

CHRISTMAS 2016



Once again, the time has come for my annual Christmas letter. It was another great year in my book and I hope it was a good one for you too. As has become a Christmas Holiday tradition for many years, my sister Lynn joined us in southern California, leaving behind the snow and cold winter weather of eastern Oregon. Also, as in the past, I had planned a trip for the three of us, and this time it was Death Valley. It's a place I've visited many times but a new place for Lynn and Leslie. As we left Redlands in the morning a light rain was falling and we were enveloped in fog all the way to Cabazon where we stopped at Ruby's Diner for a real trucker's breakfast that would last us all day. Then we headed north through Twentynine Palms and Yucca Valley, being buffeted by some fierce winds along the route. But once we entered the heart of the Mojave Desert National Preserve and on to old Route 66, the winds died down, the clouds cleared, and the sun dominated the sky. We made a short stop in Amboy to visit a small volcanic crater and lava field left over from an eruption some 80,000 years ago. During the time before the Interstate Highway System, Amboy was an important stop on Route 66, the "mother Road". But along with a number of other small towns in the Mojave Desert, it was bypassed by Interstate 10. These days Amboy is one of the last towns not to have been abandoned, but it's teetering on the edge of becoming a ghost town. The school closed decades ago and the motel/restaurant is slowly crumbling into the desert. The one and only business still open is "Roy's", which now serves only gas and soda pop. One day soon it may become a museum, if only to preserve the rich history of Route 66. Our journey took us through the small town of Shoshone and on to Death Valley Junction. As we approached Shoshone, I pointed out that for the past 3 hours or more we had been driving, we had not left San Bernardino County, clearly the largest in the country. Late in the afternoon we came into Death Valley and checked into the Furnace Creek Ranch, just over 200 feet below sea level. As Lynn and Leslie settled into their room overlooking the golf course and the Panamint Mountains beyond, I headed to the Saloon for a cold pint of local Badwater Pale Ale. As I sat at the bar, a guy proceeded to put salt, black pepper, grated cheese, and red pepper flakes on his bowl of popcorn. Later that evening I joined Lynn and Leslie for a delicious dinner in the Wrangler Steakhouse next door. While the ladies shared a steak and salad, I ordered the special penne pasta with Italian sausage, sun dried tomatoes, dates, and red chili sauce – the dish was absolutely superb, along with a glass of Blackstone Merlot.

The next morning, we awoke to beautiful blue skies and chilly temperatures (42 degrees). Breakfast in the 49'er Café was a large plate of eggs, bacon, potatoes, toast, and fruit for me, while Lynn and Leslie both had huge bowls of hearty oatmeal, which was enough to last all day again. We started our visit to Death Valley National Park with a stop at the Visitor Center for a very interesting look at the natural and cultural history of the region, going back over a century in the case of mining activity, but well over a thousand years for the native Shoshone people. Our next stop in the park was at the remains of the Harmony Borax Works where some of the original wagons of the famous "20 Mule Team" were on display. From the top of the hill above the old borax processing facility was a spectacular view of the valley floor and the



enormous dry lake bed where the borax minerals were mined. From Harmony, we drove north to the Mesquite Dunes, a massive area of sand from an ancient sea that filled the valley tens of thousands of years ago. In the distance, on one of the largest dunes, over 700 feet high, a group of people appeared almost like tiny ants on top of an enormous ant hill. In many places the shifting dunes had swallowed up old mesquite trees, which were now





just bare skeletons. In some ways it was an eerie sight and probably explains why so many Hollywood movies have been shot here, especially episodes from Star Wars. Leaving the dunes we drove east over Daylight Pass to the old ghost town of Rhyolite, Nevada – one of the best preserved mining towns from the late 1800's. Of particular interest was the fact that industrialist Charles Schwab bought the old Montgomery Shoshone mine in



1906 and invested heavily in infrastructure, including piped water, electric power lines, and railroad transportation to serve the mine as well as the town. By 1907, Rhyolite had telephones, newspapers, a hospital, school, an opera house, and even a stock exchange. At its height, the town had a population of over 5000 people. But after the gold

and silver ore was exhausted, few years before. Finally in 1920, time and weather took its toll and walked around the remains of the mining town it was over a

for Beatty, we spotted a large

highway, but they didn't seem

museum which had a surprising number of very interesting displays of historical artifacts from the glory days of mining in the

late 1800's and early 1900's. As far as we could see, we were the only visitors that day.

From Beatty we drove south on US 95 in the direction of Las Vegas, with snow-capped Mt Charleston (11,918 feet elevation) shining in the distance, before turning southwest to Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge is a very special and unique oasis in the middle of the Nevada desert, and was especially scenic under the clear skies and 60 degree weather. The visitor center had several fascinating displays about the natural environment of the refuge, as well as a very interesting short film. The refuge is a major

discharge point for a vast underground aquifer system stretching more than 100 miles to the northeast that was formed tens of thousands of years ago. The water flows south and due to the unique geology of the area, more than 30 springs have



formed at the surface, providing a rich complex of fish and wildlife habitat found nowhere else in the world. As we walked along a boardwalk trail through the desert from the visitor center, it was hard to imagine any bodies of water being anywhere in sight. But soon we came to a stand of small trees and brush, in the middle of which was a gorgeous pond of blue water gushing up from one of the springs we had seen in the film. As we looked closer we could see small fish swimming in the pond that are found nowhere else in the world, having survived over thousands of years as the water gradually settled into isolated ponds. It was

safe to say that this was one of the most unique habitats one would ever see in the middle of the desert – a very special

place indeed. As we left the refuge we encountered a very rough unpaved road for several miles before arriving in Death

Valley Junction. Here we made a short stop to visit the historic old Amargosa

Hotel and Opera House. The vintage hotel was beautifully decorated for the holidays and featured a lot of fascinating history about Marta Becket, who as a well-known New York ballerina, came to Death Valley Junction in the early 1960's. She literally "rescued" the old opera house that dated from the early 1920's, known as Corkhill Hall, and began giving performances soon after.

According to local stories, when she first began to perform on stage in the old hall, so few people came that she decided to paint in an "audience" so she could feel as if she were performing for real people. The old murals are still



there, as well as many of the stage backdrops that she also painted. The hotel has preserved much of her life story in photos and memorabilia, making it almost like a time capsule from that period.

That evening, on our way back to Furnace Creek, we stopped at Zabriskie Point to view the gorgeous sunset, one of the best locations for photos in the park. A lot of people were there to enjoy the lovely view, and as I looked around I spotted a couple of adventurous photographers "perched" on top of a rocky ridge high above us. Fortunately, I was able to get a spectacular shot of the incredible landscape bathed in the brilliant sunset colors. And as we returned to the ranch, a full moon slowly rose above the eastern horizon. At the same time, a beautiful view of the sunset was



unfolding over the Panamint Mountains to the west. For dinner that evening we went to the fine dining restaurant at the nearby Furnace Creek Inn. The service was very professional, along with the white linen and bone china. I started with the chef's special, braised rabbit empanadas that were fantastic, and then for the main dish a thick full cut pork chop stuffed with a mixture of dates, raisins, and apple, served with a delicious white bean ragout. And to finish off our fabulous meal we shared a large slice of tart lemon cake. Later, I closed the evening with a couple of pints of Badwater Pale Ale in the Saloon. Just as I was about to leave, an old local cowboy came in and bought a round for everyone in the bar, as his Christmas gift! It was much appreciated, and I thanked him as I left the Saloon to retire to my cabin for the night.



Early the next morning I joined Lynn and Leslie for another huge breakfast in the 49'er Café and enjoyed the traditional bacon and eggs. Meanwhile, Leslie opted for a stack of blueberry pancakes with maple syrup and Lynn chose the oatmeal again, but this time she asked for a much smaller portion. After checking out, I asked one of the Park Service rangers about the closure of the road south of Badwater Basin and discovered the only other route that direction to Shoshone was by way of 27 miles of rough unpaved road. Not wanting to subject Lynn and Leslie to a rough back road experience, the alternate route was west over the summit of the Panamint Mountains. In the meantime, we headed south to visit Badwater Basin, which at 282 feet below sea level is the lowest place in North America. We joined many foreign tourists to walk out on the vast dry lake bed where there were beautiful views of the snow-covered Panamint Mountains on the far side. When we returned to the parking lot, the reflection of Telescope Peak in the shallow pool of water was gorgeous. As we were leaving I pointed out an inscription on the rocky cliff 282 feet above that was marked "sea Level". It made the experience of being at the lowest point in North America a reality! I drove north through Stovepipe Wells and Panamint Springs, across the mountains that form the western boundary of the park into the remote and desolate Panamint Valley. Along the way, we stopped at the ghost town of Ballarat for a brief tour of the old mining town, founded in 1897 that once had a population of nearly a thousand people. It was named after a town in south Australia and once had three hotels, a post office, Wells Fargo station, a school, jail, seven saloons, and a morgue, but curiously enough, no churches! In recent times its claim to fame comes from the film Easy Rider, where Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper decide to head to New Orleans on their choppers. Today there is one lone



resident in the town who manages a rundown general store with his two dogs. Our journey home took us through the modern day mining town of Trona, where one is hard pressed to find any living vegetation. But the town does have a massive plant processing a long list of chemicals from an enormous dry lake nearby. (Let's just say – Trona is not the most scenic tourist destination in California!) As we continued south on US 395, through the high desert, the wind was ferocious, making driving a bit difficult. At last we came to Cajon Pass and the long descent into the LA basin. Rather than stay with the heavy traffic on



I-15, I turned off on to Cajon Blvd, the old Route 66. And at one point we were driving parallel to a massive BNSF freight train being headed by four locomotives. It was so huge that it also had two locomotives in the middle and two more at the rear. (more than 100 freight trains travel over Cajon Pass every day) At last, as the sun was setting, we arrived home and enjoyed a delicious dinner of pizza and salad, thanks to Leslie.

On Christmas morning, we shared a breakfast of Italian sausage strata, a traditional dish that my late brother-in-law Nils always fixed to warm us up on a cold winter morning. Then came the opening of gifts under the Christmas tree, a favorite time for the cats who played amongst the mound of wrapping paper, boxes and ribbons. Soon it was time for me to begin preparing a traditional Christmas dinner of oven roasted turkey basted with rosemary and thyme, garlic mashed potatoes, yellow squash baked with brown sugar, ginger and molasses, Brussel sprouts braised with bacon, sage stuffing with mushrooms and water chestnuts, and of course giblet gravy and hot dinner rolls! (earlier, Lynn and Leslie spent a couple of hours fixing fresh cranberry and orange relish, painstakingly cutting each and every cranberry into six pieces, But the taste was well worth their effort!) To finish our Christmas dinner, we enjoyed three pies that I had baked before – persimmon pie with bourbon whipped cream, pecan pie, and minced meat pie with bourbon hard sauce. (the persimmons and pecans came from our garden) Enjoying the culinary experience with family and friends was fantastic, which I enjoyed as much as the preparation and cooking of the dinner. So I am looking forward to repeating the experience this coming Christmas.

In early January I received a scholarship to attend the ImagingUSA Photography Conference in Atlanta. I took the Metrolink train from Riverside to LA Union Station and then the express bus to LAX for my flight to Atlanta. Once at the airport I enjoyed a half hour in the Delta Airlines SkyClub that had been recently remodeled. There was a full service bar and a large food buffet that included delicious Italian ciabatta sandwiches, tomato basil soup, and a fantastic chicken and broccoli salad. In addition, there were lots of desks and cubicles to get work done. Soon the Delta flight 101 was called for boarding, and as I entered the Business Class cabin I was very pleasantly surprised to see the 757 was equipped with the new International Business Elite “lie flat” seats – very comfortable indeed. (the flight continued to Buenos Aires) Lunch on board was a wonderful spicy chicken chimichanga and fresh salsa, along with a jicama salad. It was followed by a tray of several



cheeses and grapes, as well as a delicious, warm peach cobbler for dessert. For the next three hours I watched “The Martian” – a superb film starring Matt Damon, whose performance was outstanding. Although it was science fiction, it could easily be plausible in the not too distant future. Finally we landed in Atlanta amid a downpour from numerous thunderstorms pounding the region. Leaving the airport I boarded the MARTA train to the CNN Center downtown, where I had a short walk to the Omni Hotel. I checked into a very nice room on the 27th floor overlooking the Centennial Olympic Park. The hotel bar was totally packed with conference attendees, so I went downstairs to McCormick and Schmick’s, which was a bit less crowded, and enjoyed some delicious baked mushrooms stuffed with crab and shrimp. They went very well with a cold bottle of Red Hook IPA. Meanwhile, I watched large groups of people walking in the heavy rain outside, having just come from the Atlanta Hawks basketball game. They did not look happy!

The following morning the opening session of the conference featured a presentation by Amy Purdy, who lost both her legs and almost died from meningitis at age 19. Doctors had given her only a 2% chance of survival, and yet, not only did she survive, she eventually returned to her love for snow boarding and became an Olympic medalist! And if that wasn’t enough, she became a fashion model, clothes designer, and even a finalist on “Dancing with the Stars”! She has to be the most incredible woman of our age, and someone who not only overcame a seemingly impossible life challenge, but also a very humble and warm person with a remarkable sense of humor about her situation. At one point, she told a funny story about how she chose a set of artificial legs that would allow her to be slightly taller than her newlywed husband. In fact, she said she felt blessed in that she could actually “customize” her legs for any occasion, such as an evening gown gala, a day at the gym, and even a specially crafted set that allow her to continue to compete in snow



boarding events. Such a remarkable woman – beautiful, intelligent, articulate, and caring – truly inspirational!

