

CHRISTMAS 2018



Dear Friends and Family,

Once again, the time of year has come when memories of holidays surround us, and I have the opportunity to write my Christmas Letter. It's something I always look forward to, and this year is no exception. The lights are up, the tree is decorated, shopping has begun, and there's snow on the mountains! Most of my travels this year have been around southern California and the Southwest, along with a couple of trips up to the Pacific Northwest and back East. A lot of my time this year was spent doing real estate photography, which kept me quite busy as the economy flourished and the housing market picked up significantly. I have included a few stories from some of my most unique real estate photo shoots, but the majority of my letter focuses on personal travel. Last Christmas, my sister Lynn joined us again for a welcome escape



Temecula Wine Country

from the winter weather of the Midwest. For a few days before Christmas, I planned a trip to San Diego, a favorite destination for all of us. We began the trip with a delicious lunch in the Temecula Wine Country at the Wild Rose Restaurant in the South Coast Winery. Leslie and I split a half bottle of their award winning "Wild Horse Peak Meritage", while Lynn and I enjoyed the California Clam Chowder. The drive through the Temecula Valley provided us with beautiful views of rolling hills covered in large vineyards under warm, sunny skies. Leaving Temecula, we headed west to deliver one of Leslie's

Christmas gift baskets in San Marcos.

From there it was a lovely drive on the winding country roads of North San Diego County, through Rancho Santa Fe, and eventually to Interstate 5 for the short drive to downtown San Diego. We checked in to the Manchester Grand Hyatt, and our rooms on the 27th floor gave us a great view overlooking San Diego Bay. As dinner time rolled around, we walked along the waterfront to one of my favorite restaurants, the "Top of the Market". I suggested sitting at the bar where we could watch the chefs preparing all the dishes. Dinner began with one of the chefs serving us a delicious appetizer of grilled shrimp and pork belly. (he made a "special" version for Leslie, as she can't eat shrimp) Then Lynn and I split an order of Pacific scallops sautéed in capers and onions, while Leslie enjoyed delicious fried Brussel sprouts with bacon. The Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand



Manchester Grand Hyatt lobby



Grand Hyatt

paired very well with dinner. We finished dinner with a special dessert "trio" of Key Lime pie, apricot and Greek yogurt parfait topped with pistachios, and a peach cobbler cheesecake. None of us left the restaurant hungry that evening! Returning to the hotel, we finished the evening with a drink in the "Top of the Hyatt" lounge on the 42nd floor, where we had a spectacular view of San Diego Bay, Point Loma, and the lights along the waterfront. In the meantime, we were surrounded by Michigan State fans whose team would later be playing Washington State in the Holiday Bowl game. As Lynn and Leslie headed to their room, I walked across the street to "Kansas City BBQ" for a beer at the bar. Two old locals were engaged in a game that involved spinning a small top on the bar to see who would buy the next round – but neither of them really needed another drink by that time of night!

The next day began early with a huge breakfast sandwich of ham, two eggs, and Swiss cheese on a

croissant from the Hyatt Hotel deli. Then we drove up to the University of San Diego campus, located on a high mesa overlooking Mission Valley and the San Diego River. Being that it was Christmas break, there were very few people on campus as we walked around under warm, sunny skies. As we entered the beautiful, old "Immaculata Cathedral", it was being decorated for Christmas Eve Mass. The campus is one of the most beautiful in the country, with all the buildings being designed in the traditional Spanish style. We spent time taking a leisurely walk around the campus before heading down the hill to Old Town State Historical Park, where San Diego began almost 250 years ago, as one of the early



Immaculata Cathedral - USD campus



Main Street - Old Town State Historical Park

Spanish settlements along the "Camino Real" (The Royal Road) connecting old Spanish missions in California. While Lynn and Leslie toured some of the historic sights, I spent time photographing "La Casa de Estudillo", one of the largest adobe buildings from the early 1800's, which has been faithfully restored by the State Parks Department and turned into a wonderful museum that preserves the history of early Spanish/Mexican families in California. Then I went to the historic Barra Barra Saloon for a cold Dos XX's beer, before meeting up with Lynn and Leslie. We took a



Barra Barra Saloon

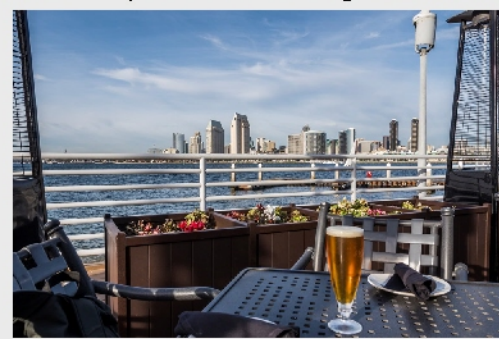
short tour of the gorgeous old Victorian homes of San Diego that had been moved to nearby Heritage Park. Some of the old homes can even be reserved for overnight accommodations and events, such as weddings. Then it was back to the hotel for some rest for Lynn and Leslie, while I took a long walk along the



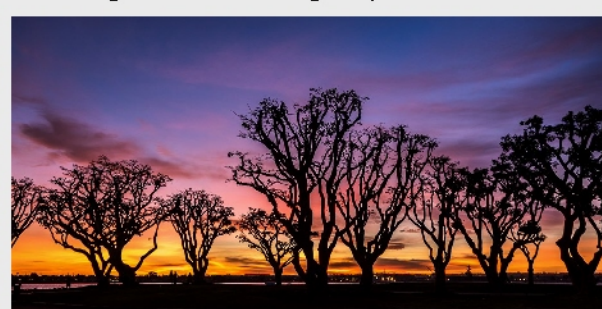
Victorian home - Heritage Park

waterfront. Near the Marriott Hotel, several huge yachts were docked, including one owned by Beyonce. (it wasn't clear whether or not she was aboard however) After taking photos of the yachts, I boarded the small ferry for a short ride across the bay to Coronado Island. As I sat outside on the terrace at "Peohe's Restaurant" with a cold pint of local Coronado Brewing Company IPA in hand, I had a spectacular view of the downtown San Diego skyline. Meanwhile, all manner of boats sailed by – everything from small sailboats and powerboats to huge container

ships and large Navy vessels. Sitting in the warm sunshine was so peaceful and relaxing, I almost didn't want to return to downtown. Upon arriving in downtown, I walked through the collection of unique shops in Seaport Village, the former site of the US Navy Recruiting Depot. As I walked past the courtyard, I spotted an incredibly long line of parents, children and strollers, all patiently waiting to have photos taken with Santa! Then I stopped at "Upstart Crow", a very unique and eclectic bookstore/coffee shop, for a café latte, and sat outside watching families heading for photos with Santa. Before returning to the hotel to



San Diego skyline from Coronado Island



meet up with Lynn and Leslie, I went to the bar in the Harbor House Restaurant for a Saint Archer Pale Ale. As I sat outside on the deck watching a gorgeous sunset unfolding across the bay, a flock of brown Pelicans slowly glided across the water. I took many photos in an attempt to try and capture the brilliant colors that were continually changing and becoming ever more incredible! Later, we all joined my dear friend Dawn for dinner at "Seasons 52" in

the Old San Diego Police Headquarters complex across the street from the Hyatt. The complex lay abandoned for many years before being renovated into a collection of boutique shops and restaurants. The developers even preserved several old cell blocks in the former jail, as a small police museum. For dinner, we shared a fantastic lobster flatbread and an excellent New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. Seasons 52 is renowned for serving dishes made only from very fresh ingredients of each season of the year, and we enjoyed every minute of the dinner experience. Later in the evening, I returned to Kansas City BBQ to join the locals at the bar. While I was “soaking up the atmosphere”, three young German tourists sat down at the bar, and then began taking “selfies” around the large “Top Gun” poster of Tom Cruise and Kelly McGillis next to the piano that was featured in the movie. To say that Kansas City BBQ has benefited greatly from the fame of the film would be an understatement!



San Pasqual Battlefield State Historic Park

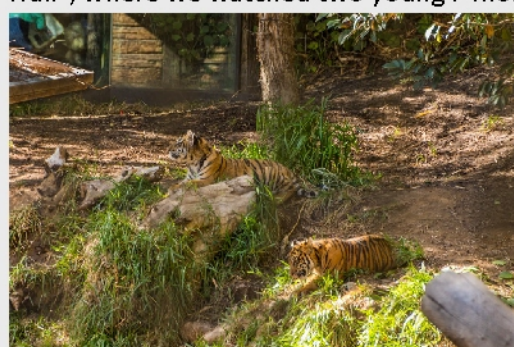
The next day, we departed San Diego and drove north to the San Diego Zoo Safari Park. But before entering the park, I introduced Lynn and Leslie to the historic San Pasqual Battlefield State Historic Park nearby. We arrived just as the museum opened, and as we were the only visitors, we had the full attention of the local museum host. He was fantastic in telling us a lot of the history of the battlefield, as well as the story of how California got its name. (the word California derives from the name of an ancient Spanish queen named “Calipha”) Our

host gave us a very detailed description of the “Battle of San Pasqual”, as he pointed out several paintings depicting events of the battle between US troops under the command of General Kearny and forces of the Mexican government. The two-day battle was the last battle of the Mexican-American War in February of 1848. We all left with an appreciation for a little-known piece of American

history! Then we drove a mile back down the highway to the Safari Park, where we spent a couple of hours exploring some of the more recent new exhibits, all while enjoying the warm sunny weather. Among the newest exhibits was the “Tiger Trail”, where we watched two young 7 month-old tiger cubs romp and play in the jungle enclosure. Later, two large male



“Tiger Trail”- Safari Park



Young Tiger cubs

tigers came out as the two cubs went back into their den. While the enclosure was designed to be as natural an environment for the tigers as possible, it still incorporated several opportunities to view the tigers up close, something which was almost impossible in the old enclosure. As I walked around the park, I noticed many Asian, Indian, and Middle Eastern families enjoying the park. All too soon, it was time to head back home, where I fixed grilled salmon and chicken with Caribbean rice and Caesar salad for dinner. That evening, as we sat around the table, we all agreed it had been a wonderful trip, and we looked

forward to celebrating Christmas Day tomorrow!

In mid-January, I made a trip to Borrego Springs to attend the local film festival. I decided to take the “scenic route” through the small mountain village of Idyllwild and the beautiful Garner Valley in the San Jacinto Mountains. The sky was clear, and the views of the mountains were gorgeous, with winter snow remaining in many places. After a couple of hours, hunger overtook me, and I stopped at the “Paradise Valley Café” for a late breakfast. The café was very busy with several groups of bikers and campers, but I found a seat at the counter. Breakfast was a huge plate of chicken fried steak smothered in sausage gravy, three eggs, hash browns, and sourdough toast! It would keep me going for the rest of the day. Further down the road, through Anza Valley, which was settled in the late 1700’s, I came to the tiny hamlet of Oak Grove, once a major stop on the historic Butterfield Overland Stage route from St Louis to San Francisco in the late 1800’s. The old log cabin station is now a museum, but I have yet to find it open, despite the large “open” sign posted outside! Later, beyond Warner



San Felipe Bar

Springs Ranch, I came to the “San Felipe Bar”, which at one time was the center of a small settlement by the same name. When I stopped at the bar, I found that I was only the second customer, joining an old man sitting at the outside bar. The bartender/owner had to turn on the lights inside in order to get a “Bud” for me – he asked, “leaded or unleaded”? (Bud or Bud Light!) No craft beer served here! As I sat outside, I could hear the sound of a football game – but there was no TV in sight. About 10 minutes later, a large motorcycle group pulled in, mostly



older folks on brand new Harleys. One guy on a beautiful new Harley trike, grabbed a cane as he got off his bike. Then it was Bud and Bud Light all around as they “bellied up to the bar”. Meanwhile, large pickup trucks hauling huge RV trailers and ATV’s were heading west on the highway next to the bar. In talking to the bartender/owner, I found out that one of the old buildings next to the bar had been the old post office and still had the name of the village on a sign above it, though it was very faded after so many years. So, at that point, I realized, as I sat at the bar, I was sitting in the center of “downtown old San Felipe”! Finally, I came to Borrego Springs and checked in to a nice king suite at the Borrego Springs Resort, a favorite of mine. I had a bit of



Borrego Springs Resort

difficulty finding the venue for the film festival downtown, but I managed to arrive only a few minutes late. There were two films of special note. A short film called “The Jar” – a rather sad story about the young son of an alcoholic father, who saved pennies in a jar for a year to attend “space school”. (the “school” was a myth invented by his father to try and satisfy his son’s dream to become an astronaut) The boy had a toy space helmet that he wore much of the time, sort of like a “security blanket”, to shield himself from the real world around him. Eventually, his father lost his job and broke into the jar to pay for his drinking habit. The film closed with the young boy in his space helmet “dreaming” that he was travelling to

the moon and the stars beyond. It was a beautiful, emotional film, and there were few dry eyes at the end! A remarkable short film shot in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The second film, titled “Cold Water”, was a full-length story about a dysfunctional family having to deal with the loss of their family cabin in the Colorado mountains after their father/husband died. The most unique and unusual aspect of the film was the fact that the actors and director were actually the real family members, and the story was true! The film was very emotional, and at times, difficult to watch, but it was beautifully produced and ended on a positive note, followed by two wonderful songs during the credits. At the end of the film, the family came on stage to interact with the audience – it was fascinating as they answered questions. As I left the theater, I had a strong desire to watch it again someday. After the conclusion of the film, I returned to Borrego Springs Resort and had a beer in the Arches Bar overlooking the golf course, with the Santa Rosa Mountains in the background. As evening approached, I headed downtown for dinner at Carlee’s, my favorite restaurant in town. The bartender recognized me from past times and highly recommended the “jumbo scallops with pesto sauce over fettucine”. It was fantastic, with lots of large scallops, as well as bell peppers and green onions on top. The dish was so huge, I ended up taking half of it back to my hotel room. It was a nice quiet evening as I watched the newest episode of “Worst Cooks in America” on the Food Network.

