the dramatic decline of passenger rail travel in the late 1950's. Now the old "train shed", where railroad tracks were once located, has been redeveloped as a center of upscale shops, restaurants and bars. Inside the main terminal building the gorgeous Art Deco features have been very well preserved, and a vibrant, modern enhancement has been added in the form of a beautiful and spectacular laser light show that performs every hour. Over the next 3 days I attended some interesting conference sessions, with the keynote address by Amtrak President Joe Boardman who became emotional when talking about the recent fatal accident in Philadelphia. Of special interest was the session titled "Ask Amtrak" where the car owners got the opportunity to "bitch" about their complaints with Amtrak and the "host" freight railroads. But perhaps the most interesting and enjoyable aspect of the conference were the tours to the National Museum of Transportation with its large collection of vintage steam and diesel locomotives and the Barriger Railroad Library at the University of Missouri where we saw the largest collection of rare railroad books, as well as a beautiful special display of original paintings and drawings by John James Audubon. Also at the Transportation Museum was a collection of vintage automobiles, including three Chevrolets from 1917, 1937, and 1957 sitting side by side which gave a unique perspective of the changes in design over time. And at the Barriger Railroad Library was a rare 3 volume set of books

from the "Pacific Survey" that was commissioned by President Lincoln in 1853 to find a route for the transcontinental railroad. Ironically, the Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis, was in charge of the four survey teams that mapped the western US. That evening was also a very special event, the "Car Party" where we were able to visit all of the private cars, each of which had either food or a bar set up. Many of the cars are very historic and luxurious, some of them dating back to the late 19th and early 20th



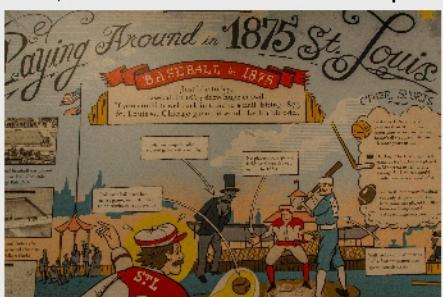


centuries. (A couple of the cars have a history of being used by president's McKinley, Roosevelt, and Truman) It was a nice time to socialize with the other riders and the owners of the cars. During my time in St Louis I took the opportunity to walk down to the historic old County Courthouse to see a fascinating exhibit about the history of St Louis in the 19th century. Of special significance was the history of the trial conducted in the 1830's in which a slave sued his master for freedom. Two blocks from the old Courthouse is the spectacular "Jefferson National Expansion Memorial", better known as the

"Gateway Arch". This year is the 50th anniversary of its construction and it remains the world's tallest arch. The National Park Service was in the process of preparing a celebration to honor its unique construction and the iconic symbol of the great westward expansion of the United States that it represents. It has also become the symbol of St Louis that is easily recognized around the world. From the Arch I walked north along the riverfront to "LaClede's Landing" where St Louis was born as a French trading post. As I walked through the old cobble stone streets and among the lovely old red brick buildings dating from the 1800's, it was like walking back in time. I stopped at the Morgan Street Brewery for a pint of the local beer and a bowl of soup before taking the Metro train to Forest Park, site of the 1904 World's Exposition that celebrated the 100th

anniversary of the *Louisiana Purchase*. Here I discovered the

Museum of Missouri History and two incredible special exhibits. The first was all about coffee and its history in St Louis, and to my great surprise, I learned that in the early 20th century the city was the leading consumer of coffee, with dozens of coffee houses all over town. The exhibit included many displays of classic old advertising and antique coffee



paraphernalia. The second special exhibit detailed life in St Louis in 1875 and included hundreds of fascinating and surprising facts that made the experience of walking through the exhibit feel like walking into the past! Leaving the museum I walked through the park taking photos of the beautiful landscaped gardens and impressive old mansions lining the street across from the park. Later that evening was the Gala Dinner Party held in the Grand Hall in Union Station. The food was superb, especially the Indian spiced roasted salmon and the "gooey butter cake with bourbon sauce" that tasted very much like a traditional "chess pie". After dinner we were treated to a special laser light show with many images depicting the history of the station and the city of St Louis.

Early the next morning I checked out of the hotel and boarded the train where I joined my fellow travelling companions in the Kansas Business Car for a delicious breakfast of homemade waffles, hickory smoked ham, and fresh fruit. Leaving



St Louis our route took us north following the west side of the Mississippi River on the tracks of the former Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad, the old "Burlington Route", which is now part of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe system (BNSF). The views of the verdant fields and the river were beautiful. Soon we passed through historic Hannibal, Missouri and the monument to its native son, Mark Twain. We crossed the river at Quincy, Illinois and rolled on through vast expanses of corn and soybean fields at 80 mph on to the historic railroad town of Galesburg. As our train slowly made



its way through the town we were greeted by dozens of people waving and taking photos. At the same time I spotted a very traditional Amish family standing on the platform patiently waiting for the regularly scheduled Amtrak train to Chicago.