Later, as I was having lunch in the hotel bar, I watched the 4th quarter of the football game between Seattle and Minnesota. Incredibly, in the final 25 seconds, Minnesota missed a 27 yard field goal, which would have won the game, only to lose to Seattle 10-9. There was a huge gasp from everyone at the bar – both the Minnesota team and the fans were stunned! Meanwhile, the air temperature on the field in Minneapolis was -1 degree. That afternoon I attended a very special presentation by Sam Abbel, a world renowned National Geographic photographer. Besides his stunning photos, he explained in great detail the heart-warming story of his father who taught him photography skills that were very simple, yet elegant and to the point. His father always told him “compose your photograph and then wait for it to happen”. The key was “waiting”. Sam’s presentation was both inspirational and a powerful lesson from his vast experience. Later in the evening I walked over to “Ruth Chris’ Steakhouse” to meet up with my Georgia cousin Sandi for dinner. We started with a delicious Clam Chowder that went very well with the cold, windy weather outside. While Sandi and her friend Matt had steaks, I ordered Alaskan cod and chips, along with a cold pint of local Sweetwater IPA. For dessert we all shared Southern Bread Pudding, served with whiskey cream sauce – fabulous. We were seated at a table by the window overlooking Centennial Olympic Park, with a beautiful view of the huge Ferris wheel lighted in brilliant colors. During dinner, Sandi and I carried on a very nice conversation that focused on the challenges in her life following the untimely passing of her husband Dwight several months before. I remember Dwight as being a very warm and caring person, as well as an excellent chef who sincerely enjoyed cooking for people. I will also miss him.

After saying a fond farewell to Sandi, I headed to the Georgia World Congress Center for the opening party. There was an abundance of food and drink, of which I couldn’t really take advantage after having just finished dinner. But the party atmosphere was a lot of fun, especially from the local rock band. In the center of the ballroom was a stage where several beautiful models posed for photographers. But the “stars” of the show were a pair of gorgeous Golden Poodles, who were also service dogs, and had unexpectedly decided to climb on to the stage. I enjoyed watching the photographers scrambling for photos, almost as much as the models trying their best to respond to all the “directions”. After the party, I headed back to the hotel bar for a beer and to watch the last half of a football game. As I sat at the bar I noticed a guy at the end order a bottle of Michelob Ultra in a glass. So the bartender put an empty glass on the bar in front of him and then proceeded to put the beer, bottle and all, into the glass! Technically it was a bottle of beer in a glass – very funny, and we all laughed.

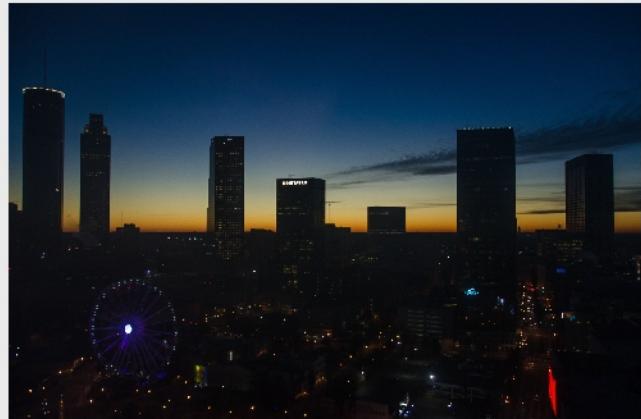


The next morning I awoke to find beautiful clear skies, but rather chilly temperatures around 40 degrees, so I took some time to walk around Centennial Olympic Park and got some great photos. Later I attended a couple of very good workshops conducted by Chris Orwig and Julianne Kost from Adobe Systems. Chris greeted everyone at the door as they entered the room, and during the session he used a rather unique “audience response system”. He would ask a question and then request that each of us respond with either thumbs up or thumbs down as our answer – simple and effective. Julianne was very informative and as funny as ever – she’s an amazing storehouse of knowledge, with an insatiable passion for teaching, although she claims to be an introvert. (I can identify with her since I’m also an introvert, but I spent over 25 years teaching computer software training classes around the world. It’s a strange dichotomy of personality) At lunchtime I went to the Food Court in CNN Center, where I was surrounded by several dozen large TV screens, all tuned to the CNN channel, naturally. After lunch, I visited the exhibits in the EXPO and then watched an amazing presentation on “Beauty after Breast Cancer”. It was a photo project that documented the lives of 36 women following their surgery and chemo treatments. The photos were both beautiful and very sensitive, in which some women had chosen to get tattoos and body painting after their reconstructive surgery, while others had decided to forego reconstruction altogether. And to everyone’s surprise, there was even the story of a man to bring awareness of the fact that breast cancer can happen to men as well. The project was initiated by a young woman who had made the decision to undergo double mastectomy at age 25, due to the long history of breast cancer in her family. Although the presentation was short, it was very powerful and inspirational!

That evening, I went to the “TacoMac Bar” in CNN Center for a beer and to write in my journal. As I sat at the bar I

looked up at the big screen TV just as the payout was announced for the PowerBall lottery – a world record \$1.4 billion! (later that night, as I returned to the hotel bar, there was a story on the news about a young bartender in New Jersey who mistakenly thought he and his colleagues had won it, but as it turned out, they had the numbers from the previous week, not this week! During their interview with CNN, they all had a good laugh at their mistake) Then I watched the second half of the college football national championship game between Alabama and Clemson. The game was tied 14 – 14 at the start of the second half, and Alabama scored a touchdown at the beginning of the 4th quarter. Then they went for an onside kick, which they recovered, to go on to another touchdown. Alabama went on to win the game 45 – 40, but the real fun for me was listening to all the “barstool coaches” during the game.

The next day, I attended another couple of interesting technical sessions. In the first one with Jared Platt I learned some very useful tips about using Adobe Lightroom, as he presented many of his own photographic “mistakes” and then how he fixed them – what a great topic. The other session was a presentation by a local photographer about his “strategy” for making money doing “volume photography” for schools and sports teams. He did schools, little league teams, scout troops, church groups, and even daycare and kindergarten! He was proud that he averaged 30 seconds or less per student and constantly stressed his goal of finding ways to become even more “efficient”. He was very humorous, which was the only reason I stayed for his session – definitely not my style of photography! That evening was the closing party and the conference organizers had rented the entire Georgia Aquarium for the event. The aquarium is not only the largest in the world, it has some of the best exhibits that cover virtually every freshwater and ocean environment on earth. What also makes the aquarium unique is the fact that almost all the exhibits are sponsored by well-known Georgia corporations, such as Coca Cola, Southern Companies, Delta Airlines, Georgia Pacific, and many others, each one sponsoring a different marine environment. It’s a great example of public/private partnership that not only provides fantastic entertainment, but also a very rich educational experience. As with any great party, there were plenty of bars and food stations throughout the huge complex. After a while, I began to notice that the overwhelming majority of catering staff were black, all of whom were very nice and happy to see us enjoying the food and drink. (I made sure to tip them well, even though the drinks were complimentary) Among the highlights of the evening were the sea otters who were very playful and always drew a large audience. In the massive main tank, the largest in the world, were four enormous whale sharks that had been transported from SeaWorld in San Antonio to Atlanta by UPS! A most unusual fact about the whale shark is that it feeds exclusively on plankton – gentle giants of the sea. And together with the whale sharks were several huge sting rays with wing spans over 18 feet. All in all, this was one of the best party venues I can remember.



I finished the evening with a local brew at “Hudson’s Bar & Grill” across the street from the hotel, along with a large contingent from the closing party. The next morning I checked out and took the MARTA train back to the airport, a real bargain at \$2.50, versus \$45 for a taxi. At the airport I had plenty of time for some coffee and blueberry muffins in the Delta SkyClub before boarding the 90 minute flight to Detroit. Along the way we had a gorgeous view of the southern Appalachian Mountains and eastern Kentucky before we crossed over the Ohio River and into a snow covered landscape around Cleveland and Detroit, where the temperature was a chilly 14 degrees. After landing I headed for the SkyClub and enjoyed a chilled glass of the local “Latitude IPA” before boarding was called for my flight to LAX. Once again, I was treated to a very comfortable lie flat seat in International Business Class aboard the 757. As soon as we were at cruising altitude, a delicious lunch was served – Italian sausage and pepperoni calzone in marinara sauce, along with a fresh green salad. To finish the meal, we were served a tray of cheeses, grapes, and slices of green apple, followed by a luscious chocolate covered brownie. After lunch I watched the new Tom Cruise film “Mission Impossible – Ghost Protocol” that had some amazing stunts by Tom himself, as well as some incredible special effects that made watching the film a riveting ride. Of particular note was the scene where Tom jumps from the 127th floor of the Burj Al Arab Hotel in Dubai to crash into a room on the 92nd floor! I really enjoyed the film, but I must say, in all honesty, the ending was a bit over the top – a Russian nuclear missile being

remotely disarmed just seconds from impact over San Francisco - really? Finally, our flight landed at LAX and I boarded the express bus to Union Station to catch the Metrolink train to Riverside. But as expected, we had arrived at the height (aka the worst) of the rush hour traffic. However, our young black female driver was incredible as she deftly negotiated the bus through the heavy traffic, sometimes using the carpool lane and at other times switching lanes to get us to Union Station in good time – really an outstanding job, and as I got off the bus I complimented her. I had enough time for a cold beer and an order of fries in the Traxx Bar before boarding the train. As I rode home on the train, I reflected back on some of the highlights of the conference and especially the dinner I shared with cousin Sandi!

Now it was early March and I attended the Esri Partner Conference in Palm Springs, in order to meet up with some of my international friends. Rather than spend time on the freeway, I chose to take a much more scenic route over the Santa Rosa



Mountains and through the beautiful Garner Valley to Palm Desert on highway 74. As the road climbed above 5,000 feet, large patches of snow remained in the forest of Ponderosa Pine. And then just 20 minutes further on, the highway rapidly descended to the desert floor through a series of tight switchbacks that seemed to twist and turn upon themselves – definitely a challenge for timid drivers! After the steep descent, I arrived in Palm Desert and decided to visit “The Living Desert Zoo”. It’s dedicated to all forms of plants and animals that make their home in desert environments around the world. A fascinating new exhibit focusing on Madagascar had

recently opened with some very exotic species from the island nation. Another highlight was the large enclosure with a small herd of Desert Bighorn Sheep, especially since there were two large rams just 50 feet away. But the most unique display was the huge model train layout that was a collection of western scenes, even including the Grand Canyon in miniature. Needless to say, it was a big hit with the kids and grandparents. I had a marvelous afternoon walking around the zoo and discovering things like the butterfly garden and the ancient dinosaur footprints. That evening I had a fabulous dinner at “Thai Smile” in Palm Springs that began with a delicious Asian lettuce wrap that was so big I had to box up some of it for later. For the main course I chose the Kung Pao Chicken, and it was some of the best that I’ve had anywhere in the world. But once again, it was more than enough for a family of four, so I boxed up some of it too. Meanwhile, across the street at “Oscar’s” I could hear some beautiful live music by a lesbian singer, and at the same time I watched a drunken man, who could barely stand up, trying desperately to find the toilet and ending up walking into the kitchen! After dinner, I walked over to the “Village Pub”, which is well-known for having great live music, as well as a very interesting clientele. There I found a very good duo playing classic old rock-n-roll, while inviting beautiful young ladies to sing along – it was a lot of fun watching their “show”. As the night progressed, more and more beautiful young women arrived, all of whom wore the latest designer shoes, tight pants, and skimpy tops that enhanced their ample endowment. In contrast, I joined a table with an older couple vacationing from Vancouver, BC on their first visit to Palm Springs. I had a great conversation with them as we “observed” the Palm Springs “scene” together. We also shared the experience of living in Vancouver, where I spent three years studying for my PHD at the University of British Columbia.

The next morning I headed for Desert Hot Springs to visit “Cabot’s Pueblo Museum”, having seen the sign for it on many previous trips to Palm Springs. What I found was a fascinating old 3 story adobe structure that was built by Cabot Abram Yerxa, an early 20th century homesteader in the Coachella Valley. While digging a well he discovered a natural hot spring that lead to the development of many spas in the valley. The hot springs are formed from groundwater flowing from the nearby San Bernardino Mountains, and as the water comes in contact with the San Andrea fault under the Coachella Valley, it’s heated naturally by the lava and rises to the surface in a series of hot springs. The town of Desert Hot Springs quickly became a popular spa destination and many resorts still operate today. On another interesting note, Desert Hot Springs is located on the North American Plate, while the



rest of the desert cities in the Coachella Valley lie on the Pacific Plate, the opposite side of the San Andreas Fault. I had a great time walking through the huge house and learning the fascinating history of Cabot and the city of Desert Hot Springs. From the top floor of the adobe house were spectacular views of the valley and the snow-capped San Jacinto Mountains beyond. Returning to Palm Springs I joined my friend from Esri Germany for lunch at "Les Vallieures Restaurant", part of an old estate at the base of the mountains. Michael was well known to the staff and the owner, so we were treated very well. I ordered the Chef's Special, a fantastic grilled Scottish salmon, along with a chilled glass of Sauvignon Blanc from Lafayette Cellars. We enjoyed a lovely afternoon of conversation and marvelous wine – thanks Michael! Later in the day I went to the



Coachella Valley Historical Museum in Indio, a city which is better known for a huge rock concert every summer. But long before it gained fame as a concert venue, it established itself as the date capitol of the country. Even today it exports more dates than anywhere else, and the date farms southeast of the city are extensive. As I toured the museum grounds I saw lots of antique farm equipment, a unique 1930's "gas-electric" cook stove, and an old schoolhouse from the early 1900's. But the most interesting feature was the new "Date Museum" that told the fascinating story of how the cultivation of dates came to America. Originally they were "smuggled" as

tiny shoots from Algeria in 1902, and apparently, it was a serious crime at the time to export shoots of date palms out of the country. In a curious twist of fate several years later, shoots from the Coachella Valley were shipped back to Algeria after a blight disease wiped out the country's date palms. (just like the re-introduction of grape vines in France from California, following a disease epidemic that decimated the vines in France) Also in the Date Museum was the fascinating history of the annual "National Date Festival" that began in the early 1930's to celebrate the harvest of the dates. It seems that the festival Queen originates from the ancient fable of "Scheherazade". As I was about to leave the museum, I noticed an "Award of Merit" given to the city of Indio in 2015 by the Royal Family of Saudi Arabia.