The next morning, I went to the State Park Visitor Center and purchased a



Sunset view from the Arches bar

book about the best hiking trails in San Diego County. Then I hiked 3 miles up the Palm Canyon trail under clear skies and 70 degree weather. The stream flowing down the rocky canyon was full of water as I approached the oasis of palm trees near the top of the steep, narrow ravine. Along the way I passed a lot of old dead palm trees scattered beside the stream. Apparently, it was the result of a huge flash flood in the winter of 2004, which also destroyed part of the campground at the bottom of the canyon. Since then, the State Parks staff has improved the campground to include new RV hookups. Luckily, the historic old rustic picnic shelters of stone, built by the CCC in the 1930's, were not affected by the flood. Upon my return to town, I picked up a cup of coffee and a delicious ham, egg, and cheese puff pastry at "Calico's Café", before heading west up the Laguna Mountains to the small mining town of Julian. On the way, I stopped to take a short hike up the William Kenyon Overlook Trail, where I had a beautiful view of the entire San Felipe Valley. Upon reaching Julian, I made a stop at the Nickel Brewing Company for a cold brew, before continuing to Warner Springs Ranch and eventually home. While the Borrego Springs Film Festival will never compete with Cannes, it was unique, charming, and alive with a passionate local audience!



Palm Canyon - Anza Borrego Desert State Park



Rocket ready to launch

At the beginning of February, I attended a 3-day photography workshop in Zion National Park. I took the scenic Mojave Desert back roads again through 29 Palms and Kelso to Nipton, before joining I-15 toward Las Vegas. As I drove old route 66 east of Amboy, I came upon a group setting up a small rocket for launching from a truck. So, I stopped to ask them when they would be launching the rocket. I was told it would be at noon the following day, and that it should reach an altitude of 5000 feet before landing (crashing) about 2 miles down range, on BLM land, from which they had a permit. Later, on I-15, I took the exit for St. Rose Parkway to I-215 east and then Lake

Mead Parkway to avoid downtown Las Vegas. The route turned out to be a very nice, scenic drive through the Lake Mead National Recreation Area. North of Las Vegas I joined I-15 again and drove northeast to the corner of Nevada, Arizona, and Utah, through the spectacular Virgin River Gorge! North of St. George, Utah I turned east on to SR 9 to the small mountain town of Springdale – the "Gateway to Zion". Along the way, there were gorgeous, late afternoon views of the spectacular, bright red cliffs in Hurricane Valley. Finally, as I approached the edge of Springdale, I was greeted by a large sign that read, "road work ahead – expect long delays"! It turned out to be a gross understatement! There was alternating one-way traffic for virtually the entire length of Main Street. The traffic was absolutely chaotic, with NO flagmen in sight. Local traffic often met a long line of oncoming traffic and forced to back up to allow any cars to move! (a real nightmare – the street having been torn up and in a terrible mess) After what seemed like an eternity, I finally got to the "Best Western Plus Zion Canyon Inn" – a very nice, new hotel at the foot of gorgeous red rock cliffs. After checking in, I headed downtown in search of a place for dinner. Rather than fighting the traffic on Main Street again, I decided to walk along the edge of the torn-up street, in the dark, as there were virtually no street lights operating. I found it very difficult to see where I was walking, and at one point I almost stepped into a 6-foot deep trench!! But finally, I arrived at "Switchback Jack's Sports Bar and Grill". Being a Friday evening, it was very crowded, however, I was lucky enough to spot a seat at the bar. The bartender recommended the hickory smoked burger topped with aged cheddar cheese and a giant onion ring, along with a huge plate of fries. It was delicious, but there was enough to feed a family! The cold pint of locally brewed "Jack's IPA" went very well with dinner. My return trip to the hotel was much better, knowing where the "hazards" were. I finished the



Best Western Plus Zion Canyon Inn



View from Canyon Overlook

evening sitting on my balcony under a beautiful, clear night sky filled with billions of stars! The following morning, I joined the rest of the group, and carpooled with a guy named Carl into the national park. (Carl was a nice enough guy, but a bit strange – not focused most of the time!) As we entered the park and drove up to the high plateau at 7,000 feet elevation, the air was freezing. We met up with the group and our workshop leader, Bob, who briefed us on what we would be looking for, specifically, Big Horn Sheep. (in addition, of course, to the spectacular canyons and rock formations, for which Zion is so famous) As the group dispersed, I decided to hike up the “Canyon Overlook Trail” to a viewpoint where there was an absolutely incredible view of Zion Canyon from the edge of a 5000-foot vertical cliff! (a visit to Zion National Park should definitely include a hike to this viewpoint) The trail was very narrow, with some significant drop-offs of more than 1000 feet! (definitely not for the faint of heart!) After returning to meet up with Carl, we joined Bob and his wife who were parked at a place where they had spotted a small band of Big Horn Sheep, all mature rams, two of which had full curls. We had some incredible views of the sheep, and stayed for

almost two hours, photographing and watching their movement. After many great shots, the band moved on, over the ridge and out of sight, but not before we were rewarded with the sight of them standing on top of the ridge, framed against the sky in the background. Soon it was time to head back to Springdale, and along the way, we had some gorgeous views of Zion Canyon from the valley floor, including the amazing mountain highway tunnel carved into the steep rock face. Then, as Carl waited with the long line of traffic exiting the park, I decided to “walk” back into town. That evening, I joined the group for dinner at the “Bit and Spur Saloon”, where I enjoyed delicious Carne Asada skirt steak fajitas and an IPA from Squatter’s



Desert Big Horn Sheep

Brewery of Salt Lake City. Over dinner, we chatted about the amazing photo opportunities we had experienced that day. I ended the evening sitting with a beer on my balcony, staring at the incredible array of stars in the night sky! Early the next morning, our workshop group met up at the Riverside Trailhead inside the park. As we gathered outside along the banks of the North Fork of the Virgin River, the early morning air was freezing, and the wind coming down the canyon made it feel even colder! A lot of us began to wonder why Bob had chosen this spot for a Q&A session, and not a warm conference room back in the lodge? But one point in favor of the outdoor location was spotting wildlife, including a 6 point Mule Deer buck less than 30 feet away, as well as a flock of Wild Turkeys! After the session, some of us hiked up the trail to “the narrows”, a spectacular place where the sheer cliffs rose over a thousand feet or more above the river. To proceed beyond that point required a special “dry suit”, since the trail was literally the river itself, sometimes chest deep! A few adventurous hikers outfitted in dry suits passed by us on their way up the trail/river. There were many beautiful photo ops along the trail, especially as the morning sun rose higher in the sky, illuminating the brilliant red and yellow cliffs, as well as the valley floor.



Along the Riverside Trail

Later in the morning, I returned to the hotel in Springdale, picked up my bags and checked out.

Then I headed down the road toward Las Vegas, where I had booked a room for the night, before continuing on the next day to Palm Springs for a real estate photo shoot. On the way to Las Vegas, I drove through the spectacular Virgin River Gorge again, where I made a stop for lunch at a BLM picnic area beside the river. Sitting under the warm sun, eating my leftover Carne Asada fajitas,

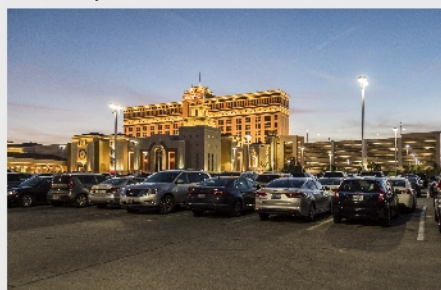


was very peaceful and relaxing. Later, just before approaching Las Vegas, I paid a short visit to the “Valley of Fire State Park”, an amazing area of ancient red sand dunes millions of years old that had been petrified and eroded into long, jagged, colorful ridges protruding from the surrounding desert! It is truly a remarkable and beautiful landscape. Following Lake Mead Parkway, I came to “South Point Hotel and Casino”, where I



Valley of Fire State Park

checked in to a spacious king suite, with a view of the tall hotel spires of the “Strip” in the distance. As I went down to the crowded lobby bar, I had arrived just in time for the second half of the Superbowl, and a very loud, enthusiastic group of Philadelphia fans! (even if you were not a die-hard football fan, it was impossible not to get caught up in the passion and fervor of the moment – it was “infectious”) Following the Philadelphia victory, hunger caught up with me and I sought a dinner recommendation from the bartender. He



was quick to rave about his favorite, a “lobster grilled cheese sandwich” and homemade potato chips at the “Oyster Bar” in the casino – and he was absolutely on point! (it was fabulous) The following morning, I packed up and headed south through the Mojave Desert to Palm Springs. Along the way, I stopped at historic “Roy’s Café” on old Route 66 in the tiny town of Amboy, now virtually deserted. As I ordered a cup of coffee to go, one of the very few things available, I noticed several handwritten signs posted on the wall, including:

- “No fresh water in town, only salt water” (with the exception of bottled water)
- “Bridge out – expected to reopen mid-1918” (the sign was in reference to a detour on old Route 66 – but it was a “century” out of date!)
- “Motel is now open only for filming”



Roy's Café - old Route 66

Finally, I reached Palm Springs and completed my photo shoot. Later, as I returned home, I would come to experience first hand the extreme volatility of the stock market!

- Monday – Dow dropped 1175 points
- Tuesday – Dow back up 567 points
- Thursday – Dow dropped 1023 points
- Friday – Dow back up 350 points

(the bottom line for the week – the Dow was down 1281 points, erasing all the gains for 2017!)

Later in February, I made a trip to Long Beach to attend the annual “Scottish Highland Games”. I travelled on the MetroLink train from Riverside to LA Union Station, then the LA Metro Blue Line train to Long Beach, where I boarded the free “Passport Bus” to the Queen Mary. Unfortunately, during the short ride to the Queen Mary, there was a very abusive woman on board, with her little “service dog”, and she began banging on the exit door to get out, as she cursed the bus driver for not stopping in the middle of the street! I suspect she was mentally unstable, but eventually she was dropped off at the next bus stop – thankfully! After arriving at the Queen Mary, I checked in to a nice deluxe stateroom that at one time was a First-Class cabin when the historic ship made her many crossings of the Atlantic between New York and Southampton. Having settled into my stateroom, I proceeded down to watch the games in the park next to the ship. There was a large crowd by this time and long lines for the food vendors, so having a VIP ticket, I was invited to “Nessie’s Nest VIP Lounge”, where I used one of my complimentary drink tickets for a pint of Guinness. As I sat



Scottish Highland Games - Long Beach

in the large tent, I watched the athletes compete in the traditional highland games, like “putting the stone” (the forerunner of modern shotput), the hammer throw, and of course, the Caber Toss. The weather was beautiful – warm and sunny! Later in the afternoon, the lines for the food stalls thinned out and I was able to get a tasty Shepard’s Pie in short order. Then I met up with Tracey and Andy to introduce them to their first highland games, and to explain some of the rules for the competition. We also watched a fascinating demonstration of herding sheep with specially trained sheep dogs that responded to whistles from the sheep herder to give them directions. Later,



Tracey & Andy



Darts competition

aboard the Queen Mary, we watched a very popular pub sport in Scotland and England – darts competition. As evening approached, we shared dinner aboard the ship in the “Chelsea Chowder House”. The clam chowder was superb, as well as the shrimp scampi, along with a glass of Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand. After having enjoyed dinner and conversation aboard the old ship, Tracey and Andy said farewell and headed back home in Long Beach. I finished the evening in the classic Art Deco “Observation Lounge”, along with many of the day’s competitors. During her days sailing the world’s oceans, the Queen Mary’s Observation Lounge was the exclusive enclave for First-Class passengers. The beautiful décor of that era has been wonderfully preserved. That evening, pints of

Guinness and shots of single malt whiskey flowed freely, well into the night! The next morning, before the games resumed, I took a long walk along the shore of the bay to a small park, where I had beautiful views of downtown Long Beach across the water. Along one part of the shoreline, there was a hangout for cats and fishermen, but while the cats were obviously being well fed, I never saw any fish being caught. Returning to the games, I sat in the VIP tent and watched the competition as I sipped a pint of Guinness. The day continued to be sunny and warm throughout the games, and as the afternoon progressed, and the closing ceremony concluded, it was time to make my return to LA and the train back to



Downtown Long Beach skyline

Riverside. Waiting at the Queen Mary bus stop, I watched several Uber and Lyft rides come by to pick up their riders. Incredibly, one group of 8 people “packed” themselves into a 5 passenger SUV! As I watched them trying to squeeze into the vehicle, I could only hope they didn’t have far to go! Finally, the bus arrived, and it too was crowded, so I decided to get off at the first stop downtown, the Hyatt Hotel/Convention Center. As I walked past the Convention Center, there was a very weird display of strange, futuristic cars parked outside. Perhaps a “back to the future” convention? Then I boarded the Metro Blue Line train to LA Union Station. With an hour before the departure of the train to Riverside, I sat down in the



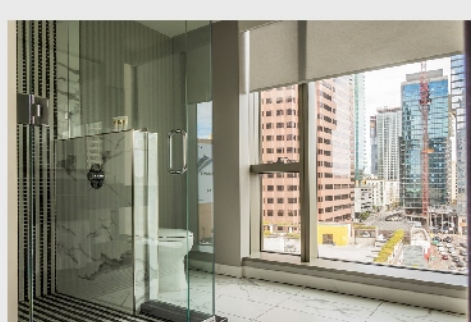
MPIOC Awards Dinner

Traxx bar for a beer. Before boarding the train, I picked up a Café Americano from Starbucks to accompany me on the return home. This trip had been my third time to attend the Scottish Highland Games, and it would certainly not be my last!