As we got closer to Chicago several Metra commuter trains passed by us with their passengers headed to homes in the western suburbs at the end of the work day. Upon arriving at Union Station chef Alan served us a delicious shrimp cocktail before dinner. It was a great ending to a very unique and amazing trip through the heart of the Midwest. Next year the convention will be held in Spokane, Washington and the special train will be assembled in Denver for a very scenic trip over tracks of the Union Pacific Railroad, as well as the former Northern Pacific and Great Northern Railroads. It should be another fantastic journey and one that I plan to do.



October

(Las Vegas – Death Valley)

Once again I headed for Las Vegas, this time for our annual PCMA Chapter fundraising dinner, in conjunction with IMEX America, a huge tradeshow for the meetings and conventions industry. Rather than take the freeway I chose to drive some of the back roads through the Mojave Desert, then north on US 95 through the small mining town of Searchlight, Nevada. According to hometown son Senator Harry Reid, the story is that the town received its name when George Frederick Colton was prospecting in the area in 1897, and supposedly remarked that it would take a searchlight to find gold ore there. Shortly thereafter he struck gold, leading to a boom when Searchlight had a larger population than Las Vegas. Now the town has 1200 residents, a gas station, motel, and casino, all in one large building! From Searchlight I took a narrow road over the hills to the tiny village of Nipton, where a sign on the side of the road read "Historic Town with B&B, café, and campground". But none of them were in sight and the town looked abandoned. Eventually I arrived at "The Mirage Hotel" in Las Vegas, the location for our fundraising dinner. The line to check in was quite long, but I was escorted to the VIP lounge to register and pick up my room key. (the lounge was a quiet retreat from the chaos of the lobby and casino, and provided complimentary beverages and appetizers as well) One of the doormen suggested that I should go to Gilly's next door at the Treasure Island Resort, where they had reasonably priced drinks, as well as some great entertainment. He was certainly right on both counts. The Alaskan Amber on tap was only \$5 and it was a lot of fun watching people try their luck riding the mechanical bull. The music was definitely country and western, which went perfectly with the line dancing on the huge dance floor. Some of the dancers were pretty good, but one grizzled old grey haired cowboy was just shuffling his feet as he stood in the middle of the floor! It was also hard not to notice the gorgeous young ladies serving drinks, dressed in skimpy black leather bikinis, black leather chaps, black boots, and black cowboy hat! (the BLT burger with smoked bacon, lettuce, tomato, and avocado was darn good too)

The next morning I checked my email and had coffee in the VIP lounge before walking over to the Sands Expo Center to pick up my badge for IMEX. Then it was time to meet up with a couple of my PCMA colleagues for lunch at the Carnegie Deli, after which we all headed to the banquet room to finish the set up for the evening fundraiser. The room décor was fabulous, the dinner was delicious, and the event was a tremendous success, having raised more than \$30,000. In addition, the program honoring two individuals in the industry was both heartwarming and funny, so everyone had a good time. The following day I spent a couple of hours at the huge IMEX America tradeshow where hundreds of hotels, resorts, travel companies and exotic destinations from around the world had displays and exhibits. But after a





while the crowds got to me and I felt the need to escape from Las Vegas, so I checked out of the hotel and drove north on US 95 to a place I had seen on the map many times but had not visited. On the north side of Mount Charleston lies the expanse of the Amargosa Valley stretching for over a hundred miles. At the southern end of the valley is the Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, which from the main highway looks pretty barren, but in fact is a surprising oasis of dozens of small ponds and marshes that provide habitat for hundreds of thousands of migratory birds. It was astonishing to drive through the

refuge and come across all of the water that flows up from a huge ocean of ancient groundwater just beneath the surface of the desert. The visitor center had a wonderful film about the refuge and its importance to the region. At one time in the 1950's, a large company proposed to build a new city for 50,000 people on the land, which would have destroyed virtually all of the wildlife habitat. As I looked at the proposed construction maps it was almost impossible to imagine the destruction that would have occurred. Luckily a partnership between the Nature Conservancy and US Fish & Wildlife Service convinced the landowners, local ranchers, to dedicate their land as a wildlife refuge. As I was driving around the refuge, visiting the incredible ponds and marshes, I ran into an old cowboy who had grown up in the area. He was on his way to show his