Outside the museum was a beautiful date palm garden with several different varieties of date palms from Algeria, Iraq, Morocco, and Iran, each with a description of its unique taste and color of the fruit. That evening I met up with some of my former Esri colleagues for a drink in the lobby bar of the Renaissance Hotel. After that I walked over to a restaurant named "Johannes" and enjoyed an authentic German wiener schnitzel – it was the real deal and went very well with a cold glass of Bitburger beer. Later, a guy sitting next to me struck up a conversation and I found out that he was a celebrity chef from Santa Fe who also runs a cooking school there in his spare time. It was a real pleasure talking with "Johnny V.", and perhaps I'll meet up with him again in Santa Fe.

The next day I headed for Borrego Springs to photograph the desert spring wildflowers. The route took me past countless fields of produce and citrus groves, in addition to the many date farms. But as I approached the Salton Sea, I encountered a serious dust/sand storm with ferocious gale force winds from an approaching Pacific storm system. In many places I couldn't see more than 100 feet ahead, and it became dangerous when huge RVs, towing boats and off road vehicles, tried to cross the busy highway. As I turned off the highway toward Anza Borrego Desert State Park, I suddenly ran into a monstrous traffic jam of RVs and trucks towing trailers. Traffic barely moved for several miles, until at one point I



spotted a long straight stretch of road where I could overtake at least a dozen vehicles that were moving at 15 mph. At last I arrived in Borrego Springs, but it was abundantly clear the prospect of photographing the wildflowers in the strong wind was definitely out of the question that day. So I checked into a lovely casita at the "La Casa del Zorro Resort" (the House of the Fox in Spanish) The room had a lovely private garden and patio, from which I could watch the heavy clouds spilling over the summit of the 7,000 foot high Laguna Mountains on the western horizon. (there was even a cute little stuffed toy fox on my bed) I

went to the Fox Den Bar, and as I enjoyed a nice, crisp glass of IPA from the Nickel Beer Company in Julian, I watched the "Kobalt 400" NASCAR race from Las Vegas. It reminded me of my "Richard Petty Driving Experience" in Las Vegas a couple of years ago. Riding along with a professional NASCAR driver at 200 mph was one of the most thrilling experiences of my life! Suddenly, an old man next to me at the bar offered to buy me "another nip" – I had no idea why, but it was a kind gesture on his part. I found out the fascinating history of the resort, which was established in the early 1920's and reopened in 2013 after a long period of neglect. It had gorgeous Spanish Revival architecture and beautiful gardens surrounding a lovely desert oasis. That evening I went to Carlee's, my favorite restaurant in Borrego Springs, and enjoyed an absolutely fantastic dinner of "Baja Penne Pasta" – a delicious combination of charcoal grilled chicken breast, with fresh tomato cream sauce, cilantro, and a splash of tequila. Judging by the clientele, Carlee's must be an AARP "nightclub" and the Borrego Springs "Haight-Ashbury" of the desert. As I savored the fantastic pasta, a local group played classic 70's Rock-n-Roll. It was a very pleasant and relaxed evening, made even more so as the winds finally became quiet. And later, the stunning view of the star studded sky gave the prospects of a beautiful day in the morning.



But as is so typical of the unpredictable nature of the desert, the morning brought a heavy overcast and light rain. As I was driving into town, I passed a group of cyclists who had stopped alongside the road to wait out the heavy rain and wind – they looked particularly miserable! I continued on the Henderson Canyon, famous for the most brilliant displays of wildflowers, and managed to get a few nice photos of them, despite the weather. Soon it was time to return to Palm Springs, and I decided to take the scenic route on highway S22 over the summit of the Laguna Mountains. There was very little traffic going up the steep, winding (aka

tortuous) road, and slowly the rain changed to snow. By the time I reached the summit at the small village of Rancherita, it was snowing heavily, with over 4 inches of snow on the ground – definitely a winter landscape. I finally left the snow around Warner Springs, but ran into it again as I drove north up through the Anza valley, before descending 5000 feet down to Palm Desert and the Coachella Valley once again. I drove to the Westin Mission Hills Resort to check in, and then decided to visit Taquitz Canyon for a hike in the late afternoon. I joined a small group, lead by a tribal ranger, for a fascinating hike into the beautiful canyon, held sacred by the local Agua Caliente tribe. As we hiked up the trail, our ranger gave us a lot of very interesting information about the natural environment surrounding us, especially the plants that possessed medicinal properties. At the top of the trail was a gorgeous 60 foot high waterfall, also a sacred place to the tribe. Upon returning from the hike, I went back to the hotel and enjoyed a delicious dinner of chicken piccata with herbal caper sauce and roasted fingerling potatoes. I finished the evening watching a great film of historic significance – "Bridge of Spies", starring Tom Hanks, based on the true story of a Russian spy who was exchanged for US spyplane pilot Gary Powers during the Cold War. I drove home the next morning after having a wonderful time in the desert, and at one point I stopped to shoot a video of a massive UP freight train framed against the backdrop of the beautiful snow covered San Jacinto Mountains.



In February and March I made several overnight trips for conference events in southern California. One weekend I attended a seminar on self-publishing, organized by the Greater Los Angeles Writers Society. The seminar was held in Burbank at LA Valley College, which is well known for its academic programs in all facets of the film industry and is well supported by the major Hollywood studios. I picked up some great pointers on writing during a couple of the sessions. The seminar concluded with a dinner at a local Italian restaurant, and during the course of the evening, I had a fascinating conversation with three doctors from Rancho Cucamonga about their travels in Africa. They were very interested in the stories of my travel across Africa in 1974-75 that I published in the book "Travels with King Kong – Overland across Africa". One of the doctors had a son who had become a sound editor and Foley artist for MGM studios – it's a fascinating aspect of film making.

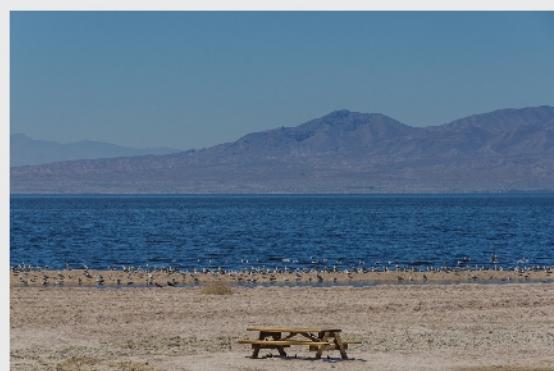
A couple of weeks after I rode the train to San Diego for a meeting with my PCMA board colleagues to plan the calendar of events for our chapter. As the National Director of Sales for Starwood, Kevin was gracious enough to provide me with a comp room at the Westin Gaslamp Hotel. As I walked to the hotel from the historic Santa Fe Depot, I saw a guy walking down First Avenue "wearing" a large billboard. I suspect he was paid to walk around downtown all day, like a moving advertisement. Perhaps it's a better gig than having to stand on a street corner "waving" a big sign. As I entered the hotel elevator, there was a guy carrying a case of 24 bottles of water. So I asked him if it was for a party, to which he responded "no, but one bottle cost \$1.00 and a case of 24 costs \$3.49 – so go figure!" (who knows if he'll drink all 24 bottles, but if he only consumes 4 bottles, he's still 50 cents ahead. After our calendar planning meeting, I walked over to the Marriott Hotel lobby bar and soon found myself surrounded by a large group of beer distributors from Texas who were in town for the "Heineken National Distributors Meeting". During the conversation I found out that Heineken also owns Tecate, Bohemia and Lagunitas breweries. At one point in the conversation, one of the Texans jokingly complained to the bartender that he was unable to use his credit card as his room key! For dinner that evening, as the sun was setting over San Diego Bay, I walked along the waterfront to one of my favorite restaurants – the "Top of the Market". I began dinner with a fabulous Dungeness Crab Cioppino, which was a large selection of fresh mussels, clams, fish, scallops, and Dungeness Crab, of course – all in a very tasty, savory broth. The hot, fresh baked crusty sourdough bread was a perfect companion, and the chilled glass of Rutherford chardonnay enhanced the culinary experience. And what made this even more memorable was the fact that the entire dinner was prepared in front of me by the chefs, as I sat at the bar. (I tipped the chefs as I left, and I think they were a bit surprised) meanwhile, my server recommended I finish the evening with a luscious slice of Key Lime pie, and he was spot on! The next morning I boarded the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train to Santa Ana where I would transfer to a Metrolink train to Riverside. Shortly after the train departed Old Town station, I spotted my good friend DeeAnne walking down the aisle. It seems she was going to LA Union Station to catch the Amtrak Sunset Limited to Tucson for a family event. We had a great time talking about our love of riding trains. And although, according to the train schedules, I had just 8 minutes to transfer in Santa Ana, I made the connection with more than a few minutes to spare. I arrived home in plenty of time to prepare Spanish Rice with roasted chicken for dinner with Tina and Leslie. Our good friend Kathleen came over a bit later, and the three ladies went through 4 bottles of wine while enjoying the warm spring evening outside on the patio.

Then one day in late March I searched out a small craft brewery in nearby Yucaipa, by the name "Brew Rebellion". It was definitely a small family run affair, but the pint of Orchid IPA was quite good. As I sat outside on the deck, I suddenly became aware of the sound from a police radio scanner at the bar inside. So I went in to investigate and saw everyone watching ABC-TV channel 7 "breaking news", as police were dealing with a deadly hostage situation. It wasn't long before I realized I was watching it unfold live in downtown Redlands! The hostage, an employee of the Office Depot store across the street, was shot by her abductor, who was then shot and killed by police. I had been shopping at that Office Depot store earlier that day. As the situation came to an end, the owner of the brewpub offered me a sample of his latest specialty brew, Grandma's Caramelized Apple Pie beer, which actually tasted like caramel apples and apple pie. Meanwhile, as I returned to the deck, the sound of chickens crowing and dogs barking brought me back to the reality of Yucaipa.

As April gave way to May, I decided to visit the small border town of Calexico, simply because I had never been there and that was reason enough. I took the scenic route on highway 74 over the Santa Rosa Mountains under clear blue skies and warm temperatures. Along the way, I made a stop at the newly opened Emerald Creek Winery for a tasting. The Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon were all very good, and the design of the winery fit in beautifully with the surrounding landscape of mountains and valleys of north San Diego County. As I sat on the terrace with a glass of wine, I had a gorgeous view of the vineyards and the mountains. Meanwhile, a bachelorette party was going on nearby. Later down the road, I stopped at the newly re-opened Warner Springs ranch Resort for a cold glass of Goose Island IPA, one of my favorite beers. But when the barmaid was about to put a slice of orange in the glass I told her to stop – she claimed she had been "instructed" to do so. Well maybe she thought Goose Island was a Mexican beer, but orange or lemon does not enhance the taste of any IPA! Still



further on down highway S2 I came to a "bump" in the road known as the village of San Felipe, a collection of derelict buildings that one could easily miss if you blinked. But I spotted a large sign for the "San Felipe Bar", basically the one and only business establishment to be seen in the tiny old village. So I felt I had to investigate the place, even if just to say I had been there. As I walked into the old bar, it became obvious it was very local and not a place to order a "craft" beer. Besides the old bartender and a couple of locals, there were three old dogs wandering around the bar, though it was pretty clear they wouldn't qualify for guard duty. Judging by all of the beer signs around the place, I should order a "Bud". Everyone was very friendly, but I'm pretty certain that when I left I would be the main topic of conversation. I took my cold can of Bud to the patio outside and sat in the warm spring sunshine as the big trucks and RVs towing trailers of off road vehicles passed by on their way to the desert. In the background was the sound of traditional C&W music, and surrounding me, above the bar, was some yellow plastic tape, "Caution – Party Zone". Perhaps it was left over from a previous time, or maybe for an upcoming event. But in any case, it definitely wasn't there for anything going on that day. As I continued looking around the place, I spotted a couple more signs of interest that I couldn't ignore – "Tip-Ping is not a place in China, you dumbass!" and "Ronnie says – if you voted for Obama, stop – you need a drink", also "Cocktails, Draft Beer, Dancing", but all I could see was Budweiser. Leaving San Felipe I continued on my way to Calexico along highway 98, where I came across some very interesting signs posted by the BLM about the history of the 1774 expedition lead by Juan de Bautista Anza into the new Spanish territory of California. Later I passed mile after mile of enormous fields of hay, as well as thousands of acres of new solar electric farms. Entering Calexico I encountered a massive traffic jam of cars heading into Mexico – a very busy border crossing. Finally, I found the "Best Western John Day Inn" and checked into a very nice, quiet room. That evening, for dinner, I walked next door to Applebee's and enjoyed a delicious chorizo burger and a cold pint of Tecate. Seated around me were many Latino families celebrating birthdays, and virtually the only language I heard all evening was Spanish. After a while I began to wonder if I had accidentally crossed the border! After dinner I returned to the hotel and watched an episode of "The Human Race" on the National Geographic channel. It was a fascinating story about a young American couple who had chosen to follow the traditional lifestyle of Mongolians during the winter as they tended their herds of Bactrian camels and sheep on the windswept steppes of central Asia. The next morning I asked the front desk clerk what was there to see in Calexico, and her response was "nothing really". Instead, she suggested I go to Mexicali and handed me a map of the town. Not wanting to deal with the border crossing, I headed north to the small farming community of Holtville, named for William F. Holt who established the first large scale irrigation system in the Imperial Valley. Today, almost a century later, there are tens of thousands of acres in the valley under cultivation, making it one of the nation's largest producers of fruits and vegetables. In the center of town is a monument to Mr. Holt and a short section of the long abandoned "Holt Interurban Railway". (on another note, my house in Redlands is adjacent to a mansion that was built by Mr. Holt in the late 1800's) As I was leaving the town park, I spotted the Chamber of Commerce Community Events billboard, with a large poster announcing the upcoming "Carrot Festival"! Along the route through the valley, on my way to the Salton Sea, I passed enormous fields of bell peppers, tomatoes, onions, cabbage, hay, and all manner of produce. And everywhere I looked were huge canals full of water from the Colorado River. Leaving behind