Later in the month, I went to Anaheim to attend the annual awards dinner of the Meeting Professionals International Orange County chapter (MPIOC). The event was held at the historic “City National Grove”, a classic venue for concerts and special events. I took the MetroLink train to the city of Orange and then the Amtrak train to Anaheim. The weather was sunny and warm, as it had been for most of the “winter” in southern California. From the Anaheim train station, I walked two blocks to the Ayres Hotel and checked in to a nice room, complete with a frig and microwave. Then I changed into more formal attire and walked next door, through the empty Angel’s stadium parking lot, to the City National Grove. As soon as I picked up my name badge, I ran into Carlos, from the time he hosted

our PCMA Board Retreat at the Morongo Casino. In our conversation, I found out he was now with Caesar's Entertainment at Harrah's Rincon Casino near San Diego. (people in the hospitality industry routinely and frequently change jobs on a regular basis) Just before the cocktail reception came to a close, I ran into my friend Michael, now the president of the Ontario Convention Center and Visitor's Bureau. It's always a pleasure and fun time to catch up with his latest challenges of being a parent to adopted children. He brought me up to date on his growing family, having recently adopted a third child, together with his companion. He's such a proud and devoted father! Before the call to dinner, I took a quick look in the "Crystal Lounge", a VIP room filled with photos of many world-famous musical artists who have performed at the City National Grove over the past five decades. Then it was time to head inside to the main hall for dinner, and I was seated at a table that turned out to be dominated by a guy named Owen. He kept dropping names of famous people, as if he ran in their circle of friends! It became very tiresome, until finally, three attractive young ladies joined our table and engaged in a very lively discussion about the changing scene of entertainment. (they all worked for MGM Entertainment, and had come to hear the featured presentation by Michael Dominquez, Vice-President of MGM and their boss!) As dinner was served, the executive chef introduced the menu for the evening, all classic dishes inspired by famed French chef Julia Childs, using only local organic foods from California. The dishes included organic field greens with goat cheese au gratin and champagne vinaigrette, Julia Child's original recipe for beef bourguignon, and an Apple Tarte Tatin, topped with clotted cream for dessert! It was a decadent meal, and each course was paired with a classic French wine. What really made the dinner special was the excellent professional service by the catering staff. Following dinner, Michael Dominquez gave an excellent presentation about the "State of the Hospitality Industry", which included some very enlightening comments on the trends of "Millennials" that ran counter to conventional thinking. At the close of the awards ceremony, I walked across the street to "JT Schmidt's Brewpub" for a pint of their IPA. The bar was surrounded by big screen TV's tuned to a number of different sports channels. There was the Lakers vs the Suns basketball, Kings vs Oilers hockey, and the Winter Olympics Curling championship between the USA and Russia. Ironically, as I looked around the bar, the majority of people were watching the Curling competition and fascinated by it, but completely clueless of the strategy or scoring of the sport! I ended the evening back in my hotel room watching a very emotional documentary about the Space Shuttle Challenger tragedy. The next morning, after a great breakfast in the hotel, I walked to the Anaheim station to board the MetroLink train to Riverside and arrived home around mid-afternoon.

A couple of weeks later, I received a last-minute invitation to attend the "Hospitality Uncorked" event at the JW Marriott Hotel in "LA Live" downtown, as a guest of the LA Convention and Visitors Bureau. A complimentary room awaited me at the new Indigo Hotel nearby, and when I checked in to the room, I found it to be very modern and quite "trendy". But there was also a very "unique" feature I hadn't seen anywhere else. The spacious bathroom was covered with gorgeous white marble, with a large glass enclosed walk-in shower – very nice. However, the most unusual and unexpected aspect of the bathroom was the floor to ceiling windows overlooking downtown! (the windows also had translucent pull-down shades for some privacy)



Bathroom - Indigo Hotel

When I went down to the lobby bar, there were two very tall racks of old Fedora hats, which fit right in with the rest of the décor, giving one the feeling of being in the era of the 1920's. Later, I changed clothes and met up with my host for the evening, Theresa. The event was very well attended, and we were seated at the LA Convention Center table, labelled as 39th St, since the theme for the evening was New York City in the 1930's. Before dinner there was a live auction of mostly upscale luxury travel opportunities. The bids ranged from \$4,000 up to \$12,000! (certainly out of my league) But the bidding was fun to watch. Then dinner began with "truffle-cauliflower custard topped with caviar" served in an egg shell! It was followed by a delicious, traditional Waldorf salad, and a main course of "Steak Delmonico", along with baked potato au gratin, wilted garlic spinach and charred heirloom tomatoes. Then a large selection of



New York sweets and confections concluded dinner in grand fashion! And to make the dinner really special, each course was introduced by the executive chef and paired with a fine wine by the sommelier! After dinner, we all moved the ballroom next door to "Club 54" for drinks and some amazing entertainment that included scenes from top Broadway plays, "Hamilton" and "Wicked". They were followed by a musical tribute to the "Jersey Boys", which got a lot of people on their feet and dancing up a storm. Meanwhile, a quartet in the lobby played some great 1920's jazz. Needless to say, it was a wonderful and enjoyable evening! The next morning, I rode the train back to Riverside and then drove to Palm Springs to meet up with old friends and colleagues who were



Jazz Quartet - Hospitality Uncorked



Renaissance Hotel - Palm Springs

attending the Esri Business Partner Conference. Fortunately, I was able to book a room in the Renaissance Hotel at the Esri employee rate. The hotel had recently renovated all of the sleeping rooms, as well as the lobby and bar, to create an elegant atmosphere. Later in the afternoon, I met up with my old colleague Myles for a beer in the lobby bar, before we walked over to "Johannes German Restaurant " for dinner that evening. There we each had a delicious, very authentic Wiener Schnitzel, Apfel Strudel, and Bitburger beer. After dinner, we went up the street to a local pub named "Hair of the Dog" for another round of beers.

Then it was time to head back to the hotel, where I met up with several more old friends in the lobby bar. We caught up on what had happened since last we met during the User Conference in San Diego last summer. The following morning, I drove up to the Whitewater Nature Reserve to hike around under beautiful, clear blue skies. Due to the very dry winter, the Whitewater River was at a very low level. After taking many photos of the small lake beside the Ranger Station and Visitor Center, I headed home to prepare for several photo shoots I had scheduled during the week.



Whitewater Nature Reserve



In mid-March, I went to the annual "Iron Horse Steampunk Festival" at the Orange Empire Railway Museum (OREM) in Perris. This year was even more popular than last year, with more people dressed in old Victorian clothes that were "accented" with weird things from classic Sci-Fi and Fantasy movies. The promotional flyer for the event described it as, *"The pop culture genre characterized by many elements of science fiction and fantasy, intertwined with hardware laden Victorian era fashion mashed up with industrial revolution themes. Think old faucet handles affixed to pantaloons, brass goggles decorated with watch gears or old mismatched drawer knobs glued to the side of a top hat! A few arrive dressed like fictional characters, such as Sherlock Holmes or Dr. Strangelove!"* I had a lot of fun photographing all the weird characters, as well as many of the vintage railroad cars, especially the old 1920's steam locomotive. It was busy taking families for a ride aboard restored passenger cars from the early days of steam. The 2019 event will be on my calendar for sure!



Old Pacific Electric "Red Car"

When April rolled around, I was invited to the "Spring Social", hosted by MPIOC. It was a cocktail reception and dinner held at "Ralph Brennan's New Orleans Restaurant" in Downtown Disney. The social was a very enjoyable evening with lots of wonderful, traditional Cajun food and entertainment. I spent much of the evening sitting on the balcony overlooking



Downtown Disney and listening to the live New Orleans Jazz band. A very fun time, as all MPIOC events are known for!

Near the end of April, I had a real estate photo shoot in Winchester, just north of the Temecula Valley. On the way back home, I drove up to the "Clifford Record Viewpoint" overlooking Diamond Valley Lake. The views of the huge lake and surrounding hills were beautiful under the clear skies.



The lake is the largest reservoir in southern California and receives water from three sources – the Colorado River Aqueduct, Northern California, and the Central California Water Project. The water from the lake is then distributed to vast areas of southern California, all the way from San Diego to Los Angeles and Orange County. The Visitor Center was filled with interesting details of the earthen dam construction, as well as fascinating exhibits of the surrounding landscape and wildlife. Before leaving Winchester, I stopped for a cold beer at the "Winchester Old West Arena", where there was a large crowd of mostly middle-aged local folks. Almost everyone was dressed in cowboy hats and boots, enjoying line-dancing to the sounds of a live band – a fun scene to watch!



Diamond Valley Lake



"Paddy Wagon"

At the beginning of May, I returned to OREM for the "Antique Truck Show", the first of its kind in the Inland Empire. I was amazed to see well over 100 old trucks, some more than 80 years old, but all beautifully restored and maintained. There was everything from pickups to big rigs and custom trucks designed for special jobs, such as the old "paddy wagon" once used by the New York Police Department in the 1920's. Another very unusual truck was the "GM FutureLiner" from the early 1950's that once travelled from coast to coast with displays of many prototypes of new household items of the future, including early versions of color TV, a forerunner of the microwave oven, and a demonstration of stereophonic sound. To the audiences in many of the small towns of America it must have seemed almost out of this world at the time. Over the course of the day, I made certain



GM FutureLiner

to take plenty of photos for Wes and Dan, family members who are professional long-haul truck drivers. (especially a vintage Peterbilt!) All in all, it was a great event that I look forward to enjoying again next year.

A couple of weeks later, I was back at OREM to watch a "Civil War Re-Enactment".



Union Camp

Two camps had been set up on the museum grounds, one Confederate and the other Union. There were well over 150 participants dressed in authentic Civil War uniforms and armed with weapons of the time. It was fascinating to stroll through the camps and observe how life was like in the 1860's – the participants were passionate about being as authentic as possible, to the point that one could easily be caught up in the moment 150 years ago! Throughout the day there were demonstrations of Civil War camp activity and weapons of the era.

The live firing of cannons by both sides was spectacular, and VERY loud! At one point, the Union forces brought up a restored Gatling gun mounted on a flatbed railcar, and when they fired it, the effect was downright "frightening"! As I stood just a few yards away, I couldn't imagine the effect it must have had on the soldiers marching into its murderous fire! Later in the afternoon, I visited the vendor area and saw them selling



Mock Battle - Union Forces



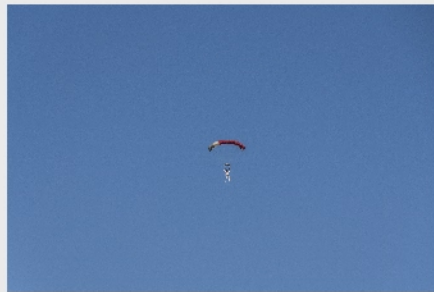
Union Cannon Fire

“re-enactment” gear and supplies, including uniforms, unit insignia, and Civil War mementoes. Around 4pm, there was a “mock” battle staged between Union and Confederate forces that included a lot of live fire from old muskets and cannons, the result being an incredible amount of smoke and loud gunfire. The troops took the battle seriously, to the point of having a cavalry charge and medics tending to the wounded on the battlefield. It was about as realistic as one could get without sustaining any damage or injuries. Soon after the conclusion of the battle, a re-enactment of the surrender at Appomattox Courthouse was held on the steps of the Town Hall at the museum Visitor

Center. The “impersonators”, honoring President Abraham Lincoln, General Robert E. Lee, and General Ulysses S. Grant were incredibly realistic! During the ceremony, President Lincoln recited the entire Gettysburg Address from memory, as Grant and Lee met to sign the surrender document. The ceremony was very moving and emotional – I felt privileged to have been there! At the end of the day, as the camps prepared to bed down for the night, I headed to a very unique local bar called the “Bombshelter Bar and Grill” at the Perris airport. I ordered a huge cheddar burger and sat outside on the terrace with a cold pint of Goose Island IPA,



Surrender at Appomattox



watching planes taking off and skydivers landing less than 100 yards away. Then as darkness ended skydiving for the night, I went inside to the bar, where I met a guy from New Zealand and his friend, who happened to be one of the pilots at the airport, taking skydivers up several times a day. During our conversation, I found out he had been jumping since 1970, and always made a trip to Perris every year for the National Skydiving Championships.

At the end of May, I travelled to Orlando to attend the annual Photoshop World Conference organized by KelbyOne, my 7th time. After checking in for the flight at LAX, I spent an hour in the Delta Airlines Skyclub lounge overlooking airport operations – landings, takeoffs, arrivals, departures, and the servicing of aircraft. It was a fascinating “choreography” of people, vehicles, and aircraft! The nonstop flight to Orlando was very full, but I had been fortunate to upgrade to First-Class – the benefit of being a “Lifetime Gold Medallion Member” with Delta, having travelled over 3 ½ million miles with the airline! The 4 ½ hour flight was very comfortable, and a fabulous lunch was served – chicken scharma with Middle-East rice mix, along with an amazing Greek yogurt-dill sauce, and a traditional Middle Eastern cold salad of tomatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers, onions, and garlic! After lunch, I watched the new film titled “The Post” – an incredible movie starring Tom Hanks and Meryl Streep. The amazing true story about the history of the Vietnam War and the lies propagated by the Nixon administration that were exposed by Daniel Ellsberg. He served in the CIA, stole classified documents about the war, and leaked them to the Washington Post newspaper. When President Nixon found out that the Post was ready to publish the CIA documents, he issued an executive order to prohibit publication. The Post went ahead with publication of the documents which revealed the truth of the Vietnam War that had been withheld from the American public. (the CIA had concluded that the war was “unwinnable”, early in the conflict, yet the administration kept increasing the number of troops for years!) The case later went to the Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of the Post, upholding the First Amendment – Freedom of the Press! (truly a landmark decision) The film ends with a very unexpected and significant moment in history – the Watergate break-in. (one of the best films I’ve seen in many years) As the flight approached Orlando, there was a bit of rough weather amid numerous strong thunderstorms that rumbled around the airport. Upon arrival, I picked up my bag and headed to the Mears Shuttle check-in desk for the shuttle to the Hilton Orlando Hotel at the Convention Center. The dispatcher said