wife where he had rode his horse to school every day as a youngster. As I took many photographs of this most unusual and fascinating landscape, I was glad I had finally taken the time to visit the refuge, a true gem in the barren Nevada desert. Of special note was "Devil's Hole", an underwater cave where no one has yet been able to find the bottom, even after diving down more than 500 feet. Its origin remains a mystery despite years of investigation and research. Leaving the refuge I continued on through the Amargosa Valley, formed during the last ice age, to Death Valley Junction. Once again I found the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad Museum closed. (maybe one of these days I'll time my arrival on the day when it's open) Early in the evening I got to Death Valley, only to find the Furnace Creek Ranch totally booked for the night, with lots of foreign tourists and a large student group. So I went up the hill to the Furnace Creek Inn, which overlooks the valley, and checked into a very nice room on the top floor. There were only two guest rooms on the top floor and a large deck with spectacular views of the valley and surrounding mountains. For dinner I went back down to

the Saloon at the ranch for a tasty plate of chicken tenders, homemade jalapeno potato chips, and a cold pint of Badwater Ale. As I watched the baseball game between Kansas City and Houston, several of the foreign tourists were confused by the saloon menu and about how to order, but they all seemed to be having a fun time. After dinner I bought some "395 IPA" (Mammoth Brewing Co) at the general store and finished the evening sitting on the deck watching billions of stars in the night sky, while taking photographs of the Milky Way. It was a beautiful, peaceful and quiet evening!

The next day I drove up the Wildrose Canyon Road with the plan to see the 100 year old charcoal kilns that remained from the days of mining in the Panamint Mountains. But after 10 miles of a bruising ride on the rough unpaved road I decided to leave the kilns for another day. So I backtracked to highway 160 and headed south into the desolate Panamint Valley, where I spotted a small herd of wild burros grazing rather nonchalantly alongside the highway. Several miles south I came to "Ballarat", an old mining ghost town that has become home to a small Libertarian community. All that remains of the original town are a few crumbling adobe buildings and a restored General Store and Museum. Despite the

the large "open" sign outside, there was no one in sight when I entered. But it was impossible not to notice the huge banner "Legalize the Constitution". While there were a few old antiques scattered around, the thing that caught my eye was the large frig of cold sodas and a sign saying "please leave your change here". (certainly a trusting place, or maybe so few people visited that it didn't make sense to staff the place) From Ballarat I continued south through Trona, home to a huge mineral extraction and chemical processing facility, where no one has a grass lawn at their home. (most likely because the grass won't grow!) I ended my trip with a delicious dinner of shrimp, spinach, and artichoke dip, accompanied by toasted rustic Italian bread, at the Old Spaghetti Factory in Redlands – really delicious!



(Twentynine Palms – Joshua Tree National Park)

At the end of the month I decided to take a trip to Joshua Tree National Park where I had finally been able to reserve a spot of the tour of the historic Keyes Ranch. I arranged to stay in Twentynine Palms, home to the huge Marine Corps Training Base. The "Sunnyvale Garden Suites" had looked interesting online, and when I got there I found a very funky hotel with lots of crazy stuff scattered around the property, like an old hospital gurney and an early 20th century washing machine. In order to register I had to use a phone on the wall outside the office to call the manager who lived across the street. I room I had was named "Palo Verde" and it had a full kitchen and a nice deck. (but there was no air dryer and the in room safe was stuck open and locked!) Once I dropped my stuff in the room, I headed for the park to join the tour of



Keyes Ranch, lead by a National Park Service ranger who was brilliant as he assumed the role of Bill Keyes. Over the course of the next two hours he told us the fascinating history of the Keyes family, seven children, two of whom are still alive. The family lived on the ranch for over 40 years, from the early 1920's until the mid-60's when the ranch became part of the new Joshua Tree National Monument. The Keyes family was very much self-sufficient, having two wells, a small reservoir, large garden, and even a small orchard of apples, peaches, and pears. (a few of the trees have survived and continue to bear fruit!) Bill Keyes was also a skilled bush mechanic who collected old machinery and truck parts that he used to keep things running on the ranch. All in all it was one of the best tours I've experienced. (the only downside were the gusty winds that sometimes exceeded 60 mph!) After the tour I headed to the Joshua Tree Saloon for a delicious plate of chicken tenders and fries, along with a cold pint of Firestone 805, while watching game 3 of the World Series between Kansas City and the New York Mets. Then suddenly, at the end of the 3rd inning, all of the lights in the bar went out and it became "bottle only" and cash only, since the computer cash registers were offline. After sitting in the dark for 15 minutes I decided to leave. Back in Twentynine Palms I discovered the "Virginian Bar", a local dive bar with a loyal following of young Marines and old locals. As I sat at the bar watching the Word Series games, some of the local ladies were chatting up the Marines, without much luck. One middle-aged woman, with an overabundance of perfume, sat down next to me and tried to start up a conversation, but I was more interested in watching the game. Meanwhile, a couple of older ladies, especially one named Loretta, kept coming up to me saying "don't be a stranger", and inviting me to come back tomorrow night for their Halloween Party. Throughout the evening, the barmaid "Cindy" deftly managed the drunken locals and young Marines. The next morning I had breakfast at Denny's where all the staff were dressed in costume. Once I was back in the park I chose to hike the "Lost Palms Oasis" trail, which was supposedly 3 1/2 miles one way, but I think that distance was