the Imperial Valley, I drove along the eastern shore of the Salton Sea that extends almost 40 miles north to the edge of the Coachella Valley. The surface of the highly saline sea is 234 feet below sea level, so no water ever drains from it, thereby continually concentrating the minerals in the water. I spotted a sign for the small community of Bombay Beach and decided to take a short drive through the town. What I found was a desolate beach with dead fish and decaying buildings – obviously the place had seen much better days. Curiously, an old abandoned boat was perched high above the water, and as I looked out upon the sea, there were two rusting old folding chairs sitting in

the shallow water. All in all, Bombay Beach was a very sad place with perhaps a glorious past that has long since vanished. Meanwhile, large flocks of brown pelicans glided over the water, just inches from the surface. In the distance, on the western horizon, were the 8,000 foot peaks of the Santa Rosa Mountains. Later, as I passed the town of North Shore, a large sign stuck out – “International Banana Museum”, with a giant sculpture of a banana beside it! Unfortunately, the place was closed so I had no idea of why it was here, of all places in the world. As I continued north I found myself driving parallel with a long UP freight train at 60 mph for almost 20 miles. Later in the day, I had a photo shoot in Rancho Cucamonga. The house was beautifully decorated , and the owner, a San Bernardino County Sheriff Deputy, introduced me to his two dogs, one a large Doberman and the other a miniature terrier – the dominant one. It was a bit of a job trying to take the photos with the dogs constantly seeking attention, but eventually it worked out. On the way home I stopped at the “Winery Estate Marketplace” next to the Joseph Fillipi vineyard, one of the oldest in California. As I sat at the bar in Monaco’s Pizza Palace, I watched the second half of the NCAA March Madness semi-final game between Villanova and Oklahoma, both ranked #2 in their respective leagues. However, Oklahoma suffered a humiliating loss by 44 points – the most in the history of March Madness!



Shortly after the trip to Calexico, I had a photo shoot in Riverside where the homeowner had a little dog named Ginger that stayed on the couch the entire time – definitely not a guard dog! On my way home I stopped at Eureka Burger for a beer and watched the end of the semi-final NCAA Hockey game between Boston College and Quinnipac College. The tournament is known as the “Frozen Four”, as opposed to the “Final Four” in NCAA basketball. Just before I left the bar, I saw there was a

new craft beer on tap – “Hell or High Watermelon Pale Ale”. What will they come up with next?

In mid-April, I joined fellow authors of the Greater Los Angeles Writers Society (GLAWS) for the Los Angeles Times Book Festival on the University of Southern California campus, to promote my book “Travels with King Kong – Overland across Africa”. The day began with light rain, but several thousand people still turned out for the annual event. In the afternoon, I had the opportunity to watch a live interview with the stars of the popular TV show “Property Brothers” – real brothers from Vancouver, BC. They were both very informative and quite funny, as they talked about their latest book. Later, as I

sat in the GLAWS booth with several other authors, a brassy, middle-aged blonde woman came over and tossed some postcards promoting her book on the table in front of me. I promptly handed them back to her and said “I’m not here to promote YOUR book”! After she left, an elderly black lady author sitting next to me said “who was that bitch?” As the day went on, I had some interesting conversations with people who were curious about my book., which was great. That evening I had dinner at the “Bombay Restaurant” nearby. When I enquired about what Indian beers were available, the owner recommended one that I’d never heard about before, by the name “Old Monk’s 10,000 Super Beer”. Despite the most unusual name, it turned out to be quite nice, the equivalent of an English IPA. It also went very well with my favorite Indian dish, Chicken Tikka Masala and fresh baked naan. As I was leaving the restaurant, I noticed a sign above the bar which read “We I.D. Responsibly – Responsibility Matters. You Must be born on or before April 12, 2016” That happened to be today’s date!

A few days after the LA event I had a photo shoot in La Puente, and on the way I stopped at the “Workman-Temple Homestead Museum” in the City of Industry. The park-like grounds of the old estate were beautiful, in stark contrast with the surrounding industrial and commercial properties. I discovered some fascinating California history, including that of the Workman and Temple families who settled the area in the 1870’s as part of a large Spanish Land Grant. In one corner of the old



estate was a small family cemetery that included the grave of the last governor of Mexican California. The highlights of the museum were the old adobe Workman House, built in 1870, and "La Casa Neuvo" (the new house) built in 1927 as the home of the Temple family. It was a gorgeous Spanish Revival style structure and furnished in original period pieces donated by the Temple family. Mr. Workman was an Englishman who married a prominent Mexican woman that had inherited the large Spanish Land Grant, known as a "rancho". This fact goes a long way in explaining the origin of the names of many southern Californian towns, such as Rancho Cucamonga, Rancho Mirage, and Rancho Palos Verdes. As we toured La Casa Neuvo, our English guide was very



knowledgeable of the family history and told us many interesting stories of the adobe house and its furnishings.

In early May I took the Metrolink train to Fullerton for the annual "Railroad days" event at the historic Santa Fe Depot. It was a very popular event and included tours of several railroad cars from the 1940's and 50's. There were a couple of Union Pacific passenger coaches, a dining car, and a classic lounge car, all of which used to be part of the legendary "Overland Limited" service that ran between Chicago and LA. Four historic Santa Fe cabooses, known as "way cars", were also open for

viewing, along with a huge new BNSF diesel locomotive idling next to the historic Santa Fe 3751 steam locomotive. Both engines were very popular with the kids and their grandparents. Later I found out that 3751 was capable of pulling 4600 tons of freight or 16 passenger cars in 1945. Today the typical freight train consist of four diesel locomotives can pull over 96,000 tons! (some of the massive freight trains that travel over Cajon Pass use 6 – 8 locomotives) Besides the real full scale railroad cars, a number of model railroad clubs around California had large layouts on display. Even Disneyland had their antique steam locomotive there, as well as Walt Disney's scale model steam railroad from his private railway in Griffith Park. Suffice it to say, there were many passionate model railroaders in attendance. One of the most unique

many memories of the my days managing the Esri User Conference continued to come to mind. Later in the day I joined my good friends DeeAnne and Dawn for dinner at Seasons 52 Restaurant in the historic former San Diego Police Headquarters - recently redeveloped into a beautiful complex of shops and restaurants. I chose the caramelized seared sea scallops with fresh snow peas, shiitake mushrooms, and roasted peanuts in Hoisin sauce and it was incredible! (Thanks DeeAnne) During dinner she mentioned that she had just been informed earlier in the day of a Trump rally planned at the convention center in two days time – good luck DeeAnne!

A week later I was headed to LA for the “PhotoCon” conference near the USC campus. I took the train into Union Station and then the new Expo metro line to USC. It now extends all the way to Santa Monica as well. As I walked over to the Radisson Hotel, I passed a large parking structure where there was yelling, clapping, and loud music going on inside. I couldn’t see what was happening, so I asked a policeman nearby if he knew what it was all about. It seemed it was the graduation ceremony for the current class of police academy cadets. After checking in to the hotel, I walked over to the conference and spent several hours attending workshops and visiting the Expo area. The most incredible and moving presentation was a series of photos of tragic scenes of child labor around the world, under some very hazardous conditions , shot by a well-known photojournalist. Some of the kids were no more 5 or 6 years old, and often they never survived beyond their teens! It wasn’t easy to watch, but it certainly made a profound impact on everyone in the room. Back at the hotel, I had a glass of “Trojan IPA” from the Angel City Brewing Company at “The Lab Gastropub”. For dinner that evening, I decided to take the Metro to LA Live downtown and my favorite bar there, “The Yardhouse”, with its 137 draft beers. It was very crowded but I was able to find one seat at the end of the bar. I ordered another of my favorites, a half order of Lobster Mac-n-Cheese, a fantastic combination of lobster, smoked Applewood bacon, shiitake mushrooms, truffle oil, and four different cheeses. I could barely finish the “half order”! A short time later, two guys came to the end of the bar to order drinks and started up a conversation with me. They looked totally opposite of each other, but they claimed to be brothers, having different mothers by the same father. I addition, they said their father was Antonio Villaraigosa, the mayor of Los Angeles! (I had no idea if it was true, but they were nice guys and interesting to talk with) Later, their wives turned up and immediately one of them latched on to me, insisting that she show me all of the photos from their recent vacation in Bora Bora. Then she kept saying that I shouldn’t be sitting alone, but I must join the four of them for dinner. Meanwhile the other woman kept shouting out the Samoan War Cry. Finally the restaurant manager came over and told her to quit or to leave! At last, the four of them headed to their table for dinner, but not until she made me promise to stop by their table later. The whole experience was very weird, uncomfortable and quite embarrassing. The bartender said she

thought they were my friends, and was genuinely surprised when I told her I had never seen any of them before. A few minutes later I asked for the bill and she told me that my “friends” had already paid it! I finished the evening with a cold glass of Tsing Tao beer at Wolfgang Puck’s on the 24th floor of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. The view of the downtown lights and the Hollywood hills beyond was spectacular. The following day I took time to walk around the old, historic West Adams Neighborhood north of the USC campus. There were many elegant mansions and estates that had been converted to be part of the Mount St Mary’s

University campus, in particular the beautiful Georgian style Doheny Mansion, now the center of the university. I spent a couple of hours roaming around the campus taking photos before walking over to Expo Park. Besides the gorgeous rose garden, the park is home to several large museums, one being the California Science Museum. It had just recently received a new addition to its collection of space age artifacts, an enormous fuel tank from the Space Shuttle. It dwarfed everything around it, including the monster trucks that transported it from the port of Long Beach. Not far from the museum was a



full-size SR-71 "Blackbird" spy plane, a big hit with all of the kids. On my way to Union Station to catch the train back home, I stopped for a beer at the "901 Bar & Grill", a local campus hangout. When I entered the bar, a few people were shooting pool and watching the Dodger's game on TV. Then at one point, a commercial came on TV for "Lipstick Bail Bonds – Kiss Jail Goodbye". There were a couple of pink trucks and some well-endowed young women dressed in pink shorts and halter tops standing beside them. I don't know if they could really get you out of jail, but it certainly was a memorable advertisement.

At the beginning of June I headed again to San Diego to attend a week of photography training at the West Coast School of Photography being held on the beautiful campus of the University of San Diego. After checking in to the Four Points Sheraton Hotel, I walked over to the Emerald Chinese Restaurant for dinner, and enjoyed some delicious Szechwan spicy chicken wings and Shanghai pork dumplings, along with a cold pint of local Sculpin IPA. As I savored the spicy wings I noticed the bar had "Belching Beaver Peanut Butter Stout" on tap from one of the many craft breweries in San Diego. The next day I joined the class titled "Photoshop – Zero to Sixty in a Week". Our instructor, Michael Collins, was very knowledgeable and very patient with a few of the students who were just plain idiots. Ellen was especially a real PITA (pain in the ass), constantly making stupid remarks about nothing, and not listening to Michael or watching him demonstrate the tools in photoshop. She kept interrupting him, asking him to repeat himself. After a few hours of this I was sorely tempted



to yell out "shut up and listen, then Michael wouldn't have to keep saying the same thing over and over again"! On top of that, I got seated next to a woman from New York who constantly talked to herself and required help with everything. At the end of the first day of class, I seriously wondered if I would be able to put up with these people another four days. But Michael provided some excellent instruction which I could really use in my work with photoshop. Fortunately, I didn't have to spend any time with them outside of the class. For dinner that evening I ordered a fantastic chicken and bacon carbonara pizza in the hotel restaurant, although I was the only one in the place. Day two in class was a bit better, but I still felt like strangling Ellen – she had a serious case of adult ADD! During the lunch hour, I went to the university bookstore and found a fascinating new book titled "Pogue's basics – Life" by David Pogue from PBS fame. It was filled with incredibly simple, yet very useful information about everyday stuff that "nobody tells you about". As a couple of examples – (the better way to peel a banana) Start peeling from the "bottom", not the top, (how to stop a pot from boiling over) Place a large wooden spoon across the top of the pot, (a quick scissor sharpening trick) Cut through a piece of sandpaper a few times. The book was filled with over 200 pages of amazing everyday tips and tricks! Later that evening I went back to the Emerald Chinese Restaurant for dinner. As I walked into the place, I encountered a large crowd of Chinese families celebrating a special birthday. And to my surprise, in the center of the large dining room, was a live performance of ancient Chinese opera – very colorful and very loud, with lots of banging of gongs and blowing of horns. The bartender was very excited, as it was her first time to see a live performance, even though she grew up in a traditional Chinese-American family. While I watched the performance, I enjoyed a fabulous dish of Kung Pao chicken, served with lots of fresh bell peppers, sweet onions, and a spicy Szechwan sauce topped with roasted peanuts. Over the next two days, the class settled down a bit and I believe some "learning" took place. Michael was always available to give individual, hands-on instruction. But when it came to the class dinner in the Little Italy district, I diplomatically declined, preferring to have dinner at the historic "Barra Barra Salon" in Old Town. The "lobster Bites" (Langostine Tails) were crispy and delicious, along with a cold pint of Dos XX's lager. When I returned to the hotel, I went to the bar for one more beer and watch the final NBA championship game between Cleveland and Oakland. There were two large screen TVs, one showing the NBA game and the other a soccer match. However, the only sound was coming from the soccer match, which no one in the bar was watching. So I asked the bartender to change the sound to the



TV showing the NBA game. He replied that the remote control for that TV was missing, despite seeing three remotes behind the bar. Then I asked if he could please switch the channel on the TV showing the soccer match to the NBA game, something I thought should be easy to do, as well as a very logical solution to the problem. But unbelievably, he said the remote for that TV was not working – are you joking? At that point I told the hotel manager on duty, it was unacceptable and that I would be taking my beer to my room where I would be able to watch the game with sound! In the end, Cleveland won the championship, fulfilling LeBron James' promise to the people of Cleveland to bring it back home after more than 50 years. He was very emotional during the post-game interview – shedding tears at one point. (had I stayed in the bar I would never have heard his words)

On the final day of class, we spent a lot of time with individual instruction before the closing general session where a prominent Mexican photographer gave a great presentation on the topic of lighting, both indoor and outdoor. He showed some incredible images where he used a flash and strobe outdoors to highlight and enhance his subjects. It was a very nice closing of the training classes and then I headed for home.