Orlando Convention Center

it would be around 20 minutes to wait, so I told him I would pickup a coffee at Starbucks in the meantime. But when I returned 10 minutes later, he informed me that the shuttle had already departed, and that he had gone to Starbucks to tell me it was about to depart. He hadn't seen me because I went to Starbucks on level 2 and he looked for me at Starbucks on level 1! (too many Starbucks in the airport) But he was very accommodating and called for a taxi to take me to the hotel instead – great service! After I checked in to the hotel, I went looking for dinner options, specifically a “personal pizza” in the hotel café/deli. Although it was on the menu, it wasn't available until after 11pm! I was frustrated and disappointed, and I asked to speak with the MOD (Manager on Duty). She went out of her way to have the kitchen make one for me, and then she “comped” it, along with a large glass of local “Fulton IPA” – another example of great service! As I sat in the “David's Club Bar”, I was surrounded by a large group from the “BH Leadership Conference”, virtually all women and very loud. While I enjoyed my pizza and beer, I watched the first two periods of the Stanley Cup final game 2, between the Washington Capitals and the Las Vegas Golden Knights. At the end of the game, I bought a bottle of “Dogfish Head 90 Minute IPA” and sat outside on the terrace in the warm night, under the light of a beautiful full moon. (note: the hotel's pantry sold liquor and wine, but no beer – for that I had to go to David's Club!) As I sat outside on the terrace, a table of ladies near me suddenly screamed and jumped up as a tiny tree frog sprang onto their table! Luckily, no one was injured by the frog! I was up early the next morning at 6:45am (3:45am Pacific time) in order to avoid the long lines for conference registration at the Hyatt Hotel next door. When I walked over to the Hyatt, I was pleasantly surprised to find conference registration much quicker and easier than in years past. Being an “alumnus” now, I had an invitation to the VIP lounge for continental breakfast, and as I sat watching people in the room, a very obese man sat down at the table and proceeded to consume three plates of pastries! As alumni, we were seated in advance for the keynote plenary session – second row from the stage. Soon after the plenary session began, the conference theme was the 50th anniversary of the Beatles first album, and the KelbyOne conference staff had put together a very funny video. It was about an unknown band from New Jersey called “The Brushes” starring the president of KelbyOne, Scott Kelby, and three of the lead instructors, all dressed as the Beatles. As the story unfolded, the Brushes had actually written all the songs that made the Beatles famous! It seems that the lyrics of the well-known Beatles songs, written by the Brushes were based upon “features” of Photoshop – such as “I want to **Clone** your hand” and “A Hard Days **Brush**”. The Beatles apparently kept the original musical score of the Brushes, but changed the lyrics “slightly” to become the famous songs we know today. It was a very clever and humorous video, especially since a British staff member had filmed part of it on location in London and Liverpool. (probably the best opening video ever) And to top things off, it was immediately followed by a live performance of “I want to Hold Your Hand” on stage by a very good Beatles “look-a-like” band – great start to the conference! The keynote address by Julianne Kost from Adobe was amazing, as always. She packed an incredible amount of valuable information about new Adobe software enhancements into 45 minutes, and did so with her unique brand of humor that made her presentation memorable. Later, I attended some great classes and workshops on Photoshop, Lightroom, and advanced photographic techniques. As evening approached, heavy thunderstorms rumbled outside, so I headed to the “Rocks Bar” in the Hyatt Hotel for a beer before walking back to the Hilton for dinner. But when I got to the Hilton, I found “Spencer's Steakhouse” closed, although it wasn't supposed to close until 8pm, and yet it was only 7:45! So, I complained to the MOD and she called the restaurant manager, who then escorted me into the restaurant, and later “comped” my dinner. That was very nice service, and I spent some time engaged in an interesting conversation with him and the bartender. He recommended the “crab and lobster cake”, which was absolutely fabulous – at least 90% crab and lobster meat! Dinner had started on a sour note but turned into a wonderful evening. After dinner, I went to David's Club again for a pint of Fulton IPA and watched the end of another Stanley Cup finals game. I finished the evening once again sitting outside on the terrace by the pool, watching a gorgeous full moon rise over a roaring fire pit. As I sat in the warm night, there was a very devoted father showing his young son how to roast marshmallows to make a classic “smore”! (a priceless moment I'm sure both will remember) I spent most of the next day attending some great classes and workshops, as well as exploring the Expo area. Late in the afternoon, the heavy thunderstorms moved into the region once more, as I sat in the Rocks Bar and caught up on my travel notes. When dinner time rolled around, I decided to try out the “Urban Tide” restaurant overlooking the Hyatt pool. The bartender

recommended the beer-battered Grouper cheeks, and they were outstanding, along with the fresh Cole slaw! My server, a young college student, was very attentive, and when an old man at one of his tables almost passed out, he handled it with discretion. Later, the old man stumbled around the restaurant looking for the young man. When he finally found him, he handed him a fistful of cash as a tip. After dinner, I returned to the Hilton and watched game 2 of the NBA finals in David's Club Bar. It was the 4th year in a row that Cleveland and Golden State had been in the finals! Then I ended the evening, once again sitting outside on the terrace in the warm air – a quiet and relaxing night. I began the next morning with breakfast at the "B-Line Diner" in the Hyatt Hotel. It was classic 1950's retro décor, with an authentic old "Rock-Ola" juke box, still in working condition. As I perused the menu, I spotted a very unique item, a "Greek Benedict" – Greek gyro meat, eggs, and Bearnaise sauce on pita bread. It was delicious, though I doubt one would find it in Greece! After attending a couple more classes and workshops, the closing session finally arrived, with many nice prizes being given away, none of which had my name on them, as usual. Following the closing session, I headed to the Rocks Bar, only to discover the bar had run out of all draft beer, except for Bud Light, so, I ordered a bottle of local IPA instead. Since it was still early in the afternoon, I dropped off my conference stuff at the hotel and grabbed my camera. Then I walked to "Pointe Orlando" to take photos of the unique collection of upscale bars, restaurants, and boutique shops. As the heat and humidity began to get to me, I stopped for a cold beer at "Cuba Libre", a Cuban restaurant and bar with a gorgeous interior that was a



Cuba Libre - Pointe Orlando

beautiful reproduction of a typical street in old Havana! Unfortunately, the bar couldn't import any Cuban beer due to the long-standing US embargo of the nation. Later, after taking more photos of the area, I went to "The Pub", an authentic old English theme restaurant and bar. Although the décor was definitely British, all the servers were wearing kilts, which made me wonder what the Scots would say if they saw the place? The bartender highly recommended the "Speckled Hen" beer



battered fish and chips – and it was some of the best I've had anywhere! There were more than 50 beers on tap, but when I asked which was the most popular, the bartender said "Bud

Light, by far" – unbelievable! I finished the evening at

David's Club Bar watching game 3 of the NBA finals, and enjoying a cold pint of Fulton IPA. The following morning, I was up early for the Mears airport shuttle, which turned out to be a taxi instead of a van – nice personal service by Mears. Once I was at the airport, I spent an hour in the Delta Skyclub lounge, a very beautiful and peaceful environment, designed with the look and feel of an old southern plantation mansion. Then I boarded another very full flight, with no chance to upgrade to First-Class. But I had a confirmed seat in Economy Comfort Plus, just behind the First-Class cabin. Throughout the 5-hour flight, the service was



"The Pub" - Pointe Orlando

very nice, with premium drinks complimentary, as well as the same snacks as served in First-Class. It was definitely a big step up from basic Economy, but still not quite First-Class. Near the end of the flight, the lead flight attendant came to personally acknowledge my Lifetime Gold Medallion status with Delta – a very nice touch! Upon arriving at LAX, I was able to catch the express bus to LA Union Station right away, so I had time for a pint of Stone IPA in the Traxx bar. As I sat in the bar, the sound of a live Brazilian band in the former ticketing hall next door reached my ear. There was even a dance instructor giving lessons to a large crowd, and as people walked by, some of them began "moving" to the rhythm of the music – very funny to watch! Soon it was time to board the train to Riverside, and I enjoyed a quiet, peaceful ride as the full moon rose over the mountains.

In mid-June, I took the train once again from Riverside to LA Union Station, along with a full train of Dodger fans. Then, after

a half hour in the Amtrak Metropolitan Lounge, I boarded the Pacific Surfliner train to San Diego. With the clear, sunny weather, we had gorgeous views of the ocean and beaches along the way. Upon arriving at the Old Town San Diego station, I took a taxi to the Sheraton Mission Valley Hotel, where I would be staying for the week while I attended the West Coast School of Photography. After checking in to my room, I walked over to the Gordon Biersch Brewery for a cold pint of their IPA. From the brewery, it was a short walk to the Hazard Center trolley station, where I boarded the trolley to Old Town station. From Old Town, it was a quick 10-minute ride on Bus #44 to the University of San Diego (USD) campus, the location for the week-long photography classes. The USD campus is definitely one of the most beautiful in the entire country! I



University of San Diego campus

arrived just in time for the Orientation session, followed by a gathering of students in Randy van Duinen's class on Architectural and Landscape Photography. I found out that my good friend from Redlands, Frank, was also in the class. After the orientation, I walked down the hill to the Ballast Point Brewery Tasting Room, and as I sat at a table with a glass of Sculpin IPA, I watched a cute little 5-year old girl entertaining herself by acting out imaginary stories with her toys. Meanwhile, her parents were absorbed with their text messages. About 10 minutes later, another family came in with a little 2-year old boy, and in no time flat, she was showing him how to play with some of her toys – remarkable! The whole experience brought the two families together eventually. It was such a nice scene to watch – much better than watching the baseball game on the big screen TV's! The next day in Randy's class, we learned how to do "light painting" of still objects, such as various small items arranged on a black background. Light painting involved taking several photos of a scene, as a light source was slowly moved around, so as to illuminate the scene from all different angles. Then the photos were combined in Photoshop to produce a "composite" image that combined the best lighted areas of the scene from different photos. It would be a technique we would use throughout the class, both in the classroom, as well as outdoors. Randy was an expert with the technique, and I learned a lot throughout the week. That evening, I joined my dear friend Lora, for dinner at the Gordon Biersch Brewery, and enjoyed our conversation over a meal of chicken schnitzel and spaetzle. Toward the end of the evening, Lora called my old Army buddy Mike and we had a great time catching up on what had happened since the last time we got together in Las Vegas. (a really nice evening – thanks Lora) In class the next day, we did some sophisticated HDR (High Dynamic Range) photographs and light painting in the "Founder's Chapel" and "French Parlor" on campus – a fascinating class exercise. Later in the afternoon, we were given special access to the gorgeous "Immaculata



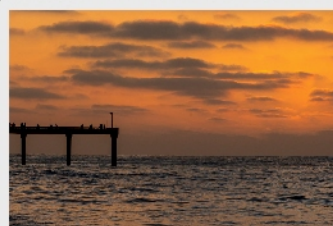
Immaculata Cathedral

Cathedral", where we had a rare opportunity to set up our cameras in the choir loft for a spectacular view of the entire cathedral and its amazing vaulted ceiling. (but we had to wait for 15 minutes while the priest finished his sermon!) Later, as evening approached, we gathered together to carpool to "Ocean Beach Pier", known for its spectacular sunset photo opportunities. We found it was extremely difficult to find a parking place in the crowded neighborhood, but eventually we found one open spot. Once we were on the beach, we were rewarded with a gorgeous sunset, as well as a high tide that brought out all the surfers. After taking a lot of photos along the beach and beneath the pier, I

walked over to the "OB Surf Pub" overlooking the ocean for a cold beer, while I waited for the rest of the group. No sooner had I ordered a beer than the group showed up. So, we all had a good time over a round of drinks, before heading back to campus. We all agreed that it had been a very interesting day in Randy's class, which would



"French Parlor"



Ocean Beach Pier

continue to be so the rest of the week. The next day, I met up with the group at the University of California San Diego (UCSD) campus where we photographed the famous "Giesel Library" building. It is one of the most unique architectural styles to be found on any university campus, and we photographed it from many different angles. The library was named in honor of Dr. Carl Seuss Giesel, better known as "Dr. Seuss". And next to the library was a life size bronze statue of him with his most famous story book character, the Cat in the Hat!



Meanwhile, a lot of graduating seniors were having their photos taken with Dr. Seuss and his Cat. Before heading back to USD, Randy gathered the group together for a class photo beside the library. Back on campus, we spent the rest of the day in the classroom processing our photos and getting some valuable one on one help from Randy. After class, I walked down the hill to the Ballast Point Tasting Room for a cold pint of Sculpin IPA, before boarding the trolley back to the Sheraton Hotel. For dinner that evening, I walked next door to Denny's, and I was pleasantly surprised to find "Mediterranean Grilled Chicken" on the menu. It came topped with sun dried tomatoes, crumbled feta cheese, grilled



Giesel Library - UCSD

zucchini and yellow squash - it was excellent! I was even able to order a cold bottle of Modelo beer as well. After dinner, I walked a couple of blocks down the road to the Gordon Biersch Brewery for a pint of their award-winning IPA. A few minutes later, a guy sat down at the bar and ordered a Bud Light! The bartender was very nice about it and said the brewery did not have Bud Light, nor did they brew it, but she suggested the lightest beer they did brew. Later, the bartender and I had the same response - why would anyone come into a craft brewery and think they could order a Bud Light? She just rolled her eyes and said, "it happens all the time"! The next day began with a special photo shoot in the Immaculata Cathedral again, with access to areas normally off limits to the public. We spent a couple of hours practicing HDR photography inside the cathedral, using just available natural light. Randy gave us some really valuable advice on what techniques to use for the best images. Then we returned to the classroom to spend the rest of the morning processing our photos, with Randy's expert guidance. After lunch, we packed our gear for a field trip to Borrego Springs later in the day. The purpose of the field trip was to photograph some of Ricardo Braceda's unique metal sculptures in the desert, especially his amazing "Serpent" at sunset. We carpooled in three vehicles via Interstate 8 east, California highway 79 north, and Highway 78 east, a journey of almost two hours. For me, sitting in the back seat of Nick's Ford Excursion became difficult when we encountered the very narrow, steep winding mountain roads, and I began to feel a bit queezy. (the feeling was made even worse as I was trying to respond to text messages on my phone regarding the scheduling of upcoming real estate photo shoots, while the vehicle constantly swayed to and fro!) Thankfully, we made a short stop in the historic mining town of Julian for a "potty break" and a piece of Julian's famous apple pies. Finally, we reached the small desert community of Borrego Springs, and as we stopped at Christmas Circle in the center of town, I took a break from the group and walked over to Carlee's Bar and Grill