3 miles one way. The trail was very scenic, passing through a variety of desert vegetation and eventually leading to a small oasis with several palm trees and a small stream. The trail then continued through the desert, eventually leading back to the park entrance. Overall, it was a great day of hiking and exploring the desert landscape.

measured as the crow flies! Although the total elevation gain was only 360 feet, the trail constantly dropped in and out of steep canyons, making it seem a lot farther. Along the trail were great views of the Salton Sea and Santa Rosa Mountains in the distance. At last I came to the edge of a deep canyon where there was the largest grove of California Fan Palms in the park at the bottom. (not many people get this far into the park) Later in the day I went to the bar at the 29 Palms Inn for dinner – maple glazed pork cutlets, baked potato, steam zucchini and red bell peppers. After which I sat outside by the pool listening to the music of a local jazz duo. The next day I returned to the park and drove to the trailhead for a hike to the abandoned Silver Bell Mine which I had seen from the



crushing, which unfortunately had been dismantled and removed decades ago after the mine closed. As I hiked around the mountain there were beautiful, sweeping views, as well as lots of small pieces of copper ore lying around. Later in the day I decided to stay at the 29 Palms Inn where I checked in to one of the old adobe cabins that had a nice, secluded patio and gorgeous views of the mountains. I spent the rest of the afternoon taking photos of the lovely palm oasis a few yards away, as the sun slowly set. As evening approached I went to



the bar, and upon the recommendation of the bartender, I ordered the dinner special, homemade spaghetti carbonara, that was fabulous – one of the best I've had anywhere! The cold pint of Anchor Steam beer went very well with dinner. Once again I finished the evening outside by the pool listening to a local rock band. The following morning I woke up at sunrise to the sound of Coyotes howling nearby. It was another beautiful clear day as I drove through the park one more time as I headed home. It was a short but very enjoyable weekend in the desert.

(Los Angeles)

At the end of October I attended a photographic workshop in LA. I took the train into the city and walked over to the Westin Bonaventure Hotel to check in. There were several streets closed to traffic for the “Rock-n-Roll 10K Walk/Run” charity event. Having the afternoon free I took the Metro to Universal City Walk and found a vast array of interesting shops, restaurants, bars, and movie theaters. I stopped at the Karl Strauss Brewpub for a superb dish of Alaskan Cod and chips, along with a cold glass of Tower 10 IPA. Meanwhile on the big screen TV was the final quarter of the game between Washington and Tampa Bay. Tampa Bay lead 24 – 0 at halftime, but Washington made an incredible comeback to win 31 – 30 on a turnover in the last 25 seconds of the game. After lunch I strolled around taking photos and discovered an amazing



demo by a young instructor at the indoor Skydiving ride. With still a lot of the afternoon open, I took the Metrolink train to Fullerton, a city I had passed through many times, but never stopped to visit. I walked around the old part of town near the historic Santa Fe station, where there were a lot of restaurants, shops, and galleries. The main street was lined with beautiful flowering trees on both sides. Then I stopped for a drink at the bar in the Old Spaghetti Factory, formerly the



Union Pacific Railroad depot. The historic old building was designed in the classic Spanish style and brilliantly white-washed. The interior had been very well preserved by the restaurant, with gorgeous dark wood paneling and white marble. Soon it was time to catch the Amtrak train back to LA Union Station, as the gorgeous sunset cast a beautiful gold color on the railroad tracks. As I boarded the train it was literally "standing room only", and I had to push my way into the Cafe car, where I was able to buy one of the last remaining cans of Budweiser. I was also lucky to grab the last seat at a table with 3 other people, all of whom were absorbed in watching videos on their phones, but several

other people were standing in the aisle or sitting on their luggage! As I looked around the crowded car, I saw many Oakland Raider hats and t-shirts. Then I remembered there had been a game earlier in the afternoon between Oakland and San Diego. A young couple sitting across the aisle were pretty well wasted, with empty wine bottles and beer cans on the table in front of them. They were even unaware of their friends taking photos of them with their own phone!

Meanwhile, a gorgeous young woman standing in the aisle, spent the entire trip adjusting her beautiful gold ear clip, putting on her makeup, and transforming her clothes to reveal her heavily tattooed body. (must have been getting ready for a pretty heavy nightclub scene later) To say this trip was a "frickin" zoo would be an understatement! On my way back to the Westin Hotel I passed the "Engine Company #28 Restaurant and Bar" on Figueroa St. As I entered the restaurant I discovered a historic old Firehouse dating from the late 1800's that has been very well preserved. As I sat at the bar, an old man near me began telling me the fascinating history of the firehouse, pointing out some of the original features, like the brass pole, the beautiful stamped tin ceiling with the original openings still in place where hay was dropped down feed the horses below. He also pointed to an old coat rack with large shiny brass hooks where the firemen hung their coats and boots. Meanwhile I savored a delicious Maryland crab cake and a cold pint of local IPA.