The following day, Saturday, I drove to Glendale for a writer's conference organized by GLAWS. There were many sessions throughout the day on the campus of LA Valley College, and I had some very useful discussions with editors and literary agents. Returning to the Glendale Hilton that evening, I had a glass of "Golden Road IPA" from a local brewery near Griffith Park in LA. As I sat at the bar, the last half of a major soccer match between Peru and Colombia was on the TV, tied 0 – 0 at the end of regulation play. In the final "shoot out", Colombia won 6 – 4. The bartender was very disappointed since her husband was from Peru and had planned a big celebration! Leaving the bar, I walked up Brand Avenue in search of a place for dinner, while lots of families were heading to the nearby Glendale Church Summer Carnival – a traditional Father's Day event. A few blocks further I discovered a small courtyard with a Japanese steakhouse and a Persian restaurant, so I decided to try the Persian cuisine. Dinner began with warm pita bread, butter, and slices of sweet raw onion – a traditional Persian appetizer. Then the owner came by and recommended the Lamb Shishlek (kabob) – excellent grilled lamb chops served with basmati rice, grilled tomato, slices of lemon and orange, along with a delicious charred Pablano pepper. For dessert, he brought me his favorite, a dish of Persian ice cream – a very tasty combination of vanilla extract, pistachios, and rose water. The whole dining experience outside in the courtyard was exceptional. Back at the hotel I decided to go up to the Horizon's Lounge on the top floor (19), but the elevator would only go as far as the 18th floor. When I went down to the front desk to report the problem, I was told that the lounge had been closed for the past two years – so why was there no sign posted in the elevator? (the front desk wondered the same thing!) The next morning I headed to LA Valley College for more sessions, the most interesting and useful of which was titled "The 12 signs that you are not ready to publish". Later that evening I went to the "Mori Japanese Teppan Steakhouse" in the courtyard next to the Persian restaurant where I had been the night before. The Japanese restaurant was very crowded with several families waiting to be seated. So I asked the hostess if I could wait in the bar and she pointed to two small cocktail tables next to her station. It had to be the world's smallest bar, but they did have Kirin beer on draft, the only beer available. When the owner came by, a little old Japanese man, I asked him if he could join a table for dinner. A few minutes later he lead me to an empty table in the corner. Shortly afterwards, he seated a large family at the table, so now I had dinner companions. The husband was a loud, domineering man, and the two teenage daughters were stereotype "valley girls" who kept making comments about a boy at another table, like "he's so totally awesome". In contrast, the two young boys were rather quiet and reasonably well-behaved, although the younger one was fascinated with his new bubblehead toy. Later he began trying to make a Star Wars "light sabre" by sticking a long plastic straw on top of a chopstick. He was fun to watch, but he was also "all over the map" – pity his parents at home. Soon our Japanese chef came to the table and began preparations for dinner by bouncing an egg on his steel spatula several times before cracking it on the edge of the spatula. Then he filled small bowls with fried rice and flipped each bowl 4 or 5 five times on his spatula before serving them to us. Next came the grilled shrimp and he flipped a couple of pieces in the air for the kids to catch in their mouth, which they really enjoyed. And if that wasn't enough, he built a small mountain of onion rings on the grill, filled it with cooking oil, and then lit it on fire to make a volcano! That got a round of applause, not only from our table, but also those around us. Dinner then proceeded to delicious portions of New York steak and lobster, followed by bowls of green tea ice cream – a memorable evening, in more ways than one! Later I told the chef that I was not part of the "family" –



and he just smiled. The next morning I drove home and was met by very hot weather, over 105 degrees!

At the end of June I was on my way to San Diego for the annual Esri International User Conference to meet up with some of my former Esri colleagues and international friends. The trip by train was very comfortable, as always, and much nicer than fighting the freeway traffic. After checking in to the Westin Hotel, I headed to the convention center to register, then to Embarcadero Park on the

waterfront. There I had a fantastic grilled cheeseburger and a cold beer at the little “Burgers, Bait, and Beer” bait shop and café. (a bit of a weird combination, but it seemed to work) As I sat outside on the pier, I watched the sailboats slowly pass by and the people trying their best to catch a fish. (during the entire time I sat there, I never saw anyone catch anything, though it looked like they all enjoyed the experience of “fishing”) Meanwhile, one of the numerous transients in the city, came by picking out aluminum cans from the trash – he was “dragging” three huge black plastic bags stuffed to the gills with cans. Later in the evening, I went to Kansas City BBQ for a delicious pulled pork sandwich and a cold glass of Pabst Blue Ribbon. I noticed a small yellow card on the bar next to me that read “gone to pee – don’t f___ with my drink” (short and to the point!) A short time later a massive BNSF freight train rumbled by, a mere 20 feet away, which meant that the bartender was obliged to pour shots of “Night Train” fortified wine for everyone in the bar – a very unique tradition!

The next morning, the conference opened with a series of great presentations on new Esri technology. As a long standing tradition, Jack asked that everyone in the audience, all 15,000 of us, to turn to someone near us and meet them. I met a first time attendee from Austin, and when he asked me how many times I had been to the conference, I told him 30 years – he was shocked! Then I explained that I had managed it for 28 years. The plenary session in the afternoon was excellent, with a very interesting keynote address by author Andrea Wulf about her new book titled “The Invention of Nature”. She told a fascinating story about German scientist Alexander von Humboldt who lived in the early 1800’s and was responsible for establishing many of the ecosystem descriptions we still use today. It also explained why we see so many streets, cities, and parks in the western US named for him. After the close of the plenary session, I joined my good friend Myles in the Map Gallery before we headed to the Fish Market Restaurant for a lovely dinner with friends outside on the deck, as the sun was setting over San Diego Bay. And, as always, the crab cakes were superb! The following day I spent time visiting the enormous exhibit hall and discovered some very interesting and unique displays of using GIS technology. Then I joined my good friends DeeAnne and Diana for a wonderful lunch at Lou & Mickey’s in the Gaslamp District. (the King Crab melt was outstanding – thanks again DeeAnne) That evening I decided to go to the Padres baseball game and bought a ticket at the last minute in the Omni Hotel Premier section that included a fabulous buffet dinner in one of the VIP sections overlooking the third base line. And with a seat just 10 rows up from the field level, it was definitely a luxurious way to watch the game. I really enjoyed the experience, even though the Padres lost to the Orioles. It was a great way to see the game!



Also in June I drove up to Cajon Pass to shoot some video of the freight train traffic. Not long after I pulled off the freeway onto old route 66 and set up my camera, there were two huge BNSF freight trains running parallel to each other northbound on the adjacent tracks, while a southbound UP freight slowly descended on the third track next to the BNSF trains. It was the first time I had seen all three mainline tracks that busy. On my way home I stopped at the “Screamin Chicken Saloon” for a beer, and as I entered the old dive bar I noticed a sign posted on the frig that read “Donate to Kristin’s Pre-Jail Party on Sunday”! Maybe it was an attempt to raise “bail”? There was a surprisingly good selection of craft beers on tap, but I noticed almost everyone was drinking “bottles” of Bud Light. I took my glass of Stone IPA outside on the deck to watch the freight trains going up and down Cajon Pass. When I realized I was sitting beneath three tall cell phone towers it explained the 5 bars on my cell phone. Meanwhile, inside the bar, a strange mix of country music and Rap was blaring away, which begged the question, are rednecks and bikers getting into Rap now? Perhaps someone should do a survey. At the end of June, on a weekend, I had another photo shoot near downtown LA in the Silver Lake neighborhood north of Dodger

Stadium. The freeway traffic into LA was horrendous, taking me over 2 hours to reach the property. It was a small 2 bedroom condo on top of the hill overlooking downtown. When I finally found the place, the real estate agent apologized to me, saying that the owner had given him the wrong keys, and since she lived in Santa Barbara, it was impossible to get the correct keys that day! So instead of driving straight back home, I decided to try and make the best of a bad situation by visiting the LA Zoo in nearby Griffith Park. I spent a couple of hours enjoying my first visit to the zoo, along with a lot of young families. The zoo was much larger than I thought it would be, and the exhibits very nice in natural surroundings, much like the San Diego Zoo. As I walked around the zoo, I heard a myriad of foreign languages from all over the world, testifying to the incredible diversity of Los Angeles. Most of the animals had sought seclusion from the hot weather, but the river otters were an exciting exception,

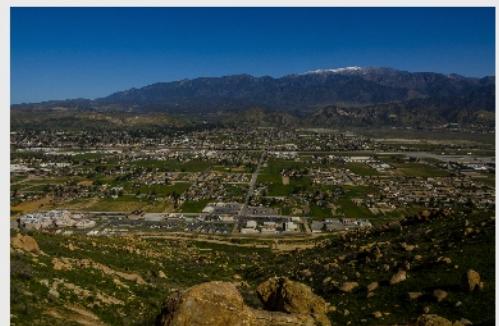


splashing around in their pool and barking at each other, to the delight of everyone – really fun to watch. Despite the long hours I spent on the freeway, the time I spent at the zoo was a most pleasant and relaxed time.

At the beginning of July, I took the train to Oceanside to photograph the Southern California Beach Club. The beach was packed with people escaping the 100 degree heat inland – sunbathers, surfers, family picnickers, and a few old fishermen. On my way back to the train station, I passed by the historic old Grave's House, a small Victorian house, now sitting alone on the edge of a huge vacant lot. The house was

built in 1887, one of the first of the original beachfront homes in Oceanside. In addition to its beauty and history, was another notable feature – it was used in the blockbuster Hollywood film “Top Gun”, where Tom Cruise and Kelly McGillis met for the first time. Thankfully, the old house is slated to be restored as part of a new downtown development project.

Later, in mid-July, our dear friend Tina came to stay with us for a few days on her vacation from her job in Saudi Arabia. About the same time, I was going to attend the Photoshop World Conference in Las Vegas, so I suggested we spend the day before on a scenic trip through the mountains to the desert. Early in the morning we drove to the small village of Idyllwild, high in the San Jacinto Mountains. The route up highway 243 was very steep and twisting, but we had



spectacular views along the way. We stopped at “Joann’s Beer Garden” in the center of the village and enjoyed a delicious lunch of grilled cheeseburgers, BBQ pork ribs, and cold beer as we sat outside under the shade of tall Ponderosa Pines. A local musician played some great classic rock-n-roll from the 60’s and 70’s, and a large group of bikers next to us were having a fun time. At one point, they were trying to take a selfie, but the group was too large, so I stepped in and took the photo for them. They bought me a beer and we had a great conversation. Leaving Idyllwild, we drove east through the lovely Garner Valley and over the summit of the Santa Rosa Mountains under beautiful clear blue skies. Eventually the road

descended 5000 feet on the steep narrow road to Palm Desert, where we encountered the 110 degree heat of the Coachella Valley, in stark contrast to the comfortable 70 degrees in the mountains. It was a true “pines to palms” tour.

The next day I drove to Las Vegas by way of I-15 and was fortunate not to encounter the heavy traffic for which it’s famous. But as soon as I arrived in Las Vegas I ran into a monstrous traffic jam – it took me almost a half hour to go just ¼ mile on the exit ramp to Tropicana Blvd. I finally made it to the Luxor Hotel where I encountered another traffic jam, this one at the registration desk. At least, when I finally checked in, I was upgraded to a “player’s suite” on the top floor, which helped to lower my stress level. That evening I went to the Press Bar in the Four Seasons Hotel nearby and had a fantastic dish of steamed pork and shrimp dumplings with Hoisin sauce, as I sat outside on the patio. Later I finished the evening at

the Ri Ra Irish bar, one of my favorite places in Las Vegas. As I drank my pint of Guinness, I listened to an Irish musician playing traditional Irish folk songs on his guitar. During the break, I talked with him and found out he had lived in Las Vegas for the past 20 years, though he's originally from Yorkshire, England. We had a great conversation and he gave me one of his CDs. The following morning the conference opened with an excellent presentation by Adobe Technology Evangelist Julianne Kost. She showed an incredible array of new software in a fascinating hour on stage – an amazing woman. Later that evening, after a wonderful dinner of sautéed sea scallops in an avocado puree at Rick Moonan's Seafood Restaurant, I went back to Ri Ra for a pint of Guinness and listened to an Irish band from Cork, Ireland by the name of "Jig Jam". They were really good, playing both traditional folk songs and more modern Irish ballads. It was their first time in Las Vegas, so I bought a round of drinks for them. To my surprise, they ordered Vodka and Sprite, rather than beer or whiskey as I was expecting. The next day I attended some very good technical workshops by instructors from Adobe and KelbyOne. The best one was "Landscape and Light" by Matt Kloskowski. At the end of the sessions was an event called "progressive snacks" in the Expo Pavilion – basically a bunch of chips and junk food, along with sodas. I saw so many obese people grabbing fistfuls of junk food – like they obviously need it? Later that evening I joined my PCMA board colleague Neil, for drinks and appetizers in the "Strip Steak Bar". He proceeded to order sushi, lobster tacos, pork belly, beef satay, and a large order of truffle fries! Everything was delicious, but there was more than enough food for a family of four. (thanks Neil!) The following day, the last day of the conference, there were more great workshops and the closing session, where once again I was among the 5000 attendees who did not win a prize. (that's one big reason I don't gamble in the casinos) After the close of the conference I decided to try a new place for dinner and discovered the "Hofbrauhaus – Las Vegas", just a few blocks off the Strip. From the outside, the building resembled a typical beer hall in Munich, and as I entered I found it to be a very authentic re-creation of the original Hofbrauhaus. The waitresses were dressed in the traditional Bavarian attire as one would see in Munich, and an Oompah band in one corner played Polka music. Everyone was seated at long tables, just as is the custom in Germany, and at one point, a young member of the band went around to each table and played a classic Alpenhorn as one would find in the Bavarian Alps. In addition, my order of Weiner Schnitzel and potato salad was delicious and very authentic – something I had yet to find anywhere in the US. Perhaps the most unusual thing about the place was when one of the waitresses, a tall, buxom blonde offered to take a large wooden paddle and use it on the butts of several young men. As they bent over the table, she paddled them three times, each stroke being with more force, and none of them were done lightly! I had no idea what the



"tradition" was about, since I had never seen, nor experienced it, while I was in Germany. But it seemed to be popular among the young men – maybe it was a macho thing with them. And perhaps it was a fitting end to my week in Las Vegas.