"The Serpent" - Ricardo Braceda



"Scorpion and Grasshopper"

for a cold beer, and to escape the 110 degree heat! As I sat at the bar, I overheard a conversation between an elderly local man and a couple visiting from Alberta, Canada that had just met. He proceeded to tell them a story of his life, that went like this. After a divorce from a bad marriage, he met a woman who had also just been divorced from a bad marriage. They fell in love at first sight, and after a few months, they decided to take a bit of time on their own before getting married. Soon after, he was relocated to the East Coast by his company, and eventually lost contact with her. In the meantime, he remarried and divorced twice more and



ended up 32 years later with three grown children. So far, the story was rather interesting, but what made it memorable was the fact that, 32 years after the two had first met, his oldest son found her on Facebook, and they were reunited! (she had also remarried and divorced over the years) At this point the story was becoming incredible and worthy of a TV reality show, but the best was yet to come – in January of this year, they married each other and moved to Borrego Springs! The story was one right out of the National Enquirer, and whether it was true or not, it was a worthy story! After an hour or so, I met up with the group again at Christmas Circle, and we headed out of town to photograph the “Serpent”. While there was still some daylight, we took a few photos, and as evening approached, the sunset provided us with some beautiful scenes. Then we began setting up our gear in preparation for “light painting” of the sculpture. It was an amazing and fascinating experience as Randy

“painted” the enormous sculpture using a powerful beam of light from a large strobe. As he did so, we took several multiple exposures that we would combine later in Photoshop to create a final, fully exposed image. During a short break in the exercise, I looked up at the night sky and saw an incredible view of billions of stars, and the black silhouette of the Santa Rosa Mountains in the distance. By this time of night, it was pleasantly warm and peacefully quiet. Finally, near 10pm, we wrapped up the photo shoot and headed back to San Diego. The entire day had been an amazing educational experience, as well as another fascinating travel adventure! The next morning began the last day of class, and we spent most of it processing our photos from Borrego Springs. Randy demonstrated the technique of selecting specific areas of each of our multiple exposures for the best lighting and



Borrego Springs sunset



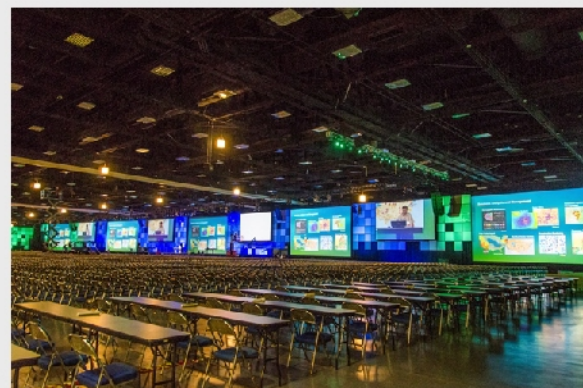
Founder's Hall - "light painted"

exposure to produce a final composite image – fascinating! Before concluding the class, Randy gave each of us a valuable critique of some photos we had submitted before the class. After the closing session, where several awards were presented, and prizes raffled, I went back to the hotel, checked out, and took a taxi to the Old Town station. The Amtrak train to Los Angeles was running almost 90 minutes late, and when it finally arrived in Old Town, it was virtually full. But luckily, I had a Business Class ticket, so I was guaranteed a reserved seat. However, for all the Coach Class passengers, there were no reserved seats

and it soon became “standing room only” in the coaches. It wasn’t long before the Café car ran low on everything – even running out of Bud Light! My original plan was to depart in Fullerton and catch the Metrolink train to Riverside, but when we arrived in San Juan Capistrano, it became clear that I would miss the connection to the last Riverside train. So, I contacted the conductor, and when I explained the situation, he said he would let me go on to LA at no extra charge. While I was very appreciative, my bag had been checked to Fullerton! He radioed the baggage car and assured me that my bag would be waiting in LA. Upon arrival at Union Station, the train was now more than 2 hours late, so my only choices were to wait, take the last train to San Bernardino, and call Leslie to pick me up at midnight, or stay overnight in LA and take the Riverside train in the morning. I chose to stay overnight at the Omni Hotel downtown in California Plaza and take the morning train back home.

The first part of July, I made my way to San Diego for the annual Esri International User Conference, which I had managed for 26 years and now have the privilege of “attending”. (note: I have been at every User Conference since 1981!) The drive to San Diego took me down the back roads and through the mountains, past Winchester, Temecula, Warner Springs, Julian, and Alpine, where I stopped at the Alpine Brewing company for a pint of their “Duet IPA”. Once I arrived in San Diego, I checked in to the Westin Hotel downtown, and I was delighted when I was upgraded to a deluxe king suite on the 17th floor overlooking San Diego Bay. Then I walked down to the Convention Center to pick up my conference badge. Soon after that,

I ran into my old friends Myles and Dale at the Business GIS Summit Reception in the Hilton Bayfront Hotel. We had a lot to catch up on over the past year, something I always look forward to at the UC – meeting up with old friends and colleagues from around the world. Later that evening, I walked over to the “Royal India Restaurant” in the Gaslamp District for my favorite Indian dish – chicken tikka masala, garlic naan, rice and a large bottle of cold Taj Mahal beer! The next morning, I joined more than 15,000 people in the Convention Center for the opening plenary session. The layout of the immense hall was absolutely amazing, with over a dozen huge 50-foot high screens and brilliant graphics everywhere! One



Plenary Session - Esri User Conference

of the highlights of the morning session was the presentation of the President’s Award to Southern California Gas Company and San Diego Gas and Electric. When lunch time came around, I enjoyed a delicious meal of “craft beer battered fish tacos” outside on the plaza in the warm sun. There were also several food trucks parked next to the Hilton Bayfront Hotel, and they were doing a brisk business. The afternoon keynote speaker was truly amazing, with a message that was both fascinating, but also a bit scary! His subject was about three “coding” languages from the earliest time to the present.

- The Alphabet and Numbers (ABC.../123...)
- Binary (0 and 1, the language of computers)
- Genetic (DNA sequencing of the 4 amino acids)

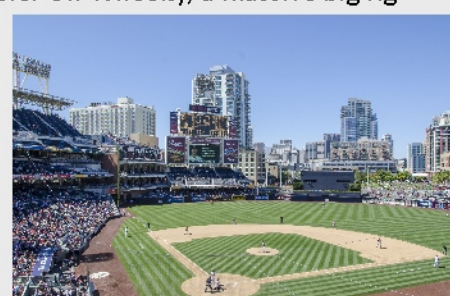
He made a stunning point that there was less than a 1% difference in DNA between monkeys and humans – *except those individuals in Congress!* He continued with an amazing fact that the human body is capable of “making” all of our body parts, evidenced by our development from a single egg into a full-grown body – so why can’t science do the same? He predicted that within a decade, it may be possible to “replicate” almost all human organs, **except** for the brain! The impossible scientific challenge is to “map” the human brain, a task far more difficult than mapping the “universe”! It was a spell-binding presentation that held the entire hall of 15,000 people in awe! Following the close of the plenary session, everyone headed upstairs to the Map Gallery, where users had displayed over 1000 maps representing their work with GIS technology. With 15,000 people, it was very crowded – so much so that I became a bit claustrophobic and escaped outside



Convention Center

to the terrace, where I enjoyed a beer, with a beautiful view of San Diego Bay. After some time viewing the displays in the Map Gallery, I met up with my old friend Jorg from Germany at the Omni Hotel bar. He filled me in on the latest news of Esri-Germany. It seems that he decided earlier in the year to sell his share of the company and was now looking forward to retirement, after more than 30 years in the company he helped to start. Then, later in the evening, I joined my dear friend Jack Horton at “Patrick’s Irish Bar” where I found him dancing with any woman who would accept his invitation! At times, it meant he was more like a dance “instructor” than a dance partner – but he still enjoyed every dance! The next day, I attended a couple of very interesting technical workshops about using the Story Map software. One of the workshops showed a fascinating story map about North and South Korea, showing them side by side with respect to some very interesting statistics. Then I visited the enormous Expo area and saw some unusual and fascinating exhibits, including the “DOW” (Doppler On Wheels), a massive big rig

outfitted with a large doppler radar and GPS unit, along with a fully equipped mobile analysis lab in the cab. The vehicle was specifically designed to do “real-time”, live measurements of weather conditions in severe storms, tornados, and hurricanes! Later that afternoon, I joined Jorg again in the Omni Hotel Bar, which was crammed with baseball fans going to the game at the stadium next door. After we shared drinks, and he talked about how he might spend his retirement, I headed to Petco Park, along with the rest of the fans in the bar to watch the game between the Los



Petco Park

Angeles Dodgers and San Diego Padres,. I had a great seat in the Omni Hotel Premier Club overlooking the third baseline, although I soon found myself surrounded by Dodger fans. Before the start of the game, I ordered a huge basket of delicious chicken tenders and fries from the “in seat” server Ben. Throughout the game, Ben kept me well supplied with cold beer – great service! During the “7th inning stretch”, legendary Dodger manager, Tommy Lasorda, showed up in our section, and the family sitting behind me was thrilled to have their photo taken with him! At the end of the game, the Padres won 4 – 1, not what Tommy wanted. I ended up giving my leftover chicken and fries to a homeless man on the street. I finished the evening back at the Westin with a beer in the lobby bar and writing my travel notes. The following morning, I spent some more time in the Expo area before checking out of the hotel. As I was about to leave San Diego, I received a request to return to a property in Canyon Lake to take photos. (the first time I had gone to the property in the gated community a couple of weeks before, I was not allowed to access the property because the security guard at the gate did not have my name on the access list!) This time I encountered the same problem, despite having been assured by the real estate company that my name had been phoned in to the security company. It took several phone calls to finally grant me access. (this gated community had tighter security than Fort Knox!) Eventually I was able to complete the photo shoot and return home. The three days I spent at the User Conference in San Diego were great, having had the opportunity to meet up with many of my Esri colleagues and old friends!

At the beginning of August, I headed for Scottsdale, Arizona to attend the PCMA mid-year Board Retreat. Rather than take the freeway, I chose to stick to the back roads, which are often more scenic and interesting. The route took me through Yucca Valley and 29 Palms, and across the Mojave Desert to Parker, Arizona on the Colorado river. As I drove east on California Highway 62, I encountered less than 10 vehicles in more than 100 miles! In Parker I picked up some cheap Arizona gas and a large iced tea. Then the road headed southeast through the small town of Bouse,



Mountain Shadows Resort - Scottsdale

famous as the home to the only WWII battalion of “Canal Defence Lights”. This unit was made up of tanks that had been equipped with extremely powerful strobe lights instead of cannons. They were a highly secretive weapon that had nothing to do with defending canals! Rather, the weapon was a powerful strobe light that was designed to “flash” rapidly at oncoming troops, thus causing them to become “disoriented” and even nauseous. Although the technology was very advanced for the time, the battalion never saw action during the war, and their story slowly faded away into obscurity. But what fascinating and unusual history in such a tiny town in the middle of the Arizona desert! From Bouse, I drove to the small community of Hope and joined US Highway 60 east to Wickenburg, and finally to the “Mountain Shadows Resort” in Scottsdale, the venue for our board retreat. I checked in to a nice deluxe king room overlooking famous Camelback Mountain. The resort was originally built at the foot of the mountain in the late 1950’s, and over several decades, it played host to many Hollywood celebrities. The original resort fell on hard times in the late 1990’s and lay vacant for many years until it was eventually closed in 2004. The property was purchased by an investment group in 2014 and the hotel was demolished to make way for a new hotel and resort. It was rebuilt in the same 1950’s style, with many



Camelback Mountain

upgraded amenities, and fortunately, much of the history of the original resort was preserved, in particular, the old photographs that are now displayed throughout the hotel. That evening, I had a fabulous dinner at “Hearth 61”, the hotel’s fine dining restaurant. My server highly recommended the “wood roasted prawns and polenta”, served with smoked cheddar, andouille sausage, wild mushroom ragout, and scallions! Dinner began with fresh baked whole grain bread, topped with pesto sauce and parmesan cheese. A glass of Kim Crawford Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand accompanied dinner very well. To finish the

meal, I selected the warm apple tart with vanilla cream sauce, served with vanilla ice cream, and topped with chopped pistachios! (really a decadent dessert) The evening ended with a double espresso, served with a lemon twist and a real “demi-tasse” spoon – in the true European style. The next morning, I had several hours to spare before the board meeting

would begin, so I decided to visit the nearby “McCormick-Stillman Railroad Park”. Despite the very hot, humid weather, typical of the “Southwest Monsoon Season”, I had a great time exploring the outdoor museum. Of particular historical interest was the display of the “Mercy Train”, an old 1930’s French Railway box car that had carried gifts of food and supplies donated by Americans from all 48 states to the people of France at the end of WWII – fascinating history! Also, on the grounds of the park was a large museum building that



McCormick-Stillman Railroad Park



Museum of Model Railroads

housed several very elaborate displays of model railroads of all different

scales. It was fun to watch the reaction of the kids, and the A/C was a welcome relief from the excessive heat and humidity outside! Returning to the hotel, I took a short walk around the resort’s par 3 golf course and captured several photos of Camelback Mountain. Then early in the afternoon, I drove to historic Old Town Scottsdale to visit the “Museum of the West”. The museum has a beautiful collection of classic American Western art, including a large number of Edward S. Curtis photographs from the early 1800’s – the first ever photos of Native