The next morning I walked down to the convention center for the Adobe Photoshop and Lightroom workshop, where I learned some new stuff that I could put to use right away. At the end of the workshop I returned to the hotel, picked up my bags and took the train back home.



November

(Chino Hills State Park)

Early in November I checked the website of Chino Hills State Park and found out that at last, after more than a year, the access road was finally open. So I decided to visit the park for the first time, since the weather was beautiful, with perfectly clear blue skies. The steep, narrow road into the park lead to the old "Rolling M Ranch" that operated until the early 1980's, before being sold to California State Parks. All that remains of the ranch is an old barn and a few out buildings, along





with a few cattle pens and loading chutes. State Parks had installed several interpretive signs detailing the history of the ranch and the cattle industry in southern California. I spent a couple of hours hiking up and down the grass covered hills taking photos of the beautiful landscape and the sweeping views of the San Gabriel Mountains in the distance. (San Jacinto Peak was also clearly in view to the east, more than 60 miles away) Just then a large hawk cruised along the slope below me, obviously searching for a meal in the thick grass. Later on I hiked down to an unpaved road that lead to an old windmill at the

head of Aliso Canyon. Along the way I passed a large patch of long green vines with dozens of small yellow, melon like fruit. (not sure if they were edible) Further up the canyon was a large grove of native black walnut trees, a favorite food of the native Americans. Near the top of the canyon was the old windmill, turning furiously in the wind! And although it was turning with great vigor, the mechanism to drive the pump had been disconnected quite a long time ago. (but as I watched the motion of the mill I had to wonder if it could be reconnected and become operational once more) I took several photos of the old windmill, and even a short video to capture the motion and sound of it spinning in the wind. The old windmill was built by the Dempster Company in Nebraska, but there was no clue as to when. As I headed back down to the ranch, beautiful high cirrus clouds began to fill the sky, signaling an impending storm. On my way back home I stopped at the Old Spaghetti Factory in Riverside, a beautiful restoration of the old "Sutherland Fruit Co" packing house next to the mainline BNSF Railroad tracks. While I sipped a local Riverside Pale Ale at the bar, lots of families came in to celebrate birthdays or anniversaries. It was fun to watch the kids having the time of their life!



(Redondo Beach)



In mid-November I drove to Redondo Beach, a small beach community south of LAX airport, for the annual PCMA Chapter Board of Directors retreat where we would plan for 2016. The Crowne Plaza Resort hosted us for the next two days, providing complimentary accommodations and meals, in addition to our coffee breaks. The hotel had been recently renovated in a modern, elegant feel of an oceanfront property. We began the first day with a fabulous lunch in a private dining room overlooking the marina, followed by meetings to review the events of the past year and discuss the direction for next year. As evening approached our group

walked to the Samba Restaurant on the Redondo Beach Pier for an authentic Brazilian dinner, complete with entertainment in the form of two gorgeous samba dancers. (everyone was busy taking photos and videos of the dancers, who persuaded a couple of the guys to dance with them) After dinner we headed for the Comedy Club in Manhattan Beach for a different form of entertainment featuring a couple of comedians from Canada who were very funny as they told typical Canadian jokes.

The following day began with a sumptuous breakfast buffet provided by the hotel, after which we continued our discussions of plans for 2016. And once again the lunch buffet was amazing, with a wide variety of food from around the world, including crab cakes, Indian samosas, Thai curry chicken with peanut sauce, and a table full of decadent desserts!



(it was really difficult to leave after that) But eventually we had to wrap up the meeting and head home. I took some time to walk along the beach and down to the pier to take photos under the sunny skies. Now I can certainly recommend a stay at the Redondo Beach Crowne Plaza Resort!



(Long Beach)

Soon it was Thanksgiving and we joined Andy and Tracey for a wonderful dinner, along with Hillary and a couple of girls from Japan and Korea who had been exchange students. Not only did we have a fabulous traditional turkey dinner with all the trimmings (thanks Andy & Tracey!), we were treated to some special dishes from Japan, Korea, and even Mexico that made it a true international event. After dinner we dived into the pies, Pecan and Persimmon, that I had baked the day before for the occasion, both of which were prepared with nuts and fruit from our garden. The day was a wonderful time of sharing and catching up with old friends and family – which is the true spirit of Thanksgiving!