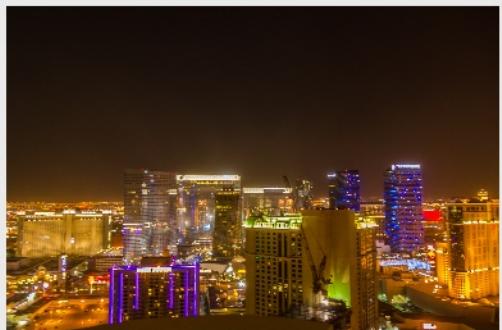
Once again, I was headed for Las Vegas, this time in mid-August to attend the mid-year retreat of the PCMA Southwest & Pacific Chapter Board of Directors, but the trip did not begin well at all. A massive brush fire below Cajon Pass closed I-15 in both directions. It began around 10am as a small 5 acre blaze, but in just over an hour it blew up to more

than 10,000 acres! Over 80,000 people were ordered to evacuate their homes immediately, including the entire town of Wrightwood. (it would be like telling the whole city of Redlands to leave in one hour!) I-15 is one of the heaviest travelled routes from Los Angeles, so when all of the traffic was re-routed through Yucca valley it created an enormous traffic jam, especially with so many heavy trucks on the 2 lane roads. Rather than follow everyone else, I took the back roads through the Mojave Desert and arrived in Las Vegas none the less. That afternoon I checked into the Delano Hotel and a beautiful 2 room suite on the 19th floor. (Thanks again Neil) The evening began with a reception hosted by the hotel in the lobby bar, with an abundance of delicious appetizers. Then our group boarded a shuttle that took us to "LinQ" for more drinks at the American bar, which had a huge portrait of Abraham Lincoln above the bar. As the evening progressed, we ended up at the "Brooklyn Bowl" for a night of bowling and a dinner of "grazing" on some fantastic dishes. We split into two teams and enjoyed bowling against each other. It was a lot of fun, especially since the last time I had bowled was 1996 on a business



trip to Moscow, Russia. Around 9pm a live concert began with a rapper named Riff Raff, who billed his music as "Redneck Rap"! The volume in the place suddenly went up ten-fold, and after a few minutes I couldn't take it any longer and left. I rode the monorail to the MGM Grand Hotel and walked back to the Delano. It was very nice of Caesar's Entertainment to have sponsored the evening events, but I could have done without the rap music.

The following morning, we all met for a great breakfast buffet served in our meeting room, before getting to work on the agenda. Michael Dominquez, senior vice president for MGM Resorts, gave a great talk on the qualities of leadership that really inspired all of us. Soon it was lunchtime and the hotel brought in a huge buffet that included a fresh green salad with shaved parmesan cheese, shrimp rigatoni with parmesan cream sauce, very tender Korean beef short ribs, warm polenta corn bread, and an amazing array of desserts! The lunch buffet prepared us well for the long afternoon of working out a program of events for 2017. Following the day's discussions, we adjourned and prepared for our group dinner in the hotel's fine dining restaurant, "Rivea" located on the top floor. We were seated in a private dining room, surrounded by floor to ceiling windows that afforded us a spectacular view of the Las Vegas lights. The menu was Italian inspired and presented in a very professional manner by waiters who described each dish and offered pairings with wines. Dinner began with appetizers of burrata cheese on heritage tomatoes and a fresh green salad with green beans, anchovy, seared tuna, and basil – thyme dressing. Then came the pasta course of lobster risotto, followed by the main course, an amazing pairing of Alaskan wild halibut served with stuffed squash blossom, diced lemon, cucumber, fresh herbs and extra virgin olive oil, together with a grilled Angus filet mignon over a confit of peppered potatoes and bordelaise sauce. The combination was absolutely incredible. And the authentic Tiramisu for dessert made it a memorable dinner. But Neil, our chapter president, had another surprise for us, tickets to the Cirque de Soleil performance of "Michael Jackson One", including a special VIP tour behind the scenes before the show. The show was incredible, with fabulous sets, amazing dance troupes, and some unique gymnastics on trampoline. Once dancer, in particular, did an amazing imitation of Michael Jackson, including his famous "Moon Walk". Throughout the show, I was astounded by the seamless integration of a Michael Jackson "hologram" on stage with the real-life dancers – truly brilliant. The sound and lighting were solid throughout the performance, especially with speakers built in to the back of the plush seats. I do have to say, the show had an odd beginning when some young people began climbing over the audience, as if they were confused and trying to find their seats. But as it turned out, they were actors who eventually appeared on stage. It was an event that I shall remember for a long time, not only for the incredible music and dancing that defined Michael Jackson, but also for the tribute to him at the end of the show that presented a very vulnerable, caring, generous side of his life, something of which I was unaware. It was very nice to see another part of MJ. After the show, I went to Ri Ra to grab a pint of Guinness and listen to some spirited Irish music by "The Donnelly's". A guy sat down next to me at the bar and asked me to save the last two seats while he went to the restroom. Just after he left, a very attractive woman suddenly sat down, and when he returned, he asked me "why did you let her sit down here?" Then he broke out



laughing and introduced her as his wife! As the conversation continued, he asked what I did for work, and when I said I photographed real estate, he got into a long discussion on the ethics of selling real estate, most of which I couldn't hear because of the loud music. But he kept going and eventually gave me his real estate business card, along with an invitation to call him whenever I was in Austin, which he kept repeating! He was a nice guy, but he was definitely "three sheets to the wind". The next morning, after another delicious breakfast buffet, the GM of the hotel gave us an interesting presentation about the unique features of the Delano, as compared to a lot of the other Las Vegas properties. It is a truly beautiful hotel, one that the GM called the world's only 1000 room "boutique" hotel! I especially appreciated the VIP lobby for check-in and not having to walk through a smoky casino to reach the guest elevators. As we concluded our board meeting, the hotel provided some upscale box lunches to take with us – much appreciated. Leaving the hotel, I went to the "National Atomic Testing Museum", a place I

had not visited. The museum housed an extensive collection of information and artifacts from the many years that areas north of Las Vegas were used as sites for testing of atomic weapons. There were several exhibits documenting the process of testing, as well as the results. But of most interest was the multi-media presentation showing how the facility worked and many of the actual tests that were conducted over a 20 year period. It was not only fascinating, but also a bit scary to imagine what might have happened had the situation arose for the use of the atomic weapons. That evening I met up with my old Army buddy Mike, with whom I served in Germany during the Vietnam war. We sat outside on his patio by the pool in the warm summer evening with our drinks, a cold Red Stripe beer for me, and for Mike, his signature beverage, Bacardi and diet coke. At one point, as we listening to some relaxing jazz, Mike got very emotional when talking about visiting his 96 year old father-in-law in the hospital. I think that experience brought the reality of how fragile life becomes with age to him in no uncertain terms. During the evening I couldn't help notice Mike fumbling with the remote control sometimes, which was so ironic, seeing that he's been in the AV industry for decades. Yet, even he can be "technologically challenged" at times! We finally called it a night at 2am. I left early the next morning, so as not to disturb his "beauty sleep". I always enjoy spending time with Mike, though it's unfortunately infrequent.

Near the end of August I had a couple of real estate photo shoots of interest, the first being in an area of old ranches and 70's suburban homes, all surrounded by lots of chain link fencing. I property I was to shoot was a fairly new house, which was a bit out of character with the rest of the neighborhood. George, the owner and builder, met me at the front gate and informed me that the young tenants were in the process of packing up to move. So I had quite a task trying to work around all the boxes – to be honest, the place wasn't really ready for photographs. As I was about to ask how to access the back yard, George lead me to a large window, opened the curtains, and showed me it was full of old junk cars, including a vintage first edition corvette and an old Toyota Landcruiser, exactly like the one I used to own in Alaska! It was nice talking with George, but quite honestly, I don't know how he expects to sell the house with a literal junk yard in back – good luck to him! The second photo shoot was in an exclusive gated community of Rancho Mirage that surrounded two large man-made lakes. The real estate agent named Joyce, met me in front of the house and said the owner wasn't quite ready yet, so she invited me to have some coffee in the nearby shopping center. Although it was only a short 10 minute drive, her old 60's Buick "battleship" had no A/C – not good in the blistering 110 degree weather. During our conversation over coffee, Joyce informed me the owner was a rather eccentric old doctor who talked too much and smoked like a chimney. So she volunteered to keep him occupied while I took photos. She also cautioned me that the house reeked of tobacco smoke, despite several air filtering devices she had installed. As we entered the house she called out his name several times, but no response. The house was beautiful, with gorgeous views of the lake and golf course just a few yards beyond the patio. There was even a small dock and boat so he could sail to the clubhouse, tennis courts, and golf course. As we were about to enter one of the two enormous master bedroom suites, we found him asleep, or perhaps passed out, since Joyce said he was also an alcoholic! (and this man was a doctor?) The house was incredible, but to be honest, the stench of the stale tobacco smoke was overpowering. Maybe he'll get lucky and find a heavy smoker to buy it, but not me!



At the end of August I arranged a trip to Sacramento, originally to visit my cousin Bud and his wife Doris. But then I found

out they would be leaving for a Mediterranean cruise that same time. However, I decided to go ahead with the trip. My route involved the train to Union Station, the Amtrak bus to Bakersfield, another train to Stockton, and finally a bus to Sacramento – a journey that took a significant part of a day. As the bus to Bakersfield was going over Tejon Pass north of LA traffic on the busy I-5 came to a sudden stop, as a young man was wandering aimlessly in the middle of the freeway! Soon the Highway Patrol arrived and escorted him off the highway and we continued our journey to Bakersfield. The landscape along the way was one of



golden grass covered mountains and small stands of oak trees. It was beautiful, but extremely dry from five years of drought. The final leg of the trip to Bakersfield was a long, steep descent from the summit of the Tehachapi Mountains into the vast Central Valley, but we arrived in plenty of time to board the Amtrak San Joaquin train to Stockton. As the train travelled north through the heart of the valley, we passed mile after mile, acre upon acre of fruit and nut trees, fields of produce, and countless vineyards. In addition were many large dairy farms and vast fields of sweet corn. At times during the five hour journey, the country looked like the Midwest, sometimes Kansas, and other times Iowa, but still within the state of California. It was truly amazing, but probably lost on the vast majority of passengers who slept most of the way across the perfectly flat landscape. Our train conductor was a bit of a comedian, with announcements like:

(while waiting to depart Bakersfield Station) "If you are waiting for the 1:25pm train, this is your train – it's the **only** one in the station, so step aboard."

(at a signal stop) "Welcome to downtown Lopez. If you want to detrain and see the town, it's not possible."

(while passing through Modesto) "Welcome to Modesto, home of the Modesto Nuts, state high school football champions two years ago."

(approaching Stockton) "Welcome to Stockton, number 2 in the nation for car thefts."

In Stockton, I transferred to a bus and a half hour later arrived at the Amtrak station in Sacramento. It was a short walk through Old Town State Historic Park to the Embassy Suites Hotel on the banks of the Sacramento River. I got there with just 15 minutes remaining for the evening Manager's Reception, so I took advantage of the complimentary drinks and snacks. Later I walked over to Joe's Crab Shack on the waterfront for a delicious Crab Dip and hot, crusty sourdough bread. The place was very crowded and quite noisy, especially with a lot of young families. Sitting next to me at the bar was a young couple who ordered a drink that the bartender said required one to "scream". The girl really wanted the drink, but didn't want to

scream, so I suggested she just say the word scream – it worked! I finished the evening at the Rio City Café next door, and then walked along the waterfront back to the hotel.

After a great breakfast in the hotel, I walked along the waterfront taking photos of the historic Tower Bridge and many of the old buildings in Old Sacramento State Historic Park. Then I paid another visit to California State Historic Railroad Museum, where there was an amazing collection of steam locomotives and elegant

passenger cars from as early as 1830. There was a fascinating exhibit about the construction of the Trans-Continental railroad, as well as a very interesting display of the proposed High Speed train from San Francisco to Los Angeles. A full-scale demo model of the new Siemens railcar was on display, presenting a striking contrast to an

old Southern Pacific steam locomotive sitting beside it. One of the best exhibits was a Canadian National Railways sleeping car, just like the one in which I travelled from Vancouver to Halifax in 1982. As I entered the railcar, there were the sounds of the train and the slowly rocking motion of the car, just as if it were actually moving down the track – very realistic. Next to the sleeping car was the Santa Fe dining car "Cochita" with an amazing exhibit of a working kitchen and beautiful

displays of china and silverware from some of the nation's greatest passenger railroads from the era of luxury train travel. It was like walking back in time to the 1940's. I had a great time in the museum, as always. Later that afternoon, I bought a ticket on the Sacramento Southern Railroad excursion that once transported passengers and freight throughout the region. The 16 mile trip south followed the banks of



the Sacramento River and was pulled by an antique steam locomotive. My First Class ticket allowed me to ride in the historic old Southern Pacific Observation Car, dating from the early 1900's. During much of the short ride, I stood on the vestibule at the rear of the train, photographing the beautiful canopy of old live oak trees. Meanwhile, staff dressed in white tuxedos as Pullman Porters from the 1930's, served complimentary soft drinks and snacks to passengers in the Observation Car. It was a fun trip, especially for all the young families aboard. Back in Old Town I walked over to the bar on the Delta King, an old, historical steam river boat from the 1800's when it was among a large fleet of river boats that connected Sacramento with San Francisco. Sacramento was the western terminus of the Trans-Continental railroad, so all passengers and freight bound for San Francisco transferred to the river boats for the last leg of the journey down the Sacramento River to San Francisco Bay. As I sat at the bar, I looked at a couple of tourist maps I had picked up earlier. Suddenly I noticed that both were essentially useless, but for different reasons. The map of Old Town had a long list of local businesses and attractions, with color-coded numbers beside each one, but absolutely none were to be found anywhere on the map! And to make matters worse, the only numbers on the map were in totally different colors with no labels or descriptions anywhere! Then I looked at the diagram for the Railroad Museum and found six numbers on it that had no



descriptions anywhere in the museum brochure! So it begged the question, why put numbers on things that can't be found on the map or diagram?