Americans! Another fascinating exhibit was dedicated to old Hollywood Western movie posters, some dating back to the silent film era of the late 1890’s and early 1900’s! As I walked among the old posters, I discovered that the earliest “westerns” were actually filmed in New Jersey! But when producers found they could film virtually year-round in southern California, westerns moved West. Ironically, in one western that was filmed in Monument Valley, at the end of a big scene, the local Navajo Indians took off the Sioux warbonnets and dismounted their horses, at which point, the director said to them, “you did that scene just right”. The Navajos replied, “we did it just like in the movies”!! In another part of the museum there was an extensive display of beautiful Hopi clay bowls decorated with very colorful, traditional intricate designs. Upstairs was a special exhibit of fascinating western art depicting the interaction between native tribes and the early explorers and mountain men. Just before leaving the museum, I took a tour of a huge exhibit displaying all types of “cowboy” gear, including saddles, spurs, chaps, hats, boots, and guns. The exhibit was



set up to resemble an Old West town, complete with a gambling hall, saloon, general store, an undertaker’s parlor, and even a jail. The museum is truly world class and a “must see” destination in Scottsdale. From the museum, I drove back to the resort, showered, changed clothes, and joined the rest of the board members for drinks in the bar. When it came time for dinner, we all took rides with Uber and Lyft to the “Culinary Dropout Waterfront Restaurant” in Old Town Scottsdale. (“waterfront” referred to the restaurant being located on the edge of the “Central Arizona Water Project” aqueduct!) Dinner began with appetizers of

soft pretzels and provolone fondue, along with homemade potato chips and onion dip. In addition, there was a delicious Ahi Tuna tartare, served with avocado, crispy onion, cashew, spicy mayo, and toasted ciabatta. For the main course, I ordered the signature house dish, Southern Fried Chicken that came with buttermilk mashed potatoes and fresh baked biscuits drizzled with wild honey – outstanding! After dinner, we took Uber and Lyft rides to “The Grapevine” a very local bar well known for karaoke. The bar was very crowded, but there were not many good voices, unfortunately. Within our small group, Jenna and Kevin sang a couple of songs, and we were all amazed at what a beautiful voice Jenna had! The most unusual participant of the evening had to be “Mr. Hollywood”, dressed in very short, tight white shorts, skimpy red tank top, and blue suede shoes! He definitely captured the attention of the crowd, but he had a very “whimpy” voice! And then there was the young Hispanic woman who tried in vain to sing a romantic Spanish song, but she failed miserably. However,

her husband/boyfriend thought she was fantastic – very touching to see his devotion, despite her voice. We all had fun together, but it was soon time to return to the hotel to be up early in the morning for the start of our board meeting. As we walked outside the bar, it was still 96 degrees! The following morning began with a wonderful breakfast buffet in our meeting room, courtesy of the hotel. (scrambled eggs covered with melted cheddar cheese, applewood smoked bacon, smoked turkey sausage, hash browns, and fresh fruit) It seemed no sooner had we finished breakfast than mid-morning snacks appeared! When lunchtime rolled around, we were served a combination of sandwiches, salads, soups, and desserts. And if that wasn't enough, mid-afternoon snacks also arrived – all hosted by the hotel! (in case you're wondering, we did manage to get several hours of work accomplished!) Following the conclusion of day one of our board meeting, we proceeded to our Chapter Reception for local Arizona PCMA members, again hosted by the resort in their lobby lounge. The turnout for the reception was great, and the board members had the opportunity to meet many of the Arizona members for the first time. My role came to be the photographer for the event. As the reception wound down, we headed to "Hearth 61" for our traditional Board dinner, where discussion of the day's events continued. For dinner, I chose the "Moroccan Spiced Rack of Lamb" – perfectly cooked on the bone and served with mashed parsnips, preserved lemon, and fresh mint. The dish was accompanied by rosemary roasted cauliflower, green olives, and capers – fabulous meal! I finished the evening at the bar with a cold pint of local "Dragoon IPA" brewed in Tucson. A local band of three young brothers played everything from the Beatles to Sinatra, and the drummer used a purely "digital" drum set. Meanwhile, I watched a young girl dance with her father as her black lab dog sat patiently beside the bar. It was a touching scene to watch. Once again, the next morning, we had another wonderful breakfast buffet from the hotel before the start of our meeting, which began with an excellent and fascinating presentation on "Lessons in Leadership" by Paul Gage, the general manager of the largest resort in Phoenix. One of his most humorous stories was about a problem several years ago when golfers were relieving themselves in the rough between the 9th and 10th holes, close to several private residences, which did not sit well with the residents. After considering many solutions, all of which involved very expensive installation of sewer, water, and electricity for providing rest rooms to meet building codes, one of the landscape crew suggested a much cheaper alternative. The old man told Paul, "just put up signs – Beware, Rattlesnakes in the Area"! With the signs installed, the problem was quickly resolved! After Paul's presentation, mid-morning snacks arrived to keep us going in discussions about plans for the rest of 2018. As our board meeting came to a close, the resort provided each of us with a delicious boxed lunch for our journey home. Everyone on the board felt the generosity of the resort was amazing and greatly appreciated! As I began the drive home, it was over 100 degrees and well on its way to a high of 115 degrees! I was looking forward to returning to the 95 degree weather in Redlands.



At the beginning of September, I had signed up for a special trip on a private railcar from Seattle to Los Angeles. The excursion would begin in LA and travel to Seattle a few days earlier, but due to my schedule of photo shoots, it wasn't possible for me to do the entire trip, so I chose to travel on the return segment to LA. Early in the morning of the 5th, I drove to Riverside to take the train into LA, and I barely made it to the station with 5 minutes to spare, due to extremely slow freeway traffic. When I got to LA and boarded the "express" bus to LAX, it took almost an hour in the heavy traffic. But as I sat up front behind the driver, the trip was made very interesting, listening to the man "training" the new driver, "suggesting" ways he could move in and around the heavy traffic. Once we arrived at the airport, I breezed through check-in and TSA in record time, which allowed me to spend some time in the new Alaska Airlines lounge for a glass of Pilsner from the Burbank Craft Brewery. On board the flight to Seattle, my First-Class seat was very comfortable, much like one would experience in International Business Class. For lunch, a delicious grilled chicken salad was served, and the glass of "12th of Never Ale" from Lagunitas Brewery was a perfect pairing. (Here is how the beer was described on the label: *As the River Styx froze and the final pig took flight, when the last winged monkey departed the darkly fragrant Netherlands, as wishes became horses and all the beggars rode... Under a newly-blued moon at dawn on the very 12th of Never: the*

second-to-last craft brewery in America pressed the green 'start' button on their canning line. We wanted to be the Last Small Brewer in the U.S. to can their beer and maybe, finally, by now, we are...The '12th of Never Ale' is everything we've learned about making hop-forward beer expressed in a moderate voice. Pale, cold, slightly alcoholic, and bitter. It's all we know.) Besides the very interesting beer, the lunch serving tray had a very unique salt and pepper shaker, in the shape of a small clear plastic airplane – by turning the propeller, one had either salt or pepper! Two and a half hours later, as the plane approached Sea-Tac Airport, we had a spectacular view of Mt. Rainier, Mt. Adams, and Mt. St Helens! As we landed, I noticed my seatmate was wearing a Superbowl 52 jacket, and when I asked him if he had been to the game, he told me the story of how his young son with cancer had received his "Make-A-Wish" to go to the Superbowl. Not only was the experience a once in a lifetime moment, but his son survived cancer – an emotional and amazing story! Our conversation lasted only 10 or 15 minutes, but it's one I shall never forget – such is the joy of traveling. Later, when I stood at baggage claim, my one and only bag did not appear. So, I began filling out a lost bag report, but no sooner had I completed it than the Alaska Airlines agent suddenly appeared holding my bag! It seemed that my bag had been placed in the "oversize/odd size bin", even though it was a pretty standard looking Eddie Bauer green handbag! Having my bag finally in hand, I took the "Link" light rail train to Pioneer Square downtown, for \$1.00 vs \$45.00 for a taxi. Then I walked two blocks to the new Embassy Suites Hotel next to King Street Station. There I saw the two vintage private railcars parked on a siding at the



"Silver Splendor" & "Pacific Sands" at King Street Station

station, and the Amtrak staff allowed me access to the platform to take photos. After checking in to the hotel, I went to the "Manager's Reception" for a beer, before going to dinner. When I entered the elevator down to the lobby, I found myself surrounded by Seattle Police officers who were going to a department dinner at the restaurant next door. (the most secure elevator I've ever been in) As I sat at an open table in the crowded lounge, an attractive lady from Baltimore sat down. During our conversation, I learned she was attending a conference on "quantum computing" at the University of Washington. I had made arrangements that evening to have dinner at "Taylor Shellfish and Oyster Bar" in Pioneer Square with my dear friends Lynne, Michael, and Bob. We all had attended the University of Washington in the 1970's. I encountered a bit of a problem finding the restaurant, even though it was supposed to be just two blocks from the hotel. It seems there was minimal signage for the restaurant, as well as some incorrect directions from the hotel concierge, which had me going to the restaurant's corporate office, rather than the restaurant. However, I found it and had a local "Preiem IPA" before my friends arrived. When we were seated at our table, everyone ordered oysters, of which there were a dozen different varieties on the day's menu. For the main course, I had a fantastic smoked King salmon toasted sandwich, topped with goat cheese and arugula. As we were finishing dinner and a wonderful conversation about "old times", the restaurant owner came over to our table and served us a taste of rare aged French apricot liquor, which was absolutely superb! (apparently, he was the only one in the city to have a bottle) After a fond farewell to my friends, I walked through Occidental Square, where people had gathered for an evening art market. After strolling through the market place, I walked over to the "13 Coins Restaurant" next to the hotel, where I sat outside on the patio in the cool evening air, beside the warmth of a fire pit, with a glass of Washington state wine. The next morning, I woke up to beautiful clear skies and 72 degree weather – perfect for my **Birthday** tomorrow! After a great breakfast in the hotel the next morning, I called John, the owner of the private railcar "Silver Splendor", to get directions of where to meet up for the trip down to LA. But to my surprise, John said that Amtrak had cancelled the train, due to a huge wildfire near Mt. Shasta in northern California. The fire had engulfed not only the Union Pacific mainline tracks, but also closed Interstate 5! The rail line was open as far south as Klamath Falls, but there were no alternative railroad routes beyond that point. Amtrak told John that it might be two or three days before the tracks could be re-opened, so his railcar would have to remain parked at King Street Station in downtown Seattle. Unfortunately, I had two confirmed photo shoots in Orange County in two days' time, so I told John I would not be able to wait in Seattle to

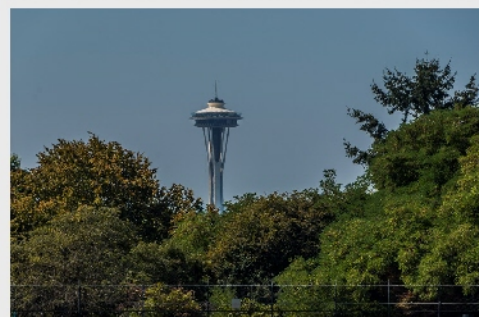
train to LA – which was a real disappointment for me! John understood all too well and offered me a complete refund of the cost for the trip. He also invited me to join the group for dinner that evening aboard the vintage dome car. Meanwhile, Amtrak passengers would be facing a 12 hour overnight bus ride from Klamath Falls to Sacramento on old two lane roads, in order to bypass the fire and rejoin the southbound Coast Starlight! I went back to the hotel to extend my stay for another night and book an Alaska Airlines flight to LA the following day. Having successfully accomplished my new travel arrangements, I grabbed my camera and bought a day pass ticket for \$2 on the “Link” light rail system. Then I took the train to the Capitol Hill Station and walked through my old neighborhood around Volunteer Park, where Marion and I lived when we returned from a year in Africa and England. From Capitol Hill, I walked down the



Interlaken Park trail

trail through lovely Interlaken Park, as I had done so many times when I worked as a research assistant at the University of Washington. Along the trail, brilliant sunshine was streaming through the thick old growth forest. Then I crossed over the Lake Union Ship Canal, just as the Montlake drawbridge was raised for the passage of a large sailboat. As I walked through the University of Washington campus, one of my old alma maters, I took photos of the beautiful old buildings, which at one time in the early 1900's, were part of the “Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition”. Eventually I came to University Avenue, better known simply as “The Ave”. And as I walked up the street, I recognized some of the same places from my university days in the early 1970's. I stopped at an old favorite “watering hole”

called Schultzy's Biergarten for a cold pint of German beer. Later, I walked along the Lake Union Ship Canal to the Link station next to the huge new Alaska Airlines football stadium and boarded the train for the return to Pioneer Square. As I was exiting the station, I saw a monstrous cast iron wheel that was once part of an old cable car system that used to run from the waterfront up the hill along Yeslar Way in the early 1900's. Apparently, it was discovered by a crew excavating the site of the new Link station. It was a part of Seattle history of which I was totally unaware. Walking down the hill along Yeslar Way, I spotted a directional sign to the ferry. By the time I reached the ferry terminal, the Bainbridge Island ferry had just departed, so I bought a “senior return ticket” to Bremerton, a one hour journey each way for \$4.15! On board the vessel, I had a cold can of Rainier beer in the cafeteria as the ship made its way across Puget Sound. Later, as I stood outside on the deck, there were spectacular views of the downtown Seattle skyline under perfectly clear skies! It was a very relaxing time sailing past islands, whose shores were lined with lovely waterfront homes. When I returned to downtown Seattle, I walked up to King Street Station and joined John and his passengers for dinner aboard the classic 1950's



Space Needle from Volunteer Park



University of Washington campus



Downtown Seattle and the Ferry Terminal

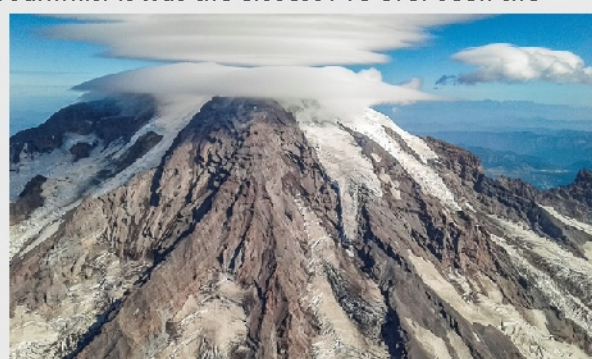
dome car parked at the station. Dinner was served in the dome lounge and began with a delicious appetizer of toasted pita bread and spicy tomato and herb hummus. Chef Alan had prepared a fantastic, fresh grilled King salmon that he had bought early that morning from the historic Pike Place Farmer's Market on the waterfront downtown. The salmon was perfectly grilled and topped with fresh herbs and chopped hazelnuts. It was served with roasted butternut squash puree and crisp steamed snow peas – a superb presentation by Chef Alan! Over dinner, I had a nice conversation with John and fellow passengers about