December

(Illinois)

Early in December I boarded an American Airlines flight to Indianapolis to attend a special event at the University of Illinois, my Alma Mater. (actually, my trip started with a PCMA Chapter holiday reception at a new steakhouse in downtown LA, followed the next day by a "Tamale making party" in San Diego) Aboard the flight to Dallas lunch was served, a delicious 3 cheese lasagna and Italian salad, along with a warm chocolate chip cookie for dessert! Sitting next to me was an Asian businessman who was trying to book two suites at the Park Hyatt Hotel in Manhattan for the Christmas holidays, and he was using his Hyatt Gold points – 180,000 of them per night! I had enough time in DFW airport for a beer before boarding the flight to Indianapolis. Just before the boarding door was closed, the Captain announced that there was a "minor" maintenance problem, the seat cushion in seat 27F had to be replaced. After waiting 15 minutes for the new seat cushion I flagged down a flight attendant and asked if there were any empty seats in coach, to which she replied, "there are 4 or 5 empty seats". So I suggested she move the passenger in 27F to one of the empty seats. Then she informed me that there was no one sitting in 27F! Seeing the look of disbelief on my face, she just rolled her eyes and said "the bonehead crew before us reported it as a maintenance issue and the airline policy requires it to be fixed before we can takeoff". Finally, after half an hour, we took off, complete with a brand new seat cushion on board! As drinks were served shortly after takeoff, I had to admit it was the first time in more than 45 years of airline travel that I have experienced a flight delay caused by a seat cushion! But at least we were served a very tasty artichoke dip and toasted flat bread for an appetizer. Arriving in Indianapolis airport that evening, I waited in the freezing night air for the hotel shuttle that never arrived, forcing me to take a taxi to the Comfort Suites Airport Hotel, the closest one. So when the journey took 15 minutes and the fare was \$20, I was not at all happy. (I found out later that it was indeed the nearest hotel to the "old" airport, but with the opening of the new airport 2 years ago, all of the "airport" hotels are now several miles away – very frustrating! And the taxi driver had to agree) I finished the evening with a beer at the bar in the Wyndham Hotel next door.



The next morning I took the hotel shuttle back to the airport to pick up a rental car. Then I headed west on I-75 to Champaign for the banquet that evening to honor the 60 freshmen who were awarded one of the Jonathon Baldwin Turner Scholarships, one of which I have funded. Having plenty of time before meeting up with Mark and Marise on campus for a tour of the recent renovation of Turner Hall, I drove around town to visit some of the places from my past. Our old house on North Randolph Street looked virtually the same as it was in the 1960's, but the old Gregory Elementary School a couple of blocks away

was in the process of being converted into condos! (as was the old Masonic Temple and the Post Office) After checking into the iHotel on campus, I met up with Mark for lunch and then a visit to the studio of a local photographer who showed us some amazing photos of the prairie landscape in all four seasons – beautiful work! Then we took a tour of Turner Hall to see the incredible renovations that have transformed the old building into a state of the art teaching and research facility, thanks in large measure to the fundraising efforts of Marise. (her passion for the project was the key to its success) That evening I attended the award banquet and met the young lady from Peoria who received my scholarship. As I sat with her and her parents it was heartwarming to hear her story and her tremendous optimism for her academic future. (best wishes Kealiel)

The next morning was very cold and foggy, with a heavy coat of ice on the car. Luckily there was a heavy duty ice scraper provided by Alamo. I drove through the dense fog to visit my cousin Josie who had just recently been transferred from the hospital to an assisted living facility. Driving through the heavy fog in such a flat landscape of corn and soybean fields was almost like being in a "bubble" or maybe like being on a treadmill, with the highway a perfectly straight line fading into the flat horizon. Every so often a small stand of trees gradually came out of the fog, and more often than not, so too did a farmhouse or barn. I wondered, was I standing still and the trees, farmhouse, and barn on a journey? It was hard to tell at times. Josie and I had a nice time talking about the family and plans for the Christmas holiday. Then I bid her farewell and drove into Pana to visit some old sites from my childhood, like the Rexall drug store on the corner of main street that has long since been converted to many other businesses. Then there was the Field School where I attended grades 1 – 6, and has since become an antique shop and flower garden. Many fond memories came back to me as I drove around the old neighborhood, especially to see that our first house was still standing after more than 75 years. Before leaving Pana I wanted to stop at

the Mound Cemetery to visit the graves of my parents, and the view of the surrounding farm land under the clear blue skies was beautiful. On the return trip to Indianapolis I drove through the small town of Hillsboro, where preparations were being made for a holiday celebration in the town square in front of the historic old courthouse where a young lawyer by the name of Abraham Lincoln had successfully argued several cases. Then I paid a visit to the old statehouse in Vandalia, the first capital of Illinois, and another significant site of Lincoln history.