That evening I was intrigued by the name of the "Fat City Bar & Café" and decided to give it a try. It was located in a beautiful old red brick building that once was a general store at the turn of the last century. A few years ago, a local Chinese-American man named Frank Fat, bought and renovated it in the same style of the period. As I entered the restaurant, I became aware of the lovely Tiffany stained glass windows and lamps throughout. In the center was a huge, spectacular

dark hardwood bar of the 1800's that had come from an old saloon in Leadville, Colorado. In addition to the abundance of stained glass, were many huge antique mirrors. Later, the general manager told me the large Tiffany stained glass chandelier above the front door was designed to be a large-scale version of an earring that Frank's wife loved more than any other. Apparently, the family owns several other restaurants in Sacramento as well. So what about the food you ask? The manager highly recommended the homestyle meatloaf with mashed potatoes, and steamed fresh vegetables – a very traditional dish that may sound a bit boring. But when it's smothered in savory, dark Bourbon mushroom gravy, it's anything but boring! It was by far the best meatloaf I've ever had – excellent. After dinner, I walked to the "River City Saloon", also in Old Town and one of the oldest saloons in Sacramento. As I enjoyed a cold glass of local "Track 7 Panic IPA" from the Natromas Brewery, I noticed a sign posted behind the bar that read "Support your local bartender – helping ugly people get laid". Among the other things I saw in the place was a gorgeous, original stamped tin ceiling and old red brick walls, interspersed with gaudy bright red velvet curtains – a bit weird, but perhaps this place once had a history of prostitution? The most prominent and striking feature was the enormous, hand carved old hardwood bar with beautiful gilded antique mirrors. Back at the hotel, I watched "The Free State of Jones", an amazing film based on the true story about a group of Confederate deserters and



run-away slaves who established an area in southern Alabama free from the Confederacy. (Matthew McConaughey gave a superb performance as Jones)

Following another great breakfast in the hotel, I headed for the Capitol Mall Park to take photos of the beautiful gardens and historical monuments and statues, including those honoring fire fighters and Vietnam POW's and MIA's. As I walked through the huge park, I had wonderful views of the pure white State Capitol Building, shining under brilliant blue skies. And with temperatures in the low 70's, it was very pleasant. As I neared the eastern edge of the Mall, two Highway patrol officers were in the process of saddling up their gorgeous Palomino horses to





patrol the park. As the horses were being saddled, they munched away on the rose bushes. Later in the morning, I returned to Old Town and watched a Sacramento Southern Railroad crew as they used the old roundhouse turntable to reverse the direction of the Southern Pacific Observation Car. By now, it was time to check out of the hotel and head to the airport for my flight back to Los Angeles. I had time to enjoy a cold glass of Goose Island IPA at the Iron Horse Tavern in the airport before boarding the Delta Airlines flight.

The Sacramento airport is not that big, but it's very modern and well furnished with shops and restaurants. The flight to LAX was very nice in First Class, and even though it was a short 45 minute duration, the crew managed to serve drinks and a tasty snack. Arriving at LAX in the late afternoon was not the best time to do so, given the horrible rush hour traffic on the freeway, but due to some amazing driving by our young express bus driver, we arrived at Union Station in plenty of time to catch the train to Riverside, despite the virtual gridlock in downtown LA. In fact, I had some time for a beer in the Traxx Bar before boarding the train. As I sat at the bar, I couldn't help notice an older woman slowly sipping a martini. She was wearing a long, slinky bright red dress, with matching shoes and hat, looking like she had come straight out of a classic 1940's film. (she fit in perfectly with the art deco splendor of Union Station, as well as the old 1945 Hollywood movie playing on the TV



behind the bar) Soon it was time to board the train back to Riverside, carrying with me many great stories and pictures of my trip to Sacramento.

Soon it was the beginning of September and the occasion of my birthday. (71 years old, but that fact hasn't hit me yet!) To make the event special, I decided to spend it at the South Coast Winery Resort and Spa near Temecula, after doing a photo shoot in Fontana the day before. Rather than driving the freeway, I took the back roads through the Hemet Valley and the vineyards north of Temecula. It was a beautiful journey past lovely wine estates, and when I arrived at the resort to check in, the

front desk looked at my driver's license and noticed it was my birthday. So in addition to wishing me Happy Birthday, they gave me a chilled bottle of wine as a gift for the evening. My villa overlooking the vineyards was really beautiful, with lovely furnishings, a fireplace, large marble walk in shower, and a private patio. I spent the afternoon roaming around the estate, taking photos of the beautiful hills and surrounding valley. Later I visited the tasting room, where I discovered that the South Coast Winery had just received the award for "California's Best Winery", for the 4th year in a row! The wines I tasted were superb. After the tasting, I stopped at the bar in the estate's "Vineyard Rose Restaurant" for a glass of their chardonnay. Meanwhile, two couples sat down at the bar and ordered champagne to celebrate two birthdays. As I was leaving, I said "congratulations – today is also my birthday"! I returned to my villa and sat on the patio, sipping the gift of wine, as the sun slowly set over the vineyards – very peaceful and relaxing in the cool evening air. Then I walked back to the restaurant for a fabulous dinner in the



gorgeous setting of huge redwood beams, vaulted ceilings, and tables set with crisp white linen and sparkling silverware. My server was very professional, courteous, and knowledgeable. I started with a glass the Sauvignon Blanc (voted best in the state!) and upon the recommendation of my server, I had the "Lump Crab Gruyere Gratin" appetizer (crab, gruyere cheese, Applewood smoked bacon, fresh thyme, rosemary, and cherry tomatoes, along with parmesan crusted sourdough toast) – absolutely spectacular! For the main course, he suggested the "Skuna Bay Salmon" (wild caught salmon from British Columbia, balsamic vinegar reduction, with Nicoise salad relish, marinated local olives, a halved egg, baked fingerling potatoes, and steamed fresh green beans) - everything was perfectly cooked and delicious. To conclude the incredible dinner, he brought me a luscious slice of Lemon Tart cake, with chardonnay cream sauce drizzled over it. I could not have asked for a more special dinner on my birthday! I spent the rest of the evening with a glass of wine on my patio and enjoyed a lovely view of the Big Dipper in the

night sky, directly above me. (Happy Birthday)

The next morning, I was up early with the sunrise to photograph the ascent of hot air balloons as they slowly rose and soared over the hills and vineyards. It was a beautiful sunrise, and clear blue skies made for some spectacular photos. After an hour or so, I returned to my villa, showered, and then enjoyed a delicious full English breakfast on my patio – a perfect way to start the day!

A couple of weeks later, I was on my way to Alaska to visit Marion and her family, something I do almost every year. Besides the opportunity to share the time with them, it's also a time to re-connect with the "Great Land". My trip began with the train to Union Station and the express bus to the airport. After checking in for the Alaska Airlines flight, I relaxed in the Board Room lounge before boarding the flight to Seattle. The lounge had recently been remodeled and now had a full bar with several options for dining as well. It was a very nice flight to Seattle and a delicious vegetarian lunch was served. (parmesan rice with caramelized onions, grilled asparagus, tomatoes and Portobello mushroom, along with a warm, crusty cheese roll) A decadent double crunch brownie finished off lunch very well. We arrived in Seattle amid rain showers – a big change from the heat of southern California. I had only 20 minutes to make the connection with the flight to Anchorage, but fortunately it was just a



few gates away. Once on board, there was a short delay when a young boy hit his head on an armrest. The captain asked the father if he wanted to disembark to seek medical attention, (meaning a longer delay) or stay aboard for the departure – he opted to stay on board. During the four hour flight, I watched the movie "Ice Age" on the personal entertainment tablet in First Class – a very funny film. For dinner, we were served a delicious plate of Korean short ribs, pasta, grilled broccoli, green salad, and hot whole wheat rolls. Another double crunch brownie for dessert made for a very enjoyable meal. As we approached the

northern coast of Southeast Alaska, there were some gorgeous cloud formations, along with views of vast glaciers, and countless islands dotting the coastline, as if part of a giant emerald necklace. As we made our final approach to Anchorage, a flight attendant made the announcement "We will be starting our descent in 20 minutes, so you might want to fast forward to the end of your movie. But if you have your earphones on, you probably haven't heard anything I've said!" As we landed in Anchorage, we encountered a heavy, low overcast and rain showers – so typical this time of year. I picked up the rental car and drove downtown to the Captain Cook Hotel, my favorite place to stay. I checked in to a very nice corner room with a view of the Chugach Mountains on the eastern edge of the city. Then I walked over to "Humpy's" and was lucky enough to find a seat at the crowded bar, where I had a pint of Alaskan Amber and listened to a very good blues band from Chicago. Back at the hotel that evening, I was surprised to see a sweet shop still open in the lobby. I found it had a most interesting and unusual selection of chocolates, like mango and ginger, lavender, and Moroccan mint – so I just had to buy some.

The next morning, I drove to Muldoon Road and did a "drive-by" visit to my old condo in Alpine Village – it looked almost the same as when I left Anchorage in 1985. The same was true for the duplex on Pussywillow Street where we lived when we first moved to Alaska in 1978. Then I drove to Potter's Marsh, south of Anchorage, and took some great photos of a pair of Trumpeter Swans engaged in a



beautiful mating/courtship ritual, that was made special by the background of lovely fall colors in the surrounding forest. The views of the snow covered peaks of the mighty Alaska Range across Cook Inlet were spectacular, highlighted in the early morning sunshine. As I walked along the edge of the marsh, I joined a small group of birders who had spotted a pair of young bald eagles sitting high in a tree. From Potter's Marsh I drove to Point Woronzof on the edge of Cook Inlet by



the airport, where the view of the fall foliage and the Alaska Range was spectacular. Then I hiked the trail in Earthquake Park through the zone of destruction, where there were some beautiful pools of standing water and gorgeous reflections of White Birch trees and golden leaves. Later, as I hiked along the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail, a lot of people were out walking their dogs in the warm afternoon sunshine. That evening I joined Marion and Michael at the "Suite 100 Restaurant" in south Anchorage for dinner, which began with a wonderful bowl of steamed mussels in a mildly spiced Thai curry sauce. After that we shared a huge plate of baby back BBQ ribs and a delicious grilled local rockfish. It was a wonderful evening of conversation about family, careers, and aging. I also was updated on the adventures of the boys, Ben and Sam, who are



spending time together in Germany where Sam is stationed with the US Army, and Ben is studying German on a Fulbright Scholarship. As we parted I gave them a box of the special chocolates, of which Marion quickly claimed ownership. Later on, I went to the Glacier Brewhouse for a pint of their IPA and to write my journal. The following morning, I had a savory crab omelet at the Snow City Café before heading to the Alaska Zoo, which I had never visited before. It turned out to be a very unique environment within the forest, with all the enclosures so well integrated into the surrounding landscape it felt like a very natural place to see the animals. Virtually all the

animals were native to Arctic regions around the world, and included a majority of them found in Alaska. There were huge brown bears, moose, Dall sheep, lynx, caribou, arctic fox, bald eagles, Musk Ox and polar bears, among many others. Perhaps the most popular were the wolves who carried on a long session of howling that could be heard throughout the zoo. The excellent interpretive signs posted at every enclosure gave the history of the individual animals, description of their habitat, and their relationship with native cultures – very interesting and fascinating. I had a great time wandering around the zoo and learning about the animals I was seeing. Later in the afternoon I



checked into the "Lakefront Hotel" on the eastern shore of Lake Hood near the airport, so as to be able to make the 7am flight home the next morning. I spent some time walking along the lakeshore, taking photos of the many seaplanes taking off and landing. It's the world's busiest seaplane base and handles nearly 200 flights a day. That evening I had a fantastic plate of local halibut and chips at the Fancy Moose Bar in the hotel. As I sat at the bar later, I overheard a conversation between two guys drinking Bud Light, and one of them commented that "IPA tastes like tree bark". Meanwhile I was

enjoying my cold pint of Alaskan IPA!



I was up very early the next morning at 5:30am to take the hotel shuttle to the airport, where I had time for a hot cup of coffee in the Board Room before boarding the flight to Seattle. We were delayed a short time by a mechanical issue, but the young female captain kept us well informed of the status. It was very overcast as we took off, and later I found out that a huge storm was approaching Anchorage with 80 mph winds, so it was fortunate that I departed when I did. Breakfast of scrambled eggs, sausage, waffles, and fruit was a welcome sight. Then I watched a film titled "Two days in the sun" about a group of four guys on "choppers" who rode across the country from Oakland to Brooklyn to participate in a chopper convention – fascinating trip and great music that reminded me of "Easy Rider". As we passed along the coast of Southeast Alaska and British Columbia, there were incredible views of the Wrangell – St Elias Range towering above the clouds. Later, we had nice views of Vancouver Island and the San Juan Islands. I spent an hour relaxing in the Board Room with a glass of Alaskan Amber before boarding the flight to Los Angeles. Once again, I had a marvelous trip - a reunion with Marion and

Michael, and my love of Alaska.