Dinner aboard the Dome Car Lounge

travelling by private train. Dinner that evening aboard the vintage railcar was really a delightful experience, especially being my birthday! After dinner, I bid farewell to John and his passengers, wishing them a safe journey back to LA, whenever that would be possible, given the wildfire. Then I walked over to the old Merchants Café in Pioneer Square, but the bartender was more interested in chatting up the ladies at the bar than serving me. So, I left and walked past the “homeless camp” to the historic “J&M Café and Card Room”. There I found a friendly bartender and a live band playing Dixieland and Cajun music – much better than the Merchant’s Café. The next morning, I rode the Link train from the International

District/Chinatown Station to Sea-Tac Airport. I noticed that all of the street signs around the station were in both English and Chinese. At the airport I was “randomly” selected for inspection at the TSA Pre-Check station – how was I so lucky! The Horizon Airlines flight to LA was aboard a new Embraer 175 aircraft, and my seat 1D was very comfortable, having no seat next to me. As we departed Sea-Tac, our pilot got special permission from Air Traffic Control to do a “fly-by” of Mt. Rainier. He brought us within 500 feet of the mountain, just below the 14,000 foot summit! It was the closest I’ve ever seen the mountain and its glaciers! Spectacular would be a serious understatement to try and explain the view and the feeling. As we continued south, we had amazing views of Mt. Adams, Mt. St Helens, and Mt. Hood, before high clouds began to obscure the view. Soon after, a fantastic lunch was served – ginger beef salad topped with spicy miso sauce, and a glass of chilled 2016 Chardonnay from Sonoma added to the pleasure of the meal, along with excellent service by the flight attendants. Once we landed at LAX, I just barely made it to the express bus as it was departing for Union Station. The bus was totally full, and I ended up in a very uncomfortable seat in the last row, which made for a very rough ride through the heavy rush hour traffic on a Friday evening. When we finally arrived at Union Station, I was ready for a cold beer in the Traxx bar that helped wind down from the miserable bus ride. The ride on the Metrolink train was quiet and peaceful in the “quiet car” which prohibits cell phones and loud conversations. Whereas it had been a pleasant 72 degrees in Seattle, the next day in Redlands was 106 degrees!



Mt. Rainier “fly-by”



“Husky” team mascot

At the beginning of October, I was invited to a University of Washington pre-game party at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena. It turned out to be a huge tailgate event sponsored by Alaska Airlines that included a lot of food and drinks to “warm up” the Husky fans for the football game between Washington and UCLA. There were also several large tailgate parties for UCLA fans as well. (Washington won the game) As I walked back to the Metro station in Pasadena, I passed an unusual and unique mansion that blended Victorian and Japanese architectural details. I found out it was the “Gamble House”, having been built in the early 1900’s by David Gamble, heir to the “Proctor and Gamble Company” family fortune. The mansion was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1977 and is now part of the University of Southern California School of Architecture.

In mid-October, I took the train to Ventura for the annual “Seaside Highland Games” which were held at the Ventura Fairgrounds. (the Amtrak station happened to be less than 100 yards from the fairgrounds) For accommodations I had discovered a unique “motel/hotel/RV Park” by the name of “Ventura Waypoint”, that I had booked online. It was a collection of vintage travel trailers, and my “room” was a 1950’s Airstream trailer called “A touch of Grey”. It was quite comfortable with a kitchen and full bathroom,



"A Touch of Grey"

as well as a wooden deck patio outside, overlooking the ocean. The staff were very friendly and rather "laid back". It was a pleasant 15 minute walk along the coast to the fairgrounds and the highland games. At one point on the route there was a pedestrian crossing of a major



street, and an automated voice announced, "walk with caution – vehicles may not stop"! (not very reassuring) Once on the fairgrounds, I found a huge crowd,

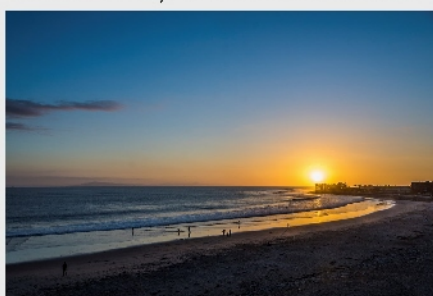
over 40 clans represented, including the Henderson clan, lots of pipe and drum bands, and a large food court serving traditional Scottish food like Shepard's Pie and Haggis! As I roamed around the fairgrounds, I saw a guy in a kilt with a T-shirt that declared, "What's under my kilt? How warm are your hands?" That pretty much answered everyone's question!



"The Angry Brian's"

I grabbed a pint of Harp and sat down in the warm sunshine to listen to "The Angry Brian's" a Scottish band playing an unusual "fusion" of traditional Celtic music and heavy metal! They were fantastic and got a lot of people on their feet. Seated in front of me was a large man wearing a T-shirt that read, "England forever – Scotland a wee bit longer!" (pretty much summed up the spirit of the Scots) As evening approached, there was a very formal ceremony, with all of the highland bands assembled in formation. Then the Pipe Major of the "LA Police Department Pipe and Drum Band" played Amazing Grace to honor

all fallen first responders – it was very emotional, and you could hear a pin drop as he played. For dinner that evening, I walked along the beach to the "Beach House Restaurant and Bar" on the Ventura Pier, and while I sat at the bar with a pint of local "MadeWest IPA", a gorgeous sunset



Sunset - Ventura Pier

unfolded before me. I took several photos as the sun slowly slipped below the western horizon. The bartender recommended the "Tempura battered Haddock" and chips – an excellent choice! He also told me about a couple of local brewpubs downtown that I should check out. The first one was the "Fluid State Brewery", which was very crowded, but I was lucky to be invited to join a table with an elderly couple. I came to find out, they were competing in the "Senior Heavyweight Competition" for the first time! As we parted company, I wished them the best of luck, and promised to watch



Tribute to the Fallen

them compete tomorrow. Meanwhile, at a table nearby, a couple was seated with a very young baby in a carriage – she was surrounded by toys and in her own "world", amid the loud noise and chaos around her. I ended the evening down the street at the "Anacapa Brewing Company", with a pint of "Track 7 Panic IPA" from Sacramento. As the barmaid served my beer, she also gave me the code to the lock on the restroom door – 1403, which I later passed on to a couple at the bar. The following morning, I watched the couple from the evening before, as they competed in several events, and although they were near the bottom of the competition, they were having fun. I also watched a young black girl win the



Sheep Dog "on duty"

"Sheaf Toss" competition, pitching a small bale of hay over the bar at 24 feet high. She was on her way to compete in the International Games in Scotland next year. During a short break in the competition, I went to the arena where the sheep herding demonstration would be held later in the morning. What I found was a sheep dog lying perfectly still, keeping his eyes focused on the small band of sheep as they grazed on some hay laid out for them, lest one of them should stray! Before



Caber Toss



Closing Ceremony

leaving the games, I had a pint of Harp, sat down, and listened to The Angry Brian's as they pounded out their unique sound. Then it was time to check out of my "trailer" and board the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner to Los Angeles. A loud party was on board the train, including a drunk fat man with a serious butt crack! Fortunately, I had my iPod to cancel out the loud noise, but it didn't cancel out the butt crack! When I arrived at Union Station, I discovered a new restaurant and bar had just opened in the old space that had once been the legendary Fred Harvey Restaurant more than 30 years ago. Now it was the "Imperial Western Brewery and Restaurant". Thankfully, most of the gorgeous

art deco interior had been preserved. As I sat at one of the original Fred Harvey tables, I ordered the brewery's "Union Lager" and their version of fried chicken. The dish was fantastic – several pieces of fried chicken coated with crushed saltine crackers and red pepper flakes, served with a spicy cream sauce and slices of dill pickle – delicious, but definitely not your grandmother's fried chicken! Before leaving the restaurant, I had a pint of their "Superliner IPA". Then I boarded the Amtrak Southwest Chief for the ride to Riverside. I sat in the lounge/observation car, enjoyed another beer, and a view of the beautiful sunset over downtown LA, as the train departed Union Station. The 2019 Seaside Highland Games is already on my calendar!

In early November, I went to the Dos Lagos Shopping Mall in Corona for the annual "Amber Waves of Grain Craft Beer Festival". I had booked accommodation at the Staybridge Suites Hotel near the site of the event. The festival was organized by the "American Veterans Motorcycle Club" to benefit several veterans assistance



organizations. There were more than 40 California craft breweries participating, all of whom would be donating the day's proceeds to charity! The festival began with a parade of marching bands, and military re-enactment groups representing the Indian Wars of the late 1800's, the Spanish-American War, WWI, WWII, the Korean War, and Vietnam War. Following them were several military vehicles from the early 1900's through the modern day. Also included in the parade were a number of antique cars and even a police SWAT vehicle. The motorcycles brought up the rear of the parade, and as they passed the review stand, they let out a thunderous roar from their engines! (as a "salute" to all veterans) Throughout the warm, sunny afternoon, there was live entertainment on the main stage by the US Navy "rock band" from San Diego and the "K-Tell Band" that played only songs from the 1970's! I spent the afternoon sampling a number of beers from the craft breweries, which was included in the festival admission fee, while I listened to the music. As with a lot of festivals, there was an abundance of children and dogs! As evening descended, the festival came to an end, and I went next door to the "Stone Church Brewery", one of the major sponsors of the festival. The bar was very crowded, but eventually I was



Opening Parade

able to get a pint of their signature IPA and a seat at a long table. While I sat amid the crowd, watching people trying to find enough space to dance to the music of a live band in the corner, a guy suddenly approached me. And when he found out I was from Redlands, he said he was an insurance agent and Esri was his account! (not sure if that was true however) Then he bought me another beer, for no apparent reason. For dinner that evening, I walked over to the "Taps Brewery and Fish House" for a delicious order of Alaskan cod and chips, along with a pint of their IPA. The next day, after a hearty breakfast in the hotel, I headed



Spanish-American War "re-enactor"



WWII Marine Veteran

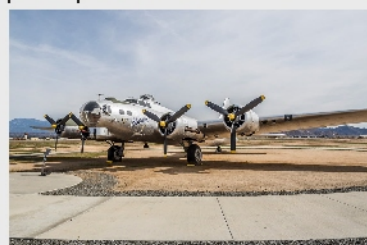


home. Along the way, I stopped to visit the “March Field Air Museum” in Riverside, where they have a huge number of old military aircraft on display. Of particular interest was a huge B-52 bomber, that seemed to dwarf the rest of the aircraft. The B-52 began service in 1952 and remains still in service today. But more amazing is the fact that the Air Force expects to continue flying the aircraft well into the future, perhaps until 2040 – incredible! Another aircraft that had a special interest for me



B-52 Bomber

was a B-17 bomber from WWII, the same type of aircraft on which my Dad served as a radio operator during the war. Next to the B-17 was another legendary bomber, a B-29 “Flying Fortress”, that helped win the war. Inside the museum hangar was an “SR-71 Blackbird” spy plane, and next to it was an old 1930’s Bi-Plane – such a contrast in technology! The museum on the former March Air Force Base has one of the largest collections of military aircraft in the country – well worth a visit!



B-17 Bomber

At the end of September, I had a photo shoot in Lake Elsinore, which turned out to be a vacant, reprocessed property in miserable condition. Once I finished the shoot, I went to downtown Lake Elsinore and discovered a craft brewery by the name of “Craft Brewery” – simple and straight to the point! When I sampled their “Warlock IPA”, I was impressed – a traditional IPA with a unique smoky caramel taste. On the way out of town, I spotted a gorgeous white, Victorian style mansion downtown called “The Chimes”. It had lots of beautiful old wrought iron work around the balcony. It was built in 1887 as the “Crescent Bathhouse and Spa” that used the natural hot sulfur water from a nearby hot spring. It operated until the early 1950’s before being abandoned. Later, it was preserved as a registered National Landmark. As the story goes, it is haunted by a young child named Gloria, who occasionally returns to visit the place of her untimely death. Then on the way home, I passed through Perris and decided to stop in for a beer at the “Bombshelter Bar & Grill”, located at the Perris Airport, which has become a favorite of mine this year. I sat outside on the terrace with a cold pint of Goose Island IPA and watched the skydivers. Huge white, puffy cumulus clouds filled the sky, the first sign of the approaching tropical storm/hurricane “Rosa”, which made it a very dramatic scene. Suddenly, as I went to swat a fly hovering over my



“The Chimes” - Lake Elsinore



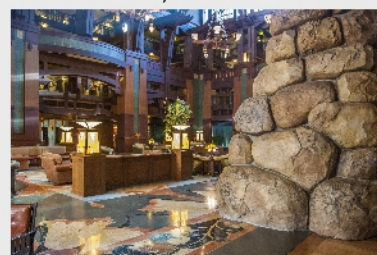
“Bombshelter Bar & Grill”

full glass of beer, it spilled! Even though I was prepared to pay for another beer, the barmaid “comped” it, and as she said, “accidents will happen” – I left her a good tip as well! Sitting on the terrace, watching the activity on the runway, I overheard a very interesting conversation at the next table, between a veteran skydiver and two young Frenchmen who were about to go up “tandem” for their very first jump! The conversation went like this – [veteran] “skydiving is the most exciting thing you can do with your clothes on”, and he added “when you’re free-falling, it’s most important to arch your back and point your dick to the ground”! (advice doesn’t get any simpler than that) When one of the young

Frenchmen asked, “how many people die skydiving”, the old veteran answered, “only 1 in 100,000 jumps ends in death, compared to 10 in every 100,000 scuba dives”. At that point, I had the thought – skydiving may be safer than driving on the LA freeways!