(San Jacinto)

A few days after returning from Illinois I took a short day trip to the small farming community of San Jacinto to visit the Estudillo Mansion, a state historic site built in 1885 on the old Rancho San Jacinto Viejo. It is one of the best preserved examples of the old Spanish colonial architecture in southern California. Unfortunately it was closed when I arrived, but the nearby San Jacinto city museum was open. I was the only person visiting the small museum that day, but the elderly lady in charge insisted in giving the full tour! Besides the usual antiques and old articles of local interest, there was a scale model of an old Russian plane in one corner. As it turned out, in 1937 the plane took off from Moscow with 3 Russian pilots and was the first plane to fly nonstop over the North Pole. What made this flight so significant, and why the scale model was displayed in this tiny museum



was the fact that it landed in a farmers field just a few hundred yards from here. The reason the flight did not receive a lot of press coverage was due to the disappearance of famed aviator Amelia Earhart shortly afterwards. Apparently the Russian pilots had their eyes set on San Diego as the original landing spot, but when their fuel ran low they picked a field in San Jacinto instead. As I drove home I couldn't help wonder just how many other fascinating stories there must be hidden in small towns around southern California.

(San Timoteo Canyon Nature Reserve)

A couple of weeks ago I spent an afternoon hiking in the newly established Nature Reserve on the edge of Redlands in San Timoteo Canyon. The trail followed the historic old "carriage road" that was built by the Smiley Brothers in the late 1800's to transport guests to their world famous "Canon Crest Park". The road was the first one to access the canyon before the Southern Pacific Railroad laid down tracks in the canyon to link San Bernardino with Yuma, Arizona. As I hiked along there were beautiful views of the vegetation and trees bordering San Timoteo creek, which offered a diverse wildlife habitat. Beyond were view of the San Bernardino Mountains to the west and San Jacinto Mountains to the east. I saw several kinds of birds as well and a covey of Quail along the trail. All in all it was a very nice hike so close to town.



Christmas

As the holiday approaches we're looking forward to my sister Lynn joining us again this year. There will be time to take a couple of days for travel to Death Valley National Park before we sit down to a traditional Christmas dinner and open gifts under the tree. The lights are up, the tree is decorated, the shopping is done, and the gifts are wrapped. Wishing you all a joyful holiday and a Happy New Year!

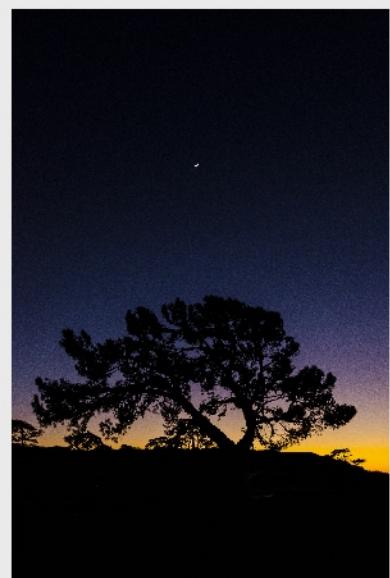
{postscript: In March this year I published my first book, the story of my overland journey across Africa in 1974-75. The book had been a personal goal of mine for the past 40 years, so I am excited to say that I have finally achieved that goal, and I invite you to check it out on Amazon.com and Barnes&Noble.com under the title "Travels with King Kong". I hope you'll enjoy reading it as much as did writing it!}



Photo Gallery



Museum of Sience & History - Chicago



Cabrillo Nat'l Monument



Idyllwild



Highland Games



Highland Games



Cadence dinner - La Jolla



La Jolla



Balboa Park



Balboa Park



Antelope Valley



California Poppies



California Poppies State Reserve



Ocotillo



Paramount Studios - Hollywood



Paramount Studios



Huntington Gardens



Huntington Gardens - Pasadena



Huntington Library - Pasadena



Anza Borrego Desert State Park



Vancouver, BC



Vancouver, BC



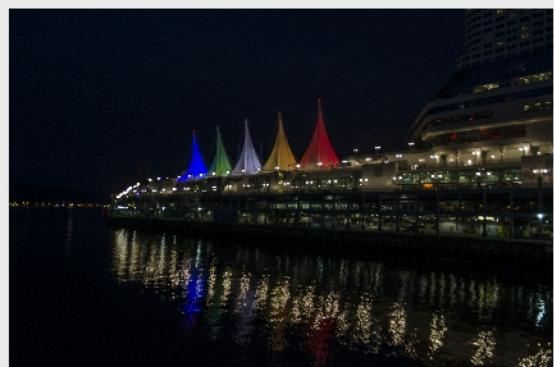
English Bay - Vancouver, BC



English Bay



Straight Of Georgia - Vancouver, BC



Vancouver Convention Center



Shaker Village



Shaker Village - Kentucky



Rolex 3-Day Event



Rolex 3-Day Event



Rolex 3-Day Event



Rolex 3-Day Event



LAonTap - Pomona



Balboa Park



Hearst Castle



Hearst Castle - San Simeon



Hearst Castle - San Simeon



Maritime Museum - San Diego



Carrizo Plain National Monument



Carrizo Plain



Julian Mining Co.



Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad Station - Rhyolite, Nevada



Scotty's Castle - Death Valley National Park



Rhyolite, Nevada



Milky Way - Death Valley



Ice Cream Eating Contest



Ricardo Breceda Sculpture - Borrego Springs



1200 year old Oak tree - Highland Springs



Lavender Fields -Highland Springs



Mt San Jacinto



El Paso de Robles Hotel



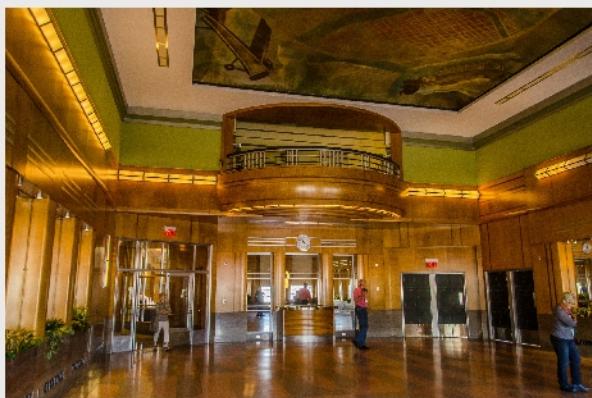
San Miguel Mission - Paso Robles



San Miguel Mission - Paso Robles



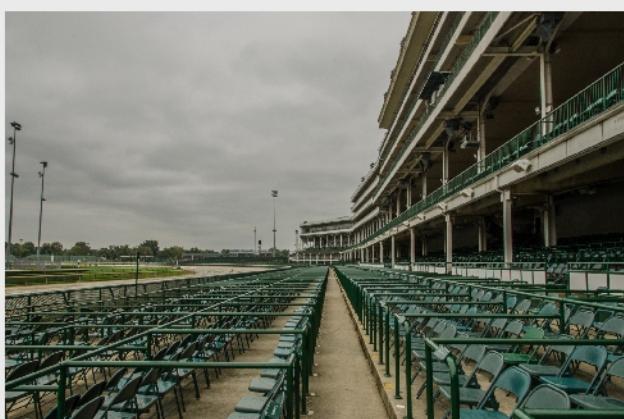
Cincinnati Union Terminal



Cincinnati Union Terminal



Cincinnati Dinner Train



Churchhill Downs - Louisville



Old town Louisville



Ohio River - Louisville



Riverwalk Park - Louisville



Southern Illinois



Mississippi River - St Louis



St Louis



Car Party



National Transportation Museum - St Louis



Transportation Museum



Audubon Exhibit



Car Party (Dome Car)



Kansas Business Car lounge



1904 World's Exposition - St Louis



Forest Park - St Louis



Galesburg, Illinois



Ash Meadows NWR



Ash Meadows NWR



Ballarat Ghost Town



Badwater Basin - Death Valley National Park



Keyes Ranch



Keyes Ranch - Joshua Tree National Park



Keyes Ranch



Sunnyvale Garden Suites - 29 Palms



Cholla Cactus - Joshua Tree NP



Adobe Cabin - 29 Palms Inn



Joshua Tree



29 Palms Oasis



Chino Hills State Park



Chino Hills State Park



Chino Hills State Park



Chino Hills State Park



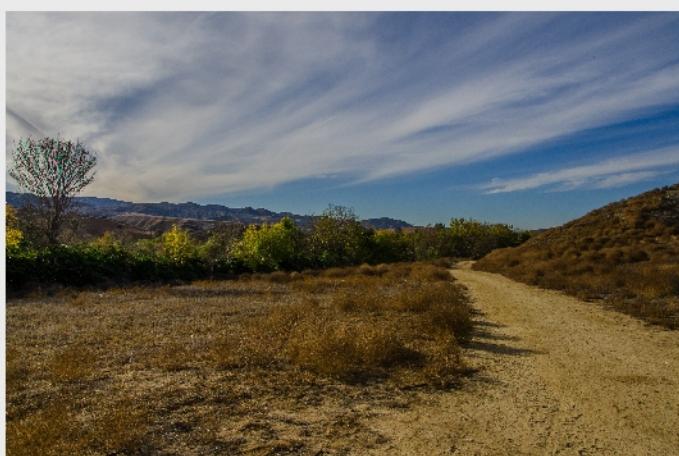
Courthouse - Hillsboro, Illinois



Redondo Beach Pier



San Jacinto City Museum



San Timoteo Canyon Nature Reserve



San Timoteo Canyon Nature Reserve