At the end of October I was on the train to San Diego to attend the annual Adobe MAX Conference. On the way down I stopped at the city of Orange station to change trains. With about a half hour to wait, I went in to the bar at Ruby's Diner for a beer. As I walked up to the bar, all of the servers were dressed in costume since it was Halloween. When the bartender appeared, I couldn't believe what I saw – a spitting image of Donald Trump! He had the same physical build, the voice, and even the movements of Trump. He was really into his role and kept making funny comments on some of Trump's campaign statements, such as "I'm going to build a wall behind the bar". He could have been Donald's twin brother! As I was about to leave the bar, I looked up to see that the real Donald was on the TV doing an interview with CNN, so I pointed it out to the bartender, and everyone in the bar burst out laughing. As the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner made its way along the coast, there was a gorgeous sunset over the ocean. Upon arriving in San Diego, I took the trolley to the Omni Hotel and then walked to the Fox Sports Bar for a superb Bacon BBQ Burger, served with delicious homemade potato chips. Once again, all the staff were dressed in costume for the



Halloween evening.

The next morning I went to the convention center to pick up my conference badge and materials, as well as a Starbucks coffee. Then I walked along the waterfront to Anthony's Fish Bar for lunch – a huge plate of fried clams, calamari, shrimp, fish, and a mountain of fries, far too much for me to eat. But sitting outside on the deck with a cold pint of local Yellow Tail Pale Ale, and overlooking San Diego Bay was a wonderful way to have lunch. After that, I went to the Midway Museum nearby and watched the new presentation

about the "Battle of Midway". The film included several former Navy veterans who served on the Midway and told some very emotional stories of the battle that changed the war in the Pacific. It was an excellent production that honored all those who died in the battle. After the presentation, I went up to the flight deck and listened to a very interesting and fascinating talk by a veteran of the Midway about how planes are launched from the deck of an aircraft carrier. It could be compared to a "choreography" of dozens of crewmen, each with a specialized job, working in harmony together to launch a plane every 45 seconds – amazing! On my way back to the hotel, I stopped at the "Upstart Crow Bookstore and Coffee Shop", for a latte and to sit outside on a beautiful afternoon. Later, I joined my friend Lora for a drink at McCormick and Schmick's. We had a great conversation about her plans to travel to South Africa in December, and I gave her some tips about my favorite places in Cape Town and Stellenbosch. That evening I had dinner at Joe's Crab Shack by the bay – an excellent plate of fish and shrimp.



The opening session of Adobe MAX the next morning had over 10,000 people in attendance – a record number for the conference. The session began with a spectacular video across multiple screens on the 100 foot wide stage – the brilliant colors and computer special effects highlighting works of many artists were stunning! And the technical demonstrations of new Adobe software products that followed were incredible! One presenter in particular, named Jason, was especially memorable with his funny moments and singing opera. Lunch was provided by Adobe and served in the enormous exhibit halls where hundreds of tables were set up in the same space as I remember the exhibits for the Esri User Conference were located the past summer – it felt a bit strange. After lunch, I attended some very good technical workshops before the Opening Reception that evening, in what was called the "Community Plaza". In addition to all of the fun activities scattered throughout the huge hall, there were bars and food stations everywhere – all compliments of Adobe. Several hands-on displays were set up to show new applications of Adobe software, such as "Your Brain on MAX" that monitored brain waves as participants created works of art, and the opportunity for people to experience Virtual Reality from GoPro cameras they could wear. There was even a display of new Airstream trailers, one of which was about the size of a large pickup truck, with

a small kitchen area, combination sitting room and bedroom, and even a toilet that converted into a shower. But the most interesting and unique display was one titled "Lost Masterpieces" in which Adobe had commissioned several "digital artists" to reproduce some very famous paintings from past centuries that had either been destroyed by fire or stolen and never recovered – using only Photoshop and "stock" photos from Adobe. The digital reproductions were displayed side by side with a photo of the original painting of the same size, as well as a list of the photos the artist used – absolutely fascinating! As closing time approached, large groups of people gathered around every available TV monitor to watch the end of game 7 of the World Series. In the bottom of the 8th inning, the Cubs lead the Indians 6 – 4, with Cleveland having a man on second base and a man at bat. Suddenly, someone in the crowd behind me from Cleveland yelled out "Tie Game" which surprised everyone. Then the very next pitch was a homerun to tie the game! (I finished watching the game, with a group of passionate Chicago fans at the Hard Rock Café – the Cubs won 7 – 6 in the 10th inning, and the Chicago fans went ballistic!) Meanwhile a massive BNSF freight train with 7 locomotives sat idling on the tracks outside the bar. The general session the next morning was outstanding, with three presenters, all of whom were inspiring in their own way. First was a woman war photographer who told incredible and sometimes unbelievable stories of her experiences in Iraq, South Sudan, Libya, and Afghanistan. Her photos were amazing and very emotional. Next was a woman sculptor who found her artistic expression in creating massive "webs" constructed of fibers that were lighted at night – they were gorgeous and often spanned several hundred feet in the air. Her latest piece that recently hung in the middle of Piccadilly Square in London was to be on display in the South Embarcadero Park for the "MAX Bash" party that evening. After a short break, New York fashion designer Zak Posen brought out an evening gown made entirely of fiber optic cable that changed color as the model moved around the stage – beautiful and innovative. Near the conclusion of the general session, Hollywood filmmaker Quentin Tarantino, told a fascinating story of how he struggled as a screenwriter for many years before breaking into film direction. He also introduced several clips of his films and described how he developed the stories behind them.

After the session, I joined my friend DeeAnne for lunch at Lou and Mickey's, her favorite spot. The clam chowder, hot sourdough bread, and the teriyaki tips of filet mignon were superb. (Thanks again DeeAnne) Later in the early evening, was a special presentation called "MAX Sneaks" in which Adobe software engineers had the opportunity to show the latest product developments they were working on. It's always a very popular event and a highlight of the conference. As I walked into the huge hall, more than a dozen bars were set up in the back, serving complimentary beer and wine! The special guest for the event was actor Jordan Peele, a very funny guy who did amazing imitations of Barak Obama, Forrest Whittaker, and Iced T. The software demonstrations were nothing short of incredible and an amazing peek into the future of technology. Soon it was time for the MAX Bash party, and thousands of attendees made their way to the park where there were lots of bars and food stations everywhere, even including several food trucks. (I had a fantastic chicken shawarma from the "Middle Feast"




food truck – they were last year's winner in the Great Food Truck Race on the Food Channel) All of the trees in the park were up-lighted in beautiful colors, and the "hanging sculpture" was stunning, brilliantly lighted beneath the night sky. Later in the evening, I watched the band "Alabama Shakes" as they performed on the stage of the San Diego Pops Orchestra. But when the sound got too loud, I retreated to a quiet corner of the park, where I happened to run into the manager of the conference, with whom I had attended several meetings of the Los Angeles Convention Center Advisory Board. I complimented her on the success of the conference. The following day, I rode the train back home and reflected upon some of the things I had learned at the conference that I'll put to use in my real estate photography.

Thanks giving Day soon arrived and I spent it at home with the cats, since Leslie was in North Carolina with her friend Mary Duke. I decided to prepare a full, traditional Thanksgiving dinner, even though I knew I would be the only one at the

table – the cats had no interest in the turkey or stuffing. Along with the pumpkin pie and pecan pie I baked the day before, it was a wonderful feast, which provided left-overs for several days after.

At the end of November, I drove down to San Diego for the annual PCMA Southwest & Pacific Chapter Board of Directors Retreat. Kevin had generously arranged for all of us to stay at the newly renovated and historic US Grant Hotel. The hotel was built in the early 1900's by the son of president Ulysses S. Grant and named in his honor. When it opened in 1910, it had two large swimming pools and an elegant ballroom on the top floor. The hotel's signature restaurant, the Grant Grill, opened in 1952 and quickly became the power spot for lunch downtown, so much so, that ladies were not permitted in the restaurant until after 3pm. In 1969, a group of prominent local women staged a sit-in, resulting in the restaurant abandoning its men-only policy. A particularly fascinating fact about the hotel is that it was the site of the first "San Diego Comic-Con International" event in 1970. Today the hotel is owned by the Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation, and operated by the Starwood Hotels and Resorts. Among the hotel's famous guests have been Albert Einstein, Charles Lindbergh, Woodrow Wilson, and 12 other US presidents. The lobby of the hotel is furnished in beautiful white marble and rich, dark hardwood, making for a truly grand entrance. I found my room, one that was recently remodeled, was beautiful and elegant – having retained the classic design elements while discarding the "dowdy" feeling of the past. That evening I joined my fellow board members for a nice reception hosted by the Westin Gaslamp Hotel across the street, followed by a lovely dinner in the Pinzimini Restaurant, also hosted by the hotel. Each dinner course was introduced by the restaurant manager and paired with an appropriate wine. First came a wild mushroom bisque with shitake crisps, followed by a wild baby arugula salad with cured tomato, truffle pecorino cheese, pignolias (Mediterranean pine nuts), and white balsamic vinaigrette. The main course was a combination of two dishes, the first a pan seared Corvina served with saffron citrus risotto, micro cilantro, and pomegranate beurre glaze. The second dish was an open fire grilled rib eye steak accompanied by roasted marble potatoes, grilled asparagus and red wine demi-glace. And if that wasn't enough of a spectacular culinary experience, a "duo" of classic Tiramisu and passion fruit Opera cake took it over the top! (Thanks very much Kevin) We spent the next day and a half in discussions about the program and challenges for next year, while continuing to enjoy the amazing food presented by the hotel. There was a hot breakfast buffet of smoked chicken and artichoke omelets with mornaise sauce, home fried potatoes and sautéed onions, and a delicious bowl of traditional Irish oatmeal with butter sautéed



bananas on top. And even the afternoon breaks were amazing, with dishes like lemon grass chicken pot-stickers served in small bamboo bowls on a steam table, and "smores on a stick". We enjoyed a most successful board retreat that will be very difficult to top. The only downside came on the morning I checked out of the hotel, when one of the valet staff had left the lights on in my jeep, rendering it unable to be started. But the staff went about getting a tow truck to jump the battery and get me on my way, after they apologized many times. I took the back roads through the lovely San Diego County mountains, and along the way, I stopped for a beer at the Warner Springs Ranch Bar & Grill. As I sat outside in the warm sunshine, along with a group of golfers, I had a beautiful view of the golf course and the entire Warner Valley. It was a great way to end the trip.

So that brings us to the week before Christmas, and my sister Lynn, will once again join us for the holiday. I've planned a trip to Paso Robles and a tour of the wine country. We'll Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo, which is one of the when we return home, we'll open gifts around the dinner, and we'll share the joys of the season. Hoping a Happy New Year!



take the Coast Starlight train up the coast through most scenic railroad routes in the country. And Christmas tree, I'll prepare a traditional Christmas that all of you will also enjoy the holidays and have

Photo Gallery



Tonapah & Las Vegas Railroad Station – Rhyolite



Glass Bottle House – Rhyolite



Glass Bottles



The Last Supper – Rhyolite



Ash Meadows NWR



Bullfrog Hills Cemetery – Rhyolite



Ash Meadows NWR



Badwater Basin – Death Valley



Amargosa Hotel



Historical Museum – Beatty, Nevada



Beatty Museum



Panamint Valley



Cabot's Museum



Cabot's Museum



Cabot's Museum



Cabot's Museum



Desert Hot Springs – San Jacinto Mountains



Date Museum – Indio



Coachella Valley Museum – Indio



Borrego Springs



Wildflower – Borrego Springs



Casa del Zorro Resort – Borrego Springs



Casa del Zorro Resort



Garner Valley



San Felipe Valley



Juan Bautista de Anza Expedition Monument



Abandoned Boat – Salton Sea



Folding Chairs in the Salton Sea



Bombay Beach – Salton Sea



Workman-Temple Homestead – City of Industry



La Casa Neuvo



La Casa Neuvo



Locomotive Air Horns – Fullerton



Model Railroads – Fullerton



St Mary's University – Los Angeles

USC Campus





USC Campus



Expo Park – Los Angeles



University of San Diego



Science Center – Los Angeles



Los Angeles Zoo



The Venetian Hotel – Las Vegas



Delta King – Sacramento



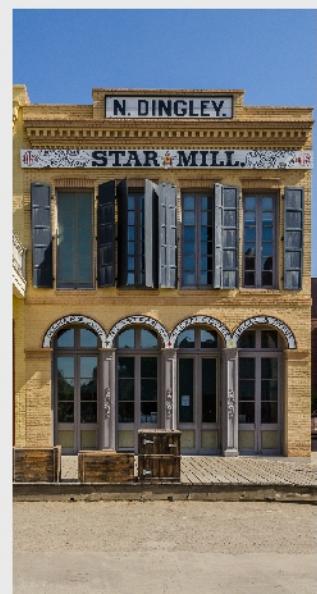
The Delta King – Entrance to the Bar



Old Town Sacramento



California State Railroad Museum



Old Town Sacramento



Old Town Sacramento



Old Town Sacramento



California State Railroad Museum



California State Railroad Museum



California State Railroad Museum



Dining Car – California State Railroad Museum



Sleeping Car – California State Railroad Museum



Crocker Art Museum – Sacramento



State Capitol – Sacramento



Cabernet Grapes – South Coast Winery



Villa – South Coast Winery Resort & Spa



Fall Foliage – Alaska



Potter's Marsh – Anchorage



Trumpeter Swans – Potter's Marsh



View of Anchorage from Earthquake Park



Anchorage, Alaska



Lake Hood – Lakefront Hotel – Chugach Mountains



Coyote – Alaska Zoo