On Halloween, I had a photo shoot scheduled in Chino, and another in Anaheim the following day, so I decided to stay overnight in Anaheim at the Marriott Suites Hotel. I had a nice quiet suite overlooking Disneyland in the distance. (at the photo shoot in Chino, the homeowners had a gorgeous and very unusual cat, a “Sealpoint Snowshoe Siamese” – with traditional Sealpoint markings, but with four “white” feet, a beautiful cat!) After checking in to the hotel, I walked next door to “Oggi’s Pizza Parlor and Brewery”. Being the eve of Halloween, the staff were dressed in costume, with the bartender

masquerading as Batman. When I was about to order, he informed me that the pizza oven was down, so no pizza tonight! (not good for a pizza restaurant) The bar had a great selection of beers on tap, including at least six IPA's! The music radio station was playing classic Rock-n-Roll from the 1960's and 70's – thank goodness for no Rap! Before I left, I asked "Batman" if Robin was coming tonight! Then I walked back to the hotel and had a fantastic dinner in "Basil's Restaurant" – perfectly roasted Prime Rib with baked potato and all the trimmings. As an added benefit of having dinner in the hotel restaurant, the charge for overnight parking was removed from my billing. The next morning, I visited Downtown Disney and the Grand Californian Hotel, beautifully decorated for Halloween and Thanksgiving, before heading to my photo shoot nearby. After the photo shoot, I made my way home, trying my best to avoid the ever present traffic congestion.



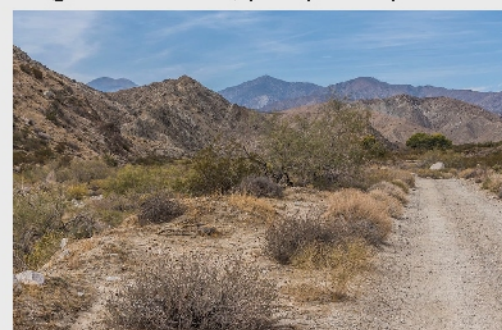
Grand Californian Hotel

In mid-November, I drove to the "Mission Creek Nature Reserve", an extension of the Whitewater Nature Reserve. Access was by way of a rough gravel road west of Highway 62 on the east side of Mt. San Geronio. The cool, partly cloudy weather was perfect for hiking. As I began walking up the trail, I passed a group of stone



Remains of old T-Cross-K Dude Ranch

"Casitas" with picnic tables. Just behind them was an abandoned swimming pool and an old stone fireplace, the only remains of the old "T-Cross-K Dude Ranch". In the 1920's and 30's it was an occasional get-away for Hollywood celebrities, like Jayne Mansfield, Humphrey Bogart, and Harpo Marx who found Palm Springs too



Mission Creek Nature Reserve trail

crowded. Unfortunately, much of the old resort was destroyed in the great flood of 1938! The old trail up the canyon paralleled the dry creek bed, and after a mile or so, I came to a large wetland with several tall trees. The entire area was covered with thick vines that looked to be wild raspberry. Just beyond the wetland, around the bend, I caught sight of the



Stone House

"stone house", and several people camped nearby. The "stone house" is a beautiful cabin built of native river stone, but unfortunately there is no history published about it. I took several photos of it and the surrounding mountains before beginning the hike back to my jeep. The trail continued up the canyon for another 3 miles to the junction with the "Pacific Crest Trail", and further on to the Whitewater Visitor Center. It looked like a trail I should take another day. On the return trip to my jeep, I hiked down the dry creek bed for a different perspective. The area certainly deserves another visit, and perhaps a chance to see some of the Desert Big Horn Sheep that call it home!

The following week was the Thanksgiving Holiday, and I spent the day before baking five pies – persimmon, pumpkin, walnut, pecan, and a pecan/cranberry pie. (I put two of them in the freezer for Christmas dinner) Then on the morning of Thanksgiving Day, I fixed a traditional dinner of roasted turkey breast, garlic mashed potatoes, baked butternut squash, cranberry sauce, and herb dressing – all made from scratch! (it was a lot of work, but also a lot of fun) We had invited Kathleen, her daughter Crystal, and Crystal's boyfriend to join us for dinner. Kathleen brought two dishes, a delicious, traditional green bean casserole and roasted Brussel sprouts. As we sat around the table, we shared memories of past holidays, and our friendship, as well as thanks for all we have, in the true spirit of the holiday!

In mid-December, I'll fly up to San Francisco to attend our annual year-end PCMA Chapter Board Retreat to draft plans for 2019. This year, our board president, Kevin, has arranged the board meeting to be hosted by the luxury "Palace Hotel"



Thanksgiving dinner with friends

downtown. (he is the Director of Sales and Marketing for Starwood) It should be a great meeting and a fun time, since the hotel and downtown San Francisco will be beautifully decorated for Christmas!

To end the year, I have arranged a trip to Ventura when my sister Lynn arrives to spend Christmas with us. Lynn, Leslie, and I will travel by train to Ventura, stay at the Crowne Plaza Hotel on the beach, and enjoy wonderful ocean views. There will also be long walks on the beach, delicious meals to share, and historic sites to visit. That pretty much brings me to the end of 2018, a year of many adventures and wonderful memories. With that said, I wish all of you a very **Merry Christmas** and **Happy New Year!**



Southern California in Winter

Photo Gallery



San Diego Bay from Grand Hyatt



Manchester Grand Hyatt



Luxury Yachts docked at Marriott Marina



Display of ceramic artwork in Old Town



Coronado Island



"Tiger Trail" - Safari Park



Scottish Highland Games



Palm Canyon Trail - Borrego Springs



Scottish Highland Games



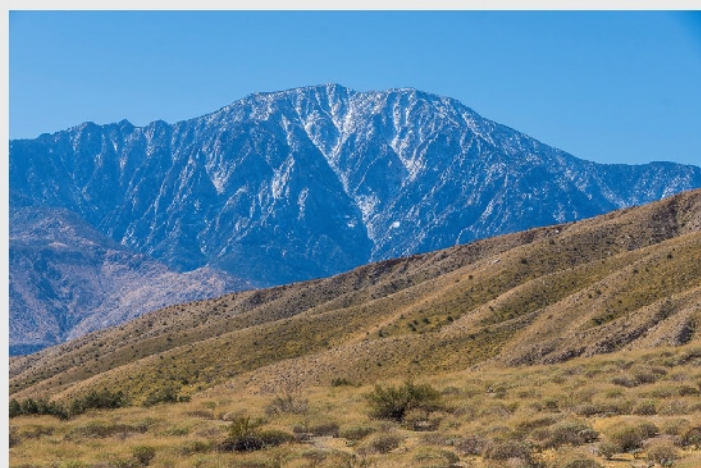
1930's Stone Picnic Shelter - Borrego Springs



Whitewater Nature Reserve



Iron Horse Steampunk Festival - Perris



Mt. San Jacinto - from Whitewater Reserve



Iron Horse Steampunk Festival - Perris



Antique Truck Show - Perris



First "Electric" Truck - Circa 1880



Civil War Recruiting Poster



Confederate Camp



General Robert E. Lee



Mock Battle - Confederate Troops



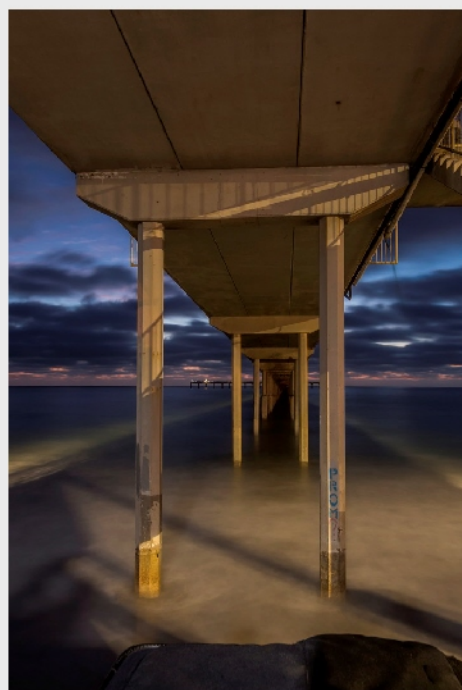
Abraham Lincoln at Appomattox



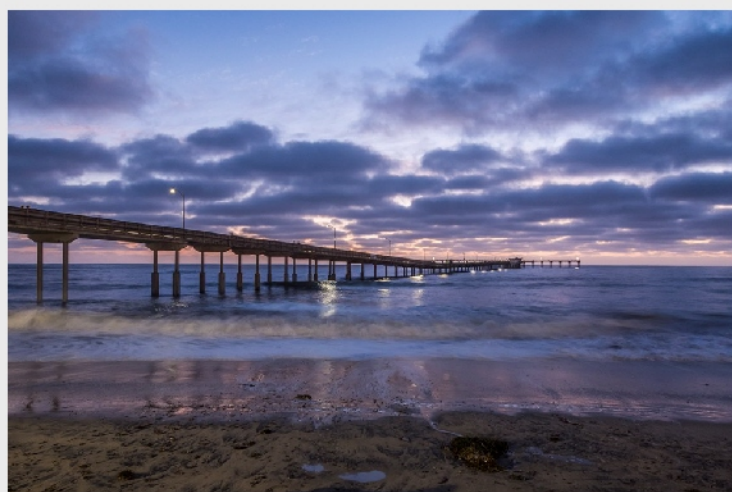
Pointe Orlando



Union Forces with Gatling Gun



Ocean Beach Pier



Sunset - Ocean Beach Pier



Graduating Seniors - UCSD Campus



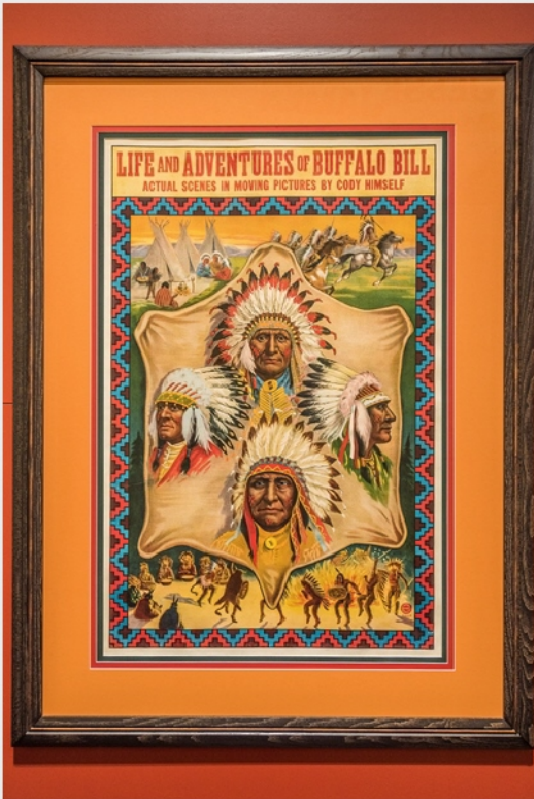
Geisel Library - UCSD



Santa Rosa Mountains - Anza Borrego Desert State Park



San Diego Convention Center - Esri UC



Museum of the West



Museum of the West



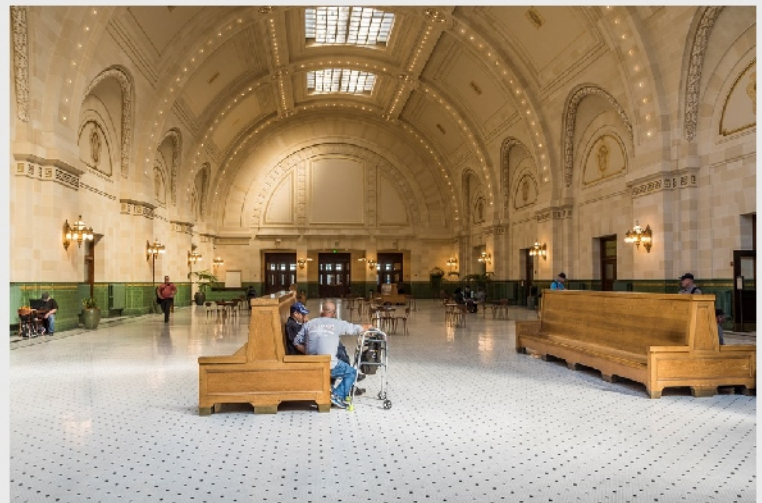
Museum of the West - Scottsdale, Arizona



Museum of the West



Lake Union - Seattle



Union Station - Seattle



Washington State Ferry



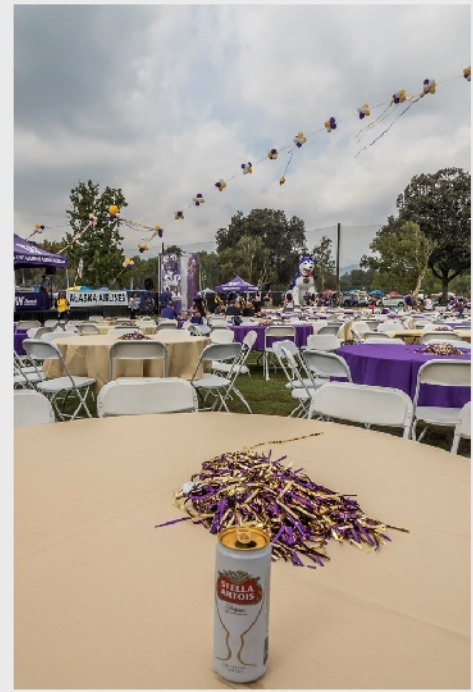
Downtown Seattle from Bremerton Ferry



"Silver Splendor" - Private Railcar



King Street Station - Seattle



University of Washington Tailgate Party - Rose Bowl



Clans at the Seaside Highland Games - Ventura



"Amber Waves of Grain Craft Beer Festival" - Corona



Bomber "Nose Art" - March Field Museum



SR-71 "Blackbird" Spy Plane



Mission Creek Nature Reserve

